Location-independence?

Exploring the digital geographies of work, mobilities and place

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

at

The University of Waikato

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2024

“We come to each place with the necessity, the responsibility, to examine anew and to invent” (Massey 2005, p. 169).

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the phenomenon of location-independence and its implications for place, work and mobilities in the digital age. The dynamic mechanisms of location-independence are examined in connection with two interrelated-yet-distinct vantage points: digital nomads (a group of location-independent workers from predominantly affluent countries working in locations with lower living costs), and coworking spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand (shared workspaces that provide socio-material and technological infrastructure for mobile workers to work from).

Critical social theories – feminist, postcolonial, new mobilities, and embodied geography perspectives – provide a framework for analysing the concept of location-independence and uneven relations of power and subjectivities such as gender, ethnicity, class, and age. These perspectives not only emphasise Indigenous geographies that give voice to non-dominant epistemologies of knowledge but also bring attention to the body and highlight how work, place, and mobility are experienced differently.

The research employs feminist methodologies for conducting qualitative research, including 12 online interviews with digital nomads globally, and 11 in-person semi-structured interviews with managers of coworking spaces or of the coworking community within these spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand. Reflexive thematic analysis is applied to interview transcripts, texts and images from websites promoting digital nomad visa schemes that surround the concept of location-independence.

This thesis demonstrates that location-independence is constituted through relational geographies of subjectivities, mobilities, materials, and organisations. The findings are organised around three themes: digital nomads; coworking spaces; and, COVID-19. Focusing on the first theme – digital nomads – provides an opportunity for foregrounding how location-independence can be partly understood as an imagined and desired geography. Digital nomads experience both flexibility and freedom afforded by location-independence, but also challenges related to social isolation, precarious work conditions, and balancing work and personal life. Focusing on the second theme – coworking spaces – allows for an understanding of how these places are curated to be inclusive yet are also subject to gendered, raced, and classed power relations. The third theme – COVID-19 – is used to examine the ways in which location-independence was disrupted and repaired. The disruption of many infrastructures that facilitate location-independence has not only accelerated the shift towards the normalisation of remote work, but also highlights the need for emergent infrastructures of repair, shedding light on the importance of place, mobilities, materiality, and embodiment in the constitution of location-independence digital geographies.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my beautiful daughter

Sophie Lily Siena

Who has made me a mother, and who already at such a young age teaches me the things that really matter in life and reminds me to look at the world through the eyes of a child, unconditioned, full of wonder, with playfulness and joy.

Acknowledgements

Undertaking a PhD is a demanding and transformative journey that requires immense effort and dedication. Over the past 3.5 years, I have faced numerous challenges and experienced personal growth. From starting as a single woman on a student visa in 2019 to an engaged, first-time mother and recent permanent resident in 2023, this journey has profoundly shaped me. I am deeply grateful for the individuals who have played a pivotal role in my success:

First and foremost, my exceptional supervisors, Francis Collins and Lynda Johnston, deserve my deepest appreciation. Your unwavering support and constant encouragement have been invaluable throughout my PhD journey. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, our (online) meetings have always been fruitful and joyful. I could not have asked for better supervisors.

To my mum, Lilian, who resides in the Netherlands, I want to express my heartfelt thanks. Your genuine encouragement and unwavering belief in my dreams have been a constant source of motivation. Your love and guidance mean the world to me.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my partner, Andrew. From the early stages of this journey, I have been grateful for your presence, support and invaluable proofreading.

A special acknowledgment goes to two remarkable individuals, Peter and Glenys Wood, who have embraced me as part of their family. I now fondly refer to them as my kiwi folks. Your warm hospitality, invaluable friendship, and insightful discussions have made my transition into New Zealand life a joy.

I am grateful for the collaboration with the following individuals and organisations: the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore, for the opportunity to present my research online and co-write an article with my supervisors; the publishers of an internationally edited book on coworking spaces, for including my coworking space chapter from a New Zealand context; my research participants, for their willingness to take part in (online) interviews from their private spaces, sharing personal experiences, or enthusiastically showing me around coworking spaces; and the publishers of webpages, from whom I have made every effort to gain copyright permissions from, despite not receiving a response. Your contributions have greatly enriched my research.

Last but not least, I could not have done this PhD without the weird and wonderful bunch I met at Les Mills Hamilton. My regular attendance of body attack and body combat classes has kept me sane and made my serious PhD life immensely more enjoyable and energetic.

I am thankful to the University of Waikato for awarding me a 3-year doctoral scholarship, enabling me to pursue this PhD journey.

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Airbnb	Air Bed and Breakfast
CBD	Central Business District
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
CWS	Coworking Space
DN	Digital Nomad
DNV	Digital Nomad Visa
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
IWG	International Workplace Group
OE	Overseas Experience
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development
WHO	World Health Organization

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Chapter One

Introduction

> The truth, at least the truth I live and will share in this book, is quite different. From leveraging currency differences to outsourcing your life and disappearing. I'll show you how a small underground uses economic sleight-of-hand to do what most consider impossible […] People don't want to *be* millionaires – they want to experience what they believe only millions can buy. Ski chalets, butlers, and exotic travel often enter the picture. Perhaps rubbing cocoa butter on your belly in a hammock while you listen to waves rhythmically lapping against the deck of your thatched-roof bungalow? Sounds nice. $1,000,000 in the bank isn't a fantasy. The fantasy is the lifestyle of complete freedom it supposedly allows. The question is then, *How can one achieve the millionaire lifestyle of complete freedom without first having $1,000,000?* […] I will show you exactly how I have separated income from time and created my ideal lifestyle in the process, travelling the world and enjoying the best this planet has to offer.
>
> Tim Ferriss (2007, p. 8, italics in original)

I begin this chapter with a passage of Tim Ferriss, from his book *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich*. This book has been referenced frequently during interviews for my PhD study and had already crossed my path years before I began my research. In 2018, while sitting in a café in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, a Canadian man whom I later befriended recommended the book to me. Although this passage, and the book in general, falls under the category of motivational self-help presented with glossy terminology, it is noteworthy for considering the idea of location independence. The idea that Ferriss presents is the desire to achieve a millionaire lifestyle, where hedonistic desires can be fulfilled without the need to work long hours. According to Ferriss, this fantasy is achievable with an opportunistic mindset, leveraging privileges to generate passive income, and finding places to live with cheaper living costs. This idea reinforces the notion that everyone in the world has the same opportunities, desires (a location-independent hedonistic lifestyle), and conditions to achieve their aspirations.

I remember discussing this idea with my friend in the same café where we often met after our yoga classes. Amongst other Western, white but tanned, relatively young and toned bodies drinking fresh coconut juice, he explained to me how this inspirational quote prompted him to quit his job, sublet his house, and hop on a plane to Bali. Originally from Canada, he now had taken some time off work to write and do yoga, while renting a relatively cheap Airbnb guesthouse, a short scooter drive away from the main town of Ubud. In this, he was not alone nor unique. On the contrary, the desire to live a location-independent lifestyle with unrestricted mobility is becoming increasingly popular. Predominantly young, digitally literate, and relatively privileged individuals from affluent countries in the Global North are increasingly adopting a location-independent lifestyle (Thompson, 2018). They

are commonly known as “digital nomads” (Müller, 2016), a term that emphasises the link between technology and mobility. Ubud, one of the many popular digital nomad hotspots (Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021), saw a surge in the number of digital nomads who came to the town temporarily to work online. However, when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic in March 2020, the town and many other places around the world experienced a sudden drop in tourism (Mufti & Akhlas, 2020). The once-bustling streets became deserted and quiet as entire countries went into lockdown, with people isolating themselves at home. Governments around the world required people to work from home and stay at home where possible to prevent the spread of the virus.

The acute phase of the Corona Virus Disease of 2019 pandemic (COVID-19 hereafter), which lasted for almost the entire duration of this thesis (2019-2023), has had a significant impact on the way location-independent work is perceived, envisioned, and experienced. Moreover, the pandemic has significantly altered the general direction of this thesis, making it a highly relevant and timely topic. While the pandemic’s impact on people’s everyday geographies has only begun to be understood midway through the pandemic, news media and consultancy firms have eagerly reported how the pandemic accelerated a vision of the future of work (World Economic Forum, 2020b, n.p.):

> As a result of the twin forces of the Fourth Industrial revolution and the COVID-19 recession, day-to-day digitalization has leapt forward, with a large-scale shift to remote working and e-commerce, driving a surge in work-from-home arrangements and a new marketplace for remote work […] The industries with the largest opportunity to work from home are the Information Technology and Insurance industries, with 74% of workers in those industries reporting having access to remote working […] in addition to established patterns of working from home and the theoretical potential for at-home work, there is actually an emerging marketplace for remote work–as evidenced by both strong demand from jobseekers as well as an increasing demand from employers for jobs that are based remotely.

The above excerpt from the World Economic Forum’s *Future of Jobs Report* indicates that there has been “a large-scale shift to remote working” and an “emerging marketplace for remote work”. This shift is particularly apparent in the IT industry, where location-independent work is most prevalent.

The pandemic has also had a significant impact on my own research and my own location-independence. My original proposal entailed conducting fieldwork on-site in Ubud, Bali, where I intended to fully immerse myself in a digital nomad lifestyle and work alongside other digital nomads in popular coworking spaces (hereafter CWSs) for a duration of three months. Simultaneously, I was interested in exploring the perspectives, experiences and responses of local populations regarding the influx of privileged digital nomads. However, due to the pandemic, this plan proved unfeasible, and I,

like the subjects of my research, found myself constrained to a particular location. I was unable to leave Aotearoa New Zealand and consequently, had to substantially modify my research approach. This included adapting my methodology to incorporate online interviews with digital nomads hailing from diverse geographic regions, while operating remotely from my place of residence during the periods of strict lockdowns. I also altered my research to include an examination of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand and visited these spaces when the lockdowns lifted. The profound changes brought about by pandemic disruptions have rendered the exploration of socio-spatial dynamics in location-independent work a timely and highly relevant topic.

The focus and scope of this research

The proliferation of digital technologies, including the ubiquitous availability of internet coverage and the widespread use of mobile communication devices, has facilitated a more mobile form of working that is characterised by less spatial fixation, particularly in white-collar work. The advent of these technologies has enabled the emergence of the "knowledge worker" (Cortada, 2009), whose work is predominantly digital and, in contrast to factory work, is more likely to be location-independent. The high-tech occupations that have arisen with the expansion of location-independent work are frequently occupied by young urban professionals from strong passport countries (Mancinelli, 2020; Thompson, 2018). People in this cohort, who have grown up with digital technology, are sometimes referred to as "digital natives" (Selwyn, 2009). The assimilation of digital technologies into daily life has also contributed to increased mobility amongst people, as is evidenced by the proliferation of transnational border flows (Deshingkar, 2019), migration rates (De Haas et al., 2019) and the increasing blurring of work and tourism (Horner & John, 2020).

The rise of digital nomads represents a significant confluence of several trends. Digital nomads are individuals who are particularly interested in living a location-independent life, where work, leisure and travel are interrelated. This lifestyle choice, which has been the subject of an increasing amount of research (Green, 2020; Müller, 2016; Schlagwein, 2017; Thompson, 2018), allows individuals to fulfil individualistic hedonistic desires by living in countries with lower living costs (Korpela, 2019; Orel, 2019; Richardson, 2018; Thompson, 2019).

By leveraging technological infrastructures such as small portable devices and high-speed Wi-Fi connections, digital nomads are able to work from the digital spheres. It is noteworthy that the demographic of digital nomads is predominantly male. According to research by Statista (2023), 79 percent of the 13,650 digital nomads participating in their research identified as men, making women significantly underrepresented in the growing phenomenon. Their occupations are typically derived

from the field of advanced computer technologies (e.g. programming), as well as the creative industry (e.g. marketing, design and copywriting) (Müller, 2016). With their particular skillset in digital expertise and their involvement in online entrepreneurship, digital nomads stand apart from other knowledge workers, as their income stream is not specifically tethered to a particular geographic location (such as expats).

The number of people who identify as a digital nomad In the United States surged from 7.3 million In 2019 (pre-pandemic) to 16.9 million in 2022 (post-pandemic), a notable increase of 131 percent (MBO Partners, 2023). Another study (based on survey response from the *English*-speaking digital nomad community) conducted by ABrotherAbroad.com estimates that there are approximately 35 million digital nomads worldwide that hold a collective global economic value of about $US 787 billion dollars (ABrotherabroad.com, 2023), which makes the growing phenomenon of increasing interest to various governments around the world.

A recent trend that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been the introduction of digital nomad visa (DNV) schemes (see Table 1.1) by various countries. These DNV schemes enable highly educated digital nomads to legally stay and work in their respective countries (Hall et al., 2019; Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023). Estonia, for instance, pioneered in launching a DNV scheme in August 2020, setting a precedent quickly followed by other nations, including but not limited to Costa Rica, Greece and Croatia, amongst others (OECD, 2022).

Country	**Minimum monthly income (in USD)**	**Visa duration**	**Name of visa**	**Launch date**	**Former colonies?**
Anguilla	N/A	< 1 year	Work from Anguilla	Aug 2020	British
Antigua & Barbuda	≥ $4,167	< 2 years	Antigua Nomad Digital Residence	Sep 2020	British
Argentina		< 6 months	Short term resident permit for Digital Nomads	June 2022	Spanish
Aruba	Package deal during stay	<3 months	One happy Workation		Dutch
Bahamas	'sufficient' funds	<12 months (max 3 years)	Bahamas Extended Access Travel Stay	Oct 2020	British
Barbados	≥ $50,000 annual or passive	< 2 years	Barbados welcome stamp	Jul 2020	British
Belize	≥ $75,000 annual	< 6 months	Work where you vacation		British

Bermuda	'Substantial income'	< 1 year	Work from Bermuda Certificate	Jul 2020	British
Brazil		< 1 year	Digital nomad visa		Portuguese
Cape Verde	≥ $1,608	6 months (+6 months)	Cabo Verde Remote Working Program	May 2021	Portuguese
~~Cayman Islands~~ *	~~≥ $100,000 annual or passive~~	~~< 2 years~~	~~Global Citizen Concierge Program~~	~~Oct 2020~~	~~British~~
Colombia	>equivalent to 3 month min income	< 2 years	Visa V Digital Nomads	Late 2022	Spanish
Costa Rica	≥ $3,000	1 year (+1 year)	Short term visa for Remote Workers		
Croatia	≥ $2,554	< 1 year	Digital Nomad Residence Permit	Feb 2021	
Curaçao	'Sufficient funds'	6 months (+6mo)	@Home in Curaçao	Feb 2021	Dutch
Cyprus	≥ $3,752	< 1 year (+2years)	Remote work visa	Jan 2022	British
Dominica	≥ 50,000 or passive	<18 months	Dominica Work in Nature Visa	2021	British
Ecuador		< 2 years	Rentista for Remote Work Visa		
Estonia	≥ $3,984	< 1 year	Estonian Digital Nomad Visa	Aug 2020	
Georgia	≥ $2,000	< 360 days	Remotely from Georgia	Nov 2020	
Greece	≥ $3,752	< 1 year (+2 years)	Digital Nomad Visa		
Hungary	≥ $2,144	< 1 year (+1 year)	White card	Nov 2021	
Iceland	≥ $7,733	< 6 months	Work in Iceland	Oct 2020	
Indonesia		< 5 years	Digital Nomad Visa		Dutch
Italy		< 1 year	Digital Nomad Visa	March 2022	
Latvia	2,5 x average wage	<1 year (+1 year)	Latvia Digital Nomad Visa	TBA	
Malta	≥ 2,700	< 1 year	Nomad Residence Permit	Jun 2021	British
Mauritius	None	< 1 year	Premium Visa	Nov 2020	French/British
Montenegro		< 2 years	Digital Nomad VIsa	TBA	

Montserrat	≥ $70,000 annual	< 1 year	Remote Worker Stamp	Feb 2021	British
Namibia		< 6 months	Digital Nomad VIsa		English
Panama	≥ $3,000	9 months (+9mo)	Short-term Visa as Remote Worker	May 2021	
Romania		< 6 months	Digital Nomad Visa		
Saint Lucia	Not specified	< 1 year	Live it	Apr 2021	British
Seychelles	Not specified	< 1 year	Visitors' workcation permit	Apr 2021	British
Sri Lanka	TBA	< 1 year	Digital Nomad Visa	TBA	British
United Arab Emirates	≥ $5,000 or passive	< 1 year	Remote Working Visa Scheme	March 2021	
* This visa scheme has been closed					

Table 1.1: Overview of Digital Nomad Visa Schemes

These initiatives are positioned as a means of economic development and pandemic recovery, allowing aspiring digital nomads to stay for an average duration of one up to two years. The countries that are offering these visas are predominantly countries dependent on tourism or countries facing economic challenges, of which the majority are non-OECD countries (Migration Policy Institute, 2023). Additionally, digital nomads, or so-called "premium migrants" (De Carvalho, 2023) often benefit from tax exemptions for one up to two years in several of the non-OECD countries offering DNVs.[1] In addition, there are tight restrictions on interaction with the labour market in all countries offering DNVs, as digital nomads are not allowed to work for local companies (Migration Policy Institute, 2023 (Matsushita, 2022; Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023).

Location-independent work, particularly in the context of digital nomadism, is marketed as an attainable ideal lifestyle facilitated by self-entrepreneurship, mobility, and technological advancements that governments increasingly embrace through the provision of temporary remote work visas to generate economic revenue. For example, Barbados announced that only ten months after the introduction of the DNV Welcome Stamp, they received 2500 applications, generating 6 million USD visa application fees and contributing to at least 100 million USD in tourism revenue (OECD, 2022), which exemplifies the interest of governments introducing DNV schemes.

[1] Costa Rica is the only OECD country to offer tax exemptions to digital nomads (Migration Policy Institute, 2023).

The phenomenon of digital nomadism aligns with broader shifts in the mobility of people from Western countries, a theme which has emerged in scholarly literature (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016). Research on lifestyle and retirement mobilities (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Croucher, 2012; Hayes, 2014; Korpela, 2010), expatriates (Fechter, 2016; Fechter & Walsh, 2010; Leonard, 2010) and tourism scholarship on gap-year and OE (overseas experience) travellers (Bell, 2002; Brown, 2009; Inkson & Myers, 2003) has noted a trend where individuals actively seek for ways to enhance their quality of life. The "search for the good life" (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009), encapsulates the idea that people move to other countries for the purpose of improving their life, which often includes residing in a pleasant environment with a good climate and relatively lower living costs (Hayes, 2014), akin to the lifestyle choices digital nomads make.

The surge in individuals working remotely has also impacted the organisational structures surrounding the concept of location-independent work, resulting in altered work arrangements such as shared office spaces and CWSs to supply the high demand for flexibility. CWSs have responded to this need by providing socio-material and technological infrastructures that allow groups of mobile or location-independent people to work from a shared space alongside other freelancers, entrepreneurs, or teams of small businesses and start-ups. As one of the providers of shared workspace, CWSs have experienced a global increase in remote workers (WeWork, 2022). *Deskmag's* statistics estimated that by the end of 2019, 2.2 million people would be working from more than 22,000 CWSs worldwide (*Deskmag*, 2019). Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the coworking industry is forecasted to grow tremendously. From a value of the global CWS market of 6.9 billion USD in 2022, to an expected market value of 24 billion USD in 2030 (Statista, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote ways of working, which digital nomadism and CWSs are indicative of. Many white-collar workers were compelled to work from home due to government-mandated lockdowns and travel restrictions (Nagel, 2020). For individuals fortunate enough to possess essential digital infrastructure, suitable white-collar occupations, and sufficient workspace at home, their residence transitioned into new – albeit temporarily – remote workplaces. However, it is important to differentiate between traditional forms of remote work and the distinct travel-work lifestyle embraced by digital nomads.

Traditional ways of remote working (such as teleworking) often involve employees executing tasks from home, with a common practice being a partial remote arrangement – working from home for some days and attending the physical workplace for the remainder of the week (Allen et al., 2015). In contrast, digital nomadism represents a more transformative approach to remote work where their income stream is not tied to a specific geographic location. Digital nomads engage in location-

independent work, allowing them to operate from various geographic locations beyond traditional work-from-home arrangements. This lifestyle shift is characterised by mobility, self-entrepreneurship, and a reliance on technological advancements, positioning it as an ideal lifestyle achievable through remote work that involves a change in residence (Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023). As mobile workers, digital nomads ascribe to the particular identity of location-independent workers whereas individuals working remotely for e.g. some days of the week, are more tethered to place (home) and ascribe less to the notion of location-independence.

The table below (Table 1.2) provides an overview of the different types of remote work while taking into account the agency of location-independent workers. Figure 1.1 presents a visualisation of this table. This taxonomy recognises that certain embodied identities (such as nationality, gender or age) – in conjunction with regulatory mechanisms – influence the extent to which they can work from anywhere.

	Definition	Characteristics	Attachment to place
Digital nomad	Individuals leveraging technology to work remotely while traveling and living a nomadic lifestyle.	Freedom to work from anywhere with internet access, frequent travel to various locations, reliance on digital tools for work, a focus on balancing work and lifestyle choices.	They look to work from places around the world that have excellent digital infrastructures
Remote employee	Working for a company or organisation in a full or part-time capacity, performing job duties from a location other than the company's office (e.g. expatriates).	Employment benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans, structured work hours, regular communication with supervisors and team members	Attachment to a home base and to places where they frequently work remotely may vary.
Freelancer	Self-employed individuals offering services to clients on a contract basis, often remotely.	Flexible schedules, project-based work, diverse client base, autonomy in choosing projects, variable income.	Varies. May work from preferred locations for comfort and productivity, but does not have strong place-attachment.
Telecommuter	Working remotely for a company or organisation, performing tasks and collaborating with colleagues from a location other than the traditional office.	Employed by a single organisation, regular communication with colleagues through digital tools, adherence to company policies and procedures, a blend of remote and in-person meetings.	Typically attached to a home base but may also have attachment to places where they frequently work remotely.
Coworker (in CWS)	Individuals working remotely from CWSs spaces that provide a encouraging environment	Access to shared workspaces and amenities, networking opportunities with other remote workers, social	Often attached to the community and services provided by the CWS, but may not have strong

	for work and community interaction.	events and activities organised within the community, a sense of belonging to a like-minded group.	attachment to a specific geographic location.
Work from home	Working remotely from one's residence, typically for a company or organisation.	Often attached to one's home and immediate surroundings	Limited geographic mobility for work purposes

Table 1.2: Taxonomy of location-independent work

While acknowledging the nuanced interplay among these categories, it is imperative to recognise that they are not distinct. The aim of the taxonomy presented in Table 1.2 and visualised in Figure 1.1 is to delve into the notion of location-independent work and to highlight both the commonalities and distinctions among remote workers. Throughout this thesis, I use the term "location-independent worker" as an overarching term to refer to any type or categorisation that falls within the practices of location-independent work. In Figure 1.1, the X-axis represents the extent to which remote workers (to use the general term) can be geographically mobile, yet due to certain work arrangements such as working from home or working from a CWS, are limited in their movements. The Y-axis represents the type of work arrangements and what flexibility that gives remote workers in being able to detach work from place, where structural constraints might affect one's location-independence (such as a mortgage, children to care for, etc.).

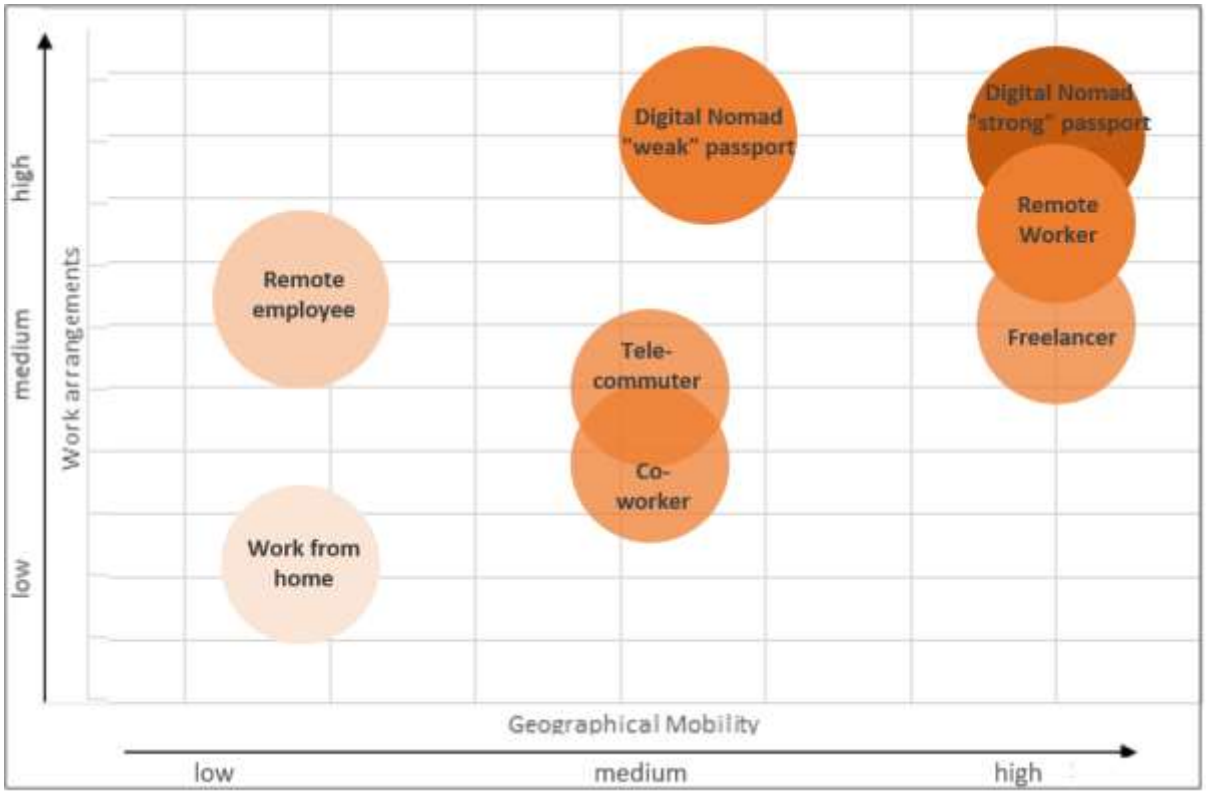

Figure 1.1: Visualisation of the taxonomy of location-independent work

Location-independent work has been celebrated in scholarly discourse for its ability to advance the geographies of work through the use of technology (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016; Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017). However, this discourse has neglected the persistent gender inequalities that are present, and the gendered nature of technologies involved in location-independent work (Choudhury, 2022). Additionally, there is a lack of scholarly attention paid to the mutual constitution of bodies and work environments, leading to a production of disembodied knowledge (McDowell, 2009, 2011a). A focus on bodies in relation to location-independent work highlights the ways in which gender (also ethnicity, age and so on) shapes the experience of this type of work, and vice versa. In addition, the gendered nature of technology perpetuates gender inequalities, including the objectification of women's bodies (Persaud et al., 2018). A politics of knowledge production means that scholarly debate lacks an emphasis on critical feminist digital geographies, which can provide a means of questioning the gendered and dominating techno-capitalist processes that exist. By incorporating a feminist embodied geography perspective, scholarship on location-independent work has the potential to highlight uneven relations of power, embodied identities, and the lived experiences of a location-independent spaces and places.

Another trend in scholarship on location-independent work is the high emphasis on promoting location-independent work for citizens from affluent countries in the Global North (see e.g., Hensellek & Puchala, 2021), which neglects the power dynamics and colonial legacies that shape the digital infrastructures producing and enabling location-independence. The expanding dependence on technology in society situates digital mobilities in a technocentric world that considers technology as instrumental to progress and development (Green, 2020; McElroy, 2019b; Thompson, 2019). As mentioned earlier, the popularised phenomenon of digital nomadism is mainly embraced by those from affluent countries who can profit from working online in countries with lower living costs (Hensellek & Puchala, 2021; Mancinelli, 2020), which are frequently former colonies that are highly dependent on tourism (Migration Policy Institute, 2023) (see e.g., Green, 2020). Adopting a postcolonial perspective provides a means to analyse how ongoing colonial relationships influence the practices of location-independent work, and perpetuate inequalities.

In the context of the aforementioned considerations, this thesis provides a critical analysis of the concept of location-independent work through an investigation of the themes of bodies, mobility, and place. The next section discusses the relevance of this research more in-depth.

Research aim and objectives

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore the socio-spatial dynamics of location-independent work in digital geographies through a focus on bodies, mobility, technology, and place. To achieve this research aim, the following objectives are to:

- conduct a comprehensive analysis of feminist postcolonial digital geography scholarship and identify critical elements relevant to comprehend the notion of location-independence.
- explore location-independence from the experiences of digital nomads, and to investigate how their experiences are shaped by embodied identities such as gender, class, race.
- investigate the notion of location-independence through the accounts of CWS managers in Aotearoa New Zealand, and to examine how the curation of shared workspaces intersects with embodied identities such as gender, age, class and care.
- analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on location-independent work practices, particularly in terms of disruption and repair of infrastructures.

I employed feminist qualitative methods to analyse how location-independent work is understood, felt, and experienced through mobility and place, with a focus on geographies of embodiment and infrastructures. Qualitative methods – such as semi-structured interviews – are useful when seeking to understand how identity (class, ethnicity, gender, nationality) and place (digital and material) are mutually constructed. Through the stories of digital nomads globally, through the accounts of both managers and community managers of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand, and through texts and images from websites promoting DNV schemes, this thesis demonstrates how location-independence is an imagined, desired and material geography rather than a seamless experience of freedom and flexibility, embedded in relations of power in the changing digital geographies of work.

The relevance of this research

This research brings in a feminist embodied postcolonial perspective and contributes to existing digital geography scholarship in four key ways:

1. This research underscores the importance of perspectives from critical feminist geographies of embodiment to examine scholarship on digital geographies of work, which has been characterised by masculinist and technocentric world views.

While existing scholarship acknowledges the privileged dimensions of mobile lifestyles, there remains only limited attention on the structural forces that shape these mobilities. Despite recent attempts to

include hypermobile people and North-South lifestyle flows in migration studies (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009), the majority of research on migration continues to reflect a masculinist technocentric worldview, with a focus on the benefits of digital technologies and a lack of attention to issues of place, nationality, ethnicity, race and gender in the constitution of mobilities (for notable exceptions, see e.g., Fechter, 2016; Hof, 2018; Leonard 2010). Moreover, scholarship on CWSs often celebrates innovation, technologies and networking, ignoring how the performance of particular masculinities enables the reproduction of globalising techno-capitalism (see for an exhaustive overview Berbegal-Mirabent, 2021). In light of this, there is an increasing need for critical thinking to enhance understanding of the socio-spatial dynamics of location-independent work, and to examine relations of power and identity constitutive of the (re)production of location-independence. Feminist perspectives on digital geographies of work highlight the multiple ways in which bodies and identities are framed within and produced by digital technologies, and how technology and politics influence these bodies. Critical perspectives on digital mobilities allow for analysis of the uneven power relations produced by and through digital technologies. An embodied geography perspective brings important interventions to the understanding of digital mobilities, emphasising the scale of the body in scholarship on digital geographies. Therefore, this research extends digital geographies of work, place and mobilities by drawing on aspects of geographies of embodiment.

2. This research extends insights into digital nomadism by exploring migration infrastructures that underpin, enable, and sustain the privileged mobilities of location-independence.

While research on digital nomadism has increased significantly in recent years (Shawkat et al., 2021), there is a dearth of research that focuses on migration infrastructures, which are defined as the "systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility" (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, p. S122). Despite the growing popularity of digital nomadism, the migration industry literature has paid relatively little attention to this group. Moreover, although digital nomadism is often associated with mobile work, it "has yet to be included in contemporary discussions of lifestyle mobilities" (Hannonen, 2020, n.p.). However, the similarities between digital nomadism and lifestyle-led mobilities offer fertile ground for scholarship to expand upon (Hannonen, 2020; Hermann & Paris, 2020; Mancinelli, 2021), providing a more comprehensive perspective on the existing literature.

The integration of literature on privileged lifestyle-led mobilities and migration infrastructures allows for a more in-depth understanding of these phenomena, broadening the current conceptual understanding of migration industries and digital nomads to include more flexible forms of migration. Koh and Wissink (2018) note that the focus of migration literature is typically on relatively permanent

forms of labour migration, which overlooks the potential for "investigating how the migration industries engage with lifestyle mobilities (Cohen et al., 2015) and migration as a privileged way of living transnationally" (Koh & Wissink, 2018, p. 593). By exploring the infrastructures facilitating digital nomadism, this study foregrounds the often-hidden infrastructures that shape, control and reproduce the privileged flow of mobilities, allowing for a critical examination of migration infrastructures and the redirection of attention towards the mechanisms of mobility. This approach enables scholars to critique colonialism that has characterised scholarship for a long time. The use of a critical feminist postcolonial lens in this research that considers issues of power behind the phenomenon of location-independence allows for a better understanding of its socio-spatial dynamics.

3. This research makes a significant contribution to scholarship on CWSs by introducing a focus on embodied geographies of care.

Recently, there has been a growing academic interest in CWSs as new form of shared workspaces that are reshaping the ways in which people work. The literature on CWSs has primarily focused on how they respond to the changing geographies of work, including the rise of the gig-economy, which is supported by digital technologies, making them an increasingly popular phenomenon to sit, work and collaborate (Gandini, 2015). Moreover, previous studies have emphasised the potential of CWSs in boosting productivity, stimulating entrepreneurship and innovation. This research examines the embodied geographies of location-independence present in CWSs and in doing so contributes to feminist perspectives on digital geography scholarship. It suggests that CWSs can be regarded as spaces of care by extending the perspective of embodied geographies of care to the domain of shared workspaces. Consequently, this thesis adds to existing research by investigating everyday practices of care in CWSs as extended spaces of care, as some of the practices employed by CWS managers align with ethics of care. Additionally, this research highlights the importance of considering the role of managers in shaping shared workspaces. The practices and decisions of CWS managers have significant material and social implications for the coworking community, but they have not received adequate attention in the existing scholarship on CWSs (notable exceptions are De Vaujany et al. (2019); Merkel (2019)). This knowledge gap underscores the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the curation of shared workplaces, the complex dynamics involved in CWSs and the potential for creating more inclusive and supportive work environments. By including a feminist embodied perspective, it becomes visible how some CWS managers challenge standardised norms in the workplace, creating more inclusive and emancipatory environments that move away from institutionalised spaces.

4. This research provides unique empirical insights on CWSs from Aotearoa New Zealand.

Until now, research on CWSs has largely focused on their emergence and development in Western contexts, particularly in Western Europe and North America, with little exploration of how CWSs operate in other geographies around the world (Berbegal-Mirabent, 2021). This Eurocentric focus has been universally applied to all CWS locations. It is important to recognise, however, that CWSs are not a homogenous phenomenon and may operate differently in diverse cultural contexts. Consequently, there is a need for scholars to broaden their understanding of CWSs and explore how they operate in different contexts, where location independence takes on particular configurations. In this regard, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the literature by providing unique empirical insights from CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand. This setting, as an isolated and less affected place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, offers interesting insights into how CWSs operate in a unique geographical and cultural context, which can be contrasted with the dominant focus on European CWSs in scholarship. By expanding the research to the settler colonial nation of Aotearoa New Zealand and drawing on principles that emerge within Te Ao Māori (the Māori world), such as manaakitanga (hospitality, kindness, generosity), kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and koha (donation, reciprocity), this thesis offers a fresh perspective on how practices of care in CWSs operate in a culturally specific context. These principles are central to Te Ao Māori and highlight the importance of relationships, responsibility, and reciprocity in social interactions (Hoskins, 2012). Through this research, a nuanced and inclusive understanding of CWSs beyond the European context can be gained. It allows for recognising the ways in which history, culture and geography shape the formation and operation of CWSs. This highlights the need for further exploration of CWSs in different global geographies to better understand their cultural specificity. In particular, this research provides insights into how principles of care and reciprocity are and can be incorporated into the management and governance of CWSs in culturally diverse contexts. It is essential to recognise the cultural differences and unique societal factors that influence the adoption and implementation of CWSs in different parts of the world. Moreover, expanding research on CWSs beyond the European context and drawing on cultural principles from Aotearoa New Zealand can create a nuanced and inclusive understanding of CWSs, which can inform more equitable forms of CWSs across different global geographies.

This study underscores the importance of a critical interrogation of digital geography scholarship, particularly regarding the intersection of feminist geographies of embodiment in relation to digital geographies of work. By drawing on different sub-disciplines that examine socio-spatial phenomena related to changing technologies, increasing mobility flows, and the meaning of place, a more comprehensive perspective on location-independent work can emerge. The theoretical lenses of feminist postcolonial geography and embodiment offer unique ways of understanding the socio-

spatial dynamics of location-independent work in the context of digital nomadism and CWSs. By exploring the multiple mobilities of digital nomads within the broader sphere of lifestyle mobilities research, this study highlights the importance of place and mobilities in understanding the spatial practices of location-independent workers. Additionally, by examining the role of CWSs as spaces of care, this research underscores the potential of CWSs to be inclusive, equitable, and empowering spaces for location-independent workers. Taken together, these diverse contributions offer important new insights into the socio-spatial dynamics of location-independent work.

Structure of the thesis

This introductory chapter has presented an overview of the background and context of location-independence, with a focus on the emergence and growth of CWSs and digital nomadism in the age of digitisation. This thesis seeks to fill a gap in the current scholarship on location-independent work, by providing a critical interrogation of this phenomenon from a feminist postcolonial perspective. The research methodology is qualitative, utilising interviews with digital nomads (conducted online) and managers and community managers of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand (conducted on-site). The significance of this thesis lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between mobility, bodies, place, and technology in the digital geographies of work. By exploring these themes, there is the potential to inform policy and practice, and to facilitate the development of more equitable and sustainable models of location-independent work.

Chapter Two deals with the core concepts that are centred around the digital geographies of work: mobility, place, and the interweaving of technology in the digital geographies of work. These concepts are interrelated and centred around the notion of location-independent work. In this chapter I provide a contextualisation of the rise of location-independent workers and workspaces, before turning to the future of work in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter Three contributes to the literature on digital geographies of work, by presenting an interdisciplinary review of three bodies of literature related to the concept of location-independence: digital geographies of work, digital mobilities and, digital geographies of embodiment. This provides a platform for investigating important aspects related to understanding digital nomadism and the proliferation of CWSs. In doing so, I identify and discuss key critiques of digital geographies of work and mobility, including critiques from postcolonial and feminist theorists. By adopting a critical feminist postcolonial geography lens onto the field of digital geographies, this literature review challenges the current hegemonic stance dominating digital geography scholarship and introduces the body as a lens to look at these particular geographies. By focussing on embodied identity and an ethics

of care perspective, embodied geographies scholarship contributes to a nuanced understanding of the digital geographies of work and mobility. Ultimately, this chapter helps in providing a better understanding of the concept of location-independence and its embeddedness within wider structures and power relations.

Chapter Four discusses my research methodology, in which I present the feminist qualitative research methods I have employed to research location-independence in pandemic times. Data collection primarily took place through a critical analysis of visual and textual material and semi-structured interviews with 12 digital nomads online globally, and 11 managers and community managers of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand. Throughout the years that I have spent working on this thesis, I have experienced some of the ways in which location-independence can be understood, felt, and envisioned, an experience that aligns with the research methods employed in this thesis.

Chapter Five discusses the production of the rapidly growing phenomenon of digital nomadism by global mobility regimes. At the core of this phenomenon lies the notion of location-independence, as digital nomads leverage their mobility and technology and challenge traditional notions of place and work. Digital nomads contribute to the development of new digital geographies of place, mobility, and work, highlighting the significance of location-independence as a means of accessing global opportunities and connecting with others in the digital realm. In this chapter, I reinforce the argument that digital nomadism situates itself within unequal global migration regimes. It shows how digital nomads enjoy colonially inherited privileges as, by virtue of being citizens of strong passport countries, class and digital literacy leads to the reproduction of their ability to work location-independently. Furthermore, their assumed unrestricted mobility is based on a global notion of white – and to some extent – masculine privilege, that sustains a digital nomad identity. The privileging of the geographic mobility of digital nomads is further reinforced by the global regimes of mobility, where nation-states in both the Global North and South have started to introduce DNV schemes. The seemingly border free life digital nomads are attracted to, is based on neoliberal subjectivities of freedom, whilst in reality, many digital nomads remain caught between various tax, visa, and residency rules of many different nations. Digital nomads themselves also report that the nature of a digital nomad lifestyle is highly precarious which demonstrates the complexity of the phenomenon, which rarely matches a digital nomad rhetoric. Nonetheless, a digital nomadic lifestyle in or outside countries offering specific DNV schemes still resembles practices of neo-colonialism, exploiting local modern infrastructures to sustain their lifestyle.

Chapter Six presents the narratives of managers and community managers of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand, where I focus on the intricate construction of identities within these shared workspaces. The

chapter highlights the dynamic interplay between the identities of CWSs and the individuals working from these sites, as the transactional and valorised identity of CWSs contradicts the supposed open, playful, and inclusive character of CWSs. The curated environments of the CWSs in this thesis specifically cater to remote workers who are often rooted in particular locations, such as home and primary workplaces, and work remotely partially from a CWS (as opposed to the nomadic lifestyle of digital nomads). As CWSs frequently serve as consistent hubs for remote workers where the managers cater for, I unravel the uneven power relations that influence the identity of place and co-production of desired bodies within CWSs. I demonstrate how CWSs are gendered and classed spaces where guidelines, material forms, expectations and practices constitute the ordering of these places. The contribution of this chapter to the thesis provides a crucial understanding of how the concept of location-independence articulates with privileged embodied identities in CWSs, which emphasises the unique dynamics at play in the evolving CWS landscape.

Chapter Seven contributes to the understanding of location-independence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This last empirical chapter provides insights that extend the understanding of the diverse spatialities of CWSs and the subjectivities of digital nomads, but also how, in an increasingly digitalised, post-pandemic world, caring practices found in some CWSs, create spaces of repair. After first providing an in-depth overview of state-led social and health restrictions, and what the New Zealand Government sought to achieve from a public health perspective, I discuss the increasing emphasis on the usage of digital technologies during the pandemic and provide a snapshot of how the pandemic impacted specific home working environments. Through interviews with both digital nomads and CWS managers, it becomes clear that both can be seen as pioneers in the transition to forms of location-independent work. Yet, the pandemic heavily disrupted and changed the operation of infrastructures that usually facilitate location-independent work. The reliance on these infrastructures creates much friction in the constructed digital nomad identity that is centred around notions of freedom. The accounts of CWS managers demonstrate how, after an initial breakdown of the socio-material infrastructures CWSs provide, the pandemic generated a desire to reconfigure work. To understand these spaces of repair in times of crisis, I adopt an ethics of care lens to appreciate the ways in which CWSs constitute an important emerging infrastructure in relation to remote working and bodies in place. This thesis reveals a re-emphasised need for social connection and being in place even as people seek flexible remote options.

The concluding Chapter Eight assesses the socio-spatial dynamics of location-independent work and demonstrates that location-independence is not reducible to a singular phenomenon but is rather constituted through multiple relational people, materials, identities, and organisations. Embedded within the digital geographies of work, location-independence is based upon uneven relations of

power that stretch across different levels. First, through the global level, where regulatory migration infrastructures dictate who can be location-independent for work and who cannot. Then, on a national level, where governments implement different strategies (exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic) that reproduce the globalised notion of white privilege from a top-down level. On a more local level, through the accounts of CWS managers, it becomes clear that these providers of socio-material infrastructure also play an important role in the reproduction of location-independent work. Therefore, I argue that location-independence is partially an imagined and desired geography, where regulatory mechanisms produce location-independent work. While location-independence is often understood as a purely technological or individualistic phenomenon, location-independence is also socially constructed, with regulatory mechanisms playing a key role in its production. This is particularly evident in the case of DNVs and other forms of government support for location-independent work (such as tax incentives, grants, or infrastructural development), which actively shape the infrastructures and conditions of work for digital nomads. However, it is important to note that regulation is just one aspect of the broader social, economic, and cultural contexts that enable and constrain location-independence. For this reason, while regulatory mechanisms are significant in shaping location-independent work, they are not the sole determinant of this phenomenon. Thus, by examining location-independence through the lens of digital nomads and CWSs, which are both closely linked to technology, bodies, mobility and place, this thesis sheds light on how various infrastructures can enable or constrain people's location-independence, and how these are tied to broader social structures.

Chapter Two

Contextualising place and location-independence

In today's increasingly interconnected world, understanding the dynamics of work requires a deep appreciation for the importance of context, place, and location-independence. This chapter delves into the realm of digital geographies of work exploring the fundamental concepts of mobility, place, and the transformative power of technology on labour. These concepts are interconnected and central to the notion of location-independent work, which has risen in popularity in recent years. To understand this phenomenon, this chapter reviews scholarly literature on two related but distinct areas: coworking spaces (hereafter CWSs) and digital nomadism.

The first section of this chapter explores the concept of mobility in relation to the digital geographies of work. Technological advancements have led to the emergence of flexible and mobile forms of work, notably embraced by location-independent workers, commonly referred to as digital nomads. This privileged group, primarily from affluent countries in the Global North, leverage their social, digital, and financial capital to travel and work location-independently, with their work lifestyle organised around the axes of mobility, technology, labour and place. As outlined by Richardson (2021), the platformisation of work and the resulting flexible arrangements of space and time, have led to a wider reorganisation of work that challenges traditional divisions between work and life. While some digital nomads utilise online platforms to secure work, or “gigs”, that support their mobility, others might have a contract with one employer, yet operate within the realm of long-distance remote work, which exemplifies the broader spectrum of digital nomadism. This mobility is further leveraged by working from liminal spaces such as CWSs, cafés and Airbnb’s.

In the second section of this chapter, I examine how digital technologies have facilitated the dispersal of conventional office work from office buildings, leading to a reconfiguration of workspace. While there are some exceptions, the literature has primarily focused on the emergence of CWSs in Western contexts (for exceptions see Adegoke & Comunian, 2021; Ishitsuka, 2020; Jiménez, 2005). However, the proliferation of CWSs worldwide has become a crucial factor in offering increasing flexibility in locations to work from. These spaces provide essential socio-material and technical infrastructures that enable mobile workers to work online. Therefore, I explore how CWSs have further mobilised and facilitated location-independent work arrangements, especially with regard to the diverse range of global contexts in which they operate. In doing so, this discussion contributes to a better understanding of the interplay between digital technologies and contemporary workspaces in a global context.

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the use of digital technologies in the geographies of work. This trend has accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the necessity and possibility of working remotely while reconfiguring the meaning of (im)mobility and

place. In the last section of this chapter, I investigate the technological changes brought about by this trend and their impact on the future of work in Aotearoa New Zealand, where part of this research is situated. With the COVID-19 pandemic being a catalyst for the increasing use of digital technologies, I seek to provide insights how Aotearoa New Zealand's workforce is adapting to these changes. In light of this, this thesis contributes to the wider debate on the impact of technological changes on the future of work across different global contexts.

The rise of location-independent workers: digital nomadism

> I see it every day – the longing, the envy, the faraway look. It's in the faces of businessmen, sweating under their three-piece suits and regarding me over the remains of expense-account lunches. It's in the faces of newspaper reporters who realize a few minutes into an interview that I am living their dream. It's in the faces old and faces young, faces barely tanned from a too-short Florida vacation and faces pallid that turn to catch a quick glimpse as I zip past the office window. It's everywhere, for it's a universal lust – the lust for freedom (Steven K. Roberts, the 'first' digital nomad, 1984, p. 117).

Although Steven Roberts' quote predates the current growth in digital nomadism, it alludes to the hedonistic and flexible lifestyle facilitated by digital technologies, a phenomenon that has now become popularly known as digital nomadism. Digital nomads are often referred to as "location-independent workers" (Müller, 2016; Schlagwein, 2017), "professional lifestyle travellers" (Cohen et al., 2015; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Suutari & Brewster, 2000), "digital natives" (Nash et al., 2018), "work-oriented professionals" (Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018), "global nomads" (D'Andrea, 2007; Kannisto, 2016), or "mobile transnational online workers" (de Loryn, 2022). They live a nomadic lifestyle where work, leisure and travel are interrelated (Richards, 2015). Enabled by technological advancements, a digital nomad "utilizes existing digital and logistic infrastructure to maintain a fluid, individualized lifestyle" (Richards, 2015, p. 340). In the following sections, I introduce various aspects of location-independence associated with digital nomads and CWSs, linking them to the current context of location-independent work.

A metaphor for freedom and independence

The nomad is often regarded as symbol of freedom and independence (Cook, 2020; Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021) and of deterritorialisation (Bardhi et al., 2012), with its mode of existence in continuous flux (Green, 2020). In its "free floating alternative subjectivity" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 100), the nomad can be seen as an agent of change, representing freedom and independence. The

rebellious nature of the nomad breaks with conventional norms and behaviours in society, making it a symbol of aspiration for many. Makimoto and Manners predicted in 1997 that the rise of the digital technologies has created opportunities for the emergence of a digital nomad, who can roam the world as part of the new "nomadic age". Modern digital nomads facilitate their fascination for travelling to "exotic" destinations with smart digital technologies and miniaturised devices, representing liquid modernity (a concept coined by Zygmunt Bauman as a metaphor to describe constant mobility and change) (Hermann & Paris, 2020; Thompson, 2021) and neoliberal individualism (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017; Thompson, 2019).

Digital nomads are often associated with young professionals who grew up with the integration of technologies in their everyday lives, and are commonly referred to as "digital natives" (Selwyn, 2009). A digital nomad lifestyle marks a departure from conventional labour organisations and nine-to-five office structures in Western society, and is viewed as a leisure-oriented work lifestyle (Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018). As such, it illustrates a shift in consumption practices ahead of labour production (Thompson, 2021), and is characterised by fluidity and flexibility. This is not to say that digital nomads can escape the impact of time zones, which is an often-mentioned constraining factor in their work-lifestyle (see e.g. Mancinelli, 2020 and Nash et al., 2018). The blurring of boundaries between work and leisure creates an entanglement of digital nomadism with the mobility of labour migrants for work purposes (Bell & Ward, 2000) and the leisure pursuits of lifestyle mobilities (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Digital nomadism is often seen as an alternative lifestyle that seeks liberation from conventional office structures (Hannonen, 2020), and is comparable to the escapist motivations found amongst backpackers (Maoz, 2007) and lifestyle migrants (Mancinelli, 2021).

Geo-arbitrage

The phenomenon of digital nomadism is characterised by a significant amount of activity in countries in which the living costs for digital nomads are generally lower. Among these countries, Bali (Indonesia), Colombia, Mexico, and Vietnam are frequently cited as popular and affordable destinations (Green, 2020; Hannonen, 2020; Hart, 2015; Hermann & Paris, 2020; MacRae, 2016; Mancinelli, 2020). The safety and familiarity of working from Westernised locations (Prabawa & Pertiwi, 2020) and the availability of affordable Western-style accommodation (Thompson, 2021) shape the lifestyle affordances desired by digital nomads. Digital nomadism, in this sense, is part of a broader phenomenon in which relatively privileged individuals seek desirable temporary lifestyles by leaving their home countries (Hannonen, 2020). This trend has been observed in research on migration studies focussed on lifestyle and retirement migrants (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Croucher, 2012; Korpela, 2010), as well as tourism scholarship focused on gap-year and OE-travellers (Bell, 2002;

Brown, 2009; Inkson & Myers, 2003). Lifestyle mobilities are often underpinned by Western constructions of paradise and the good life, with digital nomads (and lifestyle migrants more generally) primarily hailing from affluent countries located in the Global North, leveraging their relative privileges and geographical advantages to satisfy hedonistic lifestyle desires in the Global South (Benson, 2013; Richards, 2015). This practice, which is also known as "geo-arbitrage" (Hayes & Pérez-Gañán, 2017), gives individuals, often from white middle class backgrounds, a higher purchasing power by moving to countries with lower living costs, which can occur in any direction (e.g. North-South, North-North, South-South, South-North). While migration studies have traditionally emphasised North-South flows, characterised by individuals relocating from the Global North to the Global South, recent observations suggest a more complex scenario, as a wider range of lifestyle mobility pattens occur within the Global North, and from the Global South to the Global North (see e.g. Bakewell et al., 2009; Botterill, 2017; Hayes, 2021; McElroy, 2019b; Robins, 2019). McElroy (2019b) presents a case of North-North flows, that highlights the complexity of the phenomenon by pointing out how digital nomads go to Romania to possess economic superiority by earning high salaries from international companies from the Global North, while working from locations that provide affordable housing costs. Consequently, this transnational gentrification process drives up living expenses for the local population. Robins (2019) illustrates how social class forms an important factor in South-South flows of lifestyle migration, where the Brazilian middle class relocates to London for lifestyle considerations, but are still disadvantaged because of their race and ethnicity.

A denominator in these different lifestyle-led mobility patterns is that relatively affluent individuals do have the agency to make these changes and can afford them. The complexity of this landscape of lifestyle migration, as Benson and O'Reilly (2018) note, signifies wider trends of neoliberalist practices and enduring colonial power relations that reproduce and reinforce global socio-economic inequalities. Indeed, as Emard and Nelson (2020) show in their review of Global North-South lifestyle migration literature since the mid-2000s, most literature "bypasses serious engagement with the ways that Global North-South lifestyle migration is implicated in racialized colonial legacies that make this migration possible and actively (re)produce inequality in Global South destinations" (p. 1044), which signifies the importance of adopting a postcolonial lens through which to critically review the phenomenon of digital nomadism and its implications.

