Intra-European migration and identity – the case study of Germans living in the South-East of England

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Declaration of originality

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Capturing a snapshot of around the time of the 2015 general election, this research explored the motivations, experiences and thoughts of Germans living in the South-East of England regarding their decision to migrate and settle in the country. As lifestyle migrants, their motivations for moving to the UK – rather than being predominantly economic – are constitutive of an individualised pursuit of ‘a better life’. Employment and education related reasons were as common among participants as personal life motivations like being with a loved one, and, likewise, a desire to experience life in a different culture. Their accounts of settling in the new environment are largely absent of serious difficulties, which is mostly due the cultural proximity of country of origin and destination, as well as the relatively high level of secondary (and in some cases tertiary) education they benefitted from before embarking on their migratory journey to the UK. Respondents displayed a strong desire to learn the ‘British way of life’ and blend in as much as they could by letting go of German habits and by purposefully not seeking out or associating with co-ethnics. Their ability to do so is attributed to their white, Western European privilege that provided them with the ‘capital’ to be able to visually blend in and have the necessary language skills not to depend on co-ethnics. Due to a perceived stigmatised national identity and a strong sense of unease regarding the ‘slippery slope’ of patriotism, most respondents identified more with transnational and local sources of identity rather than national ones. While this tendency is likely to stem from their nation’s Nazi-past, their thoughts, convictions and self-reported behaviours suggest that they can be understood as part of a (possibly) relatively small, but symbolically significant emerging European civic culture facilitated by the European project of integration.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Germans living in the UK - The case for the (continued) importance of research into their motivations, experiences and identification

Debates about Europe and the interconnectedness achieved through EU membership have remained a constant cause for public discussion over the last decade. From the European debt crisis which began in 2009 and continued to dominate international politics for several years, to anti-EU rhetoric questioning the UK’s membership in the EU which began to noticeably gain traction around 2013 and culminated in the announcement of a referendum after the Conservative party was re-elected in 2015 – the European Union has been the topic of much discussion and disagreement. Due to the referendum result in favour of leaving the European Union and the ongoing negotiations between the UK government and leaders of the remaining EU Member States, the subjects of Europe, intra-European migration and integration remain centre-stage in British politics. In light of the predominance of these regularly negative reports over the past decade, the achievements of the European project – namely the securing of peace through partnership and collaboration – have been somewhat side-lined. While, over the course of the last century, the world has witnessed the growth and proliferation of various forms of transnational governance, EU citizenship, as Owen (2011: 110) points out, is unique since it “offers the most spectacular example of nested transpolitical citizenship” – an additional set of rights given to citizens of the Member States of the EU. Using the case study of Germans living in Britain, the research this thesis reports on explored the lived experience of EU nationals who by residing in an EU Member State other than their state of origin make use of their right to “move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States” (Maastricht Treaty, 1992).

The case of Germans moving to and settling in the UK is of particular interest for several reasons. Firstly, while “migration flows [often] are determined by economic disparities between countries” (Fassman and Münz, 1992: 469), this is not likely to be the case in this specific scenario, which in turn suggests that research into the motivating factors would be sociologically interesting and may have policy implications. Secondly, considering that much of the most recent existing academic literature on the experiences of Germans living in Britain focuses either on the experiences and conditions around the time of the First World
War (Panayi, 1991; Yarrow, 1990) or on the life histories of Germans who came to Britain immediately after the Second World War (Weber-Newth and Steinert, 2006) – and considering that these accounts unsurprisingly speak of hostility, and suspicion – it was particularly interesting to explore how the experiences of Germans living in Britain may have changed since then. So, nearly a hundred years after the end of World War One, how successful has the European project been in bringing not only peace but also amity to nations that had once been at war with each other?

On 1 January 2016, as Eurostat point out, “there were 16 million persons living in one of the EU member states (...) with the membership of another EU member state” and there were 1.4 million EU citizens who moved from one EU member state to another in the year 2015. While these figures are lower than those for the number of non-EU migrants migrating to the European Union, it nevertheless shows that a significant number of EU citizens utilise their right to move from one member state to another. Remarks by the previous leader of the Liberal Democrats Nick Clegg in 2002, which more recently resurfaced in the press, in which he laments the persistence of anti-German sentiments in Britain and “a tenacious obsession with the last war” (Clegg, 2002) suggest that Germans living in Britain may still have to deal with enmity. In contrast, recent statistics on the number of Germans resident in Britain suggest that the UK is popular among German emigrants, with nearly 300,000 Germans, as Seghi and Allen claim (2012), permanently registered as resident in the UK in 2010.

It is, however, difficult, as the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2015) points out, to ascertain exactly how many Germans are living in the UK since the figures for the German-born population include children born to UK service personnel who were stationed in Germany and therefore over-report the number of Germans. The figures recorded for UK residents who hold German citizenship on the other exclude those who, prior to 2014 when the German state loosened its laws on dual citizenship, had to give up their German citizenship when they took on British citizenship. As a result, the true number of German citizens living in the UK is likely to be lower than the 274,000 German-born population recorded in the 2011 census (ONS, 2015: 7) since this number includes some British citizens who were born in Germany. The presence of a substantial number of Germans who are living in the UK, nevertheless, raises the question of how British sentiments towards Germany are indeed experienced by Germans living in the UK today. What is it that attracts them and how
do they experience living in Britain? Also, considering academic debates on transnationalism and diasporic communities (e.g. Brubaker, 2005; Glick-Schiller, 1992; Vertovec, 2009), investigating the strength of the ties that Germans living in the UK maintain with their country of origin and how much they identify with notions of national and transnational identity proved an important gap in the literature to fill.

1.2 Aims of the thesis

Key areas of interest then were to explore individuals’ motivations to migrate and to seek answers to questions around identity construction looking in particular at the role of cultural and national notions of identity. Furthermore, investigating the complexity of respondents’ sense of belonging to their nation of origin, the society of their destination country and Europe was also a key part of this enquiry. In addition, the importance of the diasporic community to the individuals and their own perceptions on the degree of integration achieved into the social environment of their receiving society was examined.

Firstly, what is it that motivates Germans to move to and settle in the UK, and how significant are push-, pull- and network factors in this decision? This question is of particular interest in this case study because much of the literature on migration focuses on national groups or individuals who move from economically weaker nations to an economically strong(er) one. In the case of Germans moving to the UK, we have a case of people migrating from one wealthy and economically strong country to another wealthy country. A more detailed exploration of what might be behind such a person’s decision to relocate is thus of great sociological interest.

Secondly, what is this group’s lived experience of living in the UK (considering the history of their country of origin and chosen destination country)? Taking an open approach, this question sought to explore what the lives of German immigrants are like once they have arrived in the country. Participants were encouraged to talk about their everyday lives, personal views and the experiences they had had in this country. Due to the political developments outlined above, respondents reflected on the impact that the current political climate has had on their life and future in the UK.
Thirdly, this research explored what the perceptions of (cultural) identity among Germans living in the UK are and where they feel they belong. This line of enquiry aimed to find answer to the rather complex issue of the importance of national and/or cultural identity to a person’s own sense of self. In doing so, an emphasis was placed on exploring the significance or insignificance that participants attached to associating with other German nationals and networks within their community (if there is one) and with Germany while they are living in multicultural Britain. And importantly, questions of belonging and home and their relevance to respondents’ sense of self were made a focus of this research to further inform our understanding of how these play into ideas about living transnationally.

Finally, the overarching question this study sought to answer was to what extent German residents of the UK can be seen as part of an emerging transnational civic culture facilitated by the European project. How much do respondents identify with Europe? This question is quite closely linked to questions about identity and belonging and draws together the findings produced from this project and ultimately sought to contribute to existing debates about (trans)nationalism and globalisation.

The data collection for this project took place from February 2015 to July 2015 (with three pilot interviews collected in the summer of 2013). As a result, the data was collected around the time of a crucial development in the timeline which eventually led to the vote to leave the European Union; namely, the UK general election in May 2015. Some of the respondents were interviewed before the Conservative party, who had made holding an EU referendum an election promise, was re-elected. This research project, therefore, captures not the reactions of participants around the time of the referendum in June 2016 itself but their perceptions of the political climate and discussions around during the election campaign and aftermath of the 2015 general election.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

Chapter 2 introduces and discusses some of the core literature which was drawn on in the preparation for the research conducted for this thesis and which has informed the analysis and discussion of the findings from this research. In this chapter I discuss varying and contrasting theories of the impact of globalisation on Western societies and their cultures. A particular focus is placed on the salience of identity formation and the modern emphasis of
identity as fluid and a ‘reflexive project of the self’ and how such a conception of identity may relate to an individual’s decision to relocate to a different country. This chapter concludes with a discussion of existing work in the field of intra-European migration studies, and the previous research conducted on German emigrants generally, and Germans in the Britain specifically.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological stance and decisions that were made in the various stages of the research from the early stages of research design to the analysis of the data. It thus defends the appropriateness of adopting a qualitative approach to the collection and analysis of the data and explains why the use of semi-structured individual interviews was best suited to gather the information needed to best answer the above research questions and aims given the circumstances and constraints of time, money and access to an appropriate sample. Subsequently, methodological decisions regarding the sampling, recruitment and data collection are outlined and explained, followed by a discussion of the transcription and analysis of the data. This is succeeded by a discussion and demonstration of the ethical considerations which were made in the designing of the study and how these stayed at the forefront of my mind as the researcher throughout conducting the research and analysis. Finally, the chapter focuses on my positionality in regard to the participants and the topics under investigation, illustrating how my social identity is likely to have impacted on the research process.

Chapter 4 addresses the first research question which focused on why Germans might choose to relocate to the United Kingdom. To this end, it analyses the accounts that participants provided of their often multi-faceted motivation behind this move placing them firmly within the lifestyle migration narrative. Few participants felt a great ‘need’ to leave Germany. Instead, their migration trajectory which in many cases began as experimental migration with no strong commitment to being permanent in most cases was in order for them to realise their personal idea of what ‘the good life’ consists of. Opportunities for educational achievements and career progress were often cited, though only in a number of cases were these the sole motivation behind the participant’s desire to migrate. Similarly, moving for love – either to reunite with their partner who had been living in Britain when they met or to accompany their partner who wanted or needed to relocate – was a reason which was given by a considerable number of the participants of this study.
Chapters 5 and 6 explore the second of the research questions that guided the research which this thesis is based on, which is an exploration of the lived experiences of Germans of settling and being resident in the UK. Chapter 5 focuses on the interviewees’ accounts and experiences of their settling and integration into British society, discussing their accounts of coming to the UK and establishing a support network. It demonstrates that most respondents found it relatively easy to find their feet and settle in the UK. This discussion shows that respondents – due to their (mostly) good English language skills and because they perceive their German national identity as ‘spoilt’ – had a strong desire to blend into the British ‘way of life’ at the expense of accessing or creating German networks. Chapter 6 concentrates on the respondents’ perceptions about British attitudes towards foreigners in general and Germans and Germany more specifically. This chapter also discusses interviewees’ reports of their experiences of recent developments of a rise in UK Independence Party support and the accompanying emboldening of anti-immigrant voices. This discussion demonstrates that respondents, while they largely did not feel personally targeted by these developments, felt a deep sense of unease and concern regarding the rise of populist sentiments which was linked in their minds to rise of fascism in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. The (then upcoming) referendum on the UK’s membership in the European Union was viewed with disbelief by some and worry by others. Those who were younger and in higher-skilled professions were considerably less concerned about the uncertainty that the announcement of this referendum brought.

Chapter 7 focuses on what respondents revealed about the importance of notions of nationality and transnationality to their sense of self. In doing so, the discussion draws on respondents’ thoughts on home and belonging as well as their reflections on patriotism, being German and being European. As indicated by the discussion in Chapter 5, respondents’ account show that they perceive German nationality as stigmatised as a result of the country’s Nazi past and, consequently, considered being German not as significant to their sense of self than they considered being European. Linked to the discussion of home and belonging, and the salience of transnational notions of identity is my exploration of roughly half of the respondents’ disassociation from the term ‘migrant’.

Chapter 8 pulls together the various themes arising in the preceding findings chapters and addresses the fourth of the research questions in a discussion about the extent to which
the Germans who took part in this research – as agents of a Europeanisation ‘from below’ – can be understood as part of an emerging transnational European civic society. This chapter shows how their privileged status as white EU citizens manifests itself in the respondents’ motivations for moving to the UK as well as their experiences of settling and living in the country. In this concluding discussion, I propose that respondents’ own accounts of their identity and identity practices suggest that they paint a picture of them perceiving themselves primarily as Europeans living in Europe, rather than Germans living in the UK.
2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I critically review some of the key contributions to fields of literature in which my research is situated. Thus, this chapter, firstly, provides a discussion of some of the key works and debates on the topics of globalisation and migration. As part of this discussion, key concepts and debates around the notions of transnationalism and transnational lives will be assessed. Secondly, I will consider some of the sociological literature within the field of identity, placing a particular focus on how the concepts of identity and migration intersect. Thirdly, literature on the interplay of migration and identity will be highlighted, discussing primarily concepts and debates surrounding the terms of diaspora and transnationalism. Finally, I will hone in on the European context with a focus on existing literature on lifestyle migration before I turn to the existing literature on the German diaspora and, more specifically, previous research on Germans living in Britain.

2.2 Theories of cultural globalisation

The world we live in today has indisputably been impacted by the effects that processes of globalisation have had and continue to have on the way our societies function and the ways we live our everyday lives. It is, as Douglas Goodman aptly points out, “increasingly connected by global processes” (2007:330). The world, in many ways, has become what McLuhan (1962) calls a ‘global village’ where people from all over the globe can communicate with or at least know of one another and a world in which national mass media organizations bring news and running images from distant parts of the world into our living rooms.

While nation-states in and of themselves are a modern and therefore relatively recent development, globalising forces have brought about changes to the political cultures within nations, to their national economies as well as to their cultural make-up. Our world is one in which distances have been diminished by transportation technology, better infrastructure as well as fast and highly improved communication technology making possible a much greater interconnectedness of geographically distant locations and people. While this gradual compression of space and time (Harvey, 1989) and the history of globalisation dates back
further than many would think (McNeal, 1986) it has undeniably gained a much greater momentum, speed and scope over the last half of a century (Holton, 2000). In 2000, as Foreign Policy (2002) points out, global travel had increased to 698.8 million international arrivals compared to “457.2 million a decade before”. Likewise, they state that “cross-border telephone traffic (...) saw a steady growth of roughly 10 billion minutes” in the same year and 344 new embassies were established between 1995 and 2000 (Foreign Policy, 2002). As a result, the quest to explore the nature, scope and effects that “growing worldwide interconnectedness” have on societies has led to the accumulation of a substantial amount of academic literature on these issues (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004:43).

When it comes to the question of what effect(s) globalisation has on the cultural makeup of contemporary societies, theses and positions can, as Jan Nederveen Pieterse suggests (2004), be broadly summarised under three general or overarching strand paradigms – cultural differentialism or polarisation, cultural convergence or imperialism, and cultural hybridisation. The distinctions in many instances are blurred, however, as the works of some social theorists’ such as George Ritzer (2003, 2004) can be drawn upon to demonstrate. His work on globalisation advances arguments in support of the idea of convergence, while also containing arguments in favour of hybridisation. In the following discussion, I will consider and assess the merits of each position in turn. First, however, it is necessary to discuss what is meant by the term ‘culture’. This word, as Spillman points out, “has a number of overlapping (...) connotations” (2002: 1). This is in part due to it playing an important role in a number of disciplines with sociology, anthropology and psychology to name a few, but also because theorists and researchers from different schools of thought conceptualise and understand the term differently. Coming from a philosophy background, Edward Said, for instance, suggests that culture can refer to “all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social and political realms” but it can also come “to be associated (...) with the nation or the state” and be seen as something that “differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’” and that becomes a source of identity (1993: xii; xiii). Using rather deterministic words to describe it, the definitions provided by Hofstede et al. (2010: 516), writing from the perspective of social psychology, is that culture is

“the unwritten rules of the social game, or more formally the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group (...) of people from another”
So, with these differing if overlapping definitions of the term in mind, when the word culture is used in the subsequent discussions what is referred to should loosely be understood as sets of beliefs, practices, traditions and/or ways of thinking that are shared by a group of people and impact on how individuals act and understand the world around them.

The position which is commonly referred to by the term cultural differentialism holds that as the technological and infrastructural advances that make globalisation possible bring distant cultures in contact with each other these cultures and the world in general are in fact becoming more polarised as cultural conflicts persist or even deepen. Featherstone (1996:13) suggests that while there are examples of cultural integration, in many ways our world is “becoming increasingly pluralistic” rather than homogenous and all too often this becomes clear when these competing ontologies or worldviews meet. Different civilisations, as theorists such as Galtung (1981) argue, operate on completely different worldviews, ideologies and values that are for the most part resistant to outside influences which inevitably means that the potential for conflict ensues if or where they come in contact with other cultures. Thus, “cultural differences”, from a cultural differentialist point of view, “are regarded [not only] as [largely] immutable” but also as a source of “rivalry and conflict” (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004:44).

In addition, technological advances like the Internet, while they can be used to bring people closer together, can also be associated with the heightened capacity to disseminate hatred and foster animosity. Also, these advances in communication technologies, as Benedict Anderson (1994:326) states, enable what he calls “long-distance nationalism”. So, emigrants, rather than losing contact with their country of origin and needing to integrate themselves by blending into their new host cultures, or conceiving of their identity as transnational in nature, can nurture their ethnic diasporic identity instead. As a result, what is found across many of the popular nations of immigration is not the formation of a homogenous culture but a multicultural assemblage of various cultures living alongside each other – rather than with one another – giving rise to the increased potential for disagreement, hostility and conflict between the host culture and immigrant cultures and also between the various immigrant cultures themselves. A recent resurgence of anti-immigrant sentiments across many Western countries can be viewed as a symptom of such polarising developments.
Prominent proponents of (very different) strong versions of this differentialism thesis such as for example Benjamin Barber (1995), Samuel Huntington (1996) and Edward Wadie Said (1978), point to stark cultural differences, opposing ideologies and even violent ethnic conflict along clearly demarcated cultural lines. While they perceive of culture in very different ways, all three of these see particularly big potential for conflict between the West and the Islamic world. Said (1978), who was writing several decades ago, depicts a world that is very much divided into the occident or Western world and the rest of the world as ‘the other’. His focus is particularly on the Islamic Middle Eastern parts of the world which he sees as being discursively constructed by the powerful of the West as oriental and thus inherently culturally different from the West. While the West perceives itself as progressive, tolerant and rational, the Orient is understood as characterised by authoritarianism, tradition if not stagnation and religious zeal (Said, 1978). At the same time, so Said’s (1978) argument holds, the West is increasingly coming to be perceived by these Middle-Eastern peoples (and non-Western populations more generally) as their ‘other’ and portrayed as imperialist, individualist and thus unrestrained in their self-centred endeavours and self-serving goals and deeply immoral. As a result, the frontiers and opposing stances are perpetually reinforced from both sides of the divide.

This notion of a cultural dichotomy persists to the present day as the works by Barber (1995) and Huntington (1996) as well as Frank Furedi (2006) suggest. While Barber (1995) and Huntington (1996) talk about this cultural divide as a reality and threat, Furedi (2006) on the other hand criticises this way of portraying the world as discursively producing or increasing this threat. Both Huntington (1996) and Barber (1995) point to instances of conflict and violent struggle in regions like former Yugoslavia, Africa and Asia as examples for places where conflicts between Muslim and non-Muslim populations are likely and commend a greater union, cooperation and a pooling together among the nations of the West to in order for the West to remain strong and for Western culture and values to be protected (1996). What marks out Huntington’s stance from most others, as Nederveen Pieterse argues (2004:45), is precisely this “blatant admixture of security interests and a crude rendition of civilisational difference”. Huntington, thus, is part of the continued wider discourse which antagonises the Arab world of whose existence Said expressed such vehement disapproval. This discursively constructed Arab (and in recent years Terrorist) ‘Other’, as Furedi (2006) suggests, has in
some ways replaced the former Communist or Soviet ‘Other’ which during the time of the Cold War, as Zaki Laidi (2004:172) writes, fulfilled “an identification purpose”. The result of the continued prominence of these categorisations attempts to draw sharp lines, which as Holton (2000:148) suggests, leads to citizens defining themselves “more in terms of who we are not, and less in terms of who we are”. Therefore, the existence of such an ideological enemy, they argue, serves to instil a greater degree of a sense of collective purpose, identity and meaning among the West’s populaces and is thus, so the argument goes, welcomed by those in power.

While much of the above, as Tomlinson (1999) rightly points out, certainly has some salience particularly in light of the ongoing war on terror, he and many other social theorists such as for instance Robert Holton (2000), would suggest that it does not capture all that it is going on in the cultural sphere when it comes to the effects of globalisation. One of the main problems with the accounts of proponents of the differentialism paradigm, as Holton (2000:148) points out, is that “the[ir] story is too simplistic and also perhaps too pessimistic” regarding the nature of human beings and capacity to tolerate and accept difference. While instances of conflict, nationalism and hostility exist, these do not make up the whole picture and, considering this bigger picture, a trend of cultural differentialism, let alone polarisation, is not likely to be the most dominant of the forces at work within the globalisation of culture, either at present or in the foreseeable future. Another criticism that could be levelled against the strong version of the polarisation thesis is that it assumes the existence of a distinctive and homogeneous Western culture with which the Arab ‘other’ is contrasted. So, it seems that in order for this theory of a cultural polarisation based on the clash between the West and the rest of the world to hold up and be plausible, a significant amount of homogenisation or convergence on a regional or transnational level among the societies on each side of this divide needs to be assumed. Therefore, advocates of this strong position of polarisation implicitly subscribe to the idea of there being homogenising currents at work in the processes of cultural globalisation.

Quite contrary to the position of cultural differentialism, the idea of cultural convergence focuses on the ways in which processes of globalisation have increased similarities and sameness among different formerly clearly distinct cultures throughout the globe. This notion of a convergence of cultures suggests that it is predominantly Western and
more specifically American culture which is leaving its mark on societies and cultures around the world. This position, while it is also supported by some sociologists – Herbert Schiller (1976) being one example – is, as Holton (2000:142) suggests, arguably the most widely held understanding among non-academic commentators on the effect of globalisation on national or local cultures around the world. This understanding of the nature of globalisation suggests that it also carries with it the spread of the Western model and (neo-liberal) ideology of market and consumer capitalism (Antonio, 2007). As a result, Goodman (2007:330) declares, “that to the extent that there is a global culture, it is a consumer culture. This development, as advocates of the cultural convergence thesis and anti-globalisation activists warn, is leading to the increasing demise of much of the national and/or local cultures as smaller local or family businesses struggle to compete with the multinational companies and are either forced to adopt the rationalised business strategy or, if failing to do so, are often left little choice but to close down.

Furthermore, the increasingly globalised market system leads to a trend of homogenisation across cultures, while the global reach of American popular culture and Hollywood’s film industry likewise is implicated as a cause in the theory of an ever-increasing cultural convergence. Herbert Schiller (1976), for example, advocates that the power and influence of transnational media conglomerates is much greater than merely in the economic sphere. Coming from a Marxist perspective, he warns that through the integration into the global capitalist market economy, the cultures of these nations become more and more part of a global capitalist culture. “[M]edia managers”, so he writes, “create, process, refine and preside over the circulation of images and information which determine our beliefs and attitudes and, ultimately, our behaviour” (1973:1). However, while the far-reaching influence possessed by these media managers – media moguls, chief editors and producers – should not be underestimated, it is important to point out that such a deterministic view of the interplay of media producers and media consumers does belittle the agency and degree of resistance individuals can indeed display in the face of mediated discourse. Nevertheless, as Herman and McChesney (1997:35) point out, the power of these transnational corporations can “extend to basic assumptions and modes of thought” as numerous messages transported through many of their products are ideological in nature. This means that they can have a
profound effect on the ideas, values and lifestyles of those who consume them – particularly if they lack the knowledge or education to critically assess and evaluate them.

So, the argument is that the increasing resemblance of economic and political structure and the greater similarity of the cultural ideas and messages prevalent in globalized societies – attributed primarily to the global media industry, communication technologies and immigration – is leading to less distinctly national forms of identities, cultures and practices. This rather complex phenomenon, to David Miller (2000: 2), means that the nation state loses the ability “to determine the cultural make-up of its citizens” and thus blurs the boundaries between nations. Therefore, liberal nationalists like Miller, view it as a major culprit in the diminishing identification of citizens with a common national identity which – coupled with an increase in immigration due to the increased mobility made possible by globalization (Castles and Davidson, 2000) – has led to a loss of social cohesion and national political identity.

Neither the arguments for cultural differentialism nor those in favour of cultural convergence can, as Tomlinson (1999) argues, do justice to the complex reality of what we can observe around the globe when it comes to the globalisation of culture. A third and in many ways complementary branch of thought in the study of cultural globalisation is that of cultural hybridisation. What this theory entails, as Tomlinson writes (1999:142) “is the mingling of cultures from different territorial locations brought about by the increasing traffic amongst cultures”. This fusion of cultures, rather than being a product of recent years, has been going on for most, if not all, of human history. Renato Rosaldo therefore describes it “as the ongoing condition of all human cultures, which contains no zones of purity because they undergo continuous processes of transculturation” (1995: xv). This process, as Nederveen Pieterse (1995:64) adds, has however been greatly accelerated over the last century, meaning that what we are witnessing today is the “hybridisation of hybrid cultures”. While it is difficult, as Holton (2000:149) argues, to “assess its scale and scope” he mentions “colonial occupation” as well as “migration, cross-border employment” as well as intercultural marriages as some of the necessary conditions to make possible the increased intermixing of cultural content. These accounts then see hybridisation as the borrowing or inclusion of cultural content through the exchange between various cultural backgrounds.
Other accounts describe as hybridisation the incorporation of aspects of global consumer culture through adaption into local cultures. The term used to describe this process of the synthesis of the global with the local, coined by Roland Robertson (1995), is ‘glocalisation’. What the notion of glocalisation, or hybridisation more generally, suggests is that the everyday experience of people around the globe may be neither subject to a development towards living in a homogenous global culture that has replaced local culture, nor a polarising development towards a (purely) local or regional cultures that stand in contrast to each other. Instead the suggestion is that people’s experience of culture in today’s globalised world is one of a mix of the global and the local. Savage et al.’s research among different local communities in England (2005) explored the impact of globalising development on localities and highlight the salience and strength of notions of ‘elective’ belonging to place among individuals who have made a new place their home compared to the ‘born and bred’ local community who may feel estranged from the place they had always lived in as they witness it changing in front of their eyes.

This discussion of some of the arguments contained within the three broad positions on cultural globalisation suggests that this is a complex and demanding topic which requires careful thought and analysis to the intricate details, as well as the bigger picture in order to come to an understanding of the effects that globalising processes have had and continue to have on cultures around the globe. Recent findings by the European Social Survey (2016: 6-7), for instance, found that attitudes towards different groups of migrants had become more divided within most countries across Europe. Comparing attitudinal data on migration between 2002 and 2014, researchers found that while some Europeans (in each country) are becoming more welcoming towards migrants, at the same time, the reverse trend of a growing number of those who are very critical of allowing migration is observable. This polarisation, or the existence of conflicting developments taking place at the same time, the researchers state, was particularly “marked in many of the western European countries which have seen large increases in migration” including the UK (European Social Survey, 2016: 7). The existence of such polarising developments among populations underscores the validity of continuing the conversation about the above outlined different and contrasting theories of the effect of globalisation on society and culture.
2.3 International Migration

As indicated earlier in this discussion, international migration – the movement of people across national borders and their settlement in another country – has been one aspect of these globalising processes. Increasing levels of migration are at once an outcome of this growing international interconnectedness and a factor contributing to it. Drawing on Castle and Miller’s work, King (2012: 4) proposes that “we live in an ‘age of migration’: a period during which international migration has accelerated, globalised, feminised, diversified and become increasingly politicised” (2009:10-12). The days when travelling from one continent to another required several days on ship are (or feel like) a distant past for most of us with ever-faster and more affordable air travel. Similarly, the ability to familiarise oneself with the cultures of faraway countries due to the globalised media and the accessibility of the Internet enables individuals to inform themselves more than ever before about the culture of countries, to which they are considering moving. This very positive and attractive idea of living in an ‘age of migration’ needs to, as King rightly suggests, “be qualified [as it is] migration for some, but not for others”. It is, he suggests, “[f]ine if you are white, from a wealthy country in Europe, North America or elsewhere in the developed world, or if you have the money to invest or valuable skills to deploy” (2009: 5-6).

Catrin Lundström’s Research into the experiences of white, female Swedish migrants in the US, Singapore and Spain found that, while the effects of class and gender played out differently in the different contexts, in the US their white ‘exoticness’ was an advantage both in their private as well as their professional lives, and in Singapore as well as Spain their “light skin continue[d] to operate as a form of cultural capital” (2014: 124). There are then, some clear differences in the ability to move freely across borders and be accepted into the destination country which run particularly along lines of race and socio-economic background. Castles (2010: 1567) points to the double-standard which exists in popular discourse on migration when he says

“[m]ovement of the highly skilled were celebrated as professional mobility, while those of the lower-skilled were condemned as unwanted migration. Mobility equalled good, because it was the badge of a modern open society; migration equalled bad because it re-awakened archaic memories of invasion and displacement.”
Recent years – especially since the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements which meant freedom of movement gradually was extended to several Central and Eastern European countries – have seen an extension of racist and xenophobic discourse being extended to ‘putatively white’ migrants (Fox, 2013). So, while the increase in global connectivity has greatly increased the reach and therefore profits of what Leslie Sklair refers to as the transnational capitalist class which consists of “those who own and control the major corporations and their local affiliates, globalizing bureaucrats and politicians, globalizing professionals, and consumerist elites” (2002: 144), it has not had a great equalising effect between the rich and the global poor. He warns that the influence possessed by many of these global players over political decision-making, poses a threat to democracy and is directly responsible “for crises of class polarisation and ecological unsustainability” (2002: 156). Instead of boundaries becoming obsolete, they are then merely “becoming permeable, [as] not everyone can move, or move freely”, as Shirato and Webb (2003: 152) advocate.

“The study of migration” as King (2012: 9) puts forward, “has been enriched by the introduction of new conceptual frameworks such as mobility (the ‘mobilities turn’ – Urry, 2007), transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al., 1992), and diaspora studies (Cohen, 2008).” While I will return to the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora at a later point in this chapter, Urry’s paradigm of mobilities is crucial in understanding the intersection of migration and modernity. Urry’s argument, as his colleague Caletrio summarises (2012: 1), is “that travel and communication technologies have enabled the proliferation of connections at a distance” and that these connections are key in “holding social life together”. In other words, people are now able to move around the world more freely than ever before and, wherever they are, they are able to stay connected with others in different parts of the world. As the above mention of King’s (2009) point regarding the noticeable inequality among migrants along racial and socio-economic lines however illustrates, the concept of mobility, too, needs be qualified as applying more to some, and less to others.

The concept of mobility and the preceding discussion of the wider globalising developments illustrate that the importance of the nation-state in social life should not be taken for granted and requires careful enquiry. “Methodological nationalism [which] is the tendency to accept the nation-state and its boundaries as a given in social analysis”, as Levitt et al. propose (2014: 19), is inadequate when conducting social research, as social life can no
longer be contained within the nation. Therefore, Levitt et al. criticise what they perceive as many social scientists’ oversight to “take rootedness and incorporation in the nation as the norm, and social identities and practices enacted across nation-states as the exception” (2014: 19). Nation states, while they inarguably continue to play a role in contemporary life, cannot dictate or contain social life within national borders. Further research which does not fall into the trap of methodological nationalism and which explores the effects that globalising forces are having on culture and identity is therefore valuable. What effect, for instance, do local and transnational affiliations and attachments have on people’s sense of self? And what impact does the process of moving from one country to another have on migrants’ identities?

2.4 Identity in a globalised world

Questions about identity have attracted a considerable amount of attention in recent decades among the various fields within the social sciences as well as popular discourse. "Identity", so Avtar Brah suggests, "is an enigma which, by its very nature, defies a precise definition" (1996: 20). While definitions and concepts of what identity means and how it is formed and constituted certainly diverge between the various strands of sociological thought, a simple and relatively neutral definition might be "the sense, and continuity, of self that develops first as the child differentiates from parents and family and takes a place in society" (Collins, 2000). While most would agree on this somewhat basic description of the meaning of identity different schools of thought place greater emphasis on certain aspects on this depiction of identity. Due to the Western focus on personhood, identity, as Sheila Croucher suggests (2004: 185), has become very central to our understanding of the world and as a concept is powerful and pervasive. Likewise, Zygmunt Bauman (2009: 1) advocates that it has "become a prism through which (...) aspects of contemporary life are spotted, grasped and examined." Discussions of culture, as well as those of rights and justice are permeated with concepts of individual or group identities. The very notion that any individual or group of people should have the benefit of human rights assumes, so Bauman argues, a belief in "the right to a separate identity" (2009: 1). Such an understanding of humanity which places a strong emphasis on distinctiveness, identity and the individual, as Baumeister (1986) claims, was mostly absent from pre-modern societies and cultures which were characterised by a predominantly communitarian conception of social life. One's life in medieval European communities was not about fulfilling one's aspirations and finding expression through what
one did. To the contrary, a person's social status - which was relatively fixed - and their sex dictated to a substantial degree the kind of life they were able to live, and it was the community which took precedence over the individual.

Despite today's Western societies being more individuated, an understanding of individuals as being subject to structural constraints, as well as active agents prevails among social scientists. As a result, Avtar Brah (among others) advocates that "identity, then, is simultaneously subjective and social, and is constituted in and through culture" (1996: 21; see also Giddens, 2000). Moreover, while she acknowledges that people are agents and have some influence over who they are, she insists that identity and culture are in fact concepts that are "inextricably linked" (1996: 21). Any balanced enquiry into people's own understanding and lived experience of identity then needs to take account of the individual's capacity for agency as well as the structural or societal constraints which both exert influence over the identity formation and development. So, while the personal interpretation of an individual's account is of upmost interest, "the origins of [these] accounts", as Celia Kitzinger states (1989: 83), "might be more readily located in their socio-cultural and political contexts."

Identities are personal and social at the same time and need to be considered as such. The reason why a person's social context is crucially important in any exploration of their identity is that, as Henri Tajfel (1984: 5) points out, humans as social beings "derive an import part of [their] identity from the human groups and social categories [that they] belong to." In the modern world, there are number of such social categories and groups that any given individual may identify with. As a result, as Kathryn Woodward points out (1997: 1; see also Tajfel, 1984: 20), a person's conception of their identity may "derive from a multiplicity of sources" which in Pierre Bourdieu's work are referred to as different fields such as the family, education, peer groups and work groups. Beyond these, however, social factors like "nationality, ethnicity, social class, community, gender, [and] sexuality" may also be formative of identity. "These sources", as Woodward adds, may not always be in harmony with each other but can "conflict in the construction of identity positions" (1997: 1) and not all social categories that form part of a person's identity are equally important to their sense of self. Even where a person's different social roles may conflict, as Herman and Brewer suggest (2004: 8), they are usually able to resolve this inner conflict as they "learn to balance their
multiple memberships and roles". Some memberships being more significant to their identity and sense of self plays a crucial part in their being able to maintain this balance.

Being part of social groups and categories, as Turner (1996) adds, also serves to provide the individual with a sense of belonging, since membership in the group identifies for the individual a place (and a role) in the world and provides them with a "positive social identity" through which he or she comes to view themselves and the society around them. An identity, as Jan Stets and Peter Burke (2005: 137) point out, is a "set of meanings [which are] attached to the self" and thus serve as a "standard or reference for a person" regarding who they are. Identity then cannot exist in isolation but, as Croucher (2004: 40) describes, "always relies upon an 'Other', and belonging to an 'Us' necessitates the existence and recognition of a 'Them'. Consequently, being able to experience a sense of belonging to a social group "as such, necessitates [the existence of] boundaries" as to who is inside who is outside of the grouping. People's desire to "restore positive distinctiveness to their relevant memberships" if those come to lose in status (Turner, 1996: 16) is what has given rise to what is generally summed up under the term identity politics (see also Croucher, 2004).

Recent decades have seen the proliferation of another debate that is of significance here as discussed earlier in the chapter - the impact of societal changes associated with globalisation and late modernity more generally on individuals' sense of self and identity. In a world that has undergone fundamental changes through the "economic, technological, political, and cultural" dynamics that we sum up as globalisation, and that is thus more interconnected than previous centuries were, the reality of people’s social, economic and cultural life, too, has been subject to change (Croucher, 2004: 185). Resulting from the many changes which have taken, and continue to take place we, as Campbell and Rew (1999: 1) suggest, we live in a world which increasingly "lacks any precedent" and which Harvey (1990: 263) refers to as "a world of insecurity and rapidly expanding spatial horizons". People have many more freedoms and more control over how they would like to live their lives. "Now in freedom" however, as Schorlemmer (1993: 1) points out, "they must decide for themselves (...) all the old certainties are gone. The joy of freedom is at the same time a falling into a void". And he goes on to suggest that the only thing that is certain is that "everything's uncertain, precarious." The social categories which in the past hemmed people into their place in society have, as Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2009: 14) describe,
become increasingly fragile and as result there is greater freedom but also a loss of "frames of reference and role models". In this "time of liquid modernity" when it seems little is prescribed or can be taken for granted "sameness and continuity", as Bauman suggests (2009: 5;7), "are feelings seldom experienced". So, while the individual can choose more freely what career path they would like to pursue, for many, employment has become more precarious as employment security decreases, putting great pressure on the individual to avoid failure and to change path whenever necessary (Standing, 2011). "People, so Beck and Beck-Gernsheim state, "are condemned to individualisation" because they, as Anthony Giddens points out (2000: 256), "have no choice but to choose." Consequently, "the self", so Giddens suggests, "is seen as the [individual’s] reflexive project" that is ongoing and for the success and coherence of which he or she is responsible (2000: 252). The individual, he adds, must be able to maintain a coherent sense of his or her self throughout the passages of his or her life and "negotiating a significant transition" such as, for example, migrating to another country contains risks and opportunities that the individual has to balance and which he or she also needs to be able to "integrate into [their] narrative of self-development" - their trajectory of the self (Giddens, 2000: 255).

One of the consequences of the compression of time and space, which is illustrated by the diminishing impact of geographical distance through vast improvements in communication as well as transportation and transmission technologies (see Harvey, 1990; Giddens, 1987), and which has resulted from processes of globalisation, is that individuals are presented with a whole host of different cultures, values and lifestyles and thus need to continuously reevaluate who they are, what their values are and how they would choose to live their life. While Lasch (1979: 29) advocates that the identities people seek "can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume", Hobsbawm (1996: 40) suggests that "men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving, shifting, in which nothing else is certain." They can, so he adds, "find [this sense of belonging] in an identity group" (1996: 40). Instead of being certain and forever however, he continues, their identities are characterised by fluidity and change, and their allegiances are multiple and continuously shifting. Michel Maffesoli’s (1996: 98) concept of the neo-tribe, which he states, "refers to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form", may be useful in
discussions about the loosely organised memberships in lifestyles that individuals have. As Bennett (1999: 606) points out, Maffesoli’s concept illustrates "the shifting nature of collective associations between individuals as societies become consumer oriented."

Nationality is a once-presumed immensely powerful marker of identity and belonging which today, it is argued, has lost significance in the face of modernising and globalising forces (see Robins, 1997). The recent developments of cultural globalisation in particular, as liberal nationalist David Miller (2000) argues, play a crucial role in undermining the significance and consequently meaningfulness of national citizenship. The argument is that the increasing similarity in the cultural ideas and messages prevalent in globalized societies – attributed primarily to the global media industry, communication technologies and immigration – is leading to less distinctly national forms of identities, cultures and practices, thus leading to nation-states losing the ability "to determine the cultural make-up of its citizens" (Miller, 2000: 2). Statistical findings suggest, however, that nationality may still be of importance to individuals as a citizenship survey carried out in Britain in 2007/2008 by the Department for Communities and Local Government (2009), found that 83% stated that they felt a strong sense of belonging to Britain and 83% also stated that their British (or English) national identity was ‘an integral part of their personal identity’. This survey also demonstrated, however, that many people’s interpretation of national belonging allows for the existence of cultural diversity as 68% of respondents also agreed with the statement that it is possible “to maintain a separate cultural or religious identity” and still feel a sense of belonging to Britain (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009: 36). Findings like these suggest that the traditional idea of national citizenship has been transformed, rather than replaced by local and transnational affiliations meaning that “identities are overlapping, negotiable and contested” as Delanty, asserts (2000:59). In the age of globalization citizenship is thus made up of “multiple loyalties” and as such multi-layered and complex (Falk, 2000: 2; Delanty, 2000) but national citizenship maintains salience.

The introduction of European Union citizenship in 1992, as David Owen (2011: 110) points out, "offers the most spectacular example of contemporary nested transpolitical citizenship". Unlike separate or cross-cutting identities, in a configuration of nested identities, Herrmann and Brewer explain (2004: 8), "everyone in a smaller community [as an example say, the United Kingdom] is also a member of a larger community" like the European Union.
Since every national of an EU member state is automatically granted this additional set of rights and the status of EU citizen this is not an identity (at least in its official and political understanding) which the individual chooses freely, but on the other hand, is one that he or she is awarded without choice. Therefore, whether a person's "felt identity" is in harmony with their legal identity as Herrmann and Brewer point out (2004: 8), is a different matter altogether. If this is the case, they subjectively identify with the group that they are legally part of; if they do not, they merely share an objective feature of the category but do not feel a sense of association to it. One of the most important questions when thinking about EU citizenship, they suggest (2004: 2), is to explore "how far the institutions [of the European Union] can go in shaping the identities" of those residing within it. Is there evidence to suggest that there is a growing European community of citizens who perceive themselves as belonging to a common group of Europeans rather than or in addition to their national group?

Identity, as Herrmann and Brewer (2004: 4) lament, is difficult to measure because of the "several communities [to which people] simultaneously" belong. Some indicators and useful starting points in an enquiry into the strength of EU citizens' affiliation and attachment to the EU can be found. One example of this is the statistical data published by the European Commission (2010). The findings from this EU-wide survey carried out in 2006, which asked citizens whether they ever thought of themselves as 'not only a national of their country but also a European citizen', show that only 16% answered that they 'often' felt European. Thirty-eight percent stated that they 'sometimes' felt European and 43% said they 'never' did (that proportion is at 41% among German and at 67% among UK citizens). This suggests that many citizens within the EU, it seems, still attach more importance and significance to their nation state than to their European membership. It is important to note however that the data for the individual member states show great variation and that a comparison over time shows an increase in citizens who 'sometimes' identify with Europe (the percentage of people stating they never felt European was at 52% still in 1990). Something that is of interest is what possible reasons there might be for a person (not) to feel European and, considering the earlier discussion on the multi-layeredness of identity, how vital sentiments of nationality are to their sense of self. Also, considering intra-European migration in light of the previously mentioned concept of the trajectory of the self, how do individuals who move internationally
understand their experience and how does it relate to their 'life project' and overall sense of self?

2.5 Migration, diaspora and transnationalism

As previously mentioned, the last centuries and particularly recent decades have seen a rapid increase in migratory movements across national borders and even continents. Data published by the World Bank (2013) estimates that in the year 2010 there were 215,738,321 migrants in the world, which is an increase of around 24 million people from the number recorded for 2007. While migration itself has more and more become a topic, which is widely discussed both in academia and public discourse, migrants – the individuals who come to live outside their country of birth (or of that of their parents or ancestors) as a result of these movements – too have increasingly become the topic of sociological research and debates. One term that is often used in relation to such a group is diaspora. Discourses of diaspora, as Braziel and Mannur (2003: 1; see also Schnapper, 1999) point out, are interesting both to the field of sociology and citizenship studies as they challenge and "confound the (...) clearly demarcated parameters of geography, national identity, and belonging" which until recently had been assumed to be obvious. Diaspora, which is derived from the Greek dia meaning ‘through’ and speiro, ‘to scatter’, refers to “the situation of any group of people dispersed (...) throughout the world” (Collins Dictionary of Sociology, 2000: 156).

Despite this seemingly straightforward literal dictionary translation, exactly what diaspora is, how it should be defined and what criteria should be utilised in distinguishing what constitutes a diasporic group is, however, hotly debated among theorists and thus no full consensus or definitive definition can be assumed at this point. Some rather succinct and useful starting points which sum up the essence of what we associate with diasporas is Dominique Schnapper’s (1999: 227) description of "the dispersion of peoples who cling to a sentiment of their unity in spite of geographic breakup", as well as Steven Vertovec’s suggestion that what the term describes is a “group characterised by their relationship-despite-dispersal” (1999: 3). One approach to discussing and theorising diaspora that is found in the existing literature, Vertovec (1999: 8) proposes, is to refer to it as a type of consciousness, thus giving prominence to "describing [diaspora in terms of] a variety of experience, a state of mind and a sense of identity". Paul Gilroy's work on African diasporas
(1987, 1993), as well as James Clifford’s research (1994) and William Safran’s (1991) works on the Jewish diaspora can be seen as exemplifying this lived experience of individuals and groups of living with a dual consciousness and tension between two different cultural scripts. Much of the literature on diaspora also discusses it as a mode of cultural production focusing on the "production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena" and thus typically feed into debates about cultural globalisation (Vertovec, 1999: 19).

Historically, the term diaspora initially came to denote the experience of the Jewish nation who after the destruction and expulsion from their home land in Palestine by the Romans were scattered across the world and remained that way for centuries. Diaspora thus took on a “sinister and brutal meaning” (Cohen, 1997: ix). The subsequent displacement of Jews which has lasted for centuries is the prime example of a diasporic community which resulted from forceful expulsion from the homeland and, therefore, is understood to be a kind of blueprint for what we mean when we talk of diaspora. The continued centrality and importance of the Jewish example thus, as Martin Baumann (2010: 19) states, is due to "their capacity to preserve the 'law' outside the 'Holy Land', to live a life according to the command of the Torah despite strong assimilative pressures from the 'host' society" and also the expressed desire to return to a lost homeland. The ability to preserve a common identity and culture among a people (or peoples) who hold different cultural values and observe different traditions serves to strengthen the bond between members of the diasporic group but has at times in history not been a wholly voluntary or deliberate practice - hostility towards the perceived outsiders or strangers by the host society also played its part in preventing a blending in of the Jewish diaspora in the nations where they settled (Boyarin and Boyarin, 2003). Considering this account, it is not surprising that Georg Simmel refers to "European Jews" as the "classical example" of what he calls the stranger - a person who lives among a national group, but it is not perceived as being of it by the host nation (and often also not by him- or herself) (1908: 403).

For many centuries and until recent decades the term diaspora thus was, as Bakewell (2008:2) points out, used only for a rather select number of cases of national groups which had been scattered “over many generations” and yet had largely maintained a common sense of identity, namely, as already mentioned, the dispersed Jewish, Greek and Armenian communities. By the 1960s, as Safran (1991; see also Bakewell 2008) states, the term’s usage
started to be extended to further groups such as for example Palestinians and Indians but also the Chinese and, as Alpers (2001) adds, the African diaspora. Alongside the Jewish diaspora, the African diaspora has in the academic literature become one of the most established diasporic communities with several academic journals dedicated to these dispersed groups. Despite their individual differences and idiosyncrasies there are, as Robin Cohen suggests, parallels and similarities in the descriptions of the experiences and theorisations regarding these diasporic groups leading him to labelling them 'victim diasporas' (1997). The case of the African diaspora is one marked by slave trade as the main cause of the creation of diasporic communities far away from the nations of origin of the millions of men and women who are and have been part of this displaced group.

Cohen proposes a typology of five different kinds of diasporas of which victim diasporas constitute one. In addition, he talks of labour as well as trading diasporas and suggests that "the Indian indentured workers [who were] deployed in British, Dutch and French tropical plantations from the 1830 to about 1920" as well as Italians who moved to the United States and Argentina in search for work can be understood as an example of the former while the Lebanese and Chinese are examples of the latter. Cultural diasporas, which form the fourth type in this typology, are illustrated using the example of the Caribbean case as their diasporic cultural identity is "cemented as much by literature, political ideas, religious convictions, music and life-styles as by permanent migration" (1997: xii). Finally, the examples of the British, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, French and German colonists who settled in most parts of the world are put forward as examples of imperial diasporas who resulted from the "expansion of [these] powerful [European] nation-states" (1997: xi-xii). While there is a wealth of existing academic work (e.g. Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1987) on migration and diasporic communities resulting from it, much of this literature focuses on migratory trends either within the developing world or on immigration of people from economically weaker to wealthier nations and the diasporic communities resulting from these movements.

