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Exploring the social organization of difference at the interface of mobility and peripherality: Ethnographic study in a Swiss valley

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La Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de l'Université de Neuchâtel, sur les rapports de Mme Janine Dahinden, directrice de thèse, professeure, Université de Neuchâtel ; M. Tim Cresswell, professeur, University of Edinburgh, UK ; Mme Ellen Hertz, professeure, Université de Neuchâtel ; M. Joris Schapendonk, professeur associé, Radboud University, Netherlands autorise l'impression de la thèse présentée par M. Emmanuel Charmillot en laissant à l'auteur la responsabilité des opinions énoncées.

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Le doyen
Louis de Saussure

Abstract

This thesis sheds ethnographic light on the small Swiss valley of Val-de-Travers, a region of 12,000 inhabitants located in the canton of Neuchâtel, on the border with France. Inspired by critical and reflexive studies on migration, it proposes an in-depth analysis of the discourses and daily practices that participate in the construction of a local order in constant negotiation, at the interface of different forms of mobility and lived and situated experiences of peripherality.

Based on a qualitative field study conducted between 2019 and 2021, this thesis apprehends the Val-de-Travers through two of its main and interwoven characteristics. On the one hand, the *diversity of past and present mobilities* that intersect. Indeed, for decades, countless foreign workers, cross-border workers, tourists, refugees, and residents of other Swiss regions have been crossing the region to work or live there. At the same time, young people, job seekers, families and retirees have left the valley in search of professional, educational, or economic opportunities. On the other hand, the Valley is characterized by its *peripherality*: a complex set of experiences and imaginaries that refer both to its asymmetrical political and economic relationship with a neighboring city (Neuchâtel); to a romantic celebration of the valley's authenticity as a rural periphery sheltered from globalization and modernization; a supposedly superior value of seemingly unconditional solidarity; a region characterized by scattered settlement and low population density in public spaces; a region adjacent to a national border; or a tourist region with natural sites and industrial heritage.

By adopting a posture at the interface, this thesis explores how the different forms of mobility that traverse and shape the valley articulate, resonate, or come into tension with the lived and imagined experiences of peripherality; and vice versa. Indeed, the position and evolution of the valley in the global, national, and cantonal political economy contribute significantly to the daily dynamics of self-identification and social categorization. This thesis thus seeks to understand how people who visit, live, or work in this place make sense of their daily environment and negotiate the social organization of difference, namely the way in which differences between individuals and collectives, and the social categories associated with them, are produced, represented, appropriated, and organized. It shows how the lived and situated experiences of these different dynamics generate discourses and practices that participate in the emergence of an (imagined) community characterized by the coherent assemblage of its heterogeneity. By focusing on the everyday experiences of ordinary people, it also highlights how the categories, boundaries and regulations of the nation-state permeate everyday life and articulate with other social and symbolic differentiations beyond ethno-national categories and governmental logics.

In the form of a collection of scientific articles, the analysis is composed of three parts, each illuminating not only specific dynamics of the articulation between mobilities and peripherality, but also proposing specific and original conceptualizations to approach this articulation. The first paper explores the emergence of what I call an *imagined community of fate*, which can be understood as the result of

dynamic and nested forms of boundary-work in which the most important categories and markers are socioeconomic rather than nation and ethnicity based. The second article documents the discourses and everyday practices that participate in the emergence of a *regime of (im)moral mobilities*. Exploring in particular border mobilities (whether to work or to buy goods and services), I demonstrate how ordinary inhabitants categorize these mobilities in terms of good or bad and put in place informal strategies of regulation. The third article explores how the presence of people assigned to stigmatized categories of difference – in this case, refugees, cross-border workers and "cas sociaux" – generates varied and interrelated representations of experiences of peripherality. Depending on the situation, these categories of difference are presented as *familiar strangers*, as *space invaders*, or as *peripheral figures*.

Keywords: Mobility, migration, border, boundary, periphery, social organization of difference, Switzerland, ethnography.

Résumé

Cette thèse porte un éclairage ethnographique sur la petite vallée suisse du Val-de-Travers, une région de 12'000 habitant-es située dans le canton de Neuchâtel, à la frontière avec la France. S'inspirant des études critiques et réflexives sur la migration, elle propose une analyse approfondie des discours et des pratiques quotidiennes qui participent à la construction d'un ordre local en constante négociation, à l'interface de différentes formes de mobilités et d'expériences vécues et situées de périphéricité.

Basée sur une étude qualitative de terrain menée entre 2019 et 2021, cette thèse appréhende le Val-de-Travers à travers deux de ses caractéristiques principales et imbriquées. D'une part, la *diversité des mobilités* passées et présentes qui s'y croisent. En effet, depuis des décennies, d'innombrables travailleur-euses étranger-ères, frontalier-ères, touristes, personnes réfugiées et habitantes d'autres régions suisses traversent la région pour y travailler ou y vivre. Dans le même temps, des jeunes, des demandeur-euses d'emploi, des familles et des retraité-es ont quitté la vallée à la recherche d'opportunités professionnelles, éducatives ou économiques. D'autre part, la vallée se distingue par sa *périphéricité* : un ensemble complexe d'expériences et d'imaginaires qui renvoient à la fois à sa relation politique et économique asymétrique avec une ville voisine (Neuchâtel) ; à une célébration romantique de l'authenticité de la vallée, comme périphérie rurale à l'abri de la mondialisation et de la modernisation ; à une valeur supérieure supposée de solidarité apparemment inconditionnelle ; à une région caractérisée par un habitat dispersé et une faible densité de population dans les espaces publics ; au fait d'être une région adjacente à une frontière nationale ; ou encore à une région touristique dotée de sites naturels et d'un patrimoine industriel.

En adoptant une posture à l'interface, cette thèse explore la manière dont les différentes formes de mobilité qui traversent et façonnent la vallée s'articulent, résonnent ou entrent en tension avec les expériences vécues et imaginées de la périphéricité ; et inversement. En effet, la position et l'évolution de la vallée dans l'économie politique mondiale, nationale et cantonale contribuent de manière significative aux dynamiques quotidiennes d'auto-identification et de catégorisation sociale. Cette thèse cherche ainsi à comprendre comment les personnes qui visitent, vivent ou travaillent dans ce lieu donnent un sens à leur environnement quotidien et négocient l'organisation sociale de la différence, à savoir la manière dont les différences entre les individus et les collectifs, et les catégories sociales qui leur sont associées, sont produites, représentées, appropriées et organisées. Elle montre comment les expériences vécues et situées de ces différentes dynamiques génèrent des discours et des pratiques qui participent à l'émergence d'une communauté (imaginée) caractérisée par l'assemblage cohérent de son hétérogénéité. En se concentrant sur les expériences quotidiennes des gens ordinaires, elle met également en évidence la façon dont les catégories, les frontières et les réglementations de l'État-nation imprègnent la vie quotidienne et s'articulent avec d'autres différenciations sociales et symboliques au-delà des catégories ethno-nationales et des logiques gouvernementales.

Sous forme de recueil d'articles scientifiques, l'analyse se compose de trois volets, chacun illuminant non seulement des dynamiques spécifiques de l'articulation entre mobilités et périphéricité, mais proposant également des conceptualisations spécifiques et originales pour approcher cette articulation. Le premier article explore l'émergence de ce que j'appelle une *communauté imaginée de destin*, qui peut être comprise comme le résultat de formes dynamiques et imbriquées de différentiations sociales et symboliques entre des individus et des collectifs et dans lesquelles les catégories et les marqueurs les plus importants sont socio-économiques plutôt que basés sur les appartenances ethno-nationales. Le deuxième article documente les discours et les pratiques quotidiennes qui participent à l'émergence d'un *régime de mobilités (im)morales.* En explorant en particulier les mobilités frontalières (que ce soit pour travailler ou acheter des biens et des services), je démontre comment des habitant-es ordinaires catégorisent en termes de bien ou mal ces mobilités et mettent en place des stratégies informelles de régulation. Le troisième article explore comment la présence de personnes assignées à des catégories stigmatisées de la différence – dans ce cas, réfugié-es, frontalier-ères et cas sociaux – génère des représentations variées et interreliées avec des expériences de périphéricité. En fonction des situations, ces catégories de la différence sont présentées comme des *étranger-ères familier-ères,* comme des *envahisseur-ses d'espace,* ou comme des *figures de la périphérie*.

Mots-clés : Mobilité, migration, frontière, périphérie, organisation sociale de la différence, Suisse, ethnographie.

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1. Introduction

> *Departing from Neuchatel, I embark upon a journey along the highway toward the small town of Peseux, where the constructed landscape unfurls before my eyes. A roundabout soon approaches, beckoning me toward Val-de-Travers. This road is both hilly and picturesque, and as I travel down it, the lake slowly fades from view, replaced by a forest. As I pass through two small hamlets, Bros Dessous and Champ du Moulin, I enter the Clusette tunnel, which gradually slopes downwards. Upon exiting the tunnel, I am captivated by a grand sign that reads "Welcome to Val-de-Travers, land of absinthe," crowned with a verdant fairy perched atop its peak. A small sign below indicates that I have now embarked upon the "absinthe road" binding Noiraigue to Pontarlier in France. As I journey through the valley, the river flows alongside me, nestled between two mountains. The valley is dotted with many old (and even abandoned) and new industries, all testament to the region's industrial dynamism, which has attracted and still attracts countless workers from across Europe. I also notice several signs indicating tourist attractions (the Creux du Van, for example, the asphalt mines, but also the Absinthe Museum). The valley, which is characterized by a broad green plateau with a succession of villages, remains relatively level until Saint-Sulpice, where the road begins to wind its way upwards toward Les Bayards before eventually reaching Les Verrières, the last village before the French border. (Edited fieldnotes, spring 2019)*

This vignette recalls one of my first arrivals in the Swiss valley of the Val-de-Travers, a small region of 12,000 inhabitants located in the French-speaking part of Switzerland bordering France. For many months between January 2019 and October 2021, I ethnographically explored this valley and eventually wrote this dissertation within it. Whether through continuous stays of several weeks or months or tracing daily comings and goings, my research field granted a familiarity with the mundane life of a valley with multiple facets, ambiguities, and paradoxes. Indeed, it is a valley molded by a series of inwards and outbound mobilities, past and present, that have shaped the social, economic, and spatial organization of the region. For decades, as the region has evolved, countless foreign workers, cross-border commuters, tourists, refugees, and people from other Swiss regions have passed through the region, working or living there. At the same time, young people, job seekers, families, and retirees have left the valley in search of professional, educational, or economic opportunities.

At the heart of the many characteristics that comprise the Val-de-Travers is its peripherality. This category of practice, widely used by my interlocutors in the field, is indicative of a local order in permanent construction in the face of the various dynamics that cross it. Peripherality simultaneously refers to an asymmetrical political and economic relationship with a neighboring city (Neuchâtel); to a romantic celebration of authenticity associated with rural peripheries sheltered from globalization and modernization; to a supposedly higher value of seemingly unconditional solidarity; to a region

characterized by a scattered settlement pattern, a limited transportation network, and a low population density in public spaces; to a region adjacent to a national border; and to a tourist area characterized by natural sites, and industrial heritage. Understood in its dynamic dimension, the Val-de-Travers can be perceived as peripheral on both a national and cantonal scale and central on a continental scale, Switzerland being at the heart of Europe. Similarly, the dimension of time demonstrates the historical evolution of peripherality. Indeed, the Val-de-Travers has evolved from an important watchmaking center in the early 20th century to a peripheralized region, notably since the 1970s.

This introductory section presents the principal thematic, theoretical, and methodological foundations on which this thesis is built. It introduces the threads I followed to build a research project intending to understand the social organization of difference in the Val-de-Travers at the interface of mobility and peripherality.

1.1. Toward the Val-de-Travers: How to study "small localities at the periphery of Europe"?

My dissertation project began in October 2018 as part of a research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) entitled "Small Localities at the Peripheries of Europe: Transnational Mobilities, Diversification and Place-Making." Tania Zittoun and Janine Dahinden, the project leaders, developed a proposal before hiring two doctoral researchers: Oliver Pedersen and myself. The research proposal provided the major theoretical and methodological orientations, supplied the opening research questions, and suggested places in which to begin the fieldwork. This research project is part of a research center, the National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) for migration and mobility studies. It aims to enhance understandings of contemporary phenomena related to migration and mobility in Switzerland and beyond. Although the center is interdisciplinary, most of the researchers who work there are involved in migration studies. Each project strives to make innovative contributions, often at the intersection of mobility and migration studies.

In this context, the key objective of our project was to address several of the biases and critiques of migration studies and to explore what can be discovered in "small localities" when adopting a mobility perspective. Achieving such an objective necessitates considering "part of the whole population" that lives, works, or passes through the places studied without focusing on pre-established categories, groups of people, or even national origins. From an epistemological and methodological viewpoint, the objective had the ambition of decentering migration studies. In other words, the aim was to study places not commonly associated with migration studies and to use a conceptual toolbox developed outside such studies.

In particular, the first observation made in the research proposal is that migration studies have principally focused on global cities embedded in globalized neo-liberal economies and transnational spaces while

recently turning to smaller cities and neighborhoods (Baumann 1996; Dahinden 2013; Wessendorf 2013; Wimmer 2013). The goal was to move away from this "urban bias" (Schmiz et al. 2020) in migration studies and explore small localities—villages, conglomerations of villages, or valleys.

The proposal also listed various places to initiate the ethnographic investigation consistent with three sets of criteria: (i) their geopolitical location in Europe (i.e., North, East, or South of Europe); (ii) their maximal variations along a series of migration-mobility dimensions, such as types of mobility (commuters, seasonal movers, touristic, circulatory migration), local history of migration, and mobility regimes (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013); (iii) their degrees and types of diversity and forms of social stratification (e.g., linguistic, economic, racial, religious, national, gender, lifestyle, generational, social, etc.). The proposal suggested villages in Greece, in the Czech Republic, in the Faroe Islands, and in Switzerland. For Switzerland, the Val-de-Travers was mentioned as a potential case study because of its past and present mobilities and its location on the periphery of Switzerland while being at the geographical center of Europe.

The Val-de-Travers is close to the University of Neuchâtel and easily accessible by public transport or by car. Oliver and I therefore decided to explore it during the first months of our contract. Our intention was to collect initial exploratory data, to determine the relevance of this case study and, above all, to see if we could project ourselves into the future for the years of our doctoral research. We rapidly noticed the diversity of mobilities intersecting there and the tensions occasionally associated with them (for example, in relation to cross-border work). However, we also observed the industrial history that not only nourishes collective imaginaries but that has also participated in placing the region at the heart of national and transnational human circulations. After several visits and exploratory interviews, we confirmed this choice. Of course, in Switzerland the possibilities are countless—there is no lack of small peripheral valleys. However, considering the particularities of the Val-de-Travers and its accessibility, we agreed with this pre-selection. Taking this place as an entry point allowed us to access a multitude of mobilities. We could understand how a national border—and the mobilities, regulations and representations associated with it—infiltrate the daily lives of ordinary people. We could investigate how lived and situated experiences of peripherality are articulated with daily discourses and practices of social and symbolic boundary-making between the different population groups that live, work, or cross the valley. For linguistic reasons—Oliver does not speak French—it was quickly decided that I would lead this case study. Conducting interviews in English considerably limited the exchanges with our interlocutors, and French is essential for navigating the valley on a daily basis and engaging in various forms of ethnographic dialogues.

1.1.1. A project characterized by intense collaboration

The first few months of my research project were characterized by close collaboration with the other members of the research project and specifically with Oliver. Indeed, we conducted the first exploratory interviews together. Oliver traveled to the Val-de-Travers with me several times and I accompanied him to the Faroe Islands (where he was conducting his case study) for several weeks. Our overall goal was to identify and explore different forms and experiences of mobilities, how these localities transnationalize and diversify, and how these transformations in turn affect people's social relations, social and symbolic boundaries, and life trajectories.

In the case of this dissertation, the collaboration with the other team members is characterized by numerous discussions and exchanges, coupled with much feedback on our respective writings. However, Oliver's has a background in sociocultural psychology, whereas I have a human geography background with a specialization in migration studies. This has resulted in two highly divergent PhD projects. While I became close (professionally and personally) to Oliver, the writing processes were clearly separate. We exchanged information regularly and at length concerning our respective case studies, both being familiar with the two ethnographic fields. These numerous exchanges allowed us to clarify methodological approaches and place our ethnographic discoveries into perspective.

Therefore, while in this thesis I occasionally use the pronoun "we," particularly when discussing certain theoretical and methodological perspectives, I shift to the pronoun "I" when discussing my case study in the Val-de-Travers and in the three analyses presented in the scientific articles. This is with the exception of the first scientific article, which I wrote with Janine Dahinden, not only my supervisor but also a leader of our NCCR project. In this article, Janine discussed the findings with me on several occasions and contributed to the writing, particularly to the theoretical section and conclusion.

In short, this dissertation is part of an intense collaboration with the other members of the project team and markedly with Oliver. While an unusual configuration for writing a doctoral thesis, this collaboration did not extensively permeate the writing and data production process, which remained rather solitary processes I present in Chapter 3.

1.1.2. Navigating predefined theoretical and epistemological orientations

The embedding of this thesis in a larger research project, in addition to influencing the choice of case study and the dynamics of collaboration, is characterized by certain predefined theoretical and epistemological approaches. The NCCR focuses on migration studies, and it is therefore the central literature to which the different projects of the research center contribute. My intellectual trajectory and the development of my individual research project are thus rooted in migration studies; it is this literature that is largely mobilized in this dissertation. Within migration studies, our research project has sought to adopt a critical and reflexive perspective on the production of knowledge in this field of research, which remains strongly marked by methodological nationalism, ethnicity bias, and sedentary bias.

Migration studies from a social science perspective focus on migrant populations; that is, people (or their relatives) who have crossed a national border. Researchers are interested in the integration processes of a given population, in the political behavior of migrants, or in the motivations for leaving a country of origin to move to a host country (the so-called push-pull model). While these examples may produce interesting and relevant knowledge, they are based on assumed considerations and categories. We find here that all the categories based on the nation-state—such as refugees, non-citizens, migrants, second-generation immigrants, and national origins—feed the construction of research models.

The origins of migration studies therefore rest on the dichotomy between migrants and the non-migrants that are often considered "sedentary citizens" (Michel and Blatter 2021). Although there is a wide variety of epistemological and theoretical perspectives in this field of study—not least because of the diversity of disciplines involved—this dichotomy is reproduced across a considerable number of scholarly publications. These categorizations, often taken for granted, fuel the construction of a "migrant other" (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002). Migrant others are studied and their integration, usually associated with a form of sedentariness, explored. In this sense, the study of migration not only studies a social process but also creates a "problem" or "exception" (Hui 2016). In other words, while some are considered naturally integrated and members of an imagined community (Anderson 1983), others are not and must perform and demonstrate their integration, belonging, and attachment (Rytter 2018).

Authors have engaged in a wide range of critiques regarding knowledge production in migration studies (Dahinden and Anderson 2021) by adopting, for example, postcolonial (Mayblin and Turner 2021), feminist (Khazaei 2020), or de-nationalized (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) epistemologies. Migration studies have been challenged and contested in multiple ways, such as by sedentary bias (Amelina and Vasilache 2014; Faist 2013), an ahistorical theoretical construction (Mayblin and Turner 2021), the naturalization of categories (Amelina and Faist 2012), or colonial ignorance (Samaddar 2020). Our research project, and therefore this thesis, builds on what has recently been called "reflexive migration studies" (Nieswand and Drotbohm 2014; Amelina 2021): a process of decentering that aims to challenge the way knowledge is produced in migration studies, problematizing key concepts and categories while developing alternative ones (Dahinden, Fischer, and Menet 2021).

To accomplish this, the proposal was to take a place as an entry point, adopt a mobility perspective, and consider "part of the whole population" that lives, works, or passes through the places studied. This approach creates a distance from ethno-national and national epistemologies and concomitant categorizations. This entails studying what kind of movements are (and have been) significant in a given place, which are labeled "migration" and why, what categorizations of mobile and immobile people are salient, and how these categorizations are embedded in power relations.

It is with these considerations that I began my exploration in the Val-de-Travers. The critical and reflexive approaches of migration studies were central to orienting my reflections. However, questions remained regarding the operationalization of diverse concepts to investigate the Val-de-Travers and the methodological elaboration of such an approach. The theoretical recommendations for using a place as an entry point in migration studies are extensive and convincing, but the conduct of such a project, which takes migration scholars out of their comfort zone, generates substantial theoretical and methodological challenges.

Throughout this dissertation, I present the wide range of literature from which I have drawn theoretical and methodological inspiration. I combine critical and reflexive migration studies with other approaches that include mobility, border, regional, or boundary studies. Moreover, being interested in localities outside urban centers requires conceptualizing both these places and the notion of periphery that feeds my reflections and contributions. Thus, beginning with critical and reflexive migration studies, I have gradually incorporated various literatures and theoretical perspectives. Articulating this diversity of approaches allows me to connect several dynamics—such as those of peripheralization, transnationalization, and mobilities—and to situate my analysis at their interface.

1.2. Exploring the social organization of difference at the interface of mobility and peripherality

Based on the elements presented above, my dissertation explores how forms of mobilities articulate with lived and imagined experiences of peripherality to participate in the shaping and transformation of the social organization of difference (Barth 1969; Vertovec 2021). More specifically, my thesis investigates the Val-de-Travers by adopting a position at the interface; namely, a posture at the intersection of aspects related to both mobility and peripherality. This posture is particularly relevant as it allows articulating distinctive processes and to investigate the frictions and ambiguities that characterize their intersections.

Along the same lines, this work mobilizes and is situated at the intersection of literatures that include mobility, migration, regional, boundary, and border studies. These provide the necessary tools for considering the social organization of difference. The latter is characterized by interrelated dynamics of boundary-making, which consists of social and symbolic differentiations between individuals and collectives (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2013), and bordering, which constitutes processes of political and territorial delimitations (Fassin 2011). This thesis is thus constructed around a central distinction: borders refer to political and territorial considerations, whereas boundaries refer to social and symbolic considerations between individuals and collectives. These boundary-making and bordering processes emerge at different scales—including at the level of the nation-state—and permeate the daily lives of those who live, work, or transit the Val-de-Travers. These are the people I am interested in: those I call, for lack of a better term, ordinary people (Lamont and Mizrachi 2012).

This dissertation is based on several months of ethnographic fieldwork, as well as over 40 interviews with a wide variety of people (long-term residents, historians, refugees, people working in social institutions, people active in the local public administration, cross-border workers, local shop owners, etc.). Such research reveals how differences, and the social categories associated with them, are assembled and negotiated in a context marked by peripherality and the intersection of different forms of mobility. In other words, the Val-de-Travers was the terrain upon which I sought to understand how people who visit, live, or work in a place produce meaning of their environment and how self-ascribed and externally imposed categorizations are negotiated. Indeed, while peripherality and different forms of mobility can destabilize the region, the lived and situated experiences of these different dynamics also generate discourses and practices that, in everyday life, produce (imagined) coherence.

The emergence of the Valley-ers' imagined community of fate is a striking example. In the field, I observed that those who share this sense of belonging to a collective are not characterized by a presumed homogeneity but by the coherent assemblage of their heterogeneity. In this sense, the dominant conceptions of membership in the imagined community did not seem to be based on ethno-national origins but on shared feelings of marginalization and local and socioeconomic issues. Thus, in this local order, ethno-national differences are not contested but territorialized: they represent resources for negotiating the contours of an imagined community characterized by different mobilities, including those involving the crossing of a national border.

As such, this thesis also illustrates how the territorial and political border between Switzerland and France infiltrates everyday life, what kinds of symbolic and social boundaries they engender, and what norms are invoked in the Val-de-Travers to categorize daily cross-border mobilities. Indeed, as mentioned, the Val-de-Travers is located close to a national border (and can therefore be referred to as a borderland), which is an important issue for understanding its social organization of difference. While the border is not considered here as fixed or immutable—it is daily negotiated by a wide variety of actors—it nevertheless generates significant differences (notably economic) between the regions adjoining the border. For example, wages are much higher in Switzerland and the cost of living lower in France. This configuration generates daily cross-border mobilities (whether for work or for shopping). Concerned with the negative consequences for the Val-de-Travers—such as revenue losses and potentially harmful social effects—some engage in practices and discourses intended to limit, or at least deter, certain cross-border mobilities. In particular, this thesis documents the deployment of a "regime of (im)moral mobilities," according to which the border, legally rather discrete, becomes morally salient.

Building on the above reflections and in a closely related manner, this dissertation also examines how representations of social categorizations of difference (in this case, refugees, cross-border workers, and "cas sociaux" [French term for social outcasts]) intersect with place-based representations and experiences. Exploring this articulation sheds light on how social categorizations of difference—and their associated boundaries—are used and reproduced to express the lived and situated peripherality of

a place. In other words, I demonstrate how social categorizations of difference are significant resources for boundary-making processes. I discuss how people perceive their relationship to social categorizations of difference, which can impact how they identify themselves. This is indeed an important element of understanding the complexities of self-identification and how social categories are constructed and perpetuated.

In doing so, I do not claim that the mechanisms discussed in this thesis are either unique to Val-de-Travers or singular to peripheral regions. Rather, I believe the present endeavor to articulate forms of mobilities with lived and situated experiences of peripherality permits a deeper understanding of situations in which certain social and symbolic boundaries are salient. Indeed, when addressing peripherality, several boundaries become blurred while others are reinforced. This thesis thus contributes to the literature on boundary-work by demonstrating the constant shifting of social and symbolic boundaries and highlighting their situational character. Boundaries might certainly be just as fluid in places characterized by dynamics other than peripherality, and ethno-national origins could be equally secondary according to other logics, other norms, and with different interests and goals.

1.3. Outline

This dissertation consists of three articles and five chapters. Two of the articles have been published and one is under review. The three articles provide theoretical and empirical contributions at the intersection of migration, mobilities, boundary, and border studies. The five additional chapters introduce, connect, and enrich the analyses that the articles present.

This dissertation begins (**Chapter 2**) with the general epistemological and theoretical context underlying the study. I begin by situating my research within migration studies, explaining that my project unsettles and destabilizes mainstream studies in this field. I then discuss how I approached the Val-de-Travers theoretically: as an entry point I describe as peripheral borderland. This part allows me to situate my research in studies on mobility and migration in rural and peripheral areas, in regional ethnographies, and in borderlands studies. This part also permits me to clarify my understanding of the notion of periphery. I conclude by presenting my theoretical perspectives (locality, mobility, boundary-work, and bordering perspectives) before presenting my research questions and those I address in the various articles.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological choices made to produce and analyze data. I present my ethnographic process, data production, methods, and strategies of analysis. I conclude by reflecting on ethical and positional issues, elaborating on the ethnographic toolkit with which I navigated my field and produced meaning from my data. This chapter also reflects on the methodological challenges of conducting a form of regional ethnography within the field of migration studies.

Chapter 4 provides an extensive contextualization of the Val-de-Travers, focusing in particular on the processes of peripheralization and on the different mobilities that intersect in the valley. This chapter is also an opportunity to address specific aspects of migration and mobility and to situate the region in national and cantonal political contexts. By confronting my interviews and observations with multiple regional and cantonal sources, I also demonstrate how the peripherality of the Val-de-Travers is occasionally represented as a romantic celebration of authenticity, notably for the purpose of tourism development.

Chapter 5—article 1—explores the emergence of what we (with Janine Dahinden) call an "imagined community of fate of Valley-ers," which can be understood as an emplaced peripheralization: it is the outcome of dynamic and nested forms of boundary-work in which the most important categories and markers are socioeconomic rather than nation and ethnicity based. This scheme unfolds at the interface of processes related to locality, such as the economic peripheralization of the valley and the historical resistance to this process, and different types of mobility, such as cross-border work, inter-village mobilities, tourism, and the valley's historical participation in European labor circulation.

Chapter 6—article 2—addresses how cross-border mobilities are negotiated by those borderlanders who perceive them as damaging the valley's economic and social wellbeing. I explore everyday practices and discourses to illuminate the informal and mundane (re)production of borders and boundaries. To do so, I propose to delve into what I call "a regime of (im)moral mobilities." I am interested in how cross-border mobilities impact a "local order" and how these mobilities are morally negotiated by Valley-ers. Rather than examining the legalities of who is entitled to enter or remain in Europe, I am interested in how moral considerations regulate these mobilities. The deployment of a regime of (im)moral mobilities, and all the discourses and practices it comprises, produces immoralized individuals who are stigmatized and moralized persons who feel they belong to a collective.

Chapter 7—article 3—addresses the urban bias commonly associated with migration studies and explores how categorizations of difference are articulated with a region's lived and situated peripherality. Offering an ethnographic insight into the mundane life of the Val-de-Travers, it investigates how the presence of people assigned to stigmatized categories—in this case, refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux*—is embedded in the everyday cohabitation experiences of people who live or work in the valley. The chapter reveals how local representations of difference transcend ethno-national categories and navigate between what I term familiar strangers, space invaders, and peripheral figures.

Chapter 8 offers a general conclusion to the work by combining the main threads of my analysis and reflecting on the epistemological posture permitting articulation of the boundary-making processes involved in the Val-de-Travers' social organization of difference. In this chapter, I present research limits and avenues for a de-migranticized framework and conclude by highlighting the interface

perspective as a relevant entry point which offers a means of linking different levels of analysis, such as structural, organizational, infrastructural, and individual dimensions.

2. Unsettling migration epistemologies to study the social organization of difference

This dissertation addresses the social organization of difference (Barth 1969; Vertovec 2021) that informs many migration studies, particularly those examining what human movement across national borders implies for the construction and transformation of regional, national, or transnational orders. Following Vertovec (2021), I define the social organization of difference as a framework for exploring how difference, understood as socially constructed categories, is experienced, (re)produced, and represented in everyday interactions situated in broader economic and political configurations. Specifically, I address the social organization of difference by using "place" as an entry point. This approach presupposes that in each place—a café, a neighborhood, a village, a city—differences are situationally produced and organized. These differences are negotiated daily and are articulated with multiple power relations inscribing the population groups that live in, work in, or visit the places studied.

My approach departs from migration studies—the field of research in which I am embedded and in which the project I am working on is rooted. In this literature, the social organization of difference is often understood through an "ethnic" lens (Glick Schiller, Çaglar, and Guldbrandsen 2006); that is, how processes of differentiation and group formation are shaped by ethnicity. Building on this literature, this dissertation complicates these studies by demonstrating how place-based characteristics and mobility-related aspects are articulated in the everyday dynamics of boundary-making beyond negotiations around ethno-national categories. This does not mean that I am interested in "all" mobilities and "all" categories of difference but that I examine those that inductively emerge as most significant in the everyday lives of the "ordinary people" (Lamont and Mizrachi 2012) in a small, peripheral valley.

To this end, I propose in what follows a theoretical framework aimed at "unsettling" mainstream epistemologies in migration studies. "Unsettling," or destabilizing, refers to an approach that challenges established ideas or conceptual frameworks, that highlights the limitations or biases of dominant paradigms, or that aims to disrupt pre-existing norms or practices in a particular field. Thus, destabilizing mainstream epistemologies in migration studies means challenging or disrupting widely accepted approaches or conceptual frameworks in the field of migration studies to promote alternative perspectives.

Throughout this chapter, I aim to gradually define my understanding and operationalization of the social organization of difference. I explain how I approach it by exploring the interdimensional and intertwined processes of boundary-making and bordering at the interface of locality and mobility. Before defining the various concepts that constitute this definition (i.e., boundary-work, bordering, locality, and mobility), I discuss how and why I approach the social organization of difference in a de-migranticized manner.

2.1. A de-migranticized approach to the social organization of difference

Experiences of everyday cohabitation (Le Breton 2021) and categorization (Jenkins 2008) within different population groups have been widely documented within migration studies (Baumann 1996; Dahinden 2013; Wessendorf 2013). Human circulations and movements produce processes of diversification and transnationalization (Dahinden 2017; Glick Schiller, Çaglar, and Guldbrandsen 2006) that affect places ranging from large global cities to small peripheral villages. When these movements involve crossing a national border, the "national order of things" (Malkki 1995) is disrupted, generating not only political but also scientific forms of reaction. Migration scholars thus ask why people move, how they move, and, most importantly, what the effects are for the countries of origin and the receiving countries, respectively.

A substantial literature on migration studies contributes to the production of this knowledge, often relying on and reproducing categories based on nation-states (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). In the face of this, several scholars have identified what they call "mainstream migration studies" (Favell 2019; Wyss and Dahinden 2022) and have pointed out the problems associated with the dominant concepts in this literature, such as immigrant integration (Korteweg 2017), culture (Ghorashi 2017), and ethnicity (Glick Schiller, Çaglar, and Guldbrandsen 2006). Indeed, in most migration research, migration is seen as an exception (Hui 2016), an anomaly that needs to be understood and analyzed. This seems to be the goal of mainstream migration scholars, who draw on geography, sociology, anthropology, law, political science, and economics to explore human movements, primarily those involving crossing a national border. In Anderson's words, "we are experiencing not an 'age of migration' but an age of migration research" (2019, 2).

In the context of this research and in line with authors who have followed mobility trajectories (Schapendonk 2020; Schapendonk et al. 2020; Kalir 2013; Wyss 2022), I perceive the social world as an assemblage of movements and moorings in which individuals navigate and fit into different (self-ascribed or externally imposed) categories. As presented, for example, in Koshravi's autoethnography, "migration is a messy project and should not be reduced to a view of a single process of uprooting from the country of origin and re-rooting in the country of destination" (2018, 293). These studies, which focus on the life stories or trajectories of individuals, reveal the different im/mobilities that people experience and appropriate (Schapendonk 2020) and highlight how individuals are labeled and navigate different "categories of mobility" (Wyss and Dahinden 2022).

Following individual trajectories allows one to challenge and demonstrate the simplification of the labeling of some individuals as "migrants" as opposed to others who are not. This does not imply that the impacts of the "migration regime" (Rass and Wolff 2018; Wyss 2022) or "migration industries" (Cranston, Schapendonk, and Spaan 2018) on people crossing national borders should not be considered. However, such effects should not be viewed solely through the prism of migration. As such, according

to Crawley and Skleparis (2018, 60-61), researchers should pay more attention to how categories are constructed, the purpose they serve, and their consequences.

> Our call is not for an end to the use of categories as a way of making sense of our social and political worlds, but for explicit recognition and engagement with the idea that categories do not simply represent or reflect the world but simultaneously create and limit it. (Crawley and Skleparis 2018, 60-61)

Following a similar approach to migration-related categories, Dahinded (2016) proposes to "de-migranticize" migration studies. She bases her plea on three principal aspects. The first is distinguishing between the category of practice and the category of analysis. According to Brubaker (2013), this involves questioning the use of certain concepts by distinguishing between their analytical use (etic) on the one hand and their practical use (emic) on the other. For example, although the concept of integration has disputable and contested analytical power (Korteweg 2017; Rytter 2018), approaching it as a category of practice is of definite scientific interest. In this sense, it is not a matter of considering integration as a concept that helps in understanding social mechanisms but as a concept that is used and employed by a multitude of actors in divergent situations and at different scales. This raises the question of how varying understandings of integration are appropriated and used as resources to produce and reproduce social and symbolic boundaries between population groups. Hence, the issue is to understand how this notion is operationalized by different (non-)state actors to distinguish different population groups and negotiate the contours of different imagined communities (Anderson 1983).

Second, and complementary to this first point, migration studies need to draw more on concepts developed outside the migration literature. Indeed, as mentioned above, migration studies excessively reproduce nation-state-based categories. It is therefore urgent to broaden the toolbox from which researchers draw to produce knowledge concerning human movements. One inspiring approach is that of boundary-work (developed later in this chapter), which allows one to question the daily construction of social and symbolic boundaries between individuals and groups. These boundaries turn out to be situational, relational, and processual, thus energizing static notions such as "communities" and "identities." As such, this perspective is useful to understanding who is assigned to which category, who is perceived as a migrant or non-migrant, and according to which norms and markers.

Third, and this point follows from the previous two, this perspective allows researchers to stop taking migrant populations as the unit of analysis but rather to see them as members of the population. This helps us understand who is "migranticized" and who is not and to avoid presuming the relevance of ethno-national categories from the outset.

With a relatively similar argument, Anderson speaks of methodological de-nationalism (Anderson 2019), an approach that acknowledges that borders and citizenship are not fixed but politically constituted and historically and economically embedded. This approach seeks to uncover and analyze

how state-imposed categories of "migrant" and "citizen" impact individual and group experiences in different ways and examine how they influence the management, governance, and accountability of national(ized) territories and international/global relations more generally. Methodological de-nationalism, as an approach, "recognises the continuing power of the state and the national order of things, how they work together to inform our understanding of 'society', political power and accountability" (Anderson 2019, 5-6). Thus, the intention of this approach is not to neglect the power and importance of nation-states in everyday life. Instead, it attempts to "bring in the state as people experience it" (Kalir 2013, 325) rather than reproducing a methodological nationalism in the framing of the research design. Diverse strategies can achieve such an aim: (1) Not limiting the units of observation to a national scale; for example, by taking a neighborhood, a village, a restaurant, or any other place that does not reproduce a national container (Wimmer 2004); (2) Defining the "study population" according to categories and criteria beyond nation-state-based categories; (3) Empirically exploring how the state is experienced by a wide diversity of actors but also how "ordinary people" (Lamont and Mizrachi 2012) or "ordinary citizens" (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2018) participate in or contest nation-state logics and reproduce other forms of classifications, norms, and markers. In short, one way to de-migranticize and de-nationalize a research design is to examine everyday life and the subtleties, nuances, and contestations that emerge.

This approach also allows researchers, in the words of Fox and Jones (2013), to overcome the ethnicity bias that also colors migration studies; indeed, "ethnicity is naturalised as a taken-for-granted fixture of the migration landscape" (Fox and Jones 2013, 386). In other words, "ethnic" categories are often used in the research design and are therefore examined empirically without first questioning whether they are the most appropriate framework for understanding certain social dynamics. Thus, if one is interested in the integration of an "ethnic group" in a place, one runs the risk of essentializing ethnicity and overestimating the explanatory power of ethnicity in the discourses heard and the practices observed. To overcome this challenge, and broaden the criteria for defining a study population, one might consider ethnicity not as an "explicans" (i.e., as a concept that explains social processes) but as an "explicandum" (Dahinden 2014): a socially constructed notion that must be explored to grasp the occasionally ambivalent meanings associated with it.

Furthermore, adopting a de-migranticized, de-nationalized, and de-ethnicized perspective requires moving beyond ahistorical theory-building in migration studies. In this regard, several have argued that modern migration patterns, along with the rules and regulations governing mobility, are influenced by historical ties created through colonialism, displacement, and appropriation (Bhambra 2014). However, these connections are often overlooked or disregarded in migration studies and social theory in general (Wyss and Dahinden 2022). Therefore, to understand current mobilities and circulations, it is necessary to historicize them and therefore to explore and consider the "mobilities of the past" (Cresswell 2010) that symbolically and materially shape current mobilities.

Needless to say, overcoming the challenges inherent to migration studies, in particular not naturalizing the nation-state as a container of social processes (Amelina and Faist 2012), is a pressing issue in this field of research. To address such considerations, this research proposes using place as an entry point to avoid beginning the exploration by reproducing social categories constructed according to a sedentary lens (Düvell 2021) and to be receptive to the diversity of mobilities that intermingle in the place under study. Adopting place as an entry point allows consideration of the "part of the whole population" (Dahinden 2016, 2217) that lives, works, or passes through it. Thus, as I develop in the next chapter, the first consideration for overcoming methodological nationalism was to delineate starting points that do not replicate nation-state-based categories.

Methodological nationalism

Methodological nationalism is a well-known and widely recognized criticism by many researchers in migration studies. Unfortunately, it continues to heavily mark this field of research. This is not surprising as migration studies are affected by the three forms of methodological nationalism identified and defined almost 20 years ago in Wimmer and Glick Schiller's (2002) seminal article.

First, these authors have demonstrated that the construction of nation-states is not sufficiently taken into account, as they are considered extant entities that are insufficiently discussed in relation to exploring everyday social relations. Nation-states are seen as relatively fixed entities that delimit—through borders—political, social, and economic organizations. Wimmer (2009) refers to this as a Herderian view of the social world; namely, that there is a connection between a population, a culture, and a territory. In this sense, regarding to designing a research project, migration studies replicate this national unit of analysis without questioning its origin, its ambiguities, its paradoxes, and particularly its fluidity.

Second, the essentialization of nation-states in migration studies contributes to the reproduction of nation-state logics. This means that human movements that cross a national border are considered "anomalies" that must be scientifically analyzed and understood. To an extent, this contributes to the confirmation and reinforcement of the dominance and hold of nation-states and their various dimensions in the global sociopolitical organization. Indeed, through a multitude of formal and informal actors and practices, nation-states classify individuals, assigning them to categories that then privilege certain population groups over others. Rather than challenging the everyday negotiations that pursue a (utopian) global order, mainstream migration studies not only appropriate nation-state-based categories but also seem to reinforce ethno-national differences. For instance, any scientific investigation that focuses on a population group defined by its national origin runs the risk of reifying "difference" imposed by national logics.

Finally, concerning delimiting the contours of migration studies, the most common unit of analysis is the "national container" (Anderson 2019). Not only does this seem to be the most appropriate unit for understanding migration—migration being characterized by movement from one national container to another—but this unit of analysis is also the one for which most data has been produced. Thus, the accumulation of knowledge in migration studies is principally based on the compilation and production of national data that not only allows the development of new research projects but also the procurement of funding from national bodies (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), such as the SNSF.

Thus, overcoming the "national-container bias" and not (re)producing nation-state logics in the elaboration and operationalization of a research project is a primary but no less delicate task. As Anderson (forthcoming) revealed, these problems continue to color migration studies despite a long-running debate on how methodological nationalism distorts analyses, predetermining the "migrant" as an object of sociological enquiry and overlooking the productive nature of the nation-state form. Methodological nationalism is thus not only problematic in the design of the research object but also generates a series of other troubling assumptions. Indeed, this approach can lead to what has been called "migrant exceptionalism;" that is, "the assumption that migrants are extraordinary mobile subjects, discrete from other (concurrent) subject positions and central units within methodologies" (Hui 2016, 75).

2.2. A peripheral borderland as an entry point

Using a place as an entry point allows for critical and reflective research in migration studies by analyzing when, how, and for whom the category "migrant" becomes significant in a particular place. As I develop below, this approach creates a distance from ethno-national and national epistemologies and concomitant categorizations. This entails studying what kind of movements are (and have been) significant in a given place, which are labeled "migration" and why, what categorizations of mobile and immobile people are salient, and how these categorizations are embedded in power relations. Such an approach thus involves a focus on discursive practices, how such practices produce certain kinds of mobility, and how historical developments (e.g., colonialism) have contributed to the emergence of certain mobility categories.

Following authors such as Massey (1994, 2004, 2005), Amin (2002, 2004), or Anderson (2012), I more specifically follow a relational understanding of place, which works "with the ontology of flow, connectivity and multiple geographical expression, to imagine the geography of cities and regions through their plural spatial connections" (Amin 2004, 34). In other words, I understand places as intersections of relationships and movements (human and non-human) that originate at different scales. For this reason, following Çağlar and Glick Schiller (2018, 2021), I operationalize the notion of "place" as "an entry point;" that is, as the notion that will allow for an "initial" delineation of the research object to begin the empirical research. In doing so, researchers are encouraged to be attentive to the diversity of intersecting relationships and mobilities and strive to situate them in the global political economy. This approach does not mean that "everything moves" all the time, though, and it requires particular attention to be paid to the immobilities, or moorings, that materially or discursively co-constitute a place.

In this approach, any place can finally be the object of research. In our case, we[1] decided to focus on "small" places "on the peripheries of Europe;" that is to say, villages or groups of villages somewhat geographically distant from urban centers. The reason for this choice can be traced to the urban "bias" (Schmiz et al. 2020; Düvell 2021) commonly associated with migration studies; namely, an overrepresentation of studies focusing on large urban centers in relation to exploring the everyday experiences of cohabitation between different population groups from a site-specific approach. Indeed, European and American research on the transnationalization of social realities and the diversification of populations has focused primarily on global (or smaller) cities, such as London (UK), Manchester (USA), Halle (DE), Glasgow (UK), embedded in neoliberal economies (Baumann 1996; Hanley, Ruble, and Garland 2008; Wessendorf 2013; Glick Schiller, Çaglar, and Guldbrandsen 2006; Guma 2019). This is unsurprising given that a key characteristic of cities is that they are—and have always been—both the locus and the outcome of different forms of mobility.

[1] The "our" and "we" is used here to refer to the reflections engaged in with the other members of the research project that this thesis is part of.

Seeking to explore places that are differently positioned socio-spatially in the national and global political economy, the Val-de-Travers, as a "peripheral borderland" (Majstorović 2023), seems particularly interesting. This term highlights the fact that the Val-de-Travers is peripheral(ized) within the canton of Neuchâtel and Switzerland yet is situated on the national border with France.

Nevertheless, despite this urban bias, many studies have been conducted in peripheral places and borderlands. This is what I present in the following sections, situating my research in these different literatures, each shedding specific light on the articulation of peripherality and mobility at the heart of this dissertation.

2.2.1. Migration and mobilities outside urban centers

Without wishing to propose an exhaustive review here, recent publications demonstrating an increased awareness of the urban bias in the field of migration studies are numerous. For instance, a recent special issue of the *European Journal of International Migration* was titled "The Reception of Exiles Outside Big Cities" (Flamant, Fourot, and Healy 2020). The issue began by noting that most migration studies focus on "big multi-ethnic cities" and that there is therefore a need to diversify case studies (Flamant, Fourot, and Healy 2020). Other similar special issues have been published in the journals *Rural Studies* (Milbourne and Kitchen 2014) and *Population, Space, and Place* (Erickson, Sanders, and Cope 2018; Stockdale and Haartsen 2018). These studies indicate important issues related to migration in rural areas and peripheral regions (Bijker and Haartsen 2012; Gieling, Vermeij, and Haartsen 2017; Licona and Maldonado 2014; Mahon 2007; Milbourne 2007; Radford 2016, 2017; Schech 2014; Uekusa and Lee 2020; Villa 2019; Woods 2018). Jaskulowski adeptly summarizes the epistemological posture of these various studies by asserting that "[t]hese [peripheral] areas may have their own peculiarities, patterns of social life and migrant sociabilities, which are structured by limited opportunities, possibilities and cultural imageries shaped in turn by their marginal position in global hierarchies of power" (2020, 393).

In particular, multiple studies have demonstrated how peripheral or rural places are affected by distinct mobilities and migrations. Studies have explored, for example, youth mobilities (Farrugia 2016), homeless mobilities (Cloke, Milbourne, and Widdowfield 2003), contemporary rural in-migration (Stockdale 2016), processes of staying (Erickson, Sanders, and Cope 2018), seasonal migration (Rye and Andrzejewska 2010), return migration (Hayfield 2017), counter-urbanization (Bijker and Haartsen 2012), commuting (Partridge, Ali, and Olfert 2010) and tourism (Izotov and Laine 2013). Overall, rural and peripheral studies explore the diverse patterns and implications of mobilities and migrations in these areas and how they participate in transforming social, economic, and cultural dynamics. While there are many extant examples, what is important to note from this literature, however, is that the relational characteristics of the peripheries produce specific mobilities and circulations. Rural-urban migration, for instance, is often driven by a lack of employment opportunities in peripheral areas, while counterurban migration may be driven by a desire for a different way of life.

Authors have also focused on the reception of refugees outside urban centers (Leitner 2012; Ristic 2020; Radford 2016; Arfaoui 2020; Radford 2017). Leitner, for example, highlighted ambiguities related to the "racialization of immigrants to defend white privilege and culture" and parallel processes of social tie-making that "transcend differences across racial and cultural divides" (2012, 828). Ristic (2020) and Arfaoui (2020), on the other hand, observed the emergence in villages of informal solidarity networks contesting dominant "logics of dispersion and invisibilization" regarding the "unwanted" (Ristic 2020, 248).

It is partly from this body of literature that I have drawn the definition of "periphery," often defined according to various indicators that explain specific experiences of mobilities and migration. Wirth et al., for instance, define peripheralization, as a "gradual weakening of economic potential with regard to production and employment, decoupling, out-migration, dependency and negative self-perception, […] or by regional socio-economic decline and demographic shrinking" (Wirth et al. 2016, 63). In this definition, economic and social dimensions intersect with different forms of mobilities in the process of peripheralization.

2.2.2. Regional ethnographies in peripheral areas

However, it should not be forgotten that a considerable amount of research has been undertaken for decades in small villages, primarily in the field of social anthropology. After all, is it not the origin of this discipline to go to small villages and explore the classification systems that structure everyday life?

In this literature, too, there is much inspiring research (Cole and Wolf 1999; Coquard 2019; Stacul 2003; Ringel 2020; Wuthnow 2018). The work of Coquard and his book *Ceux qui restent, faire sa vie dans les campagnes en déclin* [Those who stay, making a living in declining countryside] exemplify this type of investigation. An important source of inspiration for my thesis, the book is based on several years of ethnographic fieldwork in which Coquard focused on a region slightly different from the Val-de-Travers—the French Grand Est—marked by a strong dynamic of peripheralization. He explored the professional and personal trajectories of people living there, demonstrating the importance of nuancing the role of ethno-national origins in the dynamics of categorization and self-identification. Although certain aspects related to mobility are addressed, notably those concerning young people leaving the region in search of new professional opportunities, this is not Coquard's main research question. Rather, he explored, in a convincing and interesting manner, the networks of inter-knowledge created in everyday life that structure the research participants' feelings of belonging. He also demonstrated how virulent (even racist) discourses with the "outside world" are not incompatible with the everyday formation of groups transcending national (and racial) origins. This is what he calls "racism with variable geometry" (Coquard 2019).

Wuthnow's book, *The Left Behind* (2018), and its exploration of the fabric of moral communities in rural America are along the same lines. In some of these studies, peripheralization is also found to have

an important symbolic dimension that could be mobilized as a resource to reinforce a shared sense of collective belonging (Coquard 2019; Stacul 2003). For instance, in connection with a romantic celebration of authenticity associated with (rural) peripheries sheltered from globalization and modernization (Brown and Hall 2000).

2.2.3. Borderland studies

Other research has focused specifically on borderlands. The definition of a borderland may be both controversial (Tyrell 2016) and complex. Baud and Van Schendel (1997, 221) identified, for instance, three regional units of analysis for border studies: the *border heartland*, the *intermediate borderlands*, and the *outer borderland*. However, following Martínez, I understand a borderland as a "region that lies adjacent to a border" (1994, 5). The effects of this configuration, as well as its associated delineations, daily experiences, and negotiations, are the object of my ethnographic investigation, which I develop throughout this dissertation.

Studies on borderlands have documented daily practices of cross-border mobilities (Balogh 2013), processes of identity formation (and instrumentalization) in these places (de Fátima Amante 2010; Holt 2018; Danero Iglesias 2019), and exchanges and cooperation between border regions (Prokkola 2019; Sharples 2020). Largely within the field of border (or borderland) studies, these projects have explored how mobilities—often cross-border mobilities—challenge the border on a daily basis and how the border is understood as a process rather than a line.

For example, some researchers have focused on the lived experiences of people in border regions and examined the ways in which people navigate and negotiate border identities (Campbell 2015). Others have considered the "fluidity" of the border and emphasized that borders are neither fixed nor immutable entities but are constantly "mobile" (Szary 2015). Others still have highlighted the cultural and social processes that shape borders by examining the ways in which language, religion, and other cultural factors influence the border (Wille and Nienaber 2020). Some have explored the particular power dynamics that shape the border by examining the ways in which different actors, including states, individuals, and communities, exercise power over the border (Hess and Kasparek 2017).

These contributions have particularly informed my reflections in Chapter 6, as they conceptualize border regions in their relationship to the national border. They allow me to understand the periphery in relation to the nation-state and thus how national and territorial borders are negotiated on a daily basis by the ordinary actors who live, work, or cross these border regions.

2.2.4. Intermediary conclusion: defining the periphery

The combination of these texts does not reveal single mechanisms but rather identifies the entanglement of different social processes. While I do not specifically subscribe to any one of these literatures, I draw on them in my analyses. In particular, they help me to complexify my understanding of peripherality as well as the interrelated social dynamics. Combining these studies with critical and reflexive approaches to migration studies also allows me to grasp the articulation of mobilities in peripheral places alongside the production and representation of nation-state-based categories.

As mentioned earlier, the term periphery is complex to define. In my dissertation, one of the reasons it is extensively used is that it is used often by research participants; it thus seems to resonate with their lived experiences. Nonetheless, while I initially justified this choice by its ubiquity in the interviews and case study documentation, I was quickly confronted with the term's ambiguities and paradoxes as I explored its contours. The ambiguities are primarily related to the fact that, depending on the time and scale considered, the peripherality of a place can change significantly. For example, a historically central region may become peripheralized over time, particularly following periods of deindustrialization (Wirth et al. 2016). At the same time, if a region is considered peripheral based on its geographic and relative position within the boundaries of a nation-state, it may be perceived differently if the scale considered changes.

Interestingly, as explained by Moore (2008), several geographers have viewed scale as a category of analysis. However, this can sometimes lead to the objectification of bounded spaces, the imposition of political scales, and the perception of scales as metaphors rather than social and material outcomes (Moore 2008). On the other hand, some scholars have demonstrated that scales are categories of practice rather than of analysis and have focused on how narratives, classifications, and cognitive schemas associated with scales shape perception, thought, and action. This perspective aims to understand how people, places, events, actions, and social relationships are classified in terms of scale politics and what factors influence the adoption of particular scalar categorizations and frameworks in practice (Moore 2008).

Thus, in this research, the adoption of scale as a category of practice allows for an exploration of the intersection of scales and complicates the discussion of the notion of periphery. By examining how different scales interact and influence each other, the traditional dichotomy between periphery and center becomes less stable and more nuanced. For instance, what may be considered a periphery at one scale could be a center at another scale, challenging conventional notions of geographic hierarchies. This approach enables a more comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of spatial dynamics, highlighting the intricate interplay between scales and their implications for various sociopolitical and economic processes (Paasi 2004).

