FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF RIO GRANDE DO SUL
BUSINESS SCHOOL
GRADUATE PROGRAM IN ADMINISTRATION
ACADEMIC DOCTORATE

Giovanna Silveira Milani

SELF-INITIATED GLOBAL MOBILITY AS A CAREER PROJECT:
ANALYZING TIME, GENDER AND IDENTITY

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> Academic Doctoral Dissertation to be presented as a partial requirement for obtaining the title of Doctor in Administration.
>
> Concentration area:
> People Management and Work Relations
>
> Supervisor:
> Profa. Dra. Angela Beatriz Busato Scheffer

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Abstract

This doctoral dissertation defends that self-initiated expatriation, as a boundaryless career project, expands the individual's initial field of possibilities, given the boundary crossing aspect of one geographically changing countries. When in the new context, reality will have to be renegotiated given the changes. The experimentation allowed by a different environment will trigger a reflection process that has a strong potential for metamorphosis. Throughout this process, the way the individual sees himself, the way he perceives time, and the way he responds/deals with gendered difficulties can change. The first chapter introduces the literature that supports the project and the author's research approach. The second chapter is an empirical paper addressing expatriation as a transformational experience with impact in the individuals' identity. The third chapter is a theoretical essay about time and career studies, exploring the possibilities for applications in contexts of crossing borders. The fourth chapter, another empirical study, discusses women's experience while engaging in careers abroad. From the analysis of the doctoral dissertation results it emerged that: the narratives of SIE as complex and multidimensional, with accounts of a transformed identity due to the move; international careers do not emerge automatically by crossing a border, but are formed throughout the life experiences one has access, and the meanings attributed to it by our temporal perceptions; that biographical and historical time will intervene in the pursuit of an international career; and that women can create opportunities by opting for unconventional careers while navigating boundaries in expatriation.

Keywords: Self-initiated expatriation; Mobility; Women's international careers; Boundaries.

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Personal Statement

This dissertation is about international experience, so I thought about telling you mine. The first time I expatriated I was 20 years old. Having almost finished my bachelor's degree, I used the money I have been saving from Birthdays and Christmases to go on an adventure. Little did I know back then, but that decision would affect my whole future.

That's how in early December 2007 I arrived in London for a short stay. I had a limited amount of money, no prearranged activities (I didn't book an English course, for instance) and a handful of acquaintances. It was one of them who picked me up from the airport and accompanied me to my shared house. Out of the blue I had no routine, all the people I knew were at work, and although I could speak English, the British version was quite different to my ears. Having lived in a very controlling family, all that freedom seemed incredible. I found a job through the Brazilian network after a couple of weeks living there and ended up making enough money to support myself.

It is important to give you some context. This was a planned experience. I have been saving for a while, but during my early adulthood (and in my social class), it was expected for me to spend some time abroad developing my English skills. My parents made sure of that. I, however, was not there as a student, and the money I had did not cover the expenses in full. Had I not found work, I would have to come back much earlier than planned.

In the early 2000's, the main destinations for this time abroad were the United States, England and Australia. Given that I have dual citizenship (Brazilian/Italian), London was the choice, as I could easily find a job/be permitted to work. I also had contacts with other Brazilians and could use the network to better adjust. The initial three months became seven, and I only interrupted my experience because I needed to finish my studies. The return to Brazil was not an easy one as I got depressed, and felt I no longer belonged in my home country. I finished my bachelor and within less than a year, I was back in London. This time with the idea to stay for at least five years and hope to find a job within my studies.

My first motivation was all about adventure, but my second time around felt more like a life change. I had a European passport and was ready to use it. During my life in London, I remember being self-reflective and feeling lost about my career choices. I didn't really belong there or in Brazil. I was bartending, and that didn't reflect my identity, but neither was being a journalist, my recently acquired title. I did enjoy the pubs, though, and the possibility to jump on a plane and change cultures completely, even if just for the weekend.

My move to Italy, Reggio Calabria, was motivated by the economic crisis of 2009. My then internship in London did not become a job offer, and later I learned they hired a British citizen for my position (the crisis fomented a nationalistic pride). To pay rent I went back to waitressing and that felt like a big step back. I applied to any jobs I could find. In the middle of the search, a dodgy ad called my attention. They were looking for candidates for an EU scholarship. Serendipity sure played a big part in this, as the deadline was soon approaching, and since I fitted the criteria, I was in. Within two meetings, I had a plane ticket and was on my way to the south of Italy for a three-month experience. It seemed too good to be true. I remember calling my mom, explaining it, and ending with "if it's a scheme, I'll spend a week in Italy and will be back to London". Turned out it was not a scheme at all, just Italians dealing with public money.

Again, my motivation to go to Italy at that point was another adventure. However, after three months had passed, I was confronted with the possibility of going back to London, and I chose to stay because of the weather (first and foremost), the cost of living, and because, like many before me, I had found an Italian boyfriend. My adjustment to Italy was much easier, as I had grown in a similar environment due to the ancestrality of my family. Somehow, in my mind, I said I was only going to stay there for a year but ended up living for five. This is a common situation for people who go on international experiences. Plans are quite volatile.

My return to Brazil felt like a career move. In Italy I've grown, became a full-on adult, and unfortunately experienced moral harassment at work. Things needed to change. I always loved to teach, so I decided to pursue an academic career. My interest shifted to people management and how to develop adults, maybe as a way to cope with the unpleasant situation

I've been through. There were no business schools where I was living, and the sole available option was reachable only by boat, in Sicily. I'm not sure I fully understood the system back then and I was really struggling with my mental health, so the motivation to go back to Brazil was also a life change. It felt like giving up and going to something I understood. I was also ready to settle down, make money and align with society expectations of me, a then 28 years old woman.

Funny enough, my return to Brazil was smooth, I got a job straight away, within a week of being back. I landed another boyfriend and started applying for my masters at UFRGS. Relationships and life shocks are a key factor in the subjective reasons to expatriate, as they propel people to choose differently. Life in Brazil was following its course, I got engaged and everything was fine until it wasn't. After four years in Brazil, and a painful breakup, I got myself rethinking my life choices again. Soon after that I learned about a PhD opportunity in France.

I applied in February, got selected in April and moved to France in June. Within the timespan of four months, my life changed again, and I became an Early-Stage Researcher in a Marie Curie Fellowship, a European Union program for developing talents and advancing research. My cultural shock in France was immense. I was recruited to conduct a study in a multinational company. Although they assured me French was not needed, since the classes I was going to follow and the organizational language in the company I was going to work for was English, that turned out not to be true. My whole nonprofessional world was French, and I knew nothing about it. If I think about all the bureaucracy to get things up and running I feel like crying.

During 2019, on top of finalizing my theoretical essay for UFRGS, I've also had the opportunity to attend the 8th Workshop on Talent Management at Toulouse Business School, in France; a series of workshops on cross-cultural management, expatriation and global mobility in Nuremberg, Germany; and started working in person full time collecting data at the multinational that hired me.

When COVID hit in 2020, I was on a research visit to Amsterdam. Out of the blue, the world freeze, and I was conducting research on global mobility. Not many doctoral students

will ever experience such a disruptive event in their study fields like I did. Before I was locked at home, I had the opportunity to follow the Qualitative Data Analysis for Business and Management Research course at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, and to contribute to the International Community Platform Podcast "Places Attract Talent", where I discussed the Marie Curie Fellowship. From there on, it is just a blob in my mind, I was so incredibly lonely.

The impact COVID had on graduate students is documented in the literature, but in my case, I've spent three months without touching another human being. All my connections went online, and beyond going to the supermarket once per week, I barely left the house. To make things worse, it was the end of winter in Europe, so the weather didn't help. My mental health suffered a fair bit. To cope, me and other PhD students started meeting weekly on ZOOM to check on each other. Soon the idea came to record our sessions, and the condensation of our feelings, fears and experiences during pandemic times became an academic paper. The work entitled: *"Isn't it ironic…!?!" Mobility researchers go sedentary: A group auto-ethnography on collective coping and care in pandemic times,* was accepted in June 2021, and published in the Gender, Work and Organization journal in early 2022.

