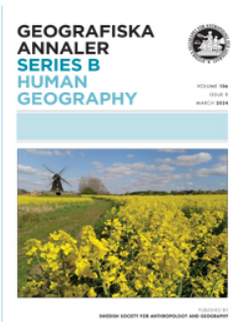

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# Travelling in time, between places, and jobs: exploring temporal dimensions of academics' international trajectories

Vera Spangler, Lene Møller Madsen & Hanne Kirstine Adriansen

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Travelling in time, between places, and jobs: exploring temporal dimensions of academics' international trajectories

Vera Spangler [a], Lene Møller Madsen [b] and Hanne Kirstine Adriansen [c]

[a]Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK; [b]Department of Science Education, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark; [c]Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Copenhagen, Denmark

**ABSTRACT**

Based on the assumption that mobility has both spatial and temporal dimensions, the aim of this paper is to bring forth the often-neglected temporal dimensions of international academic mobility. We explore how time and temporality plays a role in the decisions and lived lives of international academics by analysing their experiences and mobility trajectories. We do so by drawing on qualitative interviews with 21 international academics differing in age, nationality, and career level employed at three Danish universities. The analysis shows that for many of our participants, mobility had little to do with internationalisation of higher education rationales. Rather their mobility rationales were embedded in personal needs and wants, often related to securing permanence for the less privileged and related to experiences and adventure for the privileged. By unfolding the stories about which decisions, coincidence, and sacrifices are part of academic mobile life, we show how citizenship-based hierarchies lead to spatial and temporal inequalities. The paper concludes that for the international academics, places are positioned not only geographically but also temporally in hierarchical ways and that the individual mobility trajectories are differently entangled in a global-temporal orientation.

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## Introduction

Over the past three decades, internationalisation has developed as a pivotal objective within many higher education institutions' strategic plans (Lee 2021). Central to internationalisation is mobility – encompassing the movement of students, academics, and knowledge (Adriansen et al. 2019). In this paper, we focus on academic mobility, increasingly ingrained within academic career paths and as delineated in academic and policy discourses, considered essential for a successful research career (Bilecen and Van Mol 2017; Leemann 2010). In this context, mobility is perceived as an invaluable asset inherently beneficial to individuals (Teichler 2015). Professional stays abroad can function as a mark of distinction (Bourdieu 1990) or valuable 'international capital' (Leemann 2010) for individuals, while institutions' capacity to attract international staff is regarded as a hallmark of quality, contributing to university rankings (Teichler 2015; Uvalić-Trumbić 2022). The drivers and characteristics of international academic mobility vary and are often contingent upon factors such as age, ethnicity, gender, discipline, or socio-economic status (Morley et al. 2018). While some academics move once and settle in one new country, others travel with no fixity. Defining the group of 'international academics' poses challenges due to the differences in motives, modes of mobility, and lengths of stay amongst them (Yudkevich, Altbach, and Rumbley 2016). This diversity is mirrored

**CONTACT** Hanne Kirstine Adriansen hka@edu.au.dk Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark

in the various terms used to refer to them in the literature, such as mobile academics, foreign academics, academic migrants, or immigrant academics (Rao et al. 2019). Nevertheless, in the context of internationalisation research and policy, mobile academics are rarely characterised as migrants, and there is generally only limited engagement with migration research.

Recent years have seen a focus on time and temporality in migration research in order to produce a fuller understanding of mobility as a process with important temporal dimensions (Gabaccia 2014; Triandafyllidou 2022). Visa schemes, for instance, are examined to unpack intended and unintended consequences for mobile subjects including their experiences of temporal control, waiting and standing still, permanence or temporariness (e.g. Brun 2015; Robertson 2014). Also, migrants' perception of 'local time' is analysed to include the spatio-temporal dynamics inherent in mobility (Robertson 2021). Based on the assumption that mobility has both spatial and temporal dimensions, the aim of this paper is to bring the often-neglected temporal dimensions of international academic mobility to the forefront and explore how time and temporality plays a role in the lived lives of international academics and show how the experience of time is related to global hierarchies. We do so by analysing international academics' mobility trajectories teasing out differences in their (temporal) constraints or privileges and their geographical patterns. We draw on qualitative interview material with 21 international academics differing in age, nationality, and career level (post-docs, assistant, associate, and full professor) employed at three Danish universities. Hence, the analysis is situated in Danish higher education thereby contributing to the sparse literature on academic mobility beyond the hegemonic Anglo-American academy. Our participants can be categorised as elite knowledge workers who circulate through urban landscapes. Some of them, however, also fall in the category of highly skilled migrants making their way often through several stops from the Global South to the Global North. As we will see, our participants both represent models of one-way mobility, settlement and integration in a new country, and models of circular, transnational and the temporal fluid subjectivities. Thus, they cover broader categories than often included in migration research. According to Robertson (2014, 1917), '*it is the temporal dimension, rather than the spatial, that distinguishes migration from other forms of cross-border mobility*'. But, what about international academic mobility – which role does the temporal dimension play in this type of cross-border mobility? The paper seeks to answer this and thus shows the multiplex role time plays in academic mobility decisions.

