

2008-10-24

## **A Narratives' Exploration of Non-traditional International Assignees Locally Resident and Employed in the South of France**

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Crowley-Henry, M.: A narratives' exploration of non-traditional international assignees locally resident and employed in the South of France. 4th International Workshop on Expatriation, EIASM, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Spain), 23 & 24 OCTOBER, 2008.

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# A narratives' exploration of non-traditional international assignees locally resident and employed in the South of France

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**4<sup>th</sup> Workshop on Expatriation**

**EIASM, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Spain), 23 & 24 OCTOBER, 2008**

*Paper due:* 30<sup>th</sup> September 2008

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**A narratives' exploration of non-traditional international assignees locally resident and employed in the South of France**

**UPDATED ABSTRACT**

Contemporary publications in international human resource management call for the pluralisation of international assignees beyond the widely described expatriate. This paper presents an under-explored category of international assignees: highly educated, non French, Western (first world) individuals who reside indefinitely in the South of France, maintaining their professional careers while resident in the host country. A sample of over thirty individuals meeting these criteria was interviewed in France in depth over a three year period.

These individuals are not migrants as by their own descriptions they consider migrants to *have* to move internationally (economic migrants) while their decisions to move to and remain in the South of France are extra-economically and more lifestyle anchor related. Rather, they would describe themselves as 'an English-, Irish-, American- etc. man/woman living in France'. The narratives collected from the sample are analysed

interpretivistically and inductively, with the focus of this paper on the identity construction of the sample as described by the sample's narratives.

In an era of globalisation and fragmentation, the paper explores the sample's morphing identity. The term 'morphing' is synonymous with the protean career concept, the concept in career literature underlining the subjective career elements which impact on individuals' career choices and directions. While the use of the protean career concept as an umbrella concept which captures the structural and agential forces influencing the identity reconstruction (morphing) of the sample in question has been critiqued, this paper argues that a development of the protean career concept is warranted taking international careers into consideration. It is this dimension – a development of the protean career concept in aiding understanding of international protean careers as lived experiences of the sample in question – which is at the centre of this paper's thesis.

**PAPER**

**A narratives' exploration of non-traditional international assignees locally resident and employed in the South of France**

**Introduction**

Contemporary publications in international human resource management call for the pluralisation of research on international assignees beyond the expatriate which has preoccupied academics and researchers (Brewster and Suutari 2005; de Cieri et al 2007; Schuler et al 2002; Scullion and Paauwe 2004). While there is a lack of consistency with regard to the term 'expatriate', it is widely understood to refer to parent or third country nationals (Briscoe and Schuler 2004) sent on a temporary international assignment by their organisation. This paper presents an under-explored category of international assignees; specifically it concerns non French, Western (first world), educated (to third or fourth level) individuals who moved to and continue to be resident in the South of France, while maintaining their respective professional careers (be it by working for host country organisations in the host country on local employment contracts of an undefined duration, or by working on international projects (with the South of France as the 'home' base), or by being self employed and working on host or international projects).

These international assignees have chosen to remain in the host country (South of France) for a variety of reasons, the preference being their personal lifestyle and quality of life over an objective international career (with more transparent vertical promotion opportunities). The author has termed the sample 'bounded transnationals' – bound by virtue

of a complex of factors which impact upon their choice of continued residency in the host country; transnationals due to their experience in living in (and acclimatising or acculturating to) at least one other international country, and the ensuing association with several other international assignees and cultures. A sample of over thirty individuals meeting these criteria was interviewed in France in depth over a three year period (2002-2005). These assignees differ from traditional expatriates in that there is no pre-determined organisational option of repatriation to the home country. Indeed there is no assignment duration. The individuals are resident in the South of France where they have made their homes and careers.

