

MIGRATION, DIASPORAS AND CITIZENSHIP

# The Dynamics of Immigrant Agency

## Identity Formation, Translanguaging and Purposeful Actions of Post-Soviet Migrants in West Germany

**Tetiana Havlin**

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Tetiana Havlin
Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences
Brandenburg University of Technology
Cottbus-Senftenberg
Cottbus, Germany



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*To my parents Volodymyr and Olha Skliaruk*

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# Praise for *The Dynamics of Immigrant Agency*

"The book can be considered as a response to the current calls in migration studies to democraticize and decolonize migration research and to abolish the hierarchy between the researcher (= citizen) and the researched (= migrant). Such an emancipatory intention resonates with the author's methodological program to develop an 'immigrant agency theory' on the basis of Grounded Theory methodology by reconstructing 'sayings' and 'doings' around migrant agency 'from below'."

—Prof. Dr. Anna Amelina, *a sociologist and professor for Intercultural Communication, Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany*

"A timely contribution that brings immigrant voices back to the center of migration debates. By tracing how agency unfolds through identity, language, and everyday practices, this book makes sense of post-Soviet migration to Germany in ways that are both grounded and illuminating."

—Assoc. Prof. Dr. Martina Cvajner, *Associate Professor, University of Trento, Italy*

"Overall, this is a very knowledgeable and convincing book, in which the researcher's comprehensive expertise, profound knowledge of qualitative social research methods and a critical, reflexive attitude towards her own research are combined in a highly successful manner."

—Prof. Dr. Karin Schittenhelm, *Senior Researcher and Spokesperson of the DFG Research Unit "Transborder Mobility and Institutional Dynamics", University of Siegen, Germany*

"It is not an exaggeration to compare Tetiana Havlin's study on the one hand with the research of the Chicago School, and on the other hand, because of her repeated emphasis on the need for reflexivity in data collection and analysis, with the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu. The author applies a wide range of data collection and analysis methods, developing her methodological toolkit specifically for each research aspect."

—Prof. Dr. Stefan Kutzner, *Professor of Sociology and scientific advisor during the postdoctoral degree (habilitation), University of Siegen, Germany*

"This book is a valuable contribution to the field of migration studies, as it uses the relatively little-studied phenomenon of post-Soviet migration to make a broader theoretical contribution about immigrant agency."

—Reviewer Prof. Dr. Jannis Panagiotidis, *acquired by the Palgrave publisher, Scientific Director of Research Center for the History of Transformations (RECET), Austria*

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# About the Author

**Tetiana Havlin** is a Visiting Professor of Intersectionality and Transnational Mobility and Chair of Intercultural Studies at Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg since April 2025. From September 2022 to March 2025, she was a research associate in the DFG Research Unit 5183 *Transborder Mobility and Institutional Dynamics* at the University of Siegen, Germany. During this period, she completed her habilitation project, *The Dynamics of Immigrant Agency—A Transnational Perspective on East-West European Migration*, which serves as the foundation for this book, and earned her postdoctoral degree (Habilitation, Venia Legendi) in 2025 at the University of Siegen, Germany. Her research focuses on migration and transnationalism, entrepreneurship, gender, and intersectionality, research methodology, and multilingualism. She holds a Bachelor's and Master's degree in sociology from Odesa National University and a Ph.D. in sociology from Kharkov National University, Ukraine.

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ANT | Actor-Network-Theory |
| FSU | Former Soviet Union |
| GT | Grounded Theory |
| MG | The Monolith Group |
| MSA | Micro-Situative Action |
| TM | Transnational Methodology |
| TSS | Transnational Social Spaces |
| VSA | Visual Sequence Analysis |

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# Part I

## Traversing Boundaries: The Dynamics of Post-Soviet Migration to Germany




# 1

# Conceptualizing Immigrant Agency: An Introduction

> Globalization and migration are twin subjects. In a historical sense we are all migrants because our ancestors have all traveled to the places where we have come from. States that impose border controls may go way back in time but their spread dates only from the nineteenth century and their covering the globe is more recent still. …our perspective on history shapes our perspective on migration
>
> (Pieterse, 2003, p. 32)

As individuals embark on cross-border journeys, they encounter obstacles and barriers, successes, and setbacks in the process of movement and settlement. Throughout their journeys, they grapple not only with external challenges but also with their identities, aspirations, and actions. Some aspire to draw closer to the host society in the spirit of integration, while others resist this closeness, living a life of difference. In their multifaceted ways of being, identifying, representing, expressing, and acting, they vividly exhibit their (immigrant) agency. In this introductory chapter, I outline a fundamental question for this book: How does human agency transform in the process of migration and settlement, viewed from both individual and collective perspectives? To tackle

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this question, I turn to Grounded Theory as a guiding epistemological and methodological framework. This approach enables me to develop empirically grounded elements that shape the analytical outline of migrant agency, serving as the foundation for constructing the Immigrant Agency Theory. I illuminate my central query through a case study of immigrants from the former Soviet Union who arrived in Germany between 1990 and 2005. I layout the conceptual field by synthesizing transition and postcolonial perspectives, structural and non-structural outlooks, transnationalism and simultaneity hypotheses, and the flexible ethnic boundary-making approach combined with the reflexive knowledge production. This synthesis shapes my investigation, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of immigrant agency. The flow of the argument I present through the composition of the book, which completes the chapter.

* * *

The perception of migration and immigrants is heavily influenced by the historical perspective and depth of knowledge on the subject. Conversely, the understanding of natives and the concept of a nation-state is closely linked to the willingness to learn about their political, cultural, and social contexts, language, cuisine, traditions, and more. The extent to which foreigners and natives are familiar with each other's worlds shapes their attitudes and opinions: natives about immigrants, and vice versa. Surprisingly, despite being well-informed about migration issues and recognizing their importance compared to other EU-member states, Germans, on average, are reported to have limited daily contact and interaction with others, primarily restricted to workplaces and occasional public encounters (European Commission, 2018, pp. 24–25). This paradox becomes evident when analyzing national statistics.

National statistics reveal that the foreign-born population in Germany has steadily grown since the 1960s. In 1961, it numbered around 686,000 (1.2% of the total population), and six decades later, this figure had risen to 22.3 million, including the population with a migratory background (BAMF, 2012, p. 97, 2022, p. 9). This constitutes approximately 27% of Germany's total population. Over the course of

one generation (from 1961 to 2022), this increase represents a significant change, with immigration experiences becoming more visible, audible, and statistically traceable. It is claimed that these newcomers bring with them an array of differences—cultural, religious, and social distinctions that have sparked public and political concerns about integration, especially in cases labeled as integration-resistant or, worse, integration-incompatible.

Reflecting on questions of migration and integration, Klaus J. Bade (2007) pointed out that the public and political discourse on integration issues in Germany is often unnecessarily agitated. It is frequently overlooked that integration in Germany has long become the norm and is approached in a very pragmatic manner. Germany, like other European countries dependent on immigration, undoubtedly faces integration challenges, but there is no reason for national depressive self-descriptions regarding migration and integration. In fact, the German path to becoming an immigration society remains 'a pragmatic success story' (idem, p. 6).

The question at hand is this: What transpires on the other side of the continuum? Beyond Germans as natives, beyond the realm of public opinions, myths, and the fervent political discourse, lies a vast landscape of immigrants. These immigrants can be newcomers, long-stayers, or citizens naturalized for decades, all regarded as Germans. Within this 27% of the population, a diverse tapestry of individuals with different journeys and aspirations unfolds. Some are grated admission rights based on their historical ancestry, like ethnic German resettlers, while others claim for historical justice, as Jewish refugees. Many are driven by the pursuit of employment, such as labor migrants, or by the bonds of love, leading to family migration.

These individuals embark on a journey filled with mobility, settlement, encounters with obstacles and barriers, successes, and setbacks. Throughout this path, they grapple not only with external challenges but also with their own identities and aspirations. Some aspire to draw closer to the mainstream society in the spirit of integration, while others resist this closeness, displaying signs of being integration-tired or integration-robust. In their multifaceted ways of being, identifying and representing themselves, expressing their desires, and taking actions, they

vividly exhibit their agency. At the heart of this book lies a fundamental question: *How does human agency transform in the process of migration and settlement, viewed from both individual and collective perspectives?* To answer this question, I turn to Grounded Theory (GT) as a guiding epistemological and methodological framework (Charmaz, 2008, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach enables the empirical generation of components that form the analytical construct known as immigrant agency, serving as the foundation for constructing the Immigrant Agency Theory.

This central query is illuminated through a case study of immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) who arrived in Germany between 1990 and 2005. How do the multifaceted aspects of immigrant agency manifest in the experiences of these individuals? What renders these population groups particularly compelling within the realm of immigrant agency? These are some of the subquestions, which I explore in this book, providing valuable insights into the immigrant experience within the FSU immigrant communities in West Germany. As we delve into these subquestions, we gain a deeper understanding of FSU immigrants and their agency through several key perspectives:

Transnational and simultaneity hypothesis perspectives provide a foundational framework for understanding immigrant experiences and practices across various forms of migration, emphasizing interactions within and beyond the nation-state. They explore the influence of contested categories like ethnicity and nationality, ultimately revealing disparities and potentials in a context of cross-border migration shaped by factors like ethnic categories, multilingual contexts, transnational social spaces, and urban environments.

Structural and non-structural perspectives enable an investigation of connections and ties re-established by these groups of immigrants within the nation-state context, in the transnational social spaces, and urban settings, both within and outside the structural realities of hierarchical integration such as admission policies, labor market segregation, and a tendency to overqualification.

Transition and postcolonial perspectives also prove valuable in examining the experiences FSU emigrants and immigrants. On the one hand, they had to navigate the aftermath of a transition caused by a drastic

system transition involving ideology, economy, political regime, and values. On the other hand, the postcolonial frame helps explain hierarchies between the immigrant communities caused by colonial and postcolonial legacies, the dominance of the Russian language, and the outcomes of cultural Sovietization and Russification for these communities abroad. In this context, the boundary-making perspective is useful.

The flexible ethnic boundary-making perspective enables a comprehensive view of post-Soviet migrants' transition from the 70-year internationalist project to Germany, a country where they were largely preselected based on ethnicity, following the logic of a nation-state. They have been admitted as ethnic German resettlers or Jewish refugees, with further differentiation as Armenians, Russians, Kazakhs, Ukrainians, and so on. However, on the ground, these various groups interact and merge together in Russian-speaking communities based on familial ties, regions of origin, Russian language, and cultural traits with their post-Soviet and postcolonial legacies.

Reflexive knowledge production approach encompasses the critical assessment of the positionalities of both the researcher and researched subjects along a set of empirical studies, composing this book. Additionally, it incorporates a comparative analysis of studies conducted on FSU immigrants over the past 30 years in various academic contexts, including their former regions of origin and their current settlement regions (mainly Germany, with partial consideration of the USA and Israel). This approach contributes substantial value to knowledge production in the fields of migration sociology and East–West European migration studies.

The synthesis of these key perspectives serves as the foundation for shaping the study, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of immigrant agency within FSU immigrant communities. I aim to shed light on the nuanced dynamics and experiences of immigrants from the former Soviet Union in West Germany during the specified period and structured as follows:

In *Part I: Traversing Boundaries: The Dynamics of Post-Soviet Immigration to Germany,* I deal with the East–West European migration developments that unfolded after the dissolution of the Soviet Union

in the 1990s. In Chapter 2, I examine the socio-demographic composition of this migration wave, illustrating its composition as perceived in academic contexts: ethnicization, characterized by categories like ethnic Germans and Jewish refugees (Dietz, 2000; Panagiotidis, 2015); feminization related to the prominence of the family migration and the 'care capital' aspect (Beetz & Darieva, 1997; Nottmeyer, 2011); and liberalization of West–East European mobility, encompassing various forms of migration such as labor, study, and lifestyle choices (Fassmann & Münz, 2000). Additionally, these diverse groups are explored through the lens as 'Russian-speaking' immigrants and citizens, using the flexible ethnic boundary-making approach. The latter emphasized commonalities such as historical backgrounds, collective memory, language, culture, and comparable migratory experiences, all of which contribute to the emergence of diverse Russian-speaking communities and networks in Germany.

Adopting the transition perspective in Chapter 3, I focus on the personal transitions experienced by post-Soviet emigrants during their transition from the former Soviet Union to Germany. I analyze the shifts between closed and open border regimes (Yurchak, 2005), the contrast between self-identity in the Soviet totalitarian regime and self-perception in liberal democracies (Carens, 2003; Tlostanova, 2008), the transition from planned to market economies (Arendt, 1962 [1951]; Zaslavskaya, 1990), and the evolution from communist internationalism to the ethnic pluralism of nation-states (Yurchak, 2005; Zherebkina, 2006). This analysis holds significant relevance in comprehending experiences of these diverse populations during the post-migratory period.

*Part II: Toward the Immigrant Agency Theory—Background Preparations and Frameworks* initiates by establishing the theoretical groundwork for agency within the realms of social thought and migration studies. Chapter 4 presents the interdisciplinary discourse surrounding human agency, elucidating sociological debates encompassing theories concerning social action (Weber, 2002 [1922]), communicative behaviors (Habermas, 1975), intersubjective interactions (Schuetz, 1944, 1945), agency-structure relationships (Archer, 1982; Giddens, 1984), and actor-network analysis (Latour, 1996). Furthermore, the concept of agency is scrutinized through the perspective of socio-conditioning

factors and power dynamics, encompassing intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), nomadism (Braidotti, 1994), and postcolonialism (Tlostanova, 2012).

In Chapter 5, I contextualize agency as an analytical tool for comprehending individual and collective experiences within migration and settlement theories. The theoretical foundations that underpin the understanding of the embeddedness and processuality of immigrant agency are constructed upon the concepts of neoassimilation and integration (Alba & Foner, 2017; Favell, 2022) and transnationalism (Amelina & Faist, 2012; Glick Schiller et al., 1992). I employ the nomadic logic, 'I am rooted, but I flow' (Braidotti 2011, p. 137), to theorize immigrant agency within the simultaneity hypothesis (Beck-Gernsheim, 2004; Falicov, 2007; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), a perspective that will be specifically applied to post-Soviet immigrants in subsequent analyses.

In *Part III: Navigating Immigrant Agency—A Research Odyssey*, I elaborate on the research design and methodological adjustments, exploring experiences of research subjects both as emigrants and immigrants, foreigners, and citizens. I outline the development of a multimethod research design as an investigative instrument for constructing an empirically grounded theory of immigrant agency. In Chapter 6, I frame the research methodology, drawing upon transnational perspective (Faist, 2000; Glick Schiller, 2007; Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009; Schittenhelm, 2007), grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and an interpretative approach (Gadamer, 2000; Ricœur, 1971, 1976). Several research subprojects have contributed to the composition of this theory that encompasses identity formations, language use, and social actions, exemplified on entrepreneurial and leisure activities.

In Chapter 7, I provide a comprehensive account of the conducted multimethod research, covering sampling strategies, selected methods, their integration, fieldwork access, and development. I explore social aspects of methods and data collection, emphasizing the importance of researcher positionality, self-reflection, and methodological self-consciousness. I consider various factors relevant to empirical research, including education, gender, linguistic background, historical context, migratory experiences, and intersectional positionalities. I underscore the

significance of recognizing both privileges and limitations associated with researcher positionality, a critical aspect to consider throughout all stages of reflective knowledge production.

Parts I to III serve as the preliminary theoretical and methodological foundation for the subsequent parts where I develop the immigrant agency theory. Therefore, in *Part IV: The Unbearable Lightness of Identity—The Shifting Landscape of Immigrant Identities,* I focus on a representative element of immigrant agency: identity. The title of Part Four reflects the complex and elusive nature of identity, something both crucial and challenging to grasp. I differentiate between identity formations and identity frameworks. In Chapter 8, I view individual identification not only through identity-conditioning properties like gender, class, ethnicity, or nationality, but rather as an ongoing process of identity formation. This approach allows us to consider post-Soviet immigrants in terms of difference and authenticity, conformity and legality, reinvention, cultural blending, and mélange, drawing on the works of scholars as Bauman, Brubaker, Kristeva, and Nederveen Pieterse (Bauman, 2004; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Kristeva, 2002, 2016 [1990]; Pieterse, 2003).

In Chapter 9, I investigate the collective identification of co-migrants or those with 'ethnic' or migration similarities in the context of identity frameworks connected to ethnicity, nationality, or cultural affiliations. These affiliations may include Russian language proficiency, and a sense of Russianness cultivated within the German context. I explore the term 'russaki' as a prominent identity framework within these communities, offering insights into the various dimensions of emigrant and immigrant experiences and how group identities are socially constructed, recognized, or assigned. This identity framework is the result of diverse experiences, cultures, generational perspectives, and multiple affiliations.

In *Part V: The Silence of Polyglots—Language Practices and Language Use through the Prism of Migration*, I focus on an expressive element of agency, language practices. Sociolinguistics offers valuable insights to understand individual and collective aspects of language use in the context of migration and multilingualism (Isurin, 2011, 2013; Mazak & Herbas-Donoso, 2014; Weinreich, 1979 [1953]). The complexities

of language use in this context I illuminate through what Julia Kristeva describes as the 'silence of polyglots' (Kristeva, 2002, p. 275), where coping strategies are required to overcome this linguistic challenge (Chapter 10). One such strategy involves accommodating a standard language. In our case, this encompasses both Hochdeutsch as a language of integration and social advancement for post-Soviet immigrants in Germany and Russian as the language of loyalty to the past and, perhaps, place of origin, as well as means of connecting with the broader Russian-speaking immigrant population in the German settings, as I discuss in Chapter 11. Further, I examine translanguaging as a linguistic deviation from the norm.

Finally, in *Part VI: Entrepreneurial Endeavors—From Small Ventures to Transnational Networks* and in *Part VII: Unveiling Auto-Exoticism through Cultural Associations: A Study of Serious Leisure* I study social purposeful actions as operational element of immigrant agency. These actions are also intricately linked with identity formations and language use. While these two parts may seem quite different, as they address entrepreneurial activities and leisure pursuits, they share notable similarities. Both require a sense of self-determination, choice, and freedom to fulfill intended purposes: the embodiment of agency in achieving self-employment, despite labor market restrictions, and the ability to engage in recreational activities during one's free time, deciding how to spend it.

Self-employment and recreation often have a highly social nature, relying on social networks with their intricate ties and connections that can be challenging to explain through purely structural reasoning or structure-agency relations. This is where actor-network analysis, as proposed by Bruno Latour (1996), comes to the forefront and is applied in both cases: to analyze networks of entrepreneurs and networks of a selected leisure-time cultural associations. In both cases, a strong dependence on local communities, national and transnational social spaces is evident. I employ the urban scalar perspective (Glick Schiller, 2007) to understand the role of mid-sized cities in the well-being of the investigated communities. In the first case, I scrutinize entrepreneurial activities on the example of immigrant-owned retail shops that have evolved into a transnational supermarket chain across Europe over the last 23 years, exemplified by Mix Markt (Part Six). In the second case, the investigation

into leisure activities focuses on the Scheherazade dance group, which has been actively engaged in its community for the past decade (Part Seven). These parts also shed light on how the Soviet internationalist ideology found expression in cross-cultural patterns, behaviors, and hybrid spaces, exemplified by the immigrants of the fourth East–West European wave, as seen in the Mix Markt marketing strategy of East European culinary fusion and the multicultural auto-exoticism of the Scheherazade dance group.

*Part VIII: The Immigrant Agency Theory* presents the culmination of my study examining the dynamic transition of human agency within the complex contexts of migration and settlement. The theory integrates three key dimensions: the *representational* (identity formations frameworks), the *expressive* (language practices, translanguaging, and multilingualism), and the *operational* (socially purposeful actions).

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# 2

# Post-soviet Immigrant Population Between the 1990s–2000s

> It is from those who have suffered the sentence of history - subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement - that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking… the affective experience of social marginality … transforms our critical strategies…
> (Bhabha, 2007 [1994], p. 246)

This chapter investigates East–West European migration dynamics following the Soviet dissolution, where I specifically focus on immigration to Germany. I examine the socio-demographic composition of this diverse population, particularly as represented in academic discourse, and identify three central developments: (1) *ethnicization*, which refers to formalized categorizations such as ethnic Germans and Jewish refugees; (2) *feminization*, marked by the prevalence of migrating women for family reunification and as care capital; and (3) *liberalization of mobility*, which encompasses labor, education, and lifestyle-oriented migration. The chapter also explores how these heterogeneous migrants are increasingly framed through the embracive category of *Russian-speaking* immigrants or citizens. Adopting an ethnic boundary-making approach, my

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analysis underlines shared features such as collective memory, historical legacies, linguistic practices, and migration trajectories. These factors contribute to the emergence of diverse yet interconnected Russian-speaking communities in Germany. My framework rests on three analytical premises: first, a constructivist perspective, which treats ethnicity as a dynamic and reversible process of boundary-making; second, a differentiation perspective, which distinguishes between internally and externally imposed ethnic boundaries; third, an understanding that community formation often transcends fixed markers such as language, tradition, religion, and ethnic attribution. Drawing on a postcolonial lens, I illustrate how the Russian language operates as both a cultural resource and a tool of social differentiation within these post-Soviet communities.

## The Fourth Wave of East–West European Migration

The case of immigrants from the former Soviet Union who relocated to Germany during the 1990s and early 2000s presents the fourth wave of East–West European migration of the twentieth century, spanning the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras (Bade et al., 2008; Bazanov, 2012; Sotnikov, 2010). The migration of the 1990s is intricately linked to the political and social liberalization of the Soviet Union during the Perestroika period that ultimately culminated in the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Sotnikov, 2010, pp. 12–13). I explore the multifaceted nature of this migration and its unique characteristics, such as the diverse motives that drove individuals and groups to leave their homelands. While both German and Eastern European scholars contribute to our understanding of this migration wave, there is a noticeable discrepancy in how migration motives are portrayed. German-based scholars tend to emphasize discriminatory practices and ethnic disadvantages experienced by ethnic German resettlers and Jewish refugees[1] (as seen in Dietz,

[1] Throughout the text, I employ the terms '(late) ethnic German resettlers' and 'Jewish refugees' to refer to the specific admission policies that were implemented to accept the immigrant population from the post-Soviet space (Dietz (2000), pp. 635–639; pp. 639–640).

2000). As will be illustrated later, these two groups represent the most numerous and extensively studied among various groups in post-Soviet migration. Notably, the case of (late) ethnic German resettlers stands out, with extensive data available for this group, surpassing the data available for any other relevant for my investigation immigrant populations in Germany (Süssmuth, 2004). On the other hand, scholars from post-Soviet areas tend to focus on the economic hardships during the early post-Soviet transition and the 'zagranica effect' (e.g., as explored in Bazanov, 2012; Popkov, 2013; Popkov & Popkova, 2019).[2] This foreign land effect is rooted in fascination with the West and Western lifestyles, reinforced by the Soviet official narrative that demonized the West as a center of 'capitalist evil.' Paradoxically, this demonization of the West triggered an opposite response: a significant portion of the population fantasized about the imaginary West due to limited access to international travel to Western countries (Yurchak, 2005, p. 158).

Difference in explaining emigration and immigration motives is not the only divergent aspect in the study of post-Soviet immigrants. Theoretical and methodological perspectives also vary. Within German scholarship, a prominent focus lies on an integration-oriented approach (Bade, 2007; Dietz, 2008; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003; Grünheid, 2012; Kissau, 2008; Kröhnert & Woellert, 2013). However, it is notable that integration often stems from policy-driven considerations in research. Alternating with this integration approach are perspectives of transnationalism and cultural hybridity (Kurilo, 2015; Savoskul, 2015; Sienkiewicz et al., 2015; Sommer & Gamper, 2017). A substantial portion of publications emerges from medical and care studies (Aronson, 2011; Haug et al., 2008; Heimann, 2006; Immerfall et al., 2012; Mayer & Becker, 2011; Nesterko et al., 2014; Rudakova-Safir, 2014; Schimany et al., 2012; Zakhalev, 2008). These studies focus on aging and issues related to deviant behavior such as alcoholism, drug addiction, and minor crimes. Such research orientation reflects an emphasis on internal German concerns and raises questions about integration.

[2] In their analysis, these scholars conducted fieldwork with Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany, complemented by academic exchanges, including those facilitated by the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service).

Another notable characteristic of research on FSU immigrants in Germany is the analysis along cultural or ethnic lines. This includes the separate or comparative study of late ethnic Germans and Jews (Baerwolf, 2006; Ballenthien & Büching, 2009; Becker, 2001; Kurilo, 2015). Comparative research also examines FSU ethnic German resettlers alongside other major German immigrant populations, such as Turkish migrants or Polish resettlers (Eder et al., 2004; Geiling et al., 2011). The extent to which German migration policy with all its evolution, pursued an essentialist ethnic agenda in admitting (late) ethnic German resettlers or Soviet Jewish refugees, remains a topic for debate (Bade, 2007; Dietz, 2000). However, the outcomes of these policies have played a role in perpetuating the persistent division among ethnicized groups, a phenomenon that remains evident in scholarly discussions spanning integration studies to research on medical and deviant behaviors.

In contrast, Eastern European scholarship offers a culture-oriented approach to studying either post-Soviet immigrants or those groups depicted as ethnic Germans in Ukraine or Russia (Linchenko et al., 2019; Pobeda, 2010; Popkov, 2016; Werner, 2017). In the case of ethnic Germans residing within the post-Soviet space, the research focuses on values, language use, maintenance of cultural practices (celebratory traditions, rituals, cooking), and relations to other population groups through intercultural families or associations with different cultural unions. Regarding ethnic Germans in Ukraine, Nelly Pobeda (2010) reflected on the establishment of ethnic consciousness and highlighted the renaissance of their cultural practices in the Ukrainian context. Tatiana Smirnova (2010a) investigated, among other things, the establishment of ties between German-based organizations and ethnic Germans in Russian, strengthening cultural exchanges and German language learning. Concerning post-Soviet immigrants, Ludmila Isurin (2011, 2013) studied the formation of the Russian diaspora while analyzing post-Soviet Jews in Germany, Israel, and the USA. She focused on cultural practices related to language use and maintenance, overarching practices of Russian-speaking communities in these countries, and memory preservation.

This brief overview reveals some paradoxes and incoherences stemming from the comparative analysis used to study FSU immigrants within both German and post-Soviet scholarship. First, this scholarship emerges out of distinguishing national or transnational academic discourses on mobility and settlement. This distinction becomes even more pronounced when we consider numerous scholarly works on Russian-speaking immigrants of the 1990—wave in the USA, Israel, Canada, or in the Baltic states (Cheskin, 2014; Elias & Lemish, 2011; Isurin, 2019; Jurcik et al., 2015; Laitin, 1998). When compared, the contextual nature of research and its (national) embeddedness becomes apparent and must be underlined. Second, the differences in scholarship highlight nuances while studying structural settings, immigrant agency, and experiences in the transition between and while navigating various social, political, cultural, and economic realities. Therefore, Part I has a dual objective. Firstly, I offer a socio-demographic portrait of post-Soviet migrant populations in Germany, admitted under various policies during the period between 1990 and 2005. Secondly, I delineate personal and collective transitions in response to societal changes both prior and after migrating to Germany.

Jannis Panagiotidis estimated that almost 3.5 million FSU immigrants in Germany nowadays (2020, p. 277).[3] This estimate surpasses the populations with Turkish and Polish backgrounds, which stand at 2.77 million and 2.1 million, respectively (ibid). The majority of post-Soviet immigrants arrived in large numbers in the 1990s (Destatis, 2011a, p. 44; Worbs et al., 2013, p. 28). Ethnicization, feminization, and mobility liberalization are three defining features of FSU migration. As mentioned earlier, the two largest groups consist of immigrants admitted on ethnic policies: (late) ethnic German resettlers and Jewish refugees. Regarding gender composition, a proportionally significant share of female immigrants contributes to the demographic composition of this migration. Most frequently women arrived from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. Additionally, the fall of the Iron Curtain liberalized mobility regimes

[3] More detailed information on spatial and urban distribution across the German federal states can be found in Panagiotidis (2021).

across Eurasia, fostering individual and group mobility along the East–West European axis, especially in the wake of the 1990s transitions. Repatriation, family-driven, work, and study exchanges were the most frequent reasons for mobility during the study period.

How relevant is it to use a term post-Soviet while describing these groups of immigrants and to what extent does it outline their specific characteristics? Panagiotidis depicted the relevance of post-Soviet in geographic and historical terms, though he reflected on how problematic it is to apply groupism toward this large share of the immigrant populations: ""Post-Soviet" is, first of all, a geographic and historical notion: geographic, since we are talking about immigrants from a particular space, which used to be known as the Soviet Union…; historical, because the bulk of these people migrated when the Soviet Union was dissolving or had already ceased to exist—hence post-Soviet. The term also has certain cultural implications, as the vast majority of these migrants used Russian as their first language. But these commonalities do not necessarily produce a "group"" (Panagiotidis, 2020, pp. 277–278).

Apart from geographic and historical aspects, linguistic and cultural traits define post-Soviet immigrants. Russian is still used as a language of everyday use for the vast share of this population in Germany. Oftentimes it is a vernacular variation of Russian-German translanguaging (Havlin, 2022). The Special Eurobarometer on language use in the EU illustrated in 2012 that the younger generation in Germany (presumably second and third generations) uses Russian as well. Thus, approximately 9% of young people between ages 15 and 34 claim to speak Russian as their *mother tongue* in Germany (European Commission, 2012). This share of young people in Germany who claimed Russian proficiency is the highest in the EU and is outnumbered only by two former post-Soviet states such as Latvia and Estonia (languageknowledge.eu, 2012).

The international and regional implications of post-Soviet migration have sparked a range of evaluations, often yielding contradictory assessments. The 2009 Human Development Report (HDR), for instance, recognized the restrictive control imposed on people's movement by repressive regimes, such as that of the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, it underscored the significance of the newfound liberties and freedoms

that followed its dissolution (UNDP, 2009, p. 15). However, it also noted a caveat, suggesting "the independence of these new nations [emerging from the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia] generated an artificial increase in the number of migrants, which should not be interpreted as a real increase in the prevalence of international movement" (ibid, p. 31). While the 2009 HDR somewhat underplayed the importance of migration flows triggered by the post-socialist and post-Soviet transitions, the statistics tell a different story. In Germany, for instance, 53% of immigrants arriving in the 1990s hailed from the East–West European axis, a substantial increase compared to 18% recorded in the 1960s (idem.). The considerable scale of this migration wave within the national German context necessitated specific policy adjustments and spurred extensive research, as exemplified at the outset on Part I. Next, I analyze the FSU principal groups in Germany, examining their socio-demographic portrait.

## Ethnic German Resettlers

The largest part of the post-Soviet immigrants belongs to so-called ethnic German resettlers [Spät/Aussiedler]. Only between 1990 and 2003 1,984,909 million had been admitted in Germany from FSU (Süssmuth, 2004, p. 28). Tatiana Smirnova reported slightly distinctive statistics for the comparable period: approximately 2.2 million ethnic Germans left Russia for Germany in the period between 1992 and 2008 and received a status of late resettlers while still preserving Russian citizenship (2010a, 2010b, p. 196). Here we must consider an important fact that the admission numbers gradually decreased in the 2000s on the German side.

The data on the composition of ethnic German resettlers according to the region of origin (1950–2012), as depicted by Susanne Worbs and colleagues (2013, p. 29), illustrated Poland, Romania and FSU as the major sources of this type of migration. Though a share of the FSU (late) German resettlers by far outnumbered other groups between 1990–2000 and 2001–2012. The data reveals that only a fraction, approximately 13%, made their journey from the USSR to Germany prior to 1990

(ibid). This trend was facilitated by the liberalization of border regimes, the German migration policies, and the existence of supportive networks on the ground. This factors collectively favored the inflow of ethnic Germans in the 1990s, as many sought a chance to reclaim their historical ancestry. Nevertheless, due to their blended cultural experiences and multicultural family backgrounds, ethnic German resettlers often appeared to the public as too Russian or insufficient German. This perception contributed to a narrative of feeling foreign at home (Ipsen-Peitzmeier & Kaiser, 2006). This narrative was aptly articulated by Beck-Gernsheim (2004, p. 25), who explained that many resettlers arrived in Germany with expectations of feeling close, connected, and part of the native German community. However, what they often experienced was quite the opposite. Instead of the sense of belonging they had anticipated, they were met with a feeling of being outsiders, perceived as foreigners, and often labeled as 'Russians.'

A similar paradox, perhaps more common in multicultural contexts, is elucidated by Tatiana Smirnova (2010a, pp. 197–198). Based on her empirical research, she concluded that ethnic Germans often perceive themselves as Germans in Russia and Russians in Germany. Smirnova drew this conclusion from a longitudinal study conducted in Russia in 1989 and 1999. Unfortunately, comparable studies focusing on ethnic Germans in Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan have not been encountered. However, some studies conducted in Ukraine reported a revival of German culture among ethnic Germans residing there (Evtuch & Chyrko, 1994; Pobeda, 2010). The acceptance of ethnic Germans into Germany was based on solid ethnic categories, encompassing ancestry, language, culture, traditions, and the perceived discriminatory experiences associated with prescribed ethnic belonging. Consequently, ethnic German resettlers, particularly those who arrived later, were faced with high expectations of integration in Germany (Eder et al., 2004; Panagiotidis, 2015, 2017).

At the beginning of my research study on Russian-speaking immigrants, I planned not to include ethnic German resettlers in my empirical sample. Initially, I sought people who moved to Germany from FSU in the period between the 1990s and 2005, who either openly declared their affinity to the Russian language and culture or used Russian as a

lingua franca in their daily life in Germany. In the process, I realized that it was challenging to avoid so-called FSU ethnic German resettlers for several reasons. First, FSU resettlers differ in terms of diverse cultural backgrounds already upon arrival to Germany. According to Rita Süssmuth (2004, p. 27), the share of people who were admitted as late ethnic Germans (§4 (1) BVFG)[4] gradually declined, while the share of accompanied persons (their spouses, offspring, other relatives of stepchildren) increased. In the case of the latter, other legal regulations with different sets of rights were applied (§7 (2) and §8 (2) BVFG). Second, arriving from FSU nation-states, they were socialized in the Soviet culture until 1991, when the Russian language played a pivotal status role. Third, Russian-speaking groups have been blended culturally and language-wise in the German context (Süssmuth, 2004, p. 27).

German resettlers in Germany arrived mainly from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine. Their ancestry line goes back to German land colonizers who were recruited mainly from Swabia or Prussia in the eighteenth century by Catherine II of Russia (Dalos & Zylla, 2014). A high degree of special concentration of the German populations in the earlier periods of colonization in the Russian Empire and into the twentieth century strengthened the collective and family memory of German ancestry. This memory had been prolonged for centuries and preserved over approximately ten generations despite all obstacles (including prosecutions based on cultural background). While Western academic literature often debates which generation, whether the second or the third, overcomes insecure belonging and feels native in the country of settlement (Alba & Foner, 2017; Bade, 2007; Ballenthien & Büching, 2009 to name just a few), various factors provide plausible explanations for the enduring memory preservation among former German land colonizers. These factors include the compact living conditions in the Russian empire and later in the Soviet Union, known as German villages, attempts to create an autonomous republic in the

[4] BVFG refers to the "Gesetz über die Angelegenheiten der Vertriebenen und Flüchtlinge" (Bundesvertriebenengesetz) or The Federal Law on Refugees and Exiles (BMJ).

newly established USSR, traumatic experiences during collectivization,[5] World War II deportations from the European to Asian parts of the USSR, and restrictive labor camps [трудармия] until the 1950s. Parts of ethnic German resettlers from the post-Soviet space illustrate to us that a native status (gained through naturalization, assimilation, and cross-cultural marriages) may not prevent from keeping the ancestry memory or cultural identity for generations.

The late history of Soviet Germans in the twentieth century was highly dependent on the political conjuncture: How the Soviet governments treated Soviet Germans was synchronized with official relationships between the USSR and Germany. So, in different historical periods, being German was either an advantage or a disadvantage (Petersen, 2019). On the one hand, the experience of Soviet Germans embraces the creation of an autonomous ethnic German Republic in Soviet Asia close to the Chinese border in the first half of the past century, support of German culture, language, and associations; on the other hand, especially during the World War II and later—brutal deportations or labor camps—left deep imprinting on people's biographies for generations (Rosenthal, 2005, p. 311; Smirnova, 2010a, p. 200).

Comparable to other minority groups, Soviet Germans underwent Sovietization in the process of creating a Soviet citizen that included the acquisition of the Russian language, cultural assimilation, and ideological education (Kreindler, 1982). The use of the German language (a cornerstone of admission and integration policies in Germany) was reduced to a school subject as a foreign language, vernacular use at home or in local communities. In the process of urbanization Soviet Germans were moving away from ethnically concentrated villages and mingling with other population groups (Smirnova, 2010a, p. 191). Those villages nearly disappeared with the massive migration in the 1990s (ibid). In the Soviet internationalist melting pot, this group had a high degree of intergroup marriages leading to blended cultural backgrounds, visible in the statistics (Süssmuth, 2004, p. 27).

[5] As mentioned earlier, collectivization in this context refers to the Soviet state's policies of expropriating private property such as land or farms during the period of 1928–1940, which coincided with industrialization and agricultural reforms.

The regional distribution of ethnic German resettlers in Germany illustrates a large concentration in West Germany, with clusters in the northern and the southern regions (Worbs et al., 2013, p. 101). Though this distribution also includes resettlers from other regions (e.g., Poland, Romania), yet the largest share are FSU resettlers. This distribution is relevant later for the analysis of entrepreneurial activities and transnational networks of post-Soviet immigrants in Germany described in Part VI.