Travelling to and working from postcolonial countries is an example of neo-colonial exploitation of travel, where digital nomads follow "the pathways of previously colonized countries, especially in Southeast Asia, where digital nomads like to gather in large numbers" (Thompson, 2021, p. 20). A digital nomad enclaves in these countries share similarities with backpacker enclaves, where backpackers, in opposition to mass tourism, ventured off-the-beaten-track to explore unknown

destinations and identify themselves as travellers rather than tourists. However, the commodification of backpacker culture transformed backpacking into an entire industry (Law et al., 2007), as depicted in Alex Garland's renowned best-selling book *The Beach*. Digital nomads' lifestyles and mobilities mirror these patterns. The social media-popularised hotspots they frequent have become digital nomad enclaves, with a complete infrastructure catering to the needs and wants of this privileged group of mobile knowledge workers. Orel (2019) notes that they are a "new type of fluid workforce [that] tends to merge itself with the selected geographic area or environment for a brief period of time" and leverages its logistical and technological infrastructure "to maintain an individualized lifestyle" (p. 315). Similarly, Kannisto (2016, p. 220) describes global nomads, as "opportunists taking advantage of societies' dominant discourses and practices". These similarities with lifestyle-led mobilities support including digital nomadism as a research topic in scholarship (Hannonen, 2020; Hermann & Paris, 2020; Mancinelli, 2021).

Digital nomads occupy a privileged position in contemporary society, but it is important to maintain a critical perspective on the larger social and economic forces at play. Thompson (2018) has employed the concepts of privilege and inequality to situate digital nomadism within the broader neoliberal context. Her analysis reveals the precarious working conditions and limited prospects faced by any millennial workers, which challenges the optimistic technocratic stance often associated with digital nomadism research. For example, Gonçalves (2018) found that lifestyle migrants working in Queenstown, Aotearoa New Zealand, experienced both privileged and precarious conditions, as their future work prospects were determined by national policies. Similarly, Botterill's (2017) study of British retirement migrants in Thailand shows that their lifestyles are often precarious, with limited access to basic social rights, despite being portrayed in research on lifestyle mobilities as more privileged. Koh's (2021) research shows that the economic privilege enjoyed by expatriates through their work is not sustainable as they age, making them less desirable for work and leading to limited access to welfare support. In contrast, digital nomads are not tied to a specific geographic location or multinational organisation, providing them with a greater degree of autonomy. However, beneath the surface, precarity and uncertainty are unsolicited effects for many mobile knowledge workers, despite the glamourous lifestyles and high degree of autonomy often portrayed in popular media (Ferriss, 2007; McKinsey Global Institute, 2016; Nomadlist, 2020) and academic research (Hall et al., 2019).

Scholarly perspectives on digital nomadism: a Western-centric focus

Digital technologies are integral to the nomadic lifestyle of digital nomads, and as such, they are a key component of the popular phenomenon. Despite the fact that mobile work is at the forefront of digital nomadism, it "has yet to be included in contemporary discussions of lifestyle mobilities" (Hannonen,

2020, n.p.). Scholars who have engaged with digital nomadism have primarily focussed on understanding a digital nomad identity (Müller, 2016) and lifestyle (Hannonen, 2020) by examining their aspirations and motivations (Reichenberger, 2018; Richards, 2015; Schlagwein, 2017), and work-life balance (Orel, 2019; Reichenberger, 2018; Von Zumbusch & Lalicic, 2020).

For instance, Richards (2015) identifies digital nomads as "flashpackers" by reviewing various strands of research on youth travel and mobility, but only from a Western perspective. However, the fact that digital nomads possess digital, social and financial capital that enables them to lead location-independent lifestyles has not been contextualised with respect to the rest of the world. Reichenberger (2018) examines the challenges that a digital nomad lifestyle poses to the leisure-work arena, while Von Zumbusch et al. (2020) build on Reichenberger's (2018) mobility classification of digital nomads to investigate the role that CWSs play in and contribute to digital nomads' wellbeing. Although these insights are valuable, the focus reflects a hegemonic epistemology, wherein the authors primarily examine how Western-owned co-living spaces can better cater for digital nomads. In consequence, they overlook notions of identity and place and lack Indigenous perspectives, while a siginificant number of CWSs are situated in places and spaces that require alternative insights. Ultimately, the safety of working from Westernised spaces and places is nothing more than "the phenotypical whitening of spaces coded as global safe havens from environmental and economic expulsion" (Hayes & Pérez-Gañán, 2017, p. 128). Therefore, it is essential to incorporate non-Western perspectives into discussions on digital nomadism to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The phenomenon of digital nomadism has gathered interest from scholars across different fields, with some examining its emergence in the computer-supported cooperative work sphere (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017) and in the context of remote working in organisational studies (Trimoldi, 2018). These research domains have been criticised for their technocentric and gendered character, which privileges a capitalist perspective (Dy, 2022). For example, Schlagwein (2017) uses the "orders of worth theory" to analyse digital nomadism, which focuses on different economic value systems in modern society. Similarly, Nash et al. (2018) and Wang et al. (2018) adopt technocentric perspectives and explore how digital technologies influence the work practices of digital nomads and challenge conventional organisational structures.

However, these studies are primarily focused on the experiences and perspectives of digital nomads themselves, rather than considering the perspectives of local populations in the Global South. For instance, Orel (2020) researched digital nomadism in Thailand and examined how local infrastructure has adapted to meet the needs of these location-independent workers. His study revealed that

"[d]espite the exponential growth in work-leisure forms of tourism, it is debatable how successful the various types of work-leisure hubs have been in meeting the expectations of this new breed of travellers" (n.p.). Nevertheless, his focus remains on improving ways to cater for digital nomads' needs without considering local perspectives.

A critical perspective on digital nomadism is provided by Aroles et al. (2020) who argue that digital nomadism is not a rebellion against society, but rather an extension of capitalism that is increasingly institutionalised and corporatised. Aroles et al. (2020) contend that digital nomads who have "a high online visibility" represent an elite group of individuals who are privileged and wealthy enough to brand themselves as an alternative to society (Aroles et al., 2020, p. 124). In reality, they do not challenge the system but rather benefit from it. Moreover, Thompson's (2019) analysis of popular events organised by and for digital nomads reveals that digital nomadism has become a commodified industry. This industry includes digital nomad cruises, events, and conferences, bootcamps, co-living places and self-inscribed digital nomad coaches who offer online trainings and courses for aspiring digital nomads. Such commodification is similar to what Richards (2015) found in his research on global nomads, where the commodification of mass tourism, from which backpackers and nomads sought to escape, was recreated by the global nomads themselves. Therefore, digital nomadism may provide a new way of life that challenges the status quo, yet may also become a means of reproducing and perpetuating the existing power structures and inequalities within society. Hence, further research is needed to explore the extent to which digital nomadism is challenging or reinforcing the dominant capitalist system.

Green's (2020) analysis of digital nomadism through the lens of disruption suggests that these tech-travel savvy entrepreneurs are rebelling against society by disrupting traditional industries and ways of working. However, as Korpela (2019) argues in her work on bohemian Western lifestyle migrants to India, these produced lifestyles are primarily a strategic means of utilising the system to maintain financial independence, rather than a genuine challenge to contemporary capitalist society. Moreover, Hermann and Paris (2020, p. 332) argue that digital nomads do not subvert institutional structures, but rather "adapt to neoliberal changes that define contemporary entrepreneurial thinking and technological skills to construct their lifestyle". This opportunism is also noted by Mancinelli (2020), who contends that digital nomads combine different economic strategies to benefit from global inequalities in a capitalist society. Despite their alternative lifestyle, digital nomads only appear to scratch the surface in challenging conventional structures in society.

In light of this, it is argued that the strategic use of identity and migration infrastructures (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014) facilitating location-independence, is what enables digital nomads to profit from

technological advancements and globalisation in pursuit of an autonomous, location-independent work lifestyle. In this thesis, I demonstrate that embodied identities such as class, nationality and gender, and the various migration infrastructures facilitating the flow of digital nomad mobilities, play a crucial role in shaping a digital nomad lifestyle and facilitating their privileged status. By examining these factors, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding digital nomadism and its relationship with contemporary capitalism.

Scholarship on digital nomadism has primarily focused on examining the construction of digital nomad's identity, the strategies they employ, and the specific technologies they use to maintain their location-independent lifestyle. However, my research interest lies in investigating the power relations and embodied identities that underpin this phenomenon. To better understand the broader forces at play, it is essential to consider the multiple infrastructures that shape, control and reproduce the privileged identities of digital nomads' transnational lifestyles. While digital technologies have facilitated an entire new remote work lifestyle, they have also served as the foundation for reinforcing neo-colonial practices of digital nomadism under the techno-capitalist strategies of governments. In the subsequent chapter, I delve further into this issue by exploring postcolonial and feminist geographies and their implications for location-independent work. In doing so, I provide a nuanced understanding of location-independence that acknowledges the complex and often problematic power dynamics at play.

The rise of location-independent workspaces: Coworking spaces

Despite the implications of the term "location-independence', digital nomads are not entirely free from the constraints of place. They travel to and work from locations that offer reliable digital infrastructures and opportunities to connect with communities of like-minded individuals. Digital nomads, along with other mobile workers, utilise portable devices and digital technologies to achieve a degree of location-independence. This flexibility is attributed to the changing work norms and "the proliferation of ubiquitous personal technologies and services", according to Nash et al. (2018, p. 215). Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017, p. 7) suggest that a digital nomad identity is constructed around "digital work, an extreme form of mobility and travel, and independence from organizations". As a result, the appeal of place is largely determined by the quality of its digital infrastructure. Ultimately, a mobile workforce that relies on digital technologies has different place-based needs than tourists or lifestyle migrants. The demand for reliable and fast internet access has made locations with excellent digital infrastructure increasingly desirable (Cook, 2020; Spinks, 2015). Richards (2015, p. 16) notes that a digital nomad's lifestyle is "sustained by the Internet, and their sociality is therefore more digital, and more dispersed. But in order to sustain their 'self-contained' existence, they actually become acutely

dependent on the local context, which provides a comfortable resting place, and crucially an Internet connection". Digital nomads must ascertain reliable Wi-Fi access and the availability of suitable workspaces in every new location they visit before commencing their travels. Additionally, they need to identify a network of like-minded individuals with whom they can connect in the places they go to.

CWSs offer an essential, though not exclusive, infrastructure for digital nomads to manage and shape their mobile work-life. The role of place in a digital nomad's work-life is what Felstead et al. (2005) refer to as "workscapes", which is "the total network of workplaces and workstations that are occupied by the individuals or groups in the course of their employment" (p. 16). For digital nomads, their workscapes are found in liminal places, which are places of "in-betweenness" where individuals are in a state of liminality, "neither this nor that, and yet is both" (Turner & Turner, 1970, p. 99). Liminal workplaces for digital nomads, also known as "third places" (Oldenburg, 1999), include Airbnb's, modes of transportation used for travel while working, libraries, airport lounges, cafés, CWSs, and virtual paces for connecting and networking. One could argue that, given the intertwinement of online work in the lives of digital nomads, their workscape consists of whatever place they embody. CWSs, however, are specifically designed as shared workspaces for mobile knowledge workers and therefore provide the necessary infrastructure for mobile work.

It is important to note the intertwining of digital nomadism and CWSs, as digital nomads are likely to use the services offered by CWS managers. Digital nomads' work practices are shaped and influenced by technological and socio-material infrastructures, which are key tenets of CWSs. However, it should also be noted that CWSs articulate with a much wider range of location-independent workers and location-independence than just what digital nomadism is associated with. As the following section shows, the practices of mobile working have existed for a while, and this thesis explores the concept of coworking by critically reviewing scholarship on the practices of remote working and how, since the 21st century in particular, CWSs emerged and proliferated around the world.

The electronic cottage

> Tearing our families apart, rocking our economy, paralyzing our political systems, shattering our values, the Third Wave affects everyone. It challenges all the old power relationships, the privileges and prerogatives of the endangered elites of today, and provides the backdrop against which the key power struggles of tomorrow will be fought […] The Third Wave brings with it a genuinely new way of life based on […] a novel institution that might be called the "electronic cottage" (Toffler, 1980, p. 26).

The concept of remote working is not new, as noted by Johnson et al. (2001). Futurologists Alvin Toffler (1980) and Marshall McLuhan (1960) wrote about the idea of detaching work from conventional office buildings, relocating work into or near home space, supported by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Toffler (1980) introduced the concept of "the electronic cottage" in 1980, as part of a shift in the decentralisation of work and production that would change the nature of work and workplace, making home again the "centre of society" (p. 210). This predication has become a reality, as the changing nature of work and the workplace has shifted to the virtual realm (World Economic Forum, 2020b). Telework, a term coined in the 1970s, emerged when communication technologies allowed people to work from locations other than the office (Nilles et al., 1976). Telework was described as the future of work (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990) and, supported by ICTs, led to an increase in remote work options for white-collar knowledge workers. The alternative work arrangements that teleworking enabled, led to the potential for relocation of office-based work to other places. The spatial fixity of employment could thus move outside and beyond the office. Telecentres, which emerged in the mid-1970s, functioned as "satellite offices" that were located within close proximity to the employee's home and at a relatively far distance from the company's headquarters (Nilles et al., 1976). The size and scope of telecentres varied and offered services to a wide range of people, yet all of these telecentres only emerged in affluent countries in the Global North. Kojo and Nenonen (2017) provide an exhaustive overview of the different types of telecentres.

Serviced offices

The rapid development of digital technologies since the early 2000s has led to a significant increase in the use of mobile phones and laptops, making them ubiquitous devices in households in advanced economies in the Global North (Greengard, 1994; Taylor, 2023). This increase in access to ICTs coincided with the introduction of the term "digital divide", which referred to unequal distribution of access to ICTs among different populations (Pierce, 2019). The proliferation of digital technologies led to a decline in the importance of telecentres that provided access to computers and other office equipment for a fee (Kojo & Nenonen, 2017). Instead, serviced offices became popular in the 1980s and 1990s, offering a range of services to small-scale businesses in locations that accommodate up to ten people per room (Reed & Stewart, 2003). Serviced offices provided companies with material and digital infrastructures, including ICT infrastructures, furniture, office equipment, and catering (Reed & Stewart, 2003), and were initially mainly used by start-ups in "poor" locations in cities in the US during the 1960s and 1970s (Gibson & Lizieri, 1999). During the 1990s, the real estate and commercial property market recognised the potential of the serviced office sector, which became increasingly commodified (de Peuter et al., 2017; Kojo & Nenonen, 2017). Mark Dixon, director of Regus Business

Centre, established several serviced offices in the UK in the 1990s to provide flexible office space for remote workers. His business quickly became the global market leader in serviced office space around the world, characterised by high rents in financial business districts and close to transport hubs (Regus, 2023). Serviced offices now cater to corporate offices and employees who still prefer conventional office-based settings, with the option and mobility to work from various serviced offices worldwide.

Coworking spaces

The advancement of digital technologies in combination with the global economic crisis of 2007-2009 has led to a proliferation of entrepreneurs and freelancers. This phenomenon is a critical component of the platformisation of the knowledge economy, as noted by scholars such as De Propris (2013) and Moriset (2014). Initially, entrepreneurs and freelancers predominantly worked from home (Grazian, 2020). However, this arrangement was less than ideal, as there was an increased need for collaborative space to facilitate creativity and enable start-ups to flourish. Brad Neuberg, the founder of the first CWS, observed that the home environment did not provide adequate space for such purpose:

> Traditionally, society forces us to choose between working at home for ourselves or working at an office for a company. If we work at a traditional 9 to 5 company job, we get community and structure, but lose freedom and the ability to control our own lives. If we work for ourselves at home, we gain independence but suffer loneliness and bad habits from not being surrounded by a work community. Co-working is a solution to this problem. In co-working, independent writers, programmers, and creators come together in community a few days a week. Co-working provides the office a traditional corporate job, but in a very unique way.
>
> Brad Neuberg, founder of the first CWS in San Francisco, in Jones et al. (2009, p. 9).

Spiral Muse, a CWS located in San Francisco, is often cited as the first officially mentioned CWS in both scholarly and popular literature (Jones et al., 2009).[2] In 2005, Bradley Neuberg, a Silicon Valley programmer, founded Spiral Muse with the intention of working independently while still being part of a community of likeminded individuals (Jones et al., 2009). The concept of CWSs was readily welcomed by those working in high-tech and creative industries, whose jobs were predominantly situated within the gig-economy (Bates, 2019; Green, 2014). Typically, CWSs are located in or near prime locations within central business districts (CBDs) and in close proximity to amenities such as transportation hubs and coffee shops (Di Marino & Lapintie, 2017). However, this can contribute to

[2] The Hat Factory followed one year later (Hunt, 2009).

the gentrification of neighbourhoods (Merkel, 2015) and may lead to a shift in the morphology of city centres, as CWSs attract a new group of mobile workers to the areas in which they are situated. Therefore, it is important to consider the potential impact that CWSs may have on the local community and urban landscape.

The idea behind CWSs is to strike a balance between freedom and routine by providing a physical environment, digital tools, and social relations that allow people to "work alone together" (Spinuzzi, 2012). CWSs are designed not to only provide the digital infrastructure but also to foster community, collaboration, openness, accessibility, innovation, creativity and knowledge exchange (Cabral & Winden, 2016). People who work in CWSs share similar norms, values and ideas and identify with a sense of community (Merkel, 2015). Tara Hunt (2009), co-founder of the CWS *The Hat Factory* in San Francisco, describes three levels of "experience" within coworking communities: coworker; catalyst; and space owner. Coworkers are people who work at the CWS or spread the idea through word of mouth, while catalysts are those who initiate a CWS and eventually become space owners. Hunt emphasises the importance of one's network in setting up a CWS, stating that little investment money is needed. However, the success of CWSs is not solely determined by one's network, but also by factors such as location, education level, and access to resources and capital (Mosey & Wright, 2007; Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, the image provided by Hunt can be seen as superficial and rooted in opportunism, neglecting the underlying structures of society that contribute to social inequalities and power asymmetries between CWS users and non-users. It is important to acknowledge that CWSs can contribute to the reproduction and reworking of these power dynamics.

The emergence of CWSs has been nothing short of extraordinary. What started with a single CWS in San Francisco in 2005, has since blossomed into a global phenomenon, with 26,300 CWSs with 2,680,000 members in 172 countries in 2020 (Deskmag, 2019). Even though this is a very small component of the total workspace landscape, the proliferation of CWSs does signal the growing demand for flexible and collaborative work environments. Despite pandemic struggles, CWSs are expected to continue growing (Berbegal-Mirabent, 2021) (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2). While most CWSs today are trendy, fashionably designed shared workspaces (Grazian, 2020; Lorne, 2020), van Meel and Vos observe that the playful character of 'fun-offices' offered by large corporate companies such as Google HQ, represents only a fraction of all organisations. It is the design, multimedia and IT businesses that have a young workforce and are relatively successful, enabling them to invest in "extras" (van Meel & Vos, 2001, p. 331). CWSs materialise the "rise of the creative class" (Florida, 2019), where people are between home and work, and between private and public places (Akhavan, 2021).

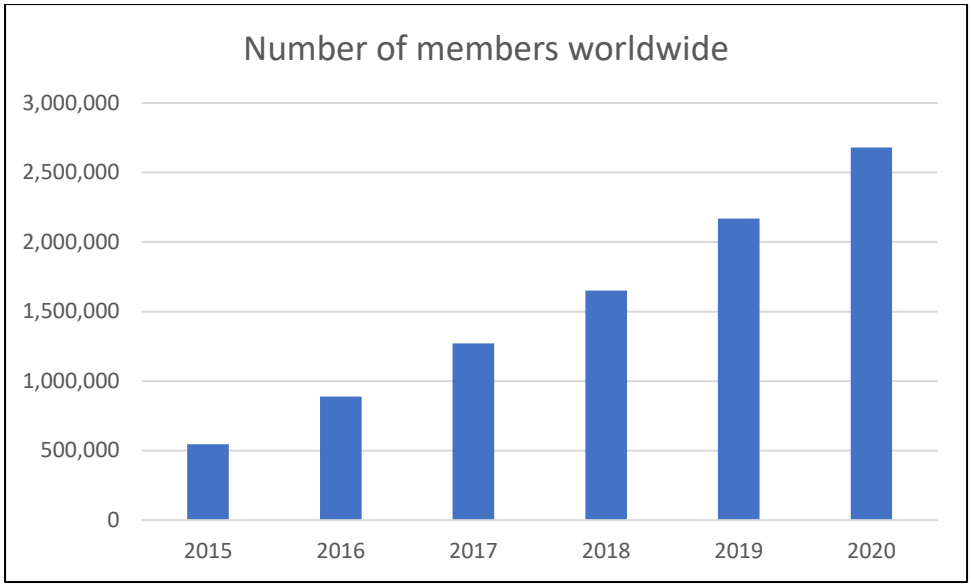

Figure 2.1: Number of members in CWSs worldwide (adopted from Deskmag 2019 survey)

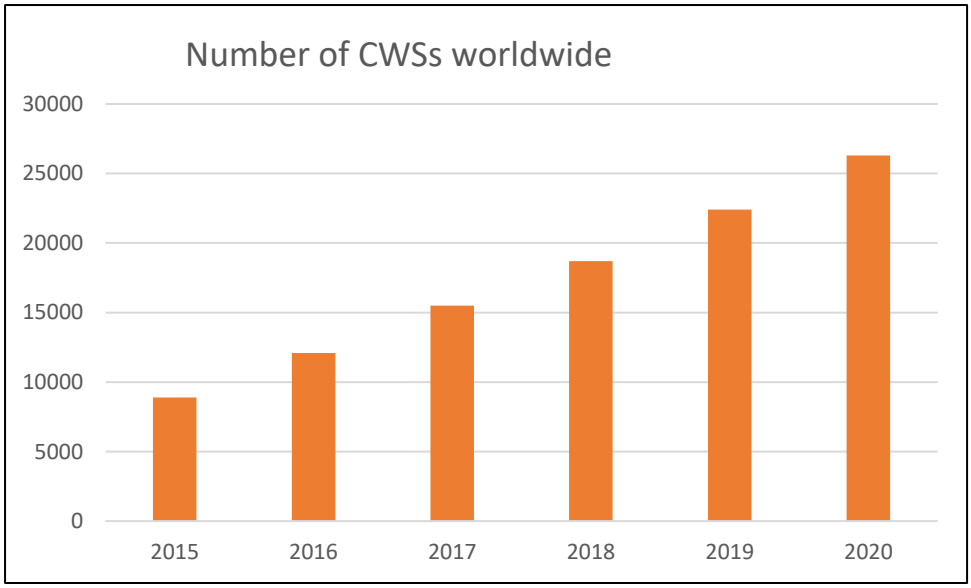

Figure 2.2: Number of CWSs worldwide (adopted from Deskmag 2019 survey)

Capitalising on CWSs

The gradual corporatisation of CWSs has resulted in the emergence of several key players in the market, such as WeWork and IWG (International Workplace Group), who have taken a prominent position in offering trendy and collaborative workspaces to the creative class in large cities. WeWork and IWG are global leaders in providing shared workspaces, capitalising on the concept of hybrid working and exploiting the growing number of freelancers and entrepreneurs (Gandini & Cossu, 2019). Adam Neumann, the founder of WeWork, describes the idea as follows: "[t]he company leases office

space, redesigns it, and sublets it to tenants, catching the eye of millennials with trendy work spaces and happy hours that foster a 'physical social network'" (*Financial Times*, 2016).

Since opening its first office space in Manhattan, New York in 2010, WeWork[3] has expanded globally and now has 740 CWSs across 140 cities in 37 countries in 2022 (see Fig. 2.3). In a similar vein, IWG is rolling out franchise plans to only one or two parties per respective country, effectively offering serviced office space in almost every city in the world. In 2021, IWG signed multiple franchise partnerships with "local" real estate businesses to open up more flexible workspaces in countries such as Thailand, Romania and India (IWG, 2021b). Mark Dixon, the founder of IWG, believes that "[h]aving a base in local communities where people actually live also enables companies to recruit better people, attracted by flexible working" (IWG, 2021a, n.p.). WeWork follows the same approach by targeting regions such as the Asia-Pacific to further expand their businesses. In 2016, WeWork raised 430 million USD from Chinese investors to launch CWSs across China (*Financial Times*, 2016). With the growing trend of hybrid working and the need for flexibility in the workplace, the demand for CWSs is only expected to increase, and companies like WeWork and IWG are well-positioned to benefit from this trend.

The global expansion of WeWork and IWG represents a capitalist form of production and postcolonialism, where Western concepts of shared and serviced office spaces dominate cities in the Global South by buying up local land and leasing it at much higher prices. In their pursuit of power and economic profit, Western-based office space providers engage in infrastructural domination in the Global South, which can be seen as a form of neo-colonialism. These shared office spaces are privileged places, accessible only to those with enough network capital, and are no longer the disruptive, small-scale initiative-based CWSs they once were (Gandini & Cossu, 2019).

[3] WeWork has faced significant struggles since its opening, that can be attributed to its unsustainable business model and its rapid expansion (*The Guardian, 2019)*.

Figure 2.3: WeWork's global expansion, with over 800 locations worldwide. Adopted from WeWork, 2022

Butcher (2016) argues that the rapid expansion of CWSs has resulted in a shift away from the ideal of community towards a greater emphasis on the need for organisation to achieve economic sustainability, with economic goals superseding social or environmental sustainability. Coworkers position themselves against traditional ways of working and in doing so construct a neoliberal ideology of "community" constituted by independent individuals. In turn, the dominant disposition within CWSs remains entrepreneurial and seemingly loosely regulated (Butcher, 2016), with coworkers independent while also subject to exploitation as a consequence of their precarious work arrangements. Therefore, the mainstream idea of working from CWSs has become a commodified and capitalised product, further exacerbating the economic inequalities between the Global North and South.

The rise of global franchise companies in the coworking industry is accompanied by a growing number of independent, community oriented CWSs that operate on a non-profit basis. These smaller-sized CWSs, often referred to as "makerspaces" or "fablabs" (Smith, 2017), are characterised by their collaborative practices, communal spirit, and use of open-source software and hardware technologies (Niaros et al., 2017). They are part of what has been recently termed "the third wave" of coworking (Gandini & Cossu, 2019), which is characterised by spaces that are funded and supported by local government bodies and businesses to promote innovation, attract tech talent, and foster community development in urban and suburban areas (Bouncken et al., 2018). However, despite their seemingly open and public nature, these CWSs are paradoxical due to their location and design, which often limits access to a certain range of people and identities, contributing to the co-production of desired bodies and practices in space (Ishitsuka, 2020). This is in contrast to large-sized spaces that have an

organisation habitus due to the commodification of coworking. While the role of managers in curating shared workplaces has material and social implications, it has been largely overlooked in scholarship on CWSs, with notable exceptions being De Vaujany et al. (2019) and Merkel (2019). Chapter 6 of this thesis explores this topic in detail.

Coworking spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand, a geographically isolated island nation-state in the Pacific, has a population of over 5.1 million inhabitants and an urbanisation rate of 86.79% in 2021 (Stats NZ, 2021). The country's ethnicity is diverse, with 70.2% identifying as European, 16.5% as Māori, 15.1% as Asian and 8.1% as Pacific (Stats NZ, 2018). The official languages of Aotearoa New Zealand are English, Te Reo Māori, and New Zealand Sign Language. The emergence and globalisation of CWSs as a new trend in work geography have led to similarities between CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand and those in other international cities like Berlin, London, or Amsterdam.

In 2009, BizDojo, the first CWS in Aotearoa New Zealand, opened its doors in Auckland and soon expanded to multiple spaces in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch. From 2016-2017, BizDojo saw 300 percent growth, more than tripled its staff numbers, and increased its revenue from NZD 2.2 to 12.5 million (Bayleys, 2016). However, in 2018, Bizdojo went into liquidation due to unpaid lease rents to Tātaki Auckland Unlimited (former ATEED), and two days later, the entire BizDojo group was sold to multinational firm IWG (*NZ Herald*, 2018). The acquisition is indicative of the market domination of global leaders in CWS provision and their capitalisation on the concept of coworking.

The number of CWSs in Auckland has increased significantly since BizDojo's opening, with 106 registered CWSs in 2022 (Coworker, 2022) (see Fig. 2.4). The total shared workspace area in Auckland increased from 1,400 square metres in 2011 to 13,800 square metres in 2016, indicating the growing popularity of CWSs (Bayleys, 2016). The average monthly price for a permanent desk for a member is NZD 509.91, while a day pass averages NZD 32.80 (based on available information of all listed CWSs). However, there is a wide variation in individual rates and perks offered with memberships, with prices ranging from $240.00 NZD per month for a dedicated desk at "Silverfox" in Whangārei to $755.00 NZD per month at "Digital Nomad", a boutique urban CWS in Wellington CBD (Coworker, 2022).

The establishment of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand serves as an illustration of the diverse range of CWSs present in other Western nations. These CWSs range from multinational franchise companies such as WeWork and IWG, which offer shared workspaces in metropolitan areas, to smaller community-based CWSs located in suburban areas (Jamal, 2018; Mariotti et al., 2021). This spectrum of CWSs highlights the extensive array of choices available to individuals seeking collaborative work

environments across various geographic locations. Examining the growth of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand and other Western countries highlights their role in shaping modern work practices and transforming conventional workspaces.

The dominance of a few major CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand raises concerns about the concentration of power and limited options for potential clients. It also highlights the challenges faced by smaller and independent CWSs in competing with larger organisations. However, there is also potential for collaboration and cooperation among CWSs, which can help to create a diverse and inclusive coworking ecosystem. For example, some CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand have formed networks to share resources, knowledge, and expertise, and to collaborate on projects and events. The Coworking Aotearoa Association, established in 2018, is an example of such a network, which represents and supports the interests of independent CWSs across the country (Basestation, 2018).

Figure 2.4: Distribution of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand, in 2022. Created with Google My Maps

Driven by expansion and competition, many larger businesses in Aotearoa New Zealand are seeking ways to expand their operation across the country (Bayleys, 2016). According to Coworker.com, which is the largest flexible office marketplace worldwide, the corporate sector in Aotearoa New Zealand accounts for 30 percent leasing contracts for CWSs. CWSs have experienced a significant growth in Aotearoa New Zealand, with a 25 percent increase in shared office space rentals between April 2017 and 2018, and the trend is expected to continue (Coworker, 2022). However, the majority (71%) of CWSs in Auckland are controlled by three main providers, namely BizDojo, B-Hive, and Generator (Coworker, 2022). While these are all local chain companies, international office space provider Regus (IWG) has also entered the CWS market in Aotearoa New Zealand, with sixteen serviced office space locations launched in Auckland (10), Wellington (3), Christchurch (2) and Dunedin (1) (Regus, 2023).

Most CWSs are located in urban and suburban areas, which is constituent with the dominant trend in Europe and the US, where the majority of CWSs are situated in or near CBDs and major transport hubs (Berbegal-Mirabent, 2021). However, the recent emergence of CWSs in rural towns is an indicator of the need for community spaces in more isolated places, particularly in an Aotearoa New Zealand context. Similar trends have been observed in Australia where a 2017 study found that CWSs in regional areas predominantly consisted of relatively newly launched businesses, as compared to the more established businesses in urban areas. In addition, only a small percentage (7%) of all CWSs in Australia (300) were located in the outskirts of urban areas (Mahlberg & Riemer, 2017). Mahlberg and Riemer (2017, p. 16) suggest that “these spaces have been established to support the development of local employment opportunities and are thus vehicles of economic development, galvanising business communities in regional areas, but often inspired by city-based models in terms of form and function”.

As CWSs are designed around innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital technologies, they tend to attract millennials who are drawn to the concept of “work and play”. While CWSs are concentrated in inner city precincts, catering to individuals residing in or near dense urban areas with easy access to excellent infrastructure and amenities, the precarious nature of freelancers’ and entrepreneurs’ work means that these spaces are often located in areas prone to redevelopment. This could potentially lead to the gentrification of the urban areas where the CWSs are located (Merkel, 2015; Morgan, 2020).

CWS scholarship: the need to critically look at bodies, identities and space

Research on CWSs has been carried out across a range of disciplines, including business, organisation and management studies (Capdevila, 2015; Gandini & Cossu, 2019), geography (Brown, 2017; Moriset, 2013), planning (Jamal, 2018; Law & Mol, 2001), and sociology (de Peuter et al., 2017). However, what characterises most of this scholarship is its tendency to examine coworking mainly from a

technological and masculinist perspective, with a focus on celebrating innovation, technologies and networking (Berbegal-Mirabent, 2021). This "celebratory framework" dominates the research focus and overlooks the ways in which performances of masculinity contribute to the reproduction of globalising techno-capitalism (Gandini, 2015). Additionally, the growing body of research on CWSs is heavily concentrated in Europe (Berbegal-Mirabent, 2021), which minimises insight into the cultural and geographic diversity of this emergent phenomenon.

The adoption of a Western model of "entrepreneurial spaces" (Luo & Chan, 2020) onto emerging knowledge economies in the Global South has been covered by some authors, highlighting power relations and development potential. In the Philippines, for instance, CWSs have been described as exclusive spaces for a "select class of independent knowledge workers" (Tintiangko & Soriano, 2020, p. 82), producing socio-spatial inequalities and asymmetries in the digital geographies of work. Similarly, a recent study on the emerging coworking landscape in Nigeria (Adegoke & Comunian, 2021) highlights the need to decolonise Western knowledge about the creative economy. Coworking in Nigeria is "not merely another business sector that is expanding globally, but a platform enabling economic and societal changes that might have a broader impact" (p. 69). By focussing on digital technologies, innovation, networking, and entrepreneurship in scholarship, there is a tendency to overlook structural inequalities in terms of digital, social, and cultural capital, as well as to neglect the different embodied experiences people have in CWSs and how bodies and practices are co-produced.

In conclusion, there is a pressing need for a nuanced and critical approach to studying CWSs that acknowledges the ways in which they reproduce globalising techno-capitalism and contribute to social and spatial inequalities. This requires a broader geographic scope and a more inclusive and diverse perspective that considers the different embodied experiences of individuals in CWSs.

Thus far, I have demonstrated how the proliferation of digital technologies have enabled greater mobility of workers, leading to the emergence of various remote workspaces, including telecentres, serviced offices and CWSs, which have transformed the role of physical spaces in the digital geographies of work. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 resulted in a significant reduction in spatial mobility, as restrictions on travel and government-imposed lockdowns forced a massive shift towards remote work among knowledge workers. Against this backdrop, the final section of this chapter examines the impact of the pandemic on the future of work, particularly in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, and underscores the changing significance of place and mobility in the digital geographies of work, in line with the central argument of this thesis.

The future of work: the COVID-19 pandemic

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the focus in the digital geographies of work has shifted towards the normalisation of the concept of remote working (Hermann & Paris, 2020). Mandatory work-from-home policies induced by nationwide lockdowns have resulted in significant changes in the way people use space for work. The digitalisation of work has enabled remote work opportunities from homes, and organisations of all sizes and scopes have had to adapt to the pandemic, leading to changes in the meaning of place and mobility in the digital geographies of work.

As a result of this increased hybridisation of work, CBDs worldwide have experienced a surge in empty office spaces. Reports indicate that nearly 16 percent of offices in New York and over 20 percent in San Francisco are currently vacant (*The Economist, 2022)*. Rather than structurally lowering rents, landlords are resorted to offering financial incentives to attract tenants to occupy their dormant offices. These incentives include rent-free months or trendy designed and furnished interiors, which bear similarities with the design of CWSs. The question that arises is whether, in the post-pandemic era, office spaces will regain their attractiveness. CWSs, as providers of shared workspace, might be well-positioned as pioneers in offering a more flexible approach to the fixed spatiality of work than conventional organisations. This possibility is explored in Chapter 7.

The pandemic has significantly impacted the digital geographies of work and has resulted in a fundamental shift in the meaning and identity of place and mobility. The increasing possibilities of remote working have transformed the traditional understanding of geographical location for work and living. With work no longer being spatially fixed, remote workers can now choose to move to smaller cities and enjoy a lower cost of living. In response to this trend, cities are beginning to compete for remote workers, a phenomenon referred to as the “great tech migration”. US cities (such as Albany or Tulsa), and US regions (such as Northwest Arkansas or West Virginia) that had previously experienced brain drain, with promising young workers leaving for larger, more thriving cities, are now in demand among remote workers who seek better work-life balance and quality of life (Kenny, 2021; Staley, 2023), promoting themselves as “knowledge towns”.

The technology sector has been a significant driver of this migration, as professionals in this industry relocate to lesser-known, often overlooked cities that are not traditionally considered as places with an attractive start-up climate (Mills, 2021). Local governments incentivise remote workers with high salaries, as they bring money into the local economy once they live and work from the respective city. While incentive programs for remote workers already existed before the pandemic, the pandemic is likely to accelerate this process (Lindzon, 2020). The decentralisation of capital and the mobilisation

of work have resulted in a growing focus on cities that are being framed as potential innovative remote work-hubs, offering a better quality of life for remote workers.

In light of these developments, it is critical to explore the implications of the pandemic on the geography of work and understand how it has influenced the digitalisation of work, the meaning of place and mobility, and the future of office spaces.

Home as the new workspace: insights from Aotearoa New Zealand

Like many countries around the world, the people of Aotearoa New Zealand have been compelled to work from home due to extended public lockdowns, vaccine mandates in various business sectors, and the need to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community. The resulting increase in remote work from home has led to many offices in Aotearoa New Zealand being almost completely abandoned, as reported by Carroll (2020). Green et al. (2020) estimated that, in 2020, as a result of the persistent threat of the virus, 29 percent of the entire Aotearoa New Zealand workforce would quickly transition from centralised workspaces to work remotely from home fulltime. As of early 2023, large national organisations have already allowed employees who can work remotely to stay at home. For instance, ASB, one of the largest banks in Aotearoa New Zealand, states that about 80 percent of its workforce is currently working from home, but the bank is "committed to maintaining its current office spaces", according to Carroll and Smith (2022, n.p.).

The shift towards remote work-from-home has lowered the demand for office spaces, as noted by Bollard (2021). Many companies have adopted hybrid working models, allowing employees to work part-time from home and part-time from the office (Carroll & Smith, 2022). Companies in the US have gone even further, adopting a "remote-first" policy in which a significant proportion of office workers' hours are spent at home, resulting in nearly two-thirds of office workers working remotely from home on average, resulting in empty offices (*The Economist, 2021*). The rise of remote work is also changing transportation patterns, as living outside metropolitan areas and working from home makes commuter areas more appealing places to live. This trend is already evident, with Stats NZ data showing sustained levels of internal migration from city precincts to provincial centres in Aotearoa New Zealand (the districts of Horowhenua, Thames-Coromandel and Selwyn for instance have noticed a considerable increase of net internal migration in 2020) (Olsen, 2020). The reduced reliance on working from the office gives employees more flexibility in deciding where to live (Olsen, 2020). Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand, to embrace remote work, and this trend is transforming traditional culture and changing patterns of urbanisation.

The current legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand presents challenges for employees who wish to work from home. The Employment Relations Act 2000 requires employers to give their consent before an employee can work remotely, stating "an indication of where the employee is to perform the work" (Carroll & Smith, 2022, n.p.). The Act only allows for exceptions if there is an explicit agreement for the employee to work from home, as entirely working from home is seen as "a fundamental change that cannot be unilaterally imposed by an employer" (Hornsby-Geluk, 2022, n.p.). Despite the availability of flexible working options such as remote work and CWSs, the Employment Relations Act still assumes a fixed location for work, rather than acknowledging the mixed spatiality of work. This creates challenges for conventional employers who have employment contracts, as they must meet the requirements of the Act, which includes providing a safe and ergonomic home work environment, appropriate breaks, securing office equipment and online information, addressing privacy concerns, and covering additional expenses such as heating and electricity (Hornsby-Geluk, 2022). According to a study by Donnelly and Proctor-Thomson (2015 n.p.) on the aftermath of the Christchurch 2011 earthquake, extending work "to an individual's homes raises significant legal and employment concerns around the balancing of worker privacy and safety rights with organisational data security". Although businesses and organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand are transitioning towards hybrid models of work, there are still numerous obstacles that need to be addressed to ensure the rights of employees working from home. However, not all employees have suitable home-work environments, and the blending of personal and professional life creates additional challenges (Klerk et al., 2021). CWSs are well-positioned to facilitate shared workspace for individuals who are adopting these emerging practices in the geography of work and who are willing to pay a daily membership rate for the services provided. The socio-material and digital infrastructures of CWSs can assist in transitioning to more hybrid forms of working for both employers and employees, which I discuss further in Chapters Six and Seven.

There is a noticeable shift in the way employees think or feel about their work and the future of work, as demonstrated by the delay in returning to the office. For instance, there has been a growing interest from students in professions centred on health and wellbeing (*The Spinoff, 2021*). This trend is part of a larger phenomenon known as "the great resignation" or "the big quit", in which employees are leaving their jobs to find more meaningful and/or financially lucrative work, while also becoming less dependent on location for work (Coltman, 2021). The increasing number of people considering changing jobs has put pressure on employers to make their work situations as attractive as possible, resulting in significant increases in salary, four-day workweeks, or employee share-schemes, and forcing employers "to sell themselves to current and future staff" (*1News*, 2022, n.p.). Frances Bearne, Director of Auckland-based Human Focus Consulting, states that "the days of just supplying a fruit

bowl are over, and retaining staff is about offering better training, pay, work-life balance and flexibility" (Coltman, 2021, n.p.). This shift is part of the growing emphasis on work-life balance in society, where the workplace is seen as a place of service rather than simply a place to work (Richardson, 2021) and enabled when the employment rate is low. However, it is important to point out that there is only a slight proportion of the total global workforce that can work remotely. McKinsey Global Institute estimates that 20 percent of the global workforce could work remotely (from three to five days a week), whereas the majority of the workforce is tethered to place. The "potential for remote work is highly concentrated among highly skilled, highly educated workers in a handful of industries, occupations, and geographies" (Lund et al., 2020, p. 2).

Crisis of care

The prolonged border closure in Aotearoa New Zealand, which lasted from March 2020 to April 2022, and the opportunity it provided for individuals to reflect on their wellbeing during pandemic lockdowns, has created an environment conducive to seeking a better work-life balance. However, the ability to effect and afford changes in their work arrangements, and to demand or negotiate for a better work-life balance, is predominantly enjoyed by white-collar workers who have already acquired certain privileges, social, cultural and network capital (De Casanova, 2015; Mills, 2002). According to research by Cole et al. (2021), poor working conditions and lower social status of essential workers, such as frontline workers with direct client contact and migrants during the pandemic, have led to "intense outbreaks of disease among marginalized groups" (Cole et al., 2021, p. 1) as compared to white-collar workers who can work safely from home. This demonstrates the existence of inequity in living and working conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions worldwide and has exposed systemic socio-spatial inequalities (Rose-Redwood et al., 2020). The World Economic Forum's (2020b, n.p.) Future of Jobs Report reveals that:

> 44% of workers are able to work remotely during the COVID-19 crisis while 24% of workers are unable to perform their current role. This estimate indicates an aspiration to expand the availability of remote work. The current theoretical share of jobs that can be performed remotely in any given economy has been approximated at 38% of jobs in high-income countries, 25% in upper-middle income economies, 17% in lower-middle income economies and 13% in low-income economies. When adjusted to account for disparities in internet access by economy, the same figures decrease to 33.6% of jobs in high income economies, 17.8% of jobs in upper-middle income economies, 10% of jobs in lower-middle income economies, and just 4% of jobs in low-income economies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified socio-spatial inequalities between workers and countries, particularly in relation to the ability to work from home. According to the World Economic Forum (2020b), the IT and Insurance industries have the greatest opportunity for remote work possibilities, with 74% of workers in those sectors reporting access to remote working (World Economic Forum, 2020b, n.p.). The pandemic has also underscored the increasing dominance of technology in society, and economies with inadequate IT infrastructures are expected to be ill-equipped to participate in the future of remote and hybrid forms of work. Furthermore, it is essential to note that the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of automation and artificial intelligence in the workplace (Singh & Tarkar, 2022), which has the potential to displace low-skilled workers, and further exacerbate existing inequalities. Therefore, it is important to consider the implications of such technological advances and their effects on the labour market structures, particularly in terms of inequality and access to work opportunities. For this reason, there is a pressing need for policymakers to address these disparities and ensure that all workers have equal access to opportunities for a better work-life balance.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the inequalities in employment patterns, particularly with regard to gender. In Aotearoa New Zealand, women accounted for 90% of the employment drop due to the pandemic, primarily because most women work in the service sector, which was disproportionately affected (*The Spinoff, 2021*; Thorpe, 2022). Additionally, Māori women working in the tourism industry were further marginalised, as the workforce in this industry shrank by 20.5% (*The Spinoff, 2021*). Working from home has become a privileged choice (Felstead & Reuschke, 2020), available only to those in particular occupations who possess the necessary resources, digital literacy, and space. The pandemic has exacerbated socio-spatial inequalities internationally, highlighting a "crisis of care" (Fraser, 2016). Critical research has identified new forms of gender and women's subordination in increasingly techno-capitalist societies in the Global North (Rose-Redwood et al., 2020). The "crisis of care" refers to the gender asymmetry of working from home combined with caregiving responsibilities. Minello et al. (2021) researched the unequal parenting arrangements of 20 working mothers during the pandemic, revealing the uneven gender geographies of work and home. Women's participation in affective and material labour continues to be undermined and reproduced by financial capitalism (Fraser, 2016). The gendered geographies of work-family balance have always been uneven, but the techno-capitalism underpinning these developments in advanced economies in the Global North only exacerbates the subordination of women while celebrating technological developments and financial gains (Fraser, 2016). Therefore, greater engagement with critical feminist theories is necessary to examine the uneven geographies of remote work resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. As suggested by Iacovone et al. (2020), creating "[c]are-full dialogues as an antidote to technocratic solutionism" (p. 126), may be a way forward.

The reconfiguration of work and workspace: highly uneven geographies

The preceding sections highlight the ways in which digital technologies have transformed the nature of work and the workplace (Adey et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift towards remote working, which blurs the boundaries between public and private space and home and workspace. This thesis explores the notion of location-independence from two interrelated yet distinct socio-spatial vantage points: digital nomads and CWSs, both of which are pioneers of location-dependent work. In Chapter 7, the implications of the pandemic on location-independent workers and workspace are examined in more detail, given the severe disruptions to the infrastructures that facilitate this form of work.

The rapid evolution of technology has revolutionised work and workplaces, demonstrating their disruptive potential and the dependence of society on them. These new forms of remote work, workspaces and the subjectivities of work are changing the way space is perceived and organised. However, the hegemonic discourse on digital technology (Richardson, 2017) marginalises feminist voices and undermines principles of care, affect and emotion (Tronto, 2017). Moreover, technological advancements exacerbate socio-spatial inequities within and between countries, as social differences including gender, ethnicity, age, digital literacy, and class are unevenly distributed across geographic locations.

Scholarship on digital nomadism, as highlighted in this chapter, primarily focuses on the construction of digital nomad identity, the strategies they employ, and the specific technologies they use to become a digital nomad. Although such scholarship has contributed to a great generation of knowledge on a relatively new trend, it does not directly address the significances of identities and power relations behind the phenomenon, as I explore in Chapter 5. One way of looking at the wider forces enabling location-independence is to examine the multiple infrastructures that shape, control and reproduce the privileged identities of digital nomads and their transnational location-independent lifestyle. I argue that digital technologies enable an entire new remote work lifestyle, but that they also provide the foundation to further reinforce neo-colonial practices of digital nomadism under techno-capitalist strategies of governments. This phenomenon highlights the need for critical inquiry into the power structures and cultural values that shape the development and implementation of digital technologies, particularly in relation to the globalisation of work and its associated inequalities. Such an inquiry should be informed by a diverse range of voices, including those marginalised by the current hegemonic discourse, to promote more equitable and just forms of digital nomadism.

The advancement of digital technologies has facilitated the mobility of workers and the emergence of remote workspaces, such as telecentres, serviced offices, and CWSs, which have transformed the role

of space in digital geographies of work. However, scholarship on CWSs has mainly adopted a technological, masculinist perspective, focussing on the celebration of innovation, technologies, and networking while overlooking structural inequalities in terms of digital, social, and cultural capital, as well as the diverse embodied experiences of people in CWSs and the coproduction of desired bodies and practices. This gap is addressed in Chapter 6, where the specific curation of space in CWSs producing desired identities is examined, along with infrastructures that facilitate and regulate remote work from these shared spaces.

Throughout this thesis, it is argued that there is a need for more engagement with critical feminist postcolonial theories in scholarship on the digital geographies of work, which provides a scope to examine the different power relations that come into play in location independence. This is elaborated on in Chapter 3. Moreover, a geographies of embodiment perspective is brought in, which addresses power relations, bodies, identities, and ethics of care in the multiple geographies produced by, through and of the digital. The aim is to critically analyse the changing meaning of place and mobility in the digital geographies of work through the exploration of digital nomads, CWSs, and the disruptions brought about by the pandemic in location-independent work. By adopting a critical feminist postcolonial perspective and taking into account the geographies of embodiment, this thesis offers a nuanced understanding of the power relations and socio-spatial dynamics at play in the digital geographies of work.

Chapter Three

Digital geographies of work, mobilities and bodies: a literature review

> For feminist digital geographers, staying with the trouble means attending to and unpacking how people make sense and meaning of data and technologies in the spaces and practices of their everyday lives, how they grapple with the effects and consequences of a digital society, and how these effects and consequences manifest differently across spaces and subject/ivities (Elwood & Leszczynski, 2018, p. 640).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of literature and ongoing debates concerning digital geographies of work, mobility, and embodiment. It serves as a platform for exploring the concept of location-independence in a digital society. In order to accomplish this goal, I identify and discuss key critiques of digital geographies of work, mobility, and embodiment, including those from postcolonial and feminist geographies.

I begin by examining scholarship on digital geographies of work, emphasising how technological advancements have transformed the geography of work and how these new technologies intersect with power relations, creating unequal gendered and classed geographies with potential neo-colonial dimensions. While digital technologies offer opportunities to advance the field of digital geographies of work, they can also exclude and marginalise people and places, thereby creating geographies of exclusion. Building on these accounts, I then review literature on digital geographies of mobility, examining how technology intersects with mobility practices and shapes them. Specifically, this thesis explores how digital technologies can enable, reproduce, and disable international mobility and migration. By critically analysing the implications of various migration infrastructures that regulate digital mobilities, I highlight the relations of power intersecting with migration infrastructures and the socio-spatial inequalities in the field of digital geographies of mobilities. Finally, I bring the digital geographies of work and mobilities into dialogue with feminist digital geographies of embodiment, which offers a particularly useful lens through which to examine bodies, identities, and power. The feminist perspective is essential for understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of digital geographies of work, and it helps us to recognise the various ways in which power operates within these geographies.

This chapter present a new perspective on digital geographies, namely digital geographies of embodiment, which examines how digital technologies intersect with bodies, places and spaces. This perspective incorporates a focus on embodied identities, including gender, race, class, and Indigeneity, as well as an ethics of care perspective. By analysing the role of the body in work, mobility, and place, it becomes possible to reveal relations of power and uneven geographies, for example geographies that are characterised by unequal distribution of power and resources. To establish a geographical approach that highlights the social dimensions of digital technologies, I adopt a critical feminist postcolonial geography lens in this field of study. This approach moves away from a dominant stance in scholarship that places strong emphasis on the potentialities of digital technologies for changing societies. Instead, by focussing on embodied identities and an ethics of care perspective, embodied geographies scholarship contributes to a nuanced understanding of the digital geographies of work, place, and mobility. In the following section, I first introduce scholarship on digital geographies of work

and incorporate a feminist perspective to highlight how digital geographies of work intersect with gender, ethnicity, race, and class.

Digital geographies of work

Digital geography is a research field situated at the intersection of technology, embodiment, space, and place (Ash et al., 2018; Brown & O'Hara, 2003; Doughty & Murray, 2016; Elwood & Leszczynski, 2018). Since the 1950s, digital technologies have greatly influenced travel, work, connectivity, and production, leading to the permeation of the digital into all socio-spatial dimensions of society. This deep embeddedness highlights not only the need to acknowledge the prominent role of digital technologies in everyday lives but also the obligation to critically intervene in digital geographies as a field of research. Gieseking (2019, p. 85) explains how geography, as a discipline, is uniquely positioned in understanding the interconnectedness of physical landscapes, human societies and technological developments:

> Geography as a discipline bears special responsibility in critically examining and intervening in the spread of digital devices, platforms, and code as they infiltrate, define, and shape the spaces and experiences of all human and animal life.

Geographical research has increasingly focused on the impact of digital technologies on work practices, as evidenced by scholars such as Barns (2019); Bissell (2020); McLean (2019); Richardson (2021); and Schwiter and Steiner (2020). This proliferation of research can be traced back to the seminal work of Ash et al. (2018), which marked a 'digital turn'[4] in geography. Rather than fundamentally altering the discipline, the digital turn highlights how the intersection of the digital and geographical can inform and enhance research in terms of epistemology, ontology, and methodology, and challenges the notion of the digital as a separate entity from the "real" world. Ash et al. (2019) state:

> there is a need to think critically about the relationship between geography and the digital, thinking of 'digital geographies' as a turn *towards* the digital as object and subject of inquiry in geography, and as a simultaneous inflection of geographical scholarship *by* digital phenomena, is more meaningful in that it allows us to think about how the digital reshapes many geographies, mediates the production of geographic knowledge, reconfigures research relationships, and itself has many geographies" (p.5, italics in original).

