



## Guest, trader or explorer

Eichsteller, Marta

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## Guest, trader or explorer: Biographical perspectives on the experiences of cross-border mobility in Europe

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### Abstract

Life stories of mobile individuals provide us with unique perspectives on the condition of modern societies. This article aims to establish the link between narrative accounts of mobility and the conceptual framework of migration studies. Drawing on autobiographical narrative interviews with 91 transnational individuals, this article presents three categories of mobility narratives, emphasizing the specific narrative form and socio-cultural discourse within which they are embedded. It is argued that the perception of power relations underpinning social experiences that can be observed in three distinct narrative archetypes: the story of the guest, trader and explorer. These empirically derived categories aim to systematize the conceptual framework for studies of individual agency and social relations in cross-border mobility contexts and contribute to the debate on methodological nationalism.

Keywords: autobiographical narrative interview; Europe; methodological nationalism; migration; transnationalism

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3 Accompanied by a movement of ideas, capital and social practices, large-scale  
4 movements of people are facilitating a new wave of social change affecting contemporary  
5 societies. Given the dynamic character of global mobility phenomena, it is crucial to re-  
6 examine the categories we use to investigate and understand the interconnected processes  
7 of individual experiences and social structures' readiness to accommodate, adjust or reject  
8 mobile individuals. Defining the key concepts used to capture the movement of people is  
9 becoming an increasingly complex task. The colloquial meanings of terms, such as  
10 migration, internationalism and transnationalism, used in political and social debates often  
11 interact with complex academic debates, creating a Gordian knot of entangled shades of  
12 meaning and political connotations. Research to date has tended to either explore the  
13 qualitative differences between terms, such as the differences between migration and  
14 transnationalism (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Kivisto and Faist 2009;  
15 Vertovec 1999), or to introduce new terms, such as expatriate (Andresen, Bergdolt,  
16 Margenfeld, and Dickmann 2014) or international professional (Van Der Pijl 1998). This  
17 article aims to reverse the issue. In lieu of top-down categories it develops bottom-up  
18 concepts allowing the systematic analysis of empirical accounts of cross-border mobility.  
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32 An additional level of difficulty lies, however, in the fact that words such as migrant,  
33 international or transnational are commonly used to describe "lived experiences". The use  
34 of any given term in empirical research is not only determined by the researcher's choice,  
35 but also by whether the individuals under investigation see themselves as migrants,  
36 internationals or transnationals. In that respect research wants to understand how cross-  
37 border mobility experience alters the sense of self. The traditional concepts can be used as a  
38 form of social categorisation to frame any group interaction, from a morning chat between  
39 neighbours to public and political debate. Terms, such as immigrant or emigrant,  
40 international and transnational, are used as specific "labels". They determine social position,  
41 sense of belonging and the structure of opportunities, shape aspects of social life and have a  
42 direct impact on solidarity, mobilisation and social cohesion, but they are rarely internalised  
43 by individual agents. This study identifies three forms of biographical narratives derived  
44 from autobiographical narratives of mobile individuals. Each story outlines a certain  
45 relational structure between the individual agent and their social context. The stories reflect  
46 the cultural archetypes of social power relations embedded in the specific form of narrative  
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3 - respectively guest, trader and explorer - and are used as an analytical tool in the discussion  
4 on the role of agency in the context of cross-border mobility. In order to avoid  
5 terminological confusion throughout this article, I will use the term cross-border mobility to  
6 describe the process of international migration.  
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11 This article begins with an exploration of the complex nature of mobility experiences  
12 and the need for a conceptual framework capable of capturing differences with regards to  
13 perceptions of power relations in modern societies. Secondly, a description of the  
14 methodological approach and the sample is given. The third part of the article presents  
15 three biographical narratives illustrating three categories of mobility respectively. The final  
16 part discusses possible implications – of both a social and political nature – for  
17 understanding the qualitative difference between different types of mobility stories in  
18 terms of perception of social and spatial rights, contributions to community and nation state  
19 as well as public discourse.  
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### 29 **Definition of mobile population**