They are not migrants as, by their own descriptions, they consider migrants to *have* to move internationally (economic migrants) while their decisions to move to and remain in the South of France are extra-economically and more lifestyle anchor (Schein 1978) related. Rather, they would describe themselves as 'an English-, Irish-, American- etc. man/woman living in France'. The narratives (Creswell 2007, Crowley-Henry and Weir 2007, Czarniawska 2004) collected from the sample are analysed interpretivistically (Blaikie 2000: 115) and inductively, with the focus of this paper on the identity construction and re-construction of the sample as described by the sample's narratives. Berry and Sam's (1997) widely cited acculturation framework serves as a basis for presenting the morphing identity construction and re-construction of the bounded transnationals, as they morph from having identities that they would appear confident and familiar with, to the identity reconstruction undergone and being undergone as they deal with daily life in a host country environment.

In an era of globalisation and fragmentation, the paper explores the sample's morphing identity. The term 'morphing' is synonymous with the protean career concept, the concept in career literature underlining the subjective career elements which impact on

individuals' career choices and directions. While the use of the protean career concept as an umbrella concept which captures the structural and agential forces influencing the identity reconstruction (morphing) of the sample in question has been critiqued (Arnold and Cohen 2008: 14), this paper argues that a development of the protean career concept is warranted taking international careers into consideration. It is this dimension – a development of the protean career concept in aiding understanding of international protean careers as lived experiences of the sample in question – which is at the centre of this paper's thesis.

The following section is concerned with the approach of the study, the findings of which are conveyed in this paper. The sample is introduced in more detail. The use of narratives in uncovering constructed realities is discussed. Then, literature considering cultural adjustment and identity construction is explored. The protean career concept is described, along with its potentially wider application encompassing identity construction. Next, findings from the research are presented. Finally, the limitations of the research, recommendations for further research, and the conclusions are shared.

## **THE APPROACH**

As outlined in the introduction, this paper concerns research into a sample of international assignees which has not been examined before. An ethnographical approach was taken, with the author/researcher a member of the community of individuals following an international career while resident in a host country, immediately prior to, during, and immediately subsequent to collecting the in-depth, semi-structured narratives from sample members in the community.

Nowadays ethnography can 'encompass such a range of perspectives and activities that the idea of adhering to *an* ethnographical position, as though there were only one, is faintly ridiculous' (Mason 2002: 55; italics in original). This particular study was undertaken following an urban, critical and reflexive ethnographical approach. Where classical ethnography is engaged in anthropological fieldwork, researching primitive, exotic, foreign cultures (such as Mead 2001 (first published 1928) and Clifford 1988); urban ethnography (cf Foote Whyte 1993 (first published 1943)) is concerned with sociological fieldwork, studying sub-populations within a single country's national culture. 'Students [of urban ethnography are encouraged] ... to bring anthropology home by learning of the vigorous, dense, heterogeneous cultures located just beyond the university gates' (Van Maanen 1988: 18). The sub-population investigated in the research shared in this paper is the sample of bounded transnationals in the South of France.

While being heavily involved in the community under examination can lead to questions about the reliability of the research, the author/researcher believes it facilitated the collection of contextual information which enabled a deeper, more holistic interpretation of the bounded transnational community. In reflexive ethnography, the ontological and epistemological position of the ethnographer is integral to the research rather than ignored. This imbedded reflexivity in ethnographic research is aptly summarised by Emerson et al (1995: 3):

No field researcher can be a completely neutral, detached observer, outside and independent of the observed phenomena (Pollner and Emerson 1988). Rather, as the ethnographer engages in the lives and concerns of those studied, his perspective 'is intertwined with the phenomenon which does not have objective characteristics independent of the observer's perspective and method' (Mishler 1979: 10). The ethnographer cannot take in everything; rather, he will, in



conjunction with those in the setting, develop certain perspectives by engaging in some activities and relationships rather than others. ... the task of the ethnographer is not to determine the 'truth' but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others' lives

Thus, this paper presents an interpretation of the narratives collected, as read and understood by the researcher/author given her involvement in the research and her association with the sub-population in question. The researcher has taken on the role of an 'insider' in order to better understand the participant's viewpoint (Flick, 2002: 58). However, the researcher relates the experiences as shared by the sample of respondents, rather than her own experiences of life as a member of the bounded transnational community: it is not an auto-ethnographical (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Russell 1999; Ellis and Bochner 2000) study or report.

