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# Between continuity and change

## A psychosocial perspective of families in repeated international mobility

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Neuchâtel, le 17 décembre 2018

Le doyen
Pierre Alain Mariaux

*To Léo and Iéte*

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# Abstract

In the context of connected transnational employment practices, an increasing number of professionals engage in repeated moves across countries with their families, living more or less permanently on the move. How are those people able to find stability despite constant changes? Adopting a sociocultural perspective in psychology, this thesis investigates how families experience constant changes triggered by repeated international mobility, and the ways in which the sociocultural environment creates the guiding conditions for leading a mobile life. This study is based on interviews with global mobility experts, in-depth interviews with mobile families living in Switzerland conducted between 2015 and 2018, as well as statistical analysis of a large-scale survey. The findings challenge preconceptions associated with repeated international mobility common in the public discourse in Switzerland. First, analysis based on data from the large-scale survey reveals that mobile families face some distinctive pressures, different from those of long-term migrants, ranging from a lack of institutional and social support to the management of new psychological needs. Second, interviews with experts show that this emerging demand has been accompanied by a proliferation of relocation experts and agencies providing services to support the international relocation of families. Finally, in-depth interviews with families show that against the backdrop of constant changes, families recreate the same spheres of experience everywhere, transform their relations to objects, and build a continuum of social relationships by enlarging their social networks while tightening-up the relationships within the nuclear family. These analyses reveal a new modality for establishing a sense of continuity despite frequent changes. By bringing together studies on psychology with those on migration and mobility, this thesis thus contributes to redefining the central challenge of international mobility, and provides theoretical directions for the study of family life under conditions of increasing global migratory instabilities. By understanding the implications of repeated international mobility, society may be able to rise to the challenge of cultivating a system of values and practices that grasps the new centrality that mobility has today and will have in the future.

**Key words**: migration, mobility, international adjustment, relocation services, family, sociocultural psychology, multiple transitions.

# Résumé

Dans un contexte où les pratiques d’emploi sont transnationales et reliées, un nombre croissant de professionnels sont conduits à des déménagements répétés dans différents pays avec leur famille, vivant plus ou moins de manière permanente en déplacement. Comment ces personnes parviennent-elles à trouver de la stabilité en dépit de changements incessants ? En adoptant une perspective socioculturelle en psychologie, cette thèse examine comment les familles vivent les changements constants engendrés par une mobilité internationale répétée et la manière dont l’environnement socioculturel crée les conditions cadres pour mener une vie mobile. Cette étude est basée sur des entretiens avec des experts de la mobilité mondiale, des entretiens approfondis conduits entre 2015 et 2018 avec des familles mobiles vivant en Suisse, ainsi que sur l’analyse statistique d’une enquête à large échelle. Les résultats remettent en question les idées préconçues associées à une mobilité internationale répétée, courantes dans le discours public en Suisse. Premièrement, les analyses basées sur les données d’une enquête à large échelle révèlent que les familles mobiles font face à des pressions distinctes, différentes de celles vécues par les migrants de longue durée, allant du peu de soutien institutionnel et social à la gestion de nouveaux besoins psychologiques. Deuxièmement, les entretiens avec les experts montrent que cette demande émergeante s’est accompagnée d’une prolifération d’experts réinstallation et d’organismes fournissant des services pour aider la réinstallation internationale des familles. Enfin, des entretiens approfondis avec des familles démontrent que malgré un contexte de changements constants, les familles recréent les mêmes sphères d’expérience partout, transforment leurs relations en objets et construisent un continuum de relations sociales en élargissant leur réseau social tout en resserrant les relations au sein de la famille nucléaire. Les analyses révèlent une nouvelle modalité d’établissement d’un sentiment de continuité malgré de fréquents changements. En réunissant les études de psychologie avec celles dédiées à la migration et à la mobilité, cette thèse contribue par conséquent à redéfinir le défi central de la mobilité internationale, et fournit des pistes théoriques pour l’étude de la vie familiale dans des conditions d’instabilité migratoire globale croissante. En comprenant les implications d’une mobilité internationale répétée, la société pourrait être capable de relever le défi de cultiver un système de valeurs et de pratiques qui saisit la nouvelle place centrale que la mobilité a aujourd’hui et aura à l’avenir.

**Mots-clés**: migration, mobilité, adaptation internationale, services de réinstallation, famille, psychologie socioculturelle, transitions multiples.

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# 1. CHAPTER

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

The present thesis was developed within the frame of an interdisciplinary research project entitled *““New Migration” and New Forms of Integration: Families in Geographical Itinerancy”* designed to document the reality of migrant families living temporarily in Switzerland because of the professional activity of at least one adult. As part of a wider network of projects connected by the *nccr – on the move*, a Swiss National Center of Competence in Research established to enhance the understanding of contemporary migration patterns, the project shared the assumption that migration patterns to Switzerland move on a continuum from long-term and permanent settlement to increasingly more temporary forms of mobility. Longitudinal studies tracking migrants’ trajectories show that the number of migrants arriving in Switzerland is steadily increasing together with the number of departures. After five years, more than half of the migrants are no longer in Switzerland (Zufferey, 2018). In a country where policies encourage the so-called “highly skilled migration”, the number of migrant families moving under the frame of professional expertise and staying for a limited period tends in this way to increase.

Initially concerned with the local insertion of these families and through a combination of anthropological and psychological perspectives, the project sought to identify the institutions providing support to these migrants, their social networks, the categorical dimensions at play between these families and the host environment, as well as to provide a more nuanced understanding of their experiences. Attracted by the idea of understanding what is like to live ‘on the move’, I became particularly interested in the phenomenon of *international repeated geographical mobility.* I wanted to understand how it feels like to be moving all the time. My point of departure was the hypothesis that moving from one country to another and adjusting to several sociocultural environments would engender specific challenges and dynamics distinctive from those experienced by migrants settling-in a single country, both for the migrants and for the host countries. Such presupposition derives from two convictions: the first being that experiencing migration for several times transforms the migratory experience as such, and the second concerns the high-priority of societies to rise up to the challenge of cultivating a system of values and practices that grasps the new centrality that mobility has today and will have in the future.

In the 21st century, fewer and fewer people live in only one country through the course of their lives. A wide range of economic, political, sociocultural and environmental factors triggers the movement of people around the globe: population growth, unequal access to resources, political interventions, wars, terrorism, precarious working conditions and the demands of global labour markets force people to migrate repeatedly from one country to another. At the same time, new technologies and lower transportation costs allow people to work from diverse countries and imagine futures in different places other than where they live. In addition to increasing global migratory instabilities, the contemporary human condition rests on a generalized and permanent feeling of displacement. As recalled by Luhmann (1986), with the transition from a pre-modern, stratified society to a modern, functionally differentiated society, “individual persons can no longer be firmly located in one single subsystem of society, but rather must be regarded a priori as socially displaced” (p.15). The far-reaching sociological analyses of Bauman (1993) on the modernity and postmodernity debate have further indicated that the existential condition of members of modern society became that of *strangers* everywhere: “there is no single place in society in which they are truly at home and which can bestow upon them a natural identity” (p. 201) he says. This condition involves dealing with the never-ending quest of finding a “fix point” in oneself as the individual can no longer find it outside.

How then, in our uprooted time, are people able to find stability despite constant changes? How do people manage to reconcile stability and change? These questions are at the core of this thesis. Studying them is challenging for several reasons, in particular due to the mutual constitution of the person and her social and cultural environment. In spite of a generalized existential feeling of displacement, people are embedded in societies that have themselves built mechanisms to respond to changes. Migration disrupts the taken-for-granted nature of the interplay between the person and her sociocultural environment. Because repeated international mobility – an extreme case of living in changing sociocultural environments – make the tension between stability and change hyperbolic, it represents a good empirical opportunity to study those broader questions. These questions are even more acute for families in repeated mobility, as typically people tend to settle down in one place once they have children. The experience of families moving across countries thus offers a useful standpoint from which some crucial yet underemphasized or overlooked dynamics of the dialectic of stability-change can be better seen.

Through the paradigmatic case of families moving across countries for professional reasons, my aim is to shed new light on the dynamics pertaining to *international repeated geographical mobility*. The present thesis introduces the specific challenges of international mobility and sets out a theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon from a sociocultural perspective in psychology. To study international mobility means, for sociocultural psychologists, reflecting on the contextual and experiential dimensions of movement. Accordingly, the objective of this thesis is two-fold:

1st) to investigate the ways in which the social and cultural environment creates the guiding conditions for leading a mobile life, with a special focus on the contemporary conditions and challenges raised for families living in Switzerland;

2nd) to investigate how people experience constant changes triggered by international mobility with a special focus on migrants and their families moving across countries for professional reasons.

In this first chapter, I define the research problem and I present the theoretical framework adopted in this thesis. To that end, I first present the definition of repeated international mobility and the problems raised by existing literature when addressing this phenomenon. Then, I briefly introduce the research context and the main assumptions of a sociocultural approach in psychology to propose a new perspective on international mobility and to raise, accordingly, the research questions that are addressed in the rest of the thesis.

## 1.2 Repeated International Mobility

International repeated geographical mobility is a growing phenomenon both in scope and in complexity. In this thesis, it refers to the movement experienced by people and motivated by work, which leads to geographical and semantic displacement and subsequent relocation of housing and occupational arrangements across countries. From a sociocultural perspective in psychology, geographical movement also leads to semantic movements of meanings, since the crossing of national borders favours the encounter with alterity and creation of new meanings (Gillespie, Kadianaki, & O'Sullivan-Lago, 2012). In the context of connected global labour markets, an increasing variety of professionals engage in trajectories of international mobility with their families, either by personal choice or against their will, living more or less permanently on the move. They no longer include only diplomats, corporate expatriates and military personnel, who typified the traditional forms of international mobility, but also international civil servants, scientists, IT experts, academics, entrepreneurs, liberal professionals, as well as "self-initiated expatriates" (Andresen, Ariss, & Walther, 2013) and the so-called "life-style migrants"[1], those migrating in search of a "better" way of life (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016).

Within the literature, numerous terms are used to refer to this population: "expatriates" (Salamin & Davoine, 2015; van Bochove & Engbersen, 2015; Wiese, 2015), also commonly referred in public discourse as "expats", skilled or "highly skilled migrants" (Lan, 2011; Salt, 1997; Scott, 2006; Smith & Favell, 2006a) and "migrant professionals" (Meier, 2014). One set of terms, such as "global nomads" (McCaig, 1996; Mclachlan, 2007), "neo-nomads" (D'Andrea, 2006), "geographical itinerants" (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013), "transient professional workers" (Appleyard, 1989), and "skilled transients" (Findlay, 1988), are used to emphasize the mobile nature and temporary duration of this form of mobility. Another set of terms, according to

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[1] The concept of lifestyle migration acknowledges the inseparability of economic factors like income, and the quality of life it supports (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016).

Cangià & Zittoun (2018) attempts to define this population specifically by its delocalized and transnational practices and includes terms like “transnational elite” (Beaverstock, 2002), “transnational capitalist class” (Sklair, 2000), or “transnational professionals” (Nowicka, 2006). Lastly, the terms “self-initiated expatriates” (Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, & Dickmann, 2014) and “life-style migrants” (Benson & O’Reilly, 2016) are used to emphasize the chosen nature of this form of mobility.

While some terms are loaded with common-sense notions, others rely entirely on socio-economic, educational and political categories. Furthermore, some terms like “highly skilled migrants” are based on policy-defined criteria and directly linked to migratory regimes. In this way, migrants may be considered highly skilled “with preferential access to residence and work permits only when their characteristics fall within the eligibility requirements” (Hercog, 2017, p. 13). This is particularly problematic as this definition changes according to the interests and regulatory frames of receiving countries. Just the same, the term “expatriate” has served to draw sharp dichotomies between “expatriates” and “traditional” migrants with regards to: 1) the countries of origin and destination - Al Ariss (2010) implies that migrants move to the “developed” world whereas expatriates relocate from “developed” countries, even though in actuality expats come from different corners of the globe and the division between the “developed” and “developing” world is outdated; 2) the forced versus the chosen nature of mobility – whereas “migrants” imply a necessity to migrate to permanently settle in and “integrate” into another country, expatriates are viewed as moving to places of their choice and as possessing a “cosmopolitan” outlook (Cangià & Zittoun, 2018) represented by their “willingness to engage with alterity, and openness toward different cultural experiences” (Hannerz, 1996, p. 106). It is important to emphasise that, while such distinctions are long-established and widely used, they are in reality based upon problematic and outdated assumptions.

In this thesis, in contrast to the aforementioned outdated divisions, the terminological choice is based on theoretical considerations (Valsiner & Sato, 2006) instead of pre-defined, artificial categories, so as to minimize essentialism and misleading categorizations and to move closer to what actually defines the experiences of these migrants. Hence, I use the term “international repeated geographical mobility”, theoretically defined in the first lines of this section, to refer to this population. I add the qualification “repeated” to emphasize the “sameness” and cumulative character of this form of mobility, whenever the idea of fluidity implied in notions of mobility needs to be contested. As I am examining here *families* in particular, I will use interchangeably the variants “families in repeated geographical mobility, “families in repeated mobility”, and “families in international mobility”, as they appeared in the publications and the locution “mobile families” to facilitate reading.

Although objections might be raised that this terminology does not include the work dimension and it can easily be associated with tourists, it allows us to extend the reference to all family members, including those who are not defined by their work-related migratory trajectory (e.g. accompanying partners and children). It also has the advantage of conferring an idea of repeated movement, an image of moving from place to place, regardless of the presence of a final destination, and as a result, does not imply a definitive or pre-assigned nature to migration. Additionally, it has the potential to shift our attention from the class-based connotation characterizing many of the aforementioned terms, to the central aspect of mobility as experienced by the person.

Most importantly, the theoretical definition is based on the commonalities of the actual *experience* of moving and adjusting to different countries and it includes a variety of migratory trajectories. This way it allows sketching a nuanced picture of mobile families' lives that captures the diversity of social and existential conditions characterizing the lived experiences of these migrants. It is a useful way of thinking about international mobility that can free researchers from the constraints of political categories and heavily loaded common-sense notions so to move forward to investigate what is really at stake in moving and adjusting to several countries for the person concerned. It further avoids turning a social phenomenon that is lived by unique persons into a discrete or new homogenous category of migrants. This is not to say that it is not important to think carefully about how categories, social labels or even theoretical frameworks are being used and how they may serve certain purposes. However, in this thesis, categories will be problematized as they are relevant for the migrants themselves, instead of drawing on political criteria as analytical categories. Chapter 5 pays special attention to this process by exploring the ways people make sense of personal and family transformation through those categorical distinctions, referred therein as "symbolic boundaries". In addition, the debate around qualifying distinctions between migrants' groups will be revisited in Chapter 3 through the specific attempt to operationalize international mobility in quantitative analysis.

In what follows, I will discuss how classical approaches to migration have contributed to a biased, one-sided conceptualization of international adjustments and to the overall presupposition that psychological well-being is dependent upon a fixed locality. I propose an alternative approach that emphasizes the dynamic and mutually defining relationship between individuals and their environments, which in turn considers mobility, the changing nature of the host environments as well as family relationships as an integral part of international adjustments.

### 1.2.1 BEYOND SEDENTARY BIAS: REDEFINING THE CENTRAL CHALLENGE OF INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

The international mobility of families is mostly discussed in the literature as a problem, either because of the difficulties affecting the international adjustments of the "accompanying" members, or because repeated mobility is thought to be detrimental to the family. Moving across countries is considered to be a major stress factor in life (Dixon & Hayden, 2008), involving high costs for physical, social and emotional well-being (Brett, 1982; Cohen & Gössling, 2015; Lagrone, 1978). Frequent relocation is also seen as a risk factor influencing children's academic outcome (Palmer, 2016) and literature on "Third-Culture Kids"[2], a term commonly used in intercultural studies to designate children raised in "globally mobile families", proceeds to explore the so-called "Adult Third-Culture Kids (ATCKs) identity problems" as an effect of mobility (Melles, 2015). The debate on whether or not repeated mobility is a harmful experience and the consequent focus on outcomes and causes of psychological well-being, tends to be normative; it is deeply rooted in Oberg's (1960) idea of "culture shock" as a malady afflicting those adjusting to a new sociocultural environment.

The fundamental reason for discussing international mobility in these terms is that, traditionally, the three main bodies of literature on the topic, namely, cross-cultural management, cross-cultural psychology and migration studies, have dealt with human movement under the paradigms of assimilation and integration. For many years, researchers looked at migration as a one-off move from one country to another for permanent settlement, assuming a "society of settlement" as the norm. In taking for granted permanent settlement and operating on a "sedentary bias"[3], they have contributed to the assumption that migrants' belonging to the geographic territory of their countries of origin and/or their cultural background is a natural and normal feature of their positioning (Ghorashi, 2017). In this thesis, I argue that this persistent sedentary bias in many of the classical approaches to migration is a critical flaw, as it further contributes to the overall presupposition that psychological well-being is strictly dependent upon a fixed locality and, as a result, moving countries and repeatedly changing one's residence can be turned into a social maladjustment, if not a pathological condition.

Why should sedentariness be the norm under which theoretical frames, policies and interventions are constructed? After all, mobility has been etched in our bodies. For nearly the entire history of our species, repeated geographical mobility has been the norm. For most of the history of humankind, humans have roamed from place to place as foragers. Harari (2015) reminds us that,

> the past 200 years, during which ever increasing numbers of Sapiens have obtained their daily bread as urban labourers and office workers, and the preceding 10'000 years, during which most Sapiens lived as farmers and herders, are the blink of an eye

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[2] This term is based on the assumption that there are three cultures involved in the international relocation experience: the "first culture" (that of the parents); the "second culture" (that of the host country); and the "third culture" - that refers to a hybrid combination of values, traditions and norms of the first and second cultures and the domains of the organizational culture, creating a unique culture that is thought to form a mental framework within which the children grow up (Benjamin, 2017; Melles, 2015).

[3] The assumption that the normal and desirable state for human beings is to be sedentary (Bakewell, 2008).

> compared to the tens of thousands of years during which our ancestors hunted and gathered. (p. 45)

According to the author, humans first settled alongside seas and rivers. The first fishing villages might have appeared on the coasts of Indonesian islands as early as 45,000 years ago, though only with the start of the Agricultural Revolution, about 12,000 years ago, did several forager bands settled down permanently. Territorial movement thus is a human prerogative and it has guaranteed the survival of the human species and its expansion worldwide. Livi-Bacci (2012) describes this prerogative as a form of adaptability. For him, this adaptability - an intertwining of biological, psychological, and cultural characteristics - has not been constant throughout historical periods and each specific migration flow had a direct impact on family configurations. He exemplifies this by claiming that the settlement of open spaces, for instance,

> required individuals inclined to form solid families tied to traditional values, individuals who would have many children and work hard, providing the fuel for further expansion. The migration of the two last centuries has instead been different: often directed to urban areas and engaged in trade and industrial work, it has favoured the single and cultural flexible individuals who instead created relatively small families. (p.viii)

This historical detour observes that repeated geographical movement has certainly been an integral part of human ways of living and the ways in which humans moved around have shaped our present-day social and psychological characteristics as well as family forms. Moreover, repeated geographical mobility has grown to be a “culturally cultivated” (Valsiner, 2014a) mode of living with nomadic people. However, repeated geographical mobility, such as that sort of culturally cultivated mode of living, becomes an issue again with the birth of the nation-state. The drawing up of national borders converted migrations into international movements regulated by migration policies. While actual movement became easier in the modern world – resources increased, infrastructures were consolidated, and technology improved – the capability of states in contesting the movement of people around the globe also increased. The nation-state building processes have fundamentally shaped how migration and mobility are perceived and researched nowadays. While migration research has taken the nation-state as the natural social and political form of the modern world, mobility studies have attempted to go beyond the limits of methodological nationalism[4] (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) and have redefined the object of research from the literal movement of people to the movements of bodies, objects, images, and meanings (Cresswell, 2006). With the emergence of knowledge-based societies, mobility became again a prerogative, but now converted into an integral part of human capital (Livi-Bacci, 2012).

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[4] This critique highlights the limitations of our conceptual apparatus. For Wimmer & Glick Schiller (2002), it is because “we have come to take for granted a world divided into discrete and autonomous nation-states that we see nation-state building and global interconnections as contradictory”. (p. 301)

The present thesis presents an analysis that tries to make sense of how people under sedentary regimes build trajectories of international mobility. By critically questioning sedentariness, this thesis contributes to redefining the central challenge of international mobility. The thesis will show that repeated mobility poses the specific challenge of adjusting to a new country while preserving a certain degree of mobility in view of the next move. Thus, mobility needs to be considered as an integral part of the international adjustments of mobile families and research should not only conceptualize how individuals and families are able to adjust to a new environment, but also consider how they are able to remain mobile due to a stay that is limited and unpredictable in duration. This ability to remain mobile has not yet been dealt with in depth. In an attempt to conceptualize the very ability to be mobile, Kaufmann, Bergman & Joye (2004) proposed the concept of *motility.* They define it as "the capacity of entities (e.g. goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographic space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances" (p.750). The idea of motility is of course implied in the degree of mobility families preserve through their trajectory of international movement. Even though motility presents us with an innovative perspective on societal features and social change, the idea deserves further exploration from the subject's standpoint, in terms of the skills and resources that enable the realization of mobility.

While these sorts of skills and resources resemble those developed and mobilized by nomadic populations, paradoxically in our increasingly uprooted time, there are no more traditions cultivating them. Hence, as people engage in trajectories of international mobility, they have to learn how to be mobile and to find strategies to tackle the specific challenge raised by repeated mobility. To date, few studies have addressed the question of how mobile people, and more specifically, mobile families, are able to systematically and simultaneously adjust to a new country while staying mobile. The publication entitled "The art of living in transitoriness: strategies of families in repeated geographical mobility" (Chapter 7) will scrutinize this question.

### 1.2.2 INTERNATIONAL ADJUSTMENT AS A TWO-SIDED PHENOMENON

The world has changed dramatically since Oberg (1960) defined the term 'culture shock' and moving across countries has grown to be the "default setting" in the life of many people. However, as the classical psychology of migration is deeply based on the sedentary bias, the ideas of moving as harmful and of 'culture shock' still permeate much acculturation research in cross-cultural psychology (Berry, 1976). They are supported by the core finding that intercultural contact and cross-cultural transition is the major problem of migrants' international adjustments. This body of research has examined important psychological and social processes involved in intercultural contact, including learning new culture-specific skills, managing stress and coping with an unfamiliar environment, transforming cultural identities and improving intercultural relations. Despite going beyond medical models of psychopathology and improving upon the older clinical approach, acculturation research still looks at migration as a one-off move from one country to another for permanent settlement involving separated cultural groups.

In this way, this literature shows its limits in view of contemporary migration flows and the complexity, multiplicity and hybridity of cultural environments, identities and belongings (Eriksen, 2007). As recalled by Gillespie et al. (2012), it is highly simplistic to consider contemporary societies as a collection of people or groups belonging to *mutually exclusive* cultures, and with defined identities. Further, "culture" in acculturation research is often equated to nationality and sharp distinctions are made between "host" and "home cultures". This theoretical frame has been limited to adjustment to a single place; it has failed to address the experience of those people moving repeatedly across different countries and engaging simultaneously and systematically both in local cultural systems and transnational practices. Besides, for those moving repeatedly across countries, encountering a new culture is not necessarily in dispute.

More fundamentally, international adjustment has long been conceptualized as *a personal response* to an *unchanging, static environment*. It is important to recall that classical approaches to migration within the discipline of psychology have significantly contributed to the notion of adaptive responses. During the 1970's, for example, forecasts of adaptability to a new sociocultural environment appeared based either on clinical assessments of personality or on "acculturation styles". Even if the acculturation "styles", in principle, apply in the same way to the migrant and to the host, in practice much of the research emphasis fell on the migrant and on the eventual outcomes that occur as a result of individuals experiencing acculturation (Carr, 2010).

In a similar vein, by explaining international adjustment as a unidirectional process of predictable and successive stages, cross-cultural management studies have further contributed to the idea of adaptation as an improvement of the individual ability to perform in a new environment (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). The "U–Curve model" - the most discussed one in the field - describes the international adjustment of individuals in four stages. There is an initial period of excitement and curiosity (''honeymoon stage''); this is followed by a period of disillusionment and frustration (''culture shock stage") as the person deals with the difficulties of living in the new culture; and then by the third stage ("adjustment stage") characterized by "gradual adaptation to the new culture and learning how to behave according to the cultural norms of the host country" (Black & Mendenhall, 1991, p. 226). Acquiring new skills and knowledge can help the person achieve the fourth stage ("mastery stage" or "adaptation stage"), characterized by "a small incremental increase in the individual ability to function effectively in the new culture" (Black & Mendenhall, 1991, p. 226).

Although the model may help elucidate the experience of "becoming adjusted" to a new sociocultural environment, and the feelings of disorientation, frustration and stress resulting from cultural strangeness may start to reduce once the person becomes familiar with the new cultural norms, the notion of stages fostered in this model nevertheless leads to the problematic search for an ideal developmental end point of migrants' adjustment. The implication of seeing international adjustment as a series of progressive psychological transformations, from one stage to the next, from honeymoon to mastery or adaptation, is that these stages become critical reference points for discussing optimal timing for cultural transitions and for discussing migrants' readiness for integrating to the host country without considering the role of the host environment in adjustments. The model dismisses the plurality of developmental trajectories and it has been the subject of criticism by many scholars for its lack of empirical support, its limited applicability to different kinds of mobile groups and its inexplicable elasticity (it expects to fit equally well the experience of those staying for 30 days, 3 years or 30 years).

Furthermore, the idea of a mastery stage is especially contested by the case of those staying temporarily in the host country. It seems evident that adjustment takes place over time and that the duration of the stay would set a different mode of relating to the host environment. As suggested by previous research with expatriates (Schliewe, 2018), the temporary timeframes become fundamental organizers of their experiences in the new country. They guide, enable, and create obstacles to the actions taken in the new environment and they dictate certain priorities (e.g. they might comply with one type of norm but not with another, they may or may not learn the local languages), at the same time as suggesting certain ways of thinking and feeling (Schliewe, 2018).

Additionally, these classical approaches to migration end up neglecting the changing nature of the host environment. In order to move away from the long-lasting ideas of adaptive responses implicit in such non-dialogical readings of cultural encounters, this thesis follows a dialectical approach (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012) to migration that conceptualizes it as a fundamentally complex and ambivalent experience of disruption within continuity, loss in favour of discovery, and novelty against the backdrop of everydayness. This approach gives emphasis to the dynamic and “mutually defining relationship between individuals and their environments” (p. 731). With that, I argue that international adjustment is two-sided. Changes and movements work on the side of the person experiencing the move and on the side of the new environment, which is by no means static. It presumes, therefore, mutuality in this relationship, meaning that mobile families' adjustment is co-constructed in a reciprocal interaction with the host environment. Thus, the study of international adjustments needs to consider the question of the transformations within the host countries in view of the multiplicity of contemporary migration flows.

This thesis represents a significant departure from earlier models of unidirectional international adjustments, and it will further emphasize the relational dynamics involved in the international adjustments of families. Therefore, before considering the current mobility flow of professionals towards Switzerland, I will introduce the principle of interrelated lives to migration research.

### 1.2.3 FAMILY AS A SYSTEM THAT FRAMES INDIVIDUAL ADJUSTMENT

In researching families' international adjustments, we need to consider not only the importance of mobility, but also the significance of interrelated lives. Lifecourse studies (Elder & Giele, 2009) have claimed that people living in intimate relationships mutually enable and constraint each other's life course. Nevertheless, the majority of research is typically concerned with the role of the family only as a resource to support or hinder the mobile worker (Haslberger, Hippler, & Brewster, 2015), as if the other family members were not experiencing concurrently different transitions. On the one hand, previous research explored the role of gender in the context of professionals' mobility, by specifically addressing the experiences of accompanying spouses (Cangià, 2017; Cangià, Zittoun, & Levitan, in press; Coles & Fechter, 2012; Lam & Selmer, 2004; Langinier & Gyger Gaspoz, 2015; Mclachlan, 2007; Ryan, 2011; Ryan & Mulholland, 2014b; Schliewe, 2018). These studies have helped to shed light on the various implications of international mobility for the accompanying spouse, and to proceed to discuss multiple gender configurations in the context of mobility (Schaer, Dahinden, & Toader, 2017). On the other hand, as previously mentioned, some research has been devoted exclusively to children growing up in the context of international mobility (Adams & Fleer, 2015; Dixon & Hayden, 2008; Gyger Gaspoz, 2013). However, the literature on "third culture kids" mainly examines children as an exemplary outcome of changing migratory patterns - often "harmed by" or "resilient to" its effects - instead of comprehending the phenomenon of repeated mobility as interdependent with the structural conditions of movement and as interrelated lives on the move. In any case, researchers have examined the international adjustments of professionals, "accompanying" partners, and children separately.

Instead of focusing on only one component of the family, presuming that the adjustments of one of its members are more worthy of study than the adjustments of the others, and instead of undermining the fact that they move altogether, this thesis looks at the family as a system: "a set of people related by blood or intention. That they are "related" means that they are affected by each other - a change in one sets off changes in the others that in turn feedback and affect the member that originally changed" (Pinsof, 1992, p. 436). In addition, by bringing to light different family members' experiences of international mobility, this thesis seeks to deconstruct the view of family as a unified and homogenous system, and consequently, does not examine the family as a unit of study per se. Family life is viewed here as the mutual, yet not necessarily equal, hierarchically organized interaction of intimately related human systems. This thesis highlights the role of parents (employed or working at-home) in guiding the development of mobile childhoods. It also highlights the fact that the family experiences its own growth through the individual members' growth during the course of mobility, by acknowledging the tendency towards integration in the making of family life that "arises out of the relationship of the father and mother, and something that comes from the innate factors that belong to the emotional growth of the individual child" (Winnicott, 1961, p. 84). The principle of interrelated lives thus invites us to invariably study the person moving as a constitutive part of the family system when analysing people moving with their families across countries.

As a final point, the issue of whether the “accompanying” members are a support or a burden for the mobile worker fails to capture the aforementioned challenges generated by the specificity of repeated mobility. The tension between adjusting to a new place and remaining mobile generates, in turn, other challenges: not knowing in advance and with clarity how long they will stay in a country further complicates the direction and extent to which putting down roots is needed and the making of a temporary “home” for the mobile family. Hence, a salient question would be: On what grounds can family members create a feeling of home in multiple locations? The challenge of recreating the feeling of being at-home on the move is addressed in the case study presented in the publication entitled “A sociocultural approach to mobile families: a case study” (Chapter 6).

Before sketching a theoretical framework that will allow me better address the issues raised in this section, I will briefly introduce the context in which this research was conducted.

## 1.3 The Swiss context

Switzerland represents an interesting context to study the international mobility of families, because it has recently become an attractive destination for mobile professionals, since it hosts a growing number of companies, international organizations and research institutes, and a particularly appealing place for families, due to the high quality of life (e.g., good transport system, health care and education) (Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2013).

The country has long been reliant on foreign workforce, and, despite being a land of immigrants (29% of the population was born outside of the country), in recent decades, immigration policies have grown progressively more restrictive and more selective. Switzerland is among the countries that openly encourage the so-called “highly-skilled immigration” while trying to limit immigration of low-skilled labour force. This reasoning aims to respond to the higher demand for technical skills and to the globalization of production and trade (Cerna, 2009; Hercog, 2017). The bottleneck occurs through the tying of visa issuance to labour market permits, facilitating “highly-skilled” or expert mobility. On a legal level, family members of EU/EFTA migrants residing in Switzerland for work (stays longer than three months) can enter in Switzerland regardless of their nationality and receive a permit (L short-term or B residence permit, Ci permit for members of foreign representations and family members of intergovernmental organizations). Family members of Non-EU/EFTA migrants residing in Switzerland can be granted special permission from local cantonal authorities as part of the family reunification program.

The transformations in migration policies have also favoured the increase of shorter-term stays. More and more, Switzerland ties visa issuance to local and fixed-term employment contracts. This is especially the case for early and mid-career academics, international civil servants, and corporate expatriates. This form of contract creates a more precarious condition for the mobile worker, who now experience the perceived risk of job loss (Doogan, 2015) and an unprecedented sense of “precariousness” associated with the lack of secure work-based identity, the condition of uncertainty and the insecurity of flexible work (Cangià, 2018). Ultimately, this form of contract intensifies the circulation of people and it put into question the dominant political debate on integration in Switzerland that views migration exclusively in terms of permanent settlement. Not by chance, current longitudinal studies tracking migrants' trajectories in Switzerland are showing that the number of migrants arriving is steadily increasing together with the number of departures. According to Zufferey (2018), most migrants leave the country after a few years:

> After a single period of residence in Switzerland, usually of short duration, 42% of migrants left: among them, two thirds stayed for less than a year and 80% stayed for less than two years. These migration pathways are generally associated with work or training, for example, students, interns or professionals seeking work experience in Switzerland. In addition, 13% left Switzerland after following a more complex trajectory (moving within the country or between countries before their departure). But mobility covers a much wider range of situations. Taking into account all the possible internal or international movements, more than seven out of ten migrants experienced some form of mobility in the five years following their arrival. Of these, 63% left the country, 12% moved to another location in Switzerland, while 21% completed at least one round trip between Switzerland and another country and 4% moved around both in Switzerland and internationally. In other words, the act of migration does not mean that a person will settle permanently in the new country; in the majority of cases, migration should be viewed as a state of permanent mobility.

In such a way, the number of professionals moving to, and living temporarily in Switzerland is likely to grow in the next few years. Those who move to Switzerland often do so either with the intention to live in the country for the duration of their work contract, or with not knowing if they will have to move afterwards. Many of these professionals move with their families altogether across countries, which raises more complex questions regarding their mobility and their adjustments to Switzerland. As a result, the above-mentioned transformations change the nature of the experience of mobile families in Switzerland as well as the difficulties they are confronted with. Yet, no research has analysed the mobility of mobile families towards Switzerland. General descriptions about mobile families living in Switzerland and the specific issues they are confronted when moving to Switzerland are presented in the introduction of every publication composing this thesis in slightly different manners. Notwithstanding, the first two empirical chapters of this thesis (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) will illustrate in detail the changing phenomenon of mobility of these families towards Switzerland by describing who these families are, and the services facilitating the lives of this families in Switzerland. Before coming to that, the next section will present the theoretical framework adopted in this thesis.

## 1.4 Theoretical framework: Towards a sociocultural psychology of international mobility

This thesis draws upon a sociocultural approach in psychology to propose a sociocultural psychology of international mobility (Zittoun, Levitan, & Cangià, 2018). This approach emphasizes the mutual constitution of the person and her social and cultural environment, with a particular focus on the experiencing person and the ways in which she makes sense of the world around her. It explores psychological development as a social and cultural process and the dynamics by which the social and cultural becomes psychological (Baucal & Zittoun, 2013). From this perspective, the person constantly recreates the world, and herself, but the world is also doing the same. By acknowledging the dynamic interdependency between the changing sociocultural environments and the person moving, it offers a more comprehensive, dynamic, person-centred, yet socially and culturally aware approach to investigate international mobility. A sociocultural approach assumes that the social and cultural environment creates the guiding conditions for people's lives to unfold. These conditions mediate and can constrain the person life trajectory, while offering her with cultural elements that can be used as resources (Zittoun, 2007).

This approach, inspired by Vygotsky's work (Vygotsky, 1997), has developed into a broad domain with different orientations (Cole, 1996; Marková, 2003; Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011; Valsiner, 2014a; Zittoun, 2012) united by the same epistemological foundations and apposite for different objects of study. Here, I propose to introduce four general theoretical assumptions, that are, in my view, at the core of different sociocultural approaches in psychology and that are relevant to migration and mobility studies, the present research, and the ideas developed in this thesis.

First, sociocultural approaches consider that the person cannot be studied outside of her location within the social and cultural world, where she interacts with different others, social representations, ideologies, and with material objects in specific time and spaces. The specific sociocultural environment has thus material and symbolic qualities, which, as previously mentioned, enable and constrain human action (Zittoun, 2016). In this way, when studying mobile families, we should consider the evolution of transnational, national and local regulations, political, economic and material conditions, social representations and ideologies, that create the conditions for families' everyday life (Strasser, Kraler, Bonjour, & Bilger, 2009). This is not to say, at the practical level, that one needs to include everything pertaining to the social and cultural world in which the person is embedded; nor that the focus should be replaced to the study of the historicity of social representations of mobility, for instance. Instead, it means that researchers must be extremely sensitive to the various elements of the context that are in dialogue with the person. Therefore, we need to consider the transnational, national, and local regulations, political, economic and material conditions, social representations and ideologies, *as they interact* with the person concerned. In that sense, it is a deeply dialogical approach (Marková, 2003). Moreover, these approaches conceptualize "the social" (here by extension, "the sociocultural") as a precondition to development, drawing on Vygotsky's "first law of development", which states that every acquisition is first social, before being reconstructed on a psychological plane through semiotic mediation (Vygotsky, 1997). Thus, the social is more than a mere condition or catalyst of development (Zittoun, 2016).

The second assumption unfolds from this first one. Sociocultural approaches invite us to understand culture as a unique organizer of person-environment relation. In contrast to the widespread notion of culture as a "container of a homogeneous class" (Valsiner, 2012, 2014a), which stands for an entity outside the person, that one either accepts or rejects, culture is viewed as the semiosphere (Lotman, 2000), the sum of all human material, social and symbolic production, which is organized into temporary local, yet evolving, subsystems within which people reposition themselves. As such, sociocultural approaches highlight the fact that culture can function as a living fabric, offering guidance and symbolic resources for those navigating between multiple and constantly changing sociocultural environments. Chapter 4 will further discuss the specific relevance of this second assumption for the study of international mobility through a detailed analysis of mobility expert's use of the notion of "culture".

The third assumption considers that humans strive toward change, and thus contemplates the temporal dimension of human experience. I contend that the notion of time here is primarily related to change, being the passage of time simply a tool to track change. In what follows, sociocultural approaches concentrate on analysing *processes of change* at different levels (i.e. the sociogenetic – transformations of the social environment itself; the microgenetic – changes in interactions; and the ontogenetic – the development of the person through time). These three levels are of course interrelated; they serve more as an analytical distinction that allows precisely to stress the interplay between the personal and the societal, enacted in situated interactions and activities (Zittoun et al., 2018). The focus on processes of change makes development a central concept for sociocultural approaches. Development is not narrowed to the idea of maturation; instead, people develop throughout their life course. Thus, sociocultural approaches are process-oriented approaches that aim to explain the social and psychological processes involved in the person's development, instead of solely comparing changes between static 'recordings' of different stages of development, such as suggested in cross-cultural management literature to study international adjustments.

The fourth and last assumption concerns the idea that every person is unique. When moving across countries, each person studied brings her own genetic and cultural make-ups, her unique trajectory built through multiple encounters irreversible in time with different others and situations, and her singular and creative way of making sense of any given situation according to past experiences and imagined futures (Zittoun & Saint-Laurent, 2014). The quest of human uniqueness is a prerogative to any psychology. Borrowing Oliver Sacks words, "it is the fate — the genetic and neural fate — of every human being to be a unique individual, to find his own path, to live his own life, to die his own death" (Sacks, 2018). Sociocultural approaches relate to the quest of human uniqueness through the specific emphasis placed on sense-making processes. In this regard, this approach seeks to understand how, in a changing complex world full of meanings and diversity, each person experiences that same world in a particular way and makes sense of her existence. The emergence of a personal sense is at the same time socio-culturally guided (as opposed to determined) and personally constructed (Märtsin, 2010a). The person's ability to think and imagine is invariably a result of the person's trajectory across different sociocultural environments, where she is exposed to manifold discourses and situations, which are then internalised, re-organizing psychological activity, and guiding thought and the very experience of the person in that shared world in particular ways (Zittoun, 2016).

Recently, sociocultural approaches have expanded the enquiry on migration and mobility in interesting directions, by taking into account its semantic and psychological dynamics. Gillespie et al., (2012), for instance, draw attention to the fact that geographical movement in space leads to semantic movements of meaning, since the crossing of national borders favours the encounter with alterity (i.e. the ability to transcend the self, which is the basis for human development), and consequently with alternative ways of viewing the world. In such a way, when moving geographically, the person engages both physically and symbolically with others across difference, and tries to re-position herself in relation to the new environment vis-à-vis past experiences. The distinction between geographic movements and semantic movements of meaning is made to elucidate the semantic consequences of mobility. In the semantic environment *self* and *other* are fundamentally inter-related; for a genuine encounter with alterity to happen, the perspective of the other has to integrate the self and to transform the self, to some extent. The authors claim that due to the threat of change, there is often a semantic effort to deny alterity and stabilize pre-existing representations of self and other when moving geographically. They call *semantic barriers* the different ways of speaking and thinking that block such transformative engagement with alterity. As a result, geographical movement is not always followed by the semantic one. People can move geographically, but symbolically be rejected by others, at the same time as, they can move geographically and, at the semantic plane, be in a different place. More fundamentally, and differently from the movement of the body in the geographic space, the semantic world enables us to move between and occupy several social, temporal, and imagined geographic positions at once: "at a semantic and psychological level, the past, present, and future can coexist along with counterfactual presents, imagined pasts, and wished-for or feared futures" (Gillespie et al., 2012, p. 697).

Other scholars have treated migration as a developmental transition (Hale & Abreu, 2010; Kadianaki & Zittoun, 2014), entailing dialectics of "home" and "non-home" (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012). They have called attention to the fact that when moving from one country to another, people can experience a rupture that introduces a break into the person's regular 'flow of being', as the patterns sustaining the life before are no longer functional, and the taken-for-granted meanings are put into question (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012). The affected intelligibility of everyday life prevents the person to carry out her usual actions at the same time as generating uncertainty and anxiety. Moreover, according to Märtsin (2010a), the rupture

> brings to notice the calls of others that previously received a spontaneous response from us. What was an earlier “other as part of me” becomes a strange, unfitting otherness “beside me.” The emergent otherness is questioning and demanding; it calls for our response, but we have no response at hand. We need to create a new response so that the otherness can again become “part of my being” and “I” can move beyond its rupturing potential (p.441).

According to Zittoun (2007a), an experienced rupture is likely to be followed by periods of transition, characterized by processes of change through which the person restores some of the “taken-for-granted” nature of everyday life. As restated by Märtsin (2010a), in a transition, “what was once backgrounded, and was temporarily foregrounded, will become backgrounded again” (p.441). The work of Zittoun (2006a) on transitions through the lifecourse has provided a theoretical frame for more closely examining these processes in order to understand how a new conduct is established. She has proposed to analytically distinguish three interconnected dynamics of changes at play in this situation: processes of learning (mobilization of skills, development of knowledge, uses of spaces, modes of relating, etc.); processes of identity-making (self-redefinition, social repositioning and social recognition, feeling the same person, etc.); and processes of sense-making (interpretation of the situation, its sense within one’s biography, re-creation of continuity within one’s past and possible futures, and elaboration of the emotions raised by these transformations) (Zittoun, 2014b).

On the one hand, approaching migration as a developmental transition has the potential to unveil the psychological processes involved. On the other hand, this theoretical frame has been developed to address only one transition, disconnected from the person’s history of migration. The distinction matters, because that history of repeated mobility may affect how the person experience each transition: some people might have left the country before the “taken-for-granted” nature of everyday life became backgrounded again, while others might be so accustomed with experiencing changes that a process otherwise transformative may be perceived as a smooth continuation of the previous situation. As a matter of fact, the particular combination of geographical mobility, temporary timeframes, and interrelated life courses on the move, can turn the transitional circumstances as-if they were permanent to the families in repeated mobility. What has emerged is a theoretical need for better explaining how families experience multiple transitions across countries.

In order to account for the multiple transitions demanded by international mobility, this thesis proposes a sociocultural psychology of international mobility that contemplates the question of how people can maintain a sense of continuity across different sociocultural environments through time. Is there some complex pattern of continuity and change in how people go about their mobile lives? Typically, the person needs to confer some permanence to properties of the self and of the world to maintain the sense of continuity despite frequent changes and beyond disruption. To construct a sense of permanent self[5] (that is not wrecked by mobility) implies that experience, as different as it may be, must be tied by a thread of continuity. This thread of continuity is of primarily importance for the study of members of mobile families, so that each person can move beyond the rupturing potential of the discontinuities in the ordinary life. At the subjective level, the experienced sense of continuity will be partly given through sense-making processes and by the similar patterns or motives of activities in which people are engaged and that repeat in diverse yet similar frames (Zittoun, 2014a).

