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SUMARIO

Citizenship *À La Carte?*:
Migration and «digital nomads»

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Abstract: This article focuses on the increasingly discussed phenomenon of digital nomads. Digital nomads are individuals who leave their home countries for various reasons and choose to live primarily in exotic locations. Their legal status in the countries they reside in is often ambiguous. Thanks to remote work opportunities, they earn income outside their host countries and attempt to build relatively comfortable lives in places where the general cost of living is lower. Due to uncertain residency statuses, they frequently change countries to comply with visa regulations.

The article aims to explore why and how people become digital nomads, whether this trend has the potential to transform the relationship between nation-states and their citizens, and if there is a connection between the decline of welfare state social security provisions and the decision to adopt a nomadic lifestyle.

The study draws on a review of existing literature as well as the author's field experiences as a participant observer in various digital nomad hubs in Thailand and Vietnam, supplemented by interviews conducted with digital nomads.

Keywords: Digital Nomad; Mobility; Geoarbitrage; Precaria; Co-working; Welfare State; Remote Work; Migration; Nation-State.

Resumen: Este artículo aborda el fenómeno, cada vez más debatido, de los nómadas digitales. Este término hace referencia a personas que abandonan sus países de origen por diversos motivos y optan por establecerse temporalmente en destinos considerados exóticos. Su estatus legal en los países donde residen suele ser ambiguo. Gracias a las oportunidades de trabajo remoto, obtienen ingresos fuera de sus países de acogida e intentan construir vidas relativamente cómodas en lugares donde el costo de vida general es más bajo. Debido a la ambigüedad sobre su situación de residencia, cambian de país con frecuencia para cumplir con las regulaciones de visado. El objetivo principal del artículo es analizar las motivaciones y los mecanismos que llevan a las personas a adoptar el estilo de vida del nómada digital, evaluar si esta tendencia podría transformar las relaciones tradicionales entre los Estados-nación

y sus ciudadanos, y explorar una posible correlación entre el debilitamiento de los sistemas de protección social del Estado de bienestar y la decisión de asumir una vida nómada.

La investigación se fundamenta en una revisión crítica de la literatura existente, así como en experiencias de campo del autor como observador participante en distintos núcleos de nómadas digitales ubicados en Tailandia y Vietnam. Este trabajo se complementa con entrevistas realizadas a personas que practican este estilo de vida.

Palabras Clave: Nómada Digital; Movilidad; Geoarbitraje; Precariedad; Espacios de Co-working; Estado de Bienestar; Trabajo Remoto; Migración; Estado-Nación.

Thirst study focuses on the group of individuals known as 'digital nomads' (people who travel freely while working remotely using technology and the internet). These are location-independent people who relocate to countries with lower living costs, climates that suit them better, and friendly communities. Their choice of location is often influenced by the visa regulations of the countries to which they move. Digital nomadism has become a more widely- adopted lifestyle as a result of the lockdowns imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nomads strive to balance work and leisure, and nomadism itself may be said to represent an attempt to address the issue of work alienation typical of capitalism by seeking alternative ways of living.

Digital nomads differ from traditional migrants in several ways: while they do work, their work is remote, meaning they do not engage in the local labor market of the countries they reside in. Instead, they earn income from companies based in other countries while living in places they find more suitable for their lifestyle. They stay in these countries on tourist visas, meaning their official status is neither that of a resident nor a worker.

As a relatively new form of human mobility, digital nomadism has the potential to reshape traditional migration patterns. Many countries recognize the economic benefits of attracting digital nomads and have introduced specific visa schemes to accommodate them. Given these dynamics, digital nomadism is a phenomenon that migration scholars should integrate into the complex reality of migration in the era of globalization..

Digital nomads create multidimensional impacts on migration, state-citizen relations, identity issues, and how foreigners are treated in different countries. As a result, migration researchers increasingly recognize the necessity of studying this emerging community.

Although digital nomads currently constitute a small percentage of overall global mobility, their numbers are on the rise. This growing community has drawn increasing academic attention in recent years (KC & Triandafyllidou,

2025). KC and Triandafyllidou, in their study on digital nomad visas, argue that these evolving visa schemes have given rise to a new type of migration regime.

Similarly, Dreher and Triandafyllidou (2024) note that while digital nomads have primarily been examined in relation to tourism and business-focused studies, migration scholars have recently begun to classify them under the broader category of «lifestyle migration.» They argue that this group will require more serious academic attention in the coming years. Although the number of digital nomads remains relatively small, interest in this lifestyle is growing, particularly as remote work practices become more widespread.

In this study, I revisit topics discussed previously in the literature, such as why individuals might decide to become digital nomads, the pathways they follow, how they choose their destination countries and the criteria they use, the problems and/or positive experiences they encounter in these countries, and the reasons and processes behind their decisions to continue living as digital nomads. All these issues are explored through the interviews I conducted.

In addition, the study focuses specifically on two key issues. The first is whether factors related to nation-states and their policies influence digital nomads' decisions to migrate. The second issue concerns how choosing this lifestyle means digital nomads step outside the protective mechanisms previously provided by nation-states. Since nomads may no longer benefit from the health insurance, pension programs, legal job security, or union protections that they had before they began moving around, this situation may be seen as a form of new precarious work and employment.