30 A wide array of social sciences disciplines, from sociology, anthropology, cultural  
31 studies to human geography, holds an interest in the processes of individual cross-border  
32 mobility, or migration. With its long history, the field of migration studies has been  
33 especially interested in the wider social, economic and political processes associated with  
34 the movement of individuals and groups. Previously focused on uncovering general laws of  
35 migration, such as push-pull theory, neo-classical economy and network theories (Kivisto  
36 and Faist, 2009), today the academic focus has shifted towards transnational practices . This  
37 split within the field is most visible in how terminology has changed from migration to  
38 transnationalism in its many forms and definitions (Kivisto 2001; Portes, Guarnizo, and  
39 Landolt 1999; Vertovec 1999). The key difference between the concepts writes itself into a  
40 wider debate regarding the critique of methodological nationalism, here defined as “an  
41 ideological orientation that approaches a study of social and historical processes as if they  
42 were contained within the borders of individual nation-states” (Schiller and Salazar 2013,  
43 185). Fundamental for methodological nationalism is a fixed relation between culture,  
44 territory and identity. The critics of this approach state, however, that identities should be  
45 seen as products of social rather than territorial relationships (Schiller and Salazar 2013). To  
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3 step outside this way of thinking, researchers investigating cross-border mobility advocate a  
4 focus on individual agency and modes of reflexivity (Archer 2007) instead of objective social  
5 structures. This paradigm shift has brought about a renewed interest in how research  
6 methodology could provide insights into individual experiences and reflective decision-  
7 making processes (Nowicka and Cieslik 2014). The autobiographical narrative method used  
8 in this study is firmly embedded in a critical approach to transnationalism.  
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14 The focus on individual agents and their social relations, which frame the individual  
15 and social identities they experience in everyday life, is not simply a matter of methodology,  
16 but also a conceptual framework. One way of avoiding common connotations of concepts,  
17 such as migrant, within the national framework, was to turn to the concept of transnational,  
18 on the basis that, in the age of globalisation, there is something distinctive about mobility  
19 now that was not there in the past. This claim has been widely discussed in the field and  
20 generally criticised. Kivisto (2001, 550) argues that “this concept suffers from ambiguity as a  
21 result of competing definitions that fail to specify the temporal and spatial parameters of  
22 the term and to adequately locate it vis-a-vis the other concepts”. Within this study it is  
23 argued that the problem with categories such as migrant and transnational is rooted in the  
24 deductive way in which these concepts are operationalised. There is an assumption that the  
25 concepts themselves can be “developed by the manipulation of a few basic ideas” (Becker  
26 1998, 109). If “migrant” indicates a person travelling and living abroad, the nature of work  
27 undertaken by the individual determines whether the person is referred to as temporary  
28 labour, an irregular, highly skilled or forced migrant (Ritzer and Dean 2015). If the  
29 individual’s professional career takes place in a global organisation, we talk about an  
30 international individual; when emphasizing a move away from a rich country we may refer  
31 to individuals as expatriates, here self-initiated and assigned expatriates (Andresen et al.  
32 2014) as well as a wide range of transnationals (Faist 2000; Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton  
33 Blanc 1995) and cosmopolitans (Fine and Boon 2007; Skrbis and Woodward 2007; Soysal  
34 2010). The application of the concept becomes more complicated when it is used to explain  
35 empirical data associated with cross-border mobility. The lived experiences of the individual  
36 on the move are complex, identities and definitions fluid, social relations dynamic. Yet top-  
37 down definitions are often simplistic and tend to carry specific cultural, historical, and legal  
38 connotations, such as refugee, expatriate, displaced person, guest worker, or temporary  
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3 migrant. Changing the word migrant to transnational does not capture the complexities of  
4 mobility experiences observable across empirical data gathered via individual-centred  
5 methodologies.  
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9 In order to capture individual agency and reflexive processes of individuals within  
10 social structures, the conceptual framework should be constructed in dialogue with  
11 empirical data. This article calls for a bottom-up approach, which makes it possible to  
12 explore the relation between the lived experiences of cross-border mobility and the  
13 dynamic framework of individual and social meanings they account for. This attempt to  
14 build a set of conceptual categories derived from narrative biographical data that would link  
15 “story-telling style and substance to social roles and context at both interactional and  
16 institutional level” (Scheffrin 1996, 170), provides an insight into an individual agent’s social  
17 and cultural identities. This approach builds on the tradition of identity and inequality  
18 studies, placing the agency of the individual at the centre of a complex network of social  
19 relations representing the intersections of different positions and status in the wider social  
20 structures (Jenkins 2008; Yuval-Davis 2011) This approach has been previously applied in  
21 investigations of ethnicity (Gee 1991; Micheals 1981), gender (Riessman 1990), social class  
22 (Lawler 2007; van Dijk 1992) and age (Coupland and Nussbaum 1993), because it accounts  
23 for the intersectionality of multiple identity categories.  
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36 This article identifies three categories of mobility narratives, namely guest, trader and  
37 explorer. The study emphasizes that each narrative refers to a different set of social  
38 relations underpinning the individual narrator’s self-perception. Guest, trader and explorer  
39 stories are conceptual generalisations, their names are derived from the cultural archetypes  
40 already existing in the social and cultural imagination. They should not be used or  
41 understood as policy categories, such as guest-workers. These categories aim to present the  
42 types of tacit assumptions regarding individual positions and roles within society, following  
43 the tradition of Simmel and his work on the role of “the stranger” (1971). They are derived  
44 from the form of narration used by the individual in the process of narration and the wider  
45 socio-cultural reality described in the process. They aim to focus the investigation on an  
46 unequal power distribution between the person on the move and the new socio-cultural  
47 context, the social mechanisms of implementation and justification for these disproportions  
48 and the ways in which they are projected in the public domain. These can be observed in  
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3 economic debates regarding employment, political considerations over the issues of social  
4 and political rights and cultural discussions about the cultural capital and cultural  
5 inadequacy or incompatibility of those engaged in cross-border mobility. Employing the  
6 following typology of cross-border mobility stories allows for a systematic discussion of the  
7 issues of status in terms of social rights, access to welfare and other state institutions as well  
8 as touching on issues of power relations and the misrepresentation of specific groups in  
9 public and political debates mainly across Europe.  
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## 20 **Methodology**