In concrete terms, if the Val-de-Travers is considered to be on the periphery of Switzerland and the canton of Neuchâtel—a double peripherality often heard during the fieldwork from both the valley's inhabitants and politicians—it is at the (geographical) center of Europe and at the heart of a multitude of intra-European mobilities. This example thus reveals that the notion of periphery is destabilized if the center is neither the nation-state nor the canton in which the region is located but the continent—or even the globe.

However, the notion of periphery is also characterized by an important paradox: while it is representative of a form of "distance," "isolation," and "socio-economic deprivation" (Wirth et al. 2016), these same characteristics can be used as resources for regional development (Brown and Hall 2000). Indeed, one should not forget that processes of peripheralization, which can certainly destabilize, weaken, and marginalize a region, can also be appropriated by political agents, economic actors, or local populations to (re)orient regional development and thus region-building. Drawing on DeLanda (2006, 2016), who himself draws on Deleuze and Guattari, key authors of assemblage theory, the notions of deterritorization and reterritorialization seem in this regard particularly relevant. These authors propose to see assemblages as emergent, self-organizing systems, composed of heterogeneous components that can enter into relations of various types with one another. In this sense, assemblages can be destabilized, leading to processes of deterritorialization, or they can be stabilized or reinforced, leading to processes of reterritorialization (DeLanda, 2006).

Thus, if the periphery is characterized by a form of "deterritorialization," it can be followed by a form of "reterritorialization," whether for tourism development (due to potential natural resources), economic development (by attracting industries seeking cheap land), or even social development (by valuing social proximity and the ties between those who live there). Therefore, exploring peripheries as proposed in my research does not mean exploring a given place but rather investigating assemblages—temporary and contingent groupings of heterogeneous elements forming a complex system—characterized by changing political, economic, and social dynamics.

It is therefore in view of these characteristics that I define the Val-de-Travers as a peripheral borderland. The notion of a peripheral borderland may seem surprising—all borderlands are peripheral to an extent. However, I think such a definition serves to emphasize that the Val-de-Travers is peripheralized within the canton of Neuchâtel and Switzerland while being simultaneously on the national border with France. This is in stark contrast to other borderlands, for example around Lake Geneva (Pigeron-Piroth 2021), which have much more privileged economic characteristics.

2.3. A multi-perspective and interdimensional approach to everyday life

To study the social organization of difference in Val-de-Travers, I used four central theoretical perspectives throughout the research: the locality perspective, the mobility perspective, the boundary-work perspective, and the bordering perspective. The combination of these perspectives offers an interesting framework in which to consider the social organization of difference in specific places and to generate specific sets of questions to explore it empirically. In what follows, I present how I articulated these perspectives and how they informed my study of interdimensional and intertwined processes of boundary-making and bordering at the interface of locality and mobility. I situate myself at the interface of structural and individual dimensions to explore the frictions and subtleties of the social organization of difference.

2.3.1. Locality perspective

There are many ways to define locality. If it can be understood in lay language as a particular place, situation, or location, I understand it as a theoretical notion that enables one to question the daily production of the local at symbolic, social, economic, and political levels. In other words, this perspective invites exploration of how a place is constructed in relation to other places and, above all, how different actors define and negotiate a place's contours on a daily basis. Locality questions how people who live in, work in, or cross a place perceive, experience, and construct that place—summarized by Strathern as "people's ideas about the significance of place" (1984, 44).

As such, a locality perspective invites one to explore a place beyond territorial boundaries (Appadurai 1996). This justifies not considering a place as a geographically delimited unit of analysis but as an entry point for investigation. In other words, one cannot simply consider a place as a "container" if one aims to capture the everyday dynamics of place- or locality-making. Cox and Mair (1991) argued that locality is not physical but must be considered in terms of a "localized social structure." As such, studying the discourses and practices of place-making allows one to capture how places are transformed into socioeconomic-political assemblages that provide an analytical framework for research.

Further, Jones and Woods (2015) suggested that the locality perspective requires focusing on two primary dimensions. First, the material dimension, which they call "the material coherence of locality." Second, the imaginary dimension, which they term "imagined coherence." By material coherence, the authors mean "the social, economic, political structures and practices that are uniquely configured around a place" (2015, 46). By imagined coherence, they mean that

> residents of the locality have a sense of identity with the place and with each other, such that they constitute a perceived community with shared patterns of behavior and shared geographical reference points. Imagined coherence therefore makes a locality meaningful as a space of collective action. (Jones and Woods 2015, 46)

Their approach proposes examining the entanglement of these two dimensions, and they find that certain places display "material coherence" but lack "imagined coherence," while other places are characterized by the inverse dynamic.

In this sense, I take from these considerations that locality-related aspects are not static historical elements but aspects (on multiple scales) that are territorialized and appropriated (socially, symbolically, economically, politically, and materially) and that co-constitute a place. According to Cresswell, who builds on Amin's work,

> instead of attempting to assert control over a given territory, Amin argues, local actors need to assert control over networks and nodes that increasingly define life in the twenty-first century. It is not the space of the region that needs to be controlled, but the spaces of flow. (Cresswell 2013, 75)

A useful example of this relational argument is managing and responding to the dynamics of the "peripheralization" of a place: peripherality is not a fixed or permanent attribute but is constructed through multiple interconnections between places; some centralize while others peripheralize.

Thus, each place, through individual, political, and institutional actors, has varying space to maneuver in the social, economic, and symbolic organization. These local dynamics, which participate in place-making (Gille and Riain 2002) or region-building (Paasi 2009) projects, are highly dependent on location in regional, national, and international political systems. In Switzerland, for example, there is the principle of "subsidiarity;" namely, that the higher-level authority only takes on a task if the lower-level authority is not able to perform it sufficiently.[2] This means that small political entities, such as municipalities, have substantial room for maneuver. This Swiss particularity influences the production of the "local," understood as "a site of daily practices that connects global processes with the fabric of daily human experience and the reconstitution of the community" (Sunier 2021, 1738).

In this thesis, using the locality perspective allows me to grasp how the "local" is constructed and negotiated at political, economic, social, or symbolic levels. Further, several mobilities are part of the local and relate to people's sense of territorial belonging (Gustafson 2009).

2.3.2. Mobility perspective

Based on the previous discussion, I associate the locality perspective with a "mobility perspective" (Faist 2013; Cresswell 2006). This derives from the (new) mobility paradigm introduced by John Urry and Mimi Sheller in the 2000s (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2007), which proposes a radical shift in the exploration of social processes: the starting point is mobility, not sedentariness. This epistemological and ontological twist (Söderström et al. 2013, 10) consists of considering that the social world is made

[2] https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/048198/2012-07-20/ [Accessed September 8, 2022]

up of mobilities, human and non-human, at different scales that intersect and produce a diversity of social realities (Söderström and Crot 2010). This paradigm has developed through a new way of "analyzing societies by paying attention to the role that movements play in the organization of social relations" (Kaufmann 2021). Importantly, this does not imply that "everything moves," and mobility scholars have also demonstrated the importance of considering different forms of immobilities. Several scholars have, for example, explored the fact of being immobile as "the process of staying" (Stockdale and Haartsen 2018), while others have examined how the immobility of some enables the mobility of others (Heil et al. 2017).

Sedentary bias

Sedentary bias (Malkki 1995; Urry 2007) is an issue that stems from a static worldview that assumes a connection between populations, territories, and cultures. "The immobile perspective takes the sedentarist way of social life as self-evident (if not outright natural) while problematising the practice of mobility as being exceptional" (Amelina and Vasilache 2014, 111). The sedentary perspective, which is also linked to the logic of the nation-state, thus views migration as a movement from one country to another followed by sedentariness. As a consequence, all other mobilities (pre- and post-migration, local mobilities, etc.) are neglected (Moret 2018) and migrant trajectories (Schapendonk 2020; Schapendonk and Steel 2014) are "simplified." Wyss (2022) and Schapendonk (2018, 2020) note that much migration research focuses (exclusively) on "either the causes or the consequences of the migration process of individuals" (Wyss 2022, 6) and does not pay enough attention to the periods between departures and arrivals or to "pre-migration mobility and post-migration mobility" (Schapendonk, Bolay, and Dahinden 2021, 3245).

As demonstrated in the recent literature, this sedentary ontology is problematic not only because it underestimates the importance that all forms of movement play in the daily organization of social relations (Kaufmann 2021)—which is discussed later in this chapter—but principally because it results in the assignment of certain people to fixed categories that underestimate the fluidity of daily life and of individual and collective belonging. On the one hand are all the categories that qualify population groups (presumably) marked by one form of migration or another; on the other hand, are all the categories that are (presumably) marked by sedentary life. The latter seem to be the norm, with research exploring how mobile people become sedentary and gradually move from a migration-related category toward a sedentary-related category. This is widely explored in studies that work on "immigrant integration" (for critics see Korteweg 2017; Favell 2022; Schinkel 2018).

The mobility perspective prompts exploration of which mobilities develop in different places, why, and with what effects. It also raises questions concerning the experiences, practices, and representations of those who perform these mobilities. Finally, the mobility perspective invites questioning the intertwining of different mobilities, how they relate to each other, and the formal and informal regulations that organize and frame the mobilities concerned. It is naturally impossible to explore "all" mobilities in one place. Therefore, researchers propose taking mobilities as a starting point before identifying those that are significant, contested, politicized, captured, or regulated by state actors (Kalir 2013). On this basis, this dissertation is thus interested in the social organization of difference and focuses primarily on human mobilities, which are of course intertwined with non-human mobilities; that is, when humans move, representations, objects, ideas, money, and knowledge also circulate.

Various voices have argued against a romanticized view of mobility studies that does not sufficiently consider power relations and forms of inequalities (Caletrío 2017). This argument indicates an important concern, of course, but seems to overlook the range of studies supporting this perspective that have approached these issues by developing a multitude of intermediate concepts. The most prominent (and referenced) example is certainly the regimes of mobility perspective developed by Glick Schiller and Salazar in 2013 and adapted since then in a wealth of scholarly contributions (Baker 2016; Fradejas-García and M. Mülli 2019). Further concepts that can be briefly mentioned in this register include the "mobility capital" developed by Moret (2018b) and inspired by the concept of motility (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004; Flamm and Kaufmann 2006); that is, the capacity to be mobile. These approaches have demonstrated that, despite increasing opportunities for rapid, long-distance movement, considerable inequalities are increasing regarding access to and experiences of these mobilities. Recent works have proposed deepening the entanglement between (im)mobilities and inequalities by exploring, for instance, social policies from a mobility perspective (Bruzelius and Shutes 2022). Not only do these policies exclusively (and problematically) address a "sedentary" and "local" population but can also deprive disadvantaged people of access to mobility. Thus, one set of fundamental questions raised by a mobility perspective concerns the inequalities intertwined with mobility issues: inequalities in terms of access to and experience of mobility (Cass, Shove, and Urry 2005).

Furthermore, although researchers have confirmed that migration is "a form of mobility," they have proposed further exploring the intertwining of these two terms. The interest is in understanding who is considered mobile or migrant and what the meanings of these distinct terms are (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2020). The imaginaries and connotations associated with these notions are highly divergent (Faist 2013). Investigating their differences represents a means of (re)introducing the nation-state and the categories that flow from it into the analysis. This would not be undertaken by reproducing a methodological nationalism but by investigating which mobilities are, through laws and policies of representation, "migranticized" (Schapendonk, Bolay, and Dahinden 2021). Again, the question of inequality and power relations is central to the analysis. Kalir sums up this purpose when he states:

> It is time for a mobilities paradigm to generate research projects which study human mobility holistically, privilege the perspective of moving subjects, explore the impact of movement on the lived realities of involved actors and 'bring in the state' as people experience it. (Kalir 2013, 325)

This means constructing a research project that considers the diversity of mobilities while being attentive to how the state interferes with various formal and informal regulations and how individuals respond to, and even appropriate (Scheel 2017), these dynamics.

Movement, mobility, migration: some definitions

Movements can repeat endlessly, be circular, and intertwine with each other (Menet 2019; Moret 2018; Tarrius 2001; Kaufmann 2021). Thus, "[c]entral to the concerns of spatial science was not 'things', [...], but processes and movements" (Cresswell 2013, 91). Once questions of "power" are added to this equation, movements are not only regulated and unevenly accessible but are categorized into different types of mobilities. These movements, which occur across multiple locations and are performed by any social actors, acquire meanings by becoming mobilities, but these meanings sometimes conflict. By becoming mobilities, they are no longer abstract notions, but socially charged categories embedded in relations of domination. Categories of mobility thus represent systems for classifying movements, the access to which and the experiences of which vary between individuals and population groups.

To explore these differences and inequalities, Cresswell defines what he calls the politics of mobility (2010). He presents six aspects—(1) motive force, (2) velocity, (3) rhythm, (4) route, (5) experience, and (6) friction—each of which has a politics and allows one "to differentiate people and things into hierarchies of mobility" (Cresswell 2010, 26). In short, individuals have different reasons for moving, varying speeds and rhythms of movement, unequal means and paths, different experiences, and face various frictions that interfere in the process of stopping. Cresswell continues his conceptualization by developing what he calls "constellations of mobility," understood as patterns of movement, representations of movement, and ways of practicing movement that make sense together. In short, if the world is made up of movements, these movements are unequally accessible, represented, and experienced (Cass, Shove, and Urry 2005): the categories of mobilities are hierarchical.

Thus, epistemologically, I conceive of mobilities as socially constructed categorizations. There are multiple strategies and practices that categorize and appropriate movements and make them meaningful mobilities. Particular movements, usually when they include a crossing of a national border, are migranticized and become migration. Migration is thus a social construction, a mobility to which specific meanings (and representations) have been assigned: "demigranticising migration research (Dahinden 2016) aims to examine how, under what conditions, for which historical reasons and with what effects some mobile people are migranticised in everyday life, in politics, in the media, in schools, etc., while others are not" (Wyss and Dahinden 2022, 14). Again, despite this constructed dimension, classifying certain mobilities as migration does, of course, have concrete implications, notably in terms of access to other forms of mobility, to political rights, or even to social and economic rights.

2.3.3. Boundary-work perspective

In addition to seeking to capture the everyday constructions of "locality" and exploring the significant mobilities in these processes, this dissertation interrogates how these practices and discourses intertwine with boundary-making dynamics. Specifically, I explore how different actors (re)produce distinctions between different population groups on a daily basis and what meanings, representations, norms, and markers are invoked in these processes of differentiation between individuals and collectives. I understand these differentiations and social and symbolic boundaries as situational, interactional, and dynamic, and as potentially linked to relations of domination (Rogers and Vertovec 1995). Indeed, certain actors wield more power to assign other individuals to social categorizations (Jenkins 2008), which can lead to a range of (non-)reactions (Wimmer 2013). It is these power games, which negotiate

individuals' categorical affiliations, that contribute to everyday group formation dynamics (Wimmer 2004).[3]

In this light, the boundary-work perspective represents, in my view, an effective and relevant perspective for going beyond the naturalization of social categories (Dahinden 2016) and individual or collective "identities" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Furthermore, a boundary-work perspective emphasizes the agency of the actors (Wimmer 2013). This approach stems from the work of Barth (1969) who proposed changing the study of "cultural" belonging. According to him, the focus should no longer be on the social group *per se* but on the social and symbolic boundaries negotiated in everyday interactions. Since Barth's seminal work (1969), multiple authors have shaped this approach and conceptualized it in sophisticated ways (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Brubaker 2004; Jenkins 2008; Wimmer 2013). The conceptualizations proposed by these prominent scholars have led to many empirical research projects (Baumann 1996; Dahinden 2013; Gidley 2013; Wessendorf 2013).

While these authors have developed their theoretical reflections by working on ethnic differentiation processes, it is important to note that the tools and concepts they developed apply to all forms of social and symbolic differentiation. Dahinden (2013), for example, studied the types of boundaries that emerge in a city characterized by high levels of immigration and demonstrated that the inhabitants are organized along dimensions such as regional origin, education, local establishment, mobility type, religion, and race. As such, the boundary-work perspective insists on the importance of de-essentializing social categories and of being vigilant against a tendency to naturalize them in migration studies. This vigilance (Gillespie, Howarth, and Cornish 2012) extends beyond the elaboration of the research design and applies also to the process of data production: "The perspectival character of categories requires researchers to actively engage with categories during interviews, which yields insights into the politics at play in the becoming of those categories" (Dahinden, Fischer, and Menet 2021, 15). In this way, researchers elicit ongoing reflection on the situational use and production of meanings associated with categories: while some are marked by "bright boundaries," others can be described as having "blurred boundaries" (Alba 2005).

[3] Importantly, Brubaker (2004), echoed by Jenkins (2008), insists on the difference between a group and a category, two notions that he believes are often confused. Unlike categories, social groups emerge with a shared sense of belonging to a collective: "They are contingent and immanently changeable, an emergent product of interaction and of classificatory processes" (Jenkins 2008, 52). They result from social processes of self-identification (the definition of "us") that are reinforced (or not) by processes of social categorization (the categorization of "them"). Thus, while a social category can certainly become a "group," these "groups are always categories" (Jenkins 2008, 57). According to Brubaker, it is therefore important not to take social groups for granted; they are not "given," but social processes to be investigated. To this end, he proposes the term "group-making project," or "groupness," a temporary or permanent, situational, and interactional feeling of belonging to a collective. Conversely, he invites researchers to beware of "groupism;" namely, the assignment of individuals to social groups without investigation and empirical examination. In this case, it would therefore be more appropriate to talk of social categorizations. The latter are also dynamic, with meanings that change regularly, whether this change is instigated from above (through political or media processes, for example) or from below—which is what Brubaker calls the "micropolitics of categories" (Brubaker 2004).

In my research, I thus conceive of social categories as dynamic constructions that are transformed, (re)produced in interactions, and have an important situational dimension. In this sense, I understand these processes as discourses and practices of differentiation, categorization, and identification that feed into systems of classification and (re)produce distinct forms of representation, stereotyping, and stigmatization of difference (Hall 1997). Like Hall, I understand the dynamics of "stereotyping" as discourses and practices that "reduce, essentialize, naturalize and fix 'difference'" (1997, 258).

Furthermore, this constructivist, situational, and interactional approach to social categories allows for the nuancing of well-established concepts in social science studies, such as the notion of diversity (Vertovec 2007). Indeed, as a large body of social science literature details, the use of "diversity" can lead to an "essentialization" of differences (be it gender, culture, class, race, etc.) that can be perceived as a "given" or "established fact" to be promoted and valued. In this sense, such use risks rendering power relations and structural problems invisible by failing to problematize the production of difference and related issues of inequality. As several authors have argued (Duru-Bellat 2011), caution is necessary to avoid falling into a "romantic" or "angelic" use of diversity. There is also the question of the effects on the individuals who "embody" the rhetoric of diversity, who are assigned to a certain category and are thus relegated to their particularities (Ahmed 2009). It is for these reasons, then, that I use the processual term of differentiation rather than diversity. I seek to understand how differences are produced and negotiated in everyday life, feeding into processes of self-identification and social categorization that classify, order, and hierarchize the people who live, work in, or pass through a place under study.

Several authors have proposed working with an intersectional approach to supersede an essentialist vision of difference and diversity and to consider the entanglement of different categories of domination (McCall 2005). This approach distances itself from research based on single analytical categories. The intersectional perspective, proposed in 1989 by Crenshaw, coalesces distinct forms of dominance (notably gender, class, and race) not to compare them but to identify their imbrications. Thus, those behind the concept of intersectionality, beginning with black American feminists (e.g., bell hooks and Angela Davis), argue that "race and class, like gender, underlie historically contingent categories of perception and judgment that order and hierarchize the social world" (Bereni et al. 2012, 279, my translation). However, these categories that produce relations of dominance should not be considered an accumulation of social properties—that is, as fixed characteristics of individuals—but as the result of a continuous process of construction. The challenge is thus to explore the production, interdependencies, and interactions of oppressions, which extend to "all forms of domination and discrimination" (Gay 2021, 22). These social relations are intertwined in "necessarily shared processes that are not experienced by social agents in the mode of separation" (Bereni et al. 2012, 296, my translation): every individual is indeed "inscribed" in relations of domination that are both transversal and simultaneous. Adopting an intersectional perspective on boundary-work practices and discourses reveals an

interweaving of numerous social categorizations and discloses how several of them reinforce or nuance social and symbolic boundaries between groups.

In line with these ideas, researchers have examined which categories of difference are of relevance in local contexts and investigated how different actors—that are socially, symbolically, economically, and politically inscribed in these contexts—identify and define themselves in terms of "differences and communalities." Several researchers have also addressed how actors are identified and defined by others in terms of categories (Dahinden, Duemmler, and Moret 2014). In this sense, the boundary-work perspective requires focusing on the creation, maintenance, and transformation of differentiations between groups. Such a perspective also necessitates considering how actors (re)produce social and symbolic delineations between individuals and collectives on a daily basis through formal and informal practices and strategies. The boundary-work perspective pays particular attention to the categorizations employed in everyday discourse and explores the meanings, purposes, and justifications of these processes of social categorization and self-identification.

In my dissertation, I therefore approach the social and symbolic boundaries between groups from an intersectional, situational, and interactional perspective, focusing in particular on everyday discourses and practices. In these dynamics (among others), actors mobilize a wide variety of "resources" to (re)produce distinctions between groups in everyday life. The situated and imagined history of a place and the diversity of political, economic, social, and symbolic elements can then serve as boundary-making discourses and practices. A particularly salient dimension of boundary-making dynamics is, in this sense, political and territorial: social and symbolic differentiations often result in politicized and territorialized distinctions between population groups. The bordering perspective allows me to grasp these issues, which are particularly important in a border region such as the Val-de-Travers.

2.3.4. Bordering perspective

While authors who subscribe to the "sociology of boundaries" conceive of differentiations between groups as situational and interactional dynamics, a similar perspective has developed with regard to the notion of the border. "To border" is used as a verb and not as a noun in accordance with speaking of a "bordering perspective" that denotes "the everyday construction of borders among communities and groups, through ideology, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and agency" (Scott 2015, 28). This approach stands in opposition to understanding borders as static lines that have been delineated "out of an eternal truth" (Green 2012, 576).

In this thesis, like Fischer, Achermann, and Dahinden (2020), I approach the notion of a border as constituting a (lived and imagined) territorial limit defining political entities, legal subjects, and formal and informal regulations that are (re)produced by an unlimited number of actors. These delimitations are conceived as being processual and continually (re)produced at local, regional, national, and transnational scales: "It's within this construction of the everyday life that the study of everyday

bordering needs to take place" (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2018, 9). Scholars have therefore increasingly attempted to complexify the understanding of borders as deterritorialized (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009), mobile (Szary 2015), and porous (see, for instance, the literature on the autonomy of migration; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010). Paasi makes it explicit that "borders are selectively porous and spread in space in the form of technical landscapes of control and social or symbolic landscapes of social order" (Paasi 2021, 23).

This thesis is thus built around a central distinction: *borders* refer more to political and territorial considerations, whereas *boundaries* refer more to social and symbolic considerations between individuals and collectives. However, these two terms are closely related, as Fassin states: "Borders as external territorial frontiers and boundaries as internal social categorizations are tightly related in a process in which immigrants are racialized and ethnic minorities are reminded of their foreign origin" (2011, 214). In this sense, national and territorial delimitations (borders) are constructed, reinforced, and transformed via boundary-making practices and discourses, and, in turn, social and symbolic differentiations between population groups are reinforced on the basis of national and territorial (non-)belonging. Van Houtum and Van Naersen's article entitled "Bordering, othering, ordering" (2002) is one of the first contributions to place the terms "border" and "boundary" into perspective, even if the authors are not formulated their argument in these terms. Othering—understood as the "transformation of difference into otherness so as to create an in-group and an out-group" (Staszak 2009)—is a form of boundary-making that is interrelated and associated with bordering practices. As Khosravi argues, othering and bordering practices in everyday life produce "invisible borders" that "keep immigrants foreign for generations" (Khosravi 2010, 76).

Therefore, according to Fassin (2011), there are dynamics of "policing borders" that are intertwined with processes of "producing boundaries." The link between the two terms becomes particularly explicit from a mobility perspective. Indeed, the formal and informal regulations of human mobility consist of bordering practices; for example, by granting or withholding a residence permit to an individual. Boundary-making practices can, in turn, be exemplified by justifying the denial of access to a territory by assigning ethnicizing or racializing categorizations. However, the mobility perspective allows one to develop this link further by focusing on the actors involved in formal and informal mobility regulation. For example, cross-border commuters, regardless of citizenship, are exposed to social and symbolic categorizations (on both sides of the national border) that evaluate their daily mobility practices, which can be judged beneficial for or detrimental to the regions concerned (Szytniewski and Spierings 2014). In turn, these constant evaluations and categorizations of population groups engaged in cross-border mobilities can generate a series of bordering discourses and practices intended to regulate their circulation between bordered territories. An example of this would be regulation of access to the labor market on either side of the border, increases in certain taxes, or other legal, political, or economic modifications and strategies.

In short, I understand bordering as a daily and dynamic process of delimitation between political and territorial entities that are constructed in close connection with the dynamics of social and symbolic differentiations between individuals and collectives. A bordering perspective invites me in this sense to question the formal and informal regulations of cross-border mobilities, to examine the diversity of actors who take part in these negotiations, and to explore how a border can be instrumentalized to produce other boundaries. As discussed above, boundary-making discourses and practices indeed require the mobilization of resources to feed the processes of differentiation. A border—with all its contested, negotiated, and regulated mobilities—represents such a resource, one that can potentially be activated by certain actors. Importantly, while a border is inevitably linked to social and symbolic boundaries, ethno-national categorizations most prominent among them, boundaries are not necessarily linked with borders. For example, discourses and practices of differentiation between groups cohabiting in a region, notably between long-term residents and newcomers (Elias and Scotson 1994), are not necessarily directly linked with bordering discourses and practices.

The border perspective is therefore relevant to my research by offering a theoretical tool with which to explore the everyday negotiations that shape regulations between different territorial and political entities. To study these phenomena, scholars have proposed multiple concepts and theoretical perspectives, one such being "ethnographic border regime analysis" (Hess and Kasparek 2017). In this approach, the border is conceptualized as "a series of practices" (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2013) that intersect to regulate or facilitate the mobility of goods and people. Within this literature, as in migration studies, several authors have attempted to distance themselves from methodological nationalism (Paasi 2019); Zhang (2019), for example, calls for a move away from state-centric narratives in border studies. Others recognize the role of ordinary actors—whether people engaged in practices of mobility across national borders (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013) or ordinary citizens (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019)—in the (re)production of borders. Rumford has particularly expanded on this topic and explored "the role of ordinary people in creating, moving, and removing borders—the idea of 'border work' (Rumford 2007, 2008b, 2012) and the variety of roles that borders can fulfill in addition to being markers of (state) division" (Rumford 2014, 3). He continues by arguing that

> a study of borders that embraces the vernacularization of borders shifts the focus from the borders of the state, securing and regulating mobilities, to the role of borders in the 'politics of everyday fear' (Massumi, 1993) and borders as a political resource for citizens who can both contest the border practices of nation-states and institute their own versions of borders. (Rumford 2014, 3)

The imagined and lived presence of national borders in collective representations thus serves as a resource through which "ordinary people" can produce meaning in or for their sociopolitical environment.

In an attempt to capture and "localize" bordering discourses and practices, Brambilla (2015) introduced the concept of borderscape. This concept fosters the exploration of "small stories" beyond governmental logics in the production and reproduction of borders. The notion of borderscape

> gives us the chance to relate the somewhat abstract level of conceptual change in border studies to actual borderscaping as practices through which fluctuating borders are imagined, materially established, experienced, lived as well as reinforced and blocked but also crossed, traversed and inhabited. (Brambilla 2015, 30)

This notion also provides a useful correspondence between the "sociology of boundaries"—the Barthian approach—and the bordering perspective. In a border region, such as the one studied in this dissertation, the notion of "border" is part of everyday life (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019). This notion therefore might not only be mobilized to negotiate the contours of an imagined community but might also be (in)formally regulated and contested in relation to, for instance, cross-border mobilities. In this dissertation, the articulation of border and boundary thus emerges not in the production of "national identity" but in the daily negotiations of symbolic and social differentiations that transcend ethno-national origins.

2.3.5. Intermediary conclusion on the social organization of difference

I believe that the combination of these four perspectives allows me to explore the complexity of the social organization of difference in the Val-de-Travers. However, the social organization of difference remains a broad framework, and I discuss in this intermediary conclusion the place and recognition of three (neglected) dimensions: (1) gender, (2) the nation-state, (3) "all" mobilities.

In focusing on the production, circulation, and meshing of categories of difference, questions emerge concerning the diversity of markers and norms that inform these dynamics, such as race, type of mobility, class, duration of stay, and gender. By inscribing myself in migration studies and focusing primarily on human movements and their interrelation with peripherality-related aspects, I have certainly overlooked other dimensions. Therefore, I would like to briefly clarify, first, the place of gender in this dissertation.

Preciado (2019) advances two fundamental assumptions. On the one hand, the epistemology of gender and the dominant norms that derive from it exert a discreet and silent "violence" on each of us. They require clear identity positioning (male or female) and the learning of social roles conceived as asymmetrical. On the other hand, the epistemology of gender shapes political regimes and the practices and discourses that characterize them (Preciado 2019).

While the first aspect could have been the focus of my work, my research questions and methodological orientations led me to other processes of identification and categorization. Such processes relate to the (re)production of an imagined community of fate (Chapter 5), the (im)morality of mobility practices

(Chapter 6), and the ambivalent uses and representations of the social categorizations of refugee, cross-border worker, and *cas sociaux* (Chapter 7). In other words, to the dominant categories I encountered during my ethnographic fieldwork that were themselves partially shaped by gendered dynamics. Here, rather than re-analyzing the gender categorizations in my corpus of data, I discuss how the epistemology of gender participates in producing the mechanisms core to my dissertation. I suggest that various domains explored in my work, following bell hooks (2021, 37) and Preciado (2019, 164), might fall under a "patriarchal definition of male sovereignty" that can include political organization, the functioning of the labor market, the deployment of regimes of mobility.

Male sovereignty might be broadly defined by the legitimate use of techniques of violence against women, against foreigners, against non-white men, and against all inferiorized and disadvantaged groups of the population (Preciado 2019, 291). This violence is expressed socially in the form of domination and economically in the form of privilege. Thus, while I have not directly addressed the production of gender difference, I believe that male sovereignty permeates most the formal and informal classification systems that distinguish an "us" versus a "them". In the Val-de-Travers, as elsewhere, dominant practices and discourses that inferiorize certain social categories of difference reproduce violent tendencies. The violence takes various forms, including racism against refugees, classism against poor individuals, chauvinism against non-residents, and sexism against women, which has been less explored.

Despite individual contestations of male sovereignty, "heteropatriarchal political regimes" (Preciado 2019) taint social, economic, and legal structures, cascade into everyday life, and legitimize the use of violent techniques in the social organization of difference.

Therefore, like race and class, gender can also be seen as a social construct produced through sociopolitical practices and institutions. While I do not explicitly analyze "gender" as a category of social differentiation and hierarchization, my epistemological perspectives and analysis are partly informed by feminist thinkers (Ahmed 2023; bell hooks 2021; Davis 2003; Gay 2021) and the capacities of a gender perspective to unveil structures of dominations and intersectionality.

Second, I would like to clarify the role of the nation-state and its associated categories in this dissertation. The nation-state, I believe, is the "obsession" (understood as a persistent disturbing preoccupation) of migration studies. This is true both for critical and reflexive migration studies, which aim to distance themselves from methodological nationalism, and for mainstream migration studies, which (un)consciously reproduce the logics of the nation-state. If the centrality of the nation-state is evident in the latter literature, it seems paradoxical in the former. Paradoxical, because studies seek to distance themselves from it, with authors speaking of "de-nationalizing" or "de-migranticizing" migration studies, and at the same time they recognize that it would be eminently pointless to free oneself from the nation-state when studying human movements. State actions remain extremely powerful in the

regulation of human movements, in the hierarchization of migratory categorizations, and in the experiences of migranticized people.

Therefore, this dissertation, with all its careful consideration of the nation-state, gives the latter a prominent place. However, the central questions of my work, which I detail below, are not "determined by the state and its interests" (Kalir 2013, 324). In other terms, I construct my research questions by exploring the everyday lives of non-state actors – ordinary inhabitants – not to sweep the nation-state from my project, but to avoid "to think like a nation-state, which led [...] to only study movement that crosses borders and to label as mobile only those who move to or settle in another state" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 192).

By exploring how the nation-state and its associated categories permeate everyday life, how they are experienced, contested, or reproduced, I contribute to a more complex understanding of the nation-state. For example, in Chapter 6, by exploring the deployment of a regime of (im)moral mobilities, I demonstrate the complexity of everyday dynamics of boundary-making, which are induced by a national border, but which go beyond categorizations of "Swiss" versus "French." In other words, while I explore the nation-state, I do not reproduce the categories that derive from it as categories of analysis but draw on other concepts outside migration studies (such as the four perspectives developed above).

Third, all mobilities can be significant for the social organization of difference, whether it is for shopping, for going to work, or for leisure; whether it is the types of mobilities (bicycle, walking, car, train, bus); the different people who perform mobilities ; the representations of mobilities (in relation, for example, to environmental issues); the inclusivity of mobilities (who has access to them, and who does not); and mobilities' effects on daily rhythms. However, I have chosen to explore those mobilities significant in the valley, those regarding which there are tensions and contestations, and, above all, those articulated with the periphery of the valley that destabilize the regional order. In other words, I acknowledge that I have not considered some mobilities that are fundamental to daily life, instead focusing on those that, in my opinion, play a central role in the social organization of difference. That is to say, movements that are associated with different categorizations of difference and with various representations of a (peripheral) sense of place.

Thus, the mobilities I explore are all linked to interrelated dynamics of boundary-making, bordering, and place-making. For example, I examine cross-border mobilities, which are informally morally negotiated and regulated by ordinary actors or mobilities between the valley's villages, which have participated in transferring self-identification from the village to the valley. These mobilities are performed by a wide range of people and generate varied reactions among different actors. This is precisely what my multiperspectival approach allows me to explore. I anchor these mobilities in multi-scalar historical, political, social, and economic contexts and investigate the heterogenous representations of the individuals who practice them and the actors who regulate them. In short, I focused

on certain mobilities that were not predefined prior to the ethnographic fieldwork but which emerged as salient and significant from my data.

2.4. Research questions

It is in the ethnographic exploration of the everyday and banal lives of people who live, work, or travel in the Val-de-Travers that I have chosen to articulate these various perspectives. More specifically, I seek to understand how people produce a sense of the environment in which they evolve (locality perspective), how the mobilities that co-constitute locality are experienced, appropriated, or contested (mobility perspective), how processes of differentiation emerge and produce individual and collective distinctions (boundary-work perspective), and how the (national) border is (re)produced and mobilized as a resource to produce other forms of social and symbolic boundaries. The three articles that constitute this dissertation address and articulate these distinct perspectives. Each of these theoretical perspectives generates families of specific questions I attempt to articulate across the dissertation: the locality-related aspects lead me to question how the Val-de-Travers is lived, perceived, represented and (re)produced daily (symbolically, materially, politically, socially, and economically) by a multitude of actors at different scales; mobility-related aspects require the exploration of human mobilities that co-shape everyday life and generate multiple reactions and transformations of the local order; boundary-related aspects involve the exploration of the daily discourses and practices of differentiation between individuals and groups who live in, work in, or pass through the Val-de-Travers. The border-related aspects require the exploration of the construction and roles played by "political" and "territorial" borders in the organization and local representations of difference.

On this basis, this thesis addresses the following main research questions: **How do different forms of (im)mobilities shape the social organization of difference in the Val-de-Travers? What can be learned by utilizing a (peripheral) place as an entry point to study mobilities, boundaries, and borders rather than pre-given ethno-national categories?**

To address these research questions, intermediate concepts are mobilized, elaborated, and theorized in the different articles. The first article focuses on the emergence of an *imagined community of fate* and poses the following research question: How are categories of sameness and difference organized in a peripheral(ized) place subject to transnationalization and local and international mobilities? The second article focuses on the everyday negotiations that produce a regime of (im)moral mobilities and asks the following question: How and why does the presence of a specific border—in this case a national border separating spheres of income inequality—inform and result in a dynamic of (morally) contested mobilities? The third article articulates the lived and situated peripherality of the region with representations and experiences of categorizations of difference and asks the following question: How do representations and experiences of difference, and the social categories associated with them, articulate with the lived and situated peripherality of the Val-de-Travers?

Before delving into these three strands of questioning and the results that follow, I present my methodology in the next chapter. I discuss how I constructed my case study and how I selected my research participants without taking ethno-national categories or specific categories of mobility as a starting point.

3. Methodology

Before "entering" the field and discussing the ethnographic process of my research, I should briefly address my methodological approach. By empirically exploring the social organization of difference, this dissertation delves into the everyday "constructions of meaning, [...] the ways people make sense of their everyday activities and surroundings" (Mottier 2005, 4). The dissertation also adopts a constructivist and interpretive methodological perspective that apprehends "the social world […] as a subjectively lived construct" (2005, 4). Indeed, for several years I explored and reflected on the Val-de-Travers, immersing myself and my subjectivity in the daily life of this small valley in French-speaking Switzerland. I met a multitude of people and listened to their stories regarding not only their trajectories and their representations of the region and of "others" but also their descriptions of their doubts and hopes. I did not simply "extract" people's stories (Burman 2018). Indeed, the multiple accounts I heard accompanied me throughout my reflections and often challenged my own conception of the world. The integration of such accounts into my theoretical and epistemological approaches finally led to analyses that were inevitably incomplete but representative of my understanding of the place.

Subjectivity concerns not only the researcher but also research participants. That is, knowledge production is dependent on participants' points of view, which has implications for how "data" is perceived. Indeed, the latter are not external objects or givens waiting to be collected but socially and situationally constructed material. Ethnographic representations are not only "partial truths" (Müller 2015, 10), they are also "positional truths" (Müller 2015, 10); each ethnographer actively and strategically draws on their characteristics and resources—their "ethnographic toolkit" (Reyes 2020)—to gain access, understand the field, and navigate asymmetrical power relations with research participants. Interpretative perspectives problematize how researchers' "multiple identities" (Reyes 2020, 223) shape field research, which I discuss at the end of this chapter.

According to Mottier, as researchers "we construct interpretations of interpretations" (2005, 7). For this reason, I privilege speaking of "data production" (Olivier de Sardan 1995) rather than data collection. Of course, I am the sole person responsible for my interpretations, and I do not intend to romanticize the participation of my interlocutors. Completing a doctoral dissertation remains a solitary task that takes shape on a daily basis in the researcher's mind. Nevertheless, a PhD researcher is not locked in an office to then produce intricate analyses "out of the blue". The "researcher" is a person who confronts the world, who talks with their colleagues, and (in the case of qualitative research) who spends many hours with a multitude of interlocutors who (un)consciously help him or her understand and illuminate social processes.

In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate the process of data production, foregrounding my subjectivity and my positionalities to contextualize and question my observations. This chapter includes five principal subsections: (1) the ethnographic process and the construction of and access to the field; (2) the conduct

in the field and the various methods employed; (3) strategies and methods used for data analysis; (4) ethical considerations; and (5) reflections on my positionality. Because this work is part of a larger research project, it is important to note that the methodological framework and the methods employed in this dissertation were partly outlined beforehand at the level of the larger project. Moreover, reflections and specificities concerning the methodological procedure were both individually and jointly elaborated throughout the research process with other members of the research team.

Given the limited space to present and contextualize my data in the three articles included in this thesis, the presentation of my methodological approach is accompanied by long extracts from interviews[4] and field notes. It should be noted that these excerpts were recorded, transcribed, and written in French before I translated them into English.

3.1. An ethnographic process

Ethnography is more than a mere discipline or method; it is a process (Bensa and Fassin 2008, 10). According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy, "ethnographers are researchers who go inside the social worlds of the inhabitants of their research setting, hanging out, observing, and recording the ongoing social life of its members" (2011, 183). Ethnography constitutes a "research strategy" (Watson and Till 2010, 122) that comprises a multitude of methods—that include observations and/or participant observations, interviews, and document analysis—to understand "how people create and experience their worlds" (Watson and Till 2010, 122). These methods allowed me to illuminate the formal and informal classification systems structuring everyday life in the valley. Nevertheless, such an endeavor does not lead to "revelations" but to ethnographic "insights" (Hertz 2004).

Contrary to scholars such as Benoit Coquard (2019), Matthew Desmond (2016), and Alice Goffman (2014)—to mention but a few—I did not immerse myself for many years in my interlocutors' private sphere to the point that "my life intertwined with theirs." Although such approaches allow a researcher to document, observe, and illuminate subtle social mechanisms that are otherwise often invisible, such a scientific and personal commitment was neither appropriate nor necessary in my case. In my project, I explored various experiences of migration and mobility and how these articulate with everyday life in the Val-de-Travers. Rather than infiltrating a "network of inter-relations" (Beaud and Weber 2010, my translation), I studied the valley by living there, participating in daily activities, volunteering in an organization, and following the news. While my life did not directly intermingle with the lives of my interlocutors, it did "mesh" with the valley.

Therefore, my approach is close to what several authors have recently termed "patchwork ethnography" (Watanabe, Varma, and Günel 2020); that is, I employ ethnographic processes and protocols designed

[4] To preserve anonymity, all names mentioned are pseudonyms. The strategies and processes used to achieve anonymization and confidentiality are discussed later in this chapter.

around long-term commitments and use fragmentary yet rigorous data and other innovations that "resist the fixity, holism, and certainty demanded in the publication process" (Watanabe, Varma, and Günel 2020). For three years, I engaged in a continuous "back and forth" movement, adapting and articulating my ethnographic explorations with my theoretical reflections. By combining my experiences, my scientific interests, and my emotions with the conduct of my research in the Val-de-Travers, I gradually "constructed theories" (Charmaz 2006) grounded in the empirical data. As such, what I call my fieldwork is not the given region of Val-de-Travers but instead signifies how I construct and understand it through a reflexive and methodological process I outline in this chapter.

Importantly, unlike traditional ethnographic studies, I conducted my investigation in place that is rather familiar both geographically (I used to live about 30 minutes by train from the Val-de-Travers) and socially (I share certain characteristics with most research participants, such as citizenship, whiteness, and language). This configuration can potentially blur the boundaries between the inside and outside of the research (Amit 1999). Nevertheless, like Müller (2015), I doubt the legitimacy of such an analytical distinction, because (1) there is no clearly identifiable boundary separating them and (2) "identities" are not as monolithic and deterministic as between "insiders" and "outsiders". Rather, I argue that this proximity confers particular resources and operative skills that I can mobilize in interactions to access and navigate my terrain. Throughout this chapter, and particularly in the last two sections, I thus clarify my positionality, particularly with regard to a form of proximity and familiarity with the Val-de-Travers and some of its inhabitants.

3.1.1. Accessing and constructing the field

My ethnographic investigation in the Val-de-Travers began a few weeks after I started my PhD contract in October 2018. The other PhD candidate working on the project is called Oliver, and the two of us, in dialogue with the project leaders, Tania Zittoun and Janine Dahinden, decided to collaborate to produce exploratory data.

During the first few months of the research, I lived in Neuchâtel, which is 35 minutes by train from Noiraigue, the first village in the Val-de-Travers. During these first months—which is when the initial explorations of the region were undertaken and the first interviews conducted—I frequently went to the valley, occasionally accompanied by Oliver. I scheduled interviews, somewhat randomly, with people who could inform me of various elements that I had identified as relevant to my research. During these first visits, I wandered the streets of the various villages and spent a lot of time in the cafés and restaurants in the region to observe, read, or write fieldnotes. This way of discovering a place by "wandering" has been described in geography as "*dérive urbaine*" [urban drifting] (Bonard and Capt 2009); it implies letting oneself be impacted and guided by the emotional effects that the locality can produce. I have fond memories of these times, and I regularly used to wonder what the other customers in these establishments might be thinking of me. Through these relatively distant observations, I became

familiar with the atmosphere and rhythms of the valley. I spent time during the working days of the week engaging in rather quiet moments in public spaces. There were several occasions in some cafés I visited when I engaged in informal conversations with either employees or customers. Here is the beginning of a conversation I had in August 2019:

> I entered a café to escape the heavy rain. The waitress immediately makes a remark about the weather, which is particularly bad for August. We continue the discussion while I order a coffee. A man is at the bar and joins the conversation. He comments on the fact that some hiking tourists must have been surprised by the storms. We talk briefly about tourists, and the waitress tells me that during the summer months there are a lot of them from the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Before continuing the discussion, I decided to introduce my interest in the region and mention my research project. Hearing the word "migration" in my short description, the waitress immediately refers to her being from Tunisia and her husband being from Spain. (Excerpts from field notes, summer 2019)

This type of small talk provided insight into experiences of migration and mobility in the valley. I also had opportunities to raise several of the dominant concerns in the region, such as cross-border workers[5] and the valley's place within the canton of Neuchâtel.[6]

A further important activity during this period was reading the *Courrier du Val-de-Travers*, a newspaper that appears every Thursday morning and is much anticipated by the local population. It contains information from the municipal council, information about the upcoming weekend activities, news from the different villages, and, above all, the column titled "*La vie au Vallon*" [life in the valley], which portrays a "Valley-er of the week". Each week, a person is written about because of his or her contributions and activities in the Val-de-Travers. The articles on these people, whose trajectories and perceptions of the Val-de-Travers I enjoyed learning about, helped me grasp the inhabitants of the region somewhat. Above all, I was able to see who and what is "visible" and "invisible" in this local press. Most of the people who had a newspaper article written about them are white, long-term residents (ranging from their 20s to their 80s) from professions representative of what one could qualify as "middle class."

After this "open" phase, I began to narrow down my radius of investigation by contacting and selecting interlocutors according to my ongoing preliminary analyses. I also decided to involve myself in an organization to provide a rhythm to my visits to the valley and to have regular interlocutors. To identify an organization, I searched online. I considered working in a museum, and even thought of applying for

[5] Differences in pay scales between France and Switzerland lead to significant cross-border labor mobility: people living in France and working in Switzerland can benefit from a higher salary and a lower cost of living. These dynamics are specifically explored in the second article in this thesis.

[6] The relations and positions of the Val-de-Travers within the canton of Neuchâtel are an important aspect of the dynamics of everyday group formation in the valley, as examined in the first article.

a part-time social worker position advertised by the municipality, before finally discovering the *Val-Sewing*,[7] a small social reintegration organization offering activities to beneficiaries of the social service and the migration service. As they also provide French language classes, I thought that this position might offer a socially beneficial opportunity to contact people who had recently arrived in the valley (given they attend French language classes). I called the relevant phone number and was put through to Arianne, a retired educator who teaches French. She said she was interested in my proposal to volunteer for the organization but stated she was only a volunteer and therefore could not make the decision to hire me. I was then reoriented to Coralie, the director of the organization. We made an appointment to meet during the afternoon of Tuesday the 17th of September 2019.

> I arrive at the place around 2:30 pm. There are about ten women sitting around a table. I greet them and ask if Coralie is around. Before they could answer, Coralie arrives; she had heard me. She immediately begins to describe what the women around the table are doing. She introduces them as learners who knit and sew under the guidance of a volunteer. She then offers to show me around. She introduces me to Samia, a woman who is employed in the institution. Coralie is in her 50s and shows me the different creations and the originality of the production. The workshop works with private clients who can request specific items. After the visit, we sit in the kitchen. Coralie and I take out a notebook to take notes. I have not planned any specific questions. My intention is mainly to understand the functioning of the institution and to discuss if a commitment as a volunteer is possible. Coralie presents me with the history of the place. At the beginning, with a friend, she wanted to create a space for "migrant women"[8] but had to extend the offer to other persons in order to obtain public funding. Currently, about twenty people benefit from the institution. They are sent by the migration service, the social service, or disability insurance service. They come from all over the canton, but the majority of them live in Val-de-Travers (according to Coralie, about two or three) at the moment. She tells me that she is very proud of the way the workshop works and that a threshold has been reached; she is not looking to enlarge the place. Around 3:00 pm, everyone enters the kitchen to take a break. On the table there is food that has been prepared by a Syrian woman who only works on Tuesday mornings. We all gather around the table. After the break, everyone goes back to their activity. Coralie and I continue the discussion and think about the possibility of including me in the group.

[7] Pseudonym

[8] Interestingly, to obtain public funding, the association was encouraged to "de-migranticize" their targeted population despite Coralie's belief in the importance of focusing on a particular group that may require specific assistance (such as language, paperwork, or gender-related support). While expanding services to other groups could help the organization achieve broader objectives, there is a risk of diluting the specific needs of "migrant women." As a result, one might wonder whether de-migranticization means broadening the target audience or whether de-migranticization involves expanding the focus on women with migration experience by addressing other inequalities that may affect them (such as gender, age, or social class) through an intersectional approach.

> She says it would be really nice. I say that I would be very happy to teach French 2 to 3 times a week. Coralie invites me to join the next morning's class. (Excerpts from field notes, summer 2019)

I did two observation classes with the other teachers, Arianne and Alice, and then I taught alone, usually with between two and four students, all women. This teaching, two hours on Tuesdays and two hours on Fridays, gave me a rhythm, and I was like a commuter (part-time) to the valley. Despite this extra activity, I continued to wander the streets of the various villages in the valley. Though I still had a car at the time, most of my trips were made on the regional train, which creates a cadence to the daily life of many villages.

Then, for private reasons, I decided to leave my apartment in Neuchâtel in October 2019. I thought it was an opportunity to seek a room in Val-de-Travers that I could live in for a few months. I met Birgit, a 78-year-old woman who grew up in Germany and later married a Valley-er. The latter had recently passed away, and Birgit now lives alone in an apartment where she rents a room on AirBnB. I moved in on January 4, 2020, with no exact end date (my cohabitation with Birgit is discussed in more detail later in this chapter). During this period, though I continued to visit Neuchâtel for professional or private reasons, I undertook more activities in the Val-de-Travers. I joined the badminton club, for instance, where I trained on Monday evenings, and I spent much of my free time in the Val-de-Travers. In accordance with Olivier de Sardan, I observed "beyond my control" by "living" in the region, and these observations "were recorded in my unconscious, my subconscious, my subjectivity, or whatever you want" (Olivier de Sardan 1995, 76, my translation).

In mid-March 2020, the COVID-19 health crisis reached Switzerland, and I had no choice but to leave my room (it was impossible to stay in a flat with a 78-year-old woman). During the first few months of the crisis, I lived a long way from the Val-de-Travers. I also stopped teaching French at the *Val-Sewing*, and I did not return to the valley for almost three months. During this period, I spent more time on social media to follow the news in the region and took the opportunity to explore the different groups that exist—particularly on Facebook—related to the Val-de-Travers. Of course, these observations did not replace the ones I could have made in the villages, but they allowed me to complement the ones I had made earlier. I also took advantage of this period to further analyze my data with both the Atlas.ti software and my analytical memos. I refined several ideas and compared them with those in the literature. The first article, co-authored with Janine Dahinden, was almost finished; the second, on the regime of (im)moral mobilities in the valley, was progressing. I decided that once I could return to the field, I would conduct additional focused interviews based on these initial analyses. Thus, when the pandemic-related measures diminished in the summer of 2020, I conducted several interviews related to my questioning of cross-border dynamics. I met with shopkeepers, cross-border commuters, civil servants, and other people who could inform me of these issues. This is how the third phase of my investigation began; it was a phase of going back and forth between Biel (my new city of residence) and

the Val-de-Travers in order to conduct targeted interviews for my ongoing analyses. Of course, this period was punctuated by pandemic-related measures and restrictions that forced me to remain flexible regarding the planning of interviews.

Once I had finished writing the first two articles, I began formulating a third analytical paper. For the latter, I considered several avenues, eventually choosing to articulate the lived and situated peripherality of the Val-de-Travers via representations and experiences of difference. I conducted additional interviews in this regard, particularly with people assigned to locally stigmatized social categories (refugees, cross-border workers, and marginalized locals), and I continued to make observations in various public spaces in the valley.

Eventually, the moment came when I had to consider leaving the field. In this regard, Desmons states that "the hardest thing for the field researcher is not getting in, it's getting out" (2016, 438). He says this on an emotional level; he became very close to his informants, eight families struggling to pay rent to their landlords in poor areas of Milwaukee. In my case, after three years of "fragmented" fieldwork, interrupted by state-wide COVID-19 measures, I was feeling "bored"—or, at least, as if I was going around in circles. Like Schaer, I interpreted this boredom "as a possible sign of data saturation" (Schaer 2021, 100), and the diversity of data produced during my fieldwork certainly tended to cover the field "as wide [...] as possible" (Flick 2018a, 182). The invitation to participate in the organization of an event in October 2021 in the Val-de-Travers at which I could present my research was the ideal opportunity to leave my field by offering a public exchange regarding my ongoing analyses.

3.1.2. Pandemic crisis: implications and adaptations

While not elaborating overlong on the COVID-19 crisis and its impacts, a few words regarding attempts at "adjustment" are necessary. The pandemic began in March 2020, 17 months into my contract and therefore about the length of time that I had been conducting my fieldwork. Though I was fortunate, unlike other PhD colleagues, to have already produced a reasonable amount of data, I was significantly impacted.

I interrupted my fieldwork prematurely. Despite attempting to continue my research online, I was quickly confronted with the limits of such an approach (Caliandro 2018). I had direct access to limited data only, such as data I could find on websites or on social media, and I could no longer conduct direct observations. In addition, for the reasons mentioned above, I no longer had accommodations that would allow me to reside on site. Although video conference interviews would have been possible, I decided to distance myself from the research during the first few months of this "exceptional" period. Furthermore, during the spring of 2020, the academic environment was operating at a slower pace, and it was necessary to grow accustomed to new working conditions. Interactions with other doctoral students and colleagues in the institute were limited, and it was difficult to fully dedicate myself to my doctoral research. The situation was concerning, and uncertainties lingered regarding returning to the

university, revisiting the field, and, above all, the danger of the virus for my family and myself. Generally, the pandemic imposed a constant insecurity and potential reschedules of my plans, which were often last-minute (since there were small, spontaneous moments in which I was allowed to access the field until the numbers of COVID-19 cases increased again, and state measures were imposed). I therefore had to adjust my schedule accordingly.

Beyond the slowed production of data, it is difficult to evaluate the impact of the health crisis on the development of my research project. If, at times, I considered myself privileged to be able to calmly analyze the data I had produced, I felt disconnected from my research at other times. I went through phases of doubt, questioning the relevance of writing my doctoral thesis when the whole world seemed to be at a standstill.

