Chapter 1
Introduction

Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?
Mawuna Remarque Koutonin, The Guardian, 13 March 2015

Story 1: Rashmi's dream was to become a doctor. On the day of her university entrance exam in Sri Lanka, the school was bombed and she had to run for her life. Although she later started university, she had to stop after 6 months because of the war. When one of her uncles obtained a British student visa for her, she migrated alone. Because she had nobody to support her economically, and because she wanted to send money to her family back in Sri Lanka, Rashmi started to work full-time in a travel agency, first as a cashier, then as a travel assistant and finally as a marketing assistant. After 8 years in England, she decided to continue her studies. She subsequently moved to Switzerland because she wanted to learn a new language and discover a new culture. She also knew someone in the country: a Swiss man of Sri Lankan origin whom she eventually married. After her arrival, she applied for asylum but her application was rejected. In the meantime, she started studying tourism, marketing and management. At the same time, she worked part-time in a restaurant until she received a scholarship. During this period, Rashmi volunteered for several projects about cross-cultural communication and integration. She also acted in two plays about migration. At the time of the interview, Rashmi had just finished her master's degree and was looking for a job in Switzerland.

Story 2: Franck grew up in the German-speaking part of Belgium. His father was the CEO of a big retail company, his mother a housewife. He studied economics and computer science in the Netherlands before starting a PhD in economics. Supported by one of his professors, he worked for a few years as a self-employed consultant for companies in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom before finding a job in Germany and later in France. He found commuting between France and Germany (where his wife was living) tiring and did not like his new job very much, so Franck started to look for other opportunities. After applying for various positions, he was offered a good job in the human resources department of a chemical company in Basel. Soon after starting his new job, the company offered Franck a role with more responsibilities, which involved managing an international team and spending 60% of his time travelling. Although he considered this project to be an unexpected opportunity to reach a senior-level management position quickly, his busy schedule and frequent travelling generated tensions within his marriage. The last time I talked to him, he had just resigned from the job for a position with a Dutch company, which had contacted him directly to offer him an attractive position.

These are the kind of stories that you hear when you start asking highly educated foreigners in Switzerland about their lives. You encounter all kinds of situations: from the unemployed trailing spouse to the successful entrepreneur; from the former student struggling to renew his residence permit to the hyper-mobile businessman; from the stateless man trying to live with the person he loves to the cross-border worker; from the undeclared woman living with friends to the newly naturalised Swiss citizen. These stories demonstrate the porosity of borders in our world: some people cross them so often that they do not notice them anymore, while others have difficulty moving from one Swiss canton to another. These stories show the importance of individual situations – a single encounter, discovery, or decision can play a crucial role in the migration process. These stories illustrate the complex relationship between individuals' goals and the social contexts in which they are embedded, which may be more or less supportive or beneficial.

Highly skilled migration has become a widely researched topic over the past two decades (Parsons, Rojon, Samanani, & Wettach, 2014; Shachar, 2006; Sontag, 2018b; Triadafilopoulos, 2013). Yet, few researchers have adopted a critical perspective to approach the category of "highly skilled migrants", despite the fact that it raises important issues regarding the subjective value of knowledge and the unequal distribution of power between social groups (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018a, 2018b; Sandoz, 2018). At a time when academics, policymakers, and corporate actors increasingly regard highly skilled migrants from the perspective of their potential benefits for the host societies, I argue that this category is far from obvious and raises many further avenues of inquiry. This book represents an attempt to problematise skill valuation processes in the context of selective immigration policies in

Switzerland. I will show that, beyond consideration of professional qualifications, the ways decision makers perceive migrants within specific social, economic, and political contexts are crucial for constructing them as skilled or unskilled, wanted or unwanted, welcome or unwelcome.

I conducted the research in Switzerland, a country which attracts exceptionally high numbers of highly educated individuals (Haug & Müller-Jentsch, 2008). Today, more than half of all adults immigrating to Switzerland have completed tertiary education (nccr – on the move, 2017).[1] In comparison, this proportion is around 40% in France (Brutel, 2014) and 44% in Germany (Seibert & Wapler, 2012). Moreover, Switzerland is one of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries with the highest share of immigrants per capita (about 25%). Only Australia has a similar rate, while countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Austria, the United States, and Germany are lagging behind (Haug & Müller-Jentsch, 2008).

I started this project by searching for information about highly educated migrants in Switzerland in order to understand how they are perceived and how they present themselves. Do they form groups or communities? I soon realised that the word "expat", as used in the Swiss context, answered my initial research questions to some extent. Although this term was once used to refer to people with highly paid jobs immigrating for professional reasons and for short durations, it has evolved into an overarching term for a much broader category of foreigners living in Switzerland. Nowadays, "expat" is generally used to characterise migrants who can communicate in English[2] and whose social position differs from other immigrants because of their ethnicity and economic, cultural, or social capital (Pavic, 2015).

Following this discovery, I found an intriguing online advertisement for an "Expat Expo" where English-speaking visitors could obtain information from exhibitors about various service providers in their region, including banks, insurance companies, schools, health professionals, social clubs, sports organisations, coaching services, employment services, janitorial services, car rental agencies, relocation agencies, real estate agencies, shops, and churches. I visited the Expat Expo on a Sunday morning in Basel in the company of another doctoral researcher who had recently arrived in Switzerland and thought that she might find interesting information. However, she left disappointed because most of the proposed services were too high-end for her needs.

This experience ignited new questions: Who can access such services? Some are free, or require just a small yearly contribution, while others are very expensive. Who can afford them, and how do they influence the migration experience?

Visiting the Expat Expo, it became clear to me that migration is not only an individual experience; for some, it is a business that relies on the mobilisation of individuals with particular resources. I define mobilisation here as both "the action of making something movable or capable of movement" and "the action of organising

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[1] Tertiary education in Switzerland includes universities, "Hochschulen", and postgraduate professional training.

[2] The four official Swiss languages are French, (Swiss) German, Italian, and Romansh.

and encouraging a group of people to take collective action in pursuit of a particular objective" (Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2017). From there, I asked myself: How do institutions target and attract the people from whom they expect an economic benefit? How does access to certain services and networks influence an individual's social position in a new environment?

Since beginning my research, I have felt that the term "highly skilled" is problematic because it evaluates an individual's competence based on subjective norms that arise from specific cultural environments. Furthermore, in my understanding, "highly skilled" is broader than "highly educated": if the latter term can be defined based on one's level of formal education to include all people with a tertiary education, the former is less clear because it often involves economic and political considerations about the social desirability of individuals in specific situations. This is particularly the case in the context of selective immigration policies, as I will discuss.

Hence, I reoriented my research to focus on the interactions between migrants to Switzerland and the institutions that organise their recruitment, selection, and settlement. Based on the literature, I call these institutions "migration intermediaries" in order to emphasise their important mediating role in mobility processes. By observing interactions between the migrants and those who organise their mobility, I aim to analyse the ways the actors involved in these institutions attribute norms and values to different groups. Moreover, this way of proceeding allows me to delve into issues regarding the inclusion and exclusion of immigrants by looking at the rights, privileges, and resources which individuals can – or cannot – access during migration. This research approach thus transforms the problematic notion of "highly skilled" into an interesting emic category, which leads to my central research question:

How do migration intermediaries contribute to structuring the mobility of highly educated individuals, and how do the practices of these intermediaries construct distinctive categories of "highly skilled migrants"?

My analysis draws on an ethnographic study conducted in the French-speaking Lemanic region and the German-speaking northwestern region of Switzerland between 2014 and 2018. This study focuses on the interactions and power relations between regional stakeholders involved in encouraging and facilitating the settlement of certain migrants whom they perceive as valuable. In my research, I identify two main groups of migration intermediaries: public sector actors and private sector actors.

The book is organised into six chapters. The introductory chapter presents my theoretical approach with regard to the literature on highly skilled migration and methodology. In the second chapter, I analyse the role of the Swiss state as an intermediary between immigrants and employers. I address the issue of admission by looking at how cantonal administrations select immigrants who are perceived as valuable enough to receive authorisation to stay and work in the country. In the third chapter, I analyse different initiatives by Swiss cantons to attract, welcome, and

retain certain categories of newcomers and to brand specific places as attractive. In the fourth chapter, I turn to the role of the private sector in managing the mobility of workers. I examine interactions between service providers, companies, and workers in order to shed light on the mechanisms that enable companies to access a flexible workforce. In the fifth chapter, I discuss the interplay between institutional practices and individual experiences to identify specific "migration channels" through which immigrants obtain access to the Swiss territory and labour market. This analysis enables me to delve deeper into the construction of "highly skilled migrants" by showing, in the concluding chapter, how such channels participate in the process of categorising immigrants into distinctive groups that are associated with specific norms, values, and privileges.

1.1   Reflections on Highly Skilled Migration

When I started this research, two issues were being hotly debated in Switzerland – asylum politics and bilateral relations with the European Union (EU). After dominating the political agenda by focusing on Muslims, foreign criminals, and the asylum system, the largest political party in the Swiss parliament – the Swiss People's Party (Mazzoleni, 2015) – started to challenge the principle of the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU.[3] In February 2014, 50.33% of Swiss voters approved a popular initiative for more restrictive migration policies in Switzerland.[4] This created a climate of uncertainty in the years that followed, raising questions about how the initiative would be implemented and whether it would be compatible with maintaining bilateral agreements with the EU.

This tense situation assists in comprehending why, in December 2013, the Swiss Federal Council announced the allocation of 17.2 million Swiss francs (approximately 15 million euros) over 4 years to the newly founded National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) addressing migration and mobility in Switzerland: at that moment, this topic was clearly of strategic importance for both government

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[3] Switzerland is not part of the European Union but has signed a series of agreements with both the EU and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member states guaranteeing the free movement of goods, services, and people between signatory states. After 2002, measures regulating EU citizens in Switzerland were gradually removed. In 2014, regulatory measures only applied to Bulgaria and Romania, and Croatia had not yet benefitted from the agreement. The free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU applied to citizens of all other EU and EFTA member states.

[4] In Switzerland, any member of the Swiss electorate can request a partial revision of the Federal Constitution by launching a popular initiative. In order for the initiative to be put to a popular vote, it needs to be supported by the signatures of 100,000 eligible voters within 18 months. The initiative then needs to be approved by a majority of the electorate and of the cantons ("double majority") during a popular vote. Once all these conditions are fulfilled, the Federal Constitution is modified according to the initiative and the Parliament draws up legislation for implementing the amended constitutional article or articles.

actors and academics.[5] Less clear, however, was what the government expected from the researchers hired for this project, in terms of contributions to political issues. Although our academic freedom appeared to be guaranteed, the visibility of the project encouraged us to be particularly aware of the impact that our research might have. I was also concerned about the implication of the NCCR: Would it reinforce the idea that migration itself is a problem that needs to be studied in order to be solved?

My studies in anthropology and migration trained me to criticise approaches that take for granted the existence of discrete boundaries between groups. Inspired by the work of Barth (1969) and Brubaker (2004), my interest lies in the processes that bring categories into being and enable social boundaries to be reproduced or transgressed in the interactions of everyday life. I therefore tend to be wary of dichotomies such as "migrant vs. native" or "highly skilled vs. low skilled". Their normative dimensions – linked to the fact that these notions entail ideas about what is good or bad, normal or abnormal, problematic or unproblematic, familiar or alien – make me feel uncomfortable. I do not want to use them as scientific categories but rather to ask how they became such important organising concepts. I also feel uncomfortable with the "migration" label attached to my research field, which in my view puts too much emphasis on migrants as "others" to be researched because of their difference from a seemingly unproblematic and almost invisible category of natives. In that sense, I support the idea that research on migration should be "de-migranticised" (Bojadžijev & Römhild, 2014; Dahinden, 2016), while research on society should give more importance to mobility-related phenomena (Cresswell, 2006a; Soderstrom, Ruedin, Randeria, D'Amato, & Panese, 2013; Urry, 2007).

With this book, I offer some solutions in response to this call. The next sections summarise my main reflections. I start by discussing migration in reference to the literature and presenting my position on certain problematic issues. I then analyse the concept of "highly skilled migrant" and introduce my research approach, which builds on previous work examining migration intermediaries, migration industries, and migration infrastructures.