21 This study is the outcome of an analysis of 91 autobiographical narrative interviews  
22 gathered by the EuroIdentities project team across 7 European countries.<sup>i</sup> The project aimed  
23 to collect a sample of unique life stories from individuals who have experienced long-term  
24 cross-border mobility.<sup>ii</sup> Whilst the project focused on the evolution of identities, especially  
25 on the issue of European identity, the autobiographical narrative interview method served  
26 to investigate a wide array of research questions (Miller and Day 2012). The project's  
27 geographical location is Europe-specific and corresponds with the socio-cultural discourses  
28 and institutional structures of countries embedded in the European Union. The most  
29 significant feature of this institutional context is the freedom of movement of people  
30 between the countries of the Union, which removes some of the structural constraints  
31 regarding cross-border mobility from individual schemes of action. The sampling technique  
32 applied in the EuroIdentities study involved theoretical sampling across different  
33 transnational groups<sup>iii</sup> in the 7 participating countries. The aim of the project was to capture  
34 the diversity of qualitative biographical experiences associated with mobility.  
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48 To tap into the lived experiences, cross-border mobility and the complex  
49 configurations of identity and belonging, the EuroIdentities project used the  
50 'autobiographical narrative interview' method developed by Schütze (2008). The method  
51 aims to evoke an unstructured flow of autobiographical narration, prompted by the stimulus  
52 'please tell me your life story'. The desired outcome of the autobiographical narrative  
53 interview is the life story narrative told from the narrator's point of view, who can freely  
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3 decide which life events carry particular significance, thus revealing the internal logic  
4 embedded in the sequential order of the recalled life events (Apitzsch and Siouti 2007;  
5 Rosenthal 2004). The autobiographical narrative interview method comes with a well-  
6 developed analytical toolkit which focuses on the *narrative forms*, or process structures  
7 (Schütze 2008; Miller and Day 2012). These narrative forms are literary representations of  
8 life trajectories (Strauss 1995) reproducing the social experiences and perceived power  
9 relations, such as disorganisation, break down, attempts to regain control and re-  
10 orientation (Apitzsch and Kontos 2008, 15). The method provides the key to unlocking the  
11 individual's accounts of self-positioning processes, meaning-making and identity-building in  
12 situations of change. In this study each story represents one particular form of narration  
13 (Apitzsch and Kontos 2008, 15). The guest story reflects "potential trajectory" emphasizing  
14 the loss of individual control over the events due to external circumstances; the trader story  
15 is a reflection of institutional expectations; and the explorer story is told in the form of an  
16 action scheme focusing on individual planning, initiative and action.  
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31 Along the form of the narration, each story was analysed with the use of narrative  
32 ethnography (Gubrium and Holstein 2008). The notion of *socio-cultural discourse* was used  
33 to embed the form of narrative within a particular narrative environment. Gubrium (2005,  
34 526) argues that narrator's work of maintaining particular ways of framing matters of  
35 relevance reflects the recognition that certain types of environment affirms, and reproduce  
36 "certain kind of accounts for institutional purposes". The guest story resonates strongly with  
37 the socio-cultural discourse on citizenship referring to the contrasts between citizens and  
38 non-citizens, the trader story is deeply embedded in the organisational context of the  
39 specific transnational institutions, and the explorer story is focused on searching for the  
40 pathways which offer the most individual freedom and flexibility in achieving individual  
41 goals. The form of narrative and socio-cultural discourse are "reflexively intertwined"  
42 (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, 29). Analysis of biographical narrative therefore focuses on the  
43 interplay between how the story is produced as well as how does it reproduce, or not an  
44 institutional order within which it exists.  
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3 The strength of this study was to explore a large number of biographical interviews  
4 collected in a very diverse, multi-national environment. The interviews were conducted by  
5 an international team of researchers and discussed in an international forum. The study  
6 used the firmly established methodological approach of Schütze (2008), but extended it  
7 with the use of narrative ethnography in order to capture not only the form, but also the  
8 content of biographical narratives. The study is firmly embedded in the qualitative narrative  
9 research tradition and is subject to its usual limitations. Firstly, although the sample is large,  
10 it is not representative and the findings cannot be generalised across the wider population.  
11 The study has an exploratory character and the theoretical sampling used in the study aims  
12 to capture a wider range of experiences, rather than make specific claims regarding the  
13 distribution of narrative patterns across the sample. Secondly, the unit of analysis is the  
14 narrative account, not the individual delivering it. This is particularly important when  
15 discussing the truthfulness of biographical accounts. As the subjects of analysis are the  
16 narrative form and individual perceptions, rather than actual events, the study's findings  
17 should be interpreted as subjective accounts of reality, not reality itself. Thirdly, the form of  
18 biographical narration is a direct outcome of the identification and social positioning of the  
19 individual at the time of the interview. It is possible that the same individual can see his or  
20 her life from a different perspective at a different time and tell their story by drawing on  
21 different narrative forms and socio-cultural discourses. Finally, the biographical narrative  
22 interview is an interaction and thus subject to interviewer bias. Within this research  
23 tradition, the input of the interviewer is minimal, but the rapport between interviewer and  
24 interviewee is necessary. The researchers on the project were trained in this particular  
25 technique, and interviews were internally cross-examined to control for interviewer effect.  
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### 46 **The meaning behind a story**

