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LOVE AND RYANAIR: ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS' MOBILITY¹

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Resumo

Para os/as investigadores/as académicos/as, a Europa é parte do trabalho: a sua mobilidade intraeuropeia aumentou nas últimas décadas e a internacionalização é a palavra-chave para suas carreiras. Por outro lado, a mobilidade intraeuropeia também traz dificuldades: casais que vivem separados, redução de empregos permanentes, frequentes deslocalizações, problemas no acesso aos sistemas de segurança social locais e o pesadelo de organizar um regime de pensões. Ou seja, a Ryanair vem com o trabalho, também. Neste artigo, vamos discutir em primeiro lugar a mobilidade intraeuropeia e académica em um contexto de crescente incerteza no trabalho. Em seguida, utilizamos um banco de dados originais de entrevistas em profundidade dirigidas aos investigadores que experimentaram mobilidade intraeuropeia, para explorar as suas narrativas e autorrepresentações. Finalmente, discutimos as implicações para o discurso de "fuga de cérebros/ circulação de cérebros" e a literatura sobre mobilidade.

Palavras-chave: mobilidade; cidadania europeia; investigadores; fuga de cérebros

Abstract

For academic researchers, Europe comes with the job: their intra-European mobility increased in the last decades, and internationalization is the keyword for their careers. On the other side, intra-European mobility also bears difficulties: couples living apart, decrease of permanent positions and frequent relocations, problems in accessing local welfare systems and the nightmare of organizing a pension scheme. That is, Ryanair comes with the job, too. In this paper, we firstly discuss intra-European and academic mobility in a context of growing job uncertainty. Then, drawing on an original database of in depth interviews addressing female researchers who experienced intra-European mobility, we explore their life narratives and self-representations, their love relationships, and their concrete life arrangements. Finally we discuss the implications for the "brain drain/circulation" discourse and the literature on mobility.

Keywords: mobility; European citizenship; researchers; brain drain

Introduction

In this article, we address academic researchers' mobility from a qualitative perspective. Drawing on an original database of in-depth interviews with female researchers who experienced intra-European mobility (and, holding non-permanent positions, likely to experience it again), we explore their life narratives and self-representations, their love relationships, and their life arrangements, in a context characterized by the increase of intra-European academic mobility, and, in the last years,

job uncertainty. We argue that, besides positively affecting the researchers' professional and social opportunities, and promoting Europeanization from below, mobility in times of uncertainty also carries huge consequences in terms of life-projects – consequences that are often overlooked, both in the literature and in European policies. The first part focuses on the growth of intra-European mobility and summarizes the theoretical debate on this topic, while the second part addresses more specifically the mobility of academic researchers, in the light of the transformations of the academic market. The third

and fourth sections are devoted to the interviewees' life arrangements and narratives, paying specific attention to their love relationships. Finally, the last section discusses the theoretical implications of the research outcomes.

The literature addressing intra-European mobility, brain circulation, and Europeanization from below mainly pays attention to the pull factors of academic mobility, and outlines the cultural dimensions of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, while it largely neglects the social aspects of mobility, and its consequences on individual life projects – apart from some pioneering studies (Ackers, 2008; 2010; Carrozza and Minucci, 2014). On the other side, the literature on economic migration, which deals with the social aspects and the consequences of mobility for families and life-projects, mainly focuses on low-skilled migration or TCNs, outlining the push factors triggering mobility (see Van Mol et al., 2015). Only recently, studies addressing "precarity" underlined the complex situation of academic researchers (Murgia and Poggio, 2014). We aim at combining these streams of literature, underlining the complex interplay of push and pull factors in the researchers' experiences of intra-European mobility. The outcomes call for a critical revision of some theoretical assumptions, including the "brain drain/circulation" narrative (Cervantes and Guellec, 2002), the push-pull model (Zimmermann, 1996) and the mechanisms of "Europeanization from below" (Eigmüller, 2013).