During the last two years (between 2020 and 2022), I have learned to live, adapt, and undertake research in this new environment. Once the state measures were reduced, I could continue to organize and conduct face-to-face interviews in the Val-de-Travers. However, a whole series of events, such as village celebrations and festivals, in which I had wanted to participate had been cancelled or postponed.

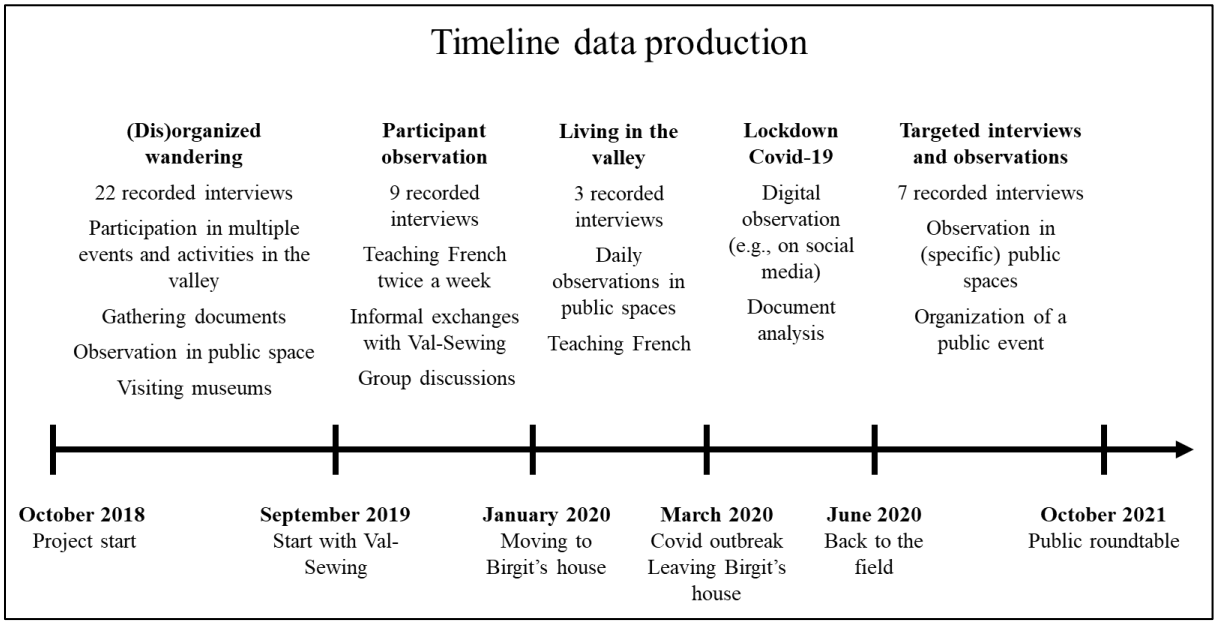

Figure 1: Timeline data Production

3.1.3. Study population: multisighted rather than multisited

As proposed by Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2018), I adopted a "multisighted" approach that contrasts Marcus' multisited ethnography (1995). That is, rather than traveling to multiple places, such as following mobility trajectories (Schapendonk 2020), I explored how different trajectories and mobilities intersect in a place and how they are interconnected "across time and space" (Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018, 10). In doing so, I operationalized a multi-perspective approach that led me to speak to people

with highly divergent experiences and life stories. My four interrelated theoretical perspectives—locality, mobility, boundary, and border—were constructed during the development and conduct of my case study and helped me select research participants. The locality perspective led me to conduct interviews with people who informed me of local dynamics, the history of the valley, the organization of the Val-de-Travers, and what it means to grow up and live in the valley. The mobility perspective, after helping me identify certain significant movements and circulations, such as cross-border mobilities, directed me toward people related to them. During (participant) observations and interviews, we discussed mobility trajectories, representations of the Val-de-Travers, the opportunities it offers, and different forms of mobility's effects on the local economy and social order. The approach to social and symbolic boundaries led me to conduct interviews according to the dynamics of the (dominant) social categorizations and self-identifications in the region. Finally, a border perspective led me to scrutinize discourses and practices related to the (national) border and how they are experienced and perceived by different actors. Of course, these dimensions are intertwined, and most of the interviews consisted of varied questions addressing all these themes.

Through this approach, I focused on the everyday life of some of the people who navigate in different networks of inter-relations. The 42 interviews,[9] with a total of 51 people (some interviews were conducted with several people), were naturally not identified and planned prior to the start of the research. The contacts were made as my research evolved, thus following an inductive approach (Flick 2009). That is to say, I built my theoretical sampling—understood as seeking pertinent data to develop an emerging theory (Flick 2018)—according to elements that emerged from the data and readjusted my research questions according to the evolution of my reflections. I conducted interviews with:

- students (who still live in the Val-de-Travers or who have left the valley)
- people who work for cultural institutions (such as museums)
- historians
- representatives of "foreign communities"
- people with local political experience
- cross-border commuters
- newcomers
- refugees
- retired people
- restaurant and café owners
- social workers for various institutions (for young people, drug addicts, welfare recipients)

[9] In this section, I refer to the recorded interviews for which an interview guide was developed. Informal "ethnographic" interviews are discussed when I describe my explorations of everyday life in the valley. Indeed, through my participation in various activities, events, and gatherings, I had the opportunity to talk with a wide range of people that extended considerably beyond these 42 interviews.

- people who own local businesses and entrepreneurs
- people passing through (tourists or travelers)
- absinthe producers
- volunteers in local organizations
- members of public security
- members of one local church
- some other people who live in, work in, or pass through the area for other reasons.

Rather than multiplying the meetings, I sought to contextualize the data produced by comparing them with my observations and analysis of the available documentation on the Val-de-Travers. I stopped conducting interviews when I felt that I had enough substance to develop refined and nuanced analyses based on my research questions. This type of data was combined with other sources of information, including regional history books (Baillods 1919, 1951; Hertz and Wobmann 2014; Jelmini, Vaucher, and Engelberts 2008; Kaeslin 2013, 2018, 2019; Morerod et al. 2014) that I used throughout the investigation. I thus engaged in what is commonly referred to as "triangulation" (Denzin and Lincoln 2018; Flick 2018b)—the act of cross-checking information—in order to "not be a captive of a single source" and "to seek out contrasting discourses, to make heterogeneity an object of study, to build on variations rather than trying to erase or flatten them; in brief, to build a research strategy on the quest for significant differences" (Olivier de Sardan 1995, 13, my translation). Below is a table that classifies (according to age, gender, duration of stay) the interviews I conducted. A total of 51 people were "formally" interviewed, most in individual semi-directive interviews but some in group discussions I provide details of below.

	Male	**Female**	**Long-term residents**	**Recently arrived, visitors, or commuters**
Age group 20–40	13	8	41	10
Age group 40–60	10	11		
Age group 60–80	3	6		

Figure 2: Interviews

3.1.4. Presenting my research: "I work on migration and mobility but not on migrants"

Before presenting my methods in more detail, I want to briefly reflect on my experience presenting my research to participants. As I mentioned above, our study adopts epistemological and ontological perspectives that may disrupt the (common sense) notions widely held by my interlocutors. I am thinking in particular of a mobility perspective, which is opposed to a sedentary perspective.

The project was largely built on migration and mobility studies literature, terms I often encountered in my readings and regularly used in my initial writings. In the field, I tended to begin the presentation of my research with these terms, which could lead to confusion for my interlocutors. Indeed, as the title of this section suggests, I used these terms while adding that I do not work exclusively with people directly involved in one form or another of mobility or migration. Beaud and Weber (2010, 99) state that it is not necessarily a problem to "leave things vague" when presenting a study, because the investigation allows a certain amount of information to remain unsaid. This vagueness was partly inherent in the larger research project in that we did not want to work with pre-given categories, and this generated a level of confusion in conversations with research participants.

The emotions I felt when I had to present my research—embarrassment, discomfort, distress regarding misunderstandings, apprehension that people would not understand the point of my research—are representative of this tension. As Thrift argues, fieldwork is indeed "a constant stew of emotions" (2003, 106). Of course, any research project can generate difficulty when it is communicated to participants. In my case, however, the first (broad) formulations, such as "I work on migration and mobilities in the valley," proved particularly confusing. I even "envied" certain colleagues who, from my point of view, had easier topics to explain. To illustrate this issue, I present next an experience that I had during my fieldwork.

> Today, I have an appointment at 3:00 pm with volunteers from a local organization that distributes food to people who are, for various reasons, in a precarious situation. This will allow me to get in touch with a population of the Val-de-Travers with which I have hardly interacted yet. I have chosen to drive to the meeting because I have another appointment in another village later in the day. I have about 40 minutes alone in the car before meeting the members of the organization. It is the first time I have met with this particular group. I conducted an interview with the person in charge of the organization a few weeks ago, and she accepted my participation in this activity. Yesterday, I called him back to confirm that I was coming. On the phone, I felt that Marco did not understand (or no longer understood) the reason why I was going to come. One of the explanations for this is that Marco's parents had moved to the valley from Italy, and we talked a lot about this topic during the interview. I believe he did not understand the link between my interest in the historical arrival of foreign workers in the valley and my desire to participate in an activity involving food distribution for locally disadvantaged people.
>
> My attempts to explain, by stating I am interested in the cohabitation of different population groups in the valley, did not, in my opinion, convince him. As Marco had agreed a few weeks earlier, he did not go back on his position and thus accepted my participation. In the car, I am conscious—perhaps excessively so—of this situation and test several approaches to present my research in a convincing way to the other members of the organization. I

speak out loud. Since the activity, *a priori*, is not directly concerned with migration issues, I try not to present my research in those terms. As I approach the village, I feel a little stressed, still not having identified an "effective" formulation. When I spoke for the first time with Marco, I mentioned migration, and I know he has registered that term. I know he will be there this afternoon, so I cannot completely detach myself from what I said, which risks adding to the confusion.

Once I arrive, Marco briefly introduces me, but as was often the case during my fieldwork, he adds "Emmanuel, I will let you say a few words about your project." Indeed, the people I knew who introduced me to other people rarely launched into a presentation of my research. Of course, because I am there, it seems obvious that I will do it myself, but in some situations, I also understand it as a sign that people do not really know what I am doing (which does not prevent a certain sympathy for me). So, I start to explain: "I am a doctoral student at the University of Neuchâtel, and I am working on a research project that deals with migration and mobility issues in small peripheral regions, such as the Val-de-Travers. I am not working directly on migrant populations, but rather on the whole population." This broad description does not seem to convince them, and the volunteers seem confused as to why I am doing this activity, which may seem distant from my main research questions. For the rest of the afternoon, people did not talk about my project. I suspect that they feel a bit uncomfortable about the subject. (Excerpts from field notes, spring 2019)

This experience stayed with me, and I tried to sharpen the presentation of my research over the next few months. One day, I arrived at a slightly more convincing formulation: "I am interested in the population of the region with a mobility perspective: that is, I am interested in people who came from outside, people who left, people who left and returned, but also people who never left and decided to stay." This relatively broad presentation in "four large categories" allowed me to encompass the entire population. It also allowed me to avoid the interviews being "overly" framed in migration terms. In fact, all of my interviewees fall into one of these categories. On the basis of this first part of the explanation, I could then make the presentation more complex according to the profiles of the participants I was talking to.

In the following section, I provide details of my fieldwork by presenting the different methods deployed and illustrating them with excerpts from fieldnotes and interviews.

3.1.5. Intermediary conclusion: Doing a regional ethnography in migration studies

It is worth noting that engaging in "regional ethnography" in migration studies is not only thought-provoking but also far from trivial. Migration scholars usually concentrate on individuals or places directly involved with migration or its regulation. Therefore, it goes partly against the grain of our peers, primarily the members of the NCCR – on the move, that I (along with the other members of the project

team) have embarked on this path. While the theoretical potentials of such an approach (which I have dubbed "place as an entry point") are discussed in Chapter 2, I briefly discuss methodological concerns here.

Paradoxically, if de-migranticizing (Dahinden 2016) the research project is seen as a necessity, it can also result in data production processes that are scattered, occasionally superficial, and less anchored in migration issues. This has led to a major dilemma. I could conduct ethnographic fieldwork by contacting institutions directly linked to the migration regime (such as refugee centers), which risked diminished time and opportunity to investigate other regional aspects and characteristics. Alternately, I could conduct a limited number of interviews with actors from these institutions, which risked generating superficial data on this topic. Intending not to restrict myself to one form of mobility (in this case, asylum migration) and to investigate the diversity of mobilities, my project adopted the second option. Engaging in ethnographic fieldwork with a refugee center does not necessitate neglecting other particularities of the regional context. However, doing so would require a considerable commitment to gaining access and would attribute to this institution a centrality I did not wish to confer upon it and which was not the aim of my project.

Of course, I have not documented all mobilities[10] and I have not considered the whole population. I made choices, occasionally out of opportunism, at times for reasons related to ongoing analyses (notably those of my scientific articles). Doing regional ethnography in migration studies is a delicate undertaking: it avoids reproducing nation-state logics but runs the risk of losing substance on migration experiences and issues, which remain unaddressed in broader analyses.

In order to solve this problem and manage the occasionally scattered data, I have oriented my analyses at the interface: Each of my contributions attempts to understand how place-based characteristics—potentially documented with each method of data production and during each interview—are articulated with other dynamics. Such dynamics can include the (im)moralization of cross-border mobilities, the production of a shared sense of belonging to an imagined community of fate, or the shifting uses of categorizations of difference. In these diverse contributions, all the aspects discussed could be subject to microanalysis, whether by documenting each mobility concerned (e.g., cross-border, between different villages, extra-European) or by documenting each categorization of difference (such as cross-border workers, refugees, social outcasts, etc.).

In short, I argue that conducting a regional ethnography in migration studies opens up this field of research and connects it to scholarly debates that have characterized other disciplines. This approach allows one to reveal the complexity and subtlety of human movements and to empirically observe how the nation-state and its associated categories permeate everyday life and feed various forms of boundary-

[10] For example, tourism, commuting between the valley and other Swiss regions, or out-mobilities have been relatively little explored.

making. However, such an approach also requires the researcher to make what I would call "sacrifices." That is to say, not to rush into the fields dear to migration studies, not to conduct a long ethnographic study with so-called migrants, but to turn toward other places, other people, and other imaginaries. In other words, the researcher must be willing to step outside their comfort zone and explore new areas that may not be directly related to migration studies. This approach allows for a broader understanding of migration and mobility in everyday life.

3.2. Doing the field

In the following sections, I delve deeper into the conduct of my ethnographic fieldwork by presenting the different methods used. I begin by presenting the interviews I conducted.

3.2.1. Interviewing participants

The interviews I conducted in the Val-de-Travers are almost exclusively semi-structured interviews (Russell 2006) with quite an important biographical component (Rosenthal 2004). Developing an interview guide is a preliminary step to conducting a semi-structured interview. The guide contained the core questions and interpellations I wanted to address with the participants. Of course, the guide evolved considerably throughout the course of my investigation. As Charmaz remarks, "framing questions takes skill and practice. Questions must explore the interviewer's topic and fit the participant's experience" (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012, 352). Four primary interview-guide types were adapted to each interviewee. The first version is the one I used before I had specific ideas for my three analytical articles. The other three versions refer to these three analytical articles. Indeed, I had specific questions I wished to address in the articles, which led me to formulate questions focused on certain issues.

In order to create an interview guide, it is necessary to translate occasionally complex scientific questions into simple, open, and understandable inquiries. In this regard, one of the primary difficulties I encountered was not naturalizing the categories, such as nation-state-based categories. The challenge is to go beyond these naturalizations and explore the local production and utilization of particular categories. During the interviews, I sought to capture the discourses that present the different uses, even though there was a high risk that my questions would strongly influence the answers.

For example, a question such as "Who are the outsiders in the valley?" assumes there are outsiders and that the person I am interviewing will certainly not question me but will instead seek to inform me of potential outsiders. Even if the person I am interviewing would not have spontaneously expressed a view regarding the presence of outsiders, such a question is likely to influence his or her representation of the valley. When I was inquiring about boundary-work dynamics, I still had to find strategies to approach local categorizations. I remember once asking someone the question, "What are the different population groups that compose the valley?" In response, they began to list the different professions present in the valley, which, while interesting, was not the topic I wanted to address.

It was by combining observations and analysis of gray literature with the interviews that I was able to capture the nuances of local social categorizations and identifications. I thus find it particularly effective during an interview to refer to a practice or discourse observed or heard in another context. Thus, after each interview, I wrote down analytical memos (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012) as well as possible questions to explore with other interlocutors.

The category of *frontalier* [cross-border worker] seems to illustrate the caution required in exploring the use of categories and the importance of distinguishing a category of analysis from a category of practice (Brubaker 2013). The word *frontaliers* is widely employed in the valley and is sometimes used almost as a synonym for "French persons." Philippe, himself a French cross-border worker, sought to inform me of the complexity of this category:

> There are French cross-border workers who will one day move to Switzerland, but there are not many. There are more advantages to staying in France. Moreover, there is something important: there are more and more Swiss cross-border workers. More and more Swiss people are moving to France and keeping their professional activities in Switzerland. I live in a village of 570 inhabitants, and when a house is sold, often a Swiss person buys it. There are people coming from the region of Biel and from Bern, not only people from Neuchâtel or Lausanne, who come to settle in France. The cross-border commuter is not only French; the cross-border commuter is also Swiss, who has expatriated to France and continues to work in Switzerland. (Interview, summer 2019)

The category of cross-border worker is interesting because, although it has wide connotations, its contours are not always clear. Philippe thus reveals a form of reflexivity regarding the categories used in the valley. As argued by Dahinden, Menet, and Fischer, "[t]his reflexivity among research participants should be included in the general definition of reflexivity. In other words, the reflexivity of participants and the reflexivity of researchers are mutually constitutive and produce scientific knowledge that is potentially co-constructed" (2021, 16). Importantly, not everyone I interviewed shared the same reflexivity regarding this category. As demonstrated in Article 2, *(Im)moral mobilities in a Swiss borderland,* cross-border workers experience a form of essentialization from other Valley-ers, and the negative image that they are currently subjected to in the valley seems difficult to transform.

While the interview guide is an important tool for conducting the interviews, the location of the conversation is also important. In most cases, I let the participants decide where they preferred to meet, sometimes specifying that it was important to sit in a quiet place that ensured confidentiality. The vast majority of interviews were conducted in people's homes, at their workplaces, or, on a few occasions, in cafés. In these spaces that are familiar to my interlocutors, I generally began with a brief informal conversation before I introduced my research project. The first question I asked was usually about the person's trajectory (in terms of work, family, mobilities, etc.) before proceeding to discuss the various

themes I had previously identified as relevant to the meeting in question. Most of the time, I recorded the interview using a voice recorder. The people were informed in advance of the recording, and I asked them again as the discussion started whether they agreed to be recorded. By doing so, I had a record of their agreement.

During each interview, I was keen for the interviewee to understand the focus of my research and to agree to contribute to it. Indeed, as Beaud and Weber (2010) state, it is necessary that the interviewees understand the reasons for the interview and have interest in the research subject. The more the person we meet adheres to the study, the more he or she will engage with us in the co-production of data.

Toward the end of the research (that is, in the spring and summer of 2021) and in the midst of writing my articles, I conducted several interviews that did not necessarily provide me with significantly "new" data but allowed me to confront my preliminary analyses. The analysis process is long and often punctuated by doubts. In particular, I was regularly afraid of falling into the trap of over-interpretation (for instance, the way in which I interpret the dominant discourse of the marginalization of the valley within the canton of Neuchâtel, an ethical issue I discuss later in this chapter). Conducting a handful of interviews during the analysis was interesting because it allowed me to present my ideas to participants and further triangulate sources of information.

Finally, there is an interesting anecdote concerning an interview with Nathan, a 30-year-old man. I met him several times in his workshop, and we had the opportunity to chat informally while having a drink. I told him about my work and my current lines of analysis. Once, while I was mentioning examples of discourses I had heard, he said to me: "If you want me to tell you specific things that you want to record and use in your work, no problem. Tell me what I can tell you if it helps you." This surprising proposal, in addition to its ironic aspect, reveals, the fragility of the co-construction of data with research participants. Even though the same type of offer was never made by another person, by being close to certain people and sometimes sharing with them rough drafts of my research findings, some participants may (un)consciously have sought to validate my observations/analyses and thus confirm hypotheses that they might not have formulated in this way. This also illustrates the importance of contextualizing the data and cross-referencing it with several interviews and observations.

In the following section, I discuss another important dimension of my research: the exploration of everyday life in the valley. This was a valuable way to accumulate (in)formal local knowledge concerning the Val-de-Travers that I could then deepen in the various interviews.

3.2.2. Investigating the "codes" of the valley: Exploring everyday life

The numerous readings I realized during my thesis have been part of my sources of inspiration. As such, I think I can say that my ethnographic investigation is somehow inspired by the work of Elijah Anderson and his book *Code of the Street* (1999). In a well-documented ethnography, Anderson demonstrates how

violence in the inner-city areas of Philadelphia is regulated by an informal but well-known code of the street. The contexts are different, of course, but my epistemological perspective has certain similarities. Just as Anderson did, I observed informal "codes" that regulate everyday life and social relations in the valley. One of my research strategies, in addition to the previously mentioned interviews, was to immerse myself in the everyday life of the valley to understand the practices, discourses, and attitudes that structure social interactions. In this sense, I have also followed Beaud and Weber, who suggest that "the researcher must take gossip, rumors, anecdotes and small stories seriously: they provide them with the structure of the milieu of inter-relations and the referential systems that constitute the field" (2010, 31, my translation).

To explore daily mundane life in the Val-de-Travers, I developed various strategies. The first, partly presented above, consisted of venturing into the valley to frequent cafés, public transport, parks, and streets. Although I could capture elements of what everyday life in the valley is like through these long hours of (dis)organized wandering, it was necessary to engage more in human relationships. Beaud and Weber (2010), again, demonstrate the importance of going beyond these observations "at a distance":

> It is what one could call the fantasy of the novice observer: it would be enough to observe from a distance to understand. However, one must "be with" or, better still, "do with", to understand anything. If I introduce myself, the other person will do the same. If I explain myself, the other person will explain themselves. The investigation plays on the norm of reciprocity, on the pleasure of doing a service, and on the rules of the game of personal relationships. To forget this is to believe that one can take a fish out of the water in order to better observe how it swims. (2010, 33, my translation)

The following points refer to field experiences that illustrate my strategies for observing and understanding the codes of the valley.

First, I spent many hours reading, listing, and analyzing all the existing documentation on the Val-de-Travers. The minutes of the municipal parliament of the Val-de-Travers were a particularly interesting source of information. The members meet approximately four times a year and discuss a wide variety of political issues concerning the commune. By consulting these minutes, which are available online on the commune's website,[11] one can learn about the issues and tensions of local daily life. Topics as diverse as waste management, the use of reusable dishes for public events, the financial situation of the municipality, investments in future infrastructure, the municipality's attempts to regulate cross-border mobilities, and many others are discussed. Members of all the main political parties in Switzerland are present at these meetings.

[11] https://www.val-de-travers.ch/page/conseil-general [Accessed on October 21, 2022]

This research also included regular consultation of the news published on social networks. There are a multitude of pages and groups, notably on Facebook, that are produced and fed by local actors who make different elements of daily life visible. The posts are generally quite short and do not necessarily give a full picture of the issues, but they do provide a general situational orientation and allow contact to be made with participants. On occasion, I contacted people who had posted specific items related, for example, to the local economy and asked them whether they would be interested in being interveiwed. One of the issues related to the consultation and analysis of Facebook content is the intrusion into private life (Hjorth et al. 2017). Not only was I observing practices and discourses invisibly, behind my computer screen, but the Val-de-Travers was becoming increasingly present in my daily life (by occupying part of my social media accounts). I found myself (in)voluntarily following the news of the Val-de-Travers on a daily basis, including in the evening, during weekends, and on vacations. Even at the time of writing this paragraph, although my fieldwork is finished, my social networks are filled with notifications related to the Val-de-Travers. Based on my experiences, I therefore reached a conclusion similar to Amit's:

> The melding of personal and professional roles in ethnographic fieldwork makes for a 'messy, qualitative experience' (Marcus and Fischer 1986, 22) which cannot readily or usefully be compartmentalized from other experiences and periods in our lives. (1999, 7)

Exploring everyday life also involves participation in specific local events, which some authors have called "place-making projects" (Gille and Riain 2002). I thus participated in various celebrations, including the commune's anniversary, the absinthe festival, several village celebrations, the Couvet fair, community events, general council meetings, cultural events, and music festivals. By participating in these types of events, I could observe and approach different local dynamics and identify the subtleties of social relations in everyday life. Navigating the Val-de-Travers also exposed me to local tensions and contestations, which I at times personally experienced. The following example demonstrates how my daily and private lives intertwine with my scientific reflections:

> On Friday afternoon, September 20, 2019, I am going to a wedding aperitif at Le Meix-Lagor, a wedding venue that is located in France, a few miles from Switzerland and the Val-de-Travers. I was driving my car with another guest. As we were crossing the border, two customs officers stopped us. One of them tells us that he could fine us 150 euros! I don't understand. He shows me some plastic bottles in our trunk. There are indeed about thirty bottles that I had planned to sort out in Switzerland but that I forgot [I had left] in the car, and it is forbidden to bring waste to France. I tell him I am sorry, that we are going to a wedding party, and that it will be done in Switzerland when we come back the next day. He does not agree and tells me to turn around or leave the car there. I mention that there are only a few bottles, that it is an oversight for which I am sorry, and that there is no sorting place nearby. His tone rises quickly; he insists that I leave the car there and that we go in

> another car with other guests. I am surprised by his lack of understanding and by his persistence in buying 30 PET bottles. His colleague approaches the car and asks me for my identity card and mutters to his colleague, "We can take them to the police station!" We are very surprised by this remark. So, I decide to go and deposit the bottles at a sorting station in Switzerland. The person who accompanies me gets into a car with some acquaintances who have joined us. I don't understand this suspicion that I could deposit these bottles in French garbage cans, as there is no tax on PET bottles in Switzerland. After a 30-minute round trip to a nearby village, I pass through border control again. I tell them that I am sorry about what happened. A customs officer tells me that they "must" be very strict because there is a lot of Swiss people who come to dump waste in French garbage cans. (Fieldnotes, summer 2019)

After this experience, I realized the importance that practices perceived as banal can have for the local order. While the tensions associated with cross-border work are widely discussed and visible—notably, the high number of cars with French license plates daily crossing the region—other cross-border practices generated by different economic and political inequalities are less visible. I therefore intensified the attention I paid to signs and symbols that suggest tensions related to the national border. My investigation of the issues with regard to the national border continued in our daily discussions. Below is an excerpt from field notes written in summer 2020. This is a conversation with a local shopkeeper.

> I decide to go to the kiosk in Fleurier [the most populated village in the valley], which sells various books, including some about the region. I enter the kiosk. I am the only customer. The salesman is young. I had once spoken with a man of about 60 years old who had told me that his son sometimes helps out. I deduce that I am dealing with the son. I look through the books; he asks me if I want help. He adds that they order books every Tuesday and Thursday, so I can ask him what I want. I thank him for the information. I come across the book *Bouchers, boulangers, et voituriers d'autrefois au Val-de-Travers* [Butchers, bakers, and drivers of the past in Val-de-Travers] by Jacques Kaeslin (2018). The villages are described one after the other and, at the beginning of each description, we learn which businesses of the locality have closed. I decide to buy it. At the counter, the young man tells me that he knows some of the butchers mentioned in the book. I ask him if he grew up in the Val-de-Travers, which he confirms. I continue: "Have you also seen the closure of many shops?" He answers "Of course" and that it is "very difficult to keep going." He gives me the example of the kiosk. With his partner, they are going to take it over when his father stops. He tells me that they would never be able to take it over if he, the young man, did not have another income. According to him, in most small businesses there is another source of income: "It doesn't bring in enough." I ask him if the competition with regard to

> the French market is tough. He gives me the example of books, which are much cheaper on the other side of the border. According to him, it is the system that is wrong: Switzerland should never allow "such high price differences to flourish." He adds the example of his company. He is co-responsible with another person for a sanitary installation company, and they have a lot of French employees: "It's impossible to find enough manpower here." They also suffer from the French competition: "People have their bathrooms installed by French companies." He adds, "But I understand. It's so much cheaper that I can't blame the people who do it. I would do it too if I did not have a local company." I pick up on his discourse and ask him, "Ah, by being a local entrepreneur you don't go to France." He says, "Yes, that would be frowned upon." I bounce back and ask him about initiatives to support the local economy, such as the local currency.[12] He tells me that these are good initiatives, but he doesn't seem to believe in them: "It's not that which will save the local economy." I go back to what he said earlier, "that everyone goes to France," and ask him how it is seen. He tells me that it depends, but it is a problem if politicians go to France; they have a good salary and are paid by public money. I tell him that I have seen caricatures of them in the newspaper *Carnavallon*.[13] I also mention a local shopkeeper who has moved to France and kept his business in the valley in order to maintain his Swiss income. He laughs and confirms this information. After all these questions, I decide to leave the kiosk. I thank him and push the exit door. (Excerpts from fieldnotes, summer 2020)

After this type of encounter, I systematically not only make observation notes but also formulate questions relating to the continuation of my fieldwork. For example, since when are shopping trips in France so important in the Val-de-Travers? Has France always been so attractive? Does the evolution of mobility— particularly the expansion of the private car, the improvement of road infrastructure, and the increase of public transport routes to France—play a role in increasing shopping trips to France? If so, when did these developments occur? Such informal conversations were therefore valuable for identifying lines of inquiry to be explored through further observations, interviews, or by conducting bibliographic research on these emergent themes.

In the subsequent section, I present a description of my months of cohabitation with Birgit, who also (un)consciously participated in shaping my thoughts.

[12] The initiative to develop a local currency to boost local expenses was launched in 2016 by the association Val'Action in collaboration with the municipality of Val-de-Travers. This point is discussed in the first and second articles.

[13] A local (informal) newspaper published every year during the carnival celebration; it highlights all the anecdotes of the year in the valley.

3.2.3. Living with Birgit

An important part of my fieldwork was, of course, living with Birgit, the (78-year-old) woman with whom I cohabited for a few months in the Val-de-Travers. Below is a field note written in December 2019 regarding my encounter with my future housemate.

> On the phone, Birgit told me that it was possible and proposed that I go and visit. I arrive around 10:30 a.m. in front of her apartment. I did not need to ring the bell because she was waiting for me behind the door. She tells me to come in. She speaks French with a German accent. She gives me a quick tour of the house. Birgit is a widow and retired. The house is very busy with decorations. There is a large bay window that overlooks the forest. She tells me that the building is a renovated former shooting range. When she heard that apartments were going to be built, she jumped at the chance: the idea of enjoying such a view quickly attracted her. The room I'll be staying in is small and a bit crowded, but it looks very comfortable. I am not surprised to find that the area is very quiet. Birgit tells me that she will make some room for me to bring some things. I tell her that there is no rush and that I can help her. We then go and sit at the kitchen table, which is open to the living room. We talk about some administrative formalities. Initially, I will move in on January 6 until the end of February. This seems to suit Birgit perfectly. She proposes a price of CHF 1000.00 for the entire period. That seems fair. She will not make the reservation via Airbnb and says "it's a win-win situation" (fewer taxes on both sides). Nevertheless, she declares my presence, and I will benefit from the services of Neuchâtel tourism (public transport and free access to museums). I take advantage of sitting at the table with Birgit to ask her a few questions about her background. Birgit is a woman in her 70s who grew up in Stuttgart. After meeting her husband, a man from Couvet, she decided to move to the valley in 1966. She describes her husband as very active and involved in the region. According to her, he was a member of all the local organizations and was also the president of the commune for a while. They had only ever lived in Couvet and nowhere else.
>
> Birgit tells me that there were rivalries with the other villages and that it was not possible for her husband to live in another commune. Her arrival in the valley was not easy; she did not know anyone, and her level of French was "poor." Her husband didn't speak German very well, so she quickly learned: "It was up to me to learn French, not him to learn German." Birgit was lucky enough to find a job in the valley. A German company had moved to Fleurier and was looking for a native German speaker (not a Swiss-German speaker) to handle relations with Germany. The company made heat pumps. She worked for them for 20 years. When the director died in Germany, the son did not want to take over and decided to sell the company to Americans, who closed the Fleurier site: "60 people in

Fleurier were nothing to them." Birgit had the opportunity to work for this company for another three years but had to go to Zurich three days a week.

Birgit has two children. A woman and a man who are in their fifties. The daughter has traveled a lot, has learned languages, and currently lives in Winterthur with her three children. The son lives in the canton of Valais. He has one child and works for the local public transport company. The children visit Birgit from time to time, but she also goes there. She will spend Christmas with her son in the Valais. Birgit does not plan to leave the valley: "I have a network here and have lived here for over 50 years." She also says that she has almost no family left in Stuttgart and that it would not make sense for her to go back. She confides in me that one gets attached to the Val-de-Travers. She asks me if I know anything about the region. This is an opportunity to introduce my project. […] The discussion then turns to absinthe.[14] Birgit remembers the period of illegality with nostalgia. She and her husband used to get regular phone calls from friends who wanted to have a few bottles. On the phone, people talked about orange juice. Birgit explains that the people who produced illegally could make a lot of money. She always orders from the same person and adds "I can order it for you if you want." Then we talk about legalization. Birgit, a little less enthusiastic, tells me that "absinthe is currently everywhere in the valley!" There is a producer in the building next door; she says she only learned about it recently. Birgit shows me a few more bottles of absinthe and the "traditional equipment" for serving it (including the glasses and the spoon).

I then moved into the apartment with Birgit on January 6, 2020. I was a little apprehensive about living with an 80-year-old person, which was, of course, a first for me. Our cohabitation was a marked success, and we had many opportunities to spend time together, whether over a meal, a coffee, or watching television. We even went once together to the local cinema. Birgit would regularly watch a game show in the evening and ask me to help her try to answer the questions. At the same time, we also had discussions about the Val-de-Travers and Birgit's background. Birgit has kept many newspaper articles related to the region, and she passed on some of them to me. Birgit also enjoyed cooking and one of her favorite recipes is an alcoholic absinthe-based dessert: "absinthe soufflé." She made one for me the first time, and when she saw that I liked it, she baked a dozen or so and put them in the freezer.

During my stay in the Val-de-Travers, I had the opportunity to benefit (in)voluntarily from another mundane source of information: getting a haircut.

[14] In the early 20th century, the valley was a significant producer of absinthe, but in 1908 a popular initiative was accepted at the federal level banning the production of absinthe in Switzerland. Nonetheless, many local producers continued to make absinthe illegally until 2005, when the ban was repealed. Absinthe became a positive symbol in the valley, an origin myth that reinforces the idea of a community, as developed in Chapter 4 and article 1.

3.2.4. Getting a haircut: a valuable source of information

During my fieldwork in the Val-de-Travers, it was not always easy to start informal discussions. Nevertheless, it turned out that going to the hairdresser was always productive for my work. Most of the hairdressers I went to were long-term residents who knew many inhabitants (and much gossip). In total, I went to get my hair cut six times. One of the people who cut my hair was from Algeria; he had moved to the valley after meeting his wife. Another hairdresser was a cross-border commuter who has worked in the region for almost 20 years. These two people could explain to me the difficulties of getting a clientele when they arrived from outside the area. The cross-border worker explained to me that some clients did not want to have their hair done by her because she does not live in the valley, which was hard to accept, but she gradually managed to get enough clients. I also visited a hairdresser in Morteau (in France), where I was able to discuss cross-border mobilities from the other side of the border.

Seizing the appropriate moment to say that I was doing research in the Val-de-Travers was a particular challenge. I occasionally started by asking questions, but because I was afraid this would be perceived as intrusive, I felt the need to be transparent with my interlocutors. Below are field notes written in September 2020:

> When I arrive at 2:00 pm, Hélène is sitting alone in her hairdressing salon; she is visibly waiting for me. She is a woman in her 50s. By way of greeting, she announces that her client (she always talks about female clients) for 1:00 pm has not come. I sit down in the chair. She puts on a face mask, which immediately breaks: "I'm going to send them back—it's not the first one that has broken in my hands."
>
> Hélène's employee is French, and if she has a problem such as testing positive for COVID, Hélène declares, "I would be very embarrassed." I ask if there are many cross-border workers in the hairdressing industry. She tells me that there are, but immediately gives me the example of her daughter, who works for a big watchmaking company in the valley. She is a lawyer. There are 500 cross-border workers out of 600 employees. I also ask her if people go to France to have their hair done, as it is certainly cheaper, but she does not know anything about that. She explains that her clients are elderly women. While talking about the French employees, I ask if any Swiss people have moved to France. I learn that two friends of hers live in France and have a salon in Switzerland (one in Sainte-Croix [a neighboring village] and one in the Val-de-Travers). I ask her if there is a risk of losing customers if one is based in France and has a business in Switzerland. Hélène explains that for some clients, it is a problem, and that one of her friends had a lot of difficulty creating a clientele in Switzerland. We speak about the shopping trips in France; Hélène says to me that she never goes there. While she understands the reasoning for families, who can make a lot of savings, for her, who lives alone, it is not worth it.

> However, she pretends that it is very common in the valley to shop in France. During the lockdown, the "border was closed," according to a friend of Hélène who works for a supermarket in the valley; every Saturday the supermarket made the same profits as at Christmas. But on Saturday, when the border reopened, it was in the red. She tells me that on that Saturday, a friend of hers went to Pontarlier [a neighboring city in France] to do some shopping, and apparently the number of Swiss people was impressive. After a while, she asks me where I live. After all the questions about the border and the Val-de-Travers, I feel I have to explain why I am here and why I am interested in the valley. Hélène responds by telling me that her partner sells books about the Val-de-Travers. I ask if I can call him to see the collection of books. She gives me his number. I ask Hélène how her partner gets his books and if he has a particular interest in the area. She tells me that there are houses that are being emptied and that he takes the books to sell them. According to Hélène, her partner has not read the books and does not really know them. While I tell her that I will call him, she responds that he lives in France and that he spends a lot of time there because he often looks after his grandson. My haircut is finished; I am satisfied and thank her. She also takes my name to tell her partner that I will call him. (Excerpts from fieldnotes, summer 2020)

This conversation illustrates that France is omnipresent in Hélène's life, though she lives and works in the valley. Her partner lives in France, her employee is French and a cross-border worker, her doctor is French and lives in Pontarlier, and her daughter works at a company in which five out of six people are cross-border workers. It also reveals her view on shopping in France: she understands why families do so, but she does not shop in France because it is not worth it for a single person (or a couple).

One of the most important tasks during (or after) all these ethnographic observations and conversations is, of course, taking notes: "

> A good set of notes quickly becomes a "constant companion"—a sort of alter ego composed of factual and reliable data, a running account of fleeting and developed interpretations and reflections, and a chronicle of operational decisions made at stated times, places, and circumstances. (Schatzman and Strauss 1973, 98)

Schatzmann and Strauss propose three types of notes: (observation, methodological, and analytical). I started with this division but soon realized that I preferred to work with two different types of notes. I made the first type of notes for my observation (I included a date and a title for each note) and created the second type for my analytical notes as well as methodological considerations. In other words, in this second type of document, I wrote notes that could help me either more effectively interpret my data or improve the data production process. I also took notes after each interview. These exercises—often defined as memo-writing (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012)—proved to be highly valuable for the

construction and adaptation of my future interview guides. In the following section, I discuss my involvement with the organization further before presenting the various strategies I employed to conduct my analysis.

3.2.5. Volunteering

Hess-Bieber and Leavy (2011) identify different levels of participation in the field: complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer, and complete participant. As part of my commitment to the organization I was volunteering for as a French teacher, I played a role that was similar to a form of "complete participation." I was teaching French, but I could not conduct observations in parallel. Thus, according to Hess-Bieber and Leavy, I was fully on the participation side. However, my involvement as a French teacher was not mobilized substantially in my analyses. I realized, with a little hindsight, that I used this approach to find a rhythm in the valley and to get in touch with different actors. I could, however, undertake several exercises with the students, such as describing their daily activities, that allowed me to capture threads of their regular lives in the valley. I also tried to develop mind maps (Buzan 2006) with the participants. I had printed a map of the canton of Neuchâtel, which also included Switzerland and had enough space to mention places abroad. I then suggested that the students name the different places they have consistent contact with and to which they regularly travel. This method proved to be rather unsuccessful. First, though I had taken care to introduce my research at length, I was not always sure that the students understood what I was doing. I was therefore uncomfortable suggesting an exercise that might be useful to my research without them fully understanding that information. Second, the duration of the French class was quite short, and I did not want to focus on this type of activity. Third, the level of some students' French was rather low, and it was therefore difficult to go beyond a superficial exchange on these kinds of themes.

To make optimal use of my involvement with the organization, I decided to coordinate group discussions to discuss the different themes emerging from my data. I found this approach particularly interesting because it allowed me not only to present my work to people who opened their doors to me but also to discuss my initial analyses with them. I discuss this below as a strategy I used to conduct my analysis.

3.2.6. Intermediary conclusion: On everydayness and the feeling of discovery

All of the activities described so far, that is, those that compose my ethnographic fieldwork, allowed me to discover the daily life of the valley. I arrived in the field with certain biases, preconceptions, and limited knowledge of the valley. As I met people, exchanged ideas, and read, I came to know the Val-de-Travers and made discoveries, several of which allowed me to produce results.

Exploring daily life in the streets of the villages allowed me to understand who is visible and invisible in public space, what is "marketed" (such as buying local), and what seems to characterize the rhythms

of the valley. For example, knowing the train schedule is an important prerequisite for planning one's movements in the valley, as the train sets the pace for a large part of the valley's inhabitants.

Being in and observing daily life allowed me to grasp how central mobility is to the organization of social life (Kaufmann 2021). Not only did almost everyone I met live or work outside the valley for a time, but they also engaged in different forms of mobility on a daily basis, all of which are socially, legally, and economically connoted and regulated. As such, I could have focused on multiple other human mobilities, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

This immersion into everyday life, alongside the discovery of the salience of mobilities, also allows for the discovery of what is presented as "local" or "immobile". Following Erickson et al. (2018), I understand "immobility" or "immobilization" as processes in their own right. In other words, if the Val-de-Travers can be conceived as a crossroads of mobilities, some of these mobilities are appropriated, are "territorialized," and are articulated with a certain materiality and representation of place. A striking example, which could be the subject of further analysis, is tourism. Tourists who visit the Val-de-Travers, in addition to being part of representations of the valley (as a "touristic place"), are attracted by place-based characteristics. This may be related to nature, which is perceived as preserved and calm, but also to the peripherality of the place. The latter is the result of varying dynamics and dimensions—economic, political, geographical, and social—and constitutes significant resources for defining the Val-de-Travers and its associated representations.

Furthermore, if my ethnographic fieldwork allowed me to grasp the centrality of the notion of periphery for the daily life of the valley's inhabitants, it particularly allowed me to grasp how this peripherality articulates with other dynamics, such as the representations of difference, the construction of an imagined community, or the informal regulation of mobilities deemed damaging for the local economy. Working on these articulations does not uncover unique phenomena but helps to demonstrate the fluidity and complexity of the social organization of difference beyond classical categorical divisions such as those based on the nation-state.

3.3. Analyzing data

"All scientific data are already interpreted at the same time as they are being observed," Mottier argues (2005, 3). Data analysis is indeed not a process that only takes place at the end of data production. Throughout the fieldwork, the researcher is constantly interpreting observations and interviews, "albeit in a latent rather than explicit way" (Olivier de Sardan 1995, 95, my translation). On this basis, my analysis was structured in various ways that were all mobilized in parallel with my ethnographic fieldwork, which consists of creating analytical memos, coding, writing, and group discussions. I present these methods in the following section:

The first method deployed is creating analytical memos (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012). These memos can take different forms, but in my case, they were always written (in notebooks or in Word documents). After each encounter, observation, or reading, I tried to formulate interpretative paths. For example, after conducting interviews, I often had a train ride of an hour back to Neuchâtel or Biel. During these periods, I often listened to the interviews, not to transcribe them verbatim but to identify avenues of analysis and outline initial interpretations. I also undertook a manner of brainstorming in order to note sentence fragments, key words, and concepts that had appealed to me and that might eventually have their place in a future analysis. Due to these exploratory and early analyses, "we avoid becoming overwhelmed by stacks of undigested data and remain involved in our research and writing" (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012, 357-358). As the research evolved, following Charmaz and Belgrave, I then "reworked memos" to make them increasingly analytic*:* "With each reworking, the researcher brings the empirical evidence forward as well as analyses of relevant new data and comparative material" (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012, 357-358).

This process was conducted in parallel with the coding of the interviews. Even though the transcriptions were undertaken by external people, I almost always listened again and made my own notes on each interview. Transcripts of the interviews were then downloaded into the Atlas.ti software in order to code them. To elaborate on these codes, I principally relied on my analytical memos, but I also used two interviews that I coded in a highly detailed manner. Thus, I had an initial grid of codes that I could apply to other transcripts. I did not spend many weeks coding all of the interviews; instead, I analyzed the excerpts that fit my analytical perspectives: in my case, the three articles.

Analytical memos and theoretical coding were combined with two other strategies that I develop further in the next two sections: group discussions and writing. First, I conducted two group discussions with members of *Val-Sewing*. The purpose of these discussions was to share preliminary analyses and refine my thinking with the help of research participants. Second, once I had identified a relevant and interesting line of analysis, I began to write drafts. To give substance to my analytical ideas, it was important for me to write. Of course, much of this writing was "abandoned"—because most of it was unconvincing—but this activity allowed me to refine my ideas and make choices. This process was nevertheless frustrating, as I sometimes felt I was investing, or had invested, a considerable amount of time in writing documents I would not "use." *A posteriori*, I realize the usefulness of these abandoned writings I kept in folders called "archives" and recognize how important they have been to the analytical process.

In the following section, I describe conducting group discussions and writing scientific articles, which I believe influenced the analysis process considerably.

3.3.1. Group discussions and "NeuchàToi"

The organization for which I was teaching French is not only composed of non-French speakers. There are also "reintegration" workshops, focused around sewing, that are proposed to beneficiaries of the regional social services, most of whom live in the valley. I asked Coralie whether I could organize one or two group discussions in order to benefit from my positive relationship with the organization's members and to share my research and thus clarify who I am and what I was doing in the Val-de-Travers. To organize these group discussions, I produced a short document explaining my research to the members of the association. We then formed groups of different sizes depending on the number of participants who had signed up. I conducted two group discussions. The first was with six women and one man, and the second was with four women and one man. I decided to prepare a PowerPoint presentation in which I included some anonymized quotes I had already collected. Conducting these group discussions, as Lambert and Loiselle (2008) argue, was a form of "triangulation" that provided the opportunity to collectively discuss and confront preliminary analyses, based on observations and individual interviews, with research participants.

I wanted to create a fun and friendly atmosphere and brought food and drinks. We held the meeting in the organization's coffee room. I had already been able to have coffee and informal discussions with the majority of the members of the organization. The two evenings were therefore convivial moments during which we discussed the Val-de-Travers. I had structured my presentation in terms of different themes (one per slide) with extracts from interviews. I briefly introduced the slide, read the quotes, and then let each person who wished to speak express themselves. Of course, some spoke more than others, and several participants were almost certainly embarrassed about sharing their experience in this setting. However, the fact that people work together and that each person's trajectory is partly known to the others made it easier for individuals to speak out. Below is an excerpt from the transcript of a group discussion in December 2019:

> Emmanuel: Many thanks for being here. I started working on the Val-de-Travers several months ago, and I have already conducted interviews with different people who live or work in the region. I have collected some personal stories about the representations of the place and the daily life in the valley. I have decided to organize this meeting with you because I find it interesting to expose part of my work and my reflections in order to confront them with your experiences and your perspectives. I am going to present you with extracts from anonymized interviews, and you are free to comment on them and say whatever comes to mind in relation to the different themes and quotes. The persons I am quoting are very diverse; some have always lived here, others have arrived recently, some are politically involved, some run local businesses, etc.
>
> Joël: What is the context in which you are doing this?

Emmanuel: I am at the University of Neuchâtel. It's a PhD project, so it's relatively long.

Joël: What is the goal of your research?

Emmanuel: I was just about to come to that. I called today's session "Living in the Val-de-Travers." The question I ask myself is how the Val-de-Travers is lived in and perceived by the people who live or work here. I explore different trajectories of people who have lived all their lives here, who have left and returned, or who have arrived from the outside (from another canton or another country). There are three starting points for this study and for today's meeting. First, there is a lot of work being done on issues of migration and mobility in urban contexts. The idea here is to focus on small villages that are ultimately affected by different types of movement. Second, many studies focus on a specific group of people, which limits the research. The advantage of having a small region such as the Val-de-Travers is that it makes it possible to consider the population as a whole without necessarily working on a single group, whether it be asylum seekers, cross-border workers, long-term residents, Spaniards, etc. Third, the idea is to present and discuss my interpretations and analyses with inhabitants of the region, which is what I propose for today. I will start by giving you some statistical data on the Val-de-Travers, and then we will discuss together different themes based on excerpts from interviews.

The exchanges that took place during the group discussion allowed me to nuance my analyses, as I witnessed different, conflicting perspectives. For example, in a quote presented on the slides, one person stated that the "Val-de-Travers is like a large family." This notion was contested by some, who said this notion was untrue and that there was, in fact, a lot of tension in the valley. Others said that there is indeed a feeling of belonging to a family when one lives in the Val-de-Travers, to which one person added, "a family with a lot of problems!" Several topics were debated by the people present. I did not have the opportunity to gather detailed information on individual trajectories, but this method allowed me to capture part of the plurality and heterogeneity of the voices that inform local issues.

I also had another opportunity to present preliminary analyses of my research in the Val-de-Travers. At the beginning of 2020, I received a call for projects from NeuchàToi, a series of activities and events financed by the cantonal authorities "aimed at encouraging better knowledge and understanding between Swiss, foreign, and migrant people, between people who have been living in Neuchâtel for a long time and those who have arrived more recently" (my translation).[15] The University of Neuchâtel was warmly invited to propose activities in this frame. After a brief exchange with Janine Dahinden, we concluded that our project in the Val-de-Travers could serve as a thematic round table that fit with the NeuchàToi events. I quickly contacted Sarah, the curator of a museum in the Val-de-Travers, to see if she would be interested in hosting such an event. I contacted Sarah because, after the interview I had conducted with

[15] https://www.neuchatoi.ch/presentation/ [Accessed on May 21, 2022]

her, she suggested I present my work in her museum. Sarah told me that she had already been contacted by Coralie, who was also considering submitting a project to NeuchàToi. This was an interesting coincidence, as Coralie is the director of the organization at which I taught French. I rapidly contacted her to see if she would like to organize an event together in the valley. She appreciated my suggestion, and we decided to organize different activities. I would be in charge of organizing a round table concerning my research, and she would organize a fashion show with creations from *Val-Sewing*. The event was originally planned for the summer of 2020, but due to COVID-19 it was postponed to 2021. Below is a flyer that was used to promote the round table:

Figure 3: Flyer NeuchàToi

Coralie exhibited an interest in taking part in the discussion, and I personally wrote and called a multitude of people who I thought could bring an interesting perspective. For example, I contacted people active in the local economy, including small shop owners who had participated in the creation of Val'Action (an association supporting the local economy that launched its own local currency in 2018). I also wrote to people active in the communal administrations, in the political authorities, and in different associations that propose and organize activities in the valley. In addition to Coralie agreeing to attend the round table, others who agreed to attend were a former local politician who is also a geographer by training, a person who is in charge of an organization providing administrative and legal support to cross-border workers, and a person involved in various associations supporting disadvantaged people.

The round table lasted 90 minutes and addressed topics such as "the local economy," "migration," "cross-border work," and "mobility." Approximately 30 people attended the event; the majority were people between 40 and 70 years old who had been living in the valley for many years. I had invited

everyone with whom I had conducted an interview and therefore knew several members of the general public who attended. This was an effective means of exposing them to my work and interpretations. This exchange also allowed me to confirm certain lines of analysis I had identified and to nuance others, notably how the feeling of peripheralization was experienced differently by participants. Before discussing this in greater detail, I present one final point in the subsequent section that I believe plays an important role in the analysis process: the writing of scientific articles.

3.3.2. Writing scientific articles

Writing a scientific article is a difficult process for a variety of reasons. However, it is also an exercise that helps to refine one's thoughts and analyses, not only through the peer review process but also during writing: one should aim at justifying and demonstrating one's interpretations, notably by comparing them with other readings and research.

The following excerpt, written in January 2022, attempts to formulate certain difficulties and disappointments I encountered during this period. Each day was different, of course: sometimes the process was pleasant, enjoyable, and exciting; sometimes I became stuck and frustrated. It was during one of these latter phases that the following personal notes were written:

> 7:30 am, my alarm goes off. I look at my phone, check the news and social media, then get up for breakfast. My partner joins me; we listen to the radio—the RTS[16] morning show—but I am already preoccupied with the day's activities. For several weeks, I have been working on a scientific article for my PhD. The writing process is laborious. Thinking, reading, writing, revising, being disappointed... then starting again. At the same time, I am thinking about the end of the contract, which is approaching—in 11 months, to be precise. Worrying, trying to think, thoughts scattered, writing in a hurry, disappointed again... It is difficult in these conditions to have a mind that is sufficiently alert, curious, and receptive to elaborating complex and relevant reflections and analyses. But I try, I strive, I concentrate, my body is tense and stressed, and my writing still disappoints me. This reality comes partly from my perception of the situation, but the structures in which I operate consolidate my lack of confidence and exert a slow, crushing pressure. Writing as a PhD student, I feel, is about trying to demonstrate to one's peers (and to oneself) one's ability to produce solid, interesting, and above all, intelligent arguments. So, I try, I write again, I think, I twist my ideas, confront them, and reformulate them. But all my spent energy does not seem to be enough to overcome my recurrent self-deception. This writing process is neither healthy nor satisfying, either for the author or for the reader. Scientific elaboration can hardly take place when our audience is our never-satisfied ego, whose harsh judgments

[16] a public radio in French-speaking Switzerland.