Literature Review

The concept of the digital nomad was first introduced in the book *Digital Nomad* by Tsudio Makimoto and David Manners (1997). This book made remarkably accurate predictions from 1997 into the 2020s. It argues that nomadism is one of humanity's oldest ways of life. According to Makimoto and Manners, advances in technology would not only make travel easier but also significantly reduce the amount/size of equipment nomads need to continue working while traveling. These technological developments would lead to the creation of compact, multifunctional tools, allowing nomads to carry fewer items and move more easily. The book extensively covers revolutionary advances in electronics and communication. Many of Makimoto and Manners' predictions have largely come to fruition today.

Research on digital nomads has notably increased, especially with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, lockdowns made remote work almost routine. In Western countries, individuals and companies

discovered that work could be effectively done remotely from home. In the United States, the number of people expressing a desire to become digital nomads rose from 54 million in 2020 to 65 million within a year, an increase of 20% (Nichols, 2022; 189). According to online surveys conducted by Nomadlist, approximately 88 million people worldwide identify as digital nomads, most of them based in the United States (Nomads.com, 13.02.2025). Of course, there are significant differences between traditional work arrangements and this new mode of working. Particularly, professionals in organizational and human resources fields began to research and publish on this topic. While technological advances and their impact on work life were being discussed before the pandemic, the number of studies increased and the subject took on new dimensions with the onset of COVID-19.[1]

Before, during, and since the pandemic, the digital nomad movement has been regarded by those in the tourism sector as a new form of tourism. Nomads have combined tourism, leisure, and professional activities with remote work, global travel opportunities, and a lifestyle based on multiple residencies (Mancinelli, 2020; 2/21). One aspect of this that has been under discussion is the potential impact on the work motivation of such travelers given their preference for tropical and subtropical regions and the dynamic lifestyles in these areas, although it would seem that adhering to a work plan may mitigate the risks of decreased motivation and productivity (Arslan, 2024; 273).

Digital nomads mainly travel on tourist visas. For a long time, governments struggled to legally distinguish nomads from tourists. Today, an increasing number of countries are implementing specialized visas to differentiate digital nomads from tourists. This is because nomads are perceived as a relatively well-educated, financially stable group that does not yet place a significant burden on the infrastructure of its host countries. Governments hope that the presence of such individuals, and their spending and interactions with locals will contribute positively to the national ecosystem. Therefore, countries are introducing digital nomad visas that facilitate those with higher income levels—and thus the capacity to pay relatively high fees—thereby distinguishing them from other types of tourists (Mancinelli and Molz, 2023; 199-200; Bednorz, 2024; 4).

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[1] As COVID-19 is no longer considered a primary threat, companies are reassessing their work practices. While remote work has reduced many costs, companies have recognized that they are missing out on several advantages of face-to-face interaction related to productivity and creativity. Consequently, companies like Google have adopted hybrid work models. This approach allows companies to continue benefiting from both remote and in-person work in a balanced manner. One thing appears certain: the nature of work life will not return to the pre-COVID-19 era.

However, some observers are more skeptical and believe that digital nomads may lead to international gentrification (Bahri and Widhyharta, 2021; 87). Gentrification is often defined as the movement of the middle and upper classes into areas inhabited by poorer populations. In essence, upper-class individuals—or in our case those from more developed countries—making use of what is known as lifestyle arbitrage (Holleran, 2022; 832, 842) to displace poorer residents from popular and emerging neighborhoods. Hence, the gentrification caused by digital nomads also impacts local middle and upper-middle classes, complicating their lives through increased housing and dining inflation. Needless to say, of course, in this context, people such as landlords and restauranteurs are among those who emerge as beneficiaries of digital nomadism.

Digital nomad studies have also attracted the attention of researchers interested in perceptions of nation-states and identity, those who try to explore questions such as: Who are these digital nomads? Are their affiliations with nation-states? How will an increase in their numbers affect nation-states? Is digital nomadism a reaction against the nation-state. It is frequently discussed that digital nomads try to distance themselves from the control of nation-states. Dave Cook (2022; 307, 308, 312) points out that digital nomads have had to develop more effective strategies to manage interactions with state laws and bureaucracies to maintain their nomadic lifestyle and avoid state control, regulations, and enforcement. Western digital nomads, who seek to escape state control, often sustain their lifestyles more comfortably based on the power of their passports (Cook, 2022; 311). While they are subject to local laws in the countries they visit as tourists, the structural or preferential weaknesses in law enforcement by states outside the West quite often provide nomads with broad room to manouevre. However, this is a precarious space, one that may be quickly closed off by the host countries' governments. Nomads may cope with this by migrating to another country.

One important focus in this area is the thesis that digital nomadism represents a new form of precarious work. Economists and sociologists researching work life have explored the impact of this situation on individuals and societies. Some studies suggest that digital nomadism has emerged as a new condition resulting from the dissolution of welfare states and adaptation to this new reality by a few fortunate individuals in the West. Digital nomads do not fully benefit from the social security provisions of their nation-states, such as health and retirement insurance. Hybrid solutions are being developed depending on the characteristics of the social security systems of the nomads' home countries. Additionally, digital nomads lack the protections offered by trade unions, and most do not have legal work permits in their host countries.

Consequently, traditional union protections are not effective for them (Thomson, 2018; 20-22).

Another significant research area is the impact of digital nomadism on individuals' psychological well-being. Questions about how this lifestyle, which deviates from traditional living patterns, affects the individuals themselves, institutions like family, the host societies, and their members are central to this group of studies. One major issue digital nomads face is loneliness. Research has examined how nomads approach this issue and how loneliness affects them. Nomads attempt to overcome loneliness and the fear of missing out (FoMO) by intensive use of social media, in a manner similar to other groups experiencing FoMO. However, while social media can indeed help alleviate feelings of loneliness and FoMO, it can also exacerbate them (Miguel, 2023; 4.629).

