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The Uncertain Value of Cosmopolitan Capital: Teachers at International Schools in Switzerland

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Abstract: Drawing on field theory, this article analyses the trajectories of schoolteachers employed in Swiss international schools, with a focus on the accumulation and mobilization of various forms of capital – and the limits thereof. The heterogeneity of teacher trajectories and resources when entering the international school sector is documented and, through the concept of cosmopolitan capital, light is shed on specific logics of distinction contributing to the segmentation of the teaching sector and the creation of an educational enclave of international schools.

Keywords: Denationalization of education, international school teachers, Switzerland, field theory, professional trajectories

Capital cosmopolite et segmentation du secteur de l'enseignement privé : le cas des enseignants des écoles internationales en Suisse

Résumé : Cet article propose une analyse des trajectoires d'enseignants employés dans les écoles internationales suisses en mettant l'accent sur l'accumulation et la mobilisation de diverses formes de capital. Il documente l'hétérogénéité des trajectoires et des ressources des enseignants lors de leur entrée dans le secteur des écoles internationales. Le concept de capital cosmopolite est convoqué afin de mettre en lumière des logiques de distinction spécifiques qui contribuent à la segmentation du secteur de l'enseignement privé et à la création d'une enclave éducative d'écoles internationales.

Mots-clés : Dénationalisation de l'éducation, enseignants des écoles internationales, Suisse, capital international, trajectoires professionnelles

Kosmopolitisches Kapital und Segmentierung des privaten Bildungssektors: Werdegänge von Lehrpersonen an internationalen Schulen in der Schweiz

Zusammenfassung: In diesem Artikel werden die Laufbahnen von Lehrkräften, die an internationalen Schulen in der Schweiz arbeiten, analysiert. Die Studie dokumentiert die Heterogenität der Laufbahnen und Ressourcen von Lehrkräften beim Eintritt in den Sektor der internationalen Schulen. Mit Hilfe des Konzepts des kosmopolitischen Kapitals wird ein Licht auf die spezifischen Logiken der Unterscheidung geworfen, die zur Segmentierung des Lehrsektors und zur Schaffung einer Bildungsenklave der internationalen Schulen beitragen.

Schlüsselwörter: Denationalisierung von Schulbildung, Lehrpersonen in internationalen Schulen, Schweiz, Feldtheorie, Berufliche Werdegänge

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1 Introduction

International schools are expanding worldwide, making them one of today's most significant global educational phenomena. According to some estimates, nearly seven million children currently attend a private or public K-12 school that pursues a non-national curriculum and/or provides instruction in English in a country where English is not a national language.[1] Although there is great diversity when it comes to types of schools and contexts, a common denominator is the recruitment of English-speaking expatriate teachers in addition to hiring teachers from the host country. Emerging research on these teachers underscores their membership to a "global middle class" but also highlights the ambivalences and subjectivities that characterise this unique articulation of a privileged lifestyle (that of an expatriate) and employment precarity in a deregulated global labour market (Tarc et al. 2019; Rey et al. 2020a; Poole and Bunnell 2023).

This article contributes to this body of knowledge by analysing different forms of capital held by teachers in Swiss international schools and the possibilities they have to convert this capital outside the international school sector. In this regard, Switzerland is a relevant and specific field of research for several reasons: It is a country where salaries are high in international comparison (including teacher salaries at public schools); it hosts arguably the world's oldest international school (the International School of Geneva), which contributes to Switzerland's standing in this field; and its international schools are mainly of the "traditional" type – i. e. they serve an expatriate community employed by multinational companies, international organizations, and embassies (Hayden and Thompson 2013).

Drawing on quantitative and qualitative interview data collected as part of a wider multi-sited ethnographic project[2], this article throws light on the heterogeneity of international school teachers' trajectories, variations in the distribution of cosmopolitan capital, and the lack of circulation between public schools and private international schools in Switzerland. The article further points to limited opportunities for capital conversion between "international" and "local" fields, due in part to different logics of distinction in these fields. This limitation contributes to the segmentation of the international school sector and the creation of an educational enclave of international schools.

1 According to ISC Research data (2023), English-speaking international schools around the world cater to close to seven million students and employ around 650 000 teachers. The sector had grown 18 percent over the previous five-year period, despite the COVID pandemic. Between 2013 and 2023, the growth was 52 percent.

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2 Teachers in Swiss International Schools

International education has developed rapidly over the past several decades, fuelled by the expansion of the private sector at all levels of education, the increased mobility of high-skilled migrants in the context of the neoliberal economy, and the growth of the middle-class in emerging countries. Over the course of this development, Anglophone international educational programmes have been increasingly incorporated into a variety of national contexts and have generated a process of denationalization of education (Resnik 2012). In this article, international education refers to an educational ideology oriented towards "internationalism" as offered by many international schools in a context of economic and cultural globalization, which creates demand for transferrable education qualifications according to defined "quality standards" (Cambridge and Thompson 2004).

Moreover, the field of international K-12 education has been expanding, both through the rise of non-national curricula (such as the International Baccalaureate) and the growing number of international schools – although there is some disagreement on the criteria that make a school international. This "crypto-growth" (Bunnell 2022) is increasingly diverse and often occurs without national debate. While 30 years ago, the vast majority of students at international schools stemmed from (mostly Anglophone) expatriate families who lived abroad for professional reasons, nowadays, students are mainly from "local" middle-class, aspirational families in non-Anglophone countries (particularly China and the UAE) seeking an Anglophone education provided by Western-trained, native English-speaking teachers (Brummit and Keeling 2013).