1.1.1   Who Are the Migrants?

Social and cultural anthropology has a long history of studying migration. Even if the "sedentarist bias" (Malkki, 1995) of the functionalist era prevented most researchers from taking into account processes of mobility and social change,

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[5]NCCRs are large-scale projects financed by the Swiss government for 4–12 years to promote cutting-edge research in areas of strategic importance for Switzerland. The NCCR in which I worked aimed to "enhance the understanding of contemporary migration patterns and to establish an innovative and competitive field of research on migration and mobility in Switzerland" (see: https://nccr-onthemove.ch/). In its first phase, which ran from 2014 to 2018, the project included approximately 70 researchers from various disciplines in the social sciences (sociology, law, economics, psychology, geography, anthropology, demography) affiliated with eight Swiss universities.

authors such as Brettel (2008) and Glick Schiller (2003) remind us that since the 1960s, an important body of literature on migration has been produced within the social sciences, and in particular, anthropology.

Preliminary studies in the 1960s focused mainly on processes of urbanisation and the subsequent cultural changes experienced by rural "peasants" or "tribe-men" in cities (Brettel, 2008, p. 114). In the 1970s, new fields of research started to emerge, with studies conducted both in the migrants' original and receiving locations. Concepts such as "network" and "kinship" allowed for detailed ethnographies on the social ties maintained or constructed during migration, thus opening the way for new approaches to complex societies and colonial relationships (Glick Schiller, 2003). However, in most of the literature produced during this period, migration remained conceptualised as a linear process from a home country towards a homogenous host society that would gradually assimilate newcomers (Darieva, 2007).

The 1990s saw the emergence of transnationalism as a central approach to the study of migration. According to Glick Schiller (2003, p. 103; see also Glick Schiller & Fouron, 1998, 1999; Mato, 1997):

> Transnational processes can be defined as political, economic, social, and cultural processes that extend beyond the borders of a particular state and include actors that are not states but are shaped by the policies and institutional practices of particular states. These processes are much broader than migration and include flows of goods, information, and political influence.

This new way of conceptualising space led researchers to draw their attention to the experience of people "participating simultaneously in social relations that embed them in more than one nation-state", also referred to as "transmigrants" (Glick Schiller, 2003, p. 105).

Criticism of "methodological nationalism" in the social sciences constituted a basis for this new approach to migration, encouraging researchers to look beyond political borders in order to take into account both the diversity within a given society and the connections between locations situated in different nation-states (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). In addition, a cornerstone of transnationalism is the willingness to consider migrants as active agents able to reshape spatial relationships through transnational practices. This perspective can be understood as a reaction to historical-structuralist approaches, which were dominant in the previous period and focused on macro-level processes such as the influence of global markets and capitalist developments on mobility (Brettel, 2008).

In fact, the transnational approach constitutes an expression of a broader transformation in the social sciences that occurred during the 1990s and 2000s and is characterised by an increased focus on mobility. The "new mobilities paradigm" (Sheller & Urry, 2006), also called the "mobility turn" (Urry, 2007), denounces a "sedentarist" bias in academic research (Cresswell, 2002) and calls for better consideration of the role of movement in social processes. By reconciling the fields of transport, migration, and social research, this approach proposes that movement be looked at as something constitutive of the social world in order to extend understandings of mobility to all social phenomena (Soderstrom et al., 2013).

By focusing on the social importance of mobility, many researchers started to question the ways migration and other forms of movement are defined and discussed (e.g. Dahinden, 2016; Favell, 2008). They realised that even if migration often refers to "the movement of individuals or groups in a geographical and social space" (Strasser, 2009, p. 17, my translation), this definition is problematic because movement in a geographical and social space does not always mean migration, so agreeing on a common, satisfactory definition is difficult. The plurality of terms used to describe movement, as well as the social values associated with these words, contribute to the ambiguity of "migration". Movement can, for instance, be categorised as related to tourism, business, or education depending on the duration of the stay and the intentions of the individual. In addition, certain forms of movement – those that do not cross any important social, cultural, or political boundaries, for example – remain unnamed. Hence, the notion of "migration", as well as other terms referring to specific forms of displacement, contain assumptions about the social value of movement and, by extension, of the people who perform these moves. Because "mobility involves both material practice and meaning" (Cresswell, 2006b, p. 735), the categories used to describe movement are never neutral. Instead, they arise from social, cultural, and historical constructions that influence the ways we perceive, evaluate, and name the act of moving in different contexts.

These observations made researchers aware that definitions of migration cannot be dissociated from the historical construction of nation-states and the representation of citizens as sedentary subjects that differ from migrants on the basis of the rights and privileges granted by the state (Dahinden, 2016; Fassin, 2011). According to Favell (2008, p. 273):

> One of the key historical ways that the state has constituted its powers over society has been to classify movement as migration, and thereby invent a fixed immobile territorial population that can call itself a nation.

This quote highlights the fact that calling certain people migrants categorises them according to a logic that is largely rooted in a state-imposed political division that presents non-citizens as exceptions to be surveyed and disciplined. This raises the question of whether social scientists should adopt these politically defined conventions when referring to their research subjects.

Defining migrants from a theoretical perspective is problematic because issues associated with a sovereign state's assertion of power often do not leave space for alternative interpretations. Favell (2008, p. 272) makes the problem obvious with a simple example:

> There is a deep truth for the Mexicans in California who complain, when accused of illegality, that they did not cross any borders; the borders crossed them. What makes the "illegal migrant" different is that a nation-state has decided to name the movement that way – as a way to asserting its own sovereign existence.

This raises important questions: How can researchers acknowledge the authority of states to regulate migration without legitimising and taking for granted this power in their work? How can examining the notion of migration open new social

perspectives without confining research to a narrow framework of political definitions? Given the normative dimension of the term, is it ethical to call someone a migrant?

I address these issues by questioning how social and political categories are produced, who produces them, and what interests lie behind different categorisation modes. Instead of selecting specific groups of people defined a priori as migrants, I use notions of "migrant" and "migration" as *categories of practice*, or categories of everyday social experiences that require critical analysis (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). This strategy enables a direct focus on the power structures behind the everyday processes of categorisation and on the concrete implications of imposing these definitions on individuals.

However, in many instances, "migrant" – or "immigrant", referring to an individual moving *towards* something – is the most precise term to describe people who experience the process of crossing a political border, and for whom this process has concrete implications. I therefore use it where transformation through a national border crossing is salient, keeping in mind that this process takes place within the historical and political context of nation-states.

I propose two definitions of the problematic notions of *foreigner* and *immigrant* in order to clarify their use in this book:

Foreigner refers to a nation-state logic, or a legal regime organised around the idea of citizenship. The category of foreigner suggests a particular relationship between an individual and a state with its associated rights and obligations. From the perspective of the Swiss state, this applies to all persons without Swiss nationality. I use the term *foreigner* when pointing to this specific legal regime and its implications for a person's experience.

(Im)migrant also refers to a nation-state logic but without including the specific nationality of the person involved. One can be a foreigner without necessarily being an immigrant, or an immigrant without necessarily being a foreigner. Contrary to the word *foreigner*, this notion does not correspond to a legal definition. Yet it traditionally refers to a linear movement from one country to the next, with detachment from the first country leading to assimilation in the new country. Even though this representation is insufficient to understand the broad range of mobility experiences, it remains an important model that influences the way many individuals perceive themselves and others. I use this notion in order to emphasise a mode of representation where the fact of crossing a national border is perceived as abnormal and is associated with further representations and expectations.

Where these terms are not appropriate, I use *mobility* to describe forms of movement that do not directly refer to national border crossings. However, I am aware that in the current political context the term *mobility* is loaded with values. The European construction, as well as broader globalisation processes, have contributed to defining mobility as a positive process that contrasts with the rather negatively loaded notion of migration. Some authors have criticised the fact that academic research on mobility tends to reproduce neoliberal ideologies and idealise mobile

subjects (e.g. Salazar, 2016). In order to avoid this bias, my research does not assume an a priori positive value for the term, but rather attempts to qualify the ways individuals perceive and experience mobility.

### 1.1.2   Who Are the Highly Skilled?

A main objective of my research project is to delve into the construction of migrant categories in Switzerland and discuss the ambiguous category of "highly skilled migrant". I thus spent a significant amount of time questioning this notion.

My first investigations revealed that highly skilled migration is a relatively new category. In their very useful text on the conceptualisation of this term, Parsons and his colleagues (2014, p. 4) note:

> Prior to 1988, not a single mention of "High-Skilled Migration" was made across the entire literary repository of Google, while the frequency of the term increased in the same written sources by over 30 times between 1990 and 2007.

In 2019, searching for this term on Google Scholar revealed 2360 results (3680 for "highly skilled migration"), showing that the notion had become a major topic in academia. Another research with the Google tool *Ngram Viewer* highlights a similar trend (Fig. 1.1).

Important policy changes in several industrialised countries after the 1960s could help to explain the recent surge in popularity of this category, as new approaches to migration management started to emerge. On the one hand, these approaches aimed to encourage "the best and the brightest" to settle in certain countries and, on the
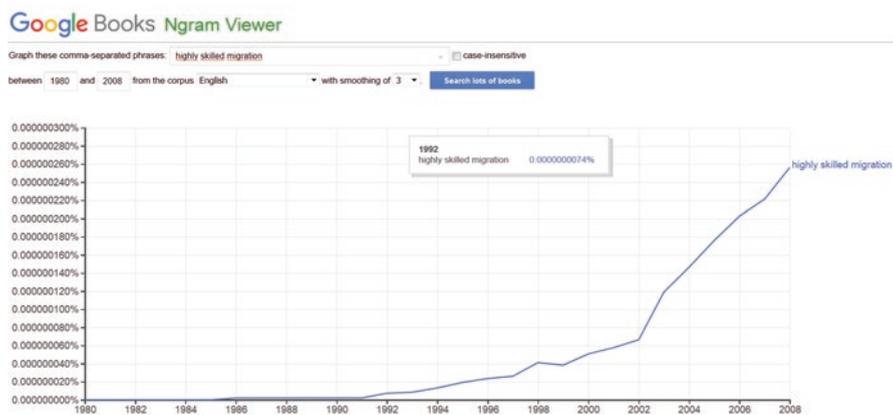
Fig. 1.1 Occurrences of the term "highly skilled migration" in Google text corpora in English, 1980–2008. (Source: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=highly+skilled+migration &year_start=1980&year_end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Chighly%20skilled%20migration%3B%2Cc0#t1%3B%2Chighly%20skilled%20migration%3B%2Cc0 (researched by the author on 22 March 2019))

other hand, to prevent unwanted categories of people to immigrate (De Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli, 2016; Parsons et al., 2014). Canada established the first points-based system for managing immigration in 1967. This scheme attributed points to candidates for immigration based on predefined criteria – skills and education played a prominent role – and those with a sufficient number of points could be admitted to the country. Australia adopted a similar approach in 1973 by developing its own point system, followed by New Zealand in 1991. Each system assigned particular importance to education. Skills-based immigration programmes then spread to the US and Europe, where several countries decided to adopt a more proactive approach to migration management (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018b), thus entering what Shachar (2006) called a "race for talent".

After the 1980s, a growing number of researchers started to analyse these policy changes. In particular, a large body of literature in political science and economics emphasised the positive impacts of skilled migration on receiving countries (Iredale, 2001; Millar & Salt, 2007; OECD, 2002; Triadafilopoulos, 2013). The authors often emphasised the importance of skilled labour for economies increasingly driven by technological advancement and knowledge. In this context, attracting skilled foreigners appeared crucial in order to fill the so-called "skill gap", namely, the idea that local workforces in many industrialised countries have insufficient skills to answer employers' needs (Shachar, 2006). Many researchers and decision makers also viewed high-earning foreigners as potential taxpayers who could help compensate public deficits resulting from population ageing. Finally, mobility was presented as a central feature of a globalised economy, since cooperation and competition between companies required flexible policies for the exchange of staff (Hercog, 2008, 2014, 2017).

However, researchers regarded these attempts by rich countries to attract skilled workers with caution, and there is a large body of literature on "brain drain" criticising this policy trend (Hercog, 2017). This term was first used in the 1960s to describe the immigration of British scientists to the United States. From the beginning, the debate involved criticising the US for attempting to attract the most brilliant individuals from other countries. It then broadened into a more general discussion on the positive and negative effects of skilled migration from poor to rich countries (Dumitru, 2009; Findlay & Cranston, 2015). The debate thus connected migration to issues of development, North–South relationships and global inequalities (Beine, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2001; Docquier, Lohest, & Marfouk, 2005; Raghuram, 2009). Most authors highlighted that the emigration of skilled individuals represents a loss for the countries that invested in their education. In contradiction to this view, some authors also showed how remittances and return migration can have a positive impact on a country's economic development (Boeri, Brücker, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2012). Johnson and Regets (1998) developed the concept of "brain circulation" to describe the circular migration of skilled workers across countries and to argue that this form of migration can benefit both origin and destination countries.

