Liquid Relationship to Possessions

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This study investigates consumers' relationship to possessions in the condition of contemporary global nomadism. Prior research argues that consumers form enduring and strong attachments to possessions because of their centrality to identity projects. This role is heightened in life transitions including cross-border movements as possessions anchor consumer's identities either to their homeland or to the host country. This study reexamines this claim via in-depth interviews with elite global nomads, deterritorialized consumers who engage in serial relocation and frequent short-term international mobility. An alternative relationship to possessions characterized by detachment and flexibility emerges, which is termed "liquid." Three characteristics of a liquid relationship to possessions are identified: temporary situational value, use-value, and immateriality. The study outlines a logic of nomadic consumption, that of instrumentality, where possessions and practices are strategic resources in managing mobility. A liquid perspective on possessions expands current understandings of materiality, acculturation, and globalization.

> How much does your life weigh? Imagine for a second that you're carrying a backpack. . . . I want you to *feel* the straps on your shoulders. . . . You feel them? Now, I want you to pack it with all the stuff that you have in your life. Start with the little things. The stuff in drawers and on shelves. The collectibles and knick-knacks. Feel the weight as it adds up. Now, start adding the larger stuff. Your clothes, table top appliances, lamps, linens, your TV. That backpack should be getting really heavy at this point—go bigger. Your couch, your bed, your kitchen table. Stuff it all in. . . . Your car, get it in there. . . . Your home, . . . I want you to stuff it into that backpack. Now try to walk. Kinda hard isn't it? This is what we do to ourselves on a daily basis. We weigh ourselves down until we can't even move. And make no mistake—moving is living.
>
> (Ryan Bingham [George Clooney's character], *Up in the Air*, film, 2009)

For consumers who follow nomadic lifestyles, such as the fictional Ryan, mobility is essential to their identity and lifestyle; possessions become problematic and inhibit the fluidity of their movements. This lifestyle fictionalized in the Clooney film brings into focus the question of how nomadic consumers relate to objects. Do they exhibit classic forms of object attachment that feature objects as key to identity (Belk 1988)? If not, how do they relate to the material world? In this study, we examine how global nomadism shapes consumers' relationships to objects. Global nomadism provides a distinctive context in which to reexamine current understandings of consumer-object relations and identify alternative relationships to the material world that go beyond notions of the extended self.

Material possessions as an expression and extension of selfhood have been a consumer research staple for over 25 years (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk 1988). This tradition argues that material possessions are crucial in maintaining, displaying, and transforming the self because of the symbolic connections between possessions and one's personal history, values, relationships, and ethnic or national culture (Belk 1988; Richins 1994; Schouten 1991; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). In this way, possessions extend the self into the external world

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and provide concrete links between the self, the material world, and the cultural context of consumption (Grayson and Shulman 2000; Miller 1987; Tian and Belk 2005). Possessions anchor and stabilize identity in space as they configure the world into a place of belonging (Csikszentmihalyi and Rocherberg-Halton 1981; McCracken 1986). During geographical moves, migrant consumers employ possessions to sustain a connection to place and to sustain the self (Belk 1992; Joy and Dholakia 1991; Mehta and Belk 1991). Research also shows that consumers use possessions to manage temporality, that is, to carry the past into the present, maintain present selves, and anticipate future selves (Marcoux 2001a; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000). Overall, consumer researchers have argued that consumers tend to form salient, enduring, and strong attachment to possessions because of the roles that possessions play in singular identity projects. Object attachment fixes one to place, time, and culture, and it may protect or buffer the self from change.

In this article, we overlay theories of materiality and acculturation to explore possessions and consumer relationships to them in contemporary global nomadism. During nomadism, attachment to things becomes problematic because possessions tether one to particular locales both physically and symbolically. Studies of traditional nomadism, such as of gypsies in Europe, Berber groups in Northern Africa, and hobos in the United States, demonstrate that nomadic people value detachment and flexibility, have diminished interest in ownership, and eschew attachments that inhibit their freedom of movement (Anderson 1975; Barfield 1993; Liegeois 1994). A detached relationship to possessions and places is a central feature of nomadic cultures and mentality, and it is one that reinforces their mobility (D'Andrea 2009). Materialism in general is seen as producing "bumps in the road" during mobility (van Binsbergen and Geschiere 2005). Nomadic perspectives challenge existing views of possessions in consumer research and invite inquiry into the role of possessions in conditions of geographical mobility.

We investigate the nature of consumer-object relations and the role of possessions in the context of global nomadism. Global nomadism is characterized by serial relocations, frequent short-term international travel, and deterritorialization. Deterritorialization refers to the unmooring of individual identities from location or territory (Craig and Douglass 2006). Serial relocations, the continuous movement from place to place, as well as frequent, short-term international travels, characterize contemporary nomadic mobility (Featherstone 1995). Such nomadism is among the global ethnoscaping processes that Appadurai (1990) identified.

Our findings demonstrate that, in global nomadism, consumers' relationship to possessions differs from contexts in which they are well rooted or in which they move between only two cultural contexts, as in historical migration. We identify and develop the construct of a liquid relationship to possessions to characterize the detached and flexible way consumers relate to objects in contemporary global nomadism. We show that relationships to possessions are temporary and situational; possessions are appreciated for their instrumental use-value and their immateriality. We point out that the liquidity of possessions and the foregrounding of consumption practices reinforce a consumer lifestyle that is detached from national geography and that favors enduring mobility rather than acculturation. Next, we introduce the theoretical orientations we use, describe the method we took to investigate this phenomenon, outline conditions of liquidity, introduce the three properties of liquid possessions that emerged from our analysis, and finally discuss the importance of our findings for understanding materiality, acculturation, and globalization within consumer research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Possessions in Migrant Mobility

Global mobility has become a pervasive phenomenon, but the study of consumption in general and possessions in particular in conditions of geographic mobility have attracted limited attention. The theoretical perspective that provides a glimpse into consumers' relationship to possessions in mobility is research examining consumer acculturation. Prior acculturation research has argued that attachment to possessions plays a salient role during cross-cultural relocation or episodic mobility as it enables migrant consumers to sustain identity (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005; Belk 1992; Joy and Dholakia 1991; Mehta and Belk 1991; Oswald 1999; Peñaloza 1994). This literature has shown that migrant consumers, whether immigrants or expatriates, remain anchored to a country of origin and value attachment to possessions for three purposes: to sustain connections symbolically to these home places, to sustain connections with relations left behind, and to match the social role expectations imposed upon them in their new locale.

However, acculturation theory is limited by two underlying assumptions. First, this stream of research has focused predominantly on the study of the role of possessions during migrant mobility from a country of origin to a host country while assuming linear mobility trajectories. Second, acculturation research assumes that consumer identity is territorialized, that is, linked to particular places of origin (e.g., homeland), and it has suggested that the anchoring of migrant identity to a place overwhelmingly shapes the relationship to possessions. Thus, possessions become visible markers of the migrants' belonging to two worlds, the country of origin and the host country. For instance, research has shown that migrant consumers carry with them and display objects that are symbolic of their home culture to express and reaffirm their national identity and re-create a sense of home abroad (Askegaard et al. 2005; Belk 1992; Ger and Østergaard 1998; Gilly 1995; Joy and Dholakia 1991; Mehta and Belk 1991; Oswald 1999; Peñaloza 1994). These studies also argue that during migration possessions are called on to fulfill roles that family, friends, and familiar environments once performed for the immigrant consumer (Mehta and Belk 1991). Representing the comfort of familiarity, possessions from the country of origin serve as transitional objects (Winnicott 1951/1992) and shelter mobile consumers from the alienation they may experience in mobility (Chung 2000). When pos-

sessions compose part of an individual's or a family's identity, they may allow migrant consumers to "transport" part of their former identities to a new place by sustaining connections with the country of origin and aiding their identity transition in the host country.

In sum, acculturation research has argued that (1) possession attachment becomes even more salient in mobility than in permanence, (2) consumers form enduring and strong attachments to possessions, and (3) possessions are valued because of their role as identity anchors to the homeland or the host country. In this study, we revisit these three findings and the nature of consumers' relationship to possessions in the context of contemporary global nomadism. We suggest that current acculturation theory is limited in explaining consumption outside the migrant context, such as the deterritorialized and nomadic context studied here, where consumer identity is uncoupled from nationality and geographical mobility does not follow a linear trajectory. We elaborate on this context next.

Possessions in Global Nomadism

Traditionally, nomadism refers to moving from place to place, and it is commonly used to identify the lifestyle of people who have no fixed residence but who move from place to place usually seasonally and within a defined territory (Köhler-Rollefson 1993; Salzman 2002). Nomadism does not refer to a rare or occasional movement of people, as in moving to a new house or migrating to a new country or community. Nomadism represents a unique context to study possession relationships as anthropologists have shown that traditional nomads have limited attachments to material objects, at least to those that do not themselves facilitate mobility, such as tents or grazing livestock (Na'amneh, Shunnaq, and Tasbasi 2008). Rather, they organize their life around relationships and economic activities (Hutchinson 1992; Köhler-Rollefson 1993; Krätli 2008; Salzman 2002). Thus, their relationship to possessions is one of flexibility and detachment. Within consumer research, there has been little study of how nomadism shapes consumption either among traditional nomads, such as the Roma (gypsies) (Barfield 1993; Khazanov 1994; Liegeois 1994; Salzman 2002), or among contemporary global nomads (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2010).

