A double perspective on the construction of nomadic identities: young people in geographical move and businessmen, Deniz Gyger Gaspoz & Hélène Langinier

# Abstract

We aim here at understanding the development of nomadic identities. We compare young people in geographical move and international executives integrating a big four[[1]](#footnote-1) in Luxemburg through a comprehensive approach. Mixing management theories and socio-cultural approaches leads us to define three types of nomadic identities. We demonstrate that intercultural sensitivity is not the only element at stake in the development of such identities. The relation to the context, the social status of the individual and the structure of his identity according to his culture play a significant role in this process as well.

Key words: Nomadic identities, expatriates, Luxemburg, young in geographical move, mobility

# Introduction

In a globalized world, facing new cultures is a daily phenomenon for everyone. Hermans (2001), Appadurai (2005) emphasize that globalization, whether through the movement of individuals or whether through the spread of culture (television, Internet, newspapers, books), leads to the creation of supranational identification that can touch everybody. In this paper, we will focus on the *nomadic identities* due to the movement of people. But first of all, let us define what we mean by *nomadic identities*? We assume that a nomadic individual is a person facing or having faced for a significant period several cultural realities different from his own. In this perspective we detect several kinds of nomadic persons according to their motivation to be confronted to other cultures. In fact, we can class them in different categories looking at the cause of this cross-culturalization (Gyger Gaspoz, forthcoming):

* For economic reasons: such as the immigrants. They choose to leave their country to find elsewhere better life conditions be it political or financially.
* For personal reasons: adoption, bi-cultural marriage.
* In case of crisis situation such as war, natural crisis: refugees.
* Nomadic population: gypsies, circus people.
* For professional reasons: expatriates, missionaries, soldiers, UN workers.

In our work we choose to concentrate on people who are confronted, for professional reasons to other cultures and who move frequently. How do people adapt to this situation? What is the impact on their identities? We will first define the concept of nomadic identity theoretically and then through the experience of two types of population – on one hand *young people in geographical itinerancy[[2]](#footnote-2)* having grown in different countries according to their parents’ career, on the other hand international businessmen joining firms in the financial sector in the multicultural environment of Luxemburg – we aim at understanding the co-construction of nomadic identities. Which elements are to be taken into account in the developmental process of nomadic identities? This construction is to be understood in the interaction with sociocultural environment (from the host and passport countries). How do these nomadic identities express themselves?

After having introduced our theoretical framework we will present our methodological choices. Then we present our research fields and detail our findings with first young people in geographical itinerancy and secondly businessmen in the multicultural environment of a big four in Luxemburg. We start our analyses by showing what individual and cultural characteristics matter in the construction of the nomadic identity before pointing out the role of the host society and the way our population is welcomed in this process. To conclude we consider the limits of this research and its perspectives.

# 1. Theoretical perspectives

To understand the co-construction of the nomadic identities we have to consider both the social environment but also the culture in which individuals operate. It is in this interaction process that the individual is defined and defined himself (Vinsonneau, 2002). Because it studies the development of the individual in a perpetual dynamic, sociocultural psychology offers an interesting approach to study the identity development.

## 1.1. A sociocultural psychology perspective

In our work we consider identity development in a sociocultural perspective (Bruner, 1991; Cole, 1996, Valsiner, 2007) as a dialectical phenomenon. This approach makes us more attentive to different elements: every interaction (with other and with reality) takes place in an environment that is culturally and historically situated and relations are mediatised by an ensemble of tools and signs (language, representations). These signs are given by the cultural context and which are seen as an heritage from the previous generation and in constant development. In this perspective the person is engaged in a process to make reality significant. As a result we postulate that nomadic identities must be studied in a sociocultural perspective according to the different contexts in which they were and they are involved such as ethnicity, culture countries of origin, culture countries of residence.

## 1.2. Understand the development of identity in multicultural context

To understand the development of the identity, and the process of co-construction, we will first investigate contributions of the social psychology. We will then focus more precisely on the development of an intercultural identity.

### 1.2.1. The identity dynamics

The work of Erikson (1972) gives an important place to the interaction between the individual and its environment to explain identity development. Identity develops throughout life and always in opposition to others: if I’m myself it’s because I’m not someone else (Lipiansky, 1993). The authors (Tajfel, 1982; Tap, 1986; Vinsonneau, 2002) distinguished two facets of identity, which are complementary, personal identity (who makes the person as a unique one) and social identity that refers to an exogenous component: membership in different groups (social, cultural). This brings Tap (1986) to emphasize that identity is constantly in-between: the individual seeks, on one side, to be unique, particular and on the other, to be recognized by the others, integrated in groups. We also have to be attentive to the different groups of affiliation “in-group” and “out-group” of an individual and to the group of affiliation. All this implies that if identity is seen as unique, it’s composed of different belongings. Identity is always in perpetual move depending on the different situations faced by the person. Camilleri's work (1989/2006) especially highlights the inextricable links that bind identity and the concept of cultures (national, social) of an individual.

## 1.2.2. Development of intercultural identity

We intend to understand the influence of international experience on the structuring of identity be it in the frame of expatriation (Peltonen, 1998; Cerdin and Dubouloy, 2004; Kohonen, 2004) or broader experiences (Joly, 1990; Fernandez, 2002). We have reviewed the literature focusing on the development of intercultural identity (Camilleri 1989/2006; Camilleri and Malewska-Peyre, 1997, Clanet, 1990/1993). According to Bennett developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (1993), the individual progresses from an ethnocentric approach to a more ethno relative one. The last step of this process consists in the integration of cultural differences and leads to the construction of a multicultural identity. Some individuals will become “multicultural beings” shifting their behaviour appropriately according to the context. They succeed in this perilous exercise by self-reflexively defining their identity. The experience is different for some others who are loosing their cultural identity without adapting to the one of their host culture.

Thus for the individual the identity structuration appears like a complex process whose challenge is to maintain some kind of unity while trying to adapt multifaceted belongings and to manage conflict situations. This process proved to be particularly delicate for people facing a new culture.

# 2. Methodology

Because we start from two different populations and two different studies, our methodological design is original. We therefore present our methodology in three steps: first the methodology used in the first study about young people’s in geographical itinerancy; second the methodology used in the second research about international executives in a big four in Luxemburg; third we will justify the interest of regrouping these two studies and the methodology used to study the emergence of different expressions of nomadic identity.