> are reinforced by its internalization of structural pressures. (Scientific) creativity does not emerge from constraints and tensions; it awakens spontaneously through a multitude of sources of inspiration to which we must be alert. (Personal notes, January 2022)

Of course, everything is not so dark, and the process is also made up of much more pleasant and constructive moments, but I do think that one should not neglect these delicate periods of uncertainty.

Importantly, writing articles was on occasion highly constructive and allowed me to refine my arguments. Indeed, another fundamental aspect of writing an article is receiving feedback from both colleagues and reviewers. Most such experiences have been enriching and have improved the quality of my work. Writing articles is not the end of a long analytical process but a part of it, and even when an article is published, the analysis is not necessarily complete. Exploring the ambivalences, nuances, and fluidity of everyday life resembles a never-ending process. Despite the accumulation of knowledge on a topic, there will always be aspects to (re)examine, (re)question, (re)analyze, and (re)impel. Therefore, my relationship with writing articles is ambivalent. The process is a way to both refine one's work and participate in a collective endeavor to accumulate knowledge on specific topics, but it also causes occasional situations of intense stress.

In the following section, I discuss ethical issues I encountered during the conduct of my research project. These questions concern not only the ethnographic process but also, again, the writing process.

3.4. Ethical considerations

During my research, I encountered several ethical issues for which I had to find solutions. Most of them were those commonly raised in qualitative research (Roca Escoda et al. 2020), such as issues of confidentiality, anonymity, and consent. In the following sections, I discuss these points and explain specific ethical aspects of my research and the paths I followed to address them.

An initial challenge was the issue of anonymization; the first dilemma was whether to anonymize the valley. Indeed, the valley's relatively small size risked the indirect identification of some of my interlocutors. At the same time, by anonymizing the valley, I could lose considerable material regarding the history of the place, rendering the writing exercise more difficult. I therefore abandoned this option in consultation with the other members of the project, but there remained the question of how to anonymize the interlocutors, who were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity at each interview.

All names were changed as a first step. Each case was then evaluated independently. That is, when I used an extract from an interview or observation in my writing, I was careful regarding the information delivered. I avoided as much as possible the risks of identification by being cautious or by modifying elements such as profession, age, and place of residence, changing or deleting several of these parameters.

There is, however, a delicate balance to be kept between anonymizing the data and providing enough substance to illustrate arguments (Béliard and Eideliman 2008). For example, in the article on the regime of (im)moral mobilities, I provide the example of a person who had to cease part of his professional activity after rumors that negatively affected his reputation were spread in the valley (he was subcontracting work in France). The case of this person, which was particularly interesting for my argument, had to be treated with exceptional care, notably by not mentioning his professional activity and by presenting only minimal details of the gossip circulating on this subject. Another example that posed a degree of concern regarding anonymization relates to a group of travelers' arrival at one of the region's villages in summer 2020. The inhabitants of this village were opposed to this presence and contested the political process that allowed these people to stay. Some villagers formed an informal group to observe them. I thought this was an interesting (and questionable) process, but again had to be particularly careful in presenting this story. Given so many people in the valley were aware of this initiative, communicating too many details would have risked indirect identifications being made that could have harmed the reputations of the people involved.

This example is also linked to another important ethical issue: how to present my interlocutors in my analyses. In the articles, there was little room to develop individual trajectories, and the occasional hazard emerges of not contextualizing discourses sufficiently and of therefore presenting interlocutors in a somewhat caricatural way. This problem was particularly acute in the article on representations and experiences of difference in the Val-de-Travers. Several interlocutors had markedly stigmatizing discourses against refugees, marginalized locals, and cross-border commuters. By focusing excessively on these discourses, I ran the risk of presenting them only through this prism, even though in other circumstances their discourses were more nuanced and moderate. I assume writing scientific articles contributes to this ethical issue: not only does this type of publication require advancing an argument and using material to illustrate it, which risks lacking nuance, but there is also little space in which to do so. In the first drafts of some of my articles, I had the impression I was "betraying" the discourse of my interlocutors by highlighting only one aspect of their discourse without sufficiently presenting their trajectory and its context. In this sense, I have therefore faced several limitations—or at least "dangers" to be aware of—during the exercise of writing a thesis through scientific articles. The feedback on my drafts from colleagues and other project members was invaluable in helping me identify the passages in which it was necessary to introduce additional nuance.

In the same vein, describing the "marginalization" or "peripheralization" of the valley also raised an ethical issue. These terms surfaced several times in my interlocutors' discourse, but I occasionally felt they were being used excessively, beginning with the use of the term "periphery" in the title of our broader project. As stated by Pattison, "the overemphasis on spatial stigma homogenizes the experience of diverse populations within stigmatized localities, flattening inequalities and concealing intra-territorial differentiation" (2023, 5). In fact, the Val-de-Travers, unlike other areas in Europe—such as

the French region of Grand Est (Coquard 2019) or the German city of Hoyerswerda (Ringel 2020)—is not an abandoned territory marked by devastating deindustrialization. The feeling of marginalization that emerged in particular conversations is far subtler. It is expressed in the context of a relatively long-standing rivalry between the Neuchâtel-city region, which is perceived as dominant, and the other regions of the canton: la Chaux-de-Fonds, the Val-de-Ruz, and the Val-de-Travers. Thus, even if demographic, economic, and political indicators support a form of peripheralization, this dynamic is strongly colored by social and symbolic dimensions that might be balanced if one adopts other perspectives.

Moreover, though peripherality underlies most of my analyses, I also had to be careful not to overestimate the notion. Indeed, given peripherality is a particularity of my case study, the temptation sporadically arises to place it at the heart of my analyses. Interestingly, Charles, a retired man who was involved in politics and wrote various essays on the history of the valley, told me: "Val-de-Travers is a peripheral region from a peripheral canton. This is a bit like the DNA of the region. I use it often, perhaps a little too often, to describe the Val-de-Travers." Charles stated I should be careful when using these qualifiers, which, according to him, may (re)produce an image of the region as excessively marginalized. In my endeavor to find an adequate means to present local dynamics and to remain as close as possible to the experiences of my interlocutors, I had the opportunity to discuss my interpretations with participants on several occasions. Sharing my analyses, which I wanted to be as faithful as possible to the lived experiences I had heard of in the Val-de-Travers, was a way to address various ethical concerns. This is what I discuss in the subsequent section.

3.4.1. Portraying the valley and sharing interpretations

Exchanges with participants regarding the research process can relate to a processual approach to ethics: "Such ethics tend to be characterized by dialogue, reciprocity, and the maintenance of trust, which is often the basis for the relationship with research participants" (Perrin et al. 2020, 141). Because I was exploring social dynamics in the valley and in particular the development of a sense of political, economic, and social marginalization within the canton of Neuchâtel, I kept questioning whether my analyses were excessive and whether I could be accused of "over-interpretation."

In ethnographic literature, such concerns are not uncommon. In one of her books, Tyler recounts a dream she had while listening to an anthropologist's presentation of her ethnographic fieldwork in Papua New Guinea; she imagines that she is one of the "natives" featured on the slides:

> That night I dreamed about the images projected onto the anthropologist's wall, the whirr of the fan, the carousel rotating, the moment of darkness before the click which announced a new image. […] [People] talk about the culture of the rural community; they share comments, offer analysis, make judgments. It is impossible for them to imagine that the object of the fieldwork might be right there with them in the room and on the wall at the

> same time, in the same space and historical time. Served up on the wall to be consumed at an academic dinner party. I shrink into the chair. I make myself as small as possible. I want to disappear. I feel I should confess that I am one of the natives on the wall. That I am the ethnographic object. But my mouth is full of wool. There is no position from which to speak—the figures in the slideshow are silent; they are artifacts to be gazed at, spoken for and about. I am caught in 'the spy-glass of anthropology'. I am overwhelmed with shame. I radiate shame. (Tyler 2020, 229-230).

Scheper-Hughes, in 1979, published an ethnographic study of an Irish village, Ballybran, which was terribly received by its inhabitants. In a subsequent article, she recounts her attempts to reconcile her responsibility to undertake an honest ethnography:

> "Still, were I to be writing the book for the first time and with hindsight, of course there are things I would do differently. I would be inclined to avoid the 'cute' and 'conventional' use of pseudonyms. Nor would I attempt to scramble certain identifying features of the individuals portrayed on the naive assumption that these masks and disguises could not be rather easily de-coded by villagers themselves" (2000, 128).

In my case, I felt that it was necessary to find a balance between using the emic categories named in the field by certain interlocutors—such as "we are the canton's dustbin," "we are seen as an Indian reservation," and "Neuchâtel doesn't give a damn about us"—while admitting that the marginalization of the valley would not seem so extreme if the perspective was broadened.

A particular experience I had illustrates my concerns. During a meeting at the institute in Neuchâtel, Jérémie, an anthropology student from the Val-de-Travers, was present. I was presenting my analyses to my colleagues, but I was aware of his presence. We exchanged views after this meeting, and he told me about the diversity of experiences and trajectories in the Val-de-Travers, emphasizing the idea that he did not recognize himself in several of the quotes I had presented. I thus became aware that, according to a person from the Val-de-Travers, my analysis might still lack nuance. I did not want to become a "monster" (Burman 2018) who extracts the data it needs without concern for the reception of its analyses by research participants. I continued to interact with Jérémie, with whom I became close. When my first paper was published, I sent it to him. His subsequent text message immediately made me (excessively) doubtful, as evidenced by the excerpt from the exchange of messages on Telegram:

> Jérémie: I read your article; we can talk about it when we have the chance (or not, I understand that you want to move on ^^)
>
> Emmanuel: Wow, you scare me! I hope you didn't think I was too far off the mark... :(
>
> Jérémie: Haha but not at all! In fact, I found elements that we discussed and that I thought were important, so I liked it (as far as a social science article can "please" me of course)

As can be seen from my answer, I immediately interpreted his offer to talk about my analyses as a sign of possible disagreement with it. This was not the case, but this anecdote illustrates the constant worry I had that my analyses would not correspond with the experiences of my interlocutors. A similar situation occurred when I was invited to briefly present my work on public radio in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. I was anxious concerning the potential reactions of people living in the Val-de-Travers who would be listening to my interview.

These experiences made me realize that conducting my fieldwork in a place close to where I live is notably different from undertaking fieldwork in a geographically distant environment. Of course, ethical issues might have been similar, but my exposure to people who live in the area under analysis would have been reduced. Indeed, though the Val-de-Travers is relatively small, I frequently met (and still meet) people in my private life who told me they lived or grew up there. When they learn the subject of my PhD, they are obviously curious and ask me questions and I, in turn, am curious (and apprehensive) about what they think of my work.

I have not interpreted this proximity to and familiarity with the field with reference to anthropological debates concerning the ethnographer's position on an insider-outsider continuum (Müller 2015). Like Müller (2015), I argue that this division is too hermetic to capture empirical research experiences, but it also tends to "naturalize" and "other" research participants by treating them as "natives" whose characteristics and everyday practices differ from those of the researcher. Rather, I view this familiarity with the field as part of an "ethnographic toolkit" that constitutes an element of accessing and interpreting my field (Reyes 2020). To phrase it otherwise, the researcher, like everyone else, has "multiple identities" that serve as resources in the construction and understanding of their research project. This is what I discuss in Section 5 of this chapter: how my different "identities" and thus "positionalities" were used, interpreted, (re)appropriated, transformed, and blurred according to social interactions and configurations.

3.4.2. Intermediary conclusion: A short note on ethnography and representation

I believe that the issue of the representation of research participants is one that haunts—or at least should haunt—all ethnographers. However, there is a balance to be struck. To what extent should ethnographers seek to satisfy participants with their contributions? Alternatively, in Mosse's words, "[t]he question is, are there ways of staying close to our research participants (when we want to) without sacrificing our intellectual projects" (2015, 136). It is true that one might wonder whether the ends of research lie beyond the satisfaction of the participants' interpretations. It seems unthinkable, if not impossible and suspicious, to represent all the voices heard in a research project such as the one I conducted. Indeed, if a researcher is concerned with this, they are likely to involuntarily seek the approval of participants with whom they feel close rather than those whose discourses are less in line with the researcher's understanding of the world.

This remark raises a series of questions all researchers might confront: for whom are we doing research, for what purpose, with what message? Answering these questions allows us to reflect on the place we wish to assign research participants.

In my case, it would be hypocritical to say I am undertaking research in the interest of the people I met. My research is aimed at social scientists in general, and it is from them that I wish to gain recognition and satisfaction. Further, how would my research have turned out if it had been in the interest of the participants? Therefore, even if I care about the research participants' representations in face-to-face interactions, I seek above all to grasp the complexity of the social world despite the risk of certain interpretations not pleasing certain people.

I thus interpret this anxiety regarding the reception of my research not only as a fear that participants will not be represented accurately or in a way that suits them but also as a manifestation of my doubts and uncertainties. These emotions are occasionally unpleasant. However, they are necessary to research anchored in the subjectivities and identities of a researcher with no desire to excessively reproduce hierarchical knowledge (Laville and Salmon 2022) distant from the lived experiences of research participants. It is therefore necessary not to be overwhelmed by these emotions, which can attribute symbolic power to research participants who might unconsciously and surreptitiously tend to make me say nice things about them.

3.5. "You know what I mean, as you grew up in the Jura": on positionality and reflexivity

As with Reyes (2020), I argue that the researcher's positionalities depend on visible (e.g. race/ethnicity) and invisible (e.g. social capital) characteristics. I am a young white male researcher who grew up in a small region near the Val-de-Travers, and these characteristics are both visible and invisible "tools" I perceive as the "multiple identities" with which I navigated the Val-de-Travers. Though these characteristics are partially imposed on me, the way I present and mobilize them in social interactions is the result of (un)conscious strategies used to access, observe, and interpret my fieldwork. It should be pointed out that these identities, despite my somewhat instrumental understanding of them as tools, are also occasional burdens and boxes to which I am assigned without knowing their subtleties, appearances, or how to jettison them.

In this ethnographic toolkit, there are also my views, my opinions, and my political reflections. These elements I carry with me have been used, sometimes premeditatedly, sometimes spontaneously, and sometimes unconsciously, to negotiate social interactions and have contributed to legitimizing my research with my interlocutors.

Over the last few years my political positioning has become strongly anchored "on the left," and I have had a marked interest in different forms of domination that are (re)produced daily in different spheres

of society. While I have not radically changed my perceptions through my work as a social scientist, regularly addressing social structures, power relations, categorizations, and inequalities has significantly shaped my perceptions of the social world. On this subject, interestingly, de Lagasnerie declared that "there are no right-wing sociologists. As soon as one questions social relations, one becomes aware of power relations, and develops interpretive grids that are incompatible with right-wing thinking" (my translation).[17] Even if this statement needs to be tempered (right-wing social scientists do exist), it is true that deconstructing power relations and exploring social configurations that privilege certain population groups over others impacts political positioning. Furthermore, my personal readings have been oriented toward politicized themes that question different forms of structural inequalities. Such themes guide how I conduct research, affect how I think of myself as a researcher (Earl Rinehart 2021), and influence "the ways of reasoning that are carried through the research act" (Mortari 2015, 2).

Infiltrating the daily life of the Val-de-Travers is quite different from conducting an ethnographic study with (non-)state actors who participate in the exclusion, exploitation, or marginalization of certain population groups. However, I entered the field with an (un)conscious intention of "revealing" prejudicial discourses and practices. Most of my reflections tended to start by considering "who is excluded" or "how exclusion is (re)produced in everyday life in a small valley." Consequently, in each of my articles, though principally the two I wrote alone, the first drafts lacked nuance and focused excessively on a certain type of practice and discourse.

My positionality therefore represents not only who I am and how I interpret my data but also what I think of the social world and what I want to say concerning it. Projects seeking to denounce exclusion and discrimination will differ significantly from those that endeavor to valorize practices and discourses of inclusion. This view of the social world led me to apprehend my interlocutors in specific ways. When I went to interviews with people I knew to be members of right-wing political parties, I expected to hear virulent discourse that was in disagreement with my political opinions. In a way, I was also looking for this. Indeed, I sometimes unconsciously asked slightly biased questions to reinforce my ideas that these people use discriminatory rhetoric against certain population groups. For example, I knew that talking about the presence of refugees in the Val-de-Travers with right-wing politicians would produce a certain type of "data".

Nevertheless, at the same time, my preconceptions of these people were occasionally upended. Many people who are involved in the Swiss People Party—an extremely right-wing Swiss political party—in the Val-de-Travers proffer an exceptionally conservative discourse that aims to defend "the local." It seems that the primary motivation for this, which colors a nationalist and often racist discourse, is a fear of losing local resources and privileges. Thus, I discovered the discourse of these people stems not from

[17] https://www.blast-info.fr/emissions/2022/se-revolter-face-aux-crimes-du-capitalisme-cqJzbGyhT623Cu-rgpyIhQ [Accessed on August 22, 2022]

a systematic opposition to all forms of incoming mobility but from an opposition to all forms of mobility deemed (rightly or wrongly) harmful to the "local." I develop this aspect in my second article on the regime of (im)moral mobilities.

As previously mentioned, another point to consider is my cantonal origins, which influenced certain conversations and how people "interpreted me." I grew up in the small Swiss canton of Jura, neighboring the canton of Neuchâtel, which relatively recently fought for its independence from the canton of Bern (obtained in 1979) and in relation to which a spirit of "resistance" in the face of "external threats" (namely, the canton of Bern) is regularly mentioned. During several interviews, people asked me where I was from, and when I answered "Jura," there was a certain echo of their experiences in the Val-de-Travers. One man said to me, "You know what I mean, as you grew up in the Jura, you experienced the same thing with Bern" (Excerpts from field notes, winter 2019). Although a little superficial, this familiarity perhaps offered, in some of my interlocutors' eyes, a certain "credibility" and "legitimacy" to conduct research in the Val-de-Travers.

I must say that I have sometimes "used" this element to legitimize my interest in studying the Val-de-Travers. For example, when I was presenting my study and my curiosity regarding the Val-de-Travers, I occasionally said something akin to, "I grew up in the Jura, and I find it very interesting that these possible tensions that emerge and that are negotiated and transformed with the surrounding regions are perceived as dominant." My experience in the Jura also fed my reflections on the Val-de-Travers and vice versa. During an interview with a young person from the region, we discussed the potential identity drifts that have emerged in both regions that can lead local actors to reproduce highly essentializing discourses concerning the emic categories "Valley-ers" and "Jurassians."

The fact that this research was conducted in an environment close to where I live and originate holds further implications, particularly in terms of distancing. Indeed, as Lavanchy states, "this specificity implies the possibility of benefiting from an in-depth knowledge of the general social context but requires in return an active effort of distancing and objectification" (2018, 159, my translation). Lavanchy also refers to the need to draw on methods from autoethnography (Khosravi 2010; Müller 2015) while other authors even consider it relevant to write an autobiography in order to produce reflexive and situated research (Mortari 2015, 3). In this respect, the triangulation of data and the regular exchanges with research participants presented above have allowed me to nuance, situate, and enrich my interpretations.

As mentioned earlier, this proximity to the valley and some of its inhabitants (in terms of language, skin color, citizenship, and spending my childhood in a small peripheral region) was a resource I could utilize in my interactions with research participants. Indeed, by mobilizing these elements, I was able to leave out others, such as that of being an academic. This facet of my identity, while naturally revealed to all my interlocutors, was treated with caution. While this allowed me to legitimize my research in certain

situations, it placed me at risk of disqualifying myself in others, as academics can be considered superfluous, disconnected from reality, or as reinforcing asymmetrical relationships with research participants. This power relationship is unavoidable. However, by mentioning my proximity to the valley and presenting myself as a young researcher—several interlocutors unfamiliar with academia believed I was doing a bachelor or master's thesis—it was easier not to be deemed a "monster" (Burman 2018) desiring data only to produce "obscure" analyses.

Moreover, a substantial number of my interlocutors had acquaintances, and even family members, who were studying or had studied at the University of Neuchâtel, which is located 45 minutes by public transport from the Val-de-Travers. This familiarity with the institution certainly facilitated certain interactions. Indeed, people with experience at the university had an idea of what a research project is and understood my reasons for wanting to talk to them. My proximity to the Val-de-Travers can also be understood through other characteristics, notably the fact that I am white in a context historically dominated by white people. In fact, I could easily "hide" in the population without being systematically referred to as a form of exteriority. In a different context, such as at a place in the Global South, my presence would certainly have been much more noticeable. In such a context, I would not have been comfortable navigating a small locality as a white researcher from a European university.

Finally, although I had preconceived ideas regarding my interlocutors, which included stereotypes, they certainly had some similar preconceptions about me. Though it was of course difficult, if not impossible, for me to guess how my interlocutors interpreted me, I often had the feeling I was considered a "student from Neuchâtel." I perceived certain interview situations as being marked by an asymmetrical relationship between me—the "student from Neuchâtel"—and interlocutors who had long-standing local expertise. This configuration was notably present during the first expert interview with a local historian. At that time, I was beginning my research and reading about the Val-de-Travers. I met with this person to learn more of the local history and the population movements that crossed the region. He received me at his home and suggested that his wife also participate in the discussion. When I entered their house, I had the feeling I was entering a small museum. Paintings and objects of all kinds adorned the walls and shelves. We sat down in the living room to begin our discussion. The historian is a man in his 70s, tall and strong, with a beard. Having studied at the university himself, he is aware of what it means to do a PhD and rapidly mentioned several historical episodes, stating: "You know them I think, if you are doing a PhD on the region." While I had heard of most of the major historical events, I did not always have an expert level of detailed knowledge. Therefore, I had to find a balance between questioning my interlocutor while maintaining some "credibility" about my knowledge of the region.

On a few occasions, though, the power relationship appeared to be reversed. This was the case, for example, during the discussion we organized (Oliver was also present) with refugees living in an apartment in the Val-de-Travers. Before working as a PhD candidate at the University of Neuchâtel, I was employed for over a year as a social worker at a center for asylum seekers in the canton of Neuchâtel.

After the end of my professional occupation at the center, I had occasionally met attendees of the center in other public spaces in the canton of Neuchâtel, and we had exchanged phone numbers. This was also the case with a person who lived in the Val-de-Travers. I contacted him to see if he would be interested in meeting us to talk about his experience in the valley and in the canton in general. We met once for coffee in Neuchâtel, allowing me to explain the process and clarify my new position. I was no longer an employee of the migration service but a PhD candidate from the University of Neuchâtel, and it was crucial to me that this aspect be understood by our interlocutors. He had arrived with two other people who were also available and wanted to meet us; I also knew them from my previous job. We explained our project, had coffee, and discussed other subjects. We stayed in touch, and eventually arranged to meet in their apartment in March 2019. During the meeting, I mentioned several times that I no longer worked for the migration service, and Oliver and I also avoided constructing too many questions related to their administrative and legal situation. Instead, we discussed their personal and professional projects and daily lives. In this case, though I used other resources from my ethnographic toolbox, my previous experience with the migration service remained highly present in the exchanges. Indeed, on a few occasions, we referred to experiences and situations at the center. This familiarity, no longer with the "valley" but with the reception of asylum seekers in the canton, was delicate to manage and made me rather uncomfortable. The strong power relationship that had marked our prior relationship—I was their "social assistant"—haunted my mind and, I believe, also interfered in our interviews for my research project.

My ethnographic toolkit also consists of personal characteristics that are, at first glance, relatively remote from the conduct of a research project. For example, I have played soccer all my life, and though I do not follow the games and results assiduously, I still retain extensive knowledge of them. This is also a resource I was able to mobilize to informally contact people, including young people from a youth center and refugees during the interview. One of the refugees joined a soccer team in the valley, and as he also knew that I was interested in this sport, we discussed it. I am aware of the formal and informal codes that structure the interactions of the members of a soccer team. This kind of knowledge facilitates exchanges and allows valuable informal conversations to take place before discussions related to my research interests proceed. This theme also reflects the singularity of ethnographic research: other researchers have other themes and characteristics to mobilize in order to make contact with potential participants and build trusting relations in the field.

In the following chapter, I present the Val-de-Travers and the contextual elements that informed my analysis. I not only enumerate historical facts but also draw on the reflections and observations made during fieldwork to substantiate the various aspects discussed.

4. Val-de-Travers: A peripheral(ized) valley located at the crossroad of mobilities

> The Val-de-Travers is a closed basin or "island in a hollow" [île en creux], locked at all its extremities so that its access, relatively difficult, requires going up to nearly 1,000 meters to enter or leave it. Only the paths leading to the Areuse [name of the local river] gorges allow you to leave it or to reach it without having to climb up to 300 meters first! Despite this kind of "mountain insularity," since the Middle Ages it has been equipped with communication routes, both pedestrian and vehicular, in the direction of Franche-Comté [neighboring region in France] and [other Swiss regions] […] The valley is therefore not a badly oriented concavity that would be an obstacle to transregional relations. On the contrary, it is a place of passage frequented throughout history. (Klauser and Perrin 1990, 9, my translation)

This chapter introduces the (historical) background of the articles included in this dissertation. For this exercise of "writing place" (Cresswell 2019) with a mobility and relational perspective, I focus on the main human mobilities (always entangled with non-human aspects, such as money, imaginaries, objects, etc.) that have co-constituted the Val-de-Travers and its representations. In doing so, although my work bears certain similarities to a regional monograph, it does not seek to define and capture "regional identity" but to explore the subtleties and fluidity of the social organization of difference.

While regional monographs can provide important keys to understanding a particular place and its population, they run the risk of reproducing static and essentializing considerations (Paasi and Metzger 2017). Moreover, a book of this type has already been written on the valley; it is entitled *Val-de-Travers: une région, une identité* [Val-de-Travers: one region, one identity] (Jelmini, Vaucher, and Engelberts 2008). It begins with considerations of physical geography before addressing the social, economic, and political elements that have co-constituted the region. This book is a rich resource for any observer seeking to understand the Val-de-Travers, its history, and the dominant identity discourses. It represents a category of practice and offers a performative portrait (Butler 2006) of the valley; that is, it participates in constructing the regional identity it describes.[18]

This chapter adopts an approach relatively similar to that of a regional monograph while attempting to highlight the heterogeneity of the valley. This heterogeneity is discussed in relation to the mobilities that can and have crossed the valley. This chapter also represents an opportunity to introduce and discuss certain elements that are not or only slightly discussed in the three scientific articles. It goes beyond a

[18] The book represents both a source of information regarding the region and material for analysis and discussion, particularly with regard to processes of identification and social categorization.

simple descriptive contextualization and attempts to provide several initial elements of analysis to more effectively understand the Val-de-Travers.

Therefore, I consider place to be an assemblage "of materiality, meaning, and practice; place as a necessary social construct; place as a crossroads of roots and routes" (Cresswell 2019, 201). Emphasis is placed on the relations, circulations, movements, and trajectories that intersect locally. On the assumption that assemblages are neither a part nor a whole (Aparna, Hendrikx, and Lagendijk 2022), I do not aim to write exhaustively on all the elements that co-constitute the Val-de-Travers. Instead, I privilege certain aspects I consider particularly noteworthy to furnish the reader with a "sense of the place." In this perspective, two simultaneous (and occasionally contradictory) historical (and contemporary) dynamics are particularly interesting—as this chapter's introductory quote suggests. The first dynamic consists of the mobilities and discourses that feed narratives of the valley's "peripheralization." Despite this lived and situated peripherality, the second dynamic is that the Val-de-Travers has always been a node wherein a multitude of regional, national, European, and transnational mobilities intersect.

Therefore, it is through these two perspectives that I frame the presentation of my case study. Putting the dynamics of peripheralization into perspective with other mobilities that intersect locally provides a means to nuance the purported "passivity" of peripheralized regions (Burdack, Nadler, and Woods 2015) and to explore the complexity of local strategies, discourses, and practices. In particular, putting mobility and peripherality into perspective allows for an exploration of what is commonly referred to as the paradoxes of peripherality (Brown and Hall 2000). In other words, if the peripherality of a region can be understood through a form of marginality (social, economic, political), it can also be used and valorized as a resource to reinforce the attractiveness of the region (its calm, nature, authenticity, etc.), notably to attract tourists and new inhabitants.

In so doing, I aim to introduce the reader to the Val-de-Travers and provide the backdrop for the analysis. I do not pursue a strictly objectifying endeavor but also rely on my experiences of and reflections on staying in and visiting the Val-de-Travers. In order to present and discuss the region, which can be conceived as both a "peripheral place" and a "crossroads of mobilities," this chapter is divided into four sections. First, I localize the region (politically and geographically) and demonstrate how it is situated at the "periphery of Europe and at the center of (European) mobilities." In this section, I also discuss the demographic evolution of the valley and the historical human circulations that have taken place in it. Second, I address its industrial history by focusing on the dominant activities (the lace trade, watchmaking, absinthe production, and knitting-machine manufacturing) that have historically participated in processes of the valley's transnationalization and then peripheralization. Third, I examine the migratory and political specificities of the valley by placing it in the context of national (Switzerland) and cantonal (Neuchâtel) histories. Fourth, I conclude by discussing the dominant past and present dynamics of region-building, which articulate peripherality, centrality, and mobility.

Importantly, this dissertation, and thus this chapter, focuses on the Val-de-Travers. This valley, composed of 11 villages, is one of the four regions constituting the canton of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. The term Val-de-Travers can confuse, potentially referring to the region, the valley, or one of the three political communes of this region. Some of the data collected, particularly online, are specific to the commune of Val-de-Travers. The commune of Val-de-Travers resulted from the merger of nine village—mentioned later—and the vast majority of the valley's inhabitants fall under this jurisdiction: only perhaps 1,000 inhabitants (of the 12,000 in the valley) live in the two other communes (La Côte aux Fées and Les Verrières). Thus, the communal data for the Val-de-Travers cover most of the region (demographically and geographically) and provide important insights regarding it.

4.1. Locating the field: Geographical and demographic positioning

In this section, I discuss the various historical and contemporary political affiliations of the Val-de-Travers and present its demographic evolution. To do so, I begin by locating the region geographically, historically, and politically.

4.1.1. At the periphery of Europe, at the center of (European) mobilities

The Val-de-Travers appeared in historical sources at the end of the 11th century (Jelmini 2009). At that time, it was part of the Kingdom of Burgundy, which corresponded to the area currently located on the borders of France, Italy, and Switzerland (Morerod 2008a). During the following centuries, the Val-de-Travers was under the jurisdiction of various lordships and dynasties. From 1707 to 1848, it was part of the Kingdom of Prussia, although in 1814 the canton of Neuchâtel (including the Val-de-Travers) joined the Swiss Confederation. Between 1815 and 1848, Neuchâtel was both a principality, under the suzerainty of the King of Prussia, and a Swiss canton, an ambiguous status that led, in the revolutionary movement of the mid-19th century, to the Revolution of March 1st, 1848 (Jelmini, Vaucher, and Engelberts 2008). March 1st is annually commemorated every year in the canton as the anniversary of both its independence and of the creation of the Republic and Canton of Neuchâtel. From this date, Neuchâtel broke its ties with the Prussian monarchy and became fully integrated into Switzerland.

Interestingly, during these historic political transformations, the villages that make up the Val-de-Travers were never "divided." As the historian Jelmini explained in 2009:

> As far back as one can go in the history or proto-history of the Val-de-Travers, one can see that this region—which is very precisely delimited by geology—is marked by a remarkable unitary destiny. Indeed, at no time in its history has the Val-de-Travers been dismembered to belong to different, let alone opposing, dynasties. [...] In terms of its history, Val-de-Travers can therefore be treated as a long-established unit, as the geological structure of the valley underlines. The durability of this original structure is also brilliantly confirmed

> by the fact that the cohesion of Val-de-Travers was never questioned in any way until the first years of the 21st century. (Jelmini 2009, my translation)

As can be seen, despite the historical political developments at the regional, national, and European levels, the Val-de-Travers has been considered a "territorial unit" that has been assigned to various political entities, such as the Kingdom of Burgundy, the Kingdom of Prussia, and, more recently, a district and then a region of the canton of Neuchâtel.

Today, the Val-de-Travers is geographically and politically located in the canton of Neuchâtel, which is one of the 26 cantons that constitute Switzerland. Importantly, Switzerland, although not a member state of the European Union, has nonetheless signed a considerable number of economic and free trade agreements with EU member states (Thurnherr 2017). Due to the bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the European Union, trade is facilitated at various levels, which has allowed for a close relationship and explains why a large part of the population does not find it necessary to fully adhere to the EU.[19] The Val-de-Travers, as a region on the periphery of Switzerland, is politically on the border of the European Union but geographically at its center—given Switzerland's central geographical position on the continent. This tension between, on the one hand, a "double peripherality" (within Switzerland and the canton of Neuchâtel) and, on the other hand, a form of "centrality" (in the geographical heart of Europe) is a common thread that runs throughout my work. Indeed, with the substantial cross-border movements between France and Switzerland, discussed in detail below, the region is significantly affected by certain Swiss-European agreements, predominantly those concerning human mobility, such as the 2002 Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP). The map below illustrates the geographical position of the Val-de-Travers region.

[19] https://www.swissinfo.ch/fre/pourquoi-la-suisse-ne-veut-pas-adh%C3%A9rer-%C3%A0-l-ue/47332902 [Accessed June 05, 2022]

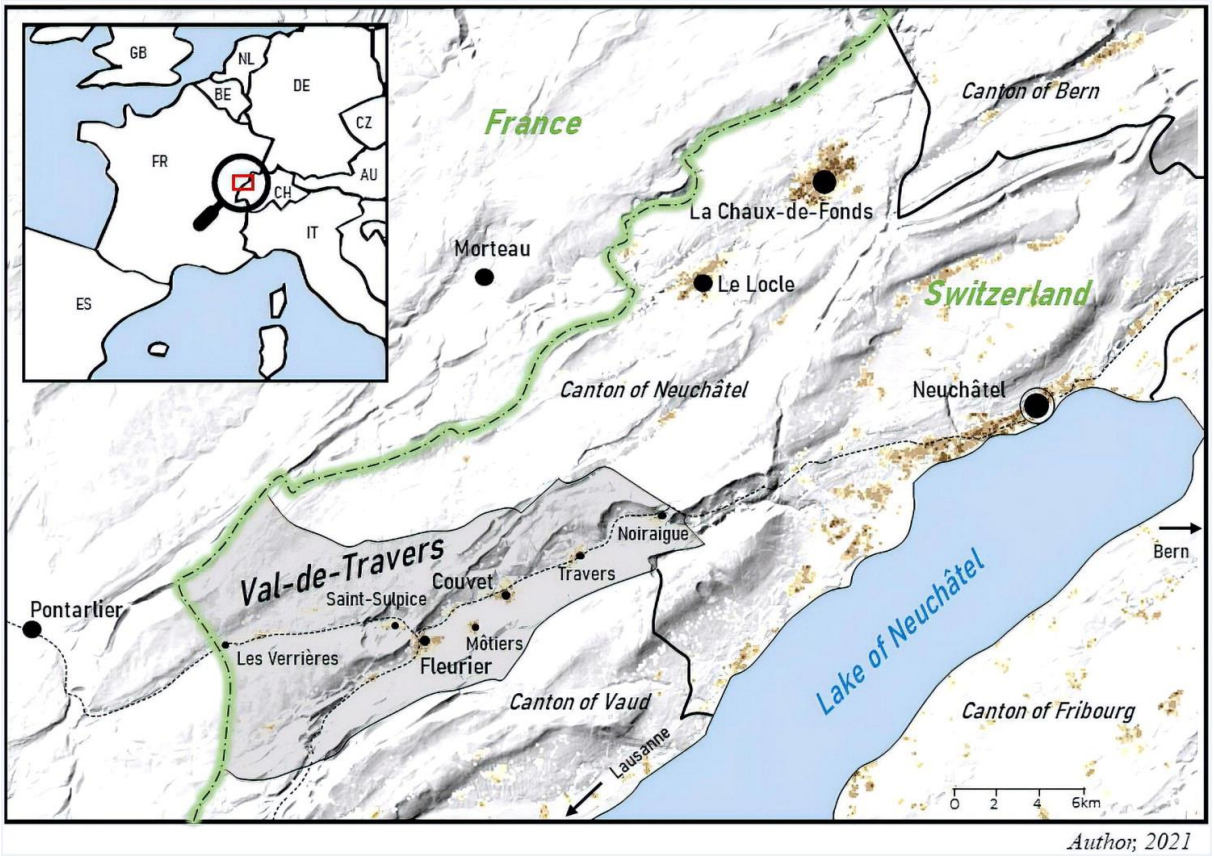

Figure 4: Map of Val-de-Travers

Daily cross-border mobilities represent the principal effects of the relations between Switzerland and the European Union experienced by the Val-de-Travers' inhabitants. The substantial differences in salaries and costs of living between the regions,[20] combined with the freedom of movement between France and Switzerland, generate significant and increasingly important flows (Garufo 2016): people living in France who work in Switzerland, companies that move to and settle in the border regions to benefit from the French workforce, or people living in Switzerland who buy cheaper goods and services in France. From an economic viewpoint, while some see such flows as an opportunity for local economic development, others consider them a threat to jobs and the local economy (due to the flight of income to France). Thus, Swiss-EU agreements and the opening of national borders within the Schengen Area have contributed to the emergence of heated local debates on the European question by positioning border regions at the forefront of the intensification of intra-European mobility.

This echoes the work of Prokkola, who explored the Finnish towns of Lappeenranta and Tornio and observed that "[t]he establishment of free trade area agreements and European integration has shifted border regions from a peripheral position to a more favorable one, and has facilitated growth in border

[20] A study on the salaries of cross-border workers in Switzerland in the Jura Arc shows that "on average, the salaries of cross-border workers are 50% higher than those of people working on the French side. On the other hand, these same cross-border workers earn on average 8% less than Swiss workers." https://www.travailler-en-suisse.ch/frontalier-suisse.html [Accessed August 15, 2022]

regions (Blatter, 2003; Hanson, 2001)" (Prokkola 2019, 1587). Because the Val-de-Travers lies on the periphery of Switzerland and the canton of Neuchâtel, it faces a significant increase in cross-border mobilities, and its status as a border region informs several of the local political debates.[21] Amilhat Szary argues that "at the local scale, and in close proximity to the border, these multiple and complex crossings create the border region" (2015, 68), a space around which, according to Amilhat Szary, it is "very difficult to draw boundaries" (2015, 68). Indeed, all these cross-border mobilities concern not only the "line" that separates two nation-states; they also permeate the everyday life of the various places where border dynamics are experienced and regulated.

With this deterritorialization of the border, authors have spoken of the "thickness of the border" (Haselsberger 2014), while several research participants mentioned "cross-border culture," notably a cross-border worker named Philippe, (see discussion in Chapter 6). This cross-border culture is an interesting emic category; it not only illustrates everyday experiences related to the border but also serves to distinguish those individuals and collectives who "have a cross-border culture" from those "who do not." In Philip's discourse, those who do not have it are those who only come to take advantage of the border "selfishly." That is, "they take advantage of economic differences (in terms of prices and wages) without worrying about contributing locally". These discursive practices reveal the specificity of the everyday dynamics of boundary-making in the borderlands, regions where the national border is not only a source of negotiation but also a resource for discourses of differentiation between different groups.

This geographical and political positioning of the Val-de-Travers formally and informally politicizes the "European question" around issues concerning human mobility that are intertwined with the mobility of capital. Thus, it is interesting to note that other European issues, such as those related to Switzerland's (non-)membership of the EU, are highly debated at the national level but less so at the local level (Fontanellaz and Saint-Ouen 2019). These broader foreign policy issues, as Eribon (2009, 43) observes, seem "distant;" put another way, before the political debates come the debates concerning the economic situation this causes for local inhabitants. This is what I discuss in Article 2, demonstrating that not all cross-border mobilities, and thus the people who engage in them, are rejected but that there is a classification regarding the (non-)morality of several of these mobilities. While some are considered "good" for the valley, such as the presence of a cross-border workforce in economic sectors struggling to recruit, others are considered "bad," such as shopping trips to France by those with significant economic resources living in Switzerland and who "should" therefore buy local.

Before discussing the industrial and economic history of the valley in more detail, in the following section I briefly present the key trends in demographic evolution. This examination also allows me to

[21] Of course, border-related issues are not new in the valley (Tissot and Daumas 2004), but they are of increasing importance because of the drastic increase in daily traffic between Switzerland and France.

discuss the various labels used to characterize the Val-de-Travers and, in particular, the tension between peripherality-related and centrality-related elements.

Figure 5: Photo Val-de-Travers, Summer 2020, Charmillot

4.1.2. Non-linear demographic evolution

The graph below discloses that, at the end of the 19th century, the region experienced an important demographic expansion: in the 50 years between 1850 and 1900, the population grew from 12,000 to more than 18,000 inhabitants. This strong demographic expansion is explained by industrial dynamism and, in particular, the rise of the watchmaking industry (discussed below). During this period, workers from other Swiss regions and from abroad (primarily from Italy) settled in the region. Today, the valley has slightly less than 12,000 inhabitants. Throughout the 20th century, there was a near-constant population decline, with the exception of a few periods. These include the 1950s and the 1960s, when many foreign workers (again, largely from Italy) arrived in the valley (I discuss this point below), and the 1990s, when a form of "rural urbanization" occurred in which individuals and families from surrounding towns came to settle (Giacchetta 1996).

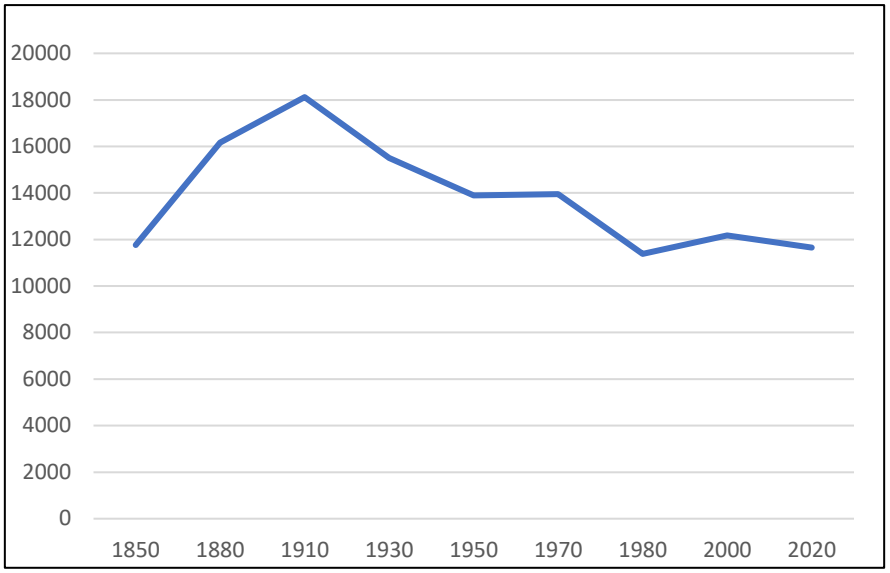

Figure 6: Population Val-de-Travers, DEAS (2021)

In the 20th century, two major crises have particularly impacted the demographic evolution of the valley. The first occurred at the end of the Second World War, when the region was hit by the world economic crisis and the rise of protectionism (Morerod et al. 2014), which contributed to a demographic decline. The second crisis occurred during the 1970s and the 1980s. The documentary *We were the kings of the world* (Brandt and Brandt 1983) effectively demonstrates the feelings, concerns, and tensions of the region's inhabitants during this period. In addition to the watchmaking crisis and the oil crisis (Morerod et al. 2014), the large Dubied company (presented below) went bankrupt in 1988 (Bornoz and Tissot 2012). As a consequence, the region lost almost 2,000 jobs (Jelmini, Vaucher, and Engelberts 2008). A local history book notes several interesting statistics: "from 1950 to 1977, the resident population decreased by 11% in the Val-de-Travers, whereas it increased by 26% in the whole canton of Neuchâtel" (Klauser 1979a, 21, my translation). This demographic evolution simultaneously illustrates a (demographic) peripheralization of the Val-de-Travers and the centralization of other localities in the canton, particularly the city of Neuchâtel. As presented in article 1, these crises played an important role in the emergence of an imagined community of fate.

The canton of Neuchâtel is structured around two main cities—Neuchâtel and La Chaux-de-Fonds—which are at the heart of a historical rivalry (for a discussion on this, see Dupraz and Morerod 2014; Hainard 2014) and two valleys—Val-de-Travers and Val-de-Ruz. The valleys have a relatively low level of demographic and political influence. The graph below establishes the evolution of the population distribution in the canton of Neuchâtel. It is particularly striking that the region of Neuchâtel (region Littoral) has continued to grow demographically to the detriment of other regions, mainly La Chaux-de-Fonds (region Montagnes) and the Val-de-Travers. The latter represented 17% of the population in 1850 and only 7% in 2017.

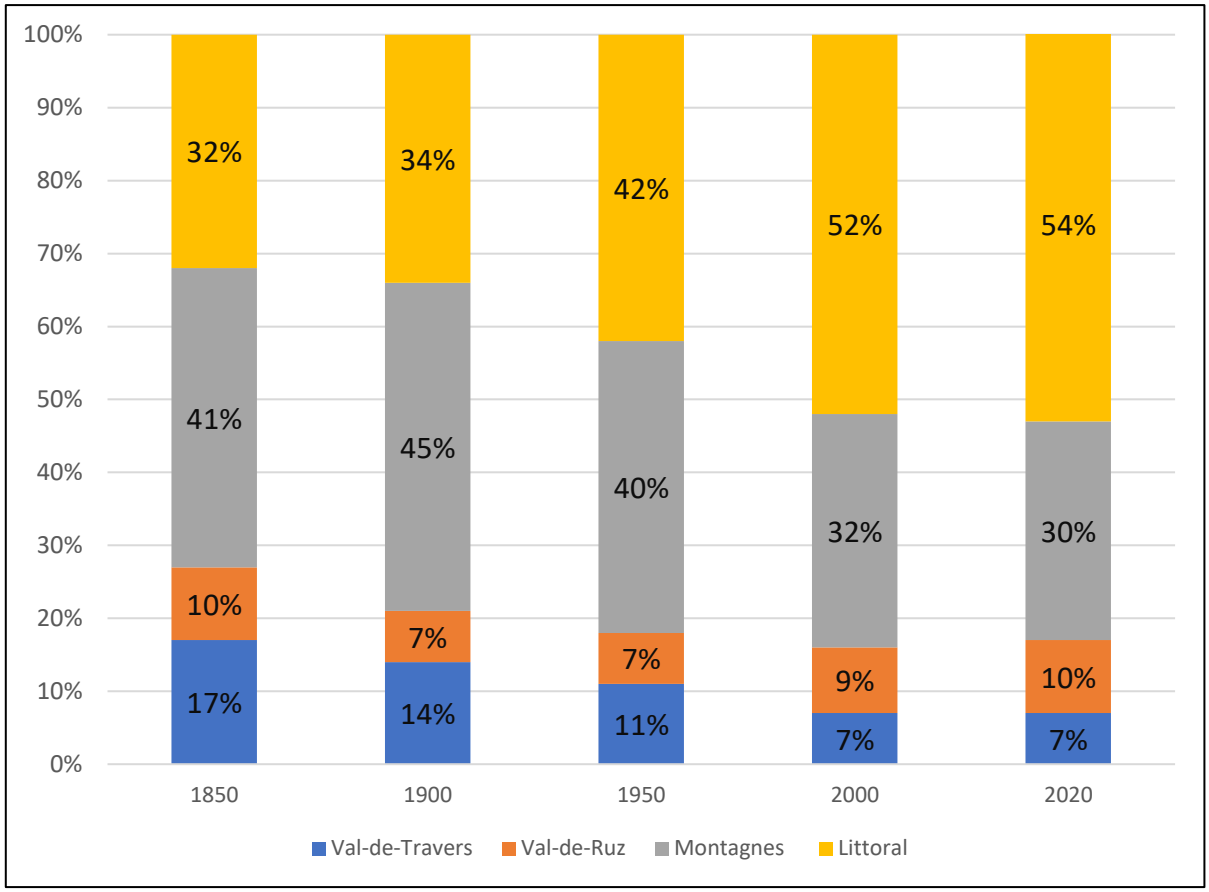

Figure 7: Population distribution by region, from 1850 to 2020, in %, Adapted from DEAS (2020)

However, demographic elements are not the only ones that illustrate a perceived loss of importance and the Val-de-Travers' cantonal and national peripheralization. For instance, the Val-de-Travers is cited as among the 10% of the poorest communes in Switzerland[22] according to income per inhabitant. In 2018, the Val-de-Travers also had the highest unemployment rate in Switzerland for young people aged between 15 and 24: 5.4%.[23] It is also one of the only regions in Switzerland to have had a falling population between 2000 and 2019 (-3.1%). Finally, in 2021, the Val-de-Travers was in the 2% of Swiss municipalities with the highest rate of social assistance (7.3%). These indicators illustrate several of the valley's current difficulties, which contrast in part with the prosperous situation the valley experienced several decades ago (Brandt and Brandt 1983).

These shifting social, economic, and demographic dynamics illustrate the flexible, malleable, and mutable aspects of "regions" (Paasi and Metzger 2017, 27). They complicate the labels used (in terms of urban, rural, center, periphery, etc.) by urban planners, politicians, and public administrations. The Val-de-Travers is, for instance, occasionally labeled as a "small peripheral center" (ARE 2000) or an

[22] https://www.atlas.bfs.admin.ch/maps/13/fr/16113_13317_7431_7261/25097.html [Accessed on August 15, 2022]
[23] https://www.atlas.bfs.admin.ch/maps/13/fr/16113_13317_7431_7261/25097.html [Accessed on August 15, 2022]

"industrial municipality of a rural center" (typology of municipalities proposed in 2012 by the Office of Statistics).[24] This last category, which is relatively uncommon in Switzerland, suggests certain particularities of the Val-de-Travers. This is what Edgar, a retired geographer from the Val-de-Travers, who had spent many years as a municipal councilor, told me:

> When I was a municipal councilor, I had to fight because the Val-de-Travers was being treated as a peri-urban region. Basically, the cantonal authorities said there is an agglomeration in Neuchâtel and one in La Chaux-de-Fonds and that the others, Val-de-Ruz and Val-de-Travers, were peri-urban. And I was saying, no, this is not peri-urban. If you look at the number of jobs and the number of persons who work locally, it is not peri-urban. In short, we are an atypical region. The Val-de-Ruz is a peri-urban region, not the Val-de-Travers (interview, spring 2019).

The Val-de-Travers' atypical situation, which has a considerable number of jobs in the region and is not only a residential place, can also be explained by its rich industrial history. The economy of the Val-de-Travers is in fact largely an industrial and not a service-based economy. Even today, almost 50% of the jobs in the valley are in the secondary sector. In Switzerland as a whole, this rate is only 20% (DEAS 2021).

This industrial character is moreover a specific aspect of the Jura Arc, a region in which the Val-de-Travers is located.[25] The Jura Arc is characterized by cooperation between different territories that share "geopolitical handicaps" (Tissot and Daumas 2004, 5), notably in competition with other large surrounding agglomerations, such as Basel, Geneva, and Zurich (Kiener et al. 2022, 91). However, the Jura Arc also shares common opportunities, such as industrial attractiveness, affordable rents, quality of life, and natural tourist sites (Kiener et al. 2022). The Val-de-Travers is part of the strategies of the Jura Arc, which seeks to create cooperation and synergies on both sides of the border. These practices and discourses can come into tension with the contestations associated with cross-border mobilities (which I discuss in Chapter 6). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that, while the category of "*Arc Jurassien*" [French term for Jura Arc] is widely used by political authorities and economic actors, I rarely encountered it during my ethnographic fieldwork. This illustrates the diversity and ambivalence of scalar categorizations (Moore 2008), which reflect different objectives, interests, and challenges at the scale of the Val-de-Travers region while exhibiting the beneficial effects of cross-border cooperation at the scale of the Jura Arc.

[24] https://www.atlas.bfs.admin.ch/maps/13/fr/12359_12482_3191_227/20387.html [Accessed on August 15, 2022]

[25] Cross-border region comprising parts of the following French departments: Doubs, Jura and Territoire de Belfort and parts of the Swiss cantons of Berne, Jura, Neuchâtel and Vaud. It extends over 230 km of border between Switzerland and France and is marked by the Jura mountain chain.

4.1.3. Historical place of passage

Although the Val-de-Travers is currently confronted with "peripheralizing" dynamics, it has been, and in a certain way still is, a crossroads of mobilities within transnational economic and social networks. Historically, the Val-de-Travers has been considered a place of passage, primarily between the French region of Franche-Comté and the region of Neuchâtel (Morerod 2008b). This is notably evident in a centuries-old main road crossing the valley between Pontarlier (the neighboring city in France) and Neuchâtel that passes through most of the villages.

