Shifting migration aspirations in second modernity

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the aspirations of Western European emigrants as part of wider processes of life course and self-development within what has been called 'second modernity'. Starting from the observation that migration often happens in stages, the article focuses on the changing meaning and content of aspirations within migratory projects. Furthermore, in order to understand the specific place chosen for migration, a multi-scalar approach is proposed. The analysis is based on two empirical studies addressing migration experiences of Austrians migrating to the United States during the 1990s and 2000s. The empirical material is drawn from qualitative interviews that explore the aspirations, realisations and evaluations of migrants after moving abroad. The article concludes by highlighting the importance of situating aspirations for migration to on-going broader societal changes by applying theoretical concepts such as second modernity and multi-scalar approaches. Migrants' experiences and meaning-making are shaped by these societal developments and contribute to them via their everyday activities.

Introduction

As this journal's special issue highlights, theoretically oriented research on aspiration and migration is scarce (Carling and Collins 2018). It is even rarer when we consider the aspirations of migrants from the so-called Western European countries. From a social scientific point of view, it is a rather neglected form of emigration compared with emigration from other world regions (Dijkstra, Garcilazo, and McCann 2015; Zamora-Kapoor and Coller 2014). Whenever typologies of migration include movements from the Western European countries, the studies are usually only of a few occupational groups, such as managers, diplomats, artists and scientists engaged abroad (Green and Weil 2007; Scheibelhofer 2006). A number of case studies, however, show that other groups of people – in this respect hitherto largely ignored – emigrate as well (Ackers and Stalford 2007; Breivik 2012; Hall and Hardill 2014). Still, the research carried out so far discusses the question of aspirations only within the framework of specific group motives studied, for example, diplomats (Niedner-Kalthoff 2006), international aid workers (Roth 2012) and individuals moving with religious congregations (Hüwelmeier 2010).

Yet, for European migrants, in general, aspirations are no trivial matter. This article, therefore, examines the changing aspirations of European migrants who have settled or are still settling in their new country of residence, rather than those with migration aspirations that are not (yet) realised (for individuals still at home who aspire to migrate, see e.g. Bal and Willems 2014).

Aspirations discussed in this article are perceived as hopes, plans, ambitions or goals that can be clearly formulated or kept rather vague (Gutman and Akerman 2008). In terms of temporality, aspirations are a two-sided coin as they simultaneously address the present and the future. These aspirations are also likely to be connected to social class and milieu (Lowe and Krahn 2000). Aspirations can be defined as the 'ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals' (Quaglia and Cobb 1996). These abilities and consequent aspirations are perceived as embedded in a specific social context (Ray 2006). Within the context of migration, it is important to note that aspirations are rather enduring; however, they are not to be expected to stay entirely stable over time because they can also be shifted by biographical changes such as employment, migration, having children and retirement. Moreover, changes in social contexts, brought on by broader societal transformations, also change individuals' aspirations.

A biographical perspective helps us understand such changes in aspirations in that it can take multiple forms of knowledge into account.[1] Aspirations are part of our biographical stocks of knowledge, or *Wissensbestände* (Berger and Luckmann 1972), that are formed through individuals' everyday life experiences and the socially constructed interpretations connected to them (Wohlrab-Sahr 1997). In that sense, aspirations are an important part of our broader action orientations which are not situational but rather enduring through the life course, influencing how individuals act and react over longer periods of time (Scheibelhofer 2003).

