

Personal Narratives and Cosmopolitan Identities: An Autobiographical Approach

Maria Daskalaki
Kingston Business School
Kingston University, UK
m.daskalaki@kingston.ac.uk

Abstract

The paper addresses the debates on transnational communities and the construction of global identities by reflecting upon personal narratives of frequent work-related mobility. It explores the process of ‘cosmopolitanisation’ through narratives of self-transformation during perpetual assignments of expatriation and repatriation. The discussion is based on autobiographical evidence namely personal diary vignettes the analysis of which reveals the importance of emplacement and translocality in the reconstitution of identity during transient inhabitation of places. The paper informs the studies on global or mobile careers exploring some aspects of a translocal identity in the context of practised cosmopolitanism.

Key words: autobiography, cosmopolitanism, emplacement, identity, translocality.

Introduction

Prior research has theorised migrants and members of transnational work communities as ‘cosmopolitans’ describing cosmopolitanism as an ethico-political endeavour that underpins new institutional as well as political arrangements (Nowicka & Rovisco, 2009). In a special issue of the *British Journal of Sociology*, Beck and Sznaider (2006) talk about the ‘cosmopolitan condition’ in order to describe a socio-cultural project that deciphers ‘the complex entanglements of cosmopolitanism with the visual, with mobilities, and with changing forms of ‘being-in-the-world’ (Szerszynski & Urry, 2006, p.115). Their cosmopolitan turn calls for the re-conceptualisation of social relations, away from a dualist nation-state towards relational, deterritorialised ‘entangled

modernities'. This cosmopolitan (a continuation of the postmodern) condition is not only a process of really-existing relations of interdependencies but also a process 'bound up with symbol and ritual...that turns philosophy into personal and social identity and consequently relevant for social analysis' (Beck & Sznaider, 2006, p.8).

Yet, despite a rather large breadth of research (Pogge, 1992; Calhoun, 2002; Delanty, 2006; Mitchell, 2007; Harvey, 2009), cosmopolitanism still remains largely a contested and heavily criticized term with different definitions. In this paper, it will be discussed as an individual practice which signifies the '*discovery of one's own way*' through other localities and cultures (Hazner, 1996; Segura, 2010). This discovery has been linked, by bottom up approaches to cosmopolitanism, with economic and environmental sustainability, civil society activism (Heater, 2002; Santos, 2005, 2006) and a sceptical and critical rather than utopian and idealized globalist vision of the future (Beck, 2002, Beck, 2006). Following this, in this paper, cosmopolitanism will describe the willingness to engage with the 'other', to emotionally and intellectually open up to divergent ways of being in the world (Held, 1996; Szerszynski & Urry, 2006; Mau, Mewes, & Zimmermann, 2008), a state which, in the following sections, will be explored through the concepts of mobility and place identity. Thus, this paper links what I call a practised cosmopolitanism with research on global careers, examining how a 'from within' (or bottom up) cosmopolitan epistemology can inform and enrich our study of expatriation and expatriates' identity transformation.

A great deal of literature in organization studies has examined identities as constructed, situated and fluid, constantly redefined and transformed through social interaction and self-reflection (Goffman, 1959; Stone, 1962; Shotter & Gergen, 1989; Sarup, 1996; Hall, 1996; Hatch & Schultz, 2004; Beech, 2008; Alvesson, 2010). I will build upon these views on personal identity and examine the impact of frequent international assignments on identity transformation. In particular, I will explore how some aspects of the 'cosmopolitan condition' are enacted during a process of identity transformation employing autobiographical narratives. The analysis will be based upon my personal diaries as an expatriate/repatriate academic, a career outside my country of origin which however requires frequent (repeated) expatriation assignments to my country of origin. I consider the vignettes presented in this paper to be stories that have framed and continue to frame my ways of relating to others in the context of my work: I envisage to contribute to autoethnographic approaches in organisation studies as well as the field of expatriate/repatriate narratives reflecting upon the concepts of emplacement and translocality and their impact on the construction of a cosmopolitan, translocal identity. I will suggest that future discussions about 'global careers' (Stahl et al., 2006) ought to reflect the multidimensionality and indeterminacy of *being located yet mobile*, an embodied transformative experience that gradually changes the frame of reference through which we relate to ourselves and others, places and localities.