These approaches focus on the economic impacts of skilled migration on nations and rely mainly upon macro- and meso-level methodologies such as statistics and policy analyses. Social scientists focusing on actors' experiences and strategies

started to engage with highly skilled migration at a later stage (Klein, 2016). Early examples of such approaches are Ulf Hannerz on cosmopolitanism (1990), Erik Cohen's anthropological enquiry into the literature about expatriate communities (1977), and Jonathan Beaverstock's extensive work on mobile managers and expatriates in the financial and business sectors (Beaverstock, 1990, 1991, 1996, 2002; Beaverstock & Smith, 1996). Anne-Catherine Wagner (1998) wrote a detailed ethnography on the life of expatriate managers and their families in Paris, analysing the way new models of mobility challenge older structures of power and social distinction. Moosmüller (1997) studied German and American employees posted to Japan by focusing on cultural interactions. In all of these cases, the research focused on individuals from industrialised countries who moved to another industrialised country – either alone or with family – for reasons related to work.

The topic of highly skilled migration gained more relevance among social scientists working with actor-centred methodologies during the 1990s and 2000s. So far, this field of migration research had mainly focused on "minorities" with relatively low social status. Interests in ethnicity and inequality had driven most researchers to study the strategies developed by underprivileged actors in order to resist various forms of exclusion (Favell, Feldblum, & Smith, 2006). This situation led several authors to criticise the fact that migrants were too often represented in the literature as ethnic units that challenge nation-states, thus maintaining a static conceptualisation of culture where migrants appear as problematic "others" (Dahinden, 2016). The "mobility turn" in social sciences encouraged researchers to focus on ways of life that imply frequent travel and communication across space (Cresswell, 2006b; Sontag, 2018b; Urry, 2007). In that context, highly skilled migrants became a form of archetypal "mobile subject" in academic discourses.

Favell et al. (2006) identify a series of assumptions in the literature about highly skilled migration, arguing that this category often appears as a point of reference against whom to contrast less privileged migrants in the social science literature. For instance, they show that highly skilled migrants are usually referred to as "elites" and are contrasted with a lower class of ethnically distinct individuals who are commonly subjected to discrimination and exploitation in industrialised countries. If low-skill migrants are supposed to be the target of strong state controls, the highly skilled are regarded as "wanted migrants" whose mobility is encouraged and facilitated by different state and private actors. Moreover, while migration scholars highlight the difficulties experienced by less privileged migrants regarding professional and social integration, they often view the skills of migrant professionals as easily transportable from one context to another, thus allowing them to fill job vacancies without trouble.

In another text, Kunz (2016) analyses the usage of the terms "highly skilled migrants" and "expatriates". Even if the definitions for each term are unstable and can include a wider or smaller range of people depending on the usage (see also Fechter, 2007), she notes that these categories often appear as synonymous in the scientific literature. She shows how the two terms oppose a third category of immigrants, from which expatriates and highly skilled migrants distinguish themselves because of social markers such as race, class, nationality, occupation, or profession

(see also Lundström, 2014). Kunz thus argues that highly skilled migrants are usually constructed in opposition to both other migrants and local populations as a category associated with specific status, privilege, and power.

Regarding representations of the lifestyles of highly skilled migrants – which in this case is used as a synonym for expatriate – Van Bochove and Engbersen (2013) show that many researchers describe this category of people as true "cosmopolitans" who feel "comfortable in many places" (Kanter, 1995, pp. 22–23) and "for whom openness to new experiences is a vocation" (Hannerz, 1990, p. 243). Yet they also notice that skilled and mobile individuals are often referred to as people who enjoy an "homogeneous lifestyle" in "gated communities" (Castells, 1996, p. 447) and whose social contacts are mostly associated with work (Beaverstock, 2005; Fechter, 2007). In these representations, the authors underline a tension between images of openness and fluidity, captured by the term "cosmopolitan", and images of closure and friction, captured by the term "expat bubbles".

Finally, many authors question the legitimacy of skill-selective migration policies, arguing that although such policies are often perceived as less problematic than other selection tools because of their merit-based approach, they nonetheless lead states to discriminate between migrants according to criteria such as race (Tannock, 2011), cultural closeness (Yeung, 2016) and social desirability (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018b; Simon-Kumar, 2015). In addition, opposition between "highly skilled" and "low skilled" migrants raise important issues concerning the value given to different forms of knowledge in a world in which power is unequally distributed across places and social groups (Wagner, 2007). The gendered bias of skill-selective policies and the disadvantages they entail for women have also been highlighted by several researchers (Boucher, 2007; Kofman, 2014; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005).

The "highly skilled migration" label brings together many studies that often have little to do with one another. While some authors analyse the social mechanisms specific to some economically valued professions (e.g. the mobility of medical doctors, IT specialists, or engineers), others focus on the cultural capital of immigrants and the impact of "creative people" on the places they move to (for a review, see Findlay & Cranston, 2015). Many authors also refer to individuals' social positioning to characterise highly skilled migrants, for instance in research on expatriates (Kunz, 2016), trailing partners (Raghuram, 2004; Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015; Willis & Yeoh, 2000), and the emergence of a "transnational capitalist class" or "global elite" (e.g. Sklair, 1998). Definitions based on social capital often involve a racial dimension, which a few authors criticise (Cranston, 2017; Tannock, 2011). The mobility of students is sometimes labelled as highly skilled migration (e.g. Hawthorne, 2008), as well as the experience of academically educated individuals who do not manage to use their skills after migration (see literature on de-skilling, e.g. Guhlich, 2017; Klein, 2016; Riaño, 2003, 2011; Weiss, 2005, 2006). In these last cases, the focus lies on the "potential" of people to be recognised as highly skilled and the analyses underscores the context-dependent nature of both skills and social status.

In sum, this overview of highly skilled migrants in the scientific literature shows that the construction of this category arises from specific policy changes in many

industrialised countries, which led to new definitions of "wanted migrants" who are targeted by various domestic legal regimes. Moreover, the vast literature on brain drain not only associated the mobility of highly skilled individuals with global power inequalities between nations, but also attempted to calculate the economic impact of highly skilled migration for both sending and receiving countries. Finally, this category has been used by researchers to capture a specific constellation of power relations among migrants, with highly skilled migrants often representing the higher end of the range in terms of status, privilege, and power. While some authors refer to a rather fantasised image of "mobile elites", others use the relationship between skills, migration, and status to investigate the impact of legal structures and social dynamics on individuals' positioning within local and global spaces. Such studies are particularly interesting because they draw attention to the contextual nature of skills and enable one to grasp the changing relations of power.

1.1.3 How to Evaluate Skills?

If the term "migrant" is problematic in many respects, the notion of "high skills" raises equally important issues regarding the value given to different forms of knowledge, which are themselves connected to issues of the geographical and social distribution of power. While several researchers have denounced the discriminatory nature of policies aimed at highly skilled migrants (Tannock, 2011), others have highlighted the gendered dimension of skills valuation (Jungwirth & Wolffram, 2017; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005).

Borrowing from the OECD, Iredale (2001, p. 8) proposes a definition of "highly skilled workers", which corresponds to the definition of highly skilled migrants used by many researchers:

> Highly skilled workers are normally defined as having a university degree or extensive/ equivalent experience in a given field. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-SOPEMI, 1997), it includes highly skilled specialists, independent executives and senior managers, specialised technicians or tradespersons, investors, business persons, "key-workers" and sub-contract workers.

According to this definition, a person can be categorised as highly skilled on the basis of having studied in a specific type of institution or having a level of experience equivalent to those promoted in such institutions. The definition also provides a list of professional fields in which highly skilled people can be found, namely the technology and business sectors.

Such a definition raises important questions about the value of different forms of knowledge. As academics we should be aware that universities do not have a monopoly in providing knowledge. Their importance is socially, geographically, and historically situated. This form of learning developed in a specific medieval Christian context (Hermansen, 2016) before imposing itself globally as the dominant pedagogical model. However, access is limited, especially in locations where it remains the privilege of social elites. Moreover, a university-based definition of

skills does not take into account other forms of knowledge that are practised and valued in various places. The notion of skills as dependent on a university degree is culturally and socially marked, since it favours people who have a particular social background or who live in places where this model of education is both valued and available. It is therefore strongly connected to issues of the geographical and social distribution of power. I find it particularly striking that few authors raise this point in relation to the conceptualisation of highly skilled migrants (an exception can be found in Tannock, 2011). Although Iredale's definition includes people with "an extensive/equivalent experience" (2001, p. 8) to university degrees, this expansion raises new questions: Who decides which experiences are extensive enough, or equivalent to a university degree? How should people whose qualifications are not recognised be considered, for instance because they moved to a country with a different educational system? Because the notion of "high skills" is loaded with values, it is difficult to use without reproducing social hierarchies and stereotypes.

Considering this notion from a gender perspective highlights the issue of social hierarchies and stereotypes particularly well. Several researchers note that the occupations most often regarded as highly skilled are typically male-dominated (Boucher, 2007; Kofman, 2014; Phillips & Taylor, 1980; Steinberg, 1990). Kofman and Raghuram (2005, p. 150) argue:

> The ascription of technological innovation as the driving force of globalisation and the new knowledge economy and society (Castells, 1996) has often led to the highly skilled being defined as those qualified in scientific and technological professions (OECD, 2002) while the skills required in educational and caring jobs, such as teaching and nursing, are considered to be inherent in their femininity and often collapsed into it, so that these jobs are primarily conceptualised as women's jobs and therefore semi-skilled rather than skilled (Hardill & MacDonald, 2000). As such, the notion of skill is not gender neutral and the kinds of work which women do are often defined prima facie as less skilled.

Many studies acknowledge the tendency to regard the skills demanded in male-dominated activities as learnt skills while viewing the skills necessary for female-dominated activities as natural talents (Daune-Richard, 2003; Jenson, 1991). This social construction of skills and qualifications associated with femininity also results in their devaluation in the labour market.

Hence, the notion of "high skills" is not neutral in terms of gender, class, or ethnicity, and implies assumptions about skills that favour privileged social positions within the globalised world order, in particular men from rich Western countries.

Based on this argument, I identify a need for a more general discussion on the conceptualisation of skills based on empirical data. I observe that few studies have so far critically analysed the notion of highly skilled migration: some authors focus on the difficulty of finding a common definition (Boucher & Cerna, 2014; Parsons et al., 2014); others discuss the prejudices associated with conceptualisations of skills in terms of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and nationality (Kofman, 2014; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005; Kunz, 2016; Tannock, 2011); others criticise the lack of an empirical foundation for common representations of highly skilled migrants (Favell et al., 2006). Much work remains to be done to fill the theoretical gaps around highly skilled migration and gain a better understanding of its inherent social and cultural biases.

In my research, I regard the notion of highly skilled as a process of internal and external categorisation rather than as an intrinsic package of skills that an individual needs to possess in order to fit a fixed definition of "highly skilled". This process happens at different levels: the political level (who is granted what kind of access to a particular country?), the economic level (who is hired, and how much are they paid?), or the social level (how do people evaluate each other in everyday interactions?). According to this perspective, whether or not a person is recognised as highly skilled in different circumstances depends not so much on their skills as on their social status, which relies on the intersection of a broad array of elements. This perspective also implies that my understanding of "highly skilled migrants" is dynamic and situational: I do not view it as a scientific category that could be defined once and for all, but as a category of practice that opens the door to the emic perspective of the actors involved.

1.1.4 Who Are the Migration Intermediaries?

My approach does not take categories for granted but rather looks at how they are constructed. In the case of the category "migrant", I observe that state-regulated border regimes play a central role in defining who is allowed to move where and how. Moreover, the category "highly skilled migrant" indicates that profit-oriented actors (e.g. companies) may also influence migration and mobility pathways. Van den Broek, Harvey, and Groutsis (2016, p. 525) observe that:

> Accumulated, but fragmented, evidence suggests that fundamental transformation in the governance structures surrounding the migration industry broadly – and in migration intermediaries specifically – has led to a greater commercialisation, and to decentralisation of services that are not just facilitating greater migration flows, but also attracting and mediating migration pathways in more interventionist, however less transparent, ways.