Most studies on migrant aspirations focus on persons in or from economically deprived world regions (Carling 2002; Van Meeteren, Engbersen, and Van San 2009; Wissink, Düvell, and van Eerdewijk 2013). Instead, I concentrate on Austrians as a case study of Western Europeans who have already left Europe for the United States. While research on migrant aspirations has concentrated on social upward mobility and/or securing survival, my interviewees did not share comparable aspirations. It was, therefore, necessary to reconstruct the aspirations analytically and use apt theoretical frameworks for doing so. In this regard, the concept of second modernity was helpful (Beck and Grande 2010; Beck and Lau 2005) because it deals with the question of which life courses are most probable under given conditions and how they may emerge. The effects of individualisation tendencies prove to be of paramount importance here: neither corporatist orders nor social classes offer individuals social anchorage. Likewise, stable family relationships no longer last a lifetime, with individuals themselves becoming 'a life-world reproduction unit of social matters' (Beck 1986, 209). Despite constraints on directing one's own life plan, we also notice a growing consistency of individual biographies and positions. Institutions, such as the labour market, that produce differentiated living situations also bring about their uniformity. In an effort to lead a meaningful life, an individual must put more effort into planning life pursuits. Such plans must, however, be flexible enough and subject to continuous change so as to adapt to various conditions. The individual is thus conceived of as a 'quasi-subject' (Beck, Bonß, and Lau 2003, 25 f.), becoming both

the product and the producer of his or her networks, living and working situations. To write, as it were, one's biography, socially acceptable parts of the past need to be communicatively ordered, eventually reordered and then contextualised in relation to the individual's will. Authors, such as Lash (2003, 51), have referred to tightrope biographies or identity bricolage, pointing out that biographies are characterised by fast choices and quick decisions (Roberts 2015).

In the context of second modernity, it is argued that social structures become fluid and unbounded. In the process of eliminating boundaries and undoing distinctions, many more delimitations and differences are thus created. The new boundaries are characterised as 'less final, more helpless, more provisional, and morally and legally more plural' (Beck and Lau 2005, 553). They are fluid themselves and open to change.

While the conceptual framework of second modernity is useful for understanding emigration outside situations of economic or other forms of deprivation, it does not indicate why migrants aspire to move to or stay in a *specific* place. In this respect, a multi-scalar approach seems promising. Rescaling is understood here as an analytical concept useful for studying current social transformations that emerge from late modern capitalism. It is the aim of rescaling research to study the effects of late capitalism on nation-state agency and urban and rural restructuring (Brenner 2004; Jessop, Brenner, and Jones 2008). In migration studies, Glick Schiller and Çağlar have shown how migration is embedded in multi-scalar conditions of cities that are smaller in scale and face difficult economic situations. They also emphasise how migrants are involved in the rescaling of cities (see Çağlar 2013; Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2015; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2008, 2009, 2011; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2016; Glick Schiller, Çağlar, and Guldbransen 2006). Introducing multi-scalar approaches into migration research is an on-going effort, and the conceptualisations of scaling vary significantly (Silvey 2004; Williamson 2015; Xiang 2013). Migrants are, at the same time, influenced by scalar processes and themselves influence scalar changes by the way of their activities (Scheibelhofer 2016).

In migration research, the focus has not yet been laid on the link between aspirations and scalar processes. The argument at hand is that a multi-scalar approach might be worthwhile when considering why individuals within second modernity aspire to migrate to *specific* places. The following examples from original empirical research, therefore, not only highlight how second modernity shapes aspirations of Austrian emigrants, but also how multi-scalar approaches help explain the choice of a specific place of migration.

Empirical findings on migrant aspirations within second modernity

The arguments developed here are based on two grounded theory research projects carried out between 1998 and 2002 (Scheibelhofer 2003, 2005). In total, 47 persons were interviewed, mostly in New York City. The research concentrated on biographical processes leading to migration, transnational lifestyles and/or short-term mobility. While the first project did not specify an occupational group, the second one zoomed in on the mobility aspirations of Austrian researchers who were at the time of the interview based in the US during early stages of their careers.

As a method, the qualitative problem-centred interview (Scheibelhofer 2004; Witzel 1985; Witzel and Reiter 2012) was chosen because it allows focus on biographical processes. At the beginning of the interviews, an open-ended prompt was given to encourage

a biographical entry to the interview (Schütze 1980). Doing so ensured that the interviewees would have as much freedom as possible to structure accounts according to their own relevance systems.

The analysis of the material was based on constructivist grounded theory strategies (Charmaz 2006) combined with the examination of biographical phases (Scheibelhofer 2008). This analytical process involved the construction of a chronological order of the migration experience. Applied here was an analytical scheme (Witzel 1985, 2001) in which researchers go through the reconstructed phases of a migration biography establishing for each of these phases the relevant aspirations, realisations and evaluations of the interviewed persons (cf. Witzel 2001).