## 2.1. Studying geographical itinerancy

We choose a comprehensive approach (see for example Charmillot and Seferdjelil, 2002) to collect our data. We wanted to investigate how young people in geographical itinerancy define themselves and how, in this discourse, appear some categories that could inform us about the co-construction of nomadic identities. Our goal was to let emerge, from the field, the different faces of nomadic identities. We therefore interview (semi-directive interview) twice, 13 French speaking teenagers in geographical itinerancy and their parents in three different countries (Switzerland, Turkey and India). All the interviews were transcribed and analysed with a content analysis method. For the purpose of this article we have decided to analyse more precisely five cases: Isabelle (French, 17), Louis (17,French), Matthieu (French, 17), Nour (Tunisian, 16), Zoe (Swiss and Portuguese, 17).

## 2.2. Studying businessmen

We have conducted semi-directive interviews with ten international businessmen in a big four in Luxemburg and used our professional experience since one of the author used to be responsible for international mobility in a big four[[3]](#footnote-3) in Luxemburg. We interpret our data through the grounded theory analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967/2010), letting theory emerge from the empirical experience in a back and forth movement between both. Schneider and Barsoux (1997/2003) hold the grounded theory as the more appropriate methodology to understand an intercultural situation.

It was important for us to interview executives coming from different countries and having settled in Luxemburg for different periods of time to analyse variation stemming from these factors. Influenced by our professional practice, by the acculturation model of Berry (1997) and by the expatriates adaptation model of Cerdin (1998) we designed our interview guide about integration in Luxemburg according to four themes: adaptation to work, adaptation to the culture, general perception of the experience and adaptation to the environment. We interviewed nine auditors: Jamy, a Filipinos senior for three years in Luxembourg; Shauna, an American senior for two years there; Ramphul, a Mauritian assistant manager since four years in the country; Eva, a German assistant since one year in Luxemburg; Muhammad, a Pakistani senior for three years there; Greg, an American senior manager having been three years in Luxemburg; Souleymane, an Ivorian manager for three years in Luxemburg; Kuzman, a Bulgarian senior for two years in the country; and Natasha, a Russian/ French manager since five years in the country (married with a French), we then interviewed Stéphane, a French human resources manager having been five years in Luxemburg.

### 2.3. Bring out the nomadic identities: an interpretative perspective

The originality of this work lies in the pooling of two separate researches: one in the field of management science, the other in developmental sociocultural psychology and social psychology. It was during informal discussions that we found similarities between our two populations. They then appeared to have both developed a nomadic identity that was, however, a term to define and clarify. So we decided to adopt a comprehensive approach (Charmillot and Seferdjelil, 2002) to bring out categories of analysis to identify the different facets of the nomadic identity. This methodology was the most appropriate to account for the originality of our approach between abduction and induction: "Abduction, induction, and deduction are three forms of inference. deduction proves that something must be, induction shows that something actually is operative, and abduction just suggest that something may be" (Valsiner, 1998, pp. 244). This methodology is particularly effective in the case of exploratory research for which there is no a priori category of analysis.

We first reviewed our verbatim with the objective of finding out if some of our interviewees had “nomadic identities”. After that we looked at similarities and differences among these profiles to characterize their specificities, then we attempted to understand the impact of the context on the possible development of such an identity. We worked in a process of *va-et-vient* between our categories and data. Our analyses let emerge three axes giving us the opportunity to understand more specifically nomadic identity complexities: 1) Distance towards one culture; 2) Self-perception and group identification; 3) Impact of the sociocultural context. We identified three types of nomadic identity:

1. **The cosmopolite identity**: individuals highlight supranational identity references. In this sense, the person is defined as someone who could feel at home everywhere or nowhere.
2. **The transnational identity**: individuals incorporate both cultural referents of their passport country but also from the host countries. Self-presentation varies with contexts. Their references are transnational in the sense that they are actualized differently in different cultural environment.
3. **The anchor identity**: individuals will define themselves primarily in using cultural references from their passport country. In the host country, they will tend to cluster with people from similar cultural environment, enabling themselves to maintain their culture of origin. However, once back home, the other members of their cultural environment that can challenge their self-definition do not necessarily perceive the individual the same way.

# 3.3. Different expressions of nomadic identities

We will now present and discuss each of the different types of nomadic identities. We will analyse cases from both studies to highlight the expression of these nomadic identities. For each type of identity, we will first present the young people in geographical itinerancy, then the businessmen and, in a last part, open a discussion to sum up main results.

## 3.1. The cosmopolite identity

### 3.1.1. The children perspective: Nour and Zoé

Nour is a young Tunisian woman who has been through six moves that led her from Tunisia to Austria to Tunisia, from Switzerland to Monaco and to Switzerland where we met her. Nour speaks fluent English, French and Arabic. She attended international and French schools. Note that French and Arabic are the languages used by Nour's family. She defines herself as an international Tunisian. She strongly opposes the Tunisians of Tunisia with whom she does not share the same values; she identifies herself with the international Arabs after attending the international school in Monaco where her friends were from different regions of the Persian Gulf. We find the same outlook in her mother who defines herself as citizen of the world. In Nour's case, her whole family also identify themselves with this international culture. It is interesting to note that for the mother, this attachment is also over-rated. She uses the term of developed culture to talk about the international culture, as opposed to a more traditional Tunisian culture. Nevertheless, this can only be understood in a well-defined cultural and historical context. For example, Nour's family confers great importance to secularism, while in Tunisia, there is presently a major rise in Islam. Therefore, international culture can only be understood in opposition to national culture. At the same time Nour remains symbolically attached to her country: "(…) I love being Tunisian, I'm Tunisian. I am so proud to be Tunisian that when someone tells me something about Tunisia, I rebel. (…) \_ It's just that I am Tunisian and I am proud to be Tunisian." At the same time, Nour highlights that unlike other Tunisians, she does not have roots there and that she is from nowhere in particular. She also underlines the fact that she has no homeland. Here, one of the characteristics of this cosmopolitan identity will therefore be the absence of roots, of a homeland, and at the same time identifying with international categories. However, Nour retains a symbolic attachment to her passport country. We will see that this is not the case for Zoe who expresses her international identity differently.