[4] While Ash et al. (2018) have marked a formal recognition of this shift, the underlying processes and implications had been evolving prior to this publication and can be traced back to the works of Castells' (2000) *The Rise of the Network* Society, Harvey's (2000) *Spaces of Hope*, Crang et al.'s (1999) *Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space and Relations*, and Kitchin and Dodge's (2011) *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life*.

The integration of digital technologies into people's everyday geographies influences and shapes the spatialities of daily life, as well as the ways in which work is conducted and spatially organised (Kitchin & Dodge, 2011; Martins, 2015; Richardson, 2015). Automation, enabled by digital technologies, has led to a displacement of many jobs and a reconfiguration of the spatiality of work (Acemoglu, 2019). The emergence of the platformisation of work is of particular interest in this thesis. The platform or online "gig" economy[5] is a diverse digital economy formation, facilitated by online platforms that connect people globally for the exchange of various research and goods (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). The platform economy originally evolved as an alternative, decentralised economic space where buyers and sellers could interact without the need for intermediaries (Martin, 2016). Peer-to-peer access became hugely popular, resulting in venture capitalists monetising on consumption goods (Richardson, 2015) under the appearance of the "positive symbolic value of sharing" (Frenken & Schor, 2017, p. 4). The platform economy has created new digital infrastructures and has fundamentally changed the scope and scale of economic activities, serving as a prime example of how geographies of work are produced by digital technologies. Consequently, the platform economy has transformed work practices and increased the spatial organisation of work, as digital technologies produce "flexible arrangements of space and time, creating forms of independence, interdependence and dependency that challenge orders of work-life division" (Richardson, 2021, p. 347).

The increasing platformisation of work, where the exchange of work occurs online, has been facilitated by digital technologies and has created a global platform for gig-workers and freelancers who must compete for the same "gigs". This phenomenon has emerged due to the intersection of digital technologies with neoliberalised dimensions of capitalism (Richardson, 2021). Neoliberalist approaches to work have attributed greater roles of responsibility, participation, and involvement to workers, which has displaced them from structured and stable employment relationships (McDowell, 2004). As a result, employers have shifted away from offering conventional forms of employment that provide long-term contracts and social benefits, towards a more flexible organisation of labour characterised by short-term contracts and social insecurity (Murgia & Pulignano, 2021). While neoliberalism has led to greater flexibility in work arrangements, it is important to note that it has also led to a highly competitive labour market where employers are competing with each other to attract talent and retain employees, such as the recent introduction of 4-day workweeks (Coltman, 2021).

[5] It is important to note that the platform economy and the "gig" economy have overlapping characteristics but are not the same (Vallas & Schor, 2020). E.g., someone can work in the gig-economy but not necessarily through digital platforms. Vice versa, someone can work in the platform economy but with a more permanent contract, rather than a "gig".

The changing digital geographies of work have been predominantly framed in a manner that highlights the positive aspects of neoliberalism and the platform economy, praising the increased access to work and the perceived autonomy and freedom it offers (Duggan et al., 2022) (for an overview of critique see e.g., Strauss, 2018, 2020). However, this framing often overlooks the deepening socio-structural inequalities in society (see e.g., Barzilay & Ben-David, 2017; Vyas, 2021). Women, for example, are disproportionally affected by the platform economy, which is characterised by low-paid and precarious jobs (Vyas, 2021). Furthermore, the algorithms that underpin the platform economy are often biased towards women, which further disadvantages them (Vyas, 2021). Edwards and Veale (2017, p. 28) argue that "[a]lgorithmic systems trained on past biased data without careful consideration are inherently likely to recreate or even exacerbate discrimination seen in past decision-making". Companies such as Uber, Airbnb and Amazon have unprecedented control over the organisation of work through the "algorithmic logics" (Crampton, 2016) that operate behind the digital interface of the platform (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). The algorithmic systems in the platform economy have reformatted and digitally disrupted labour, contributing to uneven digital geographies of work (Cockayne, 2016; Graham et al., 2015; Waite & Lewis, 2017) by reorganising and deterritorialising work arrangements (Richardson, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the deepening inequalities and biases in the platform economy to ensure fair and equitable working conditions for all.

Technological advancements in the geographies of work have given rise to a growing awareness of gendered power relations in the platform economy (Hua & Ray, 2018). Historically, women have been underrepresented in the fields of ICT and creative industries, with only 26% of women working in computing jobs in the US in 2016, of which 3% were black or African-American women (The National Center for Women & Information Technology, 2021). Furthermore, Nixon and Crewe (2004, p. 146) argue that work in the creative industries is subject to a "tightly regulated and circumscribed set of gender codes", demonstrating the intersectionality of work in the technology sector with gender, age, and class. Gender biases in the technology sector are also evident in the representation and portrayal of technology advertisments, with women being underrepresented, and Black and Latino women being almost entirely absent from such advertisements (Persaud et al., 2018). The construction and perception of gender roles in the ICT sector are rooted in longstanding heterosexual and masculine notions of identity (Virani & Gill, 2019). Despite claims of liberating labour, gender inequality in conventional labour settings continues to prevail in the digital geographies of work. This is evident in the intersection of digital technologies of work and migration, as demonstrated in the work of Altenried (2021); and Gebrial (2022), amongst others.

In his book *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society*, communication and information scholar Jan Van Dijk posits that digital technologies are believed "to provide radically new socioeconomic, political, and cultural opportunities for all people in society" (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 164), where both citizens and governments believe in the liberating power of technologies for economic development. However, Van Dijk (2005) points out that the perceived necessity of "epoch-defining" technologies for progress, creates exclusions in society, as not everyone has digital literacy, access to, or availability of digital technologies. In capitalist economies "access needs are determined by the state and extent of the market – the market of production, exchange, consumption, and labor" (p. 165) and inevitably exclude certain people, leading to a digital divide. The digital divide exacerbates socio-spatial inequalities by unevenly representing certain groups within society that use digital technologies, both within and between countries in the Global North and South, as highlighted by Dodge and Kitchin (2001).

The widespread use of digital technologies has led to the emergence of new technological affordances, such as smart devices and wireless networks in the home. These IT affordances have intersected with gendered transformations in work that have been unfolding for decades (Webster, 2014). The platform economy increasingly makes it possible for a range of services to be provided online, including food and shopping delivery services and digital assistants. Such services have traditionally been performed by women and are now being outsourced(McLafferty, 2005) which, in theory, results in a greater amount of free time for women. However, Jarrett (2015) points out to the immaterial aspects of unpaid labour in the digital spheres (such as maintaining a community page or commenting on Facebook posts) and how behind the popular digital media platforms lies immaterial consumer labour. In addition, it should be noted that the benefits of technological advancements are predominantly enjoyed by white and well-educated women from the Global North, further perpetuating the privileges that have been created by colonialism (Gorski, 2002). As a result, women of colour are disadvantaged in society (Laurie et al., 2014; Marcelle, 2008), and this illustrates the uneven power relations in technology (Kitchin, 2014). Norms that govern the "uses of time and space which affect online use" continue to disadvantage women in society (Kleine, 2019, p. 230), leading to a gender digital divide. Although digital technologies have created opportunities for women, such technologies are still subject to "the uneven social relations from which they [have] arise[d]" (Kitchin, 1998; Laurie et al., 2014, p. 35). The uneven availability and distribution of technologies within and between people mean that "while some women may find opportunities to rework gender through access to new technologies, these opportunities are not open to all women, and especially not to the poor" (Laurie et al., 2014, p. 35). The highly gendered character of technology, as well as the intersection of race, class, and ethnicity with digital geographies of work, illustrate the uneven power

relations that underlie technological developments. The ways in which technologies have been designed disproportionately affects the most vulnerable members of society (Ash et al., 2019), and this has created an uneven landscape in the digital geographies of work. This has led to scholars contesting the technocratic and neoliberal approaches to everyday geographies (Lynch, 2020; Mouton & Burns, 2021). Digital geographer Lynch, for instance, calls for researchers to focus on the inclusion of subjectivities across the lines of gender, race, and ethnicity, to shed light on more grassroot initiatives. Critical social scientists point out that the labour arising from these digital platforms is often precarious and conducted by immigrant workers, women, or those with a lower social status, which intersects with race, nationality, gender, age, and class (van Doorn & Vijay, 2021), which I discuss in more detail below.

Feminist digital geographies of work

Elwood and Leszczynski (2018) employ feminist perspectives to enhance the understandings of digital geographies of work. The focus of feminist digital geographies is on the production of knowledge in the digital realm and how digital geographies of work intersect with social identities such as gender, race, and class. Feminist digital geographers "take seriously work from postcolonial geographies, black code studies, and queer theory that demonstrates the transformative significance of theorizing from these positions" (p. 639). Perspectives from feminist digital geographies connect everyday practices to space and place and examine how datafication, coding, and algorithms produce subjectivities and normative framings in everyday work geographies. A feminist approach to the geographies of digital work can be utilised to "demonstrate the richness and complexity of feminist thought for critical perspectives on the emergent properties of work with and through digital technologies" (Richardson, 2018, p. 245). This approach forms part of the embodied geography framework which guides the contextual framing of the literature review. Feminist perspectives on digital geographies of work bring to the forefront how bodies and subjectivities are framed within and produced by digital technologies, and how technology and politics influence these bodies. The work of Holloway et al. (2000) has already demonstrated the gendered nature of computers, and Elwood and Leszczynski (2018) extend this notion by showing that, due to the gendered nature of technology, masculinity continues to dominate a technology-driven society. As such, feminist digital geographers aim to "unsettle the masculinist epistemologies undergirding much of digital work" (Elwood & Leszczynski, 2018, p. 630).

Feminist digital geography offers valuable insights into the queerness of digital geographies and represents one way to enhance understanding of the complexities of digital work. Richardson (2018) has made important contributions to the field by using a critical feminist lens to understand the role that digital technologies play in the geographies of work. She highlights that digital technologies

"enact an *extension* of the activities that count as work, together with an *intensification* of working practices (2018, p. 244, italics in original). The digitalisation of work intensifies the blurring of public and private space, as well as that of home and workspace. The boundaries between work/leisure and private/professional life have become increasingly blurred, and disruptive technologies that have led to a mobilisation of work, workplace, and workers challenge normative understandings of being "at" work (Richardson, 2018).

With reference to digital technologies that have created new platforms and infrastructures for work, a feminist approach to intimacy in the workplace recognises the ambivalent properties of these technologies. Richardson (2018, p. 252) argues, "knowing working space through intimacy means paying close attention to what it feels like to be 'at' work amidst the emergent properties of the digital workplace". In making this statement, Richardson draws on scholarship from emotional labour, ethics of care, and embodied geographies to emphasise the importance of "bringing the body" into the spheres of digital geographies of work. This approach also guides the philosophical underpinnings of this thesis.

A feminist perspective on the digital geographies of work can be used to challenge the dominant discourse on technologies that marginalises and devalues principles of care, affect, and emotion in the social, political, and economic arrangements of capitalism (Tronto, 2017). Moreover, it acknowledges the potential of technologies to destabilise patriarchal structures and challenge techno-centric views of the world. By addressing "digital practices as a social praxis" (Elwood & Leszczynski, 2018, p. 630), feminist geographers focussing on the digital geographies of work specifically examine how gender relations in digitally-mediated work are reproduced.

Feminist digital geographies of work provide valuable insights into the queerness of digital geographies, and serve as a means to enhance the understanding of the complexities of the geographies of digital work. This field of study also extends the critique of gendered divisions of labour, which has directed attention to the association of masculinity with paid work outside the home and the predominance of women in domestic reproductive and caring work (see e.g., Bondi & Rose, 2003; Massey, 2013; Meehan & Strauss, 2015). Spatial separation is a key element in the spatialisation of the gendered division of labour, where men carry out productive work in public spaces, while women engage in reproductive work in private spaces (Massey, 2013). However, technological developments such as laptops, smartphones, and WiFi have led to a spatial reconfiguration of work, resulting in the transformation of the home into a workplace (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). This transformation has been amplified by the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020), where working from home has created a new dimension of location-independence. Consequently, the geographies of work

have undergone significant changes, and these transformations are underpinned by digital mobilities, which have reorganised the socio-spatial environment in a digital society (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). In Chapter 7 of this thesis, I explore in detail the theme of location-independence. Furthermore, it is important to note that technological advancements and their impact on the geographies of work are not limited to gender, but also intersect with other embodied identities, such as race and class. Therefore, adopting a feminist postcolonial geographic perspective, I analyse the production of digital geographies of mobilities, with a special focus on location-independence, and demonstrate how digital technologies intersect with different notions of identity (gender, race, and class) in shaping the digital geographies of mobilities.

Digital geographies of mobility

Geographers who study digital mobilities focus on how "digital technologies reorganise socio-spatial relations between different activities, such as work, rest and mobility" (Ash et al., 2016, p.17). Digital mobilities, as a field of study, encompasses all kinds of mobilities made possible by technological advancements (Cresswell, 2016; Hannam, 2009; Sheller & Urry, 2006) and the reshaping of the socio-spatial environment in a digital society. The underlying principle of digital mobilities is the continuous optimisation of the flow of mobilities by digital technologies, which enhances the mobility of some while restricting the mobility of others (Adey et al., 2020). The use of digital technologies has enabled faster and more accurate screening of mobile subjects, such as the use of biometrics for border control (Muller, 2019), thereby contributing to the socio-technical infrastructures surrounding border control. However, these technological advancements can hinder the flow of certain mobilities, as digital technologies have led to increased surveillance and control by global mobility regimes (Cohen, 2021). Digital technologies can transform mobilities, but the decisions of whom it is accessible to and where it is accessible, lies on the premise of who programmes and deploys these technologies (Dowling, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic provides an excellent example of this, as in times of uncertainty, technologies and increasing surveillance techniques were used to control and rewrite borders, which severely restricted people's mobility (Adey et al., 2020), leading to situations where immobility becomes a marker of privilege (Bissell, 2021). This topic is discussed further in Chapter 7.

The debate surrounding digital mobilities traces its origins to the "mobilities turn" (Sheller & Urry, 2006), which marked a paradigmatic shift in mobilities research by highlighting the embeddedness of mobility within daily lives and its role in shaping social identities. This turn provided alternative theories and methodologies that challenged the epistemology and ontology of socio-spatial scholarship on mobilities and how movement was understood and analysed (Sheller & Urry, 2016). Through an emphasis on the complex relational dynamics of mobility and the embodied practices of

movements and flows, mobilities scholarship shifted its focus from thinking in terms of entities to thinking in terms of relations (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Consequently, the new mobilities paradigm offers a relational understanding of the complexity, multiplicity, and interconnectedness of mobility in society, challenging mainstream scholarship (Adey, 2017; Sheller & Urry, 2006).

Incorporating these alternative perspectives enables scholars to recognise the crucial role digital technologies play in the production of mobilities. Technological transformations have led to the emergence and enhancement of mobility practices, ultimately reconfiguring the relationship between people and place (Housley et al., 2023). Smith (2023) aptly points out that "[d]igital mobilities thus reshape relations of proximity and propinquity in and through the flow of images, information and other forms of interaction and expression […] digital mobilities can be considered as constituted through existing social relations and inequalities, as well as being reflexively constitutive of them" (pp. 58-59). Therefore, the significance of the new mobilities paradigm for understanding digital geographies of mobilities in this thesis is that it highlights the interconnectedness of digital mobilities with every aspect of people's everyday geographies while acknowledging the uneven relations of power involved in the shaping and facilitation of digital mobilities.

Although technological advancements have enhanced the mobility of people, goods, and services by increasing their intensity and velocity of movement (Sheller & Urry, 2006), scholars have noted the need for caution, as an increased state of mobility fails to acknowledge the exacerbated socio-spatial inequalities (see e.g., Cassiers & Kesteloot, 2012; Cresswell, 2016). Therefore, Cresswell (2016) argues that scholars need to consider the politics of mobility, as mobility practices stretch across different spaces and are subject to relations of power. There has been a growing geographical scholarship that focuses on the entanglements of power in mobility research, advancing the understanding of the relationship between uneven relations of power and (im)mobility (see e.g., Adey, 2017; Cohen et al., 2015; Straughan et al., 2020). An important way to analyse unequal access to mobility comes from Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013), who propose a "regime of mobility framework" that asserts that "there are several intersecting regimes of mobility that normalize the movements of some travellers while criminalizing and entrapping the ventures of others" (p. 189). Deploying a regimes of mobility approach makes it possible to address a "range of actors within specific situations, including, but not exclusively, state actors" (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 196). Particularly when researching digital geographies of mobilities that cross borders, the role that state actors and intermediaries play in the production of digital mobilities should not be overlooked. Cohen (2021) adds to the global regime of mobility framework by proposing that there exists a plurality of regimes that intersect and overlap on various levels, of which many are unofficial. On the micro-level, informal regimes can be found, for instance, in who is granted or denied access to someone's home. On the macro-level, various regional

and global mobility regimes control and regulate movement for individuals, such as the Schengen Visa Area, highly skilled migration regimes in, for instance, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Canada, and other cross-border mobility visa policies that grant access to some while denying entry to others (see e.g., Mau et al., 2015; Tkach, 2021; Vosko, 2022). The various levels of regimes of mobilities that are active and the ways in which they intersect give important insights for analysing how digital geographies of mobility are produced in this thesis.

As global mobility regimes increasingly permit digital mobilities, the emergence of special visas for the "transnational middle-class leisure oriented mobilities" (Alexandri & Janoschka, 2020, p. 3202) creates practices of neo-colonialism, in which individuals from the Global North strategically use their nationality, gender, class, and digital literacy to live and work in countries with lower living costs. This has resulted in mobile practices/lives such as (volun)tourism (Raymond & Hall, 2008), lifestyle migration (Hayes & Pérez-Gañán, 2017), and digital nomadism (Thompson, 2019) being viewed as modern forms of colonialism, facilitated by digital technologies. The ease with which (digitally enabled) mobile people can move across borders and spaces "become[s] a mechanism for the reproduction of social privilege, the granting of particular subjects with the ability to see and to move beyond the confined spaces of a given locality" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 85).

Ellermann and Goenaga (2019) note that the facilitation of digital mobilities is underpinned by uneven relations of power, including discriminatory mechanisms of international visa regimes. These visa policies are designed for positive selection based on one's nationality and the statistical profiling of belonging to social groups deemed at a higher risk to "violate the conditions of their admissions" (p. 106). The facilitation of smart border programmes by digital technologies also leads to a mobility regime where "privileged business class citizenship" is favoured while heavily constraining the movements of other groups (Sparke, 2006, p. 151). These "cutting-edge surveillance technologies" form part of the global mobility regimes, "profoundly changing the border control processes […] represent[ing] effective tools for drastically limiting movement of 'third countries' nationals, as well as aspirations of freedom of refugees and displaced people who are blocked behind newly erected borders" (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022, p. 1822). Therefore, it is crucial, especially in a neo-colonial context, to pay attention to the gendered, economic, and political structures within which digital mobilities operate, as their privileged movements are a critical part of understanding the production of the uneven landscape of digital mobilities. This is why I turn to feminist postcolonial critique of mobility studies next.

Feminist postcolonial geographies of mobility

Feminist postcolonial theorical approaches direct attention to the invisible workings of power and the ways in which indentity is constructed. The emphasis on uneven relations of power and the reinforcement of socio-spatial inequalities makes these approaches an important perspective in the field of digital mobility scholarship. One key area of interest for feminist postcolonial geographers is the interplay between bodies and spaces, and how normative standards shape the sense of belonging or exclusion from a particular space (see for instance Ahmed, 2000; Puwar, 2004). The focus on the mutual construction of bodies and spaces has implications for the study of digital mobilities, particularly with regard to how digital technologies further enable privileged groups to move across borders, reinforcing existing inequalities in the process.

An important aspect of feminist postcolonial theory is the critique of mobility scholarship, and Sara Ahmed's (2000) *Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality* is a significant contribution to this discourse. Ahmed (2000) focuses and the body and challenges the dominant narrative of migration and home, which characterises home as a place of fixity and migration as a mechanism for constructing identity. Instead, she highlights how migrants can feel disconnected and out of place even when embodying a particular place, placing the emphasis on the embodied dimensions of transnational lives. This feeling of displacement and disconnection often arises from encounters with "strangers", rather than from any inherent fixed difference. Ahmed's (2000) critique provides an important feminist and postcolonial perspective on migration scholarship, exploring how race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect with transnational mobility, and paving the way for other critical mobility scholars to respond to uneven power relations.

As a result of this growing critical scholarship, there has been a shift towards more inclusive accounts of ethnicity, nationality, gender, race, and place (see for example Fechter, 2016; Hof, 2018; Leonard, 2010), in which identities are shown to be constructed by mobilities and are subject to place/space, rather than being static or "fixed" (Elliot, 2016). For example, Hof (2018) notes the negligence of notions of identity (race and gender) that intersect with the privileged lives of lifestyle migrants. Hof discusses the racial dynamics of young EU professionals moving to Singapore and Japan, demonstrating how the "intersections of race and gender shape their migration experiences" (p. 45). By focussing on the embodied experiences of young EU professionals and how power relations influence their identity, Hof demonstrates the interlinkages between embodiment, mobility and identity.

Feminist postcolonial geographers are devoted to uncovering uneven power relations that exists within society, and a powerful way in which they achieve this is by challenging the dominant power

structures. Raghuram et al. (2014) suggest that the knowledge epistemology is centred around the West, resulting in a critique of Anglo-American domination in scholarship, both in terms of knowledge production and producers. Parvati Raghuram's (2008) work serves as an example of how feminist postcolonial frameworks can be used to critique the patriarchal geographic knowledge produced. Raghuram highlights how migrant women in migration scholarship are usually associated with less-skilled employment or skilled female migrants predominantly working in the reproductive sectors, such as social work or teaching jobs, whereas male migrants are typically associated with skilled employment. By challenging the dominant Western-centric narrative, Raghuram offers insights into understanding complex and marginalised identities in postcolonial places and spaces, which leads to scholars reflecting critically on their work (Raghuram & Madge, 2006), assuming responsibility for differentiating the production of knowledge (Jazeel, 2017). Feminist postcolonial frameworks can be employed to acknowledge the "ways in which colonial processes produce, inscribe, and maintain "difference" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples" (De Leeuw et al., 2011, p.22). Feminist postcolonial and decolonial geographers contend that Indigenous perspectives must be considered, enabling scholars to be attentive to non-western and non-dominant perspectives of marginalised people. Decolonial scholar Grosfoguel (2007) argues that there is a "body-political" location of those who speak, with different notions of identity (ethnicity, race, gender, nationality, class, etc.) and their embodiment in the "geo-political" location – the geographical and cultural environment – shaping the "ego-political" idea that Western knowledge is still regarded as universal truth. Feminist and decolonial scholarship recognise how embodying a specific place influences and shapes the construction of knowledge. Indigenous people are often treated as passive subjects in research from the Global North where researchers find a "solution" to a Western identified "problem", excluding any Indigenous research methodologies. Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) argues that including and acknowledging Indigenous research practices creates a more inclusive epistemology of academic research. By emphasising marginalised groups in society, such as women, people of colour, or "disabled" bodies, feminist postcolonial geographers aim to change the dominant Western narrative.

Decolonial geographers offer a critique of the colonial narrative that elevates technology and mobility as indicators of progress (McEwan, 2018; Mignolo, 2011). In this regard, Datta (2018), a feminist postcolonial urban geographer from India, argues that dominant Western geographical theories do not have universal relevance in the conceptualisation of smart cities in India. She demands a reconceptualisation of geography scholarship that recognises the pluriversal nature of knowledge (Jazeel, 2019). To achieve this goal, it is essential to acknowledge and adress the ongoing presence of coloniality and give more prominence to Indigeneity (Radcliffe, 2017; Shaw et al., 2006; Sittirak & Meksawat, 2019). For instance, in the settler colonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Stokes (1987)

created a platform for scholarship on Māori geographies, leading to the acknowlegment of Indigenous perspectives in Aotearoa New Zealand geography. By incorporating Māori perspectives into research on topics such as geographies of health (Panelli & Tipa, 2007), sexualities (Hutchings & Aspin, 2007), and tourism (Ringham et al., 2016), conventional discourse on these matters can be reframed. Acknowledging and exploring "other" epistemologies as contributors to knowledge production challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies (Shaw et al., 2006). Chapter 6 of this thesis explores Māori geographies to gain a better understanding of coworking spaces (hereafter CWSs) in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The feminist postcolonial critiques on digital geographies of mobility highlight the significance of colonial histories and power imbalances in shaping mobility practices. It is through new engagements with digital technologies that these colonial legacies continue to impact societies in uneven ways, as exemplified by the digital divide previously discussed in this chapter. By attending to voices of the marginalised and contesting the dominant Western narratives, feminist postcolonial theories can enhance scholarship on digital geographies of mobility and promote progress towards a more equitable future in which digital mobilities operate (Sheller, 2018). Sheller argues that such perspectives can challenge the existing power structures and contribute to a just and inclusive digital society.

Moving through infrastructures

In recent years, there has been increasing attention placed on infrastructure within migration and mobility studies, as a means to examine the facilitation and control of cross-border movement (Lin et al., 2017; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Infrastructures take on various forms, as noted by Larkin (2013), encompassing "technological systems, […] financial instruments, practices of accounting and budgets, or management structures and organizational techniques, […] biological, embodied in the physicality of men […], or are they social, composed of practices of visiting, drinking tea, and greeting, investments into sociality that can pay off by creating a web of connections that can be relied on for all sorts of social, economic, and political work" (pp. 338-339). Such infrastructures play a significant role in enabling, sustaining, and restricting the flow of mobilities, and are central to discussions around the "middle space of migration" (Kern & Müller-Böker, 2015). By examining migration infrastructures, scholars draw attention to the social and technical systems that enable and direct mobility. This broader perspective is necessary, as various technologies, institutions, and actors contribute to and condition cross-border movement. The expanded focus on infrastructures where "both the social and the technological are imagined as hybrids of human and nonhuman association, with infrastructure

conceptualized as a sociotechnical assemblage, and urban social life as never reducible to the purely human alone" (Amin, 2014, pp. 137-138) has been an important development in mobilities scholarship.

Xiang and Lindquist (2014) have advanced the understanding of migration infrastructures by opening up the "black box" in migration research (Lindquist et al., 2012), revealing the so-far taken-for-granted regimes that control transnational migration. Xiang and Lindquist's work outlines a framing of migration infrastructures spanning five logics of operation: "the commercial (recruitment intermediaries), the regulatory (state apparatus and procedures for documentation, licensing, training, etc.), the technological (communication and transport), the humanitarian (NGOs and international organizations), and the social (migrant networks)". Rather than existing as separate entities, these logics intersect and overlap to form a complex network of influences on mobility (Collins, 2021). Xiang and Lindquist (2014, p. S124) reveal that "it is not migrants who migrate, but rather constellations consisting of migrants and non-migrants, of human and non-human actors". Thus, migration infrastructure is constituted by a complex intertwining network of technologies, institutions, and actors that mediate, enable, and structure the process of migration. In Chapter 7, I explore this topic in further detail. Amin (2014, p. 138) posits that infrastructures should also be understood in relation to their symbolic meanings, their affective qualities, and their aesthetic function. He argues that "public sentiments of progress, modernity and wellbeing become attached to iconic buildings, highways, or new housing and shopping complexes". It is important to note that despite their perceived fixity and neutrality, infrastructures generate a variety of possibilities that are complicit in shaping uneven landscapes of mobility (Kathiravelu, 2021).

Xiang and Lindquist's (2014) key work on identifying several migration infrastructures has opened up new avenues for promising research, as evidenced by studies such as Carling and Collins (2018); Cranston et al. (2018); De Haas et al. (2019); Koh and Wissink (2018); Lin et al. (2017); and Yeoh et al. (2017). Koh and Wissink (2018) trace the intermediaries that facilitate the flow of "elite transnational lifestyle migrants" and argue that employing a migration infrastructure lens onto the "super-rich" can expand the account of the diverse facilitators who drive the process of migration. According to Koh and Wissink (2018, p. 603), intermediaries "play a crucial role in enabling, structuring, and creating the highly unequal opportunities and capabilities of groups to fulfil mobility and activity needs that the politics of mobilities literature draws attention to". Similarly, Yeoh et al. (2017) analyse the mobility in international marriage by tracing non-state actors such as marriage brokers, and place scrutiny on the role they play in the production of migration infrastructures while being attentive to emotions and affect. By looking at the diverse intermediaries embedded in the infrastructures that facilitate and co-produce the flow of mobilities, a more developed perspective can be created to

understand how, in the case of this thesis, the digital geographies of location-independence are produced.

The focus on migration infrastructures that allow for people to become digital nomads or to maintain this particular mobile work- and lifestyle, can act as "a vehicle for understanding contemporary processes of migration" (Cranston et al., 2018, pp. 551-552). Mancinelli (2021) notes that gaining more insight into the actors that structure mobile lifestyles can enhance migration research. Chapter 6 of this thesis specifically examines the practices of managers of CWSs who facilitate workspaces for a digital literate and location-independent group of people, providing a diverse and nuanced perspective to understand the flow of digital mobilities. These insights are significant for this research, as they relate to the intersectionality of mobility and migration with digital technologies.

While the analysis of infrastructures alone may not fully elucidate migration processes, it does provide a lens through which to examine the specific social processes in which migration is embedded. Lin et al. (2017, p. 170) observe "[h]ow infrastructures produce and mobilise migrant subjects thus have direct consequences on the way societies are being (re)organised through the resultant mobilities". Sheller's (2018) work on mobility justice advances the debate in mobility studies by critically combining mobility and migration strands. Mobility justice can be understood as "an overarching concept for thinking about how power and inequality inform the governance and control of movement, shaping the patterns of unequal mobility and immobility in the circulation of people, resources, and information" (Sheller, 2018, p. 14). Sheller highlights the unequal production, distribution, and experience of mobility, as well as its intersection with age, class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and abled bodies, which create hierarchies. Thus, she presents the entangled dimensions of power in the production of mobility and the role of socio-technological infrastructures that are constitutive of the politics of mobility, taking place at different scales. These can include "local, regional, urban, national and global systems for control over space, territory, communication, and speed, which produce differential mobility regimes; this means not only border controls, and passport, visas, or pass systems, but also control over logistics, energy infrastructure, and the resources that enable more efficient mobility for the elite, and it should be said, for military powers" (Sheller, 2018, pp. 23-24).

Sheller adopts an embodied approach in understanding mobilities, noting that "as we remake mobility, we also remake space, and transform ourselves" (2018, p. 23). Her work is significant for understanding the uneven geographies of mobilities produced by the digital and how infrastructures can facilitate, produce, restrict, and constrain mobilities. Drawing from Sheller's (2018) framework of mobility justice, I am particularly interested in examining how digital geographies of mobilities are

underpinned by relations of power by examining the embodied practices of digital mobilities – a perspective that flows through Chapters 5-7. Recent scholarship has emphasised the importance of critically examining the scale of the body and how processes of migration are co-produced through the body (Benson, 2018; Collins, 2021; Cranston & Duplan, 2023).

The material presented so far, illustrates the mechanisms by which power operates through both formal and informal actors, operating at multiple levels with the aim of promoting mobility for certain groups while hindering it for others. Such a state of affairs holds significance for comprehending and encoutering location-independence, which constitutes the central theme of my thesis. To this end, in the subsequent section, I bring digital geographies of mobilities and work into dialogue with digital geographies of embodiment to scrutinise the nexus between the body, workplace, mobile lifestyles and asymmetrical power dynamics.

Digital geographies of embodiment

This thesis contributes to the understanding of digital geographies of work and mobilities by drawing on geographies of embodiment, which highlights the importance of considering the body's role in digital spaces. Kinsley (2014, p. 378) argues that "technical activities convene assemblages of bodies, objects, languages, values and so on and fold them in and out of spatial practice". Therefore, I argue that scholarship on digital geographies would be enhanced through a greater focus on how geographies are produced through, by and of the digital, while at the same time are co-produced and experienced through the body. Therefore, a greater focus on the body is required to enhance digital geography scholarship, which should engage with feminist theories and geographies of embodiment, especially within the digital realm. Ash et al. (2018, p. 29) argue that a critical interrogation with digital geography scholarship is necessary to enrol "the digital within critical geographic praxis whilst simultaneously engaging digitally mediated knowledges". Adding to this, McLean (2019, p. 4) argues that "we do not yet know the extent of the shifts that digital geographies may offer, as important questions are being formed about how digital geographies work, and how societies and environments are remaking these spaces. For instance, do we consider emotion, affect and ontologies as central to this digital turn?" In line with and adding to McLean's argument, I suggest that there is value in linking digital geographies scholarship to a focus on ethics of care, power relations and embodied identities, so that the multiple geographies produced by, through and of the digital can be considered more carefully. As digital space is an extension of lived social relations (McNay, 2004), the power dynamics of technology are present in the production of space, and an embodied geography perspective can help to situate accounts of the digital and its articulation with power geometries.

The work of embodied geographies is central to highlighting the role of the body in multiple geographies and offers ways to understand emotional and embodied geographies in places and spaces (see for example Longhurst, 2004; Longhurst, 2016b). In digital geography, embodiment can be thought of as bodies, emotions, experiences, and feelings in digital space and place that exceed the bodily level (Longhurst, 1997). Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity provides a ground-breaking perspective on embodiment, as it outlines how bodily experiences take place both within and outside the body. This theory provides an excellent starting point for geographers to build on when addressing the body in digital geographies (see for instance Kinsley, 2014; Longhurst, 2016b; Longhurst et al., 2008). McNay (2004) argues that embodiment consists of "lived social relations", which means that gender, race, and sexuality are constantly being renegotiated, even in the digital space. There is a constant interplay between physical space, digital technologies, and people's own human behaviour. Van Doorn (2011) builds on McNay's concept and argues that these relations or "virtual performances of gender sexuality and embodiment become materialized" (p. 531) and extend into the digital space "where they are renegotiated within, and made possible by, hybrid assemblages of embodied users, cultural discourses and new media technologies" (p. 535). The ongoing debate within scholarship on digital spaces concerns technologically mediated experiences through virtual reality, where the geographies of the digital have been presented as being in binary opposition to the actual world (Graham, 1998), creating a false dichotomy. Instead, feminist scholars argue that the spaces of algorithmic logic (Crampton, 2016) are part of people's everyday geographies, where the body and the screen should not be seen as abstract entities, separated from each other (see e.g., Longhurst, 2016b; McLean, 2019; Rose, 2017).

Feminist geographer Longhurst (2017) has brought embodied geography into the limelight by emphasising how people embody space, providing detailed insight into uneven access to space, continuous (re)negotiation of space, and the interrelatedness of embodiment with oftentimes invisible power imbalances. In her book *Skype: Bodies, screens, space* she explores how technology, specifically the video conferencing software Skype, affects people's sense of embodiment. She argues that people can be both present in the virtual space while being aware of their physical surroundings. Longhurst's research is crucial for the field of digital geographies of embodiment, as it contributes to a heightened understanding of technology, intimacy, and social relationships. Another important contribution to the field is feminist geographer Rose's (2017) work, which highlights the differential dimensions of co-constitution between the technological and the human. This idea has been taken up by feminist geographers who have established a significant amount of work on the role of the body in digitally mediated spaces (see e.g., Koch & Miles, 2021; Osborne & Jones, 2022; Rose, 2022). Lupton (2018) demonstrates the interlinkages between bodies, technology, and space, arguing that data

comes to matter through everyday embodied experiences, which means that encounters between bodies and digital technologies are co-constitutive. Rose (2017, p. 786) summarises that "[t]his is a reserve not only of retentions but of embodied practices through which posthumans watch, touch, learn, think, hear, move, and gesture, in streets, squares, parks, and workplaces, mimicking, recombining, and reinventing". McLean (2019) provides another example of the embeddedness of the body in digital spaces, building on Rose's (2016a) work on human agency in the creation of digital spaces. In response to Rose's (2016a) concern about the neglect of creative and reflexive agency of digital actants, McLean argues that "humans engage with the more-than-human world in ways that subvert, challenge and remake humans and the more-than-real" (2019, p. 26). McLean (2019) adopts a non-technologically deterministic perspective in her work to explain how the more-than-real can be thought of as "an idea that explains the paradoxical ways that digital spaces amplify and collapse geographies, reworking spatial connections and disconnections" (p. 34), which includes the extent to which digital technologies penetrate people's everyday lives. Emotion and affect then, both "facilitate[s] geographies of digital change" (p. 27) as they can create an increasing engagement of people with social movements in both private and public online spaces. So rather than thinking of the online and offline world as two separate entities, thinking through the more-than-real aims to dismantle the binary thinking, which helps to "point out the ways in which social sciences and humanities thinking has tended to shape perceptions of digital geography as other than real" (p. 41). More-than-human relations created in digitally mediated spaces include digital subjects such as cyborgs and robots (see e.g., Cockayne et al., 2017; Del Casino, 2016; Del Casino et al., 2020). Thus, geographies of the digital can reorient people's spatial understanding and, in line with feminist theorists, incorporate the body into digital geography scholarship.

Geographies of embodiment delve into the realm of emotions, feelings, and affect, exploring how these experiences travel through and beyond the bodily level (Simonsen, 2013). The digital turn in geography provides a unique opportunity "to reconsider conceptualisations of affect and emotion, and how these interact with ways of thinking about, and doing, practices such as activism […] Emotions play a primary role in our digital geographies and invite further examination" (McLean, 2019, p. 27). Re-envisioning digital geography research from an embodied geography perspective requires acknowledging the pivotal role that the body plays in digital geographies, rather than subscribing to a view that the "offline" world is disembodied, and moving away from technological determinism (Rose, 2019). Indeed, Shah (2017) highlights in her research in India how digital spaces, in some situations, create a much safer space than the offline space to share examples of physical affection. The following sections highlight the main tenets of geographies and embodiment as they relate to the digital geographies of work and mobility that are explored in this thesis.

Place, bodies, and identities

Scholarship on geography and embodiment has brought attention to the ways in which space, place, and embodied identities are mutually constructed. By drawing upon the geographies of embodiment, it is possible to analyse the power relations that are involved in the everyday geographies of people and that are constitutive of their socio-spatial dynamics. Feminist geographers aim to reconfigure the globally mediated knowledge of how experiences of place and space are shaped by challenging hierarchical power relations and binary notions of identity (Johnston, 2018; Valentine, 2002). As a result, the epistemology of geographic knowledge production can be reworked (WGSG, 1997). Feminist geography recognises the crucial interrelatedness between body and place, which is especially relevant to understanding identities in (postcolonial) places and spaces. This perspective is essential in challenging dominant discourses that uphold patriarchal and colonial power structures and provides a framework for understanding the complex and dynamic ways in which people engage with the spaces and places they inhabit.

To gain insight into the geometries of power at play, feminist geographers have directed their attention towards the concept of the "event of place" (Massey, 2005). According to Doreen Massey, "the identity of a place does not derive from some internalised history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with ''the outside''" (2013, p. 169). This co-construction is an ongoing process and involves a constant negotiation of identity performance. Massey's focus on the dynamics of place in relation to broader socio-economic and political structures is particularly pertinent in understanding the construction of identities in postcolonial places. Furthermore, the work of feminist postcolonial scholar Chandra Mohanty (2005) adds an important dimension to Massey's conceptualisation of space as dynamic. Mohanty highlights the experiences of marginalised groups within these spaces and emphasises the intersectionality of power relations, specifically those shaped by gender, class, race, and nationality. Her work critiques Western feminist scholarship, allowing for the recognition of how women workers' experiences are shaped by these inequitable power relations. Given the intersection of uneven power relations with embodied experiences of individuals in (postcolonial) places and spaces, Mohanty's work is relevant to scholarship on digital geographies of embodiment.

Feminist geographer Linda McDowell sheds light on the ways in which uneven power relations shape workplace identities. Building on the work of Massey (2005), McDowell (2008) envisions a reconfiguration of concepts in human geography by integrating feminist embodiments with the decorporealised socially constructed nature of knowledge. McDowell's work (see for instance McDowell, 2008, 2009; McDowell, 2011a) provides an understanding of how different spaces are

constituted through embodiment. In her book, *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City,* McDowell pioneers research on the power of gendered bodies, specifically focussing on masculine and heteronormative merchant bankers in London. Through an intersectionality lens, McDowell's (2009) extensive research on gender and globalisation contributes to an increased understanding of uneven power relations in the workplace. McDowell points out how gender, class, and race intersect with the shaping of migration experiences by focussing on embodied experiences of migrant workers. Although the scope of this thesis extends beyond the workspaces that McDowell focuses on, I significantly draw upon her theoretical work. By applying the concept of embodiment to the workplace, McDowell demonstrates how workplaces are gendered sites often deemed to have a masculine rationality.

The focus of this thesis lies in exploring the changing digital geographies of work and power imbalances in work arrangements. To support my arguments, I draw upon the work of McDowell, who sheds light on the ways in which uneven power relations shape workplace identities. McDowell contends that "the location and the physical construction of the workplace – its site and layout, the external appearance and the internal layout of its buildings and surrounding environment – also affects, as well as reflects, the social construction of work and workers and the relations of power, control and dominance that structure relations between them" (McDowell, 2011a, p. 12). Consequently, McDowell argues that workplace identities are not only shaped by the social relations and hierarchies within the workplace but are also articulated through the geographical location of the workplace and the way the building is designed.

In Chapter 6, I explore these uneven power dynamics in greater detail, focussing on how the materialities of and access to the workspace demonstrate invisible social hierarchies. McDowell's emphasis on the embodied dimensions of micro-spaces, or micro-social practices, in the workplace draws on Bourdieu's argument that employees' high status is not only based on their cultural capital, such as education, professional achievements, and materialism, but also their "embodied states, as mode of speech, accent, style, beauty and so forth" (1984, p. 243). Thus, McDowell's work (2004, 2007, 2011a) underscores how different notions of identity, such as class, gender, ethnicity, and race, are performed and played out in the micro-spaces of a workplace. McDowell (2008, p. 497) argues that "gendered identities are never singular nor fixed but fluid and complex, often contradictory, reiterative and performative, and so made and remade in social relations in the workplace". Consequently, identities are constructed in the workplace through institutionalised frameworks of power, which create workplace hierarchies. The workplace is often characterised by disembodiment, neutrality, and rationality, which results in the devaluation of bodies, subjectivity, and emotion (Eisler & Eisler, 2008). To truly comprehend the workplace, it is essential to view it as a realm of fluid, embodied performances (Butler, 1990), shaped by discursive norms that continuously renegotiate

identities (Gregson & Rose, 2000). In this regard, the work of Massey and McDowell provides critical insights into how the interplay of power dynamics, digital technologies, and embodiment shapes the digital geographies of work and workplace arrangements.

Mobility, bodies, and privilege

Incorporating embodiment into mobilities research allows for a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to studying mobile individuals, one that considers the relationality of space (Massey, 2005). This approach challenges the conventional understanding of "space as a container for social processes" (Sheller & Urry, 2016, p. 12), as it recognises the active role that space plays in shaping social relations, and that space is shaped by social relations. Furthermore, the incorporation of embodied perspectives, as discussed earlier in relation to the unequal distribution of access to mobility, enables a deeper understanding of how privilege intersects with space, place, and embodiment. By attending to the ways in which bodies move and are moved within social spaces, researchers can uncover the complex and often hidden power dynamics that underpin the spatial arrangements of society.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the ways in which embodiment intersects with mobility, shaping one's experiences and co-constituting one's identity. Bissell's contributions to mobilities and embodiment research have been particularly noteworthy. By exploring the intersections of movement, affect, and the body (Bissell, 2018), Bissell has shed light on how everyday mobilities generate different experiences sensed through the body. For example, in his work on walking, cycling, stillness, and other forms of movement or immobility, Bissell has shown how emotions co-constitute the lived experiences of mobilities (Bissell, 2021; Straughan et al., 2020).

Other scholars have also emphasised the importance of bringing the body into mobilities research. Doughty's (2013) work, for instance, focuses on the affective qualities of walking together, foregrounding embodiment and demonstrating the interrelatedness between body, identity, place, and space. Similarly, Amrith's (2021) research adopts an embodied approach to investigating how migration is experienced through a focus on ageing migrant bodies. She notes how the retirement age of women migrant domestic workers in Singapore puts a temporal border on their lives, where their ageing body reminds them of reaching the end of their migrant trajectory. For these women, a sense of belonging to a place is constructed by friendship and kinship, yet there remains an "impending displacement" onto their ageing bodies.

The engagement with geographies of embodiment onto mobilities research is important, as it not only illuminates the way in which different power relations shape people's identities, but also the way in

which access to mobilities is experienced. The work of Sara Ahmed has provided fertile ground to engage in research that analyses the intersections of the body, privilege, and mobility. She argues that institutions such as universities and governments are structured in such a way that the actions of white people are automatically privileged and people of colour disadvantaged (Ahmed, 2007), pointing to the "institutional whiteness". Ahmed demonstrates how bodies and identities are actively shaped by power relations and social norms, where being white, straight, and male is the universalising norm upon which society operates. For white people, the concept of race often only becomes apparent in non-white contexts where it becomes a symbolic association for privilege (Hayes, 2018). Furthermore, Cranston and Duplan's (2023) work on privileged migration while being attentive to embodiment illustrates how "mobility as achievement" becomes materialised and idealised. They note that "privilege in migration is not only inscribed and practised out there on the bodies of migrants, but through the representation, production, facilitation, and normalisation of certain types of mobilities" (p. 13). By including embodiment in mobilities research, it sheds light on how privilege intersects with space, place, and embodiment.

It is crucial to consider the ways in which digital technologies exacerbate existing uneven power relations, thereby intensifying socio-economic inequalities. As previously discussed in this chapter, digital technologies tend to reinforce binary categorisations of people into migrants, non-migrants, and tourists, based on class and race. Loukaitou-Sideris (2016), who applies a gendered perspective to mobility, highlights that women's transport needs differ from those of men, but the transport infrastructure supporting women's mobility is built on masculinist notions and further reinforced by programmed algorithms. In fact, Nash and Gorman-Murray (2019) argue that new technologies assume and perpetuate pre-existing gender and sexual stereotypes of users in specific contexts. Moreover, the social categories of gender, race, class, among others, programmed into digital codes, shape and limit people's digital mobilities. Benson (2018) observes that citizenship in powerful nation-states of the Global North confers privileged positions that often go unnoticed, resulting in the perpetuation of "white privilege" in certain contexts, such as British lifestyle migrants in rural France. Viewing privilege as "a constellation shifts the focus from absolute understandings towards the recognition that privilege is constituted through a range of characteristics" of class, nationality and race (p. 36), which "allows for a consideration of how different social positions might intersect" (p. 27).

Thompson's (2018) research highlights how digital nomads, whose mobilities are one of the foci of this thesis, leverage their nationality and visa arrangements to live and work in third countries, strategically combining work and leisure (Mancinelli, 2020). This process, known as "geo-arbitrage", involves the strategic use of nationality, gender, class, and digital literacy to take advantage of lower

living costs in the Global South. By leveraging white privilege and cultural capital through relocation to the Global South, geo-arbitrage reinforces uneven geographies in the world (Botterill, 2017; Johnston & Pratt, 2022). Hayes and Pérez-Gañán (2017) note that geo-arbitrage reinforces global power relations of inequality, allowing privileged individuals to maintain their status and exploit the resources of the Global South. The authors suggest that "migrants from the Global North can trade on their inherited colonial privileges in order to maintain a place in an increasingly brutal global system of economic and racial exploitation" (p. 118).

Hayes and Pérez-Gañán (2017) also highlight the embodied geography of migrants, which recognises the role of specific geo-political contexts in shaping individuals' bodily experiences. While mobility is subject to one's bodily senses, it is effectively controlled by mechanisms of privilege and the social norms surrounding white privilege. Birtchnell and Caletrío (2013) argue that policymakers, planners, and politicians prioritise their own "power agendas of force, speed, ease and other discourses [in the production of mobility infrastructure] before the social considerations of the rest are addressed" (p. 3). Staeheli et al. (2016) point out that those who control mobility infrastructures can decide who to grant freedom of movement to. In light of this, it is essential to consider who is responsible for caring for individuals subject to these uneven relations of power. Feminist geographers have emphasised the importance of care and responsibility in the context of mobility, as I discuss in the next section.

Ethics of care

Geographies of embodiment encompass feminist ethics of care perspectives, which recognise care as a universal need (Tronto, 2017). By "asking difficult questions" (Bell et al., 2020, p. 178), feminist ethics of care challenge traditional masculine patterns of thinking and highlight affective geographies. Several feminist scholars have advocated for the incorporation of care ethics into epistemological, ontological, and methodological scholarship, emphasising the importance of care (see for instance Held, 2006; Tronto, 2013; Tronto, 2015). However, when care practices are situated in a neoliberal capitalist society that prioritises efficiency, standardisation, and competition (Harvey, 2007), the normative notion of ethics of care is devalued (Tronto, 2017). Feminist geographer Massey (2005) characterises ethics of care as a Russian-doll geography of affect, in which the territorial nature of geographies of care is still rooted in hegemonic thinking. The need and responsibility for ethics of care are based on spatial proximity, with geographies of affect becoming less important and less robust as distance increases. Lawson (2007) argues that feminist ethics of care "foreground[s] social relationships of mutuality and trust (rather than dependence) [… and] understands all social relations as contextual, partial, attentive, responsive, and responsible" (p. 3). It is essential to recognise the

Western-centrism that underlies the understanding, practice, and production of care ethics within feminist ethics of care (Raghuram, 2016; Robinson, 2020).

Indigenous perspectives can offer a more inclusive understanding of care. For Māori, the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, where part of this research is situated, ethics of care "is embodied in the cultural thinking and practices associated with whakapapa [lineage, descent], mana [status, influence, spiritual power] and manaaki [take care of, to protect, look out for] […] For Māori, recognition of mana and the extension of aroha [love, affection], is tika [right, truth] – it is right and ethical behaviour – and does not depend on being returned or acknowledged" (Hoskins, 2012, p. 91). Manaakitanga "ensures principled practice as the concept orientates us away from locating 'deficits' within the person and towards addressing deficits in societal systems" (Hodgetts et al., 2021, p. 1983). An example hereof is the concept of *koha*, which is a traditional gifting exchange system for the Māori (Mead, 2003), as a non-formal exchange institution that surpasses conventional Western ideas of capitalism, where the reciprocation of a gift forms an "alternative" practice (Morris & Fitzherbert, 2016). By listening to and recognising the diverse perspectives and understandings of notions surrounding the concept of care, which "resists all binaries that divide people into categories and separate them from others, and, indeed, from themselves" (Robinson, 2020, p. 11), it is possible to achieve a comprehensive understanding of infrastructures of care.

The infrastructures of care are "dynamic structures and practices that organise social and material lives" (Alam & Houston, 2020). These infrastructures can be found in both purposefully designed caring spaces for individuals with specific care needs (Power & Williams, 2020) and non-institutional everyday spaces (Alam & Houston, 2020). Power and Mee (2019), for instance, posit housing as "a sociomaterial assemblage that is constitutive of care" (p. 484). In their work, they follow Star (1999), and conceptualise infrastructures as sociotechnical systems, that are dynamic, and form the foundation of social organisation (Power & Mee, 2020). Lawrence and Maitlis' (2012) study found that organisations are potential spaces of compassion, where ethics of care are enacted through everyday practices. This approach is particularly significant in the post-pandemic world, dominated by digital technologies and oppressive global capitalism (William, 2020), where care ethics may serve as an antidote to crises (Bryson, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to examine the role of infrastructures in promoting ethical practices and social justice.

Feminist geographies of care are concerned with the politics of discomfort (Dowler et al., 2019) and highlight social spaces of care beyond the private realm (McKie et al., 2002). Feminist geographers identify new geographies of care (McEwan & Goodman, 2010), that not only shape how care practices are understood but also where they occur. For instance, England (2010, p. 146) critically examines

geographies of care, highlighting how neoliberal political reforms, such as welfare cuts and rising childcare costs, affect practices of childcare and home care, thereby blurring the boundary between "the supposedly private space of home and the public spaces of the state and the market".

Feminist theories of care disrupt normative ideas about the individualised self in the neoliberal economy (McDowell, 2004) and highlight the relationality of spaces of care, where ethics of care transcends physical spaces, blurs boundaries, and where everyone shares responsibility. By emphasising the importance of care in people's lives and the fundamental nature of its character, care work can challenge the individualised dimensions of social, political, and economic arrangements of capitalism (Held, 2006). Consequently, an ethics of care can counter the increasing individualism of the neoliberal economy, which prioritises self-sufficiency and personal growth over caring for others (McDowell, 2004). As such, an ethics of care perspective can encourage interdependent practices of solidarity and mutual recognition and create welcoming environments for all.

The application of an ethics of care perspective can be extended to various research areas, including geography. Power and Williams (2020) explore the presence of care in spaces and materialities within cities. They investigate how these materialities shape the nature of care and how care is enacted in specific spaces that constitute places of care. Their analysis expands the existing research on urban care, which considers cities as an assemblage of interpersonal caring practices, by positing that "care has the potential to be present in all urban spaces and places and that care has transformative potential in these settings" (pp. 6-7). An understanding of spaces of care can be enhanced by adopting a relational approach to space and place. Massey (2004) argues that distant places can be mutually constitutive, as people can relate to places that they do not necessarily embody at a given moment in time. Therefore, places of care encompass a wide-ranging socio-spatial field that, due to its relational nature, extends beyond the individual level to a collective, embodied level of care. As I have previously highlighted in this chapter, identity and place are co-constitutive, and the geographical location, design, and (im)materialities of space not only shape the identity of place but also influence for whom these caring places are designed.