The interviewees did not make a decision to emigrate at any certain point in time prior to emigrating, which they then acted upon and which would have led to a linear migratory biography. Rather, the empirical research showed different stages in the process of arriving at this decision and settling in the new place. Reconstruction of biographical phases also reveals divergent episodes that might have led to different migratory outcomes in individual biographies.

Most interviews were carried out in New York City, a place attractive to many Austrians because it holds a sense of opportunity for greater personal development. Ethnographic work on Japanese artists in New York shows that this opinion is shared by others (Sooudi 2014). Moreover, the city is a global centre not only in terms of financial markets, but also as a hub for arts-related production and creation, the fashion industry and academia.

Changing one's aspirations during migration

Individuals in second modernity are increasingly required to tailor their own biographies from socially more or less predefined elements. This is due to detachment from social milieus and the fact that individual life courses have come to be much less determined by social conditions (Botterill 2014). Flexibility in the sense of an ability to change thus becomes a dominant factor in everyday reality. Individuals themselves are expected to deal with large and unforeseen changes, such as unemployment and divorce, and to incorporate such events productively in their life plans at least after some period of time. But to do so, they need to be able to reshape their aspirations, too, and quickly tailor them to new circumstances.

Observing emigrants through the lens of second modernity, we see how the pressure to assign meaning to their own actions might be even greater than that of other migrants who are in the process of making some all-encompassing, life-defining decision that can be easily recognised as such by outsiders. It is a typical experience among migrants to be constantly confronted with questions in everyday life concerning their origin and reasons for migrating. Migrants in second modernity are also forced to deal with an environment that questions, scrutinises and judges their communicated aspirations concerning mobility.

Max Gerber,[2] age 46, was managing an art gallery in Manhattan at the time of the interview. As he described it, his own self-reflexivity shaped his aspirations. He made clear that the demands that came with having to forge his own path were frightening when moving to New York, though overall he believed that living in the city offered him opportunities for personal development. Being in that situation would let him to get to know his skills and limitations. On arrival, his ambition was to be an artist, yet, after comparing himself to other artists, he decided to let go of the aspiration – though it remained an important part

of his self-identity. In retrospect, Gerber could present his evolving aspirations as a success story: although unable to fulfil the dream to work as an artist himself, he revised his aspirations according to the possibilities of the place he emigrated to. This speaks directly to the Quaglia and Cobb (1996) understanding of aspirations as the 'ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals', and fleshes out how modern individuals navigate confronting high levels of insecurity and competition. Interviewees like Gerber saw the need to revise rapidly. Part of his career evolution was the need to find a niche, one in which his ability to make quick decisions would allow him to exploit his knowhow and talent.

Gerber talked about strategies that he used to deal with the pressure of job-seeking in an unknown setting and without help from friends or relatives.

> Essentially, you arrive in America, you meet a few people, and you say, 'I need a job' [laughs].
> **Interviewer:** So you didn't know anyone, didn't have any contacts here in New York?
> **Gerber:** No, not a single contact – well, at the beginning that's a little scary, but it's good because you somehow have to get yourself moving. And I believe that this is a very interesting experience – you essentially need to be very visionary, very inventive. You need to make your own life plan and also see it through. And you also need to be careful that you don't get stuck anywhere, you have to see that you also change your job at the right time, to leave something behind at the right time, in order to be able to get involved in something else because if you don't do that, the working situation and the work ethic in New York are very demanding, essentially, and very strong, and there is always the tendency that you lose yourself in it because – it's very demanding – and that also applies to the job I have here now. I also have to be careful.[3]