Contemporary global nomadism is characterized by serial relocations and frequent cross-border mobility, as well as deterritorialization. In a globalized world, mobility trajectories are increasingly shaped by demands for skilled labor in the global economy (Ong 2007; Urry 2007). Fixed reference points are increasingly absent, and nationality itself is increasingly in doubt (Featherstone 1995; Hannerz 1996). Rather than consumers being rooted in one country and then transplanted to another, movement tends to be more fluid as consumers repeatedly cross borders (D'Andrea 2009). This phenomenon of people's identities becoming uncoupled from a particular location or territory is referred to as deterritorialization; it constitutes one of the fundamental characteristics of globalization (Craig and Douglas 2006; Featherstone 1995; Ong 2007). Deterritorialization refers to the detachment of social and cultural practices from physical places (Tomlinson 1999). It represents "the loss of the 'natural' relation of culture to geographical and social territories" (Canclini 2005, 107), which has also led to a relaxing of bonds between identity and place (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). As part of the deterritorialization of contemporary society, we have begun to see a neonomadism emerging that has been dubbed global nomadism (D'Andrea 2009).

Global nomadism characterizes a lifestyle of voluntary unmooring from physical location or geography and frequent international mobility. Global nomads may be born in countries different from their nationalities; they may travel frequently, and while living in one place, they are routinely involved with others in far-flung locales. Iyer (2000) notes that in global nomadism the notion of belonging is tenuous, and involvement with one or more transnational cultures, such as a professional or leisure culture, is often combined with one or more territorially based cultures. Cosmopolitan principals of global citizenship rather than state or local loyalties are core values. As such, global nomads are portrayed as possessing deterritorialized knowledge and skills and as having a porous sense of self that changes with location (Featherstone 1995; Hannerz 1996). Mobility is deployed as a basic component of individual economic strategy and identity.

Globalization processes have produced conditions of mobility, such as this one, whose effects on consumers' relationships to possessions are not explained by current models of acculturation. When national boundaries and home or host culture are not as relevant as they are assumed to be in traditional consumer acculturation work, we need new theoretical lenses to understand the role of possessions in contemporary global nomadism. We adopt the theoretical lens of liquidity to study possessions in global nomadism, which we describe next.

Liquidity

In today's globalized world, attachment to things can be problematic because we live in an increasingly liquid world where identity projects are constantly changing. Globalization is characterized by transplanetary processes involving the growing multidirectional flows of people, objects, places, and information (Appadurai 1990; Ritzer 2010, 2) and heightened values of immaterial things, such as complex financial instruments (Miyazaki 2005). Bauman (2000; 2007) proposes the concept of liquid modernity to characterize the current social condition where social structures that "limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behavior" are no longer stable and have a shortened life expectancy; thus "they cannot serve as frames of reference for human actions and long-term life strategies" (Bauman 2007, 1). The term "liquidity" originated from the problems raised by terms such as "postmodernity" or "late modernity." Bauman characterizes the current postmodern condition as liquid or fluid as contrasted with the solid modernity that preceded it. Solid modernity was characterized by an era of heavy infrastructural and industrial investment and labor-intensive production, where "capital was as much

fixed to the ground as were the labourers it engaged" (Bauman 2000, 58), as well as relatively fixed time-space locational orientations, such as nation states. In the transition from solid to liquid modernity, over time modernity has melted the solids. In contrast to solid modernity, where size is power and weight is success, Bauman argues that in liquid modernity solidity, fixity and sheer extension of locational control is no longer automatically an asset (see also Tomlinson 2007). At an increasing rate during the last century, things that seemed so solid have tended to melt and become increasingly liquid, including institutions, people, objects, information, and places (Ritzer 2010). Slater also observes this when he argues that a key aspect of the trajectory that starts with post-Fordism and has continued to later consumer cultures "is the dematerialization of objects and commodities, indeed of the economy and ultimately of society as a whole" (Slater 1997, 193).

Bauman's conceptualization of liquidity is not entirely new; the construct has a deep genealogy in social theory. Thus, Simmel (1907/2004) argues that modern all-purpose money acts to dissolve social distinctions based on estate or class because of its abstract qualities. Currency reduces all social distinctions to a single common denominator. Marx (1930) further argues that it is not money but instead accumulation of capital that had the capacity to dissolve all previous forms of social relationships. Because of the nature of capitalism, Marx (1930) describes it as an economic system where "everything solid melts into air." Closely related and integral to the idea of liquidity is the notion of flows, where Appadurai (1990) argues that the contemporary world is characterized by a host of earthscaping flows of capital, information, images, ethnicities, and consumer goods and thus the world has become a space of flows and scapes. As Urry (2003) points out, it is the nature of global flows that accounts for the unpredictability, instability, and open-endedness of the liquid modernity outlined by Bauman (2000, 2007). While Marx is describing largely disruptive processes, Bauman argues that liquid modernity does not represent a crisis but is rather a continuing condition of mundane social existence (Tomlinson 2007), which can have both constructive and disruptive effects (Ritzer 2010).

Liquid phenomena do not hold their shape easily or for long. The value of everything, including things, is dated as they become useless when the consumer moves to different identity projects and possessions no longer serve their anchoring purpose. Thus, Bauman (2000) states, "for the possibilities to remain infinite, none may be allowed to petrify into everlasting reality. They had better stay liquid and fluid and have a 'use-by' date attached, lest they render the remaining opportunities off limits" (62). In liquid modernity, the value of fixity, permanence, and location in everyday lifestyles and attitudes gives way to the value of mobility, flexibility, and openness to change (Tomlinson 2007). Permanent or stable life projects confer limited competitive advantage, and consequently life projects are in constant transition. Bauman (2000) argues that liquid modernity is characterized by a fundamental uncertainty about the "ends of human actions" rather than the means to achieve them. He further observes that "we are witnessing a revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality and settlement" (13). Geographers also have linked the notions of flows to the notion of nomadism and the breakdown of fixity of boundaries and barriers (Shields 1997). With their flexible and highly malleable strategies, contemporary global nomads are ideally suited for adapting to the unpredictable economic environments that characterize liquid modernity.

In addition to the change from solids to liquids, Bauman characterizes the shift from heavy to light associated with liquid modernity. Preindustrial and industrial societies were quite heavy as they were characterized by that which is difficult to move with regard to labor, production, goods, and social categories (Ritzer 2010, 12). Later advances, especially in technology and transportation, made goods, people, and places "lighter," easier to move. Tomlinson (2007) expands on the concept of lightness. According to Tomlinson, capitalism has lightened its structures and processes, notably by shedding some of its older encumbrances, but this has not made the burden easier. As distance becomes no object in liquid modernity, place increasingly does not define the nomadic elites, who are "as light and volatile as the new capitalist economy which gave them birth and endowed them with power" (Bauman 2000, 153; see also Ong 2007). Finally, the capital of nomadic elites comes from portable assets as value is derived from ideas, experiences, and temporarily congealed nodes of significance (Appadurai 2005; Rifkin 2000). In liquid modernity, we postulate that stable attachments to possessions may become increasingly problematic.

Our review suggests the need to investigate whether fluid life projects and flexibility will characterize consumers' interactions with possessions in global nomadism. By investigating the nature of consumers' relationships to possessions in contemporary global nomadism, we extend these conceptualizations of liquidity and lightness to include a focus on consumption. Nomadic lifestyles, in particular among global elites who have high levels of resources, are a good place to investigate liquidity, as we expand upon next.

METHOD

To explore the nature of possessions in global nomadism, we adopt the extended-case method, which allows us to reexamine existing theory in a new context through the use of an interpretive approach (Burawoy 1991; Holt 1998). The context of global nomadism enables us to reexamine and potentially challenge the existing pro-possession perspective in consumer research, and it provides an opportunity for theory building (Price, Arnould, and Moisio 2006). To investigate consumer-possession relationships in this context, we examine contemporary global nomads. This sample constitutes an extreme case relative to the samples of migrant or cosmopolitan consumers examined in prior research in terms of their serial relocations, frequency of mobility, and level of deterritorialization.

Global nomads represent an elite, mobile professional group that has emerged worldwide with the development of

the global economy. They frequently travel internationally as well as continuously relocate from country to country; while living in one place, they are routinely involved with people in other far-flung locales (Hannerz 1996; Huang 2006; Ong 2007). These elite global nomads are considered agents of the global free-trade movement—the human agents behind the rise of the global economy and the decline of nation-state influence over economic affairs. They constitute elements of the global power elite, the technocratic-financial-managerial corps that occupies leading positions in the world-system (Sklair 1998). They tend to work in global institutions, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and global nongovernmental organizations, as well as transnational corporations, such as global finance and advertising agencies (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008; Miyazaki 2005).

Prior research has suggested that elite global nomads are found among voluntary global mobile and cosmopolitan professionals (Featherstone 1995; Hannerz 1990, 1996; Sklair 1998). Thus, we sampled our informants on the basis of these two characteristics: mobility and cosmopolitanism. First, selecting for mobility, we sampled consumers who have engaged in serial relocations and frequent, short-term international annual travel. In this way, we distinguish global nomads from expatriates, immigrants, and frequent business travelers. We sampled for individuals who have resided in more than three countries beside their home country during the past decade, as well as those who have worked in at least three different countries annually. We sampled professionals who spend at least 60% of their time on the road annually.

Second, to select for cosmopolitanism, we sampled those mobile professionals who self-identified as speaking at least one foreign language; having friends in other countries; enjoying learning and visiting other cultures; and consuming music, food, furniture, and fashion from other cultural groups. As education is an integral part of cosmopolitanism (Holt 1998), we sampled mobile professionals who have attained at least a bachelor's degree.

Since it is difficult to access global nomads due to their frequent travel, we recruited informants via snowball sampling. Each informant was asked to recommend another global nomad who met our sample criteria. In addition, to broaden our sample, we also gained access to multinational organizations through existing business partnerships of our affiliated universities. After a 6-month data collection period, we ended up with 16 informants who exhibit the characteristics of global nomads we identify in the above paragraphs (see table 1).