The “increasingly rapid international movement of people” over the past half of a century across national borders and often continents, made possible through processes of globalisation and Human Rights legislation has led to an even greater proliferation of academic work on migration in recent decades (Castles and Davidson, 2000: 157; Brubaker, 2005). This increase in mobility, made possible also through improvements in transportation
and infrastructure, has been cited as one of the reasons why migration and the diasporic communities created through these movements of people have become much more prominent during the twentieth and twenty-first century. In addition, the vast improvements in information, as well as communication, technology also have been credited as being beneficial to the groups' ability to sustain close contact with the homeland as well as the wider diaspora. The availability of televisual content from the country of origin enables many diasporic communities to maintain a closer connection to the country's culture and current events (see Georgiou, 2012; Karim, 2003). Victoria Bernal's (2006) work on the Eritrean diaspora's use of the Internet to create a community among those who are displaced and often feel isolated or even repressed in their country of residence illustrates the opportunities technology opens up for diasporas. The possibilities available to them to communicate and thus overcome distances, her work shows, serves to strengthen their collective identity and beyond that gives them a chance to engage in civic and political action affecting Eritrean political discourse from wherever it is that they reside. Similarly, Liza Tsaliki's research into the ways in which the Greek diaspora utilises communication technologies to "regain a sense of fraternity and conviviality, rooted in an original home where everyone belonged" offers an insight into the significance of this type of media to diasporas' improved ability to establish and maintain networks across space (Tsaliki, 2003: 174). In addition, the accounts and experiences of those who are part of the diaspora can now much more easily be relayed to those left in the country of origin - the diaspora itself thus becomes one factor that can encourage more migration. Beine et al (2009: 33) even go so far as to suggest that "diasporas are by far the most important determinant of migration flows" (see also Naficy; 2001, 2006).

Regardless of what the underlying causes and pre-conditions are, this increase in numbers of migratory movements, as Avtar Brah (1996: 179) suggests “are creating new displacements, new diasporas” as more and more individuals find themselves as residents of nation-states that they do not class as their primary – or at least not sole – home. As a result, as Khachig Tölölyan (1991) explains, a "term that once described Jewish, Greek and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain" and is drawn upon to illustrate and describe the experiences of a multiplicity of different cultural groups across the globe. A number of theorists, however, caution against what they perceive as the increasingly common habit of referring to any and all migrants as being part of a diasporic community.
It is important to be clear on one’s terminology and distinguish between migration and diaspora because, as Bakewell argues (2008: 3), not all migrants are automatically part of a diaspora, and on the other hand, not everyone who we might class as being part of diasporic group is a migrant him or herself (but may merely be a descendant of migrants). Likewise, as Bradatan et al (2010: 171) point out, some of the literature on transnationalism that emphasizes the ties which transnational individuals maintain with their country of origin "brings the concept close to, and difficult to distinguish from [that of] diaspora". Distinguishing between the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora is important because of what Brubaker calls the "'diaspora' diaspora - a dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space" (2005: 1). His contention is that by using the term to refer to an increasingly wide variety of groups we run the risk of the term losing its distinctiveness as it "becomes stretched to the point of uselessness" (2005: 3; see also Sartori, 1970). A distinction between transnationalism and diaspora thus needs to be made to more accurately describe and understand the different expressions of transnationalism. “Striving for exact definitions” of these two terms is difficult or, as Faist suggests, “may seem a futile exercise” leading him to recommend that comparing how their uses differ in the literature is the best way to understand how their meanings differ (2010: 14). Nyberg-Sørensen proposes that the main difference between a diasporic and a transnational identity and identification is bound up in the person’s relationship to space as she argues that

“migrants’ transnational practices have been understood to dissolve fixed assumptions about identity, place and community, whereas diasporic identity-making has been understood to evolve around attempts to ‘fix’ and closely-knit identity and community (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2007: 7).”

So, while Braziel and Mannur (2003: 6) see diasporic groups as the “paragons of the transnationalist moment”, Nyberg-Sørensen cautions that neither migration nor transnationalism are, or should be, treated as synonymous with diaspora. Similarly, Thomas Faist (2010: 13) points out that while the term diaspora usually “refers to a community or group” and “implies some sort of cultural distinctiveness” of the diaspora compared to the members of the society of the host nation(s) that the diasporic community resides in, “concepts such as transnationalism – and transnational spaces, fields and formations – refer more broadly to
processes that transcend international borders and, therefore, appear to describe more abstract phenomena” and are thus more open in their meaning than diaspora. According to Bradatan et al.'s (2010: 175) understanding of the terms, the main difference between a diasporic and a transnational individual is found in their attachment to, and association with, the two nations as expressed in their behaviour. A diasporic individual's primary (if not sole) attachment, so they argue, is to their country (and community) of origin. He or she may reside in the host country, his or her "soul" however remains in the country of origin and the sense of belonging to its national community serves as the more important source of the individual's social identity. A transnational individual on the other hand, Bradatan et al (2010: 174) explain, is someone "who participates equally in two different national communities" and whose identity is marked by a "double nationality". The transnational individual thus transcends the traditional idea and concept of nationality as being linked to only a single nation-state (2010: 174). Accordingly, “transnational migration”, as Glick Schiller et al. (1995: 48) propose, “is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement”. While Vertovec cautions that more research into the history of the transnational perspective is necessary (2001), Bradatan et al. suggest that in the US context “the history of transnationalism as a concept can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century” when academics like Rudolph Bourne (1916) argued that new immigrants to the United States should not be expected to lose their background in the assimilationist ‘melting pot’ to be accepted into society.

Sociological literature on transnationalism in the context of migration, so Vertovec points out, places much of its focus on how in their various contexts around the globe “people now live in social worlds that are stretched between, or dually located in, physical places and communities in two or more nation-states” (2001: 578). How individuals negotiate such ‘transnational social fields’ (Glick Schiller, 1992) or ‘multi-local life worlds’ (Vertovec, 2001) as well as the impact these practices have on identity construction and sense-making, is at the centre of much of the research and theory on this topic. Reflecting on her research on young Turkish transnationals living in Berlin, Çağlar states that transnationals “weave their collective identities out of multiple affiliations and positionings and link their cross-cutting
belongingness with complex attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, peoples, places and traditions beyond the boundaries of their resident nation-states (Çağlar, 2001: 609-610).

Sanaz Raji’s work (2010: 195) on Iranians living in the United States and the United Kingdom, for instance, describes the difficult balance this group has had to strike as they are “living in an indeterminate state of longing and reality” between wanting to fit in to be able to lead successful lives and to avoid stereotyping and discrimination but also wanting to maintain a sense of the identity and culture of the home they were (in many cases) forced to leave behind to escape religious prosecution. It is these types of precarious balances which individuals have to strike between both cultures that, according to Braziel and Mannur (2003: 5), are at the core of the hybridity that characterises transnational forms of identity and identity formation. Other research that highlights the potential struggles experienced by migrants who try to engage with both their country of origin’s and their host country’s culture, is Bell’s work on Polish migrants living in Northern Ireland (2016). While some of her interviewees describe the difficulties that they encountered when trying to form meaningful connections with people in Belfast, their accounts also show that maintaining a connection with the country they left behind, and which changes and develops in their absence, can pose a challenge to the migrant who is caught between several countries. Consequently, instead of the ideal case in which they seamlessly dip in and out of the two or more spaces with which they are connected and have the ability “to keep their feet in both places” (Levitt, 2003: 177), transnationals (may) at times experience feelings of not truly belonging in either or any place. This is an important issue to be mindful of in any exploration of transnationality to improve our understanding of what leads to such shifts in ability to negotiate transnational belonging and how migrants deal with and mend such fragmentations if or when they occur.

As there are no clear-cut and universally agreed upon definitions of either diaspora or transnationality (or identity for that matter), this remains a topic of much discussion and the various stances held by different social theorists tend to arise from the different key characteristics that are ascribed to a diasporic community. A very discerning point is made by Knott and McLoughlin (2010: 2) who recommend that as academics and social scientists we would do well to remember that "diaspora continues to have a meaning beyond the academy", and that what is needed is for us to invest more time and effort into exploring exactly what their experience means to the individuals and groups who live outside their
nation-state of origin. This is why, as Braziel and Mannur (2003: 5) state, contemporary academic work on diaspora increasingly seeks to “represent (and problematize) the lived experience” of diasporic individuals, and to do so in ways which appreciate and capture it “in all [its] ambivalences [and] contradictions”. I argue that the same applies for the concept of transnationality, and that an exploration of whether and how individuals who have moved from one country to another form transnational identities is important to accurately capture their lived experience. First-hand accounts such as those described above are of utmost importance and shed valuable insights into the reality of these groups’ experiences. As illustrated by this discussion of existing literature and ongoing debates, an important question to explore in the analysis of the accounts of Germans living in England is to what extent their accounts demonstrate practices as well as identities that transcend the very notion of the national and nationality, or whether they remain in a national framework and would be better understood as part of a German diaspora. But where should one draw the line between what groups constitute diasporas and can legitimately be referred to in this way? A person might have migrated and thus may have ceased to live a life contained within one polity and instead live in a transnational space but unless networks or connections are maintained with compatriots or the home country, should we refer to this person as part of a diaspora or as a transnational?

If we want to better understand not merely the experiences of individuals living outside their country of origin but want to also be able to distinguish whose experiences we should include in discussions of accounts of diasporic groups, there is the need for some more or less agreed upon defining features or at least sign-posts of what we would expect to find among the members of a diasporic community. While, as previously mentioned, no definitive consensus has been established thus far, Brubaker (2005: 5) - much like Bradatan et al (2010) - concludes that there are a number of "core elements that remain widely understood to be constitutive of diaspora". Some degree of dispersion across borders, he states, is one of these and it can quite confidently be said to be the criterion which enjoys the strongest degree of agreement among theorists. It is generally widely acknowledged that to be a diaspora a group of nationals need to have been dispersed to at least two other countries outside their nation of origin (Safran, 1991; Brubaker, 2005; Braziel and Mannur, 2003).
Secondly, there is the notion of a "homeland orientation" which serves as a "source of value, identity and loyalty" (Brubaker, 2005: 5). While some, such as for example Safran (1991) and Brubaker (2005) place a strong emphasis on the importance of this criterion, others, like Clifford (1994) and Mark-Anthony Falzon (2003) de-emphasize this point somewhat. Clifford's (1994) suggestion is that, a group's desire to maintain links among those who live in the diaspora is much more common and thus useful as a criterion than an expressed desire to return to the country of origin. Femke Stock (2010: 24) states that what lies at the heart of the idea of diaspora is "the image of a remembered home". Whether such a home has been left behind recently or never was one's own home but instead used to be the home of one's ancestors is important to the diasporic individual's own experience, but it is not however significant when it comes to deciding whether or not this person should be perceived as part of a diaspora. Regardless of the differences between these possible homes and networks what they do have in common however is that they are imagined communities, to use the terminology coined by Benedict Anderson (1991). What is suggested by this is that rather than being directly experienced and rooted in historical and empirical facts, they are maintained (and to a certain extent have been constructed) in the imagination and through the tales of their members.

Thus, a fundamental question which emerges from and through discourse of diaspora - and not merely among academics but diasporic individuals themselves - according to Avtar Brah is that of "when (...) a place of residence become[s] a home" (1996: 1). Similar to Stock's position, Brah (1996: 180) also proposes that a more flexible interpretation of this criterion is necessary and that such an interpretation should incorporate a more loosely phrased "homing desire which", so she argues, "is not the same thing as a desire for a homeland". What she refers to is the often-stated experience of diasporic groups of feeling that their sense of "home, belonging and identity is (...) perennially contested" (1996: 2). Therefore, a sense of longing for a place to belong to whilst not fully belonging anywhere could be understood as being characteristic of the diasporic experience. Such a more generous interpretation of the orientation towards an imagined home, it could be argued, takes into account the fluidity and multi-layeredness of identity markers among groups of people who are (to some degree at least) part both of their culture of origin and of that of the host society.
The third and final constitutive criterion that Brubaker puts forward is that of "boundary-maintenance". The importance of this point is quite widely shared among theorists (see for example Armstrong, 1976; Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997; Tölölyan, 1991) and refers to a diasporic group's practice of maintaining a certain degree of their "distinctive identity" in relation to the host societies they have settled in (Brubaker, 2005: 6). While Beine et al (2009: 2) propose that diasporic groups maintain their boundaries in a sufficient way to "constitute invisible nations that reside outside their origin countries" many others, such as Avtar Brah (1996) and Stuart Hall (1990) point to the cultural hybridity and multi-layeredness of identity which characterise the reality of the diasporic experience and suggest that while groups certainly do maintain some of their culture they also partake in the cultures of their host nations and so the cultural boundaries which they maintain are thus more blurred and fluid. What is of particular interest in light of this discussion is to explore and assess to what extent Germans living in the UK fit within the framework outlined above of diasporas and what constitutes them, or whether the accounts of their practices and identity transcend notions of national identification and would be more accurately captured within the concept of transnationality. A focus on particularly Brubaker’s criteria on what comprises diaspora, and the presence of discussions of transnational practices and identification in my interviewees’ understanding of home, belonging and their own sense of self in light of their respective histories, informs the analysis of these narrative.

2.6 Lifestyle migration, and the European and German context

Despite Cohen discussing European diasporas as part of historically significant imperialist diasporas, more extensive explorations of Intra-European migration and European diasporic communities, as O'Reilly (2000) stated only about a decade ago and had received less academic attention until then. This, she suggests, may be due to European (mostly white) migration being seen as far less problematic than migration from outside the Europe into its borders. However, this area of research has in fact prospered in recent decades. O'Reilly’s own work has provided valuable insights into, for instance, the British diasporic community living in the south of Spain. Her study paints a picture of a group consisting of retired and working-age co-ethnics, that is neither strongly integrated nor fully segregated from Spanish majority culture, which has created an active but loose community of belonging (2000). This
loose community, her work explains, is made up of British individuals who have permanently, semi-permanently and temporarily gone to the South of Spain as tourists which raises interesting questions regarding the nature of the levels of mobility displayed by these migrants.

Quantitative projects like Ettore Recchi’s and Adrian Favell’s (2009) work collating research on ‘pioneers of European integration’ which explored who ‘European movers’ are, why they migrate and what their levels of political participant and media practices are, provide a broad statistical overview of the situation. Included in this compendium and drawing on data from the European Internal Movers Social Survey (EIMSS) to explore questions of motivations, Santacreu et al. (2009), for instance, propose that romantic motivations have become increasingly important when describing the reasons why Europeans move across national borders. Similarly, Recchi concludes that “mobility driven by ‘expressive’ reasons like affective ties and the search for a better quality of life” have become more prominent among Western European migrants than the more traditional mobility on the grounds of economic reasons (Recchi, 2008: 219). He suggests that policies that foster EU citizens’ mobility, like the right to free movement and regulative policies that ensure the recognition of academic and professional qualifications across EU countries, rather than economic disparities between EU countries which have “slightly but constantly” decreased over the last three decades, have become instrumental in understanding intra-European migration. If we took into account only traditional theories of migration, which explain migratory movements largely through wealth inequalities, he argues, then intra-European migration should have declined as economic disparities between European countries decreased. However, instead, so Recchi’s argument goes, we have seen traditional migrations complemented by new kinds of migrations.

Also analysing EIMSS data, Braun and Arsene (2009) look into who European movers are and divide intra-European migrants into four clusters of, firstly, ‘late traditional migrants’ who conform with traditional ideas of migration for economic improvement mostly moving North from Southern Europe, and, secondly, ‘pure retirement migrants’ who mostly move in the opposite direction from Northern to more Southern parts of Europe in retirement. The third cluster, they call ‘pre-retirement migrants’ who are of working age and move to experience a different way of life as part of a lifestyle decision” (Favell and Recchi, 2009: 21),
and finally, ‘Eurostars’ is a term coined by Favell to describe highly mobile, (mostly) young and “fairly average middle-class professionals, who are often high achievers from modest backgrounds” (Favell, 2003: 20). His qualitative research explores how such European free movers make sense of their own identity and lives painting a picture of transnational, mobile group of Europeans each pursuing their own individualised idea of the ‘good life’ without being hemmed in by the fetters of national borders (Favell, 2003; 2008b). His research explores their experiences in different European metropoles, which he terms Eurocities, and concludes that London is the Eurocity, “the capital of Europe in many ways” (2008b: 30). Favell proposes that due to their high levels of mobility which is characterised by “temporariness and flexibility”, “their form of movement (...) is clearly very different to the standard migration/immigration story” (Favell, 2008b: 101; 100). London’s allure specifically, so he explains, is the dynamic business world, as well as the city being “a refuge from dull provinces, limited horizons, or overly protective family environments”. He therefore argues that London “offers the ‘outsider’ freedom of not belonging yet feeling at home, a place of comfortable anonymity” (2008b: 37).

A further example of this emerging field of research that has focussed on relatively privileged migrants are Jon Mulholland and Louise Ryan’s study of French migrants living in London (2013). Their research explored the network strategies of highly-skilled French individuals, as well as the perceived opportunities and obstacles of London to this group of business professionals and found that their networks were conducive to improving individuals’ career opportunities while also providing them with loose social ties. Anne-Marie Fortier’s ethnographic study into the UK’s Italian community (2000: 16) aim was “to uncover the constitutive potency of ‘betweenness’ in the formation of an Italian migrant belonging”. Her work paints a picture of this community as not merely being ‘between’ Italy and Britain but as a “three-way ‘amongstness’ (...) connected to Europe, Britain and Italy” which addresses interesting questions around identity construction and the multi-layered forms that these identifications can take. Considering my earlier mention of the significance of white privilege experiences of migration and mobility Fortier’s discussion of the ‘invisibility’ of this migrant group due to their ability to blend in, is particularly interesting. This invisibility, she explains, is something that is “both praised and a source of concern” among the participants of her research (2000: 72). “It is praised insofar as it stems from the identification of Italians
as Europeans” yet “is perceived as a source of concern insofar as one of the consequences of invisibility may be cultural assimilation” (Fortier, 2016: 72).

A field in the literature which overlaps with migration in the European context, as well as highly skilled migration more broadly, is that of lifestyle migration. This type of migration is defined by Benson and O’Reilly, who have been at the forefront of pioneering the research into the concept, as “a novel extension” to a phenomenon that goes back centuries (2009: 620). “It relates”, they propose,

“specifically to the relative economic privilege of individuals in the developed world, the reflexivity evident in post-/late modernity, the construction of particular places as offering alternative lifestyles, and a more general ease (or freedom) of movement” (2009: 620).

As such, it captures the experiences of relatively affluent migrants from predominantly the global North who move, not due to financial or political necessity but out of a desire to change their lifestyle and in doing so finding a ‘better way of life’ (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2016: 408). ‘Better’ in this context is to be understood in subjective terms as the lifestyle sought by such migrants is very much dependent on the specific things they believe their life is lacking prior to their move. The earlier-mentioned ethnographic research into British migrants living in the South of Spain carried out by O’Reilly (2000) is one example of work in this field. This study explored the experiences, habits and networks of British migrants “some [of whom] migrate temporarily, some more permanently”, and many of whom are retirees seeking a quieter pace of life in the sun. Benson’s (2010: 51) work on British migrants in the south of France also features accounts of retirees expressing a desire for “leisure and positive ageing” which motivated them to relocate, while other migrants of working age talked about a longing to “escape the rat race” and improve their work-life balance as a key motivating factor. Discussions of motivations and sense-making of the move, as well as explorations of network or community-building, are key themes in this field of migration literature.

One aspect of lifestyle migration literature that has been critically examined by some of the (prominent) contributors to the field, is its emphasis on individual agency which has led to a lack of attention being paid to structural factors that enable or constrain migrants who relocate in search of a different way of life. Reflecting on findings from their own
research projects on British retirees in Southern Spain, Oliver and O’Reilly (2010: 63) suggest that “there are ultimately limits to the possibilities” open to relatively wealthy migrants captured in lifestyle migration literature “of reinventing and transforming” their lives. Similarly, Benson and Osbaldiston point out that, while it is understandable that the agency of individual migrants features prominently in the discussion of empirical research in this area which is largely conducted using qualitative methods and, therefore, reports on interviewees’ accounts from their point of view, “that theories of individualism neglect important aspects of lifestyle migration” (2016: 411). The persistence of structural factors in the shaping of human experience is particularly apparent when the experiences and accounts of different migrant groups are compared. Nudrali and O’Reilly discuss some of the differences along class lines among British migrants in Turkey; between those who are able to move between Turkey and the UK because they still own property in the UK, and those who cannot because “they could not afford to go back even if they wanted to” (2009: 146; see also O’Reilly, 2007).

One’s background, then, does still matter and impacts on the experience of migrating and settling in the new country. There are, for instance, other white migrant groups who do not share similar experience and whose integration into their new environment has not been as smooth as those of the above-mentioned British, French and Italian groups of migrants. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the EU which brought twelve new member states into the union, led to racist commentary and behaviours that had thus far largely been targeted at non-white migrants being extended to Eastern Europeans as well. “[M]edia representations” in the UK tabloid press around this time, as Light and Young (2009: 293) point out, “reproduce[d] notions of hierarchies in ‘Europe’ – ‘West’ as good, ‘East’ as bad”. Their document analysis of tabloid media illustrates that the arrival of Polish migrants after the 2004 enlargement was used to stoke fear of an “incoming army of [more] cheap labourers” once Romania and Bulgaria were going to attain freedom of movement (Light and Young, 2009: 287). In their research on Romanian migrants to the UK, Moroșanu and Fox (2013) explore the effect such negative media representations have had on individuals who subject to them. Their work illustrates the strategies Romanian migrants employed to manage their stigmatised ethnic identity and disassociate from these negative stereotypes by “lessen[ing] the saliency of ethnicity” through a focus on personal achievements as virtues as
well as “reinforce[ing] the salience of ethnicity” but shifting the focus of such stereotyping to the Roma – a group to which they do not belong (2013:452).

Academic research on the experiences of Polish migrants, who unlike Romanians, as Light and Young (2009:291) conclude, have been “subject of both positive and negative representations” suggests that they too have to contend with the negative effect that being openly criticised and portrayed as a threat has on targeted migrant groups. Discussing the findings of her research into the experiences and perceptions of Polish migrants to the UK, Anne White (2011a: 147) explains that she “had the impression that interviewees were becoming more concerned about racism between [the interviews she conducted in] 2006 and 2009”. Her research shows the intricacies at play around migrants’ perceptions and ability to feel at home in their receiving country. In general, interviewees felt that British people were pleasant and polite” and their accounts of life in Britain showed that many felt able to settle and feel at home. However, they also expressed concern that some British people took issue with them being there. Likewise, Louise Ryan’s research on Polish migrants to the UK points to mixed experiences and a desire to disassociate when from “confronted by stereotypes and versions of their own ethnicity reflected back to them” (2010: 365).

The rather differing accounts of these migrant groups suggests that an exploration into under-researched European migrant groups is valuable and, especially considering the current political climate in the UK and the Western world more widely, highly interesting and of importance. The case of Germans living in the UK is of particular interest because of the relatively recent, complicated history these countries share. Furthermore, Germany, while it is the second biggest destination country of immigration among the nations that make up the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD), it is also one of the main countries within the OECD from which individuals emigrate (OECD, 2015). According to the OECD, around 3.4 million people who had been born in Germany were living in another OECD country in 2011, making it the fifth largest country of emigration in the OECD. The country with the highest number of German emigrants is the United States where about 1.1 million are resident, followed by Great Britain and Switzerland where around 270,000 have settled respectively (OECD, 2015). The OECD further records that a stable number of around 140,000 Germans leave the country every year, while a consistent amount of around 15% of Germans report that they would like to leave the country permanently or for a time (OECD, 2015). This
suggests that there is a noteworthy proportion of Germans who wish they could live abroad and a somewhat smaller but equally stable number of people who act (or have acted) on this desire.

Literature on Germans does not, however, make up a great amount of the discussions and debates in the field of either migration, or transnationalism studies and research. Considering that there have been and continue to be people of German ancestry who likely retain at least some level of attachment to their German heritage around the globe (particularly in neighbouring European countries, as well as North and South America), it is not surprising that there does exist a small yet significant amount of published works. Much of this, however, is specifically from the field of linguistics and social linguistics while a smaller amount is from within sociology or cultural studies (for example Fuller, 2001; Skidmore, 2003). Research on the motivations of skilled German migrants which was conducted by Verwiebe et al. (2010: 273), found that “for Germans with intermediate qualifications, economic factors’ like unemployment, falling wages and the promise of better working conditions in other EU countries were the dominant reasons to move internationally. They explain that German federal statistics show that an increasing number of emigrants leave Germany for other European destinations. Concentrating on the case of Germans living in Britain it is interesting that despite the fact that, as Panayi (1991: 11) points out, until 1891 “Germans constituted the largest single immigrant group”, there are only a few studies which focus on German migration to Britain. The main reasons that the literature suggests why Germans in previous centuries moved to Britain were either economic in nature or due to political or religious persecution in Germany. Over the centuries, they thus played vital roles in commerce and, as Kellenbanz (cited in Panayi, 1991: 10) ”an important part in English scientific life”.

The First World War, however, disrupted the largely harmonious relationship German exiles and immigrants enjoyed with their host society, leading Panayi to conclude that “few immigrant communities in Britain have experienced the scale of hatred which [they] endured” during this time in history (1991: 1). As a result, a previously flourishing immigrant community which sustained its own churches, charities, social and cultural clubs as well as a hospital, yet at the same time mingled and intermarried with Britons, was reduced to poverty (due to many losing employment on the basis of their nationality) and became increasingly invisible with
organisations either closing (some voluntarily, others as they were forced to do so (Yarrow, 1990: 101)) or significantly decreasing in popularity and numbers (Yarrow, 1990).

Weber-Newth and Steinert’s (2006) more recent study into German migration to Britain in the time immediately after the Second World War is based on archived documents, newspapers and “nearly 80 biographically oriented interviews with German migrants” who came to this country in the post-war era. They paint a picture of a German work force actively recruited by the British government – in part to fill “gaps in [industries of] the labour market” which were unappealing to Britons, but also due to their whiteness which was deemed easier to assimilate into society (2006: 190). Weber-Newth and Steinert’s respondents were made up of ex-prisoners of war, so-called ‘war brides’ who followed British soldiers who they had fallen in love with while they were stationed in Germany and individuals who had lost their livelihoods during the war and wanted to improve their economic situation. Many achieved this goal and were able to lead comfortable, if modest, lives. However,

“[n]early all talked about having experienced anti-German feelings, attitudes and opinions of one type or another, particularly during the first 20 years. Some downplayed it, but most took it very seriously and remembered it as a highly unpleasant experience. (…) As a result, for many years the majority had made an effort not to appear German, some even to the point of denying their nationality.” (Weber-Newth and Steinert, 2006: 165)

And they point out that half a century later, most of their respondents still felt that they did ‘not really belong’. The only other recent work on Germans in the UK is Dorothea Müller’s (2014) research situated in the field of human geography on young Germans, their practices of visiting friends and relatives in Germany, and views of ‘home’ which, as she proposes, are ambivalent. She distinguishes between those who visited and were visited by friends and family in Germany whom she refers to as ‘bi-local migrants’, those who had previously lived in another country and were visiting and being visited by friends and family in several countries as ‘multi-local migrants’, and finally, ‘settled migrants’ who had lived in the UK for longer times whose visits to and from friends and relatives were less frequent.

Writing about the perceptions of Germany and Germans in Britain, Ruth Wittlinger (2004: 453) claims that while the relationship between the two countries has “by and large
become] friendly” at the political level, “perceptions of Germany and the Germans [among the wider British society] are for the most part negative” and infers that ‘kraut-bashing’ may be “the only form of racism in Britain which is still considered socially acceptable”. However, many of the sources she draws upon to provide evidence for this claim and the deleterious effect she suggests it has on Germans living in the UK, are journalistic pieces (published in broadsheet papers in Germany and the UK), rather than academic research that is transparent about its methods, the representativeness of its data and the generalizability of the resultant findings. This suggests that research which explores how Germans living in the UK perceive they are viewed by Britons would be useful in assessing the validity of Wittlinger’s claims.

2.7 Conclusion

As demonstrated by this discussion, research into the experiences of Germans who are living in the UK is important and sociologically interesting for a number of reasons. German migrants being an under-researched group is one, while the complicated history between Germany and Britain makes German migration to the UK particularly interesting. This is especially the case, as outlined above, in light of past research on Germans in Britain (Panayi, 1991; Yarrow, 1990) which talks of hostility and animosity, and Wittlinger’s claims regarding British views on Germany and Germans which suggest that German migrants to the UK still suffer anti-German sentiments and discrimination. Also, recent developments in the UK, namely the referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union which is likely to be a tumultuous time for EU migrants living in the country, are further reason why this research is a timely contribution to knowledge. In addition, considering my earlier point that much of the literature on motivations behind individuals’ decision to migrate focuses on migration from economically-weaker to economically-stronger countries, the case of Germans moving to the UK and investigating what the reasons for such a move may be, strengthens the currently less-wealthy available evidence base.

This absence of wealth inequalities between the country of origin and destination makes the concept of lifestyle migration a highly useful one to draw on to best capture and understand the motivations and experiences of Germans moving to the UK. As the earlier discussion has shown, this literature focuses on migrations by individuals who relocate internationally for reasons other than economic or political necessity and is therefore well-
placed to elucidate the findings of this study. Furthermore, the discussion on transnationality and diasporas illustrates the appropriateness and necessity to make use of these concepts to understand the nature of German migrants’ relationship to their country of origin and settlement. Consequently, both concepts are drawn upon in the critical task of exploring how the participants’ sense of national and transnational attachments are most accurately captured and understood to strengthen the evidence of existing literature on European migration with the case study of this under-researched group. In order to capture an accurate and in-depth picture of not only the experiences but also perceptions of identity of Germans living into the UK a crucially important line of enquiry was thus to explore to what extent their accounts of both their own conception of their identity and their practices suggest a diasporic or a transnational sense of identity. Do they, for example, view themselves as Germans living in exile or do they perceive themselves as belonging equally to Germany and the United Kingdom, or do they regard themselves simply as Europeans who have moved to a different part of Europe? Linked to this question is the question of how prominent a desire for an eventual return to the homeland is and if it does not feature significantly in people’s accounts what the reasons behind this might be? In addition, finding out about the importance that individuals give to maintaining ties to other Germans - both to those residing in Germany and in other parts of the world - and particularly with other Germans living in the UK also would be hugely insightful when seeking to ascertain whether they ought to be referred to as a diasporic community. The findings gained from this case study thus serve to inform debates within the fields of sociology and transnationalism but beyond that might also be insightful for discussions around citizenship and European studies.

As outlined above, in today’s ‘liquid’ modernity where identity and one’s life course is not – as was previously the case – prescribed by the randomness of where, as who and into what socio-economic context one was born into, identity is the ‘reflexive project of the self’ (Giddens, 1991). As such identity cannot or should not be taken for granted and questions about changing notions of identification following a life-change like migration is of huge importance in order to better understand the impact that migration has on the individual who goes on this journey. This suggests that, lastly, investigating “how far the institutions” of the European Union and the European project of integration “can go in shaping the identities” of its citizens to see whether we can talk of a European community or European common
identity, is a worthwhile venture – particularly in these current turbulent times a mere decade after the crisis of the European currency and while the UK is preparing to leave the European Union.
3. Research Design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology and design of the research on which this thesis is based. Firstly, I will briefly reiterate the research questions which were the starting point of this enquiry and then, secondly, outline this research project’s ontological and epistemological background and how this shaped the qualitative research design. Thirdly, the rationale for the selection of semi-structured individual interviews as the method of data collection is discussed before I explain the conduct of these interviews themselves, including a discussion of the sampling, recruitment and resulting group of participants, as well as the design of research tools and the conduct and analysis of the interviews. Finally, I discuss my positionality and how this is likely to have affected the research, and the ethical considerations which have shaped the research from the conception of the research guide to the writing up of the findings generated.

Due to the significance of the referendum on the membership of the UK in the EU which was promised by David Cameron if the Conservatives were re-elected, it is important to point out that the first fifteen interviewees were interviewed before the general election on the 7th May 2015 (many of whom considered it unlikely that the Conservatives would be re-elected), while the remaining twenty-eight were interviewed after this event. Being interviewed before this general election, which proved to be critical for EU citizens living in the UK, may have thus affected how urgent the issue of the referendum felt to respondents at the point of being interviewed. While there was less discussion and anxiety about the Brexit referendum and what it may mean for their right to remain in the country among these first fifteen interviewees, there was a noticeable rise in concerns being voiced by participants once it was clear that a referendum would be held.

3.2 Brief Restatement of Research Questions

The research project this thesis is based on was a case study which set out to explore the lived experiences of contemporary first generation German migrants to the United Kingdom. Case studies, as Bruce Berg suggests, are a method for “systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the
researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions” (2007: 283) and this case study sought to improve our understanding of the lives and experiences of the German population who are formally resident in the UK. The main research questions were as follows.

- Considering Germany’s economic strength and wealth, what is it that motivates Germans to settle in the UK – how significant are push-, pull- and network factors in this decision?

- What is the lived experience of Germans residing in the UK (considering the history of their country of origin and chosen host country)?

- What are the perceptions of (cultural) identity among Germans living in the UK and where do they feel they belong?

- To what extent can Germans who are living in the UK be understood as part of an emerging transnational civic culture facilitated by the European project of integration? How much do respondents identify with Europe or wider cosmopolitan world views?

3.3 Ontological and Epistemological Position

As these research questions illustrate, this study sought to explore the in-depth and subjective experiences and perceptions of German nationals who are living in the UK. Therefore, the mode of enquiry which was utilised needed to be qualitative in nature (Bryman, 2008). Qualitative research is underpinned by an interpretivist epistemology which may be illustrated quite effectively by a well-known quotation by William Isaac Thomas (1949: 301) who states that “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” which suggests that it is individuals’ perception – their subjective truth – that is of importance in the study of social reality. So as Jennifer Mason (2005: 63) points out, qualitative research comes from the “ontological position (...) that people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions” are sociologically interesting and valuable in explaining the social world of which they form part. Due to its groundedness "in the lived experience of people", as Marshall and Rossman (2006: 2) point out, qualitative research is in its very nature a pragmatic and interpretive approach to the study of social reality, which
purposefully allows the study’s subjects a greater degree of control over the data that is being collected than would a deductive approach most commonly adopted in quantitative research designs. Unlike quantitative research, which is most likely underpinned by a positivist approach, qualitative research thus employs an inductive approach to the process of data production and collection (Silverman, 2005; Bryman, 2008; Gilbert, 2008). This means that rather than starting off with a hypothesis which seeks to falsify an existing theory through challenging and testing it by carrying out rigorous research, studies using an inductive approach seek to (as much as possible) let theoretical concepts emerge from the data - this approach can be described as bottom-up rather than top-down. “Inductive reasoning”, as Roulston (2010:150) points out, is thus much more open to “topics that have been initiated by participants” than a more standardised deductive approach is likely to be.

The suitability of a qualitative approach is supported by the increasing academic interest and some of the previously discussed research into migrant and diasporic groups which employed qualitative approaches due their unique ability to provide us with deep insights into groups and communities from their own perspectives. Fortier’s research into the Italian community (2000), as an example, employed a variety of qualitative methods as she carried out semi-structured interviews with Italian community leaders, conducted participant observations and analysed documents such as booklets and periodicals published by and for the Italian community in England and was able to capture some of the experiences and the sense of ‘in-betweenness’ which characterises the life of this community. White’s research on Polish migrants in the UK (2011a) and her work on return and double return migrants (2011b, 2016) utilised semi-structured interviews to generate knowledge on the experiences and opinions of Poles residing in the UK as well as in Poland. Thus, she was able to capture the thoughts of successful, return, double return migrants, as well as potential migrants on moving to Britain. Other studies include Louise Ryan’s work on London’s Polish community (2010, 2011) which were conducted using semi-structured interviews, focus groups and informant interviews and explored (amongst other things) the importance of social capital and network to the individuals’ and group’s experiences of settling into their new environment. Further examples include Louise Ryan and Jon Mulholland’s research into London’s French community of highly skilled professionals (2013) which was conducted using interviews and one focus group, Myria Georgiou’s focus group research into Arab
communities in European capital cities (2012), as well as Cypriots living in London (2001) which places an emphasis on the interplay of media practices and identity (see also Naficy; 2001, 2003) and Karen O’Reilly’s ethnographic study of the British community in the south of Spain (2000). Each of these studies provides an in-depth insight into the experiences and thoughts of individuals within the researched groups of migrants which only a qualitative, interpretivist approach would have been able to provide. Nonetheless, Adrian Favell (2008b: 702) suggests that further micro level work on what migration within Europe is like for individuals and groups – “the lives, experiences and networks” – is needed in order to reveal the ‘human face’ of these migrations which statistics are unable to provide. This is particularly the case considering the UK’s plan to cease being a member of the EU and the ongoing negotiations regarding what the country’s future relationship with the EU is going to be, because EU citizens living in England and UK citizens living in another EU member state are likely to be acutely affected by the outcomes of these negotiations.

Another (very practical) consideration which led to a qualitative approach being adopted was the impossibility of conducting high-quality quantitative research to answer the research questions. This is because in order to carry out quantitative research capable of producing results which can be used to infer to the population, a much larger number of cases (than would have been possible to include in a research study of this scale and funding) would have been necessary (Bryman, 2008; Fielding and Gilbert, 2006). In addition, in order to use probability sampling there would have needed to be a clear sampling frame (De Vaus, 1991) from which respondents would need to be randomly selected. In the case of Germans in the UK this simply was not available to me. Given these restrictions and my interest in individuals’ perceptions of the social world that surrounds them, choosing to carry out a small-scale qualitative study and using a non-probability sampling method was much more suitable than carrying out non-generalisable quantitative research, and was thus more likely to yield sociologically interesting, reliable and utilizable results.

While findings generated using this approach do not constitute generalisable data, they seek to have external validity and to very much add nuance, depth and intricate detail to the kind of inferential statistics that quantitative research produces, because interviewees have the “freedom to express things” in their own words and from their own perspective (Adams and Cox, 2008: 18). This allows for the respondents’ own subjective associations and
meanings to come to the forefront, enabling “deeper understandings and insights into complex (...) phenomena, as they occur within particular contexts” (Plantanida and Garman, 1999: 132). These inherently subjective and contextual accounts cannot be used to infer to populations in the way that probabilistic statistical analyses can. Ritchie and Lewis however suggest that as long as one remains fully aware of the limitations of a qualitative study it may be possible to a certain degree to make general statements (or suggestions) about the "parent population" that one's participants are part of ('representational generalisation'), or "about other settings in which similar conditions to those studied may exist (inferential generalisation)" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 277). In addition, as they point out, qualitative researchers aim to make a "contribution to generating or enhancing ideas and theories (theoretical generalisation)" with the findings they have made in the specific setting of their study (see also Wesley, 2010; Bryman, 2008; Mason, 2005).

So while this project did not set out to produce generalisable findings it does aim for a substantial degree of external validity and seeks to make a substantive contribution to the knowledge we have of Germans in the UK in particular ('representational generalisation') and indeed to the wider debates on transnational identities, intra-European migration and modernity by identifying new insights gained from a very contextualised setting and identifying wider concepts and themes ('theoretical generalisation').

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Rationale behind Method Selection

There are a number of ways in which qualitative data can be produced and collected. So, once I had answered the question of which epistemological position my research would stem from, there were further choices to be made and one of these was to decide which qualitative method or combination of methods to employ. A choice between the different modes of data collection (see Mason, 2005) needed to be made based on a careful consideration of which were believed to be most likely to yield data that would enable me to find answers to my research questions and to achieve internal validity.

The method of interviewing in general, and semi-structured individual face-to-face interviewing in this specific case, lends itself to this study for easily recognizable reasons.
Qualitative interviews give individuals the opportunity to put their thoughts, experiences and opinions into their own words. It is their own interpretation of events and situations that crystallizes when this method is being used and as such gives them a certain degree of power control over the narrative that is being created (see Oakley, 1981). While focus groups would certainly also have been an option given the relatively low likelihood of sensitivity of the topic of discussion, carrying out individual interviews, I believe, was more likely to result in more in-depth information to be collected on each individual included in the study. This is because I was interested in hearing as much as possible about each participant’s own account of their individual experience and was more likely to achieve that in a face-to-face interview. Thus, I would have likely collected fragments of participants’ stories if I had conducted the research using focus group interviews. I also feared that respondents were likely to be relatively dispersed across the South East of England and that this might have meant that focus groups would either have needed to be quite small in size or might have required a substantial amount of travelling on behalf of the respondents which may have been too much of a sacrifice on their time considering that they volunteered their time in order to contribute to my study. This certainly proved correct for the respondents who were located outside of Greater London. While about three-quarters of the participants of this study lived in London and therefore were reasonably close to each other geographically, individual interviews still proved a better choice from a practical point of view as many respondents liked to arrange a time to meet up at rather short notice while others cancelled and rescheduled. Individual interviews were therefore much more manageable due to their relative flexibility compared to group interviews.

However, there are of course limits to how much we can find out about the social world using interviews. By asking individuals for their views and experiences we can only ever find out what their current recall of events and past feelings are. In addition, it is important to remain aware of the fact that the accounts which they are prepared to share with me as a social researcher are also going to be limited to the information that they would want to reveal about themselves (‘social desirability bias’). In an attempt to make each participant feel as comfortable as possible to voice their opinions whatever they may be, I made it clear to them that I would not judge them and that their contributions to the project would be anonymised. In addition, I also made sure that whenever I spoke to participants
before their interview, I avoided any small talk on issues that could lead them to think that I would disagree with their views. A banal throwaway comment such as “Sorry I’m a few minutes late – public transport in this country is terrible” could have, for example, contributed to an impression of what my opinion of living in the UK was and was therefore something I intentionally avoided.

Due to the nature of my research questions, which sought to find answers about Germans as individuals (the individuals’ motivations to relocate) as well as a community (the strength of connections and attachment within the (diasporic) group) to then connect these to “larger social, economic and political” issues (Back, 2007: 23), I would have liked to utilize a combination of qualitative methods. However, due to issues around access I was not able to include existing documents in the form of discussion threads publicly available on the Deutsche in London Internet forum. I considered the existence of the online Deutsche in London forum which contains over a decade’s worth of discussions a valuable data resource that I did not want to ignore. Unfortunately, however, when I contacted the site’s administrators they advised me that I would only be able to use discussion threads on the website in my analysis if I contacted each contributor to any discussion I was interested in directly and received a positive response from all of them. As identifying each user and entering into dialogue with them would have been too time-consuming within this project’s time-frame, I sadly had to abandon this idea. The reason I decided against pursuing the participant observations was mostly to with my positionality as a student living outside of London. Once I started the research and conducted some participant observations I found that I did not easily blend into the groups present at the regular socials that take place in Central London. While everyone I encountered was very friendly and I was included in conversations, I found it difficult to contribute much to discussions because – unlike everyone else there – I was a student and had little detailed knowledge of London and therefore struggled to engage with them on the work life and London based issues they discussed. I therefore concluded that blending in and being a participant rather than a spectator in their meetings was not easily achievable for me. Hence, the only method that was used to collect the data which is presented in this work are semi-structured in-depth interviews.
3.4.2 Sampling and Recruitment

Due to the qualitative nature of the research questions the sampling method used to identify participants was purposive, and also contained a significant element of snowballing as interviewees put me in touch with German work colleagues, friends and acquaintances who fulfilled the selection criteria (as outlined below) and who they thought might be interested in taking part. When employing purposive sampling, which is a non-probability method, “participants are selected for inclusion in a study on the basis of (...) particular characteristic[s]” which are relevant to the research question(s) at hand (Gilbert, 2008: 511). Thus, the selection criteria followed very closely from the earlier outlined research objectives. In order to meet the selection criteria, potential interviewees needed to be German citizens who had moved to the UK themselves. That is to say that due to the first research questions which seeks to understand motivations for people’s relocation from Germany to the UK only first generation German immigrants were asked to be part of the sample. Also, interviewees needed to be eighteen years of age or above and they had to have been resident in the UK for a minimum of six months. In addition, and to demarcate the sample geographically only Germans who at the point of being approached were living in the South East of England were interviewed for this study. The only exception among the participants where not all the above criteria were met was an interviewee who was reached via snow-ball sampling and who – despite being sent the recruitment material – agreed to be interviewed even though she arrived in the UK as a child and therefore could not report on reasons for this move. She did, however, suggest that I additionally interview her mother, whom I visited a few weeks later. Apart from this mother–daughter relationship among the participants, and two married couples who wanted to be interviewed, all remaining interviews were carried out with individuals who did not know of any other participants intimately. The sampling method used in this pilot stage of the research also was purposive convenience sampling as I approached acquaintances of mine who as ‘go-betweens’ (see Bulmer, 2008; Heath et al, 2004) put me in touch with Germans who had moved to the UK and were currently living in the South East of England. One respondent lived in Guildford, another in Southampton and the third was living in London.

There are no areas or regions in the UK where Germans form a sizeable amount of the population. The highest recorded population density of Germans relative to their locality,
according to the 2011 Census, was in Kensington and Chelsea, yet even in this area they make up only 1.7 percent of the population (Office for National Statistics, 2013). The French residents of Kensington and Chelsea in comparison make up 5.1% of this population while Americans make up 4.1% (Spanish 2%; Italian 3.2%; Australian 1.3%). Likewise, in Richmond upon Thames which has a German nursery, school and college Germans amount only to 1.1 percent of the district’s population. In most other places around the country Germans rarely make up more than 0.2 of the population (the only places apart from the above mentioned where their numbers are above the one percent threshold are Cambridge, 1.5%; City of London, 1.4%; Camden 1.3%; Westminster, 1.3%; Kingston upon Thames 1.2%; Oxford, 1.2%; Merton, 1.1%; and Wandsworth 1.1%). One thing that I could (cautiously) deduce from these findings is that it looks like Germans who live in the UK seem to settle predominantly in the south of England and in relatively affluent places. While these areas could be seen as an indication of the social class or status of some (if not many) of the respondents, this proved to only be partially accurate as many of the participants who got in touch also lived in less affluent boroughs like Peckham, Tower Hamlets and Hounslow. Most of the respondents were educated to university level. However, it is important to be aware that many of them acquired this qualification in Germany where most university students do not pay tuition fees, while maintenance loans are available. As a result, this does not necessarily indicate a wealthy background.

Nevertheless, the current situation – that is to say, the current job and living situation – of many of the participants suggested that they were reasonably financially secure and of a medium to high socio-economic status. To put the above quoted percentages of Germans living in localities in the UK into a wider perspective, other national groups regularly make up an at least slightly larger proportion of the places where they settle. Pakistanis, for example, quite regularly make up around and above 2% of the respective populations (Slough, 2.7%; Newham, 2.6%; Redbridge 2.3%) and Poles, while generally dispersed, appear to be more concentrated in certain towns and areas as they make up 6% of Slough’s population and 6.2% of Ealing’s population. The German residents living in the UK in comparison appear to be rather more dispersed suggesting that the importance of ethnic networks may be less pronounced than those among other migrant groups, which may in part be due to their
smaller overall population size relative to other migrant groups like for instance Pakistanis or Poles (ONS, 2015).

There were, however, a number of sites that I identified as suitable to recruit potential participants. While I had initially hoped that I would be able to reach Germans through leaflets in the German embassy, my attempts to gain permission to do so proved unsuccessful. The main advantage of recruiting participants through the German embassy, which could not be realised, would have been that it was likely to result in the least biased sample achievable without probability sampling. This is because whereas recruiting participants through for example the Internet forum and German stores was likely to only capture Germans who take an interest in cultivating some degree of Germanness (or indeed the nurturing of regional or local attachments) in their life here, we would not have known anything about a person who is recruited at the German embassy apart from the fact that they must be a German citizen. As few (if any) other research studies on migrant groups have recruited participants in this way, however, its disadvantage would have been that when analysing the findings and wanting to compare them to the findings of these other studies of immigrant or diasporic groups it would not have been possible to ascertain whether differences between my findings and those of other studies in relation to the importance of maintaining ties with the home country were a result of diasporic Germans being in some way unique or simply due to the difference in recruitment. Therefore, a Sussex-based German Saturday School and two German deli stores in London (Southwark and Stratford), as well as two bakeries in Greater London were the sites where recruitment leaflets were displayed. In addition, I posted on the above mentioned Deutsche in London Internet Forum as well as a Germans in South England group on Facebook to reach more potential participants.

The German Deli store in Southwark was the most successful recruitment site, which means that most of the individuals reached found out about the research as a result of their desire to purchase some German food while they are living in the UK. Food as Warde (1997) and Inthorn (2007) point out is important to identity and many respondents being recruited through their consumption of German food is thus interesting. So, as many of the respondents were recruited through flyers placed in German food places, it is not surprising that many discussed their love for food, and in particular food that they grew up with. However, since the high concentration of people with an interest in consuming Germans occasionally or
regularly in this study is a direct consequence of the recruitment strategy, this has not been treated as a genuine finding in the discussion of subsequent chapters. While I reasoned that individuals recruited through the Deutsche in London network were most likely to be professionals living and working in London, the handful of participants recruited via this online site was more varied and included Erik – a student – and Teresa, who was about to retire to the South Coast. Only one individual was recruited through the Saturday School in East Sussex. Many more had initially expressed an interest to take part in the research. However, practicalities – such as their busy lives, as well as their weekly term-time meetings and my reliance on public transport – made it difficult to visit this recruitment site often enough to remind those potential interviewees about getting in touch with me to arrange an interview.