## Jewish Contingent Refugees

People admitted as Jewish contingent refugees [Jüdische Kontingentflüchtlinge] compose the next most numerous group in the post-Soviet migration flow (Haug, 2005, p. 6). Under this admission program, 219,604 immigrants arrived in the period between 1991 and 2004. Jewish migration is a result of the German commitment to rebuild a Jewish community that was eliminated before and during World War II (Dietz, 2003; Tress, 1997, p. 21). This admission policy was still initiated by the GDR government at the end of its existence (Panagiotidis, 2020, p. 280) and applied after the German reunification (Dietz, 2003, pp. 10–11). As data suggests the admission of Soviet and post-Soviet Jews led to a rejuvenation of the German Jewish population (Dietz et al., 2002).

Jewish immigrants compose the scientific agenda of German scholarship but in comparison not as extensively as the previous group. Considering reasons for admission, the focus lies on the establishment of a new Jewry in Germany (Schoeps et al., 1999). Besides, several comparative studies have been conducted on new Jewry emerging from Soviet and post-Soviet migration in the USA, Israel, and Germany (Elias & Lemish, 2011; Gitelman, 2016; Isurin, 2011; Tress, 1997). These studies compare adaptation processes and socioeconomic integration in those countries with the largest newly formed Russian-speaking Jewish communities. Besides some studies identify and analyze the common cultural bonds among Russian-speaking Jews that continue to unite them in their new respective environments (Gromova, 2013; Isurin, 2011; Tress, 1997). Transnational ties and family constellations, media use, and information

access build another comparative research focus directed at this group (Elias, 2008, 2011; Elias & Lemish, 2011).

Like Soviet Germans, Soviet Jews had faced ambiguous experiences in the country with the 'dictatorship of the proletariat.' Soviet cultural assimilation also had a great impact on people identified as Jewish, mixing their cultural backgrounds and (religious) identities in the strictly secular Soviet context. As Panagiotidis noticed: "In both cases, their "ethnic" languages, German and Yiddish, were increasingly replaced by Russian, the lingua franca of the multiethnic state and of social advancement" (Panagiotidis, 2020, p. 279). For this reason, post-Soviet Jews who arrived in Germany have had poor connections to Judaism, Jewish culture, and tradition. Liat Yakhnich and Hasida Ben-Zur reported similar observations with Russian-speaking Jews in Israel whose attachment to Judaism has been relatively weak, therefore "[t]heir massive migration to Israel in the 1990s is defined more as immigration than as repatriation, and is assumed to be based on financial motives…" (Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008, p. 154). Before and during the 1980s Israel and the USA opened their doors to admitting Soviet Jews (Elias, 2008; Goldstein, 1979; Isurin, 2011), whereas Germany joined in this process during the 1990s. Arriving in Germany secular Soviet Jews were attached for spiritual supervision with already established Jewish communities and Jewish religious centers in Germany (Beck-Gernsheim, 1999, p. 91). Therefore, this group—admitted based on an ethnic distinction—faced some expectations not only to Germanize but also to learn how to become Jewish from a religious standpoint. For many newly arrived immigrants, open and welcoming Jewish centers were a lifebuoy offering some psychological and financial support to ease adjustment hurdles in Germany as the interviews with people admitted as Jewish refugees illustrated during my fieldwork.

After migrating to and joining existing Jewish communities in Germany, many newcomers underwent the process of 'collective repositioning,' one of the ethnic boundary-making strategies (Wimmer, 2008a, p. 1040). "Even when a boundary has disappeared through massive assimilatory shifts," as it happened to Jewry, especially after World War II, the ethnic boundary (i.e., the Jewish ancestry) was 'rediscovered and filled with new meaning' in the German context in

the 1990s (ibid). Some immigrants admitted as contingent refugees in Germany underwent reinvention and rediscovery of their identities as the empirical results illustrate. They re-interpreted and re-evaluated their (sometimes partial) belonging to their respective ethnic-religious groups (idem, p. 1037). In her book *Juden, Deutsche und andere Erinnerungslandschaften* [Jewish, German and Other Memory Landscapes], Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim reflected on the challenges of 'being Jewish' or belonging to Jewry. To highlight these challenges, she asked: "How can one define who is Jewish? Through religion, nationality, or even race? Through membership in a Jewish community, or through belonging to a community of shared fate? Through the judgment of others … or through self-definition?" (1999, p. 155). The variety of responses to these questions underscores a dilemma in Jewish identities that the author ironically anticipated as 'passport Jews, Jews by fate, as-if-Jews, not-Jewish-Jews' (Beck-Gernsheim, 1999, p. 162). Further Beck-Gernsheim underlined a peculiar position of FSU Jewish contingent refugees in Germany (idem, p. 155). The ambiguous position of post-Soviet Jews in Germany emerges from the different approaches to how to define criteria for who can be ascribed or considered as Jewish (especially in religious terms). Yet not all newcomers felt prone to define their Jewishness through Judaism or by joining local religious Jewish communities. As statistics illustrate, the majority remained secular in their daily life. Thus, around 100,000 people in Germany belong to the Jewish community as parishioners. Approximately 90% of community members arrived from the FSU (juedische-lebensgeschichten.de).

## Family, Labor, and Student-Related Migration

Another subgroup in the post-Soviet migration is connected to labor migration from low-qualified to high-qualified. The feminization of migration from the FSU is another noteworthy aspect of post-Soviet migration to Germany, contributing to the characterization of labor mobility. The proportion of female immigrants from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine on average is 10—15% higher than the proportion of male counterparts. This pattern—feminization of migration—is reproduced

also in the case of the Baltic states, though in smaller absolute numbers as in Fig. 2.1. The statistics illustrate gender-citizenship distribution in 2003 and are the earliest data that I was able to acquire on this subject. We can observe these dynamics also in the subsequent years 2004–2006 (Destatis, 2011a, 2011b). Besides, the feminization trend is supported by the naturalization numbers: a share of FSU women who are naturalized is higher compared to the male counterparts in Germany as Fig. 2.1 and Fig. 2.2 show.

In contrast to detailed information on the previous two groups, available statistics do not provide a detailed account of this trend. The first possible explanation is that female immigrants have been fulfilling a Western labor market demand for so-called care capital occupying jobs such as caregivers for children and elderly people, and household helpers (Cvajner, 2019; Friese, 1995; Marchetti, 2013). Earlier I reflected on this subject elsewhere (Havlin, 2015). Besides Eastern European women in the German care system not only compose an important pillar of this labor sector currently but highlight historical connections going back to the forced labor or 'Zwangsarbeit' during World War II (Lutz, 2017,

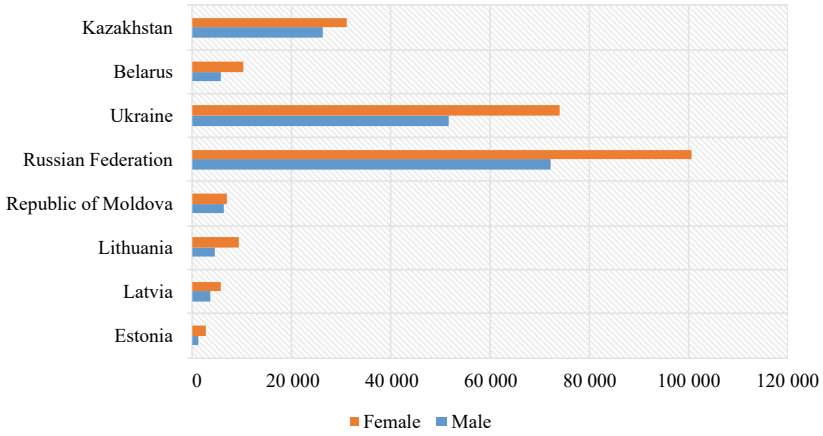



**Fig. 2.1** German Foreign population from the former Soviet Union: Citizenship and Gender, 2003 (absolute numbers) (*Source* Custom diagram created using data from Statistisches Bundesamt [Destatis, 2011a])

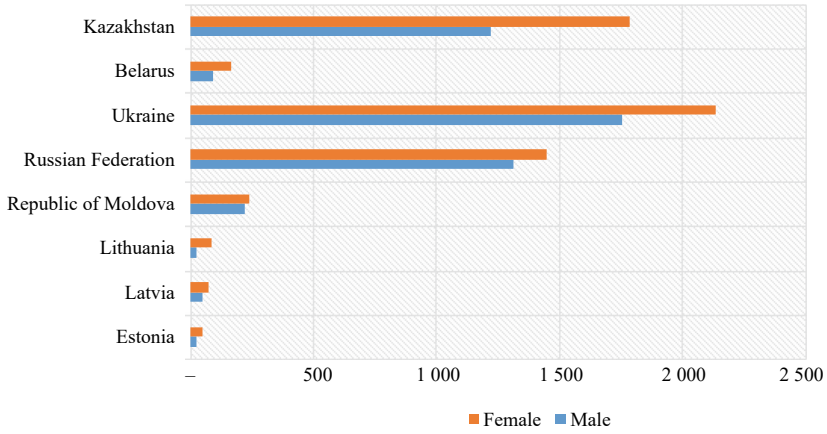



**Fig. 2.2** Naturalization in Germany according to FSU citizenship and gender, 2003 (absolute numbers) (*Source* Custom diagram created using data from Statistisches Bundesamt [Destatis, 2011b])

p. 95). In addition to gendered labor mobility, another plausible explanation for the higher proportion of women from the FSU can be attributed to the growing number of intermarriages between German men and East European women, influencing the gendered migration from Eastern to Western Europe (Beck-Gernsheim, 2004, pp. 64–72; Beetz & Darieva, 1997; Nottmeyer, 2011). Thus, for instance, women from Russia and Ukraine belonged to top-ten nationalities marrying German nationals (men) in 2004 (Nauck, 2009, p. 700). Also, from my fieldwork observations and interviews, male immigrants from the former Soviet Union are more prone to search for a wife in Eastern Europe.

From the women's perspective in the 1990s, marrying a Westerner was 'an especially favorable strategy' in the wake of economic and political uncertainties (Beetz & Darieva, 1997), which is also supported by my fieldwork observations. From the perspective of German men, East European women—perceived as domesticated, good-looking, caring, and not too much emancipated in the Western feminist tradition—created a popular myth or rather a stereotype of an ideal Slavic wife, also reproduced by some FSU immigrants (the fieldwork observations). Whether

in respect of educational, labor, or marriage aspirations, the Au-pair-program has provided a window of opportunity, especially, for women to gain access either to the German labor market sector or to the dating/marriage market (Rohde, 2014; my fieldwork observations).

Worth mentioning that the liberalization of border regimes led to an increase in low-skilled or high-skilled labor and student mobility (Dietz, 2011, p. 35). Especially remarkable is the growth in the numbers of Russian and Ukrainian students (Fig. 2.3): from nearly nonexistent in the yearly 1990s to approximately 12,000 and 9,000 annually 15 years later (BMBF, 2020). The data on students' mobility from other post-Soviet countries, depicted in the previous figures, unfortunately was not available. However, we observe a trend of educational mobility, which can also be attributed to the gradually improving economic situation in Russia or Ukraine. This improvement has created new opportunities for young people to pursue studies abroad, including participation in various exchange programs and scholarships. Besides, groups of labor or life-style related immigrants slowly emerge. The transformation of economic relationships has enabled working migration of low-skilled (mainly for seasonal agricultural) and high-qualified jobs (i.e., engineers, medical personnel, and academics) (Amelina, 2013).

Considering these diverse immigrant groups from the FSU to Germany, we can hardly talk about them in terms of a diaspora but rather dispersed communities consolidating in the 1990s and early 2000s around such factors as the Russian language as lingua franca, shared memories and present (immigrant) experiences (Isurin, 2011). These immigrants build pockets of social interaction or concentration circles of overlapping and engaging groups.

The representation of the aforementioned groups aligns with the individuals I encountered during my fieldwork. The most prevalent groups I engaged with were individuals admitted as late ethnic German resettlers and Jewish contingent refugees, followed by Eastern European female spouses from mixed marriages and labor immigrants. These encounters are consistent with the spatial distribution of (late) ethnic German resettlers and contingent refugees within my fieldwork locations in West Germany. However, I observed close-knit Ukrainian, Georgian, or Armenian communities gravitating around their distinct languages,

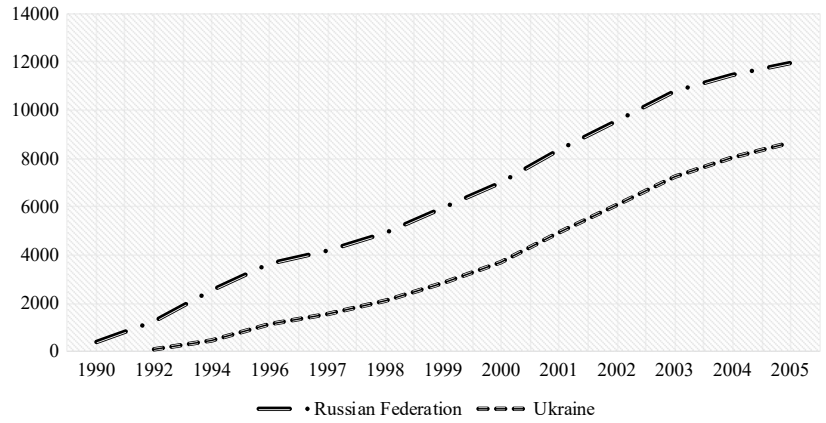



**Fig. 2.3** Foreign students in Germany from Russia and Ukraine, 1990–2005 (absolute numbers) (*Note* Students' numbers are consistently reported for winter semesters [e.g., WS 1990/1991, WS 1992/1993, and so forth]. *Source* Custom diagram generated with data from The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF, 2020))

respective nation-state identities, and religious denominations such as the East European Orthodox Church or Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. While each group has its unique history and experiences, these distinct minority groups overlapped, interacted with, or participated in multiple diverse communities while communicating with each other in Russian. Furthermore, I elaborate on my approach to Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany as an umbrella term, referring to specific experiences of individuals arriving from the post-Soviet space in the 1990s and 2000s.

## Russian-Speaking Immigrants and Citizens in Germany

Following the examination of the socio-demographic profile of the post-Soviet migration, the subsequent questions emerge: if ethnic groupism[6] fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of post-Soviet immigrants, what alternative approaches can be employed to explore connections among them? How can these diverse groups be characterized, considering their language practices and migratory experiences as unifying factors? Andreas Wimmer's flexible ethnic boundary-making approach (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009) informs my analysis of Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany. This approach elaborates on how (ethnic) boundaries can be perceived as a strategy of flexible or firm boundary-making. In the author's view, "ethnicity is not primarily conceived as a matter of relations between pre-defined, fixed groups … but rather as a process of constituting and re-configuring groups by defining the boundaries between them" (Wimmer, 2008a, p. 1027). As an agency-rich approach, this analytic frame grasps "how repeated encounters between actors pursuing different goals may lead to the stabilization of ethnic dividing lines" (idem, p. 1028). Thus, actors can maintain and protect existing (ethnic) boundaries (i.e., as 'Russlanddeutsche' or Russian-speaking Jews, Georgians, Ukrainian, or Russians), attempt to overcome, shift them while including or excluding some groups and/or individuals. Inclusion or exclusion emerges in daily encounters, during creative or sport activities, cultural associations as illustrated in Part VII or businesses as depicted in Part VI. Besides, non-ethnic modes of classification and social practice may build a bridge or create a divide between group formations (e.g., the mentioned 2022 full-scale Russian invasion in Ukraine that polarized Russian-speaking populations even stronger).

While relying on Wimmer's approach, I applied three following premises while analyzing Russian-speaking communities. First, through the constructivist premise ethnic groups can be seen as "a reversible social process of boundary making, rather than as given component parts of

[6] In Chapter 5, I elaborate specifically why the term diaspora is not appropriate to apply in relation to Russian-speaking communities in Germany.

the social world" (Wimmer, 2007, p. 17). Resulting in 'classificatory struggles,' ethnicity can be contested as it was in the example of immigrants admitted as Jewish contingent refugees and problems defining Jewishness. I address further the non-essentialist approach to ethnicity in the methodological reflections. Second, the differentiation premise helped me to conceptualize the difference between internal and external boundary-making: "ethnic boundaries result from the actions of individuals on both sides of the boundary and from their interactions across the boundary" (ibid). Such internal and external distinction highlighted the difference in the interaction between Russian-speaking among themselves and other social groups who do not understand Russian or those who do not share the post-Soviet background. On the one hand, I elaborated on self-identification and identification practices of other co-migrants, addressing it in Part IV. On the other hand, even though external boundary making or crossing was not the purpose of this book, some observations make a point. Oftentimes, when people hear Russian- or Slavic-sounding speech or accent, they automatically assume that these are Russians. That may be true but not in all cases: hypothetically Russian-sounding speech could derive from all FSU immigrants or at least in the case of the first generation. Third, communities of blended ties and diversified connections do not always overlap with an ethnic composition based on standardized language or dialect, ways of dressing, or shared traditions: "ethnic categories are relational and segmentary in nature and that therefore not all correspond to communities held together by dense webs of social ties" (idem, p. 16).

So, instead of reproducing ethnic boundaries within FSU immigrants, I analyzed how Russian-speaking communities are established; how they differentiate themselves and unite through identity formations, language practices, and purposeful actions in the field of business and leisure; how they create networks with each other. Rather than engaging the term diaspora, multiple dispersed Russian-speaking communities, networks, or communication pockets suit better to describe the post-Soviet migration (Aronson, 2011; Darieva, 2004; Koneva & Tikhomirova, 2016; Klingenberg, 2022; Popkov & Popkova, 2019). Depicted as Russian-speaking, Russian or Russianness does not necessarily correlate with the Russian Federation as a nation-state or the Russian culture. In the

German context, the phenomena of Russian-speaking and Russianness have been formed and established over the last 30 years while utilizing the Russian language as lingua franca in multicultural and multilingual settings and constructing a cultural mashup, a unique emergent in time and space. Such cultural mashup and pluralism I exemplify with the help of trickster-like identity formation as russaki in Germany (Part IV), at the same time I use the examples of the Mix Markt supermarket chain (Part VI) and cultural associations as the Scheherazade dance group (Part VII).

While I reflect on the methodological limitations to defining and addressing research subjects as Russian-speaking immigrants later, the language aspect invites the following two questions: What is the social status of Russian in Germany as a country of settlement? How have historical developments transformed Russian into a lingua franca among FSU immigrant populations? Concerning the first question, the 2017 Micro Census illustrated that Russian together with Turkish, Polish, and Arabic belongs to one of the most spoken foreign (minority) languages in multi-person households in Germany (Destatis, 2018). The 527,000 households describe Russian as the primary language of communication; these are 14 percent of the total amount of households that declare to speak daily another language than German (Adler, 2019, p. 209). Besides, Russian and Turkish are two major heritage languages in the German educational system (Olfert & Schmitz, 2016, p. 1). Yet, as minority languages, these languages are considered 'less prestigious and valuable' than popular foreign languages such as English, Spanish, and French (Olfert & Schmitz, 2016, p. 2). Moreover, according to the representative study *What People in Germany Think About Language*, those respondents who disliked foreign accents (43%) found Russian and Turkish accents unlikeable (with 17% and 13% respectively) (Gärtig et al., 2010, p. 247). These two languages belong to the widespread languages among the immigrant populations in Germany.

Post-Soviet immigrants including those who were admitted as ethnic German resettlers and Jewish contingent refugees show ambiguous attitudes toward Russian language maintenance in Germany. On the one hand, they illustrated high motivation to acquire the German language upon arrival; on the other hand, being perceived as foreigners led to 'a

reorientation … toward a Russian identity' (Olfert & Schmitz, 2016, p. 6). Such reorientation has fostered the motivation to maintain the Russian language in daily practices and as the family language. Whereas Turkish is mostly taught as a heritage language, in contrast, Russian is offered as a foreign or heritage language. Like other heritage languages, Russian is taught on a voluntary basis as an extracurricular activity at regular (idem, p. 9) or weekend schools (Kreß & Roeder, 2022, p. 147) and less as classes offered by foreign agencies as consulates (Mediendienst Integration, 2019). Such institutional support contributes to the better maintenance of the Russian language outside familiar or private contexts (Brehmer, 2021, p. 855).

After a brief overview of the social standing of the Russian language in Germany, I address how Russian plays out in relation to the post-Soviet population. In the context of migration, the Russian language has served as a unifying and dividing element or as internal/external differentiation: it brings together those who are proficient in this language (and are willing to use it); it excludes those who are not. Even though Russian belongs oftentimes to private and familial settings (ibid.), nevertheless it creates a certain niche in the public domain in Germany. It shapes the cultural niche with musical or comedian concerts, theater plays, children's shows and movies in the cinema, printed newspapers, and magazines (Darieva, 2004; Elias & Lemish, 2008; Smoliarova & Nigmatullina, 2015).

In the context of migration, Russian language proficiency among the post-Soviet population in Germany re-emerged from the Soviet context where this language was widely spread and prioritized over other national and minority languages. Administrative rationalization and dissemination of the Russian language served as an important component in imposing Russian imperial rule (Laitin, 1998, pp. 38–39) that, in turn, prepared grounds for the offensive language policy and linguistic, cultural assimilation in the Soviet period (idem, p. 368). In the USSR, the Russian language had a changing status: The periods of soft language policy (earlier Soviet years) were replaced with offensive Russification (Kreindler, 1982). Russian was presented as 'the language of 'internationality' communication and friendship of peoples' (idem, p. 13) and later as 'the language of Soviet people' in general (idem, p. 16).

Isabelle Kreindler distinguished three implicit roles that the Russian language fulfilled in the USSR context: first, Russian served "not merely a neutral instrument of communication but in its very nature contains the message of Communism" (idem, p. 18). Second, as 'an all-Soviet treasure' Russian was privileged in the official and educational use (as well as those who were fluent in it) and as such had a greater impact on national, minority, or regional languages of the Union republics (idem, p. 19). Third, the Russian language played an instrumental role in 'the formation and development of the New Historical Community—the Soviet People' (idem, p. 20). Such developments impacted linguistic biographies and cultural choices of various social groups that migrated from the post-Soviet space to Germany in the 1990s and 2000s.

Besides addressing the fact that the Russian language was spread through the Russian imperial and later Soviet rule, we need to acknowledge another important aspect of the sociolinguistic hierarchies. That is spreading Russian as a standard language. The establishment and formalization of standard languages had been strongly intertwined with the nation-building processes and the rising power of nation-states during the nineteenth century and onwards (Bourdieu, 2003). Standard languages such as, for instance, English, Russian, or German (the linguistic repertoire of my research) can hardly be detached from political, economic, and social developments: first the imperial expansions and later the nation-building. Those processes had made them dominant among a wide range of other regional languages, spoken on the territory of current Germany, Russia, the UK, and beyond. Those processes granted them the status of lingua franca in their respective regions or internationally, as a few studies illustrate the example of Russian soft power impacting public opinions of Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany (Decker, 2021; Golova, 2020). I present further methodological reflections on multilingual research conduct and the role of the researcher's linguistic biography in Chapter 7. Besides, Part IV offers a detailed account of language use stemming from the data analysis acquired during my empirical study with Russian-speaking communities in Germany.

After presenting the socio-demographic portraits of the post-Soviet migration of the 1990s and 2000s in Germany, I contemplate how

societal transitions prior and during that period could affect individual transitions in the process of migration between two ideologically, politically, culturally, economically distinct regions as the (former) Soviet Union and Germany were.

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# 3

# Personal Transitions Amidst Shifting Societal Landscapes

This chapter serves a specific theoretical function by outlining the broader societal conditions under which post-Soviet migrants left their places of origin. While I do not provide a full account of the different stages of Soviet development, I focus on late socialism, particularly the perestroika period, as the immediate sociohistorical context shaping mobility in the 1990s. At the same time, earlier phases of Soviet history set the stage for the transformations of the 1980s and influenced the trajectories of change that became visible in the 1990s. This contextual grounding is essential for grasping the structural forces and individual and collective responses. I use transition and postcolonial perspectives to analyze how emigrants and immigrants from the former Soviet Union navigated the aftermath of a profound system change—one that involved not only shifts in political regimes and economic structures but also drastic changes in ideology, values, and daily routines. I use the term *transition* to refer to non-linear shifts and in-between conditions at various social levels. Transitions can denote individual (biographical) passages, while simultaneously signaling broader, often societal and state-related, systemic changes. The term allows me to capture the complex, multifaceted shifts that occur at the meta-level (state, society) as well

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as both individual and collective levels, including shifts in identities, social roles, and practices. In this sense, I consider transitions such as the movement between closed and open border regimes, the contrast between self-identity in the Soviet regime and self-requirements in liberal democracies, the passage from planned to market economies, and the shift from communist internationalism to the ethnic pluralism of nation-states. This analysis holds significant relevance in comprehending the experiences during the post-migratory period.

* * *

While reflecting on the political and social transitions in Europe during the early 1990s, Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka remarked, "The revolutions of 1989 in Eastern and Central Europe rank among the world-historical events of greatest significance" (1993, p. 85). He emphasized that the shift from socialist and communist ideologies was evident on the surface. However, at its core, it represented a departure from Soviet-state totalitarian control over the population, economy, and politics. Across the globe, Jeffrey C. Alexander (1994, p. 166) depicted the end of the socialist project in Eastern and Central Europe as the demise of a significant alternative in social thought and social formation, one that stood in opposition to the capitalist order and liberal democracies. In the wake of such societal change, questions about transition emerged. Undoubtedly, one of the most significant events, particularly for Germany, was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent reunification of the country after 41 years of division. The demolition of the Berlin Wall also marked an ideological passage from communism to capitalism. Considering the assessment of these historical events and the societal changes they engendered, genuine questions about the impact of such a profound transition on people's lives naturally arise. Recent studies on post-Soviet attitudes have examined public opinion in the nation-states. These studies yielded ambiguous results. In the late 2010s, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was perceived with more remorse in Armenia, Moldova, and Russia than in Lithuania, Estonia, or Ukraine (Levada Center, 2020; Masci, 2017). The recent Russian war against

Ukraine further illustrated a violent departure of the Ukrainian population from the Soviet past, as Russia is viewed as a Soviet prototype (IKDIF, 2023). Such attitudes are closely tied to developments in specific post-Soviet countries after gaining independence in the 1990s.

The transition perspective has garnered scholarly recognition for studying and explaining the behaviors, practices, and experiences of the population in the post-Soviet space (Burawoy & Krotov, 1992; Bureychak, 2011; Markovic, 2006; McKinney, 2020; Sharafutdinova, 2019; Zaslavskaya, 2000). This perspective is particularly useful for examining how societal changes influence individual and collective behaviors in relation to state structures, political orientations, migration, and labor market engagement. It allows for an analysis of transitions such as the movement from closed to open border regimes, from Soviet socialism to liberal democracies, from state-controlled to social market economies, from communist internationalism to ethnic pluralism, and from collectivist to more individualist social orientations. In this context, we can only draw parallels and make hypothetical assumptions across various domains—political, ideological, economic, cultural, and social—to better comprehend how these changes might have influenced transition and, respectively, individual and collective agency of the studied group. Therefore, in this chapter, I analyze the transitions that immigrants of the 1990s experienced beyond cross-border mobility. I consider the historical and social developments in both the former Soviet Union and Germany. First, I begin an analysis of the border regimes and mobility policies within the USSR before and after its dissolution, leading to the liberalization of mobility within the region. Next, I examine the modalities of self-fashioning and subjectivities that developed under the conditions of Soviet socialism and totalitarian state formation. After scrutinizing the political and ideological settings, I evaluate the transition from planned to market economies. Finally, I examine in detail the shift from communistic internationalism to ethnic pluralism. This angle holds considerable importance within the context of the diverse population exposure during the post-migratory period.

## Transition from a Closed to Open Border Regime

Regarding the border regime and people's perspectives, Alexei Yurchak observed the following paradox, "Most Soviet people believed that the communist ideals and values they represented to the world were fundamentally "internationalist" and outward looking, and yet they were also aware that travel to that world beyond the borders was in fact impossible" (Yurchak, 2005, p. 158). Traveling beyond the borders of the socialist bloc was a legal privilege reserved for party-loyal groups within the vast population that was confined behind ideological and physical barriers. From its construction in the early 1960s until its demolition in the late 1980s, the Berlin Wall stood as a lasting monument and a tangible representation of the stringent border regime aimed at controlling population mobility from the socialist and Soviet blocs to Western European countries. While spatial mobility within the internal borders of the USSR was feasible, settling elsewhere, different from the registered place of residence [propiska], was intricate and not easily accessible to all groups. Thomas Piketty and Arthur Goldhammer elaborated on privileges and double standards in terms of mobility as follows:

> … the regime organized its inequalities in other ways by offering in-kind benefits and privileged access to certain goods to its officials. …there was also a sophisticated internal passport system, which restricted the mobility of some, including the ability of peasants, who suffered greatly from the collectivization of agriculture and the forced march toward industrialization, to migrate to the cities. (2020, p. 585)

Restricted external and internal mobility, along with censored and limited interaction with Western cultural products and commercial goods (such as literature, music, clothes, and household items), contributed to a romanticized image of the West and fueled euphoric migration aspirations among the Soviet population. Partially, such romanticization contributed to the zagranica effect (foreign land effect) mentioned earlier. The rigorous control of borders and internal mobility in the Soviet Union gave way to the relaxation of border restrictions

among the former Central and Eastern bloc nations in the late 1980s. This transition was further accelerated by the dissolution of the USSR. These events led to 'dramatic expansions of the freedoms' (UNDP, 2009, p. 15) enjoyed by people.

Freedom of mobility suddenly became possible for the population after decades of a closed border regime and restrictive mobility policies. These processes, as described by Heinz Fassmann and Rainer Münz (2000a) in the edited volume *Ost-West-Wanderung in Europa* (East–West Migration in Europe), reflected on the possibilities of legal and non-bureaucratic travel from Central and Eastern European countries. The volume depicted a demise of the East–West European political and ideological conflict, which proved advantageous for people from this region. Such transitions gave rise to significant migration movements within and from these countries.

In terms of mobility to Western Europe, the majority arrived as tourists and consumers, while others came as merchants and labor migrants (Fassmann & Münz, 2000b, p. 26). Some individuals received legal instruments, such as asylum or ethnic repatriation, that allowed them to settle in Western Europe (Zlotnik, 2005, p. 24). The region experienced a significant diversification of migration forms. In many countries of the region, immigrants with varying legal statuses appeared for the first time in post-war period. Notably, there was a fundamental shift from long-term migration to short-term mobility, often following cyclical patterns (Kaczmarczyk & Okólski, 2005, p. 4).

Beyond individual aspirations for mobility, the migration process was facilitated by Western European states' policies of open borders with the former socialist countries for a certain period (Fassmann & Münz, 2000b, p. 26). Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels (2003, p. 311) illustrated how geopolitical changes in Central and Eastern Europe led to a significant shift in migration patterns to Germany from the region. Factors contributing to this migration surge included uncertainty surrounding the success and stability of the post-Soviet system change, the prospect of greater economic well-being through emigration or cyclical mobility between Western and Eastern Europe, and the rise of ethno-national conflicts in the newly formed post-Soviet nation-states (Fassmann & Münz, 2000b, p. 26).

## Transition of the Self from Socialistic Totalitarian State to Liberal Democracy

The Soviet Union can be described as a Janus-faced state entity, or as interpreted by Tlostanova (2008), a Janus-faced empire. On the one hand, Soviet socialism aimed to mitigate class inequalities and ethno-national sentiments, aspiring toward a communist, internationalist society with equal distribution among individuals, genders, and ethnic groups. On the other hand, beneath the surface of Soviet socialism lay a totalitarian state exercising complete control over politics, ideology, and the economy. It implemented radical measures to regulate and censor the private sphere of everyday life. In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt presented a valuable framework for understanding a totalitarian state through the lens of a totalitarian movement. This framework offers insights into the relationship between such a movement and individuals, between the Soviet Union and its citizens. Total loyalty to the Soviet state could lead to a comfortable existence within the system, but it was not a guarantee, given the arbitrariness of terror, which Arendt described as 'the ultimate consequence of rule by terror.' This arbitrariness provided no assurance of security or immunity to 'nobody, not even the executors,' who were never free from the fear of prosecution (Arendt, 1962 [1951], p. 6).

In the late 1980s and beyond, critical questions began to surface within the USSR: What kind of society was being constructed within its territory in the pursuit to establish a communist classless society? (Geulen, 2003; Zaslavskaya, 1990). Politically, the answer was evident: a state-monopolistic economy coupled with a totalitarian political regime. In this regard, Tatyana Zaslavskaya wrote: "All three forms of state power—legislative, executive and judicial—are openly or latently subjected to the party authority" (1990, p. 4). Soviet elections featured only one candidate, the communist party, resulting in a lack of trust in political institutions and processes (idem, p. 20). This lack of trust may be somewhat relevant to the German context and could explain for the limited engagement of (late) German resettlers in political parties, committees, and parliaments at both the communal and national levels in Germany (Panagiotidis, 2017).

As time has passed, evaluations of the 1990s and the transition from Soviet socialism to liberalism and capitalism have yielded mixed and uncertain perspectives. In the early 1990s, shortly before the dissolution of the USSR, Russian sociologist Tatiana Zaslavskaya (1990, p. 20) depicted prevailing social pessimism: a breakdown of trust in political institutions, a lack of confidence in the future, anticipation of hardships, a profound ethical vacuum resulting from the failure of communist ideology and the devaluation of Soviet values, a resurgence of previously suppressed religious values, an increasing influence of religious institutions, an inclination toward mysticism, and societal resentment toward more affluent segments of the population. Contrastingly, Danilo Markovic portrayed the same historical period prior to the USSR's collapse as characterized by a 'feeling of social security and protection' and 'egalitarian beliefs' from the perspective of the second half of the 2000s (Markovic, 2006, p. 26). Soviet nostalgia of the late 2000s began to emerge, manifested in the revival of Soviet symbolism and reevaluation of the past.

What forms of subjectivities and self-fashioning emerged within the context of Soviet socialism and a totalitarian state? In their paper *Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity* (2008), Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone analyzed four modalities of self-fashioning and agency to conceptualize Soviet subjectivities. First, the totalitarian self-encompassed a "transcendental desire of the masses and the elites to lose themselves in a higher cause" (Chatterjee & Petrone, 2008, pp. 971–972), such as the aspiration to construct a postnational, classless, communist society. Earlier, Arendt argued that the totalitarian leadership was not merely tyrants; instead, "thanks to its peculiar ideology and the role assigned to it in this apparatus of coercion, totalitarianism has discovered a means of dominating and terrorizing human beings from within" (Arendt, 1962 [1951], p. 325). As mentioned before, total loyalty demand and the arbitrariness of terror belonged to the Soviet toolkit to ensure regime legitimacy and durability. Second, the pragmatic self-represented an ability to construct one's narrative 'in the face of a coercive state,' not just to safeguard one's life but also to gain access to consumer goods, educational opportunities, and career advancements (Chatterjee & Petrone, 2008, p. 974). The pragmatic self bears a resemblance to the trickster subjectivities discussed

by Madina Tlostanova when describing the subjectivities of the regions of Caucasia and Central Asia. In my view, the trickster self presents a remarkable mode of interaction with the Soviet state, 'based on mocking and outsmarting Soviet/imperial authority' (Tlostanova, 2012, p. 133). In further decolonial reflections on the (post-)Soviet space, Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo postulated that "a trickster sensibility of a particular kind, incorporating various cultural, ethnic, religious, epistemic traditions and demonstrating particular intersubjective models of treating the other, managed to survive and was in some cases even strengthened by the imperial control" (2012, p. 88).

Third, the autonomous self is an illusion stemming from the internalization of normative discourses, leading to self-monitoring, censorship, and behavioral restraint (Chatterjee & Petrone, 2008, p. 976). Finally, the banal self-originated from 'the banality of everyday life in the Soviet Union' (idem, p. 980), marked by scarcity of consumer goods and a deficit in living standards. "With or without official rationing, the availability of consumer goods was always a low priority. For decades Soviet citizens were told that they were preparing for a glorious future and that sacrifice today was necessary to achieve the promised abundance later," noted Judith McKinney in her analysis of the daily experiences at the end of Soviet socialism (2020, p. 21). These four modalities of self-fashioning and agency provide insight into the interactions between the Soviet state and its citizens, elucidating both limitations and arenas for actions and self-actualization.

Chatterjee and Petrone have delineated the modern, reflexive self, which presumably signifies subjectivities expected in or influenced by the democratic and liberal settings: "The reflexive self is an active agent that scrutinizes both itself and the world it inhabits and thus plays a dynamic role in creating its own narratives of itself…" (Chatterjee & Petrone 2008, p. 967). In other words, individuals actively engage in self-examination practices and interact with their environments, dynamically creating their narratives and shaping their experiences. Modern selfhood emerges from the interplay of individual agency, political systems, social structures, cultural norms, and expert opinions.

How the individual and the collective approached presents another distinction between Soviet socialism and Western liberal democracies. The former emphasized collectivism through communist ideology and collectivization policies, while the latter prioritized individualism centered on individual responsibility and self-awareness. Focusing on the initial phase of the Soviet era,[1] Ukrainian philosopher Irina Zherebkina emphasized that, from an ethical standpoint, the concept of 'individual activism of self-realization' primarily embraced a self-sacrificing disposition for the collective benefit of all—whether that pertained to all individuals or society as a whole (2006, p. 123). This type of individualism, like self-sacrifice or for the sake of the collective, contradicted Western-style individualism. According to Zygmunt Bauman, Western-style individualism involves "transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task' and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance" (2006, pp. 31–32). In contrast to Soviet collectivism, Western individualism shifted its emphasis 'from living for others to a life of one's own' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 54), with further implications that "ones lives become the biographical solution of systemic contradictions" (Beck, 1992, p. 137).

