

ASHRIDGE DOCTORATE IN ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE (ADOC)

An inquiry into the tension between displacement and  
belonging as experienced by globally mobile  
professionals

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**An emerging practice of shallow-rooted belonging**

**Pavica Krapljan-Barr**

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Student Number: M00382718

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## ABSTRACT

Global organisations increasingly require their leaders and employees to be mobile in order to meet the needs of the dynamics of the global market. As a result, the number of professionals who are uprooted from their place of origin and who experience multiple relocations as part of their globally mobile career is on the rise. This action inquiry examined whether a sense of belonging mattered to globally mobile professionals and, if so, how they could create a sufficient sense of belonging in this postmodern world of global mobility which would enable them to flourish and live a healthy, fulfilled life. The inquiry was located within the specific context of a global organisation headquartered in Europe and involved a deep, first person inquiry, together with individual conversations with six global leaders and a co-inquiry with a group of five OD practitioners. All participants in this study had substantial experience of global mobility as part of their career progression which they developed after growing up and completing their studies in their country of origin. The inquiry generated three main insights: 1) globally mobile professionals who participated in this inquiry lived permanently in liminality; 2) home seemed to hold a transient quality for these professionals; 3) the acceptance that deep-rooted belonging was not theirs to have. This acceptance led global leaders to shape an alternative form of belonging which the author has named shallow-rooted belonging. Shallow-rooted belonging is an organic metaphor to describe a form of belonging that nurtures a functional existence in the liminal social and psychological space.

This thesis also describes how the change in the ontological view of the world, held by the author, provided a fruitful condition for this deeply personal inquiry to emerge. In addition, working with expressive methods created conditions for the author to engage with the emotional territory within which the phenomenon of belonging is located. The author shares personal practices that she developed to create a sense of shallow-rooted belonging and outlines the implications of this inquiry for global organisations, Organisational Development practice and individual global leaders.

**Key Words:** Belonging, Displacement, Global mobility, Liminality, In-between (ness), Shallow-rooted belonging, Global leaders, Organisational Development

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## Thank you to the 'Quartet'

Sue, Abi and Chris, my study group

Robin, my supervisor

for supporting, challenging and guiding me on this journey



Figure 1: The 'Quartet' in action – The Fishbowl Exercise

Offering by: Steve Marshall

A 'visual freefall' in response to the unfolding dialogue;

January 2013

## Thank you to

My co-inquiry group of OD practitioners

The global business leaders who openly shared their stories

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Friends and family for their support and tolerance of my frequent 'absence'

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# PRELUDE

## A glimpse of the possibility to belong...

### Dwelling on the bridge.... Dwelling in the 'bridging' (Take 1)

Extract from my electronic journal, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2013

*"I am sitting on the bridge, at the very highest point of the bridge which connects the two islands and offers the gift of an incredibly beautiful view of Kornati Islands in the distance, scattered like pebbles in a shallow river. It is a beautiful sunny day; the warming rays of the sun tickle my face; the sounds of seagulls and gentle*



*sea waves lull me into a dreamy state; the smell of Mediterranean plants keeps me anchored in the present locality ... A perfect moment that fills me with a sense of belonging, a deep sense of knowing who I am, where I belong and why I am here ... I feel I belong to this planet ... I feel alive ... I get lost in time ... I have been dreaming ... Sudden noise of people walking nearby, car passing, people laughing and boats swashing underneath the bridge, brings me*

*back from that dreamy state into reality ... I open my eyes and watch all those activities taking place ... I slowly walk towards one end of the bridge, and go under the bridge ... I watch boats passing through – some towards the open seas, some towards the mainland ... I notice the sea moving, mixing, carrying fish from one part of the sea towards the other ... I walk across the bridge towards the other end and*

*watch a similar scene ... whilst walking across the bridge word connectivity pops up ..., the bridge is about creating connectivity, bridging is about creating connectivity ... I walk home feeling at peace with myself, with the world around me, with the universe ... I have arrived home."*



Figure 2: Photo of the Pašman Bridge, Croatia, taken by myself

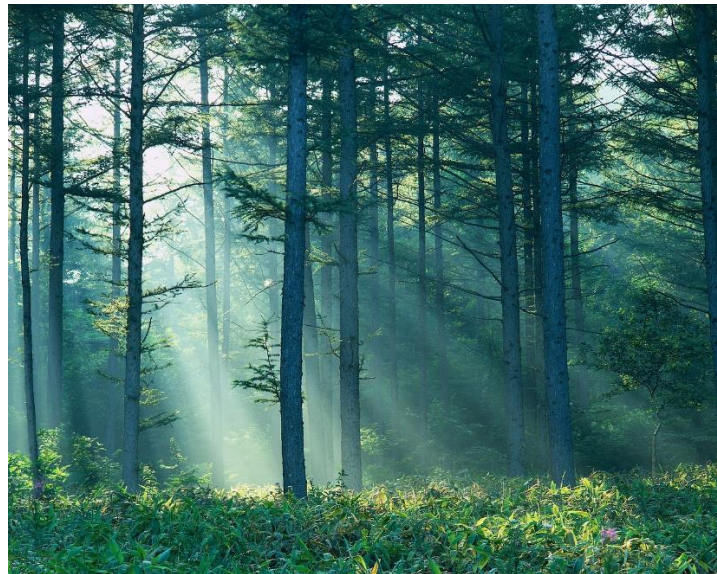
Figure 3: The view of Kornati Islands from the Pašman Bridge, Croatia, a photo offering of my friend, Dražen Tomić

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# CHAPTER 1

## An attempt to introduce the whole:

### Overview and purpose



*“Midway upon the journey of our life  
I found myself within a forest dark,  
For the straightforward pathway was lost”*  
Dante Alighieri; Inferno, Canto I

Figure 4: Photo from the Office.com Clip Art, royalty free

## 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the inquiry as a whole. I start by briefly describing the wider context for my inquiry, primarily focusing on the challenges of the postmodern world associated with the global mobility, technology and fragmentation which have the potential to simultaneously connect and disconnect us from our sense of belonging to a community or a place. I describe the purpose of my inquiry, the inquiry question and the key concepts, followed by the scope of the population to whom this inquiry may be of interest. I tell the story of how my inquiry evolved and the cycles I went through to arrive at the insights gained about: the sense of belonging of globally mobile professionals, my OD practice, my personal growth and the process that enabled me to learn. Finally, I provide a short overview of each chapter and guidance to the layout of this thesis.

## 1.2 The possibility of belonging in a postmodern globally mobile world

“I have just landed onto a new land.... The smell, the noise, the people,... everything is so different. There is nothing more exciting than putting my feet onto the new land and stepping into the unknown; I am already looking forward to this adventure. This is exactly what I love about my job and my globally mobile lifestyle – discovering new lands, learning about new cultures, ... I feel alive, excited, full of energy despite the long flight and the long day ahead ... I close the door and sit comfortably in the taxi, looking forward to my first encounter in this new country ... It does not take long for the ‘belonging question’ to pop up ... So where are you from, my dear? asks the chatty taxi driver...” (Extract from my electronic journal, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2013, South Korea trip)

Our postmodern world has been described by many as the world where fast pace, global presence, vast information exchange, consumerism, fragmentation (Block, 2008; O’Donohue; 1998, Gratton, 2011) pose a threat to the overall sense of social connectedness and belonging. O’Donohue (1998) writes poetically that: *“the global village has no roads or neighbours; it is a faceless, impersonal landscape from which all individuality has been erased”*

(p. xxiii). At the same time, the shrinking global world supported by rapidly-evolving technological developments, enable us to, for example, connect and exchange information at a speed without the need for travel or face-to-face contact. The world is shrinking in many aspects and this creates many possibilities for growth, learning and expansion of our perspectives and for bettering the life of people around the globe. Tomlinson (1999) introduced a concept of global complex connectivity, which he defined as: *“the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterise modern social life.”* (p. 11). Over the next 10+ years the anticipated trend is that the migration of people will significantly increase, be it within the same country (mostly from rural towards urban locations) or between countries in pursuit of work, a better standard of living, new opportunities to learn and grow, to gain international experience, or as a result of displacement due to war or natural disaster (Gratton, 2011).

With this movement in the population, from the decline in population growth in the West to the emergence of totally new mega cities in locations such as India, Latin America or Africa, the anticipated need for employee mobility will only grow as businesses are likely to reconsider the locations of their HQ. In their study looking at *‘Talent Mobility 2020 and beyond’* (2010, 2012) PWC highlight that the explosion of the activity and business growth potential in emerging markets has already contributed to an increased need for global companies to move people and source talent from around the world. The issue of global talent mobility was seen as rising in importance, so much so that The World Economic Forum put this topic on the agenda of its Annual Meeting 2010 in Davos. The world’s business, academic and political leaders agreed that encouragement of talent mobility was critical in order to stimulate economies in both developed and developing countries. They agreed that countries and organisations need to prepare for: *“an era of a fast-changing, dynamic, and mobile workforce”* (PWC, 2010, p. 29). Having international experience and experience in living, leading and working in several different markets around the world is becoming a standard expectation by global organisations of their leaders in order to progress to senior positions.

Amongst all these economic, governmental and business needs and reasons for advocating talent mobility, there is an individual – a leader, a professional, an employee but also a wife

or a husband, a brother, a daughter or an old friend – who has their own personal needs. Those needs are core existential human needs, such as the need to belong, to feel a part of a community and to have a place that can be called home. Where in this world of fast-paced mobility do such individuals regain a sense of belonging? Where is home? And does it really matter anymore?

On the one hand the world is shrinking, interconnecting and creating a growing sense of virtual connection; on the other hand the postmodern world has created many possibilities for isolation, loneliness and a shaken sense of identity and belonging. Block (2008) writes: “... *all this does not give a connection from which we can become grounded and experience the sense of safety that arises from a place where we are emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically a member.*” (p. 2).

Over the last seven years I have been working for global organisations where global mobility has been the norm. Currently I work for a European global organisation for whom I agreed to relocate my family and myself from London to Europe. There are around 14,000 employees who work in the company’s HQ located in Europe and, of these, 70% are non-natives, most of whom have experienced multiple moves. These employees are typically highly-qualified talent sourced from around the world. Like my colleagues, I have moved between countries several times in my life, twice for my career advancement and once as part of my father’s international work. I also held a regional OD leadership role which led me to commute across 44 countries located on the four continents that my region covered.

In many of my work encounters and business travels, sooner or later someone would ask me a question such as: Where are you from? Where is home? I frequently experienced those questions going straight to the heart of the matter - *Where do you really belong?* – causing a visceral response of temporary disorientation. These questions would typically trip me. As illustrated at the beginning of this section, the question is asked frequently with no escape, even from taxi drivers. What do I tell them? The answer is not that simple but taxi drivers usually persevere and do not accept the first short answer anyway .... And, the longer the story, the greater the discomfort that fills my body as I am entering yet another hotel lobby ... the ‘belonging question’ will simply not go away ... O’Donohue’s (1998) words ring in my



ears: “*Mostly we do not need to make an issue of belonging; when we belong, we take it for granted.*” But what happens when one is not sure about where one belongs anymore?

As someone who has experienced: *displacement*, mostly by choice and once by the force of the war in the country I was born in; *the intensity of inclusion and exclusion* as a foreigner and a woman; *the challenges of global working and global mobility* due to career choices, I embarked on this inquiry to understand how in our postmodern world I, and others similar to me, can create a sense of belonging and live a healthy and fulfilled life.

### **1.3 The purpose of my inquiry and the inquiry question**

The purpose of my inquiry has been to understand whether a sense of belonging still mattered to me and to other people participating in our fast-paced postmodern world of global mobility. I wanted to understand the ongoing tension between the pull towards exploring the wider world and the equally strong pull towards belonging to a community or a place that could be called home. I wanted to learn how to lead a healthy, fulfilling life – as an individual and a professional – whilst grappling with my own sense of belonging and pursuing a globally mobile career path, requiring regular displacement.

As I engaged in conversations with other people who also pursued a globally mobile career, I heard stories of joy, growth and fulfilment and I heard stories of tension, the high price paid for this life and the struggles surrounding this choice of life path, stories that are typically not talked about in a public or organisational context. I was deeply touched by these stories of pain and the struggles experienced not only by individuals themselves but also by their families, struggles that global mobility had brought to bear. Participants spoke about their attempts to create some sense of belonging and home for themselves and their families, knowing very well that this would never be the same experience as they had grown up with. I learned about how those people were seeking to create an anchor for themselves and related this to my own struggles in my endeavour to stabilise my sense of identity, belonging and home.

This knowledge shaped another purpose to my inquiry. I wanted to bring to visibility those existential struggles that people experience whilst pursuing a globally mobile life. I wanted to draw attention to the side of global mobility that perhaps is ignored by corporations in their desire to meet their business and resource needs around the world, in the hope that this would open up a new dialogue within organisations considering their approach to moving people globally. Currently, the focus of organisations seems to be on the cost, the packages, the relocation logistics and the benefits but not enough attention is paid to the psychological and existential aspects of the 'deal'. Equally, I wanted to offer my discoveries to those individuals who are eager to embark on their globally mobile life so that they can be more informed. As one participant said: "once you get the taste for this life, it is difficult to go back, and yet I wish I was told more about what this would really be like...." (PB).

I noted the existence of an alternative form of belonging, which I metaphorically named '*shallow-rooted belonging*', developed (consciously or unconsciously) by globally mobile participants in this inquiry in response to their living conditions of '*in-betweenness*' and '*liminality*', terms I define in Chapter 3. I tested this metaphor with my participants and discovered a great sense of relief that was caused by the acknowledgement of this alternative form of belonging and being. A sense of a 'new normal' started to emerge. This generated another purpose of this inquiry, namely to offer this metaphor of shallow-rooted belonging to others to explore, work with and see if it might be helpful in understanding their way of being.

Finally, the majority of the participants in this inquiry reported that they had never openly discussed these topics of deliberate displacement, the issues of belonging, longing, gifts and struggles associated with their chosen path of mobility. They felt that the conversation itself had had a major positive impact on them and expressed a desire for this dialogue to be opened up more broadly amongst other global leaders and professionals. I see a possibility for my inquiry to take that little step towards opening up this dialogue in the hope that more would follow and some positive action would emerge.

With the guiding purpose outlined above, I framed my inquiry question as:

**How can I, and others in a position similar to mine, create a sufficient sense of belonging in our postmodern world of global mobility which will enable us to flourish and live a healthy, fulfilled life?**

## **1.4 The meaning of a ‘postmodern world’ adopted in this thesis**

I use the term postmodern to indicate the time we live in, the way we live our lives and the way we work in organisations. In literature this use of the postmodern term is often named as the period or epochal view (McAuley, et al, 2007) of postmodernism. The alternative view of postmodern takes a more philosophical perspective and considers postmodernism to be *“a new way of viewing the world, a new philosophy”* (McAuley et al, 2007, p. 200). The two uses of the term postmodern have different trajectories. The epochal view could be seen as an historical development into a complex form of modernism, whereas the philosophical perspective provides a new theoretical position from which we can try to make sense of the world around us. That position includes a recurring theme in postmodernism of a rejection of the modernist grand or metanarrative that it is possible to develop a rational and generalizable basis to scientific inquiry that explains the world from an objective stance. Through my thesis, I develop my response to both, an epochal view in my business life and a philosophical view in my intellectual work.

The epochal view of the postmodern world as a new historical era suggests that the postmodern period arrived after the modern period of capitalist development and signalled a change from relative stability to higher levels of instability, uncertainty and complexity caused by, for example, technological advances and globalisation. In using this term from this perspective, I developed an interest in examining how changes that are happening in the world and the need for greater global mobility have impacted on our individual sense of belonging.

There is much debate in the literature as to whether the postmodern era represents anything new, a breakaway from modernism or whether it is just an extension of modernism.

Jameson (1992, in McAuley et al, 2007) suggests that postmodernism may be viewed as a continuation between current society and that which preceded it. However, there seems to be an agreement that in the postmodern world change is all around, that we are living in a more dynamic environment where time and space is more compressed. Within a few hours flight, we can travel very long distances and this has changed the way that global space is understood.

In this postmodern world, with its service industry and revolutionary developments in science and technology, a transition from individualism to mass society, there are many opportunities for those developments to enhance the quality of people's lives as well as dangers such as a loss of community or, indeed, a sense of belonging. And in this postmodern world of global mobility, it is worth noting that this world is not quite universally postmodern. A small proportion of employees overall have the opportunity to pursue the path of global mobility whilst the majority of employees work within the environment of the country they grew up in. Those who take the opportunity to pursue this path cannot fail to notice that our world is complex and there is no uniform meaning in the application of the term postmodern era. Globally mobile professionals, especially those from Western societies, are likely to have experienced postmodern developments and yet, when they travel and work in other locations and societies around the world, they face a somewhat different world, a world mostly still firmly embedded in the notions of the modernist era with *less* advanced technological developments and characterised by the desire to emphasise order, rationality and stability as ways of managing and controlling an ever-changing world. Even further, those globally mobile professionals are likely to experience the influence of modernist, rather than postmodernist, thinking on the way their leaders currently lead or the way the organisation they work for is responding to challenges in the external environment. And yet, this complexity and diversity of living conditions that globally mobile professionals experience is part of what makes their 'postmodern' life even more demanding, rich and paradoxical.

Based on my professional experiences to date, most business corporations, whether local or global, are still strongly influenced by and remain modernist in their orientation to leading, managing and conducting life in organisational contexts and interacting with their environments. As a global OD practitioner, I am continually required to negotiate the complex

differences between global and local worlds and to facilitate a connection by placing myself in the space 'in-between' those worlds and enabling emotional and relational work to bridge the differences. In my thesis, I also explore how the shift in my own ontological perspective from a modernist towards a postmodernist perspective has impacted my professional practice and created difficulties in having my work recognised as a 'real work' by the wider organisational system influenced by modernist principles. I explore my understanding of and response to the postmodernist philosophical perspective in subsequent chapters.

## **1.5 The emerging nature of this inquiry**

*"What is the source of your authority?"* asked Hugh Pigeon in our first AMOC<sup>1</sup> workshop. I refer back to that provocative question as the start of my inquiry even though this was well before commencing my doctoral studies or being able to articulate the inquiry question. My inquiry progressed through a number of phases and cycles, each building on the previous one and taking a new direction not envisaged at the beginning of my doctoral journey.

The first cycle of inquiry focused on the proactive upholding of the detached worldview and on believing that deliberate displacement and detachment enabled me to lead a healthy life and be successful at work. Exploring the source of my authority led to the uncovering of some early childhood stories I grew up with and the subsequent reframing of my life's narrative. My hunger to gain some deeper insights into my roots, my sense of belonging and my being had grown and I was set on the path of further discovery.

The next cycle of inquiry led me towards a deep engagement with extended epistemology and expressive methods which enabled me to express feelings, thoughts and memories in a way I could not do through words alone. I discovered that the act of creation brought into visibility some deeply rooted beliefs and aspects of my identity and purpose that I had previously been unable to express. My fascination with crafts and craft-making traditions connected me more closely to my original roots and culture and to the community I grew up

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<sup>1</sup> AMOC – Ashridge Masters in Organisational Consulting

in. As I was engaging in a deep personal inquiry, I also started to pay attention to my work and how I practised Organisational Development (OD) in global organisations. I noted that my journey of developing my OD craft resembled that of a journeyman from the past (Lucie-Smith, 1981) – I moved countries and jobs in an endeavour to acquire various skills to add to my mastery. Through this process, I became a master of deliberate displacement, not belonging and working on the edge without attachment. That served me well in my career and my clients and employers seemed to value the contribution I made. I privileged that mastery of mine and for some time, I convinced myself that my inquiry was about mastering that very practice further. The more I looked into that practice, the more I started to be preoccupied by the ‘absent’ side of the phenomenon; the desire to develop a mastery of connectedness, belonging and community which started to make its way towards the foreground, no matter how hard I tried to ignore it. It was quite a lonely experience, operating predominantly from the displaced position in my practice and in my life and it never allowed for the deeper experience of belonging. I developed a curiosity to learn about the possibility of retaining my mastery of ‘deliberate displacement’ while, at the same time, enriching my personal and professional mastery by developing my practice of belonging and developing a sense of a ‘more rounded self’. Whilst I saw myself as a master of ‘not-belonging’, I saw myself as an apprentice in the practice of ‘belonging’. Expressive methods, the inquiry into self, my OD practice, ethnography and my home life all led me to notice the tension between displacement and belonging, which I subsequently inquired into deeper.

The cycle of inquiry that followed, culminating in the ADOC<sup>2</sup> transfer paper, brought to visibility my past experiences of dislocating myself from my country of origin, initially by choice but then by the force of the war in the country I was born in. This was a necessary step in my inquiry which helped me to accept certain aspects of my personal history and my roots and which gave me a foundation from which I could start shaping my sense of authority, voice and identity. I became fascinated by a seemingly mobile plant in my Croatian garden and studied it intently. I discovered that the plant had rather shallow roots, which enabled it to travel and yet thrive sufficiently in its current locality. While studying this plant, I became intrigued by what seemed on the surface the absence of the need for developing deep roots

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<sup>2</sup> ADOC – Ashridge Doctorate In Organisational Change

in a culture, location, place or community in my life's narrative. I noted the tension between my longing for adventure and my need to belong to a place or a culture. This tension seemed to pull me apart and blur my sense of voice, personal identity and belonging. At that time, I relocated to a new country due to work and the intensity of the inquiry into these themes increased and started to mesh with my fresh experiences of immigration and global mobility. An ongoing inquiry into the experience of belonging has led me to the realisation that the possibility of deep-rooted belonging was never mine to have. At that stage, I started to form an emerging view of an alternative form of belonging that I named shallow-rooted belonging, inspired by the 'mobile' plant in my garden. I viewed shallow-rooted belonging as being located primarily in relationships with other people and in the scattered anchors dropped in special places around the world that nurture a portable sense of belonging and enable healthy living in one's current locality.

This inquiry does not just focus on my journey alone. In my endeavour to understand this new practice of belonging, I engaged a small group of senior business leaders in an inquiry into their lived experience of belonging whilst pursuing globally mobile careers. Their stories were deeply touching and reassuring that, in this search for identity and belonging, I was not alone. Those conversations further enhanced my understanding of the shallow-rooted belonging phenomenon and informed my view that this alternative form of belonging might have emerged as a response to the living conditions of globally mobile people, closely resembling the notion of living in liminality. In parallel, I convened a small co-operative inquiry group with a group of global OD practitioners, who decided to inquire into the experiences of connectivity with self and with others and the possibilities for the creation of a greater sense of belonging in global organisations. Over time, the group started to pay attention to its own needs for connectivity and belonging, shifting the focus towards a desire to create a '*professional home*' for themselves amongst an otherwise dispersed group of dislocated OD professionals. We explored how shallow-rooted belonging could serve us in our practice and how this concept could be beneficial to our client organisations.

I nurtured different strands of the inquiry both separately and connectedly to gain a rich understanding of how we could develop a sense of belonging in our postmodern globally mobile world. I located this inquiry in the particular context of the European global

organisation where I currently work. My inquiry involved a deep engagement with the first person inquiry and also a deep engagement with two small groups, one of five OD practitioners and the other of six leaders, all of whom had extensive experience of global mobility and working for the same global organisation, with the exception of one participant. My aim was to understand the phenomenon of belonging in a globally mobile world by people who pursued global careers, rather than to develop any generalisations about the phenomenon or to draw any universally applicable conclusions. In addition, I located this inquiry within my professional practice in the field of organisational development. My conclusions are based on discoveries made with those groups of people located in this specific context; however, some of my conclusions may resonate with others, especially those who have been pursuing globally mobile careers.

## 1.6 The core concept definition

In Chapter 3 I provide definitions of belonging by different theoretical orientations underpinning my inquiry, from the perspectives of social psychologists, existential and phenomenological philosophy to a range of other different research insights around this topic of belonging.

By considering just the core definitions of the key words found in this thesis, as given in the Oxford Dictionary, we will find that the word **belong** is defined as: 1. a) *≈ to **sb** – be the property of somebody; b) ≈ to **sth** – be connected with something or a place; be correctly assigned to something;* 2. *≈ to **sth** - be a member of a group, a family, an organisation.* According to the same dictionary, the word **shallow** is defined as: 1. *Not deep;* 2. *(derogatory of the person) not thinking or capable of thinking seriously.* The word **root** is defined as: 1. *Part of a plant that keeps it firmly in the soil and absorbs water and food from the soil;* 2. *Roots – family ties, feelings etc that attach a person emotionally and culturally to the society or community where he grew up and/or lives or where his ancestors lived;* 3. *Part of a hair, tooth, etc;* 4. *Source or basis, etc.* **Deep rooted** is defined as: *profound, not easily removed.* Finally, **displacement** is defined as: 1. *The removal of someone or something by someone or*



*something else which takes their place; 2. The enforced departure of people from their homes, typically because of war, persecution, or natural disaster.*

When we say that someone has developed a deeply-rooted belonging, we typically refer to someone who is very settled in a place, a society or a culture and who has profound ties without much desire to move. And somehow this feels right, socially acceptable and possibly what one should experience or aim for. Social psychologist, Susan Fiske (2014) argues that people are adapted and motivated to belong in groups and need strong, stable relationships with other people. She sees belonging, a motive that makes us empathetically social beings, as one of the core five social motives and one which underlies the other four (understanding, controlling, enhancing self and trusting) and aids social survival. Fiske argues that people's motive to belong may help the group to survive but even more importantly, belonging to a group helps individuals to survive psychologically and physically. She also argues that: *"people's need to belong reflects some kind of attitudes, prejudices, and social influence, but belonging especially motivates close relationships, helping and groups."* (Fiske, 2014, p. 17).

So what would shallow-rooted belonging be like? There is an immediate social connotation to the word shallow, as we can see above, indicating an insufficient, superficial or not even serious sense of belonging. In the natural world, shallow roots are just the response of a plant or a tree in need to adapt to its terrain; they are thinner and wider to secure an ongoing source of water. Plants with shallow roots have the distinct advantage of being easily transplanted. With no long, deep taproot, it is relatively easy to dig them up and move them if the need arises. However, the biggest disadvantage plants with shallow roots face is the fact that they can only absorb the water near the surface of the soil, which dries out much more quickly than deep soil. When conditions are not ideal, e.g. a period of drought, those plants tend to wilt more quickly. In addition, plants with shallow roots have a higher chance of being damaged by gardening tools or of picking up a disease. Gardeners tend to plant shallow rooted trees, for example, near houses and in urban areas as they are gentler to their surroundings and cause less damage than the deep rooted trees, which could be seen as aggressive towards their surroundings.

The metaphor of the shallow rooted plant enables me to capture the essence of the quality of belonging that I have been inquiring into – an adaptive form of belonging that is not too deep or evasive and yet is nurturing, supporting and life-giving; perhaps an alternative and adaptive form of belonging to a terrain or a context in which one happens to find oneself as part of today's postmodern mobile world and way of living.

As a result of this inquiry, I offer the metaphor of shallow-rooted belonging to name a specific form of belonging that I noticed in the stories of global leaders as well as in my own experiences. Shallow-rooted belonging is an organic metaphor to describe a form of belonging that nurtures functional existence in the liminal social and psychological space. This form of belonging is deep enough through sufficient attachments to the current locality, traditions and communities of people (local and international) to prevent globally mobile people experiencing feelings of isolation, loneliness and exclusion and yet it is shallow enough to enable movement, detachment and preservation of one's own boundaries. Shallow-rooted belonging is broad but not deep, spread amongst multiple sources of belonging, including a safe anchor somewhere in the world.

I make no claims that shallow-rooted belonging is a new phenomenon. I only offer this metaphor to describe a very specific form of belonging that I noticed in the course of this inquiry.

## **1.7 To whom this inquiry might matter ...**

In the context of our postmodern, fluid and movable world, this inquiry might be useful to many individuals, OD professionals and organisations grappling with fragmentation, isolation and loneliness in their work and daily living and desiring to create a sense of connectedness, belonging and community. According to the PWC report (2012) there are 80 million Baby Boomers who are going to retire over the next five years and they will be replaced by 40 million Generation X-ers who seem to expect and will actively seek an opportunity to travel and work abroad. Millennials (those who were born between the early 1980s and the early

2000s) have a strong appetite for working abroad; 71% of those surveyed by PWC at the end of 2011 reported that they wanted and expected an overseas assignment during their career. This may be excellent news for businesses and this is also likely to further enhance a debate about the sense of belonging. Pico Iyer in his highly popular Ted Talk ([http://www.ted.com/talks/pico\\_ayer\\_where\\_is\\_home](http://www.ted.com/talks/pico_ayer_where_is_home)) states that the number of people living in countries not their own comes to 220 million which he describes as a great floating tribe, and this number is growing quickly – by 64 million just in the last 12 years, possibly creating the fifth largest nation on Earth. With this greater mobility on such a large scale, it is likely that many more people will grapple with the tension that I and participants in this doctoral study inquired into. I also hope that this inquiry may be of interest to those who have a sense of deep-rooted belonging in their endeavours to gain a deeper understanding of those who do not have such a deep sense of belonging.

## **1.8 The structure of this dissertation**

I work with natural metaphors and images, as much as possible, throughout this paper to reflect the inspiration I gained from the natural world. The paper was structured to closely resemble the phases and cycles of my inquiry.

**Chapter 1** provides the overview of the inquiry as a whole and describes the purpose, key concepts and applicability of this inquiry.

**Chapter 2** describes how a shift in ontological perspective and an engagement with extended epistemology and expressive methods deepened my inquiry and created conditions for engaging profoundly with the emotional territory within which the phenomenon of belonging is located. I also describe methodological choices and consider ethical issues associated with the nature of this inquiry.

**Chapter 3** provides a summary of different theoretical frameworks and research that informed my inquiry.

**Chapter 4** describes my first person inquiry and the cycles I went through, from constructing my personal world through the lens of deliberate displacement towards the territory of belonging and, in particular, shallow-rooted belonging.

**Chapter 5** focuses on the description of the experience associated with the tension between displacement and belonging, together with the shallow-rooted belonging as experienced by global leaders, OD practitioners and myself.

**Chapter 6** reflects the movement from the first person inquiry towards the loosely-held co-inquiry with a group of OD practitioners. The co-inquiry went through several cycles, from inquiring into attachment and detachment in our practice towards developing our sense of belonging and creating a 'professional home' for ourselves to nurture a shallow-rooted belonging.

**Chapter 7** summarises the key insights gained through the inquiry which I explored from different theoretical perspectives. This chapter centres on the topics of deliberate displacement, living in liminality, life crises and a response to these conditions in the form of shallow-rooted belonging.

In **Chapter 8** I describe a set of personal practices that I have developed which enable me to live functionally in a liminal space and grow a sense of shallow-rooted belonging. I step into my professional practice, the OD practice, and share its evolution in the organisational context as a result of this inquiry. I also offer some suggestions for policies and practices that global organisations might want to consider when shaping their global mobility perspectives.

**Chapter 9** is the concluding chapter where I reflect on my overall doctoral journey and the profound learning gained about myself, the tension between displacement and belonging, OD practice and finally about the learning process itself which enabled me to achieve those discoveries. I conclude this dissertation by explaining where I plan to take my inquiry next and acknowledging the contribution this inquiry is likely to make to the academy and to OD practice.

I have included different voices in this dissertation and for ease of reading and clarity of authorship, I have used different font types. When sharing extracts from my own journal or previous reflective writing, I deployed Century Gothic font type. To differentiate the voices of either business leaders or OD practitioners, I deployed Bookman Old Style font type. For all other text, I worked with the main font type, namely Calibri, and when quoting other references I use the same font but *in italics*.

I now turn my attention to the ontological, epistemological and methodological aspects of this inquiry.

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## CHAPTER 2

### Conditions for the inquiry:

Ontological, epistemological and methodological  
perspective



“Where you stumble, there lies your treasure.”

Joseph Campbell

Figure 5: Photo from the Office.com Clip Art, royalty free

## 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe how the shifting of my ontological perspective, from trusting only scientifically generated discoveries towards learning to trust my personal experience and subjective knowing, created the right conditions and fertile ground for a deeper engagement and understanding of my personal sense of authority, identity and belonging. I acknowledge my developing preference for studying human lived experiences and shift towards recognising the participatory and social nature of knowing and reality. Detaching myself from the original roots in scientific psychology opened up a new possibility of engaging with untapped sources of knowing, particularly those experienced through creative activities described in this section. I draw upon some specific experiences when the exposure to the extended epistemology impacted significantly upon my inquiry and enabled me to shed light onto memories, feelings and kinaesthetic experiences that words alone could not evoke. Inquiring into lived experiences required me to engage deeply with the emotional territory within which the phenomenon of belonging is located. I describe some methodological choices I made to support my inquiry into a sense of belonging as experienced by globally mobile professionals. Finally, I explore ethical considerations in my inquiry together with the quality criteria applied to my work.

Examining my ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives has strengthened my sense of authority and the grounding of my research and professional practice. I locate my inquiry more confidently now within the action research, informed by the phenomenological principles, and see the participatory action inquiry as an aspiring approach to enacting my practice, research and life in general.

## 2.2 Shifting my ontological perspective....

*"I catch myself remembering those long conversations with my friends, relatives, family, about everything and anything... ongoing conversations about some trivial details of everyday living, from the colour of the flowers in someone's garden, to boats that have*



*just been prepared for a new season, to the choice of lunch that will be cooked that day. I long occasionally for that irrelevant conversation, the one that has no specific purpose except to connect and help us make a sense of daily dwelling... I think about my day and apart from many business conversations at work, polite smiles to my neighbours and people at the bus stop whose language I cannot understand, and the final embrace and relief of having a relaxed conversation with my husband and my daughter, there is no opportunity for this slow conversation that allows me to notice the flowers in my garden or the garden of my neighbours; listen to the song of birds and acknowledge that the spring is coming... there is not much opportunity for feeling understood in this alien environment that I find myself in ...."*

Extract from my paper "Staying with the phenomenon..." 17<sup>th</sup> March 2014

### **2.2.1 Learning to trust the personal experience, my own and that of others**

In trying to understand the phenomenon of belonging, I found the mainstream research in psychology somewhat limited in my endeavour to appreciate the lived experience of belonging, mine and that of others. Whilst some of the mainstream research helped shed light on some aspects of the phenomenon (see Chapter 3 for summary), it did not help me step inside the experience and make sense of it. Indeed, my training in scientific psychology was focused on teaching me to detach myself from the phenomena and to be an objective observer rather than an active participant. I was trained to believe in scientific knowledge as an absolute truth and was conditioned not to question the truth that was derived through a solid empirical research. And yet, how can the yearning, the pain, the loneliness and the profound sense of not quite belonging, described in the scene above, be measured, predicted or classified in a traditional scientific way?

The shift from trusting only the scientifically derived knowledge towards appreciating my own experience, subjective knowing and accepting multiple-realities and sources of truth has been a gradual process. *"Recognising that the foundations of science are cultural-historical does not affect the truth of science, but it does put a different perspective on the fundamentalist claims made on behalf of science by some of its self-appointed missionaries today. Looked at in the light of the new discoveries in the history and philosophy of science, such claims to have*

*found the ultimate basis of reality look like no more than quaint relics from a bygone age..... We realize now that nature can manifest in more than one way, without needing to agree that one way is more fundamental than another.”* (Bortoft, 1996, p. xi).

My awakening to the view of multiple truths and realities started after encountering the work of Gergen (2009) and concepts of social construction. His work and concepts fundamentally shook my foundations and brought me to examine what I had felt for a long time, but feared to explore. My trust in one universal truth got further shaken through the discovery that theories developed by Piaget, Cattell, Freud, to name but a few, that I had accepted as universal truths of human development in my earlier days of practising psychology, were not as ‘universal’ as I had thought. Those theories, intentionally or unintentionally, labelled some female behaviour as inferior and undeveloped. Whilst reading the work of Gilligan (1993), Miller (in Robb, 2007) or Belenky et al (1997), my trust in traditional science as the only source of truth in explaining human development, behaviour, feelings and emotions, got further shaken. Feminists pointed out that male domination and masculine standards influenced the emergence of a masculine social science built around ideals such as objectivity, control, distance, rationality. They also pointed out that alternative ideals such as cooperation, closeness and intuition have been marginalised (Alvesson, 2002). I could not avoid but ask myself questions such as: Whose truth am I listening to? Who is trying to assert their power over whom in the name of the ‘truth’?

My romantic and naive view of the ‘truth’ and viewing the science in a purist way, out of social-historical context, got shattered and I started to pay increasing attention to who has the power and whose voices are heard or not. As Jürgen Habermas proposed in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (in Held, 1980), any search for knowledge favours certain economic and political goals over others. This suggests that all authoritative accounts of the world contain implicit values; they carry an ideology within them, suggesting ideas of what the political and social order *should* be like. Reading about Goethe’s journey (in Bortoft, 1996) and how he was ridiculed by other scientists as he did not ‘fit’ into the mould of the time and possibly presented a threat to the established science, just further supported a degree of growing ‘scepticism’ in my view of the ‘one universal truth’. Whilst mainstream science enables us to

discover the causal order in nature, Goethe had offered a different way of looking at science which enables us to discover the wholeness (Bortoft, 1996) which I am coming to appreciate.

In addition, the traditional approach in scientific psychology, demanded of us psychologists to separate ourselves from the subject of study and play the role of a detached observer. Views about a phenomenon needed to be formed on facts, data and logical arguments. "... *Empirical research frequently meant that one assumed an independent reality out there, which can be perceived and measured through indications of that reality – data.*" (Alvesson, 2002, p. 2). I was troubled by the 'data' my senses, emotions and instincts were generating *but* that I could not quantify and therefore had to exclude from my conclusions. I felt I was cheating myself and I was cheating the club I had joined.

### **2.2.2 Accepting multiple-realities and studying the lived experiences**

I now accept that there are multiple-realities and multiple sources of 'truth' (Gergen, 2009) and that part of our reality is constructed in ongoing interactions with people around us and meaning created through discourse and the social process of relating. Creating meaning through social interaction with my fellow co-inquirers or people I had conversations with proved to be a critical part of my inquiry work described here.

As Bortoft states in the paragraph above, nature manifests in more than one way and these days I get rather cautious of any claims out there of 'fundamental truth' or superiority to other perspectives, without understanding the wider context and conditions within which that claim is asserted.

### **2.2.3 Acknowledging the phenomenological undercurrent to my inquiry**

I have developed a preference for studying human lived experiences, as this provides me with a rich contextualised understanding of a phenomenon and enables me to be an active participant in that process. I notice an influence of phenomenological perspective on my preferences. From a phenomenological perspective, the focus is on the way things appear to us through experience or in our consciousness where the phenomenological researcher aims

to provide a rich textured description of lived experience. The researcher's project is, in the words of Husserl (1970), to *'return to the things themselves'*. The 'things' here refer to the world of experience as lived.

*"As human beings we attempt to make sense of all our experiences. We strive to impose meaning upon the world."* (Spinelli, 2005, p. 5). Phenomenology, like much of modern philosophy, questions the traditional viewpoint of objective reality, suggesting that true reality is, and will remain as, both unknown and unknowable to us. *"Instead, that which we term reality, that is, that which is experienced by us as being real, is inextricably linked to our mental processes in general and in particular, to our in-built, innate human species capacity to construct meaning."* (Spinelli, 2005, p. 6). Edmund Husserl, seen as a founder of phenomenology, wanted to develop a science of phenomena that would clarify how objects are experienced and how they present themselves to our consciousness. He developed the phenomenological method that focuses on the data of consciousness in order to clarify their role in the process of meaning construction, and he attempts to bracket them in order to arrive at a more adequate knowledge of reality. Husserl was interested in finding a means by which someone might come to accurately know their own experience of a given phenomenon and would do this with a rigour and depth that might allow them to identify the essential qualities of that experience (Smith et al, 2009). From the phenomenological perspective, the objects that we perceive exist, they exist in the way that we give a meaning to them. Phenomenologists argue that the interpretational process must be acknowledged in our statements about reality and suggest that, in our everyday experience of reality, this process is invisible from the reality being perceived. Reality, as far as each of us experiences it, is this process – the process of interpretation. With this view of reality and truth, there is no possibility of any final or completely correct interpretation since such would presuppose that we had direct knowledge of an ultimate reality.

On trying to understand the tension created between feelings of displacement and a sense of belonging, I based this on my own daily experiences of the phenomenon and through inquiry with other people with similar experiences. I have been seeking to understand similarities as well as differences in our interpretations of our experiences, valuing both and accepting that,

regardless of how singular or generally shared our interpretations of those experiences are, they are still interpretations.

In the later section, I outline how the phenomenological viewpoint has informed my chosen methodology in this inquiry and the methods deployed. I draw upon heuristic research methodology, offered by Clark Moustakas (1994), together with action research methodology, and see both of those as complementary and mutually enhancing. Additionally, in Chapter 3 I further explore the influence of existential phenomenology as a theoretical/philosophical layer informing my inquiry.

## **2.3 Engaging with extended epistemology**

### **2.3.1 Developing an understanding of how we know what we know...**

According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (online, 2005, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/>) we can narrowly define epistemology as: *“the study of knowledge and justified belief. As the study of knowledge, epistemology is concerned with the following questions: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge? What are its sources? What is its structure, and what are its limits?.....”*

Informed by my evolving world view and interest in studying the lived experience, I found it challenging to define epistemology for myself as the ‘study of knowledge’. That definition suggests to me that knowledge is seen as something superior, definite, static, concrete and somehow ‘out there’ – objective, detached, controllable, measurable. And whilst this may be the case for other people, I prefer to view epistemology as an evolving inquiry into the process of knowing, which is very much located ‘inside’, is subjective and by its nature reflective of the ‘point in time’.

I am getting to know the world through my sensory experiences and my knowing is also influenced by what is going on inside me, by my interactions with the other – whether a

person or an object – and my interpretations of those interactions. Heron and Reason (1997) state that: *“To experience anything is to participate in it, and to participate is both to mould and to encounter. In relation of meeting, my subjectivity becomes a perspectival window that frames and is filled with a world which also transcends it.”* (p. 1). They suggest a participatory worldview with its notion of reality as subjective-objective and that involves an extended epistemology, together with the idea that: *“a knower participates in the known, articulates and shapes a world, in at least four interdependent ways: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical.”* (p. 2). The authors proposed four ways of knowing which seem to build upon each other, from **experiential knowing** based on our personal experiences (through a direct face-to-face encounter with a person, place or thing; it is known through the immediacy of perceiving, through empathy and resonance); to **presentational knowing** that emerges from and is grounded in experiential knowing and provides a first form of expression through story, picture, sculpture, imagery, etc; to **propositional knowing** in conceptual terms that something is the case (expressed in informative statements) and towards the **practical knowing** of how to do something, demonstrated in a skill or competence. They go on to say that: *“the knowing will be more valid if these four ways of knowing are congruent with each other: if our knowing is grounded in our experience, expressed through our stories and images, understood through theories which make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives.”* (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p. 149).

The participatory perspective on knowing resonates with me and, as part of my development over the last several years, I engaged with developing my practice of ‘critical subjectivity’. Critical subjectivity is a term developed by Heron and Reason to describe the development challenge for us as knowers, *“this involves an awareness of the four ways of knowing, of how they are currently interacting, and of ways of changing the relations between them so that they articulate a subjective – objective reality that is unclouded by a restrictive and ill-disciplined subjectivity”* (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 282). I find the concept of critical subjectivity useful and congruent with the phenomenological notion of intentionality, describing the relationship between the process occurring in consciousness and the object of attention for that process. Adopting a phenomenological attitude involves and requires a reflexive move. *“Once we stop to self-consciously reflect on any of this seeing, thinking, remembering and wishing, we are being phenomenological”* (Smith et al, 2009, p. 23).

I have been practising critical subjectivity and reflexivity through cycles of my inquiry, as I intend to demonstrate later. However, there is also something in the linearity and rationality of Heron and Reason's proposition that is not fully congruent with my experiences of trying to work with that proposition. My experience to date has been messier, irregular, non-linear and uncertain as to when my knowing was moving from one level to the other. There were times that I describe in my personal development when images or some other artful representations would emerge before I would be fully aware of my experience and I would not be sure what came first at the conscious level – experiential or presentational knowing, for example. Whilst my experience of moving from one level to the other has not always been neat, the general feel of a cycle being completed and resulting in a new insight and action did emerge, even when a new cycle started in parallel.

I can relate my personal experiences also to the feminist perspective on knowing. Belenky et al (1997) in *Women's Way of Knowing* talk about the five major epistemological categories, based on women's perspectives on knowing. They proposed five ways of knowing – silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge and constructed knowledge. They distinguish between connected and separate knowing – connected knowing starts with a receptive eye entering the spirit of what is offered and seeking to understand from within; whilst separate knowing is more about a critical eye and playing a 'doubting game'. My personal development has been closely linked with the development of new sets of beliefs and perspectives on knowing and I have drawn on the feminist perspectives in particular whilst making sense of shifts that I believe had happened.

### **2.3.2 Developing personal confidence in becoming the author of my own writing**

I notice in my personal development journey, that the development of new beliefs and perspectives on knowing was part of my growth as a woman and key to the development of my own sense of voice, identity and authority. I surprised myself in the transfer viva that took place in 2012, when I very clearly articulated my rationale for not sufficiently engaging with theories to underpin my inquiry. I realised that over the last several years I had been searching to strengthen my own inner authority and to develop the confidence to be the author of my

own writing. I needed to free myself of many theories that I had absorbed in the past and give other ways of knowing a voice that they deserved. I recognised that through this period of disengagement from the 'theory' that I absorbed through my various educational efforts, I created space for a new transformation to take place.