The practices of care within any given place shapes the socio-spatial dimensions of that place and the people embodying that space, and vice versa. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) calls for researchers to attend to how care in places circulates, "not necessarily morally or intentionally, [but] in an embodied way, or simply embedded in the world, environments, infrastructures that have been marked by that care" (p. 121). Caring infrastructures or places of care can be traditional environments such as hospitals and nursing homes, but also extend beyond these to, for instance, community centres (Tronto, 2015). CWSs, which are a significant focus of my thesis, can also be considered as caring environments. These

spaces not only promote collaboration and connectivity but also facilitate supportive environments for people from diverse backgrounds – as I further discuss in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I aim to bring together the different bodies of literature of digital geographies of work, mobilities, and embodiment, as discussed in this chapter, to explore the complexities of location-independence in the context of digital nomads and CWSs. Drawing from the critical perspectives of feminist postcolonialism, I argue that location-independence is not a neutral concept but is instead embedded within wider structures of power dynamics.

The digital geographies of work and mobility literature highlights the ways in which technology has transformed the nature of work and mobility, creating new possibilities for some but also exacerbating existing inequalities. From a feminist postcolonial perspective, it becomes possible to see how the uneven distribution of resources, opportunities, and infrastructure shapes who is able to participate in location-independent work and how it is experienced. The embodied geographies literature further emphasises the role of the body in shaping these experiences, revealing the ways in which identities, emotions, and care practices are central to location-independent work and mobility.

Building on the broad contextual framing with respect to the literature presented in this chapter, I focus specifically on the case of digital nomads and CWSs. Through an in-depth analysis of these phenomena, I explore the ways in which location-independence is facilitated and experienced, as well as the challenges and opportunities that arise in this context. Specifically, I examine how the ability of digital nomads to work from anywhere in the world is shaped by their social and economic identities, which are further reinforced by regulatory mechanisms that privilege digital mobilities over other migrant categories. Additionally, this thesis investigates how CWSs serve as crucial sites of infrastructure for location-independent workers by providing necessary resources and support for remote work. However, this research also highlights the need for these spaces to become more caring and equitable, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities in the infrastructures supporting location-independence.

Overall, this thesis aims to explore the socio-spatial dynamics of location-independence in the digital geographies of work, which is shaped by wider structures of power and inequality. By drawing on the critical perspectives of feminist postcolonialism and embodied geographies as presented in this chapter, I shed light on the opportunities and challenges of location-independent work and mobility, and to identify ways in which these can be made equitable and sustainable for all.

Chapter Four

Sit, talk, work: a feminist approach to qualitative methodologies

> Fieldwork is being stretched in new directions across time and space […] we argue that bodies, performance, digital interfaces, movement, senses, emotion and affect need to grappled with methodologically as increasing numbers of researchers turn to online interviewing (Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst, 2017, p. 148).

The opening quote of this chapter encapsulates the importance of a feminist approach to conducting qualitative research during a time when digital technologies have become increasingly important for communication. The emphasis on digital interfaces has been further heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which took place for almost the entire duration of this research.. A qualitative research approach is particularly well-suited for this thesis, as it enables a focus on contextual, everyday and embodied dynamics, which are essential for understanding the lived experiences of participants. In contrast, quantitative methods are better suited for broad data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The specific qualitative methodologies employed in this thesis are influenced by critical feminist postcolonial frameworks, which are based on the epistemological belief that "reality is known through the study of social structures, freedom and oppression, power and control" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 37). Feminist geographies also address power relations between the participant and the researcher and how this relationship informs the research process. Feminist methodologies acknowledge the importance of space in shaping knowledge production and vice versa (Datta et al., 2020). Thus, this research acknowledges the richness and complexity of (digital) spaces by taking into account embodied and emotional geographies, which is where this research is situated.

The qualitative data research on embodied experiences of digital nomads in liminal spaces is guided by the works of Hine (2015) and Pink et al. (2016) on digital ethnography and Rose's (2016b) *Visual Methodologies*. Qualitative methods – such as semi-structured interviews – are useful when seeking to understand how identity (class, ethnicity, gender, nationality) and place (digital and material) are mutually constructed. I also use reflexive thematic analysis of texts and images from websites promoting DNV schemes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has significantly disrupted my earlier research design (see ethics approval Appendix I), which was to undertake three months of fieldwork in the popular digital nomad hotspot of Bali, Indonesia through "walk and talk" interviews with digital nomads, work from CWSs and full immersion into a digital nomad lifestyle. The COVID-19 pandemic made this entire proposed fieldwork unfeasible. Although Aotearoa New Zealand went out of strict lockdown on 13 May 2020, borders were still closed with travel restrictions in place. Besides, with the aim to protect their staff and students, and with quarantine conditions in place, universities were reluctant to support overseas research projects. Therefore, my research slightly pivoted towards the notion of location-independence, which allowed me to still focus on digital nomads globally (online), while also researching, travelling to, sitting at and working from CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In the following discussion, I firstly reflect on the challenges encountered while conducting research during the unprecedented times of COVID-19, which have significantly impacted the scope and design

of this study. I then explain the multi-scalar approach that guides the research design, followed by an explanation of the qualitative methods of digital ethnography. The participant recruitment and data collection methods for both digital nomads and managers and community managers of CWSs is touched upon next. Lastly, I explain the reflexive thematic analysis, which is based on Braun and Clarke's (2013) five stages of thematic analysis, including the identification of research themes.

Positionality and conducting research during COVID-19

In the context of location-independent work, understanding the socio-spatial dynamics requires recognising the complexity of identities and how they intersect with the geographies of everyday life. McDowell (2008) notes that identities are fluid and multifaceted, shaped by a range of factors including race, gender, class, and sexuality. These identities are performed through social interactions and spatial practices. Moreover, as McCall (2005) argues, identities are not just solely determined by their work practices, but also by the wider contexts in which they live and work. By considering the socio-spatial dynamics of location-independent work in this way, a nuanced understanding can be gained of the lived experience of location-independent workers. It then becomes possible to see how their identities are shaped not only by their work practices but also by the wider social and spatial contexts in which they operate.

As a white, highly educated female in my mid-thirties who migrated from the Netherlands to Aotearoa New Zealand, I write this thesis from a perspective shaped within the geographies of the Global North. Over the course of my four-year PhD, I transitioned from a single woman on a student visa to an engaged, first-time mother on a permanent resident visa in Aotearoa New Zealand. Despite my privileges, including being white, Western, and well-educated, I too navigate the spaces of remote work, undesired immobility, closed borders, motherhood, and a sense of detachment and disembodiment, both inside and outside of academia. While some feminist geographers (see for instance Rose, 1997; Wolf, 2018) point out that emphasising one's own identity as part of reflexivity risks recreating the privileged identity of the researcher, I believe that my positionality informs my work on privilege, gender, (im)mobility, and disruptions. It can also be argued that my identity made me approachable, as my characteristics overlap with those of location-independent workers and travellers found most dominant in CWSs (such as age, ethnicity, class, nationality). In the next sections, I reflect on how the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted my research design and proposed fieldwork, as well as how I navigated these disruptions.

Disruptions part 1. Confirmation of enrolment: Let the fieldwork begin!

On 18 February 2019, I received a text from my mother in the Netherlands, informing me about a mysterious virus detected in China. Although my mother frequently sends me news updates from around the world, I did not pay much attention to it at the time. I was occupied with finalising my confirmation of my PhD enrolment proposal and had just submitted an application to the ethics committee of the ALPSS Division (Arts, Law, Psychology and Social Sciences) at Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato (The University of Waikato) seeking approval for my proposed fieldwork activities – a three-month fieldwork study in Ubud, Bali. Bali is considered one of the most popular destinations for digital nomads[6] and is within relative reach of Aotearoa New Zealand, where I reside. My proposed research would take a feminist approach, involving full immersion in several CWSs where digital nomads often work from while also taking into account the perspectives of the local population on the sudden influx of digital nomads. This would involve working alongside other digital nomads, observing coworkers, networking, and conducting on-site interviews. I had planned to use innovative interview methods such as drawing assignments and "walk and talk" interviews, which have been found to make participants feel at ease (Braun et al., 2017; Dowling et al., 2016) while providing additions insights into their remote work lives. I had even considered giving participants cameras or making a special social media account to document their daily lives. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this plan was abandoned.

My formal proposal and presentation to achieve confirmation of enrolment in the PhD was on 16 March 2020, and I remember adding a slide at the end of the presentation that humorously asked, "what to do if COVID-19 hits?". The slide functioned as a requisite to address current issues and to demonstrate to the committee that I was up to date with the world's happenings. However, a week after I received confirmation of enrolment, Aotearoa New Zealand went into a lockdown, and I found myself uncertain of what steps to take next. The unknown and uncertainty of the situation caused significant disruption not only in work and travel but also in the mind. My headspace that was usually bursting with creativity and positivity was now unsure of what to do. My supervisors and I decided to wait and see, and in the meantime, I began working on the contextual framing of the literature review , which occupied most of my time during the first lockdown in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, it soon became evident that there would be no quick resolution, and my research design had to be significantly altered. In my confirmation of enrolment proposal, I had argued that qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret,

[6] According to research by Statista, in 2019, Bali had the highest number of digital nomads throughout destinations in Southeast Asia (Ganbold, 2023).

phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). The irony lies in the fact that digital nomads are both physically working from a location but conducting all their work in online environments, the digital realm. The natural setting that Denzin and Lincoln (2011) refer to can, in the case of digital nomadism, be seen as the digital space where digital nomads work in and the physical space from which they work.

As a result of travel restrictions, online digital platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Skype became the only viable means for communication with potential participants. However, many digital nomads were immobilised and seeking repatriation (as evidenced by Facebook groups and blog posts), and most CWSs were closed due to government restrictions; making it difficult to find suitable candidates. Therefore, the research design had to be revised to find a middle ground where I could still interview digital nomads but with the understanding that they were in a liminal state and reflecting on past experiences as digital nomads.

The experience of meeting people in person, sharing physical space, and being immersed in the energy of a particular place are sensory experiences that shape who we are and how we connect with others (Longhurst et al., 2008). Qualitative research has the potential to "empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 40). However, conducting research online presents unique challenges, such as poor internet connection and the possibility of participants presenting a staged performance (Howlett, 2022; Longhurst, 2016b). However, this does not mean the interview becomes disembodied. In contrary, Longhurst (2016b) and Morrow et al. (2015) remind us that both the interviewer and interviewees are still "embedded in a variety of material relationships in particular places" (p. 536), which signals the various ways in which we can embody online space. Establishing rapport and asking intimate questions through a screen can also be difficult, but it was through the mediation of digital technologies that I was able to present myself, what clothes I wore, what background I choose, my facial expressions; my body was the 'instrument of research' (Longhurst et al., 2008). Additionally, COVID-19 restrictions and the sudden shift to remote work have disrupted existing infrastructures at home, making it challenging for participants to engage in research while juggling multiple online meetings (Howlett, 2022). These limitations forced me to alter my original fieldwork plans and adapt to the new reality of conducting research during a pandemic (Tremblay et al., 2021).

During a brief period when Aotearoa New Zealand was experiencing a pandemic-free period prior to the arrival of the COVID-19 Delta variant, I reoriented my research to explore the perspectives of managers and community managers of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand on digital nomads, and how

the pandemic had impacted their businesses. The large number of prompt and positive responses I received from CWS managers compared to the slow and difficult recruitment of online digital nomad participants was heartening. It provided a unique opportunity to conduct in-person interviews while much of the world still faced severe travel restrictions. Although my original research proposal did not include a focus on CWSs, the emergence of this direction has been critical in shaping my understanding of the concept of location-independence, particularly in relation to place, mobility, and embodiment. This connection and interlink between the presented literature in Chapter 3 have been instrumental in forming the concept of location-independence. In addition, the inclusion of CWSs in my research allowed for a deeper understanding of the impact of the pandemic on a digital nomad community, as these managers were directly involved in providing the physical spaces and services that catered to the needs of digital nomads. Their perspectives provided valuable insights into how the pandemic affected the demand for such spaces and services, and how digital nomads adapted to the changing circumstances. This in turn contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between location-independence and the physical spaces and communities that it supports.

Disruptions part 2. Lockdowns in Aotearoa New Zealand: Working from home and motherhood

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on my PhD research, not only in terms of disrupting my fieldwork and research design, but also by affecting my mental wellbeing and creativity. The lockdown created a sense of isolation, loneliness, and social disconnection, which are common challenges for PhD students, but were exacerbated by this unprecedented event. During the first lockdown, I relied on my weekly meeting with my supervisors as a lifeline and attended various workshops to have a sense of online presence and community. However, the lockdown also highlighted my need for social contact, which was previously found outside my office space. In the third lockdown, I faced a new challenge of caring for my new-born baby girl, without any maternity leave or recognition as a PhD student in Aotearoa New Zealand. The lack of childcare options due to lockdown restrictions added additional stress to my already demanding PhD work. This experience highlighted the precariousness of being a PhD international student and new mother in these unpredictable times.

In this section, I have provided an account of the unforeseen challenges that have arisen in both my personal and academic life due to the unprecedented situation of COVID-19. The pandemic has disrupted the infrastructures that are critical for me to work from and has created additional challenges due to motherhood. Despite these disruptions, I continued to navigate the challenges

presented to me. I found myself constantly in a state of 'in-betweenness' as a location-independent worker with constraints on a mobile lifestyle. The ability to adapt and continue my work amidst these challenges has been an essential part of my academic journey and has provided me with a unique perspective and lived experience on the intersection of place, mobility, and work.

Research design: multi-scalar approach

This research employs a multi-scalar approach, which involves collecting data through online interviews with digital nomads located around the world, as well as visiting various CWSs in four different cities in Aotearoa New Zealand. In addition, photographs of CWSs and online images related to DNVs were collected and analysed to complement the interviews. The research is multi-scalar in the sense that it examines the phenomenon of digital nomadism at different levels of scale, from the global to the local level. At the global level, the research looks at the emergence and growth of location-independent workers as a new form of work that is facilitated by digital technologies and the Internet. At the national level, the research examines the increasing popularity of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand as a response to the changing nature of work and the growing demand for flexible workspaces. At the local level, the research investigates the curation of workspaces that facilitate location-independent work and what it means embodying a CWS in four different cities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

It is worth noting that a multi-scalar ethnography surpasses multi-*sited* ethnography, which is limited to conducting research across multiple sites without delving deeper into the relationship between these sites (Salazar et al., 2017). The multi-scalar ethnography adopted in this study is used to examine the emergence of the relatively new phenomenon of digital nomadism globally, the increasing popularity of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the changing everyday geographies that these emergent work practices bring about. Xiang (2013, p. 282) points out that "multi-scalar ethnography delineates how movements are constituted at different scales". Following Xiang's perspective, the research explores the interrelationships between various scales by describing how the expanding mobility of location-independence for work at the global level has influenced the growth of CWSs at the national level, specifically in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Moreover, this research examines how the use of CWSs by digital nomads and mobile workers at the local level has constituted new patterns of mobility and sociality. By taking a multi-scalar approach, this research seeks to illuminate how these various scales are interconnected and influence one another.

Additionally, I adopt a reflexive approach, as highlighted by Jiménez (2005), as the location and position of me – the researcher – within the research context significantly shapes the conduct and

analysis of multi-scalar ethnography. In the context of digital nomadism, where mobility and a lack of fixed spatial boundaries are the norm, the researcher's positionality holds even greater significance. Therefore, by investigating my own positionality in this chapter, I pay close attention to the influence it has had on the selection of research sites and the interpretation of data.

Williamson (2015) highlights the potential benefits and challenges of adopting a multi-scalar approach in migration research. This method allows for a deeper understanding of the various scales and sites involved in migration processes. By being attentive to how mobility processes are constituted and enacted at different levels (Xiang, 2013), this research takes into account the embeddedness of research participants in the broader socio-economic context and how it influences their identities. The social and cultural contexts in which digital nomads and CWS managers operate both constrain and influence their decisions and opportunities on an individual level (Luo & Chan, 2021). This study incorporates aspects of these multi-scalar approaches, exploring the micro and meso levels at which location-independence occur, such as at home, a CWS in the neighbourhood or overseas, and via different modes of transport. Additionally, it touches on multiple levels of governance, including regulatory migration infrastructures at a macrolevel and locally-based initiatives that have emerged from COVID-19 disruptions.

In this geographical research, the concept of scale should be understood from an embodied point of view. When making the body explicit in geography research, it becomes possible to analyse "the geography closest in" (Longhurst, 1994) and understand the embodied practices in space. An embodied approach enables researchers to critically unravel power relations by examining how bodies are situated in space, how space is experienced, and how identities are constructed (Longhurst et al., 2008). In the context of this research, the focus is on the construction of identities in space, which encompasses digital nomad mobilities as well as the curation of CWSs to enable location-independence for knowledge workers. This study seeks to uncover the ways in which these identities are shaped by spatial and social contexts, and how they influence the experiences and practices of research participants.

In this research, the creation and experience of CWSs are analysed in relation to the wider public realm, revealing their relationality to the broader environment. The 'openness' of CWSs is scrutinised as space that may only be accessible to some while excluding others, reflecting the wider socio-spatial structures at play. It is vital to understand the socio-spatial dynamics and embodied practices in the spaces of location-independent workers at an individual level while considering the broader socio-economic and political factors that underpin the global proliferation of CWSs. The evidence in this thesis shows the ways in which CWSs and workers' bodies are co-curated.

Adopting a multi-scalar approach requires an understanding of the complexities and political nature of scale production. Marston (2000) critiques the "social constructionist approach" in geography research, arguing that power is pervasive across all levels of society, and that the production of scale is a political process. Johnston and Longhurst (2010, p. 14) highlight that "[e]ach scale represents an intersection between a range of different people and places", which implies fluidity and contingency. Xiang (2013) emphasises the messy and indefinable nature of emergent scales, and highlights the importance of considering the consequences and effects of scale production. By paying attention to the production of scale as an inherently political process (Marston, 2000) and using the idea of scale "as a platform" (Johnston & Longhurst, 2010), this research takes a critical geographical approach to understanding the socio-spatial dynamics of digital nomad mobilities and CWSs.

Digital ethnography

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of location-independent workers in liminal CWSs during the pandemic, this study engaged with digital materials and spaces as an important part of the research. In addition to interviews, observation in CWSs and engagement in the online spaces occurred through relationships with interlocutors. The lives and experiences of digital nomads are greatly influenced by the digital, and the digital has redefined the ways in which data from participants can be obtained. Digital ethnography was adopted as the method is similar to ethnography, but applied to digital spaces that make up the "field" and was indispensable in the context of pandemic-related restrictions that made it impossible to undertake research with digital nomads in person.

To expound on this approach, I draw on Hine's (2015) view that the Internet has become an inevitable part of many (privileged) people's lives, and IT infrastructures constitute an everyday phenomenon that is both embedded and embodied. Hine notes that "we find ourselves being online in an extension of other embodied ways of being and acting in the world" (2015, p. 14). A feminist approach to digital ethnography offers tools to carefully navigate these complex spaces, where rather than being in direct physical proximity to participants in a traditional ethnographic setting, the contact with participants is mediated (Pink et al., 2016).

Pink et al. (2016) suggest five key principles for conducting digital ethnography: "multiplicity, non-digital-centric-ness, openness, reflexivity and [an openness to] unorthodox [encounters]" (p. 8). These principles have guided the empirical work in this study. Digital nomads embody and embed digital technologies in their everyday lives while often "residing" in liminal spaces. Therefore, a feminist approach to researching the richness of digital spaces and taking note of the emotional geographies

is particularly suitable for this study. This research explores feelings and practices in digital spaces, focusing on the intimate social geographies and the actual physical locality that make up everyday geographies (Pink et al., 2016), which when combined with insights gained from the experiences of location-independent workers during the pandemic. The flexibility of digital ethnography makes it well-suited for exploring the impact of the COVID-19 disruptions and uncertainties on these workers' lives.

Both Pink et al. (2016) and Hine (2015) argue that the digital should always be seen as part of something bigger, moving away from the often-dominating techno-centric, disembodied approaches to digital geography scholarship, a point that I addressed in the previous chapter. The described critical feminist approach to digital ethnography makes it possible to research the emotional and gendered geographies of digital nomads while examining the (hidden) role power plays in the spaces that remote workers embody. Sensitivity to relations of power in this research can reveal the uneven geographies, as well as the power relations between interviewer and interviewee (Rose, 2016b) and the construction of identity in place (McDowell, 1997).

The concept of place, as Massey (2005, p. 141) suggests, can be seen as a dynamic "constellation of process" rather than a static or fixed entity. This understanding highlights the impact of users on a place and its knowledge production, which has implications for digital ethnography. Pink et al. (2016, p. 126) describe the concept of locality, which captures the fluid and adaptable nature of place and represent the "environments as they are inhabited". For example, Forlano's (2009) research shows how WiFi hotspots can change the flow of people and information in a place. By integrating the digital realm into the concept of place or locality, it becomes possible to investigate the experience of space in a holistic manner, avoiding the online-offline binary. Pink et al. (2016, p. 127) further argue that the online and offline "are part of the same process through which localities are produced, experienced and defined". Boellstorff's (2015) research on the users of virtual game "Second Life" illustrates that a sense of place exists in the digital realm just as it does in the physical environment. This is especially relevant for studying digital nomads, as their work often takes place in various global locations while heavily relying on digital technology. However, as time zones and seasons might differ when conducting online interviews with people from various countries, there is a chance for moments of disjuncture in research. Ash (2013) uses the concept of 'affective atmospheres' to highlight how the sensory input differs from the location of the interviewer and the interviewee. Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst (2017) point out that some of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch) become "filtered through a screen, bodily rhythms are disrupted prompting different emotional and affectual responses than when people are interviewed in person" (p. 149). Indeed, I often interviewed people

when it was early morning and still cold, whereas my research participants would be talking to me in the evening and sometimes enjoying the warmth of late summer evenings.

The advent of digital spaces has led to an increase in research obtained from online fora, Facebook, and other Internet platforms. This approach is considered a novel way of retrieving data for qualitative analysis (de Jong, 2015; Pink, 2016). For example, de Jong (2015) employed Facebook as an online platform for storytelling, while McLean et al. (2016) explored feminist activism in online digital spaces. Graham (2013, p. 180) elucidates that the importance of drawing digital research material lies in its ability to encapsulate "the hybrid and augmented ways in which the Internet is embedded into our daily lives", thereby making it an intrinsic part of people's existence. However, the fast-growing and widespread adoption of digital research necessitates a critical examination of ethical dilemmas associated with these techniques. Sparks et al. (2016) contemplate the ethical implications of online research methods, arguing that researchers must pose more (or perhaps revisit) questions about "how conventional ethical concerns such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, secure data storage, and the maintenance of intellectual property rights can (or cannot be) translated into online spaces" (p. 42). The proliferation of digitally mediated research, particularly in the wake of COVID-19, poses additional challenges that force scholars to critically evaluate the implications of online research and move cautiously through these spaces (Howlett, 2022). Therefore, digital research raises crucial ethical considerations that require researchers to be diligent in their approach to these methods.

Participant recruitment and data collection methods

The qualitative data for this research was obtained from online semi-structured interviews with 12 digital nomads (as listed in Table 4.1) and in-person semi-structured interviews with 11 managers and community managers of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand (as listed in Table 4.2). Although the interviews were conducted separately, they complement each other and provide valuable insights into the reconfiguration of various infrastructures that enable location-independence, and the relationship between labour, geography, and mobility. In addition to these interviews, news websites and social media platforms were monitored to keep up with the latest developments in digital nomadism. To ensure that no relevant information was missed, Google alerts were set up to receive daily updates on the topic, filtered for relevance using the keywords "digital nomad" and "coworking space New Zealand'. In addition to the textual data, visual data including photographs taken in and around CWSs, images on public Facebook groups of digital nomads and CWSs, and images on websites promoting DNVs were also collected. Consent was asked to the publishers of webpage by contacting the owner and sending an email explaining my research and asking for permission to use the digital images. There has been no reply from any of these website owners, which is why, after consulting

with the librarian, I have included the following information in the Acknowledgements section: “all efforts have been made to gain copyright permission”.

Recruitment of digital nomads

The recruitment of self-identified digital nomads was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic using multiple methods. Firstly, an online flyer (see Appendix II) was designed and included a QR-code that directed interested participants to a Qualtrics website. This website contained three simple questions and invited participants to register their interest in being part of the study (see Appendix III). Secondly, a paid Facebook advertisement (see Fig. 4.1) was created and targeted individuals aged between 18 and 65 with an interest in digital nomadism. The advertisement was launched on t 20 August 2020 and was boosted for seven consecutive days. The advertisement reached 625 individuals in the targeted audience, of which 49 engaged with the post, 20 reacted to the post, 15 clicked on the link, and two commented on the post. The advertisement consisted of an online flyer and was initially designed as a preliminary experiment to gauge public response. Subsequently, a more proactive approach was adopted, involving postings on several digital nomad Facebook groups. These groups were chosen as they represented large numbers of established and aspiring digital nomads. Personal messages were sent to individuals who had expressed interest, providing them with detailed information and scheduling an online interview. Furthermore, the online flyer was shared on my personal Facebook profile, resulting in reactions from friends and acquaintances, which in turn initiated a snowball effect. As a result, the number of responses continued to grow as more digital nomads became aware of the opportunity through word-of-mouth referrals from friends and acquaintances.

All interviews with digital nomads were conducted online using Zoom and Skype from September 2020 to February 2021, with smaller follow-up interviews conducted from January to April 2021. Due to lockdowns, all participants conducted the interviews from their temporary homes, while I was situated in my home in Hamilton, Aotearoa New Zealand. The time difference between Aotearoa New Zealand and some of the participants’ locations, such as the Netherlands, posed a challenge and required early morning interviews from my side. The duration of each interview was 1 to 1.5 hours.

Figure 4.1 Facebook advertisement

Each interview commenced with an informal introduction, followed by a brief explanation of the study's purpose and an emphasis on the consent form (see Appendix IV and V). Participants were requested to grant permission for audio-recording their interviews, which was necessary for transcribing purposes. To ensure consistency in data collection, a semi-structured interview approach was utilised, and a set of questions was prepared beforehand (see Appendix VI). This approach allowed me to ask a series of questions, while still providing room for participants to elaborate on issues that were of significance or concern to them (Hay, 2016). The primary objective of the interviews was to allow participants to share their authentic stories, uninterrupted, and to gain insight into their backgrounds and perspectives. The interviews provided a platform for participants to share their stories comprehensively, including providing essential background information and detailed data descriptions. The interviews were conducted to comprehend participants' experiences of privilege and identity. To ensure anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. The majority of the interviews were conducted in English, while three interviews were conducted in Dutch and later translated into English by myself, as I am a native Dutch speaker. Table 4.1 lists the digital

nomads participating in this research as well as their location at the time of the online interview. My location – as interviewer – was consistently from the same room in my home in Hamilton.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Digital nomad's home country	Digital nomad's interview location	Traveling alone?	Digital nomad's profession
Michael	M	28	Netherlands	Netherlands	Alone	Programmer
Jessica	F	31	Germany	Netherlands	Partner	Web shop seller
Josh	M	39	Belgium	Austria	Alone	Website maker, ski instructor, language teacher
Carlos	M	41	Peru	Peru	Alone	English language and tourism teacher
Rahul	M	40	India	USA	Alone	Software engineer (former EFL)
Fleur	F	28	Netherlands	Netherlands	Partner	English online language teacher
Stephanie	F	34	USA	USA	Alone	Professional blogger
Abby	F	28	USA	Bali	Alone	English private language teacher (online/onsite)
Destinee	F	35	USA	Bali	Alone	Content strategist and storyteller
Sigrid	F	34	Iceland	Georgia	Partner	Writer / Consultant
Rose	F	40	South Africa	South Africa	Alone	Organiser of digital nomad retreats
Julia	F	34	Germany	Bulgaria	Partner	Web shop seller

Table 4.1: Overview of digital nomad participants

Overview of selected digital nomads

Interviews were conducted with 12 digital nomads with ages ranging from 28 to 41 years old. Out of these, eight were travelling alone, while four were accompanied by their respective partners. The participants – four men and eight women – had diverse occupations and nationalities (as presented in Table 4.1). The participants originated from various countries in the Global North and shared the characteristics of being either from strong passport countries (as defined by Henley & Partners, 2023) or holding dual citizenship, which facilitated visa-free travel and border crossings. Observed in prior research (McElroy, 2019a; Thompson, 2021), the sample was predominantly European/white, reflecting the dominance of digital nomads from affluent countries in the Global North.

Despite the uneven distribution of gender in the sample, with a higher proportion of female respondents, it should be noted that this finding contrasts with existing literature that portrays digital nomads as predominantly male. However, it is plausible that women were more inclined to participate in the study, possibly because of their interest in the topic or because of their more active engagement in the Facebook groups this study was promoted in. Nevertheless, the sample size is small, but is, apart

from the gender representation, consistent with digital nomad demographics in other studies (Thompson, 2018, 2019), and thus provides an indicative representation of the broader population.

Recruitment of coworking spaces managers in Aotearoa New Zealand

During the course of interviews conducted with digital nomads, significant attention was given to CWSs in line with the initial research plan to conduct fieldwork in Ubud, Bali and experience a digital nomad lifestyle within a CWS. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic about two months prior to the commencement of fieldwork rendered this plan unfeasible. Subsequently, in March 2021, a comprehensive examination of the CWS phenomenon in Aotearoa New Zealand was undertaken, following the finalisation of all interviews with digital nomads. The research's emphasis on embodiment and the lack of ability to sit alongside location-independent workers in a CWS created a sense of a crucial research opportunity being missed. Consequently, to gain a deeper understanding of the CWSs mentioned by the research participants, websites of CWSs located in Indonesia, Colombia, the Netherlands, and Bulgaria were examined. Although this provided valuable insights into the CWSs that participants worked from, a genuine embodied experience of being and working in a CWS remained absent. This led to an exploration of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand, to understand the construction of these spaces as well as what working from (and within) a CWS entailed. Given that Aotearoa New Zealand was among the few countries that had resumed "normal life" during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, the opportunity presented itself to be in the same space as interview participants and to experience the dynamics of CWSs first-hand.

To identify suitable CWSs for this research, an initial Google search for "co-working spaces New Zealand" was conducted. A comprehensive analysis was undertaken of numerous websites of CWSs in both the North and South Island. Selection criteria included accessibility within Aotearoa New Zealand, either by relative driving distance from my hometown Hamilton, or by plane. In addition, selected CWSs had to possess the essential characteristics of a CWS, which eliminated serviced offices that were marketed as CWSs. To contact the CWSs, I communicated with community managers by phone and requested their email addresses to provide more information regarding the research and consent. When a telephone number was available, Facebook messenger proved to be the most effective mode of communication with the managers and community managers of CWSs. They responded positively, and expressed a willingness to engage with the research, resulting in a more straightforward process than online recruitment of digital nomads. To begin the data collection process, I visited CWSs within driving distance of Hamilton, resulting in interviews with four managers and community managers of CWSs in Auckland and Tauranga. Additionally, a flight to the South Island

resulted in interviews (see Appendix VII for the interview questions) with seven other managers and community managers of CWSs in Christchurch and Dunedin.

Between March and May 2021, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the 11 managers and community managers of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand. At the time of the interviews, Aotearoa New Zealand was largely free of the pandemic, except for closed national borders. Subsequent to the interviews, I was often offered the opportunity to work and observe in the CWS, while taking notes and experiencing the work environment. To maintain confidentiality, I have refrained from disclosing the names and exact locations of the CWSs visited and have used pseudonyms for the participants' names. Additionally, I sought permission from the managers or community managers to take photographs of the premises, allowing for an extensive analysis of visual data that included both the interior and the exterior of the building, as well as the location. The collection of two membership agreements from separate CWSs provided an additional data source that was useful in analysing the interviews.

Overview of selected CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand

The selected CWSs for this study were diverse in terms of size and location, with five located in suburbs and six in city centres (see Fig. 4.2).

Consistent with the demographic profile of digital nomads, the majority of CWS managers were Pākehā (white settlers / European). The proportion of female members ranged from 30 to 60 percent, while the industries represented within the CWS varied, with creative industries and technology being the most commonly cited. Most of the CWSs had a mix of established businesses and start-ups, with only one CWS favouring established businesses over start-ups. In contrast, three CWSs placed a high priority on attracting start-ups (see Table 4.2). The membership size also varied significantly, ranging from nine members in a small suburban CWS to around 160 members in relatively large CWSs located in city centres. With the exception of two CWSs, women primarily staffed reception and daily operations, reflecting the gendered nature of hospitality and service occupations (McDowell, 2011a). The gender of the managers varied, with six CWSs managed by men, four by women, and one managed by a couple. Seven CWSs had a café or bar onsite that was open to the public, which facilitated the attraction of non-members to the CWS and familiarise them with the concept of coworking (see Chapter 6).

Figure 4.2: Locations of CWSs participating in interviews

CWS (com) manager	Centre/ suburb	Type of industries	Start-ups/ established	Business model	Public café
Paul	Centre	Diverse	Both	Commercial	Yes
Angela	Suburb	Creative	Mostly start-ups	Council-controlled	No
Leona	Centre	Tech	Mostly start-ups	Council-controlled	Yes
Stephanie	Suburb	Diverse	Established	Commercial	Yes
Cliff	Centre	Social impact	Both	Not for profit, funded	No
Alex	Centre	Tech, creative	Both	Commercial, funds	Yes
Richard	Suburb	Diverse	Established	Commercial	Yes
Rebecca	Centre	Diverse	Mostly start-ups	Commercial (private funds)	No
Jeremy	Centre	Tech	Both	Commercial, with IT business	Yes
Dan	Suburb	Tech	Established	Commercial, with IT business	No
Robert	Suburb	Art, creative	Both	Commercial	Yes

Table 4.2: Overview of CWSs participating in this research

The interviews conducted with digital nomads from various countries and managers and community managers of CWSs in four different cities in Aotearoa New Zealand were not the result of a formalised case study approach, but rather a necessity to be flexible during the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach was motivated by a desire to explore various experiences across different contexts, allowing for a multi-scalar approach to understanding location-independence. Aotearoa New Zealand, being a country that is geographically isolated and undertook some of the most stringent border controls in the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, represents an ideal case for conducting qualitative research to explore how location-independence was reconfigured in response to the disruptions of 2020 and 2021. Similarly, interviews with digital nomads, who are ordinarily presumed to be hyper-mobile privileged subjects, provide valuable insights into the reconfiguration of mobility in the context of pandemic-related border and public health controls.

Reflexive thematic analysis for textual and visual data

I employed reflexive thematic analysis to analyse both textual and visual data. The visual data consisted of photographs taken in and around CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as images on social media platform Facebook related to digital nomadism and CWSs, and images on the Internet related to the promotion of DNVs. The selection of visual images was based on predetermined criteria, including relevance and representativeness. To analyse the data, I employed Braun and Clarke's (2013) qualitative thematic analysis approach, which facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants. The analysis process also enabled me to explore the relationship between the textual and visual data, thus enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's findings. After conducting semi-structured interviews, the data was transcribed *ad verbatim* and uploaded into the data analysis software NVivo. The following five stages of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke were applied:

1. Reading and familiarisation of the transcripts
2. Initial coding of the dataset (complete coding)
3. Searching for themes (keeping the research objectives and theoretical framework in the mind)
4. Creating a thematic map (a map of the provisional themes and subthemes, and relationships between them)
5. Defining and naming themes (keeping the research objectives and theoretical framework in the mind)

The first phase of the data analysis required complete immersion in the data. Although the interviews were transcribed soon after they were conducted, listening to the interview recordings allowed me to

revisit CWSs and hear background noises, such as seagulls flying by, traffic near the intersection, or other colleagues of the CWS manager moving furniture around. These moments were crucial for full immersion, while reading the transcripts and recording thoughts and observations in a research journal enhanced engagement with the data. In addition to analysing the audio data, visual data was also analysed. This included the reviewing of photographs of the physical space and the exterior of CWS buildings, as well as the images on the Internet. The analysis of the visual data provided insights into the layout and design of CWSs, and the representation of the image of digital nomads. By combining analysis of both textual and visual data, a comprehensive understanding of digital nomadism and CWSs was obtained.

Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 205) note that "our personal experiences shape how we read data; they can be a great resource for analysis, but they can also limit what we see in data". Therefore, maintaining a continuous awareness of my positionality and locality was essential in this research. I practised this awareness by keeping a notebook to record any subjective thoughts and feelings that arose after the interviews. Despite this personal involvement, the theoretical lens of critical feminist and postcolonial geography was continuously applied, which influenced the creation of themes. The reflexive thematic analysis was a dynamic and continuously evolving process, where I adapted and explored other forms of theories and concepts based on new knowledge, insights, and experience gained. This approach allowed for ongoing critical engagement with the data, rather than a static application of a predetermined theoretical framework.

The second phase of the data analysis involved a thorough and comprehensive coding of the transcripts, referred to as complete coding. This approach involves coding every element of the text rather than selective coding, which only codes certain sections (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A similar approach was used to analyse the visual data including images and photographs systematically. The full coding was executed systematically and organically while maintaining focus on the research objectives. At the beginning of the coding process, some initial codes were descriptions of the selected text and visual data instead of specific code names. The rationale behind this was to avoid distraction and remain immersed in the process. After all the pieces of text were coded, the coded data was collated, and codes with similar characteristics were clustered together. An Excel sheet was utilised alongside NVivo to organise the clustered codes, which provided a detailed account of the new codes developed and their relevance to the research objectives and theoretical framework (see Appendix VIII). It should be noted that NVivo was used solely as a storage tool for transcripts and to facilitate the coding process. The analysis and interpretation of the data were conducted manually through notetaking and creating word clouds to identify potential themes. Additionally, it is worth mentioning

that maintaining awareness of my positionality and its potential influence on the analysis was a continuous practice during the coding process.

The third phase of the data analysis focused on identifying themes in the coded data. This process involved reviewing the clustered codes that had been created, as well as referring to the literature review, my own notes and observations, and the images and photographs collected. The visual data has been reviewed alongside the textual data to identify potential themes. To develop provisional themes, I examined whether there was a central organising concept uniting the codes in some way, which can be seen in Figure 4.3. Some codes were excluded from the thematic analysis as they did not align with the research objectives. The resulting themes emerged from the clustered coding and were chosen based on their ability to stand alone as themes while also being able to connect with other themes and fit together in the research. To prevent confusion, the process of identifying themes in the coded data was carried out separately for the interviews with the managers and community managers of CWSs and a digital nomads and relevant photographs and images to the themes.

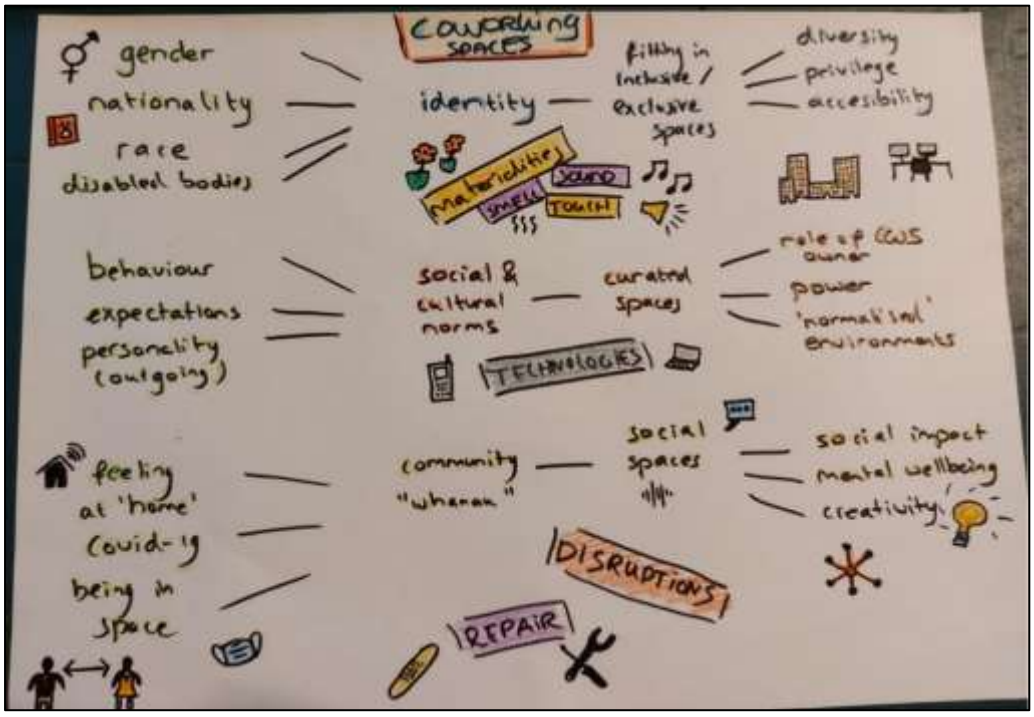

Figure 4.3: Provisional themes on CWSs derived from selected associated codes

The fourth phase of the data analysis consisted of creating a visual representation of the themes that had been identified. The purpose of this visual mapping was to comprehend and identify potential hierarchical relationships between the themes, as depicted in Figure 4.4. However, the themes were found to be non-hierarchical, indicating a clear structure for presenting the research findings in the upcoming three chapters.

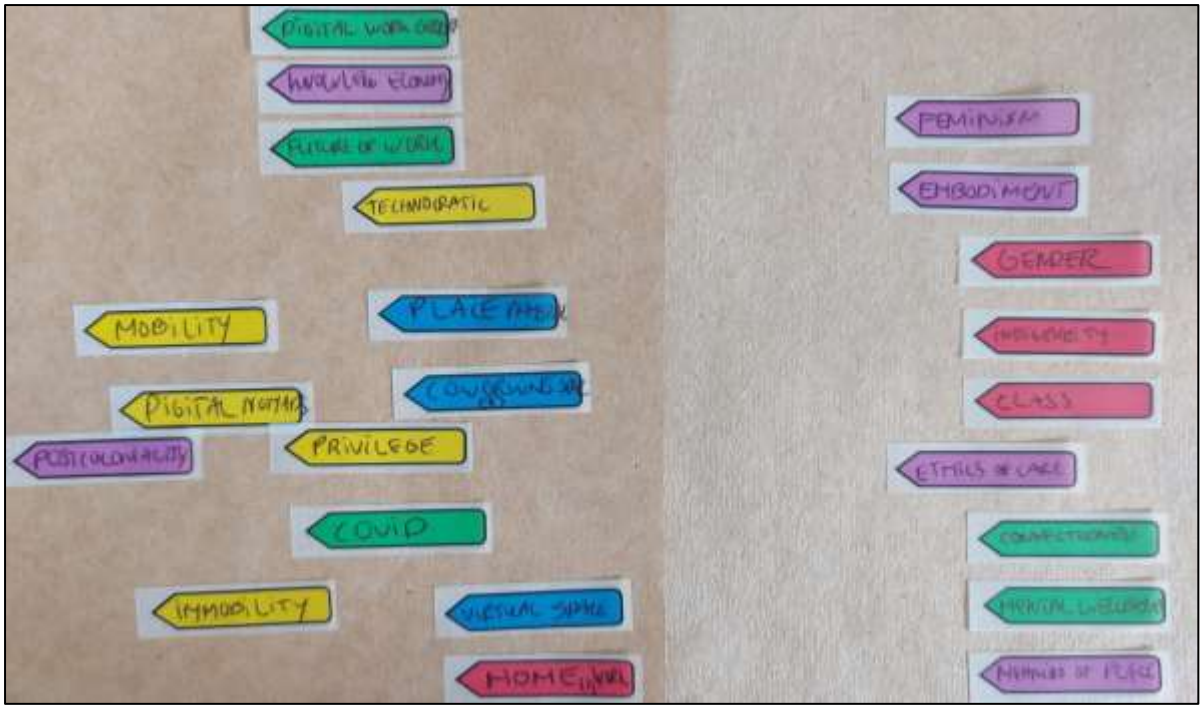

Figure 4.4: Visual mapping

The fifth and final phase of the data analysis aimed to refine the data and investigate how the themes relate to the literature review and the larger dataset. This involved revisiting the themes and making any necessary adjustments or revisions, based on the findings from the literature review and the broader data set. The goal was to develop descriptive names for the themes that accurately reflect the data's narrative, which can be seen in Figure 4.5.

This visual representation illustrates how the themes relate to each other and how they fit within the larger context of the research. The broader themes that emerged from the data were informed by reflexive thematic analysis and laid the foundation for Chapters Five to Seven.

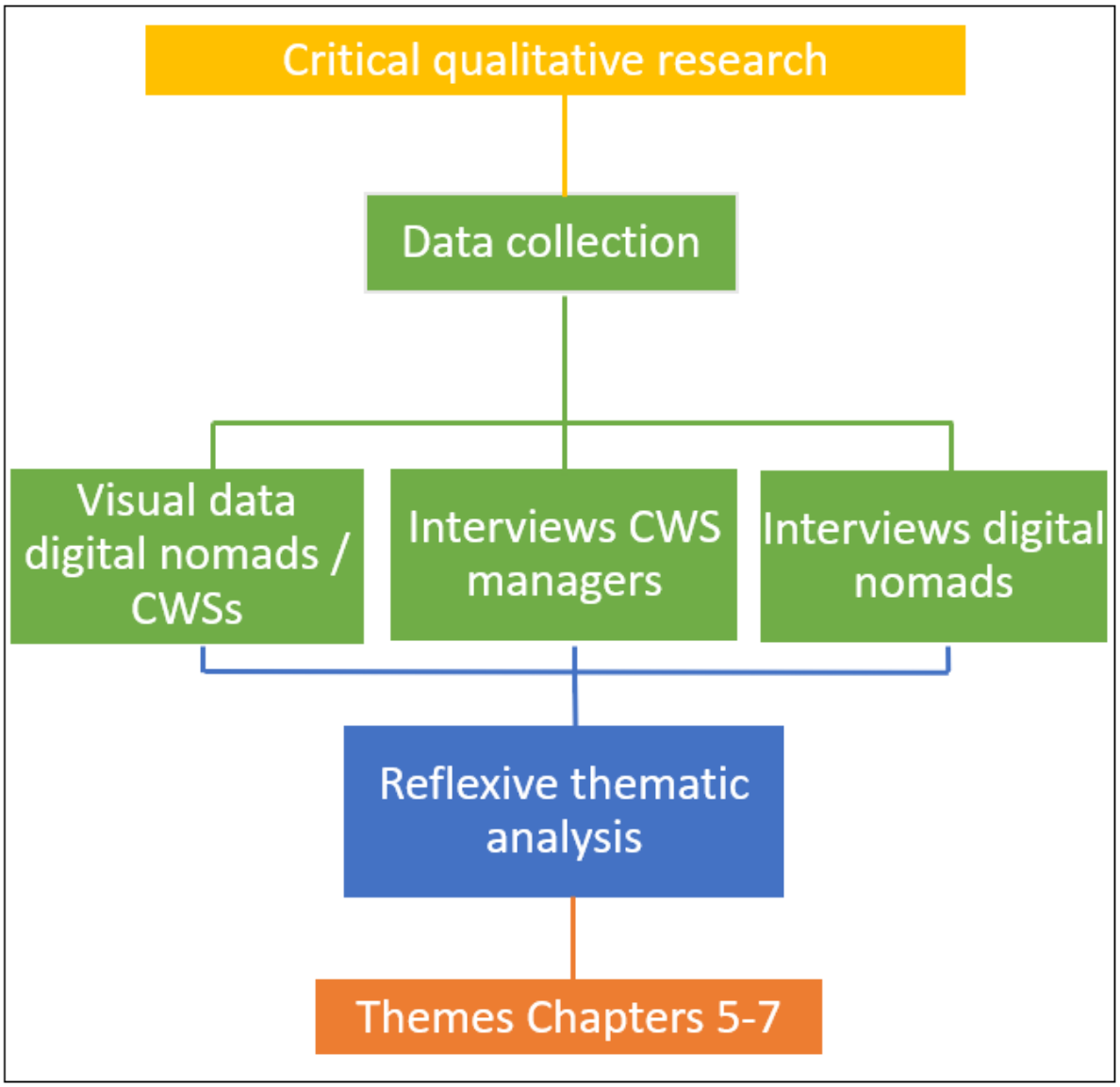

Figure 4.5: Research design of the thesis

Summary

In this methodology chapter, I presented the use of feminist qualitative methods that guide my research. Alongside the discussion of the research design and employed methods, I addressed my positionality and how this personal lens undeniably influences the research process, interactions with participants, and data analysis. Given that the pandemic lasted almost for the entire duration of this thesis, I have provided a personal and in-depth overview of how I navigated the resulting disruptions, the emotions and uncertainty it evoked, and the necessary alterations made to the research design. This exploration is particularly crucial from a feminist geographer's standpoint as it allows readers to comprehend the profound impact COVID-19 had on the research design. The interviews with digital nomads were conducted online, utilising digital technology for communication across various

countries worldwide. This markedly differed from the face-to-face interviews with managers and community managers of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand, where I had the opportunity to visit in-person, sit, observe and work alongside other coworkers. Another data collection method involved analysing visual images on websites promoting DNVs, which significantly contributed to framing the concept of location-independence within this research. The subsequent three empirical chapters delve deeper into the common themes constructed from the visual data, interviews with digital nomads, and interviews with CWS managers. I begin by examining the notion of location-independence through the accounts of digital nomads in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five

Digital nomads: Coloniality, privilege and global migration regimes

> Go where you're treated the best. We create and implement bespoke, holistic strategies for successful investors and entrepreneurs to legally reduce their tax bills, diversify and protect their assets, become global citizens and maximize their freedom (Andrew Henderson, founder of Nomad Capitalist, 2021, n.p.).

> Michael, a white, twenty-eight-year-old male, is Dutch and calls himself a digital nomad. He is currently residing in the Netherlands, housesitting a friend's place, and is waiting for the pandemic to subside before making his next move. He has a background in computational linguistics, a field concerned with developing computer programmes for processing natural language, and has further enhanced his programming skills through online platforms such as Udemy. He was introduced to the field of programming by coworkers who emphasised its potential for high earnings. His first remote job was with an international company, which afforded him the flexibility to work from anywhere. Over the two years he spent with the company, he only saw his colleagues twice, both times online, before virtual meetings became commonplace due to the pandemic. Michael asserts that he does not really mind the remote working arrangement and prefers it to the office politics that are often a part of traditional work environments. He identifies himself as part of the millennial generation, which he views as the next generation to take charge and establish new rules, breaking away from conventional office structures and traditional norms and values. Michael's perception differs from that of his mother, who has worked for the same company for fifteen years.
>
> Location-independence is a crucial aspect for Michael, as he emphasises several times during the interview that all he requires to work is a Wi-Fi connection and a place to sit. Although he is financially able to work from coworking spaces, he prefers not to spend money on such services, especially when he can work for free in a library. Michael constantly seeks ways to take advantage of lower living expenses to sustain his lifestyle, which was reinforced by his recent trip to Colombia, where he realised that his money was worth three times more than in his home country, the Netherlands.
>
> Notes from researcher's diary

This chapter explores the evolving landscape of location-independent work, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of individuals who embrace a digital nomad lifestyle. Digital nomadism, characterised by the ability to work remotely from various locations around the world, has gained momentum in recent years. The purpose of this chapter is to delve into the implications of digital nomadism, examining how individuals navigate issues of location independence, enabled by various infrastructures. Through interviews with digital nomads like Michael, who are able to work from various destinations in the world, and an analysis of texts and images surrounding the digital nomad discourse, this chapter aims to critically examine digital nomadism within the broader context of global mobility and socioeconomic inequality.

Tony Wheeler's *Lonely Planet* guidebook revolutionised backpacking and has since become a staple reference for this audience. Similarly, Tim Ferriss' book *The 4-Hour Work Week: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich* and Thomas Friedman's book *The World is Flat* have emerged as the quintessential texts for digital nomads. During my interviews with Michael and other digital nomad participants, both books were frequently cited as essential reads for anyone exploring a digital nomad lifestyle. However, the Friedman's flat-world hypothesis, which posits that ICTs have created an egalitarian global marketplace, is problematic. This perspective ignores the profound inequalities and power imbalances that persist in the Global South (Sparke, 2007). By referring to Friedman's book, digital nomads may unwittingly adopt an Orientalist and neo-colonial outlook that perpetuates an imagined geography of exotic difference. Sparke (2007, p. 124) notes that the transnational capitalist class is the only group for "whom [this] flat world discourse is a daily reality". The Western-centric and historically myopic perspective in Friedman's book reflects the ongoing legacy of neo-colonial imperialism in contemporary society (Domosh, 2010). This outlook reinforces a binary way of thinking and perpetuates the imagined and desired geographies of privileged digital nomads and their location-independent lives. By mentioning Friedman and Ferriss' works, digital nomads not only reproduce these neo-colonial and opportunistic ideas, but also help to perpetuate these patterns of thought. Michael is just one of many digital nomads who aspire to lead a location-independent lifestyle and his reference to these texts underscores the extent to which they have become central to shaping the worldviews of digital nomads.

