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PRECARIOUSLY BEYOND BORDERS:
THE LIFE OF A DIGITAL NOMAD

An ethnographic exploration of the tensions in self-
making and being made in the remote working
community in Lisbon, Portugal

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Seven months ago, a thread was started on Reddit with a photo of a graffiti in Lisbon that read “digital nomads you are fucking disgusting!!!” in red block letters.¹ The photo had 315 interactions and 130 comments, but was retweeted on Twitter, reshared on Slack and reposted on Facebook for a much wider audience. The Portuguese words “trabalho mata e é uma seca” (“work kills and sucks”) were spray painted on the wall next to the slogan (see Figure 1). In the comment section, users were discussing that the dismay comes from the fact that the local average salary of 850€ a month has to compete with remote working salaries of 5000€, leaving them unable to afford basic things like housing. A person wrote, “Who would've thought that unrestricted movement between countries with considerably large gaps in median income might be a bad idea?” Someone answered, “#typical gentrification.” Another user wrote that during their last visit to Lisbon, they had seen a graffiti “fuck you tourist scum” and that hostility towards foreigners was a growing trend in Portugal.



Figure 1 (taken by Reddit user)

¹ “Dive into Anything,” Reddit, accessed July 1, 2023,

https://www.reddit.com/r/2westernerurope4u/comments/11806hr/based_portugese_graffitis/.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The picture above highlights two central questions of the thesis: how do remote workers and digital nomads, the more mobile subgroup, define their relationship to work under conditions of neoliberalism and which tensions arise from this relationship in the context of Lisbon, Portugal?

Location-independent work has become more common in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Holleran 2022). A new generation is entering the workforce with new expectations for conducting work. However, as previous research has shown (Thompson 2021) (Orr and Savage 2021), different expectations about work do not always result in positive experiences and may in fact lead to the reproduction of already existing inequalities. This thesis builds on the previous research and explores the tensions within a digital nomad lifestyle in order to gain a better understanding of the different experiences of remote workers in Lisbon. The term “digital nomad” was first coined by Makimoto and Manners (1997), who foresaw a wave of working professionals whose information- and communication technology (ICT) based jobs would allow them to work remotely and travel while earning an income. The lifestyle of digital nomads is fueled by a desire to break free from the structures of conventional, location-dependent work and seek a life where work and leisure are not spatially and temporally segregated, but rather where both equally contribute to the individual’s goals of self-actualization, -development, and -fulfillment (Reichenberger 2018). Thus, they lead a life of minimal possessions, commitments, and integration into their chosen location to keep a high degree of mobility. This however comes with implications for themselves as well populations of the host countries. The conversations I had while conducting fieldwork on digital nomads and remote workers in Lisbon illustrated that the city mostly attracted foreign workers who wished to live in a cheaper country while earning a higher salary. This development had an impact on the livelihood of locals, and the locals were not happy about it.

My research population were digital nomads and remote workers aged 18 and older in Lisbon, Portugal and its surroundings. I included the label “remote worker” later on during fieldwork as I understood that many foreigners working remotely did not feel like “digital nomad” best described them as the group was relatively heterogeneous in terms of income levels and mobility practices. Although my informants self-identified based on their own understanding of the terms, I will borrow a framework from Reichenberger (2018) in order to underline the different levels of digital nomadism: Level 0 are people conducting work away from an office, Level 1 are workers who are flexible with their workplace without incorporating travel, Level 2 are individuals who retain their permanent residence but use the opportunity to travel more extensively, and Level 3 are those who abandon a permanent residence and fully commit to a life of mobility. The group was suitable for my research population as a digital nomad’s format of flexible employment is both highly precarious and relatively highly mobile (Ens, Stein and Blegind Jensen 2018, 4).

I chose Lisbon as my fieldsite for multiple reasons. Currently, it is the highest-ranking location for digital nomads on Nomadlist.com on criteria such as LGBTQ+ friendliness, quality of working spaces, walkability, level of English, energy usage, safety, good weather, internet access and leisure activities.² In previous years, Portugal had a reputation of being a cheap destination for remote workers, which attracted digital nomads in the first place – but by now, different economic factors have significantly raised the cost of living in Lisbon. Today, Nomadlist.com ranks the cost criteria as “too expensive,” giving an estimate of \$4,133 a month.³ In addition, the Portuguese government has adopted an open visa scheme to attract commercial or recreational foreign investment: creating visas for being a resident receiving passive income from abroad, for high-skilled migrants in managerial positions, and for digital nomads (Ehn, Jorge and Marques-Pita 2022). Finally, Portugal has its past with precarious employment. In 2011, *Geração à Rasca* (“precarious” or “struggling” generation) took place, a series of protests calling for improved labor conditions after a wide range of welfare cuts were imposed in healthcare and education, unemployment benefits were reduced, and taxes were increased (Baumgarten and Duarte 2015). Since then, there have been multiple profession-specific protests organised by trade unions, e.g., teachers, the police or public transport workers, which also took place during my time in Lisbon. The history of economic crises and the current advertisement of Portugal as a “digital nomad hub” (Merkel 2022) make it an interesting location to explore the changing expectations for work.

THEORETICAL DEBATES

ANTHROPOLOGY OF LABOR AND MOBILITY

Primarily, this thesis is situated within the frameworks of the anthropology of labor and mobility. The anthropology of labor is a vast field of various authors and concepts as labor is everchanging – from trade unions (Mollona 2009) and affective labor (Muehlebach 2011) to labor agency (Carswell and De Neve 2013) and informal labour arrangements (Millar 2015). Sharryn Kasmir is one of the most influential scholars in the field, having recently written and edited works on the “global anthropology of labor,” where some workers are protected while others suffer poverty and insecurity as they work in hazardous circumstances, migrate for employment, suffer in the unwaged sector, and become targets of law enforcement (Kasmir and Gill 2022). Kasmir and Carbonella (2008) discussed that the scholarship ought to move beyond binary distinctions such as North/South and working class/the poor, in order to understand labor inequality in a more nuanced and globally interconnected way. The authors

² Lisbon for Digital Nomads, accessed June 30, 2023, <https://nomadlist.com/lisbon>.

³ Ibid.

emphasized the dynamic nature of labor hierarchies and divisions, investigating the concept of “the privileged worker” (2008, 7). They coined the term “dispossession,” meaning the loss or deprivation of something that was previously owned or enjoyed, often as a result of power dynamics and unequal distribution of resources – such as land loss, privatization of public utilities, job loss, or reductions in social welfare payments (2008, 9). Dispossession has the potential to concentrate money in the hands of a powerful few while marginalizing and impoverishing others (2008, 21). In her later work, Kasmir underlines how neoliberalism has influenced worldwide labor relations through free markets, privatization, deregulation, and individual responsibility for social safety; resulting in the increase of temporary and informal work, gig economy platforms, and job security degradation (2020). These concepts will be discussed further under the subsection on precarity and precariousness.

By studying human mobility, anthropologists have gained insight into the processes of acculturation, assimilation, and transnationalism (Brettell 2018, 8). This has led to a more nuanced understanding of the richness and diversity of human experiences, calling into question previous rigid and bounded representations (ibid). The study of human mobility has compelled anthropologists to critically engage with concerns of globalization and the hierarchies of inequality that have emerged in the context of neoliberalism (Brettell 2018, 20). Scholars have argued that concentrating on movement as practiced, perceived, and conceived is a fruitful framework for investigating both movement as an object of observation and mobility as an object of research (Lelièvre and Marshall 2015, 441). One of such research objectives can be how individuals experience independence or empowerment via their mobility, or how they encounter limitations in their capacity to move: for example, how economic inequalities or policies affect people's access to mobility, or how cultural norms and values define the forms of movement that are seen desirable or acceptable (Salazar and Smart 2011, vi). Thus, mobility is not a neutral or universal phenomena, but it is impacted by social structures and power dynamics.

Nomadism is one of the oldest forms of human mobility. A nomadic perspective on ethnographic work emphasizes the value of flexibility and questioning traditional concepts of identity, territory and power (Engebriksen 2017, 44). Nomads have been idealized as representations of independence and a threat to the existing world order (Engebriksen 2017, 45). Similarly, another author agrees that nomadism is a countercultural lifestyle that can be distinguished by fluidity, rootlessness, and a rejection of traditional forms of identification (D'Andrea 2006, 107). Furthermore, the notion of neo-nomadism is viewed as a “dizzying development toward the deconstruction of identity and the molecularization of the self” (D'Andrea 2006, 116). In the context of digital nomads, the idea of “disruption” is perceived as a manifestation of flexibility, fluidity, and newness on a tangible level – through their use of digital technologies to mix work, leisure, and hypermobile travel interests – but it also exists on a more subtle level as even among mobile persons, there is a persistent idea that work necessitates a feeling of regularity, belonging, and structure in place (Green 2020, 436). This historical expectation might shake

the digital nomad's sense of self, locality, and mobility: the friction between the ideological commitment to hypermobility and the desire for stability and regularity may make building a cohesive sense of self, work, and productivity difficult (ibid).

STRUCTURE VS. AGENCY IN THE CONTEXT OF MOBILITY

Secondly, this thesis is situated within the framework of the structure vs. agency debate in social sciences. Some scholars argue that powerful “structures” dominate and determine human behavior, highlighting how crucial social norms are in influencing individual conduct, while others place emphasis on human “agency” in social life through the importance of individual judgements, decisions, and actions (Tan 2011). In anthropology, we see structures both as observable, tangible things such as city planning or political institutions and as longstanding normative relationships between people or groups (Majumder 2021). Agency, on the other hand, is seen as an individual freedom, liberating from the constraints of structure; or alternatively a way through which structure is communicated (ibid). Through empirical research, some anthropologists would argue that it is impossible to observe a social structure – we only see individuals and their actions within it (ibid). Strathern (1987) thought about agency as an individual acting independently but not always with independently conceived aims. Sökefeld (1999) argued that agency necessitates both reflexive self-monitoring and monitoring of one's relationships with others: people think about how their decisions and behaviors affect their connection to others in addition to how they are affected themselves. Agency, reflexivity, and the self are interrelated; recognizing limitations of the self is a part of self-reflexive monitoring of action, which aids people in realizing the boundaries of their agency (ibid).

This comes together under Foucault's “subject” – one's existence is not simply imposed but also taken on, and a self-knowledge of such subjectification means that the individual is able to translate and transform their identity continuously for the self is not fixed (1975). Because of this aspect of the subject, there is an interplay between self-making (deriving from agency) and being made (deriving from structure). Ong (1996) brings the two together under the concept of subject-making and ties it to the idea of cultural citizenship through arguing that it is a “cultural process of subjectification” in which both the state and its subjects participate. Her definition of cultural citizenship is: “cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating [...] relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish criteria of belonging, within a national population or territory” and that it is both “self-making” and “being made” in relation to transnational processes such as capitalism (1996, 738). The role of the state in universalizing citizenship is paradoxically attained through a process of individuation whereby people are constructed as citizens in definitive and specific ways – cultural citizenship is dialectically determined by the state and its subjects. Ong was one of the first to investigate the lived and imagined cultural products of citizenship and civic identities of diasporic peoples through a framework of

transnationalism and portray how the first dimension (being made by state institutions) and second dimension (self-making through cultural practices) interact.

Self-making is most often written about in the context of migration from countries of the Global South. The first instance described in Tuckett's work (2018) on Italian community brokers suggests that self-making (or self-fashioning) allows migrants to get a sense of empowerment and agency by taking on the role of immigration consultants. Self-making through brokerage is not just motivated by personal gain, it has its roots in moral initiatives for the improvement of the community – referring back to the idea of reflexivity under agency. They do so in order to traverse feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and precariousness they are structurally subjected to (Tuckett 2018, 256). A second instance of migrant self-making lies in the work of DeJaeghere and McCleary (2010) which further discusses the concept of transnationalism, immigrant cultural productions and lives that cross national boundaries. Mexican adolescents construct social fantasies about living both in their country of origin as well as their host country, independent of their physical mobility across borders. A third instance of self-making is discussed in Rosenblatt's work (2011) which ties it back to Ong's more traditional idea of cultural citizenship – discussing self-making through the revival of cultural practices and traditions that enable people and groups to participate in the process of creating their identities and sense of self; this process can be seen as a reaction to modernity and cultural self-consciousness (2011, 422). In this thesis, these concepts will be employed for understanding the experiences of digital nomads and remote workers in relation to labor and mobility: for example, mobility highlights how structure and agency interact; and self-making becomes more important for people who are not tied to a specific nation-state.