Accordingly, I build upon the concept of *spheres of experiences* developed by Zittoun & Gillespie (2015, 2016) to designate “a configuration of experiences, activities, representations and feelings, recurrently occurring in a given type of social (material and symbolic) setting - it is one of the various regular, stabilized patterns of experience in which a person is likely to engage on a regular basis” (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016, p. 8). This notion combines first- and third-person’s perspectives as it understands the situations that feel “relatively the same” for a person as socially given but phenomenologically experienced. For one specific person, her family dinners could be regarded as one sphere of experience: the situation is recurrent enough to be distinct from working or playing with friends, and it takes place in a materially given and symbolically shared environment, which is subjectively experienced by that specific person.

It is worth noting that spheres of experiences should not be reduced to the concept of activity. First, because a “sphere of experience” includes also a relatively stable configuration of social relationships and meanings as well as aspects of identity, emotional qualities, personal sense and orientation (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). For this reason, “packing for the next move” will only be considered a sphere of experience when this “activity” becomes recurrent enough and regulated by a number of implicitly shared “rules” among family members that it activates certain ways of doing, skills, emotions, social roles, and relational modes. Second, because within sociocultural psychology “Activity Theory” or “CHAT” (Cultural-Historical Activity Theory) has strongly centred in the notion of activity to conceptualize tasks being carried out in context. Whereas this approach has nicely expanded the work of Vygotsky and his successor Leontiev by emphasizing the mediated, collective and situated nature of human activity (Wertsch, 1998), it focuses only on concrete and delimitated activities. Hence, it is ill-suited for the study of more complex phenomena that develop at the intersection of multiple and changing sociocultural contexts (Saint-Laurent, 2018) and that can transcend the here-and-now of social, spatial and temporal constraints.

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[5] Self here refers to the agent responsible to the sense of experiential continuity, distinct from others and the world, from which emerges a sense of personal identity (Bento, Cunha, & Salgado, 2012; Hermans, 2001; Märtsin, 2010a).

On the other hand, the concept of spheres of experiences is especially interesting for studying the transitions engendered by moving across diverse sociocultural contexts through time. When people move from country to country, some spheres of experience are preserved, while others disappear. Others can even be created as a function of moving, like "packing for the next move". In view of this, the concept of spheres of experience is particularly useful for the pursuits of this thesis in two ways. First, it provides a conceptual frame that allows us to understand how people are embedded in their sociocultural worlds without having to resort to the problematic idea that everyone needs to belong somewhere (often a place) and to something (social groups, in this case, national and transnational communities). The idea that we owe our being, our ontology, to the spheres of experiences we transit throughout life, challenges the centrality that studies on mobile people put on the feelings of belonging. Each migrant move through different spheres of experiences within the host countries, and identifying these spheres are more relevant than identifying the variety of mobile migrants' group memberships. Second, the concept of spheres of experience is particularly useful to highlight the differences between psychological movement and geographical movement, as it further proposes the differentiation between proximal and distal spheres of experiences. "Proximal spheres of experiences" are primarily anchored in the experiencing body, in the here-and-now moment; they are materially bounded and often socially constrained. "Distal experiences", in contrast, are relatively independent from material constraints, and can be located out of the immediate setting, as when one's mind is wandering through past and future experiences (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016).

With this perspective, in what follows, I present the research questions that will be addressed in this thesis.

## 1.5 Research questions

The theoretical framework presented in the previous section brought to the fore two challenges that a sociocultural psychology is confronted with when studying international mobility: first, to account for the multiplicity of sociocultural environments and experiences mobile people accumulate across countries and through time, and second, to account for the unique ways through which people make sense of their mobile trajectory. In order to account for both the sociocultural conditions of mobility and the perspective of the moving person, this thesis aims at addressing two sets of questions:

***How does the sociocultural environment create the guiding conditions for leading a mobile life?***

The above question is approached through the following two sub-questions:

1) What are the features of repeated international mobility? What are its implications for families? Which challenges does it bring about?

   This question will be mainly addressed in Chapter 3 through a quantitative study characterizing the universe of mobile families in Switzerland and the distinctive pressures they face. In addition, all publications, when describing the research context, will bring to light different aspects of the challenges posed by international mobility. The conclusion will summarize the challenges of leading a mobile life in the studied sociocultural environment.

2) What types of services are made available to support the international relocation of mobile families and what are the implications of expert interventions in the field of international relocation?

   This question will be answered in Chapter 4 through the identification of different service providers emerging to facilitate the life of mobile families. This study offers insights into the structural conditions supporting a mobile life and into the paradoxes emerging from the attempt to improve and mediate intercultural encounters.

***How do people relocating with their families for professional reasons experience repeated international mobility?***

The above question is approached through the following three sub-questions:

3) How do members of mobile families make sense of their experiences of international mobility?

   This question shifts the focus to the lived experiences of families as it is signified by different family members through a qualitative study based on face-to-face, in-depth interviews. It is a transversal question that will be addressed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Chapter 5, in particular, will explore the way people make sense of personal and family transformation resulting from international movement, through the analysis of symbolic boundary work and openness and closure to diversity. Moreover, the divergent ways in which children and adults make sense of international mobility, and how meanings are created to overcome the ruptures raised by the moves, are analysed in the case study presented in Chapter 6.

4) How do members of mobile families cope with international mobility? What strategies enable them to, on the one hand, move across countries while adjusting to each new sociocultural environment, and, on the other hand, adjust while remaining mobile?

   This question will be thoroughly answered in Chapter 7 through the identification of strategies enabling mobile families to move across countries while adjusting to diverse sociocultural environments, based on the same qualitative study exploring families' lived experiences. It sets the focus on the resources families mobilize to facilitate their adjustments and mobility and on the processes through which these moves are handled. In addition, Chapter 6 will approach the question of coping with international mobility by considering how family members support each other throughout their experiences of movement and relocation.

5) How can people retain a sense of continuity despite repeated changes and disruptions?

   This question continues to explore members of mobile families' lived experiences. It sets the focus on the subjective experiences of being confronted with constant changes and how a sense of continuity is created across time. This is a general and theoretical question aimed at addressing the most subjective issue raised by mobility as well as at providing a theoretical direction for the psychological study of international mobility. It will be partially answered in the different publications comprising this thesis. More specifically, Chapter 6 will approach the thread of continuity through the analysis of how family members create a shared feeling of "home" on the move. Chapter 7 will bring to the fore a new modality of establishing a sense of continuity through the employment of three different strategies.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. **Chapter 2** describes the research process and the different methods used to answer these questions, namely, the expert interviews with global mobility specialists, the in-depth interviews with mobile families and the Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. The methodology chapter is followed by five empirical chapters that present the main results of this thesis. **Chapter 3** presents an original analysis based on data from the Migration-Mobility Survey 2016 that characterizes the universe of mobile families in Switzerland and challenges some preconceptions associated with repeated international mobility common in the public discourse in Switzerland. Chapters 4 to 7 were prepared as stand-alone publications[6]. Despite containing some repetition in terms of background information and literature review, each chapter features different yet interrelated dynamics pertaining to repeated international mobility. **Chapter 4**[7] brings to the fore the structural changes in the mobility of professionals and their families towards Switzerland through the depiction of services available to support mobile families' international relocation. **Chapter 5**[8] reflects on the role of family in the way people make sense of personal transformation across time and different countries, with a special focus on boundary dynamics. **Chapter 6**[9] discusses in depth a case study to provide theoretical directions for the psychological study of mobility. In **Chapter 7**[10], a transversal analysis of all interviews conducted with mobile families is conducted to present the strategies enabling mobile families to move across countries while adjusting to diverse sociocultural environments. Finally, in **Chapter 8**, the empirical and theoretical contributions of the thesis as well as concluding remarks are reviewed.

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[6] Each publication has posed more specific questions in relation to the literature and fields they were in dialogue with. Yet, all questions raised through this thesis are aimed at addressing the more overarching question of how international mobility is experienced by families, and under which conditions.

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[7] Chapter 4 encloses the book chapter originally entitled "Relocation services for families in geographical itinerancy: beyond the "cultural problem."", published in the book "Cultural Psychology of Intervention in the Globalized World".

[8] Chapter 5 reproduces the article "Family, Boundaries and Transformation. The International Mobility of Professionals and Their Families", published in the Journal Migration Letters.

[9] Chapter 6 contains the article entitled "A sociocultural approach to mobile families: A case study", published in the Journal Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology.

[10] Chapter 7 reproduces the article entitled "The Art of Living in Transitoriness: Strategies of Families in Repeated Geographical Mobility, published online in the Journal Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science, and currently waiting to be assigned to a specific journal issue.

# 2. CHAPTER

# METHODOLOGY

## 2.1 Introduction

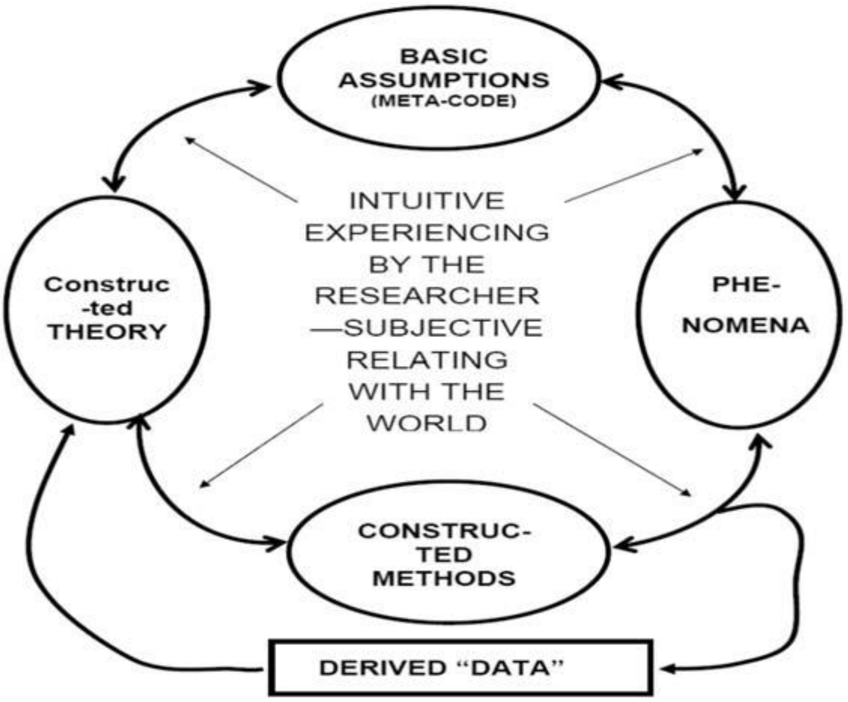
In order to understand how people experience repeated mobility and in line with a sociocultural approach in psychology, the present research was designed to account for both the sociocultural conditions of mobility and the perspective of the moving person. Accordingly, I combine different methods and data sources to enhance understanding of international repeated geographical mobility. I agree with Bauer, Gaskell & All (2002) in that methodological pluralism arises as a methodological necessity to provide adequate coverage of a particular social phenomena. Central to this thesis are the qualitative interviews conducted with members of families in repeated international mobility; nonetheless, as our research team approached the fieldwork, we immediately identified the necessity of interviewing experts and of having specific data about our target population. To that end, we designed an online questionnaire to document the experiences of mobile families, at the same time as launching a proposition to survey migrants recently arrived in Switzerland. Before detailing these methods, I will first present the research process and the researcher's positionality.

## 2.2 Research Process

I conducted the empirical fieldwork between October 2014 and March 2018. The research approach was abductive and collaborative. In the next paragraphs, I will briefly present the "Methodology Cycle" (Figure 1) as recommended by Valsiner's (2017) so to better understand the process of knowledge construction occurring through the methodology adopted here, to then explain how the abductive way of looking at knowledge generalization in science sets up a different relation between theory and methods.

According to Valsiner's (2017) model, science starts from intuition, an "educated" intuition, initiated through the different social practices of science varying across disciplines. A progressive movement between the four following elements then takes place: 1) Basic assumptions, which are axioms assumed by the researcher in relation to the field of a particular phenomenon; 2) Phenomena, the empirical object of study perforce context-bound, 3) Constructed Methods, the means by which the phenomena is investigated; 4) Constructed Theories, the system of ideas intended to explain the phenomena. All these elements interact dynamically to construct the scientific research and all data is subservient within this methodological cycle.

**Figure 1 - The methodology cycle according to Valsiner (2017)**


BASIC ASSUMPTIONS (META-CODE)
INTUITIVE EXPERIENCING BY THE RESEARCHER —SUBJECTIVE RELATING WITH THE WORLD
Construc -ted THEORY
PHE- NOMENA
CONSTRUC- TED METHODS
DERIVED “DATA”

The cycle re-establishes the indissoluble ties between theory and method and it becomes clear that the derived data is always linked with the theoretical contexts in which they were produced. Data, in turn, can inform theory that will participate to the construction of new methods to shed new light on the phenomena towards an ever-enhanced complexification. The apparent “finished nature” of the data is, in fact, a natural result of the scientific inquiry as it is limited in time.

In this research, some theoretical assumptions originating from sociocultural psychology presented in Chapter 1 were selected on the basis of how they related with the phenomenon of repeated international mobility to guide the construction of the methods. The literature about repeated mobility and the theoretical framework also helped to sharpen which research questions were worthwhile asking in the first place, to only then proceed with the construction of the methods. Nevertheless, the research strategy was not limited to developing hypothesis based on existing theory; instead and in parallel, I relied on the observations made during the preliminary fieldwork. The first study conducted for this thesis (see Chapter 4), for example, was a way of setting off into the “field”. Aiming at understanding better the target population and their needs, I first approached organizations and professionals working with mobile families. This exploratory fieldwork allowed me to raise the relevant questions specific to repeated mobility to only then construct an interview guide especially for the families based on the emerging issues. Moreover, this first contact with key people structuring the mobility of these families in Switzerland enabled the expansion of the phenomenon investigated so to consider the structural conditions of mobility as an integral part of these families’ experiences, regardless of their elaborations on that. This exemplifies how the object of study is continuously adjusted to the characteristics and complexity of the phenomenon, as suggested by Saint-Laurent (2018). This is particularly true for the whole scientific research process: methods may be readjusted to novel constraints, new literature may be required, reality may surprise us and assumptions we were not fully aware of from the start may be revealed and problematized along the way.

For this reason, the process of knowledge construction of this thesis develops as it spirals through all the quadrants shown in Figure 1 above, to the effect that phenomena, methods and theory are also progressively constructed at each cycle. During the research process, it was necessary to rotate several times through the cycle so to allow the exploration of the phenomenon from different perspectives. This movement often requires the aforesaid methodological pluralism to have a more integrative view on the different perspectives about the phenomenon under investigation. Methodological pluralism is not synonym of an exhaustive gathering of data, as accumulation of data not necessarily allows generalization. The different methods adopted in this research emerged, instead, from the need of gathering empirical data at some specific points to shed new light on the phenomenon and to potentially contribute to theory building. This search for key empirical evidence characterizes the abductive path to knowledge construction. Valsiner (2014b) critically observes that the "qualitative turn" in social sciences has "simply replaced the focus of the inductive generalization exercise from the field of quantified phenomena (as data) to that of qualitative descriptions (some ''rich,'' some ''poor'') (p.3)", yet either ways make methods having an authoritative existence on their own. He thus asserts that the inductive pathway to generalization is necessarily limited, requiring a combination with the "top-down pathway of deductive guidance of where empirical investigation can be crucial" (p.25). Not all empirical investigations are crucial. By "crucial", the author means the theoretically relevant moments in which input of empirical work acquires absolute relevance, in an attempt to bring Albert Einstein's *experimentum crucis* to sociocultural psychology. The use of abduction presents an alternative between these inductive and deductive paths and can best describe the present research process.

In addition to abduction, the research process was also collaborative. My research was developed through several scientific collaborations. Despite the growing number of PhDs conducted within research projects and of interdisciplinary collaborations in academia, the social dimension of research is hardly ever acknowledged. First and foremost, research is always an interactive process, made possible through the exchange with many others. It is not only the case that researchers learn from others, and teach others in turn, but dialogue and social interaction are crucial for scientific innovation. Communicating research in the making and confrontation of ideas, for example, are progressively more used as analytical tools. Remarkably enough, researchers are still viewed as single thinkers, solitary minds. The very organization of academia contributes to this representation by overplaying the role of self through the pledge of originality and by rewarding individual scientists seeking recognition while downplaying the role of others to further scientific progress. It is important to recognize thus that every piece of research reflects the trajectory of an individual researcher, but the processes of interaction and communication are integral parts of the research process and shape the final outcome.

During my research, I had the chance to be part of an interdisciplinary network, the nccr – on the move, from which exchanges between different disciplines across social sciences were fostered from the beginning. I was also part of the CUPSYNET, a European doctoral network in the specialized domain of sociocultural psychology. These exchanges provided me with externality over my own research, preventing me from the partiality of a single point of view. Moreover, while collaboration between different disciplines is not easy to realize, when it comes to researching pressing social issues, such as human migration and mobility, it is hard - not to say sterile - to cling to a single discipline. Rather, to conduct research that is problem-oriented, one needs to cross the boundaries of historically developed disciplines. For this reason, whenever in the course of this research, I encountered problems that could only be solved by means of other expertise than my own, collaboration was fostered. At the beginning of 2015, our research team teamed up with another research group investigating the mobility of highly skilled migrants towards Switzerland to launch the idea of an immigrant survey. The nccr – on the move supported the idea and organized a survey of recently arrived immigrants in Switzerland through the collaboration between different research projects and under the coordination of the demographer Dr Ilka Steiner from the University of Geneva. Our research team contributed to this survey by proposing the modules related to the family life and their integration in Switzerland. The collected data, in turn, provided a representative overview about migrant living conditions in Switzerland that was essential for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena I was interested. This is just one example of how interdisciplinary can work successfully without losing its epistemological legitimacy and the integrity of its form. As long as the interdisciplinary cooperation starts from a thematic opening and find a way to create epistemic interfaces, be it through shared research question, shared methods or shared theories cooperation (Padberg, 2014), the cooperation will not infringed on the perspectives of those involved.

While interdisciplinary can be fruitful for broadening the reflection through the creation of exchanges between people with different perspectives, a pronounced effort has to be made to take the perspective of the other and this is not an easy task. I found myself “betwixt-and-between”, a la Turner (1979), two audiences constantly while conducting my PhD in an interdisciplinary project. In ‘Discourse in the novel’, Bakhtin (1981) brings the issue of answerability through the dialogic orientation of a word towards all kinds and degrees of otherness:

> The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue. (p. 280)

As every word is directed towards an answer, the different audiences play a crucial role on the answers produced. My research had to address simultaneously two audiences: psychologists and migration scholars. This thesis is somewhat an effortful response to this "double addressivity". The laborious work of such "double addressivity", in my opinion, can constitute a disadvantage of these collaborations. Here I found that the interdisciplinary research situation is more complicated than the epistemic vs non-epistemic tradeoffs and I had to learn to accept that, this thesis, as a by-product of this tension-filled interaction cannot escape the great influence of the "answer" it anticipates.

Moreover, I worked in close collaboration with the anthropologist Dr. Flavia Cangià, and counted with the consistent support of my supervisor who also led the research project, Professor Tania Zittoun. Our research team, composed by Prof. Tania Zittoun, Dr. Flavia Cangià and I, devoted lot of work in developing a sense of having a shared definition of the object of study and a common language to create the conditions for a constructive dialogue between the research partners. This sense can be better described as the realisation of mutual awareness of agreement and disagreement than the stipulation of prescriptive forms to create epistemic interfaces. In practice, this meant numerous meetings and discussions among our core research team to make research practices acts of dialogue, going beyond a simple process of data collection. As will be evident in the empirical papers, we worked closely together to build a theoretical frame that could accommodate the diverse research interests, we analysed data together, and we wrote articles and book chapters together. In creating this space, I have discovered that to investigate is also to reflect upon the words of others, the writing of others, the experience of others. This is possibly the main benefit of fostering collaborations during the PhD – to learn early on the dialogic nature of knowledge construction; after all science is a shared enterprise. These exchanges enabled me to be more equipped to show the complexity of the phenomenon and surely made my research more accountable. At last, confronting one's own assumptions, hypotheses, ideas, procedures and decisions at different phases of the research process through the filter of the other is a strive towards rigour and systematization.

There are risks, nevertheless, in the collaborative endeavour. Concerns include matters of social positioning, power relations, the division of labour, trust and answerability. It is challenging to assert the researcher autonomy and preserve some freedom necessary for scientific innovation when circumscribed by so many social voices. It is worth mentioning here that despite working closely, in particular with Dr. Flavia Cangià, we had different interests and projects and we conducted fieldworks separately. Cangià research focused on the trailing spouses, gender roles and "precarity" within the context of migration and mobility, while my research focused on the psychosocial dynamics of the specific phenomenon of repeated international mobility as lived by families. In general, the risks did not pose a problem to the development of the present research. Learning to negotiate and to set boundaries between each researcher work are important steps during long-run collaborations. As a final point, the experience of developing a research through collaborations made me realize that the issue of trust may be the most fundamental one. The epistemic reliance is not sufficient, research partners must be held together by shared ethical values.

To conclude, the collection of empirical papers presented in this thesis reflects both the abductive and collaborative process of my research. Some papers are product of a collaborative endeavour; others well reflect the different phases of the research. The format of a PhD thesis with publications was chosen precisely to account for the dynamic nature of research and to show the evolution of my research project.

### 2.2.1 RESEARCHER’S POSITIONALITY

> After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower’s straying afield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that these games with oneself would be better left backstage; or, at best, that they might properly form part of those preliminary exercises that are forgotten once they have served their purpose. But, then, what is philosophy today – philosophical activity, I mean – if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? (Foucault, 1990, p.8)

My own positionality proved to be an important aspect of the research. Being a foreigner in Switzerland and having lived in different countries helped me to feel-in into the experience of repeated international mobility. I knew what it is like to start a new life over again in an unknown country without any social network and not knowing the local language. I had experienced myself the hardships and the bliss of encountering a new cultural environment. I knew what it was like to feel displaced, overwhelmed and extremely sentimental by the “little” things that were taken for granted in my own cultural environment. I lived the ambivalent experience of trying to fit in and adjust to a country without the warranty of being able to stay. I caught up myself in the attempt to live in more than one place, in the noise between different demands, torn by which direction to put down roots. I was familiar with the uneasiness of returning back “home”, with the misleading effects of nostalgia, the loneliness of living in Switzerland, and with a wide array of emotions and practical issues involved in mobility. These have set the stage for asking relevant research questions and the common ground for enabling exchanges with my interviewees on issues of international mobility.

This space of intersujectivity, activated by a sense of having a mutual understanding of repeated mobility, helped participants to feel comfortable to share their intimate struggles during the interviews. This was accentuated by another position, that of psychologist. Often, after turning off the audio recorder, interviewees shared with me aspects of their trajectory of international mobility that they would not have done otherwise. I opted not to treat those as data, since I prize for their confidentiality, but surely those gave me a better grasp of the profound humanly implications of repeated mobility.

The interview encounter is indeed an emotionally charged experience, especially when the interviewee ongoing emotional journey of migration meets that of the interviewer. To navigate this emotional terrain derived from one's own positionality, Ryan (2008) advises to adopt a reflexive approach to bring "all this messy, personal and emotional baggage out into the open and allows a discussion of inter-personal dynamics that would otherwise remain buried within the research process." (p. 311). I was attentive to explore not only the interviewee's but also my own emotional reactions during the research process. I kept a notebook separately for this purpose. Whenever I was powerfully moved by my interviewee's descriptions, I tried to reflect on how my positionality was affecting my engagement with their narratives.

The challenge here is twofold: 1) taking into account the fact that our emotional reactions generally conceal something deeper that we cannot always articulate at the time of the given social interaction (Ryan, 2008); 2) making explicit, through reflexivity (i.e., critical self-awareness of the researcher's historical-cultural situatedness (Finlay, 2014), the researcher's subjective knowledge around the phenomenon. The later becomes particularly important to move beyond our own understandings of the "lived experience" so to "do justice" to the phenomenon under study. In fact, one's lived experience of the phenomena under investigation can simultaneously enable and prevent particular kinds of insight**.** Furthermore, as Valsiner (2017) suggests, not every kind of feeling into one's experience leads us to science. For this reason, confronting my interpretations of the interpersonal dynamics engendered by my own migrant positionality with that of other researchers in my research team was a way of gaining further insight into the phenomenon. A reflexive engagement with the transcript at different times during the research process was also helpful to reveal different facets of the relational process emerging between researcher and participant.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite sharing the experience of repeated mobility with the participants, I was not moving with my family and my mobile trajectory was constructed on the grounds of a sedentary childhood. In this way, I could only relate partially to their experiences, and I was able of seeing with fresh and curious eyes the particular challenges related to family life. All and all, my position of mobile-migrant-psychologist in Switzerland enabled me to have a phenomenological sensibility, so to say, towards repeated mobility and played a role during the entire research process. It did not prevent me though from thinking differently about the phenomenon: in truth, the art of intuitive grasping a certain phenomenon becomes streamlined in the process of knowledge construction, enabling one ultimately to get free of oneself.

## 2.3 Methods

In this section, I present an overview of the different methods used for data collection and data analysis. Every one of the papers composing this thesis includes a methodological section, hence repetition is unavoidable. Here the research methods are introduced in more details, additional information not available in the papers is provided, as well as the rationale behind the choices made. The presentation is chronological, following the order of the implementation of each method.

### 2.3.1 EXPERT INTERVIEWS

To gain leverage on our research context and to better understand how the mobility of professionals and their families was structured and supported in Switzerland, our research team started by conducting exploratory interviews with global mobility experts working with the relocation of mobile families. In particular, I carried out six expert interviews between October 2014 and October 2015 with a relocation consultant, a scientific advisor, a relocation account manager, intercultural trainers, and representatives from public and private organizations working at International People Operations departments and at Welcome Centres. All of these global mobility specialists dealt with the relocation of professionals and their families worldwide. Some worked more specifically with the professional integration of accompanying partners through programs as “Dual Career Couples” while others lead teams focused on attracting international employees to their Swiss office and managing their time in Switzerland.

The expert interviews were particularly appropriate to gain practical insider knowledge about family relocation and access to our target population. Bogner, Littig & Menz (2009) contend that conducting expert interviews in the exploratory phase of a project is an efficient method of gathering data particularly in institutions, as the organizational structures behind the experts and their position in the organization can serve as a strategic entry point to the research field. Most of our interviewed experts held key positions either within the organizations they worked or within an extended circle of experts. They indicated potential interviewees and provided us with additional opportunities for expanding our access to the field. The expert interviews thus offered a privileged source of updated information about relevant structural changes approaching mobile families’ lives and allowed us to document what was being done to facilitate the life of these families. They were also useful to confirm the reliability of our strategy to study mobile families. As a final point, the expert interviews offered a distinguished material to unfold the underlying authoritative power of expert knowledge. Chapter 4 discusses more in depth the implications of a different set of relocation expertise by bringing to the fore the ambivalent nature of expert interventions.

Considering the advantages of expert interviews for the present research, we were also very cautious in the way we used them to advance our main research goals. By virtue of their exploratory character, there was a need for increased reflection on the information gathered through these meetings. One of the main methodological issues around expert interviews is the "risk of granting the undisputed relevance of expert knowledge a standing that would ultimately constitute the non-validated confirmation" (Bogner et al., 2009, p. 2). Triangulation of data sources was used during the analysis of these interviews as efforts to provide validity (Flick, 1992). All information collected was anonymously and confidentially treated. The analysis of expert interviews was based on a data-driven, bottom-up approach resembling the basic thematic analysis proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001) in order to identify the most recurrent themes emerging across these interviews as well as to raise further relevant questions for the interviews with the families.

### 2.3.2 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH MOBILE FAMILIES

Twenty-nine migrant families living in Switzerland were interviewed within the frame of the research project between 2015 and 2018. The sample size was set at 30, on the grounds that this number would generate a data set sufficiently large to reveal, in detail, both commonalities and differences in families' experiences of international mobility; given the intensive and time-consuming nature of qualitative analysis, it was felt that a sample any larger than this would generate excessive demands in terms of transcription, coding and analysis. Interviews were conducted by me (23 in-depth interviews with 14 mobile families, including the professional and/or the partner and when possible their children) and Dr. Flavia Cangià, who conducted the other interviews. In order to understand the experiences of families in repeated international mobility, I selected 26 families that participated in these interviews according to the following inclusion criteria for the category of mobile families:

(1) having at least one child living in Switzerland,

(2) having moved internationally more than one time (in other words, having a history of international mobility),

(3) having moved due to the professional expertise of one or both adults.

As a result, for this thesis, three families were excluded because they did not fulfil the criteria, reducing the interview sample size to 26 mobile families. In addition to considering only families fitting my target population, I sought to guarantee variability across the selected sample, such that a full and wide-ranging picture of interviewees' experiences could be built up. Through constant iterations between data collection and data analysis, I tried to ensure that each interview would illuminate different aspects of the phenomenon until I reached a satisfactory level of understanding of the object under study i.e. that there was confidence all important facets of the phenomenon has been observed and recorded. It is important to note that there are variations in the numbers reported in the articles comprising this thesis according to the objective of each article and when it was written. However, the families referred to in those articles are all part of the 26 families that make up the thesis' sample.

### *Recruitment Procedures and Sampling Strategy*

Families were approached through various means. To begin with, I used the internet and a list of stakeholders to identify relevant organizations (public and private), associations and relocation agencies supporting or employing mobile families. I also visited some of these organizations to create a network useful for accessing interviewees from different professional sectors. In addition, I relied on my personal network in Switzerland to connect with these organizations. I have joined several online community platforms of international people relocating due to work and participated in a number of their gathering and events so as to connect with those living in Switzerland with their families. Our research team then circulated a research call through these community platforms, social networks, international organizations and associations, and multinational companies. Snowballing (Patton, 2002) through trusted community organizations and previous participants also contributed to gaining access to more people as well as to understanding the relational networks of these families. Finally, we designed an online questionnaire (Appendix A) specific to our population to document the experiences of international professionals and their families living in Switzerland. The online questionnaire was particularly useful for recruiting participants for interviews. Our research call contained a link to this online questionnaire and the last section of the questionnaire invited respondents to provide their contacts to meet for an interview. The Migration-Mobility Survey (n=5973) also contained a similar concluding section. In order to account for the diversity of mobile families' situations and trajectories, and to avoid participation of only the most easily reachable participants, I concentrated on contacting those respondents who agreed to an in-depth interview and met the inclusion criteria for the category of mobile families. Almost 60% of the families who participated in in-depth interviews were recruited from the associations, organizations, and professional and international networks supporting or employing professionals relocating with their families and the other 40% replied either to the questionnaire or the large-scale survey.

These sampling strategies increased the participation rate, yet I also consider important to highlight the role of secondary motivating factors for encouraging people to participate in the present research, such as their curiosity about the topic and their willingness to contribute to scientific research – families frequently declared they were content that empirical research on this topic was being conducted. In addition to this, I have adopted a flexible position as a researcher to facilitate the research process and make it as agreeable as possible for the participants. When contacting the families, I suggested the place and order of the interviews, but I let them choose the best format for them and I tried to accommodate their demands as well as any other constraints arising from the fieldwork - even if this meant going to their house in a remote Swiss village in the mountains at night without any assurance of travelling back home.

### *Interviews with mobile families*

The interviews, held at a time and place chosen by participants, were conducted in different Cantons in the French-speaking and German-speaking parts of Switzerland. The majority of interviews took place at the family's house as I suggested; however, a few were conducted at a coffee shop or at the interviewees' workplaces. When possible, different family members including children were interviewed during the same visit; on other occasions I had to come to their house twice. The possibility of interviewing more than one family member per household, in particular the children, was highly dependent of the families' willingness to open their house to me. When I met interviewees in a coffee shop or at their workplace, it was harder to reschedule another interview with another family member. Based on this experience, I prioritized interviewing the family members who were available upon the scheduling of a visit. Interviews were conducted mostly individually, except for two interviews with couples. Some participants were interviewed twice. It is worth noting that many times other family members interacted with and intervened in the ongoing individual interview. Instead of regarding these as unwelcome interruptions, I considered them as rich sources of data and in line with the aim of studying families.

Participants were briefed about the nature of the study before completing standard procedures concerning informed consent (see Appendix B for the Participant Agreement). The research followed the ethical guidelines of the Swiss Psychological Society (SSP - Société Suisse de Psychologie or FSP - Fédération Suisse des Psychologues) and of the Institute of Psychology and Education of the University of Neuchâtel. All children were interviewed with the consent of their parents. Interviews were audio-recorded, all information collected was treated in strict confidence and the researchers guaranteed data protection. The data was later stored on a university server, which is password protected. Interviews were conducted mostly in English, with the exception of five conducted in two Latin languages, as preferred by the participants.

Each interview lasted between approximately 60 and 180 minutes and was based on a semi-structured guide with an initial narrative question about the person's trajectory of international mobility and internal and external narrative questions (Rosenthal, 2004). They were iteratively refined through pilot interviews, using a combination of theory-driven concepts from literature on migrant families and research on transitions, pointing toward the identification of the resources people mobilize to address an unfamiliar situation in their everyday lives (Zittoun, 2007b). Questions focused on the main difficulties of moving internationally and adjusting to a new country, the moving decision-making process and negotiation within the family, the resources they used to facilitate their mobility and adjustments to diverse countries and in particular to Switzerland, their social networks and transnational ties, the changes they might have experienced because of mobility and their future plans. More specifically, participants were asked about the kind of adjustments they made in their everyday life to deal with a more mobile life, what they carry around throughout their moves, what kind of activities they preserved across places, what were the differences between moving with and without the family, what they have learnt from previous moves and how mobility has transformed them. A sample interview guide can be found in Appendix C. It is worth noting that the socio-demographic information and the qualitative answers provided through the online questionnaire (n=56)[11] as well as the responses of the Migration-Mobility Survey allowed me to personalize the interview guide for each participant before conducting the interview. In those cases, I could reframe the questions in relation to their experiences and raise more specific questions so to gain a more in-depth understanding on how they subjectively experience international mobility.

In addition, I developed an elicitation technique to help participants narrate their trajectory of international mobility and to understand their experiences of locality and feeling at-home across places. In one module of the interviews, I asked each participant to zoom-in on Google Maps/Earth to the place or situation of which they are a local and where they feel at-home (they could make five choices; Figure 2 is an example of such a response). The idea was inspired by the proposition made by the writer Tayie Selasi (see Selasi (2014)) to replace the question of “Where are you from?" to "Where are you a local?" when talking to mobile migrants, so as to shift the focus to where real life occurs. This technique was an attempt to enact a methodological paradigm shift – to go beyond the limits of methodological nationalism and experiment with a different way to narrate mobile trajectories.

Methodologically speaking, the mobility turn was accompanied by a proliferation of ‘mobile methods’ (for a complete review see Büscher & Urry (2009)) that sought to ‘follow the people’ to observe their movement through overt methods like ‘shadowing’ others, or covert methods like ‘stalking’ and to explore the imaginative and virtual mobilities of people. As I could not follow my participants throughout their trajectories of international mobility, I used the visual aid of Google Maps/Earth to navigate across places, and context bounded-experiences with each participant. The use of visual methodologies has grown in psychology because they have the potential to engender further talk around life experiences which do not fit into organized, pre-rehearsed life narratives (Reavey, 2011). The elicitation technique, created for this specific research, turned out to be a powerful way of inviting participants to connect threads of their stories and weave them together in a different way than possible through narrative interviewing alone. The movement of zooming into each “locality” had the potential of evoking three dimensions of experience (informational, affect and reflection) particularly well. Every time participants would choose one locality, I would ask them why they made this choice, but also what feelings arise when they look at that particular place, situation, person or experience. Further, after juxtaposing the 5 “localities” in the same plane, I would ask them what happens when they look back at them altogether. It was an alternative way of making them reflect on how they build self-continuity across places, and methodologically, to deal with the distributed nature of remembering.

Moreover, this visual aid provides additional information or cues which enables researcher and participant to overcome potential interactional difficulties such as asymmetries. For this reason, they are particularly apposite for interviewing children. The use of “life-maps”[12] (Hviid, 2012, 2016) has proven to be helpful for gaining an understanding of children’s everyday lives. However, drawing these maps on big pieces of paper would not provide a good picture of the “life world” of mobile children, as their experiences entail movement across multiple localities around the globe. The Google Maps/Earth module was the cornerstone of the interviews with children in the present research, as this exercise provided the key point of entry for the interview process as such. For children and adults, this elicitation technique required a computer or similar device with an internet connection. This in turn limited its use for all interviews, as such connections were not available at some locations.

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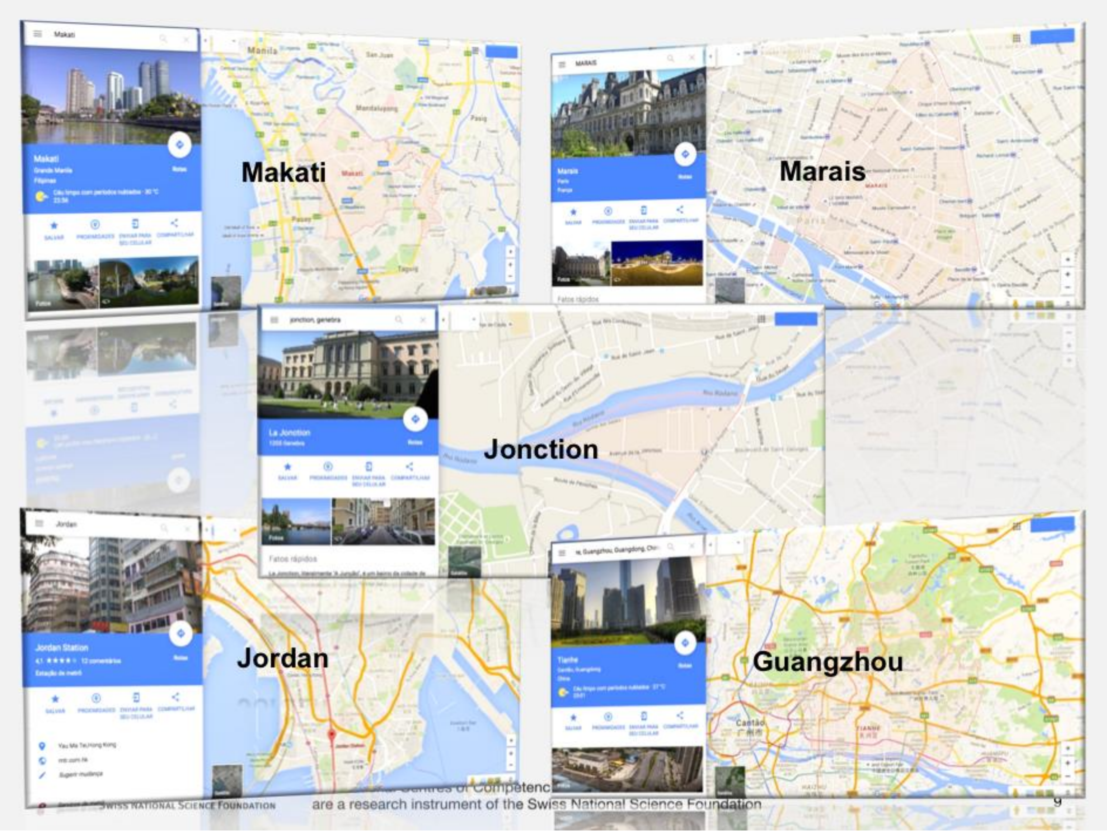
[11] This thesis makes use of the online questionnaire both as a recruitment tool for participants and as a source of information about the respondents who were later interviewed. Analysis of the online questionnaire data was not conducted, because I opted to use instead with the Migration-Mobility Survey for a representative analysis.

**Figure 2 – Where are you a local of?**


Makati
Marais
Jonction
Jordan
Guangzhou
are a research instrument of the Swiss National Science Foundation

Debrief procedures completed the session. At the end of each interview, participants were offered the chance to add new information, ask clarification questions to the interviewer and to discuss any reflections. After turning the recorder off, I would ask them again if they wanted to add any particular information. They often shared more intimate struggles in this moment. Finally, participants were informed that they have a right to withdraw consent at any time without giving any reason, about the consequences of a withdrawal and about the future use of research data.

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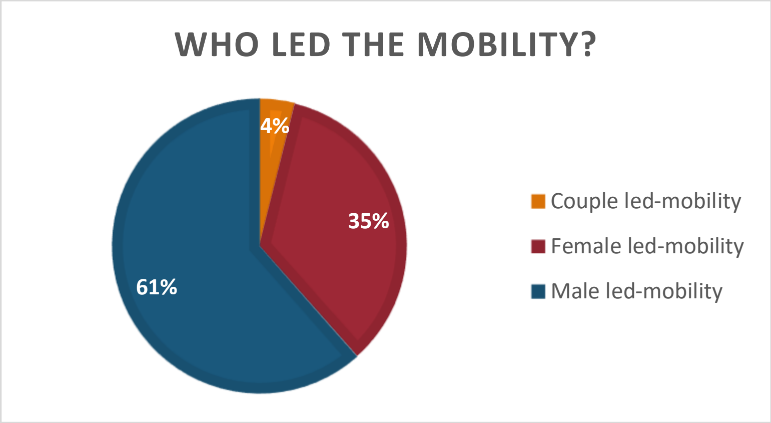
[12] Hviid (2012) asked children to draw “life-maps” on big pieces of paper, representing places and people they considered important in their lives and to make roads or motorways, representing the connections between different sociocultural arrangements such as school to home.

*Participants*

All families in the sample moved to Switzerland initially for professional reasons, however the range of professional sectors and their occupational status were varied. Among the interviewees, there were employees of different international organizations and multinationals, researchers, engineers, lawyers, diplomats, consultants, teachers, coaches, entrepreneurs, and some accompanying partners, who were often looking for a job or taking care of family duties. They were living in the German and French speaking parts of Switzerland. The vast majority have been granted the initial Swiss residence permit “B”, which is limited in time, but allows the spouse and children to reside in Switzerland as well. As a result, they are bounded and constrained to a system regulating the duration of their residence in the country at the same time in the counterpart regulating their future mobility.

**Figure 3 – Who led the mobility?**



Another result of this regulatory frame is that conventionally one of the adults had a job in Switzerland first, only in one of the cases from our interviewee sample both partners had a job around the same time. Figure 3 shows that in 65% of the families men had the job first in Switzerland and were responsible for the family’s international mobility. Only 35% of the families has the women leading their mobility for her career.

All the interviewees, except for one accompanying a mobile husband for the first time abroad, have moved internationally many times (from 2 to 9 international relocations), living and adjusting to several countries. Their destinations included countries on all continents and the duration of their stay in each country varied. Each family member had a different trajectory of international mobility, including different countries of origin. They often hold more than one nationality. The present research focused rather on the common experience of relocating frequently.

In addition, although not a criterion, some of the interviewees have also frequently moved houses within the same country of residence - one interviewee told me she had moved houses 37 times - and some adults had also moved frequently during childhood. Despite having diverse trajectories of international mobility, all families came and were currently living with at least one child in Switzerland. The sample included one single parent family and one couple that separated upon their arrival in Switzerland but remained living close to each other for the children. Table 1 presents some sociodemographic details about the participants.

**Table 1 - Participant details**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Adults** | | |
| Age range | | 33-57 |
| Gender F:M | | 17:11[13] |
| Educational level | Bachelor or equivalent<br>Master or equivalent<br>PhD or equivalent | 8<br>15<br>3 |
| Civil status | Single, never married<br>Married<br>Separated | 1<br>24<br>1 |
| Number of children (living in Switzerland or in the same household) | 1<br>2<br>3 | 7<br>14<br>5 |
| **Children** | | |
| Age (range) | | 7.46 (0-23) |
| Type of school | Public (state-run) and local<br>Private and local<br>International<br>Not applicable | 9<br>2<br>9<br>6 |
| **Trajectory of International Mobility** | | |
| Number of countries lived (range) | | 4.75 (3-8) |

| Considered countries of origin | Countries lived |
|---|---|
| Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Nigeria, Philippines, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States. | Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bermuda, Bosnia Herzegovina, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Kosovo, Kuwait, Malaysia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Philippines, Russia, Santo Domingo, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Trinidad e Tobago, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay. |

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[13] Gender count was based on the overall number of adults interviewed.

### *Transcription Conventions*

I relied on Hepburn & Bolden (2012) conversation analytic approach to transcription to build the transcription conventions. This approach is based on Jefferson (2004) system of conventions, which has been developed to account for the various relevant features involved in talk that orthographic representation often misses. My aim was to capture and preserve the rich subtlety of interviewees' talk for a fine-grained analysis of the transcripts. While conversation and discourse analysts have mainly focused on transcribing what happens in the interaction between interlocutors, I was more interested in building a convention that would allow the recognition of the interviewee's emotional state through text. For this reason, I selected only a few conventions and adapted them when necessary according to this purpose. The conventions address temporal and sequential relationships, aspects of speech delivery and intonation, meta commentaries and uncertain hearings and other features accompanying talk such as laughing and crying. The transcription conventions are presented in Table 2.