## **THE SAMPLE**

The criteria of belonging to the bounded transnational sample are expressed in the paper's introduction section. More detailed background information regarding the individuals interviewed can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. Overview of Interviewees**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Profession</b>
Sarah	46	British (English)	Divorced (French ex-husband)	1 son (21)	Self employed, consultancy, own business, previous manager, people responsibility
Angie	41	American	Married (French husband)	son (10), daughter (8)	Lead Program Manager, people responsibility, employee
Alice	43	Scottish	Married (Scottish husband)	sons (13, 8)	Head of Recruitment, self-employed/consultant, people responsibility
Mary	34	Scottish	Married (Scottish)	no	Pharmacist, employee

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			husband)	children	
Deirdre	42	Irish	Married (Irish husband)	2 daughters (11, 8)	Toxicologist
Shaun	39	British (English)	Married (American wife)	son (2.5), daughter (8 mths)	Manager, people responsibility, employee
Natalie	56	British (English)	Married (British (English) husband)	1 daughter (17)	Self-employed/Consultant (Personal & Business Coaching, Marketing Rep), previous manager, people responsibility
Rick	43	British (English)	Engaged (British (English) fiancée)	no children	Industry Business Manager, employee
Barry	39	British (English)	Married (British (English) wife)	1 son (6), daughter (3)	Professor, employee
Francis	32	Irish	Single (long term relationship, Swedish partner)	no children	Internet Technology Developer, employee
Fiona	28	Irish	Single (long term relationship, French partner)	no children	Marketing Manager, employee
Clare	62	American	Twice divorced	4 step-children	Senior Manager, Educational Systems & Services, people manager, employee
Katharina	37	German	Married (French husband)	2 daughters (12, 10)	Professor International Business, employee
Lisa	33	German (East)	Married (Irish husband)	2 daughters (14, 12)	Self employed, consultancy
Joe	55	British (English)	Married (German wife)	son (26), daughter (25)	Trainer and Consultant, own business, previous manager, people responsibility
Kate	38	British (English)	Married (British (English) husband)	son (6), daughter (4), expecting	Site Manager, people responsibility, employee

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				new baby	
David	32	Irish	Single	no children	Networking Consultant/MBA
Donal	36	Irish	Married (German wife)	2 step-daughters (14, 12)	Manager, people responsibility, employee
Pat	34	British (English)	Engaged (French fiancée)	no children	Technology Consultant, employee
Tracy	54	British (English)	Widow (prev husband American)	2 daughters (24, 21)	Senior Manager Marketing, people responsibility, employee
Philip	51	British (born Jamaica)	Married (Irish wife)	2 children (7, 5)	Professor (vacataire)
Milly	34	American	Married (British (English) husband)	son (2), daughter (7 months)	Project Manager, employee
Ingrid	30	Swedish	Single	no children	Team Coordinator EMEA PreSales, employee
Steve	34	British (English)	Married (Italian wife)	no children	Manager Professional Services Operations
Vincent	41	Irish	Married (Irish wife)	2 daughters (11, 8)	Partner
Ronald	40	Italian	Married (Italian wife)	1 daughter (6)	Manager, people responsibility, employee
Geraldine	52	French (British)	Divorced (French ex-husband)	2 grown up children	Responsable of Maison des Entreprises (Chambre de Commerce)
Diane	31	British (English)	Engaged (British (English) fiancée)	no children	Initial position as nanny/child minder, then moved to work in wine export trade, employee
Billy	52	Welsh (British)	Divorced (French ex-wife)	3 children (19, 14, 11)	Pre-sales consultant
Hilda	41	German	Married (Spanish husband)	daughter (7)	Manager, people manager, employee

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Susan	39	British (English)	Single	no children	Help Desk employee
Gordon	35	Scottish	Married (Scottish wife)	no children	Freelance consultant (telecoms)
Elaine	45	British (English)	Single	no children	Employee
Catherine	40	Australian	Married (British (English) husband)	no children	Employee
Mark	34	Norwegian	Married (British (English) wife)	no children	Manager/employee
Tim	54	British (English)	Married (British (English) wife)	3 children (17, 15, 13)	Project Manager, self-employed contractor
John	29	Belgian	Single	no children	Technology Consultant, employee

The sample consists of seventeen males and twenty females, with ages ranging from twenty-nine to sixty-two, all knowledge workers with professional careers.