Therefore the paper's contribution is twofold: first, it addresses the limited autoethnographic work in the organisational literature with an autobiographical approach demonstrating how a self-reflexive analysis of personal narratives can contribute to

organisation theory. Second, it proposes the concept of practised cosmopolitanism as a platform for the exploration of a particular mode of identity transformation which occurs when individuals embody the concepts of emplacement and translocality in the context of frequent international mobility. The first part of the paper will present a brief account of prior autoethnographic and autobiographical work in management and organization studies highlighting the limited self-reflexive work in the field. The next section will refer to prior research on personal narratives of identity construction and how it has informed the study of my identity transformation as a mobile employee. After that, four diary vignettes will be presented and reflexively analysed leading to the formation of the two emerging themes, emplacement and translocality. These will be discussed in the final section of the paper as two of the key aspects of practiced cosmopolitanism, a process that ought to frame future studies of international careers and management of mobile employees.

Autoethnography and Autobiography in Organisation Studies

Autoethnography, a term coined by Hyano (1979) and initially used by Heider (1975) refers to ‘personal narrative, where scientists view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative stories specifically focused on their academic as well as their personal lives’ (Ellis, 2004, p. 45). The term is used rather broadly to include writing traditions ranging from self-stories to reflexive or narrative ethnography and often employs engaging and evocative language. As an editor, Jean Boddewyn encouraged the submission of more autobiographical articles for the *Journal of International Business Studies*, and following this, Dunning (2002) and later on Starbuck (2006) wrote an

autobiographical account of their professional experience as academics. Interestingly, Tenni, Smyth & Boucher (2003) suggested collaborative analysis, forms of grounded theory and poetry, art and drama as tools in the analysis of autobiographical work and more recently, Wallace (2009) analysed career stories of women using Simon de Beauvoir's writings on an interesting account of feminist voices in organizational research. These aforementioned studies and others (Muncey, 2005; Reed-Dannahay, 1997, 2001; Spry, 2001; Learmonth, 2007; Cohen, Duberley & Musson, 2009) have used personal experiences in the study of organizations.

However, there is limited auto-reflexive analysis of autobiographical documents particularly when it comes to: first, the study of identity transformation at work and second, the study of identity transformation during expatriation or international assignments. The contributions of Cotterill & Letherby (1993), Haynes (2006) and Vickers (2007) are valuable exceptions: they all use autobiographical narratives to study: the first, academic reflexivity in relation to feminist research and the second, the co-construction of personal (motherhood) and professional (accountant) identities and the latter, identity changes in targets of bullying. Building upon these studies, the autoethnographic method adopted in this article offers direct access to the lived experience of self-transformation, direct access to 'the internal monologue that provides a narrative sense of personal, subjective continuity which we think of as 'our self'' (Land, 2005, p. 453):

'Being inside the whale is one aspect of the autobiographical connection with ethnographic research. Another is being part of one's own research process. In this, the researcher explicitly sets out to investigate how particular processes (like decision making and creativity and making sense of experience) take place, and include himself/herself as a protagonist' (Hannabuss, 2000, p. 104).

Much of contemporary interest in autobiographical analysis lies in its mediational role, its capacity to intertwine theory and experience. By employing autobiographical methodologies we can understand how our academic ‘characters’ fit the plot of our personal life and how our experiences as practitioners in/transform the plot of our academic scenarios: the academic-practitioner will create meaning out of experiences taking into consideration historical and institutional discourses that render these experiences and meanings relevant to engaging audiences. The subject matter of autobiographic writing

‘is concretely *experienced* reality and not the realm of brute external fact. External reality is embedded in experience, but it is viewed from within the modification of inward life forming our experience; external fact attains a degree of symptomatic value derived from inward absorption and reflection...Autobiography [therefore] presupposes a writer’s intent upon reflection on this inward realm of experience, someone for whom this inner world of experience is important’ (Weintraub, 1975, pp. 822–823).

This inward and outward orientation of the discourse characterizing autobiographical texts demonstrates the intersection between life (‘experienced’) and conceptual knowledge or the understanding of life through ‘formalised self-reflection’ (Marcus, 1994:137). Thus by using autobiography as a methodological practice rather than a mere data source, ‘using both overt and reflexive autobiographical material, using an autobiographical lens through which the research is filtered, [we can access our] own ontology, and [make ourselves] an object for analytical discussion, in a way that links epistemology and methodology’ (Haynes, 2006, p.407). More importantly, autoethnographic approaches including autobiography (Reed-Dannahay, 1997; Ellis, 2004; Kettle, 2004), constitute a ‘poetic science’, a critical narrative inquiry that lies at

the 'intersection of art and science': 'the social scientist, broadly conceived and imagined, can and should enter into the endeavor and, when the situation calls for it, do so as imaginatively and artfully as possible through creating work that not only purveys knowledge of this or that area but that uses writing, that uses form, in a way that truly serves the content, and the people, in question' (Freeman, 2006, p. 141).