Another significant issue related to digital nomadism is the management of time and work discipline. Digital nomads want to use their time as they wish, preferring to work or rest without being bound by strict schedules. Despite their original plans or expectations, this tendency can result in nomads working longer hours than they did before becoming nomads (Arifa et al., 2022; 8-10).

Methodology and Scope of the Study

This empirical study employs a qualitative exploratory approach, utilizing participant observation and thematic analysis to examine digital nomads' attitudes towards the state. The fieldwork was conducted primarily in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, Thailand, as well as on Koh Samui Island, with a brief period also spent in Da Nang and Hoi An, Vietnam, between October 1, 2023, and September 30, 2024. Literature and social media confirm Thailand as a leading destination for digital nomads, which I experienced firsthand during my year-long stay, with Bangkok as my base as part of an EU-funded project.

To connect with digital nomads, I leveraged social media and discussed my research within my Bangkok network for recommendations. I identified and visited digital nomad meetups and coworking spaces but found that social media alone was insufficient for building trust. Digital nomads contacted online were cautious until they verified my intentions. Conversations were more productive with individuals who had mutual connections, while those with no prior link were more reserved. For example, a Russian digital nomad remarked, «You know, I'm not actually a digital nomad; Thailand's laws do not recognize such a category».

To effectively access digital nomads, I employed various methods, including working from co-working spaces frequently used by them. During this time, I conducted literature review tasks, participating as an observer. Addi-

tionally, I attended evening meetups organized through multiple digital platforms where digital nomads, expats, and newcomers gathered to socialize. These gatherings allowed me to introduce myself, explain my research, and build trust, facilitating access to more digital nomads and providing me with insights into how they address socialization challenges.

In total, I conducted interviews with 40 digital nomads, selected through a multiple-entry snowball sampling technique. The interviews lasted between 14 and 78 minutes, with an average duration of 45.38 minutes, and were conducted as semi-structured interviews. I began with questions that had been previously posed in the literature regarding digital nomadism, and the answers given were broadly similar to existing findings. Later, I shifted focus to the issue of precarity, connecting it to individuals' perceptions of citizenship and the changing nature of their relationships with nation-states. Initially perceived as abstract, the questions regarding digital nomads' relationships with nation-states became more concrete as the study progressed.

Of the people I interviewed, 14 were from non-Western countries, while 26 were from Western countries. Instead of asking demographic questions during the interviews, I collected demographic information through a form sent to participants after the interviews. Out of the 40 individuals interviewed, 34 filled out the demographic information form. Among the interviewees, 16 identified as women and 22 as men, with one respondent leaving the gender question unanswered and another marking «other.» I created the gender distribution table by referring to both my interview notes and the forms. The age distribution of those who completed the survey was as follows: 2 were in the 18-24 age range, 16 in the 25-34 range, 10 in the 35-44 range, 4 in the 45-54 range, 1 in the 55-65 range, and 1 was over 65. Among the respondents, 27 were single; 2 were married with children, 3 were married without children, and 2 were divorced.

Regarding educational background, participants were classified as follows: 13 had a master's or doctoral degree; 9 had a college or vocational diploma; 5 had left college or vocational education; 4 were high school graduates; 1 had completed elementary school, 1 had completed middle school, and 1 had no formal education.

According to income levels, participants were grouped as follows: 4 individuals earned less than $1,000 per month, 8 earned between $1,000 and $2,000, 2 earned between $2,001 and $3,000, 4 earned between $3,001 and $4,000, 1 earned between $4,001 and $5,000, and 14 earned $5,000 and above.

Responses to the religion-related question indicated that 10 identified as atheist, 6 as Christian, 4 as Muslim, 3 as Buddhist, 1 as Jewish, 1 as Deist, and 9 as «other».

Participants were also grouped according to employment status: 13 identified as digital entrepreneurs, 9 as freelancers, 2 as contract-based workers, and 4 as salaried employees. Since freelancing and contract-based work are similar, they were grouped together. One person preferred to identify as someone who earns their income from financial markets. The employment status question was not answered by 11 individuals.

When asked how many countries they typically reside in during a year, the responses were as follows: 8 individuals reported living in only one country, 10 were in two countries, 7 resided in three countries, and 8 lived in more than three countries.

Historical and Structural Background

Neoliberal policies have been in development since the 1980s, and have left a deep historical mark, and significantly altered the role and functions of states. The ideology underlying these policies reflects a period in which states have become increasingly unwilling to maintain many of the responsibilities and functions they assumed during the modernization period. This shift has been attributed to the relative loss of competitive advantage of Western welfare states and the decline of Western hegemony. Neoliberalism posits that this decline may be countered by reducing the state's presence and impact in the economic and social spheres. And, for a long time, this ideology did indeed hold hegemonic status (Harvey, 2007; 23, 29), but since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 the claims of this ideology are increasingly being questioned.

Western capitalists who have embraced neoliberalism argue that states can no longer shoulder the tax burden required to sustain welfare systems. However, the financing of welfare states was not solely dependent on taxes paid by businesses; transfers of resources from colonies were also a significant source of funding. As Lenin predicted, Western capitalist states managed to maintain the loyalty of the working class by offering them a form of bribe, preventing the anticipated revolution in the West. Colonialism evolved into a new form of imperialism (Lenin, 1916).