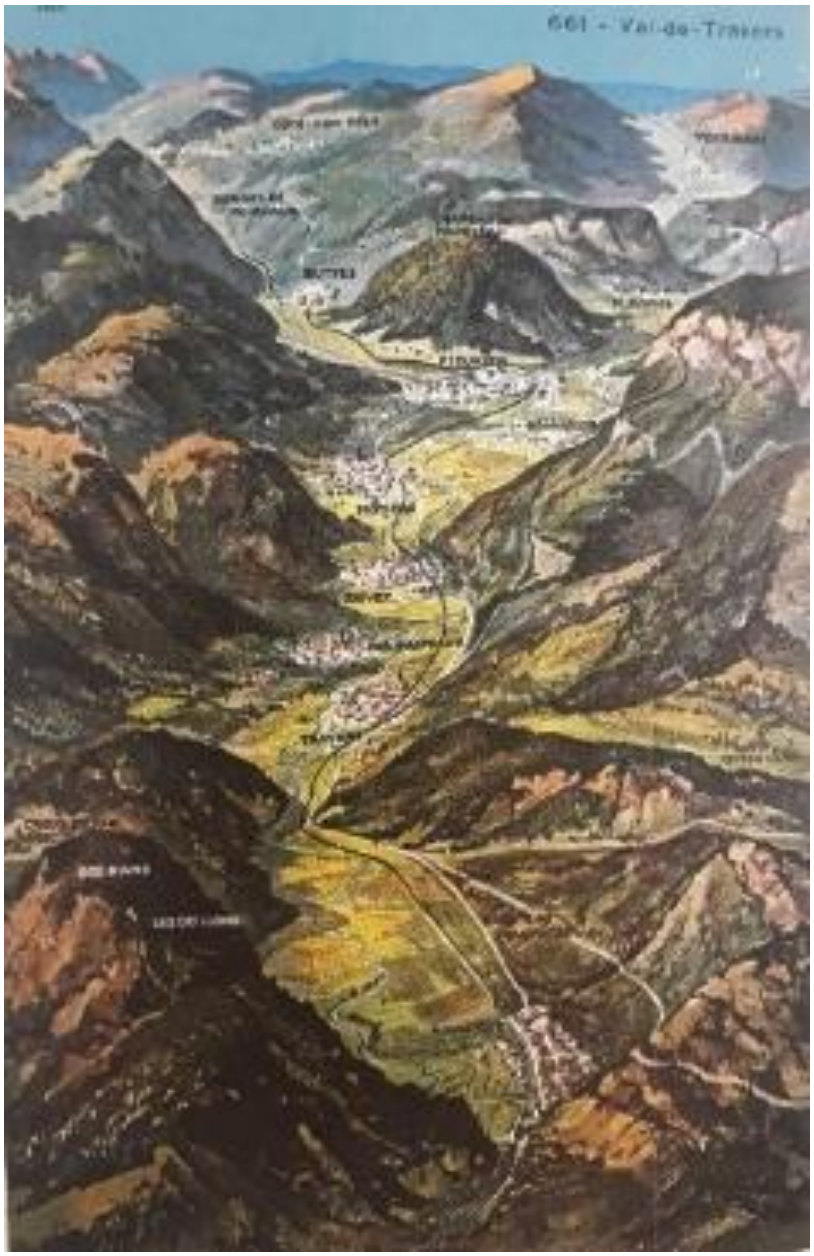

Figure 8: Postcard Val-de-Travers, Klauser and Perrin (1990, 3)

In the 14th century, the destinations of travellers were generally between the regions of Pontarlier and Neuchâtel. One of the primary goods that transited through the Val-de-Travers was salt, which was transported from Franche-Comté (the neighboring border region), through the Val-de-Travers, to other Swiss regions and cantons (Dénervaud et al. 2014). Later, other roads in the area became increasingly important, and the transit of salt through the Val-de-Travers decreased. In an interview in the winter of 2019 with a local historian, I learned that two other examples are also regularly mentioned in labeling the region a place of passage. The first concerns the stay of Jean-Jacques Rousseau between 1762 and 1765 in the village of Môtiers (Eigeldinger 2008), and the second is the hospitality offered to 90,000 refugees from the French Army—the so-called *Bourbakis*—in the winter of 1871 (Hebeisen 2008). The latter episode is perceived as a milestone of Swiss neutrality and hospitality and contributes greatly to the construction (of the myth) of Switzerland as a country of refuge (Piguet 2017). Later in this chapter, I discuss what is perceived to be the tradition of hospitality in the canton of Neuchâtel and the current discourses and practices that participate in reproducing this aspect in relation to the non-Swiss population.

On July 24, 1860, the Franco-Swiss railway line was inaugurated, linking Neuchâtel to France by crossing the Val-de-Travers. A few years later, in 1883, the regional line—Régional du Val-de-Travers (RVT)—was opened, linking the different localities in the valley. According to Boillat and Huguenin, these first local connections laid the foundations for a link between the villages of the valley (2008, 206). Today, the Val-de-Travers region continues to ensure the road and rail connection between Switzerland and Franche-Comté, and the train is still used extensively by the inhabitants of the region who commute between the villages or to Neuchâtel. The train runs once or twice an hour between 5 am and 11 pm and plays an important role in shaping the rhythm of daily mobility in the valley. Access to this mobility, particularly for people with scant economic resources, is an important issue. For instance, one person who works for the regional social service explained that certain cantonal decisions, such as the non-reimbursement of transportation costs, are harmful for welfare recipients. Since April 2021, the norms for reimbursement of public transport costs have changed in the canton; costs are only covered at the regional level and no longer at the cantonal level. According to her, this results in disconnecting beneficiaries from the rest of the canton, adding that this type of decision principally impacts peripheral regions such as the Val-de-Travers, which are insufficiently considered by the canton. Moreover, the current train line does not extend as far as France, and there is only a less regular bus between Fleurier and Pontarlier. These limited public transport links with France contribute to the cross-border workforce's predominant use of motorized travel.

As one can see, the valley is crossed by regular flows. Anyone who travels through the region by train, bus, car, or bicycle cannot fail to notice the large companies that are part of the landscape. Most of them are still in operation and have historically shaped the valley's economy and embedded it in networks of transnational relations.

4.2. Industrial history: Transnational connections and economic crises

The Val-de-Travers has a rich industrial history, as a multitude of companies in a wide range of economic sectors have settled in the valley. The core industries of the past centuries have been marked by two principal characteristics: a strong transnational presence and significant economic and social crises. In this section, I argue that these different industries participated in inscribing the Val-de-Travers in networks of transnational relations, connections, and mobilities that temporarily rendered the region an economic hub. When deindustrialization prompted serious economic crises, these industries then participated in the symbolic and material "peripheralization" of the region. This industrial past is now patrimonialized for various region-building dynamics, notably attractiveness to tourists.

4.2.1. Lace trade and indiennes: industrialization and transnationalization

The industrial history of the region began in the 16th century with the development of the bobbin lace trade. This industrial activity, which originated in Venice, was established in the Val-de-Travers as a result of Italian merchants passing through the valley on their way to Paris (Montandon 2008). The first mention of a lace factory in the canton of Neuchâtel was in 1625, and production steadily increased until the beginning of the 19th century. For several centuries, this activity marked the region. Although it was later replaced by other economic activities, it can be considered as the activity that placed the Val-de-Travers in the transnational trade network. In 1800, 2,173 people (mainly women) in the Val-de-Travers were employed in this sector and the demand was transnational: lace from the region was exported to Europe and America. Though the lace trade has departed, it facilitated relationships far beyond the valley and is therefore considered to have established the reputation and wealth of the Neuchâtel region long before watchmaking (Jelmini, Vaucher, and Engelberts 2008).

In parallel to the lace trade, the Val-de-Travers, as well as the canton of Neuchâtel as a whole, was a producer of "*indiennes.*" The term "*indienne*" refers to a printing technique developed in India in the 17th century that allows the repeated production of colorfully patterned cotton fabrics representing flowers, birds, and landscapes. Initially, these fabrics were imported from Indian trading posts by merchant companies but soon began to be produced in Europe. Neuchâtel canton's climate, rivers, and lake—water is crucial to producing *indiennes*—explain its selection as a region in which to establish such factories. While this production was dominant on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel, several factories were also established along the Areuse river in the Val-de-Travers.

Like lace, *indiennes* were exported throughout the world. These highly prized pieces of cloth were also used as currencies of exchange in the slave trade in West Africa[26]. Interestingly, Swiss history is often portrayed as distant from colonialism. A statement by former Federal Councilor Doris Leuthard during

[26] https://www.rts.ch/info/culture/arts-visuels/10262441-deux-siecles-dindiennes-a-neuchatel.html#chap01 [Accessed on June 22, 2022]

a visit to Benin is quite illustrative of this: "I am glad that Switzerland has never participated in these histories of slavery or colonization."[27] This unfortunate, and false, statement is increasingly being contested by various organizations[28] and social scientists (Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné 2015; Boulila 2019). The example of the *indienne* trade, produced notably in the Val-de-Travers, is an important example of the close link between Swiss industry, colonialism, and the slave trade. As this trade generated important revenues, part of the canton's wealth and regional development was built on a little-known colonial history. It is possible to find traces of families from Neuchâtel and the Val-de-Travers on the website *www.cooperaxion.org*, which documents the role of Switzerland and, more particularly, of its entrepreneurs and merchants in the former transatlantic slave trade routes. Noteworthy, for example, are the Favre and Petitpierre families of Couvet. Manufacturers of *indiennes* in Nantes, they created a company called *Favre, Petitpierre & Cie* in 1797 that produced the fabric almost exclusively for slave ships, supplying it for four slave expeditions between 1826 and 1830. These types of stories are endless in relation to unpacking the Swiss economic history that amassed the wealth of the country. This is demonstrated by Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné (2015) in their book *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*. They highlight, for instance, the concept of "colonial naiveté;" that is, claiming to stand outside the colonial project while making full use of white supremacy. The book looks at Switzerland "as a country shaped by colonialism in a variety of ways" (2015, 5) and thereby explores overlooked avenues of inquiry tied to the "colonialism at the margins" or "colonialism without colonies" (2015, 8).

Although relatively distant from my argument in relation to the Val-de-Travers's historical insertion into transnational networks, these aspects echo the discussion at the beginning of this chapter concerning the peripherality of the Val-de-Travers. In terms of commercial development, transnational links, and the participation of certain regional actors in colonial history as colonizers, the Val-de-Travers is historically inscribed in a center that captures resources. Thus, while the Val-de-Travers emerges from this history as a privileged and exploitative region, in other dimensions and scales, the region is rather disadvantaged; this is particularly the case regarding its relations with the canton of Neuchâtel and Switzerland more generally.

4.2.2. Watchmaking: between expansion, tradition, and economic crisis

The production of lace and *indiennes* was gradually replaced by the watchmaking industry, which is highly visible in the documentary records of regional history. This industry began in the middle of the 18th century. The significant presence of this economic sector in the Val-de-Travers can be explained by three major factors (Jelmini, Vaucher, and Engelberts 2008): (1) the need to find an activity that was

[27] https://www.parlament.ch/fr/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairI [Accessed on June 22, 2022]

[28] https://www.rts.ch/info/suisse/11404937-suisse-et-colonialisme-les-luttes-antiracistes-reaniment-le-debat.html; www.cooperaxion.org [Accessed on June 22, 2022]

complementary to agriculture, which could no longer feed everyone; (2) the opening to the outside world was already in place through the lace trade; and (3) the substantial freedom of trade at that time and the encouragement of the government to develop new industries. Other relevant factors are that iron had been worked in the region for a long time, and that the watch is an object that can be easily transported from where it is made to a point of sale (Calame, Evard, and Schlup 2017).

In the beginning, watchmakers often worked at home in a familial context, and the watch trade was in the hands of a few families. To conduct business with foreign countries, some formed alliances with lace traders. As a result, the watch industry in the Val-de-Travers swiftly became transnationally connected and exported products to many countries. In 1818, Edouard Bovet, a leading watchmaker in the Val-de-Travers, was sent to China. Several years later, he created a company with his brothers to export watches to China.[29] Below, an advertising poster for Bovet watches in China illustrates that the watch industry did not intend to trade locally but transnationally.

[29] https://www.rts.ch/archives/tv/information/c-etait-hier/7360905-les-montres-chinoises-bovet.html [Accessed on May 12, 2022]

Figure 9: Advertising poster for Bovet watches, Calame, Evard and Schlup (2017, 78)

The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing was a landmark in the Val-de-Travers' watchmaking industry, as it marked the opening of the Chinese market, thus allowing watchmakers from the region to establish themselves there.[30] During this period, the form of manufacture changed from dispersed production to a centralized logic that corresponded with Fordism. Companies realized "that machines can do as well as humans," and "the mechanical manufacture of watches was born" (Vaucher 2008, 177). In addition, the arrival of electricity played an important role in industrial development, and the 1905 federal business census counted no less than 187 watchmaking companies in Fleurier. The beginning of the 20th century also saw the launch of prestigious watch manufacturers, such as Piaget and Co. in La Côte-aux-Fées.

However, the watchmaking industry in the Val-de-Travers subsequently faced various crises. In the 1920s, following the fall of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires, a general rise in protectionism impacted the Neuchâtel industry negatively. With the crisis of the 1930s that followed, a profound restructuring of the production apparatus began. The watchmaking industry lost 32% of its jobs in the

[30] https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/003405/2009-04-29/#HLiensE9conomiquesetcommerciaux [Accessed on March 3, 2022]

canton. Under these circumstances, the school of watchmaking and mechanics located in the village of Couvet closed in 1936 (Vaucher 2008, 180). Swiss watchmaking again prospered after the Second World War and until the oil crisis of the 1970s. Nevertheless, in addition to the economic decline of the 1970s, the sector also experienced a crisis in the mechanical watchmaking upon which the Swiss watch industry had built its reputation. With the arrival of quartz, the watch became a common consumer good. It was only in 1990 that high-end watchmaking revived, with several such companies based in the Val-de-Travers. At the time of writing, prestigious brands are established in the valley and "capitalize" on the authenticity of the Val-de-Travers in their marketing (Jeannerat and Crevoisier 2011; Munz 2016). A striking example is the installation of the Bovet company in the castle at Môtiers in 2005. By privatizing this place to make it a watchmaking company, the company has created an image of "authentic, historic, local" production and receives certain prestigious clients in this emblematic place (Mairy 2008). In sum, watchmaking regions such as the Val-de-Travers have continually navigated the dynamics of peripheralization while facing crises, restructurings, and the undercurrents of human and monetary mobilities. Watchmakers circulate, watches move, and relationships expand.

4.2.3. Absinthe as a historical symbol of resistance

Another industry that has marked the Val-de-Travers is absinthe (Delachaux 2008), a strong green alcoholic drink that has a bitter taste. It remains omnipresent in the valley, whether in public spaces through signs for distilleries or in private spaces I frequented. The absinthe industry illustrates the same dynamics as the other economic sectors mentioned above: it positions the Val-de-Travers at the center of a multitude of human and non-human mobilities and, in parallel, has become a symbol of the valley's peripherality.

Figure 10: Photo Val-de-Travers, Summer 2021, Charmillot

There are a multitude of anecdotes related to absinthe, particularly concerning the period of illegality between 1908 and 2005. As discussed in article 1, in 1908, a popular initiative was accepted at the federal level banning the production of absinthe in Switzerland. Following a homicide supposedly caused by the consumption of this hard liquor, it was claimed that absinthe had the potential to transform its consumers into murderers and arsonists and would lead to the destruction of the family (Delachaux 2008). The valley was heavily affected by this decision. Nonetheless, many local producers continued to make absinthe illegally until 2005, when the ban was repealed. Many myths emerged around this traditional prohibited drink, and they remain important. The century of illegal production is regularly described as a period of resistance and solidarity (Roth, Hertz, and Wobmann 2014). Though the authorities seemed relatively compliant with and informed about these practices, the distillers were ingenious in concealing their activities, particularly the smells that emanated during production. Some people hid production areas in the basements of their homes—behind bookcases, for example—while others lit fires (by burning tires, for example) to hide the vapors of absinthe production. Despite the illegality of these activities, the Val-de-Travers therefore continued to cultivate its image as an absinthe-producing region, even if the consumer had to be well informed to obtain it. All the anecdotes surrounding absinthe during the period of illegality served the local industry and commerce when it was

legalized in 2005 (Roth, Hertz, and Wobmann 2014). Indeed, the local actors have largely capitalized on the past century and still tell these stories today to attract tourists, the curious, and absinthe lovers.

A multitude of mobilities revolve around absinthe: through global exports and through the arrival of tourists from other Swiss regions and surrounding countries. Following an interview with a local distiller, I witnessed an interesting discussion that illustrates not only the transnational anchorage of absinthe but also the passion it generates:

> At the end of an interview with Michel, an absinthe maker, a Dutch couple enters the distillery. Michel invites me to drink an absinthe with them. The young man is passionate about absinthe and a collector. Michel has to leave for a few minutes, and I stay alone with the couple. They explain the reason for their presence to me. The man is fascinated with absinthe and its history, and according to him it is essential to visit the Val-de-Travers if you are interested in absinthe: "It's like a pilgrimage that all collectors make at least once." The man talks to me about absinthe and knows his subject very well. He is 34 years old and has been drinking it since he was 16. Yet he wants to see Michel for a very specific reason. An Englishman is selling (allegedly) authentic old bottles of absinthe on the web, and the young Dutchman claims to have discovered a fraud. The Englishman would buy empty old bottles, reproduce labels, and fill the bottles with other absinthes. And one of Michel's absinthes aged in an oak barrel has a particularly good taste [that the Englishman might be using] to trick customers. The young Dutchman is convinced that some of the bottles are filled with it. When Michel returns, he confirms that he has sold over 20 bottles of his absinthe to the Englishman. He sells his bottles for about 150 CHF, and the Englishman sells his fake bottles for about 1800 CHF! Michel even bought one from him, probably with his own absinthe in it. The Dutchman knows the shapes of the bottles, the labels, and the tastes. This is what allows him to investigate. His girlfriend tells him that he should be an investigator. (Fieldnotes, summer 2020).

Absinthe is part of many myths. Its particularly rich history allows for a transnational business, with bottles costing nearly 1,800 CHF. Of course, while the sales are apparently being conducted fraudulently in this case, it nevertheless illustrates that, due to absinthe, the Val-de-Travers is part of transnational tourist routes and is building a reputation on a large scale. Local actors capitalize on the aspects of "resistance," "authenticity," and "trickery" to produce cultural resources around absinthe (Roth, Hertz, and Wobmann 2014). This narrative seems to be effective given the number of annual visitors to the valley's distilleries. Absinthe symbolizes a spirit of resistance that is adopted and nurtured by the local population as "cultural stuff" (Barth 1969) that is used to define the contours of the local imagined community.

4.2.4. Dubied, the emblematic company characterized by an unprecedented strike

The production of knitting machines by the company called Dubied, which went bankrupt in 1988, is another local industry emblematic of the Val-de-Travers. This company was founded in the 1860s by Henri-Edouard Dubied and was at the heart of the Val-de-Travers economy for more than 122 years. There were then no less than "five family generations [who] followed one another, transforming the company from a small workshop to a multinational with branches in Pontarlier, Milan, Chemnitz, Paris, Barcelona, New York, Leicester, Buenos Aires and employing in Couvet, in 1966, more than 1,400 workers" (Bornoz and Tissot 2012, 10, my translation). Dubied forged transnational links by setting up points of sale in more than 15 countries. The company was a major provider of employment and kept businesses in the region going. Interestingly, the large number of employees in the company led to an adaptation of local mobility. A train stop was installed in front of the company premises, and buses, particularly from neighboring France, were organized to allow the workforce to commute to the factory. The building, still visible in the heart of the village of Couvet, is impressive in size and serves as a daily reminder of the local industry. When he was remembering this period, Edgar told me that "Dubied was everything in the Val-de-Travers" (Interview, spring 2019). This remark refers to the fact that the company organized vacations for its employees, opened a home for retired people, financed local events, and provided jobs.

The employees of the company were diverse: there were, of course, people from the Val-de-Travers, but there were also workers from other European countries (largely Italy) and cross-border workers. A building was even constructed next to the factory to house many of the employees. There was a strong class division within the Dubied factory, with employees on one side and managers on the other. This is evident in Gilbert Pingeon's book *été 76* [summer 76] (1995). When the company began to experience economic difficulties, significant tensions emerged and lasted for several years. The employees had various demands related to the 13th salary[31] that the company had suppressed to save money. Strong power relations marked the valley; my interlocutors remember a period during which they had to choose a side. Edgar told me that in some families, including his own, this subject is still sensitive. The employees went on strike in 1976 and engaged in a brutal struggle with the company's management. This strike was one of the most impactful[32] in recent Swiss history and left its mark on not only the region but the whole of Switzerland. Some employees refused to go on strike for fear of losing their jobs, but the strikers demonstrated their opposition on a daily basis in front of the company gates.

[31] "Salaries in Switzerland are paid once a month and are often based on a 13-month system. That means an annual salary is paid out in 13 instalments: one a month until the end of the year when a worker receives two instalments." https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/salaries/29235700 [Accessed on October 24, 2022]

[32] https://www.rts.ch/audio-podcast/2019/audio/la-greve-5-5-25086024.html [Accessed on September 22, 2022]

This episode is particularly significant for the Val-de-Travers and the rest of the country, as the "myth of a strike-free Switzerland"[33] persists due to the introduction of the "peace agreement"[34] at the federal level in 1941. This refers to a situation in which collective conflicts between employers and employees are resolved through negotiation and "fighting" measures such as strikes are rejected. This concept, rarely invoked abroad, became an "element of national identity"[35] in Switzerland in the second half of the 20th century. The number of strike days per 1,000 working days in Switzerland—despite clearly existing conflicts and demands—was significantly lower during that period than in Germany, Great Britain, and France.[36] The Dubied episode has similarities with labor struggles in other contexts; for example, in the French city of Reims (Eribon 2009). As Eribon noted in his autoethnography, the city was divided into two camps: "those who defend the worker and those who do nothing for the worker" (Eribon 2009, 44, my translation). Edgar, in the Val-de-Travers, told me that he no longer speaks to certain people in his family following the conflict at Dubied, particularly to an uncle who was close to the company's managers.

After the strike, the company continued to operate for another 12 years but production gradually decreased, and the doors of the factory closed permanently in 1988. The Dubied episode is far from a mere anecdotal event; the trauma of the strike and the loss of jobs are still at the heart of today's discourses. The difficult economic times that the Val-de-Travers experienced during the 1970s and 1980s marked a turning point in the dynamics of region-building and generated a number of initiatives to revitalize the local economy.

4.2.5. Intermediary conclusion: industrial heritagization

The economic activities presented above share several commonalities. On the one hand, they enmeshed the Val-de-Travers in transnational networks of relations; on the other hand, they underwent important crises that contributed to forging a rhetoric of "resistance." The economic and industrial history connected at the transnational level is occasionally mobilized in local history books to question the stereotypes that present the valley as "closed" to the outside world:

> The Valley-er is often reproached, in a very stereotypical way, for their enclosed character, but this does not seem to correspond to reality. How many of our fellow citizens, over the centuries, have taken to the sea—demonstrating initiative and openness and not in any way withdrawing into themselves—in such diverse capacities as General Charles Daniel de Meuron from Saint-Sulpice, who traveled through India, Ceylon and Africa, or the watchmaker Edouard Bovet, from Fleurier, who made China a new market for our Swiss

[33] https://www.generalstreik.ch/wp-content/uploads [Accessed on September 22, 2022]
[34] https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/016535/2010-05-06 [Accessed on September 5, 2022]
[35] https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/016535/2010-05-06/ [Accessed on September 5, 2022]
[36] https://www.generalstreik.ch/wp-content/uploads/2016 [Accessed on September 10, 2022]

> watches? Nowadays, many of our people and products travel the world, testifying to our existence, our creativity, and our communicability: the asphalt of La Presta, the Piaget jewelry watches, the Dubied knitting machines, and so on. It is often ignored, but there is always one or more Valley-ers on an economic mission somewhere on one of the five continents of our planet. (Klauser 1979b, 25, my translation)

This quotation is interesting for several reasons: not only does it illustrate the extent to which mobility has been core to the economic development of the Val-de-Travers but also demonstrates the participation of regional actors in transnational, even colonial, trade. The Val-de-Travers has, in this sense, always been involved in transnational activities.

Today, this industrial heritage is actively mobilized as a resource for certain political, economic, and tourist actors (Jeannerat and Crevoisier 2011). The latter invite visitors to come and discover "the industrial heritage of the Val-de-Travers,"[37] which is not limited to watchmaking. In this sense, deindustrialization and peripheralization are not contested but appropriated for tourism and thus economic purposes. In DeLanda's terms, one could say that it is a form of reterritorialization that aims at reproducing a coherence by capitalizing on the economic history of the valley. This "patrimonialization" (Hertz and Chappaz-Wirthner 2012) of the Val-de-Travers' industrial past feeds collective dynamics of self-identification and is part of cantonal strategies (République et Canton de Neuchâtel 2017) of tourism and demographic promotion.

Nevertheless, this particular industrial history of the valley, marked by prosperous periods of economic expansion—"transnationalization"—as well as economically depressed periods—"peripheralization"—must also be contextualized within the political and migratory specificities of Switzerland and Neuchâtel. I therefore discuss such elements in the subsequent section.

4.3. Migration and political specificities

For decades, and particularly during the 20th century, a large number of foreign workers have moved to Switzerland to work there, including in the canton of Neuchâtel. This can be explained by industrial development, particularly in the years following the Second World War, but also by specific migration policies. These human circulations have also contributed to what could be called a "diversification" of the population, accompanied by specific discourses and narratives on the role and place of migration in national and cantonal social organizations (Maye 2016).

For the sake of consistency with what I have discussed in previous chapters, I must clarify my position with respect to the ethno-national categories presented in what follows. Indeed, why speak of such categories when I have repeatedly insisted on the need to move beyond methodological nationalism?

[37] https://www.myvaldetravers.ch/2021/04/13/une-escapade-culturelle-au-val-de-travers/ [Accessed on March 30, 2023]

Moving beyond methodological nationalism does not mean ignoring nation-state-based categories. These categories are not only used in everyday life but are associated with legal statuses that have everyday implications for the foreign workers (in terms of accessing the labor market, social insurance, international mobility, etc.). Nevertheless, these nation-state-based categories should not be considered in isolation, and I seek to explore their everyday uses without reifying, essentializing, and overestimating their performativity (Butler 2006). The people assigned to these categories are characterized by their heterogeneity. Relegating them to their ethno-national particularity without considering other characteristics may confine them to simplified and distorted representations of their trajectories. Such an approach could create a stereotypical image of their belonging deficient in recognizing the complexity and multiplicity of their individual identities.

4.3.1. European labor mobility in Switzerland and Neuchâtel

It was not until the end of the second half of the 19th century and the acceleration of industrialization that Switzerland became a country of immigration (d'Amato 2016). These first arrivals, notably from Italy, Spain, Germany, and France, joined industries such as textile production, machinery production, watchmaking, and the chemical industry. Many moved to the canton of Neuchâtel when the watchmaking sector was thriving, particularly in the Val-de-Travers, La Chaux-de-Fonds, and Le Locle. For example, in La Chaux-de-Fonds, the population tripled between 1850 and 1900, going from 12,000 to 36,000. It was primarily after the end of the Second World War that the regulation of migration became bureaucratized at the federal level, with a system that provided different types of residence permits: seasonal residence permits (permit A), annual residence permits (permit B), establishment permits (permit C), short-term permits (permit L), and permits for asylum seekers (permit N). In parallel, Switzerland signed a labor recruitment agreement with Italy in 1948, which explains the large influx of Italian nationals after the Second World War (Garufo 2016, 67).[38]

The policy at the time relied on the "rotation of foreign labor" (d'Amato 2016, 18); that is, the regular replacement of migrant workers with new workers so that the former would not settle and contribute to the "foreign overpopulation" (Piguet 2017) of the country. This is a reason why foreign workers were only granted one-year permits at the beginning of their stay. Interestingly, these relatively precarious residence permits allowed Switzerland to deport people who lost their jobs—for example, after the 1973 oil crisis—which authors have called the export of unemployment (Piguet 2017). In the decades following the Second World War until 2002, when the AFMP came into force, Switzerland made extensive use of the seasonal permit,[39] which legitimized the arrival of several million workers in

[38] In 1960, in the canton of Neuchâtel, 71.7% of foreigners were Italian (Garufo 2016).

[39] In 1931, Switzerland institutionalized the seasonal permit, the A permit: "Institutionalized by the federal law on the residence and establishment of foreigners of 1931, the seasonal status is part of a global migration policy aimed at guaranteeing the flexibility necessary for the needs of the economy and fighting against 'foreign overpopulation'" (https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/025738/2012-10-04/ [Accessed on September 5, 2022]). The

Switzerland for short periods of time. Between 1945 and 2002, an estimated 6 million A permits were granted.[40] The first to arrive were Italians in the 1950s, followed by Spaniards in the 1960s, and finally Portuguese and Yugoslav people in the 1970s. The effects of this precarious permit on the individuals concerned have been extensively explored by researchers, who have indicated problems related to the poor protection of workers, the excessive entanglement of residence permits and employment, and the impossibility of family reunification (Piguet 2017). Current projects led by historians are also interested in this period's "hidden children,"[41] which refers to children who were hidden by their parents because they did not have the right to family reunification.

The large influx of foreign workers, occasionally referred to as "guest workers,"[42] has strongly marked political and media discourses in Switzerland and its cantons. The most striking episode was the campaign for the initiative against foreign overpopulation organized by James Schwarzenbach on June 7, 1970.[43] The project was radical: it aimed to limit the proportion of foreigners in Switzerland to a maximum of 10% of the population. If successful, some 350,000 workers would have been forced to return to their home countries.

The Val-de-Travers has naturally been affected by this circulation of European labor and has also seen the rise of certain tensions. In the vast majority of interviews with people who have experienced this mobility, we have mentioned the sometimes-conflicting relations between the inhabitants of the region and the newly arrived workforce. These mobilities have played an important role in shaping the past and present composition of the region's population, as displayed in the table below (a comparison between 1970 and 2017):

political resolution behind this new policy was to only accept foreigners who were "useful" to the Swiss economy without giving them the opportunity to settle.

[40] https://www.swissinfo.ch/fre/permis-de-travail_saisonnier- [Accessed on September 25, 2022]

[41] https://www.unine.ch/shm/home.html [Accessed on September 25, 2022]

[42] The website of the Swiss Confederation gives the following definition: "After 1947, companies in Switzerland recruited an increasing number of workers from Italy and other neighboring countries to counter shortages on the labor market. The idea was that guest workers would return to their home countries after a certain period of time. Trade and industry depended on these workers. At the same time, the trade unions were concerned that the low wages paid to guest workers would put pressure on Swiss workers. Xenophobic movements such as the National Action heated up the debate on 'foreign infiltration' and submitted anti-immigration initiatives." (https://www.bar.admin.ch/bar/en/home/research/research-tips/topics/) [Accessed on August 15, 2022]

[43] https://blog.nationalmuseum.ch/fr/2020/06/initiative-schwarzenbach/ [Accessed on June 28, 2022]

Citizenship	1970		2017	
	Inhabitants	%	Inhabitants	%
Switzerland	10,728	76.9	9,689	81.1
Italy	1,923	13.8	408	3.4
Spain	588	4.2	127	1.1
France	459	3.2	419	3.5
Portugal	108	0.8	666	5.6
Belgium	20	0.1	32	0.3
Kosovo	12	0.1	148	1.2
Poland	4	0	29	0.2
Eritrea	0	0	22	0.2
Region Val-de-Travers	13,953	100	11,898	100

Figure 11: Composition of the region's population (1970 and 2017), DEAS (2021)

As the graph establishes, people who did not have Swiss citizenship in 2017 were largely holders of Italian, Spanish, French, Portuguese, or Kosovar passports.[44] The presence of French nationals is explained less by the arrival of foreign workers than by the proximity of the national border. Moreover, the presence and proximity of the national border in connection with the agreements on the free movement of persons led to a marked expansion in the number of cross-border workers from the second half of the 20th century onwards, as discussed in the following section.

4.3.2. The significant expansion of the number of French cross-border workers

Over the previous decades, the cross-border workforce has become increasingly important in the region. It has been regulated since 15 April 1958[45] by an agreement between Berne and Paris, and these workers represent a large proportion of the commuters in the Val-de-Travers region, as demonstrated in the graph below.

[44] Importantly, the number of people who do not have Swiss citizenship should be put in perspective with naturalization processes in Switzerland [one of the most difficult citizenships to obtain in international comparisons]. However, some of the people who arrived from Italy after the Second World War have since acquired Swiss citizenship.

[45] https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/19580049/index.html [Accessed on May 21, 2022]

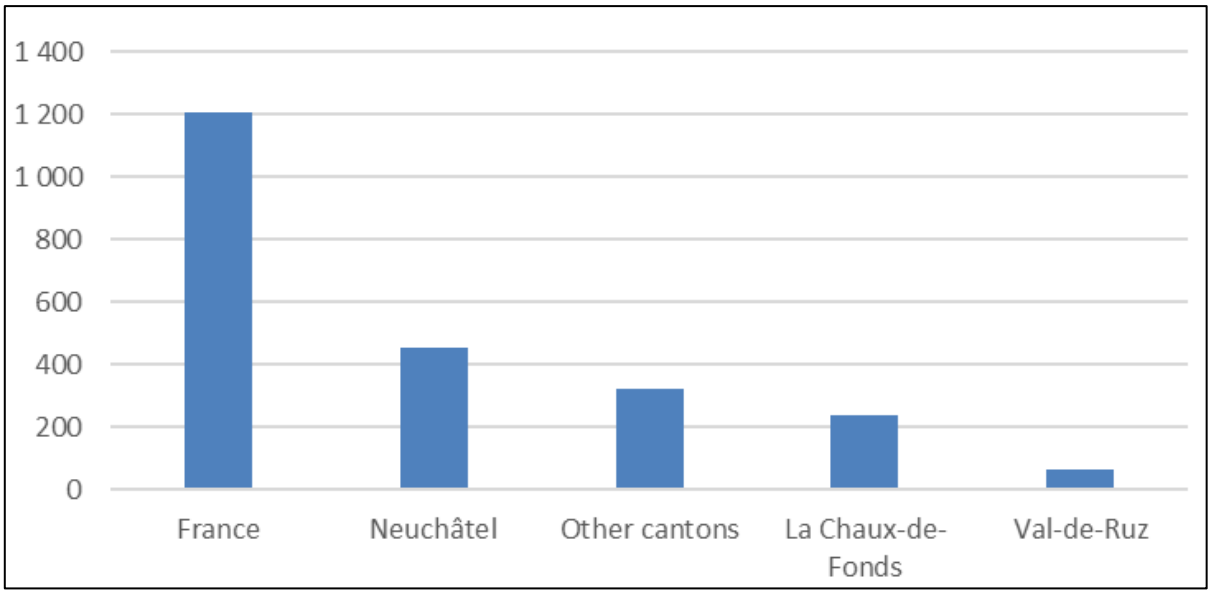

Figure 12: Place of residence of commuters who work in the Val-de-Travers (2017), DEAS (2021)

According to Garufo (2006), the number of these employees increased in the 1960s, although they had already been in the valley for a long time. It was during this period that restrictions in Swiss migration policy were introduced, limiting the recruitment of foreigners and thus leading employers toward the cross-border workforce. Since then, tensions and debates have emerged, particularly regarding unemployment and wage dumping, for which cross-border workers are accused of being partly responsible. Since the late 1950s, the high proportion of foreigners in Swiss companies has led to a growing mistrust among the population, and the Federal Council has been encouraged to take measures to limit their number. Since March 1, 1963, it has issued decrees to this effect every year (Garufo 2006). This is when the population of cross-border workers began to increase, as they were not affected by these restrictive measures and their employment was encouraged by the authorities. Indeed, Swiss Political Correspondence (SPC)[46] defended the employment of cross-border workers. This was because, on the one hand, they do not use the country's infrastructure and do not therefore participate in any "overheating." On the other hand, they are considered closer to the "Swiss way of life" and therefore do not represent a danger of "colonization or intellectual and spiritual annexation" (Garufo 2006, 124, my translation). However, due to its growing numbers in subsequent years, voices have been and continue to be raised against this workforce. It is argued that, because cross-border workers benefit from Swiss infrastructure, a tax system that entails Switzerland gaining revenue from these workers must be established (either directly or through a retrocession from France). This is despite the 1983 tax

[46] "Press agency founded in 1917 by bourgeois journalists under the name of Schweizer Mittelpresse. With the help of economic actors, it initially supported bourgeois positions vehemently, especially during electoral struggles" (My translation). https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/043156/2011-10-28/ [Accessed on March 30, 2023]

agreement between Switzerland and France,[47] according to which France pays compensation of 4.5% of the gross income of cross-border workers. Nevertheless, concerns regarding tax redistribution persist, with some people questioning whether this percentage is too low.

In addition, accusations have been leveled relating to the pressure on salaries resulting from these workers' recruitment. This labor mobility has become increasingly important in recent decades, particularly since the entry into force of the FMPA in 2002, which facilitated cross-border workers' recruitment. There is no typical profile of the cross-border worker; economic and personal motivations are highly diverse. It is nevertheless interesting to note that, in 2018, almost 63% were men and that the secondary sector is the largest provider of this labor force.[48] As revealed in article 3, cross-border commuters are particularly visible on the roads because of their license plates, which differ from those of Swiss cars. According to the OSTAJ (Cross-Border Statistical Observatory of Jura Arc), the road that runs from Pontarlier through the Val-de-Travers to Neuchâtel is used daily by 1,000 to 2,500 cross-border commuters.[49]

While cross-border workers were widely discussed and categorized by my interlocutors in the valley, it is noteworthy that they were not racialized. As discussed in Chapter 7, cross-border workers are predominantly white and speak French, which allows them to merge into the population of the Val-de-Travers. Other categories, such as refugees, are racialized, which I discuss below.

The Val-de-Travers is crossed daily by multiple mobilities that give rhythm to everyday life. These mobilities, as I reveal in my articles, are the subject of many discussions and negotiations. They are contested or politicized and participate in the daily dynamics of place-making. In the following section, I return to a particular element of the canton of Neuchâtel and therefore also of the Val-de-Travers: the specific discourses and practices related to the history of migration.

4.3.3. Tradition of hospitality in Neuchâtel: several particularities

The numerous arrivals that marked the second half of the 20th century found an important political and civic echo in the canton of Neuchâtel. Here, I highlight two aspects: the rights granted to foreigners and the construction of an "inclusive" discourse on migration. I conclude by briefly discussing the reception of asylum seekers in the valley.

The canton of Neuchâtel is distinct due to the rights granted to the population without a Swiss passport (Carrel 2016). In 1875, in the canton's communes, foreigners' right to vote and stand for election—which had already been in effect between 1849 and 1861—was reintroduced for those born in

[47] file:///C:/Users/emman/Downloads/Accord%20frontaliers%2011%20avril%201983.pdf [Accessed on March 30, 2023]

[48] https://www.ne.ch/autorites/DEAS/STAT/emploi-chomage-salaire/Documents/STAF_T318.pdf [Accessed on September 2, 2022]

[49] https://www.arcjurassien.org/ostaj/publications-et-analyses/les-deplacements-domicile-travail-dans-larc-jura [Accessed on September 2, 2022]

Switzerland or who had lived there for over five years and resided a year in the commune concerned. This political peculiarity of Neuchâtel not only encouraged the political participation of foreigners but was mobilized as a "tradition of hospitality" of the canton. In 1888, however, the right to stand for election at the communal level was abolished before being reintroduced in 2007. At the same time, in 2002, the right to vote at the cantonal level was granted to foreigners, again an exceptional case for Switzerland, with only one other canton conferring similar rights on foreigners (Carrel 2016). Importantly, as Carrel mentions, "the right to vote for foreigners is described as a cantonal tradition and a characteristic that represents key values in the conception of the canton" (2016, 205, my translation). Dahinden uses this to illustrate how "migrants become citizenised" (2021, 32) but indicates the gendered aspects of citizenship:

> Swiss women only obtained the right to vote in this canton [Neuchâtel] in 1959—which was comparatively early, given that women did not have the right to vote in federal elections until 1971. These are all instances of citizenising migrants (while migrantising Swiss female citizens). (2021, 32)

Hertz (2016), who explored "rites of inclusion in the canton of Neuchâtel," provides additional anthropological understandings of this Neuchâtel particularity. Hertz delved into what she calls the "cantonal rites of citizenship of the canton" (my translation), exploring two official awards—"Salut l'étranger!" and "Prix de la citoyenneté"—that are presented to inhabitants of the canton of Neuchâtel for actions deemed deserving of recognition. She also gives the example of the March 1 march[50] and the fountain festival.[51] They celebrate the spirit of resistance to the Prussian monarchy that fueled the Revolution of 1848 as well as the attachment of Neuchâtel's citizens to the Helvetic Confederation. Hertz also notes that the secular rites, actions, and *dispositifs* that "fall under a 'tradition of openness' toward foreigners and migrants have a prominent place" (2016, 244, my translation) and therefore underscores foreigners' rights to vote and to be elected. The canton of Neuchâtel also stands out because of its "citizenship charter,"[52] which states that the canton of Neuchâtel has a "tradition of hospitality, with an economic, social and cultural history that has often been marked by the history of its successive immigrations" (my translation). The figure of the "Neuchâtelois" [inhabitants of the canton], as presented in the charter and occasionally adopted politically, is not that of a "native inhabitant" (Hertz 2016, 245, my translation); rather, "a Neuchâtelois is anyone who, over time, becomes involved in the everyday life of the canton of Neuchâtel" (Hertz 2016, 245, my translation). The canton has actualized a number of actions and "inclusion rites" that "give substance to this set of values and representations,

[50] https://www.lebendige-traditionen.ch/tradition/fr/home/traditions/marche-du-1er-mars.html#:~: [Accessed on September 28, 2022]

[51] https://www.lebendige-traditionen.ch/tradition/fr/home/traditions/la-fete-des-fontaines.html [Accessed on September 28, 2022]

[52] https://www.ne.ch/autorites/DECS/COSM/conseil-information/Pages/Charte-de-la-citoyennet% [Accessed on September 28, 2022]

ritualizing a moment of passage between the outside and inside with respect to citizenship" (Hertz 2016, 245, my translation). Exploring these provides an opportunity to consider the central role foreigners play in the official conception of what it means to be Neuchâtelois.

As a result, migration is represented, experienced, and recognized as a central aspect of the canton's history, which is intrinsically linked with Swiss history. As revealed in article 1, most inhabitants of the Val-de-Travers, whether foreigners or Swiss, may be perceived as members of the local imagined community if they are seen as supporting local daily life economically and socially. In line with this, some people—or "foreign communities," to use the term employed by municipal officials—had an interesting reaction to a 2012 program the confederation launched to promote "integration" and "social cohesion" in the valley. The regional authorities established various activities, including meetings with "foreign organizations based in the valley." One part of the final report states:

> Unfortunately, [this approach] is not meeting the expected interest. It emerges from these meetings that people feel perfectly integrated and would even tend to misunderstand the fact of being invited in this form, which highlights the difference according to nationality. (Hoya 2015, my translation)

This reaction is particularly interesting because it demonstrates certain population groups' rejection of "migranticization" attempts. By inviting such groups to reflect on the integration of their "foreign community," the authorities migranticized them and returned them to a presumed particularity contested by the groups concerned. This was taken up by Gabriel, a "non-Swiss" member of the Val-de-Travers' municipal parliament, who confided in me that ethno-national origins are of secondary importance concerning the question of "social cohesion in Val-de-Travers" (interview, spring 2019).

One cannot consider questions of hospitality without mentioning the regulated migration of asylum system. In recent years, the Val-de-Travers has seen the opening of two centers for asylum seekers. The first was in Couvet, in the large building that was previously used to house employees of the Dubied company, and had a capacity of 80 places. It was open between 1990 and 2000 and then between 2004 and 2018. The second center was located in Les Cernets (Les Verrières), and it also had 80 places. It was open from 1987 to 2005 and belonged to the migration service of the canton of Neuchâtel (as did the one in Couvet). It has recently been acquired by the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM). The SEM adapted it to create a specific center for asylum seekers considered to be "recalcitrant." This new role for the center, initiated as part of the revision of the Swiss Asylum Act, officially began on December 3, 2018.

These arrivals have not significantly impacted the demography of the region but have nevertheless given rise to important negotiations. In Switzerland, a significant part of asylum reception is the responsibility of the cantons, which are charged with ensuring the functioning of reception centers (although decisions on asylum seekers are processed at the federal level). Identifying places to accommodate refugees is

always presented by the authorities as a complicated task, and they often turn to peripheral regions (Stünzi 2016). The opening of the centers in the Val-de-Travers region was contested by the local population, and petitions were launched to attempt to prevent them from opening. In response, the authorities engaged in a dialogue with the local population that included organizing public meetings to present the issues involved in receiving refugees and to respond to various concerns. Refugees accommodated in the Val-de-Travers generally stay for only six to nine months before being transferred to an apartment, often outside the valley. Links with the valley's inhabitants are rather limited beyond associations that organize food, second-hand clothes distributions, and activities for refugee children. School-age children attend the public school in the village where the center is located, often for a limited period if the family is then transferred to another commune in the canton.

Several people active in a refugee support organization added that these people do not want to settle permanently in the valley and would rather live in nearby cities (e.g., Neuchâtel). Anne-Marie told me: "They feel isolated in Val-de-Travers. They all want to go to Neuchâtel. It is also easier to live in a certain anonymity. There, they can easily meet up with people from their community." This desire to leave the valley was confirmed by Omer, a young asylum seeker, when I met him on the train a few months after our first meeting. He told me he was relieved because he had just found a flat in Neuchâtel for which he had been waiting a long time. Enok, a young Eritrean man living in an apartment in Couvet while waiting for a response to his asylum application, told me he has little contact with the population of Val-de-Travers and frequently takes the train to Neuchâtel or to visit his family in other parts of Switzerland.

During my employment for the migration service of the canton of Neuchâtel, two years before starting my doctoral research, I was employed as a social worker in another center in the canton located outside the Val-de-Travers. However, for a month in 2017, I was sent to the center in Couvet, which was before I even suspected I would one day conduct an ethnographic study in the region. I do not have observation notes or any other forms of written records of this activity, but I naturally bore in mind relevant episodes of this experience. The center was located near the train station and thus in a relatively central area of the village of Couvet. Despite this location, the center and its residents remained relatively distant from the daily activities of the valley. Asylum seekers generally do not work and most of them only stay temporarily in the valley. Thus, even if their presence is occasionally visible, the residents of the center remain foreign figures to the population. This is what I observed during my research and what I develop in the third article. The categorizations of refugees by the valley's inhabitants navigate between three types of representation: familiar strangers (Paulos and Goodman 2004), who are geographically in the heart of the valley but socially distant; space invaders (Puwar 2004), where refugees' presence on, for example, trains produces different forms of suspicion; and peripheral figures, when refugees' presence is politically and symbolically instrumentalized to negotiate the peripherality of the valley. Importantly, the category of "refugee" is markedly racialized, whether in the Val-de-Travers or elsewhere in

Switzerland (Michel 2015). In contrast to cross-border workers, skin color is regularly invoked concerning refugees, a visible cue (Wimmer 2013) that engenders immediate identification in public spaces.

In the following section, I discuss in more detail the dynamics of region-building by examining the ways in which the authorities and the population articulate a history of the Val-de-Travers constituting processes of peripheralization and transnationalization. In particular, I demonstrate the three aspects that characterize the dynamics of place-making: peripherality, centrality, and mobilities.

4.4. Region-building: Articulating peripherality, centrality, and mobility

All the elements presented so far feed the dynamics of region-building (Paasi 2009). In this section, I am interested in the discourses and practices—of local authorities but also of ordinary inhabitants—that participate in producing a collective representation of the Val-de-Travers. This section provides complementary elements to the three scientific articles and offers the reader more substance with which to understand the social organization of difference in the Val-de-Travers.

Indeed, investigating the current and historical processes of region-building permits a comprehensive understanding of how difference is constructed and organized in a region marked by occasionally contradictory dynamics of peripheralization, centralization, and mobilities. I do not consider the Val-de-Travers to be a "bounded" region, but I explore how its symbolic, political, and economic contours are negotiated and how different mobilities are appropriated, contested, and (in)formally regulated in these processes. As asserted by Paasi and Metzger,

> 'Region-building' is performed not only by economic, political and cultural/media elites in the production/reproduction of regions and identity narratives, but also in everyday practices and in the work of, for example, regional planners and developers, as well as through such mundane material structures as transport infrastructures (Metzger, 2013; Paasi, 2013). (2017, 25)

I thus conceive the region not as "being" but as "becoming" and therefore consider that "the present configuration may just be but a snapshot, a temporary stabilization (of lesser or greater duration), of one specific moment in a 'coming together' of heterogeneous trajectories of change" (Paasi and Metzger 2017, 23). This section therefore questions the relational and contextual production of the Val-de-Travers through the locality perspective developed in my theoretical framework. To do so, I begin by exploring the (historical) construction of authenticity. I then investigate how the closure of local businesses—a form of peripheralization—and the construction of collective memory have strengthened lived and imagined links between the region's inhabitants. I also explore how narratives regarding preserving "local identity" and the economy are articulated with attempts to (in)formally regulate certain

forms of mobility. Third, I explore the role played by the local press in the creation and growth of valley-wide social networks.

4.4.1. (Historical) construction of authenticity

To begin, it seems important to return to an element that has been relatively little discussed thus far in this dissertation: the (historical) construction of a form of authenticity in the Val-de-Travers. The writer Jules Baillods (1889-1952) embodies, I believe, a romantic and authentic discourse of the Val-de-Travers. He was born in Couvet and his work contains many poetic texts that evoke the landscapes of his native region, notably the publications "chez nous" (1919) and "Le Val-de-Travers" (1951). In this second text, one discovers his romantic vision of the authenticity of the Val-de-Travers, its landscapes and its industry.

> The Val-de-Travers is a very small valley lost in the vast world, between two waves of Jura forests, in the country of Neuchâtel. [...] The traveler who likes to linger and who is as interested in memories as in the picturesque aspects of a pleasant nature can slow down and sit down to admire. The Val-de-Travers lends itself wonderfully to the daily games of the sun. When it rises, it throws its rays in golden arrows over the southern forests and, while the whole valley is in shadow, it strikes the high forests and the rocky banks which, from the Signal of Fleurier to the Clusette of Noiraigue, form the northern rampart. [...] And perhaps these are the reasons why the Val-de-Travers is worthy of being placed among the privileged treasures of my country. (Baillods 1951, 5-7, my translation)

The quotation reproduces a romantic vision of the Val-de-Travers by describing it as a secluded valley, surrounded by majestic forests, traversed by a winding river, and offering picturesque views at every step. This quote reflects the romantic aesthetic that valued natural landscapes as sources of inspiration and emotion while seeking to escape industrial city life. Interestingly, in a document recently produced by the regional political authorities concerning a "strategic positioning agreement for the Val-de-Travers Region," one finds the same lexical themes as in the writings of Jules Baillods:

> The Val-de-Travers is a unique and preserved green setting. Close to the urban centers, it is the link between the Swiss Plateau and the French Jura. Its identity, based on a rich natural, industrial, historical, and cultural heritage, is the pride of its inhabitants and the companies present on its territory. Its history is marked by that of its emblematic product, absinthe, as well as by the evolution of its industry, notably in the field of luxury watchmaking. In line with the economic structure of Neuchâtel, industry is still today the beating heart of the local economy, which develops in perfect harmony with the region's high-quality natural environment. The Creux du Van, one of Switzerland's most visited sites of worldwide renown, welcomes nature lovers from all over the world and invites them to discover the many treasures of the entire region, including the Areuse Gorge and

> the Chasseron. The Val-de-Travers is above all a region where visitors, entrepreneurs, workers, and inhabitants feel at home! (Val-de-Travers 2017, 5, my translation)

This valorization of the authenticity of the Val-de-Travers, associated with a form of peripherality, can be considered a form of "place destigmatization" (Dunn 2012). The peripherality of the region is not contested. However, rather than seeing it as characterizing isolation, deindustrialization, distance, deprivation, and marginalization, peripherality is mobilized to emphasize calmness, a strong sense of place, authenticity, and the natural environment. Thus, in a region such as the Val-de-Travers, one can just as easily hear "there is nothing; it is the asshole of the world" as "there is everything; it is the most beautiful place in the world" (Fieldnotes). Alkan, a man who grew up in Kosovo and came to the valley 30 years ago, offered the following description of the valley:

> Maybe this will sound strange to you but it's like Disneyland, Paris. It's the land of dreams. You imagine a dreamland. It's got everything. We have the sports centers, we have the stores, we have the mountains, the paths to walk, to cycle, to do all the possible sports, the swimming pool, the schools, all the infrastructure you need, the calm, the people are very friendly. [...] Personally, I could never go to Neuchâtel or to a big city. I am used to it. I love the countryside, and here we have everything. [...] I think you find it strange if you come from Lausanne. You must think, "He's an idiot. What is he saying? There is nothing here" (laughs). But we have a magnificent landscape. There are waterfalls, caves. It's just beautiful. (Man, 50 years old, spring 2019)

Capitalizing on this historical heritage, the political authorities and the current tourism actors are promoting a certain image of the romantic and authentic valley:

> It is sometimes forgotten, but the region abounds in qualities that it can naturally boast. Landscape, built heritage, local life, and associations, infrastructures, human relations [...] Thus these qualities of which the Val-de-Travers can boast are sufficiently strong and natural to establish the region's identity. (Val-de-Travers 2015, 2, my translation)

In the following part, I present another facet of the Val-de-Travers, which also participates in the creation of a shared (peripheral) sense of place: the closure of businesses and the associated creation of collective memory.

4.4.2. Closure of businesses, the creation of collective memory, and the merging of municipalities

Throughout the 20th century, a multitude of small shops and businesses closed in the Val-de-Travers. This dynamic has been extensively addressed by Jacques Kaeslin, who has notably written two books, entitled *Bouchers, boulangers, et voituriers d'autrefois au Val-de-Travers* [Butchers, bakers, and valet drivers of the past in Val-de-Travers] (Kaeslin 2019) and *Auberges, Bistrots et Cercles d'autrefois*

[Hostels, Bistros and Circles of the past] (Kaeslin 2018). The tone is sometimes "tragic," as evidenced by this excerpt regarding the closing of several bars:

> The inescapable destiny of a great number of public establishments in the valley is to be victims of the changes in the habits of a population, occupied with other leisure activities, more mobile and working elsewhere than in the valley. Whether one considers the glass half empty or half full, one can either celebrate this slow death of places of debauchery and drunkenness or deplore the disappearance of these places of exchange where social ties are forged. The neighborhood café was an essential part of the community life. As a refuge for the lonely in need of companionship and an outpouring of neighborhood worries, it provided a form of social service. (Kaeslin 2018, 119, my translation)

The closure of certain structures contributes to the collective production of a certain memory of the Val-de-Travers. I had the opportunity to experience a moment of this "production" by attending an event that included the work of photographer Daniel Schelling. Schelling has photographed and documented the Val-de-Travers for several decades, and the historical museum of the valley recently dedicated an exhibition to him. In conjunction with the exhibition, an evening event was organized at which a local historian was invited to comment on the photos. There were perhaps thirty people in the audience, the vast majority retired. With each picture of an establishment in the valley or of a Valley-er, comments and personal anecdotes were heard. Some people also referred to the family members of the person whose portrait was displayed.

Various publications document the loss of certain establishments and thus participate in the production of a collective memory of them. A book published in 1990 presents photographs and postcards of the region, which, "because of their uniqueness, perpetuate the memory of a demolished house, a closed store, a dismantled factory, a disused chapel, a disappeared character, or a forgotten event" (Klauser and Perrin 1990, 27, my translation). Of course, the reasons for the closures vary and not all reflect the peripheralization of the Val-de-Travers. However, they illustrate the process that has been transpiring since the last century and that has involved the closure of many local institutions.

