MIGRATION
LETTERS

EDITORIAL:
When "expatriation" is a matter of family. Opportunities, barriers and intimacies in international mobility

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Abstract

This special issue aims at understanding "expatriate" mobility with a special focus on the role of family and intimacy, and brings together different case studies, built through different theoretical perspectives. These allow approaching "expatriate" family mobility along two main lines: as part of the making of life trajectories, and as shaped by, and shaping, professional trajectories. This editorial highlights the contributions of the various articles, before addressing a series of emerging issues. Among these, it questions the very notion of "expatriate" in the light of family life, shows the evolution of families and family relations in repeated mobility, and brings to the fore the importance of temporality and timing in family mobile life, as well as that of reflexivity in mobility. As a whole, the various contributions of this special issue complement each other in illustrating the complexities of expatriates' migration and family life in times of increasing global mobility, but also, they raise theoretical discussions, point to possible empirical implications, and suggest avenues for further investigations.

Keywords: Mobility; expatriates; family; intimacy.

Expatriates and Family Migration

The geographical mobility of the so-called "*expatriates*", also known as *expats*, represents a significant component of contemporary migratory flows. These people include individuals who need or choose to move internationally for their career or life trajectories, professionals who change residence often for work-related reasons (e.g., employees at international organizations and multinational

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companies, academics, scientists, diplomats, doctors, and artists), as well as the so-called "life-style migrants"[1], those individuals migrating in search of a "better" way of life (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009).

Although this population has become more numerous and diverse with regard to ethnicity, nationality, economic conditions, migratory trajectories and gender (Meier, 2014), the popular image of expatriation has long been based on the idea of a privilege, friction-less and root-less form of mobility. This population is commonly defined as having a high level of education or substantial experience in a specific field (Iredale, 2001), as well as being "cosmopolitan" and "super-mobile" (Elliott & Urry, 2010). Numerous are the terms used to refer to this people, including "expatriates" (Cerdin, 2001; Farrer, 2010; Walsh, 2006), skilled or "highly skilled migrants" (Lan, 2011; Salt, 1997; Scott, 2006; Smith & Favell, 2006), and "migrant professionals" (Meier, 2014). Other terms, such as "transnational elite" (Beaverstock, 2002), "transnational capitalist class" (Sklair, 2000), or "transnational professionals" (Nowicka, 2006), define this population specifically by its delocalized and transnational practices. Some terms, including "voluntary migrants" (Greco Morasso, 2013), "geographical itinerants" (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013), "transient professional workers" (Appleyard, 1989), and "skilled transients" (Findlay, 1988), are used to primarily emphasize the voluntary nature or the temporary duration of this migration. Finally, various terms such as "retirement migration" or "leisure migration", among others, were used to conceptualize what has been more broadly called "lifestyle migration" (Benson, 2016; Benson & O'Reilly, 2015).

In this editorial, we use the term "expatriates" as a general term to include a variety of migratory trajectories. The term is "socially contested, politically and morally charged, ambiguous, and is linked to particular notions of ethnicity and class" (Fechter, 2007: 6). It indeed conveys an image of "privilege" that, although differently, applies both to professional mobility and "lifestyle migration". This image is linked to a series of aspects invoked to draw sharp dichotomies between "expatriates" and "traditional" migrants. A first dichotomization refers to the "forced" versus the "chosen" nature of mobility, and to the duration of stay: the term "migrant" often seems to imply a necessity to migrate to permanently install in another country, whereas expatriates are viewed as relocating to places of their choice, mostly "with no time frame in mind" (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010, p. 1016). The second dichotomy relates to the origin and destination of various people's mobility: while traditional migrants are usually associated with individuals moving to developed countries from developing countries, expatriates are commonly viewed as relocating from

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[1] We here include under the term "expatriate" also the "lifestyle migrants", migrants that in the literature have been generally conceptualized separately from professional expatriates (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009).