Zoe is a young girl who has lived through six moves since birth, which have brought her to the following countries: Switzerland, Denmark, Lebanon, Switzerland, Belgium, Switzerland and Turkey, where we met her. Of Swiss German and Portuguese origin, Zoe has dual nationality. If at home she speaks German and Portuguese, she decided to follow her education in French schools, both parents mastering this language.

Zoe takes on a thoughtful posture. Without comparing the different travelling or the different countries in which she has lived, she sees in each one an opportunity to learn from other cultures, a perspective which we have not found with Nour. It was Zoe who asked to attend a French school, having particularly loved this language during her stay in Belgium. During the interview, Zoe insisted on the necessity to adapt to the new environment where one lives. She cited the example of clothing; you should dress as the others, blend in with the masses. The kilt that she loved wearing in Belgium was the object of mockery in Zurich and finished up at the back of her wardrobe; in the same way she asked her mother not to prepare Portuguese meals when she was at school in Bern as her school friends made fun of her meals in the canteen. Zoe identifies herself with other travellers, expatriates, and international communities. For her, people who have always grown up in the same place have difficulties in understanding the frequent relocations of those who must, nevertheless, have more extensive world knowledge, complemented by a fascination for discovering new regions. So Zoe will say that she feels at home everywhere: she is not actually Swiss, nor Portuguese but a citizen of the world. She emphasizes that she has some portable roots allowing her to adapt everywhere.

### 3.1.2. The adult perspective: Natasha and Stéphane

To our opinion Stéphane and Natasha have developed a nomadic identity. Let’s precise that both of them have been for five years or more in Luxemburg, and they both had extensive international exposure previously. Indeed Stéphane’s parents worked for the World Bank so he lived in Cameroun, France, Canada and the United States before arriving in Luxemburg. Natasha left Russia at eighteen after having studied in France and in the United States she worked several years in Germany before arriving in Luxemburg. Moreover she travelled a lot because she used to be a professional tennis player.

First of all, they develop a strong ability to take distance towards their culture. Questioned about the comparisons with their home country, they both struggle to find towards what to compare. For Natasha "It is difficult, I left Russia when I was eighteen, I don’t think it is good to compare, let’s say I would compare to France and Germany". The same for Stéphane "I don’t think I have a home country, let’s compare to the US". During the interview none of them made reference to their host country. They obviously take pride in not being attached to one culture.

Another common attitude between Natasha and Stéphane is that what they enjoy most in Luxemburg before the high quality of life is to discover new cultures and they are blossoming within this multicultural environment, they are fluent in English and French plus German and Russian for Natasha and take pleasure in using their language skills. Both developed relationships with international community, they do not gather with their compatriots and they were looking for an international place before applying to Luxemburg. Stéphane stays in Luxemburg for "This diversity, high quality of life, respect of other people from other people*"*, Natasha confesses her satisfaction *"*For me the best place to be and you don’t change when you are happy".

Finally we noticed similarities between Stéphane and Natasha’s identity change, they are based on an opening to the new cultures (Kohonen, 2004) present in Luxemburg and previously during the other experiences they had, their evolution correspond to the last step of the Developmental Model of Integration Sensitivity of Bennett (1993), they have constructed step by step a multicultural identity enabling them to shift their behaviour according to the context. They succeed in this exercise by reflexively self defining their identity. Stéphane explains us how he succeeded in achieving this distance towards culture:

I note differences, I don’t judge, you come to a distance enabling you to adapt any culture. Finally where you are does not matter, you will remain who you are. I bring the same values everywhere, you should not judge people around you.

Natasha’s approach is the same: "Don’t judge and don’t compare, just take other people the way they are, try to bring the best from your side without saying the way you do is the best, it’s your way and observe". This identity change based on openness to new cultures for Stéphane and Natasha enables them to take distance towards their culture of origin and help them developing an exceptional adaptability.

Now, what is the impact of the multicultural environment of Luxemburg in this process? Stéphane and Natasha both noticed the relative coldness from locals towards foreigners however the exceptional welcome they receive within the international community largely compensates for this drawback. Natasha shares her views on natives of Luxemburg: "I found that natives are rather cold to foreigners in general but they represent a minority in their home country therefore it is OK"*.* Let’s precise that Stéphane and Natasha having both European passports did not encounter problems to get visas or work permits. Therefore they have found in Luxemburg a welcoming environment and appreciate especially its multicultural aspect. This leads them to be willing to integrate and to open and adapt to the cultures present in Luxemburg and impacts their identity change.

Let’s focus now on the role of the organisational context. Following the integration of international executives was part of our job when we were managing international mobility at Diversaudit. Stéphane and Natasha both demonstrated exceptional performance with the best rating according to Diversaudit’s grid, they were well integrated and their reflexive approach and ability to adapt enable them to be very effective in the multicultural teams they joined. We think that this recognition from their professional environment while reinforcing their self-confidence and their desire to adapt participates in the construction of their cosmopolitan identities.

### 3.1.3. Discussion

We noticed with both children and businessmen having developed a “cosmopolite identity” a strong ability to take distance towards their culture of origin. They don’t refer to this frame of reference to approach their environment. Regarding teenagers in geographical move, Nour has no roots in Tunisia, she is from nowhere in particular. In contrary to Zoé, who sees herself everywhere at home. She sees an opportunity to learn from the different countries in which she lived. The international executives in Luxemburg experienced the same feeling as Zoé. Questioned about comparisons with their home country, Natasha and Stéphane both struggle to answer towards what to compare.