Faced with this trend, a group of Valley-ers recently launched a local initiative to "resuscitate" historic bars. The association is called Mood Events.[53] For an evening, it brings back to life some emblematic places of the region, most of which have been closed for years or even decades. In the same register, Pascal, one of my interlocutors, has begun (for his own private records) a work of memory on the lives of young people in the valley during the 1970s and 1980s. He is seeking photos or videos of different events, parties, restaurants, bars, and dances that marked daily life during this period. Pascal told me:

[53] https://www.facebook.com/moodevents.ch/ [Accessed on March 25, 2022]

> It's extremely interesting because it allows us to see the evolution of society in our region. Typically, in the 1970s, we had three cinemas, one in Les Verrières, one in Fleurier, and one in Couvet. There were a lot of events. I have photocopies. There was dancing. There were people everywhere. (Interview, summer 2020).

This desire to safeguard local economic and social activities is present in my articles and reflected in the exploration of an imagined community of fate. The dynamics of peripheralization—in particular through the closure of small businesses—adopt an important symbolic dimension beyond their materiality and become emblematic of the Val-de-Travers. There is no rejection of peripheralization, but these dynamics can be appropriated to define a "positive" belonging to an imagined local community. This is notably what underlies the recent merging of villages in the Val-de-Travers.

The commune of Val-de-Travers was created on the first of January 2009 and resulted from the political merger of nine of the valley's 11 villages. Only two villages did not vote in favor of this new political entity: the most geographically distant villages of La Côte-aux-Fée and Les Verrières. The votes in favor of the merger were close and the subject was debated at length in the Val-de-Travers. It is often said that the merger project was possible because of the collaborations that had existed for several decades in the region (Kaeslin 2013) and the socio-economic history that has contributed to the shared feeling of belonging to a collective. The vote took place on February 24, 2008 (an anniversary that is celebrated every year) and the general council (communal parliament) was elected on June 22, 2008, to implement the merger, which became effective several months later.

The central concerns of opponents during the campaign were a loss of village identity, a forfeiture of autonomy, and the potential creation of distance between elected officials and the population (Kaeslin 2013). Thus, one of the goals of the pro-merger actors was to demonstrate that these concerns were "excessive." Interestingly, a report written in 2001 regarding the municipal merger begins with the words: "People must be persuaded that they have a common destiny. They must be convinced that they will not lose their identity" (Kaeslin 2013, 25, my translation). Local authorities often emphasize the need to strengthen a sense of belonging to a community of fate while preserving "village identities." Jacques Hainard, an anthropologist who lives in the valley, referred to the spirit of resistance—a widespread notion in the discourse of Valley-ers—to justify the need for a merger of the villages:

> The Valley-ers have a natural inclination to resistance, it is true. But I see it more as the need to combine it with a certain difficulty of living. The Val-de-Travers is not very rich, the transport is not very good. When I went to secondary school in Les Verrières, sometimes I couldn't get back to Les Bayards because of the snow. This constant struggle to exist creates a very strong attachment to the place. We live here; we stay here. If we don't get on well, we don't get divorced. It's a fighting strategy. Of course, things have changed in recent decades. Luxury has arrived. But that doesn't stop us from keeping our

> eyes open. The Dubied factory in Couvet closed down 20 years ago because we were unable to anticipate the future. We cannot afford to make the same mistake today. The merger is a necessity. (My translation)[54]

Convincing people of the need for a municipal merger requires balancing the arguments for strengthening the links between villages with reassurances that a "policy of proximity" will be maintained. The lively debates of this period have somewhat overshadowed other local issues and contestations, such as questions concerning the cohabitation of people with different ethno-national origins. There is therefore a desire to gather all the inhabitants of the valley around this common project and thereby "naturalize" certain mobilities by including them in the imagined community. The merger of the nine villages is presented in a book that relates this process as the development of a "sense of belonging to a regionally, politically, and geographically defined entity" (Kaeslin 2013, my translation). This discourse is interesting because it illustrates a desire to present the Val-de-Travers as a "bounded territory." This sedentary perspective on the valley is indicative of a certain political project, in this case the project of strengthening the sense of belonging to the region in order to convince people that a merger of municipalities is beneficial. As Amin observes, local authorities tend to "shut [exteriority] out through strong narratives of local embedding and local pedigree, which allows them to fabricate a pure imagined local community" (2004, 40-41). These narratives, which blur certain mobilities, are also widespread in inhabitants' discourses, as presented in the various articles in this dissertation.

These discourses and practices, when performed by the authorities, resemble "a deliberate campaign to fashion a community of local sentiment (over other political projects)" (Amin 2004, 38). However, they are also articulated alongside strategies for preserving the local economy and regulating certain disruptive mobilities, which I discuss in the ensuing section.

4.4.3. Preserving the local economy and regulating mobilities

Attempts are being made to blur social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002) within the valley by encouraging and supporting the economic and social participation of all Valley-ers regardless of nationality. However, there are also parallel negotiations and contestations regarding mobilities out of and into the valley that can potentially threaten the local economy. I explore the discourses and practices of regulation in the second article by examining the emergence of a regime of (im)moral mobilities in the valley, providing additional detail on this here.

Though the local economy of the Val-de-Travers is not in the same dramatic decline as other European regions, local actors, often supported by the municipality, continuously cooperate to ensure the area is as socially and economically attractive as possible. The most striking example is the Val'Action[55]

[54] https://www.letemps.ch/suisse/jacques-hainard-commune-unique-sortira- [Accessed on September 28, 2022]
[55] www.valaction.ch [Accessed on September 28, 2022]

association, which was launched in 2016. It consists of a group of local merchants, who, with the support of the municipality, develop initiatives to promote the local economy. One example, which I discuss in my articles, concerns the creation of a local currency that can only be spent in the valley. This original strategy, despite its limited economic impacts, has a strong symbolic dimension and illustrates attempts to regulate mobilities—such as those across the border—that export income. This type of initiative, I believe, also strengthens the symbolic links between the inhabitants of the valley by valuing local economic and social contributions regardless of ethno-national factors.

While local currencies have different interests and scales—for example, they can be transnational and aim to combat the financialization of traditional currencies (Blanc, Fare, and Lafuente-Sampietro 2022)—several initiatives aim at a territorialization of activities (Fare 2012). As such, Fare argues, local currency can promote "the emergence of a community of solidarity" (Fare 2012, 56, my translation), which seems to be an objective of the Val-de-Travers' initiative. This objective is embedded in a quest to recreate coherence in the context of peripheralization and the flight of income from the valley.

Interestingly, however, there is nothing new about different actors in the region joining forces to support the local economy. In the 1970s, the Swiss Confederation launched a program to provide financial support to so-called mountain regions such as the Val-de-Travers. This measure is known under the abbreviation LIM (federal law on investment aid in mountain regions). It involves planning regional development in consultation with the various regional actors (Calame, Michel, and Stähli 2008). The authorities of the villages of the Val-de-Travers were therefore encouraged to collaborate, and they founded the Val-de-Travers Region Association (ARVT) in 1977. This initiative represents a "crucial moment for the survival of the valley, an essential period when a true regional spirit is finally emerging at the political level, fueled this time by a federal financial source capable of concretizing the change" (Kaeslin 2013, 25, my translation).

Nevertheless, two people who were members of ARVT told me that these negotiations were not at all simple. Discussions concerning the delimitation of the new industrial zones in the region, from which each village wanted to benefit, is an evocative example: the rivalry between the two largest villages of the valley—Couvet and Fleurier—was exacerbated at that time. Because of their respective geography, it was much easier to define a (large) industrial zone in Couvet than in Fleurier, which had less space available. Negotiations were fierce, as the establishment of companies in either village would have a significant impact on the taxes that the communes would collect.

Nonetheless, this did not prevent a multitude of initiatives from emerging due to the financing of the LIM, and collaboration between the villages gradually intensified. Since the 1980s, this period of recovery from the crisis has been marked by the strengthening of collaboration between the villages and was presented in the local newspaper as a turning point for the Val-de-Travers:

> Although the current crisis has many negative consequences, it also has its virtues. For example, it stimulates individual or collective, private or public initiatives. [...] In order to recover, it is urgent, according to economists, that the industry of Val-de-Travers obeys three watchwords: modernize, diversify and specialize. (Klauser 1979b, 23-24, my translation)

Because of this new economic strategy, the region has seen the arrival of a multitude of new enterprises from the 1980s onwards, including pharmaceutical and watchmaking companies. Though they employ local workers, a large proportion of the employees are cross-border commuters. Indeed, the presence of the border with France has played a decisive role in the implantation of these companies in the region, as the following quotation from the minutes of the local council attests:

> It should be remembered that if these companies come to Val-de-Travers, it is also because they find cross-border workers who also contribute significantly to communal revenues. With regard to the financial figures for 2014, Val-de-Travers expects to collect 2.5 million francs from "cross-border taxes." The municipality cannot disregard the usefulness of being situated in a border region. (Minutes of the municipal parliament, December 2013, my translation)

However, the arrival of new companies is a subject of intense debate. Though, since the crises of the 1970s and 1980s, any initiative that contributes to job creation is generally welcomed, tensions arise regarding the workforce that will be employed and competition with local companies. In this respect, the discussions concerning the possible opening in 2008 of a LIDL (supermarket) in the village of Couvet were particularly fierce. The valley's shopkeepers wrote a letter to the municipal parliament to try to prevent this. Jérémie, whose father was serving in the parliament at the time, told me that the tensions were intense and the anger of the shopkeepers was "bitter." In order for the supermarket to open, a roundabout had to be built at the expense of the municipality. This was the point on which the municipal authorities could influence the arrival (or not) of a LIDL—intervening in the sale of the land was impossible. The parliament, under the influence of local shopkeepers, eventually refused the credit to build a roundabout, and the store never opened. A municipal employee explained her experience of the situation:

> We pushed the managers of LIDL away. They harassed us more than once and we were actually not cooperative. They never came. Well, maybe one day they will, but I don't know. In any case, for the moment, we have been able to prevent them from coming. We didn't want to, because they offer a wide range of products and it's clearly cheaper. At some point, to bring in large supermarkets like that, I'm not sure it would be very wise. Afterwards, if people want this type of product, let them go and get it elsewhere. [...] But we can't stop them from coming either. If they find private land that is suitable for building

> and they have the authorizations, we can't do much. But if we wanted them to come, we would have found a solution for them. (Interview, summer 2020)

The arrival of new companies is therefore generally not a quiet affair. Local stakeholders assess the impact on the local economy, on the labor market, and on the added value of the local supply of goods and services. The mobility of companies is not the only issue that concerns the actors in the local economy. One of the major issues also concerns the departure of certain people from the Val-de-Travers, particularly young people. In the Val-de-Travers, as in most regions considered "peripheral," the lack of professional opportunity and diversity is an important factor contributing to the exodus of young persons (DEAS 2019). Today, there is an overrepresentation of retired persons in the Val-de-Travers. Edgar, the retired geographer, shared his thoughts on the subject:

> Basically, young people, if possible, they try to go to Neuchâtel. When the time comes to create a family, you want to stay in the agglomeration. We can see this movement going in this direction. If you cannot go to the agglomeration, if the prices are too high for you, you will aim for the Val-de-Ruz and very exceptionally you will aim for the Val-de-Travers. That's how it is. The Val-de-Travers always comes last. [...] It is not a region in which one dreams of settling. (Interview, spring 2019)

Marco, a retired teacher, refers to another element that explains this low level of attractiveness; namely, the scarce professional opportunities:

> Many young people leave, of course. There is only the watchmaking industry in the Val-de-Travers for qualified workers. Apart from that, there is no other important economic sector. There are only jobs for craftsmen, electricians, carpenters, self-employed people. Otherwise, you must go to Neuchâtel, or I don't know where. There are some who come back but not many because this kind of work does not exist. Engineers, technicians, we need some here. In Môtiers, there is Etel which hires quite a few people. Now, there are quite a few young people who become watchmakers, but it's a small number. (Interview, summer 2019)

While conducting my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to speak with several young people concerned with residential choices. Students regularly emphasized their desire to pursue their education—and then their careers—outside the valley. Birgit, with whom I lived for a few months, also told me that her children "even though they were attached to the valley" decided to leave the region rather promptly. Her daughter now lives in German-speaking Switzerland, while her son lives in the canton of Valais (Interview, January 2020). The fact that the Val-de-Travers is an aging region is of concern to the political authorities, which have long sought to attract young people and families (or to make them stay). One example of an attempt to do so is the recently launched citizenship card, which is distributed to all

young people when they celebrate their 18th birthday. On the commune's website, this card is presented in the following way:

> When you turn 18, you receive a citizenship card, a symbol of your belonging and attachment to the Val-de-Travers. The municipality of Val-de-Travers is proud to count you among its citizens and, with this card, wants to show you its confidence. Thanks to your citizenship card, you can benefit from financial advantages in different establishments until your 20th birthday.[56] (My translation)

There is, however, recognition from municipal officials that it is difficult to focus their demographic strategy exclusively on youth and families. Thus, in order to counteract the continuing demographic decline, the strategy has recently been "reversed." The Val-de-Travers now wants to attract retirees, whom the municipality perceives as a potential source of new inhabitants who could stimulate the local economy and strengthen the associative network.[57]

However, long before these political strategies were developed, a considerable number of people settled in the valley: since 1981,[58] more than 5,000 people have done so (DEAS 2021). Interestingly, when I mentioned this number at the public roundtable in the Val-de-Travers, one participant reacted with great surprise and admitted that he did not expect so many people to have come from "outside." The arrival of newcomers, while generally perceived positively, does raise some opposition, albeit in a minority. In this respect, Vincent's discourse regarding a project for another tunnel that would reach the heart of the valley from the shore of the lake in Neuchâtel is interesting. Vincent is a young Valley-er who spoke to me at length on the existence of a regional identity:

> I would be totally against [a tunnel]. On one side, it would be convenient so that we can go to Lausanne directly. But, on the other side, we will have such direct access that all the people with a bit of money on the littoral will say to themselves that they want the peace and quiet of the countryside and will all land here. There will be too many of them and then we will have an exponential boom in residential construction, and we will have this alteration of the identity of the valley. (Interview, summer 2019)

Vincent's main fear is the preservation of the "region's identity," which he believes could be threatened by increasing mobility from other parts of the canton. However, though this tunnel has never been built, many people have settled in the valley from outside it. In fact, the great majority of the people I met were from outside the valley or had lived a period of their life in another region. This was true even for people who claim to have a "strong local anchorage." Therefore, the narratives of region-building, while occasionally constructed through sedentary considerations, are strongly marked by and articulated with

[56] https://www.val-de-travers.ch/page/carte-de-citoyennete [Accessed on September 28, 2022]
[57] https://www.canalalpha.ch/play/le-journal/topic/26540/ [Accessed on September 28, 2022]
[58] Date of the data available on the website of the OFS (Federal Office of Statistics).

different forms of mobility. In addition to the regional transport networks discussed above, local newspapers play a considerable role in binding and strengthening the ties between the valley's inhabitants.

4.4.4. Local newspapers and the reinforcement of social networks

> The newspaper is the central pillar of the Val-de-Travers. You absolutely have to say something about this newspaper in your work. And it's a miracle that it still survives. It is free and delivered to the inhabitants of the valley. It is run by people who are not trained in this field. (Interview with Charles, summer 2021)

As has long been demonstrated by various ethnographic studies, gossips are crucial to forming a sense of belonging to a collective (Jenkins 2000). Indeed, I have often heard in the valley that it is "a place where everybody knows each other, and everything is known." While I partially address these issues in my articles, I focus here briefly on another element that plays an important role in the valley; namely, the weekly newspaper: *Courrier du Val-de-Travers*. Mentioned in the introductory quote and widely read and discussed in the valley, the newspaper was first published in December 1854. The following comments are included in a small book from 1979, which traces its history:

> Printed in the valley, for the valley, the Courrier is more than ever linked to the life of our small community, which it seeks to protect the interests of. It serves as a link between the villages, whose activities are reported by faithful correspondents. (Klauser 1979a, 7, my translation)

Without detailing its content, there is a section that I found particularly rich: "Life in the valley." Each week a person is featured as "the valley's person of the week." There is a short biography of such people and a description of their relationship to the region. Books have been published of these collections of testimonies. A striking feature of the various portraits is the omnipresence of mobility. Although the aim is to illustrate that people are anchored in the valley, this is accomplished by demonstrating that many people have left and, crucially, returned. In this local publication, mobility is "blurred" in the sense that these people are associated with a particular territory and are presented as Valley-ers. Mobility is also "valorized" in that experiences outside the region are mentioned as enriching not only individual trajectories but also the "community." In the preface to the 2020 edition, a local historian states:

> The valley may seem hostile. At certain times, it may even have appeared to be a devastated region. People leave to make a life elsewhere out of economic necessity, in search of work, or simply with the desire to discover other horizons. But something brings us back to the fold sooner or later. The sigh of satisfaction once you have passed the Clusette [tunnel to access the valley from Neuchâtel] towards the west, or coming from the south, the ill-concealed emotion of finding wooded pastures, farms, and bells. How to name this feeling?

> Strong identity? Attachment to the land? Preserved links with those who were born and lived there before us? All of this, no doubt. But also, the richness of the associative network made possible thanks to the commitment of every one of us to the local organizations, whether they are devoted to sport or culture, places of exchange, and necessary meetings. (Vaucher 2020, 2, my translation)

Of course, this vision is somewhat romantic (and echoes what was discussed earlier), as many young people, for example, leave and do not return to the valley. Nevertheless, it is interesting in the sense that it recognizes that mobility is an integral part of the life trajectories of those who comprise the population of the Val-de-Travers. These portraits contribute to the construction of the Valley-er: a figure who is both mobile and locally anchored, who carries a rich industrial history, and who somehow resists peripheralizing forces.

These aspects echo the points discussed throughout this chapter. Exploring local history from a mobility and relational perspective brings to light the complexity and diversity of the elements that participate in the making of a social organization of difference. In this thesis, and throughout the development of the research project, the goal was to explore and illuminate the ambivalences, paradoxes, and subtleties of everyday life. I hope to demonstrate that, far from being structured in fixed social categories, the Val-de-Travers, like all regions of the world, is marked by daily dynamics of situational boundary-making inscribed in collective and individual trajectories.

The following three articles explore various aspects of everyday life in the Val-de-Travers. The first addresses the emergence of an *imagined community of fate of the Valley-ers*. The second article focuses on the emergence and daily (re)production of a *regime of (im)moral mobilities*. The third article focuses on *representations and experiences of categorizations of difference*. All these contributions illuminate interdimensional and intertwined processes of boundary-making at the interface of peripherality and mobility related aspects. The interface perspective is discussed in the conclusion as a relevant analytical lens to capture the articulation between the subtleties of everyday life and broader processes of peripheralization and nation-state categorizations.

5. Imagined community of fate

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5.1. Foreword to the article

This article is the first one I wrote for my thesis. The starting point for the reflection was the emic category of "Valloniers" [Valley-ers] and how it is articulated and shaped by different forms of mobilities. I presented a first version at the 16th IMISCOE Annual Conference at the University of Malmö, 27 June 2019, and at the third edition of the Neuchâtel Graduate Conference at the University of Neuchâtel, 13 September 2019. An extended version of the paper was presented by Janine Dahinden at the Alexander von Humboldt Lecture at Radboud/Wageningen Universities on 11 November 2019. Janine Dahinden discussed the findings with me on several occasions and largely contributed to the writing, in particular to the theoretical part and the conclusion.

5.2. Mobilities, locality and place-making: understanding categories of (non-)membership in a peripheral valley

Introduction

> Tonight, we [the two PhD students working on this research project] are invited to attend a dinner in a village in the Val-de-Travers hosted by a local organisation to thank people for supporting a cultural event. We get into a discussion. One of the participants, Sylvie, is a Belgian woman who settled in the region with her husband almost 50 years ago. A second woman and her child join in; they are from Kosovo and live in another village in the valley. When a woman comes through the door, Sylvie immediately announces that she is from Lithuania and has a Spanish husband, and when a couple from the village arrives a few seconds later, Sylvie says: 'Ah, here are the first Swiss!' [. . .] At the table, we sit next to a couple who emphasise that they have always lived in this village and the husband shares some clichés about the Val-de-Travers – that from the outside it looks like a 'native reserve' and 'a hole'. Later, he recounts how a friend of his one day suddenly had a health problem in the street in Neuchâtel [the nearest city] and nobody came to help him. The man explains that this would never happen in the Val-de-Travers: 'Here, people care about others.' (Fieldnotes)

> So, for people, the valley is a hole: we live there, we die there, but we don't move there! What you need to know is that all valley activities are outward-looking ones. Take the economy, which was based on watches, lace, absinthe, knitting machines – these are all export products. Lace was sold all over the world, watches in China. So, everything that happens is for the outside world. We live there, but it's a place of passage. Goods move, and I would say people do too. (Man, 70 years old, lifelong resident)

These excerpts from our fieldnotes offer a first glimpse into the ways in which a place, the Val-de-Travers in the Canton of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, is peripheralised, but also transnationalised and diverse.[1] They also illuminate how mobilities and locality – the latter understood as 'people's ideas about the significance of place' (Strathern 1984, 44) – shape the social organisation of difference. This 'hole' is indeed economically, politically and culturally produced by multiple mobilities at different scales (Urry 2007), rather than defined by fixity.

Based on a long-term qualitative-interpretative ethnographic case study in the Val-de-Travers, located in French-speaking Switzerland on the border with France, this article describes the particular scheme of ordering we have found in the valley. We call this *the imagined community of fate of the Valley-ers* (Valley-ers is the translation from the French word 'Valloniers'), which can be understood as an emplaced peripheralisation: it is the outcome of dynamic and nested forms of boundary work in which

the most important categories and markers are socio-economic – rather than nation- and ethnicity-based. This scheme unfolds at the interface of processes related to locality and different types of mobility. In the following we demonstrate the relationship between conceptions of membership in the valley and the valley's history – it evolved from an important watchmaking centre in the early 20th century to a peripheralised region, especially since the 1970s.

Taking a specific place, understood as 'a meaningful segment of space combining location, locale, and sense of place' (Cresswell 2013, 280),[2] rather than a type of mobility or a group of people, as the unit of analysis makes it possible to develop an encompassing understanding of the local organisation of difference and to explore the dynamics of mobilities and locality that have been significant in the emergence of this imagined community of fate. This specific scheme of ordering, in turn, offers the opportunity to enhance studies of peripheral places by emphasising their critical embeddedness in external dynamics and within national, European and transnational orders. In particular, we focus on the creation, maintenance and contestation of categories of difference and membership, namely, the symbolic and social boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002) partaking in the (re)production of what we call an 'imagined community of fate'.

Our article provides new insights into two subject areas – peripheral places and migration – while simultaneously connecting them. First, although extensive research has been conducted in peripheral places in many disciplines, these places are rarely apprehended in terms of the (interrelated) dynamics of mobility and locality. Furthermore, most of this literature has not directly addressed the entanglement of (im)mobilities and their relationship with local processes of community formation. In other words, we propose a renewed form of 'community study' of a peripheral place, one which brings new insights into these dynamics through a focus on mobilities and interconnections.

Second, we contribute to what has been called 'reflexive migration studies' (Nieswand and Drotbohm 2014; Dahinden 2016) by making a case for de-centring the role of the city and of migration when it comes to understanding the social organisation of difference in particular places. On the one hand, migration studies traditionally mostly focused on cities when investigating membership and place-making. We show that peripheral places provide important insights into these issues. On the other hand, migration studies most often examines only one form of mobility, that referred to as 'migration' – the movement of humans across national borders that is expected to lead to settlement and which is thereafter discussed in terms of 'integration'. This 'sedentary bias' (Urry 2007) in migration studies is entangled with methodological nationalism and the logic of the nation-state (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), according to which mobility across national borders is a problem, an exception and disruptive (Hui 2016). By including transnational, national and local mobilities in this study, we demonstrate that mainstream integration theory overlooks important aspects of the ways in which processes of inclusion and exclusion operate in contexts shaped by transationalisation and mobilities.

This article thus seeks to enhance the understanding of dynamics of (non-)membership beyond the common distinction between locals and newcomers. To this end, in what follows, before presenting our methodology, we theorise our approach by combining reflexive migration studies and mobility studies in order to critically operationalise our perspective on a place that has so far not attracted much scholarly attention. We then discuss our case study by examining the different processes participating in the emergence of the imagined community of fate of the Valley-ers. We demonstrate the entanglement between different dynamics of locality – such as the economic peripheralisation of the valley and the historical resistance to this process – with different mobilities – such as cross-border work, inter-village mobilities, tourism and the valley's historical participation in European labour circulation. Through this example, we show that dominant conceptions of membership in local imagined communities might be based on shared feelings of marginalisation and on local and socio-economic issues, rather than on ethno-national origins. People's shared sense of emplacement is inextricably shaped by marginalisation. We therefore demonstrate the critical importance of de-centring research in migration studies both conceptually and geographically.

Investigating a peripheral place through a mobility lens

Of course, conducting research in peripheral places is nothing new. On the contrary, extensive research has been conducted in peripheral places in many disciplines – for example, anthropology (Cole and Wolf 1999; Stacul 2003), human geography (Milbourne 2007) and sociology (Coquard 2019). However, peripheral – or rather *peripheralised* – places are rarely apprehended through the (interrelated) dynamics of mobility and locality. Instead, the existing literature on human mobilities in villages has mostly documented specific types of (im)mobility, such as the mobilities of youth (Farrugia 2016), the mobilities of homeless people (Cloke, Milbourne, and Widdowfield 2003), contemporary rural in-migration (Stockdale 2016) and processes of staying (Erickson, Sanders, and Cope 2018). While a few studies have worked on the emplaced construction of difference and membership through a migration or mobility lens (Schech 2014; Villa 2019), scholars have rarely addressed the entanglement of (im)mobilities and their relationship with local processes of community formation (as an exception we can point to the work of Olwig (2003)). Our study contributes to these questions by combining dynamics of mobility and locality while analysing how they partake in the evolving and shifting contours of the imagined community of fate.

At the same time, European and American research on the transnationalisation of social realities and the diversification of populations has focused mainly on global (or smaller) cities embedded in neoliberal economies, as have mainstream integration or assimilation theory (Baumann 1996; Smith 2001; Hanley, Ruble, and Garland 2008; Wessendorf 2013).

While these studies provide important insights into the ways in which diversity is structured, lived and organised in urban spaces, locally and transnationally, they suffer from an *urban bias*. As Milbourne

and Kitchen have argued, 'Much of the recent geographical scholarship on mobilities has focused on the city, with "the urban" constructed as the archetypal space of hyper-mobility' (Milbourne and Kitchen 2014, 326). More recently, Schmiz et al. (2020) have argued that migration studies has not only an urban but also a metropolitan bias: their bibliometric analysis of journals in the fields of urban and migration studies demonstrates that a large proportion of migration studies is conducted in large cities. Our study de-centres migration studies by investigating how the social organisation of place-making in a peripheral place is influenced by various local and transnational dynamics and types of mobility.

Furthermore, our article contributes to a strand of literature that attempts to incorporate greater epistemological and theoretical reflexivity into migration studies (Nieswand and Drotbohm 2014; Dahinden 2016; Anderson 2019).

First, it has been argued that migration studies suffers from a *sedentary bias*. A newer body of work maintains that, contrary to mainstream integration research, place-making cannot be reduced to dynamics between 'natives' and so-called migrants (critically see, e.g. Favell 2016), because different types of mobility play a role in determining who does and does not belong (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Moret 2018). A mobility lens (Cresswell 2010), which we apply in this study, reverses the ontological and epistemological assumption that pairs territories and people to reorient research to the entanglement of mobility and immobility (Cresswell 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006; Amelina and Vasilache 2014).

Second, following this change of perspective, we are interested in all the varieties of human mobility that can be found in this place, and we investigate the role not only of migration – typically understood as a permanent move across international borders – but also of local mobilities within the valley, cross-border commuting and tourism. In addition, we argue that, alongside mobility, locality is also crucially important in framing group membership. We investigate how locality as 'people's ideas about the significance of place' (Strathern 1984, 44) – which we understand as the subjective results of being 'rooted', or historically, socially, economically or politically anchored in a given place (Dahinden 2010) – is produced and conditioned in interaction with mobilities.

Finally, we build on Cresswell (2010) but also on post-colonial scholars (e.g. Mayblin and Turner 2021) who argue that research in the social sciences needs to take mobilities of the past into consideration in order to understand their present forms and meanings. While the discourses and practices explored during our research in regard to mobilities are situated in a specific place and period, we also take into account the (recent) history of the Val-de-Travers and the evolution of mobilities and their perceptions.

In short, we attempt to de-migranticise research (Dahinden 2016), and this attempt extends to our research design: we do not adopt a national or ethnic group as our unit of analysis, but instead those who live in or pass through this place – residents and people who work but do not live there, regardless of their nationality, whether or not they are migrants and whether they are long-term residents or

newcomers. This approach makes it possible to identify how membership is socially organised and which categories of difference are significant. We therefore investigate inductively the categorisations that our interlocutors mobilise in order to produce and negotiate the relevant social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2008; Dahinden and Zittoun 2013), which in turn inform the social organisation of this peripheral place and lead to the emplaced marginalisation we observe. We are particularly interested in symbolic boundary work, namely, in the 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. [. . .] Symbolic boundaries separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership' (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168).

Methodology

Our case study is based on long-term qualitative-interpretative ethnographic research in the Val-de-Travers that began in early 2019. We first conducted four expert interviews (Meuser and Nagel 2009) with historians and local authorities in order to get an overview of the social landscape and the historical, legal and institutional environments that frame the interactions between mobility and locality in the valley. With the same objective, we also analysed available documents and research, including reports, statistics and historical studies about the valley.

Second, we conducted 29 problem-centred interviews (Witzel and Reiter 2010) with people involved in different types of mobility, including cross-border workers, asylum seekers, people involved in the tourism industry, people working in local organisations for foreigners and people who came from other parts of the canton or Switzerland. We also conducted interviews with people who have lived in the valley for their entire lives. We asked our interlocutors about their experiences of the meshing of different mobilities, their ongoing negotiations of symbolic boundaries and their imaginations and representations of themselves, others, the locality and the future. One objective of these interviews was to pinpoint processes of self-identification and categorisation in the valley (Stokoe 2012).

Emmanuel also conducted participant observations in the villages – in places where people meet, including cafés, museums and parks, but also during specific events and activities such as conferences, festivals, film screenings and community events. This ethnographic data explores interactions between mobilities and the socio-institutional system, daily encounters with alterity and the negotiation of shared categories (Hammersley 2006). Emmanuel visited the valley on a weekly basis over a period of five months and later rented a room and lived there for two months. He also conducted informal ethnographic interviews in the form of day-to-day conversations. Finally, Emmanuel conducted two focus-group discussions with members of an association that offers 'integration' activities to beneficiaries of the Migration Service and other social services. These focus groups were used to present our preliminary results to the participants, and to engage in a discussion by sharing our interpretations with them and taking their reflections into account in our analysis.

The data analysis began with a global analysis (Flick 2009), which allowed us to discover the main themes in the documents and interviews. Thus, we identified the observations and transversal discourses and categorisations that define the contours of this imagined community of fate. We then targeted specific passages, coding and classifying the results to explore the dynamics of this specific ordering scheme.

The emergence of the Valley-ers' imagined community of fate

In what follows, we investigate how different individuals, who live and/or work in the valley and those who pass through for various reasons are involved in boundary work in order to differentiate themselves from others – actors, geographic entities, 'centres' – while producing ideas of membership and cohesion in regard of the group 'Valley-ers'. The Valley-ers' *imagined community of fate* has emerged under the specific condition of being peripheralised in various ways, and at the interface of narratives related to locality and various types of mobility, namely, cross-border movements, historical European labour circulation, internal mobility within the valley and tourism.

We are not interested in determining which specific individuals are or are not members of this community, but in identifying the effects of mobilities and locality on the social organisation and representation of the Val-de-Travers. While we acknowledge that the use of the term 'community' runs the risk of essentialising social processes (Amit and Rapport 2002), we argue that it also makes it possible to understand the specific mechanisms through which 'groupness' (Brubaker 2004) and corresponding relational boundaries emerge and are emplaced. That is, we use the notion of 'community' to illustrate the situational emergence of a relational sense of membership to a collective – the Valley-ers. We do not consider it to be 'out there'; rather throughout our analysis we seek to identify the circumstances and boundary work in which the local actors are embedded when they negotiate its contours and we shed light on the significative and interrelated dynamics of mobility and locality in this social process.

A transnationally embedded 'periphery of the periphery'

'We are on the periphery of the periphery' (Man, 45 years old, lifelong resident). This quotation succinctly captures many layers of the narratives and categorisations we heard in the valley. Obviously, 'periphery' is a situationally and relationally constructed term (Wirth et al. 2016). In valley residents' discourse, 'periphery' has a strong symbolic and spatial dimension, and when the residents discuss the boundary of 'periphery' they oppose it to three different types of 'centre'.

First, the valley is perceived as *geographically* peripheral. It is relatively far from what our interlocutors call 'urban centres'. It is a narrow valley between two mountains, barely 20 kilometres long and 3 kilometres wide. A river, which follows the main road, runs all the way through the valley and passes through most of the villages before flowing into Lake Neuchâtel. Due to its topography, the valley is a

confined basin separated from the rest of the canton by a small winding and hilly road. A trip by train or car from the city of Neuchâtel to the entrance to the valley takes about 25 minutes. Furthermore, being located on the border with France, the Val-de-Travers is regarded as the periphery of a canton that many people already perceive as the periphery of Switzerland. This reinforces the idea of the Val-de-Travers as geographically decentralised, a view that is mirrored in the legislative programme of the local government: 'It is essential to give ourselves the means to constantly improve the image of the Val-de-Travers, which will always remain a peripheral municipality of a peripheral canton' (Val-de-Travers 2016, 3).

Second, the valley is perceived as *demographically* peripheral. It has a small population – 11,772 inhabitants scattered across three municipalities and 11 villages (DEAS 2019).[3] And third, the valley is perceived as *economically* peripheral. Historically, agriculture and watchmaking were the main economic activities in the valley, but watchmaking reached a breaking point in the 1970s due to, among other factors, the oil crisis and declining demand for mechanical watches. In addition to watchmaking, a knitting-machine factory in the valley that had as many as 1,200 employees at one time closed down in 1988. The economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s caused the permanent loss of about 2,000 jobs in the valley (Mairy 2008, 266). The regional authorities subsequently developed an economic programme to diversify the economy (before its economic decline, nearly 50 per cent of its jobs had been in watchmaking and machinery) and attract employers. The programme included the creation of industrial zones, renovation of infrastructures, development of tourism and improvement of the image of the region. Even so, relative to the rest of the canton, average income in the valley is low, a greater percentage of the population is employed in the primary and secondary sectors and educational levels are lower (DEAS 2016). This situation has prompted some, especially the young and non-Swiss citizens who lost their jobs, to leave the region (expert interview, local historian).[4]

Nonetheless, being the 'periphery of the periphery' does not necessarily mean that the region is disconnected from 'centres'. Translocal and transnational connections are a fundamental part of the valley's history and present. Local industries – the lace trade at the beginning of the 17th century, and watchmaking from the mid-18th century until the 1970s – were always connected transnationally and often entangled with the colonial capitalist system. Lace products were exported to Europe and North America. In the 19th century, the watchmaking sector benefitted from the outward-looking approach established by the lace industry, and many young people from the valley moved internationally to continue their training and develop their businesses (Jelmini and Vaucher 2008). In the 20th century, prestigious watch manufacturers established themselves in the region, again reinforcing international connections (Mairy 2008).

Long-standing transnational connections were also established through population movements. Beginning in the late 19th century, the watchmaking industry created significant demand for workers, triggering important waves of immigration, first from other cantons, then from France and Italy, and,

after the Second World War, in the form of guest workers from Italy, Spain and Portugal. As a result of the Switzerland–EU Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP), which came into effect in 2002, the region has also seen an increasing number of cross-border workers from France. These *frontaliers* ('border-crossers'), as they are called, live in France but commute to the valley daily for work.[5] In addition, the valley has experienced an increasing number of tourists (mainly from Switzerland's German-speaking regions), seen the opening and closing of several centres for asylum seekers and witnessed the arrival of people looking for cheaper real estate, especially those with low incomes and families wishing to settle in single-family homes.

As we demonstrate in the following sections, the strong feeling of being a periphery together with the transnational embeddedness of the valley form the foundation upon which the Valley-ers' imagined community of fate is built.

Local mobilities within the valley: blurring the boundaries between villages and the emergence of the identification as Valley-ers

The mobility of people within the valley is the first important dimension underlying the symbolic boundary of 'Valley-ers' that residents adopted for themselves in the 20th century (Jelmini 2009). Milbourne has argued that 'short distance re-locations are the most significant movement between places' and emphasised that researchers should be aware of the 'difference that a few miles can make to constructions of localness in the rural context' (Milbourne 2007, 385). His observation is valid for our case. Historically, the valley was clearly separated into distinct villages, each of which was presented as having specific characteristics. One, for instance, was defined as the 'cultural and bourgeois centre'. It is in this village that most of the museums, the castle and most important historical buildings are located. Another was proclaimed the 'watchmaking centre' of the valley. The village in which the knitting-machine factory was located was known as the most industrial – it contained a large industrial zone and was said to have a working-class character. These distinctions are still present in residents' discourses and generate a certain 'rivalry', to use our interlocutors' term, but they are also fading. While the inhabitants told us that earlier generations identified strongly with their villages, self-identification today is based on the valley as a whole:

> I used to listen to my parents talk about the different villages. I attach less importance to that. We come from a 'neighbourhood', which is one of the villages. It's also a question of generation. I don't hear young people talking about one village or another. (Woman, 48 years old, lifelong resident)

Local mobilities within the valley play an important role in this shift towards a higher-level identification and the emergence of the category 'Valley-ers'. Importantly, people who have lived in the valley for a long time often juxtapose the immobility of villagers in the past with the mobility between different parts of the valley today. Our interlocutors mention two main factors as responsible for this change. The

first is the closure of shops, bars and services in some villages, which has forced people to be mobile within the valley. At a café, a woman told us the following: 'Small local shops have closed in some villages – the bakery, butcher's, dairy, etc. That encourages people to move to other places. We now have to go to [the neighbouring village] to shop' (Fieldnotes).

Second, over the last few decades the region has seen an increasing number of organisations that link the villages in an inter-communal or regional network. The Association Région Val-de-Travers (ARVT), the valley's regional association, for example, was created on the basis of a Swiss Confederation initiative to support peripheral regions. Local authorities endorse this development, invest in inter-communal infrastructure, centralise services and encourage inter-communal organisations. At the initiative of the ARVT, the local population voted in 2008 to merge nine villages into a single political municipality, thus consolidating the bonds between the villages. Importantly, these reinforced connections are also mirrored in new public-transport infrastructure, which facilitates circulation within the valley. A cross-border worker pointed to the importance of mobility between villages in promoting social identification with the valley as a whole:

> I don't feel like there are village identities. People are very Val-de-Travers; it's more of a Val-de-Travers identity. [And what are the things that unite people in the Val-de-Travers?] Well, you Swiss are the champions of mobility! And look at that, you have these small public-transport lines between villages that are very efficient, and that makes people move between villages a lot. You've made it easier for people to move around. People go from one village to another and know they can come back whenever they want. (Man, 53 years old, cross-border worker)

The category of Valley-ers has developed in parallel with the increase in local mobilities and the corresponding mobility infrastructure (associations, transportation), and it is crucial in framing who is an insider or outsider, as we will show in the following.

Locality in terms of a history as an economic periphery: The emergence of a 'community of fate' and concomitant ideas of solidarity

While increased local mobility has produced the identifying term of 'Valley-ers', *locality* has a twofold importance in giving content to and bounding this term – the valley's history as an economic periphery and the role of 'tradition' as a positive symbol for the valley. This subsection delves into the first aspect, and the next discusses the second.

Val-de-Travers is strongly defined by its status as an economically peripheral region. Residents describe the valley as economically disadvantaged, and they convey a general feeling of economic inferiority in their narratives. The relevant 'Other' in view of this boundary is the neighbouring city, Neuchâtel, which

is represented as a place with more economic capital and better educational and professional opportunities.[6]

In 1998, a journalist from the valley expressed these differences in an article in the French-language Swiss newspaper *l'Hebdo*:

> There is a feeling of abandonment, a feeling that, in this canton, everything happens in Neuchâtel and La Chaux-de-Fonds[7]: that's where you invest, that's where you dig the tunnels, that's where you attract companies. And, too bad for us, we're next door. (Rebetez 1998, p. 30, our translation)

The economic decline discussed above still looms large in the collective memory. Some interlocutors speak of 'traumatic' periods that marked a turning point:

> In the 80s, the situation was terrible in Val-de-Travers. All the watchmaking companies were closing down. We lost Tornos [a large local company]. We were wondering if we were going to have to close the village. People were being laid off, a lot of people we knew, people we met on the street. (Man, 65 years old, lifelong resident)

These memories nourish the Valley-ers' imagined community of fate: 'You're a real Valley-er when you've been here for a long time and have experienced this kind of thing [the economic crisis]' (Woman, 30 years old, lifelong resident). That this speaker is 30 years old demonstrates that those who claim ownership of discussions on the economic difficulties of the 1980s were not necessarily working at the time. Economic marginalisation and historical trauma trigger a discourse in which solidarity among the Valley-ers is presented as vital for survival, and they contrast this with the city of Neuchâtel where, they claim, nobody cares about anybody, as the quotation that opened this article indicates. As one interviewee put it, 'And there's something important: you have to be ready to show solidarity if you're from the valley' (Woman, 30 years old, lifelong resident). A report issued by the municipal council makes similar claims:

> On average, the population of the Val-de-Travers has significantly lower incomes than the other regions of the canton, and the country. Nevertheless, the solidarity that exists among the inhabitants and the social conscience of the region's companies generally make it possible to maintain socio-economic cohesion. (Hoya 2015, 11, our translation)

Following Baehr (2006), we label this element of self-representation 'fate'. According to Baehr, a community of fate comes into being when a group of people face 'an unwanted, yet socially recognised, emergency which confronts people with a major challenge to their existence' (Baehr 2006, 182). Interestingly, a local politician also employed the term 'fate' in an interview:

> We are a small peripheral region of a peripheral canton. So if we don't care about our fate, others won't either. [. . .] When you come from a small region, if you don't stick together, you're screwed. (Man, 45 years old, lifelong resident)

Another important facet of this 'fate' is inhabitants' belief that they are perceived negatively by outsiders. Our interlocutors, whether newcomers or long-term residents, repeatedly stated that outsiders view them as 'farmers' and the valley as 'a hole', and that 'no one wants to move here' (Fieldnotes). A man described outsiders' perception as follows:

> I went to high school in Neuchâtel. I was the strange animal in class who came from the Val-de-Travers. We've always experienced this marginalisation vis-à-vis people from the city. And even today this hasn't changed. It also creates a bond between the people of the valley. The simple fact that we're marginalised by others makes us stronger. That's a mechanical principle of survival. [. . .] And hardly anyone from the outside moves here. People think, 'What the hell are you doing here, this is the end of the world'. Good if they think that, we don't! (Man, 63 years old, lifelong resident)

This perceived negative external categorisation strengthens internal cohesion and reinforces the discourse regarding solidarity. As Van Houtum and Van Naerssen argue, defining an 'Other' reinforces feelings of membership with the group: 'Others are needed and therefore constantly produced and reproduced to maintain the cohesion in the formatted order of a territorially demarcated society' (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002, 134). Valley-ers' imagined community of fate is based as much on this feeling and experience of living in an economic periphery and being perceived negatively as it is on the supposedly superior value of (seemingly) unconditional solidarity. This local (historical) condition was so important that people began identifying with the new category of 'Valley-ers'.

Locality: 'traditional' absinthe production as resistance to being peripheral and a positive symbol for the valley

More surprisingly, this imagined community of fate derives also from inhabitants' view of themselves as a community of resistance based on what they call the 'traditional artisanal production of absinthe'. This is the second element of locality informing community formation in the valley. Barth (1969) insisted that groups mobilise various cultural elements – what he called 'cultural stuff' – in order to mark boundaries from other groups and confirm similarities within the in-group. Any *subjective* cultural trait can serve to mark group boundaries. Max Weber (1996[1922]) argued that what is called a community of origin is always subjective, but that this *subjective belief* in a community of origin and common descent can nonetheless be important for group-formation processes. Both Barth and Weber were referring to the formation of ethnic groups, but a similar mechanism operates here. Traditional artisanal absinthe production becomes cultural stuff, a marker of group boundaries, a constituent of the myth of a common origin among Valley-ers and a symbolic element of their positive group identity.[8]

In the early 20th century, the valley was a significant producer of absinthe, but in 1908 a popular initiative was accepted at the federal level banning the production of absinthe in Switzerland. Following a homicide supposedly caused by the consumption of this hard liquor, it was claimed that absinthe had the potential to transform its consumers into murderers and arsonists and lead to the destruction of the family (Delachaux 2008). The valley was heavily affected by this decision. Nonetheless, many local producers continued to make absinthe illegally until 2005, when the ban was repealed. Many myths emerged around this traditional prohibited drink, and they remain important. The century of illegal production is regularly described as a period of resistance and solidarity (Roth, Hertz and Wobmann 2014). When we asked a woman whether anyone was opposed to the illegal production of absinthe and whether any producers were reported to the authorities, she answered: 'I've never heard that. There was solidarity among inhabitants. It was in our genes' (Woman, 65 years old, resident in the valley for 40 years).

Absinthe became a positive symbol in the valley, an origin myth that reinforces the idea of a community: 'Absinthe, it creates ties' (Man, 55 years old, resident in the valley for seven years). On the question of what is important to the identity of Valley-ers, an interviewee elaborated:

> Of course absinthe, we identify with the history of absinthe. This legacy came out of prohibition, and it's really strong among people. We talk about it a lot, and we talk about it with pleasure. (Man, 31 years old, lifelong resident)

Since the legalisation of absinthe, it has acquired significant economic importance, in terms of both production and as a tourist attraction. There is now a museum dedicated to absinthe production in the region, which it refers to as 'the cradle of traditional absinthe production' (Fieldnotes), although absinthe is also important in neighbouring France.

This origin myth is also mobilised and reinforced by younger people and newcomers, both of whom are heavily involved in the absinthe industry. They exploit and reinforce it by presenting absinthe as an element of local authenticity in order to attract tourists. In this way, locality has become entangled with a form of enhanced mobility – tourism. Tourism has started to play a role in reinforcing this local origin myth, thus contributing to the representation of the community of Valley-ers.

International mobility and boundary work regarding outsiders: French cross-border workers and other non-members

Another form of mobility is also fundamental for community building among Valley-ers. Following the AFMP, the number of cross-border workers from France has increased: there are now some 1,200 in the Val-de-Travers, where they hold 20 per cent of the jobs (DEAS 2019).

These *frontaliers* have become the focus of (sometimes violent) debates. Although some interlocutors describe these debates as racist and xenophobic, they reveal a particular type of boundary work in which

nationality and language (the cross-border workers speak French, the same language as the local population) are of minor importance, but where another logic, again related to the view of the valley as economically peripheral, dominates. Cross-border workers are reproached for not contributing to the local economy.

Most of the inhabitants we talked to acknowledge that the valley does not have enough workers to cover its job demands, and that unemployed residents do not always meet employers' expectations. In this sense, cross-border workers are accepted and even seen as necessary: 'Without cross-border workers, there's no factories' (Man, 65 years old, lifelong resident). Instead, they are resented for not consuming in the valley and paying little in taxes there. Cross-border workers take advantage of the difference in purchasing power between Switzerland and France: salaries are higher in Switzerland, while the cost of living is significantly lower in France and cross-border workers are eligible for benefits such as health insurance in France. As a retiree told us at a local bar, 'Cross-border workers come with their sandwiches or eat in the company cafeteria and then leave for France' (Fieldnotes). He compared this situation to the 1980s, when the knitting-machine factory was still in business: 'The employees were from the region and ran the businesses. After work, when the factory closed, they went to restaurants and bars' (Fieldnotes). Hence, this human mobility is strongly intertwined with the mobility of money in the form of taxes and wages spent outside the valley, which is contested by some residents and which reinforces the boundary with cross-border workers. Political authorities and local associations have initiated several measures to encourage cross-border workers to spend their money locally. For instance, in 2016 Val'Action, a local association,[9] created a local currency, the Val (with one Val equal to one Swiss franc), in order to promote the use of the currency in the region and thus support the local economy. This association comprises all shops, restaurants and other locales where it is possible to pay in this local currency (Fieldnotes, discussion with a founder of Val'Action). The municipal government also plans to create a label of certification for companies that recruit their employees locally (Val-de-Travers 2016) and has created so-called welcoming kits for newcomers and cross-border workers.

> There are a lot of commuters who come here only for work, and they leave as soon as the workday's over. These welcoming kits are a way of saying, 'Look, the region you come to work in has other advantages besides offering you a job. Try to visit the shops, go to the restaurant, take advantage of the leisure infrastructure'. So, it's trying to raise awareness so that people who work here might want . . . at least to do stuff here, and maybe even settle here. (Man, 45 years old, lifelong resident)

Nationality is not the central issue in tensions over *frontaliers*. As a French citizen who has settled in the valley told us,

> What they [people in the valley] don't like is people who cross the border every day – the frontaliers. They're much more open with people who live here. Because I'm almost like them. Same taxes, same way of life. (Man, 30 years old, resident in the valley for two years)

This interviewee emphasises that because he has settled in the valley he is not a victim of stigmatisation. Interestingly, the few Swiss people from the valley who have moved to France and commute back for work are also stigmatised by some residents. The following is an extract from an exchange during a focus-group discussion:

> E: And how are the Swiss [who have moved to France to save money and commute to the valley for work] perceived in the valley?
>
> Interviewee: Badly. [. . .] They [those who have moved to France] tell us that we're really stupid, that we don't understand anything, etc. [. . .] A woman in her fifties [who moved to France], she goes shopping every weekend for 500 bucks. And she shows up like this. She laughs at us, she laughs at people like us who live here, who work here and who haven't moved. This kind of thing is badly perceived. (Woman, 35 years old, lifelong resident)

In other words, an outsider is anyone who does not participate in the local economy, regardless of their nationality. This is an important insight, given that an understanding of belonging on the basis of descent continues to colour these processes, as the following quotation demonstrates:

> If a French person settles here, it's much better [than if they only work in the valley]. It's like they arrive, they buy local, they are local. There's even a little kindness towards them, 'Ah, it's nice, they make the effort'. [. . .] We have a strong feeling of betrayal towards the Swiss person who moves to the other side [France]. We knew them, and they commit this act of betrayal. (Man, 28 years old, lifelong resident)

Hence, while international mobility is seen as economically necessary, it is also contested when mobile people are seen as not contributing economically to the place. At the same time, Swiss – who could be considered as 'naturally belonging' – become outsiders if they do not participate in the valley economically or if they settle on the other side of the border.

An 'imagined extended family': belongers and outsiders

The processes we have presented so far culminate in a final necessary element for the emergence of this community of fate – the view that Valley-ers belong to an 'imagined extended family', 'imagined' in Anderson's (1983) sense. Although the valley has almost 12,000 inhabitants, in Valley-ers' imaginary they form a large family:

> Everyone knows everyone! We go to school together. Then there are our little sisters, little brothers, or big sisters, big brothers. So already at school we all know each other. And we

> all go out together to the same village festivals. We all live according to the same calendar [i.e. everyone goes to the same local events]. (Woman, 30 years old, lifelong resident)

This quotation sheds lights on the dynamics of closure that go along with the imagined extended family that comprises the Valley-ers. Lifelong proximity with other Valley-ers creates barriers that are difficult for newcomers to overcome. For instance, a German woman who married a man from the valley said that she is a 'fake' Valley-er, while her husband, whose family is from the Val-de-Travers, is a 'real' one (Fieldnotes).

In the valley we find mechanisms similar to those described by Elias and Scotson (1965) in their discussion of established groups and outsiders. They pointed to the importance of old established groups when newcomers arrive, and demonstrated that established groups close ranks and reinforce internal cohesion to keep the newcomers at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In a group discussion, a woman said:

> I totally agree [with the assertion that you have to be born in the Val-de-Travers to be a real Valley-er]. I've always felt like an outsider, even after 30 years. [. . .] When I first got here, I'd hear people say, 'She's the French one'. (Woman, 65 years old, resident in the valley for 30 years)

Valley-ers employ the same means as those described by Elias and Scotson, but there are some distinguishing characteristics about the way they do so. The distinctive characteristic of being the 'periphery of the periphery' complicates the insider/outsider configuration considerably. How long one has lived in the valley and how deep one's roots there go matter considerably. But other elements are also significant. For example, those who are seen as not supporting local daily life economically and socially might indeed be considered outsiders, regardless of whether they are foreigners or Swiss, mobile or immobile. Similarly, Coquard (2019), who has studied declining rural areas in France, makes a similar observation. In marginalised and impoverished regions, sharing economic and social difficulties and membership in the same circle of acquaintances are decisive in determining inclusion and exclusion. Ethno-national origins are of secondary importance.

These processes of boundary closure not only determine who among the sedentary and inwardly mobile can be considered members of this community, but can also cause outward mobility by pushing people to leave. Not all inhabitants in the valley identify (primarily) with this imagined extended family. This is true of some people who did not choose to live there but are required to do so (e.g. asylum seekers, whose place of residence is determined randomly), and of some people who grew up there but identify with other social groups in other places. A young asylum seeker who has been living in the valley for three years emphasised that he rarely has contact with other people in the valley and wants to leave as soon as he can. Thus, simply living in the region for a few years is not enough to become a member of this imagined family. This is especially true for asylum seekers, who, in addition to being highly

stigmatised and racialised in Switzerland, are perceived as not contributing to the local economy. Moreover, some people, whether regarded as insiders or outsiders, want to leave in order to 'escape' social control. A young man in his twenties who grew up in the Val-de-Travers emphasised that he wants to move to Neuchâtel as soon as possible:

> There's a feeling of being one large family, but not everyone's like that. [. . .] When I go to Neuchâtel, it's peaceful. I do my groceries and I'm quiet [i.e. I don't have to talk to anyone]. Here, you have to say hello to everyone because you always meet people you know. It's a bit annoying because when you do something stupid, the next day you can almost read about it in the newspaper. You do something now and people will talk about it and spread it around. (Man, 22 years old, lifelong resident)

This young man is not alone in his sentiment: the flip side to the perception of solidarity and extended kinship is that young people, as many of them told us, find it impossible to be anonymous, and many wish to leave.