For some years now, there is growing concern that prevailing internationalisation practices and mainstream policies reproduce global inequalities and accentuate existing uneven relations and geographies (Stein et al. 2016; Stein 2019; Unterhalter and Carpentier 2010). Playing into this are also, the different regional and national arrangements affecting academics' decision for mobility (e.g. free movement between EU countries). Going abroad does not always represent a favourable career prospect but constitutes for some rather a necessity due to, for instance, limited job opportunities (Ackers 2008; Van Der Wende 2015). Extant research presents personal-level perspectives of international academics on intricate aspects including the challenges of adapting to a new academic environment and how such adjustments affect their teaching, research, experiences, and professional identity (Balasooriya et al. 2014; Hosein et al. 2018; Pherali 2012; Saltmarsh and Swirski 2010; Van Noorden 2012). This paper is inspired by these critical internationalisation studies that, according to Stein (2019, 1773), '*problematize the overwhelmingly positive and depoliticized approaches to internationalization that tend to dominate in universities*'. Some but not all critical internationalisation scholars use decolonial frameworks in their analyses of internationalisation policies (e.g. Shahjahan 2016; Stein et al. 2016). Scholars within this field examine a wide range of topics, for instance the meaning of the term 'international' within international student mobility (Brooks and Waters 2022; Adriansen et al. 2023), the reproduction of global inequalities through internationalisation policies (Unterhalter and Carpentier 2010), and the environmental costs of international mobility (Shields 2019). Studies, particularly in the field of academic mobility applying a temporal lens to the mobile trajectories of staff travelling in time and across space, are yet rather limited. This paper thus introduces a temporal dimension to critical internationalisation

studies by bringing forth the individual voices of internationally mobile academics, unfolding their stories about which decisions, coincidence, and sacrifices are part and parcel of their mobile life and how time plays into that.

First, we outline our conceptual understanding of temporality in relation to mobility, wherein we further situate our approach in existing studies of time and temporality in academia. Then, we take a closer look at Danish higher education in the context of the European Union (EU) and outline the methodology. In the first analysis, we explore how participants are 'living the mobility', where we also show how authoritative rules and restrictions can impact the participants' possibilities for mobility, and how this can create both spatial and temporal unevenness amongst them. In the second analysis, we investigate 'the time of place' by analysing temporal distinctions and possibilities the participants ascribe to Denmark (and other places), and how these play into their choices of where and when to move. We end with a discussion and some concluding remarks.

## A temporal perspective on the study of international academic mobility

This paper argues that mobility not only takes place in space but also in time, and that academic mobility thereby has temporal dimensions. Studies of time have a long tradition in the field of geography, especially since the Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand's seminal work (e.g. Hägerstrand 1970), which has inspired studies e.g. of young Swedes' transnational mobility biographies (Frändberg 2008) and of mobility practices of urban youth (Thulin and Vilhelmson 2012). These studies apply a quantitative and strong visual approach to time and space, where a person's path can be mapped in a time–space cube. Like space, time can be understood in multiple ways. One common way to understand time is as quantitative time, as linear, or series of predictable pasts, presents, and futures, as something that can be measured, (Kang 2018). Another way relates to understanding time as lived time, charged with meanings, negotiated continuously by people (Cheng 2014). We see time not only as what we can measure and observe on a clock or a calendar, but also as something personal, individual, as a life history and a life course. The latter is explored in the book *TimeSpace: Geographies of temporality* (May and Thrift 2001), where different chapters explore how time and space are mutually co-constituted. Our exploration of time, mobility, and place is in line with this understanding. Following Sharma (2014), we understand temporality, like spatiality, as relational and transformed by mobilities between places (Robertson 2021).

Several scholars have explored academics' temporal experiences. Wang (2020) and Guzman-Valenzuela and Barnett (2013) offer studies of temporality as experienced by academics in the Global South. Shahjahan, Niloy, and Ema (2022) contribute the concept 'Shomoyscapes' to capture how faculty experience and contest time in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Most research, however, focuses on universities in the Global North. Gibbs et al. (2014), for instance, provide comprehensive insight to time and temporality in university life in their edited book *Universities in the Flux of Time*, while other studies have examined time and shame in the neoliberal academy (Shahjahan 2020), the time-structure typical of capitalist industry as fatal to thought-time and free work activity (Noonan 2014), or the accelerated academic life and associated psychosocial risks (Conesa and Gonzalez 2018). We add to these studies of academics' temporal experiences by analysing international academics' mobility from a temporal perspective, highlighting the role of time in relation to mobility trajectories, including particularly the choice of destinations, and the (re)production of geographical hierarchies.

Both migration and refugee research abound with studies of time and temporality (e.g. Baas and Yeoh 2018; Brun 2015; Griffiths 2014) highlighting temporal uncertainty and the role of waiting for this vulnerable group. By being academics, our participants belong to the more privileged of migrants, and we draw primarily on studies of highly skilled migrants (e.g. Robertson 2021). The first part of our analysis explores 'living the mobility' wherein we use the concept 'temporal control' (Baas and Yeoh 2018) to explore the role of visa regimes and EU citizenship in the role of (im)mobility and experiences of being stuck in time and staying in place. From this, we move on to

discussing 'permanence' (Robertson 2014), which in the migration literature usually relates to permanent residence and/or citizenship. Amongst academics, however, permanence is (also) related to the privilege of a permanent position, tenure or an associate professor or full professor position. For some international academics, permanence relates to both the position and the visa scheme, where the former influences on the latter. By including the differences between EU and non-EU citizens, we see how inequality also has temporal aspects. This also shows the way some academics are 'trans-temporal', a concept coined by Baas and Yeoh (2018) to show the difficulties of working within one time zone and having families and social relations in another time zone.

