The contradictory condition of ‘homelessness’ in the life of the transnational professional

Gabriela Whitehead

Department of Communication, Marketing and Media, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK

ABSTRACT
This paper explores the condition of ‘homelessness’ as self-represented by a particular category of skilled professionals, who in the pursuit of work have relocated internationally more than once. The argument proposed is that, as a result of their highly mobile lifestyle, these transnational professionals experience ambiguous feelings regarding their notion of home, considered as a source of direction and stability associated with a given place or culture. Drawing on 48 personal narratives, this paper examines how the notion of home is manifested as part of the life of the transnational professional. The analysis follows the approach of intertextuality to identify associations with certain archetypal tales and novels associated with individual displacement. The findings show contradictory references to a sense of homelessness, which in the context of work is perceived as an ideal attitude, whereas in the private sphere generates negative feelings of self-alienation.

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Introduction
The aim of this paper is to explore the condition of ‘homelessness’ as self-represented by the transnational professional. The term transnational professional as used here refers to a particular category of skilled professionals who, in the pursuit of work opportunities, have relocated internationally more than once and who intended to continue to move globally at the time this study was carried out. The argument put forward is that these transnational professionals experience ambiguous feelings regarding their notion of home, which is considered on the one hand as a source of direction and stability associated with a given place or culture, but which at the same time is weakened by the continuous change of locality involved in the life of the transnational professional because it results in ephemeral relationships with place and the local community. Drawing upon the narratives of these transnational professionals, this paper suggests that, as a part of their work-life experiences, they sense a ‘contradictory condition of homelessness’ which encompasses self-perceptions of a heroic status alongside negative feelings of self-alienation.

The mobility of the transnational professional differs from traditional migration in that the former primarily perceives the host location as temporary rather than a place in which they seek to reside on a permanent basis (D’Andrea 2006; Nowicka 2007; Ossman 2004). Host locality refers to the country in which the individual lives and works at a given time, so it is considered as a stable place of residency during a defined period of time. Following this, the life of the transnational professional necessarily involves a series of host localities. It is important to note that the kind of mobility here examined is embedded with a sense of willingness, meaning that it is initiated by personal agency rather than a

CONTACT Gabriela Whitehead g.whitehead@rgu.ac.uk

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response to external circumstances, as is the case with other forms of individual mobility in modern society (e.g. refugees and economic migrants). Moreover, the mobility of this category of skilled professionals can be considered as privileged, because employment, hence individual economic stability, is secured in the host location before mobility takes place.

On the basis that transnational professionals actively seek job opportunities abroad, this paper follows the view that international experience is perceived by the individuals as an important asset in the construction of their corporate career (Dickmann and Baruch 2011; Doherty and Dickmann 2009). The interest here is to contribute to the existing literature on mobile professionals by focussing on people’s attitudes towards their idea of home. It falls beyond the scope of this paper to explore the extent to which international experience gained by employees results in financial gains for the corporation in which they work.

Drawing on 48 personal narratives, this paper critically explores how the idea of home is represented as part of the life of the transnational professional and identifies the narrative elements used to construct such representations. A personal narrative is a unique composition of past events, characters and experiences of an individual history (Boje 2001; Czarniawska 2004). In constructing the narrative, the narrator consciously or unconsciously incorporates different narrative elements, such as other texts and discourses, to express a particular perspective or intention (Gabriel 2004). Archetypes are narrative elements used for the plotting of a narrative to communicate meaning; they provide the narrator with a shared frame of reference for the understanding and self-representation of different aspects of life (Brunel 1992; Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2012).

The analysis of the narratives adopts the methodological approach of intertextuality to trace patterns of emplotment that draw upon existing or prior texts (Boje 2001; Czarniawska 2004; Fairclough 2006). In particular, the analysis examines the use of archetypal characters and prototypical plots as represented in certain archetypal tales and novels associated with individual displacement, whether physical or emotional. Specifically, the analysis draws upon the ideal of home as presented in the archetypal plot of Homer’s Odyssey, the sense of self-alienation as illustrated in The Metamorphosis by Kafka and in the legend of The Flying Dutchman, and the archetype of the wanderer as depicted in Eichendorff’s story Life of a Good-for-Nothing. These texts were chosen to support the analysis of the narratives because they contain narrative elements relevant to the idea of homelessness as put forward in this paper, particularly the change or transformation of the traditional values of fixity and rootedness associated with the notion of home as the individual attempts to adopt continuous international mobility as a form of life.

The intertextual relations between the archetypes and the narratives presented here are based on the references to shared assumptions and common beliefs concerning geographical displacement and relationships to place, which are traced to the functional as well as the moral dimensions attributed to certain archetypal figures and plots (Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2012). At the same time, the analysis of the representations of international travel is framed by the corporate discourse of individual global mobility, as part of the wider context of modern corporations in which the transnational professional moves. A review of this discourse is presented in the next section. This is followed by the methodological approach of the analysis, the overview of the sample of transnational professionals and the methods used to collect their personal narrative. The analysis offers extracts of the narratives to illustrate the findings in terms of the discursive themes identified in the texts, whilst the discussion focuses on these findings. The conclusions in the final section complete the paper.

**The corporate discourse of individual global mobility**

Mobility has become one of the main class-stratifying factors of modern society, as the ability to change and adapt puts certain individuals at the top of the hierarchy in relation to those who are rooted to place or locally fixed (Bauman 2000). Those who oscillate between such extremes are in ‘a state of permanent anxiety about being disconnected, rejected, abandoned on the spot by
those who move around’ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007, 364). The perceived social deprivation associated with the immobility of the spatially settled is reinforced by the pervasive gloss which contemporary globalization puts on the mobility of the ‘nomadic elite’ by associating this elite with social promotion, advancement and success, and subsequently directing people’s desire towards a life ‘on the move’ (Bauman 2000).

This paper considers the transnational professional as part of the nomadic elite, because the corporate context in which they move provides a sort of protective environment regarding economic stability and professional development (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007). From this standpoint, value is measured by the individual’s readiness to be physically and intellectually mobile; the sacrifice of lifetime projects, such as a profession or a marriage, is considered as a ‘form of investment’ to sustain the ability to remain available and flexible (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007). This view generally opposes the principles of stability and rootedness characteristic of previous stages of capitalism and encourages the detachment from the local as well as the renouncement of longstanding links (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007; Harvey 1990). In such an environment, individual mobility is associated with positive and even glorified metaphors of flux, freedom and boundary crossing through the ways in which they encompass the changes occurred in the capitalist forms of production and consumption (Bauman 2000; Boltanski and Chiapello 2007).