By going back to my roots and taking an introspective approach to my experiences I developed trust and appreciation for experiential and presentational knowing. Extended epistemology enabled me to develop personal confidence and my own inductive approach to the theory generation based on personal experiences as a starting point. Using Belenky et al (1997) terminology, in my personal development, I probably moved away from a 'received knowledge' perspective and started to value the 'subjective knowledge' – a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, subjectively known or intuited – which enabled me to trust and value my inner voice much more than before. *“The passionate rejection of science and scientists, whilst not true of all subjective knowers, was very common. .... In many of our interviews with women currently in school, the shift into subjectivism was accompanied by a shift in academic major from science to the arts or humanities”* (p. 71). I moved away from scientific psychology and towards relational and social psychology, informed by a phenomenological philosophy and action inquiry as a way of approaching my practice and work.

### **2.3.3 Creating a fertile ground for my inquiry – extended epistemology**

As described above, action research draws upon different forms of knowing, not just conceptual and empirical, but also experiential, tacit, emotional, visceral, presentational, aesthetic and practical (Marshall and Reason, 2003).

I provide here several examples from my lifeline of those poignant moments where engaging with the extended epistemology and valuing diverse ways of knowing enabled me not only to understand the essence of my inquiry question but also to start gaining an understanding of the experience of belonging (or the tension between a chosen displacement and the desire to belong) and provided me with a way of discovering those untapped sources of knowing.





I had flashes of a walk in Devon with Stephan and being fascinated by the underground fungi network – I seem to be interested in bringing ignored voices out to be listened to and the image of connections, support and unity...I suddenly could see the cover of the book – Disappearing Acts – emerging in front of my eyes and I could vividly see a word immigrant – yes I am an immigrant but I also felt that I am a citizen of the world and a traveller..."

### Insights and Impact

I produced the poster shown above in April 2011, as part of the first ADOC workshop. At some unconscious level, I recognised the state of awakening that I would write about in my journal several weeks later. The poster already contained the word *awakening* and images showing softness and hardness; an intensive contrast between coloured and black/white images; freedom and imprisonment. At the time, I could not make sense of this, but now, looking back and connecting with my journaling, I can see that this period was full of tension wanting to free myself up from the self-imposed constraints and the fear of the unknown 'muddy' path ahead. The continual desire to understand my own sense of authority, voice and identity started to spill into an understanding of myself as a woman. Imagination and playfulness started to be unleashed. The word immigrant appeared which then shaped further my exploration of my identity, source of authority and sense of belonging. Evolving questions started to grab my attention: Where do I belong? What are my roots and how are they informing my sense of belonging, identity and purpose? What do the words – immigrant or foreigner - evoke in me?

### **Moment: Searching for purpose**

Figure 7: The 'Tree of my inquiry', painted by myself,  
26<sup>th</sup> November 2011



### The Moment

Extract from my electronic journal,  
26<sup>th</sup> November 2011

"I put the music on and started to play with the paints... I enjoyed the feel of the paint on the paper; smudging it, mixing it, having the paint thin and thick and enjoyed the moves. The image started to appear in front of my eyes... I had a wonderful feeling of connection and wholeness.

I looked at the image and was delighted that the image I was carrying for days in my head suddenly appeared on the paper. I simply

stopped; there was nothing more to be added.

I am looking at it now and feel that this image is helping me see what really matters. The process of getting to the point of moving the image from my head to the paper has been a long one.... I am fascinated by the movement in my picture – the movement is showing the pull from underneath and reception from the top and in the middle there is a circular movement and blend of colours and energy. And what really provides the energy is the sense of connection and sense of colours dancing together and creating yet another colour in its movement. The beauty is in movement, connection and positive energy. The energy in creation came from using powerful colours and helping them stand out whilst at the same time the energy came from creating the connection. "

### Insights and Impact

The image presented on the painting above preoccupied my mind for weeks. At the time, I grappled with the purpose of my inquiry which silently spilled into questioning my own purpose – Why am I here? What is my purpose? In the progress papers written for my DSG on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2011, I wrote: "The circle that connects for me is about discovering and facilitating 'connections'. This is about Purpose, Meaning, Human Kindness, Creating A Better World, Creating Hope and Positive Change" (p. 5). In the same paper, I wrote about an incident of waking up in the middle of the night (immediately after the production of the

painting) and voice recording my thoughts, whilst seeing various images. I recorded the following sentence "... my purpose in life is to create and facilitate connections and build bridges to help people create a better future..."

I started to realise the power of creative activity for self-expression and awareness and became aware of the need to engage with creative activity in order to generate a space for self-connectivity, an enrichment of my spiritual life and the re-discovery of emotional expressions. This engagement with creative activity enabled me to express feelings and thoughts in a way I could not through words. I discovered that the act of creation brought into visibility some deeply rooted beliefs and aspects of my identity and purpose that I had previously been unable to express.

### **Moment: Layering, connecting, experiencing**

Figure 8: Playing with Clay, created in the pottery session, January 2012

Figure 9: A segment from 'The Tree of my inquiry – Take 2: Body Size', painted by myself, January 2012



#### The Moment

Extracts from my electronic journal:

Playing with clay 6<sup>th</sup> January 2012

*"I opened the bag with the clay and was surprised to see the brown clay .... I put my hands on the clay and felt its coldness.... I smelt it but there was no smell. I then started to pull it apart... . I was fascinated by the way the clay broke in some sort of irregular but still linear fashion... I was getting my hands deeper into the material, started to feel it more closely and mould it; I felt that I was developing a relationship with the clay. I was guided by my fingers rather than my head... – I was thinking with my fingers ... I was in my world of interaction with the clay and was curious to see what I could create through different moves and different ways of folding and unfolding the clay, rolling and curling, etc. I had no image in my head – the object was emerging through my hands interacting with the clay.*

*As we were invited to reflect, I had a strong need to come out into the garden. My legs took me to the rockery... I closed my eyes and let my body process it all. I enjoyed seeing through my closed eyes the sunlight coming in and flowing through my body and connecting me through my shoes back to the ground and with the rocks. Memory of the clay had filled me with a wonderful uplifting feeling – for a few moments I was somewhere else..."*

### Insights and Impact

The experience of working with clay was a very powerful reminder that I needed to engage with creative activity in order to flourish, nurture my soul and feel at my best. My overreliance on rationality tended to lead me to the feeling of being stuck and lifeless. The discovery of making enabled me to regain the energy, movement and flow. Working with clay untangled some tough knots that were preventing me from moving. A new energy was released within me and a hunger for a radical change in my life started to intensify.

I came to realise that I need to allow myself to 'play', use my creativity and imagination in order to feel connected with myself and to flourish. I engaged in more painting and clay activities. I became deeply intrigued by the concept of layering, introduced by James Aldridge and my attention went towards trying to untangle the layers of my inquiry.

### **Moment: Jumping into the unknown and feeling alive**

Figure 10: Image from the poster, ADOC workshop 1, April 2011

#### The Moment:

Deciding to move to Europe, May 2012

This image haunted me since I first placed it on my poster at the beginning of my ADOC journey. Its presence in my consciousness intensified after the pottery experience. Eventually, when I was due to



make a significant decision to accept a new job which would require my family and me to relocate to Europe, the image kept recurring till the decision to jump and embrace the new opportunity was made.

### Insights and Impact

Creative activity untangled some knots that constrained me for a while. I was not aware of all the knots, but I knew in my body that I was free to fly. The fear of the unknown turned into excitement and a sense of adventure. The opportunity to start afresh in a new country intensified my inquiry into identity, voice and personal flourishing, coupled with the challenges of having to restart life in a new culture, country and organisation. Questions related to the sense of belonging started to emerge into the foreground and memories of immigration from Croatia to the UK came to the surface.

#### **2.3.4 Valuing multiple ways of knowing**

After my intensive experience during the pottery session, I found myself reading the work of Chris Seeley (2008; 2011) around the stronger integration of different art forms into action research, ways of knowing and presenting what we know. Reason and Bradbury (2001), Seeley and Reason (2008) talk about the different ways of knowing and invite us action researchers to honour those different ways of knowing – whether in the way we generate the CAPTA or evidence in our inquiry or the way we express and present those discoveries. When reading about this it sounded right but only after the pottery session had I been in total harmony with the notion of extended epistemology and the diversity of presentational knowing. It is because of the intense embodied experience during the pottery session, that I could finally truly understand those concepts that made such sense to my head, and yet they were not fully part of me – they were not felt by my body in the way that they were felt during the clay session. After the clay session, I felt that my body knew what my inquiry was about, ahead of my head.

I felt a significant moment of inner power and confidence that my body already knows many things about my inquiry and that perhaps I need to learn to discover all that knowing to bring it out on the surface and present it to others. I noticed in my paintings that the colours were so bright and mixed and unique. There were some unusual combinations and exciting patterns all waiting for me to discover their meaning. Bateson (2000) talks about the interplay of all of those ways of knowing when he states: “There are bridges between one sort of thought (intellectual) and the other (emotional), and it seems to me that the artists and poets are specifically concerned with those bridges. .... Artistic skill is the combining of many levels of mind – unconscious, conscious and external – to make a statement of their combination” (p. 470).

Allowing different ways of knowing to come forth, I created a safe space for myself to engage with a difficult territory charged with a whole range of emotions associated with the inquiry into my sense of belonging. It has also taken my inquiry into a different space, away from logical or rational territory which acted as a protective shield, and more towards the engagement with deeply held memories, emotions and experiences. This resulted in a deeper understanding of the tension I experienced and opened up the space for additional layers of inquiry.

## **2.4 Adopting action research methodology**

### **2.4.1 Framing the inquiry within the action research umbrella**

I am choosing to work with action research as the core methodological approach to my inquiry. My intent in this action research is to create an understanding of the phenomenon of belonging as experienced by globally mobile professionals and to develop some practical knowledge that would support my personal and professional practice. Reason and Bradbury (2006) define action research as: *“a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to*

*bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.” (p. 1).*

There are many different approaches under the umbrella of action research as illustrated by different authors (Ladkin, 2004, Reason and Bradbury, 2001, Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Reason and Bradbury (2006) highlight the fact that action research refers to a range of approaches and practices which are grounded in different traditions and are underpinned by different philosophical and psychological assumptions and pursue different political agendas, but the common denominator typically is the fact that they are participative, grounded in human experience and action oriented.

I am choosing to refer to my action research as an action inquiry, rather than research. The word inquiry reflects more closely my experience and intent of this ‘research’ as an ongoing process and captures more closely the necessary condition of curiosity which I see to be the key ingredient in the action inquiry work. My action inquiry has evolved around multiple strands, starting with the personal inquiry, developing into conversations with global leaders around their experiences of displacement and belonging, and creating a loosely held co-inquiry with fellow OD professionals. My primary intent in this inquiry has been to be practical and transformative within the realm of organisational development practice in the broadest sense, and more specifically to develop some practical knowledge and action for my personal practice of belonging as well as for my practice as an OD practitioner in the global organisational context. Each strand of my inquiry has generated some practical knowledge that informed certain actions. Through personal inquiry I discovered the need to develop some sufficient belonging and the insights I gained by talking to a group of globally mobile leaders has led me to re-examine the life I lead, helped me to recognise my priorities and needs and inform my recent career choices and return to London. Working with my fellow global OD practitioners, we co-inquired into how ‘belonging or not-belonging’ showed up in our practice, explored the potential of shallow-rooted belonging in our practice and took action to create a sense of a ‘professional home’ for ourselves to nurture our need for sufficient belonging. Working with different strands of the inquiry and with different



participant groups shaped some of my initial thoughts on the practical application of the learning in this inquiry for its wider context in global organisations.

Reason and Marshall (1987) state that: *“All good research is for me, for us and for them: it speaks to three audiences, and contributes to each of these three areas of knowing. It is for them to the extent that it produces some kind of generalizable ideas and outcomes which elicit the response ‘That’s interesting!’ from those who are concerned to understand a similar field. It is for us to the extent that it responds to concerns of our praxis, is relevant and timely, and so produces the response ‘That works!’ from those who are struggling with problems in their field of action. It is for me to the extent that the process and outcomes respond directly to the individual researcher’s being-in-the-world, and so elicits the response ‘That’s exciting!’ – taking exciting back to its root meaning, to set in action. Research thus contributes to personal motivation and development.”* (p. 113). In shaping my inquiry question and the purpose, I have considered all three audiences. However, my inquiry has been very strongly embedded within ‘me’, with the aim of supporting my personal development and helping me understand the life tensions generated by the ongoing pursuit to understand my sense of belonging. The first person inquiry has therefore been a primary strand in my inquiry and as a result of this, the other strands emerged. Having progressed the first person inquiry to a sufficient level of depth, I moved into working with a group of global OD practitioners – the ‘us’ – to explore how a sense of belonging and, indeed, an emerging concept of shallow-rooted belonging could enhance our practice in global organisations. Finally, this inquiry is for ‘them’ in that I intend to influence the academic community and the wider society to consider different forms of belonging as appropriate for some populations.

#### **2.4.2 Locating my inquiry within myself – personal inquiry**

The overall inquiry question has been derived from my desire and need to understand the tension that I have been experiencing between the pull towards adventure, learning and developing my career in the international context, which requires me to be globally mobile, and at the same time the pull towards wanting to belong to a community or a place. The aim of my first person inquiry has been to develop a greater self-knowledge, awareness as well as

to master the other side of 'displacement' and learn how to develop a sufficient sense of belonging whilst living in places in the world different from my country of origin.

The first person inquiry terminology was introduced by Bill Torbert (2004), describing a process where we study ourselves in the midst of practice to develop self and generate effectiveness and personal integrity. Action research involves and calls for a degree of self-reflection and personal development. Marshall (2001) relates action research with the 'personal process' and notices that we all draw on our lives to inform our inquiries. The following statement speaks to me: *"I currently prefer the notion of inquiry as life process, respecting how inquiring is a core to my being, and that my full (multiple) being is involved in any 'researching' I have undertaken."* (Marshall, 2011, p. 341).

Making the choice that this inquiry would contain a strong first person inquiry required me to overcome some of my own inner obstacles, informed by my early training in scientific psychology where first person research/methods (such as introspection) were not seen as valid or 'proper research' and prominence was given to experimental research. Accepting this choice, I have used a range of methods to capture as rigorously as possible my experiences and have engaged in cycles of inquiry to gain a deeper understanding of my experiences and myself that enabled me to act differently in my professional practice and life in general.

I have engaged not only in self-inquiry but also in a dialogue with others, namely six global business leaders, to seek further understanding of their, as well as to make sense of my own, experience of belonging and to learn about how they have developed a sufficient sense of belonging whilst pursuing globally mobile careers.

As my inquiry progressed and I noted a phenomenon that I named shallow-rooted belonging, I chose to stay longer with that phenomenon to gain a deeper understanding of it. Within the frame of the action research, this aspect of my inquiry required me to hold myself in the descriptive rather than the transformative inquiry approach for a period of time. Reason and Bradbury (2006) state that the inquiry can of course be both, transformative and informative, one before or after the other. Through the period of informative inquiry, my approach has been somewhat informed by the underpinning philosophy associated with the heuristic

phenomenological research, developed by Moustakas (1990, 1994). He defines this approach as: *“a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, whilst understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic process incorporates creative self-process and self-discoveries.”* (Moustakas, 1994, p. 17).

This process begins with a question which a piece of research seeks to illuminate or answer and the question is typically the one that has been a personal challenge in the search to understand oneself and the world in which we live. Moustakas states that this form of research is autobiographic by its nature but typically every question that matters there is also of a social and perhaps universal significance. This way of engaging in research is through a self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences. *“The deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual through one’s senses, perceptions, beliefs, and judgements. This requires a passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is illuminated or answered.”* (Moustakas, 1994, p. 18). This form of research requires the researcher to engage with wide and deep explorations of the phenomenon and to work with a whole range of data (or CAPTA), from narrative descriptions to self-dialogues, stories, poems, artwork, journals, diaries and other personal documents to portray the experience.

My intention to study my own lived experience of belonging whilst pursuing a globally mobile career has been combined with the intent to take some positive action to develop myself and enhance my own sense of belonging based on the learning gained. So the motivation to understand the experience of belonging, my own and that of other globally mobile professionals, and to bring it to visibility for others, coupled with the desire to take positive action in the wider social context, brings me to blend the transformative action inquiry with the methods associated with heuristic phenomenological research. The lived experience is at the core of both, action research and heuristic phenomenological research, and I see those two approaches complementing and enhancing the depth of my inquiry.

### **2.4.3 Engaging in a co-inquiry with my colleagues, global OD practitioners – co-inquiry**

As my first person inquiry progressed, I became interested in exploring how the tension between deliberate displacement and a sense of belonging plays out in my OD practice and what impact this may have on the way I and my global colleagues turn up as OD practitioners. I convened a small co-inquiry group, made out of five global OD practitioners and myself. I saw this part of my inquiry as part of the second person inquiry, which can be described as our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern (Reason and Bradbury, 2001) or in Torbert's terms (2004), it can be described as having a conversation with others to generate a greater 'mutuality' and commitments to whatever conclusions we reach. As the purpose of this strand of my inquiry was very much focused on us as a group of practitioners learning together and shaping our agenda together, I consider this part of my overall inquiry to be the second person inquiry. I did initiate the formation of the co-inquiry group and proposed the initial inquiry question, but shortly after the group was formed, the agenda shifted towards the co-created and shared agenda by the group, as described further in Chapter 6.

I saw the co-inquiry very much as a loose form of co-inquiry, a process conducted by a group of global OD practitioners with equally valuable expertise in a spirit of collaboration, co-operation and mutual desire to learn together. Co-inquiry, as described by Heron and Reason (2006), involves cycling between four phases of reflection and action (experiential, presentational, propositional knowing and practical knowing – as described earlier) and draws on an extended epistemology. The four phases of reflection and action are meant to be inquiry cycles that move between reflection and action. For example, Phase 1 of the co-inquiry cycle would be to agree an inquiry focus, developing together a set of inquiry questions and methods. In Phase 2, the co-inquirers become co-subjects in that they engage in the action they agreed to take and observe and record the process, experiences and outcomes for themselves and others. During Phase 3, the co-inquirers typically become fully immersed in the action and experience and at that stage superficial understandings are deepened or the experience leads to new ideas, creative insights or unpredicted action. In Phase 4, the co-inquirers get together to share their experiences and may reframe the inquiry

question. This simulates a new cycle of inquiry, accompanied by cycles of action and reflection.

I describe the process, the experience and the personal challenges associated with conducting the co-inquiry in more detail in Chapter 6. The co-inquiry I conducted with my peers drew upon developmental, emerging and improvised processes. As a group, we were adjusting the inquiry process as we went along, based on our joint and individual learning and our growing experience of working together as well as working with the action inquiry principles.

#### **2.4.4 Developing insights for ‘them’**

As stated earlier, one purpose of good research is to offer some insights, ideas and outcomes to ‘them’ out there in the public which they may find of interest. As Kathleen King (2005) described in her thesis, the third person inquiry aims to create a wider community of inquiry. This may also include writing and other forms of reporting of the outcomes of an inquiry and making it available to a wider public. Apart from sharing the writing up of my Module 3 paper, written in December 2013, with my co-inquiry group and gathering their responses and reactions to the paper, as well as sharing certain chapters of this thesis with the same group and several global business leaders who participated in conversations with me, I cannot make any further claims of third person inquiry practices. I introduced the concept of shallow-rooted belonging to them and received some encouraging responses, indicating a high level of resonance with this concept. Further than that, I cannot make any other claims. Following the completion of this thesis, I hope to publish in journals and present at both conferences and leadership events in the organisation I work for in order to open up a dialogue in the wider public around the topic of displacement and belonging in a globally mobile world.

## 2.5 Deploying a variety of inquiry methods

### 2.5.1 Personal inquiry - displacement, belonging and the tension

This strand of inquiry examines in depth some transformational moments on my development journey by looking at my personal experiences. To capture my experiences and make sense of those, I used a variety of methods:

- a) **Reflective journaling** – Recording some specific incidents from day-to-day experience and vividly capturing those incidents, thoughts, emotions, kinaesthetic responses and reflections. I used the written word and the voice-recording method, utilising a digital recorder.
- b) **Recording supervision sessions** – I recorded my supervision sessions, re-listened and took notes to inform my inquiry. I found this method helpful in ensuring that I heard everything that was said by my ‘critical friends’ from my DSG. I frequently found myself surprised by what I did not hear during the live session but later saw in my transcript or heard in the replay.
- c) **Writing as a process of creating and ‘data’ collection** – I wrote reflective papers on specific topics of inquiry in the spirit of creation. I had been experimenting with the process of ‘writing as creating’ – and using the writing process as an opportunity to give myself ‘space’ to make sense of my experiences and tensions. Denzin and Lincoln (2005), Richardson (2000), Richardson and St Pierre (2005), and Marshall (2008) suggest that writing is both an inquiry and a data collection method. Colyar (2009) suggests that writing enables us to look inward and enables us to connect with ourselves. She also suggests that writing generates new understanding, new ideas and is a learning process. I experimented with evocative writing to capture the emotions and intensity of experiences, memories and feelings as felt in my body.
- d) **Artistry, making, listening to music as inquiry methods** – I experimented with photography, painting, clay and pottery, needle crafts and collage making as well as

listening to classical music to create different quality 'space' for knowing to emerge or to create different 'forms' for expressing the knowing that emerged. There is a whole body of research related to the use of artistry, photography and making as inquiry methods (Seeley and Reason, 2008; Seeley, 2011; Brinton Lykes, 2006; Prosser, 2011). I discovered that I was unable to write my papers without having some classical music playing in the background which would centre me in my whole body and connect me with my feelings.

- e) **Capturing dreams and visual imagery** – I developed the habit of having a notepad and voice recorder next to my bed to capture dreams, thoughts and imagery as they emerged. Frequently I would find out in the morning that I had captured my dreams or those thoughts that emerged during the semi-awake state at night; these would turn up in the form of drawing, writing or, occasionally, voice recording.
  
- f) **Auto-ethnography** – I engaged with auto-ethnography as a method of inquiry and a selection of extracts from that work are included in this thesis. As part of my first person inquiry, I found that auto-ethnography and auto-ethnographic writing was a necessary method to apply. Ellis (2004) defines auto-ethnography as: *“research, writing, story, and method that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political”* (p. xix).
  
- g) **Timeline** – I used the timeline method to map the poignant moments significant for my inquiry and personal development. The timeline method is increasingly used in qualitative research (Bagnoli, 2009) and I found it an extremely useful method to see the parts and the whole of my development journey. That form enabled me to make sense of my first person inquiry as well as the inquiry as a whole. The timeline therefore not only acted as the inquiry method but also as the inquiry representational form. The visual representation of the timeline in a summative form is given in Appendix.
  
- h) **Participating in my doctorate supervision group (DSG)** – I have been an active member of my doctorate supervision group that we named *The Quartet*, comprising

my three peers – Abi, Sue and Chris - and our supervisor Robin. Working with and learning with/from this group of colleagues, who I deeply respect, has been an invaluable aspect of my inquiry process. My peers have acted as critical friends, a concept introduced by Reason and Marshall (1987), on many occasions and their challenge, support and ongoing pursuit of quality, ethics and good work have been an absolutely critical part of my inquiry. Although on occasions, their input left me uneasy, I knew that they were acting in the service of my learning. Our mutual deep trust and love for each other (see the encapsulating image in Acknowledgements) enabled us to offer ‘radically honest’ feedback which deepened my inquiry and accelerated my self-awareness and development.

- i) **Conversations** – As described earlier, I engaged in deliberate conversations with six global leaders which lasted one hour and typically resulted in a follow-up conversation to allow for reflections and a deepening of our conversation. Those conversations were recorded with the permission of the leaders, transcribed and the transcripts shared with them. I approached those conversations with some loose structure, having in mind a few key questions I was hoping to explore, and then allowed for free flow and emergence in each conversation. In addition to those deliberate conversations, I participated in many accidental conversations with numerous colleagues at work and with co-travellers I met on a plane or in an airport lounge.

### **2.5.2 Co-inquiry - Developing a sense of ‘professional home’**

In Chapter 6 I have described the co-inquiry work with a group of OD practitioners that I started in June 2013. The purpose of this inquiry was to co-inquire into our daily experiences of belonging or not belonging and how this showed up in our practice as OD practitioners in a global organisation. In the later phase, the purpose was to form a ‘professional home’ for us as a dispersed group of global OD professionals to learn and co-inquire into our practice and the applicability of the concept of shallow-rooted belonging.

We worked with several different methods:



- a) **A contracting meeting** – A short 30 minute conversation to explain and agree the approach and our mutual expectations. Informal conversations were held and participants were given time to reflect and confirm their participation after this initial meeting.
- b) **Semi-structured conversations, supplemented by the timeline method** – At the beginning of the inquiry, I conducted one-to-one semi-structured conversations, the purpose of which was threefold: a) to contract further with the participants around the inquiry that I had invited them to participate in; b) to set the foundations for a trusting relationship between us through getting to know each other; c) to explore the individual stories around their professional and personal history using the timeline method. I judged that those preliminary conversations were necessary to develop trust and to provide each individual with time to consider if they wanted to join the co-inquiry. I invited each participant to prepare their timeline ahead of our conversation. I asked them to map the critical moments on the timeline when they felt attached/detached or felt that they belonged or did not belong in the work context. I encouraged them to use pictures, words and symbols when creating their timeline. A couple of examples are shown below.

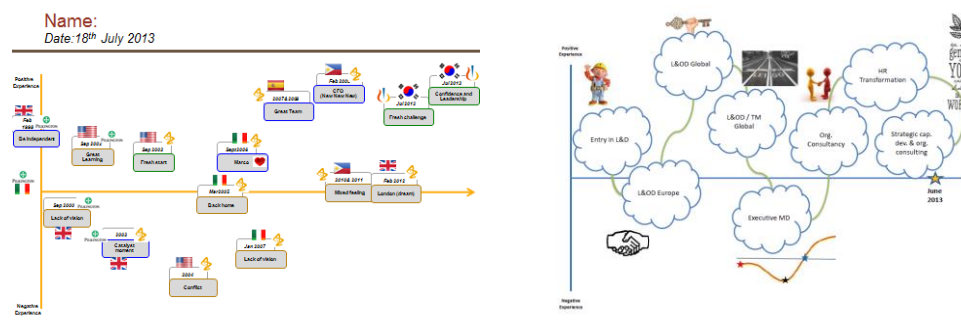


Figure 11: Examples of timeline by two participants, July 2013

With the permission of each participant, I recorded each conversation and the transcripts were shared with individual concerned. I shared my own personal history and professional experiences, together with subsequent writings.

- c) **Co-inquiry method** – After the one-to-one conversations, I convened a temporary co-inquiry group. I was attracted to this method as it is highly participative, democratic and a method congruent with my personal values of wanting to conduct the inquiry with, rather than on, people. Reason (1988) and Herron and Reason (2006) defined the co-operative inquiry as: *“a way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to yourself to: (1) understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things; and (2) learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better.”* (p. 144). I had all our meetings transcribed and shared those transcripts with my participants.
- d) **Artistry and visual inquiry methods** - I invited participants to experiment with creative methods such as photography, digital video creation or any other artistic forms that they preferred. The purpose of using those methods was to create an opportunity for participants to experiment with the extended epistemology and to find another form to capture the inter-relational moments of connectivity, displacement and belonging in our practice as OD practitioners. Some examples of the work produced are presented in Chapter 6.

## 2.6 Introducing participants in this inquiry

### 2.6.1 Who is the author of this paper? What is her background?

I am a 46 year old woman who grew up in Croatia where I finished my first degree in Psychology at the highly respected University of Zagreb. I was born in a small town and always felt that I did not quite belong there. I spent part of my childhood going back and forth to West Germany due to my father’s work assignments in Germany but those visits were of a short time-span, i.e. two to three months. I could not wait to go to university and leave the place of my birth. At school, I loved arts and science equally and chose to study psychology as I felt that psychology would connect my love for both art and science. I left Croatia after

completing my university studies, initially to learn English which I needed in order to pursue my career choice in business psychology. I married an Englishman and recently we as a family returned to live in London, having spent the last two years residing in a European country.

I could go on with this story but I chose have chosen to tell you 'my story' through glimpses, details and selected moments presented in the following chapters. As also applies to most of the participants in my inquiry, English is not my first language and this may be reflected in this thesis.

## **2.6.2 Who are the other participants and voices in this thesis?**

### **Global Business Leaders:**

I have engaged in conversations with six global leaders– two French male leaders, a Belgian male leader, an Algerian male leader, an Italian female leader and an Austrian female leader. Those leaders have experienced between four and ten international moves each. None of them moved from their country of origin during their formative years and all of them started their international career after completing their university degrees in the country of their origin. The age of those individuals ranged between 37 and 55 years old. At the time of this inquiry, all of those leaders were senior leaders holding significant roles in countries such as the UK, South Korea, Singapore, Canada, France and Taiwan. English is not the first language for any of those leaders and, when using their quotes, I have deliberately left the transcripts as they were, without correcting their English or grammar to keep the authenticity of their voices.

### **Global OD Practitioners:**

Participants in the co-inquiry group included four individuals who worked for the same large global organisation that I work for while one individual worked for another global organisation, also headquartered in the same town in Europe. At the time of the inquiry, we all held global OD roles that required us to work across geographies, cultures and organisational boundaries. We had all relocated from the country of our origin to join our

current organisations. Some of us relocated more than once in our career lifespan to date and all of us relocated after completing a university degree in the country of our origin in pursuit of an international career. The group included four female and two male practitioners; two American citizens, two British, one Italian and myself with dual Croatian and British citizenship. The age range for this participant group was from 35 to 47 years old.

## **2.7 Personal criteria for good work, quality and ethics**

### **2.7.1 Authenticity as ‘validity’ in postmodernist research**

What constitutes valid research is strongly influenced by the ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives upheld by researchers. Different paradigmatic perspectives provide different views as to what is considered to be ‘valid’ research and how researchers judge the quality of inquiry (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011). The question of validity cannot be ignored in a piece of research as it leads to answering a fundamental question: *Are these findings sufficiently authentic and trustworthy, related to the way others construct their social worlds, that I may trust myself on acting on their implications?* One can say that the key measure of the ‘validity’ of a piece of research can be judged by whether it produces actionable knowledge for research participants and others who encounter the published research report.

Lincoln et al (2011) suggest that: *“One of the issues around validity is the conflation between method and interpretation. The postmodern turn suggests that no method can deliver on ultimate truth....; although one might argue that some methods are more suited than others for conducting research on human construction of social realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), no one would argue that a single method – or collection of methods – is the royal road to ultimate knowledge. In new-paradigm inquiry, however, it is not merely method that promises to deliver on some set of local or context grounded truths; it is also the process of interpretation.”* (p. 120).

This results in two arguments proceeding simultaneously. The first borrowed from the positivism that argues for a kind of rigour in the application of the method; whereas the second argues for both *“a community consent and a form of rigour-defensible reasoning, plausible alongside some other reality that is known to author and reader in ascribing salience to one interpretation over another and in framing and bounding the interpretive study itself.”* (Lincoln et al, 2011, p. 120). Classical social scientists, influenced by a positivist perspective, would like to see human phenomena limited to those social experiences from which scientific generalisations can be drawn. In contrast, postmodernist research, in its broadest sense, is increasingly concerned with the single experience, the individual crisis or the moment of discovery, relying increasingly on the experiential, the embodied, and the emotive qualities of human experience.

The discussion around the quality and validity of action research has provoked different perspectives in the academic community, Lyotard (1997) argues that in the postmodern world the validity question has lost its legitimacy, whilst Kvale (1989) suggests that the very question of validity is the inheritance of the positivist world that may need to be abandoned all together. Bradbury and Reason (2006) wrote extensively about the topic of validity and in particular focused on issues and choice points for improving the quality of action research, providing the basis for some key questions that action researchers need to engage with to evaluate their work.

With the shift in my ontological and epistemological perspective described in earlier sections of this chapter, I have adopted the postmodernist research perspective and have located my inquiry within the specific context of a global organisation and a small group of global business leaders and OD practitioners. I inquired into the experience of belonging within a specific context and was interested in gaining an understanding of the particular phenomena rather than in producing universal generalisations.

In adopting a postmodernist approach to the research, I chose to replace the term ‘validity’ with the term ‘authenticity’ to judge for myself the trustworthiness, rigour and authenticity of my interpretative and participative action inquiry. And I would invite the reader to engage with the proposed authenticity criteria when judging the trustworthiness of my work.

The authenticity criteria I developed were influenced by the work of Reason and Bradbury (2006) and the work of the group of qualitative researchers consolidated by Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011). I framed the authenticity criteria I worked with as a set of five questions:

1. Has this inquiry enabled a full participation and for a range of voices to be heard?
2. Does this inquiry demonstrate plurality of knowing and congruence in methodology?
3. Has this inquiry generated useful, practical and actionable knowledge?
4. Is this inquiry creating capacity for social and political change?
5. Has this inquiry been conducted in an ethical way?

Below, I raise those questions and present my responses, further elaborating on those in subsequent chapters. I acknowledge here that conducting my action inquiry has proved to be a demanding and at times overwhelming task, coupled with the sense of responsibility for a good quality and ethical work which I found complex and frequently uncertain. There were times when I felt paralysed by this sense of responsibility and questioned if I had all the skills needed, despite extensive professional training in many areas relevant to this type of research. One of the ongoing struggles with conducting this action inquiry that I experienced has been related to my desire to truly understand what the good enough, sufficient level of quality is, which led me to pursue an ongoing dialogue around this with the participants in my inquiry and my peers from doctoral study. I found some reassurance in words shared by Reason and Bradbury (2006) stating that: *“all action research is circumscribed by particular interests, that is, our work is always partial or partisan...”* (p. 346).

### **2.7.2 Has this inquiry enabled full participation and allowed a range of voices to be heard?**

**Being an active participant and placing the inquiry in my personal experience** – I see this to be the key criterion for good work and ethical considerations in an action research. I participated in the inquiry process in the same way as my fellow participants and did not expect anything of others that I would not be willing to do myself (Ladkin, 2003). This was a guiding principle for my work in every choice I needed to make, including choices around what to include or exclude in this thesis. The intention of my action inquiry was to develop myself

and my practice of belonging and to help others develop themselves – this acted as an anchor in choices I made. I endeavoured to write this thesis in as evocative a style as I could to bring you as a reader into those experiences and onto the journey with me, hoping that this would further develop trust between us in the authenticity of this work.

**Developing caring, respectful and quality relationships** – As part of the first person inquiry I discovered that exploring one’s own experiences of displacement and belonging could be charged by many emotions. I was mindful of the impact my inquiry could have on other people and therefore I took care to gently engage others, starting with one-to-one conversations and developing trust between us. I made it a deliberate practice to hold initial conversations without the expectation of my participants’ commitment to proceed with the inquiry. One participant did decide not to proceed and this was mutually agreed. As it was essential that the co-inquiry group members should know who other potential members were before they decided to join I kept this transparent from the beginning. Martin (2006) stresses the need to consider carefully whom to invite to participate and when in the inquiry. I took care to protect participants’ anonymity and considered any distress or negative impact that the inquiry could create for participants. This meant that I needed to take care of myself and ensure that I treat with care my personal experiences and disclosures and prepare myself for the responses of others.

**Working in a participative way with attuned sensitivity to issues of power differentials, gender and cultural diversity** - This quality criterion goes to the heart of my personal values of equality, fairness and honesty. I strived to create conditions for open conversations between equal partners during the co-inquiry process. Participants reported that they felt empowered to shape the agenda and the way we worked together, despite some of my private anxieties around the occasional ‘diversion’ of our inquiry. I paid attention to the issue of power that might have been associated with the fact that I was conducting the doctoral study and hence could be perceived an expert in action inquiry and superior to my peers. As it can be seen in the later chapter, my colleagues appreciated my willingness to show vulnerability in those situations. In this inquiry, I have been working with individuals with different cultural backgrounds. I needed to flex my style when interacting with those individuals and communicating in English, which was not the first language for all. This also

required sensitive probing and clarification as well as ensuring that I, also with English as my second language, understood their experiences appropriately and did not confound the meaning due to my own background. Despite all this effort and sensitivity, I accept that some things may still have been lost in translation as an inevitable component in the sense making process informed by such diverse backgrounds of the participants.

Different participant voices have been introduced throughout this thesis and particularly in Chapter 5.

### **2.7.3 Does this inquiry demonstrate plurality of knowing and congruence in methodology?**

**Including and exploring multiple ways of knowing** – Reason and Bradbury (2006) advocate that exploration of multiple ways of knowing should be a key criterion for validity of an action research based study. As it has already been evidenced, and will be further in subsequent chapters, working with and valuing equally multiple ways of knowing was an integral part of my approach to the inquiry, be it as part of the first or second person inquiry process. I believe that I have provided throughout this thesis sufficient evidence of this claim, without needing to further elaborate on that.

**Inviting and responding positively to feedback from my critical friends** – Reason and Marshall (1987) highlight the importance of having others to engage with the inquiry process to help the researcher identify blind spots in their thinking or unearth assumptions which may be impacting on their sense making. I recognised and appreciated the contribution, support and challenge I received from my critical friends, in particular my DSG and co-inquiry group. Developing a critical reflexivity practice is a key to the action inquiry process and its quality. There were times when I adopted a rather harsh self-critical perspective of my work and questioned its quality and purpose to the point of wanting to give up my doctoral studies. Reflecting on this, I think I expected too much too soon and found myself being prematurely dissatisfied with the progress and quality of my work. My supervisor and my DSG peers enabled me to recognise this and see it as one of the ‘foggy stages’ in the inquiry process. I



learned to work with multiple cycles of inquiry, however imperfect they might have been, to develop quality work, valuing 'foggy stages' as necessary for a quality work and an emerging discovery without moving too quickly to focus, clarity and conclusion.

Being informed by a world view of participation and social constructionism, I inquired into the sense of belonging by drawing on relational methods such as co-inquiry, dialogue, semi-structured conversations and collective sense making, as described earlier in this chapter. In addition, conducting multiple cycles of inquiry and moving between experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing as part of the first and second person inquiry brings further methodological congruence, rigour and strength to my inquiry, as demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

#### **2.7.4 Does this inquiry create capacity for social and political change?**

Postmodern research aims to create capability for positive social change in research participants and forms of emancipatory community action. This research aim is the very point that practitioners of positivist and post-positivist social inquiry are most critical of (Lincoln et al, 2011) because any action on the part of the inquirer is thought to destabilise objectivity and introduce subjectivity, resulting in bias. Park (2006) argues that: *"in addition to creating objective knowledge of social conditions, action research also strengthens community ties, and heightens transformative potential through critical consciousness."* (p. 349). Seeing social change as a research activity forces us to think of community ties and critical awareness as forms of knowledge. (Bradbury and Reason, 2006).

As a result of this inquiry, the group of OD practitioners formed a network and a safe space for themselves where they could openly discuss challenges in their practice, provide a sense of belonging to a professional community and seek support from their colleagues to influence the wider system. In addition, towards the end of the inquiry, opportunities started to emerge for me as the researcher to bring some of the insights gained through this inquiry into the public space with the potential to influence discourse and policies inside the organisation within which this inquiry was located. I cannot claim that the main social or political change

has emerged as yet; however, I can say with confidence that the outcomes of this inquiry have started to open up a discourse in the wider organisation around the sense of belonging, global mobility and psychological and existential impact on professionals who pursue globally mobile careers.

### **2.7.5 Has this inquiry generated useful, practical and actionable knowledge?**

There is an expectation that an action inquiry would ultimately result in some practical knowledge and some action researchers (e.g. Heron, 1996) argue that this is a primary criterion for good work. The criterion of usefulness – has the inquiry been useful to participants in fulfilling the purpose of the work and in the everyday conduct of their lives? - has also been highlighted by Ladkin (2003), Reason and Bradbury (2001) amongst others. In answering the above question, I have considered it from three different perspectives:

#### **a) Has this inquiry been useful to ‘me’?**

Conducting this inquiry has helped me understand the tension that has for years pulled me in different directions and caused me a great deal of distress and dissatisfaction, without fully understanding the nature of it. Having spent time inquiring into the reasons for this tension between displacement and the need to belong has led me to revisit my life and the choices I have made. The realisation that, to flourish and feel healthy, I need to develop a sufficient sense of belonging to a place and within the community I live in, enabled me to make some recent life choices. One involved declining an exciting job opportunity requiring relocation to the USA and the other led to my family’s decision to return to London which provides suitable conditions for the shallow-rooted belonging that I seek to achieve. I feel at peace with my choices and positively excited about the prospect of attaching myself sufficiently to the community where I live and to several anchorage places points in the world that provide an additional sense of home, even if somewhat temporary in their nature. I feel at peace with this new way of being.

In terms of my professional practice, I have negotiated a new relationship with my employer where I would still carry on an HQ global role but from a different location, i.e. London. This has challenged their organisational policies and their view of global mobility and has started to open up a new dialogue in the organisation around the global mobility.

**b) Has this inquiry been useful to ‘us’?**

Answering this question requires other voices to be heard rather than my own. Business leaders who participated in conversations with me declared the benefits of that conversation alone in helping them to make sense of their own experiences and in some cases to stimulate further thinking around their career choices and the future. I explore this further in Chapter 8 and illustrate below with a direct quote from one leader’s conversation:

“...it has triggered more thinking about what do I want to do next? Do I really want to go and get to know another country or do I want to get closer to home? And closer to home, where would that mean? Cos I’m not sure in my case if that would be A [the name of the country] or if that would be B [the name of another country]. So it’s really the question, Where is home now? So those two things are what, how long do I want to tour the world versus settling down, setting the anchor. And when I set the anchor where would that actually be? So that’s also a conversation I then had with my husband and, actually, we don’t know.” (MB)

And the OD practitioners have continued to meet to nurture shallow-rooted belonging through maintaining the ‘professional home’ and by continually engaging in dialogue around how this concept plays out in their practice and life in general. I explore this further in Chapter 6 and illustrate briefly below:

“So, I can tell you what I am doing. ... well, number one, I’m reflecting a lot. I’m talking with my wife differently. I told her about this concept...” (EP)

### c) Is this inquiry useful to ‘them’?

I hope that my research will be of interest to other globally mobile professionals as well as to OD professionals and global organisations. Existential and psychological aspects of belonging and displacement due to global mobility need to be further explored and appreciated by organisations, in addition to more mundane issues such as relocation packages, support with logistics, etc. I hope to contribute to this ongoing dialogue and to shift the focus towards paying attention to individual experiences and needs, in addition to transactional aspects of mobility.

### 2.7.6 Has this inquiry been conducted in an ethical way?

Conducting action research places a significant responsibility on all of us action researchers to continually re-examine and negotiate the ethical consideration. Action research is supposed to be a democratic process aiming to achieve positive social change and requires commitment to action (Braydon-Miller et al, 2008). Living up to those values and aspirations is the ethical challenge that needs to shape and inform our actions in the research and in our roles as change agents (Braydon-Miller, 2008; Coghlan and Shani, 2005; Hislen, 2006). Braydon-Miller (2008) asserts that: *“using the tools of action research, our common goal is to find ways to ensure that the key ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence and justice, as embodied in the shared values of action research – participation in democratic processes, the improvement of human life, and engagement in morally committed action – remain at the core of our practice”* (p. 209).

My authenticity principles are also closely linked to **ethical considerations** that I had been continually re-examining whilst making choices during the inquiry. For example, I immediately recognised that, in my research, I would need to show sensitivity towards cultural differences and agreed with participants what would be acceptable and considered ethical for all participant co-researchers. I held a continual dialogue with my co-inquirers around the topic of ethics, power, and dominance to ensure that we consciously worked with those in our inquiry. This brought another ethical issue which was related to co-ownership of the co-inquiry whilst conducting work with colleagues. I took special care to discuss issues of power

with my co-inquirers as can be seen in Chapter 6 and I negotiated some ground rules with my colleagues. I had contracting meetings with everyone before engaging into the inquiry to discuss, clarify and agree the issues concerning ethics. As a group, we discussed the ownership of the co-inquiry work – my colleagues seeing our work as serving their learning needs and at the same time contributing to my doctoral study. I committed to all of them to protect their identity throughout my doctoral work and to share my writing, together with the transcribed recordings of all our meetings. I also sought their permission to use their visual images (as I did with all other participants), quotes, etc. The Module 3 paper, written in December 2013, was made available to my co-inquiry colleagues and most of them chose to read the paper and provide me with their individual responses via one-to-one conversations ahead of the group discussion. These shaped not only the content but also the direction of my inquiry and in some cases what I presented in this thesis and how I presented it.

As stated earlier, this inquiry has been conducted within the specific context of a global organisation that I currently work for. My employer sponsored my research and my doctoral study and consequently my thesis would be considered to be a public document in the organisation I work for. To protect the identity of participants and the organisation within which my inquiry was located, I needed to pay attention to what I disclose in my final thesis. I had to make choices as to what would be appropriate to include in this thesis and which elements needed to be excluded from public disclosure. Some elements of my practice as well as discourse topics and actions taken have been deliberately left out of this thesis. As much as is possible in today's world of interconnectedness enabled by technology, I made every effort to protect the identity of my participants and the organisations we work for. To my knowledge, I have not disclosed any information that could compromise the identity of the parties involved in the inquiry.