From analysing temporal aspects of 'living the mobility', we then turn to 'the time of place' where we analyse temporality in the direction of mobility. Our analysis is based on the idea that spaces have temporal dimensions, we look at these at two scales. First, we employ 'local time' (Robertson 2021) to denote how places are constituted through and by different forms of time that are part and parcel of international academics' quotidian mobility experiences. This includes local rhythms such as the working hours per week, length of holidays, and the whole work-life-balance and social infrastructure of a welfare state like the Danish one. Like Shahjahan, Niloy, and Ema (2022, 248), we do this to highlight '*how life 'outside the academy' spills over into working 'inside the academy', rather than vice versa*'. From these studies and concepts of temporality in migration studies, we turn our attention to how researchers have studied academic mobility in geography. Interestingly, Wallerstein's (2007) world system theory[1] has inspired many (e.g. Chankseliani 2016; Kurek-Ochmańska and Luczaj 2021; Lee and Kuzhabekova 2018; Mulvey 2021), who use the model to show the geographical hierarchies that international academic and student mobilities are embedded within and reproduce. Through its idea about development, there is an implicit focus on time in Wallerstein's model in the sense that the core is most developed and modern, while the periphery is less developed and more traditional. As the research mentioned above, we find this hierarchical temporal geography useful in understanding directions of academic mobility, and how the participants themselves talk about the mobility as not only a spatial endeavour, but also one entailing temporal dimensions. However, we also show how core–periphery regions cannot be universally defined but need to be contextualised. We use the concept 'temporal distinctions' to denote how our participants place different countries in a temporal hierarchy that may seem linear as 'past-present-future', but which turn out to be more complex.

## Context and methodology

Since the 1990s, international mobility of academics has increased significantly (Kim 2009); especially within Europe due to EU policies designed to encourage academic and student mobility, because inter-regional mobility is important for the Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area (Bergan and Deca 2018). In a European context, mobility patterns have been from less affluent to richer countries, and the majority of academic mobility has tended to be from east to west, wherein Germany in particular has high shares of scholars from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Bauder, Lujan, and Hannan 2018). Between 2000 and 2019, Danish universities experienced a steady increase in the numbers of international students and particularly junior researchers, who were attracted by the reputable working conditions for PhD students (Tange and Jæger 2021). Nevertheless, the UK (and globally the USA) still attracts disproportional large flows of international scholars and students (Lee 2021). Across Europe, patterns of academic mobility are uneven and complex, and some countries, notably Anglophone states, have thus had the effect to uphold and reproduce geographical power inequalities (Brooks 2018).

According to EU policies, all EU citizens living in a particular EU member-state are entitled to the same rights to social benefits within that state as soon as they are paying taxes there (Tange and Jæger 2021). The joint rights for all EU citizens also have bearings for how we understand the group of international academics at Danish universities. Issues such of visas, permanent residence, and access to bringing your spouse are virtually non-existent for EU-citizens, because all EU citizens

have (almost) the same rights within all EU countries (yet see Schittenhelm 2022; Mavroudi and Warren 2013). Denmark has eight universities, a number of university colleges, and other higher education institutions. Universities are the main research institutions and our concern here. Even though Denmark is part of the affluent Global North, it is not a primary destination when it comes to internationalisation; this is in part due to language as few people beyond the realm of the Danish monarchy speak Danish. There are quite a few higher education programmes taught in English, yet primarily master programmes in STEM disciplines.

This paper is part of a larger research project[2] called Geographies of Internationalisation concerning internationalisation in Danish higher education. An interdisciplinary team of two geographers and one anthropologist with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and 'in/outsider positionalities' (see Adriansen and Madsen 2009) have conducted the research and written the paper together. We conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with international academics employed at three Danish universities at the time of the interview (2020–2022). The participants are all foreign-born. To ensure confidentiality, we use pseudonyms, may have changed their gender, and any specific place names throughout the paper (including country of origin). In order to trace the spatial movement and patterns, we have listed the participants by 'country of origin' in Table 1 and shown their previous academic employment by region. Please note that for the purpose of anonymising participants' mobility trajectories we have used countries with similar socio-economic and cultural characteristics in the anonymization process, which still allow the spatial and temporal analysis.

Eight interviews were conducted online due to Covid-restrictions, while 13 took place in person. The online interviews were carried out by one of us, while the other interviews were conducted

**Table 1.** This shows participants, their country of origin, and regions where they may have had academic employment prior to their position in Denmark. Please note that country of origin may have been changed to another country within the region with same socio-economic and cultural characteristics to ensure anonymity.

| Participant | Career level when moving to Denmark (when interviewed) | Country of origin | Europe or outside | Previous academic employment by region before Denmark, not including research visits |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abyasa | Assistant Professor (Associate professor) | Malaysia | Outside Europe | Anglophone inside Europe |
| Adil | Assistant Professor (ibid) | Turkey | Outside Europe | Northern Europe |
| Anders | Assistant Professor (ibid) | Finland | Europe | Anglophone outside Europe |
| Angelika | BSc (Assistant professor) | Poland | Europe | None |
| Antje | Associate Professor (ibid) | Netherlands | Europe | Northern Europe |
| Alena | MSc (Professor) | Bulgaria | Europe | None |
| Binna | Assistant Professor (ibid) | South Korea | Outside Europe | Central Europe and Anglophone outside Europe |
| Catherine | MSc (Associate professor) | Northern Ireland | Europe | None |
| Eliana | Assistant Professor (ibid) | Spain | Europe | None |
| Ellis | Student (Associate professor) | Canada | Outside Europe | None |
| Ena | Assistant Professor (ibid) | Japan | Outside Europe | Anglophone outside Europe |
| Fay | Professor (ibid) | Canada | Outside Europe | None |
| Hendrik | Assistant Professor (ibid) | Belgium | Europe | Central Europe and Anglophone inside Europe |
| Horácio | Associate Professor (ibid) | Chile | Outside Europe | Central Europe and Northern Europe |
| Larissa | Assistant Professor (ibid) | Austria | Europe | Northern Europe |
| Marc | Professor (ibid) | Scotland | Europe | None |
| Peter | Assistant Professor (Professor) | USA | Outside Europe | Anglophone outside Europe |
| Rachany | Assistant Professor (ibid) | Thailand | Outside Europe | Anglophone inside and Anglophone outside Europe |
| Robert | Professor (ibid) | England | Europe | None |
| Sofia | Professor (ibid) | Spain | Europe | None |
| Taska | Student (Assistant professor) | Estonia | Europe | None |