Our two populations have developed relationships with international communities, they have joined international groups and enjoy being part of this community, they don’t mix with locals. Only Nour joined a more restricted group "the international Arabs" she met at school. We don’t find in Nour’s narrative this desire to discover new cultures that is characteristics from other respondents. Stéphane and Natasha lay stress on this pleasure of discovery and the ability to develop while operating in an international business environment. Zoé demonstrated as well this open-mindedness, while in Belgium she became passionate about French and wanted to join that kind of school. She thinks that through these itinerancies she got a better knowledge of the world

Regarding Natasha, Stéphane and Zoé's self perception, they take pride in their status of "citizen of the world", and feel some kind of superiority towards people having stayed their whole life in the same country. Most of them identify themselves with the international community and do not refer to their passport country. They define themselves through this adaptation to different cultures and assume this ability as part of their personality; they reached the integration stage of the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity from Bennett (1993) with an ability to shift from one culture to the other without effort. Nour demonstrated another identification process than the others : she refers to her culture of origin but to define herself in opposition to it. Let’s precise that the model of Bennett failed to integrate all the elements to be taken into account while studying the identity construction of our population. Our cases show that this process can’t be reduced to the individual’s intercultural sensitivity development, it’s important to understand the influence of the context on the development of such identities. They all enjoy some recognition from their international groups and by their organizational environment for the adults, they strive to adapt their behaviour to their new country.

The common treat of these cosmopolitan identities is to concern people having taken distance towards their own passport culture and to valorise international belonging. For Natasha, Stéphane and Zoé we could identify an opening to new cultures and took it as an opportunity, thus this type of individual feels everywhere at home. On the contrary, Nour's cosmopolitan identity develops more in accordance to a valorisation of international belonging in opposition to her passport culture and feels nowhere at home. We therefore have two different manifestations of the cosmopolitan identity which could be further detailed in future research.

## 3.2. The transnational identity

### 3.2.1. The children perspective: Isabelle and Louis

Louis is a young French man who had been through five moves since birth which led him to France, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Benin, Belgium and Switzerland, where we met him. Louis strongly identifies himself with his region of origin: the Basque country. So here is revealed a precise regional identification with the land of his mother. Although Louis has never lived in this region:

So, I feel Basque, genuinely from Bayonne - I also like "patxaran - Basque liqueur" and everything. I don't feel... because for me French, you know when we say French, we immediately think of Paris. When I went to study languages abroad: «You are French, you come from Paris and that's it», «No, not from Paris\_ Bayonne, Bayonne» (…).

About Louis, the opposition is between the metropolis, Paris, and other regions of France. If Louis has some relatives there, he only visits them for two weeks in summer. Nevertheless, Louis plans to go on studying there and also, if he likes it, perhaps to live there at some future date.

He does not make any distinction between French people in France and French people abroad but more between provincials and Parisians. Similarly, Louis does not identify himself with an international and/or expatriate in-group. If Louis sees himself as Basque, it is also of interest to observe that he sees himself just as much as African. Louis spent his childhood in Africa in fact until he was 12 years old:

Researcher: But you say that you are from Africa or you only think this?

Louis: No, I think it more than I say. When people ask me where I come from, I say from the Basque country, I'm Basque. So there it is.\_But as to being African, I think it when people say things to me about Africa.

His sojourn in Africa did have an impact then on Louis, even if that impact remains symbolic, even idealized. Nevertheless, it is a hidden definition of self. Louis does not share this feeling but part of him identifies with this continent in which he grew up and to which he accords major importance. For example, Louis accords a special place to cultural source elements from Africa. So if Louis is attached to his Basque culture and defines himself as Basque, we see that his extended stays in Africa, and certainly his stay in Switzerland, have allowed him to integrate into his cultural world elements acquired in countries where he resided.

In transnational identities we also find the case of Isabelle, a young 17-year-old French girl that we met in Turkey. Since childhood, Isabelle has lived through six moves which have led her from France to Brazil, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand and Turkey. Isabelle defines herself as French precisely because she lives abroad. If we had interviewed her in France, and not in a foreign country, her answer might have been different. We must therefore ask ourselves about this link Isabelle has developed to her country of origin. The context thus influences the way in which the individual perceives himself; according to the place in which he finds himself he will define himself differently. Abroad, where Isabelle is in a minority group, that is French, this identity fits her. In a certain way she positions herself as being French. But in France she no longer belongs to a minority given that she is in her own country. So she also identified herself with the expatriate community and as a "citizen of the world":

When we move, we have an open mind that bears no comparison with other people, not in France in any case. I'm taking them as an example. They have really closed minds, think they know everything, but have never left their country. In fact there is something strange because when you live in France, I do not feel French when I'm in France, but when I'm abroad I feel French.\_ So here I think it's just because I do not recognize myself in the mindset of most French.

### 3.2.2. The adult perspective: Eva, Shauna, Souleymane, Greg and Kuzman

We gathered Eva, Shauna, Souleymane, Greg and Kuzman in the second group since their adaptation process presents similarities. They are willing to adapt to Luxemburg, they enjoy this multicultural environment as well and succeed in integrating it, yet they have not reached this detachment towards their home culture and they demonstrate less self-confidence than the previous group. They all have been in Luxemburg for one to three years and have had less extensive international experience than Natasha and Stéphane.

Our interviewees while recognizing cultural differences still use their culture of origin as scheme of references. For example, Souleymane from Ivory Coast, worked two years in France before joining Diversaudit Luxemburg. He is satisfied with the welcome of his colleagues in France and in Luxemburg, but he cannot prevent from comparing life outside the professional context with his home country: "(... ) I was frustrated by the reaction of people outside of the work environment. In Ivory Coast more friendly, more open, not the same especially in France". Eva appreciated as well the welcome from her colleagues in Luxemburg but she lays stress on the differences with Germany: "It is very different in Germany, there is always somebody coming with you, you would not go alone to the client."

The whole group is very enthusiastic about Luxemburg multicultural environment and willing to integrate it. Greg explains us the major input of this experience: " (...) from a work perspective, beneficial, a lot of international clients, appreciating different cultures. Paola (his wife) and I, after living in a country for so long, we appreciate more differences, more different cultures"*.* Kuzman feels that this diversity helped him to integrate: "(...) the country multi ethnicity, you have people from everywhere, you don’t feel like a stranger in the street"*.*

Finally we noticed similar identity changes among the members of this group, they observed and learned how to adapt to the host culture and how to empathize with their environment but there is still a reference to their culture of origin. In that they differ from their colleagues having developed a multicultural identity. Souleymane alludes to his way of integrating: "When you come from another country, you have a point of view. To integrate yourself, don’t do the contrary as the others do, you have to make an adaptation to how people are living, if people are singing, start singing"*.* This state is consistent with the adaptation step of the developmental model of integration sensitivity of Bennett (1993) in which the experience of another culture leads the individual to perceive and behave appropriately in that culture. Let’s precise that these five international executives have been in Luxemburg for a shorter period than Stéphane and Natasha and that their background is less international. They may be for some of them on the way to develop a multicultural identity.