FROM PRECARIETY TO PRECARIOUSNESS: WORK UNDER CONDITIONS OF CAPITALISM

Digital nomads and remote do not necessarily have the same lived experiences as people that have migrated from the Global South. Yet still, how they negotiate their place transnationally and within their chosen location has similar implications. An additional framework will be employed in order to better understand the work aspect of the lifestyle and the shared experiences of digital nomads. "Precarity," otherwise understood as unpredictability, labor insecurity and a lack of social capital plays an integral role in the processes of globalisation and neoliberalism (Kasmir 2022). However, this definition assumes that it is primarily experienced by marginalised, poor, and disenfranchised people exposed to economic insecurity, injury, violence, and involuntary migration (ibid). In this thesis, I am going to be using "precariousness," which is a general, overarching state of insecurity wherein everyone is subjected to a capitalistic world order (Han 2018). These terms are often used interchangeably in literature.

Bourdieu (1998) was one of the first to describe this type of social destruction: the erosion of secure and protected employment arrangements. In anthropology, Butler (2009, 25) connected it to social marginalization and named it “the politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks.” Similarly, Tsing saw precariousness as a “life without the promise of stability” that is fundamentally concerned with a capitalist logic (2015, 20). The biopolitics of precariousness emerge through the recognition that life contains no safety net. Millar’s work (2015) has contributed to the scholarship through her work on a garbage dump in Rio de Janeiro, where she explored temporalities of wageless work that challenged the dominant temporalities of neoliberal capitalism. She coined the term “woven time,” a time-sense that diverged from the clock time of industrial capitalism and the ruptured time associated with post-Fordist and precarious employment; allowing for the alternation of work and everyday (social) life (2015, 35). It can be seen as a way for individuals to navigate and make sense of their lives in a precarious existence. In her further work, she advocated for a relational approach to precariousness – it is not just an individual experience, but rather a product of broader social and economic structures that shape people's lives and opportunities (2017, 5). However, she also highlighted how current literature on the topic has the potential to uphold normative forms of work and life – there is a risk of reinforcing the idea that full-time wage labor is the desirable way to live and work (2017, 1).

Work, or remunerated labor, is fundamental not just to the economy and an individual, but also to their subjective identities. It is a structure that can be seen both as an internalized social norm and the locus of self-making; it is crucial to western ontology and its absence or loss is often seen as a pathologized deficiency (Vij 2019). Temporary and informal labour has become the main source of income in the late 20th-early 21st centuries, placing part-time workers in its center. A small percentage of people today have secure jobs and steady incomes while others survive on the gig economy. Digital technologies, the wide availability of handheld devices, and ever-increasing high-speed connectivity have combined with the realities presented by multiple cycles of economic downturn, changes in lifestyle, and generational preferences to make it possible for instantaneous opportunities to work that may not always comply with employment and labor laws (Lobel 2017). This has given rise to the precariat, which Standing (2011) has defined as precarious workers that have lost rights normally conferred upon full citizens. Therefore, the structure of being made as a citizen in connection to employment and labor laws is lacking in the context of most precarious workers and can influence their self-making as a result.

Precariousness can serve as a catalyst for identity reformulations and the reinvigoration of collective organization within uncertain livelihoods (Casas-Cortés 2021, 525). Although digital nomads and remote workers may not be subjected to traditional forms of precarity, there are emergent forms of insecurity. They are subjected to precariousness in two ways: firstly, as neoliberal entrepreneurial workers with flexible contracts and secondly, as migrants creating a home away from home. There is

an increasing trend of firms outsourcing projects to digital nomads or other gig workers since they can avoid paying for health insurance or firing benefits and the workers need to afford them out of pocket, resulting in precarious work situations (Nash, et al. 2018, 211). However, digital nomads in Lisbon were less concerned with earning a salary and more with the world order of individuality and hyperactivity that made them feel restless and dissatisfied – as precariousness can also be present outside of the economic realm, for example through loneliness, as most digital nomads are unable to maintain long-term relationships due to the nature of their migration practices and are confined to whichever spaces and people surround them (Nash, et al. 2018, 212). Precariousness can influence people's agency, feeling of belonging, and capacity to design their own lives and narratives; in this setting, self-making may entail resilience, resistance, and adaptation techniques (Gajarawala 2022). However, many digital nomads and remote workers knowingly choose precariousness as they are motivated by a desire to reject prevailing structures and explore alternative ways of living and working (During 2015, 20).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the theoretical debates, I am able to extract the main research question **“How are the practices of being made and self-making of digital nomads and remote workers influenced by their experiences of precariousness in Lisbon, Portugal?”** The question was operationalized through the following subquestions:

1. How do digital nomads and remote workers define their relationship to work under circumstances of economic insecurity?
2. How do digital nomads and remote workers experience their relationships with the Portuguese in their role as *global citizens*?
3. How do digital nomads and remote workers balance the search for freedom and flexibility with their desire to feel *at home* abroad?

With that, I expect to shed light on the lived realities of digital nomads that conducting ethnographic fieldwork allows me to gain first-hand experience in, but also contest some of the preconceived notions of their lifestyles. Initially, I expected economic precarity to be central to the lived experiences of digital nomads as the majority are self-employed or freelancers, often perform gig- or platform work, and are responsible for covering their own social security (Nash, et al. 2018, 210-211). However, most of my informants did not see that as the biggest downside to remote working; instead, they described feelings of loneliness, uprootedness and inability to relate to people around them as the main struggles. Sometimes, after experiencing those feelings and attempting to settle down, they were met with several barriers to integration into their chosen communities. Therefore, I became curious about the ways in

which these barriers can be external or self-inflicted, and how are digital nomads and remote workers' experiences of precariousness shaped as a result.

METHODOLOGY

My fieldwork was conducted between February and April 2023. I employed the methods of participant observation, semi- and unstructured interviews, and online ethnography. Participant observation is the main method of ethnographic fieldwork which involves active participation in the lives of research participants at the research location for a particular time period usually in a slow, intimate, and extremely focused fashion (Bryman 2016, 492). This was how I collected qualitative data: field notes on things I saw and heard, photographs of the spaces and places I visited, audio recordings of interviews that I later transcribed (Russell 2011). During my fieldwork, I took an overt role as a researcher in a relatively public setting (Bryman 2016, 426) which allowed me to enter spaces and speak to people more easily. Via establishing rapport, I was able to find my key informants. I conducted observations on 30+ occasions in various co-working spaces and at Meetup events, but also at bars and cafés, public transport, political protests and a yoga studio. To compliment my observations, I conducted 14 semi- or unstructured interviews. My interviews were usually just guided conversations with participants, not necessarily having a clear structure or a specific outcome (O'Reilly 2012). Lastly, I conducted online ethnography for the purpose of data triangulation (Bryman 2016, 130) in order to theorize and understand how the digital realm has become part of the physical world. I joined Facebook groups, a Slack channel, and a Meetup page meant for digital nomads and remote workers prior to entering the field (I will go into further detail in subsequent Chapters).

In terms of ethics and positionality, I made sure that my informants were able to give informed consent which they were able to renegotiate at any given point (Bryman 2016, 130). Secondly, I anonymized the informants who wished so and made sure to never discuss the data I gathered with a different informant. I respected the well-being, safety, dignity, and privacy of all participants in my research, and I was mindful of the impact that the disclosure of my research findings may have on the research population as a whole. All participants knew that their answers will be used for the purpose of this master's thesis, and I provided transparency about my methods, choices made in the research process, and my analysis upon their request. As subjectivity is present to a high degree in anthropology, I cannot claim to produce universal truths nor can I state that I have translated and transmitted all of my research findings in the most straightforward way or the way intended by the research participants. However, I did not deceive or knowingly misrepresent (i.e., fabricate evidence, falsify, plagiarize) any data. In terms of positionality in the field, I fit in with my intended research population through my identity as a white, middle class, European young woman – although I did encounter remote workers of different races and ethnicities, people of European origin were definitely the majority. Therefore, my presence in remote working spaces did not come across as striking. There were covert economic discrepancies

between some of the research participants and me, but this did not hinder my access to the population. Moreover, I gained access to work-related spaces and places through occasionally working for my own-part time job.

STRUCTURE

In the Introduction, I have presented the research problem alongside my population and research location, brought out the most relevant theoretical debates, formulated research questions and reflected on the methodology and ethics of my research. Following the Introduction, this thesis is made up of three ethnographic Chapters, each inspired by a subquestion of the main research question. Chapter I will illustrate how digital nomads and remote workers define their relationship to work under circumstances of economic insecurity under the themes of workspaces, time management and social security. In Chapter II, I will bring forth an argument about the ways that digital nomads and remote workers experience their relationships with the Portuguese while remaining *global citizens* through the topics of issues with community-building, income differences and political privileges. Chapter III will bring together how digital nomads and remote workers balance the search for freedom and flexibility with their desire to feel *at home* in their chosen location through discussing their conceptualizations and different embodiments of efficiency, loneliness, home and future. They all contribute to the narrative that digital nomads and remote workers often had set expectations when entering the lifestyle or a certain location but were met with a different reality. Lastly, in the Conclusion, I will underline the most important points of each Chapter and tie my ethnographic data together with theory.

CHAPTER I. WORKING FOR THEMSELVES WHILE LACKING SECURITY**INTRODUCTION**

It was a rainy afternoon at the end of February. I Googled whether there were any coworking cafés close to me I could visit. To my surprise, a space called UNOBVIOUS Lab was right on my street and I was there in 15 minutes. The room was dark, empty, and smelled of cleaning products. A staff member who introduced himself as Francisco guided me to the reception where we made small talk and I paid 9€ for a half-day pass. He handed me their business card with the slogan F@?K THE CLICHÉ. The space was rustic, with modern paintings on the wall and a red neon sign overhead that read FUCK IDIOTS. I figured they quite liked the use of profanities – as other things that should go “fuck” themselves on their Instagram page were the pandemic, working in an office and societal norms. Francisco told me that the space was inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, connecting the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability. “Here, we think outside the box. We try to show that work can be fun.” Soon after I was craving a snack, so I left my things behind and went out. When I returned, someone else had sat at the table, and I had to move my things out of the way. When the clock struck five, I was out the door, never to return.

This vignette illustrates a small independent coworking space in the center of Lisbon, Portugal. Coworking spaces first appeared in the mid-2000s in reaction to the rise of unconventional work arrangements and the liberalization of employment relations as adaptable, on-demand office spaces that are available to meet the specialized demands of independent contractors, small firms, and the growing number of remote employees who have flexibility in where they work (Merkel 2022, 141). Coworking spaces play an essential role in facilitating interactions between remote workers and allow them to connect to others with similar experiences, which can ease the transition to and integration into a new location. This is especially beneficial for digital nomads that do not stay in one location for an extended period of time and thus such spaces help cultivate a sense of belonging, productivity, and a work-life balance (Orel 2019, 217-219). This is a notion that this Chapter is going to challenge. I recognized the potential of consistency a coworking space could offer to a remote worker – who otherwise may lack a suitable space to conduct work in – but I never visited UNOBVIOUS Lab again. Even though it was located on my street, I did not feel that the facility nor the atmosphere they provided was better than working out of my bedroom.

Multiple coworking spaces saw themselves as an aid to mitigate the precarious work and life conditions of freelancers (Hensellek and Puchala 2021). In the field, I noticed that a coworking space would attempt to brand themselves differently from a regular office: as more laid-back, flexible, and innovative to appeal to a young, mobile workforce. However, when I decided to start my own research from coworking spaces in Lisbon, I realized that some members of the group did not care for them much.

The heterogeneity of the group made them agree on virtually nothing: whether it indeed raises productivity to work from a coworking space, what were the appropriate working hours or what differentiated a digital nomad from a remote worker. Not only did they disagree among the members of the group; the way they conceptualized work and related to it were different from that of regularly employed workers. For a digital nomad, the time they saved by not commuting to their workplace or the flexibility they got from working wherever and whenever allowed them to repurpose the time into working on a side project, doing chores or a physical activity – as I heard from multiple informants. That made it so that sometimes a coworking space was not their preferred location for conducting work.

The desired flexible nature of their work and the types of employment digital nomads and remote workers would enter into resulted in a regenerative cycle, which also related to woven time by Millar (2015). By working in less structured ways – no fixed office, colleagues, hours, or salary – how they viewed security also changed. Out of my 12 informants in Lisbon, the majority were self-employed or freelance: more than half were in a finite contractual agreement and some were in between clients. At least two of my informants said that they enjoyed being self-employed or freelance because their previous employer had let them go unexpectedly and they never wished to be in that situation again. The things they missed which an employer might have done for them, i.e., file their taxes or cover certain health benefits, were being weighed against the anxiety they felt over losing their job unexpectedly. I learnt that some remote workers felt more comfortable in a short-term contract where there remained a high degree of independence and a possibility to terminate the contract early if they wished to do so. However, some also noted that working for yourself, time became money and therefore it was a challenge not to overwork. In this chapter, I answer the subquestion “How do digital nomads and remote workers define their relationship to work under circumstances of economic insecurity?” The main argument of Chapter I is that **digital nomads and remote workers did not mind working by and for themselves as they saw it as more efficient and economically secure while they acknowledged that covering their own social security was unsustainable in the long run.**

From my data, it follows that several things are important for understanding how digital nomads organize their work-life: the (absence of a) workplace, time efficiency, and social security. I will first highlight how precarious placemaking at coworking spaces contributes to some digital nomads and remote workers preferring to conduct work by themselves, then I will discuss their division of time under the framework of neoliberal work and lastly I will show that even though many digital nomads feel that working for themselves is more secure than working for an employer, some also acknowledge how covering the cost of one’s own social security is a heavy economic and emotional burden.