Considering some of these immense differences, we can only speculate about the personal and collective (in a group sense) transitions that immigrants from the post-Soviet space underwent upon their arrival and settlement in the West, particularly in Germany. Edgar Goldstein (1979) and Carmella Leipzig (2006) have offered some insights into understanding the personal and collective: unrealistic expectations regarding identity and status, neurotic competitiveness and aggression, the quest for professional identity, the clash between a paternalistic parenting style and the challenge to compel offspring to conform to parental authority, impeding offspring from making their own decisions. Goldstein's conclusion about the persistence of the 'inner dictator' within immigrants aligns with his observations on the impact of Soviet totalitarian cultural structures (1979, p. 158). His findings suggest that even after departing

[1] The author referred to the Stalin epoch (1927–1953), one of the most repressive Soviet periods Baberowski (2007); Zherebkina (2006).

from the totalitarian regime, the coercive internal system established by these structures continues to exert control over individuals' thoughts and actions. This phenomenon, coupled with inner censorship, creates challenges for immigrants as they navigate and settle in the new contexts. The clash between the ingrained values and behaviors influenced by the Soviet and post-Soviet systems and the expectations and norms of their host countries may impede the integration process or require a reflective transition between the conflicting systems.

## From Planned to Market Economies

The Soviet economy operated under state ownership and centralized economic planning, leading to a unique class stratification that differed significantly from that of Western capitalist societies (Dahrendorf, 1959; Giddens, 1973; Havlin et al., 2016; Wright, 2005). First, I outline the features of the economic system that contributed to the actual class composition of Soviet society. Second, I reflect upon the role of social ownership prioritized over individual and private ownership in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, I contemplate the mechanisms of the planned economy, which, among other things, undermined entrepreneurial activities and people's economic initiatives. These aspects are particularly important in the context of the post-Soviet immigrant in Germany as illustrated in Part VI.

In 1990, Tatyana Zaslavskaya described the Soviet is "based on the state means of production, centralized economic planning, as well as a powerful apparatus for the accumulation and redistribution of material and financial resources" (1990, p. 4). The Soviet economy heavily relied on state monopoly and ideology. Additionally, the Soviet economy could be characterized by features such as low-cost labor (where engineers or medical doctors earned nearly similar incomes to factory workers), poor product quality, and a lack of competitiveness (idem, p. 5). Such equality of payment regulated or prevented the composition of distinct social classes.

Ideologically, the Soviet state aimed for the economic eradication of classes, which Arendt (1962 [1951], p. 322) considered to be 'positively

disastrous for the Soviet economy.' Instead of completely eradicating classes, the Soviet regime established a system of stratification, not based on merit or economic capital but rather on one's affiliation with the party and ideology. Zaslavskaya depicted late Soviet society as profoundly polarized with the upper and lower classes divided by an in-between class (1990, p. 5).

In terms of economy, such stratification system created the conditions for the economic exploitation and political suppression of the working population by the nomenklatura. This party-state bureaucracy enjoyed distinct political and economic privileges within the Soviet society (Voslensky, 1990 [1984]). During the initial phases of Soviet state-building, the nomenklatura substituted the former bureaucracy of factory managers and engineers, which "finally deprived industrial enterprises of what little experience and know-how the new Russian technical intelligentsia had been able to acquire" (Arendt, 1962 [1951], p. 322). These processes contributed to rendering the Soviet economy unsustainable and noncompetitive in the long run.

The social ownership and central planning were two fundamental features that distinguished the Soviet economy. The first one was the prioritization of social *ownership* of the means of production over private ownership. Hypothetically, this implied that Soviet citizens collectively owned "the country's capital stock—its factories and machinery, its oil rigs and coal mines, its shops and restaurants" (McKinney, 2020, p. 14). However, in practice, the Soviet state, dominated by the communist party and the nomenklatura, exerted control over this social ownership. Nevertheless, this prioritization had repercussions on the individual lives of citizens, as it shaped state policies against private ownership, aiming to minimize it (Conquest, 1987; Yakubova, 2004). These restrictive policies led to the demise of wealthy farmers and manufacturers in rural areas. Among various population groups, former German colonizers who primarily resided in rural regions were significantly affected by these damaging policies.

The state-owned economy fostered the perception that "Soviet Communism was based on the complete elimination of private property and its replacement by comprehensive state ownership" (Piketty & Goldhammer, 2020, p. 578). Nonetheless, the situation with property

and ownership was more intricate. While the ideology claimed to eradicate private ownership, in practice, personal property and certain facets of private property endured (Kimura, 1970, p. 64). Hiroshi Kimura's observation highlighted the disparity between political and ideological assertions and the actual circumstances on the ground, where the actual situation could deviate from official declarations. Nevertheless, the active promotion of ownership was absent, and stringent policies concerning property rights contributed to the sacralization of private property, a trend that gained momentum with the ascent of economic liberalism in the 1980s and persisted into the 1990s (Piketty & Goldhammer, 2020, p. 578). The sacralization of property and ownership can provide a plausible explanation for the relatively high proportion of home ownership among (late) German resettlers compared to other migrant populations in Germany. In the comprehensive study on German resettlers, Worbs and colleagues (2013, p. 8) delineated a noticeable tendency toward establishing home ownership through new construction. They asserted that constrained living conditions in rental accommodations impelled ethnic German resettlers to aspire to own homes (idem, p. 108). While I do not intend to diminish this valid reasoning, I also propose that the sacralization of private property, extensive privatization involving the transfer of ownership into private hands during the 1990s (McKinney, 2020, p. 164), and the subsequently increased rates of home ownership in former socialist and Soviet states (Statista, 2021) collectively contribute to explaining the notably high home ownership rate among the FSU immigrants in Germany in general.

Central planning is the second fundamental feature connected to the allocation of national resources. The communist leaders held the responsibility to guide the population through the path of economic development and the redistribution of wealth. Because the leadership was accountable for top-down planning and wealth redistribution, entrepreneurial activities were actively discouraged and selectively criminalized, leading to imprisonment or labor camps. Throughout the Soviet era, entrepreneurship carried a negative connotation, perceived as exploitation of the people. Entrepreneurs faced repressive measures from the totalitarian authorities (Ostropolska, 2013, p. 29). The stigmatization and criminalization of entrepreneurship caused the emergence of a

significant *shadow economy* legalized during the transition of the 1990s (Ageev et al., 1995, p. 366). This was often referred to as the 'second economy,' essentially equated with the market (Sampson, 1987, p. 121). Despite the challenge to accurately measure the extent of such a shadow economy, certain indirect indicators provided a basis for estimating its scale. Thus, interviews with Soviet emigrants indicated that approximately 18 percent of total consumption expenses were allocated to private individuals, and around 30 percent of household food purchases were made outside the public sector or through personal connections (idem, p. 125). Steven L. Sampson suggested that numerous underground entrepreneurs belonged to ethnic minorities (e.g., Jews) who were 'denied avenues of social mobility in the universities, army, policy, or party apparatus,' while ethnicity served 'as a mobilizing network and as a shield against controls' (idem, p. 129). Entrepreneurship under challenging circumstances paired with the significance of mobilizing networks holds relevance for my subsequent analysis of entrepreneurial activities among post-Soviet immigrants in Germany.

Thus, the Soviet state-owned, planned economy had several effects on the population, including shaping work ethics, influencing attitudes toward property, and constraining entrepreneurial behavior. In this section, I delineated how these effects could potentially have influenced behavioral patterns during migration and the transition to a market economy. In the upcoming section, I explore the contrasting dynamics of transitioning from Communist internationalism to societies rooted in nationalism and ethnic pluralism. This process holds significant relevance to the migration experiences of individuals from the post-Soviet space to Germany.

## From Communist Internationalism to Ethnic Pluralism of a Nation-State

Internationalism, characterized by universal governance and a shared global language, signifies the practice of collaboration, solidarity, and engagement among diverse people on a global scale. This concept contrasts to the ideology of nationalism (Halliday, 1988, p. 187).

Throughout seven decades of the last century, communist internationalism was implemented across the vast expanse of the Soviet Union, encompassing more than 288 million individuals across eleven Eurasian time zones. This spanned a multitude of national majorities and ethnic minorities, contributing to the blurring of ethnic boundaries at both the state and individual levels. The inherent 'worldliness and internationalism of Soviet culture' were evident in how Soviet individuals maintained profound connections to history (Yurchak, 2005, p. 158). They saw themselves not limited by state borders but as integral components of a global and historical continuum. International events resonated personally, intertwining with their lives on an existential scale. This innate global perspective of Soviet identity was further enriched by the diverse experience of belonging to the USSR. The tangible coexistence of various cultures within Soviet society, combined with the principles of collective unity and equal treatment for different ethnic groups, fostered inclinations that could be described as a notably "cosmopolitan" identity (idem, p. 159). Nevertheless, 'good internationalism' and 'bad cosmopolitanism' were ideologically juxtaposed: the latter was represented as values of the bourgeois world, while the former symbolized 'the realism of common people's culture' (idem, p. 164).

Publicly, ethnicity was regarded as a private matter in the Soviet context (Pobeda, 2010, p. 5). However, the Soviet internationalist agenda obscured the significance of ethnicity (Brubaker's idea (2002) of ethnicity without groups), which covertly influenced state policies, particularly concerning ethnicized groups perceived as unreliable. This included the forced resettlement and deportations of Soviet Germans and Crimean Tatars from North Caucasus and Crimea to Kazakhstan and Central Asia during World War II (Smith, 2013, p. 147). Tlostanova (2012, p. 137) critically highlighted this dual standard, revealing that despite the Soviet Union's proclaimed internationalist ideals, it created a secondary category of Soviet citizens within the colonial context. These individuals were meant to evolve into future Soviet Mestizo/a, emphasizing the fusion of ethnic identities under the influence of Russian culture and Soviet ideology.

In contrast, the unaffected majority lived a life characterized by a sense of camaraderie among nations. For instance, the late Soviet anthem

proclaimed: "Unbreakable Union of freeborn republics / Great Rus' has welded forever to stand! / Created in struggle by will of the peoples, / United and mighty our Soviet land!" (Soviet History Archive, n.d.). However, despite the songwriters' intention to portray the multinational composition of Soviet society, 'the lyrics conveyed a message of Russian primacy,' suggesting a shift toward 'Russian-centered national pride' imposed on the extensive Soviet populace (Geldern, n.d.). In hindsight, Irina Zherebkina described the Soviet internationalist project as 'a violent conglomerate of nations' friendship' (2006, p. 148). The violence manifested itself through the restrictive treatment of specific ethnic minorities, involving deportations, and a repressive approach toward nationalist movements or dissidents within the union republics. From the vantage point of post-Soviet coloniality, Tlostanova (2012, pp. 137–138) emphasized the persistent impact of this legacy in the present post-Soviet space. The prevalence of Russian as a shared language was partly a consequence of the colonial legacy of the Russian empire, as discussed. In this context, the usage of Russian did not necessarily indicate an endorsement of Russian nationalism, as empires operate beyond national boundaries.

The increasing importance of post-Soviet nation-states since the 1990s has led to a profound transition in ethnic and national consciousness. The Soviet slogans that concealed ethnic disparities and tensions, along with the discourse of international unity and 'druzhba narodov' (camaraderie among nations), have been overshadowed by a diverse array of national (Suny, 1992, p. 22). In this book, I primarily focus on individuals who migrated to Germany between the 1990s and the early 2000s. This implies that they have, to some extent, and perhaps moderately, been influenced by the emerging nation-states with their respective national ideologies. The dissolution of the Soviet Union prompted a movement of people returning to their places of origin, with approximately 25 million individuals relocating within the post-Soviet space (UNDP, 2009, p. 31).

The transition from communist internationalism to the ethnic pluralism of the German nation-state carries significant implications. On the one hand, certain indications of the previous camaraderie can be observed within the Russian-speaking mixed groups and communities in Germany. On the other hand, we can only speculate about the impact of

openly discussed ethnic pluralism in Germany, the prevailing discourse on migration, and political concerns about integrating foreigners. This may have contributed to the rising popularity of right-wing populist parties among ethnic German resettlers, as indicated by Tatiana Golova (2017). Unlike the Soviet Union, where such matters were absent from public discourse and were instead relegated to the domain of tacit policies aimed at addressing intricate ethnic or nationalist matters.

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## Part I Summary

In Part I have provided an understanding of the East-West European migration resulting from the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the 1990s and beyond. In respect of the East-West migration, ethnicization, feminization, and mobility liberalization are three key features characterizing the post-Soviet migration of the 1990s. Firstly, I discussed the two major immigrant groups admitted based on ethnic policies: (late) ethnic German resettlers and Jewish refugees. Secondly, I highlighted the gender composition of this migration, noting a higher proportion of female immigrants compared to men. These women are often engaged in the feminized labor sector or migrate for marriage and family-reunification reasons. Thirdly, I discussed how the relaxation of travel restrictions led to increasing diverse mobilities across Eurasia, particularly along the East-West European axis, during the transformative 1990s. The prevalent mobility motives encompassed repatriation, family reunification, work opportunities, and educational pursuits. While primarily composed of various sociocultural groups, Wimmer's flexible ethnic boundary-making approach (2007, 2008a) permits an assessment of the diverse Russian-speaking communities formed during the process of settling in Germany.

Relying on the transition perspective, I provided explanations for comprehending the personal transitions that post-Soviet emigrants underwent while moving from the former Soviet Union to Germany. I aimed to explore how societal changes, such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union, affected and impacted individuals on the ground. Therefore, I analyzed the shifts between closed and open border regimes, the contrast between self-fashioning under the Soviet totalitarian regime and the selfhood of liberal democracies, the transition from planned to market economies, and the evolution from communist internationalism to the ethnic pluralism of a nation-state. This analysis holds particularly relevant in the context of the diverse population's experiences during the post-migratory period.

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# Part II

## Toward the Immigrant Agency Theory—Background Preparations and Frameworks

# 4

# Human Agency Between Conceptual Morass and Mosaics

I am rooted, but I flow

(Braidotti, 2011, p. 137)

The relationship between society and the individual is one of the fundamental concerns in social science. This concern has brought to the fore lasting debates about structure and agency, which flourished in the twentieth century. These debates have continued in contemporary social thought. Engaging renewed scientific vocabularies, novel methodologies, and actualized contexts, scholarly attempts have continued to grasp the relationship between society and the individual. In these attempts the concept of agency plays a central role and as such it presents various challenges when employed as an analytical category to be empirical applicable. In contemplating agency-structure dynamic, I outline four approaches to social theory building scrutinizing how they arrange the relations between society and the individual: namely, macro, micro, immanent, and linking. These approaches prominently place at the upfront a scale perspective. I then explore the question of whether it is feasible to contemplate agency beyond scale (structural) perspective, envisioning human agency in a non-hierarchical way, detached from

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macro-meso-micro scaling. And what are the benefits of such analytical experiment. I conclude the chapter by examining how agency as an analytical tool fits my purposes, underscoring why it necessitates explicit and thorough explanations of the components, especially for an empirical research.

* * *

Exploring agency in research introduces multiple complications inherent to this category. First, one must grapple with a multitude of meanings and interpretations associated with agency in the interdisciplinary context, such as an administrative division in state governance, a relation between principal and agent in economics, business, and management, a connection between a ruler and a governor in political science, and aspects like acting self, subjectivity, self-determination, identity, capacity, and life course in sociology. Second, there is an issue of translation if we deal with comparative research navigating among multiple academic languages. Especially if we rely on non-English and yet well-established academic traditions.

Besides, the concept of agency has various conceptual expressions belonging to the vocabulary of a specific period in the development of social science. In their article *Time, Self, and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency*, Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder presented such conceptual plethora: existential agency, identity, life course, and pragmatic agency (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). As an existential agency, a notion of the self had derived from George H. Mead's theory of self. In his classical work *Mind, Self, and Society,* Mead defined the self as a social emergent: "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity" 2015 [1934], p. 135). He believed that as a social emergent, the self was constructed from the reflective process based on an individual ability being 'an object to itself' (idem, p. 136). Hitlin and Elder expanded Mead's concept of the self, portraying it as a core of agency that forms the basis for identity, life course, and pragmatic agency.

A common thread running through the concept of agency across disciplines is the interplay between voluntarism, which pertains to the

choices made by individuals and their interactions, and determinism, which emanates from structural configurations such as society, organizations, corporate hierarchies, and control mechanisms. The following section delves specifically into voluntarism and determinism, situating them within the realm of social theory and initiating a discussion on the relationship between structure and agency.

## Structure-Agency Dilemma

The 1980s witnessed extensive scholarly debates revolving around the structure-agency dilemma, the dilemma of voluntarism and determinism. Jürgen Klüver (1991) identified four approaches to social theory building are identified: macro, micro, immanent, and linking. These approaches outline the relationships between society and individuum, as well as the dynamics between structure and agency.

According to the macro-approach, structure shapes and modifies agents. While striving to construct a grand theory, macro-theories do not neglect agency or individuals, but rather prioritize classes, systems, societies, and institutions as, for instance, the Marxian class theory (Marx & Engels, 2009 [1848]) or Luhmann's system theory (Luhmann, 1975). Such theory building tends to be structurally incomplete, while exhibiting either empirical deficits and inclining to the excessive generalization (Klüver, 1991, pp. 217–218).[1] An understanding of a social structure as composed of social classes or comparable equivalents (i.e., strata, milieus, lifestyles) has had an enormous impact on social theorizing up to the current day (Havlin et al., 2016, pp. 8–13). Regarding this type of theory building, Margaret Archer criticized that "agency—the acting subject became increasingly lifeless whilst the structural or cultural components enjoyed a life of their own, self-propelling or self-maintaining" (1982, p. 455).

According to the micro-approach, individual actions and interactions compose 'the social structure of the world of daily life' or 'the intersubjective world' (Schuetz, 1945b, p. 542, p. 533). Working with such

[1] All translations from non-English texts are mine, TH.

categories as a stranger and a member of an in-group (Schuetz, 1944, p. 506), homecomers and homestayers (Schuetz, 1945a, p. 371), Schuetz elaborated on group interactions, on us—them dichotomy, highlighting an intersubjective dimension of relations and various possibilities of their meaning and understanding (Schuetz, 1945b, p. 535). This microsociological line of thought has been further developed based on the assumption that experiences and actions constitute the empirical reality of individuals, contrasting with abstract structures that are challenging to perceive through individual practical experiences and empirical conduct. Randall Collins stressed that "radical micro-sociology is epistemologically and empirically much more thorough than any previous sociological method" (Collins, 1981, p. 82). Yet, neglecting an abstract feature of social structure may lead to 'an extreme micro-empiricism' (idem, p. 83). Empirically grounded theories explore human agency through actions, relations, and experiences.

According to the immanent scale approach, structure and agency are always implicit components of any theory, which can be restored through a proper theory reconstruction. In this understanding, a sociological theory consists of vertical layers such as micro, meso, and macro: "every sociological … displays such vertical layers at the core of its theoretical composition; yet there are variations between theories as to what extent reality can be recognized in its distinguishing layers" (Klüver, 1991, p. 216). In other words, such theory building incorporates small scale/large scale: The micro-level represents the level of individual actions, the meso-level stands for an organizational component, and the macro-level includes a society in general, a nation-state. Approaching society as a set of vertical layers finds its expression also in migration theory (to name just a few Havlin, 2013; Laitin, 1998; Pries, 2015).

Finally, explicitly connecting agency and structure presents a fundamental problem throughout the history of sociology. The structure-agency debate emerged as a discussion "over whether it is possible to integrate structural and action-oriented analysis in a single theoretical perspective and, if so, which dimension (if either) should have priority" (Calhoun, 2002). The link approach aimed at reconciling actor- and structure-centered theories, attempting to solve the structure-agency dilemma. Two influential efforts of such reconciliation are Archer's

theory of morphogenesis (1982, 2000) and Giddens' structuration theory (1984). The latter one comprehended 'the nature of human action and the acting self' by focusing on human agency and abstract social institutions (Giddens, 1984, p. xvii). Giddens reconceptualized agency and institutions (as structure) as a duality, the duality of structure (idem, p. xx). Archer, in contrast, used social morphogenesis to highlight dynamic relations between agency and structure, "where the structure predates the action that in turn may transform it and where the transformed (or reproduced) structure postdates this action" (Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2018, p. 867). Comparing these two theories, Archer pointed out an immanent dualism between voluntarism and determinism and between individual and society present in Giddens' structuration theory (Archer, 1982, p. 456). Whereas the theory of morphogenesis is "sequential, dealing in endless cycles of—structural conditioning/social interaction/structural elaboration—thus unravelling the dialectical interplay between structure and action" (idem, p. 458), between environment and a subject. Because "[t]he properties and powers of the human being are neither seen as pregiven, nor as socially appropriated, but rather these are emergent from our relations with our environment. As such they have relative autonomy from biology and society alike, and causal powers to modify both of them" (Archer, 2000, p. 87).

## Agency in the Non-Structural Context

The actor-network analysis by Bruno Latour and a theory of strategic action by James M. Jasper offer us to conceptualize agency in non-structural and non-hierarchical ways. In these cases, networks and arenas are social environments for human agency and actions. Networks and arenas are the most recent conceptual entities. Much earlier Erving Goffman explored concepts such as (primary) frameworks and frames to explain human experiences and subjective involvement in social events, patterns of thinking, and interactions. The frame analysis as a methodological tool examines 'the organization of experience' (Goffman, 1974, p. 11). Instead of focusing on society, he addressed "the structure of experience individuals have at any moment of their social lives" (idem,

p. 13). The author distinguished two types of primary—natural and social—networks, which differ in degree of organization: "Some are neatly presentable as a system of entities, postulates, and rules; others—indeed, most others—appear to have no apparent articulated shape, providing only a lore of understanding, an approach, a perspective" (idem, p. 21). According to Goffman, individuals are not capable of guiding the outcome of natural frameworks prevailed from 'full determinism and determinateness.' In contrast, social frameworks "… provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being. Such an agency is anything but implacable; it can be coaxed, flattered, affronted, and threatened. What it does can be described as "guided doings" (idem, p. 22). For Goffman, agency as guided doings connects to actions, evaluating these actions by personal and social qualities. Daily individuals find themselves embedded in different frameworks that evoke various attitudes and experiences of social reality. In situations when frames cannot be applied, they might be broken or replaced with other frames (Goffman, 1974, p. 347). The frames are changeable and so does the agency. Built on Goffman's ideas, Jasper developed his theory of strategic action.

## Actors, Strategic Actions, and Arenas

Jasper's concept of human agency extends beyond mere action and strategy. He introduced the term 'arena' as a dynamic collection of rules and resources that facilitate various formal or casual interactions. While some arenas clearly define their participants, others are more open (Jasper, 2006, p. 141). Jasper noted that despite the structural appearance of some arenas, players often accept and operate within the rules. Players also develop interests within these arenas that contribute to their identities as participants, sometimes even legally. However, the scholar emphasized that it is always possible to challenge the rules, create new strategies, or reshape the arenas themselves, allowing for agency within the defined boundaries of these arenas (idem, pp. 167–168).

Resources and skills empower an individual to navigate across various arenas such as the workplace, market, and relationships, which may differ based on individual goals, objectives, and motivations to enter them. Strategic individuals can change an arena while pursuing their efficacy. In this pursuit humans "form groups, develop identities, engage in conflicts, construct goals," and fulfill them (idem, p. 4). Action and confidence in one's strengthen agency, it provides an individuum with "a sense of agency, a belief that the world responds to your actions, that you are in control of events" (idem, p. 110). Furthermore, Jasper questioned the meaning of structure as some imagined social system, which turns into a fiction without (strategic) actions, without human agency. He argued: "Most barriers come from other players trying to block us. Structures should be constraints (and aids) that operate independently of strategic intent– a rare condition. Behind every "structure" is usually another player hard at work" (idem, p. 167).

While in his book *Getting Your Way. Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World* (2006), James M. Jasper focused on an individual strategic action and intersubjective element while navigating various arenas (markets, sports, workplaces, interpersonal relations), in turn, collective agency as multitude finds its expression in Jasper's cultural understanding of social and protest movements (Jasper, 2014). In his book *Protest. A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements*, the scholar applied structural and action-centered theories to examine a growing tendency to social movements. In respect of structural theories, he pointed at the deficit toward an understanding of constraints of action while addressing "one particular kind of constraint, namely those imposed by resources and arenas. They overlook the constraints imposed by other players, who are pursuing their own strategies, making their own decisions, and often trying hard to block the initiatives of protestors" (Jasper, 2014, p. 34). For this reason, he arranged his analysis to capture collective actions of protesters enabled and constrained not only by structural obstacles but also by a collective effort of other players involved (opponents, opposing parties, and other conflicting movements).

While Goffman's and Jaspers' theoretical efforts still either engaged with or acknowledged a social structure in their analysis, Latour criticized structural theories that he considered devastating for social theory.

## Actors and Networks

Latour's actor-network theory (ANT) (1996a) provides an alternative perspective to overcome structural determinism, gaining resonance across academic disciplines internationally (Bruni & Teli, 2007; Fenwick, 2010; Murdoch, 1997; Sayes, 2014). Together with or merely within post-humanism, ANT confronts a scale perspective to structure and agency and its claims related to the micro–macro-distinctions. In his critique, Latour accused a scale perspective of dominating social theory building for far too long. He argued:

> … the ANT claims that modern societies cannot be described without recognizing them as having a fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary character that is never captured by the notions of levels, layers, territories, spheres, categories, structure, systems. It aims at explaining the *effects* accounted for by those traditional words without having to buy the ontology, topology and politics that goes with them. (Latour, 1996a, p. 370)

The scale perspective follows the logic of top-down and bottom-up distinction, which Latour found doubtful, since society has neither top nor bottom. Besides this perspective "implies that the element "b" being macro-scale is of a different nature and should be studied thus differently from element "a" which is micro-scale" (idem, p. 371). Moreover, a scale is not able to capture a reciprocal relation between individual, collective, and societal. By using a concept network to explain social reality, Latour strived to solve three dilemmas related to far/close (global/local), small scale/large scale, and inside/outside. In the far/close relation, a network passes a geographic proximity defining space as "neither social nor "real" space, but simply associations" (ibid). This attribution through associations is especially important in the context of transnational social spaces that are relevant to my methodological approach (Sect. 5.1) and employed to explain mundane transnational social spaces on the example of an entrepreneurial network stretching across Europa and Asia (Part VI).

Furthermore, a network opposes a small scale/large scale and regains "some margin of maneuvers between the ingredients of society—its vertical space, its hierarchy, its layering, its macro scale, its wholeness, its overarching character" (Latour, 1996a, p. 372). The network enables thoughts about a highly connected global entity, which remains continuously local: "Instead of opposing the individual level to the mass, or agency to structure, we simply follow how given element becomes strategic through the number of connections in commands, and how it loses its importance when losing its connections" (idem, p. 372). Finally, an inside and outside dilemma is diminished by a notion of the network since the latter "is all boundary without inside and outside… Literary, a network has no outside" (ibid). Instead of the significance in far/close (global/local), small scale/large scale, inside/outside, an application of network shifts the focus to associations and connections, relevant for the analysis of the transnational social networks later.

The actor-network theory presents an opportunity to move beyond the theoretical dualism of structure-agency and of micro–macro paradigms; besides ANT questions and undermines social determinism by accounting for realms beyond social reality. In doing so, ANT contemplates agency within its social, biological, technological, and physical interactions imbedded in networks. Latour (1996b, p. 1) elaborates on his intricate conception of agency or agencies: First, "to attribute them to naturality" involves associating them with nature, aligning with the domain of natural science. In the case of humans, this expression is manifested in corporality (body) and physicality. Second, "to tie them to the social fabric" involves attributing sociality to them, connecting agency with the realm of social science. Third, approaching agency as a semiotic construction necessitates recognizing that agency carries meaning, which forms the basis for interpretation. Thus, simultaneously agency emerges as a physical, social, and semiotic entity. In this way, Latour insisted on rethinking and redefining an actor and its/his/her agency. For him, an agent (actant) can be a human or non-human (Latour, 1996a, p. 369). What matters are their interconnections and the networks they form, the linking nodes they create, their intensity and dispersion. Furthermore, "instead of thinking in terms of surfaces—two dimensions—or spheres—three dimensions—one is asked to think in

terms of nodes that have as many dimensions as they have connections" (idem, p. 370).

In the field of migration studies, deliberate efforts have been undertaken to integrate networks—both collectives and social networks—into analysis at both macro- and micro-levels. The aim is to conceptualize these networks as an intermediate meso-level, positioned between structure and agency (Castles & Miller, 2009; Hugo, 1981; King, 2012, pp. 20–22; Pries, 2015). It is crucial to emphasize that these endeavors diverge from the Latourian perspective, which transcends the limitations of scale. This specific distinction underscores the significance of Actor-Network Theory and other approaches discussed in this subsection for my study, where I aim to present considerations of agency within and beyond both structural and non-structural approaches to theory building. Further clarification on how I apply these non-structural approaches to study networks is exemplified in the examination of immigrant businesses (Chapter 13) or an immigrant leisure group and its community engagement (Chapter 16).

## Agency, Socio-Conditioning Factors, and Power Relations

Next, I explore agency through the lens of socio-conditioning factors and power relations, building upon the earlier epistemologies. This approach involves a critical examination of classification categories and their profound influence on individual and collective actions, identities, and on agency. When viewed through the socio-conditioning lens, agency takes on a gendered, racialized, nationalized, and ethnicized character, molded by societal perceptions and individual experiences. It emerges as a force in direct opposition to oppression, underrepresentation, and objectification.

Utilizing socio-conditioning factors for classification, hierarchization, and identification offers a range of strategies to cultivate and nurture a sense of agency. These strategies include politicizing (female) agency by merging the personal and political, decolonizing agency to liberate postcolonial subjectivities and subaltern positionalities, and what agency

means in the context of nomadic subjects. When exploring the dynamics of power relations, several key aspects come into focus: systems of oppression and subordination, power structures, and struggles. This analysis is facilitated by intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1994; Lykke, 2011), postcolonial theories (Boatcă et al., 2018; Ponzanesi & Colpani, 2016; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012), nomadic thought (Braidotti, 2011; Braidotti & Regan, 2017).

## Gendered Agency in Theory and Practice

Throughout its development, feminism has prominently addressed the subject of gendered agency, examining concepts like self-organization, female selfhood, gendered identity, sexuality, self-determination, and self-expression (Irigaray, 1979; Nave-Herz, 1997). This exploration has also sparked discussions about gender-sensitive language (Pusch, 1991; Renegar & Sowards, 2009) and broader acceptance of diverse bodily practices (Price & Shildrick, 1999; Villa, 2007). The pursuit of gendered agency has meant a recognition of a crisis within traditional notions of womanhood and prompted a quest for solutions. In the process, it has raised fundamental questions about how female agency is shaped and influenced by political, social, and sexual emancipation and liberation. All these expressions contribute to the analysis of the notions and feelings of selfhood that are essential for a comprehensive understanding of individual and collective agency and the way in which societal structures impact these concepts (Clegg, 2006, p. 310).

Feminist theory building and activism in terms of agency refer to but do not exhaust such issues as gaining a voice (hooks, 1984), freedom of choice, sexual freedom, and right of self-determination primarily for women (Millett, 2000), work and life balance outlining such issues as equal pay, child- and elderly care, female well-being (Billson & Fluehr-Lobban, 2005). Some of these issues have been originating from the initial 1960s feminist agenda, which gradually transformed into the post-millennial program. Focusing on these issues embodies and fosters a sense of female (gendered) agency in the political, public, and intimate realms. According to bell hooks, "politics becomes a condition for

reasserting the relationship between agency, power, and struggle" within both the feminist movement and theory building (hooks, 1994, p. 129). Coming to voice through politics, scholarship or public debate, hooks saw as a "democratization of voice wherein everyone's words will be given equal time and be seen as equally valuable" (idem, p. 186). Furthermore, she emphasized that the contemporary feminist movement has laid the cultural foundation for legitimizing gender-based scholarship (idem, p. 126), which, in turn, has introduced innovate and often contradictory perspectives for assessing womanhood and female agency.

The concept of contradiction, particularly prominent for further developments of feminism, transcends simple opposition. It provides a multifaceted framework that includes ambiguity, paradox, multiplicity, complexity, anti-orthodoxy, opposition, and inconsistency. Third-wave feminists intentionally employed these contradictions to disrupt conventional notions of identity and agency, introducing ambiguity, divergence, incompatibility, and alternative modes of thought. Contradiction is strategically utilized to navigate the interplay of opposing elements. This performative and participatory use of contradictions opens avenues for self-determination, transcendence, and the cultivation of counter-imaginations, ultimately fostering and relying on a sense of agency (Renegar & Sowards, 2009, p. 6).

## Intersectional Agency: Discrimination and Identification

In alignment with critical and reflective developments in theory building, the intersectionality debates in the 1980s and early 1990s had brought a transformative dimension to feminist theory. The intersectional approach has enriched feminist discourse by providing a conceptual framework to address complex identity formations and layered discriminatory practices. Acknowledging these developments, hooks highlighted the significant contributions of black women and women of color in challenging and deconstructing the conventional notion of woman. Their insistence that gender alone does not encompass the entirety female identity has profoundly impacted feminist theory, challenging the prevailing feminist

discourse primarily shaped by white academic women and initiating an important shift (hooks, 1994, p. 63).

While this book cannot comprehensively cover the diversity of intersectional approaches, it primarily focuses on two foundational directions that have laid the groundwork for subsequent theoretical and methodological developments in this field. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) analyzed the intersections of gender and race, particularly through the experiences of African-American women facing structural discrimination in the workplace. In her legal work and writings, the author addressed the structural injustices stemming from the convergence of racism and sexism. Crenshaw's intersectional approach is two twofold. Firstly, she explored structural intersectionality as a frame for understanding how race and gender intersect in the context of violence against women of color (idem, p. 1296). Secondly, she emphasized representational intersectionality to reconcile the tension between claims of multiple identities and the ongoing need for collective political action (ibid). According to the scholar, social categories such as gender, race, and class possess significance and implications in social interactions. The key lies not merely in the existence of these categories but in the specific values assigned to them and how these values give rise to social hierarchies (idem, p. 1297). The process of categorization itself is an exercise of power (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1297). The expression "I am Black," as argued, involves the application of socially imposed identity. However, by using this identity, one transforms this expression into 'an anchor of subjectivity' (ibid). This act transcends mere description or subordination, evolving into a statement of resistance, essentially a 'positive discourse of self-identification.' Conversely, the statement "I am a person who happens to be Black" conveys another message, emphasizing that the person is primarily an individual and that their Black identity is circumstantial (ibid). This statement aims to establish a form of universality in self-identification, highlighting its contingent, contextual, and nondeterministic character. While both categorizations are trustworthy and valid, their effectiveness varies depending on the political and social context. Crenshaw underscored the importance of occupying and defending a politics of social location as a 'critical resistance strategy' for marginalized groups, rather than vacating or destroying it (ibid). In line with Cranshaw's perspective,

bell hooks (1994, p. 1) believed that by acknowledging subjectivity and the limitations of identity, we disrupt the objectification inherent in a culture of domination.

Butler's intersectional analysis, in turn, delved into the interplay among gender, sexuality, and sex, significantly influencing the queer debate and queer feminism in the early 1990s. In her seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler emphasized the need to recognize the multiplicity of "cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of 'women' are constructed" (1999 [1990], p. 20). She identified a political problem when feminism assumed that the term woman represented a singular, common identity. Rather than being a stable signifier that universally encompasses those it aims to describe and represent, the term women, even in its plural form, became a contentious term, a site of contestation, and a source of anxiety. Butler argued that being a woman is not an exhaustive identity because gender is not consistently or coherently constituted in various historical contexts. Moreover, gender intersects with other dimensions, such as sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, and regional identities (idem, p. 6). Consequently, separating gender from other cultural and political intersections becomes impossible since these intersections inevitably contribute to its construction and maintenance.

Beyond race, class, sex, and gender, the scholarly debate further highlighted other frequently discussed intersections, including ethnicity, nationality, and body (Davis, 2008; Degele & Winker, 2011; Lutz, 2014; Lutz & Amelina, 2017; Lutz et al., 2011; Villa, 2010). Intersectionality, as an analytical tool, offers a complex approach to understanding power differentials, normativities, and identity formations in the context of categories such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age, nationality, and more (Lykke, 2011, p. 208). It allows us to examine how these categories influence an individual's position in society concerning discriminatory or privileging practices.

Paola Rebughini has elucidated the widespread adaptation of intersectionality beyond the realms of gender studies and feminism. The analytical potential lies in its ability to approach phenomena and dissect the "multidimensionality, simultaneity, pluralism and situatedness of the social construction of categorizations, as well as the way in which single

subjects deal with them" (Rebughini, 2021, [10]). According to the scholar, employing an intersectional analysis to explore agency can help uncover a dual facet of agency. It encompasses the subject's capacity to contend with pertinent social categorizations and the situated nature of agency, where it becomes a temporary subjective synthesis of social reality amidst the ever-changing currents of social life (idem, [1]). Furthermore, linking intersectionality with agency facilitates the examination of how agency is situationally constructed when confronting forms of domination through categorization and the endeavors to resist them. This approach investigates the formation of the categories we employ to make sense of reality, highlighting the significance of their boundaries and varied definitions. Intersectionality acts as an analytical framework to scrutinize the agency of individuals positioned at the transient crossroads of multiple and dynamic categories (idem, [18]).

Intersectionality, initially conceived as a theory of social injustice, has evolved not only into a framework for understanding intricate forms of discrimination but also for examining identities and human agency. In the context of intersectional identities, individuals or their representatives can engage in activism either for themselves or on behalf of others to confront or surpass intersectional inequalities. The means to address these inequalities may involve vocal advocacy, challenging conventional norms, or subjecting them to critical examination. This highlights the intertwined relationship between theoretical development and activism, an essential aspect of epistemologies that deal with power dynamics and socio-conditioning factors, as further demonstrated in the realm of postcolonialism.