Some interviews were transcribed verbatim by me and others by trained students. Our research team circulated a call among students enrolled in the University of Neuchâtel and I prepared and conducted a training session for transcriptionists. I reviewed and corrected the transcripts and I altered the names of people, places, organizations and any other revealing information in order to guarantee participants' anonymity. The transcriptionists also signed a Confidentiality Agreement, agreeing to maintain full confidentiality in regard to the audio file of recorded interviews, transcriptions, and documentations received, and to delete all electronic files containing research-related documents from their computer/tablet/smartphone hard drive, any back-up devices and any cloud storage, as soon as they completed the work.

It is important to note that that during the phase of data analysis, having transcripts that provided a detailed version of interviewees' talk was extremely useful for discussing the interviews among our core research team. Since transcripts are selective in nature and therefore cannot be treated as a replacement for the data, the effort to generate transcripts that pay a lot of attention to the emotional quality of the interview's talk is worthwhile when conducting research that seeks to understand people's experiences. However, such detailed transcript extracts do not always feature in subsequent thesis chapters, as the constraints of space set by their original format of publication (i.e. as articles) did not necessarily allow extensive quotation.

## Table 2 - Transcription Conventions

| **Symbol** | **Meaning** |
|---|---|
| **[ ]** | Square brackets mark overlapping talk. |
| **(.)** | A full stop inside brackets indicates a micro pause, a notable pause but of no significant length. |
| **(15 secs)** | A number inside brackets denotes a pause long enough to be timed. |
| **-** | Single dash indicates a halting or abrupt cut-off in the flow of speech. |
| **“ ”** | Quotation marks indicate third party quotation. |
| **CAPITALS** | Upper-case letters indicate that something was said loudly or even shouted. |
| **>>** | Arrows like a forward button surrounding talk show that the pace of the speech has quickened. |
| **<<** | Arrows like a rewind button show that the pace of the speech has slowed down. |
| **:** | A colon marks lengthened sounds, usually extended vowel. |
| **Underlining** | Underlining marks word or part of a word for emphasis. |
| **° °** | Degree signs are placed around talk that is markedly quiet and soft. |
| **hh (.hh)** | The letter *h* indicates hearable breathing. Inhalation is shown with a full stop before the letters (e.g. (*hh)* for exhalation vs. (*.hh)* for inhalation). |
| **(Laughter)** | Laughter inside brackets for laughing. |
| **(h)** | When a bracketed ‘h’ appears, it means that there was laughter within the talk. |
| **(Crying)** | When the person speaking cries. |
| **mhm** | Mhm marks hesitation. |
| **(( ))** | Material within double parentheses marks transcriptionist’s comments on how something is said or on what happens in the surrounding situation. |
| **((Smiley voice))** | Denote the voice quality or suppressed laughter.<br>For the sentence spoken with the referred voice. |
| **((Creaky voice))** | Denote the voice quality**,** can appear during upset and turn endings.<br>For the sentence spoken with the referred voice. |
| **((Tremulous voice))** | Denote the voice quality**,** can signal upset.<br>For the sentence spoken with the referred voice. |
| **(Single parentheses)** | Words within parentheses are used to represent a possible hearing. It denotes that the words spoken were too unclear to transcribe. |
| **(xxx)** | Denotes speech that cannot be deciphered. |
| ***italic*** | Italic is used for speech produced in other language than English. |

### *Analysis*

To understand how family members experience repeated mobility, I conducted a transversal analysis of all interviews with the aid of the software Atlas.ti 8 using a systematic approach of iterative categorization (Neale, 2016), starting with open coding (identifying key issues or themes emerging from the derived data, such as the difficulties prompted by repeated mobility reported by participants), then inductive sorting of codes into broader conceptual codes, followed by moving iteratively between the derived data, coding framework as well as the frames of reference (Valsiner, 2014b) to identify the main themes coming across the interviews and the strategies family members employed to cope with repeated mobility. The unit of analysis encompassed any meaningful segment of an utterance and its context so to preserve focus on the identification of processes at stake (codes were enlarged and contextual). The overarching themes highlight the variability across the data set. The subsequent path to generalization followed the abductive mode apposite for areas of science where the object is constantly changing (Valsiner, 2014b). I also conducted a case study analysis of one family (Chapter 6) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved.

### 2.3.3 MIGRATION-MOBILITY SURVEY 2016

Prior to this study, little information about mobile families living in Switzerland was available, produced by official statistics. For that reason, our research team joined efforts with the one investigating the mobility of high-skilled migrants towards Switzerland, to survey “highly skilled” migrants within the framework of the nccr – on the move, with the support of a third research team seeking to create a longitudinal database on foreigners living in Switzerland.

As meetings evolved, several research teams manifested their interest in this survey. Due to the different needs arising from each project, it was decided not to distinguish migrants by their skill levels and, instead, to survey recently arrived migrants (up to 10 years in Switzerland) by expanding the initial questionnaire topics along two thematic modules: first, family trajectories, and second, civic engagement and political and social participation.

For methodological reasons, the Migration-Mobility Survey focused on different groups of migrants (from German-, French-, Italian-, English-, Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries), allowing researchers to compare different countries of origin, gender and durations of stay within each language group. The chosen groups represent important immigrant populations in Switzerland. In addition, the languages spoken among other migrant groups were very diversified, especially among the so-called “lower skilled” migration.

**Table 3 - Geopolitical region, origin groups, attributed language and share in the total foreign-born population**

| Geopolitical region | Regions and countries | Attributed language | Share in total population* |
|---|---|---|---|
| EU(EFTA) | 1. Germany | GE | 23% |
| | 2. Austria | | 2% |
| | 3. France | FR | 8% |
| | 4. Italy | IT | 9% |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 5. United Kingdom | | EN | 3% |
| | 6. Spain | | SP | 3% |
| | 7. Portugal | | PO | 13% |
| Industrialized non-EU/EFTA | 8. North America | Canada, USA | EN | 2% |
| Non-industrialized non-EU/EFTA | 9. India | | EN | 1% |
| | 10. West Africa | Benin, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Togo<br>Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Saint Helena<br>Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe | FR<br>EN<br>PO | 1% |
| | 11. South America | Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela<br>Guyana<br>Brazil | SP<br>EN<br>PO | 3% |

Note: *The share in the total foreign-born population considers other selection criteria (age at immigration and the time of the survey, specific resident permit and max. ten years of residence).

The target population was sampled through the Swiss Federal Statistical Office sample register (SRPH), considering residents who:

1. immigrated after June 2006 to Switzerland (max. of 10 years of residence),
2. were foreign-born,
3. held one of the selected nationalities,
4. held a resident permit (B), settlement permit (C), short-term permit (L) or are diplomats/international civil servants,
5. were over 18 years old at the time of immigration,
6. were between 24 and 64 years old at the time of the survey.

In order to maximize response rates and to guarantee the representativeness of the final sample, the methodology followed a mixed-mode approach, with information collected through an electronic questionnaire (CAWI), in which subjects could answer survey questions through different electronic devices (computers, tablets or mobile phones), and telephone interviews (CATI). The first mode secures the participation of subjects who are more difficult to reach through landlines. Anticipating potentially low response rates due to the mobile nature of our subjects, 13’660 addresses were sampled and a reserve sample of 6’476 was drawn. The fieldwork was conducted between October/2016 and January/2017, coordinated by Dr. Ilka Steiner. Ultimately, 5,973 interviews were successfully completed (97% by CAWI).

The survey instruments included the core questionnaire and two additional modules. The core questionnaire was composed of 1) screening information, 2) basic current demographic information and 3) information on the migratory trajectory/history (residence, education, employment and legal situation) and migratory intentions. Module 1 contained questions on the members of the family and the household, as well as modifications of the family configurations and household composition. Module 2 focused on the civic engagement and political and social participation of migrants in Switzerland and their country of origin. To ensure comparability and overall coherence, questions were taken from Swiss surveys, or from international surveys and adapted to the Swiss context. The survey instruments were developed in English and translated to five languages (German, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese). Table 4 presents the different topics and variables included in the different thematic blocs. The target length of the survey was about 30 minutes per interview.

### Table 4 - Questionnaire structure, sections and topics

| Section | Topic/Variables |
|---|---|
| Introduction screens | Welcome<br>Explanations regarding participation |
| A. Screening | age, gender, country of birth, nationality(ies), arrival year in Switzerland, permit, family status, postal code |
| B. Migratory history | country of origin, degree of international mobility before coming to Switzerland, previous stays in Switzerland, reason of immigration, migratory status of partner/spouse, support when moving, from whom and in what areas |
| C. Citizenship | intention to apply for Swiss citizenship, why/why not |
| D. Education history and current situation | highest level of education, in which country, level of education obtained in country of origin, certificate of equivalence, learnt profession, current formal education |
| E. Employment history and current situation | |
| Employment before arriving in Switzerland | labor market situation, occupational status, sector of business |
| First job search in Switzerland | job before arriving in CH, company transfer, job search strategy, difficulties, help, job search duration, labor market situation once arrived in CH, occupational status, sector of business |
| Current professional situation | years spent in paid work, current labor market situation, occupational status, sector of business, present occupation, work contract, company's locality, reasons for job-education mismatch, subjective perception of job situation before and after migration to CH |
| F. Family configuration and household situation | household size, partner: residential situation, birth country, nationality(ies), level of education, labor market situation, children: birth date(s), residential situation(s), childcare, type of school, school language |
| G. Integration | |
| Language | languages one masters best, level of understanding/speaking local language |
| Personal network and transnational ties | relatives in CH, circle of friends, visits to the country of origin: frequency, residence, feeling of being at home, visits by friends/family of country of origin, place outside of CH |
| Leisure activities, civic engagement | CH and home country: interest in news and current events, type of voluntary work, politics, trying to improve things, access and confidence in own ability to participate in politics |
| H. Life in Switzerland | stay in CH: limited in time, number of years, intention/plan to leave Switzerland, country of destination<br>level of satisfaction: life, job, studies, relationships, decision to move to CH<br>experience of discrimination (why, where), income, level of attachment to CH and country of origin |
| J. Conclusion | contact details (follow-up survey, qualitative interviews, win a tablet), further/final comments |
| Salutation screens | Thanks<br>Transfer to webpage of nccr – on the move |

Further information on the survey and results can be obtained at the webpage of the nccr – on the move (http://nccr-onthemove.ch/research/migration-mobility-survey). The survey report and the dataset can also be found at FORSbase, a Swiss data-access portal (https://forsbase.unil.ch/project/study-public-overview/14592/0).[14] The next chapter is based on the analysis of this survey. In what follows, I will first describe how I prepared the dataset to obtain information about mobile families and the methods used for data analysis, and then proceed to present the first empirical results of this thesis.

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[14] Accessed on June 14, 2018.

# 3 . CHAPTER

# MOBILE FAMILIES IN SWITZERLAND

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on data from the Migration-Mobility Survey 2016 to characterize the universe of mobile families living in Switzerland, in order to better understand their experiences, as well as the contemporary conditions and challenges of repeated international mobility. To date, no other survey undertaken in Switzerland has produced information specifically about this group; in fact, most of what is known about families in repeated international mobility is based on qualitative analyses.

The contribution of this chapter is twofold: first, to situate the reader with a depiction of the profile and conditions of mobile migrants in Switzerland, accounting for the host environment – shared by all migrants interviewed –; and, second, to provide a first-hand sense of the pervasiveness and magnitude of the features and challenges of repeated international mobility, before zooming in on its qualitative and experiential dimensions, discussed at length in the following chapters. Concretely, the statistical analysis presented in this chapter complements the qualitative analysis by putting it in perspective, informing the extent to which its insights can be generalized to mobile families at large.

In what follows, I first describe how I prepared the dataset to obtain information about mobile families and the methods used to analyse the data, then I describe the basic features of mobile families living in Switzerland. More specifically, I focus on the support mobile families received when relocating to Switzerland and on some indicators of transnationalism, such as close friends and attachment to host and home countries, to understand families' embeddedness in the host country. The chapter further investigates the relationship between repeated mobility and well-being indicators, such as life satisfaction, feelings of loneliness and homesickness. Quantitative findings challenge key preconceptions long associated with this form of mobility and common in the public discourse in Switzerland.

## 3.2 Goals, operational definitions and empirical strategy

As previously mentioned in the methodological chapter, the Migration-Mobility Survey sought to provide information about migrants who moved to Switzerland over the last ten years. A total of 5'973 subjects completed the questionnaire, either online or by phone. Thanks to the wealth of information about family configurations, we dispose of detailed data about the situation of mobile families in Switzerland.

Researchers' ability to rigorously study mobile families is typically limited by three issues. First, it is challenging to survey mobile populations due to the very nature of their mobility behaviour. Second, as a result of the latter, the most common strategy for surveying mobile families is approaching multinational companies or their organizations for expatriate spouses; however, this strategy tends to oversample employees of those companies and, as a result, to misrepresent the characteristics of professionals' international mobility. Third, national statistical offices tend not to focus on this population, presumably due to lack of interest in understanding the reality of those who are likely to leave the country afterwards.

To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first attempt to characterize mobile families without oversampling from multinational companies, enabling a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics engendered by international repeated mobility through a survey conducted at the national level and representative of 63% of the Swiss immigrant population.

The survey is particularly well-suited to study my target population, as it includes holders of resident permit (B), settlement permit (C), short-term permit (L), as well as diplomats and international civil servants, while excluding those only provisionally admitted (permit F) and asylum seekers (N). As such, it covers migrants and their families coming to Switzerland mostly for professional motives, rather than those seeking protection for political reasons. Moreover, despite oversampling high-skilled immigrants[15], the survey did not reject individuals with lower qualification levels; 52% of all subjects hold a tertiary degree.

Before looking specifically at mobile families, their characteristics and the subgroups against which I benchmark them, I perform a cluster analysis to identify the most common *personas* in the data, and a discriminant analysis to tease out the main characteristics that tell them apart. The goal of this analysis is to allow for a data-driven classification of the profiles of migrant families in the survey, being agnostic about how they should be grouped. Once groups and their characteristics have been identified, I return to the issue of mobile families and rely on the key characteristics that emerge from the cluster analysis as *classifiers*, setting up comparison groups in a more controlled approach – varying one characteristic at a time.[16]

The hierarchical cluster analysis was based on the following variables from the Migration-Mobility Survey: gender (1 if male, 2 if female), type of resident permit (1 if C permit, 2 if B permit, 3 if Ci Permit, 4 if L permit), number of countries in which the person has lived, number of moves before the latest move to Switzerland, year of birth of the eldest child, and year of arrival in Switzerland. I also added the following composite variables, computed from other survey variables: an indicator variable of German origin (the most common home country of survey participants), a life satisfaction index, and a relative attachment index. German origin equals 1 if the person reports Germany as their home country, and 0 otherwise. In what comes to life satisfaction, the survey asks subjects to rate their current life satisfaction in a scale from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest); the life satisfaction index I use rescales survey responses as follows: it attributes life satisfaction a value of 1 if the respondent rated satisfaction with their life in general 6 or lower, a value of 2 if the rating was 7, a value of 3 if the rating was 8, a value of 4 if the rating was 9, and a value of 5 if the rating was 10. Last, in what comes to relative attachment, the survey asks respondents to rate, on a scale from 0 (no feeling of attachment) to 7 (strong feeling of attachment), to what extent they had a feeling of attachment to Switzerland and to their country of origin; relative attachment is computed as the difference between the score assigned to the country of origin and that assigned to Switzerland (Origin – CH).

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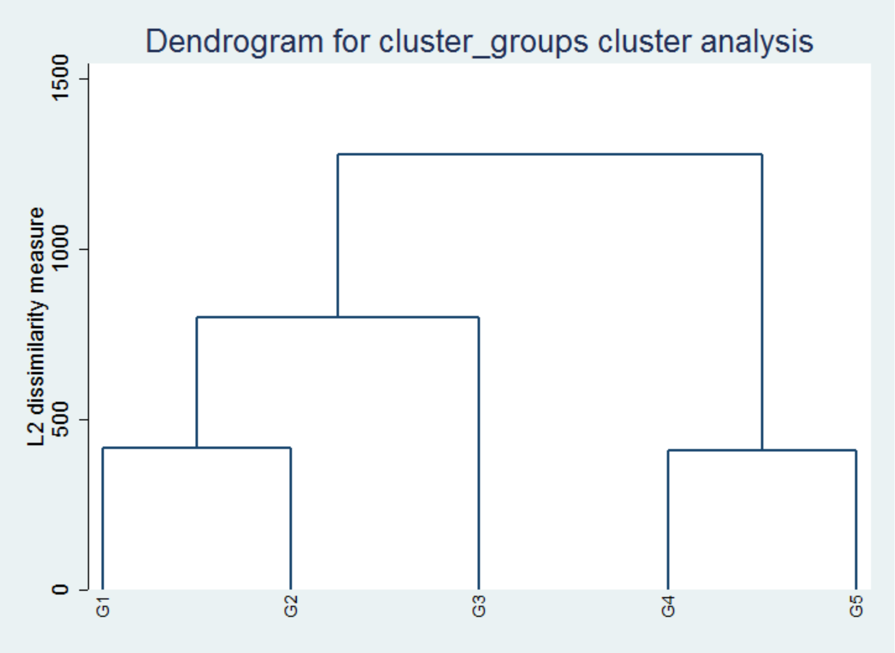
[15] Since the survey was only administered in 6 languages, all of them European (Migration-Mobility Report, 2017).

[16] For that reason, in the cluster analysis, I restrict attention to migrant families, by including the year of birth of their eldest child (which inputs missing values for migrant individuals) as a variable for hierarchical cluster selection.

In doing so, we are left with 3’192 subjects – those members of migrant families. We restrict the dissimilarity index such that we are left with 5 clusters, to keep the analysis manageable. The figure below displays the dendrogram that results:

**Figure 4 – Dendrogram for hierarchical cluster analysis**



I start by summarizing the descriptive statistics for each cluster, in an attempt to informally infer what are the key characteristics underlying each group, in the following table:

**Table 5 – Descriptive statistics of each cluster (mean values)**

| | Less recent moves | | | More recent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **G1** | **G2** | **G3** | **G4** | **G5** |
| Gender | 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.3 | 1.4 |
| Origin Country = Germany | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.08 | 0.12 | 0.00 |
| Number of Countries | 1.0 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 0.9 | 0.9 |
| Number of Moves | 4.1 | 3.9 | 3.2 | 4.0 | 3.7 |
| Year of Birth Eldest Child | 2006 | 2009 | 2006 | 1995 | 2004 |
| Year of Arrival in Switzerland | 2011 | 2011 | 2010 | 2012 | 2013 |
| Number of Prior Moves to CH | 1.3 | 1.3 | 1 | 1.4 | 1.7 |
| Residence Permit | 1.6 | 2.1 | 1.4 | 1.8 | 2.4 |
| Relative Attachment (Origin - CH) | 0.2 | 0.0 | -0.3 | 0.2 | 0.6 |
| Life Satisfaction | 3.1 | 3.5 | 3.1 | 3.0 | 3.4 |
| Number of subjects classified | 2’148 | 357 | 12 | 630 | 45 |

Roughly speaking, the algorithm splits subjects into two branches: those who migrated to Switzerland in 2011 or earlier (G1, G2 and G3), and those who migrated after that (G4 and G5). Within the former branch, the main characteristic that sets G3 apart from the others is the number of moves – close to 3 (on top of the latest to Switzerland), while all other groups are much closer to 4 previous moves. What is more, members of G3 on average only lived in Switzerland once before the latest move, while a higher share of subjects in all other groups have lived in Switzerland twice or more in the past.

As it turns out, this feature seems to matter for patterns of relative attachment. G3 is the only group to display, on average, higher attachment to Switzerland than to the origin country; all others are either neutral (G2) or display higher attachment to the country reported to be considered that of origin (G1, G4 and G5). Consistently, G5, the one with the highest share of subjects with multiple prior moves to Switzerland, displays the highest average relative attachment to the origin country as opposed to the host country. The fact that, unsurprisingly, such patterns strongly correlate with those of residence permits (G3 has the highest share of settlement permits, and G5, the lowest) suggests that forced repeated migratory movements due to constraints on the length of stay may map into the quality of adjustment of migrant families to the host environment.

In what comes to life satisfaction, an interesting pattern emerges. The age of children at the time of the latest move to Switzerland seems to correlate with reported scores: the younger the eldest child at the time of the move, the stronger the patters of life satisfaction. In fact, the lowest average life satisfaction (G4) had children averaging 17 years old at the time of the latest move to Switzerland. That pattern is consistent with the principle of inter-related lives on the move: family relations mutually constraint and enable each other’s life trajectories, including how they feel.

All groups have a similar proportion of men and women. Other differences, such as the proportion of German origin subjects (null in G1, G3 and G5), do not seem to correlate with differences in life satisfaction or relative attachment across clusters.

While the above analysis is informative about the different groups of migrant families present in the survey data, and about the characteristics that potentially distinguish them, it does not necessarily yield an accurate understanding of the *relative importance* of each variable, since descriptive variables are correlated. To overcome that limitation, I next undertake a discriminant analysis – a statistical procedure that decomposes variation in the dissimilarity index into canonical functions, and then analyses their sensitivity to changes in each variable.

**Table 6 – Canonical linear discriminant analysis**

| Function | Canon. Corr. | Eigen-value | Variance |  | Likelihood Ratio | F | df1 | df2 | Prob>F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  | Prop. | Cumul. |  |  |  |  |  |
| **1** | **0.5248** | **0.380186** | **0.8608** | **0.8608** | **0.6824** | **35.536** | **36** | **1.20E+04** | **0** |
| **2** | **0.23** | **0.055879** | **0.1265** | **0.9873** | **0.9418** | **8.0301** | **24** | **9224** | **0** |
| 3 | 0.0644 | 0.004169 | 0.0094 | 0.9967 | 0.9944 | 1.2747 | 14 | 6362 | 0.2143 |
| 4 | 0.038 | 0.001443 | 0.0033 | 1 | 0.9986 | 0.76539 | 6 | 3182 | 0.5971 |

**Table 7 – Standardized canonical discrimination function coefficients**

|  | **function1** | **function2** |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | 0.28 | -0.20 |
| Residence Permit | 0.01 | **0.73** |
| Origin Country = Germany | -0.17 | -0.36 |
| Number of Countries | -0.01 | **-0.44** |
| Number of Moves | 0.11 | 0.36 |
| Year of Birth Eldest Child | **0.94** | 0.03 |
| Year of Arrival in Switzerland | **-0.32** | 0.08 |
| Relative Attachment (Origin - CH) | -0.07 | -0.02 |
| Life Satisfaction | 0.06 | 0.42 |

The formal discriminant analysis confirms the intuition emerging from the informal comparisons between clusters: hierarchical cluster classification is most sensitive, on the one hand, to patterns of mobility and family configuration – number of countries and eldest child's age at the move – and, on the other, to conditions at the host country – length of the latest stay and type of residence permit.

Even though it may be tempting to use such clusters to study the features of repeated mobility and its challenges for mobile families, that strategy entails three important limitations.

First, each cluster captures different dimensions of mobile families – e.g.: different number of prior moves, different residence permits, different origin countries. To answer the research question posed by this thesis, however, the relevant focus is on the population of mobile families as a whole – of course, always mindful of their heterogeneous experiences. Second, while differences across clusters help define the challenges they experience and how different dimensions of those experiences may map into their patterns of life satisfaction and relative attachment, the relevant counterfactual is rather other family profiles: *not* different profiles of migrant families, but settler families, families that migrated without children, families that do not currently live with their children in Switzerland, and individuals who migrated without families. Third, many characteristics change across clusters simultaneously. To rigorously study which characteristics of mobile families lead to different experiences and psychosocial dynamics, it is important to vary each of its defining characteristics at a time. This is what I do moving forward.

In order to describe my population of interest, I propose an operational definition of *mobile families* based on the theoretical construct adopted in this thesis. As the survey did not inquire whether respondents moved along with their families, the inclusion criteria for defining a family as *mobile* are as follows:

(1) having at least one child when moving to Switzerland, and

(2) living with at least one child in Switzerland, and

(3) having lived for at least three months in one other country in addition to the country of birth and Switzerland.

The first criterion is meant to distinguish mobile families from those who migrated as a couple, having children only after arriving in Switzerland.[17] The second criterion is meant to distinguish mobile families from "transnational families" – those that only had children living abroad (possibly in the original "home" country).

I did not include as criterion motivations for moving to Switzerland because I wanted to include all family members: not just those who moved for professional reasons, but also those who came to accompany the mobile worker. My main concern was to keep a sample large enough to contain respondents moving with their family to Switzerland while not excluding different family configurations (i.e. single-parent families were included in order to not be normative).

Those three criteria yield 919 subjects classified as mobile family members in my sample. The analysis I present here thus focuses primarily on this group. To ensure representativeness, my analysis relies on sample weights. A weighting based on a three-stage process was applied, weighting observations by their inverse probability of being selected in the sample (so as to correct for non-response), rendering the data representative of the population of migrants in Switzerland covered by the scope of the survey. Using those weights, *mobile* status characterizes 57’620 family members currently living in Switzerland.

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[17] The year of birth of the eldest child was subtracted from the family's year of arrival in Switzerland.

By covering different migratory realities, the survey allowed me to compare my target population (i.e. mobile families) to other groups[18], so as to disentangle the characteristics specific to repeated international mobility, highlighting the new phenomena distinctive of the latter. The definition of each comparison group is as follows [19]:

- “Migrant settler families” [20]: those who comply with criteria (1) and (2) that define mobile families, but not with criterion (3);
- “Mobile families with children living only abroad” [21]: those who comply with criteria (1) and (3) that define mobile families, but not with criterion (2);
- “Mobile families who had children after moving to CH” [22]: those who comply with criteria (2) and (3) that define mobile families, but not with criterion (1);
- “Mobile individuals without children” [23]: those who comply with criterion (3) that define mobile families, but not with criteria (1) and (2).

Over the following sections, I rely on this typology to analyse my working hypotheses about mobile families in Switzerland.

## 3.3 Assessing mobile families’ profiles, support and privileges

Repeated international mobility has long been associated with the movement of corporate and business expatriates, diplomats, military personnel, and their privileged living conditions. Within the public discourse and the social sciences literature, the international mobility of professionals and their families has been considered a privileged, frictionless (Cresswell, 2006) and rootless form of mobility. This is because the most important reason behind the move is work, which theoretically facilitates the crossing of international borders and the adjustments to the new country.

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[18] The weighted and unweighted frequencies of each subgroup can be found in Appendix D

[19] Recall that, for mobile families, *childBeforeCH* = 1 & *familyLivingCH* = 1 & № countries lived > 2.

[20] i.e.: *childBeforeCH* = 1 & *familyLivingCH* = 1 & № countries lived = 2.

[21] i.e.: *childBeforeCH* = 1 & *familyLivingCH* = 0 & № countries lived > 2.

[22] i.e.: *childBeforeCH* = 0 & *familyLivingCH* = 1 & № countries lived > 2.

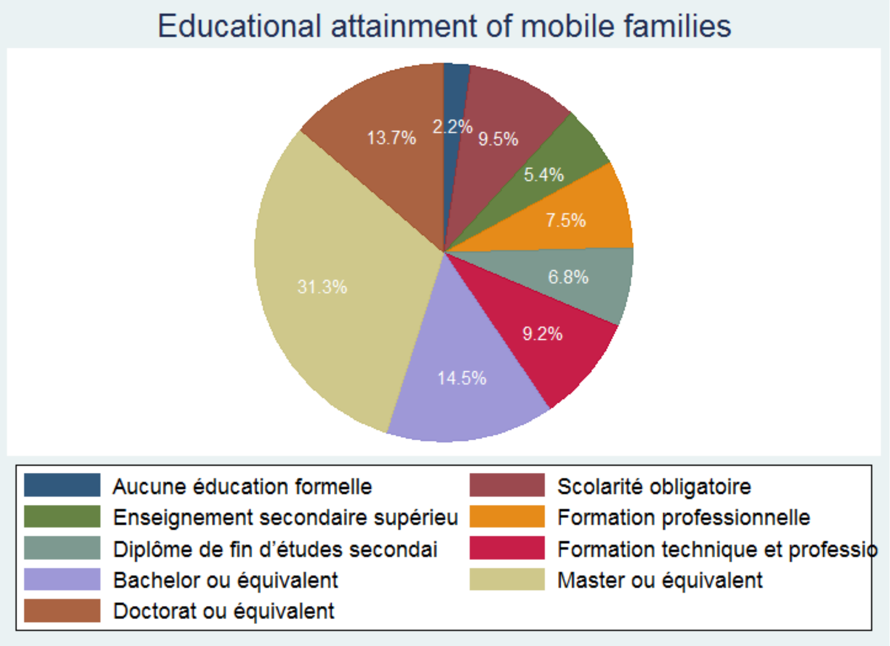
[23] i.e.: *childBeforeCH* = 0 & *familyLivingCH* = 0 & № countries lived > 2.

Besides, social scientists tend to conceptualise the international mobility of families as a smooth phenomenon, being mainly concerned with the structural conditions and frames under which people move. Governments and mass media relentlessly narrow the discourses about international mobility to the channel of entrance in a certain country, further perpetrating these views about the elite characteristics of these migrants and the presumed "effortlessness" of this form of mobility.

In contrast, my analysis for *mobile families* challenges such widely held views. Results show that this population is more diverse than the public discourse seems to indicate in terms of gender, educational background, country of origin, migratory trajectories and arrival conditions.[24] As a striking example, within mobile families, 24.8% of males did *not* indicate professional reasons among those that led them to move to Switzerland; among those, 52.6% indicated they migrated to accompany their family or to start a family in Switzerland.

In what comes to other descriptive statistics of the sample, approximately 68% of mobile families arrived in Switzerland between 2011 and 2016. Educational attainment of mobile family members is consistent with the increase of highly qualified migrants among new arrivals in Switzerland since the end of the 20th century: 59.5% of subjects in this group are highly qualified migrants, with tertiary education (Figure 5).

**Figure 5 – Educational attainment of mobile families**



Most mobile family members are European (Figure 6). While the top-5 countries represented in the sample mirror the Swiss migratory landscape (20% from Germany, 10%

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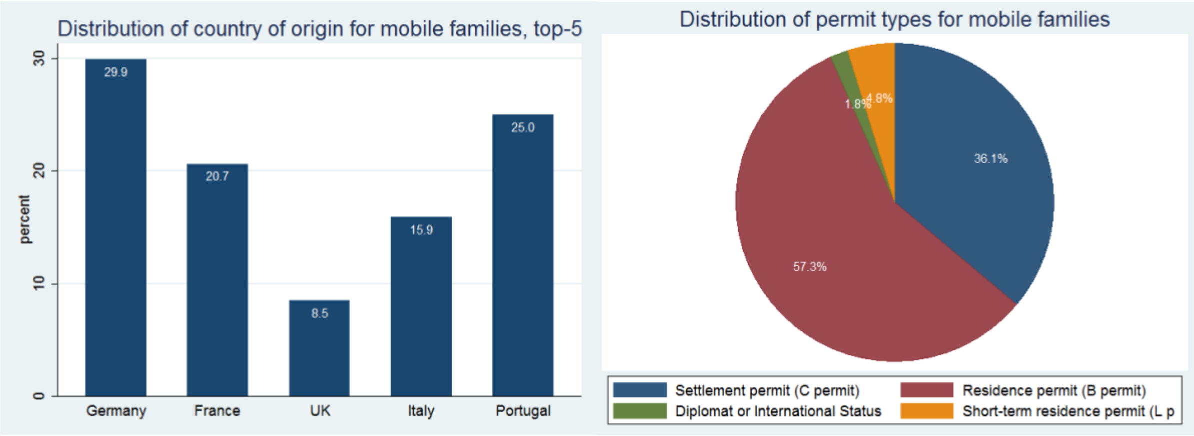
[24] In the following, all figures are weighted according to the procedure described in the previous section.

from Portugal, 9% from Italy, 8% from France, and 5% from former Yugoslavia[25]), the proportion of British nationals is higher than in the whole population of recent immigrants in Switzerland. This might be partly due to coverage problems arising from the languages in which the survey was conducted (German, French, Italian, English, Spanish and Portuguese) and partly due to the migratory patterns since 2010 – 80% of the highly qualified European migrants coming to Switzerland were British nationals.[26]

The reason why the majority of mobile families living in Switzerland comes from European countries is directly related to the facilitating conditions Switzerland grants to EU-27/EFTA member States' nationals. In terms of residence permits, Switzerland makes a sharp distinction between EU/EFTA nationals and non-EU/EFTA nationals (also known as third country nationals). The restrictive admission system for third country nationals strongly contrasts with the open policy for EU/EFTA citizens based on free movement. As Figure 6 shows, over a half of mobile family members in the sample have been granted the residence permit "B", meant for foreign nationals who reside in Switzerland for a purpose and for a limited period of time (up to five years for EU-27/EFTA nationals, and limited to one year for non- EU-27/EFTA nationals with possibility of renewal). Almost one third have the settlement "C" permit, granted after five or ten years of residence in Switzerland. Only 1.8% of them have a diplomatic or international status. The distribution of permits clearly shows that the traditionally typified forms of international mobility are declining. It contests the fluidity associated with the supposed privileged form of mobility. Regardless of their intentions to stay longer in Switzerland or not, the majority of mobile families are bounded to a system that regulates the duration of their stay in the country, which at the same time constrains and shapes their future mobility patterns.

**Figure 6 – Distribution country of origin and permit types for mobile families**



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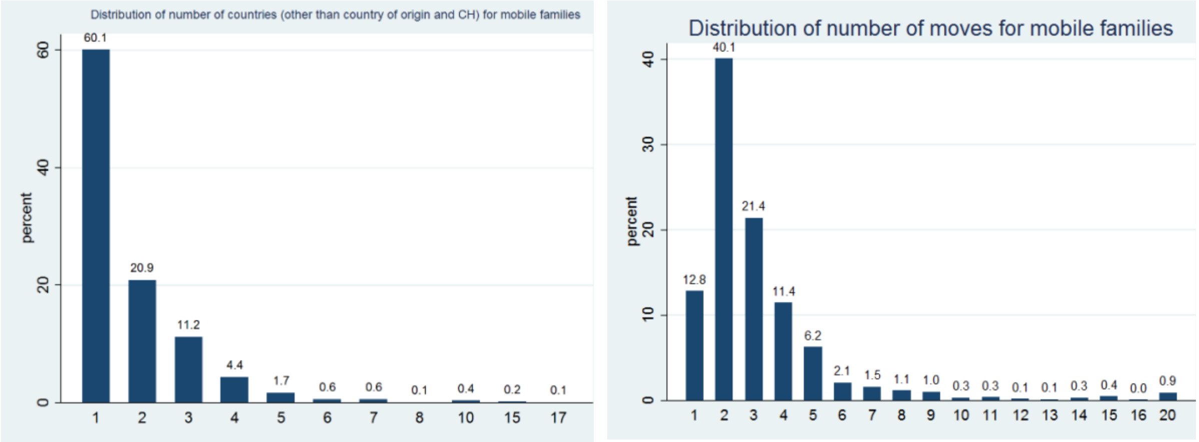
[25] NCCR Migration-Mobility Survey Report.

[26] https://indicators.nccr-onthemove.ch/how-qualified-are-migrants-in-switzerland/, accessed in July 7th, 2018.

Consistent with that argument, about 40% of mobile families had lived in two or more countries besides Switzerland and their country of origin (Figure 7), a pattern that is also captured by the distribution of number of moves among mobile families, which is more skewed to the right.

**Figure 7 – Distribution number of countries lived and number of moves**



Beyond legal frameworks (the legal constraints that affect the ability of mobile families to adjust locally, such as residence permits), institutions and social networks are also critical for understanding the conditions of mobility: the availability of support and the sustaining environment for the mobile family in the host country.

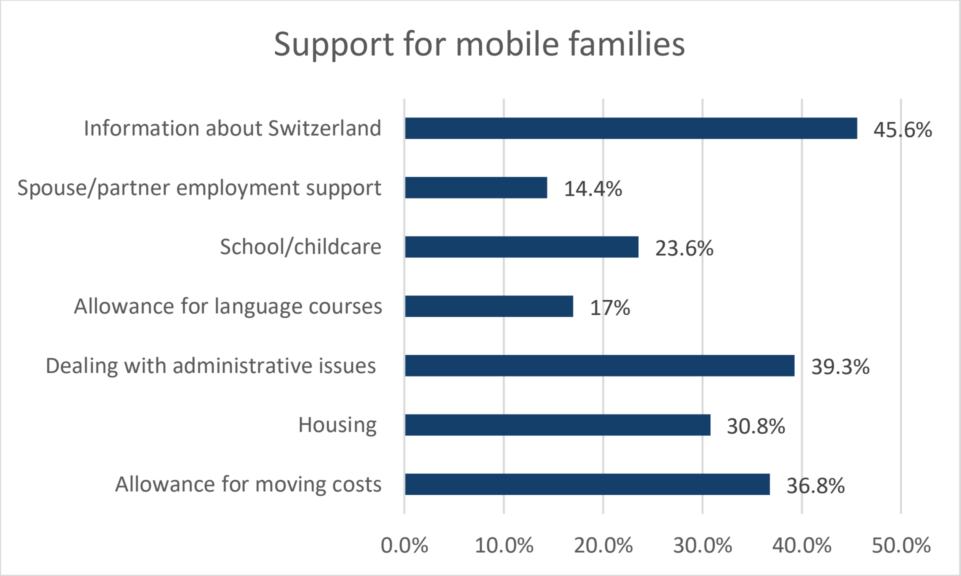
To illustrate the role of institutions and social networks, I turn to the issue of support upon arrival. Once again in contrast to the common sense that repeated international migration is characterized by smooth transitions and privilege, Figure 8 documents that mobile families receive surprisingly little support. Across all potential forms of support, at least half of the sample could not lean on another individual or organization to make the transition smoother. This is true even for simple arrangements, like being provided with information about Switzerland (which applies to only 45.6%), and is particularly more acute for spouse/partner employment support, which only 14.4% of mobile family members report to have received.

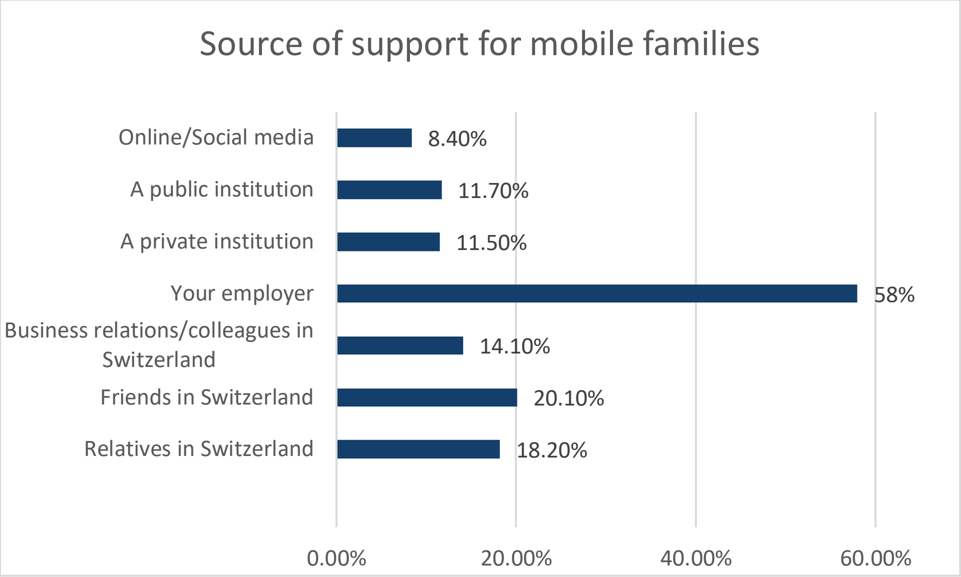
Qualitative interviews with members of mobile families complement the quantitative analysis. According to those, the accompanying partner often faces a number of practical challenges. These include loss of occupation, the lack of social network in the arrival destination, and difficulties in finding a new employment in the Swiss labour market. This is partly related to issues of residence permit and, partly, to a lack of local language knowledge or to skill mismatch. Some short-term types of permit, for example, can at times create an obstacle in the job-search and the application process, as local employers are often unwilling to employ someone who will probably need to move again. As a consequence, many partners who quit their job in the previous country, have to take care of family duties, or to reinvent themselves in Switzerland. For these partners, usually in charge of the more practical relocation and settling-in process, the adjustment to the host country can be harder compared to the working partner, who generally continues to rely on the workplace as a possible anchorage in the new environment (Cangià et al., in press; Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015). Although the provision of “dual career” programs for spouses has become an integral part of the relocation agenda of companies, organizations and academic institutions, the majority of interviewees complain about the lack of partner employment support and the difficulties of accessing childcare in Switzerland.

Furthermore, since the 90s the number of professional women moving with their male partners keep increasing (Cole, 2012). In Switzerland, some of these partners are also confronted with challenges relating to gender-based social expectations. A striking example of those challenges is the case of male accompanying spouses. In our study (see Cangià et al., in press), we observed that often male accompanying spouses reconsider what counts as “work”, and then redefine the concept altogether to handle the identity change from being a professional to being a stay-at-home male. Work stops being viewed as merely related to employment but starts including different responsibilities, including work in and out of the household, family duties, administrative tasks, emotional and practical support, that very kind of social contribution associated with the role of the “accompanying wife”.

What is more, Figure 8 also shows that 42% of the subjects did not indicate employers as a source of support of *any* form. Strikingly, this is not simply because friends and relatives in Switzerland substitute for employer support: among those who do not report having relied on the employer, almost half (48.1%) also did not rely on friends or relatives in Switzerland to obtain support.

**Figure 8 - Support and source of support for mobile families**





Qualitative interviews with members of mobile families complement the quantitative analysis. According to those, the high cost of living in Switzerland suspends the “privileged” status that these mobile families could have in other countries. Additionally, the traditional full-support package that covers expenses of accommodation, childcare, and relocation is often not included in their contracts, or only partially. As a result, these families have to find accommodation and local goods under conditions similar to permanent residents, but without the same social networks. Some issues seem to be particularly challenging in Switzerland: e.g.: the hard access and high costs of childcare, and its implications for stay-home parenting and reinforcement of traditional gender roles and family values.

Together, these challenges represent the constrained “motility” of the host environment for mobile families: in face of those challenges, one is likely to stay and lose their capacity to retain movement. Excerpts from qualitative interviews substantiate this claim by showing how Switzerland is highly based on sedentary values and traditional gender roles:

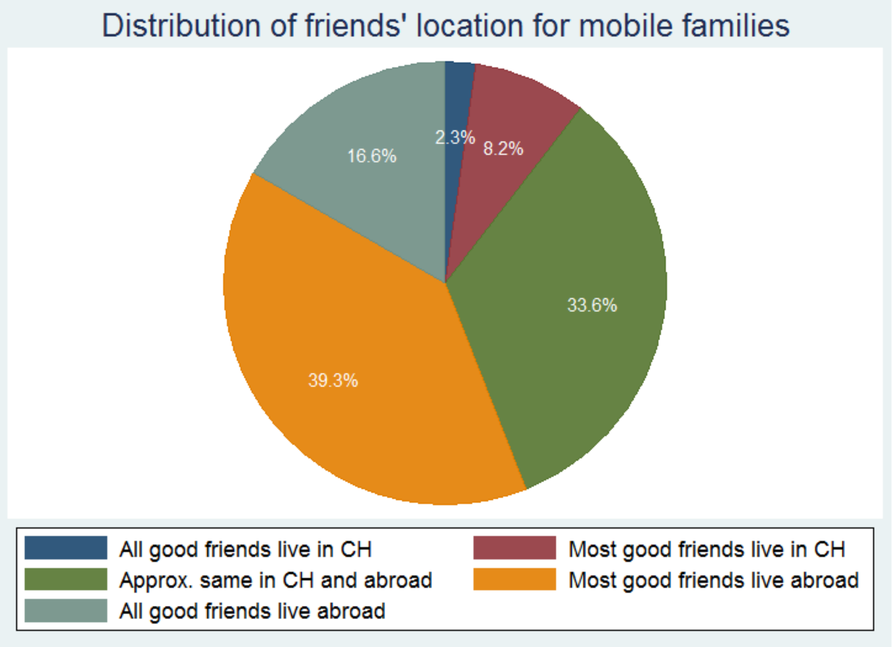
D More specifically, what were the main difficulties that you and your family went through once you arrived here?