For historical, economic, and political reasons, Switzerland represents an important centre in the global international education landscape. Switzerland has hosted many of the most high-end, elite international schools in the world (Koh and Kenway 2012). Recent historical and socio-historiographic studies have described how education tourism and the international elite schooling sector developed in Switzerland from the late 19th century onwards (Bertron 2016; Metz 2019; Rey et al. 2019; Lillie 2022). Bertron (2016) addressed the issue of how Swiss elite boarding schools historically promoted their territorial resources to increase their attractiveness and prestige. Nevertheless, the key discursive turn towards "internationality" came with the foundation of the International School of Geneva in 1924. Dugonjic (2022a) documents how the creation of this prestigious international school was influenced by post-war ideologies and geopolitical power relations, but also demonstrates that it emanated from stakeholders with heterogeneous profiles and interests who held significant social capital, including international civil servants eager to ensure the reproduction of their status through the education of their children.

Since the 1990s, the influx of highly qualified English-speaking migrants (Wanner and Steiner 2018) has further contributed to reshaping the educational

landscape in Switzerland, where public education is otherwise prevalent. In urban areas that host many multinational companies and their "expatriate" staff, the growth of English-language international streams in Swiss private schools has been significant over the past two decades (Bolay and Rey 2020) – although French sections often coexist in Western Switzerland's international schools. In 2017, in the canton of Geneva, there were nearly 10 000 students enrolled in English-speaking or bilingual private schools – many of which claim to be international in character – compared to 71 000 enrolled in public education. These international schools generally correspond to the Type A "traditional" international schools of Hayden and Thompson's (2013) typology, namely schools established to cater to mobile expatriate families for whom the local education system is not considered appropriate; although, some international schools, mainly in French-speaking Switzerland, also educate children from "host country nationals".

While the private to public school ratio remains low at the national level,[3] the increase in the number of schools accredited by the International Baccalaureate (IB) since the 2000s also reveals a trend towards internationalization within the Swiss private educational sector. In 2023, 55 schools offered the IB curricula in Switzerland (48 private and 7 public schools). The IB curriculum has been adopted both by international schools and by other private schools undergoing internationalization processes with the aim of attracting the growing expatriate population. There was an increase during the 2000s, until a certain saturation was reached after 2010: This is partly due to the 2008 financial crisis, which resulted in the reduction in benefits offered by multinationals to their "expatriate" employees, in particular concerning school fees for expatriate employees' children.

The growing field of international education necessitates the recruitment of specific teaching staff. International schools tend to look for English-speaking teachers, preferably with previous experience in the curriculum offered by the school (Canterford 2003). The teaching staff may vary according to local and school conditions, including the curriculum offered, national and local government requirements, school employment policies, immigration policies and work permit restrictions (Hayden and Thompson 2008). Worldwide, the English-speaking sector of international schooling attracts as many as 30 000 new entrants each year, predominantly professionals trained in the United Kingdom (Bunnell and Poole 2021a).

The emerging scholarship on teachers at international schools, which has recently shifted its focus from institutional issues like recruitment and retention to the study of teachers' perspectives and lived experiences (Poole and Bunnell 2023), has described this population of teachers as motivated by a quest for adventure, travel, and discovery (Savva 2015; Bailey 2015), but also by career or economic opportunities (Tarc et al. 2019). This motivation is despite the fact that teach-

3 Only about five percent of Swiss pupils (aged 2 to16) across Switzerland attend a private school, although this varies greatly according to canton and age. https://www.edk.ch/fr/ (01. 09. 2023).

ers face numerous cultural and professional challenges when transitioning to an international school environment, including a sense of "de-skilling" when teachers feel their expertise and knowledge are not valued (Bailey 2015). Indeed, teachers at international schools often ambivalently and simultaneously experience privilege and vulnerability: They are highly mobile and identify with a global middle class, and yet have precarious employment linked to contractual and economic insecurities in a largely deregulated teaching sector (Rey et al. 2020a; Soong and Stahl 2021; Bunnell and Poole 2021b; Bright 2022; Poole and Bunnell 2023).

Moreover, a common typology differentiates between two categories of teachers: "expatriate" and "host country" (Poole and Bunnell 2023) – echoing the dichotomy between the "global" and the "local" that often implies asymmetrical positioning within international schools (Savva 2015). And, in fact, when studying the professional profiles of expatriate teachers, a further distinction can be made between "local hire expatriates" (Garton 2000), who are generally in the country because of their spouses' mobility or career, and "overseas hire expatriates" (Garton 2000), or "adventurer teachers" (Rey et al. 2020a), whose presence is related to their own professional mobility, activities, and interests. This distinction is particularly relevant in the Swiss context, as the country employs a large number of expatriate staff in its international organizations and corporate sector. Spouses of these employees are often highly qualified yet unemployed when they arrive in Switzerland (Cangià 2018). The following addresses the ways in which these various trajectories reflect different possibilities for cosmopolitan capital recognition in a national context with a dominant public education sector.

3 Cosmopolitan Spaces and the Construction of Educational and Social Privilege

Many education systems cultivate an ambivalent stance towards cosmopolitan identities. While cosmopolitanism implies valuing the plurality of cultural experiences, school actors often take a deficit approach to migration, meaning migrant students are characterised primarily by what they lack in relation to national and local educational expectations. Educational systems thus tend to place single national citizenship, immobility, and fixed boundaries above multiple citizenships and movement across borders (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011).