As for the context, the perception of our five international executives corroborates the observation of the previous group. They think that joining a multicultural country makes things easy despite the relative coldness of locals to foreigners. Souleymane confesses that his integration was easier in Luxemburg than in France: "It is more difficult to live in France when you arrive than in Luxemburg". For the non EU members they raise, it takes much more time to get their work permit, especially Souleymane who needed a visa but on the whole it was easily overcome.

This group is very positive about its integration in the firm, they lay stress on the easiness to join international teams. Shauna is enthusiastic about her multicultural team: "I did not come across to anyone not interested in my experience, it was very easy to go on people with that team, you did not feel like an outsider"*.* Our five international executives were indeed well integrated in their team and demonstrated good performances even exceptional ones for Souleymane and Kuzman according to Diversaudit rating.

### 3.2.3. Discussion

All the respondents having developed a transnational identity define themselves first towards their home culture, however the international experiences they have been through is part of their self-definition as well and they refer mostly to the country they are actually in contact with. For the businessmen they enjoy this experience and they develop contacts with the international community but with compatriots as well. They lay stress on the necessity to adapt their behaviour according to the new culture. We don’t find this preoccupation with children, we may explain this difference by the need to perform well in the organizational environment and to adapt quickly for business expatriates, this reality remains less present for young people in geographical itinerancy.

Coming to self perception and identification of our two populations we observe a feeling of “in-betweeness” (Adler, 1977). All our respondents identify with their passport country, they have roots in their home country and they refer to this scheme of reference but at the same time they feel different from their compatriots at home. They are aware of having developed differently thanks to the contact to new cultures and this change is part of their identity.

The context seems to play an important role in the way the two children perceive themselves and their identification to the group. Isabelle feels French when she is outside France but once in her home country she identifies herself to the group of foreigners. For Louis the identification level is different but although linked to his passport country yet with a regional identification, and when he is told about Africa, he feels African.

For businessmen, they are satisfied with the welcome they received in their host country and in their organisational environment. We think that this can explain their tendency to experience an opening to the new culture. They define themselves towards the cultures they are in contact with and strive to adopt new behaviours in line with their current host culture but did not shift from one to the other without efforts, we think that they reach the adaptation stage of Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. At this stage, the individual is able to adapt his behaviour to different schemes of references. However, according to Bennett, this type of identity is less reflexive than the integration stage one and the individual seems to remain more dependent on the cultures he is in contact with. But our cases show that the individual integrates very well to the environment and that the references to their home culture does not prevent from opening to host culture. The development of this kind of identity confirms that maintaining references to one’s passport scheme of references does not prevent the individual from developing his or her intercultural sensitivity.

## 3.3. The anchor identity

### 3.3.1. The children perspective: Matthieu

In the context of the 13 interviews that we conducted, Matthieu is the only one that we are able to classify in this identity category. We think that this is due to his itinerary as an expatriate which is rather special and also implies that the type of mobility may influence the development of one or another style of nomadic identity. Matthieu is a young French man who was living in New Delhi at the time of the interview. Although his parents were already working for an international group, they did not start their expatriation immediately. It was only when he was seven that Matthieu undertook his first move. He went at that time to Portugal where he resided for five years before moving to Russia for one and a half years. At the age of 13, he returned to France. This return to his home country was to put an end to the family's nomadic existence, the father having been offered a non-transferable position*[[4]](#footnote-4).* However, when he was offered a challenging project in India, he accepted it. While the family had thought they would be staying in France indefinitely, they were again on the move. At 16, Matthieu flew to India. So we can already see that Matthieu, unlike the other young people that we interviewed, started his expatriate life later. Apart from that, he did not want to follow his parents to India, one and a half years before taking his A-levels. Matthieu actually requested to be allowed to remain in Bordeaux with his grandparents and his friends especially, but his parents did not agree.

Matthieu does not show any reflexiveness with regard to his displacements. So, when asked to comment on his experience of geographical displacement, he will always refer to the experience of others, but never to his own. The *meta-learning experiences* picked up are the result of outside influences. Thus, talk about the *open-mindedness* and the opportunity of *fluently learning various languages* are of the parental mindset. At the time of the interview, Matthieu also faced the possibility of future moves. He explained that if he had to go abroad again this would be the result of a decision that he alone would have taken. This makes us connect his move to India with a lack of control over things in his life. Matthew does not identify himself with an expatriate in-group as shown by the lack of an apprenticeship to geographical displacement. On the contrary, Matthieu uses strong national identity elements to define himself. It is as much to do with the country whose passport he holds as with the city where he was born and where he lived for seven years that he overvalues: French culture (this attitude may seem to contradict the *open-mindedness* Matthieu referred to, but it indicates, at the same time, that it has to do with parental discourse as opposed to personal). This strong identification may be related to the fact that Matthieu has spent more time in Bordeaux than abroad. Besides, Matthieu was already seven years old when he first left for foreign parts. This would indicate that *he did not take to leaving abroad like a duck to water* from a very early age. He then returned in early adolescence to Bordeaux where he again spent three and a half years, an important period in his development. Moreover, the time for him to move to India was close to the end of his high school graduation and Matthieu had already planned to continue his studies in Bordeaux. Matthieu's travels question us on the possible link between the number and location of moves and how geographic relocation is experienced and its impact on human development.

### 3.3.2. The adult perspective: Jamy, Ramphul and Muhammad

Lastly we will focus on a group of three executives having encountered difficulties to integrate professionally and socially in Luxemburg. : Jamy, Ramphul and Muhammad. Let’s notice first that their cultures are really distant from the one of Luxemburg, that can explain partly the challenge they met. They all come from developing countries, Jamy and Muhammad speak only English on top of their mother tongue, Ramphul from Mauritius speaks French as well. They have been in Luxemburg between three and four years

First we noticed that they got overwhelmed by cultural differences and failed in taking distance towards their culture. Jamy told us about her difficult experiences: "In the Philippines although you work a lot, it is easier to work with people (...) sometimes here it’s different from the Philippines, Europeans have different ways of doing things".All of them have thought about going back to their countries but finally stayed.