The mobility of academic researcher in the context of the mobility turn

Physical and virtual mobility are constitutive features of global society. According to Urry (2008), global society is defined by a "mobility turn": the quantitative growth and the qualitative change in the movement of information, commodities and individuals, which affect "the creation of identities and the micro-geographies of everyday life" (Cresswell, 2011: 551). The social experience increasingly loosens its ties with the physical space: the trespassing of borders triggers the re-orientation of identities and belongings – life beyond borders (Recchi, 2015) – and promotes the creation of transnational social networks that "creates multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation states" (Vertovec, 1999). Transnationalism from below (Smiths and Guarnizo, 2001) describes the transnationalisation of every-day lives, different from, even if entrenched with, transnationalism from above, carried out by multinational firms, global finance, international and supranational institutions. Nonetheless, scholars underline that the chances of moving are not equally distributed – therefore the freedom to move can be defined as a "fourth liberty"

(Favell, 2014), discriminating between those who actually enjoy the "beyond borders" social experience and the stayers. According to this interpretation, in a context shaped by the dramatic increase of inequalities (Therborn, 2006), the winners of globalization increase their opportunities, as they have the chance to live beyond physical borders and are involved in transnational experiences, while the losers' social experience is confined in a local dimension, that globalization gets even poorer (Bauman, 1998).

European institutions actively promote intra-EU mobility as an instrument of "horizontal Europeanisation" (Mau, 2010). Nonetheless, in spite of the formal equality in terms of rights and entitlements, the mobility cleavage also affects the European citizens (Flingstein, 2008). Several researches (cfr. Recchi and Favell, 2009) show that in fact physical mobility is still a selective practice, experienced by a small part of upper class and highly qualified EU citizens, that Favell (2008; 2011) defines as 'Eurostar generation'. Unsurprisingly, the transnationalisation of every-day life is positively correlated to the support toward European integration and post national identification (Recchi, 2015), increasing the distance among "transnational europhiles" and "local eurosceptics" (Kuhn, 2015). In turn, Europeanization of every-day lives is expected to promote cultural change, turning European citizenship from an abstract entitlement to a social practice. The denationalization of the social experience and the institutional framework promoting mobility carry a wide range of benefits for the European elite, while the lower classes' mobility is mostly limited within national borders. Thus, for a large part of citizens, the European integration risks to be perceived as a top-down process, threatening their economic security, job conditions, and political sovereignty. The economic crisis exacerbates these feelings, nurturing nationalism and anti-European attitudes and triggering a defensive approach to mobility, as mobility takes the forms of immigration or the form of emigration, rather than promoting a transnational life style. In this perspective, mobility is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, generating both new opportunities and new inequalities. The multiple definitions of mobility (see Ackers, 2010) may be combined to thicken the analysis of the complex interactions between pull and push factors by focusing on the individual experiences of mobile workers.

To shed light on the ambivalent characters of mobility, the case of mobile researchers is of particular interest, for at least two reasons. First, because of their high levels of education and social networks they are likely to take advantage from the mobility turn. Moreover, for academic researchers, the "mobility ideology" (Flamm and Kaufmann, 2006) is a career imperative or, at least, an implicit expectation of mobility (Ackers, 2010). Second,

because of both the economic crisis and the neo-liberal turn in the University market, academic jobs undertook a path of precarization, that resulted in processes of "brain drain" and increased mobility for economic reasons. Thus, academic researchers lie at the crossroad between pull and push factors.