I designed flyers which contained information about the study and how people could take part as well as what their voluntary participation would look like, whilst I was still carrying out analytical work on the data produced from the pilot study which I had carried out in the summer of 2013. All the recruitment material was printed in German, which is likely to have had an influence on which language potential participants used when getting in touch with me and in their interview. While I had initially hoped to print the recruitment material in both English and German, this proved impractical as the amount of information that needed to be included in it made it impossible to print dual-language flyers. As all potential interviewees were going to be able to read and understand German, I made the decision to print and distribute these in German.

3.5 The participants

In total, forty-three individuals were interviewed for this study – three of these were pilot interviews which were conducted in June 2013; the remaining forty interviews were carried out between February and July 2015 (see A.7 in the appendices for further detail on participants). Twelve of these interviewees were male, while thirty-one were female. There is thus a clear dominance of the voices of women who moved from Germany to the UK. The age of respondents varied greatly as their ages ranged from 21-year-old au-pair Nele to 76-year-old pensioner Evelyn, while the majority of respondents were aged between 34 and 50. The interviews were about an hour and twenty minutes on average with the shortest lasting around forty-two minutes and the longest lasting about two hours and twenty minutes. All
participants were white and most held German as their only nationality. Most of the participants would fall under what Conradson and Latham (2005: 290) refer to as ‘middling’ migrants “if we understand middling in terms of socio-economic and class position in a country of origin” while Smith (2005:8) defines “middling trans-national actors” as individuals who inhabit “more or less middle class or status position” in both their home country and immigration country.” While many of the participants of this study arrived in the UK without much money and qualifications and (as will be discussed in more depth in the subsequent chapter) in fact chose the UK because it was the most affordable English-speaking country to travel to and settle in, they have gained qualifications and progressed in careers since moving the country. Nevertheless, few of them would be categorised as part of the upper middle class or elite and while a small number of them owned the place they lived in, most rented. The few dual citizens who took part in this research had a second citizenship either from the UK (some from birth other through naturalisation), from Israel, the Czech Republic or Romania.

I gave all participants pseudonyms and tried to ensure that they were appropriate for their age and background, choosing more traditional names for older participants and more modern names for younger ones. To avoid confusion, I also tried to make sure that none were too similar. Furthermore, to make reading this work easier for non-German speaking readers, I chose names that are fairly frequently used in Germany which I believe are relatively straightforward to pronounce without knowledge of German spelling and pronunciation.

3.6 Development of Research Tools and Conduct of Pilot Interviews

While I was reviewing the existing literature on topics relevant to my research project I was already beginning to draw up possible questions that could become part of the interview guide and during June 2013 I then carried out a small number of pilot interviews. As would be expected with any research project, there was then a certain element of deduction involved in the design of the research as some of the key literature on, for example, diaspora transnationalism research and theory was consulted. Since I aimed to get respondents’ views on topics which would be sociologically interesting and relevant this literature informed the design of the interview guide (A.1 and A.2 in the appendices). This, as Thomas Schwandt (2001:125) argues, is quite commonly observed in qualitative inquiry since social researchers’
empirical work in most cases is informed by “substantive theories from prior research” and literature which are then used to make sense of and place the new data within the existing literature. Similarly, Alan Bryman points out that such blurring of the inductive – deductive divide is increasingly common and acknowledged, and can thus be seen to reflect the “growing maturity of the strategy” of qualitative approaches to social research (2008:373).

Before any of these pilot interviews were carried out the preliminary interview guide, a participant information sheet and consent form were drawn up in English. These interviews were carried out in the interviewees' respective work places and audio-recorded. Carrying out these pilot interviews served a couple of purposes. Most importantly, they were conducted to test how well developed the interview guide was. So, on a very practical level, these pilot interviews were being carried out in order to get an idea of the kinds of responses that participants might give to particular questions and to give me the opportunity to change or adapt individual questions, as well as the order in which questions were asked in the remaining interviews and to identify where further probing questions may be of use. Reflecting on their usefulness in the design of the research I certainly think that doing a small-scale pilot helped to inform and refine the interview schedule, gave some insights into the kinds of topics that were salient for participants and more generally gave me a better idea of how using semi-structured interviews was going to work in practice when asking people questions about their move to and life in the UK. As a result of the findings and conclusions of the pilot interviews the interview guide was then reviewed and slightly modified by the addition and deletion of some prompts.

3.7 Conducting the research

3.7.1 Conducting the interviews

While it was possible in the pilot interviews to visit most respondents in their workplaces this was not the case for most of the remaining interviews. Although I was aware that there may be risks involved in going to strangers' homes, I was prepared to visit them where they lived to carry out the interviews because I took appropriate precautions. The main reason why I found it important to offer to interview individuals in their own home was that I believe most people are likely to feel most at ease in familiar surroundings and are thus likely to be forthcoming, confident and open during the interviews. In addition, I also wanted to
ensure that the interviewees experienced the least amount of inconvenience possible and requiring a person to travel to a separate location was likely to mean that I take up more of their time and resources which I wanted to avoid. When discussing with the potential participant where to conduct the interview I mentioned the importance of the need for relative silence to ensure that the recording of the interview would be successful. Similar to what Yee and Andrews (2006) discuss in relation to their research, one issue that I realised quite early on once I began interviewing participants in their homes was the lack of control I had over who was present and what noises might end up interrupting or complicating the interview recording. I was, as they describe, “unable to control who was present, or the length and conditions of the interview” (Yee and Andrews, 2006: 404). These ‘conditions’ ranged from a partner or children entering the room in which the interviewee and I were sitting, to a cat sitting down in between the interviewee and me and meowing into the recording device, as well as washing machines’ spinning cycles making it difficult to understand each other and, therefore, were situations that I needed to deal with ‘in situ’. Sometimes I was able to continue the interview with the background noise, but in other situations – most importantly when a respondent’s children were hungry, or a diaper needed to be changed – the interview was paused, and I made small-talk with the participant and their family members if they were around.

As the leaflet through which most of the respondents found out about the study was in German, the majority of them contacted me in German and this remained the dominant language with which we communicated before, during and after their interview. Of the forty-three interviews, only nine were conducted in English. Regardless of which language the communication in the run-up to the interview was conducted in, I made each interviewee aware that it was their choice which language they would rather be interviewed in and reassured them that irrespective of which language they chose they should feel free to switch between languages whenever it became more convenient in their interview. Nearly all interviewees switched between languages occasionally. For instance, among those who were interviewed in German, many needed to draw on English words when describing scenarios from work as they lacked the terminology in German. While such a dual language approach may have made the process of transcribing and analysing the data more time-consuming, I wanted to ensure that I made every participant feel as much at ease as possible and did not
want to risk missing out on valuable data due to a participant feeling he or she could not adequately express a thought or discuss an event using either English or German.

As the interviews were all semi-structured, an interview guide with pre-formulated questions was devised in both English and German (see A.1 and A.2 in the appendices). There was, however, a great amount of flexibility on my part as the researcher to, firstly, abandon the order in which questions were asked and, secondly, to rephrase or leave out certain questions altogether as well as to, thirdly, spontaneously ask probing questions that follow up on things the respondent decided to talk about. With only a small number of exceptions, the interviews carried out as part of this study nonetheless generally followed a similar pattern. In the first instance, I told the interviewee a little bit about myself, why I was carrying out this research, and discussed the aims of the study to the interviewee. This was done to avoid starting the interview 'cold' (see Berg, 2007) and helped the interviewee to feel comfortable and at ease as the interview itself was then more likely to be experienced as a continuation of an already started conversation. As a next step, the interviewee and I went through the information sheet to ensure that each participant was taking part in this study as fully informed as possible about what their role in this research project would be and what their rights are. Before asking them to sign the consent form (see A.5 and A.6 in the appendices) I gave each interviewee the opportunity to ask any further questions that they might have. Once the consent form had been signed, I reminded them that I was interested in their personal experience and assured them that there therefore were no wrong answers to any of the questions I was about to ask. Then the recording device was turned on and the interview itself began.

In order to give the interviewee a relaxed start to the interview, the first questions were ‘warm-up’ questions about themselves to help the interviewee become more comfortable to talk (Harvard, 2016). In the first instance, I asked each participant to tell me a bit about themselves and their life in Germany, which often led to them mentioning their move to the UK. Where interviewees did not start talking about their move without prompting, I posed questions about this when it seemed they had said all they felt was relevant about their life in Germany. Asking participants to recount their own migration experience was done in the hope that it would remind the interviewee of this experience which in some cases was a significant amount of time ago. So, in the first instance each
The interviewee was asked to talk about their life before moving to the UK and discuss what they believe led to their decision to move to the UK. If the respondent hesitated and did not automatically go on to discuss what the move itself and settling into the UK was like, they were prompted to discuss their experience of moving to and living in the UK. In order to actively encourage respondents to give detailed accounts and explanations of their opinions expressed in their very own words, questions were posed in an open-ended fashion as much as possible to discourage them from offering one word answers and to encourage the interviewee to give fuller accounts of their thoughts, views and experiences, as well as to allow them to exert a considerable degree of control over what they would like to talk about and where they wanted to take the conversation depending on what they considered relevant.

Overall, all questions sought to contribute to shedding light on the research questions and were organised into “topical related” clusters (Fielding and Thomas, 2008:254) as I sought to ensure that interviewees discussed content that broadly covered each of the research questions. In nearly all interviews this was what happened. There was only one interview which did not follow any kind of structure as for the first 45 minutes the interviewee recounted her story and thoughts without needing to be asked anything but brief clarification questions. In all other interviews, there were small variations in what interviewees discussed and, consequently, what follow-up questions were asked. Quite regularly respondents moved from one topic to another without prompts or further questions and, in addition, brought up different topics which meant that the structure of the interviews, as already pointed out, was adapted spontaneously. This did not pose any problems either to the research questions being answered or the flow of the interviews. On the contrary, it added to the depth of the participants’ accounts and, in most cases, proved highly interesting as it provided an insight into the connections and associations that respondents themselves made between different issues and concepts. This in turn thus allowed for a “deeper understanding and insight into” individuals’ often complex and intricate understandings and experiences (Piantanida and Garman, 1999:132). Therefore, while the first cluster of questions which aimed to uncover the respondent’s motivations and experience of moving were roughly the same for nearly all of the interviewees taking part in this study, each interview continued slightly differently based on where each respondent took the guided conversation.
An important aspect of this research was to explore the importance of notions of nationality and transnationality to each of the participants. While aspects of the respondents’ identity and sense of self were likely to shine through their own accounts of their lives I believed it would be useful to additionally draw out more explicitly interviewees’ understanding of what best described their identity, and I believed that using props which could help to prompt respondents might be beneficial in this instance. So, in addition to the predominantly open-ended questions, respondents were also presented with a number of cards at a convenient point towards the end of their interview (pictured on page 67), each of which had printed on them a possible source of identity. While I was mostly interested in their own reflections on their sense of national and transnational belonging, myriad forms of sources of identification were provided in order to avoid falling into the trap of ‘methodological nationalism’ (Glick Schiller, 1992) or of inflating the importance of nationality or citizenship over the many other lenses through which individuals may view themselves. Using these cards was thus not done to prescribe categories or in order to test any theories but exclusively to make an abstract concept and interview question more accessible.

The main reason for using these templates therefore was to, on the one hand give interviewees a visual aid, but was also done because I concluded that simply posing a question like ‘What would you say defines who you are?’ might be too abstract to some (if not many). In order to avoid biasing the responses I sought to make the list of characteristics as comprehensive as I could and made sure to point out to respondents that the list of possible sources of identity named on the cards were not in any way to be understood as exhaustive and encouraged them to add anything that they felt was important (which several of them did). I found that respondents welcomed and seemed to enjoy using the cards possibly because they experienced the use of this prop as a welcome break from the predominantly one-sided nature of an interview setting where they had been talking with little break to allow them to reflect quietly.
Figure 1 Respondent’s use of identity cards

Figure 2 Respondent’s use of identity cards
3.7.2 Positionality

The importance for social researchers to always remain reflexive and aware of their own position and of how their own social identity may influence their research is widely recognised throughout the social sciences – Jackson (1993: 211) calls on social scientists to recognise their “own positionality” while Smith highlights the need to explore “the politics of position” (1993: 305). “Reflexivity in research”, as Farhana Sultana (2007: 376) succinctly points out, “involves reflection on self, process and representation, and critically examining power relations”. Such reflexivity in relation to the research participants then requires a careful consideration of “differences as well as similarities” (Hopkins, 2007: 388) between the researcher(s) and the participants he or she comes into contact with.

My own position as a researcher exploring the experiences of Germans moving to the United Kingdom could quite accurately be described as that of an insider researcher since I too am a German national who has relocated to the UK. I was born and brought up in Germany and at the age of nineteen decided to move to UK indefinitely. This meant that when I was interviewing participants in 2015 I had lived in the UK for around eleven years. Conducting research on a group within society that one is a member of themselves, as social researchers like Gololobov (2014) point out, comes with advantages as well as disadvantages. The main benefit I had from also being a German EU citizen living in the UK, is that it certainly helped to break the ice and build rapport. It was easy to find topics to engage in small-talk in and while several respondents explicitly asked me to tell them why I was conducting the research, there was no sense of suspicion regarding my intent and how I was going to report the information that they were providing me with. I went into the interview situations knowing that one disadvantage of being an insider researcher and being perceived by the interviewee as someone ‘in the know’, was that they were likely not to go into as much detail and explain things as much as they likely would to someone they considered an outsider to their own experiences. In his reflections on insider research he carried out in the Punk scene, Gololobov (2014) discusses the issue he faced of interviewees omitting information that they thought he would already know. It is difficult to know to what extent interviewees left out information and detail because they felt I already knew what they could have added. In an attempt to avoid this from happening I made sure to make interviewees aware that I would only be able to report on what my participants explicitly said in their interviews and, therefore,
encouraged them to try to overlook the fact that I might have knowledge or experience of what they were discussing. As mentioned above, however, it is impossible for me to know whether they nevertheless omitted information that an outsider researcher would have received.

While there were of course many variations between how much or how little I had in common with the different participants in the sample, what I had in common with each of them is a shared nationality (in the legal sense at least) and the experience of leaving behind Germany and relocating to this country. However, despite such “commonalities in nationality or ethnicity” there are “other axes of social differentiation” (Sultana, 2007: 378) which I as a researcher needed to be mindful of. Reflecting on her own research, Sultana points to characteristics such as “gender, (...) attire, [and one’s] ability to engage in regular conversation” in the participant’s native language which may influence the social dynamics between researcher and participants. I would add age, perceived social class and level of education to this list. What this means is that depending on the participant’s gender, age and socio-economic as well as educational background they were likely to perceive and interact with me differently than they might with a person with social characteristics different to mine. The data I collected, and the findings generated from it, in the words of Sultana (2007: 382), “will always be interpretive and partial, yet telling of stories that may otherwise not be told”.

This then required a commitment to remaining mindful of my own biography and social identity as I prepared and went about my fieldwork, but also when I came to analyse and interpret the findings of the research since they also, as Sultana (2007: 376) suggests, “influence methods, interpretations, and knowledge production”. One of the most obvious ways in which my research is likely to have been impacted by my position as a woman, for example, is that it probably made women more likely to contact me than men. On reflection, it is also possible that women may have been more likely to frequent some of the recruitment sites. While the sex of the interviewee did not appear to make much of a difference to where they wished to be interviewed, it was clearly noticeable that, apart from a couple of exceptions, there was less conversation with the male interviewees after their interviews had finished. Thus, women were more likely to contact me – a female researcher – to be interviewed and they also were more likely to want to continue talking to me once their interview had been completed. My age and perceived socio-economic status, too, are likely
to have had a certain amount of impact on how interviewees related to me. This was noticeable certainly in regard to age (and gender) as women in their twenties and thirties were on the whole most likely to relate to me in a more informal manner and wanted to engage in more of a two-way conversation with me after their interview. There was, however, little difference in how much male and female, or younger and older interviewees disclosed during their interviews with similar lengths of interviews being recorded regardless of either age or sex of the respondent.

3.7.3 Transcription and Analysis

Each interview was transcribed by me as soon as possible after it was carried out in an attempt to ensure that my memory of the interview situation was still as fresh as possible. However, as many of the interviews were in-depth and the total hours of audio data collected was just under sixty hours (and the resulting word count of the transcripts was around 472,000 words), transcribing did take a considerable amount of time and many interviews were not transcribed as soon after the event as I would have liked. Though time-consuming and sometimes frustrating, I would suggest that this time of transcription was useful beyond its obvious function of turning audio into more easily analysable transcripts. Like Bird (2005: 227), I believe that transcription is “a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology” and particularly useful especially when the dataset is large as it helps to stay acquainted with what each participant has said. Listening back to each interview which I had transferred from the recording device to my computer, I produced an “orthographic transcript – a verbatim account of all verbal (and sometimes nonverbal (…)) utterances” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 90). Due to the dual language approach to the interviewing, the transcripts are mostly in German as I did not translate interviews into English in order to preserve their original words and meaning for as long as possible in the analysis process. Where verbatim quotes which were recorded in German have been used in this thesis they have been translated into English and every effort has been taken to ensure that the original meaning of the words have been retained as much as possible.

I was very aware of my added responsibility when translating verbatim quotes into English. As Bird points out (2005: 228), the person transcribing is “representing an oral voice in written” and in doing so becomes a channel for that voice. Translation adds another layer
of complexity and therefore duty to be attentive to every little detail in speech to ensure the participant’s words are interpreted and translated as the participant intended. While transcription, as Lapadat and Lindsey (1999) propose, is always an interpretive act, it is even more interpretive in nature when expressions and colloquialisms are translated into another language. My habit of coding inclusively – that is to include context ‘around’ coded citations (Bryman, 2008) – I believe, helped immensely to be able to interpret and translate such citations as accurately and truthfully as possible. In instances where I realised that I could not be entirely sure how a phrase had been meant and should therefore be translated, the text was not used as a citation in this thesis. In order to be transparent about which citations have been translated from German to English all such quotes are presented in *italics* to distinguish them from the untranslated citations.

Once transcribed each interview transcript was inputted and coded using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. A thematic analysis approach was used to make sense of the data and identify how the newly collected data contributes fresh insights and knowledge to the existing literature in fields such as migration, transnationalism and identity. Thematic analysis as Vaismoradi et al. (2013: 404) suggest, “is widely used, but there is no clear agreement about what [it] is and how researchers should go about conducting it”. Nevertheless, Braun and Clarke (2006: 79) describe it as a flexible “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data” which appeals to many social researchers as unlike other approaches to analysis it does not come with a theoretical approach ‘attached’ to it. While it is similar to other coding approaches, for instance a grounded theory approach to coding (see e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as it also starts with the labelling of text with small, initial codes which are developed into wider themes, it is less regimented in its procedure as no definite process has been decided on. It is this “theoretical freedom”, as Braun and Clarke (2006: 78) refer to it, that led me to choose thematic analysis as the method to use in my coding of the data.

While themes are often discussed as (passively) emerging from the data, like Braun and Clarke (2006: 80), I consider it crucial to remain mindful of the “active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the reader”. Being clear about this agency of the researcher, goes a long way to providing transparency and demonstrating awareness that no two researchers would write
exactly the same analysis of the same qualitative data. While I sought to be as open and inductive in my coding and analysis as possible, I did come to the data with my four research questions in mind, certainly in the later stages of coding. As such, my approach to coding was not a purely inductive thematic analysis but contained definite elements of theoretical thematic analysis, and is therefore, “more explicitly analyst-driven” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 85). This is not to discount the reality that I came across themes that I had not entirely anticipated as I did remain open to discovering connections and meanings that participants made without me enquiring about them or expecting them. On the whole, however, once I had familiarised myself with the data, my coding and analysis was aimed towards identifying themes that helped to answer my research questions.

As I collected the data myself, the process of familiarising myself with the data had already begun before I commenced with the reading and coding of the transcripts as I had started to see patterns while I was interviewing and during the time spent listening to and transcribing the interviews. Nevertheless, in order to immerse myself in the data I read and reread the transcripts to begin to systematically look for patterns and themes which led to the creation of initial codes that became more complex and interconnected the more transcripts I coded. In order to be able to easily compare themes across all interviews, the codebook and memos were exclusively written in English regardless of whether the transcription or parts of it were in English or German. By doing this, I ensured that the bilingual nature of the dataset did not lead to duplicate codes which could have led to missing data in the analysis. Once I had coded all interviews I began to collate salient codes into broader themes. While there was a substantial amount of overlap due to the interconnectedness of many of the themes, I was able to broadly organise themes into groups to elucidate the different research questions which my research had originated from. I then revisited the codes within the relevant themes as I began to draft each of my findings chapters and collated overarching themes that were most relevant to answering each of the research questions which led to the structuring of the subsequent chapters.
3.8 Ethical Considerations

The emotional welfare of my respondents was paramount in my considerations when setting up the research. This, is reflected in the time I spent designing and going over the interview schedule to ensure the topics and questions were as unlikely to cause anyone upset as possible as well as by my offer of interviewing potential participants where they preferred to be interviewed. As I visited a Saturday School where children would be present to recruit participants a DBS check was carried out. In addition, I sought ethical approval from the University’s Ethics Commission, which was granted after some minor changes had been made to the recruitment materials. While the three pilot interviews were conducted before this faculty level review had been carried out, none of the further interviews were carried out until approval had been granted. The data from the pilot interviews was used to inform the subsequent interviews and was also included in the analysis and discussion of the findings. The three participants gave informed consent to their data being used for this purpose. While including data from pilot studies in the reporting of the overall study can pose issues of contamination in quantitative or experimental research, this is not usually the case in qualitative research since, as van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001:3) point out, “qualitative data collection and analysis is often progressive, in that a second or subsequent interview in a series should be ‘better’ than the previous one”. Including data from pilot interviews in the reporting of the main study, as they suggest, was thus a practice commonly employed by qualitative social researchers and the University Ethics Committee approved this.

All respondents were fully briefed in advance on what the interview would be about and were, for instance, assured that their participation – if they agreed to take part – would be wholly voluntary and that they would be able to withdraw their consent at any point before, during or after the interview. They were also informed that all their data was going to be treated as confidential and that their interviews would be anonymized in the transcription process. To document that respondents’ informed consent was sought and given, all who agreed to be interviewed (which was all of them) were asked to sign a consent form which have been safely stored at the University of Surrey. In order to ensure that a high standard of ethical procedure was adhered to and that no respondents were at any risk of emotional harm, great care was taken to make sure that no questions had the likely potential to upset or offend or asked participants to disclose potentially sensitive information. There was of
course always the possibility that if part of a respondent's account of their experience had in some way been upsetting or difficult, reliving those moments had the potential to bring to the surface negative emotions. However, providing all potential respondents with the participant information sheet (see A.3 and A.4 in the appendices) which informed them of what the research was about and that interviewees would be asked to talk about their own story of moving and living in the UK, I believe greatly reduced the likelihood of this happening since each individual was able to make an informed decision on whether or not they would like to discuss their story, experiences and opinions. Consequently, no issues or problems arose during any of the interviews. To the contrary, many interviewees pointed out that they had greatly enjoyed having an opportunity to think about and put into words their thoughts and feelings about what they experienced and what their life thus far had been like.

Great care was also taken to make sure that all interviewees felt comfortable in the location that they were interviewed in. To ensure this as much as was physically possible, interviewees were given the choice of where they wanted to be interviewed – in their home, at their place of work or a library which was convenient for them to get to. A couple of interviewees asked for their interview to take place at the University of Surrey, while one was conducted on a park bench, and another in a pub in the morning which was conveniently located for the interviewee. Only one interview was conducted in a private room at a local library. Roughly a quarter of interviewees suggested that I meet them at their place of work. Some of these interviews took place during their (sometimes extended) lunch breaks, while several asked me to come to see them at their place of work after their working hours had finished. The vast majority of the participants, however, invited me to come to their homes. While this meant that I needed to travel to many different places throughout the South-East of England, I was glad that it was able to make the experience of taking part in the research less time-consuming for the participants and was contented also because I believe that participants, as Yee and Andrew (2006: 403) also suggest, “are empowered by a more familiar setting”.

Furthermore, I particularly considered being invited into someone’s home a privilege due to the very personal nature of the environment and made every effort to ensure I made interviewees feel as comfortable as possible with having a stranger in their house or flat. While I had initially planned to provide all interviewees with refreshments, I realised quite
soon that this did not quite work in situations where I was in my interviewee’s home. While I arrived at their home aware of my obligations and responsibilities as an ethical social researcher, they welcomed me in the role of a host or hostess inviting a stranger into their home. Therefore, while few turned down chocolates or biscuits I brought along, my offer of soft drinks was received with a smile but not taken up. Instead, I quickly realised that interviewees, most of whom had never been in a similar situation of being interviewed about their experiences, seemed to find an element of familiarity in enacting their role of host and wanted to offer me beverages. As I did not want to make anyone feel out of place in their own home – after all, one of the main reasons I offered to come to their home was in the hope that they would feel more comfortable in their familiar surrounding – I slipped into the role of guest and allowed them to make me a cup of tea because I realised that not allowing them to treat me like any other guest, would have made them feel uncomfortable and would have undermined their agency and thus my very reasons for interviewing them there. As a result, I had countless cups of teas with respondents, was offered cake by several and had dinner in a couple of the homes that I went to. While accepting anything from your participants is deemed inappropriate by some researchers, I am convinced that assuming “the role of polite guest with the ‘rules’ and obligations connected with this” was necessary in order for me not to be disruptive or alienating to the participant (Yee and Andrew, 2006: 407).

One of the things that was not always entirely easy to work out was whether to leave immediately after the interview to let them get on with their day or to stay a little longer to debrief and continue to talk to the interviewee. The main reason that I chose to be flexible about whether or not to stay was that I believe it was of upmost importance that I make sure they did not feel exploited by me disappearing as soon as I had collected their data (Borbasi et al., 2002). In situations where I was not sure whether the participant continued to talk to me because they wanted to extend the conversation or whether they were merely continuing to talk to me because I had not said that I needed to leave (and they as good hosts did not feel they could ask me to leave), I simply asked what their plans for the rest of the day were. This gave them the opportunity to let me know that they had plans, which in turn allowed me to excuse myself to ‘let them get on with their day’ without sounding like I was cutting the conversation short. Sometimes, however, it was clear that the interviewee wanted to continue the conversation and find out more about my experience. Sophie, for instance,
enthusiastically offered me another cup of tea the moment I turned off the recording device, making it very clear that she wanted me to stay longer, and so our conversation continued for some time. Similarly, Lisa was keen to continue to talk to me and asked if she could ask me some questions back, to which I agreed, leading to her borrowing my interview guide and asking me some of the questions that I had asked her. This in turn led to her telling me more about her views on some of the topics covered. Sjoberg and Nett (1968: 215-216) suggest that “frequently researchers in the course of their interviewing, establish rapport not as scientists but as human beings” which I found to be true as illustrated by these examples. They viewed me not only as the social researcher who had interviewed others in similar situations to their own but also as someone whose situation was not so different from theirs.

Allowing participants to ask questions back is another issue which is debated among researchers. In line with my conviction that the relationship or dynamic between me as the researcher and my participant should be as non-hierarchical as possible, I answered all questions that interviewees asked me. This is a stance shared by other social researchers like Ann Oakley (1981), Dorothy Hobson (1978) who, based on their qualitative research conducted with women, propose that established doctrine which conceives as the researcher’s relationship with their participant as clinical, neutral and professionally detached is wholly inappropriate in the research situations they found themselves in as female researchers interviewing women about their personal experiences. The widely-accepted and encouraged practice of establishing rapport with one’s interviewee, I argue, would be greatly undermined by a refusal to connect with the individual – whether male or female – in front of you on a basic human level that goes beyond mere niceties. So, while I held back any opinions or details about me before the interview that might deter a participant from feeling they could tell me their honest opinions, I provided fuller answers in the conversations once the interviews had been completed to those respondents who asked them. Nearly all respondents told me that they would like to read the finished report and several asked how their thoughts and experiences compared to those of others whom I had interviewed. Therefore, I believe it is reasonable to deduce that respondents who asked me questions did so because they were interested to know how their account compared to others, including mine as a researcher.
Borbasi et al. (2002: 32) point out that in their qualitative research experience, due to the often private and intimate nature of the information that participants reveal, “walking off with this self-exposure on tape is not easy” and they further explain that they “were unable to conclude [their] interviews and leave the field immediately”. This is how I at times experienced ending interviews as well. Sarah, for instance, mentioned during the course of her interview that she felt quite lonely because she felt that she and her husband did not have many real, close friends in this country as they have struggled to form close friendships with British people and most non-British friends tended to move on from the UK after some time. This kind of personal revelation is not something that makes leaving after an interview is finished easy, and while few respondents expressed feelings quite as painful as Sarah’s, all respondents opened up to me about their stories, thoughts and feelings. Accordingly, I wanted to be sure that I did as much as I could to ensure none of my respondents were left feeling exploited and I spent at least a few minutes talking to them once the interview was finished as a kind of debrief and an opportunity for them to ask me any questions they may have after reflecting on their experiences and feelings in front of me.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated why a qualitative data collection method was the most appropriate to answering this project’s research questions due their inherently explorative nature and focus on lived experience, as well as the practical issue of access to the group of interest which could only be made using non-probability sampling. Qualitative semi-structured individual interviews were used to explore why Germans who were residing in the UK had decided to do so and find out what their lives, stories and thoughts on their decision were. Purposive and snowball sampling enabled me to find forty-three participants who fit all the recruitment criteria and while such a non-probability method of sampling cannot produce a representative sample of the population of Germans living in the UK, it was able to bring together the stories and lived experiences of a variety of people, which shed light on the lives of Germans living in the country. Adopting a dual-language approach to interviewing and analysis allowed participants to express themselves as freely and naturally as possible and thus provides an account that is linguistically true to their thoughts as participants switched freely between languages depending on what expressions and words they felt would best capture what they wanted to say. Keeping the orthographic transcript in
their original language for most of the analysis stage further aided in the preservation of the intended meanings despite the inevitable threat of connotations being lost in translation. To be as transparent about which quotes from the data are verbatim and which are my translation of what respondents said, all translated quotations are in italics.

“Reflexivity in research”, as Sultana rightly suggests, “involves reflection on self, process and representation, and critically examining power relations (2007: 376).” To this end, I did my utmost to create interview situations in which the dynamics of power would not automatically be in favour of me as the researcher and offered all participants the choice of where they would prefer to be interviewed. Many chose their home as the most convenient or preferred place to be interviewed. This meant that I entered the interview situation as both a researcher and a guest and needed to strike a comfortable balance between these two roles in order to avoid making the interviewee feel at unease in their home as they are faced with their temporary social role as research participant while at the same time enacting their familiar role of being a host(ess). I have discussed the implications this had on my conduct whilst in a participant’s home, most importantly my decision not to disrupt participants’ efforts to act as a host and accept their offers of food or drink, my decision to answer any questions that participants wanted to ask me (while trying to ensure that I did not deter them from voicing their own opinions in doing so), and my decision to be flexible about how long to stay after the interview depending on whether the participant wanted to continue discussing the topics raised with me. Furthermore, I have outlined the different stages of the research from decisions about sampling, recruitment and designing the interview guides to the interviewing itself, and the transcription as well as analysis of the data and how these decisions were guided by, firstly, ethical considerations and, secondly, by the desire to design the research in a way that it is feasible, able to answer the research questions and able to generate internally and externally valid results.
4. The motivations and expectations of respondents regarding their move to the United Kingdom

4.1 Introduction

While the reasons why people migrate are manifold, existing literature identifies some useful frameworks to make sense of and analyse the motivations behind migrants’ decision to relocate from their country of origin to a new country of residence. One of the most well-known and influential analytical approaches is the theory of push and pull factors developed by Everett S. Lee (1966), which categorises reasons why an individual might migrate. Lee (1966: 50) in his original articulation of the concept proposes that “in every area there are countless factors which act to hold people within the area or attract people to it, and there are others which tend to repel them”. What factors attract or repel depends on the individual assessing them and it is therefore the individual’s perception of the situations in their country of origin and any potential country of destination that he or she considers rather than objective social facts which are drawn upon in their estimation. This concept has been further advanced by Martin and Zurcher (2008) who divide push as well as pull factors into economic and non-economic ones while also adding the effects of network factors which, so the argument goes, also facilitate movement.

Adding Martin and Zurcher’s (2008) dimension of a split between economic and non-economic factors we can distinguish between labour recruitment as an economic pull factor and family unification in the destination country as a non-economic pull factor, while a lack of employment possibilities would present an economic push factor and discrimination, for example on the basis of sexuality or ethnicity, comes under non-economic push factors. Furthermore, networks of acquaintances or family, they suggest (2008: 5), can through their stories about the destination country spark or strengthen a desire for others to also migrate and can “pave the way at many points in the migration process” to lower the deterring effect of potential “intervening obstacles” (Lee, 1966: 50), thereby reducing the risks involved in international migration and increasing the likelihood of an individual’s resolve to embark on a migratory journey. As discussed in the previous chapter, most participants fall into what Conradson and Latham (2005: 290) term ‘middling migrants’ which is understood to mean “middling in term of socio-economic and class position in [the] country of origin.” They are thus not part of what Sklair (2002) calls the ‘transnational capitalist class’ which by contrast
refers to managers and executives of big transnational corporations and whose financial capital opens doors that remain closed for transnationally mobile individuals like those who have contributed to this study.

This chapter begins by discussing the motivations that interviewees provided for their migration to the UK, focusing on the most salient ones, whilst also discussing some of the more idiosyncratic reasons that were mentioned. The most commonly offered explanations for a move to the UK were taking up educational or employment opportunities, wanting to be closer to a loved one who was either already living in the UK or needed to move there and a desire for a change from their familiar surroundings and daily lives. This chapter will then proceed to discuss the intentions the participants had regarding the length of their stay in the UK before they left Germany. More than half of the respondents explained that they had not left Germany with the clear intent of it being a permanent departure from their home country. While there was a significant number among them who stated that they had indeed planned to move to the UK for good, many had only intended to live in the UK for a fixed term internship or year as an au-pair and still others had viewed their move to the UK as experimental and explained that they embarked on the move in the knowledge that they could return with relative ease should life in the UK not pan out as they had hoped. Finally, this chapter addresses the reasons that those participants, who had only intended to stay in the UK for a limited time, provided as to why they decided to remain. The reasons are not dissimilar to those offered by other participants as to why they decided to move. Some stayed as they had fallen in love during their time in Britain, others to provide stability for their family and in particular their children, while others explained that they had realised once living in the UK that they job prospects were good and so decided to stay on longer. Still others explained that the qualifications they had gained in the UK would not easily be transferable to Germany. The most commonly mentioned reason not to move back to Germany, however, was social embeddedness – remaining in their current home, job and circle of friends appeared much more convenient than migrating once more. The importance of “locally embedded friendship networks” (Ryan and Mulholland, 2013: 159) and the security of employment mean that few consider moving on or moving back unless their current situation becomes less desirable and the risks that come with starting over somewhere else appear less daunting in comparison.
It is important to note that, due to the interconnectedness and multiplicity of individuals’ motivations, most of the interviewees fall into several of these groupings of motivating factors. However, it is clear that reasons which are traditionally considered pull-factors that drew participants to the UK were cited far more often than push-factors that led them to want to leave Germany. Most of the reasons mentioned – be they related to job offers, romantic relationships or educational opportunities – suggest that participants engaged in “migration of the relatively affluent in search of a better way of life” (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2016: 407) whatever such a ‘better’ life may be in each person’s own estimation, rather than migration of economically disadvantaged individuals searching for financial security. Participants’ accounts suggest that such migratory movements or transnational mobility are fundamentally caught up with what Giddens (1991) terms the ‘reflexive project of the self’, a way to realise themselves and live their life in the most fulfilling way they can.

4.2 Participants’ motivations to relocate from Germany to the United Kingdom

The reasons and accounts that the forty-three respondents gave for how they came to make the decision to move to the United Kingdom are varied and deeply embedded into each of their own life stories. Very few of them discussed only one motivating factor for their move. For the vast majority of the interviewees, their decision to come to the UK was influenced by a number of reasons and experiences they had in their life before moving to the UK, confirming Santacreu et al.’s (2009: 60) assertion that “migration projects are often complex and multi-dimensional actions” as well as Wallace’s (1998: 30) suggestion that “there is no single explanation for migration potential but rather a combination of explanations”.

What is striking is how interwoven pull and push factors were in participants’ accounts and how most of them did not paint Germany as a place that they felt a great need to move away from. The vast majority of respondents named only reasons why they wanted to experience life in the United Kingdom, rather than reasons why they no longer wanted to live in Germany. This corresponds with Kelo and Wächter’s proposition that “due to the relative absence (...) of classical push factors, which make life unbearable, such as wars and political unrest, famine, and ethnic or racial discrimination and persecution” it is unlikely for push factors to play a significant role in the decision-making of European citizens who engage in intra-European migration (2004: 71). The two exceptions among the respondents were
Simon, who throughout his teenage years in Germany suffered from homophobic bullying by his classmates, and Monika and Lukas who were passionate advocates of home schooling – and more precisely unschooling – and felt they needed to leave Germany in order to be able to bring up their sons the way they believe is right for them. In Simon’s case Germany remained the place which in his mind was intrinsically linked to the traumatising experiences he made during a crucial time in his life and he therefore decided to make a clean cut from this time by removing himself from this environment and starting afresh in multicultural London. Monika’s and Lukas’ story, similarly, is characterised by a strong sense of a need to leave as their desire not to send their sons to school placed them in a very difficult legal position in Germany, where school enrolment and attendance are mandatory by law.

However, for any given pull factor in the destination country to have an appeal to a potential migrant, the home country must be lacking in regard to it. If it was not, the individual considering to move internationally would not feel motivated to relocate. A dual conception of push and pull factors (and how they are inevitably connected) that takes into account this interplay of circumstances in the home, as well as a potential destination country may aid in providing a more nuanced and holistic picture of what drives some to migrate.

4.2.1 Economic and education-related pull and push factors

4.2.1.1 Employment-related reasons to relocate

“Mobility for work represents the main form of migration into Germany and Britain” Santacreu et al (2009: 60) declare drawing on findings of the earlier mentioned Pioneers of European Integration project. While a lot of this mobility follows the traditional South–North route, there is also “a noticeable proportion of work-related French and British migrants in Italy and, British in Germany and Germans in Britain” (2009: 60). What their quantitative data, however, cannot explain is why these individuals chose job opportunities in the UK over job opportunities (or their existing jobs) in Germany. The qualitative findings from this research elucidate some of the possible scenarios and illustrate some of these reasons why someone might embark on this journey. Motivations to do with better job or educational opportunities – whether these are formal such as a university degree or informal such as an internship in order to improve English language skills which in turn would improve their CV – were mentioned by more than half of the respondents in this present study.
A quarter of respondents pointed out that a key motivating factor behind their decision to relocate to the UK had been a job offer or the expectation of better employment opportunities than those they had had in their old home in Germany. For example, Lisa explained that the job market in the Eastern region of Germany that she grew up in was so bleak in 2006 when she had just finished her A-levels that she had the choice between having to take on work that was not what she wanted to do or to move away. As a result, and because she was worried about “being stuck” in the same small village for the rest of her life, she decided to go to the UK for a year to work as an au-pair. While this illustrates how intrinsically linked push and pull factors can be, it also is indicative of the impact that the accessibility of affordable travel and transportation and the freedom to move facilitated by the EU’s freedom of movement has on people’s decision to be internationally mobile. Like many other respondents, Lisa pointed out how little difference (apart from the added excitement from experiencing life in a different culture) it makes in terms of travel costs and time whether she moved to London or a city in another part of Germany. This is reinforced by a finding that Verwiebe et al. (2010) came to when exploring the motivations behind skilled German migrants and their motives for emigrating to other European countries. They found that “for Germans with intermediate qualifications, economic factors” such as the availability of job opportunities is highly influential in their decision-making process and that “unemployment, low or falling wages, as well as poor working conditions” are significant push factors that lead to some considering looking for opportunities outside of Germany (2010: 273). Consequently, the comparatively “higher wages and better working conditions” that they became aware of as well as specific job offers abroad acted as pull factors which drew them to their prospective new host countries. Hence, these respondents who moved as a result of perceiving better opportunities in the UK, as Kennedy (2010: 466) points out did so in response “to the macro constraints and opportunities generated by changes taking place in the nature of work and driven by economic globalisation”, all the while endeavouring to “mesh these into their own lives” as active agents.

The pull that job opportunities, and more precisely a more flexible job market has on potential German migrants is, however, not limited to individuals with intermediate qualifications. Paul, for instance, worked in investment banking and grew up in Münster which, while it is not a small village in the countryside, is not where the banking industry is
centred in Germany. So, he said, to be able to shape a career in this industry he needed to move from his home town and therefore considered two places – Frankfurt, where most of the investment banking industry is based in Germany and London, and he decided that he may as well choose London as he believed that the location would offer better opportunities. Furthermore, his previous experience of living and working in New York and France, he suggested, further affirmed him in his decision to move to the UK. As a result, he signed an initial two-year contract when he arrived in the UK in 2006 and has permanently lived in the South-East of England since. Similarly, Peter and Ellen who at the point of being interviewed were both in their first graduate jobs explained that the UK business world which is much more flexible than its German counterpart in terms of what qualifications are required to secure employment played a great part in their decision to move and settle. Both respondents pointed out that it would have been impossible for them to work in their respective positions in the IT business and UK Civil Service had they remained in Germany, as the attainment of job-specific formal qualifications is much more important in Germany while in the UK having a degree in (almost) any subject matter, opens up employment possibilities in unrelated economic sectors, particularly when it is paired with relevant work experience. Yet, interestingly, Peter still was unwavering in his assertion that he did not need to come to the UK. The relative flexibility of the job market when compared to Germany’s thus is a major economic pull factor for those Germans who did not attain the necessary qualifications to be able to work in the field that they would like to work in within the German market. A desire to find fulfilment in their job by pursuing a career of their choosing, rather than necessity, thus was a key factor in swaying the scales in favour of moving to the UK.

4.2.1.2 Formal and informal learning-related reasons to relocate

Several of the respondents said that an imperative motivation for moving to the UK was to go to a UK university. “The UK”, as the Office for National Statistics (2016: 2) points out, “attracts large number of students” and in recent years, “was the second most popular global destination for international students after the USA” and has been increasing relatively steadily since the 1990s, with 187,000 in 2014. Some of these respondents had already begun a bachelor’s degree in Germany and wanted to do a semester or academic year in the UK to then return to Germany and complete their degree there. There were a few, however, who reported that they moved to the UK to begin a bachelor’s degree either because they were
not able to get into higher education in Germany because of insufficient marks they received in secondary education and the lower entry level requirements in some UK universities opened the opportunity to attain this qualification. Brooks and Waters (2009) found that some (particularly private school educated) UK pupils who had not achieved high enough grades to get into Oxford or Cambridge, considered applying to universities in the United States as they considered these easier to get into without failing their personal goal to attend a highly prestigious university.

Several of my respondents, similarly, pointed out that in Germany they would not have been able to get into a higher education course as the admission criteria were stricter, whereas in the UK they were able to find universities that would accept their lower grades or were able to gain entry onto a course as a mature student and therefore did not need to satisfy the same marks-based entry level requirements. Peter, for example, was one of the respondents who saw an opportunity to further his life-chances by relocating to the UK and attending a university. He had begun a vocational training course at a private, international college in Germany before he came to the UK and pointed out that an important factor in his decision to move was that he believed that attending the particular degree programme at a UK university on which he took up a place and the bachelor degree that he was able to convert it into would open up better career opportunities for him. He explained that he “knew” after having worked in Germany for a few years that he “wouldn’t be able to get a much better job than the one [he] already had without getting a degree”. Therefore, since coming to the UK would open up the possibility for him to gain a bachelor’s degree, he chose to leave Germany. The stark difference to Brooks and Waters’ findings, however, is that in this case international student mobility enabled individuals who otherwise had no option to go to university to do so, showing a different facet of what they refer to as “a second chance at ‘success’” as a reason for international student mobility (2009: 1094). Moving to the United Kingdom opened the door to gaining higher educational qualifications that in Germany would have been shut off from them. This also illustrates how intrinsically interwoven pull and push factors can be when there is no strong push factor like war, poverty, genocide or oppression, and how it can therefore be difficult to disentangle them sufficiently to determine conclusively which has the stronger impact when discussing migration between two countries which are of similar economic strength and living standards.
There was also, however, a small number of respondents who could have got into university in Germany but who chose a UK degree because the course they wanted to pursue was not available in Germany. Linda, for instance, came to the UK to start a university degree in European politics because she was interested in working in the general field of European policy and politics and could not find a similar course that had the right focus for her interest and that was additionally taught in English to prepare her for working at European level. Soon after completing her degree she then moved to Brussels for a few years and worked on EU policy to later return to the UK.

A desire to more informally improve their English language skills was quoted by nearly a quarter of respondents as a reason to temporarily move to the UK. Most of the respondents who fell in this category were unsure how long their move was going to be. For example, Leonie, decided to come to London to improve her English after she was rejected from a dual study master’s degree in International Studies because her only experience of English was learning the language in school. She said,

“so, I applied to a few places where I could possibly learn English and doing that at a tourist information centre was a great way to really improve my English because I knew probably there would a lot of tourists where I had to speak. It wasn’t just an office job, I had to speak.”

Similarly, Kathie, who arrived in the UK in 1990 after finishing her German A-levels recounted that she had decided to spend some time working in London to improve her English language skills. She explained that her father had wanted for her to go to university, but she thought,

“Ah, no. I didn’t want to do that. And then I thought I could go to England to learn English – or more precisely to improve my English... I did technically learn English in school. And my dad, he knew – I’m not sure – maybe the manager of the German YMCA in London and so that’s how I got a job as a maid.”

This demonstrates the saliency of informal learning opportunities, in the form of internships and fixed term low-paid jobs, to improve their command of the main language of international business, which living in an English-speaking country can provide to, especially, young adults.
who want to enrich their skill set and thereby boost their employability in a non-academic way.

### 4.2.2 Non-economic pull and push factors – personal life motivations to relocate

Love or reuniting with a partner whom they were in a relationship with and who either already lived in the UK or wanted to relocate to the UK was another factor that had an impact on why nearly half of respondents decided to leave Germany and settle in the UK. “In such [family migration] cases”, Martin and Zurcher (2008: 5) explain, the immigrant or partner of another nationality already living “in the destination country is a demand-pull factor (…) Spouses and children join the immigrant first and may be followed by parents and brothers and sisters, in so-called chain migration.” While there were no instances among the respondents where such chain migration of further relatives migrating occurred, nearly a quarter of all respondents explained that it was their partner who wanted or needed to move to the UK, while a further handful of respondents fell in love with a British person and decided to move to be able to be with them. Caroline was one of the individuals whose decision to move to England was her partner’s need to move and her commitment to being with him. She explained that her partner (at the time) was from Nigeria and had had his visa rejected by the German authorities. Due to the easy availability of information about different country’s visa systems brought about by modern technology, they were able to inform themselves about his chances of being able to obtain a visa elsewhere and, since they believed that his chances of being granted leave to remain were higher in Britain, they moved to London together.

Hanna and Charlotte, on the other hand, both moved to England because their respective husbands wanted to move to accept a job offer – Charlotte’s (now) ex-husband was offered a post with the United Nations Organisation (UNO) in 1977 and Hanna’s husband was offered a lecturing position at a UK university which led to their move to England in 2008. Both of these women also pointed out, however, that they were very happy to accompany their husbands. Charlotte put this down to a curiosity regarding the country, and Hanna, who had previously spent a gap year in Surrey had always hoped she would be able to return to England one day. Evelyn was one of the respondents who moved to the UK – in part – to be united with her British partner whom she had already been in a long-distance relationship.
with for some time. She explained that she reached a point in her life when she was unhappy with her situation at work and her children from a previous relationship were old enough to no longer need her to stay around and therefore decided to use the opportunity to move to England and be with her partner.

Similarly, Stefan decided to move to England to be with his British girlfriend (now wife). He had met her during a previous six-month internship that he carried out in Birmingham as part of his degree at a German university and after two years in a long-distance relationship while he finished his degree in Germany, he then returned to England to be with her. Due to the lack of economic disparities between Germany and the United Kingdom, it is not entirely surprising that affective reasons play a significant role in many of the respondents’ accounts of why they moved to the UK. In addition, Santacreu et al (2009: 60), commenting on the findings of their quantitative study into intra-European migration, state that in comparison to reasons for global migration flows “it is clear that intra-EU migration shows a much greater tendency towards affective factors”. They point out that 29.2 per cent of answers given by respondents “refer to reasons of a sentimental nature” whether that is to reunite with a partner or spouse or their children (2009: 57), leading them to conclude that “people in Europe, first of all, move because of love and family”. Looking specifically at the Germans who had moved to the UK who formed part of the sample the figure is a little higher still with 33.5% of these Germans giving affective reasons as one of or the sole reason for their decision to relocate to the UK (2009: 61).