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48 Stories are one of the most advanced instruments of transmitting knowledge. With  
49 their unique mode of narration, plot and structure they are able to make explicit the tacit  
50 rules of social behaviour. According to Scheffrin (1996, 170) "telling a story allows us to  
51 create a 'story world' in which we can represent ourselves against a backdrop of cultural  
52 expectations about a typical course of action; our identities as social beings emerge as we  
53 construct our own individual experiences as a way to position ourselves in relation to social  
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3 and cultural expectations". Within the biographical accounts, the "story world" narrated  
4 consists of subjective sequence of individual actions negotiated by structural and cultural  
5 powers. The final outcome of the story is the elaborate explanation of the narrator's sense  
6 of self and how he or she became this way. The baseline assumption is, that if the narrator's  
7 circumstances change, as is the case in situation of cross-boarder mobility, the sense of self  
8 needs to re-define and re-position itself towards new social context. These shifts in the  
9 identification are reflected in the way individuals tell their life story. Each form of the story  
10 presented below attempts to outline the *narrative form* in which the individual narrator  
11 recalls life events in terms of sequence and selection of key life events, emphasizing the  
12 individual's sense of power relations underpinning the social reality of the newcomer and  
13 the wider socio-cultural discourse framing how these experiences are understood. Both  
14 directly influence the scheme of action and indirectly reflect the form of narration. For  
15 example, embedded in the citizenship context, the guest story may prompt direct action,  
16 such as applying for residency or naturalisation, but also reflects aspirations and the need to  
17 fit in. Analysis of the biographical interviews in this study identified three reoccurring  
18 categories of stories - those of the guest, trader and explorer. All three stories are used here  
19 to systematize the relevant set of assumptions about agency-structure interplay, but do not  
20 claim to be a complete typology of those relations. The choice of different socio-cultural  
21 discourse frameworks, or identification of further narrative forms may add or modify this  
22 set of narratively derived categories. The cases selected to illustrate the stories were chosen  
23 due to the particular clarity of the narrative patterns as well as socio-cultural discourses.