alone or by two of us together. We followed a semi-structured interview guide for all interviews, and the language of communication was English or German. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The questions concerned the academics' mobility trajectory, motivation to come to Denmark (and other places), their career path and plans as well as their research interests. We also asked them about their experiences of being an 'international academic' (or how they would describe themselves) in relation to demands of gaining international experience and being geographically mobile. Finally, they were asked to draw comparisons between the various places they had been for instance in relation to teaching and students' behaviour.

The interviews conducted in person were based on a timeline interview approach (Adriansen 2012), which is an exploratory interview method using time as the guiding structure for elucidating life histories. We used a big sheet of paper and drew a timeline in the middle of the paper. Then, both the interviewer and the interviewee could write and draw important events on the paper with pens of different colours and add other timelines if necessary. The timelines described different events and stops in temporal ordering that influenced and shaped the academics mobilities in time and across space. Yet, the timelines should not be seen as a simple chronological order or an assumption of linearity. Rather along the way, the interviewee often re- and deconstructed their narrative and came to see various patterns. In this way, the interview became a co-construction able to capture the academics' reflections concerning their motives within their choices of destinations. Further, we learned about how the academics perceived their own story, the world, and the (educational) history of the places where they moved to and have lived and worked.

The issue of time and temporality was not a theme that we had decided upon when conducting the interviews. Rather it emerged as a possible lens for analysing these interviews when in fact we were writing another paper (Spangler 2022). However, temporality has been an implicit theme in the interviews, especially in the timeline interviews that are organised around time. Moreover, as noted above, mobility does not only take place in space but also in time whereby issues of temporality naturally occurred when the interviewees were reflecting on their mobility experiences. All three of us conducted the analysis of the empirical material by reading the interviews and discussing emerging themes. As Guzman-Valenzuela and Barnett (2013), we argue that our themes can be understood as dialectic themes, because they were established both inductively (emerging from the empirical material) and deductively (emerging from the literature). Our dialectic themes are inspired by literature about academics' geographical mobility and academic experiences of time (by Chou 2021; Kurek-Ochmańska and Luczaj 2021; Shahjahan, Niloy, and Ema 2022) and migration research about time (by Baas and Yeoh 2018; Robertson 2014; 2021).

## *Living the mobility*

In this analysis, we focus on the quotidian temporal experiences of academics' international mobility. Inspired by Robertson (2021), we posit that academic mobility is not a simple event of departure and arrival but instead mainly exists in flux, involving an unfolding of possibilities, detours, and re-organisation of plans, creating uncertainty both in the short and the long-term future. We will illuminate how choosing to be mobile for an academic career comes with various possibilities and compromises for one's personal life and shed light on how privilege relates to temporality. We start by exploring how temporal control of mobility is within/beyond the reach of some of our interviewees especially based on their access to visa schemes and EU citizenship. The possibility to obtain an academic career as well as the demands and necessity for academic mobility differ greatly between people and places.

Adil, an assistant professor from Turkey, explained that young Turks interested in pursuing an academic career must move abroad due to limited study and academic job opportunities in Turkey. Further, one would '*have to be self-funded somehow for PhD* [… because] *nobody would pay salary*'. Adil's decision for mobility was driven by this need to leave his country for an academic career. He found himself at different times having to wait for approval to enter different places. For instance,

he was accepted for a PhD position in Canada but did not receive his visa and said: '*[visa delays and rejections] probably it happened with maybe 20 persons. Sometimes you have to re-apply for visa*'. Over several years, Adil applied for positions in various places around the globe, aspiring towards places where he could receive permanent residence while or after finishing his PhD. He said, '*I'm sure this is not often decision factor for Danish persons […] But it's, for a [Turk] it's a big deal*'. Hereby, Adil points to the hierarchies of nationalities produced by entry regulations and visa restrictions, which in turn produce different possibilities for temporal control. Mobility of people is always promoted or limited by institutional, political, and material infrastructures (Salazar 2020). Being denied access to countries brings for some people long periods of waiting and precarity, creating temporal unevenness. Adil said that he '*sacrificed these years as delay'* in which he had to wait for approvals of visas and other application regulations.

Two assistant professors Hendrik and Larissa, EU citizens from Belgium and Austria respectively, described their moves for academic positions as unplanned with opportunities just arising over time. Hendrik stated: '*They [university in Germany] would give me a small salary, and I said, yes of course, I will take it. So, that's how I ended up there more or less by accident*'. Both describe their moves as coincidences and random, neither one experiencing temporal constraints in terms of, for example, visa requirements, instead having temporal control of their academic mobility. As EU citizens moving within the EU, their mobility seemed seamless. Larissa's decision to be mobile was voluntary and deeply desired; in fact, she never planned to stay in academia and mentioned that '*it just kind of happened*'. Larissa explained: '*I mean conferences are nice, but I did them more for the sake of travelling and seeing places'*. She created a link between her commitment to an academic position and the possibility of travelling. For Larissa, being mobile carried a sense of adventure and the promise of expanded possibilities for a global lifestyle with ongoing, flexible mobility over which she exercised temporal control. In contrast, Adil had to leave his country for a chance to pursue an academic career, and his considerations where to go to were disrupted by a lack of temporal control and possibilities for residence and citizenship, highlighting citizenship-based hierarchies pertaining to spatial and temporal inequalities amongst our participants.