These authors argue that a shift from a government-initiated approach to a network governance approach to migration has been occurring on a global scale since the 1980s (Groutsis, Van den Broek, & Harvey, 2015). The multiplication of agents that monitor mobility has created new inequities for people on the move in terms of access to information and a greater dependence on intermediaries from the private sector. At the same time, intermediaries have come to play a crucial role in matching people with jobs and providing resources for organising their moves. As Agunias (2009, p. 2) notes:

> Intermediaries are key actors that facilitate, and sometimes drive, migration within and across borders. By providing information and extending critical services in many stages of migration and in places of origin, transit and destination, legitimate intermediaries build migrants' capabilities and expand their range of choice.

These observations need to be situated within a broader field of research that focuses on the interactions between mobile individuals and the agents that create the social conditions of their mobility. In the early 1990s, Findlay, Garrick, and Li developed

the concept of a "migration channel" to describe the role of intermediary actors in international migration (Findlay, 1990; Findlay & Garrick, 1990; Findlay & Li, 1998). More specifically, they distinguished between three main forms of international labour mobility: people who individually move within the labour markets of multinational companies, people who are moved by their company to foreign countries tasks, and people who move within the frame of a recruitment agency. Iredale (2001) later added two more channels to this list: mobility in the context of small recruitment agents or ethnic networks, and recruitment through other mechanisms such as the Internet.

More recently, several authors have noticed the multiplication of intermediaries in migration processes, and have focused their research on the "institutions, networks and people that move migrants from one point to another" (Cranston, Schapendonk, & Spaan, 2018; Goss & Lindquist, 1995; see also Groutsis et al., 2015; Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012, p. 9). Their work not only focuses on actors from the private sector, but also on the practices of governments that monitor and support the mobility of individuals perceived as valuable while preventing others from moving. In this context, several authors highlight the tendency of government to outsource economic promotion and migration control to non-state actors (Groutsis et al., 2015; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, 2018), arguing that the resulting "migration infrastructure" (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014) not only connects migrants with places and jobs, but is also involved in selecting them, motivating them to move, and monitoring them before, during, and after migration (Van den Broek et al., 2016). For this reason, research into migration intermediaries, infrastructure, and channels takes as a starting point that "we cannot understand how migrants move unless we examine how they are moved by others" (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, p. 131).

This approach complements older studies on the role of social networks in migration processes. Many authors have highlighted the impact of kinship ties and ethnic communities on supporting migration and mediating access to resources in destination countries (MacDonald & MacDonald, 1974; Massey et al., 1998; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008). More recent work on commercial intermediaries and migration industries expands this perspective by stressing the influential role of profit-oriented actors in migration trajectories (Beaverstock, Faulconbridge, & Hall, 2010; Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2013; Cranston et al., 2018; Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, Hall, & Hewitson, 2009; Findlay, McCollum, Shubin, Apsite, & Krisjane, 2013; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013; Ravasi et al., 2015). This literature shows that personal contacts are not the only resource available to people on the move; access to professional services can strongly impact a migration experience and provide important support for adjusting to a new environment. Furthermore, research on migration industries points to a commodification of migration processes both within and outside state-based legal structures (Menz, 2013; Salt & Stein, 1997). Commercial intermediaries can thus play a central role in circumventing restrictive immigration policies (Betts, 2013; Cranston et al., 2018; Groutsis et al., 2015).

These studies examine the central role of certain actors in providing resources to migrants and invite a reconsideration of migration and mobility as phenomena that involve not only individuals, but also infrastructures. The work of anthropologists such as Xiang Biao and Johan Lindquist – who developed the concept of migration infrastructure – is particularly interesting because it enables an actor-centred perspective on the large variety of individuals involved in migration processes. In this sense, focusing on migration intermediaries does not necessarily mean leaving behind the experiential dimension of social phenomena. For instance, one ethnographic study conducted by Xiang (2007) analysed the role of staffing agencies in encouraging and organising the mobility of IT specialists between India and Australia. His work describes in detail how such agencies have developed an infrastructure that enables companies to access a cheap and flexible workforce in the field of IT. It also shows that the development of intermediary agencies not only enables an increasing number of Indian workers to find jobs abroad, but also creates new forms of precariousness and dependencies between intermediaries and workers. The study analyses a "world system of body shopping" (Xiang, 2007, p. 100) through the perspectives of the various actors involved.

Although I am interested in the social mechanisms that structure different migration and mobility situations, my research follows a similar actor-centred approach. Unlike many studies, I define as actors not only the migrants themselves, but also the people and institutions that have stakes in their mobility. This enables a better understanding of the logic, constraints, and power relations associated with the mobility of individuals. My focus thus lies on the strategies of various intermediaries from the public and private sectors to select, attract, and retain mobile individuals who represent value to them. In particular, I ask how these "migration intermediaries" influence which resources are available to different groups of people by defining and dividing immigrants according to constructed social categories that correlate with specific status and privileges.

1.1.5   Why Study Highly Skilled Migrants in Switzerland?

As a small country with few natural resources, the economic development of Switzerland has largely been built on immigration and internationalisation (Mach, David, & Bühlmann, 2011). Today, Switzerland is a rich country with a gross domestic product (GDP) that ranked third of all OECD countries in 2016 (OECD, 2018). Approximately 10,000 multinational companies are operating within the national territory and the number of international firms per capita is more than three times higher than in the US (SwissHoldings, 2016). Moreover, since the end of the nineteenth century, Switzerland has clearly become an immigration country (Fig. 1.2). In 1914, the foreign population of Geneva was 40.4%; by 2015 this had risen to 49%, while the average for Switzerland was 24.6% (Leimgruber, 2016). This proportion is among the highest in the world (Nguyen, 2016), with the majority of
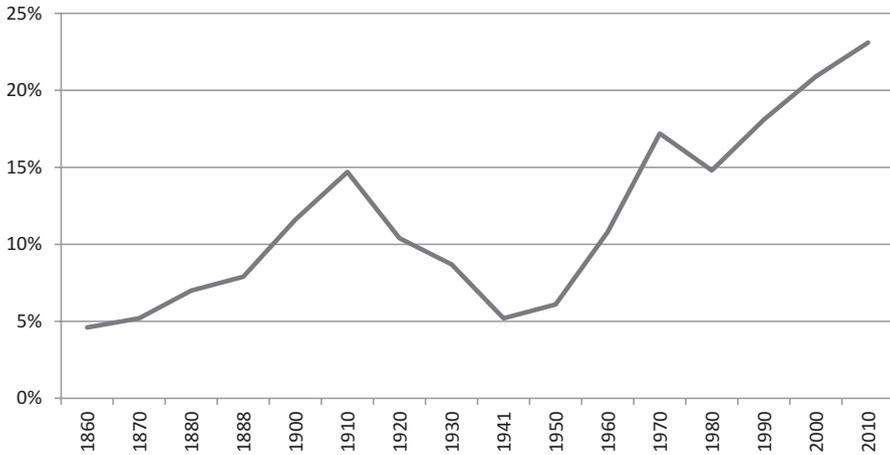
Fig. 1.2 Proportion of foreigners in the resident population of Switzerland, 1860–2010. (Source: Own diagram based on Swiss Federal Council, 2012, p. 11, with data from RFP, PETRA, ESPOP, STATPOP, OFS)

recent immigrants having completed a tertiary education (university degree or equivalent postgraduate professional training) (Fig. 1.3).

Switzerland's exceptional attraction to foreigners can be attributed to various factors, including relatively high salaries, generous tax policies, and low unemployment rates, as well as its geographic location, political situation, safe and stable environment, dynamic and international economic outreach, and high concentration of multinationals (Müller-Jentsch, 2008b). A gradual decrease in the industrial sector and the development of a knowledge-based economy also helps to explain the high levels of education among recent immigrants (Swiss Federal Council, 2012). In addition, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Swiss immigration policies have consisted of a dual system that prioritises immigration from the EU and of highly qualified individuals from third countries. While EU citizens benefit from agreements regarding the free movement of persons, citizens from the rest of the world – the so-called "third-countries" in Swiss policy – are strictly selected based on their perceived economic value (Fig. 1.3).

These elements make Switzerland a particularly interesting location for studying highly skilled migration. Nevertheless, it is striking that this topic remains relatively under-researched. This lack of scholarly interest highlights the fact that issues related to highly skilled migration are rarely discussed in public debates. As I will show in the next chapters, highly skilled migrants tend to be perceived as unproblematic migrants (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018b; Yeung, 2016) and conflictual discussions about migration in Switzerland in the past decades have rather revolved around "less privileged" categories of migrants such as refugees, criminals, low-paid workers, and socially disadvantaged individuals.
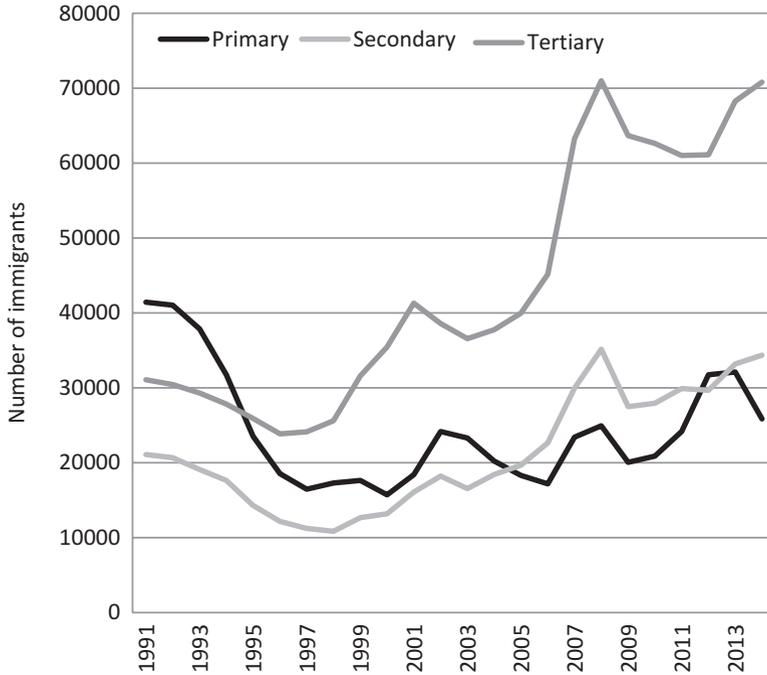
Fig. 1.3 Education level upon immigration to Switzerland, 1991–2014. (Source: Own diagram based on estimates by Prof. Philippe Warner with data from the Swiss Structural Survey for the years 2010–2014)

Nonetheless, research provides important insights into the topic of highly skilled migration in Switzerland. Existing studies indicate a strong increase in the number of highly educated people moving to Switzerland since the mid-1990s, the majority of whom come from neighbouring European countries (Germany, Italy, and France) (Müller-Jentsch, 2008a). Most of these migrants live in urban centres (in particular, Zurich, Geneva, Basel) and work in service-oriented sectors (Pecoraro, 2005). Although more men than women had a tertiary education among the people arriving before 2010, there have been equal proportions of highly educated male and female immigrants since 2011 (nccr – on the move, 2017).

Statistics show that the share of immigrants with tertiary education is currently higher than 80% for certain nationalities – in particular for people from English-speaking countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and India – but is lower than 30% for immigrants from other countries, such as Turkey and Portugal (nccr – on the move, 2017). Moreover, certain nationalities are overrepresented in management positions in comparison to Swiss nationals, in particular Dutch, British, American, German, French, and Austrian nationals (Jey Aratnam, 2012). The sociologist Ganga Jey Aratnam (2012, p. 153) uses the term "sandwich position" to describe the fact that migrant workers in Switzerland are overrepresented in both higher and lower paid positions, whereas Swiss nationals tend to occupy middle positions.

In general, existing research shows great diversity among people who could be labelled "highly skilled migrants" in Switzerland. Although most come for work-related reasons, some also migrate as spouses, students, or refugees (Cangià, 2017; Lombard, 2017; nccr – on the move, 2017; Sontag, 2018a; Tissot, 2018). The majority of these leave the country after a few years but some stay longer and actively engage in their new place of residence (nccr – on the move, 2017; Wiener & Grossmann, 2011). Some experience extremely mobile transnational lives (Sontag, 2018b) while others organise their daily activities around a few geographically close locations (Berthoud, 2012). Most declare that they are satisfied with their decision to move to Switzerland (nccr – on the move, 2017) but some experience difficulties accessing the job market (Berthoud, 2015; Riaño, 2015; Riaño, Limacher, Aschwanden, Hirsig, & Wastl-Walter, 2015) and adjusting socially to their new environment (Ravasi et al., 2015; Salamin & Davoine, 2015; Schneider-Sliwa, 2013; Wiener & Grossmann, 2011).