### 42 ***The guest story***

43  
44 The first category of cross-border mobility narratives outlined in this article is the  
45 "guest story". Both in its *narrative form* and the *socio-cultural discourse* the guest story  
46 outlines a type of mobility experience focusing on issues of adjustment and negotiating the  
47 right to stay. It reflects the mind-set and self-definition of the archetype of a "guest" or, in  
48 more old-fashioned language a "sojourner". Individuals see their own biographical  
49 experiences as a struggle against the new society's power structures, identity labels as well  
50 as cultural and ethnic diversity. Their life stories concentrate on identifying these struggles  
51 and overcoming them, up to the point of deserving their status and position within their  
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3 chosen country of residence. This kind of life story narrative can encompass difficult life  
4 experiences associated with discrimination and prejudice as well as empowering transition  
5 events full of acceptance and belonging. The biography of Zula, a 26-year-old Moldavian,  
6 illustrates this type of narrative.  
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11 Zula was born in East Germany to the family of Moldavian guest workers. After her  
12 birth she moved back to Moldavia with her mother, leaving her father behind. At the age of  
13 6 the family reunited in Germany and moved to a small village near the French-German  
14 border. Zula mentions these transitions in terms of learning German and experiencing being  
15 different in the small rural community. She mentions that her different look, and  
16 particularly her eyes, attracted attention, but with her mother's support she was able to  
17 deal with her ethnic diversity and be proud of who she is. She mentions that, during her  
18 high school years, she was part of a peer group involved in the punk scene. The only  
19 difference between her and her friends was the complex relationship between her family  
20 and their formal status in Germany. In her narrative Zula mentions:  
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29 *I had a rebellious phase. And had friends who had been punks. Who found*  
30 *Germany shit and so forth. And then I myself have ... joined in, right. And my father*  
31 *said then: So, listen, right. We are guests here. And the way you walk about and what*  
32 *you say, you are more being paid attention to. And you are not allowed to do that.*  
33 *Somehow you have to keep yourself small. And over the years I got to know, my father*  
34 *has, when one gets older, one gets a bit more told by the parents. And my father said*  
35 *to me: We are simply in a different position. We are treated differently. We haven't*  
36 *the same privileges too. Then, that was also the time where I noticed then, we haven't*  
37 *got German passports. That brings certain restrictions with it. When we still had the*  
38 *asylum-seeker status, we couldn't move freely... And when we had a bit better status,*  
39 *got residence permit status, this has changed a bit but you still hadn't had the same*  
40 *rights, right. [Zula, 25]*  
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50 During her school years Zula developed a keen interest in international politics and  
51 different countries. She took part in a student exchange with Finland, where, for the first  
52 time, she experienced being seen as a German student. She describes some historical  
53 anecdotes and comments she has heard around her and has come to realize how fluid  
54 identity labels really are. She has also visited Moldavia and was shocked how German she  
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3 has become. Zula mentions her German accent but also cultural differences and  
4 expectations. From that point onward she focused on her interest in European studies. She  
5 attended university and took part in a number of European youth initiatives, especially  
6  
7 focused on migration and freedom of movement. She has lived and studied internationally,  
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9 visiting France, Sweden and the US. Zula mentions that her experiences and her studies  
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11 have made her 'more open' to cultural diversity and human experiences. At that point she  
12  
13 applied for German citizenship, because she wanted to 'have a voice' and enjoy freedom of  
14  
15 movement. Zula talks about some struggles with cross-border mobility and her awareness  
16  
17 of ethnic profiling at the borders - her German passport means freedom.  
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21 In its overall tone and structure, the *narrative form* of the guest story is determined by  
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23 the individual's perceived loss of control caused by external forces (Apitzsich and Kontos  
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25 2008; Riemann and Schütze, 1991). The story unfolds along the lines of the mobility's  
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27 involuntary nature underpinned by political instabilities, economic demands and family  
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29 circumstances and, as the quote illustrates, can span generations. These elements are  
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31 embedded in the individual's perception of their inability to direct their actions, here  
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33 reflected by the control of rights to physical movement, and lack of a sense of belonging.  
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35 This story category highlights the fact that, in order to regain control over the situation, the  
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37 agent's identity needs to be reconstructed along the institutional frames of migration  
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39 regulations. The returning sense of control when the situation normalizes is reflected in the  
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41 narrative through episodes highlighting recognition of new social norms, self-positioning in  
42  
43 this new context - recognising the position within the educational system – and adjustments  
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45 to the individual's sense of self, thus accruing a new type of identity.  
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49 The guest story is the most firmly established type of cross-border mobility  
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51 perspective, often associated with the experience of economic and political migration in the  
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53 "methodological nationalism" sense. The guest story is framed and defined by *socio-cultural*  
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55 *discourse* of citizenship in terms of individual participation and access to civil, political and,  
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57 most importantly, social rights. In Zula's story, the layers of these rights, here illustrated by  
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59 freedom of movement, are regulated by the individual's status – from the child of asylum  
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61 seekers, to resident, to citizen. In terms of participation, the guest story often reveals a  
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63 directory of demands placed on the individual by the receiving country, frequently regarding

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3 language proficiency and some prescriptive understanding of cultural values and customs.  
4 Many countries, such as Germany and the UK, test for these. They demand change, or more  
5 precisely assimilation, by “the guest” in order to gain the right to be part of this specific  
6 national community. In terms of civil, political and social rights, citizenship guards the access  
7 to the nation state’s resources and internal power structures. The guest story is about the  
8 disproportion of symbolic power between citizens and non-citizens and about the process of  
9 gaining various degrees of power by becoming a citizen (or resident, or green card holder)  
10 of the state. This type of story has a strong relational character: even if the polarity between  
11 “guest” and “citizen” is only imagined, people on both sides in the story act and utilise this  
12 power relation in their everyday life. The guest story thus writes itself into this dichotomy of  
13 power from an inferior position, framing institutionally defined social hierarchies and  
14 individual aspirations associated with cross-border mobility.  
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### 27 ***The trader story***

28 The “trader story” is the second category of biographical narration outlining the  
29 impact of cross-border mobility on an individual’s identity formation. Unlike the guest story,  
30 the trader story is embedded in the context of international organizations, which overarch  
31 the nation state structures. The story’s narrative pattern is often structured along  
32 experiences such as international employment, transnational intimate relationships,  
33 educational exchanges, a degree abroad or other programmes, for example through  
34 religious organisations. These constitute a specific transnational structure of opportunity  
35 and become gateways into the receiving society. Unlike narrators of guest stories,  
36 individuals with a trader story enjoy direct access to specific social environments – a  
37 university or organisation – connecting them to the new social structures.  
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47 An illustration of this type of story is found in the biographical narrative of Jakub, a 32-  
48 year-old Pole living and working in France. Jakub mentions a normal childhood in a mid-  
49 sized city. He attended a high school focusing on economics, with strong emphasis on  
50 mathematics, but quite poor on languages. He started his studies at a technical university in  
51 Poland, where he came across EU-funded student exchange opportunities. His marks were  
52 not strong enough to qualify to an English-speaking country, but there was no competition  
53 for the French-speaking places. Jakub applied even though he did not speak French beyond  
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3 a few basic phrases. His first months at the French university were an adventure. Along his  
4 studies he was learning French, coping with the help of other international students. As a  
5 university student he was granted part-time employment and access to practice  
6 placements. When the program ended he took up the opportunity to finish his degree  
7 abroad. The company where Jakub undertook his practical placement offered him his first  
8 professional job as an IT consultant. Jakub decided to stay in France and build his career. His  
9 solid professional background as well as his fluency in Polish made him a valuable employee.  
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11 When asked about his life and relationships in France, he says:

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18 *You meet Poles because they are Poles. And you know the French from work,*  
19 *from university, from outings with mutual friends. At first we stuck more with the*  
20 *Poles. But then it turned out, Emelin, who was my friend's girlfriend. She gave us guys'*  
21 *contact details. And then it turned out that they already had their own network and*  
22 *they took us in. And then we brought our friends from our year. And it all ended in big*  
23 *hikes in the mountains, in the Polish-French-Romanian-Chinese cultural mixture. And*  
24 *now, you know, I spend quite some time with the people I work with. So we have our*  
25 *own crew at work. And when it comes to Poles, we went go-carting on Sunday. They*  
26 *also came, a Polish group was there, but my friends from work came as well, so we all*  
27 *drove together. And it's really not a problem to make those connections, even with*  
28 *different nations. [Jakub, 32]*

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37 The social worlds that facilitate the trader story operate across national boundaries,  
38 bringing together individuals from across the globe and combining internationally  
39 accumulated perspectives, attitudes and knowledge. Student and professional communities  
40 give these individuals legitimate status, along the archetype of "the trader". Throughout  
41 their lives and careers they have built specific networks enabling them to move within  
42 international places, together with other international individuals. The *narrative form* of the  
43 trader story is framed differently to the guest story. The key distinction lies in the fact that  
44 mobility experiences are not embedded in the wider context of a nation-state and  
45 citizenship, but rather focus on the sense of belonging to, or membership in, a specific  
46 organisation or professional body reaching beyond the nation (Apitzsch and Kontos 2008).  
47 These international networks facilitate transitions and stay in the new country, legitimizing  
48 the individual's status. In the quote Jakub says: *"it is really not a problem to make those*  
49 *connections"*. In his narrative Jakub highlights a number of groups he belongs to due to his  
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3 diverse status - university people, work people and other Poles - and highlights how he can  
4 bring them together, or rather place himself at the centre of his own unique network of  
5 resources.  
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9 The trader story is framed by a *socio-cultural discourse* of membership in a particular  
10 type of international organisation or institution. Students and international professionals  
11 are commonly accepted assets to the country's economy and development. Telling the story  
12 as a trader represents an identity formation with a level of detachment from the national  
13 context, but at the same time it is strongly embedded within the institutional context of an  
14 organisation or profession. In that sense doctors, academics as well as corporate  
15 employees, humanitarian workers and priests operate within the same socio-cultural  
16 discourse, where citizenship is secondary because of the individual agent's high economic or  
17 social status. The organisation is a gatekeeper, facilitating the working environment as well  
18 as social life of these individuals, granting the more powerful status of the 'useful stranger',  
19 placing them within the socio-cultural discourse in which differences can be overlooked due  
20 to the skills brought to the social system by the individual.  
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### 33 ***The explorer story***

34 The "explorer story" forms the third type of biographical narrative framing cross-  
35 border mobility experiences. This type of narrative carries more personal uncertainties over  
36 individual life decisions than the guest and trader stories. The explorer story can be quite  
37 complex, involving multiple episodes - a life project spreading across multiple countries and  
38 social contexts. From a biographical point of view, this type of narrative can be illustrated by  
39 the story of Sarah<sup>iv</sup>, a Brazilian of Italian origin currently residing in the UK. Sarah was  
40 brought up with the strong identity of being Italian, like her father, who migrated to Brazil  
41 before she was born. She grew up in a big family and, after a not very successful school  
42 graduation, moved to the US, where she was working as a stewardess. In her job with the  
43 airline company she met her husband and had two sons. Sarah was very committed, and the  
44 company she was working for promoted her into a relatively high professional position. But  
45 she was not content with her life, having made it her life project to move "back" to Italy and  
46 live there. She managed to convince her husband, and they moved to Italy where she had a  
47 'reality check'. Sarah's self-identification as an Italian was questioned considering that she  
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3 did not speak Italian and did not know much about the country. She mentions that, what  
4 was supposed to be a home-coming, turned out to be a very difficult identity crisis. After a  
5 year they decided to go back to Brazil, mostly on her sons' request. But Sarah did not  
6 abandon her 'Italian project'. Her aim was to find a way to make this transition successful.  
7 She identified the obstacles: the language and entry points to the Italian social structure.  
8 This is how Sarah tells this part of her life story:  
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14 *But all in all we've had a very interesting life, because we are driven by projects.*  
15 *Obviously we didn't stop the [living in Italy] project, we start again with fingers*  
16 *crossed a new project and I decided to learn the language and I started to learn the*  
17 *language just listening to RAI, you know 'RAI televisione', the Italian channel in Brazil,*  
18 *so I learned a lot and I learned more Italian in Brazil than I learned there, when I lived*  
19 *there [...] and I had a bright idea because it's me, to start a new career so, and I*  
20 *started to start nursing. [...] And I studied nursing for 3 years, and for me it was a*  
21 *project as well, because the Italian government, they were taking nurses from*  
22 *countries which offered in, which was a programme just designated to Italian people*  
23 *living abroad. [...] It was my case. They are intentional to get the best nurses abroad,*  
24 *Italian ones, which was my case to go to Italy and to get a job straight away in - the*  
25 *health public sector in Italy. And I start to study, because I am such impatient, we*  
26 *started this project and to how can I say to be a nurse, because amazingly I had such a*  
27 *desire to do something quite a challenge for me. [Sarah 48]*  
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38 However, the project to become a nurse was affected by her sons' choices to move  
39 and study in the UK. Sarah and her husband decided that the "Italian project" preparations  
40 can be done in the UK. Sarah is currently completing a degree in three languages - Italian,  
41 Spanish and German - at a British university. She is working as a waitress but plans to work  
42 as an interpreter in the future. She believes that, by speaking five languages fluently and  
43 with a university diploma, she can succeed in her next attempt to move to Italy.  
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49 This type of story writes itself in the archetype of 'the explorer'. The *narrative form* of  
50 this type of cross-border narrative is built around a set of individual action schemes (Schütze  
51 2008; Apitzsch and Kontos 2008) focused on a vague idea or project. These can range from  
52 finding a fulfilling job to an appreciation for non-traditional biographical patterns in terms of  
53 cross-border relationships, careers or lifestyle. This project is presented throughout the  
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3 explorer life story as a final goal, which somehow explains the list of rather disjointed  
4 biographical episodes. The biographical consequences of attempting these non-traditional  
5 schemes of actions are weighted against the positive and negative aspects of cross-border  
6 mobility. The explorer story's narrative form forces evaluations and cross-cultural  
7 comparisons. These are concentrated on the individual's ability to consume and incorporate  
8 cultural differences into a complex matrix of one's identity and status, navigating complex  
9 cultural and institutional pathways.