Taking on this poetic challenge, I will employ Gunn's (1982) three interrelated and constituting elements of autobiographical writing in order to analyse and reflect upon my diary vignettes: the first element, *impulse*, describes the ways through which we try to create meaning of past experience and re-construct the self based on these experiences. By re-constructing the self through auto-narrativisation, we come to perform various discourses and realize alternative forms of action; a sensemaking process. Through the second element, *perspective*, the authors-subjects, position themselves within the wider socio-cultural context and re-define action based on historical and institutional discourses within which action is embedded; a process of narrating myself-in-place or a self-placing activity. Finally, through the last one, *response*, the autobiographical vignettes presented here invite the readers to a shared interpretation of experience as a platform for reflection and action; a praxis. This autobiographical work is a form of radical introspection that transforms my practice as an academic (writer) who does not only write about narratives but also inhabits them. Thus I propose autobiographical writing as a valuable tool in organisational research, a methodology as well a reflexive framework that could potentially enrich our understanding of work and organisations.

Narratives of Expatriation: Accounts of an Emerging Cosmopolitan Identity

Recently a special issue in *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal* re-established expatriation as a topic of contemporary and relevant research with papers on female expatriates, expatriates' adjustment in emerging markets, roles of expatriates' spouses, marital status and its effect on self-initiated expatriates, a reward perspective on expatriates' affective commitment and expatriates' compensation packages (Selmer & Suutari, 2011). Earlier research on expatriation also addressed issues of learning and change (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2010), cross cultural adaptation (Siljanena and Lämsä, 2009) and stress that expatriates and their families may face before, during and after the expatriation/repatriation experience (Adler, 1983; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). Escape from complexity, institutionalised marginality, illusion and heightened visibility have all been seen as part of the expatriates' subjective interpretation of reality (Ambuske, 1990). Expatriates' dual loyalty to the home or host organisation has also been explored as a transformation process, in some cases described as leading ideally to the identification halfway between the cultures involved (Black and Gregersen, 1992; Sanchez, Spector & Cooper, 2000; Richardson & McKenna, 2006). For 'international itinerants' (Banai & Harry, 2004) like academics, who are moving between organizations as well as between several countries and cultures, this identification often becomes blurred (Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Richardson & McKenna, 2006; Katrinli & Penbek, 2010).

The expatriation literature has also been informed by social constructionist views and particularly, narrative views on identity construction (Bruner, 2002; Shotter & Cunliff, 2003; Holman, Gold & Thorpe, 2003; Collinson 2003; Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004).

‘Indeed, identity without narrative would be superficial and lack meaning...It is because of the importance of narrative to identity that writers talk about ‘narrative identity’ (Ricoeur, 1992/1990, in Holman et al., 2003: 56). Kohonen (2004, 2005) and others (Schneider & Asakawa, 1995; Osland, 2000; Gardner, 2005) take these views into consideration in their expatriates’ narrative analysis and propose that international assignments are transformative experiences. It is not just a developmental identity process but ‘a change in the composition of selfhood, perhaps a minor rearrangement in what one is’ (Peltonen, 1998, p.888). This reflexive construction and reconstruction of a narrative self is ‘a potentially effective way of dealing with the openness and uncertainties of life’ (Alvesson, 2010, p. 212), aspects that a translocal career undoubtedly entails.

Nevertheless, though the need for identity transformation and the reconstitution of self have been discussed extensively, all prior work in the field aspires to a coherent (though adjustable) identity necessary for the ontological security of mobile employees; hence rational and linear narratives of self-identity have been rarely problematised (Land, 2005). Addressing this and consequently, trying not to impose linearity and order on my personal narratives, I present my personal stories as they were experienced, disjointed, fragmented and rhizomic. I recognise the lack of a unique, complete story in favour of a compelling number of voices that celebrates the plurality and contradictions that characterise mobility, transformation and cosmopolitanization. As a result, I construct a cosmopolitan translocal identity which entails the inhabitation of intermediate spaces of temporary displacement and perpetual dislocation.