Being an EU citizen provides reasonably seamless mobility within the EU and in addition entitlement to the same social benefits as Danish citizens. During three years of unemployment, Angelika, a postdoc from Poland, was allowed to stay in Denmark, something impossible for non-EU citizens. Angelika had the possibility to take temporal control over 'being stuck'; and immobility was her active choice, being possible due to her EU-citizenship. Therefore, EU-citizenship becomes a valuable asset, as we will also see in Abyasa's story. Originally from Malaysia, Abyasa was only allowed to stay five years in France to pursue his doctoral education. Therefore, his girlfriend back then suggested to get married as this would give Abyasa different rights to stay in Europe. Although Abyasa did not believe in the institution of marriage, he eventually agreed, commenting that this would provide him a '*more steady ground*', not in relation to academia but in terms of permanent residence. Now, being a French citizen allows him to commute between countries in Europe and gives him residency in any EU country, including his current home Denmark. Abyasa reflected on the change of his citizenship: '*I don't think I would be where I am now if I still had that* [Malay] *passport'*. Abyasa's statement clearly shows the drastic change in his status, and his reasoning behind marriage and the possibilities for a new citizenship. Abyasa, similarly, to Angelika, Larissa, and Hendrik, is now relatively privileged by citizenship which provides him with some sense of temporal control over his mobility.

These stories also reveal the intricate connections between (im)mobility and privilege. Being privileged means having temporal control over when to be mobile and where to go *as well as* controlling when to 'stay in place'. This relates to the issue of permanence. For international academics, this involves both permanence in relation to having a permanent position and in relation to having permanent residence in a country – and often these two are intertwined. At some life stages, neither type of permanence may seem particularly important but later this can change, which the story of associate professor Horácio illustrates. Horácio was born in Chile, his decision to move abroad

was not necessarily strategic, rather it reveals notions of opportunism and 'grasping the moment' (see Collins 2017). From his first mobility to Europe, Horácio's path continued to be in fluidity, and he lived more or less 'on the move' until he came to Denmark upon finishing his postdoc in Belgium. Over time, his choice for mobility carried experiences of having to take risks and making decisions from moment to moment. He reflected on his move to Denmark:

> This position […] appeared completely by kind of chance […] I didn't know much about Denmark. Oh, really nothing, I would say […] I applied for a position in Belgium, […] in Chile, and I applied for the position here. And the first one that I got was here. And here it was already permanent and as an associate professor […] the decision was easy, so to speak.

Here we see how securing temporal control became significant for his mobility. Horácio applied for positions in three countries choosing the first position he was offered, which, as Horácio emphasised, entailed the attractive temporal aspect of tenure. During the interview, he looked at his timeline and commented: '*But then* […] *my wife gets pregnant, and I have kids and there is the pandemic. There is a lot of things, kind of, that might explain this more stable phase*'. Horácio described his current life as '*more stable*' compared to his mobile academic lifestyle before. This more stable life had both spatial and temporal dimensions of being in one place for a longer period, without prospect or desire to move soon.

Binna, an assistant professor from South Korea, also reflected on the link between an international academic career and family life:

> I think that [an international academic career] to me […] that's probably not the most family or child friendly route […] I think you are expected to move a lot […] Like you know going from a two-year contract to another two-year contract, [is] not necessarily […] you know, the most stable thing.

Here, mobility was associated with instability and rootlessness. She found the lack of permanence in academic positions made family life difficult. As argued, spatial permanence, the possibility to 'stay in place', is easier for EU-citizens and it may not only be children or family that make academics want to stay. Angelika, the postdoc originally from Poland, explained why she applied for a new academic position in Denmark after she had lived there for two years:

> But you know, in the meantime, you also make friends, right, you make networks, and your life starts to make sense here […] So, you know, it doesn't make it easy to leave somehow.

Angelika did not want to let go of the place and people she had built relations to and therefore chose to be immobile by staying in Denmark. Time is here relational in the way it is made meaningful through, for instance, encounters with family and friends, a process of synchronising time with others (Robertson 2021). Mobility is for the individual person not only a moving across space and between places; it is also '*negotiating a here-and-now*' (Massey 2005, 140). Negotiating a geographically distinctive and unfamiliar place happens in part much through social relations and connections people establish over time (Beech 2018). Angelika now being unemployed eventually started to also apply for positions abroad and even outside academia. However, as she emphasised, she made that decision in a moment when she '*had no hope anymore*', which suggests that this step towards a potential move abroad, was not voluntary and desired. In the end, Angelika accepted a teaching assistant position in Denmark, which was not even part-time, certainly not enough to make a living out of, but it allowed her to 'stay in place' and be with friends. Even though she did not obtain permanence through an academic position, she could choose permanence despite being unemployed, to 'stay in place', due to her EU-citizenship.

For many international academics, the mobile life entails not only a transnational identity and lifestyle (Kim 2017), but also a transtemporal reality, which makes relationships with family and friends difficult. Mobility and time connect but also separate people and places (Sharma 2014). Ena an assistant professor from Japan exemplifies this. With her husband, she had moved to Canada, where she worked in academia for ten years. When her husband got a job in Japan, she returned with him but could not find an academic job there. Like Angelika, Ena also began to

apply at universities abroad. She was offered her current position in Denmark and moved together with their daughter. Her husband was taking care of his ill mother and stayed behind in Japan with their two older sons. During the interview, Ena reflected on this arrangement and the separation from her family, where she was living in two places and time zones at once, so to speak. She reported a lack of social connections in Denmark and expressed feelings of loneliness. Mobility entails relationships across space and in time. As we see in Ena's case, being mobile also includes the absence of people to spend time with and the wish to be across time with family. This made her mobility not only transnational but also transtemporal.