## **2.8 Reflections**

In this chapter I described the shift in my ontological and epistemological perspective, a move from a realist/positivist and an epistemological objectivist perspective that I used to hold towards the ontological and epistemological subjectivist perspective that I developed over

the last several years. This shift led me to develop a perspective that it is impossible to neutrally observe what is out there without inevitably influencing what one perceives and that influence could be due to people's different backgrounds, cultures, etc. This shift also led me to assume that reality is itself created and determined by our subjective act of perception and that we are active participants in the process of perceiving rather than detached observers. Our sense-making literally creates what we see and what we know about the world.

This strand of my inquiry enabled me to learn to trust my own experience as a source of knowing. To reach that point in my development, I abandoned some of my previously held beliefs that the objective truth existed out there and needed to be found, beliefs I had adopted as part of my scientific psychology training in the past. With this evolution in my personal development, I recognised the movement in my position, from a positivist/modernist position (the truth is out there and we can objectively know it) towards a postmodern philosophical perspective where everything is relative to the eye of the beholder and the subjective means by which we organise and perceive. I accepted that multiple realities exist and that the language that we use shapes what we see or mean.

With this shift in my ontological and epistemological perspective towards postmodern philosophical orientation, I located my inquiry within the action research umbrella and worked with the methods congruent with those perspectives. My inquiry was localised and was specific to the context of a large global organisation within which a small group of participants, global leaders and OD practitioners were making sense of their experiences associated with belonging, displacement and global mobility. In this inquiry I started to open the space for myself and others to engage in discourse around the topic of belonging and global mobility, which participants saw as an important and yet emotionally charged topic, silenced by the organisation and not discussed in public. Consequently, I highlighted the ethical dilemma associated with what can or cannot be included in the publicly available elements of this research thesis. I explore further the issue of the disappearance of emotional and relational experience in the discourse of global organisations in Coda, the final part of this thesis.

In this chapter, I also explored aspects of the authenticity, the quality and the usefulness of this inquiry. I shared my criteria for the authenticity of this inquiry, comprising the five key questions that I asked myself and endeavoured to answer to demonstrate the 'validity' of this research. With the shift in my ontological and epistemological perspectives informed by participatory and constructivist principles, I chose to engage with the methodology and methods congruent with my evolved worldview.

In the next chapter, I describe the different theoretical frameworks that informed my inquiry and the struggles I experienced in relation to theories whilst experiencing the this shift in ontological and epistemological perspectives.

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## CHAPTER 3

### Grounding and nourishing theory:

Informing theory, research and inspiring reading



*“Mostly, we do not need to make an issue of belonging:  
when we belong, we take it for granted.”*

O’Donohue (1998, p. xvi)

Figure 12: Photo from the Office.com Clip Art, royalty free

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe how I worked with different theoretical frameworks, mirroring the emerging nature of my inquiry. I start by describing my approach to working with theory and tension experienced between the need for theoretical grounding for the inquiry, as part of the academic requirement and evolving focus of the inquiry and my ontological perspective. I connect my approach to theoretical grounding with the shallow-rootedness concept and illustrate how over time the theoretical grounding shifted to nourish sense making of a new discovery. I describe the two primary areas of theory: 1) existential philosophy, with a particular focus on concepts of ‘homeworlds’, ‘alienworlds’ and ‘liminality’, and 2) social psychology, with the focus on belonging as a core social motive and attachment theory. Those two primary areas of theory gained their prominence in later stages of my inquiry. In addition, I briefly note the secondary areas of informing theory which were significant in earlier stages of my inquiry, namely: 3) developmental and relational psychology.

Rather than providing a detailed overview of those theories, I have chosen aspects of those theories that had informed my inquiry and helped me create a meaning to what I discovered on the way. In addition, I have provided a concise summary of the key insights I gained from looking at the previous research in the field of belonging, displacement and global mobility combined, gained from reading a mainstream as well as the qualitative and phenomenological research. Finally, I include a brief acknowledgement of what might be viewed as peripheral reading, involving evocative, poetic or autobiographical stories of lived experiences associated with the displacement and belonging. I found that particular reading generated an inspiring source of energy and connection with the emotional side to belonging.

I decided to include the review of literature and theories that informed my thinking throughout the inquiry in two separate chapters in this thesis. In this chapter I briefly describe theories and research in the manner representative of my early relationship to theory, best described as ‘received’ rather than ‘connected’ with. I would like to remind the reader that my process of engaging with the theory mirrored the process I went through that resulted in the shift of my ontological and epistemological worldview. Initially, I was trying to find the

‘truth out there’ as reflected in theories, informed by the modernist influence in my approach to theory. At later stages of my doctoral work, I reached an understanding that the theory can be emergent from the data and information I had obtained. I realised that the literature available was not giving me the answer I was hoping to find. As my ontological view was shifting towards a subjective, participative and interpretative perspective, I developed my confidence to engage with the theory in a different way. I started to generate my own understanding of the phenomena I inquired into and engaged with theories in a different way; I started to view the theories of others as practical devices that could illuminate my understanding further. I arrived to that insight rather late in my inquiry and recognised that there is a body of theories, briefly described here, that helped me explore the phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging in a somewhat different way. The shift in my relationship with these theories was concurrent with the ontological shift. I return to this body of theories in Chapter 7 in a different way, more congruent with my evolved relationship to the theory. In Chapter 7 I was able to more confidently integrate experience, reflection and the theory. At the end of this chapter, I provide some insights and reflections on the key learning that I gained from producing it.

## **3.2 Grounding my action inquiry in theoretical perspectives**

### **3.2.1 Working with theoretical frameworks in an emergent manner**

Working with theoretical frameworks has been an ongoing point of tension for me throughout this inquiry. On the one hand, there is an academic expectation to ground an inquiry in a chosen theoretical framework, on the other hand the lived experience of conducting an action inquiry left me with the need to respond more flexibly to what emerged and engage with a theory as a helpful lens at that point in time. How could I predetermine my theoretical grounding at the beginning of the work when the lived experience of conducting the inquiry demanded flexibility? How can I keep my mind fresh and open to what emerges from my experience, without putting theoretical frames into my ‘seeing’ too soon to notice what really goes on? I grappled with those questions throughout the inquiry, and still do.

In the previous chapter I described a period in this doctorate study during which I refused to work with any specific theory and received knowledge. This period of disengagement with 'theory' created space for me to develop my trust in subjective knowing. Another significant step in my development was a moment when I started to view the theories of others not as an absolute truth, but more as a consolidated point of view that an author of the theory arrived at through their learning journey at a specific moment in time. I reframed the way I related to theories from an 'absolute truth' towards the 'point of view' which enabled me to engage in a dialogue with theories rather than simply accepting them as 'the universal truth'. This moved me back into the space where I was able to engage with theories again, but at a different level; at a level of being a professional peer rather than being a subservient student. I started to respectfully consider theories that I find useful in helping me make some sense of my inquiry, and respectfully deselect those that did not.

From the action inquiry point of view, action inquiry has a different starting point from the mainstream academic research. Rather than starting from the premise of a carefully designed response to a body of a previous theory and research as it exists at a given point in time, action research is based on a relatively free-flowing dialogue with various bodies of theory as the inquiry progresses and new aspects are brought into significance, especially once the scope and significance of the provisional action research topic is established (Winter, 1998). Action research therefore does not aim to provide a comprehensive review of all the previous knowledge, rather it aims at being flexible and allows for the emergence of significance of different theory as the inquiry progresses. I found this aspect of action research liberating and more congruent with my lived experience of conducting the inquiry.

### **3.2.2 Holding onto theories lightly, in the fashion of shallow-rootedness**

I worked with a different theory at different stages of my work and tried to view each theory as a helpful lens in making sense of my experiences or the work I was conducting at the time. Initially, as I was deeply engaged with the first person inquiry and was experiencing shifts in my ontological perspective, developmental and relational psychological theories provided me

with some helpful concepts and insights to shed light on my lived experiences. Those theories helped me reflect and make sense of not just those experiences but also inquiry as a whole. My personal development was intertwined with shifts in ontological perspective, which in turn enabled me to engage more deeply with my experiences and learn to value those, as informed by reading of phenomenology and existentialism. Inquiring into the lived experience with some rigour led me to notice the tension between belonging and displacement. The emergence of my response and partial resolution of this tension, named shallow-rooted belonging, led me to acknowledge an alternative way of being in the world, potentially applicable to some people, especially those who live a globally mobile life. Whether shallow or deep rooted belonging, social psychology theories, such as the work of Fiske (2014), argue that belonging is one of the core social motives that make us humans uniquely social beings. And by the nature of the phenomenon I inquired into, social and existential theoretical perspectives proved to be useful frameworks in understanding the phenomenon and informing my perspectives of my personal and professional practice.

I have worked with theories in a somewhat emergent way, based on my need to understand, reflect or make sense of my work. I outline below the informing theories, giving primacy to theories I engaged with most recently as a lens to the essence of my inquiry. I also outline below some of the other, secondary theories that facilitated insights and led me to discover the essence of my inquiry, but are no longer in the foreground of my inquiry.

### **3.3 Informing primary theories - existential philosophy**

#### **3.3.1 Perspectives on 'Homeworld', 'Alienworld' and Liminal Experience**

A philosopher Anthony Steinbock (1995), in his book *Home and Beyond* asks some essential questions around what it means to belong to a family, a group or an organisation so that we can say 'we' or 'our' community. He raises questions around unity and whether unity excludes difference and presumes sameness. He states that answering those questions inevitably leads us to their essence namely the relation between social forms of identity and difference.

Steinbock's own contribution was to develop an approach that defines 'homeworld' and 'alienworld' as generating each other's existence. In this context he states: *"Normal and abnormal, home and alien, become liminal notions. By liminal I mean not merely that home and alien are formed by positing limits, but that they are mutually delimited as home and as alien, as normal and as abnormal. For that reason, they are co-relative and co-constitutive."* (p. 179).

He describes the structure of 'home' and 'alien' by the process of normalisation as liminal experiencing which are present in two modes: appropriation and transgression. Those two modes co-create the 'alien' through appropriate experience of the 'home', and co-create the 'home' through the transgressive experience of the 'alien'. Steinbock (1995) states that: *"... neither homeworld nor alienworld can be regarded as the 'original sphere' since they are in a continual historical becoming as delaminated from one another. This is the sense in which home and alien are co-generative."* (p. 129).

By developing the 'homeworld' through various modes of appropriation (e.g. stories and narratives, routines, repetition, etc) and in interaction with our home comrades, an 'alienworld' is simultaneously formed and bounded. Through the process of co-creating a 'homeworld' as normal or as familiar, a 'world' is simultaneously formed as not belonging to our conceptual systems, our normality, our values, norms, etc, which is to say that it is constituted as 'alien', unfamiliar, atypical. Steinbock asserts that: *"we exist in such a way that our world takes on a privileged sense of 'home', which may be thought of as being inside, near, accessible, etc. Because this inside is privileged as being normatively relevant for us, inside and outside, home and alien cannot be understood as being merely relative in the sense of reversible or exchangeable."* (p. 181).

Throughout our lives, we are continually in a liminal encounter with the 'alienworld', co-creating the 'alienworld' by re-creating the 'home' as a normatively significant 'lifeworld'. *"Because we are home we 'belong to' the alienworld in the process of co-constitution, but again, precisely by not belonging to the alien as being 'home'."* (p. 181). The perspective of home as normal 'lifeworld' generates the experience of the 'alienworld' as not normal, not

'home' for me. He infers that the 'alien' is other and the 'home' is known and our relations to each will incorporate these qualitative distinctions.

Steinbock says that when we change places, move, relocate, we do not simply leave that terrain behind. By 'terrain' he means our familiar milieu and states that the terrain 'sticks' to the lived-body. 'Homeworlds' can make us happy or unhappy, and regardless, they are privileged as the world from which we accrue our bodily movements, our way of sensing or seeing. He attaches the sense of 'homeworld' to a geographical location, like our birthplace, and reiterates that the 'homeworld' cannot be equated simply to our place of birth for this would restrict 'home' simply to origin.

Steinbock's work raises as many questions as insights in helping to illuminate the experiences associated with global mobility and a sense of belonging. In later chapters I will explore the notion of 'homeworld' for those globally mobile professionals who have been on the move for a number of years and who experience an ongoing interaction between 'home' and 'alien'. And what is 'homeworld' for those people, bearing in mind that every encounter of the 'alienworld' through residence in another country remoulds that which was once the original 'homeworld' but is long reshaped through encounters with the 'alien'? Who are the 'homecomrades' of those globally mobile people? And where does the sense of belonging stem from when most of the daily existence is spent in the liminal space between the 'homeworld' and the 'alienworld'? And yet, the ongoing dynamic process of co-creation and remoulding of those two worlds in the space of liminality has resonated with my experiences of living a globally mobile life. Every encounter with the 'alien' culture, tradition, locality, way of living has entered and disturbed my 'homeworld' and existing conceptual systems leading to an examination of my 'homeworld' from the 'alienworld' perspective and remoulding, however little, to adjust to a new learning and discovery.

Steinbock, like others, presents the 'homeworld' and 'homecomrades' concepts as geographically based. In the light of a modern global mobility, I question if this notion of a geographically based 'homeworld' still stands or is there an alternative form of 'homeworld' emerging to reflect closely the postmodern world of global mobility?

### **3.4 Informing primary theories - social and development psychology**

Belonging is seen as one of the core social motives underpinning social behaviour by social psychologists (Smith and Mackie, 2000; Fiske, 2014). Belonging is a powerful, fundamental and pervasive human need based on strong biological and psychological mechanisms. People's motive to belong may help the group to survive, but essentially belonging to a group helps individuals to survive, psychologically and physically. The need to belong motivates close relationships, helping and group existence.

#### **3.4.1 Belonging as a core social motive**

Understanding self would not be complete without understanding self at a social level – relational self (a connection between people) and societal self (a social identity defined at the level of the collective or the culture). At the societal level, identity is defined by one's concept of oneself as a member of society and by other people in general having a concept of one's group membership as meaningful. People's sense of self depends on their standing with various groups which is related to belonging. In the same way, ostracism or involuntary exclusion by other people, solitude or exile from a group, is an ancient form of group sanction. It can be said that involuntary solitude disheartens and social support heals (Fiske, 2014). In their desire to belong, people go to a great length to work on how they want to present themselves to others, influencing how they would like others to perceive them. One of the obvious strategies that people deploy is, for example, ingratiation which means behaviour to promote being liked or self-promotion which carries the goal of being seen as competent. Fiske (2014) argues in her book that: *"motive for belonging with other people drives much of our social behaviour"* (p. 547) and demonstrates that people who are connected with other people live longer, healthier and happier lives than those who are isolated. And, as a result, people attune themselves to social norms, and to roles within groups as well as their identity with the group.

Psychologist Alfred Adler (1964, 2011) introduced a concept of social interest. 'Social interest' in German is 'Gemeinschaftsgefühl', which translates as 'community feeling', as opposed to one's private interests or concerns. The concept of social interest refers to an individual's



attitude and relationship with society, or social connectedness, which determines both success in life and mental health.

Sociologist Elias (1987) warns against 'group superiority' and highlights the dark side of belonging when he states: *"Human groups seem to take a strange delight in asserting their superiority over others, particularly if it has been attained by violent means. .... the pleasure people derive from the feeling that one of the groups to which they belong is superior to other groups, one touches on the emotional aspects of group relations and the dangers inherent in them."* (p. xi). My experiences of displacement due to the war and experiences of inclusion/exclusion due to being a foreigner and a woman, have influenced my view of belonging and taught me to aspire to shallow-rooted belonging which allows for choiceful detachment should belonging to a place or community become too deep and suffocating. I have personally experienced horrors that a sense of deeply-rooted belonging to a nation and religion brought into my life as well as the life of my 'homecomrades' caused by the war in former Yugoslavia, country where I grew up. Elias (1987) suggests that people in general, and sociologists in particular, have a blindness of emotional involvement which prevents them from developing ways of looking at situations which would help them tackle more realistically the dangers facing them.

I feared to engage with the topic of belonging as a red thread in my inquiry because of the predominant notion that belonging is about being deeply-rooted in something, e.g. a place, a culture or a community. My memories of deep-rooted belonging were a mixture of the happiness, associated with the life before the war, and the pain, associated with the war that erupted as result of too much belonging to a religion and the nation. Having persevered with my inquiry, despite of those difficult memories, I developed my interest in opening possibilities for new perspectives to emerge and introduced a metaphor of shallow-rooted belonging as an alternative to the traditional perspective on belonging. Shallow-rooted belonging has a degree of detachment associated with it which acts as an 'internal alarm bell' at the slightest possibility of 'suffocation' due to social pressure and a request for deepening roots as a condition of belonging.

I now turn to the attachment theory, which I found informative in the context of belonging and its possible alternative form of shallow-rooted belonging. I engaged with this theory in my earlier inquiry stages when I was grappling with the notion of displacement. I was positively encouraged to notice that the social psychologist, Fiske (2014) also explored the attachment theory within the field of belonging.

### **3.4.2 Attachment as a universal form of belonging**

It seems that all people get attached to other people and the core social motive of belonging cuts across many domains in our lives. However, people do have different styles of belonging which affects their core relationships with others. Those different styles of belonging reflect attachment.

The attachment theory was initially formulated by John Bowlby in the early 1960s and subsequently extended by Mary Ainsworth. The theory begins with a premise that human beings, similar to many other primate species, have an innate orientation to social life. Attachment theory claims that human beings have an evolved, biologically based predisposition to direct their 'attachment behaviours' (e.g. searching for, promoting physical contact with, visually tracking, etc) towards persons who serve as their primary caregivers. The attachment behavioural system is a loosely organized set of behaviours whose primary feature is common and is oriented towards achieving a goal of increasing physical proximity to a primary caregiver. When the attachment system works well, young children treat the caregiver as a secure base. Secure attachment allows young children to explore and move away from their caregiver, knowing that they can return to their 'secure base' when they feel a need to. The process of forming emotional bonds with attachment figures is proposed in attachment theory to be fundamentally universal, even though it may vary in detail across cultures.

Different children respond differently to separation from and reunion with their primary caregivers. When their protests bring reunion they repeatedly experience stable, reliable attachment; when their protests sporadically bring reunion they experience unstable

attachment. From those experiences, children develop their understanding of themselves and their relationships and form internal working models of relationships.

Mary Ainsworth (as described in Fiske, 2014; Rholes and Simpson, 2004), observed that most children (56%) seemed securely attached and behaving openly and sociably even in strange situations. Other children (24%) behaved anxiously and fearfully, as if they had unreliable experiences and expected relationships to be unreliable. And some other children (20%) responded in an avoidant and detached manner and responded as if they had consistently unresponsive caregivers, with attachment bringing them mainly disappointment. It is worth noticing that all of these children were attached to their caregivers but that children's styles depended on their relationship experiences. Attachment theory holds that these internal working models remain fairly stable into adulthood where they affect other relationships.

There is a whole body of research confirming those core premises forming the attachment theory. The distribution of adult attachment styles came close to the Ainsworth-Bowlby 56-24-20% observation of infants (as described in Fiske, 2014) and multiple sources of evidence suggest that these styles persist from infancy to adulthood. Avoidant people seem to be uncomfortable with close relationships, anxious-ambivalent people seem to be worried about their relationships, and secure people seem to be comfortable in their relationships throughout their lives, perhaps as a result of early experiences. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) provided the revision of this classification and proposed that people have mental models about both themselves and others in close relationships resulting in four combinations:

1. **Secure** people feel good about both themselves and others
2. **Preoccupied** people feel personally unacceptable and unlovable but feel that others are good (anxious/ambivalent people)
3. **Dismissing** people feel good about self and view others as unworthy of relationship
4. **Fearful** people feel personally unacceptable and unlovable as well as feeling bad about others, are socially avoidant and fearful of intimacy.

Although the different attachment styles allow us to classify ourselves and others, Fiske (2014) advocates that attachment represents a universal form of belonging. Just like children, when adults get separated from family by war or job they react similarly to disrupted intimacy. She points out that, based on research to date, there is evidence to show that commuter marriages, military families and travelling spouses all have separations built into their relationships. Adults show emotional reactions to separation experiences similar to that of children – emotional reactions of being left include anxiety, depression and anger and these emotions are more intense during long-term, routine separations than during repeated short separations (Vormbrock, 1993). Home-based spouses may follow periods of distress with detachment and emotional distancing and may seek contact with relatives and alternative attachment figures. At the same time, absent spouses tend to feel guilty and reunions are difficult. Returning spouses may seek intimacy while home-based spouses may feel ambivalent.

The basic premise of the attachment theory is that people relate to their environment with attachment (intimacy) and detachment (autonomy) from their earliest experiences. People strive for a synthesis of the two – balancing attachment (freedom from fear of abandonment) with detachment (freedom from fear of engulfment) – resulting in liberation from the defeat of either (freedom to explore the internal and external worlds). Zimberoff and Heartman (2002) explored the concept of ‘openness to experience’ and its association with that of freedom to explore. Attachment theory can be viewed as an evaluation of the balance (security) or imbalance (anxious insecurity) of exploration and attachment.

According to the attachment theory, the dynamic balance between the attachment and exploratory behaviour systems is characteristic of humans at all stages of development, including adulthood. Attachment behaviour in adults can be witnessed in many distressing situations – for example, adults often seek proximity of the significant people in their lives (often spouses) in response to stress resulting from physical pain, fatigue, fear of new situations, feeling of rejection by others, work problems, etc. Attachment behaviour and an associated increase in desire for care is considered to be the norm in these situations. According to this theory, the urge to explore the environment – to work, play, discover and

create – is regarded as another basic component of human nature (Rholes and Simpson, 2004).

The key concept in this theory is the concept of secure base. *“All of us, from the cradle to the grave, are happiest when life is organised as a series of excursions, long and short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figure(s).”* (Bowlby, 1988, in Rholes and Simpson, 2004, p. 306). Caregivers provide a secure base for their relationship partners when they respond sensitively and appropriately to their partners’ exploratory behaviour and to their need for encouragement in their exploratory activity. An important role of caregiving involves providing a secure base from which an attached person can make excursions into the outside world (by playing , working, etc) and knowing that he or she can return for comfort, reassurance and/or assistance should they encounter difficulties along the way. Bowlby (1988, in Rholes and Simpson, 2004), describes the concept of a secure base as one in which caregivers create the conditions that enable the relationship partner to explore the world in a confident way. The theory postulates that individuals who thrive emotionally and socially and who make the most of their opportunities are those who have attachment figures who, while always encouraging the individual’s autonomy, are also available and responsive when called upon.

The attachment theory provided me with a lens through which to explore the very tension that I have been experiencing – the tension between deliberate displacement (possibly reflected in exploration) and belonging (possibly reflected in attachment) in search of an optimal state where one feels free to explore the internal and external world. Pursuing a globally mobile life places us, who choose that path, on the very edge of that tension on a frequent basis. That also results in frequently being exposed to a completely new environment, having to detach self from relationships formed in the current locality and typically having to move away from the wider family and friends, sometimes to a greater geographical distance. A globally mobile life results in frequent interruptions or even closure of relationships, absences and short- or long-term separations within a family unit. Whilst my inquiry has not been framed to test the theory or add to the already vast body of research related to the theory of child and adult attachment, I chose to work with this theory to help me make sense of the experiences, my own and that of others, associated with the tension

of displacement and belonging whilst pursuing a globally mobile life. I have also been intrigued by the concept of the secure base and the role it plays in nurturing globally mobile individuals to carry on exploring the wider world. According to the attachment theory, the secure base comes from the attachment figures and relationships with those figures. And I was curious to explore the role of a place, in addition to relationships, in providing the secure base to return to at times of need or to nurture the sense of belonging (and attachment) somewhere in this global world.

## **3.5 Informing secondary theories - developmental and relational psychology**

### **3.5.1 Early influence of work by Carl Gustav Jung**

In the earlier stages of my inquiry, I engaged with the work of Carl Gustav Jung (1958, 1983, 1995) to make sense of my personal development and indeed fascination with the tensions I experienced. By engaging with his work and theory, I related my personal development journey to Jung's (1983) concept of individuation, which he describes as: *"I use the term individuation to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological individual, which is separate, invisible unity or whole"* (p. 212). I related this to my own development journey in this inquiry, my age and the fact that I have also reached the mid-point in my life and have been searching for my voice, identity and belongingness. I have been trying to find that inner voice and confidence to author my own life and point of view, separate from the voice of the group, convention and tradition. I have chosen a different path in my life, a path of global mobility, which is not a typical norm for a woman of my generation. And through the process of this inquiry, I have been looking to work through the tension between displacement and belonging to create a meaning in my life.

For Jung, individuation was essentially a spiritual journey. He articulated this as: *"... only the man who can consciously assent to the power of the inner voice becomes a personality. By paying attention to the voice within, the individual achieves a new synthesis between*

*conscious and unconscious, a sense of calm acceptance and detachment, and a realisation of the meaning of life*" (1983, p. 19). I will not make a claim to have achieved the individuation in Jung's terms. However, I am certain of arriving at a space where I can exert a calm acceptance of my newly discovered state of being, where the tension between displacement and belonging is not pulling me apart; rather, it is energising me to accept an alternative form of being in the world.

### **3.5.2 Influence of relational psychologists**

The relational psychologists, such as Belenky et al (1997), Gilligan (1993), Fletcher (2001), Miller (in Robb, 2007) suggested that staying in relationships and on-going connection with others enables our growth and maturity, rather than separation. Dwelling in the relational theory and propositions around a women's way of knowing, provided me with a deeper understanding of my own development path experienced over the last few years.

Relational theory assumes that: *"the development of an enhanced capacity for relationship and the desire to be in connection as the central intention in people's lives."* (Robb, 2007, p. 178). Mutuality and holding are two additional relational concepts that I find helpful in my inquiry. According to the relational theory, people are psychologically equipped for mutuality, *"to participate in life as equals – anger erupts whenever one participant in a relationship is treated as less powerful and less equal than the other."* (Robb, 2007, p. 222) Mutuality is essential for a sense of belonging or not belonging; when one is participating in groups equally with others, the sense of belonging is likely to emerge.

### **3.5.3 Reflections on early theoretical influences**

Both Jung's and relational psychologists' work enabled me to make sense of certain aspects of my personal development and first person inquiry. Reading Jung's work led me to recognise the tension between belonging and detachment and relational psychology helped me understand the significance of relationships in maintaining the sense of shallow-rooted belonging and holding the space of 'in-between'. However, as my inquiry progressed away

from just first person inquiry and involved deeper engagement with the experience of others and with the phenomena phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging, other theories, described above as primary theories, enhanced my sense-making process further.

## **3.6 Emerging insights from the work of others in the field**

### **3.6.1 Mainstream research**

In mainstream literature, terms around the social connectedness and belonging are frequently used interchangeably. Terms. As I was going through a stage in the inquiry where I tried to determine if the focus of my inquiry was around connectedness or belonging, I found the separation of the terms, as offered by Crisp (2010), useful. Connectedness is more about participation in social networks or organisations and relational psychologists describe this concept as an essence of relating process. Crisp (2010) states that it is possible to be connected but not feel any of the emotional attachment which is associated with belonging. Crisp advocates that the two concepts need to be carefully distinguished when applied in practice. For example, understanding of both connectedness and belonging enables a more nuanced understanding of social exclusion. This helped me crystallise the focus of my inquiry on the sense of belonging, rather than connectedness.

Research work by Walton and Cohen (2007) indicated that belonging may have an impact on one's performance and showed that academic achievements could be undermined by belonging uncertainty. Walton et al (2012) showed that people draw a motivation from a sense of belonging to an intellectual community. This work has triggered some thoughts as to why organisations may find it beneficial to pay some attention to the phenomenon of belonging, which I explore in Chapter 8.

The more mainstream literature focuses frequently on the challenges with cross-cultural communication, transitioning into a different culture, adapting and dealing with a cultural shock. For example Furnham (2010) provides an overview of recent literature and research



of adaptation process to new social, political and economic conditions that one experiences through global mobility. He highlights that most research focuses on identifying expatriates (who they are, why they go, perceptions of contract, etc) or conducting predictive studies to determine qualities of those likely to succeed in an international assignment or become successful global leaders. Mainstream research also looks into the reasons why multinational companies post people abroad (Torbiorn, 1982) or types of allegiance of expatriates to parent or local firms (Black and Gregerson, 1991). Furnham (2010) indicated that the most powerful predictors of socio-cultural adjustment of new settlers were length of residence in the new culture, immigration status and perceived discrimination. He highlights the need for more research of the psychological impact and response to work as a result of global mobility to fully understand the issues involved.

I found the mainstream research rather limited in providing me with an understanding of the issues involved with global mobility and in particular of daily experiences associated with global mobility or a sense of belonging. Mandenhall (1999, as referenced in Russell and Dickie, 2007) noted that the expatriate literature was composed primarily of quantitative studies, and called for other types of methodologies to be utilised in order to advance the literature and understanding of experiences associated with the global mobility. Therefore I turned to explore other available research that spoke to me more closely and provided me with some useful insights when making sense of my own experiences or that of others.

### **3.6.2 Research with Third Culture Kids (TCK)**

An increasingly growing body of research within psychology and social science has been focusing on various aspects of the TCK experiences of cultural identity, belonging, sense of place, etc. The term Third Culture Kids refers to a person who has spent a significant part of his/her developmental years outside the parents' culture. They build relationships with all of the cultures, while not having full ownership of any. Sense of belonging is typically located in relationships with others of similar background (Pollock and Van Reken, 2001). This population is sometimes referred to as 'global nomads' (McCaig, 1992) or transculturals (McDonald, 2010) and the key differentiator for this population is that their intercultural

experience (living abroad in cultures different from one's birth culture for an extensive period of time) must begin during their formative years. Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCK) are those people who spent a significant part of their formative years overseas. For ease of reading and consistency, I will use TCK or ATCK as the main term to refer to that population. The third culture refers to a created culture that is neither the 'home' culture nor the 'host' culture, it is the culture between cultures (Pollock and Van Reken, 2001).

Although neither the participants in my inquiry nor I fit within either of those two populations, as none of us experienced global mobility in our formative years, I found some of the research insights helpful in understanding experiences explored in this inquiry.

### **3.6.3 TCK and identity, belonging, culture**

Pollock and Van Reken (2001) state that the greatest challenge that TCK face are in forming their sense of identity and sense of belonging. They argue that when people travel to different cultures as adults, whilst they may experience culture shock, they already have a sense of who they are and where they belong. This is an interesting assertion which is relevant to my work and one which I would like to come back to in subsequent chapters. Research reveals that most TCK have a multiple sense of belonging or no sense of belonging at all (Fail et al, 2004). They have moved so many times, attended so many schools and lived in so many different places that they feel at home everywhere and nowhere and are likely to feel rootless and restless as adults. Research suggests that a TCK's sense of belonging may be connected to relationships with similar people rather than geographical place (Pollack and Van Reken, 2001).

Walters and Auton-Caff (2009) conducted a phenomenological research the aim of which was to hear the stories of TCK women and explore how the lived experience of movement between multiple cultures influenced identity development. They found that transition was typical in the lives of their participants and was a disruption in identity development because they often had to focus on surviving and adjusting rather than gaining a sense of who they were. Transitions was another theme that my participants talked about and will be discussed

further in a later part of this thesis. Authors also learned that through relationships with other TCK, most of their participants found their sense of belonging. They felt understood in those relationships which also provided a safe place to explore their identity and belonging without having to explain themselves.

Previous research (Schaetti and Ramsey, 1999; Walters and Auton-Caff, 2009; McDonald, 2010) identified four themes common to all TCK: change, relationships, world view and cultural identity. Change is one of the few constants in the lives of globally mobile children, whether they themselves or their friends are coming and going; they become accustomed to change, life without change seems to be somehow incomplete. An often cited by-product of this experience is a deep sense of rootlessness and research shows that, typically, home does not exist for the TCK as a single place but as a multiplicity of relationships; the home is not a 'here and there' but 'everywhere' (Schaetti and Ramsey, 1999). Due to ongoing changes, the TCK learn to make friends quickly and have a tendency to enforce a certain amount of distance as part of their survival skills. Grieving lost friends is a part of the regular experience for TCK. People raised internationally have the opportunity to gain a three-dimensional world view. For them, international news reports are more than just a printout; TCK associate sights, sounds, smells and feelings with those locations. They know that people different from them share with them a fundamental humanness. They frequently demonstrate ethical maturity by being able to maintain the paradox between their appreciation of differing truths in differing contexts and a commitment to a personal truth. Finally, TCK are influenced by multiple cultural traditions and as such may frequently experience themselves as 'culturally marginal'. Schaetti and Ramsey (1999) believe that TCK become constructive in their marginality when they recognise and understand the multiplicity of their experience and when they have the language to communicate about it.

There is some similarity, as well as difference between the stories of experience of global mobility as experienced by my participants and the above research findings that I will connect and explore in Chapter 7. I found, in particular, the concept of 'living in liminality', introduced by Schaetti and Ramsey (1999) interesting in the context of my inquiry. They define this social-psychological construct of liminality as: *"an in-between time when what was, is no longer, and what will be, is not yet. It is a time rich with ambiguity, uncertainty, and the possibility of*

*creative fomentation.*” (p. 3). They state that when a person is in liminal space, he or she is on the threshold, no longer part of the past and not yet part of the new beginning. For many TCKs and their families, especially those who frequently move, the experience of liminal space becomes the most constant lived experience. The authors state that liminality reinforces that it is a blessing to be able to ‘dance in-between’ with a foot planted gently in each reality. Living in liminal space, authors argue, and making a home in that intersection of multiple identities, is more complex than living in a singular reality. ‘In-betweenness’ is a theme that strongly featured in my first person inquiry and indeed in my conversation with business leaders and OD professionals.

Grote (2010) in her quantitative study with ATCKs explored the concept of Nationlism as an emerging phenomenon in the cultural identities of some ATCKS. The author coined this term to define a sense of belonging strongly tied to nation-less identification and defines this term as:

1. *“the action or condition of attributing no value or sense of belonging to a nation or territory.*
2. *A sense of belonging tied with nation-less-ness.”* (p. 17)

The author argues that many ATCK claim to belong to ‘spaces between’ – between different nations, religions or cultures that they have experienced or been part of. It seems that it is in this space that many ATCK have also chosen to define and locate their ‘home’. The author argues that ATCK are challenging the traditional notion of home as a static concept and that they are changing the focus of ‘home’ from a place to a feeling, perhaps also indicating the emerging notion of belonging to a *space* rather than a *place*. The study highlighted the need to move beyond identifying each other solely in terms of belonging towards geographical location and problematized the subsequent question ‘Where are you from?’ as dated.

### **3.6.4 Mobility, place and belonging**

There are different aspects of belonging that some researchers have been looking at and belonging to a place has been one area of extensive research (Inglis, T.; Pirinen, M., 2008). At

earlier stages of my first person inquiry, I tried to convince myself that belonging to a place did not matter to me. As my inquiry progressed, I realised that belonging to a place does matter but perhaps in a different way from traditional descriptions of belonging to a place which are usually congruent with the perspective of the deep-rooted belonging. In my inquiry I have pondered over the meaning of place and whether place is important to me and my colleagues and whether place is related to a sense of belonging. *“Most people do not have the time or inclination to ponder the meaning of place, especially if they have always lived there. A multicentered population more often forced to consider places than a monocentered one.”* (Lippard, 1997, p. 43-44). The author also emphasises the psychological need to belong somewhere to prevent alienation, asserting that when a person feels s/he belongs to a place, the place becomes part of the self. To have a strong sense of belonging is to have roots. It is often thought that to have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world. There is a recognition that some places give us a sense of belonging and some give us a sense of not-belonging. Relph (1986) states that mobility and nomadism do not decrease an attachment to place. He believes that most mobile people are not automatically homeless or placeless; mobile people may be able to achieve an attachment to a new place very quickly because of familiar landscape or simply because they are open to new experiences.

Pirinen (2008) in her book *In Place, Out of Place* explores the meaning of place and the relation of place and sense of belonging amongst Adult Third Culture Kids in Finland. The author adopted a humanistic geography stance in her definition of the place where place is seen as an experience, seeing the place from an individual's perspective on place of an individual and the individual identity. She argues that place(s) have considerable meaning to mobile individuals. She suggests that place has more meaning to TCK than non-TCK. She asserts that changing places makes mobile people think of place in a substantial way. Mobile people do not ignore places but instead relate strong feelings to them. She believes that place for an individual is about belonging. Place for a TCK is always a puzzled sum of the many places s/he has been to or lived in. She questions some previous research where TCK are seen to be at home everywhere and nowhere as her research showed that a sense of belonging still existed amongst most TCK she worked with. Her research however still does not answer questions such as where the sense of belonging comes from for those individuals.

### **3.6.5 Expatriates and belonging**

Phenomenological research conducted by Russell and Dickie (2007) revealed that individuals experience paradoxical ways of being when immersed, living and working in another culture. They identified eight paradoxical experiences by expatriates, one of which they named – ‘Feeling of Belonging and Not Belonging’. They noted that expatriates have a dispirited feeling of belonging, yet never really belonging, when being immersed in another culture. The authors note scarce literature describing the expatriate experience in relation to the feelings of belonging /not belonging and recommended further research in all eight paradoxical ways of being to gain further understanding of what it is like to live and work amidst contrary ways of being.

In her doctoral thesis, Wang (2006) conducted an (auto)ethnographic study into experiences of Chinese expatriates and their family members whose lives had been impacted by globalization and how they adjusted and tolerated cultural differences inside and outside the workplace. She recounts her own struggles with a sense of displacement from the academic life, uncovering her own identity as a Chinese professional in the USA culture and how this has impacted on her as a researcher and her research. In this deeply touching narrative inquiry, Wong concludes her thesis with the acknowledgement that, whilst she did not resolve the ongoing quest to understand who she ‘really’ was and where she ‘truly’ belonged, she became more aware of the influences and conflicts in which she was immersed. I sympathised greatly with this conclusion as my own experience with this inquiry has led me to notice that, while the tension between displacement and belonging may not ever truly disappear, through exploring the tension and understanding it, I too have reached a place where I feel more peaceful and open to living with new forms of belonging.

### **3.6.6 Voluntary migrants and belonging**

I discovered the work of Madison (2010, 2006), whose doctoral theses have focused on existential migrants, leaving home and the psychology of relocation. In his book *The End of Belonging* he tells the tales of existential migrants, those people whose motivation to leave

home is to find out who they really are. He developed this concept to describe people who: *“leave his/her homeland, pushed out by deep questions that can’t be answered at home, pulled into the wide world in order to discover what life is. We are living paradoxes. We need to feel at home but have never done so, we need to belong but renounce opportunities for belonging, we venture out into the unknown in order to experience homecoming that will finally settle us, but doesn’t.”* (p. 7). Madison conducted a phenomenological research, a rare discovery in the myriad of other papers and books focusing on the topic of belonging. His work has also been informed by existential philosophy and psychoanalysis. He conducted phenomenological interviews with individuals who chose to leave home for reasons other than employment, career advancement or improving their economic conditions. They chose to leave home in search of greater possibilities for self-actualising, exploring foreign cultures in order to assess their own identity and ultimately grappling with issues of home and belonging in the world generally. He differentiated his participant group as those individuals who chose to leave for reasons of self-discovery rather than career or employment, which results in complex individual challenges. He states that the choice leave for career purposes may be straightforward, or it just appears to be straightforward, and could be more psychologically complex than first meets the eye.

In his book, Madison offers a redefined view of the ‘home’ as: *“an interaction, a moment when the individual and the environment match in specific and idiosyncratic ways, temporarily allowing the flow of being at home.”* (p. 142). He asserts that: *“the traditional home is characterised by its cosiness, rooted in place, whilst authentic home nurtures an experience of dwelling where we belong without exiling the deeply human sense of not-being-at-home in the world.”* (p. 209). He ends his book by warning that in this age of globalization we may be heading for a world where no one really belongs anywhere anymore.

Finding Madison’s work greatly excited me and provided me with confidence in the inquiry I have been conducting. His work is congruent with my work from the ontological, epistemological and methodological perspective, a very rare find of research in this territory that focuses on lived experiences of such existential struggles associated with leaving home and pursuing a globally mobile life. Whilst there are similarities between Madison’s work and my work, it is worth noting that my interests were focused on the tension between choiceful

displacement and belonging as experienced by people who chose to pursue globally mobile careers. So, motivation to leave the country of origin might not have been for purposes other than economic or career advancement, or so it may appear on the surface. Participants in my inquiry experienced multiple moves and relocations to new environments and most moved their families with them, adding to the complexity of the experience and the potential for questioning the sense of home, identity and belonging. In addition, the initial choices to pursue globally mobile careers were in most cases influenced by the individuals' desires and motivations, but some of the subsequent moves were influenced by the organisational needs, too.

What I have learned to date would not lead me to conclude that we may be heading towards the end of belonging, as Madison suggests. I am proposing to reframe the concept of belonging, adapting it to changing conditions of living in our postmodern world. This may be helpful to people who are grappling with the tension between displacement and belonging. In the absence of deep-rooted belonging, which seems to be the case for an increasing number of people, one can accept to live the life of not-belonging or one can consider whether shallow-rooted belonging could be sufficient to nurture, inspire and provide the safety that we seek.

Towards the end of his book, *The End of Belonging*, Madison (2010) writes: *"I've been back in London for nearly two years now and for the first time in my life there is a new feeling of peace, of settling in some subtle but significant way. Probably not the way that my neighbours feel settled and certainly not the way my parents have always been settled, deeply rooted and interwoven into the web of lives around them. My 'settled' has come about largely through a gradual acceptance of my homelessness. I have freed myself from the assumption that I must be place-specific in my attachment to this earth. This acceptance is not without loss, longing and envy. I have given up on a type of belonging that is not mine to have and thereby paradoxically achieved at least some form of belonging."* (p. 211). In my experience and through the language I have introduced in this thesis, I would say that Madison had achieved a sense of shallow-rooted belonging.



### 3.7 Inspiring peripheral reading

Throughout this inquiry I needed both inspiration and encouragement to engage with writing evocatively to show the depth of emotional experience associated with the tension that I inquired into. I sought that inspiration outside the research and theoretical literature and found myself feeling understood through reading the autobiographical stories of Eva Hoffman's (1989) *Lost in Translation – A life in a New Language*, describing vividly her life after leaving her beloved Poland as a young girl, struggles with displacement, belonging and identity as experienced through a language. Edward Said's (1999) story of exile and homecoming described in his memoir *Out of Place* proved to be another source of inspiration, together with the book *Eternal Echoes – Exploring our hunger to belong* by John O'Donohue (1998), which spoke to me like poetry.

### 3.8 Reflections

My main learning from producing this chapter relates to my changed relationship with the theory. I used to have a rather detached view of theories, something out there that is academic and mostly without practical use. My ongoing struggle with the theory and how to work with it was related to my desire to find the pre-existing answer that would explain the phenomena I was engaging with. The frustration only grew as a result of not being able to find the direct answer and I was left with only partial influences to my thinking from the work of other researchers and theorists. Initially, influenced by the social psychology perspective, I thought that shallow-rooted belonging was related to social needs. Whilst this perspective provided some understanding, it was only a partial explanation of the phenomenon I inquired into.

My frustration with the theory and research grew so much so that I went through a period of total abandonment of the theory as I became disillusioned by both the theory and received knowledge. During that stage, I started to pay attention to my subjective knowing and found Belenky et al (1997) framework of women's way of knowing helpful in understanding what

was going on for me. I started to value my personal experience and the experience of others and started to engage more deeply with the theories of others, but in a different way. I realised that the answers to many questions depends on the context in which they are asked and on the frame of reference of the person who is posing the question. I moved from subjectivist towards what Belenky et al (1997) called constructed knowing. And I started to develop the confidence to generate my own theory and new knowledge based on the 'data' I collected throughout my first and second person inquiry. I revisited the theoretical frames and research introduced here in a different way, more as a helpful lens to explore the particular and contextualised knowledge I was generating through my context specific inquiry. My earlier engagement with the theory was very much reflective of the traces of positivist influence in my ontological worldview and later my approach to theories was influenced with my evolving constructivist and participatory worldviews.

As a result of this shift, I started to see the theories and research of others as practical devices that illuminated further experiences, mine and that of others, reflections and indeed the overall phenomena I was inquiring into. I accepted that I would not find all the answers out there as they did not exist, there was no name for or a full explanation of the specific phenomenon I was interested in. It was rather late in my inquiry that I discovered the body of literature that I found helpful in making sense of the data I gathered. Once I located the shallow-rooted phenomenon within the existential philosophy and saw it more as a way of being, rather than a purely social/psychological need to belong to a group, my understanding became much deeper and my confidence in this newly generated knowledge grew. This moment of realisation was rather like a moment of epiphany and the point at which I was able to clearly connect experience, reflection, theory, sense making and future action. I describe this moment in the next chapter focusing on the first person inquiry.