The analysis of my autobiographical narratives, in other words, will demonstrate that the impact of expatriation/repatriation on self-identity is complex, undecided and polyvocal and does not necessarily lead to a 'heroic representation of the global manager' (Osland, 1995). The 'cosmopolitan condition', I will propose, requires constant change in the frame of reference and values, a realignment of social patterns and ontological positioning which sometimes may not become complete, finite, but remain unbounded, multiple and incoherent. This paper is a way of exteriorising feelings, (re)-shaping experience and (dis)connecting with an endless journey: from home (London), back home (Athens). In the section that follows, I reflect upon four narratives, part of a series of vignettes that my personal diary includes, which concurrently -yet not in finality- constructed an identity of what I call a non-Euclidean¹ cosmopolitan: someone who takes herself back and forth from place to place (both textually and physically/geographically), not seeking for the bridges, not adapting to the differences (cultural, spatial or social) but simply embracing immanent encounters, multiplicity and incompleteness.

Narratives of Emplacement and Translocality: The Diary Entries

Following a Thomas & Znaniecki (1958) historical tradition, life story researchers have recognised the value of a variety of personal documents which unveil aspects of people's lives, based on the fact that these are means through which participants can freely express and construct meaningful aspects of their lives (Harrison, 2009). These personal documents include letters, diaries, journals, auto/biographies and memoirs (for example,

¹From Deleuze and Guattari's (2004b) non-Euclidean space of multiplicity and immanence (see also the work of Doel, 2000).

Cooper, 1987; Stanley 1993). In this paper, I have chosen to discuss four vignettes from my personal diary that I suggest demonstrate how the themes of emplacement and translocality emerged in relation to my identity reconstruction as a cosmopolitan. Translocality, a term also used by Appadurai (1998), denotes the in-between places in which mobile people are locally grounded, connecting in a way the notion of mobility and emplacement (Smith, 2001; Christou, 2003; Smith, 2005; Conradson & Latham, 2005; Sinatti, 2009; Wanning, 2010). That is, the ‘trans’ describes not only the movement from place to place (mobility) but also the process of inhabiting a transitory place (emplacement).

The four vignettes, two from 2005, one from 2008 and another from 2009, portray how my personal and professional journeys evolved and merged in an attempt to release myself from a Western, modernist need to construct a cohesive identity and reflect upon my experience in relation to a concrete yet intermediate place. My narration starts below with two conference events in which the themes of emplacement and translocality start forming as dimensions in a process of self-transformation:

‘Suddenly, I was disorientated, a familiar feeling that had started haunting me occasionally after the beginning of my current job. It was three years ago when I started working as a Director of Overseas Collaborations for a British University and their Greek partner institution. This meant that every two months, I had to spend a week to a month working in Greece, my country of origin and place where I spent the first 20 years of my life. That day in the conference, momentarily, I felt Greek but ... It is not the case for people to pause when they have to answer the question ‘where do you come from?’ I did. In fact, being away from both London and Athens had somehow unsettled me; Of course, in London if the same question was posed to me I would have said “I come from

Greece". Similarly, if I was to be asked when in Athens, I would have answered "I live in London but I also live here, I come here regularly...". Now, first time across the Atlantic, I seemed not to be able to find the 'other' against who to define myself, we were all others in this room somehow, I thought. That day, across the Atlantic, I hesitated. Could working in my country of origin so regularly be responsible for my hesitation? 'Where do I come from'? I was feeling out of place, no, not because I was in Philadelphia. Out of place being Here or There, where I was born and Here and There, where I live; Here and There, where I work and Here and There, where I have always to understand, to remember, to belong, to distance from, to connect, to arrive, to depart... Where did I come from? Dislocated, misplaced, yet with a surprising conviction, I answered: "It is complicated, where can I start from..." (Diary Entry, April 2005, Conference, Philadelphia, USA)].