Summing up, being internationally mobile requires the individual to relocate, be flexible, and to adapt. Tzanakou and Henderson (2021) write that an academic may be both stuck and mobile, aligning with Salazar's (2021) description of mobility and immobility as dynamic rather than reciprocally exclusive categories. We saw mobility and immobility overlapping and intersecting where immobility or choosing to 'stay in place', in this case Denmark, can be a privilege only enjoyed by EU-citizens. Hence, immobility, as Salazar (2021) argues, may be a consequence of constraints, it may also carry positive connotations as a conscious choice and a site of agency. For some of our participants, mobility seemed smooth and with few clashes between mobility and personal life. Mobility was described as opportunities just arriving over time. For others, however, mobility was related to limited temporal control and led to situations of waiting and being immobile. The mobile life further created disruptions of social and family life and for some mobility created the need for being transtemporal.

## The time of place

In this section, we analyse temporality in relation to place at two scales. Firstly, how places are constituted through and by different forms of time coined by the concept 'local time'. Secondly, how our participants ascribed 'temporal distinctions' to places, mainly to countries, and how these distinctions, which situate countries in a temporal hierarchy, have guided the direction of their mobility. Work-life-balance, such as the working hours per week, length of holidays and social infrastructure was a crucial factor in many of the academics' reflections about moving or staying in Denmark. Eliana, an assistant professor from Spain explained:

> 'I really like the way of living here, so the work-life balance and how people really seem to care if like people are happy, and they have a life outside of the work. These things are difficult to find in [Spain]'.

Horácio, the associate professor from Chile, also said: '*after some time here* […] *I'm happy where I am. I have time for some things*'. Peter, an assistant professor from the US, also expressed work-life considerations when reflecting on the possibility of moving back to the US: '*there's a lot of good things about life here*', mentioning, for instance, maternity leave. Marc, a professor from Scotland, and his partner liked Denmark in the way that '*everything worked, and everything was clean and all those kind of things*'. For Binna from South Korea, being assistant professor without tenure gave rise to temporal uncertainties, but she also said: '*I'm very happy to raise my children in Denmark, that's for sure*'. All expressed a deeper sense of connection to the local time, developed over the years alongside the slower pace of life in Denmark. They felt in sync with the local rhythms of their everyday life, which gave them, in fact, time, as Horácio pointed out.

Local time also has significance in the decision to move to Denmark. In his narrative, Marc expressed a desire towards a slower pace of life and temporal balance within and between personal and academic life, which made him decide against an imminent promotion in Scotland. Here, slowness becomes a symbol of a more meaningful life, opposing the fast-paced demands of global capitalism and shows how place and time are intimately interwoven; time is inherently local and embedded in place (Robertson 2021). The appreciation of the local time seemed to be independent of the career level of the interviewee. There was, however, a connection to the time spent in Denmark. Some expressed an understanding of the intricacies of life in Denmark, the workings of the

welfare state, which had developed over time. As we will explore now, this way of understanding the time of place is different from the 'temporal distinctions', the participants ascribed to different places and countries irrespective of their close knowledge of the place.

As explained by Salazar (2011, 577) '*The motivations to cross borders are usually multiple but greatly linked to the ability of travellers and their social networks to imagine other places and lives.*' Taska, an assistant professor from Estonia, showed this in her reasoning for moving to Denmark:

> It's part of growing up in a post-soviet country that is very much oriented towards the West and towards the world […] The world is Western Europe and the US and Canada and maybe Australia […] it's part of a societal orientation towards these places […] you want to become more like the people who live in these countries, and more like these civilised societies.

For Taska, studying and working internationally, and particularly in the (Anglophone) West was perceived to hold possibilities for building a global lifestyle, an international career, and to experience different academic cultures and ways of life. Taska saw Denmark as a desired destination symbolising 'the West', believing that it could take her life in new directions. She expressed a strong directionality and 'imaginaries of place' (see Salazar 2011) in her desire to move to Denmark growing out of her experiences in Estonia. There was a strong temporal element in her desire for Denmark:

> And I think through coming from [Estonia], this place, which was always aspirational striving to be … become the West […] While my idea about Denmark is that perhaps it's a bit more unidirectional. There is not so much that needs to be discarded in the journey to become more West, because it already is Denmark. And [Estonia] was not already anything. It was always wanting to become someone else, to become more.

Taska positioned the place she came from through a specific time-logic. She spoke about Estonia as lagging behind and in relation to this, she expressed a personal desire of 'becoming more like'. Her account shows how deeply entrenched and embodied this feeling of wanting to 'become more' is; it is shaped by her experiences of growing up in a place that she experienced as constantly striving towards 'becoming more west', whereas, as she phrased it, Denmark 'is already'. By moving to Denmark, she came closer to her desire of 'becoming more' and thus in ways 'moved up' towards a certain notion of future. Here we see Taska ascribing temporal distinctions to Denmark as a destination. Her move to Denmark was not only spatial mobility, but also a movement forward in time. Such temporal notion – towards the future is often implied in the directionality of international academic mobility. Places are given temporal qualities. We also see this in Kurek-Ochmańska and Luczaj's (2021) paper '*Are you crazy? Why are you going to Poland?*' where academics from the UK were asked why (on earth) they would move to Poland. This shows us at least two things; first, that despite all the internationalisation jargon, it is not about gaining international academic experiences from anywhere in the world. Some places count more than others (which indicate that some places may not count as international at all). Second and related hereto, it shows that destinations have different temporal distinctions, that places are not only located in space but also in time. Some countries are seen as advanced and others as lagging behind.