Global nomads are members of a global professional group who are not bound by nationality or place of origin. Hence, we included mobile professionals of different nationalities, where 10 informants are Americans and five are from other countries, including the United Kingdom (2), Canada (2), Turkey, and Romania. Most of our informants are Anglo-American, which is consistent with prior characterizations in the literature as to the composition of contemporary global nomads (D'Andrea 2009).

As table 1 illustrates, our informants exhibit the two key distinguishing properties of global nomads: they (1) engage in serial relocation, (2) travel frequently internationally, and (3) exhibit deterritorialization from locality or territory. The third column in table 1, serial relocations, demonstrates that our informants have lived in multiple countries (three at minimum), which distinguishes them from migrant populations and business travelers. Several of our informants were "born global," in the sense that they were raised in multiple countries or experienced multiple cultural influences as children, while others developed into this particular lifestyle either through familial mobility or their own education. The fourth column, short-term international travel, demonstrates their frequent engagement in professional travel (duration in location is 3 months or less), which further distinguishes them from expatriates and immigrants.

Global nomads are deterritorialized in the sense that their identity is uncoupled from a particular locality or territory. The data summarized in the fifth column of table 1, deterritorialization from place of residence or country of origin, demonstrate that our informants are not anchored to a particular nationality or locality. We detect several markers of deterritorialization, including (*a*) lack of identification with home country or country of residence, (*b*) defining home as where they live, not where they were born, (*c*) lack of attachment to a physical structure (house), and (*d*) lack of attachment to place of residency, that is, disinterest in creating a social network in their place of residency.

In addition to the key characteristics of our sample, we also note some demographic factors that may influence how global nomads negotiate mobility, such as gender, age, and marital status. As illustrated in table 1, our sample consists of six females and 10 males; eight of the informants are single, and eight are married. Informants range in age from 27 to 64 years old. Although the income level was not reported by everyone, the average annual income for 11 of the informants is at about US$100,000. These are high-income individuals who vary on other demographic traits.

We collected our data through semi-structured interviews (Bernard 2002; McCracken 1988). Following the extended-case method approach, our interview guide is based on existing possession and acculturation consumer research, the theoretical lens of liquid modernity, and our research questions (Burawoy 1991; McCracken 1988). We deemed an efficient, focused, preorganized interviewing technique such as the semi-structured interview to be suitable for use in a study with busy elite informants (Bernard 2002). The interviews focused on the nature of mobility, relocation and travel practices and experiences, personal possessions, relationship to possessions, and consumption practices. On average, interviews lasted 2 hours and were conducted at the informant's place of residency or work place or at an airport or a coffee house.

In the iterative data collection and analysis process, after each meeting with an informant, a first interview analysis led to fine-tuning the format of the next interview. Data analysis involved a continual process of comparison between data, field

notes, interpretations, existing theory, and study expectations (Burawoy 1991; Spiggle 1994). After each interview was completed, the researchers read the transcripts carefully to familiarize themselves with the identity, consumption, and mobility narratives of the informant. Within-case analyses were conducted at this stage to examine the ways that personal mobility patterns, life cycles, personal history, and profession structure the informant's relationships to possessions (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Next, to conduct cross-case analysis, the data were coded through a list of preliminary codes derived from the theoretical background and theoretical expectations of the study (Miles and Huberman 1994). As the analysis progressed and new categories emerged from the data, we revised the list of codes.

CONDITIONS OF LIQUIDITY

In order to contextualize our findings, we highlight the process of negotiating global nomadism. Narratives of frequent relocations (Europe, Africa, Asia, and Middle East) and frequent travels and self-transformation (studies, job changes), such as this of David, a Scottish consultant for the World Bank, are common in our corpus of data:

> My first trip out of the country was when I was seven when I went with my dad to make a film in the south of France. The first time I went by myself I was fifteen as a tourist to Eastern Austria. . . . At seventeen, I hitched around Europe, and at eighteen, I dropped out of education and hitchhiked around the world . . . up to Iceland and back to university! During university, I made a deal with myself to carry on doing a bit of traveling. . . . When I graduated, my first professional post was in Papua New Guinea at twenty-three where I worked on a two year assignment with the UN way out in the bush. I got tangled up and stayed in that country eleven years but with several different employers and considerable traveling in the region. . . . So, I'd sort of completed everything I went there to do and more, and decided it was time to disengage. And so, I wandered west into Indonesia, where I spent half a year there doing a few consultancies. One day I got a telex saying, would you like to go to Africa for six month assignment. I was expected to go on another assignment like that, but instead I took a little holiday to the States to visit a friend I knew from my African days, and I just got tangled up. Ten days later I was in Jordan working for the World Bank, and I've been in continuous employment with them ever since. So the first five years was in operations in the Middle East and North Africa . . . based in Washington, but making many trips to the these countries, with various meetings in Europe. Then the next five years I was in the region where I've just returned to, Eastern Europe, Southeast Europe, Turkey, former Soviet Union, Central Asia. And then I went out to Asia for the past two years. (David, age 40, Scottish)

This mobility narrative highlights values of cosmopolitanism, voluntarism, flexible engagement with work and place, and, implicitly, transportable skills and expertise that facilitate mobility. It also illustrates the nonlinear mobility trajectories our informants follow, where relocations are accompanied with frequent cross-cultural, short-term travel driven by the demands of the global institutions or multinational corporations they work for.

Their nonlinear, frequent mobility (Featherstone 1995) is reflected in nomads' relationship to places, which problematizes the notion of home as situated in one place (Askegaard et al. 2005). In contrast to the migrant consumers studied in prior consumer research, global nomads do not anchor identity to territory. An experience of deterritorialization shaped by global mobility is illustrated in the following quotation: "I have not felt attached to a place in my adult life. . . . I have lived in other countries, and so I don't feel particularly tied to one place. My home, I happen to be living here 'cause this is where my work is" (Matt). Global nomads describe the relationship to the country of origin in the following terms: "not very meaningful" (Susan); "I do not feel at home in ____" (Brandon); "It doesn't relate to my life" (Philip); "I am no longer ____" (Tina); "I do not have any intentions of going back" (Mark); and "I do not miss or think about it when away" (Carol). Country of origin does not constitute a reference point and does not shape major life decisions.

Similarly, identity is not anchored in the place of residency, which is typically characterized as a "base of operation," as is also illustrated in the last column of table 1. For some informants, such as Brandon, an American anthropologist who was born in Saudi Arabia and grew up there as part of an American expatriate family, home is a base out of which he can operate comfortably. He describes Botswana merely as his home base, which reflects the deterritorialization of nomadic lifestyles. During the interview, Brandon (age 54, American) talked about the fact that he tried to hide his American nationality when abroad:

> *Brandon:* It's hard to do with my accent. I do try and hide it. For a long time I would have a Canadian flag on my backpack. I didn't want to be identified as an American. I only have one passport, so they identify that pretty fast and they always get confused with the Saudi Arabia birthplace.
>
> *Interviewer:* Where is home for you? If US is not home, do you feel there are other places in the world that are kind of home?
>
> *Brandon:* Botswana, yeah, I could live there easily and have and thought about living there over the long term.
>
> *Interviewer:* What makes Botswana home for you?
>
> *Brandon:* I don't know. I really like working there. I really like the people there, and I have a lot of connections; I speak the language.

In global nomadism, "home" becomes a choice rather than an artifact of where one was born or where one currently resides. It is related to the capital that global nomads have built up in a given location and through their travels, from such things as social connections and language proficiency. For informants like Susan (age 51, Romanian), who was

TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHIC AND MOBILITY PROFILES OF INFORMANTS

Informant (age, civil status, income)	Country of origin, profession, education	Serial relocation	Short-term international travel	Deterritorialization from place of residence or country of origin
David (48, S, NA)	Scotland, environmental consultant, MA	UK → Australia → UK → New Guinea → Indonesia → Uganda → Jordan → US → South and Eastern Europe → Vietnam → US.	China, Cambodia, Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, US, Albania.	Does not identify with the country of origin/nationality. "Home, it's wherever I am." Considers home a base of operations. His social network is other global professionals.
Tina (32, S, NA)	Trinidad, teacher, MBA	Trinidad (8 years) → Canada → Caribbean → Canada → South Japan → Canada → Japan → Russia → Canada → China. Born global.	Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, New Zealand, Mongolia, and within China.	"Home is you." Not anchored in Trinidad or Canada. She feels detached from others in Canada. Feels most comfortable with other global nomads.
Susan (51, M, NA)	Romania, environmental consultant, PhD	Romania (30 years) → Switzerland → Central and Eastern Europe → US → Caribbean → South Africa → US. Developed into a global nomad through her profession.	South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Botswana, Zambia, Central America, Central Asia, Central and Eastern Europe.	Difficult to respond to the question of where is home. Not anchored to Romania. Has two bases that serve her married life in South Africa and her professional life in an apartment in Washington, DC (headquarters of her organization). Reports that she is not home for more than 2 weeks at a time.
Emma (50, S, $100,000)	El Salvador, journalist, MA	El Salvador (10 years) → US → Latin America → US → Africa → Cambodia → US. Born global. Has a network pattern of nomadic mobility.	Latin America and Africa—very frequently. Going to the Middle East.	Does not identify herself as an American. Has an apartment in NYC, which she considers her base; however, is rarely there because she travels frequently domestically when she is not abroad.
Brandon (54, D, $65,800)	Saudi Arabia, anthropologist, PhD	Saudi Arabia (15 years) → US → Middle East → Africa: Swaziland, Botswana, and Somalia → US. Born global.	US, Bolivia, Kenya, Botswana, Swaziland, Europe, Japan, Canada, Guatemala, Southern Africa.	Does not identify himself as American. Has a house in Lincoln (NE), which he considers a base. Considers Botswana his home because he feels close to the people there, despite his ex-wife and child being in US.
Peter (64, M, $36,000)	US, human rights consultant, PhD	US → Middle East→ US → Syria →, Ethiopia →, Iraq → Egypt → Somalia → US. Born global as he was a US military brat.	Italy, Austria, Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, China, and Japan. Duration at each location: 10 days to 3 weeks.	"Home is where I am, and I'll be for a while. I don't have a settling period, probably because I travel so much. Where I am, I become comfortable very quickly." Wants to retire in South Africa.
John (27, S, $150,000)	US, IT consultant, BA	US → UK → Germany → US.	Germany, UK, Australia, US. Travels every 2 weeks. Duration at each location: 2 weeks.	Apartment in NYC, but he only visits on the weekends. Uses it for work. Does not feel he belongs or feels at home anywhere.
Carol (41, M, $72,000)	US, education, PhD	US (23 years) → Botswana → US → Indonesia → US → Eritrea → Ghana → US. First international experience with Peace Corps.	15 countries around the world. Typically gone at least 8 months out of the year.	Home is where she feels a connection to people. Lincoln (NE) is just where she visits her husband. "We have a house because he [husband] feels better having a house. Home for me is not a building. It's just the people. I don't even know Lincoln."