I return to the theory and previous research described here in Chapter 7 where I fully integrate those influences with the experience and reflection to make sense of my inquiry and define its future practical application. Informed by the constructivist perspective, I learned that the lack of a pre-existing name and language to describe and understand the shallow-rooted belonging phenomenon did not mean that the phenomenon was non-existent. By providing the name and language to label the phenomenon of shallow-rooted

belonging, I offered to participants in this inquiry a framework and language through which we could understand and make sense of global mobility.

I now turn my attention towards my first person inquiry.

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## CHAPTER 4

### Personal inquiry:

Displacement, belonging and the tension



*“The arduous task of being human is to balance longing and belonging to work with and against each other – so that all the possibilities that sleep in the clay of the heart may be awakened and realised.”*

O’Donohue (1998, p. xx)

Figure 13: ‘Shallow rooted plant’ found in my Croatian garden,  
photo taken by myself August 2014

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the movement from constructing my personal world through the lens of deliberate displacement towards the territory of belonging and, in particular, shallow-rooted belonging. I describe four first person inquiry cycles and illustrate each cycle through extracts from my personal journal or other writings, images and poetry, describing my experiences, significant learning moments, insights and learning gained through reflections. I conclude this chapter through an introduction of the concept of shallow-rooted belonging, primarily sharing what this concept means to me. I further elaborate on this concept and associated experiences in Chapter 5, interweaving further my personal experiences with the experiences of other global professionals who participated in my inquiry.

This chapter contains self-reflective writing that explores accounts of my personal experiences associated with the struggle to establish a sufficient sense of belonging to a current locality and to confront the issue of not deeply belonging anywhere anymore. In this autoethnographic writing, a method I describe in Chapter 2, I share highly personalised accounts where I draw on my own experiences to expand understanding of the tension between the desire to belong and deliberate displacement. I share those emotional moments of pain associated with coming to terms with my own 'homelessness' and the moments of joy associated with discovering an alternative form of belonging. In the spirit of postmodernist research, I bring my own voice, the voice of a researcher, into this inquiry acknowledging that this has the potential to make me vulnerable in the eyes of the public. At the same time, I hope for empathy, connection, resonance and expanded understanding that sharing those personal accounts would bring into the wider social context (Holt, 2003). As a researcher, autoethnographic writing enabled me to discover a profound meaning in a disorienting experience that was triggered by my displacement and has subsequently helped me to draw on my own experiences to expand the understanding of the phenomenon of sufficient belonging, an experience that I named shallow-rooted belonging.

## 4.2 Cycle 1 - An inquiry into deliberate displacement

In earlier chapters, I wrote about the impact the change in ontological perspective has had on my inquiry as a whole. This, coupled with the experimentation I have undergone with extended epistemology, working with artistic and creative activity, has opened space for me to engage with some deeper aspects of my inquiry. The initial question around the source of my authority unexpectedly opened up a whole new territory of self-exploration and examination of the construction of the world that I have created for myself. One theme that preoccupied my first cycle of inquiry was around deliberate displacement – in my practice as an OD practitioner as well as in my life as a whole. This cycle of inquiry started well before the doctoral inquiry and displacement was a dominant theme in my AMOC<sup>3</sup> thesis that got carried into my doctorate thesis for a while. Deliberate displacement was not only informed by my personal experiences but also by my ontological perspective influenced through the notion of detached scientific observer. Presented below are some selected moments from my personal experience that triggered significant disturbance that had a cumulative effect which eventually led me to confront the theme of deliberate displacement that was heavily present at that time of my life.

### 4.2.1 Moment: Reframing life's narrative

Figure 14: Photo of plant from a Croatian garden, symbolising opening, flourishing and engagement, photo taken by myself, summer 2010



#### The Moment

2010, Extracts from AMOC Dissertation

*"It seems to me that 'the rest of my life ...' was significantly marked at the moment of my birth. When I was born, my dad was disappointed that I was a girl as he wanted another boy.*

---

<sup>3 3</sup> AMOC - Ashridge Masters in Organisational Consulting

*According to the story, my father said that he would never love me as much as he would have loved his son.... This crude story kept being re-told by my neighbours and relatives.....*

*I grow up with this story but I did not spend much time looking at the significance it had on my life and me as a person ....only when I started AMOC, in the very first paper this story came up. The discovery of the impact this story had had on choices I made in my life was overwhelming....I came to accept the impact this story had on me ... but I tended to feel rather sorry for myself ...*

*... Until I met with Robin on 2<sup>nd</sup> July this year. As I was sharing this story with him and questioning if this story had something to do with my choice of the topic for my dissertation, Robin used such a powerful word, he used the word 'GIFT'. He said something like '... how interesting it is to see how we all are given 'gifts' in our life and how these shape us up ...'*

*I felt I was spinning when he said this – my whole perspective on my 'sad life story' shifted 360 degrees.... I came to realise that out of this crude comment made by my dad and the crude story being re-told by people whilst I was growing up - I have been given a big life present, a big GIFT.*

*This casual comment and conversation was a big 'moment of truth' for me – a big moment of change in my perspective of myself and my life. (2010, p. 14-15).*

### **Insights and Impact**

This moment opened up a number of new paths of inquiry for me, including self-appreciation, growing up with the sense of being different and keeping myself on the edge. Looking back at that moment of insight in my personal development, I hypothesise that this narrative might have influenced my choices to move away from 'home' in the search for a 'new home' elsewhere in the world. This was one of the most significant development moments in my life and it signifies the beginning of my personal transformation. The process of reframing the self-created life's narrative had triggered a desire in me to explore some key existential questions. I started to pay attention to questions such as: Who am I? Where is the source of my authority? Where do I belong? How do I know what I know? I started a journey of examining ontological and epistemological underpinnings of my worldview.



### **4.2.2 Detachment, displacement and craving for flourishing**

I embarked on AMOC 12 at a very specific point in my life and career. I was dissatisfied with both my career and life and lacked direction in my professional practice. I experienced genuine disengagement at work and even felt like an outsider and a detached observer in my own personal life. Looking back, it is not surprising that as part of my AMOC dissertation I chose to study the phenomenon of engagement at work. I was curious to explore what life would look like if I got myself 'alive again' and fully engaged with my work. The AMOC inquiry continued and influenced the start of the ADOC inquiry.

### **4.2.3 Believing that being detached, was a helpful way of being**

In an interim paper, named *Searching for my space... my voice... my centered self... for my space to flourish*, written on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012, I was trying to convince myself that, through my somewhat detached way, I offer some unique contribution to others:

"In my life and in my practice I see myself as a crystal, a transformer. ... the role I seem to adopt is one of a 'bridge builder' between the opposites; someone who operates in the 'no man's land'; someone who works on the edge. So my task and my role in work and life seem to be to bridge incommensurable to connect the opposites and create a 'magic' moment that enables us all to positively transform. This seems to be my space, my base from which I start and place from which I flourish." (p. 4)

And I immediately noticed that whilst I had strived to enable others to flourish, I did not seem to flourish myself.

### **4.2.4 Starting to notice the tension**

In the same interim paper, written on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012, I make the first observation of the tension I have been experiencing.

“... I realise that I am experiencing a lot of tension. I realise that I need to reconcile a number of opposite dimensions within myself, so that I feel grounded and centered. I have not paid sufficient attention to those opposing dimensions which seem to create tension, and yet I take a role of a bridge maker for others. I feel that this is not helping me in my practice and in my life in general and could be preventing me from flourishing. And this is a moment when I realise that the only choice I have right now is to embark on the first person inquiry, in the hope that this inquiry will help other people learn something valuable from my experience.....

..... I anticipate that I would write my little life story around the topic e.g. about a girl who grew up in a communist country and then emigrated to a capitalist country at the age of 23. What happened to her and her view of the world? How has she been making sense of life, work, her identity, etc...? Where does she belong, bearing in mind that the country she originally came from does not exist anymore? p. 7)

Noticing the tension has led to the start of an inquiry into the tension itself.

#### **4.2.5 Reflections on Cycle 1**

Having engaged with writing about my earlier life experiences, I discovered the power of writing as an inquiry method (Richardson, 2000) and I opened space for myself to explore in a more profound way experiences associated with displacement, detachment and tension. At this stage, I created conditions for opening ‘communicative space’ (Habermas, in Kemmis, 2006) within myself to explore the key inquiry strands that started to emerge. I noted my sense of difference, which I was, much later, able to relate to my way of being and existing in the liminal space (Steinbock, 1995) and operating in that space from the stance of a tempered radical (Meyerson 2003) in my professional practice. Although I noticed those key strands to my inquiry in this first cycle, I was only able to recognise the significance of what I noticed much later in my inquiry, especially when I started to explore those discoveries through the lens of the theoretical frameworks that started to speak to me. I write more about those discoveries in later chapters.

## 4.3 Cycle 2 - Recognising the tension between displacement and belonging

I started to notice the tension between my personal sense of choiceful displacement and desire to belong, magnified later on through the job offer to move to another country. However, at this stage of my inquiry, I was not ready to engage with the theme of belonging. I was still very much convinced that I was inquiring into human flourishing and the professional practice of engagement, something perhaps I was aspiring to, rather than experiencing. This was the time when I generated the painting 'The three of my inquiry' and shortly after I made a decision to accept a new job and move to Europe, experiences described in Chapter 2. A combination of intense emotional experiences, generated through a creative activity and paying attention to the extended epistemology, together with emotions associated with making a decision to move to another country resulted in a recognition of the tension I was experiencing – a tension between wanting to displace myself again, to learn and test myself in a new 'alien' environment and the fear of not belonging anywhere. This intense period in my life led me to write an auto ethnographic transfer paper into the doctoral level. I felt I had no choice but to engage with my past and my profound experiences of displacement, loneliness and lost sense of identity and belonging.

### 4.3.1 Moment: Auto ethnographic writing and re-living the past

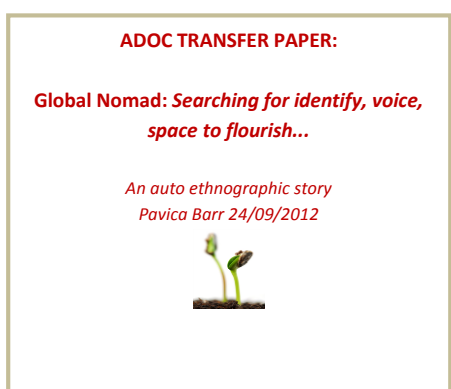


Figure 15: ADOC transfer paper – cover page, September 2012

#### The Moment

Selection of paragraphs from the transfer paper

“..... I close my eyes for a moment and I can see my parents at the airport on the day of my departure. It was May 1992. I was a 23 year old recent graduate in psychology. I was excited about the opportunity to fulfil my childhood dream to visit London and live in another country. I grew up in a small town and with a very strong feeling of not belonging there.

At that moment at the airport I knew I was moving on. Mum and Dad had a very specific sad look in their eyes but they kept composed; when I passed the passport control and looked back, I could see tears in their eyes and I let myself go... I knew that this was the very last moment of my old life. I was confused, tearful and thrilled at the same time. As I write this, the powerful memory of those moments and emotions experienced then get me crying now.

I was relieved to finally get onto the aeroplane to take me away from the problems of the former Yugoslavia. At the time, there were big political tensions, rumour of the war, build-up of a conflict. With the take-off, I also left the country called Yugoslavia and my next visit to that same land was the visit to a new country called Croatia a couple of years later..." (p.21)

"....I remember how puzzled I used to be when people would ask me where I was from and on hearing that I was from Yugoslavia, they would start asking some odd questions ...

... Things got even more challenging when the war broke out in Yugoslavia. Up until the beginning of the war, I was relaxed, curious and surprised by responses and questions but once the war started, things started to change for me significantly.

The excitement of a new possibility, playfulness and lightness were replaced by sadness, sense of loss and confusion - this is when I started to feel that I was an immigrant. I could not go home – all flights were cancelled and borders were closed. .... I had strong sense of being trapped on this island and there was no escape. I was getting more and more uncomfortable when people asked me where I was from. I actually did not know what to say – I came from this country that was called Yugoslavia but this country was disintegrating in front of my eyes. There was a period when there was no country I can call 'my country' ... I was born Croatian but I did not know what this new country was about. I did not know what I was about any more. I just knew that I did not want to be visible, I did not want to be different – I wanted to disappear myself into the background and simply survive.

As I write this, tears are pouring down my face... I did not envisage how hard and emotional writing this was going to be..." (p. 23)

"This is the toughest part to write. I brace myself, I take a deep breath.., I put a CD with a selection of Mozart's work on... I grew up with this music and it connects me with the past... I will give this a go, I tell myself, and I already sense that my throat is getting tighter, the tears are in my eyes already and I have not started yet...

It is hard to write about the unhappiest period in my life. I coped with it by simply boxing it in. And yet I know that this period in my life has had a lot to do with my struggles around the identity, voice, space for flourishing. This is a period when I learned to make myself invisible in order to survive. A carefree, adventurous and free spirited girl that arrived on British soil started to wilt and simply hide in the background. I remember thinking that the sun had somehow disappeared from my life and the grey cloud took over. My colours, my sparkle, my playfulness toned down and moved into dull shades of non-descript colours. I felt that I turned grey.

Watching your country being torn apart by civil war is not a pleasant experience. I could not go home and I was watching horrific scenes on the TV instead.

For two years I could not go back. I was extremely confused as to who I was and what was happening.

.....I was dreading the question that people frequently asked – Where are you from? I hated that question. I did not even know what to say – I was not from Yugoslavia any more, Croatia did not exist for a while; and that question was a painful reminder that I had no place I belonged to....

.....I vividly remember a morning that changed my life forever. I had a lovely dream and as I was waking up I could feel the warmth of the sun. I felt that the sun had passed a message through me. A wilting girl stood up tall and decided that she was going to embrace the world standing tall. I do not know where the energy came from but I do remember that very moment, which was so light, bright and warm. This was a turning point for me ...." (p.39)

### Insights and Impact

At the time of writing the Transfer Paper, I was in the midst of making the transition from living in the UK to living in Europe; moving jobs, moving family and relocating to a new country. The sense of being a global nomad started to influence the focus in my inquiry and, at the time, the prospect of becoming and joining the globally mobile community once again felt very real.

The choice to dedicate a significant portion of my transfer paper to auto ethnographic writing was a courageous act on my part. As it can be seen from the selection of paragraphs above, some deeply buried experiences from the unhappy periods of my life came out into the open.

This period in my personal development and inquiry was a significant period of disorientation and confusion. I worked through the consequences of bringing to visibility experiences I hoped to forget. And I was living through the most intense period of change in my personal life due to this relocation to another country, starting a new job and moving my daughter to a new school.

In my viva, I was asked to make full sense of what I wrote in my paper and yet I was struggling to hold onto something stable amongst the huge wave that hit me through the process of writing the transfer paper and the process of relocation. I felt vulnerable, lost and just able to hold onto a small straw of hope that the wave would pass and sun would come out again.

### **4.3.2 Belonging and global mobility surfacing to the foreground**

The process of writing about the past and reliving some of those poignant moments in my life, even though it brought some pain, confusion and disturbance, also opened up a new space for me to engage with. Looking back, I can see that the transfer paper enabled me to grow as an individual and deal with the past experiences that needed processing – it was the right time to process those events that had been ‘composting’ for years, in order to create new energy and movement in the process of personal growth.

This was a necessary step in my development which helped me accept certain aspects of my personal history, my roots and experiences and gave me a foundation from which I could start shaping my sense of authority, identity and my sense of belonging. Interestingly, at this stage I noticed the shallow-rooted plant, a weed that kept moving around our Croatian garden. I started to notice the absence of the need for developing deep roots in a culture or place in my life’s narrative that I kept telling to myself.

Reflecting on the transfer paper, I noted the tension between longing for adventure, novelty, discovery and belonging to a place, relationships or a culture, that seem to pull me apart and blur my sense of voice and belonging. My sense of uniqueness seemed to come from my belief that I could skilfully operate in that ‘in-between’ space of tension between opposites. And

yet, there was something noticeably missing and troubling in relation to that belief, requiring more attention. I had feeling that I was a master of displacement and that a sense of belonging was an alien experience to me. The ongoing curiosity around developing a personal voice and identity continued and increasingly started to mesh with the fresh experiences of immigration, global mobility and the tension between longing for 'adventure' and belonging to 'community'.

### **4.3.3 Reflections on Cycle 2**

In this cycle I experienced the power of autoethnographic writing to its maximum, resulting in a much greater understanding of myself and my past experiences. Writing about those experiences enabled me to understand further the impact of displacement that war in my country of birth had had on my sense of belonging and identity. The purpose of this personal narrative was to *"understand a self or some aspect of a life lived in a cultural context."* (Ellis, 2004, p. 45). I started to understand how important the sense of belonging was for my identity and how painful it could be when one feels labelled as different and socially excluded or condemned by the immediate social and cultural context. I felt vulnerable due to public disclosure of this part of my life through autoethnographic writing and was worried that I would be judged as a person and that my life would be judged by readers. What gave me the courage to share this writing in public was my desire to bring to visibility those experiences that I, and people similar to me, grapple with. In addition, I have established myself in my adopted country, become 'successful' in the eyes of those in the society I live in and have been accepted as 'one of us'. I felt a moral duty to reveal some of those experiences that perhaps newcomers to a foreign land grapple with but are silenced as they are not accepted by the wider social context.

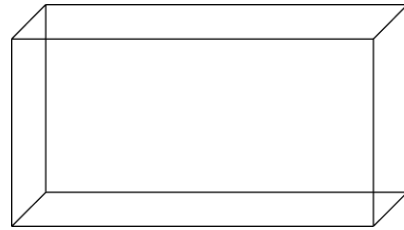
#### **4.4 Cycle 3 - An inquiry into the possibility of belonging**

My third cycle of inquiry commenced shortly after the transfer into doctoral level study. In my personal and professional life, this was the time of adapting to a new country, six months into moving to Europe. This was an intense period of trying to survive in a new context and rebuild a life whilst holding a demanding new job requiring me to travel extensively around the world. Despite the intensity of this period, I simply could not stop my inquiry and a strong personal need to continue with the inquiry carried me through this challenging period of transition. In this cycle of inquiry I experienced periods of numbness and inability to describe what was going on as well as movement towards inquiring into a possibility of belonging. I faced a period of time during which I tried to convince myself and my DSG group that my inquiry was now firmly focused on human connectivity, not realising that this was my way of avoiding facing up to my deep longing to belong somewhere. But my DSG group did not allow me to blind myself any longer and, just before writing up the assessed progress paper towards the latter part of 2013, my supervisor Robin and DSG group provoked me to consider replacing the words 'human connectivity' with the word 'belonging' to test my own views on the inquiry focus. This provocation was another moment of new energy being unleashed and everything started to make sense, just like one of those moments described earlier when the sun entered into my life and gave me a new purpose after the period of displacement and hiding. This moment of transition required me to face up to the realisation that deep-rooted belonging was not mine to ever have, at emotional not just intellectual level. Described below are some of the moments leading to that realisation.



#### 4.4.1 Moment: The 'white' box of despair – not belonging anywhere

Figure 16: The white box of despair  
Period from January to May 2013



##### The Moment

This was a period during which I spent time reading various books, from Jung, to Bortoft, Crawford, Sennett, etc. Reflecting on that period I noticed an absence of journal entries; engagement with artistic/creative activity and music. I noticed the absence of 'me' in my inquiry, in my life, in my practice.... This period felt very much a period of 'vacuum' and a period of a desperate need for defining the inquiry question, defining the methodology and a frantic quest for focus – but I was not present in the moment. I wrote a progress paper for my DSG group titled: *A Quest for focus; An effort to sharpen my inquiry question...* (10<sup>th</sup> March 2013). In papers that followed, *Reflections on the progress* (8<sup>th</sup> April 2013), *Brief Overview of my progress* (5<sup>th</sup> June 2013) I tried hard to define what my inquiry question was about.

*"I was frustrated with myself for not being able to name precisely what I have been inquiring into; for not being able to clearly articulate the answers to those questions. Taking a bit of a butterfly approach to my inquiry certainly has not been congruent with my 'laser sharp' approach in my practice."* (10<sup>th</sup> March 2013)

I described this period as the 'White box of despair' because that image, against the white background of the paper, sums up best how I felt at the time. I felt that this was a period of 'nothingness', 'numbness' and 'stuck-ness'. The intellect, rationality and desire to get hold of and control the destination of my inquiry started to take over. This was also accompanied by an intense period in a new job involving relentless travel around the world and the delivery of high-visibility work in the organisation. I had little quality time for self-reflection and most of the time I was tired and jetlagged, coupled with intense pressures from my personal life associated with the adaptations required to function in the new environment we as a family found ourselves in.

Trust in the process, playfulness and creativity were pushed aside in favour of control, efficiency and linearity. The resulting outcome was a period of frustration and a fixation on the need for absolute clarity around my inquiry question, methodology and the outcome I desired. I felt I was 'pushing water uphill' and the harder I tried, the less progress I made. This was a period during which I started to think that perhaps there was no inquiry here and that I should give it all up.

Physical exhaustion due to travel and jetlag, stress due to relocation and the intensity of trying to re-create life in a new country, all contributed to my being closed and unreceptive to learning and inquiry. However, during this period, I started to have informal conversations with leaders, CEOs responsible for businesses spanning continents. Their stories were stories of craving connections with their peers, social interactions and fulfilment in their careers. Several of them questioned choices they had made and the price they had to pay for living the 'globally mobile life' in terms of their careers, their family's sacrifices and a general sense of not belonging. Those stories started to interest me greatly and more conversations surfaced. In those conversations, I started to notice what was going on for me. The deep sense of not belonging to the immediate environment where I lived and the organisation I joined and the physical sensation of inevitable detachment from the place I left (London), combined with the stress of trying to recreate a life in a new country, was taking its toll. I described the inevitable process of detachment from the place I used to call home in my electronic journal on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2013:

*"Walking around London and visiting the city I lived in for many years – how familiar, and yet I question if I belong to this world any more. What has changed? I have changed – I have gone to live in another place, in another town and feel somewhat distant from the city I used to love, from the city that treated me well, from the city that enabled me to be who I am, from the city which gave me a chance.*

*I look back and feel that I neglected my relationship to this city whilst living here. I used the city for my means but what have I given back?*

*But now I walk on the streets; familiar faces rushing to work and going on with their lives. I should be doing this right now but no I am actually watching others do it? I am a passer-by in the city that felt home not long ago.*

*I am frantically reading the newspaper, Metro is in my hands, and yet I know that I cannot catch up on all that has passed me by over the last several months – I am not part of this anymore.”*

And I started to understand why I was focusing my energy on mundane, logistical and mechanical aspects of life. Words of business leaders I spoke to started to help me make sense of my own experience:

“... you spend so much time sorting out logistics and schools and everything you need to operate properly in your life and, actually, you lose yourself in that process. And then you have work so, when they put you in a country .... actually I cost probably [COMPANY NAME] twice as much as I would cost if I would be in my home country ..... so there is an expectation that you will deliver more and therefore you have the work that is extremely demanding. You have the high family expectations that you will do everything so that it is smooth, you have high company expectations that you will deliver quickly and the person you forget in that process is actually yourself. And, very honestly, you forget about yourself for the first year.” (FG)

“So not only do you have to establish yourself you also have to establish your partner. I think that’s probably not unusual in moves with families where the person who moves also has to establish him- or herself and then also help to establish the family.” (MD)

“It’s an incredibly tiring life. You know you have to entirely rebuild your life every two/three years. So you realise how easy it is to live in a place you know when you’ve moved as much as we have... you spend a lot of time managing stuff that you do not normally in your own country that you can ... in automatic mode, you know.. ” (FG)

“...the time wasted in changing. Because the good part is when you are established which is, in fact, in an assignment of three years, it’s two years. And the difficulties when you break what you have built, friendships, hobbies, habits, you move, you go, you search (for) a new house which is a very stressful one.... and you know how important it is to find the right one.... so the period where you have this position, maybe three months before and six months after, so in total nine months, is almost destroying your life.” (PB)

I was experiencing a part of a globally mobile life that seems to be a normal phase that most of the globally mobile leaders I spoke to knew very well, even if they had not spoken to anyone in particular about it before. Losing yourself in the process of moving whilst ensuring you take care of your family and deliver on the expectations of your employer seems to be a normal part of the globally mobile life experience and an experience that was adding to my own feeling of not belonging anywhere – just plainly surviving this stage.

### Insights and impact

In retrospect, this might have been a helpful phase in my development journey and in my inquiry; a phase of transition into a different layer of inquiry and development; a phase where I needed some recovery post viva and auto ethnographic writing whilst experiencing the full power of what a globally mobile life brings with it.

Questions around the impact of longing and belonging in the sense of personal authority, started to deepen. I started to explore the price I, and my family, are paying to live the life of ‘shallow-roots’ and what it would take for us to put down deeper roots in a place or country and form relationships with people. Locating self in the ‘in-between space’ gives us a freedom to move in and out, attach/detach with ease; to enjoy the novelty and hold the difference lightly. Yet, something deeper seemed to be missing; an ongoing struggle with not belonging gave a sense of emptiness and superficiality. How can I grow my sense of authority, identity and voice whilst holding lightly different perspectives and choosing to be grounded in the ‘not being too grounded’ proposition? How does placing self in the ‘not quite belonging’ space

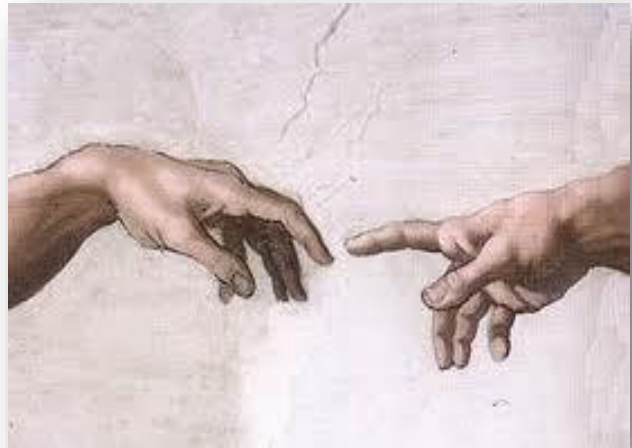
impact on my OD practice? How do I sustain and resource myself to work in that place? These were some of the questions that kept me preoccupied throughout this period.

#### 4.4.2 Moment: 'Seeing the space' where my inquiry is located

Figure 17: Sistine Chapel – Michelangelo, Creation; Google search, images on line

##### The Moment

Extract from my electronic journal, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2013



".... I am imagining the scene of sunrise right now and seeing this beautiful touch between the sun and the earth's horizon, the blurriness between the two and a light touch between the boundaries merging into the two and into the one... enough touch to connect and be one, enough separation to be independent. I wonder what happens in that moment of sufficient touch – I am imagining a space of energy, lightness, touch, separation and the moment passes. As I write, the Sistine Chapel in Rome flashes in my mind and I can vividly see the famous Michelangelo painting – Creation of Adam (hands detail). I remember the moment I saw this painting for the first time whilst visiting the Sistine Chapel – I was overwhelmed by the power of it and the space between the two hands; two fingers; there was something so intense in that space, the moment of two boundaries touching so lightly and the magic power of energy exchanging between the two boundaries..."

..... I am interested in that field where boundaries touch and energy of possibility gets created. And how does one know that the boundaries have really touched and opened up something else or created a new connection and sense of oneness. And at which point the moment is past and the boundaries are so far apart that the touch is impossible, the energy is gone."

##### Insights and Impact

At the time, I was intensely reading the Wholeness of Nature by Bortoft (1996) and trying to define the inquiry question. Visual images, either from memory or newly imagined, started to

vividly emerge whilst I was either reading Bortoft or thinking about my inquiry. For a long while, I kept writing about my OD practice as being located in the 'in-between' space and as performing the act of 'bridging'. However, I could not quite name the practice or give it more specificity. The Creation of Adam image appeared totally unexpectedly and out of context as I had long forgotten my visit to the Sistine Chapel, or so I thought. Reading Bortoft's work challenged my thinking of linearity and seeing opposites as a linear continuum. Reflecting back on this experience, I now see this space as the space of creation – the space of intensive creative energy, relationship with the other, connection and the boundary guided by intuition. And that space I would call 'home', the space where I belong whether professionally or personally – the space I later discovered and named as liminal space.

Playfulness, imagination, visual imagery and artistry re-entered my work and my inquiry, resulting in the new movement. I started to inquire into those moments when I experienced the 'in-between space' in my OD practice. I also engaged in conversations with my peers, other OD practitioners and some business leaders, around those moments when we felt a sufficient amount of attachment/detachment, belonging/not belonging and created conditions for new insights to emerge. I have described this work in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

### 4.4.3 Moment: A glimpse of the possibility to belong

I have described this moment in Prelude, and invite you as a reader to go back to that page and re-read the description of the moment.

Figure 18: Photo of the Pašman Bridge, Croatia, taken by myself



This very moment took my inquiry into a new level and proved to be a turning point in accepting that I, as a globally mobile professional, have a deep need for both – a deliberate displacement and a sense of belonging – and that the ongoing interplay between those perhaps opposing dimensions shapes who I am.

#### Insights and Impact

Bridges and bridging appeared consistently in my writing and my inquiry over the last several years of my AMOC<sup>4</sup> and ADOC<sup>5</sup> journey. I used the word ‘bridging’ to describe my professional practice and to give a name to the essence of my inquiry. I tended to describe that practice as the practice of bridging, connecting and holding the opposites to create new possibilities.

Until the experience of the moment described here, I did not pay enough attention to the word ‘bridging’ itself. In the summer of 2013 I felt a strong need to spend time on the Pašman Bridge in Croatia. The bridge I chose was not just any bridge; it was the bridge that I had been engaging with for years. Every time I would go to our home in Croatia, I would have to cross this bridge to reach the island where our house was. My husband (a British national) and I have established one of our anchors on this island, even though I do not come from that very part of Croatia. Every time we come to stay here, with no exception, I will slow down or even

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<sup>4</sup> Ashridge Masters in Organisational Change

<sup>5</sup> Ashridge Doctorate in Organisational Change

stop on the bridge to soak in the magnificent scenery and embrace that special moment of arriving. Once I reach that very top point on the bridge where the two islands fully connect, I feel I have arrived - I have arrived home.

It is not surprising that I had chosen to go to that very place and that very bridge at the time of difficulty and despair that I was experiencing in my life and in my inquiry. I needed the comfort of the space that I connect with, the space that felt familiar, welcoming, safe... It was only through experiencing that reassuring sense of connectedness with self, with the environment around me that I was able to grasp a significant theme in my work. I realised that one of the layers of my inquiry has been about connection and belonging and now I noticed the other theme, the significance of space in my inquiry.

Bortoft (1996) wrote about receptivity and the receptive mode which I find helpful in understanding why my experience on the bridge suddenly brought a 'new way of seeing' the same work that I had been doing for a while. *"... the receptive mode, is one which allows events to happen.... Instead of being verbal, analytical, sequential and logical, this mode of consciousness is nonverbal, holistic, nonlinear, and intuitive. It emphasizes the sensory and perceptual instead of the rational categories of the action mode. It is based on taking in, rather than manipulating, the environment."* (p. 16). By dwelling on the bridge in a safe and familiar environment, and letting myself simply be, I perhaps ended up entering the receptive mode, a mode where I let the phenomena of my inquiry come to me. Going and dwelling on the bridge and in 'bridging' was a deliberate act. I went to that specific location because I felt I needed to pay attention to the word 'bridging'. I sense that the physical movement enabled my body to process my experience and come to an insight that might not have been accessible through 'intellect' alone.

And yet, after this event, I wanted to give up my doctoral studies. I felt that I did not have enough energy left to continue with my inquiry which was taking so much out of me personally. I was afraid of what else I would need to confront on this journey.



#### **4.4.4 Moment: Accepting the need to belong whilst holding displacement lightly...**

##### The Moment

Extracts from my electronic diary, November 2013

*"It is my turn and my work is being discussed in our DSG meeting. I feel everyone else has made so much more progress than me... and I feel fragile. I have just been recovering from the emotionally draining phase of wanting to give up my doctorate studies... I felt my work has moved to a new much deeper level but it was incomplete... my attention was fully caught by Robin's invitation to replace the word connectivity in my paper and work with the word belonging and see what this would create for me. ....knew in that moment that this is what this is all about... I felt tearful; I felt I wanted to run away.... I was not sure I could carry on... working with belonging might mean I need to confront the fact that I feel I do not belong anywhere anymore.... Do I have courage to put this out there? Do I have courage to say it to myself? ..."*  
(15<sup>th</sup> November 2013 DSG Meeting)

*" I am sitting on the tram, going to work.....Thinking of my inquiry... my thoughts wander towards Croatia again... the image of the shallow rooted plant in our garden comes back to me... I suddenly have this moment of realisation, accompanied by the somewhat sickly feeling in my gut and dizziness, I realise that the deep rooted belonging is not mine to ever have.... It is not possible any more... it has gone with years that have passed.... An elating feeling fills me with joy as I think of the 'travelling shallow rooted plant' in Croatia.... I realise I am one of those ..."* (November 2013)

##### Insights and Impact

Accepting that my inquiry is about the mastery of belonging, not just the mastery of displacement, has been a hugely liberating and yet slow-to-come realisation. It took me such a long time to accept that the more socially desirable way of belonging is not applicable to me, with my personal history and chosen lifestyle of global mobility. And yet, the sense of belonging still mattered to me greatly.

I sensed an increased strength in my voice and authority in understanding and accepting my background and my roots. I started to accept myself as an ongoing 'immigrant' with shallow roots and started to cherish my 'difference' as a gift. I was sensing less pull towards wanting to disappear myself in the vast 'sea' of sameness. I started to identify some anchors that were enabling me to have a sufficient sense of belonging and home. I began to accept that my sense of personal belonging was unlikely to come from a strong attachment to a specific place. It was likely to develop from the quality of relationships, emotional connection and creative energy that I experienced in relation to a space, the people around me and my own sense of being.

My personal development was shifting towards developing my personal practice of belonging whilst still maintaining my shallow roots. This did not mean that I was to abandon my mastery of 'not belonging' as this had served me well in my life and professional practice. What it meant was that I am now keen to develop the mastery of belonging.

#### **4.4.5 Reflections on Cycle 3**

In this cycle of inquiry, I started to consider and recognise that my sense of 'home' comes from the space 'in-between'. Having engaged with the work of Bortoft (1996) my linear thinking associated with the home and belonging were seriously challenged. I explored concepts such as wholeness and receptivity and engaged with nature to understand those concepts through my experiences. By engaging with nature, I experimented with and practised the method of seeing the wholeness through its parts, an idea developed by Goethe and described by Bortoft (1996). That profound engagement with nature and examining the paradoxical tension between the whole and the part, belonging and displacement, enabled me to break the mould of my linear thinking and led me to realise that one can view and experience a sense of belonging in a different form. Rather than limiting my thinking to a one dimensional linear trajectory with two opposing ends, one being 'deep belonging' and the other being 'not belonging at all', I discovered that my experience of belonging is neither of those two extremes, and yet it encapsulates both ends of the spectrum in a form of being that I named shallow-rooted belonging. This breakthrough in my thinking frame enabled me

to finally make more sense and greater connection with the other theoretical frameworks that I had been engaging with but had been unable to make full use of. This cycle of inquiry resulted in a profound 'Aha!' moment and unleashed a new energy that enabled me to suddenly see how my personal experiences, professional practice and theoretical frameworks sufficiently connected to create a new meaning in my understanding of the phenomenon of belonging.

#### **4.5 Cycle 4 - Staying with the phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging**

The fourth cycle of inquiry started following the viva held on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2014 when my doctoral work was examined further by external and internal faculty, with the aim of providing me with the final assessment and guidance ahead of proceeding to the final stage of writing the doctoral thesis. In the viva, I was invited to stay longer with the phenomenon of shallow rooted belonging and to pay specific attention to the question: What am I yearning for?

I dedicate Chapter 6 to the phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging, where I attempt to vividly describe the experiences of the tension between displacement and belonging as experienced by globally mobile professionals and the response to this tension in the form of shallow-rooted belonging, intermeshing my experiences with those of global leaders and OD practitioners who engaged with me in this inquiry.

Here I present one more poignant moment on my personal journey that led me to a space where I accept that the tension between belonging and deliberate displacement is here to stay with me for good. I learned through this moment that I have chosen to lead this life of ongoing tension and have the freedom to alter it should I wish to do so.

#### 4.5.1 Moment: Staying with the phenomenon ...

Figure 19: Photo of the Pašman Bridge, Croatia, taken by myself

##### The Moment: Dwelling on the bridge – Take 2

Extract from my electronic journal,

17<sup>th</sup> May 2014

“I am walking towards the bridge, that special space that welcomes me back every year, every time I arrive for a visit. I am noticing a slight sensation of unease in my body, a bit of tension in my shoulders, butterflies in my stomach; a mixture of excitement and anxiety. I am not sure what to expect. I walk slowly and as I get closer to my special place, my legs are getting heavier, I am dragging them along. What if this time, for the first time, the magic does not happen? What if this time the feeling of detachment prevails? I stop. I take a deep breath. I hesitantly put my foot over the line that marks the start of the ascending part of the bridge. What if this time I do not feel welcomed.... the feeling of home and belonging betrays me... what if it does not happen.... I step forward... I need to test this... I walk forward and suddenly feel lightness, my legs are not heavy any more, I am moving forward



I feel my eyes watering with tears, tears of joy that this very spot brings every time... the vastness of space, the sense of the known, the sense of belonging to this very spot..... the smell of spring Mediterranean plants is helping me feel grounded in the place... I sit down ... on that very spot where I sat last time... the spot where the two sides of the bridge meet... where two separated islands meet... the point of tension... the point of connection...

What are you longing for? What are you yearning for?, Steve asked. Those questions are still echoing in my ears. I fix my stare on the horizon... I am hoping those islands might just give me an answer... I am forcing myself to stay still, stay in that moment of tension...

Walking from side to side of the bridge makes me tired.... my legs take me back to the highest point on the bridge. I sit down and wait... this time eyes wide open.... I am waiting to see what happens next.... What am I longing for? Am I longing for something long lost that will never come back? Am I longing for that feeling of being fully understood by those around me...

when there is no need to even speak as words are not necessary to be understood... am I yearning for those days when I felt I knew everyone and everything around me and felt that deep sense of connection with people and place... when no explanation was needed when jokes are shared, when references are made to points in history we shared... when I felt meshed into society and was not even thinking about it all ... there was that deep sense of understanding between us – me and people around me – we shared moments in our lives that formed a fabric of who we are...

Is that what I am longing for? But those ties have been long cut... so much has changed ... I have changed... I am more of the stranger than the local, I do not understand every nuance in language, jokes, little quotes and sayings that have been knitted recently as part of daily events in those people's lives.... I speak the language they do not understand... my manners are not local any more... I have become more restrained, somewhat 'polished', not quite the same....

Am I longing for a 'home', for being fully understood, that will never return? Am I struggling with tensions between my desire to belong and the inner pull towards adventure, learning and testing myself? Am I longing to belong to the local community when I know deep down that a deep rooted belonging is not mine to have? Ever have.... that possibility has long gone...

Am I longing for those moments when I felt fully understood, fully enmeshed in the fabric of the local community? And I now know that there is no possibility for that experience to come back to me ever again? I have long left my country and the country I left does not exist anymore – erased from the maps, political systems, and daily vocabulary. I have adapted to new lands, absorbed new manners, language and way of being... and that makes me a 'hybrid human being' as FG said in my conversation with him. I cannot be any more who I had been those years back; I cannot be that flower that had grown in Croatian gardens; the wind of desire for adventure transported me to some other lands and with every temporary cohabitation on those new lands, I have learned to modify myself to survive and thrive... and I have lost some of the colours, intensity and qualities that I originally had and that were once imprinted in my DNA... that the original local soil fed into my existence... there is no more return to that, no matter how much I tried... and I have gained some new qualities that make me stronger, make me thrive in inhospitable lands, make me richer for all the experiences that travel with me, help me keep my eyes wide open to new possibilities that may emerge...."

## Insights and Impact

This most recent poignant moment enabled me to realise that the tension between deliberate displacement and belonging is here to stay with me whilst pursuing a globally mobile career. I discovered that this tension, when embraced and held lightly, is a source of creative energy for me and keeps me alive. I started to accept that a simple, linear response to resolving the tension is unlikely to occur and it is actually an undesirable state of being for me. I belong to that space of 'in-betweenness' and by understanding the tension that I felt was pulling me apart, I am starting to create conditions for personal flourishing. I have found my home

### **4.5.2 Reflections on Cycle 4**

Staying with the phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging deepened my understanding of the nature of the phenomenon (Spinelli, 2005) and confirmed my understanding that this alternative form of belonging is existential in its nature and it is about the way of being (Steinbock, 1995), rather than about the social/psychological need to belong to a group. I discovered that my home is firmly located in the liminal space between the familiar and foreign, home and alien, or indeed in the very point of tension and connection where the two sides of the 'bridge' meet. Those insights brought me to the place where I accepted that the tension between displacement and belonging will never cease to exist and yet it is my source of energy, my space and my home that nurtures my sense of belonging and enables me to live a healthy, fulfilling life.

## **4.6 Reflections**

The poignant moments described have left a significant trace on shaping my sense of belonging in a globally mobile world. Each moment has brought some disturbance and opened up new paths to follow. It has been an emotionally draining journey and I have no doubt that this inquiry will continue but, for the purposes of my doctoral study, I choose to take a pause at this stage. In this Chapter I have deliberately chosen to focus on the aspect of

personal inquiry concerning my own experiences associated with the tension between deliberate displacement and belonging and the emerging response to the tension in the form of shallow-rooted belonging.

Autoethnographic writing, revealed in this chapter, enabled me to profoundly understand my sense of shallow-rooted belonging as a way of being in this world of global mobility. I give more voice to the struggles and joys associated with global mobility in the next chapter, where I share experiences, mine and that of others, to draw attention to this phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging in a contemporary world of global mobility. I deliberately chose to immerse the reader in those experiences to evoke empathy, connection and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon familiar to those who pursue the path of global mobility. I chose to draw attention to the psychological and existential needs of globally mobile professionals, who may be viewed by some as a privileged group of people or by others as a minority group or both. And by drawing attention to this group of people I hope to raise awareness of this little-understood phenomenon.

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## CHAPTER 5

### Staying with the phenomena:

The experience of tension and  
the emergence of shallow-rooted belonging



*“... a weed is a plant in the wrong place,  
that is, a plant growing where you would prefer other  
plants to grow...”*

Mabey (2012, p. 5)

Figure 20: Weeds by the footpath,  
photo taken by myself August 2014

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the description of the experience associated with the tension between displacement and belonging, together with the experience of shallow-rooted belonging, whilst pursuing a globally mobile career. This chapter integrates some CAPTA collected via not only first person inquiry but also conversations with globally mobile business leaders. I endeavoured to capture those experiences in as vivid a form as possible, experimenting with evocative writing, in the hope that this approach would bring you, the reader, directly into those experiences. In writing this chapter, I have interwoven some of my personal writings, submitted in various interim papers, with quotes from my journal and conversations with global leaders. At the end of the chapter, I provide a description of the phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging based on the input gained from various participants in this inquiry, those purposefully engaged as well as those accidentally pulled into the conversation as the inquiry progressed.

I have included different voices in this chapter and for ease of reading and clarity of authorship, I have used different font types. When sharing extracts from my own journal or previous reflective writing, I deployed Century Gothic font type. To differentiate the voices of either business leaders or OD practitioners, I deployed Bookman Old Style font type. For all other text, I worked with the main font type, namely Calibri.

## 5.2 Detachment from the home base, pull towards exploring the wider world

I could not wait to go. I sat on that plane, shivering with excitement that my childhood dream to travel and live in other places was becoming a reality. Finally it was happening. In that moment, I had no idea that this would be the moment of no return, a moment of no going back, partially due to the war which took place soon after, and then personal choice – I did not fit any more. I developed a taste for adventure. I changed. Others changed. And this pull towards adventure, learning and discovery seems to be something I share with my fellow, globally-mobile professionals,

“... when I was very young, I always dreamed to travel, so travelling, for me, (is) something which is exciting. I like curiosity, I like to discover new cultures, I like new challenges and perhaps this was the driver for me. ....” (RA)

“Oh, it was not easy! It was not easy because I did not want to leave. I even remember when I left my city, it was emotionally difficult. I remember, I mean, the face of my father. ...it is emotionally heavy for me because somehow you create relationships with people. ...it is not just coming and leaving, it is coming, developing and creating relationships, getting closer to people, to their culture, working with them and then you leave them. So it is not something emotionally I like but the curiosity to discover something else is high.” (RA)

“...I was more attracted with the complexity, with discovering new cultures and with professional challenges than just going back. “(EO)

“... what one may underestimate is how quickly you change when you get disconnected from your home base and how difficult it is when you come back to fit in. ...when you live in a different country you are constantly stimulated. You learn things every day. The culture is different, there are artists you don't know, there are shows you haven't seen, there are books you haven't read. It's extremely stimulating. And I found, coming back to France, extremely boring. And so easy that I found it a bit kind of ... I thought I could do better things in my life than living in France, basically.” (FG)

After two years of not being able to meet my family and friends in person due to the war and closed borders, I finally was able to travel back, to see them all, to share and learn about the pain and joy they had experienced whilst war was pulling us all apart.... I felt lonely and not understood, expected to listen endlessly to their stories and wait for an invitation to share stories of my life in London.... No invitation ever came... no one was interested....I was relieved to get on that plane and go back to a place where I belonged that little bit more now than the place I was born in...