F Mhm (...) Here (…) property is owned over a much longer period of time. (…) Mhm, it's actually, it seems to me a very unstructured, unregulated market, and so the dynamics of the market make it very difficult to find a place and get a place. And then when you do, the expectation is that you can stay there for a long time. And that's- so you just have very- it it's a shift in terms of how you think about finding housing and what housing is available and that sort of thing. (…) but the other thing that sticks out to my mind (.), now the thing that probably was difficult for the transition, but yet was mhm, something that, I think we've all overcome, you know, at this point, is that there is a: (.) there is an implied (..) and it and it spans across a lot of different things. But a- the- you you don't really know this, the Swiss, probably never say it, just because they don't- it's probably not quite so (.) mhm politically correct to say it these days. Mhm but the Swiss country is very structured around the women staying at home. A:nd and so everything from shopping to schoo:ls to, you know, interactions and and all of that is is- it has this implied premise that, you know, your wife is at home. And it even shows up in the workplace a little bit, where, you know, people (.) have- they won't question it outright, but if I were to say "hey, I need to take this afternoon off because I need to take the kids to the doctor'', they would ask- you know, they they would be distraught about it. ''Why isn't your wife doing that?'', you know. And and so (.), so when you don't when you don't know that, it's a: that's a that's a shift in the transition. And then plus, you know, depending on your style and for me, my ex-wife is just very- she's far more a feminist with strong, you know, directions and opinions about her- she wants to work, she wants to- she has her thing. And and it's not solely defined by taking care of the house. Now if your family is set up where, you know, where you're coming from, your your wife is a stay-at-home and she manages the household and that's- and and there's- this is probably a much easier transition. But getting here, where that wasn't the setup and and now, the ecosystem almost dictates that that has to be that way, that was a really difficult for her, you know, my ex-wife and my son. It was just, I mean, it it's, you know, simple things like, mhm, like in Canada, we would go shopping for food two weeks at a time. Here, you can't buy food for more than maybe three or four days. If you get it for a week, you I mean, you have to be very structured in order to make that work. And it's it's and so it goes all the way down to the size of a refrigerator. You don't have a big refrigerator. And at first, I was like ''oh my God, what are we gonna do?'' But then you realize it doesn't matter, you can't put any more in it, anyway, it would go bad. So the size of a refrigerator is structured based on how much food you really should be buying anyway and so you (.) you learn how to adapt to that. Mhm (.) but once again, I mean, I think that all has contributed to, my ex-wife having a really difficult time with that.

(Frank, international organization worker, father of 3 kids, had a mobile childhood, divorced upon arrival in Switzerland but still lives in the same quartier as his ex-wife and children)

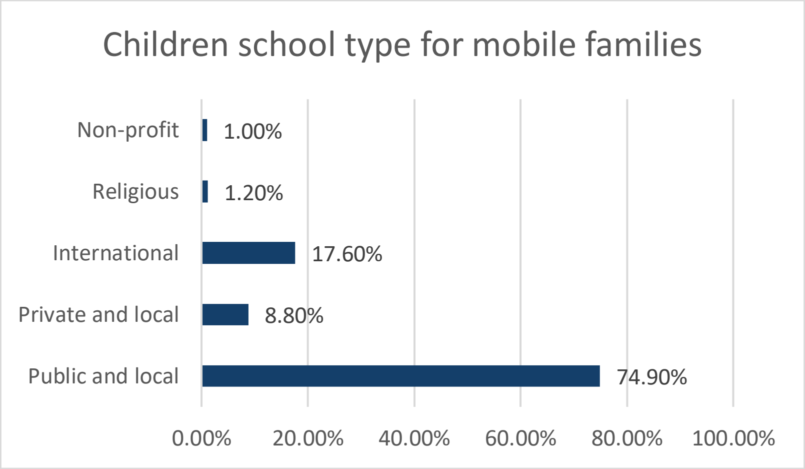
The combination of legal framework, institutions and social networks that limit the ability of mobile families to adjust further complicates their insertion in the host country. It generates dilemmas that balance, on the one hand, families' desire to adjust locally, and, on the other hand, the constraints they face in their need to remain mobile. As an example of the latter, the reported distribution of good friends of mobile family members (Figure 9) showcases that, for only 10.5% of those, most or all good friends live in Switzerland; in contrast, for 45.9%, most or all good friends live abroad, which could be interpreted as their unwillingness to establish close ties in the host country or as difficulties to meet and establish close friendships with Swiss people.

**Figure 9 - Distribution of friend's location for mobile families**



In contrast, as an example of the former, Figure 10 documents that almost 75% of mobile families' children attend public and local schools in Switzerland, as opposed to international schools (only 17.6%), presumably better-suited for recurring mobility episodes.

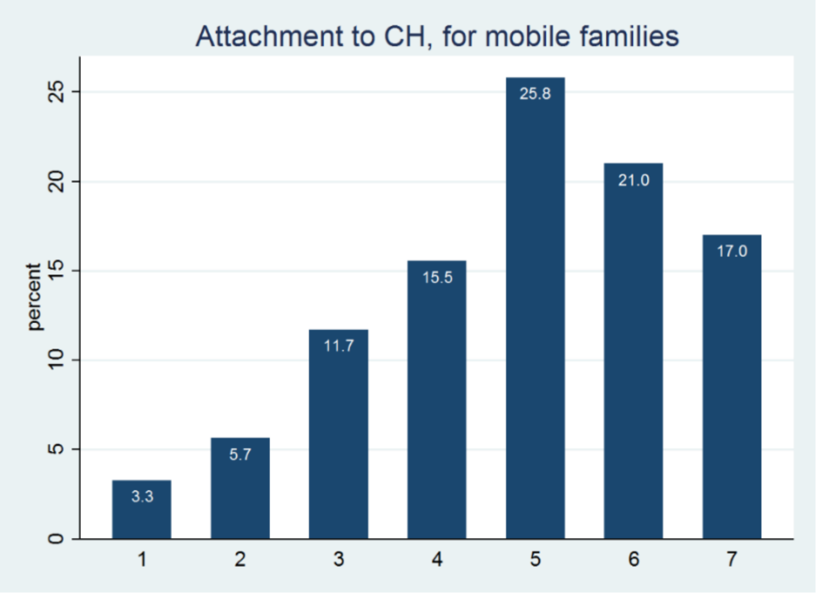
**Figure 10 - Children school type for mobile families**



Qualitative interviews with members of mobile families complement the quantitative analysis. Those confirm that parents now prefer to enrol their children in Swiss public schools rather than international schools under the bid of promoting a "Swiss experience". Although only temporarily in Switzerland, these children may thus get a significant part of their primary and/or secondary education in the country. They often have rich experiences due to their mobility and can quickly pick up new languages. But, according to their parents, they can also experience difficulties if schools do not attend their specific needs.

Another way to see that dilemma is through the patterns of relative attachment of mobile families. To assess those, the survey asked respondents to rate, on a scale from 0 (no feeling of attachment) to 7 (strong feeling of attachment), to what extent they had a feeling of attachment to Switzerland and to their country of origin. Figure 11 displays the distribution of attachment to Switzerland for mobile families, documenting that the largest mass of respondents rates their attachment at intermediate levels of the scale.

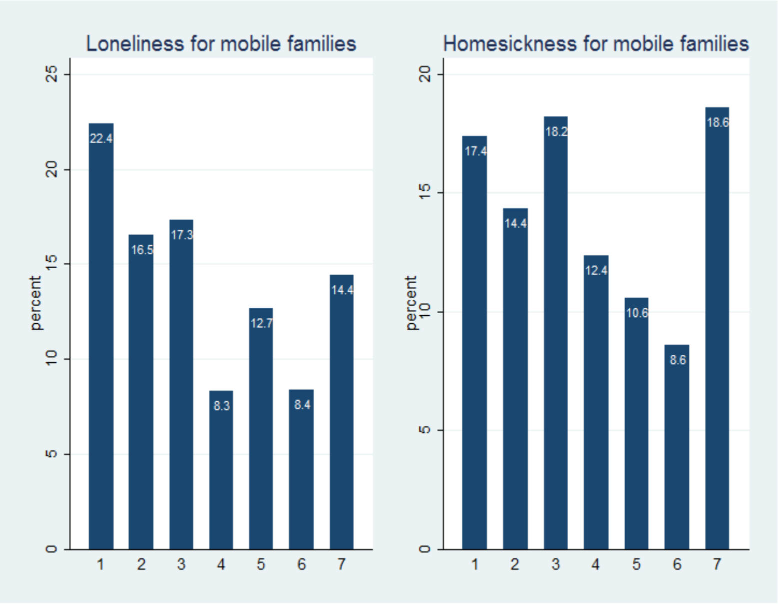
**Figure 11 - Attachment to Switzerland for mobile families**



The tensions generated by managing those apparent concurrent requirements have implications for how mobile family members feel in the host country, how they rate their life satisfaction and their relative attachment between the origin and the destination.

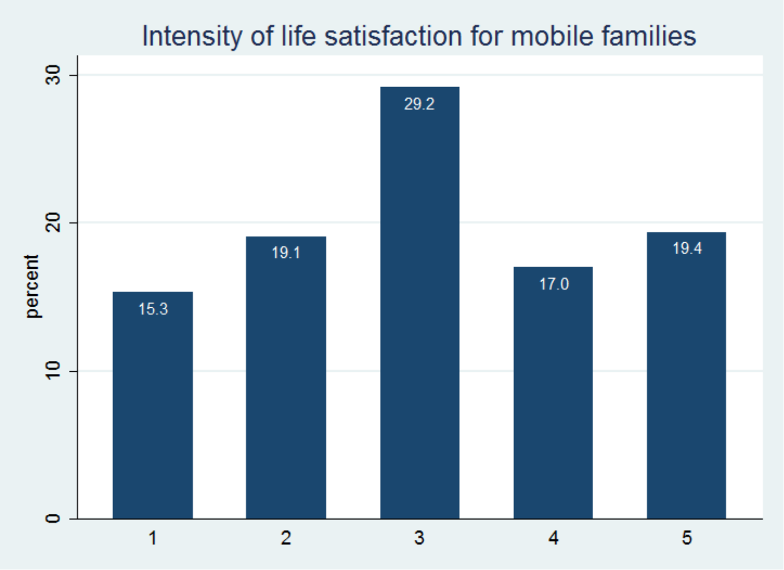
To assess loneliness and homesickness, the survey asked respondents to rate, on a scale from 0 (not problematic at all) to 7 (very problematic), how problematic were those aspects when moving to Switzerland. Figure 12 displays the results: 43.75% rate loneliness 4 or higher, and 50.08% rate homesickness 4 or higher.

## Figure 12 - Loneliness and homesickness for mobile families



Consistent with those findings, only 19.4% of mobile family members assign maximum satisfaction with their life in general in a scale from 0 to 10. Figure 13 illustrates that result collapsing the scale in fewer categories.[27]

## Figure 13 - Intensity of life satisfaction for mobile families



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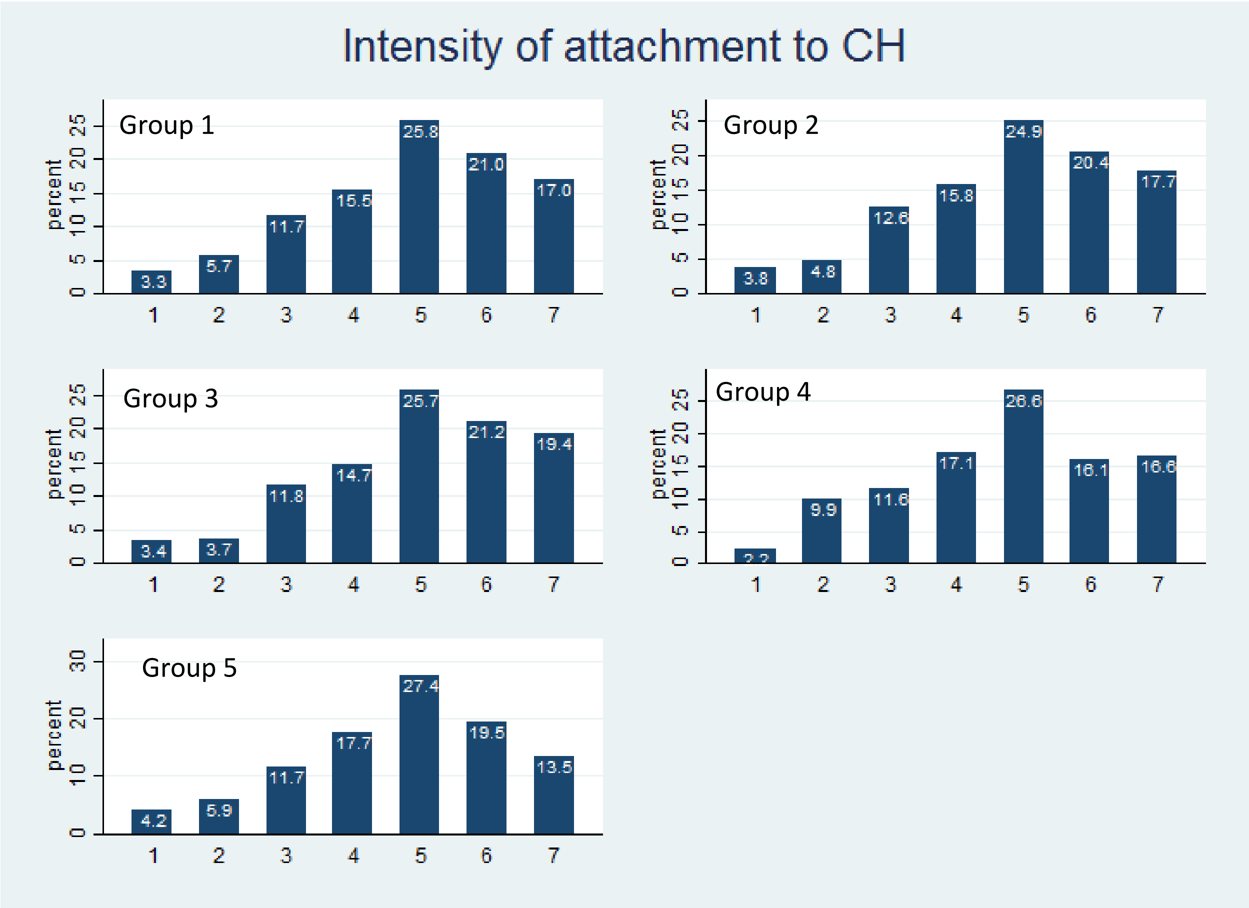
[27] The new scale attributes life satisfaction a value of 1 if the respondent rated satisfaction with their life in general 6 or lower, a value of 2 if the rating was 7, a value of 3 if the rating was 8, a value of 4 if the rating was 9, and a value of 5 if the rating was 10.

## 3.4 Benchmarking mobile families to comparison groups

Documenting those patterns for mobile families already allows one to depart from the received lay knowledge that suggests such migration is frictionless. However, we can go beyond, by benchmarking that group to the comparison groups in order to assess what are the distinctive features of mobile families within the broader category of repeated international mobility.

A first take on these comparisons is given by Figure 14, which contrasts mobile families (Group 1) to migrant settler families (Group 2), mobile families with children living only abroad (Group 3), mobile families who had children after moving to CH (Group 4) and mobile individuals without children (Group 5) with respect to their attachment to Switzerland.[28] As the figure indicates, none of those groups can be distinguished by a particular profile of attachment to the host country alone.

**Figure 14 - Intensity of attachment to Switzerland**



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[28] See the previous section for how each of those groups were defined.

Having said that, comparing mobile families to the other groups when it comes to their life satisfaction and to their *relative* attachment to Switzerland *vis-a-vis* that to their country of origin depicts much more revealing results, particularly when analysed as a function of the number of moves experienced by respondents of those groups before moving to Switzerland.[29]

Figure 15 showcases that mobile families are very similar to mobile individuals without children (Group 5) both with respect to how their assessments of life satisfaction vary with the number of moves, and in terms of how their patterns of relative attachment vary with their migration history. For both groups, life satisfaction is relatively stable at first but then declines substantially for a higher number of moves. In what comes to relative attachment (positive when attachment to the country of origin is rated as higher than that to Switzerland), for both groups it is also stable at first and then increases, for a high enough number of moves. In fact, this is the same we found in the hierarchical cluster analysis: attachment to Switzerland *decreased* with the number of moves, particularly when such moves were repeatedly to Switzerland itself.

The difference between mobile families and mobile individuals without children are two-fold. The decline in life satisfaction and attachment to Switzerland (relative to that to the country of origin) happens only at a longer history of moves for mobile families. However, when such decline starts, it happens at much faster rates for mobile families.

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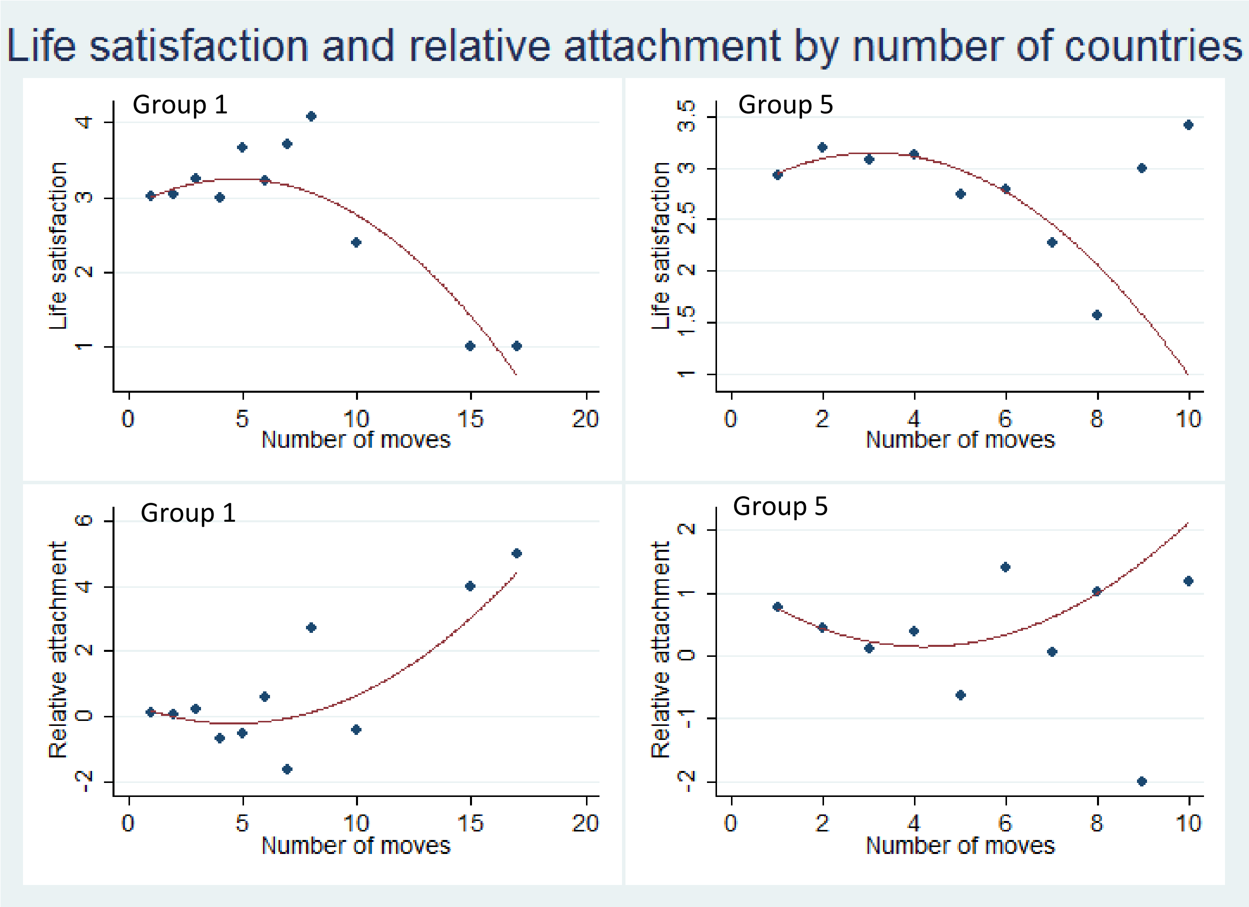
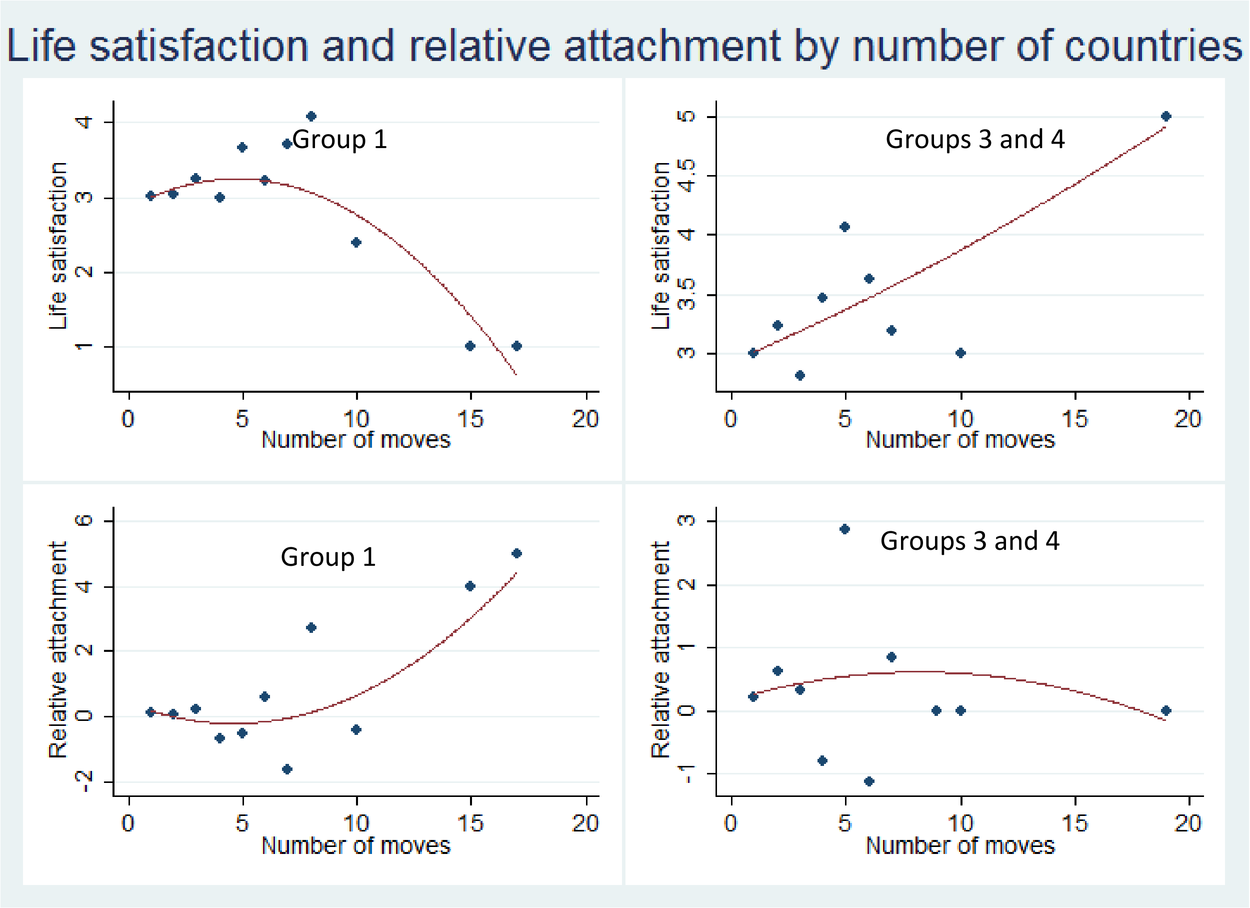
[29] Since the comparisons highlight how such variables change with the number of moves, mobile settler families (Group 2) are not included in this analysis.

**Figure 15 - Life satisfaction and relative attachment by number of countries – Groups 1 & 5**



In contrast, Figure 16 showcases that mobile families are very different from mobile families with children living only abroad (Group 3) and mobile families who had children after moving to CH (Group 4) with respect to those patterns. For those comparison groups, life satisfaction is always increasing in the number of prior moves, no matter how high. By the same token, relative attachment is basically stable, independent of the number of prior moves.

**Figure 16 - Life satisfaction and relative attachment by number of countries - Groups 1 & 3/4**



Those comparisons are informative about the distinctive pressures mobile families face. Migrating with children generates tensions between mobility and life satisfaction and ability to feel attached to the new host country. Strikingly, this ends up making them look more similar to individuals without children than to other family profiles. Having said that, mobile families tend to be more resilient that individuals, resisting to a higher number of moves before life satisfaction and relative attachment start declining. However, we have also shown that, when such declines are set off, they take place at faster rates for both dimensions.

Those patterns are consistent with the evidence from the qualitative interviews in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Beyond consistency, however, the quantitative analysis adds value by highlighting how pervasive such issues are, before zooming in on individual instances, and by providing a sense of the magnitude of the effects, not just of their direction. In particular, the figures of lack of supporting services provided by the employer at the host country are striking and overthrow common wisdom based on quantitative evidence.

## 3.5 Conclusion

Altogether, the analyses highlight previously overlooked patterns of repeated international mobility, pointing out important differences in terms of family configuration that map into their ability to adjust. The data suggest that mobile families face some unique challenges, different from those of long-term migrants. In particular:

(1) Little institutional and social support;

(2) Tensions between the need to make investments specific to the host country (e.g.: enrolling children in public schools as opposed to international schools) and uncertainty about the length of stay; and

(3) Temporary frames and cumulative migration episodes, which become fundamental organizers of mobile families' experiences in the host country, engendering a specific dynamic of relative attachment to places and psychological needs.

The first challenge suggests that mobile family members are likely to rely on each other for support, given the lack of a sustaining environment provided by employers or friends and relatives at the host country. Chapter 4 further explores the type of support available for mobile families, and Chapters 6 and 7 showcase how mobile family members support each other.

The second is closely linked to one of the main issues of this thesis: the need to remain mobile while adjusting temporarily to the new environment. Chapter 5 discusses how mobile family members create boundaries with the environment, and Chapter 7 discusses strategies to cope with such transitoriness.

The third suggests that the length of the stay, particularly when associated with repeated forced relocations due to residence permit constraints, fundamentally alters the way how the outer world is interpreted and categorized by mobile family members. Chapter 5 discusses how dimensions of mobility become symbolic markers for how migrants make sense of their surrounding environment and of themselves in that environment, and Chapter 7 highlights the underlying psychosocial dynamics engendered by repeated mobility.

# 4. CHAPTER

# RELOCATION SERVICES FOR MOBILE FAMILIES

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*Abstract:* Formerly a minority, families in geographical itinerancy have recently become more numerous and diverse. Furthermore, they are becoming the new targets of intervention in the realm of global mobility. A new body of relocation experts and agencies is emerging to facilitate the life of these families. We identified a number of different service providers, which we clustered under four main categories, according to their origin: from a pre-existent organizational format (as outsourcing), from organizations themselves (insourcing), from personal interactions (self-organized groups), and from self-standing expertise (private coaches and intercultural trainers). All these services include on the one hand information, guidance and support in everyday activities; and on the other, a more "interculturally-oriented" type of intervention. In this regard, we discuss relocation experts' use of the notion of "culture", as well as the problematic nature of interventions aimed at developing problem-solving skills to deal with "intercultural" encounters. Relocating and adjusting to new places have been defined as "problems" by mobility experts, "culture" being their main cause. In contrast, we propose a sociocultural psychological perspective to reconceptualize culture and to redefine the actual experience of families in geographical itinerancy, bringing to the fore a possible alternative to the paradox of expert intervention in the field of mobility.

*Keywords*: relocation, intervention, mobile families, intercultural training, geographical itinerancy.

## 4.1 Introduction

In a globalized world, where individuals move more and faster than ever, human mobility becomes the object of concern for researchers and for various practitioners. In particular, international companies and organizations in different professional domains try to hire the best professionals globally, regardless of their location in the world. Such pull forces, combined with individuals' own professional ambitions and their quest for personal achievement, lead many people to engage in mobile lives. However, people have also personal and family lives, which means that their international relocation raises numerous everyday issues, including those relating to family arrangements, family local insertion and socialization. The increasing mobility of professionals has thus been accompanied by a proliferation of "experts" providing services to support international relocation. If the main function of these services is mainly to facilitate the relocation process, so as to help people perform better in their new assignment abroad, what is the significance of such intervention, and what are the implications of this emergent expertise?

In this chapter we introduce the reality of relocation service providers emerging to facilitate the life of mobile families in Switzerland. Adopting a sociocultural psychological perspective, we move away from a cost-benefit reading of relocation expertise, in order to identify the ambivalent nature of these interventions, and to raise further important questions for future research on repeated mobility, concerning the way people confer sense to these frequent moves. Sociocultural approaches in psychology explore migration as being a fundamentally complex and ambivalent experience of disruption within continuity, of loss in favour of discovery, change and novelty against the backdrop of everydayness. It calls attention to the fact that when moving between places, people can experience a rupture that introduces a break into a person's normal and taken-for-granted flow of being (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012; Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson, & Psaltis, 2003).

Considering this approach and the ever-increasing differentiation in our globalized world, designing practices of intervention has become a special challenge for professionals intervening in the domain of human mobility. The experiences of families in repeated mobility seem to challenge the traditional division between practices of intervention "at home" and "abroad". In effect, repeated mobility calls for an intervention "abroad" (from the perspective of the migrant arriving in a new country) as well as an intervention "at home" (from the perspective of the agents of intervention when they are placed in the same sociocultural environment as the newly arrived professionals), which demands the development of transnational practices.

In the next paragraphs, we illustrate the changing phenomenon of mobility of these families towards Switzerland. We then present our research and the methods used, as well as a typology of service providers supporting families in repeated mobility. Finally, we discuss relocation experts' use of the notion of "culture" as well as the problematic nature of interventions aiming at developing problem-solving skills to deal with "intercultural" encounters.

## 4.2 Mobile families in Switzerland

Switzerland, like many countries involved in international exchanges, hosts a large number of multinational companies and international organizations. Not only do companies move, but so do their employees, partly as a result of transnational employment policies. Hence, a growing number of working professionals and their families become part of a more global migration flow.

Over the past decades, Switzerland, whose economy has been reliant on a foreign workforce for manual professions or low-skilled jobs, and has hence spared the local working classes and women from performing this sort of work, has begun to develop a policy aimed at encouraging highly skilled migration. According to Pecoraro & Fibbi (2010), the nature of migration flows has evolved in favour of highly skilled labour consonant with the so-called "skill bias technological change," which points to a shift in the mode of production that favours skilled over less skilled labour by increasing its relative demand. There has also been a demonstrable "increase of the relative total labour supply of qualified workers" (Pecoraro & Fibbi, 2010, p. 179) and of the perceived importance of attracting this sort of foreign workers to Switzerland, in order to foster the local economy and national growth, as well as to counteract the national shortage of skilled workers (Naville, Walti, & Tischhauser, 2007). Moreover, the country naturally attracts this type of foreign workforce due to its fundamental constituents of multiculturalism, multilingualism and diversity (D'Amato, 2010; Lhabitant, 2003; Ravasi et al., 2015). Recent transformations in migration regimes in Switzerland are creating the grounds for increasing the number of families which, within in the context of the international professional activity of at least one of the family members, move to Switzerland to live only temporarily. In particular, the growth of this type of mobility has been facilitated due to the tying of visa issuance to labour market permits, which favours the recruitment of highly skilled professionals, the freedom of movement within the EU and the emergence of shorter-term employment contracts. This policy goes hand in hand with recent policies restricting access to Switzerland to other segments of less skilled foreign populations.

Mobile families in Switzerland are, accordingly, notably defined by their job-related migratory trajectories. Formerly a minority, these families have recently become more numerous and diverse, with regard to education, professional sectors of activity, gender, ethnicity, nationality and migration history. They no longer include only diplomats and their families, typifying traditional forms of repeated mobility and the "expatriates[30]" whose labour is usually structured by their employers, but also alternative forms of international mobility (Bonache, Brewster, Suutari, & De Saá, 2010). A wide array of professionals, such as different sorts of specialists, managers, international organization workers, academics, doctors, artists, among others, are now requiring frequent relocation. As a consequence of this diversification, as well as of the high cost of life in Switzerland, highly mobile and skilled migration has experienced a profound change in its demographic profile. Previously limited to a group of people with higher financial capacity than the average population, often beneficiating from facilitated settling measures (such as "transfert des cadres" – senior managers transfers or diplomatic personnel transfers), mobile families' lifestyle is tending to become closer to that of local middle or upper middle-class families. This could paradoxically be designated as "democratization" or at least, de-elitization of highly skilled migration.

Moreover, literature on expatriation has also pointed to the increasing number of self-initiated expatriates, that is those people who migrate to work in another country on their own initiative and who cannot rely on any corporate support (Andresen et al., 2013; Ravasi et al.,

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[30] Research on expatriation has used the term "expatriate" to refer to employees sent abroad for a limited period of time by an international company from their headquarters to foreign subsidiaries. (Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015).

2015). This reveals a trend in global geographical movement towards more self-initiated, middle management, expert and female-led mobility (Brookfield, 2015; Salamin & Davoine, 2015; Xavier Salamin & Doris Hanappi, 2014). This, in turn, creates new difficulties for people and families that are often not socialized in such transnational lifestyles.

Our study contributes to previous research on global mobility of professionals and their families across the social sciences (Adams, 2014; Gyger Gaspoz, 2013; Meier, 2014; Smith & Favell, 2006). For the sake of clarity and in order to account for these changes, we use the term families in "geographical mobility" to refer to those families frequently moving because of the professional expertise of at least one family member. We will use the locution “mobile families” and “families in geographical mobility” interchangeably. This terminological choice seems to be appropriate in view of current debates around categories such as “highly skilled migrants”, “highly qualified migrants” or “expats” (Dahinden, 2016; Kuotonin, 2015). The use of this term allows us to refer to the various family members simultaneously (e.g., professionals, accompanying partners, children, or members of the extended family or household), as well as to shift our attention from a class-based connotation characterizing the term “expats”, to other aspects[31].

The above-mentioned changes in the mobility of professionals are transforming the nature of the experience of mobile families as well as the difficulties with which they are confronted. In turn, it is transforming the ways in which these families can be supported, and thus, the way interventions in global human movement are conceived by the agents of the global labour market. In what follows, we give an overview of supporting measures that we identified approaching the life of mobile families in Switzerland. We first present our methodological approach, and then a tentative typology of these support providers.

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[31] The objection might be raised that the term does not include the work dimension (it can easily be associated with travellers or tourists). We have however chosen to maintain it for two main reasons. First, it solves some of the possible lexical issues of terms such as “expatriates”, “highly skilled migrants” (Lan, 2011), “skilled international migrants” (Findlay, Li, Jowett, & Skeldon, 1996), “skilled migrants” (Scott, 2006), “highly skilled globetrotters” (Mahroum, 2000), and “migrant professionals” (Meier, 2014); as well as “transnational elite” (Beaverstock, 2002), “transnational capitalist class” (Sklair, 2000), or “transnational professionals” (Nowicka, 2006). These terms tend to define this population mostly on the basis of educational levels, and of its delocalized and transnational practices. Second, its connotation is interesting here, as the term “repeated mobility” suggests an idea of constant and repeated movement, an image of moving from place to place, regardless of the presence of a final destination, and it hence does not imply a chosen or assigned nature of migration. This kind of idea highlights some of those aspects that have psychological and developmental implications, and that we are currently investigating for our NCCR project.

## 4.3 Methodology

In order to gain leverage on our research context and to facilitate access to our target population, we first approached organizations and professionals working directly and indirectly with frequent moving families. This allowed us to connect with key people structuring the mobility of families in Switzerland and elsewhere, as well as to contact several associations and locally based networks of global organizations uniting professionals and families in repeated mobility.

We drew on our preliminary contacts, rather than starting with the local administrations, in order to address directly those providers for which frequent mobility is a top priority[32]. Our account does not aim to be an exhaustive review of all existing service providers. Meetings and discussions with these key informants allowed us to confirm the reliability of the strategy employed to study mobile populations, and to document what is currently being done to facilitate the life of families in geographical itinerancy. We also joined several mobile family online community platforms, and participated in a number of gathering events so as to connect with these individuals, relying on fieldwork-based 'hints' to grasp the characteristics, spheres of experience (Zittoun, 2012), social networks, dynamics and circulation of this population. Accordingly, in order to address a wide range of professional sectors, we opted to circulate a research call through these community platforms, social networks, international organizations and associations, and multinational companies. Snowballing through previous participants and trusted community organizations also contributed to mapping these services.

Our sample has thus emerged from this first exploratory phase in the field. Here, we draw on preliminary research fieldwork, in particular qualitative empirical data collected through:

1. Semi-structured interviews with global mobility specialists[33] supporting the mobility and relocation of individuals, couples and families.

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[32] This decision is also a consequence of the mobile character of our population, which could not be easily accessed through public and cantonal institutions and which is usually not the target of integration policies or of traditional assistance for migrants, such as Migration Centres.

[33] In particular with one "Intercultural Trainer" and "Career Development Coach", one "Relocation Consultant", the directors of a relocation agency and one "Account Manager".

2. Exploratory interviews with staff working at a Welcome Centre of a large public institution and at the International People Operations department of a multinational company[34].

3. Ethnographic fieldwork, in particular participant observation conducted at the office of a multinational technology company, during some workshops promoted by private relocation agencies and intercultural trainers' associations, as well as at one International Women's Club and other gathering events.

4. Desk research: as data sources, we also use information shared through online invitations and posts of associations, online platforms of relocation agencies, and a number of social networks we joined.

Data collection forming the corpora of the present analysis took place between October 2014 and October 2015. All information collected was anonymously and confidentially treated. Participants were made aware of the aims of the study prior to their participation and agreeing to be questioned, interviewed or observed.

The semi-structured and exploratory interviews with key people responsible for the relocation of mobile families offered a fine-textured material to explore and unfold multiple meanings underlying power positions often salient in expert interviews. Further, triangulation of data sources was used as efforts to provide validity (Flick, 1992) and to account for the multifaceted reality under study.

The analysis was based on a data-driven, bottom-up approach resembling the basic thematic analysis proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001) with regard to managing the overall data into basic, organizing and global themes, as well as to finding the "principal metaphor" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388) across the data set, in order to reflect upon the super-ordinate unfolding issues. We first manually identified the themes, prioritizing for the analysis the most recurrent ones across the whole data set, despite the differences between various service providers. The subsequent path to generalization followed the abductive mode proposed by (Valsiner, 2014b), particularly in its observation that "the primarily theoretical work requires empirical verification—but only once in a while, at specific theoretical bifurcation points. Yet—at those points, and only there—that input of empirical work acquires absolute relevance" (p. 15). Thus, the findings that will be analysed here stemmed from the adoption of this combined movement towards generalization, being themselves subject to post-factum scrutiny. In what follows, we present an overall emerging description based on this analysis.

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[34] The first one deals with the relocation of families, as well as with the professional integration of accompanying partners through a specific project for "Dual Career Couples", while the latter leads a team focused on bringing international employees to the Swiss office and managing their time there.

## 4.4 New Mobilities – New Services

International mobility of highly skilled professionals is by no means new, and there is a long tradition of supporting moving families through different settling measures. Standard expatriation arrangements, for instance, worked with corporate-style compensation packages, which included salary supplements, professional and cultural training and all the expenses of family relocation abroad. Over the last years, many companies and especially multinationals (MNCs) that used to offer several relocation support facilities to their employees, have reduced their budget for expatriation packages and international assignment costs in response to economic pressures (Brookfield, 2015).

In a bid to reduce costs, companies are moving towards other employment terms and conditions, such as shorter fixed-term assignments and, in Switzerland, even the localization of contracts (Ravasi et al., 2015). The reasons invoked for such employment policy shifts ironically include references to the “desire of employees for flexibility” (Hindman, 2013, p. 21) and self-initiated expatriation. These arguments are used to reduce former privileges enjoyed by these migrants and to delegate the encumbrance of relocation to the employee. Caution is thus required when using studies on mobility highlighting current changes in global migratory patterns – namely the move from long-term and permanent settlement towards more temporary and fluid mobility (Cresswell, 2006; D’Amato, Jain, & Wichmann, 2015).

Considering that the expected length of stay in the destination has been shortened overall, as mentioned by some of the interviewees, and that the scale of international employment and conditions for transnationalisation have expanded, many companies and governments seem to rely more often on outside agencies to manage their employees’ relocation process (Hindman, 2013). We found that services offering support to highly mobile families have been progressively redistributed, and they are currently tending to stem from various and different providers. As a consequence of the logic of outsourcing, a new body of relocation specialists is emerging. In Switzerland, in particular, the number of relocation agencies and experts supporting mobile families has increased considerably. To a certain degree, this new body of specialized experts and services are responding to the kind of support that was formerly provided by certain local organizations, companies and public institutions.

This scenario poses concrete restrictions on how support practices are framed and offered, pointing to the diversification of services provided to mobile families. In order to describe the present situation, we group the different service providers according to their origin: that is, whether they originated from a pre-existed organizational format (as outsourcing), from organizations themselves (insourcing), from personal interactions (self-organized groups) or from self-standing expertise (private coaches and intercultural trainers).

## 4.5 A typology of service providers for families in geographical mobility

### 4.5.1 RELOCATION MANAGEMENT COMPANIES

We found many relocation companies offering support for mobile families during the moving process from one country to another. We identified two main types of organizations emerging from the outsourcing of international assignment programmes: Relocation Companies with Global Reach (RCGR), and Relocation Agencies. The former sort offers “Global Mobility Services”, which are advertised in different webpages as “a complete cross-border relocation solution” designed to assist corporate clients and their employees anywhere in the world, and promising to make the relocation “a rewarding experience” as much for the professionals, their accompanying partners and family, as for the employer.

The full range of services typically includes apartment and house searches or coordination of temporary accommodation where necessary, tenancy management (e.g., assistance with lease negotiations, subscriptions and other property-related services), packing and transporting furniture or what is currently being called “furniture rental solutions”, help in dealing with work and residence permits or other necessary immigration services, registration with local authorities, coordination of tax law consultation, social insurance and bank services, school searches for the children, general accompanying partner support, local orientation programmes and pre-visit area tours, language courses, intercultural training and continuous support in practical day-to-day matters.

The emergence of globally operating companies providing relocation solution correlates with a demand for support for these hands-on and operational issues. One of our interviewees reports that the company he currently works for was created precisely when the company pinpointed this demand coming from their own employees. As soon as they identified a shortage of services assisting people with the practicalities of the relocation process, they launched an international relocation company.

While RCGRs, to a large extent, seek to ensure efficiency in the transfer of international employees between headquarters and subsidiaries scattered around the globe by mostly focusing on the practical relocation into a new home and settlement into a new environment, relocation agencies are more focused on various aspects of families’ adjustment into the host-country. Although RCGRs can rely on the services of a number of consultants giving continued support to these families in facing the challenges of settling into a new environment, their understanding of these challenges seems to be somewhat narrow and essentially limited to practical problems raised by the move such as finding a new house, dealing with immigration authorities, or at most, avoiding what they call “cultural misunderstanding”. Conversely, relocation agencies have more resources in the host country to operate across different aspects of families' adjustments in the new environment, especially in comparison with the RCGRs which simultaneously face the challenge of managing a large number of families from a distance (one consultant interviewed was in fact following up to eighty families in different countries around the world).

A pronounced effort in the relocation process is directed towards pre-departure preparation, which commonly includes need assessments, "cross-cultural training" (Forster, 2000), information on important practical issues, and exercises on how to deal with an unfamiliar and unknown environment. Attempts to provide a foretaste of how life will be in the destination country are also made through organized and funded trips, as well as by helping them formulate realistic expectations about the new destination (MacDonald & Arthur, 2005).

### 4.5.2 INTERNAL SERVICES

Another type of service for these families is offered by the well-established services commonly managed by the Human Resources (HR) departments of international companies moving their employees and their families, and the Welcome Services of large institutions in the destination country. This category encompasses all the HR practitioners and the different internal staff of a great number of industries, which either deal with their employees' international relocation, or are in charge of helping recently arrived professionals and their families settle in, and adjust to, the new country.

One remarkable transformation observed with regard to this traditional source of support is that the greater the basic conditions and benefits provided by the organization, the more room there is for self-organized practices of support. One of the companies investigated and widely recognized as a pivotal player in HR innovative practices brought a different approach to the support of mobile families. Instead of restricting support to a function of the HR, the company focuses primarily and intensively on enhancing the overall work environment: from providing restaurant-quality food and building collaborative office spaces to increasing maternity leaves. When it comes to families' relocation, the company does not offer a specific program to mobile families, but instead actively and strongly supports employees' self-organized initiatives, such as different meet-ups organized by and for accompanying spouses, whereby several communities are then built out of such networking. In this way, they are moving away from the traditional HR paternalistic approach.

Whatever the case, support services falling within this category are circumscribed to the organization and to the employer. If an in-source core support structure exists, responsibility for facilitating global movement is totally assumed as part of organizational support, and sustained employee-based community-building practices also arise as a result of organizational settings.

