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# Expatriates' and teenagers' nomadic identities: an intersectional analysis

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to understand the influence of the different relations of power embedded in social structures on the construction of nomadic identities at the individual level.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors use a qualitative approach. The authors interview expatriates adjusting to an international audit firm in Luxembourg and young in geographical itinerancy. A multilevel analysis based on intersectionality let emerge macro- and meso-level influences on the construction of nomadic identities.

**Findings** – The authors differentiate three types of expression of nomadic identities thanks to the concept of intersectionality. The authors showed that power relations at the macro level of the society leads to cultural imperialism at the meso level of organizations thus shaping the identity construction of the individual.

**Research limitations/implications** – The qualitative approach remains very specific and future research may focus on different contexts to generalize the results. The influence of gender on the construction of nomadic identities needs to be further investigated.

**Practical implications** – Diversity policies should be revisited to avoid cultural imperialism.

**Originality/value** – The authors go beyond the monolithic approach, explaining the development of nomadic identities through the lens of national culture only. The authors point out that the individual develops different social identities intersecting in his or her identity development.

**Keywords** Teenagers, Expatriation, Cultural imperialism, Intersectionality, Nomadic identities, Post-colonialism

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

In a globalized world, encountering new cultures has become a daily phenomenon. Appadurai (2005) emphasizes that globalization leads to the creation of supranational identification that can affect everybody. In this paper, we will focus on the development of nomadic identities linked to geographical movement. We assume that nomadic individuals are facing or have faced several cultural realities different from their own for a significant period of time.

From this perspective, we choose to approach the concept of identity as a dynamic and fluid process that progresses through an individual's different experiences across different cultures and different social environments. In the same way, we define culture as a process of intersubjective sense-making (Mahadevan *et al*, 2011; Geertz, 1973). The construction of multiple identities for people facing a new culture has mainly been investigated through a national culture perspective, in works on biculturalism

(Lee, 2010; LaFromboise *et al.*, 1993) or intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993). However, the field of diversity literature denounces this monolithic approach and points out that individuals develop different social identities intersecting with their identity development. Some feminist studies have analyzed how the intersection between colour and gender is connected to the identity development of women of colour; however, no such reflexions have been developed to understand the identity construction of people who have lived in several different countries. Post-colonial studies (Prasad, 2006) demonstrate that the way people see themselves might be less a question of cultural differences and more a question of post-colonial relations and the power relations between individuals under certain boundary conditions.

The aim of this paper is to understand the development of identities across cultures and to delineate the influence of the different power relations between individuals dictated by social structures in this identity development process.

We choose to focus on expatriates and young people forced into in geographical itinerancy (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013) by their parents' occupation. In our work, we refer to expatriates as both self-initiated expatriates and organization expatriates. Self-initiated expatriates are people hired on a contractual basis and not transferred overseas by the parent organization (Lee, 2005). In contrast expatriates are sent by their home companies to specific international posts (Edström and Galbraith, 1977; Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013). We apply the theoretical framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Winker and Degele, 2011) to understand better the intersection between the different factors influencing the process of identity construction, while taking into account reciprocal effects at various contextual levels.

We begin by detailing our perspective on the definition of identity and culture to justify the use of the theoretical framework of intersectionality. We then present our methodological choices before focusing on our research fields and detailing our findings. We review the experiences of our respondents, analyzing the intersection between age, culture and status in society on the identity definition process, at a macro, meso and micro level. We bring to light different context levels that intersect in the development of a nomadic identity to distinguish different ways in which those identities are expressed.

By using intersectionality to understand the development of expatriates' and teenagers' nomadic identities, this study brings to light general tendencies in which identities are constructed in interrelation with different contexts.

## 2. Theoretical perspectives

### 2.1 A socio-cultural perspective: identity construction as a dynamic

The sociocultural perspective (Bruner, 1991; Valsiner, 2007) analyzes identity as a dialectic phenomenon. This approach requires attentiveness to different elements: every human interaction takes place in an environment that is culturally and historically situated, in which relations are mediatized by a collection of inherited tools and signs from cultural and social contexts that are in constant development.

Identity develops throughout life and always in opposition to others: "if I'm myself it's because I'm not someone else" (Lipiansky, 1993). It has two complementary facets: personal identity, which makes an individual unique, and social identity, which refers to membership of different social or cultural groups. This implies that while individual identity is seen as unique, it is also composed of different affiliations, "in-group" and "out-group". Joly (1990), Fernandez (2002), and Cerdin and Dubouloy (2004) stress the significant influence of international experience on the development of identity.