When airplanes were allowed to fly again, I was on one of the earliest flights back to France, as required by my company. Everything had moved online, including conferences, so that's how I attended EURAM 2020, presenting in a symposium about COVID and expatriation. Late 2020, another strict lockdown was imposed in France. This time my rights were even more restricted. Different from what happened in Brazil, France imposed a hard lockdown on its citizens, including a curfew and heavy fines. I was allowed out of my home for one hour a day for exercising but had to carry a declaration with me where I self-reported the time I left the house, and for what reason. In case the police stopped me, they could check if I was following the rules. Beyond the hour limit, I also had a distance limit of one kilometer radius from my address, which meant I couldn't even bump into friends while grocery shopping. At that time, I was focusing on surviving and barely did any research. Luckily, I had the support of my previous supervisor, prof. Sidinei Rocha de Oliveira, who checked on me periodically, and supported my decision to focus on my mental health first and foremost.

2021 was a better year. We had a bit more experience with COVID and were used to wearing masks everywhere. I started interviewing people online. My first data collection included 30 self-initiated expatriates like me and generated a total of 358 pages of data to code. I knew about prof. Sidinei's illness and we agreed on a flexible supervision style. It is also the year my cotutelage with Prof. Khapova started. My contract in France came to an end, and in September 2021, I moved to Amsterdam.

There I was having to adjust to a new working environment yet again, although the cultural shock was a bit less intense this time. Not long after arriving, I've learned prof. Sidinei had passed away. I was excused from my work for a few days, which was highly appreciated, as nobody expected this outcome. I started teaching in my very first international environment and integrated the staff team for the courses of Academic Skills, and Growth Strategies and Organizational Challenges at Vrije Universiteit. Prof. Angela generously adopted me after that, and we started working on the doctoral dissertation you will read next.

In January 2022 I started my supervisor journey, leading 11 master students on their six-month master thesis trajectory. I'm proud to say, they were all approved. In that same period, I started my second data collection for paper number three. Another 30 women self-initiated have been contacted, interviewed, and the data transcribed, for a whopping 434 pages of new data. It is important to share those steps with you as they have influenced my being a researcher, and the way I looked and have interpreted the narratives I collected. Given my personal background, I was able to relate to most of the lived experiences of my interviewees and provided them with a shared understanding that allowed for very personal accounts to be collected. In this doctoral dissertation, I will defend that self-initiated expatriation expands the individual's initial field of possibilities, consequently changing the way people view themselves and the world. The work you will read next is a collection of these experiences.

Chapter One

Introduction

Being able to move from one country to another is an intrinsic feature of our ever-globalized world. Hence, career mobility has become a topic of interest for scholars and practitioners alike. A survey from the United Nations population division estimated that there were 244 million individuals undertaking international mobility. This represents about 3,3 percent of the total world population (OECD, 2017; IOM, 2017). A phenomenon that is growing in its complexity, with people deciding to move countries as a rite of passage, interest in learning other languages, or even as a way to change their lives (Myers & Pringle, 2005; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Vance, 2005); and impact, with research showing that the per capita income of natives increases when their skills are complemented with those of foreigners (International Monetary Fund Research Department, 2020). In the specialized literature, however, there's no consensus for a definition of international mobility, and each literature uses different semantic terms, like expatriation and migration.

Law wise, migration, is defined by the United Nations (2019) as: "an umbrella term, not defined under international laws, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons" (p. 130) and expatriate as: "a person who voluntarily renounces his or her nationality" (p. 65). For the Dictionary Oxford (2021), an expatriate is "a person who lives outside their native country", while a migrant is "a person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions". In the management literature, a plethora of terms has been used "with many articles using the same words to mean different things and or different words to mean the same things" (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 45).

In Human Resources, expatriates have been defined as "legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a

career-related goal, being relocated abroad either by an organization, by self-initiation or directly employed within the host-country" (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 46) and migration as "the process of moving to, and intending to settle in, a country other than one's own. It involves the intent of permanent relocation to that country" (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 52). A distinction, hence, is made between the terms, with regards to temporality and objective of the move.

Expatriates must be living and working in the foreign country, and migrants have to permanently wish to stay abroad. Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry (2013) remark, though, that the choice of one term or the other, brings with it the replication of derogatory stereotypes and meanings. For McNulty and Brewster (2019) "expatriates come in many different forms. (…) Like migrants, expatriates are living somewhere other than in their native (home) country – 'home' being determined by their passport and citizenship" (p. 50). Depending on context and decisions, the borders of the terms can be blurred as, for example, an expatriate on a temporary move abroad can become a migrant, and even pursue to obtain the citizenship of the new country, and a migrant can decide to live somewhere else, or even to go back to their home countries. The next section will introduce the concept of self-initiated expatriate, which will be the focus of this doctoral dissertation.

Self-initiated Expatriation

In the international management literature, the topic of self-initiated expatriation has begun to be studied under the generic descriptor "overseas experience" (Inkson et al., 1997), while there were still few studies describing the "career development of individuals who build their professional lives in an arena not limited by national borders" (Peiperl & Jonsen, 2007, p. 351). The term, *self-initiated expatriate*, however, was broad and could be used for travelers or residents in foreign countries. In 2017, Oliveira carried out a bibliometric study on the subject, and found that the literature was using other terminologies for the same phenomenon, such as *self-initiated international experience*, *self-expatriated* and *voluntary expatriates* (Oliveira, 2017).

Definition wise, self-initiated expatriates are "internationally mobile individuals, who have moved through their own agency (rather than through an organizationally assigned expatriation) to another country for an indeterminable duration" (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013, p.79) The term has evolved from the more established concept of 'corporate expatriate' (Doherty, Dickmann & Mills, 2011) and although being separate fields of study, both concepts are related. Three elements are important when addressing self-initiated expatriates: physical mobility across a national border (Andresen et al., 2014; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Tharenou, 2015), individual volition (Doherty, Richardson & Thorn, 2013; Andresen & Margenfeld, 2015), and the temporal condition (Begley, Collings & Scullion, 2008), as expatriates leave their countries with the expectation of a temporary move, whereas migrants undertake the change as a permanent move (Andresen et al., 2014).

In a literature review on the topic of self-initiated expatriation, Doherty (2013) highlights that there are many aspects that influence the choice for an experience like this, requiring a subjective analysis at the micro level, such as family and work specificities; in addition to meso issues, as the choice for a type of career; and macro, in relation to the choice of a country and its relative culture. Nardi and Becker (2014) also defend the phenomenon as "a movement for the reframing of work, considering that professionals who work at the global level have been demonstrating that the professional relationship, materialized by their career, represents only one facet of their universe, much broader and more complex" (p. 2). For Rogers (2013) the more we can learn about adaptation strategies for self-initiated expatriates, the more elements we will have to help others in negotiating environmental changes and assimilation, such as migrants and refugees, and international displaced persons.

The choice for a career change is not always the main reason for self-expatriation, although it influences the choice of the country for mobility. People also go abroad as a rite of passage, a way to change their lives, financial reasons, interest in learning other languages, among others (Myers & Pringle, 2005; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Vance, 2005) and, although it is possible to return to the country of origin after some time of experience, many choose not.

Motivations to move abroad

Motivations to go abroad are complex and usually comprise a combination of factors (Inkson & Myers, 2003). In a qualitative study of New Zealanders, Inkson et al. (1997) found out that the drivers for an overseas experience was a desire for adventure and exploration. Family and social connections also prompted a predisposition to the experience (Richardson & Mallon, 2005), or a way to escape from their current way of life (Richardson & McKenna, 2006). This implies that there is an equation for each person who decides to move, made up by a mixture of motivation variables, family and personal priorities (Thorn, 2009).

Motivation may change from one geographical location to another. Among British academics that decided to self-initiate an expatriation, motivation was divided in: exploration, desire to escape, financial motivations, and career building (Richardson & McKennna, 2006). For SIEs in New Zealand, pull factors were identified as lifestyle and family, whereas push factors were career, culture and economics (Jackson et al., 2005). Main motives to expatriate can be summed on five general typologies a) adventure/travel/sociocultural factors, b) life change/escape, c) career, d) family, and e) economics/finance/money (Cleveland, Mangone & Adams, 1960; Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Jackson et al., 2005; Thorn, 2009). When compared with corporate expatriates, results show that SIEs were primarily intrinsically motivated, driven by personal goals and aspirations, not just career issues (Doherty, 2013; Guo et al., 2012).