Following the First and Second World Wars, Western states lost their colonies. Countries like the United Kingdom and France granted autonomy or independence to the colonies they knew they would lose. However, they embedded provisions in independence agreements and processes to protect their interests. Thus, even though these colonies officially became independ-

ent, Western companies and governments continued to extract resources from them (Fanon, 1963; 97, 99, 104; Kwone, 1966; ix, x, xii). This arrangement, however, became increasingly unsustainable. Western companies lost their relative competitive advantage on a global scale, which reduced the resources available for the working class. Some argue that the shareable pie is still substantial, but capitalists' appetite and greed have increased, and the imposition of neoliberal ideology only reinforced these appetites. The norms proclaimed by the West as universal values have increasingly made it impossible to sustain the exploitative system established by the West at a normative level.

Ultimately, Western capitalists believe that it is no longer sustainable to allocate more resources to their own populations. Whether this belief is grounded in reality exceeds the scope of this paper. What remains is an ideology that Western capitalists are using to argue that they can no longer sustain welfare states as they once did, and pushes them to develop and implement policies accordingly. We will consider this ideology and the situations it generates as the independent variable and proceed from there.

The impact of this situation on the state, capitalists (industrial and financial capital), and other groups, as well as their reactions, need analysis on different levels. First, let's examine the situation from the perspective of capitalists:

Western capitalists have had to forgo some of their profits due to increasing regulatory and tax pressures on welfare states. Rising labor costs also put pressure on their expenses. Additionally, the lack of sufficient investment in technology development has led to a loss of competitive power. In response to this situation, Western industrialists have shifted their production bases from the West to the East and South. The ideology of globalization supported this shift. Western industrialists began relocating their production to countries with inadequate regulations in areas such as working conditions, health standards, and environmental standards. The form of globalization that allows the free movement of goods and capital facilitated this preference. They started producing outside the West and channeling their profits to countries with lower income taxes and wealth taxes. We also know that flexible working forms developed during this process.

There is significant debate about whether globalization has led to the contraction or expansion of welfare states, with no definitive answer in sight. Arguments suggesting that globalization pressures welfare states are opposed by arguments claiming that the difficulties experienced by many people in the West due to globalization, has led to an increase in welfare policies by states. It is not possible to reach a single conclusion to this debate. In countries like France, where unions and leftist parties are strong, welfare state practices

have expanded. In countries like the United States, where the working class is less politicized, insecurity has increased, and many people are seen to accept lower incomes in the service sector (Genschel, 2004: 625-629).

Throughout this process, financial capital benefited significantly. By providing credit to finance the consumption of Western consumer societies, they increased their wealth. Additionally, they financed failed states outside the West to help them stay afloat and grow further through interest income.

However, Western states were disturbed by some new circumstances brought about by globalization. They experienced a loss of tax revenue due to capital fleeing the West. In countries with a strong politicized working class, growing demands for regulation and the implementation of these regulations led to the emergence of larger bureaucracies. Larger bureaucracies meant more financing, which became a significant issue for Western states.

The gradual reduction and eventual cessation of resources from lost colonies, which were still somewhat controllable after their loss, also prevented Western states from behaving as they once did. Due to the democratic nature of Western societies, whereby convincing large segments of the population to give up their rights is not easy, these states could not abandon their policies Consider the farmer and worker protests in Europe over the last 10-20 years, especially in Germany and France. Workers and small scale farmers do not want to give up the rights and advantages they had previously won, and protest when their share of the country's wealth begins to decrease. Their organized nature plays a significant role in this (Politico, 31.01.2024). Some claim that the arguments of neoliberalism are not accurate and that the restriction of workers' and farmers' rights is unnecessary, attributing it to the greed of Western capitalists. Nonetheless, such a situation did occur in the West, and a type of neoliberal ideology, which we might classify as globalization, was introduced to temporarily alleviate the difficulties created. This ideology fundamentally proposed the free movement of goods and money and a reduced role for the state in the economy. Without considering many other conditions, there was no guarantee that this proposal would succeed and benefit nations. Indeed, neoliberal policies have led to disasters in Chile and Mexico (Rodrik, 2017).[2]

The neoliberal ideology proposed that by shifting production to lower-cost locations outside the West, consumer goods could be provided to the Western working class at more affordable prices. This claim proved accurate; West-

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2 Where they are wrong is in believing that there is a unique and universal recipe, to which they have access, for improving economic performance.

ern workers did indeed gain access to cheaper consumer goods. This was intended to persuade the Western working class to remain within the system with minimal resistance by adopting a new ideology or lifestyle known as consumerism. However, today we see that consumerism has also reached its limits (Žižek, 2015). There are many systemic, international relations, power dynamics, environmental, and sustainability reasons for this. Recent policies in the West that reduce welfare state practices, cut transfers to workers and small scale farmers, and the reactions to these policies demonstrate that the recent form of globalization has not provided the long-term relief that was expected.

Western states have also adapted the ideology of globalization in another way: by turning a blind eye to immigration from outside the West. They have accommodated a phenomenon known as irregular migration, allowing many people to migrate to the West and work in precarious conditions. This influx of precarious workers has helped alleviate some of the pressures within the West, whose citizens, with their small capital, have been able to exploit the vulnerable status of these migrants and benefit from their labor. In effect, this has recreated a situation reminiscent of the colonial era, with the West transferring resources from the «other» and attempting to relieve its own pressures. Western democracies could only survive by satisfying these class demands. An important aspect of this process is the growing xenophobia towards migrants. The West has benefited from the labor of these migrants, their contributions to health and pension systems, entrepreneurship, and innovation (Thompson, 2014), while also transforming them into objects of hatred. I will further explore how this mechanism's politics and impact on Western societies are unfolding.