*2.2 Defining culture: a process of intersubjective sense-making*
Drawing on Mahadevan *et al.* (2011), we understand culture as multilevels of sense-making (Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen, 1998). We depart from the "given culture perspective" (Mahadevan *et al.*, 2011), that is from the field of cross-cultural studies (Hofstede, 1980, 2003) where individuals are said to be programmed by and bound to their national culture. We believe instead that individuals create and negotiate shared meanings through social interaction and co-construct an "interculture" (Mahadevan *et al.*, 2011). From this perspective, borders between cultures are no longer static but fluid and negotiated through social encounters, the different cultures in which individuals develop, and many other factors, like age, gender, profession and social background. The concept of a doing culture, based on and constant interpersonal interactions that reaffirm and reproduce social structure (Goffman, 1956, 1977), accounts for this process of identity construction. The feeling of belonging to a culture is not developed individually but rather constructed socially through practice and strongly linked to the different contexts through which the individual progresses.

*2.3 Too much focus on national culture*
Brannen and Thomas (2010) analyzed the development of bicultural identities and their effectiveness within an organization. LaFromboise *et al.* (1993) distinguished between biculturals who switched behaviours in response to situational demands and others who identified with an emergent culture distinct from their original culture.

However, the diversity literature denounces the simplistic understanding of identity suggested by these models, which reduce individuals to one social identity linked to their culture. These models fail to take into account issues of race, ethnicity, gender and religion that are projected upon individuals and intersect with their identity development.

*2.4 The impact of power relations on identity construction*
Post-colonial theories attempt to understand how former colonial relations initiate complex dynamics between the west and other countries and today still create unbalanced power relations between countries and between individuals (Prasad, 2006). These representations inevitably influence individuals' self-definition and the in-group with which they identify to define their social identity (Tafjel, 1982). Similarly, Crenshaw shows that culturally imperialist groups project their own values and perspectives as normative and universal, reminding dominated groups of their group identity because the behaviours and reactions of "cultural imperialists" call them back to it. We need to understand how these relations influence the development of nomadic identities.

*2.5 Defining intersectionality*
The concept of intersectionality explains the complementary effects of different factors – in our case, host culture and the status social structures give to the individual - and analyzes how they intersect within a phenomenon. This approach fits perfectly with our aim in this paper: to explore general tendencies in the ways people construct their identity in relation to different cultural contexts, and to delineate what factors are at stake in this process. Intersectional analysis focuses on interwoven categories and how they mutually strengthen or weaken each other (Crenshaw, 1989). However, the concept of intersectionality is highly controversial in the academic world. While some authors see it as the most important contribution from feminist theory

(McCall, 2005), others denounce it as a "buzzword" related to an ambiguous and unsubstantiated theory (Davis, 2008). While we disagree with this extreme view, we acknowledge that designing a methodology to apply intersectionality is challenging. McCall (2005) offers some clues to this and distinguishes between three kinds of complexity related to intersectionality. One of these, intracategorical complexity, questions the boundary-making and boundary-defining process of categorizing, which focuses on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection. The identity-building process of expatriates and geographically itinerant young people, which has not been analyzed through the intersection of age, culture and social status, constitutes precisely our social group at a "neglected point of intersection". We support Winker and Degele (2011) in advocating intracategorical intersectionality, taking into account reciprocal effects between various levels: in our work we focus on the macro and meso levels of social structures and the micro level of identity construction. Winker and Degele (2011) make a case for praxeological intersectionality. Drawing on Bourdieu (1998), they start from the social practice of an individual to reconstruct the identities people develop as well as the structures and the norms on which they draw. This approach is useful to complete the social identity theory, focusing only on the micro level of analysis when studying identity development.

For the individual, identity development appears to be a complex process in which the challenge is to maintain some kind of unity while trying to adapt to multifaceted affiliations and manage conflict situations. National culture is far from being the only element influencing identity development; host culture, social status, power relations between individuals and the context within which identity development occurs also matter in this process. Intersectionality, which allows us to study the complementary effects of different elements on a phenomenon, is the best way to conceptualize the boundary-making of these different factors and to analyse how they intersect in the nomadic identity construction process.

Numerous studies have explored the intersection of colour and gender on the development of identity and denounce unequal regimes (Acker, 2012), pleading that there is an urgent need to manage diversity within organizations; others have investigated multiple identities through a national culture lens. Yet Sparrow (2000, p. 195) states that "definitions of self are inextricably linked to the cultures and languages as they describe the self and within these cultures and languages the freedom to define oneself is dependent on relationships of power".