“I did notice that my friends didn't change while I was a different person. I felt terrible because I couldn't belong to that circle, anymore, because I was not

interested and I had to reconcile also with my feeling because I felt a bit guilty.”  
(FC)

“I felt on the one hand immediately again embedded in the family ... not all the friends, mainly in the family. At the same time, I felt a little bit awkward somehow because some of my friends had moved in different directions than I had moved. So when you come back it’s difficult to continue the friendship with some people at the point where you left. And there was also always a little bit of a balance between people asking you about your experience, at the same time maybe charging you that you’re showing off.” (MD)

Tired of life in a foreign land, tired of trying to understand and fit in, tired of speaking a language that is not my own, I turned up on the doorstep of my birthplace to find myself again, to remind myself of the path I had travelled to get some energy to carry on...

“I probably needed to rebalance my personal life to feel connected again and feel sort of confident with myself also in my professional life. And also the fact that belonging sometimes is easier when you share the culture. So you don’t have to deal with the type of challenge or learning because, before you belong into a place of work that is not your native place, you have to learn about the values and the culture and the people and their behaviour so, in Italy, I didn’t have to because I quite read the people easily .....

...when I experience some moment where I don’t belong anymore, I need to go back and look for some reference points, some firm points for me, like, when, at some point I go back to Italy. And that was maybe a way to reconnect and rebuild my confidence and my values with my origins, a place I was more familiar with but then I miss the rest so, when I was ready, then I started to miss the diversity and the challenge and I wanted to go abroad again.” (FC)

...and I find myself a stranger in my homeland...

“... now that I am back to my so-called home country, it’s cultural shock, is like the magnitude of the difference in the journey I have had versus most of the people journey that I meet every day... I do believe that, once you have done it,

it's difficult to stay in our own country if you have seen how different people may live in the world.” (PB)

### **5.3 Living through ongoing transitions; never quite being there in the moment of happening**

It was Thursday, shopping night in the West End and I ventured down the shops looking for some summer wear in anticipation of our holiday in Croatia. A couple of female Croatian friends were staying at our house in London that week and they were both on their shopping crusade that evening, too. We were all looking forward to a dinner together at my house, showing off our newly purchased items and catching up on all events since we saw each other last time. The mobile phone rang a few times whilst I was out and I could see that it was my London home number – I ignored those calls on the assumption that it was Jonathan who once again had forgotten that I would not be back home at the usual time. I enjoyed looking around, picking a few items.... I was walking down the street close to the London home, when the phone rang again. I finally got myself to answer the call. I hear Jonathan's voice: “Where are you? How far are you from the house?”; I paused to listen. “Well, it's your dad. He called. Things do not sound good. Your mum is in hospital. Come home and call him straight away.” How could I be so stupid? Why did I not answer straightaway? I felt weakness in my knees... What has happened? Is she alive? The stupid capitalist temptations of shopping... has this kept me away from having a chance to see her alive just one more time? I do not know how I made it home. I ran up the stairs towards the office where I knew I could make that phone call away from those sympathetic and worried eyes of my friends and my beloved husband. No words were exchanged between us, just the look that only people who know each other well can exchange and who do not need words. I dialled my parents' phone number and my dad answered. It only took for him to hear me say ‘Hello’ to tell me in his trembling voice “It is not good; Mum is in hospital. I do not know if she is going to make it through... another stroke... your brother and I had a bit of an argument as to whether we should tell you today or should we wait to see if she pulls through... I decided to tell you... “ It was all hardly making sense to me; I was spinning with dizziness and overwhelming emotions and fear that I would not be able to make it over to Croatia fast enough to see her alive...”.

I put the receiver down and started to feel an overwhelming anger. How many more times did I need to be reminded that I did not quite belong? How many more times would my family exclude me in the name of protection and the assumption that I was too far away to help or

make one of those family events in time? How many more children would be born, weddings held and deaths taken place that I would find out about just on the regular call on Saturday mornings so that my distant global life would not get interrupted? How many more times did I need to explain to my family and friends that I was only a couple of hours' flight away?

Saturday morning, my regular call with my parents – chit chat, the usual niceties and then finally Mum explains that my uncle, my dad's brother, has died. I loved that uncle, he was a simple but generous man and he loved me dearly. He was a farmer and a simple man but he was part of my growing up and we shared many moments when he showed his love and affection by giving me some special treats...! I will never forget when he gave me my first-ever horse as a gift. What a gift! He let me name all his horses and cows and I loved it all very much. And then I find in the flash of a moment on the phone that he died. They had kept it from me that he had cancer and that he was actually dying. To make matters worse, I then discovered that not only had he died but he had also been buried in between our last and current phone call. When questioned why they did not call me on the day it happened, as I would have liked to come to his funeral, I heard another protective explanation that they did not think it was necessary, it would be too expensive ... could not interrupt my work...

So how can I belong when I am not even part of some key events in the family where loss, life, death are shared and acknowledged. I have had no chance of closure, of saying my farewell to loved ones; I was just presented with the final fact. Life events in the community I once belonged to are simply passing me by... I am watching and participating in all of this from a distance, through a 'smoke screen', on my own, unable to share the joy or grief with those with whom I share memories of a previous life, of that life we had together. Is this a kindness, a desire to protect me from pain or is it some form of punishment for leaving and excluding them from my life?

The receiver goes down and I am left on my own to make sense of it all. I am left on my own to process and grieve for those lost people who meant so much to me. A globally mobile life is full of sadness and loneliness as FG says.

“.. you get disconnected from your friends and your family because you're never there. ...when people were getting married and I was living in Australia, I was not coming back for the weddings. When people die, you are not there. ... it's an extremely lonely life... there are times when you say, You know, I missed something big and that's sad, you know. So there is a lot of sadness and loss in

that. But it's what you have when you travel. There is always a sense of loss..."  
(FG)

And you are not able to connect with your loved ones when you need them or they need you. FC describes that longing for spontaneity and closeness with the important people in our lives who are frequently out of our reach, on a different continent or in different time-zones.

"It is not to have the people around me I want to have in the moment I want. So it's really to have the opportunity to choose and live the moment I feel I want that, I cannot because everybody is on the other side of the world so I can only call them and I don't have the physical presence when I want it." (FC)

I am getting grumpy at Christmas time. I am getting fed up following some other people's traditions and trying to fit in. I miss home.

"...there are moments of homesickness, when, for example, there's a big festive season where you would normally come together with the family or if something happens with a family member. Those are moments where you feel, I would like to be closer. ...in the moments when you get in touch with the old roots then you feel them stronger. And those are the moments where I think, maybe it might be a good idea to go back or be closer, at least. (MD)

And we know we are not here to stay. Others know. My daughter says they are not real friends – they come and go and they can so easily forget you. You spend so much time working out who is from where and how long will they be here. And when you say that you are leaving, no one is very sad, not like our friends in London; it happens all the time, it's so normal to be leaving....

"Yes, you are alone somewhere and,...if your wife is sick you are alone...If you stay in your home country you have a family around you. ... people know that you will leave at one point of time and therefore they build without building. You build a relationship without building something to last because they know ... and even, I remember .... this was actually painful to hear for me but even the kids at one point of time, they were saying to their friends that they were not leaving, to try to have the same kind of relationship as their other friends. Because, once

they know that you are leaving, then they don't stay a lot with you... you will leave therefore it's better to have a relationship with people who will stay.” (RA)

But this is not what we see or we talk about, of course. We see the glamour of paid-for flights, school fees, and exotic places. Who notices you when you sit on your own with that phone receiver down and an echo of the last words heard... so-and-so has died and I am not going to see them ever again and I am not going to be able to share my sadness and grief with anyone else who remembers those moments. There is no chance to once more recall those moments of joy, sadness and loving with those who were part of that experience and knew the characters involved. How can my newly formed ex-pat friend from another continent truly understand and celebrate those moments I shared with my uncle who was disabled and yet so loving and who would rather spend his farmer's small income on buying me that wonderful doll than replacing his old pair of worn out shoes?

## **5.4 Holding tensions between the pull to explore and the desire to belong**

I grew up with a story that my parents used to tell me when making sense of my unsettled spirit which sought to travel and explore new places. My mum used to tell me the story where I apparently fell out of a gipsy's carriage and they found me and adopted me but apparently my travelling spirit never left me.... I find some soul mates in my travels amongst other globally mobile professionals....

“I believe everything started when I decided to change less than one year after I started my professional career which I think is quite unusual. Also, not to step from one job to the other in the same place but to change my life, moving from Belgium to Italy, learning Italian...” (EO)

The pull and hunger to learn, to experience diversity and personal growth became so important that they led me, and others too, to step out of our familiar 'home' ground and set off into the 'wider world'. Somehow, change and movement rather than a stable life, provided the energy to keep going, fuelled by the fear of being the hostage of a predictable life that staying in the same place and culture might create.



“...All my friends are there but is it challenging enough? Is it something which really will build my future? And I really wanted after less than one year just to learn many things: new language, new company, new friends. Everything new. ...because more around new challenges, horizons which were more important than just belonging and having all my friends and had a quite good life there. (EO)

“...coming from, I would say, a situation where everything was sort of easy because I was very close to my parents and they were very protective and I had the willingness to prove to myself that I was standing on my own feet. And when I went abroad... that was my sort of excitement and I would say, golden moment because I felt independent and I felt I was taking a challenge and I was very energised and I was really excited... I was so hungry for learning and trying different things...” (FC)

“I decided that all the choices I’ve made, even when I decided to study [xxx], were actually choices made to give me the flexibility of, you know, having different jobs and work in different locations. So right from the early beginning, I really wanted to .... that possibly was what I always wanted to do, never to close any door. So when I started my first decision to move overseas, that was my first .... and I loved it. And therefore, I said, Why should I stop there?” (FG)

“... it’s not coincidence. It’s been a genuine interest in different cultures, geographies and languages from my childhood on. Maybe a little bit influenced by my mother’s background who’s been moving around with her family also... I always knew that I wanted to go somewhere else to explore. It was... an inner drive, an inner motivation.” (MD)

“Just an anecdote which is in fact a real reason. I’d been studying veterinary and the objective I had was to be a vet surgeon for horses.... Now, very quickly, I realised that I could not stand the belief to be in one place with, a clinic and knowing that this clinic may stay for 10, 40 years. I was very anxious to get stuck and not mobile, etc. So that pushed me back out of this way and then I explored different routes of having a more flexible life,..., opportunity for change... So the choice was to go with a multinational that would offer you a wide palette of

options..., so I need to have a job that is very rich in terms of, diversity but also life that is changing.” (PB)

And I discover that my fellow globally mobile professionals have had their own childhood stories that seemed to capture their imagination and influenced their choices to pursue globally mobile careers and lives.

“...I’ll give you a small example. It may be ridiculous but when I was a child I lived in a small town and there was the train station not too far. And so I really enjoyed my Dad taking me on an evening walk to the train station to watch the long-distance trains. You know, the night trains where they had the beds in there and I was imagining and asking my Dad where would people go and so .... it was sort of, I don’t know, like an inner world that takes you away!” (MD)

The sameness is draining me, the difference excites me..., I need movement in my life...I need to test myself in different contexts, embrace the unknown and see if I can do it.

“I have a strong sense of curiosity in diversity and I find the global mobile life a continuous change and I am a person who needs to have change. I cannot live in a routine environment. It will, you know, make me die. And when you are globally mobile, you change constantly, just for the sake of moving from one culture to the other. So absorbing new culture, new experience, and going through the change made me feel alive.”(FC)

“... while you have to prove yourself, so that was one, and the second is to say, You know, yes, I can do it.” (PB)

“I think there were two drivers. One was, of course, career, that I wanted to move on..... the worst thing to imagine was that I would stay the rest of my life in the same job in my country. I think, every now and then, having a change, for me, is something that is helping my motivation. Or actually, my motivator is to continue learning or to continue experiencing new things. And sometimes it’s almost like schizophrenic that, on the one hand there’s the driver, the inner voice tells me I want to move on, I want to do more things, I want to do more, I don’t want to get stuck here forever. At the same time then you have the voice saying, Ah, you’re

sort of missing so much family time. You're missing all the ... so it's always as if they are two MD speaking!

.... the same time you have almost like an anchor that pulls you back. And sort of tells you, Why do you do this? Why don't you just settle down and enjoy the time with your family and live at home and whatever? So, it's that anchor that pulls you back, that makes you sometimes question the decision - the push at the same time. The push to another place or the pull from another place is stronger." (MD)

## 5.5 Life crises awakening the need to belong

And where you stumble, that's your treasure, said my colleague. I stumbled and now I wonder where is the sense of security going to come from? Will I be rejected by the current environment? Will my employer cut the tie? Will my family and I float in the ether with no roots in the ground? Where is our space, where is our anchor? I am getting middle-aged, I am tired of the movement, I am starting to feel a need for some predictability. Suddenly routine life starts to appeal...

"It's only since 2010 that I was starting to look for a house and say, maybe I should look at when I will get older, at one time I will be 55, 60, I should plan ahead. ....maybe with kind of situation critical, that I developed this sense of belonging back to [name of a country]. .... I was not in a very good mood, and it had an impact on my health. ... in November 2010 it was the first negative, really negative event.... I said, Wow! I'm in [name of a country] now for Christmas. I think sooner or later, I don't know if I will be working for this organisation and I should probably take a little bit of care of myself and plan ahead what could be my life in ten or fifteen years ...this was the first time I was going back to [name of a country] for ten days and then I was looking already at buying something... Ah, I believe still it's my culture and after all this experience abroad and I have a much different understanding of culture in Africa and Asia, I still feel that it's my culture, I still have my friends from childhood.... And also my family.....,.... to really change my life because I know that I want to have a house in [name of a

country] and I want to have something there. Which I've never thought of it before, having this kind of crisis situation...." (EO)

"... fourth year, it was time we got back and we knew that. We knew it was important to get back because the kids, it's not their own country in terms of education, in terms of culture, etc. and when you go into that type of country, you feel that, at least in the work, you exhaust yourself. You give as much as you can. So you need to go back into, let's say, a more sophisticated country to resource yourself." (PB)

My daughter said that her home was in London, that was where she was born, and she wants to go back there. She feels Croatian too but her home is in London. She missed her room, her friends, her carpet, a place where she understands the language people speak on the streets.... Do I want my daughter to struggle with her own sense of belonging and to follow my path?

"... we found that from the family and from the logistics standpoint, [name of a country] is actually an easy place for us to repatriate ... we went through that process at the end of our time in Egypt and the time we were in Barcelona, we said, you know, we cannot keep on moving around our family without having a base somewhere. We need to create a sense for the kids of, This is where you belong because the issue is, with kids, as you know, my daughter was born in Egypt, she grew up in Spain and she arrived in Australia and, one day, when she was asked, What are you? and my daughter said, You know, I'm Egyptian. Because, for her, she was born in Egypt which was a logical answer. And she could not understand how on earth she could be [name of a country] ...why the passport was saying [name of a country] where, actually, she never lived there. So we wanted to make sure their identity was clear. And then they can make their choice... I have no doubt about my own identity. My wife hasn't got any doubts about hers so we wanted to make sure the kids were the same. It was more a process for the kids than for us..." (FD)

"I would say, perhaps this moment it is happening and I see it's related to the age of the kids, actually. When the kids are very young, I would say before 14; before ten it is very easy to go wherever you want. They are like luggage; they follow you so it's very easy. Between ten and 14 it might be challenging because they have

their friends and their social life starts to become important to them. And after 14 they start to ask questions and you start to ask questions about your future and they start to ask questions about, OK. Who are we? Because their friends ask them questions and they say, Yes. We had a great life. We lived here and here and here. Yes, but who are you? and then you feel it at the family level that somehow, even if that is not important to you, it might be good for the family to have a base. And base does not mean that you become also a hostage for the base but the base means that you can come back there and say, You know what? We can meet there and find each other there, and so on..." (RA)

"Well, in fact, we were aware of the risk of being without any roots and the reason why we bought a small, vacation house somewhere in [name of a country], and every time we had the opportunity to go back to the house was in fact our, root for the family and for the kids. So we did that in order to ensure that we were keeping a foot in our country, that the kids would be able to know that there is a house and that's the family house. It's not just moving from A to B and C. There is a family house." (PB)

"You need that type of anchor. I mean, obviously, it's not the same anchor that, for other people that don't have that type of moves, etc, but I think we have been moving in our lives something like 19 times and obviously it's important that you keep something somewhere. ....when you come back it's also a question that you are stable, friends, family can come to you and visit you." (PB)

## **5.6 Locating a sense of belonging in the space 'in-between'**

I feel at home in that very space between the two islands joined up by the bridge. That very space where two islands meet, the highest point of the bridge, the highest point of the tension and connection. That is the space I would call my home. The space where two worlds meet, different cultures interact; no-man's land, reserved for those trespassing boundaries and moving between cultures, geographies, languages, traditions... Just like the plant I discovered in my garden – thriving in the crack between the two rocks, attached sufficiently through shallow roots, ready to move when conditions change. Just like a weed, using space that no one wants, frequently abandoned and only noticed when the boundaries are crossed and

the weed stands out, unwanted. In my practice, as an OD practitioner, I find my home in the space between different organisational boundaries – that elusive, vaguely defined space of connection and frequent tension. I find myself connecting those disjointed spaces, providing perspective unaffected by the boundaries. The space that some of my colleagues call 'shades of grey'.

“I would say my vision of the world ... it's me probably going around the world. It's the way you see the world.... your value system becomes more flexible in a sense. ....after having lived abroad in so many different countries and so far away from home, and you know that actually different systems apply in different places. And therefore, my vision of the world is not black and white, at all, for me - It's operating in grey. I am still surprised now by how some people still have such a black and white vision of the world. ....for me, it's always in the middle ... it's not in the middle but it's somewhere in between. So I think it gives you that ability to probably flex a bit your style and flex a bit your imagination on what is possible and what is not.” (FG)

“It's, an observational skill ...an ability to look from the balcony of what's going on. It helps you to get some self-confidence, over time you realise you can realise things that you didn't think it would be possible to achieve. (PB)

“I have a strong belief that we don't have one truth, like, you have many truths and it depends on the context and the history and so on. So, I tend not to judge. First, I don't judge people or I don't judge cultures. I don't have any bad or good, I just try to understand the context and the why and then I respect. Because many times when you discover new cultures, new societies and if you understand really the context and the background and the history, you can pretty (much) understand almost everything you discover in the culture because there are reasons (behind?). I have perhaps enough flexibility in me to accept it and not to challenge or to judge.” (RA)

“... you become a hybrid human form because when you have our life, you have the luxury to pick and choose what you want to be. So, for instance, cooking and drinking, I go French...That's my choice. ....the way of running a business, I would not run it in the kind of French traditional way. I would run it in a more fact-based and less political manner. This is why I like British culture.... the

simplicity of the life of Australians, for instance. I really try to adopt it....So I think you have this ability to choose.

... you're a hybrid of many different cultures. And the learning you have, ..... how can a French who lived their whole life in France have the experience of us living in Egypt just before the revolution? ....And I think that this incredible wealth of experience - it changes you.” (FG)

## 5.7 Developing a sense of shallow-rooted belonging

When I was little I dreamt of travelling to exotic places; it has been my destiny to keep moving, exploring and discovering new places, cultures and people. The difference attracted me. MD, a leader I recently spoke to as part of my inquiry said that when she was a little girl she was frequently taken to the train station by her dad to watch the trains pass by on their way to some international destinations. She thinks that this got imprinted in her mind and she developed an appetite for exotic travel. She feels that living a globally mobile life is about getting on that train and discovering places rather than standing at the station and watching trains pass by, imagining what this life could be. I am reflecting on this as I am sitting on the tram and going through the city I barely know even though I have been living here for nearly two years. Is this really about living life or is this all about watching life pass me by, happening out there whilst I am sitting in the comfort of the tram and watching the familiar/unfamiliar scenes of daily life unfolding out there? I am not a part of that fabric, I have no words to connect with the actors in those scenes: I smile politely but cannot engage, they speak a language I do not understand. It is all so familiar and yet so foreign at the same time. I am a lonely shadow on the tram that the actors of the life out there may just catch sight of out of the corner of their eye. An insignificant foreigner trespassing on their land, who leaves no trace and disappears with the wind. Who will miss me when I am gone from this land and this city? I guess, no-one .... I am an anonymous shadow in the land of colourful actors...but I am free to fly with the next wind that may come... I have no roots that tie...

“I mean, the roots are mostly in the international community because that’s where we live and where a lot of international people are. And those are shallow roots for two reasons. One is, they’re not really roots into the country because it’s less with locals than with international people. And they move in and out. So, whilst you have a very good relationship it’s not really deep root.... I think that

the sense of belonging comes from relationship rather than a place ..... it is the relationship with your immediate family, of course, and it is the relationship with the people that you meet and that you bond with.” (MD)

“For me shallow rooted belonging is enough....., but perhaps for me the fact that I belong too much to something almost will make me feel that I am (a) hostage of the given culture, of the country or whatever. Therefore, somehow, yes, perhaps on purpose I try to keep it very flexible and moving.” (RA)

“So there is no sense of belonging basically except my work and my family. Because you discover after your sixth country that making friends is a long process ... if, actually, you make friends, you have to let them go. So we have neighbours and of course we know people around but my friends are my university friends or my childhood friends; ... we moved too often...” (FG)

“Once you’re moving away from home, it’s not home anymore. You’re sort of somewhere in the world but it’s not home anymore even if you come back. I think this is what many people experience. And in a more extreme way, in the end you’re not at home anywhere anymore. What I mean here is what you call the shallow root. You don’t have the deep rooting anymore once you cut the root, basically. Even if you go back.” (MD)

“You know, it’s definitely not a physical place, For me, home is a feeling more than a physical place. ...it’s really more attached to the feeling I have when I am in a particular place. So, that’s home for me. It’s more a feeling than a physical place.” (FC)

“What a big question! It is a big question. I mean, my home today is really in the country where I live. I would not say a home today is in Algeria for many reasons... So my home is really where I feel at home and this is perhaps why I like global mobility. Perhaps home is where I live and work. But I don’t have this strong sense of belonging about, like, home, where I was born.” (RA)

“So, home is in [name of a country] and that is something ... I’m glad you asked this question now because, four years ago, we didn’t know actually, with my wife.



And so we went through that whole process of trying to find out where it was. You know we have five kids, they are born in four different countries, my wife is not [nationality], so we are all from all over the place. We went through this long process of trying to find out where do we feel the most comfortable for holidays. That was the thing. And we said, we ended up finding that actually [name of a country] was the place where we felt it was the easiest for us to operate. So we decided that, OK, because that's the easiest place we're just calling that home. But that was a long process to get there, I can tell you." (FG)

I am free to fly and I need some anchor to nurture my soul, in this very moment of existence. I am free to choose the life I want to lead, who I want to be and who I interact with. I have a freedom to transform with changing conditions and I thrive in this mobile world. But I also need some human connection to my immediate environment, which tends to mean my closest family, a few long standing friends and some newly acquainted friends – fellow travellers. Those relationships seem to nurture my soul sufficiently to allow me to function, get on with my life and even flourish. I carry with me some possessions to remind me of the journey I have travelled so far; photos of the places I have been to or in which I was raised; family moments captured on film to remind us of our journey; art, craft or treasured objects that taught me something about my own culture, the culture of others and this beautiful world. I struggle to see the world in black and white, I thrive in the land of grey; navigating in the space 'in-between' seems to be the space where I belong. My old countrymen do not seem to understand my world fully, my new hosts see me as a 'different species', perhaps even as a weed, and only the occasional traveller who trespasses on the same 'no-man's land' embraces me as one of their own. And we soon part and continue to move in the land no-one fights for. I am growing old and finding a new peace – in the knowledge that I belong to those spaces 'in-between' and have some anchors around the world, my special places where, when I return, I know I belong to the fabric of the wider world. I am growing old and finding a new peace – reconciling the pull towards the discovery resulting in displacement and the desire to anchor myself in some quiet bay. Life is not 'black and white', life is 'shades of grey'.... enjoying displacement whilst knowing that I will return to the quiet bay, helps me feel anchored and attached to the current locality, sufficiently nurtured to flourish.

## 5.8 Reflections

It seems that the dream to pursue a globally mobile life was formed for me and for the leaders I spoke to early on in our lives. For most of us the initial choice to pursue a globally mobile life and career was not a fully conscious choice; only when we all reflected on the patterns in our lives and the shared stories of our childhood dreams, did we all recognise this pattern and the desire to travel which formed early on in our lives. It is interesting to note that in my conversations with those leaders, I never proactively asked about their childhoods, and yet all of them without exception went back to those early days. The desire to learn, test self in the unknown, seek diversity and change seem to be a powerful inner force that have led us all to choose the path of mobility. An avoidance of a stable life and a real fear of being the hostage of a predictable life, associated with staying in the culture of origin, has governed our choices to move and explore the wider world. And yet the tension between the desire to learn/grow/change resulting in choiceful displacement and the ever-growing need to settle and belong seems to be an underlying current that appears to be continually present in the lives of those who choose a globally mobile life.

Interestingly, leaders did not speak about their careers as being the main reason why they left their native home. Stories about the lifestyle they desired and a personal need to learn, discover and test self in the unknown dominated their narrative. It seems as if the career opportunities enabled those individuals to fulfil their personal dreams and the purpose of their lives, but career progression alone was not the main inner force.

According to the narratives I heard and my personal experiences, the pursuit of a globally mobile life shapes the view of the world that globally mobile professionals uphold, seeing the world more through the spectrum of grey – in between black and white – and that ‘in – between space’ seems to be the space where leaders, who have been exposed to different cultures and traditions, see themselves occupying. The ‘in-between space’ provides nurturing and grounding that shapes their world view and this is seen as a major ‘gift’ that came about as the by-product of the lifestyle they pursued. And this worldview of ‘in-betweenness’ enables them to lead others and connect them with new possibilities that the adopted

worldview empowers them to foresee. And that same world is a space that they find themselves in on an ongoing basis, a space where they experience ongoing connections with the past, the present and the future.

Another commonly shared theme seems to be that of describing self as a 'hybrid human form' shaped by all those intense life experiences that a globally mobile life offers and by the choice of identity one desires to adopt, free from the predetermined norms. Despite all the excitement, learning and discovery, every leader noted a need to reconnect with their base, their anchor, at some point in their lives or at points when the tiredness of being a foreigner and a traveller took its toll. Those anchors were placed not always in the place or country where they were born but in spaces where they felt at home and enjoyed the familiarity and ease of living. The strong need to create a sense of belonging for their own children led many to create a home, a solid anchorage point, somewhere in the world.

A sense of belonging seems to derive from the 'in-between' space of current locality and some permanent anchors that provide consistency. Leaders said that 'Where is home?' is a complex and difficult question to answer. The sense of home, the same as belonging, derives from relationships and spaces where people feel fulfilled and experience an ease of living, not necessarily specific physical places. Work and the immediate family seem to provide the source of belonging whilst pursuing a globally mobile life as those two seem to be the only constant in those professionals' lives. Whilst some feel that they do not have deep roots anywhere, the sense of sufficient belonging, or shallow-rooted belonging, seems to come from the immediate relational environment. And some leaders feel liberated by the opportunity to choose where they want to belong or who they want to be as they do not have ties that bind them to any specific location, community or place.

By pursuing a globally mobile life, mobile professionals eventually learn to live with the dark side of this choice. They learn to live without direct contact with their friends and loved ones and with missing important life events and being outsiders. This hurts and it is tiring, filling the lives of those people with sadness, loss and loneliness. Not being understood by others who used to be close friends and family and being placed on the edge is something globally

mobile professionals learn to live with too. They feel truly understood only by others with similar life experiences

I now turn my attention towards my second person inquiry conducted with the group of OD practitioners.

## CHAPTER 6

### Co-inquiry:

Developing a sense of 'professional home'



*“How and why and where we classify plants as undesirable is part of the story of our ceaseless attempts to draw boundaries between nature and culture, wildness and domestication.”*

Mabey (2012, p. 5)

Figure 21: Weeds growing in-between rocks,  
photo taken by myself, Croatia, August 2014

## 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe how my inquiry progressed from a first person inquiry to a temporary co-inquiry with a group of global OD professionals. After the initial contracting and one-to-one conversations, the group met formally six times over a period of eight months. After the formal part, the group continued to meet on an informal basis to maintain the sense of 'professional home' that the group had created for itself. The group was convened to co-inquire into the tension between attachment/detachment and belonging/not belonging in their practice as global OD practitioners. As the inquiry evolved and the group took a greater ownership of the co-inquiry process, the inquiry moved into exploring the sense of belonging to a professional community and eventually taking an action to create a 'professional' home for themselves. The co-inquiry then progressed into exploring how we, as global OD practitioners, might enhance our own practice and make a positive contribution to global businesses through a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging.

I describe here the three inquiry cycles that the group went through and emphasise the key learning not only around the topic area but also about the process of conducting the co-inquiry. Earlier I have deliberately described this process as a loosely held co-inquiry as the cycles of inquiry appeared not quite in a linear or immediately obvious way; they became much clearer after the reflection on the overall process that took place.

## 6.2 The context to the co-inquiry

Having engaged in conversations with globally mobile leaders, I was relieved that in this experience of struggle with the tension between displacement and belonging I was not alone. At the same time, my conversations about my inquiry spilled over into other areas and I started to talk to my peers, other global OD practitioners in the organisation I work for. This generated curiosity and conversations started to move towards how this tension might be playing out in our work as global OD practitioners as well as in the life of leaders and the organisation we work for. Encouraged by those conversations, I decided to commence a semi-

formal co-inquiry group to inquire into the tension between displacement and belonging as experienced in our OD practice as well as in our own lives as globally mobile professionals. From the outset, I made a choice to hold the process lightly to ensure my peers were given space to co-own the inquiry.

In Chapter 2, I described the methodology and methods applied in this part of the inquiry and I introduced the participants, Global OD practitioners, who participated in the co-inquiry with me. It is worth noting that all of my Global OD colleagues, like me, have relocated at least once in their career and were residing in a country other than their country of origin at the time of the inquiry. The inquiry question I had been grappling with proved to be interesting to my peers not only from the professional perspective but also from the personal perspective.

### **6.3 Cycle 1 - An inquiry into the tension between attachment/detachment and belonging/not belonging**

The first cycle of inquiry mainly focused on exploring our own experiences of the tension around attachment/detachment and belonging/not belonging in our practice as OD practitioners and we explored those moments when sufficient attachment and belonging were present in our practice. In this cycle of inquiry we started to experiment with the extended epistemology, resulting in more trusting relationships amongst ourselves.

#### **6.3.1 Individual conversations**

Initially, I conducted one-to-one conversations with each OD practitioner, using the lifeline as a backdrop to our conversation. During those conversations we explored their past work-related experiences when they experienced and held tensions such as attachment/detachment; belonging/not belonging and when they experienced the golden middle when both, attachment and detachment, were sufficiently present. I shared my past

experiences and those initial conversations were very much in the service of building relationships and trust amongst us.

I noticed that the initial one-to-one conversations triggered a process of reflection and interest in examining our own OD practice. The group started to share references and began to invite each other, on an informal basis, to comment and add ideas to work related projects; something that had not been happening before. This all aided the process of developing trust amongst ourselves before we even started the co-inquiry process.

### **6.3.2 Group contracting session**

In our first meeting (18<sup>th</sup> September 2013), my colleagues said that the reason why they were keen to participate in the co-inquiry was because it was an opportunity for them to learn and grow. They also felt connected to me and wanted to support me on my doctoral journey.

“You know, at the end of the day, it’s you who gets your doctorate. I think, I hope, that everybody has the same motive and that, in volunteering to be a part of the group, it is not necessarily that, you know, you were getting all the benefit and we, none. That we were doing you a favour, in a sense. I would hope that everybody is coming to the table in a curious capacity and will in some way, shape or form get a good benefit and outcome for themselves in terms of their personal practice.” (SM)

“... it’s really finding a non-political platform where we can exchange and learn together, explore the topic which is very rare.”(BC)

“...an initial motivation being the willingness to participate because of the connectivity that I experienced with you.” (ST)

In the initial meeting, we as a group discussed the possibility of inquiring into our OD practice and exploring how the tension between detachment and belonging shows up in relationships with others. We agreed we would experiment with creative methods – using video, photography, drawings, etc, – to capture those moments of connectivity or dis-connectivity



with self and others in our daily practice as OD practitioners. We agreed that we would bring into our subsequent meetings the work we produced and use it as a stimulus to tell each other a story about the experience. This was the time when, in my personal inquiry, I was still convincing myself that I was inquiring into the phenomenon of human connectivity rather than belonging; therefore, inquiring into the connectivity in my practice made absolute sense.

After the meeting, I wrote in the Reflections paper (20<sup>th</sup> September 2013) about my experience of having to conduct this meeting:

"It has been a somewhat strange experience. I was trying to convene a group of people to kick start a temporary action inquiry with them and was trying to stick with some core principles – democratic process, co-creation, co-researchers, co-participants, etc. At the same time, I was explaining the action inquiry approach, how it works through cycles, etc, and, as none of them had previous experience of participating in an action inquiry, this put me into a position of 'power' in the group; which I noted with the group and also tried to explain that this was the first time that I had been convening a group in this way.

I felt a sense of responsibility for the process in the group and needed to show some leadership and at the same time wanted us to work as a group of equal co-researchers/co-participants. ....

I was anxious about the response of the participants to my proposed topics for the inquiry, the inquiry questions and the methods suggested. They would be exploring those topics and I had to hold the tension in myself from trying to influence them to go with what I wanted to inquire into (since this was for my doctorate!). At the same time I wanted them to co-own the inquiry process.." (p. 19)

### **6.3.3 Group inquiry into the lived experiences of the tension and experimentation with extended epistemology**

It emerged that we all described those golden moments when we experienced sufficient amounts of attachment and sufficient amounts of detachment, as moments of personal and interpersonal connectivity. In those moments we found ourselves becoming sufficiently

attached to our clients, striving for a positive outcome and at the same time not crossing the line where our involvement could cloud our judgement. Illustrative examples:

“Golden point – there is a degree of objectivity that’s able to be maintained. You can feel connected to something and you can intend for a certain outcome but not over a certain point that it compromises your judgement, your ability to perform... Golden point for me is having enough connections so that you can empathise, to factor in how you make decisions, how you are going to be helpful but, at the same time, being detached enough so that you do not take on for your client as your own. (SM)

“... it is about having trust of the client and connection with the client and enough intimacy to be allowed to ask the thorny and difficult questions but, at the same time, describing it as floating above it all to see the bigger picture and ....having both trust and intimacy to ask those difficult questions without getting a defensive reaction from the client” (ST)

Hearing about moments when some of my colleagues felt too attached to their work and about the negative impact this had had on their personal and professional life reminded me of some of my own previous experiences.

“I was very attached to the outcome in terms of work I was doing for that group and very attached to trying to be helpful and totally overly engaged. I didn’t reserve enough detachment soon enough to be as effective as I could have been.” (EP)

“I became overly attached to the outcome because, at a point, I got so blinded... I started to compromise my own boundaries and my own standards and it just became a hugely toxic period ... I was totally alienated and isolated and I did not belong anywhere” (SM)

I felt very vulnerable at this stage of my inquiry as I was working with my peers, who were intrigued by my doctorate, and I did not feel fully settled with my inquiry question. I noticed that I was a lot more energised to talk about the tension between displacement and belonging

with the business leaders than I was to continue working with this theme of detachment/attachment in our OD practice.

I felt rather shaky about my inquiry and started to have conversations with my supervisor about giving up my doctoral thesis. Concurrently, an immense support was coming from my peers in some gentle, invisible and untouchable forms, to keep moving with the inquiry. Whilst at this stage of my co-inquiry, insights tended to confirm what we already knew; I started to develop a greater sense of connection with my co-inquiry group.

#### **6.3.4 Cycle 1 – insights and impact**

We came to the realisation that holding those tensions of involvement, detachment and belonging in balance and at the degree of sufficiency, but not crossing the line, is a delicate act of connecting with self and others in our practice as OD practitioners. When we were able to hold those tensions at that very intense moment of sufficiency in connection, we felt that we provided added value to our clients and that our performance was at its best. We explored those moments when we had felt a sufficient sense of belonging to a group at work that enabled us to feel nurtured, inspired, rejuvenated and free to float between the boundaries of the inner and outer circles of the group we were working with.

Our inquiry provided us with a confirmation of what we already knew and our ‘learning juices’ started to dry up. I was somewhat stuck as to where to go from here, until I noticed the energy of the group to keep learning, exploring the practice and experimenting with creative methods in their practice.

One theme we noticed at that time was that we all felt professionally isolated and lonely, unable to share our experiences with anyone around us. The inquiry group noticed that to work effectively with our clients, we needed to have certain conditions in place for ourselves to feel sufficiently nurtured and ready to ‘give’ to others. We noted that in order to be effective OD practitioners and able to develop sufficient connectivity with others, we needed to hold in balance the boundaries of attachment, detachment and belonging with our clients

and hold ourselves firmly grounded in our own sense of being and belonging. When this was missing, or something was imbalanced, our work didn't provide us with a sense of achievement. We noticed the lack of belonging to a professional community, either at work or outside of work. We had all relocated from places and environments where we had had strong professional networks which we belonged to and we now found ourselves in a displaced position.

## **6.4 Cycle 2 - Noticing the absence of belonging and creating 'professional home'**

### **6.4.1 Noticing the absence of belonging**

Having revisited all the transcripts from our one-to-one conversations and group discussions, it was noticeable how little we actually talked about a sense of belonging in our practice and in life in general. Our attention as OD practitioners was directed towards the attachment and detachment dimension. As our relationships developed and trust deepened, we started to open up the dialogue around the sense of belonging and professional loneliness. We noticed that in addition to the professional aspects, we also grappled with a sense of not belonging and possibly loneliness in our private lives, too.

### **6.4.2 Resetting the purpose for the co-inquiry**

In our subsequent couple of meetings, we spent time re-contracting and revisiting what we were doing and why; we discussed whether our work was purely in the service of the research or whether it could be about learning together and enhancing our practice. We unilaterally agreed that we would like to orientate our group work around learning, developing our practice and broadening our understanding of the phenomenological aspect of the connectivity by taking a deep dive into our own experiences. In one of the meetings, I proposed that we should regard our work together as being in the service of our professional development rather than purely as in the service of my research. This suggestion was

enthusiastically received and the group then formulated a plan for longer sessions every six weeks in order to give this work the time it deserved.

I sensed that after the initial cycle of inquiry my peers started to engage more deeply and to take an active role in shaping what work we should do together and how we would do it; whilst still agreeing to focus on human connectivity and a sense of belonging as the core themes. I felt we started to move into participative work and a shared responsibility for what we would do together. This felt a lot more congruent with my evolving sense of belonging with the group. I also noted that this could be one of the first poignant moments on the group development journey where the group started to claim ownership of the journey, rather than just be 'responsive' participants. I had been mindful of the possible power differential and worked hard on reducing any power gaps. Provided below is some feedback from participants:

“What you did that was helpful: encouraged others to speak up / share / take sense of ownership in the group; What you did not do: dominate and control dynamics of the group to stay under the umbrella of “Pavica’s school project” (SM)

“Very rich and enjoyable conversations this morning. I am certainly developing a sense of professional ‘home’ 😊” (ST)

“Making space for us to create it together; providing reading which provoked thoughts; encouraging us to experiment and role-modelling by un-self-consciously sharing your experimentation. Asking probing and helpful questions. Finally, encouragement! I have felt hugely encouraged to experiment and share further and that what we share is valid and useful and 'good enough'” (SE)

“Gave us ownership to shape the forum, relax, and experiment.” (EP)

We set out to explore the following overarching question: What do I need to do to attend to myself so that I feel sufficiently connected with self and others in order to make a difference and a positive contribution at work?

This question represented our intent in our inquiry but what proved to be very interesting in terms of my inquiry is actually the purpose this inquiry group served for each of us. Whilst we had a 'task' and focus for our inquiry, the underlying processes were fascinating and even more relevant for my inquiry. Over time, the group started to provide a safe place for the exploration of our practice, deep personal connections and indeed a sense of home, a 'professional home'.

### **6.4.3 Establishing a sense of a 'professional home'**

We started to discuss our need for a 'professional home' and we identified the opportunity for this group to offer that 'professional home' that we all seek. The need for home seemed to emerge from our sense of loneliness as professionals – we had reached a certain level of seniority in the organisation, we were responsible for teams and the work in specific business units or divisions, our roles were stand-alone within a complex matrix business and we had little opportunity to discuss our work with anyone else. And we all happened to find ourselves in a foreign country. When asked about what having a 'professional home' meant to the participants, some of their responses were:

“A community of colleagues which is both familiar and welcoming – and which is 'intact' and not fragmented and to which I 'belong'.” (SM)

“A circle of professionals whose work is akin to mine; we understand, embrace and accept one another's styles, approaches and experiences.” (EP)

“It means a locus where I am valued and understood professionally. It means a lot to me personally, particularly as I am currently in an organisation which is going through a lot of change, traditionally very operational and rather men-dominated. Sometimes, it can be a little difficult to get my voice heard and I also feel 'different' - the Nemo fish. I like to jump out of my BUSINESS UNIT

'fish bowl' and swim in the larger sea with my OD colleagues. The 'professional home' manifestation for me is a base where I can return and recharge, reflect, share and grow." (ST)

"A professional home is a place where I feel among colleagues – mutual respect, shared understanding and sense of mission around the work and roles we play, a place where I can be myself and appreciate the character of others being themselves." (BC)

When asked "What do you think the aspiration for the 'professional home' is in response to?", some of the responses were:

"The sense that professionals doing this work are not well connected or if so, the connections are institutionalized to the extent they cannot truly be open and accepted; deep trust cannot be built and therefore expression of self is stunted (thus eroding the feeling of home, community and sense of belonging)" (SMM)

"The aspiration for this 'professional home' I think is in response to being an under-developed function in [Note: name of an organisation] and so sometimes, we need support from our peers on how to work with the business and show them the value we bring...." (ST)

Finally, I wondered if our sense of loneliness might have been impacted by the fact that we had all relocated, had left behind the professional networks we had established over time in the countries we came from and we had found ourselves in a country and a city where there was no tradition of social networking or professional exchange across companies.

"Another theme that may well play in is that we are nearly all 'away from home' and from our established networks, whether family, long-term friends or OD circle. We are adapting our environment to our needs and creating a new home and circle" (ST)

#### 6.4.4 Experimentation with extended epistemology, strengthening of a 'professional home'

As a group we decided to experiment with 'extended epistemology' and play with creative methods, such as video production and photography, in order to capture those moments in our practice when we felt we belonged/did not belong, connected or disconnected with self and/or others. Our intent was to capture our own experiences and share stories during our group meetings. We captured those moments in our daily work and brought some material into our meetings to inquire into it jointly.

I present here some examples of our work together. One of the participants created a video using a voiceover to tell the story and to enact the situation and experience of connection and disconnection through the characters in her story. She was a 'Nemo fish' amongst the ducks.

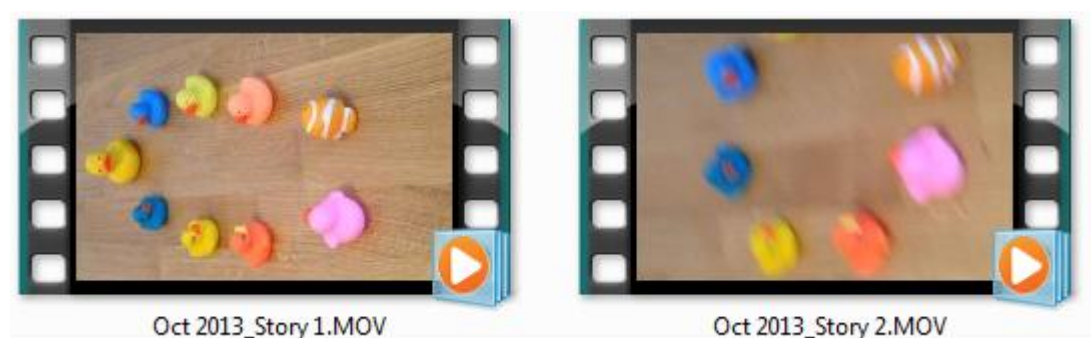


Figure 22: Screen-shots of video clips produced by co-inquirers

Having watched the videos and explored them in detail, the group reported a high level of resonance with their colleague's experience. The willingness to share their own work increased as a result.