Let's move on to the third group: «others». This group encompasses a very large demographic, making it quite challenging to analyze comprehensively. However, we may define this group as those who sustain their lives either through income earned by working or through resources transferred to them by the state from other segments of society.

A significant portion of this group supports what may be considered reasonable policies, is relatively open to compromise, and tries to influence the system by supporting traditional political parties or shifting their support to another central party within the political system.

Another noteworthy subgroup within this large category feels significantly marginalized and believes they do not deserve their current situation. This group tends to engage in more radical actions. Throughout history, there have always been marginalized groups in every society. Today, those who feel side-

lined are dissatisfied with the commitments made by central politics and are demanding more. They perceive themselves as being pushed further to the periphery.

One group of politicians who have understood the dissatisfaction, anger, and frustration of this marginalized group have pointed the finger at a scapegoat for their problems: irregular migrants. Radical right-wing parties that initially had a small voter base have begun telling these angry Westerners that the hardships they face are due to irregular migrants. This form of politics is quite opportunistic, in that blaming migrants incurs no cost for these parties.

Since migrants are not generally well-organized and are a minority, they cannot adequately defend themselves. No one, including the main political parties, is able to explain to the Western masses the global, structural, and historical roots of the issue and that solving it would require significant structural reforms. Major political parties also avoid taking a pro-migrant stance because there is no benefit to them. They know that supporting migrant-friendly policies would lead to a loss of votes. Irregular migrants cannot even vote, as they are not deemed electors in most countries. One of the most recent examples of this situation is Angela Merkel's experience before she left office. Although Merkel was not particularly pro-migrant, she accepted a significant number of migrants from Syria for various reasons. This decision led to a significant decline in her popularity (Oltermann, 2020).

In summary, blaming migrants for negative outcomes comes at no cost, but with potential benefits. Therefore, radical right-wing parties exploit this narrative, and even central parties follow suit by shifting their immigration policies further to the right to prevent losing votes to these radical parties (Akkerman, 2018, 6-8).

Elder people are also making up a smaller group of others in the West and their mobility in many ways resemble the migration dynamics of digital nomads (Garcia-Macias and Munck, 2020). However they are out of the scope of this study.

Among the «others» in Europe, there is a smaller, more specific group that seeks individual solutions to escape their current dilemmas. This group exhibits an eclectic approach, continuing to benefit from the remaining aspects of the welfare state while also migrating to non-Western countries seeking to regain their declining economic status. This article will focus primarily on these groups.

The rise of remote work practices, which gained momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been particularly instructive for these individuals. Many Westerners are leaving their countries, continuing to work remotely

while traveling and visiting different countries. According to the platform Nomadlist, 67,801,684 people from 30 countries identify themselves as digital nomads. Among these, the United States has the highest number of digital nomads, with 37,800,834 individuals. The United Kingdom, Russia, Canada, Germany, and France follow (Nomadlist, 2024).

There are also numerous debates about whether the digital nomad lifestyle is sustainable. These discussions continue on various platforms where nomads interact, such as Quora, Reddit, and Facebook. One of the main debates is how to balance work and leisure. Digital nomads often struggle to maintain this balance and continue working with discipline, and those who can are those who succeed in sustaining the digital nomad lifestyle (Reichenberger, 2017; 16, 18).

Digital nomads attempt to maintain the living standards they may have struggled to preserve in the West by relocating to the East or South. Here, they can sustain a comfortable lifestyle with the wages they earn from the West, wages which would be insufficient or barely adequate in their home countries. The key factor driving this is the relative value of their home currencies against other countries' currencies. For example, an American Digital Nomad in the South or East finds their American dollar wage goes a great deal further compared to back home. This phenomenon is named as geoarbitrage (Hayes, 2014).

However, the decision to become a digital nomad is influenced by more than just differences in wage levels and currency values. While these structural factors play a significant role in reinforcing the choice to adopt a nomadic lifestyle, individual and systemic reasons also contribute to the decision. The next section will explore how digital nomads decide where to settle and what factors influence their choices.

Digital nomads form a dynamic class globally. By moving away from the West, they improve their living standards, but in doing so forgo the social services provided by their home countries' welfare states. In other words, they find «freedom» more valuable than the welfare and security offered by their home states. This situation implies that they choose not to contribute to the financing of the social services provided by their home countries' welfare states.

Digital nomadism may be described as a survival strategy adopted by a relatively small and specific group of people amidst the decline of welfare states in the West and the transfer of resources from around the world that previously sustained and satisfied people. In reality, digital nomads still represent a very small segment within their societies. Those who can pursue this lifestyle

are those who live in the West and have the opportunity to work remotely, can create passive income streams, or have secured a pension, or who can work remotely based on their experience, such as in consulting.

The dynamic lifestyle of digital nomads, often showcased on social media—such as posts about working from a beach—makes the idea of being a digital nomad appealing. It is also important to note that digital nomads typically possess certain skills, a high level of digital literacy, and a relatively high capability to use technology. Their passion for creating a desirable lifestyle and the skills needed to achieve this is often greater compared to other groups. Nomads have various opportunities and skills to overcome conditions they perceive as negative in their lives, and they actively seek to leverage these to improve their situation.