A further factor in Caroline’s desire to move besides her partner’s need to move which can be considered an affective reason, she said, was that she felt she had always had an underlying feeling of ‘Fernweh’ – a German word whose literal translation would be ‘farsickness’, which describes an ache or strong desire to move beyond one’s horizon (as opposed to Heimweh which could be translated as homesickness). Christiane Kraft Alsop (2002: 6-7), while acknowledging how difficult the word and its connotations are to translate into English, elaborates that “Fernweh and Heimweh, despite being opposites in their meaning, share the same root – ‘Weh’.” ‘Weh’ is best translated as an exclamation of pain or an ache. She further proposes that the word ‘Fernweh’ encapsulates a feeling of being suffocated by the mundane of the familiar surroundings and an accompanying ache to further one’s horizon into the unknown. This feeling of ‘Fernweh’ or an ache to travel and experience living away from the
familiar surroundings is a notion that a quarter of the interviewees expressed as a reason or explanation as to why they began to contemplate moving away from Germany. It is quite unique among the reasons participants provided for why they left Germany because it is not tangible but an abstract, and rather cosmopolitan, need or desire felt by the individual that can only be fulfilled elsewhere, beyond one’s horizon. For some this was a longstanding, vague feeling of wanting to live in another country, for others it expressed itself as a desire to live in the UK or London more specifically. Lena for example, described a general desire to live abroad that she grew up with and which she attributes to her late father’s love for travel which he instilled in her. As a result, she felt a connection to him through her living abroad, because she believes that it is what he would be doing if he was still alive and what he would have liked for her life too. Teresa’s feeling of Fernweh expressed itself in a desire to go to the UK. Her account of what sparked her desire to move to England, she explained, is also linked to her late father. When he was 16 years of age, her father was drafted into the German army during World War II and after being captured in France was brought to England and remained in English war captivity until the age of 21 when he returned to Germany. Teresa said

"he kind of spent his formative years of adolescence here and (...) he came here with the expectation that he would be punished, that they wanted to take revenge",

but, she continued, instead "they were harsh but also incredibly fair towards him" and he always spoke warmly of the country. So much so that from a young age she was keen to go to England and see this country for herself and when at 15 years old she visited London with her mother, she described experiencing a feeling of belonging which sparked the wish to return to London. She said, "I just had the feeling that I was in the right place and since that day I was kind of always trying to get back to London because I belonged there somehow". She described her first attempt to permanently move to the UK as a young adult in the late 1970s as a failure, saying that she had “to return to Germany in defeat” as she was not able to secure permanent work, reiterating that she views her mobility as part of her ‘project of the self’ (Giddens, 2000) the ‘success’ of which is her responsibility. It took her a further sixteen years, but she returned to London in the mid-1990s where she subsequently bought a flat and has lived ever since, enabling her to view her return to the UK as a personal achievement and, therefore, success. What the above discussion of economic, educational and relationship related reasons that participants provided for their decision to relocate to
the UK, shows that the search for a better life means very different things for different people – it is highly individualised. “Lifestyle migration”, as Benson and Osbaldiston (2016: 410) similarly conclude, “thus becomes symptomatic of reflexive lifestyle choices” that the individual migrant makes based on what is most important to them.

4.2.3 Adventure, excitement and escaping the familiar

One of the difficulties of moving to a new country, Lee (1966: 50-51) states, is that while the individual who considers migrating is familiar with the country of origin, he or she is not as acquainted with the advantages and disadvantages of the country or countries that they are considering as a new home. As a result, there remains, he suggests, a risk that there are unknown disadvantages which, if known by the individual, might sway the balance in favour of staying where they are. This element of the unknown, according to him, is an obstacle that deters migration. Interestingly however, this element of exploring the unfamiliar was provided by nearly a quarter of the respondents as a motivating factor to move away from Germany. In addition, close to a quarter of those respondents who lived in London also pointed out their move to the city and England more generally was a curiosity or excitement about London that drew them to the UK. Fiona, who pointed out that she had always had an interest in American and English literature and culture, explained that the thought of living in a metropolis was one of the motivating factors in her move to London. She had previously moved from her small hometown to the city of Cologne in Germany but got to a point where Cologne began to feel too provincial. She said,

“Cologne became too small for me. (...) I had the feeling everyone knows everyone. I had been working in an art café and I started to feel like it didn’t matter where I was – on the train to Hamburg or on a plane to Thailand – I always bumped into a customer I knew from the café. And I therefore felt I needed to move on, go somewhere bigger (...). It’s the idea of being completely new – you are a blank page and you start from scratch – I have always found that inspiring and exhilarating.”

“The foreigner”, as Sennett (1996: 184) suggests, while he may have the advantage of gaining “a more intelligent, more humane relation to his or her culture than the person who has never moved”, also has to confront “the pressing business of becoming a foreigner (...). One has to make oneself”. For some individuals, such as Fiona, this notion of having to ‘make oneself’ in
the new place was in fact one of the benefits of moving, illustrating what Alfred Schütz (1944: 506) suggests when he proposes that “the cultural pattern of the [host society] is to the stranger not a shelter but a field of adventure”. While Schütz, however, considers this a problematic situation which the stranger or immigrant needs to overcome, it is to these participants the chance to invent or reinvent themselves since a complete change of surroundings and people means that one is relatively free to begin with a blank slate. “What one was yesterday” as Bauman points out, “will no longer bar the possibility of becoming someone totally different today” in this highly individualised pursuit of meaning and happiness (2007: 104). Beginning afresh can thus be perceived as liberating rather than problematic. Moving to a new country, as Butcher congruently (2009: 29) suggests, can allow an individual to “become history-less, able to recreate” themselves in a new environment which several of the participants of this study experienced as something very positive (see also Favell, 2008; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002).

This sense of excitement and adventure was also reported as one of the reasons to relocate by Erika, who moved primarily because her English partner who had moved to Germany to be with her was struggling to integrate into German society because of language problems. She summed up her reasons to move by saying,

“Yeah, I met an English guy and he came first to Germany, but his German wasn’t good enough and he wasn’t feeling [good]. (…) He couldn’t express himself, so I said ‘ok, let’s go to England – I like adventure and my English should be ok.”

So, while the primary reason to make this decision was to live in the country that was in the best interest for both partners in the relationship, there was also a strong element of excitement which she experienced at the idea of moving to a new country and the adventure of starting afresh in this new place.

The other ‘side of the coin’ or the concomitant push factor to this desire for adventure which was brought up by some (though fewer) of the participants, which is also illustrative of ‘lightness’ and ‘liquidity’ which Bauman (2008: 1) suggests “we associate (…) with mobility and inconstancy”, was that of wanting to escape their familiar surroundings and of making a change in one’s life which nearly a quarter of the respondents expressed. They pointed out that a desire to ‘get away’ (in some cases from a difficult family situation) was a push factor
in their decision to leave Germany. Lisa, for instance, as earlier mentioned explained her initial move to the UK in terms of avoiding being stuck in the little village she grew up in, working in a job she did not want to do. She said:

“... the only thing that I could have done, would have been to work in the kindergarten in the nearest village and that was the worst thing imaginable to me – to have grown up in the Ore Mountains, go to university in the Ore Mountains and then spend the rest of my life there too. And that’s when I suddenly felt that I’d had enough and said to myself, I need to get away and so I applied to be an au-pair. And actually, I wanted to go somewhere rural, a little village but the only family that the au-pair agency could match me with was a family in West London. (...) I think quite a few people thought I was crazy to hop from A to B like that but that was the only thing I wanted to do.”

This illustrates that at this point in her life, she felt the need to escape the rut which she was scared she might succumb to otherwise and could instead embark on a journey of “individual self-constructing” (Bauman, 2008: 8). It is such a conviction “that through immersion in a new kind of existence, relocation to a place of personal refuge, the intentional changing of daily routine and a deliberate refocusing of personal goals and relationship to work”, as Brian Hoey (2014: 77) proposes, the individual engaging in lifestyle migration pursues their own happiness and fulfilment. In Lisa’s case, it helped her own ‘project of self-fashioning’ (Conradson and Latham, 2005: 290) greatly as she returned to Germany after her two years as an au-pair inspired to study business management.

In addition, a small number of participants pointed out that their relationship with parents and/or siblings was (and in Peter’s case continued to be) complicated and that they wanted to get some distance from the situation. Hanna explained,

“I grew up without dad – just with my mum and sister... financially it’s always been difficult in our family. So, for me [going to England] was also a way to get out of it. So, to get out of my small world and to actually step into the bigger kind of context and say, ‘let’s find out what’s out there’.”

Similarly, Peter explained that he was so estranged from his parents that in the four years that he has lived in England (at the time of being interviewed), he had not visited Germany
once and stays in touch with his brother via the phone. So, while his narrative suggests that the possibility of attaining a university degree was the main reason he decided to relocate in the first instance, a desire to avoid the reach of his overbearing parents was a strong contributing factor and one that remained significant once he had attained his bachelor’s degree.

However, broadly speaking, accounts which focus on the pull of exploring the unknown outweighed those that emphasised the aspects of their ‘old’ life that pushed them to leave. Many respondents simply wanted a change from their circumstances and felt that since their passport allowed them free movement within the European movement and relatively easy access compared to nations outside of the European Union, they may as well consider places outside their national borders if they were going to relocate from their familiar surroundings.

4.2.4 Cultural proximity and circumstantial factors

Another factor in some of the respondents’ decision-making process that led to their relocation to the United Kingdom were previous visits to Britain and the positive experiences and memories that these had left them with, as well as knowledge they had gained about England and specifically London through popular culture made available to them through the myriad forms of entertainment and information technology. While just under a quarter of respondents pointed out that their previous visit(s) to the UK had been influential in their decision, many more recounted memories from times that they had spent on holidays or a school trip in England, which then served to further encourage them in their decision to move to this country. Lukas explained that he ‘lost his heart’ to England during a previous trip to the country, saying:

“England has long been a matter of the heart for me. I cannot really explain why. I was here in 1988 and was about to turn 16 and one of my teachers always organised a two-week-long exchange trip to England. So, we were here, near Southampton. (...) And we were housed in twos with a local family and visited the surrounding areas and I somehow lost my heart to England. (...) So, I have this connection [to this country].”
Anna explained that a previous visit to London sparked a love for the city and its culture because she realised that for her London is the perfect mix of modernity and tradition. She proposed that in Germany people in her opinion can be only either one or the other – modern with no appreciation for traditions or traditional with no respect for modern ways of life. In London, in contrast, she felt it was perfectly normal to retain traditional aspects of culture while also adapting to and appreciating the way life and culture have changed in recent decades, which is very interesting in regard to debates surrounding cultural globalisation and in particular, what Robertson (1995) calls glocalisation. Getting a taste of the other culture was key in both of their decisions to later return to the UK permanently, illustrating the impact these earlier experiences which nurtured the seed of the desire to return.

The friendliness and warmness of the British people they had encountered on earlier visits to the UK is another reason that several respondents who had been to the UK prior to their permanent move to the country stated for their decision. Respondents spoke emphatically of their appreciation of the way in which in British people were much more likely to approach them in a politer and more friendly manner and to extend a warmer welcome to new acquaintances. Ellen, for example, pointed out specifically that this was one of the reasons why she chose to come back to England – because she really enjoyed her time and “always find[s] the English quite friendly, politer than Germans; especially compared to people from Berlin” where she is from. This perceived quality of the British is credited with respondents’ feeling of being welcome and their desire to integrate into society and is put in stark contrast to what is perceived as the German straightforwardness and ‘matter of fact’-ness which lacks this warmth and politeness.

Besides earlier visits to the UK, many respondents suggested that the knowledge they had gathered about England from TV and film, as well as music made them feel like they were familiar with the culture. The globalised sphere of particularly the film and music industries provide individuals with information about other cultures and, in this specific case, about London and its vibrant and multicultural character giving them the impression that while life would not be hugely dissimilar, it was idiosyncratic in ways that appealed to them. Evidently, having had prior mediated knowledge about London as a great place for musicians and artists, Sarah recalled the hopes and plans she had before she and her now husband moved to London, saying:
“back then... I make music. I should probably explain. It has always been a dream of mine to make music, to compose myself. I used to sing in bands; well it was part of my job [before moving to England], but I really wanted to make my own music and so I thought London would be a good place to do it... Maybe I’d be able to develop something.”

This is just one example of mediated knowledge communicated widely through the global music and entertainment industries that provided participants with an idea of what London and England more broadly would be like, inspiring and tempting them to contemplate what their life could be like if they lived there and making the possibility to move there appealing. Due to its “global cultural cool or its access to the English-language business, media and cultural life”, London, as Favell (2008b: 30) describes, has been the European city with the most appeal to intra-European movers, making it understandable that Sarah attached these hopes for a future as an artist to her move to London.

While respondents felt that London and the UK more broadly were different enough to consider moving there as an exciting endeavour, they also felt that Germany and the UK were not so dissimilar to make settling in the UK too great a challenge for them to master. Linda, for instance, contemplated the cultural difference for a few moments and suggested:

“Yes, of course [there are differences] but if you compare this to, say, the difference to Asia or Africa then that is of course a completely different thing. I feel there are a lot of things that are different [between Germany and the UK]. It’s a different approach, but on the whole, there is no big difference, I would say.”

Similarly, Christina said:

“Well... globally, rather similar – they are both Western-European countries, both Christian traditions. Yes, of course there are differences but those are not differences like between, say, Saudi Arabia and Germany or (...) Southern Europe. So, Germany and England are relatively close and as my [British] husband, who comes from an aristocratic family, always says, the royal families are all related.”

While they were very aware of the small ways in which life in England was different to life in Germany, they reasoned that on a global scale of the differences between cultures England
and Germany were not so dissimilar and concluded that the similarities were greater than the differences they had encountered, making it comparatively easier to move between these two countries.

Several of the respondents pointed out that essentially for them, there had been no strong motivations either to leave Germany or to move to the UK but that the opportunity to do a gap year, spend a year as an au-pair or work on a UK-based project, that their employer had offered them for a time, simply arose and they decided to make use of the opening without thinking too much about the long-term implications or plans. Such seemingly unintended or coincidental scenarios that led some of the participants to spontaneously decide to go to England for a fixed amount of time may appear surprising. However, keeping in mind the relative ease with which EU citizens are able to move around within the borders of the European Union it is perhaps less surprising. Moving for a limited amount of time and, in many cases, being able to keep an address as well as bank account in their country of origin, makes it possible to make such a decision relatively spontaneously as the convenience of international travel and freedom of movement make moving as well as returning relatively easy for most ‘middling’ intra-EU migrants. In addition, as most of the participants in this study had a good basic (if not excellent) command of the English language, moving to an English-speaking country to settle and work for a time presented itself as a manageable and interesting challenge as their chances of settling in and finding skilled work were highest in a country whose language they can speak well. The influence that the ability to converse fluently in the English language is not wholly surprising since, as Santacreu et al (2009: 67; see also European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006: 11) point out, “language is possibly the [biggest] cultural barrier inhibiting mobility”. I will return to the privileged position that the participants of this study (and Germans more widely) inhabit in regard to language efficiency in the subsequent chapter. In relation to the importance of language in respondents’ motivations to move to the UK, the English language’s dominance as lingua franca in international business and relations makes it understandable that English speaking countries exerted a particularly strong pull on individuals who were considering a temporary or permanent international move. This was, firstly, due to the advantage gained from their pre-existing knowledge of the language and, secondly, because further improving their fluency in the English language was going to also
improve their employability regardless of whether they stayed in the UK or moved back to Germany or, indeed, on to another country.

Furthermore, the close proximity as well as the freedom of movement among EU member states made England the more convenient choice of country compared to the United States or Australia, suggesting that despite the rise of global mobility (Urry, 2007), geographical distance and the meaning of place retains meaning and significance. In fact, a small number of respondents pointed out that they considered moving to the United States and England, or in some cases their greater wish would have been to move to the United States, but practical issues of access, costs and distance led to them choosing to move to the UK over these other English-speaking countries. Respondents like Lena, Fiona and Ellen explained that they had been interested in going to the US after finishing the German equivalent to their A-levels in Germany but decided to go to England instead mostly due to its proximity and the greater ease with which they can travel to and settle in another EU member state. Fiona said,

“in my twenties, I loved travelling to America and explored the country, and initially I actually really wanted to go there to study. But that would have been a lot more difficult financially and through Erasmus I was then able to get a stipend to go to London and lived here for a year. I enjoyed my time here very much and so had the loose plan to return to London at some point after my studies if I could find work.”

While this lends some support to Santacreu et al.’s (2009) finding that individuals who engage in student migration are more likely to relocate internationally later on in life, it also strongly suggests that for many people mobility remains limited to the countries that they can afford to travel to and have the necessary citizenship to gain access without the need to go through lengthy and often costly visa application processes.

Finally, a small number of respondents explained that one of the main reasons for moving (and in a couple of cases the key motivating factor) was their perception or experience of the United Kingdom as a more tolerant and liberal society than Germany. Simon is one of these respondents. He describes the amount of bullying and name-calling that he had to endure throughout his secondary education in a small village in Germany as well as on the street because of his sexual orientation. His decision to move to London was in no small part due to his disappointment and anger at the homophobia he encountered from parts of
German society. He said that after he had already left he made the conscious decision to deregister, which is to formally advise the German state that he will no longer have a residence in Germany.

“because [he] was home for Christmas in 2014 and on the street, I was, like, abused five times with bad things – even in Cologne! (...) Then I was like, ‘that’s it – I’m deregistering, I am breaking [away] completely, I’m cutting all my ties off.’ It was a bit of a protest, a stubborn act but I was, like, ‘I just have to do it.’”

A further example of respondents who moved to the UK as they considered it freer than Germany is that of Lukas and Monika who are married with two sons and who left Germany as they wanted to home-school their children. Germany is very strong in its stance that not sending children to formal school or taking them out of school (for reasons other than illness) is a criminal offence and there is little to no leeway given to parents in this regard. Consequently, Monika said that while she has always felt a desire to live elsewhere (and she lived in France for a year as a young adult), it was when their oldest son was getting closer to the compulsory school age of seven that she and her husband started to feel increasingly anxious to leave. Since, among the European countries, home schooling is the least regulated in the United Kingdom and because her husband (who is the main wage earner in their household) is most proficient at speaking English besides his native German, she explained, they chose to move to this country. Among the individuals in this sample, these two accounts are by far the most radical expressions of this notion of moving away from Germany to become part of what they considered a ‘freer’ and less controlled society. What they felt was that life in the UK was less regulated by the state and that they were less restrained by custom and tradition in the UK, and London more specifically. For all further respondents, who mentioned it, it was a more muted, contributing factor. Fiona, for example, explained that issues in Germany like being stopped by police officers for faulty lights on her bicycle or for crossing the road on a red traffic light make her feel more comfortable in the UK, while Damaris and Teresa both pointed out that they perceived their neighbours in Germany as more nosy and pedantic than the people they had encountered in their UK homes. Damaris explained:
“It was a nice area we lived in and as a result neighbours would observe when you’re leaving, when you get home. ‘Why do you always come home so late? Why do you not leave the house at 8 in the morning? Why does your husband do this or that?’ and they were properly keeping book and I found that so obtrusive. I found this investigating, this insistence – what I consider typically German – I couldn’t bear it anymore. (...)”

Life in Britain, in comparison, appeared liberating to them as they felt that other people and state institutions were less likely to impede on their personal decisions and expressions of self. What is interesting in this respect are the remarks of frustration many of the respondents made about connections with many British people whom they have got to know mostly remaining ‘skin-deep’, shallower relationships that they would describe as acquaintances. This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 6 when I talk about respondents’ accounts of creating a new circle of friends after arriving in the UK. However, it is worth pointing out at this point for it is evocative of Bauman’s work on the juxtaposition of freedom and community.

“There is a price to be paid for the privilege of ‘being in a community’ – and it is inoffensive or even invisible (...). The price is paid in the currency of freedom, variously called ‘autonomy’, ‘right to self-assertion’, ‘right to be yourself’. Whatever you choose, you gain some and lose some.”

(Bauman, 2001: 4)

Personal freedom, he argues, comes at the expense of a sense of belonging to a community. Thus, a person who is part of a close-knit community is more restrained by custom, traditions and by others being ‘in their business’, while a person who, like Damaris or Teresa, has ‘escaped’ the confines of this kind of community, may find themselves lacking depth of connection and community. While this is a very interesting point to consider, it is difficult to ascertain, however, to what extent this perceived difference may be down to disparities in the closeness of community between small towns and big cities – as many respondents moved from rural places to London – or whether there is a wider difference between the neighbourhood spirit and level of community between German society and British society.
4.3 Return Migration and Mobility

An important aspect to some of the respondents’ life stories is that several of them engaged in multiple moves between Germany and the UK or to several different countries and thus demonstrate a large degree of international mobility. The concept of mobility, which explores the movement of people (as well as information and things) and their impact on social life (Urry, 2007), therefore, is very pertinent. Nearly a quarter of the respondents explained that they had previously lived in the UK, returned to Germany for some time and moved to the UK again and remained residents since their second arrival in the country. The term circular migration

“refers to repeated migration experiences between an origin and destination involving more than one migration and return. Effectively, it involved the migrants sharing work, family, and other aspects of their lives between two or more location. It is usually differentiated from return migration which refers to a single emigration and return after an extended absence.” (Hugo, 2013: 1)

This term, however, is usually used when discussing the migration flows of unskilled or lower skilled workers often between a country with a less equal society thus containing more impoverished individuals to a country which is more equal and economically strong and back, such as, for example, Chinese migrants to Australia or Mexican migrants to the United States and is on the whole seasonal in nature and closely linked to the host nation’s temporary need for workers. ‘Repeated migration’ is another term, additionally used by White (2016: 164) when she discusses the migratory movements of economically disadvantaged Polish migrants who “construct livelihood strategies based on migration” by moving to another country where they can find work for some time and save as much of their wages as they can to return to Poland (and in many cases financially dependent relatives) where they remain until they repeat this circle of migration. This illustrates that there is a stark difference along the lines of social class and education that impacts on migration practices.

Due to the German respondents’ position as ‘middling’ migrants “in term of socio-economic and class position in [the] country of origin”, their accounts are rather different to those of the participants in, for instance, White’s above-mentioned research among seasonal migrants from Poland. I propose that in the case of ‘middling’ or wealthy EU citizen migrants
of which these Germans moving between Germany and the UK or from Germany to a third country and then to the UK are a part, the term ‘facilitated mobility’ most succinctly captures the comparatively higher level of freedom and mobility that they as relatively wealthy EU citizens exhibit. This is mostly due to the generally very mobile nature of their lives being facilitated and made easier by the benefits of EU citizenship and the English language skills and generally high levels of education that provide them with a better starting position compared to many other migrants. All apart from one respondent explained that they frequently embarked on visits to Germany as well as travel to other places on holidays, adding a further, more transient, dimension to their movement or mobility across borders. As a result, these instances of multiple migratory moves, too, are more accurately understood as further expressions of international mobility that illustrate the relative ease with which these individuals have been able to move within the European Economic Area that enables a flexible approach to what otherwise might have to be a more drastic and long-term decision. It is thus appropriate to think of them as examples of mobility rather than circular migration. Lisa, for instance, who, after two years as an au-pair in the UK, returned to Germany to commence a university degree, fell in love with her friend’s housemate on a visit to her friend in London, and therefore decided to move back to England to be with him after completing her bachelor’s degree in Germany.

Similarly, Judith, who works as a journalist in London, moved to Canada and then Scotland with her Scottish husband whom she met in her hometown Munich, but explained that in order to progress her career she chose to move to Berlin for a time (while her husband remained in Scotland). After several years in a long-distance relationship, the pair then moved to London and have remained there since, raising their young son. Linda’s story also demonstrates this mobile dynamic. As previously described, she moved to England to pursue a bachelor’s degree in European politics, followed by a master’s degree which was dually taught in England and France. Once she had completed this, she moved to Brussels for a few years to work in this policy area and has also lived in Australia for some time with her Irish husband before returning to the UK once they had become parents. Linda and Judith are two examples of a few respondents in this sample whose accounts are suggestive of very internationally mobile lives. However, Judith’s account of her time in Canada paints a rather
more sobering picture of the opportunities available to EU migrants when they relocate to places outside the European Union. She said,

“I went to Canada, my husband had a job [lined up], I did not. I started looking for work when we got there. We weren’t particularly happy there; well, we had a happy personal life, but in terms of work it was difficult, and we had issues with visas because you couldn’t move jobs on the visa we had. And that is why we ended up looking elsewhere and then my husband got a job offer to go to Scotland.”

What this shows is that the freedom of movement that EU citizens enjoy within the Union’s borders is quite unique from a wider or global perspective and that while many of the respondents moved internationally more than once and therefore demonstrate a great amount of international mobility, this mobility is limited on a global scale. It would, therefore, be inaccurate to declare it global mobility, insofar as that would suggest successful and smooth transitions from one continent to another as few attempted to settle in a country outside the EU and the few who did, reported legal complications. However, since many reported going on shorter trips having moved across national borders several times, they therefore experienced every-day life in three or more different cultures or societies even if these were predominantly EU member states, this does nevertheless suggest that they occupy a privileged position of opportunities in regard to international mobility and thus the “pursuit of their project of self-fashioning” (Conradson and Latham, 2005: 290).

4.4 Respondents’ expectations regarding the length of their stay in the UK

A theme that arose from the data was the variability in respondents’ expectations regarding the length of their stay abroad. When assessing the expectations in regard to how long the respondents intended to stay in the UK, it becomes apparent that while there was a sizeable number of respondents who moved to the UK with the intention not to return to Germany, just over half of the respondents did not view their move as permanent and, even in instances where individuals wished that it would be permanent, they embarked on the venture knowing that they could easily return if things did not turn out as planned or hoped. King (2012) suggests that such flexibility is one of the features of modern day migration, particularly among those who would be considered elite migrants as they are able to move with few restrictions due to their financial situation and privileged passport, and therefore
can be flexible about their place of residency. He states that, “temporary migration can morph into permanent settlement, as migrants who intended to stay for a limited period of time continually postpone their return until it never happens” (2012: 8). While my participants, as previously discussed, were not predominantly elite but middling migrants, the freedom of movement facilitated by the European Union mitigates the hurdles, such as visa applications, which would otherwise make migration more costly and complicated. The flexibility with which many of the participants were able to move from one country to the other is characteristic of lifestyle migration, which as Cohen et al. (2013: 4) point out, “does not presuppose that there is no intention to return. A return to point of origin, or to any other point in the on-going movement process” is possible but should not be assumed. This of course is only possible, however, where the migrant has or can gain the right to move and settle freely, as is possible for EU citizens within the Union’s borders.

One aspect of the mobility that respondents demonstrate which to some extent complicates the differentiation between respondents who left Germany intending to return and those who intended to remain in the UK is that, as previously mentioned, several of the respondents had, at the point of being interviewed, already moved to the UK twice. So, for example Hanna, whose account of her second move to the UK with her husband leaves no question about the fact that she left Germany without the intention to return, had spent a gap year working at a YMCA at the age of 19 in Surrey and returned to Germany where she went to university and began her working life and got married. While she said that for the first few years after returning to Germany she had hoped to one day return to England, it is unlikely that she would have returned had it not been for the job offer her husband received from a UK university. So, she moved to the UK twice – once for a one-year stint and the second time with the goal to remain and settle in the UK with her family.

Nearly half of the forty-three interviewees pointed out during the course of their interview that they moved with the intent to settle permanently in the UK. There were a number of reasons for people’s decision to relocate with a view to doing so indefinitely. However, many of them could not give one definitive reason or struggled to explain why they left Germany without the intention to return. Based on their accounts it simply seemed to them the right or most logical decision to make. They viewed their move as part of a process of progression and several of them expressed concerns that only moving to another country
for a limited time would be counter-productive as they would have to create a new life for themselves in the new country only to abandon it again and have to start again in Germany on their return. So, for them, leaving behind their native country only made sense as a permanent move.

Several of the respondents who said that they moved to the UK with or for their partner pointed out that they had no intention to return to Germany at the time. In some instances, this was due to the length of relationship and depth of commitment (due to marriage and shared children), but in all instances (even when the relationship was in its early days) this can be put down to the belief that these respondents had thought their relationship was stable and would last. They therefore assumed that their stay with this partner would be permanent. Hetty was one of the respondents who moved internationally with her then-husband and two daughters of school age and arrived in England with the resolve to stay permanently. Her story is one of a number of moves across borders, having moved to Spain and back to Germany with her family due to her now ex-husband’s “restlessness” and desire to move. She explained that what was most important to her at that time was that they go somewhere where her husband was most likely to want to stay as she wanted more stability for their young daughters. Consequently, since her ex-husband was British she felt that moving to England meant that he was more likely not to feel the need to continue moving.

As is a common migrant experience, roughly a quarter of respondents said that their initial plan was to go to England for a limited time and to then return to Germany and remain there. These respondents did not entertain any thoughts about a future that they could or wanted to forge in the UK and as a result they, in many cases, had structures or plans in place for what they would do in Germany after their short-term stay abroad. All of these respondents had formal arrangements set up for their time in the UK. For instance, a small number of the female interviewees came to England to work as an au-pair for a year. Olivia explained that she wanted to take one year out as the opportunity simply presented itself through friends of her parents and she was going to return afterwards to redo her German A-levels equivalent, and once completed would begin working in Germany. Similarly, Nele decided to come to England as an au-pair for a year to have more time to decide which degree programme and university in Germany she wanted to choose. Likewise, Stefan, Deborah and Natalie explained that as part of their degrees at German universities they needed to carry
out internships and decided to undertake these in the UK. Prior to their arrival, all of them had arranged accommodation for the duration of their six or eight month stays and each made it clear that they had had no doubt in their mind that they would return to Germany after that time to continue their education and life there. It was during their time in the country that for different reasons each of them decided to extend their time in England to the point where some of them could no longer imagine ever returning to Germany at the point of being interviewed.

For the majority of the respondents, however, the question of how long they would stay in the UK did not seem to be one that they felt they needed to have an answer to when they embarked on their migratory journey. They left Germany knowing that depending on how life unfolded in the new country they could either settle and build a life there or return to Germany having gained international experience and language skills which would be personally enriching as well as enhance their curriculum vitae. Sarah and Thomas were a married couple, who both grew up in Germany and after being in a long-distance relationship while Thomas was in Austria for some time, decided to move to London together. They explained that since Thomas was not keen to return to Germany and Sarah did not want to move (back) to Vienna, they felt that moving to London – a city which they both liked from previous visits – seemed a good and exhilarating option for both. Their example, which is one of many among the individuals in this study, further exemplifies the relative ease with which intra-European migration (within EU member states) can be undertaken. Respondents pointed out that, besides the initial position of not knowing anyone and having to find one’s feet, there are few obstacles to settling in another country in the European Union and that their experience of planning, traveling and settling in the UK (while it had its challenges) was positive and something they would recommend to others. In addition, the geographical proximity which has been enhanced further through the advancements in transportation technology and the affordability of travel, they suggested, also makes moving from Germany to the United Kingdom an appealing possibility, as visiting friends and family regularly remains comparatively inexpensive, and is not as time-consuming as traveling to other destinations may be.

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4.5 Reasons to remain

Apart from one interviewee, none of the respondents stated that they had any concrete or immediate plans to move back to Germany at the point of their interview. The one participant who was about to return to Germany when she was interviewed explained her decision saying,

“Well, if I had a great job here I would not leave and if I had a great partner, I would not leave. But since I do not have either, and the Tories may be re-elected, I’d rather leave”,

indicating that she regretted having to leave her life in the UK behind but that her situation at that point in time meant that she could not justify staying when she felt that her financial and social situation in Germany was likely to be better than in the UK. Fischer and Malmberg’s (2001: 365) finding, which is based on Swedish census data, that both losing a job and losing a partner “decreases the propensity to stay”, illustrates the importance that such life-course events have on a person’s desire to stay or move on. A considerable number of respondents who initially did not have the intention to stay in the UK long-term or permanently remained in the country beyond their original timeframe. “Studies of mobility which directly investigate the overlapping of temporary and permanent migration” and the reasons why one can turn into the other, as Khoo et al. (2008: 195) propose, continue to be rather limited. The reasons to remain in the UK that the participants in this research provided varied relative to their personal circumstances and histories but are not dissimilar to those that other respondents offered as the initial motivations for their move. In addition, there were some among those who arrived with the intention to stay permanently, who stated that when they encountered challenges in their personal life which made them reconsider their move to the UK, they still decided to stay. As with individuals’ initial motivations, there often was more than one reason why a respondent decided to stay. These reasons why they remained can be summarised into three categories – relationships and children, employment and educational opportunities, and convenience and continuity.

Several of the respondents who did not intend to stay in England explained that they fell in love with a UK citizen or resident during their stay and decided to remain (or return) in order to be in a relationship with this person and explore whether there was the possibility of a shared future. Like Lisa, who returned to the UK because she fell in love with the friend’s
housemate when visiting the UK, Stefan stayed in the UK longer than he had intended for love. A change in their personal life, and more specifically their love life, then was the main reason why they changed their intention to spend only a limited time in the UK. Khoo et al. (2008) made a similar discovery when researching temporary migrants’ reason to remain in Australia, saying that the forming of ‘personal relationships’ was one of the reasons their respondents gave as to why they had a change of mind and applied for permanent residence. Another frequently cited reason Khoo et al. (2008: 222) state why previously temporary migrants decided they wanted to stay in Australia was if they had children and saw “a better future for themselves and their children there”.

Parental concern for the wellbeing of their children was also mentioned by participants in this research. Some of the parents among the respondents pointed out that they decided to stay in the UK in order to provide their children with a steady and stable upbringing, as they believed that uprooting them while they were young would have detrimental effects on their development and education. Caroline, for example, who moved to England with her husband as he had better chances of securing indefinite leave to remain in the UK, remained in the UK despite the breakup of this relationship. She made it clear in her interview that she intended to stay in England permanently and had recently been granted British citizenship for herself and her three daughters. She named her children as the main reason for her decision saying that she “know[s] that [her] children are more likely to feel at home here than anywhere else in terms of their national identity”. Similarly, Hetty whose marriage to her British husband also ended in divorce pointed to her daughters as the reason she remained in England as she was concerned about what a further international move back to Germany, with its change in official national language, would have meant for her children, their educational performance and thus chances in life. While it is not clear what exactly Khoo et al.’s (2008) survey respondents meant by ‘seeing a better future’ – it could be this same wish for stability, or it could be better opportunities and living standards – it highlights the significance that children play in their parents’ decisions, which in some cases can turn migrations that were intended to be temporary into permanent ones. While some mothers among the respondents explained that they had waited to leave Germany until after their children had reached adulthood, most of the instances where children were mentioned in this context were parents who currently had under-age children living with them in the UK.
This again highlights the importance of life-course events on migration (Fisher and Malmberg, 2001).

In some situations, the decision to return or stay can be complicated, requiring a great amount of emotional labour on the part of the migrant (Hochschild, 2003). Emotional labour, as Amy Wharton (2009: 147) suggests, “refers to [the] process by which” individuals are “expected to manage their feelings”. According to Arlie Hochschild (2003: 7) who termed the expression, it is labour which “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others”. An example of someone enacting this kind of labour in her daily life was Linda who, it became apparent, was presently struggling with her situation. When I interviewed her, she was living in East Sussex with her Irish husband and two daughters of toddler age, and during our conversation expressed a strong desire to return to Germany on the one hand, but on the other, felt unable to do so as her husband, who was the main wage earner and who did not speak German, did not want to move there.

“Well, to be completely honest, if it was down to me I would be back in Germany. I feel from me you’ll get a lot of negative things about England. So, I am glad this is anonymous but especially now since I have children... I still have friends with children in Germany and I think I must say that the longer I live in England, the more German I become somehow. I know this sounds awful but that is how it is. It is just that I miss a lot of things and I hear a lot of what this phase [of raising children] is like in Germany. For example, child benefits and childcare – well, it is unbelievable. You probably shouldn’t even think about it – the difference in cost. It is terrifying. It’s unbelievable – so much more expensive. (...)”

MW: Had you ever considered returning, moving back before you had children?

Linda: It never really came up because we were living in Australia then. That’s where the oldest was born and then it was obviously that the main breadwinner has the last word. And my husband simply doesn’t speak much German and as a result it was decided. Well, we wanted to return to Europe to be closer to the grandparents and so it just kind of happened that we moved to the UK.”
Like the previously mentioned example of Erika who moved to England as her British partner did not feel at home in Germany, the sacrificing of one’s own wishes is something the accounts of several of the respondents in intercultural relationships (whether German-British or German and another, third nationality) show. Due to the better proficiency of the German partner in the English language, the English-speaking country tends to be where the couple settles permanently. While in most cases in this research, this was a sacrifice the interviewee professed they were happy to make, this is not always the case and when such a situation arises it has the potential to come at a high emotional cost of the person(s) affected which the example of Linda makes clear. The feelings of loss and longing she expressed around her desire to raise her children in Germany echo feelings not uncommon for ‘trailing spouses’ many of whom, as Mcnulty (2012: 430) among others discusses, have to deal with “psychological challenges that are manifested in feelings of isolation, loneliness, resentment and depression”. The dilemma posed by the perceived impossibility to relocate to Germany due to her husband’s inability to speak German and therefore work in Germany while she raises their children (whom he, according to her, considers mostly her responsibility), effectively leaves her feeling trapped and in need to manage or suppress these negative feelings. In this respect, accounts like Linda’s differ from those of ‘trailing wives’ as these usually have accompanied their partner who originates from the same country and a possibility to return to that country, therefore, is a clear possibility. A wider exploration of the experiences of spouses in inter-cultural relationships with a partner who cannot easily move to the country of the spouse’s origin would be interesting to further understand what such spouses go through and how they deal with their situation.

In the same way that it has been a commonly mentioned reason why respondents chose to move to the UK, the job market and business world which, as many of the respondents point out, is more flexible and accessible and the educational opportunities made possible by lower or more flexible entry requirements are major factors in people’s decision to stay in the country. Lotte, who came to the UK initially only to gain work experience in an architectural office in the hope that it would improve her chances to get onto the degree programme in Germany despite her lower Abitur results. She described that she
“originally wanted to study architecture in Germany but that did not work out because I was not good enough at school. So, I decided to do a six-month long internship in London after which I would have returned to Germany to try to get onto the degree programme.”

However, towards the end of the internship she was persuaded by her colleagues to consider studying architecture in Scotland as in the UK her lower Abitur results would not jeopardise her chances of getting a place on the degree programme. As a result, she abandoned her plan to return to Germany after her internship and extended her stay in the country for several more years when she fell in love. Apart from a three-year long stay in Berlin with this now ex-partner, she has remained in the UK. Leonie, too, decided to stay in England for educational reasons as she wanted to do a master’s degree (which was then followed by her first graduate job) saying that it had not been something she had thought was possible for her as a non-UK resident. So, when she realised that completing a UK degree was a possibility, she decided not to pass it up. It is not entirely clear in some cases, however, - and Leonie’s is one of them - whether this really was the dominant motivating factor or whether starting a university degree or job simply became their way of making it possible to remain. In addition, vocational qualifications gained in the UK are not in all cases easily transferable to the German job market. This is something that Kathie pointed out as one of the reasons why she feels she could not easily return to Germany. She said,

“I don’t really know. When you are pretty happy where you are, why would I go back to Germany? Why? And my vocational training, the one I got here in England, it is not accepted in Germany. That is a whole other thing. I was talking to some German stone masons and they said, ‘Well, alright. Maybe you could start as an assistant stone mason or you might have to start from scratch as an apprentice.’ So, I thought, ‘well, great!’ I feel like the German system has advantages and disadvantages, but; well, it simply is different to the English one and so I think, well, why should I go?”

A return to Germany while she simply does not see its point due to being happy where she is, therefore, also would mean a significant step back in terms of her career as she would have to retrain to be able to work in the same profession there.
The most commonly stated reasons to remain in the UK despite an initial plan to return to Germany after a set number of months or years were to do with the degree of social embeddedness. Many respondents pointed out that their experience of settling in the UK had turned out to be a much more smooth and positive experience than they had expected and that they did not want to uproot themselves and abandon their new circles of friends or the connections they had made at their work place. To them, remaining meant to continue building on these accomplishments whereas returning to Germany was seen as disrupting the progression that they had accomplished in their social life and/or career. They, as a result, report that they did not need reasons to stay but rather reasons to leave – staying in their new home had become the ‘default’ and returning to Germany had become the option that would need to be weighed up carefully or would be taken if their circumstances in the UK were to worsen or elderly parents were to become frail.

Unsurprisingly, the longer most respondents had lived outside of Germany the less likely they were to say that they felt they wanted to or could return to Germany. The reasons they suggested were their own level of integration into British society facilitated by the degree to which they have embraced British culture and adopting of habits and customs. Several, for example, described symptoms of reverse culture shock such as “alienation, disorientation (...) and disenchantment” (Gaw, 2000: 84) when they pointed out that they felt like a stranger during visits of their old home towns or Germany more generally. Reverse culture shock, as Furnham (2012: 14) suggests, “occurs when returning to one’s home culture to find it different from that which was recalled”. The shock therefore is in the realisation that “you can never go home again because” the place you remember no longer exists. This phenomenon is thus “the process of readjusting, reacculturating and reassimilating into one’s own culture after living in a different country for a significant period of time” (Gaw, 2000: 83-84). Their time of submersion into another cultural code and context meant that some of the respondents no longer felt they fitted in or belonged in what used to be their home. Teresa for instance, explained why she had no intention to move back to Germany saying,

“I simply feel completely at home here; despite my moaning. When I went to back to Germany, say after ten years, I could no longer recognise [my old hometown]. And now, everything has changed, even the language. (...) All the cultural references that I use no longer exist. My 25-year-old nephew and my niece, they speak in terms I do not
understand, and they do not understand mine. I missed all these new expressions. (...) I left two or three months after the German reunification. Germany has changed completely. It is; yes, I simply no longer recognise it. (...) I don’t want to move back. I don’t know it anymore. It would be like emigrating a second time; I am too old for that.”

Accordingly, while previous studies by Stelling (1991) and Werkman (1980) suggest that adolescents and children suffer most severely from the effects of reverse culture shock, I assert that attention should also be paid to the experiences and concerns of older migrants; particularly considering the uncertainties regarding their future in the UK that EU migrants have had to bear since the calling of the referendum on the UK’s EU membership (which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 7). Nevertheless, younger migrants among the participants similarly discussed difficulties they experienced when returning to Germany after spending some time living in the UK. Lisa, for instance, who, as previously mentioned, returned to Germany to begin a university degree after working as an au-pair declared that the “second culture shock” which she encountered on returning to Germany was more severe and that the immensity of this effect took her completely by surprise. She explained that while she had expected there to be an initial phase of having to find her feet when moving to England, she had not expected to have to readjust to life in Germany. She said,

“I found that the culture shock when I went from England to Germany was greater than when I came from Germany to England and I felt really homesick. I did not feel homesick when I went to England after twenty-two years in Germany, but after two years in England the homesickness when I returned to Germany was great. The culture shock really was immense. I simply could not live among Germans anymore. I genuinely took two to two and a half years until I felt okay again.”

What this suggests is that a key factor in the strength of such a reverse culture shock is that unlike the culture shock that a migrant may experience on arriving in a new country, it is likely to hit the migrant unexpectedly. Furthermore, Lisa’s account shows that she had invested so much energy and effort into accustoming herself to English social norms and etiquette that, as she explained, she found the more direct and less warm way of communicating with acquaintances and colleagues which she encountered on returning to Germany hard to get
used to. She further explained that she found the experience of readjusting to life in her old home so testing that she decided she did not want to move away from Germany again. However, when she visited a London-based friend while she was a student, she fell in love with her friend’s flatmate of Indian origin which led to her decision to return to the UK after completing her degree and the couple have remained in London, renting a room together in a shared house. Based on the accounts provided by the participants in this research, what length of time qualifies as a significant period, is also influenced by a number of other factors, including for example interest and ability to consume media from the home country, and strength of remaining ties in home country which will be discussed in subsequent chapters, and varies from one person to the next.

Interestingly, however, a limited number of respondents who had left Germany with a very firm intention that it would only be for a small number of months explained that after the planned time had passed they had not felt that they had “properly arrived” in the country, as Kathie put it. She explained that while she had intended to only stay for a few months, she did not feel ready to leave as she had not made many British acquaintances during her internship working in a hotel and as a result decided to stay on to immerse herself more into British culture and society (which in turn led to her meeting and falling in love with an English man who she has been in a relationship with for over a decade now). While this desire to ‘go native’ and to properly experience British life was not given as a reason to stay by many of the respondents, it nonetheless corresponds with an often-cited desire by participants to want to take part in British cultural life (as discussed in the following chapter). So, in the early days of living in the new country a lack of social embeddedness and inability to immerse oneself was viewed by some as a reason to remain, while in the long run strong social ties as well as an embeddedness into British cultural life made staying in the UK the default position for many who had initially not intended to settle in the country permanently.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and explained the motivations for respondents’ decision to move to the UK as well as the reasons why those respondents, who initially had intended their stay in the country to be limited, decided to extend their time in the UK. Despite both the country of origin and country of destination being similar in regard to their economic strength
and living standards, the comparatively more flexible business industry and easier access criteria to get into some universities made moving to the UK an opportunity to reach personal aspirations. The prospect of being able to gain higher qualifications and get into jobs which would have been closed off for them, were significant factors in the decision-making process of many of the respondents, illustrating that to them their move was part of their ‘reflexive project of self’ (Giddens, 1991) and their active attempts at shaping the course and direction in life. Love and the desire to be near the person with whom they had formed an emotional bond – either during a previous visit to the UK or while in Germany – was another key motivation discussed in this chapter, illustrating the importance that such non-economic factors had in the far-reaching decision on whether to leave one’s country of origin. While love – either moving to be reunited with a partner or to accompany a partner – was provided as a motivation by participants at varying life stages, moving to the UK to *accompany* their partner was mentioned more by those among the participants who were in their thirties or forties and particularly by those who already had children with their partner. Due to the number of men being considerably lower in the sample than that of women, it is difficult to comment on whether motivations differed based on gender. Migrating to accompany or reunite with a partner was salient among both male and female interviewees. Motivations to move to the UK, thus, were varied and were also often overlapping with a number of factors, such as, a romantic relationship as well as the prospect of a desirable job leading individuals to make the decision to relocate. Push and pull factors were closely-intertwined in the narratives that respondents produced which suggests that in the absence of strong push factors like war, poverty or persecution, the decision whether to stay or relocate is down to individual lifestyle choices, rather than clearly distinguishable “factors which act to hold (...) [or] repel” people (Lee, 1966: 50).

This chapter has also demonstrated the importance of English language proficiency and sense of cultural, as well as geographical, proximity in respondents’ choice of the UK as their country of destination. English language proficiency varied between participants, particularly based on educational background and the individual’s age at migration, with older migrants reporting greater difficulties than participants who were younger and had enjoyed more intensive English language teaching and more recently. The convenience of moving to another EU member state, whose official language they can speak and where they therefore
believe that they can find work is not to be underestimated, raising questions about the future of the UK as a destination for EU movers when it will cease to be part of the European Union. This chapter’s discussion illustrates that the intra-European mobility of German participants of this study places them in the group of middling lifestyle migrants who embarked on their journey not because of dire necessity but in the pursuit to create the life that they wanted for themselves. Due to the ease with which most of them were able to move, which was facilitated by their EU citizenship rights as well as the strong educational and vocational skills with which their previous life in Germany had provided them, I concluded that they form part of I what I have termed ‘facilitated mobility’. This is to acknowledge and stress the structural advantages that they benefited from, which made making the transition from one European country to another and successfully settling in it significantly easier compared to non-EU migrants and/or migrants from lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds and needs to be highlighted to add balance to the more dominant narrative of individual agency in the respondents’ accounts of their successful migration.

Embedded into this discussion of motivations and reasons, the chapter also reviewed what respondents’ expectations regarding the length of their stay in the UK had been, demonstrating that while a significant number had left Germany with the intention to remain in the UK permanently, most did not, and their accounts therefore illustrate how temporary migration can change into permanent migration. The insight that, once settled in the country of destination, a return to the old home country is often viewed by the EU migrants in this research as effectively another act of emigration, which has to be carefully weighed up and which is only undertaken if the perceived gains are likely to justify the cost of uprooting oneself another time, is a fascinating one. It suggests that maybe the direction of the question should be the other way around. Instead of asking migrants why they have remained in the country that they have moved to – a question which many respondents reported being asked on a regular basis – we could ask what it would take for them to consider embarking on another migratory journey, as for many staying has become the default position. The “increasing policy significance of (...) the transition from temporary to permanent” in the face of few studies on this topic having been carried out, as Khoo et al. (2008: 195) suggest, makes the above exploration of the accounts of respondents who stayed in the UK despite their initial intentions very valuable and adds knowledge to this gap in the academic literature.
In line with literature on lifestyle migration (e.g. Favell, 2008) but departing from earlier, traditional work on migration (e.g. Lee, 1966), this research provides evidence that certain characteristics of migration, such as embarking on a journey into the unknown (or only partially known) as well as the need for the migrant to re-make themselves, which have been thought of as hindrances from or struggles in migration, were found to be some of the very reasons why many of the people interviewed chose to move from Germany to the UK. Furthermore, the discussion of the experiences of migrants who started families in the UK with a non-German partner poses important questions about the experiences of such spouses, particularly in situations where they would like to return to their country of origin and may not feasibly be able to. In the following chapter I turn to discussing participants’ accounts of settling into their new surroundings and – unsurprisingly considering the number of participants who remained in the UK despite having other plans prior to their arrival – the relative ease with which many were able to do so.
5. The lived experience of arriving and settling in the United Kingdom

5.1 Introduction

Following on from the previous discussion of individuals’ motivations for moving and remaining in the UK, this chapter focusses on the accounts which respondents provided on how they found their feet in the new country and how they experienced this process. Thus, the subsequent discussion focuses on the accounts respondents provided on how difficult they perceived their new start in the UK to have been, how they went about creating a new social network in the new environment whilst maintaining transnational ties with family and friends and the respondents’ thoughts and experiences around the idea of integration. Due to most of the respondents having benefited from a good secondary and in many cases, tertiary education, which placed a focus on teaching English as a foreign language, few respondents reported any significant language barrier. Many did, however, point out that they encountered situations in which minor linguistic or cultural misunderstandings occurred which they needed to overcome and learn from. Listening to respondents’ views on their life in a different country provided an insight into their opinions and thoughts on what they believe immigration and integration should look like. Many stressed that they considered it their duty to integrate and blend in as best as they could, while a small number of interviewees extended this thought not just to themselves but immigrants more widely.