The primary argument presented in this chapter posits that digital nomadism is an embodiment of the "coloniality of contemporary regimes of mobility" (Hayes & Pérez-Gañán, 2017, p. 116), wherein concepts of identity (such as class, nationality, gender and race) and the assumed privileges of leading a good life are reproduced by the ability to work remotely from any location in the world, revealing neo-colonial and techno-capitalist practices. The preference for geographic mobility among digital nomads is further reinforced by global mobility regimes, where several national governments in both the Global North and South have initiated DNV programmes. The "border free" lifestyle digital nomads seek is founded on neoliberal subjectivities of freedom, yet in reality they are confronted with numerous tax, visa, and residency regulations in different nation-states. Despite their often-fragile position as online entrepreneurs in the platform economy, digital nomads utilise their embodied identity and citizenship of countries with strong passports to navigate these regulations strategically. The agency that they have is upheld by DNV schemes.

This chapter is structured as follows: firstly, it discusses how digital nomads employ geographic mobility as network capital, as their mobility has become a driving force of "symbolic power, bodily habituses and pleasure-seeking lifestyles" (Elliott & Urry, 2010, p. 3). The subsequent section explores

how various governments are attempting to appeal to the relatively wealthy, long-term stay, digitally literate nomads through the introduction of DNV schemes. While these visa schemes are available to almost any nationality, the income requirements and images portrayed on the websites of the different DNV schemes reveal a different narrative of the type of individuals governments are trying to attract: knowledge workers with strong passports and an elite habitus (Kunz, 2016). This not only classifies digital nomads but also reinforces the concept of neo-colonial capitalism within realms of neoliberal economic structures, deepening socio-spatial inequalities.

Liberation from the state apparatus? Neo-colonialist and techno-capitalist practices

Digital nomads are commonly recognised for their independence, flexible lifestyle, and unconventional work practices, which deviate from traditional norms and behaviours associated with workplace organisation (Reichenberger, 2018). Makimoto and Manners (1997) highlight the longing for a nomadic lifestyle, which entails the ability to travel the world while working remotely without being tethered to a specific place. This desire still persists today for many aspiring digital nomads (Cook, 2020). The notion of deterritorialisation, which liberates individuals from national territories and state apparatus, serves as the fundamental basis of the hyper-mobile lifestyle of digital nomads. Their location-independent work possibilities, facilitated by digital technologies, combined with their privileged identities, further enhance their freedom from location constraints.

The phenomenon of perpetual travel and roaming the world by digital nomads is primarily sustained by temporary residence in countries with lower living costs, while monetising their digital skillset in the gig-economy by working with Western-based contractors. This process is referred to as geo-arbitrage, whereby individuals from affluent countries in the Global North take advantage of lower living costs in emerging economies in the Global South (Hayes & Pérez-Gañán, 2017). The influx of digital nomads to any location in the world also results in processes of gentrification. As techno-capitalised subjects, particularly in countries with emerging economies that are popular due to the lower living costs, they create areas of tourist consumption, where relatively wealthy digital nomads shape and reproduce this process of gentrification (McElroy, 2019b).

The extended geographic mobility of digital nomads and their prolonged duration of stay in a country have contributed to the popularity and growth of platform-based companies such as Airbnb (McElroy, 2019a). The US-owned company operates as an online global marketplace for housing, and has penetrated hundreds of housing markets worldwide (Alizadeh, 2018). As a result, there has been displacement of regular tenants, exacerbation of the rental market as rent prices increase and housing stock gets reallocated (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). Governments are striving to regulate the market

by, for example, relaxing rules around short-term letting (Nieuwland & Van Melik, 2020). Furthermore, gentrification is also evident in other retail and hospitality businesses that specifically target a digital nomad market, thereby displacing local industry and jobs, which is a well-known effect of the international tourism industry (Cocola-Gant, 2018).

Digital nomad Michael explains in relation to Colombia that a low-cost destination perfectly facilitates his hedonist lifestyle:

> For instance, Colombia, there are so many people there and so much is happening, not Colombians but because the living costs are low, the weather is nice, the food is good, it has nice people. You can do everything remotely, so these values are becoming more important. People want to live somewhere where you can have a nice private life.
>
> Michael, Dutch, white male, late-20s, programmer

This focus on achieving lowest costs, however, raises concern over the potential negative impacts on the host country's economy, as well as the sustainability of the nomadic lifestyle long term. Michael's experience of lower living costs in the Global South is only made possible through geo-arbitrage, which allows him to benefit from his privileged identity as a white, Dutch, male in his late-20s, who is educated in the technology industry. However, the low living costs are only low from the viewpoint of a digital nomad or other privileged mobile subjects who work remotely using digital infrastructures and earn salaries based on Global North standards. This further exacerbates global inequality. The increasing popularity of digital nomadism results in intensifying global interdependencies, which mirrors the neoliberal economic structures that create "new struggles against dispossession on a global scale" (Sparke, 2007, p. 117). Michael's experience is an example of how digital nomads fulfil their desire for independence and freedom by colonising space supported by digital technologies, based on Western constructions of paradise (Benson, 2013). The technologies underpinning Michael's lifestyle enabled him to become location-independent, allowing him to focus more on his hedonist desires.

Furthermore, the ability to live a digital nomad lifestyle, supported by the growth and availability of ICTs, is similar to the techno-capitalist underpinnings of Friedman's theory of the flat world. However, to make use of these ICTs, one needs to belong to the privileged few in the world. Globalisation has only deepened the digital divide, making digital nomads from the Global North neo-colonial techno-capitalists who take advantage of the ICT infrastructure and lower living costs in the Global South. Aydogdu (2016, n.p.) argues that "the nomad can be criticized from a critical feminist perspective for its perpetuation of a 'phallo-centric' and technologically-driven notion of progress. This nomad fully

embraces the dominant capitalist logic of speeding up the desire for ever-new products and services". The increasing popularity of digital nomadism and the associated geo-arbitrage holds similar characteristics through the way it can lead to processes of gentrification, furthering global inequality, and reinforcing the privileged position of digital nomads. The following digital nomad Stephanie, takes the opportunity to reflect on her privileged lifestyle, acknowledging the advantages that come with it:

> But what happens is that who can do this? All people from the West who are already privileged. They are now the ones who decide hey I don't like winter, I don't like my high rent, I'm going to a place where my Euro or dollar is three or four times more worth, and I am going to live there. Airbnb is also something that doesn't have a great impact on the local housing market, so I think that especially a lot of Americans are in Medellin in Colombia because they have the same time zone and are still relatively close to home but still much cheaper, nice weather, different people.
>
> Stephanie, German, white female, early 30s, webshop owner

Stephanie demonstrates awareness of her privileged position, although not all of a digital nomads interviewed share this awareness. Stephanie strategically employs her privileges to finance her location-independent lifestyle, which is facilitated by her digital literacy, class, race, and nationality. These factors contribute to the neo-colonial practices of digital nomads, who opportunistically use their inherited privileges to live and work in other parts of the world. According to Elliott and Urry (2010, p. 3), "the globalization of mobility extends into the core of the self". However, the practices of digital nomads working and living in the Global South are neo-colonial, as Stephanie acknowledges her privilege but cannot extricate herself from the inherited global social structures characterised by inequalities. Hayes and Pérez-Gañán (2017, p. 128) have argued in relation to North-South lifestyle migrants that even with goodwill and a desire to fit in, mobile people "remain captive of the inherited structural advantages embedded in the narrower utilitarianism of geoarbitrage, which [..] so often animated their transnational migrations", perpetuating colonial stratification. Digital nomads, therefore, continue to enjoy the colonial and capitalist legacy that advantages the people of the Global North by having a powerful, flexible citizenship that allows them to work and reside in the Global South, further entrenching colonial stratification.

Mobile transnational lifestyles: a globalised notion of white privilege

Digital nomads face numerous challenges when navigating existing regulatory frameworks, as migration policies often prohibit them from working legally and impose restrictions on the duration of tourist visas (Mancinelli, 2020; Thompson, 2019). Many digital nomads find these limitations

frustrating, as their way of life involves frequent border crossings and the need to purchase food, eat out, and rent Airbnb accommodations. For example, Fleur, a digital nomad, argues that her lifestyle is a legitimate reason for governments to adopt a more flexible policy towards digital nomads:

> I mean it is just ridiculous that you can only stay in Mexico or Bali for one month and are officially not allowed to work and then have to do a visa run and come back again. Though it is relatively easy to work your way around it, it would be great if governments can allow us to stay longer. They get money from us as well, the Airbnb's that we are staying in, the food we buy and all.
>
> Fleur, Dutch, white female, late 20s, online marketer

Fleur, a highly educated European white female in her late 20s, expresses a view that her mobility is normal and an entitlement and is frustrated that something beyond her control limits her duration of stay in Mexico or Bali. Fleur's sense of struggle reflects a globalised notion of white, epistemic privilege, which is consistent with Sara Ahmed's critique of nomad theories in her work *Strange Encounters.* Ahmed (2000) argues that the theorisation of migration in critical literature fetishises the formation of nomadic identity, detaching it from place and decontextualising it from asymmetrical power relations. In Fleur's case, her idea of unrestricted mobility is based on the notion of freedom of movement within the Schengen area of the European Union (Jensen & Richardson, 2004). Yet the invisibility of the hegemony of current conditions of the Schengen area gives freedom of movement to European citizens while limiting social and economic mobility to others (Neumayer, 2006).

Neumayer (2006) explains that the regulations of global mobility regimes exacerbate inequalities and uneven access to "foreign spaces", with "passport holders from privileged nations, particularly rich Western countries" enjoying transnational mobility, while others face severe restrictions (p. 72). When digital nomads like Fleur confront restrictions on their mobility in Mexico or Bali, their responses often express entitlement with connotations of white supremacy. This phenomenon is a common observation among digital nomads and has also been reported in research by Thompson (2019). Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge and critically examine the role of race, class and power in the experiences and attitudes towards digital mobility and location-independence.

Digital nomads are known for their flexibility and adaptability, and often resort to creative means, such as undertaking "visa runs"[7] and manipulating migration governance, to navigate visa restrictions and extend their stays in countries, but their legal status remains precarious (Thompson, 2019). This

[7] Visa-runs are "a necessary practice of renewing one's visa and residential status in a particular nation-state by crossing national borders and/or applying for a new visa at a consulate or embassy overseas" (Green, 2015, p. 750).

is similar to Western lifestyle migrants who, despite their relative privilege, also have to navigate expiring tourist visas and governance structures that render them "marginal migrants" with many self-inflicted insecurities (Benson, 2018; Green, 2015; Howard, 2009).

Nevertheless, digital nomads, and lifestyle migrants more generally, possess network capital and hail from countries with "strong passports"[8] (Benson, 2016; Thompson, 2019). In contrast to labour migrants or refugees, whose mobility is often controlled by border and migration regimes (Koslowski, 2011), digital nomads appear to have greater freedom to make what are expressed as conscious choices to move abroad and pursue hedonistic lifestyles, seeking a better work-life balance. Indeed, the search for "the good life" is an underlying motivation for many lifestyle migrants (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Stephanie's backstory illustrates this point well. Her mobile life trajectory has shaped her desire for travel and led her to become a digital nomad unintentionally:

> Stephanie, a thirty-one-year-old white female, was born and raised in Germany and currently resides in the Netherlands with her partner. She obtained a Bachelor's degree in tourism and as always been interested in themes related to travel, foreign cultures, and languages. Stephanie recounts how she used to go on holidays with her mother in Europe and developed a passion for foreign cultures, which influenced her interest. Presently, Stephanie works fully alongside her partner, who owns a website that provides airport information. Her partner's business was set up in a way that allows him to work remotely. Stephanie is proficient in several languages, including German, Dutch, English, French, Spanish. She is always eager to learn new things and conducted her internships online while working from the Netherlands. Although friends had suggested that they could work from anywhere, Stephanie had never planned on becoming a digital nomad.
>
> Notes from researcher's diary

Stephanie's life path trajectory has been shaped by her interest in other cultural and languages, her study of tourism, and her experience working abroad. This has led to her strong desire to travel. Despite not initially planning to work abroad during her professional life, Stephanie has already acquired the necessary skills and network capital that allowed her and her boyfriend to easily adopt a mobile transnational lifestyle, also known as a digital nomad lifestyle. However, their independence is heavily influenced by policies set by nation-states. The COVID-19 pandemic is a prime example of this, as it has illustrated how location-independent digital nomads became limited in their lifestyles and choices of where to live and work. Stephanie and her partner were working from Panama when the situation became increasingly concerning. They discovered that their Western nationality and

[8] Thompson (2019) defines the strength of the passport by the number of visa-free countries one can enter.

white skin suddenly connoted a negative association for the local people, who regarded them as carriers of the virus. For the Panamanians, the pandemic wave came from Europe after it spread from China to Europe. Despite initially wanting to continue working from Panama due to its Westernised "modern" outlook, which gave Stephanie a sense of security, they were forced to leave due to the pandemic's impact:

> Well, it [Panama] was safe and it is quite modern. We were used to deciding everything ourselves and all of a sudden we couldn't do it anymore … Everything was arranged differently in Panama, stricter, and here [the Netherlands], we are surrounded by our friends … We always said, let's try it out, and if it doesn't work, we can always come back [home] … We first felt ok and safe. Prior to Corona, we were able to decide everything ourselves. Where do we go, what will we do today? That became difficult. We have tried to make the best of it. But the simple things, you know, suddenly the pizza store closes, you don't know the city that well, it became quieter and quieter on the streets, people looked at us. For people from Panama, the virus came from the West, for us [German] it came from China, but for them [Panama] it came from us. So, they stared at us, "what are you doing here, you are bringing the virus to Panama". That was interesting. First, I was stared at because I was blonde, and now I was stared at because they thought we were infected with the virus.
>
> Stephanie, German, white female, early 30s, webshop owner

The couple's transnational lifestyle, combined with their Dutch/German nationality and "strong passport" status, provided them with the necessary resources to mobilise themselves and safely repatriate back to their home country. Their values of freedom are manifested through their mobility, which is made possible by various embodied identity and migration infrastructures that facilitate this form of escapism. Digital nomads enjoy a range of privileges that are obtained through their acquired network capital and embodied identities, which allow them to move freely and return to their home countries needed. Despite being temporarily immobile during the pandemic, digital nomads have become increasingly geographically mobile. As I discuss in the following section, government bodies and tourism operators are now keen to capitalise on the growing phenomenon of digital nomadism.

Capitalising on digital nomadism: Airbnb

Government bodies and business tourism operators are actively seeking innovative ways to attract location-independent workers, thereby enhancing the opportunities for digital nomads to live in countries with lower living costs (Hall et al., 2019). The phenomenon of digital nomadism has also been recognised by platform-based companies such as Airbnb and WeWork, which sometimes

collaborate with governments to attract digital nomads to specific locations. For instance, Airbnb partnered with the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) in May 2022 to promote the Caribbean through their newly launched platform, "Live and Work Anywhere" (Airbnb, 2022). On their website (see Fig. 5.1), where they actively seek other governments and destination management organisations to promote digital nomadism, Airbnb (2022, n.p.) states the following:

> Do you represent a destination that is well-suited to attract the world's growing population of remote workers? […] Airbnb is launching the Live and Work Anywhere initiative to help support destinations to become the most desirable and remote-worker friendly locations around the world.

Figure 5.1: Screenshot of Airbnb's Live and Work Anywhere initiative (Airbnb, 2022)

The above statement highlights how Western-owned platform-based company Airbnb leverages and profits from the phenomenon of digital nomadism "to help support destinations" in the Caribbean, thereby increasingly commercialising and commodifying the industry. In my interviews with digital nomads, many of them mentioned Airbnb as their primary choice for accommodation, especially as it was the most affordable option for long-term stays and allowed for a more independent and relaxed lifestyle, where they could work and cook from home without having to rely on expensive coworking spaces or dining out frequently.

Stephanie provides an example of how Airbnb has become a popular choice for digital nomads seeking accommodation. According to her, she and her boyfriend used Airbnb for 80 percent of their stays and Booking.com for the remaining 20 percent, often booking well in advance to secure a spot in the popular areas of cities. In addition, Stephanie notes that the couple preferred to work from Airbnb's, from cooking meals to organising their work schedules:

> We stayed in Airbnb's with a small kitchen, so you could make your own food, and had a table and so that was really simple. So, you just work with your laptop behind the table all day. We mostly did that in Chiang Mai, really a hotspot for digital nomads, and we just worked from home. This was especially nice in the beginning, you can decide the temperature in the room, how you want to have your coffee, you are free to design things. Especially in the beginning, everything was so different, all the different impressions.
>
> Stephanie, German, white female, early 30s, webshop owner

The use of the term "home" by Stephanie when referring to the Airbnb in Chiang Mai is intriguing as it highlights a significant shift in the meaning and constriction of the concept of home for hypermobile individuals. The spatial boundaries between home and workspace are becoming increasingly blurred due to the proliferation of digital technologies, and as a result, Airbnb's may become a safe haven for digital nomad work. For digital nomads the Airbnb becomes a home for work in unknown "territories". Digital technologies and the mobility practices of digital nomads are redefining the notion of home. The concept of home is not solely tied to a physical place, but rather a broader construct that reflects a sense of comfort, safety, and familiarity that, through privilege, can be recreated wherever the individual places themselves.

As Airbnb and digital nomadism continue to gain popularity, research has highlighted the negative impact of Airbnb on local housing (McElroy, 2019a; Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). The consequence of this, as Coldwell (2016, n.p.) explains on Airbnb's in London, is that "rather than arriving to a home-cooked meal served up by a hospitable individual, you could well find yourself renting a flat run by a third-party management company, and collecting your keys from an agent who lets out hundreds of other properties for hosts who are less interested in cross-cultural connections and more concerned with collecting their money at the end of the month". Such practices, which prioritise collecting rent money over cross-cultural connections, are indicative of the on-demand working lifestyle of digital nomads as embedded within the platform economy. They also illustrate the processes of neo-colonialism and techno-capitalism, with research demonstrating that Airbnb hosts list their places based on stereotypical images of local people that fit the desired and imagined geographies of the coloniser (Törnberg & Chiappini, 2020). Many of the Airbnb's used by digital nomads for their long-term stays articulate with the process of contemporary colonialism, shaping the desired and imagined geographies of digital nomads that they, in turn, can profit from. This process further reinforces the gentrification of many areas, which is recognised as another form of neo-colonialism (Smith, 2005). Moreover, governments worldwide are offering DNVs, providing more legal long-stay options, and

reinforcing the process of transnational gentrification, which is explored in more detail in the following section.

COVID-19 and digital nomad visa schemes

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, various governments worldwide responded by implementing lockdowns, health mandates, and border closures, leading to the suspension of tourist and migrant visas. In response, many countries promptly introduced the "digital nomad" or "remote worker" visa (Hermann & Paris, 2020). The initiative has accelerated as several governments (such as Estonia and Aruba) around the world have started to introduce DNVs, ironically paving the way for the hypermobile and tech-savvy digital nomad to come to their country during a time of economic upheaval caused by the pandemic. With citizens limited in their mobility due to lingering COVID-19 restrictions, governments have strategically enticed location-independent workers whose embeddedness in the digital work sector allows them to work remotely, offering an alternative to losses in the tourism sector (Hermann & Paris, 2020). The competition among countries to attract digital nomads has increased, with newly created visas supporting a digital nomad lifestyle. For instance, Michael, a digital nomad, already noted the rise in competition for digital nomads since the beginning of the pandemic:

> Well, yes you see it happen more and more. Digital nomads themselves are becoming more popular now, media covering them and Estonia introducing this digital nomad visa. So, I think we have the power to change some things and the bureaucratic regulations in countries … Countries are in competition with each other to attract and host digital nomads. A digital nomads are very rich people. In Colombia, these people [digital nomads] are willing to pay three times as much as the rental price than the local population. So those countries want to attract digital nomads. Thailand, I just read it this week, they have created a visa that allows digital nomads to stay up to nine months to keep on attracting digital nomads. As they know, they [digital nomads] have the money and that's how we [the government] can earn money.
>
> Michael, Dutch, white male, late 20s, programmer

Michael's remarks highlight the potential of the bourgeoning digital nomad landscape to partly influence the reconfiguration of regulatory migration infrastructures (Mancinelli, 2021), as well as digital nomads' own perceptions of their ability to navigate these reshaped landscapes (Cook, 2022). As discussed in Chapter 3, the concept of migration infrastructure shifts the focus from the drivers and outcomes of migration towards a recognition of the diverse technologies, institutions, and actors involved in facilitating and shaping cross-border movement (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). It could be

argued that COVID-19 has accelerated the diversification of migration and tourism policies, enabled by technological affordances, with governments attuning to the needs of location-independent workers and revising visa regulations. As a result, digital nomads are both subject to and potentially influential in the development of institutional and governmental regulations.

The provincial government of Bali, a well-known destination for digital nomads, has recently introduced a Work from Bali (WFB) plan in May 2021, which aims to attract Jakarta-based civil servants to work remotely from hotels in Bali. This plan has been introduced to assist hotels that are experiencing extremely low occupancy rates and to revive domestic tourism in Bali (Ulung, 2021). Supporters of the WFB plan argue that it should include a DNV scheme, as the long-term stay of digital nomads seem to embody sustainable tourism by allowing individuals to stay longer in one place. It is noteworthy that in 2020, existing digital nomads in Bali, alongside highly positioned local advocates, started a petition that was presented to the Indonesian president Joko Widodo. In the petition, they sought support from government ministers to advocate for a DNV in Bali (Collet, 2020). Similarly, the Croatian DNV was launched following an open letter from a Dutch entrepreneur, Jan de Jong, to the Croatian prime minister Andrej Plenkovic, urging him to follow Estonia's lead[9] in reworking their migration infrastructures and to compete with other countries that offer DNVs (Schengen Visa Info, 2021). Following Croatia's example, neighbouring country Montenegro is also moving towards becoming a digital nomad hotspot, with support from the Ministry of Public Administration, Digital Society and Media for legislative changes. The growing influence of digital nomads is evident in several other countries across Europe, Central America, and Asia, where governments are increasingly embracing a digital nomad phenomenon. Madeira, an island off the coast of Portugal, is taking it one step further by building an entire digital nomad village in Ponta del Sol, a small municipality on the southwest coast of the island. Digital nomads in this village (see Fig. 5.2) have access to existing infrastructures, and "to a global community – with fantastic internet" (Startup Madeira, 2022, n.p.).

The question that arises is whether the local residents of Ponta del Sol and the island of Madeira are genuinely included in the "global community", or whether the privilege of digital nomads creates "an insulated bubble-like existence transporting a comfortable, middle-class, Western environment, to any location around the global, while excluding the local population and cultural contexts" (Thompson, 2018, p. 28).

[9] Estonia was among the first in the world to launch a digital residency program, known as E-residency, which enables individuals from anywhere in the world to legally work and stay in Estonia.

Figure 5.2: Screenshot of the website promoting of Madeira's Digital Nomad village (Startup Madeira, 2022)

The widespread adoption of digital nomad visa (DNV) schemes by countries globally in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the crisis offering an opportunity for policy reforms in the tourism industry, underscores the complex dynamics of colonial legacies and economic dependencies (Gössling et al., 2020). These visa schemes, predominantly embraced by countries reliant on tourism or facing economic challenges, are predominantly offered by postcolonial nations, many of which are non-OECD countries (Migration Policy Institute, 2023) (see Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3: Overview of the countries offering DNV schemes

This observation raises critical questions about the underlying power dynamics and neocolonial influences shaping mobility and economic relations in the contemporary world. Notably, the majority of digital nomads, who predominantly originate from the Global North, countries with colonial histories, are beneficiaries of these visa schemes. This alignment between the origins of digital nomads and the nations offering DNVs highlights the enduring legacies of colonialism, which continue to shape global movement patterns and economic relations.

Moreover, while DNV schemes are often marketed as open to all, closer examination reveals their highly restrictive nature, particularly in terms of income requirements. This restriction disproportionately affects individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, further perpetuating inequalities rooted in colonial histories. The imposition of income thresholds for DNV eligibility reflects a continuation of colonial-era stratification, where access to mobility and opportunity is determined by socio-economic status and historical privilege. As such, the proliferation of DNV schemes underscores the persistence of colonial legacies in shaping contemporary migration policies and the distribution of global mobility rights.

In addition, digital nomad employment must be remote, typically exempting the worker from local income tax and requiring travel and health insurance for the entire visa duration. With few restrictions on nationality (except for Aruba and Barbados, which are only open to US nationals), anyone can work from anywhere and live the leisure-driven lifestyle that American entrepreneur Tim Ferriss promotes in his book. However, the overlapping criteria that characterise a DNV create a restrictive visa, privileging certain mobile individuals over others. In the subsequent section, I explore how governments use the popularised phenomenon of digital nomadism as an incentive to capitalise on the normative concept of remote work (Edwards, 2021) and demonstrate how this results in the privileging of certain bodies based on nationalities, ethnicities and classes.

Reinforcing the stereotypical image of digital nomads: feet in the sand

The romanticised and idealised notion of a digital nomad as an adventurer working remotely from exotic locations such as a beach, is a common perception shared by friends and families of digital nomads. However, Michael and Fleur, two digital nomads, assert that this image does not reflect the reality of their lifestyle:

> Well, you know what the biggest problem with travelling is, with that kind of lifestyle? It is the psychological issues … Because that is an important issue. You know, a lot of people think “oh this is beautiful, your laptop on your lap, cocktail in your hand, nice view”. But that of course isn’t realistic at all (laughs). I mean it is possible, I did sit on the beach with my laptop, but you can’t see anything because of the sun (laughs). But it really is true. The lifestyle is pictured more rosier than it actually is. It is not a holiday.
>
> Michael, Dutch, white male, late 20s, programmer

Fleur further expounds on her experience as a digital nomad, noting that even her friends who visited her while she rented an Airbnb for a couple of weeks, did not truly comprehend the nuances of being

a digital nomad. It is essential to recognise that a digital nomad lifestyle is multifaceted and often involves various challenges and complexities that are not apparent in this superficial representation.

> The good thing as well is that we rented an Airbnb in Mexico for a couple of months and some of my girlfriends came over to join us for a couple of weeks! It was really nice, but they were just on a vacation while we really had to work to keep our business alive. A lot of friends and family don't really understand what we are doing, they think it is a lot of vacationing and a bit of work, while in reality, it is the other way around.
>
> Fleur, Dutch, white female, late 20s, online marketer

The idyllic portrayal of a digital nomad is commonplace and is reinforced by the visual representations of "remote worker visas" on tourism websites of several countries. A closer analysis of the images of the various DNV schemes (see Figures 5.4-5.8 below) that have been introduced since 2019, reveals how nation-states are promoting the lifestyle-led digital nomad phenomenon. For example, the governments of Aruba and Croatia promote the basic concept of a digital nomad lifestyle, which is working from a sunbed or hammock on the beach. However, this depiction is a misrepresentation of the reality of digital nomadism and has the potential to create false expectations for those who aspire to adopt this lifestyle.

Figure 5.4: Aruba's concept of digital nomadism (Aruba, 2023)

Croatia The symbolism of a hammock employed by the government of Croatia is used to portray a white well-groomed male in his late 20s or early 30s, working from his laptop, while gently rocking in a hammock. This portrayal reinforces the notion of ultimate freedom and relaxation associated with digital nomadism, as Cook (2020) noted. Nevertheless, as previously pointed out by Michael, the notion that one can work efficiently from a laptop on the beach is impractical. Despite this, the image is commonly used to entice and convince aspiring digital nomads by reproducing the relaxed and stress-free image of this lifestyle.

Figure 5.5: Croatia's image of a digital nomad (Croatian National Tourist Board, 2022)

Antigua and Barbuda reinforce the stereotypical image of a digital nomad (Thompson, 2019) as a Western, white, tanned male, who is working remotely on his laptop while reclining on a sunbed, with his feet in the immaculate white sand. This imagery perpetuates the notion of digital nomadism begin a lifestyle choice for privileged Westerners seeking a sense of adventure, leisure, and freedom in tropical locations. Such representations tend to ignore the realities and complexities of working remotely, such as the challenges of securing reliable internet connectivity, managing time zones, dealing with cultural differences, and coping with social isolation and loneliness.

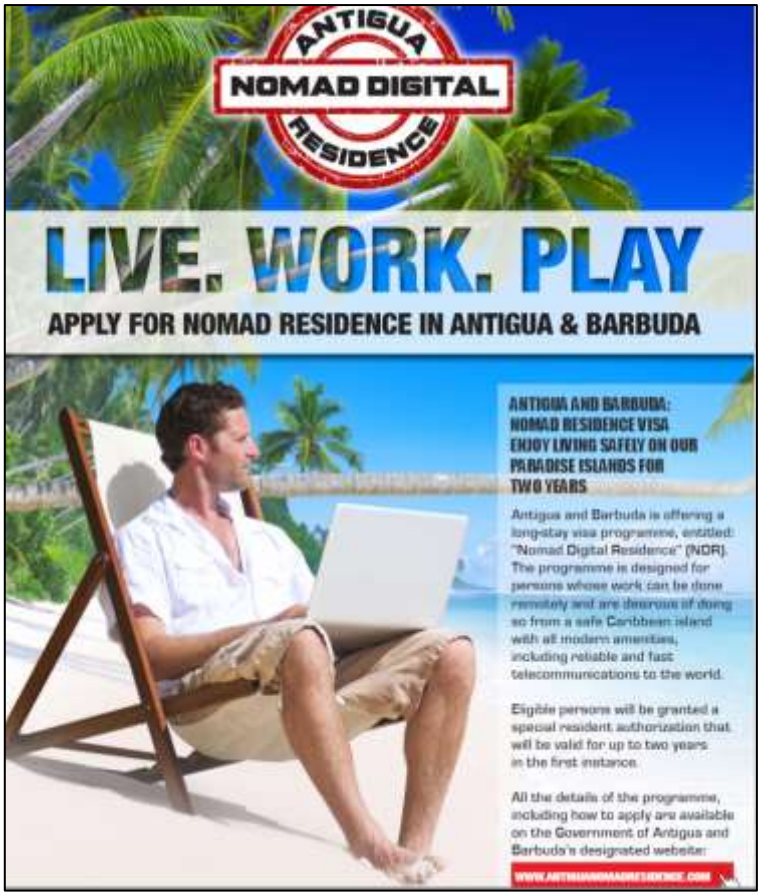

Figure 5.6: Antigua & Barbuda's idea of a digital nomad (Antigua and Barbuda, 2022)

Figure 5.7: Belize's representation of a digital nomad (Belize Tourism Board, 2022)

Lastly, Belize's website showcases a white, tanned, young female perfectly manicured nails working on her laptop while sitting on the beach, the yellow straw of a cold drink peeking through the bottom right corner. Shap, thin shadows in the sand reveal a palm tree providing shade under which she works. This image, coupled with the text that reads "business and pleasure blend", creates an impression of luxury and status, where it is perhaps likely that a waiter or waitress is just outside the frame of the image, waiting to serve a digital nomad a drink. The use of such imagery on official government websites, which is further reproduced by digital nomads themselves through social media, creates a fantasy of an independent and free life (Cook, 2020). It is exactly this reproduction of the fantasy of an independent worry-free life led by digital nomads, that leads to aspiring digital nomads wanting to adopt the same lifestyle. Digital nomad Stephanie explains:

> But yes, digital nomad, once you have searched for it, once you see and read several articles about it, and then in your head you think like, "oh cool"!
>
> Stephanie, German, white female, early 30s, webshop owner

This fantasy, along with visa names such as "Premium Visa", "White Card", "Global Citizen Concierge Program"[10] (see Fig. 5.8) or "Nomad Digital Residence", contributes to the perception that this lifestyle is associated with elite status, privilege, and exclusivity.

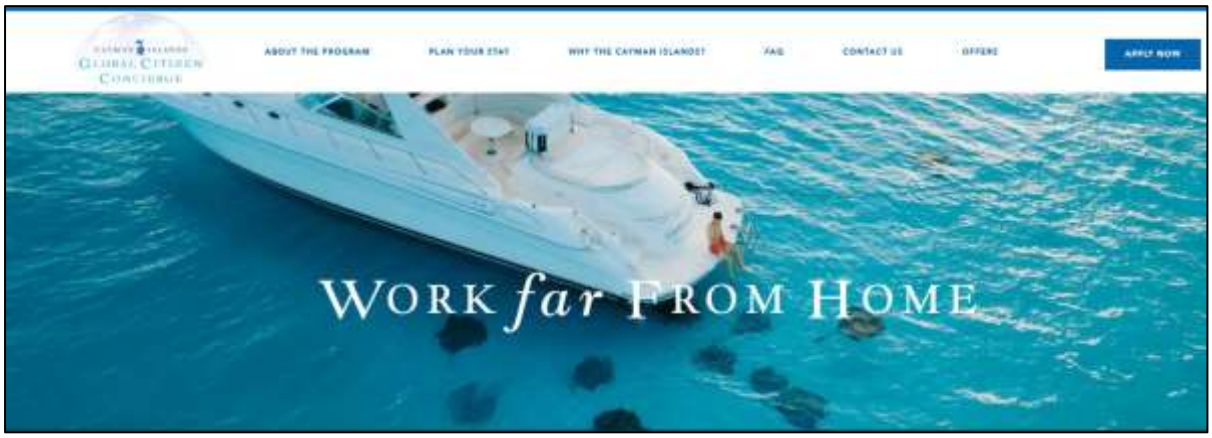

Figure 5.8: Cayman islands' idea of working remotely (Cayman Islands, 2022)

The typical representation of digital nomadism suggests that it is a lifestyle predominantly centred around leisure and technology, reflecting a form of mobile network capital accessible only to the privileged. "The good life" (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009) is often associated with a "life on the move", and multiple mobilities have become symbols of power and pleasure-seeking lifestyles embodied by a digital nomad (Elliott & Urry, 2010). Examining how governments of countries offering DNVs portray digital nomadism as a privileged and exclusive lifestyle, provides insight into how colonial legacies may

[10] As of October 2022, the Global Citizen Concierge Program is closed for applications.

reveal themselves in the intricate dynamics between digital nomads and postcolonial countries. The reproduction of the colonial imaginary of these countries as comfortable, with unlimited access to beaches and a great digital infrastructure, echo the colonial images of digital nomadism in popular media (Bonneau et al., 2023). While digital nomads have flocked to these destinations prior to the introduction of the DNV, it is important to recognise the active role these regulatory infrastructures play in facilitating the phenomenon of digital nomadism, whereby they further reinforce stereotypical colonial imaginaries and commodification of place, perpetuating uneven power relations. These socio-economic imbalances are further reproduced by the high-income requirements necessary to qualify for digital nomad visas, as discussed in the following section.

High-income earner or precarious gig-worker?

In order to attract highly skilled digital nomads, many governments offering digital nomad visas impose strict income requirements as part of the eligibility criteria, which are often two or three times higher than the average monthly income in their respective countries. Income requirements range from 476 USD in the Czech Republic to 8,333 USD per month in the Cayman Islands (see Table 1.1). Moreover, some governments may require applicants to submit a bank statement to prove that they have sufficient funds to support themselves throughout the duration of the visa.

It is often claimed that digital nomads enjoy significant financial freedom, as promoted in popular books like Tim Ferriss' *The 4-Hour Work Week: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich*. However, contrary to these popular beliefs and media representations, only a small percentage of digital nomads are financially free, as most of their work is situated in the competitive platform economy (Thompson, 2019). Fleur, a digital nomad, explained that she is able to live a nomadic lifestyle due to her partner's secure income as her own income from picking up gigs is not sufficient to sustain her financially.

> Yes, it took me quite a while to make a sustainable living out of my work. I had three small freelance gigs when I started in the first month, and we mostly used our savings and my boyfriend's income to sustain our lifestyle. It is still really hard for me, though my network is growing, it is hard to get gigs. Not to find them but to get them for an actual fair rate.
>
> Fleur, Dutch, white female, late 20s, online marketer

Fleur's comment illustrates that her ability to sustain her digital nomad lifestyle is contingent on her boyfriend's income from the IT industry. The perceived independence of Fleur's lifestyle is, in realty, is, constrained by the inconsistency of gigs that offer a reasonable pay rate. Fleur emphasises the

importance of obtaining a fair rate that corresponds to a Global North salary (McElroy, 2019a) in order to maintain a sustainable living while living in low-cost destinations. Similarly, Julia describes how her digital nomad lifestyle required a great deal of determination, hard work, and investment over several years, rather than a quick solution or a start-when-you-land lifestyle:

> It is more the established nomads who are secure of an income. I met so many digital nomads who have the idea of setting up a business while already being abroad. What they don't realise is that it takes years and a whole lot of dedication to set up a good-running business. It's a lie that is old and bought by everyone.
>
> Julia, German, white female, mid 30s, webshop owner

Similarly, Julia took years to establish her business in Germany before embarking on a digital nomad lifestyle. Moreover, Stephanie and Sigrid also followed this approach by investing significant effort into building their respective businesses in their home countries, the Netherlands and Iceland, before setting out to work from other countries. These narratives illustrate the underlying challenges associated with digital nomadism, contrary to popular perceptions of a carefree, leisure-based lifestyle.

> I had one client whom I already knew, so I guess 70-80% of my time was already filled with work. So, I didn't go on a journey without any work or so. I think you often see that question asked in those digital nomad groups: oh, what can I do to become one? I understand that question, it looks nothing better than living from somewhere else and earning money.
>
> Stephanie, German, white female, early 30s, webshop owner

> It takes years though to build up a good profile and make connections. That's often what you hear other digital nomads saying or asking, "how did you do it, how long does it take". Running and having your own business isn't a quick fix! You really need to spend a lot of time and research (laughs), yes research here I go again, in making a business successful.
>
> Sigrid, Icelandic, white female, mid 30s, content writer/environmental consultant

Sigrid candidly admits that becoming a digital nomad requires years of dedication and hard work to set up a successful online business before embarking on a location-independent lifestyle. A digital nomad lifestyle is not simply a matter of hopping on a place and working from anywhere. Instead, it involves a long-term strategy that includes navigating various tax, insurance, and international legal regulations. Furthermore, it requires a strong work ethic and discipline to work effectively while being abroad in the desired destination. This is exemplified by Michael's experience while staying in a hostel in Poland and attempting to work remotely.

> I worked in Poland for a while, just for a week, not that long. And I was in a hostel trying to work 30 hours a week. But I met a lot of great people in that hostel who often did things together, sitting in the pub until late night, but I couldn't join them. And that was really annoying. On the one hand it is really tempting to really celebrate the holidays, but that's not realistic, you can't keep up. So, people often make it more glamorous than it is.
>
> Michael, Dutch, white male, late 20s, programmer

During his stay at a hostel, Michael was unable to join other tourists for drinks late into the night as he had to work the following day. This highlights the less glamourous reality of the location-independent life of a digital nomad. According to Wang et al. (2020), working long hours is a more common and realistic practice for knowledge workers, and Michael's disciplined approach exemplifies the competing work/leisure boundaries that digital nomads face. Contrary to the popular notion that digital nomadism prioritises lifestyle and freedom, accounts such as these reveal the precarious nature of this lifestyle (Thompson, 2018, 2019). Although it is often asserted that anyone can become a digital nomad (Hart, 2015), Stephanie clarifies that it is not as simple as "living from somewhere else and earning money". Hall et al. (2019) and Thompson (2018, 2019) suggest that the decline of the social welfare state and the embeddedness of digital nomads in the platform economy deprive them of the institutional safety nets that are usually available to expatriates. Despite the challenges, many digital nomads find the lifestyle fulfilling and rewarding.

While digital nomads enjoy flexibility and freedom, their employment is often uncertain, and social security is lacking (Murgia & Pulignano, 2021).[11] This complex phenomenon often falls short of the stereotypical representation of digital nomadism promoted by governments, which portrays digital nomads as well-tanned individuals working on their laptops from the beach or a hammock. In reality, digital nomads face numerous precarious conditions associated with the platform economy (Thompson, 2018). Many of the participants interviewed for this study admitted to the precariousness of their lifestyle, with some relying on their savings or their partner's income when travelling.

Despite the availability of technology that allows digital nomads to work from anywhere, many still choose to establish their businesses from the comfort and security of their home country, often while working as a separate job. Chapter 3 has highlighted that the neoliberal approach to work has resulted in increased responsibilities, risks, and liabilities being shifted onto platform workers who lack organisation, structural information, representation, and collective agreements, regardless of their status (Hauben et al., 2020). However, digital nomads from affluent countries in the Global north have

[11] This is not to say that all standardised forms of work arrangements are necessarily secure and stable.

access to the safety nets and insurance provided by their citizenship, which mitigates some of the risks associated with starting a business (Faist, 2000). This privilege creates an uneven playing field, where platform work, particularly in a transnational setting, engenders unfair competition (Hauben et al., 2020, p. 2). Only digital nomads from countries with robust social security systems and networks are able to maintain their socio-economic privilege despite the precarious nature of digital nomadism (Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021), in contrast to their counterparts from the Global South whose governments provided limited social security provision (Tintiangko & Soriano, 2020). Graham et al. (2017) demonstrated how temporary or permanent migrants from low-income countries to Malaysia and South-Africa, due to visa or work permit limitations, can only secure work through digital labour platforms that enable them to bypass "institutional and regulatory constraints associated with their temporary countries of residence" (p. 147). Although digital nomads and labour migrants can both secure "gigs" through the global platform economy and work remotely, the legal status of labour migrants is even more precarious than that of digital nomads.

I highlight the discrepancy between different types of migrations and their perceived economic benefits, because a digital nomad, who is typically a white, highly-educated individual with a powerful passport from the Global North (Emejulu & McGregor, 2019; Thompson, 2019), is often perceived as being more economically beneficial than labour migrants. However, labour migrants have fewer socio-economic resources and do not conform to the hegemonic concept of digital nomadism. Despite the all-nationalities-are-welcome discourse framing the policies, labour migrants are not eligible for the newly created digital nomad visa schemes due to income requirements.

Shamir (2005, p. 209) explains that in the US, "classes of people who are typically barred entry, namely, unskilled laborers, may be granted mobility rights for designated tasks, while people who become valuable citizens of multinational corporations, namely, corporate executives, are granted special mobility privileges". Similarly, in the case of digital nomads, the remote worker visa grants entry to highly educated and ICT-skilled digital-literate mobile workers, adhering to their privileged embodied identities as predominantly hypermobile people from the Global North. The phenomenon of digital nomadism is now further exacerbated by the governments of many different nation-states that are embracing it.

The introduction of digital nomad visa schemes has resulted in new legal frameworks that can be challenging for digital nomads to navigate (Cook, 2022). Various blogs and vlogs, such as those by Henderson (2021) and NomadTalk (2022), feature digital nomads openly discussing the practicalities of obtaining a digital nomad visa. They often prefer to remain perpetual tourists rather than conforming to more rules, as this contradicts their vision of digital nomadism as a symbol of

independence and freedom. However, the tourist visa that many digital nomads rely on is a result of the privileges conferred by colonial histories that continue to shape visa policies and restrict mobility for others. Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013, p. 188) argue that "[i]t is the labour of those whose movements are declared illicit and subversive that makes possible the easy mobility of those who seem to live in a borderless world of wealth and power".

Andrew Henderson, founder of online company Nomad Capitalist, recommends that fellow and aspiring digital nomads should obtain digital nomad visas for "difficult" European countries such as Norway or Croatia, which are otherwise challenging to immigrate to. However,

> "if you're looking at Central America, South America, Southeast Asia, those countries [sic] generally have residence programs that you can get into that might be more flexible for long-term work […] look at some of the deals that are still open in the Philippines […] [countries] where you can show wealth and you can go there" (Henderson, 2021, n.p.).

This extract illustrates how digital nomadism is not only associated with neo-colonialism, but also how digital nomads use systemic privileges to their advantage. This confirms Mancinelli's (2020, p. 417) argument that "rather than a challenge to the system, digital nomadism is an opportunistic adaptation to neoliberal impacts". This highlights the need to explore the political economy of digital nomadism, which is an area that has not been thoroughly researched.

Digital nomads as techno-capitalist subjects

Additionally, digital nomads must work in the technology sector to be eligible for a digital nomad visa. The introduction of digital nomad or remote worker visas specifically targets highly skilled workers in the IT sector. This perspective is reinforced by Michael's description of digital nomads, which states:

> We are millennials, travelling, working, exploring the world, we are open-minded. Traditional norms and values are thrown in the bin, and we replace them … this new generation I believe, act different in this respect. Less tolerant now. Bosses would tell you what to do and you would do it, that's not how things work anymore. Especially being a programmer, if I don't like it, I can just go and start somewhere else. Plenty of choice.
>
> Michael, Dutch, white male, late 20s, programmer

Michael's expression of freedom, entitlement, and prospects for upward mobility through class, technology, gender, and ethnicity (McDowell, 2011b) positions a digital nomad at the centre of the world, claiming to have the right and power to dominate it while staying at a comfortable distance from it. This highlights the male-dominated nature of knowledge in digital nomadism, where

increasing importance and power are ascribed to technology in their everyday lives. Michael cites his job as a programmer as indicative of the position he holds as a global subject and the power he has to direct his life and mobility. While many professions nowadays allow for remote work, digital nomads with established businesses have the most opportunities to sustain a location-independent lifestyle. This is illustrated by digital nomads Michael and Rahul, who view programming as the future:

> There is so much competition. And everybody wants to have the best people. Like programmers, we are the future. We programmers are deciding where we go. Let's say we are the train and control the speed of the train. If you want to hop aboard, then it is up to you. But that means that you have to work with us.
>
> Michael, Dutch, white male, late 20s, programmer

> What I really like about it is that you don't need to speak the language of the country you are working in to do the job. Programming traverses all languages!
>
> Rahul, Indian/American, male of colour, late 20s, programmer

The techno-capitalist imagery of digital nomads is not only constructed by popular media, but it is also reinforced by various migration infrastructures and embodied by digital nomads themselves.

The introduction of the DNV scheme is part of a wider strategy adopted by governments to digitalise their countries or enhance specific regions, and attract foreign talent to facilitate innovation and technology (Edwards, 2021). Countries are increasingly competing with one another to attract digital nomads, the ultimate subjects of liquid modernity. For instance, Forbes' research on the government of Greece estimates that "if at least 100,000 digital nomads stay in the country for six months of the year, the economy would be €1.6 billion ($1.8 billion) richer every year through taxes and local spending" (Williams, 2021). This highlights the discursive framing around the phenomenon of digital nomadism, portraying them as neoliberal subjects of liquid modernity with high network capital, particularly in post-pandemic times. The techno-capitalist mindset that underpins the migration infrastructures of several governments to attract this affluent migrant category becomes further apparent in the rapid transformation of cities into digital or techno-hubs, as well as the upgrading and expansion of internet coverage and mobile networks. The process of improving digital infrastructures has accelerated during the pandemic, with the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) recommending that countries invest in digital skills and strengthen ICT infrastructures as a way to reinvigorate economies and become more resilient (OECD, 2020), which would also facilitate the online work demands of digital nomads in remote places.

Cyprus is one of the countries that have recently introduced a digital nomad visa as part of their broader digital policy to attract science and technology companies. According to Secretary Himonas of the Ministry for Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, the aim of offering a digital nomad visa is to create a fast-track process to attract established science and technology companies and start-ups from abroad to improve local wealth:

> And this framework consists of four pillars: The institutional environment, access to human capital, upgrading our infrastructure, and of course, building brand Cyprus as a favorite destination for science and tech companies. We are institutionalizing a digital nomad visa and the EU blue card. This means, giving the right to live and work in Cyprus to qualified professionals as an EU country. We are making it easy to acquire work permits by simplifying and digitalising the processes. We are also revising the naturalisation process. And we're considering a reduction of the legal residence time. We may reduce the current seven years required to obtain naturalisation to five years – this is just being discussed (*CyprusMail*, 2021).

Thus, a digital nomad visa serves as a facilitator of the promotion of affluent individuals who have a highly qualified digital skillset, while downplaying the migration opportunities of others.

Shamir (2005, p. 209) notes on the global mobility regime that "the visa system allows for the fine-tuning of movement, carefully sorting out individual identities […] geared toward sorting out those who are deemed necessary to enhance the quality of the labor market from those who are considered redundant or, worse, a burden". In this regard, a digital nomad visa is part of the techno-capitalist strategy of nation-states to attract high-skilled workers in the ICT sector and to govern mobility flows that contribute to the digital economy of the country. Digital nomads can upwardly mobilise themselves by using their digital skillset, where technologies and foreign investment are increasingly prioritised for profit by governments from nation-states around the world. A digital nomad visa can be seen as a new tool of mobility that governments use to attract a global mobile workforce with digital skillsets, contributing to the creation of transnational lives with flexible citizenship, as well as reinforcing the discourse of liquid modernity.

The implementation of digital nomad visas, which allows digital nomads to work temporarily in foreign countries while enjoying flexible citizenship, seems to be part of a broader techno-capitalist strategy by governments to invest in and create networks in emerging digital markets and technologies, rather than just providing digital nomads with a lifestyle experience (WTO, 2020). This aligns with the notion of a global mobility regime proposed by Shamir (2005), which restricts social movement by various borders and actively contains them. By facilitating mobilities that privilege certain individuals, such as digital nomads, a digital nomad visa reinforces the borders of various nation-states.

The reworking of technology and regulatory logics of operation is not a new phenomenon, as demonstrated by Beaverstock's (2012) research on highly-skilled migrants in Singapore. In his research, the concept of "'foreign talent', has been used in economic policy to overtly enhance the city's world city competitive status" (p. 240).[12] The introduction of digital nomad visa schemes marks a shift in the geopolitical landscape, as new and alternative migration categories are introduced for digital nomads, enabling them to lead transnational lives with flexible citizenship (Ong, 1999). Meanwhile, those who do not work in the technology sector are increasingly relegated to the status of 'migrant labourer', despite the skill set they may bring to the country. The introduction of digital nomad visas is indicative of the promotion of highly-skilled labour migration, where a young digital-labour workforce, such as digital nomads, enables countries to further attract and invest in technology businesses and innovation (Gershman, 2021; Kamin, 2020).

Conclusion

The analysis of digital nomadism and its impact on global mobility and economic growth reveals the growing significance of location-independence. Digital nomads, often considered privileged global citizens, possess the freedom to work from any location worldwide, unrestricted by the confines of traditional office-based employment. The rise of digital nomads and the implementation of digital nomad visas are part of a broader techno-capitalist strategy by governments to attract highly skilled workers in the ICT sector and drive future economic development. However, this strategy also has the effect of reinforcing borders and privileges certain individuals, perpetuating epistemic coloniality.

At the core of this phenomenon lies the notion of location-independence, which has gained increasing significance in the digital era. Digital nomads, by leveraging their mobility and technology, challenge traditional notions of place and work. Thus, they contribute to the development of new digital geographies of place, mobility, and work, highlighting the significance of location-independence as a means of accessing global opportunities and connecting with others in the digital realm. Furthermore, this shift signifies a departure from the significance of physical location in work and the emergence of a new type of work culture that transcends geographical boundaries.

Moreover, digital nomadism has led to the commodification and gentrification of platforms such as Airbnb, which has become a popular choice for many digital nomads seeking accommodation during

[12] In late November 2020, The Singaporean Economic Development Board introduced a the "tech-pass", a visa scheme that enables "established tech entrepreneurs, leaders or technical experts from around the world to come to Singapore to perform frontier and disruptive innovations" (Singapore Economic Development Board, 2021, n.p.). The scheme, which requires a monthly salary of 14,808 USD, targets a specific group of elite business individuals and foreign investment in the technology sector.

their travels. This further reinforces the inherent power structures and privilege in digital nomadism, as only those with the financial means to access these spaces can fully participate in this lifestyle. It also raises significant questions about the role of third-party intermediaries in facilitating these mobilities and extracting value from them. In the context of location-independence, these issues emphasise the need for a critical examination of how privilege and power structures operate in the digital geographies of place, mobility and work.

The emergence of location-independence has significant implications for scholarship on the digital geographies of place, mobility, and work, prompting a reconsideration of traditional work paradigms and concepts of physical space. The concept underscores the importance of flexible and remote work arrangements in the digital era, and the accelerated adoption of remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic further solidified the relevance of location-independence as a crucial element of the future of work. The pandemic disrupted conventional work patterns, eventually resulting in a growing demand for coworking spaces, which will be explored in depth in subsequent Chapters Six and Seven.

Chapter Six

Coworking spaces: the ‘right’ space for the ‘right’ people

> It’s the *human geography*. Why do some places work and some don’t, you know, you can’t just build and we all come? No, you’ve got to be quite clever as to who you put in that space. And who do you bring into your space for that connectivity (Rebecca, manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area, italics added).

Each step I take leading up to the coworking space (hereafter CWS) echoes around the hard interior with a distinct click, click, click. The industrial minimalism of this refurbished building in the heart of bustling central business district (CBD) of Auckland strikes me as I pause on the stairs. Looking through the glass of the black-steel-framed window to my left, I observe well-dressed young and middle-aged men and women confidently talking on their phones or holding eco-friendly take-away coffee cups. I have just purchased one myself before my scheduled interview with a CWS community manager. As I continue up the stairs, I notice a few words on each step, that read:

There's a lady, who is sure, all that glitters is gold and she's buying a stairway to heaven. *When she gets there, she knows, if the stores are all closed, with a word she can get what she came for.*

As I ascent the light-grey concrete stairs towards the top, my mind drifts to Led Zeppelin's iconic song, *Stairway to Heaven,* and I find myself quietly humming the melody. I am reminded of encountering the same lyrics at another CWS, while climbing a similar industrialised staircase adorned with graffiti artwork on its grey concrete wall (see Fig. 6.1).