## Postcolonial Agency

Matters of agency and subjectivity belong to the problem area that creates tensions within postcolonial theory (Williams & Chrisman, 1993, p. 6). On the one hand, there are attacks on individualism as a Western and 'bourgeois liberal concept' (ibid). On the other hand, postcolonial critique questions the unequal cultural representations 'in the context for political and social authority within the modern world order' (Bhabha,

2007 [1994], p. 245). In this respect, Homi K. Bhabha argued that "postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South" (ibid). Colonial testimony is not only a political topic or a geographical division but rather 'a distinction of geopolitical awareness' penetrating culture, scholarship, and institutions; it is a discourse of 'an uneven exchange with various kinds of power' (political, intellectual, cultural, moral) (Said, 1979 [1978], p. 12). These powers among other things define, control, and manipulate a subaltern, colonial subject. In contrast, 'a Subject of the West,' a 'concealed Subject' pretends it has 'no geo-political determinations' as claimed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her influential essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* She unraveled the critique toward European subjectivity contrasting with the subjectivity of subaltern (Spivak, 1993, p. 66).

Further, postcolonial discourse promotes a trope agents not victims that according to Gudrun Dahl aims at overcoming subvert risks of passivity and non-responsibility attached to the role of victim (2009, p. 396). Rejecting the notion of victimhood stands as a key feature of postcolonialism when reevaluating postcolonial subjectivities. Irina Zherebkina contended that such rejection puts an end to "humiliating him/her with practices of ruthless compassion or cynical consumption" (2006, p. 156). From the perspective of postcolonial subjectivity, this signifies moving away from rhetoric that perpetuates victimization and instead reexamining "what has been done to us" and contemplating "what can we do for each other" (Zherebkina, 2007, p. 79). This reassessment necessitates a revision of the political activities and daily practices of all parties involved. The author further emphasized that postcolonial discourses enable a dialogue between the seemingly irreconcilable worlds of the West and the East. So, what changes in terms of agency have occupied in this renewed dialogue between the West and the East? This new dialogue has led to a transformation from potential (exotic, indigenous, ethnic) informants to postcolonial-aware, capable subjects.

Postcolonial agency, in this context, does not solely emanate from former colonies (Mignolo, 2000; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). In

this book, the primary focus deviates from Anglophone and Francophone postcolonialism, which is deeply rooted in the resistance dynamics between former empires and their colonies. Instead, it delves into an alternative dimension of post/coloniality, specifically pertinent for my analysis: agency actualized within the framework of migration and settlement, as exemplified through the experiences of post-Soviet immigrants in Germany, who can be situated within postsocialist coloniality (Amelina, 2022, p. 2405). This manifestation of postcoloniality (and concurrently, postcolonial agency) originates from post-Soviet, post-socialist, former 'second world' contexts. As Anna Amelina elucidated, considering the Soviet Union as a subaltern empire, "socialist coloniality/ies as a subaltern (in relation to the "West"), anti-Western materialist project of (class) equality and progress (of state socialism)" (ibid) provides a nuanced understanding of the impact that post-socialist (imperial) relations exert on immigrants and individuals from former post-socialist countries. She further emphasized, "In the context of current post-socialist relations, coloniality/ies continue to be articulated in the superiority and missionizing claims of former socialist societies (towards themselves and other regions) that still function as an essential source for individual and collective belonging …" (ibid).

In the context of post-socialist coloniality, such postcolonial agency represents a liberation or decolonization from the totality of a state, from current or former totalitarian regimes as in the case of post-Soviet subjectivities (Tlostanova, 2015, p. 40), processing postcolonial modalities beyond the historical Anglophone and Francophone traditions.[2] Madina Tlostanova critically analyzed post-Soviet discourses, especially relations between (former Soviet) Russia and its ex-colonies. Such analysis undermines the dichotomous scheme of West versus East, and North versus South indicating the differences between historical colonialisms and the phenomenon of global coloniality. Postcolonialism is not only regionally located in the former colonies. Inevitably it connects to the global coloniality incorporating 'today's ex-third-world, ex-socialist and

[2] See Chapter 3 for an in-depth analysis of personal transitions within evolving societal landscapes, encompassing transitions across various modalities of colonialities—from Soviet coloniality to post-socialist dynamics (regions of origin) and ultimately to Euro-centered coloniality (destination region).

western subjects alike' (Tlostanova, 2012, p. 133). The author differentiates between colonialism as 'a specific socio-historical configuration' and coloniality as an aftermath of colonialism. Without critical reflection, coloniality is expressed in behaviors and (in)sensibilities resulting in "uncritical acceptance of the existing world hierarchy in which everyone is assigned a strict and never-questioned place" (ibid). For this reason, a postcolonial approach is supposed to question existing world hierarchies in everyday life but also scholarship and research. Postcolonialism undermines uncritical and never-questioned attitudes toward the global world that "is subordinated to the general logic and structure of power, firmly linked with capital, exploitation and violence, as well as the idea of race, resulting in the specific control of labor, state and, more importantly, subjectivity (coloniality of being) and knowledge (production and distribution)" (ibid).

Trickster as a remarkable in-between subjectivity is one of the postcolonial agencies that emerged in the post-Soviet space 'based on mocking and outsmarting Soviet/imperial authority' (idem, p. 133). The detailed account of tricksterism and tricksters, Tlostanova in the co-authorship with Mignolo offered in the book *Learning to Unlearn* (2012). They engaged "the contemporary understanding of the term, which is linked with yet departs from the classical mythological, religious, and folklore meaning" (i.e., God-like creatures or people with supranatural characteristics) (2012, p. 88). The recent applications of the term feature such qualities associated with tricksters as: "ambiguity, deceit of authority, playing tricks on power, metamorphosis, a mediating function between different worlds, manipulation and bricolage as modes of existence" (ibid). The authors depicted suspended indigenous agency through transcultural tricksters in the non-European Russian or previously Soviet regions. In the colonial and postcolonial beliefs, "tricksterism acts as a form of resistance and re-existence" (idem, p. 89). Tricksterism as the agency of (post-)Soviet coloniality contrasts other modalities of selfhood produced by the Soviet state: totalitarian, pragmatic, autonomous, normative, and banal selves (Chapter 3). Despite the specific contextualization of tricksterism, such a type of agency can be transferred to other transcultural and transnational contexts that emerged from international migration I illustrate in Part IV. In

a postnational context, tricksters, characterized by cross-cultural and transnational features, find resonance, aligning well with the realm of nomadism. Nomadic agency completes my analysis.

## Nomadic Agency

'I am rooted, but I flow' serves as the epigraph opening Part II and encapsulates the underlying logic of nomadism, elucidated by Rosi Braidotti to describe 'a new figuration of subjectivity in a multidifferentiated nonhierarchical way' (2011, p. 137). Nomadism, in contrast to previous epistemologies, is envisioned in a post-identitarian and non-hierarchical manner (D'Andrea, 2006, p. 101). It diverges from the scale perspective and structure-agency reasoning. This perspective resonates with my experiences in conducting and analyzing semi-structured interviews. Participants refrained from framing themselves strictly through intersections of nationality, gender, class, and ethnicity. Instead, they articulated their positionalities in a manner aligned with what Braidotti describes as 'a multidifferentiated nonhierarchical way' of being, acting, and subjectivity (2011, p. 137).

With a philosophical and feminist background, Braidotti conceptualizes nomadism as, in essence, an inclusive approach that combines social, natural, and technological elements to conceptualize subjectivity. The author argued that nomadic thought "invites us to rethink the structures and boundaries of the self by tackling the deeper conceptual roots of issues of identity. … Whereas identity is a bounded, ego-indexed habit of fixing and capitalizing on one's selfhood, subjectivity is a socially mediated process of relations and negotiations with multiple others and with multilayered social structures…" (Braidotti, 2011, pp. 3–4).

Individuals engage in intricate interactions involving both human and non-human elements, all while bearing multiple layers of identity and belonging as subjects-in-process (Braidotti & Regan, 2017). An intriguing parallel emerges between this notion and Latour's efforts to synchronize actor-network analysis, creating a comprehensive framework encompassing social, physical, and semiotic realities. Both Braidotti and Latour endorse a posthuman and non-anthropocentric perspective on

subjects. In this perspective, posthuman subjects encompass not just the human but also the non-human. Braidotti's nomadic subjects embody technologically mediated human agency, where technology significantly influences their interactions. This mediation takes a broad form, ranging from the impact of medical technology on human corporeality to the transformation of human sociality through information and communications technology. The latter aspect is of particular relevance when conceptualizing international migration and the evolving dynamics of immigrants' relations in the twenty-first century (Barbosa Neves & Casimiro, 2018; for more details, refer to Havlin, 2019).

Furthermore, nomadism questions 'a binary logic of self-other opposition' because such logic reduces differentiation 'to pejoration, disqualification and exclusion' (Braidotti, 2010, p. 409). Sameness postulates subjectivity 'as coinciding with the dominant image of thought and representation of the subject' (ibid). This sameness revolves around a "dominant image of the subject as masculine/ white/ heterosexual/ speaking a standard language/ property-owning/ urbanized" (ibid). This kind of post-humanism frames not only in technological terms but rather primarily in a philosophical sense. And as such it opposes the humanism of the eighteenth century with its understanding of subject, subjectivity, and agency: a knowing, rational, conscious, moral subject, a man who contradicts the other. Who is the other then? Braidotti reflected the pervasive construction of 'Otherness' in Western philosophy. This construction often occurs through the lenses of sexualization, racialization, and naturalization. The marginalized groups, including women, sexual minorities, natives, non-Europeans, and non-human entities like animals and the Earth itself, have historically been subjected to exclusion, exploitation, and dispossession. This violence is closely tied to the assertion of universalism and the oppositional view of consciousness (ibid).

Now, nomadism emerges from Western post-humanism and non-Western neo-humanism with its dynamic style and boundary-crossing attitude. By the same token, it alters hybridity, diasporas, and creolization by "means of regrounding claims to connections and alliances among different constituencies" (idem, p. 411). With the intensified migration flows in the European Union and growing encounters

with otherness, Braidotti contemplates novel ways of European identity formations and new models of European subjectivity. In doing so, she aims at overcoming destabilizing effects in the interaction with the other, at de-mobilizing "the dangerous binary oppositions into which cultural, racial, and religious differences" (Jusová, 2011, p. 56). Braidotti's work focuses primarily on political agency, which together with ethnic origin and national identity, composes 'basic components of the liberal view of citizenship' (2011, p. 19).

Nomadism completes my exploration of epistemologies grounded in socio-conditioning factors and power dynamics, offering vital theoretical and methodological interventions concerning subjectivity, self, and identity, demanding flexibility and multiple belongings. These epistemologies integral to this exploration, suppressed or marginalized agency (hooks, 1994, p. 172). Beyond providing alternative frameworks for understanding agency, subjectivity, and self, these epistemologies advocate for a methodological departure from traditional subject-object research logic or researcher-researched relationships. This departure challenges assumptions about neutral and objective standpoints, highlighting that perspectives are geopolitically located, shaped by class, gender, and race-infused values, and historically contingent (Boatcă et al., 2018, p. 435).

Such a premise resonates with the researcher's accountability and the need for rigorous self-analysis (Braidotti 2017, p. 191), aligning with the self-reflexive turn in sociology (Amelina and Faist 2012, p. 1709). Braidotti urged: "You have to start from where you are at and acknowledge that you're a part of the problem, and then read the situation from there to become part of the solution" (Braidotti & Regan, 2017, pp. 191–192). The liberation of agency extends to a deep scrutiny of ingrained categories, critical questioning knowledge production (Amelina, 2022), and recognition of the limitations of research methods (Alonso Bejarano et al., 2019; Khosravi, 2010).

## Agency as an Analytical Tool

I finalize the discussion on understanding of agency by exploring potential methodological applications aligned with the book's objectives and scope. The concept of agency presents a kaleidoscopic view, provide and my approach. Firstly, agency is intricately linked to the realm of individuals, encompassing their relationships, experiences, and actions. It delves into the core aspects of individuals, including their self-concepts, identity, and subjectivity. Secondly, individual and collective agency is not merely a product of individual will; it is shaped, reproduced, and influenced by structural characteristics imbedded in entities such as societies, nation-states or institutions, and social-conditioning elements like social classes, gender, nationality, race, and ethnicity. Thirdly, a non-structural perspective on agency underscores the importance of understanding the connections, associations, and interactions between various agents. These agents are grounded in their social, physical, and technological environments, and their interactions are dynamic and multifaceted.

The first and second avenues create a tension between agency and structure, a dilemma that has been discussed and refined, particularly through the structure-agency link in the 1980s. The third avenue, which advocates for a non-structural approach, presents relatively novel perspective that diverges from the dominant theoretical frameworks in social science. This non-structural approach challenges the conventional understanding of social as structured into layers or hierarchies while addressing the divide between individual and collective agency. It not only considers interconnections within the social realm but also extends its scope to encompass broader contexts such as environmental and climate regimes (as seen in actor-network theory), the impact of corporality and technology (as in nomadism), and indigenous cosmologies (as in postcolonialism).

Given the book's focus on immigrant agency, the relevance of these avenues becomes evident. Immigrant agency involves mobile individuals navigating across borders and boundaries, dealing with challenges both individually and collectively. At the same time, various structural elements, such as legal, political, economic, cultural, symbolic, and linguistic distinctions, enable or constrain individuals and groups during

mobility. Immigration highlights individual interactions with multiple societies, while occupying multiple positionalities, transitioning between nation-states and their stratification systems. On the other hand, a non-hierarchical approach offers innovative insights and interpretations of migration experiences that may not be adequately captured by either macro- or micro-paradigms. This approach provides fresh perspectives on the postcolonial setting and the complexities of migration.

Thinking beyond the confines of structure perspective is challenging, as the mainstream logic of social theory building adheres to the scale perspective. Combining aspects of the agency-structure convergence with the insights from actor-network analysis helps address criticisms of methodological individualism and emphasizes the existence of complex systems of vertical and horizontal constraints and opportunities, as well as unexpected connections and relationships that emerge during migration.

In summary, the aforementioned avenues outline the discursive field around the concept of agency, providing a foundation for the analytical framework of this book. Agency as a concept does not pertain to any specific phenomenon but rather serves as a versatile analytical tool.

And as such it necessitates explicit and thorough explanations of the components that constitute this toolset. This is essential to avoid the risk of turning it into a mere rhetorical device or a black-box category that are referred to without fully considering its implications and contextual relevance, as cautioned by Nina Lykke (2011, p. 210). To avoid the risk of oversimplifying agency while maintaining the flexibility of theory construction, it is crucial to delineate the key categories that constitute the analytical framework of agency, particularly when illustrating agency in the context of migration and settlement. Through a nonlinear book composition and analysis of the empirical data collected by means of grounded theory, certain core categories have emerged: identity formations, language use, and social purposeful actions.

By considering these elements in the context of immigrant agency, a range of critical questions emerge. These questions prompt deeper investigation and provide a more comprehensive understanding of immigrant agency:

1. What precisely are identity formations and identity frameworks, and how do they evolve in the context of international mobility?
2. What is the significance of language use within migration, and how do individuals navigate multilingual transnational environments?
3. What types of actions are pertinent in the realm of international migration, and how do these actions influence individual and collective transitions across boundaries?
4. How do these actions relate to the micro- and macrosocial aspects of migration, and to what extent are they informed by non-structural networks?

I address these questions systematically using the example of FSU immigrants to explore identity formations, language use, and social purposeful actions through the lens of the migration experiences. In the forthcoming chapter, I focus specifically on agency in the migration theory.

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# 5

# Agency Through the Prism of Long-Term Migration

I contextualize agency as an analytical tool to study individual and collective experiences within migration. Migration theory building has experiences strong impact of scale (macro-meso-micro) perspective which is contemplated in terms of levels, mirroring the macro–micro divide, with theories gravitating toward either end of the spectrum. Moving beyond the traditional nation-state perspective and engaging simultaneously postcolonial, and nomadic viewpoints, I explore migratory experiences. While the structure-agency link remains crucial for me, I integrate the non-structural approach to comprehend migrant experiences, including navigating transnational communities, networks, and family lives across borders. I contemplate units of analysis in terms of both individuals and groups. Such shifting focus highlights the emigrant-immigrant dilemma within multilocal and multireferential contexts. This dilemma resurfaces in discussions on whether immigrants settle (adjust, integrate, assimilate, etc.) or continue navigating various transnational national, cultural, and symbolic spaces. The resolution of this dilemma depends on how experiences prior to and post-migration are reconciled and developed further. For this reason, I examine settlement-oriented migration theories such as neoassimilation, integration, and transnationalism. Besides, by

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employing Rosi Braidotti nomadic logic *I am rooted, but I flow*, I conceptualize immigrant agency from the simultaneity hypothesis, specifically applied to post-Soviet immigrants in subsequent analyses.

* * *

Within the exploration of agency, my focus shifts to long-term and settlement-oriented migration as the processual frame in this chapter. I[1] begin with describing a relevant analytical field within migration studies to investigate long-term and settlement-oriented mobility while differentiating between units and levels of analysis within the disciplinary lens. Then, based on a literature review, I explore immigrants' experiences, embedding and maintenance practices upon migration connected to a host country and to a country of origin. For this reason, I explore these practices from relevant theoretical directions: neoassimilation or integration, transnationalism, and a simultaneity hypothesis. Finally, I offer an analytical framework steaming from presented approaches to migration and agency, offering an outlook how this theoretical vocabulary is further implicated in the book.

## Outlining the Field: Levels and Units of Analysis

Operating within various levels of analysis, migration theory, as a component of social thought, grapples with the deterministic and voluntaristic dilemma. This dilemma emphasizes the intricate relationship between human agency and social structure in the realms of migration, mobility, circularity, and settlement. Examining migration theories through this lens, Oliver Bakewell has highlighted that they often sidestep the challenge posed by the problem of structure and agency. He noted that "the problem of structure and agency is a major stumbling block for the development of an integrated and coherent theory of migration" (Bakewell, 2010, p. 1692).

[1] I use the terms (international) migration and immigration interchangeably, both denoting the mobility of individuals or groups (including families) across international borders.

Mirroring the macro–micro divide discussed earlier, migration theories tend to gravitate toward either end of the spectrum. Some theories concentrate on the study of macro-factors influencing international human mobility, such as the new economics of migration, dual labor market theory, and world system theory (Massey et al., 1993, pp. 346–440), employing models like the push–pull model or historical-structural model of migration (King, 2012, pp. 13–18). The rationale behind these theories centers on macro-factors like the world power hierarchy, the influence of political and economic institutions, and conditions in labor and wage markets, as well as push and pull factors like poverty, inequalities, natural catastrophes, wealth, wage differences, and lifestyle prospects. Within these theoretical frameworks, individuals and groups find themselves embedded in settings beyond their control, compelled to act under the influence of prevailing circumstances.

According to Stephen Castles (2007, p. 354), institutions, class and stratification, social order and conflict belong to 'traditional' categories to approach international migration. Most recent approaches investigate international mobility in terms of socio-conditioning factors (gender, ethnicity, race), networks, social exclusion and inclusion, the author contrasted. These approaches resonate with epistemologies discussed earlier in the context of power relations. We can assume that such change to analyze migration illustrates among other things a conceptual shift to investigate immigrant agency and capabilities, their choices and free will, memory and belonging, voluntaristic actions as decision making, moving, or settling processes, while navigating within existing cross-border networks or communities (Faist & Ozveren, 2017; Isurin, 2019; Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2007; Näre, 2014). Reflecting on the new keywords in migration studies, Maribel Casas-Cortes and colleagues (2014, p. 83) pointed out that the recent developments "seek to overcome conceptions of migration as a derivative or dependent variable of 'objective' factors like wage differentials or 'structural' forces such as the destruction of subsistence economies through the expansion of capitalism."

Leveraging Stephen Castles' logical framework, I crafted Table 5.1, which, while not exhaustive, illustrates the dynamics of migration studies over time, capturing the evolution of conceptual vocabulary. This table

conveys the increasing nuances in the interdisciplinary nature of migration research and the evolving landscape in migration studies.

Moving beyond the traditional nation-state perspective, transnational, postcolonial, and nomadic viewpoints, coupled with non-essentialist and denaturalization approaches toward ethnicity, nationality, race, and their social-conditioning factors, shape the exploration of mobility and associated human experiences. While the structure-agency dilemma remains crucial in migration research, the non-structural approach, integrated into my argument, provides a sophisticated perspective on migrant experiences. This includes navigating transnational communities, networks, or family lives across borders. As I illustrate later in presenting my methodology and evaluating the empirical results, the conventional structural logic of macro, meso, and micro does not always offer comprehensive answers or adequately reflect the intricate connections and

**Table 5.1** Evolving trends in migration studies—Traditional and contemporary foci

| Traditional foci | Contemporary foci |
|---|---|
| Ethnicity | Gender, ethnicity, class, and their intersections |
| | Symbolic ethnicity |
| | Flexible ethnic boundary-making |
| Nationality | Citizenship—Denizenship |
| | Multicultural, dual citizenship |
| Class and stratification | Social, economic, cultural, symbolic capital |
| Institutions | Borders, mobility regimes; borderscapes; frontiers |
| Social order | Agency and structure |
| Local—strangers, us—them | Identities; multilingualism |
| Anomie, disorientation | (Patchwork) biographies |
| Hegemony/Authority | Networks; communities |
| Assimilation (melting pot) | Integration; social inclusion and exclusion |
| Social conflict | Migrant struggles |
| Nation-state | Transnational social fields, scalar perspective |
| Push- and pull factors | Globality and cosmopolitanism |
| Solidarity | Postcoloniality |
| Diaspora | Nomadism and post-humanism |

relations that transcend structural settings in the realm of transnational multilocal network-like entities.

Structural approach refers the scale-perspective (macro-, meso-, micro-) and highlights the power relations with potential power struggles and conflicts resurfacing in the context of human mobility (Casas-Cortes et al., 2014, p. 81). As a part of structural relations, power struggles emerge, on the one hand, through the categorization of individual and group experiences based on class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and their intersections. We observe an increasing number of scholarly attempts to engage structural and identarian intersectionality within migration studies (Anthias, 2012; Grosfoguel et al., 2014; Lutz & Amelina, 2017; Shinozaki, 2012). While an intersectional perspective is not the primary focus of my analysis, I employ intersectional reasoning to contemplate the identity formations of the research subjects, business and leisure activities, as well as when reflecting on researcher positionality. On the other hand, structural elements find expression through institutions as a state and international entities, their hierarchical relations and tensions, political and ideological regimes, and mobility politics (Brickner, 2013; Castles, 1995; Horvath et al., 2017; Rass & Wolff, 2018). From this perspective, it was particularly intriguing to observe how immigrants transitioned from post-Soviet, post-socialist, state-controlled spaces into the realms of market-driven, atomized democracies, and transnational social spaces (Chapter 3). At last, legislature and policies predefine which groups are compliant for 'legal' mobility and which are not, they regulate migration flows and immigrants' incorporation practices (Brubaker, 2016; Castles, 2017; Feldman, 2012; Goodman, 2015). Though there is no separate chapter dedicated to policies and legislature, yet relevant migration policies are reflected upon throughout the book.

In addition to recognizing structural features and their impact on migration development, the non-structural approach serves to emphasize migration effects, immigrants' experiences, and networks that emerge through horizontal connections. This argument diverges from the logic of the scale perspective. To exemplify: the category of a network is utilized to visualize and highlight horizontal, non-hierarchical connections and nodes within communal, national German-wide, transnational European, or Eurasian contexts of interactions among FSU immigrants.

Therefore, I investigate whether and how these horizontal connections and nodes influence the formation of transnational social spaces through individual and collective agency. By additionally incorporating the non-structural perspective, I do not assert the irrelevance of structural elements such as power relations, hierarchies, institutions, and policies. Instead, the non-structural perspective enriches the analysis, illustrating actions and connections that may not be as pronounced in the scale perspective. In this book, I examine the two domains of social actions: transnational entrepreneurship and active leisure activities.

## Agent as a Unit of Analysis

In the subsequent discussion, I focus on individuals as agents and group formations as units of analysis, examining them through migration and settlement lens. Commencing an agent as a unit of analysis, it is noteworthy to recall Helma Lutz's critique two decades ago. She noted the prevailing tendency to perceive migrants not as active subjects but as mere puppets of predetermined narratives, cast in a tragic (victim) role (Lutz, 2000, p. 39). While this deterministic perspective on immigrants endures, recent scholarly endeavors have increasingly focused on agency of immigrants (Brettell & Alstatt, 2007; Näre, 2014 to name a few).

Within the context of this book, this involves a concentration on FSU emigrants/immigrants as agents who engaged in cross-border mobility between the post-Soviet space and Germany in the 1990s and 2000s. Typically oriented toward settling, some studies also shed light on return migration (Kaiser & Schönhuth, 2015; Mattock, 2015; Suppes, 2015) and the impact of state policies shaping such return movements (Molodikova, 2017). The growing interest in multi-sited research has expanded scholarly attention to spaces that emerge between immigrants and related actors, particularly those connected to the places of origin (Sienkiewicz et al., 2015; Tauschwitz, 2006, 2015).

Simultaneously, scholarly exploration has turned toward relationships between immigrants, conceptualized as imaginary others, and locals (natives) within the logic of the receiving country (Anderson, 2013; Beck-Gernsheim, 2004; Kristeva, 2016 [1990]; Mau, 2007, with the last

two sources focusing exclusively on the German context). These attempts bridge the gap between the local population, immigrants, and stayers, emphasizing reciprocal relations between them and their relevance in the application of the transnational perspective, which has gained popularity in studying FSU migrants (Golova, 2018, 2020; Golova & Sablina, 2023; Sanders, 2015; Savoskul, 2015; Sommer & Gamper, 2017).

Migration as an act undertaken by an individual, may assume different connotations. The individual engagement in this mobility act, while crossing borders and trespassing boundaries, varies in meaning depending on the individual evaluation criteria and the starting point of the assessment. Many of my interviewees often reported that their decision to move to Germany was connected to familiar considerations or their desire to provide better life chances for their offspring, which emigration entailed for them at that point. Some linked migration with a process of gaining freedom across borders, as individuals sought to escape the constraints of the post-Soviet system or the struggles related to the hardship of transition. The joy of freedom could be attached to the anticipation of a new beginning in a novel place of settlement (Beck, 2006b, p. 331). However, the challenges of settling and struggles connected to the identity formations, involving individual and professional negotiations, underscore the complexities of living a life marked by difference (Baerwolf, 2006; Gitelman, 2016; Popkov, 2013).

Nevertheless, movers or immigrants perceive themselves as embodiments of the processes toward improvement: personal, existential, economic, and political advancement, as some studies illustrate (Darieva et al., 2012; Havlin, 2013). However, mobile individuals accumulate precolored and ambiguous demarcations, exposing themselves to struggles that unfold in realms such as legality and illegality, security and insecurity, citizenship and denizenship, privilege and disadvantage, cultural native and cultural other, and so on. These demarcations and struggles in the wake of migration and settling may, in some cases, result in what Beck-Gernsheim (2004, p. 23) referred to as 'a profound biographical recess, a break.' This is what I observed with the individuals I investigated. Following this profound biographical fracture, individuals have to confront and manage their transforming selves, including how they understand themselves, their identities, motives, emotions, aspirations,

capabilities and limitations to adjustment and/ or resistance, as well as memories and experiences (Ballenthien & Büching, 2009; Havlin, 2014; Lokschin, 2011; Rosenthal, 2005). How individuals manage and navigate their biographical developments in the process of migration is another frequent focus on other migrant cases that appears in connection with an individuum and migration (Behrensen & Westphal, 2012; Kutzner, 2009; Lutz, 2000; Nowicka, 2014). While not having individual biography at the heart of my analysis, I concentrate on selected biographical episodes of the research participants related to their migration and settlement experiences. From this standpoint, I consider migration, in the words of Beck-Gernsheim, as a biographical recess.

## Group Formations as Units of Analysis

Examining group formations as units of analysis provides another focal point for me to contemplate collectives and group entities in the process of moving and settling. Identities, motives, emotions, aspirations, and experiences also bear collective relevance (Falicov, 2005; Isurin, 2019; Svašek, 2010; Wimmer, 2008b). Group formations as units of analysis encompass various types of relations—family, co-migrants, community, friends, and colleagues—significant in different stages of mobility. Simultaneously, the quality, intensity, and dynamics of such relations (engaging, un/belonging, distancing, or marginalizing) can be differentiated and investigated. Ethnic boundary-making through culture, religion, linguistic practices, comparable migratory experiences, places of origin, and historical events are some of the categories that may serve as demarcation lines. These lines are either imposed or selected by an in-group to draw intergroup boundaries and preserve differences, such as affiliation or disassociation with different Russian-speaking communities. These categories belong to classificatory practices that either divide or unite. In this respect, Andreas Wimmer noted: "Still, the world is made up by clearly demarcated communities of identity and shared culture, albeit now including some deterritorialized communities stretching over several nation-states" (Wimmer, 2007, pp. 11–12). Immigrant groups may stand out from national majorities

in the context of cross-cultural encounters. With the boundary-making approach, Wimmer invites us to denaturalize these distinctions, explicitly elaborating on the numerous strategies of ethnic boundary-making (idem, p. 19).[2]

In research, immigrant groups receive differentiated attention depending on the quality and purpose of the connection. At the collective level, researchers investigate families and generations (Barbosa Neves & Casimiro, 2018; Bryceson, 2022; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rosenthal, 2005; Rosenthal et al., 2011), goal-oriented interest groups, for instance, migrant NGOs or cultural associations with various degrees of institutionalization (Havlin, 2019; Priemer et al., 2017; Pries, 2015), communities or imagined, ethnic, religious communities (Beck-Gernsheim, 2004; Castles, 2002; Falicov, 2007). Diaspora presents a larger and at times deterritorialized entity at the collective level of analysis based on migration, settling and belonging (Brubaker, 2005; Vertovec & Cohen, 1999).

Though some authors apply the term diaspora while investigating FSU immigrants (Brubaker, 2005; Isurin, 2011; Jašina-Schäfer & Aivazishvili-Gehne, 2024; Nikolko & Carment, 2017), I am reluctant to use it. According to Rogers Brubaker, "one can identify three core elements that remain widely understood to be constitutive of diaspora… The first is dispersion in space; the second, orientation to a "homeland"; and the third, boundary maintenance" (2017, p. 122). Considering these criteria, the term diaspora appears to be problematic to describe post-Soviet Russian-speaking immigrants8 for the following reasons. First, though being from the post-Soviet space, orientation to a homeland is not applicable, since these immigrants have different countries of reference that may or may not be considered homelands. Referring to one or another country as a homeland may be conflictual considering the developments in the post-Soviet space and Russian revisionist, neo-imperial wars for domination in the region, especially in Moldova in the 1990s, Georgia in the 2000s, and Ukraine since 2014 (Kassymbekova, 2024; Muradov,

[2] The detailed account of how I employ Wimmer's ethnic boundary-making approach concerning immigrants from the former Soviet Union I present earlier in Part I. At the same, I elaborated on how post-Soviet migration was essentialized through admission policies upon arrival to Germany.

2022). Second, the logic of boundary maintenance is eroded through lacking homeland orientation. Migrating from the post-Soviet space in the 1990s, speaking Russian, and sharing collective memories offer some grounds for community-building as a community of friends, interest groups, cultural associations, or migrant NGOs, but do not construct a diaspora. Also, religion (if relevant) does not emerge as a unifying factor but disperses FSU immigrants: in the case of active churchgoers, they belong to different religious denominations and attend catholic or protestant churches, Greek-Catholic, Ukrainian, Russian Orthodox churches, synagogues, or mosques.

For these reasons, the community perspective informs my approach to FSU immigrants. In contrast to the ethnicized admission policies, I investigate how post-Soviet immigrants interact and operate on the ground: That is as diverse culturally mixed multilingual communities. They resemble concentric circles of communication that gravitate around (extended) family relations, formal and informal businesses and activities, and common interests such as cultural associations or leisure clubs. In the course such interactions and relations, these communities develop unique identity formations and linguistic practices in Germany different from Russian-speaking communities in the USA and Israel (Al-Haj, 2002; Elias, 2011; Gitelman, 2016; Gorbin, 2014; Münz & Ohlinger, 2003).

Furthermore, family and an intergenerational aspect are relevant for my analysis in particularly in the context of repatriation migration as in the cases of ethnic German resettlers and partially in respect of Jewish refugees. These groups were eligible to move to Germany as extended families, not solely as nuclear families, as is often the case with group migration or subsequent family reunification. On the one hand, the family contributes to the complexity of the migration and settling processes (Ballenthien & Büching, 2009; Rosenthal, 2005; Rosenthal et al., 2011). On the other hand, extended family structures may serve as an additional resource (Gresch & Kristen, 2011) as I illustrate later on the example of family-driven businesses.

The diverse applications and relevance for engaging categories such as community and family as units of analysis create possibilities to elaborate on the collective agency of FSU immigrants. The empirical

research, driven by grounded theory, allowed me to outline categories that reflect immigrant agency as a continuum, ranging from individual and collective, through identity frameworks and formations (Part IV), the specificity of language use within and beyond the in-group (Part V), the roles of family, community, and networks in entrepreneurial activities (Part VI), and the building and maintenance of groups, communities, and networks through active leisure activities, such as semi-professional dancing (Part VII).

Next, I explore various theoretical approaches to conceptualize the incorporation processes of immigrants, namely neoassimilation or integration on the one hand, and transnationalism on the other. A simultaneity hypothesis offers an alternative to these dominant approaches, combining transnational and integrational perspectives while analyzing the complexity of immigrants' experiences during long-term migration and settlement.

## Neoassimilation and Integration in the Continuum of Incorporation Orientations

Neoassimilation and integration belong to the broad spectrum of incorporation theories that reflect societal needs driven by a state or the host community. They can also be seen as strategies of convergence and embedding for individuals or groups. With nuanced distinctions, neoassimilation and integration refer to the blurring of boundaries between the mainstream society and immigrant populations, signifying immigrants' blending into or adopting the host society. These processes transform immigrants into nationals, ease distinctions, and promote accommodation and facilitation of their incorporation into the host society. It is essential to distinguish between neoassimilation, which is conceptually related to integration, and the 'melting pot' assimilation of the past century (Favell, 2022, p. 33). The latter is characterized by intolerance of differences and an expectation of conformity, while the former acknowledges that some differences may persist, particularly within a short-term

framework, offering a more lenient version of neoassimilation, akin to integration.

In their book *Strangers No More* (2017), Richard D. Alba and Nancy Foner conducted an in-depth analysis of second-generation migration and settlement experiences in North America and Western Europe. This scholarly work represented a shift toward neoassimilation distinct from the traditional assimilationist approach. Neoassimilation theory, as defined by authors, focused on the cultural and social proximity of immigrants to the mainstream society and its impact on their life opportunities (idem, p. 7). The theory recognizes that immigrants often undergo various forms of assimilation concurrently, driven by the pursuit of better opportunities in their host country. Social mobility within mainstream institutions can also promote certain aspects of assimilation. Importantly, this theory does not presume a specific sequence of assimilation dimensions but highlights their mutual interaction. As assimilation processes, group distinctions between the majority and minority populations may lessen, resulting in fewer social boundaries. Notably, assimilation does not necessarily lead to cultural homogeneity, as the mainstream society can incorporate elements of immigrant-group cultures, allowing for a degree of cultural diversity (ibid). Despite these theoretical advancements, Glick Schiller criticized that the notion of neoassimilation perpetuates a fundamental social division in society based on certain distinctions: natives and foreigners, endogenous and outsiders, us and them (Glick Schiller, 2007, p. 57).

Conversely, the concept of integration, akin to a form of inclusive neoassimilation, thrives within the European context and has a great impact on the European and German scholarly, public, and political discourses (Anthias et al., 2013; Bade, 2007; Carmel et al., 2012; Esser, 2009; Hunger et al., 2008; Phillips, 2010). Integration primarily revolves around addressing practical issues related to social support, economic opportunities, and housing for newcomers (Favell, 2022, p. 58). In contrast to neoassimilation, the concept of integration does not inherently prioritize cultural and social transformations. It is perceived as being more considerate of immigrant families' autonomy in determining significant sociocultural aspects of their lives. This expanded perspective

recognizes the coexistence of various cultural practices, ethnicized identities, and institutions "within an acceptance of the dominant language and institutional fabric of the host nation-state" (Glick Schiller, 2007, pp. 57–58). The maintenance of ties with a country of origin and participation in transnational networks are tolerated if they do not hinder the integration process. However, Favell (2019, p. 4) underscored the normativity of integration, which at times may not represent an autonomous facet of the scientific discourse but rather 'a form of thinking-for-the-state.'

Wimmer (2008a, p. 1039) explored (neo)assimilation and re-classification as "the main strategies to 'shift sides' and escape the minority stigma" within the context of flexible ethnic boundary-making approach. In contrast with a re-classification strategy, assimilation is strongly associated with individual or group behaviors aimed at crossing boundaries between minority and majority. This transition is one of the ways for groups that were previously considered foreign or immigrant minorities to progress into becoming full-fledged members of a nation (Wimmer, 2007, p. 20). Proficiency in the mainstream language is a key requirement for crossing these boundaries, although Wimmer highlighted notable regional differences in the expectations for speaking national languages, as he noted "… while speaking with thick accents and bad grammar is acceptable for many jobs in the United States, as long as the language spoken is meant to be English, is it much less so in France" (idem, p. 22).