WORKING ALONE TOGETHER IN COWORKING SPACES

Anthropological accounts of precarity, self-making and being made tie together under the concept of placemaking (Hinkson 2017). Recently, the field has experienced a move from a classical account on the anthropological *place* as something static and unchanging to a posthumanist account of seeing places as shaped by social, cultural, and political aspects in addition to their physical locations. Posthumanist anthropologists frequently utilize ideas like networks and assemblages to explain how various components combine to create a certain place or space (Hinkson 2017, 59). Precarious placemaking refers to innovative methods for adjusting to the circumstances of precarity and establishing a home in new or strange places. According to the article, posthumanist notions of place and space emphasize how people, other living things, and the environment are interrelated. Other useful concepts when discussing placemaking are the *politics of space*, which refers to the interplay between power, identity, and difference in creating and reproducing space; and *poetics of space* refers to the way we experience and give meaning to physical spaces (Fesenmyer 2019). By embodying a particular sociality or way of being, visitors of the space thus consciously include or exclude themselves from the it. The extent to which remote workers are being made through space and situating themselves within it will be explored over the course of the Chapter.

I started my participant observation in Lisbon by visiting Workhub LX in Braço de Prata, around 40 minutes by public transport from the city center. Workhub was situated around the corner from a construction site on a block of identical four-story warehouses with dusty sidewalks and no greenery. In the lobby I was greeted by Filipa, a cheery community manager.⁴ She told me that the Lisbon branch of the international franchise opened in 2015, making it one of the flagship locations. The members of Workhub were entrepreneurs from different walks of life: aviation, catering, marketing, infrastructure; both international and Portuguese. Most people at the space would work by themselves and rent a fixed desk for 215 euros a month; for the more mobile worker, there was an option to sit at a flexi-desk for 19 euros per day. Filipa guided me into the workspace through an app-controlled door. On the left of the room were fixed desks where people had brought their own monitors, photos and plants; on the right were flexi-desks where you could choose your seat and just work on your laptop. The contrast between the two sides was stark: essentially all the chairs on the left were occupied and there was a murmur of chatter in the air, whereas there were very few people on the right, some wearing their coats as if they were about to leave at any moment, sitting at a distance from each other and no one was speaking.

Spinuzzi coined the term *working alone together* as the the extensive organization and communication needed for people working side by side in coworking facilities (2012, 433). Even though their jobs are most likely not connected, people are nonetheless working in the same open-plan office space. As a

⁴ Fieldnotes, 07-02-2023

result, in order to ensure that everyone can work effectively, they must strive to be good neighbors and coordinate their efforts. For example, while one worker is trying to focus on a difficult task, another may need to make a phone call – to prevent disturbing others, the person ought to make the call from a designated phone booth. People using coworking spaces needed to be considerate of their noise levels and cognizant of other's need for privacy. At Workhub – I perceived it elsewhere too – the coworking assumed a prerequisite of respect for other members and it was not commonplace to strike up a conversation with your neighbor while sitting at the desk, at least if the two were not familiar. For less mobile remote workers, the interactions happened organically when people spent enough time in the space together. For more mobile digital nomads, the limited time they spent in the space served a primarily productive function and thus organic interactions happened less.

Similar themes were present at the FinTech House, a location of another franchise situated in the business district Avenidas Novas, where I met the office manager Mariana.⁵ FinTech House was a startup-centric financial technology hub, an “ecosystem not an incubator” as they helped with many aspects of investing and networking, but also served as a coworking space. Over ten floors, the building boasted offices, meeting rooms, an auditorium, a lounge, a cafeteria, and a rooftop terrace. I inquired where the desks for digital nomads and remote workers were situated, and she said they usually stay in the open space on the 6th floor with flexi-desks or in the cafeteria downstairs. “They mainly use the space for a few days to a few weeks and don't qualify for the fixed desks.” Although the space was not primarily meant for digital nomads or remote workers, FinTech House still had a high percentage of foreign business owners, about 40% of 90 companies members to the House. “They like to stay with us because we have that ecosystem, the contacts, the corporate and investor infrastructure, and we organize two events per month for networking,” Mariana said. “Usually, one entrepreneur's challenge can be solved by another entrepreneur.” However, it was clear she meant remote workers rather than digital nomads by her emphasis on the notion of “staying.”

To get an idea of the ecosystem that Mariana was advertising, I sat down in the 7th floor lounge. From there, you could access a spacious outdoor space. Although it was early February, the weather was pleasantly mild; many of the members held meetings there or sat in the sun during their lunchbreak. The room had a lot of natural light that reflected back from the linoleum floors and plastic furniture. The kitchen was equipped with multiple fridges, microwaves, garbage bins, wine glasses, plates, Tupperwares for general use, and coffee makers. I observed two women packaging orders ready to be sent out, spreading cardboard, packing paper, and stationery all over the communal table. Around lunchtime, people gathered at the other table and ate their lunch in silence, only occasionally making

⁵ Fieldnotes, 09-02-2023

small talk in Portuguese and English. The group was either not very familiar with one another, not interested in engaging in conversation or simply tired. Although the conditions were met for social interactions to take place, people were not using the opportunity.



Figure 2: A quote about optimizing energy on the wall in the lounge of Fintech House (taken by author)

The processes of being made and self-making were also present at Second Home, located right next to the central transport station Cais do Sodré.⁶ I was greeted by the assistant general manager, another Filipa. Second Home LX had opened in 2016, far before working location-independently became “cool” after the pandemic. The founders had seen a gap in the market and had worked together with an architect to create a coworking space with an emphasis on both design and practicality. The working area was over 1000m² and sat 300 members. Although all of the desks were shared, they were designed to be clustered into “pods” of four to six seats. There were almost no sharp 90-degree angles, the space was multi-functional and had a natural flow (see *Figure 3*). Rows of plants made the big, open space exceptionally quiet and private (see *Figure 4*). Filipa explained that the founders had followed the principle of “biophilia” after a study was published on hospital patients recovering faster when their windows were facing greenery as opposed to a busy street.

⁶ Fieldnotes, 10-02-2023



Figure 3: A close-up of one of the “pods” (taken by author)

Figure 4: Plants are placed between and among the working spaces (taken by author)

Second Home charged almost double the prize for monthly desks compared to other spaces I visited, 418€ for a fixed/resident one and 289€ for a roaming/“hot” one. “We don’t do any daily passes or short-term contracts because we want the people to have a sense of community. And we do not actually have those trendy ergonomic chairs, our furniture is all made by the same designer and fits the atmosphere. So I can tell you, it is not our chairs that make the people stay,” Filipa said. Members could also make use of phone booths and meeting rooms, access to showers, free printing, hours from 8AM to 10PM on weekdays and Second Home’s event programs, which included anything from yoga and massages to an initiative called “Borrow Brain” where members would collaborate in solving each other’s professional questions. I asked Filipa whether she enjoyed her job and what was her opinion on the increase of digital nomads and remote workers in Lisbon. She said that in her current position, she felt respected as staff because members stayed longer and often became friends. “I like that Lisbon is becoming multicultural. It helps to expand our horizons, both on an individual level and as a country. I used to live abroad too, which definitely made me more open-minded.”

There was a shared outlook on digital nomads and remote workers in the coworking spaces that were ran by bigger companies – they were generally in favor of the phenomenon as the group would be a major stream of income for them. However, it was not easy to find people in those spaces that identified as digital nomads because working there often required making an unfavorable contractual agreement of committing to the space for several months. Instead, coworking spaces were preferred by Portuguese people working remotely for a foreign employer or foreign remote workers settled in Lisbon. In

conclusion, coworking space franchises do try to harbor a community by creating a feeling of exclusivity and a shared sense of identity through clever marketing, however they only succeed in including the less mobile remote workers. Since many of these coworking spaces were owned or staffed by Portuguese people, there were instances where digital nomads and remote workers were being made by external structures, for example through the creation of a certain kind of membership system or a client narrative. As a result, digital nomads were made as a group that makes minimal time, financial, and social investments to the space. The main premise of this subsection – working alone together – thus seemed like more of an ideal than an actual practice, as the way in which the spaces were set up did not seem to allow for deep connections to take root between the more mobile workers.

WEAVING A WORK-LIFE WEB

According to Reichenberger's levels of mobility, the Level 1 digital nomad/remote worker disowned the notion of conducting work from the same set environment over a time period. As I did not encounter many workers with Level 1 mobilities in the coworking spaces, I set out to explore how they organized their work life differently and how they self-identified in the process. Millar's concept of *woven time* (2015) became especially relevant here as the lack of an organized 9-5 work week alongside the unwillingness to conduct work from an organized space meant that the time-temporality associated with full-time labor meant relatively little to digital nomads. Instead, they were used to the flexibility they received in conducting their own workday, usually calling it a better "work-life balance."

Derek, a Canadian remote worker in the media and entertainment industry, spent a few months every year working from a different country.⁷ I shared my previous insights from the field with him and asked how he would compare working on-site to online. "When people work in an office space, a lot of it is performative – you pretend to be busy. At home you can drop the bullshit and focus on your actual work. That frees up a lot of time for things like mental health." He added, "It is also better for the environment – in North America, a million people are getting in their car every day and wasting their human consciousness sitting in a car not doing anything except for emitting carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and for what? To be an organic office decoration. That's ridiculous in hindsight. It's a throwback to the olden days before Internet." He described it as a paradigm shift for the next generation and their relation to work. I asked him whether he believed that being a digital nomad made his life less stable. He said, "Life is short, you don't want to spend it in a drudgery and monotony of grinding through a very similar day-to-day. The opportunities of exploring other places and meeting new people outweigh the almost nonexistent downsides to doing it. You're putting yourself into a new situation where you

⁷ Interview, 16-02-2023

have to perhaps learn some aspects of the new language, new culture and new city, I'm also freelancing. But for me, I like the instability, it's exciting, I don't understand why somebody would want their life to be so boring that you can predict it."

Jens' self-making practices were similar. He was a Danish digital marketer in the process of integrating his company in Portugal with business partners from multiple countries, under the premise that the Portuguese "do not know how to do online marketing."⁸ His remote working journey started during the pandemic when he was an employee at Microsoft but was soon able to grow his own company out of a side hustle. "You never really secure if you don't work for yourself. I believe you can always be replaced and that was one of my main reasons why I chose to start my own thing. I don't want the stress." When I asked him which label he resonated with, he said, "I don't want to call myself a digital nomad, it doesn't sound good, I think it's too used. I prefer an entrepreneur. I like to start things and build things. I am self-employed, but I just think entrepreneur sounds sexier." I asked him to elaborate a little on his opinion. "I don't want people to think that it's just sitting at a laptop, that it's not a real job. A lot of people don't understand what it is so I don't wanna be the one who has to explain it for them. I'd rather just say that we help local businesses with managing online marketing because that's something people understand and can relate to." Talking about his daily schedule, he told me that he did more focused work between 8 and 12 o'clock in the morning and ad hoc admin work, emails, and meetings in the afternoon. "People [who are self-employed] can say they work 10 or 12 hours a day. I don't think you do. The efficient working time is probably three or four hours a day."

Youssan, who I met at a *Lisbon Digital Nomads* Meetup event, had a more mundane reason for working remotely. He was a freelance game developer from Egypt.⁹ "I first thought about going remote because there aren't many jobs in the industry in my country. But even then, I would not prefer to return to on-site. I like my time management; I have more time for me. I can decide how to divide my work hours, have the afternoon to myself or if I don't have plans, then work on weekends and take a different day off. Even if you have an on-site job with flexible hours, when you decide to leave office early, others will look at you. But right now, I can be in another country, I like that." I asked him about the relationship he had with his current employer. "I can move without telling them because I continue doing the same things no matter the place. Until I accomplish the deadlines, they have no issues with how I manage my time. We just have to keep a record of how many hours you work. They always use the invoice to see if it matches with the hours in the tool. The salary is dependent on it." When I

⁸ Interview, 13-02-2023

⁹ Interviews, 10-02-2023 and 20-02-2023

expressed surprise about working on weekends, he said, “At this point I’m doing what I like. For me, my work is also a hobby because I love what I do. It is not only to pay the bills. Since it is something I really like, then I don’t have problem doing after hours.” Youssan was one of my informants whose livelihood depended on platform-based work.