5.2 Settling into the new country

Settling into a new environment requires a great deal of flexibility and cultural sensitivity on the part of the individual who leaves behind their familiar surroundings to find their feet somewhere new. Securing employment and finding a place to live are generally two of the most immediate issues with which new arrivals in a destination country are faced. One advantage many of the respondents in this study had was that their knowledge and command of the English language was already good if not excellent prior to their arrival in the UK. Previous literature, as Adsera and Pytlíkova (2015: 49) point out, “has shown that both fluency in the language of the destination country and the ability to learn it quickly” have a significant impact on the immigrant’s ability to transfer or apply their knowledge and skills in the new setting, thus making it easier for such an immigrant to maintain or increase their socio-economic status. Furthermore, the ability “to speak the host country language”, Guven and
Islam (2015:513) point out, enables the immigrant “to communicate with their colleagues and customers more effectively, consequently increasing productivity and opening up new opportunities as their fluency improves”. Language proficiency, as a number of existing studies suggest (e.g. Chen, 2013; Bleakley and Chin, 2008, 2010; Guven and Islam, 2015), is instrumental in enabling immigrants’ process of settling and integrating into their new environment. Initial difficulties to do with English language proficiency and linguistics were an issue for some of the respondents. The severity of the problems that they encountered was of course down to factors such as their level of education, previous experience of visiting English speaking countries, as well as age. Many of those respondents who came to England at a more advanced age or who began to learn English later in life were more likely to express that they had struggled with the language and when I spoke English with the respondents (though with most interviewees this only happened briefly as most interviews were conducted in German) I detected stronger accents and more grammatical errors in speech among some of the older respondents, most of whom did not learn English from a young age. This is in line with existing research (e.g. Guven and Islam, 2015) which found that the age at which one migrates to a country where the official language is not that of the immigrant’s home country likely has an impact on how easily a person is able to learn or improve their language proficiency, which in turn is likely to affect how effortlessly they are able to integrate socially and economically.

On the whole, the English language proficiency of respondents in this study was very good, in no small part due to the good levels of education that many of the interviewees enjoyed, which eased their process of settling into their new surroundings and also helped them to adjust to British cultural norms. It is worth pointing out that this is not to say that all Germans have higher than average English language skills. Germans with a poorer command of the English language are probably less likely to engage in lifestyle migration to a country where their life chances were likely to be scuppered by an inability to communicate in the national language. In addition, German migrants to the UK who found that their understanding of and ability to successfully communicate in English were insufficient, would likely not have remained and instead returned to Germany where they were more likely to develop fulfilling careers and social lives. This illustrates the importance of social class in relation to types of migration in so far as that individuals from lower socio-economic
backgrounds and/or with fewer foreign language skills are not as likely to engage in lifestyle migration as people higher socio-economic backgrounds. Even though many of the respondents who took part in this study are not wealthy enough to be considered part of a transnational Capitalist class (Sklair, 2002), as lifestyle migrants they, nonetheless, “are and continue to be structurally located within a global elite” (O’Reilly and Benson, 2014: 9).

As discussed in the previous chapter on respondents’ motivations, to most respondents having some (at least) basic knowledge of and experience in using the English language was a prerequisite for choosing an English-speaking EU country as their country of destination. This demonstrates that prior to their decision to move, they were aware of the impact that language proficiency was going to have and, thus, chose the United Kingdom partly because they realised that their chances of successfully integrating and succeeding economically were highest in a country whose language they already had a good grounding in. When asked how easy it was to move across national borders within Europe, Hetty’s response succinctly illustrated this point when she explained,

“in my personal opinion, such a move is not a problem at all, but I would never move to a country whose language I don’t speak because if you cannot speak the language then... that’s chaos, you understand? And well, I have lived in Spain and I was able to speak Spanish before I moved there. Then I lived in Spain for seventeen years and I am still fluent in Spanish, just as I am in English, but I would not go to live somewhere without being able to speak the language.”

Such a stance, which as previously discussed was displayed by nearly all respondents, is very likely to have greatly impacted on their experience of settling in the new country since “the acquisition of the host country’s language”, as Euwals et al. (2007: 9), who conducted research on the issue, propose, is a crucial “aspect of integration into a host country”. An immigrant’s command of the host country’s language, as they suggest further, plays a significant role in the immigrant’s ability to integrate socially, culturally and economically. As all of the interviewees wanted and needed to integrate themselves into their new host society as well as possible (most of them in no small part due to their need to secure (well-)paid employment) such a stance of course makes sense.
However, some did report having initial difficulties with expressing themselves accurately which came at an emotional cost for these individuals. Experiencing some level of difficulty is not surprising since “language”, as Favell’s (2008b: 143) research into European movers from the original fourteen member states found, “is the most frequently cited barrier to free movement in Europe.” Similarly, White (2016: 164) reflecting on the findings of her research on Polish return migrants and long-term unemployed potential migrants living in Poland concludes, as pointed out in the previous chapter, that individuals who lack support from ethnic networks and “who migrate without the linguistic or other kinds of confidence needed to construct new, ‘bridging’ ties abroad have little choice (...) but to return”. The experiences that the respondents in this study recounted, however, were not as severe as to leave them feeling that they had no choice but to go back to Germany. Lisa, whose first move to the UK was an au-pair in West London, recalled that while she found her feet over time, in the beginning she did struggle in part because of her comparatively limited vocabulary.

“In the beginning, when I was really quite bad at speaking the language I struggled because there were so many emotions inside of me, but I had no way of expressing them. My English really wasn’t that good back then, I have to say. And I did not have any German speakers around me. So, you feel all these emotions and you cannot get them out, you cannot express them. The only thing I was able to say was, ‘Yeah, I’m not well’ or something like that. And then... yeah, then it all got better with time.”

This citation clearly demonstrates the emotional pain Lisa underwent in these early days when she felt alone and unable to communicate how she felt to those around her because she had no German-speakers around her to whom she could turn. The emotional labour she needed to invest into the management of her emotions, particularly as she was living with the family whose children she was looking after, understandably, did not make the situation easier as the private home and ‘public’ workplace (see Hochschild, 2003) were one and the same, allowing little space for her to retreat and tend to the difficult feelings with which she was struggling.

The feeling of isolation that some of the respondents experienced initially was not solely down to language barriers as other respondents like Kathie discussed, saying that when you live among people from a different cultural background
“you are kind of alone, you know? Because then there are things [which are important to you that are not important to people of the majority population] where somehow nobody understands why these things mean so much to you – they just cannot comprehend it”.

Drawing on Schütz’s (1971) interpretation on the Simmelian concept of the stranger, Kathie found that her past and with it particular things she treasured did not carry the same significance in the culture by which she was now surrounded. Such an occurrence, as Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 17) advises, “is sometimes experienced as an amputation because a whole part of one’s own story becomes invisible to those who are now close”. Hence, the freedom to remake oneself when you are a person without a history to people around you which some of the respondents relished, as discussed in the previous chapter, was occasionally also experienced negatively as Kathie’s comments illustrate. This, as several of the respondents pointed out, can be difficult to deal with, but particularly so if one cannot even find the words to express one’s thoughts and feelings. So, for those who moved to the UK on their own and had no one to talk to in a language in which they were confident, those early days of settling in the other country felt overwhelming and isolating at times, mostly because of the language barrier which stopped them from being able to make themselves understood and share their experience with someone who could help or understand them.

Furthermore, while many of the respondents did not bring up any issues concerning language proficiency, several did say that they realised in the early weeks and months of living in the UK that their school English had not prepared them as well as they had expected for conversing socially, as well as at work, in English with native English speakers and non-native English speakers from other backgrounds. The numerous different accents which can be found in Britain, many respondents pointed out, made it harder for them to quickly get used to understanding and using the language fluently in their everyday lives. Patrick, like many of the respondents most of whom had exclusively lived in the South East of England in their time in the UK, stated that he had and continues to have some difficulty understanding Scottish, Irish and particularly Northern-English accents like Mancunian and Midlands accents. Likewise, Leonie explained that despite learning English in school she struggled initially with becoming fluent in the language and said that “in the beginning” she “really had to get used to it and there were a lot of misunderstandings just language-wise.” Over the four years that
she had lived in London she learned a lot in that respect but points out that strong accents still cause her some problems. She further described that for some time she had now been living in a flat share with a married couple who are Scottish and Irish. She explained,

“so, she is Scottish and he is Irish, and I understand her perfectly fine, she has a great accent – Scottish. His accent is Irish; from Belfast – it’s a nightmare sometimes. They’re lovely people; I love them to pieces but… they; they sort of swallow half of the sounds, so they don’t really make breaks and it sounds nearly like a sort of singing sound. (...) So often we don’t understand each other, or I say one thing or he says something and I’m like ‘I’m sorry?’ and he says it again and I, ‘I’m sorry, I just can’t understand’. So, his wife is actually very often sort of translating so that I understand everything. And that’s even after four years of living here.”

This illustrates that some of the respondents who had good prior knowledge of the English language, nevertheless, found that the reality of speaking English in every-day situations with people from a variety of regions and linguistic backgrounds still posed a challenge to successful communication. However, the accounts of participants draw a much more positive picture of their ability and experience of settling in the UK than research on other migrant groups on their experiences of settling in the country they have immigrated to.

Linguistic difficulties which immigrants may encounter go beyond the inability to speak the country’s language fluently but also extend to differences in expressions and social etiquette which can create barriers to intercultural communication and understanding. “There is no way”, Jandt (2010: 81) points out, someone who has just arrived in a new cultural setting “could learn all the rules governing appropriate and inappropriate behaviour”. In addition, homonyms, which are words that an immigrant knows the (or a) meaning of, can have further meanings or an entirely different meaning in a different cultural context (Jandt, 2010: 135). Many respondents said that there were instances that caused some confusion to start with. One of these issues was mentioned by both Charlotte and Nele and when they recalled them in retrospect seemed to them almost silly in their banality. Charlotte exclaimed

“one thing that I do remember is the word ‘tea’. When you get invited for tea, which obviously is dinner over here… So, I remember being invited for tea and I didn’t understand the concept; that it was actually dinner – it was not a cup of tea.”

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Nele, was similarly unaware of the second meaning of this word when her au-pair hosts instructed her that one of her tasks was to make the evening meal for the children, but instead of calling it dinner, referred to it as tea. She said,

“I was really very confused because up until then I had no idea that tea can also mean dinner. So, I was confused that the children would drink tea every afternoon. Looking back, I think it’s hilarious but at the time I just felt very, very confused.”

While for Nele small misunderstandings like this felt quite overwhelming due to the level of responsibility that she felt towards the family who she worked for as an au-pair, Charlotte who did not feel a similar level of responsibility, reflected on it as being one of “those little things that were quite interesting” when she was settling into her new environment. Such experiences were similarly uncovered among Favell’s European respondents who settled in London. He reports that “much of what is expressed as difficulties with living abroad is linked to not quite understanding what is going on, to some lack of linguistic know-how” (2008:143). Thus, even a good language education does not necessarily lead to a completely seamless or entirely smooth transition from one linguistic setting to another.

Due to the “nested transpolitical citizenship” that being a citizen of an EU member state grants them (Owen, 2011: 110) and the freedom they enjoy as EU citizens to “move and reside freely” within the European Union and the lack of restrictive visa requirements (Maastricht Treaty, 1992), most respondents pointed out that they found settling in the United Kingdom relatively straightforward and that it took place without any major complications. As discussed in the previous chapter, most respondents arrived either on their own or with a partner but in either case without any strong ties or existing networks that would provide them with a familiar group of friends or contacts. This stands in contrast to the experiences of many migrants who arrive in countries of destination with less knowledge of the language and internationally transferable qualifications and are thus more dependent on help from networks of other migrants who are more established in the country and can offer advice and practical support in the beginning. The earlier mentioned research by White (2016) into Polish migrants’ experiences highlights the importance that ethnic networks play when individuals who lack the right foreign language skills migrate out of a necessity to find work. Similarly, Ryan et al (2008) discuss the widely-discussed phenomenon which is regularly
stereotyped and slandered in tabloid media, of newly-arrived immigrants who settle in their new host country with the help of co-nationals. Focusing on Polish newcomers to London, they point out that “many participants [of their research] spoke no English upon arrival and were dependant on the practical support of co-ethnics” (2008: 678). While many of these Polish migrants were spatially dispersed across the city, they nevertheless socialised and worked “within exclusively Polish groups” due to their limited ability to communicate and socialise in English, limiting their social and economic opportunities (2008: 679).

The accounts of the majority of the respondents in this study, on the other hand, show that while they had made arrangements regarding their immediate accommodation prior to their move, few had co-ethnic networks or indeed, knew many or in some cases any people in the UK when they arrived. Those who came as students had applied and been granted a place to live through their university, while those moving to England for a job or internship often had received help from their employer with finding accommodation and au-pairs naturally did not need to think about making any such arrangements at all. While not all interviewees went into much detail when discussing the actual journey of their move or the practical steps they undertook prior to and immediately after their arrival, those who did discuss them pointed out that they encountered some minor challenges but said that on the whole their transition went smoothly in regard to the physical move and practicalities. As such they illustrate the stark difference between migration experiences of “relatively privileged”, (mostly) well-educated mobile Europeans “whose migration experiences are rarely characterised by economic or political hardship” (Croucher, 2012: 2) compared to those of less-educated individuals, as well as those of migrants who are subject to visa or work permit restrictions. The high standard of their proficiency in the English language, for instance, meant that they were in a much better position to be able to integrate into British social and economic life than migrants from a country with a lower standard of education and, particularly, of teaching English as part of the curriculum. While education is an issue that is governed not at the national but at the level of the sixteen Länder and thus is not completely uniform in its educational policy, English as a compulsory subject for secondary school pupils have been established in most of Germany for several decades. In Bavaria, as Friederike Klippel points out, English has been the dominant foreign language taught at secondary schools since 1923 and became a mandatory subject in the academic year of 1964/1965.
(Klippel, 2007). According to the agreement of Hamburg in 1964, a decision to make English a mandatory subject was agreed upon by all West-German Länder (Hamburg agreement, 1964) which means that while language aptitude is of course strongly impacted by other, more individual factors, having been taught English from around the age of ten, is a major structural benefit working to the advantage of the respondents in this study.

Many pointed out that opening a bank account presented itself as a challenge as they were asked to provide proof of address in the form of utility bills which they could not provide as they could not be billed without already having a bank account. This is recognised as a wider issue of financial exclusion explored by economists like Carbó (2005), who points out that mobile citizens are affected more greatly than settled ones by increased regulation of the financial market to prevent money laundering and criminal activity. So, setting up an account was not as straightforward for many of them as they had anticipated confirming Favell’s (2008b: 141) claim that “British banks are far from open for international business if you are a foreign European resident and you just want to open a bank account”. Among those respondents in this research who came to the UK to study, several said that as they did not have a bank account in the UK, they were required to pay several months’ rent upfront which, they explained, was financially challenging for them. On the whole, however, the absence of serious problems and setbacks in the stories of respondents’ experiences of arriving and settling in the country is astonishing when viewed in the context of existing literature on the process of acculturation of newly-arrived migrants. The vast majority of the respondents pointed out that while they did find that there are distinct differences between the two (or more) societies that they had lived in, both in regard to how they were organised as well as their cultural makeup, they did find that the cultures were close enough to each other that recognising cultural norms and adapting to them did not pose too much of a challenge most of the time. I will discuss respondents’ thoughts on how they perceive British views on immigrants in general, and on Germans in particular, in more depth in the next chapter. However, it is important to point out at this point that the relative ease with which these white German respondents integrated, cannot be disconnected from the fact that they blend in with the majority white British population of the UK and as a result, do not attract the negative attention or treatment that non-white migrants often receive. Anton, an academic who had lived and worked in Leicester and London said,
“That has been a bit paradoxical, that you – because you fit in wonderfully because of your appearance – you were practically accepted without question, no matter where you went. You almost feel a bit guilty. When for example, someone with an Indian background – you know, he just looked different – and often I saw them being turned away by the bouncers at bars and clubs. And it made me think, they turn away people who in actual fact are more British than me, but I get in. I found that odd.”

His remark captures the privileged position that German migrants inhabit due to their ability to blend in racially which, as Anton’s example illustrates, means that they are not faced with the same suspicion that many non-white persons regularly face. Many – but not all – respondents demonstrated an awareness of this inherent privilege they enjoyed (without direct questions having been asked). It is important to be clear, that much of the relative effortlessness with which most of the respondents found their feet in the UK, was due to the “invisibility of whiteness” (Dyer, 2005: 3) which led to them not to be known or perceived immediately (by themselves and those they encountered) as ‘other’.

Nearly all respondents were very happy to discuss (and many did so in detail) the differences between Germany and Britain and in doing so also suggested that there were things and habits that they considered to be typical for one or the other. However, most were very quick to add that they believed that the similarities outweighed the differences and that, especially viewed on a global scale, the two cultures were rather close. The reasons beyond descriptions of their experience that respondents provided varied but often included references to what Goodman (2007: 330) refers to as a ‘global consumer culture’ and what respondents referred to as a shared cultural heritage that is steeped in Judeo-Christian tradition and a shared history of Enlightenment and democratisation. Linda, for instance, suggested that “there are many things where I would say they are different – a different approach really, yes but roughly similar, I would say”. In a similar vein, Ralf proposed that Germany and Britain “share certain ideas and attitudes, as well as history and culture”, and explained that, apart from the initial language barrier that some Germans moving to the UK would have to overcome, this culture proximity makes it relatively easy to settle in the country.
And Paul who had lived in France for some time before he moved to London and was reflecting on his past experiences of living in different countries said,

“I guess I would say that you would not see single glazing in Germany and walls are not as thin as they are here. That probably annoys many Germans [who live here]; I know that from German colleagues. Personally, I have always perceived Germany as the odd one out, because if you have lived in the south of France you know that you can live in the middle of Europe and everything is... quite simple and not everything works perfectly. And that’s just how it is. So, Germany is the exception. As a result, it never bothered me.”

This ability to put differences into perspective and resist the trap of categorising differences into a right and a wrong approach or the way to do things, as is often associated with national pride – or worse, national supremacy – is at the heart of being able to adjust and become part of the new culture that these individuals have sought to live in. Leonie’s reflections on her experiences with the British National Health Service illustrate this point. She pointed out,

“Well, it was different. It was just different. It’s access to... like with the health [service]. It’s access to; everyone’s access to it and... yea, you can’t just walk in, get an appointment. Is that better or worse? You can’t really say. It’s just different but again, the point is you have to open up your mind and get to know all these things. How do people [vote] here? How do people go to the doctor here? What if I have this issue? You just have to really open up your mind and start all over again and question what you know. Like, ‘I know this is the case in Germany but is this really the case here?’”

While Kennedy’s research on EU postgraduate students in Manchester (2010) found openness to be an outcome of international mobility, it was considered by many of the respondents in my research to be a necessary prerequisite for anyone who wishes to integrate and settle successfully. Several interviewees pointed out with some disapproval that they were aware of other non-British colleagues (particularly commented on were other Germans) who, in their perception, were incapable of simply accepting the ways in which the UK is different and who as result were not as well integrated and tended not to settle permanently. When asked about this, Hetty pointed out that “it is down to you”, and Frank proposed that
“you need to be open for [it to expand your horizon]. Rather than saying, ok I’ll stay with my tribe and enjoy the stuff I enjoy in Germany”. Similarly, Sophie explained:

“So, when I did Spanish from scratch, I had one term of Spanish and then they sent us to Spain for half a year to improve it because I’d gone there with the mind-set of ‘I’m gonna meet people who don’t speak any English and I’m gonna mingle, I’m gonna, kind of, immerse myself in that culture and everything’ and so... I think it really depends on the mind-set that you have, and I see that a lot with the diplomats I used to work with at the embassy. You know, you’ll have some who want to learn as much as they can about the country and you have others who just want to stick with their little clique within the embassy world, stick with the Germans, do German things. So, I think it’s very much upon, it’s very character dependent and mentality dependent.”

These short-term stayers’ lack of interest in British life and culture, their perceived negative judgement of cultural difference and subsequent departure was then deemed the failure of such individuals, demonstrating the emphasis that respondents overall placed on the agency and duty of the migrant, rather than the structural constraints or duty of society to encourage integration. So, while many respondents displayed an understanding of the advantageous position they were in regarding their ethnicity and resultant ability to blend in, their accounts were relatively absent of remarks or complaints concerning the responsibilities that British society may have to better enable immigrants to integrate. Perhaps this is not entirely surprising considering their motivations and background as lifestyle migrants who moved in order to fashion their life to be more to their liking, which in itself is a very agency-driven, highly “individualised quest” (O’Reilly and Benson, 2014:9). The flipside of such a strong emphasis being placed on individual freedom and pursuit in liquid modernity means that, as Bauman (2000: 8) suggests, “the burden of pattern-weaving and the responsibility for failure [falls] primarily on the individual’s shoulders”. Consequently, the successfully settled migrant likely has a tendency to view their success as a personal achievement and perceive the ‘failure’ of another as that person’s personal responsibility.

5.3 Transnational Ties

Many of the participants pointed out that they have sustained good, if not strong, relationships with family members who still live in Germany. This is a common feature of
transnational lives, according to Vertovec (2009: 61), who suggests that “the provenance of most everyday migrant transnationalism is within families”. Such keeping in touch can take various forms. Most pointed out that they spoke on the phone regularly, and for some this meant several times a week, while others stated that the contact that they kept with relatives was more sporadic but stressed that it was nonetheless important to them. Most also pointed out that they tried to visit relatives in Germany regularly which they explained was not too difficult to manage due to the proximity and affordability of air travel. Life course plays an important role in this respect with younger respondents and respondents with young children maintaining much closer ties with their parents, siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews while among older respondents and respondents with adult children it was more common for the frequency of contact to be lower (unless there were grandchildren in the picture). Key life events, for instance the birth of a child in one’s family often has implications for close family members since, as Greenfield and Marks (2006) suggest, that the link between parent and child persists into the child’s adulthood. In several cases where the participants reported that they were not visiting Germany on a regular basis this was in part due to parents having passed away which had removed the most important point of contact that they had maintained in Germany. In some cases, ties to siblings or more distant relatives persisted, in others these relationships had become more distant, which meant that they felt less of a desire or need to travel to visit them.

New technologies, which enabled individuals to stay in touch through the use of sharing visual content like photos and videos, many respondents stressed, made it possible for them to share their everyday experiences with their loved ones afar and in doing so facilitated a closeness that negates the geographical distance between them. Olivia, for instance, suggested that these technologies were hugely important for her ability to let her mother take part in milestones in her young daughter’s life, saying,

“Well, it is much easier these days to talk to each other because we are on skype and then we can talk daily and [my daughter] has started to crawl now these past couple of weeks. So, the first day that she crawled I could immediately call my mother and I put the laptop on the floor and she was able to see for herself (...) So it really has become much easier to stay in contact. Even my sister who lives in Africa has Skype and WhatsApp and therefore we can send each other photos”.

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Hence, while talking on the phone only enables an exchange of sounds and exchanges via the post come with a delay of days or weeks, visually enabled communication technologies facilitate an immediacy that creates the illusion that one is in fact part of each other’s experiences despite the geographical distance. The fundamental transformation that the experience of migration and its impact on family life across borders has undergone has, as Baldassar et al note (2017), been discussed widely. The stories of participants like Olivia form part of the accounts of countless individuals who by their ‘mobile lives’ (Elliott and Urry, 2010) and transnational practices defy any “taken-for granted assumption that physical proximity is necessary for the maintenance of significant social ties” (Baldassar et al, 2017: 133).

Hence, the emergence and readily available nature of live video enables transnationals to spend time together with significant others despite the geographical distance that separates them spatially. While it is the technology that enables this level of closeness to her mother living in Germany, it was the birth of her daughter that sparked the desire for closer contact as Olivia pointed out that in the early years of living in the UK she had had less contact. Lisa reported quite a similar development in her own life, in so far as becoming an aunt to her nephew in Germany has increased her desire to stay in touch and even more so to visit her family more often. For her being in touch via modern communication technologies simply is not enough. Instead, she explained that she makes use of the relative ease with which she can travel to Germany through the advances of transportation technologies enabling time-space compression (Harvey, 1989). She said,

“I go to visit them quite often but that’s predominantly down to my nephew. He was born two and a half years ago. Before then, I visited once, maybe twice a year and since [his birth] I try to go four times; as often as possible. Even if it’s just for a weekend and so all I can do really is say hello because it is really important to me that he knows who I am. I don’t want him to ever think “who is that woman?” No. I want him to know who I am and that is really important to me.”

There is then, a strong desire for her to be part of her nephew’s life despite living in another country which leads her to prioritise him and spending time with him virtually, as well as physically through regular visits to this part of her family.
While nearly all respondents have maintained close connections with family living in Germany (where close relatives were still alive), most respondents who had lived in the UK for more than a few years reported that friendships with people living in Germany had not fared as well. As a result, “we cannot” as Ryan et al. (2014: 206) point out, “take for granted the success of Skype and cheaper telephone calls in maintaining” friendships across significant distances. Many pointed out that trying to maintain these relationships despite the distance had become harder without new shared experiences to provide topics for conversation and that they had thus slowly grown apart. This lends support to Ryan and Mulholland’s (2013: 16) assertion of “the importance of shared interests and incentives for maintaining long distance ties over time”. They also stated that only having a limited amount of time when they visited Germany, particularly as many of their old friends had engaged in internal migration and moved to different parts of Germany, had made it increasingly difficult over the years to meet up with friends even for just an annual catch up. As a result, the longer respondents had lived away from Germany, the fewer friends they generally reported having in Germany.

Most respondents clearly attached greater significance to informing themselves about current events in their country of residence than of those in their country of origin. Hanna, for instance, pointed out her lack of interest in staying informed about German news saying, “we don't vote [in Germany anymore]. (...) I have to admit that I'm completely out of it. I get a glimpse here and there and I come in the school in the morning and someone will point out to me that a German football team has won this or that, but I think that's about it really. I'm not really... I leave it behind - I think that is the key thing for me that, yes, I am German, and I roughly know what's going on but really, for me it's now more important to know what's going on here 'cause that is where I live.” Kathie instead pointed to the struggles she had with staying informed about current events in Germany and explained:

“Well, my parents they tell me things about some minister and I think, ‘who on earth is this?’ I have no idea who they are. Who? What does this person do? Finance minister? Okay.’ Alright, Schäuble I remember, because he is Swabian. Therefore, I still
Kathie’s citation demonstrates not only the difficulties and expressions of feeling overwhelmed that many experienced as they tried to stay informed enough to feel able to vote in general elections, but also that the importance of the local or regional. She points out that a political figure whom she does still recognise is Wolfgang Schäuble, a centre-right politician who began his political career in Swabia, the region in the south of Germany where Kathie grew up. Attempting to keep up with current events in places or regions of Germany other than those they have a connection with, like Hamburg or Bavaria in Kathie’s case, as her above citation shows, feels overwhelming or impossible. While many respondents said that, like Kathie, they tried to stay at least somewhat educated about what goes on in the political sphere in Germany, most of them also pointed out that they were no longer as knowledgeable as they had previously been and less well-informed about politics and current events in Germany than in the UK. Many also discussed the difficulties they had with remaining knowledgeable about wider cultural and societal developments such as popular music, new idioms and expressions or TV personalities.

Most respondents did state that they kept themselves informed about UK politics and immerse themselves into British cultural life. Consequently, several interviewees expressed their discontent at not being allowed to take part in political life at the national level. The right to vote at general elections, these respondents feel, should be granted to them in the country where they currently reside and pay taxes; not in the country where they no longer live. Theresa, for instance said,

“It bothers me. (...) No taxation without representation! I would quite like to have twenty-one years’ worth of taxes back – thank you very much. But yes, why can I not vote in the country where I pay taxes? That has always bothered me a little, but it’s a price I have chosen to pay.”

Similarly, Judith pointed out that she had started to consider applying for British citizenship because she felt strongly about her right to vote. She explained,
“You see, I have been here for six years now, I have a child here, I have a husband here, I will probably remain here, [and] I pay taxes here – really I should have the right to have a say, democratically, I mean.”

They and the many more among the interviewees who voiced their thoughts on this issue, felt that the right to vote at national level should be given to tax-paying residents and citizens alike and stressed that they would rather forego the opportunity to vote in Germany if that would allow them to have a say on which party was in power in the UK and on how their taxes would be spent. Calls for non-national EU citizens’ voting rights to be extended to national elections are not entirely novel. Research which was conducted on behalf of the European Commission in 2010 using Eurobarometer data found that opinions among citizens across EU member states were divided on whether non-national EU residents living in their country should be allowed to take part in their national elections (2010b). The report states that while “50% in the EU favoured [such an] extension of electoral rights (…), while 43% were opposed to it”, which is not surprising in the context of the UK considering the rather the similarly divided views the electorate demonstrated in 2016’s referendum on the UK’s membership in the EU. So, while many respondents stressed the sense of duty they still felt to continue to vote in German national elections, several voiced their frustration about not being able to vote where they were directly affected by the outcome of elections.

“The issues [and] the political discussions [in Germany] don’t really affect me anymore, and I am much more affected by what goes on here [in the UK]. I am allowed to vote at regional level but not the national.”

Rather than wanting to maintain a say in the political decision-making process in the home country that they have left behind, their wish is to be involved in electing who represents them and makes decisions which will directly influence their life in the present and future. This is in rather stark contrast to McIlwaine et al.’s (2011) research on the political activism of Colombians living in London and Madrid as well as Victoria Bernal’s (2006: 670) discussion of the Eritrean diaspora, which, using the internet, “mobilize[d] resources, [and] organise[d] campaigns” in the hope of making an impact in their home country from afar. This is likely not to be at the forefront of German emigrants’ minds in part due to the absence of political turmoil and disorder, but also because only very few of the participants expressed
any immediate or concrete plans to return to Germany and for that reason, did not feel the desire to invest time or money into political activism in the country they had grown up in. Sending remittances to relatives who have remained in the country of origin, while a common practice among migrants who have moved from economically weaker to economically stronger countries (e.g. Bernal, 2006), was not something any of the respondents reported doing.

5.4 Creating a social network in the new home

Despite the ability to stay in touch with friends and family in the home country, “geographical mobility”, as Ryan and Mulholland (2013: 13; see also Campbell, 1988) point out, “can lead to a dramatic loss of support networks, resulting in the need to form new social relationships from scratch.” As a result, Coleman argues that “individual mobility is potentially destructive of social capital” (1990: 320) which the mobile individual needs to rebuild in their new environment. So, one of the challenges which each of the respondents faced when settling into their new host nation’s society was that of needing to establish a new social circle; they needed to make friends. This, as Nele matter-of-factly pointed out, was not as simple to do from scratch as someone (including her past self) would have thought. She was very happy with the family she was placed with by the au-pair agency but meeting and making friends, particularly with her unusual working pattern, proved testing in the beginning. She found that while it was perfectly possible to approach someone else and ask them to be your friend as a child, starting a friendship base from scratch in a country that you have only recently moved to poses quite a challenge.

“It is not really possible to just go to a pub on your own to make friends. You can’t just sit there and say ‘Hey, I’m new here and don’t know anyone. Would you like to be my friend?’ When you are six years old you could just go up to someone and say, ‘I like your t-shirt; are we friends now?’ That just does not work when you are an adult. It would be nice, but sadly, no.”

Instead, as Putnam (who has been subject to much criticism for his stance on the effects of diversity on society) terms it, respondents needed to find ways to form new bonding and bridging ties in their still unfamiliar surroundings. He suggests that
“of all the dimensions along which forms of social capital vary, perhaps the most important is the distinction between bridging (or inclusive) and bonding (or exclusive). Some forms of social capital are by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups. (...) Other networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages.” (Putnam, 2000: 22)

This is a concept and distinction which in Putnam’s view applies to society at large and social as well as ethnic groups within it. Bonding are thus to be understood as links between homogenous groups, while bridging ties connect heterogenous groups. Elsewhere however, Putnam describes the difference between these different types of connections by saying that bonding ties constitute “ties to people who are like me in some important way” while bridging ties are “ties to people who are unlike me in some important way” (2007: 143). Ryan et al (2008) suggest that this framework can be drawn upon in the analysis of the kinds of ties that newly arrived immigrants form and the networks they are part of. While the accounts of the German respondents in this study at first glance contrast rather starkly from those of the Polish participants in Ryan et al.’s previously mentioned research, as few of the Germans expressed an interest in forming links with other Germans, the experiences of many show what I argue are bonding ties which are not along ethnic or national dimensions. Conceiving of the two different types of connections as ‘ties to people who are like me’ or are ‘unlike me in some important way’ (Putnam, 2007: 143) and being mindful of how unimportant the Germans who took part in this research said they considered nationality to be, I argue that bonding ties can be any ties that are based on ‘likeness’ that is important to the individual. For example, the way Nele for instance tackled the issue of meeting people to connect with was to use social media sites and look for online groups of other au-pairs in the area that she lived in and to go along to their social meetings. Since other au-pairs had very similar working patterns she was able to meet up and organise activities with these other young women and eventually began to make new acquaintances in pubs while going to these places as part of a group which made it much easier to get into conversation with others. Nele’s example is one of many demonstrations of how the respondents forged new connections with strangers by forming an attachment over something they had in common which was not nationality; in this case a shared or similar experience. It would therefore be mistaken to place too great an
emphasis on the importance of nationality in discussions of bonding and bridging ties as national groups are not homogenous to start with and other characteristics can feel much more salient to an individual, as the example of Nele illustrates. Falling into the trap of methodological nationalism (Glick Schiller, 1992) by assuming that nationality is the prominent factor through which identification and thus bonding with those similar to oneself leads to an inaccurate understanding of the lines along which bonding and bridging ties can be established.

How respondents went about making friends and what opportunities they had available to them depended greatly on the circumstances of their arrival in the country. Based on the respondents’ accounts it appears that those who came to the UK and began their new life as students found it easiest to make connections quickly as they were in an environment where most of those around them – namely, other students – were also seeking to meet new people, make friends and get used to new surroundings. Christina’s evaluation of the ease with which students forge new connections suggests that being a student in many ways still is very similar to Leonie’s recollection of how easily children make new friends. She moved to the UK on her own in her late teens and during her interview pointed out that

“as a student, you get to know new people quickly anyway but I think moving to a new country as an adult where you don’t know anyone, especially if you are going without a partner… then it’s quite a challenge to make friends and to make close friends, ones that will be lasting friends who you have things in common with. Those kinds of friendships take time to build.”

This quote by Christina very nicely captures the challenge that starting a new circle of close friends poses to many migrants. Her account of how easily students make friends – while it may present a somewhat simplistic view of the reality of student experiences (see Snow Andrade, 2006) – is supported by existing research on the topic of student migration which has shown that most students are successful in making friends within their first year at university (Buote et al., 2007; Hays and Oxley, 1986). In line with these findings, Lena, who came to England to study at a London-based university, explained that she had no problem meeting new people and making connections when she arrived as there were so many among the other students who like her were looking to make friends and start a new social circle.
An experience which was commonly shared among most of the participants of this study is that they found it much easier to make connections and start friendships with other non-UK residents whom they encountered in the early weeks and months of settling into their new environment than with British people. Consequently, unlike the commonly assumed (and to some extent documented (e.g. White, 2011a) practice of migrants associating with others from within their ethnic community, these migrants associated strongly with others who shared the same experience of moving to the UK and who were also keen to make new acquaintances and friends. Lena stated that she “didn’t have any English friends really at university”. “For quite a while”, she said, “I had problems making contact with English people” who in her estimation felt uncomfortable being a minority on the particular degree she was on and who as a result kept to themselves rather than engaging with non-UK students like herself. Thus, in those first few years, she elaborates, most of her friends were neither British nor German but a mix of many nationalities – mostly first-generation but also some second-generation immigrants – instead. International students not making many friends among the domestic student cohort has been reported in past research (Rajapaksa and Dundes, 2002). A study carried out in the US by Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002), for instance, found that most international students reported not having formed any close friendships with US students and while some had not done so out of choice, others said this was due to a lack of opportunity. However, unlike the participants in this study, previous research related these findings to a lack of language proficiency. Similar to Lena’s comments above, Ellen’s account of her early years in the country paint a picture of a network of multinational connections that eased the settling in process.

“In Hull, most of my friends were other Erasmus students (...) and in Southampton I was mostly friends with my housemates who were all different – there was one German guy, one Malaysian, one French and one Portuguese (...) I had even less [sic] English friends. (...) And I found it really, really hard to make friends with the English girls there and that was actually something that really worried me before I moved to London. That worried me the most – that I’ve never managed to be really friends with English girls. (...) So, I started to get really worried – I can’t seem to be able to have English female friends.”
Interestingly, however, she did not place blame for this problem she encountered with anyone, but instead suggested that the phenomenon of Erasmus students making friends mostly among themselves “might be the same in other countries; it’s probably not limited to England”, which is supported by Ioannis Tsoukalas’ (2008) ethnographic research on Erasmus students in Stockholm and Athens. Similarly, Linda who came to the UK initially to study but now lives in Brighton with her Irish husband and two young daughters in her ponderings wondered whether it is so atypical for someone who lives in their home country to mostly have friends who also grew up in that country saying “well, if I am honest I can probably count on one hand the number of people who were non-native German speakers whom I knew when I was still living in Germany”. She added that as someone who has moved and settled in several countries over the years she believes that “you more easily connect with people who share similar experiences with you”. Many of the respondents voiced similar opinions that support the notion that the shared experience of international mobility is considered more salient than a shared nationality reinforcing the earlier point about the importance of not over-estimating the importance of nationality by assuming its inherent saliency. Instead, they formed, what Sara Ahmed refers to as, a new ‘community of strangers’. Since “the very experience of leaving home and becoming a stranger, as Ahmed (2000: 85) states, “leads to the creation of a ‘new community of strangers’ a common bond with those others who have ‘shared’ the experience of [migrating].” They thus, have a “collective past by sharing the lack of a home rather than sharing a home” (Ahmed, 2000: 85).

Others pointed out that the colleagues at their first places of work became their first friends in the country. Depending on the skills they came with (which in many cases were German language skills), these in many cases were jobs or internships where they were also often working in international teams and most easily forged bonds with other first-generation immigrants who shared their experience of coming to the UK. Judith, for example, a journalist living in London with her Scottish husband (who moved to London a little later than she did) recounted that in the early days of settling in London when she started working for a news agency

“there were many other internationals who started around the same time”, meaning that “there was a whole group of us who had come from all corners of the world, who
suddenly found themselves in London and most of whom didn’t really have the support of a family.”

And as a result, she explained, they felt drawn to each other and in becoming friends became each other’s support network and social circle. Similarly, Maria, whose first job in the UK was working as a legal secretary in a company that was half English and half German, reflected on the strength of the relationships she formed through work in her early days in the UK. The relationships among colleagues, she explained, “were very close... probably because there were quite a number of other Germans who also did not know anyone yet.” And therefore, she described, they organised quite a number of social meetings such as after work drinks, sports activities and opportunities to socialise on the weekends. This is something that Ryan and Mulholland’s (2013) research on French highly-skilled professionals found too. They point out that the participants of their study explained that “their migrant work colleagues shared a common interest in befriending each other because they did not have roots or family networks around them” either (2013: 157), which suggests that this is likely a more widespread phenomenon among migrants who have the linguistic skill to forge connections using a shared language.

Those who could not use their workplace to create a new social circle – either because they did not work or because their place of work was not conducive to meeting likeminded people, pointed out that they either made friends through taking up a new or an already existing hobby of theirs or, in the case mostly of mothers, through their children. Natalie, for instance, described a situation where, because all her colleagues were older and married with children, she found it quite difficult to find friends. She said,

“what I found very hard in the beginning; in the first few months; was to build a circle of friends because what it was, was that most of my colleagues were married and had children. As a result, people didn’t really do anything together after work and I tried to meet people at a fitness studio but nothing social developed from that. It wasn’t really until I found a volleyball club and joined a team that things started to improve, and I began to make friends.”

Like the experiences outlined among the participants who were students, she found that many of the friends she made in these early months were other non-British UK residents
whom, she believed, she bonded with more easily through their shared experience of settling in England. “They too arrived here at some point and everything is new... and then you just kind of get to know each other”, she suggested. Over time, she said, she started to also make British friends but initially this was something she found harder to accomplish. Hanna, who moved to the UK twice and arrived in the country with her husband and three-month old son on her second time, pointed out that while she made some connections through her husband’s work also explained that as she was a stay-at-home mother during the first year in the country most of the friends she made in that time were through baby-related activities.

“My husband’s boss and his family”, she recounted, “were living in the same village and his wife just had a son a few months prior to ours. So, our children were pretty similar in age and they had started a mum-baby group. And so, I went along and there were all those mums with all their children – same age as my son and it was just fantastic. It developed into a regular thing and I met a really, really good friend and really enjoyed that year. So, I was really just mum for one year and got to know the English way of doing things.”

Those respondents who came to the UK with a partner who already had connections in the country, explained that their process of settling in to the new surroundings was greatly helped by their partner’s presence. Several of them pointed out that initially the people they socialised with most easily were friends of family members of this partner. However, even in the cases of the couples where neither partner had prior connections nor existing friends in the UK, respondents’ reports suggest that they found it relatively easy to settle in and began making connections quicker. Companionship and emotional support, then, may be the more important function that spouses – whether British or of another nationality – play during the period of settling into a new cultural environment.

Most respondents pointed out that while they, as previously mentioned, found it easier to connect with other new arrivals to England, wished they could and felt that they tried to get to know British people and, in fact, purposefully did not seek out other Germans living in the UK. Many placed a strong emphasis on making this clear in their interview (which will be discussed further in the next section). This stands in contrast with much of the existing research on migrants’ social circles. Butcher’s (2010: 27) research on mobile Australians
temporarily living in Singapore, for instance, discusses the existence of “a circuit of social activities centred on other expatriates’ homes, particular ‘expat’ areas, and sporting events”. This ‘Western bubble’, she suggests, “was ostensibly an extension of Australian cultural space within Singapore” (2010: 27). Likewise, O’Reilly’s ethnographic research among British residents on the Costa del Sol (2000) shows that there exists a loose but active community of British nationals who socialise regularly.

Based on the respondents’ accounts, it could be argued that the English politeness which made many of the respondents feel welcome and which they experienced as a positive difference from the blunter and ‘colder’ way that strangers interact with each other in Germany, was also in some ways a hindrance to their being able to feel at home and build relationships with British people. Ralf who lived in London and works in museum management pondered this shortcoming when he reflected on what lies beneath the politeness,

“superficially... yes, very [welcoming] but... that brings us back to some of the clichés. Superficially, the English are indeed welcoming, but they are also very reserved, reticent. Their openness is only until a certain point and then; we talk about this quite frequently. It’s tricky and it may be more of a Southern thing, but it is difficult to go deeper and to build real relationships – ones where you share everything including your true opinions and the like... (...) real close relationships, but due to my previous job up North I have made different experiences there.”

Other respondents similarly explained that while they found strangers and fleeting acquaintances to be very pleasant, they also perceived British people as very reserved and reluctant to progress beyond mere niceties leaving many of them guessing at times whether British politeness was genuine or disingenuous. One of the most often quoted cultural differences between German and British small-talk was that of the question of ‘How are you?’. Whereas in German culture generally, asking how someone is doing is understood as a conversation starter, in British culture, often, it is a term of politeness and courtesy rather than an invitation for the other to explain what is happening in their life or to catch up. Many respondents expressed their – in some cases – bewilderment, in other cases mild annoyance, with their experiences which, as they perceived it, suggested that often British people were
not genuinely enquiring about their wellbeing and did not expect to hear anything but a brief ‘fine’ or ‘not too bad’ as a response to the question. Hanna, for instance, seemed bemused when saying that

“that’s the other thing – ‘how are you?’ – getting used to the idea that they ask you but they don’t actually want to know. (...) And if you say, ‘I’m actually not so good’; ‘Oh!’... You know – they can’t actually deal with it if you suddenly take this question seriously.”

Thus, while British politeness was named by many as one of the key differences that they like about British culture, it has not come without its challenges when it came to settling into and understanding cultural cues.

5.5 Integratory and assimilatory conceptions of migrants’ settlement

The accounts of most of the respondents demonstrate clearly that they have a strong desire to learn the British way of doing things, to integrate themselves and, even more so, to blend into the culture around them by adopting habits and mannerisms as best as they feel able to. The lengths to which respondents reported going not to stand out as German, seem greater than is documented in much of the existing empirical research on migrant groups. The difference between integration and assimilation in debates about immigration boils down to questions about the extent to which the migrant retains their ethnic or cultural background when settling and living in the host society. Assimilation is defined by Alba and Nee (2003:11) as “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences” in an attempt to blend in as seamlessly as possible into the new cultural environment and in doing so migrants become similar to natives. Integration, which has become the favoured approach certainly among European migration scholars, by contrast does not require migrants to lose their cultural heritage and is thus defined by the European Commission as “a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and [native] residents” which results in multicultural societies (2005: 2).

Many of the interviewees discussed how it was much more important for them to be informed about current events in the UK than in their home country and that getting more acquainted with and immersed in British culture was something to which they aspire greatly.
Taking an interest in staying informed about current events in the host society and being seen to be showing an interest, their accounts suggest, is of great importance to many of these respondents. Likewise, becoming more knowledgeable about national ‘treasures’ such as well-established celebrities and long-running television programmes may at first glance appear trivial and not particularly integral a part of integrating oneself, however several respondents pointed out the difficulty that a lack of a shared cultural background can mean for the individual who is trying to socialise with others in a group scenario. Lena, for instance, mentioned the importance of cultural references when socialising when she said

“I am not really that knowledgeable on a lot of things because I did not grow up here and I therefore don’t always get things that people talk about. When we are doing a pub quiz for example I simply don’t know who Cilla Black is and don’t know most TV shows that everyone else knows”.

Cabaret and stand-up comedy, as other interviewees point out, also rely on such cultural references and can, as a result, only be fully understood and appreciated once a migrant is knowledgeable enough about the culture – be it high or low culture – to be able to read between the lines of what is being said and tell what is being implied or referred to in order to get the joke. The contextual nature of humour, which depends on the understanding of the culture within which it originates (Lockyear and Pickering, 2008), makes it one of the harder aspects for a migrant to grasp. Damaris, for example, explained that, unfortunately, even after many years of living in England, cabaret is not something that she can fully appreciate as she often cannot understand the allusions and cultural references that are key to understanding the humour of such performances, illustrating what Juha Ridanpää talks of when he states that “as often remarked, there are no unified ‘codes’ for humour and the recognition of it is always culturally conditioned” (2009: 733). How much of a struggle this presents to a migrant depends in no small part on how much exposure they have had to the culture in question (both or either in terms of length of stay and the level of integration) and how proximate their native culture is to that of their host country. Not being able to understand such cultural references in everyday life can, as Linda described, feel alienating at times when, as she suggested, you are the only one in a group who is clueless when a joke has been told. She said that while she mostly felt quite integrated and included after over a decade of living in the country,
“fully belonging is something else still. What happens to me every now and then is that I think ‘why on earth is everyone laughing all of a sudden? I must have missed something.’ You know? Despite having lived here for fifteen years and I do feel quite established here; you know, I haven’t just arrived in the country”

and she went on to suggest that until you get to the point when you get all such cultural references there will always be situations that will momentarily make you feel like an outsider – or stranger in the Simmelian (1908) sense – and remind you that you do not fully belong to the group.

Quite a few of the respondents did not recall encountering (m)any memorable instances where they committed a serious faux pas, whether at work or in social settings, where they interacted with others. However, some of the respondents recalled moments where they realised that their behaviour had been interpreted differently to how they had intended. Hanna recalled a situation at work where she needed to call a colleague on their day off and, therefore, decided to keep the phone call brief to not inconvenience them. She said,

“my boss who was sitting behind me was like ‘that was quite sharp and short’. And I said, ‘Yeah, well, it’s his day off. I don’t want to take up his time’ and that was actually seen as quite rude because I didn’t go through the whole business of ‘Oh, how are you? And how is life? Oh fine. Oh, good. So, let’s move on...’”