This representation of the mobile individual relates to the perceived spatial and temporal compression provoked by contemporary globalization, which contributes to the dissolution of the illusory relationship between identity and nation-state, and between self and place (Harvey 1990; Sloterdijk 2013). Such intense compression has changed the ways in which individuals perceive and interpret the world, resulting in a ‘disorienting and disruptive impact’ on all aspects of social life (Harvey 1990, 284). Within this context, Sloterdijk (2013) refers to the ‘self without place’ as a condition of modernity, meaning that the sense of collective unity is generated through the construction of imaginary communities, which are formed and sustained outside the subjective and actual boundaries of a given locality. The term imagined community was originally coined in 1983 by Benedict Anderson to describe nations (Anderson 2006, 6); from his perspective, a nation is imagined because it is created in the mind of the individuals who consider themselves as members of the nation’s community.

In the context of modern corporations, the discourse of individual mobility often draws upon idealized representations of international travel and subjective detachment from place, notions that relate to other salient discourses such as ‘being global’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’ (Whitehead and Halsall 2016). For instance, Nowicka and Kaweh (2009) argue that ‘cosmopolitan ideas’ as used within certain international institutions influence the way individuals make sense of their reality and relate to culturally different others. The authors note that being part of international organizations is generally perceived by individuals as an ‘important step’ in their professional career, because it is perceived as the means to move across cultural borders. Nowicka and Kaweh (2009) conclude that cosmopolitanism is not only an aspiration embedded in the social positions and the institutional context of the international professional, but also ‘a way of giving sense to some daily struggles in an unfamiliar environment’ (Nowicka and Kaweh 2009, 68).

Similarly, Colic-Peisker (2010) examines how global mobility represents, for the individual, an opportunity to develop ‘cosmopolitan credentials’ because it facilitates cross-cultural connectivity and the establishment of international networks. Career, in this environment, provides a sense of continuity and structure for the mobile professional that may serve as substitute for the traditional view that identity construction and sense of belonging are fixed to a defined geopolitical territory (Colic-Peisker 2010).

The notion of home for the transnational professional

Studies concerned with globally mobile professionals sometimes draw upon characteristics traditionally attributed to nomadic communities as a source for metaphorical descriptions of geographical
displacement and relationships to place. For example, D’Andrea (2006, 97) proposes the theory of ‘neo-nomadism’ to address the ‘hypermobility’ of individuals in contemporary society, characterized by a convergence of economic strategies and lifestyles that structure the social life of individuals who claim to embrace the global as a ‘new home’. According to D’Andrea (2006), these ‘global nomads’ reject the rigidity of their ethnic or national origin, meaning that they do not have feelings of nostalgia for their homeland. This portrayal of a ‘deterritorialized nature’ of the mobile individual is presented as a positive sense of homelessness because it opposes the hegemonic conventions and traditional values of fixity and rootedness.

Meerwarth (2008, 113) uses the term ‘nomadic worker’ to refer to those individuals who, in order to accomplish work, follow repetitive and structured patterns of geographical mobility, temporarily grounding themselves in different places. Meerwarth (2008) explores the changes in behaviours or adjustments involved in the mobile lifestyle concerning the relationships with the social and physical environment. He finds that the meaning of home is no longer limited to a given location but extended to places in which particular people, objects and activities are situated (Meerwarth 2008). From a similar perspective, Nowicka (2007) argues that highly mobile professionals perceive home as a network of social relations, objects and familiar environments that can be spatially and temporally dispersed. The private space called home is constantly reconfigured as new locations and social relations become part of the ‘transnational connections’ that make up such space. On this basis, Nowicka (2007, 83) describes home as a ‘flexible space in-becoming’ that, in an abstract sense, can move with the individual since it is ‘located anywhere and everywhere’.

Butcher (2010) challenges the ideas of ‘belonging everywhere’ and ‘being a global citizen’ related to the highly mobile lifestyle, arguing that individuals are confronted by the need to associate their sense of ‘being at home’ with a given place in order to manage the feelings of unsettlement generated by their continuous mobility. Butcher (2010) suggests that fixing home to the imagined or real characteristics of an unfamiliar location provides individuals with feelings of security and familiarity. This process of ‘re-placing’ home represents for the individual a stabilizing weight amid changing frames of reference, thus confronting the notions of fluidity and cosmopolitanism attributed to transnational movement (Butcher 2010).

**International experience in the context of contemporary careers**

Geographical mobility as part of the individual’s working life is often represented in the literature of careers as the means to develop ‘career capital’, understood as knowledge and skills that are believed to be highly valued in the labour market (Doherty and Dickmann 2009). One of the associated ideas found in the literature is the concept of the ‘boundaryless career’ (Defillippi and Arthur 1994). In general terms, the notion refers to the individual’s ability to transcend traditional organizational arrangements or boundaries, considered within dimensions of physical or psychological mobility (Arthur and Rousseau 2001). These boundaries may be objective, as for instance among fields of work, organizations and countries, or subjective, such as those perceived between the domains of work and family. Boundaryless career principles are oriented towards self-directed career paths as opposed to organization-managed careers. Individuals are encouraged to seek ‘psychological success’ in their changing work settings and to rely more on their personal talents and potentials in their search for employment (Arthur and Rousseau 2001; Defillippi and Arthur 1994).

This view relates to the ideology of neoliberalism and the emphasis the latter places on people’s responsibility for their social and economic success or failure, rather than being the result of the system’s properties (Whitehead and Halsall 2016). This is noted, for example, by Roper, Ganesh, and Inkson (2010) in their study of the boundaryless careers discourse as represented in the academic literature. According to the authors, these texts generally accept the normalization of the view that individuals must take maximum responsibility for their own career outcome (Roper, Ganesh, and Inkson 2010, 668). This support, whether tacit or unconscious, is manifested by a lack of critical
recognition of the unequal power relations and the economic interests embedded in the discourse (Roper, Ganesh, and Inkson 2010).

Another influential idea associated with employee mobility is the concept of ‘protean career’ (Hall 2002). The notion draws upon metaphorical representations of the archetypal character Proteus in Greek mythology who, as depicted in Homer’s (1980) poem the Odyssey, can change shape at will in order to survive. Following this archetype of self-transformation, the construction of a protean career generally refers to the individual’s ability to ‘reinvent themselves’ and shape their identity to adopt the changes in the contemporary work environment (Hall 2002). In the same manner, the skill to ‘reshape’ thinking and behaviour to be more sympathetic and act appropriately in respect to the culture of others is considered as a valuable competence of the global manager (Thomas and Inkson 2004). For instance, some studies concerned with internationally mobile professionals agree that possessing a ‘protean attitude’ can be considered as a type of career capital, as it can positively influence career success and satisfaction (Cao, Hirschi, and Deller 2012; Mäkelä et al. 2016). However, other studies note that following a protean career can also generate negative feelings for the individual in terms of psychological well-being (Briscoe et al. 2012) and job security (Roper, Ganesh, and Inkson 2010).

It is this ambiguity between professional advantages accrued and negative individual feelings which forms the ‘contradictory condition of homelessness’ explored in the narratives of transnational professionals in this paper. The notion of protean career is an example of how archetypes as narrative aids interlace different texts on a temporal continuum (Fairclough 2006), in this case the Odyssey and career literature. This paper identifies this sort of intertextual connections between the sample of personal narratives from transnational professionals and certain archetypal tales and novels associated with individual displacement.