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16 The socio-cultural discourse of the explorer story is quite unique. Whilst, in the  
17 previous stories, the cultural patterns of entering the new social structures are quite well  
18 established, the explorer has to navigate uncharted territory. The individual's actions create  
19 a hectic and uncoordinated impression, but in the story they are used in a strategic manner.  
20 They create a framework of various forms of identifications and play it to their best  
21 advantage, often trying to mitigate the unfavourable status of an outsider with a 'citizen of  
22 the world' lifestyle. The explorer story is a collage of individual encounters and strategies  
23 aimed at navigating complex cross-cultural situations. Its key features are well-developed  
24 individual agency and keen awareness of social and cultural situational positions. The  
25 explorer story is presented by narrators who orient themselves well in contemporary  
26 modern society and often gamble with their individual plans and wishes against the national  
27 social structures of opportunities and limitations.

## 38 39 Discussion

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43 The categories presented above illustrate the variety of configurations between the  
44 social position of the individual agent and the social structures. The aim of the story  
45 categories is to draw attention to the relevance of individuals' ability to understand the  
46 interplay of individual motivation as well as structural constraints and engage in concrete  
47 social action. This approach provides a bottom-up alternative to the "catch-all" concepts  
48 used in contemporary migration and transnationalism studies, which often conceal the  
49 nature of the processes by focusing on border crossing instead of the interaction between  
50 mobile individuals and their "social circumstances". These top-down categories are  
51 challenged in three distinct aspects by the story categorization presented in this study.  
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3 Firstly, the existence of diversity in narrative patterns of mobility exposes the variation  
4 in the perception of power and status between different mobile individuals. This is  
5 particularly relevant in the discourse of individual rights in changing contexts. The  
6 internalised perception of being a guest reinforces a submissive status within society; it  
7 questions the person's rights, starting from fundamental aspects of physical mobility, such  
8 as the ability to lock people into refugee camps, restrict their ability to settle or to move  
9 within a country as well as between countries, up to offering limited and conditional access  
10 to civil, political and social provisions available to citizens, as illustrated by the story of Zula.  
11 Given such power disproportions, individuals learn quickly that they do not have the right to  
12 make demands. In contrast, the story of explorer highlights a different understanding of the  
13 idea of rights, conceptualised in terms of choice. The individuals classified here as explorers  
14 are aware of the power disproportions, but they choose to actively navigate through or  
15 around them. They do not accept their lower status and do not allow their assigned position  
16 to define their identifications. They are aware of the gaps within the structures of social  
17 institutions and, if the situation they find themselves in is not what they are willing to  
18 accept, they move to a different place, project or plan. What sets them apart from the guest  
19 story narrators is their belief that they have a right to choose where and how they want to  
20 live instead of accepting that those fundamental rights have to be earned.  
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36 Secondly, the variations in the mobility stories can be observed in how the narrators  
37 perceive risk and in their willingness to follow traditional institutional scripts. The  
38 biographical narratives of explorers show how discontinuous these stories can be. The  
39 individual actions, often chaotic and geographically spread between different countries, are  
40 not focused on fitting in - they concentrate on constant readjustments of individual plans of  
41 action and individual identities. The explorer story has significant cultural and social  
42 consequences. On the one hand there is an acceptance of an "episode of freedom" from  
43 national bounds, at least in most Western cultures, associated with youth and biographical  
44 exploration of choices, but employed in a different biographical configuration or over a  
45 longer time this action scheme is related to a "vagabond mentality", raising the question of  
46 risks and biographical consequences. Resettling families or lifestyle migration is considered  
47 irresponsible in terms of security rights, such as health and pensions, and unproductive in  
48 terms of contributions toward society. To reject traditional ways of doing things, this type of  
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3 social action challenges the established institutional patterns, such as employment, family  
4 or community. Some of the individuals choose to stay within this kind of social script as it  
5 writes itself into wider globalisation changes, the global market economy, global culture and  
6 human rights discourse, corresponding to “citizen of the world” identities. They assess the  
7 risks of not following established social patterns and dive into an uncertain future.  