However, this value asymmetry between a stationary life and international migration is reversed within certain educational niches designed for a mobile and privileged clientele. Dugonjic-Rodwin (2022a) shows how the field of IB schools developed on the back of "political internationalism", which contributed to the unification of dominant social fractions from various countries under a single logic of distinction (Bourdieu 1979). This gives us a contrasting, even opposing, picture

of how migratory journeys can be approached in a school context: Whereas in public schools, students from migrant families experience how their life trajectories run against assumptions of state-based educational systems that emphasise acculturation and citizenship within a single nation-state, in international schools, students from more privileged families are taught to embody the transnational culture of global elites (Wagner 1998).

A cosmopolitan ethos in schools, however, does not erase national, language-based, or culture-related asymmetries. Behind the purported neutrality of discourses associated with a celebration of diversity (Bolay and Rey 2020) or the formalism of political internationalism in which they have historical roots, international schools reflect implicit hierarchies and tensions that refer to geopolitical relations between nation-states (Dugonjic-Rodwin 2022b; Lillie 2020). In addition to aspects of nationality, social inequalities are also reproduced in international schools through socio-economic differences, ethnicity, "race", and gender (Bailey 2022). This is particularly visible in the language of instruction (English) and the recruitment of predominantly white, Anglo-Western teachers.

Taking Bourdieu's (1992) concept of social fields as a basis, various scholars have examined intersections among academic credentials; social, symbolic, or economic capital; and the reproduction of social networks in transnational contexts. Cosmopolitan practices and dispositions (openness towards other cultures and the ability to enact this openness) have been conceptualised in terms of cultural capital as a source of class distinction and elite privilege under the cover of meritocracy (Weenink 2008; Igarashi and Saito 2014). Other authors point to the moral superiority implied in the claimed capacity to transcend the local (Moore 2013): Cosmopolitan self-definitions are paradoxically also markers of a distancing from local realities, and they establish a certain class identity.

Wagner and Réau (2015) conceptualize international capital as related to various forms of social, economic, and cultural capital – the lattermost including institutionalised (diplomas), material (objects), and embodied (dispositions or *habitus*) cultural capital. They argue that an approach to globalization through the notion of capital avoids essentializing the social effects of globalization by framing it in terms of social relations rather than sub-groups or reified populations (Wagner and Réau 2015, 34). Other authors suggest that the term "cosmopolitan capital", which is used in this article, may refer to the actors' social or cultural capital (Bühlmann et al. 2013), while "institutional international capital" is relevant for institutions and organizations such as schools (Delval 2022). Gardner-McTaggart (2016: 20) thus suggests that international schools draw their symbolic power from their credentials of internationally transferrable, outstanding qualifications, while their material power lies in the economic elitism of expensive private education.

The theoretical relevance of the international/cosmopolitan capital perspective also lies in its consideration of space: Scholars analyse not only how and when this

capital is accumulated but also identify in which (local, national, transnational) spaces this capital may be recognised and converted. To account for the spatial relation of international schools to their "host country", Rey et al. (2021) proposed the concept of the "cosmopolitan enclave". Marked by discourses of openness and ideals of universality, cosmopolitan enclaves are characterised by dual dynamics of bordering and circulation: They facilitate the global circulation of specific actors, like teachers (Bolay and Rey 2021), and resources across enclaves, while maintaining (relative) detachment from local social, political, and legal conditions and constraints. This article will look at the extent to which different forms of capital play a role in the process of constructing these enclaves.

4 Methodology

This research draws on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2015 to 2018 in the international education sector. The ethnography included classroom observations, participation in school events, attendance at teaching job fairs and school fairs, and interviews with international school teachers from a variety of backgrounds as well as with other experts in the field (including school directors, school owners, consultants, and teacher recruiters). In Switzerland, several schools were selected for short visits or for observations over a couple of weeks, and ethnographic research in one international school was conducted over a period of 10 months (one school year).

Participant observation and interviews were conducted with the explicit consent of school principals and teachers. The research was introduced to the school community, department, or section (as appropriate) orally and through written documents. Schools and interviewees have been given pseudonyms in all publications deriving from this research.

In this article, two sets of data are of particular interest. The first set concerns the trajectories of teachers at Swiss international schools, which was gathered by means of a questionnaire addressed to teachers employed at four international schools: two in French-speaking Switzerland and two in German-speaking Switzerland. Data was collected on the trajectories of 60 primary and secondary school teachers, two thirds of whom identified as female. Respondents taught the International Baccalaureate (85%) and/or other curricula (42%) – including the British, French, and Swiss curricula as well as school-specific curricula.

The second set of data comprises 22 interviews with teachers employed at Swiss international schools, with a focus on their personal, professional, and mobility-related trajectories. Eight teachers started working at international schools as expatriates accompanying their partners abroad; six began as "adventurers", most of whom

were recruited to teach overseas via mobility brokers such as teaching job fairs and recruiting agencies; and eight were from "local" – yet heterogenous – backgrounds.

5 Teachers' Cosmopolitan Capital

This section categorises different forms of cosmopolitan capital held by the participants in the study: teachers in Swiss international schools. The indicators considered refer to embodied and institutionalised cultural capital (e. g. skills and diplomas), as well as social capital accumulated from living in different countries: (multiple) nationalities, mobility during childhood and for higher education, and language skills. Transitions from one professional sector to another is also considered, as they have the potential to generate a conversion of capital, as is professional mobility between various public and private education sectors in Switzerland or abroad.