A precarious worker "can be broadly defined as a worker with a short-term contract, either full-time or part-time, and who experiences constant uncertainty with regard to work" (Mattoni, 2012; for a discussion, see Giorgi and Caruso, 2015). In the last decades, job precariousness has dramatically increased, beyond class and educational differences (Armano and Murgia, 2014). Due to the fact that welfare benefits and social entitlements are still mainly related to permanent jobs, the effects of precariousness affect all the life spheres, thus some scholars propose the definition of social or existential precariousness (Murgia, 2010). Highly skilled workers are expected to be better equipped with the resources to manage precariousness and to protect themselves from the precariousness trap (Murgia and Poggio, 2012), that is, in turning unstable employment as a transitional period in which they acquire professional and relational experiences. In this frame, geographical mobility is often addressed as an individual resource, a "mobility exit power" (Alberti, 2014), which results in the 'brain drain', for which countries lose their "highly qualified human capital" (Milio et al., 2011: 3). Nonetheless, the brain drain narrative underestimates the costs of academic mobility and precariousness. The discussion of academic precariousness goes beyond the scope of this contribution. Nonetheless, it is important to underline that this particular category of Europeans do not fit in the category of economic immigrants (Gastarbeiters), but, at the same time, nor it fits in the Eurostars one (Favell, 2011), as researchers' economic and professional conditions are usually weak, if compared to their cultural and social status. For this reason, mobile academic researchers are a good test to analyze the ambiguous coexistence of push and pull factors, opportunities and constraints, characterizing intra-European mobility.

The Erasmus generation on the move

According to Eucross (Recchi, 2014), almost 13% of Europeans experienced a long-term residence (more than three months) in another EU country. The Erasmus program highly contributed to the mobility of young people during their higher education formation. In 2013 the number of Europeans who spent a period in another EU country thanks to the Erasmus project was more than 3 million.

The so called "Erasmus generation" (Bettin and Bontempi, 2008) describes cosmopolitan individuals who developed a strong feeling of attachment to

Europe, who learned to study and to live in a multinational context, who speak fluently two or more languages, who are highly more prone to work and settle abroad than the average European population. Mobility opens the door to further mobility, both for cultural (transnational habitus) and for structural (linguistic and professional skills) factors. Academic researchers are expected to be particularly affected by the Europeanization process. They have high levels of education, which surveys positively correlate with a higher propensity to work and settle in another in EU country and the feeling of "being a European citizen". A high share of them studied abroad thanks to the Erasmus program, which means that they established links and connections with another university and learned to deal with different approaches and organizations to the production and transmission of knowledge. As a result, post-Erasmus students who aspire to work as researchers, did not only acquired the professional skills and the cultural transnational humus positively correlated to the propensity to experience European mobility, as they learn to live and to work in multicultural contexts. Among previous Erasmus students, the incidence of mixed couple and the propensity to settle and to work abroad is significantly higher. It has been estimated that 33% of Erasmus students have a life partner with a different nationality, compared to 13% of non-mobile alumni and that around 40% of Erasmus students went to live/work abroad (European Commission, 2014). Researchers, and more generally high skilled youth also find concrete incentives to experience intra-EU mobility. The importance and the prestige of the internationalization of education and the experiences abroad slowly penetrated even in the most protectionist systems. Erasmus students and international researchers are likely to experience fewer difficulties in relocating, with respect to other job categories, because of the powerful infrastructure of European research. Summing up, academic research represents good candidates for intra-EU mobility, as cultural factors and structural factors converge in creating "pull" factors promoting mobility. Looking to available data on academic mobility, and in particular on the mobility of young researchers, we actually find evidence that intra-EU mobility is growing and that higher education and academic research sector are highly Europeanized. The EU funded project More (Mobility Patterns and Career Paths of EU Researchers) shows that around 15% of researchers working in the EU are currently mobile, but the percentage doubles to 31% if we look to all the researchers who experienced at least three months abroad in the last ten years during their Post PhD career (More2, 2013). Higher education and academic research, then, seem to represent a field particularly interested by horizontal Europeanization dynamics, as intra-EU mobility is

more than double than in the general population². Particularly, academic mobility fluxes move from Southern and Eastern to Northern and Central European countries (Ackers and Gill, 2008). As in the international student mobility, also the fluxes of the international mobility of academic researchers contribute to configure a network, made by central hubs and peripheral knots, which primarily act as country of origin (Chen and Barnett 2000).