To our knowledge, the effect of the intersection between cultural context and social status on the development of nomadic individuals' identity has not been analysed so far. We intend to bridge this gap with this paper. Understanding the identity development of nomadic individuals will yield insights into how to improve the way they adapt to different contexts and contribute to the literature on expatriation and immigration.

Going beyond the national culture approach, we aim to understand how nomadic identities are constructed in relation to different cultural contexts. Using the concept of intersectionality, we point out the reciprocal effects of the social structures that initiate power relations on the construction of identity.

## 3. Methodology
We focus on expatriates and geographically itinerant young people who have to adapt to different cultures at different periods of their life and develop different relations to the new cultures they encounter. Drawing on the parallels between these two samples,

we want to understand how their relations to different cultural environments differ and what other factors intersect in the process of identity construction. This comparison makes the process of identity construction particularly visible; indeed, teenagers go through an identity crisis (Erikson, 1972) breaking free from their parents to identify with groups other than their family. Combining two fields, we approached expatriates and teenagers differently:

We adopted the comprehensive approach (Charmillot and Seferdjelil, 2002) to analyze teenagers' experiences. Our objective was to investigate how geographically itinerant young people define themselves and how intersecting elements appear in the way they describe their nomadic identity. This methodology aims to define the meaning they give to their actions and the sense they make of their situation. The comprehensive approach conceives the individual as a social actor, not merely a passive agent. This fits perfectly with our objective to understand the development of nomadic identities, starting from the individual's social practices.

Our first sample consisted of only five teenagers. This was a deliberate decision because our purpose is to obtain deep insights into cultural meaning-making by focusing on a few specific cases rather than generalizing our results. For our second sample we chose expatriates who were adjusting to the multicultural environment of Luxembourg; we had privileged access to these data, as the first author used to be in charge of international mobility in an audit firm in Luxembourg. For confidentiality reasons we called the organization Diversaudit. We use the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to investigate the adjustment ten expatriates made to living in to Luxembourg, looking for the emergence of intersecting elements in the construction of individuals' nomadic identities (Tables I and II).

The originality of this work lies in the pooling of two separate searches: one in the field of management science, the other in developmental sociocultural psychology. During informal discussions we found similarities between our two samples of individuals who had developed a nomadic identity. We first reviewed our interview transcripts to find out if some of our interviewees had "nomadic identities". Our starting point was to analyze the influence of having lived in different countries and social background on the development of individual identities. We looked at similarities and differences between these profiles to characterize their specificities, then attempted to understand the impact of context on the possible development of such identities using a multilevel approach based on intersectionality (Winker and Degele, 2011). We focus on a macro-level influence of social environment and a meso-level influence of organizational environment on the micro-level

| Data collection First name | Semi-structured interviews with five young in geographical itinerancies having lived in at least three countries due to their parents' occupational activities | | | |
| | Nationality | Age | Parents' occupation | Number of previous host countries | Gender |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Isabelle | French | 17 | Diplomacy | 6 | Female |
| Louis | French | 17 | Manager in a multinational | 5 | Male |
| Matthieu | French | 17 | Expatriates in non-governmental organization | 4 | Male |
| Nesrine | Tunisian | 16 | Diplomacy | 6 | Female |
| Zoe | Swiss and Portuguese | 17 | Diplomacy | 6 | Female |

Table I.
Data collection with young in geographical itinerancies

| Semi-structured interviews with ten international business people in a Big Four in Luxembourg settled in the country between three and five years | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Data collection First name | Nationality | Hierarchical level in the organization | Motivation for expatriation | Previous international experience | Gender | Age |
| Jamy | Filipinos | Senior auditor | Improving financial situation | No | Female | 30 |
| Ramphul | Mauritian | Assistant manager audit | Improving financial situation | No | Male | 32 |
| Eva | German | Assistant auditor | Gaining international experience | No | Female | 28 |
| Shauna | American | Senior auditor | Gaining international experience | No | Female | 27 |
| Muhammad | Pakistani | Senior auditor | Improving financial experience | Yes Dubaï | Male | 33 |
| Gregory | American | Senior manager | Gaining more international experience | Yes Amsterdam | Male | 38 |
| Souleymane | Ivorian | Manager | Gaining more international experience | Yes Paris | Male | 35 |
| Kuzman | Bulgarian | Senior auditor | Gaining more international experience | Yes Paris | Male | 33 |
| Natasha | Russian/ French married to a French | Senior manager | Living in an international place similar to what she experienced | Yes France, Germany, Japan, USA | Female | 39 |
| Stéphane | French | Human resources manager | Living in an international place similar to what he experienced | Yes Cameroun, Canada, USA | Male | 40 |

**Table II.**
Data collection with
business people in
Luxembourg

of identity construction. Our aim was to identify concrete power relations and to analyze their interrelatedness between different levels. We analysed separately data on expatriates and geographically itinerant young people, drawing on similarities and differences to identify subsequently three different types of identity.