## **NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

The aim of narrative inquiry is to understand experience and to make sense of life through the stories that are told (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Czarniawska 1998, 2004; Crowley-Henry and Weir 2007). Using narratives in uncovering constructed realities allows the respondent to relate his/her story as made sense of by the person in question. It also enables the researcher to piece together different elements, events and characters that are mentioned in the narratives and which appear to have influenced and to influence the respondent's choices and life direction. Interpretation of the narrative texts (which include interview transcripts) is a fundamental component of narrative inquiry, which lends itself to the hermeneutic approach to research methodology (Patton 2002: 116). Interpreting narratives requires reflexivity on

the part of the researcher (Denzin 1997). Tedlock (2000) describes narrative ethnography as an 'ethnographic interchange' (Tedlock 2000: 461) where the researcher gives both an accurate description of a group's culture as built up through analysis and interpretation of the group's narratives, while also including the researcher's experiences. The narrative inquirer has a dual experience: he/she experiences the experience and is part of the experience (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 80).

Narrative analysis enables the researcher to find out what a particular issue means to a person, how it affects them, how they think about it and what they do about it (Patton 2002: 13). In order to understand issues and individual perceptions, the researcher is required to ask the individuals questions about their experiences and to hear their stories (Patton 2002: 115). In this study the researcher conducted semi-structured exploratory interviews using a topic guide to ensure key areas the researcher was interested in investigating were covered. However, the respondents were free to speak about events in their lives that were important to them in order to make sense of and map their careers (as bounded transnationals) since moving to France. The ensuing stories allowed the respondents to look back, reflect upon and consider his/her life in order to make sense of it and in so doing, to construct recognisable selves (Chase 2005: 658-659) or their identities.

The complexity of structural factors including organisational, institutional and cultural settings which shape the lives of respondents becomes apparent in narrative inquiry (Crowley-Henry and Weir 2007). The use of narratives is a form of story-telling (Gabriel 2000), an interpretive basis for exploring and understanding complex constructs which could prove difficult to uncover using different analytical approaches.

## **CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT, IDENTITY & THE PROTEAN CAREER**

This paper considers the identity construction and evolving identity reconstruction of bounded transnationals through analysing the narratives collected from the sample. According to the Berry and Sam (1997) acculturation framework, there are four broad alternatives or categories for individuals that move to a new culture. Some people assimilate or 'go native' (assimilation). They do not value their home country culture but prefer to take up the new country's culture and ways completely. Those that go in the opposite direction and focus on their home country culture, avoiding host country nationals and culture are termed separatists or are deemed to follow a separation strategy. This strategy is evident in the building up and popularity of expatriate communities where home country food, sports, language and customs are celebrated to the exclusion of the host country's culture. The third acculturation strategy is known as marginalisation, which is when the individual rejects both the home and host country cultures. The 'ideal' strategy is integration, whereby the individual retains elements of the home country culture while also embracing the host country. It is this strategy that is deemed the most successful for traditional expatriation assignments.

The experiences and stresses from the process of acculturation differ individually, with the process itself impacting upon identity construction and the search for self identity. It is argued that the present culture is that of individualism and narcissism (Lasch 1979), where individuals want to belong and to find their self-identity (Riesman 2001 (original publication 1950), Lasch 1979, Bauman 1994, 1995, 2001). In this study where bounded transnationals are in a new community, different to that from the home country, and displaced from extended family and long term friends, 'self-identity' construction (and re-construction) is even more apparent and emergent. The removal of familiar structures places the bounded

transnationals in a position which facilitates the reassessment of such structures, and enables the individual/human/agential choice to maintain a link to familiar structures or to modify the connection to such structures, to the extent that similar structures are present in the host environment and/or the bounded transnational can retain a connection to the structures in the home country, despite geographical barriers.