Figure 6.1: The 'stairway to heaven' (image by author)

This similarity piques my inters, and I begin to ponder the meaning and interpretation of these lyrics, and the rationale behind featuring them on these staircases. I am curious if these lyrics are meant to

convey words of hope, inspiring visitors to believe that entering the CWS will be an experience akin to heaven. Alternatively, is the message conveyed in these lyrics purely materialistic and hedonistic, suggesting that money can buy a woman anything? I wonder if these words serve as a daily inspiration for the coworkers or if they evoke feelings of greed among them? Is this a stereotypical assumption based on gendered expectations, or is it an attempt to locate the CWS within a particular generational sphere? Perhaps the lyrics are intended to situate the CWS within the liminal space of urban chic, reflecting the "rise of the Creative Class" (Florida, 2019) and appearing as a materialised form?

The lyrics featured in CWSs, along with their industrialised look and feel, are indicative of the significance places on aesthetic features, the curated cultural environment, and the ideology behind the space's establishment. Unlike conventional office spaces found in banks, government institutions, or other similar settings, CWSs prioritise design and ambiance to foster collaboration, entrepreneurship, and creativity. They offer digital technologies, appealing aesthetics, and a range of materialities such as desks, screens, chairs, plants, and beanbags (Grazian, 2020; Jamal, 2018). These arrangements provide the spatial, social, and digital infrastructures necessary for a range of location-independent freelancers or entrepreneurs.

CWSs are continuously evolving places that shape and are shaped by understandings and notions of identity, making individuals feel in or out of place (Massey, 2005). These spaces are curated, particularly by CWS managers, who have the ability to create inclusive and/or exclusive environments. Consequently, CWSs are often described in the literature as trendy office spaces with a cool vibe that encourages collaboration and innovation (Gandini & Cossu, 2019).

This chapter investigates the digital geographies of work, mobilities, and bodies by examining the operation of CWSs. Through an exploration of feminist digital geography and embodiment scholarship, this chapter sheds light on the mutually constructed identities of CWSs and the people embodying these shared workspaces. Feminist geographer Massey (2013, p. 169) contends that "the identity of a place does not derive from some internalised history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with "the outside"". To further examine this issue, this chapter presents the stories of 11 managers and community managers of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand. By doing so, it becomes clear that CWS managers hold uneven power relations that contribute to the construction of place identity, and the coproduction of desired bodies within CWSs. These power relations shape not only the physical layout of these spaces, but also their cultural and social dimensions.

In doing so, this chapter provides a nuanced account of CWSs than the popular and dominant framing of CWSs as open, welcoming and informal spaces (see e.g., Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; Spinuzzi, 2012; Weijs-Perrée et al., 2019). In particular, I focus on the ambivalence of the practices of coworking,

contrasting with some of the "celebratory" discourses around CWSs. This chapter demonstrates how CWSs, like conventional workplaces, are also gendered, racialised, and classed spaces where guidelines, material forms, expectations, and practices constitute the ordering of these places. Despite the intention to create more inclusive spaces, the CWSs in this research were often valorised and transactional workspaces that create a surprisingly conventional and conformist community, especially when held in comparison with conventional workplaces. By looking at concepts of embodiment, place, and mobility through the lens of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand, this chapter provides a crucial understanding of how the concept of location-independence articulates with privileged identities of who is an ideal coworker and ideal CWS. To begin, the chapter discusses the materialities of CWSs and how they reproduce specific desired identities in space.

Access to the CWS: Stairway to heaven

Upon reaching the top of the staircase, I am promptly welcomed into the CWS by a friendly white New Zealand Pākehā (European) woman in her late 20s who requests that I register on the tablet, while she contacts the community manager with whom I have arranged to meet. Despite its appearance of being readily accessible, entry to the CWS is only granted to registered residents or members. According to a manager of a medium-sized CWS located in an urban area, CWS managers endeavour to establish an inclusive and accessible environment for coworking:

> Yeah, make it accessible. Unlock that door. So, how will I feel already locked out? So, it's that whole sort of thing how you curate, again … We can just activate spaces, you know, go and work with the business owners and work with property owners and say, wow, sweet, what do you need? Do you want to fill space? We can do that.
>
> Rebecca, manager of a middle-sized CWS, urban area

In this manager's view, the focus is not simply on removing physical barriers that signify inaccessible and closed spaces by "unlocking that door". Rather, it is about creating an environment that is welcoming and accessible to everyone, including those who are co-constitutive of the space's identity. The question that arises is to what extent these spaces are truly accessible and for whom. It is important to note that there is a fine line between being an inviting, open pseudo-public space and one that is invisible and inaccessible. Lorne's (2020) study highlights how a CWS in London creates geographies of exclusion, where the concept of openness is associated with social innovation, but in reality, intersects with spaces of exploitation and enclosure. By placing restrictions on access to CWSs, such as requiring paid membership or swipe-cards, the seemingly open and public nature of these

workspaces is paradoxical. In reality, CWSs only cater to a limited range of people and identities, co-producing specific desired bodies and practices in space (Ishitsuka, 2020).

As I register as a new guest on the tablet to locate the community manager I have an appointment with, I look around. Because the space is so open, it almost feels like too much to take in all at once. The 90-year-old building formerly housed a steel company. The exposed rustic masonry of the refurbished structure is carefully preserved to create a modern and industrial look. Apart from the dog that is resting on the floor next to one of the bright-coloured bean bags, everyone seems to be working on their laptop or desktop computers with double-screens. Some of them are working in teams at dedicated large tables, while others preferred to work at standing desks, ergonomic office chairs, old-fashioned wooden chairs, or stools, cumulatively conveying a serious work atmosphere. Despite the hustle and bustle, some coworkers have headphones on, and others are having private conversations in meeting rooms or green pods. Pop-rock background music plays through the speakers in the ceiling, accompanied by the soft chattering of coworkers. Cables are visibly attached from the ceiling and desks to computers, complemented by freshly watered hanging plants and pot plants scattered around the space. A community board provides information about upcoming events, such as the next yoga class and pizza night scheduled for tomorrow. Adjacent to the community board, a ping-pong table and paddles patiently await players. The kitchen's wall is painted in a happy, bright yellow, and the coffee machine boasting fresh coffee beans is a valuable and "free" resource frequently used – across all CWSs visited. The CWSs' social dynamics are apparent, with numerous events organised to sustain an atmosphere that caters to extraverts.

Materialities of space: bare feet and professional play schools

The physical environment of CWSs is composed of various material elements. These include the use of particular colours and fabrics, a significant emphasis on digital technologies, and adaptable workstations that cater to various work needs throughout the day. Despite their differences in design, the CWSs I visited all shared common features such as vibrant colours, different fabrics used on walls and furniture, motivational quotes, and engaging artwork displayed (see Fig. 6.2).

Many of the CWSs were situated in industrial urban settings, formerly used as manufacturing facilities, repurposed to accommodate a new mobile and digital workforce. Others were more lifestyle-oriented, located near the ocean to enhance the outdoor experiences of their workers, and one emerged from an existing company with an already established site and building.

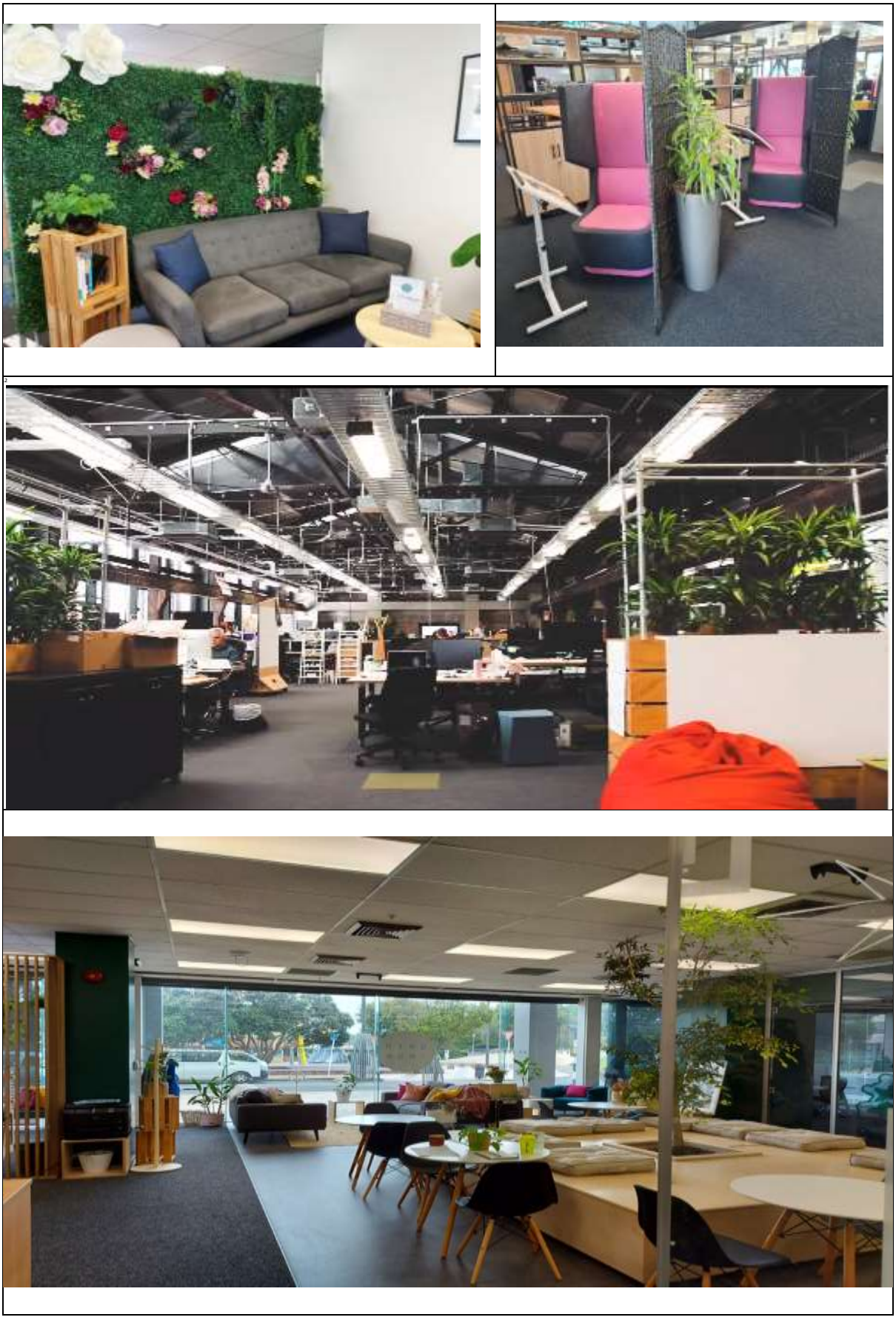

Figure 6.2: A collage of some of the open workspaces in CWSs visited (images by author)

The creation of a welcoming and relaxed culture appears to be a primary objective of the managers when designing the interior of CWSs. The design elements attract a specific workforce who identify with the atmosphere and ethos of the space. In CWSs, the relationship between place and identity is mutually constituted, as previously highlighted by Massey (2004) and discussed in Chapter 3. The geographical location, design, and materiality of the space not only shape the identity of the place but also influence the target audience for whom these CWSs are intended. As spaces of liminality, CWSs cater to a specific audience associated with the creative class, which has been both lauded (Florida, 2019) and lambasted (Peck, 2005), as I demonstrate next.

An excerpt from a community manager of a small-sized CWS located in a semi-urban area illustrates the careful curation of the space. The manager aims to create a comfortable, lounge-like atmosphere with a beach vibe, highlighting the informal nature of CWSs:

> Oh, there is massive thought behind it. It's not like you're at home, but you can be comfortable like you're at home, it's professional, but at the same time you can waltz down to the beach and come back in your jandals or your sandals and be at your desk with no shoes on, I mean you have your togs on. And other times there's that people stop halfway through the day go for a surf in their wetsuit, let it dry and are then just back at their desk in their shorts and have sand on their feet.
>
> Stephanie, community manager, small-sized CWS, semi-urban area

Similar to other empirical research conducted on CWSs by Gandini and Cossu (2019) and de Peuter et al. (2017), this community manager's account of the space reflects an expression of freedom that is playful and fosters work-life balance, similar to the framing of digital nomadism (Cook, 2020). CWS managers seek to facilitate altered work arrangements by encouraging an informal work culture that diverges from formal office practices and conventional workspaces. The informal approach aligns with the individualistic lifestyles of some digital nomads, as I discussed in Chapter 5, and with Thompson's (2018, 2019) view of digital nomadism as a quest for freedom (Kannisto, 2016).

People who work from CWSs share similarities with digital nomads in their engagement with playful spaces where they are willing to pay for location-independent work, supported by digital technologies and enabled by their own digital literacy. The strategic and careful curation of a CWS is therefore responsive to the needs of location-independent workers who exhibit overlapping characteristics of the "creative class" (Florida, 2019).

The curation of CWSs appears to be in line with the emergence of "fun-offices" that are common in the high-tech and creative sectors, which challenge conventional office space planning by

incorporating playgrounds for adults (van Meel & Vos, 2001). This trend towards siliconisation, where work and play merge, and where technological innovations are considered essential for the future, has led to the creation of uneven geographies (Datta, 2015), particularly as the playful nature of CWSs is limited to specific sectors. Specifically, design, multimedia, and IT businesses, which typically have a younger workforce, "are relatively successful, meaning that they have sufficient resources to invest in 'extras'" (van Meel & Vos, 2001, p. 331). In light of this, CWSs are considered to be 21st century valorised workspaces that are produced under the conditions of techno-capitalism, while also serving as a mechanism for promoting techno-capitalism. The gradual corporatisation of these CWSs has resulted in key market players, such as WeWork and Regus, becoming prominent in offering trendy collaborative working spaces to the creative class in large cities. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the CWS has become a commodified product itself (Bandinelli, 2020; Cook, 2020), reflecting a shift towards the commodification of workspaces.

Open-floor plans for all? Invisible hierarchies

The physicality features of CWSs, such as their design, materials, and furniture, all contribute to creating a particular ambiance that may appeal to some coworkers while potentially alienating others. For instance, all the CWSs that I visited had open floor plans (see Fig. 6.3), allowing independent entrepreneurs to work alongside one another. This type of layout fosters a hypermobile approach to work, with the space serving as a large area offering multiple opportunities to sit, work, or network. The kitchen facilities and "open" meeting spaces almost blend into one another, providing a seamless experience for users. Rose et al. (2010) observed that individuals who traverse through buildings are mutually constitutive of one another. In other words, the design of the space influences the behaviour and interactions of individuals within it, while their movements and activities also contribute to the overall atmosphere and functionality of the environment. In the context of CWSs, the liminal workspaces act as active, ever-changing containers that cater to the needs of 21st century knowledge workers in tangible and practical ways.

CWSs differ from conventional offices with closed doors, moving away from privacy and personal freedom towards a more collective identity that shapes the identities of those who belong and work in the space. The CWSs I visited provided a mix of private meeting rooms and permanent rooms for established or rapidly growing companies. Freelancers or those starting their businesses typically worked at one of the large, shared tables in the open-plan space.

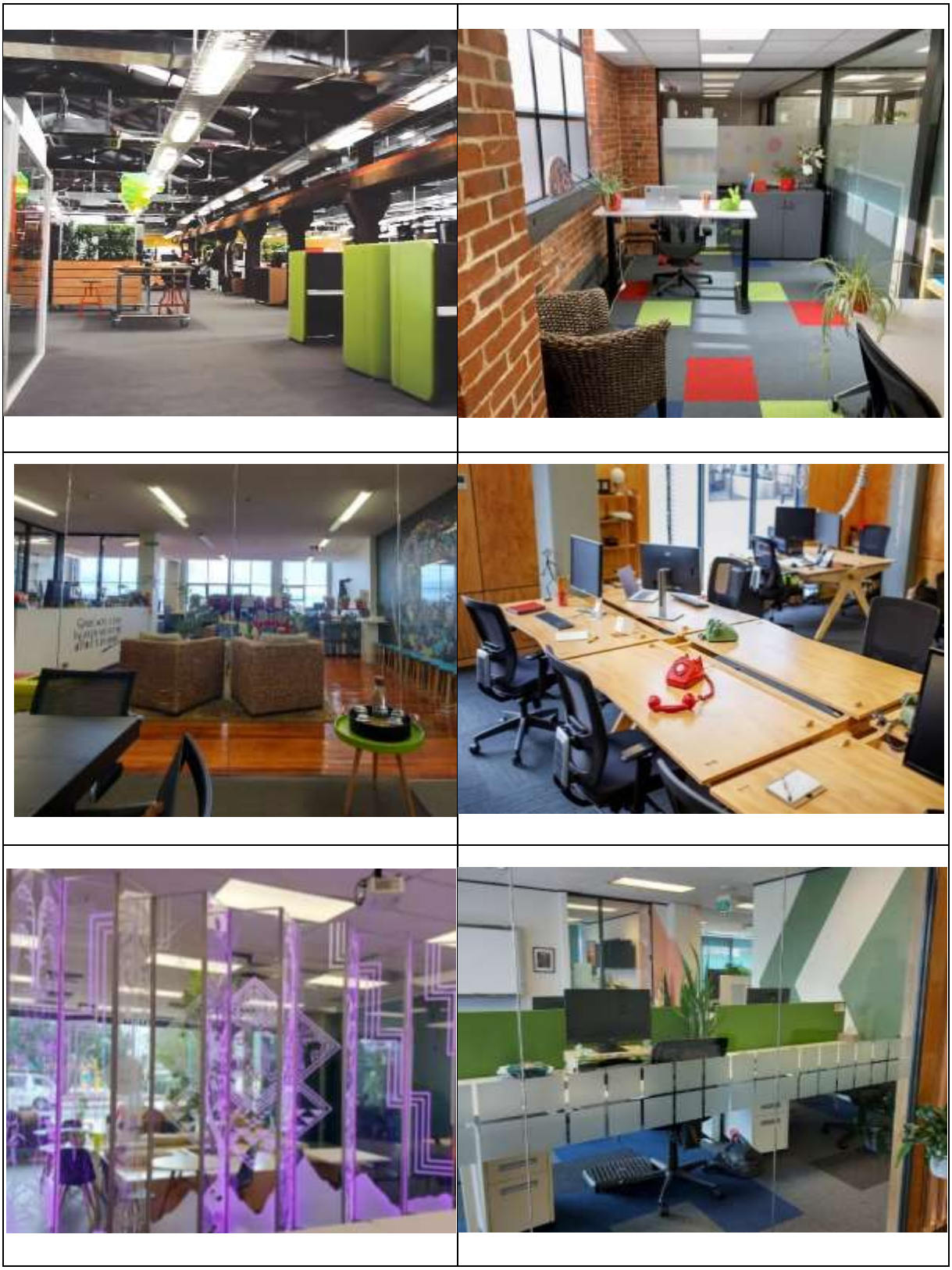

Figure 6.3: A collage of the open-floor plans at CWSs visited, often with glass windows separating offices (images by author)

The ways in which individual coworkers embody the space and express their needs by personalising their workspace can spatially express power relations, as can the clear separation of materials and office furniture, which creates a certain hierarchal order (e.g., managers with private offices, leather chairs, and assistants, versus coworkers in open-plan spaces with a cacophony of sounds). Successful coworkers or teams, as measured by profit and expansion, "graduated" to other spaces either inside or outside the CWS, as the following quote demonstrates:

> So, the idea of the campus is that you will start with an idea downstairs in the café. You grow your team, and you sit here, you will graduate to [name of other building] to your own office because they have some studios and it's a really beautiful building as well. It's a little bit more formal I guess than here. So, you will graduate from there. And then we have the big national company and the big international company with Amazon Services and Google, that's the big future of the campus.
>
> Leona, community manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

As startups grow and become successful, coworkers in some of the CWSs visited are expected to move up to more private office spaces, often located on the second or third floor.[13] These private offices are typically separated from the open-plan space by glass windows that cut out sound but not sight, making them the most visible distinction in the space. The embodied performances and spatial practices of coworkers in these private offices and the visibly open-plan space create a corporate aesthetic, which can be "a major creator of value in many industries" (Gabriel, 2005, p. 19). This aesthetic places increasing focus on the body that is visibly at work, requiring greater attention to style and "bodily representations, to looking appropriate for work, to dressing for success and maintaining the body" (McDowell, 2009, p. 10). As a result, some bodies may feel in place while others feel out of place. While coworkers in CWSs may not engage in interactive work as much as front-office facing roles, the required social interactions in the workspace aimed at generating social innovation and economic growth resemble McDowell's observation of bodies in the service employment industry. Ishitsuka's (2020) research on a CWS in Shanghai, China, reveals that "[t]he community as commodity is produced through a visual management of bodies" (p. 45), where the managers of CWSs ultimately decide who they want in their space and who not.

As CWSs are primarily intended to provide shared workspace to people starting businesses and entrepreneurs, who highly value the curated community network they can access as part of their

[13] While some CWSs may offer private offices as an option for individuals or small teams, the essence of co-working lies in the shared and collaborative nature of the workspace, rather than individualized, isolated offices.

membership, the age group of late 20s and early to mid-30s tends to be the most represented (*Deskmag*, 2020). Therefore, the industrial design and specific choice of colours, materials and intensified visibilities of technologies in these spaces play a prominent role. CWSs are specifically designed to attract young coworkers who are flexible enough to sit and work on a beanbag and physically able to get out of it. The heterogeneity of the materialities that constitute the space creates a sense of belonging to some, those who can conform to the mobile, youthful body. Indeed, the dominant understanding of what coworking is, is based on the idea and desires of a white, young, male entrepreneur working in the technology industry in the technological innovation hub Silicon Valley. By curating their spaces to primarily attract this demographic, CWS managers further contribute to reproducing this normativity. It is important to recognise that other forms of entrepreneurialism exist and to promote greater inclusivity in CWSs, so that they can cater to a broader range of people, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity or social background.

Creating informal work environments

As argued in Chapter 2, the original concept of a CWS was to strike a balance between freedom and routine by providing a shared workspace with the necessary physical (material) environment, digital tools and social relations to work in, away from conventional office spaces. The de-formalisation of office-based structures is also apparent in the following statement made by a manager of a middle-sized CWS, who aims to create a work-home environment:

> We have two phrases we use in the general design and feeling of the place a lot of which we just use is work-home. So as this place should feel like home. And the second is professional playschool. It should be a fresh environment, but it should be fun. It should be vibrant. So, we have a chill zone down the back, which has got bean bags and a borrow-book library. And it's just where people can crash and just relax for a bit. And we have screens with computer access if you want to stream if you want, just use your earphones, to not have noise in the building and things like that.
>
> Cliff, manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area

In this example, creating a home away from home atmosphere is based on the assumption that home is a comforting environment, and that there is a shared understanding of what a comfortable environment looks like. Blunt and Dowling (2006) suggest that the notion of home can be viewed as "an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings […] of belonging, desire and intimacy […] but can also be feelings of fear, violence and alienation" (p. 19). Therefore, the CWS, where the feeling of being at home is recreated, becomes a constructed place based on spatial imageries. The ways in

which CWS managers establish a homely feeling may be as attractive to some people as it is alienating to others. For instance, Warren (2006) refers to the concept of hotdesking as "hot-nesting", as the participants in her research reported feeling more at home at their office workspace once the organisation introduced hot-desks. In contrast, other studies report how employees in so-called hot-desking offices report much higher levels of dissatisfaction than dedicated desks (Bodin Danielsson & Theorell, 2018).

The recreation of "home" in a CWS, which attracts people to leave their homes and pay for a membership to work in a space that feels like home, may seem ironic at first sight. However, the social contact provided by the physical embodiment of the same space, and the specific amenities that people do not necessarily find in their own homes, are what attracts them and what they are willing to pay for to work from a particular CWS, creating a liminal space between work and home (Yang et al., 2019). Therefore, the CWS provides an environment where there are no "home-like" responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and caring duties that are often taken up by women (Miranda, 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified the feminised work of what makes a home (Power & Williams, 2020).

The following excerpt from the community manager highlights how the curation of the space is aimed at creating an informal work environment:

> Half the time I see people walking around in like bare feet, like Ben does it all the time. You know, it's just having an environment that people are comfortable to kind of feel at home. We've also kind of purposely created spaces for people to, kind of, work from. Upstairs. I'll take you through. We've got like a big amphitheatre. We've got mattresses and blankets, because some people, you know, they like to park up on their beds with their laptops, you know, it's just really creating those spaces where people can work productively. Or how they like to work productively.
>
> Angela, community manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area

The CWS' design is intended to facilitate work productivity in all its diversity by curating the material conditions. The CWS, in a way, produces and reinforces certain embodied identities through its materialities. For instance, the design of the space influences who feels comfortable in the CWS (e.g. mattresses and bean bags), may attract a more diverse audience than conventional office spaces. The emphasis placed on creating a homely feeling is apparent through the playful and fashionable lounge furniture to work from, as well as the freedom and ability to walk barefoot in the space (see Fig. 6.4) as you could do at home. The CWS' design aims to create a space where individuals can work in an informal work environment that facilitates productivity while feeling comfortable and at home.

Figure 6.4: A 'chill zone' at one of the CWSs visited (image by author)

The clothing worn by coworkers in CWSs is typically casual, suited to the informality of the space. At first sight, it appears that the CWS manager is attempting to create a transgressive workspace environment that challenges the conventional idea that people need to sit on a chair behind a desk and wear formal clothing to work. This fun work environment and informal nature of CWSs articulate with the entrepreneurial culture originating from Silicon Valley, which "reject[s] old-school business models and traditions (including a particular kind of corporate masculine self-presentation)" (De Casanova, 2015, p. 14), in favour of a creative and casual dress code. Consequently, the CWS cultivates a work ethic through the provision of a fun, playful environment (Thrift, 2004), where CWS managers move away from the normalised workplace culture where the workspace resembles a comfortable home-like environment. The prevailing atmosphere, experienced through embodiment of a CWS, where the tactile, auditory, and visual elements aim to create and yield positive feelings of being in that space, further enables social connectivity. The attraction of CWSs is largely based on the recreation of the Silicon Valley campus culture, which facilitates the strategically designed spaces and "routes" bodies need to move towards, and the various material infrastructures a CWS consists of. In this regard, CWSs could be viewed as exemplars of a "new" 21st century capitalism that manifests itself through the valorisation of soft skills (such as flexibility, empathy, and innovation) and the recreation of a culturally chic environment. The blending of work and play also has the effect of creating an ever-present work environment, where soft skills form immaterial manifestations of labour, and where the lines between home and workplace are explicitly blurred (Waters-Lynch & Duff, 2021). In the context of location-independence, the blurring of home and work becomes even more pronounced. When people are not tied to a physical location for work, they may find themselves working from a variety

of locations, including their homes (amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic), coffee shops, Airbnb's, CWSs, or even while travelling, as I pointed out in the previous chapter. The demarcation between work and home is increasingly blurred.

Ping pong tournaments and induction programmes. Coffee anyone?

The curation of CWSs is enhanced by the incorporation of specific and organised activities aimed at appealing to particular bodies and identities. CWS managers created a scene that aligned with their target audience, utilising the café-style ambiance to its fullest potential by having a trendy coffee bar on site to attract a diverse customer base beyond just those seeking a workspace. As CWSs provide a blended workspace which embodies the characteristics and conviviality of café-like environments, it blurs the boundaries between work and private life, which is manifested through specific practices of hospitality. CWSs can be regarded as "third places" (Oldenburg, 1999), such as cafés, libraries, or airport lounges, which exist between the spaces of home (first place) and conventional workplace (second place). The purposefully designed shared workspaces of CWSs that blur the boundaries between home and work reflect Richardson's (2021, p. 347) description of the digital geographies of work, which involves "a wider reorganization of work through technologies that produces flexible arrangements of space and time, creating forms of independence, interdependence and dependency that challenge order of work-life division".

Of the 11 CWSs visited, eight were found to have an onsite coffee bar. For instance, a middle-sized CWS located in an urban area creates a contemporary atmosphere by having an outgoing and talkative barista rent a space, just like any coworker would rent a desk. This allows him to set up a lively coffee bar in front of the CWS, where the sound of the coffee machine and constant chatter fill the front space, while people engage in conversations, making phone calls or read newspapers. The importance of the coffee bar is highlighted by one of the CWS managers, who explains that it plays a crucial role in creating an environment where work blends into leisure:

> One of the things for us … we did have this right from original plan … is the barista up front. In terms of community I mean, not everybody drinks coffee. You know people who drink coffee regularly think that everybody drinks coffee and that's the way to have a meeting. But still a café-type environment or just that relaxed and informal feeling. If we took away that space, like we were for the first eight months, we just had a reception out there. The differences are tremendous. Yeah, we have a huge effort to ensure that that is successful.
>
> Jeremy, manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area

Organised activities are a key feature that distinguishes CWSs from conventional offices, as they are physical sites where work practices influence the worker's identity, which is subject to and produced by social, cultural and material conditions (Dowling & McKinnon, 2014). The café-type culture that creates a social and cultural environment influences and reproduces identities that conform to and feel comfortable embodying that space. The identities of people and place are interrelated and co-constructed (McDowell, 2011a), and this further expanded into the activities offered, as explained by one of the community managers:

> We have community activations, we have ping-pong tournaments, we talk a lot about wellness as well. So, we have a masseuse coming in every week, we have the run club, we have meditation and things happening as well.
>
> Leona, community manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

In an environment that deviates from conventional office spaces, expectations regarding participation in activities or social engagement heighten the responsibilities participation, and involvement of workers (McDowell, 2004). Although CWSs were initially presented as an alternative to conventional office-based structures (Gandini & Cossu, 2019; Merkel, 2019), they have increasingly become a commodified product. Wellness activities, meditation, running clubs, and ping pong tournaments cater to a specific active lifestyle that aligns with many of the characteristics of the creative class, a group of individuals that Richard Florida described as leading lives "packed full of intense, high quality, multidimensional experiences" (2019, p. 166). The creative class represents the intersection of technology, creativity, and trendiness that defines 21st century knowledge workers. Therefore, CWS managers create an aesthetic community that is meant to be experienced within the exclusive spaces of CWSs. Moreover, the selective membership mechanisms that require payment to become part of the community reinforce the geographies of exclusion underlying the establishment of CWSs. The coworking community can only be experienced and accessed within the confines of the CWS. By providing various activities, the workspace becomes a leisure destination where coworkers are enticed to stay longer, thereby blurring the boundaries between work, leisure, private and professional life and space (Richardson, 2018). The various activities organised within CWSs visited during this research express the celebration of the fit, healthy, young, mobile, and middle-class body that symbolises success and self-control (Ishitsuka, 2020). The social and economic climate of these activities, within the exclusive spaces of CWSs, fosters the formation of a privileged group of knowledge workers, but at the expense of others. Consequently, CWSs not only redefine the experience and appearance of work but also redefine who can embody these valorised 21st century workspaces.

"The perfect people, the perfect fit in the building"

All the managers and community managers of CWSs acknowledge that they seek people who "fit" the community of social collaborators and establish this in different ways. The interiors of CWSs are specifically designed to encourage social collaboration, as one male manager from a large-sized CWS explains. While showing me around, he points out how he intentionally put a bin far away from office desks to encourage people to get up, move away from office desks, and walk towards another area near the kitchen to dispose of their garbage.

> But yeah, that idea of a whole unit of the building is crucial. You know we all have a desk, but don't restrict yourself to your desk … What people find in the space is flexibility. You can go on and on forever and you actively encourage that, so people know that they can do that. And of course, that's the aim, what is all about. We have a number of environmental practices that are designed around the need to collaborate. So, nobody has a bin under their desk … People have to get up from their desk and go to a place to have lunch. Doing that, people are going to get on. So that was a very deliberate plan. Similarly, when it comes to, I guess our interaction with this space, you know, we wanted this to be what we describe as a user-driven environment.
>
> Cliff, manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

This passage illustrates how the curation of the material work environment of CWSs creates specific socio-spatial practices for the coworkers. The space is designed to influence foot traffic to those areas in the space where social collaboration and networking takes place (see Fig. 6.5). Jeyasingham (2016) research on the potentialities of the shift to more agile working revealed that the ways in which office space is designed, particularly open office space, is "likely to impact significantly on social workers' experiences of practice, interactions with colleagues and development of practice knowledge" (p. 209). In CWSs, there is an increasing emphasis on organising arrangements to enhance flows of people to stimulate social interaction.

Figure 6.5: The playful design of a CWS (image by author)

By curating the space in a specific way, the CWS manager seeks to influence the movement and the social activity of coworkers, creating a carefully designed and manipulated space (Dovey, 2009). The manipulation of collective experiences through the strategic design of the interior of the CWS reveals how people working in the space are expected or pushed in a direction to be active collaborators, similar to findings by Adey (2004), who demonstrates how the specific design of airports, co-produces experiences and emotions, which are further reinforced by people embodying these spaces. Similar insights emerge from the analysis of CWSs, where the desired identity of individuals embodying the need of the CWS to be pro-active in seeking connection with people is shaped and reshaped by various subtle power relations that are at play in these spaces, contributing to the production of these identities. Another manager also acknowledges that there is research behind the set-up of his CWS:

> And it wasn't about the chair, and the desk, and the screen, and the pod, and the thing; it was about how people were actually working in the space and how they're, you know, what those touch points are and how people interact. And it was a whole, it was very research driven.
>
> Richard, manager, small-sized CWS, semi-urban area

This excerpt illustrates how CWSs are carefully curated spaces, where managers facilitate the environment and design the space to create every opportunity to collaborate or connect, making it

appear organic but in reality, is strategically designed. It is important to recognise the power dynamics at play in CWSs and the ways in which the design of the space reinforces social networking behaviour, simultaneously creating geographies of inclusion and exclusion.

Another community manager explains how bringing the 'right' people into the CWS, influences the feeling and identity of the space:

> It's the *human geography*. Why do some places work and some don't, you know, you can't just build and we all come? No, you've got to be quite clever as to who you put in that space. And who do you bring into your space for that connectivity … And again, it's a long sales process, because you're technically recruiting people into your space? Because it's not just about, for me it wasn't about the numbers, it was about are we getting the right fit in here. Because you know, when you bring one poison sample one to an orchard, the whole orchard goes down. So, being able to curate the environment, knowing who would be the right fit, you know, does this kind of work? And, you know, it was all around to be very careful and who we actually put together in a space.
>
> Rebecca, manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area, italics added

The female manager of the CWS discusses the importance of carefully curating the environment by selecting the "right" people for the space. Coworkers who do not confirm to the CWS's established standards, norms, and values are likely to experience friction in becoming part of the community, despite the space's open and accessible image.

The concept of community has been a prominent topic in research on coworking (Spinuzzi et al., 2019). For instance, Kubátová (2014, p. 571) argues that coworking "gives rise to a professionally heterogeneous community". However, if managers selectively recruit coworkers into their space, how can the community truly be heterogenous? The female CWS manager mentioned earlier expresses concerns that "one poison sample" who does not align with the community's ethos could negatively impact the entire coworking community. Therefore, her approach to building a community involves constructing an organic community where any unwanted intrusions risk disrupting the potential of the carefully crafted community. This approach creates a romanticised image of community. Similarly, the following community manager explains how she strategically curates a community by carefully selecting the "right" individuals for the space:

> Yeah, my role is basically, I like to say that I'm a babysitter for grown-ups (laughs). Yeah, we have amazing humans here and my role is to look after everyone, to know who is in the building, to know what they are working on and to see how can we connect them with each

> other … The more people you meet, the more opportunities you can detect? Yeah, the community and having the right people in the building, it makes a huge difference. Creating the right image … So, for me as community manager, my role is to have an interview beforehand to know that we have the perfect people, the perfect fit in the building, just because a lot of people is really advancing the entrepreneurship journey. And we want the people who are just starting, early stage, teams that are growing, and are willing to give back mostly.
>
> Leona, community manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

The classification of coworkers as "the perfect people" who are social, successful in their business, and can expand the CWS by making valuable connections with other companies, underscores the importance for CWS managers of carefully selecting individuals to curate the desired community. Depending on one's perspective, the community in CWSs can be seen as either a curated community in a transactional space or a more multi-purpose community. de Peuter et al. (2017) acknowledge the ambivalence of community in CWSs and critically interrogate the practice of coworking, pointing to entrepreneurial individualism. As the community manager earlier explains, she is looking for "people who are just starting, early stage, teams that are growing" to "advance the entrepreneurship journey". By positioning the desired coworker in this way, she highlights the production of the entrepreneurial self as central to the creation of CWSs. This process involves transforming the coworker into an entrepreneurial subject who can contribute to the community's growth and development.

Induction programmes 'community activations'

Some managers use induction programmes to introduce potential new members into the CWS. According to one manager, certain activities and social events are organised as part of the induction to assess whether the potential new member is a "good match" for the CWS:

> So, we, I've got a particular methodology of like, building and curating a community. And we apply that here. So, what I call it, circles of community … Like there's a clear progression of inducting new people into and activating a community. And that's lots of touch points, like we do the quiz. The Stuff.co.nz quiz [online Aotearoa New Zealand news website], probably quite a common office thing to do, but we sort of really push it as a thing. Yes, so 11 o'clock every day … We do like yoga, and we do coffee training. And we do each one teaches ones, which is just like a lunch-and-learn type scenario … And if they go, I want to be in, great, easy, sign up. And then we take you on an induction, which gives you like the so-called induction circle one. Circle one introduction is literally showing you everything in the space, how it works, what the

> expectations are, where the exits are … If you go out of induction, you're sort of well-primed to get the most out of the space … And then circle two happens once a month, which is I take, or my community manager takes, a troupe of newbies, and some existing residents out for coffee, facilitate a conversation out of the space … And then circle three will be community lunch, which we do once a month … It's a facilitated induction into the community.
>
> Paul, manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

This manager activates the community by organising various "circles of community" that are only accessible to paid members. In doing so, the CWS manager acts as a "broker" (Burt, 2007) and actively curates a social community by paid access to various socio-material and digital infrastructures provided by the CWS. While the manager makes it sound like anyone can join the CWS by merely filling out a membership form, he juxtaposes this by explaining the various "circles of community" that need to be completed and the expectations of partaking in social activities laid on the coworker, such as participating in a stuff.co.nz quiz that is "sort of really pushed". Coworkers who do not feel comfortable in the space or do not align with the specific identity and practices of the space, will "naturally" decide to go elsewhere. This process is indicative of the entrepreneurial individualism and the making of the entrepreneurial self, where the coworker becomes an entrepreneurial subject, essential to the success of the CWS (de Peuter et al., 2017). As a female community manager explains, the CWS "naturally weeds out those people":

> There have been a couple of instances where it's been obvious that they probably wouldn't fit in comfortably, because maybe they came across more eccentric than most people here. The behaviours of the awareness of personal space, or courtesy within a shared space weren't as well developed … And I think just the environment itself naturally weeds out those people. I haven't had to say no.
>
> Stephanie, community manager, small-sized CWS, semi-urban area

This manager's approach involves carefully regulating the cohabitation of coworkers in the space by creating distinct inclusive and exclusive areas. The ability to fit in comfortably appears to hinge on adhering to specific types of behaviours. The exclusion of behaviours deemed as "eccentric", for instance, highlights a need to conform to particular working identities. Such claims raise questions about the supposed informality of the CWS, or at the very least, emphasise how it depends on maintaining certain forms of sociality.

Most, if not all, of the managers and community managers of CWSs recognise that they hold specific expectations regarding how coworkers should interact and socialise. These expectations reflect the

geographies of inclusion and exclusion (Sibley, 2002) that make up CWSs as physical spaces. As the following manager indicates, his vision, etiquette, and guidelines on how coworkers should behave are clearly stated and agreed upon the membership agreement:

> So, this [pointing to the agreement] is basically and overly dramatically referred to as the Magna Carta. Because it's four levels deep, it has vision values. But then you know, everybody has vision values, right? But then the last two parts are the most crucial. That is the etiquette. Which I guess is sort of situational-driven guidelines. So, what's our view, and it talks about what is gossip, what is not gossip etc. And then there's the guidance, so that makes the rules … And a whole bunch of stuff is designed to get people on the same mindset … So, when we do inductions of people in this place, everybody wants to do this. And everybody signs this document [that] says, I'm buying into this. And that is a real statement of okay, I understand what this is all about. I understand that it's not just about me. One of the most, I guess, appropriate paragraphs out here is this last one under participation and engagement … And it says often in this document, we use the term community, we don't use that term lightly. We use it to highlight their intention that we're all here to work together for the greater good of organisations as that is what community is supposed to do.
>
> Cliff, manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

The CWS manager's statement that "a whole bunch of stuff is designed to get people on the same mindset" suggest that conformity is crucial for individuals to become part of the CWS community. The manager establishes a transactional space with a formal agreement, guidelines, and vision values, requiring prospective coworkers to "sign this document [that] says I'm buying into this". The CWS operates under the assumption that there is a uniform idea of what "community is supposed to do", as moralised in an official membership agreement. The agreement bears the informal name of a key document in the constitution of modern law and constraints on sovereignty in England, which is particularly poignant given the CWS's location in the settler colonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand. This excerpt demonstrates that working at a CWS entails being in an environment that is defined by rules and order to ensure a smoothly running business. Although CWSs often speak of informality and community, their particular ethics of care are also formalised in explicit or implicit contractual agreements that emphasise values of conformity as a condition of inclusion. Community becomes a transactional product agreed upon and symbolised in the form of protocols, where community can only be maintained if rules are followed.

The concept of "community" in a CWS represents a perceived network of individuals who form social bonds based on individual needs, rather than conventional communities where collective identity

supersedes individual identity organically. According to Arvidsson (2018, p. 295), CWSs are "seldom 'communities' in the traditional sense of that term. They are not marked by dense webs of social interaction. Rather they are spaces of practice. People frequent such spaces to engage in particular practice and it is by engaging in such practice that they connect together and form social bonds". However, the excerpts from CWS managers presented in this chapter tell a different story, contradicting the notion that individuals can easily become part of the CWS community and "form social bonds". Instead, the dominant framing of CWSs as open, welcoming spaces for networking, collaboration, and innovation does not always align with their arrangement as social spaces. CWSs are also valorised and transactional workspaces, often constructed around conventional and conformist communities, particularly when compared to conventional workplaces. The active curation of the "perfect fit" in these seemingly nonconformist, creative, and supposedly open workspaces creates spaces that shape the social and material fabric of CWSs in relation to particular people, identities, and practices. The same manager further explains how some members take up the more desirable role of active community members than others:

> You have numerous examples of them, I guess, members who do really well on that concept. They certainly come in here, and they really sort of got out there and put the feelers out, and connect and collaborate with the people do really well … And then you get a small number, but there are so many we just signed on. A very, very, very small number we have to really push against the concept of being involved in something bigger than themselves. That's community, right?
>
> Cliff, manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

Although CWSs are commonly perceived as places for independent work alongside others (Spinuzzi, 2012), coworkers are expected to engage in significant efforts to collaborate and socialise with each other. As the above quote suggests, coworkers who do not demonstrate the expected behaviour will receive a "push" from the CWS to become more involved in the community. This statement reflects not only the type of outgoing personalities that CWS managers prefer to have in their space but also the desire from managers that members follow the norms established within the space. Hislop and Axtell (2009) build on Felstead et al.'s (2005) typology of how the character of space interacts with and influences work practices, emphasising how social norms shape the workspace. They describe informal norms as evolving "to shape what constitute acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in particular locations and which are typically regulated and enacted by the people who share and use such spaces" (Hislop & Axtell, 2009, p. 63). The explicit norms, signed agreements, membership forms, and active curation of CWSs suggest that CWSs are perhaps more driven by formal norms than

conventional workspaces, despite their open and fun image. The regulation and limitation of worker behaviour within CWSs are controlled by CWS managers, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> No [we haven't turned anyone away]. We've had to have reasonable words with a few people like reasonable sit downs and go "look, this isn't working because of these reasons".
>
> Richard, manager, small-sized CWS, semi-urban area

In contrast to conventional offices, where employees are typically valued primarily for their work performance according to dominant meritocratic discourse, CWSs place much greater emphasis on having individuals in the space who are willing to collaborate, socialise, and share norms and values that align with the CWS. The notion of a "reasonable sit down" thus represents a personal expectation of how coworkers ought to behave, and functions as a form of policing to weed out those who do not meet expectations. By directing the expected behaviour of coworkers and how they must embody the space in a particular way, CWSs (re)produces desired identities within space.

However, the excerpts presented in this research suggest that CWSs do not necessarily represent open, fluid, and inclusive spaces. Rather, many CWSs are carefully curated spaces designed to attract specific identities and bodies in space that can conform to particular social norms and expected behaviours. While CWSs may appear to be open, informal, fun, vibrant, and homely spaces to work from on the surface, they often conceal workspaces that are characterised by exclusivity, conformity, and transactional agreements, where community is framed by more formal guidelines often associated with conventional office spaces. Nonetheless, this research reveals other approaches that sometimes align more closely with notions of inclusivity, which I present in the following section.

Notions of inclusivity

Some of the CWSs articulate with an ethics of care perspective (Tronto, 2013), as discussed in Chapter 3, which can challenge masculine patterns of thinking and shed light on affective geographies. The following CWS manager exemplifies an approach that places greater emphasis on care, using the Māori concepts of manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga. She elaborates on how the manaakitanga values that she has instilled with have influenced the way she manages the CWS:

> So kaitiakitanga [guardianship] is looking after our environment, respecting and loving it. And so, everyone that walked in, and there was never a sign up saying anything. There's no, you know, rules other than don't pretend … There's no magic in the fact that if you make people proud of the space. Selling the atmosphere and change is their game … And we kind of exhale with that, because I think with it being a new concept, it was almost like we wanted to, really,

> I guess, I'm big on, you know, for when it comes to hospitality or manaakitanga, it's kind of what we do. You know, we're brought up that way of offering people a cup of tea, you know, coffees, you know, whatever it is that you did, the first thing you do when it's what we teach our rangatahi [youth] as well. It's like, greet.
>
> Rebecca, manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area

The Māori manager in this passage discusses how she creates a hospitable environment by practicing different forms and principles of care that align with Te Ao Māori [the Māori worldview]. She emphasises the values of being hospitable [manaakitanga] and inviting people in, which for her, represents the normative understanding of what working in a shared workspace entails and is embedded in her everyday geography. In Te Ao Māori, the ethics of care are "embodied in the cultural thinking and practices associated with whakapapa, mana and manaaki […]. For Māori, recognition of mana and the extension of aroha, is tika – it is right and ethical behaviour – and does not depend on being returned or acknowledged" (Hoskins, 2012, p. 91). Rather than ethics of care documented in a signed agreement, the CWS described here provides an alternative expression of hospitality based on reciprocity and caring for others, without expecting anything in return. Manaakitanga "ensures principled practice as the concept orientates us away from locating 'deficits' within the person and towards addressing deficits in societal systems" (Hodgetts et al., 2021, p. 1983). By emphasising care ethics, this CWS not only disrupts the masculine-based nature of work organisation by attending to Indigenous voices but also foregrounds social relationships of trust and mutuality, turning to the relationality of spaces of care. The use of care ethics in the context of location-independent work, in combination with the previously described transactional and valorised nature of CWSs, could offer a valuable framework for the creation of more equitable and supportive workspaces, irrespective of physical location. Additionally, and as I pointed out earlier, CWSs have traditionally been seen as male-dominated spaces, with women often experiencing marginalisation and exclusion. However, as more women enter the workforce (Catalyst, 2019) and seek out flexible and collaborative workspaces, it is essential to consider the gendered nature of these spaces and the specific needs and challenges faced by women, which I discuss more in the next section.

Feminised workspaces and the practice of "mothering" in CWSs

CWSs mainly accommodate start-ups in the technology and creative sectors, aligning with existing research findings (*Deskmag*, 2019). However, this focus on technology has resulted in a gendered makeup of CWSs, with a predominance of white men (Ishitsuka, 2020). This gender imbalance is reflective of wider gender disparities in the technology industry (Laurie et al., 2014). Lynch (2020)

highlights that the "digital revolution" is led by privileged individuals, "overwhelmingly white, middle-class and wealthy men with formal technical training" who make critical decisions "about the future direction of technological development" (n.p.). The community manager of a large-sized CWS in Auckland CBD confirms this trend, stating that they deliberately aim to attract high-tech workers and focus on scalable businesses, marginalising "women and all those sectors that tend to employ them" (Papageorgiou, 2022, p. 12). Virani and Gill (2019) argue that the representation and perception of roles in the IT sector is based on conventional heterosexual and masculine notions of identity. McDowell (2009, p. 61) adds that the status of high-tech workers "depends on their construction as cerebral and disembodied: attributes which are, of course, traditionally associated with a particular version of hegemonic masculinity".

The CWSs that I visited that have a lesser focus on attracting technology businesses tend to have more coworkers working in non-profit or creative industries. Notably, it was reported that the majority of coworkers in such locations were female. As evidenced by the following excerpts from two male CWS managers, the industry in which coworkers work influences the gender ratio and membership type in the CWS. Deskmag's (2019) findings indicate that primarily freelancers and entrepreneurs are concentrated in the technology, innovation, and creative industries, which is reinforced by the geographical placement of CWSs in innovation precincts. These industries are largely dominated by young, middle-class entrepreneurs (World Economic Forum, 2020a), and hence class intersects with both gender and age. For example, the following manager explains that the majority of members of his non-profit CWS are engaged in the social service sector, which is predominantly comprised of women:

> The social community service sector is by a large part, largely female. Largely middle-aged, largely female. Yeah so, we've definitely got more women than we have men … coworking in the commercial world, the main cohort is men, and twenty-five percent women? And here, it is the other way around.
>
> Cliff, manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

Furthermore, it is apparent that women are largely underrepresented as permanent full-time members across all visited CWSs, with the largest proportion of female members being "casuals". Despite a growing number of white women using CWSs in Western regions (Deskmag, 2019), the conditions under which women may or may not utilise CWSs remain limited. Drawing on the notion that conventional workspaces and organisations are gendered spaces, in which "male advantage is built into job design, distribution of power, rewards and resources, physical design of the workspace, and rules for work-related behaviour" (Sargent et al., 2020, p. 7), the specific identities embodied in

CWSs and the ways in which CWSs are curated highlight the gendered tension between inclusivity and exclusivity.

Despite the fact that technological advances have led to an increase in the number of women taking up paid work outside the home (Costa, 2000) and working increasingly from CWSs, men remain the most frequent and permanent users of CWSs (*Deskmag*, 2019). It is widely acknowledged that, in addition to the institutional, classed, and gendered nature of the industries in which coworkers are employed, there are certain gendered constraints that arise from the ability to work remotely from a CWS (Papageorgiou, 2022). Women, in particular, tend to have more caring duties than men, which can limit their choice of where to work, such as from home or a CWS. This creates further gender inequities in CWSs, which are similar to patriarchal separation of home and conventional workspaces (Gill et al., 2017). One manager I spoke with also highlighted the impact of caring duties on women's ability to work from CWSs:

> It's all those little things, it's our goal to make it more accessible for women. There's a woman upstairs who's a civil engineer, and she was saying how, when she was doing her course, she'd have her baby and her course started at eight in the morning. And day-cares don't open until like 830 or 9am. When she was going to day-care, she was always sick. And she couldn't take any time off because you just fall so behind and we're just talking about how it's [refers to conventional workspaces] not accessible.
>
> Alex, community manager, large CWS, urban area

In contrast to conventional workspaces, which are often designed to be childfree, CWS managers are increasingly challenging these standardised norms by adopting an ethics of care. Many CWS managers recognise the difficulties faced by coworkers in managing their caring responsibilities and work-life balance. Rather than reproducing the traditional gender roles that associate women with caregiving, CWS managers are moving away from these institutionalised spaces by creating more inclusive and caring workspaces that welcome children, who are often excluded from workspaces, into the CWS. The following quotes from two female community managers illustrate how they are striving to create more inclusive and caring spaces:

> Sometimes, parents say they have to bring their kids in and we're okay with that … and I guess for us it's also creating that environment. The reality is you're gonna have a child that has to stay home from work or school. And I guess we have created spaces for them to be able to do that too.
>
> Angela, community manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area

> So, we have actually two single dads upstairs and they have children … And they come in all the time for the full day. Just hanging out on the couches and play games and that sort of thing … yeah, people bring their children all the time … So, it's interesting to say, and I guess you get that with marginalised communities [referring to those with caring duties], they want to help people like their own … So that's our goal as well, making sure that it's accessible for everyone here and that people don't feel like excluded from the space. Because that's when businesses in cities succeed right, when everyone, not just rich, straight and all, [succeeds].
>
> Alex, community manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

The extracts from these two community managers serve as an example of how altering the normative structures surrounding caring duties and children in the workplace can expand the range of individuals working from CWSs. This expands the traditional masculine image of a young, independent ICT worker, as noted by Sargent et al. (2020). One of the community managers emphasises the importance of accessibility and inclusivity in the CWS: "that's our goal as well, making sure that it's accessible for everyone here and that people don't feel excluded from the space". However, achieving this goal requires addressing the youthful and trendy curation of CWSs, specific norms and values in place, and the strong emphasis on digital infrastructures, which assumes that everyone is digitally literate, comfortable in a homely environment, can work from a beanbag, and can afford membership to an "open and inclusive space". It is not meant to downplay the efforts of managers to create more inclusive spaces and eliminate gendered constraints in CWSs. Reshaping existing gendered relations through the creation of more inclusive environments can be a catalyst in the often-marginalised position of women in the workplace and is one way in which practices of care are expressed.