5.1 Nationalities, Education, Languages, and Mobility

Most of the teachers who answered the questionnaire (77%) are citizens of an Anglo-Western nation (Table 1) – despite the administrative hurdles posed by Switzerland's restrictive immigration policies, as reported by recruitment staff. One out of every three teachers is British (35%), followed by American (20%), Australian, Irish, Canadian, and New Zealander. By contrast, only 15 percent of the sample are Swiss nationals. About one quarter (24%) of all teachers have more than one nationality.

When considering the countries in which the teachers in the sample were educated, the Anglo-Western component becomes even more pronounced (Table 2). Four of every five teachers received their primary and secondary education (K-12) partly or solely in an Anglo-Western country, with Great Britain named most frequently (39%). By contrast, the ratio of teachers who attended school in Switzerland is low (8%), and only one respondent stated that Switzerland was their sole place of schooling – all other Swiss nationals had also attended school in other countries (United States, France, Netherlands, New Zealand, India, Canada, and/or United Kingdom). When examining the backgrounds of the Swiss teachers in the sample, it also becomes apparent that the vast majority (with the single exception) spent their childhoods outside of Switzerland. Some of them grew up in an expatriate family and went to school in three or four different countries.

The Anglo-Western component becomes even more predominant when analysing the countries where teachers received their tertiary education (bachelor's or master's degree). Nearly half the teachers (48%) studied in the United Kingdom and 84 percent of them studied in at least one Anglo-Western country, while not quite a third of the teachers studied in a continental European country and only 10 percent were trained in Switzerland. Moreover, teaching degrees were almost

Table 1 Nationalities of International School Teachers

	Nationality	N	%
Anglo-Western	British	21	36
	American	12	20
	Australian	5	8
	Irish	5	8
	Canadian	3	5
	New Zealand	1	2
	subtotal	47	77*
Swiss and neighbouring countries	Swiss	9	15
	German	5	8
	French	3	5
	Italian	2	3
	Austrian	1	2
	subtotal	20	33*
Other European	Spanish	2	3
	Danish	1	2
	Finnish	1	2
	Slovak	1	2
	Swedish	1	2
	subtotal	6	10
Other	Malaysian	1	2
Two or more nationalities		14	24
Three or more nationalities		1	2

* Ratio related to the number respondents (excluding multiple countries from the same region for the same respondent).

exclusively obtained at Anglo-Western universities (85%). About one quarter of the teachers (26%) attended universities in more than one country.

It is interesting to note that only one respondent holds a teaching degree from Switzerland. Although most Swiss nationals in the sample have a teaching diploma, this qualification was almost always acquired abroad, notably in the United States, Australia, Chile, Great Britain, or Canada. The other international school teachers who studied in Switzerland either have no teaching degree or acquired their teaching qualification through an in-service training offered at a university (such as the University of Nottingham or Durham University, both in the UK) that specifically targeted an audience of international school teachers. These programmes often have infrastructure (distance learning and face-to-face classes) geared towards international school teachers who have not yet earned a teaching degree – and notably do not provide access to teaching positions in the countries where they are awarded. For instance, according to the university's website at the time of writing, the PGCEi (Postgraduate Certificate Education [International]) degree offered by the University

Table 2 Countries Where Teachers Received Their Primary and Secondary Education (K-12), Tertiary Education and Teacher Training

	Country	K-12 education		Tertiary education		Teaching degree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Anglo-Western countries	UK	23	39	28	48	25	48
	US	13	22	18	31	11	21
	Australia	4	7	6	10	5	10
	Canada	4	7	2	3	2	4
	Ireland	2	3	0	0	1	2
	New Zealand	1	2	0	0	0	0
	subtotal	47	78*	54	84*	44	85
Switzerland and neighbouring countries	Germany	6	10	4	7	1	2
	France	5	8	2	3	0	0
	Switzerland	5	8	6	10	1	2
	Austria	1	2	1	2	1	2
	Italy	0	0	1	2	0	0
	subtotal	17	24*	14	21*	3	6
Other European countries	Netherlands	2	3	1	2	0	0
	Denmark	1	2	1	2	1	2
	Slovakia	1	2	0	0	1	2
	Spain	1	2	3	5	0	0
	Sweden	1	2	0	0	0	0
	subtotal	6	10	5	9	2	4
Other countries	Chile	1	2	1	2	1	2
	India	1	2	0	0	1	2
	Malaysia	1	2	0	2	0	0
	Hong Kong	0	0	1	2	1	2
	South Korea	0	0	1	0	0	0
	subtotal	3	5	3	5	3	6
Education in 2 or more countries		7	12	15	26	–	–
Education in 3 or more countries		5	8	2	3	–	–

* Ratio related to the number respondents (excluding multiple countries from the same region for the same respondent).

of Nottingham does not licence someone to teach in the UK or elsewhere – including in Swiss public schools. To teach in the Swiss public sector, a teaching qualification must be recognized by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CDIP 2016). This is only possible if that qualification allows direct access to the profession in the country of origin (professional accreditation), which does not apply to international teaching qualifications such as the PGCEi.