This need to adapt to the exigencies of a new place in terms of work as well as 'life plan', in a broader sense, relate directly to the theory of second modernity, as I briefly described. Gerber's account can also be read as the experience of a migrant moving to a vibrant city where economic life constantly changes and demands much of its residents. He characterises just what kind of agency is necessary in a place that has been described as a nodal point of the world economy and a driving centre of global financial markets (Sassen [1991] 2013). What Gerber experiences is the need to compete as an individual in a complex setting. Applying a multi-scalar perspective, we observe a learning experience in a world centre not only of economic power, but also of hegemonic cultural production. In Gerber's account, the implicit basis of comparison is Austria: a highly industrialised country yet one with economic and political dependency on other nation-states. Austria, moreover, is not an international hub of contemporary creative output, although its artistic and cultural legacy has given it a lasting tourist appeal. We might conclude that a scalar comparison of cultural environments allowed Gerber to aspire to move to New York and stay even when his job aspirations changed. The final thoughts in the excerpt reveal how he still believes that his aspirations and work ambitions may need to evolve in order to remain competitive on the job market.

Self-determination seemed a key factor in Gerber's attempt to independently and capably exploit the various resources available to newcomers. How he chose to recount his migration story included a reinterpretation of former aspirations, having had to part with what he came to consider unrealistic future plans. The creativity to revise and reinterpret prior aspirations thus largely depends on migrants' own ability to adapt quickly to external influences. In doing so, they continually undergo learning processes in which they

usually cannot rely upon the support of ethnic (or other) networks or contacts. Looking at Gerber's case, one might conclude that migration within second modernity emphasises tendencies towards individualisation.

Another way to deal with aspirations that might later be deemed unrealistic, in the face of actual circumstances, is exemplified in the case of Herbert Weger, age 36. In our first conversation, he introduced himself as a producer and cameraman for experimental films. He also stated that he was an artist with a university degree in his field, who had been living in New York City for five years. In the interview, Weger talked about his job as a software developer for a local company, where he had started to work soon after his arrival. The following excerpt shows how he managed to reconcile his aspiration of being an artist with his work at a nine-to-five job.

> It's a very small company, with four or five people – and I get along with them very well. I work there three or four days a week, or more if necessary, and ah – and, well, I like my work a lot, well – I'm learning a lot there and – [I] also have to travel and such once in a while – this would really be my job if I wasn't an artist because I can learn a lot [on the job] for my art, and I have never had technical difficulties in my projects. That's always the big problem, that many of these projects don't really turn out right because the artists don't have a clue, and don't have enough money to be able to afford a good technician. This means that many things are only half-finished and then it doesn't really work – in this case, I am lucky to get all the necessary practice in this job. I wouldn't have chosen to make my living that way if it didn't work.

Weger emphasised his employment-related advantage over other artists in his field, having accumulated at his day job the technical knowhow he also needed as an artist. He pointed out various characteristics about the job to show how attractive it was for an artist: working in a small, friendly environment, the opportunity to work on a part-time basis and the chance to travel for work. Weger chose to make software development seem like a secondary occupation: it was a side job because his main aspiration was to be an artist and he perceived himself as such. The aim of my analysis is not to determine whether Weger was being honest with himself, but rather to examine how aspirations are kept intact by letting them co-exist with the need to meet daily life's economic demands and pursue vocational ambitions. Focus here is on how viable forms of everyday life practices get constructed and integrated into a non-contradictory whole.

Revising aspirations during the course of migration was a result not so much of dissociation from original desires and expectations. Rather, my interviewees were adjusting to the conditions they encountered in New York and, specifically, the labour market, which is a crucial component to the following discussion.

Striving towards positive self-state as main action orientation

Since the mid-1970s, empirical studies carried out in Europe have indicated a significant shift from the traditional value of fulfilling family-related duties to striving for self-realisation (Garhammer 2000). That shift mainly stems from the fact that self-realisation as a key value has modified other orientations of migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Crespi 2014; Sooudi 2014; Vonk 2007). By contrast, studies dealing with the motives of migrants from economically deprived regions have shown that everyday actions are largely determined by the wish for a better future, economic or otherwise, which is

often connected with a sense of duty vis-à-vis family and communities. Schiffauer (1991) described how the meaning of the moral principle of duty changes with the migratory experience: within the context of migration, a distinction is drawn between performing one's self-duty and the duty to obey others (e.g. elders). While these aspirations do not get altogether replaced by some orientation towards self-realisation, they take on a certain degree of freedom. According to Schiffauer's study, someone in Turkey cannot know in what way his migrant relative can most effectively support the family; meanwhile, the migrant himself makes a decision – on the basis of his new environment and/or experiences – as to how this duty would be best executed. The significance of this modified sense of duty towards extended family in the country of origin can manifest in migrants' aspirations and social practices (Six-Hohenbalken 2001). Much current research interprets aspirations for the family's economic well-being as key, serving as the guiding motive in the lives of many first-generation migrants.