Individuals can also pursue a strategy to expatriate (Shortland, 2018) as SIEs acculturation process seem to start before departure, contemplating macro and micro factors (Tabor & Milfont, 2011). Andresen et al. (2014) illustrated the process of deciding to go abroad through the Rubicon model of action phases: first, a diffuse idea about the benefits of moving abroad in the idea of expectations happen. These expectations will be derived by inputs and clues from multiple sources like the internet, friends and family. From that an individual will trigger an active role of evaluating their options and decide if extra support is needed. In the

final stage, preferences will be built on the anticipated satisfaction with the outcome (valence) and how much effort that will require (expectancy).

We have so far demonstrated that self-initiated expatriates individually choose to leave their countries, choose where to go, and for how long. Rather than a focus on career development as a primary driver (Doherty, Richardson & Thorn, 2013), the experience itself can be their motivation (Doherty, Dickmann & Mills, 2011). For Selmer and Lauring (2012) this implies that the extent of dominance of the context is also important, as individuals could choose to move abroad as a way to control the circumstances affecting their own self-development. The exposure to another culture and ways of life, new languages and skills needed in those new environments, would enhance personal improvements (Reichenberger, 2018). The next sections will introduce the axis that led to the development of the doctoral dissertation argument.

Studying careers

Much has been said about globalization and the contemporary information age. For Beck (2002) we are living in a second version of modernity, one characterized by reflexivity and a shift from the institutions to the individual. This individualism, according to Lash (2001), is a result of the retreat of the classic institutions like state, class, family and ethnic group. Functions that once took place through an institution, are now closely and more intensively dependent on the individual. This can be seen in the evolution of the notion of careers, for example.

Career was initially defined as the "sequence of individually perceived attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities throughout a person's life" (Hall, 1996, p.4), where the emphasis was initially placed within the organization and restricted to work activities. That made sense in a society much more homogeneous than that of today, with highly unequal levels of education. Back then, the traditional large organization offered employment and stability with a career model based on vertical linear progression. Most of the jobs available were on the formal spectrum of work within an organization, and the notion of

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advancing from one hierarchical position to another, still dominant (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019).

The subjectiveness of it appears in the work of Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989), where career needs to be understood in a relationship between the individual and the providers of official positions, such as institutions and organizations. An individually perceived and an organizationally prescribed view is established. In the objective view, the position, situation or status of this person will be defined by the organization, responsible for the validity of the activity performed. The individual, however, would have the possibility of interpreting his own abilities, making a unique choice in life, and preparing for such professional performance. This would be sequentially endorsed by the organization, in a relationship of movement and status change over time.

In the last decades of the 20th century, the feminization of the labor market, increased levels of education, affirmation of the rights of individuals, globalization of the economy and the flexibilization of work (among others), made room for a non-traditional model, marked by "instability, discontinuity and horizontality" (Chanlat, 1995, p. 72). Studies of other forms of career, beyond those purely on length of service and hierarchical position within the company, began.

Resources such as knowledge and reputation were mobilized in a more technical career, based on professionalization and acquisition of professional skills, called by Chanlat (1995) as *professional career*. The appreciation of individual initiative and the ability to create new products and services in the entrepreneurial career, and the recognition of the importance of relationships and community life, accumulating a capital of knowledge and active relationships in the sociopolitical career, are deemed essential (Chanlat, 1995).

With technological advances and the globalization of the economy, there is an increase in labor competitiveness. The traditional psychological contract, in which the individual would work with an eye on performance, being committed and loyal to the organization that hired him to guarantee his employment security, gives way to a trajectory based on the

psychological satisfaction of that individual with the opportunity for personal growth and continuous learning, the do-what-you-like (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022).

Such a contract is part of the *protean career*, defended by Hall (1996). The name comes from the Greek mythological figure Proteus, who had the ability to change shape, a versatility required in the new career model. According to Hall (1996), there is an inversion of the idea of success linked to the rise in hierarchy, with a single way of obtaining it, to psychological success, with multiple paths. In this sense, the career comes to be understood as a series of identity changes and continuous learning, defined by the person and not by the organization. Chronological age loses importance due to the experience acquired at any time. The protean model, therefore, opens new ways of thinking about work, as it goes beyond the organizational barrier. Career development is no longer restricted to rising levels, but to adaptability, and the expansion of individual identity. The company becomes the place for professional challenges and personal relationships.

Such transformations in the macroeconomic context, with the fall of geographic barriers and the conception of professional success based on psychological satisfaction, give space to a new perspective called boundaryless careers. Arthur (1994) defines it as the antonym of "organizational" careers, making use of six meanings for the term, with the main ones being associated with the typical careers of Silicon Valley in the United States, were professionals' transit through different employers. A career without borders, however, can also mean validation by the market, not by the current employer; or the choice not to pursue professional opportunities for personal or family reasons (Arthur, 1994, p. 296).

In this sense, the idea of a career without borders is adapted to the current economic era, with the decentralization of large firms and competent authorities. The responsibility for the development of a career is transferred to the individual. The commitment and loyalty, once highly valued, give space to the network of relationships, and previously acquired knowledge that the employee can offer. For Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009), the concepts of protean and boundaryless careers are independent, but related, as a person can demonstrate a protean and independent attitude, but prevent the work done from going beyond the limits of the

organization in which they find themselves. Likewise, an individual may have a borderless mindset, focusing on relationships across organizational boundaries, but relying on a single institution to further their career. The authors argue that far beyond physical mobility or recurrent job changes, the "new careers" actor has a different psychological attitude towards understanding his own trajectory, being self-directed and guided by his own values (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009). This puts the focus mainly on the individual, neglecting the role context and other elements will have in the development of a career path.

The concept of career, as seen, has evolved over time, and can now be applied to any person or group, whether through obtaining knowledge, personal development, or one's own work, constituted or not in the organizational sphere. The consideration of the subjective aspect of a career opened the door for an interdisciplinary analysis of the individual, their needs, aspirations, and his current life situation, with consequent influence on decision-making (DeLuca & Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2016). It is not only the situations inherent to organizational life that have space, but the individual perception of the point at which he thinks he is in the career, his family and emotional ties, and his social relationships. The linear career representation has also changed to an understanding in the form of a spiral, with the consequent accumulation of new knowledge with each new experience lived.

Since careers managed to free themselves from the organizational walls, more attention was dedicated to the social environments that hold our careers, such as our origins, education, culture and relationships (Mayrhofer, Meyer & Steyrer, 2007). The interest moved beyond the individual point of view and its motives, character or personality, to an understanding that individuals are embedded in macrosocial contexts, shaping and being shaped by them. This has an effect in career change decisions, for instance.

The social environment plays a major role in career decisions for two main reasons: first, people estimate their position in society based on others, therefore, their peers can act as a 'mirror' for individuals to locate themselves and their efforts; second, people also base the sense of who they are on their group affiliations, which can in turn, strongly influence careers. Where you come from can also play an important role in careers, be it the

socioeconomic background of your family, or the access, type and length of your formal education. Studies also show that the social background will influence the learning of unwritten habits and rules for elite positions, which can gate-keep access to certain positions (Hartmann, 2000; Yee, 2016).

"While analysis of societal developments differs in all sorts of aspects, many would agree that [there's] a less clear picture of what is generally valued and regarded as legitimate constitute core characteristics of today's industrialized and secular societies" (Mayhrofer, Meyer & Steyrer, 2007, p.16). Contextual elements should, therefore, be analyzed as integrated. It's not only upbringing and socialization practices that will play a role in how individuals react to career opportunities, but their personal life situation, for instance, will also be relevant, especially when related to household responsibilities.

Up until now, I have brought forward the changes that initiated in the 1980s and the impact they had on the understanding of careers as something beyond the hierarchical position within the company. The next section will present the current theories on career studies in an attempt to crystalize this knowledge.

State of the art overview of career studies

The basic premise of career studies in the traditional view is that a career is composed by stages given the way people play different roles and development tasks (Super, 1980) within the corporate environment. Based on the careers of men who climbed the organizational hierarchy and retired, it categorizes people's development into age-based stages as they complete certain tasks as they gain work experience. The model focus on extrinsic rewards and upward movement, with little attention to subjective career satisfaction and work-life balance.