**The study**

**Narrative analysis: intertextuality**

The analysis is situated within the methodological framework of narrative analysis, with a particular emphasis on intertextuality. The term intertextuality was first introduced by Kristeva (1980) to describe her idea that a text redistributes language in a ‘destructive-constructive’ manner, a view that refers to the quality of texts to both construct and subvert meaning. According to this approach, a text contains various utterances which are taken from other texts and intersect and neutralize one another as they are linguistically incorporated (Kristeva 1980, 36). This abstract relationship of texts occurs in a wider social and historical dimension, interlacing past, present and anticipated texts (Boje 2001; Fairclough 2006). Intertextuality transforms texts as they come to be incorporated as part of the production of a new text, which in turn is distributed and used as reference for the constitution of other kind of texts (Fairclough 2006). As Barthes (1977) advocates, intertextuality is not the tracing of the ‘origins’ of a text but rather the ‘citations’ that make up a text and which are ‘anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read’ (160).

The intertextual analysis in this paper follows the critical approach assumed by Fairclough (2006) and Boje (2001), who suggest that texts incorporate shared conventions and hegemonic assumptions that seek to perpetuate dominant ideologies. This approach partially relates to the structuralist view in that texts contain traces of other texts as well as structural features intended to impose order and unity to the narrative. For example, the structure of a narrative is founded on the function that certain actions carried out by one or more characters have in the overall meaning of the text, such as actions that are rendered ‘heroic’ or ‘villainous’ in relation to the significance of the story (Barthes 1977; Czarniawska 2004). A particular discourse, in this case the corporate discourse of individual global mobility, can be considered as a sort of structural principle that is incorporated in personal narratives, whether consciously or subconsciously, as a frame of reference to render past experiences meaningful and coherent (Fairclough 2006). Following this, the analysis presented here identifies references to
other texts on a temporal continuum, namely narrative archetypes and prototypical plots, and seeks relations to discourses associated with individual global mobility. These narrative elements are then examined for the ways in which they are used in the narratives to construct the meaning of home.

Archetypes as narrative aids

Archetypes can be considered as structural principles used for the plotting of a personal narrative or textual unfolding of events, as they provide the individual with a frame of reference for the understanding and self-representation of different aspects of life (Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2012). This view sees narratives as intertwined with one another through underlying associations that draw upon prototypical interpretations which concern the function and moral dimension certain actions and events have in a given story (Barthes 1977). Following Jungian psychology, archetypes are a ‘collective unconscious’ from which individuals subconsciously obtain the source of their dreams, delusions and symbolic material used for the creation of religious, cultural and mythical texts (Brunel 1992; Jung 1990).

In a study of literary myths, Brunel (1992) argues that stories always contain, to different extents, some representations or particular features that correspond to one or more archetypes. Following the ideas advocated by Carl Jung, Brunel (1992, 111–117) proposes that the meaning of the term archetype can be considered from three different dimensions: as a prototype, as an ideal model and as the supreme type. An archetype is a ‘prototype’ or the original conception or symbol of something because the characteristic features provide a sort of matrix for future representations of themselves from one text to another, according to the imagination and subjectivity of the narrators who consciously or unconsciously draw upon them. For example, original or prototypical plots are romantic, tragic, comedic or ironic (Boje 2001; Brunel 1992).

An archetype is also an ‘ideal model’ understood as a preconception against which actions and characters are measured. This perspective refers to the image recreated by an archetype rather than to the original instance that it represents. For example, an archetypal figure as an ideal ‘heroic’ model is embedded with knowledge and virtues that are unique to the individual and that are used as a reference for the interpretation of other texts. In the case of management and organizational narratives, Boje (2001, 27) notes that they typically have a romantic plot in which the figure of the chief executive is pervasively represented as the hero in the story.

The third dimension put forward by Brunel (1992) corresponds to the archetype as the ‘supreme type’. This metaphysical perspective refers to absolute and perfect images that are reproduced through language. The archetype is the essential point from which all other representations generate, despite their particular circumstances and context. It is universal and instinctive knowledge that transcends the personal psyche and so it is spontaneously shared among individuals as a sort of permanent structure to organize their reality (Brunel 1992; Jung 1990).

Although this paper considers archetypes as conveying a structural principle that underlies how transnational professionals understand and represent the notion of home, they are not assumed as a definitive form through which all texts can be analysed. Rather, archetypes are here considered as a narrative element that the individuals use, whereas consciously or subconsciously, to plot events, actions and characters associated with their highly mobile lifestyle in order to render their narrative consonant with their intentions.

Personal narratives

A personal narrative or life story can be defined as a text that involves meaningful representations of past events, characters and experiences of an individual history (Boje 2001; Czarniawska 2004). It is a text produced by the individual who inhabited or lived the story rather than being narrated by someone else (Boje 2001; Czarniawska 2004). The narrator or storyteller can mould, twist, embellish and omit events or facts to portray a given perspective or intention. The interest of narrative analysis is thus to explore how events are textually interrelated and adapted to express particular negotiations
of meaning, but which may be subconsciously contradicted, reflecting a certain amount of inconsistency in the narrative as intended by the narrator (Gabriel 2004).

This is what Cohn (1978) refers to as ‘consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ self-narration. In dissonant self-narration the narrator evaluates and interprets the actions, characters and experiences being narrated, whether in consonant self-narration past events are reproduced through the expression of feelings and opinions that are less critical. Consonant self-narration and dissonant self-narration result from the conscious or subconscious incorporation of information or comments that sustain or contradict the accordance among different parts of the narrative, and which may transform its overall sense (Cohn 1978).

The sample of transnational professionals
The study draws on 48 personal narratives collected between 2010 and 2011 from transnational professionals located in different parts of the world. The term transnational professional as used here refers to those individuals who in the pursuit of work opportunities have relocated internationally more than once, and intended to continue to move globally at the time this study was carried out. This category of professionals had secured employment in the host location before each move, meaning that the latter is defined by corporate demands and job availability.

The study was advertised in online discussion forums in two online social networks concerned with international mobility (namely LinkedIn and InterNations). These websites are available to a worldwide audience, rather than to the members of local communities or groups supporting private interests. To meet ethical considerations, the author disclosed her identity in the forums, explained the academic purpose of the discussions and assured the anonymity of the participants. English was the common language between the author, who is a Spanish native speaker, and the participants in the study, who are of different national origin, including English speaking countries.

Approximately 80% of the participants manifested their interest through the online discussion forums; the remaining 20% approached the author via email. Purposeful sampling was used to achieve a diverse group of participants in terms of gender, age, country of origin, profession and family situation, while ensuring homogeneity in terms of the highly mobile lifestyle adopted by the participants. The narratives were gathered using interviews (16) and online discussion forums (32). These methods are explained below.

The narrative interviews
The narrative interview allows individuals to construct a unique composition of events, actions and characters situated within the context of their own life history (Czarniawska 2004). Interviews that aim at life stories generally focus on how individuals impose order on the flow of experience, the linguistic and cultural resources they draw upon, and how these are put together to communicate meaning (Fairclough 2006).