Diverging from this pattern, the migration movements prompted by the conditions of second modernity can often be described as positively aspiring self-states. Those states may range from personal development and self-determination to hedonistic orientations. Aspiration towards self-realisation also features in empirical case studies on recent migration movements, although the empirical data are not systematically analysed in this respect. Most frequently, aspirations towards self-realisation form part of the reconstructed biographies in these studies (Schondelmayer 2003; Weiss, Schnell, and Ates 2013), indicating that migration experiences are connected to the desire to achieve a positive self-state, thus differing considerably from labour migration research findings. In my studies on Austrians who migrated to New York, this difference became most apparent during analytical reconstructions of aspirations of self-realisation; the most salient reason to migrate was the desire for personal development.[4] While the second modernity framework helps us understand shifting aspirations towards self-fulfilment, it cannot explain why people choose a specific place to emigrate. From my interviews, it seemed that that New York City's uniqueness and the opportunities the setting offered for social networking were what compelled Austrians to go. There, in a different sphere, they could enjoy their freedom as individuals. The city's global prominence played a decisive role in this respect. From a social scientific point of view, the hegemonic powers within such a discourse add another dimension to the evaluations. Comparing Austrian ways of life to those of the US was typical for the interviewees, who usually characterised their place of origin as rigid and trapped in tradition.[5] If we look at this characterisation through rescaling, we see that Austria has been unable to transmit an image of innovation, appeal broadly to artists and researchers or show that it has a culturally vibrant life influential beyond its borders. In social scientific terms, what stands out are Austria's political and socioeconomic stability, high standards of social welfare and rather conservative way of life (in terms of gender norms, social reproduction and political landscape). Esping-Andersen's (1990) characterisation of the US as a liberal welfare state with its market logic and Austria as a conservative welfare state come to mind, despite criticisms of this simplistic conceptualisation in recent years.

My interviewees continuously placed their aspirations in perspective by describing their limited opportunities for self-realisation in Austria. When I spoke with Alexander Mittersill, he was 45 and had been living in New York for over 15 years. He had left his university studies in Austria and worked briefly in different jobs before coming to the city to visit a

friend. It was not his plan to stay, yet on arrival, his aspirations quickly changed. Here, we see the important influence of biographical momentum, which was described earlier as being characteristic to the formation of aspirations. After finding work as help in a kitchen and later on as a cook, Mittersill extended his stay, for reasons stated as follows:

> The energy level here is just so much higher, and the people are so much more ambitious – and I like it that way. It is always – you are always with people who feel some kind of urge and who want to start something new, who are supported by their friends and families if they want to start something new. This is what has fascinated me so much here right from the beginning. The support system here is so strong – there is so much strength here. The people you talk to, if you say, 'I want to do this or I want to do that,' they always tell you, 'Go for it! Do it! You can do it!' – Ah, while in Austria it's always like […] if you have some kind of idea, which doesn't fit in well with your environment or your friends – you always hear 'Oh, well.' 'Oh, well' – 'maybe' – and this is what makes the difference to me.