And then almost a year later, I wrote:

'There I was again, a delegate in an international conference, this time in Germany, socialising with fellow academics from all over the world: [my name], where are you from?' 'Oh, well, I came from London, I work in London for a British University but I am Greek...I also work in Greece'. Again, a familiar hesitation, a feeling of having to... justify (?) myself for what I am and for what I also am, or I am not, an uneasiness. For almost three years now, I have been living through the stories I tell about being and not being there...We all live through our stories but mine? Somehow disconnected, actually some of them totally disconnected. Stories that always leave me with this sense of incompleteness; before I finish them, I have to fly back, go somewhere, leave behind, only to expect that I will find the same or other stories again soon, maybe not there but somewhere, somewhere else, not here. My life is as if it is lived only when I tell these stories about me not-here, not before. And I know that as I talk about my past, I try to bridge the gap between the two places, to eradicate the distance, to stand still. Or, at least, if I could take you all with me, here and there? People, events, conversations fade in a recurrent question: "when are you leaving again?". Standing still, trying to find my

centre, me the decentred one, to find my balance with one foot on one boat and the other on another, like this, balancing, I feel I am sailing away, somewhere else, not here. Yes, I also work in Greece, yes, I have a home there, yes, and my home is in London....Which part of the story do you want to hear?’ (July 2005, Diary Entry, Conference, Berlin)].

Which part of the story do I want to tell? I was born in Athens, and now I am a permanent resident in the UK, a British academic for almost twelve years; yet part of my current role requires frequent -every two months- trips to Greece that last from one week to a month, sometimes more. I guess this is a form of repeat expatriation; however, as Greece is my country of origin, it is also a temporary repatriation. In the aforementioned conference experiences, I felt the need to clarify that, to justify my confusion when the question was posed, to claim back my ‘Greek identity’ yet to construct a new one at the same time as an academic in the UK, who is Greek and also works in Greece periodically. Could going back to work in my country of origin potentially be the trigger for my ‘identity crisis’? There was something paradoxical in that. It must be travelling, other voices would tell me. But what is travel?

‘Travel, like existence, is a non-figurative art. Travel is in the head. It is the allegiance to a complicated spatial ritual and a radical simplification of existence. It is a moon-landing at the outlying point of all rest. Travel is an anamorphosis’ (Baudrillard, 1996, pp. 29-30).

My desire (Western, modernist ontology) to understand things in a linear way, to organise events in a coherent and progressive manner had come in direct conflict with the fragmentation and cyclicity of the meaning-making process that I was experiencing. Narration contexts are not subject-centred but processes that occur within an established realm of discourse. Thus, communities’ embedded identities are continuously constructed within the groups to which they belong. I was re-constructing my identity - as a perpetual

expatriate and repatriate to and from my country of origin - within discursive boundaryless spaces. What I also had to re-construct however was my ontological position and my method of defining the self: from a practicing materialist-realist I had to become 'realising' and 'de-realising' deconstructionist (Boje et al., 2004). It is very easy to adopt postmodernism when you are writing your doctoral thesis; yet what happens when you have to embody Jameson's 'schizophrenia' (1998) while seeking to perform Deleuze & Guattari's (2004b/1987) 'radical schizophrenic', a revolutionary and nomadic wanderer? And your life when you think back, when you narrate, resembles *Cool Memories II*:

'The world has become a seminar. Everything now takes this wearisome academic form. Some existences are merely perpetual seminars, with the hope of a cool grave in Cultures' shade at the end. The Last Judgment transformed into a giant symposium, with all travel and hotel expenses paid' (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 33).

My transient work experiences resulted in incomplete narrative performances that left me with various unlinked threads full of discrepancies, conflicts and incoherence. The constant (re-) telling of experience due to the frequent nature of my expatriation/repatriation became a form of self- reflection about past, present and future activities. Yet, at the same time, highlighted the dynamic interrelationship that existed among narratives and ante-narratives (active and in flux on a constant basis) and left me with an 'unfinished', incomplete story (Boje, 2001), 'a polyphony of competing narrative voices and stories told by many voices within different historical, cultural and relational contexts' (Cunliff, Luhman & Boje 2004, p. 276). 'When walking down the street, the internal monologue and experience itself, is realised as a series of interruptions and

random juxtapositions...language produces a “false” appearance of subjective coherence and narrative continuity’ (Land, 2005, p. 459). This seemingly coherent narrative identity is described in a recent study on international itinerants:

‘Regardless of the experienced discontinuities the repeat expatriates maintain a sense of coherence which makes the transitions less difficult. In their narratives the repeat expatriates integrate their experiences and as described by Ezzy (1998) it provides a subjective sense of self-continuity. Whereas for the international itinerants the temporality and transitions in themselves become important, they find a sense of coherence even though doing different things as they have established themselves in their global careers’ (Näsholm, 2011, p.182).