## 4. Findings
The comparison of our separate analyses allowed the emergence of three axes that account for complex nomadic identities: distance from a culture, self-perception and group identification and power relations resulting from social structure. Three different expressions of nomadic identities also emerged:

(1) Cosmopolitan identity: individuals highlight supranational identity references. In this sense, the person is defined as someone who could feel at home anywhere.

(2) Transnational identity: individuals incorporate cultural referents from both their home and host countries. Self-presentation varies with contexts. Their references are transnational in the sense that they are actualized differently in different cultural environments.

(3) Anchor identity: individuals define themselves primarily by using the cultural references of their home country. In the host country, they tend to cluster with people from similar cultural backgrounds, enabling them to maintain their culture of origin.

Next, we analyze cases from both studies to highlight the different expressions of these nomadic identities.

### 4.1 Cosmopolitan identity

*4.1.1 The teenage perspective: Nesrine and Zoé[1].* We identified Nesrine, a young Tunisian girl, and Zoé, a young Swiss-Portuguese girl, as cosmopolitans. Indeed they both identify themselves as international, take pride in their status and enjoy being in their international circle; they express the fact that being easily uprooted enables them to adapt anywhere. However, this international identification process differs slightly between the girls. Nesrine likes to remain with people from the same social background as her own:

> I'm much more international [than Tunisian], I know two languages and I speak them well: French and English […] I guess they are better than my Arabic. I think that the look is also important, that's so in my school, but in Tunisia, it's not as important.

Nesrine distances herself strongly from the Tunisians of Tunisia, with whom she does not share the same values. Instead she defines herself as an "international Arab" and identifies with that group at school. For her mother, this attachment is overrated. Nesrine uses the term "developed culture" to talk about international culture, as opposed to the more traditional Tunisian culture. One of the characteristics of cosmopolitan identity is the absence of roots, or homeland and simultaneous identification with international categories. Zoé, on the contrary, professes that she feels at home everywhere:

> I'm half-Swiss, half-Portuguese. I don't define myself as Swiss or Portuguese. I'm half-half. I'm both of them, a mix, it's something different.

Without comparing the different countries in which she has lived, Zoé sees each one as an opportunity to learn from other cultures. She identifies herself with other travellers, expatriates and international communities. Zoé insisted on the necessity to adapt to the new environment where one lives:

> It's important to adapt to the people of your new country, not be afraid of new cultures, not to despise them, it's an adventure, you can learn a lot.

Nesrine enjoys being at an international school and making friends with other international students; she was made welcome by the other students and had not had any problems adapting. Zoé asked to attend a French school, as she had particularly enjoyed this language during her stay in Switzerland. Both know that they will not stay long in one place. Although Zoé makes efforts to adapt to the different countries in which she finds herself, neither girl feels the need to invest time in building relationships with locals, and both find it easier to stay within the international community.

*4.1.2 The adult perspective: Natasha and Stéphane.* Natasha and Stéphane are also cosmopolitans. They have developed a strong ability to distance themselves from their own culture. When asked, both struggled to make comparisons between their home country and the country in which they were currently living. During the interview neither referred to their host country. They take obvious pride in not being attached to one particular culture.

Both have developed relationships within the international community rather than with their compatriots. They enjoy their international network and do not see any point in developing relationships with locals.

They identify themselves with this international community and have developed the feeling that they belong to a privileged group that is in some respects superior to others, because of their ability to adapt to any culture, thanks to their international experience. Like the teenagers they tend to stick with their own circle. Natasha admits that most of her friends are colleagues:

It's pleasant, the population at Diversaudit is relatively young and bright.

Like the teenagers, Natasha and Stéphane's itinerary began in childhood. They enjoy a high level of financial resources, which is typical for their group of expatriates working in the financial sector at the managerial level. Because they both have European passports they did not encounter problems obtaining visas or work permits.

Referring to their social environment, Stéphane and Natasha both noticed the locals' relative coldness towards foreigners; however, the exceptional welcome they received within the international community largely compensated for this. They are not concerned about it because their international network means they have no need to make this kind of adaptation.