The narrative interviews took place via Skype, email and traditional telephone; in each case the method was selected by the interviewee. The interviews were carried out in two stages during which the same sample was interviewed twice with a 12-month period in between each interview; this was to consider potential changes in attitudes towards the mobile lifestyle. The spoken interviews lasted an average of 80 minutes and those via email lasted an average of six days. All the interviews were recorded under informed consent from the interviewee, the transcripts were made within one week following the interview and the average length on paper was 10 pages per interview (voice and email).

Out of the 16 interviews, 5 were carried out in Spanish, which is the native language of the author, where this was a common native language between the author and interviewee. The remaining 11 interviews were carried out in English which served as a common second language between the author and interviewee. The interviews conducted in Spanish were translated into English during the transcription process. The quality of the data collected for the analysis was not compromised by the use of English as the common language in this study. This is because the qualitative style
of the interviews provided the interviewees with an opportunity to construct elaborated answers, in ways in which their intended meaning was clear for the author. The demographic characteristics of the sample of transnational professionals are presented in Table 1 (fictional names are used to protect the identity of the participants).

**The online discussion forums**

A total of nine online forums were created in LinkedIn and InterNations. The forums were maintained active for 12 months. The maintenance of the forums meant that the author as well as the contributors participated regularly in the discussions. The themes of the discussions were related to the notion of global mobility in the pursuit of work opportunities, which was in accordance with the overall orientation of the online social networks in which the forums were contained. All communications in the forums took place in English, which is the standard language used in these websites. The narratives of this sample were chosen on the basis of the richness of the data collected in terms of the length and the depth of the narrators’ account of their own life story.

The sample comprises 32 narratives collected from 10 female participants and 22 male participants. The countries of origin of these participants are Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Nepal, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The demographic variables of profession, age and family situation were not offered by all the contributors. This is not a limitation of the study because the unity of the sample is based on their mobile lifestyle. Nonetheless, examining the narratives on the basis of the diversity of variables can be of interest for further research (e.g. see Vance and McNulty 2014).

**The findings**

The analysis identified how the notion of home is manifested in the narratives in relation to the overall sense of the text as well as in relation to the other narratives of the sample. In addition, the analysis identified the narrative elements and discourses used by the narrator to render events, characters and experiences meaningful, and how these narrative elements and discourses are textually interlaced with certain narrative archetypes and prototypical plots associated with individual mobility. The corporate discourse of global mobility is considered in the analysis as a source for metaphorical representations of international travel and subjective detachment from place, as it is part of the wider social context in which the individuals live and work. The sections below are organized following the common themes identified in the narratives. Extracts from the narratives are

| Participant | Country of origin | Profession | Age | Family situation |
|-------------|-------------------|------------|-----|-----------------|
| Leslie      | Australia         | Information Technology | 34  | Single          |
| Hannah      | Denmark           | Marketing and Sales | 37  | Single          |
| Christelle  | France            | Research and Development | 23  | Single          |
| Leris       | Malaysia          | Banking and Finance | 32  | Single          |
| Laura       | Mexico            | Marketing and Sales | 27  | Single          |
| Sonia       | Trinidad and Tobago | Education    | 39  | Single          |
| Jenny       | UK                | Marketing and Sales | 33  | Single          |
| Katya       | USA               | Marketing and Sales | 44  | Single          |
| Carlos      | Argentina         | Marketing and Sales | 36  | Married         |
| Daniel      | Canada            | Engineering  | 37  | Single          |
| Ron         | Taiwan            | Banking and Finance | 36  | Married, 2 children |
| Ian         | UK                | Banking and Finance | 54  | Married, 1 child |
| Raymond     | USA               | Marketing and Sales | 61  | Married, 2 children |
| Luis        | Venezuela         | Marketing and Sales | 43  | Single          |
| David       | Venezuela         | Information Technology | 35  | Married         |
| Marco       | Venezuela         | Engineering  | 34  | Single          |

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample of transnational professionals.
offered to exemplify these findings. The extracts from the sample of narratives collected from the discussion forums have the word ‘forum’ following the fictional name of the participant.

**The duality ‘mobile-sedentary’ as a narrative element**

A common feature identified across the narratives is the categorization of mobile professionals in relation to their sedentary counterparts, based on personal qualities and attitudes which generally imbue the former with a marked sense of elitism: ‘I think people who travel a lot and have lived in different places develop the skills of openness and flexibility to get around more easily in the world’ (Richard-forum). In this extract, the notions of ‘openness’ and ‘flexibility’ are consistent with the corporate discourse of global mobility in that they are used to support the belief that transnational travel is a desirable form of action in contemporary society. According to the narrator, they are required skills to ‘get around more easily in the world’. The expression ‘more easily’ carries the idea that global mobility involves a degree of ‘difficulty’ for those individuals who lack international experience. This is further exemplified in the following extract from a different narrative:

> We like to think of ourselves as being perhaps more flexible than the average person, more willing to take risks and perhaps more willing to engage in more cultures than most people. (*Raymond*)

The ideas of being ‘more flexible’, ‘more willing to take risks’ and ‘more willing to engage in more cultures’ are presented in this text as positive qualities of the mobile individual. These are used to differentiate the narrator as part of the class of the globally mobile professional (‘we’), from a wider category that seems to include all other individuals (‘the average person’, ‘most people’). The value of global mobility in people’s lives is thus measured against the image of the sedentary individual, which reinforces the perceived social hierarchy associated with the immobility of the spatially settled (Bauman 2000). This ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 2006; Sloterdijk 2013) of the mobile professional is constructed in the narratives based on a shared lifestyle and attitudes towards place, rather than by the locality in which individuals dwell.

Another salient characteristic that recurs in the narratives is the portrayal of the motivation to initially relocate outside the country of origin as a personal objective. This is often presented through idealized associations of international travel with notions of liberty and self-growth, as the following quote shows:

> What I’m doing is to discover what there is in the world. I don’t want to stay with these visions so narrow about what is normal […] I want to know different ways of thinking, meet different people and widen my horizons. This knowledge redefines my values and my way of seeing life. (*Laura*)

The expression ‘to discover the world’ in this extract draws upon ideas of flux, freedom and boundary crossing, which emphasise the gloss contemporary globalization puts on the mobile elite (Bauman 2000). Moreover, the idea of discovery refers to individual agency. Mobility is motivated by a personal desire rather than as a result of external circumstances, such as economic crisis or political disputes, as it is the case of other forms of individual displacement in modern society.