Table 3 Languages Spoken and Level of Mastery

Number of languages spoken	N	%	Number of languages mastered (C1 or higher)	N	%
one	4	7	one	25	49
two	23	40	two	16	31
three	17	30	three	8	16
four	5	9	four	1	2
five	7	12	five	0	0
six	1	2	six	1	2
Total	57	100	Total	51	100

Finally, most teachers in the sample are multilingual (Table 3), with the majority (53%) speaking three or more languages, at least two of them fluently (51%) at a language level of C1 or higher.

In summary, these data reveal that almost all teachers who responded to the questionnaire obtained qualifications abroad and/or were geographically mobile during their educational paths. This situation starkly contrasts the career paths of teachers in Swiss public schools, who rarely have an immigration background (Beck and Edelmann 2016) and whose career paths are essentially based in Switzerland.

5.2 Previous Teaching and Other Professional Experience

Most of the teachers (53%) in the sample have significant work experience outside the field of education. They reported 39 significant job experiences in a variety of fields, including research, industry, marketing, sales and finance. Most were previously employed in the private sector, and a significant proportion of those jobs were in private corporations (Table 4): travel, technology, pharmaceuticals, and banking and insurance. These jobs were mainly based in Anglo-Western countries, especially in the United Kingdom, but also in the United States, Australia, and Canada. Other jobs were in continental Europe (Switzerland, France, and Spain) or in Asia.

Table 4 Teachers' Previous Significant Employment Experiences

Research	6	Education (non-teaching)	3	Arts	2	Media	1
Aviation and travel	4	Marketing	3	Entertainment	2	Military	1
Business and sales	4	Pharmaceuticals	3	Business owner	1	Navigation	1
Banking and insurance	3	Technology and informatics	3	Logistics	1	Therapy	1

Table 5 Previous Teaching Experience

	Previous teaching experience	N	%
International school	No	34	57
	Yes	26	43
Swiss private school	No	48	80
	Yes	12	20
Swiss public school	No	58	97
	Yes	2	3
Private school abroad	No	34	57
	Yes	26	43
Private school in Switzerland	No	20	33
	Yes	40	67

Respondents' teaching experience ranges from 0 to 35 years, with an average of 15. The average number of years working at their current school is 6735 years. This is relatively high for the international school sector, which often operates on a two-year renewable contract basis. However, international schools in attractive locations tend to have lower turnover rates of expatriate staff than those in other parts of the world (Hayden and Thompson 2008). Switzerland is often seen as offering a good quality of life, which may appeal to expatriate teachers seeking "a place to call home".

Most teachers who responded to the questionnaire had also taught at another school (Table 5); just 12 percent had taught only in their current school. Previous teaching experience was mainly accumulated outside Switzerland, with 80 percent of the teachers in the sample having previously taught abroad and only 22 percent having previously taught in Switzerland, almost exclusively in the private sector. In contrast, two out of every three teachers had taught in the public sector abroad (67%) – confirming similar findings among international school teachers in other contexts (Savva 2015) – while a large minority (43%) had also worked in the private educational sector abroad. This sector includes international schools, which 43 percent of respondents report having taught at (in Switzerland or abroad).

The data show that, in general, there is a high degree of permeability between the public and private sector when it comes to educational trajectories. Yet boundaries arise between the Swiss educational landscape and private international education, where almost no circulation is observed. This can be explained by several factors, namely the structure of the international school sector and the kind of profile (and capital) that employers seek, as well as the economic structure of the Swiss educational employment market, as discussed later.

When comparing teachers' cosmopolitan capital to other categories of actors in international education, it appears that their capital tends to be lower than, for

instance, that of students in the internationalised sector of hotel management education where, as Delval (2022) reports, one out of three students moved to another country during their K-12 education (compared to only 12% of teachers in this sample) and a similar ratio of students has two or more nationalities (compared to 24% of teachers here). The next section explores this analysis in greater detail by drawing on qualitative data to situate Switzerland in teachers' heterogenous career trajectories.

6 Pathways for Accessing International Schools: A Typology

The previous section offered a general overview of teachers' backgrounds with regard to the cosmopolitan capital gained through education and training, but did not discuss the diversity of their trajectories or the different ways and settings in which they accumulate and mobilise various forms of capital. The following addresses how international school teachers enter the international school sector in Switzerland and the different considerations that shape this process, depending on the teacher's background. It uses the typology of Rey et al. (2020a) to account for how a teacher gained access to their first international school position: as the "trailing spouse" of another expatriate who followed their partner abroad; as an expatriate "adventurer", who are mainly young Anglo-Western teachers excited by the opportunity to travel while teaching; or as a "host-country" or "local" teacher with a background in Switzerland.

6.1 Expatriate Teachers Accompanying Their Spouses: The School as a Community

Many international school teachers in Switzerland are foreign nationals whose mobility is related to personal circumstances, most often because they have moved with their partner and family as a "trailing-spouse" (Hayden and Thompson 2008), i. e. if their partner works at an international organization or multinational company. As the ratio of highly qualified migrants has increased in Switzerland, family configurations and gender roles imply that women are more likely to follow their spouse and arrive in Switzerland with no employment than men (Wanner and Steiner 2018).

These individuals often turn to teaching as a viable career opportunity. For many, teaching was not the first career choice; rather, it is seen as an interesting solution to the issue of limited employment opportunities in the host country. For accompanying spouses, Switzerland is described as a hard-to-access labour market with few job opportunities, where employers tend to prefer hiring locals. As such, teaching at an international school represents an accessible professional option. These "trailing spouses", most of whom have professional qualifications, experience a form of precarity (Cangià 2018) linked to job instability and periodic changes in work destinations, as well as to possible breaks in their own careers in favour of

their partner's. At the same time, they often have more economic resources than other categories of migrants.