This anecdote illustrates that, at times, slight differences between two generally quite closely aligned cultures regarding what is considered the correct way to behave can lead to misunderstandings which, if not picked up on, could lead to the person from the host society perceiving the person who is new to their cultural norms and is settling in, as being rude without the newcomer necessarily realising this. Paul, for instance, said that he did not encounter any problems because, as he suggested, he is quite polite anyway and therefore feels that he did not have problems adapting to the British code of politeness. He added, however, that
“the typical English person would not tell you directly if you have offended them. So even if they thought I was direct or rude I think they would be too polite to tell me which means I guess I cannot really know if I have broken the rules at times.”

Hence, on the whole respondents either said that they did not believe that they had experienced any misunderstandings beyond issues around language difficulties or, where respondents did encounter them, they seemed relieved to have been politely told what the correct etiquette was as it was interpreted as a cue to how they could better adapt to British customs and habits.

As stated earlier, many respondents displayed a strong desire and, in some cases, sense of duty to adapt to what they perceive to be the English way of life. Hanna for instance pointed out that

“to a certain extent, because we are German and there are certain ways and certain things about being German which we’re not going to just put aside. [However,] and I think that was for us the reason to be part of it and to say we made the decision, we chose to come to this country because we wanted to - or because my husband wanted to work here - and we as a family wanted to live here. And it was a decision we made. We can’t come, you know, go to a different country and think “but we won’t mingle”, “we won’t be part of the culture” you know?”

To them, she explained, it was thus never a question – while they did not want to let go of all their German habits completely they, as with a great number of the other respondents, made a conscious effort to minimise what they considered German traits and habits in order to pick up what they perceived to be British mannerisms and practices. Thus, minimising traits and practices which they considered German was one way in which respondents sought to blend in with what they perceive as British. However, internalising British cultural norms and speaking the language does not, as Favell (2008b: 144) points out, “remove the fact you are still an audibly obvious foreigner”. As a result, another rather striking discovery was that nearly all respondents pointed out the importance they attached to speaking English accent-free and as not being detected as German.
The interviewees who explicitly brought up this topic could be divided into those who felt proud that they had successfully lost their accent and could no longer be detected as German by the people around them and those respondents who had not lost their accent and expressed frustration and unhappiness about not having been able to succeed in this endeavour. Judith for instance expressed her desire to lose her German accent and while she was not able to speak accent-free, she was glad that she had been able to work on her pronunciation sufficiently to no longer be detected as German. She pointed out, “yes, I have an accent. For ages, I tried to get rid of my accent, but I just cannot accomplish that. It is always there. For a while I even tried to adopt a Cockney slang”. To illustrate she said the word bottle without the t being audible to demonstrate the accent and continues,

“but I think everyone just thought I was crazy. I don’t have a “comedy German” accent (...) and actually – and I think this is due to my hair colour – most people guess my nationality as Swedish or South African. Most people do not notice that I am German.”

Similarly, and expressing the pride several stated they took in their accomplishment of not being immediately recognised as a native German-speaker, Ellen whose heritage is Italian and German but who has grown up in Germany, pointed out

“I know that I am German and, in many ways, I am very German but I’m always very proud when people come up to me and don’t realise I am German or a foreigner whereas I think for some other nationalities this might almost be an insult.”

Not being outed or immediately detected as German when they speak thus is something that many interviewees felt was important to them, indeed it was seen as an accomplishment they had achieved and was part of their strategy to blend in as seamlessly as possible. Ellen’s comment about this not necessarily being perceived the same way by other migrant groups suggests that she understood this to be something that may be uniquely German.

This discussion illustrates the impact that the public and specifically tabloid discourse on immigrants and immigration (Bleich et al, 2015; Light and Young, 2009) has had on many of the participants. While this discourse and its impact on respondents’ perception of British views on migration and migrants will be discussed more in-depth in the subsequent chapter, it is necessary here to highlight the influence it is likely to have had on respondents. It is
perhaps not surprising in a climate of emboldened anti-immigrant voices across the Western world that these migrants who are – through the colour of their skin and their language proficiency – capable of staying under the radar by blending in, would endeavour to do so. While most respondents discussed this perceived duty to adapt and integrate merely referencing their own obligation to do so, a small number of the respondents, as previously mentioned, went further than solely discussing their own duty to blend in and also expressed concerns about the perceived lack of assimilation of other migrants and migrant groups. Frank for instance pointed out,

“nationality is not important to me. That’s the case but maybe it’s also sort of more philosophical in the sense of I think it’s wrong and that does not apply only to Germans – if you go abroad then it’s best to sort of immerse yourself into; I wouldn’t call it culture, but you know, into the daily life of that country and a lot of people they stick to each other. So, there is the Turkish tribe, there is a Turkish community, there is a Bangladeshi community and you know, they don’t learn from other cultures or nationalities and that’s … It’s part of London – you learn from others rather than saying ‘okay, do you know what – I will stick to the German community because at least then I can speak German and have German Bratwurst’ or whatever. And I think it’s wrong because there is a reason why you came over and you should appreciate what’s here. That’s my view.”

Similarly, Kathie who otherwise showed a great deal of nuance in her opinions of immigration and the treatment of migrants, said

“Well, you are a bit on your own, but no… No, I have never really missed [the company of other Germans]. That is something that I have noticed with many other migrant groups because I have a lot of contact with others. For instance, Spanish or Australian people – they always seem to stick together. And that makes me wonder why they came here in the first place. I mean, England isn’t that amazing – especially if you’re from Spain or Australia. I mean, so now they then sit in the rain to talk to a fellow Australian [rather than in the Australian sunshine]? I just don’t understand it!”

They, and a small number of other respondents, clearly subscribed to a more assimilatory conception of how immigrants should behave in their chosen host nation, which they not only
applied to themselves but also expected of others. While I will problematize this more in-depth in the next chapter, the main issue with projecting such an expectation onto others, and especially other migrant groups, is that the relative ease with which they as white and mostly well-educated, and thus privileged (Dyer, 2005; Lundström, 2014), German migrants have experienced integrating themselves into British society has led them to erroneously assume that this experience is universally possible for all migrants who come to the UK. Furthermore, Kathie’s remark about why anyone would migrate only to move their interactions with co-ethnics into the British climate, negates the myriad reasons why someone might migrate temporarily or permanently or, for that matter, why someone might feel the need or desire to (occasionally) spend time with someone from the culture they grew up in. As White (2011a: 5), while reflecting on her Polish research participants, points out:

“individuals have a degree of choice as to how cosmopolitan their lives will be (...) social and economic structures [nevertheless] also determine how much cosmopolitanism is possible for individual migrants [as] [s]ome have more agency than others”.

The privilege of the Germans taking part in my research provided them with opportunities to build connections and friendships with people of other national backgrounds that migrants with less English language confidence are simply less likely to have.

However, a much more prominent reason among the respondents’ accounts of why they attached so much importance to blending in visually, audibly and in their manner, is linked to their perceived stigmatised national identity (see Goffman, 1990). While respondents’ perceptions on how British people view Germany and Germans is one of the focal points of the following chapter, its connection to their desire to blend in and become ‘invisible’ (see Fortier, 2000), is key to understanding why it is so prominent in nearly all their lives. “Stigmatisation”, as Moroşanu and Fox explain (2013: 439) can (...) weaken [ethnic solidarity] by pushing migrants away from claiming a disgraced ethnicity”. While stigma, according to Goffman, can lead to those within the stigmatised group to come together and reclaim their identity, it can also do the opposite, “resulting in ambivalence towards, and distanciation from the stigmatised category” (Moroşanu and Fox, 2013: 440). Many of the respondents discussed the weight and guilt that Germans to this day carry because of their
country’s Nazi past and suggested that this is the reason why few want to nurture national associations. Discussing the development of this national guilt, Norbert Elias (1996: 253) suggests that

“[e]very German felt the force of that guilt when he or she met foreigners, even if their youth acquitted them of any participation in the stigmatized events. If the fathers’ generation had seen the problem of being cleansed of the past primarily as one as a matter of individual guilt or innocence, for the generation of the sons and daughters the social problem of the origins of the Nazi regime surfaced to a much greater degree. For them, who lived later, it was clearer than for their fathers that the nightmare of the past would not let itself be buried quite so quickly…”

Evelyn, one of the older participants who had been raised in post-war Germany, expressed her bewilderment at the casual patriotism she encountered in the UK, saying

“Oh, this patriotism! Well, this having little union jacks on the beef at the butcher’s and things like that. I found that a little off-putting. That didn’t sit right with me. I have difficulties [with that] and I would never walk around with a German flag, but maybe that is also a generational thing. For me – after the war and so forth – we weren’t exactly popular.”

Apart from a handful of participants who pointed out that they felt Germany should learn to move on from the past and its guilt and develop a healthy level of national pride, most respondents irrespective of age expressed unease and disapproval when talking about German nationality and the nurturing of a collective national identity and culture.

Leonie pointed out

“I think we Germans are not [very enthusiastic about being German]. We don’t dare to be after what happened during the Second World War. So, we’re very, very conscious about [the dangers of] patriotism and being proud of our nation. It’s just something we really, I think, don’t want to touch. (...) I think most people don’t dare to be and me, myself – it’s not that important to show it.”

And Simon explained,
“this is quite a big issue in Germany – do we still have to feel guilty about this? Do we still have to remember this? And, you know, I find Brits here, they cannot really understand that much. You know, even though British people themselves have a bloody history in all the colonies and, you know, not dating so long back,”

Their comments show that as individuals who have experienced first-hand how (differently) dark and repressive chapters of national history are dealt with in Germany and the UK, has led to them reflecting on how they believe such issues should be dealt with. Simon’s comment regarding British colonial history is made all the more relevant by a YouGov poll conducted in 2014 which, as Will Dahlgreen points out, found that “most think the British Empire is more something to be proud of (59%) rather than ashamed of (19%)” and a third of those polled said that they wished Britain still had its empire. Such nostalgia for Germany’s past – even for pre-World War One days, and expressions of patriotism seem alien to the respondents. What Leonie’s words, which are representative of what many respondents expressed on this topic, show is that due to this dark part of Germany’s past, many are very critical of the very concept and practice of patriotism, viewing it as a slippery slope towards xenophobia and fascism. So, their reluctance to engage in the nurturing of co-ethnic networks is not only due to their perceived stigmatised or spoiled identity, but beyond that, due to an internalised wider concern about the threat they believe giving importance to nationality can pose to liberal values and society which they have inherited as post Second World War Germans.

5.6 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has shown that most respondents’ experience of settling in the UK was free from serious practical difficulties or complications. While not all of them were educated to tertiary education levels or possessed other highly desirable economic skills, confirming Recchi’s (2008: 208) assertion that “EU movers are now a positively selected population in terms of migration” many of them were well educated, and their experiences reflect those of highly skilled migrants who due to their more privileged position in the job market and often also due to their cultural proximity are better prepared for a smooth transition into their new environment. While language proficiency and the ability to correctly interpret social situations and in turn be understood by those around them required some further learning on the part of the respondents, on the whole, these were not perceived by
them as onerous or too much to handle. Such issues were reported particularly by those respondents who had gone straight into a work environment – whether paid or as an au-pair – and who had needed to very quickly adapt to professional norms and standards without having been able to learn about the cultural differences in less pressured surroundings. Younger interviewees generally reported having fewer difficulties losing their German accent when speaking English – something that many pointed out they took pride in, and which inversely several of the interviewees, who felt they had not succeeded in blending in audibly, lamented.

Furthermore, respondents stressed their own responsibility to adapt to the culture, norms and etiquette of their chosen host society whilst neglecting to also reflect on the responsibility that a society may have to ensuring the successful integration of its newcomers. Thus, a rather agent-based and assimilatory approach and understanding of migration emerges from some of the interviewees’ accounts of their own experiences and thoughts. Nevertheless, many of the respondents during their interviews showed an awareness of the different ways in which immigrants from different backgrounds are received and treated differently. However, despite many of them demonstrating at least some awareness of the fact that they are in a privileged position compared to many other migrant groups (this is discussed in more depth in the subsequent chapter), a wider reflection on the different levels of ease with which immigrants from different backgrounds and ethnicities are able to integrate or blend into British society, was largely absent from many of their discussions about agency and structure in integration. This illustrates the invisibility of whiteness and its effects in the participants’ minds and the discussion adds to “an exploration of the limits of creative self-making projects and their outcomes in practice” (Oliver and O’Reilly, 2010: 63), showing that while participants’ perception of their successful integration was down to their own efforts, many of the tools for their success were available to them due to their background.

Unlike much of the existing research on migrant groups (e.g. Butcher, 2010; O’Reilly, 2000; White, 2011a), nationality was not considered relevant by respondents when they discussed how they established their new circle of friends. While research on, for instance, Australian migrants in Singapore discusses the existence of an “expatriate community’s ‘Western bubble’” which seeks to re-place the old home to the new environment, most respondents emphatically stressed that they did not seek out other Germans and actively
tried to make friends with British people. However, due to the more abundant opportunities of bonding over shared experiences, many pointed out that in the early days of settling in the UK they predominantly forged connections with other first-generation migrants to the country, regardless of their nationality, and have maintained quite international friendship circles as a result. The main reasons given for this phenomenon were that they could easily establish common ground with which to connect based on the shared experience of migrating and settling in the UK, and that they felt other migrants, especially other recent arrivals, were more likely to be seeking to make new friends than many of the British people they first encountered (though most explained that over time they began to also make more British friends).

In this light, I have argued that a reconceptualisation of the concept of bonding and bridging ties (Putnam, 2000) is necessary to acknowledge that conceiving of these connections purely or predominantly along national or ethnic lines runs the risk of being inaccurate and being constitutive of ‘methodological nationalism’ (Glick-Schiller, 1992). Migrants – and people more generally – can bond with new people they get to know over a variety of characteristics, such as shared experiences or shared hobbies and not taking this into account is reductive and unhelpful in many ways. A difference to this general approach was observed in relation to the parents among the interviewees, many of whom explained their desire to raise their child(ren) bilingually and pass on some German customs alongside the British language and customs. Therefore, interviewees who were parents discussed taking their children to German Saturday Schools or German play groups in their local area to try to encourage them to pick up and cultivate their German heritage. Those whose partner was also German reported having been more successful in getting their child(ren) to speak German and take an interest in German books or films.

This chapter has also shown that the reluctance of the respondents to socialise with other Germans and their desire to not be outed by a German accent is symptomatic of a deeper unease they feel regarding the cultivation of an outward German identity which is due to their perception of German national identity as a stigmatised (Moroşanu and Fox, 2013; Goffman, 1990) one due Germany’s Nazi past. This is something which will be explored further in the following chapter when I discuss respondents’ thoughts on how welcoming they perceived British society to be towards immigrants in general and Germans specifically.
In this subsequent discussion, I will also explore in more depth issues of whiteness which I have briefly touched upon in this chapter and will illustrate the role that their ethnicity plays in their ability and desire to blend in and disassociate from other migrants.
6. The perceptions of British attitudes towards immigrants

6.1 Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter on respondents’ integration into British society and their everyday lives, this chapter also addresses the second research question about the lived experiences of Germans living in the UK but focuses more specifically on respondents’ perceptions of British people’s attitudes towards immigrants in general and Germans in particular to explore the effect it has had on their experience of living in the country. As the interviews were conducted roughly a year before the UK’s European Union membership referendum in 2016, this chapter captures respondents’ feelings, thoughts and experiences around the time of the 2015 general election when intensive campaigning for the referendum had not yet begun. On the whole, respondents reported that despite the difficult history that the United Kingdom and Germany share, their experiences of living in the UK had predominantly been very positive. The accounts of respondents paint a picture of privileged, white migration. In fact, many respondents pointed out that they were aware of the relative ease with which most of them had been accepted by the British majority population compared to immigrants from other backgrounds. Many do thus demonstrate a sense of awareness of their privileged status among the immigrant community in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, it appears that many feel a certain amount of guilt in the face of the relative ease with which they can go about their lives compared to other – predominantly non-white and Eastern European – migrant groups who do not have the ethnic and cultural background to blend into the majority culture as well as they are. The recent emboldening of anti-immigrant voices and the extension of anti-immigrant sentiments to putatively white Eastern European migrants, as well as calls for a departure from the European Union – while seen as a decidedly worrying trend considering their familiarity with dark chapters of Germany’s past – has not personally affected most interviewees. Due to the media’s and public discourse’s obsession with Eastern European migrants as the problematic kind of EU immigration, the German respondents of this study have not felt personally targeted or marginalised by current events. The anxiety and concern, however, that are the result of living with an uncertain future is clearly apparent in many of their accounts.
6.2 Perceptions of British attitudes towards immigrants

The aforementioned British sense of politeness was cited and commended again and again when respondents discussed the way they perceive British people’s attitudes towards immigrants and tourists. Many of the interviewees pointed out that, in their experience, most British people have been very friendly and courteous towards them which helped them to feel welcome and at home in the country. Several respondents pointed out that they found that British people either did not comment on or enquire about them being foreign or that when they did comment on this it was often done in such careful and polite terms that it was not perceived as unwelcoming or hostile but instead as curious, and therefore, positive. Hanna, for example, sounded bemused rather than upset when she recalled instances when people had asked her about her background saying

“the first thing very often that happens is that very polite English people tend to say ‘Oh! Can I maybe hear an accent there?’ So, they’re very careful, very careful. I say, ‘yea’, and then they try to - very carefully – try to figure out where you come from without trying to be – they don’t want to be rude, they don’t want to insult you. So, they; I get a lot of [suggestions] of [being] Scandinavian”.

Charlotte, however, suggested that there may be a difference between the experience of someone who stays in England for a limited time and a person who intends to stay indefinitely. “The English”, she said,

“They have always come across to me as very friendly; really very welcoming. On the other hand, I do think when you arrive as a foreigner, as an immigrant they are very friendly but only to a certain point. They especially don’t know what to make of you if like me you get here [on a UNO secondment] but from the moment that they realise that you want to stay they begin to see you as competition, then their attitude towards you changes; the way they relate to you changes. (...) Then you have to work to get their approval.”

And she concluded her evaluation of the situation by suggesting that most British people are friendly toward the individual immigrant but not necessarily towards immigrants as a whole;
that while many are sceptical of immigration in the abstract, they try not to let the individual immigrants whom they encounter feel this scepticism.

Many suggested that the main reason why the United Kingdom is welcoming of newcomers is its history of migration due to the relative ease of movement among the Commonwealth of Nations. Hanna, for example, said “I think generally there is a higher percentage of immigrants in this country than what I have experienced in Germany and I think they are coping quite well. I would expect more anti-immigrant (…) behaviour in many ways”. She further explained that she has been subject to the occasional Nazi joke or anti-German remark but that on the whole the reception has been “quite warm, I think, quite open. And we have found it quite easy to settle in”. Similarly, Peter stated that he thinks

“with the past of the UK – having more colonies all over the world – there seems to be a higher tolerance of people from other countries while in Germany there may be parts which haven’t seen a foreigner for hundreds of years”

but as he developed his line of thinking he then qualified his assessment by saying that this may be more a difference between urban and rural spaces rather than different countries. He continued to add, the “countryside… I think that’s where they are maybe more closely-minded [sic] than in the cities where they always had some kind of people coming from wherever”. This is a realisation that several of the respondents, who felt that the UK is more welcoming to foreigners than Germany, came to as they pondered the question – that their own experience of living in Germany was for the most part limited to small towns or even villages while what they know of life in England was mostly centred around London or other big cities which, as they proposed, were more likely to be used to a higher proportion of immigrants and therefore be more comfortable with and more welcoming of influxes and influences from other cultural backgrounds. Lisa, who came from a very rural area in the East of Germany wondered out loud,

“I obviously only know life in London, you see? I don’t know what my experience would be like if I moved somewhere rural. I think there, it probably would not be so dissimilar to where I am from in Germany but here… it really makes no difference where you are from but as I said, that’s London. In London, everything is different to the rest of the country anyway. So, in that sense it is not really representative. It would probably be
the same if you went to Berlin and asked, ‘Are people unwelcoming towards immigrants?’ Probably not, but go to Dresden or Chemnitz and things may look very different.”

So, what at first glance when listening to many of the respondents’ accounts appears to be a difference between the two countries in question, may in fact be as much if not more of a difference between rural and urban regions which manifests itself similarly in both the United Kingdom and Germany. This is supported by Eurostat data, which shows that the proportions of immigrants living in the UK and Germany are very similar as foreign-born individuals made up 13.3% of the populations of both Germany and the UK respectively (European Commission, 2016). Likewise, Markaki’s (2012: 23) quantitative analysis of UK data from the European Social Survey on sources of anti-immigrant attitudes found that “London is the region with the highest percentage of immigrants but also the lowest percentage of native respondents who think immigration has made life in the country worse.” Similarly, Garner (2012: 451) remarks that it has been observable across the European Union that the profile of the most migration-averse voter is “male, older, rural-based (...) [and most significantly] low levels of education”. Consequently, most of the respondents of this study lived in a part of the country where they were largely insulated from more direct confrontation with anti-immigrant sentiments and their knowledge of this phenomenon therefore was predominantly from media commentary.

6.3 Dealing with the emboldening of anti-immigrant voices around the time of the Brexit referendum

The sense of scepticism and unease with current levels of immigration among some of the British population seems to be on the rise to many of the respondents and is something that they view with a noteworthy amount of worry. As previously mentioned, many of the respondents pointed out that they rarely felt targeted themselves. This does not, however, mean that they were not concerned by the recent intensification in anti-immigrant rhetoric. Many tried to understand what lay at the bottom of this development and tried to reconcile it with what to them seemed to be in stark contrast to the tolerance with which they believed foreigners from different ethnic backgrounds were being welcomed into the UK’s multicultural society. The personal experience of being treated in a friendly and warm manner
which nearly all the respondents described they had experienced throughout their time in the country is very different to this wider societal development. As Lundström (2014: 1) suggests, white people are rarely thought of as migrants since it is the “non-privileged migrant (…) who has often been subjectified as ‘the migrant’ in (Western) literature, research or the media (and as such ‘the problem’ in ‘our’ current times).” There are thus hierarchies of migrants in the way they are perceived and received by majority white destination countries. Being a white migrant to a predominantly white receiving society therefore prevented them from being racialized since “whites”, as Dyer (2005: 3) points out, “are not [perceived to be] of a certain race, they’re just the human race”.

While Pease (2010: 9) advises that “not being aware of privilege is an important aspect of privilege”, a perhaps surprisingly high proportion of respondents demonstrated an awareness that they were in more ways than one privileged in their migratory experience. The main privilege that most of them were aware that they benefit from, firstly, is their status as established EU citizens. During the course of their interview quite a few interviewees discussed that they were or had become aware that moving freely between countries is not a right and experience that all people enjoy. Simon, for instance, said

“at first, I thought ‘maybe it is actually too easy for people to come to our country’; you know, to Britain but then my friend from South Africa for example (... he would like to work as a farmer here, you know, in Kew Gardens (...) [but] he could only stay for six months on a holiday visa and now he has to move back because it’s so hard for him to [settle] here. And my friend from Japan – she would like to live here but it’s also very impossible ‘cause you need to find a workplace that helps you support your visa”.

Like Simon, many of the interviewees when they discussed what being an EU citizen meant to them (which I will discuss in the subsequent chapter), showed a strong awareness of the practical advantages that holding this passport affords them. It is interesting to note that Simon, in the above quote, acknowledged that he did not realise what restrictions and regulations many migrants from outside the European Union face until he encountered individuals who did not enjoy the same privileges he enjoyed. His erroneous previous assumption was likely based on sensationalist media reporting on migration which had
remained unchallenged until the reality of migration rules was brought to his attention by migrants whom he considered friends. In addition to the legal advantages, many of the respondents also were very aware that as already noted in Chapter 5, unlike other immigrants, they visually blend in much more easily due to their ethnic background which means that they are not easily distinguishable from the majority of the host society. There was a strong sense of awareness that as white, mostly highly educated individuals settling in a majority white receiving society they did not face the same problems as other groups who are from an ethnic minority background. Judith, who is a London based journalist, was just one of a number of respondents who discussed this issue saying

"what I notice is that when you talk to people about politics or about life in general; say, when they start talking about migration with me and they then start to say unkind things about immigrants and when I then normally say, ‘you [realise], just to point out – I am actually an immigrant myself. So maybe you don’t want to talk to me about this.’ And then comes the standard reply ‘oh, but you’re a good immigrant, right?’ And that is the concept that as a white German woman you are not viewed the same way as someone who has come from the Caribbean or Africa and who has a different colour of skin. That is not my opinion, it is not how I think things should be, but it is what I think happens and it is how I experience it frequently. I experience it at work. At my work, there are a lot of immigrants. Probably around 40% of us are immigrants from all over the world – Zimbabwe, Romania... my boss is Indian – from all corners of the earth and generally when discussions [about this topic] come up among immigrants and non-immigrants, we [immigrants] stick together. So, we do say that we are immigrants; that is how it is. Yes, I am an immigrant here. Sure, there are different levels of integration and I am a very integrated immigrant, but I am still an immigrant, I’d say."

Many more among the interviewees expressed similar feelings regarding their own experience which they believed was more positive because of their ability as white Europeans to blend in. Hanna, a secondary school teacher from Aldershot, for instance, was one of the respondents who also commented on this saying,
“...as Germans, we’re still... you know, most of us are white. So, in a way, if you speak English fluently people don’t realise where you’re from. (...) I know it is really awful. I just sometimes find that you get less hassle because you have the same skin colour and you speak English fluently – you blend in more easily”.

Similarly, Evelyn, who had lived in the UK for several decades, emphasised how welcoming British society is to foreigners but believed this to be a “a bit of weird thing” saying that

“you become normalised, are made to fit in in many different ways, you see? There are different habits and ways of doing things which English people have that you pick up as well – like drinking tea and so on. And as a result, your English changes and then you don’t stand out anymore. And my skin colour doesn’t stand out either – I am white, so you become integrated and I think that’s the crazy thing. This process of integration is only; how do put this? It depends on... in my opinion a lot depends on where you have come from, who you are and what you are, yeah?”

While, as I will discuss in the following chapter on respondents’ sense of self, many of the respondents struggled to identify with the term ‘migrant’, the above citations show that there was some recognition of the privileged treatment they as Western, white migrants received. Judith’s discussion of her experience of being automatically considered a good migrant – which she attributes to the colour of skin and country of origin – illustrates Dyer’s assertion that “being deemed white, given what whiteness connotes, is white people’s greatest asset” (2005: 45).

There is, however, another theme; one that to some degree runs contrary to this awareness of one’s own privilege as a migrant group that can easily blend in. As discussed in Chapter 5, there is a tendency among some of the respondents to view it as an immigrant’s responsibility to assimilate into the society that they have moved to by means of learning the language (or, ideally, having learned it before arriving in the country), adopting to a certain degree the cultural etiquette and resisting the desire to create closed communities of nationalities. This is in many ways an extension of to their own desire to blend into British society or it may indeed be part of the reason why they themselves demonstrate a desire to blend in – many of them consider it the duty of all immigrants (including themselves) to integrate or possibly even assimilate into their host society. They have internalised what
Garner’s research into British attitudes toward immigrants found, that to some British people (whose voices are amplified by the tabloid media) successful integration of migrants equates to “not being different”, “trying to muck in, and kids speaking with regional British accents” (2012: 456). What those of the respondents who (cautiously) extended their criticism to other migrant groups for what they considered ‘being cliquey’ demonstrated is somewhat of a blind spot regarding the differences in ability to blend in along racial as well as class lines.

This is in many ways at odds with the awareness that so many respondents demonstrated about their own privileged experience of migration as such a stance on the duty of immigrants does not necessarily consider that different immigrants may find it considerably harder than others to blend in. Of those respondents who expressed these views, some pointed to Polish immigrants as an example who are part of the wider group of Eastern European migrants whose “putative whiteness”, as Fox (2013: 1871) states, “has not exempted them from the effects of racism”. Natalie who works and lives in London, like many of the interviewees thought that British society does not welcome every migrant equally and said that “there are definitely differences, I believe – differences in relation to nations, also in relation to age (...) but definitely geographic differences”. However, she also quite carefully suggested that there were ways in which some migrants make it harder to be accepted and to become part of their surroundings. When discussing her involvement and the social connections she has made through her local volleyball club she also said

“Well, I would say, with some of the Poles... they are quite cliquey. They keep to themselves a lot and just talk amongst themselves and when they do so they speak in Polish. Whereas for me (...) I was meeting up with a German friend yesterday and when we are just the two of us then, sure, we speak in German but as soon as a third person approaches us we automatically switch to English. For me that is; you don’t even need to think about it – that’s just what you automatically do even if they don’t ask you to. As soon as they join you, you switch to English because not doing so would be rude, but many others don’t do that and then [when I try to join in a conversation with these people and they continue talking in their own language] I think ‘hm, okay. Well, I best leave them to it then’ and I go and talk to other people.”
And unlike Judith’s reflection, she concluded from her own experience of feeling excluded by other immigrants who do not speak English when they are around people who are not co-ethnics, that this behaviour is likely to make a difference to how easily people are able to integrate and feel at home in the host society. While it is true that the practice of socialising mostly with co-ethnics in their native language is likely to have an isolating effect, Natalie’s comment, however, suggests a failure to realise or acknowledge that the ability to switch languages and to confidently speak in English is not one that every migrant possesses equally. Discussing findings from her own empirical research on Polish migrants to the UK, White points out that “It would be wrong to assume that (…) their attitudes were insular or that they had no interest in British culture or associating with non-Polish people” (2011: 14). Instead, she points out, such migrant practices among her Polish respondents were a symptom of “poor knowledge of English [which] did make access to non-Polish community quite limited” (2011: 14), illustrating that it is an indication of structural disadvantage which serves to further disadvantage them.

In a similar vein, Patrick mentioned that Eastern Europeans may face greater challenges being accepted by the majority population simply “because they often get to the UK in big families”, suggesting that not arriving on your own is a factor in how much the new arrival is going to mingle with the receiving society, which as Natalie’s comment above also suggests can be perceived as a hindrance to being welcomed if you appear exclusive to people you encounter in your day to day life. This is a point that several respondents made about some of the other Germans living in the UK. Paul, for instance, brought it up in relation to Germans living in the Kingston and Richmond area where there are more Germans due to the only UK-based German school and nursery being located there. He, however, does not problematize it while Kathie, who talked about Germans in Hackney expressed her disapproval of people, and more specifically Germans, who move to the UK and make little effort to become anglicised or take part in British life when she said

“these infamous German families in Hackney – I don’t know if they really have arrived in England. They live in England but whether they truly engage with… maybe they are only here for the time being and they raise their children in German; speak to them in German. And it makes me think ‘why are you even here?’ Oh, I don’t know.”
While perceived issues around appearing cliquey and forming ‘expat bubbles’ (Bochove and Engbersen, 2015; Butcher, 2010) by sticking to those of one’s own national group were mentioned by some, the most cited reasons for the recent emboldening of anti-immigrant voices, was the media reporting and discourse around migration. In addition, the role of the UK’s membership of an expanding European Union, and a general lack of knowledge and understanding about other (European) countries and cultures were also provided as reasons. Respondents however, places most of the blame predominantly with the British tabloid press. Sophie who lives in London and works for the police suggested

“I think the problem is there is a skewed vision in the media and they love scare-mongering and people don’t have any real idea. I mean, (...) they always seem to think ‘ah, you know – immigrants are coming over here and they’re taking over our jobs and our housing’. Look at the figures! You know, there’s actually more generous benefits systems in Denmark, in Sweden, in Ireland. There’s four-hundred thousand Romanians in Spain. Compared to what we have over here... I think (...) France, Germany, Italy and some other countries take on more asylum seekers than the UK, but it doesn’t ever get documented. And it’s the same in the press; it’s only ever the bad stories. So, you know, the Bulgarians and Romanians – their reputation has been ripped to shreds and you never get to hear anything good that they do. You know, all the hard-working people who come over here to work hard, who contribute to society, who pay their taxes and actually will generally improve our life and you only ever get to hear about the small number of people [who do not]”.

This perspective is supported by research carried out by Light and Young (2009) and the Migration Observatory (2013) both of whom analysed UK print media coverage on immigration and found that since their accession to the European Union, Eastern European immigrants have been discussed and singled out more by nationality than many other immigrant groups, and this discussion has predominantly been negative. Britain, as Favell (2008b: 35) suggests, “remains fixated on more exotic forms of cultural difference as a threat, whether it is radical Islam, the great unwashed of Roma invading the country [or] too many Polish workers”. Due to widespread prejudices about Polish immigrants, “they are thus disrespected and badly treated like any other low-status migrants”, as Garner (2012: 454)
suggests. Western Europeans – like French, Italians or Germans – by contrast rarely get a mention or are complained about as they are viewed or portrayed as unproblematic.

6.4 **Perceptions of British attitudes towards Germany and Germans**

The respondents’ perception of how British people think about Germans and Germany, while it was slightly mixed, was mostly positive overall. While Sophie says

“I guess that’s where the Germans have been quite fortunate – they have never been tainted with [a bad] reputation. They have always had that very hard-working reputation and they have never really been ripped to shreds like the Eastern European countries”

she does not explicitly consider that Germans were indeed subject to discrimination, bad press and accusations as well internment less than a century ago (Panayi, 1991; Yarrow, 1990). However, she correctly identified that the way Germans, and German migrants more specifically, have in recent years been treated or talked about in the media is much less negatively than the treatment that Eastern European migrants have been subject to.

As Joep Leerssen (1998, cited in Mai, 2003: 943) has suggested regarding the function and origins of national stereotypes,

“stereotypes can be positive or negative in their valorisation, depending on the political circumstances: countries which present a threat, or political or economic rivalry are usually described in negative terms, giving rise to xenophobia; countries which do not pose any threat are represented in ‘cute’ terms, giving rise to exoticism or ‘xenophilia’”.

Interestingly, however, respondents suggested that Germany does not fit very easily into this binary typology as it is seen by British people – in the respondents’ perception – as an economic rival, yet is not considered as threatening and is therefore subject to both positive and negative stereotypes. Despite the generally positive appraisal of British attitudes towards Germans, many respondents did point out that they are confronted with references to the First and Second World War by people whom they meet. However, such confrontations ranged from only occasionally having to deal with anti-German or Nazi jokes to those who
reported having to deal with such jokes more frequently, and a small number of respondents
who stated that they had encountered situations where they were subject to more than mere
anti-German jokes. Teresa for instance, who has lived in England for several decades recalled

“in the eighties, it happened to me a couple of times that I went to a bar when I was
travelling in England with German friends and they refused to serve us because they
could hear that we were German. But that was in the countryside; that was in Devon
– need I say more?”

However, only a small number of the respondents reported having been subject to
such discriminatory and categorically unpleasant behaviour by locals and in the majority of
these cases they happened over a decade ago. It is, nevertheless, interesting to see the
perceived or, in this instance, experienced discrepancy between urban and rural life in
relation to anti-immigrant attitudes. As someone who had experienced the British school
system first-hand, Sophie was one of those respondents who felt that the current levels of
xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment were in part down to a lack of knowledge about
other European countries and cultures which she links to a perceived failing of the educational
system. A lack of knowledge and exposure to other cultures through education, in her view,
thus leaves a vacuum that can make individuals more susceptible to sensationalist popular
media discourses. She said,

“I think (...) it maybe comes back to languages. A lot of; I blame it on the education
system over here. They start far too late [with the teaching of foreign languages]. (...) You
can’t just assume that [people in all other countries] speak English; even though
a lot of the other European countries like Germany are very good at speaking English.
But you go to certain places and you can’t [expect people to speak English]”

A lack of knowledge about Germany is something that some of the respondents said
they had encountered which they found surprising. Simon and Kathie for instance both
expressed their bewilderment at people displaying gaps in knowledge regarding the former
German Democratic Republic. To Simon, this suggested that what British children were taught
in school about Germany starts with teaching about the First and ends with teaching about
the Second World War. He said he recalled conversations about the wall which separated the
former Soviet part of Germany from West Germany with the British people saying, “oh yea,
there was a wall in Berlin, but it was only in Berlin’ and I am like ‘no, actually – it was all the way around. They have this very limited knowledge about what Germany is”’. Similarly, Kathie appeared shocked when she recounted an incident where she was asked the question “what do you mean there were two Germanies?” She expressed her surprise and frustration when she said,

“they don’t have a clue, and these were people, who were educated to A level. Yet they have no clue that there were two Germanies? But two world wars and one world cup – that they know. Yeah, great.”

Several of the respondents, including Simon, also stated their surprise at their experience that many people in Britain did not know German geography and did not know, for example, that Germany has a coast. However, these experiences were in some way counter-balanced by the reports of other respondents who talked of the great enthusiasm with which they said British people had responded to finding out their country of origin. Many pointed out that while many of the British people they had encountered may not have been able to master more than a couple of sentences in German, they nonetheless practiced these enthusiastically. Several respondents also said that in their experience, those British people who have been to Germany tended to speak about their time in the country and Germany itself with much warmth.

There was a clear distinction that the respondents made between the ways that people they met in their day to day life treat them and how they feel treated by the British tabloid press and its accompanying wider public discourse. While few had personally had bad experiences with verbal abuse or physical confrontation, many pointed to the war rhetoric that the tabloid press often resorts to whenever Germany or Germans are discussed in their publications; particularly during football tournaments. This assertion is supported by Ruth Wittlinger’s (2004: 458) argument that such a “connection between football and war against Germans is frequently made” in British sports reporting, much to the detriment of Germans who are confronted with it. “Football”, as historian Antony Beevor (1999) similarly points out in an article written for the Guardian, “became an extension of the second world war by other means” for some. This was lamented by many of the respondents. Simon for instance expressed his frustration when he recounted that “even when we won the world cup and I
was, like, boasting about it in the office, they replied, ‘you know, we still won the war!’ and he sighed deeply. Despite the frustration, they nonetheless pointed out that such references to Germany’s Nazi past – while they were perceived as exasperating at times – were bearable and in jest and did not significantly hinder their ability to feel at home in the UK.

While none of the respondents for this study had lived in Britain long enough to have encountered the press treatment that Germans received around the time of the world wars, Teresa nevertheless emphasised that she still remembered stereotypical and negative depictions of Germans in TV shows, particularly in comedy series. Such representations, she added, have however largely disappeared over the last couple of decades.

“Over time normal German characters appeared on the odd TV programme – for example, German girlfriends who weren’t stupid and didn’t goosestep but who were normal and simply had a bit of a German accent. (...) So, these were German characters played by British actors with a German accent who were added to shows and that was something new. I bet British people probably didn’t even notice but I noticed and found it a positive development and found that things became easier from then on.”

While her recollection points to a very laudable development of reconciliation demonstrated in part by a more positive depiction and attitude towards Germans over time, it also hints at the sense of discomfort that she felt before she began to encounter more neutral portrayals of Germans that in her view normalised and made it easier for Germans who were living in Britain to feel comfortable.

As few respondents reported having experienced any tangible hostility from anyone whom they had met in person, the wider negative and stereotypical mediated discourse in the tabloid press was experienced by most as somewhat discomforting and possibly frustrating at times. However, most of the respondents stressed that they had rarely been made to feel unwelcome in the country as a result of it. In addition, the accounts of respondents overwhelmingly suggest, as quite a few explicitly stated, that over the course of their time in the country they have simply developed a thick skin in relation to negative stereotypes which are mostly limited to equating Germans with Nazis and Germany with its Nazi past, as well as the stereotype that Germans have no sense of humour. The latter stereotype, as Ruth Wittlinger (2004: 459) interestingly suggests, puts Germans into
somewhat of a bind through making the “suggestion that whoever does not find” these jokes that are made at their expense “funny lacks a sense of humour”. Germans can then either reject such jokes as unfunny and risk being teased for conforming to the stereotype of Germans lacking a sense of humour or treat such jokes as harmless fun. Hence, while it is convincing, considering the respondents’ generally high level of awareness of their position as privileged migrants, that they consider such stereotypes and references to the Nazi past to be minor compared to the xenophobia that other national groups experience, it is also possible that they downplay the effect such jokes out of a desire not to be perceived as the stereotypically unfunny German who cannot take a joke.

Several respondents’ accounts suggested that being confronted with the way that the British as a society remember and celebrate their past has the effect that they reflect on how the past can or should be remembered and respondents come to different conclusions. Lotte, for example, said that while in the beginning the continual remembering of the First and Second World War made her feel like she had to repeatedly apologise on behalf of her country, she came to believe “that it is not necessarily a bad thing to keep what happened in the public conscience”. She further explained that conversations she has had with friends who assured her that they do not blame her for the past have made her feel more at peace with being German in Britain. Similarly, Nina pointed out

“I mean annually there is a time to reflect on that part of the past on Remembrance Day and whether you want to or not it makes you reflect and I think that is a positive thing. And I mean, the cityscape of London would be very different had it not been for what happened during the Second World War and it’s not like you are personally being blamed for it”

which shows that apart from reflecting on the past and on whether one should make an effort to maintain an awareness she has also managed to emotionally detach herself from her role as a descendant from the German nation that caused the war and as the antagonist being remembered during Remembrance Day. Others’ description of the habit of celebrating Memorial Day and the way that much of the reporting of any German public figure – be it a politician or a football player – is often linked discursively to this dark chapter of German
history range from amusement to frustration and, to some degree, upset at times. Erika who recently gained dual German-British citizenship, for instance, stated

“I’m not being judged by this of course [but] you are confronted by it because the British are a bit obsessed with the First World War. There is always some memorial to be opened and always [Remembrance] day” and she added, “I mean you should not forget what happened, but I think it is wrong what the British are doing – this is just enforcing trauma, war trauma. So, it’s not good, I think.”

Overall, respondents did not feel that British people who bring up the war or make Nazi jokes do so because they dislike Germans or continue to view Germany as an enemy. Several pointed out that instances when British people bring up the war reveal more about the British than about how they see Germans. As Paul suggested,

“I think for the majority the wars no longer play a role. (...) They crack jokes, yes. And the Second World War seems omnipresent on TV; I mean there’s always yet another TV show or film (...), it was the finest hour of the British and Americans. So, of course they hang on to it. But it doesn’t seem to have an impact on the general population – they can differentiate…”

And similarly, Lisa suggested “sometimes I get the feeling that this is seen here as the glorious past”. So many of the respondents, while they did point out that they felt a rising degree of concern and unease with the continued presence of this past in public life, did not perceive it as a threat to their personal sense of feeling welcome and part of British society at the time of being interviewed. They viewed it as an introspective and nostalgic issue; a way for the country to which they have moved to reminisce about a point in its history that enabled them to maintain a sense of national pride and collective identity. In addition, the rise in anti-immigrant sentiments was perceived as a wider issue across Europe and thus not as a movement that targets immigrants to the UK like them specifically, making the development less personal. Maria who lives in East Sussex with her British husband and teenage daughter noted, “I find it frightening, regardless of where it happens, whether it’s in England or in Germany or in France... when such parties can gain power.” While many of the respondents did not feel made unwelcome, many of them said that they were very saddened by the rise in anti-immigrant sentiment. The main reason for this that most of them carefully suggested
for their worry and disappointment about this rise in anti-immigrant sentiments, was that they knew from Germany’s history where “this kind of thinking” can lead.

6.5 Dealing with the rise in UKIP support and the uncertainty surrounding the EU referendum

In many of the respondents’ accounts, the rise in support of the UK Independence Party was closely linked with the previously discussed emboldening of anti-immigrant rhetoric and sentiment. This comes as no surprise, as much of the UK Independence Party’s and subsequent Vote Leave’s campaigns were using anti-immigrant sentiments to garner momentum and support. A recent Home Office publication (O’Neill, 2017: 6) confirms that “there was an increase in [racially and religiously motivated hate crimes] from April 2016, which reached its peak in July 2016” – the month after the referendum on Britain’s membership in the European Union, “with the level of these offences being 44 percent higher than” in the previous year’s July. Drawing a definite line between interviewees’ thoughts and experiences of these two developments is therefore difficult to make. The main difference was that while the latter was rarely experienced as being directly aimed at them as Western European, white EU citizens, the former was identified by many as a potential real threat to the legal right to all EU citizens including themselves to be able to continue living in the UK. While this possible scenario instilled respondents with varying degrees of fear, most perceived the knowledge that a rising proportion of the British population were supportive of the proposal to remove their right to live in the UK as hurtful. So, beyond the effect that rising UKIP support and its predominantly xenophobic concurrent discourse had on how welcome and at home they reported being able to feel in the UK, the possibility of a withdrawal of the UK from the EU and the uncertainties that this posed for most of the participants were clearly visible among many of the respondents.

Most did not feel personally targeted or attacked and thus made to feel unwelcome by the rise in UKIP support for several reasons. As already discussed, due to the ethnic and cultural proximity to the White-British majority, they were not made the explicit targets of the party’s campaign against EU membership and therefore did not have any such label imposed on them. Furthermore, some respondents pointed out they were able to see how some of the arguments could appeal to some segments of society; particularly to individuals
from lower socio-economic backgrounds. “I picked up one of their leaflets. Certain points really are presented in such a way that they address worries people have and so hit a nerve and that’s why they can gain votes” Caroline, who lives in London with her Nigerian husband and three daughters, suggested when pondering the rise in popularity of the UK Independence party. The media’s sensationalist and mostly negative portrayal of the impact of immigration in the country was cited as another reason and culprit for the problematic development in opinions. Sophie, for instance, expressed her concern about the effect that the subjective and biased media portrayals of immigration, which were employed heavily in UKIP materials, has had when she said, “I think it’s a shame because I think the press often failed to mention all the benefits that the EU has; especially for commerce, you know, for businesses.”

Nevertheless, the announcement of a referendum on the UK’s membership in the European Union unsurprisingly did have an effect on European citizens who are currently living in the country and the participants of this study were no exception to this. There was a notable difference between the level of worry with which respondents discussed this issue among those who were interviewed before the Conservative party was re-elected compared to those who were interviewed when it had become clear that a referendum was going to be held. It was nonetheless clear that all respondents hoped that a UK exit of the EU would not become a reality. The reasons interviewees gave for wanting the UK to remain part of the EU were predominantly personal, but many also showed concern for the UK economy and the people who would likely suffer from an economic downturn following Brexit, while a lot of anxiety was expressed about the future of the European project of maintaining peace and prosperity.

The level of concern and indeed fear about an uncertain future varied considerably along lines of age, class and the length of time spent in the UK. While there certainly was a level of disparity, it can be said that overall the more senior respondents, and those who were in less specialised or prestigious jobs as well as those who felt that they would find it difficult to reintegrate into German society due to the length of time away from their country of origin, expressed a stronger sense of fear at the possible prospect of the UK leaving the European Union. Evelyn, who at the age of 76, was the most senior among the participants stated that
“this is something I have thought about, and it terrifies me. It would be a catastrophe. It wouldn’t be good at all, and I don’t even think it’s an unlikely scenario for it to happen.”

For Evelyn, who had lived in the UK for over thirty years and who no longer had many friends in Germany, the possibility of being made to leave her home in Kingston was far more unsettling than for many of the younger respondents who found the idea of relocating anew less daunting due to their existing stronger links in Germany and age-related perceived flexibility regarding employment opportunities. However, several among the younger participants of this study pointed out that they had either thought about or taken steps to securing their right to reside in the UK if the eventuality of a withdrawal from the EU was to become a reality. While there were two participants who were dual citizens, due to having a British parent, a further two had applied for British citizenship in part to ensure they would have the right to continue living here, and several more said they are toying with the idea of getting a UK passport to secure their status in the UK. Lisa was one of these individuals. She said,

“Well, to be safe I provisionally applied for a residence card last year after UKIP got such high results in the European Parliamentary elections, in case the UK decides to leave the EU. So, that if it comes to it I won’t have to apply for a visa through my boyfriend.”

Her decision to act pre-emptively, she said, was influenced by her familiarity with the difficulties and costs that her Indian boyfriend has had to contend with due to his need to apply for visas over the years. Witnessing his dealings with border agencies, she explained, had made her aware how privileged and easy traveling with a European passport is.

Most of those respondents who did not feel worried either had dual citizenship or felt so disillusioned with the political process that they considered a referendum taking place (let alone succeeding) too unlikely to be a cause for concern, while others felt confident enough that due to their young age and successful careers they could start over elsewhere if they needed to. However, many simply did not believe that exiting the European Union was a smart move for the UK economy and they, therefore, concluded that it was not likely to become reality. Leonie who at the age of 27 was working in the city of London suggested,
“I would be very surprised if it happens. Especially in London (...) there are such qualified immigrants here, if you really kick them out you can’t possibly maintain that sort of level of GDP.”