These three executives allude to the international community, but they prefer to gather with compatriots in the firm and in the social environment, they seem to have difficulty in breaking free from their national community, may be by lack of self-confidence and that prevents them from integrating to a more global group.

We can make a parallel between their identity change, they seem to move towards maturation rather than an opening to host culture (Kohonen, 2004), their major concern while coming to Luxemburg was to improve their financial situation and they demonstrate less interest in the discovery of new cultures. Jamy for example is aware of changing: (...) I became a better person, before I could not understand, now I say they do that because they think in another way." To our opinion the development of their intercultural sensitivity corresponds to the defense step in the model of Bennett (1993). For them the world is organized between “us and them”, their culture is superior and they strengthen a separate cultural identity in contrast to other cultures present in Luxemburg. We think that the different cultures they met in Luxemburg are in contradiction with their culture of origin and they can’t integrate them, their identity can’t adapt without loosing its unicity and experiences some kind of crisis. This phenomenon has been studied for bicultural individuals, Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee and Morris (2002) developed the construct of Bicultural Identity Integration to evaluate the degree of compatibility and integration between the two cultures of the individual.

Let’s analyse what is the relation of this group to the context. The experience is not so nice in the society, they experience difficulties with the administration to get their visas. Al Ariss and Özbilgin (2010) shows that in France for example: "(...) Government policies are restrictive when it comes to entry and work of self-initiated expatriates coming from development countries” (p. 282). The situation seems to be the same in Luxemburg. Our respondents recognized nevertheless that the international atmosphere of the country and the possibility to speak English make the situation easier. Muhammad approaches the subject: " (...) More friendly than other countries. For example if you travel in Germany and you ask for something in English, they will never reply to you in English."

They encountered some problems in the organisational context as well, during their interviews our three executives did not confess bad experiences except Jamy who became a friend. We explain this attitude through their cultural background and the desire not to loose face linked to a collectivist approach (Hofstede, 1980). But following their integration in a professional perspective, we noticed that they struggled during their first time at Diversaudit, for Ramphul and Muhammad they had difficulties integrating the teams. The audit managers did not want to plan them, giving as pretext that they did not understand their English and had strange ways of working. The situation improved but was not perfect and they still suffer from prejudices in the firm and don’t perform very well according to Diversaudit ratings.

### 3.3.3. Discussion

Here our interviewees are strongly attached to their home culture and they firmly keep it as scheme of references. However the international experience they have been through is not without impact on their identity. Matthieu overvalues French culture and identifies strongly to his home culture. As for the businessmen Jamy, Ramphul and Muhammad they got overwhelmed by cultural differences and had difficulties in taking distance towards their passport culture.

Nothing in the speeches of these respondents alludes to the pleasure of discovering new cultures or to develop through this mean. For Matthieu the reference to the development of language skills and to open mindedness stems from his parents. The businessmen interviewed gathered with their national communities in Luxemburg, they enjoyed the contact of this group and were reassured to meet people sharing their cultural references.

Coming to self-perception and identification we noticed that both the child and the businessmen having developed an anchor identity perceive themselves exclusively as member of their host country and they identify to their national community in the host country. They refer to the "us and them" model and identify themselves in opposition to both international community and locals. As for Matthieu, he doesn't define himself towards the international community as well but neither in opposition to it. Thus they strengthen a separate cultural identity in contrast to the other cultures they met. To our opinion their experience abroad reinforces their national cultural characteristics. In that they reach the defence stage of Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity.

This situation may be partly explained by a difficult relation to the context for the businessmen, be it in the organisational sphere or the social sphere, they seem to meet problems regarding visa, work permits, their colleagues complain about the way they work and their accent in English. In the case of Matthieu, he integrated well, he got recognition from the others but it was not his choice to go to India and he always wanted to stay in France.

Thus the respondents having developed an anchor identity reinforce their national characteristics while abroad, they strongly identify to their passport country. This tendency may be explained by a significant cultural distance between passport and host culture and a difficulty for the identity to maintain their uniqueness while integrating that kind of differences. For the businessmen, another explanation may be a lack of recognition from the host groups and the impossibility to identify to them, we were under the impression that the businessmen coming from the Philippines, Mauritius or Pakistan were suffering from discrimination. For the three businessmen, the anchorage to their host culture is partly linked to their dissatisfying status in the host country. Tajfel (1982) showed that individuals try to maintain theirs self-esteem thus when their social identity is dissatisfying, individuals try to leave this group and to join another one and or to make their group distinct in a positive way. We observe here two types of anchor identity, Mathieu seems to keep this strong attachment to his passport culture and to idealise it because he has not chosen his itinerancies and would have preferred to remain in France. For the businessmen the issue is different, coming from minority groups, they enjoy a lower social prestige in the host country which leads them to identify strongly to their passport culture in a collective way and to strengthen their passport culture characteristics (Lorenzi-Cioldi and Doise, 1994). Indeed according to the authors while studying intergroup relations, we observe that individuals in groups of lesser prestige tend to identity themselves on a collective way, a “depersonalisation” phenomenon occurs. Interestingly, Mahadevan (2011) showed that in the specific organisational context of an Indo-German corporation, highly qualified Indian suffering from a dependency towards German overemphasize Indian culture strategically.

# 4. In conclusion

The experiences of young people in geographical itinerancies and business expatriates in Luxemburg bring to light three types of nomadic identities. The cosmopolite identity corresponds to a reflexive identification process (except in the case of Nour where she defines herself more in an opposition relation), individuals shift from one culture to the other without efforts, they feel everywhere or nowhere at home. People having developed a transnational identity, identify themselves both according to their passport and host countries. Self-definition is more influenced by cultural contexts. The anchor identity tallies with an identification to the passport culture and even an overestimation of the home culture. The model of development of an intercultural sensitivity from Bennett (1993) helps us to understand the different steps of opening to a new culture. However we found out that the development of an intercultural sensitivity is not the only element at stake in this process (Sparrow, 2000). Our cases demonstrated that the very structure of the identity of the individual and contexts are to be taken into account while studying the construction of the identity facing new cultures. The self-anchor in culture dominated by an occidental independence standard or by an oriental interdependence standard strengthen a dual conceptualisation of individuals’ identity (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). We realize that the nature of the intergroup relations in host countries has a significant impact on the identity development of our population as well, (Lorenzi-Cioldi and Doise, 1994).