The portrayal of ‘the world’ as presented across the narratives relates to the figure of ‘the wanderer’. The wanderer is a Romantic archetype of liberation that refers to people’s transcendence of the traditional boundaries of the parochial, bourgeois environment in which they live (i.e. ‘the local’ context of home). For example, in the story *Life of a Good-for-Nothing*, by Joseph von Eichendorff, the wanderer motif represents the ideal of freedom from traditional intellectual and artistic models (Cusack 2008, 222). *Life of a Good-for-Nothing* is the story of a young man who wanders away from his family home to seek his fortune out into the world. He wanders from place to place towards Italy in search of what he believes is exciting and different in comparison to the ordinary context of his native village in Germany. The protagonist in Eichendorff’s story feels an overwhelming desire to ‘be on the go’, always daydreaming of future travels. To travel is the fantasy of being
somewhere else, despite having realized that everyday life in distant places can also be monotonous and ordinary once the excitement provoked by the new and unfamiliar has passed.

In the case of the extract above, the notion of rootedness, in terms of the narrator’s relationship with her own culture, is depicted as an obstacle to professional success and personal development (‘these visions so narrow about what is normal’). Conversely, the notion of homelessness, in terms of geographical displacement and subjective detachment from a given culture and place, is presented as a personal competence through positive associations with ideas of flexibility (‘redefine my values’) and autonomy (‘what I’m doing’).

The narrator’s ‘heroic’ status as a globally mobile professional

The duality ‘global-local’ identified in the narratives draws upon certain archetypal plots of travel, exploration and conquest that serve to imbue the narrator with a sort of ‘heroic status’ on the basis of his/her ability to be internationally mobile. This heroic status can be understood from the perspective of the hero as an adventurer as proposed by Campbell (2004). Campbell (2004) refers to the ‘call to adventure’ as the motive that drives the hero to embark on a mythological journey. The hero, ‘summoned by destiny’, sacrifices the sense of security of a familiar environment in order to explore the ‘unknown’. In the following extract, for example, the narrator refers to her decision to relocate internationally as a sort of ‘superior calling’:

I came to realise that the culture and the environment around me was starting to feel very limited. I wanted to branch out professionally […] when I got the offer to move I almost instinctively knew that I had to take it. I mean, I was terrified initially, but I knew that it would open a new life for me. I also knew that once I left home I would never go back. (Sonia)

The expression of an ‘instinctive’ desire to move abroad is an example of how certain discourses, in this case the corporate discourse of global mobility, infiltrate the everyday life of individuals (Fairclough 2006). In the extract, global mobility represents an ideal the narrator naturally aspires to achieve, despite feeling ‘terrified’ of renouncing the security of the familial environment of her home country. To become a transnational professional is presented as an assumption in the sense that it is not questioned by the narrator.

The notion of ‘branching out professionally’ positively represents the global as a source of opportunities in comparison to the limiting context of the local. This relates to the utopian message of the global as promoted by the ideology of neoliberalism, which carries promises of freedom, equality and progress (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007; Harvey 1990). However, it is a contradictory element in the text because it is at the same time presented as an aspiration and as a necessity for the narrator. In terms of the career literature, this representation of the duality global-local reinforces the idea that international experience constitutes a valuable asset for the individual (Dickmann and Baruch 2011; Doherty and Dickmann 2009). However, in the narrative sense, dissonance occurs in the expression ‘I would never go back’ as it contradicts the archetypal hero whose journey is traditionally completed by his return having survived the ‘impact of the world’ (Campbell 2004, 209).

Metaphorical representations of mobility away from home in the quest for new experiences can be related, for example, to the archetypal plot of the Odyssey (Homer 1980). The Odyssey narrates the return to home of Odysseus after the 10 years of absence that followed the defeat of the Trojans. The Odyssey is primarily seen as a journey driven by the nostalgia for home (Gabriel 2003), ‘an overwhelming yearning for home […] no matter how poorly it compares with the wonders that are discovered along the way’ (621). In the Odyssey, as well as in later representations and associations in the literature, the heroic image of Odysseus is based on a series of stories that recount the dangers, adventures and discoveries that fill his trajectory or journey (Gabriel 2003). In the narratives, a metaphorical representation of the ‘dangers’ in the life of the transnational professional is found in the challenges the individuals encounter as they move from one country to another (‘the unknown’), such as to learn a new language and adapt to different cultures.
The ‘split’ of the self: contradictory work-family experiences

References to contradictory work-life experiences in the life of the transnational professional are common in the narratives. The narrators self-represent as in control of their own mobility by regulating all aspects in their mobile lifestyle, which involves trade-offs that generate some kind of improvement for the individual. However, this is opposed by certain comments and opinions that indicate negative feelings and undesired consequences of continuous global mobility, as the extract below exemplifies:

I have been ‘feeding’ the professional part of me, the part that wants to see and conquer the world. But the part of me that wants to be close to my family and friends [...] has been suffering. (Hannah)

In this extract, the consonant-self, portrayed through the heroic intentions of the narrator to ‘see and conquer the world’, is deconstructed and the dissonant-self is presented in the inner ‘split’ manifested in the comment ‘I have been feeding the professional part of me’. The narrator evaluates the struggle her mobile lifestyle provokes, represented as a divided-self in the sense that one side has achieved success (‘feeding’ her professional ambition) at the expense of the other (the ‘suffering’ of her personal relationships). This condition is contradictory because the sacrifice of leaving home to embark on a journey ‘to see and conquer the world’ results in negative feelings, rather than enriching the protagonist as happens with the archetypal hero (Campbell 2004; Kostera 2012).

A similar image is found in another narrative as the perceived gains continuous global mobility generates in the context of work are compared against the perceived losses in the private sphere: ‘the capital I have invested [in my life] is not to have a stable romantic relationship, so it’s one thing for another’ (Laura). This idea can be related to Michel Foucault’s (2008, 226) argument that the neoliberal doctrine treats the worker as an ‘entrepreneur of himself’ based on how individuals use or shape the resources available to them, including the ability to be mobile and their behaviour regarding family: ‘being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of his earnings’. In the literature of careers, this approach refers to the notions of boundaryless and protean careers as they emphasize people’s ability to manage their professional path as well as the development of personal skills (Arthur and Rousseau 2001; Mäkelä et al. 2016.

Although the narratives widely place a positive emphasis on the view of international travel as the means to achieve personal growth and career advancement, dissonance occurs in the references to repetitive international relocations as an ‘endless’ cycle in the life of the transnational professional. The next comment exemplifies this: ‘I knew I wanted to see the world but I didn’t think I would keep doing it for ten years’ (Leslie). In consonant self-narration, the narrator describes the motives of her actions as an innate desire for adventures. However, in dissonant self-narration, the narrator assumes a rather critical view of her continuous mobility, feeling almost ‘cursed’ to wander eternally, as it was not part of her initial life-plan (‘I didn’t think I would keep doing it for ten years’).

A related archetypal element is found in the legend of The Flying Dutchman, according to which a sea captain who in his quest for self-enrichment is doomed to sail forever, condemned by the devil to never bring his vessel to harbour (Pelzer 2004). The myth of The Flying Dutchman is considered to represent discontent with modernity and the loss of stable frames of reference for the individual’s sense of identity. The story symbolizes society moving away from the order provided by traditional ways of thinking and established cultural structures, resulting in the loss of a ‘harbour’ where the individuals can anchor their systems of meaning (Pelzer 2004, 143).