We should note here the importance of spoken language in determining links (or otherwise) with locals. French, German and Luxembourgish are the official languages of the Grand Duchy and most native Luxembourgers speak English, so foreigners have no need to learn the local language to adjust. Many foreigners claim that this accounts for the few relationships they have with locals. Indeed, international executives perceive Luxembourgers as protective of their own circles and insist they meet a strong language barrier. Native Luxembourgers' notable linguistic skills allow them to switch easily from one language to another; internationals feel that they resort to their own language for the explicit purpose of excluding them. While speaking Luxembourgish may have political or symbolic significance (Lüdi, 2012; Lauring and Selmer, 2011), most Luxembourgers use their native language when they want to express things more casually.

In return, locals interpret internationals' failure to learn Luxembourgish as disdainful indifference towards them (Gardner, 1985). Thus, in Luxembourg most international executives gravitate towards the international community; some even limit their contacts to the small circle of their national community. Their adjustment to this environment is relatively quick and easy, but delays their adjustment to interaction with the locals. We contend that the lack of necessity for international executives to learn Luxembourgish prevents them from identifying with the locals.

Concerning the organizational context, following the integration of international executives was part of the first author's job when she managed international mobility at Diversaudit. Stéphane and Natasha both demonstrated exceptional performance with the best rating, according to Diversaudit's measures; they were well integrated and their ability to adapt enabled them to be very effective in the multicultural teams they joined.

### 4.2 Transnational identity
*4.2.1 The teenage perspective: Isabelle and Louis.* Louis and Isabelle, both French and 17, develop a transnational identity. While they distance themselves from their own culture, it remains their frame of reference. They are interested in the culture and inhabitants of the country in which they live. Isabelle, for instance, remains close to the nanny she had in Brazil and to the country. Louis shows a similar interest in the people of the African country in which he lived: "They were always there, always smiling in spite of their poverty and their illnesses. My African nanny was great".

Both of these teenagers identify themselves strongly with their country or even region of origin, while also identifying with their host culture or the international community. Louis strongly identifies himself with his mother's region, the Basque country, although he has never lived there. However he does not identify himself at all with his French father's Savoy region. At the same time, he sees himself as just as much African, although he is not of African descent:

> When people ask me where I come from, I say from the Basque country, I'm Basque. So there it is. But as to being African, I think it when people talk to me about Africa.

His stay in Africa had a real impact on Louis, even if that impact remains symbolic, or idealized. Nevertheless, it is a hidden definition of his self. Part of him identifies with the continent in which he grew up and to which he accords major importance.

Isabelle goes through the same process of identification. She defines herself as French precisely because she lives abroad, yet when she is in France she identifies with the international community and she feels different from other French people who have not had the experience of living abroad. Context thus influences the way in which individuals perceive themselves; they will define themselves differently, according to the place in which they find themselves. Abroad, where Isabelle is in a minority group, her French identity fits her. But in France she no longer belongs to a minority, so she also identifies herself with the expatriate community.

Louis and Isabelle adapted well to their schools and received warm welcomes. We noted that they had not always attended French schools but that had not been a problem for them. For instance, in France, Louis was in a French high school in an educational priority zone in a difficult neighborhood with problems but this had not prevented him from making good friends and adjusting well. In fact, he remained in contact with some of them.

Louis and Isabelle come from a financially privileged group, but we found no strong feeling of superiority towards locals in their discourse; they do not restrict themselves to the same circle and show some kind of empathy towards locals. They adapted more to the cultural environment of their host country than the other teenagers, even though they remained with expatriates in some environments for security reasons.

*4.2.2 The adult perspective: Eva, Shauna, Souleymane, Greg and Kuzman.* We designated Eva, Shauna, Souleymane, Greg and Kuzman as transnationals. They are willing to adapt to Luxembourg, they enjoy the multicultural environment and succeed in integrating, yet they have not reached detachment towards their home culture and demonstrate less self-confidence than the cosmopolitans. They have also had less extensive international experience than Natasha and Stéphane.

Our interviewees still use their culture of origin as scheme of references while recognizing cultural differences. For example, Souleymane, from Ivory Coast, worked in France for two years before joining Diversaudit Luxembourg. He is satisfied with the welcome he received from his colleagues in France and Luxembourg, but he cannot help comparing life outside the professional context with his home country:

> I was frustrated by the reaction of people outside the work environment. In Ivory Coast they are more friendly, more open; not the same especially in France.

The whole group is very enthusiastic about Luxembourg international community and has developed contacts within it. Souleymane shares his satisfaction:

> The best in Luxembourg is to meet people from different countries. It brings me a new view of the world, you don't focus on the view of your country, you change your mind in a good way.