Conclusion

In this article, we have asked how sameness and difference are organised in terms of categorisations in a peripheral(ised) place subject to transnationalisation and local and international mobilities. We have investigated the Val-de-Travers through a mobility lens and brought to light the relevant categories mobilised in boundary work. We have shown that the imagined community of fate of the Valley-ers has emerged in the context of a relational, historical and situational process shaped by both mobilities and locality. Historically, the valley was transnationalised by the mobility of people, money and goods. More recently, internal mobility within the valley, facilitated by the development of public-transport and organisational infrastructure, has replaced the previous identification with specific villages with identification with the valley as a whole. Economic and symbolic marginalisation, an important facet of locality, reinforces this imagined community of fate. Another facet of locality, 'tradition' – here in the form of the formerly illegal and now industrial production of absinthe – also reinforces the boundaries of this community. Tourism, another form of mobility, helps strengthen this element of locality. Finally, cross-border (human and economic) mobilities are also essential to this community of fate.

We have demonstrated that (interrelated) dynamics of locality and (all forms of) mobility are as important as international mobility in defining insiders and outsiders in this valley. More importantly, we have shown that the current local understanding of membership and the boundary work are grounded more in local and socio-economic issues than in ethno-national origin. The social, symbolic, spatial and economic peripheralisation of the valley and the entanglement of 'new' and 'past' mobilities relegate ethno-national origins to a secondary place in membership representations. For instance, the valley has experienced transnational mobilities for several decades, and the ways in which they have been perceived have changed over time. While guest workers from Italy, Spain and Portugal who arrived after

the Second World War were strongly ethnicised and stigmatised by Swiss residents (Piguet 2017), these individuals might today be perceived as members of the imagined community of fate (notably due to their economic contribution). In other words, while other modes of identification exist – in some contexts, people refer to themselves as 'Swiss', 'Italian' or 'French' for example – categories related to the valley's political economy are more decisive in determining who is an insider or an outsider, and processes of differentiation vis-à-vis social and geographical 'centres' – the city of Neuchâtel in particular – also reinforce internal cohesion and solidarity.

Importantly, the boundaries of this imagined community of fate are not immovable, but instead contract and expand like an accordion depending on the issue being considered. When it comes to protecting jobs and the local economy, the group seems large and the closing of ranks is strong. The absinthe-based origin myth might matter most to older residents and those of the younger generation who exploit it economically. But belonging is also strongly influenced by family genealogy and how long one has lived in the region. If people contribute to the local economy, they may be considered members of the community of fate in some contexts, but they may still be considered 'fake' Valley-ers in others. The image of the accordion allows us to highlight the complexity and what Moerman (1965) called the 'nested' character of boundary work (see also Jenkins 2008): people identify with it differently depending on the economic, social, historical and political context.

Finally, our case study challenges the epistemological assumptions of mainstream integration or assimilation theory that continues to dominate migration studies: the emic category 'Valley-ers' is linked to neither nationality nor migration. As such, traditional migration studies, with its epistemology centred on nation-state and ethnicity and concomitant blindness to forms of mobility other than migration, is likely to overlook its importance. This study demonstrates that boundary work in the valley is not in the first instance based on nation-state categories such as nationality, and that the categories that do influence group formation can contribute to our understanding of mobility-related issues. In other words, processes of place-making and membership are contingent on the place in question: depending on how it is positioned in the global economy, different processes and categories may determine membership differently. As such, we make a plea for the inclusion of peripheral places in the theorisation of the organisation of social differences and concomitant processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Notes

1. This article was jointly written by the two authors. The first author conducted the ethnographic fieldwork, was the lead in writing the empirical parts of this paper and contributed to writing the theoretical and analytical discussion. The second author was the lead in writing the theoretical and conceptual discussion and contributed to writing the empirical parts.
2. The Val-de-Travers is thus both a 'place', as theoretically defined by Cresswell (2013), and a region, as geographically and politically delimited in the Canton of Neuchâtel. We privilege the notion of place

given its dynamic character, but we also use 'region' when presenting our case study, this term being regularly mentioned by our interlocutors.

3. The other regions of the canton have a population of 94,076 (Neuchâtel), 53,373 (La Chaux-de-Fonds) and 17,499 (Val-de-Ruz) (DEAS 2019).
4. The population fell from 13,953 in 1970 (OFS 1970) to 11,381 in 1980 (OFS 1980).
5. Today, some 20 per cent of the population living in the valley are not Swiss citizens. This is close to the percentage in the Canton of Neuchâtel as a whole, which is 25 per cent (DEAS 2019).
6. In Switzerland as a whole, the city of Neuchâtel is itself seen as rather peripheral.
7. Another large city in the canton.
8. Interestingly, the region's watchmaking history is rarely mobilised as a symbol of group identity in the Val-de-Travers. Although the economic importance of the industry is undeniable, the fact that it is not specific to the region and has been 'claimed' by other localities in the canton (such as La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle) diminishes its symbolic importance and prevents the Val-de-Travers from using it as 'cultural stuff'.
9. See also www.valaction-vdt.ch

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6. Regime of (im)moral mobilities

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6.1. Foreword to the article

This is the second article I have written. It stems from a reflection initiated in the context of a seminar of regional anthropology for master students at the University of Neuchâtel entitled "vivre la frontière" (in the sense of "living and experiencing the border"), in which I collaborated with Ellen Hertz. The starting point of my reflection was a sentence that I often heard in the Val-de-Travers: "Everyone complains about cross-border workers, but at the same time everyone shops in France". On this basis, I started to ask myself about the daily negotiations regarding cross-border mobilities. I presented the first version of this article at the 6th Annual Conference of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft (KWG) in Frankfurt (Oder), October 10, 2020, and at the Research Day on Justice in Migration and Mobility at the University of Neuchâtel, October 23, 2020.

6.2. (Im)moral Mobilities in a Swiss Borderland

Introduction

Val-de-Travers is a narrow valley between two mountainous ridges, barely 20 kilometers long and 3 kilometers wide, situated at the Swiss border with France. It is often presented as being "at the periphery of a peripheral canton [Neuchâtel]" (Kleiner 2020). In the words of many *Valley-ers* – the emic term used by my interlocutors and translated from the French word *Valloniers* –, entering Val-de-Travers means arriving in a "hole," on an "Indian reservation," in a "poor" and "isolated place," a vocabulary that thematizes the stereotypes of which they see themselves as victims. Some Valley-ers feel that they are marginalized by people and public authorities from the surrounding localities and that they have to fend for themselves (Mairy 2008).

Indeed, Val-de-Travers has experienced various economic crises, the closure of many local companies and shops, and a sharp population decline over the course of the twentieth century (Jelmini and Vaucher 2008). The municipal tax point per inhabitant of the three municipalities in the valley – a Swiss indicator to measure the economic resources (wealth and income) of the local population – is the lowest in the canton (DEAS 2018b). The social, economic, and geographical position of the valley, a form of "nested peripheralization" (Pfoser 2017), (re)produces an "imagined community of fate of the Valley-ers" (Charmillot and Dahinden 2021). Informed by this process of peripheralization, the current local dominant conception of membership in the imagined community appears to be mainly grounded in local and socioeconomic values, such as supporting the local economy.

In this context, the porosity of the nearby national border, reinforced by the Swiss–European Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP) in 2002, is seen as problematic by some local actors. Although cross-border mobilities are legal, they might be *immoralized* by some inhabitants who argue that they do not support local development and who perceive them as damaging to the economic and social well-being of the valley. The daily flow of people, money, and goods across the border – reinforced by economic differences between Switzerland and France – is contested by some long-term residents of the region who carry out their main economic activities there. According to a study conducted by a local newspaper, the price of a shopping cart of food in France is more than 30% cheaper than in Switzerland (Hofer 2018). In parallel, while the median monthly salary in Franche-Comté (the neighboring region in France) was around 1,800 euros in 2018 (Insee 2021), in the canton of Neuchâtel it was about 5,500 euros (DEAS 2018a).[1] Worried about harmful consequences for the Val-de-Travers – such as the loss of revenue and, presumably, its possible negative effect on social life – some people engage in practices and discourses that aim to limit, or at least deter, certain cross-border mobilities (human as well as non-human). These practices, discourses, and strategies produce and reproduce an informal system of classification and control that values and judges cross-border mobilities.[2]

On this basis, this research raises the following question: In a peripheralized region such as the Val-de-Travers, how and why does the presence of a specific border – in this case a national border separating spheres of income inequality – inform and result in dynamics of (morally) contested mobilities? To answer this question, I propose to delve into what I call "a regime of (im)moral mobilities." It is not a question of identifying the precise contours of this "regime," which cannot be "captured" as such. Rather, I aim to explore the everyday effects of this conflictual field of practices and negotiations between a variety of actors at different levels. In other words, I am interested in how cross-border mobilities impact a "local order" and how these mobilities are morally negotiated by Valley-ers. Rather than the legalities of who is entitled to enter or remain in Europe (Eule, Loher, and Wyss 2018), I am thus interested in how moral considerations, i.e. "conceptions of good and bad, just and unjust, acceptable and reprehensible" (Massé 2016), regulate these mobilities. In so doing, I contribute to border studies by offering an ethnographic insight into the informal, mundane, and thus often invisible practices that participate in the regulation of cross-border mobilities.

More specifically, through the analysis of the local deployment of the regime of (im)moral mobilities, I shed light on the interrelated social, economic, and symbolic consequences of cross-border dynamics.[3] Thereby, I aim to go beyond the dichotomy between border and boundary by combining these two perspectives (Fassin 2011; Fischer, Achermann, and Dahinden 2020). While borders refer to territorial limits defining political entities and legal subjects and to all related regulations – formal and informal – (re)produced by an unlimited number of actors (Fischer, Achermann, and Dahinden 2020), boundaries refer to the creation, maintenance, institutionalization, and contestation of social and symbolic differences (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Thus, I analyze the practices and discourses that morally exclude (or include) people engaged in cross-border mobilities (a form of *boundary-making practices*) and that morally "seal" the national border (a form of *bordering practices*). In other words, although the national border is legally porous, those who cross it to take advantage of it (e.g. to save money) are exposed to moral judgments. In this sense, the border is morally salient while it is legally rather discreet. Hence, exploring the deployment of the regime of (im)moral mobilities requires questioning the symbolic and social boundaries of local communities while putting them into perspective with the (non-)reinforcement of national borders. Specifically, I identify three layers of practice and discourse that demonstrate how the national border is related to and used in the production of other boundaries: localizing, evaluating and ostracizing practices.

In what follows, the first part of the article shows how cross-border dynamics have infiltrated the valley and how they permeate daily life. I then present my conceptualization of a regime of (im)moral mobilities, before briefly describing my methodology. In the second part, I explore everyday practices and discourses of long-term residents in order to illuminate the informal and mundane production and reproduction of borders and boundaries. Through a regime of (im)moral mobility perspective, this article reveals how cross-border mobilities are informally and morally negotiated and regulated by "ordinary

actors" whose everyday lives are embedded in and affected by broader economic and political configurations. In particular, it shows how dynamics of inclusion in and exclusion from a local moral community (Wuthnow 2018; Eckert 2020) are informed by individuals' cross-border practices and participation in the local economy, rather than ethno-national categories that have been the focus of many studies (critically see, e.g. Fox and Jones 2013).

Everyday Cross-border Dynamics in Val-de-Travers

In the daily life of the inhabitants of Val-de-Travers, the national border (with France) is omnipresent. It is not only a border checkpoint in the last village of the valley – rather it is experienced, contested, and performed on a daily basis by the people there. In line with recent conceptualizations in border studies (Wilson and Donnan 2012; Kolossov and Scott 2013; Agier 2016; Paasi et al. 2019; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019), I look at the border not as a line, but as a process ("doing or experiencing the border") and investigate how the border deterritorializes (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009) and inserts itself into a given space – in this case, the Val-de-Travers. The two border regions – the French and the Swiss – are connected and interdependent (Tissot and Daumas 2004; Maffre and Charbonneau 2011) yet they differ in economic and political terms (Crevoisier et al. 2006; Dubois and Rérat 2012; Rérat et al. 2012). These differences are the driving force behind a whole series of "entangled mobilities" (Kleist 2020) (Figure 1).

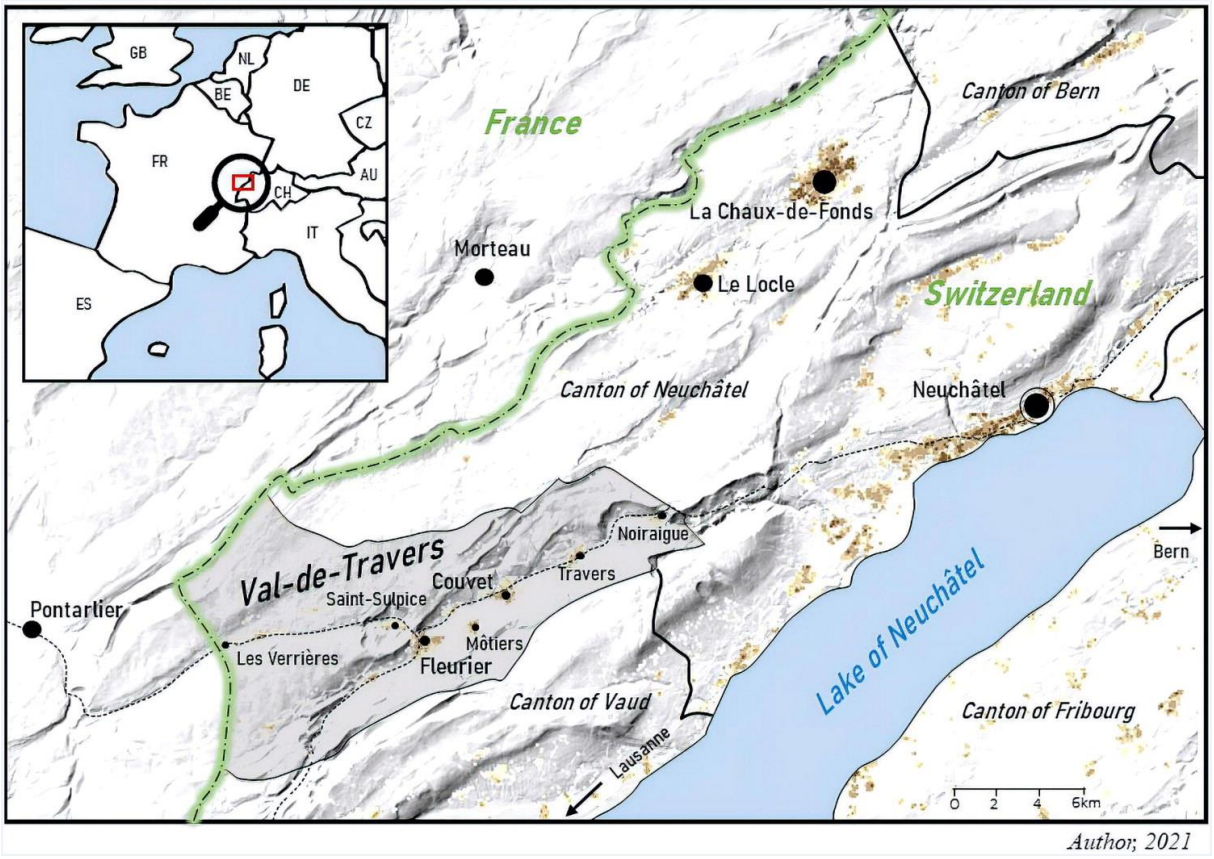

Figure 13: Map of Val-de-Travers

As an illustration, I will briefly describe mobilities related to the labor market. The higher salaries in Switzerland encourage some French people to cross the border every day to work in Val-de-Travers – around 1,300 according to the statistics of the canton of Neuchâtel (DEAS 2019). Thanks to the existence of this cheaper workforce in the French border region, companies from other Swiss cantons or other countries – particularly in the watchmaking sector; a historical economic activity in the region (Jelmini and Vaucher 2008) – have settled in Val-de-Travers. As a result, more and more people living in France are looking for a job on the Swiss side of the border. This has led people from more distant French regions (e.g. Paris or Brittany) to settle in the French Franche-Comté region.[4] As people working in Switzerland and living in France spend a large majority of their income in France, tensions emerge due to the loss of income and taxes, despite agreements between Switzerland and France on a rate of tax retrocession (currently 4.5% in the canton of Neuchâtel). In parallel, some people move from Switzerland to France to lower their rent but keep their job in Switzerland and maintain their Swiss income.

As this brief description demonstrates, the two regions are affected on a daily basis by the differences associated with the national border, and this drives a multitude of human and non-human mobilities. Some of these mobilities are perceived as problematic for the Val-de-Travers and are presented as a threat to the social and economic well-being of the valley. In the Val-de-Travers, the process of "region building" (Paasi 2014) informed by the national border is a long-standing phenomenon (Tissot and

Daumas 2004). Local contestations have continuously emerged, and long-term residents have questioned the "morality" of cross-border mobilities, recently facilitated by Swiss and European political processes. Currently, there is no legal barrier to a French national being employed in Switzerland and, despite some taxes on certain food products (e.g. meat or alcohol), shopping trips are allowed. Apart from some efforts to protect the local economy (e.g. by financially supporting "Val'Action," an organization of local entrepreneurs and shopkeepers), regional and cantonal authorities are only marginally involved in local contestations and rather engage in cross-border cooperation. It is therefore mainly the practices and discourses of "ordinary actors" that reveal the informal and mundane deployment of a local regime of (im)moral mobilities, partly induced by wider state-based migration and mobility regimes.

Theorizing an Informal Regime of (Im)moral Mobilities

Mobility practices and their (in)formal regulation take place in complex political, social, and economic systems (re)produced by a multitude of actors – public and private, individual and collective – operating across local, national, and transnational scales (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010; Rass and Wolff 2018). This complexity forms and is formed by regimes of mobilities that evolve over time, that are performed according to specific local contexts, and that materialize through various instruments of control (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Baker 2016; Fradejas-García and Mülli 2019). Following Glick Schiller and Salazar, I do not conceive of one regime of mobilities, but of an array of intersecting regimes of mobility with varying logics, principles, objectives, and rules that "normalise the movements of some travellers while criminalising and entrapping the ventures of others." (2013, 189).

To explore these dynamics, Hess and Kasparek (2017) introduce an "ethnographic border regime analysis" and propose to approach the border from the perspective of the autonomy of migration (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). They investigate how the forces of migration and mobilities "challenge and reshape the border every single day" (S. Hess and Kasparek 2017, 60). An ethnographic border regime analysis implies paying attention to the different levels and dimensions that constitute "the border," including not only regulations, institutions, and technical devices, but also moral beliefs and representations, discourses, actors, and practices (S. Hess and Kasparek 2017, 60).

Building on these authors, rather than adopting a nation-state perspective (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), I explore the daily, often banal, and unspectacular negotiation strategies of "ordinary actors" with regard to different mobilities. By taking Val-de-Travers as an everyday space and by analyzing the "small stories" (Brambilla 2015) of borderlanders, I reveal the specificities of the local dynamics around cross-border mobilities, namely, the everyday deployment of a regime of (im)moral mobilities. This emerges and spreads through social interactions in the physical and digital spaces, and is performed through informalities. Informalities are improvised, plural, and mundane elements that do

not follow standardized procedures; they express the "fumbling of an order still under construction" (Hibou 2015, 142) and can participate in the production and reproduction of borders and boundaries.

Therefore, this paper seeks to identify how and why ordinary actors in a peripheralized region engage in moral negotiations with regard to cross-border mobilities. Studying moral questions is nothing new in the humanities (Howell 1997; Lee and Smith 2004; Fassin 2013; Pellandini-Simányi 2014) and this paper does not aim to contribute to the long-standing philosophical debates concerning the nature of morality (Mattingly and Throop 2018). Following Hitlin and Vaisey, I define morality as "any way that individuals or social groups understand which behaviors are better than others, which goals are the most worthy, and what people should believe, feel, and do" (2013, 55). I thus explore ethnographically how ordinary actors produce a certain local morality that can engender dynamics of exclusion and inclusion. My focus is empirical rather than philosophical or semantic and I adopt an "inductive approach" that seeks to understand what people "regard as the most salient moral distinctions" (Hitlin and Vaisey 2013, 57). In other words, I suggest that while some mobilities might be morally accepted (e.g. studying abroad or traveling), others might be morally rejected (e.g. grocery shopping outside the place of residence or work) (see, e.g. Zhang 2019). I approach morality as the local norms and values concerning the economic and social survival of the imagined community. In turn, I explore the daily materialization of these objectives through different strategies, practices, and discourses at the individual and collective levels.

Ethnographic research on borderlands has largely documented the daily practices of cross-border mobilities (Balogh 2013), the processes of identity formation (and instrumentalization) in these places (de Fátima Amante 2010; Holt 2018; Danero Iglesias 2019), and the exchanges and cooperation between border regions (Prokkola 2019; Sharples 2020). However, few studies consider "ordinary borderlanders" (Strüver 2005; Rumford 2008, 2014) as actors (re)producing specific logics of border control in an "open border context," for example in a region where the European Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons applies. Hence, this article includes the role and perspective of hitherto neglected actors in the informal and mundane negotiations and regulations of cross-border mobilities, i.e. long-term residents.

Furthermore, contrary to research that focuses on cross-border mobilities to understand people's attitudes with regard to otherness and to illustrate the interrelation between border practices and feelings of (un)familiarity (Spierings and Van der Velde 2008; Klatt 2014; Szytniewski and Spierings 2014), this regime of (im)moral mobilities perspective focuses on the production of (in)visible boundaries that might concern all who benefit from the agreement on the free movement of persons in Europe (citizens or not) and who are included in or excluded from a moral community (Wuthnow 2018; Eckert 2020). Following Wuthnow, moral communities consist of "a sense of boundedness that separates insiders from outsiders, […] and everyday practices that verbally and behaviorally reinforce common norms about persons' obligations to themselves, their neighbors, and the community" (2018, 43). While I

acknowledge that the use of the term "community" runs the risk of essentializing social processes, as developed elsewhere (Charmillot and Dahinden 2021), I mobilize this notion to illustrate the situational emergence of a sense of membership to a collective. I argue that exploring the everyday negotiations of its (evolving) contours through a regime of (im)moral mobilities perspective can reveal collective dynamics that shape processes of inclusion and exclusion beyond ethno-national categories (Dahinden 2016) and enable further discussion of research on identities (Vila 2005) or "ordinary cosmopolitanism" (Agier 2016) in borderlands.

An Ethnographic Approach to the Regime of (Im)moral Mobilities

My ethnographic fieldwork was conducted over the period of 15 months. After carrying out expert interviews with local historians, geographers, and politicians, I went to the valley weekly to conduct observations in different public spaces, including cafés, museums, and parks, but also during specific events and activities, such as round tables, festivals, film screenings, and community events. I also had the opportunity to live in the valley for three months and volunteer (as a French teacher to beneficiaries of the Migration Service) with a local organization that I joined before my stay. In addition to many informal discussions, I conducted 30 semi-directive interviews with persons working or living in the region. The occupational fields of my interlocutors included hairdressing, real estate, local factories, food services, local businesses, and public administration. The interviews focused on people's life stories, their mobility practices, their experiences in the valley, and their professional activities. Most of my interlocutors also expressed their doubts, fears, and the problems they – and the valley – have encountered. In parallel, I also conducted observations on Facebook, as digital spaces have become "unavoidable" for social science researchers (Caliandro 2018). On websites and social media and in blogs people not only express opinions, but they also share information, structure networks of acquaintances, and exchange experiences. I was thus able to identify the tensions and contestations that emerged, particularly in relation to the proximity (and porosity) of the national border.

Acknowledging that not all Valley-ers participate in the (re)production of a regime of (im)moral mobilities, this paper focuses on a portion of the population in the valley, namely, those who – intentionally or not – strengthen the moral community. As emphasized above, these are mainly long-term residents, regardless of whether or not they were born in the valley. In contrast, some (mostly young) Valley-ers considering leaving the region seem to be less involved in the contestations of cross-border mobilities; or at least they do not appear threatened by the presence of cross-border commuters or by shopping trips in France, perhaps because they project themselves outside the valley.

Finally, this article focuses specifically on the Swiss side of the national border. While the French region certainly plays a role in the emergence of a regime of (im)moral mobilities, one should not forget that the valley's relationship with the rest of the canton and more broadly with Switzerland is also a critical factor (Charmillot and Dahinden 2021). Indeed, the effects of Neuchâtel's "marginality" in Switzerland,

and the Val-de-Travers' double marginality with respect to other Swiss cantons are a major tension that feeds into the cross-border dynamics at the heart of this paper. Thus, this paper investigates how border dynamics – such as cross-border mobilities – impact and order the daily life of a region situated at the "periphery of the periphery" within its own country. Specifically, it shows that the transnational border openness contrasts with a form of local and informal closure that deploys around the aforementioned regime of (im)moral mobilities.

Deployment of the Regime

The regime of (im)moral mobilities in the Val-de-Travers emerges through three layers of mundane and informal practices that draw the contours of the moral community. These three layers of practices – which seek to promote the development of the region and to prevent mobilities that contribute to its decline – take many forms (material or immaterial) and reify not only the border, but also other forms of boundaries, beyond a Swiss–French dichotomy.

Localizing

Localism has different definitions. There is the anthropological – or empirical – definition, understood as "a set of ideas about the significance of place" (Strathern 1984, 44). It refers to understanding how people represent the place in which they live and/or work. There is also what I call the doctrine of localism, understood as a movement "to buy local" (Hess 2008, 625), to make an economic (and social) contribution to the local community.[5] Furthermore, the political definition is summarized "as the view that policy is best when it operates at the level closest to the people it affects" (Parkinson 2007, 23). My understanding of localism integrates these different definitions. I demonstrate how discourses and practices situated in the Val-de-Travers value different forms of local contribution and how local actors contest certain policies. In other words, some Valley-ers seek to regain control over certain mobilities that are portrayed as damaging to local development. They emphasize the need to "localize" people and their practices to prevent the valley from declining further (Henguely 2015).

Pascal, a man in his sixties who grew up in the Val-de-Travers and who admits to being "nostalgic" for his childhood, shared with me his current and past experiences in the region. He argued that there were more social and collective activities in the past, that many shops, bars, and restaurants have disappeared, and that he would not want to be young now. He added "*we're a small, economically weak region"* and *"if we don't stick together, it's complicated."* Pascal is not the only one who worries about the Val-de-Travers; other inhabitants have shared similar concerns with me. This is also the case for Bertrand, a retired person I met in a restaurant in the region. We exchanged views on the increase in the number of French cross-border commuters. He told me that the problem is not the increase, but their practices: "*They don't buy local! They come with their sandwiches or eat at the company cafeteria and leave."* Bertrand claimed that in the past this was not the case: "*employees were from the region and*

kept the businesses going." This concern for the region, a loss of social and economic life, is leading to strategies to support local consumption and practices.

First, there are individual strategies. For example, although Stephanie, who runs a small grocery store in a village in the region, is aware that financially it is not easy to run a local business, she thinks it is essential to maintain an attractive local offer. She told me that she can do this thanks to her husband's income; the store alone is not enough to meet their needs. Aware that competition from France is damaging, she offers products that are not available on the other side of the border and tries to develop and maintain personal ties with her customers: "*People don't come here just to buy food; they are looking for social contact."* In the same vein, a couple from the region told me that they go to most local events in order to support them: "*Even if we are tired, if there is an event in a village in the valley, we will go. It helps to support them and keep them alive."*

In addition to these individual strategies, there are collective actions to defend the local materially and symbolically. The most striking example is the implementation of a local currency that can only be spent in the valley. This initiative is part of the Val'Action association, launched in 2016 in cooperation with the municipality. There is one note denomination ("20 Val") in circulation and the exchange rate is 1 Swiss franc (CHF) to 1 Val. The vast majority of the valley's shopkeepers are members of this association and therefore accept the Val. The aim of the initiators of this currency is to disseminate these notes as widely as possible to limit the export of revenue. One of them told me that the topography of the Val-de-Travers is favorable to "*making the money stay here."* The valley is "*a hole, not too big, where money can stay."* To some extent, this discourse sheds light on the fact that the spatiality of the valley – a so-called "hole" – is a "natural" given that facilitates the reinforcement of economic boundaries, and, in this case, of the national border. Having experimented with this currency, I have noticed that some shopkeepers are not yet used to seeing their customers paying in Val. One shopkeeper told me that I was only the second person to have handed her such a note. This currency still has an informal status in the sense that the main and official currency in circulation is the CHF. However, there are some initiatives to increase its distribution. For example, thanks to donations (public and private) it was possible for several months in 2020 to buy 20 Val for 18 CHF. As Hibou says, formalities are "successful" informalities; informalities that have been validated (2015, 146). The discourse of the members of the association promotes an institutional validation and they have the support of the municipality. However, there are many bureaucratic steps, and being recognized as an official currency might be an impossible dream.

Finally, these localizing practices take place not only in the physical space of the Val-de-Travers, but also in digital space. Different online groups exist, in which people exchange, discuss, and share content. In order to facilitate the exchange and transmission of information these groups bring together people who claim to "belong" to the Val-de-Travers. Local shopkeepers advertise their businesses, promote local consumption and the importance of keeping the shops in the valley alive, and seek to dissuade

people from buying in France. For example, a local Facebook page is presented as a means of "*sharing good addresses in the municipality in order to encourage local producers and independent businesses."* It is also often specified on such websites that advertisements for businesses outside the valley are not acceptable and will be removed from the webpage. In other words, only those who "add value to the imagined community" are included (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002, 128).

These localizing practices establish the basis for excluding actors who do not follow local and moral norms, or, in other words, who spend their income in France (or elsewhere), despite the efforts made to stimulate economic and social contributions locally. Importantly, localism in the Val-de-Travers is largely informed by the recent history of the valley: it evolved from an important watchmaking center in the early twentieth century to a peripheralized region, especially since the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s (Charmillot and Dahinden 2021). This evolution of the valley's position in the cantonal and national orders has generated a need to support the local economy, which is further threatened by some border dynamics. As observed by Wuthnow in his exploration of the moral fabric of what people consider to be right and good in rural America, "[i]t matters greatly […] if people perceive – correctly or incorrectly – that the communities upholding their way of life are in danger" (2018, 43).

In the following section, I unfold the (evaluating) discourses that identify and classify practices according to their (im)morality.

Evaluating

I am interested here in the creation of a "moral order that is fragmented and hierarchical" (Lézé 2006, 2) and which implies an unequal treatment of people with regard to cross-border dynamics. Similar to Zhang's exploration of the local contestations in response to Mainland Chinese day-tripping in Hong Kong border towns, I observe that "ordinary actors" question what is "the 'right' or 'appropriate' way of doing business" (2019, 161). The result of this process is not a clear distinction between moral people on the one hand and immoral people on the other, but rather an informal classification informed by individuals' socioeconomic backgrounds and positions in the local economy. Following Balsiger (2016), I identify the moral struggles in different situations and the justifications provided by different actors. In this section, after presenting the form that evaluating – or judging – discourses take, I analyze the "substance," i.e. the people and practices that are targeted.

To begin with, moral judgments are not often heard in the public space. Instead, they are a rather more diffuse form of control, a social pressure that is felt and internalized by some people, as Pascal mentioned: "*When we go buying in France, we don't really like to meet people from the valley because I wonder what they will think of us."* I observed a fear of gaining a bad reputation that emerges with practices deemed "immoral" by oneself, by others, or by what "one thinks others think." In the valley, there is a dispersed local structure of norms that is notably promoted and materialized through a multitude of logos and images that encourage local consumption. For instance, on store windows one

can regularly see the message "I live here, I buy here." In contrast, discourses are more directive on social media, as stated by Benjamin in a group discussion at a local organization:

> I just want to say something about the people who go buying in France. We've got Facebook groups for the Valley-ers, where we have to say that we're from the valley to be accepted. And if someone asks "Do you know when the Leclerc [a shop in France] is open? What time and on what days?" they get insulted! People say "in small villages little shops are closing; you have to go there or there, where it's such and such's son, or cousin … " They are getting burned! "Why are you going to do your shopping in France?"

Thus, there is a form of moral pressure to consume locally. However, these evaluating discourses and practices are more complex than the simple dichotomy of local consumption in the valley versus consumption in France.

Importantly, in the evaluating dynamics of (im)morality, economic resources (in terms of income and wealth) and professional position (in terms of social and professional status) of people who consume outside the valley play a central role. Damien, a young man in his thirties who has always lived in the region, defended with determination certain people who go buying in France and who have few economic resources:

> The family that has two or three kids, lots of taxes, school fees, they're lower middle class and even working class; they're going to end up with a limited budget, they have to feed themselves, they have to pay for everything, what are they going to do? By choosing cheap ingredients, it will cost four times less in Pontarlier than in Val-de-Travers. […] People are ideological when they can afford to be. Real people, they look with their wallets and we're all the same. You always look for the best deal, the cheapest stuff, and if you can afford to consume locally, you will. But, if you're stuck … I've been surviving on 2,000 CHF a month and at 2,000 CHF a month I wasn't wondering if it's a free-range chicken farm – no, I'm looking at how much it is a kilo. Everybody does it like that.

In contrast, people who are financially well-off and who consume in France are perceived differently. Stephanie told me that "*when people have the means to buy local and go to France, it makes me angry."* Furthermore, in addition to economic resources, socio-professional status also impacts moral expectations. Nathan, a young man employed in a local company and who has always lived in the valley, categorizes the shopping trips in France by people who work for the municipality as something "*very, very bad! They have a good salary paid by public money and therefore have to promote the region."* This vision is also reflected in a local (informal) newspaper – *Canarvallon* – published every year during the carnival celebration and which highlights all the anecdotes of the year in the valley:

> There's no need to prove it: some of our elected officials go shopping in France. Nothing forbidden of course, but ethically embarrassing since these people are paid (and even well

> paid …) by taxpayers' money. Because of their status as public figures, we are allowed to expect them to set an example for the population.

A form of moral stratification of the inhabitants thus emerges, or, in other words, an informal device of inclusion and exclusion informed by economic resources and socio-professional status: Shopping trips in France taken by economically disadvantaged people are tolerated but are stigmatized when people are financially well-off and especially when they work as civil servants or politicians. In addition to being accused of spending tax money outside the valley, people who occupy these two types of professional positions are "known," "visible," and under moral pressure to set an example to the population (due to their central function and role in the community). Furthermore, together with local shopkeepers, they represent actors who promote local consumption. If they go shopping outside the region, they run the risk of being regarded as hypocrites, as "*they would not practice what they preach."* Charles, who worked as a local politician, told me "*I morally restrained myself from shopping in France while in politics."* He then gave me the example of a former politician colleague who had hired a French company to do some personal work and he remembered that it was controversial in the valley.[6]

Interestingly, not all spending in France is evaluated in the same way. The construction of (im)morality also comprises non-human aspects (such as the characteristics, availability, or scarcity of the products or services). If a person buys a good in France or benefits from a service that is not available in the valley, then the practice is better perceived. The interviewees are aware of this situation and regularly justify their purchases in France by claiming that it is for specific products that cannot be found in the valley. For example, Isabelle, a local shopkeeper, said that she only goes to France for cheese and pâté that she cannot find in the valley. In a Facebook discussion, I read a tense exchange between two people: One of them wanted to go to the vet in France. The other person immediately and vehemently pointed out that it is possible to obtain this service in the Val-de-Travers.

These considerations suggest that engaging in cross-border mobilities is not incompatible with moralizing practices and discourses. For example, Isabelle finds it very damaging for the local economy that some people buy "everything" in France and complained about the fact that cross-border workers do not participate enough in the local economy, but she acknowledges buying some specific products in France. Therefore, some people might navigate between being moralized and being moralizing and thus engage in constant negotiations about what is "good" or "bad."

This set of (sometimes contradictory) practices and discourses leads some people to contest moralizing discourses and to question the legitimacy of those who perform them, which illustrates a constant negotiation of the regime and its local norms. Sarah, who grew up and works in the region, explained to me that there is a form of hypocrisy among some people who moralize. Their discourses, which value the local, are sometimes contradictory because "*everyone goes shopping in France"* and "*at the same*

time, people complain about cross-border workers who don't contribute in the Val-de-Travers." Interestingly, Sarah, who is in her thirties, explained that she is tired of these tensions and would consider moving out of the region one day. There are thus other voices in the valley that contradict and contest moralizing dynamics. The elements presented in this section inform moral judgments, but each individual may interpret them differently and construct their own classification system (to evaluate their own practices and those of others). As presented by Casas-Cortes et al. (2015, 69), "the border constitutes a site of constant encounter, tension, conflict and contestation" in which not all borderlanders are equally involved.

Ostracizing

In addition to localizing and evaluating practices, there is a higher layer of practices that aim to economically and socially ostracize people who do not participate in the local economy despite moral pressure. I speak of ostracism in the sense that those targeted are not physically or legally "kept away" but rather economically and socially "ignored" or "avoided" and, thus, excluded (Williams 2007). As Lee and Smith claim, morality can be seen as "practical action," which refers to "what people believe and what they do in pursuit of [it]" (2004, 2). Ostracism goes beyond discourses and symbols and might manifest in concrete and visible forms of exclusion from the moral community. In this section, I describe the two instruments mobilized by certain people who perform the regime: boycott and gossip.

First, there is an informal strategy that intentionally aims to exclude people who carry out an economic activity in the Val-de-Travers but whose practices are morally contested. This is the boycott, which I define as a refusal to buy a product or take part in an activity as a way of expressing strong disapproval. Two main immoralized practices can lead to a boycott: (1) subcontracting work in France, and (2) moving to France while continuing to run a business or enterprise in the valley. Nathan, who works for a small industrial company, shared with me the risks involved if his company subcontracts in France and explained that working locally might also be "*a strategy to attract new clients"*:

> Clearly, we can lose customers. […] [O]bviously, in our field, everything is cheaper on the other side of the border. Really everything. But, if we don't give the local businesses work, we get boycotted. We could subcontract some of our work in France. But if we do that, most of the painters, electricians – they just won't come to us anymore.

The financial attractiveness of France is also found in the real estate market: There are people who move and settle on the other side of the border and continue to work and maintain part of their social and working lives in the Val-de-Travers. Some scholars refer to this well-known practice as "sleeping abroad and working at home" (Balogh 2013; Lundén 2018). Stephanie gave me an example of a local shopkeeper who moved to France and still works in Switzerland. She sells products from this person and she confided to me that she has customers saying, "*ah you have goods from this person; but I won't*

take them because he lives in France." She added that "*everything is known and said here. That's why you have to be careful. The negative spreads much faster than the positive."*

There is thus a will not to consume products that generate money for people who engage in immoralized practices. In order for a boycott to be effective, it is necessary that its call is disseminated – this is what gossip does. It represents the second ostracizing instrument in the deployment of the regime of (im)moral mobilities and is, as demonstrated by Adkins (2017), a strong instrument of power. Michel, a former local entrepreneur, who not only subcontracted work in France but also moved there, explained to me that he had to close his business:

> I was accused, a few years ago, by a friend of mine. I subcontracted abroad. I do it because people want good prices. He accused me and then he wrote to all the local companies in the Val-de-Travers saying, "you should not work with Michel because he subcontracts everything abroad." I told him that I am a local company and I pay my taxes here. Where I have my products manufactured is my concern.

Thus, although Michel's practices are legal, they are illegitimate, and word of their immorality is spread around. As is the case with *illegalized* migrants (De Genova 2013), I argue that there is a form of "humiliation" of *immoralized* people. The latter can even be staged in the local newspaper, the *Canarvallon*. In the recent editions, there are portraits and drawings that caricature and stigmatize some of the cross-border mobilities of certain inhabitants. In this way, the newspaper reinforces the diffusion of gossip in a region that is presented, notably by Sarah, as a place where "*everyone knows each other and where everything is known."*

Through boycott and gossip, facilitated by the "smallness" of the valley, local actors hold (informal) instruments of exclusion from the moral community. In other words, I argue that the national border, despite its legal porosity, has a form of moral impermeability for those who export all or part of their revenue. Interestingly, however, Philippe, a cross-border commuter who has been working in the region for more than 20 years, contested the moral judgments he sees himself as a victim of – such as not consuming locally – and described what he calls the "cross-border culture":

> The Bretons, the Parisians, the people from Lille who settle at the Swiss border to work in Switzerland, they don't know Switzerland. They don't have the cross-border culture. They don't consume in Switzerland. It creates tensions. But it's not true to say that all cross-border workers don't consume in Switzerland. It's a rumor, because some cross-border workers consume here. What do they consume in Switzerland? Tourism, multimedia, petrol. Moreover, we see cross-border workers in Swiss supermarkets because there are products that we don't have in France. Yoghurts are very good – they are more expensive than in France, but they are very good. It is not every day that we go shopping in Switzerland but occasionally, yes. We eat meals in restaurants as well. But I'm talking

about the Francs-Comtois, those who come from the border region. We consume in Switzerland.

Philippe's statements illustrate the essentialization that cross-border workers experience, especially their alleged non-consumption in the valley. Philippe's discourse nuances this vision and opens new questions, such as the extent to which and how cross-border workers can integrate into the moral community without living in the Val-de-Travers. However, following Eribon's (2009) reasoning on negative stigmatizations, one may wonder whether in the Val-de-Travers any person who belongs to a (morally) inferiorized category (e.g. cross-border workers) might be held responsible for everything that another person belonging to the same category does (e.g. not consuming locally). In this case, the negative image that cross-border workers are currently subjected to in the valley seems difficult to transform.

Finally, ostracizing practices of the regime of (im)moral mobilities do not primarily rely on ethno-national origins. Rather, dynamics of ostracizing are based on respect for moral norms. Nathan emphasized this point in our discussion. He explained to me that if a French person settles in the valley, it is a "*good thing*" because he or she "*makes an effort to contribute locally*." On the other hand, a Swiss person who moves across the border and keeps part of his or her daily life in the valley might be seen "*as a traitor."* "Betrayal" is a strong word and represents an "ordinary kind of objectification" (Keane 2016, 182) of local morality. In the words of Keane, it is "naming," which "refers to the creation of verbally explicit categories and descriptions and their application to specific persons and actions" and where "an ethical judgment is being offered" (2016, 182). This betrayal of the "local moral order" can be committed by all actors who are under pressure to contribute locally. Therefore, within this framework, the portrait of "immoral" people is not primarily based on national affiliation, but rather on the combination of mobility practices and an individual's socioeconomic background and position in the local economy.

Moreover, even though in anthropology and sociology the creation of moral communities through gossip and "moralizing" practices is a constant (including online communities), in a "peripheralized" borderland such as the one under study, these practices and discourses are largely performed in relation to cross-border dynamics. Thus, cross-border mobilities that emerge from (and reinforce) national differences in political, economic, and social terms not only inform "people's assessment of otherness and the subsequent feelings of (un)familiarity" (Szytniewski and Spierings 2014, 347), but also shape local dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, beyond national affiliations.

Conclusion

In this article, I have ethnographically explored how and why the presence of a specific border – in this case a national border marking income disparity – informs and produces dynamics of morally contested mobilities (e.g. buying goods in France while living in Switzerland or working in Switzerland while

living in France). I have demonstrated the emergence and the deployment of a regime of (im)moral mobilities in the region. The resulting processes lead to symbolic, social, and economic dynamics of inclusion in and exclusion from a local moral community (Wuthnow 2018). Importantly, the evolving contours of the latter are formed and reinforced in a specific local context where the immorality of certain mobilities is constructed in relation to a process of peripheralization of the valley in the cantonal and national orders and where individuals' socioeconomic backgrounds and positions in the local economy matter significantly.

By adopting a regimes of mobility perspective (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013), I shed light on the informal and mundane moralizing discourses and practices with regard to cross-border mobilities. Such a perspective reveals the effects of cross-border mobilities on everyday life in the valley, for example dynamics of ostracization promoted through boycott and gossip. These "practical actions" of morality (Lee and Smith 2004) are indicative of local dynamics of bordering and boundary making induced by broader economic and political developments. Although social and economic impacts on moralized actors might be limited, there are direct effects on mobility practices. For instance, several people "morally" restrict themselves from shopping in France. In this sense, a regimes of mobility perspective demonstrates how different forms of social control aim at preserving moral economies and it invites us to look at the "small stories"(Brambilla 2015) of ordinary actors beyond governmental logics (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015).

This article reveals that the boundaries of a moral community are interrelated with cross-border dynamics and are continuously reinforced and negotiated through localizing, evaluating, and ostracizing practices. Although a "dominant morality" is shared by most of my interlocutors – preventing the place from declining further – the different practices and strategies to support the social and economic development of the valley are subject to local contestations (e.g. not all inhabitants engage similarly in localizing, evaluating, and ostracizing practices). Furthermore, this dominant local moral order (Lézé 2006) and the practices related to it are embedded in forces coming from all scales and may be different in the future – depending, for instance, on Switzerland's relationship with the European Union and on the evolution of economic differences between border regions. This underlines the socio-historical and local embeddedness of the regime.

Interestingly, with e-commerce (which generates financial mobilities) – accentuated not only by the increasing opportunities but also by the current health crisis – as well as the wider infiltration of large distribution chains in all regions of the world, moralizing practices against diversified forms of mobilities that are damaging to local economies might intensify. Therefore, to understand and reveal the diversity of reactions, boundaries, and contestations that develop as a result of "global hierarchies" (Jaskulowski 2020, 392), and in order not to obscure the participation of "ordinary actors" in the (re)production of border control, I call for more ethnographic research with a regime of (im)moral mobility perspective. Such an approach can contribute to border studies by providing a framework for

analyzing how different cross-border dynamics challenge borderlands on a daily basis and reveals complex processes of inclusion and exclusion beyond ethno-national categories. These dynamics are not reflected in the emergence of "border identities" (Vila 2005), but are negotiated on a daily basis by ordinary actors (citizens or not) embedded in specific place-making processes situated in time and space.

Therefore, a regime of (im)moral mobilities perspective provides a theoretical framework to combine a border and a boundary perspective (Fischer, Achermann, and Dahinden 2020). Indeed, exploring the practices and discourses (re)producing a regime of (im)moral mobilities – in Val-de-Travers or elsewhere – triggers an examination of the symbolic and social boundaries of local communities while putting them into perspective with the strengthening – or not – of (deterritorialized) national borders.

Notes

1. The significant wage difference between the Swiss and French regions must, however, be balanced. The higher health insurance and housing costs and the greater number of working hours in Switzerland put this wage difference into perspective.
2. Although some internal mobilities within Switzerland (e.g. moving to another canton) and virtual mobilities (e.g. buying online) can also be seen as morally problematic, they are less "visible" and less contested by my interlocutors. For example, in the face of young Valley-ers' out-mobility, my interlocutors show a willingness to improve local opportunities, yet the departures do not seem to be (overtly) criticized and stigmatized.
3. Exploring the deployment of a regime of (im)moral mobilities inevitably sheds light on specific social, economic, and political organizations situated in time and space. One can indeed imagine that in less peripheralized border regions than the Val-de-Travers – such as the Lake Geneva region – the inhabitants would consider cross-border mobilities and the border itself in a (slightly) different light, notably in terms of moral considerations.
4. Interestingly, this internal mobility within France causes tensions between "old" and "new" French borderlanders.
5. Although the doctrine of localism is often associated with ecological considerations, these aspects are of secondary importance here.
6. Interestingly, the population at the heart of moralizing and moralized practices is predominantly masculine (or at least it is the most visible population in the public and governmental spaces). In addition to the over-representation of men among cross-border workers (DEAS 2019), they are also over-represented in political institutions (100% of men in the municipal council and 71% in the local parliament) and in the local labor market (60% of full-time equivalent jobs are held by men) (DDTE 2020). Therefore, it might be assumed that this context is informed by, yet also partakes in, the gender dynamics that prevail in wider Swiss society (Fischer and Dahinden 2017).

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7. Experiences and representations of “difference”

Emmanuel Charmillot (under review). Experiencing and representing ‘difference’ in a peripheral valley, *Identities*

7.1. Foreword to the article

This is the third article written in the framework of my thesis. In this context, I wanted to focus on some population groups that I have heard a lot about; categorizations that I sought to explore by articulating them with the region’s lived and situated peripherality. My starting point was therefore to understand how the presence of people assigned to stigmatized categories – in this case, refugees, cross-border workers, and marginalized locals – is embedded in everyday experiences of cohabitation between people who live or work in the valley. I presented this article at the 4th edition of the Neuchâtel Graduate Conference at the University of Neuchâtel, 1 July 2021 and at the 9th Doctoral Seminar of the Centre of Migration Law (CDM) in Münchenwiler, 3 September 2021. This is a version of the article that was submitted to the journal *identities* on July 3, 2022. The article is currently under review.

7.2. Experiencing and representing categorisations of difference in a peripheral valley

Introduction

Since Barth's pioneering work in 1969, a multitude of authors have explored the 'social organisation of difference' in specific localities. While most of these studies have investigated processes of ethnic differentiation (Baumann 1996; Wessendorf 2013), others have proposed broadening the spectrum of analysis by working on additional markers of differentiation, such as race, religion, gender, class, duration of stay, and type of mobility (Dahinden 2013; Elias and Scotson 1994; Vertovec 2021). These studies reveal how social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2013) between groups are situationally constructed in everyday interactions informed by diverse political, social, and economic contexts.

However, these approaches, often mobilised in migration and ethnic studies, tend to be applied to cities (Berg and Sigona 2013; Guma 2019) or urban neighbourhoods (Wimmer 2013), leading several authors to protest the urban bias in this literature (Schmiz et al. 2020). 'Small' and 'peripheral' places seem to have been neglected despite their inclusion in processes of diversification and transnationalisation (Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018). Furthermore, a peripheral—or peripheralised (Wirth et al. 2016)—position in the regional, national, and global political economy should not be overlooked. Indeed, following Stacul (2003) and Banack (2021), this position may influence the way 'difference', understood as socially constructed categories (Vertovec 2021), is experienced and represented. Thus, peripheral localities may not only have particular 'spatial' characteristics, such as scattered housing, limited transportation, and restricted services (Woods 2018), but also be embedded in asymmetric power relations with surrounding 'centres' (Wirth et al. 2016).

Drawing on several months of ethnographic research conducted in Val-de-Travers, a valley of 12,000 inhabitants situated on the Swiss/French border, this article contributes to the literature on boundary work by exploring everyday experiences and representations of difference. It investigates how categorisations of difference are articulated with this region's lived and situated peripherality. Val-de-Travers is of interest in studying such dynamics, as the valley's geographical, political, economic, and demographic peripherality (on a national and cantonal scale) intertwines with the daily dynamics of its occupants' social categorisations. As presented elsewhere (Charmillot and Dahinden 2022), most inhabitants of Val-de-Travers—be they foreigners or Swiss—may be perceived as members of the local imagined community if seen as economically and socially supporting daily life. However, others are assigned to stigmatised categories (Tyler 2020). These others consist of refugees housed in centres or apartments in the valley; cross-border workers living in France and working in Switzerland; and '*Cas*

sociaux' ['social cases'][59] in serious social and economic precarity, who are often considered drug addicts dependent on social welfare. Although these categories are subject to stigmatisation at other scales—for example in social (England 2008), economic (Bolzman, Pigeron-Piroth, and Duchene-Lacroix 2021), or racial (Radford 2016) terms—in Val-de-Travers, their representations are inextricably linked with experiences and imaginaries of peripherality. Importantly, these social categorisations are not considered in this article as categories of analysis that are understood as experience-distant classifications used to explain social phenomena (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 4). Rather, such social categorisations are considered practice-based classifications that are developed and deployed in everyday life (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 4).

While acknowledging that other categorisations of difference exist in the valley, I focus on refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* to demonstrate the role of peripherality in long-term residents' representations and experiences of difference. I illustrate how the everyday uses of these categorisations of difference might intersect and serve common goals and interests. The aim of this article is therefore not to identify who is a member of a particular social group. The intent is rather to explore how these social categorisations, which result from intertwined and multiscalar dynamics of boundary-making and bordering, are experienced and represented in relation to the lived and situated peripherality of Val-de-Travers.

In doing so, this article reveals how long-term residents use their room for manoeuvre in employing institutionalised and 'powerfully sanctioned categories' (Brubaker 2004, 68) in their daily lives. Depending on moments and situations, refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* are variously perceived and categorised. The factors that influence such divergent representations include limited contact with a part of the population, (hyper)visibility in public spaces (roads, trains, parks) wherein different mobilities intersect, the meanings of 'visible cues' (Wimmer 2013, 65) of difference (skin colour, licence plates, physical appearance), and the political and symbolic negotiations of their presence 'on the periphery'. Importantly, the discourses and practices explored in this article reveal that those placed within such social categorisations are not systematically presented as 'outsiders'. Indeed, their presence can be reappropriated for self-identification processes related to a (peripheral) sense of place. As such, the peripherality of the valley is not always rejected by long-term residents but occasionally claimed as an attribute of an imagined community that the production of 'difference' can reinforce a feeling of belonging to.

This article accordingly explores everyday experiences and representations of difference and highlights the subtleties and ambivalences of the valley's cohabitation. Investigating such tensions allows nuancing

[59] '*Cas sociaux*' is an informal category used in French-speaking Switzerland to refer to (and 'stigmatise') marginalised persons in a precarious socio-economic situation. Although it comes close to the English term social outcasts (Wacquant 2008), I employ the French term in the remainder of the article to avoid confusion in exploring the uses of this category of practice.

stigmatisation processes and understanding their entanglement with representations and experiences of a peripheral local order. In short, I am interested in how the valley's long-term residents produce and adapt these social categorisations and how they use them to negotiate other boundaries, including those concerning the valley's lived and situated peripherality.

In what follows, I first operationalise the social organisation of difference framework to investigate a peripheral region. I then briefly present the context and process of data collection before delving into my analysis. I subsequently explore the diverse representations of difference that emerge in Val-de-Travers and examine their underlying meanings and origins. To approach shifting representations of the social categorisations of difference, I mobilise three categories of analysis—'familiar stranger', 'space invader', and 'peripheral figure'—each of which emphasises a respective dimension: time, space, and scale.