Jan Nederveen Pieterse's interpretation of the term assimilation provided further insight into the evolving nature of the neoassimilation debate. In his influential work, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (2003), the author viewed assimilation though a hybridity lens. He presented a constructed continuum of hybridities, ranging from assimilationist hybridity that aligns with the mainstream, adopts conventional norms, and mimics hegemony, to destabilizing hybridity that blurs the established norms, challenges the current order, and subverts the center. The scholar categorized hybridities based on their components in the mélange, including assimilationist hybridity where the center prevails and passive / active hybridity that disrupts the norm and its

categories (idem, pp. 73–74). Pieterse's assumption of multiple incorporation practices from blending in (assimilating) to destabilizing hybridity is important because it opens a possibility for a variety of incorporation orientations.

Neoassimilation or integration, the ethnic boundary-making approach involving re-classification, and the concept of mélange as a continuum of hybridities represent various ways to understand contemporary forms of neoassimilation. While this selection outlines several possibilities, it acknowledges the existence of numerous other interpretations beyond the scope of this book. For the purposes of the book, it is relevant to consider practices of neoassimilation or integration that are tolerant to difference and diversity. Later, I will elaborate in detail about the further implications of such an approach during the theoretical background work. Meanwhile, in the following section I examine transnationalism, often seen as a contrasting perspective on immigrant incorporation.

## Navigating the Analytical Landscape of Transnational Perspectives

Nina Glick Schiller and colleagues described transnationalism as a process "by which immigrants build social fields that link their country of origin and their country of settlement" (1992, pp. 3–4). Moreover, this publication takes a critical stance by calling accountable structural settings such as Gramscian hegemony of a nation-state or Wallerstein's world-system. These structural settings 'monopolize power and foster ideologies of identity' (idem, p. 15) as, for instance, strict admission rules along ethnic lines, favoring ethnic groupism of migrants. Yet, as the authors pointed out "identity, fields of action, ideology, or even legal rights of citizenship of transnational migrants are not confined within the boundaries of any one single polity" (ibid).

Originating as a process, the term transnationalism has evolved to encompass a spectrum of interpretations and meanings. Alejandro Portes and colleagues recognized multitude of transnationalism types, contingent upon the level of institutionalization (Portes et al., 1999, p. 222), thereby allowing a multitude of interpretations. Capturing the essence

of this phenomenon has become increasingly challenging, as it is viewed both as a process that transcends nation-states and as practice that embraces them. While Glick Schiller and colleagues (1992, p. 46) initially defined transnationalism as a process involving two units of analysis—international migrants and at least two nation-states—the analytical scope for investigating transnationalism has become remarkably intricate due to the expanding academic debate (Beichelt & Worschech, 2017; Faist, 2000; Faist et al., 2013; Glick Schiller, 2007; Mau, 2007).

Within the transnational debate, transnational social spaces, urban scalar perspective, and transnational methodology hold particular relevance for my research. Since the exploration of ethnic, multilingual, multicultural, and spatial (urban) categories is discussed in the chapter dedicated the methodological preliminaries, I focus at this point on social spaces informed by transnational practices and experiences. Transnational social spaces denote "triadic relationships between groups and institutions in the host state, the sending state … and the minority group," as exemplified in the case of ethnic minorities, immigrants, or refugees (Faist, 1998, p. 217). These spaces emphasize the transnational links and ties actively or passively maintained by immigrants with different degree of engagement through relationships such as family connections, networks, and organizations (idem, pp. 216–217).

Normalization through transnational social spaces may have several effects on how immigrants see themselves or their families, which strategies they apply and how they measure their success and failures resulting from migration. Thus, Elisabeth Stone and colleagues (2005, p. 382) reported an increase in transnational motives in the family stories. They connected this to the growing tolerance to cultural pluralism that newest immigrants have encountered in the USA. In turn, Magdalena Nowicka offered a reevaluation of migrants' experiences with labor market integration. Transnational orientations, described as "social incorporation in multiple rather than single social spaces," along with multiple organized memberships, can be viewed as biographical resources (Nowicka, 2014, p. 74). This perspective sheds new light on immigrants' advantages and disadvantages in the labor market, particularly in situations where deskilling is predetermined (Vouyioukas & Liapi, 2013).

If transnational social spaces frame certain experiences, relations and practices and make them visible, transnational methodology enables empirical research procedures while undermining methodological nationalism (Glick Schiller, 2007, p. 43). In Chapter 6, I elaborate in detail on how I employ transnational methodology during my empirical research while operationalizing further relevant categories such as urban scalar perspective, ethnicity, and multilingualism that help me to construct the immigrant agency theory. Engaging the concept of transnational social spaces helps me, on the one hand, to describe mundane social spaces benefiting from transnational engagements and to illustrate the outreach of immigrant activities, on the other. These observations pose the following question: What if transnationalism and integration or neoassimilationism are neither opposing nor binary ways to explain incorporation strategies, but compatible experiences of immigrants? A simultaneity hypothesis enables a comprehensive answer to this question.

## Bridging Transnationalism and Neoassimilationism—Simultaneity Hypothesis

The simultaneity hypothesis represents scholarly attempts to explore the compatibility of transnationalism and neoassimilationism/integration (Beck-Gernsheim, 2004; Faist, 2000; Falicov, 2005). In the seminal article *Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society*, Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller argued that assimilation and transnational practices are 'neither incompatible nor binary opposites' (2004, p. 1002). The authors urged to surpass national boundaries of social theory building and methodology to underpin processes, relations, connections, and activities that take place in the transnational social field: "Migrant incorporation into a new land and transnational connections to a homeland or to dispersed networks of family, compatriots, or persons who share a religious or ethnic identity can occur at the same time and reinforce one another" (idem, p. 1003).

The development of the simultaneity hypothesis is influenced not only by the increasing cultural pluralism of receiving societies, exposing them to greater diversity. The simultaneity perspective can also reinterpret the outcomes of historical migration research, shedding new light on the incorporation of immigrants a century ago, as recent findings of Félix Krawatzek and Gwendolyn Sasse (2018) have demonstrated. While analyzing 150 years of private migrant correspondence between 1830 and 1970, the authors pointed out that with the lacking restrictive host state policies German-speaking immigrants in the USA could simultaneously feel German and be American. These findings question a notion about offensive, melting pot assimilation in the USA in the past. Academically "underexplored dimensions of continuity and change in both the context [sending and receiving countries] and practices of transnationalism" led to an assumption of one-way assimilation in the country of destination (idem, p. 162).

A tendency to primarily focus on adaptation practices in a destination country, coupled with reluctance to investigate ties and connections to a country of origin, illustrates the limitations of migration research within the historical framework constrained by interpretation boundaries. Lacking or biased knowledge can lead to misinterpretation or one-sided evaluation of results as Zygmunt Bauman (2011) pointed out earlier while drawing a parallel between the approach to human mobility a century ago and how it informed analysis of wasps' mobility: since immigrants as newcomers face obstacles upon migration in a new country, by the same token it was assumed that wasps met obstacles while moving from one nest to another. Until the opposite was proved on the account of wasps who unproblematically mingle with wasps from another nest. Bauman concluded: "… the selfsame beliefs that not so long ago were imagined to be reflections of the 'state of nature', have been revealed now, retrospectively, to have been but projections upon the insects of the scholars' own human, all-too-human, preoccupations and practices" (idem, p. 427). Since most migration research was conducted predominantly in receiving countries, approaches to investigate immigrant experiences were rooted in a nation-state frame (i.e., methodological nationalism).

Aligned with the simultaneity hypothesis, I unpack potential arrangements to consider the compatibility of neoassimilationism and transnationalism as a continuum of multiple practices characterizing primarily intergroup relations and related social actions, as I illustrate in Fig. 5.1. The composition of this figure is informed by theoretical frameworks on intergroup relations and embedding practices upon migration. From the viewpoint of immigrants' experiences, this figure demonstrates, on the one hand, the complexity and variety of incorporation practices with different orientations and interpretative frames; on the other hand, it may serve as a reconciling step to bring a debate on assimilation, integration, transnationalism that applies to a wide range of players (immigrants-natives, institutions-policies). The possibility of negative intergroup effects and outcomes of hindered or failed convergence is also anticipated and depicted on the left and in the lower part of Fig. 5.1. The first factor on the x-axis illustrates worldviews ranging from ethnocentrism as the exceptionalist attitudes of one group (i.e., a nation, ethnicity, or race) to cosmopolitanism as the acceptance and tolerance, a cosmopolitan vision (Beck, 2006a).

Ethnocentrism, in this context, is understood as one's own cultural assumptions or biases used to measure a society or a group as superior or inferior (Scott & Marshall, 2014, p. 222). The second factor on the y-axis stands for social actions reinforcing either group's exclusion or inclusion (Casas-Cortes et al., 2014, p. 79). Based on these factors, there is a distribution of incorporation practices that could be defined as neoassimilationist, integration-oriented, or transnational actions. A gray circle emphasizes this area in the upper half of the graphic. This circle reflects on practices and experiences I encountered during my fieldwork with Russian-speaking immigrants and naturalized citizens in Germany. The fact of encountering individuals and group formations ranging between neoassimilation and transnationalism also illustrates a certain bias of my fieldwork accessibility and availability of those who were willing to contribute to my research. Another important aspect of this illustration is a clear outline that incorporation practices are not rigidly defined and may vary based on individual and collective actions, which can demonstrate either voluntary choices or responses to contextual demands like political regimes, policies, and economic settings.

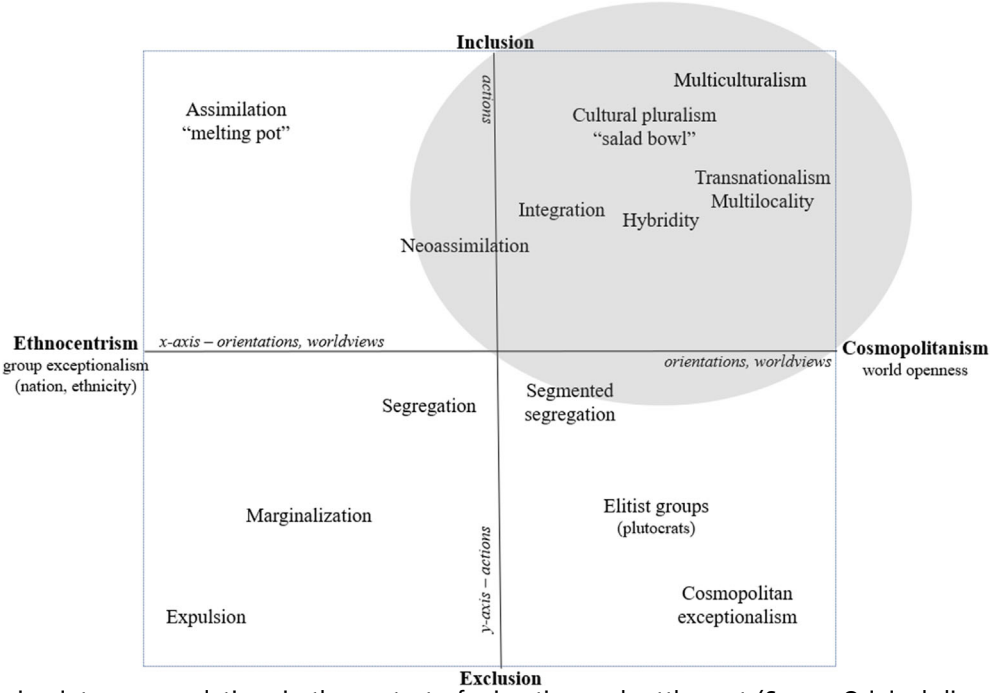



**Fig. 5.1** Exploring intergroup relations in the context of migration and settlement (*Source* Original diagram)

A simultaneity hypothesis poses another question: How does a combination of transnational and assimilationist lens enrich our explanations of immigrants' practices and their daily routines? Celia Jaes Falicov, who worked extensively with Latino immigrants and their families in therapy in the US-American context, reported her observations (2005, p. 400). Falicov's academic interest in the compatibility of transnational and assimilative practices is deeply rooted in the empiricism of therapies with immigrant families, encompassing both parents and children, those who leave and those who stay, focusing on family dynamics, gender issues, illnesses caused by immigration, and mental and social outcomes (Falicov, 2000 [1998], 2007, 2010). Drawing from her empirical observations, the author concluded that rapid assimilation and the rejection of one's cultural heritage and migrant family story may have psychological and social repercussions for immigrants. These observations apply to both parents and their children, as flexible adherence to one's traditional culture appears to provide protection from depression in immigrant groups (Falicov, 2003, p. 384). Metaphorically, Falicov likened European immigrants who arrived in the US a hundred years ago, living with 'the broken heart,' to current European immigrants who live 'with two hearts' (ibid). Life with two hearts, or adhering to a simultaneity hypothesis, may offer a way to capture multiple belongings. A combination of 'transnational and assimilative practices inside and outside' of immigrants' homes (Falicov, 2005, p. 400) seems to become widespread, accepted by receiving societies and practiced by immigrants themselves, as I will illustrate through my findings and analysis later.

In conclusion, the demonstrated compatibility of assimilationism and transnationalism allows to draw on Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim's insightful rhetorical approach (1999, 2007). By exploring the complexities of social constructions and the multiplicity of identities among both Germans and immigrants, the author highlights the paradox inherent in rigid category preservation and the pursuit of clear definitions. As she provocatively notes, the world appears chaotic, challenging established norms and prompting unconventional categorizations such as "native foreigners" and "foreign Germans" (Beck-Gernsheim, 1999, p. 174), exposing the limitations of nation-state logic. In embracing a 'both…and' rather than an 'either…or' reasoning, Beck-Gernsheim

encouraged to navigate the intricate interplay between transnational and assimilationist dynamics, recognizing the nuanced and context-dependent nature of individual and collective behavior. This echoes her broader methodological stance that lifelong questions of nationality demand responses beyond simplistic dichotomies, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of rights, obligations, and entitlements in various institutional contexts.

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## Part II Summary

I opened this part with Braidotti's expression *I am rooted, but I flow*, attempting to outline the conceptual references of this book. 'I am' stands for an individual, I-related point of reference, expression and acting. On this account, Antony Giddens suggested: "The 'I' is an essential feature of the reflexive monitoring of action" (1984, p. 51). This monitoring of actions I undertake later from the individual and collective standpoints. At first sight, the reference to the specific actions as 'to be rooted' and 'to flow' seems to contradict each other: the passive rootedness and the active mobility. Yet, Braidotti combined them with making an act of flowing as moving, evolving, transforming, settling, maintaining and a static being, belonging compatible. Mobility as a flow does not contradict settling or maintaining roots. Paraphrasing the selected expression: An individuum can have roots and backgrounds yet be mobile and/or multilocal. Borders and boundaries can be transgressed yet roots and connections are actively preserved or maintained. The Braidottian expression speaks of agency. It speaks of individual agency of mobile people. Moreover, this formula shows us the possibility to reconcile being rooted, moving, and settling. An emigrant-immigrant agency dilemma emerges, that is living and navigating in the multilocal and multireferential contexts, in the transnational social spaces. Immigrant agency brings to the fore an actor-driven perspective. Thus, immigrants are actors who trespass, navigate, adjust, combine, cope, settle, and resettle. The emigrant-immigrant dilemma resurfaces out of the discussion of whether immigrants settle (adjust, integrate, assimilate, etc.) or keep on navigating within. The solution to this dilemma depends on how the experiences prior and post-migration are reconciled and developed further.

In Part II, I explored the possibilities and limitations of applying the category of agency in the broader realm of social thought and, specifically, within the field of migration studies. That means discovering immigrant agency utilizing the theoretical, methodological, and empirical toolkit. This toolkit allowed me to examine the advantages and restrictions of the actor-driven approach to immigration while acknowledging hierarchical (structure) and non-hierarchical settings of the respective environments such as sending and hosting societies, networks, and

transnational social spaces. In the upcoming Part III, I will reflect on the open multimethod research design that relies on grounded theory, transnational methodology, and an interpretative approach. Additionally, I will provide methodological considerations for conducting research with the studied group.

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# Part III

## Navigating Immigrant Agency—A Research Design




# 6

# Crafting the Methodological Framework

In this chapter, I approach methodology as a living entity, embracing changes that occur in the research process relating to methods, subjects of study, or the researcher. Grounded theory and transnational methodology, together with the interpretative approach, frame the methodological layout of my study. I provide a detailed account of how each methodological framework informed my research process, fieldwork, data collection, and analysis. My choices have shaped the outcomes and composition of the immigrant agency theory. Several research subprojects have contributed to the composition of this theory, including identity formations, language use, and social actions, exemplified through entrepreneurial and leisure activities. These three fundamental pillars of immigrant agency are progressively elucidated in subsequent sections.

First, with the transnational methodology I explore principles underpinning the transnational and simultaneity approach, allowing me to de-essentialize ethnicity and language, apply urban scalar and transnational social spaces perspectives. Second, I elaborate about the grounded theory relevance for my open research design and flexible empirical approach. Third, the interpretative perspective provides insights into how the analysis of collected data framed the findings and outcomes.

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## Transnational Methodology

Transnationalism elaborates on a complex system of interactions within and beyond the nation-state frame, on different (individual, organizational, institutional, and urban) levels of interaction. Transnational methodology shaped my approach toward ethnicized categories (Amelina & Faist, 2012; Wimmer, 2007), multilingual and multicultural contexts (Schittenhelm, 2017), transnational social spaces (Faist, 2000b), and urban scalar perspective (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009). These categories build conceptual scaffolding of my investigation and rely on research based on the following methodological premises.

When dealing with ethnicized categories, Anna Amelina and Thomas Faist (2012, p. 1710) emphasized a need to move beyond ethnic essentialism and denaturalize ethnicity. To achieve this, I employ two strategies. First, I utilize a flexible ethnic boundary-making approach that enables me to focus on culturally diverse communities and networks, as is the case with Russian-speaking FSU immigrants in Germany. Yet, the Russian language can be seen as boundary-making (Wimmer, 2008, p. 1028). Russian, despite its associations with imperial and colonial power, is appropriated and adopted by immigrant communities of diverse cultural backgrounds in Germany, Israel, and the USA. Furthermore, while studying individual and collective practices, Andreas Wimmer cautioned against assuming 'communitarian closure, cultural difference, and strong identities' (2007, p. 30). These aspects are highly situational and contextual, as exemplified in the discussion of language use depending on intimate, familiar, public, and professional contexts.

Second, the transnational methodology accommodates cultural mashups, hybrid, mélange, or mixed categories. These categories emerge from post-Soviet, postnational, and multicultural practices, shaped by cross-cultural unions and diverse local, national, and transnational networks (Perianova, 2019, pp. 50–66; Pieterse, 2003, pp. 71–74). These hybrid entities tend to disappear when rigid ethnic categories are applied, as seen in the studies on ethnic German resettlers or Jewish refugees in Germany. Saskia Sassen's (2013, p. 80) methodological suggestion is relevant here: while studying a specific category, such as a particular ethnic group, we must ask ourselves what lies behind it and what we

might be overlooking. Working with fixed ethnic categories in multicultural contexts presents a challenge, as the next methodological principle illustrates.

The principle of language denaturalization relates to daily multilingual practices. Karin Schittenhelm emphasized the importance of not taking multilingual practices for granted and called for a mindful examination of the intertwining of language and knowledge transfer that is not coincidental, and it necessitates careful and reflective consideration (2017, p. 102). This principle applies not only during the research process but also in the reflection on the multilingual practices of both researched subjects and researchers (Havlin, 2022). We can ask how different languages are utilized for the purposes of research design. When studying transnational experiences and conducting migration research, different languages come into play at all stages of the research process, from fieldwork preparations and data collection to subsequent data analysis, presentation, and dissemination of findings.

In the context of the current research, various linguistic modalities were employed, including standard German, Russian, and English, occasionally Ukrainian, and different variations of translanguaging, primarily German Russian. These language choices were determined by the researcher's language proficiency, which, in turn, influenced the language choices of interviewees. Proficiency of these languages facilitated access to specific contexts during the ethnographic study or the selection of media sources for further empirical investigations. Working in multilingual contexts requires an understanding of cultural nuances and a thoughtful approach to different linguistic and cultural translation techniques, focusing on the appropriation of meaning rather than attempting to Germanize the text (Bassnett-McGuire, 2011, p. 6). Another methodological technique, especially in situations of mixed language use, involves preserving 'a sporadic language change' in transcription and later in interpretation (Schittenhelm, 2017, p. 109). Next chapter, I dedicate one of the sections to reflecting on conducting research in multilingual settings. Multilingual elements are inherent features that shape transnational social spaces, constituting the next principle of transnational methodology.

The principle of transnational social spaces highlights an outreach of the current study across borders and cultural dimensions, though I conducted the interviews and ethnographic study in two mid-sized cities of West Germany. The fieldwork and data analysis raised transnational aspects that I was able to address while contemplating transnational social spaces and extending my methodological tools (e.g., while using digital ethnography). This additional method extended the outreach of my primary focus.

Various transnational layers construct an understanding of social spaces. On the one hand, transnational spaces can be concentrated within a single geographic space. Some examples are a cross-cultural marriage or partnership, an immigrant community, or a diaspora. Part VII reflects on the cultural pluralism of Scheherazade, an immigrant dancing group, which is an excellent example of the transnational social space within one geographic space. Further, transnational social spaces concentrated in one location find their expression in mélange identity formations (Part IV), multilingual practices (Part V), cultural reproduction and consumption (festivals, church services, ethnic shops), technology for sustaining cross-border relationships or watching TV from a country of origin, etc. (Stone et al., 2005). On the other hand, there are those transnational spaces that extend over more than one geographic unit as a region, a state, a continent, or the globe in general (Barglowski et al., 2014, p. 215). This type of transnational space is reflected in numerous examples of the present study. The best illustration is the transnational networks of the Mix Markt supermarket chain spreading across the Eurasian continent (Part VI). Such transnational entrepreneurial network encompasses transnational social spaces on various levels, serving as transnational kinship groups, collaborative partners, and communities (Faist, 2000a, p. 195). Thus, I understand transnational social spaces as multidimensional spaces, stretched across borders, kinship groups, and communities; besides, they can be layered in one place piling the combination of various cultures and their hybridity, multilingual practices, interpersonal interactions, and relations. Apart from immigrant' transnational outreach, their daily experiences take place to spatial and physical spaces of various urban units.

The principle of urban scalar perspective or transnational urbanism (Glick Schiller, 2007, p. 55) composes another principle from the transnational methodology relevant to my research design. This principle stands for a sociospatial feature of transnational social spaces but it also stands for horizontal connections of urban entities across national borders through the ties and connections that emerged within transnational social spaces. I focus on experiences and practices of immigrants who reside in the two mid-sized German cities or follow immigrant retail businesses that emerged from these types of cities in Germany and were exported in the EU-wide context. My attempt to focus on these urban units was informed by Glick Schiller's critique: "Only occasionally do researchers working in cities of smaller scale examine variations in local opportunity structures as they affect migration incorporation" (2007, p. 56). The author explains this in terms of 'globe spanning hierarchies of economic and political power' where global cities, metropoles, and large cities are winners in the fight for capital, talent, and brain, leaving behind in the shadow other urban units (idem, 2007, p. 60). To the best of my knowledge, there is no systematic study, analyzing experience and practices of FSU immigrants in cities of smaller scale (with approximately 100,000 inhabitants or less). Such mid-sized cities could be classified in Jennifer Robinson's category of ordinary cities (2006), invisible or less visible entities of urban life. Lacking attention to these types of cities in scientific analysis leads, among other things, to neglecting experiences and practices made or lived in these urban units. At least, when we speak about the population in the focus, FSU immigrants populate these types of cities extensively. A thorough examination of two specific immigrant shops in selected cities led to a detailed analysis of the respective supermarket chain and its distribution across Germany. This chain primarily operates in the specified category of cities as I will illustrate later in Part VI. Furthermore, tracking the entrepreneurial activities of Mix Markt stores reveals a transnational business network extending from ordinary German cities across the EU and the Eurasian continent.

Denaturalization of ethnicity, plurality of linguistic use, transnational social spaces and transnational urbanism are the cornerstone principles of how I apply transnational methodology. These principles of transnational methodology define how such categories as ethnicities,

identities, multiple languages, and entrepreneurial and leisure activities are framed. In general, such methodological implications help me to oppose methodological nationalism grounded in essentialism and territoriality, assuming the congruent relation among society, nation-state, and territory (Faist et al., 2014, p. 27). In turn, the simultaneity hypothesis enriched the approach toward understanding of immigrants' experiences classified as integration in the host society, yet without devaluing or neglecting transnational elements. Such an assumption stems from the open research design guided by the grounded theory methodology, the next element of my methodological setup.

## Grounded Theory

As a form of social science hermeneutics, grounded theory methodology (GT) helps to construct a data-generated and reality-based theory (Hunger & Müller, 2016, p. 260). Such a theory relies on theoretical sampling, which Barney G. Glaser and Anselm Strauss understood as "the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (2006 [1967], p. 45). When accumulating additional data fails to reveal novel insights into the characteristics of emergent theoretical categories or researched subjects (Charmaz, 2010, p. 167), the ground theorist attains theoretical saturation. The latter implies that, with the current data, a researcher can define the 'properties of the category' (Glaser & Strauss, 2006 [1967], p. 61), and while additional data adds value, it is not necessarily required to bolster the researcher's empirical confidence in the saturation of a category (ibid.).

Utilizing the theoretical sampling, I develop and control the emergence of the immigrant agency theory, whereas theoretical saturation indicates elements of the studied phenomenon and its properties. Constituting the empirically grounded immigrant agency theory, I relied on two developments in GT: on the one hand, these are the research principles deriving from the groundbreaking work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm Strauss (2006 [1967]) laying an

early base for the grounded theory; on the other hand, the elaborations of Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (1990) impacted the subsequent developments in the grounded theory as, for instance, coding procedures or data quality management (Mey & Mruck, 2011, p. 29). To illustrate my GT applications, I outline the emerging phenomena identified during my fieldwork, describe the rules governing the comparison and verification of empirical data, and explain the arrangement of the coding procedures.

## Emerging Phenomena

Grounded theory methodology enables a researcher to capture emerging phenomena or those aspects, which are either novel or underrepresented in research. Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany as well as post-Soviet migration are, without doubt, a well-studied phenomenon, as I illustrated in Part I. In the last three decades, post-Soviet migration has received profound attention within German academic scholarship, in the academic settings of the post-Soviet space (though unevenly distributed) as well as within the comparative international scholarship. Nevertheless, the topic is far from being fully exhausted; still certain aspects are either not present or not fully covered with the available approaches and studies. Four aspects make a point:

(1) The ambiguity of identity formations shaping self-identification and identity frameworks to identify co-immigrants. The analysis of contextual applications of russaki [руссаки], a common description of Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany, allows to contemplate this ambiguity (Part IV). To the best of my knowledge, russaki as an identity formation is underexplored in academic literature.
(2) Multilingual and translanguaging practices involving German and Russian (Part V). These practices exemplify the contextuality of language use, highlight language hierarchies (standard vs vernacular, majority vs minority languages), and comprehend language use as languaging. The latter stresses a processual feature of language that emerges in the moment of communication.

(3) Emergence of the Mix Markt transnational supermarket chain generated from the family-based entrepreneurial activities of the Russian-speaking immigrants (Part VI). This phenomenon also outlines the establishment of and demand for the East European culinary mashup concept in Germany and the EU context (Part VI).
(4) Everyday cultural pluralism and auto-exoticism exemplify leisure time activities and derive from the example of Scheherazade, an immigrant dancing association (Part VII). Such cultural association belongs to a wide range of creative and recreational leisure activities that characterize research subjects.

These emerging phenomena brought to the fore aspects of immigrant agency and outlined its diverse facets (identity formations, multilingual practices, and purposeful actions) that I strive to explore. Such a discovery of the elements of immigrant agency resulted from theoretical sampling and data analysis, which was informed by background literature analysis. An agency-based approach in the context of migration allowed me to investigate immigrant ways of representing and expressing themselves through identity formations and language use as well as to capture their actions, experiences, and practices in the process of immigration and long-term settlement.

Discovering these aspects meant, first of all, to rely on an open-method design and acceptance of changeability, that is 'to build change, through process, in the method' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 419). Besides, it implies avoiding deterministic as well as nondeterministic paths to capture an interplay of agency and structural elements. A rejection of determinism as well as nondeterminism redirects us to a structure-agency link discussed earlier. Structural settings contain, constrain, and enable individual agency (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 419). It is a researcher's responsibility to demonstrate specific linkages between agency and conditions (nation-states, sending and receiving societies, policies, labor markets) (idem, p. 423). As, for instance, in Chapter 3 I illustrated the societal change during the 1990s and contemplated its impact on human agency. Apart from establishing a structure-agency link, a researcher carries a responsibility to look beyond structural settings and a structural conditioning matrix. Looking beyond implies an analysis of ties

and connections that emerge despite such matrix or its constraints. In doing so, the departure from macro-, meso-, and micro-layers opens new possibilities for analysis and interpretation such as, for instance, translanguaging to overcome the dominance of standard languages (Part V) or non-hierarchical networks of transnational business ties (Part VII).

## Coding Procedures

Since GT processes data through coding, it is relevant to reflect on coding procedures and how I employed them. Through coding a researcher gains access to the thematical variety of data, preselects relevant pieces and analyzes in detail the selection (Strübing, 2019, p. 535). I processed the empirical data with open, axial, and selective coding, which served different purposes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, pp. 423–424). In what follows I exemplify how the coding procedures structured the interview data. The theme language use from the empirical data illustrates my point.

First, I prepared the subset of data, that is twenty transcribed interviews.[1] According to Gabriele Rosenthal, the transcription was understood as 'word for word and without any omissions' (2018, p. 83); at the same time I kept a record of understandable speech and signals, as well as preserved pauses, emphases, mistakes, or language interference. I avoided punctuation marks as required in the written text, instead indicated pauses.

After the transcription of audio data, I subjected the transcripts to an open coding, the first step of the coding procedures. Open coding allows for 'identifying important words, or groups of words, in the data and then labelling them accordingly' (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 10). I facilitated open coding by means of Atlas.ti that helped me to process an extensive among of text. Along with the coding process I could embed custom-made memos that I integrated later into my further analysis by establishing thematic, methodological, or interpretative connections between the interviews. Open coding breaks through a researcher's

[1] Table A.1: The Interviewees' Profiles in Appendix presents all interviews, which were transcribed.

subjectivity by constant questioning and comparing between emerging concepts and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 423). For instance, how might various interview partners articulate their migration experiences? In what manner would they express their experiences? How would they depict the challenges they face, and what solutions might they propose? At this stage, the codes were generated at first as literal entities (i.e., language acquisition and mixing languages). Subsequently, I united thematically related codes into abstract categories (e.g., linguistic competencies, language of communication).

Next axial coding enabled me to search for conditioning factors of the established codes and categories by open coding. Once I recorded German-Russian translanguaging and linguistic interference, the next step required comprehending in which cases and instances the interviewees were inclining to blend languages: context-based, topic-related, mimicking someone else, or expressing authoritative manners. Additional pertinent questions surfaced: To what extent did language blending occur? Which terms best capture these experiences: language borrowing, language interference, or translanguaging? Using the axial coding, I established conceptual linkages that led in turn toward the conceptual density in the process of theory building (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 423). Simultaneously, systemizing memos helped me to capture the overarching themes among the interviews, the processual or methodological challenges, to unravel open questions and address them.

Finally, I applied selective coding in the latest phase of the data assessment and reassessment, after I adjusted and transformed the codes, categories, and concepts increasing their degree of plausibility, reliability, and checkability. While coding twenty interviews one after another, the coding book required constant refinement along the way. In doing so, codes and categories gained greater precision and expressiveness to cover all analyzed interviews. The selective coding helped to unify the refined codes, meta-codes, and categories around a central concept: language use and language as an expressive element of immigrant agency.

These coding procedures allowed me to establish the measurable components of immigrant agency: language use and identity formations, labor- and leisure-oriented actions. Not only these components

have their relevance in the process of immigration, but their combination also offers a comprehensive picture to reflect on immigrant agency. Besides conceptualizing agency, the differentiation between individual and collective agency emerges. The former carried person-related features, and I-oriented expressions; the latter covered group-related aspects (family, mating, communities, networks). Yet I struggled to draw a line between the individual and the collective, another fundamental problem in social science. Therefore, I assessed individual and collective agency as a continuum. Further reflections on coding procedures I included in the subsequent section elaborating on data and text types, and subsequent interpretation.

The GT advantage consists in ability to capture emerging phenomena, develop an agency-based approach to immigrant experiences with consideration of structural and non-structural elements, to adjust the methodological toolkit in the process of research. The challenges of the GT methodology entail an acceptance of uncertainty in an open-method design; a need to process the extensive amount of empirical textual, visual, and statistical data to generate the empirically grounded conceptual frame and to build a comprehensive data-driven theory. On the one hand, GT did not provide explanatory frames for the analysis but allowed me to discover them in the research process. In turn, transnational methodology provided a comprehensive approach to an understanding of mélange identities, ethnicity, multilingual and multicultural practices, transnational social spaces, actions, or urban scalar perspective. On the other hand, GT opened multiple possibilities for interpretative analysis accompanying the research conduct.

## Interpretative Approach

Later developments in GT move it closer to interpretative social science (McGuire, 1981, pp. 180–181). My interpretative approach relied on the premises of hermeneutics as a study of understanding through interpretation (Gadamer, 2000a; Ricœur, 1976). Its epistemology derives through an interplay between language(s), individuals, and reflexivity

(Gadamer, 2000a, p. 7). Besides I drew inspiration from constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). The latter "places priority on the studied phenomenon and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships" (idem, p. 239). According to Kathy Charmaz, 'guiding interpretive theoretical practice' rather than 'providing a blueprint for theoretical products' (idem, p. 233) is one of the important developments in GT since 'the resulting theory is an interpretation' (idem, p. 239). The theory building that I am striving for with my work is the interpretative immigrant agency theory.

But where does interpretation begin? I distinguish between sensitive, processual, and deep interpretations (Havlin, 2022, [51]). Since empirical research in migration studies oftentimes has to do with multiple languages and translation. Therefore, translation is already an act of interpretation (Reichertz, 2016, p. 250). The sensitive interpretation of multilingual or intercultural data resembles 'an unpacking of the precious porcelain' (ibid.), with great care and sensitivity. Processual interpretation underlines data transcription as an act of interpretation (Rosenthal, 2018, p. 83). In other words, who makes a transcript, and by which means has significance. My idea of deep interpretation stems from Gadamer's approach to listening (2000b, p. 48): the first act of meaning transfer and interpretation is already in listening or in reflective listening. Gadamer understood active listening as something, which transfers something invisible through language, by means of unspoken, and observations. If the meaning emerges in the act of speaking and listening, it is inextricable from an understanding (idem, pp. 49–50). Sensitive, processual, and deep interpretations do not contradict one another. They relate to each other and refer to distinct stages of research conduct intertwined with unfolding interpretation and meaning production. Thus, all stages of the research conduct incorporate different layers of meaning constructions and their interpretation.

Since the empirical data of the current project is composed of a plurality of formats, I would like to clarify how I understand the text and how I processed it considering the purposes of my study. Diverse types of data required distinct methodological procedures to extract meanings and explain them.

(1) *Audio/written text*. Interview audio recordings were transcribed in written form and coded. Three pillars of immigrant agency emerged from the interview analysis.
(2) *Visual text.* I depicted specific situations oriented toward identity, language, and strategic actions. The acquired data was not narrations (such as interviews), but actions or conversations were documented as a video text. For the later analysis, the video text was reduced to single cuts as images and a set of cuts as sequences.
(3) *Fragmented text*. The establishment of the original dataset aimed at covering entrepreneurial activities initiated by FSU immigrants. The text in this case was composed of dispersed information pieces—iconographic, oral, written (typed), printed, and digital—that together reflected on the purposeful actions.

In the wake of the pictorial turn (Bohnsack, 2003), such an approach to text does not present a novelty. Moreover, empirical data does not usually occur as written but is processed and presented in a written form according to the specific rules. These three major text types—audio/written, video/visual, and fragmented—allowed me to interpret data in total or its parts, comparing various parts of data and arranging them in meaningful patterns.

After outlining the methodological preliminaries of my empirical research, next I present the open multimethod design from the standpoint of the reflexive research conduct.

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# 7

# Multimethod Empirical Approach

I present an overview of the multimethod research design for investigating immigrant agency. Relying on the principles of Grounded Theory, the study evolved through iterative sampling and data collection, allowing methodological flexibility and the integration of diverse empirical tools. Four key sections structure this chapter. The first section, *Sampling Procedures*, outlines the rationale behind participant selection, including demographic and contextual considerations. *Research Methods* details the range of tools employed—such as interviews, real-time and digital ethnography, and visual method—highlighting their relevance in capturing layered dimensions of immigrant experiences. The section *Conducting Multilingual Research* explores the linguistic diversity encountered in the field, addressing strategies for navigating multilingual settings and the interpretive implications of language use. Finally, *Researcher Positionality* reflects critically on the role of the researcher, emphasizing the significance of self-reflection and methodological self-consciousness. It considers how factors such as gender, linguistic biography, disciplinary training, and migratory experiences shape knowledge production. By foregrounding the social embeddedness

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of empirical research and the reflexive role of the researcher, I underscore the methodological flexibility and ethical responsibility involved in capturing immigrant agency. I highlight the continuous interplay between theory development, data collection, and analytical refinement that characterizes this study's grounded and interdisciplinary approach.

## Sampling Strategy and Selection Procedures

The sampling, rooted in GT theoretical sampling, allowed me to progressively develop selection criteria for studies subjects and group formations (Schittenhelm, 2009, p. 12), adapting to various fieldwork periods and research methods.