Despite the diversity of migrants' situations, academic research on the mobility of the "highly skilled" in Switzerland tends to restrict its representations of migrants. In economistic and neoliberal approaches, highly skilled migrants are active agents who can decide without any constraints where and how to move, and are perceived as valuable subjects to be attracted through legal and economic incentives. In sociological and left-oriented approaches, research focuses on the experiences of highly skilled migrants whose qualifications are not valued, and who are often presented as victims of a system that fails to use their full potential. Yet, these approaches do not take into account the important "migration infrastructure" (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014) and the diversity of actors that make Switzerland an attractive location for certain groups of highly educated migrants, while excluding others.

My research attempts to transcend these representations by offering a more comprehensive analysis of "highly skilled migrants" in Switzerland, arguing that it is necessary to study not only the migrants, the state, or the economic actors, but also the relation between those who move and those who organise their mobility. Highly skilled migrants are neither free-movers nor helpless victims, but it is clear that some have more options than others, and it is important to understand why this is the case. Analysing the role of migration intermediaries contributes to an understanding of not only the intentions of migrants but also their relative positions and, perhaps even more importantly, why they are treated as migrants (or highly skilled migrants, expats, refugees) in the first place. Thus, a focus on the different actors involved in migration processes can enable a more critical reflection on the reasons and methodologies for our research.

1.2   Methods for Grasping the Diversity of Mobility Pathways

My research is inspired by the overall framework of critical ethnography. The main objective of this approach is to make visible the power structures involved in the discourses and practices of everyday life. As a researcher, I consider that my role is

to problematise notions and situations that may be taken for granted. In this way, I expose the ways that social hierarchies are (re)produced by subtly advantaging certain people and disadvantaging others. In the words of Pierre Bourdieu (2002, p. 58): "Research is perhaps the art of creating fruitful difficulties for oneself and for others. Where things were simple we make problems appear."[6]

My approach is mainly ethnographic and combines different methods and data sources (interviews, observations, documents, survey, statistics) to enlarge an understanding of specific situations and contrast them with personal experiences (Flick, 2006). I use a multi-sited approach in order to grasp the relationships between events and actors situated in different locations (Marcus, 1998). I am aware that my knowledge is partial and connected to my position in the world, my way of interacting with others, my values, and my areas of interests. For this reason, my research is an active confrontation of different perspectives on one topic. In this section, I present my research design and reflect on the various collaborations that contributed to this project. I then introduce my main research locations and conclude by detailing my methods of data collection and analysis.

1.2.1   Research Design

I conducted this research between October 2014 and March 2018, mainly in the French-speaking Lemanic region and the German-speaking northwestern region of Switzerland. As part of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research on Migration and Mobility (nccr – on the move), I worked in close collaboration with two other researchers, Dr. Metka Hercog and Dr. Katrin Sontag. We wanted to question the category "highly skilled migrant" by analysing how different actors understand this notion and translate it into practice. We also wanted to understand the "resource environment" (Levitt, Lloyd, Mueller, & Viterna, 2015) of highly educated individuals in Switzerland – meaning that we wanted to analyse the role of institutions in structuring opportunities and obstacles for migrants, as well as migrants' ability to influence and reshape society.

In order to answer our questions, Dr. Hercog and I developed several sub-projects that combined our research interests. The first sub-project focused on the selection practices of the state administrations in charge of granting residence permits to non-European immigrants wanting to take up employment in Switzerland; the second focused on place-branding and the economic promotion strategies of state administrations and other organisations in two specific locations in Switzerland; the third focused on the job search processes of highly educated individuals who attempt to become economically active in Switzerland. By analysing specific situations, we wanted to understand how different actors negotiate definitions of highly skilled migrants in their daily practice. Our focus was on the construction of migrant cate-

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[6] The original text reads: "La recherche, c'est peut-être l'art de se créer des difficultés fécondes – et d'en créer aux autres. Là où il y avait des choses simples, on fait apparaître des problèmes". All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

gories in Switzerland through policy design and implementation in political, economic, and social contexts.

Our methodology was mainly qualitative and inductive. We conducted interviews with key figures structuring the mobility of people in different Swiss cities and regions in order to observe processes of definition and evaluation, as well as the negotiation of skills in relation to immigration in Switzerland. Our findings were complemented by the analysis of policy documents, websites, and statistical figures on the mobility of people towards Switzerland. In so doing, we wanted to acquire a broader understanding of the institutional context regulating the selection, admission, employment, and support of immigrants arriving and staying in Switzerland. We also relied on participant observations and biographical interviews to provide a detailed analysis of the daily interactions through which identities are negotiated and future prospects are imagined and shaped. This closer look at individual stories provided information about how institutional practices are experienced and challenged by individuals. Dr. Hercog and I collaborated closely on each of these sub-projects: we conducted some observations together, exchanged information obtained from interviews, and jointly analysed part of the data.

In 2016, the nccr – on the move offered the possibility of financing for an additional sub-project. At this point, public attention was fixed on the Syrian crisis and the millions of people risking their lives in the attempt to reach Europe. After German president Angela Merkel's controversial decision to open the borders to refugees in 2015, the integration of these newcomers into Germany became a central issue. Interestingly, many of the refugees who came to Europe were educated but experienced difficulties getting their diplomas recognised. "Highly skilled refugees" thus emerged as a new topic of interest in public discourse and academic research. In this context, we decided to collaborate with Dr. Katrin Sontag on an additional topic that complemented our research framework on conceptualisations of highly skilled migrants. Dr. Sontag studied university programmes at Basel (Switzerland), Freiburg (Germany) and Mulhouse (France) that support refugees seeking access to higher education. By comparing the situations in these countries, she was able to highlight the impact of different social, political, legal, and economic contexts on individual migrant trajectories. Her research was an interesting addition to my own project examining the role of institutional agents in mobility.

The nccr – on the move also supported a representative survey of recent immigrants from selected countries in Switzerland. This survey resulted from a collaboration between several research projects and was coordinated by Dr. Ilka Steiner from the University of Geneva. The objective was to complement existing surveys by offering an overview of the migration history of recent arrivals to Switzerland with a focus on highly educated individuals. My colleagues and I contributed to this project by proposing two modules of questions that specifically addressed our research interests. The collected data provided a representative overview of relocation support received by recent immigrants within the scope of the survey.

Parallel to these collaborations, I conducted additional interviews and observations to better understand the role of migration intermediaries. My fieldwork concentrated on institutions identified as interesting because of their specific focus on highly educated foreigners. Even though their goals, activities, and target groups

varied, they all contributed to my understanding of how highly skilled migrants are constructed and perceived in Switzerland. These intermediaries included recruiting companies, human resources departments, temporary staffing agencies, consulting companies, relocation agencies, administrative bodies that regulate the labour market, integration offices, organisations for economic promotion, organisations supporting job searches, "expat" organisations, a chamber of commerce, a support organisation for multinational employees and their families, a marketing event for "expats", and a meeting place for English-speaking foreigners. For each of these institutions, I combined different methods – interviews, observations, document analyses – in order to confront discourses and practices and to increase my understanding of their activities. I also engaged in exchanges on my research process by asking some interviewees to review my texts and by discussing my hypotheses with them.

During the first 2 years of this research project I personally experienced a specific form of mobility. My partner's job as a consultant for a global company involved high flexibility, frequent travel, and long hours spent working on short-term projects at clients' workplaces, generally in Switzerland but occasionally abroad. As the company financed accommodations when he worked away from home, I was able to join him on several occasions. I experienced life in business hotels, participated in evening dinners and other activities with his colleagues, and attended parties organised by the company. In this way, I met people with very mobile lifestyles, and could observe how large multinational companies manage their employees' mobility. I recorded my observations and ideas in a field diary and subsequently discussed them with my partner and some of his colleagues in order to get feedback and to confront my hypotheses with their personal experiences.

This experience motivated me to think further about the collaborative dimension of my research. Given the political relevance of the topic, it was important for me to share my results and engage in public debates. Moreover, many of my respondents were interested in discussing my research content, interpretations, and theories, leading me to contemplate how to expand my research collaborations. The concept of "para-ethnography" developed by Douglas Holmes and George Marcus offered a theoretical framework to further reflect on participatory approaches.

1.2.2 Para-Ethnographic Experiments[7]

The collective dimension of research in social sciences is rarely acknowledged. Despite the spread of participatory methodologies (Riaño, 2016), and although academic projects tend to be increasingly collaborative, social sciences researchers

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[7]This section benefitted from conversations I had with colleagues during the preparation of the following article on para-ethnography: Oberlé, H., Sandoz, L., & Sontag, K. (2017). Mobilität – der Weg zum Erfolg? Eine öffentliche Veranstaltung der Wissenschaftsvermittlung als paraethnografisches Experiment. SAVk, 113(1), 75–88.

generally appear to be singular thinkers. Academic competition encourages researchers to insist on the originality of their work, which often hides the cooperative nature of research processes, and the importance of the discussion, exchange, and confrontation of ideas.

During my research, I became involved in various academic networks from which I largely benefitted. I would therefore like to highlight that my project was not a solitary process comprising merely the definition of a research question, the selection of a field, data collection, coding, and analysis. In addition to classical methodological prescriptions, the act of communicating my research constituted one of my main analytical tools. Selecting the relevant information, framing it in a concise and understandable way, connecting it with references, and discussing critical issues with others enabled me to gradually develop my understanding of the social processes at hand and to adjust my methods, hypotheses, and analyses. It also contributed to my emotional wellbeing by keeping me active and motivated. Being part of a network and actively engaging with others was central to the success of my project. Although this dimension is rarely acknowledged in the literature on methodology, I think that it is crucial to the development of innovative ideas.

I would like to emphasise that in parallel to these academic connections, I had productive exchanges with people from my research field. In many instances during this project, the boundaries between academia and fieldwork, as well as between my different roles as a researcher, a friend, and a family member, became unclear and tenuous. Since academia is a very international environment, most of my colleagues have personally experienced some of the situations that I studied and could be categorised as "highly skilled migrants". This was also the case with several of my friends and family members. Moreover, I previously mentioned that my partner's job became one of my research fields, and this situation led to a very rewarding collaboration between us. Finally, several of the people I interviewed had a similar education to mine and did not hesitate to share their analysis with me in a sometimes very academic way. In some instances, they worked for institutions at which I might be interested to apply in the future, which also contributed to the blurring of boundaries.

The concept of para-ethnography opens interesting avenues for reflection to analyse this situation. Holmes and Marcus introduce it in the following way (2005, p. 250):

> When we deal with contemporary institutions under the sign of the global symptom, as we have termed it, we presume that we are dealing with counterparts rather than "others" – who differ from us in many ways but who also share broadly the same world of representation with us, and the same curiosity and predicament about constituting the social in our affinities. At base, then, the postulation of the para-ethnographic is a somewhat veiled, maybe even hesitant, overture to partnership or collaboration with our counterparts found in the field.

The aim of this approach is to broaden reflection processes through the creation of exchange spaces between people with different perspectives and positions. It encourages researchers to actively use and reflect on the participative dimension of

interactions during fieldwork. For this purpose, Holmes and Marcus propose a methodology that they call "para-site" (2008, pp. 97, 100):

> [A para-site event is] a space for a kind of conceptual work that is not derivable from theory, academic literatures, or interviews … [It blurs] the boundaries between the field site and the academic conference or seminar room.

The objective of para-site events is to create the conditions for a dialogue between the researcher and the research partners that goes beyond a simple process of data collection. It starts from the recognition that research partners are self-reflective beings who also analyse the world around them and who can share questions and concerns with the researcher. Such an approach is not new in anthropology, however, Holmes and Marcus focus on cases where research partners have a similar background to the researcher, whether due to education or professional position. These situations can constitute both a challenge and an opportunity: research partners can understand and criticise the research process, the concepts used by the researcher, and the ways concrete life situations are translated into theoretical observations; they can sometimes also describe their personal experiences in an analytical and self-reflective way that follows the codes of scientific presentation.

I do not mean that people with different backgrounds are not able to form their own opinions on a research design or to share important insights with the researcher. However, in comparison with other studies that I have conducted, for instance with farmers in Bolivia or with Turkish women in precarious situations in Berlin, the fact that my research partners sometimes started to discuss my methodology, concepts, and questions was new for me. I thus find it important to reflect on the specificities of these exchanges.