In the case of the narratives, the expressed intention to become internationally mobile in the pursuit of new experiences is opposed by dissonant feelings of being ‘eternally castaway’ from what the participants consider as home. Moreover, the idea of never-ending mobility is in some of the narratives directly associated with traditional forms of nomadism, as found for instance in the next comment:

I don’t see myself spinning around the world all my life. I like this life of adventure, but I guess that at some point I would want to settle down somewhere. (Carlos)
In this extract, global mobility (‘spinning around the world’) is used as a consonant element to sustain the narrator’s self-representation as an adventurer (‘I like this life of adventure’). However, global mobility becomes a dissonant element as the narrator presents it as a temporary condition in his life-plan (‘at some point I would want to settle down somewhere’). The idea of having a stable home fixed in a place is consistent with traditional sedentary values, which in the comment above is expressed as an assumed expectation in one’s life (‘I guess that’). This finding supports the argument put forward by Butcher (2010), according to which highly mobile individuals are confronted with the need to associate their sense of ‘being at home’ with a particular place.

The need to ‘always be somewhere else’

To relocate internationally is described in the narratives as a sort of persistent need to be globally mobile. For example, in the next comment the narrator describes global mobility as a ‘drug’ to which she has become addicted: ‘I think travelling around and working in different places is like a drug, some people do it for some time and then stop, other people cannot find out how to stop’ (Leslie). The drug metaphor is a dissonant element in the extract because it is used to depict continuous global mobility as an undesired need that controls or dominates the narrator’s life. On this view, the narrator seems to become a ‘victim’ of her own mobility, in the sense that mobility generates the need for more mobility; like a drug that is difficult to resist. This is further exemplified by the following quote from the same narrative:

I am happy here but I don’t feel like it’s home forever, but then I felt like this about London […] I had this sort of irrational love for London, but maybe it’s only me painting a worthy picture of it now that I am not there […] you always kind of want to be somewhere else, and that’s a big problem for me […] it’s a terrible condition that I have to overcome. (Leslie)

The reference to the desire to be continuously on the move as a ‘terrible condition’ challenges the heroic and adventurous elements associated in the narratives with international travel. As in the myth of The Flying Dutchman, the narrator is somewhat ‘condemned’ to wander eternally because the need to always be somewhere else means that no place will ever become a home in which to settle. In addition, the narrator’s reference of a persistent desire ‘to be somewhere else’ relates to the archetype of the wanderer as represented in Eichendorff’s story. To repeatedly relocate internationally seems to fulfil the narrator’s fantasy of moving away from what is familiar and ordinary, despite having realized that she feels the same in different places (‘maybe is only me painting a worthy picture of it’). This is manifested in the extract as a contradictory element because it opposes her value of being spatially settled (‘it’s a terrible condition that I have to overcome’).

Eichendorff’s lyrical narrative is considered as a critique of the confines of sedentary bourgeois society represented through the figure of the wanderer. It proclaims the individual’s liberty to be spontaneous and to seek pleasure in face of the pervasive rationality and uniformity that characterizes modernity (Cusack 2008, 226). However, in the narratives the wanderer motif represents a dissonant element because to wander opposes the portrayal of self-direction concerning the narrator’s own transnational mobility, which is consistent with the values of autonomy and self-entrepreneurship embedded in the discourses of boundaryless and protean careers (Defillippi and Arthur 1994; Hall 2002). This ambiguity in the life of the transnational professional is exemplified in the extract below; the narrator starts by providing justifications for her desire to change locations and ends by self-evaluating such a desire:

After four years I think I want to move, or I need to move, or there is something better, or there is something different […] I’m slowly realising that different countries will bring different things to you. There is never going to be a perfect place […] suddenly I’m looking at my life and thinking, ok, does this mean that three years from now I’m going to look again and think that I need to move? but why? What is it that I’m looking for that I haven’t found in three or four lives already? and if I change again, what is that place going to bring to me? (Sonia).
As in Eichendorff’s story, the narrator in the extract above believes that other countries may be better and different in a positive way than her current location, thus to relocate internationally is at the same time a desire and a necessity for her (‘I want to move, or I need to move’). The narrator justifies this view by making reference to the benefits she believes different places can offer (‘different countries will bring different things to you’). Global mobility is partly articulated as a consonant narrative element that sustains the narrator’s lifestyle, depicted as a self-structured life-plan to find places that ‘best suit her’ (‘what is that place probably going to bring to me?’). However, continuous mobility becomes a dissonant element as the narrator questions her own attitudes (‘why?’). In particular, the expression ‘what is it that I’m looking for’ is contradictory because it reflects the negative emotion of being ’doomed’ to wander eternally in the quest for a non-existent ideal place (‘there is never probably going to be a perfect place’).

**Personal transformation as a contradictory narrative element**

The notions of personal change and adaptability are often used in the narratives to describe a sort of personal transformation that refers to the narrator’s transition from being a sedentary individual to being a globally mobile professional. For instance, in the next extract, the transformational motif is incorporated as a positive element that sustains the narrator’s self-development: ‘I feel I’m more fluent culturally, that is, I know what’s normal and what’s not normal in different cultures’ (Daniel). However, as discussed above, to become a transnational professional is generally a contradictory narrative element because it is at the same time represented as an ideal form of behaviour and a negative condition in the narrator’s life. This is notably evident in the descriptions of work-life experiences, as the next extract shows:

They have converted me in a little soldier who is conditioned to accept these changes and who sees them as normal, because in the environment where I move [a multinational corporation] it’s seen as normal. Although others, for example my family in Mexico, they don’t see it so normal. There are also other circles in which doing this is not seen as a symbol of strength but as a symbol of total instability, of not knowing what one wants to achieve in life. (Laura)

The ‘corporate soldier’ is a dissonant narrative character because it emphasizes the narrator’s inability to manage all aspects of her globally mobile lifestyle. Being a corporate soldier positions the narrator as under the organization’s control, in the sense that the narrator’s actions are intended to respond to external interests rather than to her own motivations. The narrator assumes a critical perspective to evaluate the contradictory meanings of her mobile lifestyle in and outside the work context (‘family’, ‘other circles’). The character soldier is thus used to symbolize the narrator as being ‘conditioned’ by the organization for which she works, to adopt standardized attitudes within the setting of modern corporations. In addition, the view that in the workplace being a highly mobile individual is considered as normal relates to the argument that feelings of belonging to the community of the mobile provides the individual with a sense continuity and structure (Colic-Peisker 2010; Nowicka and Kaweh 2009). However, as the extract exemplifies, the individual dis-identifies from the corporate identity of the transnational professional as she becomes aware of a dissonance from her identity in the private domain.