### 4.5.3 SELF-ORGANIZED GROUPS

Several informal groups and associations of families in geographical itinerancy have been created in order to offer a space that allows family members to meet, connect and share experiences with their peers, as well as exchange information and knowledge about life in the new country. The best-known example is the self-organized groups of accompanying spouses of international professionals. Very often these groups are constituted within the context of non-profit associations formed through the collaboration of companies, international organizations and academic institutions, and aimed at facilitating the job search for mobile employees' partners (as in the case of the International Dual Career Network). These groups can then develop into more informal networks within the context of a single company and evolve towards grassroots initiatives such as organizing meetings, activities and projects in accordance with specific needs[35]. They can also be totally independent from the companies, as in the case of International Women's Clubs, different training centres, or online platforms dedicated to sharing support and ideas on the social and professional integration of accompanying partners. Most self-organized groups take shape as online community platforms, in the form of forums or blogs especially designed for globally mobile individuals, families, and those working with them. The emergence of self-organized groups has been facilitated through online social networking services that simply encouraged conversation and interaction between families experiencing relocation.

### 4.5.4 PRIVATE COACHING & INTERCULTURAL TRAINERS

Lastly, private coaches and intercultural trainers offer another type of service to mobile families. These are professionals offering guidance and coaching to individuals, parents, children, families and small groups. Commonly a one-to-one service, coaching is designed to assist people, in their own terms, to "achieve and fulfil their potential", be it professional or personal. These private services are advertised mainly to mobile professionals to help them go through the changes, remove roadblocks and "thrive" during their stay in the new country. They offer support whether through face-to-face meetings or via Skype anywhere is the world. Such professionals consider that people will search for support if they need it. A subset of coaches specializes specifically in intercultural relations, offering culture-specific orientations through the development of specific techniques and training programmes for mobile families and organizations.

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[35] As in the case of the "pivotal player in HR innovative practices" company mentioned in the previous section, and of any informal meetings of accompanying partners of employees at the same company, or of parents of children at the same international school (e.g., different language conversations, coffee meetings).

## 4.6 Beyond practicalities: “intercultural training”

The above description suggests that there is a wide range of services available to facilitate the life of mobile families. Adopting a slightly more analytical perspective, we can distinguish two main levels of their action.

Firstly, almost all of these services primarily address a supposed information gap. They provide mainly practical advice to families: on finding somewhere to live, a school for the children and a job for the partner; on how to get around, how things are done, shopping, banking, “making new friends”, and understanding the “local culture”[36]. Moreover, some of these associations organize various leisure activities and family initiatives, including language courses, morning coffee sessions, art and creative activities, outdoor excursions and mother/toddler/infant groups. Basically, these different service providers perform the role of counselling experts, fostering acquaintance with the new and unknown environment by sharing existing and available knowledge, *localizing* information both in the sense of finding it and directing it to families’ needs, as well as of accommodating to the new local circumstances and hence defining what “local” actually implies.

Secondly, above and beyond advice on practicalities, the different types of services also provide “intercultural” or “cross-cultural” training to mobile workers and their families in order to prepare them to deal with life abroad. This emphasis on “culture” deserves a closer look, as it reveals the implicit assumptions with which these services work.

For instance, the services offered by RCGRs include a varied range of tailor-made professional training and consultancy solutions in “intercultural communication” seeking to empower mobile families to become, as advertised, “interculturally competent and realise their full potential when working across cultures”. Here the notion of “culture” is used to designate some supposed “obvious” differences between the “family” and the “host country”. Intercultural “awareness” becomes important as the services sold by these companies rely on these differentiations. Only thus can workers and their families be trained to deal with cultural differences. Hence the first assumptions on which their action is based are that cultural differences are inevitable in a global economy, and therefore, that “understanding and appreciating cultural differences” ultimately promotes clearer communication, breaks down barriers, strengthens relationships and yields innovative ways of thinking.

In many approaches, it is then assumed that the individual lacks a certain skill, that of “cultural competence” which presumably can be compensated for by means of intercultural training. Cultural competence assessments are thus used in some cases for pre-departure selection and training, especially with the soon-to-be moving professional. Such assessments make use of psychological tests based on the idea of inherent personality traits to examine the person's ability to respond to cultural differences and to transform their work accordingly. In other words, these approaches perpetuate individualistic explanations as they relegate to the subject a possible "intercultural incompetence". Cultural-competence tests themselves confine "culture" to an ahistorical list of traits (Hindman, 2013), instrumentalising it as an operative, applicable and even pedagogical concept for globalization.

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[36] In this regard, the book entitled “Know It All” (www.know-it-all.ch), defined in an interview as “the bible that all expats need” and featuring the information required for relocation in Switzerland, is often provided to these people by relocation agencies.

Furthermore, training within this framework recurrently group sets of supposed inherent personal traits into cultural types, constructing cultural difference through the claim of intrinsic properties characterizing distinct "cultures". In our fieldwork, we observe that some relocation specialists focus on forcibly finding what is typical of one culture or the other, resulting in an inevitable reiteration of clear-cut and sharp distinctions between cultures based on stereotypical categories. This can be exemplified by the common use of metaphors (e.g., "coconut cultures" versus "peach cultures"[37]) or storylines that show for instance how "different cultures" express emotions differently. One post about cultural differences circulating on a community platform vividly illustrates this point:

> For the Spanish, the concept of face is not nearly as important as it is for the Japanese. Demonstrating your emotions (…) is typical of the Spanish culture. Relationships are created and maintained with visible passion and a few sparks are inevitable. The ups and downs are nothing to be ashamed of or hidden (…) For the Japanese, losing face in public is the worst possible humiliation.

Here one "culture" is contrasted with another one (Spanish vs. Japanese Cultures) at the risk of reinforcing dyadic constructions, typically derived from thinking in antinomies and polarities (Marková, 2003), and long employed to classify cultures into individualist versus collectivist, masculine versus feminine, neutral versus emotional and monochronic versus polychronic in relation to time orientation. In the example cited above and as proposed by some cross-cultural trainings aimed at fostering communication with "the Other", the underlying premise is that there are the "cultures" in which people make a great effort to control their emotions, avoiding revealing what they feel, whereas other "cultures" are said to accept a show of emotions and people belong to them are viewed as constantly finding ways to express them. This mode of thinking reduces the effort required: one merely needs to identify the dyadic pairs into which a culture may be categorized, and then transit between them when meeting a new sociocultural environment. Such dyadic constructions are frequently used to produce national character, as the nation-state is often the presumed unit of many forms of typologyzing culture

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[37] According to these metaphors, "coconut cultures" are defined as those cultural contexts in which people seem to be hard to get to know, unfriendly and less available to engage in conversations at first, but that tend then to become close and loyal friends. "Peach cultures", on the contrary, are regarded as those contexts in which individuals are usually very friendly on the outside but where it is more difficult to become real friends.

(Spanish vs. Japanese Cultures). It is accordingly a recurrent feature of intercultural training and relocation workshops to ask nationals (the Spanish, the Japanese, etc.) to “represent” their home country’s culture by bringing some traditional food and wearing traditional clothes, or by performing national types in role-playing games (Hindman, 2013).

In this manner, relocation agencies and experts treat global intercultural contact in terms of fixed and separated cultural groups, and “culture” takes a very uniform and national shape. This framework implies a model of “culture” as “a container of a homogeneous class, in which the boundary of ‘culture’ is assumed to be rigid and defined” and where people are IN a given culture (Valsiner, 2012, p. 6). “Culture” seems to stand for an entity outside the person, which is either accepted or rejected and which exists only in relation to the host and the home “cultures”.

Moreover, there is an underlying idea that meeting and dealing with different cultures could be a minefield, and that shock would be the typical outcome of cultural contact. The so-called “cultural shock” can lead to the pathologization (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) of the disturbing and disorienting experience of encountering a new cultural context found in migration, and further confines “the experience of difference to a set of treatable symptoms that exist independent of the forms of contact or the location of placement” (Hindman, 2013, p. 147), “symptoms” that can supposedly be managed through the intervention of experts. For families, relocation practices have often relied on developing intercultural training to alleviate such “cultural shock”, turning it into what Hannerz terms a “cultural shock prevention industry” (Hannerz, 1996). Trainings therefore mainly insist on a problematic nature of the encounter between “cultures”, which they regard as central to the difficulties faced by relocated families.

Nonetheless, some service providers respond to the insufficiencies of the implied models by moving away from the clear-cut formula of cultural types in intercultural training. In our fieldwork, we also found relocation agencies that develop learning tools focusing on the systematic exploration of the participants’ practical, everyday experiences, and proposing storytelling and games to support people “in going beyond the cliché”. Through such attempts, we see service providers trying to build experience-based expertise. Furthermore, many also respond to the porous nature of contemporary boundaries by reinforcing a “business” understanding of culture, which preserves at its core mandatory practices for the operation of global capitalisms and appears to translate “cultural encounters” into occasions to optimize “business opportunities”. Intervention on the basis of a “(trans)culture(d)” environment may appear as a good strategy for addressing relocation through the same mechanisms worldwide, excluding discussions of power and history. It may thus serve to the production of truly global workers, workplaces and markets, while addressing the question of “adjusting to what?”. Many relocation organizations and experts thus try to solve this issue by preparing families for an international corporate business culture that could be found everywhere. For instance, they offer “Puzzling Intercultural Stories[38]” aimed at “developing intercultural competence by playing and storytelling”: a compilation of entertaining short stories based on real events and encounters experienced by the authors to help people think “out-of-the-box”.

Relocation services and specialists appear to prepare families for an encounter with “the Other” regardless of the context, through generalizable intercultural training, or through a transnational orientation based on the universality of business practices. Their action remains at the level of practical information and problem-solving skills to deal with “culture shock” and they thus appear as mere operators of a complexity-reducing strategy for approaching intercultural encounters in a globalized and increasing mobile world. Despite the importance of these services for the everyday life challenges faced by these families in a new environment, the practical approaches of relocation agencies may run the risk of bypassing possible issues people might face as they elaborate new spheres of experience and meet new neighbours, teachers and other actors in everyday life. By contrast, it may be only when the support is framed in such a way as to enable the adjustments of these families to a life of itinerancy, that relocation practices can go beyond practicalities and exceed the instructional level, as we will now explore.

## 4.7 Supporting repeated mobility

Relocation practices clearly show their limits in view of the transformations of migration movements. Despite the increasing complexity of people’s migratory trajectories, relocation is still managed, and migration still dealt with, as if it were an unilateral movement from one country to another. Existing services currently take little account of those people who move repetitively across different countries, and engage simultaneously and systematically both in local cultural systems and transnational practices. In other words, services do not always correctly address the complexity, multiplicity and hybridity of cultural contexts, identities and belongings (Eriksen, 2007; Gillespie et al., 2012) characterizing contemporary forms of global mobility.

Moreover, services designed for international adjustment to expatriation present adjustments as linear processes over time, made up of predictable phases in which learning new skills and knowledge would be enough to help families to cope with the difficulties that arise, and to reach the “adaptation stage” where new stability can be found (Ward et al., 2001). Such a stage-model is implicitly based on a telos of adjustments for all migrants. However, this universal final aim does not hold in the case of geographical itinerants, who know prior to their arrival that they will leave.

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[38] The German version is titled “Interkulterelle Crazy Business Stories”

And even when relocation services are able to account for the specificities of mobile families' experience, namely that their trajectory will include multiple and diverse host countries, they end up assuming a fixed and immutable "host country culture" to which families should adapt or adjust. Repeated mobility challenges any attempt to encapsulate culture within "host" and "home" countries, and to regard "culture" as a container, as in the cases analyzed above. Furthermore, where and what is "home" for highly mobile families? Is it the country where they were born, or the place where their loved ones live? Is it a single place or a multitude of localities? How could services frame support for people that are presumably not rooted in national identities or even in a home place? The experience of repeated mobility draws attention to the irreversible effect of movement both on a person's sense of continuity and on people's perceptions of their "original home"; it can also lead to reflection on what "familiarity" means, if one can feel "at-home" again after the experience of migration (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013; Schuetz, 1944), or, indeed on the possibility of feeling "never at-home" (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012).

Consequently, we first propose moving away from the long-lasting ideas of adaptive responses and conformity found in adaptation and implicit in such non-dialogical readings of cultural encounters; and instead seeking to understand adjustments as changes and movements working from two sides: the person experiencing the move, and the new changes of the environment. Therefore, adjustments presume mutuality in this two-sided relationship, meaning that mobile families' adjustment is co-constructed in reciprocal interaction with the host environment. Secondly, we call attention to the fact that, by disregarding the transformations within the host countries, relocation services are still looking at, and designing practices for a "society of settlement". Thirdly, families in geographical itinerancy move with such intensity that attempts at "rooting" become obsolete; the focus should instead be placed on gaining an understanding of the dynamic nature of geographical itinerancy. But before turning to an alternative understanding of what might facilitate itinerant lives, we must first explore the potential consequences of the kind of interventions proposed by the mobility experts.

## 4.8 Expertizing mobility

In the context of the logics of free movement and transnational spaces, the international mobility of professionals and their families is itself both the result and a precondition of homogenized and connected global forms of production and transnational employment policies. Families in geographical itinerancy represent not only an increasing reality in current global migration flows, but they are also becoming the new targets of intervention in the realm of global mobility. The latter has turned into a field of activity, one that can be transformed into business and materialized through the displacing bodies of these families. Emerging services providers "are creating a new epistemology of alterity which efficiently intersects" (Hindman, 2013, p. 145) with the demands of global markets and intercultural encounters.

Authority is now being given to this new industry that is structuring global mobility, with a special emphasis on outsourcing, as it becomes specialized, functionally differentiated and apparently independent. Global mobility experts, global relocation experts, intercultural experts, intercultural competence experts and so forth, appear to translate mobility needs into services and then translate it back, adding a sophisticated technical language into practical advice for mobile professionals and their families. Through such authority, and by professionalizing respective services, the expert has emerged as the “agent of intervention” in the area of global mobility, responsible for the work involved in adjustment. In their attempts to improve and to come between intercultural encounters, they function as mediators of the available information and knowledge pertaining to a certain context, and also as an interpreter of what is particular to a context, bridging and wording the dialogicality of encounters prompted by globalization and human movement across borders. The expert, for (Bauman, 1993), is defined “not so much by the qualities and possessions which characterize her, but by the function she (he, or it) is perceived as performing by the recipients of the services. (…) The expert is, so to speak, a condensation of the diffuse need of trustworthy – because supra-individual – sanction of individuality” (Bauman, 1993, p. 200).

According to his analysis, the privatization of ambivalence – when ambivalence moved from the public to the private spheres – has cast on individual shoulders the task and responsibility of handling all their problems, thereby transforming the discomforts and anxieties it normally engenders into problems calling for solutions. Expertise offers then socially approved solutions; however, at first, as Bauman (1993) calls our attention, it has “equally authoritatively articulated them as *problems* that require solutions” (p. 208). Accordingly, before offering any service, mobility experts need to translate the problem of ambivalence or discomfort related to the permanently displaced condition of individuals in modern societies (Luhmann in Bauman, 1993). Indeed, “the availability of solutions more often than not precedes the articulation” (Bauman, 1993, p. 209). Thus, the experience of encountering a new cultural context is viewed as disturbing or as disorienting only if an encounter without disturbance or disorientation is possible. Further, “since the assumed availability of solutions made living with unresolved problems uncomfortable, solutions are actively sought; finding them, choosing and appropriating is perceived as an act of emancipation and an increase in the scope of personal freedom” (Bauman, 1993, p.211-2012). Thus, as “the personal skills needed to deal directly with the problems are no longer available”, people are asked to swallow “the right kind of expert-prepared and expert-prescribed pill in order to ‘solve’ – neutralize – a complex interpersonal problem” (p.211). As a whole, the growing incompleteness and insufficiency of the individual, thereby generating the need of expert, create a very complex structure and network of dependency. Expertise, in creating the need of itself, generates this chain of ceaseless problems. In this sense, expertise is consequently *self-reproducing.*

We can see this clearly through our fieldwork. First, a body of experts appeared to intervene to alleviate the discomfort and frustration associated with the move for the relocating person, by dealing with property owners, suppliers, and so on. In some cases, when the company covers the practical expenses, packers take care of moving people’s furniture and objects, employers take care of the career development of the moving professional, while relocation experts try to assist partners with job searches and school searches for children. Soon, however, complaints were raised about the strict focus on solving practicalities alone. For one of our interviewees, “there is no possibility of ‘intervention’ on families’ adjustments when working in a RCGR company”, as every service offered operates from distance: “everything is done by e-mail, needs assessment and coordination calls; I have never seen the face of those people!”. The consequence of impersonal professional service aimed at personal use is highlighted here, showing the contradictions of a growing industry “serving the consequences of the privatization of ambivalence” (Bauman, 1993, p.208).

This situation also creates conflicts of interest between relocation experts and the very structure of this industry. Many relocation experts are aware of the intrinsic issue of discretionary power when relating to the target of intervention – mobile families – from an expert knowledge position, and wonder how much support they can provide to these families. This not only points to the insufficiencies of existing services, opening the way to proposing new services to address the newly recognized problems, but interestingly enough, it also stresses the limits of support.

Relocation experts’ position of being on the frontline to which distress triggered by frequent relocation is transferred, brought about an awareness that other life transitions, including these related to family life (marriage, birth, death) – according to one interviewee – “spills over” into their work. The difficulty of dissociating the mobile families’ working and private family life is exacerbated in geographical itinerancy. “Problems” faced by the family have contributed to defining new experts and to expanding the intervention to non-employee members of the family and into domestic life. Consequently, spouses and children became “incorporated” into the experts’ domains. In this way, the paradigm within which problem and solution are crafted as a single entity could potentially be creating a “burden of support” for these families, who are expected to respond and resort to the available solutions and to contribute to smoothing out adjustments, thereby strengthening the network of dependency and control. Paradoxically, the social authority of expertise could also des-responsabilize the families.

## 4.9 A living fabric on which to draw: redefining culture

By attempting to facilitate the life of mobile families, experts are turning “culture” into the cause of discomfort generated by the encounter with a different sociocultural context. They have presented themselves as the only ones in a position to sort out these kinds of problems. Expertizing intercultural encounters to deal with mobility thus paradoxically creates and reinforces the very problems experts have initially sought to solve.

In contrast, a sociocultural developmental perspective invites us to understand culture as a unique organizer of person-environment relations. We can for instance agree with Shweder (2001) according to whom,

> ‘culture’ refers to community specific ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient. To be ‘cultural’ those ideas about truth, goodness, beauty, and efficiency must be socially inherited and customary. To be ‘cultural’ those socially inherited and customary ideas must be embodied and/or enacted meanings; they must actually be constitutive of (and thereby revealed in) a way of life (Shweder, 2001, p. 3153).

Culture can be seen as a whole, as the sum of all human material, social and symbolic production: the semiosphere (Lotman, 2000; Valsiner, 2007a, 2014a) which is organized into temporary local, yet evolving, subsystems. This approach prevents us from talking about cultureS, and enables us to redefine mobile families’ experience as an extreme case of living in changing sociocultural environments.

If culture is borderless, transcending the stereotypes confined to the surface of nationalities and recurrent in some studies on migration and intervention practices, it can function as a living fabric upon which mobile people could draw, and that could offer direction for those navigating between multiple and constantly changing sociocultural environments, instead of being the cause of problems. There seems to be a need for interventions facilitating processes of elaboration related to the construction of meaning. This is imperative in dealing with frequent relocation and with the existential displacement of people and families, wherever they find themselves at the moment.

From this perspective, a sociocultural approach invites then to reframe the questions relating to the experience of frequent moving, transforming them for example into a quest for how to maintain a sense of self-continuity beyond repeated changes and potential experiences of ruptures. People need to establish a stable and defensible difference between their own and the wider outside sociocultural world. In the case of mobility, when people lose the common ground – the taken-for-granted – by changing sociocultural worlds, they have to re-create sense (Zittoun, 2006; Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson, & Psaltis, 2003). In effect, we carry the power of stitching together our experiences while moving between different contexts and conceivably turning them into meaningful experience through the process of sense-making (Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011). Sense-making is itself made possible because people draw on available cultural “stuff” that they can use as semiotic and symbolic resources (Dahinden & Zittoun, 2013; Kadianaki & Zittoun, 2014; Zittoun, 2006). As a consequence, “culture” can be seen as naturally providing people with the cultural elements that could be used as resources for dealing with relocation.

## 4.10 The paradox of expert intervention – a possible alternative

International forms of mobility contributed to the emergence of “families in geographical itinerancy”. These families face new problems, as they not only experience migration, but as frequently mobile people, they face host countries that have a longer experience of hosting long-time residents. However, our exploratory work allowed us to highlight the emergence of a new body of international mobility experts. The latter design their interventions on two levels: helping with practicalities, and dealing with meeting a new sociocultural context – this being done through intercultural education. Our analysis suggests that this approach creates a double problem: firstly, it reduces the specific and new problems faced by these families to a problem of “culture”, which can be solved by adequate training; and secondly, it individualizes people who are facing this problem, and who, within a skill-deficit approach, need to be taken care of by “experts” with intercultural expertise. We believe that the whole situation can only be changed if we as researchers reconceptualize culture, differences, and movement, and if we then redefine the actual experiences of these families in geographical itinerancy. Our first proposal is to adopt a sociocultural psychological perspective, which, in keeping with other social sciences, views culture as a whole within which people reposition themselves. Seen in such terms, culture is not “the problem”; it provides means that people use as resources to deal with new situations.

Secondly, it follows that we need to emphasize the dynamic nature and diversity not only of the families’ trajectories, but also of the “host countries”. These, as much as families themselves, are changing and undergoing transformations, moving from policies designed for long-term “immigrants” (from the schooling system to loan terms), towards conditions more likely to facilitate the life of frequently moving families.

Thirdly, instead of considering international professionals as isolated individuals, relying on experts to solve their problems, we choose to see these persons as members of families and networks, who can be active in exploring and using various resources. This serves as a reminder that families in repeated mobility are not merely passive recipients of the expert intervention of service providers and of intercultural trainers. They can actively participate in adopting, negotiating or re-making sense of the different resources necessary when relocating to a new environment. In this regard, an important direction of study would be to explore the very meanings that these individuals construct themselves when confronted with “cultural differences” in their “mobile lives”; when and under which circumstances this difference actually matters, or when it does not. Most importantly, this has led us to observe various self-organized groups and associations of frequent mobile people that have more potential to meet mobile families’ different and emerging needs, especially because their structure is more malleable and less rooted in previous non-functioning models of culture.

The underlying structure enabling the emergence of the different service providers – whether originating for example from people's interactions or from a self-contained agent as the expert, as described in our typology – appears to change the potential for developing relocation support practices, which go beyond rooting. The more fluid and shared their organization, the greater the possibility of accounting for movement and temporality in terms of intervention. Nonetheless, even within foreign self-organized groups, we also found much replication of constructions of culture as essence as well as cultural stereotypes.

Fourthly, we are aware that the reduction of geographical itinerancy to a practical problem and to an issue of intercultural contact has actually tended to erase the question of the actual psychological experience of frequent relocations as member of a family. This is not in itself a novel human experience. One need only look back at nomadic trajectories, or those of the "cosmopolitan" upper classes from past centuries, to know that geographic itinerancy is not a problem per se. Yet the conditions of these frequent moves need to be understood within the current sociocultural context. This is the aim of our project and we hope to be able to contribute to new knowledge on this field. Only such new understanding can enable us to reconceptualize family geographical itinerancy in a globalized world, and on this basis to define new tools for intervention.

# 5 . CHAPTER

# FAMILY, BOUNDARIES AND TRANSFORMATION

Cangià, F., Levitan, D., & Zittoun, T. (2018). Family, Boundaries and Transformation. The International Mobility of Professionals and Their Families. *Migration Letters*, *15*(1), 17–31.

## 5.1 Introduction

Professionals who often move for their career prospect have become more numerous and diverse (Meier, 2014), and include, among others, workers at international organizations and corporations, diplomats, academics, and researchers. Also commonly known as *expats*, they have long been described, both in the literature and in dominant discourses on expatriation, as super-mobile individuals possessing a "cosmopolitan" orientation, and "a willingness to engage with the Other" (Hannerz, 1990, p. 239). Recent studies challenged this image, and brought to the fore the complexity of "elite cosmopolitanism" (Jansson, 2016), and the various socio-cultural boundaries that *expats* encounter and construct during the course of their everyday life (Fechter, 2007; Smith & Favell, 2006a). Some research specifically focused on the lives of professionals' mobile families (Adams, 2014; Coles & Fechter, 2012; Gyger Gaspoz, 2013; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005; Ryan, 2011; Ryan & Mulholland, 2014b; Schliewe, 2018; Willis & Yeoh, 2000; Zittoun et al., in press). Recent research showed how openness or closure to diversity depend on the social "sphere" of life (the economic, political, and sociocultural) (van Bochove & Engbersen, 2015, p. 298) in which these people and various family members are involved. Social networks of these families can also change across time, as family needs change (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014c).

The present paper contributes to this research with a special focus on boundary dynamics and through an interdisciplinary perspective[39]. In particular, it explores boundary work as relating to different aspects of intimate life, as well as to the way people make sense of personal and family transformation across time. This paper will also contribute to understanding the temporalities and transformative nature of mobility, by considering boundary work both at the spatial and temporal level.

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[39] This paper is based on a larger project conducted since 2015 at the Institute of Psychology and Education of the University of Neuchâtel, supported by the National Center of Competence in Research NCCR – On the Move, and funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

## 5.2 Theoretical Background

Following a sociocultural perspective in psychology (Valsiner, 2007; Zittoun, 2006), we understand migration as a "dynamic, dialectic, and developmental experience" (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012, p. 741), which entails various changes at multiple levels: these include the "encounter" with alterity, the ruptures and transitions resulting from relocation, and identity transformations at the intrapersonal level (Greco Morasso & Zittoun, 2014; Zittoun et al., 2013). When moving, individuals physically and symbolically engage with others across differences (Gillespie et al., 2012), and re-position themselves in relation to the new environment. These semantic movements occur both spatially (with new positions people self-identify with in the new environment) and temporally (the self before the relocation, the present self and the imagined future self). These changes make the person not only move between different self positions (Hermans, 2001), but also re-define what in cultural sociology is called "symbolic boundaries", those conceptual distinctions created to make sense of the surrounding environment and of oneself in that environment, "to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 168). Symbolic boundary work is an integral part of the process of defining who we are, emerges as "we constantly draw inferences concerning our similarities to, and differences from others" (Lamont, 1992, p. 11), and is inextricably linked to the process of meaning-making (Dahinden & Zittoun, 2013).

Based on the combination of these theoretical frameworks, we analyse symbolic boundary work in relation to the experience of mobility at two interrelated levels: at the synchronic level, as categorization within a given social and spatial situation; at the diachronic level, occurring at the level of self and other repositioning with regard to the personal and family transformation resulting from the movement. The two levels are mutually dependent: situated categorization processes also relate to experiences and understandings of a changing self vis-à-vis others; at the same time, one's sense of change emerges out of confrontation with others in specific temporal and spatial situations across distance. In the next paragraph, we introduce the context and methods of our research.

## 5.3 The Study

Switzerland represents an interesting context in which to explore the experiences of mobile families, as it has recently become an attractive destination for international newcomers, especially in view of career opportunities and quality of life. Recent transformations in migration policies, as well as the growing number of companies, organizations and research institutes in Switzerland, favour the increase of this form of short-term skilled migration. Although less subject to structural and practical constraints affecting other forms of less skilled migration, international professionals and their families can face some challenges when relocating to Switzerland (Ravasi et al., 2013). The high cost of local life and the limited support from employers in certain aspects of life (e.g., accommodation, childcare, dual career arrangements) have contributed to changing the profile of this population, previously limited to a group of people with higher financial capacity (Cangià, 2018; Levitan, Zittoun, & Cangià, 2018). International associations, social networks and informal gatherings have been proliferating to respond to some of these challenges (Levitan et al., 2018), and together with other daily situations (e.g., schools, partners' networks, workplace), represent the main contexts in which these people interact with others at the local level. Those people who live in small villages can have more opportunities to meet with "Swiss" and permanent residents. Respondents seem to show interest in interacting with the "Swiss". However, they tend to meet often with people who do not hold a Swiss nationality. Family life (i.e., children's education, family care, couple relations, the emotional and practical support from proximate or extended family) can play a role in this regard. Other family members' presence and experiences, for example, can represent practical channels for meeting others, in various spheres in which people find anchorage in the course of their daily lives (e.g., child-care, schools, networks). Other times, parents' participation in children's life can be more difficult (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014b), for example for those parents who face difficulties in networking with other parents, or for some male accompanying spouses who avoid school's social networks when this is mostly composed of non-working women.

The paper is based on a qualitative research carried out with 27 families in different cities and regions of Switzerland, in particular on in-depth interviews conducted with various family members[40]. Participants include scientists, workers at international organizations and multinational companies, diplomats, civil servants, and their familiars. They were contacted through relocation agencies, personal contacts and snowballing sampling. The interviews (between one and two hours) were conducted by the first author (FC) and held at a time and place chosen by participants (*café,* office, house). Questions focused on people's migratory trajectory, everyday life, social networks, work situation and future plans. Other topics were raised during the interviews, including feelings about migration, ideas about what constitutes "home" and "family", as well as family changes occurred during the relocation.

The interviews represent emotional encounters guiding both participant and researcher's "multiple positionalities" (e.g., gender, parental and professional status) (Cangià, 2017; Nowicka & Ryan, 2015; Ryan, 2015), and affecting researcher's understanding of people's stories and specific life events (i.e. the birth of a child; unemployment). In particular, the personal experience of the researcher conducting the interviews, as a woman and migrant working in Switzerland, helped evoke narration from the part of the respondent, and facilitated exchanges on issues of migration, work and family life.

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[40] This research is based on a combination of methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation (e.g., with spouses' associations), an online questionnaire and a large survey on migration in Switzerland (http://nccr-onthemove.ch/research/migration-mobility-survey/).

Here, we draw on the analysis of three interviews with two women and a man, pseudonym Hela, Nathalie and Luke[41]. The interviews were conducted individually, following a person-centered approach (Levy & Hollan, 1998), whereby the interview aims at addressing sensitive topics and evoking narrations that would be differently articulated in front of other family members. These interviews were chosen as they represent extreme cases of the kind of descriptions on "locals" that emerged during the research. These stories are also representative of the different gendered configurations that structure professionals' experience of mobility, also in the context of Switzerland (Cangià, 2018; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005; Schaer et al., 2017): Hela's experience is an extreme case of conventional gendered arrangements of mobility with the woman following a male partner (Kofman & Raghuram, 2005); Nathalie and Luke's stories reflect a more consensual couple mobility: while the male partner was the main mover for work reasons, it was Nathalie that facilitated the choice of destination. Luke, in turn, the main mover to Switzerland, is now about to go back to his home-country in order to facilitate his wife's job-search after years of unemployment.

A thematic analysis of each interviews was conducted, in order to identify boundary dynamics through a look at specific aspects in the self-reports, including: descriptions of experiences of mobility, descriptions of friends and social networks, how the respondents differentiates herself and her familiars from others, and how she distinguishes herself and her familiars across time (before, after the move, in the future). Common themes and variations among criteria of evaluations of others and of oneself across time and space were then identified transversally through the use of interpretative analysis (Geertz, 1977).

In what follows, we first present boundary work as occurring at the synchronic level with regard to given spatial and temporal situations: the experience of mobility across countries and the temporary status in Switzerland offer specific symbolic markers through which people construct difference and similarity with others. After, we consider boundary work as occurring at the diachronic level, with regard to personal and family transformation in mobility.

## 5.4 The Boundary Work Outside: Mobility as Symbolic Marker Between Self and Other

Our respondents make sense of difference and similarity with others, between "mobile" and "non-mobile" people, with regard to the transformative nature of the experience of mobility (e.g., personal change resulting from migration, meeting new people and discovering cultural diversity). According to the majority of respondents, mobility is an occasion to see the world and meet cultural diversity. Mobility and immobility, however, become the main symbolic markers of these people's boundary work when it comes to the spatial and embodied experiences in specific places and in social interactions with others. In particular, when respondents describe the kind of person with whom they associate mostly during their everyday life, they make a distinction between “internationals” and “locals”, between “mobile” and “non-mobile” people, as those who move and “have some international experiences” on the one hand, and those who stayed behind, “who never lived in another culture” or “do not want to or need to make friends” on the other. In general, we observed that “experience” represents a recurrent means to differentiate oneself from others. Sharing similar experiences on-the-move (willingness to cultivate new friends, language knowledge, number of countries where people have lived previously) becomes the marker of group distinction. When indicating the criteria through which they constitute their networks and feel different from or similar to others, respondents often draw a line of demarcation on the basis of emotional (Cangià, 2016; Zembylas, 2012), social (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014b), and cultural aspects (Lamont, 1992), relating to a person’s capacity to engage with diversity. The different and unique trajectories and words of Hela, Nathalie and Luke illustrate these dynamics respectively.

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[41] Names of people, places, and any other revealing information have been altered to guarantee anonymity.

Hela arrived in Switzerland in 2014, after following her diplomat husband for almost six years across Europe. On the occasion of the birth of her first child, she quit her work plans, as she was not able to balance working and personal life between two different countries. She faced a difficult period to adjust to her husband’s mobile trajectory. During the interview, Hela ambivalently ascribes the way she feels about the new environment to the alteration of her work plans, to the encounter with “locals” and to the lack of social networks. The “international bubble”, and the “international culture”, represents for her the reference group, which crosses spatial borders and becomes “kind of similar in every country”:

> Our reference culture is the international bubble […] we would love to [meet with Swiss people] usually it doesn't work out, cause they are not interested in making international friends who are leaving […] They [Swiss people] don't even say hello […] I find them very distant […] It’s the expats who are on the same boat, they also want to and need to make friends, they understand us better.

Boundaries are drawn between the “Swiss” and the “Expat” on the basis of emotional (“being distant” or “being cold”*)* and social attitudes based on the “perceptions of transience” (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014c, p. 259), including the wish to make new friends with people who will move again*,* and being “on the same boat”.

Before moving to Switzerland, Nathalie lived and worked in New Zealand with her husband for about four years, when they decided together to get closer to their families in Europe. Her Swiss passport (that she got from her father) proved to be useful to choose their destination. Her passport also helps feel less “precarious”, as she explains, compared to their status in New Zealand, and the experience of getting a visa renewed every time when moving to a new place. She tells about their life in New Zealand, where they used to engage with “internationals”, as “it was easier to bound with people in the same situation”. Nathalie talks explicitly about how moving and in the transient condition of temporarily living in a new country have changed her personally, and contributed to creating a line of separation between her and those people who stayed behind, between migrants and home communities, who, she said, could not accept personal changes occurring in the experience of migration:

> I think migration is a big change, it's a big change from old perspectives, it just changes the way you see the world and also the way people see you because they see that you have changed […] there are still some people that can't handle it. They don't understand why you left […] and they take personally. So it's also good to have an idea of who you wanna be friends with and what kind of people are good to you and what kind of people are not toxic, but have this attitude that you no longer wanna be associate with.

Connection with the home-country can contribute to altering the way migrants make sense of themselves and home communities. In particular, the feeling of not being understood from those who stayed behind, as well as the expectation to find people back home unchanged (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012; Schuetz, 1945; Van Leeuwen, 2008), make Nathalie prefer to "associate with" those who seem to share her experience of migration.

Luke moved to Switzerland with his wife and two children for an assignment with his company. Since his childhood, Luke has been living across different countries, as a result of his father's work first, and of his career trajectory after. He moved for the first time with his family in Switzerland. Also for Luke, previous knowledge about living in an international environment and resulting "cosmopolitan abilities" associated with the spatial and embodied "experiences of travel or displacement, transnational contact and diasporic identification" (Vertovec, 2009, p. 10) come here to constitute a marker of difference between people. Luke makes it clear when illustrating his social networks:

> Initially my wife was friend with some of the women very close to us geographically, neighbours or adjacent building (.) and then those relations worked and didn't work […] we joined the international club of Basel which is largely expats, and because we were in the international school I was really happy with that, because it was about 50% Swiss and 50 % expats and (.) our very close friends are probably a third Swiss and 70% expats but the Swiss we are friends with are almost always married to an expat or someone not from Switzerland […] there is a lot of Swiss people that have also visited other parts of the world and come back to Switzerland but are maybe more aware of the differences between Switzerland and other countries.

He explains how "living in other cultures" and having different experiences worldwide can represent an important aspect for building relationships, for sharing similar stories, as well as for personal "expansion":

> almost all of our friends, they were either living here as a second place they had come to or they have come back to Switzerland after having been in other places. And I find spending time with people like that, you just learn a lot […] people that have lived in another culture and have kind of experiences, the same (.) some of the same frustrations […] you always have good stories, right? There is always something […] I think (.) it builds you up […] it helps you kind of expand as a person. […] For me it would be very hard to stay in the town I grew up in […] I think that world is a little too small for me.

Hela, Nathalie and Luke’s words suggested how the very experience of mobility as the occasion for encountering diversity becomes the symbolic marker for constituting boundaries of “experiential cosmopolitanism” (Glick Schiller, 2015), of emotional, socio-cultural and spatial commonality and transiency, between “those who stay” and “those who leave”, between “locals” and those who are “on the same boat”. Boundary work, and the resulting “opening up” to or “blocking” the encounter with diversity (Gillespie et al., 2012), are also inextricably linked to understandings of personal and family transformation in migration over time, as we will discuss in the following paragraph.

## 5.5 The Boundary Work Within: Mobility as a Personal and Family Transformation

Mobility entails also a transformative and developmental experience (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012). When moving, the individual changes and develops as a person by becoming (an)other (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012), by re-establishing a sense of “sameness” and identity (Mahmoud, 2008; Märtsin, 2010), or by transforming personal trajectories, plans, beliefs, relations and knowledge along with external changes. We suggest that boundary work occurs in these transformative movements and developmental trajectories, between past, present and future selves and significant others as they develop through time, and can relate to more situated gender identities, cultural values (like in Hela’s case) or national categories (Nathalie and Luke). Hela, Nathalie and Luke, like other respondents, put special emphasis on the personal and family transformation allowed by the repeated moves, and by the confrontation with others. The various developmental trajectories of these individuals and resulting shifting roles in and out of the household (e.g., becoming mother, work transitions, couple arrangements) intersect with the encounter with others, and can affect the sense that a person makes of the experience of repeated mobility. Inner boundary work on-the-move can then occur along with transformation in one’s view on personal and family life simultaneously. It can be complicated by new arrangements resulting from developmental trajectories in migration (e.g., becoming mother in a new and unknown environment), and the kind of implications that this can have on personal work plans, like Hela’s case demonstrates. It can also take place in the way a person changes views on family relations or on other family members’ life if compared to what was before the move. Hela, Nathalie and Luke’s shifting views on their family life in mobility well illustrate this second point.

Moving can entail a change in personal work plans like in the case of Hela and other accompanying spouses. This can represent a disruptive experience of alteration of occupational identities, yet also an important opportunity for self-exploration and change of values (Cangià, 2018; Cangià et al., in press). Moving can also disrupt the capacity for personal transformation, and can affect the way one might feel in a new environment. The transition to motherhood with the consequent alteration of her work plans and change in her occupational identity affected Hela’s experience of repeated mobility. Before the birth of her first child, she explains, she easily managed to live across countries, traveling back and forth between the new destination and her work place: “[…] I was going back and forth until I had my first child, […] and we were just fine then”. The birth of a child represents a break between a before and an after point in time in her trajectory as a mobile person, between different ways of positioning herself with regard to gendered identities, from being “highly educated” and “talented” in her professional sector, to being a full time mother and a “housewife type” (Schaer et al., 2017).

A distinction is drawn between the past “I” and “we” like those who move for the first time and still have the “euphoria” of moving, versus the present “I” and “we” like “those who move a lot” and for whom the emotional impact of mobility has changed (Cangià, 2017). Her own and her family’s transformation comes to be typified through these two main categories:

> […] like those who move a lot, you don’t have the six month-honeymoon period when you are over the moon because you don't have this idea that you’re gonna change and you’re gonna dive into a culture and you’re gonna be part of the society […] you feel you can do everything you can to reinvent yourself, but we don’t think so anymore, cause we had to do it so much. So you know I am stuck with myself, it’s still me, and I don't care so much about the customs, the local ways of life, I don't fool myself into believing that I can dive into it, and adjust, and grow roots, we can’t, it would be idiotic to grow roots cause we have to put them out of the soil again.

“Being still herself” represents a barrier that limits her willingness to engage with diversity. Yet, when talking about her children’s developmental trajectories, transformation and engagement with other’s diversity is still possible: “it’s amazing to watch them grow into multicultural […] for them is so natural that people are different, they look different, they talk a bit different, they come from different places”. In her imagination, her children in the future can be different from now as a result of years of mobility, and can become more similar to her, with less willingness to constitute new social networks: “Are they going to become tired to make friends as I did, are they going to stop to make any effort because they have to leave anyway?”

Transformation is still possible for Hela though: she explains how she changed her own values regarding family life, and became more open to relationships with, and support from, extended family as a result of mobility. A line between past and present selves is drawn on the basis of cultural markers, such as difference between family values in different cultural environments (i.e., nuclear family culture in Northern Countries versus multiple child-care in the Mediterranean countries).

In Nathalie’s case, a distinction between past and present is made more explicit with regard to intimate relations, when you get out your “comfort zone” and reposition yourself vis-à-vis a significant other:

> we [her and her husband] both changed, I guess as we were together when it happened we just adapted to the other … how the other changes. I think that my husband has changed a lot […] you see how the other one changes and you think – *oh, maybe I am doing that too*!

A distinction between herself before and after moving is drawn in parallel with collective boundaries, between French people "who complain a lot" and the "English way of thinking where you should smile and not complain". Nathalie tells how she became "more positive than before" as a result of migration, because people in New Zealand could not understand "this whining thing".

For Luke, moving represents an opportunity for personal and his children's "expansion". Learning new languages, for example, is a transformation that can make his family different from other "Americans" who normally speak only one language:

> Their language is amazing to me. I mean you hear about children just being able to absorb languages […] One of my proudest moments here so far as a parent was about a week or so before we were leaving, […] we were at a restaurant and my son said to me "*Dad can I order? Can I get the meal? […] I would like to order for the table*" and I "*oh ok, sure you can do that".* […] And the waitress comes and he starts to speak to her in German. […] I don't know if you ever heard the joke about Americans… if you speak 3 languages, you're trilingual, if you speak 2 languages, you're bilingual, if you speak one language, you're American. And there is some truth to it, but to me it is much sadder. America is a great country and there is lots of opportunities there and there is a great diversity of people and kind of environment you can live in […] but I think I have a bit of hunger for adventure I want to see other parts of the world.

By describing his own child speaking other languages and opening up to diversity, Luke engages in a process of self-definition and group categorization on multiple spatial and temporal levels: there is his child who can speak German in the here-and-now of the restaurant; the reflection of his child in the future, growing up and being able to "absorb languages"; there is the other "Americans" over there, who can only speak one language" and to which Luke compares himself and his family over here; finally there is "the striving self" (Gillespie, 2007), that is Luke who wants "to see other parts of the world" in the future, based on his past childhood of mobility and his present willingness to travel more[42].

Hela, Nathalie and Luke's interchangeable use of the pronouns "I" and "we" (read as family) suggests the shifting and blurred nature of the boundaries between themselves and their significant others in their "multivoiced self" (Aveling, Gillespie, & Cornish, 2014). Boundaries are still drawn between "those who move" and "those who never move", yet these boundary processes take place at the individual level when making sense of the past, present and future, of oneself and one's own familiars in relation to real and imagined others.

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[42] For different experiences in the same family see also (Zittoun, Levitan, & Cangià, 2018).

## 5.6 Conclusion

This paper has analysed boundary work both as a process of self-identification and categorization in a specific space and moment, and as the understanding of personal and family transformation across time. Hela, Nathalie, and Luke’s unique experiences represent variations of the same dynamics with regard to the two levels under exploration. This analysis has showed how family and intimate life play a twofold role in the different construction of socio-cultural and emotional boundaries between self/other: socially, by offering a practical channel to social networking and to socializing with people in a similar environment (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014c); symbolically, in the way people make sense of the importance of diversity in one’s life-course as an opportunity for change. Moving to new destinations can be the occasion for living new experiences and meeting “new cultures”. At the same time, turning to “internationals” can help find similarity across difference. Other times, personal transformation or a new event in family life allowed by the experience of migration, can affect the way individuals relate to diversity, and make sense of the distinctions between themselves and others.

Considering boundary dynamics through the lens of family and intimate life can contribute to research on (im)mobilities, and to understanding the complexities and tempos of people’s migratory trajectories and relationship with diversity. Boundary work can occur on multiple levels and involve a variety of markers of similarity and difference. Openness and closure to diversity are hence not exclusive processes, but more dynamic than usually portrayed: they can represent ambivalent responses to the dialectics of migration (Glick Schiller & Irving, 2015), in the form of both geographic and semantic movements between social and cultural positions (Gillespie et al., 2012), between mobility and immobility (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013), between personal and family identities, or, after all, between different moments in one’s own life.