The following manager's excerpt highlights the continued prevalence of male-dominated industries and masculine work settings within CWSs, with a focus on achievement and productivity. However, the manager also acknowledges the value of more female-driven workspaces within CWSs:

> I think women do relationships much better than men, but like, you know, women's circles [sharing circles where women gather and can share in a safe space] are way more common than there are men's circles, right? Which is something in that social field, and I do feel like in CWSs, the focus is on productivity and maybe more of what was the male-driven industries, like we're gonna do this thing, run lead, get the numbers, or whatever it looks like. Whereas here, it's like, hey, how are you doing? You know, like, let's look after each other. Let's do this as gracefully as we can. Yeah, for something that I guess, [is] more female-driven.
>
> Robert, manager, small-sized CWS, urban area

The manager notes the gendered nature of social communication and how women are often perceived as better at maintaining relationships, reflecting the gendered identities performed in the workplace (Tyler & Cohen, 2010). The CWS in question aims to challenge these dominant narratives and instead focuses on inclusivity and looking after one another as the main driver of success. This counters the hegemonic and entrepreneurial subjectivity found in many CWSs, which prioritise techno-capitalist principles and economic growth over care for one another. By prioritising care and inclusivity, this CWS represents a shift towards more equitable and inclusive work environments.

The aforementioned male manager reflects on the high percentage of female coworkers in his creative makerspace and contemplates the reason behind it. His observations shed light on how gendered identities are shaped and reshaped by their embodied states in relation to the workspace:

> Eighty, ninety percent is female here. It's funny because, maybe for guys, there's this barrier of doing something right or being a leader or something that's expected of you and like, not to say it's not for women, but just my own personal thing is you know, do I feel comfortable making something out in the open? Or do I like to wait till it's completely finished and then show it off? And that's what I struggle with the city is like, it's only art if it's pretty, looks, you know, like, good on the walls or something, you know, the final product. And here it's about the process.
>
> Robert, manager, small-sized CWS, urban area

Specifically, in the environment of this particular CWS, designers of products are transferred from traditional, behind-the-scenes roles to an open, public space where the "personal embodied attributes of workers enter into the exchange process in a direct way" (McDowell, 2009, p. 9). The manager suggests that this might provoke more uncomfortable feelings for men than women, as there exists a masculine barrier including the gendered expectation of men not to make any mistakes and to demonstrate perfection and leadership straight away. Women, on the other hand, are more comfortable with showing failure, which points to the gendered nature of norms and behaviours around the construction of workspace. By positioning the CWS as an accessible space that hosts artists who can openly work on unfinished products, this creative makerspace attempts to contrast with the dominant high-tech Silicon Valley-based model of a CWS. Yet in doing so, the CWS reinforces the masculinised assumptions of working from a CWS, where gender is, despite the high proportion of women entrepreneurs, not undone. Therefore, the embodied performances of women working from the space reinforce a discursive construction of gendered behaviour in the workspace (McDowell, 2009).

Challenging stereotypical gender roles

In terms of the roles in the visited CWSs, it was found that almost all of the community managers were women, which aligns with the conventional notion of women working in the service industry (McDowell, 2009). In all of the CWSs visited, I was greeted by a friendly and hospitable woman. Acts of warmly welcoming people into the space, introducing coworkers to each other, refilling coffee and tea pots, are all performances of hospitality, predominantly by female community managers, reinforcing gendered stereotypes. Papageorgiou (2022) refers to this phenomenon as the "mothering" of CWSs, in which roles and responsibilities are based on normative gender assumptions. The supporting roles that women occupy in CWSs perpetuate gendered norms and qualities that underpin the entrepreneurial landscape in these spaces. The women who create a friendly atmosphere at the reception desk embody the classic association between femininity and front-desk employment. This reinforces the idea that caring and nurturing are women's traits that are required in a world dominated by technology. This notion is emphasised by many, if not all, of the managers and community managers of CWSs:

> And so that these two [points to two women part-timers, white, late 20s], they keep me on my toes and give me a great perspective that I would otherwise would not have and would run a very flat structure and I couldn't do what I do without them. There's a lot of good, strong, creative, impressive women here. That's awesome. It's a safe environment.
>
> Paul, manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

It is important to acknowledge that the way in which gender operates in the workplace is complex and multifaceted. One aspect of this is the often-unseen emotional labour that is frequently performed by women in the workplace. For example, the manager in the above excerpt, who values the perspectives of women in his workplace, may unknowingly be reinforcing gendered assumptions about emotional labour and the role of women in the workplace. Despite its importance, emotional labour is often undervalued and can be seen as a "feminine" trait, reinforcing gendered assumptions about work.

Richardson (2018) suggests that a feminist approach to intimacy in the workplace can help to make visible the often-invisible emotional labour that takes place in CWSs. By paying attention to the embodied experiences of workers in these spaces, it becomes possible to recognise how digital technologies can both enable and constrain the performance of emotional labour. She argues that "knowing working space through intimacy means paying close attention to what it feels like to be 'at' work amidst the emergent properties of the digital workplace" (p. 252). For example, digital tools such as messaging apps and video conferencing can facilitate communication between coworkers, but they can also blur the boundaries between work and personal life (Longhurst, 2016b), making it more

difficult to manage emotional boundaries. In recognising the importance of emotional labour in CWSs, it becomes possible to see how gendered assumptions about work can be reinforced by the design of collaborative workspaces.

Several managers of the CWSs visited were women. According to a female CWS manager, the presence of women in managerial roles attracts both men and women to the space. This phenomenon highlights the importance of gender diversity in leadership positions, as it creates a welcoming environment for individuals of all genders.

> Initially, we actually had a lot of interest from women. So, some of our first residents were guys. And then what tended to happen is that there were probably women coming in and sort of looking around and then of course it is, it's easier being a woman saying, hey come in! And because it's kind of a bit more that influence of, 'ah cool it's a wāhine [woman] running the ship' which is choice [colloquial saying for really great in Aotearoa New Zealand], so there's going to be a certain level of the maternal bit coming in, for lack of a better phrase, that maternal that I think most guys really like. And you know, I mean, obviously, from a female perspective, that feminine element of 'ah cool, so I'm not going to walk in, and I feel like I don't belong as a woman', because it's a woman leading the charge on it.
>
> Rebecca, manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area

The presented excerpt suggests that the conventional leadership role in CWSs is masculine, and that the female manager in charge is challenging these gendered norms. Despite some women holding managerial roles in CWSs, men still dominate these positions (*Deskmag*, 2019). This trend reflects the broader gendered and racialised nature of workplace roles (McDowell, 2009). Furthermore, the female manager notes that her gender identity influences the sense of belonging within the CWS. Her presence as a female manager allows women to better identify with the organisation's leadership, in contrast to a male manager. Although the female manager's appointment signifies empowerment, respect, and achievement, the gendered qualities of safety, nurture, and comfort that she embodies only reinforce the gendered landscape within CWSs. Therefore, it is essential to question whether CWSs genuinely redefine work or whether they simply uphold traditional gendered expectations in a trendy workspace, creating a "home away from home" experience.

Conclusion

The exploration of CWSs offers valuable insights into the changing nature of work and the evolution of the workplace, revealing how digital technologies influence the socio-spatial experiences of workers.

Although CWSs provide a flexible workspace that supports a location-independent work lifestyle, they also present challenges such as power dynamics and gendered leadership roles.

The rise of CWSs and location-independent work represents a shift towards more fluid and adaptable forms of work, with implications for workers, and organisations. It is important to cultivate a sense of community and connection in these rapidly changing and often isolating work environments, while also considering the potential drawbacks of location-independent work. The discussion of CWSs in this chapter, however, draws attention to the ways in which CWSs, despite being marketed as open, fluid, and dynamic, can still be subject to societal tensions and exclusions similar to conventional office-based structures. The curation of CWSs in this research tends to focus on entrepreneurial subjects, resulting in the privileging of certain bodies, spaces, and occupations. The idea of community in the researched CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand can also be transactional, exclusive, and conformist, which contradicts their discursive framing as places of openness, informality, and inclusivity. These particular insights from this chapter highlight the importance of acknowledging and addressing the societal tensions and exclusions that exists within CWSs, given their increasing prevalence as location-independent work environments.

It is important to acknowledge the pandemic's impact on the infrastructures and spaces of care that support location-independent work. In the next chapter, I delve into how disruptions to work and mobility have affected location-independent work and bodies, and how CWSs can be understood as spaces of care to maintain connection and support mobile workers in this new reality of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter Seven

Crisis and repair in pandemic times

> In a coworking space, you've got bodies in a space, and you can develop new interactions … It's this tangible, your energy, like your atoms are physically in the same room with the other person and they're charging, you can bounce off that so much better than a screen, the screen's great if you have no other option. To see the facials. It's not about guessing what is behind the subtext of the written word. So, there's definitely a place for that. But if you can be in a space with a person, my goodness, just be in that space (Stephanie, community manager, small-sized CWS, semi-urban area).

The opening quote of this chapter is attributed to a community manager of a coworking space (hereafter CWS) located in a semi-urban area of Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa New Zealand hereafter). The interview with the manager took place in mid-autumn 2021, a time when people in Aotearoa New Zealand were experiencing a relatively "normal" life. However, the country of 5.1 million people had, like the rest of the world, been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated government restrictions. On 23 March 2020, the New Zealand Government announced a nationwide lockdown due to the fear and risk of virus spread.

Reflecting on the lockdown periods when people were confined to their homes and "bubbles", the CWS manager spoke of the strong desire to be in a physical space with other people again. The pandemic created a situation that rapidly increased and enhanced the use of technologies in work and social life, while also generating an increased desire for physical proximity that pandemic-related restrictions had prevented.

The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally transformed the digital geographies of work, workplaces, and workers. It has placed an increasing emphasis on the use of digital technologies in places of work, facilitating and accelerating the possibility of remote work. In this last empirical chapter, I analyse how the pandemic disrupted location-independence by examining place, bodies, and mobility. To understand the impact of the pandemic on location-independent work, I bring together feminist geographies of embodiment and care (McLean & Maalsen, 2021; Power & Mee, 2020; Rose, 2017) and critical mobilities literature, analysing the disrupted and repaired infrastructures associated with location-independent work during pandemic times.

As demonstrated in Chapter 6, CWSs provide socio-material infrastructures for location-independent workers to work from, while migration infrastructures, outlined in Chapter 5, facilitate location-independence for digital nomads, including regulatory mechanisms managed by states, commercial agents, and social networks. I draw on these two interrelated-yet-distinct vantage points associated with the concept of location-independent work: CWSs as providers of open, shared workspaces where individuals sit, socialise, and work next to each other; and digital nomads as a usually hypermobile workforce who travel extensively to work online from locations worldwide. However, pandemic-related restrictions have severely disrupted the various socio-material infrastructures that characterise CWSs and normally facilitate location-independence.

To understand these disruptions and the subsequent cultural repairs that followed, I adopt an ethics of care lens to explore the ways in which CWSs constitute an essential emerging infrastructure for location-independence in times of crisis. Simone (2004, p. 5) suggests that cultural repair can set "in motion a specific way of seeing, of envisioning the environment that will inform how people, things,

places, infrastructure will be used". Some CWSs developed alternative practices and spaces of care to address these disruptions. Focussing on care, which can be defined as "everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, p. 40), provides a particularly useful lens through which to examine bodies, identities, place, and power in the reconfiguration of location-(in)dependent work during times of crisis.

This chapter explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the digital geographies of work, workplace and workers, with a particular focus on the Aotearoa New Zealand context. It begins by examining the infrastructural breakdown of location-independence caused by pandemic-related restrictions, specifically what the New Zealand Government sought to achieve from a global health perspective, and how these restrictions created tension in the meaning and experience of mobilities and place. Next, it highlights the increasing emphasis on the usage of digital technologies during the pandemic and provides a snapshot of how the pandemic impacted specific home working environments. The chapter then turns to interviews with digital nomads and CWSs managers, analysing how both groups can be seen as pioneers in the transition to forms of location-independent work. It explores the challenges faces by digital nomads in convincing employers that they can work remotely from other countries and time zones, and the pandemic's impact on employers' perceptions on the possibilities of location-independence. The insights of CWS managers are also considered, particularly the implications of the pandemic on CWSs, ad how managers navigated the disruptions when no bodies were occupying CWSs. Finally, the chapter adopts an ethics of care lens to explore the repair of spaces, emphasising the ways in which CWSs constitute an important emerging infrastructure of care that cultivates practices of care within the coworking community. Despite the flexibility in work arrangements that comprise location-independence, the desire for embodied connections in physical place is particularly strong during times of crisis.

Public health responses to COVID-19 by the New Zealand Government

On the 11th of March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the world was facing a pandemic, which quickly resulted in unprecedented disruption to international travel and migration. The COVID-19 virus was first identified in Wuhan, China, and quickly spread across the globe, affecting other provinces in China as well as several countries in Southeast Asia (WHO, 2021). The announcement by the WHO left the world wondering how COVID-19 would change people's everyday geographies. Similar to historical global pandemics such as the 1918 influenza pandemic or SARS (Rose-Redwood et al., 2020), the pandemic prompted many countries around the world to adapt and repair various infrastructures that typically facilitate the mobility of people in order to manage the risk and severity of an outbreak. These include a wide range of networks including transportation systems

(e.g., airports and public transport) and public health systems (e.g., hospitals and clinics). Public health responses to the pandemic varied between countries and continuously evolved. Initially, measures such as quarantines, suspension of flights, and social isolation were implemented rapidly to delay any outbreak. To minimise the social and economic impact of the pandemic, governments worldwide banned flights from COVID-19 "hotspots", screened visitors at ports of entry, and required those at risk to self-isolate or go into quarantine (ElFayoumi & Hengge, 2021). The rising death toll and fear surrounding COVID-19 prompted many governments to implement strict measures and intensify border controls to prevent the virus' spread. This approach arguably indicates the emergence of a new global border regime (Radil et al., 2021). Similar to numerous other countries worldwide, the New Zealand Government implemented a rigorous nationwide lockdown, which started on 26 March 2020, raising the alert level to the highest setting, Alert Level 4. The lockdown persisted until 13 May 2020, as illustrated in Figure 7.1, which provides an overview of the alert levels in Aotearoa New Zealand during the pandemic.

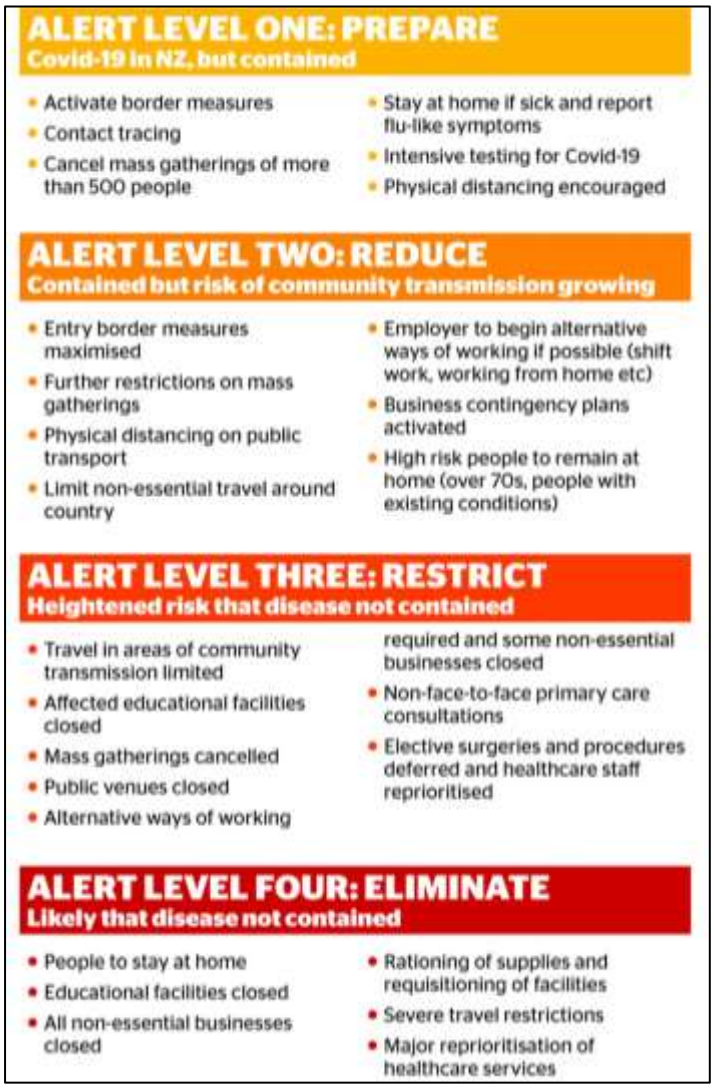

Figure 7.1: Aotearoa New Zealand's Pandemic Alert levels (adopted from NZ Herald, 2020a)

Aotearoa New Zealand's stringent border controls earned the country nicknames like "Fortress New Zealand" and "the Hermit Kingdom" in the media (McCulloch, 2022). Other reports suggest that Aotearoa New Zealand's aggressive lockdown measures were among the best in the world (Bremmer, 2021). It was not until two years later that non-citizens were allowed to apply for visas for entry into the country again. As part of its public health response, the New Zealand Government aimed to foster social cohesion and resilience in geographical, social, and political levels. Phrases like the "team of five million" created a collective identity that focused on the idea that everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand was "all in it together". While this approach created a collective mood (Bissell, 2021), it also sparked socio-political discourse because it did not include nearly 1 million New Zealand citizens living overseas (Ergler et al., 2021; Keys, 2020). Additionally, while it numerically included the 300,000 temporary migrants in the country, such as people on student visas (a category I fell in at the time), they were excluded from most government support and protection (Collins, 2020). The successful eradication of COVID-19 through the first lockdown, coupled with Aotearoa New Zealand's geographical advantage as a relatively isolated island-nation, heightened this sense of collective identity and shared purpose. A survey conducted in mid-2020 reflects the widespread support for the government's approach, showing that "New Zealanders overwhelmingly back the Government as the more competent economic and health managers for the post-COVID-19 world" (Cooke & Malpass, 2020, n.p.). This approach emphasised inclusion for everyone inside the confined international borders of Aotearoa New Zealand. However, stringent border controls severely restricted the return of citizens or residents who were unable to get home. Figure 7.2 illustrates the timeline with key events and restrictions put in place to protect citizens' daily lives and prevent deaths, which temporarily restricted people's mobility (Blair et al., 2022).

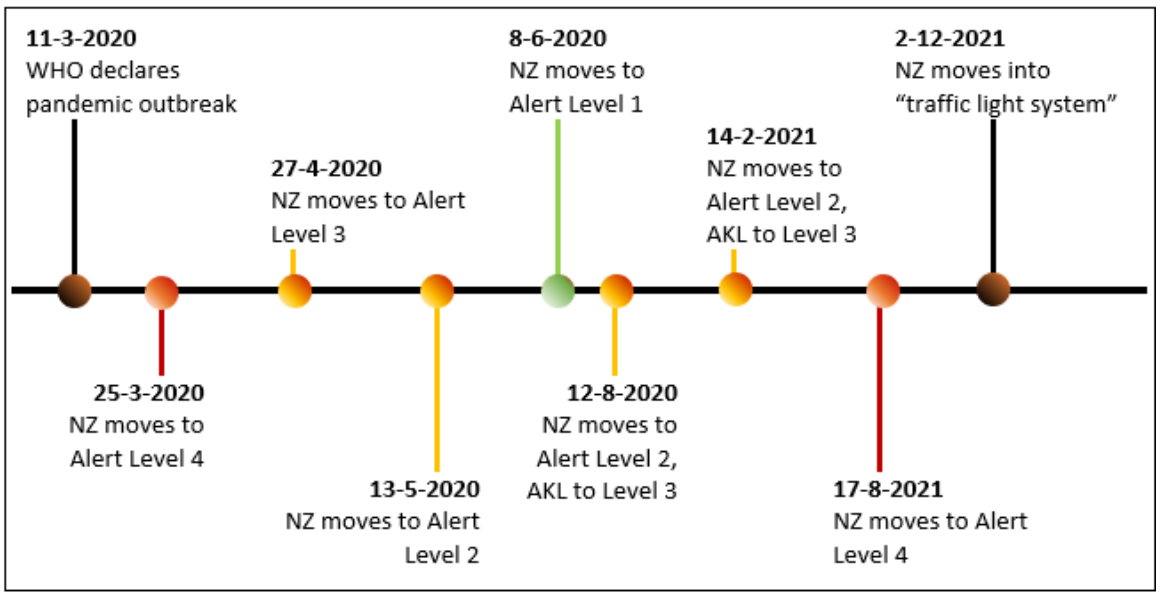

Figure 7.2: Timeline showing some of the main policy responses of the New Zealand Government

As the New Zealand Government transitioned from Alert level 4 and 3 to Alert level 2, restrictions were gradually lifted allowing people to return to workplaces, schools, and childcare facilities.[14] However, to ensure continued control of the virus, the government implemented measures for individuals to self-monitor their movements by registering access to different locations via the "NZ COVID Tracer" app, which was introduced in May 2020. Compliance with these measures was vital, and New Zealand citizens were heavily reliant on peer-pressure to comply with the app's scanning and signing-in requirements (Howell, 2021). In December 2020, a Bluetooth-enabled feature was added to the tracer app, enabling digital tracing and contact tracing, which officially remained in place until 23 March 2022 (Lee, 2022). Similar techniques were also deployed in other countries, such as South Korea and Singapore, which utilised GPS and credit card records to investigate movements and prevent the virus' spread (Zeng, 2020). These public health surveillance approaches relied on digital technological innovations that enabled large-scale data gathering.

In December 2021, the New Zealand Government introduced the COVID-19 Protection Framework, replacing the Alert Levels, and implemented a vaccine pass, which remained in place until mid-September 2022 (New Zealand Government, 2022b). The pass, which could be downloaded online, served as digital proof of identity and vaccinations status. Its use became mandatory for entering many buildings, offices, and venues, which generated significant political debate, similar to other countries (Bardosh et al., 2022; Mitchell, 2021). The concerns raised included the potential violation of human rights (Letzing, 2022). The vaccine pass requirement had implications for employment, as individuals who chose not to get vaccinated faced the risk of losing their jobs (Taunton, 2022).[15] The vaccine passes had both positive and negative effects on businesses and organisations as all visitors, coworkers, staff, suppliers, contractors, and external organisations had to comply with the new rules. The vaccine pass restricted location-independent workers who chose not to vaccinate themselves from working from semi-public spaces, such as CWSs, cafés, or libraries (Smith, 2021). It was a vital step towards normalising public life and restoring the economy to pre-pandemic levels. Nonetheless, the vaccine pass' legality and its impact on civil liberties and privacy continue to be the subject of debate and analysis.

Starting from 27 February 2022, the New Zealand Government implemented a phased reopening of international borders, starting with eligible travellers to and from Australia, with some exceptions being made for people deemed "essential" during the pandemic. Exactly two weeks later, on 13 March,

[14] There were various movements in and out of levels 1-4 over the subsequent 18 months, depending on new national and local outbreaks and the protection of vulnerable communities, where Auckland, Waikato, Northland, and the Wellington region sometimes had different alert levels than other parts of the country.
[15] In total 90% of people 12 years and older have completed the primary course of vaccinations, and 73% of the eligible 18+ received their first booster (New Zealand Government, 2023).

visa categories such as skilled workers and working holiday visa schemes, and eligible travellers from the rest of the world, were allowed entry into the country. In July 2022, the borders of Aotearoa New Zealand were finally fully opened from visitors from all over the world, and all visa categories were made available (New Zealand Government, 2022a). As of early 2023, Aotearoa New Zealand is still fully open to approved arrivals from virtually all nations. Although different variants of COVID-19 have emerged or are active in the community, most interventionist actions have been suspended. However, some measures are still in place, such as self-testing when feeling unwell or have been in contact with COVID-19, and some employers requiring employees to self-test several times a week to ensure a COVID-19-free workplace.

In addition to the measures introduced by the New Zealand Government, some organisations and businesses themselves implemented additional surveillance technologies (Blumenfeld, 2020; NZ Herald, 2020). Local management of operational environments allowed for policing at a grassroots level, where citizens could even download a QR code to register attendees at home events, exemplifying a bottom-up approach to maintain control over local environments, as opposed to merely top-down coercive policy decisions (Bissell, 2021). The incorporation of digital technologies in the renegotiation of these geographies highlights their significance in shaping everyday spaces. Although digital knowledge is often perceived as disembodied, neutral and objective (Rose, 2019), it is situated and constituted through power relations, and thus has a tangible impact on people's lives. Digital stories in times of crisis can evoke fear and uncertainty at a bodily level, and the screening of body temperature, wearing of masks, and markers of social distancing heighten awareness of proximity to others in space. Due to technological advancements, people were required to work from home, resulting in reduced flow of people in public spaces. This sudden loss of movement in streets and parks altered the sense of place and changed the meaning of home (Bissell, 2021), as the subsequent section elaborates.

A capsular sense of home

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in nationwide lockdowns and a shift towards remote work that has dramatically altered how people use space for work. Digital nomads have left their usual locations and set up temporary homes in their countries of origin. People have been required to stay at home and work from home, as well as attending school online, engaging in leisure activities, and even "dining out" at home. As a result, the home has become the epicentre of people's everyday geographies, with "daily commutes for many have become a walk between the bedroom and kitchen table, and non-work travel has been reduced to an infrequent shopping trip or a walk around the block for exercise" (Bissell, 2021, p. 153). Despite the fact that the physical location of home has not changed,

Bissell argues that its meaning and feeling have. This new, temporary sense of place, which Bissell refers to as "a capsular sense of place", shares many characteristics with Augé's (2015) concept of non-place. The pandemic has created a sense of place, "feeling devoid of meaning, bodies worn down by the relentless pressures of life without forward movement: in short, a kind of non-place that is detached from its surrounds, from elsewhere, from aspiration and optimism: a closed bubble, to use one of the pandemic's most prevalent spatial metaphors" (Bissell, 2021, p. 156).

The pandemic has also challenged the notion of home as a safe haven. For instance, incidents of domestic abuse have increased during the pandemic (Blunt & Dowling, 2022). Blunt and Dowling (2022, p. 113) note that power relations are "enacted and resisted through these material manifestations of ideas of home". The pandemic has put intense pressure on households, as parents and caregivers have been expected to work and care for their children simultaneously. Work meetings and classes have taken place in people's bedrooms, resulting into a constant renegotiation of the boundaries between personal and professional space (Longhurst, 2016b). The divisions between home, office, leisure, and work have been disrupted, as people have been forced to merge their professional and social lives in the same space. The home has become a melting pot where digitally-mediated work and social activities permeate many aspects of daily life, both inside and outside the household (De Klerk et al., 2021). Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the ways in which people share space and how they understand the meaning of "home". By blurring the lines between private and professional life and creating a sense of "capsular" space, the pandemic has caused a radical reconfiguration of everyday geographies.

The home, typically associated with care and viewed as a private sanctuary (Maalsen & Dowling, 2020), has become a space that evokes feelings of isolation, loneliness, stress, and disconnection during the pandemic. Bissell (2021) notes that scholars have a responsibility to consider how to care for those whose lives have been diminished by the pandemic. This theme has been developed by geographers such as Emma Power and Kathy Mee (2020), who emphasise the importance of consoling and repairing rather than merely restoring productivity. An ethics of care, particularly in times of disruption, recognises the importance of care practices and highlights their centrality and relationality in people's daily lives (Fisher & Tronto, 1990; Tronto, 2013). In this chapter, I also draw attention to the notion of the ethics of care. The COVID-19 pandemic generated new geographies of uncertainty and created friction regarding location-independence, as digital nomads and other location-independent workers found their mobility severely restricted by travel bans and lockdowns measures. In the next sections, I explore the contradicting effects of the normalisation of remote work for digital nomads, before turning to the (re)working of CWSs through the pandemic.

Location-independence and the pandemic: contradicting (im)mobile lives

In this thesis I argue that location-independent work has gained increasing recognition in recent decades, leading to a surge in its popularity (Hermann & Paris, 2020). However, the concept of location-independence underwent significant changes during the pandemic due to the disruption of infrastructures that typically support this mode of work. The pandemic brought about unprecedented uncertainty and immobility for digital nomads, who had previously been at the forefront of the transition towards location-independent work. Despite being pioneers, digital nomads were unable to continue working remotely from their preferred destinations due to border closures, the shutdown of public spaces, and stringent travel restrictions. This limited their mobility and disrupted their location-independence precisely at a time when remote work became more commonplace for others. In this chapter, I explore the challenges faced by digital nomads and the contradictions that arose. I illustrate how digital nomads repatriated to their home countries to benefit from state-funded social safety nets and care infrastructures, which ironically contradicted their initial desire to escape a fixed location within their home countries. By focussing on these contradictions, I contribute to the growing literature on the impact of the pandemic on work practices and the complexities of location-independent work.

In the decade preceding the pandemic, a new migration infrastructure began to emerge around digital nomadism, consisting of regulatory mechanisms, commercial agents, and social networks. This infrastructure included bespoke websites promoting digital nomadism, which depicted an idealised image of working from one's laptop on the beach or in a café. While such arrangements have existed for some time, they gained momentum in the early decades of the 21st century (Ens et al., 2018). In 2018, it was estimated that there were roughly 4.8 million digital nomads in the US alone (MBO Partners, 2018), a figure that is predicted to grow to 35.7 million remote workers in 2025 (22% of the US workforce) (Castrillon, 2022), despite pandemic disruptions. The significant increase in international mobility for travel, work, and relocation highlights a shift in people's attitudes towards travel, where mobility contributes to how individuals experience and comprehend place (Bissell, 2021). Digital nomads associate working location-independently with notions of freedom, lifestyle choice, and flexibility, as evidenced by the following excerpt:

> But what I like so much about this type of work that I'm doing is that I can decide when I want to work and where. You know, my previous job I just had to be in the office from 9-5, this typical, typical work setting where they expect you to be there and work and be efficient. That's something really traditional in my culture, all about the efficiency and trying to fit in this standard. I really hated it … [Whereas now] I can decide when I want to work and where

> and for how long. I can sit in my pyjamas for a start, and that's fine. Nobody will know. I can take a couple of hours off in the afternoon to go to the beach and that is fine. Just that freedom, that is the greatest thing for me!
>
> Fleur, digital nomad, Dutch, white female, late 20s, online marketer

The idealised image of digital nomadism has been challenged by the pandemic, which has created unprecedented uncertainty and immobility. The concept of location-independence is often associated with freedom and flexibility in digital nomadism (Mancinelli, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, Fleur described how being a digital nomad allowed her to make decisions about when and where to work, as well as for how long. This autonomy provides a sense of agency in the privileged lives of digital nomads and disrupts conventional work arrangements. Typically, digital nomads work for themselves as start-up entrepreneurs or take up gigs to support their location-independent lifestyle, challenging the conventional idea of working from a fixed location from nine-to-five. Fleur's pre-pandemic narration of "sit[ting] in my pyjamas for a start" is reminiscent of the collective experience of people working from home during lockdowns and embodies an unconventional way of working that revolves around digital nomadism. Digital nomads claim to have full agency in their location-independence, which embodies neoliberal notions of the self and places increasing pressure on starting entrepreneurs or gig-workers who often face precarious labour situations with little or no social security (Thompson, 2018, 2021). Stephanie and Sigrid, two other digital nomads, explain how the freedom to decide when, where, and for how long to work is liberating:

> You can go away for a day, and it just means that people can't reach you and that is fine. That is that freedom and I still have that. I am so used to that now, but so many people don't have that you know, to be this free and decide yourself when do you begin to work, when do you stop, do you work in the evening?
>
> Stephanie, digital nomad, German, white female, early 30s, webshop owner

> And because I love my work, I don't mind working a lot. I think I work about five hours each day but effectively ... You know often people just hang around the office to get their work hours in and waste a lot of their time not doing much. Research shows that shorter working days are more effective. I have a couple of friends in Sweden who work for companies that now have trials and they love it. They have more time for their family and pastime. But I still wouldn't want to be confined to an office. I have lived this lifestyle now for five, six years, I just couldn't go back to 'normal' life, you know, what society wants you to do, to think, to act.
>
> Sigrid, digital nomad, Icelandic, white female, mid 30s, content writer/environmental consultant

Prior to the pandemic, digital nomadism allowed individuals to experience a sense of freedom, as expressed by Stephanie and Sigrid. According to Stephanie, being a digital nomad provided her with the extreme flexibility to decide when to work, when to take a day off, and when to work in the evening. However, the reality of different time zones in which she worked is a major constraint that has been reported by digital nomads, as well as in digital nomad scholarship (Nash et al., 2018). Thus, Stephanie's seemingly untethered lifestyle is still bound by the constraints of deadlines and time zones. Similarly, Sigrid mentions that she works more efficiently for about five hours a day, which disrupts the traditional belief that a workday must consist of an eight-hour duration. Although some companies are experimenting with shorter workdays, Sigrid feels that the confined space of an office restricts and limits her freedom, which she seeks outside the office space.

The aforementioned excerpts indicate a strong association between digital nomadism and freedom, particularly in terms of flexibility regarding when and where to work. While the ability to work from any location without constraints is often viewed as empowering, it also results in a significant overlap between work and personal life, with the boundaries between the two blurred. This loss of boundaries and lack of structure can have implications for the overall wellbeing and work-life balance of digital nomads, which is a topic of interest among scholars studying this phenomenon (see e.g., Hensellek & Puchala, 2021; Richter & Richter, 2020).

Mobile lives: pioneers of remote work prior to the pandemic

Digital nomadism can be regarded as a pioneering form of a remote work lifestyle in which mobility and location-independence grant agency in one's life. The flexibility and freedom associated with this lifestyle are often seen in contrast to the rigidity of conventional work arrangements that digital nomads seek to subvert and reconfigure. Prior to the pandemic, aspiring digital nomads faced challenges in convincing their employers to adopt remote work, which (partly) influenced their decision to become digital nomads and start their own businesses, as the following excerpts reveal:

> I asked my boss if I could take some time off and come back and continue working, and when he didn't agree with that, I tried to suggest that I could actually work from abroad as well, as most of the tasks I was doing were online anyways. However, my boss told me: Well, if I allow you to go and work like this, then the next one comes, and the next one, and I can't say yes to you and no to the rest.
>
> Michael, digital nomad, Dutch, white male, late 20s, programmer

> I remember my old job very well when I proposed to work remotely, and they just laughed at me. Whereas now, I would love to walk back in there and say: "YOU SEE?!" But yes, I am happy that I have started my own business and not being directed by anyone anymore.
>
> Fleur, digital nomad, Dutch, white female, late 20s, online marketer (emphasis in original)

Fleur left her job and started her own business, which allowed her to travel to South America with her partner, who was already working remotely in the IT industry. Michael managed to work for an Australian online company that facilitated remote work from Thailand. For digital nomads, geographical mobility translates into social mobility, where location-independence also leads to increased income relative to costs and greater purchasing power that aligns with youthful desires for self-fulfilment and a hedonistic lifestyle (Hannonen, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, the notion of digital and flexible work arrangements represented a challenge to employers that had become accustomed to temporal and spatial norms of physically being present in the workplace. However, the global lockdowns have altered this, as many businesses have had to adopt remote working arrangements. This shift is evident in the experiences of digital nomads, as illustrated in the following excerpts from Fleur and Michael:

> I think Corona [COVID-19] in some ways has been really great for the future prospects of digital nomads. Of course, not in the travelling sense, but in the way that companies are now used to the fact that their employees can work from home and still deliver the work … I think Corona [COVID-19] has opened the mindset of traditional offices and companies that can make work for workers more flexible.
>
> Fleur, digital nomad, Dutch, white female, late 20s, online marketer

> I think that this digital nomad lifestyle will increasingly take off, everyone is already working remotely, first forced but I notice that a lot of friends with traditional jobs are actually enjoying the working from home as they are more flexible … I mean when there is a vaccine and borders open again, people realise that they really can go anywhere they want! If they can work from home, that means they can work from other places as well.
>
> Michael, digital nomad, Dutch, white male, late 20s, programmer

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, digital nomads had already demonstrated the feasibility of working remotely. However, the pandemic has accelerated the normalisation and transition to remote working, making digital nomads pioneers of this movement. According to Michael, the pandemic's disruptive effects can change the mindset of businesses and organisations, as they are compelled to adopt hybrid models of remote work. Similarly, Fleur suggests that now that people have experienced working from

home, they may realise they can work from other locations as well. Nonetheless, the infrastructures that typically facilitate and enable location-independent work were severely disrupted by the pandemic, causing tension and temporary immobility for the usually hypermobile digital nomads. This disruption is an aspect that requires further exploration, which I do next.

Immobile lives: tension and friction during the pandemic

The pandemic has led to disruptions in the regulatory mechanisms of state infrastructures that facilitate digital nomads' work lives and mobility. Lockdowns, closed national borders, and temporarily closure of cafés and CWSs have impeded the location-independence that digital nomads value. Prior to the pandemic, as described earlier, participants in this research enjoyed the flexibility to choose their work location, enabled by migration infrastructures (such as borders and visas as elaborated upon in Chapter 5) and digital and socio-material infrastructures (such as cafés, Airbnb's, and CWSs). However, the pandemic caused a sudden loss of mobility that challenged a digital nomad lifestyle. While digital nomads could still work online, they could no longer work from anywhere due to restrictions imposed by state interventions. Digital nomads, often associated with privileged identities that enable their location-independence (see Chapter 5), experienced uncertainty and tension in their mobility due to pandemic-induced disruptions. This situation highlights the need for nuanced understandings of digital nomadism and its intersection with state regulatory mechanisms. Abby describes how restrictions evoked feelings of uncertainty and tension in their mobility:

> I got really homesick when the news came. I wanted to reconnect with my family and friends, be with them, hug them, spend quality time with them. But I was in Indonesia … in general, life has been pretty good. Yoga schools and coworking spaces did shut down, but a lot of local cafés and *warungs* [local Indonesian restaurants] were still open.
>
> Abby, digital nomad, American, white female, late 20s, ESL teacher

Abby's account of the early days of the pandemic illustrates the emotional challenges faced by digital nomads who suddenly found themselves disconnected from their loved ones. In her desire to be physically present with her family and friends in her home country, the US, Abby reflects on the emotional complexity of the "material, discursive, and psychological spaces" that bodies occupy (Longhurst, 2016a, p. 200). Despite technological affordances of online communication, Abby experienced a strong longing for physical touch that she could not fulfil while working from Indonesia. MacRae (2016) notes that trendy cafés, CWSs, and yoga schools in Bali are predominantly foreign-owned operations, which constitute the socio-material infrastructures that support a digital nomad

lifestyle, were forced to temporarily shut down. This disruption highlights the vulnerability of digital nomads to state interventions, especially those related to mobility, and underscores the importance of these infrastructures in enabling location-independence.

Whereas Abby opted to remain in Indonesia, Fleur, another digital nomad who was in Mexico during the pandemic outbreak, chose to return home to the Netherlands:

> We were in Mexico when things got really bad, and we had very stressful weeks not knowing if the Dutch Government could repatriate us or not. In Mexico we were sort of treated as risky persons, *gringos*, as back then it was the Europeans who had brought the virus further to Latin-America. So, it was really awful. We mostly stayed in our apartment, until at the end the Airbnb lady wanted to get us out of her place as she got worried as well. Luckily, we were able to go on a repatriation flight the day thereafter, it was crazy! It was so good to be back home though.
>
> Fleur, digital nomad, Dutch, white female, late 20s, online marketer

The excerpt discussing Fleur's experience highlights the limitations that digital nomads faced during the pandemic, where their options to work and stay abroad became increasingly restricted. Even the temporary location of their Airbnb, which resembled a sense of "home", became a place that they had to leave due to the breakdown of social infrastructures that digital nomads typically enjoy while abroad. This breakdown illustrates how "individuals and groups can find space within infrastructures that were designed for different purposes or with exclusion in mind" (Power & Mee, 2020, p. 489).

The sudden failure of these infrastructures changed Fleur's sense of home and put her in a deeply precarious situation, experiencing friction in her mobility. To address this disruption to location-independence, Fleur decided to return to her country of origin to find a new sense of home. The breakdown of these previously-taken-for-granted infrastructures greatly diminished the place-dimension of digital nomads' work arrangements. Movement, as Tsing (2005) and Cresswell (2014) remind us, always implies friction. By exploring the concept of friction and its 'sticky materialities', Tsing highlights the transformative nature of mobility, as power relations continue to exist yet at the same time are transformed by social relations. As infrastructures that typically facilitate location-independence begin to break down, digital nomads lose the flexibility and geographic mobility that underpins their entire lifestyle. For example, closed national borders disrupted digital nomads' freedom of mobility, which is heavily dependent on state infrastructures and policies. The restrictions that governments impose on digital nomads by introducing DNV schemes create friction in the mobile lives of digital nomads, yet at the same time transforms the digital nomad landscape. By leveraging

their privileged identities and using various strategies, digital nomads are able to transform these frictions to their advantage. It is important to acknowledge the agency and self-governance of digital nomads to understand the intersecting notions of privilege within global migration regimes.

For instance, Fleur and her boyfriend's privileged identity and citizenship status allowed them the option to repatriate safely. This illustrates the freedoms this digital nomad couple has and the resources they can draw upon, both personally and through government-organised repatriation flights. Their class and nationality also allow them to stay with family in their home country, even though they no longer have their own dwelling:

> We both really struggled. Because I gave up my room and my boyfriend as well, we were forced to stay with my parents. Which was really nice of course, they live in Soest, which is like a fancy retirement village, and we thought that initially it would be for three months so the idea with summer coming along and all, it looked really bearable. We have been here now for nine months and it just hard living with your parents again, as a couple, especially when you are an adult and you have lived your own independent lifestyle for such a long time.
>
> Fleur, digital nomad, Dutch, white female, late 20s, online marketer

Fleur's description of "living with your parents again" signals a restricted place-based attachment that disrupts her notions of location-independence. Her compromised mobility by living at her parent's place, waiting for the pandemic to be over, made Fleur more tethered to her home country. The constructed image of a digital nomad identity revolves around the idea of freedom, yet is largely dependent on state and social infrastructures. The pandemic has disrupted the mobility of digital nomads, resulting in temporary stays at a single location, often characterised by friction. Although Fleur describes her current living situation as less than ideal, the fact that she has the option to return to her parents' home and work from there highlights the importance of her class, savings, social network, and nationality, which have afforded her access to a robust welfare state system. Thus, the continued pursuit of remote work necessitates the availability of social support and housing, particularly during times of crisis and disruption to mobility. Fleur's connections and social network that provided her with a safety net are primarily located in her home country. It can be argued that the hypermobility of digital nomads can lead to detachment from places, which can result in a lack of access to essential infrastructures during crisis, such as those Fleur experienced. In response, Fleur sought to embed herself in a place with more support than her Airbnb rental abroad, and her home environment became a space of repair where she could wait for the pandemic to subside. The loss of

her independent lifestyle was mitigated somewhat by the alternative workspace provided by her home space.

Chapter 2 discussed how CWSs offer an alternative workspace. However, the pandemic caused forced closures during lockdowns and other health and safety restrictions, severely impacting CWSs. The following section examines how CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand adapted to the unexpected disruptions caused by the pandemic. Similar to digital nomads, CWSs can also be considered pioneers in the transition to remote work. Despite the temporary breakdown of the socio-material infrastructures that they typically provide, some CWS managers in this research demonstrated practices that prioritised care. Therefore, this section explores how CWSs can be viewed as emergent spaces of care during crisis. By focussing on care in unexpected places (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), infrastructures of care can facilitate "particular forms of sociality and life to flourish" (Alam & Houston, 2020, p. 3).

Disrupted infrastructures in CWSs: notions of care and repair

CWSs provide new spatial forms of workspace for location-independent workers. As demonstrated in Chapter 6, even prior to the pandemic, CWSs challenged and disrupted conventional beliefs about workspace. However, the pandemic resulted in the temporary breakdown of the socio-spatial environments that CWSs typically provide for location-independent workers. Forced closures of CWSs during lockdowns shifted social and networking activities that managers actively curated in their spaces into the digital sphere. The transition to remote work disrupted the embodied, in-person social-material infrastructures that characterised CWSs. Managers felt pressure to maintain connections among coworkers during the pandemic, leading to an increase reliance on digital technologies. Online platforms became essential tools for meeting and socialising in virtual space while working from home, and they were widely adopted during the pandemic. However, as the following manager explains, maintaining coworker connections online during the lockdowns was challenging:

> We did like a check-in every morning. Share coffee, what are you working on and stuff like that. The first lockdown was a success. The first one was good, because people needed to connect, the second one not that good, and the third and the fourth, we had maybe two or three people showing up.
>
> Leona, community manager, large sized CWS, urban area

An interesting observation that can be drawn from this excerpt is that the digital technologies that facilitate location-independence and remote work infrastructures in CWSs do not necessarily serve as

a panacea to keep coworkers connected in online spaces when CWSs are temporarily closed. It is important to adopt an embodied geographies of care approach, especially in times of crisis and disruption, to examine the disruption and repair of CWSs that facilitate location-independence. This approach can shed light on how "working space is felt through disruption of the boundaries of the intimate sphere through digital technologies" (Richardson, 2018, p. 257). This highlights the importance of considering the interplay between digital and physical space in understanding how CWSs and location-independence are experienced and maintained during times of crisis.

CWSs, which also function as venues for public events, had to navigate the evolving public health regulations that emerged during the pandemic and had to adhere to the new COVID-19 response protocol to provide a safe environment for workers. With the emergence of new COVID-19 variants, shared workspaces were under greater pressure to establish new measures to ensure the safety of workers who wished to work from a shared space, once the initial first lockdown was lifted. Figure 7.3 presents two examples of how CWS managers communicated the COVID-19 restrictions. The implementation of these measures underscores the importance of maintaining a safe and healthy workplace during a public health crisis.

Figure 7.3: Examples of COVID-19 measures of two CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand (public Facebook posts)

The public Facebook post on the left demonstrates how the CWS sought to protect the coworking community through the vision of wellbeing and securitisation of the CWS, extending the notion of community to "staff, members, customers and wider network" – which includes everyone who has a link with the CWS. Similarly, the public Facebook post on the right situates the CWS's public health response in relation to the wider community, while also offering online options for people who do not

want (or are unable) to comply with vaccination requirements or do not feel safe with these protocols, "to connect virtually".

The public health mandate, which led to a disruptive landscape in the geographies of labour, challenged CWS managers to rearrange their space in a way that met the New Zealand Government's requirements and kept the CWS operating. It is important to acknowledge the geographies of uncertainty that characterised many workplaces during the pandemic. Bissell (2021, p. 157) notes that "in this uncertainty, we need to listen closely to see what is happening, and we need to better appreciate—not downplay—the complexity of the situation and the new relations and associations that have formed in this crisis". CWSs, as highly regulated and carefully curated spaces (as discussed in Chapter 6), were well-positioned to integrate the new public health requirements established in response to the pandemic, despite the uncertainties. Indeed, as the following excerpt from a CWS manager shows, this CWS had a pandemic response policy ready and in place well before the New Zealand Government introduced their COVID-19 response plan.

> And we had, we are quite proactive, a COVID response policy. I took the view in January last year, when it was becoming obvious that something was going to happen. In fact, we tell a joke by the end of, in fact the 27th of February. Which was the day they found out about the first case in New Zealand … So, the morning of the 27th of February we released our COVID response plan, which was essentially various security actions at the coworking space that ranged from the sanitising that went over all the way through to the building. And it went from the four stages, various triggers around the country, etc. And then three weeks later, the government stole our plan … I should have patented it (laughs), just kidding. The idea, when we saw this [COVID-19) coming was, that we wanted to ensure that this is a beautiful safe space, that it feels like a safe space and the members meeting here, all residential or non-residential, are a 100% priority. And then on that basis, this response brings change, and you as a member are the priority and you will be safe in this spot but, you have responsibilities to make sure you're safe. So, we've rolled out this plan. It is two-ways. Members are more able to be here because they felt safer in the environment, which was a coping experience and things like that, which was great. That was the whole point. The community concept, the idea that where you should be safe in your work home. And that was part of it.
>
> Cliff, manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

This excerpt highlights the bottom-up policing that occurs during times of crisis, despite top-down state-enforced rules in Aotearoa New Zealand (Bissell, 2021), as I have previously discussed in this thesis. The CWS's additional policies implemented prior to the pandemic demonstrate the regulatory

capacity of the manager at a local level, allowing them to be prepared for pandemic outbreaks. By adopting a policy that prioritises the smooth-running of the business and the protection of the health of the coworkers, the manager places responsibilities on both the coworkers and the CWS to navigate the pandemic and protect the coworking community. The manager takes responsibility for the care and safety of the coworkers before it becomes a public concern, reflecting "the relocation of care responsibility from the state (through welfare) to communities and individuals" (Power and Williams (2020, p. 7). The CWS manager's commitment to creating a safe space for coworkers reflects the reconfiguration of workspace in response to the pandemic, emphasising the value of bodies, identities, and inclusion in generating a feeling of safety.

"Coming out the other end": inverted digital nomadism and practices of repair

According to research by *Deskmag*, CWSs worldwide have been severely impacted by the pandemic. The implementation of social distancing measures and health regulations has resulted in a 20% loss of capacity and a 25% reduction in membership (Foertsch, 2021). In Aotearoa New Zealand, following the first lockdown, CWS managers expressed concerns that people would not return to shared spaces due to their newfound familiarity with working remotely from home. However, as one manager explained, there were individuals "coming and going, and then come back":

> We have had people coming and going, and then come back. And of course, if you then add COVID into the whole mix. Like the remote working concept. And so, working from home, remote working, all of the things that coworking was, that came about because of, we've just been through the washing machine (laughs). Idea-wise people were learning as in how do I do this? How do I remote work, how do I work away from my team? How do I work in another place? This is where I was before, you know, all of that, all just comes right into a mixer. And then it's all coming out of the mix again. It's all positive towards coworking, right? There was a time in the middle of the pandemic people going on: the industry is gone, it's dead. Business will shut down …Yet the key point was that everything was turned upside down. Coming out the other end, we're back to what we were looking at in terms of the benefits of coworking. All residents included. We have all come back again.
>
> Jeremy, manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area

The interview referred to in this paragraph took place in April 2021, approximately one year after Aotearoa New Zealand experienced its first long lockdown and returned to a pandemic-free life except for closed borders. "Coming out the other end", most CWS managers reported having the same level of membership as before the pandemic, or even experiencing an increase, as reflected in the

optimistic outlook of the CWS manager who stated, “it’s all positive towards coworking, right?”. This excerpt demonstrates how well-positioned CWSs were, as CWSs provide various digital and socio-material infrastructures that enable remote working, working in other places, and working away from one’s team, which were already practiced by coworkers. As one community manager told me, “It’s amazing, the managers didn’t imagine to having to decline people after COVID” (Alex, community manager, large-sized CWS, urban area). Other interviewees reported similar stories, with a dip in membership after the first lockdown but eventually seeing an increase in members.

Several CWS managers reported an influx of new members from New Zealanders who repatriated back home. These individuals were still employed by their overseas employers and found CWSs to be the perfect place to work from, as noted by this manager:

> A really interesting trend has been what I call COVID refugees. So, Kiwis [a colloquial national identity moniker for New Zealanders derived from the native kiwi bird], or partners of Kiwis arriving to New Zealand coming back from overseas because of COVID for various whatever reasons. And starting their own thing, or still working for their old employer, but remotely. So, it’s been quite a lot of really interesting people joining the community here. Like people who are well travelled and have really interesting stories. And they come in, like, I’m still contracting back to my place in Australia, or Colombia.
>
> Paul, manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

The CWS manager describes a kind of inverted digital nomadism, so-called COVID refugees. The phenomenon occurred when Aotearoa New Zealand closed its borders to everyone except national citizens, leading to an influx of New Zealand citizens and residents who temporarily returned to their home country. This observation is supported by another community manager who shared that they had to adjust their business model to offer different membership options, as they noticed that some New Zealanders who moved home during the pandemic were still working for UK-based companies:

> There are people that come over since COVID and they’re like, I need Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm access but in reverse, so I need to come in at like six o’clock at night and I work till two o’clock in the morning. Because I’m working remotely from the UK. So, it [membership] is flexible and fair if you don’t want to be in here during the day … COVID’s just thrown such a spanner in the works for so many people. And it really changed the way that people work. So, I think CWSs need to have that flexibility … and also, be prepared for whatever is going to be thrown at us. Like if there’s another pandemic.
>
> Alex, community manager, large-sized CWS, urban area

By providing night-time access to CWS facilities, the community manager transformed the conventional office model that only operates during daytime hours. This flexible approach enabled coworkers to continue working remotely at any time, reflecting a reworking of the geographical and temporal fixity of working. This innovation illustrates the interrelation between mobility, place, and technology. Furthermore, CWSs play a crucial role in the urban landscape by providing spatial work infrastructures that facilitate the transition towards hybrid or remote working models.