I had therefore to find coherence, to find self-continuity, to construct my own heroic narrative of a truly global employee. Yet, the Deleuzian ‘radical schizophrenia’ seemed closer, looking back to what I wrote a few years later:

‘Sitting on the bus, my mind wanders off and then suddenly, I am surprised to realize where I am (in this double-decker bus?): ‘I am in London!’ I say to myself, full of surprise, ‘of course you are’, I reply, equally surprised. I smile with my momentary confusion and then I wonder: awareness of the interior, lack of connection with the exterior, realization and distancing; processes that for a minute do not matter as ‘I’ could be anywhere and, like waking up from a dream, I had to look around and reconnect, identify with. And then it strikes me how often I experience this, and often, I need to re-place myself, I find it difficult to identify and define the inside in relation to the outside (or is it the outside in relation to the inside?). The familiar does suddenly become unfamiliar. I notice the colours; I look around like I can see for the first time, trying to fit myself in the picture, to place myself in the map. I often do that; I imagine the world map and then from above mark my position on it. I am not sure what makes me do that but I compelled to do it. Zoom out and then zoom in, all the way to the point where I stand. To locate myself, I suppose, only for a moment however, before I zoom out again. Does it matter? I suppose it does...Snapshots of my life. Before I miss my stop, I push the red

button. I am in the streets of London again; I am walking home' (Diary Entry, November 2008).

The frequent changes (perpetual nature of expatriation/repatriation experience) in the socio-cultural and topological environment (and consequently my relations, discourses and representations) that I experience, require shifts between the levels of self-categorisation. This could reflect the opposing forces of assimilation and differentiation which seem to be responsible for the fluctuations in the degrees of identification either with the collective or the individuated self. In *'Another Place, Not Here'*, Brand (1996) portrays the diasporic experience for the women characters and indicate that their consequent feeling of not belonging 'emerges symbolically from their spatial dislocation—a displacement that mirrors their inability to fit in or to become part of a world from which they are alienated' (Almeida, 2008, p.16). Fitting in requires reworking of relations to ensure singularization of broken experiences and a 'fixed oedipal self' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a/1984):

'More fundamentally, the trap of linear narrative time produced by language has arrested the development of difference by constantly fixing it back upon identity. Human identity is straitjacket that reterritorializes inhuman forces, potentials and differences back onto oedipally legitimated identities (Land, 2005, p. 457).

Undoubtedly, cross-cultural contact produces less stable interaction systems which as a result lead to the formation of temporary identity structures visibly produced through social processes. Fragmentation and change of identities through role negotiation and conflict suggest therefore that any self-authoring attempt would be temporary and 'in relation to others, a writing that takes place in social/historical contexts' (Deetz, 2003, p. 125). My expatriation, which at the same time is a form of repatriation, is a transitory

experience that brought about iterant narrations that re-create an open and heterogeneous place identity. This openness and heterogeneity are necessary for inhabiting a 'home' in-between, inhabiting my *Erewhon*²; a place where 'movement is not from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b/1987, p. 389). It is not order, self-continuity and realisation of the desire for the coherent self and stable homogeneous place reference³ but disorder, fluidity and impossibility that govern this mode of inhabitation: being mobile yet located. To put it differently, emplacement and translocality materialise *because of* the impossible desire, the eternal force in the process of becoming: 'everything stops dead for a moment, everything freezes in place - and then the whole process will begin over again' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a/1984, p. 8).

I quote from my diary almost one year later:

'Getting off the plane, I cannot wait to pick up my red suitcase (this time is the small one) and walk through the airport gates. I am here, I am in Athens. Trying to remember when I was last here...So much has happened since then. No, it can't be that long...surely! In the taxi, I look outside the window and a strange kind of familiarity makes me smile. As the taxi approaches the inner city, we drive down a street with tangerine trees. I go back in time. Their smell reminds me of my childhood... this for some inexplicable reason makes me reflect on what has happened since the last time I arrived at the airport, picked

2 'Erewhon', the word used by Samuel Butler to refer to a City, called *no-where* as well *now-here* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 100).