We noticed similar identity changes among the members of this group. They identify themselves primarily with their country of origin; however, they have observed and learned how to adapt to their host environment and identify with the international community. Unlike the group having develop cosmopolitan identities, appreciating the multicultural environment does not lead these nomadic individuals to develop a feeling of superiority towards locals or people with less international experience. Eva, for instance, is dating a Luxembourgish man and has met many locals through this contact. Souleymane decided to learn Luxembourgish to develop more contact with locals.

The members of this group adjust well professionally, stressing the ease with which they join international teams. Shauna is enthusiastic about her multicultural team:

> I did not come across anyone not interested in my experience, it was very easy to get on with people in that team, you did not feel like an outsider.

Our five international executives were indeed well integrated in their teams. They had received a warm welcome and a positive attitude from their colleagues and performed well – even exceptionally in the cases of Souleymane and Kuzman, according to Diversaudit ratings.

All five appreciate the social environment of Luxembourg and have not come across major issues, despite the relative coldness of locals towards foreigners. All originate from the middle class in their home countries, except Souleymane who comes from a wealthy business family in Ivory Coast.

### 4.3 Anchor identity

*4.3.1 The teenage perspective: Matthieu.* Matthieu was living in New Delhi at the time of the interview. He had not wanted to follow his parents to India, 18 months before taking his baccalaureate, and had actually asked to be allowed to remain in Bordeaux with his grandparents and friends, but his parents had refused. He had difficulties distancing himself from his cultural frame of reference. He remarked:

> We are lucky to be French, we don't live like Indians.

He did not choose this international experience and did not strive to empathize with his host environment. Neither did he identify himself with an expatriate in-group. On the contrary, Matthieu used strong national identity elements to define himself and kept close links with French friends in France and in India.

In spite of his strong attachment to France, he recognized that he had been made welcome at his French school in New Delhi, even reassuring other expatriates, "Don't be too stressed, we generally receive a good welcome". He had a small group of French friends and was well integrated.

His experience was positive in the social context as well. Although Mathieu had little contact with Indians, he did not feel any animosity from locals and did not mention encountering any problems. Matthieu comes from a less financially privileged environment than the other teenagers we interviewed. For example, his parents had

had to organize their move themselves. In his discourse Matthieu pitied Indians and recognized that he was privileged but we did not detect any feeling of superiority towards others.

*4.3.2 The adult perspective: Jamy, Ramphul and Muhammad.* The adult having developed anchor identities - Jamy, Muhammad and Ramphul – all come from developing countries and ethnic minorities and have encountered difficulties in adjusting to Luxembourg, professionally and socially. We noticed that they were overwhelmed by cultural differences and failed to distance themselves from their own culture. Jamy told us:

> In the Philippines although you work a lot, it is easier to work with people […] sometimes here it's different from the Philippines, Europeans have different ways of doing things.

All of them had thought about going back to their countries but ultimately stayed. They tended to get together with compatriots within the firm and in the social environment.

All three had had some tough social experiences and difficulties with the administration to obtain their visas. Al Ariss and Özbilgin (2010) confirm this tendency with French administration.

They had encountered problems in the organizational context as well, although they did not express this during their interviews. Only Jamy, who became a friend of first author, confessed to having had bad experiences. This attitude can be explained in terms of their cultural background and the desire not to lose face, linked to a collectivist approach (Hofstede, 2003). But following their integration from a professional perspective, we noticed that they struggled during their early days at Diversaudit. Ramphul and Muhammad had difficulty integrating in teams; audit managers did not want to include them, on the pretext that they did not understand their English and had strange ways of working. The situation improved but was not perfect; they continued to suffer from prejudice in the firm and did not perform very well, according to Diversaudit ratings.

In terms of their social background, Jamy, Ramphul and Muhammad belong a privileged group in their countries; they are qualified auditors, are better educated and have a higher income than most of their compatriots. Yet their major concern when coming to Luxembourg was to improve their financial situation: all three come from developing countries and suffered from prejudices linked to this identification in Luxembourg. Belonging to an ethnic minority affected their interrelation with the environment and therefore the expression of their identity while confronted with new cultures.

## 5. Discussion
Comparing the experiences of international executives and geographically itinerant teenagers brings to light significant differences between individuals from developed and developing countries. Social interaction plays a key role in respondents' identity construction. They develop their identities differently through their international experiences in confronting new cultures,' however, this is always through interaction with their environment and according to the role and the status ascribed to them within it. Their practices fit the concept of "doing culture", accounting for the social construction of identity. Teenagers and expatriates "experience the world" through the frames of reference of dominant groups, producing a pattern of thought and behaviour

that reproduces social inequalities. This power relation dynamic strongly influences our respondents' identity construction. They define themselves through their affiliation to specific in-groups, according to their status in society, while differentiating themselves from their out-groups in a social identification process (Tafjel, 1982).