In my selection process, I primarily adhered to theoretical considerations, prioritizing the representativeness of studied concepts over that of individual persons or organizations (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, pp. 420–421). This meant that the focus was not on the number of cases but on the emergence of phenomena related to immigrant agency, related concepts, their meanings, forms, and expressions that contributed to theoretical explanations of agency in the context of immigration and settlement.

Additionally, the multimethod design necessitated distinct levels of selective procedures during fieldwork. To gain insights into migrant individual agency, cases for problem-centered interviews were chosen using explicit selection criteria. The interview analysis revealed three core components that formed the basis of the emerging immigrant agency theory: *identity formations, language use,* and *social actions* (as depicted in Fig. 7.1), which construct immigrant agency:

*Identity Formations* are conceived as multidimensional identities that potentially carry a character of project-identities. They are continually under construction or renegotiation throughout the process of migration and settlement (Part IV).

*Language Use* is an evolving experience in the migration process and includes the acquisition of new languages at the destination point while preserving primary language(s) (Part V).




**Fig. 7.1** The pillars of the emerging immigrant agency theory (*Source* Original Diagram)

*Social, Purposeful Actions*: Within the array of social action, my focus lies on actions stemming from the prolonged migration process. Specifically, I examine actions propelled by the goal of settling. In my analysis, I center on entrepreneurial actions (Part VI) and the exploration of recreational and leisure activities (Part VII).

I employed these core concepts to delineate the individual and collective capacity for being, becoming, and acting within the intricate web of interpersonal relationships and structural settings that shape the immigration process. Based on these core concepts, I determined 'where and how to collect or generate the next tranche of data' (Birks et al., 2019, p. 4). In other words, I decided what to select next while adhering to theoretical sampling in the construction of the emerging theory. These sampling procedures were aimed at addressing specific units, cases, or questions that emerged from the interview analysis, with the goal of

ensuring 'maximum variation in the sample' while keeping 'the quantity of data for analysis to a manageable size' (ibid.).

Initially focusing on individuals and their agency, the interviews revealed the need to study immigrants' collective agency. The selection of group formations as units of analysis stemmed from interviewees' reflections on the significance of cultural associations and retail shops with the East European orientation in their daily lives. For instance, after one of the interviews, an engaged interviewee took me to a local Mix Markt shop with the comment: "*when I miss home* (.) *I come here*" (from the interview with Matilda). Another interviewee, Lisa Bardo, invited me to visit a rehearsal of the dance group she initiated. I followed these suggestions and began attending activities of various immigrant cultural organizations and creative hobby groups. Karin Schittenhelm referred to this selection method as a 'practiced sampling procedure' (2009, p. 9), wherein cases and units of analysis are chosen based on the developments observed during the fieldwork. Another example illustrates this point. Some of my interviewees continuously used the word *russaki*: in some instances, it served as a self-description, while in others, it was an ambiguous portrayal of Russian-speaking migrants in Germany. As in other cases, the interview data alone was insufficient to fully explore the meanings. Emerging from the interviews, these suggestions guided my research in different directions, such as culture- and recreation-oriented leisure groups, retail businesses initiated by Russian-speaking FSU immigrants, and collective identification and identity frameworks. These new areas of theoretical sampling required additional selection procedures and methodological adjustments. Therefore, in these cases, I applied multimodal (real time and digital) ethnography to acquire data about the Mix Markt business network and cultural associations, as well as to unpack the meanings of the ambiguous identity framework russaki within the semantic field.

The real-time ethnography conducted in two different cities revealed, on the one hand, a plethora of creative and educational initiatives, such as cultural centers or weekend (Sunday) schools that integrated singing, dancing, acting, and music activities for FSU immigrants. While I encountered other comparable creative leisure groups, I chose to focus on one such group for in-depth analysis in Part VII, using the others

as comparison. On the other hand, the background investigation of two stores in Xcity and Ycity redirected me to other comparable shops connected as a supermarket chain across Germany and the EU (discussed in Part VI). Since most of the information about these shops was publicly available, I compiled a dataset that included 249 stores.[1]

Lastly, it is important to emphasize urban scalar perspective plays a crucial aspect of my sampling process. I conducted interviews and real-time ethnography in two mid-sized cities, Xcity and Ycity in West Germany,[2] which share comparable characteristics. Both cities have a population of around 100,000 inhabitants, with approximately 11% being foreign-born residents. Quantifying the number of post-Soviet, Russian-speaking immigrants posed a practical challenge, as a significant portion had undergone naturalization processes by the time of my research project, rendering this immigrant group partially invisible in statistical data. Therefore, I relied on relative characteristics that pointed to the presence of a significant number of the studied groups. In both cities, there were vibrant and visible Russian-speaking communities actively engaged through cultural associations and small to medium-sized businesses. For instance, in each city, there were two East-European-orientated shops, one of which was a Mix Markt. The visibility of post-Soviet communities in these cities overlapped with the presence of late ethnic German resettlers and Jewish refugees.

The selection of these mid-sized cities directed my focus toward ordinary small or mid-sized cities. Background research revealed that the experiences of post-Soviet immigrants in these types of cities are limited (Aivazishvili-Gehne, 2024; Bartels, 2008) and, therefore, largely invisible. Considering the fieldwork locations, many available studies have primarily concentrated on large German cities or metropolises such as Berlin and its surroundings (Aronson, 2011; Baerwolf, 2006; Darieva, 2004), Hamburg (Isurin, 2011), Munich (Popkov & Popkova, 2019), Duesseldorf (Sommer, 2012), and Frankfurt am Main (Savoskul, 2015).

[1] More details on dataset composition can be found in Table A.2 of the Appendix.

[2] For anonymity reasons, I designate the cities where I conducted real time ethnography as Xcity and Ycity. When I specify cities, it means I use of data from open-access sources.

To overcome the urban bias of large cities, I examine experiences of FSU immigrants in small and mid-sized cities.

## Methods and Data

In response to challenges and demands during the fieldwork, I complemented an interview method with real-time and digital ethnography. Applied methods not only interacted and strengthened each other but also influenced each other (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009 [1996], p. 8). Table 7.1 illustrates concisely the important aspects related to each method: a way of data documentation, samples, urban scale, amount of data and its processing, outcomes from the specific method, and their implications for the theory building.

## In-Depth Interviews

The interview method is a important tool for constructing of personal narratives and experiences, allowing researchers or interviewers to gain brief yet intimate glimpses into the interviewee's private world (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997, p. 315). Through in-depth interviews, individuals become the focal point where the interview process shapes the construction of the self (Kvale, 2006, p. 493). Problem-centered and semi-structural interviews laid the foundation for my initial project *Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union: Arrival and Settlement in Germany*. These in-depth interviews, as a qualitative research method, played a pivotal role in collecting individual accounts from participants reflecting on their migration experiences and settlement practices in Germany. This type of interview is considered a theory-generating method and closely aligns with the GT research procedures.

In employing conversation techniques, the problem-centered interview allows for a certain degree of flexibility in a communication situation while focusing on the individual respondent (Witzel, 2000, [4]). During these interviews, I guided and continually questioned the

**Table 7.1** Multimethod research design for immigrant agency theory

| Methods and documentation | Fieldwork timeframe | Sample | Data processing | Urban scalar | Elements of immigrant agency theory |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Problem-centered, semi-structured interviews**<br>Recording, transcripts | **2012–2014**<br>Phase 1: Xcity<br>**2014–2016**<br>Phase 2: Ycity | N = 22; 16 women and 6 men | Text transcripts;<br>GT coding procedures; interpretative approach | Mid-sized cities 100,000–150,000 inhabitants | **Individual and Collective Components**<br>*Identity formations* and*identity frameworks*,<br>*Language use.* Topics: multilingualism, language interference, translanguaging |
| **Real-time ethnography**<br>Video recording, fieldwork notes, video scripts | **2012–2016****<br>Phase 1: Oct 2012–May 2014 Xcity<br>Phase 2: Jun 2014—Jan 2017, Ycity | Approx. 50 hours shooting time,<br>Cultural associations, educational projects, festivals, and businesses, | GT coding procedures of iconographic evidence (videos and picture); interpretative approach; sequence analysis;<br>ANT | Mid-sized cities 100,000–150,000 inhabitants | **Collective Components:**<br>*Immigrant leisure associations*<br>*Social actions:* cohesion-oriented, routinized, micro-situative actions. Strategies: community engagement, flexible ethnic boundary-making,<br>Contextual and flexible *language use*<br>*Identity frameworks.* Topics: cultural pluralism, self-exoticism, hybrid/intersectional identities |

(continued)

**Table 7.1** (continued)

| Methods and documentation | Fieldwork timeframe | Sample | Data processing | Urban scalar | Elements of immigrant agency theory |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Digital ethnography**<br>Dataset composition, fieldwork notes | **2019–2020**<br>Phase 3: composition of the original dataset | N = 249 of Mix Markt Stores across Europe (incl. n = 165 in Germany) | Selective coding GT, qualitative and quantitative (distributions, median, etc.) analysis; mapping with Excel/ Google map; ANT | Small cities under 99.999 inhabitants<br>Mid-sized cities | **Collective Components.** Immigrant businesses<br>*Entrepreneurial actions*: fostering socioeconomic cohesion; facilitating sociocultural involvement; promoting professionalization; embracing and navigating mundane transnational social spaces; marketing strategy based on promotion of the East European culinary fusion<br>*Identity frameworks* in cultural consumption, food memory. *Language use:* flexible multilingual contexts |

interviewee's reflections and narrations, resembling a pseudo-dialogue-like situation. Steiner Kvale (2006) cautioned about treating an interview as a dialogue due to the hierarchical relationship with an asymmetrical power distribution between the interviewer and the interviewee. The author provided several reasons for this power asymmetry in interview settings (idem, pp. 484–485). First, the interviewer leads the interview based on a research problem and interview guidelines. Second, the interview is a one-sided dialogue in which one party asks questions (interviewer), and the other party follows a lead and answers (interviewee). Third, the interview is an instrumental and manipulative dialogue, serving the interviewer's need for narrative material for interpretation and analysis, while the interviewee may not be privy to the interviewer's hidden agenda. Finally, the interviewer holds the monopoly to interpret and report the worldviews of research subjects. These factors do not diminish the explorative potential of the interview as a valuable research method. However, these factors made me sensitive to ethical issues. In addition to effective conversational strategies and my sensitivity to ethical issues, I utilized strategies for generating comprehension during the interviews. This involved the use of interview guidelines and questions designed to enhance understanding (Witzel, 2000, [16]).

As the selection of interview participants was based on explicit criteria, I provide next the composition of the interview sample.[3] This sample consisted of sixteen females and six males, ranging in age from 21 to 59. Out of the twenty-two interviews conducted, twenty, which were considered more relevant for theoretical sampling, were transcribed. The interviewees primarily originated from Armenia, Kazakhstan, Russia, or Ukraine and arrived in Germany between the 1990s and the early 2000s. While most of the interviewees initiated their migration, four followed their parents as young children or teenagers and were students at the time

[3] Table A.2 in Appendix: *The Interviewees' Profiles*, furnishes a comprehensive overview of all interviews conducted between 2012 and 2016. These interviews, on average, extended for approximately three hours, with the shortest lasting one hour and the longest spanning two sessions, totaling eight hours. This table encompasses specific details about the interviewees, including their age and gender, place of origin, year of arrival in Germany, reason for admission, family status, parental experiences, educational level, occupation at the time of the interview, language proficiencies, and the predominant language used during the interviews. To safeguard the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were employed to replace their actual names.

of the interviews. Despite their high educational levels, many research participants experienced various degrees of employment difficulties and often held temporary and precarious jobs.

Although gender and education were not the main sampling criteria, they invite explanations for the sampling 'distortions' in these aspects. In terms of education, a researcher's influence and willingness to participate in interviews are possible explanations. Regarding the overrepresentation of women, there was no attempt or requirement to ascertain or represent gender differences in the depiction of interview partners. However, the high proportion of female interviewees undoubtedly influenced the material elicited, at least in the case of interviews. I had previously reflected on gender effects in international migration elsewhere else (Havlin, 2015). Furthermore, ethnography balanced these gender and educational distortions, enabling outreach to individuals with more diverse educational backgrounds and greater gender distribution. For instance, a sample on entrepreneurial activities included a larger share of male owners or managers.

This concurrent data collection and analysis approach facilitated a learning effect during the research process and allowed for the refinement of conversation strategies, interview guidelines, data processing, and guided further theoretical sampling. During the interview analysis, I identified overarching and contrasting patterns across interviews, primarily to understand individual perspective. This endeavor necessitated the development of a conceptual framework for examining structural, collective, and non-structural (networking) factors in the context of migration and settlement. This analytical approach aligned with the GT coding procedures and ultimately led to the development of core elements of immigrant agency theory.

## Multimodal Ethnography

My ethnographic studies reflected on collective aspects of immigrant agency, on the interaction between individual and collective aspects of immigrant agency. Ethnography as a research strategy stands for 'the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through

the analysis of one's own experience in the world of these others' (van Maanen, 1988/2011, p. xiii). The world of others may be unfamiliar and strange for a researcher, yet ethnography poses a task of in-depth interactions with the researched subjects and their social realities as 'multiple realities' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 231).

The ethnographic study met three objectives of my empirical research: first, to acquire knowledge about immigrant cultural associations; second, to reflect on russaki, an identity formation and framework; third, to gain data on immigrant businesses as Mix Markt shops (or Russian shops in the vernacular use). In the first case, I refer in this book primarily to my real-time observations of Scheherazade, the hobby dancing group, whose activities I followed for two years. In the second case, I was able to distinguish four clusters of meanings that the word russaki conveys while used in the Russian-speaking contexts in Germany. Here real-time and digital observations allowed me to interpret ambiguous and inconclusive data gained during interviews on this account. In the third case, digital ethnography enabled me to access and accumulate information on Mix Markt stores that enriched my real-time ethnographic observations of two specific Mix Markt stores in Xcity and Ycity. In all instances, I attempted to answer the following questions related to the core concepts of immigrant agency: How are identity formations and frameworks actualized in daily interactions of studied subjects? What are the key features of language use in their mundane affairs? Which actions can we call significant in pursuing agendas of cultural associations and retail businesses?

About the advantages of multimodal (real time and digital) ethnography, Murthy (2008, p. 839) noted that "a balanced combination of physical and digital ethnography not only gives researchers a larger and more exciting array of methods to tell social stories but also enables them to demarginalize the voice of respondents in these accounts." The compilation of data gained through real-time and digital ethnography as well as by problem-centered interviews provided me with a unique possibility to combine various data sources while constructing the theory of immigrant agency. Real-time ethnography reflects and reacts to 'traditional physical configurations' (idem, p. 849) of social research, while digital

ethnography depicts social reality and interactional practices of immigrants, their businesses, or other types of associations that are increasingly moving into the digital realm. The empirical research presented in this book reflects such developments: everyday life simultaneous encounters in real-time and physical dimensions as well as asynchronous, shifted in time and space digital encounters and representations.

*Real-time ethnography of immigrant businesses* took place in two Mix Markt stores located in the mid-sized cities sporadically in the period between 2015 and 2018. As I realized that these two shops are part of a larger network comprising over a hundred shops across Germany and the EU, my objective shifted toward reconstructing a detailed account of this network. With digital ethnography I accessed the data about the Mix Markt supermarket chain and individual stores and constructed an original dataset to structure an extensive amount of qualitative and quantitative data from various fragmented and dispersed sources. These sources included the Mix Markt official webpage (Mixmarkt.eu, 2020), a commercial register and other websites generating information about businesses (firmenwissen.de; Northdata; Unternehmensregister, 2020), the newspaper *Resettler Messenger* [Aussiedlerbote][4] and a range of publications in the local and national newspapers and magazines as, for instance, *Ost-West Panorama. Russlanddeutsche Zeitschrift* (Panorama, 2009), *Schwäbische Zeitung* (Richter, 2017), or *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (Vogt, 2004). As a result, I generated the original dataset with 249 stores' profiles including two initial ones where I conducted real-time ethnography in Xcity and Ycity. Out of the total amount, 165 stores were based in Germany, the rest mainly in the EU.

In the sample with 249 stores, forty-five stores had a detailed profile (Table A.2 in Appendix), and 204 stores with fragmented profiles. The

[4] The monthly *Aussiedlerbote* or *Переселенческий вестник* [Resettler Messenger] is a German online and print newspaper in Russian and German, affiliated with the business association *Hamburger Verein der Deutsche aus Russland e.V.* (HVDAR, n.d.). Primarily focusing on ethnic German resettlers from the post-Soviet space, this newspaper positions itself as dedicated to the lives of resettlers, encompassing "not only Germans, but Jewish, Russians, Ukrainians, all who speak Russian" (Aussiedlerbote, 2020). It covers a diverse range of topics, including business, history, culture, and legal advice related to labor, homeownership, and immigration policies. Additionally, it features a significant number of advertisements from (Russian-speaking) businesses.

data for 45 Mix Markt store profiles were complete, first of all, thanks to the interview-styled advertisements in Aussiedlerbote (2014–2020). Written in Russian with minor degree of Russian-German translanguaging, Swetlana Siemens authored these ads arranging them as an interview with an owner or a manager of a respective store. Often pictures accompanied these interviews featuring an owner(s) and his/her family, a shop team, or products depicted in the interior or exterior design. As a rule, such interviews include the Mix Markt store's information: an address and location, biographical details about the owner(s), store size, number of employees and a story of the business development. Neither the Monolith group nor any of the Mix Markt stores, which I mentioned openly or anonymously, have been actively involved in any way in this research project. Their contributions have been indirect: I relied strongly on the data available on the official webpage, as well as on the public presence of selected Mix Markt entrepreneurs, who gave public interviews to the newspapers (print/online) or left other digital traces on the Web. Except for my field notes, all empirical data used in my analysis was publicly available either online or in different Mix Markt locations in the period between 04/2014 and 08/2020.

*Real-time ethnography of cultural associations* took place between October 2012 and May 2014. The ethnographic study included participatory observations of the group's activities, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations with group members and those related to the group (family members, friends, colleagues, and collaborators). I used fieldwork notes as a documentation method. Additionally, I complemented ethnography from the initial stages with a video method. Such combination allowed me to collect a large amount of iconographic evidence. In contrast to the textual evidence, iconographic material helps to mitigate the 'dominance of the text interpretation model' in the research conduct (Bohnsack, 2003, p. 241).

Developed and adopted in the process of fieldwork, such a method could be described as visual ethnography or filming ethnography. Since 'film has increasingly become one of the forms of our culture and our lives' (Nancy & Kiarostami, 2001, p. 14), the reality of images, gained in the process of filming, becomes the way to 'access to the real itself' (idem, p. 16). Making a documentary was my narrative that the group members

accepted and never questioned.[5] That reasoning justified my continuous presence with the group. A camera had found a way backstage of the group's life, to their worries and their joy, dedication, and frustration. From a still and one-location camera, over time I switched to an active camera following the subjects (Gamaley, 2007; Paul, 2005). Initially, I was afraid to disturb the group members with the moving camera during rehearsals; later in the fieldwork, I gained the confidence to replicate the movements of the participants by following them, looking behind the shoulders.

In total, I attended thirty-five rehearsal practices, twenty of which were video recorded. Also, I filmed nine public and semi-public performances of the group, twelve private gatherings at members' homes for photo-shooting, birthday celebrations, lunches, and work-in-progress discussions, but also such occasions as assisting them in private matters as helping with a job application, translations from German to Russian, writing official letters. Such researcher involvement reflects the collaborative aspect of research conduct and data collection (Birks et al., 2019, p. 4). Additionally, I accompanied some members to five group-related events as, for instance, two meetings of multilevel marketing events organized by some of the group's members or the conference *250 years of Russian-German history* in Augsburg (2013) organized by Association of Germans from Russia.[6] At the end of the fieldwork, the video-recorded material contained approximately 50 hours of filming total.

Since I was working with one camcorder, a practical way of video recording was in short clips ranging from ten seconds to a maximum of five minutes. Doing so allowed me to capture, on the one hand, different focuses, perspectives, and motives. On the other hand, this duration correlated with the time frequency of the group's interactions during rehearsals (Chapter 15). As, for instance, an average music-track ranges between four to five minutes. This duration defined the sequence

[5] The cinematographic literature played a vital role in operating the camera, its placement and shot depiction as camera-subject distances. Internationally acclaimed expert in the philosophy of cinema, Oleg Aronson provided generously me with substantial support in this field: from expertise in the field of film images, to documentary-making, to technical suggestions and literature recommendations (Aronson, 2003, 2007; Nancy & Kiarostami, 2001).

[6] Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland e.V. (LMDR, 2019).

analysis that I applied for data interpretation: actions related to cohesion and the group's integration, or actions related to community engagement (Chapter 16). Recording of long 30-minute uninterrupted cuts (the camera's capacity) was an exception, usually in situations where I actively participated: birthday celebrations, grill parties, lunch meetings, helping with private matters such as assistance with job applications, or in dealing with official correspondence.

With the extensive amount of empirical data, a secondary sampling (Schittenhelm, 2009, p. 23) focused on identity formations, language use, and social actions. A secondary sampling allowed me to extract these phenomena predefined by the interview analysis and select iconographic evidence for sequence depiction and situational schemes. In turn, they were utilized for the visual sequence analysis (VSA) (Abbott, 1995), to recreate a micro-situative action and its types, as well as chronological reconstruction. I combined the visual sequence analysis with field notes and audio-to-text transcripts of videos for more comprehensive examination and illustration. Additionally, I examined the selected publications about the Scheherazade dance group in the local newspapers of their community. The analysis of publications allowed me to compare the inside and outside perceptions about the activities of the group. One of the examples I present at the beginning of Part VII that highlights a problem identifying the group in terms of nationality or ethnicity.

*Ethnography of identity framework russaki* started with irritation: Three examples during the interviews' open coding caught my attention. Example one: "… *for God's sake who did he bring with him* (.) *was their reactions as they told me later* (..) *I was small red-headed and additionally russachka*," Liza ironically told me a story about how her husband introduced her to his social circle. Example two: "*keep away from Germans* (.) *they are not good* (..) *you are going to have troubles* (..) *better stay in touch with russaki* (.)" Diana-Anoush reflected on the advice she received in the refugee camp upon arrival to Germany. Example three presents an excerpt from the interview dialogue between me and Igor where he reflects on his first and short visit to Kazakhstan (below as 'there') after his family settled with him in Germany (below as 'here') for eight years:

| Translation with preserved German elements of translanguaging | Original |
|---|---|
| **Igor:** (…….) the difference well here (..) when I was there[7] the difference I noticed they are polite (.) they are politer zu einander (..) #00:13:49 # | **Igor:** (…….) разница вот тута (..) когда я там был разница я заметил они вежливые (.) они больше вежливые были zu einander (..) # 00:13:49 # |
| **TH**: than who? | **TH**: чем кто? |
| **Igor:** than those people those russaki who live (.) not those who just arrived (..) in general those who have been living longer [[in Germany]] (.) I am about (…) I think this depends on (…) von der Gesellschaft \| this is a big factor \| #00:14:07# | **Igor:** чем те же люди те же руссаки которые живут (.) не только что приехали (..) а вообще уже подольше живут (.) \| это я за (…) я думаю (…) von der Gesellschaft зависит \| это большой фактор \| #00:14:07# |

As these examples illustrate, the label russaki reappeared on separate occasions during some interviews and required an additional effort to understand its perplexity. My unfamiliarity with the label russaki in the context of Russian-speaking communities in Germany and its awkwardness in standard Russian played an important role in my decision to add this emerging phenomenon to the theoretical sampling for further analysis. Russaki contains multiple and, at the same time, contradictory meanings, frequently referring to people from the post-Soviet space. The signifier russaki slips (nearly) by chance into a swirl of conversation and belongs to the oral Russian-speaking culture in Germany. Therefore, I remained cautious and theoretically sensitive during real-time and digital ethnography while building the semantic clusters of meanings and interpretations attributed to the word russaki.

I used ethnographic notes to record instances in the application of russaki from real-time ethnography. In the cases of digital ethnography, I used search engines of YouTube, Facebook, Vkontakte,[8] and Google (to search in blogosphere and forums) exploring variants of the word russaki attributed to the German Russian-speaking contexts: russaki/

[7] The interview participant Igor referred with 'there' to Kazakhstan during his short visit after settling with his family in Germany for eight years.

[8] Vkontakte [Вконтакте] is a Russian based social media, an equivalent of Facebook.

rusaki, russak/rusak, russachka/russachka (and their Cyrillic equivalents). The following online sources were identified on social media: individual blogs (usually as a text), several discussion forums (de-online.ru, 2013; hip-hop.ru), YouTube contributions in the form of video clips, and several Facebook groups with their posts. When I identified contributions elaborating on russaki, they were extracted and subjected to the GT coding procedures. Coding allowed to build four clusters of meanings and their contexts deriving from the use of russaki among the Russian-speaking communities in Germany. Later I compared these meanings with the use of russaki during the interviews. This strategy of the meaning extraction I name metaphorically an onion strategy: while having a vernacular word I intended to pill a meaning after meaning revealing its ambiguity, its contextuality, and its implications in terms of identity formation. I elaborated on the purposes served by the term russaki and the modifications it undergoes depending on the speaker and context in Chapter 9.

The background check illustrated that the word rusak [русак] derives from the Russian language, though there are instances in Polish. The Russian version of rusak has two meanings. The first one is a hare, a gray rabbit and can, for instance, be found in Lev Tolstoy's work (Tolstoy, 1982, p. 115). The second one refers to a person from Ruthenia, the Kievan Rus' (Dostoevsky, 1916; Rakovskij, 1959). The first meaning is more common in Russia, while the second one is less widespread. Following the most frequently reappearing variant russaki [руссаки] in interviews and blogosphere in Germany, I adopted this version. Russaki is a plural form and refers to a group of persons with certain shared characteristics; seldomly I encountered gendered variants such as a male singular russak [руссак] or rusak [русак], or a female singular russachka [руссачка].

Through my inquiry, I did not intend to determine the correctness or incorrectness to using the term russaki, identify specific group, or highlight certain experiences. I strived to capture its complexity and ambiguity, its contradictory meanings, its ironic use, and the problems of its applications. My analysis does not offer an exhaustive answer to what the word russaki signifies entirely but demonstrates how russaki functions as a signifier that populates a complex semantic field and

embodies different, at times conflicting meanings. And as such russaki offer one of the few opportunities to grasp empirically the complexity of Russian-speaking communities in Germany.

## Multilingual Research

From the initial stages of my empirical study, language played an instrumental role. While researching post-Soviet immigrants in Germany, fluency in Russian was my implicit criterion during the interview sampling. A commonsense assumption that Russian as a lingua franca is useful for conducting interviews with post-Soviet immigrants in Germany proved to be insufficient. While conducting interviews, I offered a choice between Russian and German. From that moment on my implicit criterion was quickly overruled by those who preferred to have a conversation in German (as a rule, the interviewees of the one and a half generation) or by those who inclined to translanguaging between Russian and German (blending both languages in the process of conversation).

As I proceeded with my fieldwork, I realized that my initial approach to Russian-speaking communities had a methodological limitation. My use of the label Russian-speaking tended to overshadow the richly multilingual and multicultural experiences of the individuals I interviewed and observed. Moreover, while witnessing their endeavors and challenges in acquiring or preserving various languages, it proved 'to be ineffective to think of this group from the monolingual perspective' (Havlin, 2022, [13]). What started as Russian-speaking interviews promptly required me to include in the fieldwork my full linguistic repertoire of German, Ukrainian, English, and translanguaging. I have benefited from my linguistic competencies, yet, at the same time they restrained me. My linguistic repertoire predefined in which languages my interview partners might activate during our conversation.

Translating Weinreich's observations in my research context would mean that my linguistic range as a researcher defined how research participants narrated their stories in terms of language: monolingually, multilingually, or inclining to language interference translanguaging.

Shared bilingualism or multilingualism of an interviewer and interviewees are important factors in this respect (Havlin, 2022; Resch & Enzenhofer, 2017). The linguistic and cultural flexibility can be characterized as transcultural tricksterism to illustrate multilingual and multicultural experiences (Tlostanova, 2012). This term refers to the ability to adopt changing contextual expectations (idem, p. 139). On the one hand, this concept resonated with the experiences and activities witnessed during my fieldwork when researched subjects adeptly navigated linguistic and cultural contexts. On the other hand, it demanded that I, too, act as a transcultural trickster to seamlessly integrate into fieldwork settings and mimic observed strategies.

In addition to transcultural tricksterism, Julia Kristeva's concept of the silence of polyglots sheds light on the experiences of immigrants as speech-denying strategists (2002, p. 275). This concept underscores the idea that, in the process of expressing oneself in various languages, one may eventually find themselves silenced, unable to convey one's thoughts adequately. Paraphrasing Kristeva: Between two or more languages, foreigners find themselves trapped in the realm of silence. The silence of polyglots is situated on the other side of the continuum where transcultural tricksterism contrasts it. Considering both transcultural tricksterism and the paradoxical silence of polyglots allows us, as researchers, to capture the intricate and often contradictory nature of immigrant expressive abilities or limitations within the multicultural and multilingual contexts of transnational social spaces. These concepts provide valuable insights into a range of sociolinguistic phenomena related to migration and settlement, including the practice or neglect of bi- and multilingualism, language interference, translanguaging, and the foreign accent effect. Together, these aspects highlight the complex role of language in shaping the immigrant experience and the multifaceted nature of linguistic biographies within immigrant communities.

Besides, changeability in language use made me tackle the question of multilingualism and reflect on language hierarchies in my research conduct (Havlin, 2022). These reflections inspired an idea of de-naturalizing language, investigating social construction of language or languaging as a process of communication (i.e., translanguaging as blending specific languages in a certain context). In most of the cases

during my fieldwork, people were indeed fluent in Russian, yet it belongs to their mundane practices of language use to switch (even in the middle of the sentence) between Russian and German (or other languages in some cases), to incline to a varying degree of language interferences or to translanguaging in more familiar or informal contexts (idem, [29]). Understanding these peculiarities of multilingual and cross-cultural communication raised another question about translanguaging patterns (idem, [35]). Further, I attempted to assess to what extent my linguistic biography enabled me to understand the multilingual daily experiences of the researched group. As a result of this heuristic process, I strove to advance a set of reflections on how to navigate multiple languages during research conduct, specifically during data gathering, processing, and interpretation.

The researcher's linguistic biography shapes multilingual research conduct and presents one of the essential elements while conducting an empirical study in the field of migration. Further relevant elements of researcher positionality belong to the last theme of methodological reflections, which I address in the next Section.

## Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

Charmaz's insights into the relativity of the empirical world and its relationship with our analytical perspectives encouraged me to adopt a reflexive stance during the research and writing process (2014, p. 241). Reflexivity does not necessitate a public disclosure of the researcher's entire biography but requires careful consideration of research-relevant details. The GT founders, Glaser and Strauss, envisioned a distant expert researcher conducting GT research (Birks et al., 2019, p. 3). In contrast, Kathy Charmaz (2017, p. 36) emphasized the importance of methodological self-consciousness. This self-consciousness compels researchers to reflect on their own positionality and their role in the research process. Methodological self-consciousness entails turning a deeply reflexive gaze on oneself as researcher, the research process, and the empirical world. Its primary objective is to scrutinize our positions, privileges, and priorities and evaluate how they influence our actions throughout the

research process and our relationships with research participants (idem, p. 35). Self-consciousness also entails examining ourselves in the research process, caution with the meanings we produce, and actions we take at each step along the way (idem, p. 36).

Self-reflection on one's positionality becomes a methodological and ethical imperative when conducting social research (Braidotti, 2007, p. 191). In previous sections, I considered the role of my gender and education, and how they influenced, enabled, or restricted my sampling strategies and fieldwork access. I also briefly discussed the impact of my linguistic repertoire on data collection and research outcomes earlier. In this section, I explore other pertinent aspects of my positionality and subjectivity as a researcher. I contemplate how I was perceived by research participants during my fieldwork.

First, to provide context, I see myself as a product of history, born in the 1980s during the late Soviet period, and shaped by the values and experiences of my parents and grandparents who spent a significant part of their lives in Soviet Russia and Ukraine. The 1990s marked the post-Soviet transition period, with the emergence of national consciousness in independent Ukraine (Goldman et al., 1992, p. 8). During this decade, I completed my primary and secondary education in a small provincial town, Kodyma, in Southern Ukraine, this borderland town situated between two major Ukrainian regions, Odesa and Vinnytsia, and Transnistria, a Russian satellite on the Moldavian territory (for further details, see in Roper, 2001, p. 106).

In our daily interactions, both in casual exchanges and at home, we used Surzhyk,[9] a linguistic blend resulting from our Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism (Bernsand, 2006, p. 77). However, we employed standard Ukrainian or standard Russian at school, with strangers, or when conversing with extended family members who primarily spoke Russian, particularly residents of Moldova or Russia. Those times were marked by scarcities of goods, financial constraints, frequent power outages, and my parents' persistent efforts to make ends meet.

[9] Surzhyk is Ukrainian-Russian translanguaging resulting from the Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism (Bernsand, 2001; Del Gaudio, 2015; Masenko, 2019; Skvirskaja, 2009).

The 2000s brought relative stability after the turbulent transitional decade, and the irreversibility of the Soviet dissolution became increasingly apparent. Looking back, my family never dramatized the end of the Soviet era. In 2000, I commenced my sociology training at Odesa National University named after I.I. Mechnikov, where the predominant language of instruction was Russian, including my PhD studies and PhD thesis (Havlin, 2009). The dominance of the Russian language in Odesa was a legacy of the Soviet past (Skvirskaja, 2009), and we must also consider the lingering influence of the Russian imperial colonialism that had a lasting impact on Southern Ukraine and, specifically, Odesa (Belge, 2021).

My upbringing significantly influenced my positionality, how I was perceived outside of Ukraine, and how I presented myself during the fieldwork. As Antonio Gramsci wrote in his *Prison Notebooks*, researchers must recognize themselves 'as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory' (cited in Said, 1979 [1978], p. 25). To use Gramsci's words, Edward W. Said reflected on his 'personal dimension' and individual investments during his influential study on Orientalism. He emphasized that one of the researcher's tasks is to explore this inventory by being aware of their own historical circumstances and maintaining a critical consciousness while conducting research (idem, p. 26).

Second, my own migratory experiences and mobility across three generations within my family played a vital role. My family's migration spanned a 7,000-km axis within the Eurasian continent. 5,000 km stretched to the East, where my maternal grandfather, Wasyl, was deployed for a two-year military service in Novosibirsk and then remained there for professional reasons in the civil sector. Later, he married Tekla, my grandmother from his home village in Southern Ukraine, and brought his newly formed family (with my mother born in Ukraine) to Russian Siberia. In her twenties, my mother Olga returned to her village of origin and married my father Volodymyr. Accompanying my parents in their work, studies, and familial pursuits, I grew up along this Eurasian axis until the age of six when my grandparents realized their dream after 30 years and returned to their places of origin in Ukraine at the end of the 1980s. Eighteen years after their return, I moved 2,000 km

westward for studying reasons to Germany, where I remained for professional reasons. Westward was the direction in which neither my parents nor grandparents ever traveled or were allowed to due to the strict Soviet border regimes.[10]

Third, classifications such as gender, nationality, class, education, language/s, and their intersections impacted how I was perceived, and which positionalities were attributed to or recognized in me as a researcher. Intersectional positionalities had positive and negative effects in different contexts of research conduct and the dissemination of findings: as a member of the minority group in Germany (i.e., Ukrainian), a researcher with an international family and migration background, later a naturalized German national, a non-native German speaker, and an Eastern European woman. At various stages of research conduct, these attributions could, on the one hand, provoke 'institutionalized racism, sexism, and class elitism' (hooks, 1994, p. 142) and reinforce these hierarchies in my positionality as I conduct or present my research. On the other hand, recognizing my subjectivity, my positionalities, and the limits of my identity formations allows me to 'disrupt that objectification that is so necessary in a culture of domination' (idem, p. 139).

After these lengthy reflections on my researcher positionality, the following questions emerge: What relevance does it carry for my research conduct? What methodological implications arise from self-reflexivity and self-consciousness? Reflections upon my educational path in Odesa and in Southern Ukraine revealed several methodological advantages in accessing the fieldwork with Russian-speaking communities in Germany: I was Russified (language-wise, culture-wise) at the University in Odesa, but not to the extent that it erased Ukrainian elements from my identity and my positionality formed during my school years in the Odesa region. In the German context, this had a twofold effect on my encounters: I was perceived as fluent in Russian in contrast to Ukrainians from Western Ukraine (who are often envisioned as 'nationalistic'); in the Ukrainian community, people were thrilled that I am fluent in Ukrainian (researcher as a transcultural trickster). Here I must stress the years of my

[10] I reflected earlier on the border regimes in relation to my research participants in Chapters 2 and 3.

fieldwork in the period between 2012 and 2020. After the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion in Ukraine, speaking Ukrainian in Ukraine and in the abroad communities (including those in Germany) became a strategy of Ukrainian resistance and fight in the lasting Russo-Ukrainian war.

My personal and familiar migratory experiences had the following methodological advantages for me: (international) mobility was a constituent part of our transnational family life. Through my maternal grandparents, my mother, and my visits to Russian Siberia, I gained geographical and cultural knowledge useful in dealing with immigrants from Russia or Kazakhstan in Germany. I obtained insider knowledge and could connect more quickly during the introductory period with some of the research participants. As for intersectional positionalities: while it is incredibly difficult to pinpoint any disadvantages I experienced from racism, sexism, and class elitism during my research conduct, it is easier to reflect on the limits of my identity formations and positionalities. Thus, for instance, I had to continually check my bias informed by my place of origin and my places of educational and professional training.