The manifestation of the transformational motif recurs in the texts as a dissonant element to express feelings of self-alienation from what the narrator considers is normal, as shown in these two comments: ‘they actually see you as a strange element, as a weird bug’ (Luis); ‘I think you are supposed to settle down, you are not supposed to keep moving on like this, because it means that there is something weird about you’ (Leslie). These extracts depict a sort of self-transformation that results from continuous mobility, presented as a metaphorical metamorphosis of the self into a ‘weird bug’ in comparison to the normal sedentary individual.

This use of self-transformation as a narrative element relates to The Metamorphosis by Kafka ([1915] 2009). In the story, the protagonist character Gregor Samsa, who is a travelling salesman, wakes up one ordinary morning and realizes that he has mutated into an insect-like creature.
Gregor assumes his metamorphosis and attempts to carry out the everyday tasks of his working life; however, his family rejects the different other into which he has become. In Kafka’s story, the motif of self-transformation is a central narrative element that symbolizes people’s self-alienation that results from their struggle in meeting demands from contemporary society. This struggle is expressed through Gregor’s conscious feelings of self-estrangement that are finally visible to others as his body is also transformed (Sokel 2002, 219).

In the case of the narratives, the individuals are seen to assume their ‘metamorphosis’ as a new way of being, as expressed for instance in the comment: ‘being different becomes a normal feeling’ (Hannah). However, this is contradicted in a different part of the same text: ‘my mum considers this as one of the phases that I have to go through, that it will be over soon and I will go back and be normal’ (Hannah). To be normal in this extract means to be spatially sedentary; the counterpart of such a view is that to be always on the move is perceived as being out of the norm or different in a negative way.

A different representation of Kafka’s transformational motif is found in the perceived status of ‘outsider’ attributed to the narrator: ‘if you don’t show any sign of being a foreigner the local community will accept you, but if you start living the same life as back home you will always be ignored’ (Samuel-forum). This extract presents the notion of being a foreigner in a place as a negative condition which the narrator attempts to regulate by masking the outsider he actually is (i.e. not a local or native in the host locality). Adapting the self as presented in this extract is a positive manifestation of the condition of homelessness that relates to the cosmopolitan ideal of immersing oneself in the culture of the different other (Colic-Peisker 2010; Nowicka and Kaweh 2009). However, the text is contradictory because the comment of ‘being ignored’ by the other based on the narrator’s national origin and socio-cultural background reflects the traditional socio-cultural boundaries the neoliberal discourse of globalization claims to transcend (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007; Harvey 1990). As with Gregor in The Metamorphosis, the narrator assumes his transformation to adapt to his new environment, but this is at the expense of his sense of identity which is a negative manifestation of the condition of homelessness.

Although such a ‘protean ability’ (Hall 2002; Thomas and Inkson 2004) is represented in the narratives as the means for the transnational professional to attain a sense of belonging in the places in which they temporarily live and work (to be ‘accepted’ by the local), it is also manifested so as to provoke negative feelings of self-estrangement. This is exemplified in the next comment: ‘I don’t fit in […] everything is in German so I have to renounce my own culture, to put it in the background […] I don’t recognise myself’ (Christelle). This extract is dissonant self-narration as the narrator assumes a critical perspective of self-analysis, considering the adoption of the local language in her everyday life in the workplace as a sort of ‘renunciation the self’. To be able to speak the local language would generally be a consonant element in the narrative because it supports the cosmopolitan element in the life of the transnational professional as discussed above. However, as in Kafka’s story, the narrator’s feeling of self-alienation (‘I don’t recognise myself’) is contradictory because it reflects a loss of home as a frame of reference for her sense of identity.

Discussion

Continuous global mobility as a marker for identity construction

Individual global mobility is manifested across the narratives as a positive discourse that establishes a hierarchy in the duality ‘mobile-sedentary’ (Bauman 2000), thus serving as a marker for the narrator’s identity construction as a mobile professional. More specifically, international travel is represented in the texts as an ideal form of behaviour that at the same time justifies the narrators’ adoption of repetitive transnational relocation as a form of life and discursively differentiates them from their sedentary counterparts. It can be argued that the notion of being part of the imagined community (Anderson 2006; Sloterdijk 2013) of globally mobile individuals provides a frame
of reference in the narratives that validates the sense of elitism embedded in the figure of the transnational professional.

Continuous mobility is rationalized in the texts by presenting it as a lifestyle that requires particular skills and knowledge that are somewhat unique to the mobile individual, discursively validating the subjective and objective rewards that the participants perceive to gain from their own mobility. Such a view is reinforced in the narratives by the references to the sacrifices or trade-offs involved in the life of the transnational professional, namely, the fulfilment of personal expectations in the private sphere.

The contemporary discourse of global mobility may be perceived by the individuals as inspirational because it carries strong utopian concepts of freedom and equality (Harvey 1990). This is represented in the texts as a sort of liberation from the familial and limiting context of home; not only in the sense of the individual’s national origin and local culture, but also in terms of personal development and professional advancement. From this perspective, the discourse of sedentariness is incorporated in the narratives as the ‘antithesis’ of progress and success, by associating it with lack of advancement and the loss of potential opportunities for the individual. This illustrates the need for flexibility in a world where mobility is amongst the highest values that infiltrates all aspects of social life (Bauman 2000; Boltanski and Chiapello 2007).

**Ambiguous representations of becoming a transnational professional**

The representations of international travel as the means for the narrator to ‘explore and conquer the world’, draw upon the archetype of the hero as represented, for instance, in the archetypal plot of the *Odyssey*. The transnational professional relocates internationally to pursue work opportunities abroad; however, work as the motive for their mobility is generally marginalized or simply omitted in their narrative. Instead, global mobility is depicted as an ‘inner’ or ‘natural’ desire to seek new adventures and live exciting experiences, almost as if ‘summoned by destiny’, following the archetypal hero as an adventurer (Campbell 2004; Kostera 2012).

The heroic status attributed to the narrator is often challenged by contradictory references to the lifestyle of the transnational professional as a never-ending mobility. Feelings of ‘never being able to return home’, in the sense of satisfying the sense of belonging and providing the possibility of establishing meaningful long-term relationships, are a manifestation of a negative form of homelessness, which opposes the cosmopolitan ideal that values detachment from the individual’s national origin in order to embrace the global (D’Andrea 2006; Nowicka 2007; Whitehead and Halsall 2016).

The ambiguous portrayal of continuous mobility can be related to the archetypal myth of *The Flying Dutchman*, in that the narrator self-represents as somewhat ‘condemned’ to wander eternally, feeling that no place will ever be home. The narrative element of the hero as an adventurer is thus challenged by the figure of the ‘eternal castaway’ individual. To a certain extent, this dissonance in the narratives represents a level of struggle from the part of the participants as they attempt to adopt continuous international mobility as a form of life.