While traditional career models emphasized lifelong employment, contemporary career concepts focus on maintaining employability throughout the lifespan. Two noteworthy models are the boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and protean career (Hall, 1996), which focus beyond the physical and psychological borders of the traditional

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organization, putting the individual forward as the main actor. It focuses on the idea of opportunities beyond a single employer. Both models are guided by a person's internal values and involves self-directed career management, where employees take responsibility for planning, directing, and evaluating their careers. It is also important to address the notion of boundaries, as current criticism exists in relation to the positive aspects of these orientation being often emphasized (Rodrigues, Guest & Budjanovcanin, 2016).

Within the notions of the corporate world are the studies beyond the organizational walls, known as post-corporate careers (Brewer, 2018). This field of study will focus on how a variety of nontraditional careers are made possible given the worlds' more agile and dynamic structures. This framework considers individual, organizational, and work-environment factors in career transitions, and contrasts traditional and contemporary careers models. It acknowledges that in today's dynamic labor marker, individuals have the ability to form connections and pursue career opportunities that go beyond traditional geographic and organizational boundaries, in a similar way to organizations.

Another development was given by the notion of intelligent careers (Arthur et al., 1995) and the importance of three key competencies: knowing why, knowing how, and knowing whom. The approximation with expatriation studies was conducted by Dickmann & Mills (2009), regarding location considerations. Three important skills are necessary for a successful career development: understanding one's personal motivations for choosing a particular career path, having the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in that path, and building relationships and connections to further one's career (Arthur et al. 1995). This idea has later been expanded to include competencies related to understanding opportunities, training and advancement, and timing of choices and activities (Jones and DeFillippi, 1996).

The Kaleidoscope career model (KCM; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006) proposed that career decisions and transitions are based on three interactives parameters: authenticity, balance, and challenge. Current research (O'Neill & Jepsen, 2019; O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2020) have found empirical support for these premises. The KCM considers three parameters that are always active and that interact with each other to influence career

decision-making and transitions. These parameters are always active and can shift in response to an individual's values and life context. People will follow either a more traditional career pattern or a discontinuous pattern, where they leave their jobs for personal interests or caregiving responsibilities.

For the career construction theory (CCT; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), the main element of study is career adaptability, comprising the resources of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. The CCT proposes that individuals shape their careers through their interpretations of the environment and their interactions with others over time. The process of career development involves adapting to changing circumstances. Sustainable careers (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2015) support the idea that sustainability in careers is given through learning, creating, testing, and remaining adaptable. The latest development in career studies is given by the notion of career shocks (Akkermans et al., 2018) when analyzing chance events that triggers a deliberate thought process about one's career such as traumatic injuries, disabilities or the covid pandemic.

A search on the database SCOPUS for the term career, associated with expatriation, time, gender and identity in the last five years wield close to 40 articles. A critical analysis of those results will be conducted next since the investigations on these themes usually overlap. For example, Myers, Thorn and Doherty (2022) explored the career and personal motivations for self-initiated expatriation of older women, encompassing both time and gender issues. In this case, the authors found that career dissatisfaction and escape are key motivations for these women, who seek authenticity, although not in the career domain, but in their personal lives.

Another example is given by the study of Slobodin (2019), focusing on identity change for female trailing spouses. In this case the author found that the male employees sent abroad were sheltered from identity discontinuity by institutional frameworks, with their spouses often facing a sudden loss of essential social and psychological functions such as a sense of belonging, professional achievement, and social interactions. Heterosexual couples'

dynamics were also explored by **dual-couples coordination strategy** (Shortland, 2020), and **spousal support** (Shah, Agrawal & Moeller, 2019).

In the case of intersections between expatriate career and gender, studies in the last five years have focused on the organizational support for women's mobility, such as **policies** (Shortland, 2018) which do not cover gendered concerns specifically, with women reporting limited female networks, family concerns, work-life balance issues and the need to cope with loneliness; **procedural justice given by performance reviews** (Shortland & Perkins (2019); the **interpretation of the effectiveness of equality/diversity policies** (Shortland & Perkins, 2021); and **training interventions** (Shortland & Porter, 2020) perceived as insufficient or irrelevant to building human capital for future expatriate positions..

Other studies have also focused on the impact of *gender* and *expatriation* choice on a **hierarchical progression of women's careers** (Ruel & Jaegler, 2021), proving the difficulties for women in enjoying the same career progression as men, since gender significantly influences the level reached at a far greater influence than expatriation; **cultural and institutional issues** (Elkouz, Bastida & El-Husseini, 2022) that may prevent Jordanian women from undertaking expatriation; the **effects of ethnicity on self-expatriation experiences and outcomes** (Bozionelos, 2020); and **differences between male and female career paths** (Dolce et al., 2021).

The intersection between expatriate career and identity in the last five years have focused on **subjective and objective notions of success** (Bharadwaj & Buchanan, 2023), with findings suggesting that personal initiative underpins the dynamics of being an effective self-initiated expatriate**; re-*expatriation* inclinations** (Ho et al., 2023) being anchored in career identity, family identity and social identity; and **location issues** with highly skilled Indian expatriates moving to Australia having to rely on sensemaking and acculturation to resolve their crisis of habitus (Mohyuddin et al., 2022), and immigration difficulties, family separation and social adjustment problems being reported for academics in South Africa (Harry, Dodd & Chinyamurindi, 2019). Fraga, Antunes & Rocha-de-Oliveira (2020) have also analyzed the **construction of career trajectories**, highlighting ways of being and acting in

the work environment; and Wechtler (2018) the motives for **female childless workers** to decide to work abroad.

Time has been explored through **repatriation studies** (Peltokorpi et al., 2022; Ryan et al.2023), and the **accumulation of individual career capital**, with Dickmann et al. (2018) analyzing its effects and increasing value for one's career, and Oleskeviciute et al. (2022) focusing on the transfer of knowing-how through time. Time has also been addressed through expectations **of salary in relation to age**, seniority, previous international experience, and culture attraction of the host country (Duarte, Eccher & Brewster, 2021); and **entry-level job** applicants' intention to leave their home country to work abroad (Gostautaite et al., 2020). Having presented an overview of the current literature on the topic, the next section will explore the possibilities given by the use of interdisciplinarity.

Interdisciplinarity in career studies

We have so far established that the contemporary individual is better educated and more knowledgeable than ever (Beck, 2002), given the range of information made available through technology. He is also characterized by choice, opportunities not available to previous generations, and part of a very complex urban society. In order to analyze these very personal experiences, interdisciplinary research is needed (Khapova & Arthur, 2011).

Velho (2003), an anthropologist, doesn't study careers per se, but "the relationships and trajectories that are built in their modern and complex urban societies" (DeLuca, Rocha-de-Oliveira & Chiesa, 2016, p. 2). The interactionist perspective on careers, however, relates the theme to the anthropologist's concepts, since it "intends to better understand the coexistence of differences" in society (DeLuca, Rocha-de-Oliveira & Chiesa, 2016, p. 3). For this doctoral dissertation, four main concepts from Velho (2003) are relevant: *project, field of possibilities, negotiation of reality and potential for metamorphosis.*

Project, or "conduct organized to achieve specific purposes" (Velho, 2003, p. 101), concerns the future, but anchors behavior on the memory that one has, and on the construction of meaning given to what is being lived, like a patchwork quilt. Memory, however,

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is a discontinuous thing, so the project will be based not only on facts, but on the interpretation that the individual gives to these moments in his history.

Field of possibilities concerns "the alternatives constructed from the socio-historical process and with the interpretative potential of the symbolic world of culture" (Velho, 2003, p. 28). It has elements of reality but depends on the meanings attributed in the different contexts in which it exists. It is a blank canvas, encapsulating the many paths the individual can choose to follow, but bound by his current life situation. As life unfolds, new paths become available, and old ones disappear.

The negotiation of reality deals with the network of meanings (Geertz, 2008) existing for the same fact (the heterogeneity of homogeneity). The facts can be objective, but how the individual analyzes it, and grants meaning to it, will always be subjective, hence, it presupposes difference as a constitutive element (DeLuca, Rocha-de-Oliveira & Chiesa, 2016).

And, finally, the potential for metamorphosis, refers to the interaction between individual and collective projects. The possibility of transformation and change given contextually and over time (Velho, 2003). Taken together, these elements allow for an understanding of careers as "a construction, carried out by the individual, from objectivities and subjectivities that make up a field of possibilities, through which he transits and negotiates reality" (DeLuca, Rocha-de-Oliveira & Chiesa, 2016, p. 6). This is relevant to this doctoral dissertation as it allows us to see the self-initiation mobility as a project, the path taken through a field of possibilities, revealing a process of negotiation between different symbolic boundaries. It will be through this negotiation that choices will be made, leading to a metamorphosing of the individual and its trajectory.