Shifting the focus to the intra-European mobility experienced by young precarious researchers, empirical evidence about intensity and direction of mobility fluxes suggests combining the literature on Erasmus generation and its effects (that is, on pull dimension) with the literature on precariousness and its effects in terms of so called "brain drain" (i.e., on the push dimension of mobility).

In short, pull factors encourage researchers (and students) to move to work and study in other countries, characterized by active recruitment policies, where universities are prestigious and well-positioned in international rankings, and which offers better opportunities to make research. Broadly speaking, also the linguistic skills, the cultural predisposition for mobility, the involvement in transnational networks act as pull factors. On the contrary, young graduate students and researchers are pushed to move when the conditions in their country of origin is unfavourable, due to the low prestige and the low ranking of the higher education and research national sector and to the lack of opportunities in projecting an academic career. Generally speaking, the perception that the stay in the country of origin would dramatically reduce the opportunities of cultural, professional and personal self-realization, acts as a push factor.

The shift of focus from the pull to the push dimension in the analysis of the intra-European mobility has been stimulated by the effects of the economic crisis, was harsher in southern than in central and northern countries. Previous research actually revealed that the goals and the expectations of mobile researchers are different for southern, eastern and northern mobile researchers. The former, in particular, express a particularly low expectation in terms of advancement opportunities, mobility perspective, and benefits regarding their professional positions (More2, 2013; Ackers, 2010). As a result of the negative perception about their professional (and, by the way, for their personal and familiar) future in their country, high skilled youth from countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece, experience mobility in order to seek for opportunities they do not find in their countries.

Mobility is an adjunctive, extraordinary tools, in the life projects, but it can also represent the only possibility to nurture the hope of building a professional trajectory in line with skills and expectation,

in a context marked by precarity and by the risk of downward social mobility.

Summing up, behind the increase of academic researchers' mobility we find the effects of a complex combination of cultural and structural variables, acting as push and pull factors. Academic mobile researchers are both members of the "Erasmus generation" and members of the "Precarious generation" (Raffini, 2014). They move, pulled by their transnational habitus, the loosening of EU internal borders, and in the framework of various initiatives of the European Commission, aimed at promoting the Europeanization of higher education and academic research. They, indeed, experience mobility also pushed by professional and economic reasons.

Once identified the structural factors acting as push and pull factors, we must not fail to mention also the orientations and the subjective expectations of youth, and more generally their individual characteristics are crucial in configuring mobility choices, besides the social, political and economic structures involved in international higher education and research (Cantwell et al., 2009; Hu, 2014).

The research on academic mobility is mainly focused on the macro-dimension. Reversing this tendency, we argue that the integration of macro and the micro dimension is necessary in order to nuance the analysis, as "both push and pull factors are external forces which impact on actors' behaviors and choices, but much depends on the personal characteristics of the actors. These characteristics include socio-economic status, academic ability, gender, age, motivation, and aspiration" (Mai and Bray, 2007: 793).

In a context shaped by individualization and radicalization of uncertainty, where young generations are called to give individual responses to structural problems (Beck, 1992), the individual agency is of extraordinary importance for the management of time and space (Leccardi, 2014). Young people, in fact, are called to make reflexively their choices of mobility as part of an individual construction of a life project.

Mobility, Europe and future

Due to both pull and push factors, researchers are extremely mobile. These structural factors interact with the agency of individual and institutions, in shaping mobility patterns. As already mentioned, mobility deeply influences personal and professional life, and individual attitudes: a growing body of literature shows that mobility fosters, for example, a positive attitude toward Europe (and – to a lesser extent – toward European Union, Cfr. Recchi, 2013, 2014, 2015; Kuhn, 2015), and holds a positive correlation with the formation of bi-national love relationships – which, in turn, foster transnational

solidarity (Van Mol et al., 2015). Therefore our first analytical interest regards the researchers' experiences of mobility within Europe and their attitudes towards Europe and/or European Union.