Other respondents, like Peter, similarly expressed a strong disbelief in the frequent calls for a referendum being a reason to be concerned but they did so for different reasons. “There is a lot of talk”, he said, “but I don’t think it will happen as the majority of people would like it to. It’s not; (...) the influence of citizens is just so small.” So many simply were too disillusioned with the political process to be able to imagine that such a radical change was likely to happen and discounted the possibility that politicians might in fact be guided by the public and call for a referendum in this way.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reflected on respondents’ thoughts regarding wider British societies’ attitudes towards immigrants and how their perceptions of these compare to how welcoming they have found the UK towards Germans specifically. Many found the UK to be more multicultural than Germany and commended the general openness to other cultures, which several suggested they felt was not as great in Germany. Such statements, however, as I have pointed out, need to be somewhat qualified as many of the respondents had moved from relatively rural areas in Germany to urban places in the UK and some suggested that the difference they had observed may be in part down to the difference within both countries, rather than differences between them (Markaki, 2012; Garner, 2012). Respondents also commented with concern on what they perceived as a recent rise in anti-immigrant sentiments against mostly non-white and Eastern European migrants, which they felt was very different from what they had experienced. Adding to academic knowledge on whiteness and, specifically white migrations, I have discussed that participants reported that they themselves, as white Germans living in the UK, had not become the target of such sentiments and while viewing these through the lens of their national history made them feel uneasy and concerned, few had personally been made to feel unwelcome by them. In this respect, there was a difference between interviewees who had lived in the UK for longer – several of whom had over the years made some negative experiences – and those who had lived in the UK for only a few years or less, most of whom did not report any such experiences. Where negative
experiences were reported, these all had taken place in places other than London showing that experiences in this respect differed slightly based on whether participants had lived or had previously lived outside of London. So, for most the privileged status and experience, which I have discussed in Chapter 4 and 5, thus extends to their experience of events of recent years which have seen particularly Eastern European migrants becoming (new) targets of negative media representation and sentiments. Despite the complicated German – British history and to the surprise of many of the respondents, German migrants living in the UK do not appear to suffer the same consequences of anti-immigrant media discourses as other migrant groups. As a result, they spoke of Nazi jokes which they were occasionally subjected to as minor annoyances which they considered manageable. Viewing their awareness of the rather different treatment that other (more visible) migrant groups receive in conjunction with their desire and attempts to blend in as seamlessly as possible with the UK’s majority population, raises the question whether this desire is in part driven by an anxiety about being perceived as part of the ‘bad migrants’ if they did not try to assimilate as much. It is possible that their efforts not to be conceived as ‘other’ are a way of trying to disassociate from the ‘stigmatised’ image of Eastern European migrants. This interplay of national guilt and the ability to visibly blend into the host society is an interesting phenomenon, as it sets the German migrants in my research apart from much of the existing literature on migrant groups and is a novel contribution to literature in the field of migration and whiteness.

Lastly, I have discussed respondents’ views and worries regarding the (then) upcoming referendum on the UK’s membership in the European Union. This discussion offers insights into a very recent development on which there is not yet much literature and showed clear differences between individuals along the lines of age as well as the perceived transferability of their professional skills to a different national context. Those who, due to their youth and/or varied skillset felt that they could easily relocate to a different country, if the post-referendum reality required it, appeared much more carefree and untroubled by the prospect of the referendum than interviewees who were older and whose jobs were lower skilled. While most respondents did not report feeling personally affronted or rejected by calls for UK independence, the consequences of a potential withdrawal from the EU on their rights left many feeling anxious and concerned. In contrast to respondents’ portrayal of the impact of anti-immigrant sentiments, which they explained they were concerned about but rarely
personally affected by, their thoughts on the possible consequences of a (then) potential exit from the European Union were experienced as much more worrying and anxiety-producing. This is because while their whiteness and status as Western European migrants meant that they were “systematically privileged” (Dyer, 2005: 9) and had therefore been largely shielded from racialized discrimination, the outcome of the referendum was going to have an impact on all EU citizens living the UK and, in that respect introduced a shared migrant commonality with these other European migrants.
7. Nationality, transnationality and identity

7.1 Introduction

So far, this thesis has discussed the motivations behind and experience of individuals’ moves from Germany to the UK, as well as their process of settling in and dealing with German-British history and current events, such as the Brexit referendum. In discussing these, I have highlighted connections and tensions within the respondents’ accounts. While continuing to draw on their narratives on these experiences, this chapter focuses on their implicit and explicit reflections on the impact that these experiences have had on their own sense of self. In doing so, this chapter addresses the third of my research questions which was about the perceptions of (cultural) identity among Germans living in the UK, and their thoughts on notions of home and belonging. I will first discuss the importance of transnational associations to respondents’ identity, followed by a critical discussion of the continued significance of being German. Thirdly, I will turn to addressing questions regarding home and belonging, and to conclude this chapter, I will return to some of the key characteristics of diaspora as outlined by Brubaker (2005) in relation to this study of Germans in the United Kingdom to exemplify why discussing this group using the term transnational is more fitting than the concept of diaspora.

So, in the following discussion, I propose that participants’ accounts of themselves and their lives, while they do not fit neatly into diasporic discourses because of a lack boundary maintenance and homeland orientation, are decidedly transnational and their sense of identity multi-layered, with a strong emphasis on sources that transcend the national. While passing on linguistic knowledge was important to the parents in the sample, identification with being European had much greater saliency among respondents than identification with being German. Drawing on Bradatan et al (2010), I argue that the significance that parent respondents attached to passing on German as well as British cultural capital to their children is illustrative of a desire to reproduce transnationality rather than ‘Germanness’. The accounts of many participants suggest that their lingering unease with Germany’s difficult past (the stigmatising effect of which I have discussed in Chapter 5) may be responsible for why they identified more with the transnational concept of Europe. This rather fascinatingly suggests that while the expression of their identity is predominantly transnational in its
consequences, the roots of this association may lay in their country of origin’s specific national past.

As respondents discussed their experiences of moving across borders and finding their feet in their new environment many inadvertently began revealing some of the impact their move had had on their sense of self and how they defined their identity. This chapter therefore draws on some previously discussed themes in the data. While for many, glimpses of their identity did indeed shine through their own accounts and narratives of their choices, challenges and experiences, all respondents were asked to reflect upon what they believed had shaped and defined them as well as what they felt was important to them and their sense of self. In discussing these, this chapter focuses on the characteristics that were most salient to the participants’ sense of self viewed through the lens of their migration experience and thereby addresses the research question which sought to explore what perceptions of (cultural) identity and belonging were among the Germans living in England who participated in this research.

Before beginning this discussion about whether and how much respondents identified with national, transnational, local and/or regional sources of identity, it must be pointed out that such characteristics in all cases were not the respondent’s sole source of identity and in many were not even considered by them to be part of the most important ones, but merely one among many. Other sources of identity beside those to do with their political or civic association were those grounded in their family relationships, such as mother, father, son, daughter and sibling. For instance, the vast majority of those respondents who were parents made it clear that they considered being a parent to their child(ren) far more significant in defining themselves than any notion of national or transnational identity. The importance of these close, meaningful relationships as well as hobbies and, in quite a few cases, the respondent’s career or job meant that according to the participants in this study, national identity did not hold the place of being the sole or chiefly exceptional defining character. This lends support to Glick Schiller et al.’s (1992) assertion that conceiving of the nation-state as the framework within which to understand the contemporary human experience would be erroneous. In fact, most respondents pointed out that their move across national borders, as well as being confronted with the populist UKIP agenda, have led to their increased reflection
about questions of what it means to be German, to be European, and fundamentally what it means to be ‘them’.

### 7.2 The significance of transnational associations to identity and (lack of) boundary maintenance

All respondents identified to some degree with being German, although around three quarters of the respondents’ reflections about their sense of self showed that they associated more strongly with transnational sources of identity than national ones. All but a couple of the respondents who identified more strongly with being German stated that they to some degree also identified with a source of identity that transcends the national. For the vast majority this meant feeling more European than German, though some of those who identify with the transnational would go even further and describe themselves as cosmopolitan or global citizens. Anna, for instance, explains that she viewed herself as a global citizen but while spending some time in Australia realised that there were some cultural differences that made her conclude that she probably was a European global citizen, rather than fully global. Similarly, Kathie when pondering the question of identity suggested,

> "Well, I am European and German at the same time. That is the beauty of the EU, that I can be a global citizen and German at once. (...) So, it’s not one or the other, but both – that you have the space to be both and that we aren’t working against each other but together. That’s the European ideal. (...) I think seeing yourself as a European is better than seeing yourself as a German. That’s what I think – it is more progressive and it is much better."

Cosmopolitanism, as Benhabib (2006) points out, means slightly different things to different social theorists. It arguably is the same for most people but at its core is constitutive of a conviction that our shared humanity connects humans in spite of national borders and differences. Drawing on Martha Nussbaum’s work, she describes it as an “an attitude of enlightened morality that does not place ‘love of country’ ahead of ‘love of mankind’” (2006:17-18). While the above examples of Anna and Kathie illustrate that they do believe national and regional forms of identification continue to hold significance, they are also illustrative of an attitude that recognises the need to see and care beyond the confines of nationality.
Identity, as Strauss (1969) among others suggests, is subject to constant processes of change and transformation (see also Kazmierska, 2003). So, it does not come as a surprise that, while some said that they already felt this way before they left Germany, many of the respondents explained that their move to the United Kingdom (or another country in the cases of those for whom the UK was not the first country that they had moved to) led to them associating more with being European. Tabea said,

“Well, I think I am simply not a friend of nationalities as a concept. I think this concept is outdated and I would be fine with it if we could wholly abolish it. (...) So yes, I find being a European very important. Despite not being keen on nationalities, but I think [European] includes such a range of people who are bonded together through a shared history. And with all our similarities; as well as differences – but I think that really there is more that unites us than separates us; more than we maybe realise or want to admit. That is really important to me.”

Like Tabea, many respondents reported that they attached little importance to national and ethnic labels and that these were or should be a thing of the past. Several referred to Germany’s Nazi past when discussing the irrelevance of these concepts and demonstrated a distinct feeling of unease with the way they perceived nationality and ethnicity is dealt with in the UK.

Some of the respondents – particularly those who had previously moved across national borders – said that for as long as they could remember, they had felt quite European because they had always identified with more than one national identity. Daniel, for instance, explained that he had already felt European when he was still living in Germany

“because I have four ethnicities and have lived in several countries. Therefore, I never really felt particularly German, and I have definitely not felt Romanian. When it is the football world cup I do support the German and the Romanian teams – so I don’t support all European teams but just those two which means there is a certain sense of national identity but no national pride. It’s more that I sometimes feel ashamed on behalf of other Germans when I hear stories about what they have been up to or when I hear stories of Romanians having been caught stealing. It’s not that I want to be associated with that”
This illustrates that he at times felt an involuntary sense of association or implication by nature of sharing the same ethnic background with other Germans or Romanians but reaffirmed that apart from such instances where the national temporarily becomes apparent, he considered himself European. He consequently reaffirmed being European as the umbrella term that can most accurately unite the several facets of his transnational perception of himself, thus illustrating how “individuals construct their identity by integrating their diverse and conflicting life experiences into an evolving yet continuous narration” and providing him with a sense of unity of his “vital trajectory” (Barbera, 2015: 7).

When discussing notions of European identity, a question that requires some analysis is what respondents meant when they talked about being European – how did they define it? What being European meant to the specific individuals who identified with the label varied according to their accounts. Daniel, for example, explained that to him being European meant “not having a national identity or national pride as such” while Stefan took a moment to ponder the question before he said

“I think Europe; or contemporary Europe is quite civilised. Perhaps being European is also a way of drawing a line to differentiate us from American cultural influences or other cultures more generally. What do I like about Europe? What I like about Europe is the multiplicity of cultures – that you can get on a one-hour flight and arrive in a completely different culture”

and he pointed out that in other, bigger countries like parts of the United States, this would not be possible. He then summarised his viewpoint saying,

“So, it’s the fact that it is so diverse, that there are cultural differences, different languages, and many attractive cities, that there is no capital punishment – that is important to me. I feel very happy being European.”

Leonie suggested that being European,

“it’s a bit of an add-on probably because; I mean you can’t just wipe out twenty years of your life – that absolutely shapes you – being German. (...) It is a nice way of saying it – [being European] it’s probably like an add-on. Then, whenever you travel; I’ve
spent some time in Italy, (...) some months in Spain – you just get so many new inputs (...) and you take what you like best out of that culture and it’s like an add-on.”

Her understanding of being European thus fits neatly into how Owen (2011: 110) refers to European citizenship as “the most spectacular example of contemporary nested transpolitical citizenship”. As discussed in Chapter 2, unlike separate or cross-cutting identities (where an individual holds citizenship status in two different nation-states), in formations of nested identities, Herrmann and Brewer explain (2004: 8), "everyone in a smaller community [as an example, say, Germany] is also a member of a larger community" like the European Union. Identification with one, therefore, as Leonie demonstrates, does not (or theoretically should not) compete with the other so long as the individual does not conceive of them as being at odds (as many British people admittedly do).

However, separating being European from being German may not be as straightforward as it initially seems, as several of the respondents suggested that their strong feelings of affinity with Europe may in part be linked to their upbringing in Germany. The experience of living in more than one (European) country led Nina to reflect on what being German and being European meant to her which led her to state

“I believe I see myself more as a European than a German. Although if you think about it, I think one begets the other in a way because in Germany Europe is seen as much more positive and an emphasis is placed on how important it is that we all work together and ensure that there will not be another war. And as a result, [being European] is very important in Germany and I think here in England Europe is viewed as a burden”

and she subsequently concluded, that English people were probably less likely than Germans to feel European. Olivia brought up a very similar thought when she said

“I am very pro-Europe, because Germany is very pro-Europe and that is important to me. (...) I feel German, but not quite to the same level, but nearly. I also feel European because Germany is very European, and you feel very much part of the whole [European project]”.

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So, both of them concluded that to some degree, it could in fact be dependent on the society that one grew up in whether one identifies with being European.

Not feeling very patriotic was suggested by some, like Fiona, as a reason why being European seems more appealing to many of the respondents. Fiona said, “I have never felt patriotic or national” and explained that “this could have something to do with our history or with my age”. This feeling of unease of identifying with the national, to feel patriotic or proud of their country was something which was mentioned (at least in passing) by many of the respondents who made references to Germany’s problematic history of Nazism and, despite Fiona’s reference to age, did not appear to solely be an issue among the older respondents. It is a sensitive topic that has been widely discussed in German academia, most prominently in what has been dubbed ‘the historians’ dispute’ which took place in the 1980s and included prominent social theorists such as Jürgen Habermas (1986) and Ernst Nolte (1986) whether Germany should let go and move on from castigating itself for its fascist past or should continue to ensure it remains part of public debate and, if so, how it should be remembered.

While many of the respondents’ accounts illustrated the weight of that guilt and how it had shaped their understanding of what it means to be German as well as how they presented themselves when they were outside of Germany, some – particularly (though not exclusively) the younger respondents – pointed out that they felt there was a change in the national atmosphere during and after the 2006 football world cup that took place in Germany.

All the interviewees who said that they did not seek out interaction and friendships with other Germans stated that they (as they put it) simply did not feel the need to be in contact with other Germans who were also living in the UK. Nationality – and thus, boundary maintenance – as some explained further, did not seem important to them and they, therefore, did not believe that they felt or indeed should feel any stronger affiliation with fellow Germans living in the UK than they do with anyone of a different nationality or background. When asked about this topic Kathie paused and began to think out loud,

“I don’t know. I don’t know. I mean, I do have one colleague here who is German – he is from Nuremberg – and we get along really well but if we didn’t get along then I wouldn’t have anything to do with him. I don’t have to talk to him just because he is German and there are other Germans [I have encountered in the UK] who made me
think ‘oh well, I wouldn’t want to talk to you if I met you in Germany. So why should I talk to you while I’m here?’ No, [having contact with other Germans] was never really important to me.”

Similarly, Judith’s explanation as to why she has no interest in seeking out Germans was along the same lines when she suggested,

“It just isn’t on my radar and I actually found that I had more in common with other mothers who are in similar stage in their life but aren’t German than I did with those who are German. I keep noticing that. And I do try every now and then but then I just think ‘this is crap’. It’s like when you have two gay friends and say to them ‘you are both gay, you must be a couple’. It’s the same thing.”

Many of those respondents, who stated that they did not seek contact with Germans and would not approach someone if they found out that the other person was German, therefore, demonstrated a lack of interest in boundary maintenance along national lines. They were, however, quick to add that they would make an exception and would indeed approach a German to offer their help if they could tell that they were in need of assistance. Natalie, for instance, said that she does not seek out Germans and only has some loose German acquaintances whom she happened to meet through her volleyball club. She explained,

“I actually try to avoid Germans a little; I have to admit. I don’t know exactly why. No idea. Sometimes it happens to me that you overhear some talking and I think ‘oh, Germans’ because their accent is so strong. I don’t know. Okay, they are German, but I don’t really care if they’re German or a different nationality whether they’re German or French or Italian – I wouldn’t seek a conversation with them. It doesn’t make a difference to me. Well, every now and then it does happen that you come across an elderly couple who you can tell are lost and, in that case, I would turn around and would ask if they need any help. But apart from that, you actually hear it too often, especially if you are in Central London where there are many tourists, then you just ignore it.”

Similarly, Judith said,
“well it does depend on the situation. So, if I can hear that someone is desperately trying to read the map to find Covent Garden and is not able to do it, yes, then I would [approach them]. If I think they need help, then I would. Or if they are saying something stupid. It can be quite funny sometimes because people have the habit of gossiping in their own language and don’t stop to think about whether someone within earshot can understand them. London is very dangerous in terms of that and sometimes I do enjoy [listening in on people who are careless like that].”

Thus, while they said that they did not especially seek the company of others of German origin, there was a certain level of civic duty they felt which would compel them to offer assistance should they become aware that someone who speaks German is in need of help by someone who is accustomed enough to life in England and can do so in the German language. The further point raised by Judith’s quote above about the carelessness with which she believed some Germans speak in German in public was one remarked upon by several respondents and it may in some way be linked to their own desire to blend in to not be involuntarily discovered as Germans. Consequently, they expressed thoughts which suggested that they disapproved of or at least consider it a faux pas when they overheard other Germans speaking in public in a manner that suggested that they thought no one could understand what they are saying.

The reasons that respondents suggested or implied that they and, as several pointed out, many Germans, choose not to seek out other Germans and why they prefer to blend in as much as they can (instead of announcing to those around them that they are German), vary. Peter for example, suggested that Germans simply are very independent and do not need the assistance and support of a network of people from one’s own cultural background. While this is very clearly a rather sweeping generalisation on his part, it may be the case that those Germans who choose to move abroad are more self-reliant. Considering the previously discussed characteristics of lifestyle migration this would not be entirely surprising. However, such an inference cannot be made from the available data and is outside the remit of this research. Peter explained further, “people who are German, they’re not... advertised as such. So, I... only by chance I found out that those people are Germans as well.” And when asked if he had an idea why this might be he replied,
“Among Germans I think it's a different kind of personality; a specific kind of personality who go abroad. And those are already quite confident in starting that kind of journey and being here they look out for themselves and they are to - some extent - self-sufficient. They don't need someone to help them. They don't need any other Germans to help them. (...) It didn't seem in any way that I needed to get in touch [with other Germans] when I actually came over. And that's ... and all the other Germans I have ever met here they all seemed to be quite happy where they are already. So, they already have found a place to be while the French and Spanish students, they try to stick together quite a lot. Or at least they do [so] maybe because they are not as confident in their English and that's the easy way to do it. And we did the same thing... [in the beginning]. That's what everyone did.”

A further reason that a small number of the respondents with a German partner (and in some cases children) pointed to why they did not have an interest in finding Germans in their area was that they can speak German at home and, therefore, did not feel the need to have more German-speaking contact in their everyday lives. A number of respondents among those who were single or in relationships with non-German speakers also pointed out that as they were still in contact with family and, to a lesser extent, friends in Germany they did not feel a desire to meet other Germans living in the UK. Based on the accounts of the respondents in this study, there is then little in the way of evidence to suggest that there exists a flourishing, let alone close-knit, German community in the UK. While respondents showed that there is a level of civic duty that they feel to help other Germans who they realise need it from someone who also speaks their language, few among the respondents had any desire to build connections or networks with other Germans living in their vicinity. What transpired in most of these accounts of respondents, as the main reason why they do not seek to form a community with other Germans who are living in the UK, is the previously mentioned low importance that they attach to their German national identity. This, as quite a few interviewees pointed out, has to do with the national guilt that many Germans still feel as a result of Germany’s Nazi past as well as a perception of Germans who leave the country as being self-sufficient and able to cope on their own.
7.3 The importance of cultivating national links

Maintaining transnational ties with the country of origin is another way in which respondents could cultivate the German part of their transnational identity. Since many of the respondents pointed out the high importance that their relationships with parents, siblings and/or children had to their own sense of self, it is not surprising that, as discussed in Chapter 5, most reported keeping in regular contact with them regardless of whether they lived in the UK, Germany or in other parts of the world. This is a common feature of transnational lives according to Vertovec (2009: 61), who as discussed in more depth earlier, suggests that “the provenance of most everyday migrant transnationalism is within families”. Many of the respondents who had lived away from Germany for more than just a couple of years pointed out during the course of their interviews that apart from other members of their family, such as siblings, parents or children, they no longer cultivated many or any relationships with people still living in Germany. Therefore, I argue that the desire to remain close to their relatives is a sign of the family bond and what it means to them and does not reflect a desire to maintain close links to a homeland more generally. While these relationships were made up of transnational practices and lives, they did not easily fit within the narrative of diasporic practice.

A further important aspect to explore is the extent to which passing down their German ethno-cultural capital was important to those respondents who had or wished to have children. Looking specifically at the effect that having children had on the parents among the respondents it becomes clear that it was a defining moment not only in their private lives but also regarding how much they incorporated Germanness into their daily lives. While some interviewees pointed out that having children and raising them in the UK and in British institutions had led to a greater level of integration and adaptation into British ways of life, other parents said that having children had strengthened the connection they felt with their German roots. Hanna, for instance, explained that in order for her children not to feel or be perceived of as different to the other children in school, she and her husband kept some German habits but ensured that they adapted as much as possible for the children’s sake. She said,
“I find when it comes to birthday parties for our children that we kind of start to adapt a bit more. So, we have a bit of a German part to it but certain things we are adding because we know that people over here expect it to be like that. And especially children - for them it's sometimes hard to understand why we would do it completely different. So, I remember our son's third birthday - we had a playground date and we had a picnic and a few games. So, we did it on the playground and for food we (...) didn't have those little sausages and we didn't have, you know, sausage rolls and one of the girls was saying ‘Mummy, where is all the party food?’ And that was, you know, the moment of [realisation that] (...) So, I think in that way we’re starting to adapt more to the English way of life because we find it sometimes more difficult, you know, to really keep it German because it’s not just about my husband and me; it’s about our children and they’re at an age where it’s hard to explain and rather than them being upset you know you kind of do things a bit differently.”

An awareness of how being perceived as ‘other’ by their peers might affect their young children, hence, led some respondents to let go of what they came to realise were habits and practices that they had cultivated.

Conversely, however, all respondents who raised or had raised children while living in the UK stated that teaching their children to speak German in their day to day lives was or had been of importance to them, even if not all of them felt they had succeeded in their endeavour. The reasons that respondents suggested for their desire to raise children bilingually were mostly linked to their family abroad and a desire for the child to be able to communicate with their grandparents and cousins fluently as well as nostalgic in the sense that parents wanted to pass on to their child experiences of which they have positive memories from their own childhood. There was then a strong desire among parents in this study to pass their own transnational mix of cultural goods on to their children. And language, as Bradatan et al. (2010: 177) point out, plays an important role in transnationality stating that "only those with a good knowledge of two or more languages, cultures and societies would be able to claim a transnational identity." Raising their children bilingually, and thereby equipping them with the necessary language skills to enable them to move between the UK and Germany in the way that they themselves were able to, was seen as non-negotiable for most respondents. There was a small number of respondents who said that they had given
up on their ambition to raise their children bilingually. These were particularly parents in mixed background relationships (particularly where English, German and a third language were being spoken in the home) and single mothers who said that despite their attempts they had not been able to keep their children speaking in German. This illustrates that the time and effort needed to sustain bilingualism is considerably higher when it is only the ambition of a single parent or when both parents hope to pass on their native tongue in addition to the host country’s language.

7.4 The continued significance of being German

As previously mentioned and as illustrated by the above discussion, nearly all respondents identified at least to some degree with being German. So, while about two-thirds primarily identified with being European or cosmopolitan, most of the respondents acknowledged that having been raised in Germany and/or being German has had an impact on their personality and how they see themselves. Hetty, who at 65 years of age is one of the oldest in the sample, arguably is the respondent who identified most strongly with being German (and least with being European). Unlike contemporary notions of identity as liquid and malleable (Bauman, 2000), her understanding of identity sounds rather fixed and unchanging. She said,

“Well, I am German. I am German through birth and I cannot imagine being anything else. I see myself as a German who lives in England as a guest [and] all my traditions are things that my parents taught me which obviously are German and that is how I want it.”

When asked to talk about what she thought of being European she expanded on it saying that

“I feel German and I live in Europe as a German. And I must say that despite all of us being in Europe, each country is different, and the people of each country are different as well as their traditions. It is therefore ridiculous to say that we are all the same because we aren’t all the same.”

While none of the other respondents identified with their German nationality quite as much as Hetty did, many did acknowledge that their national background held some importance for
them and has had a substantial impact on how they developed in childhood and adolescence and has thus been instrumental in shaping their identity and who they are today.

What is of particular interest is the effect that respondents reported moving to a different country has had on their sense of being German. What respondents’ accounts as discussed earlier in relation to the reverse culture shock they had encountered, suggest is that many have been feeling less German following their immersion and integration into British culture. Some, however, explained that they now felt more German in some ways. Sarah explained this by saying,

“This is something I have wondered about before because I don’t think I have ever felt as German as I do now that I live abroad. I mean, we are asked about it again and again – the first thing that happens when you meet new people (...) they ask where you are from. Then [you say]: Germany. And then it starts, if you’re lucky they just ask you about topics like football or Bratwurst but, unfortunately, it’s usually other topics. I mean, I don’t think it’s meant maliciously but I tend to be interrogated on political matters and the World Wars and after some time I sometimes just wished I could sit in a corner and read a book. I am tired of talking about it and I never felt that German before – not while I was still in Germany. There, I was quite anglophile, devoured English literature and I would say I was quite cosmopolitan – I was interested in America and Europe and, as I said, I didn’t feel German and as soon as you go abroad (in Austria more than here), I get identified as German and sometimes even classified, I would say, as if you and the politics of the country you are from are one and the same.”

What she described in this quote is the feeling that she has had her otherness impressed and reinforced onto her by others who make her history and national background (rather than shared commonalities) the topic of conversation. These repeated reminders of her otherness by others, therefore, have served to make her feel more German than she did when she was one German among many and other characteristics about her stood out more to her. Monika, who discussed similar feelings, suggested “this doesn’t happen all the time – sometimes I am completely unaware of being different – it really depends on the situation and context”. So, despite their ability to blend in visually migrants who speak with an accent, as Favell (2008b:
points out, cannot “remove the fact [they] are still an audibly obvious foreigner” which if made the topic of conversation can lead to an involuntary re-identification with otherness, and, in this case, being German.

One thing that many of the respondents agreed on, however, was that they had begun to feel more at ease with their German identity since their move to the United Kingdom. Erika who recently took on British citizenship to complement her German citizenship pointed out:

“I have to say that the longer I live in England the prouder I am also to be German. If you [had] told me [this] eight years ago I would have said – no, never. I have now got an outside view on being German. The British have taught me to be more relaxed about being German and the Second World War. They have taught me that I am not personally responsible for what the Nazis did and that was like therapy, so to speak.”

So, realising that British people did not hold her personally responsible for what happened in her home country’s past helped her and several other respondents to begin to feel more at ease with their national identity as being German.

While many were critical and shocked by the way they perceive British people deal with their colonial past (see Simon’s comment in Chapter 6), they also pointed out that realising that other nations are not paralysed by or defined by mistakes in the country’s past, has also made them realise that maybe they do not have to personally shoulder the heavy burden of such a historical, national guilt. Nele for instance, when reflecting on the weight of German twentieth century history, explained

“What I have found very interesting from the British perspective – because in my time in school I didn’t really engage with the topic much since my history teachers were of the old school with the undertone of ‘You must feel guilty because we are German, and we carry an eternal guilt’ – No! I have noticed that in England people deal with these topics in a much more untroubled manner.”

Reflecting on the effect of the German – British past and the shadow it casts onto contemporary relations, he said
“Just open the newspapers! Turn on the television! There is this nice phrase here in England about the English and Germans – don’t mention the war. The funny thing is it’s always the English who mention the war. (...) And it is a great penchant of the English – and it is probably to do with the nostalgia and melancholy for the British empire – that the second world war is seen as something they excelled at and it is therefore drawn upon again and again. And they don’t view their past as something negative and that has been driven out of us as Germans and realising this has made it easier for me to deal with the German past”.

This shows that in contrast to Elias’ suggestion discussed in Chapter 5 that encountering people of other national backgrounds brings to the fore feelings of national guilt (1996), some of the respondents also said that the experience of getting an ‘outside’ view on being German – or being a citizen of a country with a problematic history – had generally helped them to come to a more positive opinion on the country and their part or personal responsibility within it. In this vein, Paul said,

“I don’t have a problem with being German; in some way, I may even feel proud and particularly in the last few years when there has been the euro crisis, Germany” has internationally shown that it is a strong country. “And”, he added, “occasionally I am little bit proud of that. But I certainly don’t like everything about the Germans.”

This rather restrained expression of patriotism is what all the statements made by those respondents who did express a degree of patriotic feelings towards Germany sounded like. A certain amount of pride was taken in Germany’s living standard and recent economic or political accomplishments and these were provided by these respondents, it appears, as justification as to why they ought to be allowed to feel proud or patriotic. Reflecting on other Germans’ insistence that Germans cannot take pride in their country, Ellen said

“You can’t be proud of living in Germany. But why? If somebody can be proud of living in the UK, why shouldn’t we? It is of course because of the history – sixty years [it’s been] and I personally feel; I think Germany is a better place to live than the UK [in regard to] living standards and health system. So why wouldn’t you say... I actually like Germany as a country – it’s a good place to live in.”
Likewise, Paul whose wife was Taiwanese pointed out that seeing how patriotic his wife and Taiwanese society in general was, had led him to reflect more on patriotism.

“As a result,” he says, “I believe I know what patriotism is in a way, yea? In Germany, we of course are more apprehensive and careful in that respect, I think. And I think we may be ahead of some other nations in that view because, I would say, we have tried it – patriotism – and it hasn’t worked so well and therefore I would say, and I say this carefully, I think in this instance we know better. I would normally be very careful about saying something like that but in this case, I believe that we do know better and I do not want to see our son being raised to be patriotic and I don’t think it’s likely to happen in our situation. Not patriotically, if anything, then European patriotism, if that is possible.”

To him identification with Europe, thus, is protection from what he considered an otherwise dangerous form of nationalism.

While few respondents said that they believed being a UK resident was particularly important to them or defined who they are, many described a process of becoming anglicised as they reported that they no longer felt they properly fitted in when they visit Germany. This in fact forms part of the above-mentioned paradox that crystallised as respondents discussed the impact that moving to the UK had had on their sense of being German. While many started to feel that they were no longer fully German and that their horizons had been widened to gain a broader, more varied and transnational or European perspective, many also pointed out that in other ways they, at the same time, had never felt more German than they did now that they lived abroad. This was discussed by respondents in reference to minor incidents of cultural differences that led to misunderstandings which reminded them that they had not yet learned all of the nuances of British cultural etiquette and this had the effect of a temporary feeling of ‘otherness’, which made their national background resurface. Considering the preceding discussion on the importance that many of the respondents attached to adapting to the British way of life by internalising what they perceived as British cultural norms (where these differed from what they were used to living in Germany), the former is hardly surprising. Because of their strong tendency to immerse themselves as fully as they felt they could into British life, over time, many of the respondents became so
accustomed to these new ways of doing and viewing things that when they found themselves back in the old environment they experienced feelings of estrangement which is linked to the experience of ‘reverse culture shock’ (Gaw, 2000) which I discussed in Chapter 5. Judith suggested,

“here, I feel very German and when I return [to Germany] then I don’t feel German at all because being German suddenly has become something peculiar or simply because I have forgotten how to behave and that, for example, that someone might use their elbows and ram them into your side in order to get onto the underground. In such a situation, I then look at them quite affronted, like an English person and think to myself that this is unacceptable. And that’s what happens – you no longer fit in in the country that you come from, but I believe that London is full of people who do not fit in. So that is alright – I am in good company here.”

Respondents thus expressed feelings of hybridity and ‘in-betweenness’, pointing out that they experienced moments in which they felt as if they no longer belonged fully to any country or place. They put this down to their having lived and being influenced culturally and personally by the different places that they had resided in over their life course. Sophie, for instance, suggested that

“it’s kind of a bit of a grey area for me, like, where do I actually sit, you know, and I often kind of change sides, you know? Am I with the Brits or am I with the Germans?”

Despite saying that she barely really remembered what life in Germany was like, as she had lived in England for several decades, Charlotte similarly talked about this feeling of what she referred to as sitting ‘in-between two chairs’, which she described as difficult emotionally but, all in all, considered manageable.

Illustrating the importance that regional and local sources of identity held, several of those among the respondents who grew up in the former German Democratic Republic, interestingly, pointed out that this was an important part of their identity as well. Hanna began her interview by saying, “What I might have to point out first of all is that I grew up in the Eastern part of Germany” clearly indicating that she considered this significant to her story and how she viewed herself. In addition, Caroline, for instance, said
“not that it plays that much of role anymore and I was still quite young when the wall came down – I was nine back then – but still you are influenced, and I definitely feel East German and I don’t have any problems saying that I am Saxon despite the accent.”

And she later added, “you see, being European is important too and when I talk about being German then I see myself as an East German because I think you are particularly influenced in early childhood.”

Likewise, Peter who also grew up in the Eastern part of Germany talked at length about the East Germany that he knew growing up and how it had changed since reunification stating that experiencing these different systems had had a crucial impact on how he views politics and public life. This lends support to what Roland Robertson terms ‘glocalisation’ (1995) which is the everyday experience of people around the globe perceiving of themselves as neither part of a homogenous global culture that has replaced local culture nor as being part of a (purely) local culture. Instead, features of globalisation are adapted locally and the local thus maintains importance to the individual. Anton, who lived and worked in London said, “I feel more European than German, and also more like a Berliner” than German, while Nina also proclaims that “firstly, I am Kölner [which is a person from Cologne], then European and then German.” When contemplating why she did not feel particularly patriotic, Lisa summed up quite succinctly why she (and others) might struggle to associate strongly or primarily with being German when she explained that she did not feel like she had that much in common or knew, let alone felt, a connection with people from all parts of Germany. This was a notion shared by others, like for instance Ellen who said,

“I would say that I love Berlin but not sure about Germany. It’s a whole big [country] and I’ve never lived anywhere else [in Germany apart from Berlin] and definitely; I might even be patriotic when it comes to Berlin and apparently that’s quite normal”.

As she explained, many Germans she knows had expressed similar feelings, which as she explained further, her mother referred to it as ‘Lokalpatriotismus’, meaning a feeling of patriotism at a local rather than national level. This is a term which is so widely used and accepted in Germany that it is included in the official dictionary of the German language and its salience suggests that ‘translocalism’ with its “focus on cross-local link” from a specific
place in the country of origin to a specific location in the country of destination (White, 2011b: 14).

7.5 Questions about home and belonging

A question that feeds into this discussion about identity is that of belonging and where or what respondents believed their home was. While the thoughts that respondents expressed present a variety of views they all demonstrated the closely intertwined nature of these two issues.

To some, home had become linked to a person or persons rather than any fixed location. Hanna pointed out that, to her, home is where her husband and her children are. It was the feeling of belonging to this close-knit family unit rather than a connection to one of the many places she has lived in over the course of her life to date. So, the feeling of belonging was linked to the constant in her life which was her family unit and had become severed from any specific location that they inhabited or had inhabited over the course of her life. Other interviewees said that the word ‘home’ had lost some of its meaning. Peter was one of these interviewees and stated,

“I don't think that I; I would say home as such does not have any meaning for me. There is a place where I live, there is a place I grew up, there's a place where I studied but there is not yet a place where I would think ‘it's home’. I mean obviously if someone asked me go home I know what it means in the context but it's not something that is actually home but it's something”

and he continued to speak of being in the process of refurnishing some of the room he rents saying that finding a place and making it your own is the first step to creating your place and thereby a home. Thus, home and belonging in his point of view were not fixed and inherited but elected and created by the individual. Such ‘elective belonging’, as Savage et al. (2005: 29) suggest, is possible when individuals who relocate to a new environment “can link their residence to their biographical life history”. That is to say, if they can “satisfactorily account to themselves how they come to live where they do” and the place where they are feels “appropriate to their sense of self” (2005: 29). Conceiving of themselves as active agents who create their own life trajectory and meaning, they are able to feel they belong as long as they
can make sense of their being in the chosen place. This is likely dependent on how successfully they are able to fit into this place and succeed in their pursuit of their project of self-fashioning” (Conradson and Latham, 2005: 290).

When asked whether they considered themselves immigrants the views of the respondents were very split with slightly more of them saying that the terms immigrant or foreigner were not ones that they felt were appropriate or captured how they viewed themselves, while some expressed thoughts that made it clear that they were rather undecided as to how they felt about these terms and their appropriateness. Not identifying as immigrants is a phenomenon also found by Fortier (2003) in her ethnographic research among the Italian community in London. She states that many among the women at an Italian Women’s Club she attended “resisted the labels of ‘immigrant’ or ‘émigré’” (2003: 243). From listening to the reasons German respondents gave for either answer it becomes apparent that much depended on, firstly, how they defined the terms foreigner or immigrant and, secondly, whether their lived experience meant that they predominantly felt included in or excluded from the UK’s majority population and culture. Finally, how they viewed themselves and their own trajectory considering their legal status as an EU citizen, who possesses the right to move and settle freely within the territory of the European Union, also had an influence on many who stated that they did not identify with labels such as immigrant or foreigner.

Looking first at the group of the respondents who rejected the label of immigrant for themselves, one of the reasons provided by several of them was a disagreement or misconception over what the definition of an immigrant is. While the widely accepted official definition of an immigrant is that of a person who leaves one country in favour of settling in another, this was not how some of the respondents delineated the word. Peter’s thoughts on the topic, for instance, were

“Hm, I guess I didn’t have to come and I think that the name immigrant to me always suggests that there was a need or if you ask for asylum or whatever, then it’s usually for political reasons or whatever. I think that immigrant is a name I wouldn’t call myself because I chose to come – so it’s more of an expat than an immigrant.”

Hence, for some there was a misconception about who qualifies for being considered an immigrant that led to their understanding that they are not an immigrant themselves. As
Peter’s quote illustrates, the term immigrant was misinterpreted by him as referring only to persons who move to another country because they needed to leave the country which they originate from for reasons of great economic pressure or political persecution. This is likely due to the public discourse surrounding immigration which is strongly racialised as well as negative in its depiction of immigrants and their impact on the country of destination (Popescu, 2008). The racialised and often racist way in which immigrants are portrayed in mediated discourse does not compel white migrants to identify with the label (see e.g. Lundström, 2014). Furthermore, the predominantly negative discourse of immigrants and immigration as a societal problem does not encourage those migrants who do not have the label imposed on them by others to appropriate or choose it for themselves. As Fortier (2003: 243, see also Favell, 2008b) suggests, commenting on what she discovered on this issue among some of her female Italian participants,

“in a country and continent where ‘immigrant’ means black, minority, and foreigner, these women refused to be pushed to the margins of belonging in Britain.”

Instead they, and the German respondents in this study, focused on how they had not been explicitly included in the term ‘immigrant’, and instead, the term ‘expat’ which has recently started to be discussed critically in academic literature due to its raced connotation, was being appropriated by some respondents. The use of this term is problematic as it has predominantly been used in American and British (postcolonial) contexts and, as Cranston (2017: 2; 10) argues, “is often used without reflection as a way to describe white Western nationals abroad” both in public discourse and also still “in much research on white migrants”. Its use thus perpetuates a raced and racist distinction between white and non-white migrants which places white migrants discursively outside of the negative concept of immigrants as disruptive and threatening to social cohesion and economic prosperity. Emanuele Gatti’s (2009) research among highly skilled migrants living in Brussels shows similar patterns of thought among the participants – the label of expat is appropriated while the term immigrant is rejected because they consider “an immigrant (…) somebody who doesn’t really have the choice to come back”. So, the privileged nature of their own migratory experience is perceived as a justification to disassociate “from common migrants” (2009: 2). The term expatriate, as Alistair Pennycook (1998: 24) suggests, is of interest because it differentiates
“a certain group of people clearly from 'immigrants' and other darker-skinned arrivals, (...) [while] locating their identity not as 'foreigners' or 'outsiders' in a host community, (...). Being an 'expatriate' [by contrast] locates one not as an outsider in a particular community but as a permanent insider who happens for the moment to be elsewhere.”

Considering the negative imagery and rhetoric used to discuss migrants in media discourse, it is understandable that a migrant who does not have the label of immigrant or foreigner forced upon them, might not be keen to appropriate it. This, however, does diminish the need to address both the raced and racist discourse on immigrants and use of the term ‘expat’ when referring to privileged, white migration.

Others who disagreed with the appropriateness of the term immigrant to their experience of living in a different country based this sentiment on their own perception of being included and integrated which, undeniably, also constitutes a misconception of the word, as the level of how integrated someone feels does not factor into whether one is an immigrant or not. Olivia who worked for the police and who cohabited with her Portuguese partner, with whom she had a young daughter, also struggled with considering herself an immigrant. She said,

“I wouldn’t say immigrant. As a result of having lived here for quite some time” and she interjects her own line of thought by adding “I, of course, know that I am not British or English and I am fine with that. I think that is right and I don’t want to be British, but I also don’t really feel like a foreigner because I have built my whole life here – I have my family, I have my job, my flat, my friends. That means I am very integrated. Even at work, when I talk to people in English they do know that I am not English, most of the time. Or maybe some don’t know, but most of the time they can’t work out where I am from (...) maybe because there aren’t many Germans living here. There are more Poles and Romanians. But as I said, I would say that I am very integrated and, therefore, I do not feel like a foreigner at all. I don’t think it’s a bad thing that; I am happy being German and I enjoy it but I am integrated. Therefore, I don’t feel I am a foreigner.”
Being a foreigner or immigrant here is equated with a person who has moved to a different country and is not well integrated – whether through choice or lack of the necessary skills or opportunities and in an attempt to avoid destabilise their own sense of belonging they reject the label as it is associated in their mind with not being integrated. This too diverges from the official definition of what an immigrant is. However, due to the common portrayal of immigrants in the media as groups of foreigners who supposedly choose to be badly integrated, participants like Olivia, who live thoroughly transnational lives, do not identify with being an immigrant.

A further (closely related) explanation given by some of the respondents as to why they did not consider themselves foreigners, which is very interesting in light of previously mentioned debates about glocalisation and the importance of local sources of identity, was a high level of integration in their local environment, coupled with a belief that the local trumps the national, or wider levels of association more generally. Paul for instance, when asked whether he considered himself a foreigner replied,

“Not really actually, because I have more of an affinity with London. Well, I feel more like a Londoner than an English person who comes from Sheffield and has moved to London six months ago. So, I would be more likely to say that this person is visiting my city than to say that I am visiting their country, if that makes sense?” (...) “I mean, of course I am a foreigner, but when I walk through the streets, chances are the others are foreigners as well. And even if not, then I am one of hundreds of thousands. It’s a different way of being a foreigner compared to being in a German village with a population of ten thousand where, I don’t know, there are only twenty from Nigeria and other places – that is a different way of being a foreigner to walking across Trafalgar Square without owning a British passport. Yea, so what?”

This resonates with White’s discovery that it was common among the Polish migrants she interviewed to think of their migratory journey as from one town to another, rather than from Poland to the UK (2011b). The fact that most of the respondents lived in bigger towns or cities, and many in London, meant that the multi-cultural nature of the life that they experienced while living in the United Kingdom had the effect that they did not – or only rarely – felt different from the people they were surrounded by. According to census data from 2011, 45%
of London’s population is white British, an additional 15% are of other white backgrounds, while people from Black African, Pakistani and Indian backgrounds each make up around 7% of the city’s population (Office for National Statistics, 2011). As a result, there was a feeling of a loose belonging to an abstract wider group of foreigners most of whom they had never spoken to and of whose experiences they had little or no knowledge of. However, knowing that they were part of a society that is in significant amounts made up of people who, like them, had come from other parts of the world, blurred any clear-cut distinction between natives and foreigners that could otherwise have made them feel excluded from the majority population. As a result, due to the majority population being heterogeneous, the experience of living among it was, for the most part, not experienced as alienating.

Consequently, one key difference between those who considered themselves foreigners or immigrants and those who did not was related to their everyday experiences and whether these frequently reassured them that they belonged to their chosen country of residence. This did not have to be linked closely to the length of time that a person had lived in the new society. Charlotte, who was the most senior interviewee and one of the participants who had already lived in the country the longest at the point of being interviewed, stated clearly that she “still feel[s] she is a foreigner. You don’t become English. Even my children have barely become English; maybe Britons. Brits; but definitely not English.” As previously discussed, at an earlier point in her interview she discussed that she felt British people’s behaviour toward her became less welcoming once they realised that she intended to stay permanently. Her own perception of British people accepting her as a guest but not as much as a permanent resident is likely to have played a role in her not being able to feel like she fully belonged.

Following on from the discussion in Chapter 6, for some, the recent emboldening of anti-immigrant rhetoric led to them feeling less at home in the UK and more like a ‘stranger’ (Simmel, 1908). Kathie, who had lived in the Greater London area her entire adult life said,

“for a long time, I actually just felt like a German living in London and then I began to feel like a Londoner – as it happens in this English mix and that was really nice but now; well, this past year or so I feel like a foreigner. And I think, that actually is pretty awful. It doesn’t need to be that way. I think it’s so unnecessary. And I think, it’s the same in
Germany – that people are considered foreigner even if they are third-generation migrants. I think that’s ridiculous. Mesut Özil is not a foreigner; his grandparents immigrated to Germany. That is ridiculous. Okay, he has a Turkish background but [considering him a foreigner] is absolutely ridiculous! (...) And I think for a long time this characterisation wasn’t happening in England and that is one thing I liked and being British could mean almost anything. That was good, let’s keep it that way. But now everything is different and [as a result] I feel like a foreigner, you see? And this [debate about] immigration, which makes me think ‘I am also an immigrant and I also live in social housing’. I mean, where else am I supposed to live? I can’t afford to rent privately.”

Kathie was not alone in feeling this way. She was one of a handful of interviewees who said that recent debates about EU membership and immigration had shaken their sense of self and belonging which in turn had made them feel like a foreigner or stranger (Simmel, 1908). Fiona, like Kathie, said that after fifteen years of living in the UK and feeling well integrated and thinking of herself first and foremost as a Londoner, she had recently found that “she [had] been made a foreigner” by these recent developments.

This highlights the vulnerability of the sense of self and identification that a person who lives in a society that he or she was not born into but to which they feel an elective sense of belonging is subject to. Their ability to view themselves as part of the group that they joined by choice rather than birth is, to some part, precarious as it is dependent on feeling accepted as part of that group and, therefore, if that acceptance is perceived as being withheld, their sense of identity and belonging is threatened. The degree of how big a threat is posed to their sense of self is influenced greatly by their level of exposure to such anti-immigrant sentiments and how grave an impact such moments of confrontation with such sentiments has on their otherwise mostly positive experiences with the majority population in question - be that in the form of social interactions personally experienced or mediated discourse brought to them via digital or print media. Most respondents did not voice great concerns regarding any effect that recent developments like the rise in anti-immigrant sentiment and the (then) impending referendum on leaving the European Union had on their own sense of feeling welcome (though this may have changed since the referendum result). The reason participants offered was that the overwhelmingly affirmative and positive experiences they had and were
continuing to have with the people whom they encountered personally meant that they continued to feel welcome to the people who mattered to them. These more tangible personal experiences, therefore, acted as a counter balance to the more abstract negative discourses in the media. As a result, their strong embeddedness within social circles that reinforced their sense of belonging supported their continued identification with the chosen host society and has prevented most from an involuntary (re-)identification with being a foreigner who does not belong. Their embeddedness and the social support they continued to receive from their friendships has insulated them from the mediated knowledge of a rise in anti-immigrant sentiments. Furthermore, the media depictions of the kinds of immigrants which the public takes, or is portrayed as taking issue with, focus on Eastern European, lowly skilled and non-white immigrants. So, while the impact of an exit of the UK from the EU will have the same legal consequences for German citizens and Eastern European citizens living in the UK, the impact of the rhetoric that has been accompanying the build-up to the referendum, which largely ignored Western European, middling, ‘invisible’ migrants, has been much lower, thereby posing less of a threat to the German respondents’ sense of self and sense of belonging in the UK.

7.6 Transnationalism and diaspora

As discussed in chapter two, the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora are closely linked as diasporic lives are inherently transnational in nature. However, not all expressions of transnationalism are diasporic and a number of theorists caution against what they perceive as the increasingly common habit of referring to any and all migrants as being part of a diasporic community (Brubaker, 2005; Bakewell, 2008). I therefore consider it important to be clear on my terminology and want to distinguish between transnationalism and diaspora because, as Bakewell argues (2008: 3), not all migrants are automatically part of a diaspora, and equally, not everyone who we might perceive to be part of a diasporic group is a migrant him or herself (but may instead be a descendant of migrants).