For Velho (2003), the individual does not trace its projects in isolation, but is influenced by collective projects, groups, institutions, and organizations. Given the existence of different possible interpretations, the projects will not be homogeneous, but mutually influenced by many forces, transforming themselves. This means that the individual envisions a career in the future, imagining the roles, positions, and status (Hughes, 1958) he can go through, but

considering other individual and collective projects, such as his family, for example. Throughout the lived experience, new meanings can be attributed and negotiated, consequently metamorphosing the project along the way.

Each trajectory will be unique in the individual biographical view, but also greatly influenced by both the geographic space, and the historical time in which it is located. Time will also be an important component in our choices, given that individual's previous plans and projects (retrospective trajectory) and expectations about the future (projected trajectory), can change with the unfolding of events, culminating in dilemmas (Hughes, 1958) or conflicts (Hughes, 1937) that must be negotiated.

Conveying identity and career

The concept of identity has deep cultural historic roots, and can be seen in the notions of soul, body, and social belonging, present in biblical and classic literature (Beswick, 2007). The connection between career and identity is a long lasting one, with Law, Meijers and Wijers (2002), linking it to the work of Parsons at the beginning on the 20th century, and the idea that to choose a vocation wisely, one would need a clear understanding of themselves. From a psychological perspective, identity relates to how one sees themself and their values, experiences, beliefs, encompassing an understanding of ourselves that have a continuing element. Even if we know that we change through time, we recognize our identity as an ongoing entity (Beswick, 2007). In the social sciences, the term gained popularity in the 1960's when the notion of identification was taken from its psychoanalytic context and linked to ethnicity and reference group theory. However, it was only in the 1980's that identity came to be paired with works on gender, sexuality, race, religion, nationalism, immigration, culture, and politics (Brubacker & Cooper, 2000).

When we bring the concept to the global careers' context, identity becomes ambiguous and multidimensional (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000), being connected to institutional cultures (Pratt et al., 2016), and to a multi-level complexity, given that the individual's notion of self and

feelings of belonging become less exclusive, and more diffuse (Martel, 2019; Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Contemporary discussions in the field of human resource development acknowledge the recognition of multiple identifications (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Black, Warhurst & Corlett, 2018) and belongings "tied to territoriality, memorizations of landscapes, lifestyles and cultural imprints [...] without enquiring into context and individual background" (Youkhana, 2015, p.10-11).

On one hand, Anthias (2002) defends that "identity has a tendency to function as a disabling concept that limits the focus and moves the analyst away from context, meaning and praxis." (p. 493). On another, Youkhana (2015) contends that "space is an analytical category that cross-cuts established categorizations such as race, class, gender, and stage in the life cycle, and integrates a material semiotic perspective more systematically into the study of social relations" (p.10), defining belonging as "the complex relations that individuals have with other people, circulating objects, artifacts, and changing social, political, and cultural landscapes, thus mirroring both the material conditions and underlying power relations" (p.10). Beswick (2007) follows the same line in arguing an interdependency of the social and personal aspects of identity, especially in times of "rapid social change, globalization, geographic and social mobility, unstable relationships and uncertainties in many aspects of life" (p.3), by establishing our identities in a context of group memberships (married, divorced, liberal, conservative, nationality changes).

In expatriation literature, identity appears in the idea of national culture and personal values, relating to the adjustment between home and host countries. Martel (2019) criticizes the seemingly underlying assumption that "national cultural origin is equivalent to individual identity" (p. 253), stating that still little attention is devoted to "belongingness to professional cultures, identifications with various forms of subcultures or even cultures of ephemeral or virtual social groups and communities that individuals might identify with" (p. 253). This criticism for the homogeneity of cultural and individual identity is not new, with intercultural management scholars defending for many decades that "the idea of one coherent and uniform

culture within the boundaries of the nation seems by now inadequate" (Gertsen & Soederberg, 1995, p.7).

To solve this issue, Martel (2019) suggests an alternative perspective on identity within expatriation studies, which involves examining how situational factors and intersubjective processes interact with one's sense of self. In this way, identity could also be understood (and studied) as the consciousness is the narratives the brain produces (Dennett, 1991), in order to make sense of disparate elements of experience in an integrated and meaningful life (Bruner, 2003). Therefore, experiences of place can shape who we have been, are and will become, or our own notion of self.

Intersections between careers and time

Careers have, so far, been introduced as a situational and relational phenomenon. I have also established its connection with one's notion of self. It is important, however, to take into consideration that careers have, at the same time, a heterogeneous component, given by the individual time lived by each person, and a homogeneous element, since they can be analyzed together over historical time. It is, therefore, necessary to discuss career as a chronological phenomenon.

The first known evidence of time keeping is 28 marks carved on a bone, which would connect to the menstrual cycle of a woman, an important information for survival. Time was "organized" in the early 1900 with Ford's division of the day in eight well defined shifts, with one-third of the day aimed at work, one-third for leisure and one-third for sleep (Bluedorn, 2002). This artificial division was aimed to fit the routines of the industry and improve consumption at the same time. It broke with the natural division of the day given by sunrise and sunset, having an impact on sleep and eating schedules. It has also imposed the business notion of time on employees: "timesheets, timekeepers, clocking-in, fines and informers were all utilized by the employers to impose their time sense on the workforce" (Schein, 1985, p.70). Employees would sell their time as labor force, and many strategies have been employed to

maximize productivity within the same period of time. This made sense when the outcome of work was products, but in the knowledge society, this division doesn't seem to work anymore.

Pandemic times have also exposed how the traditional office setting and time keeping doesn't necessarily correlate with higher performance, and people were able to achieve the same results working from home, in asynchronous activities mediated by technology. The five workdays a week is also declining, with many countries trying, or even successfully, implementing a four-day work week in a more balanced lifestyle, without impact on productivity. It is relevant to understand time as a social construction that influences not only individuals, but also organizations and societies.

It is from the western notion of time based on monochronicity (one thing at a time, with a marked beginning and an end) that the linear careers assumption comes from, influencing people's planning and life evaluations. In other words, it is important to understand and analyze individual time orientation as this will influence the roles people will potentially take, and how they negotiate their career paths.

When gender and work converge

Gender studies emerged as a field of study in the late 1960's and early 1970's in response to the feminist movement and the need to address issues of gender inequality and discrimination. The Handbook of Gender and Work (Powell, 1999), emphasizes that although used interchangeably, it's important to distinguish sex "the biological property of individuals" (p. xiii), and gender "the psychological and social ramifications of being biologically male or female" (p. xiii). For Eagly & Diekman (2003), our current assumptions regarding gender and work are rooted in the accepted western culture notion that women and men have different natures, and, therefore, their roles in society should be radically different. Feminist scholars such Beauvoir (2014), Friedan (1998), and Millett (2016) have challenged this naturalistic idea of gender and argued its social construction core, which is perpetuated through cultural norms and practices.

Korabik (1999) defends that our conceptualization of gender has evolved from a unidimensional model (based on bipolar notions of biological sex, male and female, and their psychosocial determinant, masculinity and femininity), to a bidimensional model (rooted in different degrees of gender identification based on one's own sense of identity), with the acknowledgement of androgynous and undifferentiated individuals. The intersections of gender with race, class, and other social categories gained prominence in the 1980's, but remain a field that still needs to be further explored (Fraga & Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2020).

The social, economic, and political changes given by the expansion of educational opportunities, the contraceptive revolution and the flexibilization of work (among others) led to a feminization of the labor market (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). However, due to the different socialization mechanisms, women's careers are different from men's (Cohen 2014; Lee et al., 2011). Fraga and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2020) take a similar approach when they defend that it's important to understand how professional opportunities are structured in specific gendered historical constructions and contexts, to reveal the distinct tasks and challenges given to men and women.