Our interviewees' countries of origin are in Southern and Eastern Europe and the experience of mobility, even when described as a "choice", is mainly related to push factors: better job conditions and salary, or the very possibility of working as a researcher. As clearly explained by these two excerpts, for example:

"There are two reasons for moving. First, it's academic mobility, that has become rather the norm: the more places you've been to and the more universities you have diplomas from, the better for your cv and for your competitiveness in the field. [...] Of course it's great for networking [...] Third....so I said they were two reasons, but in fact they are three – third, there is the...the lack of jobs, you know, in our field. There are so few jobs and they are all so precarious that one needs to follow the money [...] and it requires to moving from one country to the other, from one continent to the other, in search for better and more stable positions." [M.]

"I understood that, in order to work as a researcher, I needed to leave Italy [...] and it was a choice of the couple [...] As a matter of fact, we both did the PhD, we invested a lot in our education, and, frankly, to remain in [Italian City], doing two jobs, being over-qualified...well!" [V.]

Coherently with the results of the literature, our interviewees mention the importance of family, among the reasons for mobility (Ackers and Gill, 2008). When considering the differences among the European countries, our interviewees speak very competently about their bureaucracy and political climate, which of course influence their desires or chances for moving. Nonetheless, the experience of mobility is described as related to cities, rather than States.

"There's this place, in Cornwall – I was shortlisted, then I decided to withdraw my candidature because, you now, it was difficult to go there. [...] It would have been the perfect job, had it been in a capital. So we said no. Now, I am waiting for the results of some applications: [...] one is in Kazakhstan [...] in a city easier to reach than the one in Cornwall." [P.]

The importance of the city's infrastructures and facilities has to be framed within the perspective of

a situation in which mobility is a constant feature of life, rather than an exceptional case. First, academic precarity increased in the last years – and the number of years between the PhD and a permanent position increased as well, like it did, in relation to that, the intra-European and/or within country mobility. In this situation, researchers are required to be able to relocate within short notice and after brief periods of time. Therefore, it is not rare the situation in which the researchers prefer to commute, relocating only when a permanent position is on the table. Moreover, if they are in a love relationship and/or have a family, it is unlikely that the partner (or the family) relocate with the perspective of moving again in one or two years. This means that our researchers, more than relocating from one city to another, are characterized by a bi-polar or multi-polar mobility profile, that, in turn, promote the making of a "multipolar spatial bond", where the same notion of place change, redefining as a relational structure which is composed of various social relationships of differing scopes (Bittner et al., 2007). The insertion in transnational social fields, in which cultural, economic and social activities are no longer framed in a limited and geographically delimited local space, acts de-coupling social and physical space. Second, even when researchers relocate – meaning that they move from one place to another – it may happen that their partners and/or family cannot easily relocate. And, this is especially true with respect to their relatives. In other words, our researchers move frequently from one city to another – and this mobility is neither migration nor relocation: it is a structural condition of researchers' lives. Mobility fosters mobility and more than "cross-borders", our researchers live "on" the borders. In this perspective, when we speak about Academics' intra-European mobility, we should specify which kind of mobility we are referring to.

Indeed, the interviewees complain about the bureaucratic difficulties of inhabiting a European space: even though mobility is supported by specific policies, the basic entitlements (like the retirement schemes) and the job conditions are still State-related while working at the same time in more than one European countries is a "bureaucratic nightmare" (A₂). Moreover, there is a lack of European services – like, for example, the possibility of having an international bank account (because public universities require country-specific bank accounts) or European web/phone plans. In other words, the public policies supporting mobility support in fact relocation, while mobility as such is more related to the private services – like the low cost flights of Ryanair and EasyJet, low cost Eurobus, or the private rent-service for short time stay AirBnB. For these reasons, one of the basic requirements of cities in which our researchers can work and/or live is the

presence of a (more or less loose) network – a crucial infrastructure. Our researchers are cosmopolitan with nonchalance, and *de facto* European citizens – even when Europe itself makes their citizenship difficult. More than that, the interviews make it clear the ambiguities of European citizenship. First, the status of European citizen bears the possibility of accessing rights in one European country – meaning that borders are in fact still in place. Second, even though cosmopolitan and well informed about the cultural and political life of the European poles of their mobility, the researchers underlined the difficulties related to a full political participation (e.g.: “I mean, you can enter a charity – but, a political party?!” (V.)) The difficulties are framed in terms of passion, and interest, more than the concrete possibility of access.