About half of the interviewees in this study who fit the profile of the expatriate trailing-spouse teacher did not choose teaching as their first profession, and therefore did not have a teaching license when they first applied for a position at an international school in Switzerland. To cite a few examples, one teacher worked in the chemical industry; two were management consultants; one was a researcher and biomedical technician in various laboratories; one worked in the cultural sector of museums; and two were doctoral candidates in sociology or chemistry. Their international mobility is dictated by their partner, who often works on assignment for embassies, NGOs or multinational companies.

For these individuals, one advantage of starting a career in international education is that they can easily find work anywhere, as was often mentioned in the interviews. In addition, most of them have school-age children and so the school community also becomes a site for the social life of the whole family, either through events organised by the school or through informal networks between teachers, parents, and children. In terms of the social capital they accumulate in Switzerland, their relationships often remain restricted to contacts within the expatriate world.

In addition, employment at international schools is also an economic strategy in relation to the children's education (Tarc et al. 2019). For example, certain privileges regarding tuition fees for children are offered to teachers at international schools. This consideration was related by one teacher:

> *Another good thing about working here is … my husband's job paid for the girls to go to this school, his job paid for them. And so, if you imagine, at some point in life we have three children in an expensive school and if my husband would lose his job, we would have had no way [of] paying that fee, three times, whereas now, because I have got my job – because the fees are less – if my husband loses his job, we don't have to worry about [maintaining] such a nice lifestyle which we have. (…) The girls are [still] going to school, it is fine. It really made a big difference; my husband must feel quite released [that I'm] pulling my weight a bit more. (…) He appreciates [the fact that], now, we have got more security.*

As Wagner (1998) pointed out, in the 1990s, jobs for expatriate wives needed to be transferrable to different countries. This included teaching, secretarial work or self-employment. Today, teaching remains a popular employment option among accompanying spouses (male or female) not only because it is transferrable, but also because it enables them to become involved in the education of their children by becoming an actor in the school community.

In general, the expatriate trailing-spouse teachers in this study tended to have significant economic and cultural capital: They came from families of highly quali-

fied professionals (such as lawyers) or pursued careers in science or finance before moving overseas. In addition, most respondents feel a proximity to their school's socio-economic environment as well. One teacher expressed this proximity by saying that, as she comes from a wealthy family, she was not "shocked" to have "rich kids" in her class. Other teachers also grew up in expatriate communities themselves, making them well-acquainted with the social environment of the school:

> *I noticed that I was happier in an international environment. So, when my partner at the time said "Oh, I'm gonna get a job, I'm thinking of getting a job in Switzerland", it was actually quite exciting to me, because (…) I could be an expat again, which is how I grew up. (…) Personally, it seemed to make sense. So, I was happy to come out here and I did, I had a very international expat friend group (…) I actually feel a lot more comfortable as an outsider than as an … assumed insider. (…) When I came to this school, and I am sitting with the students, and I am talking to the students, I felt at home, in the same way that I did, growing up (…) as an expat. (…) Like I say, when I decided to become a teacher, part of that decision was, I'm gonna become an international teacher in an international environment. If for personal reasons I had to move (back), I am not sure I would teach. The emotional trajectory, the how much I feel at home in this sort of environment … I have come to realise means so much to me.*

For many alumni of international schools who came to teach at international schools, the international school setting represents a home. These expatriates have a greater familiarity with this cosmopolitan environment than with one that could be considered "local".

6.2 The "Adventurer" Teacher: The School as a Path of Exploration

"Adventurer teachers" are a priori connected neither to the site/country of the school nor to the expat community. In contrast to the trailing spouse profile, the adventurer teachers are oriented very early on towards the professional teaching sector. They are typically trained teachers from Anglo-Western countries who completed teacher training in their country of origin; recruiters often require that these new teachers have accumulated at least one or two years of experience at home before moving overseas. They are also mostly young and unaccompanied by a spouse or children when they first apply for employment at an international school (Rey et al. 2020a). Although adventurer teachers are often single when they first move abroad, they frequently start a relationship with a teacher they meet at work.

Like the "trailing spouses", there is a certain heterogeneity in the social background of these kinds of teachers in the sample. Still, they tend to be from a middle-class or working-class background. Many grew up in small towns in rural or peripheral areas. In a certain sense, they embody the meritocratic ideal of the

education system, as they experience their educational trajectory as a social springboard allowing them to leave their original environment, which some consider in retrospect to be rather narrow-minded:

> *I grew up in a very rural community. So, I went to state school (…) which was, you know, very narrow, very … white. [laughs] I thought it was completely normal but in hindsight, [it was] very … restrictive, very nationalistic.*

This group's entry into the international school circuit is motivated by several factors: lack of professional opportunities or dissatisfaction with working conditions in their home country, a quest for adventure and travel (sometimes spurred on by the experience of a stay abroad as part of their studies), and financial imperatives related to repaying their student debt and/or a desire to save for either a return to their home country or a departure to a new destination (Rey et al. 2020a). Their statements are often marked by contradictions linked to their perception of the "cost-benefit" of enjoying life, freedom and "fun" in their leisure activities, while nevertheless choosing a destination that offers the best advantages in terms of financial savings.