If we combine these temporal findings with Wallerstein's (2007) terminology about core, semi-periphery, and periphery, we see that academics generally want to move from the temporal periphery to the temporal semi-periphery and mostly to the temporal core. In geographical terms, this terminology is overlapping with the now somewhat out-dated terminology of developed and developing countries. Based on our participants' temporal distinctions, we consider Denmark a core country in this terminology despite being outside the hegemonic Anglo-American academy, which can be considered the 'core-core'. While we have unfolded the narrative of Taska in more detail, we can see a similar orientation in the accounts of Angelika (Poland), Sofia and Eliana (Spain), and Alena (Bulgaria) moving from semi-periphery countries to core countries within Europe. This is interesting in relation to the mobility patterns of Adil (Turkey), Abyasa (Malaysia), Horácio (Chile) and Rachany (Thailand). These are scholars moving from temporal periphery

countries outside Europe to temporal core countries, through many steps. Here we can observe a constant change of place parallel to each step upwards in their academic career corresponding their move 'into the future' in terms of the temporal distinction of the destinations. However, as we have shown elsewhere, Denmark is rarely the first choice for academics from the periphery (Madsen and Adriansen 2019). In our study with African recipients of Danish research capacity funding, language was an important factor for choosing one European country over another. Academics from Francophone Africa prioritised France or Belgium, just like academics from former British colonies prioritised Anglophone countries. Denmark was only first choice for those who had established research networks there. For the rest, '*Denmark was not an active choice but rather the best opportunity available at the time*' (Madsen and Adriansen 2019, 16). Even for Ena, who had worked in the core but in temporary positions before returning to her home country Japan, Denmark became the best opportunity available at the time, when she could not find an academic job in Japan.

The mobility trajectory of Marc, the Scottish professor, provides another interesting case in relation to mobility and temporal distinctions. He was recruited to join a specific department in Denmark. Coming from Scotland, Marc had established an academic career in a place that is a major hub for international academics. His mobility was thus in opposite direction of the predominant flow of scholars. During the interview, Marc explained his motives for moving to Denmark as follows:

> I was just about to be promoted to head of a very large department […] professionally it probably wasn't the right decision to move […] and a lot of my colleagues couldn't understand why on earth I would leave, you know, a top ten institution […] So, I think professionally, the only reason I did it actually was because it was a chance to step away from doing so much senior leadership work that I had been doing for quite a number of years, and to refocussing on teaching and research.

Here, Marc notes the temporal distinction of moving 'backwards' by coming to Denmark. He continued:

> One of the things that I had to think a lot about when I moved, was ok, so I'm going, in terms of rank of institution, I'm kind of going down. What does that mean for my international profile? Not that I'm that worried about things like that, but it's something that I've had to have in the back of my mind as a consideration, right, in case I want to move at some point in the future.

Interesting herein is how Marc related his academic career to the places in his past and possible future mobility. He reflected on how his present work in Denmark – after having had a career in Scotland at a highly ranked institution – might affect his international profile in case he would move again in the future.

Our next example shows that moving to Denmark can also be a move 'into the future' despite moving from prestigious institutions in the Anglophone academy. Assistant professor Rachany from Thailand has studied and worked at top-ten institutions in the Anglophone academy. Moving to Denmark with that kind of background, would normally be considered moving 'backwards'. However, she explained that within her field, one should move where the best research groups are and her current department in Denmark '*has become really one of the places*'. Hence, Rachany moved to pursue a highly competitive research career within a world-renowned institution in Denmark. Her move was a deliberate choice to move 'forward'; in terms of her disciplinary background, Denmark was the future.

In her intriguing book about temporality in mobile lives of high skilled workers from Asia to Australia, Robertson (2021) shows how places are ascribed different temporal distinctions and are inscribed in spatial and temporal hierarchies. Australia symbolises 'the West' an aspirational destination, however not as a 'progress' and 'modernity' moving from somewhere 'lagging behind'. Instead, Robertson (2021) shows how Australia is a 'relaxed' and 'slow place' compared to the 'fast cities', 'hypermodern' Asian cities her participants come from. In that sense, Robertson (2021) nuances our understanding of global hierarches whether labelled Global North/Global South or

core–periphery. Likewise, our analysis contributes by nuancing Denmark as the Global North outside the Anglo-American academy. Depending on the eye of the beholder, Denmark can symbolise the 'future' (Taska, Rachany), a 'kind of going down' (Marc), or as we shall now see in the following example, a 'sideways movement' (a concept coined as well by Robertson 2021) between core places. Larissa from Austria, whom we met before, explained:

> 'I guess for me travelling comes before academia, and academia is just, … it pays me to travel […] So, it's [her mobility trajectory] just a lot of random things that I didn't plan for or didn't even want […] or dream about'.

All of Larissa's international academic experience took place in the Global North, including Austria, her place of origin. Similar mobility patterns between only core places are observable for Hendrik (Belgium), Antje (Netherlands) and Anders (Finland). Interestingly, during the interview, Larissa argued:

> 'For academics, […] I think [it is] easier than for many other people, to move and still feel at home, like you always feel at home at the university, right. It doesn't really matter […] but I feel it's pretty easy to feel at home at universities, because they are so alike'.