Examples of other participants' work:



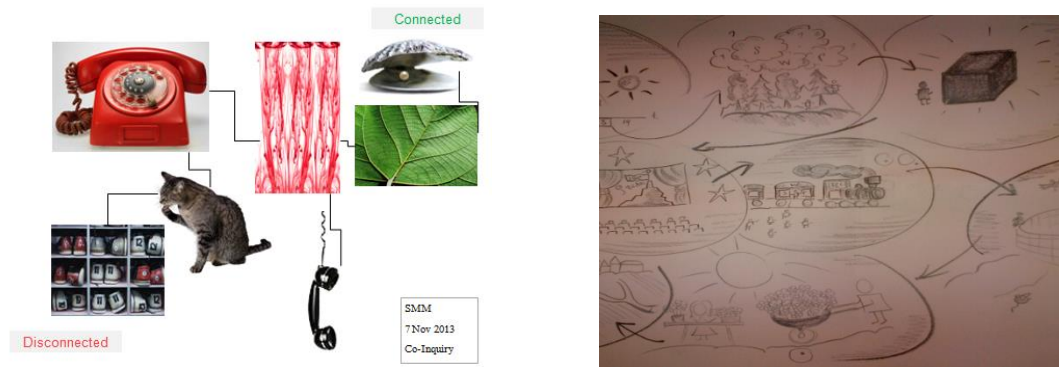


Figure 23: Collage and drawing produced by co-inquirers

This session proved to be a significant moment for our journey as a group with the shared experience, openness and trust deepening the level of our connection and our sense of a ‘professional home’.

After the session, participants wrote spontaneously to each other via e-mails:

“The opportunity to explore and reflect openly with OD colleagues, to receive their coaching and to have a place to be rather more experimental. I have really enjoyed rediscovering an old passion in a different format and using it as a creative means to explore my OD experiences and achieve growth” (ST)

“.....also learn from her own feelings and decisions re: how she chose to process and react to the dynamics in the moment. It was a sign of trust to share this with the group, which brought the group to the next level of discussion, openness and exchange of debate.” (EP)

### **6.4.5 Cycle 2 – insights and impact**

A sense of belonging started to strengthen the creation of the ‘professional home’ with people I could trust within the context of a highly mistrustful organisational culture. I was not alone; I was not a lonely OD professional any more. And I felt that we, as a group of OD practitioners in positions of influence in the organisation, could increase our influence levels, by introducing different perspectives and ways of thinking through an increased sense of professional connectivity and belonging.

Experimentation with creative methods and engagement with the extended epistemology enabled us as a group not only to explore and gain a deeper understanding of our experiences of connectivity, belonging and attachment/detachment, but also helped us create conditions that enabled more trusting relationships to emerge amongst the group members. Our attention started to move more towards our own sense of belonging as individuals and professionals and towards what conditions we needed in order to perform well in our roles. We recognised the risk that work could become the main source of belonging whilst pursuing a globally mobile life and that this would impact on the role we, as OD practitioners, wanted to play in the organisation.

### **6.5 Cycle 3 - Enhancing our practice of belonging**

In the final cycle of this temporary co-inquiry, we focused on our personal experiences that resonated with the concept of shallow-rooted belonging and on our initial thoughts on the possibilities for the applicability of the concept and the associated work for our OD practice. Conversations deepened further around the tension we experienced between deliberate displacement and belonging whilst choosing to pursue our globally mobile careers. Our conversations became more personal than ever before and our relationships reached another level of depth, giving participants the sense of being fully understood in this globally mobile, temporary world that we had all been grappling with.

### 6.5.1 Responses to my paper

I shared my doctoral progress paper, submitted in December 2013, with my co-inquiry colleagues and invited them to give me feedback on what resonated for them in the paper, if anything, and whether I had represented our work appropriately. To my surprise, I received individual requests for one-to-one meetings from all of them to share their responses to my paper. I was not prepared for the emotional responses that the paper triggered in my colleagues and for such deep engagement with the content. Following those individual conversations, the group wanted to talk about their responses to the paper in the group setting. I bring some of their voices below to illustrate their reactions whilst being mindful that extracts from our conversations will never fully represent the emotionally charged nature of our dialogue.

“I feel like you carved out this concept that left me, page after page, I found myself asking questions and identifying with things. So ... this idea of shallow rooted belonging is what that is, it carves out this experience. This experience that was relevant to me personally but then also intellectually. I see it as an ex-pat’s experience.

So these experiences you talked about resonated with me certainly and made me feel like, ..., with the last year, some of the things I’ve experienced, ..., an ex-pat, a new country, a new industry, and the family pressures and things that that creates, I just felt very like, Oh, ..., I’m not alone in that. You’ve opened up this area that I think will touch people, they’ll get it, they’ll understand it and they’ll start asking their own questions and want to take it in a new direction and apply it in a variety of places..... ” (EP)

“....the thing that resonated with me the most was the need for the belonging and the virtues of shallow rooted belonging and I saw it as liberating ... because it’s in the moment. So you’re paying a really high-level of attention to others and you’re being in the moment, you’re not planning a future with them so you leave yourself and them free of any obligation.” (ST)

“...it was work that really resonated with me personally..... obviously you and I come from two very different parts of the world and we have different backgrounds and experiences but there were a lot of parallels in your kind of major milestones in your life.... So, for me, ..., at a very personal relationship level, one of the first things that occurred to me is, Ah! So that’s why I connect so well with Pavica! I just felt like there was a lot of kindred spirit there... In terms of its applicability to the field, to both personal and professional practice, I felt there were a lot of things that were coming through in the paper that had a lot of linkages to spiritual practice, actually... So, you know, really, everything resonated with me...” (SM)

“...it was a very powerful experience reading your work. And thank you for doing it. [EP becomes emotional]...” (EP)

The responses of my colleagues gave me the confidence that my inquiry was tapping into something deeply meaningful to my colleagues, globally mobile professionals.

### **6.5.2 Exploring the meaning of shallow-rooted belonging**

The metaphor of a shallow rooted plant or tree made a lot of sense to my colleagues and summed up the meaning of the experience and the phenomenon.

“But that’s where the metaphor makes sense. And what’s great is you found a natural metaphor for it which, ..., I also saw in here in the description. Because it then does tie up to some fundamental principles. And you understand it is a natural way of being that is, ..., it’s a life, a way of surviving... the thing is you probably will have people who will have that as 20 years of their life and then another mode of their life will be different...” (EP)

“I thought this tree analogy on the sidewalk was very interesting because that’s what ..., for the rest of the paper that’s just what kept on popping into my mind whenever I thought of the concept. I think, ..., it’s well described that ... you’re saying that this is almost necessary in a postmodern world and it’s, ..., perhaps something that is an in-between, a kind of continuum where there’s deeper belonging and then just no belonging at all! And so it seemed like a really healthy

antidote to not belonging at all, particularly for many, increasingly so, many global nomads. So that's why I think the work has a lot of implications because there is an increasing need for a growing, demographic, where this work is directly applicable in terms of their lifestyle. So it resonated." (SM)

The metaphor resonated with my colleagues and they also noted that the choice to pursue a globally mobile career results in an ongoing tension between the desire to learn and test self through deliberate displacement and the yearning to belong to a community and a place. In our meeting (February 2014) we discussed this further:

“EP: I know I had to go to do enough different arenas, enough different companies, different places to stir up enough so that I could see what would settle. I had to shake the little snow globe so hard for myself that, some of the sediments would fall out and the ones that stayed would tell me more about who I was. I had to do that. And you have to kind of question, Did they [NB: individuals with deeply rooted belonging] know themselves very well? Or, did they just decide to explore only so far?”

ST: It could actually be linked to learning, what you've just said, because my very first experience of living abroad was when I was a student so I was like 20 and I had to go and do my year in France and I was absolutely terrified. The learning and the evolution for me personally was unbelievable and then I got a bit hooked on it. I can't do without this learning. I want to shake things up a bit. So there's something about learning. Self-discovery learning that's come to me from what you've just said.

EP: I think we step into these new situations to resolve something about ourselves. You know, they become an arena to learn and stretch ourselves. ... when you go and push yourself to these new experiences and use them as an arena to resolve something .... because, as we were talking about shallow rooted belonging to me,..... it's a state, whether I like it or not, it is the state I'm in and so,.... , how do I make it an effective state for me because it is my state. So, regardless of how I got here, let's just talk about how do we make this work? It works when it becomes something that you grow from and learn from and that means getting to closure and feeling good about things.... So there's also this

thing round the shallow rooted belonging around, It is. It is what it is. It's our lives.

ST: There's also an opportunity from the learning and growth perspective, almost ... not so much reinvention but dialling up and dialling down facets of you in new situations. I quite like that. I quite like, ..., how I'm different here compared to if I were back at home in xxx compared to ..... I like that.

EP: ... you put yourself in these different situations but you're able to still find what's authentic and purposeful about yourself. And that's what I mean about the sediment from the globe. You shake yourself up. You put your purpose in different situations and it shakes it up a bit..."

Accepting that once one has chosen to pursue a globally mobile career one is never going to have a deep rooted sense of belonging seems to be a powerful moment in one's personal development. There was a sense of relief expressed by co-inquirers in relation to the introduction of the concept of shallow-rooted belonging as the alternative form of belonging in the chosen life of global mobility. The naming of this alternative experience resulted in a growing sense of being understood by others.

"I think it's a tension, for me, I think it's a tension between like, there's gravity in expectation [N.B. to have deep rooted belonging], and there's a pull which you experience a freedom from. But the risk, potentially, again, if not managed well, is that you can end up feeling misunderstood." (EP)

Reading my paper triggered a realisation that deep rooted belonging was never ours to have and this very realisation caused some strong emotional responses in my peers, similar to my own response.

"... when you talk about, you could leave your home and then it's destroyed [EP becomes emotional] .... and ... it was a hyperbole for me because it's what happens for everyone.

PKB: Yeah. It does. In my case it just literally got destroyed.

EP: ... and that's the thing, that will be so powerful, I think, about your story whether it's in this workshop or this paper and actually..... I think people will realise when they see, because it's a metaphor for their own experience, that when they leave, when they go to these different places, different companies, different cities, different geographies, they will naturally destroy their home or see their home destroyed behind them because they didn't participate. They're detaching themselves from that history and those things going on....." (January 2014)

### **6.5.3 Applicability of the concept of shallow-rooted belonging**

My peers saw the opportunity to work with the concept of shallow-rooted belonging in the context of individual development and coaching in global organisations, supporting individuals to engage with the dialogue around their sense of belonging – either in a one-to-one setting or in a group setting – to enable individuals to flourish personally in this changing and globally mobile world.

“The practice, the mindset, the functional natures, the dysfunctional, ..., so how do you say, Well, this is going to be the mode of my life for a time, for all my life, and what are the implications for that? How do you operate? And then what do you have, as you start to acknowledge personally, what do you have to give up? I mean, one of the more powerful personal things in here – there were many – for me was when you kind of admit your envy for what would be the contrast,..., this deep rooted belonging because,..., I'll share, ..., I have my best friend..... my best, lifelong friend, is in complete contrast.” (EP)

“...whether or not shallow rooted belonging is a problem or not, it's a mode, it's a method of adapting to your surroundings, a coping mechanism. It brings to the table this idea that, here's an experience and you must have certain coping mechanisms to thrive in it. And then I think what you've touched on is, and here was your method for dealing with that and function with that. And what it told me was there's pieces of that, your method, that I was applying, pieces that work but I looked at that and I was like, ..., but where's the workshop you're going to put together that, ..., leads people through this, ..., and helps them get connected with their core purpose that's transportable

and can float at times but then find temporary root with certain environments”  
(EP)

An idea for applicability to a wider organisational system was also put forward, in the form of organisations as a ‘loosely-coupled system’ where ‘the network is the leader’.

“From more of a professional, academic, conceptual point of view I thought,... This is great work that has a lot to do with what I understand to be, ... I think it’s already emerged, more so in places like Google or non-profits, etc, but the loosely-coupled system where the hierarchy no longer is the driving force, more the network is the leader. So when you have a group of dispersed people with different roles in the network, the applicability of shallow rooted belonging could be huge if you were to be able to codify this work and create some kind of framework that could span both personal and professional use. To go from the individual to the system.” (SM)

Co-inquirers identified a need to create conditions for ourselves as practitioners where we would have a sufficient sense of belonging in order to work with others, globally mobile leaders in organisations, who themselves were displaced and might be questioning their own sense of belonging. We questioned whether we could offer our professional support to others if we did not have these nourishing conditions in place for ourselves.

“... your support network not being there. That’s a condition to me, when I talk about physical condition. Another one is I need to feel part of the community, of a family, of people I love. But if I don’t have time for that, that’s also part of the conditions for me not to be effective. But, for shallow rooted belonging, because what are the conditions? What are the conditions that allow you to be effective in such a life?...And you must, in their basic needs, it still must be met. And so the reason that hit me so strongly is that I kind of had this image of a diabolical monster system which is trying to keep these vulnerable people, ..., with their roots up out of the ground so it can continue to manipulate them. But the reality is, to be effective in the work we do, you have to have a grounding, a purpose, a meaning, a family, a physical... otherwise you can’t create a tension and you just follow ...” (BC)



#### **6.5.4 Closing the formal co-inquiry and starting the informal community**

The co-inquiry group had committed to meet six times as a group over a period of eight months and after the sixth meeting, we concluded the formal part of the co-inquiry. However, the group felt strongly that they wanted to maintain the notion of a 'professional home' and to continue meeting, co-inquiring and learning together. The responsibility for organising those meetings was distributed amongst the group members and, to this date, the group is meeting and actively working together. Our focus has shifted towards supporting each other with our OD practice, more in the spirit of action learning, and offering a supportive environment to inquire into challenges, professional and personal.

“I’m now starting to feel a part of a trusted community in [name of the company]. So I really like that and I need that anchor but I like the fact that we don’t bind each other. We don’t bind each other on that. There’s this absolute foundation .... bedrock of trust so I know that anything we discuss is absolutely confidential, it’s taken in a way in which we put it but there’s no obligation.” (ST)

We were putting into practice and creating conditions for a shallow-rooted belonging that nurtured our souls and enabled us to flourish; to feel safe, understood and free without any formally binding ties.

#### **6.5.5 Cycle 3 – insights and implications**

In the third cycle of inquiry my colleagues and I developed further our sense of belonging, perhaps a shallow-rooted belonging, that was enhanced through an open sharing of common experiences and a growing sense of 'being understood'. This opened up a new level of dialogue, much deeper and more intimate than ever before, and there emerged a strong sense of trust, of being understood and of belonging to a group. In this co-inquiry, as part of the action research, we as a group have developed an understanding of our own way of being and have discovered that a sense of belonging mattered to us all. This sense of belonging, whilst pursuing a globally mobile career, was a necessary condition for us to flourish as OD practitioners and we took shared action to provide a sense of a 'professional home' for each

other whilst living our lives outside our countries of origin and working in a geographically dispersed and fragmented organisation where distrust was the undertone of the organisational culture. We learned over time how to trust each other and develop intimate relationships in a professional capacity. For us, the challenge at this point was to work out how we could welcome others who also need a 'professional home' into this loosely-coupled network and community.

In addition, we discussed how the naming of the experience that we shared – this shallow-rooted belonging – had brought a sense of relief, a realisation that we were not alone in this situation. This realisation created a sense of being understood. The energy and excitement around this spilled over into the generation of ideas for some practical applications of this concept in our OD practice – from developing a methodology for individual coaching and development to developing workshops for groups and looking at the wider organisational system implications.

I will expand further these topics of enhancing the practice of belonging and developing the practice of shallow-rooted belonging, both personal and in the context of OD practice, in Chapter 8.

## **6.6 Reflections**

### **6.6.1 Opening communicative space, core to my practice in this action inquiry**

Creating the right conditions was critical for this inquiry to happen. I believe that this process of creating the right conditions started at the very beginning of the inquiry, well before any conversations and meetings took place in the group setting or in individual interviews. Based on my personal experiences, deeply examined through my first person inquiry, I recognised the sensitivity of the topic of my inquiry, which required me to work with the emotional territory within which the sense of belonging is located. Furthermore, working with the topic of belonging and mobility in the context of a global organisation where there was a norm and

an implicit expectation that talented individuals would move countries to meet the business needs and to progress their careers, required an additional level of sensitivity in order to open up a conversation around the psychological and existential aspects of global mobility.

I recognised that before I could engage with the cycles of inquiry and shape the inquiry question, I needed to create a safe, open and generative space for the conversation to happen. As Kemmis (2006), building on Habermas, puts it: *“The first step in action research turns out to be central: the formation of a communicative space which is embodied in networks of actual persons.... A communicative space is constituted as issues or problems are opened up for discussion, and when participants experience their interaction as fostering the democratic expression of divergent views. Part of the task of an action research project, then, is to open communicative space, and to do so in a way that will permit people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what do to ...”* (p. 103-104).

Before I explore my practice of opening the communicative space in this inquiry, I want to clarify what is meant by the term ‘opening the communicative space’. The term stems from Habermas’s theory of communicative action. A key aspect of Habermas’s critical theory is its concern with how a collective of diverse individuals may effectively coordinate their actions and orientations (Kemmis, 2006; Wicks and Reason, 2010). Habermas sees the difference between individuals as the starting point for discussion aimed at a mutual understanding and consensus. He identified three features of communicative action: 1) mutual understanding; 2) unforced consensus about what to do; 3) making communicative space – communicative action brings people together around shared topical concerns, problems and issues with a shared orientation towards mutual understanding and consensus. Habermas shows that: *“... such communicative spaces are open and fluid associations, in which each individual takes an in-principle stand to participate, but does so knowing that a variety of forms of participation are available - ... as speaker or listener, at the podium or in the gallery, as an occasional participant or as a fully engaged advocate...”* (Kemmis, 2006, p. 103).

So what did I do to open the communicative space in this inquiry? Whilst the challenge of opening communicative space can be seen as primarily an issue for second and third person inquiry, I would argue that opening the communicative space in my first person inquiry had

significantly informed my approach to my second person inquiry. As described in previous chapters, I opened communicative space within myself and that enabled me to gain an initial understanding of the phenomenon I inquired into as well as allowing me to develop sensitivity towards the difficulties one could face when engaging with a dialogue around belonging and global mobility. The highly emotionally charged context to this topic, typically explored within the private world, and the deep existential questions that the exploration brought to the surface, needed to be handled with a great degree of care in conversations with others. Engaging with creative activity, music and meditation enabled me to create a sufficient space for myself to engage deeply with my inquiry. I carried some of those methods into the second person inquiry, together with insights as to the significance of opening communicative spaces with others sensitively and with deep care.

In my inquiry with business leaders, described in Chapter 5, my initial engagement with those leaders was somewhat unusual. I had an informal conversation with one of the leaders from this inquiry during a business dinner whilst I was delivering an assignment for this leader and his team. We had a good pre-existing working relationship based on trust developed over time. I shared with this leader some insights from my first person inquiry and shared some of my personal struggles with my sense of belonging. As he was well along his route of global mobility, he listened with a great degree of interest and empathy and started to share some of his struggles and experiences. He suggested that we continue this conversation over the next few days, which we did. After we felt we had exhausted our dialogue, he suggested that I speak to a few other people from the organisation to learn more about their experiences and he approached them on my behalf to open the door for me. He had a good trusting relationship with those leaders and recommended to them that they would find participation in my inquiry valuable. His gesture then led to other leaders recommending my inquiry work to their trusting colleagues. Looking back, I frequently wondered what would have happened if this 'word of mouth' approach to recruiting participants for my inquiry had not taken place. I wondered whether inquiry into this very topic could have been possible otherwise. Due to personal recommendations I felt that there was a degree of trust present at the very beginning of the engagement with those global leaders and that this approach made it possible to have those conversations. I also ensured that I adopted a very transparent approach and shared all transcripts as well as some of my personal examples during those

conversations and I believe that this also contributed to opening the communicative space for us. I held the process lightly and its informality, openness and flexibility provided those leaders with space to engage with those conversations in a deep and personal manner.

My work with the co-inquiry group, involving OD practitioners, further required a deliberate and concerted effort to open communicative space within the group. In that effort, I recognised the phases that group went through and created conditions that enabled interpersonal needs to be expressed and met. Schutz's (1994) interpersonal theory, describing the need for inclusion, control and intimacy, has been integrated into frameworks of group development. I used Schutz's theory to illuminate the process that my co-inquiry group went through and made some conscious choices to create conditions where core needs were met in order to open communicative space within the group.

Initially, I approached those OD professionals on an individual basis and shared with them my inquiry work and topic in a very open manner, not with the definite intent to recruit them into my co-inquiry group. I held our conversations lightly as I wanted to test whether what I was inquiring into would be of interest to those OD professionals. Those initial conversations generated interest and my colleagues volunteered to take part in the inquiry. Only after those initial informal conversations did I consider forming a co-inquiry group.

To deal with early concerns of inclusion and enabling participation choice, I maintained an open stance with all participants, sharing who the potential members of the co-inquiry group would be as described earlier in this chapter. I took my time to develop individual relationships with each co-inquiry participant before getting them all together and starting the co-inquiry process. During our initial individual engagements we explored our careers, shared some personal stories of professional challenges at work and how this impacted upon our sense of belonging and discussed what needs the inquiry could serve for each individual.

It took time to create the right conditions for the conversation to go into the territory associated with the sense of belonging. This deeply personal territory was explored only after a deep trust developed amongst the group participants. One of the key enablers for this conversation to emerge was my choice to share my personal story and experiences and my

struggles with a sense of belonging in a globally mobile world. I was anxious at the point of sharing my story with my co-inquirers and feared that I would not be understood by my peers and would be judged in a negative way. However, by making this gesture, I opened a space for others to come forward and share their own experiences, resulting in a deeper inquiry and a much greater sense of trust and belonging. The unconditional trust enabled us as a group to inquire into the emotional territory that perhaps we would not have been able to do had those conditions not been in place.

As has been shown earlier in this chapter, I needed to delicately negotiate issues of power within our group, the overall purpose of the inquiry, ownership of the inquiry and its outcomes. As the ownership of the inquiry increased as noted earlier, the group members renegotiated the purpose of the inquiry to meet their own development needs. I believe that my open and non-controlling approach to the inquiry enabled fluidity and brought about a sense of openness, pre-requisites for a deep inquiry to take place. In addition, the group recognised that we created conditions for ourselves where we could be ourselves and where we could freely express differences of opinion.

Experimenting with the extended epistemology and artistry in this group created conditions for us to jointly reflect, explore and experiment as well as develop increased levels of trust and connectedness. At this stage, participants started to openly express their dissatisfaction with the wider organisational issues, culture and the organisational system which further deepened the engagement of the group with the inquiry. As can be seen from some of the comments by group members, relationships reached a different level of depth and a sense of belonging started to deepen. We developed a sufficient level of intimacy as a group to engage with much deeper and richer dialogue around our own sense of belonging. Consequently, the group formed a 'professional home' for itself to create conditions to experience shallow-rooted belonging that we sought to develop.

I continually worked on creating and maintaining open communicative spaces, be it in the first person inquiry, in conversations with global leaders or in the co-inquiry, and that enabled me to connect all the various layers of the inquiry and generate a rich understanding of the phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging.

## **6.6.2 Having a personal sense of belonging, as a necessary grounding for working with others**

Working in truly global organisations involves working with leaders and employees, many of whom have embarked on a globally mobile career and are likely to grapple privately with the tension between displacement and belonging in an endeavour to understand their own sense of belonging.

As a group of OD practitioners we noted that it was essential for us to have a sufficient sense of belonging, at a personal and a professional level, in order to flourish in our roles and indeed to work with people who are grappling with their own sense of belonging. We noted that our confidence and authority increased as result of participating in the ‘professional home’ that we created for ourselves. We also felt that by being grounded within our ‘professional home’ our need to belong at work was met and, therefore, we felt freed up to perform our OD roles without needing to meet our needs to belong within the context of our clients’ work. We felt sufficiently nurtured through belonging to our small community that we were then enabled to work with our clients in a freer way, not shying away from creating some disturbance when that was necessary. Our sense of shallow-rooted belonging to our current locality provided us with sufficient nurturing and a sense of security without any deeply held ties or constraints, and facilitated a sense of freedom to act in the service of creating conditions for change that our clients desired.

## **6.6.3 Naming the experience – Shallow-rooted belonging**

Naming the experience of shallow-rooted belonging seemed to bring some sense of relief associated with being understood. Whilst it proved to be helpful to do this, the naming itself is not sufficient and it is just a starting point for organisations and OD practitioners to engage with the experience and work with it to support globally mobile professionals in creating conditions for them to flourish. I work through the implications of this for OD practice in Chapter 8.

In this chapter, I have shown some initial thoughts on the applicability of the concept of shallow-rooted belonging in OD practice as expressed by my co-inquirers. In Chapter 8, I explore further the implications of this inquiry for OD practice and global organisations.

In the chapter that follows, I return to the theoretical frameworks that informed my inquiry, with the intention to explore various insights gained in this inquiry through the theoretical lens.



## CHAPTER 7

### Reconnecting with the theory:

Home and belonging as transient notions



*“... one of the shards sticking in my ribs suggests that maybe  
I’ll never belong comfortably to anyplace, that my  
sensibilities and opinions will always be stuck  
in some betwixt and between place.”*

Hoffman (1989, p. 216)

Figure 24: Weeds flourishing in the space ‘between’  
a stone wall and a footpath,  
photo taken by myself, Croatia, August 2014

## **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I make sense of what I have learned in my inquiry by applying the different theoretical lenses described in Chapter 3. I start by drawing attention to the particular nature of this inquiry and I then explore what might lead some people to choose to displace themselves from their home base. I consider whether choosing a globally mobile career is a route to the fulfilment of a deeper need to explore the wider world, away from the predictability of the familiar home environment. I then note the nature of globally mobile living, namely, described as living in liminality and how that impacts upon an individual's sense of identity, view of the world and sense of home and belonging. I look into how a life crises and, possibly, one's age awaken an individual's need to reconsider the sense of belonging and to seek synthesis between the desire to explore and the need to attach and belong. In the section that follows, I gently challenge the traditional notion of home and introduce the idea of a transient home, sufficiently and simultaneously placed in the current locality and in a special place that participants of this inquiry call an anchor. By introducing the concept of shallow-rooted belonging, I provide an alternative metaphor to the socially predominant notion of a deep-rooted belonging, typically seen as the desirable form of belonging, with the aim of igniting a dialogue around alternative forms of belonging as being equally valid and appropriate for some people. I offer this metaphor to my fellow globally mobile professionals, acknowledging that in their chosen path they are not alone. I propose that belonging sufficiently, but not deeply, to multiple places, relationships and liminal spaces is potentially a norm for some of us.

## **7.2 Particular or universal - the nature of this inquiry**

I started this inquiry with the intention of understanding the tension between displacement and belonging as experienced by globally mobile professionals. I set out to inquire into how I and others similar to me could create a sufficient sense of belonging in our postmodern world of global mobility which would enable us to flourish and live healthy and fulfilling lives. And I located the inquiry in a particular context of a European global organisation where all of my

inquiry participants worked. They were not all geographically located in Europe but all, except one OD practitioner, shared the same employer. I therefore focused my attention on understanding the experiences associated with my topic of inquiry within this particular context, without intending to claim any universally applicable conclusions.

I present below interpretations of my own experience and that of others and I draw some insights underpinned by the chosen theories from existential philosophy, social and development psychology and previous research in this field. I make no claims that those insights are universally applicable to all globally mobile professionals. In this context-specific inquiry, I open up a rich territory for further inquiry, but make no claims of universal conclusions. It may well be that some of the insights gained in this inquiry could have the potential to become universally applicable but this was not the intention of this inquiry.

### **7.3. Displacement from the home base**

#### **7.3.1 A strong need to displace oneself from the home base**

Reflecting back on my own experiences, together with the stories of both the business leaders and the OD practitioners, it seems that early on in our lives we developed dreams and fantasies informing our desire to travel. Not one of my participants, including myself, recalls the exact moment when a deliberate choice to pursue a globally mobile career was made and yet all of us have been pulled towards pursuing careers which allowed us to move globally and lead a flexible life. For many of us, taking the first global role that required mobility created excitement but none of us realised that this would lead us to a totally new path in our lives. Whether as result of post-rationalisation or not, all participants claimed that they simply **had to go** and had to test themselves in the unfamiliar world in the name of learning, growth and self-discovery. Most of those participants described their family backgrounds as relatively stable and, interestingly, the majority had siblings who stayed in close proximity to their parents and local community. The global mobility is on the increase but still, when the total population is considered, the majority of people stay in a relatively close geographical

proximity to where they grew up. This begs the question why some people have a strong need to displace themselves from their home base to pursue a mobile life by choosing global careers while others have no such need. A question which is yet to be answered.

### **7.3.2 The attachment theory perspective**

One of the perspectives that could be adopted here, informed by the attachment theory, is that, potentially, people who are comfortable displacing themselves from their home base in pursuit of discovering themselves and the wider world, might uphold a secure attachment style. From their secure base formed through early experiences, globally mobile professionals might have ventured out into the wider world to explore it. Having said this, I do not suggest that those who stayed and developed a deeply-rooted belonging to a local community may be not secure. They also may have a secure attachment style but their need to explore the wider world may be expressed in other ways.

As the globally mobile professionals in my inquiry matured, their attachment moved from their parents towards their partners who acted as attachment figures and provided a safe base. Bowlby states that the urge to explore the environment – work, play, discover, create and take part in activities with peers, is regarded as a basic component of human nature (Rholes and Simpson, 2004). According to the attachment theory, true exploration is possible only when attachment needs have been satisfied, meaning that when an individual of any age is feeling safe and secure, he or she is likely to explore away from the attachment figure; however, when distressed in any way, he or she is likely to feel an urge towards proximity. According to the attachment theory, when individuals are confident that an attachment figure (in adulthood, often a romantic partner) will be available and responsive when needed, they should feel secure enough to explore the environment, take on challenges and make discoveries. Those exploratory activities may take many forms for adults such as travelling, hobbies, visiting new places, etc. *“... focused and productive exploratory activity is presumed to occur only when the individual (1) does not question the security and availability of his or her home base and (2) is not experiencing fear, distress, or any condition that would lead him*

*or her to feel an urge to move toward his or her home base.*" (Rholes and Simpson, 2004, p. 302).

All but one, of the participants in my study had been married for a significant number of years and seven out of eleven were married to a partner from a different country/culture. The individual who was not married, was also in a long-term, stable relationship. When asked to name the source of their current sense of belonging, after expressing some difficulty with this question, participants would say that their immediate and current secure base was associated with their partner and their children. This was the only stable base that most individuals had in their adult life, whilst pursuing their global careers. According to the attachment theory, a secure base in adulthood stems from stable relationships with partners. One can possibly argue that exploring the world, as expressed through global mobility, has been possible for participants in this study because they had a secure base in their immediate home life, meaning their partners and children, and that has been a stable source of attachment and, possibly, belonging whilst everything else around them remained in flux. The current sense of security generated by their relationship with their partner and supported by early experiences informing their secure attachment style might provide individuals with a base from which to explore different environments, cultures and countries. I will come back to the attachment theory in the section below when I explore the impact of a life crises and the desire of people to seek a synthesis between displacement (exploration) and belonging (attachment).

One could hypothesise that globally mobile professionals might have more of an avoidant attachment style and that a motive to move frequently could be associated with their discomfort with close relationships. Having considered that idea, I was less sure that this hypothesis would be congruent with the stable nature of the relationships that participants in my inquiry held with their life partners. In addition, participants shared many examples illustrating the importance of their relationships with colleagues and other people in their current locality, even placing their sense of belonging into a relational space. I therefore did not find that hypothesis congruent with my own experiences and the experiences of the participants in my inquiry.

Whilst the attachment theory may enable us to get some insights into what conditions are required for individuals to pursue a globally mobile career and where those people may get some sense of attachment, the theory does not fully shed light on why some people feel this strong need to displace themselves from their original home base in pursuit of personal growth and testing self in the unknown. This may well be due to a specific personality trait and I have not gathered enough CAPTA to substantiate this possibility. However, I do find a concept of existential migration, coined by Greg Madison of interest here. This concept provides me with another lens and angle with which to explore the same question.

### **7.3.3 Existential migration perspective**

The existential migrant is a person who chooses to leave his or her homeland, pushed out by deep questions that could not be answered by their home environment, and who is pulled into the wider world to discover what life is. Madison (2009) states: *“We need to feel at home but have never done so, we need to belong but renounce opportunities for belonging, we venture out into the unknown in order to experience the homecoming that will finally settle us, but doesn’t.”* (p. 7). In this inquiry, as in Madison’s, participants stated that they **had to go** and that this was a part of some inner drive for learning and seeking diversity in their life experiences. Whilst this need to go was described in different ways, all participants, including myself, felt that strong inner pull towards the wider world. Stories of early childhood influences shaped those dreams to travel and explore the world. Participants in this inquiry did not have to go nor they were forced to go, they could have pursued their careers in their home countries but the pull towards the unknown and exploring the wider world was stronger. The fact that this is a chosen and a voluntary act, typically also supported by good financial packages from sponsoring organisations, means that the psychological impact, pain and struggles associated with this act are rarely acknowledged in the public domain. I have experienced little interest or sympathy from people around me who were not pursuing a globally mobile career for those painful experiences or existential struggles, as frequently their views of my chosen path were influenced by external symbols of ‘the glamour’ and ‘a good life’.

Madison differentiates existential migrants as people who did not move away from their homeland for career or financial benefit, rather they moved purely due to the existential need to discover who they were. He somewhat hastily places globally mobile professionals into the category of people who move purely for career or wealth benefits and separates them out from the 'pure' existential migrants. He did note, however, that the motives to move by global professionals might be deeper and more complex than it may appear on the surface. Based on the stories I heard, I would argue that the concept of an existential migrant has some potential to explain the reasons for leaving one's home base of my participant group. Madison describes voluntary migrants as those who are seeking greater possibilities for self-actualising, exploring foreign cultures in order to assess and understand their own identity and ultimately grappling with issues of home and belonging in the world generally. Some participants in my inquiry, including myself, have spoken about their desire to test themselves in the unknown to understand themselves better or, indeed, to remould their identity. The majority of my participants spoke about the desire to learn as an underlying motive to keep moving and keep seeking novel environments. I needed to move from the environment I grew up in because I felt constrained by its patriarchal society and could not settle in accordance with the rules of local society. I needed to find a space for myself to freely experiment and discover who I was and what I was capable of achieving.

Madison cautions against seeing existential migrants as a label that would indicate some personality trait or another diagnostic category, although he acknowledges that there may well be individuals who are more likely to engage with 'existential migration' due to their openness to certain sensitivities or potentials in life. Existential migration can arise or subside in virtually anyone in response to their changing circumstances, and can last for shorter or longer periods of time. The stories shared by participants indicated that none of them, including myself, initially planned to pursue a globally mobile career for life. They reported that their original home environment was constraining them, routine life was suffocating them and they needed to break out from that in order to discover themselves. None of them spoke about financial benefits or career alone as a primary motive. One theme that was consistent in all the stories shared by the senior leaders and OD practitioners was the desire to learn and the fear of stagnating as the key motivating factors for choosing to displace themselves. This motivation to learn was more clearly pronounced in the stories of the

participants in my inquiry than in Madison's inquiry. This may well be due to the very different professional backgrounds of the participants in those two inquiries. The participants in my inquiry were all employed in a business context, holding senior roles in a global organisation, and were in their mid-forties whilst participants in Madison's inquiry were from a wider range of backgrounds, mostly from academic, therapeutic or educational backgrounds, with the majority of participants being in their mid-thirties.

#### **7.3.4 Insights and implications**

One can question whether the stories shared by the global leaders and OD practitioners are some form of post-rationalisation for choices made primarily based on career advancement and financial benefits. This may well be the case, but I accepted the sincerity of the narratives shared by the participants in my inquiry. Having said this, I presume that there are other globally mobile professionals who would offer different stories and perspectives on their motives for leaving their home base. Participants who were attracted to my inquiry indicated an existential motive to their chosen mobile lifestyle.

Equally, one could argue that leaving the home base may well be about fleeing from something unresolved at home or could be related to a dysfunctional or pathological trait. I chose not to pursue that line of thought as the participants in my study were, professionally, highly successful individuals, high performers as well as popular leaders, and were seen as the best global talent that organisation could have. I had no evidence to view their motives as dysfunctional or pathological.

There may be other explanations for this desire to dislocate oneself to an alien culture and country in the service of personal growth and discovery. Based on my own experiences, the combination of the idea of branching out from the secure base to explore new cultures and satisfy my need to learn more about myself and discover the purpose of living, helps me make some sense of my reasons for pursuing the path of ongoing displacement. And by dislocating self from the home base, one inevitably imposes the questions surrounding the concepts of home and belonging upon oneself.



## 7.4 Living permanently in liminality

### 7.4.1 Philosophical perspective on liminality

The philosopher Steinbock (1995) introduced the concept of liminality in his explorations of normal and abnormal, home and alien, and sees them as 'liminal notions'. By liminal he means that home and alien are mutually delimited as home and as alien and for that reason they are co-relative and co-constitutive. He describes the process of normalisation as 'liminal experiencing'. The liminal structure of home and alien takes place on many levels of intersubjective experience: as home family/alien family; home town/alien town; home country/alien country, etc. They crisscross, intersect and intertwine in various respects whilst they do not form an overarching totality. Influenced by Husserl's work, Steinbock (1995) suggests that: "... both practically and ethically the homeworld and alienworld cannot be synthesized into a 'high unity' taking the form of an all encompassing 'one world'." (p. 237). This would suggest the impossibility of belonging to a 'global world', perhaps as a high unity world for globally mobile professionals; and as we have seen in previous chapters some participants challenge this assertion and believe that they do belong to the 'global world' and that they are global citizens.

Husserl suggests that an alien community of homecomrades and their alien homeworld is normatively different from those of us in our homeworld: their validities are not our own. The alienworld has its own generative solidity of tradition and Husserl writes that one needs to question: "to what extent and how far I can appropriate in understanding [im Nachversehen] their [the aliens'] experiential validities, that is, how far I can progress in bringing into a synthesis their homeworld with that of mine" (Cited in Steinbock, 1995, p 237).

Steinbock (1995) refers to transgression as the co-constitution of the alien and simultaneously the co-constitution of home through a direct encounter of the alien. He states that: "The difficulty in describing transgression for a generative phenomenology entails having to speak of the limits of an encounter that only arise in and through the encounter. Or put it differently, it is the difficulty of characterizing the generation of a homeworld while it is still becoming

*what it is through an encounter with an alienworld at the same time that the alienworld is still in generation in this very development and encounter. Thus, when I speak of an encounter of the alien by the home, I am not presupposing that the home is a ready-made sphere from which one comfortably departs in order to encounter another sphere that is not in co-generation through this encounter.” (p. 238).*

Globally mobile professionals find themselves continually on this edge between the homeworld and the alienworld, and in the process of transgression through a direct encounter with the alien and unknown world. In their daily experiences that have a direct encounter with a new country, tradition, history, religion, etc. and through the encounter and the process of transgression, their ‘homeworld’ becomes enriched and expanded by appropriation. Based on the experiences shared in the inquiry, the daily experience of the globally mobile professional can be described as liminal, involving an ongoing interaction between transgression and appropriation. I will turn to explore further those experiences in the paragraphs below.

#### **7.4.2 Anthropological and social perspective on liminality**

As my writing of this thesis progressed, the concept of liminality grew in its importance for my work. Very recently, the prominence of the concept of liminality led me to discover the work around liminality that originated in the fields of anthropology and the field of social and political theory.

The concept of liminality was first introduced by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1909 and further revived and enhanced in the 1960s by another anthropologist, Turner (2008) who brought the term liminality back into anthropology and social sciences. Arnold van Gennep introduced the term liminality in his remarkable book, *Rites of Passage*, where he classified all existing rites. He distinguished rites that mark the passage of an individual or social group from one state to another from those which mark transitions in the passage of time (e.g. harvest, calendar events). He stressed the importance of transitions in any society and singled out rites of passage as a special category consisting of three sub-categories,

namely, rights of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation. Van Gennep called the middle stage in a rite of passage a *liminal period*. He called transition rites *liminal rites* while naming rites of incorporation *postliminal rites*.

Liminality emerges in the in-between of a passage. Van Gennep held the spatial dimension of thresholds, doors, gateways and other transit zones to be fundamental for the cultural elaboration of ritual transitions and cultural transformation. Van Gennep simply noted an underlying pattern in rites that marked a passage from one state to another, without taking away or reducing all the other aspects or 'individual purposes' that such rites may also have. Van Gennep's work cannot be used directly to argue for any specific theory of rites. He detected a pattern, a sequence, a ritual form. The ritual pattern was apparently universal: all societies use rites to demarcate transitions, and the forms taken by such rites of transition are comparable. Liminal spaces and moments are key to personal and social development anywhere in the world. It is via the liminal that persons and groups are taken apart, recomposed and regenerated.

Turner (2008) stumbled across van Gennep's Rites of Passage almost by chance in 1963 and experientially recognised the importance of van Gennep's insights which inspired him to write the essay *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage*. He showed how ritual passages served as moments of creativity that freshened up societal make-up and argued that rituals were much more than mere reflections or elaborations of social order. Ritual passages and liminal experiences gave form and rhythm to social groups, and also formed and shaped individual personalities in ways that were certainly 'structured' but at the same time never perfectly pre-determined. Turner came to see liminality as the key to culture. He suggested that liminal experiences in modern consumerist societies to a large extent have been replaced by 'liminoid moments', where creativity and uncertainty unfold in art and leisure activities. He also argued that pilgrimage shares aspects of liminality because participants become equal as they distance themselves from mundane structures and their social identities leading to a strong sense of *communitas*.

For Turner, the study of liminality was a study of human experience. He realised that liminality serves not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand

human reactions to liminal experiences: the way in which personality is shaped by liminality, the sudden fragmentation of agency and the sometimes dramatic tying together of thought and experience.

In his book *Liminality and the Modern*, Thomassen's (2014) perspectives on liminality has been informed by an in-depth examination of Gennep's work together with the work of Turner and others in the field. Thomassen's interest in liminality was primarily from the societal level; his interest lying in the consequences of such liminal states and moments at societal level. Thomassen (2014) states that: *"during ritual passages, the initiands or the neophytes are brought to question most radically their own sensory apparatus, just as they challenge social order by setting themselves apart from any normally accepted social rules from their betwixt and between position; they become nameless, timeless and socially unstructured, existing in a floating state of being, even as they acquire throughout the liminal period the necessary knowledge and experience in order that their transformed beings may eventually re-enter society and take up their new roles, which are recognised and tamped into them in the re-aggregation ritual."* (p. 92).

Living in liminality refers to moments or periods of transition during which the alienworld and the homeworld are in constant making, during which the normal limits of thought, self-understanding and behaviour are relaxed, opening the way to novelty and imagination, construction and deconstruction. Thomassen (2014) suggests that, on the one hand, liminality involves a potentially unlimited freedom from any kind of structure and this freedom can spark creativity and innovation. On the other hand, liminality involves a peculiar kind of unsettling situation in which nothing really matters, in which standing norms disappear. The moments of liminality are filled by a condensed and simultaneous sensation of freedom and anxiety, detachment and belonging, the familiar and unfamiliar, creation and destruction. The paradoxical nature of liminality has been noted by others (Thomassen, 2014; Miller, 2004; Steinbock, 1995; Turner, 2008) and its limiting as well as generative powers are described in this inquiry through the stories of the inquiry participants. Thomassen sees liminality as a paradoxical state, both at the individual and the societal level. At the level of the individual, it is the destruction of identity while at the societal level, it involves the suspension of the structure of social order. The aim, nonetheless, is to return to stability or normality and this

happens by forging a new identity in the individual case, reflecting a shift of one's position within the social order. In the case of society, new common bonds are formed through the cathartic experiences of *communitas* – a term introduced by Turner. Both processes involve the social and the asocial and redraw the boundaries between them.

Thomassen argues that the contemporary world has problematically incorporated liminality at its core. He points out that the concept of liminality can be relevant as a diagnostic tool of the times in which we live, such as the time of globalisation. He states that globalisation essentially has to do with the disappearance and breaking down of previously existing boundaries and that the most problematic aspects of current globalisation have to do with just such a continuous loss of limits. He states that the pressure toward constant transformation which is everywhere today is intimately related to a sense of exile and homelessness which is also found at the level of thought and philosophy. He suggests that any effective response to this development must entail a reconsideration of human experiences of liminality and how such experiences need to be channelled into feeling at home in the world. He states that it is impossible simply to feel at home everywhere if one does not feel at home somewhere.

Whilst my interests in this inquiry have been primarily in exploring experiences of global mobility and the associated tension between displacement and belonging at an individual and small group level, I found that the work of anthropologists sheds further light on those experiences. The participants in this inquiry described the stages that they go through from detachment via 'in-betweenness' to re-attachment to a new locality which closely resemble the process described by Van Gennep when rites of passage take place. Whilst frequently feeling on the margins of any society and culture, experiences described by globally mobile professionals illustrate that movement from painful separation from the current locality to moving into an unknown stage of flux, ("a stage where your life is hell and can easily destroy you but learning is the most intense" PB), and finally moving into a short phase of stability where one can re-establish some daily routines and feel part of a community. This period of incorporation and stability is usually experienced as a short but rewarding period before a new cycle of separation takes place. The frequency of moves of global professionals typically results in an ongoing process of movement between those three stages – separation,

liminality and incorporation – and participants referred to their life as permanently ‘in-between’. The liminal experience is understood by participants as an opportunity for testing themselves in a new and alien environment and recreating their own identity by letting go of the past and embracing new experiences. As a result of those experiences, they have learned to suspend their judgement, keep their minds open to novelty and respect local history, traditions and rituals before forming any solid conclusions. I note the significance of paying deliberate attention to that movement between different phases and rites of passage and working with that movement to foster healthy living and nurture creativity, openness and flexibility whilst pursuing a globally mobile career - an insight that started to inform my work as an OD practitioner. I explore this in Chapter 8.