To replace the loss of stabilising structures such as community, religion and family, Lasch (1979) uses the term 'psychic security' to describe the desire by individuals to be positively noticed or admired by other people. This movement is corroborated by Riesman (2001, 1950) who describes three phases of sociological change in American culture, from tradition directed (based on belonging to a/the community, conformity), to inner directed (based on individualism and a constant desire for more wealth), to other directed (based on peer advice and approval). Riesman emphasises the influence of 'others' in the construction of identity. This is interpreted in the Findings section.

The protean career (Hall, 1976) focuses on the individual and his/her role in transforming his/her own career path. The emphasis is on internal or subjective success rather than objective success (position, salary). The protean career concept acknowledges that people can use their past experiences and situation to reformulate a career direction; the 'morphing' of a career over time thanks to past and present experiences (professional and/or personal), and potential future opportunities. It is this 'morphing' element of the protean career concept, taking the complex of structural factors and agential ability and ambition that provides a rudimentary framework for the continuously 'morphing' identity construction of the sample as they encounter new situations and experiences over time.

## **FINDINGS**

On analysis and interpretation of the narratives, the author/researcher finds the bounded transnational sample to be both separatists and integrated (Berry and Sam 1997). While 'at home' in France, enjoying the lifestyle on offer there, and integrated into the community through work, sport and family, they continue retain very strong links to the home country, be it through frequent visits there or from family/friends to them in France. Philip (51 years old, British, married (Irish wife), 2 children aged 7, 5) acknowledges that he gets to

*'see them [family and friends] all the time. I go back every ... 6 weeks – 2 months... ...Flights are cheap from the Cote D'Azur. ... I keep in touch with them because I see them so frequently and I do keep in touch with them still. As I said I mean London's only about 1 and a half hours on Easyjet...'*

Indeed, the sample enjoy acknowledging their difference in that they are proud of being from a different culture, and to that extent, want to retain that separatist or different status. Sarah (46 years old, British, divorced (ex-husband French), 1 grown up son) observes that her affinity to people originating from Britain has increased over the years.

*'I have noticed as I've got older, it's more and more important for me to have English friends. I think my roots are really important for me. I think the culture. I mean I prefer English humour to French humour. I mean I appreciate both but I think... it's just ... different... I just feel that I've got this sort of something in common, more in common with, not with every English person but with the English people that I acquired out here'*

As regards the agential impetus to adopt structures that are familiar in the home country while now resident in the host country, the research shows that the sample did embrace similar structures, such as sports clubs and religious institutions (see quote below from Steve, 34 years old, British, married (Italian wife), no children).



*'I go to the English church in Nice which is like a Church of England church and I go there most Sundays'*

This suggests that the 'tradition directed' (Riesman 1950, 2001) culture persists. This disproves the loss of community and structure as suggested by Lasch (1979), Riesman (1950, 2001) and others. Rather, it proves that community and structure is important for bounded transnationals in a new culture, and co-exists with individualism (wanting to remain separatist, different) and the desire to be approved by others (Lasch's 'psychic security') as evidenced in the following quote by Tracy (54 years old, British, widow (previous husband American), 2 grown-up children):

*'I love that I am living where other people want to go on holidays'.*

However, the environment of being just one of many other bounded transnationals is facilitating in that it provides the sample with a group/social identity, other than their original nationality. Catherine (40 years old, Australian, married (British husband), no children) describes this:

*'I'm in a community where I'm actually the same as everyone, because everybody's quite different.'*

This aids integration while encouraging the individuals to maintain the close connection to their original home countries. The integration and separation dimension of Berry and Sam (1997)'s adjustment typologies is underlined.