At a macro level we noticed that international individuals from developed countries seem to join their counterparts in an international network, sharing an international culture reserved to a small group of privileged people, whereas expatriates coming from developing countries feel excluded from this network. To differentiate between developed and developing countries we refer to the Human Development Index from the United Nations Development Program. This index ranks each country level of development based on three categories of development indicators: income, health and education. Post-colonial theories (Prasad, 2006) explain how historical conflicts still impact relations between individuals from the west and those from other countries today. Prasad (2006) maintained that post-colonialism significantly shaped the western perception of otherness, and therefore the relations between home and host countries matter significantly in the way international individuals develop identification. We noticed that individuals who had developed cosmopolitan identities recognized themselves in the global culture of their international community and felt like citizens of the world, with the exception of Nesrine. Indeed the young Tunisian defines herself as an "international Arab". She does not identify with western values because her frame of reference is shaped by the post-colonial dynamic of west and non-west.

At the meso level (school for the teenagers and the organization for the adults), individuals are perceived more positively when they come from dominant countries that impose their own values, experiences and perspectives as normative and universal. In the French oil industry, Pierre (2003) observes two classes of expatriates: those from developing countries, who enjoy less prestige than the Americans and Europeans who make up the other class, forming some kind of international aristocracy. Indeed, we noticed how difficult it was for expatriates from developing countries to adjust to a multinational context in Luxembourg, and how negatively they were perceived by their colleagues because they did not have the "right" accent or the same cultural standards. Tung (1993) suggests that existing principles of organization and management that were developed for workforces consisting predominantly of white males may not be applicable to a diverse workforce. Fitzsimmons *et al.* (2012) show how multicultural individuals belonging to this privilege international community meet the expectations of global organizations.

Thus the cultural imperialism that applies within most multinational organizations makes identification with the organizational culture more challenging for international individuals from ethnic minorities than for the others.

History has produced a dynamic of power relations at the macro level of society, in which post-colonial relationships shape interactions between the west and other countries. This inevitably influences the meso level of international schools and organizations, within which the cultural frame of reference is imposed by dominant western groups. Such interactions inexorably affect individuals' identity construction at the micro level by determining possible in-groups of social identification (Tafjel, 1982), for both expatriate executives and geographically itinerant young people who have lived in different cultures.

These multilevel interactions generate three different kinds of nomadic identity. The individuals in our study who have developed a cosmopolitan identity come mainly from the dominant western group; all of them belong to financially privileged groups

and started their geographical itinerary early in life. Power relations at the macro level of society favour them, and the organizations or the school they join fits perfectly to their dominant cultural frame of reference. They therefore naturally identify with an international community in which they recognize themselves totally - and they find the same international community in whatever the country they live. Willing to remain within their social circle, they limit their involvement with locals. Their adaptation to the culture of their host country appears ideal. However, we suggest that they identify with the international community that is representative of their dominant values and build this identification in opposition to locals, showing limited interest in them and their culture. Cosmopolitans can even develop a feeling of superiority towards locals and local society in general. These identities correspond to the international aristocracy denounced by Wagner (1998) or Robinson and Harris (2000) in their definition of a global ruling class. Their wider geographical experience within a privileged circle is accompanied by narrow acceptance of social difference.

The individuals in our study who have developed a transnational identity also belong to the western dominant class, with the exception of Souleymane who nevertheless comes from a highly privileged social class in Ivory Coast. However, as a group they are financially less privileged. The expatriates in particular had not started their international experiences early in life; for some it was even their first time abroad. We noted that they had not developed the same awareness of social distinction (Daloz, 2013) in their discourse as the cosmopolitans. Power relations at the macro level favour transnationals as well, but to a lesser degree than the cosmopolitans. They do not automatically recognize themselves as members of the "global ruling class" of the international community. This situation shapes their experience at the meso level within organizations or at school. Although adults and teenagers alike found them favourable environments, their adaptation was not automatic; they needed to adapt, and made an effort to understand the cultural frame of reference of their host country. They were interested in the locals and met them, and the teenagers were sometimes registered in local schools. This situation leads these individuals to a situation of "inbetweeness" (Adler, 1977) at the micro level. They still define themselves through their home culture and identify themselves with this in-group but simultaneously identify with the culture of their host country. The favourable environment perceived at the social and organizational level motivates their openness to identifying with the host culture.