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13 Finally, the biographical narrative patterns of mobility stories highlight the important  
14 role of alternative forms of belonging. The top-down migration concepts emphasise the fact  
15 that the outcome of cross-border movement is to find a new place to which people will  
16 belong. The story of the guest is a key example of that type of reasoning. By assigning the  
17 individual to a particular place, the individual is embedded in the local and national context,  
18 assigned a specific legal position and status. The story of the trader, however, challenges  
19 this reasoning. It indicates that it is possible to replace “place-based belonging” with  
20 “organisation-based belonging”. This narrative pattern illustrates that particularly organised  
21 professions, such as consultants, medical professionals and academics, operate in a  
22 different type of social structures, partially independent from ‘national rhetoric’. The trader  
23 story is told with confidence and control over one's biographical choices and apparent  
24 continuity of life events. Individual agents telling their life story in this narrative form know  
25 their position and value for the receiving society and know that their skill set allows them  
26 some level of independence as well as access to specific rights. Professional membership in  
27 an international organisation grants a power position secured by the organisation and  
28 endorsed, often also welcomed, by most of the national systems. This membership becomes  
29 so much part of their social identity that it can outweigh the lack of citizenship. Those forms  
30 of belonging are also extremely powerful social structures, within which individual agents,  
31 especially outside their national environment, are highly dependent because, without the  
32 organisational endorsement, the individual skill set (even if highly demanded) is difficult to  
33 utilise. In contrast to the guest, the trader is granted a more powerful social position and  
34 easier access to rights and resources, but also pays a price which the explorer is not willing  
35 to pay: individual freedom to pursue individual action independently from social constraints.  
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## 54 55 **Conclusion** 56 57 58 59 60

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3 An individual's story "reveals a self that exists within a cultural matrix of meanings,  
4 beliefs, and normative practices" (Scheffrin 1996, 170) and provides an insight into the  
5 social and cultural identities shaping their social practices and engagement. The categories  
6 of guest, trader and explorer present lived experiences in contrast to top-down categories  
7 based on whether movement across borders was forced or voluntary. They encompass  
8 individual agency as well as the social structures in a pursuit to understanding cross-border  
9 mobilities. All three categories of cross-border mobility stories focus on the reflexive  
10 relationship between two main elements: the *narrative form* which indicates transnational  
11 individuals' perception of their social position across the wider social structures, and the  
12 *socio-cultural discourse*, the narrative reflection of social structure within which individual  
13 agents operate. Their aim is to analytically combine the interplay between individual agency  
14 and social structures in a cross-border mobility context and highlight that top-down  
15 categories, such as migrant or even refugee, are reflective of a 'methodological nationalism'  
16 perspective that ignores both the individual's ability to oppose top-down decisions  
17 regarding their social status as well as rights and the existence of other 'institutional' forms  
18 of belonging, which operate across and beyond national contexts.  
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## 36 Notes

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38 <sup>i</sup> EuroIdentities 'The Evolution of European Identity: Using biographical methods to study the  
39 development of European identity' is a Framework 7 Collaborative Project. Partners include The  
40 seven partner teams in EuroIdentities – Queens University, Northern Ireland; Bangor University,  
41 Wales; Otto-von-Guericke Universität, Magdeburg, Germany; Łódź University, Poland; Tallinn  
42 Technological University, Estonia; Institute of Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Science; and  
43 'Federico II' University, Napoli, Italy; more information available on <http://www.euroidentities.org/>

44 <sup>ii</sup> The sample involves 91 individuals representing a range of mobility experiences - from one-time  
45 long-term mobility to multiple, long- and short-lived destinations. The age of narrators varies  
46 between 20 - 70 years old. Gender distribution is 37% male and 63% female. All interviews have  
47 been masked, the names presented in the article are pseudonyms.

48 <sup>iii</sup> The sensitized groups involved in the sampling procedures in the (name of the project removed)  
49 project were: educationally mobile, transnational workers, civil society organisations, cultural  
50 contacts, intimate relationships and farmers.

51 <sup>iv</sup> Sarah's biographical narrative, per her own request, was delivered in English rather than her native  
52 language. The vocabulary and syntax are original. By contrast, the other two interviews were  
53 conducted in native languages and translated into English. For further details on the translation of  
54 biographical narratives in research see Domecka et.al (2011).  
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