Supported by his friends and acquaintances in New York, Mittersill had enough courage to get involved in projects that were entirely new to him. At the time of the interview, he owned a well-established restaurant, which he had opened by taking out loans on several credit cards and balancing the debts. It had been his ambition to buy his own restaurant. He explained how in Austria, his creative aspirations had taken various promising directions, but his actual efforts had all been impeded. Yet in New York, his ideas garnered a lot of positive feedback and encouragement, which pushed him each step of the way to what he deemed a successful, fulfilling life. Mittersill found that placing himself in a positive environment, one that would support him and his high ambitions, was a way to boost his own creativity and sense of innovation. From a sociological point of view, these experiences can also be linked to broader societal traits. In Austria, being an untrained restaurant-owning cook would not have been possible because the labour market is strictly regulated; a year-long apprenticeship and completion of exams would be required before being able to cook in – and own – a restaurant. In New York, Mittersill received enough social support to make such a project possible and did so on a labour market that is far less regulated.

Balancing degrees of self-determination

Self-determination also carried tremendous weight in the second empirical study that forms the basis for this article. The interviewed researchers, who moved to the US (for a limited period, at least initially) despite not having a long-term work position, developed divergent aspirations in terms of their migration. The crucial question for them concerned how they could – under the differing circumstances of their disciplines[6] – reconcile their self-determination in work and private life.[7] My empirical study identified two antipodal ways in which individuals coped with these exigencies, as illuminated by the following two cases.

At the time of the interview, Erwin Schmied had spent seven years at different universities across the US. Shortly before our meeting, he was offered his first assistant professorship after obtaining a postdoc in a social scientific discipline focusing on computer-assisted innovative testing methods. This new development in his biography was, on the one hand, a big step forward in realising his professional aspirations – he was a dedicated researcher hoping to pursue a career in academia. On the other hand, during the interview, he spoke of a 'lose-lose' situation; he was about to move, yet

again, to another state within the US and would be living not just far from his family in Austria, but also from the friends he made over the years in the US. Most of them were young researchers like him and some also had to move around for academic positions. Schmied described the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing his ambitions, as follows:

> So, studying [in the US] at one of the best universities with big-name professors still does not mean that you'll get a job afterwards. So – there is no job guarantee anymore. But still, the probability [...] to find a suitable position is much better than [in Austria]. The suitability is important. I'd rather live – in terms of life quality and where in fact I'd like to have my life – I'd very much in fact like to return to Austria or to Europe. This would be the ideal thing to do for me. So, I really would like to return and continue my research. But it is not valued [in Austria]. So, for example, if I had a position in Austria – that does not exist anyway – I'd never have a suitable position comparable to the one I was offered in California. So in California, I'll be my own master with this assistant professorship. And this is simply because it is acknowledged that you have pulled through the programme.

Schmied's aspirations thus pulled him in different directions and could hardly be reconciled with his view of the present-day circumstances in the life course of many researchers. Securing a job that met his expectations meant having to be more mobile than he would like to be. Returning to Austria was not an option. At best, it would force him to bow to the hierarchies of the Austrian university system – which was too risky, especially considering the job scarcity – and to give up a good share of the academic independence he could expect in the US. Schmied's accounts correspond with on-going shifts in the politics of education and science: while researchers face financial constraints in the US and in Europe, many of the elite global research institutions within the US (which Schmied refers to) rank higher than those in Continental Europe. This impacts job opportunities for younger researchers in especially vulnerable biographical situations (Ackers 2005). Comparing the circumstances of young researchers in the US and Austria, we see how differences in the university systems often compel European researchers like Schmied to migrate to the US. These individual decisions also contribute to a further upscaling of the US research competitiveness.

As conceptualised in this article, aspiration must also be perceived as being embedded in specific social environments. Schmied accepted the norms that govern academic work in his field and thus embraced the professional aspirations that come with embarking on a successful career. Thus, Schmied accepted having to move to yet another region of the US, where he had to build social ties anew and could not realise his wish to return to Austria. Under different circumstances, another researcher faced a similar problem and forged another strategy to deal with competing interests.

Before turning to the second case of Vera Jungwirth, I should stress the limits of comparability between the two interviewees, largely concerning costs involved in their research. While Schmied relied on expensive testing devices, Jungwirth worked in cultural science requiring, above all, brainpower and empirical research. Consequently, Jungwirth's research routines could be carried out independent of the office infrastructure, laboratory space and equipment that Schmied depended on.