Moreover, the condition of “mobile researchers” is mainly perceived as a temporary/transitional situation: therefore, the emotional investment, and the participation in the public and political life of the country-of-job are “postponed” to a time in the future when, hopefully, the country-of-job and the country-of-life can be the same. Indeed, when asked about what is “home” for you the researchers pointed out the difficulties in defining what is “home” in a situation of constant mobility:

“Well, I think that my home is where I am at the moment, it’s very difficult to establish a sense of normality giving all these moves...I think I’ve moved five times in five different cities and countries in the last 7 or 8 years - so it’s very difficult to keep a sense of home, of normality” (M.)

At the same time, they underlined the relational dimension (“we are home to each other” R.), while drawing an imaginary love-map connecting various cities within Europe (and around the world). When asked about the future, the interviewees expressed many doubts, and no one was able to explain where and in which situation she would have been within three/five years (e.g. “This is a question that upsets me [...] I mean, I don’t know.” (E.)). Moreover, and unexpectedly, it also emerged a wide incapacity in detailing a desire with respect to the future. As this excerpt clearly shows, the generic desire of a stable future (couple living in the same place, open-end job) is combined with a deep difficulty in imagining a detailing a specific strategy to achieve this goal.

“I want to imagine that there is a future, a possibility in the future where we both work in the same place. Maybe with little sacrifices, I renounce to something, he does the same, but trying to stay together anyway. That is, as far as possible. [...] I would like to have a child,

somewhere in the future [...] I’m not sure of how this will happen. On this, I’ve really no idea. After these two years, where I see us moving around [...] When I speak about that with people outside our job field I say ‘maybe we’ll live here, maybe in France, but Mexico, also, can be an option’...and I realize that I speak of ‘us.’” (R.)

This excerpt underlines the importance of the relational dimension when dealing with mobility strategies. Both the first choice of mobility, and the strategies for the future are related to considerations in which the current partner or the perspective of a family plays a crucial role. This leads us to the second important analytical interest, besides the conceptualization of mobility, which is related to the effects of mobility on the life trajectories and family plans.

Brain and bodies

Mobile researchers often live long-distance relationships: the studies dealing with non-cohabiting relationships (Levin and Trost, 1999) rarely (if ever) considers the nuances of togetherness and apartness – as clearly argued, for example, by Stoilova et al. (2014), who, moreover, suggest to use the more neutral concept of “Living Apart Relationships” (LAR). Exploring how researchers conceptualize LAR sheds light to an often-overlooked aspect in the “brain drain/circulation” narratives, which is the fact that researchers have bodies as well.

LAR is mainly described as a transitional or temporary situation, even though it’s considered an event likely to happen various times in life. It is mainly described as problematic when talking about the future and the possibility of having a family, even though it is considered as a normal experience in this line of work, which marks a difference with respect to non-mobile peers. LAR is also characterized as a positive situation, for many different reasons. First of all, it triggers a complete refocusing of what is being a couple beyond the everyday life (e.g. “It is a sense of complicity” P.). Therefore, the relationship becomes an object of constant attention, something to take care of, and to protect and support. It is a job, not taken for granted. Second, LAR is also positively correlated, in the interviews, with gender balance, constant negotiations, and constant growing. Indeed, the literature underlines the disadvantaged position of women in transnational academic mobility (for a literature review, see Jöns, 2011). Family responsibilities, possible gender discrimination in academia and the complexities of dual-career partnerships constitute well-known constraints for female workforce³. For this reason, we specifically focused on female academic researchers, with the aim of exploring their narratives. The decision of moving

in fact highly impacts women's lives, especially in relation to family projects.

