

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

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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.

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 and 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 twenty-first 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 triggered 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.

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 semantic¹ 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”,² who typify the traditional forms of repeated mobility, but also a wide range of professional sectors, such as academics, school teachers, 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 and 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 and 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

¹ 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 et al. 2012).

² 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).

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 haome 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.

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.

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 and 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 and 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 (2006) 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, recreation 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 and Abreu 2010; Kirk et al. 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 (Van Gennep 1960) and the experience of being “betwixt-and-between” societies (Turner 1979, p.465). 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 et al. 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 and 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 and 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 and 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.

Methods

The present study is part of a larger project entitled “‘New Migration’ and New Forms of Integration: Families in Geographical Itinerancy”,³ 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 criteria for

³ 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.

the category of families in international repeated geographical mobility and after reaching the point at which no new strategies were observed in the data.

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 1 for details of participants).

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 criteria, 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 1 Participant details

Adults		
Age range		33–55
Gender F:M		16:9 ^a
Civil status	Single, never married	1
	Married	22
	Separated	1
Number of children (living in Switzerland or in the same household)	1	7
	2	12
	3	5
Educational level	Bachelor or equivalent	8
	Master or equivalent	13
	PhD or equivalent	3
Number of countries lived (range)		4.75 (3–8)
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.	

^a Gender count was based on the overall number of adults interviewed.

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 min 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 2007), 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,⁴ 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.

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.

⁴ All participants spoke English fluently; in nine households, they were English-native speakers.

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 et al. 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.

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 (see Adams 2014),⁵ 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 close by, 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

⁵ Findings show how the absence of routines adds to heightened emotions felt while relocating.

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:

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 (see Zittoun et al. [in press](#)), 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.

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 and Flear ([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' shrank 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 then 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 decathezing 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.

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 and Kesebir 2012; Ryan and Mulholland 2014). 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 Oriane 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 Tarrus (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.

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 and 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.

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.

Notes about Transcription Conventions

- (.) micro pause, a notable pause but of no significant length.
- halting or abrupt cut-off in the flow of speech.
- “” third party quotation.
- CAPITALS loud or shouted talk.
- : extended sound.
- Underlining for emphasis.

- ◦ quiet and soft talk.
- (Laughter) for laughing.
- (h) laughter within the talk.
- (O) transcriptionist's comments or uncertain hearings.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards:

Conflict of Interest The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. The author took all reasonable precautions to protect participants' anonymity, suchlike not disclosing individual information about professions, languages spoken, nationalities, or trajectories of international mobility.

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