Although in a different manner, all three of them were portraying a strong commitment to woven time. Youssan and Jens said they preferred working from home as this way they were most efficient in their work, they did not spend time commuting and could prepare their own lunch. About coworking spaces, Jens said, “There is always small talking, there's coffee machines and snacks, I think it's a distraction all the time. Maybe some people need more of that social interaction but I’m OK.” I asked him whether he believed that remote working would become the dominant work form in the future. “I like the hybrid model where you can work from wherever you want and just go to the office once or twice a week. There’s been a lot of studies. At some jobs you have to be there obviously, if you’re a mailman or you're in construction. But even teachers do not have to be there physically anymore as we saw with virtual teaching during COVID. I think there are many employers now trying to lure people to go to the office again but we got so used to not doing it. Remote jobs save the company money on rent and electricity and it means giving your employees more trust and freedom.”

The freedom they sought to escape the status quo of being an office worker was a trade-off with economic and social security, making labor an important part of their self-identification. Mancinelli (2020) highlights how digital nomads and remote workers employ a variety of economic strategies to support their lifestyle, for example by diversifying their sources of income, taking advantage of disparities of economic systems abroad and adopting a minimalist attitude toward possessions and consumption. Furthermore, the author brings out that the commercialization of network capital or “the ability to engender and sustain social relationships with those who are not necessarily close by [...] which generate emotional, financial, and practical benefit” entails making interpersonal connections a tradable good that can be exchanged for money (2020, 434). Where routine sustenance at a distance is more important than geographic proximity, this process is considered as a replacement for the idea of social capital. Digital nomads’ self-realization projects meet the ideology of entrepreneurialism by utilizing entrepreneurial abilities such as self-responsibility, capacity to adapt to new situations, risk-taking, and capacity to be productive (2020, 431). Their lifestyle is based on a neoliberal entrepreneurial philosophy – working for themselves by maximizing their income while minimizing their expenses. As entrepreneurialism celebrates individualism and creativity, many prioritize passion projects and personal growth alongside their careers (2020, 429). Thus, digital nomadism should be viewed as an opportunistic adaptation of the neoliberal ideology instead of its challenger.

Cook’s work illustrates a similar point – how digital nomads run their lives as entrepreneurial projects (2020). The work-related freedom of digital nomadism is often described as generalized ideals of

independence as remedies for the annoyances of things like commuting and defined work hours, which was also expressed by my informants. As a result, many experience the *freedom trap* – the perceived independence and flexibility of the digital nomad lifestyle first draws people in; but with time, they can start to feel entrapped by routines and structures that were imposed externally in order to continue working and earning money. This can involve obligations like deadlines, client expectations, and other kinds of discipline essential for a self-employed remote worker's success (2020, 358). This implies that some digital nomads had an idealistic vision of their way of life that may not correspond to the reality of their lived experiences. In the case of my informants, they all displayed a certain level of self-discipline, for example by sticking to a daily schedule.

RENEGOTIATING SOCIAL SECURITY

In addition to economic security and having multiple streams of income, digital nomads and remote workers give up receiving social security from their employer in the name of professional independence. Neither Youssan, Jens nor Derek had their employer paying for their healthcare or retirement; but the price they were asking in exchange for their work was sufficient to keep paying for those things out of pocket. Jens, who had told me that he would choose being self-employed any day, was re-negotiating what security meant in the context of work: not a fixed contract with benefits, but working independently and taking care of your own benefits. Raquel was a Spanish digital nomad that lived on a sailboat with her partner and worked as a remote therapist.¹⁰ She was grateful for his financial support when she was able to book less clients. “There’s been times where I’ve said it’s too hard being by myself, I just want to be an employee, I want to forget about all this and just do something like [he does]. But it would not be my calling and he’s been there to say that I shouldn’t give up, I have to do what’s right for me. I wouldn’t be happy working for a company making apps.” Dilan, an informant from Turkey, offered a different perspective: if you're not a developer or had a specific senior title, employers were reluctant to pay full benefits, especially in her field as a content marketer.¹¹ Only receiving a paycheck and no social protection in the event that you get sick or are temporarily unable to work decreased the level to which some remote workers felt taken care of, settled or safe in their remote employment contracts.

Kim was a Congolese-born Belgium remote worker and a consultant in the international aid sector influencing policy changes in Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen. She was in her 40s and had moved to a

¹⁰ Interviews, 22-02-2023 and 31-03-2023

¹¹ Interview, 21-02-2023

different country every few years since childhood.¹² She first came to Portugal over ten years ago, when it was not as attractive for remote workers as it was today. “I know a lot of people like me that have been doing this for decades, so it is strange to see this hype coming up. My sector is quite unstable, mainly based on emergencies, so I am currently in between work – but I’m a senior in what I do, so usually when I’m out of work, I start receiving offers after two weeks. The one I’m discussing now will be three months in Geneva – usually short missions. They can kick me out in ten days or I can leave in ten days, that’s the beauty of flexible contracts.” When I asked her whether the job insecurity was something that bothered her, she said, “I am used to it, but I don’t always like it. I think growing up in different unstable countries I have this inborn restlessness. I’ve never had a job for more than three years, signing a contract for one year is a long-term commitment for me. But I do admit I’m starting to get tired. I know a lot of people would be super happy, but I want to go to an office.” This last point made Kim a definite outlier among my other informants.

She told me that she paid a high amount in social security each year as a remote worker in Portugal. “In Belgium, you pay a little bit more, but at least there are doctors and a system when I get sick. I pay so many taxes here and I’m getting very little, I literally have to work a very high paid job for a few months just to be able to pay my taxes for a year, that’s quite mind-blowing. I didn’t expect that when I moved here.” Talking about topics like healthcare, Kim shared her insight on how digital nomads take advantage of them. “Many people come but don’t contribute, or not enough for what they’re costing the country. They don’t have to go through bureaucratic processes that we do, but when they get sick or break their leg, they go to the hospital and overburden the existing systems. To see a specialized doctor in Portugal, you have to book six months in advance. Then I hear digital nomads saying that public health in Portugal is amazing, but I’m paying €700 per month of social security and there’s just no doctors for the people that live here. It’s the people living here that are taking this heavy toll of a nice lifestyle for digital nomads.” As a result, she was thinking of relocating to Spain or Switzerland where she would pay only 11% for social security when self-employed compared to 21.3% in Portugal. “I’m a very complex case in terms of administrative things. I have contributed to social security in Belgium, in Ecuador and now in Portugal, but I’m never gonna see a pension and that frustrates me. I feel like it’s too far ahead even though I’m 40. But I don’t believe that I’ll get anything from it considering how much I’ve worked.” Kim saw a need in new systems of taxation as ones bound by place of residence did not fit the current world order.

CONCLUSION

¹² Interviews, 23-02-2023 and 24-03-2023

In this Chapter, I have shown how “working alone together” manifested in coworking spaces in Lisbon, how digital nomads and remote workers were being made in these spaces, for which reasons the more mobile population of the group preferred to conduct work in a different setting, how were they embodying the “woven time” of precarious employment arrangements and how were they self-making as neoliberal entrepreneurial workers in the process. There are three main takeaways from this Chapter. Firstly, most co-working spaces are organized in accordance with a capitalist logic of place where efficiency is prioritized over community-building for more mobile digital nomads and remote workers, influencing people’s relationships and their sense of belonging. Secondly, the same capitalist logic of efficiency and labor optimization runs through people’s perception of meaningful work. Lastly, rethinking work in these terms – as time optimization and personally meaningful – allows for a different view on social security. In the following Chapter, I will connect the working- and relocation habits of digital nomads to their inability to integrate in their chosen location, which is partially fuelled by a difference in income compared to the local population.

CHAPTER II. BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION WITH THE PORTUGUESE

INTRODUCTION

On April 1st, a protest march called “Casa Para Viver” (“A House to Live”)¹³ took place in six major cities in Portugal. People were protesting due to the government’s unwillingness to provide affordable housing, tax properties currently vacant, and increase salaries. Thousands of people took to streets of Lisbon with posters and banners, such as “Uma casa que possa pagar, isto é radical?” (“A house you can afford, is it radical?”) According to the protesters, there were 160,000 houses currently vacant in the city. Rents in Lisbon increased 65% since 2015 and sale prices rose 137% in the same period; rents increased 37% in 2022 alone, more than in Barcelona or Paris.¹⁴ In March, the average rent for a one-bedroom flat in Lisbon was around 1,350 euros a month whereas the majority of Portuguese workers earned less than 1,000 euros with inflation being 8%.¹⁵ Many Portuguese people that earn an above average wage may still be subjected to sharing accommodation and even be at risk of homelessness.

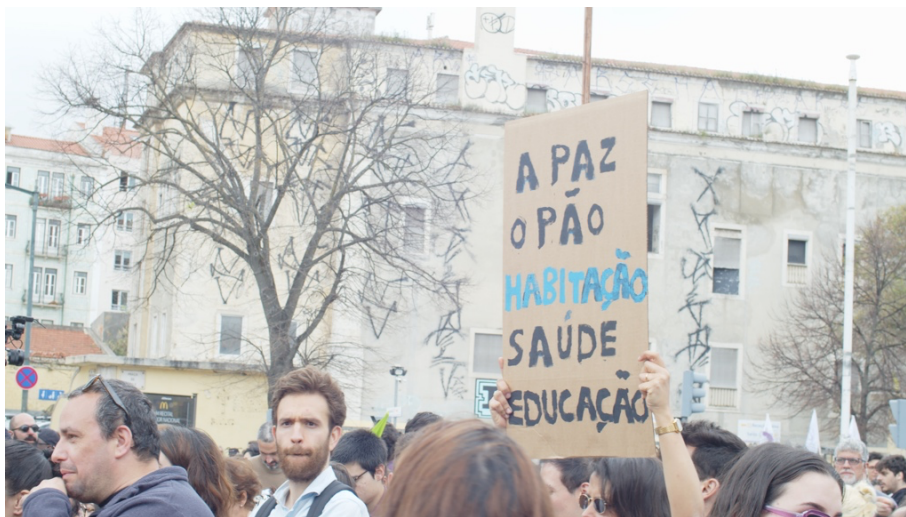


Figure 5: The words "A paz, o pão, habitação / Saúde, educação" are lyrics from a famous Portuguese song, "Liberdade" by Sérgio Godinho. It is about the end of the dictatorship in Portugal and what the newly conquered freedoms should include. It shows that even in 2023, this prophecy has not been fulfilled (taken by John Brooks).

¹³ Araci Almeida, “Protest for the Right to Housing Takes Place on April 1 in Portugal,” Portugal.com, March 28, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-portugal-over-housing-crisis-2023-04-01/>.

¹⁴ Miguel Pereira and Pedro Nunes, “Thousands Protest in Portugal over Housing Crisis,” Reuters, April 1, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-portugal-over-housing-crisis-2023-04-01/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The tensions between remote workers and locals in Portugal are longstanding as the country has a history of economic inequalities, joblessness, and foreign intervention. The Carnation Revolution, a leftist coup on April 25, 1974, turned over a fascist regime of more than 40 years.¹⁶ Although Portugal never became a communist country, leftist parties gained political influence in the aftermath of the Revolution and the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) has been represented in the parliament ever since. However, in the beginning of 2010s, the PCP started losing foothold¹⁷ right as *Geração à Rasca* was taking place. When the population was just starting to feel the effects of the protests, the Portuguese financial crisis hit and the economic downturn was one of the worst in Europe. In response, the government implemented serious austerity measures and by 2017, the economy somewhat recovered.¹⁸ In addition, Portugal took alternative action to attract foreign investment and introduced the Golden Visa – allowing foreign nationals to obtain Portuguese citizenship in return of at least a 350,000€ investment in residential or commercial real estate. Quickly, this became one of the driving forces behind extremely high rental prices in Portuguese coastal cities (as houses were purchased but never put on the rental market) and a source of distress for locals. By the end of my stay in Portugal, the government had just changed the requirements for the Golden Visa and temporarily seized issuing new Airbnb licenses – but the after-effects of the ten-year policy could be felt. Although some locals told me that they were blaming the government for the high prices rather than foreigners, it influenced the public discourse on digital nomads and remote workers.