Our results show that hierarchisation of identities types should be avoided, contrary to what Bennett’s model suggests we demonstrated that our internationals having developed a cosmopolitan and a transnational identity adapt equally well to their new environment and even to their professional environment for the businessmen interviewed. Thus keeping one’s passport culture as main scheme of reference does not prevent from developing intercultural sensitivity and to empathize with host culture members. Wagner (1998) even suggests the contrary and mentions the formation of an “international culture” reserved to a small group of privileged persons, this culture defines itself in opposition to national culture. According to the author people developing this kind of culture overvalue this international belonging and show little interest to national cultures met during their various expatriations. In the organisational context Pierre (2003) observes international executives developing “opportunists’” identity strategies to adapt their professional environment with little intercultural sensibility. However the internationals enjoying a cosmopolitan identity in our study don’t confirm such an approach, they take into account national culture in the way they take distance towards their own culture. They develop a nomadic intelligence through an enrichment of their identity altering their self (Fernandez, 2002). Peltonen (1998) alludes to a rearrangement of the identity composition rather than to a radical change.

Coming back to the anchor identity type, we found it striking that individuals having developed such an identity and meeting integration difficulties in their host countries, all stems from minority groups coming from collectivist countries according to Hofstede’s categorization. This finding is consistent with Sparrow ‘s (2000) critic of the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity of Bennett. While studying the example of the Chinese self with an identity externally ascribed, subordinated to the collective, Sparrow (2000, p 178) questioned whether: "(...) the concept of an individuated self, capable of free choice and action is not a construct of western languages and cultures*.*" This difference of identity structure could be an explanatory factor regarding the difficulty to take distance towards their passport’s cultural scheme of references for our Mauritian, Pakistanese and Filipinos businessmen. If their identity is ascribed by the group, they are not willing to try to take distance towards their culture. The status of the groups in whom the three businessmen having developed an anchor identity recognize themselves plays a role as well. The intergroup relationship is of utmost importance in the self-definition process (Allen, Wilder and Atkinson, 1983), especially with discriminated groups. Individuals belonging to ethnic groups whose language, physical and cultural treats are distinct from the dominant group will often be apprehended by others in relation to their group (Oyserman and Markus, 1993). We observe here a vicious circle explaining the challenge for people issued from discriminated group to take distance towards their home culture. Indeed on one hand if they come from “collectivist countries”, the very structure of their identity makes this process difficult and on the other hand, the dominant group does not recognize them as individuals. Thus we observe inequalities in the ability to take distance towards one culture according to the group’s social prestige of the individual and the nature of the identity structure. Let’s conclude with Sparrow (2000, p. 195) that: “(...) definitions of self are inextricably linked to the cultures and languages as they describe the self and within these cultures and languages the freedom to define oneself is dependent on relationships of power."

The originality of our article is to highlight the way in which different nomadic identities intervene on individual self definition and the impact on the adaptation to host culture. Linking two displinary perspectives gives us an opportunity of reflexivity (Holland, 1999). Indeed using socio-cultural models (Valsiner, 1998, 2007) and management theories leads us to highlight the limits of the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity from Bennett (1993) and to develop Sparrow’s (2000) approach showing that the development of a nomadic identity can’t be reduced to an identity change linked to an opening to the host culture. Our cases confirm that the structure of the identity linked to cultural perspectives, the nature of the relation to the context and the status of the group of identification play a significant role in the development of each specific types of identity. It’s important to take into account individuals, primary culture especially when they grow-up in a sedentary environment. Multiculturalism, interculturality and even identity concepts may correspond to very different definitions according to the cultural perspective selected. The risk could be to forget that the individual and his/her identity are generated by diversified cultural contexts and to limit oneself to a too ethnocentric and western view of these concepts, unable to account for the diversity of nomadic identities forms. Comparing the development of identity in different cultural contexts and at two moments of the life of the individual, childhood and professional life enables us to bring to light sub categorizations to the three nomadic identities types developed. Our work shows that there is no "perfect nomadic identity" likely to adapt in any context but rather different modality of apparition of it, in that our results question Lam and Selmer’s (2004) approach and show that all "former third culture kids are not ideal business expatriate" in terms of adaptation to a multicultural context.

While being an asset our interdisciplinary approach constitutes a limit as well, indeed we had to conciliate two different methodologies and the way we questioned our respondents was different, children in geographical itinerancy where asked about their self representation whereas businessmen more about their integration. Yet while reviewing our data we realized that both mentioned identity evolution. Moreover our study using a qualitative approach remains very specific and it would be useful to analyse more cases of identity structuration in case of acculturation in different contexts to generalise our results.

This broader analyse would be the first perspective of this work, another one would be to develop a reflexive approach taking into account the impact of the authors’s background on the results of this study (Devereux, 1980), indeed one of the author had been child in geographical itinerancies and the other one responsible of international mobility in the firm where business expatriates have been interviewed.

# References

Adler, P. (1977), "Beyond cultural identity: reflections on cultural and multicultural man", in Brislin, R.W. (Ed.), Culture learning: Concepts, application and research, University of Hawaïi Press, Honolulu HI, pp. 24-41.

Al Ariss, A. and Özbilgin, M. (2010), "Understanding Self-Initiated Expatriates: Career Experiences of Lebanese Self-Initiated Expatriates in France", Thunderbird International Business Review, Vol. 52, No. 4, pp. 275-285.

Allen, V.L., Wilder, D.A., and Atkinson, M.L. (1983), "Multiple group membership and social identity", in Sarbin, T.R. and Scheibe, K.E. (Eds), Studies in social identity, Praeger, New York, NY, pp. 92-115.

Appadurai, A. (2005), "Après le colonialisme: les conséquences culturelles de la globalisation", Payot, Paris.

Benet-Martınez, V., Leu, J., Lee, F., and Morris, M. (2002), "Negotiating biculturalism: Cultural frame-switching in biculturals with oppositional vs. Compatible cultural identities", Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, Vol. 33, pp. 492-516.