I think that the way my research partners sometimes started to discuss my theoretical and methodological approach relied partly on how we perceived each other's social position. In many cases, my respondents were well-established male professionals who had already completed their academic education. In comparison, my position as a young female researcher at the beginning of her career put me in a lower social position. Furthermore, the fact that I was conducting research in fields close to me, where I might have a professional stake in the future, meant that I was more directly affected by these power relations than, for instance, during my project in Bolivia. Because of these asymmetrical power relations, my research partners probably felt more justified in challenging me than in situations where my social position as a researcher was better established, and I was maybe also more inclined to accept their critical comments under these circumstances.

I find an interesting tension here. On the one hand, Holmes and Marcus encouraged me to see these interactions as potentially rewarding partnerships during which research partners can think together with the researcher and participate in the theory-building process. On the other hand, several authors call attention to the risk for researchers to be instrumentalised and patronised in such situations, or to overestimate the contribution of socially powerful informants (e.g. Fitz & Halpin, 1995; Lowell, 1998; Ostrander, 1993; Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 2002).

I observe both points of view. On the one hand, it is true that I sometimes felt intimidated by the interviewees, in particular those in senior positions in the state administration. On the other hand, I think that my exchanges and discussions with the people concerned with my project helped to develop the critical yet empathetic attitude that I consider to be the basis of the anthropological approach. In my view, my role as a researcher is to show the complexity of social situations, and a good analysis is one that enables the people involved to recognise themselves without feeling judged and to expand their understanding of the constraints and power relations that structure their actions. The best way to attain this is, I argue, to open a dialogue with the research partners. Of course, I am also part of the situations that I observe, which is why I need to reflect on my position throughout the research process. Talking with others to test my hypotheses and ideas is a valuable method to challenge my assumptions

However, I think that Holmes and Marcus's approach does not sufficiently address the issue of the power relations at hand during interactions between the researcher and the research partners. Ultimately, the person writing the analysis remains the researcher, and it is their role to maintain a certain authority in preserving their research independence.

Although I opened various collaborative spaces with my research partners, I also needed moments alone in order to critically reflect. It was important to clearly assert my autonomy and scientific freedom in order to preserve my research from my interviewees' particular interests. On one occasion, for instance, a research partner did not agree with a part of my analysis. We subsequently had an interesting exchange which helped me to understand her perspective. I realised that I had been too radical in my formulations, so I adapted the text in order to show better the multifaceted nature of the situation. At a certain point, however, I decided not to adapt the text to further align with her views, since this meant omitting other perspectives that I wanted to include. This example illustrates the limitations of such collaborations and the importance for the researcher to set boundaries between their work and the research partners' expectations.

The research based on my partner's job constitutes another example where I had to negotiate the collaboration carefully. I was aware that this project could generate tension between us if my research approach and analyses conflicted with his own work. In addition, involving me in his professional activity constituted a risk for him, because he had contractually signed a strict non-disclosure agreement and his managers were very serious about confidentiality. At the same time, it was a wonderful opportunity for me to approach a research field that would otherwise have remained closed.

Several elements contributed to making this collaboration not only possible but also rewarding. Firstly, before beginning we agreed that he would read the final text in order to make sure that the information I disclosed could not violate the terms of his contract or harm him or his colleagues. Our mutual trust paved the way to open exchanges. Secondly, I tried to avoid putting constraints on his professional activity. In a later discussion, he said that he had not felt the need to make any effort to cooperate with me during the research process. This was mainly because this collabora-

tion did not change our habits too much, since we live together. This favourable situation countered one of the main limitations of the para-ethnographical approach, which is that deep exchanges require time, engagement, and an adequate setting (on this topic, see the discussion in: Oberlé, Sandoz, & Sontag, 2017). Thirdly, collaborating with my partner opened many doors, but I also tried to work independently, without relying too much on him. I developed my own network among his colleagues, which enabled me to diversify my sources of information and access. Finally, my partner enjoyed reflecting on his job, and I am convinced that our exchanges helped him to manage some of the constraints associated with his professional activity.

In fact, I think that this collaboration closely corresponds to Holmes and Marcus's concept of para-ethnography: not only did I learn about my partner's job, but he also became involved in mine. For instance, we co-organised a presentation as part of a seminar where he introduced his job and I presented an anthropological text on consulting (Skovgaard Smith, 2013), which he later used in a debate with some colleagues. In this way, our experiences were mutually enriching. Rather than remaining merely an informant, my partner became a research partner with whom I could reflect on the situations that we observed. By discussing our experiences, we challenged each other's assumptions and expanded our understanding of the social phenomena at hand.

If active research collaborations can constitute a risk for researchers, my experience shows that they can also be rewarding. Nevertheless, power relations should not be underestimated, and it is important that researchers actively reflect on them. Moreover, researchers need to clearly negotiate collaborations. To do so, they must establish a framework that affords them enough freedom to compare perspectives and develop their own analyses in order to protect their research from private interests. This necessitates clear communication and a willingness from both sides to play by the set rules. I am convinced that the additional effort is worthwhile in order to enable researchers to challenge their assumptions, expand their reflections, and enable their research partners to both participate in and benefit from the process.

1.2.3 Research Locations

Switzerland is an interesting country for studying highly skilled migration, in particular because of the exceptional share of highly educated immigrants it attracts each year and the social, cultural, political, and economic importance of this topic for the country (Müller-Jentsch, 2008a; nccr – on the move, 2017). I am, however, aware that presenting my research as a project *on* Switzerland is problematic, because it limits the perspective to a national level and tends to essentialise the phenomena under study. If my research is situated *in* Switzerland, it is neither representative of the whole country nor are my analyses valid for this single country. In fact, my project focuses on specific situations that transcend political constructions of space, even though they are also influenced by them. I argue that the state should

neither be neglected nor essentialised as the unique unit of analysis. For this reason, I adopt a multi-sited and multi-scalar perspective in terms of which I understand space as a social product that results from the interaction between material elements, human actions, and meaning (Riaño, 2017).

Like many other researchers of my generation, I have read Wimmer and Glick Schiller's text on methodological nationalism and I acknowledge its relevance. Defined as "the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, p. 301), methodological nationalism describes the tendency of many social scientists to reproduce without question a construction of space based on nation-states. Wimmer and Glick Schiller argue that this tendency is problematic because it prevents researchers from looking beyond political borders and taking into account both the diversity within a given country and the connections between locations in different countries.

It is thus important to acknowledge that my research is neither limited to the borders of the Swiss state, nor does it encompass Switzerland as a whole; it will always be limited to specific regions, organisations, and people that are situated in Switzerland but are the result of a multitude of interactions happening on various scales. Switzerland itself is a multidimensional construction that cannot be reduced to its borders. It is a combination of institutions, practices, norms, infrastructures, imaginaries, and people, whose specific organisation contributes to structuring various aspects of everyday life, including mobility. As Favell says (2008, p. 271):

> Instead of telling a story about how foreign objects (migrants) fit into or challenge the given (nation-state) narrative and institutional structures by which we recognise the world, we might instead look at how the very process by which collectivities manage movers by naming and counting them, and thereby distinguishing them from nonmovers or residents, is the fundamental way in which the territorial nation-state society constitutes itself in the first place.

My approach is constructivist in the sense that I do not take the existence of the Swiss nation/state/society for granted. I rather try to question it by studying specific forms of organisation and mobility management. Moreover, my research does not focus only on the Swiss state. I also consider actors such as companies, private service providers, and migrant networks in order to understand their role in the mobility of some individuals. In most cases, the scope of activity of these actors extends beyond the political borders of the Swiss state. Yet the political processes that construct these borders also structure their actions to a certain extent. Even in cases where the spaces involved are transnational, the state cannot simply be dismissed because the power and value that we attribute to this social construct has an effect on the world and contributes to shaping it in return. It thus makes sense to analyse how different actors interact with each other, and how they spatially define their spheres of activity.

My approach is multi-sited in the sense that it focuses on specific situations and locations that are not directly connected with one another, but whose assemblage offers complementary perspectives on my research topic. This could be summarised as "follow the people" and "follow the stories" (Marcus, 1998): "follow the people"

means looking at the connections between actors and institutions in relation to my research questions; "follow the stories" means understanding how social situations are co-constructed by various actors that have stakes in the mobility of highly educated people.

For instance, during my fieldwork on admission policies and practices in Vaud, I contacted a specialised lawyer who recommended that I talk with the cantonal administration in charge of approving work-permit requests for non-European workers. In parallel, I interviewed an economic promotion agent who regularly collaborates with this department to obtain work permits to support the establishment of foreign companies in the canton. I also met immigration specialists within companies, and participated in information events about admission issues for human resources staff. Finally, I interviewed migrants who had experienced the procedure in order to understand their perspective on this process. In this case, my research field was defined both by the administrative borders of the canton and by the network of relations between the cantonal administration and other actors in relation to a specific normative process.

In comparison, during my research on mobility within companies I started by following a single person – my partner – on business trips. The research field was defined by this person's professional connections, which were situated in various places and countries. I then expanded this research by interviewing other people involved in the mobility of professionals (relocation agents and professional recruiters, in particular). Although these people were not directly connected, talking with them enabled me to understand better the logic of corporate mobility management and to contrast my partner's specific case with other forms of professional mobility.

Although my research spaces include various scales (local, regional, national, transnational, international), most of my fieldwork is situated within two specific areas, which I chose in part for practical reasons (language, prior knowledge, distance from home) and in part because of their relevance in relation to my topic. Both the German-speaking Basel area and the French-speaking Lake Geneva area are economically strongly dependent on international companies that attract significant numbers of highly qualified workers to the region.
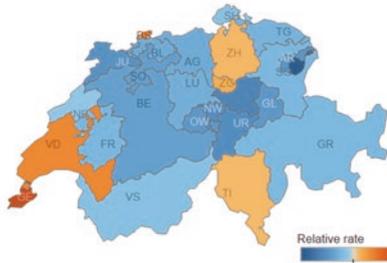
The Lake Geneva area is part of the "Health Valley", a nickname referring to the region's dominance in the fields of medical technology and biotechnology. The development of Health Valley is connected to the BioAlps Life Sciences Cluster, a promotional platform created in 2001 with the support of the cantons of Bern, Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Geneva, Wallis, and Jura, as well as the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and research institutions in the region. This area is host to the headquarters of various multinational companies (e.g. Nestlé, Philip Morris, Medtronic, British American Tobacco, Chiquita, Edwards Lifesciences, Nissan), renowned higher education and research institutions, international organisations, and financial companies. Similarly, Basel is an important centre for the pharmaceutical and chemical industry. Companies such as Novartis and Roche – headquartered in Basel, with an annual revenue of about 50 billion dollars in 2016 and more than 100,000 employees globally – constitute central sources of wealth for both the region and the country (Fortune, 2016).
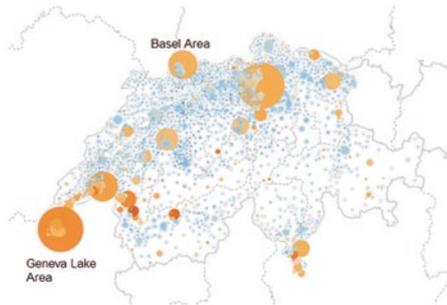
Fig. 1.4 Migrants' arrivals in cantons and municipalities, 2015. (Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Indicators, https://indicators.nccr-onthemove.ch/where-in-switzerland-do-newcomers-settle/ (last consulted on 8 March 2019))

One consequence of this economic vigour is that the proportion of foreigners among the resident population in the two main cantons under scrutiny is significantly higher than the Swiss average: 33.6% in Vaud and 35.2% in Basel (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2016).[8] A dense network of institutions and services has developed in both areas around the mobility and needs of the so-called "expats" (Fig. 1.4).

Part of my research was to enquire about resources for newcomers in these regions, which enabled me to connect my observations and develop a more global understanding of the social phenomena at hand. In addition, one region is French-speaking while the other is German-speaking, offering interesting comparisons between linguistic areas which, to a certain extent, are exposed to different cultural influences and can differ in addressing political issues. Connections and contrasts between specific social and cultural contexts thus form the core of my analysis.

In Vaud, I used the chamber of commerce as a point of departure because this institution is a main service provider for the region's international entities and their employees. Interviews with people who specialise in supporting new employees and their families and who regularly collaborate with other institutions involved in economic promotion and corporate mobility management in the canton enabled me to better grasp the web of relationships and resources available to this category of newcomers. Participating in some of the events organised by the chamber of commerce, I met people who combine frequent mobility with high social, cultural, and economic capital, and discussed their specific challenges with them.

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[8] The Swiss average was 24.6% in 2015.