Jungwirth was a 36-year-old political scientist who had been living in New York City for 10 years. After studying for two of them on an Austrian grant at a university in the city, she received her diploma and obtained a PhD fellowship at the same university. While doing her PhD, she cooperated with two scientist friends who, like her, lived

partly in Austria and partly in New York. When we spoke, Jungwirth was teaching at two universities in New York and one in Austria. Additionally, she had won a grant for her research in Austria, thus stabilising her finances for another two years. She planned to secure research funds from the US, although up until then, her money mainly came from Austrian or European funding sources.

To reconstruct her aspirations was no easy task. From her own observations and descriptions of her past and present situations, one might derive that she strives for a high degree of independent work and personal living conditions. However, unlike Schmied, she plainly pointed out that she was not ready to follow the unwritten rule of taking up less attractive academic positions for the sake of being at a more renowned university or living in a better city. In other words, she did not believe in applying for university positions in places where she did not wish to live. Still, in her view, the path to full professorship in a highly popular city, such as New York, was first to take up a position at a less attractive university and then to work one's way up to better reputed places. Being a researcher with expectations beyond the job itself – that is, the wish to live in a certain place – Jungwirth found another way of financing her position as a scholar in a globalised academic arena. This strategy worked for her; yet looking only at her professional pathway it would not suffice to understand the complexity of her situation.

Jungwirth is part of a large social network whose members are used to moving back and forth between two places. The network contacts facilitated consultation between members about various difficulties arising from a common transnational lifestyle. Jungwirth emphasised the need to be highly organised when holding employment contracts in two countries. Having annual teaching duties in Austria and spending part of her summer holiday there, Jungwirth still rented an apartment in Vienna. Discussing the insecurities of her current situation as a researcher, Jungwirth was simultaneously forging strategies for how to cope with the field's demands and her work conditions. Exploiting resources (contacts, information, teaching opportunities and research funds) both in Europe and the US was necessary to meet her aspirations to live as a researcher in the place or places she chose. Jungwirth was actively engaged in constructing a social environment that was transnationally oriented and that, in turn, helped her achieve work goals and find satisfying living arrangements.

The interview also permitted a glimpse at aspirations-in-the-making. When we spoke, Jungwirth's economic circumstances implied potential precariousness in the future. But going back to work full time in Austria was ruled out as an option for personal reasons; her husband, an American, spoke no German and would struggle to find employment there. The couple discussed the possibility of moving to London or Berlin so that both would have a chance at finding professional positions in their respective fields. Yet also keeping Jungwirth from pursuing her aspirations was an awareness that she would immediately move back home, to the Austrian countryside, should her aging parents ever need care. As an only child, she saw no other solution to a problem, which she anticipated coming sooner or later. Although, in general, she avoided thinking about these uncertainties, she could not imagine how her professional and private life, with her husband still in the US, would evolve after returning to Austria at some point. Gender-specific norms and views on caring for parents or young children proved recurrent when talking to other female scientists about their future aspirations. While the issue of

children and their education was brought up by male scientists who were also fathers, caring for the elderly did not come up in our interviews.[8]

Concluding discussion

Most studies on migration aspirations have centred on a particular type of connection between spatial and social mobility. They have examined how people in economically deprived and insecure places see migration as a pathway to a better future and a successful life. Also after having left home, the migratory projects under study are typically intertwined with striving for a better life in the face of adversities (Carling 2002; Van Meeteren, Engbersen, and Van San 2009; Wissink, Düvell, and van Eerdewijk 2013). A fuller understanding of aspirations in international migration requires attention to different types of contexts too, namely those in which individuals are not leaving their countries of origin to better their economic prospects or to secure a future not endangered by war or ecological crisis. My work on Austrians in New York City contributes to such an endeavour.

I have suggested here that the perspective of second modernity is a helpful theoretical venue for such cases. My respondents revised their aspirations once already living in the US, and this dynamism resonates with the continuous need within second modernity to be flexible in one's action orientations in order to accommodate changing circumstances. While studies on aspirations and migration have concentrated on emigration environments, looking more profoundly at the immigration context would enhance the already existing research. To appreciate how a migrant's biography develops, we need to appreciate shifting and changing aspirations in new environments. Meeting the demands of the new environment can lead to further migration or to revising aspirations. In the material presented here, such revision of aspirations was most prominent in the case of Gerber, the art gallery manager.