Matt (53, M, $70,000)	US, project manager, PhD	US (14 years) → Hong Kong → US→ Zimbabwe → . . . → Philippines → Middle East → Albania → US. Born global as he traveled with his family internationally to accompany his father working for YMCA.	Constant long-term travel for work (US AID). Middle East, Albania, East Timor, Rwanda, Philippines. Duration: 4–8 weeks in each location; 80% of the year travels internationally.	"Home is where my wife and two dogs are. It's not any particular place anymore." Does not feel a connection to the place where he lives and does not plan to stay there long or retire there.
Scott (35, M, $140,000)	US, human resources manager, MBA	US → Spain → US → Australia → Asia → Italy → Argentina → US. Wife is Venezuelan. Was exposed to international travel through his father's business.	South America (Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela), Singapore, India, UK, China.	Wherever he moves, he makes a home (makeshift idea of home); it can be a hotel.
Mark (41, S, $65,000)	England, public administration, PhD	England → . . . → Philippines → New Guinea → Ghana → South Africa→ US. First international experience during university studies.	90% of the year on the road; travels mostly in developing countries because of work with World Bank. States that he is never at his residence for more than a few days.	Identifies himself as a world citizen. He never unpacks at his apartment in Washington, DC. Apartment is a functional base next to his organization's headquarters.
Jennifer (58, D, NA)	US, economist and diplomat, PhD	US → Africa (14 years, multiple countries) → Russia → Sweden → Israel → India → US.	Traveled to 50 countries over 33 years. Works for the UN.	Maintains two houses–Nebraska and NYC. NYC apartment is mainly a work space. Nebraska house is to show the world the Midwest. Neither is home for her.
Nelson (60, S, $100,000+)	Quebec, academic, PhD	Canada → . . . → US → Poland → Czech Republic → Romania → Indonesia → France → Germany → Cuba → Canada.	US, Italy, France, Germany, China, Thailand, New Zealand. Travels to a destination for 3–4 weeks.	Never felt at home in Canada. Detests their narrow mindedness. Doesn't feel attached to his house in Montreal. Feels at home in most of the other countries he has lived in because of the people. No close friends or relationships in Montreal. Will not retire in Canada.
Philip (38, M, $170,000)	US, manager, MSc	US → China → UK→ Canada→ Latin America → Philippines → US. Born global. Spent most summers abroad as a child (e.g., Russia). Father was a diplomat.	Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, UK, Venezuela. Very frequent travel to Latin America. Only home for the weekends.	Considers himself a world citizen. In Omaha (NE) because his company headquarters are there and his wife wants to be there. Never misses Nebraska, has no local friends, does not socialize there.
Alex (48, M, $140,000)	US, academia and consultant, PhD	US → . . . → Greece → Egypt → Germany → US → Vietnam → Croatia → Southeast Europe → US.	Predominately ex-Yugoslavia, Vietnam, and Cambodia (numerous other locations). Duration: 2–6 weeks at a time.	Place where he lives is functional as a base and is rarely there. Located in Arizona because of the headquarters of his corporation. Does not know people locally.
Sarah (36, M, $90,000)	Turkey, energy analyst, MBA	Turkey → US → Azerbaijan → UK → Uzbekistan → Tajikistan → Germany → Kazakhstan + Azerbaijan → Turkmenistan → South America (seven countries) → Turkey + US → Canada.	Argentina, Germany, Costa Rica, US, Turkey, Greece, China, Italy.	Does not identify with the country of origin/nationality. Home is wherever she is. Considers home a base of operations.

NOTE.—M = married, S = single, D = divorced, NA = not available. Only the countries remembered by the informants are included. For several informants, the frequency of relocations and travel made it difficult for them to recount all the places of residency. In the second column, the first-noted place refers to the country of birth. However, as we have pointed out, for the born global informants, their citizenship at times does not necessarily reflect that. When possible, in addition to where they travel, the third column contains information on how often and for how long. Returning to a particular country does not necessary mean to the same location or physical place. Informants report several relocations/places of residency within each country.

raised in Romania and currently has an address in Washington, DC, home becomes a juggling act between multiple potential home bases. She has more difficulty than Brandon, though, in articulating where she belongs in the world as she is juggling between home bases:

> *Interviewer:* Where do you currently live?
>
> *Susan:* Oh, that's a difficult question! My residency is in the US. But I'm traveling a lot.
>
> *Interviewer:* What do you mean when you say: "That is a difficult question"?
>
> *Susan:* Because I'm traveling a lot, for long periods of time, it's very difficult to say where you live, you know. I live in hotels, my permanent address is in Washington DC, and I have a house with my husband in South Africa. . . . I never feel home when I land in Romania. I cannot relate with anything. It's very interesting since I used to work quite a lot there, even after I left, I used to go back very often, seven, eight times a year. . . . My family is still there, but I don't feel at home there.

Global nomads are anchored in cosmopolitan mobile and professional lifestyles, and they do not anchor their identity to their country of origin or residency. Chronicling these origin stories helps us to understand why a different relationship to possessions operates in global nomadism, which we discuss next.

LIQUID RELATIONSHIP TO POSSESSIONS

Data analysis reveals that our informants exhibit a different relationship to possessions than other mobile consumer groups studied in prior consumer research. They are more detached from possessions, and they relate to objects in a more flexible way. They value objects temporarily and because of their functionality and immateriality. We characterize this relationship as liquid. It emerged from our data that a liquid relationship to possessions has three characteristics: objects are valued for their (1) situational value, (2) instrumental use-value, and (3) immateriality.

The nomadic and unmoored lifestyle of global nomads shapes their relation to possessions. It teaches sometimes hard lessons about not making possessions special. Our data were full of stories of formative, mobility-related events where informants lost possessions because of theft, fire, or relocation and that changed their relation to things. Consider the following mobility narrative from Matt (age 53, American), a project manager for USAID, who reflects on a fire during his 4 years living in Zimbabwe:

> *Interviewer:* Are there possessions or things that you carry along?
>
> *Matt:* Not really. When I was quite a bit younger, more than 20 years ago, I did. I would have special belongings. But I woke up one morning in Zimbabwe to find all my belongings were stolen, everything. Fortunately I was wearing pajamas, or I would have been in big trouble. (*Laughs.*) And so that was quite a traumatic incident, but I also realized that they're just things. They didn't really define who I am. So since then, I'm quite a bit detached from any particular items. So I don't haul things around for sentimental reasons. I mean I have pictures of family here and there, and certainly I have things. But there's nothing that I really feel a strong need to keep with me.

While the literature on possessions would predict that because victims suffer the absence of symbols of former lives, catastrophic loss of possessions would be traumatic and disabling (Price et al. 2000; Sayre 1994), we do not find this. Whereas the separation from possessions seems both involuntary and inevitable, the theft becomes a formative event for Matt and teaches him to be more detached from possessions. While Matt clearly has and uses possessions, he expresses limited appreciation for possessions' identity-defining value. This is in contrast to the changes in meaning associated with possessions among nonnomadic, elite fire victims, where "objects lost their former use-value and assumed a much more powerful meaning as signifiers of absence" (Sayre 1994, 4). Similar to Matt, David had a formative moment when living in Papua New Guinea, which he narrates below; he decided that possessions do not define a person, that everything can be replaced, and that he would go through life without enduring attachment to objects. Interestingly, this orientation applies even to inherited possessions, including those from his father, who also imparted to David a passion for nomadism.

> I remember once when I was in Papua New Guinea I went on a little expedition up the highest mountain. I put everything in the backpack that my Dad had given to me when I was 12. And it included a mixture of bush gear that I'd picked up and refined and developed over 10 years or something. So there was a bush knife and a sheath knife that I had for a long time and had been through a lot of adventurous experiences with. And there was, you know, articles of clothing and footwear and stuff that similarly had been through some rough times. And so they were a comforting reference to have with me. That rucksack got stolen from the car, just before we went up the mountain. And it was like, oh, okay, we need to be philosophical about this. So I went down to the market and just replaced everything with stuff that could be purchased with a few bucks and just carried on. And it was okay actually. Well, if something's gone, it's gone. There's no point crying over spilled milk. This regret is a waste of energy. (David, age 40, Scottish)

Like Matt, David values "adventurous experiences"—New Guinea, the highest mountain, rough times, and bush gear are evocative references that reveal this. He is committed to this as a practice—"over 10 years or something," but the behavior is not dependent upon the gear. As David points out, nothing is irreplaceable, even possessions that represent symbolic connections to family or that may serve a comforting role as transitional objects. This is a novel finding when contrasted to the sacred role previously shown

for family heirlooms (Curasi et al. 2004; Price et al. 2000). In global nomadism, consumers do not evoke attachments to special possessions.