3 'Desire', for Lacan (1992), can never be satisfied, or as Žižek (1997) put it, 'desire's *raison d'être* is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire' (1997, p. 39). Arguably for Lacan, desire is not a relation to an object but a relation to a lack. He states that lack is what causes desire to arise. Yet, Deleuze & Guattari claim that desire does not arise from lack, but rather is a productive force in itself. Although there are various interpretations of the Lacanian lack and desire, for the purpose of this paper, I will use desire as a self-productive force, a source of energy that sustains mobility and transformation.

up my suitcase, got a taxi (which way around? For a moment in time I lose track, my thoughts follow a path, or is it a circle); I arrive, pick up my suitcase, unpack, pack, go the airport, arrive, unpack... (which way around?); I am thinking of events that happened, news to share, things to do; I have already started telling stories, my mind already reconstructs the experiences since the last time I was there (here). 'Which there' (here)? Does it matter? Maybe not anymore because I, during my plane or taxi rides away from home and towards home (which home?), always try to reconstruct the narrative, to identify...but the story never ends and I? I look back to all the accounts, the accounts of my life, my work, my-self and realize that it is all unfinished embeddings of old and new me, of here and there, fragments, fuzzy memories of my attempt to be. Momentarily, at times like this, I grasp it: the fluidity of being and the actuality of becoming, the smell of tangerines, me then and me now. I get off the taxi, I have arrived at work' (Diary Entry, from the Airport, December 2009).

In an attempt to emplace myself, I began questioning singularity, linearity and separateness which had played a big role in formulating my essentialist approach to identity work but also constructed my feelings of displacement. The “failures’ (Lacan, 1992) that mark our conscious discourse are not errors of speech but important aspects of our self-construction’ (Driver, 2009, p. 59). These repeated failures to construct a linear identity-in-place resulted in a self-knowledge, a resource for the constitution of a new cosmopolitan understanding of my work role, an identity in-between places, a sanctuary that contextualizes solitude not as an isolated moment of singularity, but through a sense of becoming; a place where I could explore my trans-location (here and there), the spiritual and the physical, discovering that meaning is created through intersection and transformation.

In Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, an example of perpetual mobility is presented, in which the narrator becomes overwhelmed with the 'constant movement of the infinite' (Shaviro, 2009, p.123) and only desires everything to stop (Bell, 2010). The ontological desire to order things, to own my stories was initially responsible for my feelings of displacement: place could only be defined if I stopped moving (*to stand still*). It was not a 'failure' of my conscious discourse to construct a unified or even heterogeneous and fluid sense of self; it was a response to a lived state of impermanence rather than finality, spatial and chronological fluidity rather than ordered historical chronology. This response required a constant redefinition of my emplacement strategies, the telling of a story that starts from the middle and sometimes never ends.

Through the inhabitation of a smooth, 'heterogeneous, in continuous variation...amorphous and not homogenous' space (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b/1987, p. 536), I am learning to relate to the world in a nebulous way. It is not *still*; it is still and mobile and because of that, it creates new possibilities for being in the world. An internalised, practised cosmopolitanism presupposes a strategy to break away from this double-bind of still/mobile, smooth/striated. What is important here is the passages linking mentally and physically smooth and striated, homogenous and heterogeneous spaces. This is because passages are the becomings: they reveal a *chora* in-between that in order to inhabit it in its exile, 'we leave the rational dwellings we construct and try to belong to, and deepen our consciously constructed image of the world by facing signs of our wilderness' (Brown, 1966, p. 261):

'I never saw this *strange dwelling* again. Indeed, as I see it now, the way it appeared to my child's eyes, it is not a building, but is quite dissolved and distributed inside me: here one room, there another, and here a bit of corridor which, however, does not connect the two rooms, but is conserved in me in fragmentary form. Thus the whole thing is scattered about inside me, the rooms, the stairs that descended with such ceremonious slowness, others, narrow cages that mounted in a spiral movement, in the darkness of which we advanced like the blood in our veins' (Rilke, 1983/1910, p.33, emphasis added).

I inhabit this 'strange dwelling' by going here and there, by embodying a pendulum movement from order to disorder. I can only achieve this through mobility, by a continuous process of placing myself in territories, by deterritorialising myself, by inventing new trajectories, new socialities, a grid of identities. This personal journey is my perpetual folding and unfolding, my nomadic voyage to a non-Euclidean cosmopolitanism. This was / is my story.