Milly (34 years old, American, married (British husband), 2 young children aged 2.5 years and 7 months) recommends maintaining contact with friends and family in the home country during and after the integration process in order to support acculturation and identity reconstruction, by grounding one's identity as perceived in the home country relationships and building off that in re-examining and re-building one's identity in the host country environment:

*'My one bit of advice would be to keep in touch with some people from the past who know you, as a support, because you're going to need it. A few people who know you as you are because you're going to be put in completely different roles and be expected to perform in different ways. And just feeling how that doesn't feel true to you is going to be quite stressful. And I think continues to be quite stressful'*

She feels that in keeping close ties with people you knew really well in the home country, you retain part of your old identity. It helps to remind you of what you are, where you come from, who you are/were. It acts 'as a support' when reassessing your identity during adjustment and integration in the host country.

The findings critique the notion of the individual as a free agent, able to select, construct or reconstruct an identity. Rather, it is clear that there is a complex web of actors which play a part in what and who the individual ultimately is or becomes. For those in the sample who were in long term relationships or who were married, the respective partner's happiness plays a large part in the structural status of the individual, which in turn impacts upon identity construction (as a home or host country national). Ronald (40 years old, Italian, Italian wife, six year old daughter) admits that:

*'I miss Italy (laugh). I like it more than here definitely. ... [But my wife] would like to stay here ... for life (laugh)'*

This complicates further the identification (Bauman 2001) process, as the feelings of the significant other players in the relationship also need to be considered.

All of the respondents went through the stages of adjusting to life in France; how they had brought with them their learned behaviours and cultures from their prior country (or countries) of residence, which they then had to re-construct to fit in with the way of life in France. Joe (55 years old, British, married (German wife), 2 children aged 26, 25) tells:

*'I've got an English base... But I've gone past that if you like and I've had the luck to have impacts from different cultures like the German and the French you know. When I first came here after 4 years in Germany, I was a German driver. I hated the way these French didn't follow the rules. And I was doing German crazy things by looking at them and flashing the lights... and after a while I said to myself: "this is crazy. You're not German. You know why don't you just calm down." And I quite like the way they drive now, because they're very... here they're sort of "yeah I know it's a rule but re-word it, we'll bend it a little bit". And it works. You know if it works what the hell.'*

The incorporation of learning from other cultures, and the placing of the non-relevant learning aside in the context of residing in France does not come naturally. As Joe (above) describes, it took him a while to change his outlook on how the French drive compared to his Germany experiences.

The identity development process evolves during the adjustment and integration period. However, it can result in confusion regarding identity or affinity to the ways of doing things. The interviewees acknowledge their hybrid identity state: their allegiance to their home originating country (due to their personal histories and experience with the home

country culture, through family, education, language), their non-French-ness, their being 'different', their ties to the host country (through children, spouse, work, community). Milly (34 years old, American, married (British husband), 2 young children aged 2.5 years and 7 months) describes her status in stronger language terms:

*'I see myself as a true bastard (laugh). You know, a true hybrid is probably the nicest term. Yeah I'm American and I'll always be American... I realise that's my roots, but I don't really fully identify with "American" anymore and I don't fully identify with English [English husband] or French [both children were born in France]... It's a true hybrid. ... I feel like a true hybrid. I mean I couldn't go back to North Carolina or Croydon and fully feel comfortable. I'd always miss the interaction with completely different people...'*

This concept of being a hybrid is common across the interviews: whilst retaining your national identity to some extent (i.e. the country in which you were reared), there is a feeling of no longer fitting or belonging in that context simply because your experiences are different, your everyday life is now played out in a different country stage.

Rick (41 years old, British, engaged (British fiancée), no children) remarks that:

*'You get to the point of just being foreign everywhere, including in your own, home country.'*

Milly (34 years old, American, married (English husband), 2 young children aged 2.5 years and 7 months) confides how difficult the acculturation process was (and continues to be) for her – from being an out-going, social organiser on home country soil to feeling helpless at times in the host environment (due to cultural, particularly language barriers).