# 6 . CHAPTER

# A SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH TO MOBILE FAMILIES: A CASE STUDY

Zittoun, T., Levitan, D., & Cangià, F. (2018). A sociocultural approach to mobile families: A case study. Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 24(4), 424–432.

*Abstract:* This paper proposes a sociocultural perspective to mobility, of which migration is only one case, with a focus on mobile families. Consistent with mobility studies, sociocultural psychology of the lifecourse proposes to study both the sociocultural conditions of mobility, and the perspective of mobile people. In addition, in this paper, we consider interrelated lives in mobility. We discuss the specific case of one family documented as part of a larger research project on repeated geographical mobility, and highlight the specificities of the context, the experiences of each family member, and some of their overlapping spheres of experiences. We thus hope to document the life of such families, but also to provide theoretical directions for the psychological study of mobility.

*Keywords*: Mobility; sociocultural psychology; family; lifecourse; spheres of experience

## 6.1 Introduction

As this special issue argues, there is a need to renew psychological approaches to study mobility and migration. This paper does so by proposing a sociocultural lifecourse perspective to mobile families. We highlight the specificities of this approach: first, it attempts to understand both sociocultural dynamics, and the perspective of people; second, it examines not only the single person, but also, interrelated lives. This double proposition is built around the specific case of a family living in international repeated geographical mobility, namely, a family relocating to another country every few years because of the professional expertise of at least one family member. We therefore build our argument in order to account for repeated mobility with family, and then highlight the possible contribution of a psychology of migration and mobility.

First, we briefly highlight the terms in which repeated mobility has been addressed in migration and mobility literature, before turning to the relatively limited psychological literature on the topic. Afterwards, we draw on a sociocultural psychology of the lifecourse to explore family mobility, and propose to study sociogenetic, ontogenetic and microgenetic dynamics. We then focus on one case study, that of the international Ulrich-Mann family living temporarily in a Swiss village. We finally highlight the contributions of this paper.

## 6.2 Repeated geographical mobility

A general paradigm change in social sciences consists in addressing mobility at large, so that what is traditionally considered as migration becomes just one form of mobility (Sheller & Urry, 2006). A specific case of mobility is that of “repeated geographical mobility”, designating persons, families or groups regularly or repeatedly relocating their housing and often occupational arrangements geographically, usually across countries. Repeated mobility is often seen as a contemporary, elite phenomenon, different from more “traditional” country-to-country migration. However, we argue, repeated mobility does not radically differ from traditional migration; both are cases of mobility. Repeated mobility is an old phenomenon, traditionally associated with nomadic lives, or in the Occident with the lives of religious people, or, since the 19th century, with a certain intelligentsia who could afford to circulate mainly in Europe and North America. With a larger awareness of the lives of forced displaced persons on the one hand, and the globalization of the market with its associated delocalization of workplaces and professional expertise on the other, various forms of repeated mobility have come to the fore in mobility and migration studies.

In the social sciences, repeated mobility has long been addressed as the mobility of the “expats”, through a look at the specific experiences of diplomats or managers and their families. Recently, the literature on mobility has widened its scope by addressing highly skilled migrants, or other persons engaged in repeated migration, alone or in couple. This literature shows that repeated mobility is not a simple and smooth phenomenon, in contrast with unqualified or forced migration; difficulties can affect the main mover but also his or her close relationships (Schaer, Dahinden, & Toader, 2017; van Bochove & Engbersen, 2015). More generally, with the transformation of migration regimes in Europe, of the economy, and of the structure and regulation of labor market on the one side, and with the recent development of transnational studies and networks analysis on the other side, the clear-cut differences between “cosmopolitan” mobile persons (easy-moving across countries) and “traditional” migrants (moving from a home country to settle in a host country) tends to fade out (Ryan, 2011). More critical approaches in these fields argue for a demand a de-nationalization of the discussion on migration, and de-essentialization in the analysis of people on the move (i.e., beyond categories defined by national or ethnic belonging (Dahinden, 2016). These critical studies also acknowledge the swiftly evolving and even shifting boundary dynamics by which mobile people or communities are mutually defined. Finally, some scholarship in the social sciences has called for a move from analyses limited to general policies and group movements, to more case-based and person specific analyses, giving thus a “human face” to mobility (Favell, Feldblum, & Smith, 2007).

In psychology, little literature is devoted to the question of repeated mobility, especially in the case of families[43]. Classical approaches to migration have usually focused on people aiming at long-term residency in a new country, and mainly addressed issues of acculturation, integration, cultural identity, language acquisition, schooling, or psychosocial distress linked to the experience of leaving one home to reconstruct another one. Regarding repeated geographical mobility, some authors have addressed the specific problems of military families (Ender, 2002). Yet most peer reviewed literature on the topic proposes models or factors explaining, often from a psychopathological perspective or in organizational terms, the difficulties of adjustment or copying in the case of individuals or families frequently moving. A limited number of peer-reviewed papers address the case of "third culture kids"[44], a term commonly used in management and intercultural studies literature to designate children of frequently moving families. However, these papers tend to be static and normative – they aim to render people efficient in the globalized market, using standardized tests at times developed for other purposes, and focus on possible outcomes or causes of well-being. They scarcely take in account the social and cultural conditions of these moves, and do not explore the trajectories of people frequently moving, the experience of repeated displacement, or the process through which these moves are handled. Hence, also in psychology, paradoxically, the "human face" of mobility tends to be missing.

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[43] About 200 occurrences in PsycArticles for keywords such as repeated mobility/expats/geographical mobility & family in July 2016.

Sociocultural approaches have however expanded the enquiry on migration and mobility in interesting directions, by taking into account sociocultural, relational and psychological dynamics (Abreu & Hale, 2011; Gillespie, Kadianaki, & O'Sullivan-Lago, 2012; Hale & de Abreu, 2010; Kadianaki, 2014a; Märtsin, 2010; Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012). However, repeated mobility only starts to be addressed by such approaches, which try to account both for sociocultural dynamics and the more subjective experience of mobile families (Adams & Fleer, 2015; ; Schliewe, 2017). This paper hence pursues a comparable effort.

## 6.3 Towards a sociocultural psychology of family mobility

Sociocultural psychology examines the mutual constitution of persons, seen as unique, and their social and cultural environment, in a dynamic understanding (Valsiner, 2013). Together with dialogical or critical approaches in psychology, it opens the possibility of a more comprehensive, dynamic, person-centered, yet socially and culturally aware approach to mobility and especially repeated mobility. To sketch a sociocultural psychology of mobile families, we need first to account some general sociocultural principles, such as the interdependence of cultural and personal dynamics, and the primacy of time – that is, change and development (Valsiner, 2014; Zittoun et al., 2013). In order to do so, we will draw on the distinction between sociogenetic, microgenetic and ontogenetic dynamics – the study of sociohistorical changes, that of interactions and society and people in the making, and that of psychological change at the level of the lifecourse; the three are of course interrelated, but the analytical distinction allows precisely to highlight the interplay between the personal and the societal, enacted in situated interactions and activities (Duveen, 2013; Gillespie & Cornish, 2010; Valsiner, 2014). More specifically, when studying families on the move, we have to consider at the sociogenetic level, the evolution of transnational, national and local regulations, political and economic situations, social representations and ideologies, etc., creating the conditions for everyday life (Strasser, Kraler, Bonjour, & Bilger, 2009).

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[44] 8 occurrences in PsycArticles in July 2016.

Second, in order to account for ontogenetic dynamics, we borrow notions and principles from the psychology of the lifecourse, namely, the notions of "transition" and "spheres of experiences", and the principle of interrelated lives. Lifecourses are unique unfolding of life trajectories in their social and cultural world. It has been acknowledged that the study of transitions offers a rich analyzer to the study of the lifecourse (Levy, Ghisletta, Le Goff, Spini, & Widmer, 2005), and these have been largely explored by psycho-sociocultural studies of migration and repeated mobility (Greco Morasso & Zittoun, 2014; Gyger Gaspoz, 2013; Kadianaki, 2014b). The notion of "sphere of experience" designates situations, partly socially given, yet phenomenologically experienced, that feel relatively "the same" for a given person. A "sphere of experience" includes certain ways of doing, routines, aspects of identity, emotional qualities, personal sense and orientation (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). For a child, spheres of experience include, for instance, family dinners – it might be a relative stable experience for a child, even though food and kitchen are different – learning mathematics or playing football with friends. Over a day, people move through spheres of experience, and over time, some spheres disappear, and others have to be created – which implies often experience of ruptures and associated transitions, until a new taken-for-granted experience is installed. In addition, we have proposed to distinguish "proximal spheres of experience", which are supported by the actual, present social and material reality (e.g., playing football with friends) from "distal spheres of experiences", which are enabled by imagination, that is, are liberated from here-and-now social and material constraints. Hence, the memory of one's childhood football matches, watching a movie, or imagining how one's next home will be, are examples of distal experiences (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). Transitions thus typically demand the reconfiguration of spheres of experiences: some proximal experiences will disappear, new ones will be created, and some will become distal experiences, as has been shown in the case of geographical mobility (Zittoun, 2012; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015).

Finally, the principle of interrelated lives is one of the axioms of lifecourse studies (Elder & Giele, 2009), and it claims that people living in a close relationship mutually enable and constrain each other's lifecourse - per extension, people with kinship or family ties[45]. Adopting comparable principles, sociocultural studies of mobility suggest that mobile people, including those moving with their families, have to establish a sense of "home" on the move, however challenged it may be (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012), as well a sense of self-continuity (Märtsin, 2010; O'Sullivan-Lago & de Abreu, 2010). In order to do so, people engaged in repeated mobility develop a mobile “know-how”, or a reflexive stance over repeated transitions: people develop moving routines, are aware of the objects to take first with them, learn how to cultivate friends both abroad and in a new temporary home, use various symbolic resources (including food) to facilitate their move, find support in relocation agencies, or learn to maintain transnational bonds (Adams & Fleer, 2015; Greco Morasso & Zittoun, 2014; Levitan, Zittoun, & Cangiá, In press).

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[45] We work here with a consensual definition of family, such as: "A family system is a set of people related by blood or intention. That they are "related" means that they are affected by each other—a change in one sets off changes in the others that in turn feedback and affect the member that originally changed" (Pinsof, 1992, p. 436).

However, the role of interrelated lives has been little addressed when it comes to the relationships between parents and their children on the move. In her study on repeated mobility of adolescents in “geographic itinerancy” (whose parents work in consulates or international companies), Deniz Gyger Gaspoz (2013) shows that young people use various resources to maintain a sense of continuity, such as objects (taken with, left behind) and places. She also alluded to, but does not explore further, the role of the family moving with and around these adolescents, and only partly sharing these youngsters’ experiences. On their side, Adams and Fleer interestingly show how parents actively regulate their small children’s relation to objects when in repeated mobility (Adams & Fleer, 2015). But are adults and children’s experiences of the move “the same”? How can we understand the differentiated experiences of children, for whom a move might be half a life, and those of their parents?

In order to address interrelated lives in families, we propose to expand the reflection on spheres of experiences in a sociocultural lifecourse perspective. Although spheres of experiences are identified from the perspective of each single person, we can say that some may take place in the same social and material setting. In that sense, from a third person’s perspective, these spheres “overlap”. Consequently, different persons’ experiences may affect each other; also, the experience of “sharing” or intimacy might be seen as related to the experience of sharing these spheres of experience. Consequently, the following question can be raised: how are interrelated lives in a family affected by repeated mobility, and how can these support people’s experience of mobility? In what respects can frequently moving family members share a lifestyle or a feeling of home, and in what conditions can they support each other in their spheres of experiences? Hence, we propose to contribute to a sociocultural psychology of mobility by exploring the spheres of experiences of members of families in repeated mobility, their possible overlaps and divergences, the tensions created, and their resolutions.

## 6.4 A case study: A mobile family in a Swiss village

To demonstrate and illustrate the relevance of a sociocultural approach to repeated mobility, with a focus on interrelated lives in family, we present the case study of one family, which we call Ulrich-Mann, documented as part of a research project on “Families in geographic itinerancy”[46]. The goal of the research is to describe and to analyze the experiences of families in mobility because of the professional expertise of at least one adult. The target families needed to have a trajectory of repeated mobility, residing in Switzerland for a limited period, and have at least one child in school age. As a consequence, the adults tend to have achieved higher education (which reflect the sociogenetic forces at play - see below).

Methodologically, the project includes three parts: (i) an online questionnaire circulated through various networks and filled by mobile people (N=56); (ii) a large scale survey on mobility in Switzerland (N=5973)[47]; (iii) and interviews with members of families in repeated mobility – at times with only one member, at times with two adults and children (29 families for a total of 42 interviews). For the present analysis we selected a case in which we were able to interview all members from the nuclear family; the dynamics highlighted however are recurrent in the interviews data. The family Ulrich-Mann was contacted through informal networks and met twice at their place by one of us (DL), who conducted a life-narrative and a problem-focused interview with each family member as well as a couple interview, and observed the family house. The first interviews were conducted in July 2016; seven months later, a second round of interviews took place. The life-narrative and problem focused interviews were carried out with the aid of visual methods, which included a Google Maps/Earth based series of questions. Parts of interviews were translated from a Latin language into English by one of us. Other parts, where members spoke to each other in English during the interview, were maintained in the original. The original interview was listened many times by one of us, transcribed, discussed with the team members, and *ad hoc* sequences were translated. The set of interview transcripts contained approximately 46.440 words. Data was anonymized. The analysis focused on the notions put forward for this paper, with, as theoretical background, equivalent analysis in other fieldworks (e.g., Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015).

First, we have identified the different “spheres of experiences” of each family member. For this, we map the activities, places or experiences that appear as recurrent for one given person. The Google task was very useful for this, as it brought about places, experiences and activities which were particular important for people through their mobility. Indeed, people were asked to identify places where they felt “local”, and they often replied in terms of “feeling at-home”, highlighting the affective dimension of certain spheres of experience. After that, we single out every time each participant described an activity or experience in which at least two family members were engaged, as well as when they refer to other members' experiences or activities. Initially, we also focused in coding how one member of the family supports the other. As a way to discriminate which spheres of experiences were most relevant, we triangulated people's descriptions with observations we conducted in their home. "Overlapping spheres" have been then identified as activities or experiences in which family members were recurrently jointly engaged. Experiences of "home" have been identified either because they have been identified as answer to the Google task, or because of their qualities of "togetherness" or comfort. Interpretations have been checked by the triangulations of interviews and team members' perspectives.

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[46] This research was supported by the “nccr – on the move” and funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). Designed to develop new perspectives on the changing migratory reality in Switzerland, “nccr – on the move” brings together different research projects in an interdisciplinary framework. This article is based on part of our fieldwork research for the project *“New Migration” and New Forms of Integration: Families in Geographical Itinerancy*, which aims at understanding the experience of frequently moving families living temporarily in Switzerland.

[47] Migration-Mobility Survey Report (2017), internal document. The Migration-Mobility Survey is an initiative of the National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) - On the Move.

In what follows, we quickly introduce the sociocultural situation of the family, then focus on each member's spheres of experiences, before showing their possible overlaps; we then synthesize the case study.

### 6.4.1 LIVING AS AN INTERNATIONAL MOBILE FAMILY IN A SWISS VILLAGE

To be consistent with the approach proposed above, we first need to sketch the sociocultural and politico-legal context within which the Ulrich-Mann family's mobility takes place. Switzerland has a restrictive migration policy, which however tends to privilege "highly skilled migrants". Through the "internationalization" of its business environment along with the increase of multinational companies and international organizations, Switzerland has recently come to be viewed as an attractive destination for "expatriation", in terms of job market, salary and career opportunities, as well as an appealing place for families, due to the quality of life-standard (e.g., transports, health care, education) (Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2013). In addition, standard expatriation packages offered by employers can include salary supplements, as well as expenses for family arrangements (e.g., assistance for accommodation, professional training, children's education, as well as support in spouses' job search). Over the last years, however, many companies and organizations have reduced their budget for overseas assignments and therefore relocation support in response to the global economic crisis (Levitan et al.,in press).

On a legal level, relatives and partners of EU/EFTA highly skilled migrants temporarily residing in Switzerland for work (stays longer than three months) can enter in Switzerland regardless of their nationality and receive a permit (L short-term or B residence permit, Ci permit for members of foreign representations and family members of intergovernmental organizations). Family members of Non-EU/EFTA highly skilled migrants temporarily residing in Switzerland can be granted special permission from local cantonal authorities as part of the family reunification program. Hence, compared to other forms of migration, "highly-skilled" or expert mobility occurs under facilitated legal conditions.

The move to Switzerland confronts mobile families with typical issues: in main urban centers, for example, where the number of “internationals” is larger, housing conditions can be difficult, scarce and expensive. Some families rather choose to live in smaller localities and villages, for reasons including workplace and children school’s location. These, in contrast with mobile families residing in urban centers town, may be confronted to an apparent ‘closeness’ of these villages’ inhabitants (Hercog & Tejada, 2013). Also, in general, the high cost of living in Switzerland and the fact that many companies have stopped offering relocation packages makes highly mobile families, often a financially privileged group in many countries, become economically “average”. This means, for example, that the cost of private international schools cannot always be afforded. Frequently mobile families in Switzerland thus are typically confronted with the experience of having lost some privileges and of feeling boundaries separating them from the local population, and tend to look for networks of people sharing their mobile experience (Levitan et al., in press). The family we study faces a similar situation, living in a village and sending their children to the local public school.

### 6.4.2 FOUR FAMILY MEMBERS’ SPHERES OF EXPERIENCES

At the time of the interview, the Ulrich-Mann family, composed by Helena, her husband Emilio and their two sons Eduardo, 13 years old and Arthur aged 9, live in a small Swiss German-speaking village. Helena was born in Argentina, but grew up as a child in repeated international mobility because of her father’s profession. She first moved aged three to the US, where the family relocated to several States, then during most of her childhood, before finishing her university studies in Argentina. There, she married Emilio, also an Argentinian citizen. It is only as a married adult, with two children, that she and her own family became mobile again, and moved first to the US and then to Switzerland, because of her husband’s professional expertise. Although she was working in Argentina, she stopped during their US stay. Her first period in Switzerland was difficult; while she speaks Spanish and English, not speaking German gave her the impression of not being able to manage everyday life and of losing her independency – she had indeed to wait for her husband’s return from work to handle various situations. She was distressed by this experience and went to see a psychologist in Switzerland. She recently took a job in Switzerland in a German-speaking company, arguing that this is also to force her to learn German. She also wished not to move anymore to places that would demand learning a new language. Finally, asked to find on Google Maps where she feels a “local”, Helena replies directly and abruptly: “I am not. I can’t find a place at Google Maps in which I am, that is, my home. *“Home is where the heart is”* is literal to me”. However, later, she mentions the importance of creating an “at-home” feeling by cooking a nice meal anywhere she moves in, having her pans ready for it.

Unlike Helena, Emilio grew up as a sedentary child in a farm in a small town on the Argentinian border. There, they spoke some variation of German; later he did a three-month internship in Germany. The first time he actually lived abroad was when he was sent to the US by his employer, a South-American multinational, with Helena and their children; his job as electrical engineer continues to be relatively the same, and in Switzerland he works all day long. Moving to the US and afterwards to Switzerland had however what he refers as “the cost of ignorance” – for instance when confronted with the new health or educational system. When asked about the places where he is a “local”, first he chose the university where he studied in Argentina; for him, studies made a huge difference in his life, granting him social mobility and the opportunity to move out of poverty. He also chose his parents’ house in Argentina, followed by the Swiss village where his family lives, the first house where he lived with Helena and the kids in Argentina, and the city where they lived in the US.

The children go to a public local school. The parents decided not to send them to an international school, where friendship bonds could be insufficient because of students’ turnover. They wanted their children to have what they consider a proper experience of childhood and a "Swiss experience", as expressed by Helena: "We want them to learn German, we want, you know, a complete socialization, we want to experience Switzerland". The children have rapidly picked up the educational system.

According to Helena, the eldest son, Eduardo, has difficulties with the teacher although he is perceived as “cool” by the other children. Two weeks after their arrival, he was invited to join the local football team. He has many friends all among the foreigners from the neighborhood, mostly from the Balkans, of which some are refugees. The mother thus thinks that this proximity to foreigners can be recognized through his accent: "The way he speaks German is Albanese (…). His accent is Albanian". Asked directly to locate five places where he feels a local using Google Maps, he responded: the village where the family currently lives, the Pepsi Cola factory in the US; the Cailler chocolate factory in Switzerland; his grandmothers’ house in Argentina; his friends’ houses in their street in Switzerland. Regarding the Pepsi Cola and the chocolate factories, the mother comments how much soda they used to drink and, and that chocolate is important in their family (she served a home-made chocolate cake to the interviewer). Asked about where he feels more at-home, he replies the same town where his grandmothers’ house is, and asked why, he explains by bringing the temporal dimension: “mhm I was there for the first five, basically first five years of my life (…) and my uncle and my grandma were there as well”. It is important to note that Eduardo’s distal relevant spheres of experience are not shared by his mother; when she understood that he had mentioned the Pepsi factory during the interview, the mother laughed: “Strange is saying that you like the Pepsi factory as a place that you call home!”

The youngest son started his life “on the move” aged one year when the family moved to the US, reason for which he masters English and German better than Spanish. He does not consider his school the most suitable for him, as he sometimes feels victim of bullying. He plays football in the school team and recently started playing drums. He mentions that he also learns guitar because of his dad. When asked to locate five places where he feels a local on Google Earth, he replied in the following order: his grandparents’ city in Argentina, where his uncle also lives; his room in their house in Switzerland - he says he feels at-home there because he sleeps a lot; the other grandparents’ house in the countryside of Argentina, where he plays with the dogs; “mommy’s father” house also in Argentina and; finally, the city in

Argentina where his brother's friend live. He explains that he feels home and a local where his family is, and that he considers moving back to Argentina when he will be older: "Because when I'm older and my mom and dad are probably going to live in Argentina so it's easier to visit. If I lived, like, in Russia it would be very hard to visit".

At first view, then, these four family members seem to have quite different experiences of the move. Emilio's professional and domestic proximal spheres of experience seem relatively stable across moves, while Helena experienced a radical disruption of daily spheres of experiences when moving to Switzerland. The children build their own daily proximal spheres of experiences at school and in leisure and at their friends' places, and the personal sense of their distal experiences (e.g., the chocolate factory) is not always understood by their parents. With regards to the more subjective "feeling-at-home", the children and Emilio associate this feeling to their house in the Swiss village, their most proximal spheres of experience, while Helena's "home" seems transportable around her kitchen, now circumscribed in their Swiss house. Emilio and the children seem to share an experience of "home" in the distal experience of the grand-parents' house in South-America – a typical "anchor" place for mobile children (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013). Given their relative different experiences of mobility – as a life-trajectory or as a recent experience, where the larger portions of lives are, proportionally, lived in different countries – what do these family members then share on the move?

## 6.5 The family's overlapping spheres of experiences

To better understand interrelated lives in repeated mobility; we propose next to examine the overlapping spheres of experiences of the Ulrich-Mann's family. Based on the family members' discourses and practices, we try to retrace their daily spheres of experiences at a microgenetic level, and their possible overlaps.

On a daily basis, Helena and her children speak in English with each other; this creates for each of them an English-speaking home sphere of experience distinct from other ones taking place in their German-speaking environment, and these overlap in that sense. Then, although school is the place that children attend, Helena tries to take part in their spheres of experience. It took her some time to understand the educational system, yet she seems quite involved:

> I am part of the "parents and teachers" at their school, which is comic, since I don't understand anything they say. Swiss German. I occupy a chair at the "parents and teachers", literally.

She went to meet the teacher of her older son and confronted the children that bullied the youngest. She also monitors which friends of Eduardo can and cannot come to their house:

"I cannot say to them "no, do not be friends with this boy". But I can tell him "this boy doesn't step in our house anymore, because he has beaten your youngest brother"".

For the children, spheres of experience did change a lot over time, and Eduardo's feeling at home, for example, relate to three different countries. As mentioned, their grandmothers' house seems to be a relevant distal experience. Similarly, the memory of the Pepsi Cola factory, evoked for its emotional quality, seems to summarize or designate the whole experience of living in a country, a distal experience significant for Eduardo but not for his mother. The proximal spheres of experiences for both brothers include the school and the football team. For Eduardo, it also includes his local friends, whereas for Arthur these are centered in the family. It is interesting to note that Eduardo chose to join other children with a migratory background, which suggested that the community creates a boundary between "Swiss" and foreign children, rather than a nationality, class or religion-based boundary.

For the two adults, the first period in Switzerland was difficult; they helped each other much in the shared experience of intimacy. Although Helena is an experienced mobile person, she felt a rupture that affected many of her spheres of experience, partly because of the language, spoken in the neighborhood, shops, doctors, school and work. Emilio could use his professional linguistic skills to help Helena in these daily spheres of experiences where German was needed. Hence, for this relocation, Emilio needs to be engaged in daily life to support his wife, whereas previously in the United States it is Helena who played a major role in supporting daily life, as it was his first experience of mobility and he had more difficulties.

Another event brought the family members to look for each other, a few years after their arrival in Switzerland. Helena had a health problem; a diagnostic mistake forced her to stay one month at the hospital. During this period, Emilio had to reduce his engagement in his professional sphere of experience to share more time with his wife at the hospital and with the children – playing football with them, giving them support – an experience that he describes as emotionally intense and demanding. Two members of Helena's close family also came from Argentina to Switzerland to help the family at home. Hence, a dramatic event affecting one family member brought a reorganization of the other members' spheres of experience; the rupture caused by the illness redistributed spheres of experiences and created occasions for more overlap and possibly shared spheres of experiences.

Such overlapping dynamics even seem to be the resource used by this family to address ruptures, including the very ones created by the repeated mobility. This can be seen in two different ways. First, talking about whole-family overlapping experiences that constitute "home", Helena mentions food, as well as her husband's guitar and family games:

> Another thing that defines our house is the guitar. Since I was pregnant with the children, my husband has been playing the guitar to them at night for them to sleep. So when my husband is travelling, this is something that they miss, so it is something that sort of defines the structure of the BED for them. There is the guitar, there is the kitchen and another thing we do a lot is (…) family game

nights, which is to sit and play, any game, but it is the action of sitting together, without mobile, without tablet, (…) but doing home activities, at home, TOGETHER. I think those things define more or less our home.

D And could you do it everywhere?

H Yes, yeah, because they don't depend upon physical structure necessarily, you know. It is more of a routine, a custom we have than having something. You don't need a table to play games, having a "Uno" is enough. So it is something that is possible to do anywhere, it is something that we do anywhere, including Argentina, we do when we are at my mom's house, we do…

Second, when asked if she could leave behind some of their belongings when moving, Helena replies:

I could leave all these things behind; I wouldn't like to, because I like them. (…) No, for us (.), I think it has strengthened after what happened last year at the hospital, the only thing that is important for us is *us*. (…) We only make decisions that are good for the family UNITY, if it is good for one, but not to the other, it will not happen. (…) What really matter is the family well-being.

Hence, it seems that the capacity of the family to tie its own relationships, by bringing together different members' spheres of experience, and reinforcing their togetherness around specific experiences – food and music - is precisely the strategy used to fight against the ruptures generated by repeated mobility.

## 6.6 Discussion: Interrelated lives and mobility

A family is a system in which people's lives are mutually dependent. However, in their own trajectories, each person moves daily through a variety of spheres of experience. Some of these are highly personal and refer to various proximal and distal spheres of experiences; some others take place in settings in which they meet other members of the family and interact with them. On the one hand, these experiences differ, first, because of members' relative ages: one move in a repeated mobility life for a parent is experienced by a child as a half-life rupture. Second, members of the same family have to deal with different daily issues and approach the same situation with different perspectives – such as the school or the neighborhood children. On the other hand, overlapping spheres of experience create what their members call "family" or "home". Such overlapping experiences appears in three cases: as a resource in the emergency case of an incident affecting the whole family system (illness), as stable anchor point in a distal experience (such as the grandparent home) or built around simple, emotionally laden transportable matters – food (Greco Morasso & Zittoun, 2014), games and music.

On the basis of this case study, we can highlight three aspects that deserve further attention in the study of families in repeated mobility: first, the contrast between the expert-working parent and the accompanying spouse needs to be further understood - the accompanying partner usually dealing with more rupturing spheres of experience in the course of the relocation and settling-in process (e.g., job-quitting, taking care of children's education and everyday administrative life) (Cangiá & Levitan, 2015; Ravasi et al., 2013). Second, a close attention should be given to children, who experience temporality differently than adults, and who actively build rich networks of proximal and distal spheres of experience, which can present different qualities of home-ness (Adams & Fleer, 2015). Hence, children might be very attached to apparently anecdotic objects or places that become powerful symbolic resources (e.g., a chocolate factory, a toy) with anchor function (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013); their development might be supported by a clear attention to these.

Third, an emerging core proposition is that the possibility of creating overlapping spheres of experiences might precisely constitute, through emotional and relational support, transportable "homes", enabling to smoothen the difficulties found in mobility as well as to potentially provide a sense of continuity between different places for family members in repeated mobility.

## 6.7 Conclusions

Psychology of migration has long been limited to a discourse on acculturation and integration, and divided between studies of movement and settlement. This discourse cannot be hold anymore in the light of the general paradigm shift to mobility studies in the social sciences. In that theoretical context, sociocultural psychology of the lifecourse can bring an original contribution. In this paper, we have applied two principles of this approach to the case of families in repeated mobility.

First, a *sociocultural* psychology assumes that the social and cultural environment creates the guiding conditions for people's lives, by constraining and mediating life trajectories, but also by offering people with cultural elements that can be used as resources. Here, we have therefore paid a special attention to the sociogenetic condition of people in repeated mobility, including the evolution of migration policies in Switzerland, and specific social, material and economic living conditions for such families. It is clear that the experiences of members of a "highly-skilled" family differ from these from a family in repeated mobility in a trajectory of political refugees, whose daily experiences may entail compulsory language classes, or interactions with administration in order to obtain residency rights (Zittoun, 2017). Conversely, families such as the one we studied here experience specific dynamics of boundaries making and crossing with the local population, dynamics that appear to be very different if compared to those of families in "expat bubbles" living in an economic condition superior to that of the wider population (e.g. Schliewe, 2017). More generally, one cannot develop a psychology of mobility, that is, an understanding of experiences of moving and their related ruptures, without understanding their causes, their meaning in a given social environment and in various groups, and the sense these have for a specific person.

Second, a sociocultural psychology of the *lifecourse* pays a specific attention to the unfolding of lives, which we have done with the use of concepts of ruptures, transitions and spheres of experiences, and also, to the *interrelated* nature of lives. If the first aspect has been quite explored, the new proposition here is to consider *overlapping* spheres of experiences. In effect, kinship and families start to be studied in migration and mobility research, among other, through the lens of transnational ties (Dahinden, 2012). Yet the question of overlapping spheres of experience allows highlighting precisely the subjective, experiential and intersubjective nature of the experience of what remains “family” or “home” when the rest moves (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012) – questions at the heart of the psychological enquiry.

What, then, can be generalized from our proposition for the psychology of migration and mobility? Some aspects of our studies – the nature of people’s everyday life, their goals and experiences – are specific to the case of families in repeated mobility, with certain facilitated conditions. One has however to bear in mind that current EU policies and the demands of the market might increase the frequency of this type of mobility, yet without their classically associated privileges.

However, beyond the specific case of this subgroup of mobile people, we believe that the two theoretical propositions made here can become more generally relevant for a psychology of mobility.

First, as mentioned, a sociocultural approach invites to consider the social, cultural and political construction of any case of mobility, drawing on studies in broader social sciences. Hence, one cannot simply consider “migrants” in a country, without questioning the modality of mobility and its political status in a given context (e.g., repeated, circular, unique, etc., acknowledged as refugee, family reunification, illegal, etc.). This invites to consider the sociogenetic conditions in which any specific case of mobility can be apprehended. These afford and shape the experience of mobility, the challenges to self- continuity and family ties, the daily challenges and the possibilities to draw on significant resources.

Second, a sociocultural psychology of the lifecourse invites to consider, first, the perspective of the person, that is, ontogenesis, but also, and specifically in the case of mobility, the fact that lives are always interrelated. In any form of mobility, people do not move alone: people have family members, friends, and social networks; these can move with them, or not; these can establish transnational networks, support exchanges of goods, provide people with proximal and distal interactions, and thus support or challenge their experiences of mobility – as transnational studies show. Here, in the particular case of mobile families, we have concentrated on the microgenetic dynamics of interrelated lives, which we have proposed to apprehend as “overlapping spheres of experiences”. That notion has been proposed to explore family life, and may of course be used to describe sedentary families, or perhaps even other configuration of interrelated lives. The point here is that the notion allows precisely capturing some daily dynamics of the experience of mobility, which are central for the construction of mobile family life.

As a whole, then we hope to have not only given a glimpse of the life of families in repeated mobility, but also, by drawing on current debates in the social sciences, to make two propositions for the psychological study of mobility: the need to articulate sociocultural dimensions and the person's perspective; and a particular care for interrelated lives in the study of mobility.

# 7. CHAPTER

# THE ART OF LIVING IN TRANSITORINESS: STRATEGIES OF FAMILIES IN REPEATED GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

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*Abstract:* In the context of migratory instabilities, an increasing number of professionals engage in repeated moves across countries with their families, living more or less permanently on the move. Yet the international adjustments of these families are usually studied in terms of the adaptation of family members to a single host country. This article uses in-depth interviews conducted with families in repeated geographical mobility and currently living in Switzerland to identify the strategies enabling them to move across countries while adjusting to diverse sociocultural environments. By bringing together studies on psychology with those on migration and mobility, the article introduces the specific challenge of repeated geographical mobility and sets out a theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon from a sociocultural perspective. It then presents three types of strategies employed by families. The findings show that against the backdrop of constant changes, families recreate the same spheres of experience everywhere, transform their relations to objects, and build a continuum of social relationships by enlarging their social networks while focusing inward on the relationships within the nuclear family. The analyses bring to the fore a new modality of establishing a sense of continuity that involves a complete reconfiguration of investments so to embrace more complex ways to cope with the apparent concurrent requirement of adjusting to a new country while preserving some degree of mobility in view of the next move. The research sheds light on very contemporary dynamics embedded in the broader unfolding context of mobility by taking into account its experiential dimension.

Keywords: migration, mobility, sociocultural psychology, family, transitions, spheres of experience

## 7.1 Introduction

Despite recent transformations in migration regimes around the globe, contesting the free movement of people and advancing control over borders, the mobility of professionals across countries continues to be a growing reality. This is particularly true for Switzerland, whose economy has long been reliant on foreign workforce. In addition, Switzerland largely ties visa issuance to labour market permits, encouraging the recruitment of qualified workers to foster national growth, while simultaneously creating shorter-term employment contracts, ultimately intensifying the circulation of people, capital, and knowledge.

In the context of global forms of production and transnational employment policies, an increasing variety of professional expertise demands frequent relocation. More and more people engage in repeated moves across countries for their careers, either by personal choice or against their will, being more or less permanently on the move (Cangià et al., in press). These international workers are notably defined by their job-related migratory trajectories and by the temporary character of their stay; those who move to Switzerland often do so either with the intention to live in the country for the duration of their work contract or with not knowing if they will have to move afterwards. Many of these professionals move with their families altogether across countries, which raises more complex questions regarding their mobility and their adjustments to multiple and changing host countries.

The international mobility of these families has been an object of interest for researchers mainly with respect to the family's international adjustment, which, in turn, is typically concerned with the "adaptation" of the family members to the host country and with the role of the family in supporting or hindering the mobile worker (Haslberger et al., 2015). To date, very few studies have examined how mobile people, and more specifically families, are able to systematically and simultaneously adjust to a new country while staying mobile in view of the next move. In order to better comprehend the dynamics pertaining to *international repeated geographical mobility*, my proposition here is to look at how mobile families cope with repeated mobility by identifying the strategies enabling them to move across countries at the same time as adjusting to diverse sociocultural environments.

The present article first brings together studies on psychology with that on migration and mobility to introduce the specific challenge of repeated geographical mobility. It sets out a theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon from a sociocultural perspective. It then outlines the three main strategies that families have employed, by presenting in each subsection illustrative extracts to examine more closely the dynamics involved. This is followed by a discussion characterizing the paradox of living in transitoriness and a conclusion indicating that the experiences of families are of paramount significance in times of increasing global migratory instabilities.

### 7.1.1 FROM PERMANENT SETTLEMENT TO REPEATED GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

As mobility becomes a defining feature of modernity, the focus in social sciences has shifted from migration as an unidirectional movement from one place to another towards mobility as the repeated circulation of bodies, objects, images, and meanings across countries (Cresswell, 2006). Nevertheless, the vast majority of research in the discipline of psychology has centered on migration and the psychosocial dynamics it engenders assuming permanent or long-term settlement. Only a few studies have been concerned with the phenomenon of repeated geographical mobility, as in the specific cases of military families (Palmer, 2016), adolescent children of diplomats and "expats" (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013), or "third culture kids" (Melles & Frey, 2014). These studies mainly examine children as an exemplary outcome of changing migratory patterns - often "harmed by" or "resilient to"- instead of comprehending the phenomenon of repeated mobility as interdependent of the structural conditions of movement and, above all, as interrelated lives in a globalized world (Zittoun et al., in press). They end up neglecting the changing nature of the diverse sociocultural contexts and assuming a "society of settlement" as the norm, in the same way as does the broad body of research on psychology of migration and integration (Berry, 2001; Kuo, 2014). In taking for granted permanent settlement, psychological studies on migration contribute to the presupposition that psychological well-being is strictly dependent upon a fix locality and, as a result, wandering between places and repeatedly changing one’s residence becomes a social maladjustment, if not a pathological condition.

Despite being under researched, repeated geographical mobility is by no means a new phenomenon. For most of the time in the history of humankind, *Homo sapiens* bands lived on the road as foragers, wandering from place to place. According to (Harari, 2015), humans first settled alongside seas and rivers. The first fishing villages might have appeared as early as 45,000 years ago on the coasts of Indonesian islands; only with the start of the Agricultural Revolution (about 12,000 years ago) did several forager bands settle down permanently. From a phylogenetic perspective, they shaped several human habits and possibly psychological characteristics. Moreover, repeated geographical mobility has grown to be a culturally cultivated mode of living with nomadic people, for whom roaming has been the norm. It is important to observe, though, that there has never been a single human ‘natural way of life’ and that present-day nomadic populations have also been shaped by the agricultural and industrial societies. The possibility of repeatedly changing one’s residence has certainly remained an integral part of human ways of living.

In the 21st century, fewer and fewer people live in only one country through the course of their lives. A wide range of economic, political, sociocultural, and environmental factors have conjointly trigged the movement of people. On the one hand, population growth, unequal access to resources, political interventions, terrorism, and labor market insecurity are all driving a rise in migratory instabilities, and people have again to face the challenge of moving from one country to another. On the other hand, the fast-paced technological changes had a tremendous impact on how people relate to places, others, objects, time, and more fundamentally, themselves. New technologies well allowed the reinvention of nomadic lives, showing, to a certain degree, how we can be freed to roam again: wireless communication, for example, has granted us the possibility of working from diverse places, and the daily increasing flows of information conveyed by social media are changing human imagination. The very expansion of people’s social space widens people’s life horizons, as “more people than ever seem to imagine that they or their children will live in places other than they were born” (Appadurai, 1996, p.6) and intensifies their inclination to move geographically (Stark, 2017).

Contemporary mobile lifestyles, despite resembling nomadic lives, are very different from ancient ones. In our uprooted times, there are no more traditions of how to move across countries. The old ways of lugging around are no longer suitable in view of the above-mentioned transformations, and new modes better suited to the new conditions have to be created as people engage in this way of life. Precisely because it is not yet given, the efforts of identifying the strategies that families employ towards repeated mobility become especially relevant. Before looking closer at the ways in which people deal with a mobile lifestyle, it is first necessary to contextualize and specify the type of mobility I am addressing in this article.

### 7.1.2 THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL REPEATED MOBILITY FOR FAMILIES IN SWITZERLAND

In this article, international repeated geographical mobility refers to the movement lived by people and motivated by work, which leads to geographical and semantic[48] displacement and subsequent relocation of housing and occupational arrangements across countries. The case presented here focuses on families currently living in Switzerland. Formerly a minority, *families in international repeated geographical mobility*, hereinafter referred interchangeably as to mobile families, have recently become more numerous and varied. They no longer include only the families of diplomats, military, and “expatriates”[49], who typify the traditional forms of repeated mobility, but also a wide range of professional sectors, such as academics, schoolteachers, international organization workers, and entrepreneurs, among others. Previously limited to a group of people with higher financial capacity than the average population, mobile families’ lifestyles have become closer to that of local middle-class families in Switzerland, in line with the global trend towards more middle management, expert, self-initiated, shorter-term, and even female-led mobility (Levitan et al., 2018; Ravasi et al., 2015; Salamin & Davoine, 2015).

Because the most important reason behind the move is work, which facilitates the entrance in the country, most of the time these families do not encounter any visa or legal constraints, at least upon their arrival in Switzerland. Partly because of this, the mobility of professional people and their families is often seen as an elite and smooth phenomenon, as opposed to “forced” or “controlled” migration. Governments and mass media relentlessly narrow the discourses about mobility to the channel of entrance in a certain country, disregarding the commonalities of the actual experience of people moving and settling in a new country. Recent research on “highly skilled” or “highly educated” migrants challenge these widely held views about the elite characteristics of these migrants and the presumed “effortlessness” of professional mobility (Smith & Favell, 2006).

In this vein, repeated mobility is not a frictionless form of mobility. It entails a number of practical challenges, including, among others, finding a house, a school for children, and often a new job for the partner; dealing with administration, visa restrictions, and discrimination; building new friendships; maintaining transnational ties; and learning not only new languages, but also new social norms and systems. In addition, moving across countries with the family implies helping the children to adjust to several aspects of life in the new environment at the same time as dealing with one's own sense of disorientation prompted by the move. While many of these challenges are also present in migrant-settlers' families, or are lived by only one or few of the family members, repeated geographical mobility (im)poses to *all* family members the common challenge of adjusting to the new country and thereby of restoring the taken-for-granted nature of everyday life, at the same time as keeping the members mobile and uprooted due to a stay limited and unpredictable in time. The tension between adjusting to a new place and remaining mobile generates, in turn, other challenges. Not knowing in advance and with clarity how long they will stay in a country further complicates the direction and extent to which putting down roots is needed and the making of a temporary home for the mobile family. The temporary timeframes also become fundamental organizers (Schliewe, in press) of mobile families' experiences and actions in the newly arrived country, engendering a different mode of relating to the places they are currently residing in and dictating certain priorities.

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[48] From a sociocultural perspective in psychology, geographical movement also leads to semantic displacement, since each move favors the encounter with alterity, engendering semantic movements of meanings (Gillespie, Kadianaki, & O’Sullivan-Lago, 2012).

[49] Research on expatriation has used the term “expatriate” to refer to employees sent abroad for a limited period of time by an international company from their headquarters to foreign subsidiaries (Vance, 2005).

The starting point for this article is that families are likely to develop diverse strategies to the specific challenges posed by repeated mobility, under conditions of increasing global migratory instabilities and difficulties of obtaining permanent residence in Switzerland. Strategy here relates to one's capacity of anticipating needs and consequently could better inform us about what is really at stake in the tension of adjusting while remaining mobile. I argue that, to better account for repeated mobility, it is necessary to take its experiential dimension seriously, and, for this purpose, a sociocultural psychological perspective is needed. It focuses on the person as an embodied self taking part in a variety of social practices, and it acknowledges the dynamic interdependency between the changing sociocultural environments and the person moving.

### 7.1.3 TOWARDS A SOCIOCULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY OF REPEATED MOBILITY

International repeated geographical mobility is a phenomenon that concerns both the person and the sociocultural environments. The *person*, who moves geographically, brings her own genetic and cultural make-ups, her unique trajectory built through multiple encounters irreversible in time with different others and situations, and her singular and creative way of making sense of any given situation according to past experiences and imagined futures (Zittoun & Saint-Laurent, 2014). The changing *social and cultural environments* provide the material, historical, cultural, and institutional conditions for personal development and are also transformed by the circulation of people. Whenever meeting a new sociocultural environment, as sized in the case of repeated mobility, humans not only *react* but *act upon* it *purposefully* (focused on some goal orientations towards the future), *meaningfully* (by intentionally constructing it as meaningful to themselves), and *flexibly* (by adjusting themselves to the new environment and the environment to themselves) (Valsiner, 2014a).