Regarding their first destination, there is a considerable degree of randomness – it depends on the contract, which is generally offered at job fairs or recruitment agencies for the international school sector. Their basic contracts – which are subject to financial or social penalties – are usually limited to two years, whereafter they might be extended or replaced by a new contract in another school/country. Their next destinations tend to reflect more conscious decisions, with the end goal of teaching in their preferred location. Switzerland was never the first country of teaching in an international school for the adventurers in this study; they had all gathered experience elsewhere.

The geography of desirable destinations does not reflect the available positions on the international school employment market, and thus does not correspond to the needs of the global international school industry. To North American teachers ready to move overseas, for instance, Europe is often a favourite destination. But as employment opportunities in European schools are limited compared to the growing international school sector in Asia and the Middle East, recruiters often stress the high cost of living in Europe, which leaves little room for saving, and redirect the teachers towards regions with a higher demand for Anglo-Western teachers (Rey et al. 2020a).

Salary conditions and quality of life are therefore two important variables that determine a teacher's mobility to the next destination. For example, a teacher working in an international school in Switzerland will rarely benefit from housing and other allowances, which are frequently offered as part of a package (Canterford 2003) in less desirable destinations. Salaries within Switzerland can vary by as much as double, depending on the international school. At the wealthiest international schools, a teacher's income approaches that at the public schools. At the least wealthy

schools, salaries are enough to cover living expenses but, due to the high cost of living in Switzerland, leave little room for saving – despite seeming attractive in international comparison.

Other factors also influence whether a school is more or less attractive to teachers. A common approach among teachers to rating the quality of an international school is to categorise it into one of three tiers. "First tier" schools (also called "premium schools") are those with the best conditions – although there is no strict consensus on what those conditions are. Criteria for qualifying as a top-tier school might include an international student body, an academic orientation, a shared work ethic, a strong teaching environment (including low student to teacher ratio, good infrastructure, and pedagogical support), high salary and good benefits (housing, travel, tuition for teachers' children, retirement funds), high quality management and being non-profit. Still, a high salary may be offered at a tier-three school to compensate for otherwise poor employment conditions. While there is no definitive answer as to in which tier a school belongs, many schools in Switzerland are generally associated with the first tier. This sets the country apart, sometimes ambivalently, as a destination for adventurers.

Schools in the upper tier in Switzerland rarely rely on job fairs and tend to recruit teachers through other means (like networking or online job postings), making social capital central. For example, a humanities teacher explained how he and his wife were recruited from an international school in Southern Europe to a school in Switzerland:

> *The director of that school was looking for other jobs around Europe and he secured a job as director of [an international school] in Switzerland. So, I remember, we had kind of a going away party for him, his name was Paul*, and I said to Paul*, "Well, all the best! Switzerland sounds good. I'm not asking for any favours, but should you ever need at your new school in [Switzerland] a humanities teacher and an English-German teacher (that's my wife), let us know."*

The couple was hired, went to Switzerland and eventually settled, married, and lived with their children there. While many adventurer teachers, like trailing spouses, move on to other destinations after two or more years, Switzerland is also a place where some individuals establish their roots for a longer period.

6.3 Local Teachers: A Search for Alternatives

In addition to expatriates and "adventurers", international schools also hire teachers with a local background. Being more stationary, these local teachers often remain at a school longer than the other, more mobile kinds of teachers, thus increasing stability within an environment with an otherwise relatively high turnover rate. Interviews with local teachers and recruitment staff revealed the diversity of this

category of teacher, including Swiss nationals who turned to teaching as a second career and so have no teaching degree, although many will complete on-the-job teacher training; alumni; and (less frequently) young Swiss who recently qualified as teachers, although it should be noted that young Swiss graduate teachers are often recruited by lower-tier international schools, as the most prestigious international schools prefer local teachers with international cultural capital. This category of teacher also includes those from neighbouring countries (France and Germany) who commute daily to work in Switzerland – thus, the designation "local teachers" refers not only to teachers from the "host country", but also to French and German nationals living close to the Swiss border.

Various factors motivate the entry of local teachers into the international school circuit. For some recent Swiss graduates, the lack of professional opportunities at the start of their career is behind the decision (Rey 2016). For others, it may be their personal identification with the institution as an alumnus of the school. In the case of cross-border commuters, the higher salary (compared to France or Germany) can be an incentive to teach at a Swiss international school – yet it should be noted that in Swiss border cities such as Geneva, cross-border status potentially applies to all three types of teachers, and even to some pupils, because of the expensive rental and real estate market. Lastly, it may be the international community that attracts them. Some local teachers have non-linear professional backgrounds and no teaching degree, but considerable cosmopolitan capital. One teacher in this study, for example, explained that she could identify with her school because, while having lived most of her life in Switzerland, she is "of Lebanese origin, Belgian, now Swiss, married to a Frenchman and [has] family all over the world".

While in many countries, hiring a host-country teacher is perceived as a guarantee of stability for the school, Swiss international schools experience some difficulty in retaining these employees. In Switzerland, salary and job security are better in the public school sector than the private one – although other conditions at international schools (such as the student to teacher ratio) offer some compensation. As a result, teachers who have the credentials to teach in the public sector are likely to leave when an opportunity at a public school arises.