In parallel, I contributed to the organisation of an informational event targeted at Tigrinya-speaking migrants, for which I collaborated with the integration office in Vaud, the Swiss Secretariat for Migration, and a non-profit association partly made up of Eritrean refugees. This offered me the opportunity to observe integration specialists' attitudes and practices directed at less privileged categories of immigrants: refugees, asylum seekers, and illegalised foreigners. I also met people who experienced special difficulties transferring their cultural capital due to nationality and migratory status. Contrasting these situations with those observed at the chamber of commerce was interesting because I wanted to understand how social actors construct "highly skilled migrants" in relation to other categories of immigrants.

In Basel, my fieldwork focused on "expat" networks and political processes around the issue of highly skilled migration. The hotel stays and evening activities with my partners' colleagues constituted an interesting case study of short-term business travellers. I participated in several "expat" activities such as Language Cafés (events at which non-German-speaking people meet to practice the language and socialise) and Swiss-German classes. Despite being Swiss I was a newcomer to Basel, and my German proficiency was limited (my native language is French), which legitimised my presence at these events and enabled me to personally experience their benefits in terms of access to contacts, information, and competences.

In terms of the political processes around the issue of highly skilled migration, I first participated in a welcome event for newcomers in Basel which was organised by the cantonal authorities. This event clearly belonged to the place-branding strategy of the canton, so I wanted to understand who created it, and why. My investigation yielded information about conferences organised in Basel in the early 2000s around the issue of "expat integration". One conference particularly intrigued me, so I decided to interview its main organisers, two women of North American origin involved in the creation of several of the "expat" organisations with which I had been in contact. The combination of these interviews, my observations within "expat" organisations, my encounters with cantonal authorities, and my analyses of the canton's integration and economic promotion strategy indicated how the category "expat" has been constructed at a local level, and how it has led to the development of policies and practices that target this specific category of immigrants.

In some instances, I conducted interviews and observations outside of Vaud and Basel. For example, during my field research on the practices of firms that attract highly qualified workers, I interviewed relocation and recruitment specialists active in various locations in Switzerland. In my attempt to understand how definitions of skills and access to resources structure labour market access, I participated in informational workshops and training sessions with human resources specialists and job coaches about job search strategies, self-marketing, and professional networking. Since the social phenomena that interested me in these cases extended beyond local political processes, it made little sense to limit myself within cantonal borders.

Finally, my colleagues and I actively created field research situations. The nccr – on the move provided significant economic and symbolic capital to organise events, for instance, a "stakeholders meeting" in Bern that enabled us to meet and discuss our research plans with people whom we considered to be important actors in our

project. I contributed to the organisation of a conference about migration and mobility in the Basel area, at which I presented some of my research results to an audience of researchers, relocation specialists, immigrants, and local authorities (Oberlé et al., 2017). An "expert roundtable" on "expat" mobility organised in Lenzburg offered a similar setting to present and discuss my results with colleagues and research partners. These events not only enabled me to observe interactions between representatives of various institutions, exchange ideas about my research, and test opinions on matters of interest, but also increased my legitimacy as a competent research partner. Therefore, my involvement in these events facilitated my access to fieldwork.

1.2.4   Data Collection and Analysis

My epistemological approach is qualitative, constructivist, and interpretative. I do not aim to achieve representative measurements that would enable the generalisation of my findings to all migrants. I am, rather, interested in the meaning that different social actors give to the realities they experience. My goal is to understand how these meanings influence their opinions and practices and shape their realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In the following section I provide information about my data collection and analysis methods. I start with a presentation of recorded interviews and observations and finish with a description of the secondary sources, namely documents and surveys.

Recorded Interviews

My interviewees included individuals who work for institutions that have a stake in attracting, selecting, or retaining immigrants in Switzerland and highly educated individuals who moved to Switzerland under the auspices of such institutions (Table 1.1). As previously mentioned, I divided the research into complementary sub-projects and actively collaborated with my colleagues Dr. Metka Hercog and Dr. Katrin Sontag (Tables 1.2 and 1.3). I followed a theoretical sampling approach, which involved constant iterations between data collection, data analysis, and reading the relevant literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each interview raised new questions, which I answered by researching more information and interviewing new people. I stopped when I reached theoretical saturation – or at least a satisfactory level of understanding of the situations under study.

I accessed my interviewees through various means. In the case of institutions, I used the Internet and other media to identify relevant stakeholders and collect information in parallel with the interviews. I also used the snowball sampling technique (Atkinson & Flint, 2004), which helped me to access more people and to understand my interviewees' relational networks better. Participating in public events enabled me to get in touch with potential interviewees, exchange preliminary information,

Table 1.1 Recorded interviews conducted by the author

Interview date	Interviewee characteristics	Interview topics
25.10.2014	US couple (man/woman), naturalised Swiss; founders of the "Expat Expo"	Migration biography and migration industries
		Focus: Chaps. 3, 4, and 5
29.1.2015	Swiss man; former professional recruiter; trained in sociology	Experience as a professional recruiter
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 4
5.2.2015	Swiss man; former professional recruiter; trained in chemistry	Experience as a professional recruiter
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 4
18.2.2015	German man; human resources specialist in the chemical industry planning to relocate to Basel for professional reasons	Migration biography; reasons for and organisation of relocation to Basel; experience in human resources
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 4, and 5
27.2.2015	Swiss woman; head of a municipal department in charge of city marketing in Vaud	City marketing strategies
		Focus: Chap. 3
27.2.2015	Two Swiss women working for a support organisation for multinational company employees and their families in Vaud (project initiated by a chamber of commerce and a cantonal organisation for economic promotion)	Aims and activities of the organisation; collaboration with other institutions
		Focus: Chaps. 3, 4, and 5
20.3.2015	Swiss woman; legal consultant and migration specialist in Vaud (founded a legal advice bureau)	Migration policies for highly skilled individuals in Switzerland
		Focus: Chap. 2
11.4.2015	Swiss man; human resources manager at a bank in Vaud	Experience as a human resources manager
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 4
6.5.2015	Swiss man; head of a cantonal department in charge of labour market control in Vaud	Selection of non-EU/EFTA nationals requesting work authorisation
		Focus: Chap. 2
27.5.2015	Swiss man; head of an organisation in charge of economic promotion at the cantonal level in Vaud	Practices of economic promotion and collaboration with other institutions
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 3
29.9.2015	German man; human resources specialist in the chemical industry who had recently relocated to Basel for professional reasons	Second interview: experience with relocation; experience with job
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 4, and 5
1.10.2015	US woman, naturalised Swiss; communication coach specialising in integration in Basel	Migration biography and experience as a coach
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5

Table 1.1 (continued)

Interview date	Interviewee characteristics	Interview topics
6.10.2015	Brazilian man; engineer currently working in Switzerland	Migration biography and experience with the administrative procedure of requesting work authorisation
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 5
18.11.2015	US woman; head of a relocation agency in Basel	Migration biography and experience as a relocation specialist
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 4, and 5
2.12.2015	Swiss woman; head of a relocation agency in Zug	Migration biography and experience as a relocation specialist
		Focus: Chap. 4
13.12.2015	German man; professional recruiter trained in history and anthropology	Migration biography and experience as a professional recruiter
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 4, and 5
21.12.2015	Swiss woman; head of a municipal programme supporting highly educated foreigners' job searches in Bern	Aims and activities of the programme; collaboration with other institutions
		Focus: Chap. 5
17.4.2016	Colombian couple (man/woman) who relocated to Vaud for professional and family reasons	Migration experience; job search experience in Switzerland; strategies deployed
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 3, 4, and 5
17.4.2016	Greek woman; medical doctor who relocated to Basel for family reasons	Migration experience; job search experience in Switzerland
		Focus: Chaps. 3, 4, and 5
19.4.2016	British man; head of an organisation supporting highly educated foreigners' job searches in Basel (sponsored by multinational companies)	Migration experience; aims and activities of the organisation; collaboration with other institutions; job search experience in Switzerland
		Focus: Chaps. 4 and 5

Table 1.2 Recorded interview conducted by Dr. Katrin Sontag

Interview date	Interviewee characteristics	Interview topic
27.1.2017	Iranian man; engineer who fled his country and sought asylum in Switzerland	Migration biography; job search experience in Switzerland
		Focus: Chap. 5

Table 1.3 Recorded interviews conducted by Dr. Metka Hercog

Interview date	Interviewee characteristics	Interview topics
13.5.2015	Swiss woman; coordinator of a cantonal programme that promotes migrants' political engagement in Basel	Aims and activities of the programme
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
28.5.2015	Swiss woman; head of a cantonal department in charge of labour market control in Basel	Selection of non-EU/EFTA nationals requesting work authorisation
		Focus: Chap. 2
17.3.2016	Brazilian woman; communication specialist active in organisations that promote migrants' civic participation	Migration biography; reasons for engagement; job search experience in Switzerland
		Focus: Chap. 5
18.3.2016	Italian man; engineer who relocated to Switzerland for family reasons	Migration biography; job search experience in Switzerland
		Focus: Chap. 5
30.5.2016	Eritrean man; legal scholar who fled his country and relocated to Switzerland for family reasons	Migration biography; job search experience in Switzerland; experience with the administrative procedure of requesting a residence permit
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 5
14.4.2016	Sri Lankan woman; business and marketing specialist who fled her country and relocated to Switzerland for study and family reasons	Migration biography; job search experience in Switzerland; reasons for engagement in various organisations
		Focus: Chap. 5

and decide whether to meet them again. Finally, I relied heavily on my personal network in Switzerland to access interviewees. I often had email or phone exchanges before and after the interviews, which I took into account in the analysis.

My interviews were semi-directed, with a relatively free and informal structure. I developed the interview guides based on my research interests and on preliminary information found online or during fieldwork. In several instances, representatives of institutions asked to see the interview guide in advance. I always ensured that my interviewees understood the research framework and agreed with the proposed disclosure conditions.

The analysis was mainly inductive and involved a coding process inspired by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I regarded my interviews as narratives situated within and shaped by a specific context. Beyond what was said, I reflected on how and why it was said, and what remained unsaid (Charmaz, 2014). I also adopted a collaborative approach drawing on Holmes and Marcus's para-ethnography (2008). In several instances, I asked interviewees to review texts based on their experiences, in particular the portraits. Although the amount of time invested in these exchanges varied, the feedback from interviewees deepened my analysis and helped to render the information more precise.

Examples of interview guides

Interview with a Person Who Followed Her Spouse to Switzerland and Searched for a Job in the Country
Goal of the interview: To understand the strategies used to access the Swiss labour market and the impact of the institutional context on the individual experience.
Background:

– Place of birth; social background; early experiences with mobility; education; work experience; family situation

Migration history:

– Places where the person lived before Switzerland; reasons for the different sojourns; main activities during the different sojourns; personal evaluation of the different experiences

Relocation to Switzerland:

– Reasons for moving to Switzerland; previous knowledge about Switzerland; research about Switzerland
– Expectations/disappointments
– Contacts in Switzerland
– Support for the relocation (sources: websites, institutions, individuals …; types: permits, insurance, taxes, housing, language, children, partner, financial support …)
– Legal status in Switzerland (impact of the legal status on other aspects of daily life; changes of the legal status …)
– Experiences with the administration; support and obstacles from the state

Access to the labour market:

– Career history
– Professional contacts in Switzerland before moving
– Use of intermediaries (headhunters; employment agency; non-profit organisations; state-run organisation; trainings; specific networks …)
– Obstacles to accessing the labour market (legal limitations; impact of the family situation; recognition of qualifications; forms of discrimination …)
– Opportunities/support for accessing the labour market (key persons; key moments; key decisions …)

(continued)

- – Strategies for accessing the labour market
- – Other strategies (volunteer work; start business; start a family; get involved in politics; new studies; move elsewhere …)
- – Expectations/disappointments

Impact of policies:

- – Experiences with the application procedure for residence and work permits
- – Support obtained during the process of settlement
- – Main obstacles to fulfilling goals since migration to Switzerland
- – New opportunities available since migration to Switzerland
- – Most important forms of support available since migration to Switzerland
- – Opinion about possible policy changes that would improve the situation of people in the same situation (If you were active in politics, what would you change?)

Future plans:

- – What are your plans for the future? How long do you expect to stay here? Do you have intentions to return to your home country? Elsewhere? Why?

Interview with the Employee of an Economic Promotion Agency
Goal of the interview: To understand what the institution does, its objectives, its target audience, and how it collaborates with other institutions.