In our attempts to record sacred possessions as well as our informants' overall possession inventories, we were struck by the absence of sacred possessions that link informants to their place of origin or home. We also took note of the reduced level of ownership; several informants claimed never to have owned or bought a house, apartment, or major durable such as a car, a television set, or a refrigerator. Our informants have minimized their possessions and ownership, as David (age 40, Scottish) and Mark (age 41, English) suggest:

> *Interviewer:* Are there things you carry or brought with you there to make it a home?
>
> *David:* Well no, I don't actually own anything very much. In fact I've tried to keep it to a minimum. It's where you're based and where you spend most of your time, where you build personal relations that make it home.

> *Interviewer:* Are there things that you might have in your apartment in DC, at your office, or that you carry with you?
>
> *Mark:* I'm not much of a memento kind of guy. So no, not especially; I don't really need or use things to sort of try and stay in touch.

The informant narratives we have seen here illustrate that enduring, strong attachments to possessions and the tangible are devalued in global nomadism. Because of the uncertainty and unpredictability that characterizes nomadic lifestyles, global nomads resist solid relationships to the material world and do not find identity-linking value in possessions. In other words, we can see how these formative events "liquefy" their views of possessions. Instead, they value detachment and flexibility, and they exhibit a practical logic toward possessions. Liquidity in possession relationships is a way to cope with a lifestyle of relative risk, discomfort, and uncertainty. We now go on to further develop the concept of liquid possessions, We find that it is characterized by three properties: situational value, utilitarian use value, and immateriality, as we describe below.

Situational Value

Our findings suggest that our informants exhibit a flexible relationship to possessions, valuing them in each locale rather than forming an enduring attachment over time and space. As global nomads focus on reterritorializing themselves in each locale, often things carried with them become irrelevant in the new context. By reterritorialization, we adapt Deleuze and Guattari's (1993) concept to refer to establishing the ability and the authority to act in an unfamiliar sociocultural milieu by adapting one's consumption habits. For example, Sarah indicates that possessions can have a symbolic value in one place (New York City) but that they lose their value when one relocates to another place (Azerbaijan); thus, there is no enduring attachment to them as their value does not carry over. These objects do not seem to act as "transitional" objects or conform to what we know about cherished objects (Curasi et al. 2004; Winnicott 1951/1992). We label this characteristic "situational value," which we define as the value provided by an object but only in the particular cultural context in which it is deployed.

Sarah, a Turkish engineer who currently lives in Toronto, shares her experience of moving from Manhattan to work for a year and a half in Azerbaijan. As these two locations represent unique cultural, social, and infrastructural contexts, most of her possessions become irrelevant in the new country—even mobile technologies, such as personal data assistants. Although Sarah finds enjoyment in her technology gadgets as they were important status symbols during her Wall Street experience, their value did not translate to the new location in Azerbaijan. Like other informants, her comments evoke her adaptability to and mastery of different contexts without evoking enduring connections to them.

> I remember I had a Sony Palm back in 2001 in New York City. I thought it was cool as it was so high tech at the time. But in these countries, they don't even have regular phone services, so all these high-tech things I had did not mean anything or became useless. You still accumulate things during your stay; if nothing else you receive gifts. But they turn into a category of junk after a year or so because you have no way of displaying or carrying them. . . . So 90% of the things I would have to trash before I leave each country. I had to. I would also give things to other people as it will at least be useful to someone else. It can be hard, but you have to learn to do that. (Sarah, age 36, Turkish)

To enable fluid movement, Sarah's narrative suggests that she learned to value possessions for their situated value, "while I am using it" in a locale, rather than valuing the same possessions over time or across space. As she travelled and relocated with only one suitcase for a 12-year period, Sarah demonstrates how global nomads tend to minimize ownership in general. Perhaps even more telling is her devaluing of gifts both as recipient and giver. In neither case does the gift evoke a formative role in building affective social relations or the reciprocity that cements them (Sherry 1983). Thus, implicit in the devaluing of the gift is the idea that interpersonal relationships too are liquefied. Similarly to Matt, David, and Mark previously, nomadism teaches Sarah to become detached from past places, relationships, and possessions.

The temporary relationship we identify is related to the challenge of accumulation and ownership in global nomadism. As informants often live in rented apartments or already furnished houses, they do not engage in curation practices, such as caring for, displaying, or transporting things they accumulate, as Sarah points out above. Such curation practices have been found to be important in transforming the meaning of possessions and incorporating them into the extended self or family lineage (Belk 1988; Curasi et al. 2004; Marcoux 2001b). In fact, stories of appropriation or divestment rituals are absent in our data, which is tellingly

distinct from findings in other relocation contexts (e.g., Marcoux 2001a).

As returning home becomes irrelevant and the absence of storage becomes a challenge in global nomadism, our informants learn that storing possessions inhibits their mobility. As global nomads change destinations, they divest themselves of most possessions and refocus on accessing their use-value (e.g., library, e-books). Tina, who was teaching at a university in China at the time of our interview and whose parents were living in Canada (where she could potentially store things), explains how her accumulation and disposal behavior has changed over the years due to her mobility:

> I used to buy art or crafts from the places I lived in, especially if I liked it. Now I find if I buy something I like in the country I give them away. I don't need them. I don't, I can't use all of this stuff. I used to do this when I was younger, because I thought, oh, I can put it in my home. Generally I figure, I've got to the point where, when I eventually have my own house, I can come back to these places and buy these things (*laughs*) because I know where they are now. I don't really feel like taking them anymore. . . . I just got to the point, I think because I move, because I bought these things, put them at home [her parents place], and then I was home for a while. [But] I wasn't in the country [Canada] for a few years, so I had to keep moving everything. And I thought, well this is a nuisance; even books. You know I like books, and I had to keep moving these books. I just said, forget it! So that's it, I've tried to cut down now. (Tina, age 32, Trinidadian/Canadian)

The symbolic value of possessions often does not translate to other cultural contexts; curation, that is accumulating, caring for, and storing them, is not important, as possessions turn into what Sarah called "junk" over time. For Tina, attachment to possessions seems linked to home practices antithetical to her life of nomadic mobility and periodic reterritorialization.

In another instance, as the interviewer noticed the lack of any personal photographs displayed in Sarah's apartment, she inquired about photos and whether Sarah (age 36, Turkish) transports and displays photos in her nomadism:

> *Sarah:* No. As you can see, I don't even have my wedding pictures out. I didn't even print any. I seriously think that nothing should be indispensible in this lifestyle. So what if I don't have pictures of my family or my husband? Will I think less of them? No.
>
> *Interviewer:* So, you did not display pictures of them in the apartments you lived in?
>
> *Sarah:* No. I never carried pictures of any kind with me. I do not see the point. I have my memories and do not need the photos to remind me of them. I lived in furnished apartments, and there were photos displayed there of the owner's families. I think they looked like ghosts! I want nothing but peace of mind as things come with baggage too.
>
> *Interviewer:* What about electronic photos?
>
> *Sarah:* I rarely look at pictures. I had like 3,000 pictures that I took during my time in South America, and I have never gone through to look at all of them. They are saved somewhere in one of those memory sticks. I did not print, share, or display any of them. I showed a couple to my family after my return, but that is it.

Like other informants, the nomadic lifestyle brings Sarah to an existential position where things are devalued over immaterial ideas and memories. We find it especially telling that images of her wedding—a key life cycle rite for many—summarize Sarah's disinterest in such symbolic anchors. While well aware of the linking value of possessions (Cova 1997), Sarah indicates that these consumption symbols may threaten the prospects for a successful reterritorialization in a new place. And out of context cherished possessions become phantasms ("ghosts"). Thus, Sarah's behavior toward even immaterial possessions such as digital photographs, which she chooses not to share with family or friends via her social networks or even look at herself, illustrates detachment from things. In sum, possessions tend to have situational rather than enduring value in global nomadism: Sarah had photographs taken at her wedding, and she took them herself in South America, but their value did not endure as she changed contexts. Thus, situational value characterizes flexible, liquid consumer-object relationships. In order for it to endure, the value of possessions has to transfer between locales. Data presented in the following section highlight that this transferability equates to instrumental use-value in global nomadism.

Use-Value

A second aspect of the liquidity of possessions is the emphasis on instrumental use-value rather than linking value. The linking value typical of migrants' possessions becomes problematic rather than identity enhancing in nomadic mobility as it inhibits reterritorialization. We define use-value as the instrumental functionality an object possesses, in contrast to the symbolic value that has been emphasized in much consumer research. As compared to situational value, at times use-value can carry across time and locations. Use-value is a concept originating from the work of Marx (1930). It describes the utilitarian value of the material operation that an object can perform. Building upon Marx, later researchers have emphasized that it is the work of consumption through which use-value is realized (Miller 1987), and use-value and functionality have themselves become part of reflexive identity processes in consumer culture (Baudrillard 1981). While absent from stories of object attachment, our global nomads' movement narratives are replete with objects valued for their instrumental use-value (e.g., survival, orientation, safety, health, etc). For instance, comfort food, found to be of particular symbolic value to expatriates (Gilly 1995; Thompson and Tambyah 1999) or business travelers (Bardhi, Ostberg, and Bengtsson 2010), does not resonate with informants like Jennifer, who lived in Africa for 14 years. Expatriate consumers go to great lengths to find home

foods when abroad; by contrast, our findings show that global nomads eat locally except for functional foods:

> When I went to Mozambique, for instance, I would carry high-energy bars, which have come in very handy if you're out on the road or in villages where there's no food. So I do carry the high-energy bars, which I found enormously helpful. . . . It's not for a nostalgic reason; it's just convenience and survival if you like. (Jennifer, age 58, American)