The current rental prices in Portugal are only affordable for workers with a high foreign salary. This discrepancy influences the extent to which digital nomads and remote workers can integrate into Portuguese society and build meaningful relationships with locals. I use the framework of reflexivity by Sökefeld (1999) to discuss the ways that my research population negotiates their place in Lisbon. It is an interplay between the reflections of digital nomads and remote workers on their responsibility to and relations with the Portuguese, which level of involvement and rootedness is desirable and how that can be achieved. Alongside that, I will be exploring how more mobile digital nomads are perceived by less mobile remote workers and the Portuguese public, as it sometimes seemed that they served as a

¹⁶ Lara Silva, “25 Things to Know about Portugal’s Carnation Revolution,” Portugal.com, April 26, 2022, <https://www.portugal.com/history-and-culture/25-things-to-know-about-portugals-carnation-revolution/>.

¹⁷ João Madeira, “Portugal’s Communist Party Is Struggling to Return to Past Glories,” Jacobin, February 13, 2022, <https://jacobin.com/2022/02/portuguese-communist-party-pcp-january-elections-parliament-costa-ps>.

¹⁸ Silvia Amaro, “How Portugal Came Back from the Brink - and Why Austerity Could Have Played a Key Role,” CNBC, August 2, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/08/02/how-portugal-came-back-from-the-brink.html>.

convenient scapegoat for issues present in society. The guiding question for Chapter II is “How do digital nomads and remote workers experience their relationships with the Portuguese in their role as *global citizens*?” and the main argument is that **while digital nomads seek to integrate and build meaningful relationships with Portuguese people, they simultaneously contribute to and reproduce socio-economic inequalities that jeopardize that same integration.**

In this Chapter, I will illustrate how income inequalities contribute to the locals’ reluctance to befriend foreigners and how it intervenes with the digital nomads’ ability to integrate, how less mobile coworking space owners attempt to mend the issue (but without success), and how the structural issues of visas and residency influence the way digital nomads and remote workers from outside of the Schengen area make claims to the place.

THE TROUBLE WITH BUILDING A COMMUNITY

Despite many digital nomads and remote workers claiming that one of the reasons for choosing Portugal was the great “digital nomad infrastructure,” it mainly served as a network for obtaining information, not so much building group cohesion. To materialize that, I conducted participant observation at different leisure activities targeted at digital nomads and remote workers. The *Lisbon Digital Nomads (LDN)* Meetup group had nearly 20,000 members¹⁹ and their volunteers would organize weekly events like comedy nights, a running group and a big meetup every Thursday night, which was the most well-known and widely attended event for foreigners in Lisbon. Around 200 people would come to drink and mingle – the event did not serve any greater purpose than meeting each other in a casual environment. The bar O Bom O Mau e O Vilão located on Rua do Alecrim (an avenue descending from the Bairro Alto to Cais do Sodré, right above the famous Pink Street) was a recurring spot for Thursday meetups.²⁰ At my first Meetup I met Melissa, a 21-year-old Portuguese woman. She was working in a foreign-owned chemicals company in a logistics-related position, making more than the average salary while living with her mother in the outskirts of Lisbon. We would go to multiple events together. I once asked Melissa what drew her to Meetups as a local. She listed getting to know foreigners and seeing her city through their eyes. “It is an interesting way to escape reality and to experience life as a nomad because it’s relaxed, it’s easy. Even if it is for one hour every week.”

¹⁹ Lisbon Digital Nomads (Lisbon, Portugal) | meetup, accessed June 30, 2023, <https://www.meetup.com/Lisbon-Digital-Nomads/>.

²⁰ Fieldnotes, 09-02-2023

Undoubtedly, Portuguese people were a minority at the Meetups. While none of my informants claimed to consciously exclude themselves from the locals, it was commonplace that they would go to more Western-style accommodations, places of service or entertainment and mostly socialize with other foreigners (Thompson 2021, 70). Jens told me that he felt it was hard to meet Portuguese people because they were reserved. “I would say I am more and more connected to the Brazilians, they're just more outgoing. I don't think I have a really good full-blooded Portuguese friend, because when they live here and they have grown up here their whole life, they have an established friend group already. Why would they make friends with foreigners? I think it's harder to develop a good deep friendship with people who live in their own country, also because of the language barrier.” Regardless, a few other informants thought the Portuguese seemed like genuine and respectful people. Dilan said, “As a woman, it's a really big freedom compared to Turkey to be going out anywhere by wearing what you want and by people not bothering you. If someone asks for a drink, when you say no, people don't bother you again. From my experiences in nightlife, nobody ever cat called me. Also at the institutions where I have been for paperwork, everyone was extremely helpful.” Raquel expressed regret for the fact that Portugal had become so touristic, “I can imagine how some of the locals might feel like. But the people I've met have been really nice. I meet quite a few people through my hobby which is pole dancing, it's nice to be doing an activity that is not tourism based. I don't want to do touristy things.”

The locals' reluctance to mingle with foreigners can be connected back to the issue of housing. One time, the big Thursday meetup was held in Lisboa Rio, a nightclub at the riverfront.²¹ It had a bouncer at the door, a huge area for dancing with a single wooden shelf that ran along the walls, a sticky floor, and expensive drinks. I arrived in the first hour to talk to people when it was still quiet. I noticed that everyone had flocked to the patio and there was a camera crew. They were filming for RTP1, the Portuguese national television, and they wished to speak to digital nomads about the rent situation in Lisbon to include all sides of the story: the Portuguese, the expats, the government. They also interviewed Ngan, a *LDN* volunteer. I asked her what she spoke to them about. “I basically talked about the free market. I said that we are not here to steal from you, we are here to make you money.” On another occasion, Ngan told me she was going to Canada for a while and she would sublet her place for 2500€ a month. “Lisbon is too full in the summer and you have so many tourists. I feel like Lisbon is not a city you live in anymore – it is a city you pass by,”²² was her comment. It was commonplace that

²¹ Fieldnotes, 16-03-2023

²² Fieldnotes, 12-04-2023

digital nomads and remote workers viewed their consumer spending as a viable contribution to the local economy, not necessarily connecting it to the rising prices of real estate (Thompson 2021, 72).

An issue on the political scene that accompanied the housing crisis was the rising power of the right wing. Kim told me, “It’s not been a new issue, people are looking at rich foreigners come in and demand certain things. Portugal has historically been a socialist country. Now there’s a new party called Chega, for two or three years it has been getting more supporters. I have some Portuguese friends, high-skilled IT workers that are earning €5,000-6,000 per month, they are not low class. But they are frustrated because they know they’ll never be able to buy a house with the current situation of prices increasing. There are cultural changes that are happening which I don’t have an issue with, I’m used to change and cultures are dynamic – but it’s going too fast. It’s only looked at from the business perspective. The Portuguese government has never been good at managing social issues, there’s clearly still a lot of corruption, it’s capitalistic. The people that are taking decisions are not feeling the consequences of this wave of digital nomadism. We call them mosquitoes with my Portuguese friends, the digital mosquitoes come, they suck everything they can, then the policies become stricter.”²³ She continued on the topic of gentrification, “Sometimes you need to walk blocks around Lisbon before you find just a typical local Portuguese café. The whole center is changing in such a way. I think this fuels the right wing – it used to be about immigrants, now it’s about all foreigners. I never experienced so much hostility towards foreigners.”

“LOCALS CANNOT AFFORD THE PRICE”

Peaceful coexistence between locals and foreigners in social and political spaces, let alone meaningful integration, was oftentimes a challenge in Lisbon. I explored further into work-related spaces to seek an answer on whether less mobile remote workers, some of whom ran coworking spaces, would have been able to integrate better than more mobile digital nomads. I visited a coworking space called DEVAZUKA, advertised by a user on Slack, a space meant for coding and software development.²⁴ The owners, Aline and her husband Clémant relocated to Lisbon, did not find a space which they liked, identified a gap in the market, and opened their own. Although they were remote workers themselves, they were quite critical about the influx of digital nomads in the city. “These people do not think of others around them, so they cannot expect respect in return. We have invested a lot of energy into opening up the space for them,” the couple told me. There is a platform called *Croissant* that allows people to make use of different coworking spaces and pay a membership fee to them rather than the

²³ Interview, 24-03-2023

²⁴ Fieldnotes, 10-02-2023

space. In Lisbon, there are around 40 locations that offer some form of coworking facilities on the platform.²⁵ Aline and Clémant told me that it has also affected their business. “The app distributes some of its earnings back to us, but not a significant amount. We have had to standardize our prices because *Croissant* controls the market, and therefore we cannot have a premium space,” the couple said. “It limits the quality of coworks in the city. But we need it for visibility.” They reserve 7-8 hot seats every day for the *Croissant* clients and keep the rest for their own members.

However, Aline and Clémant also recognized their own role and responsibilities – portraying reflexivity in their agency as self-made coworking space owners. “There is some tension here. We wished to create a community of both locals and internationals, I guess like many do, but locals cannot afford the price. Yet we are charging fairly for what it costs for us to run the space.” I heard the same from the office managers of Second Home and Workhub – that people earning a Portuguese salary were least likely to be able to afford working from a coworking space. The owners of DEVAZUKA chose to target a more conscious and slow type of nomads, the “digital settlers” who were at a more mature stage of their career, looking for a contract from 6 to 12 months. “We want to bring a mental shift towards a positive change when it comes to understanding how your work is affecting others. You cannot go to a coffee shop for the whole day, occupy a big table by yourself, order one coffee, and ask the cashier to turn down the music when you have to make a conference call.”

Digital nomads and remote workers sometimes took matters into their own hands to organize coworking opportunities and make it accessible for locals. I regularly attended *LDN* Coworking Wednesdays. The events were free of charge and attracted different people from one week to another, both Portuguese and internationals. It took place in A Sala, a café and event space in the São Bento neighborhood right opposite the Portuguese parliament building, which was a lot more peaceful than the busy street outside. The day started around 9:30, but people came as they pleased. They greeted Ngan, the *LDN* volunteer who was organizing it, chatted a bit regardless of whether they knew each other or not, and picked a suitable seat for the day. People would bring their laptop stands, keyboards and mice, headphones, notepads – the gadgets serving as convenient conversation starters. At 1 o’clock, we assembled the tables in the middle of the room to sit all together, and Daniela, the owner, served lunch. The café felt different than any of the official coworking spaces I visited – there were no special amenities, the room resembled a home rather than an office, and the laid-back atmosphere fostered conversation between

²⁵ “Enjoy Coworking Anywhere in NYC, Brooklyn, LA, SF, London & More,” *Croissant*, accessed July 1, 2023, <https://www.getcroissant.com/discover/lisbon>.

remote workers. There, the group had an opportunity to be involved in their own self-making, both individually and collectively.

One Wednesday, everyone had left A Sala before 5 o'clock and I was chatting to Daniela as she was closing the café.²⁶ She opened the space in 2018 as a regular café, but the pandemic forced her to close for walk-ins and only open for planned events. "This is a horrible street to be on," she said, "nobody comes to this area to sit in a café, everyone is just walking by." She used to be open from 10AM to 10PM and sometimes sell only a beer and a coffee while paying electricity and staff costs for the whole day. Then she started receiving requests for renting out the space and figured this made more sense budget-wise. When she would host groups from Meetup, she would not charge for rent but earned money with the bar. "I also like being here for the events and talking to people, listening in." I also learnt that A Sala meant "living room" in Portuguese. "That's what I wanted to embody. I painted the walls green and pink. There are so many cafés around town that have been popping up with this minimalistic style, for example Copenhagen Coffee Lab. Don't get me wrong, I like knowing how people take their coffee in Denmark. But this is Portugal!" She laughed lightheartedly.

Following Daniela's description as well as my own experience in her space, I want to bring forth literature on anthropological atmospheres and their role in self-making. Atmospheres can be both sensed by an individual as well as co-created by group engagement with a space (Schroer and Schmitt 2017). Anderson's affective atmospheres (2009, 78) occur during the emergence of subjectivity, across human and non-human materialities, and in-between subject/object divisions. It is shown through opposites in tension: presence and absence, materiality and ideality, definite and indefinite, singularity and universality. The phenomenology of singular affective qualities relates back to reflexivity – it highlights that atmospheres are not reducible to the particular bodies from which they emanate; instead, they have distinct emotive properties that transcend the gathering of bodies (2009, 80). Specific moments of shared emotion, whether expressed vocally, physically, or via cultural customs, deepen the atmosphere and reinforce the link between the structure and expression of shared emotion (Trigg 2020, 5). Atmospheres were important to digital nomads and remote workers in social settings, but also in their coworking environments.

Even though Coworking Wednesdays were held in a Portuguese-owned establishment and there were some Portuguese remote workers in attendance, they worked in a foreign-owned company or freelanced for foreign clients which meant that the narratives of international remote workers were still dominant. Ngan and other organizers of the Meetup group would say that building a community and helping local

²⁶ Fieldnotes, 22-03-2023

businesses with their events was their priority, but as most of them were remote workers themselves, they had prevailing ideas of *us vs. them*. The conversations at lunch on Wednesdays²⁷ would involve similar topics: we started off asking each other where everyone was from, what they did for work, and what they thought of the city. Then the discussions would steer towards criticism on the high rent prices in relation to poor living conditions, how capitalistic Portugal had become, how the law enforcement was poor and how the government was to blame for all of it. These conversations added to an affective atmosphere where the group felt safe to express their mutual concerns without the fear of being judged, meanwhile it did not help with improving the relationship between locals and foreigners.