- – Tell me more about yourself: How did you come to work for this institution? What are your main tasks and responsibilities?
- – Tell me more about the institution: origins, employees, functions, objectives, activities …
- – Tell me about the companies you support: How do you get in touch with them? How many do you support per year? What do they generally expect from you?
- – Do you have specific objectives in terms of the kind of company or activity sector you support?
- – What are your main economic promotion tools?
- – Why do companies decide to come to your canton?
- – What kind of evolution have you observed in the way economic promotion is organised in your canton?

- What impact do political decisions have on your work?
- What are the other economic promotion institutions in the region? How do you collaborate with them?
- What are the main institutions that you collaborate with? How is the collaboration organised?
- How do you support people who come as part of a company relocation? Do you have specific measures to attract highly educated people to the canton?
- Have you experienced difficulties bringing in certain people (for instance regarding access to residence permits)? Is this a concern for companies?
- What kind of relationship do you have with the labour market office in the canton and with the Swiss secretariat for migration?
- Do you think that the current political orientation responds to the economic needs of the cantons? Is it possible for you to influence this?
- What do you think of the initiative "against mass migration"? Does it affect your work?

Observations

I conducted three main types of observations: at public events; at events where I played an active role as a presenter and/or organiser (e.g. roundtables, conferences, informational events); and during informal situations (Table 1.4). In each case, I recorded information in a field diary, differentiating between descriptions, methodological notes, and analytical considerations (Beaud & Weber, 2010). This enabled me to observe practices and interactions, and gave me the opportunity to conduct informal interviews and discuss my research with a variety of people.

Most of the events did not pose any problems regarding access. Some cases required special permission based on my researcher status, but I did not encounter any objections. Other events and situations were only accessible to me because of my personal involvement in the organisation or network, for instance, through my partner. However, I was initially refused permission to conduct observations during recruitment processes at a consulting company, and subsequently decided to focus my research on more accessible locations.

I never hid the fact that I was conducting research, but I was not always able to communicate my research objectives and framework during observation. However, I always maintained the anonymity of participants and never disclosed any potentially harmful information.

The analysis situated my observations within a broader context by connecting them with other sources. For instance, triangulating my ethnographic observations with other data from my fieldwork (interviews, documents, statistics) helped me to grasp the different perspectives of the actors involved and to compare discourses

Table 1.4 List of observations conducted by the author

Observation date	Type of observation	Research interests
12.2.2014	Informational workshop about careers in consulting	Consulting; mobile workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
25.11.2014	Visit to the "Expat Expo" in Basel	Migration industries
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 3, 4, and 5
18.12.2014	Christmas party at a consulting company	Consulting; mobile workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
10.2.2015	Welcome event for new residents in Basel organised by the canton	Place-branding strategies
		Focus: Chap. 3
11.2.2015	Roundtable on the consequences of the initiative "against mass migration" organised by the University of Neuchâtel	Swiss immigration policy
		Focus: Chap. 2
26.2.2015	Welcome Day for international employees and their families at a chamber of commerce	Place-branding strategies
		Focus: Chap. 3
9.3.2015	Workshop on job market perspectives at a consulting company	Consulting; selection of workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
21.3.2015	Collaboration with the organisation Metsai – Zukunft: organisation of an information event for Tigrinya-speaking people in Switzerland, in collaboration with the Swiss Secretariat for Migration and the integration office in Vaud (active participation of the author in the organisation)	Support institutions; integration strategies; labour market access
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
11–12.4.2015	Workshop on job search strategies for university students with a human resources specialist (organised by a private foundation)	Labour market access; selection of workers; definition of skills
		Focus: Chaps. 4 and 5
22.4.2015	Meeting at the integration division of the Swiss Secretariat for Migration to discuss the organisation of an information workshop in Vaud for Tigrinya-speaking people	Role of the federal administration; integration strategies
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
23.4.2015	Workshop on "Successful Self-Marketing" for graduate students at the University of Basel	Labour market access; selection of workers; definition of skills
		Focus: Chaps. 4 and 5
7.5.2015	Roundtable on border management with a lawyer specialising in admission processes at the University of Neuchâtel	Swiss immigration policy
		Focus: Chap. 2
4.6.2015	Informational event organised by a chamber of commerce in Vaud on the consequences of the initiative "against mass migration" for companies (target group: human resources staff)	Swiss immigration policy; admission processes for non-EU/EFTA workers; mobility management within companies
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 3
12.6.2015	Workshop on Switzerland's European policy with representatives of the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (organised by the nccr – on the move)	Swiss immigration policy
		Focus: Chap. 2

Table 1.4 (continued)

Observation date	Type of observation	Research interests
9.7.2015	Training with a lawyer specialising in work permits (organised by the nccr – on the move)	Swiss immigration policy; admission processes for non-EU/EFTA workers
		Focus: Chap. 2
13.9.2015	Nccr – on the move stakeholders meeting on integration with representatives of state administrations, NGOs, companies and research institutions (active participation of the author in the organisation)	Swiss immigration policy; support institutions; integration strategies
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 3
18.9.2015	Informational workshop about careers in consulting	Consulting; selection of workers by companies; definition of skills
		Focus: Chap. 4
6.11.2015	Workshop on work permits with a lawyer (organised by the nccr – on the move)	Swiss immigration policy; admission processes for non-EU/EFTA workers
		Focus: Chap. 2
6.11.2015	Workshop: "What Is Consulting?" (organised by the author and her partner as part of an informal seminar)	Consulting; mobile workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
13.11.2015	Event on migration and borders with researchers, activists, and artists (organised by a graduate student association with the active participation of the author)	Swiss immigration policy; support institutions
		Focus: Chap. 2
10.12.2015	Christmas party at a consulting company	Consulting; mobile workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
16.12.2015	Welcome event for new residents in Neuchâtel, organised by the canton	Place-branding and integration strategies
		Focus: Chap. 3
3.2015–8.2016	Accommodation in business hotels in Basel about three times a week and evening activities with employees of a multinational consulting company (e.g. dinner, sport, informal meetings etc.)	Consulting; mobile workers; mobility management within companies
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 3, and 4
1–6.2016	Swiss German classes at an "expat" organisation in Basel	Support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
21.1.2016	Conference on asylum with representatives of the federal administration and NGOs, organised by the UNHCR and the Swiss Refugee Council	Swiss immigration policy; support institutions
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 5
25.1.2016	Language Café for foreigners living in Basel organised by an "expat" organisation	Support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
26.1.2016	Informational session for refugees interested in studying at the University of Basel organised by a student association	Support institutions
		Focus: Chap. 5

Table 1.4 (continued)

Observation date	Type of observation	Research interests
22.2.2016	Meeting to discuss programmes for refugees interested in studying at universities with the representatives of various organisations that promote the participation of refugees in higher education (organised by the author and colleagues from the University of Basel)	Support institutions
		Focus: Chap. 5
26.2.2016	Event on the Swiss job market for trailing spouses organised by an "expat" organisation and the University of Basel	Labour market access; support institutions
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
17.3.2016	Webcast on Swiss immigration and mobility management organised by a consulting company (target group: human resources staff)	Consulting; mobile workers; mobility management within companies
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 4
6.4.2016	Language Café at an "expat" organisation in Basel	Support institutions; mobile people; labour market access
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
13.4.2016	Meeting with the representative of an "expat" organisation as part of the organisation of a conference on mobility in Basel (organised by the author and colleagues from the University of Basel)	Support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chap. 3
14.4.2016	Workshop on job search strategies for trailing spouses organised by a chamber of commerce in Vaud	Labour market access; support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
14.6.2016	Roundtable on migration at the University of Basel, with a presentation by the mayor of Basel	Place-branding strategies; integration strategies
		Focus: Chap. 3
31.6.2016	Summer party at a consulting company	Consulting; mobile workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
20.9.2016	Meeting with representatives of Basel's integration office, an "expat" organisation, and the University of Basel's welcome centre to organise a conference on mobility in the Basel area (organised by the author and colleagues from the University of Basel)	Place-branding and integration strategies; support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
27.9.2016	Conference on mobility in the Basel area with representatives of Basel's integration office, an "expat" organisation, and the University of Basel's welcome centre (organised by the author and colleagues from the University of Basel)	Place-branding and integration strategies; support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
26.10.2016	Roundtable on business travellers organised by a consulting company (target group: human resources staff)	Consulting; mobile workers; mobility management within companies
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 4

Table 1.4   (continued)

Observation date	Type of observation	Research interests
2.11.2016	Conference of the Federal Commission for Migration on work and migration	Swiss immigration policy; labour market access
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 5
30.10.2017	Expert roundtable on relocation support and the mobility of workers with representatives of state administrations, NGOs, companies, and research institutions (organised by the nccr – on the move with the active participation of the author)	Mobility management within companies; place-branding and integration strategies; mobile workers
		Focus: Chaps. 3, 4, and 5
21.11.2018	Expert discussion on Swiss admission policies and implementation practices with researchers and representatives of federal and cantonal offices (organised by the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies)	Swiss immigration policy; admission processes for non-EU/ EFTA workers
		Focus: Chap. 2

with practices. Observing interactions between people in different roles and positions better enabled me to situate their status and constraints, and the power structures in which they were embedded. Moreover, I actively reflected on my own position and role in order to take into account how I co-shaped the observed situations with the actors involved. Thus, my focus was on understanding how meaning is co-constructed by different actors in specific places and times (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Documents

The analysis of relevant documents provided complementary information about my research fields and the actors involved. Legal texts on immigration to Switzerland helped me to understand the normative context regulating admission in relation to the construction of a dual regime of unwanted "migration" and desirable "mobility". A lecture on Swiss migration law by Professor Minh Son Nguyen at the University of Neuchâtel guided this analysis. I also consulted official reports of the federal and cantonal administrations to analyse the rationale behind immigration, integration, and economic promotion policies.

Throughout the project, I collected media articles relevant to my topic. This database provided interesting insights into how the mobility of the highly skilled is perceived and debated in Switzerland. I also consulted public statistics on immigration to Switzerland published by the Swiss Secretariat for Migration, the Federal Statistical Office, and cantonal administrations in order to situate better the scope of my ethnographic observations. The nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Indicators, which are based on aggregated public statistics, constituted another

important source of information.[9] Finally, I conducted online research about the interviewees and their affiliations. Institutional websites, Linkedin profiles, and other online platforms provided useful data on actors' histories and connections. This research enabled me to identify stakeholders and gather information about their public profiles.

The analysis focused on identifying emic definitions (Pike, 1954) of concepts such as "highly skilled migrant", "low skilled migrant", "expat", and "economic interest" in order to understand the political and cultural logic and the power structures that these terms reflect. The analysed documents are quoted throughout the text and referenced in the bibliography.

Survey

The main objective of the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey is to provide new data on recent migration to Switzerland. The preparatory work started in 2015 in collaboration with my research team and other colleagues from the nccr – on the move. The survey was conducted in 2016, successfully reaching 5800 people from German, French, Italian, English, Spanish, and Portuguese-speaking countries who had arrived in Switzerland during the past 10 years. They were contacted via a register provided by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office based on the following criteria:

Residents who:

1. Immigrated after June 2006 to Switzerland (max. 10 years of residence)
2. Are foreign-born
3. Hold one of the selected nationalities[10]
4. Hold a residence permit (B), settlement permit (C), short-term permit (L), or are diplomats/international civil servants
5. Were 18 years or over at the time of immigration,
6. Were between 24 and 64 years at the time of the survey.

Respondents provided information about their migration trajectory before arriving in Switzerland, the composition of their family, their labour market participation and integration, and their level of satisfaction with life in Switzerland. Most of the questions were taken from other surveys in order to allow for national and international comparisons. The methodology followed a mixed-mode approach, which

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[9] See the website of the nccr – on the move: http://nccr-onthemove.ch/knowledge-transfer/migration-mobility-indicators/ (last consulted on 14 November 2017).

[10] The nationalities were selected based on the languages mentioned above. They account for 63% of the total foreign resident population and include the following countries: Germany, Austria, France, Italy, United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, North America, Canada, India, Benin, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Saint Helena, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe. Citizens from the Balkans and Turkey make up almost 20% of the remaining 37%.

combined an online questionnaire with telephone interviews. The nccr – on the move mandated a private institute to carry out the data collection process.

I received the data during the latter stage of the research process (March 2017). I was thus not able to fully include them in my project. Nevertheless, one of my chapters specifically focuses on questions from the survey about the relocation support received by recent immigrants to Switzerland. The statistical analysis nicely complements my project by enabling me to better understand the significance and generalisation potential of my ethnographic data.

More information about the methods used for analysing data from this survey is available in Chap. 5. A detailed description of the survey methodology is also available in the Migration-Mobility Survey report written by Steiner (2017).

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