"There are a lot of obstacles that the academic lifestyle places in front of building a family. The other consideration is of course tenure, which is yet another obstacle and another hurdle that we have to pass...we still have to prove ourselves and, again, you know? I think that any woman who is in academia and is not honest about the fear of having a family before tenure is dishonest" (M.)

Nonetheless, transnational mobility of female researchers may also result in positive outcomes in relation to gender balances in the couple. One of the interviewees, for example, explained her role of first-mover (from Southern to Northern Europe), and breadwinner, while her husband takes care of their child:

"We said let's go! [...] Now many things have changed. The relative value of my job within the family has changed [...] the division of roles between me and [*name of the husband*] is more settled. [...] Everybody, when we introduced ourselves – I work, he doesn't – asked him 'So you are looking for a job?' and he said 'No!' Because, well, taking care of a child, a house...it's a full-time job. If there's a family, there's someone who takes care of it. To date, it's been a women's job: mommies, sisters, grannies...I realize it may be surprising that there's a man in the job. [...] Sometimes it has been difficult. Not for him, he was amused, but he had to stand and say 'I'm fine at home'. Yes, we moved together, but he fully accepted all the challenges, otherwise I could have not done all this." (M₂)

In this perspective, then, transnational mobility can also offer the chance of re-negotiating the roles within the couple and the family.

Third, LAR allows to re-discover non-sexual forms of intimacy and complicity, namely with friends in the country-of-job, which become another family, with whom share life and apartments. LAR is characterized by specific temporal and spatial dimensions with respect to cohabitation relationships. First of all, being together is an interruption of the daily routine, an exceptional event ("it's like a holiday" P.).

"Of course, because what happens in long distance relationships is that things that are part of the normal life of a couple, like the breakfast or having a dinner are no longer possible, and they become extremely exciting when you finally are in the same place, I guess.

But yes, it requires, a lot of innovation and it requires a lot of energy by both to keep the relationship alive because of the separation and of course when you are together the expectations are extremely high and again it takes a lot of understanding and tact to keep things going and to keep the relationship alive." (M.)

The partner is new and familiar at the same time and intimacy is continuously renegotiated and redefined. The periods of separation are mediated by devices (like Skype, Facebook, mobile phones) that allow a constant communication and, at the same time, mediate the relationship, somehow de-coupling "brain" and "body". Therefore, an ambivalent relationship with these devices emerges. Moreover, devices that allow a certain degree of ubiquity may at the same time trigger competition phenomena, by de-territorializing the bodies of the partners, as this excerpt exemplifies:

"If I have to be at my computer to speak with you every night, it means that I cannot have friends here – it requires my complete attention. Had he lived here, it would have been different. We could go out with friends – together. Right now, it's mutually exclusive" (A.)

LAR becomes even more problematic when the time of the couple is de-synchronized, meaning when there is a non-mobile partner. In this case, tensions emerge with relation to the integration of different rhythms – of life, work, friendship and relationship. In a couple living at distance, there is not the possibility of "taking it slowly": everything has to be scheduled in advance, so it becomes a high emotional investment right from the beginning – at least for the mobile one. The same goes for the "life imaginaries" and mutual expectations.

The many temporalities of LAR also interact with the spatial dimension. First of all, the private space is continuously changing between the "couple's space" and "the personal space". "Yes, well, he comes here, or I go there...you know, the food, the products...we don't choose them together, it's like...I don't know, sometimes it's difficult to say that our apartment is mine as well" (P.). The spatial dimension is, in turn, strictly related to the economic dimension, which is crucial for the possibilities of intimacy – whether or not it is possible to have a private apartment, or to move frequently – and therefore shapes the conditions of LAR. It not only intervenes in the forms of intimacy, it also plays a role in the rhythm of the relationship: "Well, it means that maybe I would prefer to stay at home, because I'm sick, but I can't because I already booked the flight...or I would like to see you because we need to talk, but it's too expensive..." (A.)