Articulating the social organisation of difference and peripherality

This study approaches the social organisation of difference in a specific place. Vertovec argues that 'each context or scale—nation, city or neighbourhood—will have its own historically produced social organisation of difference' according to three dimensions: configuration, representation, and encounter (2021, 1290). He formulated a framework for exploring how difference, understood as socially constructed categories, is experienced, (re)produced, and represented in everyday interactions, which are themselves situated in broader economic and political configurations.

Vertovec's framework draws extensively on the literature of boundary work—the creation, maintenance, and transformation of social and symbolic differentiations between groups (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2013). Within this body of work, several researchers have adopted a 'site-specific approach' (Fox and Jones 2013, 390)—applying to cities (Glick Schiller, Çaglar, and Guldbrandsen 2006), neighbourhoods (Wimmer 2013), or small towns (Dahinden 2013)—to explore the differentiating factors mobilised in the daily discourses and practices of various local actors. Based on these findings, scholars have recommended approaches that do not reproduce ethnicity (Fox and Jones 2013) and migration (Dahinden 2016) biases and instead advocated a reflexive use of nation-state-based categories (Dahinden, Fischer, and Menet 2021). These approaches acutely illuminate how difference is produced and experienced locally and how it is embedded in social, political, and economic contexts.

However, these studies on local group-differentiation dynamics are often conducted in urban areas or cities where multiple trajectories intersect, exposing different population groups to the views of others (Wessendorf 2013). Research has already disclosed how villages (Villa 2019) or small cities (Woods 2018) are also co-constructed through the entanglement of manifold (im)mobilities, relations, and imaginaries (Amin 2004). Nonetheless, research has not directly addressed how the socio-spatial

position in the national and global political economy intersects with local representations and experiences of difference in these places.

This article therefore seeks to articulate everyday representations of difference in the context of the experienced and imagined peripherality of Val-de-Travers. 'Peripherality' echoes the commonly and locally used notion invoked to define the region as situated geographically, economically, socially, and politically in an asymmetrical power relationship with dominant 'centres'—the city and canton of Neuchâtel (Jelmini, Vaucher, and Engelberts 2008). Val-de-Travers is classified as one of the four regions of this Swiss canton. It is the least populated—with only 7% of the canton's inhabitants—and constitutes three political municipalities and eleven villages. The valley was an important watchmaking and industrial centre at the beginning of the 20th century and had nearly 19,000 inhabitants. However, its population has declined in recent decades and currently stands at 12,000. Incomes are on average lower than the national average, and the valley struggles to attract new residents from surrounding localities. This context, which reinforces the importance of socio-economic markers in local boundary-making dynamics (Charmillot and Dahinden 2022), also influences local dynamics of 'stereotyping'—discourses that 'reduce, essentialise, naturalise and fix "difference"' (Hall 1997, 258). In Val-de-Travers, the presence of refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* is occasionally represented as a stereotypical illustration of the region's peripheralisation. This does not necessarily mean that these people are presented as 'outsiders' (Elias and Scotson 1994) but rather as emblematic figures of the periphery.

In Val-de-Travers, the notion of peripherality is also associated with a certain 'materiality'. In contrast to the neighbouring 'centre'—the city of Neuchâtel—the region is characterised by scattered housing, a limited transportation network, and a low population density in public spaces. These spatial layouts influence the moments and situations in which different groups are exposed to the view of others (Ulceluse, Bock, and Haartsen 2021). In certain public spaces in the valley, difference is materialised through 'visible cues' (Wimmer 2013), such as skin colour, licence plates, and physical appearance. As demonstrated by Licona and Maldonado (2014), the meanings of visibility and invisibility extend beyond mere presence or absence: they are often associated with different connotations and imaginaries. While the visibility of certain people is experienced as positive, the visibility of others can be negatively charged and reinforce various stigmas.

As such, articulating the social organisation of difference alongside the lived and imagined experiences of peripherality aids in demonstrating that the everyday dynamics of categorisations are not always obvious and political. Such dynamics are also 'subtle, implicit, and nested into the everyday web of interactions among individuals' (Wimmer 2013, 4). Building on this, this paper aims to nuance studies on insiders–outsiders relations (Elias and Scotson 1994) by demonstrating that this dichotomy is occasionally too hermetic to capture the complexity and fluidity of social relations and representations.

Instead, I address how the latter are situationally (re)produced, contested, and transformed (Rogers and Vertovec 1995) according to contexts, spatial settings, and individual and collective interests.

Specifically, this paper examines how the representations and experiences of social categorisations—refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux*—intersect with place-based representations and experiences. Exploring this articulation contributes to the literature on boundary work by illuminating how social categorisations of difference—and their associated boundaries—are used and reproduced to express the lived and situated peripherality of the place. In other words, this paper investigates how social categorisations of difference constitute significant resources for (other) processes of boundary-making situated in specific times, spaces, and scales.

Methodology

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2018 and 2021 in Val-de-Travers, where I lived in a village for three months in addition to my regular visits. In addition to undertaking observations in meeting places, such as parks, train stations, sport facilities, cafés, and bars, I also volunteered for a local organisation, teaching French twice a week to beneficiaries of various social services. This ethnographic data was complemented by 40 interviews with people occupying various positions in the valley. Most of the semi-structured interviews were conducted with long-term residents, with people working in social institutions (e.g., social workers), and with people active in the local public administration (politicians or civil servants). I also had the opportunity to conduct a focus group with refugees, complete three semi-structured interviews with cross-border workers, and participate in food distribution for people in conditions of socio-economic precarity.

These interviews and observations focused on different experiences of everyday life and on my interlocutors' varying mobility practices and trajectories. Furthermore, I collected and analysed public documents, local newspapers, minutes of public and political meetings, websites, and Facebook pages. I decided to primarily focus on long-term residents who neither identify as nor are assigned to the categories of refugees, cross-border workers, or *cas sociaux*. Of course, the contours of these social categorisations are far from clear; authors have demonstrated how 'people can and do shift between and across categories' (Crawley and Skleparis 2018, 59). One person I interviewed, for example, arrived through asylum in the 1990s and is currently employed in public administration. He no longer identifies as a refugee but as a long-term resident and a 'Valley-er'. The people I refer to have different characteristics regarding gender, professional activities, age, and national origins. This heterogeneity is useful not only in understanding the nuances of how the social categorisations of difference are employed but also in highlighting the dominant (and shared) discourses of the valley's long-term residents. Through this analysis, the perspectival nature of categories becomes evident: the process of categorisation is always derived from social position, historical perspective, and personal or collective interests (Gillespie, Howarth, and Cornish 2012).

Val-de-Travers: a journey through the valley

Between two mountain ridges, Val-de-Travers is relatively flat and is threaded by a main road that serves the valley's principal villages. Arriving from the neighbouring city of Neuchâtel, the elongated village of Travers appears, closed asphalt mines at one end. This site had been exploited for 274 years and not only exported asphalt to London, Paris, or New York but also attracted foreign workers from Italy, France, and Spain. A few hundred metres away lies the current industrial zone of the village of Couvet, dominated by an American pharmaceutical company and a large Swiss watch company. Further on, at the entrance to the village, a huge, abandoned factory appears. This building reaches as far as Couvet train station, close to where a refugee centre is located. Continuing through the valley, one might notice railway lines running adjacent to the main road that are widely used by commuters, students, but also the refugees who travel daily to the various villages or Neuchâtel. The train sets the rhythm of these flows and, once or twice an hour, several people and pupils appear, who then disperse into the streets. In Fleurier, the most populated village, there are several cafés and a shopping street where the stores and restaurants are Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Swiss, but also Thai or Algerian. Next to the train station, there is a public garden where some people, known locally as *cas sociaux*, meet and drink together. From Fleurier, the road rises through two small, rather agricultural villages, to eventually cross the border to Pontarlier, a French town of 17,000 inhabitants. A large proportion of this town's inhabitants are French cross-border workers, many of whom drive daily to Val-de-Travers.

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As trivial as they may seem, these past and present mobilities matter: they have made the valley socially diverse. People of diverse ethno-national origins have lived there for decades (Jelmini, Vaucher, and Engelberts 2008) and have participated in shaping the contours of an imagined community of Valley-ers (Charmillot and Dahinden 2022). A feeling of belonging to this collective is also reinforced by an (experienced or imagined) interconnectedness between the inhabitants. This web is consolidated by the small population and the substantial number of organisations, particularly those concerning sport and culture, that link the region's population (Kaeslin 2013). This journey through the valley also reveals a particular spatial order in which refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* are embedded.

Limited contact and long-term cohabitation: familiar strangers

Refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* are part of the valley's local order: they represent people who have been living or working there for many years and those one might encounter in public spaces (e.g., refugees on the train, French cross-border workers on the road, and *cas sociaux* in the public garden). These social categorisations represent both social difference and geographical proximity.

In recent years, the Val-de-Travers region had two cantonal centres for refugees, each with a capacity of 80 places, but one closed in 2005 after a decline in asylum applications in Switzerland. After a certain

amount of time spent in cantonal centres, refugees are transferred to apartments in different localities in the canton. In 2017, only the village of Couvet had housing for refugees and hosted 27 people. Currently, Eritrea, Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Sri Lanka are the principal countries of origin for asylum-seekers in Switzerland. As in other European countries, the issue of asylum has polarised public opinion since the 1980s, and the rhetoric of 'fighting the abuse' of asylum laws has become a dominant framework of public debate (Leyvraz et al. 2020, 9). These discourses are associated with a 'racialisation' (Michel 2015) of refugees, itself reinforced by a 'securitisation' (Wilopo and Häberlein 2022, 84) of migration policy in which public discourse portrays refugees as a threat to the security of the country and its citizens (Maire 2020, 97).

The number of French cross-border workers in the Val-de-Travers economy has increased considerably since 2000. After the Swiss–European Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons came into force in 2002, the share of cross-border workers rose from 9.5% in 2005 to 23% in 2020,[60] and they currently number approximately 1,300 in the valley (DEAS 2021). The category of *frontalier* [French term for cross-border worker] is difficult to determine. It is a simplifying term, often poorly defined in everyday language (Bolzman, Pigeron-Piroth, and Duchene-Lacroix 2021, 10), that may refer to a cross-border work permit (the G permit) or simply to people who regularly cross a border (Bolzman, Pigeron-Piroth, and Duchene-Lacroix 2021, 10). For the purposes of this article, the category of *frontalier*, as used by my interlocutors, refers to (presumed)[61] French people, living in France, who work in Switzerland. These mobility practices are largely explained by economic differences between Switzerland and France (significantly higher salaries in Switzerland, lower cost of living in France). This category is increasingly present in public discourse due to the *frontalier*'s growing number, the politicisation of the issue, and their importance to the Swiss economy. In the canton of Neuchâtel, 48.5% of cross-border workers work in manufacturing industries, principally watchmaking (Pigeron-Piroth 2021, 131).

The percentage of people on social assistance was 7.2% in 2020, and the region's social assistance service had approximately 750 recipients. Importantly, certain inhabitants occasionally conflate drug addicts, people on social assistance, and others who do not depend on social services but who have behaviours which are locally considered 'inappropriate', 'deviant', or 'marginal'. These are the individuals to whom I refer with the (permeable) category of *cas sociaux*. This category, which a recent documentary presented as highly stigmatised (Bakhti and Jeannet 2014), is employed with much caution in media and political discourse but occupies an important place in everyday life. It is used to designate, under the same umbrella, people or groups who are confronted with complex and persistent social problems and who disrupt dominant norms regarding physical appearance, the use of public space, the (absence of) professional activity, and the consumption of intoxicants.

[60] In 2020, this percentage was 13% for the city of Neuchâtel and 6.7% for Switzerland as a whole.
[61] 'Presumed', because the nationality of the persons concerned is often unknown but inferred, particularly from French licence plates.

These categories of difference thereby seem to correspond to what different authors have called 'familiar strangers' (Paulos and Goodman 2004): Valley-ers recognise that refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* live or work in the valley, but encounters tend to be fleeting, although they may happen repeatedly over time. The fluidity of the relationships and the weakness of social ties with other long-term Valley-ers may be explained by various factors: the scattered nature of housing, mobility practices (cross-border workers live in France and work in Switzerland, refugees have not chosen to live in Val-de-Travers and spend a large part of their time outside the valley), legal and economic situations that restrict access to public goods and services, or various forms of (stigmatised) precarity.

However, the degree of familiarity with these social categorisations varies significantly among the valley's inhabitants, and notably so regarding refugee centre or social services employees and people who meet cross-border workers at their workplace. Furthermore, several associations—often composed of retired volunteers—have established various activities, occasionally with the support of the municipality, such as monthly meals cooked by 'migrants', food distribution for disadvantaged people, and arrival kits to encourage cross-border workers to shop locally. These activities may be somewhat 'stigmatising' and might even reinforce group boundaries, yet they also provide daily support (e.g., food distribution) and represent attempts to encourage plural experiences of cohabitation.

For people who do not encounter refugees, cross-border workers, or *cas sociaux* in their private lives or through voluntary or professional activities, contact occurs primarily in mobility: on the train, on the road, or when crossing the public garden. In these spatial settings where 'difference' becomes 'salient', the representation of what Puwar (2004) refers to as 'space invaders' emerges, which I explore in the subsequent section.

(Im)mobilities and visibility: space invaders

The spatial settings I explore in this section are understood as nodes or entanglements of varying circulations that expose different people to the view of others. My interlocutors referred to 'visible cues' (Wimmer 2013, 65) in these 'contact zones' (Lawson and Elwood 2014) that facilitate the categorisation of people. These visible cues, such as skin colour, French licence plates, and physical appearance, contribute to the crystallisation of differences and can act as semantic barriers hindering or preventing dialogue between groups (Gillespie, Kadianaki, and O'Sullivan-Lago 2012). People who carry these visible cues—which can only be hidden at great cost (Wimmer 2013, 65)—expose themselves unwittingly and unconsciously to being perceived as 'invaders'. Of course, these cues are situational and hold slightly different meanings and imaginaries in other places, such as urban areas.

The visible markers that refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* carry immediately activate an imaginary of suspicion that can be mobilised 'in the logics of sidelining repulsive profiles' (Coquard 2019, 105, my translation). This can contribute to an illusion of unity through the creation of symbolic others in contradistinction to such adoptive identifications as, for example, white, Swiss, or taxpayer

(Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002). To illustrate this, I explore various discourses encountered in relation to roads, trains, and the public garden.

As described above, the whole valley is threaded by a main road which connects it with the French town of Pontarlier. The large amount of traffic at rush hour annoys some inhabitants. The car is the most common means of transport for French cross-border commuters, and their 'trips' do not go unnoticed in the region: identified by their licence plates, they are blamed for the traffic. Philippe, a man from France who has been working in the valley for almost 20 years, shared his experience:

> When I get into the car with French licence plates, people sometimes honk their horns and some even give me the finger. People cut me off; they make us understand that we are not welcome.

Nathan, a young man from the valley, confirmed a certain irritation: 'Cross-border commuters on the roads are annoying. Every morning you see the column of cars and it's not pleasant.' Some inhabitants present themselves as 'powerless witnesses' of this flight of income to France—powerless in the sense that local actors have little leeway to change migration policies and company recruitment processes.

Jérémie told me that 'except on the roads, you can't really know who is and who is not a cross-border worker.' According to him, these people would be rather invisible 'outside their cars' because they speak French and are 'white'. The licence plates therefore take on an important symbolic role; they are often the only element that allows identifying cross-border workers, and they 'represent' the flight of income to France. Without this visible sign, cross-border workers disappear into local companies or 'merge' into the population. They are therefore mediators of 'powerful temporal imaginaries' (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012, 65) that depict cross-border workers as 'profiteers of Swiss income to live on the other side of the border' (Richard, 75-year-old man). This representation is stereotypical, but it also reveals the sincere concerns of some Valley-ers concerning the local economy (Charmillot 2021).

Trains and stations are also often presented as contact zones where different population groups are exposed to each other. In Couvet, the refugee centre the cantonal authorities operate is located next to the station, and residents benefit from a public transport pass for the whole canton. Thus, the refugees, who often travel to Neuchâtel for administrative, medical, or private reasons, move predominantly by public transport. For refugees, skin colour seems to act as the dominant visible cue categorising them (in this case, as refugees). Several local commuters and students told me they had 'met black people from the centre' during their journey from Neuchâtel to Val-de-Travers. While several people related 'positive experiences', such as Céline, who told me that she often 'enjoyed talking to people from West Africa because [her] son-in-law is Cameroonian', others shared with me 'problematic encounters.' Sarah, a woman in her 30s who grew up in the region, told me that she had been bothered several times by refugees on the train. Sarah said that she is not opposed to the presence of refugees in Val-de-Travers, but it was not always 'pleasant' on the train.

Although experiences are diverse, the arrival of refugees on the train seems to 'disrupt' the mobility experiences of Valley-ers. In a space historically dominated by white people—the train line running through Val-de-Travers is over 150 years old—the arrival of 'non-white' people does not go unnoticed. They are promptly identified by other users, and the colour of their skin, as with the licence plates of cross-border workers, gives rise to various powerful imaginaries and stereotypes (Hall 1997). In this case, the visible signs do not refer to economic considerations but become the symbol of 'danger that triggers fears' (Leitner 2012, 838). The racialisation of refugees in Val-de-Travers seems to be based primarily on 'security' aspects, as illustrated by Julie, a 30-year-old woman who grew up in the region:

> I have seen some refugees when I take the train—it's true that it's not reassuring and often they don't speak French. Sometimes they called to me to ask me a question. It happened sometimes on the last train, at 11:30 pm, and I got suspicious, especially when I don't understand the question. And well, often it was nothing. But in Val-de-Travers, on the last train, there is nobody and often no controllers.

Julie's experience on the train with refugees seems to reinforce their 'otherness': they don't speak French and some of them travel at late hours, which might raise 'suspicion' and feelings of 'unpredictability' concerning their practices. However, not only refugees can be the target of stigmatising discourses on the train. *Cas sociaux* on public transport are also recognised by visible cues—in this case physical appearance (the most frequently invoked elements being tattoos, the company of dogs, and alcohol consumption)—that carry strong connotations. Sarah continued her discourse by also mentioning them:

> In Couvet, there are a lot of people who are dependent on social services; they are very recognisable because I always take the train, and they also take it to go to Fleurier to get their welfare payments in the centre, and then we feel a little sorry for them. They stick together. They are always drunk.

Some Valley-ers told me that there is an 'over-representation' of unpleasant encounters. Deni, a man in his 30s working for the municipal authorities, admitted that 'most of the time there is no problem' and that these people 'stick together' without necessarily disturbing other passengers. Nevertheless, this does not prevent visible cues from producing powerful stigmatising imaginaries, as illustrated in the following exchange with Sophie, a 40-year-old woman who has lived in the valley all her life:

> Sophie: In the valley, people always say that the Couvet train station or the public garden are nasty places. You shouldn't go there.
>
> Emmanuel: And do you know these people who hang out in these public spaces?
>
> Sophie: ...Mmh, no, they're not people I know. I have the impression that some of them are not from here. Then there are a few well-known guys. We've seen them for a long time, people with tattoos that we recognise. There are figures who become part of the valley.

Her discourse is interesting because it reveals a certain ambivalence: on the one hand these people are repulsive, identified through their tattoos, and portrayed as space invaders; on the other hand, they become 'part of the valley' and considered familiar strangers increasing an 'environment's readability, predictability, and familiarity' (Felder 2020, 687). As mentioned by Sophie, *cas sociaux* are also associated with the public garden in Fleurier. In this park, with its benches and a playground for families, people meet when the weather is pleasant. As this place is close to an institution that supports drug addicts, part of this population tends to use the park. Several interlocutors, including Julien, complained of their presence and expressed it a as form of 'invasion':

> Basically, it's a garden for children in the village. I used to go there when I was young. And now it's a place where some people drink and turn the music up. The municipality can't do anything, nor can the police, because they don't hurt anyone. So, they leave them alone. I come by every day; they are always already there. Anyway, it's disturbing.

According to Julien, the presence (and visibility) of these people is disturbing because they transform the quiet order of the garden into a place of 'noisy depravity.' Various inhabitants made complaints to the commune to prompt the latter to take measures to avoid possible 'incivilities.' A member of the communal council responded as follows:

> Yes, these people drink and smoke; yes, they loiter and hang out; yes, they sometimes have dogs, tattoos, and are hirsute; yes, the taxpayer can object to them idling while they get up every morning to work. The reality is that the public gardens in our commune are not unsafe. It is rather that part of our population feels insecure about these 'marginalised people.' (Minutes of the General Council, 22.6.2018)

The municipal councillor moderates the nuisance but admits a form of 'non-conformity' with the 'place-ballet' (Buttimer and Seamon 1980)—in this case, getting up in the morning to go to work. Because of their deviant behaviour, *cas sociaux* appear 'clumsy' and 'out of place' (Cresswell 2014, 64). Viviane, a retired woman who has been in the region for almost 40 years told me that those who hang out on the benches in the public garden are associated with social services and represent individuals 'who live off grid.' The garden's benches seem to embody a space with an imaginary Tyler calls 'the abject figure of the welfare scrounger' (2020, 190).

From this section, it emerges that the road, the train, and the public garden represent places where stereotyping dynamics occur. When 'difference becomes salient' through visible cues, refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* appear as space invaders. In accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically, and conceptually), they are situationally circumscribed as 'out of place' (Puwar 2004, 8). In Val-de-Travers, security issues (for refugees), non-contribution to the local economy (for cross-border workers), and inappropriate behaviour in public space (for *cas sociaux*) are the main dimensions that feed into the dynamics of stereotyping.

The concept of 'space invaders' encompasses a range of representations that elicit a variety of 'responses to stigmatisation' (Lamont, Welburn, and Fleming 2012) from those assigned to social categorisations of difference. An individual who has experienced such stigmatisation is Pierre, a man in his 50s who frequently visited the garden and was labelled a *cas social*. To alter the negative representation of the garden's users, he organised regular clean-ups and encouraged other users to participate. However, the response was not as expected, leading to internal tension, and Pierre eventually ceased visiting the garden. Pierre said that people often judge others based on appearances, stating:

> People avoid us and judge us. They assume we drink beer and do nothing all day. They are afraid of us. I'm a teddy bear. But people are afraid of me! They don't know me. And once they do, they say, 'Oh yeah, you're not bad.' I'm not violent.

His response to stigmatisation points to a fundamental dimension of stigma: 'ignorance' (Fleming, Lamont, and Welburn 2012). People who lack knowledge or understanding regarding a particular category may rely on limited information or assumptions to form opinions, perpetuating harmful stereotypes or myths. Interestingly, similar discourses to combat stigmatisation are also espoused by certain cross-border workers. Arthur, a 35-year-old male who works in the health sector in Val-de-Travers, questions the stereotype that 'cross-border commuters steal work from the Swiss', arguing that 'if tomorrow all cross-border commuters stopped going to work, there would be many factories in great difficulty' and adds that 'it's better to come to Switzerland to work than to take advantage of social assistance.' In this case, he seems to pass the stigma on to another category of people: the recipients of social benefits.

Regarding the refugees I met, while they did not engage in counter-stigmatising discourse, they told me they have vanishingly few social ties in the valley and have no intention of settling there in the long term. It is conceivable that their weak identification with Val-de-Travers stems from their projection outside the valley and their mobility, which might also be an indirect response to stigmatisation.

Geographical and political positioning of the valley: peripheral figures

Interestingly, the 'difference' of refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* also becomes salient in other situations: their presence is sometimes mobilised in Valley-ers' discourses to illustrate the 'peripherality' of the place. In this case, stereotyping dynamics transpire at a wider scale relating no longer to the valley's internal relations but rather to its geographical and political positioning. As such, I argue in the following that these three categorisations are mobilised as 'peripheral figures': they are represented as emblematic of a certain form of peripherality and act as 'common reference points' (Felder 2020, 689). This (re)production of peripheral figures is rooted in geographical and political dimensions.

First, the valley is located on the periphery of the canton of Neuchâtel and on the border with France. This situation is an explanatory factor behind the presence of these population groups, which is often mentioned in my interlocutors' discourses. Cross-border workers are over-represented in border regions for obvious reasons of geographical proximity. The peripherality of Val-de-Travers is also said to have an impact on the real estate market.[62] Some Valley-ers claim that it attracts people from other Swiss regions with socio-economic difficulties, as evidenced in Coralie's discourse: 'In social services, there are people who come to look for a flat in Val-de-Travers because they are much easier to find at highly affordable prices. You can find things for 300 Swiss francs.' In this discourse, what has been described as 'social tourism' emerges (i.e., moving to peripheral places to receive social assistance and benefit from a lower cost of living). While this mobility is hardly statistically supported (Tabin 2004; Ferwerda, Marbach, and Hangartner 2023), it is nevertheless widespread in local discourses and reinforces symbolic boundaries towards people who would come to 'take advantage' of the periphery, in this case economically. Concerning the presence of refugees, the location of Val-de-Travers also plays a role. As demonstrated by others, it is common practice in Switzerland to place centres for refugees in remote regions (Stünzi 2018), such as Val-de-Travers. There are various political reasons for this dispersal of asylum accommodation, but it can also be explained by the availability of financially attractive infrastructure.

Second, the political positioning of the valley also plays a role in the (re)production of refugees, cross-border commuters, and *cas sociaux* as peripheral figures. Charles (a former member of the municipal council) told me that, while Val-de-Travers is increasingly recognised within the canton of Neuchâtel, some Valley-ers use the presence (and visibility) of refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* to claim political marginalisation within the canton of Neuchâtel. Julie, for instance, claims that the cantonal authorities 'put everything in the valley' when she refers to the refugee centre and a centre for drug addicts. Bernard, a retired man I met in a café in the valley, believes that Val-de-Travers is the canton's 'trash can': 'All the people who are on social assistance and who Neuchâtel does not want are sent here; the housing is cheap, and the supply is more abundant.' Obviously, not all residents engage in discourses contesting political processes. Arianne, a retired volunteer committed to helping refugees, displays a certain distance from discourses opposing cantonal authorities. She told me that she does not share the view of Valley-ers that 'resist' the outside world and represent, according to her, a 'loud' minority.

However, contesting the stigmatising use of categorisations of difference does not mean that they are not employed to define the peripherality of the valley. Liliane told me about the network of solidarity that exists in the valley and the quality of the support for refugees and people with socio-economic difficulties. She made the comparison with the neighbouring city, Neuchâtel, where the network is more

[62] In 2018, the average monthly rent for vacant three-room apartments was 796 Swiss francs in Val-de-Travers, whereas the Neuchâtel region was 1,212 Swiss francs (DEAS 2018).

fragmented, and people are more left to their own devices. In these discourses, the (in)formal support system is highlighted as a place-based characteristic. This is reversal of the stigma with the neighbouring cities, which are reportedly characterised by a lower degree of solidarity.

Sarah told me that 'the valley would not be the valley without the cross-border workers, the *cas sociaux* and the refugees.' Her discourse highlights the importance of these categories in discursive practices that contribute to the sense of belonging to an imagined community. They are 'symbols' of both the valley and its peripherality and, in this sense, play an important role in self-identification processes.

Some people also put forward the expression 'cross-border culture', referring to the fact that people in the valley have learned to live and experience the border and the mobilities associated with it. The (familiarity with the) categorisation of cross-border workers embodying these mobilities is a resource to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a collective.

The uses of social categorisations of difference that reproduce 'peripheral figures' are diverse. However, all are important in producing a peripheral sense of place regarding the canton of Neuchâtel, whether by formulating political claims towards cantonal authorities or practicing a solidarity presumed superior to that in cities. Thus, the inhabitants do not seem to contest the peripherality of Val-de-Travers and represent the category of 'Valley-er' as signifying a peripherality distinct from Neuchâtel's 'city dwellers'. The daily cohabitation between different social categorisations therefore forms a fragile and unstable assemblage of different representations.

Conclusion

This article has investigated how the lived and situated peripherality of Val-de-Travers articulates with experiences and representations of difference and its associated social categories. It particularly explored how social categorisations of difference such as refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* are experienced and represented in everyday life in relation to the valley's peripherality. This analysis offers an ethnographic insight into the complexity and fluidity of representations associated with social categorisations of difference circulating in everyday life. Three notable dimensions seem to emerge from the investigation and might explain this constant and simultaneous shifting of the uses of social categorisations: time, space, and scale.

The temporal dimension is emphasised by the representation of 'familiar strangers'. While refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux* have been present in the valley for many years, encounters tend to be brief, although they may occur repeatedly over time. Thus, a persistent geographical proximity exists alongside a social distance.

The spatial dimension is emphasised by the representation of space invaders. Public spaces connected to local and national imaginaries of belonging and behaviour become contact zones (i.e., places in which different mobilities intersect and where 'difference' becomes salient through visible situational cues).

Visible cues act as powerful vectors of essentialising difference and facilitate the dissemination (and banalisation) of stigmatising discourses.

Finally, the dimension of scale is emphasised by the representation of 'peripheral figures'. The presence of these population groups is mobilised as a symbol of 'peripherality'. In geographical terms, cross-border workers are over-represented in border regions, refugees are placed in outlying areas, and the presence of *cas sociaux* is said to be linked to the periphery's cheaper living costs. In political terms, these population groups' presence can be informally used to demonstrate the valley's political marginalisation. Importantly, the representations of difference in Val-de-Travers are also positively appropriated at times to define what it means to be 'Valley-ers', an emic category also constructed as 'peripheral'.

Thus, by exploring the social organisation of difference in a peripheral region, this article has illustrated the importance of investigating places other than cities or urban neighbourhoods. It argued that diversifying the places under analysis permits a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between the circulation and production of social categorisations (at local, national, and transnational scales). The fluidity of everyday cohabitation experiences in particular places cannot be simply divided into those of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Elias and Scotson 1994). Instead, a plurality of representations of difference emerges, leading certain social categories to be occasionally stigmatised while being embraced in the local order. It therefore appears important to diversify places and scales of analysis to address the ambivalences, subtleties, and even paradoxes of everyday life when documenting local experiences and representations of difference beyond dominant (political and media) discourses.

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8. Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I combine the main threads of my analysis by reflecting on the epistemological posture permitting articulation of the boundary-making processes involved in the Val-de-Travers' social organization of difference. This posture has been particularly useful in articulating the locality and mobility-related aspects in individual and collective processes of self-identification and social categorizations.

In doing so, I argue that the analyses in this dissertation are situated at an interface. That is, in the interactions and frictions between locality- and mobility-related aspects that mutually influence each other. Locality related aspects, characterized in this dissertation by lived and situated experiences of peripherality, are intertwined with mobility-related aspects that are characterized by past and present forms of human movement intersecting in the Val-de-Travers.

By adopting a perspective at the interface, this thesis makes three principal contributions: first, it illuminates interdimensional and intertwined processes of boundary-making at the intersection of peripherality and mobility-related aspects. Second, this thesis contributes to the literature on the social organization of difference and, more broadly, to migration studies by offering ethnographic insights on various mobilities and categorizations of difference in the fabric of a coherent imagined community. Third, by focusing on the everyday experiences of ordinary people, this thesis illuminates how nation-state categories, borders, and regulations permeate everyday life and articulate with other social and symbolic differentiations beyond ethno-national categories and governmental logics.

8.1. Intertwined processes of boundary-making at the interface of peripherality and mobility

While migration studies are principally interested in the movement of humans across national borders and the actors who experience or regulate such movement, I was primarily interested in a place: the Val-de-Travers. Instead of studying a particular ethnic or national group, I included a variety of people arriving, living in, or transiting the valley—and thus different types of transnational, national, and local (im)mobilities. An open research design, without pre-given categorical delineations, is unusual in migration studies. By adopting such a perspective, this thesis thus offers an original analysis (which involves regional, mobility, and border studies) of the interaction and articulation of diverse social processes and their everyday effects. These articulations demonstrate the fluidity and complexity of the social organization of difference beyond traditional categorical divisions based on the nation-state.

The contribution of such a perspective at the interface is, in my view, twofold. On the one hand, it contributes to the theoretical literature on migration studies by combining the microscale (individual trajectories and everyday experiences) and macroscale (structural or state framework that regulates migration). On the other hand, it contributes to the thematic literature on mobilities in peripheral regions

by revealing their interrelatedness with place-based characteristics and multiscalar dynamics of boundary-making and bordering. I thus use place as an entry point; that is, not as a clearly delimited object of analysis but as a gateway to explore how human mobilities and their associated representations articulated with place-making discourses and practices. In this sense, I accepted the invitation of Cass, Shove and Urry (2005) to account for "spatial" and "mobility" related aspects, observing that these were rarely considered in the literature on social inclusion and exclusion.

As presented, the Val-de-Travers is characterized by a multitude of mobilities—and indeed can be conceived as a "crossroad of mobilities" (Chapter 4)—all of which are potentially significant to place-making and not only those that concern crossing a national border (Gustafson 2009). For example, the shift in self-identification from the scale of the village to the scale of the valley is partly explained by the intensification of relations, connections, and mobilities between the villages that constitute the Val-de-Travers region. This intensification has been particularly salient since the merger of the nine villages that occurred in 2009. At the same time, the Val-de-Travers is also a transnationalized region, which is reflected in all the chapters of this dissertation. This is presumably the case for all villages, regardless of their size and location, but always with local particularities. Transnational relations were created and maintained through the industrial dynamism of the valley, which began with the 17th century's lace trade and continued with watchmaking, attracting people across Switzerland and from abroad. The production of locality (Appadurai 1996) has been critically influenced by different forms of human mobilities. Migration—broadly understood as human movement across a national border—is often represented by my interlocutors as a central aspect of the valley's history, which is intrinsically linked with Neuchâtel and Swiss history.

However, not everything proceeded linearly in the region. Major economic crises have punctuated its history and have triggered peripheralization dynamics, particularly in connection with the neighboring city of Neuchâtel. The social organization of difference's specificities are thus generated by tensions between the dynamics of peripheralization of those of diversification and transnationalization initiated by multiple mobilities at different scales. Indeed, the position and evolution of the valley in the global, national, and cantonal political economy contribute significantly to the daily dynamics of self-identification and social categorization. The three articles specifically demonstrate how notions of peripherality and mobility are articulated and negotiated in everyday life. Experienced and imagined peripherality is appropriated as an attribute of the valley, fuels the dynamics of place-making, and feeds romantic rhetoric of authenticity and tradition. As such, my thesis reveals that valorizing the Val-de-Travers' landscapes and authenticity fulfills a double promotional strategy. Not only do the cantonal authorities valorize the region for tourism purposes but the ordinary inhabitants also highlight the positive aspects of the periphery regarding the countryside's quality of life and solidarity. The analysis thus seems to indicate an attempt to redirect attention "towards more positively evaluated attributes of the locality" (Pattison 2023, 13) symbolic of unspoiled rural Switzerland and enhanced solidarity.

8.2. Assemblage and territorialization of difference in the fabric of a coherent imagined community

The Val-de-Travers is a region that experiences a range of parallel and interrelated socioeconomic fluctuations, such as peripheralization, transnationalization, and diversification. These dynamics are linked and lead to different representations and types of mobilities. Although these diverse and occasionally contested dynamics may cause fragmentation or deterritorialization, the people living, traveling, or working in the Val-de-Travers engage in discursive practices to (re)produce a (re)territorialized coherence (Anderson and McFarlane 2011). These discursive practices strategically aim to assemble and unite differences (Kinkaid 2020) and reinforce a shared sense of belonging to a collective. Differences, and their associated social categories, are nether blurred nor rejected. Rather, they are appropriated and included in a local order situated in a specific time and space. This thesis proposes several examples of this phenomenon that suggest areas for future research.

The imagined community of fate, developed in Chapter 5, illustrates this assemblage of heterogeneous elements in the feeling of shared belonging to a collective. Exploring these dynamics does not mean determining which specific individuals are or are not members of this community. It means identifying the specific mechanisms through which "groupness" (Brubaker 2004) and its relational boundaries emerge and are emplaced. In this sense, rather than considering community to be "out there," I sought to identify the circumstances and boundary work in which local actors are embedded when negotiating the community's contours. In doing so, I have indicated how various social categorizations of difference, even if stigmatized, are incorporated into a (peripheral) sense of place.

My thesis also illustrates that exploring the emergence of imagined communities requires a historicization of social processes. Indeed, historicizing migration and mobility studies allows a more comprehensive grasp of the current meanings of different movements. Such historicization also furnishes a deeper understanding of which movements have been significant, and in what way, over time. In the Val-de-Travers, opening the history books and paying attention to mobility issues is instructive. One can see, for example, that the important tensions that continue to color current representations emerged through different regional and cantonal mobilities. Jules Baillods, in 1919, wrote a book entitled *Chez Nous* that mentions the serious 18th century conflicts that followed the arrival at the village of Couvet of people from the city of Neuchâtel. Historicization also allows one to comprehend the construction of inequalities between different population groups, particularly those associated with transnational (and colonial) trade, as presented in Chapter 4.

Furthermore, exploring the everyday negotiations of an imagined community allows researchers to situate and examine the power relations that inform emplaced discourses and practices of self-identification and social categorization (Jenkins 2008). As assumed by a relational perspective (Amin 2002, 2004; Massey 2005), places are not constructed in isolation but linked through relationships and

flows that generate uneven spatial development (Wirth et al. 2016). These relationships of hierarchy and domination between places generate feelings of belonging and human circulations and relations between centers and peripheries. As Massey (2005) assumes, the singularity of places is understood not by its clear delimitations but by its specific positioning in a particular network of regional, national, and transnational relations and circulations.

Thus, what I retain from these considerations, which run throughout the whole of my thesis, is that interrelated dynamics of peripherality and mobility generate two successive dynamics. In the first instance, there are complexifications and fragmentations of place that lead, in the second instance, to reactive strategies that cohere an imagined community. This community is not characterized by its presumed homogeneity but by the *coherent assemblage* of its heterogeneity. As such, in this local order, ethno-national differences are not contested but territorialized. They represent resources for negotiating the contours of an imagined community characterized by distinctive migrations. In this manner, I observed that most of the inhabitants of the Val-de-Travers—be they foreigners or Swiss—can be perceived as members of the local imagined community if considered to be economically and socially supporting local daily life. In this respect, processes of differentiation with other social and geographic entities reinforce the formations of this we-group. The relevant Other regarding this boundary is neighboring Neuchâtel. The city is represented as a place with greater economic capital and superior educational and professional opportunities but purportedly inferior unconditional solidarity. In this context, I have thus revealed that ethno-national categorizations are of only secondary importance in these everyday dynamics of boundary-making. The dominant migration-related categories are used in everyday life (Italians, migrant workers, etc.), but other categorizations have more weight in the formation and exclusion of a we-group.

Transversal to the three articles, another important element transcending the traditional categories of difference is what could be termed, drawing on Bourdieu's vocabulary, the capital of localness. This refers to specific social and cultural resources associated with the Val-de-Travers and often possessed by long-term residents. Such resources relate, for instance, to "communal relationships" or to "social networks which evolve over time in residentially-shared localities" (Jenkins 2000, 15). The capital of localness also relates to experiences of living on the periphery or adherence to the myth of a common origin reinforced, for example, by historical and traditional absinthe production (Roth, Hertz, and Wobmann 2014). The capital of localness echoes Elias and Scotson's work (1994) on established-outsiders relations, which demonstrated that it is the configuration of social relationships, not the characteristics of groups *per se*, that explains relations of domination between groups.

Importantly, I observed that the peripherality of the valley is strongly understood in economic terms, particularly following the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s. This economic peripheralization is therefore a central aspect of the region and generates strategies I have called localizing discourses and practices. The most striking example is the creation of a local currency, which aims at territorializing

activities (Fare 2012). Although local currency projects—occasionally called alternative currencies—have historically emerged in urban or transnational spaces (Blanc, Fare, and Lafuente-Sampietro 2022), this initiative is partly motivated by economic peripheralization in the Val-de-Travers. The implementation of a local currency not only encourages people to spend their money in the valley but also provides a tangible and visible way to do so. This localizing strategy reinforces exclusionary discourses and practices toward those who are not considered to contribute economically to the valley. This type of dynamic is particularly interesting because it highlights the shifting of social and symbolic boundaries: anyone who lives or works in the valley and spends their money elsewhere might be negatively categorized.

The creation of a local currency can therefore be understood as a response to economic peripheralization in order to territorialize consumption practices and reinforce shared feelings of belonging to a collective. However, this dissertation also illuminates how certain categorizations of difference are used by long-term residents to define, positively or negatively, a peripheral sense of place. In Chapter 7, I explore shifts in categorizations of difference regarding refugees, cross-border workers, and *cas sociaux*. One element of the analysis demonstrates that people assigned to these categorizations are represented as peripheral figures. That is, these categorizations of difference are partly constructed outside the valley through state regulations, media discourses, and political practices. Nevertheless, their presence in the valley engenders representations inextricably linked with experiences and imaginaries of peripherality. Several long-term residents claimed that there is an over-representation of these social categories in the periphery and mobilized them to complain (politically) about the cantonal authorities. Other long-term residents pretended that these social categorizations of difference are part of the valley and engaged in discourses that value greater regional solidarity compared to the cities. These ambivalent representations illustrate how social categorizations of difference and their associated boundaries are varyingly used and reproduced to express the lived and situated peripherality of the place. In other words, social categorizations of difference constitute significant resources for (other) processes of boundary-making related to a peripheral sense of place.

Another peripheral figure is, of course, the Valley-ers, who were the focus of this dissertation. While refugees (who stay in the region for a short period of time) and cross-border workers (who do not live in the region) are rarely referred to as Valley-ers, it is worth noting that people categorized as *cas sociaux* are often also people who identify as Valley-ers. Interestingly, the peripherality of place is not contested by those who identify as Valley-ers. Rather than engaging in such opposition, people use tactics that reproduce representations of the periphery, though with different nuances. As Cuny points out, certain authors "use the term 'tactic' rather than 'strategy' to describe the different types of responses residents have to 'territorial stigmatization'" because the "'tactics' operate in a space predefined by dominant representations, so they can adjust it, but never (re-)appropriate it and (re-)order the power relations that shape it" (Cuny 2019, 892).

Needless to say, by situating myself at the interface, the many (micro-)strategies of boundary-making—for example, those between refugees and other population groups—have not been subject to an exhaustive analysis. This certainly represents a limitation of this work. However, these micro-strategies have been addressed in their links to the lived and situated peripherality of the valley, thus shedding an alternative but complementary light on the processes of social categorization.

8.3. Exploring the nation-state from a non-legal perspective

Studies that seek to address methodological nationalism do not to exclude the nation-state from analysis but empirically explore its construction and effects in everyday life. This dissertation has sought to contribute to this scholarly endeavor by focusing on the subtlety of the everyday lives of ordinary people (Lamont and Mizrachi 2012) who live in, work in, or traverse the Val-de-Travers.

In Chapter 6, by exploring how individuals negotiate, contest, and judge different forms of mobilities in terms of what is good or bad (Lézé 2006), I shed light on the role played by all actors in the (in)formal regulation of mobilities. The room for maneuver of ordinary people, which border studies researchers occasionally refer to as non-state actors (Rumford 2008), may be relatively limited in negotiating the legality or illegality of human and non-human mobilities. However, I have emphasized that these actors do engage in negotiating the morality and immorality of these same mobilities. Indeed, as Zhang (2019) notes, legalo-centric or state-centric narratives in migration and border studies risk missing important dynamics (such as moralizing discourses and practices) that have long been documented in social anthropology (Fassin 2013) and that can impact individual mobility practices. Thus, focusing on these dynamics renders it possible to explore the *moral* fabric of locality (Wuthnow 2018), as complementary to and interrelated with its economic, political, and symbolic dimensions. In this sense, I believe that articulating (empirical) questions of morality within mobility studies is a significant contribution to this field of research, which does not appear to sufficiently explore the everyday negotiations, in terms of good or bad, around different forms of mobilities (for an exception, see Zhang 2019). While certain mobilities, as presented above, have helped shape the peripheralization of the Val-de-Travers, this very condition impacts the moralization of specific forms of mobilities, such as everyday cross-border mobilities, which are perceived as damaging to the economic and social well-being of the valley. Although the mobility of crossing the border may not itself be a concern, this mobility can be associated with the negatively categorized flight of money to France.

Furthermore, addressing issues of (im)moralization allowed me to empirically and theoretically contextualize borders and boundaries (Fassin 2011), two notions that have largely been the subject of distinct scholarly debates (Fischer, Achermann, and Dahinden 2020). On the one hand, boundaries involve the creation, maintenance, institutionalization, and contestation of social differences and concomitant forms of inclusion and exclusion. On the other hand, borders are necessarily linked to states, which are territorial, and scholars in this field have explored how borders and bordered territories are

produced, regulated, governed, circumvented, lived, and shaped by power relations (Fischer, Achermann, and Dahinden 2020). Interrogating the moralizing discourses and practices associated with certain mobilities that occur between two bordered territories requires examining the social and symbolic boundaries that intertwine with border regulations. Boundaries, constructed on moral considerations, feed into meanings of territorial and political borders and lead borders to become moralized, thus distinguishing moral from immoral mobilities. This is what I explore in Chapter 6, which questions the emergence, production, and reproduction of a regime of (im)moral mobilities. In this chapter, I have presented how the border between Switzerland and France is used as a resource to produce boundaries; for example, by morally categorizing people who engage in certain forms of cross-border mobilities. I have also discussed how these boundaries morally reinforce the border. In other words, if the border is legally rather discrete, it becomes morally salient.

Further means exist of exploring the nation-state from a non-legal perspective. For instance, examining everyday encounters where visible cues (Wimmer 2013) of difference emerge and exploring social categorizations of difference in the everyday lives of ordinary actors allows capturing their role in representational negotiations of space (Piotrowski 2013), which are "key in places imagined as racially fixed, white, and working-class" (Pattison 2023, 2). By examining visibilized and locally significant differences, parallels can be drawn with various forms of marginalizing categorizations, such as migranticizing, racializing, ethnicizing, and gendering processes (Ahmed et al. 2003).

Finally, mobilities link different population groups and associated categories of difference to which individuals and collectives are assigned. Indeed, categories of difference are produced at different scales by different actors and travel through time and space generating different experiences, representations, and transformations of difference in everyday life. In Chapter 7, I demonstrated how people assigned to distinctive categories of difference are represented as familiar strangers, space invaders, or peripheral figures by long-term residents. In these situational and relational representations of difference, nation-state-driven differences persist but are appropriated in everyday life and participate in the production of locality. In other words, there are processes producing difference from above that occur through the strategies used in state action. However, there are also the micropolitics of difference (Sarat 2000). These micropolitics represent the everyday production of difference by ordinary people who have room for maneuver in the ways in which they use even highly institutionalized and "powerfully sanctioned categories" (Brubaker 2004, 68) in their daily lives. Media and political discourses certainly (re)produce racial and cultural stigmas that cascade into everyday life (Tyler 2020). Nevertheless, exploring the fluidity and complexity of everyday experiences allows researchers to illuminate the reactions, contestations, and appropriations that are performed by a wide diversity of actors. This is also what this thesis has attempted to contribute to.

8.4. Research limits and avenues for a de-migranticized framework

In this research, I sought to construct and conduct an ethnographic exploration inspired by a reflexive approach to migration studies (Amelina 2021; Nieswand and Drotbohm 2014). The de-migranticized perspective allows one to move beyond research that focuses, for instance, on the integration process of foreign populations in a receiving place. Indeed, such a perspective assumes a local population exists that shares certain values and practices that foreign populations must adhere to (critically, see, for example, Rytter 2018). I attempted to challenge knowledge production in migration studies, problematizing key concepts and categories while developing alternative ones (Dahinden, Fischer, and Menet 2021). Following Çağlar and Glick Schiller, I have revealed that "working in a single site is not synonymous with a bounded ethnography of the local" and have attempted to document "the multiple ways in which [a site is] interconnected through time within hierarchies of differential power" (2018, 218). Based on my experience and the literature that I have examined, I outline certain limits and avenues for further explorations.

While many authors agree on the added value of a de-migranticized approach (Dahinden 2016), few have discussed the methodological implications of such an approach. While the theoretical and epistemological reflections seem convincing and relatively clear, the techniques for methodological operationalization can appear less defined.

In Chapter 3, the methodological chapter, I extensively present the operationalization of a de-migranticized approach and discuss several methodological issues at length. By taking a place and not a population group as a starting point, the researcher leaves his or her comfort zone and faces a potential assemblage of heterogeneous data. Other authors have already used site-specific approaches in migration studies (Baumann 1996; Wessendorf 2013), though often with an ethnic lens (Glick Schiller, Çaglar, and Guldbrandsen 2006), which risks reproducing essentializing analyses of ethnicity. Distancing myself from these social categories in the elaboration of my research project, I hope to have demonstrated the complexity of experiences and representations associated with migration-related categories.

However, I acknowledge that it would have been possible to provide more space to people assigned to migranticized categories. The marginal place afforded them in this dissertation undoubtedly represents a limitation perhaps generated by an excessive concern not to reproduce nation-state logics.

Based on my experience, I therefore think that one of the strengths of my approach is also one of its weaknesses. A de-migranticized approach prevents presuming the existence of a collective "we" (Blokland 2003), as occasionally transpires when studies are conducted using ethno-national categories as a starting point. However, this approach risks overemphasizing the analysis of the collective identification process' construction at the expense of exploring other social phenomena regarding forms of mobilities or social categories. Thus, the "Valley-ers" have become the primary category in this work,

and while I think I have demonstrated its heterogeneity, there are categorizations of difference I have explored less. Furthermore, this de-migranticized approach has potentially distanced me from several of the central spaces of the "migration industries" (Cranston, Schapendonk, and Spaan 2018), such as migrant associations, refugee centers, and migration administrations. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that authors who join Dahinden's call to de-migranticize are neglecting the importance of these categories and spaces. Instead, I call on those who engage in a de-migranticizing approach to adopt a vigilant posture to avoid becoming lost.

8.5. A way forward: The perspective of the interface

Based on the experience of the present research, I propose to continue thinking about place as an entry point by advocating for a strengthening of analyses at the interface of diverse phenomena. In the case of this dissertation, the aim was to explore the social organization of difference at the interface of peripherality- and mobility-related aspects. Nevertheless, I could have focused on other dynamics, such as the social organization of difference at the interface of gender and racial aspects.

The perspective of the interface invites researchers to explore a place using an ethnographic and historical approach and an inductive mode of reasoning that permits distance from fashionable theoretical currents and political debates (Fresia 2007, 116). This perspective offers a means of linking different levels of analysis, such as structural, organizational, infrastructural, and individual dimensions. Authors have long called for moving beyond a "bounded field" (Amit 1999). However, I argue that using place, or interface, as an entry point can capture specific complexities of social dynamics and enables exploring the subtle frictions nestled in the daily lives of ordinary people. Interfaces are where the intricacies of the social world meet, where different dimensions, scales, categories, and mobilities interact. In these interfaces, researchers can explore the shifting of boundaries and the ambiguities they inscribe in various spaces, times, and scales.

Of course, focusing on the interfaces also allows one to go beyond the national scale by encouraging researchers to explore the overlaps and interrelations between local, regional, national, and transnational processes of self-identification and categorization (Jenkins 2008). Such an approach constantly raises the question of who should be researched to understand a place and admits that a place should not always be researched from the inside.

Adopting the interface as an entry point for studying different forms of mobilities allows capturing how mobile actors are positioned differently and which mobility regimes and historical legacies are consequential. The interface perspective also allows examining how these elements produce particular forms of inclusion and exclusion, bordering and boundary work, and thus forms of inequalities (Wyss and Dahinden 2022, 7). In other words, not taking a population group or category as a starting point allows researchers to explore the diverse trajectories that intersect within a site and to position social

relations within multiscalar connectivities that situate "actors within various networks of power" (Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018, 11). Thus, a "site specific approach" (Fox and Jones 2013), if combined with a relational understanding of space and place (Varró and Lagendijk 2013), allows researchers to capture the intricacy between mobility and inequality. It is therefore undoubtedly a relevant avenue for pursuing scientific endeavors that aim to go beyond a romantic vision of mobility (Wyss 2019) and document inequalities in access, experience, and representation (Cresswell 2010).

Furthermore, I believe that using interface as an entry point enables exploring what Glick Schiller calls "situated mutualities" (2020) and thereby theorizing connections between solidarities, emotion, and political action. In other words, the interface perspective can aid in empirically examining what at different times and places brings people together or drives them apart (Schiller 2020). Much research, including the articles in this thesis, has focused primarily on the dynamics of exclusion, marginalization, and stereotyping (Hall 1997). However, fewer studies seem to explore the everyday dynamics that create forms of solidarity and inclusion. An approach such as the one proposed in this dissertation could provide a framework for examining what brings people together beyond shared feelings of belonging to an imagined community and instead in social movements and practices against all forms of injustice. In this respect, current projects, such as the University of Geneva's *Unexpected Inclusion*,[63] are a source of inspiration.

Finally, research that seeks to explore the interfaces would (ideally) produce knowledge that could lead to alternative policy decisions more effectively equipped to address global, national, and local inequalities (Wyss and Dahinden 2022). For example, certain policies, such as most integration policies, derive from decisions built on migranticized considerations and ignore other forms of inequalities and exclusions that transcend ethno-national categories. In the same vein, current debates on diversity-related issues—such as *diversity management* strategies—would benefit significantly from scientific inputs intersecting individual experiences with distinct spaces, temporalities, and scales. Diversity issues are too often considered using an essentialist approach and are either positively perceived as a cultural enrichment or politicized negatively as a threat. However, this debate also reiterates ethno-national origins without exploring the other facets of diversity and does not question the structural conditions of inequalities.

In short, I do not claim that this case study has revealed specific and unique dynamics but that it has allowed me to articulate dimensions that participate in the constant shifting of social and symbolic boundaries. To do so, this work relied on an epistemological and methodological destabilization of migration studies. I believe this work should be continued, principally by encouraging ethnographic

[63] https://www.unige.ch/urbanhub/bienvenue/recherche/projets/unic [Accessed on October 11, 2022] This study aims, using an *inclusionist perspective*, to understand how the city works "as an inclusion machine on the ground in everyday activities that connect rather than separate newcomers and the established" and looks at "inclusion dynamics as fundamental elements for social justice."

investigations situated at the intersection of small-scale boundary-making processes (e.g., through individual life histories) and those of a larger scale (e.g., through state action); where different dimensions meet and where frictions remain to be explored.

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