Gender differences are also relevant when building international careers. According to Suutari and Brewster (2000), a much higher percentage of women seek work abroad on their own initiative. For Arifa, El Baroudi & Khapova (2021), the decision to self-initiate their expatriation would be in response to push and pull factors, such an inherent lack of opportunities in the home country. For Fraga and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2020) "women may be less available for mobility due to boundaries anchored in socio-cultural, political, organizational and biological relationships" (p. 758). Examples of what the authors call "immobilities" can be illustrated by the lack of representation in leadership positions, family expectations, physical restriction of freedom, and organizational glass ceiling (even if the term is considered a too rigid metaphor to address the barriers women must face) (Fraga & Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2020). Additionally, women are more likely to face discrimination and harassment in the workplace, which can limit their career opportunities, further complicating their gendered labyrinth. For

Uteng and Cresswell (2008), "narratives of mobility and immobility play a central role in the constitution of gender as a social and cultural construct" (p. 2).

Doctoral Dissertation Argument

In view of the above, the main argument of this dissertation is **that self-initiated expatriation, as a career project, expands the individual's initial field of possibilities, given the boundary crossing aspect of one geographically changing country. When in the new context, reality will have to be renegotiated given the changes. The experimentation allowed by a different environment will trigger a reflection process that has a potential for transformation. Throughout this process, the way the individual sees themself, the way they perceive time, and the way they deal with gendered experiences can change.**

Research Question and Objectives

According to Creswell and Poth (2016) a qualitative research design begins with philosophical assumptions and "good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and, at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p.15). These will be presented next.

This doctoral dissertation follows a social constructivist worldview, in which the understanding of the world in which the research exists is sought. Ontologically, we are "embracing the idea of multiple realities" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 16), and the creation of subjective meanings to individual experiences. Epistemologically, we conduct the research within "the field where the participants live and work as these are important contexts for understanding what the participants are saying" (p. 18). Axiologically, we bring our own worldviews and sets of beliefs to the research project, informing how we will conduct and write our study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). And lastly, methodologically, inductive logic is used, as questions are continually revised from experiences in the field.

Therefore, the following research question will guide our doctoral dissertation: **what do self-initiated expatriates narrate regarding their ensuing lived experience considering aspects of identity, time, and gender as a career project?**

Given that the logic used is from the ground up and based on the data collected, rather than a theory previously chosen, "sometimes the research question changes in the middle of the study to reflect better the types of questions needed to understand the research problem" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p.19). With that in mind and aligned with the research question and the proposed argument, the main objective of this doctoral dissertation is to **understand and analyze the narratives of self-initiated expatriates' lived experience regarding their careers with relation to identity, time, and gender.**

To do so we will focus "on the way the relational, temporal, and continuous features of a pragmatic ontology of experience can manifest in narrative form, not just in retrospective representations of human experience but also in the lived immediacy of that experience" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2012, p.10). Specifically, the aim is to:

Objective 1: Understand and analyze how SIEs have shaped their identities through international experience (Chapter 2).

Objective 2: Theoretically substantiate the mutual relationship between social and personal perspectives on time in order to situate and understand the possibilities of articulation in contexts of crossing borders (Chapter 3).

Objective 3: Investigate women SIE responses to career challenges abroad and their (new) interpretations derived from this experience (Chapter 4).

This research hopes to bring light on the way "people go about making sense of their experience" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2012, p. 11), presenting what "negotiating purposes, next steps, outcomes, texts, and the other concerns" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2012, p. 34) influence this ongoing sensemaking. Figure 1 illustrates the connection between each objective and its corresponding doctoral dissertation chapter.

Figure 1

Objectives and chapters of the doctoral dissertation

Main objective:
Understand and analyze the narratives of self-initiated expatriates
lived experience regarding identity, time, and gender.

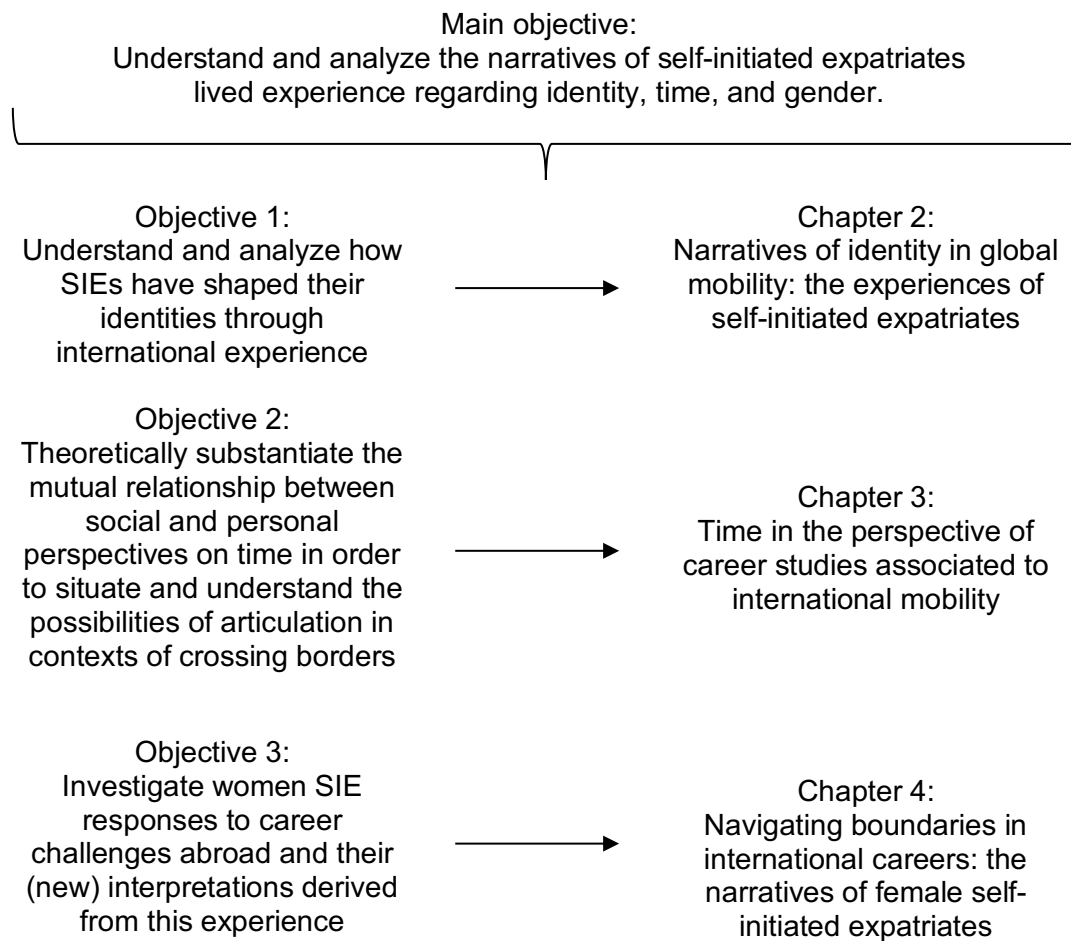|	
Objective 1: Understand and analyze how SIEs have shaped their identities through international experience	Chapter 2: Narratives of identity in global mobility: the experiences of self-initiated expatriates
Objective 2: Theoretically substantiate the mutual relationship between social and personal perspectives on time in order to situate and understand the possibilities of articulation in contexts of crossing borders	Chapter 3: Time in the perspective of career studies associated to international mobility
Objective 3: Investigate women SIE responses to career challenges abroad and their (new) interpretations derived from this experience	Chapter 4: Navigating boundaries in international careers: the narratives of female self-initiated expatriates

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation consists of five chapters. After this first introductory chapter, the second chapter is devoted to an empiric paper on the narratives of identity during global experiences of mobility, the third is a conceptual paper on the notion of time and how it can be associated with the study of international mobility, and the fourth, an investigation of the lived experiences of women self-initiated expatriates as they navigate the boundaries of international careers. The fifth, and final chapter, is a discussion of the results. An outline of chapters two through four is presented next and illustrated in Table 1.

Chapter two of this doctoral dissertation addresses expatriation as a transformational experience with impact in the expatriates' identity. By interviewing 30 self-initiated expatriates

with experiences in 16 different countries, I was able to collect narratives of different episodes that portray the nuances of international mobility.

Chapter three is all about time, and how it is still overlooked in the human resources literature. By exploring and combining concepts, future research contributions are explored.

Chapter four discusses women's experience while engaging in careers abroad. It considers gender differences and inspects how women have navigated boundaries given by the new context, and what new meanings and resignifications come out of it.