Similarly, instead of examples of the identity value of clothing or ethnic costumes reported in the consumer acculturation literature (Askegaard et al. 2005; Ger and Østergaard 1998), our nomadic informants talked mainly of functional clothing:

> I designed a particular outfit that I wear when I travel. That, I guess in the old days would have been called a safari suit. It's got lots of pockets, it also has some inside pockets, inside which I can carry, in the US it's called a dickey, it's a half shirt with a clip on tie so if I'm going from the field in to see a government official, I can take the shirt out of my pocket, put it on, snap it, and I've got a suit and I can take that off. And it's got zippers on all types of inside pockets. I've got particular pockets that hold tickets and passports, and I know where everything is, so if I am leaving a place and I'm moving in a hurry, then I know right where if I've got something with me or not. It's got small flashlights in it, first aid, and all types of things, so I'm totally self-sufficient if I have to be. (Peter, age 64, American)

This safari suit constitutes the main type of clothing in Peter's closets everywhere he has lived and has become the main type of clothing he wears. Valued by Peter for their lightweight features, flexibility, and durability, these safari suits, like Jennifer's energy bars, enable the fluidity of the nomadic lifestyle. As often happens to Peter since he regularly works in war zones, he has to be able to pick up and move at a moment's notice and leave everything behind. The safari suits, with their detached pockets, where Peter stores his passport and other essential documentation, enable him to be organized and oriented in time and space regardless of the situation. Even though Peter invested resources in preparing these suits—processes that may have singularized them (Kopytoff 1986)—they do not represent an indexical relationship to his identity (Grayson and Shulman 2000). While the safari suits are essential facilitators of his mobility practices, Peter replaces them when needed and would typically order them tailored locally when he could do so.

Other items that often provide linking value (Cova 1997), such as cultural artifacts in Tina's case or family photos in Philip's case, our informants instead employ strategically to perform their jobs and facilitate temporary reterritorialization:

> No I don't carry anything about Trinidad right now [in China]. When I was living in Japan I had more of these things because I was teaching partly culture. But here, for me this experience is different. I think if I were teaching English I would probably bring some representative things. But in China I am teaching business, so I don't think about bringing those things. I just bring me and do my teaching. (Tina, age 32, Trinidadian/Canadian)

> In each of our offices in Latin America, I'd rotate family pictures, so it's a fun thing we did because these are very family-oriented cultures, and we and they [local colleagues] would rotate the pictures through, and I could tell the last time I had been in that office or I could almost chart the children's growth through what I call the baby board. I put up a baby board in every office, and they weren't just pictures of my children. They were pictures of everybody's babies and so, it was a lot fun because some of the offices in Venezuela, Brazil, and Chile really got into it, and so we would have all these recurring pictures of everybody's babies. So I spend a lot of time talking about my children and family stuff and that helped connect me. (Philip, age 38, American)

Tina deploys her cultural background and artifacts as a resource in Japan as part of teaching English to Japanese students rather than as a means of connecting to her homeland or maintaining her national identity. Similarly, Philip's family photos assumed instrumental rather than linking value in his dealings with Latin American coworkers when he was working as the Latin American manager for a global corporation. He says they helped connect him to his work colleagues; he does not say that they helped him retain his connections to his family. The instrumental use-value logic predominates in global nomadism, especially because it translates cross culturally better than symbolic or identity value. Objects valued for their functionality are also easier to disconnect from without personal loss, and as such they are more liquid.

Immateriality

Tomlinson's (2007) notion of lightness is manifested in the third dimension of liquid possessions, that of immateriality. Portability of possessions as characterized by their physical weight is an important feature of value for our nomads. Possessions our informants value appear in a "flexible," "light," or virtual form, such as virtual financial products, e-books, mp3 music, and electronic pictures. When probed, for instance, about photos of their families, immateriality is dominant, as illustrated by Matt and Carol: "I have them on my laptop and once in a while will bring them up. But I don't carry them in my wallet" (Matt). "I could, but really never thought of that. (*Laughs.*) No, I carry all my pictures in my head. It's the one thing I know that won't be taken from me because I've gone to places that I've lost everything" (Carol). It is the idea that matters to our informants rather than the physical photograph per se. Carol values relationships deeply and has learned over time not to rely on things (e.g., pictures) as a way to memorialize them. This can be an ineffective strategy in nomadism. Similarly, for Tina, in articulating her evolution of possessions from material (books) to electronic books, she reveals that

digital materials enable access without tying her down to particular locales or inhibiting fluidity of border crossings:

> I'm using the library, and I'm doing e-books online now. So, that makes it easier because things always ended up in my parents' place and then, you know, I just got to the point where I don't really need most of this, especially if I'm not there. You know, I'm always somewhere else, seeing something else. So what am I cluttering up this spot for. (Tina, age 32, Trinidadian/Canadian)

Virtual consumption facilitates nomadic mobility without the commitments invoked by solid possessions. Technology has increasingly enabled consumers to gain access to needed products and services without the obligations and transport and storage costs associated with ownership (Rifkin 2000). The immateriality of possessions facilitates mobility; digital objects enable global nomads to be flexible and adaptable as they simultaneously participate in multiple locales and enact their roles in various relationships. Thus, Jennifer uses online services via e-greeting cards to sustain her relationship to her fiancé when she is traveling. Such e-objects are especially useful for nomads like Jennifer, who can participate in her relationship from afar:

> I send him or I have my concierge at the apartment send often times a card every other day that's ready. So like, happy Thursday, missing you. And it's different cards, so he gets them while I'm away. And then I send the Blue Mountain or American Greeting Card e-mails, and when I call him, I say, have you checked your e-mail, you know, there's a special e-mail coming in today. (Jennifer, age 58, American)

Another way that immateriality manifests itself within the global nomads context is via consumption practices that assist in reterritorialization in new locales. As compared to objects, practices are by nature immaterial, and global nomads depend on them heavily in their daily lives. Consistent with a preference for the flexible and immaterial, consumption practices become instrumental in reterritorializing in various locales. Our informants evoke a variety of routine consumption practices surrounding food, music, art, fitness, or hobbies. For example, our informants testified to consuming local food rather than shipping or transporting food from prior locales or their countries of origins. Jennifer, originally from the American Midwest, consumes local food in each of the African and European countries she lives in, and she does not engage in the nostalgic consumption of home country food reported among business travelers (Bardhi et al. 2010):

> I don't want to exaggerate on this, but I do enjoy meat, and I have it in Africa, and I have it in Europe. But I always try to eat the local products most importantly. It's fun to do the comparison, but it's not as though I would sort of seek out a restaurant because I'm hungry for Nebraska steak. (Jennifer, age 58, American)

While steak could be perceived as comfort food for business travelers who remain anchored to a place of origin, consuming locally permeates global nomad experiences.

Below, David discusses how the social engagement practice of "consuming locally" temporarily roots him in imagined geographical spaces. Note also how he emphasizes cooking as a "mixture of ideas," rather than as a combination of sensory qualities, and as a temporary conjuncture of preferences that "might very well change." At the time of the interview, David had just returned from a 2-year assignment in South East Asia and was in transition to his new assignment in the Mediterranean area. This fluid border-crossing transition is clearly apparent in his cooking:

> The sort of food that I eat, strangely enough, usually relates to the countries that I'm emotionally bound up in. So, for a long time I was cooking sort of Melanesian and Asian stuff. I like to cook. I just pick up ideas and then mix it; either you have something Chinese or Indonesian or something, or it might be a bit of a mixture of ideas. But, at the moment, most of the stuff that I would cook for myself is Mediterranean, because that's where I spend a lot of time, and in and around that base. At the moment, I think that probably the default in my cuisine is Mediterranean—it's either French or Italian type stuff. But you know, sometimes there are a few ideas from Asia. But that might well change in the next year. (David, age 40, Scottish)

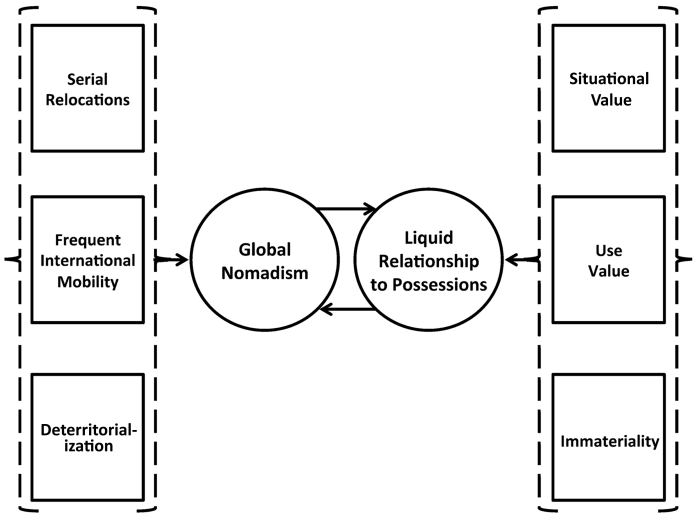
Food has been identified as a powerful cultural representation in daily consumption across a wide variety of cultures (Douglas 1972; Mintz and DuBois 2002). It has been highlighted in acculturation research as a consumption practice that anchors migrants to a sense of home (Askegaard et al. 2005; Oswald 1999; Peñaloza 1994) and as a bridge to becoming cosmopolitan (Thompson and Tambyah 1999). In contrast we find, as David articulates above, that in global nomadism food is consumed to anchor one temporarily to a destination. In order to succeed during reterritorialization, informants forge professional and personal relationships and embed themselves in the community.