*'I just missed being fully competent and being fully pro-active. Here I'm not able to do the things that I would normally be able to do, and succeed in the ways that*

*I'd like to succeed or go in a different direction or volunteer or help or do something along those lines, like I would like to do. ... It kind of strips away all the things that you think you know about yourself and really leaves the bare bones about what you really are... It's both good and bad: it's a very painful process but at the same time I mean what you end up with is maybe a bit more real than you'd really want to know.'*

Her description of needing to re-assess her competencies underlines the identity reconstruction that is undergone, at times quite painfully, when integrating into the host country. Billy (52 years old, Welsh, divorced (ex-wife French), 3 grown up children) who has spent more than half his life in France recalls an episode in which he recognises his identity undergoing reconstruction when adjusting to life in France originally; where the most mundane of previously conceived routine tasks suddenly became challenging.

*'I lost quite a lot of confidence I think in those initial 6 months I was in Paris. Obviously I used to take the lead in the family role in Britain. I could no longer do that here, and I found that quite destabilising initially. Even the fact of initially just going to buy bread, you feel awkward about it... In time you get over that, but it was quite destabilising initially I found.'*

This acceptance of who you really are, although the self-discovery may be a painful process (see Milly's quote above) is however all part of the adjustment process. John (29 years old, Belgian, single) explains how being comfortable with who you are, despite country of origin, is prerequisite.

*'I always felt I was a foreigner. ... On a personal level, it sometimes bothered me ...because sometimes I would say you forgot that you were a foreigner. But then ... something happens and you suddenly realize: "Oh, I am a foreigner". Then it's harder. ... I think it's easier to always see yourself who you really are, where you come from... And you should always... be proud [of where you come from].'*

The coming to terms with whom 'you really are' (John above) takes time, and evolves gradually through experiences while adjusting to the host environment. It affects the

individual's core (as evident in Milly's and Billy's quotes above) as it forces them to reconsider their competencies and abilities and the person they perceived themselves to be, reshaping their identity and how they think others perceive them to be in the host country. This difficult identity confusion and reconstruction process is a central part of the adjustment process, and the question regarding identity never completely evaporates.

## **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This paper explores identity construction for a sample of bounded transnationals. The difficult cultural adjustment is in line with research on expatriates adapting to their temporary host country environment. However, for bounded transnationals the acculturation is persistent, regardless of how long the individual has been resident in the area. While they feel they are comfortable now, or are *more* comfortable now with their status/position in France, it has taken some time to adjust, with assimilation (Berry and Sam 1997) never taking place.

Social identity is very pertinent for bounded transnationals. It helps them to associate themselves with their home country nationality, while at the same time recognising that they (or by proxy, due to a significant other (spouse/partner or child)) have chosen to reside in the South of France. They acknowledge that they are different, but are protected in the knowledge that there are others equally different living in the area. They enjoy the lifestyle on offer and the image it portrays of them. Despite difficulties, they take a pragmatic approach and simply get on with life in the context of their being bounded transnationals.

The findings underline the identification (Bauman 2001) of the sample: the morphing, all-encompassing elements that impact upon the evolving identity construction of the sample is obvious. Individual agential, relational, 'other-directedness', structural, temporal and situational influencers all need to be regarded in order to ascertain a more complete picture and assessment of identity construction. To quote Bauman (2001: 129): 'Perhaps instead of talking about identities, inherited or acquired, it would be more in keeping with the realities of the globalising world to speak of *identification*, a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged'

This paper has opened up preliminary discussion on using the protean career concept in line with identification or identity construction with regards to an (until now) unexamined group of international assignees termed bounded transnationals. The discussion requires further interpretation and support from empirical research. It is argued that rather than closing off avenues of potential value in analysing aspects of identity, it may be worthwhile to engage new concepts, or rather old concepts considered in a different way. The discussion here is by no means complete, and further research in the area is warranted. The author also echoes contemporary authors in international human resource management that other categories of international assignees be explored in the future, in order to portray a fuller picture of the international staffing alternatives in existence in reality.

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