Nonetheless, this new encounter, just as when moving to a new country, can also introduce a break into the person's regular 'flow of being', as the patterns sustaining the life before are no longer functional, and the taken-for-granted meanings are put into question (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012). The affected intelligibility of everyday life prevents the person to carry out her usual actions at the same time as generating uncertainty and anxiety. This discontinuity in the ordinary life calls, respectively, for processes of change through which the person restores some of the "taken-for-granted". The work of Zittoun (2006a) on transitions through the lifecourse has provided a theoretical frame for more closely examining the processes by which a new conduct is established and the ways in which people adjust to changes. She has proposed to analytically distinguish three interconnected dynamics of changes at play in this situation: processes of learning (mobilization of skills, development of knowledge, uses of spaces, modes of relating, etc.); processes of identity-making (self-redefinition, social repositioning and social recognition, feeling the same person, etc.); and processes of sense-making (interpretation of the situation, its sense within one's biography, re-creation of continuity within one's past and possible futures, and elaboration of the emotions raised by these transformations) (Zittoun, 2014b).

This theoretical frame and many studies alike (Hale & Abreu, 2010; Kirk, Bal, & Janssen, 2017) have treated migration as one case of transition, the kind that would mobilize these three processes of change or as a moment during which a person is caught between two states, what is typically associated with the idea of liminality (Gennep, 1960) and the experience of being "betwixt-and-between" societies (Turner, 1979). While approaching migration as a developmental transition has the potential to unveil the psychological processes involved, repeated mobility essentially questions to what degree a person can engage ceaselessly in those processes of change. Presumably, one would need to confer some permanence to properties of the self and of the world to create a sense of continuity and predictability despite frequent changes and beyond disruption. In addition, the very combination of geographical mobility, temporary timeframes, and interrelated live courses on the move, in a way, turns the transitional circumstances as-if permanent and may also create a sense of living constantly in a transition, in an enduring liminality (Stenner, Greco, & F. Motzkau, 2017). Furthermore, a moment of complete restoration of the taken-for-granted meanings or "full mastery" of the new sociocultural environment is especially contested in the case of repeated mobility, where people know prior to their arrival that they might leave for another country. Finally, studies on the transitions evoked above have been developed to address only one transition at a time; repeated geographical mobility demands adjustments to multiple transitions, as it involves the complete reconfiguration of each family member's spheres of experiences every time the family moves.

Accordingly, to better simultaneously address several and concomitant transitions within the family and movement in the geographical and psychological levels, I build upon the concept of *spheres of experiences* developed by Zittoun & Gillespie (2015, 2016) to designate "a configuration of experiences, activities, representations and feelings, recurrently occurring in a given type of social (material and symbolic) setting- it is one of the various regular, stabilized patterns of experience in which a person is likely to engage on a regular basis" (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016, p. 8). This notion combines first- and third-person's perspectives as it understands the situations that feel "relatively the same" for a person as socially given but phenomenologically experienced. For one specific person, her family dinners could be regarded as one possible sphere of experience: the situation takes place in a materially given and intersubjectively and symbolically shared environment that is recurrent enough to be distinct from working or playing with friends. Each family member also experiences the situation differently, although these various experiences can, in some ways, "overlap" (Zittoun et al., in press). When people move from country to country, some spheres of experience are preserved, while others disappear. Others can even be created as a function of moving, just as when "packing for the next move" becomes recurrent enough and regulated by a number of implicitly shared "rules" among family members that it activates certain ways of doing, skills, emotions, social roles, and relational modes. This approach conceives the person's life as movement through diverse spheres of experiences, and it further proposes the differentiation between proximal and distal spheres of experiences. "Proximal spheres of experiences" are primarily anchored in the experiencing body, in the here-and-now moment; they are materially bounded and often socially constrained. "Distal experiences", in contrast, are relatively independent from material constraints, and can be located out of the immediate setting, as when one's mind is wandering through past and future experiences (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016).

The proposed sociocultural psychology of repeated mobility thus invites us to consider more than the three interconnected processes of change (i.e. processes of learning, identity-making, and sense-making) and look at the ways in which people are able to be relatively stable under migratory instabilities. In what follows, I will present the research, and in the analysis, explore the psychosocial dynamics arising from attending two apparent concurring requirements: adjusting to a new country and remaining mobile in view of the next move. I will first focus on how mobile families recreate the same spheres of experience everywhere, then I will look at how they have transformed their relations to objects and to people, arguing that mobile families are creating a new mode of relating to time/space, objects, and social relationships so to enable them to move and adjust to diverse countries.

## 7.2 Methods

The present study is part of a larger project entitled "'New Migration' and New Forms of Integration: Families in Geographical Itinerancy"[50], which aims at understanding the experiences of mobile families living in Switzerland. The research combined qualitative and quantitative methods, including (i) an online questionnaire with close and open questions (n=56); (ii) a large scale survey (n=5973) on migrant living conditions in Switzerland; and (iii) interviews with different members of families in repeated geographical mobility, including the professional and/or the partner and, when possible, their children (n=43); some of the participants were interviewed twice. To examine how mobile families are able to systematically and simultaneously adjust to a new country while remaining mobile in view of the next move, I reflect upon the in-depth interviews conducted with 24 families in different Cantons in Switzerland between 2015 and 2017. This sample size was determined according to an inclusion criterion for the category of families in international repeated geographical mobility and after reaching the point at which no new strategies were observed in the data.

### 7.2.1 PARTICIPANTS

Families were recruited in two different ways: first, through a research call circulated among associations, organizations, professional, and international networks supporting or employing professionals relocating with their families; and second, by an e-mail or a phone call made after families completed the large-scale survey or the online questionnaire and agreed to be interviewed. Twenty-four mobile families currently living in Switzerland were selected according to the three following inclusion criteria: (1) having at least one child; (2) having moved internationally more than one time (in other words, having a history of international mobility); and (3) having moved due to the professional expertise of one or both adults.

All families in the sample moved to Switzerland initially for professional reasons; nevertheless, the range of professional sectors and their occupational status were varied. Among the interviewees, there were employees of several international organizations and multinationals, researchers, engineers, lawyers, diplomats, consultants, teachers, coaches, and entrepreneurs, as well as the associated accompanying spouses. They were living in the German and French speaking parts of Switzerland. The vast majority have been granted the Swiss residence permit "B", which is limited in time, but allows the spouse and children to reside in Switzerland as well - validity period of five years for EU/EFTA nationals and for non-EU/EFTA nationals tighter regulations apply very often conditioned to employment. Some held a Permit Ci (residence permit with gainful employment) generally deliberated for members of the families of intergovernmental organisations, but also limited to the duration of the main holder's function. As a result, their stay is limited in time, and regardless of their intentions whether or not to stay longer in Switzerland, they are bounded and constrained to a system regulating the duration of their residence in the country, with implications for their future mobility. Another result of this regulatory frame is that conventionally, one of the adults had a job in Switzerland first; in only one case from the interviewee sample, both partners had a job around the same time (See Table 8 for details of participants).

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[50] This research project was led by Professor Tania Zittoun and supported by the National Center of Competence in Research nccr – on the move funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Participants have moved internationally many times (from 2 to 9 international relocations), living and adjusting to several countries. Their destinations included countries on all continents, and the duration of their stay in each country varied. Each family member had a different trajectory of international mobility, including different countries of origin. They often hold more than one nationality. The present research focused rather on the common experience of relocating frequently. In addition, although not a criterion, some of the interviewees have also frequently moved houses within the same country of residence (one interviewee told me she had moved houses 37 times) and some adults had also moved frequently during childhood. Despite having diverse trajectories of international mobility, all families came with, and were currently living with, at least one child in Switzerland. The sample included one monoparental family and one couple that separated upon their arrival in Switzerland but remained living close to each other for the children.

**Table 8 - Participant details**

| **Adults** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age range | | 33-55 |
| Gender F:M | | 16:9[51] |
| Civil status | Single, never married<br>Married<br>Separated | 1<br>22<br>1 |
| Number of children (living in Switzerland or in the same household) | 1<br>2<br>3 | 7<br>12<br>5 |
| Educational level | Bachelor or equivalent<br>Master or equivalent<br>PhD or equivalent | 8<br>13<br>3 |
| Number of countries lived (range) | | 4.75 (3-8) |

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[51] Gender count was based on the overall number of adults interviewed.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Children** | | |
| Age (range) | | 7.46 (0-23) |
| Type of school | Public (state-run) and local | 9 |
| | Private and local | 2 |
| | International | 9 |
| | Not applicable | 4 |
| **Trajectory of International Mobility** | | |
| Which partner had a job first in Switzerland? | Male led-mobility | 14 |
| | Female led-mobility | 9 |
| | Couple led-mobility | 1 |

| Considered countries of origin | Countries lived |
|---|---|
| Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Nigeria, Philippines, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States. | Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bermuda, Bosnia Herzegovina, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Kosovo, Kuwait, Malaysia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Philippines, Russia, Santo Domingo, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Trinidad e Tobago, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay. |

### 7.2.2 PROCEDURE

Family members were briefed together about the nature of the study before completing written informed consent. Interviews were conducted individually, except for one couple's interview. It is worth noting that many times, other family members interacted with and intervened in the ongoing individual interview. Instead of regarding these as unwelcome interruptions, we considered them as rich sources of data and in line with the aim of studying families. These situations mainly occurred when interviews took place at the family house. A couple of interviews were conducted at a coffee shop or at the interviewees' workplace, depending on their availability and willingness to open their house.

Each interview lasted between approximately 60 and 180 minutes and was based on a semi-structured grid with an initial narrative question about the person trajectory of international mobility and internal and external narrative questions (Rosenthal, 2004). They were iteratively refined through pilot interviews and theory-driven concepts from research on transitions pointing for the identification of the resources people mobilize to address an unfamiliar situation in their everyday lives (Zittoun, 2007b), as well as literature on migrant families. Questions focused on the main difficulties of moving internationally and adjusting to a new country, the moving decision-making process and negotiation within the family, the resources they used to facilitate their mobility and adjustments to diverse countries and in particular to Switzerland, their social networks and transnational ties, and the changes they might have experienced because of mobility and their future plans. More specifically, participants were asked about the kind of adjustments they made in their everyday lives in order to live with more mobility, what they carried around throughout their moves, what kind of activities they preserved across places, what differences existed between moving with and without the family, what they learned from previous moves, and how mobility has transformed them. I also used often the visual aid of Google Maps/Earth to understand their experience of locality and feeling at-home across places and to help participants narrate their trajectory of international mobility.

Debrief procedures completed the sessions. At the end of each interview, participants were offered the chance to add new information, ask clarification questions to the interviewer, and to discuss any reflections.  Interviews were conducted mostly in English[52], with exception of four conducted in one Latin language, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Names of people, places, organizations, and of any other disclosing information have been altered to guarantee anonymity.

### 7.2.3 ANALYSIS

To address the question of how mobile families cope with international repeated geographical mobility, I conducted a transversal analysis of all interviews using a systematic approach of iterative categorization (Neale, 2016), starting with open coding (identifying key issues or themes emerging from the derived data, such as the difficulties prompted by repeated mobility reported by participants), then inductive sorting of codes into broader conceptual codes, followed by moving iteratively between the derived data, coding framework as well as the frames of reference (Valsiner, 2014b) to identify the strategies family members employed. The unit of analysis encompassed any meaningful segment of an utterance and its context so to preserve focus on the identification of processes at stake (codes were enlarged and contextual). The subsequent path to generalization followed the abductive mode apposite for areas of science where the object is constantly changing (Valsiner, 2014b). The identified strategies highlight the distinctions between different ways people deal with repeated mobility and indicate significant dynamics at play. Not all families employed exactly the same strategies, yet I prioritize to present here the most pronounced ones across the data set. In what follows, each extract herein selected refers to the unique experience of that person, but it illustrates the dynamics under exploration.

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[52] All participants spoke English fluently; in nine households, they were English-native speakers.

## 7.3 Results

The following sections present three main strategies enabling families to simultaneously move and adjust to diverse countries. In migration and mobility studies, the use of the term strategy is either linked to practices - the ways in which people "do" movement - or to the pursuits of maximizing the benefits of migratory opportunities (Wentzel Winther, 2015; Yeoh, Graham, & Boyle, 2002). I use this term to stress the variety of modalities people undergo in an effort to adjust to the demands brought upon by repeated mobility. Strategies are to be seen as regulators of the relationship between the moving person and the changing sociocultural environments, as they change the "outcome" of the persons' adjustments and highlight the processes involved.

### 7.3.1 CROSS-COUNTRY CONTINUITY: RECREATING SPHERES OF EXPERIENCES ON-THE-MOVE

Research conducted with extremely mobile people shows that under conditions of extensive mobility, people stick to certain rhythms as a form of coping. The *rhythming* strategy was observed by (Lynggaard, 2012) when people kept the same patterns week after week and when they forcibly tried to maintain the body clock on a specific time zone despite being physically in a different one. Against the backdrop of constant environmental disruptions, mobile families likewise employ a strategy for continuity beyond places involving the maintenance of certain patterns. Nevertheless, as mobile families concomitantly need to adjust to the destination country, the findings indicate that they conversely focus on recreating the same spheres of experience everywhere. This is performed in three distinct ways I will describe below: through the reinforcement of routines, the preservation of same activities everywhere, and the making of overlapping spheres of experiences among different family members.

To live a more mobile life and adjust to Switzerland, Gabrielle, mother of three girls, after relocating with the family due to her professional expertise, describes the strategy employed by the family:

G Well, we actually try to have the same routine wherever we are, so that they - for the children, so that there is nothing really changing, the environment is changing, but we are still together as a family and we still do the same things at the same times, we try to keep it as structured as possible so that they don't get too destabilized every time we move.

D And what kind of things, if I may ask more specifically, do you do that you think provides this sort of structure?

G In the evening normally, well, not today ((referring to the interviewer visit)), but normally they get one movie and they need to brush their teeth and then one goes to bed and then the other one gets another movie and she has to go to bed, and we keep that the same wherever we are.

Along with previous research highlighting the importance of routines for expatriate families (Adams, 2014)[53], Gabrielle brings about its critical role in structuring a new and unfamiliar environment. The environment might change, but not their everyday lives' routines. Doing "the same things" at "the same times" allows them to structure the environment in terms of time. The structuring of time is made possible through the organization and disposition of activities, and their regularity allows the establishment of a routine. The reinforcement of routines was more evident in the case of families with small children. Routines provide consistency and order that allow children to anticipate what is happening next. The very ability to anticipate via recognition of a sequence of actions is fundamental for understanding the world around us and engaging in learning in a new environment. As follows, routines can also be preventative, helping mobile families to turn the changing environments into manageable pieces and to more rapidly restore control over the unfamiliar, rendering them a sense of predictability under nebulous circumstances.

Inasmuch as routines are important to structure instable environments, they are additionally permitting the practice of constant and repetitive movement, as embodied routines impose regulated markers, which actually enables movement. In this way, routines create certain rhythms, and could be seen as an activity-based, body-centered technique for establishing continuity between places at the individual level, and for reproduction of familiar patterns at the family level. Through the adherence to routines, each family member can create a type of "unbreakable" sphere around their bodies, which is transportable throughout the diverse places and bounded to the family, helping them to develop a sense of self-continuity while remaining mobile.

In a similar vein, participants in the present study further emphasize the importance of preserving the same activities everywhere, which is also a way to ensure continuity across countries. The regular practice of physical exercises appeared as a recurring activity across places, providing further evidence that physical and psychological well-being depends greatly on movement. Olivia, an experienced diplomat, tells me how the practice of physical exercises has remained untouchable throughout her mobile and busy life:

O When I go on holidays in ((country of origin)), I go every day to the gym (…). ((Exercising)) was something I have maintained my whole life. As my time schedules do not always allow me to go to the gym closeby, in my house, there is also a small room in the basement, where I have set up a home gym for doing exercises, lifting weights, etc. (extract translated by the author)

As the extract shows, these activities are not strictly dependent on geographical places. Olivia can do the same exercises in her home country, in the gym close by, or in her basement. Their maintenance function becomes more noticeable when Olivia also goes to the gym on her holidays. For less mobile people, being on holiday or in a new place is generally associated with the practice of different activities than those performed in a person's place of residence. This also applies to the reinforcement or loosening of routines. Other activities mentioned by mobile families were related to those enabling them to maintain their skills across countries. Gwyneth, a teacher who took time away from her career for nursing her kids, tells me she started visiting her friends' school in Switzerland so to actively practice her teaching skills. In the same strain, Olga, a business owner living in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, tells me how activities can be carried over from one place to another and how she intentionally crossbreeds places through activities to facilitate her children's adjustments:

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[53] Findings show how the absence of routines adds to heightened emotions felt while relocating.

> O Wherever we've lived, we've always done a fair amount of learning at home in other languages. So that they maintain it and even now - now they're fluent German speakers, now it's the opposite. Now we're doing learning in English to make sure their English is good enough. So, they always know that there's always going to be half an hour each day or an hour each day where we're going to do something, which is going to be in French or German or Mandarin or maths or whatever. Because even things like maths, the way they do maths in Singapore, the way they do math in England, the way they do math in Switzerland ((is)) completely different.

Doing activities together as a family also assisted their progress of adjusting to a new place while preserving a degree of mobility. Families need to create a common ground for the diverse family members and, as argued elsewhere (Zittoun et al., 2018), family members' *overlapping spheres of experiences,* like the family dinners, became especially important to establish a sense of continuity throughout the moves. Moreover, as families' overlapping spheres of experiences coincide between different places, they are overlapping not only for family members, but also for places, thus enabling families to span and bind these localities.

In summary, routine building, preserving the same activities everywhere, and doing activities together as a family are three variations of recreating proximal spheres of experience that can be relatively the same across countries. Part of the sense of continuity we experience is also due to the similarities existing between various situations in which one is involved, and the similar patterns or motives of activities in which people are engaged and that repeat in different frames (Zittoun, 2014a). Repeated mobility demands a constant reconfiguration of spheres of experience, and as a result, families focus on recreating similar and familiar spheres of experiences on-the-move, which suggests that spheres of experience can be recreated beyond the boundaries of geographical places.

### 7.3.2 FREE TO WANDER: TRANSFORMING RELATIONS TO OBJECTS

The physical objects of our daily lives provide us with a recognizable image of stability and permanence. Moving countries and houses constantly disrupts the regularity of the physical surroundings. A previous study conducted by Adams & Fleer (2015) has shown how objects are imbued with emotional meanings that could support children to form connections throughout their mobility and create a feeling of being at-home. The role of objects has been further supported by research with francophone adolescents growing up in the context of international mobility (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013), which stressed the permanence function of objects in anchoring these adolescents in their history. It would be expected that to preserve some feelings of familiarity and comfort, mobile families would lug around all their belongings, like ancient nomads.

Interestingly, whether a reflection of employers' shrinked relocation packages - which now only occasionally include transport for furniture - or the very laborious work of (un)packing, more and more mobile families carry less. Some families rent furnished apartments; others buy everything new upon their arrival; one family told me that they buy the same Ikea series everywhere. The majority of them, when relocating, prioritize carrying children's toys and clothes, which lends support to the aforementioned studies. The challenge of repeated mobility turned out to be less about dragging around the whole household and more about fitting it all into luggage. Against this background, to be able to move across different countries, mobile families have transformed their relations to objects. This transformation is realized in the following three ways I detail in the analysis below: first, by the complete withdrawing of heavy objects and the alignment with the lightness culture; second, by the detachment of material objects and the expansion of inner relationships; and third, by the maintenance and creation of transitional experiences.

When I asked Linda, an international organization worker and mother of one boy, if she brought her furniture from elsewhere, she replied:

L No, actually every time we move, I have to buy, I have trouble committing to furniture.

D Is there something that you carry around?

L We carry mostly the small personal stuff like clothes, toys, books, some SMALL electronic gadgets, like computers, laptops, speakers, the TV we bought here. So, when I try to buy things, I try to buy things that collapse (laughter), it's tiny things and, yeah, everything else we had to buy here or they were given to us by friends here.

D Any other objects that have some meaning that you carry? A particular thing?

L I've learned to be detached to things. Every time we go shopping I thi(h)nk "Oh I have to pack that! and it won't fit into the ((trams)) and they're going to charge me so much. So I always have to rationalise every purchase with that in mind, the next move.

Linda, as with the majority of people I interviewed, has created a new mode of relating to objects. As objects become expendable, Linda becomes more objective, learning to "rationalise every purchase". She only carries around small objects. She packs and moves light. This mode of relating is embedded in a wider transformation transporting many societies to a "civilization of lightness" (Lipovetsky, 2015), in which nanomaterials and mobile devices allowed us to reduce the size and weight of objects and to dematerialize. Clearly, what is required is not the complete abandonment of objects. The transformation of the person-object relationship in repeated mobility thus involves, first and foremost, the withdrawing of cumbersome objects and alignment with lightness, but it also involves the progressively detachment from “things”.

The process of detachment can be better described as a progressive process of “stripping off” material needs, where these families learn to leave the heavy layer behind, to invest primarily in “what really matters” and to find their “oasis”, easily detecting what the new environment can provide to avoid carrying. The detachment task also encompasses a work of psychological distancing, to an extent that Linda has “trouble committing to furniture”; similarly, Fred (who has an accompanying spouse and is the father of two girls), while acknowledging the benefits of having the company’s support to organize the family move, reveals:

F For every move we were hoping that our container drops into the water, and we get the insurance claim, so that we can just start over again, because we are not really attached to (.) a couple of photo albums, but not really, there is nothing that is irreplaceable. So, we’d be ready to do that as well, to start over, it would be much easier, actually, than to always carry on the stuff you bring along.

Fred’s ambiguous feelings towards their belongings and his pretension detachment points to the complex interplay between retaining and relinquishing. In a way, repeated geographical mobility has obliged many families to give up objects, unleashing a process similar to what psychoanalysis describes as *decathexis* (Freud, 1922) of the object (the abandonment of investing mental or emotional energy in an object),which fundamentally frees the mover to create new relationships. One way of recreating a relation to an object is by means of internalizations, which enable the person to sustain an inner relationship with the forsaken object. The expansion of inner relationships potentially leads to intransitive qualitative reconfiguration of the person’s “inner world”. For Gabrielle, this process occurs in the following way:

G I don’t know, in the very beginning I was someone who tried to save everything, but the:n I just realized that doesn’t really make sense, I mean, every time you have to move you have to slim down whatever we have because we cannot take it with us, so now they are just - they are memories (laughter). They are memories and wherever we have been, it’s always like a part of us, I mean, I think that every time when we go somewhere else it’s like another part of your personality, of yourself that you learn. And I mean the way we cook (h)is also a combination of wherever we have been, and so I think that’s how we incorporate it, yeah. (…) I think it’s also because the more you move, the richer everything gets, and the richer the memory gets. I don’t have the need any more to have these external things, it’s just like - two reasons, one is practical, but the other is just like, yeah.

D In which sense "the richer it gets"?

G I don’t know it’s just like all the experience of being somewhere else just makes you richer, because you know different aspects of yourself, you just get. But I don’t know, maybe that’s just growing up, maybe without moving you have that as well, I don’t know, all I know is that for me it’s related to every time when you are somewhere else you more and more become independent, you get to know yourself better and your partner as well. And then you have all these memories, all these things that you have done, all these people that you have met, those are things I mean, puff, even if I would have something physical that reminds me of them, that doesn't mean anything. Over the years it's got less and °less important these physical things°.

To be free to move, she learns to detach to these "external", "physical things". The transition into being a mobile person becomes clear in the first lines: "I was someone who tried to save everything, *but* the:n I just realized that doesn't really make sense…" where the conjunction *but* signalizes her change of perspective. This change has required the development of a new mode of relating to material objects, now on an internal basis. Gabrielle explains that the objects they cannot take with them became memories, and these embodied memories turned the diverse locales into a part of the self. Encounters with diverse environments have enabled her to know different aspects of herself in such a way that she questions if it is owed to mobility or if "that's just growing up". On that account, I contend that the environmental enrichment improving memory building - "the richer the memory gets"- is essential to her process of detachment from objects. The progressive complexification of realities prompted by several moves coupled with internalization – here referring broadly to all processes by which a person transforms interactive characteristics of her environment, under the guidance of socially shared interpretations of reality, into inner regulations – have allowed the development of a generalized state of "memory of the environment", linked by the common features of different environments and which includes the experiences connected to material objects. As participants cannot rely entirely on objects, they move from using objects to using transportable practices to remember. The use of a different type of materiality to remember enables them to complete the detachment task.

For young children, however, environmental enrichment not necessarily leads to a more robust remembering, which exempts the use of objects. When I asked Oliver, a nine-year-old who has moved internationally five times, if he would like to continue moving, he asserts:

O No.

D No?

O I'd - I'd - I prefer to settle.

D And why is that?

O Because, I don't really like, mhm, moving about so much - it gets all my memory we-weird. It-it- gets so fuzzy and stuff.

D In which sense?

O I can't remember a place or a name that I have just been to.

Oliver's past distal experiences are numerous and fleeting; as such, they tend to get fuzzy. This reveals the fundamental interconnectedness between place and memory (Eichenbaum, 2000) as well as the age-related variability in remembering. In spite of the prevalence of changes, Oliver's family invariably brings five boxes with them containing small objects like photos, first shoes, and first pieces of hair. Oliver and his siblings call them "life in a box". This artifice helps children to recall distal experiences before transforming the organized "memory of the environment" into a prop.

Interestingly enough, towards the end of the interview, I asked Gabrielle again about the objects, but this time, I questioned if she could show me any meaningful object in the house. She replied:

G Well their teddy bears, but I cannot show them because then they would cry (laughter), I have my teddy bear that I also take everywhere.

D Oh, you do?

G Yes (laughter) I mean, it's very old one, he is like 30 years old or something, and he goes everywhere with the family (…) There is no way I would move somewhere without my teddy bear. So that's maybe why I also think for them is important to have their teddy bear, they have like a whole installation of teddy bears around them and all these teddy bears need go with them.

Gabrielle, who learned to detach from most of her objects, still carries her old teddy bear, a lifelong 'transitional object' (Winnicott, 1971), everywhere she moves. The teddy bear serves as a valuable ambulant connector between places, so as to enable her to continue experiencing an inner sense of connection over time to what was left behind. Differently from memories, transitional objects are not fully integrated as part of the self, and rest in an intermediate area of experiencing, helping the person to simultaneously connect and yet separate the inner and external realities. The maintenance of such transitional phenomena is an interesting way of preserving an experience at the threshold of a transformation in response to a situation of constant changes of the outer reality. The upshot of this is the possibility of creating transitional experiences as a form of producing new relations to objects and, more generally, to the external material world, which encompass a degree of familiarity. Few participants in this study revealed they maintain a basement, own a garage, or rent a room to store part of their belongings, highlighting the importance of creating transitional spaces. The role of virtualization of social reality is also fundamental for creating transitional experiences and sustaining transitional phenomena.

Finally, another deployment of decathexing objects is the global shift of focus from material objects to experiences taking place in material and social settings with important others. To repair the disruption to the person-object relationship, people in repeated mobility move forward to reinvest their mental or emotional energy in transportable social relationships. I examine this with more detail in the next section.

### 7.3.3 ENLARGING SOCIAL NETWORKS AND STRENGTHENING FAMILY TIES

The analysis of how contemporary mobile families lug around and the derivative modes of relating to objects in mobility brought up the compelling fact that coming to terms with repeated mobility involves the progressive *decathexis* of objects and the subsequent reinvestment in new relations. Mobile families invest on their social relationships instead, and people are essential to facilitate their mobility and adjustments to diverse countries.

As families move geographically, they learn first how to be more proficient in creating and maintaining transnational ties. Enlarging social networks and cultivating a broad range of friendships are part of the strategies found to cope with repeated mobility. The advantage of friendship diversification is consistent with studies in psychology and in the social sciences showing that geographical mobility is associated with a larger and looser friendship network and the value of weak ties in providing access to information and resources beyond those available in people’s own social circle (Granovetter, 1983; Oishi & Kesebir, 2012; Ryan & Mulholland, 2014a). People, just as routines, can bestow anticipation when relocating, which, as previously discussed, is so fundamental for understanding and acting upon the world around us. Most participants resorted to global networks to prepare their move. Ilaria, mother of two children moving due to her husband’s work, explained how preparation for her means connecting with people: “I prepared myself, means I started contacting people living here through Italians websites, Italians in the world, the LinkedIn website, people that my husband already knows (…), that was our first contact looking to understand how is life in Switzerland”.

Familiar with moving across countries because of her work in an international organization, Ursula told me how she managed to set up a new social network in a country where she knew no one: “there is a website called couch surfing. And they have quite a few activities as well. So it is not only staying at ones' place, but you can also do activities together and we did some trips with the community there, so this helped to get to know people”. She used *couch surfing,* a website initially made for travelers, to stay with locals who could help her settling in the new country. It is interesting to note here how she hijacked services initially made for mobility to provide the local anchorage. This illustrates the dynamics of migrant’s transnational formations and is consistent with studies on transnationalism that argue how mobile migrants need to develop some local ties to stay mobile (Dahinden, 2011). In addition to this, established transnational ties functioned as resources to ease the family adjustments in different locations around the world. Before moving from Uruguay to Switzerland, Ursula ventures acclimatizing her four-year-old daughter with the upcoming place through a family friend originally from Geneva but living in Uruguay:

U So she started to talk in French with ((daughter)), playing music in French, and show her some places, so she would get familiar with it. And this was something really nice for her. So she thought like “Okay I will go where Orianne is from, where she went to school and everything” and she was already a bit familiar with the place before coming here.

She further advises to “keep the old networks and not break them”, as they can be the connection between the new and old life. These forms of mobilizing local links and transnational ties are part of what (Tarrius, 2002) calls ‘*savoir bouger*’. Such mobile know-how has the potential to turn into a generalized skill with self-transformative effects, as evident in following statement made by Ursula:

U My physical distance mainly disappeared (laughter). Mhm I think this is like the important issue and then (.) I think I now know better how to set up a network and how to become, yeah, more acquainted with a place quite fast. And, I think (.) like ten or fifteen years ago probably this would not have happened.

Out of this know-how may also grow an acute awareness of the mediational role of others in connecting diverse localities, even if they are not physically present. When I was interviewing Cedric, a five-year-old boy, he brought me to his room to show me a world map poster with stickers of his family members spread around the world: “This is daddy,” he said to me while moving the picture of his father across countries. Linda, his mother, explained that they hang the world map on the wall, so Cedric could visualize where the father, who works for an international organization and is often on the field for missions, was. This creative idea operates in two levels: it attenuates the geographical distance at the same time as creating the representation of a “moving person” – an important other being transferred from one place to another - in a way that mobility is also transferred. It highlights the role of parents in guiding the development and implementation of the strategies enabling children to move and adjust to diverse countries. In effect, children tend to internalize these strategies, as their own are relatively similar to those employed by the adults. Gina, eight years old, already knows how to keep her old networks. She told me the hardest part of moving across places is “saying goodbye to my friends”, and she explains how she maintains contact with them:

G We send each other stuff.

D Oh really? What do you send?

G Necklaces. Takes like takes two months.

D That's super nice. Do you send it by the post?

G No. Our father works, closer where she lives. So, I can give him the stuff.

Furthermore, new technologies enabled families to initiate and maintain these dispersed connections across long distances, and most importantly, to create a continuum of relationships through the virtualization of social reality. In the case of mobile families, findings further suggest that the enlargement and looseness of social networks is accompanied by the strengthening of particular social relationships. In order to stay mobile, it is imperative for families to expand their social networks and to develop some strong social ties to anchor them in different countries. For this reason, I propose to look at mobile families' social networks as nets cast for fishing. A net needs to be small enough to be operated by a single person, but once thrown, can cast over a large area. Its gridlike structure is malleable enough to sizably open up at the same time as the small weights distributed around its edge help it to sink. Social networks alike allow mobile families to size up their social relations and create a deployable net of social support while deepening a few ties involving aspects of intimacy and caring. As families are likely to be moving some day, they cannot sink roots too deep, but to "enlarge the mesh" they will also need "heavier lead weights", which are provided by the strengthen of nuclear family relationships. All families devoted considerable time and efforts for looking inward after the nuclear family and the ties within the family increased with mobility. To successfully "throw the cast net", families make use of this complementary strategy to find simultaneously practical and emotional support.

As a result, the family unit increased their strength, and participants indicated family relationships as the main source of support in repeated mobility. As Olga points out, "if you're a family then, you know you've got each other". She deliberately uses this dynamic to facilitate both mobility and adjustments:

O "Because they're so close in age, they're very good friends, so it's like a little team. And we always talk about it being an adventure. And we're on an adventure and as long as we stay in a very closeness and very tight group, then we'll have fun. You know, we have fun together. And we make sure that they feel content, secure and happy. Yeah, you know? Just keeping them close. It makes you realize that material things, like belongings, they don't really matter.

D Is there any particular action that you do to create this atmosphere that will allow them to be more secure and close?

O I suppose for the last two or three nights before we move, we all sleep in the same place all together. I think when we arrive, we probably will sleep in the same place for the first week or so. Like we're all in the same bed, or whatever, yeah. Um, but then they get sort of choose their room and choose their bed and choose their, you know, duvet cover and that sort of thing. But that's what I mean, by sort of just keeping them close and - now they love it here, so that's fun".

Finally, the inward focus on the family relations is a way to constrain the space to the confines of family life. When stability does not come from the environment, families' relations become a source of stability. Centering in the family life ultimately enables moving constantly and adjusting to diverse countries.

## 7.4 General Discussion

In the context of connected transnational employment practices, an increasing number of professionals and their families are living more or less permanently on the move. I used in-depth interviews with mobile families currently living in Switzerland to explore the psychosocial dynamics pertaining to international repeated geographical mobility. Through an initial transversal analysis of the material, I concluded that repeated mobility poses to all family members the specific challenge of adjusting to the newly arrived country while remaining mobile in view of the next move. Based on this finding, I proposed to identify the strategies enabling them to simultaneously move and adjust to diverse countries. In a world where nomadic traditions need to be reinvented in view of the contemporary migratory instabilities and rapid technological transformations, this effort becomes especially relevant. I have outlined three main strategies employed by families to attend these two apparent concurring tasks, presenting illustrative extracts in each section to highlight the unfolding dynamics and more closely examine the processes involved.

Interestingly, participants in this study did not concentrate too much, as expected from previous research (Adams & Fleer, 2015; Gyger Gaspoz, 2013), in lugging around with their furniture and objects across countries; instead, they focused on recreating the same spheres of experiences beyond the boundaries of material limited spheres of experiences. In the analysis, I tried to partly situate this finding within the broader historical context transporting many societies to a “civilization of lightness” (Lipovetsky, 2015), noting that a reliance solely on “these external physical” objects would thus bias an account of mobility in the contemporary world, where the scaffolding is increasingly virtual and the experience of constantly detaching oneself from concrete immediate surroundings is lived in an unforeseen and intense way. In this sense, the old ways of lugging around with unwieldy infrastructure are earmarked for replacement. The transformation of people’s relations to objects has been facilitated by the new connectedness allowed through the virtualization of social networks and by the transportable practices shared within the family. This finding also furthers the discussion about the importance of considering *spheres of experiences* to theorize movement across places: first, because there will be always a certain blindness if we consider solely the geographical places people transit instead of the spheres of experiences they transit within and across these places; and second, because they resonate in the stability of self, as they provide a sense of continuity across places.

This research makes empirical contributions, showing that against the backdrop of repetitive environmental disruptions, mobile families first focus on recreating the same spheres of experience everywhere through the reinforcement of daily life routines, the practice of same activities across countries, and the making of overlapping spheres of experiences among family members. Second, they have transformed their mode of relating to objects, through the withdrawing and detachment of objects they cannot carry and by sustaining an inner relationship with them, as well as by maintaining and creating transitional experiences. Lastly, families build a continuum of social relationships, by enlarging their social networks at the same time as strengthening particular transnational ties and focusing inward on the relationships within the nuclear family.

These strategies bring to the fore a new modality of establishing a sense of continuity involving a complete reconfiguration of investments so to allow the emergence of a state of transitoriness. I contend this state is a fundamental implication of repeated geographical mobility and can be regarded, psychologically speaking, as a way out, or as a viable choice for embracing more complex ways to deal with enduring concurrent requirements and multiple transitions. The art of living in transitoriness is thus the art of living in a situation in which change has acquired an enduring quality in that nothing is changing when everything changes. Change is the constant. Paradoxically, the strategies employed by families not only allow them to be relatively stable under conditions of migratory instabilities but rather to “feel changing”, enabling movement and the continuation of the situation of change. This is the reason why routine building is not merely a technique for recreating “unbreakable” spheres of experience that could confer some permanence to properties of the changing environments and provide fast-reorientation post-move, it is also a technique for imposing regular markers for the actual practice of movement. Similarly, by creating a deployable net of social support, or by sustaining an inner relationship with the objects left behind, families are able to preserve and extend their mobility, accelerating their transitions.

As a theoretical contribution, I have introduced the idea of maintaining transitional phenomena and creating transitional experiences as a form of preserving an experience at the threshold of a transformation. This is a way to prolong the feeling of change when temporarily settling, which highlights an identification, a sort of attachment to the in-between phase of a transition in the reconfiguration of investments. Sustaining a transitory state actually allows the person to remain mobile, and it participates in the emergence of a state of transitoriness. Furthermore, it enables the person to experience an inner connection to the multiple transitions.

Another unfolding implication of repeated mobility is being constantly confronted with the transitory states of each move. Adjusting to one place while imagining leaving for another unknown is akin to living in a double temporality. The identification of strategies carried out in present study is the first step towards enhancing our understanding of the psychosocial dynamics of repeated mobility, and further work could be done to address such existential challenge.

## 7.5 Conclusion

The empirical contribution of the study has shown that families in repeated geographical mobility are able to systematically and simultaneously adjust to a new country while staying mobile in view of the next move, as long as they develop a sense of continuity across countries and are capable of re-establishing a sense of active determination over the constant changes. The proposed theoretical approach invited us to consider that stability is a co-construction between the moving person and the changing sociocultural environments, and therefore, it differs from the broad body of research on psychology of migration assuming a “society of settlement” in that it shifts the focus from investigating the “adaptation” of the family to a host-country to look at the adjustments to repeated geographical mobility.

International repeated geographical mobility (im)poses to all family members the apparent concurring requirements of adjusting to a new country while preserving some degree of mobility. The tensions this raises are partly addressed through the strategies families employed, and they contribute to a complete reconfiguration of investments in repeated mobility as well as to the rise of a state of transitoriness, with which some people may identify. For this reason, repeated mobility is by no means a frictionless form of mobility and, in times of increasing global migratory instabilities, the experiences of families are paramount to inform practices and to grasp the new centrality that mobility has today.

# 8. CHAPTER

# CONCLUSION

## 8.1 Answering the Research Questions

This thesis aimed to answer five sets of research questions. In what follows, I will revisit each research question and respond them according to the analyses conducted in the empirical chapters.

1) What are the features of repeated international mobility? What are its implications for families? Which challenges does it bring about?

Chapter 3 has shown in detail that mobile families have recently become more diverse than the public discourse indicates with regards to gender, educational background, country of origin, migratory trajectories and arrival conditions. The results of this study indicate that the traditionally typified forms of international mobility are declining. As a striking example, only 1.8% of mobile families have a diplomatic or international status. The misconception that the movement of professionals and their families is a privileged and frictionless form of mobility has led researchers to refrain from carefully examining the conditions under which these families move and from contemplating the hardships engendered by repeated moves. These repeated relocations have challenging implications for these families' lives. Together, the analyses of data from the Migration and Mobility Survey and from the qualitative interviews with members of mobile families and mobility experts have identified four specific challenges faced by mobile families, different from those of long-term migrants.

First, in contrast to the common-sense idea that international mobility is characterized by facilitated and privileged conditions, this study revealed that mobile families receive surprisingly little support. Across all potential forms of support, at least half of the sample in the quantitative study could not lean on another individual or organization to make the transition smoother. This was true even for simple arrangements, like being provided with information about Switzerland, and is particularly acute for spouse employment support, which only 14.4% of mobile family members report having received. What is particularly interesting is that 42% of the families did not indicate employers as a source of support of *any* form. Strikingly, this is not simply because friends and relatives in Switzerland substitute for employer support: among those who do not report having relied on the employer, almost half (48.1%) also did not rely on friends or relatives in Switzerland to obtain support. Consequently, these families have to deal with multiple aspects of the host environment under conditions similar to permanent residents, but without the same social networks.

Second, consistent with the results of chapters 5, 6 and 7, moving across countries with the family all together requires the making of a temporary home for the mobile family in each destination. As repeated mobility involves the complete reconfiguration of each family member's spheres of experiences every time the family moves, families need to persistently create *overlapping spheres of experiences*, so that the environmental changes will not affect their adjustments and future mobility. Beyond that challenge, each family member transits through different spheres of experience in the host country and relates to the relocation process in different ways. In this regard, Switzerland, in particular provides an especially challenging set of conditions. First, its tight job market makes accompanying partners experience a great disruption in their work trajectory and professional identity that affects their future work prospect and transforms family life. Second, 75% of mobile families' children attend local schools. If on one hand, this facilitates their local insertion, on the other this might restrict their future mobility.

A third challenge comes from the fact that the length of their work contracts is often fixed. Not knowing in advance for how long one will stay in a country or having limited time contracts that restrict one's ability to choose to stay longer further limits the person's ability to insert herself in the host country and her willingness to do so. Regardless of their intentions to stay longer in Switzerland or not, the majority of mobile families are bound to a permit system that regulates the duration of their stay in the country, which at the same time constrains and shapes their future mobility. Finally, at the ontogenetic level, repeated mobility demands the preservation of an inner sense of continuity beyond disruption and despite environmental changes. Psychologically speaking, the specific challenge of international mobility is to embrace more complex ways to deal with enduring concurrent requirements and multiple transitions.

2) What types of services are made available to support the international relocation of mobile families and what are the implications of expert interventions in the field of international relocation?

This second research question segues on the issue of support for mobile families. Chapter 4 provided an overview of the different service providers emerging to support the international relocation of mobile families. I proposed a new typology that organizes the services available according to their origin: whether they originated from a pre-existing organizational format (relocation management companies), from organizations themselves (internal services), from personal interactions (self-organized groups) or from self-standing expertise (private coaches and intercultural trainers). In accordance with Chapter 3 that indicated reduced support from employers, the findings showed that services offering support to mobile families were progressively redistributed, and now they stem from various services providers, including a rising body of relocation experts to cater to those needs. Moreover, the analyses distinguished between two main types of intervention: practical guidance and intercultural or cross-cultural training. In this regard, the analyses problematized relocation experts' use of the notion of "culture", as well as the tricky nature of interventions aimed at developing problem-solving skills to deal with intercultural encounters.

Furthermore, the emergence of a new body of relocation experts aimed at facilitating the life of these families and providing guidance for leading a mobile life, paradoxically, can strengthen the problems it has sought to solve at the outset. When experts turn "culture" into the cause of discomfort generated by the encounter with a different sociocultural environment, they pose outdated demands on families at the same time as reducing the problems they face to intercultural education that obscure the task of locally adjusting while staying mobile. The promise of "cultural-specific" solutions encourages us to assume that moving and adjusting to a new country is an operational problem that can be fixed. But when we reduce international adjustment to a function, the idea of dysfunction is also invoked.

A final word: while in that chapter we have been quite critical of services aimed at providing practical advice and expert solutions for intercultural encounters, it is undeniable that there is a demand for such services and that they may prove valuable for some people experiencing their first migrations and for some specific relocation moments. What I claim is that there is a clear scope for improvement.

3) How do members of mobile families make sense of their experiences of international mobility?

Chapter 5 has explored the ways in which mobile families make sense of their experiences of international mobility, through an in-depth analysis of symbolic boundary work, and semantic structures (at the level of meaning) that enable alterity to be resisted or that create an openness to alterity. The analysis showed that "mobility" and "immobility" became the main symbolic markers used by families in social interactions with others for making sense of their everyday lives. The very experience of mobility across countries and the temporary status in Switzerland offered specific symbolic markers through which people construct difference and similarity with others. The majority of interviewees differentiate between "internationals" and "locals", between "mobile" and "non-mobile" people, as those who move and "have some international experiences" on the one hand, and those who stayed behind, "who never lived in another culture", on the other hand. It is remarkable to observe how people make sense of difference from, and similarity with, others on the basis of "experience" (e.g. mobile "know-how" and number of countries lived in prior to Switzerland) and socio-emotional aspects relating to a person's capacity to engage with diversity (e.g. willingness to meet new people and to discover cultural diversity). These "cosmopolitan" values redraw identity boundaries and mobility, as the occasion for encountering diversity becomes the symbolic marker for constructing boundaries of what (Glick Schiller, 2015) calls "experiential cosmopolitanism".