Larissa describes the places she has been to during her academic career as 'so alike' and speaks of 'feeling at home' at the different universities. Travelling between core places only, Larissa orientated herself towards places with similar or possibly even synchronous geographies and temporalities. Moving sideways fosters familiarity and comfort in otherwise different or foreign places, which can facilitate a person's sense of 'being at ease', 'fitting in' and comfort (Anderson 2014). For Larissa, and the other participants with similar mobility paths, moving sideways was only possible because of a certain already existent privilege in terms of nationality/citizenship, which we may also read as a certain lifestyle and constitutive element of (often white) middle-class privileged, and more secure mobilities (as explained by Robertson 2021).

Summing up, looking across the empirical accounts, we can see that the individual mobility trajectories of our participants are differently entangled in a global-temporal orientation. For Marc moving to Denmark was professionally a 'kind of going down', for Larissa a 'sideways move', for Rachany and Taska a move 'into the future' and in addition for Taska also a 'becoming more'. Both Marc's and Taska's stories illustrate an orientation towards certain temporal possibilities Denmark could offer them. Marc sought the local time of Denmark and academic life there, whereas Taska strove towards a broader idea of Denmark as a developed, desirably future-oriented place. This illustrates an unevenness in the ways places are positioned not only geographically but also temporally in hierarchical ways.

The Findings add two dimensions when applying Wallerstein's core–periphery concept to international academic mobility. First, that there is a temporal dimension to the core–periphery distinction, an idea that the core is more 'modern', more advanced – the core is the future, whereas the periphery is the past. Second, we need to add complexity to this understanding for example to consider academic departments (and universities) as sometimes having other temporal distinctions than the country wherein they are located. Hence, an international renowned and leading research group in its field can be perceived as 'the future' despite being located in a country not considered core. Finally, we want to point to academics' needs and wants for other things than just their academic career, for example the treasured work-life-balance in Denmark. This shows the importance of including 'local time' for understanding international academic mobility.

## Discussion and concluding remarks

While internationalisation through academic mobility can bring many social, material, and professional benefits concerning, for instance, intercultural competencies and employability for both the individual scholar and institutions, there is a diversity in geographical patterns, constraints, privileges, and motivations that are largely silenced in prominent policy documents and discourses. In

parts of academia the idea of the 'wandering scholar' is strong (Kim 2009), requiring one to be 'baggage free', while most of the time it is the baggage that makes one feel at home and grounded (Balaban 2018). This is problematic because most policy narratives romanticise academic mobility as something favourable and a positive force (Fahey and Kenyway 2010), and to have a successful research career, many research policies demand an ongoing willingness for mobility, not acknowledging but neglecting the trade-off not only for the academic but also for the social network to which they belong (Balaban 2018). The empirical accounts of our participants yet have shown that for many of them, mobility had little to do with internationalisation of higher education rationales but was rather embedded in personal needs and wants, related to moving 'backwards' to a calmer life, moving into 'the future' to becoming more, or to securing permanence for the less privileged. By including interviewees from different countries and at different stages of their career with different degrees of permanence, we have come to see the temporal and spatial complexities of academic mobility and have shown how academic mobility not only takes place across space but, in various ways, also in time. Citizenship-based hierarchies led to spatial and temporal inequalities amongst our participants. Some participants had temporal control and were allowed to move freely amongst desired places, some of them climbing the career ladder, others in pursuit of a different 'local time'. Especially for the most privileged academics among our participants, mobility and immobility were chosen rather than forced, while the rather less privileged participants had no or little temporal control of their academic mobility, resulting in temporal sacrifices and obstacles involved in 'living the mobility'. Although mobile international academics can be categorised as elite knowledge workers and in that sense are privileged (Baas and Yeoh 2018), they are by no means a homogenous group – some are more privileged than others are by citizenship and/or by permanence in their academic position.

Hence, with this paper, we have added to existing studies of academics' temporal experiences by bringing temporality into the analysis of international academic mobility, highlighting the role of time in relation to mobility trajectories and the (re)production of geographical hierarchies. We have shown how attending to time and temporal dimensions can help us to pay '*a greater regard for spatio-temporal complexity*' (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018, 206). Bringing temporality in the analysis of international academic mobility, allowed us to not only unpack the multiplex role time plays in mobility trajectories, but also to tease out and highlight the complex ways in which temporality relates to privilege and is inscribed in global hierarches. These findings have thus relevance for the growing field of critical internationalisation studies, adding in particular to the literature that problematises international academic mobility (e.g. Madsen and Adriansen 2021; Tzanakou and Henderson 2021).

Furthermore, our paper brings together and extends some of the thinking across geographical studies of international academic mobility, the field of higher education internationalisation, and migration research. To strengthen further the engagement across these research fields, we argue that a spatio-temporal lens is a potentially valuable tool to work in concert to analyse the relationship between macro power structures and the multiplicities of experiences of mobile academics from diverse contexts. Particularly also when considering the point raised in the introduction of this paper that mobile academics are rarely considered as migrants and are not traditionally captured under a migration research rubric.

## Notes

1. World systems theory is Wallerstein's (2007) attempt to explain why economic development vary across space. Inspired by Marxist thought, Wallerstein made a model of the world as a single socio-economic system divided into three regions with different flows of capital and goods between them: the core, the periphery and in between these the semi-periphery.
2. The research meets ethical guidelines and adheres to the legal requirements (including GDPR) in Denmark. The project has been approved by the legal support at Aarhus University: 2016-051-000001-1622.

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## ORCID

*Vera Spangler* http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5761-8421
*Lene Møller Madsen* http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7149-9142
*Hanne Kirstine Adriansen* http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8080-5030

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