Our interviewees underlined that, besides the many difficulties, LAR is nevertheless a form of resistance to a work-centered life. Facing a precarious work situation, characterized by push factors and constant change, maintaining a relationship is also a way of affirming different priorities, and to express hope and desire. At the same time, and in the same perspective, maintaining a couple is an uncertain situation can also help to cope with uncertainty. Therefore, being a transnational couple is both an anchorage and a form of resistance, of hope and desire. With all the difficulties, LAR may be seen as a part of a broader possible positive attitude towards the difficulties of mobility and academic uncertainty. This positive attitude, nonetheless, as a choice and a discipline, is the best way to cope – and, at the same time, a consequence: “And it enrages me that it’s my material condition to determine what I have to feel, I mean, to be joyful is a surviving strategy, an obligation” (R.)

Final comments

In this paper, we presented the preliminary results of a research addressing the experiences of intra-European mobility of female researchers. The outcomes invite first of all to critically revise the push-pull model of mobility, integrating the analysis of the agency dimension and the exploration of orientations and expectations of actors. We also suggest to rethink the “brain drain” or “brain circulation” narrative: indeed, researchers have bodies as well. This means that the social aspects of intra-European mobility are as important as the economic and scientific aspects, and need specific policies. Second, and intertwined, the outcomes point out the importance of nuancing the analysis of the bottom-up processes of Europeanization, by taking into account the actual experiences of the mobile Europeans. Some of the interviewees underlined the sense of detachment from the collective and political life of the new country. Therefore, while the “private” affection maps are constantly growing, enriching and relocating, exemplifying the Europeanization from below, the public/political ones are described as dying. Third, when speaking about European mobility, we need to separate “mobility” by “relocation” – while Europe widely addresses the latter, the former is still neglected (see also Golynger, 2006). Fourth, our respondents are neither Eurostar generation nor economic migrants, as they combine high social and cultural capital with low professional and political capital. They can be conceived as “Eurostar” candidates, but in their everyday life experience they experience some typical problems characterizing the immigration experience.

The every-day life of precarious mobile researchers is characterized by a continuous strategy of positioning in time and space. If precarious “stayers”

never know how best to spend their time (Standing, 2011), mobile precarious also never knows how best to manage the space. The ambivalence and complexity of their situation lead us to speak about a Ryanair generation – they live on the borders, more than beyond borders, in their attempt to reconcile work (or works) and life in their country-of-job and countries-of-family-and-love. This article provides some first result and identifies some directions for further research. In particular, it suggests promoting a stronger dialogue among macro-analysis on migration and mobility and micro-analysis of personal narratives and life-projects characterizing mobile individuals. This analysis strategy allows to critically test both the rhetoric of horizontal, transnational mobility – that, stressing its positive effects, we risk to underestimate the personal costs of mobility – and the rhetoric on brain drain, that analyze individuals as resources, more than persons. A critical focus on life trajectories and individual narratives allows exploring how mobility comes with opportunities and constrains. Mobility affects every aspects of the personal life and increases complexity, acting as a multiplier of precariousness.

Notes

- ¹ The paper is the outcome of a common work. The responsibility can be divided as follows: Alberta Giorgi sections 3-4; Luca Raffini sections 1-2. Introduction and conclusion are co-authored. Acknowledgments: FCT grant SFRH/BPD/77552/2011.
- ² Almost one out of two researchers experienced mobility (31% in the last 10 years and another 17% more than ten years ago). Even excluding mobility towards USA (11%) and other non EU countries, the data is more than double than the 13% of EU population.
- ³ See the European Projects: GARCIA – Gendering the Academy and Research: combating Career Instability and Asymmetries (<http://garciaproject.eu/>); STAGES – Structural Transformation to Achieve Gender Equality in Science (<http://www.stages.unimi.it/>).

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