Thomassen cautions that the permanent sense of liminality is likely to create a sense of displacement, loss of home and homelessness. He argues that we need to feel at home somewhere in the world and that that response to this permanent liminality calls for a need to establish a home somewhere in the world. This goes to the heart of my inquiry question and supports the notion of shallow-rooted belonging as a response to condition of living permanently in liminality by globally mobile professionals in their desire to create some sense of belonging for themselves. Thomassen’s work also highlights liminality as a source of creativity and growth – either at an individual, group or societal level. His work inspired me to consider the liminal experience of globally mobile professionals as a potential source of creativity, innovation and agility in global organisations that may provide these global organisations with the strengths to enable change and sustainable transformation. This potentially untapped capacity to live functionally through a liminality that already exists in organisations has the possibility to enable organisations to transform their cultures by working deliberately with that strength that their global leaders already possess. This has sparked some further insights for my OD practice that I describe in the next chapter.

I now turn my attention to how this concept of living in liminality showed up in the stories of my participants and I explore the perspective of liminal space as the only constant space in the life of globally mobile professionals.

### **7.4.3 Stories of living in liminality by participants in this inquiry**

Global leaders described this experience of living in liminality as living in the 'in-between' space, living amongst the 'shades of grey' or bridging and living in the 'space where two opposites meet'. Globally mobile professionals typically move every three years for their assignments and are likely to feel that they are in the liminal space for most of their time in any location. Typically, it takes up to nine months to detach oneself from the previous location and to establish a basic existence in a new location followed by eighteen months of enjoying one's existence in the new location, before then starting to get ready for a new move and restarting the process of detachment and separation again. This ongoing movement creates a sense of being permanently in the space of liminality.

This fluid existence involves an ongoing process of transgression and appropriation, trying to understand the new environment and simultaneously absorbing some of what is local and alien to become part of the home or familiar. One of the key lessons for mobile professionals has been to keep an open mind about the encounters with the alien environment including not just aspects of national culture, religion or other traditions but also business practices and ways of thinking and behaving. It could be argued that everyone experiences that liminal space in their life but the intensity, magnitude and frequency of that experience by globally mobile professionals, in my view, differentiates them from others, be they occasional tourists, domestic migrants or native dwellers.

As result of this experience of living on the threshold of different cultures, traditions, religions, business practices, globally mobile professionals continually examine their identity, what they value now and where they belong. It is an ongoing and dynamic process of forming and reforming one's own sense of self. What possibly differentiates participants of this inquiry, who started their mobile careers after their formative years, from TCK, is that participants in this study had a clear sense of their national identity, even if they saw themselves more as hybrid human beings and different from their original homecomrades.

#### **7.4.4 Impact of this unique living experience on the worldview and identity**

The participants spoke very passionately about the change in their world view that emerged as a result of their experience of global mobility and living in liminality. Some of them referred to developing an appreciation for a multiplicity of truths and accepting that what truth is in one culture may not be in another. They spoke about developing a worldview where they do not judge but work with a diversity of perspectives. They saw this shift in their worldview as a major gift that they gained whilst working and living across different cultures.

Some participants described themselves as 'hybrid human beings' who adopt into their own way of living a quality they like from different cultures that they have experienced. They feel the freedom to pick and choose and to evolve their identity as they move from one alien environment to the other. An alien environment gives them the space and opportunity to 'reinvent themselves' should they chose to do so without being constrained by the norm of the culture they originally came from. Through the process of shaping and reshaping their own sense of identity, globally mobile professionals end up being marginal to both, their original culture, the homeworld, and their current host culture, the alienworld.

The participants in this inquiry had a clear sense of their national identity, which typically is not the case with TCK, even though they acknowledge that they are not a true representative of that nation any more as their experiences moulded them in a different way. The majority feel that they neither fit into that original homeworld anymore and nor do they feel that they fit into the current locality that is more alien than familiar. It is not surprising therefore that some individuals in this inquiry and, indeed, previous researchers (Schaetti and Ramsey,1999) suggest that globally mobile people may feel at home in this liminal space, that perhaps living in liminality is the homeworld for those people. Making a homeworld within liminality, the space of intersection where multiple identities, cultures, traditions meet, results in a complex way of living and being, far more complex than living in a singular reality.



### **7.4.5 Insights and implications**

Living in liminality, the space between separation (displacement) and integration (belonging), resonates very closely with my daily experiences. Due to multiple relocations, this liminal, 'in-between' space is the only space that has been truly familiar and consistent to me for many years now. Madison (2009) makes an observation that has some resonance with the stories I heard in my inquiry: *"Migration can be a way to safeguard one's burgeoning identity when the home environment threatens to obstruct the developing self. The foreign place offers a more spacious environment, where personal discovery rather than conformity, is the touchstone for identity formation. Identity is in flux, an interaction of person and place, and while the home environment can suppress one's true identity, having no roots at all can result in a fragile sense of self."* (p. 132)

I turn now towards looking at life crises which seem to awaken a need in globally mobile professionals to develop an anchor somewhere in the world and to recreate a sense of safe home base for self and their families.

## **7.5 Life crises and seeking synthesis**

### **7.5.1 Life crises awaken the need for security, home base and belonging**

Moving from one unknown country to the other may be carried out by a small number of people, even if dreamed of by many. And this does not come without price. All of us in this inquiry woke up one day somewhere in the world and took a deep look at our lives. This might have been caused by that dreaded phone call from a family member far away, or by the screams of our children in the middle of the night due to a nightmare caused by yet another transition, or by an unsympathetic demand from our employers to move again.

Some of us felt hurt by our isolation from our home base and the feeling of being marginal in our own countries. Isolation and loneliness hurt, as we have seen not only in the attachment

theory and the social psychology theory but even more in the poetical writings of Donohue and Eva Hoffman. Many of us went back to our country of origin, some of us to reconnect with its original values and culture and our 'own people' in order to regain energy and confidence; some to check if this could still be a place to call 'home'; and some to just recover from a tiring life of global mobility.

An exploration of the wider world and the alien world is possible but only if there is a secure base and one is not in distress. The attachment theory suggests that when one is in distress, experiencing fear or facing difficulty, it is natural to seek proximity to the home base. And this is exactly what I heard in the stories in my inquiry. Those moments of distress awoke the need in us to ask that dreaded question as to where one truly belongs and where is the home base for ourselves, our children and partners?

With the ageing process, our own and that of our children, it seems that a sense of belonging becomes more prominent. I heard in the stories shared that people worried less about sense of belonging for themselves or their families when they were in their 30s. The story is somewhat different once they approach their mid-forties. In my first person inquiry I discovered that ageing contributed to my desire to confirming my identity and sense of belonging. My daughter's age and readiness to voice her confusion relating to her identity had led me to re-examine that whole territory and to make some life choices to establish a secure base for myself and my family. The desire to create a sense of home and a secure base for our own children feature strongly in the stories of others, resulting in re-examining our own life choices, our sense of belonging and making new life choices to create some form of home.

### **7.5.2 Seeking synthesis and finding an anchor**

Some of us have undergone this long process of working out where there might be a secure base or, as participants called it, an anchor point that could be called home for oneself and the immediate family. The answer was not always the obvious one, namely, that the home would be in the country of origin. Many of the participants in this inquiry were also in mixed-

culture marriages and several of them had children born in different countries – in this complex family system, whose country of birth should they choose as their home? Some have picked a location in the world, or even multiple locations, where they felt happy to go on holiday or where they felt happy and understood, regardless of the country of origin. It seems that they picked a place where they felt at home in the world, something Madison (2009) calls an authentic home which he describes thus: *“The traditional home is characterized by its cosiness, rooted in place, while authentic home nurtures an experience of dwelling where we belong without exiling the deeply human sense of not-being-at-home in the world.”* (p. 208)

A couple of participants are still grappling with where to locate their anchor point but it seems that this desire for a synthesis of the two – attachment with detachment - becomes a significant life task for globally mobile professionals, amplified once they reach their late 40s. I assume that this search for synthesis is experienced by many people, but globally mobile professionals seem to experience profound pain and grief with that search for synthesis.

### **7.5.3 Insights and implications**

With the ageing process, either our own or our children’s, there arises the need to establish a secure anchor somewhere in the world that can be called ‘home’. With the widening gap between the original ‘homeworld’ and the current ‘homeworld’, the need to place one’s anchor in the place that was once ‘home’ is weakened. Whilst the anchor provides some sense of home and place, it is not a permanent dwelling location for globally mobile professionals. They continue to live in the liminal space, adding another level of complexity by intersecting their sense of home between the current locality and a secure anchor, whilst not living permanently in either of those dwelling places.

In my own experience, my husband and I have created an anchor for ourselves in Croatia, several hours drive from the place I was born. We chose this place for ourselves as we felt at home in that part of the world. We created another anchor point in London, a place our daughter calls home, but for us this is another anchor point that gives us a sense of security and familiarity. From those anchor points, we have branched out into other locations and

lived in other places, having a sufficient sense of attachment to both places and feeling safe in the knowledge that we have a place to go to, to recharge our sense of belonging when the need arises. In the meantime, we live our lives in between those different places and our daily experiences resemble closely those experiences associated with liminality. I now turn my attention to that very way of existence, informing the transient notion of home.

## **7.6 Transient notion of home, home as an experience**

### **7.6.1 Home base - locating home in a place or a space**

Seeking to drop an anchor somewhere in the world to develop some sense of home, however temporary or transient it may be, suggests that place has a meaning for the globally mobile people who participated in this inquiry. As we have seen in previous research (Pirinen, 2008), place matters to those who frequently move as they are more inclined to ponder the meaning of place than those who have always lived in the same place. Most participants in this inquiry have been astutely aware of place and have sought to locate their 'home' somewhere in the world where they felt connected with the place. The place gives them a feeling of the familiar, evokes positive emotions and generates a rejuvenating sense of belonging. However, this sense of place and home is not necessarily attached to the geographical location they originally came from. This somewhat challenges Steinbock's view that home is located in a geographical place associated with the original home. An anchor is typically located in a specific location, but the choice of this location is less influenced by the original culture or geography one stems from and more determined by the quality of the experience that the location generates for those globally mobile people.

And yet, the notion of home is not static for globally mobile people. Whilst the anchor might be placed somewhere in the world that feels like home, globally mobile people also see their current locality as their temporary home. Some spoke about their approach to creating a home in their current locality by ensuring that their treasured possessions are always taken from one place to the other and displayed in their temporary homes to create a cosy space.

One of the leaders spoke about acquiring ‘a box on wheels’ whilst in Japan, something a typical Japanese family would have to store their precious possessions that can be wheeled out of their house quickly in the event of an earthquake. He described how this ‘box on wheels’ travelled with him and his family wherever they went, filled with precious family possessions that reminded them of their past and informed their present life. I noticed that I carried with me accumulated artefacts, from Croatia and the UK and other places that I have stayed in, to my new locations to remind me of where I came from and where I have been. All of those artefacts not only created a sense of home in the current locality but also helped with transitioning into the alien world and providing comfort and a sense of security, an archetypal way of dealing with transitions.

Locating a sense of home in a space in-between or in the liminal space has also emerged as one of the themes in this inquiry and this has been covered in previous sections. Home is experienced as being of a transient nature and the only permanent space that remains is the liminal space between those multiple anchors and homes.

### **7.6.2 Home base - locating home in relationships**

For some leaders a sense of home derives from their relationships, either with their immediate family or with their wider family and friends. In an earlier section, I have discussed the notion of a secure base and its significance from the perspective of the attachment theory. Relationships in the current locality, mostly with people from similar backgrounds and with experience of global mobility, provide a sense of belonging to a community rather than a place. Those relationships provide a sense of being understood owing to the similarities in life experiences which create a sense of belonging, even if somewhat temporary. Steinbock (1995) talks about homecomrades as being connected by a typically familiar home space and time. He states that: *“the homeworld is a community of homecomrades, individuals in a homeworld are simultaneously ‘made home’ in the process of co-constituting a home. ... The identity of the individuals, then, is revealed as a homecomrade in communal and historical interaction. Who we are is how we are as home.”* (p. 223).

In globally mobile communities, who are the homecomrades of those people? It seems that the sense of homeworld in the current locality is shaped with other globally mobile professionals who share similar experiences and who happen to be in the same location at the same time. So there is a community of globally mobile people within the wider social community in the current location that constitutes home for globally mobile people, something Ruth Useem and John Useem (as described in Pollock and Van Reken, 2009) named as 'the third culture' in the 1950s. They realised that expatriates formed a lifestyle that was different from either their home or their host culture, but it was one they shared in their current locality.

Participating in shaping the third culture with other globally mobile professionals seems to create a sense of 'home' and belonging to that community and, with time, belonging to this mobile community becomes stronger than belonging to the original home.

### **7.6.3 Insights and Impact**

I have learned that home has multiple meanings to globally mobile professionals. It is not simply associated with a nation, building or the place where one was born or where one established oneself. The notion of home is far more complex and fluid for this group of people. Home is seen as a multidimensional phenomenon, from a special place where one goes to recharge and reconnect with a familiar location chosen as an anchor in life (not necessarily the place of origin), to a relationship with other globally mobile professionals, to a safe home base with the immediate family. One element that is constant in all of these perspectives is the sense of home that is derived from the 'in-between space', the space of liminality, the threshold between different dimensions – past and present, original and alien culture, anchor and current locality.

Living in liminality potentially leads globally mobile professionals to reframe their view of home; away from a geography or a building or a nation and more towards a fluid concept that has multiple meanings but primarily enables individuals to experience a sense of being themselves, being understood, being safe and nurtured. The sense of home is informed more

through the experiences it creates than purely by geography. Daily experiences of living in liminality create unique conditions of existence and call for fluid and transient perspectives of home and the homeworld. However, this daily experience of liminality and a transient sense of home has the potential to become a generative space for flourishing, self-renewal, growth and freedom from the ties and constraining norms that a settled home offers.

## **7.7 Transient notion of belonging - shallow-rooted belonging**

### **7.7.1 Recognition - belonging matters**

I learned through this inquiry that a sense of belonging matters to the globally mobile professionals I spoke to and that it really matters to me. It matters to me to know where I belong in the world, where I can depart from and return to at different points in my life. It seems that belonging matters even more when one questions whether one belongs, perhaps due to a marginal or excluded feeling that characterises the current existence.

The initial phase of my inquiry was very much around my personal struggles with my own sense of belonging and my yearning for a home that was long lost – a loss that was never properly grieved for. I could not quite come to terms with the fact that I might not ever belong to the place, the community, the soil of which I was once a part. I could not admit to myself that my choice to move and leave all this behind me had a consequence that I did not quite account for. Suddenly awakening to the fact that I might have cut myself off from the home base I once considered my secure base, my roots, the solid ground for my identity, brought pain, a sense of loss and loneliness. I awoke to the realisation that this was my choice, it was my dream to explore the new places that I pursued and that realisation brought a desire and the courage to hold myself in the place of inquiry and exploration to understand the consequences of that choice. I had created a comforting and self-protective shield in believing that detachment is the way to live one's life and to be successful. And yet, deep underneath, a longing to belong was eroding my shield.

In this fluid and movable world, belonging matters. My participants and I grew up with a sense of belonging that somehow faded away and got remoulded without us consciously noticing all that change. We had been too busy to notice until one day we woke up to face the reality. Deep emotions are evoked by a very simple question – Where are you from? – and our voices tremble. It is difficult to voice personal doubt as to whether one belongs anywhere any more. This is just too painful to admit because we all, in the end, want to belong somewhere, we want to be part of a community or a place or a space that envelops us with a sense of security and knowing that we are a part of this bigger world.

### **7.7.2 Acceptance – deep-rooted belonging is not mine to ever have**

But how in this mobile world can I create a sense of belonging for myself and my family? I have chosen a path of mobility and my daily reality is located in the liminal space, the edgy space of ‘in-between’, on the margins between my current locality, my past and my anchor that I currently call my home but do not visit very often. The one thing I know well is the liminal space that keeps evolving with every crossing of a boundary. I yearn for deep rooted belonging and yet I know that my current lifestyle does not create the conditions for roots to grow deep. There is no space or time for that to happen before the next move pulls me into the world of exploration and encounter with the alien environment. My fantasies were reinforcing my aspiration to return to a place and a community where I would have a deep rooted belonging one day and yet my reality and the pull towards exploring the world out there draw me further away from that dream.

Accepting that a deep-rooted belonging is never mine to have, at an emotional and not just an intellectual level, either by myself or by the participants in this inquiry, has been a difficult process. It is like accepting that one will remain on the margins or between the cracks of societal structures for some time to come, if not for ever. This is hard to process and yet this probably is my reality and the reality of others in a similar situation to me. But the process of accepting this reality has opened generative spaces for new possibilities to emerge. Acceptance has led towards the release of a new energy that I have channelled towards recognising the power and the gifts that a chosen life has to offer. It has brought a relief from



yearning for something that will never be. My reality and the reality of the participants in this inquiry seem to be located in that 'in-between', liminal space, that is in a constant state of flux and yet is a source of creative energy and learning. As result of this, the question arises: So if deep-rooted belonging is not mine to have and I still have a need to belong, what then is the alternative?

### **7.7.3 Question – is there an alternative form of belonging at play here?**

I want to lead a healthy and fulfilling life nurtured by a sense of belonging whilst leading a globally mobile life. What are the possibilities of creating that sufficient sense of belonging whilst pursuing the path of global mobility? In my conversations with global leaders, I noticed that each global leader has adopted, consciously or unconsciously, their own way of developing a sense of sufficient belonging. Most of us noticed that whilst we could not have a deep-rooted sense of belonging, we could develop a sense of sufficient belonging in our current locality through a variety of ways. One of the ways involves creating a sense of home in our temporary home through our possessions, ordinary as well as treasured items that remind us of where we come from, where we have been and where we currently exist. Another way is to join the local community in various activities and actively participate in those to learn and adjust to newly discovered norms. Additionally, joining a community of like-minded people who share our experiences of mobility enables us to gain a sense of support, to be understood and be part of that community rather than just existing on its margins. That, together with some secure anchor in the world that we call a 'permanent home' or an anchor, gives a sufficient sense of belonging, whilst living in liminality. Throughout the conversations with my inquiry group, every now and then the metaphor of shallow-rooted belonging, inspired by the plant in my Croatian garden, came to my mind as a metaphor for an alternative form of belonging that may be experienced by globally mobile people.

#### **7.7.4 Response – shallow-rooted belonging, a response to living conditions**

As result of this inquiry, I offer the metaphor of shallow-rooted belonging to name a specific form of belonging that I noticed in the stories of global leaders as well as in my own experiences. Living in a liminal space is typically seen as a period of transition or as a mid-point between a starting point and an ending point and as such is a temporary state that ends when the newcomer is reincorporated into the social structure. According to the anthropologist Turner (2008) human beings in that state of liminality are in-between the social structure, having temporarily fallen through the cracks of society and, in those gaps in the social structure, they are the most aware of themselves. This liminal space is also a space 'in-between' the past and the future with temporary and emergent qualities. From a psychological perspective the liminal space could be seen to be disabling and dysfunctional and, at the same time, it can be viewed as a source of possibility or as Miller (2004) states: *"The liminal is the territory not only where both death and birth coexist but it becomes an archetypal place of pure possibility that is the potential source of all sorts of original and new ideas. A space that can simultaneously hold opposites as polarized as death and birth where neither one nor the other prevails can, indeed, be the space of pure possibility."* (p. 105).

Hearing the stories of how global professionals have consciously or unconsciously developed practices to live functionally in that liminal space, I take the stance that living in this liminal space has the possibility to be generative and functional. In order to live functionally in that space, global leaders have learned, perhaps unconsciously, how to develop a sense of belonging that is possible in that liminal space and that form of belonging seems to have qualities of shallow-rooted belonging. Thomassen (2014) argued that we need to feel at home somewhere in the world and that the response to this permanent liminality calls for a need to establish home somewhere in the world. I propose that some globally mobile individuals have learned to form a response to this tension by developing an alternative form of belonging, which I call shallow-rooted belonging.

Shallow-rooted belonging is an organic metaphor to describe a form of belonging that nurtures a functional existence in the liminal social and psychological space. This form of

belonging is deep enough through sufficient attachments to the current locality, traditions and communities of people (local and international) to prevent globally mobile people from a feeling of isolation, loneliness and exclusion and yet it is shallow enough to enable movement, detachment and preservation of their own boundaries. Shallow-rooted belonging is broad but not deep, spread amongst multiple sources of belonging, including a safe anchor somewhere in the world. It has nurturing qualities that enable flourishing in this liminal space that globally mobile professionals who participated in this inquiry seem to occupy.

I make no claims that shallow-rooted belonging is a new phenomenon. I believe that this phenomenon existed well before I came into this world. I only offer this as a metaphor to name a very specific form of belonging that I noticed throughout this inquiry and I offer an alternative perspective to the traditional perspective of deep-rooted belonging or not belonging at all. I do believe that this shallow-rooted metaphor of belonging has more prominence now than perhaps centuries ago due to the speed and distance of movement between different places in the world that globally mobile professionals experience. Within a flight distance away, they could be moving their shallow roots from one continent to another and the time for transition is significantly compressed. The shallow-rootedness is a survival response to adjust and thrive in a new locality, required by one's rapidly changing living conditions and in preparation for the possibility of another move after a relatively short time span.

## **7.8 Reflections**

In this chapter, I have highlighted the three main insights developed through my inquiry. The first insight suggests that globally mobile professionals who participated in this inquiry live permanently in liminality and that liminal space seems to be the space where they feel at home in their unique way. Secondly, home seems to hold a transient quality for globally mobile professionals who participated in this inquiry, where the homeworld is shaped by multiple factors. Living in liminality is the most frequent experience of globally mobile people who participated in this inquiry and therefore it is not surprising that the concept of home

evolved into a transient notion. The ongoing experience of movement, change, transition, creates conditions for a different form of home to emerge from the more traditional stable environment, and brings to challenge the traditional notion of home and belonging. The third insight is related to the acceptance that deep-rooted belonging is not theirs to have whilst living in liminality, which led global leaders to shape an alternative form of belonging that I named shallow-rooted belonging using an organic metaphor. I take the view that shallow-rooted belonging offers the possibility for an enabling, nourishing and functional existence in the liminality, a space that can be associated with having constraining and dysfunctional effects on individuals. Belonging still matters to globally mobile people and yet the conditions created by life choices and our postmodern global world do not nurture the traditional sense of belonging. By developing a number of practices and approaches to respond generatively to those living conditions and in order to live a functional life, a concept of shallow-rooted belonging emerged. Naming that experience and response to the living conditions has brought a great sense of relief to the participants in my inquiry. They felt relieved that at last someone had recognised their experience and that they were truly understood. Giving a name to this phenomenon had in some way legitimised the experience and created a sense of normality amongst the globally mobile participants in this inquiry.

I now turn my attention towards how insights gained through this inquiry have become, and are in the process of becoming, a part of my personal and professional practice.

## CHAPTER 8

### Implications for the practice:

Emerging implications for individuals,  
global organisations and OD practice



*“Because I have learned the relativity of cultural meanings  
on my own skin, I can never take any one set of meanings  
as final.”*

*Hoffman (1989, p. 275)*

Figure 25: Photo from the Office.com Clip Art, royalty free

## **8.1 Introduction**

To live in liminal space in a functional way, I am developing a set of personal practices that enable me to lead a healthy and fulfilling life. I describe here some of those practices that I have consciously developed for myself and which I hope will be useful to other globally mobile professionals. With my new understanding of liminality as the most frequent living condition for globally mobile people and recognising the response to this condition as a form of shallow-rooted belonging, I now step into my professional practice, the OD practice, and share the evolution of my practice in the organisational context. The evolution of my OD practice is still in the making and I provide not only an account of where I am currently but also where I hope to take my OD practice as a result of the inquiry. Finally, I offer some further thoughts on the policies and practices that global organisations may want to consider when shaping their global mobility perspectives.

## **8.2 Personal practice**

I have started to develop a number of practices that are enabling me to live my life in liminality in a functional way. Acceptance of the key discoveries in this inquiry has had a major impact on how I have started to approach my life whilst pursuing a globally mobile career. This acceptance became the key enabling condition for new personal practices to emerge that create the conditions for shallow-rooted belonging to nurture my daily existence.

### **8.2.1 Developing the practice of shallow-rooted belonging – transportable ‘home’ and transitional objects**

Over time I have accumulated various objects that remind me of either Croatia, where I was born, or places where I have lived or currently spend significant time. Those objects were placed in various boxes and are precious to me, although somewhat neglected or ignored and have never been paid full attention. At some subconscious level, it was comforting to know that those objects existed in close proximity to me. As this inquiry progressed, I started to pay

attention to my interests in crafts and noticed that I kept collecting those items which connected me with the places and people who made them and the places where I had lived. Shortly after relocating to Europe, I pulled out all my collected items and displayed them around a room. I held in my hands the Croatian national costume representing the region my family came from and I felt such a connection to my roots and my beloved uncle and aunt who had given me this costume which had belonged to them. I felt that I had those two lovely people back with me in my life and I enjoyed this connection to them. I was spreading and touching an incredibly beautiful hand-produced linen tablecloth that was made for me by a group of female relatives from the village my father came from – it took them three winters to create this tablecloth, from creating the linen cloth to decorating it with non-replicable embroidery. I felt their presence in the room, in my house, with an intensity never experienced before – I cried with joy at having them with me in a new country I was transitioning to. I looked at the Indian curtains created for me, too, ..... and the more I looked and touched those items, the more vivid the presence of those people and places became. I realised that I had been collecting those items for a reason – I wanted to take a bit of history and tradition, the experience of a specific culture and place with me. I wanted to take all of those multiple experiences and memories with me in order to recreate their presence in my current, and admittedly temporary, home so that I could create a feeling of safety, continuity and comfort. Some of my global leaders shared their stories of having a special ‘box’ in which to store all their precious items which could be easily moved from one location to the other. In one case, the box was literally on wheels – a Japanese design, purpose-built to enable the fast movement of precious items in the event of an earthquake. An interesting metaphor for global mobility.

This discovery has been significant for me as I realised that those items are not just some random items to be held in the box. I realised that those transitional objects have been deeply rooted in my practice to maintain some sense of belonging, even if not to just one place or culture or nation. Those objects have been helping me remain centred and anchored whilst moving geographies and physical homes. I am bringing a bit of those special places and anchor points, such as stones, sea shells, sea urchins, lavender from my Croatian garden, to name a few, into my house where I currently live. This creates a space that I would call home, regardless of the physical locality of the building. Having returned to London, I am starting to

deliberately place my special objects around the house so as to be able to feel the presence of those people, places and memories in my everyday encounters. It is a daily reminder of the multiplicity of experiences that inform my identity and an acknowledgement that small traces of my 'soul' have been left in those places or with those people.

On a smaller scale of daily experiences, I now always carry a few small items with me that remind me of my home, in particular when I am travelling and moving away from the place that serves as the current home. I carry with me some small items of Croatian jewellery and a small toy that my daughter packs into my suitcase. In return, I give her a small object to hold onto whilst I am away. This small ritual of our exchange of transitional objects fills us both with a reassuring sense of belonging.

I adopted this practice as my regular routine, because it helps me maintain a sense of shallow-rooted belonging.

### **8.2.2 Developing the practice of shallow-rooted belonging - rituals and rhythm of connecting with my anchors**

I noticed that there is a regular rhythm in my cycle of yearly life when the need to reconnect with my anchors is strong and, if this need is not met, it causes me frustration and unhappiness. There is a seasonal pattern to this and when I follow it, I feel at peace and have a strong sense of belonging to this world – a sufficient sense of belonging to my current locality which is re-energised through a connection with my anchor points.

Wintertime calls me to visit mountains and enjoy the stillness and silence of those magical places. My love for mountains grew in the last two years whilst living in Europe. My soul is nurtured in the presence of mountains and, when in those places, I absorb energy that sees me through the winter. Visiting mountains in the winter is becoming a regular rhythm for me and my family. During these visits, I spend some time alone and follow a little ritual I have developed – spending time walking and sitting in a sunny spot to soak up the sun whilst enjoying the stillness and silence. As I walk, I connect with the rocks that I encounter – holding,



hugging and touching rocks gives me energy and a sense of connection with the past and with the present and offers me optimism for the future.

Springtime is a time to go and visit our house in Croatia. Without exception, I spend time on my special point on the bridge as part of my arrival. I soak up the scenery, absorb the sun, the smell of the sea and spring Mediterranean plants. This is now part of my regular routine of arriving and departing. I work in my garden at that time of year, enjoying the physical contact with the local earth, plants and water. I track with curiosity the movement of the 'shallow rooted plant' and touch and welcome plants, or perhaps what locals would call weeds, that have located themselves in various crevices in the local rocky landscape. Those beautiful and resilient plants put a smile on my face and remind me of my own lifestyle.

Summertime calls for another visit to Croatia, however long or short the visit. I repeat the bridge ritual with no exception, and I have a need to soak up the energy from the sun and the Mediterranean Sea whilst inhaling the smell of dried local herbs and plants like lavender or 'kadulja' (Latin: *Salvia*). This is a time of reconnection with my local friends, relatives and the summer cultural festivals.

Autumn calls for a visit to Scotland and an engagement with the local sea, hills, mountains, mud and rain. I walk through the countryside and pause to enjoy those occasional moments when the sun peeks through the clouds or to welcome raindrops on my face whilst being surrounded by beautiful autumn colours and the sound of swooshing dry leaves under my feet. This is the time of a slowing down in anticipation of winter; reflecting, preserving energy and getting ready for the slow rising of expectation associated with the beginning of a new cycle.

Whilst I know I belong to many different places and perhaps to none deeply enough, this annual rhythm of reconnection with my anchors gives me a sufficient sense of belonging to my current locality and it gives me a sense of belonging to a bigger world that is being shaped on this planet Earth. The regularity of the rhythm of an annual life cycle provides me with some structure in my liminal space. I find that in these rituals and rhythmic moments I now

pay deliberate attention to my surroundings and experiences. These interactions provide me with a sense of purpose.

### **8.2.3 Developing the practice of functional living in liminality - working consciously with the transitioning process**

I started to pay deliberate attention to the process of transition, paying specific attention to the rites of separation, transitional rites and rites of incorporation, something I had ignored in the earlier stages of my inquiry. During my last move from Europe back to the UK which took place in July 2014, I made the deliberate choice to manage this process differently. Rather than avoiding the process of separation, I embraced it, and not only did I allow myself to work with it but I also supported my family and friends through it. I allowed emotions to work their way through the process and allowed myself to feel sad and hurt by having to sever some of my relationships once again. I did not just focus on logistics, packing, sorting contractual details – a convenient process that I (and global leaders in this inquiry) used to use in the past behind which I would hide myself and my emotions. This time I did not make it better for myself or my newly-acquired friends by making empty promises that we would remain friends forever, when we all knew that the chances of this happening were slim. We all acknowledged that we would hold our friendship loosely and see what emerged over time without setting any firm expectations that this had to happen. This felt so much more real and honest and a mature way of handling the inevitable separation.

I supported my daughter with the process of separation by organising a goodbye party at her school and showing understanding for the sadness she felt. I let her work through this emotional process of recognising that things would never be the same – either with her current friends or with her former friends that she was returning to. And my husband and I chose to approach the separation process in a very deliberate way which I describe in the extract from my journal below. We deliberately chose to drive, rather than fly, to allow ourselves to experience the physical and geographical process of separation and to give ourselves time to prepare psychologically for our arrival in the new place. Flying was an option

but we found that this would just fast-forward the process of separation and would not allow us to prepare for the transition.

*"Our last night in the house .... We came back from our walk during which we wanted to say goodbye to the local vineyards, hills, woodland, the spring, the old castle ruin, the BBQ site we used to have our picnics at ... We walk slowly, and in silence. It is not easy to speak when a lump is felt in the throat. Just one more walk to inhale deeply the fresh and sharp local air ... We stare at the horizon and stop. Need to soak up this scenery, need to remember, need to let this foreign land go that bit deeper under my skin. My feet are glued to this foreign soil. I feel powerless to move. I am letting the local scene get imprinted in my mind... I take a deep breath and stare for a bit longer. Reluctantly I move my feet and start moving .... I am taking a bit of this scenery and this foreign land with me ... some soil on my shoes, some memories stored in my body... it is hard, it is really hard to say goodbye; my husband and I look at each other, our eyes watery, and one of us says – we will be back at some point ... those words make us feel better but they also hurt ... it is the end of this episode in our lives... we are moving on ... we reluctantly start walking that bit faster, that bit more decisively now ... we need to ... tomorrow we are gone ....*

*I walk one more time around the house.... the empty house now ... as I walk from one room to the other, memories of events over the last two years fly through my head ... it has been a roller-coaster, it has not been easy but it has been worth it .... My husband follows me around and we do not talk. We need to say goodbye in our own ways to the place we called home for a couple of years.... Boxes are ready to go, the car is loaded ... we must move on...*

*We sit in the car and both feel teary, unable to talk, avoiding eye contact .... OK, shall we go? We reverse a bit to get a better look at the house and the garden – a place that provided us with shelter, security and comfort whilst establishing ourselves in this foreign land ... We take another long look and both say: Bye bye house. We may not see you again. The car starts to move slowly and I feel a strong physical reaction in my body, my shallow roots are now being pulled out and it hurts ... I feel the heaviness in my legs and yet the car is moving me forward, whilst my body is trying to stay behind ... We drive to the end of the road, house out of our sight. I take another glimpse of the hills and vineyards, and I wonder if there will be another chance to make an encounter ... the car is now going down the hill and the pain of detachment and separation is getting excruciating, staring ahead so I do not need to meet my husband's eyes and*

yet I know he is in pain too. We start talking about being back one day ... and starting to wonder how the place might change ... this conversation is comforting us both.... And as we drive past my daughter's school, now ex-school, another wave of tears fills my eyes ... trying to be brave, justifying our decision to go... we both feel torn apart through this process... but car keeps going ... and as we drive, one kilometre after the other passes, and the pain is weakening .... The feet feel lighter... the body is less tight ... if somewhat numb. As kilometres are passing by we start to talk again, recalling various moments of our life over the last two years and expressing disbelief that the two years have passed .... We laugh at some silly moments of confusion, misunderstanding and are reliving some of those lovely events when we discovered the delights of a new country and indeed surrounding countries ... we have learned so much about Europe, some small nuances that we absorbed through everyday living ... as we drive close to the wine route in xxx region, we fondly remember our first trip to this region and discovering the lovely food, traditions, wine and enjoying the scenery ... Our memory trail takes us to other ordinary and extraordinary moments that took place over the last couple of years .... We laugh at ourselves for occasionally being so naïve or being unable to understand .... And then we remind ourselves that it was not all that easy... it was hard, it was occasionally a painfully lonely life in a closed society .....

There are now many kilometres between us and the place we left behind .... The pain is easing off ... the detachment is at full force .... For a moment we forget all of this and decide to drive off the motorway in pursuit of the discovery of another unknown place ... we decide to have an early lunch there and for a moment we forget that we are on our way to another country and are getting further away from the lovely place we just left behind ... we pretend to be on holiday or on one of those unplanned little trips of discovery ... a glance at the clock brings us back to the reality ... we really have to move, we are not on holiday, we are on a serious mission ...

A part of the journey that follows brings us into a sombre mood; What are we driving towards? What have we left behind? We left a bit of ourselves, our hearts behind, some bits of our shallow roots have remained in that soil and will call us back ... the detachment has not been complete, some aspect of us has been left behind .... We left behind our struggles to live life as a family during the week, not just the weekend. It has been hard to achieve this due to our business travels .... We want to shift this when we get to London ... we want to be an even stronger unit ... we want to give our daughter more stability, our presence and some family routine .... We acknowledge that the life we left behind did not have much of a home time or a family time at home, our time together was mostly about visiting new places, trying new things, discovering

*new cultures .... And yet we felt that it might be nice to just have a home time – something our daughter reminded us of recently. I notice I had not baked a cake since we relocated... my husband notices he did not cook much – something he enjoyed before ... We did not have much time at all ... working and constant business travel got on the way ... and what was left for us to enjoy ... we invested in the discovery of the local land ....*

*We acknowledge that we both have developed a love for mountains, the countryside and open space. How can we create this for ourselves, whilst living in London?, we ask ourselves. Our exploring spirit has been nurtured and now we start to fear that we will return back to our old habits – too much routine perhaps and too many city dwelling grinds ... We start dreaming about creating a permanent home for us, in addition to Croatia, somewhere in Scotland ... a big part of the journey goes into dreaming about the future ... we are getting optimistic again, new possibilities are emerging .... We are looking forward to this new family life ... new life style ... creating a sense of home.*

*Only a few kilometres left to our final destination ... London's hustle and bustle starting to overwhelm us ... I catch a moment of desperation in my husband's eyes – what have we done? But we reassure each other and drive bravely towards our old/new home in London. We arrive with a new dream ... a reframed life which may not keep us too tightly attached to our London home ... we have a vision of living between 3 places, ..... A mixture of anxiety, apprehension and positive feeling around a new possibility streams through my body as I walk through the front door of our old/new home ... We have arrived at our next destination....*

*Next morning, I feel disoriented as I walk across London streets, it feels as if I am floating slightly above the ground ... it feels somewhat surreal ... a feeling of not being here but not being there either .... Somewhat lost in the space .... With no anchor to keep me in place.... Saturday morning, I had to go and spend some time walking around London and around the part of London where we now live .... I went for a run in the local park, starting to see the same faces as the day before and being greeted by some new acquaintances ... going back to my old hairdresser, the florist, the dry cleaner and being welcomed back .... the feeling of floating without an anchor is somewhat weakening, I am feeling the soil under my feet again, ... I am touching it... and the process of attaching my roots somewhat lightly is starting again ....”*

**Extracts from my electronic journal, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2014.**

Whilst I am aware that my roots in my current locality are going to remain shallow, I am working through establishing routines of day-to-day living, including regular yoga sessions in the local studio, regular meetings with parents from my daughter's school, buying bread from my local deli and the regularity of these activities is starting to make me feel sufficiently at home. I have supported my daughter to re-establish herself with her old/new friends and to create her own space in the house that she calls her home. I know that I will never be fully integrated but I now seek sufficient rather than full integration into local society. I am not aspiring to something that will never be mine and I feel at a newly-found peace with myself. I am cherishing the difference of the experiences and gifts I received in pursuing global mobility. I have a new understanding of the life I lead.

#### **8.2.4 Developing the practice of generative living in liminality – fostering creativity and open-mindedness**

I have learned to keep myself consciously in the 'in-between space' characterised by ambiguity, contradictions and tensions, sufficiently long enough to enable new ideas, sometimes creative ones, to emerge. As time progressed, I started to feel more and more confident to do this and have developed trust that progress will emerge.

Working in an environment where my daily encounters involve interacting with people from more than ten nationalities and cultures, I now deliberately practise holding myself in the space of liminality where I hold things tentatively and explore different perspectives that come from my culturally mixed colleagues. Living in liminality calls for the acceptance of multiple truths, an openness to new ideas and suspending one's own judgements sufficiently long enough. In my work, I try to understand my colleagues' multiple and diverse points of view to allow for different perspectives to be voiced, multiple truths to be explored, before drawing any conclusions or making any decisions. Although this approach sometimes takes longer, I repeatedly find that the quality of our/my work is so much higher when I allow for these perspectives to shape the final decisions.

During this inquiry, I have discovered that I needed to engage with creative activities – either with music or pottery or painting, in order to create a mental space for myself and come up with new ideas, identify patterns and approach life puzzles in a fresh way. Living in liminality in a healthy and generative way asks for creativity and receptivity to new ideas while allowing for uncertainty and chaos. My increasingly regular practice of engaging with creative activity helps me create the conditions for receptivity and openness to new ideas either at work or at home. To maintain focus and connectivity with myself and my purpose, I have been regularly working with music, writing and painting which helps me to sustain myself whilst experiencing ‘in-betweenness’ – a practice that I developed directly as a result of this inquiry.

### **8.3 Organisational development practice**

Over the past several months, I have started to consciously work on enhancing my OD practice by working with some of the insights gained through my inquiry. This is very much a work in progress and in its early stages but it provides me with some direction as to where I intend to take my practice next. I share here some of the initial work that I have started to shape when working with globally mobile professionals in the context of global organisations. As we have seen previously, living in liminality is a rather paradoxical state. On the one hand, that experience can be dysfunctional, and on the other hand it can be source of creative energy. In my professional practice, I choose to focus on the generative power of liminality and shallow-rooted belonging to draw attention to the gifts those experiences bring to individuals, teams and organisations.

#### **8.3.1 Implications for coaching and mentoring practice**

Recently a body of work has emerged that focuses on counselling globally mobile professionals (Madison, 2009; Bushong, 2013) and, in particular, Third Culture Kids (Bushong, 2013; Pascoe, 2006) to deal with the various difficulties that a life of global mobility presents to those individuals. I see potential for further coaching and mentoring support that can be offered to globally mobile professionals. What my inquiry highlights is the need for coaches

and mentors to be aware of the experiences, tensions and existential dilemmas that globally mobile professionals may be grappling with. As participants in this inquiry stated, they would need to feel understood by those who coach or mentor them before they would be willing to open up this topic of conversation. Sharing the same life experiences of global mobility creates this sense of 'being understood'. I would therefore urge professional coaches and mentors to recognise the importance of having had the experience of global mobility before engaging in coaching or mentoring relationships with globally mobile professionals.

In these coaching and mentoring relationships, there could be possibilities to support globally mobile professionals in identifying and working with the strengths and capabilities that they developed as a result of their career and life choices. In my inquiry, leaders' faces lit up when we started to explore the skills they had developed through choosing a globally mobile career. Exploring their experiences of managing and working with paradoxes, living constructively with marginality and 'in-betweenness' were moments in our conversations which resulted in an uplifting source of confidence, optimism and purpose. Enabling globally mobile individuals to recognise their strengths as a result of the multiplicity of their experiences seems to unleash generative power and creativity. I see this as an area where I want to develop my practice further and work out the application of coaching approaches to enable global leaders to work with their very valuable strengths for their own benefit as well as for the benefit of the organisations they work for.

In my mentoring relationships with several high-potential individuals who are in the early stages of their careers and have already relocated several times, I have started to draw their attention to the 'rites of passage' and the three sub-phases of this process, enabling them to explore their approaches to those experiences and functional practices that they are putting into place to develop their shallow-rooted belonging and flourish whilst living in liminality.

### **8.3.2 Implications for leadership development**

As we have seen at the beginning of this dissertation, global organisations will experience an ever increasing need for globally mobile talent with certain capabilities that global leaders will



need to have. Many global organisations have already invested in developing those capabilities through coaching, mentoring, leadership development programmes or rotational assignment approaches, to name but a few. However, global leaders in this inquiry have highlighted the need for creating safe spaces where leaders can explore and shape their own sense of belonging, perhaps in interaction with those peers who share similar life experiences. So far, struggles around home and belonging have been framed as a private affair and possibly regarded as an inevitable sacrifice demanded by the global leader role. And this may be a counterproductive view to adopt because it makes our leaders more isolated, disconnected, withdrawn and puts them in no position to lead.

Most leaders need some sense of home to keep their purpose, passion and courage alive and to remain connected to the people they are meant to serve, to themselves and to the environment around them. As Petriglieri (2010) states: *“To forego the possibility of feeling at home, or to make do with the surrogate of a dispersed cohort of fellow nomads is to give up the possibility of intimacy, of commitment, of trust. It is all that it takes to give up being human and become ‘human resources’. And once we do that to ourselves, it’s a short step to viewing everyone else as such.”* (p. 2)

As we have seen in this inquiry, the home does not always need to be a place; it can be a relationship or a space where one feels happy and fulfilled. Home is where many people feel secure, fulfilled, attached to our close ones – the place where we begin to be. I would therefore argue that global leaders need to learn to live in and between different homes that they can create for themselves, rather than learn to live away from home or do without one. They can learn to live in both – their local home, frequently named by participants in this study as their anchor, and their global home in their temporary locality. And leaders can learn how to create connections between the two, across the ‘in-between’ spaces surrounding their local and global home – the role of a leader in today’s global world. This asks for simultaneous physical and emotional presence, staying close to those nearby as well as those far away. I see this work of embracing the struggle to make a home that feels one’s own as an important area of leadership development work in today’s world of global mobility. And this is an area for my professional OD practice that I intend to shape further.

The globally mobile professionals in my inquiry have spoken of their mastery of the transitions and how this has served them well when needing to deal with paradoxes, uncertainty and change. Their life is filled with flux and ongoing change and acting in this space brings out the best in them. This is the world they know and understand. Their worldview is open, receptive to new ideas and cautious about making any premature judgements. I am currently developing a practice which I can take into global organisations to help them work with the untapped strength these globally mobile professionals hold in order to unleash that creative and generative power for the benefit of individuals and the wider organisation. From my experience of working with global organisations, that untapped potential still needs to be recognised and further brought to its full use – by individuals as well as by organisations.

I am only at the beginning of developing my professional practice in this space. I intend to explore how methods I used for myself and with some participants in my inquiry, such as the timeline, creative imagery, pottery, reflective writing, music, etc, can be worked with to create the right conditions for opening up a dialogue around global mobility, identity, liminality, shallow-rooted belonging and the generative power of those experiences; and to create the right conditions for engaging with the emotional territory within which these topics are located.