While, as discussed in Chapter 2, no clear consensus regarding what constitutes a diaspora has been established among theorists, Brubaker (2005: 5) nevertheless concludes that there are a number of "core elements that remain widely understood to be constitutive of diaspora". Some degree of dispersion across borders, he states, is one of these and it can
quite confidently be said to be the criterion which enjoys the strongest degree of agreement among theorists as it is widely acknowledged that to be a diaspora a group of nationals need to have been dispersed to at least two other countries outside their nation of origin (Safran, 1991; Brubaker, 2005; Braziel and Mannur, 2003). As discussed in Chapter 2, this criterion is satisfied in Germany’s case as a sizable number of Germans are resident in countries other than their country of origin.

Secondly, there is the notion of a "homeland orientation" which serves as a "source of value, identity and loyalty" (Brubaker, 2005: 5). The strength of this orientation to the country of origin is a matter of debate and one’s stance on how narrowly or widely it can be interpreted greatly influences how wide one is prepared to cast the net when deciding what group can be considered a diaspora. Bradatan et al (2010: 174), for example, propose that “a diasporic migrant is one that not only identifies him/herself as a member of the home nation, but s/he is also strongly committed to that community [in the home country], while living as a passive citizen in a different country.” As demonstrated by the above discussion in this chapter about respondents’ own accounts of the importance that being German had for their sense of self, there is only a rather weak orientation to Germany. While some interviewees explained that since living outside Germany they had realised that they do have some German traits and habits, they largely preferred to think of themselves within a European frame of reference rather than a national one and, apart from a sense of loyalty that many expressed for the German national football team during international championships and a sense of duty to help ‘stranded’ German tourists, few demonstrated or spoke of a strong sense of loyalty toward their country of origin or co-ethnics.

The third and final constitutive criterion that Brubaker puts forward is that of "boundary-maintenance". This refers to a diasporic group's practice of maintaining a certain degree of their "distinctive identity" in relation to the host societies they have settled in (Brubaker, 2005: 6). It is noteworthy that boundary maintenance, while it is sometimes deliberately practised by the diasporic community (sometimes through self-imposed segregation which is accomplished through, for example, group-enforced endogamy (see Armstrong, 1996)), is in many cases (re)inforced through the antagonism or hostility the group may face from (some) members of the host society, or social exclusion more generally (Laitin, 1995). As the discussion in this chapter, as well as Chapter 5, has illustrated, most respondents
were very clear and outspoken about their desire not to seek out other Germans while they were living in the United Kingdom. This is not surprising considering that, as discussed in Chapter 5, most of the respondents stressed the importance that they attached to blending as fully as possible into their host society’s culture. They therefore chose to forego the opportunity to build ethnic networks with other Germans. For many this simply meant not taking an interest in finding or engaging with other Germans who are living in their vicinity but for some it goes as far as actively avoiding having to interact with Germans whom they say they encounter occasionally as they go about their day to day lives. I argue that while the narratives of some of the respondents fulfilled certain criteria to be considered diasporic – most prominently, the geographic dispersion – the term transnational is the more appropriate way to describe them due to their distinct lack of distinct community boundary maintenance, relatively weak ‘homeland orientation’, and strong levels of self-identification with the transnational concept of being European. In making this argument I acknowledge and concur with Brubaker’s contention that not all migrant groups are diasporas and that conceiving of them as such regardless renders the term less useful.

7.7 Conclusion

Drawing on respondents’ accounts of their sense of self and the importance that regional, national and transnational sources of identity held for them, this chapter has concluded that the Germans who took part in this research did not neatly fit into the concept of a diasporic community (see Brubaker, 2005). Instead, I have argued that the accounts of how they perceive themselves and the identity practices they described are demonstrative of a conception of themselves that transcends notions of national borders and thinking. Nearly all of the respondents identified more strongly with European or more broadly transnational ideas of who they were, which goes some way to explaining why few (apart from the parents of young children among the participants) expressed a strong desire to maintain many of their German habits and practices, or to build networks with other Germans who are living in the UK. The above discussion also illustrated, however, that in the respondents’ accounts, the desire to transcend the national, which many of the respondents demonstrated, may not be so easily disentangled from the German context from which it originated. The stigma felt about the dark chapter of the Second World War and Holocaust in Germany’s past weighed heavily on participants’ minds, and in doing so, made any identification with being German
difficult and undesirable, which in turn made their relationship to national pride and patriotism complicated. This was particularly evident in the accounts of interviewees in their thirties to fifties, but less so among the younger participants in their twenties. While they also acknowledged the role that the shadow of Germany’s past holds on the national consciousness, they discussed it less frequently and with less gravity. In this chapter, I have thus shown how the respondents’ strength of attachment to transnational sources of identity may in some ways be borne out of their perceived stigmatised national identity and the resulting reluctance to identify with being German. This is an interesting twist to what at first glance appears a straightforward downplaying of national attachment in favour of a transnational one. Through this exceptional constellation and interplay of national and transnational forms of identification, this research adds new insight and extends debates about national identity and transnational notions of identity and how these can be related and interwoven. It also suggests that academic pursuits to impact on national governmental policy-making may be effective to combat the current rise of populist political affiliations across European nations. Favell’s (2008: 223) description of ‘Eurostars’ as

“pioneer individuals who learn – while crossing national borders and making their way in strange yet familiar cities – to be able to see and use all sides, to adapt and change without ever losing that sense of where they came from”

resonates with the above discussion that has painted a picture of the German respondents of this study as transnational, yet nationally influenced, pioneers of European integration.

While respondents displayed signs of unease with their national identity which, as I have argued, were rooted in their country’s past, their accounts also showed that, apart from a few exceptions, they had rarely encountered any hostility by the people they had encountered in their time of living in the UK which shows that the current experiences of Germans living in Britain are vastly different from those of previous generations (Panayi, 1991; Yarrow, 1990; Weber-Newth and Steinert, 2006) and from the assertions made by Wittlinger (2004) regarding the negative impact of British treatment of Germans in the media. Differences in this respect were noticeable between participants who had spent all of their time in the UK living in London compared to those who were living or had lived in more rural environments in England or Scotland. However, among those who lived or had lived in places
other than London, it remained only a small number who recounted incidences where they had been made to feel uncomfortable due to their ethnic or national background. In fact, several respondents explained that realising that British people did not view them through the lens of their national history had been liberating. They also had not been explicitly made the subject of prevailing negative media reporting which had increasingly focused on vilifying Eastern European migrants, particularly in the build-up to the referendum on Britain’s membership in the European Union. While few respondents expressed a sense that they had personally felt alienated by such discourse, many pointed out that it deeply saddened and troubled them – especially in light of their historical understanding of where such scapegoating can lead. Due to the focus of the racialized and racist media attention, their own whiteness, their socio-economic background and non-problematised Western European background shielded them from experiencing any serious threat to their sense of self and their sense of elective belonging to the UK. In the following conclusion chapter, I will reflect more broadly on what this case study of Germans living in the South-East of England can contribute to debates about Europeanisation ‘from below’ and questions regarding a possible emerging transnational civic culture in Europe.
8. Conclusion

8.1 Germans in the UK or Europeans in Europe

In this chapter, I bring together and critically reflect on the findings from the various preceding chapters on respondents’ migration experiences, the accounts of their lives in the UK and their own reflections on their sense of self. In doing so, I address the final of the four research questions which asked whether the participants of this research could be seen as part of an emerging European civic culture. I also return to a set of questions that emerged from the discussion in Chapter 2, which centred around how successful the European Project has been in fostering and strengthening a shared sense of identity. As Herrman and Brewer (2004: 2) suggest, when contemplating EU citizenship and the free movement it offers, a crucial question to explore is "how far the institutions [of the European Union] can go in shaping the identities" of those residing within its polity. Is there evidence to suggest that there is a growing European community of citizens who perceive themselves as belonging to a common group? This question continues to be at the centre of much of the academic literature on migration in the European context and my research contributes new insights which I outline in this chapter. One of the dominant themes that emerged throughout the discussion in the preceding chapters has been the rather privileged status of these German lifestyle migrants whose migratory experience is understood by them as part of their ‘reflexive project of the self’ (Giddens, 1991). While not all of them were from middle-class or comfortably well-off backgrounds, none of the respondents’ accounts of their life before coming to the UK suggested that they were in such economically dire situations that these required them to relocate internationally. This alone sets them apart from many of today’s migrant populations around the globe illustrating the privileged status they inhabit. Because Germany is a wealthy nation with a solid welfare system, it is not – as is the case with many migrants from non-EU and Eastern European countries – individuals in need to find work abroad who embark on migratory journeys (e.g. White, 2011a, 2016; Ryan et al., 2008). Instead their narratives are ones of middling migrants “within the context of the individualised quest for a better way of life” in which the meaning of the word ‘better’ is determined subjectively and the achievement of which, therefore, is viewed as their own personal responsibility (O’Reilly and Benson, 2009: 7). My discussion has, however, highlighted that it is to a significant degree facilitated by structural privilege or advantage.
While many interviewees displayed an awareness of this advantage that they have compared to other migrants, this slipped in and out of their consciousness during their portrayals of their successful migration and integration into British life. This discussion which has drawn out the various ways in which the German participants in this research benefitted from structural privilege, therefore, contributes to literature on lifestyle migration that recognizes “the contexts and conditions within which individual action and experience takes place” (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2016: 413), which shows why discussing lifestyle migration with a sole focus on individual agency and achievement does not provide a holistic picture of this type of migration and is thus problematic. Without clear acknowledgement of the structural advantages enjoyed by some migrant groups, but not others, the impression would otherwise be made that these privileged migrants’ successful settlement and integration are personal achievements attained on a level playing field while others fail due to personal shortcomings or a lack of commitment.

In the absence of wealth disparities between the country of origin and country of destination, the discussion in Chapter 4 has illustrated, that motivations behind respondents’ decision to move from Germany to the UK were centred around individual notions of creating a ‘better’ life for themselves. As pointed out, better, in this context, is to be understood as subjectively defined by the migrant based on their own priorities of what they want from or in life. As the discussion demonstrated, most respondents’ reasons were multi-layered, and attractive employment prospects, attending higher education institutions, improving one’s English, being with a loved one, and embarking on the adventure of experiencing a different culture were all salient reasons that interviewees pointed to when explaining why they had come to the UK. This resonates with existing work in the lifestyle migration and European migration literature, like the before mentioned quantitative analysis of EIMSS survey data (Recchi, 2008: 218), which demonstrates that “quality of life’ mobility (...) is particularly the case among English and German movers, especially when resettling in Spain and France”. While the experiences of English intra-EU migrants settling in France (Benson, 2010) and Spain (O’Reilly, 2000; Oliver, 2007; Casado-Diaz, 2009) have been explored using qualitative methods, less has so far been known about the lived experience of German intra-EU migrants. My research, therefore, contributes to the literature on European migration and lifestyle migration literature by adding the in-depth accounts of such German movers to complement
the surface-level description provided by survey data on their motives, and add to existing qualitative research on the experiences of other intra-EU migrant groups.

Addressing the relatively under-explored question of why migrations which were intended to be for only a limited amount of time can turn into permanent settlement in the destination country which Khoo et al. (2008) propose is important to fill, I have added to knowledge by exploring why participants, who had moved without the clear intention that their move would be permanent, decided to stay. The discussion in Chapter 4 showed that a change of priorities after getting into a romantic relationship and/or the arrival of children, being in a rewarding job and the prospect of educational opportunities that would not be open to them in their country of origin, as well as the convenience of remaining where one is settled (rather than migrating once more) were all reasons why returning to Germany was not something many respondents considered unless the benefits of leaving outweighed the emotional and financial costs of relocating. So, a change in personal circumstances, which in some cases meant entering a different stage in the migrant’s life course, while in other cases meant feeling very settled in a job, friendship circle or relationship, made embarking on another international move less attractive than staying. Considering the increasing significance that such transitions from temporary to permanent settlement have to national governments’ migration and integration policy, addressing this phenomenon and contributing to emerging knowledge on it from the perspective of lifestyle migrants is beneficial to improve understanding of it.

My research, thus, adds to academic knowledge of this phenomenon by providing some valuable insight into the lived experiences of migrants whose initial expectation was to move temporarily but who decided to stay in the place that they made their home – an issue with policy applications since governments seek to understand what stops migrants from returning ‘home’. ‘Elective belonging’ (Savage, 2005) and notions of home as fluid rather than static and as bound up with loved ones rather than geographical locations, this research suggests, go a long way to explaining why these individuals (so far) chose not to return to the country they grew up in (or, indeed, move on to another country). In addition, returning was viewed by many individuals as ‘migrating again’ rather than going home as their embeddedness into British life, social circles and careers meant that the thought of returning to Germany was viewed as an unnecessary upheaval which they would only consider if the
benefits of moving outweighed the (emotional, financial and time) costs of such a move (Lee, 1966).

A way in which their privileged position became apparent was in the form of cultural and ethnic proximity to the receiving country which enabled them to more easily and seamlessly blend into the multicultural, but nevertheless distinctly majority-white, British population than other migrant groups. Consequently, they had an ethnic background that allowed all of them to blend in visibly, while many also had the linguistic capital to blend in audibly. Considering the strong focus on agency and personal choice in respondents’ accounts and the literature on lifestyle migration, I have argued that to more accurately account for the structural elements (such as freedom of movement and the level of education they had received in school) that the term ‘facilitated mobility’ should be used. As such, this term acknowledges the structural advantages that respondents benefitted from compared to, primarily, non-EU migrants, but also EU migrants who come to the UK from economically weaker countries which may not be able to provide their citizens with the same level of support and education. I advocate the word ‘facilitated’ as it more accurately describes the nature of their advantage, since the word ‘privileged’ may arouse connotations of ‘wealthy’ or ‘rich’ that cause it to sound at odds with being used to describe migrants from middling or working-class backgrounds. What is striking about their stories is, therefore, how relatively free of serious struggles and obstacles most of the respondents’ accounts were. This is of course not to diminish the very real emotional and personal challenges many would have had to overcome at times, since any kind of international migration, as O’Reilly and Benson (2009: 7) propose, “is undoubtedly a massive upheaval bringing about many transformations in the migrants’ lives”. Rather, their accounts were comparatively free of structural difficulties in comparison to the much greater hurdles and legal complications that many migrants (and potential migrants), especially from outside the EU, face. Consequently, this is unquestionably in no small part the result of the greater independence facilitated by the freedom of movement which all citizens of EU member states enjoy.

Their privileged position was further amplified by many of the respondents’ high level of education – and, particularly, the level of English language teaching they received as part of it – which enabled them to have an easier start in the new country compared to other migrants many of whom need to learn or more significantly improve their English language
skills before being able to secure work, let alone work that is well-paid. This illustrates the continued structural advantage and resultant inequality between migrants from different backgrounds as they – despite the participants’ self-conception of their successful integration in the new country as their own accomplishment – in many ways “rely on aspects of [their old lives] to facilitate their migration and post-migration lives” (O’Reilly and Benson, 2009: 9). So, while migrants from poorer countries of origin can indeed improve their situation in their chosen host country, they are likely to be worse-equipped to succeed than migrants similar to the individuals who took part in this research, who were from a wealthy Western European nation with strong welfare support and state subsidised high-level primary, secondary and tertiary education. There is also, however, as demonstrated by the preceding chapters (and Chapter 6 in particular), a very clear racial and ethnic dimension to why their experiences have been so different from many of those of other migrant groups which should not be ignored.

Many respondents demonstrated a clear awareness of the advantages with which being white and coming from another Western European country provided them. They came to understand that “the ability to move in and out of spaces marked as ‘other’ becomes part of the process through which” migrants like themselves come to blend into their surroundings (Reay et al., 2007: 1047). Unlike other migrants who, due to their visibly different ethnic background or more obviously non-British accent, may inevitably be recognised as ‘other’ by the majority population, most of the respondents in this research were able to choose if or when to reveal their ‘otherness’, giving them more autonomy and power to control their ‘presentation of self’ (Goffman, 1956) and avoid potentially becoming the target of xenophobic verbal abuse or physical assault. I argue that their desire to actively diminish traces of otherness and to blend into what they considered British mainstream culture, was partly fuelled by their insecurity and perceived national guilt regarding Germany’s twentieth-century past. However, another reason why many among the participants preferred not to exhibit their different background, I argue, is that they were acutely aware of from (tabloid) media reporting of immigration and immigrants, which communicates that “it is sameness that routinely gets valued” (Reay et al., 2007: 1042). And since they had the advantage of being able to choose between appearing ‘same’ or ‘other’, they often chose the more appealing or rewarding choice of sameness. In other words, they had internalised what Favell
refers to as the “master narrative of immigration” dominating ideas of about migration in nations that are net receiving countries, which “assumes that all legally welcome ‘immigrants’ must be on some kind of track to full integration” and tried to live up to this perceived ideal (2008b: 101).

This research makes an important contribution to literature on migration and transnationalism as the respondents’ experience is not only different than those of economic migrants from less wealthy countries, but also stands in contrast to the previous research conducted on Germans in Britain as well as Wittlinger’s claims regarding the experience of Germans currently living in the UK. The accounts of respondents’ experiences are very unlike Panayi’s conclusion that “few immigrant communities in Britain [had] experienced the scale of hatred which the Germans endured” during the First World War (1991: 1) and Weber-Newth and Steinert’s discovery that many of their respondents “remembered [the early years after the end of the Second World War] as a highly unpleasant experience” (2006: 165). Nevertheless, their finding that many tried “not to appear German” (2006: 165) resonates with many of the participants of my study as many – due to a belief that it was their duty to integrate as fully as possible, and because they felt uncomfortable about their German national heritage – did not want to appear German to those whom they encounter. Consequently, they worked hard to lose any accent they may have had and reported trying to adhere as perfectly as possible to what they identified as British cultural etiquette.

The experiences of German migrants in the UK, as the discussion in preceding chapters has shown, differs particularly in relation to how visibly these migrants exhibit the German part of their identity, demonstrating the value that adding this case study to the literature has. Unlike most other migrant groups in the literature on lifestyle migration, like British migrants in Spain, who created a strong sense of community (Casado-Diaz, 2009; O’Reilly, 2000), the German participants in this research largely avoided building ethnic networks or communities in which they could have cultivated and celebrated German traditions, language and connections. Instead they expressed the German aspect of their transnational identity through more private transnational practices, like maintaining contact with family and, for many, also friends, visiting Germany, buying German food, consuming German media and, if they felt able, taking part in German general elections. Exceptions to this general observation were parents of young children who were often keen to pass on their transnational identity
and enable their child(ren) to be able to speak with their grandparents in Germany, and who therefore sought opportunities for them to practise their German with other children of Germans living in the England. A fascinating finding that has emerged from the data, which is linked to the theme of nationality, is the difference with which national history – and particularly, problematic parts of both Germany’s and the UK’s histories – were perceived by respondents. Most respondents, when they reflected on their own relationship with their home country, commented on how differently they perceived Britons and Britain as a nation deal with the country’s colonial past. This was framed by some through the lens of the liberating effect that it had had on their own personal struggles with Germany’s Nazi past, but by many others was commented upon in a carefully critical tone. The positive view with which they perceive many British people view (and glorify) British colonialism contrasts starkly with how the participants felt about the Third Reich and the two World Wars. This opens up an important, and in many ways necessary, discussion about national guilt and responsibility, and on how these could or should be dealt with responsibly. This is particularly topical due to the appeal and utilisation of imperialist notions in recent years and months by proponents of UK independence from the European Union who employed romanticised visions of Britain’s past (Green, 2016). “Brexit”, as Virdee and Mcgeeever (2017: 4) point out, “draws on deep reservoirs of imperial longing in the majority population” which was only successful because it appealed to an underlying nostalgic – and largely uncritical – perception of Britain’s past held by some of the British population. My research extends discussions on how national culpability for past wrongs could be dealt with by showing the effect that the German approach to addressing and moving on from dark chapters of a country’s past has had on some of its citizens. In doing so, it can contribute to academic conversations about how nations can constructively and responsibly engage with their past and make reparations for damages. This is not to say that the German way of dealing with the country’s Nazi past is to be understood as an ideal way – while the effect it appears to have had on the participants in this study was to encourage a more open cosmopolitan outlook instead of a narrower national one, this finding cannot be generalized to all Germans and other less constructive ways of responding to it are possible, if not likely. Nevertheless, it provides a useful perspective on the effect that one way of dealing with national guilt may have on its citizens’ view of themselves and the world which warrants further investigation.
Finally, an embrace of ‘Europeanness’ and transnationality more broadly in conjunction with an unease around notions of nationality, national identity and patriotism was a theme running through the participants’ narratives that is different to accounts of other European migrant populations. This was evident in their discussion of creating new social circles once in the UK, as well as when they more generally talked about how they felt about Germany and other Germans living in the UK and was made even clearer when participants reflected on the importance of national and transnational forms of identity to their sense of self. The accounts respondents provided of their lives and of how they perceived their identity therefore very clearly suggest that they considered themselves European rather than belonging primarily to any one nation-state, lending support to Santacreu et al.’s suggestion that “intra-EU mobility begins to look more like a ‘internal’ migration” as an emerging group of mobile individuals increasingly view themselves as Europeans rather than national citizens (2009: 71). Interestingly, however, the findings from this study indicate that embrace of Europeanness and the reluctance to identify with the national, in the case of the participants of this research, may be borne out of their German national identity which many perceived as spoilt and stigmatising (Goffman, 1990; Moroşanu and Fox, 2013). Since transnationalism, as Bradatan et al. (2010: 169) point out, “is often discussed as opposed to (…) nationalism”, this is an intriguing paradox as their strong association with transnationality is at least in part a result of their national background which adds further nuance to debates of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. This is particularly so, since as Bradatan et al. (2010: 175) point out, “the relationship between transnational and ethnic identity is an interesting and rather understudied field”. And irrespective of the underlying factors, their embrace of transnational and European ideals – regardless of what initiated it – is real in its consequences and many declared very clearly and passionately the importance that being European had for them and how little they cared for visible or jubilant displays of patriotism and national identity. Based on the respondents’ accounts, I argue that they can indeed be seen as an emerging European civic culture – albeit an expression of European culture nurtured by Germany’s attempts to rectify its historical wrongs.

This is not to suggest that such a European civic culture constitutes a rapidly growing phenomenon or that it necessarily is true for most (let alone, all) Germans living in the UK – such generalisations are beyond the scope (and methodology) of this research. Rather, the
German UK residents who took part in this research compose part of structurally facilitated ‘Europeanisation from below’, which at first glance gives the appearance and is perceived by the migrants as a highly individualised agentic endeavour as they were able to follow their own individual desire through their migration. This emerging European civic culture in many ways runs contrary to the populism and nationalist tendencies that have become more vocal and visible across Europe in recent years (even if the participants’ accounts clearly show that the populist public discourse on, for instance, ‘good and bad migrants’ has had an impact on their thinking and behaviour). They are each “one-off cases illustrating individual mechanisms that might someday aggregate into a trend, a pattern, even a structure – a Europe that is changing, perhaps”, as Favell (2008b: xi) suggests reflecting on intra-European movers.

8.2 Reflection and suggestions for further research

As an EU citizen also living in the UK, the uncertainty regarding the future both in the run-up to the referendum while I was conducting and transcribing the interviews for this research and its (particularly immediate) aftermath while I was analysing the data made working on this project challenging both as a researcher and on a personal level. As a researcher, I felt frustrated about my inability (due to time pressures) to return to my interviewees and collect follow-up interviews to capture their experiences during this likely tumultuous time for them but also simply to check in with them in an attempt to ensure they had someone to talk to.

On a more personal level, it felt raw to read and analyse the words of people recorded only about a year prior to the referendum, whose praise of British tolerance and acceptance of multiculture suddenly felt so at odds with the reality of a divided and politically chaotic post-referendum Britain where intolerance, prejudice and misinformation was given a platform by both politicians and media. This in turn meant that as a researcher I was very aware of my heightened responsibility to ensure I was not projecting my own feelings and thoughts onto the accounts of my participants. Making sure I stayed immersed in the data beyond the analysis stage and throughout the writing up phase was the best way to ensure this risk was kept as low as possible. As a student who was reliant on part-time income from precarious fixed-term contracts, I found myself worried about the uncertainty surrounding Brexit and what it may mean for EU citizens’ future in the UK. So, my own
concerns were not dissimilar from those of participants in my sample whose economic situation left them less resilient to potential changes in migration and settlement policies. Consequently, continuing as normal with my life more broadly and my research, which served as a constant reminder of the uncertainty facing me, became challenging. At times, work on writing up the findings from this research was made harder still by my frustration at the (seemingly) countless times that Leave supporters in my wider circle of friends, when challenged, assured me that when they expressed their displeasure at current levels of migration they did not mean me, that I was one of the good migrants, “an asset” and should not feel included when they expressed their dislike of levels of immigration and EU membership.

So, considering this research was conducted in 2015 and much has changed in the interim, it would be highly interesting to carry out further research on Germans living in the UK, now that the country is preparing to leave the EU, to see how thoughts, experiences and plans may have changed over the last couple of years. In fact, re-interviewing some of the same participants would provide a particularly fascinating new set of data to compare the findings discussed in this thesis with another point in time in these participants’ lives. Another very valuable research aim would be to conduct a similarly designed project on Germans in other EU countries, including some which were and others which were not as involved (or enemies) during the First and/or Second World, to investigate whether this present study’s participants’ desire to blend in could be specific to the UK context or may be a general tendency of Germans who settle abroad. It would be highly interesting to explore how the awareness of Germany’s difficult past plays out in the migrant experience of Germans moving and settling in other European nations. How do German migrants in, for instance, Italy or the Netherlands – two countries whose relationships with Germany during the country’s fascist years were very different – feel about their national identity and how much it impacts on their daily lives?

In addition, an aspect of transnational family life which this research could only touch on briefly but could not explore in great depth were the similarities and potential differences in experiences between same-nationality couples and the way they raise their children and mixed-nationality couples and their approach to raising their children. Exploring the dynamics, ways of negotiating and decision-making particularly in the comparatively
uncertain times brought on by the British referendum on EU membership could shine a light on potentially complex intimate relationship constellations and gender roles in migrant lives. On the topic of gender, it would be valuable to conduct further research with a more gender balanced sample of participants that explores whether there are differences in the experiences of male and female German migrants and, if they exist, what these are.
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A.1 English Interview Guide

Personal Story

To begin with, please **tell me a bit about yourself and your every-day life.**

- **Job? Hobbies?**
- **Home life?** Who do you live with (age, nationality, gender, job)?
- **Circle of friends.** Who is it made up of? (Age?, nationality?, gender?, job? How did you meet them?)

Would you mind telling me about your life **before the UK.** Where did you **grow up?** And what do you think were the **things/events that influenced** your decision to move to the UK?

So what would you say **motivated your move** away from Germany to the UK?

- Migration often thought of as from poor nations… Motivation?
- What were your **plans/expectations?** (short-term or long-term stay?)

What was the **move itself** and **settling in** like?

- **When** was it?
- Did you come on your own?
- Do you remember **first impressions?** Any problems settling?
- **Smooth transition?** (practical steps/contacts in the UK/education system/language/job market)

Please tell me what **has happened since** those early days? Your **personal story of the last few years…**

- The different things/jobs/places/stages in life you have experienced here since?
- Did you ever consider leaving?
- **Where did you turn for help/advice? People/homepages?**

Culture

How do you feel about living in Britain?

- If there were things you could change about how the country is/the culture/how people behave - what would that be?

How easy did you find to make friends here?

- Is it different/harder to form relationships when living abroad?
- if applicable: what is like to be in a relationship with someone from a different country?

Based on your own experience **how different / similar** would you say the two countries are?

- Any **anecdotes? Examples?**

So based on your own experiences, would you say there are **customs that are typically German or typically British?**

- **Examples?**
- Anything new you’ve **discovered about yourself?**
- **How do you feel about people having stereotypes?**

Have you ever experienced **misunderstandings** which you think may have been due to a difference in cultural background?
Diaspora and Germanness

Are you aware of any German events or communities in your area? Does it matter to you? If yes, what do you like about it?

If you find out that someone is German, how do you tend to react?

Do you enjoy spending time with Germans from time to time? Why?
How important is preserving some Germanness to you?
What language do you speak when among Germans? Public/private?

Quite often you find communities of immigrants. Why, in your opinion, are there no German parts of towns like you might find with other immigrant groups?

Are Germans special in this respect? Why might that be?
Do you think Germans tend be an invisible group?
Would you say you are an immigrant? Why not?

If you have or wanted to have children, would it be important to you that they learn to speak German? (Why (not)?)

What is home to you? What makes you feel at home? Where do you feel you belong? What is ‘Heimat’ to you?

When you visit Germany, do you still feel at home there or like a visitor?
Do you feel you belong here? When did you start feeling at home here?

What about family? (What is it like not living near them?)

Parents? Siblings?
How does your family feel about you living here?

How and how much do you stay in touch with friends/family in Germany?

Skype? Phone? Visits? How important is being able to stay in touch?
Have your relationships changed? In what ways?
Have you changed? In what ways?

How involved are you with what goes on in Germany?

Newspapers, Internet, Voting, TV? Do you vote in the UK?

Sense of (National) Identity

(Show cards of different sources of identity!) Which of these are most important in describing who you are?

Would you mind elaborating why you chose the ones that you picked?

Now let’s just look at: German, Being a UK Resident and European!

How important would you say your nationality is to you? Have you ever considered changing nationality? Why (not)?
Difference to how you felt when you lived in Germany?
Olympics? World Cup? – Which country do you tend to support? Why?
Has your experience of living in the UK had an impact on your personality?
How European do you feel? Does it replace or complement national identity?
Would you say you are an immigrant? Why (not)?

Would you say you’re patriotic/love your country?
Is patriotism a good or bad thing?

Immigration Summary and Feelings about EU Exit

So, in your experience would you say the UK is a country that’s welcoming to newcomers?

What made/makes you feel welcome? What didn’t/doesn’t?
Do you think the experience might differ depending on country of origin? If so, how?

How do people tend to react if people find out where you’re from? Are there stereotypes?

How do you feel about that? Does it bother you if people treat you like a foreigner?

How far do you think British have come in terms of remembering the Second World War? Does it still affect Germans living in this country today? (How?)

How do you feel Germany and Germans are portrayed in the British media?
And how do you think British people think about Germans?

Have you made experiences of Britons bringing up the war? Nazi Jokes?
How does it make you feel?

You are able to live here because the UK is part of the EU – I’m not sure how much do you follow the news about the UK’s relationship with the European Union but.... The UK Independence Party has recently gained more support among British voters...

... how do you feel about that?
... how do you feel about a possible EU exit?

What is your impression of people's feelings in this country towards the Europeans living here? And how do you feel about it?

We’re nearly at the end of the interview. All in all, what would you say are the challenges and perks of moving to another country? Would you recommend it?

What are your plans for the future?

Moving back? Moving along to new country? Staying?

Is there anything else about your experience of living here that you’d like to add?
A.2 Deutsche Interviewfragen

Persönliche Geschichte

Bitte erzähl mir bitte ein wenig über dich.

    Job?
    Hobbies und Freizeitgestaltung?
    Wie sieht Dein Freundeskreis aus? (Wie habt ihr euch kennengelernt?, Alter, Nationalität, Beruf)
    Situation zu Hause (mit wem lebst du zusammen?)

Bitte erzähl mir ein wenig über dein Leben bevor du nach England gezogen bist. Wo bist du aufgewachsen?

Und wie kam es dass du dich dazu entschieden hast nach England zu ziehen? Was waren entscheidende Faktoren?

Weiβt du noch was zu dem Zeitpunkt dein Plan/deine Erwartungen waren?

Wie lief der Umzug und das Eingewöhnen im neuen Land?

    Wann?
    Kamst du allein? Konntest du Leute hier?
    Kannst du dich an die ersten Eindrücke erinnern?
    Lief alles reibungslos? (praktische Schritte / Info/Kontakte / Ausbildung / Sprache / Jobsuche)

Bitte erzähl mir darüber was seitdem geschehen ist. Deine persönliche Geschichte der letzten Jahre sozusagen...

    Die verschiedenen Jobs/Standorte/Lebensphasen?
    Hast du irgendwann mal in Betracht gezogen zurückzuziehen?
    Wo hast du ggf. Hilfe oder Rat gefunden?

Kultur

Wie findest du das Leben in England? Was gefällt dir an England und was eher nicht?

Ist es dir leicht gefallen neue Freundschaften und Beziehungen zu schließen? (macht Nationalität einen Unterschied?)

Wie ähnlich/unterschiedlich findest du die beiden Kulturen? Irgendwelche Beispiele / Anekdoten? Herausforderungen?

Würdest du sagen dass es so was wie typisch deutsche oder typisch englische Umgangsarten / Verhaltensweisen gibt?

    Beispiele?

Ist es dir passiert dass kulturelle Missverständnisse aufkommen? Beispiele?

Diaspora und Deutschsein

Gibt es deutsche Events oder Gruppen in deiner Umgebung? Interessierst du dich dafür?
Es kommt vor dass manche Migrationsgruppen recht sichtbar sind wo sie sich ansiedeln. Findest du dass Deutsche dies tun? Gibt es deutsche Stadtteile oder „Ecken“? Wenn nein, was meinst du warum dies so ist?

Wie sichtbar sind Deutsche? (Was denkst du warum das so ist?)

Wie verhälst du dich wenn du hier in England Deutsche triff/kennenlernst?

Worüber redet ihr und in welcher Sprache?
Ist es nett ab und zu mit Deutschen zu sprechen?
Ist es dir wichtig etwas Deutschein bewahren? Deutsches Essen?

Falls du Kinder hast/haben solltest, wäre es dir wichtig dass sie deutsch lernen? Warum?

Würdest du sagen, dass es Herausforderungen gibt wenn man Kinder außerhalb seines Heimatlandes groß zieht?

Wo fühlst du dich zu Hause? Was ist zu Hause?

Wenn du nach Deutschland reist, fühlst du dich dort noch zu Hause oder wie ein Besucher?
Wo fühlst du dich angehörig?

Wie ist es mit dem Begriff Heimat?

Wie ist es von der Familie entfernt zu leben?
Was hält deine Familie davon dass du in England lebst?

Wieviel Kontakt hast du mit deiner Familie und alten Freunden?

Telefoniert ihr? Emails? Besuchst du sie bzw. sie dich? Wie wichtig ist dieser Kontakt?
Hat die Distanz deine Beziehung mit Eltern/Geschwistern/Großeltern etc. verändert?

Inwieweit hältst du dich auf dem Laufenden was aktuelle Geschehnisse in Deutschland angeht?
Liest du deutsche Zeitungen? Guckst du deutsche TV-Programme?
Wählst du in Deutschland? Wählst du in England?

Identität und Selbstbild

(Breite die Karten mit Identitätsquellen aus!)
Welche dieser Eigenschaften sind ausschlaggebend darüber wer du bist und wie du dich beschreiben würdest? Was prägt wer du bist?

Wenn möglich, erläutere bitte welche Wichtigkeit diese Eigenschaften/Dinge für dich haben.

Und wenn wir uns nun auf diese Karte konzentrieren: Deutsche(r), UK Einwohner(in), Europäer(in)

Welche Wichtigkeit hat deine (deutsche) Nationalität für dich? Ist das eine Veränderung zu vorher (als du noch in DE warst)? Hast du jemals in Betracht gezogen die Nationalität zu ändern?
Was meinst du - wieviel Einfluss hat dein Englandaufenthalt auf deine Persönlichkeit? (Finden Familienmitglieder oder alte Freunde dass du dich seitdem verändert hast?)
Wenn es um internationale Wettkämpfe geht – welches Land feuerst du an bzw. unterstützt du?
Wie europäisch fühlst du dich? Ersetzt das nationale Identität?
**Fühlst du dich als Immigrant/Ausländer? Warum nicht?**

Würdest du dich als **patriotisch** beschreiben? **Liebst** du dein Land? (Wenn ja, welches?)

*Ist Patriotismus deiner Meinung nach etwas Positives oder eher problematisch?*
*Findest du die Deutschen tun sich da womöglich schwe...* (im Vergleich zu Engländern)?

**Reflektion über Erfahrung, deutsch-britische Beziehung und Auswirkung der britischen EU-Skepsis**

Deiner Einschätzung nach, **wie freundlich sind Briten gegenüber Zugewanderten?**

*Generell? Und in deiner eigenen Erfahrung? Wie willkommen fühlst du dich hier?*
*Merken Leute generell dass du nicht hier aufgewachsen bist? Wie reagieren sie?*

Hundert Jahre nach dem Beginn des 1. Weltkrieges und fast 70 Jahren nach dem Ende des 2. Weltkrieges, **wie gut sind die Briten auf die Deutschen zu sprechen?**

*Deiner Einschätzung nach, wie sehen Briten Deutsche bzw. Deutschland?*
*Gibt es Vorurteile – positive oder negative?*

*Sprechen Engländer deiner Erfahrung nach die Kriege an? Wenn ja, wie gehst du damit um?*

Dein Recht hier in England leben und arbeiten zu können beruht darauf dass Deutschland und Großbritannien EU-Mitgliedstaaten sind. **Wie stark verfolgst du die Beziehung GB’s mit der EU in den Medien?**

*Deiner Einschätzung nach, wie stehen Engländer zu Europa/ europäischen Union? Wie findest du das?*
*UKIP hat in den letzten paar Jahren an Sympathien und Stimmen gewonnen. Wie empfindest du das?*  
*Und was hältst du von der Möglichkeit dass es ein EU-Ausstiegssreferendum geben könnte?*  
*Ist ein möglicher EU-Austritt Großbritanniens etwas womit du dich beschäftigst oder dass dir Sorgen macht?*

Wir sind fast am Ende dieses Interviews. Zusammenfassend, was würdest Du sagen sind die Vorteile bzw Herausforderungen davon in ein anderes Land zu ziehen?

Würdest du einen **Umzug ins Ausland empfehlen? Warum?**

*Hast du auch neues über dich selbst entdeckt?*

Was sind deine **Pläne für die Zukunft?**

*Zurück nach Deutschland? In England bleiben? In ein anderes Land ziehen?*

Gibt es irgendetwas was du gerne noch anmerken würdest?
A.3 Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: The Germans in England Project
Researcher: Miriam Wlasny

Please take the time to read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?
I am carrying out this research as part of my sociological PhD thesis at the University of Surrey. I am interviewing Germans living in the UK about their motivations for moving to this country, their experiences of living here, and their relationship to Germany and Europe more generally. So I am interested in finding out why you decided to move to the British and what that move was like for you. I would also like to hear about what your life in this country is like and how integrated you feel, but also how close you still are to your family and friends back in Germany.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been asked to participate because:
- you are a German national living in (Greater) London or the South-East of England
- you have lived in Germany and have moved to the UK
- you have been resident in this country for a minimum of six months
- you are 18 years of age or above

What will happen to me if I take part?
If you agree to take part in this study you will be interviewed by me at a time that is most convenient to you, in a space which is in a convenient location for you. The interview is estimated to last for approximately an hour and – with your consent – will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. This is to make sure your views are accurately captured and reflected in the report which is produced from the interviews. Please note that you are free not to answer any questions that you would prefer not to answer and that you can end the interview at any time.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?
There are no direct benefits or financial gains in taking part in this study. However, you will be able to share your views and experience, and your contribution to this study will enable a greater understanding of how Germans perceive living in the UK.
Will my participation be confidential?

Yes, your participation will be confidential. Personal data will be stored securely in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998 and all research data will be securely retained at the University of Surrey for a minimum of ten years. The audio-recording of your interview will only be used for transcription purposes and will not be made available to anyone else apart from me or used for any other study or publication. In addition, the written transcript will be anonymized. This means that your own name, as well as the names of people and locations you may mention will be changed.

What happens if I change my mind?

You are taking part in this study on a completely voluntary basis and can withdraw your consent at any given time with no negative consequences to you. If you change your mind during or after the interview has already been carried out, all data collected on you will be destroyed.

Does my participation carry any risks?

No, there are no risks associated with taking part in this study. None of the questions that you will be asked are sensitive in nature and you are free not to answer any questions that you would prefer not to answer and can end the interview at any time. In the unlikely event that something that you discuss in the interview later causes you to feel dejected I would ask that you please talk about this with a friend or relative who you trust or that you contact a support helpline (e.g. Samaritans, 08457 909090).

Who can I contact if there has been a problem?

If you are at all concerned about anything to do with this study, and would like to complain or speak to someone, please know that you can contact my supervisor Dr Sarah Neal (01483 683766; sarah.neal@surrey.ac.uk) or Professor Rachel Brooks, Head of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Surrey (01483 686987; r.brooks@surrey.ac.uk).

Where can I get more information?

If you would like additional information on anything to do with this study or your participation in it, please feel free to contact me either by phone or email (07518 930380, m.wlasny@surrey.ac.uk).

The study has been reviewed and has received a Favourable Ethical Opinion (FEO) from the University of Surrey Ethics Committee.
A.4 Informationsblatt für Interviewpartner

Studie: Das Deutsche in England Projekt   Forscherin: Miriam Wlasny

Bitte lesen Sie die folgenden Informationen gründlich durch, bevor Sie sich dafür entscheiden, an dieser Studie teilzunehmen. Wenn Sie der Teilnahme zustimmen, werden Sie gebeten eine Einverständniserklärung zu unterzeichnen.

Was ist das Ziel dieser Studie?
Diese Studie hat zum Ziel herauszufinden, warum Deutsche sich dazu entscheiden nach England umzuziehen und was für Erfahrungen sie im neuen Land gemacht haben bzw. machen. Darüber hinaus zielt die Studie darauf ab ein Bild davon zu bekommen wie sich das Leben der in England lebenden deutschen Community gestaltet. In den Interviews werden (unter anderem) auch Themen wie nationale Identität, kulturelle Ähnlichkeiten sowie auch Differenzen, die heutigen Auswirkungen der deutsch-britischen Vergangenheit und die Auswirkung von britischer EU-Skepsis auf hier sesshafte Deutsche, behandelt.

Warum wurde ich für die Teilnahme an dieser Studie ausgewählt?
Sie wurden eingeladen an dieser Studie teilzunehmen, da Sie:

- deutsche(r) Staatsbürger(in) sind und zur Zeit im Süd-Osten Englands leben
- in Deutschland gelebt haben und nach England gezogen sind
- seit mindestens 6 Monaten in England leben
- mindestens 18 Jahre alt sind

Was beinhaltet meine Teilnahme an dieser Studie?
Wenn Sie sich zur Teilnahme an dieser Studie entscheiden, werden Sie von mir an einem für Sie günstigen Ort und zu einem Ihnen passenden Termin über Ihre Erfahrungen und Meinungen interviewt. Die Länge des Interviews kann variieren, es wird jedoch voraussichtlich ungefähr eine Stunde lang sein. Da alle Interviews von mir transkribiert werden, hoffe ich dass Sie damit einverstanden sind, dass ich Ihr Interview mit einem Diktiergerät aufzeichne. Der Grund dafür ist, dass ich sichergehen möchte, dass Ihre Geschichte und Gedanken auf jeden Fall richtig festgehalten werden. Während des Interviews steht es Ihnen frei jegliche Fragen, die Sie nicht beantworten möchten, unbeantwortet zu lassen und das Interview jederzeit abzubrechen.

Was habe ich davon an dieser Studie teilzunehmen?

Werden meine Informationen vertraulich behandelt?

Was geschieht falls ich meine Entscheidung rückgängig machen will?
Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Studie ist hundertprozentig auf freiwilliger Basis. Von daher steht es Ihnen frei Ihre Zusage jederzeit zurückzunehmen. Falls Sie Ihre Entscheidung zur Teilnahme während oder nach der
Durchführung des Interviews rückgängig machen wollen, sagen Sie mir dies einfach und jegliche von Ihnen bereits gesammelten Informationen werden selbstverständlich umgehend gelöscht.

**Trägt meine Teilnahme irgendwelche Risiken?**


**An wen kann ich mich wenden falls ich Bedenken oder eine Beschwerde habe?**

Falls Sie irgendwelche Bedenken oder Beschwerden haben, können Sie sich an meine Mentorin, Frau Dr Sarah Neal (01483 683766; sarah.neal@surrey.ac.uk) oder an Frau Prof. Rachel Brooks (01483 686987; r.brooks@surrey.ac.uk), Lehrstuhl für Sozialwissenschaften an der University of Surrey, wenden.

**Wo kann ich mehr Informationen über die Studie bekommen?**

Wenn Sie zu irgendeinem Zeitpunkt weitere Fragen über diese Studie bzw. Ihre Teilnahme haben sollten, schicken Sie mir einfach eine Email (m.wlasny@surrey.ac.uk) oder rufen Sie mich an (07518 930380). Ich bin gerne bereit jegliche Fragen zu beantworten!

*Die Studie wurde von der Ethik-Kommission der University of Surrey überprüft und hat ein anerkennendes Urteil erhalten.*
Study title: The Germans in England Project
Name of researcher: Miriam Wlasny

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet (version 3, 14/12/2014) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study.

I consent to my interview being taped, transcribed and stored by the researcher until the completion of the research study.

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.

I understand that all of the information I provide will be treated confidentially and will be anonymized.

Data Protection

I understand that in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998 all information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored securely on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name) .................................................................

Signature of participant .......................... Date: ...........................................

Name of researcher (print name) .................................................................

Signature of researcher .......................... Date: ...........................................
A.6 Einverständniserklärung

Studie: Das Deutsche in England Projekt
Forscherin: Miriam Wlasny

Bitte bestätigen Sie Ihre Zustimmung zu den folgenden Aussagen indem sie Ihre Initialen in die zugehörigen Felder eintragen.

Ich habe das Informationsblatt (Version 3, 14/12/2014) gelesen und verstanden, und hatte die Möglichkeit Fragen über die Studie zu stellen.

Ich bin mit der Teilnahme an dieser Studie einverstanden und bin damit einverstanden, dass der Inhalt meines Interviews für den Zweck dieses Forschungsprojektes genutzt wird.

Ich bin damit einverstanden dass mein Interview aufgezeichnet, transkribiert und von der Forscherin bis zum Ende des Projektes aufbewahrt wird.

Ich bin mir bewusst dass meine Teilnahme auf freiwilliger Basis ist und dass ich meine Zusage ohne negative Folgen rückgängig machen kann.

Ich bin mir bewusst dass alle Informationen, die ich preisgebe, vertraulich behandelt und anonymisiert werden.

Datenschutz

Name des Teilnehmers (Druckschrift) .................................................................
Unterschrift des Teilnehmers .................................................................
Datum ..............................

Name der Forscherin (Druckschrift) .................................................................
Unterschrift der Forscherin .................................................................
Datum ..............................
A.7 The Participants

Age and gender

The ages of participants at the time of their interviews ranged from 21 to 76, with an average age of 42. Thirteen were in their thirties, another thirteen were in their forties, eight in their fifties and three of retirement age. Thirty-two participants were female, compared with eleven men. While the ages of women showed a wider range than those of the male participants, the average age was the same in both groups. While only a few interviewees were in their twenties at the point of being interviewed, 16 were in their twenties at the time of arriving in the UK. Seven were under the age of 20, and 13 were in their thirties. The remaining seven interviewees were in their forties.

Time in the UK

While the average length of stay in the UK at the point of taking part in this research was 12 years, the time participants had already lived in the UK varied greatly with a range from a little over a year to thirty-five years. Nevertheless, those who had lived in the UK for only a short number of years were in the minority. Thirty-five of the forty-three interviewees had lived in the UK for five years, and nearly half had been resident in the UK for ten years or more.

Employment

Participants reported being in a wide variety of jobs and those who had lived in the UK more than a few years often reported having changed jobs over time. Apart from five participants who worked in IT and two academics, no job title was represented more than once. Some worked in the emergency services, others in clerical jobs for large London based corporations, others in marketing and account management and a handful were taking time out from paid employment to look after their children full-time. While most were in a permanent job, a handful of interviewees discussed being on fixed-term contracts, some worked freelance, and one was unemployed. As mentioned above, three were retired, though one of these interviewees worked part-time to supplement her pension. Two participants were students, and one worked as an au-pair.
Marital status

Around a dozen of the participants were single when they took part in this research, while twenty-eight were in a relationship. Of those in a relationship, nearly half were married, while others were cohabiting or living separately from their partner, and one was in a long-distance relationship. A small number of interviewees did not discuss their marital status, while two mentioned being divorced. Seven of the twenty-eight who were in a relationship had a partner who was German, nine were in a relationship with a British partner, and ten had partners who were citizens of other EU or non-EU countries. Eighteen of the interviewees were parents, four of whom had adult children.

Region of origin in Germany

Twenty of the participants described places where they were from that are located in Western parts of Germany. Most of these places were small towns or rural areas, while a few were cities (e.g. Cologne, Düsseldorf, Duisburg). Nine of the participants came from Southern parts of Germany. As with those from Western parts of Germany, most were from towns or rural areas while a small number had lived in cities like Munich or Karlsruhe. Six participants came from Northern parts of Germany. While one was from a city, most had lived in rural areas or small towns. A further six participants were from Eastern parts of Germany, two of which were from Berlin. The other four reported being from rural areas in the Eastern parts (which had belonged to the former German Democratic Republic). Two participants explained that they had moved a lot within Germany while growing up and therefore could not identify one place that they felt they were from in Germany.