Table 1

Doctoral dissertation research summary

Chapter	Sample Data	Concepts	Findings
2	30 SIEs (moving to 16 different countries)	Identity	Context has an impact on identity
3	Conceptual	Time	Context will influence our notion of time
4	30 women SIEs (between the ages of 24 and 53)	Gender	Context will require women to navigate boundaries differently than men

Chapter 2

Narratives of Identity in Global Mobility: The Experiences of Self-Initiated Expatriates

Abstract

Using interpretivism, the objective of this study is to contribute to the discussions of the interplay between context and identity during mobility experiences. To that end, empirical data was collected in the form of 30 interviews. From the interviews with the self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), three main narratives emerged: identity ruptures as motivations to expatriate, negotiation of reality as an adjustment process, and identity transformation as a result of the mobility process. The unique contribution of this paper is as follows: it presents some of the mechanisms used by the SIEs to negotiate and re-significate reality in the host country; and it helps shedding light to the complexity and multidimensionality shaping international experience.

Keywords: Global Mobility; Identity; Self-initiated expatriation; Narratives.

Chapter 3

Time in the Perspective of Career Studies Associated to International Mobility

Abstract

This study is a theoretical essay and discusses the mutual relationship between social and personal perspectives on time and how that will influence views of careers aspirations, achievement, success; especially in contexts of crossing borders, such as expatriation. To that end, we present a critical review of the literature regarding time and individuals, and time and career. After combining concepts, we explore the international mobility case and how our perception of time can influence our awareness of global careers. Considerations regarding the intertwine of biographical and historical time, the meanings attributed to careers by our temporal mental models, and specific temporal practices of different cultures are made.

Keywords: Careers; International mobility; time.

Chapter 4

Navigating Boundaries in International Careers: The Narratives of Female Self-Initiated Expatriates

Abstract

This study aims to investigate and understand the careers of women self-initiated expatriates as they navigate the new life in the host country, and what interpretations they derive from this experience. To achieve that, we adopt an interpretative research design based on narrative analysis. The emphasis is on interpretation and interpersonal processes. From analyzing women's narratives, it has surfaced that when engaging in careers abroad, women navigate boundaries by contemplating the move and what that would entail; enduring the hardships experienced; and persevering to face the challenges presented. This paper contributes to the career literature by identifying the changing nature of boundaries that shape mobility over time, and to the current knowledge of international career perceptions of women.

Key words: Gender; Career; Global Mobility; Boundaries.

Chapter 5

Summary of Key Findings

This doctoral dissertation addressed expatriation as a career project. Emphasizing the transformational nature of the expatriation experience, I demonstrated the importance of examining the individual's lived experience, especially in relation to identity, time and gender. In the introduction of this dissertation, I stated that the purpose of my inquiry is to understand and analyze the narratives of self-initiated expatriates' lived experience considering aspects of identity, time, and gender as a career project. To do so, I posed three sub-questions in the format of individual papers: (1) "What do self-initiated expatriates narrate about their identity work when pursuing international careers?", (2) "What is the relationship between social and personal perspectives on time and how will that influence our views of careers, especially in contexts of crossing borders, such as expatriation?", (3) "How do women self-initiated expatriates (SIE) navigate boundaries when engaging in careers abroad?" In this chapter, I reflect on those findings collectively.

Table 1

Research questions and key findings

Chapter	Research question	Key findings
2	What do self-initiated expatriates narrate about their identity work when pursuing international careers?	a) non-subscription of certain social and gender expectations while abroad will lead to ruptures of identity and the feeling of not belonging, strengthening the importance of the pre-expatriation context in the decision to move. b) identification of two mechanisms for dealing with the new reality in the host country: development of a cosmopolitan identity, elevating the experience to a higher motive in the face of difficult and traumatic experiences.

		c) narratives of SIE as complex and multidimensional, with accounts of a transformed identity due to the move.
3	What is the relationship between social and personal perspectives on time and how will that influence our views of career aspirations, achievement and success, especially in contexts of crossing borders, such as expatriation?	a) international careers do not emerge automatically by crossing a border, but are formed throughout the life experiences one has access, and the meanings attributed to it by our temporal perceptions b) not only individuals have unique experiences of time, but cultures also follow specific temporal practices c) biographical and historical time will intervene in the pursuit of an international career.
4	How do women self-initiated expatriates (SIE) navigate boundaries when engaging in careers abroad?	a) gender bias and discrimination affect women's career opportunities and progression b) there is still an expectation of women being the primary caregiver, leading to career compromise and settling for inadequate expatriate roles c) women can create opportunities by opting for unconventional careers and establishing creative solutions to conquer boundaries in expatriation.

Objective one, aimed at "understanding and analyzing how SIEs have shaped their identities through international experience", was explored in chapter 2. There I have discussed how the globalization of the world and the fall of communication barriers have made it possible for workers to explore different options for employment and development. I've also presented how currently 3% of the world population is living in a different country than the one they were born in, influencing the way people establish a sense of identity and place. Using

interpretivism, I analyzed the interplay between context and identity during mobility experiences. I demonstrated that the concept of identity is complex and multifaceted, and can change throughout our lives through self-reflection, and as we experience different environments. National identity is not an innate characteristic, but rather shaped and altered through cultural interpretations.

The paper showed how the environment is a powerful force in shaping identities, and that narratives are central to understanding an individual's experience. Three narratives emerged from the accounts of participants who decided to expatriate: identity ruptures as motivations to expatriate, negotiation of reality as an adjustment process, and identity transformation as a result of the mobility process. The narratives show how international mobility was an opportunity to break free from cultural expectations and explore a different version of oneself. However, that didn't happen automatically, but upon a negotiation process triggered by self-reflection, and leading to an initial identity shock, when known rules and ways of doing things no longer apply. Despite potential challenges, participants see expatriation as the right decision and speak favorably about the transformation of their identity.

Objective two, to "theoretically substantiate the mutual relationship between social and personal perspectives on time in order to situate and understand the possibilities of articulation in contexts of crossing borders", was developed in chapter 3. In this paper, I stated that the concept of time is central to studying careers but remains underexplored. That time has a function in the social order, but that human experience of time is not uniform, with each culture having its own specific temporal practice. Global mobility allows people to choose, experiment and establish new temporalities.

This article discusses the mutual relationship between social and personal perspectives on time and how they influence views of career aspirations, achievement, and success, especially in contexts of crossing borders such as expatriation. The study is presented as a theoretical essay, and by analyzing the concepts presented it was possible to discuss how an individual's perception of time (passing fast or slow) can affect their

satisfaction with their work environment and play a role on how people make decisions about their careers.

The **third,** and final **objective,** to "investigate women SIE responses to career challenges abroad and what interpretations derived from this experience", was answered in chapter 4. In this paper, I explored two opposing views in the literature regarding contemporary careers: that careers would be either bounded or boundaryless. Previous research shows that global work has not been in favor of women, with a "domestic glass ceiling" identified as the main barrier for them to pursue international careers. Self-initiated expatriation appears as a solution for this constraint. The article contributes to career literature by identifying the evolving nature of boundaries that shape mobility over time, and the centrality of personal relationships in this particular form of career decision.

In this study I've also defended that the social environment plays a crucial role in molding careers, as individuals are embedded in macro social contexts that shape and are shaped by them. Although expatriation is a decision which emphasizes flexibility, mobility, and adaptability to changing environments, women face personal and professional boundaries during the move, including immigration policies, language barriers, cultural differences, and qualifications. Relationships and family seem to influence the pace of women's professional lives differently than men. Overall, existing research fails to consider how people perceive these boundaries, and there is a need to expand career theory that centrally situated women's experiences in that sense.

Possible Contributions

With this doctoral thesis, I have defended that "that self-initiated expatriation, as a career project, expands the individual's initial field of possibilities, given the boundary crossing aspect of one geographically changing country. When in the new context, reality will have to be renegotiated given the changes. The experimentation allowed by a different environment will trigger a reflection process that has a potential for transformation. Throughout this process, the way the individual sees themselves, the way they perceive time, and the way they deal with

gendered experiences can change". With one conceptual and two empirical papers, I have expanded the understanding and analysis of self-initiated expatriates' lived experience narratives, contributing to the ongoing discussion of international careers, especially in relation with identity, time, and gender.