developed countries[2] (Al Ariss, 2010). Finally, whereas "traditional migration" is often characterized by the possible challenges people can encounter when trying to "integrate" in the new context, expatriation is viewed as the migration of those "white" and "Westerner" individuals who are able to integrate when they choose to in their host destination[3]. "Expatriates", differently from other migrants, are seen as possessing a "cosmopolitan" outlook represented by their "willingness to engage with alterity, and openness toward different cultural experiences" (Hannerz, 1996, p. 106)[4]. From this point of view, expatriates' mobility has been viewed as a fluid movement, never impeded by any form of friction, by those social and cultural forces that "work to slow or stop mobilities on the one hand, and make the very fact of mobility possible on the other" (Cresswell, 2014, p. 109)

The present issue aims at exploring "expatriate" mobility with a special focus on the role of family and intimacy in people's making of life and professional trajectories on-the-move. The focus on family can shed light on the making of life and professional trajectories under different mobility regimes and socio-economic, cultural and psychological conditions (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013).

New Perspectives on "Expatriation": Making Mobile Trajectories with the Family

Recent research in the social sciences started to challenge the image of expatriation as a friction-less, privileged and cosmopolitan form of mobility by investigating the "human face" (Smith & Favell, 2006) of global mobility at multiple levels. Some studies have explored the everyday social, emotional and spatial experiences of mobile professionals, frequent travelers and lifestyle migrants (Beaverstock, 2005; Farrer, 2010; Levitan, Zittoun, & Cangià, 2018; Meier, 2014; Nowicka, 2007; O'Reilly, 2000; Walsh, 2006, 2012). Other studies have focused on the postcolonial legacies of this form of mobility (Fechter & Walsh, 2010, 2013; Korpela, 2010), on the way expatriates' mobility is affected by different categorical dimensions (Favell, 2003; Scheibelhofer, 2010; Wolanik Boström & Öhlander, 2015), as well as on the way these people actively constitute various socio-cultural boundaries (e.g., class, ethnicity, race, age, gender) in the course of their everyday life (Fechter, 2007; van Bochove &

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[2] Some exceptions already refer to these individuals as moving both from and to developing and developed countries (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2009).

[3] For a critical debate on the validity of these representations see also Smith & Favell, 2006.

[4] Other studies on cosmopolitanism proposed to overcome this dichotomy and have defined "cosmopolitanism" as a "competency" a "toolkit" that all migrants, regardless of their origins and socio-economic condition, bring on their journey: as a set of attitudes, practices and abilities, including analytic, emotional, creative/imaginative, and behavioral/communicative competencies, "that can be associated with experiences of travel or displacement, transnational contact and diasporic identification" (Vertovec, 2009, p. 10).

Engbersen, 2015). Current research problematizes the image of privilege for some groups of professionals and highly qualified mobile groups (e.g. academics) and their relatives (e.g. accompanying spouses), and framed their experiences within the study of precarity (Cangià, 2018; Doogan, 2015; Lempiäinen, 2015). The present issue contributes both theoretically and empirically to these studies with a special focus on family and intimacy in the making of life and professional trajectories for these people.

In times of increased mobility and time and space compression, family represents an important anchoring yet shifting entry point through which people live movement (Coles & Fechter, 2012; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005; Kraler, Kofman, Kohli, & Schmoll, 2011). Extensive research has been conducted in social sciences with regard to transnational family migration (Al-Sharmani, Tiilikainen, & Mustasaari, 2017; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2003; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2009; Ryan, 2011). With the increase of highly skilled, lifestyle global international mobility, however, more research is needed on the experiences of those families that move together, and how this movement affects and is affected by family, kin relations, gender roles and related meanings. Previous and current research explored the dimension of family and the role of gender in the context of professionals' mobility, by specifically addressing the experiences of accompanying spouses and mobile children (Cangià, 2017; Cangià, Zittoun, & Levitan, in press; Coles & Fechter, 2012; Lam & Selmer, 2004; Langinier & Gyger Gaspoz, 2015; Mclachlan, 2007; Ryan, 2011; Ryan & Mulholland, 2014; Schliewe, 2018), and the overlapping spheres of experience for families in repeated mobility (Zittoun, Levitan, & Cangià, in press). This research has largely contributed to problematize the fluidity associated with expatriation, by shedding light on the various barriers and opportunities for different family members, on the gendered configurations that structure these people's mobility (Yeoh & Ramdas, 2014), as well as on the way they subjectively challenge family roles in mobility (Schaer, Dahinden, & Toader, 2017). Here, we aim to address the relationship between family and mobility from a broader and combined perspective, through a look at people's trajectories and the role of family, in particular:

- how family shapes, and is shaped by, people's life trajectories; in particular, how family dynamics and roles relate to personal changes and transformation of relationships, as well as to the experience of mobility, including its imagination, decisions and practicalities;
- how family shapes, and is shaped by, people's professional trajectories; in particular, how, in the making of professional trajectories, people negotiate expectations and dreams with their close ones, as well as gender roles in the intimate sphere of domestic life.