Analyses of aspirations should examine not only dynamism and revisions, but also explore prevailing trends in their direction. What I observed among Austrians in New York City was that they typically aspired to a positive self-state. This overriding action orientation means that migrants are not orienting themselves towards traditional values, such as performing one's family duty or attaining a higher standard of living, but rather that they are striving for self-realisation (Schondelmayer 2003; Weiss, Schnell, and Ates 2013). Researching the opportunities migrants have to realise their personal potential by trying out life elsewhere can contribute significantly to understanding migrants' aspirations in more general terms, especially when newcomers move to societies that can be analysed through the lens of second modernity.

Cases such as that of restaurant owner Mittersill are deeply embedded in an immigration context of a neoliberal economic market, which is linked to its own set of immigration and settlement laws. These political and economic circumstances lead to the scalar positioning of New York City, which is, in turn, very attractive for many international migrants.[9] In Austria, by contrast, economic markets are highly regulated: without a year-long training, Mittersill would not have gotten the necessary licenses to open a restaurant – and he likely would have struggled with the higher taxes and incidental wage costs financing the conservative Austrian social welfare state. Thus, research that takes the scalar positioning of emigration and immigration environments, both, into account is certainly also useful when discussing migrant aspirations.

A final theme that emerged from the interviews concerns migrants' balancing degrees of self-determination. Aspiring to high degrees of self-determination is a core mechanism within second modernity because the extenuating socioeconomic circumstances are not as decisive for the biography (Beck, Bonß, and Lau 2003). The problematic of balancing was especially salient with those interviewees who worked as junior researchers in the US. Most of them aimed at reconciling a career as a researcher with satisfying social relations with family members and friends. Schmied's and Jungwirth's cases exemplified how the meaning-making and strategies of migrants can vary. Although different aspirations shaped their migratory moves, both shared their ambition for high levels of self-determination in their biographies.

The concept of second modernity helps us see the individual work of bricolage in one's biography; it highlights the importance of interpreting and re-interpreting one's own life course. Individuals who move across international borders are thus engaged, as are those who stay, in bricolage work in order to build their own biography and interpret it according to their action orientations.

Whilst second modernity may explain the social phenomenon of emigration from countries, such as Austria, we still need to examine why the interviewees mostly chose the US, and specifically New York City. Here, a scalar approach reveals the aspirations for these specific locations. In these case studies, the migrants aspired to be in a place that influenced world economy, arts, research and academia as well as popular culture, in a broad sense. Conversely, the Austrian migrants themselves contributed to the upscaling of New York City and elsewhere through their own everyday activities, professions and financial investments in these places.

Notes

1. For a by now classic argumentation in favour of a biographical approach, see Halfacree and Boyle (1993).
2. All names, dates and specifics of empirical work presented here have been altered in order to maintain the anonymity of data. Half of the empirical work has been financed through a grant of the Jubilee Fund of the Austrian National Bank (grant number 9156, project name 'mobility perspectives of young Austrian researchers').
3. All interview excerpts were translated from German by the author.
4. The study on which these results are based had also endeavoured to reconstruct the main action orientations of migrants. Here, it was found that besides action orientation towards self-realisation, orientations towards personal realms such as family, career and work life were highly important. In many actual cases, these action orientations also overlapped in differing ways (Scheibelhofer 2009).
5. For further reflections on methodological nationalism in everyday life of migrants, see Scheibelhofer (2011).
6. Interviewees were selected from two disciplinary groups – life sciences and social science – in order to see how working in different subject matters create different research circumstances.
7. The divide between professional and private life spheres is applied cautiously here, keeping in mind feminist works on gender-specific inequalities hidden by such discourses (Acker 1990).
8. For further insights on gender issues in the mobility of female researchers, see Ackers (2004).
9. For an example of Japanese emigrants to New York City, see Sooudi (2014).

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