We find that engaging in local consumption practices is one way through which nomads quickly embed themselves locally. They enlist not only the consumption of local foods in this practice but also music, brands, art, and even friendships. Matt describes his experiences in Albania. He evokes food consumption, engagement in local social customs, and engaging in the social networking practice of participation in an expatriate leisure pastime as producing reterritorialization:

> In Albania, it's obviously sitting around drinking espresso, cappuccinos, and raki, which are just a social activity just to chat. And just going out to dinner, or having dinner in their homes. . . . I look for opportunities to hike. Like in Albania, I like to hike in the mountains. . . . There are Albanians that hike in the mountains, so that's part of our activity with them . . . so it's a nice way to get to know people if you can join a group that hikes or jogs, runs. You might have heard of Hash House Harriers. It's a group of [expatriate] runners that exists in many places around the world. And they will go cross-country jogging on a day in the weekend. (Matt, age 53, American)

FIGURE 1

CONNECTION BETWEEN GLOBAL NOMADISM AND A LIQUID RELATIONSHIP TO POSSESSIONS



Matt engaged in such practices (e.g., running, hiking) in every locale, indicating a recurrent performance of reterritorialization practices. Further, such practices are salient for their instrumental use-value as well, in particular, their ability to enhance local cultural capital that enables global nomads to operate in a new environment. These practices are relied on precisely because objects are relied on so little. Due to their flexibility and liquidity, they provide the type of resources needed by global nomads to temporarily embed themselves in varying cultural contexts.

In sum, the identity and attachment value of possessions that have been of central concern in much consumer culture research are not so salient among consumers in global nomadism. To enable fluidity of nomadic mobility, our informants value intangibility and functionality. We find a temporary and flexible relationship to possessions rather than strong enduring attachments. The objects that have value for global nomads are the immaterial ones that provide access while being "light," such as electronic books, greeting cards, and music. In global nomadism, consumption objects and practices do not play the roles consumer acculturation research ascribes to them as identity anchors connecting consumers to their homeland; rather they are strategic resources enabling the serial reterritorialization process.

DISCUSSION

This study advances our understanding of the relationship that consumers form with the material world by introducing and developing the notion of a liquid relationship to possessions. We identify some boundary conditions of the solid possessions perspective in consumer research, which argues that consumers form strong and enduring object attachments that fix them to culture, place, time, and enduring identity projects. We evoke ideas of liquid modernity and the increasingly postnational global economy as conditions in which different relationships between consumers and the material world may evolve. We identify global nomadism, characterized by nomadic mobility (serial relocation and frequent mobility) and deterritorization as a lifestyle in which an alternative, liquid relationship to possessions emerges. Under such conditions, consumers tend to form situational attachments to objects, appreciate objects primarily for their instrumental use-value, and value immaterial or "light" possessions as well as consumption practices. At the same time, our findings suggest that, in return, a liquid relationship to possessions also facilitates global nomadism. The model in figure 1 illustrates how global nomadism shapes the relationship to possessions. Our findings make a contribution to three streams of research, which we outline below: materiality, acculturation, and globalization.

Materiality Research

Materiality is an interdisciplinary concern that examines the links between the material world, social organization, culture, and selfhood. In consumer research, commercially produced objects play a central role in theories of consumer self, identities, and communities, as well as in the construction of narratives of belonging, personal and family identity, and collective memory. The bulk of these studies are framed within a modernist ontology that presumes both solidity and stability as (preferable) attributes of these objects of study. In many ways, prior consumer research has privileged the static and solid in thinking about possessions, consumption

behavior, identity, and other domains (cf. Zwick and Dholakia 2006). We use the context of global nomadism to reexamine this perspective. Our study contributes to materiality research by identifying and developing a new type of relationship to possessions and practices that we characterize as liquid. The liquid relationship characterizes a detached and flexible connection to possessions that deemphasizes the singularity of the object. This finding is in contrast to studies with other elite nonnomadic consumers who exhibit strong attachment to possessions (Gilly 1995; Joy and Dholakia 1991; Sayre 1994; Thompson and Tambyah 1999; Walsh 2006). As illustrated in figure 1, three properties of the liquid relationship to possessions emerged in our study.

First, a liquid relationship to possessions represents a temporary consumer-object relationship where objects are consumed because of their situational value, and it is this situational value that renders attachment temporary and limited. While prior research shows that consumers invest in enduring attachment to objects as identity anchors to place, time, and role positions, this is not the case in global nomadism. Possessions may lose value in a new context and as such are discarded. As our findings illustrate, enduring attachments inhibit fluidity of movement. A detached and temporary relationship to possessions makes one more flexible and adaptable in dealing with the unpredictability and uncertainty that characterizes nomadism. Thus, in conditions of continuous relocation and change, consumers may learn to value objects temporarily.

Second, in a liquid relationship, objects are valued for their instrumental use-value. In contrast to solid possessions that play a salient role in consumers' lives because of their linking value or as identity markers (Belk 1988, 1992; Mehta and Belk 1991; Price et al. 2000), we do not find such roles in a liquid relationship to possessions. We show that the linking value of possessions becomes problematic in global nomadism as it tethers one and inhibits the flexibility of moving in and out of locales. Instead, the use-value of objects becomes salient as the objects nurture, maintain, and prepare one to be fit, ready, and flexible to perform and adapt in new contexts. Our findings bring various examples of objects or products valued for their light weight, durability, flexibility, and functionality. In contrast to the linking value of objects, use-value is more transferable in multiple contexts enabling flexible identity positions.

Finally, in a liquid relationship, objects are valued for their immateriality. Immateriality is expressed in the preference for objects that are light and portable and that can easily tag along in mobility (e.g., battery-operated electronic products) or, more importantly, because of the access they provide to networks, locales, or consumer roles (e.g., electronic books, music, greeting cards, and photos). Immateriality is transferable and thus enables flexible identity possessions. Because of their immaterial nature, consumption practices also emerged as salient in complementing the role of liquid possessions. Liquid consumption practices emerged as essential in global nomadism to enable successful reterritorialization in new locales, and these were relied upon by our informants to navigate their everyday lives. Our context suggests that liquid possessions are accompanied by these liquid practices and are used in accumulating situational cultural and social capital that facilitates global nomadic lifestyles.

In contrast to the solid perspective on possessions that has dominated consumer research, we introduce the idea of a liquid relationship to objects and show that liquid possessions and practices are consumed because of their situational use-value and immateriality. We illustrate that it is not the object per se that is valued but its function and accessibility. In that sense, possessions are replaceable and not singularized through appropriation practices that incorporate objects into the extended self (Belk 1988). As our findings illustrate, curation and dispossession rituals are absent in global nomadism. In contrast to prior work on singularity of possessions (Epp and Price 2010; Kopytoff 1986) and the extended self (Belk 1988), liquid possessions are replaceable regardless of their origin, form of appropriation (e.g., self-produced objects, family gifts, etc.), or history (e.g., long-term ownership).

The instrumentality of objects in a liquid relationship to possessions allows us to contribute to the discussion of materiality in contemporary society. In seminal work, Miller (1987, 2005, 2010) argues that ontologically and axiologically speaking, the material world, selfhood, and society are co-constituting, a proposition much developed in actor network theory. Baudrillard too argues for a historically constituted person-object relationship in the Western economy. Late capitalism is characterized by the order of simulation, in which ever-shifting and proliferating signs and sign values swamp use values (Baudrillard 1981, 1983). In Baudrillard's history, the modern self corresponding to the order of imitation, with its emphasis on reason and rationality, has given way to a self characterized by postmodern bricolage. This conception rejects ideas of personal essence or authenticity and adopts the corollary contention that selves are artifacts of the hyperreal order of simulation (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). The Baudrillardian perspective on the human condition within the order of simulation follows Weber in its fundamentally pessimistic vision of a disenchanted world. Consumers are enmeshed in a web of significations that thrives on an endless proliferation of increasingly meaningless distinctions (Arnould 2007).

In a parallel research stream, major social theorists have argued for a fundamental change in the constitution of the self in contemporary society characterized by multiplicity, fragmentation, and "saturation" with alternatives (Gergen 1991; Giddens 1991). These theorists argue that the driving force in all this is high-tech communication technologies that have dramatically increased the global flow of images, signs, and information. This perspective too tends toward pessimism, arguing that postmodern global social structures have their hold on the self, inducing decentering and risking dissolution. An alternative framing in consumer research offered by Firat and Venkatesh (1995) argues for considerable con-

sumer agency in responding to the postmodern condition and Baudrillardian material world. This view has been criticized as overemphasizing agency and underemphasizing the doubly exploitative character of a world of unpaid consumer "co-production" (Arnould 2007; Cova and Dalli 2009).

The perspective offered here is different. Liquid modernity (Bauman 2000) is driven not by single causal force as in the theories of Giddens and Gergen; instead it is similar to Appadurai's (1990) vision of a world in which multiple global shaping forces are simultaneously operating. And while Bauman obviously shares these authors' belief in fundamental changes to the human condition, Bauman locates an "out" through liquidity. As we have shown through an embrace of immateriality and the situational nature of value, contemporary nomadic consumers develop an instrumental orientation to the object world that recaptures something of the use-value associated by Baudrillard with the premodern symbolic order and by Marx with the precapitalist economy. We suggest that consumers engage in liquid consumption as a way to deal with and manage the challenges of globalization and liquid modernity.