A PRIVILEGE OF THE FEW

Upon learning about the tensions between locals and foreigners in Portugal, many of my informants expressed their wish to seize a life of mobility and settle down in order to facilitate their integration into society. However, this went more smoothly for some than others – whether they held a Schengen visa or a passport. I attended a workshop “Portugal Visa Guide” at the Outside coliving and -working space.²⁸ Before starting the presentation, we were asked who is from within the EU and who is not. Out of 20 attendees, one other person and I were European passport holders. “What are you guys doing here then?” the presenter joked. As is the case with the majority of Schengen countries, there is a significant amount of bureaucracy involved in obtaining a long-term visa or residency in Portugal, so presentations like this are held in order to facilitate the application process. But as the short duration of stay of most digital nomads proved unsustainable for Portugal, the newer visa schemes also allow for settling down and integrating (your business) in the country.

Portugal offers various visas to remote workers. The most common is D7, known as the “passive income from abroad” visa with at least 9,000€ as annual income (equivalent to the Portuguese minimum wage). People with a D7 have to be registered as taxpayers, therefore this visa is most often used by American retirees. The D8 or digital nomad visa was introduced in late 2022. In this case, the applicant needed to prove active monthly income of 3,100€. However, the process of getting accepted normally took up to a year and the visa would be granted for two years, defeating the purpose of continuous travel and rather offering a route to becoming a Portuguese resident. The presenters emphasized the timely nature of all bureaucracy in Portugal.²⁹ The speakers also introduced the non-habitual resident clause, which is a

²⁷ Fieldnotes, 29-03-2023 and 12-04-2023

²⁸ Fieldnotes, 22-03-2023

²⁹ The application is started in a consulate or an embassy in your country of origin, first receiving an initial visa for four months that is then renewed for two years and three years consecutively. After the consulate interview, it

privileged fiscal regime where the individual only pays a flat rate of 20% tax on their business activities – significantly less than otherwise. It applies for the more mobile digital nomads and remote workers that would still like to have Portugal as their base. The presentation was concluded by reasons for embarking on a path to Portuguese citizenship: it is generally a strong passport with entry to 189 countries, the resident is able to keep multiple nationalities, and it is a relatively simple way to bring your dependents over to Portugal. Youssef told me that him and his wife were going to apply for Portuguese passports as it would make it easier for them to keep moving around than their Egyptian passports.

During the Q&A round, members of the audience told personal stories and asked for advice. Most people were rather established in their careers and were looking to relocate their existing business to Portugal from a non-EU country. A woman that had just applied for the D8 visa said her appointment was coming up and asked for tips on how to “nail it.” Having been assured she had done all the preparations, she exhaled contentedly. “I never want to go back to the UK,” she exclaimed. “I love it here too much.” Hearing the stories of people made me realize that regardless of the level of income or professional seniority, a non-EU passport holder has to go through an entire set of hurdles of immigration, which made them less likely to opt for a lifestyle of continuous travel. Being a digital nomad seemed only possible when your rights and responsibilities of being a citizen were not bound to a specific country but to the European Union as a whole.

The voluntary migration of digital nomads is inconsistent with the philosophy of most global immigration. The conditional inclusion of immigrant minorities in society is to govern and regulate their inclusion while simultaneously providing them with limited possibilities to make active citizenship claims and respond strategically to the prospect of exclusion (Hackl 2022, 990). Who qualifies as a “good immigrant” is determined by the dominant group, which immigrants and their offspring must earn via their efforts and accomplishments: they are frequently asked to exhibit characteristics such as economic contribution, civic awareness and observance of the law (Hackl 2022, 999). Discussions over the deservingness of immigrants frequently center on economic reasons, emphasizing the importance of working hard and proving their merit for inclusion. Social precarity stems from this, as the state of insecurity and instability experienced by the precariat comprises the difficulties that people confront in insecure job conditions, which can lead to social degeneration, isolation, and a lack of personal

takes up to 90 days to receive a decision before the first phase is activated. If the applicant already has a Schengen visa, they can reside in Portugal for the duration of that time but must travel back to their country of origin for the appointment.

relationships (Allison 2012, 349-350). This relates back to how Ong's cultural citizenship involves just as much of being made by the state as it does individual and collective attempts at self-making.

Kim, having devoted her career to humanitarian aid, refugees and displaced people, said, "If we go back to the very strict definition of a nomad, it is someone that is constantly on the move. Historically, many have had to move from one place to another in order to survive through agricultural livelihood. Today, there are serious race and class implications. I'm constantly seeing the suffering of people that are moving because of a conflict or a disaster, who are forced to leave their homes. No one really wants to be a nomad, I think. That's where my issue is with the identity of digital nomads – it is created; it is commercial; it is money. They are fairly privileged Western young people, they don't seem to care. I don't know if it's a lack of information or indifference. In my sector, there's a big discussion about decolonization and white privilege. Some of the digital nomads that I've met use #digitalnomad #freedom #freedomseeker and I am thinking what would happen if they talked to a [person from a warzone] with that language. You have this freedom because you're white, and it doesn't make it okay."

On a few occasions in the field, I encountered people of Western/European heritage that felt comfortable detaching themselves from their countries of origin. Derek felt that Canada was a failing state. "Our current leader is an absolute embarrassment to our nation and citizenship means nothing anymore, national identity has been lost. I'm looking at getting another passport. It's tragic – just ineptitude beyond repair. Leaders that are focused more on woke optics than responsible leadership. I would get a passport for a low tax transaction so it could be Portugal – there are a lot of opportunities with these digital nomad visas. We pay 50% tax in Canada and receive nothing for it. I want to be in a place where money goes a longer way. But I would potentially still want to continue working for a Canadian company."³⁰ Marie considered herself a global citizen that belonged to no country. "I left Belgium because I don't feel I belong there. I know I've been Portuguese in past lives. Belgium is not good for me; the more I go south, the better I feel. I feel more comfortable with people who are from different countries. But I find it difficult to have a boyfriend or to live in a culture which is not European. Even people from Eastern Europe, it's different history that translates to a different culture. I think I could live in Latin America because they come from Europe and maybe it's closer."³¹ Both Derek and Marie both lacked awareness for the kind of privileges they already have due to their country of origin.

Many digital nomads balance their desire for freedom and their relationships with state institutions by becoming "global citizens" and compromising their ties with their countries of origin (Cook 2022, 304).

³⁰ Interview, 16-02-2023

³¹ Interview, 22-02-2023

This creates a dichotomy where they supposedly ask for “nothing” from the original state but require more amenities from the host state. Similarly, they prefer to live in countries they render cheap but perform arbitrage by earning a higher salary elsewhere, benefitting from a capitalist system (Cook 2022, 320). Mancinelli (2020) agrees with Cook on the political component of digital nomadism, taking advantage of privileged nationalities to navigate global inequalities in the capitalist system. This relates to discrepancies in their precarious citizenship – they break the social contract of rights and responsibilities to the state by seemingly renouncing the relationship to their employer or government. Sometimes they also fail to recognize the more covert ways in which their citizenship is accounted for, for example through a strong passport or visa-free movement.

CONCLUSION

In this Chapter, I have shown that there are longstanding tensions between Portuguese people and foreigners due to capitalistic government measures such as the Golden Visa, that most locals do not enter spaces meant for remote workers due to their lower income or differing political and economic views, and that the integration of the two groups thus suffers. I have portrayed that through the notion of self-reflexivity and the making of affective atmospheres, digital nomads and remote workers create spaces which foster conversations on their shared experiences, but do not create a more meaningful community. Moreover, as there is a mobility divide between remote workers from within the free movement area of the EU and elsewhere, there are different degrees of opportunity and privilege even within the group. The main takeaways from this Chapter are that many digital nomads benefit from and contribute to the capitalistic outlook on Lisbon, while some of them remain ignorant about the ways their presence in Portugal shapes the experiences of locals. In the following Chapter, I will illustrate how precarious experiences of digital nomads and remote workers described in the previous Chapters contribute to their expectations for places, social interactions, feelings of rootedness and their ideal life.

CHAPTER III. THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCES OF ROOTEDNESS**INTRODUCTION**

Xylia was staying at her friend's place in the center of Lisbon. The only things that were essentially "hers" in the apartment were two carry-on suitcases that held a small collection of mainly black clothing. On the table, there was a pile of clothes she was currently mending. Xylia was looking to settle down in Portugal but was finding it hard to buy property as she hadn't been working steadily for a while. "It's very difficult to qualify for mortgage right now, it would be easier to buy if I was a normal person that had a remote job. I'm looking to rent while I figure out what I'm doing with my career and income. But I've looked at 18 apartments so far and I don't like any of them." She had gotten tired of continuous travel already last fall. "I can't stop the momentum. It's very annoying. I can't get off." Before Xylia started traveling, she had turned down a chance to pursue a master's degree in London. "It would have been an opportunity to meet interesting people at school, find a life partner, go down the beaten path. Part of me thinks that had I done it, I would be married with kids." When I asked her whether she regretted any of it, Xylia thought for a while. "The thing is you can't escape from your life and you can't escape from yourself. I've had a lot of "what the hell am I doing with my life" type of thoughts, but I think it would be like that also if I was in the same apartment in Portland for ten years working for the same company. It would be the same depression without the highs of the amazing unbelievable experiences I've had."

Xylia was an American digital nomad that had been working remotely and traveling the world continuously for seven years.³² Although she had been nomadic the longest of all my informants, her inner dialogue was one that I recognized from multiple people in the field. It illustrated the hopes and dreams of many digital nomads and remote workers that they had traded off for the lifestyle of travel, flexibility and freedom. However, it was not a life that many people could sustain for a long time and therefore settled down much faster or never aspired to be "truly nomadic" to begin with. By referring to herself as a "normal person," Xylia implied that there is something extraordinary about her current lifestyle. By saying that she "can't stop the momentum," she exhibited a sense of exhaustion from the lifestyle and a wish to be finally rooted somewhere, to have a place to call home. She described the opportunities being a digital nomad brought her that she would not have had otherwise – attending creative writing workshops in Europe, taking a digital nomad cruise across the Atlantic, staying in

³² Interview, 28-03-2023

Central America or Southeast Asia for extended periods of time, going on safaris and trying white water rafting in Southern Africa, hang gliding in Brazil.³³ But now, she wanted different things.

To a large degree, the life of Level 2 and 3 digital nomads is inconsistent with settling down and feeling committed to people and places. However, the physical and emotional need for rest, belonging and rootedness may drive them to stop continuous travel and give up a certain level of freedom and flexibility (or transform how they perceive them). While the previous Chapters have illustrated that through work and relationships, this one will look at the embodied and emotional self-making practices of digital nomads and remote workers as they search for a home base. The concept of transnationalism will be referred back to in this Chapter as members of the group hold certain ideals and wishes for their life regardless of the location they are in physically. On the topic of settling down, Kim said, “I don’t think a lot of digital nomads realize that they cannot keep jumping from one country to another. They’re gonna crash hard. I was like that myself, clearly running away from something. At some point it becomes really heavy on mental health. It’s fun for a while, but what are they gonna do in the future?” These contradictions were explored through the question for Chapter III “How do digital nomads and remote workers balance the search for freedom and flexibility with their desire to feel *at home* abroad?” and tied together under the main argument that **even though digital nomads and remote workers are drawn to places that have similar characteristics or are shaped by familiar sentiments, they strive for unique conceptions of home and rootedness.**

In this Chapter, I am going to look at the different criteria based on which digital nomads usually chose their next location, how that approach could lead to loneliness and superficiality, how many have found ways to feel at home in places they have no prior emotional attachment to, how they dealt with a lack of structure in their lives and how settling down was what a few of them regarded as “the good life.”