Although the contributions gathered here do not frontally question the notion of family, they give us hint of the evolution of family life and its dependency on contextual arrangements. Hence, although classical norms of family appear to be still prevalent in these case studies, the articles show how mobile families at times become creative, as they have to address new modes of partnership, work and family arrangements. At the same time, how well family mobility will be experienced still depends on many other aspects including how much employers or supervisors are sensitive to families issues, the availability and capacity to access local nurseries and schools in various countries, and families' relative financial capacities, just to name a few.

Contents of the Issue

This special issue brings together different case studies and disciplinary perspectives (i.e., anthropology, sociology, sociocultural psychology, linguistics). The articles rely on a variety of methodologies (semi-structured, narrative and biographic interviews, participant observation, surveys), and focus on different mobile and migratory trajectories on a global scale (including countries such as, among others, Switzerland, Sweden, United Kingdom, India, Uganda, South Africa, New Zealand, United States, and Peru). The case-studies include various professional and life trajectories (i.e., academics, graduates, medical and other professionals, lifestyle migrants), different actors and family members (women, accompanying spouses, children, professionals), as well as topics so far under-explored with regard to expatriates' mobility, such as: decision-making processes and parenthood (**Greco**; **Wolanik Boström, Öhlander and Pettersson**), the relationship with personal, family and others' diversity across time and space (**Cangià, Levitan and Zittoun**; **Büchele**; **Korpela**), as well as gender norms and configurations (**Toader and Dahinden**; **Seminario**).

As a whole, the special issue follows two parallel yet complementary directions of analysis, namely a cultural, psychological and semantic perspective on the subjective making of life trajectories in mobility, and a more socio-anthropological perspective on the constitution of mobile professional trajectories. Some articles draws on specific disciplinary approaches on the topic (like ethnographic analysis in the case of **Wolanik Boström, Öhlander** and **Pettersson**; **Korpela**; **Büchele**), others propose methodological integrations (argumentation theory for **Greco**; life-course approach for **Seminario**), adopt multi-method approaches (**Toader and Dahinden**) or integrate different interdisciplinary and conceptual frameworks (**Cangià, Levitan and Zittoun**).

A Cultural, Psychological and Semantic Perspective: The Making of Life Trajectories

A first cultural, psychological and semiotic line of research explores, through the use of different analytical approaches, how family life and intimacy unfold in the making of life trajectories, at the level of subjective experiences and intrapersonal dynamics for various people involved.

In *Family, Boundaries and Transformation. The International Mobility of Professionals and Their Families*, **Flavia Cangià, Déborah Levitan,** and **Tania Zittoun** bring to the fore the complexity of these individuals' and their families' experiences of international mobility and the relationship with diversity, by drawing on qualitative research conducted in Switzerland. Through a combination of concepts and analytical approaches in socio-cultural psychology and cultural sociology, the authors reflect on the role of family in boundary processes and in the constitution of social networks, in the way people make sense of diversity across time and space, make and un-make symbolic boundaries between themselves and others, and understand diversity as an opportunity for change and self-exploration.

In *The roles of family relationships in migration decisions: a reconstruction based on implicit starting points in migrants' justifications*, **Sara Greco** draws on the discourse analytical approach of Argumentation Theory in order to understand the "voluntary" choices of international migrant women with their children in London. The article proposes an innovative methodological approach to look at the different roles of family and intimate relations within migrants' trajectories and decision-making processes. By analysing the interview as a dialogical exchange (with present and absent interlocutors), Greco explores the inner dialogues and starting points of these women narrating their migration, and illustrates how children and couple relations enter here to subjectively construct the decision of migrating internationally.