### **8.3.3 Creating a sense of ‘professional home’**

During a co-inquiry with my OD peers, we recognised the need to belong to a professional community and to create a ‘professional home’ for ourselves in order to have some sense of a base whilst performing our roles in a fragmented organisational context. This ‘professional home’ enabled us to feel understood by our peers, to engage in deep conversations around our sense of belonging at a personal and professional level and to provide support to each other whilst working in our roles away from our original home and social networks.

Over the last twelve months, I have taken this idea of a ‘professional home’ further into the organisation. I have created the conditions for 120 senior leaders, who are globally dispersed, to connect and form small action inquiry groups. Many of those leaders are currently placed in a country that is not their home country and most of them have experienced more than

two relocations. They reported that they felt isolated, lonely and disconnected from their peers. Many of them were grappling with establishing themselves in a new country and facing loneliness at work and at home where they needed to support their families with the transition and, in that process, they tended to forget themselves. These small inquiry groups have enabled those individuals to connect and to work on topics of their own interest, frequently associated with the paradoxes that they were grappling with and very occasionally tapping into the exploration of their sense of belonging – for that conversation to take place only a few groups felt close enough to take a dive into the topic. The popularity of this process proved to be immense and now, after a year of those inquiry groups taking place, the process has become self-sustaining and is managed by the participants themselves, a proof of their level of engagement and indeed of the value they have been getting from their interactions with their peers.

Feedback I received from the participants themselves was that this process not only helped them at a professional level but also created a sense of sufficient belonging to a community of peers, something that had been absent at a professional level but also at a personal level. I would argue that in global organisations where leaders are expected to be globally mobile and to undertake several postings in different markets to grow as global leaders, organisations need to pay attention to creating conditions for these people to connect with their peers around the world so that they can create a sufficient sense of belonging to that community.

As result of their participation in my inquiry, the six global leaders have proposed that we form an inquiry group to inquire jointly into the generative power of living in liminality and creating a sense of shallow-rooted belonging. At the time of writing this thesis, I am in the process of setting this group up and believe that this inquiry group is likely to shape the evolution of my OD practice in this area of interest.

## **8.4 Implications for global organisations**

### **8.4.1 Paying attention to ‘transition’ and the psychological and existential aspects of mobility**

It is a common practice in global organisations, like the one I work for, to pay a lot of attention to supporting mobile professionals and their families with the logistical aspects of relocation. From taking care of moving possessions to allocating a personalised relocation support, to helping with choosing a school or house or dealing with the local authorities. This has become a part of a very slick service and it is gratefully received by mobile professionals and their families. Organisations are also slick at resolving contractual issues and, indeed, providing cross-cultural awareness training and immersion in the local language.

This supportive and immensely valuable service typically stops around this point. Global leaders in my inquiry pointed out that, once the initial process of movement relocation and settling in has been completed, they are then left to get on with their new lives. Very shortly after the global leader’s arrival in a new country, organisations expect him or her to adapt quickly, assess the business situation on the ground and make a fast impact. After all, they have brought the global leader into that location because of the business need and that need is typically related to some sort of performance issue, be it underperformance or a significant opportunity for growth that needs to be taken advantage of rapidly. And, as one of my participants pointed out, global leaders cost organisations significantly more than the local leaders, therefore the expectation that they will bring speedy results is very high.

This is all happening whilst the family and the leader herself/himself are still adjusting to a new environment, mostly going through, psychologically and emotionally, the separation stage. As one leader said, it takes three months to work through the separation stage and then the next six months can be described as a pure liminal stage, with no attachment to a local environment and detachment from the previous location. It takes at least nine months to fully appreciate one’s arrival in a new location. This is the time of the greatest stress for the family and for the global leader who is pulled between the need to deliver to the expectations

associated with the new job and the transitional process that they and their family are living through. This is also the time when some members of the family might start to raise questions about their own identity and sense of belonging. Under all that pressure, I wonder if our global leaders can perform to their best, regardless of how capable and strong they are as individuals. As presented in Chapter 3, research shows that there is a correlation between belongingness and performance (Walton and Cohen, 2007; Walton et al. 2012). I would therefore argue that this supports the case for why global organisations should not ignore the topic of belonging in their thinking related to the global mobility. I would go further with this argument and advocate that corporate leadership development programmes might need to incorporate the theme of belonging, living in liminality and developing functional approaches to adapting to those unique living conditions.

I believe that this is a missed opportunity in organisations to extend their support to their employees and their families, beyond the logistical and transactional support. It seems to be a taboo to discuss those difficulties associated with 'transitions' in organisational life. Organisations do not seem to enter this space, leaders do not seem to be courageous enough to open the dialogue around this in their fear of showing their vulnerability or weakness. There is insufficient dialogue taking place in organisations around what it really takes to experience and deal functionally with the separation, liminality, and reintegration not only for people who are moving to another country but also for those people who are staying behind.

I see this as an opportunity where my inquiry work can make a difference and open up a new dialogue in organisations. I intend to start that dialogue with a small inquiry group involving the global leaders who participated in this inquiry and develop with them an approach to influence wider organisational policies.

#### **8.4.2 Recognising core strengths of globally mobile professionals**

In our current world of increased competition and rapid changes in market conditions, leaders in organisations tend to hold and work with many paradoxes. For organisations to remain

successful, they need to continually innovate and be creative in how they work. Global organisations may have an uncovered strength amongst their employees already and they may consider engaging in an appreciative inquiry to uncover stories where globally mobile leaders have successfully generated breakthrough approaches to their business that were enabled through their core strengths of being able to live functionally in the liminal space. This may enable organisation to discover new possibilities for the future, embracing change and transition as part of daily experience.

Globally mobile professionals participating in this inquiry have also developed, some consciously and some unconsciously, an ability to respond to living in liminality by creating a sense of shallow-rooted belonging. This enables them to live healthily in those fluid, and at times, very demanding living conditions and provides them with a sense of security, safety and nourishment whilst they perform significant roles in organisations. The ability to develop a sense of shallow-rooted belonging evolves from personal experiences, not always positive ones. It may be helpful for organisations to coach and support globally mobile professionals who are on the early stages of the mobility path to deal with the existential and psychological aspects associated with the sense of belonging that they are likely to face.

### **8.4.3 Developing a range of policies and approaches to global mobility**

As a result of this inquiry, my husband and I have concluded that we want to provide our daughter with a safe base and enable her to form her sense of belonging during her formative years, especially as she is now approaching the teenage years. I have therefore turned down an exciting career opportunity and instead decided to relocate back to the UK and to London which my daughter considers to be her home. My employer and I have agreed that I would carry on performing the global role that I had before that decision and that the role would just be performed from a different location. The role would require me to undertake regular international commuting as a result of this arrangement. This mutually workable arrangement was seen by the organisation as a tailored talent strategy. However, my long-term career opportunities within this organisation would be limited due to the restricted mobility on my part.

Traditionally, it has been men who were being offered international assignments and their partners and children would travel with them. This social pattern is changing and increasingly women are given international assignments which seems to generate requests for more flexibility from employers. More and more, both partners want to work and this creates tensions around relocation and requests for international commuting or remote working are on increase. Organisations will need to become flexible around their expectations of unlimited mobility as part of career progression prerequisite. With the growth in virtual working due to technology, the international commuting option and a restricted pool of talent, organisations may need to reconsider their philosophy towards mobility and linking mobility to career progression.

## **8.5 Reflections**

Insights gained through my inquiry have enabled me to develop new practices that are impacting positively upon not only the quality of my personal life but also my professional practice. I am starting to develop my personal practice of shallow-rooted belonging and living in liminality in order to live a healthy and fulfilling life whilst pursuing a globally mobile career. I am also evolving my professional practice based on what I have discovered through this work. Having mapped out the territory of my interest and passion, I feel that my work has just started and a lifelong inquiry has just been shaped. I look towards the future with great optimism and an excitement associated with the possibility of both carrying on with the inquiry and continuing to develop my OD practice in order to make a difference to globally mobile individuals and their organisations.

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## CHAPTER 9

### Closing reflections:

The start of a life-long inquiry



*“The future is not some place we are going, but one we are creating.  
The paths are not found, but made, and the activity of making  
them changes both the maker and the destination.”*

John Schaar

Figure 26: Shallow-rooted and ‘mobile’ plant  
found in my Croatian garden,  
photo taken by myself, August 2014

## **9.1 Introduction**

In this final chapter, I reflect on the overall doctoral journey and the learning gained on the way. I start by reflecting on what I discovered for myself and about myself and then go on to reflect on the key discoveries made about the tension between displacement and belonging as experienced by my colleagues – globally mobile professionals. I acknowledge the key insights gained through this inquiry that have started to inform my professional practice in the OD field. I also reflect on the learning process that enabled me to arrive at these discoveries and finally offer my current thoughts as to where I plan to take my inquiry next. I close this chapter with some views on the contribution that I believe this inquiry will offer to the academy and to OD practice.

## **9.2 Living generatively in liminality and nurturing my shallow-rooted belonging**

In this study, I have travelled full-circle and found myself enriched by a much deeper understanding of the tension that has preoccupied my life for a long time. I have learned to accept that this tension is an integral part of global mobility and yet is not a simple issue that can be ignored.

What is the significance of this inquiry for me personally? I find myself at a newly-discovered peace, knowing that the tension between deliberate displacement and the desire to belong will stay with me for the rest of my life. It will not disappear and yet I now understand it. I understand when too much displacement is causing me pain and recognise the moments when returning to the ‘home base’ – those anchors around the word that nurture my soul – is necessary for me to flourish and maintain a sense of purpose by providing me with a secure base. I have learned to be patient with the process of transition and to let it take its natural course, giving myself and others around me time to go through its stages. I have learned to appreciate that my daily sense of belonging stems from a space, the liminal space of ‘in-between’, rather than a place and a physical location. And it stems from the temporary

relationships with people around me, particularly those people who share my experiences of global mobility. Acknowledging that deep-rooted belonging will never be mine to have enabled me to accept my reality and appreciate the gifts of shallow-rooted belonging as an alternative form of belonging. I have learned to create a 'home' in my temporary locations by bringing with me the memories, feelings and cultural influences that my globally mobile life offered to me. These often take the form of various objects, scents and memorabilia. And I have learned to pay attention to those moments when it is time to move on and displace myself again in the pursuit of discovery, learning and testing myself in the unknown.

London is a home for my daughter and I am committed to maintaining this for her as a secure base for her own sense of belonging. My husband belongs to this country even if somewhat less strongly to London itself. And as for me - I am now living the life of an 'international commuter' and am curious to learn if this form of employment and lifestyle may just be a 'golden middle', providing me with a sufficient amount of displacement and a sufficient amount of belonging, whilst having a secure base in London.

### **9.3 Belonging is important and different forms of belonging co-exist**

Because of the travelling demanded by our careers we become strangers in our home lands and we evolve as 'hybrid human beings' who belong far more to the liminal, 'in-between' space than to any specific country. On the surface, the reason for choosing this globally mobile life may be seen as a simple career advancement motive but, as we have heard from the stories in this inquiry, the motivation for choosing this path is a much more existential one. Choosing to move away from the stable environments offered by the safety of the original home in the search for freedom, diversity and the discovery of the unknown, seems to be a strong inner force leading some of us to pursue a globally mobile lifestyle.

The pull to displace oneself deliberately is a strong one and comes not without a price. One price that we pay is that we end up losing our sense of belonging, this very loss creeping up silently into our lives without our noticing. We are too busy with delivering on business

objectives and the expectations of others at work, at home and within the wider network of friends and family. We are busy moving and sorting logistics, excited by the possibility of a new discovery. And in all of that we forget ourselves until the moment of darkness descends when we take a deeper look at what really matters.

A sense of belonging matters and it matters to globally mobile professionals, too. Having an anchor and knowing where in this global world we may feel at home and having a home as a solid base provides some of us with the energy that renews and nurtures our souls. And yet, we can accept that the sense of belonging amongst globally mobile professionals may have a quality that is unique and experienced in an alternative form when compared with the more traditional deep-rooted belonging.

In this thesis I offer an alternative metaphor – a shallow-rooted belonging – to give a name to this alternative experience, referring to a more temporary, fluid and wide, rather than deep, form of belonging to a current locality and community. Shallow-rooted belonging is located in liminal space, the ‘space in-between’ rather than a place, and within a community of people who share the same experience of belonging to the space ‘in-between’. Some of us develop our personal practice of nurturing shallow-rooted belonging, be it through carrying our treasured possessions in a ‘memory box’ to help us feel at home in the next location or by keeping our treasured possessions in a place we call home, a place located somewhere in the world that we keep returning to regularly to recapture our energy and sense of purpose. But a sense of home, however loosely defined, seems to be an important source of purpose and energy whilst maintaining a globally mobile life and career.

## **9.4 Opportunities to enhance OD practice**

My attention now goes to influencing global organisations to rethink their policies around global mobility and, more importantly, to reconsider their approach to supporting individual leaders and their families through transitions and re-establishing their roots in a new location. The aim of this act will be to highlight the need to pay attention to psychological health,

existential dilemmas and the need to flourish whilst living in liminality. As an OD practitioner and a developer, I am starting to craft methods and approaches to enable global leaders to create spaces to reconnect with their identity, purpose and sense of belonging whilst pursuing globally mobile careers and to create a secure base from which they can lead others through transitions. Acknowledging and working with the gifts associated with shallow-rootedness and belonging to the 'in-between' space may provide global leaders with the energy to work with their strengths and with their experience of seeing the world in a unique way.

## **9.5 An enabling learning process**

In this doctoral journey, I have discovered that certain learning processes enable me to learn, develop and grow. Working with those learning processes, I was able to shape this inquiry in a way I had never imagined at the beginning of this journey. I discovered that I need to engage regularly with creative activity to allow myself space to experience the world around me, not just through my 'head' but also through my senses, feelings, sense of smell, touch and my whole body. I have also discovered that regular connection with the 'natural world' in the form of plants, mountains, rocks, water, earth, sea and sun help me feel grounded in this world. Writing, in the form of journaling or simply free-flow writing, has become another method of learning for me and something that surprised me greatly as I experienced real inhibitions with writing evocatively and poetically at the beginning of this journey. I have also learned that co-inquiring with my peers and global leaders has broadened my horizons and enabled a much richer learning outcome. Finally, it is essential to mention that being a part of the peer study group in this doctoral journey was the 'blood line' to my learning. My peers Abi, Sue and Chris, together with our supervisor Robin, have contributed to my learning in so many ways that a new doctorate study could be completed on that theme alone. In fact, my peers and I have just submitted our paper to be accepted at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Developments in Doctoral Education and Training to share our discoveries as a result of working together as a study group – something we paid attention to and co-inquired into as we went along with our individual inquiries.

I am looking forward to continuing my learning journey and have already marked pottery places and courses that I am going to join shortly after the completion of this thesis. Reflective writing has already become a habit for me which I intend to maintain. I intend to continue working through my rituals and routines of deliberately engaging with the natural world, especially in those special places that act as my anchors. The newly-formed co-inquiry group with the global leaders mentioned earlier is likely to produce some new insights for the continuation of this inquiry not only at a professional level but also at a personal level.

## 9.6 Contribution to the academy and OD practice

I believe that I make the following contributions to the academy and to OD practice:

1. **The phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging** as an alternative form of belonging – I see this as my contribution to the theory of sufficient belonging.

I defined shallow-rooted belonging as a form of belonging that nurtures a functional existence in the liminal social and psychological space. I upheld the view that this alternative form of belonging might have emerged as a response to the living conditions of globally mobile people which closely resemble the notion of living in liminality.

2. **An integrative and multi-layered approach** to the action research that enabled a rich understanding of the inquiry territory.

I continually worked on creating and maintaining open communicative spaces, be it in the first person inquiry or in conversations with global leaders or in the co-inquiry, and that enabled me to connect all the different layers of the inquiry and to generate a rich understanding of the phenomenon of shallow-rootedness. I offer to other researchers my approach to creating conditions conducive to opening communicative spaces, including the approach I took in recruiting participants to my inquiry, developing trusting and open relationships and holding an inquiry lightly to enable shared ownership of the inquiry.

3. **The practice of shallow-rooted belonging** to nurture a functional and generative existence in liminality, as illustrated in this thesis in the areas of Coaching, Leadership Development, and various HR policies and practices of handling global mobility.
  
4. **A vision for the contemporary OD practice.** I would argue that the delicate act of working in this space where life-world and system worlds intersect is the 'real OD' work in contemporary organisations. This work involves creating spaces for dialogue and conditions which enable silenced topics to be explored in the public sphere. It also involves engaging organisational players to recognise the value of connecting the isolated parts, bridging the cracks of organisational world in order to become the seamless whole. And this work also includes bridging the two paradigms, humanistic, postmodern view of organisations with the modernist business cultures that dominate corporate world. I elaborate on this in CODA.

Academically, developing an understanding of the phenomenon of shallow-rooted belonging based on the lived experiences of people for whom deep-rooted belonging is not an option, could open up a new field for exploration and an alternative to the traditional perspective of belonging. In addition, this thesis brings to visibility the nature of the daily existence of globally mobile professionals which can best be described as living in liminality, that transient stage between the new and old, home and alien.

Developing the practice of living in liminality and the practice of shallow-rooted belonging could be of potential interest and relevance to:

- 'Mobile' individuals grappling with the tension between belonging and displacement or those considering embarking on the 'mobile living' path in their lives.
  
- OD and HR practitioners as well as leaders in organisations who are creating environments that potentially contribute to the feelings of loneliness, fragmentation and not belonging through their increased demands to move a skilled workforce around the globe rapidly.

- Sociology, psychology and community researchers and professionals who work with 'uprooted' or 'globally' and 'locally' mobile people.

And finally, I hope that those who have a deeply-rooted sense of belonging may find my work of interest in their endeavour to understand those who perhaps do not feel they belong in the same way.

I close this thesis with some thoughts on further inquiry that may be of interest to others to pursue. In my inquiry, I have included a very small group of globally mobile professionals who are at a prime stage of their careers and lives. It would be interesting to undertake an inquiry across different generations and different stages in careers to discover whether grappling with the tensions between belonging and displacement is more pronounced at a particular stage in life and what learning would be shared by different generations in terms of adaptive mechanisms for dealing with the tension. My inquiry gave some indication that life crises and the aging process brought to visibility that tension for my participants, which they then tried to work through. As this inquiry has been conducted with a small group of participants and located in a specific context, the intention was to look at 'particular' rather than 'universal' phenomena. It could well be that shallow-rooted belonging may be a very specific response to living in liminality by this group of people. Further inquiry into the meaning and experience of shallow-rooted belonging and living in liminality as experienced by other globally mobile professionals may shed light on these phenomena and help us discover a potential for their universal applicability.

## **9.7 A life-long inquiry**

As I write my final sentence in this thesis, my eyes flood with tears .... a joyful sense of purpose fills my heart .... I realise that I have shaped my path to pursue ...



# **CODA**

## **My perspective on the role of OD in contemporary organisations**

## Introduction

This final part of my thesis represents my response to the requirement generated at the final viva to reflect on the overall thesis and offer my thoughts on the disappearance of emotional and relational experience in the discourse of global organisations. The suggestion was made that this reflective work may help me to acknowledge the OD practice that I have discovered for myself and enable me to offer my vision for OD practice in contemporary organisations.

Having engaged with this requirement, I consider this work to be the fifth cycle in my inquiry even if it is somewhat short in nature. I started the inquiry process by considering the nature of contemporary organisations and concluded that contemporary organisations are still predominantly informed by modernist assumptions. In addition, I noted that contemporary organisations are rational and masculine in their nature, with significant power over their employees. This is further exaggerated in the context of global organisations which seem to operate within a somewhat different configuration from domestic organisations – they are neither controlled by nor do they have much allegiance from a nation state. This seems to give them a significant amount of power and control over their employees, many of whom have been uprooted from their countries of origin, as evidenced in the stories of globally mobile professionals.

I reflected upon the difference between the organisational theory that seems to dominate North American and European thinking and how the difference in those fundamental assumptions impacts upon the positioning and purpose of the OD role. The OD role may fundamentally differ from being solely in the service of the management and unitary (North American) position to being in the service of the pluralistic (European) position and interests of wider groups in organisations, not just small minority groups of managers and leaders who have the most power.

Within this context of contemporary organisations, I have developed my personal view of the OD role I perform which I described as a connecting, translating and bridging role. I notice the

evolution of my view on the role I perform over the course of my doctoral research. By acting as both a researcher and an internal OD practitioner, I have been able to open up further 'communicative space' and have developed my practice as a 'tempered radical' OD practitioner and researcher whose practice is centred on opening up an otherwise silenced space. I conclude this section with an offer of my vision for contemporary OD, based on my personal practice, to other OD practitioners to engage with further.

## **Contemporary organisations are modernist and masculine by their nature**

In this section I argue that contemporary organisations are still predominantly modernist and masculine by their nature. Examining the topic of global mobility and belonging had led me to notice that contemporary organisations and those in leading positions in such organisations are still informed by modernist principles and beliefs. The assumption that the global perspective can be translated into any culture, predominantly informed by Western modernist traditions implying clear lines of authority and order that are based on logic and reason, seems to be still firmly established in global organisations. As a global OD practitioner, I experience this prevailing assumption in organisational life on a daily basis. For example, my work requires me to continually navigate the boundaries and tensions between the worlds of:

- Local organisations – the organisational life that takes place in local countries;
- Regional organisations – the organisational life that takes place within structures set up to encompass a particular region of the world; mostly created through setting up some artificial boundaries to meet the need for control by the management;
- Global organisations – the organisational life that seems to be all-encompassing and spreads across the globe. In reality, this is the headquarters world that is exercising its modernist muscle and putting into practice the assumption that the global perspective, with some order, rationality and logic, can be translated into any culture. The most senior leaders and executives typically occupy roles in headquarters and hold most of the power in the organisation.

Global organisations are set up in a way that enables control and dominance of power by executives who are located typically in headquarters and geographically far away from the daily life of the majority of their employees, customers and markets. I noted that in this organisational world, I seem to navigate between those organisational structures and frequently my work requires me to create the space for voices to be heard and connections to be made between those three different organisational worlds to enable the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts. I write about this practice below while here I draw attention to the modernist organisational context within which my work is located.

A key ontological premise of modernism is that the natural and social worlds are ordered and that the social world can be conducted in a rational and structured manner that is not dominated by emotion. I noted this premise in practice whilst conducting my inquiry into global mobility and the sense of belonging. Global organisations, as part of the global capitalist system, increasingly seek to move people to different geographical locations, frequently at short notice, to meet the pressures of cost, global and local competition and the requirement for natural resources. Employees are typically enticed into the 'globally mobile pool of professionals' under the banner of personal and professional development and the opportunity to progress their careers. This 'employment deal' seems to be assumed in global organisations, so much so that it is frequently not even discussed during the selection process. There is an underlying assumption that employees with career ambitions will accept the global mobility deal without questioning or even needing to understand the implications of the deal at the point of accepting the job offer.

As we have seen in this inquiry, employees feel that they could not publicly discuss or challenge this assumption for fear of the negative consequences for their careers and the livelihoods of their families. They also do not dare to show to the organisation the real feelings and the psychological and existential struggles that they and their families experience as a consequence of their frequent relocations. They do not want to be labelled as weak, emotional, unable to cope or disloyal to the organisation. They are concerned about being isolated by the organisational system which has the tendency to turn an organisational and political issue into the personal issue of an individual. Consequently, those conversations take

place in the private sphere, amongst trusted friends, colleagues and within family, outside the work environment.

This idealised expectation in organisational life that talented employees (most of whom happen to be male professionals) should unquestionably embrace global mobility in the service of their careers could be viewed as a very masculine perspective on worklife in organisations. A willingness to be globally mobile, as a ticket to career progression, is therefore seen as a desirable attitude and an indication of one's seriousness in pursuing a 'real career'. Those who might be reluctant to pursue that 'masculine' career path and who give importance to their need for deep belonging or other existential needs may be perceived as uncommitted, unambitious or less of a talent by global organisations. Their careers may be seen as less promising, not 'real' careers and those individuals are given less valued work and limited opportunities in global organisations. The career choice not to pursue a globally mobile career is typically associated with femininity and is less valued in the global context. I put forward a view that the whole issue of global mobility is gendered and a silenced issue in global organisations Fletcher (1998). Fletcher (1998, 1999), argues that the common sense definition of work in organisational discourse is an active, even if somewhat unobtrusive, exercise of power that silences and suppresses alternative definitions of work, that might challenge the traditional view. In her research, Fletcher (1998) gives *"voice to an under theorised aspect of the nature of work by making visible, giving language to, and building theory about relational activity as practice in organizations....., explores the gender power dynamic of the silencing process itself."* (p. 164). In her work, Fletcher (1998) points out that the current definition of work in organisational discourse is socially constructed and based on the premise of a gendered dichotomy between the public and private spheres of life. In the public work sphere, the dominant actor is assumed to be male and in the private family sphere the dominant actor is assumed to be a female. Based on that dichotomy, the author points out that *"the notion of growth, effectiveness, and an ideal worker in the public work sphere is conflated with idealized masculinity and where, in the private sphere, these same notions are conflated with idealized femininity."* (p. 166). Fletcher goes on further to highlight that *"deeply interior power of a silencing process in which aspects of work that can be textually represented as congruent with idealized masculinity will be considered real work and those that are associated with idealized femininity will not."* (p. 166).

Giving a voice to this issue and opening a conversation about global mobility as a prerequisite for career progression could *“momentarily disrupt the gender-power dynamic inherent in the current definition of work in organisational discourse”* (Fletcher, 1998, p. 166). I would add that this could also disrupt the gender-power dynamic in the current definition of the ‘real career’ in the discourse of global organisations. The dominant organisational discourse and rhetoric focus on valuing diversity of talent and giving employees choices around their careers. However, the reality shows that some career paths are more valued than others and consequently those who declare themselves to be mobile without restrictions are promoted and given greater attention by the organisation. These employees are seen as a real talent. The non-globally mobile are seen as less of a talent and are “disappeared” into the nondescript mass of employees who frequently perform critical tasks that make the ‘real talent’ look good in the eyes of those who hold the positional power and make decisions on promotions. Statistics show that though the number of international assignments taken up by women is on the increase, nonetheless, globally mobile careers are still predominantly followed by men. Recent research conducted by ~~the~~ PWC consultants Dunlea and Sojo (2015) shows that seven out of ten female employees want to work outside their home country, yet only one in four expatriates is female. The research also shows that nearly half of females on assignment are single, whereas seventy percent (70%) of male assignees are married. This research highlights the issue of gender bias in the world of global mobility. The authors of this study argue that *“Assumptions around the availability and willingness of female employees to move overseas can result in viable female candidates being overlooked before the selection process has even begun..... This use of male-centric language and the attitude of ‘just knowing’ when a candidate is appropriate for an international opportunity is a concern, as it is indicative of bias whereby good management characteristics are equated with male managers. Whilst there has been a positive shift at a domestic level in addressing this type of bias, it may be that these assumptions remain embedded to a much greater extent when male and female employees are being considered for international opportunities.”* (Dunlea and Sojo, 2015, p. 5). Authors of this study have also uncovered that many organisations, consciously or unconsciously, still adhere to the traditional view that expatriates are male with homemaker wives, with the critical role of family integration into the host country life typically left to the non-working spouse. The issue of global mobility simply perpetuates the wider gender issue in organisations and societies and this matter deserves to be brought into the public sphere

as yet another obstacle in the path of diverse talent's attempts to gain equal opportunities in organisational contexts.

HR departments tend to develop a wide range of 'rational' policies and processes to move employees around the world in the service of their development and, most importantly, in the service of the corporate need for a specific resource in a particular location. HR function is unwilling to deal with some of the deeper issues outlined above and in previous sections of this thesis. When HR, as well as business, do deal with those existential and psychological issues associated with the sense of belonging and mobility as a result of an individual's request, it is typically dealt with in such a way that the issue becomes a personal issue for this individual; it is the individual who is the problem rather than the system and its core assumptions. And even when solutions are found, the individual is typically made to feel that the organisation is being very accommodating of their needs and that the individual should be grateful for the support provided. The public narrative portrays the organisation as supportive and sympathetic towards the needs of the individual and the individual's side of the narrative is typically silenced and "disappeared". This seem to be congruent with what Fletcher (1998) observed in organisations and described as a 'disappearing' processes. Her findings suggest that *"behaviours such as relational practice are not merely overlooked in organizations, they are systematically disappeared through a process in which they are coded as private sphere (i.e. feminine) activities that stand outside the definition of work and competence."* (p. 181). Expressing a desire to give priority to a family stability, a sense of belonging and rootedness may well be systematically "disappeared" through the process in which this is coded as private sphere motivation and could be seen as being outside the definition of commitment to the 'real' career in global organisations.

Saying 'no' to a globally mobile career puts an individual off the 'fast track' career and individuals are made to feel that they do not fit into the norm any longer. Saying 'no' to this career is not even an option for some people who have left their economically less developed countries, sold their homes and moved their families and partners who have frequently given up their careers because of this move. Adopting a rather critical perspective, one can view those people as an 'oppressed group' totally subservient to corporate needs and wishes. Due to the fear of consequences, the discourse around the impact of global mobility and an

individual's sense of belonging, well-being and identity is typically silenced in organisational public life by employees themselves.

The exploration of the modernist nature of contemporary global organisations and the nature of global mobility have led me to notice the gendered nature of those organisations. They seem to be gendered in the way 'real careers' and the suitability for and commitment to those careers is defined by a very masculine language and by traditional perceptions of the role of the male and female in societies. They seem to be further gendered in the way real work and careers are defined, silencing alternative views that may be associated with femininity. As seen above, the work of Fletcher (1998, 1999) opens up a dialogue around the gendered nature of organisations, work and organisational theories which seem to implicitly privilege stereotypically masculine attributes and devalue stereotypically feminine ones. Some other authors have also examined the gendered nature of global organisations. For example, Hearn (2004) has argued that globalisation process and its impacts are largely gendered. He states that men have dominated political and corporate leadership globally, in exploration, adventuring, pioneering and collective destruction and warfare. Metcalfe and Rees (2010) identify international development agencies, transnational corporations, international non-governmental organisations and government state machineries as key stakeholders in the global and national regulation of employment and diversity issues. They stress the need for all of those actors to engage in human rights awareness and equality consciousness raising. Hearn (2004) highlights how female labour power in both the private and public sphere is less valued in societies. Men tend to hold power in the highest positions in the organisation hierarchies of international organisations such as the UN and the World Trade Organisation, whilst women are largely absent from those international organisations. Beneria (1999) argues that the organising logic of globalisation assumes the rational economic man principles, popularly called the 'Davos Man'. The 'Davos Man' reflects the fact that businessmen, bankers and intellectuals, who speak English and believe in individualism and market economics, seem to control many of the world's governments and the bulk of its military and economic capabilities. Tienari et al (2010) argues that global leadership in international and transnational organisations is masculinised. The authors stress that transnational corporations nurture and develop idealised forms of relations and practices that exemplify hegemonic masculinities. Barbosa and Cabral-Cardoso (2010) show that rhetorical



practices and significations prevail in global HR systems and practices. Similar to what I have noticed in the organisation I currently work for, those authors highlight that the rhetoric of a global commitment to valuing difference and inclusiveness is typically not realised. HR strategy measures do not seem to address the local social justice concerns and do not challenge prevailing social systems. Further reinforcement of the notion that contemporary organisations are masculine that I advocate in this section of my thesis can be identified in the work of Elias (2008) who found that 'transnational business masculinity' as a discursive ideal legitimates the workings of global capitalism significantly; state machineries and global organisations co-operate to embed dominant and symbolic masculinist configurations in the everyday communications of global business and managerial practices.

In this concise inquiry cycle, the examination of the nature of contemporary organisations has led me to conclude that they are still rational and masculine in their nature, with significant power over their employees, which is further accentuated in the global organisational context.

### **Global organisations as powerful entities**

My inquiry enabled me to note that global organisations in particular have significant power over their employees. In contrast to national organisations, global organisations have little allegiance to or control from nation states in local countries and they employ a heterogeneous mix of nationalities, which further reduces the power of employees. This is manifested particularly in the phenomenon of globally mobile professionals, a phenomenon I inquired into in this research. Globally mobile employees have been uprooted from their country of origin; have lost their sense of belonging to those roots; do not fit any more into national business traditions; and have become dependent on the wishes of their employers with little protection from the home state or the country they currently reside in, especially those who hold an international assignment employment contract.

I would propose that systems such as global corporations have been entering the private lifeworld which is being totally eroded by the system world. Globally mobile employees have

had their lifeworld heavily overtaken by the systems world, rules, expectations and rationality, something Habermas named as a colonisation of the lifeworld. “...colonization in the sense that the imperatives of the economic and political-legal systems dislodge the internal communicative action which underpins the formation and reproduction of lifeworlds, providing in its place an external framework of language, understandings, values and norms based on systems and their functions.” (Kemmis, 2006, p. 100). I would argue that those who have unquestionably embraced global mobility have allowed the system world to fully overtake their own lifeworld and to become the servants of corporate needs. It is only when a life crisis takes place that those individuals wake up and recognise the impact of this colonisation. They typically look to find a way out of the situation but, predominantly, this is handled within the private sphere and disturbance of the wider system is avoided for fear of the system’s rejection.

Having considered the nature of contemporary organisations, I then inquired into the role of OD discipline in the context of those organisations.

## **Fundamental assumptions that determine the role of OD**

I discovered that it is essential to pay attention to the underlying assumptions informing the organisational theory in operation within a contemporary organisation in order to understand the role OD is likely to play. OD as a discipline had historically emerged as a discipline critical of the mechanistic approach to the way people were dealt with in organisations, a perspective that was particularly prevalent in Europe and the UK. Over time, there has been a notable difference in focus within the OD discipline. It has long been argued that the underlying organisational theory is significantly different between North America and Europe (McAuley et al, 2007). Those differences are complex and evolving but nonetheless it seems that mainstream North American organisational theory remains largely attached to a managerialist orientation. Management oriented organisational theory is mostly concerned with identifying and implementing “*the most efficient means for instrumentally achieving given ends.*” (McAuley et al, 2007, p. 25). In contrast, organisational theory, especially in the

UK, has been developed around the critical tradition, inspired by German and French philosophers and postmodernist thinking. For example, critical theorists start from the premise that it is unethical to tie organisational theory to the interests of a small minority group in organisations (managers and leaders) who have the most power, and therefore the critical theorists consider this to be undemocratic.

During my twenty-years long career of practising OD, I have worked in organisations with both the UK tradition and the North American tradition of organisational theory, and have experienced the variance in approaches to OD practice based on the difference in the underlying theoretical premise. This difference was also reflected in the overall HR approach. In organisations with the North American tradition, there is a greater desire by the HR function to subsume OD into HR practice, with the aim of turning OD into a 'tool' that could be mechanistically deployed by HR in the service of achieving the corporate goal.

I noted that those different theoretical assumptions determine the type of OD that is practised in various organisational contexts. Understanding those two different traditions is the key for OD practitioners. I would urge OD practitioners to examine deeply the theoretical frames that underpin their own practice as well as assumptions and the underpinning organisational theory in use favoured by the HR department and the organisation they work for or consult to. Understanding the type of OD one practises and the context within which one practises a preferred type of OD will help OD practitioners to understand the role they play, formally and informally, in the organisational context in which they operate.

### **The role of OD in contemporary organisations – my personal view**

Within the context of contemporary global organisations, which I found to be modernist and masculine by their nature, I have developed my own personal view of the OD role I perform in that very context. That view has been further enhanced by a deepened understanding of the theoretical frames underpinning my practice. Having experienced the shift in my ontological perspective and developed the roots of my OD orientation within postmodern

organisational theory and dialogical OD practice (Marshak, 2010), I have identified my OD role to be one of translating, bridging and connecting.

Before I started the doctoral work, I upheld the view that my OD work was located in the 'in-between space' and that it required me to perform the role of bridging. However, the doctoral work and assuming the role of a researcher have helped me to crystallise my view on my role in contemporary organisations and to discover the essence of my OD practice which is to open communicative spaces.

In the course of my doctoral work, I have discovered that the work that I perform and my OD practice have specific quality. With an understanding that I practise OD from the postmodernist perspective in the context of the modernist HR and modernist business culture, I came to discover that the work I consider the 'real OD work' requires me to bridge the two paradigms (i.e. modernist and postmodernist) and work on humanising and democratising workplaces in a way that would push the boundaries and yet be accepted by the organisational system. This practice requires me to work within the cracks of organisational boundaries, opening communicative spaces and bringing lifeworld into the systems world. I want to borrow Kemmis (2006)'s words to summarise the essence of what I see to be the task of the contemporary OD that I practise: *"To explore and address the interconnections and tensions between systems and lifeworld aspects of a setting as they are lived out in practice."* (p. 101).

Conducting this action inquiry required me to work in those in-between spaces within the organisational world, on the edges between the private and public sphere, and to open what Habermas named communicative spaces (Kemmis, 2006). My role as a researcher, not just an internal OD practitioner, enabled me to create conditions for the silenced discourse to come into the public sphere, as described in earlier chapters. In this action research as well as in my OD practice, I have been focusing on creating conditions for the 'lifeworld' to enter the 'systems' world and consequentially blurring the boundaries between the two worlds to humanise the mechanistic life of contemporary organisations. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas considers the strengths and weaknesses of systems theory and theories of social action. He criticises both and arrives at *"a two level social theory which*

*explores the tensions and interconnections between system and lifeworld as two faces of the social world of modernity.”* (Kemmis, 2006, p. 97). Systems, such as organisations, operate through rational-purposive action which employs a form of reason that can be described as functional rationality. From the lifeworld perspective, modern society encompasses the dynamics by which social order, culture and individual identity are secured. The lifeworld could be seen more as a private world, emotional and emergent.

In my professional practice I frequently step into this space between the system and the lifeworld to open a discourse and enable the lifeworld to come into the systems world. This is not an easy territory to occupy as it is both emotionally and politically charged territory where opposing powers are at their full force. I have experienced the power of the tension in this in-between space on numerous occasions and wondered whether I would be rejected by the system. However, as seen in my earlier chapters of this thesis, this space is the space that is familiar to me and that I belong to, personally and professionally. I have learned through this inquiry that I care deeply about humanising the workplaces and organisations which seem still to be predominantly informed by rationality, modernist philosophy and a desire to control and manipulate ‘human resource’ to solely serve the purpose of economic and political gains. I also care deeply about equality and enabling the voices of suppressed and silenced groups in organisations to be heard. Caring about those issues places me on the edge and in the ‘in-between’ space of the organisational world where the lifeworld and systems world intersect. Only through careful balancing and ongoing judging of how far one can expand the boundaries am I able to influence and change the organisational system whilst remaining part of that system.

In order to sustain myself whilst working on the edges in the organisational context, I have adopted an approach to this work in the form of a tempered radicalism. Mayerson and Scully (2001) define tempered radicals as *“... individuals who identify themselves with and are committed to their organisations and also to a cause, community or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with, the dominant culture of their organisation. Their radicalism stimulates them to change the status quo. Their temperedness reflects the way they have been toughened by challenges, angered by what they see as injustices or ineffectiveness, and inclined to seek moderation in their interactions with*

*members closer to the centre of organisational values and orientations” ( p. 585).* However, I would describe my form of tempered radicalism as somewhat different perhaps from the more established view of it. My approach to tempered radicalism is more in the service of opening communicative spaces, allowing for a dialogue to take place and answers to be jointly found rather than pursuing a specific agenda and influencing the content of those answers. I found that adopting the role of an action researcher, combined with my role as an internal OD practitioner, gave me the power to open up space for a dialogue around topics that were otherwise silenced, as evidenced in my co-inquiry work with OD practitioners and global leaders. My form of radicalism is tempered by my being seen in the organisation I work for as a ‘trusted professional’, a ‘safe pair of hands’ and yet as someone who may be ‘radically honest’ and courageous to bring to visibility ‘the real topics that need to be discussed’ rather than someone who pushes for a single agenda. I work with the premise of respect for difference and endeavour to ensure that those involved in the dialogue who uphold opposing views feel equally valued and supported in voicing their perspectives. I tend to ensure that every party feels equally valued and not shamed for the views they advocate. I look to generate a movement towards identifying the common ground on which to establish the base from which the new co-created answer can be found. And this is my way of influencing change in the organisational context in which I work. I work from a position of earned trust to create conditions for dialogic OD to take place and co-created answers to be found in order to influence change around silenced topics and humanise the work place.

I propose that the role of OD professionals in contemporary organisations should be that of a bridge builder, a connector and a translator. To act into this role, OD professionals need to be clear on the OD theory underpinning their work and the thinking of their clients. They also need to be able to create conditions required for the dialogic OD to take place. I would say that this is a somewhat different role of OD, perhaps influenced neither by the singular (North American) perspective nor by the pluralistic (European) perspective. Rather, I would say that this OD practice is informed by the ‘open version of the OD theory’ focusing on opening communicative space between the organisational/system world and the personal/private world in the service of meaningful dialogue and the co-creation of shared answers, whilst not pursuing a singular personal agenda. I believe that the art and radicalism of this OD practice

is in the process adopted and the way of being as a practitioner, rather than in the influence of the content.

I have learned to look after myself whilst performing the role of a bridge builder/connector and spanning the divide between the postmodern, dialogical OD that I practise and the modernist context within the organisations I work with. Work associated with the role of a bridge builder and connector can be seen as relational practice in action, as defined by Fletcher (1999). To sustain myself in conducting this relational work, I have discovered that I need to be a part of a group of like-minded professionals, such as my Doctoral Study Group, to learn together and actively examine my practice and experiences. In our meetings, I was able to take time out from the corporate environment and reflect on my work, the context within which I work and inquire, together with my peers, into my practice. My peers' support, challenge and selfless guidance provided a space for me to ensure that I sustained myself – professionally, emotionally and intellectually – in this very often challenging role.

In addition, I have developed a support network at work comprising influential peers and senior sponsors to ensure that the system does not reject me too soon and limit my sphere of influence. I have mastered the art of 'creating sufficient protection' for myself from those who have excessive power, in order to act into my chosen professional role. Finally, I have developed the skill of crafting my performance objectives in such a way that they recognise the relational work I carry out and the connector role that I perform.

As a result of my doctoral work, I have formed a clear view of my OD role and OD practice developing from:

1. The stronger base from which I practise OD – I gained an understanding of my way of being in this world, best described by the term I introduced in this inquiry - shallow-rooted belonging.
2. The clear understanding of the organisational theory that underpins my work – which enables me to work with different perspectives and provides me with the confidence to pursue the 'open version of the OD theory' in order to open communicative spaces and facilitate meaningful dialogue.

3. The understanding of the power of the role of the action researcher which provides me with the authority, greater than my internal OD role alone, and the power to influence change in the organisational system with the ultimate goal of humanising the workplace.

### **Contribution to the OD profession**

In summary, I offer here my view on the contemporary role of OD and OD practice that I discovered for myself through this inquiry in the hope that this may be of interest to other OD practitioners.

I would argue that the delicate act of working in the space where the two worlds – systems world and lifeworld – intersect is the ‘real OD’ work in contemporary organisations. This work involves creating spaces for dialogue and conditions which enable silenced topics to be explored in the public sphere. It also involves engaging organisational players to recognise the value of connecting the isolated parts, bridging the cracks of the organisational world in order to become a seamless whole. And this work also includes bridging the two paradigms, the humanistic, postmodern view of organisations with the modernist business cultures that dominate the corporate world.



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# APPENDIX

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# Timeline : Pavica's Inquiry Journey (2010 – 2012) Poignant Moments

AMOC  
2010

ADOC  
2011

ADOC  
2012

MOMENT		
Reframing Bir's narrative		
Summer 2010		

MOMENT		
Asking		
Apr 2011		

MOMENT		
Searching for purpose		
Nov 2011		

MOMENT		
Layering, connecting - Clay		
Jan 2012		

MOMENT		
Layering, connecting - Point		
Jan 2012		

MOMENT		
Jumping into unknown		
May 2012		

MOMENT		
Noticing shallow rooted plant		
Summer 2012		

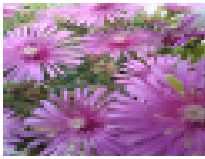

MOMENT		
Autoethnographic writing		
Sept 2012	 <p>ADOC 2010-2012</p> <p>What does it mean to be a writer?</p> <p>What does it mean to be a researcher?</p> <p>What does it mean to be a person?</p>	

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## Timeline : Pavica's Inquiry Journey (2013 – 2014) Poignant Moments

ADOC  
2013

ADOC  
2014

MOMENT	MOMENT	MOMENT	MOMENT	MOMENT	MOMENT	MOMENT	MOMENT	MOMENT	MOMENT
The 'white box' of despair	Seeing the space where my inquiry...	Dwelling on the bridge (Take 1)	Connecting with the halima rooted plant	Accepting the need to belong...	Staying with the phenomena...	Meditating whilst surrounded with the halima-rooted plants	Photographing weeds...	Relocation to London...	
Jan-May 2013	Apr 2013	Aug 2013		Apr 2013	Apr 2013		Summer 2014	Sept 2014	
				Assured Paper					

Co-Inquiry with Global OD professionals

Conversations with Global Leaders

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