The pandemic has disrupted traditional beliefs and normative understandings around the organisation of work, prompting a paradigm shift in companies and organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand, as described by the following CWS community manager:

> What's happening a lot is we have a lot of big companies who don't want their own office anymore. And they want just a place they meet once or twice a week and the rest of the time working from home … it's easier now that this [COVID-19] has proved that actually work from home is going to be fine. I think COVID accelerated that stuff, they're gonna think in innovation, how can we innovate and work from home.
>
> Leona, community manager, large sized CWS, urban area

According to Leona, normalisation of remote work involves an element of trust in companies, as they realise that "actually work from home is going to be fine", thereby stimulating the possibility that this arrangement becomes more widespread (for wider discussion see Lufkin, 2020). The adoption of remote work models requires learning not to be dependent on fixed locations, which is similar to the findings of Reuschke and Ekinsmyth (2021) who identified new spatiotemporal patterns of work in the city where work is multi-locational.

It should be noted that prior to the pandemic, modern IT companies did not consider remote work options for their employees, as *The Spinoff*'s business editor Michael Andrew (2021, n.p.) notes, "[e]ven though we had the technology to work away from the office, it was too much of a radical shift from New Zealand's rusty business conventions – shirt and dress pants, seated at your desk, 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. While businesses in other countries were using technology to evolve and prosper, most New Zealand firms were stuck in the ways they'd upheld for more than a century". The pandemic has normalised the notion of remote work due to enforced working from home, and has opened the eyes of businesses to the benefits of employees working from home (Criscuolo et al., 2021). Employees who had not necessarily experienced remote work or pictured themselves as "digital nomads" have now had a taste of what remote work can feel like. This shift in perception has resulted in new opportunities for companies to explore the potential of remote work, and its potential to

improve work-life balance, job satisfaction, and productivity. However, it is important to recognise that this shift also presents new challenges such as the need to adapt to new technologies, and to maintain effective communication and collaboration in a virtual work environment.

The digital technologies that enable remote work also increase the presence of remote workers in virtual spaces, leading to a reconfiguration of experiences in physical spaces that are characterised by physical separation from others. Abd Elrahman (2020, p. 117) asserts that "ICTs exaggerates how people combine the household and the workplace, how people work and socialise. Our current understanding of being in a place continually links the physical space and virtual space, and between synchronous and asynchronous communicative modalities". While remote work has been made possible by the many technological affordances that enable working from home, CWS managers in Aotearoa New Zealand have reported that coworkers are increasingly seeking connection and opportunities to work from CWSs again post-lockdown. A similar observation has been made in research by Straughan and Bissell (2022) in which they found that the increased pressure of food delivery to be contact free during the pandemic, led to "feelings of boredom and a sense of detachment" (p…..). This finding highlights the importance of in-person encounters with people.

As previously discussed, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a blurring and challenging of the familiar divisions between home, the office, leisure, work and care, resulting in what Bissell (2021) describes "a capsular sense of place". Many people experienced feelings of "exhaustion and being pushed to thresholds of bearability" (Bissell, 2021, p. 156), due to the continuous living, working, eating and breathing from the confined spaces of home. Therefore, CWSs play an important role in providing caring infrastructure, as they facilitate shared workspaces that generate feelings of belonging and provide social interaction with likeminded individuals. A manager of a large-sized CWS in an urban area recounts a conversation with a coworker who expressed a desire to return to a social shared workspace, away from the isolating work home environment: "I [speaking from the coworker's perspective] just want to come in, I just want some social interactions. I've been working from home for the last three weeks and I'm going insane" (Paul, manager of large-sized CWS, urban area). Despite technological affordances at home, the following CWS manager's account illustrates the importance of social connectedness and belonging, which has always been a basic need (see e.g., Mee, 2009):

> Fundamentally, in the new version of it and the new iteration of it, it's like, well, this is what our people have been doing for thousands of years. So, living in tribes and living in clans, living in villages. And over the years, we've kind of moved, migrated away from each other. And then what happens is, there's no collaboration, the connectivity is a bit more fractured. So, bringing people back into an environment that you could meet cool new people, likeminded people, share ideas.

Rebecca, manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area

In an era characterised by disconnection and fragmentation driven by technology (Lawson, 2007; McLean, 2019), the manager explains that she established a CWS prior to the lockdown as people had become increasingly dispersed. They "kind of moved, migrated away from each other". She argues that the ubiquitous presence of digital technologies in people's daily lives has transformed physical connectivity. In this sense, CWSs represent a longing for human connection and the embodiment of space, as they can provide supportive infrastructures that foster social connectivity in physical space. Another manager also emphasises the significance of face-to-face interaction in CWSs, explaining the need to return to these spaces post-lockdown:

> It's the more interaction [in a CWS] I guess. People-to-people interaction … a space like this is why you create a space so that people can have that.

Angela, community manager, middle-sized CWS, urban area

The value of working from a social space where individuals are "working alone but together" (Spinuzzi, 2012) is a vital consideration. A research on the impacts of teleworking on workers requested by the European Parliament supports this notion, highlighting that although teleworking may increase productivity, it can ultimately be detrimental to workers' health and wellbeing due to the absence of social interaction (Lodovici, 2021). Furthermore, Deloitte's 2016 (Monahan, 2018) study found that nearly half of all gig-workers and freelancers reported feelings of loneliness and isolation before the pandemic (Fisher, 2016). The flexible work arrangements for location-independent workers often lead to physically separation from others. It is important to acknowledge the detrimental impact of isolation and loneliness on the mental and physical health of workers, leading to adverse effects on both the individual and the organisation. Thus, it is essential to ensure that remote workers have opportunities for social interaction and can access collaborative spaces to promote a sense of community and belongingness.

This discussion highlights the significance of caring infrastructures and the human desire to interact with others in a particular place, particularly within a CWS. As outlined in Chapter 6, CWSs encompass more than mere workspaces; they represent socio-material environments that arise from various relationships. Moreover, the relevance of social connectivity that arises from being present in a CWS can be regarded as a vital social infrastructure for location-independent workers. Acknowledging the role that these spaces play as social infrastructures in local contexts, as Klinenberg (2018) points out, allows us to see the reparative dimension of CWSs and their potential to act as spaces of care. By extending the notion of care, CWSs can be where "care, as a capacity and a practice, is cultivated,

shared and resourced on an egalitarian basis" (Care Collective, 2020, p. 6). The CWSs, as a physical location, provide the spatial context where caring relationships can be developed, facilitated by community managers and managers of CWSs. When placing this in the context of a highly individualised world characterised by an ever-increasing emphasis on digital technologies, the reparative dimensions of CWSs demonstrate their potentiality to create a social infrastructure for coworkers, based on mutual dependency of the coworkers. This point is further exemplified by the following excerpt:

> And I think that desire for flexible work-life or home-life or balance, people often come back to that work balance life … In a coworking space, you've got bodies in a space, and you can develop new interactions, which is great. So, I'd really love the idea that people could take ownership of their work. That they get the option, and when the option works for them, it can add to that, that's fantastic … It's this tangible, your energy, like your atoms are physically in the same room with the other person and they're charging, you can bounce off that so much better than a screen, the screen's great if you have no other option. To see the facials. It's not about guessing what is behind the subtext of the written word. So, there's definitely a place for that. But if you can be in a space with a person, my goodness, just be in that space.
>
> Stephanie, community manager, small-sized CWS, semi-urban area

The importance of physical proximity and embodied connections in shared workspace is highlighted by a manager who expressed the need to be in a communal space after the first lockdown. This manager emphasised the benefits of face-to-face communication, the energy of being surrounded by others, and the ability to "bounce off" other people's ideas, which is "so much better than a screen". Such expressions underscore the reparative dimensions of CWSs, which foster caring practices and enable social interaction among coworkers. This also demonstrates how affect and emotion play an important role in people's lives, which is important to consider in the penetration of the digital into people's lives and the more-than-real geographies. CWSs are carefully curated to promote social movement, which distinguishes them from other shared workspaces (Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). Research by Clifton et al. (2022) indicates that the social factors of CWSs are a crucial motivation for freelancers to work from these shared spaces and have the potential to become important sites for social capital in the digital economy. The social and caring dimensions of CWSs create an environment that bridges the complexities of health regulation, the need for social interaction, and the opportunities for flexible work, particularly in the context of the transition towards location-independent work.

The emergence of care practices in CWSs is evident in how managers in Aotearoa New Zealand attempted to support members who were struggling financially due to the pandemic. In this context, one manager suspended membership fees for existing members, as did most of the interviewees:

> I'd say over half of our members didn't come back. They didn't have the funds to come back. But what was interesting about that was, we said to a few of them, or actually all of them: if money is the problem, then don't make it the problem. Just come back. Don't pay rent. Until you can. For us, it's more important to have people in the space than not.
>
> Richard, manager, small-sized CWS, semi-urban area

This action exemplifies the way in which CWSs can operate as sites of care, offering support to members experiencing financial hardship. This relates to one of the phases of care as identified by Fisher and Tronto (1990), caring about, which talks about solidarity and responsibility. In the example above, the CWS manager fosters an ethics of care in which he genuinely cares about his coworkers, offering the space to them for free. This account provides an alternative perspective on the role of CWSs in fostering care practices. The manager's decision to prioritise the wellbeing of the coworker over financial incentives exemplifies the caring infrastructure that CWSs can create. In times of financial hardship and uncertainty, CWS managers can play a vital role in supporting location-independent workers and promoting their wellbeing. Moreover, the manager's decision reflects the ethical perspective of care that underpins the CWS model. As such, CWSs can operate as spaces that articulate with empathy, support and care-full social relationships (Williams, 2020). The CWS managers' actions reflect a broader recognition of the importance of social connectivity, communal support, and care practices in fostering a sense of belongingness and promoting wellbeing among location-independent workers, also recognised by the following CWS community manager:

> So previously, we had set memberships, permanents, casuals, flexies, and then hot-deskers. But what we've done now, this time, is that we based our memberships on koha economy … so how the koha economy works is that we give them the opportunity to be like: Hey, this is what we can offer to be able to be a member of this space and there's other things that work around your memberships is that we ask them, that they contribute to monthly events … It could be anything, it'd be something from team building or sharing knowledge or something that he's learned recently, and then another part of the koha economy is that you contribute to filling up this chocolate jar or, bringing or paying for the milk this week.
>
> Angela, community manager, medium-sized CWS, urban area

The concept of a koha economy, as mentioned in Chapter 3, puts forth the notion that individuals utilising CWSs not only have varying financial resources, but also other resources that are not easily monetised. Rather than being evaluated solely on their income, coworkers contribute to the CWS community itself. Furthermore, rather than assigning individuals to different coworker typologies, such as member, resident, permanent, or casual, this CWS rejects such terminology and the hierarchical distinctions it creates in terms of the value of different coworkers. This approach impacts not only the identities that form the CWS, but also the entire constitution of the space. By offering alternative forms of care, this CWS illustrates how the disruptive nature of CWSs holds the potential for a more embodied geography, as demonstrated by the whakataukī (Māori proverb) on the wall of one of the CWSs visited (see Fig 7.4):

Figure 7.4: Whakataukī at a CWS in Aotearoa New Zealand (image by author)

This account provides an alternative narrative that suggests that CWSs can serve as spaces of repair, by embodying practices and principles of care, particularly in the post-pandemic era.

Conclusion

This last empirical chapter of this thesis has contributed to the ongoing discourse on location-independent work by exploring how the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the regulatory, technological, and social infrastructures that typically support such work arrangements. In doing so, it has shed light on the various ways in which the pandemic has impacted daily and transnational mobilities, as well as traditional beliefs regarding the fixed spatiality of work. Digital technologies, in particular, have played a significant role in facilitating remote work, blurring the boundaries between home and office, work, and leisure, and challenging the separation between private and professional spaces.

The accounts of CWS managers and digital nomads presented in this chapter provide valuable insights into how the pandemic has normalised the concept of remote working and accelerated the transition from conventional to location-independent work. Prior to the pandemic, digital nomads had already challenged normative beliefs regarding the organisation and fixed spatiality of work by adopting a hypermobile lifestyle that allowed them to work from various locations around the world. CWSs, too,

have played a significant role in this transition by providing flexible workspace solutions that emphasise social connection and repair.

However, the pandemic has also highlighted the vulnerabilities of location-independent work arrangements and their dependence on regulatory and social infrastructures. State interventions, such as lockdowns and travel restrictions, have greatly diminished the place-dimension of digital nomads' work arrangements and restricted their geographic mobility. The reliance on state benefits and social safety nets has also created friction in the constructed digital nomad identity that centres around notions of freedom. Similarly, CWSs have been severely impacted by the pandemic, with temporary closures and lockdowns disrupting their operations and challenging their viability as a workspace solution.

Despite these challenges, the insights generated in this chapter offer a wider perspective on the values of location-independent work and the flexibility of work arrangements in post-pandemic times. The reconfigured landscape of location-independent work arrangements, supported by regulatory, socio-material, and technological infrastructures, underscores the intensifying interdependencies of mobility, technology, and place in the establishment of location-independence. However, the fundamental grounding of location-independence in locational infrastructures that are vulnerable to disruption underscores the need for repair and community-level support, such as that provided by CWSs.

In conclusion, this chapter has contributed to an understanding of the various challenges and opportunities presented by the transition to location-independent work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. By exploring the perspectives of both digital nomads and CWS managers, it has highlighted the complex interplay between mobility, technology, and place in the establishment of location-independence. Looking ahead, it is clear that location-independent work will continue to shape the digital geographies of place, mobility and work. However, the pandemic has also underscored the importance of ensuring the resilience and repair of locational infrastructures, particularly at the community level, to support the growing demand for remote work and a digital nomad lifestyle. Ultimately, this chapter highlights the critical analysis of location-independent work, particularly from feminist and postcolonial perspectives, to ensure that these arrangements are equitable and sustainable for all individuals and communities involved.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

As I write this conclusion, individuals find themselves in a period of uncertainty, marked by unprecedented technological advancements and a global pandemic that lingers. Despite this, there can be witnessed a gradual return to normalcy, as people in Aotearoa New Zealand resume their daily lives and engage in activities, they once took for granted. Friends who have talked about travelling for years are now embarking on their long-overdue overseas trip, and wealthy individuals from Aotearoa New Zealand are able to travel to Australia with relative ease and attend concerts and sport events once again. Emotional stories and images of families reuniting have also been featured prominently in the news since Aotearoa New Zealand fully opened its borders in mid-2022. The movement of bodies out of the confines of home and into public spaces and streets is once again becoming the norm, as people go about their daily routines with a sense of familiarity. State infrastructures that were previously disrupted are now being repaired and the enforced immobility of those who previously enjoyed the privilege of being mobile seems to be a theme of the past.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged people's working lives in many ways, it has also created new opportunities and imperatives for location-independent work. For many knowledge workers, working remotely is no longer a futuristic idea, but a global reality. Liminal workspaces that cater to the needs of remote workers have emerged, accelerating the trends towards location-independent work. However, it remains unclear what form location-independent work will take in aftermath of the most intense phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has prompted many governments to mandate or advise people to stay inside and work from home where possible, which in turn has created new challenges and opportunities for those engaged in location-independent work.

The overall aim of this research has been to examine the socio-spatial dynamics of location-independence work in digital geographies of work through a focus on bodies, mobility, technology, and place. To achieve this research aim, the following objectives were to:

- conduct a comprehensive analysis of feminist postcolonial digital geography scholarship and identify critical elements relevant to comprehend the notion of location-independence.
- explore location-independence from the experiences of digital nomads, and to investigate how their experiences are shaped by embodied identities such as gender, class, race.
- investigate the notion of location-independence through the accounts of CWS managers in Aotearoa New Zealand, and to examine how the curation of shared workspaces intersects with embodied identities such as gender, age, class and care.
- analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on location-independent work practices, particularly in terms of disruption and repair of infrastructures.

My thesis has focused on the notion of location-independence as viewed from two interrelated yet distinct socio-spatial vantage points: digital nomads and CWSs. Both digital nomads and CWSs are valuable examples to explore and analyse the dynamic mechanisms around the digital geographies of work, workplace, and workers.

Scholarship on digital nomads and CWSs has experienced significant growth since the inception of this research. A search on Google Scholar for the terms “digital nomads” and “coworking spaces” reveals an increase in the number of results over the years. Prior to 2012, there were 225 results for digital nomads and 291 for CWSs. From 2013-2017, there were 454 results for digital nomads and 1540 for CWSs. And from 2018 to 2023, there were 3150 results for digital nomads and 6440 for CWSs. These figures indicate a substantial increase in the number of articles related to digital nomads and CWSs over time. Furthermore, as of early 2023, the phenomenon of digital nomadism appears to be on the rise, after a sudden drop due to the pandemic (Castrillon, 2022). Similarly, shared workspace providers like CWSs have seen a surge of remote workers seeking to work and socialise from shared spaces globally (Foertsch, 2021). The growing desire for location-independence and flexibility in work in the post-pandemic era is unsurprising. In times of lockdowns, many people longed to escape the “capsular sense of home” (Bissell, 2020) and fulfil their aspirations and utopian desires by traveling in their armchairs. Prior to the pandemic, digital nomads challenged the conventional belief regarding the organisation and fixed spatiality of work by adopting a hypermobile lifestyle that allowed them to work and travel from various places around the world. Similar to digital nomads, CWSs can be seen as pioneers in the transition to location-independent work. The increasing fluidity and spatiality that have come to characterise digital work arrangements have become more widespread after the pandemic. This thesis has demonstrated that the reconfigured landscape of location-independent work arrangements is supported by various regulatory, socio-material, and technological infrastructures, signifying the interdependencies of mobility, technology, and place in location-independent work.

Within my contextual framing of the literature presented, I have examined three interconnected yet distinct bodies of literature on the digital geographies of work and mobility in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of current debates in this field. Employing a critical feminist postcolonial geography framework, I have closely scrutinised the identities and power relations at play in the evolving digital geographies of work. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted and then led to repair of the infrastructures that facilitate location-independence during the course of this thesis, presented an exciting and challenging opportunity to explore the geographies of uncertainty in greater depth.

The geographies of uncertainty that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic have heavily influenced and characterised the entire scope and design of this research. As a result, it is essential to reflect on my methodology to explore how my personal experiences of conducting research during the pandemic have shaped my approach and findings. Originally, my research plans were centred on the concept of digital nomadism and involved conducting fieldwork with digital nomads in Ubud, Bali. I intended to immerse myself in their lifestyle by working from foreign-owned CWSs in the area, using critical feminist and postcolonial theories to guide my analysis and to explore the perspectives of the local population regarding the influx of digital nomads. However, the pandemic drastically disrupted these plans, and I had to revise my methodology to accommodate the new reality of remote work and restricted travel. As a feminist researcher, I am acutely aware of how my personal experiences and positionality can influence my research. The remote and isolated nature of the pandemic context and the disruptions caused have emphasised the importance of reflexivity in the research process. This disruption not only impacted my research plans but also influenced my analysis by prompting me to reflect on the importance of infrastructures and place that has contributed to important insights.

In this concluding chapter, I synthesise the divergent outcomes that have arisen from the empirical data concerning location-independent work. I demonstrate that the disruption of infrastructures has revealed the complexities of location-independence, which exposes their dynamic interplay that I now turn to next. With the research objectives in mind, I have grouped the findings under three themes: the imagined and desired geographies of location-independence, regulatory mechanisms producing location-independent work, and the role of an ethics of care perspective in the adoption of location-independent work. By reflecting on the significance and implications of these findings, all of which are situated around place, mobility, bodies, and technology, I present the limitations of this thesis and suggest future research directions to focus further on the evolving digital geographies of work.

Imagined and desired geographies of location-independence

The highly popularised and romanticised notion of location-independence that surrounds the celebratory framework of digital nomadism and CWSs, is an image of an untethered life, of a borderless world; a reiteration of Tim Ferriss' (2007) ideas around the four-hour workweek where "[t]he fantasy is the lifestyle of complete freedom it supposedly allows" (p. 8). I argue that the concept of location-independence in the digital geographies of work is made possible through imaginatively and desirably associating them with notions of mobility, freedom, and identity that are infused with spatiality, coloniality and neoliberalism. One of the key tenets of digital nomadism is the high degree of mobility: the constant travel to various destinations around the world, while using digital infrastructures to work online. The concept of location-independence achieved through mobility, is

based on the social construction of spatial imaginaries that facilitate and legitimise the practices of digital nomads and CWSs. However, the idea of being detached from place by being able to work from "anywhere", is inaccurate. Even though the shift to more remote ways of working signifies a departure from the significance of physical location in work and the emergence of a new type of work culture that transcends geographical boundaries, the extent to which digital nomadism is truly location-independent is debatable. Consequently, I contend that location-independence is a product of an imagined desire for unfettered mobility and global agency, which is actually upheld by material, regulatory, and social arrangements grounded in specific places.

The rebellious nature and pursuit of autonomy central to the digital nomad identity (Mancinelli, 2020; Thompson, 2019) have experienced increased regulation through the introduction of DNV schemes. The image of seemingly untethered lifestyles of mobile knowledge workers is not only reinforced by digital nomads themselves in the digital realm; government agencies promoting DNV schemes highlight their country's natural and technological resources such as their digital infrastructures and dreamlike beaches, to market themselves to digital nomads, build on the same digital nomad imageries of location-independence. While these schemes aim to facilitate mobility, they concurrently impose conditions that constrain mobile lives. Consequently, it is perhaps unsurprising that digital nomads do not necessarily celebrate these new legal visa frameworks, and trying to find new ways to strategically navigate around DNV schemes to use it to their benefit (see e.g. Henderson, 2023). This demonstrates how digital nomadism is an imaginary and desirable phenomenon with great agency, while in reality, digital nomads too, cannot escape the power of global migration regimes embedded in a neoliberal capitalist world.

Digital nomads are oftentimes viewed and described as untethered from place, as scholars adopt a mobile perspective that does not pay attention to the relationship with place and local communities. When viewing location-independence through the lenses of digital nomadism and CWSs while using critical feminist postcolonial geography, it becomes evident how closely intertwined location-independence is with place. As Massey (2005) has shown, both mobility and place are socially constructed and are mutually constitutive of each other. The inherent connection to place within the concept of digital nomadism undeniably transforms destinations, often referred to as digital nomad hotspots, and has the potential to negatively impact local communities, infrastructures, and economies. For example, the practice of geo-arbitrage, where digital nomads from economically advanced countries in the Global North seek locations with lower living costs, frequently found in Airbnb's and CWSs in digital nomad hotspots in the Global South, creates a significant risk of gentrification in these areas (Holleran, 2022; McElroy, 2019b). Considering how digital nomadism

influences place and how identities are constructed in the postcolonial places digital nomads often travel to and work from, is of utmost importance.

These trends also raise important questions about the role of third-party intermediaries in facilitating these mobilities and extracting value from them. For instance, recent research on a CWS in Greece highlights the impact of international digital nomads on a small town's CWS that gained popularity during the pandemic (Pettas & Avdikos, 2023). This influx led to an increase in membership rates. However, their temporary presence often meant limited contribution to the local community, while digital nomads did utilise local resources and knowledge to their benefit. Despite drawing coworkers from diverse backgrounds worldwide, CWSs remain tethered to their geographical locations, intricately tied to local economies. As such, CWSs shape and reproduce specific identities and desired bodies in CWSs at a local level but are also articulated through the geographical location of the CWS, operating on a wider spatial level (McDowell, 2011).

Therefore, location-dependent work may be a more appropriate term to use when considering the critical role of place in the lives of remote workers. This insight prompts important discussions about power dynamics within CWSs and the facilitation of location-independent work practices. The spatial regulations in CWSs are indicative of broader cultural, social and economic dynamics, and the extent to which individuals are able to embody a mobile work-lifestyle. The regulatory mechanisms of CWSs where managers control who can work from the space and when, also raises discussions around the spatial boundaries and exclusions created within CWSs and how individuals' perceptions of belonging (or not) are influenced by these boundaries. CWS managers' control over access to resources and space not only impact one's ability to work within these spaces but also underscores power dynamics that can either promote or restrict social inclusion and diversity within these spaces. It is essential not to overlook the implications of these power dynamics, as they have a profound impact on the extent to which individuals have agency within these spaces. In reality, these mechanisms regulate not only the mobility but also the agency of remote workers within the context of location-independence.

These discussions underscore the need for a critical examination of how privilege and power structures operate within digital geographies of place, mobility and work. There lies an important role in scrutinising infrastructures to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of digital nomadism and its entanglement within broader power relations. In the next section, I discuss in greater detail the multiple infrastructures that regulate location-independence.

Regulatory mechanisms producing location-independent work

In this thesis, I have argued that the notion of location-independence evolves from a complex interplay between regulatory, socio-material, and technological infrastructures that underpin the reconfigured landscape of location-independent work. The employment of feminist postcolonial geographies and mobilities scholarship has allowed me to expose hidden infrastructures that contribute to the privileged mobility examined in this thesis, and shifted the focus of research towards the mechanisms that enable mobility. I argue that there lies great potential in adopting a migration infrastructural lens in research on both digital nomadism and CWSs. Yet despite the growing popularity of digital nomadism, the migration industry literature has paid little attention to this group as they perhaps do not fit the conventional definition of long-term migrants. Koh and Wissink (2018) note that the focus of migration literature is typically on relatively permanent forms of labour migration, which overlooks the potential for "investigating how the migration industries engage with lifestyle mobilities (Cohen et al., 2015) and migration as a privileged way of living transnationally" (Koh & Wissink, 2018, p. 593). A lens on migration infrastructures to analyse how location-independence is constituted, disrupted, reproduced and repaired can elevate existing scholarship on digital nomads and CWSs – and to a larger extent location-independence – as it makes possible to unravel its complex embeddedness in global relations of power.

A postcolonial feminist critique of CWSs can further reveal how regulatory mechanisms shape location-independent work, where CWSs serve as crucial infrastructures for remote workers. Rather than being passive agents, CWS managers play an important role in the constitution of location-independent work practices, which makes individuals working from these spaces subject to the workings of neoliberalism. Consequently, it becomes imperative to recognise CWS managers as active mediators in shaping the practices of location-independent work. This perspective aligns with the understanding of intermediaries in migration infrastructures, as elucidated by Koh and Wissink (2018, p. 603), who highlight their crucial role in "enabling, structuring, and creating the highly unequal opportunities and capabilities of groups to fulfil mobility and activity needs that the politics of mobilities literature draws attention to". This mediation occurs at various spatial levels, further emphasising the complex power dynamics at play within the realm of location-independent work.

A postcolonial feminist critique of digital nomads reveals how they strategically leverage their globalised embodiment of white privilege, digital literacy, and flexible citizenship to claim "unrestricted" mobility, enabling them to work from any location. While digital nomads are relatively privileged individuals compared to the local population of countries offering DNVs, their agency and perceived freedom is dependent on infrastructures facilitating location-independence. The COVID-19

pandemic further revealed this dependence, disrupting regulatory, migration, and socio-material structures usually supporting digital nomadism. The breakdown of these infrastructures significantly diminished the spatial dimension of digital nomads' work arrangements, creating tension. Yet, if mobility implies friction (Tsing, 2005), it can also transform mobility, and reshape the landscape of location-independent work – of which the introduction of DNV schemes is an example.

Governments' efforts to attract mobile individuals and to recognise location-independent work have driven significant shifts in migration infrastructures. As the changing regulatory mechanisms surrounding DNV schemes are increasingly integrated into governments' diversifying tourist and migration policies, the location-independent work-lifestyle of digital nomads becomes commodified and capitalised. Yet rather than viewing digital nomads as mere neoliberal subjects, they are also – albeit partly – active agents in the process of shaping their desired and imagined location-independent life. Governments too, situate themselves as neoliberal subjects, competing with other countries to attract and capitalise on digital nomads. The increasing adoption of DNV schemes in the last few years signals a worrying trend, as there is a risk in potentially exacerbating global socio-economic inequalities.

The production of location-independence occurs within political regimes that prioritise economic objectives and impose regulations on who can engage in location-independent work, despite the technological affordances that facilitate global mobility. As a result, digital nomads from affluent countries in the Global North enjoy greater access to legal opportunities for remote work and mobility, while those from other regions face greater barriers to pursuing similar lifestyles. These changes in global migration regimes are indicative of neoliberal agendas of governments operating under free market conditions, characterised by flexibility and competition where governments are increasingly competing for digital nomads. The ways in which these regimes shape who can migrate and under what conditions expose the colonial underpinnings of these regimes (Collins, 2022). The imposition of constraints on digital nomads' mobility not only limits their autonomy but also perpetuates existing hierarchies within global mobility systems. By examining the coloniality that is inherent in global migration regimes, this insight underscores the need for critical examination of the socioeconomic and political forces that shape contemporary mobility practices. Ultimately, the friction of this mobility framework underscores the inherent tensions and complexities that arise when digital nomads navigate through regulatory landscapes shaped by neoliberal economic priorities and historical colonial legacies.

These findings demonstrate that there is more beneath the surface than understanding digital nomads as free-flowing subjects living untethered lives. Rather, the structural conditions that they operate in,

set the scene for the extent to which they can work location-independently. Tied up in a web of neoliberalism, coloniality, and capitalism, digital nomads are reproducing global uneven relations of power, while navigating their own contingencies and friction caused by the same global migration regimes offering DNVs. It is important to understand how digital nomadism is shaped by historical processes such as colonialism while operating under principles of neoliberalism.

Ultimately, the popular claim of digital nomadism that "anyone can work from anywhere", should be understood in terms of the various infrastructures enabling, controlling, and reproducing location-independent work and shaped by globalised notions of white privilege, digital literacy, and "flexible citizenship" (Ong, 1999), which determine one's ability to cross borders and to legally work remotely. This interdependence is, when viewed through a feminist postcolonial lens, illuminated by scholars such as Ong (1999) and Sheller (2018), who have highlighted the ways in which global mobility is shaped by intersecting power dynamics of race, gender, class, and colonial legacies, providing valuable frameworks for understanding how digital nomads navigate and negotiate their mobility within a globalised world. Sheller's call for equitable access to mobility, considering the intricate social, cultural, and technological processes shaping mobility, is particularly relevant in the context of DNV schemes. Recognising the diverse mobilities that exist within global systems underscores the uneven distribution of digital nomadism and its impacts on place and local communities. To address these discrepancies, it is imperative to recognise the infrastructures that both reproduce and control the mobility of location-independent workers so that DNV schemes can be scrutinised.

Global mobility justice is manifested across various spatial levels, from global mobility regimes governing border access to localised spaces like CWSs, where uneven power dynamics are also at play. Examining these various geographical scales reveals the tangible impacts of global mobility-related policies. DNV schemes, while offering opportunities to privileged individuals, may temporarily disrupt local communities. As such, it becomes evident that CWSs, as sites where digital nomads operate from, are part of wider migration infrastructures. These spaces can serve as local manifestations of mobility justice, where principles of ethics of care become apparent. The last thematic section addresses the ethics of care, examining how caring infrastructures emerge within the unexpected spaces of CWSs.

Reparative, caring dimensions in uncertain geographies of location-independence

In this thesis, I have identified emergent infrastructures of repair and practices of care within the unexpected spaces of CWSs, shedding light on the importance of place, materiality, embodiment, and feeling in the constitution of location-independence. As the insights on CWSs in this thesis are based on empirical evidence from Aotearoa New Zealand, this thesis expands CWS scholarship that currently

has a particular focus on European CWSs (Berbegal-Mirabent, 2021). Through the accounts of community managers and managers of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand and digital nomads globally, I have highlighted the tension and contradictions that arise in the process of location-independent work. In this final thematic section, I discuss the reparative and caring dimensions that have emerged in supporting mobile knowledge workers in uncertain geographies of location-independence. The research findings illuminate how location-independence is experienced and repaired during times of crisis.

Through an analysis of CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand and their regulatory mechanisms, I have demonstrated that these spaces have the potential to be more inclusive and provide a sense of community that is often lacking in conventional remote work arrangements. By emphasising the need for social connection and place-based work, CWSs offer a space that brings people together and contributes to the transformation of normative notions of work organisation. By focussing on an ethics of care perspective, it becomes evident that caring practices underpin some of the CWSs' operations, where the wellbeing of coworkers is prioritised over financial incentives during times of financial hardship and uncertainty. This particular embodied perspective advances the understanding of the phenomenon of location-independence, and challenges normative assertions that typically prioritise flexibility and productivity over social connection and community building.

The identification of a trend towards diverse economies in the context of location-independence aligns with Gibson-Graham and Dombroski (2020) argument challenging binary economic frameworks and introducing research that "presents a range of strategies for 'doing economy' differently – starting with an understanding of the economy as diverse and heterogenous (rather than monolithic) and mutable rather than fixed in form, […] empowering and supporting these differences can promote ethical and solidaristic modes of interdependence" (p.1). Rather than viewing economies as solely capitalist or non-capitalist, they emphasise the coexistence of multiple economic practices within one single space. Applying this lens onto the notion of location-independence reveals the presence of diverse strategies and economic practices among both digital nomads and CWSs. For instance, the findings in this thesis highlight the importance of caring infrastructures within CWSs, which demonstrates a human desire for interpersonal interaction within these spaces. Despite operating within global and local economies, CWSs can also prioritise alternative economic practices, such as fostering care during times of uncertainty. Recognising the diversity of CWSs challenges the dominant stance of them as exclusive spaces solely for entrepreneurial activities.

The significance of physical proximity and embodied connections in shared workspaces is underscored by the reparative dimensions of CWSs, which facilitate caring practices and enable social interaction

among coworkers. These practices highlight the important role CWSs play in reconfiguring work dynamics, especially in an increasingly digitalised, post-pandemic world. Moreover, in the unique settler colonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori principles such as manaakitanga, kaitiakitanga, and koha have the potential to be interwoven into everyday practices of care within CWSs. As this thesis has shown, the relevance of social connectivity that arises from being present in a CWS can be regarded as a vital social infrastructure for location-independent workers. CWSs, that have not yet been regarded as potential spaces of care, can actually play an important role in the facilitation thereof, and as such, challenge normative assumptions of location-independence by promoting wellbeing and social support, particularly in times of crisis.

In conclusion, by foregrounding care, this research highlights the need for – and offers – a more nuanced understanding of location-independence, one that takes into account the ethics of care and embodied geographies that characterise remote work in CWSs. This perspective emphasises the importance of caring practices and social connectivity in supporting mobile knowledge workers in uncertain geographies, particularly in times of crisis. Overall, this thesis contributes to the literature on digital geographies of work by illuminating the potential of CWSs to provide inclusive and caring spaces that challenge normative notions of work organisation, and foster wellbeing and social support among location-independent workers.

Concluding thoughts

Throughout this thesis, I have argued the pressing need for employing a critical feminist postcolonial framework when looking at the notion of location-independence, which can elevate future research on digital nomads and CWSs. The framework of embodied geographies is a great instrument to unravel and witness the unequal distribution of mobilities, as in the case of this research both digital nomads and CWSs were involved in socio-economic inequalities where embodied identities such as class, age and gender influenced individuals' ability and experience of movement.

I also contend that within the wider digital mobilities literature, there is too little focus on infrastructures, embodiment and historic relations that link back to coloniality. That while digital nomads are predominantly from affluent countries in the Global North, travelling to and working from predominantly countries with a colonial past. Understanding the long-standing relationships between the colonising and colonised countries can help to reveal the still existing inequalities on the basis of race, nationality and class.

Ultimately, the notion of location-independence, wherein anyone can work from anywhere is highly uneven. Despite the widespread adoption of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept

of location-independence remains deeply rooted in geographies of imagination and desire. Location-independence is actively enabled, reproduced, and restricted by regulatory migration and socio-material infrastructures. In other words, while the idea of working from anywhere has become more prevalent, the actual ability to do so is highly uneven and contingent on a range of social and material factors, including access to visas, tax laws, and physical workspaces. These factors play a key role in shaping the geographies of location-independence and highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of how place, mobility, and technology intersect to produce new forms of work and ways of living.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that the concept of location-independence, as currently understood, requires rethinking. In particular, the role of CWSs and digital nomads in shaping new work arrangements highlights the need for a broader perspective on the value of location-independent work and its flexibility in the post-pandemic world. The realisation that people can work remotely has created a vision of a future where physical location is less important (Hermann & Paris, 2020). However, the pandemic has also exposed the vulnerability of locational infrastructures, which are essential to location-independent work. The rapid transformation of work and the mobilisation of workers through technological advancements have not only shown the disruptive nature of technology but also society's reliance on it. This vulnerability highlights the importance of repair in the face of disruption. I argue that there is need for adopting a migration infrastructure lens onto scholarship on location-independence, which allows to broaden the current conceptual understanding of migration industries and digital nomads to include more flexible forms of migration. By redirecting the attention towards the mechanisms of mobility, it becomes possible to explore how various infrastructures, both physical and digital, shape the experiences of location-independent workers. This lens also enables a deeper examination of the socio-political and economic factors that influence mobility patterns and access to resources. Additionally, it encourages scholars to consider how disruptions, such as those caused by the pandemic, impact the mobility and agency of location-independent workers, and the need for adaptive strategies and support systems to address these challenges.

By moving away from institutionalised spaces such as the conventional office, CWS managers have challenged standardised norms in the workplace. This shift has led to the emergence of more inclusive and emancipatory environments, with some practices articulating with an ethics of care. This bottom-up approach to policing that has come to the fore due to pandemic disruptions demonstrates how reparative dimensions can be found on the community level (CWSs), rather than at the state level. It also brings forth the idea of Gibson-Graham that centres around the diversity of economies that can exist within particular geographies, of which the dynamic mechanisms of CWSs are an example of. In

the context of digital nomadism, the diversity of economic activities can also be witnessed. For example, the various forms of work arrangements and typologies that exist and that have come to characterise location-independent work, explains why some of their income-generating activities have moved beyond the conventional employment structures. As such, it offers a way of seeing the bigger picture in digital nomadism. Rather than viewing them as merely a group of privileged individuals that adopt this mobile lifestyle, it could also be understood as a part of a livelihood strategy adopted by individuals engaging in location-independent work. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates the complexity of digital nomadism, its embeddedness within wider economic structures, its strong connection to place and local economy while at the same time being part of the wider global economic forces and power relations.

The significance of these insights lies in the need to rethink the foundations of location-independent work. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of locational infrastructures and the importance of repair in the face of disruption. Moreover, the emergence of more inclusive and emancipatory work environments at the community level suggests the potential for positive social change through bottom-up approaches. These insights offer valuable lessons for the future of work in the post-pandemic era, emphasising the need for flexible and sustainable work arrangements that take into account the importance of place-based characteristics.

Further research

Building on the findings and discussions presented in this thesis, there are several key areas for future research to advance the understanding of location-independent work and its implications, that I present next.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the direction of this research, which ultimately focused on the timely topic of location-independent work during a time of unprecedented disruption. In early 2020, during interviews with self-identified digital nomad research participants, many recounted the challenges they faced in convincing their employers to allow them work remotely prior to the pandemic. Given the increased acceptance of remote work as a result of the pandemic, it is worth exploring whether this shift in attitude will eventually alter the way digital nomadism is perceived. The greater agency to decide where to work from while being employed may lead to changes in the presentation of digital nomadism, which could in turn affect digital nomads' attitudes towards long-term travel. As discussed in Chapter 5, a digital nomad lifestyle is often precarious, despite the associated privileges. Due to their engagement in the platform economy, digital nomads have less social security networks than those on permanent contracts with established employers.

However, the increasing availability of hybrid and remote work options may attract digital nomads who desire more social security benefits while still enjoying the freedom of mobile workplaces.

The literature on CWSs has predominantly focused on CWSs in the Global North, while failing to acknowledge the growing prevalence and commodification of CWSs in the Global South. The impact of these working arrangements on local communities in the Global South remains largely unexplored. As highlighted in Chapter 3, the increasing emphasis on technology has widened socio-spatial disparities between and within nations, contributing to what is commonly referred to as the digital divide. To shed light on this issue, it is crucial to consider the power dynamics between CWS managers and the ability to create either inclusive or exclusive spaces, as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. Therefore, future research on CWSs should prioritise the proliferation of CWSs in the Global South, acknowledging the unique perspectives and dynamics of different communities. Including the voices of local communities in the cities and regions where Western CWSs operate can provide a more nuanced understanding of the proliferation of CWSs and the diverse viewpoints of those who are situated differently.

Rather than solely examining the economic implications of CWSs in the Global South, it is crucial to shift research attention towards embodied geographies. Doing so will enable the unravelling of power relations and provide a better understanding of the mechanisms driving location-independence for work. As demonstrated in Chapter 7, there are discernible emerging practices of care in CWSs, offering a fruitful insight into considering CWSs as spaces of care, with implications for the wider community. While the research in question has been limited to informal and open CWSs in Aotearoa New Zealand, there is an opportunity to extend the notion of embodied geographies to other liminal workspaces, such as libraries (Wiesel et al., 2020) and community spaces. CWSs occupy a unique and prominent position, which could be amplified by creating more inclusive spaces. Berbegal-Mirabent suggests “breaking down social and cultural barriers to shape and build local inclusive communities” (2021, p. 19), thus underscoring the need for CWSs to prioritise inclusivity.

The various relations of power that underpin the infrastructures facilitating location-independence create tension and contradictions, as I have demonstrated in this thesis. In addition, I have identified the uneven power relations that surround the introduction of digital nomad visas. A digital nomad work visa scheme exacerbates existing socio-spatial inequalities, as governments focus on attracting high-earning, digitally literate location-independent workers. Therefore, I argue that there is an important role for research to critically examine the (long-term) effects of these visa schemes on other migrant groups and local communities. The neo-colonial practices of digital nomads, as I have touched upon in this thesis, are further reinforced by government policies. It is crucial to recognise the

regulatory mechanisms that contribute to the ongoing uneven power relations and the production of location-independence. This need has been similarly highlighted by Koh and Wissink (2018), who note that “there is a missed potential in investigating how the migration industries engage with lifestyle mobilities”. Any research related to location-independent work must carefully consider the politics of location-independence and the many different actors involved in its production. While I have been able to highlight some of these contradictions, a bigger and more longitudinal sample could be helpful in identifying in-depth, how location-independent workers respond to friction and power relations.

With the growing normalisation of location-independent work in advanced economies in the Global North, there is a need to acknowledge the importance of continuing critical thought about location-independence. This thesis has highlighted the long-term effects of location-independent work on the changing urban landscape, and the emergent properties of care that can be recognised in unexpected spaces of CWSs. Overall, this highlights the urgency of a critical approach to location-independence that takes into account the broader societal implications and potential consequences, and the importance of continuing to explore these topics in future research.

List of Appendices

Appendix I Letter from ethics committee showing approval

Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences

The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton 3240
New Zealand

Te Piringa – Faculty of Law
Dr Nathan John Cooper
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THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Joke Methorst
Francis Collins

26 March 2020

Re: FS2020-01 METHORST; Joke: Socio-spatial dynamics of digital nomads in Ubud, Bali

Dear Joke,

Thank you for submitting your revised application to the D-ALPSS Human Research Ethics Committee, along with your detailed explanations around points of suggested revision. We are pleased to be able to give approval for your project, and wish you every success in your research.

Please continue to liaise closely with your supervisor, and to consult this committee again, should your proposed research change significantly.

Please also note that as your research (in its currently proposed form) will require overseas travel, you should not book travel until such time as the University's travel ban has been lifted. More information on this is available at:
https://www.waikato.ac.nz/students/health/coronavirus/students

Kind regards,

Dr Nathan John Cooper
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee
Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences

Appendix II Flyer for recruiting participants

WANTED: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

ARE YOU A DIGITAL NOMAD?

Is your office wherever you want it to be?
Or has COVID-19 messed up your plans?

If you identify with working location-indepdently, then I would love to get in touch with you and listen to your story!
I am a PhD candidate at the University of Waikato researching people who use digital technologies to work from anywhere in the world.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
NEW ZEALAND

INTERESTED?

Please scan the QR code or go to https://waikato.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dm8VaEe62xLLjjT or email jm365@students.waikato.ac.nz

Appendix III Short survey created on Qualtrics

This short survey about digital nomads consists of 3 basic questions about your background. You will be asked for your name and email address to register your interest in potential participation in this research project. This research is fully approved by the ethics committee and the information you provide will be treated confidentially.

→

What city and country do you currently live in?

Have you worked remotely before (that means working from a different location than your home/office)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

← →

Would you be interested to participate in my research?

	Yes	No	Maybe
Interview	○	○	○
Self-photography assignment (taking pictures of your everyday life / environment)	○	○	○
Follow-up interviews (max 3 times in 12 months)	○	○	○
Biographical assignment (eg. 1 week diary writing)	○	○	○

← →

What is your name (first name, last name)?

Could you please provide your email address? (I will send you one email with more detailed information if you are interested in participating in this research project)

←

→

Appendix IV Information sheet interview participants

Research project title: The socio-spatial dynamics of location-independent work: a focus on coworking spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand**.**

Researcher's name: Joke Methorst, PhD Candidate, Department of Geography, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, Aotearoa New Zealand

Background

My name is Joke, I officially come from the Netherlands and started my Doctoral Studies at the Department of Geography, University of Waikato in Aotearoa New Zealand last September 2019. My supervisory panel consists of Professor Francis Collins (Chief Supervisor) and Lynda Johnston (co-supervisor).

The purpose of my research is to critically explore remote working, that is, people who are using digital technologies to work remotely and have a location-independent lifestyle. Coworking spaces have mushroomed all over the world, and I am interested in finding out how remote workers make use of these co-working spaces. I am therefore interested to learn more about co-working spaces from the manager's perspective as well, to understand why coworking spaces arise in specific locations around Aotearoa New Zealand, what the idea behind the co-working spaces are and what kind of community coworking spaces are creating/serving.

Your involvement in this interview

This semi-structured interview will be carried out with owners or community managers of co-working spaces throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. I have prepared several questions but will follow the flow of the interview.

Basically, the interview consists of 2 parts:

1. **The background of the coworking space**

Some general questions about creating this co-working space, the location, the design of the space, the main objective.

2. **The coworking community**

Some questions about who you customers are (age, local/regional, long-term), values of co-working, events organised for members, collaboration with e.g., local businesses.

The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed, but **only with your approval**. The interview will take place at the best suitable time for you. The interview will approximately last for 45 minutes. I will provide you the option to receive and review the transcript of the interview.

Your rights:

- Decline to answer any particular question
- Withdraw from the research up to 3 weeks after the interview has taken place
- Ask to pause the audio-recorder at any given time
- Allowed to ask questions during the research project

Confidentiality

Your answers will be treated with complete confidentiality. Your identity and information provided will be treated anonymously and with confidentiality and will never be disclosed in the course of this research. All of the information (including digital recordings and information on paper) will remain secure at all times in a locked cupboard in my supervisor's office and on my password secured Google Drive. Data will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research.

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email alpss-ethics@waikato.ac.nz , postal address, Division of Arts, Law, Psychology and Social Sciences, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240, Aotearoa New Zealand.

The findings

Findings from the research will form part of my PhD thesis (which will be publicly available online) and may be published in academic journals and books or used for a research conference presentation. Both a summary of the research findings and the transcript of the interview will be available to you, if you wish to receive.

Contact information:

Contact details researcher:

Joke Methorst, PhD Candidate

University of Waikato, Department of Geography, Hamilton, Aotearoa New Zealand

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Contact details supervisor:

Professor Francis Collins, Chief supervisor

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Appendix V Interview participant consent form

Research project title: The socio-spatial dynamics of location-independent work: a focus on coworking spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Researcher's name: Joke Methorst, PhD Candidate, Department of Geography, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, Aotearoa New Zealand

Participant's name: …….

Thank you for your interest in this research!

This interview will take about 45 minutes. You have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time. This consent form is here to make sure that you understand the purpose of your involvement in the interview. After reading the following information, by signing this form you will certify that you approve the following:

- This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed
- You can request the transcript to be send to you
- My research team (myself and my two supervisors) are the only ones who will have access to the transcript other than yourself
- I will analyse the transcript as part of my research as a PhD candidate
- Any content provided might be used in my doctoral thesis publication (publicly available online), an article for an academic journal or a conference paper / presentation
- The actual audio-recording will be kept for five years and then destroyed

Background of the research

The objective of this research is to explore the socio-spatial dynamics of remote workers and shared workspaces in Aotearoa New Zealand.

All or part of the content of your interview may be used for:

- Academic papers
- PhD publication (online available on the Australasian Digital Theses Programme)
- Conference paper or presentation
- Popular media / digital nomad events

Your rights as a participant:

- Decline to answer a particular question
- Withdraw from the research up to 3 weeks after receiving the transcript
- Ask to pause the audio-recorder at any given time
- Allowed to ask questions during the research project

By signing this form, I agree that:

- I have read and agree with the information stated on this sheet
- My participation in this project is entirely voluntarily
- Part of the content of this interview may be used for publication
- I do not expect any financial or material benefit for participating in this research
- I can always ask questions and decline to answer a question
- I can stop the interview at any given time

Participant's signature **Date**

Researcher's signature **Date**

Contact information

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato. If you have any questions about the study, please contact:

Contact details researcher:
Joke Methorst, PhD Candidate
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Contact details supervisor:
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Appendix VI Interview questions with digital nomads (guideline)

I am interested in your life story and experiences of being a digital nomad

Your life as a digital nomad

Some questions about being a digital nomad:

1. How long have you been a digital nomad for? Could you please tell me a little bit about when you started thinking about becoming a digital nomad? And when did you became one? Has your life as a digital nomad changed over time?
2. How does being a digital nomad here makes you feel? (If not in hometown: why have you chose this destination?) Would you rather be someplace else at the moment? If so, where and why?
3. Can you tell me more about the work you do? Is this part of your educational background? What does a typical day/week look like?
4. How do you decide where (e.g., café, co-working space, hotel room) you work? What are the key factors for this decision?
5. Are there any places you purposefully avoid or dislike? Why?
6. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being extremely uncomfortable, 10 being totally at ease), how would you rate your comfort level being a digital nomad in where you are now. Why?

Your work environment

Some questions about your workspace:

7. Are you currently a member of a co-working space / multiple ones? How long have you been a member and how often do you go there? Why did you choose this workspace? What do you like so much about it?
8. Is there a particular culture in or community feeling to this workspace? Could you describe that for me? How do you relate to this?
9. Do you have a particular spot where you always sit? If so, where and why?
10. Are there any spots you avoid? If so, where and why?
11. Is there anything else you would like to say about the workspace?
12. How do you feel about your co-working community? Do you feel you are part of it? Do they affect your work in any way (learning from each other, sharing things)? Do you do things together after work?
13. What would you like to change to your life as a digital nomad?
14. How do you see yourself five years from now? Please elaborate.

Drawing exercise: Could you draw yourself in the world for me? How do you see yourself?

Appendix VII Interview questions with CWS managers (guideline)

General/location

1). I am interested in the background of this co-working place, how did this co-workplace come to fruition? Do you have experience with co-working yourself? For how many years has it existed? Did you have another business before this? What is your role here?

2) Describe a typical day in this coworking space.

3). Why did you choose this location? Tell me about the reason for shared workspace? What type of resources do you provide for customers and/or are most desired?

4). Can you tell me something about the design of the space and the arrangements? E.g., the use of artwork, furniture, separation and linkage between spaces, key facilities (water cooler, coffee, sound tolerance, background music. Do you want to create a special scene to feel home-away from home?) *(Question to understand felt character of CWS, the layout, feel of the place, type of furniture etc.)*

5). What is the main objective of this co-working space? (Commercial or not-for-profit?) Why? Do you receive (financial) support from local government? How many people work at your business? Have many start-ups been initiated here?

Customers/community

6). Could you describe your ideal client/customer? Or maybe you use other terminology, why?) (Think of mix of gender, age, occupation, ethnicity as it is a social space (e.g., might turn into a male dominated space? Or doesn't it really matter?)

7). Who are your customers? Local, regional, international? Specific industries? Are they returning 'residents' or many new faces each day/week? What do you prefer? Have you ever declined someone? What is the average length of people staying here? Do you like to have a mix of long-term + day-trippers?

8). Does diversity (ethnicity) matter? (Is it important to have a mix of ethnicities or does it not matter? Why/why not?)

9). Was it difficult to establish a community / attract people to co-work here? Do you know where your customers commute from?

10). Do you organise community events? Are these only available for members?

11). Do you collaborate with other co-working spaces / local businesses?

12). What do you think is the benefit of your co-working space to the community / this region?

13). Can you tell me the impact COVID-19 has had on your co-working space?

14). What are the values for coworking to you? What are your goals for the future? Do you see this industry changing?

15). What do you think is the future for coworking spaces (in Aotearoa New Zealand)?

Appendix VIII Codes emerged from analysis

Name	Files	References
Identity of space	10	137
Curated space	11	127
Curated community	11	109
Embodiment, presence in space	10	85
Feeling of space	11	82
Community	10	77
Supportive space	10	70
Residents, members, whanau	11	67
Goal of CWS	11	65
SME business community	11	55
Sharing space	9	54
Gender	11	51
Future of work	11	49
Lockdown, COVID	11	48
Remote work	10	44
Network	10	43
Diverse space	9	41
Location	10	41
Manager's role	10	40
Connecting people	6	39
Entrepreneurship, freelance, youth	9	38
Induction	11	37
Social cultural norms	10	35
Technology	9	35
Funded or charitable trust	10	32
Social space	8	32
Co in coworking definition	11	29
Flexible space	8	29
Wellbeing	8	29
Mentorship	7	28
Creatives innovators	5	27
Professions at CWS	11	26
Kiwi mentality	9	25
Public events	9	23
Social impact	6	22
Creating jobs	9	19
Placemaking	8	18
Exclusivity	5	14
Koha Economy	7	12
Age	8	10
Creative ecology	6	8

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