FROM “TICKING OFF BOXES” TO LONELINESS

At one of the Thursday Meetups, I met John, an American documentalist who had wandered into a *LDN* event two years ago, immediately became fascinated with the people and decided to shoot a film on them.³⁴ He told me that many Americans came to Lisbon because it was safer than the US, but they had no regard for cultural differences and expected to keep the same lifestyle as at home. He showed me clips of interviews with remote workers he had shot at Meetups. A man from San Francisco said, “Lisbon feels like home. It is just a different flavor of America. It even has the same red bridge. It ticks

³³ Interview, 28-03-2023

³⁴ Fieldnotes, 03-04-2023

all the boxes.” At a different Meetup, Melissa introduced me to Ben, an Australian that was working from Lisbon before moving to London to start a charity for global health. He said, “London is quite similar to Sydney [where he was from] and I wanted to try a different culture. But I was also conscious that spending a month in a place is not much time. Given I am monolingual, it would be very difficult to connect with everyday people if I was in a country where English wasn’t spoken much. Lisbon ticked a lot of those boxes; I had the impression that I could get by with English compared to Spain or France. When I started to do research, Lisbon was at the top of a lot of lists for the best cities to do this in.”³⁵ Another informant Miranda said, “I was terrified to come here after a bad experience in Bali. But it is actually wonderful, all of the problems there that didn’t align with me are solved here. Lisbon is developed enough that there is good infrastructure, but not too developed, it still has that quaint charm. It ticks all boxes from a lifestyle perspective.”³⁶

These accounts showed me that many digital nomads and remote workers viewed possible options for relocation through a lens of efficiency and by “ticking things off.” This approach was very pragmatic and detached, looking for similarity between the locations and not staying in places that would inconvenience them in terms of local language or infrastructure. Therefore, it did not seem like they really wanted to experience what made Lisbon unique. I shared this sentiment with John and asked whether he had any insight about it. He said, “In my experience, Portuguese people do not want to be bought out, assimilated with Americanism or global capitalism – they just take themselves out of the equation. Maybe they are busy as they have to work multiple jobs to afford a life in Lisbon. But a lack of evident national culture means that an international one can flourish.” The same has been reflected in other ethnographic work on the research population (Thompson 2021, 71).

The emotionally detached approach many digital nomads took to places also transferred over to people. Ben told me, “As nice as the digital nomads are, these are all superficial relationships. I just don’t have that much in common with the typical digital nomad. Most of them are five years into some professional role in the private sector, doing a job which I don’t find interesting. I found the crowd both at Outside [his coliving space] and at weekly Meetups quite hit or miss. [...] There’s certainly a high potential for loneliness. There might be people who you could get a drink with but there’s not going to be someone you can tell “I’m feeling down, can we chat.” Coliving seemed like an easy way to buy a foothold here, where I will know a large set of people who would be similar in their life approach; I didn’t realise that I wasn’t like this. I was open to the idea of “I can move anywhere and I will just make an effort to be

³⁵ Interview, 12-02-2023

³⁶ Interview, 14-04-2023

outgoing and then I'll have a social life." I've now moved towards having an existing community that you really connect with on a deeper level." Raquel said, "I have been having the same conversations over and over everywhere I go. It gets tiring."

As the frequency of travel and the transnational nature of nomadic lives prohibited people from making meaningful friends on the road, missing human connection became an integral part of the lifestyle. Xylia told me that she preferred being friends with other digital nomads as she had a lot more in common with people that were travel-savvy, and it made the expectations for the relationship more aligned. And yet, because she was an extravert, it was easy for her to feel lonely. "I really don't like feeling like I'm in a period of my life where there's no one around, there's no community at all which is very common if you're constantly traveling to new places." However, she also said that loneliness was part of the human experience and no one should be afraid to experience it. For Raquel, it came in waves: sometimes she missed her loved ones but other times she was happy in isolation. "When it comes, it's time to reach out, to connect and spend more time with the people you love. Maybe it's time to book a trip to see them. I just listen to the urge. Sometimes the only way to deal with it is to cry, have some tea, watch a movie – just feel it."

Kim and I talked about the independence necessary to sustain a life of travel and remote work. She said, "It became my way of life, it's not something I chose. I was engaged ten years ago, ready to settle down and have babies, we had a dog and a cat, looking to buy a house. Since then, I've had two relationships where I was willing to follow them. Maybe I am not inherently independent, and I had to become it. If you move to another country as a single woman, you become tough. Then you're so independent that it is difficult to break those patterns. I connect easily with people but also have no issue disconnecting. I have had to do it so many times. I'm never gonna throw a farewell party because it's just useless, over half of the people I met somewhere I don't connect to really deeply or want to see again." On her experience with feeling lonely, she added, "Nowadays I stay longer when I travel to escape the loneliness. I understand where it comes from – people do not stick around long enough. But I do wish I could go back to the time when saying goodbye used to be hard." These testimonies were essentially what made Level 2 and 3 digital nomads seek a home base. The different accounts of embodied as well as emotional homemaking will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

FEELING "AT HOME" IN YOUR BODY

As digital nomads and remote workers experienced relatively little external structure through a lack of fixed working hours, relationships, and a permanent residence; they were responsible for the creation of alternative structures and feelings of belonging. I attended an event from the Meetup group *Happy in Lisbon: Expat Ladies and Local Sisters* from their *Sister Share* series that took place in A Sala. The workshop was called "Rooted and Rested" and ran by Rose, a Dutch-born holistic psychologist, yoga

teacher, healer and nutritionist.³⁷ The goal was to give attendants the tools to combat rootless- and restlessness that came with constant traveling and a knowing that one must find that from within. Rose had moved around a lot as a child and was therefore familiar with the feeling. Before the official start of the workshop, I sat down at the table with two women from Hungary and Brazil. The Brazilian was studying architecture in Lisbon and the Hungarian worked in marketing and had traveled as a digital nomad for the previous three years. They were at the workshop because they, too, struggled with feeling rooted and therefore found the topic of the workshop intriguing.

Rose started the workshop by explaining the concept of “third culture kids” – how being from one place but growing up in another shapes your understanding of the world and yourself. There are external and internal elements to that: the practical implications of missing places and people but also the lived experiences of loneliness, nervousness, newness and inability to relate to your surroundings. “Even the birds sounding different around you can signal to the brain that you are in a new environment,” Rose said, and recommended to always try and be present in your physical environment in order to deal with the internal implications. We did a guided meditation where we visualized lightbeams on a globe, in places we held dear. Then we imagined roots connecting us to the core of the Earth. The lesson was that our bodies are biological and the modern world is technological, but the mind reaches beyond the two realms. She advised to bring small details into your daily life to cultivate a sense of structure, like a practice or a trinket that we liked. Routines create safety, so we talked about habits that made us feel rooted and rested. At the end of the workshop, she talked about “choosing your hard” – moving around a lot may be a struggle but at least you will not struggle with feeling stuck in the same place forever. “Let yourself be scared sometimes,” she said. “Your body is your only guaranteed home, forever. Make sure you do not fight against it.” For the final meditation, we practiced creating a living room inside our head that had all of our favorite things and loved ones. We closed the night with the affirmations: “Home is within me” and “I am where my feet are.”

Living a life of little physical attachments, many digital nomads had unique conceptualizations of home. Raquel told me how working for herself on her own flexible schedule allowed her to balance taking on clients and managing the more practical side of sailing.³⁸ Life on a sailboat was not something she ever imagined, however like Rose, she was accustomed to being nomadic from childhood due to her parents’ work. Now, she considered being docked in port as “being home” as opposed to sailing, which she called “traveling.” She spoke about how this lifestyle made her more in touch with her surroundings.

³⁷ Fieldnotes, 23-03-2023

³⁸ Interview, 22-02-2023

“You get to travel in a clean way just using the power of the wind. You generally have to be mindful of your usage of water and electricity – it’s a more conscious lifestyle. Another big pro is freedom. If we anchor in a bay, we don’t pay rent, we don’t pay utilities. You get to change country without changing home, which is usually a huge hassle.” She continued, “I really want to see the world but I never want to move again. I’ve moved house every single year for the past ten years, I’m done. I don’t want to see another moving box ever again.” Consequentially, it was a lifestyle of very little stability – she said that sometimes she missed feeling the ground beneath her feet.

We also spoke about the need for an internal structure when lacking an external one. Raquel said, “There’s not a lot of things anchoring us, we have to create a lot of that. We love to organize our week on Sundays: go food shopping, prepare the menu for the week. We also discuss what our week looks like and when I have clients. I also have a morning routine. I don’t like not having structure.” She also said that practicing different types of movement and sports helped. “If I don’t move, my internal structure collapses. Funnily enough, sailing is a very static lifestyle, you can only walk up and down the boat.” The next time we met up in Lagos, she invited me to her farewell party as they were going to purchase a bigger boat and leave Portugal. I shared what I had heard at the “Rooted and Rested” workshop, and she had contradicting opinions.³⁹ “I agree that home can be a state of being as well as a place. But saying that “your body is your only home...” Therapists call that spiritual bypassing, diverting from the actual issue by saying that if you meditate and imagine growing roots, you won’t feel restless and ungrounded anymore. If you still do, just meditate harder. In reality, it is okay to feel uprooted because it’s happening for a reason, your body is communicating its needs. Then you help yourself alleviate the feeling. But by wanting to get rid of restlessness, you imply that some emotions are bad and some are good. They are all valid.”

RETIRING FROM THE LIFESTYLE: SEARCHING FOR THE GOOD LIFE

As illustrated through both the embodied and emotional conceptualizations of home in the previous subsection, there was an interplay between choosing to come to Portugal because it felt familiar and choosing to stay there for the purpose of settling down. Some potential disadvantages of digital nomadism as a privileged form of lifestyle migration include difficulties adapting to a new culture or language, social isolation or loneliness, financial constraints, a lack of access to healthcare or other essential services, and the need to establish new social networks and support systems (O’Reilly and Benson 2009, 2). Balancing work-related desires (flexibility of working hours, having a high income, feeling fulfilled in their career) and leisure- and ideology-related desires (traveling, practising hobbies,

³⁹ Interview, 31-03-2023

being in nature, defying societal expectations, experiencing self-development, being surrounded by a supportive community) could not usually be fulfilled successfully while being nomadic. Thus, many digital nomads resorted to seeking a slower pace of life and some arrived at the conclusion that perhaps leaving the lifestyle behind to work remotely from a fixed location could offer them a higher quality of life. Xylia quite literally told me that “Lisbon is where digital nomads go to retire.” Therefore, I also wanted to explore what my research population wanted out of life, what did they envision for the future and whether it aligned with their current reality.

Lifestyle migration is a form of self-realization and self-making, implying that people who migrate their lifestyles frequently see it as a method to lead a more full and meaningful existence (O'Reilly and Benson 2009, 5). Lifestyle migrants' motives and objectives in their quest of the “good life” stem from the power of continuous reinvention of the self. They seek literal and figurative places of asylum or rebirth: characterized as therapeutic, as self-making and enabling, as hedonistic or as providing escape (O'Reilly and Benson 2009, 6). In the works of other anthropologists, some of the material conditions of welfare are income, health, security; and immaterial conditions are aspirations and opportunities, dignity and fairness, and commitments to larger purposes – all constituting the good life (Fischer 2014, 2). Nowadays, the state has shifted from being a welfare supplier to a facilitator with a greater focus on individual responsibility and self-sufficiency (Langer and Højlund 2011, 1). The authors investigate the relationship between welfare and the pursuit of the good life, arguing that welfare is not just about individual well-being but also about collective well-faring, which entails active interaction between individuals and their social, cultural, economic, and political settings (Langer and Højlund 2011, 8). Millar's work (2015) on precariousness also emphasized that individuals develop more rich and meaningful personal and social relations by embracing alternative temporalities of precarious work, promoting a reevaluation of the boundaries between work and life and forming a new understanding of how marginalized people build their own “good life” outside of standard ideals of success.

Ngan posted a picture on her Instagram story of her partner with the caption: “I don't want to have money for luxury things, for five-star hotels or expensive restaurants. But I do want to have money to be able to sit on a bench on Monday afternoon, enjoy the sun and feel how beautiful life is.” For Youssan and his wife, the good life was manifested in a space they once visited. “There is this perfect coliving space in Cascais called Luna. It's small, open and it was a perfect week we spent there. In the morning I worked, sometimes by the pool, and after I took my swimming clothes and went to the beach. My dream came true.” Raquel interpreted the question philosophically by asking, “Is good life a life that is devoid of badness? [...] It's following my passions, growing as a person, growing as a professional, growing as a partner, doing things that interest me, feeling fulfilled financially, laughing, overcoming difficult things, there's a lot of eating pizza. A nice beach covers pretty much all those aspects,” she laughed, bridging it back to the benefits of being a digital nomad. “It's looked different throughout

different stages, a good life right now is living on a boat with a French dude, a few years ago it wasn't like that. It's doing what your body's asking you to do and as long as I follow that, I'm going to have a good life. I was very much a planner, I think I missed opportunities because I was so focused. Now I'm not making a single plan and I'm just going to go with the flow."