This shows that their trajectory of international mobility is of major importance for defining who they are; it provides the symbolic resources (Zittoun, 2006) to create meaning about the world, the self and others. Turning to "internationals" is then a resource used to help them find similarity across difference and stabilize the shifting boundaries of identities. However, the process of meaning making always takes place in interaction and dialogically with several others, including different groups and the wider political and sociocultural contexts, thus is highly dependent upon the dynamics of recognition. The theoretical work on boundaries (such as social psychological studies on intergroup dynamics (Tajfel, 1978)) are valuable here as they conceptualize boundaries as having both symbolic and *social* dimensions; the latter calls attention to consider the “objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities” (Lamont and Molnar, 2002, p.168). Hence, the combination of legal framework, institutions and social networks that limits mobile families’ insertion in the host countries renders some uses of the above-mentioned symbolic markers more salient, necessary or vain (e.g. the experience of getting a visa renewed every time versus having a passport became a marker of group distinction, contributing to create a line of separation based on the transient condition).

Most importantly, as a whole, this thesis has highlighted that the process of sense-making of repeated mobility is greatly affected by the different developmental trajectories of each family member. The way each family member makes sense of international mobility differs considerably because of their relative age and the different spheres of experience that they transit within and across countries. Given that the aforementioned account was mostly based on interviews with adults, I now bring to the fore one extract that shows how children themselves make sense of their mobility. For most of them, moving and adjusting to different countries has always been part of their mode of living and the experiences of traveling, discovering cultural diversity, making new friends and speaking different languages are so familiar that they do not even realize how much they have moved. After navigating across places on Google Earth, I asked Oliver what happens when he looked back at those places and what kinds of feelings have arisen:

O mhm, amazement at--at how many places we’ve live and I haven’t realized.
D Yeah. It’s, mhm, amazing really.
O I mean, as I've never have told anyone.
D And how do you feel about moving that often?
O Quite weird actually.
D Weird. In which sense weird?
O Weird like-- we’ve lived in so many places and I-I haven’t realized it. Amazing, that kind of thing.
D And would you like to continue moving?
O No.
D No?
O I'd-I'd- I prefer to settle.
D And why is that?
O Because, I don’t really like, mhm, moving about so much- it gets all my memory we-weird. It-it- gets so fuzzy and stuff.
D In which sense?
O I can’t remember a place or a name that I have just been to.
D Okay. So >>you want to settle a bit>> and where do you want to settle?
O mhm, I'd-I'd settle here.
D Here in Switzerland?
O Yes.
D So, you would like to-to finish your school here?

O I'd finish-I'd finish my school here. And-and-and then I'll see where my job takes me. (Oliver, 9 years old, moved who has moved internationally five times)

In contrast to previous research on the topic, this particular extract shows that children do not always acknowledge their “atypical” life-courses (Benjamin, 2017). On the one hand, Oliver found it rather surprising and disorienting to have lived in so many places. The Google Earth exercise actually allowed him to have a different perspective on his life trajectory, yet “moving about so much” complicates the development of a generalized understanding of mobility because his past distal experiences are numerous and fleeting. As a result, he imagines an immobile future located as an extension of his present proximal experience, i.e. Switzerland. On the other hand, parts of the mobile and “cosmopolitan” values of his family were internalized: Oliver is open to go where his future job takes him in the future, just as his parents did.

Although children still need support to remember the different places they have lived, such that these same places are transformed into memories that become part of a generalized rendition of the "environment", children actively build rich networks of proximal and distal spheres of experience. Chapter 6 exemplifies that by bringing to the fore the divergent ways in which children and adults make sense of international mobility based on their understanding of “home”. Children easily attach a quality of “home-ness” to unusual places, such as the “Pepsi Cola factory” and the pool where they swim. On the Google Maps/Earth exercise, they navigated easily through context bounded-experiences while adults where more restricted to geographical places. The emotional qualities of the places they lived seemed to summarize or designate the whole experience of living in a certain country (one child named “Fun” the island she had lived on and where she could snorkel and swim). As a final point, it is worth noting that all children in the present research referred to their grandparents’ home, a typical “anchor” place for mobile children (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013).

4) How do members of mobile families cope with international mobility? What strategies enable them to, on the one hand, move across countries while adjusting to each new sociocultural environment, and, on the other hand, adjust while remaining mobile?

Chapter 7 has proposed an innovative exploration of how mobile families cope with international mobility, through the identification of strategies enabling mobile families to move across countries at the same time as adjusting to diverse sociocultural environments. Findings show that, to deal with constant environmental changes, mobile families employ three main strategies. First, they recreate the same spheres of experience everywhere (they reinforce their daily life routines, practice the same activities across countries and focus on creating transportable practices within the family). Second, families have transformed their mode of relating to objects. They did not concentrate too much, as expected from previous research (Adams & Fleer, 2015; Gyger Gaspoz, 2013), on lugging around their belongings across countries, and focused rather upon using a different type of materiality to remember. The transformation of people’s relations to objects has been facilitated by the actual environmental enrichment prompted by several moves. Third, they build a continuum of social relationships, by enlarging their social networks while focusing inward on the relationships within the nuclear family. Chapter 6 has explored in depth how families' "overlapping spheres of experiences" supported the making of a temporary home everywhere and concretely enabled the strengthening of family ties, which in turn helped each family member to cope with repeated mobility.

This is the first research documenting the family's strategies; in the previous scientific literature, this effort has been devoted to each family member separately, with emphasis placed upon children growing up in the context of repeated mobility. What is particularly interesting is that the strategies employed by children are relatively similar to those employed by the adults, supporting the role of adults' guidance in the way children cope with repeated mobility. Most importantly, the ways in which the strategies were analyzed highlighted the underlying psychosocial dynamics involved in the process of retaining a sense of continuity across countries.

5) How can people retain a sense of continuity despite repeated changes and disruptions?

The analyses conducted in Chapters 6 and 7 have brought to the fore a new modality of establishing a sense of continuity, expressed mainly in two ways: first, through the focus on experiences with others (rather than objects) to preserve this sense of continuity, and second, through the maintenance of transitional experiences that preserve their attachment to the history of mobility (rather than to the new place). First, different from those who migrate only once, the way mobile families established a sense of continuity involved a complete reconfiguration of investments so to embrace more complex ways to cope with the concurrent requirements of adjusting to a new country while preserving some degree of mobility in view of the next move. By switching the focus from keeping material objects to creating transportable practices within the family in specific material and social contexts, they are employing a new form of materiality to create subjective continuity out of objective discontinuity. This new dynamic challenges the common use of objects as resources in transitions. Furthermore, it shows that the more people move geographically, the more they circumscribe their worlds to the confines of family, suggesting that psychologically they need to find some stable core to resort to.

Second, again, different from those who migrate only once, for mobile families, *change* has acquired an enduring quality. I have shown that families recreate "unbreakable" proximal spheres of experience, such as reinforcing their everyday routines, to tighten the dialogical dynamics originating from the tensions in dialogue with different and changing sociocultural environments. Through the maintenance of transitional phenomena, the person can prolong the feeling of change when temporarily settling and preserve an experience at the threshold of a transformation. Sustaining such a transitory state allows the person to remain mobile. Most importantly, this can be a way to weave together past and present experiences of mobility, through a different thread of continuity, that actually enables the person to experience an inner connection to the multiple transitions.

## 8.2 Making sense of empirical findings

This thesis has contributed to redefining the central challenge of repeated international mobility, namely that this particular form of mobility raises the challenge of adjusting to a new country, whilst at the same time preserving some degree of mobility in anticipation of the next move. Although existing research has examined the coping strategies that are used by the internationally mobile, it has overlooked the significance of *repeated* mobility, and the difficulties this presents in terms balancing adjustment against the future demands of further movement. By considering this challenge, this thesis offers an innovative account of how people cope with these apparently concurrent tasks, and brings to light the resources they mobilize to both adjust locally and preserve some degree of mobility.

The tension between *adjusting to a new place* and *remaining mobile* creates, in turn, a specific psychosocial dynamic. First, psychologically speaking, it requires a lot of effort to perform this double task simultaneously. Unlike migrant "settlers", who are focused exclusively on adjusting to various aspects of their new sociocultural environment (e.g. learning new culture-specific skills and modes of relating), mobile migrants have also to actively maintain and enlarge their transnational networks, often to look for a job and children's school in the next country, *while* also adjusting to those same aspects of the new sociocultural environment, but without the same kinds of local support. On top of that, what makes this double task so difficult is that it requires reconciling two opposing demands. Second, adjusting to a new place while imagining leaving for another destination is akin to living a double temporality. The experience of being constantly confronted with the transitory state of each move not only generates anxiety, but also restricts the person's ability to be present in the here-and-now and can even block her capacity to imagine an alternative life. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 7, in order to prolong the "feeling of change" when temporarily settling-in and to be able to uproot easily, some people can sustain the transitory state and, as a result, feel that they are "'caught suspended' in the limbo of an in-between phase of transition" (Stenner, Greco, & F. Motzkau, 2017, p. 142). At other times, the same feelings associated with imminent departure can trigger the creation of new meanings about their lives and about repeated mobility, and can become the occasion for reactivating imagination against the backdrop of uncertainty and fear about what comes next (Cangià, 2018; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016).

At this point, it became clear that what makes the international adjustments in the context of repeated mobility so demanding is not only the reestablishment of new conduct vis-à-vis the disruptions raised by the repetitive encounters with a new sociocultural environment. Rather, it also entails the management and navigation of a paradox arising from attending to the requirements of two concurring - and often mutually incompatible - orders (e.g. calling your friend from childhood in a different time zone when attending the local neighbour's meeting). We can relate the heightened sense of uncertainty, frustration, ambiguity and the experience of feeling overwhelmed to the prolonged and protracted encounter with this paradox. My hypothesis is that when the paradox endures over time, it can push the person towards the establishment of a new and meaningful relationship to the paradox based on the creation of hyper-generalized meanings (Valsiner, 2007b, 2014a), capable of embracing a greater degree of complexity, within which the paradox can be re-signified (Greco & Stenner, 2017).

The analysis presented in this thesis so far has placed considerable weight on the transformative nature of mobility, by showing how participants became more open to diversity and to new relationships by changing their values and by introducing "mobility" and "immobility" as distinctive symbolic markers that can be transported to different contexts. Nevertheless, we observed in general that people in repeated mobility cultivate a very particular relationship to newness (Zittoun & Levitan, forthcoming). For example, the in-depth interviews have shown that participants develop metaphors showing their readiness to engage with new sociocultural environments and with changes in general, depicting as positive the inclination to undertake new and daring experiences. Olga, who moved several times with her family, calls her moves "adventures" and considers that if something "challenges you, then it must be a good thing". Moreover, the transcripts revealed the presence of much "laughter" when interviewees talked about their experiences. It was interesting seeing how mobile migrants frequently used humour to turn a threatening, dangerous experience into something challenging and positive – humour indeed seems to transform the affective tonality of the experiences, and to support new sense-making, as way out of concurring and incompatible orders.

These observations lead us to suggest that in order to re-signify the paradox, and finally reconcile the two opposing forces of stability and change, mobile migrants create hyper-generalized values (Valsiner, 2007b, 2014a) which enable them to apprehend positively potentially rupturing experiences. Hyper-generalization enables them to turn differences into likeness and mobility into normality, to accept the unexpected, to cultivate a different relationship to newness and ultimately, to adjust to repeated mobility. Hence, through the development of more a distanced and abstract understanding of their own lives with the help of culturally cultivated semiotic means, such as hyper-generalized values or humour, mobile people have transformed the very way they apprehend change.

Finally, another factor that makes the international adjustments of families so difficult is that they also require the making of "overlapping spheres of experiences" (as shown in Chapter 6) to afford relationally tight and emotionally positive spheres of experiences. Thus, the challenge of adjusting to a new place while remaining mobile is not only a psychological or practical problem; it is also a systemic one. Every member of the family needs to support each other in their task of adjusting to a new place while remaining mobile. The analysis presented in Chapter 6 has clearly shown how the couple Helena and Emilio helped each other greatly in the shared experience of intimacy and thereby created a stable, transportable core they can always resort to. The tightening-up of the relationships within the nuclear family can suggest a kind of "sedentarism", pointing to a human need of belonging to something relatively stable. If that is the case, mobile childhoods are not unfolding in an uprooted way, strictly speaking. For that reason, we can move away from the idea that children are harmed by repeated mobility, to suggest instead that children are in fact harmed by being forced to choose between the needs of mobility and their needs of settling, or between their mobile identity and "know-how" and a single national identity and "know-how". The analysis conducted in this study seems to indicate that children do better[54] when society allows them to embrace both identities and knowledge-sets and to promote an integration of these two.

All in all, this research points out that the common misconception of international mobility being detrimental to the family is ill founded. Findings suggest that previous results about how international relocation increases family coping for military families (Palmer, 2016) apply more generally to mobile families. Considering the principle of interrelated lives, the more family members move together, the more they grow as a family, converting the family into the main scaffolding for its members, and migration into an opportunity for growth and development. Consistent with the results of Chapter 3, the strengthening of family ties in the context of mobility actually makes mobile families resemble individuals without families, who resist better a higher number of moves if compared to other family forms. The flipside of that intense reliance on other family members is that, when such declines are set off, they take place at faster rates: family ties play multiple roles for mobile families, and when they are broken, feelings of life satisfaction declines quickly and relative attachment to country of origin increases again. In this way, family mobility has provided an even sharper empirical opportunity to investigate the phenomenon of international mobility, as it constitutes an extreme case of the reconciliation between stability and change.

## 8.3 Theoretical Contributions and Limits to the Theory

As a whole, this thesis has contributed to the development of a sociocultural psychological perspective on repeated international mobility, considering that psychology has been so far mainly concerned with unidirectional migration processes. It has highlighted the constraints of current theoretical frameworks based on the assimilation paradigm, and it has tackled migration as a dynamic phenomenon, investigating it beyond nationalists' frames. It has shown how new social and economic realities expose people to repeated experiences of change, and consequently has called attention to the importance of studying multiple transitions.

The study of multiple transitions shifts the investigative approach from a photograph to a movie: instead of focusing on a snapshot of individuals' trajectory of international mobility, it focusses on the complex pattern of continuity and change people establish through that trajectory. Self-continuity becomes then a powerful theoretical construct within psychology to address the continuity and connectedness of experience, and to move away from the constraints on knowledge construction generated by overloaded concepts, like “identity” or “belonging”. Moreover, the analysis conducted in this thesis clearly showed the importance of considering *spheres of experiences* to theorize continuity across places. First, because spheres of experience themselves resonate in the stability of self. Second, because they allowed us to understand how people are embedded in their sociocultural worlds without having to resort to the problematic idea that everyone needs to belong to a place and to national or transnational communities. The thesis has argued that there will be always a certain blindness if we consider solely the geographical places people inhabit, instead of the spheres of experiences they traverse whilst moving within and across these places.

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[54] In various aspects of life aspects (educational performance, mental health, emotional well-being, forming healthy social bonds and relationships).

My main theoretical contribution to the conceptual frame of spheres of experiences has been to show that spheres of experiences are not dependent upon places and that they can be recreated beyond the boundaries of materially limited spaces, and still have an anchoring function. Furthermore, this thesis puts forward the concept of “overlapping spheres of experience” to designate the intersubjective experience of “family” or “home”. Although the idea could be applied to other contexts (e.g. “overlapping spheres of experience” among co-workers), it has proven particularly suitable for the study of family life, as it evokes emotional and relational qualities of the juxtaposition of experiences.

Moreover, this thesis has shown how a sociocultural approach in psychology offers a more comprehensive perspective for the study of repeated international mobility. Sociocultural psychology has demonstrated important links between sociocultural context and individual development. Given the mutually constitutive nature of this relationship, this approach is particularly valuable to investigate what happens to a person who has developed in one sociocultural context when she attempts to live in another. The fundamental assumption that a person cannot be studied outside of her location within the sociocultural world has important implications for the theorization of repeated mobility. It leads us to expand the unit of analysis “person in her context” to include the previous countries in which she has lived, the current location and the future potential moves as an integrative part of the context of the mobile person. In that way, a sociocultural approach enables us to understand the particular context of repeated mobility in a “translocational frame”. Such a frame recognizes the different and multiple locations and positions that people bring and actualize in their present location, thereby making it possible to explore the question of self-continuity in terms of complex relations to different locales, which includes networks and ties in/to different destinations and relation between those destinations. When a mobile person is adjusting to Switzerland, she is mobilizing all the skills learnt from previous moves and re-actualizing and re-enacting them in a new context. Her adjustments then are necessarily shaped by the experiences lived in previous countries (this is exemplified by Gabrielle’s use of the metaphor of cooking to explain how she “incorporates” the places she has lived) and her experiences of mobility are often foregrounded and backgrounded in the new environment depending on the situation (e.g. in a gathering with international people it might be relevant that the person lived in three countries before Switzerland, whereas in the local neighbours meeting this might be irrelevant).

Moreover, not knowing how long one will be able to stay in the country and what one will do next pushes the person to imagine the future. When imagining, the person can orient her thoughts toward more distal experiences in the future or alternative presents and then go back to the here and now. In this "looping out" (Zittoun and Gillespie, 2015), imagining possible future destinations can help to counteract feelings of uncertainty, helping to establish a sense of continuity through past, present and future locations.

Additionally, the departure this thesis made from earlier models of unidirectional international adjustments was only possible through the adoption of a sociocultural approach. Its multiple levels of orientation to social processes allowed me to integrate the sociogenetic, microgenetic and ontogenetic levels. In that way, I could analyse both international and national (Swiss) contexts, the interpersonal (professional, accompanying partner and children) and the intrapersonal dynamics (sense-making) to shed new light onto the phenomenon of repeated international mobility. While this approach enables us to better articulate these multiple levels and to fully consider the bidirectional exchanges between the person and her environment, it lacks a theoretical work about the structuring role and significance of intimate relations to the human psyche and, therefore, is unable to fully explain the processes by which the family becomes such a stabilizing force in repeated international mobility.

## 8.4 Open questions and future research

This thesis has shed light on a number of issues linked to the psychosocial dynamics and adjustments of families facing repeated international mobility. Findings have, in turn, given rise to new questions, suggesting interesting directions for future research.

First, my analysis restricts attention to migrants coming to Switzerland for professional reasons, purposefully excluding refugees and asylum seekers mainly because the research project and the Migration-Mobility Survey – the starting point for both the quantitative and qualitative analyses undertaken – do not include those types of migrants. How do those other migrant populations deal with repeated international mobility? In the current world, in which practically permanent economic and political turmoil feed into effervescent migratory pressures for the economically excluded, members of political opposition, and ethnic minorities, the issue of repeated mobility – from settlement to settlement or camp to camp – is bound to emerge. Do refugees and asylum seekers experience similar psychosocial dynamics in what comes to living in transitoriness? Do they use similar strategies to deal with repeated mobility?

Second, my analysis studies repeated international mobility by focusing on migrants' adjustments *in the host country*. Having said that, I have shown that a significant share of those individuals (around 10%) had already lived in Switzerland for three months or longer before the latest move. For at least a proportion of those individuals, this pattern may result from a process of moving back-and-forth from their country of origin, in face of legal constraints (mainly, residence permits) that prevent their permanent settlement in Switzerland. While the quantitative analysis has shown this process to have negative consequences for relative attachment to the host environment (in comparison to the country of origin), what does it do to such individuals' experiences when they return *time and again to* their *country of origin*? Do those *repeated homecomers* (Schuetz, 1945) face different psychosocial dynamics? Do they rely on different coping strategies?

Third, and related to the aforementioned, I have shown that relative attachment changes non-linearly with the number of moves. At first, a higher number of moves seems to increase attachment to the host country, but eventually reaches a point of saturation (around 5 prior moves, for mobile families) and the opposite process sets in, with attachment to the country of origin increasing with additional moves. Is that process completely explained by the number of moves?; or is it driven primarily by specific migratory trajectories, such as forced and repeated back-and-forth movements due to legal constraints, or subsequent 'downward moves' to less and less desirable countries, in the pursuit of professional achievement?

Fourth, I have shown that the unitary approach to studying family dynamics within the context of repeated international mobility is unwarranted: parents' and children's life trajectories are interrelated, and each part's experiences must be jointly accounted for to accurately understand the role of the sustaining environment for mediating the migrant's experiences in the host country. While this thesis has focused on the relational phenomenon between parents and children, it has not focused on the role of siblings. The added value of shifting focus would be to understand how symmetric relationships – in contrast to that between parents and children – enable and constrain a child's experiences and perspectives of repeated international mobility. In particular, without one-sided scaffolding and resources, how do siblings use the family narrative as a symbolic resource to signify their mobility experiences? Lastly, what explains why some of them will grow up to recreate mobile families – the experience they shared as children – while others will grow up to settle down, distancing themselves from their early-life experiences?

Those are open questions that, to the best of my knowledge, have not been investigated to date. Each requires new data – from different target populations, such as refugees and asylum seekers, with additional variables not accounted for by the Migration-Mobility Survey, such as individuals' full history of migration, or with a larger pool of relevant subjects and with a longitudinal dimension, such as to allow understanding the role of siblings and the drivers of their different long-term trajectories.

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# APPENDICES

# Appendix A – Online Questionnaire

## Families in Geographical Itinerancy

Q1 Dear Sir/Madam,
Are you living in Switzerland with your family? Have you lived in different countries?

If you have been moving across countries due to the professional expertise of one of your family members and you currently have children living in your household, we would be grateful if you could complete this survey. The aim of the research is to document the experiences of international professionals and their families (e.g., partner, child) living in Switzerland temporarily, and moving across different countries.

The survey is composed of 6 sections including personal background, migration motives and relocation process, experiences in Switzerland, current employment situation, transnational ties, and experiences of international mobility. The survey contains both closed-ended and open-ended questions and should take about 20 minutes to complete. We would appreciate if you could take the time to answer also the open-ended questions.     This research is part of the nccr – on the move which conducts a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary changes in migration patterns in Switzerland and it is supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).More information about our research project can be found at http://nccr-onthemove.ch/projects/new-migration-and-new-forms-of-integration-families-in-geographical-itinerancy/.

All information collected from the survey will be used for academic purposes only and all respondents will be treated as anonymous. Any public available analysis of these data will not identify you by name, nor identify your organization/company. You may choose to stop your participation in this survey at any time.

If you have questions regarding this research, you may contact us via e-mail at families@nccr-onthemove.ch. At the end of the questionnaire you can indicate whether you are also interested in sharing your experience through an interview with us.

We thank you very much for your participation and remain at your disposal should you have any query.     Professor Tania Zittoun, Dr. Flavia Cangià and MSc Déborah Levitan

Q2 I have read and understood the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q3 **Personal Background**

Q4 Please select your gender:

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Other ________________________________________________

Q5 Please indicate your age range:

- ○ Under 25
- ○ 25-34
- ○ 35-44
- ○ 45-55
- ○ Over 55

Q6 Where were you born?

▼ - ... Zimbabwe

Q7 In which country/s were you raised? (You can select more than one by pressing Ctrl)

☐ -

Q8 What language/s do you speak? (You can select more than one by pressing Ctrl)

☐ -

Q9 What is the highest formal education diploma you own?

- ○ No formal education
- ○ Vocational school
- ○ High school/ non-vocational school
- ○ Trade certificate or apprenticeship completed
- ○ College diploma or certificate
- ○ University Bachelor's degree
- ○ University Master's degree
- ○ PhD
- ○ Other, please specify: ________________________________________________

Q10 What is your present relationship status?

- ○ Single
- ○ In a relationship
- ○ Married/in a partnership
- ○ Separated/divorced
- ○ Other: ______________________________________________

Q11 Where is your partner residing currently?

- ○ In Switzerland in your same household
- ○ In Switzerland in another household
- ○ In another country, namely in ______________________________________________

Q12 Do you have children?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q13 How many children live in your household?

| |
|---|
| ▼ 0 ... 10 |

Q14 Please specify how many children you have, how old they are and where they are currently residing.

| | *Age* | *Country of Residence* |
|---|---|---|
| Child 1 | ▼ 0 ... 18 | ▼ - ... Zimbabwe |
| Child 10 | ▼ 0 ... 18 | ▼ - ... Zimbabwe |

Q15 Are/is they/she/he enrolled in a school?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q16 What kind of school is this?

- ○ Public and local
- ○ Private and local
- ○ International
- ○ Other ____________________________________________

Q17 Please specify the name of the school:

____________________________________________________________

Q18 **Migration motives and relocation process** We would like to know more about what motivated your decision to come, as well as about the relocation process (e.g., moving, settling-in, adjusting) to Switzerland.

Q19 Where do you live in Switzerland? (Please specify the zip code)

____________________________________________________________

Q20 In which year did you arrive in Switzerland?

▼ 2015 ... 1915

Q21 Where were you living before arriving here?

▼ - ... Zimbabwe

Q22 What resident status/permit do you currently hold? (Please insert the permit type)

- ○ Student visa ____________________________________________
- ○ Family reunification visa ____________________________________________
- ○ Temporary residence permit ____________________________________________
- ○ Permanent (unlimited) residence permit ____________________________________________
- ○ Citizenship
- ○ Other, please specify: ____________________________________________

Q23 Please specify which citizenship(s) you hold?

____________________________________________________________

Q24 What was the most important motive behind your move to Switzerland?

- ○ I was sent by a foreign company/institution.
- ○ I found a job at a Swiss employer on my own initiative.
- ○ I was told about a job opportunity by a friend/relative.
- ○ I wanted to start my own business here.
- ○ Family reunification/ to join my partner
- ○ Other, please specify: ____________________________________________
- ○ I don't know.

Q25 Did you get/are you getting any support by some private relocation agency/public institution when moving to Switzerland?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q26 Please specify the name of the relocation agency or public institution:

____________________________________________________________

Q27 What kind of support did you get from this agency/institution?

- ☐ Pre-Move Orientation
- ☐ Home Finding and Settling-in Services
- ☐ Support in professional development/Career Partner Assistance
- ☐ Counseling for integrating into the local society
- ☐ Schooling/ Child Care Assistance
- ☐ Information on living environment and amenities (e.g. leisure activities, intercultural training)
- ☐ Provision of information on public services (e.g. taxation, transport, visa, health care)
- ☐ Other, please specify: ____________________________________________

Q28 What kind of support did you get from your friends/acquaintances in Switzerland?

- ☐ Pre-Move Orientation
- ☐ Home Finding and Settling-in Services
- ☐ Support in professional development/Career Partner Assistance
- ☐ Counseling for integrating into the local society
- ☐ Schooling/ child care assistance
- ☐ Information on living environment and amenities (e.g. leisure activities, intercultural training)
- ☐ Provision of information on public services (e.g. taxation, transport, visa, health care)
- ☐ Other, please specify: ____________________________________________
- ☐ None, or don't have friends/ acquaintances in Switzerland

Q29 What else do you think could be done to facilitate the relocation of international families/people in Switzerland?

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

Q30 **Experiences in Switzerland**

In this section we would like to ask you some questions about your experience in Switzerland.

Q31 Do you currently work in Switzerland?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q32 In case you moved with your partner/spouse, is she/he working in Switzerland?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ N/A

Q33 Please specify professional sector:

____________________________________________________________

Q34 How well do you master the local language of your current place of residence?

- ○ Not at all
- ○ A little bit
- ○ Reasonably well
- ○ Very well

Q35 Which language/s do you speak at...

| | Work | Home | With your partner | With your children | Public daily life (e.g., neighbours, shopping, administration) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Language 1 | ▼ N/A ... Zulu | ▼ N/A ... Zulu | ▼ N/A ... Zulu | ▼ N/A ... Zulu | ▼ N/A ... Zulu |
| Language 5 | ▼ N/A ... Zulu | ▼ N/A ... Zulu | ▼ N/A ... Zulu | ▼ N/A ... Zulu | ▼ N/A ... Zulu |

Q36 List 5 types of leisure activities important for you in Switzerland, by indicating the person/s involved in these activities, frequency of your engagement (within a month), where these activities take place (i.e. city), and main reason of your engagement.

| | Type of activity | People involved | Frequency | Where | Motive |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Activity 1 | | | | | |
| Activity 5 | | | | | |

Q37 Are you a member of any of the below named types of organization/group based in Switzerland? (You may choose more than one answer.)

☐ Religious/ethnic/national/cultural organization/group, please specify the name
_______________________________________________

☐ International network, please specify the name
_______________________________________________

☐ Local sports/music or other leisure organization/group

☐ Humanitarian organization, please specify the name
_______________________________________________

☐ Professional organization, please specify the name
_______________________________________________

☐ Political party

☐ Other, please specify: _______________________________________________

☐ No

Q38 What are your most important motive(s) behind your participation in these organization/groups? (Please explain briefly)

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

Q39 Please indicate how often you spend time with people of your same nationality, people of Swiss nationality/permanent residents, and/or others, and on what occasion (e.g., work, leisure time):

| | How often you spend time with... | On what occasions? |
|---|---|---|
| | | Answer |
| People of your same nationality | ▼ Every day ... Never | |
| Swiss Nationals/permanent residents | ▼ Every day ... Never | |
| Other Nationalities | ▼ Every day ... Never | |

Q40 How many and which members of your family live with you in Switzerland?

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

Q41 What kind of activities do you do more often with your family here?

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

Q42 Are there situations in which you feel to be a stranger in Switzerland, and if yes, can you describe these situations and how you feel about it?

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

Q43 Please evaluate how difficult has been to deal with the following aspects while moving to Switzerland (9 most difficult).

______ Learning the local languages
______ Employment/career opportunities
______ Cost of living
______ Living environment and amenities (e.g. housing, transport)
______ Residents' attitudes towards foreigners
______ Social welfare system (e.g. schooling, health care, children day-care facilities)
______ Availability of cultural activities and local lifestyle
______ Accessibility of information on public services (e.g. taxation, change of residence status etc.)
______ Obtaining a residence/work permit

Q44 **Current employment situation**

Q45 What is your main employment situation at the moment?

- ○ I am working for a multinational company originating from Switzerland
- ○ I am working in a multinational company originating elsewhere
- ○ I am working for a local company/institution.
- ○ I am working for a family business.
- ○ I am self-employed.
- ○ I am employed in an academic and research institution.
- ○ I am employed in an international organization (like UN, ILO, IMF, UNDP etc)
- ○ Other, please specify ____________________________________________________

Q46 What is the name of the company or the institution of your present employment? (If you have multiple affiliations, please specify.)

____________________________________________________________________

Q47 What is the title/designation of your position at the current employer?

____________________________________________________________________

Q48 What is the sector of your current employment?

○ Information & Communication Technology
○ Advertising, marketing, media and PR
○ Banking and financial services
○ Pharmaceutical/ Biotechnical industry (Energy and environment?)
○ Business, management and HR
○ Consulting
○ Development, international organizations and NGOs
○ Healthcare
○ Law
○ Public sector, politics and policy
○ Academic and research institution
○ Other, specify ________________________________________________

Q49 What is your position at the current employer? (Please choose one that suits best your position.)

○ Managerial/Professional
○ Supervision
○ Technical
○ Research
○ Other, specify

Q50 What is the level of your position at the current employer? (Please choose one that suits best your position.)

○ Entry-level
○ Mid-level
○ Senior

Q51 What type of position do you have?

○ Temporary employment; please specify the length of your contract:
________________________________________________
○ Permanent employment
○ On secondment (on-site work)
○ Consultancy
○ Part-time work; please specify the percentage:
________________________________________________
○ Other, please specify:

Q52 **Transnational ties**

In this section we ask about your connections with family, friends and other people living in other countries.

Q53 How often are you in contact with your family abroad?

○ Daily
○ 2-3 Times a Week
○ Once a Week
○ 2-3 Times a Month
○ Once a Month
○ A couple of times per year
○ Less often
○ No contact

Q54 How often are you in contact with your friends abroad?

○ Daily
○ 2-3 Times a Week
○ Once a Week
○ 2-3 Times a Month
○ Once a Month
○ A couple of times per year
○ Less often
○ No contact

Q55 With whom are you in contact most frequently? You may choose more than one answer.

☐ Family
☐ Friends
☐ Boyfriend/girlfriend
☐ Colleagues
☐ Any other professional contacts
☐ No one
☐ Other, specify ________________________________________________

Q56 What social media do you use the most to communicate with people abroad?

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

Q57 How often do you travel to these countries and why?

| | Frequency | | | | Motive for visit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Once a Month | 2-3 Times per Year | More than 3 Times per Year | Never | Answer 1 |
| Country of your nationality (select one country if you have more than one nationalities) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | |
| Country where you were born | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | |
| Country/ies where you grew up | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | |
| One of the previous countries you lived before arriving to Switzerland | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | |
| Anchorage country (a place you go back to on a regular basis) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | |

Q58 **Experience of international mobility**

In this section we ask about your past experiences and future plans of international mobility, namely your travels between different countries.

Q59 Before coming, have you ever lived outside of your home country staying in one other location for more than three months?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q60 Please list 5 countries where you have recently lived for more than 3 months, duration, purpose of your stay and the type of visa you stayed on (student visa, employment visa, family reunification visa, permanent residence permit, tourist visa).

| | Country's name | Starting Year | Duration of stay | Purpose of stay | Visa |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | (number of months) | | Type |
| Country 1 | ▼ - ... Zimbabwe | ▼ 2015 ... 1960 | | ▼ Study-related ... Accompanying my family/partner | |
| Country 5 | ▼ - ... Zimbabwe | ▼ 2015 ... 1960 | | ▼ Study-related ... Accompanying my family/partner | |

Q61 What was your best and/or your worst experience in the country you lived before arriving in Switzerland? (Please explain briefly.)

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

Q62 What do you bring with you when migrating to a new country? (e.g. memories, values, objects). Please briefly explain the reasons.

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

Q63 What are the most important aspects of migrating internationally? (Please explain briefly)

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

Q64 What are the main challenges of migrating internationally?

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

Q65 “Home”, for me, is…

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

Q66 How many years do you expect to stay in Switzerland (from this moment onwards)?

○ Less than a year
○ From 1 to 5 years
○ From 5 to 10 years
○ More than 10 years
○ Permanently
○ I don’t know

Q67 What do you plan to do in the following five years?

○ I plan to stay in Switzerland
○ I plan to return to my country of origin/of nationality/or another country I lived before arriving to Switzerland
○ I intend to move to another country. Please specify where ______________________________________________
○ Other plans, specify ______________________________________________

Q68 Please specify the most important reasons for moving away from Switzerland.

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

Q69 Do you plan to move with your family/partner?

○ Yes
○ No
○ I don't know

Q70 What are for you the main reasons to travel with your family/partner?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q71 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your current experience in Switzerland and of migration?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q72 Would you like to receive a summary report of this study project?

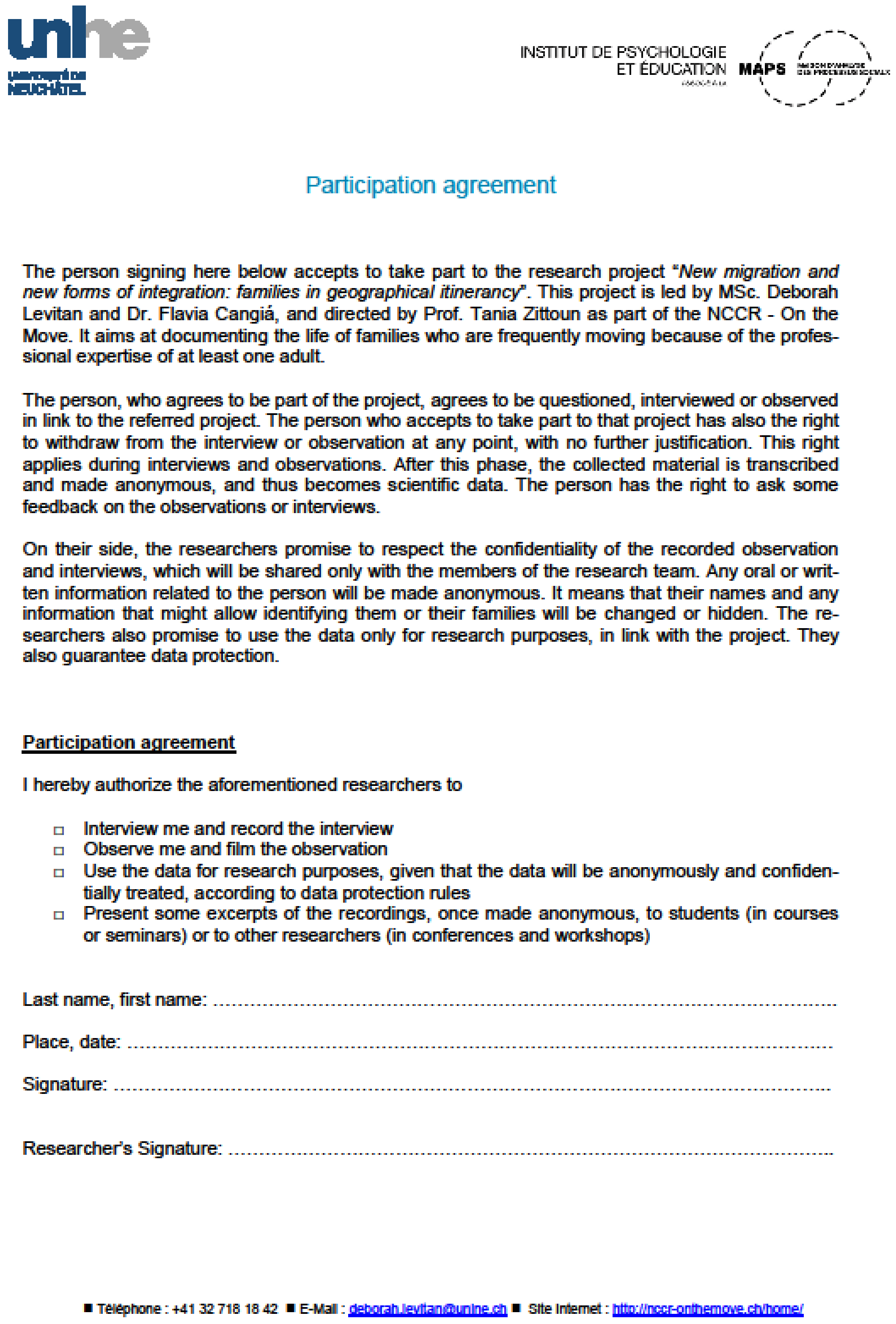
○ Yes. Please indicate your e-mail address:
________________________________________________
○ No

Q73 CONTACT INFORMATION

We are kindly inviting families to talk about their experiences of moving across different countries, the possible difficulties and what has facilitated their adjustment in Switzerland. We are especially interested in understanding what is like to live a life on the move. We hope that our research can contribute to a smoother adjustment of families in Switzerland and on the move. If you are willing to share your personal and family experiences and are available to meet for an interview, please list phone numbers and/or an e-mail address where you can be reached. Any member of the family is welcome to participate.

○ First Name ________________________________________________
○ Last Name ________________________________________________
○ Email ________________________________________________
○ Phone Number ________________________________________________

# Appendix B – Participation Agreement



INSTITUT DE PSYCHOLOGIE
ET ÉDUCATION

MAPS

## Participation agreement

The person signing here below accepts to take part to the research project "*New migration and new forms of integration: families in geographical itinerancy*". This project is led by MSc. Deborah Levitan and Dr. Flavia Cangiá, and directed by Prof. Tania Zittoun as part of the NCCR - On the Move. It aims at documenting the life of families who are frequently moving because of the professional expertise of at least one adult.

The person, who agrees to be part of the project, agrees to be questioned, interviewed or observed in link to the referred project. The person who accepts to take part to that project has also the right to withdraw from the interview or observation at any point, with no further justification. This right applies during interviews and observations. After this phase, the collected material is transcribed and made anonymous, and thus becomes scientific data. The person has the right to ask some feedback on the observations or interviews.

On their side, the researchers promise to respect the confidentiality of the recorded observation and interviews, which will be shared only with the members of the research team. Any oral or written information related to the person will be made anonymous. It means that their names and any information that might allow identifying them or their families will be changed or hidden. The researchers also promise to use the data only for research purposes, in link with the project. They also guarantee data protection.

### Participation agreement

I hereby authorize the aforementioned researchers to

- ☐ Interview me and record the interview
- ☐ Observe me and film the observation
- ☐ Use the data for research purposes, given that the data will be anonymously and confidentially treated, according to data protection rules
- ☐ Present some excerpts of the recordings, once made anonymous, to students (in courses or seminars) or to other researchers (in conferences and workshops)

Last name, first name: ..............................................................................................

Place, date: ..............................................................................................

Signature: ..............................................................................................

Researcher's Signature: ..............................................................................................

■ Téléphone : +41 32 718 18 42 ■ E-Mail : deborah.levitan@unine.ch ■ Site Internet : http://nccr-onthemove.ch/home/

# Appendix C – Sample Interview Guide

**Introduction**

- Explain the research project and the nccr – on the move
- Tell them they can refuse to answer any question and stop at any time
- Ask if they are willing to use a computer to complete a 'Google Maps/Earth' based series of questions
- Ask if I can audio record and make them sign the form
- Ask if they have any questions

**Trajectory of International Mobility**

*Initial narrative question:*

1) Can you please tell me more about you and your trajectory of international mobility?

*Internal narrative questions:*

   a) When was your first experience abroad?
   b) What made you move to […] at the first place?
   c) Why did you move to Switzerland?

*External narrative questions:*

**Pre-Move & Decision-making**

2) How much and what kind of preparation did you have to come here [move there]?

3) Thinking of the time when you were deciding upon moving to […], with whom did you discuss your decision of moving? Before leaving, who encouraged you moving to […] [here]?

**Difficulties & Barriers**

4) What are the main difficulties of moving so often?

   a) Do you encounter any concrete barrier while moving?
   b) How do you feel restricted here in Switzerland [or elsewhere]?
   c) What are your main concerns, apprehensions or fears when moving [or when constructing your home abroad]?
   d) Is there any specific situation in which you feel overwhelmed when settling in a new country?
   e) Did you experience any changes in your body when you moved to […]? (e.g. gaining, losing weight, lack of sleep, etc.)

**Support & Resources**

5) In those moments, what and who has helped you?

    a) Can you recall a story that exemplifies this?
    b) How did your friends [international friends] help you with [this…]?
    c) What else has facilitated your mobile life?

**Challenges for the family**

6) What were the specific challenges of moving with the whole family?

7) How was the negotiation with your wife/husband to come here? And with the children?
    a) Who in the family had the strongest reaction to that choice? Why?

8) Do you have any family “rituals”?

9) Do you have any “anchorage place” - a place you go back on a regular basis with the family?

**Experiences of RIM**

10) What kind of adjustments did you had to make in your daily practices to live a more mobile life?

*E.g. Google Maps/Earth-based questions:*

11) Can you please zoom in where are you a local/where do you feel at-home? You can make five choices.
    a) Why did you choose these places/people/experiences?
    b) What do they have in common?
    c) When you look back at those places, what feelings arise?
    d) What makes these particular places/people/experiences home for you?
    e) Is there any object do you carry while moving from […] to […] to […]?
    f) Is there any kind of activity do you preserve across these places?

**Experiences in Switzerland**

12) What new activities did you add in your daily life in Switzerland?

13) What is concretely difficult in adjusting to Switzerland?

*E.g. Migration-Mobility Survey-based questions:*

*14)* In the survey, to the question of “to what extent do you have a feeling of attachment to Switzerland”, you replied […] in a scale from 0 to 7 (0 being no feeling of attachment and 7 strong feeling of attachment) and to question of having a feeling of attachment to your country of origin you replied […]. Can you please tell me more why did you chose […] to Switzerland and […] to your country of origin?

15) Overall, how is Switzerland different from previous countries you lived?

## Meanings of RIM

16) What has changed from your first move to this one?

17) How has mobility transformed you, in general?

## Future

18) Where do you plan to move next? Why?

19) Where and how do you imagine the future of your children?
    a) Would you like them to continue moving?

*Ending question:*

20) Can you give some advice for frequently moving families?

## Conclusion

- Would you like to add anything?
- Do you have any other questions or comments?
- Would you like to be updated on the results of the research?

# Appendix D - Weighted and unweighted frequencies of subgroups

Unweighted

| subgroup | Freq. | Percent | Cum. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 919 | 15.39 | 15.39 |
| 2 | 751 | 12.57 | 27.96 |
| 3 | 321 | 5.37 | 33.33 |
| 4 | 498 | 8.34 | 41.67 |
| 5 | 1,298 | 21.73 | 63.4 |
| 999 | 2,186 | 36.6 | 100 |
| Total | 5,973 | 100 | |

Weighted

| subgroup | Freq. | Percent | Cum. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 57,620 | 12.55 | 12.55 |
| 2 | 58,742 | 12.8 | 25.35 |
| 3 | 23,695 | 5.16 | 30.51 |
| 4 | 33,788 | 7.36 | 37.87 |
| 5 | 98,819 | 21.53 | 59.4 |
| 999 | 186,374 | 40.6 | 100 |
| Total | 459,038 | 100 | |