Last but not least, digital nomads are drawn to the allure of traveling to foreign, often exotic destinations. This desire to explore new countries and engage with diverse cultures is a significant pull factor that should not be underestimated. My argument is that structural factors play a crucial role in making these pull factors even more attractive and accessible for digital nomads.

Why and How People in the West Decide to Become Digital Nomads

In the previous sections, I provided some macro-level assessments of why a certain group of people in the West choose to become digital nomads. In this section, I will delve into these questions in more detail now, based on the literature and interviews conducted with digital nomads: Why and how do they decide to become digital nomads, and how do they determine where to go? Additionally, I will address whether their relationship with nation-states influences their decision to migrate. How do digital nomads handle issues such as health insurance and retirement insurance? How do they experience other forms of insecurity when not under the protection of a nation-state, and how do they secure themselves against these? How do they overcome loneliness? I will attempt to answer these questions based on literature and interviews.

Based on the interviews I conducted for this study, I can assert that individuals who find themselves feeling trapped or under pressure within the framework outlined above tend to turn to digital nomadism when the right conditions arise. While there was not a statistically significant number of interviews to confirm this proposition, many of the interviews revealed stories of people experiencing a sense of entrapment in their lives before deciding to become digital nomads as a form of escape. Categorizing these feelings of entrapment is not straightforward. Some individuals spoke of family issues or the darkness created by being a minority in their country with no visible pros-

pects. There were also interviewees who, without mentioning any specific sense of entrapment, were drawn to digital nomadism due to the allure of the lifestyle and the influence of prevailing conditions. Traveling to foreign destinations and exploring different parts of the world is certainly a motivation that should not be underestimated in this context. However, I still maintain my original argument that structural constraints, or what migration scholars refer to as 'push factors,' play a highly influential role. When push factors are strong, individuals are more inclined to pursue their dreams. These factors, combined with 'pull factors' such as the allure of new opportunities abroad, bring people closer to realizing their ambitions, as moving becomes the most rational decision under the circumstances.

Another point to consider is that while some individuals make the decision quickly after a period of observation and research, others follow a more gradual transition process. I also inquired about how interviewees decided which country to move to. Many of those I spoke with had previously visited the country they chose and already had an idea about it before relocating.

In summary, people tend to move to countries of which they have some prior knowledge. Several crucial factors influence their country choice, with perhaps the most significant being whether their income will allow them to maintain a comfortable standard of living in the chosen country. This means they select countries where prices are relatively lower and the currency they earn is strong. Another important factor is the host country's hospitality towards foreigners, and whether the government is welcoming to them. Opinions on this are often shaped by visa policies and the attitudes of security forces towards foreigners. These factors are consistent with findings previously highlighted in the digital nomad literature.

After making their decision, digital nomads may start their lifestyle with a temporary trial period—if their resources allow. However, some choose this lifestyle by completely leaving everything behind, 'burning all their bridges' so to speak. They opt for countries with mild climates and hospitable people and governments. They then move to these countries, rent a place, and start living and working there. Nomadism is not just about traveling; these individuals need to, and do, work.

To socialize, they join various digital groups, including Facebook groups and meetup groups, which are common tools for social interaction among nomads. They also regularly visit coworking spaces specifically designed for digital nomads in their host countries. In these spaces, they try to overcome the loneliness that comes with working remotely and alone by meeting and socializing with other nomads, sometimes even engaging in mutual support.

There are numerous studies addressing why digital nomads go where they do and what they do there (Lhakard, 2022; Sukma Winarya Prabawa and Ratih Perwiti, 2020; Wang et al., 2018). Many of these studies elaborate on the aspects of nomadism I outlined above.

As mentioned above I focus on two specific dimensions of digital nomadism; the relationship between nomads and the nation-state, including their home governments, and how digital nomads cope with the insecurities created by this lifestyle.

As a political scientist, I have been curious from the beginning as to whether digital nomads have issues with the nation-state. In direct questions about this, I generally received responses indicating that they did not have problems with the state. However, upon asking more detailed questions, I found that digital nomads from Western countries and those from non-Western countries may be categorized into two different groups. Digital nomads from the West typically did not mention specific problems with the state, but a digital nomad from a non-Western country stated, «I don't want to finance the Audi A8s of the bureaucrats in my country who make absurd decisions and work inefficiently». Another digital nomad from a non-Western country, who belonged to a religious minority, indirectly expressed that although they lived under generally good conditions in their country, they did not see a clear future for themselves there. The most significant distinction regarding the nation-state dimension seems to be the differing responses from those coming from Western versus non-Western countries. While those from the West pointed out declining welfare state practices and the confusing political shifts in their countries, they did not rank these factors as primary reasons for their decision to become digital nomads. A Japanese digital nomad mentioned that they decided to become a digital nomad to escape the stifling corporate culture in Japan.

Digital nomadism appears to be a mechanism developed by relatively skilled and mobile classes living in countries with constrained social transfers due to falling wages and the redistribution of resources to large populations in the West. Initially, companies in the West adopted this practice. Feeling constrained by high levels of regulation and relatively high taxes, companies moved significant portions of their operations to countries with fewer regulations and lower taxes. It seems that now professionals with declining wages and less support from social transfers and welfare state spending are following suit. Some digital nomads work for certain companies, meaning that Western-based companies that cannot or do not want to increase their employees' wages allow them to work remotely and continue their jobs while living in exotic locations.

Some digital nomads work on a contract basis without being tied to a company. They establish their own companies and receive payment based on the invoices they issue for the work they do. Western companies prefer this arrangement because they are not obligated to cover insurance, severance pay, and other benefits for these workers. Consequently, nomads feel freer but must independently organize and finance their health insurance and retirement plans.