In *"We live a life in periods" Perceptions of mobility and becoming an expat spouse,* **Julia Büchele** introduces her ethnographic study with expatriate spouses in Uganda and investigates their perceptions of mobility. Some spouses narrate their experience by temporally dividing it into "periods" and phases of "before" and "after" the move, and present it as a transformational experience, as an opportunity for "adventure" and change or as the interruption of professional paths. Others narrate mobility as a predictable phase in the lifetime, and the relocation as a routine process. Viewed as contiguous stages of life as a mobile person, rather than as distinct types of migratory experiences, these perceptions of mobility illustrate the complex and ambivalent process of "becoming an expat spouse" in contemporary times.

In *Moving to Paradise for the Children's Sake,* **Mari Korpela** explores the experience of 'Western' families spending several months a year in Goa, India, and the rest of the time in the parents' native countries or elsewhere. Her article illustrates the significance of "nuclear family" and kinship in the lifestyle of these people,

and discusses children's views on the meanings of "lifestyle", where change and mobility become normality. Korpela's ethnographic research suggests how meanings of "stability" are socio-culturally situated, and need to be reconceptualised differently for those people and those age spans (childhood) for which movement and change represent an integral and temporally extended part of life. The temporariness of lifestyle affects children's attitudes concerning social relations and friendships and the way they experience mobility as "normal". Family, in particular "nuclear family", in turn, plays an important role in constituting a sense of stability and in constructing a life trajectory on-the-move.

A Socio-Anthropological Perspective: The Making of Professional Trajectories

A more socio-anthropological line of research illustrates the tensions between socio-cultural and institutional aspects and family life in the making of professional life for various mobile persons.

In *Family Configurations and Arrangements during the Transnational Mobility of Early-Career Academics: Does Gender Make Twice the Difference?* **Alina Toader** and **Janine Dahinden** examine the transnational mobility for early-career academics, by exploring the role of gender, family configurations and arrangements during the mobility. By using both quantitative data from an online survey conducted in two European universities, and qualitative data consisting of biographical interviews with early-career academics and their partners, this article shows how gender configurations in mobility have become more complex and how these mobile academics engage in a variety of gendered practices. The social environment for these mobilities remains in many respects gendered, yet gendered configurations now hinder not only women's career and mobility, but also men's career in the transition to parenthood. The article suggests adopting a relational and life-course approach for the study of academics' mobility and career paths, with a special focus on family timing (e.g., transition to parenthood), as well as on changes and different stages in both partners' professional trajectories.

In Femininities and Masculinities in Highly Skilled Migration: Peruvian Graduates' Narratives of Employment Transitions and Bi-national Marriages in Switzerland, **Romina Seminario** addresses the migration of young Peruvian graduates to Switzerland, their bi-national marriages, and their employment transitions and trajectories. By adopting a life-course approach, the article analyzes the impact of gender norms and family life in the transition to employment both for female and male young graduates. Access to a Swiss Higher Education in turn affects, and at times transforms, family arrangements and transnational meanings of femininities and masculinities across different cultural settings. Seminario challenges the tradition versus modernity dichotomy concerning gender norms between home and host country in

migration contexts, and describes the transformation of meanings of femininities and masculinities and related family roles emerging in people's narratives about their intimate life and transitions to employment in Switzerland.

In *Temporary International Mobility, Family Timing, Dual Career and Family Democracy. A case of Swedish medical professionals,* **Katarzyna Wolanik Boström, Magnus Öhlander** and **Helena Pettersson** reflect on interviews conducted with Swedish physicians and molecular biologists, in order to discuss how "family timing" and "family democracy" become crucial factors in the decision-making and the organization of international mobility for these highly skilled medical professionals. Dreams about career, knowledge improvement and humanitarian values, are negotiated with other family aspects, including the partner's career and children's development. The "temporariness" of mobility is what makes the negotiation possible among different family members. On the one hand, short-term mobility becomes hence an opportunity for strengthening family relations, for cultural enrichment and transformation at the personal level. On the other, mobility can still jeopardize "family democracy", ideals of parenthood and the equal opportunities both for the professional and the accompanying partner's career trajectory. All these values are highly embedded in the socio-cultural environment of Swedish middle class. The arrangements of mobile medical professionals do not only reflect the personal and domestic sphere, but entail also a complex negotiation with socio-cultural meanings associated with profession, family and intimacy.