My lengthy reflections emphasize the critical importance of methodological self-consciousness and self-reflectivity regarding researcher positionalities within the GT study. As Melanie Birks and her colleagues aptly pointed out: "… it is not possible, nor indeed desirable, to separate our history and ourselves from the construction of a GT. Understanding and articulating our assumptions makes clear how our philosophical position only serves to enhance our work…" (2019, p. 4). Following these principles, my efforts to construct the immigrant agency theory stem, among other factors, from my proactive role as a researcher in recognizing emerging phenomena, securing insider access to Russian-speaking communities, acquiring empirical data, comprehending language constellations, language use, identity formations, and social actions associated with business and leisure activities. As a sociologist with educational and professional training in both Eastern and Western Europe, I would characterize myself as a (professional) transcultural trickster whose theoretical sensitivity guides and shapes the resulting theory, the immigrant agency theory.

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## Part III Summary

In Part III, I covered my research design and methodology employed to delve into the multifaceted landscape of immigrant agency. It provided an overview of the methodological principles and the multimethod research design utilized for collecting and analyzing empirical data gathered during extensive fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2020, forming the foundational basis for the subsequent development of the Immigrant Agency Theory.

I outlined the combination of methodologies employed to address the complexity of immigrant agency as an analytical tool for understanding of immigrant experiences and ways of existence in the post-migratory context. The utilization of transnational and grounded theory methodologies, along with an interpretative approach, facilitated the creation of an open multimethod research design. This design enabled the accumulation and processing of a substantial volume of empirical data, contributing to an understanding of both individual and collective aspects of immigrant agency.

Further, I provided a detailed account of the multimethod research. This included sampling strategies, individual methods and their integration, access to the field, and the development of fieldwork. Additionally, I offered reflections on the social aspects of methods and data collection. In this chapter, I assessed researcher positionality, addressing self-reflectivity and methodological self-consciousness. This comprehensive approach to researcher positionality considers various factors relevant to empirical research conduct, such as education, gender, linguistic background, historical context, migratory experiences, and intersectional positionalities.

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# Part IV

## The Unbearable Lightness of Identity—The Shifting Landscape of Immigrant Identities

# 8

# Balancing Acts—Self-Identification and Identity Formations

> Chance and chance alone has a message for us. Everything that occurs out of necessity, everything expected, repeated day in and day out, is mute. Only chance can speak to us
> Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*[1]

In this chapter, I dedicate to the first pillar of immigrant agency, namely identity formation. International migration creates transnational social spaces for diverse identity constructions. Migration can bring to the forefront identities that were previously less significant or hidden. On an individual level, these identity projects may trigger the question "Who am I?" revealing a need for the renegotiation of self-understanding. With migratory experiences a gap between one's former self as emigrant and present self as immigrant widens. Unstable and changing environments heighten the personal need for flexible identity formations. This chapter

[1] The title of this part is a homage to a 1984 novel *Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí* (from Czech *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*) by Milan Kundera ([1984] 2006)).

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views individual identification not through identity-conditioning properties such as gender, class, ethnicity, or nationality, but instead as an ongoing process of identity. Analysis of interview data revealed several identity formations on an individual level: identity renegotiations, legitimizing identity, professional reinvention, lifelong projects of multiple belongings and difference, mélange identity, and temporary escapism. These formations highlight the emigrant-immigrant dilemma. One solution to this dilemma may be integration into mainstream national identities, more common among the one-and-a-half and second generations. Alternatively, the simultaneity hypothesis offers another solution, suggesting compatibility between integrational and transnational experiences while navigating different cultural and social contexts.

* * *

In the realm of social thought, the term identity is nearly as problematic as the concept of agency. Although it gained prominence in the latter half of the previous century, the notion of identity has evolved into an elusive and ambivalent concept (Bauman, 2004). Various theoretical perspectives contribute to shaping our comprehension of identity within the domain of social science, and some of these approaches are examined below.

In earlier applications, identity referred to individual changes that a person experiences in their teenage years or amid a mid-life crisis. These were the most commonly studied biographical occurrences that traditionally raised questions of identity (Erikson, 1968). On that note, in their seminal work *Beyond 'Identity,'* Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000) offered a thorough and critical analysis of the concept, framing modern existence as a journey of discovering identities and exploring them in the moments of distress or transition. The revelation of identity is accompanied by a sense of unbearable lightness, which may trigger contests or struggles during this self-discovery.

In more recent interpretations, identities or their formations are viewed as constantly changing due to the dynamic world around us. Bauman (2004) elaborated on identity in terms of its constant change driven by uncertainty. He wrote: "'Identities' exist today solely in

the process of continuous renegotiation. 'Identity formation,' or more correctly its 're-formation,' turns into a lifelong task, never complete; at no moment of life is the identity 'final.' Meanwhile, the concept of identity can be understood in two distinct yet interconnected ways: firstly, on an individual level, it manifests as self-identification, hereafter referred to as identity formations. Secondly, on a collective level, it manifests as identity frameworks that either describe or are prescribed to a group.

In the context of increasing temporary and permanent mobility, questions surrounding identity formations or identity frameworks have gained prominence within the field of migration studies. What happens to one's identity when they become mobile or displaced? Exploring this inquiry requires a deep examination of immigrants and their representative behaviors as they navigate the complex realities of their lives. This examination encompasses a multitude of factors, including mobility, social, political, economic, or cultural transitions, as well as the process of settlement and integration.

## Identity Renegotiations in the Course of Migration

When considering identities in the context of migration, Steven Vertovec (2001, p. 578) stressed the importance of examining the circumstances that lead to identity shifts. These shifts can occur within the complex conditions that affect the renegotiation and reconstruction of identity in the multilocal lifeworld. As the interviews reveal, the individuals are often preoccupied with practical concerns such as documents, applications, visas, financial means, transportation, and new language acquisition before departure. There is often little thought given to what is happening to one's sense of self or personal identity. Even when all practical obstacles have been addressed, and the physical transfer has been completed, migration can still cause emotional distress (Lutz & White, 1986, p. 414) and serve as 'an inner shock' (Isurin, 2011, p. 56). In this regard Isurin posed an intriguing question: "… why in some instances differences tend to create a lingering effect of cultural shock and why in other instances they easily are embraced by immigrants"

(ibid.). Individual characteristics, such as tolerance for ambiguity, cognitive flexibility, aptitude and orientation in language acquisition, and stress resilience, play a role in problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies (Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008, pp. 153–154).

To further understand emotional complexities associated with immigration processes, the concept of emotional transnationalism becomes relevant (Falicov, 2005). Emotional transnationalism refers to the intricate emotional experiences and connections that individuals and families maintain when their lives, relationships, and identities span across two or more countries or cultural contexts (idem, pp. 399–401). It delves into the emotional intricacies of simultaneously belonging to and forming attachments to multiple places, languages, and cultures. This concept provides an additional framework for comprehending the emotional challenges and adaptations that individuals and families undergo during their migration experiences, often requiring a significant degree of renegotiation of their identities and emotional connections.

Renegotiating one's own identity can become an instantaneous quest of self-definition, evolving into a lifelong project (Bauman, 2011, p. 430). This type of renegotiation often involves continually grappling with the concept of 'living with a difference' and asserting the 'right to remain different' (ibid.). Migration disrupts the comfort zone of national or regional identification and introduces multiple, often transnational, affiliations. In the context of migration, identity is not just something to be discovered metaphorically; it becomes a literal journey of self-discovery.

The instance from the interview with Katia illustrates my point. Arriving in Germany during the early 1990s as part of the Jewish migration, she, along with her created family and family of origin, did not find Jewish traditions significant to their family life prior to migration. However, some memories of these traditions have been preserved through retrospective narration. With a university degree and fluency in English and, to some extent, German, Katia saw an opportunity in the admission program for FSU Jews and encouraged her family to seize it. What began as a pragmatic decision turned into an identity quest that spanned three generations within the same family.

Katia, concerned about her daughter, noted that the migration experience posed a challenge for her as she tried to find her own identity. For Katia personally, rediscovering her Jewish roots served as a door-opener to the new community and provided a means to understand and explain herself in this new context:

> "*only thanks to our religion we found* (.) *discovered* (…) *we have gained a lot of acquaintances* (.) *my daughter though has additional troubles now* (..) *it is much more difficult for her* (.) *difficult* (…) *identität* (.) *identity* (…)" When I asked what it meant to her, Katia responded: "*well (.) I started to feel here as a Jew* (…) *on the contrary* (.) *I gained myself here* (.) *altogether* (.) *for instance I realized* (.) *it was not by chance that I married my husband because he is half Jew* (.)"[2]

This citation reveals several key aspects of identity renegotiation: religion as a discovery, acquiring social connections, intergenerational challenges, personal growth, and reevaluation of marriage. The interviewee emphasized that religion played a crucial role in their journey of self-discovery. It implies that embracing their Jewish religious identity in the new country opened doors for them, both socially and personally. Through this discovery, they acquire social connections that suggest that religious affiliation can act as a bridge to a new community and social network for immigrants. Katia acknowledges that her daughter faced additional challenges related to identity. This indicates that the process of identity renegotiation can vary within a family, with generations experiencing it differently. She also mentions that she 'gained herself here' and realized certain aspects of her identity, which might not have been apparent before. This implies that the process of renegotiating one's identity can lead to personal growth and self-discovery. At last, Katia's realization that her husband being half Jewish was not by chance. In the light of the new events, she reevaluates and sort of recreates her union with her husband. After so many years, Jewishness suddenly takes on a special meaning; it now plays a larger role than perhaps initially when they met 30 years ago.

[2] Unless otherwise specified, all interviews have been translated from Russian into English. Any words or parts that emerged in German within the flow of Russian speech have been preserved as such.

Katia's renegotiation is influenced by her current contexts, possibly their demands, and her individual desire to find equilibrium within them. This example illustrates not only how moving to another country can become an identity quest but also how admission laws can introduce adjustments or even contribute to individual self-perception.

## Legitimizing Identity

In the context of migration, the legality of an individual's identity is determined by receiving nation-states. They play a pivotal role in facilitating, controlling, and restricting migration, which, in turn, influences how identities are shaped, managed, and defined. These processes are governed by policies that regulate both the admission of migrants into the country and their integration into the society (Madsen & van Naerssen, 2003, p. 72). It is important to recognize that these legal frameworks are far from static; instead, they are dynamic and subject to constant change. Legal and bureaucratic requirements frequently evolve, resulting in shifts that impact the conditions for social acceptance and the various criteria for recognition (Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2007, p. 97).

To illustrate this, we consider the case of (late) ethnic German resettlers. Notably, through policy changes in 1993, there emerged a sudden differentiation between ethnic German [Aussiedler] and late ethnic German resettlers [Spätaussiedler]. This differentiation had significant implications, leading to structural hierarchies within families, as observed in a study on Kazakh-German social space and symbolic social protection (Sienkiewicz et al., 2015, p. 271). Therefore, individual identifications and how they are conveyed to others often involve a delicate balancing act between the official identity as stipulated in legal documents like passports (Isurin, 2011, p. 20) and one's self-understanding, which is closely intertwined with their immediate surroundings and personal experiences.

The distinction between adhering to rules and seeking ways to circumvent them holds significant consequences for the life opportunities of individuals, often determining whether their status is perceived as legal or illegal. During my research, I encountered a majority of immigrants who

had secured their legal statuses through various means. Some had undergone naturalization processes long before our interactions, while others maintained their residence permissions by extending visas or abiding by residence permission restrictions.

Among these cases of secure or relatively secure legal statuses, one stood out as exceptional. This particular case underscored the profound influence of the legal frame on self-identification, privileges associated with legal status in the host country, and the far-reaching impact on identity formations, personal well-being, and recognition. This exceptional case revolves around Diana, a 47-year-old woman who had been residing in Germany since 1999. Diana's story illustrates a unique degree of legal complexity in an individual's life. She had moved to Germany from Armenia due to critical health issues stemming from dysfunctional kidneys. The medical assistance available in her hometown, as she entered her early 30s, was inadequate. While searching for better medical care, her family explored various options. Eventually, they saw an opportunity in sending Diana to Western Europe, specifically Germany or France, known for their renowned healthcare systems. One of the legal pathways to accessing medical care in Germany was to claim refugee status from the Nagorno-Karabakh region. This avenue became viable in the aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which escalated into a full-scale war in the early 1990s. According to Diana, refugees from this conflict zone were eligible to seek asylum in Germany during the 1990s.

Seizing this legal opportunity, Diana's family acquired a birth certificate belonging to Anoush, a woman of similar age to Diana who had been born in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Diana embarked on a perilous journey: she entered Germany with an officially issued tourist visa in her Armenian passport. However, upon arrival, she had to conceal her passport, allowing her to assert her identity as Anoush, originating from Nagorno-Karabakh, in her bid to claim asylum. German customs police encountered Diana/Anoush on a train, where her deteriorating health condition was evident. She was promptly transported to a medical facility, where she underwent emergency treatment for approximately six months. After her condition stabilized, her case underwent review, and she was subsequently relocated to a nearby refugee camp. As her health

improved, Diana found herself legally trapped in another woman's identity, complete with her birthdate, biography, cultural background, and educational status as Anoush. Despite holding a university degree in teacher training, Diana could not utilize it due to embracing Anoush's identity, who never studied. Furthermore, from a legal perspective, she was entirely separated from her Armenian family, including her parents, husband, and two minor children. As a result, she had not seen them for more than a decade. In Germany, she essentially had to start her life from scratch: learning how to be someone else, becoming acquainted with people and culture, learning the German language, and entering the labor market as an unqualified person.

For our interview location, she proposed a hospital where she received her routine weekly dialysis treatment. This was her only free time, amid her work and other obligations. At that point, Anoush/Diana had been commemorating Anoush's birthdays for 14 years. That was also the period when she initiated a legal procedure—with the help of her lawyer—to reclaim her Armenian national identity, facing legal consequences and penalties for identity fraud. The following interview exempt between Anoush/Diana and me illustrates how complex the situation was:

TH: *do you have a residence permit or have you undergone naturalization* (?)
Anoush/Diana: *I have a residence permit* (.) *it's already unbefristed* [unlimited] *and* [I have] *niederlassungerlaubniss* [a settlement permit] (.) *but because I went to kreisverwaltung* [the district administration] *and told the truth* (.) *I received a penalty* (..) *I must pay a fine and I received duldung* [a toleration] *but it all depends on the boss of kreisverwaltung* [the district administration] (...)
TH: *who advised you to do so* (?)
Anoush/Diana: *no one* (.) *I was ready to take this step* (..) *all this time I was afraid* (…)
TH: *does it mean that you lived with constant fear* (?)
Anoush/Diana: *well* (.) *not that I had fear every day* (.) *no* (.) *but I was continuously tormented by thoughts* (..) *that* (…) *for instance people here congratulate me on November 1st as Anoush's birthday is on that day* (.) *my birthday is on December 9th* (…) *but they knew everything because I told*

*them who I am from the beginning* (..) *that I am not Anoush* (..) *but they congratulate me on that day* [a birthday indicated in the id] *and I forget* (.) *they would say* [imitating other's people voices] *how could you forget your birthday* (?) (…) *I also got fed up* (.) *and I want to see my mom* (.) *my mom has become old* (..) *and if something happens to her I wouldn't be able to go* (..) *all these things have piled up* (..) *and it's time now and I want to do it* [to claim her identity given through birth].

Anoush/Diana's continuous torment and fear related to her dual identity drove her to make the decision to claim her Armenian identity as Diana. This sheds light on the psychological and emotional toll of living with a hidden identity and the fear of being discovered. Anoush/Diana mentions that she possesses favorable legal statuses in Germany, including an unlimited residence permit (unbefristed) and a settlement permit (Niederlassungerlaubniss). However, she voluntarily approached the district administration and confessed the truth about her identity, resulting in a penalty and her status of Duldung (toleration). This decision shows a significant risk she took by revealing her identity to the authorities, potentially jeopardizing her legal status.

Furthermore, Diana's health situation keeps her dependent on continuous medical treatment in Germany. Nevertheless, she pursued the path to reclaim her original identity, even with associated risks, to have the opportunity to reconnect with her family. Diana's story is a complex one, emerging from the legal and ethical gray area. Her case underscores the intricate interplay between individual identity and structural constraints. On the one hand, it highlights the privilege or disadvantage associated with one's place of birth and how it intersects with available opportunities. On the other hand, the strategic use of accessible identity frameworks, whether considered legal or illegal, demonstrates agency in the struggle for survival and advancement.

## Professional Reinvention

Professional reinvention was a recurring theme among interviewees who arrived to Germany as adults and as such had undergone professional training and gained work experience. During the interview, Matilda, in her late 40s, shared her experiences of initially moving to Germany due to her marriage to a German national and her challenges in coming to terms with her struggle to find employment. She stated:

> *the only thing that was bad* (..) *literally from the very first day* (.) *when he* [her husband] *went to work* (..) *and I couldn't imagine myself staying at home* (…) *I mean* (.) *I still remember how I hear the neighbors getting into their cars* (.) *mostly men* (.) *and driving away* (…) *those car doors closing everyone leaving* (...) *and I stayed at home* (..) *you see* (…) *I had always worked before* (.) *and at that moment I'm not working* (..) *and this feeling of not working* (....) *I look at it differently now* (.) *if my financial situation allowed it now* (.) *I would gladly not work (..) but back then the idea of being without a job at the age of 31* (.) *it was some kind of horror* (…). [translation from Russian]

This citation underscores the intricate relationship between identity, gender roles, and the emotional impact of employment status, particularly within the context of adjusting to a new country. Additionally, it highlights another crucial aspect of identity formation, professional identification, as immigrants (especially high-qualified) navigate the process of professional reinvention upon arriving. Various scenarios highlight how these professional reinventions may occur. Given the interview sample's composition, which included many individuals with university degrees, the theme of professional reinvention emerged prominently during the interviews.

I can draw parallels to another study conducted with Soviet emigrees in the late 1970s in the USA. Despite being from another geographical context and a decade earlier than my research subjects' concern, however, it had variable implications for my understanding in the realm of professional identification and subsequent renegotiations in the light of migration. Goldstein (1979) noted the profound impact of status loss

on individuals whose identity was closely tied to their profession, education, and social position. He observed that this form of identity, rooted in one's social status, held particular significance in the USSR. Those who had enjoyed such status clung to it tenaciously, as it provided a deep sense of self-worth and security. However, for some immigrants, factors like age, previous training, experience, or language barriers made it impossible to continue their careers in the same way. Consequently, they struggled to accept this change in their status and desperately clung to their past identities, feeling profoundly threatened by transitions (idem, p. 260).

This phenomenon of status loss due to immigration is not unique to Soviet refugees in the USA; similar challenges I observed among post-Soviet immigrants in Germany. A poignant example is a married couple of medical doctors from Kyrgyzstan who relocated to Germany in the 1990s, seeking better opportunities for their adult children. However, their settlement in Germany led to an unplanned and premature retirement in their fifties, while their offspring, in their twenties and early thirties, struggled to find employment in their respective fields, despite holding university degrees obtained in Kyrgyzstan. Olga Pavlovna, former clinical psychotherapist, shared an insightful observation with me. She noted that the tendency for immigrants to face challenges in maintaining their professional identities might be linked to their educational backgrounds:

> *perhaps* (.) *this relates to the fact that they studied humanities and* (..) *social sciences* [teacher training, linguistics, and literature]*, rather than engineering* (…) *I've noticed that people with engineering degrees tend to have better chances when they first arrive* (..) *only our youngest son who studied languages works in a role currently more closely aligned with his university degree* (.) *he is employed in airport security* (..). (excerpt from my ethnographic notes)

Based on her observations, Olga Pavlovna is convinced that individuals with engineering degrees tend to have better job prospects upon arrival in Germany compared to professionals in other fields. However,

the inability to achieve professional realization often results in overqualification, a challenge faced by several interview partners from my sample and acknowledged by a few, as in the case of Anna. After numerous job-seeking attempts, Anna ultimately gives up, stating, "*For them* [employers] *I was a young Russian woman with a strange diploma*." Entrepreneurial activity is one way to address overqualification or general unemployment, as seen in the experiences of those interviewees who engaged in business activities to mitigate their unemployment and pursue their desired field of work (e.g., catering, event management).

If employment has previously served as a means of self-actualization and personal fulfillment, then a loss or temporary loss of professional status can have a detrimental impact on an individual's well-being and identity formation. This effect is particularly pronounced among first-generation immigrants who have already obtained qualifications and professional experience prior to their settlement. Additionally, proficiency in German plays a crucial role in improving one's situation and facilitating socially and professionally advancement, as exemplified in Taras's case. He decided to pursue another German university degree in electro-engineering in addition to his previous engineering studies from his home country. This time-consuming strategy ultimately had a positive effect on his professional and financial positioning.

## Identity of Difference and Multiple Belongings

Identity formation in terms of difference is another aspect for understanding identities in the context of migration, where the experience of otherness often becomes an integral part of everyday life. This concept can also be viewed as a matter of authenticity, highlighting the gap between one's inner identity and one's behavior in relation to the surrounding society (Fukuyama, 2007, pp. 2–3). For instance, previous national identities as being a Soviet citizen, Armenian, Russian, or Ukrainian are no longer supported by the pillars of a nation-state with its culture and traditions. Instead, there are expectations and demands to conform to the prevailing cultural norms. Ethnic German resettlers,

especially, faced such demands upon their arrival. This is exemplified in an interview with Alex. He reflected on his school experience when he arrived in Germany:

> *back then I was Ukrainian* (.) *and it was fine for me not to talk German* (…) *for others* (.) *for locals it was acceptable* (.) *but for a girl with a name like Lena Mayer* (…) *what to do about her* (..) *if she doesn't speak German* (?) *she has a German passport* (.) *yes you can imagine people spätaussiedler* [late ethnic German resettlers] (.) *they know a little bit history* (.) *they returned to their homeland* (.) *that's truth* (.) *they have that right* (.) *but no one warned the locals that millions of people were coming back to their homeland* (..) *who were looking forward to it and want to feel at home* (…)

This reflection by Alex sheds light on the challenges faced by immigrants, especially within the group identified as late ethnic German resettlers, and the intricate nature of identity in the destination country. It underscores the inherent tension between one's cultural identity and the expectations of assimilation in a different cultural context. Specifically, the experience of being a Spätaussiedler entails not only a return to a homeland but also the complex process of negotiating one's identity and sense of belonging in a society with distinct norms and expectations. While being admitted based on German ethnicity, their previous experiences often found 'little space in the public and official discourses' (Darieva, 2006, p. 355).

Intentions to assimilate or acculturate into mainstream society can arise from a desire to minimize differences and fulfill immigrants' longing for security. Alternatively, some individuals may choose to consistently embrace and live with their differences while asserting their right to remain different (Bauman, 2004). An interesting case in this context is Anna, a 41-year-old immigrant from Russia who arrived in Germany in 1995. In her early twenties, she moved to Germany to marry her boyfriend, a German national, she met in one of Russia's largest cities. The turbulent early years of Russian independence left her feeling uncertain and unstable, and a marriage proposal seemed to offer more security. After grappling with doubts, she ultimately decided to follow her partner

abroad. With curiosity and an open mind, she gradually integrated into her German surroundings:

> *in the beginning I had a strong interest in German life* (.) *well I didn't necessarily want for feel German myself* (..) *I was intrigued by the culture and way of life* (…) *I naturally became involved* (.) *mainly through my husband and later through connections made at the kindergarten* (.)

Freedom of expression, European mobility, environmental awareness, political liberties, and consumerism were all new concepts to her and greatly fascinated her. As she became increasingly immersed in her new life, she grew distant from her home country and never returned. She embraced another world that appealed to her more, feeling somewhat embarrassed by elements that represented her past. German has now become dominant in her everyday life and communication with her children, friends, and acquaintances. From the integration standpoint, she has succeeded. Surprisingly, despite all this, she has retained a sense of difference that has grown stronger with each passing year, leading her to yearn for a return to the places she left 17 years ago. Perhaps our interview also triggered her nostalgic feelings and contributed to her continued sense of being different. At some point, she shared:

> *I realized that* (…) *I don't know about other foreigners* (.) *but I'm proficient in German and I'm open to and invite all people regardless of who they are* (..) *however* (.) *there won't be friendships as deep (..) you're a foreigner and that's how you'll always be* (.)

The sense of being different has become an integral part of Anna's self-perception, deeply ingrained in her inner world, and reinforced by emotionally charged or critical situations. Our extensive interview, lasting eight hours over two sessions, falls into this category of critical situations. It forced Anna to retrospectively assess her family and migratory experiences, prompting her to reflect on personal transitions as an emigrant and immigrant. Anna shared her narrative of difference, which undoubtedly stems from her experiences in Germany, including her 17-year marriage to a German national, her long-term residence in the

predominantly monocultural neighborhood, and her role as a mother to two children who are fully disconnected from her pre-migratory life due in part to the choices and decisions she made. Anna's journey embodies what Bauman (2011, p. 430) described as living a life with difference and asserting the right to remain different.

Another way of experiencing a sense of difference is through a mélange identity formation that embraces multiple affiliations, multilingual practices, and active engagement in transnational social spaces. Simultaneously, the mélange identity formation may offer the possibility of temporary escapism, as illustrated next.

## Mélange Identity and Temporary Escapism

Identity formation in culturally mixed environments can be framed in terms of hybrid or multilayered identities, with hybridity linked to the concept of migration mélange (Pieterse, 2003, p. 73). Hybridity or mélange encompasses a range of mixed elements, the blending of various cultures and cultural symbols, and the interplay of languages as translanguaging. This opens possibilities for the fusion of lifestyles and life variations, illustrated in the examples of language use (Part V), entrepreneurial (Part VI), or leisure (Part VII) actions.

Hybrid identities can become a common scenario echoing the Braidotti's notion of '*I am rooted, but I flow*' (2011, p. 137). Certain parallels can be drawn between patchwork identities and mélange identities. Beck-Gernsheim (2004, pp. 102–103) described the identities of individuals within mainstream society as a patchwork of different elements and layers. Consequently, she urged not to perceive immigrants' identities with connections to multiple cultures or origins as unstable or threatening to the mainstream.

Expressions of mélange identities can manifest differently, as observed in some interviews. Martha and Vlad serve as illustrations of this diversity. When I encountered them, they were undergraduate students who had immigrated to Germany from Kazakhstan as children alongside their parents, having been admitted as late ethnic German resettlers. Vlad, hailing from one of the German settlements in Kazakhstan, arrived in

Germany in 1994, while Martha arrived with her family four years later. Independently from each other, they settled with their respective families and extended network of relatives within the same small city in West Germany. It was there that they crossed paths while attending school and eventually became a couple.

Martha initially reached out to me after discovering my research flyer at her university, where I was seeking for Russian-speaking interview partners. She later persuaded Vlad to participate in an interview a few days afterward. Vlad, who converses in Russian with his parents and relatives, preferred to conduct the interview in Russian. In contrast, Martha communicates in both Russian and German with her family of origin, using Russian with her father and German with her mother and younger brother. Consequently, she chose to conduct the interview in German.

In our conversation about leisure activities, Martha aimed to elucidate their preference for Russian discos as this exempt from our interview illustrates:

> TH: *with your circle of friends* (.) *how do you usually spend your free time* (?)
> Martha: *it's mostly quite boring* (.) *we stand outside and talk* (.) *the guys have some beer* (..) *and that's about it* (.) *sometimes we have birthday parties* (..) *occasionally we go to a disco-club but mostly Russian clubs* ['russische Disko'] (.) *we don't go to German clubs that often* (…)
> Me: *where is this Russian club* [disko] (?)
> Martha: *in Hcity for example there's one called Unique* (.) *it's near the R-river* (.) *then there's one near Scity* (.) *there's another one in Lcity called Russian Glamor* (.) *but I haven't been there* (..) *there used to be one in Gcity but they closed it* (.) *there's one in Ncity called Kolosseum* (.) *there used to be one in Tcity but they closed it too* (..) *in Pcity we have Russian nights* (.) *occasionally there's a Russian disco* (...)
> TH: *why do you mainly go to Russian discos* (?)
> Martha: *because of the music and the people* (.) *I guess* # 00:37:55 # [translation from German]

Martha enthusiastically provided a list of Russian discos located within a 200-kilometer radius of her current residence. These leisure preferences are rooted in their appreciation of the music and the social ambience

found in these so-called Russian discos. The phenomenon of this discos, much like Russian shops, offers an intriguing context for the examination of symbolism, consumption, and leisure cultures among post-Soviet and Russian-speaking youth in Germany. Russian discos hold significant importance as elements of identity formation for the younger generation. Nevertheless, to my knowledge, there have been no comprehensive studies on this topic.

The phrase 'Germans during the daytime, and Russians at the Russian disco,' paraphrasing Jan Nederveen Pieterse's description of the second generation of Muslim immigrants (Pieterse, 2003, p. 73), underscores the need to exhibit a blend of cultural traits, encompassing elements of both the home and outdoor cultures. Pieterse's notion highlighted the phenomenon of hybridity because of migration mélange. It commonly occurs in second-generation immigrants, where they exhibit a complex blend of cultural traits. This entails a separation between their home culture and language, typically matching culture of origin their parents, and an external culture aligning with their culture of education, vocation and, at time, residence. I consider Russian discos as venues for temporary escapism.

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# 9

# Co-Migrant Identity Frameworks—Semantic Complexities and Perceptions

I explore further identification of co-migrants, focusing on identity frameworks that underpin ethnicity, nationality, or cultural affiliations. These affiliations may include Russian language proficiency and a cultivated sense of Russian-speaking community within the German context. Identity frameworks encompass various markers, related ethnonational elements, policy-related terminology, shared cultural heritage, geographical origins, and generational reference. Notably, some of these identity frameworks have also emerged in other fieldwork contexts. The term *russaki* emerges as a prominent identity framework within this community, offering insights into various dimensions of emigrant and immigrant experiences and the ways group identities are socially constructed, recognized, or assigned. This term operates as a linguistic hybrid, sometimes used as we-description (akin to ethnic German resettlers), at other times with a general connotation (Russian-speaking), or in a derogatory they-description. Beyond interview material and ethnographic observations, gaining an understanding of the nuances associated with *russaki* required further data collection through digital ethnography. This involved comparing meanings emerging from interviews with those found in various sources, including online forum discussions, blog

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contributions, captions in Russian community newspapers, and club advertisements. Through this comprehensive analysis, I delineate four distinct semantic types of russaki, which I explore in this chapter.

* * *

Exploring identity formations revealed through individual interviews, it becomes relevant to investigate the identity frameworks through which FSU immigrants perceive their fellow co-migrants and whether they utilize these identifications to define themselves. Various markers have surfaced in the interviews, encompassing ethno-national elements, policy-related terminology, shared cultural heritage, geographical origins, and generational reference. Notably, some of these identity frameworks have also emerged in other fieldwork contexts. Table 9.1 presents several identity frameworks employed by research subjects to identify their co-migrants.

Identity frameworks outlined in Table 9.1 serve as common markers for identifying distinct groups or communities from the former Soviet Union. In addition to mundane (fieldwork) occurrences, the right column indicates other contexts in which I encountered these identity markers. Unlike nuanced individual identity formations, collective identification often relies on easily recognizable patterns and general terms, occasionally influenced by stereotypes or prejudice (as, for instance, ethnic slur). Most participants in this study underwent naturalization and, from a legal standpoint, could identify themselves or others as German nationals. Citizenship holds considerable importance for their everyday well-being, particularly in comparison to a few cases where legal status was not permanent. However, they seldomly referred to themselves or their co-migrants in terms of acquired nationality.

**Table 9.1** Identity frameworks for identifying FSU co-migrants

| Identity frameworks | Markers | Context of use |
|---|---|---|
| Ethno-national Mosaic | Armenians, Jews, Russians, Russian Germans, (Russlanddeutsche), Kazakh Germans (Deutsche aus Kasachstan), Ukrainians | Official, statistical, academic research, everyday contexts |
| Legal and Mobility Status | Resettlers, returnees (переселенцы), ethnic German resettlers (Aussiedler, Spätaussiedler) refugees | Official, mundane, academic research |
| Ethnic Slur | khokhol (хохол) for Ukrainians, moskal (москаль/ muscovite) for Russians[1]; russaki | Mundane, social media |
| Shared Cultural Background | Russian-speaking (русскоязычные), post-Soviet migrants; Russian or Slavic brides (русския, словянская невесты), Russian or Slavic wives (русския, словянская жены); russaki | Mundane; academic research |
| Geographical Origin | Fellow countryman (земляки) | Mundane |
| Generational Reference | First, second, or third generations | Mundane, academic research, statistical |

## A Niche and a Semantic Field of Russaki

In this section, I analyze the concept russaki as an identity framework. This term carries semantic ambiguity, as it can serve as a means of self-identification, denote group identification, or represent distinct identity projects within the German context. However, it is crucial to note that at times, russaki is used as an offensive ethnic slur. Certainly, the term russaki encapsulates the complexity of collective identification and

[1] In late 2015, I engaged in a discussion on this matter. While conversing with the hostess (originating from Russia) at a party, she inquired about why it is offensive for Ukrainians to be called khokhol. I responded by drawing a parallel to the situation when Russians are referred to as moskal/muscovite. She understood my point, and we agreed that it is fair not to use such derogatory labels. Both khokhol and moskal are historically formed ethnic slurs with negative connotations. It is worth noting that after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the commencement of the war in Eastern Ukraine, this ethnic slur started to be used as hate speech on social media and beyond (Allan, 2017).

identity frameworks among Russian-speaking migrants on the ground. Earlier, I offered some relevant methodological reflections on why and under which circumstances I added the word russaki [руссаки] as an emerging identity framework to the theoretical sampling of my study on Russian-speaking communities in Germany. Russaki likely represents one of the few opportunities to empirically capture the multifaceted nature of Russian-speaking communities in Germany.

How is the term russaki used, and what insights does it provide into the research subjects? The word russaki naturally emerges during a conversation. In the moment of its usage, it appears evident that the speaker is referring to fellow co-migrants, either identifying them as a collective entity (as russaki denotes plurality) or alluding to shared experiences such as Russian language proficiency, migratory backgrounds, or behavioral patterns. For instance, a young woman named Mila, a Ukrainian national married to Bernd, whose parents arrived from Russia under the resettler policy shared her personal experience. She mentioned, "*Russaki from upstairs picked up our post while we were away*." This simple statement reflects Mila's trust in her Russian-speaking neighbors, indicating their reliability in handling their home affairs. In contrast, an elderly resident named Galina Ivanovna, who had lived in Ycity for an extended period after being admitted as an ethnic German resettler, had a different perspective. She expressed her concerns, saying, "*I know russaki did it* (!)" In this context, Galina Ivanovna distrusted individuals she considered russaki for not adhering to recycling rules, assuming they had discarded foil candy wrappers with Cyrillic writing in the wrong container. In both conversations, the use of the word russaki was accompanied by an implicit understanding of its meaning and the specific individuals it referred to. Although the connotations of russaki differed in these instances, it was unmistakable what the term signified within each context. Mila's usage conveyed a sense of trust and shared responsibility, while Galina Ivanovna's usage was tinged with suspicion and mistrust.

Similar patterns of the ambiguous yet clearly understood use of russaki emerged in my interviews. Matilda, for example, shared her initial shock upon hearing the use of this word: "*First time when I heard russaki applied to* US *and not only to ethnic German resettlers* (.) *I was shocked*." With the

emphasized 'us' she referred to 'ethnic Russians' since Matilda, who was married to a German national for ten years, identified herself as such.

The contextual clarity surrounding the term russaki becomes less certain when we examine its various meanings in interviews compared to its usage in other fieldwork contexts, such as social media, online forums, or the blogosphere. In addition to its casual usage, as described above, russaki has triggered intense debates within Russian-speaking circles, particularly concerning whether it is an appropriate term for describing ethnic, national, or cultural identities. Indeed, the findings reveal that russaki often pertain to cultural identity or framework and serve as a means of identification. While immigrants use it to identify other immigrants (and less frequently to refer to themselves), russaki signifies a specific cultural affiliation based on the Russian language, symbolic Russianness, as well as Slavic, post-Soviet, all tied to East European culture, customs, traditions, and routines in Germany. Simultaneously, the term russaki carries stereotypes and prejudices, as exemplified in Galina Ivanovna's recycling inquiry, Matilda's bewilderment, or some images found in online forums. Essentially, the multiplicity of meanings associated with russaki underscores a fundamental characteristic of semantic constructs: they encompass multiple interpretations and are open to a plurality of meanings.

The diversity of meanings projected into russaki in Germany can be attributed to the substantial influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, each with their unique cultural traits and behavioral patterns (Savoskul, 2006, p. 215). This heterogeneity has resulted in the absence of a unifying image of this migration wave, whether from within the immigrant communities or from external perspectives. Additionally, attempts to apply terms like post-Soviet or Russian diaspora (Isurin, 2011) have not achieved consensus, as explored in more detail in Chapter 5. There is no agreement as to what russaki signifies: Is it a collective image of Russian-speaking community? Does it specifically refer to Russian-speaking German resettlers from the post-Soviet region? Or is it associated with a youth subculture that embraces and capitalizes on imagery from the Soviet era's grandeur? Through analysis, I have identified four distinct clusters within the semantic battlefield russaki. These clusters include: (1) all Russian-speaking immigrants as russaki;

(2) exclusively ethnic German resettlers as russaki; (3) russaki as a prototype of gopniki, representing a deviant gang subculture; and (4) cool russaki as a youth sub(club)culture, which I explore next.

## Russian-Speaking Immigrants as Russaki

This interpretation of russaki as referring to Russian-speaking immigrants includes individuals who use the Russian language in public and private settings. This perspective is broad and all-encompassing, as demonstrated by the following examples. One interviewee reflects on her initial employment experience in Germany:

> *there was one interesting moment* (.) *there were only* russaki *employed as workers* (.) *well as carpenters or as craftsmen* (.) *they* [the owners] *were Germans and all the* russaki *were working there* (.) *they* [the owners] *liked it so much* (.) *so they decided to pay closer attention to the applications of Russian-speaking office assistants* (..) *and they liked me so they offered me a job* (.) *they liked that Russian-speaking individuals were responsible* (.) *work hard and don't ask for high salaries* (.)