Some digital nomads prefer to see themselves as entrepreneurs running their own businesses. During my interviews, I observed some nomads discussing which countries offer the best tax rates for setting up a company. One nomad mentioned that states like Delaware, Wyoming, Nevada, and Texas in the U.S. offer very low taxes for companies, provided they do not conduct business in the U.S. Another nomad, from Russia, noted that income tax in Russia is only 7%. From these overheard conversations in coworking spaces, it is clear that minimizing tax payments is one of the most significant concerns for digital nomads.

Many digital nomads feel disobliged to pay taxes to a government they believe does not provide adequate health services and other benefits. However, a Swiss digital nomad expressed satisfaction with paying taxes in Switzerland, stating that the services received in return were worth the tax paid. This service was valid even while traveling. When visiting a hospital, the nomad would pay upfront and then submit the invoice to their insurance company, which would cover the cost. This method is likely advantageous for Swiss health insurance providers as well, since health services in places like Thailand can be obtained at significantly lower costs than in Switzerland. Thus, both the insurance company and the person receiving the service outside Switzerland are satisfied.

Digital nomads' attitudes toward health insurance vary based on their home country, the health insurance conditions in their country of residence before becoming a nomad, and their age group.

To start with age, younger and healthier digital nomads often place less importance on insurance. Many seem to give it little thought, as they are healthy and can easily manage minor issues by paying directly at hospitals in places like Thailand. In contrast, middle-aged and older digital nomads, as well as those who have had unpleasant experiences, take the issue more seriously. Their attitudes towards health insurance vary depending on the health security offered by their home countries. For example, an American digital nomad is required to purchase private health insurance, even when living in the U.S., where comprehensive private insurance can be very costly. Digital nomads

from countries where health insurance is provided by private companies often opt for more affordable and comprehensive plans that cover potential health issues in places like Thailand. In the U.S., even Medicare—a government health insurance program for those who cannot afford private insurance—serves as a last resort, offering basic coverage when things go wrong.

Digital nomads from European welfare states exhibit a somewhat different approach. While in Thailand, they prefer not to pay for health insurance in their home countries. According to them, dealing with minor health issues, such as visiting a hospital, seeing a doctor, undergoing tests, and purchasing medications, is generally cheaper in Thailand compared to the costs required by their home country's health system. They opt for this approach. When asked about plans for more serious health issues, they indicated that they would return to their home countries and resume paying premiums to regain health insurance coverage. For these individuals, the protective umbrella of the welfare state remains an important source of security.

Individuals from countries with less comprehensive national health systems, such as Turkey, adopt a similar strategy. They continue to pay for their insurance if it is inexpensive in their home country, but if they experience a health issue while in Thailand, they visit a local hospital and pay out of pocket for consultations and treatment. If a more serious health issue arises, they plan to return to their home country. However, those coming from countries with privatized health insurance and services do not have such an option. They find it more sensible to resolve health issues through the more affordable and efficient health systems available in Thailand.

These individuals choose to purchase comprehensive but cheaper insurance in their host countries. A Norwegian digital nomad[3] I interviewed mentioned that good comprehensive insurance options are available and, if selected, do not lead to issues. However, nomads without sufficient income security might opt for cheaper and less reliable insurance, which may lead to problems in receiving health care.

Another significant issue I explored in the study is how digital nomads plan to retire when they are no longer able to work. For young digital nomads, this is not considered an urgent matter. However, many digital nomads I spoke with expressed concern that existing pension systems are in crisis and, even if they contribute to these systems, they believe that by the time they retire, these systems will not be able to provide the pensions that are currently paid

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3 This digital nomad stated that if you are a worker in the Norwegian system you are provided social security protection. However if you own your own business, the system does not offer you protections.

to retirees. They expect the number of retirees needing support to increase due to the rising average age of the population. This concern is not only highlighted by the interviewees but is also emphasized by many economists and experts in social security systems.

I noticed a shared attitude among French and Turkish digital nomads regarding this issue. In France, the matter is quite politicized, while in Turkey, pensions are very low, and retirees struggle to sustain their livelihoods. Almost all digital nomads aim to channel their income into various investment vehicles, minimizing or avoiding taxes if possible. One French digital nomad mentioned investing in cryptocurrencies and real estate, buying properties in Paris, and renting them out through platforms like Airbnb or to students. Others reported investing in the stock market. Digital nomads, who generally have a relatively high level of financial literacy, are developing their own solutions to these issues. Almost all digital nomads emphasize that financial literacy is essential for anyone pursuing this lifestyle.

During an interview with a Norwegian digital nomad, they mentioned that if digital nomads were to invest the amount they would allocate to retirement insurance into a mutual fund linked to the S&P 500 index, and continue to do so for the duration of their working years before retiring, they could withdraw this money from the stock market upon retirement and deposit it in a bank, thereby earning an income of approximately $5,000 per month from interest alone. In contrast, retirement pensions in Europe are generally around $1,000[4].

Among all the digital nomads I interviewed, almost none believed that their country's pension systems would continue to function effectively and provide them with security in retirement. They are attempting to secure their own future independently. Nomads might be at an advantage compared to non-nomads by using this approach, but it is important to remember that their investments could quickly disappear due to financial market crashes. The nomads I spoke with mentioned that nothing in life is fully guaranteed, a notion which seems to reflect a key achievement of the neoliberal agenda: convincing people of the idea of insecurity. Nomads describe their choices as making the best of what they can and trying to live a good life in the process.