Xylia described her good life differently. "A few years in the future hopefully I will be making passive income, working part time on different projects, maybe real estate investing. I want to run retreats and get published if I do a memoir. Doing a mix of cool things where I'm not working 8 hours but 5 hours a day. I want to live in a beautiful villa in Portugal or Spain or Italy where I have different rooms for travelers like me, I would like to have places for people to come and stay and have a community of friends, having regular dinner parties and gatherings. Having a life partner definitely and maybe some dogs and goats. I like to think big." However, this was contradicting the current reality she was experiencing. When I asked Xylia what she found the most exciting about Portugal, she said that nothing in particular. "I don't think Portugal is the best place in the world. I don't believe any place is paradise, that's something I've learned. There are many layers of realities about every single place and a fairytale paradise does not exist – it's certainly not Bali, it's not Thailand, it's not Portugal." I asked her what made her settle there regardless. "Just personal connections, there's nothing to do with the current trendiness. I'm not very trendy, that's why I don't like what is happening here. I'm a little bit ashamed wanting to move here."

The different ideas of the good life seemed to include unique conceptualizations of freedom. In anthropology, freedom is understood through the continuous reinvention of human nature through independent choice and action; rejecting the notions that behaving freely entails acting in accordance with reason and that freedom is only conceivable in the absence of all constraints or power relations (Laidlaw 2002, 323). Another author emphasizes the importance of freedom in identifying and distinguishing the human individual: without freedom, a person disintegrates (Parisoli 1999). It was clear that in the cases of Ngan, Youssan, Raquel and Xylia, freedom played a substantive role in their understandings of the good life and it was relative to their lived experiences: the ability to fix their own work schedules, work in untraditional spaces, mix work and leisure, find a home base and follow their desires – that were, to a large part, enabled or challenged by their precarious employment.

CONCLUSION

In this Chapter, I have problematized how digital nomads and remote workers view their relocation efforts by creating a metaphorical checklist of livability criteria and then "checking off boxes," how their tendency to loneliness contributed to feelings of uprootedness, how that eventually drove them to fantasizing about the life they wanted and whether that involved a degree of mobility and precarious labor. I have used the term *rootedness* as an emic term to a sense of belonging as it was used extensively

in the workshop by Rose as well as by some informants. Similarly, the terms *freedom* and *flexibility* served as emic terms to general conditions of labor and mobility as they were part of the research group's everyday experiences. The main takeaway from this Chapter is although members of the research group seek different ideals of "the good life," they all described being content in their personal freedoms rather than societal understandings of welfare and success. In Conclusion, I will tie together how the experiences of neoliberal precarious work, social precarity and inability to integrate, and the attempts at feeling at home in their chosen location all contribute to the general state of being made and self-making of digital nomads and remote workers.

CONCLUSION

When I arrived to Lisbon five months ago, eager to research the contemporary labor and mobility practices of digital nomads, I was met with multiple tensions. While the lifestyle has repeatedly been praised in media for its perceived ability to go against the status quo of organized labor practices, it quickly became clear that the implications of being a digital nomad were multilayered and not necessarily positive. Unwelcoming graffiti, protests, insults in the newspaper and disapproving looks were regular happenstances for these laptop workers, who had come to Portugal to enjoy sunshine when the rest of Europe was still recovering from winter. Although nobody admitted to it, a common practice for digital nomads was to relocate to places where their money went a longer way – meaning, where the cost of living was more affordable as their foreign salary was higher than that of the local population. The Portuguese rebellion against rising consumer prices, prices of real estate and the melting pot of monoculturalism characteristic of a capitalistic world order was inspiring to observe, let alone research.

The premise for the thesis was that the current dominance of global capitalism and neoliberal policies have shifted the norms of employment from secure to precarious (Kasmir 2020). The Fordist “privileged worker” that enjoyed a steady income, healthcare and a national retirement plan has been replaced with the self-employed entrepreneur that has lost the majority of their labor rights (Kasmir 2008; Nash, et al. 2018). Digital nomadism, a novel form of precarious employment and lifestyle migration, emerged through the rise of ICTs alongside capitalistic values of the Western world, motivated by seeking a life of “freedom” through assimilating work and leisure for self-development and renouncing attachments to people and places (Reichenberger 2018). The relevance of the issue is high due to emergent expectations for work in post-COVID times. The main contributions of the thesis will be derived from the tensions identified in the fieldsite – investigating the norms and values about labor, mobility, and freedom that shape the work digital nomads engage in and the lifestyle they lead. It also explored how global inequalities are reproduced on a local level by reflecting on digital nomads’ financial position vis-à-vis the Portuguese. This thesis aimed to show that digital nomads and remote workers experienced both opportunities and challenges: a healthy work-life balance and a threat of overworking, attempting to integrate with the local population and enforcing existing inequalities, and dreaming of a life of both freedom and settlement. They entered the lifestyle with certain expectations, and when reality turned out to be different, they had a choice between accepting the changes or abandoning the dream.

As brought out in the Introduction, this thesis engaged with literature on the anthropology of labor and mobility, the structure vs. agency debate and the scholarship on precarity – the higher the degrees of mobility and precariousness, the more important self-making practices became for digital nomads.

In Chapter I, I set the context for the thesis by showing how precariousness was central to the identity of digital nomads as full-time employment had become undesirable or unattainable (During 2015;

Millar 2017). In Lisbon, digital nomads and remote workers differed from regularly employed workers through working by and for themselves. Coworking spaces have been theorized to cultivate a sense of productivity and community for digital nomads (Orel 2017), however in the absence of an organized office space, my informants preferred to conduct work from a café or their accommodation – due to saving money or being able to concentrate better. The advertising of coworking spaces would portray them as unique, open and innovative; in reality many of them looked like traditional offices, had fixed rules for working hours and contract lengths, and presented the highly mobile workers with an unfavorable environment for conducting their work. It was an interaction between the ways that digital nomads were being made by the dominant power structure (the space owners), and how they practiced self-making and renouncing said structures through choosing to work alone. In addition to physically conducting work by themselves, most of my informants preferred being self-employed due to being unexpectedly fired in the past. Working for themselves, they expected independence, flexibility and feelings of fulfilment; but instead, they experienced more stringent salary conditions, client demands, a constant need to self-advertise, and the expense of covering their own social security. This is how *woven time* became the *freedom trap* – the opportunities presented by unstructured working time meant that many would fall victim to overworking and a cultivation of new yet similarly restrictive habits. As a result, the freedom they sought to disown traditional work was a trade-off with economic and social security (Mancinelli 2020).

In Chapter II, many digital nomads expected to be regarded as equal members of the Portuguese society, but experienced inhibiting conditions such as income inequalities and cultural differences. The desired level of integration was not homogenous within the group – while some aspired to remain *global citizens* even while living in Lisbon, others wished to be integrated to a higher degree. Regardless, they reproduced socio-economic inequalities that jeopardized that same integration, for example by living in apartments with a higher rent than the local average salary. The framework of reflexivity used to describe the relationship between digital nomads and the Portuguese was borrowed from Sökefeld (1999): it is supposed to make people reflect how their decisions and behaviors affect their connections to others as well as themselves. Although a few of my informants portrayed the use of reflexivity, it would not be fruitful unless done on a collective level. Some coworking space owners said that even though they would have liked to welcome people with lower income levels into their space, they could not afford to lower the prices. Discourse surrounding capitalism was prevalent in society: in addition to digital nomads, the government was also found guilty through adopting the Golden Visa and treating citizenship as an economic mean. In terms of social precarity, the nature of the Portuguese culture as relatively reserved was a contrast that many digital nomads from more extraverted cultures did not expect, which further impeded their integration. Lastly, the freedom of not being bound by structural issues such as a complicated visa process simplified the mobility practices of Western and European digital nomads – enjoying a double privilege of a strong passport and a high income. This Chapter

suggests that the economic precarity of Lisboners and social precarity of digital nomads resulted in a regenerative cycle.

In Chapter III, some digital nomads expected to feel fulfilled and free when being highly mobile, however it was straining for their mental and physical health. I explored how digital nomads and remote workers balanced their search for freedom and flexibility with their desire to feel *at home* abroad. They did so through striving for unique embodied and emotional conceptions of home and rootedness, even though many were drawn to places that portrayed characteristics of convenience and familiarity. The concept of transnationalism (Ong 1996; DeJaeghere and McCleary 2010; Brettell 2018) in the context of this Chapter reveals that the ideals digital nomads have for their life – freedom in their choices and flexibility in their work – are sought to be fulfilled regardless of their physical location. While they are exploring the sensation of creating a home away from home, they disregard many aspects of what makes a place unique. By choosing their next destination with a lack of emotional attachment, they also viewed people and relationships in those destinations as disposable – making superficiality and detachment integral parts of their experience. Another expectation that contrasted with reality was their ability to create genuine feelings of home in their chosen locations, which inspired many to learn mindfulness techniques in order to cultivate it. For an informant that was a sailing digital nomad, living on a boat created both opportunities and challenges: while she was able to travel climate consciously and see the world without ever having to “move” again, it brought with a lack of physical and mental structure. In addition to some of the economic and political tensions portrayed in the last Chapters, some digital nomads expressed the wish to settle purely because it was getting exhausting. At the same time, others found the unknowingness exciting.

“The good life” was introduced at the end of Chapter III, offering a different perspective on the ideas of labor, mobility, and self-making discussed in the thesis. The freedom digital nomads seek in their work and private lives is not unconditional (it requires certain documents and financial abilities) and comes with a particular outlook on life. The tension between the commitment to mobility and the desire for stability makes building a cohesive sense of self, work, and productivity difficult (Green 2020, 440-441). Through everyone’s idiosyncratic conceptualization of the good life, a digital nomad is able to determine whether their current lifestyle is consistent with it; and whether their material and immaterial desires are balanced (O’Reilly and Benson 2009; Fischer 2014). Additionally, it is important to note that precarious experiences can be meaningful as they allow individuals to imagine a good life outside of standard ideals of success (Millar 2015). According to my informants, both material and immaterial aspects were necessary for the good life: to have the financial freedom to work at a chosen time; to blend work and leisure in a naturally beautiful place; to be fulfilled in your life even if there were occasional bad emotions; to live in the moment; or to be settled in a house with a family and offer

services to other travellers. The freedom to define the good life for oneself was an essential experience of self-making as a digital nomad.

In conclusion, my thesis set out to answer the question “How are the practices of being made and self-making of digital nomads and remote workers influenced by their experiences of precariousness in Lisbon, Portugal?” It was answered through subquestions about the labor, integration and embodiment practices of digital nomads and remote workers that were illustrated by corresponding arguments. Furthermore, the Chapters contributed to a narrative about digital nomads expecting certain kind of experiences but being met with a different reality. My thesis adds to the bigger debate on labor and mobility through the conclusion that in their extreme forms, both can promote global inequalities and have be harmful for the individual. Fieldwork allowed me to devote time, energy and attention to researching a group relevant to the future of labor and mobility, and I was able to draw conclusions that a more hurried form of research would not have permitted. However, I experienced some repercussions during fieldwork: on occasion, my informants seemed uncomfortable talking about their income, privileges or integration practices. Although my research did not directly contribute to the ongoing hostility between some members of the Portuguese society and foreigners, it definitely highlighted such tensions. After completing the thesis, I have knowledge on the realities of digital nomads and remote workers that are not usually highlighted – their private emotions, hopes and aspirations, and the downsides of living a life “on the go.” With regards to further research, I would recommend a longer fieldwork in one location to get a more complete picture of the culture of digital nomads that frequent it; or follow one digital nomad along their travels across the world to gain a better understanding on the the effects of the lifestyle on the individual.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Topic list

Expected list of interview topics: work and employment, lifestyle and social life, habits and free time, mobility, citizenship practices, political views, responsibilities.

Expected list of interview questions:

- What is the current employment status of the informant?
- What are they currently doing as a job and how did they find it?
- Is it a long-term contract or gig-based work?
- Do they have an employer or are they self-employed?
- How do they shape self-employment into a lifestyle?
- Do they see themselves as entrepreneurs, and if so, why?
- Who is responsible for paying for their healthcare, retirement, etc.?
- Do they work from home, from a coworking space, or from an office?
- Which is their preferred setting to conduct work in?
- What does their typical work day look like?
- How many hours they work per week?
- How would they define work?
- Why and when did they became a DN?
- What did they do previously?
- What are the challenges of being a DN?
- Do they miss a more traditional employment status/arrangement?
- Do they have frequent contact with other digital nomads?
- Do they have frequent contact with family members and friends?
- In which ways are they involved with their country of origin/previous residence? Do they vote, pay taxes, invest, visit?
- What are their political views?
- Do they have feelings of loneliness?
- Regarding COVID-19: how did they feel when physical meeting was not possible?
- Have they struggled with finding friends in the new country?
- Has their lifestyle as a DN changed the way they consume/share resources?
- How do they manage a work-life balance?
- How long do they wish to stay in one location?
- Based on which criteria do they choose the next destination?
- What do they think is the biggest trade-off and the biggest benefit of this lifestyle?
- How would they justify the trade-off you are making?
- Do they see themselves more as a traveller or as a worker?
- Do they think they have a stable lifestyle?