The expatriates in our study who developed an anchor identity all came from ethnic minorities and had left their country mainly to improve their financial situation. This was not the case for the sole teenager, who, like the transnationals, came from a relatively privileged social class. However, in common with the expatriates his international experience was not a personal choice; Matthieu wanted to remain in France with his grandparents and friends and his parents had refused to allow him to do so. The anchor expatriates were not especially attracted by an international experience but saw it as a means to improve their financial situation.

The context was far less favourable to these expatriates from non-western countries. They did not recognize themselves in the norms of the social structures in which they were embedded, and their adjustment to their host environment was challenging. Their experience was similar in the host organization, where they faced a radically different cultural frame of reference and a negative perception from their western colleagues, who made no efforts to understand them. Indeed, individuals from ethnic groups whose language, and physical and cultural traits are distinct from the dominant

group will often be excluded by others (Oyserman and Markus, 1993). Here we observe a vicious circle that explains why it is a challenge for people from groups that are discriminated against to distance themselves from their home culture. At the micro level this situation leads to reinforcement of their identification with their country and culture of origin. They cannot identify with a western in-group that dominates and in some ways rejects them. The only way to make this tough situation bearable is to overstate their culture and remain in the comfort zone of their national group. For the teenager Matthieu, the identification process worked the other way round. He did not want to identify with locals from a country in which he had not chosen to live, but at the same time he did not look for contacts within the international community. His anchor identity was expressed for different contextual reasons than those of the expatriates.

Cosmopolitan, transnational and anchor identities are socially constructed. Having experienced different cultures, teenagers and expatriates are "doing culture and identity" through their interactions with others in society, within the organization and at school. They are guided in this process by the dominant group's frame of references, with which they identify themselves or not. Figure 1 sums up the multilevel influences shaping individuals' nomadic identity construction.

## 6. Conclusion
We analyzed the underexplored intersection between cultural context and social status within society and its effects on the development of nomadic individuals. In doing so we went beyond the mainstream approach that focuses on national culture to understand the complex identity development of people who have lived in different cultures.

Using the concept of intersectionality, we show that power relations at the macro level of society lead to cultural imperialism at the meso level of organizations, thus shaping the identity construction of the individual (micro level).

Focusing on the development of identity in different cultural contexts, and at two different life stages (teenager and adult professional), we differentiate three types of nomadic identity. Our research highlights that the specificities and affiliations of each individual need to be taken into account to understand the way in which power relations shape individuals' identification processes with in-groups and delineation from out-groups. This complex social identification process accounts for the development of different kinds of nomadic identity.

While it was an asset to this subject, our interdisciplinary approach also constitutes a limit. Indeed we had to conciliate two different methodologies: the ways we questioned our respondents differed, in that geographically itinerant teenagers where
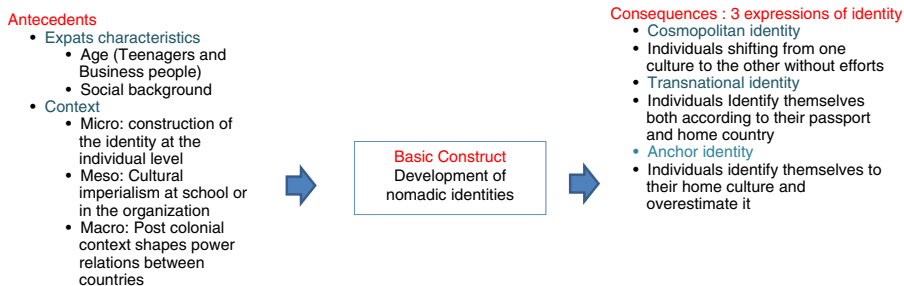


Figure 1.
The development of
nomadic identities

asked about their self-representation while the executives were asked more about their adjustment. Yet our different samples both mentioned the same issues, especially group affiliations. We also chose a qualitative approach to develop deep insights into the construction of nomadic identities, so focusing on a limited number of cases our results remain closely linked to the specific experiences of our respondents. As to practical implications, our findings suggest that diversity policies within organization should strive to avoid cultural imperialism. Moreover a better understanding of the development of nomadic identities could lead to a better understanding of expatriates' adjustment according to their status in the dynamic of power relations. A future avenue for research could be to analyse the intersection between cultural context and social status with other characteristics that play a role in the construction of identity, such as gender or age.

### Note

1. Pseudonyms have been used throughout.

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