I also asked the nomads about job security and the protections offered by labor laws and unions in their home countries. They see themselves as somewhat different from those who live in their home countries and do not choose nomadism. They mentioned that if unions and laws had been effective, they

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4 It is diffciult to verify correctness of this statement. The numbers seems a bit bold but I took it here to reflect the ideology of some digital nomads.

might have stayed in their home countries and only visited other places for vacation. However, they felt that things were not working out in their home countries, leading them to seek a different path, resulting in their choice to become nomads. There is a common belief among nomads that the protection offered by nation-states and their institutions is an illusion. While there are material bases for this belief, nomads are also skilled at legitimizing their choices. It's important to remember that the line between myth and reality is not always clear. Nomadism is both a response to structural constraints and a personal choice. Each nomad chooses this path at some point in their personal story. It is possible to say that the structure influences these decisions, but it is also crucial to recognize that individuals make their own choices and select this path.

Nomadism is not only a response to structural constraints but also a highly romanticized lifestyle choice.

Conclusion

Throughout history, people have moved for various reasons. Digital nomadism represents one of the most recent forms of such movements. Therefore, it is possible to consider this group within the broader context of migration studies. However, travel for leisure is also an important aspect of nomadism, and formally, nomads are not supposed to be working. They do not enter the countries they visit with work permits. For these reasons, there is considerable research on nomadism and nomads within tourism studies as well. Although formally nomads are not supposed to work, everyone, including states, is aware that they are working in the countries they visit. However, this work does not take place in the job markets of the host countries but rather in the job markets of developed economies in the West and North. Nomads work remotely for these Western and Northern job markets and live in countries they perceive as cheaper, with warmer climates and friendlier people, the phenomenon previously referred to as geoarbitrage.

As a human condition, nomadism is a multidimensional and complex issue. This paper focused on the intersections of digital nomadism and nation-states and nomadism's relationship with insecurity, both of which are aspects of the issue that have been less explored in the literature.

It would seem that those digital nomads who have issues with nation-states are from countries not typically considered democratic in the West. The number of nomads who say, «I pay taxes to the state», «I pay insurance premiums», «ultimately these resources are used inefficiently», «they are wasted

through corruption», and thus «why should I live under the sovereignty of these states» is greater among those coming from the East and South.

Western nomads, on the other hand, generally seem satisfied with the welfare programs offered by their states. However, nomads from countries seeking to curb welfare state practices have expressed concerns about not being able to retire in the future and have noted that healthcare services in their home countries are either very expensive or difficult to access. For example, French nomads have significant doubts about retirement. The number of retirees that a worker has to support has significantly increased due to rising life expectancies and deindustrialization in the West. I spoke with many nomads who are concerned that the state will not be able to pay them a pension in the future.

Nomads almost universally agree that remitting taxes and insurance premiums to their home states is not an effective approach. Nomads from countries with high social welfare standards, such as Switzerland and Denmark, do not complain about transferring resources to welfare states. They say, «I pay high amounts, but in return, I receive a high-standard healthcare system». On the other hand, nomads from countries with lower standards believe, as mentioned earlier, that it is better for them to manage these resources themselves rather than transferring them to the state.

Nomads believe that governments are poorly managing their retirement savings, and they think that by avoiding taxes, not paying health insurance premiums to state systems and investing in certain indices, they will gain much higher returns. Many digital nomads I spoke with expressed this belief, which has almost become an ideology. It seems that they absorbed neoliberal antistate ideology.

A significant finding from my interviews is that nomads have very little faith in their ability to change the world. Instead, they focus on changing their own lives. They develop strategies to improve their own living conditions. For nomads, traveling, having more control over how they live their lives, and being free are important motivational factors. Nomadism can also be seen as a kind of fashion. Earning valuable currencies such as dollars and euros from the West, they can exchange them in the East to sustain a prosperous life. A standard of living that could be considered ordinary in the West provides a good quality of life for nomads in the East. The images and news, especially on social media, of those who manage to live this way support this trend.

Another issue for digital nomads is loneliness. They try to overcome this by meeting and working together in coworking spaces or attending meetups.

This study focused on those who have managed to become digital nomads. Therefore, we do not have a complete understanding of the experiences of those who have not succeeded.

Nomadism is a personal response by individuals to increasingly complex global issues. The number of nomads is growing, a circumstance which may be attributed to the disintegration of traditional forms of living, citizenship, and security, with increasing numbers of those who have not managed to adapt trying new ways of living. We do not know how many more people will leave their countries and adopt this lifestyle, or how many digital nomads the world can tolerate. Within the nomad community, there are also different classes. Nomads with good incomes can maintain a hybrid lifestyle, while those with lower incomes sometimes struggle to meet even their basic needs with minimal earnings.

Nomads have also established solidarity systems among themselves, but these generally do not include financial support. Instead, they focus more on the exchange of information and experience, and on facilitating job placements that are perceived as suitable for individuals. However, traditional forms of solidarity seem to be less effective among nomads due to the limited amount of time people can dedicate to each other.

Although the number of digital nomads is not large, they represent a group with a kind of litmus test feature from a social sciences perspective. Studies on this group provide many insights into topics such as state-citizen relationships, individual-state relationships, and how individuals develop and can develop strategies for existence in a changing world order. Monitoring human movements and how individuals position themselves in relation to states and systems has the potential to provide valuable qualitative data for the social sciences in general, and for political science and international relations in particular.

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