Discussion and Closing Remarks

Prior work in organisation studies has recognised the authors' interference in the construction of their subjects' worlds as an inevitable part of qualitative research (for example, Czarniawska, 1997; Boje, 2001) and proposed that 'one way ... to resolve this issue is for interpretive research to seek to offer options and possibilities rather than prescriptions...by representing research in a way that attempts to give direct voice to the organisational actors who tell their stories' (Rhodes, 1997). In this autoethnographic study, I became a researcher of my own organisational experience and a writer who does not translate but instead narrates and reflects. I consider autobiographical writing as a direct form of interaction of the reader with the subjects' experience without the authorial interpretive framing of the events narrated. In autobiographical writing the only interpretation or story that emerges is the one that the subject chooses to reconstruct for

the purpose of sharing with an audience. However, this does not mean that the personal narratives fully escape interpretative processes. I do not claim that autobiographical writing is representing a unique reality experienced and consecutively shared with audiences. Autobiographical writing is still an attempt of the subject/narrator to make sense of a previous experience, to make sense of interactive social contexts. Yet the interpretation in this case is the constructing act of the author-subject herself anticipating interaction with the audience and the context/space and time of narration.

Further, I also recognise that autobiographical work has been criticised in social sciences as suffering from 'excessive individualism' (Harisson, 2009) moving the frame of reference away from the social and embedded to the personal and the specific. However, a narrative construction, even a personal one, is a social process, contingent on time, space, structures and interactions. The vignettes employed here clearly demonstrate not only the relevance of the organisational and cultural context in the construction of the narratives but also the relationship between personal experience (self-transformation) and collective/social dimensions of the study (emplacement and translocality as social practices). The social dimensions of this study can be further developed conceptually by future projects that could try to link a practice-based, individual approach to cosmopolitanism with the processes through which transnational communities constitute new spaces of engagement and inclusivity, activism and organizing. On another level, this study can also be linked with work on global cities, with the translocal examined as the site for studying macro-social transformations. For example, both levels of analysis can benefit by further exploring how various actors, institutions and networks

contextualise the concepts of emplacement and translocality in order to transcend bounded territoriality and normative orders towards the formation of multiple 'particularised segmentations' and new 'embedded borderings' (Sassen, 2006).

The series of my diary entries also points to other themes such as relationships, cultural differences, adaptation practices and change all extensively discussed by the literature on expatriation in the past (see earlier section). Yet, in all the diary entries shared here and in the others that are not, the themes of emplacement and translocality lie behind, driving the plot of my stories, almost unconsciously constituting a '(self-)critical cosmopolitanism' (Beck, 2002). The simultaneity and perpetuality that characterise my expatriation/repatriation experience demonstrate lived situatedness, with increased interdependence and translocal interactions. It is not cosmopolitanism imposed but an embodied experience that requires emplacement strategies towards a new translocal identity. In my case, it was the simultaneous repatriation and expatriation on an occasional basis which provided this very particular space in which I reconstructed my translocal identity as a mobile employee and I embodied my situated cosmopolitan consciousness. This case therefore highlights the subjective nature of self-transformation and the unique conditions which characterise a practised cosmopolitan condition. Thus a practice-informed, individual approach signifies a movement towards embedded and multifaceted modes of cosmopolitan understanding which however have as defining feature the co-existence of multiple sometimes incoherent realities, homogeneous and heterogeneous spaces, still and mobile communities and in-between, intermediate places.

This is a cosmopolitanism that constitutes itself; it is not an abstract creation but a radically indeterminate and situated project.

Following this, the concepts of expatriation and repatriation have to be re-evaluated as other, new terms which can more precisely describe the cosmopolitanization process as manifested in the context of international management and individual career choices appear more relevant. These new terms should reflect the dynamic processes of emplacement and translocality which constitute the embodied experience of a mobile yet located self. Moreover, less standardised human resource management practices and flexible work patterns have to be established to account for temporality, fluidity and transformation. Future research could focus on the exploration of those practices taking into consideration the importance of emplacement and translocality -and other relevant themes that other autobiographical narratives may reveal- in the constitution of cosmopolitan identities.

To conclude, this paper is an autobiographical account of self-transformation as affected by my professional role as an expatriate/repatriate academic. My recurrent transitory experience posed questions to taken-for-granted assumptions about place and continuity and exemplified the effects of mobile careers on the performance of identity. My personal and professional journeys merged in the transformative experience of a simultaneous and perpetual expatriation and repatriation, a state of mobility that entailed various modes of emplacement and translocality. It is through these modes that 'my cosmopolitanism' folds and unfolds, embedded in the fragments of incomplete narratives and situated not

only in the diverse communities I interact with but more importantly, in the passage to and from them. I continue to wander in this Cosmopolis, a derive towards an unimagined future.

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