Self-initiated mobility as an individual's project

When choosing to move abroad, the individual makes a choice for their future which will have an impact in his biography, an anticipation of a future trajectory. Is it a decision based on a positive impression given by past influences, be it a person, family member or culture expectancy (like the desirability of international experiences imprinted since school). The society we live in sees mobility as a new symbolic capital and desirable in the work world (Fraga & Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2020), especially amongst young people. The project (Velho, 2003), therefore, being subject to transformations, becomes unique to the subject: a characterization of their individuality, an orientation in the path through fields of possibilities and, finally, the basic instrument for negotiating reality.

Empirically, this can be seen when the **non-subscription of certain social and gender expectations while abroad will lead to ruptures of identity and the feeling of not belonging, strengthening the importance of the pre-expatriation context in the decision to move.** When people realize they do not subscribe to social or gender expectations at their home countries, they will explore alternatives to their current boundaries. Changing countries can be seen as a possibility to start over. This project (Velho, 2003), therefore, starts before the move, with the exploration of other possibilities and the individual choice for a specific place. This initial context is important, as people will leave some boundaries behind but will face new, unknown ones, in the new environment. The initial field of possibilities (Velho, 2003) will be enlarged. It is relevant to stress that the experiences are not always going to be positive.

For instance, this can be seen through **the identification of two mechanisms for dealing with the new reality in the host country: development of a cosmopolitan identity; and elevating the experience to a higher motive in the face of difficult and**

traumatic experiences. The development of a cosmopolitan identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to the world community, beyond national, cultural, or religious affiliations. And in the face of difficult and traumatic experiences, some individuals may elevate their experience to a higher motive as a way to cope or derive meaning from the difficult situation, finding comfort in the 'it was meant to be' idea.

Field of possibilities encompassing careers options

If the field of possibilities (Velho, 2003) encompasses both objective aspects, such as professions, education system, organizations, and values of a society, as well as subjective aspects, such as the resignifications that are built from what is socially given, it will hold all possible options for the individual's career. It is a fundamental concept for understanding the way in which projects move along a life trajectory, as it lists the alternatives presented from broader socio-historical processes. Thus, the social role generated by the individual's conception of himself in relation to others (Hughes, 1937) carries a status in front of a certain group, replicated throughout history. Status is an elementary form of office, which Hughes (1937) defines as a group of standard obligations and privileges under which a person submits itself in a given situation.

For Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989), career reflects the relationship of the individual and the providers of official positions, like institutions and organizations, and how these relationships fluctuate over time. Subjectively, a career will be based on the type of job the individual chooses given the interpretation of one's own skills. Objectively, the position, situation or status of this person will be characterized by the organization responsible for the validity of the activity performed. In self-initiated expatriation, this is given by different job opportunities that were not available at the home country, for instance. New niches, new needs, different ways to assess the skills. It also relates to life-balance and the perception of success. A continuous reinterpretation and negotiation of realities. If before the SIE had to negotiate with other collective projects, like family and social groups, after the expatriation this negotiation happens with the new meanings that are being created and with the 'new versions

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of themselves' that appear due to this new experimentation of values and experiences in the new country.

The notion that international careers do not emerge automatically by crossing a border but are formed throughout the life experiences one has access to, and the meanings attributed to it by our temporal perceptions is important, as an international career is a complex and ongoing process that is shaped by a range of objective and subjective factors, such as personal experiences, cultural background, and interpretations of the lived situations. The subjective understanding of life can also be influenced by temporal perceptions which are the internal representations of our past experiences that guide the meaning attributed to new information.

It includes the realities/projects with which the SIE negotiates before moving (family, group expectations) and after (which explores all the possibilities that can now present themselves), options not possible before. Because it includes different individual interpretations of the reality (due to status, trajectory, gender, generation, time) but also the change in context, people can start to consider projects that were before not available to them for a series of reasons. It's a continually reinterpretation of the information received as they interact with this new reality.

Bear in mind the **notion that not only individuals have unique experiences of time, but cultures also follow specific temporal practices.** If we take into consideration two individuals who have lived in the same country, their unique experiences of time will be so that they may have very different interpretations of their circumstances. One person may view their situation as an opportunity for personal growth and cultural exchange, while the other may view it as a challenge to be overcome or a source of frustration. By understanding the impact our (individual or collective) temporal perceptions have on our decisions, we can develop a more nuanced and intentional approach to building an international career that aligns with our personal goals and values.

Negotiation of reality as an adjustment process

Where difference is a constitutive element but presupposes a context of shared meanings. It's a characteristic of the social culture, the new country with its new meanings. As much as they have the ability of choosing, it will be anchored in a broader set of values and social representations (Velho, 2006), "pushed by forces and circumstances that they have to face and try to cope" (Velho, 2003, p.45). Not a vacuum but shared paradigms in specific universes. Individuals can have different and even contradictory projects.

Empirically, this can be seen by the result showing that **narratives of SIE are complex and multidimensional and should be studied in multi-levels.** In order to fully understand the lived experiences of this group it is necessary to pay attention to multiple levels. Individually, personal motivations, goals, and experiences can provide a first layer of information. At the organizational level, policies for attraction and career development can also be relevant. Finally, the broader cultural and social context in which self-initiated expatriates operate, including society expectations, as well as the role of national and international policies, can help us shed light on the way international careers are shaped.

Mobility as an ignition to metamorphosis

I have so far established that the international career project brought forward by the move will not emerge automatically but will be constructed. Once in the host country, the individual will face new cultural experiences and expectations, which will lead to negotiations and renegotiations of themselves, and their initial certainties. Difficult or even traumatic experiences will have to be accommodated internally and resignified in this new reality.

This reflection process and adjustment have a potential for transformation. New experiences will lead to new meanings, and experimentations of different versions of self, individual and cultural time perceptions, and gender experiences can change the way people see their lives. The frequent transit between provinces of meanings develops a potential for individual metamorphosis (Velho, 2003). Observe flexibility and transformation as projects and people change. Or people change through their projects. Empirically, this relates to the fact

that **biographical and historical time will intervene in the pursuit of an international career.**

Each trajectory will be unique in the individual biographical view, but because it is also a localized social fact, it will be greatly influenced by the geographical space and by the historical time in which it is located. A country that encourages mobility by offering a structured welfare for the adjustment of foreigners in a historic time that accepts crossing borders as a career project, will make all the difference in an individual's choice for this kind of international career, for example.

Limitations

No work is without limitations. While narratives were deemed a suitable approach to investigate how careers are shaped by contextual interactions of crossing borders, such as expatriation, it is important to take into account that it relies heavily on the recollection of individual experiences and perceptions, which can have several shortcomings.

First, given that memory is flawed, people may forget details, distort or confuse events, or fill gaps in their memory with speculation or assumptions. Recollections can also be influenced by various cognitive biases, which distort or may selectively emphasize certain aspects of past events. People are also inclined to focus their accounts on what they think the research wants to hear, exaggerating situations or undisclosing embarrassing or sensitive information, in what is known as social desirability bias.

A second point of attention is the way people interpret and frame past events or experiences differently depending on their perspective, beliefs, or emotions. Although the position of the main researcher is not objective given the interpretivist nature of this doctoral dissertation, it is also important to be aware of one's own biases when interpreting and analyzing data. Those can relate to our preconceived notions, attitudes, beliefs, or preferences that affect how we think and make decisions. As it was illustrated in the personal statement at the beginning of this dissertation, I am a women self-initiated expatriate, so although I

considered that a strength when approaching my field of study, it can be that my own personal experiences have influenced some of my conclusions.

It is also important to mention that this doctoral dissertation is built upon 792 pages of collected data, which has proven to be a monumental task, particularly in relation to synthesizing and making sense of the complex and dense narratives. The choice of which interviews' excerpts to use can also be seen as arbitrary, and although careful thought was put in presenting it as close as possible to the original language used by the interviewees, it may not fully represent the depth of the narratives collected.

Finally, the data collection was carried out through the COVID pandemic. A highly complex social event that is still being assimilated by humanity, and which consequences we are only starting to document. Although the interviews didn't address COVID impact, as focused on the self-initiated expatriation decision as a career project, the historic moment we were currently living in, may have altered people's accounts, given their own self-reflection processes and inherent career choices. The nature of this research doesn't aim for a generalizability of results, but it could be interesting for future research to collect similar data at a different moment in time, and check if it affected the narratives of self-initiated expatriates at different stages of their careers.

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