Bennett, M. J., (1993), "Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity", in Paige, R.M. (Ed.), Education for the intercultural experience (2nd ed.), Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, ME, pp. 21-71.

Berry, J.W. (1997), "Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation", Applied psychology: an internal review, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 5-68.

Bruner, J. (1991), "… car la culture donne forme à l’esprit de la révolution cognitive à la psychologie culturelle", Eshel, Paris.

Camilleri, C (1989/2006), "La culture et l’identité culturelle: champ notionnel en devenir", in Camilleri, C. and Cohen-Emerique, M. (Eds.), Chocs des cultures: concepts et enjeux pratiques de l’interculturel, L’Harmattan, Paris, pp. 21-73.

Camilleri, C. and Malewska-Peyre, H., (1997), "Socialization and Identity strategies"*,* in Berry, J., Poortinga, Y., Pandey, J., Dasen, P., Saraswathi, T., Segall, M. and Kagitcibasi, C. (Eds.), Handbook of CrossCultural Psychology, Volume 2 (2e édition), 3 volumes, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, pp. 41-67.

Cerdin, J.-L. (1998), "L’adaptabilité des cadres expatriés", *Gestion 2000*, Septembre-Octobre, pp. 57-70.

Cerdin, J.-L. and Dubouloy, M. (2004), "Expatriation as a maturation opportunity: A psychoanalytical approach based on "copy and paste", Human relations, Vol. 57, No. 8, pp. 957-981.

Charmillot, M. and Seferdjeli, L. (2002). "Démarches compréhensives: la place du terrain dans la construction de l’objet", in Leutenegger, F. and Saada-Robert, M. (Eds.), Expliquer et comprendre en sciences de l’éducation, De Boeck: Bruxelles, pp. 187-204.

Clanet, C. (1990/1993), "L’interculturel. Introduction aux approches interculturelles en education et en sciences humaines", Presses Universitaires du Mirail, Toulouse.

Cole, M. (1996), "Cultural psychology: a once and future discipline", Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Devereux, G. (1980), "De l’angoisse à la méthode dans les sciences du comportement", Flammarion, Paris.

Erikson, E. (1972), "Adolescence et crise. La quête de l’identité", Flamarion, Paris.

Fernandez, B. (2002), "Identité nomade", Economica, Paris.

Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. A. (1967/2010), "La découverte de la théorie ancrée", traduction française, Armand Colin, Paris.

Gyger Gaspoz, D. (forthcoming), "Une jeunesse au souffle de la mobilité internationale répétée. Etude exploratoire et descriptive sur l'impact de l'itinérance géographique sur le développement à l'adolescence", Thèse de doctorat en sciences sociales, Institut de psychologie et éducation, Neuchâtel.

Hermans, H. (2001), "Mixing and moving cultures require a dialogical self, Human development", Vol. 44, No. 1, pp. 24-28.

Hofstede, G. (1980), "Culture’s consequences: International differences in work related values", Sage publications, Newbury Park, California.

Holland, R. (1999), "Reflexivity, Human Relations", Vol. 52, No. 4, pp. 463-484.

Joly, A. (1990), "Etre cadre à l’étranger", in Chanlat, J.F. (Ed.), L’individu dans l’organisation, les dimensions oubliées, Les Presses de l’Université de Laval Editions Eska, Québec, Ottawa, pp. 467-506.

Kohonen, E. (2004), "Learning through Narratives About the Impact of International Assignments on Identity", International Studies of Management and organization, Vol. 34, No.2, pp.27-45.

Lam, H. and Selmer, J. (2004), "Are former "third culture kids" the ideal business expatriates?", Career Development International, Vol.9, No.2, pp.109-122.

Lipiansky, E.-M. (1993), "L’identité dans la communication", Communication et langage, Vol. 97, No. 3, pp. 31-37.

Lorenzi-Cioldi, F. ans Doise, W. (1994), "Identité sociale et identité personnelle", in Bourhis, R.Y. and Leyens, J.P. (Eds.), Stéréotypes, discrimination et relations intergroupes, Mardaga, Liège.

Mahadevan, J. (2011), "Teaching Indian Culture as Organizational Subalterns’ Means of Resistance", Proceedings of the 7th International Critical Management Studies (CMS) Conference, Naples, July 2011.

Markus, H. and Kitayama, S. (1991), "Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation", Psychological Review, Vol. 98, No 2, pp. 224-253.

Oyserman, D. and Markus, H. (1993). "The sociocultural self", in J. Suls (Ed.), Psychological perspectives on the self: The self in social perspective (Vol.4) Hillsdale, NJ, Erlbaum, pp. 187-220.

Peltonen, T. (1998), "Narrative construction of expatriate experience and career cycle: Discursive patterns in Finnish stories of international career"*,* The international journal of Human Resources Management, Vol. 9, No.5, pp. 875-892.

Pierre, P. (2003), "Mobilité internationale et identité des cadres, des usages de l’ethnicité dans l’entreprise mondialisée", Sides, Fontenay-sous-bois.

Schneider, S.C. and Barsoux, J.L. (1997/2003), "Managing across cultures", Pearson Education Limited, Harlow.

Sparrow, L. (2000), "Beyond multicultural man: complexities of identity", International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 173-201.

Tafjel, H.H. (1982), "Social identity and intergroup relations*"*, Cambridge University press, Cambridge.

Tap, P. (Ed.) (1986), Identités collectives et changements sociaux: colloque international, Privat: Toulouse.

Valsiner, J. (1998), "The guided mind: a sociegenetic approach to personality", Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Valsiner, J. (2007), "Culture in minds and societies: Foundations of cultural psychology", Sage, New Delhi.

Vinsonneau, G. (2002), "L’identité culturelle", Armand Colin, Paris.

Wagner, A.C. (1998). "Les nouvelles élites de la mondialisation", PUF, Paris.

1. Four biggest audit and advisory international firms [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Teenagers in geographical itinerancy have spent their childhood and adolescence years in a number of different countries. The frequent relocations are due to their parent’s employment (diplomacy, international business…). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. People who are no longer subject to repeated geographical mobility and occupy a stable position in it's organization. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)