Re-thinking "expatriation" and "family" in mobile lives

The various studies composing this issue allow sketching a more nuanced picture of mobile families' lives, as well as challenging the above-mentioned traditional image of "expatriation". The special issue contributes to the 'de-migranticization' of research on migration (Dahinden, 2016), and particularly challenges the use of "expatriation" as an analytical category, by showing the diversity in this people's family mobility, and the various social and existential conditions that characterize these experiences and that are not always typified by the category. What emerges from these articles and unifies these very different lives, after all, is the repeated, liminal and ambivalent nature of these migratory experiences.

Greco, **Korpela**, **Wolanik Boström, Öhlander** and **Pettersson, Toader** and **Dahinden** and **Büchele**'s analyses call into question the very "chosen nature" and the meaning of "temporariness" of expatriation. The focus on the different family members and from different levels of analysis (e.g., inner dialogues), reveal that the "choice" of moving and the "timing" to do so, do not pertain only to structural conditions that enable and facilitate mobility, but also to a complex negotiation between domestic life, intimate relations, socio-cultural

environment, and personal and familiars' life and professional plans. **Cangià, Levitan** and **Zittoun** and **Seminario**'s articles, in turn, interrogate the socio-cultural profile of the "expat" and their relationship with diversity. The case of Peruvians in Switzerland challenges the image of expatriates as merely "White" and "Westerners", and brings to the fore the role of cultural, gender and racial differences in young highly qualified migration and their family life. At the same time, expatriates' "encounter with alterity" appears to be a complex and ambivalent phenomenon, a "semantic movement" (Gillespie, Kadianaki, & O'Sullivan-Lago, 2012), which takes place on multiple levels, involves psychological dimensions, includes a variety of self and others, and has to do not only with the domains of life (the economic, political, and sociocultural) in which these people act, but also with family life and roles, and with personal and family change over time.

In addition, these articles invite us to reflect on the concept of "friction" in mobility studies (Cresswell, 2006), defined as a "social phenomenon with its own politics" (Cresswell, 2014, p. 114), which at times can slow mobility, other times can enable it. The special issue, in particular, invites us to pay a renewed attention to the role and implications of family in the making of life and professional trajectories, and to explore these two dimensions respectively. A variety of sensitive issues emerged, including the question of emotional experiences and family expectations, children's education, couple relations, and self-change in the making of life plans, as well as traditional and culturally based gender norms, dual career arrangements, and the willingness to explore and reflect on one's own possibilities and dreams in the making of professional life. Emerging from the case studies, hence, "friction" appears to be more than a "social phenomenon" and a mixture of structural, social and cultural forces that block and enable mobility; "friction" also seems to be a relational and affective experience that can impede or facilitate the movement at the personal and professional level. The image of "friction-less" mobility becomes more a normative label useful for institutions in order to create a category of "hyper-mobile" individuals, ready to choose their career over personal and family life. Far from being a "friction-less" and costless form of migration, international mobility comes to reveal its increasingly "precarious" character (Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016; Cangià, 2018), depending increasingly on the socio-economic changing conditions and moods of neoliberal capitalism (Bourdieu, 1999; Castel, 2002; Della Porta, Hänninen, Silvasti, & Siisiäinen, 2015). It is precisely by *reflecting* on, and negotiating, their lifestyle and professional opportunities with an eye on the tempos, flows and moments of family and intimate relations, that these migrants can find a margin of freedom to respond to the demands of global labour market.