**The contradictory condition of homelessness**

The notion of becoming a transnational professional is represented in the narratives as a sort of personal transformation, which can be related to Kafka’s archetypal plot *The Metamorphosis*. This is depicted as a desirable form of action in the context of work, a view that draws upon discourses associated with international mobility and the construct of a protean career (Hall 2002; Thomas and Inkson 2004). At the same time, this transformation of the self is described as an undesirable condition that generates feelings of self-alienation in the private sphere, because it challenges traditional values of spatial stability and continuity. In this environment, transnational professionals experience a sort of ‘split-self’ or divided identity between their identity in the organization (corporate-self) and their identity in the private sphere of home (family-self).
This finding relates, for example, to Collinson’s (2003) work on identities and insecurities in the workplace. Collinson (2003, 537) argues that employees who feel their job lacks opportunities for personal development may distance themselves from the organization as a ‘conformist survival practice’, and seek meaning to their lives in the private sphere outside work. Distance may be manifested physically, for instance through absenteeism or resignation, or psychologically, by dividing or splitting their identity between the self at work (instrumental and indifferent) and the self outside work (the authentic and real). However, Collinson (2003, 537) notes that the precarious nature of the splitting self is evident as the domains of work and family are brought together, for example, during periods of unemployment. In the case of the life of the transnational professional, characterized by a perceived dissolution of boundaries between work and family, the individual experiences contradictory feelings as the corporate-self is challenged by what he/she considers are the expectations of the family-self.

This situation generates a negative sense of self-estrangement for the individuals as they feel they do not recognize the person they have become. This finding can be understood through the concept of self-alienation in contemporary organization as put forward by Costas and Fleming (2009), for example. Their approach builds on the notion of the divided-self (dis-identification), to explore the individual’s sense of self-alienation generated by the blurring of the illusory distinction between the corporate-self and the authentic-self. According to the authors, as the employees become aware that their narrated imaginary of authenticity is unrealizable in lived experience, ‘they simultaneously notice that “who they really are” is an alien corporate self’ (Costas and Fleming 2009, 360). In other words, the corporate-self dominates the individual’s life and the family-self is experienced as inauthentic. In the case of the transnational professional, feelings of self-alienation can be seen as a form of homelessness, in that the individual’s perceived authentic or real self is dissociated from his/her idea of home.

The transformational motif is also manifested in the narratives in the expressions of the narrator’s self-portrayal as an outsider in the local community. This may be understood as a representation of the individuals desire to establish some sort of relationship with the places through which they move, so they are perhaps experienced less as ‘non-places’ and more as home. The idea of non-places as advocated by Augé (1992), refers to spaces without past that lack the meaningful and historical relationships that tie individuals with anthropological or ‘existential places’. Non-places are ephemeral because the individuals who experience them are in transit, as it is the case of airports and train stations (Augé 1992). It can be argued that for transnational professionals the division between anthropological places and non-places has been transcended as they establish temporal and conditional relationships with the localities in which they live and work, perceived as places of transit in a life driven by a persistent desire ‘to be somewhere else’. In the narratives, this view draws upon the archetype of the wanderer, which contradicts the references to a sense of self-direction concerning the individual’s own mobility.

Conclusions

This paper examined the ways in which transnational professionals perceive and self-represent their idea of home, considered as a source of direction and stability associated with a given place or culture. The analysis followed the methodological framework of narrative analysis with a particular emphasis on intertextuality. The objective was to identify intertextual connections between the personal narratives and certain archetypal characters and prototypical plots associated with individual displacement. Archetypes as narrative elements are consciously or subconsciously used by the narrator as frames of reference in their attempt to render meaningful past events, actions and characters.

The adoption of a highly mobile lifestyle as represented in the narratives is generally associated with feelings of homelessness, expressed as a sense of detachment from place, including the individual’s national origin. This notion of homelessness results in contradictory accounts in the narratives because it is at the same time incorporated to endow the narrator with a sort of heroic status and to
describe negative feelings of self-alienation. This is manifested through the discursive favouring of the figure of the mobile individual over the figure of the sedentary individual. The mobile individual is associated with the elements of adventure and success; homelessness is described as a positive condition. The sedentary individual, as the oppositional narrative character, is equated with the loss of opportunities for personal growth and professional advancement; homelessness is described as a negative condition.

The representations of the duality ‘mobile-sedentary’ in the narratives draw upon the corporate discourse of individual global mobility. The positive representation of the individual’s subjective detachment from place is considered as a personal asset in the workplace because it involves a privileged lifestyle and economic rewards. However, this flexible identity is challenged by the individual’s need to belong to a community, expressed in the narratives through references to the desire to establish meaningful long-term relationships as part of their intended life-plan.

This tension is also identified in the references to a divided identity. Descriptions of a corporate-self are discursively opposed to the family-self, in the sense that one side in the life of the transnational professional benefits at the expense of the other. The split element recurs in the descriptions of the individual’s self-transformation from being a sedentary individual to becoming a transnational professional; this change is perceived by the transnational professional as a sort of Kafkaesque metamorphosis. In the workplace, the mobile individual feels normal or even superior in comparison to non-mobile employees, but in the private sphere of personal relationships and family life, the individual feels alienated from the person they perceive they have become. These contradictions can be seen to represent a form of homelessness in that the individual dissociates from the family-self who is tied to the idea of home.

**Final remarks and future research directions**

This paper contributes to the existing literature on mobile professionals in three ways. First, it critically analyses the contradictory condition of homelessness in the life of the transnational professional as a result of their highly mobile lifestyle. Second, it identifies intertextual relations between the narratives and certain archetypal characters and prototypical plots, considered here as a source for metaphorical descriptions of geographical displacement and relationships to place. Third, it examines the ways in which the individuals draw upon the corporate discourse of global mobility to represent and justify their own mobility in the construction of their narrative.

The findings in this paper show that global mobility in the context of modern corporations is associated with personal growth and career advancement, discursively favouring the figure of the mobile professional in relation to their non-mobile counterparts. In addition, repetitive or serial mobility opposes the notion of migration, which in the workplace involves different experiences in terms of the individual’s career expectations and in the wider social context is traditionally perceived as a less privileged form of displacement. Following this, further research could examine the extent to which failing to achieve continuous global mobility results in negative feelings for the individual.

Another area of interest is the extent to which the ongoing circumstances relating to migration in Western countries, such as the so-called ‘Brexit’ in the United Kingdom and President Donald Trump’s policy on immigration, influences the attitudes of transnational professionals towards their own mobility. For instance, further studies could critically examine how the figure of the mobile individual and the discourse of border crossing are manifested in the media and the ways in which these representations are incorporated in the personal narrative of the highly mobile professional.

This paper provides an account of some of the ways in which transnational professionals perceive and self-represent their own mobility. As the narratives show, there is ambiguity between the perceived professional advantages associated with the highly mobile lifestyle and the individual’s feelings towards their idea home as a frame of reference for their sense of identity. The ‘contradictory condition of homelessness’ that results from this ambiguity is an example of the dissonance that occurs between the contemporary discourse of corporate individual global mobility and the
individual’s work-life experiences. Therefore, a critical approach to the representations of such a discourse is necessary so that its meaning is not taken for granted.

Notes
1. www.linkedin.com – social network focused on the professional context.
2. www.internations.org – social network focused on global mobility.
3. www.skype.com – online application for verbal communications.

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