The host-country teachers who choose to remain in international schools often have a particular attachment to the school, notably when they had attended the school or when its educational ethos reflects a personal or family trajectory. For example, one teacher in this study, whose family history is marked by World War II, as her grandparents were from France and Germany and later sought refuge in Switzerland, emphasises how she identifies with the ethos of international education:

> *The values of peace education and living well together are really put forward in all the programmes that are proposed, and then to see that it is possible on the scale of children, well that makes me hope that it is also possible on*

> *the scale of adults. I am utopian, I know, but it feels good to live it and to be able to share it with my children.*

This connection to the international environment partly explains why the local-expatriate dichotomy is less pronounced in Switzerland than in other countries (Bailey 2015), as many local teachers also look back on an expatriate experience in their personal life history.

Nevertheless, in terms of educational strategies, Swiss nationals are less likely than expatriate parents to send their own children to international schools, as they believe public schools offer the best preparation for the Swiss Matura – as long as their children are admitted to selective secondary schools – which is a qualification to enter any university in Switzerland. The same considerations apply to French and German nationals with regard to the French Baccalaureate and German Abitur, because many local teachers' children are likely to study in Switzerland (or France or Germany) and not go abroad. For parents of younger children, language issues, such as the ability to speak Swiss German, can also be a concern. Many local teachers consider mastering the local language more important than being educated in English.

7 The (Non) Recognition of Cosmopolitan Capital: An Enclave Effect

As already noted, there is little circulation between international private schools and the public education sector in Switzerland, leading to a strong segmentation of the teaching labour market. This is partly due to differences in the nature of the cultural capital required to enter the two different sectors. In international schools, where proficiency in English is generally required, cosmopolitan capital is important for accessing a teaching position. This capital may have been accumulated in different contexts – for example, a cosmopolitan habitus developed while living in expatriate communities (for expatriate accompanying spouse teachers), professional teaching experience in different countries (for adventurous teachers), or inherited cosmopolitan cultural and social capital (for local teachers, for instance).

For individuals in this study who did not initially have teaching credentials when they were hired by an international school, the conversion of capital plays a major role: All had significant economic, social, and cultural resources – including cosmopolitan capital – that aided their applications. In public schools, by contrast, where field-specific international teaching diplomas are not recognised and mastery of the local language is a requirement, international experience is considered unimportant, and may even be a disadvantage in some contexts (Rey et al. 2020b).

When it comes to economic capital, there is a clear asymmetrical positioning of these two teaching fields, with the public non-international teaching sector in a dominant position. Thus, while the Swiss international school sector may well be described as having a privileged teaching body and employment conditions in

international comparison, this statement requires additional nuance. Swiss public schools pay some of the highest teacher salaries in the world (the second highest after Luxemburg according to the OECD 2016); therefore, even the wealthiest international schools in Switzerland struggle to compete with public sector salaries. In this study, no examples were found of an international school where the salaries generally exceeded that of the public sector in the same area.

From a strictly economic perspective, then, there is no incentive to remain employed in an international school. However, other aspects of the job (such as the student to teacher ratio, teaching students from privileged backgrounds, professional and material support, or the international environment and cosmopolitan ethos) may compensate in the wealthier Swiss international schools. In addition, the prestige ascribed to the "international", the dominant position of English as a global language and the cultivation of a cosmopolitan ethos constitute the symbolic and cultural capital which facilitates the "closing off" of the international school teaching sector in Switzerland.

Frictions appear between these competing logics, which become visible when French- or German-speaking teachers leave the more prestigious international school sector to teach in the better remunerated and more stable public school sector. This reveals the ambivalent positioning of the international sector in relation to the national sector in a globally connected country whose public schools, teacher training and teacher employment is nevertheless state-driven and national.

8 Conclusion

To conclude, the specific contributions made by this article are highlighted, and possible future avenues of research are proposed. First, as a contribution to research on globalization and the denationalization of education (Resnik 2012), this article addresses how, on the level of the circulation of international school teachers, a segmented teaching sector is dynamically produced by mobility trajectories, individual and household strategies of capital accumulation and mobilization, state regulations and specific logics of distinction in the field of international schools. A detailed analysis of how cosmopolitan capital is accumulated and converted by other school-related actors, including the role of state or economic actors, would help further document the social and legal processes involved in creating an enclave of the international school sector in a context of the globalization – or denationalization – of education.

Second, the research results suggest that while international school teachers primarily belong to the "global middle class", this appellation may obscure their heterogeneity in terms of the economic and symbolic resources tied to the diversity of their trajectories. For instance, there may be unequal recognition of a teacher's

legitimacy to embody the cosmopolitan habitus associated with a school's educational ethos: While adventurers from middle or working-class backgrounds may have to first appropriate the international ethos of the school, the "heirs" of the expatriate milieu may already possess a cosmopolitan habitus that appears even more legitimate because it seems natural. Further attention to the distribution of different forms of economic, social, and cultural capital in other national contexts would allow for comparisons across the social dynamics of stratification within the teaching staff of international schools.

Third, the article highlights the importance of context for the recognition of cosmopolitan capital by documenting limits both to the conversion of professional teaching experience and to the recognition of a cosmopolitan habitus outside the international school sector. While Switzerland a priori offers a privileged and sought-after working destination, the structural precarity of the private school sector, especially when compared to employment conditions in the public education sector, reveals how thin the line is between privilege and precarity for those who are not previously endowed with significant capital. This finding suggests that the specific dynamics of educational landscapes need to be integrated into studies on mobility, education, and precarity.

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