Acculturation and Globalization Research

Currently, consumption in mobility is broadly understood through the theoretical lens of acculturation research, which conceptualizes migrant socialization in a host culture and is dominated by an identity perspective as the driver of consumption (Peñaloza 1994). Our findings challenge the romanticized view that dominates the portrayal of acculturation that is underlined by the logic of identity work and in which possessions provide linking value to a home country of origin. As we find a diminished role for nationality and possessions in identity work, our study highlights a different logic to nomadic consumption, that of instrumentality. Liquid consumption is valued in mobility not for its linking value as found among migrant consumers or expatriates (Askegaard et al. 2005; Thompson and Tambyah 1999) but for its use-value. Consumption in nomadic mobility as it relates to possessions and practices is a strategic element in serial reterritorialization; recall Philip's instrumental use of family photos. Our findings resonate with research on transnational consumers that has highlighted the strategic and instrumental relationships that mobile populations form with nationalities and countries of origin or residency (Amit-Talay 1998; Ong 1999). The main concern is neither consumer conformity nor consumer distinction, as in Veblen's or McCracken's work, but rather consumer "adequacy—of being 'ever ready,' of having the ability to rise to the opportunity as it comes, to develop new desire made to the measure of new experiences" (Bauman 2000, 77). Thus, we introduce an alternative modality of instrumental adequacy that underlines liquid consumption.

Moreover, our findings outline the boundary conditions of the acculturation model with respect to its underlying assumptions about the nature of consumer identity. The dominant identity perspective in acculturation research is derived from a "nationalist emphasis on the territorialized imagination" (Pollock et al. 2000, 579) that connects identities to the imaginary constructions of place, such as homes, homelands, boundaries, and roots. As we illustrated, consumer models of acculturation are fundamentally based upon static, stable, and homogenous representations of nations and national cultures and the crossing of nation state boundaries (McSweeney 2002). However, deterritorialization, the effacement of linkages between national boundaries and belief systems, values, or subcultures that characterizes globalization processes, does not fit with the conventional schemas of territorially-based identity positions (Huang 2006; Tomlinson 2007) that have directed our past acculturation research. Moreover, global flows have created a landscape where cultural patterns, such as "youth culture" or "business culture," are no longer concentrated in a given locality but are rather linked across geographical areas and multiple groups (Appadurai 1990; Roudometof 2005).

We know little about how deterritorialization affects consumption. Cayla and Eckhardt (2008) have demonstrated how it affects branding practices. Here we point out how the consumption styles of the deterritorialized consumers who pursue a nomadic lifestyle contrast with those of the migrant consumers studied so far in the consumer research literature who remain anchored to places of origin or residency, social connections, and sacred possessions during mobility. The emotional suffering, the longing, and the homesickness that underlines migration and border-crossing experiences among other mobile people are not seen in global nomadism. As migrants continue to remain anchored to their homeland, migration and mobility become experiences of permanent transience and homelessness as they plan and hope to go back home (Joy and Dholakia 1991; Mehta and Belk 1991). In contrast, nomadic consumers do not look back and contextualize their identity projects in each destination. They avoid nostalgia and endorse a fluid and flexible sense of self. This fluidity is facilitated through liquid consumption that enables them to change and continuously adapt to each locale. In a way, rather than being disenchanted because of the lifestyle required to sustain effective mobility, global nomads are liberated from the emotional, physical, and social obligations or indebtedness imposed by solid possessions and belongingness (Featherstone 1995; Firat and Venkantesh 1995). Our study proposes that individual well-being and success in global nomadism depends on how well one is able to adopt a liquid relationship to materiality as well as places.

In sum, as acculturation studies in consumer research are steeped in modernist conceptions of selfhood, identity, and nationality, they have argued that (1) possession attachment becomes more salient in mobility, (2) migrants form enduring and strong attachments to possessions, and (3) possessions are valued because of their symbolic role as identity anchors to homeland or host country. In conditions of global nomadism associated with a liquid world, we demonstrate that (1) possession attachment becomes less salient in mobility, (2) consumers form temporary attachments to possessions, and (3) possessions are valued primarily because of their use-value. In this way, we help to move the acculturation research from a model linked to the nation states

and linear trajectories between them to one that foregrounds postnationalism, deterritorialized selves, nomadism, and circular movements.

Overall, the findings highlight the relationship between the liquid rather than the solid nature of consumption and globalization. Ideas associated with liquid modernity (Bauman 2000), access (Rifkin 2000), and globalization (Appadurai 2005; D'Andrea 2009) have hinted at potential changes in the significance of possessions in consumer lifestyles, which here we document empirically. Static and strong attachments to things become problematic in a liquid world characterized by global flows of information, capital, people, and heightened values of immaterial things and their management. In this world, value is increasingly derived from experiences, open-ended ideas (Belk 2010; Carù and Cova 2007), access, and temporarily congealed nodes of significance, including economically significant nodes like credit (Appadurai 2005; Miyazaki 2005; Zwick and Dholakia 2006), and decreasingly derived from "stuff." We also build upon Tomlinson's (2007) notion of lightness in that we demonstrate that, in the context of global nomadism, lightness is manifested in immateriality. Thus, our study advances our understanding of the role of possessions in liquid globalized modernity.

Limitations and Future Research

One possible limitation of our study is the interview method we employed as our data collection method. We utilized long semi-structured interviews as a way to collect data from a busy, elite consumer group who are difficult to reach due to their mobility (Bernard 2002). In some instances, we were able to observe the contents of informants' dwellings; however, this was not generally possible. Thus, as with any interview data (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994), our results reflect what informants believe they do, and they may also reflect what they believe we sought from the interviews; in other words, there may be some social desirability effects in our results. Our informants could be exaggerating their detachment and lack of reliance on possessions. To bolster the veracity of our findings, we contrasted them with those of other studies featuring upscale, nonnomadic consumers who have found significant possession attachment (Gilly 1995; Joy and Dholakia 1991; Sayre 1994; Thompson and Tambyah 1999; Walsh 2006). However, future research with observational methods that foster prolonged engagement with nomadic consumers in their domestic spaces would further strengthen this contention.

While we identify liquid consumption in the context of elite global nomads, this construct could be applicable to a variety of consumption situations. One obvious extension is to investigate attachments among nonelite nomadic consumers, such as the armies of laborers who crisscross the world in search of remittance income and who invest heavily in wireless products and services (Amit-Talay 1998; Colatrella 2001; Kuriyan et al. 2011) or the highly nomadic yet underclass Roma ethnic group. Is it possible that the liquid orientation we identify here may extend to a larger global constituency, those who lack the economic capital enjoyed by our informants but who mobilize wireless money transfer, wireless banking, and pay to access Internet services? (Kuriyan et al. 2011). This is an important direction for future globalization research.

Moreover, while in our study the global infrastructure, fostered by multinational corporations and global institutions as well as the high economic capital among our elite nomads, facilitates liquidity of consumption, this is not the case among nonelite nomadic consumers. The elite nature of our sample raises the questions of whether it is their capital and support infrastructure that enables them to live liquid lives. While our respondents rely on infrastructure and economic capital to navigate nomadism, other researchers (Belk, Groves, and Østergaard 2000; Sahlins 1974/2004) find that traditional nomads without access to these tools rely upon social capital and sharing to navigate their existence. Others, such as Urry (2007), would suggest that in contemporary times, network capital is the most valuable form of capital, as unlike social or cultural capital, which is embedded in one context or milieu, network capital can be transferred across borders. Future research can investigate the role of all of these types of capital in facilitating global nomadism and a liquid relationship to possessions.

Deterritorialization is one of the conditions that shape the consumer-object relationship in this study. As deterritorialization has been considered one of the major forces transforming the relationship between places we live and our cultural practices, experiences, and identities, more research is needed to unpack the ways in which this condition changes the nature of consumption. For example, deterritorialization brings into question the taken-for-granted relationship to national culture and the notion of place-based identities and ultimately the notion of home. While we do not study the notion of home here per se, our findings speak to a liquid relationship to places in global nomadism. Prior research has portrayed global nomads as having no home and belonging nowhere (Bauman 2000; Featherstone 1995; Iyer 2000). As we also illustrated, global nomads do not anchor identity in nationality or places. However, our findings seem to counter the notion of the homeless nomadic elites as we find that liquid consumption enables global nomads to re-create a sense of home everywhere they are. Our findings suggest that traditional notions of home as a place of identification and belongings (Dovey 1985) do not explain the relationship of home to place. Instead, our findings allude to a more practice-based notion of home embedded in localized, everyday consumption practices of orientation in time and space. Engaging in local consumption practices, such as consuming local foods, music, or art, enables global nomads to quickly enhance local social and cultural capital and embed themselves temporarily in a locality. Our data suggest that, while the nature of nomadic practices is localized and as such changes with each destination, participation in such consumption practices is almost routinized and strategically deployed during reterritorialization. Future research could further examine and

identify alternative notions of home in conditions of mobility and deterritorialization embedded in consumption practices.

Our study highlights the temporal aspect of consumption, as consumer-object relations in our context of study are situational and of limited duration. We postulate that other contexts where the interaction with objects is of limited temporality may demonstrate a liquid relationship to materiality. Thus, a liquid relationship to possessions may be an appropriate theoretical lens for investigating the emerging context of access-based consumption, where consumers access products or experiences for short periods of time rather than purchase them, such as in the car-sharing model of Zipcar (Rifkin 2000). The emphasis in access-based consumption is on experience value and less on the identity value of objects (Chen 2009). Thus, exploring the notion of liquidity in an access-based consumption context could be a fruitful area for future research.

The liquidity lens might also shed light on consumers in cultural contexts influenced by Buddhism, where emphasis is placed on flexibility and nonattachment (Eckhardt and Zhao 2011). Asceticism in general advocates a liquid relationship to possessions, and thus future research could investigate the parallel between what we found in global nomadism and the way in which monks and other ascetics interact with possessions. Finally, as illustrated in figure 1, the feedback loop from liquidity to global nomadism suggests that the more liquid the nature of consumption, the more deterritorialized one can become. In this way, a liquid relationship to possessions could constitute another form of what Giddens (1991) called disembedding mechanisms because they reinforce deterritorialization. Future research is needed to explore this disembedding nature further and to examine the behavioral and social impact of these liquid possessions, such as the general impact of portable objects like e-readers and MP3 music files on consumer identity, that are helping to dematerialize contemporary society.

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