Related to these subjective frictions in professional and personal trajectories, two complementary issues emerged from these various articles: the temporal

dimension of family mobility (e.g., transitions, ruptures, trajectories, life-course, stability) as well as the importance of reflexivity. The issues of timing, the tempos and rhythms of migration (Bissell, 2007; Griffiths, Rogers, & Anderson, 2013; Kirk, Bal, & Janssen, 2017), intertwine with the making of kin relations, family and gender roles. This temporal dimension and the making of one's own trajectory are also strictly connected to the opportunity for "reflexivity" (Archer, 2007, 2009) triggered by the experience of migration (Bell & Domecka, 2017). In times of "reflexive modernity" where contemporary individuals now have "no choice but to choose" (Giddens, 1991, p. 81), and where the possibility for self-exploration and self-reflexivity become opportunities of mobility that may guide the "choice" to move, to what extent are these possibilities "chosen"? To what extent do life and professional projects and related identity making for expatriates and their families reflect a "reflexive habitus", that is those structural and material characteristics due to socio-cultural and economic changes, contemporary work and employment conditions and changing forms of relationship, "which encourages us all to constantly monitor and 'improve' ourselves" (Sweetman, 2003, p. 537)? Do family and intimacy work as constraints or as liberating forces to the reflexive making of mobile life and professional paths? The imagination of change and development (personal or professional) for other family members can at times represent a trigger for mobility and for "choosing" to move, yet this can also contrast with more personal career and life projects and dreams. As illustrated by the articles, there is a constant negotiation between the temporal dimensions of mobility (i.e., change, moments of immobility, stages of relocation, career timing, past, present and possible futures), the opportunity to explore oneself in the making of one's trajectory, family life and gender roles.

Conclusion

This issue aims at exploring the common images associated with expatriate mobility. Based on the dimensions discussed above, including subjective experiences as frictions, the issue of temporality and reflexivity, three are the main theoretical implications for future research.

First, some of the challenges, opportunities and intimacies of mobility illustrated by the various papers can be at times and in some respect comparable to those of other forms of mobility (Smith & Favell, 2006). The focus on family can, in this regard, help challenge the binary logic separating "traditional" and "contemporary" form of migration. Further comparative research is needed to understand where and when opportunities and constraints of mobility for different migrants diverge, or under which circumstances the dynamics and demands of global capitalism affect the life-worlds of a multitude of individuals in comparable ways (Della Porta et al., 2015).

Second, the subjective, emotional and psychological work of planning and organizing international mobility with the family, including people's encounter with diversity, their inner dialogues and decision-making, as well as their perceptions and narrations of (im)mobility, require further attention (Cangià, 2017; Ryan et al., 2009; Walsh, 2012). These more subjective aspects can help re-conceptualize "friction" as an analytical category, and by extension, shed light on the challenges of international mobility as more than a friction-less form of mobility.

Third, the present issue invites for further research on the temporal dimension of migration (Griffiths et al., 2013), the issue of "timing" and "reflexivity" in expatriates' mobile life, for those migrants who are usually defined as those "who have chosen to live abroad for some period, and who know when they are there that they can go home when it suits them" (Hannerz, 1996, p. 106). A focus on family life and intimate relations can reveal other forms of temporal barriers (e.g., family arrangements and timing) and reflexive opportunities (e.g., personal and family change across time) that these people face when moving. Also, a look at the personal and professional trajectories in the life-course contributes to shedding light on how family life, kin relations and gender norms can change and be transformed across time as a result of migration.

Finally, a number of implications for policy-making can be highlighted. The various articles in this issue suggest how dual career couples in mobility (with an increasing number of women followed by accompanying male partners) become more the rule than the exception (Cole, 2012; Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2013). Spouses' career at times becomes part of the economic value of expatriation and, more concretely, part of employers' business strategy, in the form of a variety of programs (job search assistance, language and intercultural training). The articles in this issue illustrate how mobile trajectories also characterize more and more academic career paths. The balance between academic career and family life is an emerging issue in the context of research gender equality policies in certain countries. The role of mobility in this context, and the possible challenges and arrangements with regard to family and couple life on-the-move should be further explored in order to better respond to the different needs and at times precarious conditions in which academic employees work (Lempiäinen, 2015). Finally, the temporal and reflexive character of mobility represents an important aspect of the making of career trajectories and work-life balance for employees, and should become integral part of human resources' programmes.

The idea of these people's mobility as a "friction-less" and "chosen" form of migration requires hence further exploration on the basis of more comprehensive and theoretically, methodologically and empirically informed investigations on expatriates' everyday experience with their families, and on the various meanings of "privilege" and "lifestyle" emerging from their lives.

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