In this context, russaki refers to Russian-speaking residents in Germany who are distinct from other population groups in Germany. The German employers held positive stereotypes about employees considered as Russian-speaking. They believed that Russian-speaking workers were responsible, hardworking, and not demanding in terms of compensation. These positive stereotypes might have influenced their decision to hire a Russian-speaking office assistant. This citation also suggests that Russian-speaking immigrants, referred to as russaki, were primarily employed in specific blue-collar jobs such as carpentry and craftsmanship. This indicates a form of occupational clustering where these immigrants were concentrated in certain professions.

In another instance, a more generalized and somewhat problematic connotation in total of the term russaki emerged during an interview with Diana. Reflecting on her earlier experiences in a refugee dormitory, she recalled receiving advice from other refugees from the FSU:

> *They told me to keep away from Germans* (.) *they are not good* (..) *you are going to have troubles* (..) *better stay in touch with russaki* (.)

Essentially, Diana was advised to place more trust in fellow co-migrants, particularly those of Russian-speaking backgrounds, as opposed to local Germans. However, as she gained more experience, her attitude toward russaki became more skeptical. She even emphasized that if she were to enter any new relationships after her divorce, they would be with Germans rather than russaki. This shift in her perspective may be attributed to her experiences with other co-migrants that made her more cautious and, at times, distrustful. Another possible explanation for Diana's change in attitude is that she associates *russak* (singular masculine form) with a certain type of masculinity, possibly a conservative one, from which she prefers to distance herself:

> *if I were to date someone* (.) *I don't want russak* (.) *an Armenian or anyone from the Soviet Union* (…) *I prefer to be with a German* [man]." Further she elaborated on her preference to German men: "*this attitude to a woman* (.) *I felt that I am persona* [in sense of treating her as a personality] *that I can have my own opinions and express them* (.) *in Armenia such a thing doesn't exist* (.) *there* (.) *there are a mother-in-law and a husband* (.) *I didn't have a say* (…) *they could decide for me whether I could graduate from university or not* (.) *what I could wear or not* (.)

In these statements, Diana expresses a preference for dating a German man over FSU immigrants, including russaki and Armenians. She highlights her desire for a more open and equal relationship, contrasting it with the traditional gender roles she experienced in Armenia, her home country. Diana's choice reflects her personal experiences and values, emphasizing her desire for independence and the opportunity to express her opinions freely in a relationship.

In addition to its everyday use, the term russaki as a designation for the Russian-speaking in-group is occasionally employed for marketing purposes, as exemplified by an advertisement in the Aussiedlerbote (2016, p. 29). This advertisement, presented in a biographical style, narrates the story of a male immigrant from the FSU who faced men's health issues after relocating to Germany. Struggling with this problem,

he tried various remedies without success. Disheartened, he went on vacation to Turkey, where he encountered another man, 'a russak, also from Germany,' who recommended a specific treatment (presumably an advertised medicine). Surprisingly, the treatment worked for him. The underlying message is that no one can provide more effective help than someone from the same in-group, the russaki, whether through advice or by offering a suitable product, as intended by this advertisement.

In this interpretation, russaki may also encompass former residents of a country that no longer exists but is preserved in memories, narratives, and myths. As a result, it acquires an internationalist dimension in the German context. This internationalist identity project is based on a shared language, collective memories, childhood and youth experiences, shared values like 'friendship, unity, collectivity' (Isurin, 2011, p. 97), and possibly a common reality marked by solidarity in addressing within emigrant-immigrant dilemma. This definition of russaki minimizes differences, celebrates commonalities, and unites individuals under a collective identity. This collective identity framework serves as a fertile ground for a broad business network, both within and beyond German borders, as will be demonstrated later in Part VI dedicated to the entrepreneurial actions. It is plausible to assume that the underlying concept of this network revolves around the idea of shared identification and in-group status among Russian-speaking migrants in Germany.

With all range of connotations between positive and negative, this multifaceted interpretation of russaki appears to serve as both an inclusive term to refer to FSU Russian-speaking immigrants and, simultaneously, as a differentiating concept used to distinguish oneself from others. This variant of russaki encompasses individuals like an ethnic German resettler from Karaganda in Kazakhstan, a marriage migrant from Saint Petersburg in Russia, or a Jewish refugee from Kiev in Ukraine, regardless of whether they are willing to be identified this way or associated with each other within a single group. This reflects the aspect of collective identification driven by everyday logic: all individuals who speak Russian, despite of their backgrounds or preferences.

## Ethnic German Resettlers as Russaki

The next interpretation of russaki is used by or to refer to ethnic German resettlers, primarily from Kazakhstan and Russia.[2] First russaki resurfaced in the interview with Liza, an ethnic German resettler from Kazakhstan. She enthusiastically described how skillful and well-organized russaki in her parents' neighborhood were, including their ability to build and maintain various amenities:

> [my parents] *built a house just near the lake* (.) […] *there are some multi-story buildings but also some family houses* (..) *they* [referring to neighbors] *are singing there* (.) *they are having fun there* (.) *they are celebrating* (..) *they even made a volleyball beach* (..) *those russaki borrowed money from the city and constructed a lot of things there* (.) *cleanliness* (!) *order* (!) *they are all taking care* (..) *anyway they sing there* (.) *they quarrel they kiss each other and they fight* […] *of course they are great* (!)

In this context, Liza described the vibrant neighborhood where her parents live. Her description aligns with Worbs and colleagues' observations (2013) about state funding and house management among ethnic German resettlers. The lively atmosphere Liza conveyed with warmth in her voice and emotional connection contrasts with how she described her current upper-class neighborhood, where she moved in after marrying her late husband. In this case, russaki serves as a collective reference for ethnic German resettlers, emphasizing their affinity with what is understood as Russian culture in the German context.

In another instance, Liza used a variation of russaki as self-reference. Her case is particularly interesting in terms of self-identification. In another instance, Liza humorously recounted a story about how her future husband, a highly ranked local doctor, introduced her to his friends:

> […] *for God's sake whom did he bring* (.) *was their reactions as they told me later* (..) *I was small red-headed and additionally russachka* [laughingly].

[2] Including an extended blog post in Russian titled *Rusaki: To the Issue of Self-Designation of Russian Germans in Germany* by Wladymyr Golubchikov (2012), among others.

Here, russachka [руссачка] is the feminine singular form of russaki, which Liza used to playfully emphasize her migration background. Besides the humorous application, this term implies two important divides based on culture and class. It is possible that Liza's appearance or background made her stand out among her husband's friends, who had different cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds. The term russachka highlights her connection to Russian culture and, by extension, her distinctiveness from the group she was introduced to.

Connecting russaki to the Russian language and culture reveals a historical context deeply influenced by Soviet cultural policies. These policies promoted a sense of familiarity with Russianness among many individuals, as discussed earlier. Soviet internationalism emphasized the unity of brotherly nations within a single union, discouraging nationalistic ambitions. This historical backdrop helps us understand the multifaceted role of russaki in contemporary identity framework. It is noteworthy that even those who cannot identify themselves as Russians, such as ethnic German resettlers from Kazakhstan or Russian-speaking Ukrainians, may still use the term russaki to underline their connection to the Russian language and culture. For them, russaki serves to emphasize their cultural affinity, despite not being recognized as or not identifying themselves as Russians. Conversely, those who identify themselves as Russians, whether through birth or nationality, often use this identity to distinguish themselves from other Russian speakers, especially those who are not identified as Russians. This highlights the intricate interplay between language, culture, and identity. Considering the extensive family histories that span the Eurasian landscape, from the Odesa region in Ukraine to Karaganda in Kazakhstan or Novosibirsk in Russia, many ethnic Germans willingly or were coerced into undergoing processes of Sovietization or Russification. Additionally, cross-cultural marriages and families have played a significant role in preserving cultural Russianness among these diverse communities.

One notable illustration of this cultural interaction can be observed in the *Resettlers' Messenger* (Aussiedlerbote), a bilingual monthly publication available both online and in print. This publication seamlessly incorporates articles in both Russian and German, celebrating cultural figures like Alexander Pushkin alongside narratives about famous Soviet

Germans and stories from both the Soviet past and contemporary German life. The cover page of the Resettlers' Messenger symbolically underscores the connections between German and Russian cultures by featuring the national tricolors of both countries. In contrast to this Messenger, many other German newspapers published in Russian tend to avoid translanguaging between German and Russian or adhere to a strict editorial policy that maintains clear boundaries between standard languages. One such example is the *Rhenish Newspaper* (Рейнская газета / Rheinische Zeitung), a German daily newspaper published in Russian. These cultural patters serve as a reflection of the complex interplay between language, culture, and historical legacies within diverse immigrant communities in Germany. These dynamics play a significant role in shaping the various identity frameworks at play in this context.

The types of cultural and linguistic fusions as in the case of *Resettlers' Messenger* reveal the closeness to German-Russian cultural contexts and can be also observed, for instance, in the spoken language of ethnic German resettlers (and not only). These fusions take forms of translanguaging (mixture) of Russian and German, a declination of German words according to the Russian grammar or construction of Russian sentences with German syntax (Chapter 10). This hybrid cultural experience of FSU Germans distinguishes them from native Germans but also from other FSU ethnicized groups, oriented on preserving purity of their national language (also Russian among others) and the authenticity of their ethno-cultural belonging. For these groups, preserving cultural (Russian or any other) authenticity, being called russaki is an offense, an ethnic slur. Some discussions in online forums are especially vocal about it.

In this interpretation, employing the term russaki for group identification or self-reference is viewed as discouraging or demeaning, as argued by one of the forum participants:

> *Rusak is definitely an offensive word. It is on par with derogatory terms as 'Nemchura' or 'Fascists' for Germans. 'Japs' for Japanese. 'Yankee' for Americans. Macaroni for Italians. Niggers for blacks. Note that all these are conventional expressions. All these words are offensive, accented with prejudice.* […] *For these words people can be killed* […]. (de-online.ru, 2013)

The underlying message of this post underscores what Celine-Marie Pascale refers to as the 'weaponization of language' (2019, p. 899), wherein ethnic-based hostilities are conveyed through linguistic hybrids. Additionally, Irina Perianova encouraged a critical examination of linguistic hybrids (2019, pp. 217–259) and highlighted that language can be potent tool for deception (idem, p. 5). Such ready-made linguistic formulas or hybrids can easily become guidelines for thought and action (idem, p. 126). Thus, it is important to recognize that the word russaki has the potential to be weaponized, leading to significant consequences.

## Russaki as a Representation of Different Subcultures

Within the third interpretation of russaki, the term is associated with specific subcultures, encompassing two distinct connotations: one as a deviant subculture and the other as a clubbing subculture.

### Russaki as a Deviant Subculture

In this connotation, russaki is employed to designate individuals associated with criminal activities and behaviors akin to the gopniki subculture. It is crucial to highlight that this usage of russaki markedly differs from its previous interpretations. The term gopniki refers to a criminal subculture that originated in the 1920s within the newly formed Soviet Union and purportedly resurfaced in the 1990s within the post-Soviet territories (Gavrilyuk & Latysheva, 2009). During transitional periods marked by political, economic, and social upheaval, this marginalized group adopted a distinct worldview characterized by rejecting values such as education, tolerance, labor, and self-improvement. Stereotypically, these individuals are depicted as poorly educated, engaging in petty criminal activities, and displaying anti-social behavior. This particular interpretation often carries negative connotations and serves to stigmatize and marginalize a specific segment within the Russian-speaking immigrant community.

Efforts to link russaki with the prototype of gopniki are driven by a desire to shame and downgrade certain segments of the studied migration. In the blogosphere, a satirical image has emerged portraying russaki as gopniki, accompanied by messages like:

> … *But this is the emigration that calls themselves rusaki. They listen to Seryoga* [a Belarusian rapper]*, speak Russian badly, and look a bit like this. A bad image of a Russian gopniki. I haven't been in Germany that long but was surprised that this exists. They even created a name for themselves – rusaki*. (hip-hop.ru)

The author openly acknowledges a short period of residence in Germany, signifying a limited exposure to the various contexts. Additionally, interviews have uncovered another prevalent narrative: newcomers often perceive themselves as better-educated and more refined compared to previous FSU populations. This perception may stem from a desire to counteract some negative stereotypes that may have influenced Germans' impressions of East European immigrants in the past. It exemplifies a distinct cluster, potentially shaped by individuals seeking to establish their credibility within the German surroundings.

In contrast to the previous meanings of russaki, which encompassed both self-identification and external categorization, the current use of the term is an externally imposed label heavily reliant on stereotypes and prejudices. Russaki are often depicted as inadequately educated and ignorant young men, marked by their criminal history or present involvement in criminal activities, and seemingly devoid of opportunities for reintegration into mainstream society. This group is marginalized, criminalized, and stigmatized, occupying the lowest rung of the post-Soviet immigrant hierarchy in Germany.

It is worth noting that the russaki, when associated with gopniki, exhibit a style somewhat reminiscent of the YouTube show *Ost-Boys* from Berlin-Marzahn (Lux, 2019). The main characters are Slavik and Wadik, the children of late ethnic German resettlers, born in Germany and holding country's citizenship. The connection to their mixed cultural background is humorously expressed through the subjects they tackle in the *Ost-Boys* show, such as life in the Plattenbau (pre-fabricated tower

blocks) of Berlin Marzan, family dynamics from the generation aspect, and comparisons between East-Europeans and Germans, referred to as pazan [пацан] и aleman [алеман]. The language used in this web series combines German youth slang with Russian interference, particularly using catchy words like davaj [давай / let's go], and pazan [пацан / a lad, a youngster] as well as some (mild) swear words, as seen on a striped waistcoat bearing the phrase BLYATBERRY ESTABLISHED BY ОСТ БОЙЗ (a merchandize on *Ost Boys / Ост Бойз* Web). These five words exemplify language fusion and social class-related irony: BLYATBERRY satirizes the British retail Burberry Brand, with blyat meaning damn it in Russian. ESTABLISHED denotes branding and design, while ОСТ БОЙЗ, written in the Cyrillic alphabet as Ost boys, combines the German Ost (East) and the English boys.

However, the YouTube show *Ost-Boys* represents a grassroots business project that offers fictional, sarcastic, and socially critical media content, primarily portraying the second generation of post-Soviet migration. In terms of imagery, *Ost-Boys* can be situated between the earlier mentioned russaki, akin gopniki, and cool russaki, thus representing the next cluster of meaning associated with russaki.

## Cool Russaki as a Clubbing Subculture

The cool russaki subculture is a distinct youth niche firmly entrenched in the club scene. This interpretation emphasizes the social and recreational aspects of the subculture, distinguishing it from the criminal subculture connotation. Defining features include discotheques featuring Russian-styled popular music and a glamorous aesthetic. They constitute the primary audience for events like *Russaki in Germany* [Russaki w Germanii] and *One Night in Mother Russia*. On the social media front, various attempts with different degrees of success have been made to consolidate this group on platforms like Vkontakte and Facebook. This subculture predominantly comprises teenagers and young adults, likely the children of Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany. Shared interests and like-mindedness take precedence in this subculture over social backgrounds or generational ties. As one popular song boldly

conveys a sense of collective belonging and difference, emphasizing shared late-night gatherings, musical expression, and the feeling that outsiders—particularly Germans—cannot fully grasp their way of life (Dillema).

While they may not have firsthand experience of the USSR, some within this subculture romanticize the Soviet past, intertwining it with an imagined sense of Russian greatness. This romanticization finds expression in pop songs like 'Coole-Russen – Russen sind Überall' [Много нас, много нас – руссаки везде] (Coole-Russen 2008). However, the extent to which this romanticization is a widespread belief within the subculture remains contested. Visually, this subculture, or at least a fraction of it, appears to embrace a form of masculinity influenced by stereotypical East European imagery. This masculinity is characterized by exaggerated expressions of power, strength, and potency, with materialistic values playing a prominent role. Expensive cars serve as status symbols, and guns are used to symbolize danger and potency. On the other hand, femininity within this subculture is often highly sexualized and objectified.

These two connotations within the subculture interpretation of russaki illustrate the multifaceted nature of the term and how it can be used to describe vastly different social groups and behaviors within the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Germany. Despite varying assessments, russaki delineates a collective identity framework for FSU immigrants. It can denote an in-group asserting belonging, serve as a means of differentiation, or function to establish boundaries. Andreas Wimmer's flexible ethnic boundary-making approach encompasses both categorical and social dimensions, including social classification and collective representation, as well as the everyday networks resulting from individual acts of connecting and distancing (Wimmer, 2008, p. 975). From this perspective, the concept of russaki offers only a partial view of collective and individual identification and belonging, highly contingent on the sociocultural context of its application.

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## Part IV Conclusion

I underscored the critical role of migration narratives as dynamic arenas, often serving as battlegrounds, for the construction and reconstruction of identity formations and frameworks. These formations and frameworks entail binary or even multiple points of reference, encompassing considerations such as one's home country and a host country, languages and translanguaging, and engagement in transnational social and cultural spaces. They emerge from continuous negotiations, incorporations, and reconciliations within the emigrant immigrant dilemma, contributing to the intricate process of resolving identity debates among post-Soviet immigrants in Germany.

I highlighted the significance of questioning and approaching identity as a representative element of agency within the migration context. In doing so, I emphasized the distinction between identity formations and identity frameworks that helps to explore the dynamics of both individual and collective identifications within the diverse groups under examination. On an individual level, I delved into nuanced and profound identity formations, encompassing various aspects such as identity of difference, mélange identity, professional reinvention, and adherence to legal structures. These individual identities reflected the complexity of self-understanding and self-reflection in the postmigratory context.

On a collective level, identity patterns often incorporate markers related to ethnicity, nationality, or cultural experiences, such as language proficiency or affinity to Russianness developed in the German context. These collective identity frameworks are more generalized and recognizable. The term russaki is presented as a prevalent identity framework among the Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany. The diverse applications of the term illustrate different dimensions of emigrant/immigrant experiences and provide insights into how project identities are socially constructed, accepted, or assigned. This identity framework is shaped by a mixture of experiences, cultures, generational perspectives, and multiple belongings. The meaning of russaki can vary depending on the context and the individuals using the term. It embodies the complexity of identity and cultural belonging among Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany.

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# Part V

## The Silence of Polyglots—Language Practices and Language Use through the Prism of Migration

# 10

# Language Use—An Individual and Group Perspective

> … between two languages, your realm is silence. By dint of saying things in various ways, one just as trite as the other, just as approximate, one ends up no longer saying them… Yet when the foreigner – the speech-denying strategist – does not utter his conflict, he in turn takes root in his own world of a rejected person whom no one is supposed to hear. (Kristeva, 2002, p. 275; p. 277)

In this chapter, I focus on language practices as an expressive element, the second pillar, of immigrant agency. The complexities of language use in the context of migration and settlement I illuminate through Julia Kristeva's concept of the *silence of polyglots*, highlighting an entrapment while overcoming linguistic challenges. To explore an expressive element of immigrant agency, I take a dual approach: on one hand, I delve into the individual and collective dimensions of language use within the context of migration. On the other hand, I explore how immigrants' use of language serves as an expressive element for both individual and collective agency. While my fieldwork primarily centered on immigrants, I recognize the significance of language use as a tool for conveying discourses and embedded hierarchies. These discourses,

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as external structures of meaning and signification, are intricately intertwined with the expressive element of human agency and often transcend linguistic boundaries, in line with the ideas of Paul Ricœur. When examining language interference (translanguaging) resulting from the blending of two or more languages, it is evident how the temporal discursive context is expressed and replicated by immigrants in their linguistic repertoire.

* * *

The selection of language or dialect is linked to the broader community or society in which they are applied. Language use, including phonetic tones and vocabulary, can reveal social class (Bernstein, 2003 [1971]), cultural, regional, and educational backgrounds (Dirim & Auer, 2004; Leopold, 2015 [1959]; Spiekermann et al., 2016). It raises questions such as whether one employs a vernacular or standard language, speaks with an accent, exhibits traces of a dialect, regiolect, or ethnolect, or falls into the contested categories of native or foreign speakers. The answers to these questions and approaches to these nuances can either build bridges or erect barriers between individuals, communities, and societies, similarly to what flexible ethnic boundary-making approach (Wimmer, 2007) prescribes to the category ethnicity as a distinction marker.

Language, as a structural element, can be perceived as a code that trespasses time (Young, 1990). It is posited that language operates on a macro-level beyond individual experiences (Coulter, 1996, pp. 339–340). Language functions as a mechanism for translating personal impressions into public expressions, echoing the insights of Paul Ricœur (1976, p. 19), who noted that language transforms private experiences into the public domain. However, individuals and groups adapt language to suit their specific contextual needs, seamlessly integrating it into their everyday lives, and in turn, language influences and is influenced by their activities (Giddens, 1984, p. xvi). Moreover, the dynamic and contextual nature of language is encapsulated in the concept of languaging (Mazak & Herbas-Donoso, 2014, p. 700), which underscores the ever-changing quality of language shaped and modified by its users. Through these interactions, people create and employ distinct languages depending on

the situational context, the individuals involved, and the institutional framework of that context.

The ability to express oneself individually or collectively and the interconnection between language and action require a broader vocabulary, encompassing languaging as a process. Categories such as voice or coming to voice are related to language and also involve elements of agency from within. hooks' concept of voice combines individual and collective agency to express, oppose, insist, and assert (1994, p. 1). Coming to voice transcends the mere act of sharing one's experiences verbally; it entails strategically using one's voice to speak freely about subjects of significance (ibid.). This concept resonates with the interview process, where interviewees discover their voice and reconstruct their experiences and perspectives, often reflecting their migration, transnational, and integration experiences, as reflected in the section dedicated to in-depth interviews.

Considering both structural and non-structural approaches to language, in my theory building I focus on the concept of languaging (Mazak & Herbas-Donoso, 2014, p. 700) as a dynamic process embedded in both time and space. This process is continually molded and influenced by its users, particularly the speakers. Within the context of transnational social spaces, individuals partake in what Martin-Jones and his colleagues have termed 'multiple discursive practices' as multilingual speakers, while engaging language interference (Weinreich, 1979 [1953]) and translanguaging (Mazak & Herbas-Donoso, 2014). In doing so, they effectively draw upon the resources within their communicative repertoires (Martin-Jones et al., 2012, p. 10). Fieldwork observations have highlighted the intricate relationship between migration and languages, emphasizing the complexity inherent in this connection. Various behaviors related to language use underscore this complexity, including:

1. Facing the challenges of acquiring a new language.
2. Preserving certain languages while neglecting others.
3. Concealing language proficiency.
4. Choosing deliberately between everyday multilingualism or monolingualism.

5. Preferencing standard language use or translanguaging, which involves blending languages.
6. Communicating specific languages depending on the context.
7. Possessing full language command, encompassing comprehension, speech, writing, and reading.

It is evident that language use and language-related behaviors play a significant role in constructing a theory of immigrant agency. In this context, language use, or languaging, represents an essential facet of agency as an expressive element, forming the second pillar of the theory of immigrant agency. Specifically, in this part I examine a critical aspect of language use in the transnational social spaces, focusing on languaging and translanguaging with its practical applications. In the context of settlement-oriented migration, particular attention is given to FSU immigrants who maintain the use of the Russian language in specific spheres of their daily lives for intimate, familial, and communal purposes.

Examining these language practices, which simultaneously preserve distinctions and blend them (Chapter 8), enables us to explore an expressive element of agency deeply rooted in cross-cultural, transnational, and multilingual contexts. The theme of language, including its acquisition, proficiency, preservation, and multilingualism, resurfaces prominently in the conducted interviews and other fieldwork activities, particularly concerning the language proficiency of the interview partners. I seek to provide insights into the following core inquiries: What are the individual and collective behavioral traits observed within multilingual and transnational environments? How do these behaviors reflect immigrant agency, particularly in the context of the groups under investigation?

In the exploration of immigrant agency, I take a dual approach to understanding language use. On the one hand, I delve into the individual and collective dimensions of language use within the context of migration, aiming at engaging sociolinguistic applications. On the other hand, I explore how immigrants' use of language serves as an expressive element for both individual and collective agency. This examination sheds light on the sociolinguistic and cultural facets of communication among FSU immigrants, as well as occasional interactions between

the subjects of study and other population groups. While my fieldwork primarily centered on immigrants, it is important to recognize the significance of language use as a tool for conveying discursive elements. These discourses as external structures of meaning and signification, are intricately intertwined with expressive element of human agency and often transcend linguistic boundaries, echoing the ideas of Paul Ricœur:

> An act of discourse is not merely transitory and vanishing... It may be identified and reidentified as the same so that we may say it again or in other words. We may even say it in another language or translate it from one language into another. (1976, p. 9)

As later exemplified in my exploration of discourses trespassing from German into Russian, we see that discourse and language use as languaging are intricately intertwined with the temporal context. When we examine language interference (translanguaging) resulting from the blending of two or more languages, it becomes apparent how the temporal discursive context is expressed and replicated by individuals' linguistic repertoires.

## Individual Traits: Aptitude, Age, and Foreign Language Acquisition

When examining the connection between individuals and language in the context of migration, several critical aspects come into play. These include cognitive processes and decision-making when using a foreign language, individual capabilities, and age-related factors in the process of language acquisition. We explore these nuances one by one, shedding light on individual behaviors within the context of migration. Language serves a dual purpose as both a conduit for thought and a tool for navigating the external world. In his work titled *Decontextualised Meanings*, Jeff Coulter explored the concept of language as a vehicle of thought, emphasizing that:

> Language itself can never distort or restrict, can never be true or false, but can only be either meaningful or meaningless in the sense of conveying intelligible or unintelligible usages in contexts. Language, and the concepts articulated therein, is the medium or vehicle of thought. (1971, p. 309)

However, the distinction between thinking in a foreign language and one's primary tongue introduces a compelling dimension with potential implications for decision-making and individual expression. Research conducted by Boaz Keysar and colleagues (2012) suggested that using a foreign language can mitigate decision-making biases and enhance one's propensity to risk-taking.

The intricacies of decision-making and individual cognitive processes in the context of multiple languages are closely intertwined with several factors. These include one's ability to switch between languages, their outward expression through verbal communication, and the influence of variables like exposure to multicultural environments, educational background, personal resilience, and innate flexibility and adaptability. This interplay becomes most apparent in an individual's seamless navigation of multilingual contexts, whether for oral communication or written expression.

Individual capacity for language acquisition is closely linked to one's social background and the broader societal context. The commitment to learning (foreign) languages and the time invested in this endeavor are significantly shaped by various elements in one's social environment. These factors encompass family background, attitudes toward education, experiences within the school system, and the accessibility of linguistic sources, among others. In essence, this amalgamation of influences constitutes what Pierre Bourdieu (1983) would term cultural capital. For example, consider the case of Katia, who shares her experiences with multiple languages before migrating to Germany:

> *I began learning English in the second grade* (…) *that was a specialized English school* (.) *well* (.) *it was my hobby English and as I say I always had an inclination to communicate with people in different languages* (..) *for this reason I was not afraid that I have to learn German (…) I had*

*private* [German] *classes* (.) *so I knew some German basics* [prior arriving in Germany].

Katia's orientation toward foreign language acquisition was significantly influenced by her parents, who enrolled her in a specialized school. Growing up accustomed to learning and communicating in various foreign languages, she faced no substantial barriers when she took a decision to relocate to Germany in her 30s. This sharply contrasts with the experiences of immigrants who had to depend on their own resources to learn German upon arrival. In such cases, individuals often depend on state-provided language courses or must rely on their own efforts to acquire the language through everyday interactions.

An individual's age at the time of acquiring a new language plays a pivotal role in determining whether markers of foreignness, such as accents, mistakes, or linguistic borrowings (translanguaging), are evident or recognizable in their speech and interactions. Foreign accents, as well as phonetic idiosyncrasies kinked to dialects or regiolects, hold the potential to simultaneously signify both otherness and belonging. Accents can introduce a layer of phonetic interference that carries social implications, bestowing advantages or disadvantages based on cultural perceptions. For instance, Uriel Weinreich (1979 [1953], p. 78) noted how a French accent can be favored in the United States, possibly increasing employment opportunities in certain scenarios.

Conversely, having an English accent, whether it be American or British, can be advantageous when seeking assistance or support in a European context. In Europe, English enjoys the status of being the most widely spoken foreign language, as the Eurostat (2023) demonstrated. This dominance surpasses languages with larger populations of 'native speakers' within the EU. However, it is crucial to recognize that the advantages and disadvantages associated with accents are highly dependent on situational and contextual factors, where we explored public attitudes toward Russian- or East-European-sounding accents.

Furthermore, a person's age at the time of migration and their level of language proficiency can significantly influence their ability to adapt and integrate into the host society, as Isurin highlighted: "… depending on the age at which the person comes into a new country his adaptation may

take different routes" (2011, p. 63). In essence, the age at which an individual acquires new languages and motivation have a profound impact on both their acculturation and their overall incorporation into their new country of residence. Language, in this context, plays a crucial role in the process of discovering and connecting with the host culture and its traditions. As Isurin suggests, "a better knowledge of the host language allows a better understanding and appreciation of a new culture" (ibid.). This assertion holds relevance when considering the distinctions between the first generation and subsequent generations, such as the second and third generations. While the abovementioned elements or language use patterns in the context of migration are not solely individual, it is an individual that takes center stage when examining language use from the vantage point of cognitive processes, personal capabilities, and the age of language acquisition. Next, I shift my focus to explore group aspects of language use, examining its sphere of application and its implications for social advancement.

## Group Aspects of Language Use: Sphere of Application and Social Advancement

When examining the connection between language and migration from a collective standpoint, several key aspects come to the forefront. These encompass the social functions of language, language choices, emotions and interpersonal relationships, integration and social mobility, the societal status of a language and its speakers, and language loyalty. In this section, we explore these components in greater detail. Languages serve distinct social functions and carry varying degrees of intimacy in interpersonal communication. They function as communicative frames that facilitate or hinder interaction, fostering connections or disconnections based on factors like cultural affiliations, regional ties, and socioeconomic backgrounds. These factors manifest in linguistic variations such as dialects, regiolects, and sociolects (Bernstein, 2003 [1971]; Leopold, 2015 [1959]).

From a group perspective within a multilingual context, language takes on diverse social roles, adapting to different contexts of use.

These range from familial and intimate settings to informal or formal exchanges, intergroup and between-group communication (Weinreich, 1979 [1953], p. 87). Julia Kristeva further emphasized language's functions as an expression of meaning in communicable sentences among speakers and as a vehicle for conveying social identity (Kristeva, 2002, p. 100; Lucchetti, 2023). The choice of language underscores the level of intimacy or distance within a group or between various groups during interactions. These linguistic choices, signaling closeness or distance, can range from the use of standard languages, dialects, slang, to translanguaging. The moments of interaction and the linguistic choices made during those moments are deeply intertwined with affective influences, emotions, and feelings. Language use, in essence, is highly emotionally charged. This emotional aspect exists both at individual and collective levels, particularly in how people perceive native and foreign languages. This brings us back to the profound dilemma articulated by Kristeva concerning the tension between 'a language of the past' and 'a new language' (2002, p. 275). For immigrants, the preservation of their first language and its transmission to the next generation can carry significant cultural and personal importance (Isurin, 2011, p. 20). It raises questions about what to do with one's familiar linguistic and cultural heritage in a new context. The availability of a community with whom these experiences can be shared heavily influences the attitudes and sociolinguistic strategies of immigrants.

The casual use of terms like native language, native speaker, or a mother tongue give rise to numerous questions. The concept of a native speaker has faced critical scrutiny, with Adrian Holliday (2015) challenging its validity and impact. He considered this term as perpetuating a 'widespread cultural disbelief' that contributes to the ideology of native-speakerism. This, in turn, can project a 'neo-racist meaning' by reinforcing stereotypes and biases based on linguistic background and plays into a divisive 'native-non-native speaker division' (idem, p. 12).

Furthermore, the mother tongue as a primary language not only impacts linguistic knowledge but also provides a blueprint for orienting oneself in the world. It offers a framework for navigating life and adapting to various circumstances. In the words of Gadamer (2000, p. 7), language provides 'a kind of draft for dealing with life,' and in

our primary (mother) tongue, as in the languages of other cultures, a world orientation is prefigured, always offering the possibility of connection (ibid.). This intricate connection between language and emotions may shed light on the concept of language loyalty and its affective components, which can manifest unexpectedly in diverse contexts.

When considering the interplay of structure and agency, Anthony Giddens (1984) offered insights into the significance of one's primary language and the impact of personal circumstances. Individuals do not consciously choose their primary language, but they do conform to its rules while learning it. Language, as a system, imposes constraints on both thought and action by establishing specific structured properties. However, the process of acquiring language simultaneously sets boundaries on cognition and activity while significantly enhancing an individual's cognitive and practical capabilities (idem, p. 170).

Integration and social mobility hinge significantly on language proficiency, raising questions about whether a particular language skill can enhance one's social standing. The language of the host country is often seen as a crucial tool that can increase opportunities for success and acceptance (Weinreich, 1979 [1953], p. 78). This pursuit of social acceptance and advancement can sometimes lead individuals to hide the fact that a language was learned as a second language. This concealment strategy is particularly relevant for the one-and-a-half or second generations who manage to learn the new language at (relatively) young age without exhibiting markers of foreignness.

Empirical evidence highlights various motives for concealing Russian language proficiency among my studying subjects. In some cases, Russian was exclusively used for intimate family communication, while German served as the language of broader societal interaction. In other instances, maintaining proficiency in the Russian language was viewed as an obstacle to successful integration into German society. Such behavioral patterns are not uncommon and find parallels among Spanish-speaking immigrants in the US, where some individuals 'will even deny that they know Spanish' in their efforts to improve relations with English-speaking individuals (ibid.).

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# 11

# Normativity of Language Use and Translanguaging

Language serves as a repository of deeply ingrained structural components. Pierre Bourdieu aptly described it in terms of the linguistic market, encompassing culture, tradition, state, status, temporal and spatial contexts. Nevertheless, individual and interpersonal influences can manifest in language use (languaging), revealing a structure-agency linking. One strategy involves accommodating a standard language. In this case, I assess both standard German, as a language of social advancement for post-Soviet immigrants in Germany, and Russian, as a language of loyalty to the past and place of origin, as well as a means of connecting with the broader Russian-speaking immigrant population in the German context. This presents a normative perspective on language, drawing from Bourdieu's framework. Additionally, I explore translanguaging as linguistic deviation from the norm. I explore the reasons and variants of translanguaging. In detail I focus on lexical language interference from German to Russian and contemplate semantics of this type of translanguaging. By examining these dynamics, this chapter provides insights into how language operates within both normative structures and as flexible living entity. It reveals how post-Soviet immigrants navigate and negotiate their linguistic identities, emphasizing the complex interplay

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between standard and non-standard language practices in the migratory experience.

## Standard Language: Hochdeutsch and Standard Russian

In this study, we examine not only the standardized German language but also standardized Russian. Before analyzing how language is employed by Russian-speaking immigrants, it is essential to understand the role of a standard language. Bourdieu contended that a standard language emerges as a normalized amalgamation of 'the regional dialects and, as the dialecticians' maps show' (2003, p. 46).

### Standard German and Dialects

High German [Hochdeutsch] occupy a central position in German integration policies (Dietz, 2000, pp. 635–639; Worbs et al., 2013, pp. 140–141). It is also a prominent theme in the narratives of immigrants, as they discussed settlement in Germany. The language that holds paramount importance for the state, authorities, newcomers, and long-term immigrants alike is the standard language, Hochdeutsch. This standardized form of speech enjoys elevated social prestige (Leopold, 2015 [1959], p. 130). Hochdeutsch primarily serves as the language of communication with the state and its institutions, education, and culture. In essence, it is the official language 'bound up with the state, both in its genesis and in its social uses' (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 45).

The rise of Hochdeutsch in popularity during the latter half of the twentieth century can be attributed to several factors. One key reason is the decline of local dialects and the emergence of regiolects (Spiekermann et al., 2016). Additionally, the accessibility of mass television broadcasts, which often relied on the use of standard language, played a significant role in promoting its adoption. Werner F. Leopold's research (2015 [1959]) also demonstrated how the influx of German-(dialect)-speaking

refugees from Eastern Europe following World War II had a transformative effect, leading to the decline of local dialects in Western Germany. It is evident that factors such as increased internal work-related mobility and changing family structures have reshaped linguistic practices and amplified the role of standardized language.

In the context of a unified linguistic market, educated groups are expected to possess the knowledge, understanding, and ability to use standard language for daily communication, regardless of their regional or cultural backgrounds. The forces of both internal and external migration, coupled with the development of modern transportation and mass communication, have further emphasized the importance of standard language, or at very least, its colloquial version. Conversely, regional dialects, slangs, broken German, pronounced regional or foreign accents, as well as various forms of language interference and translanguaging, are often seen as deviations from the standard language. These linguistic variations serve as markers of social, cultural, economic, regional, and geographical backgrounds. Deviations from standard language usage can trigger various social mechanisms, leading to either inclusion or exclusion, acceptance or stereotyping (Campbell-Kibler, 2010; Moyer, 2013).

This hierarchy that places standard German language above regional dialects, assigning lower social value to dialects, is something that immigrants often become aware of, as Anna, for example, reflected on her experience upon arriving in Rhineland-Palatinate, a Western German federal state, saying,

> *when I arrived here* (.) *there was this dialect* (.) *I realized that I knew NOTHING* [meaning in the German language]." She later elaborated on her difficulties during professional technical training, explaining that "*he* [a teacher] *ignored my problems* [of understanding] (..) *he was also talking with such horrible accent* (.) *a dialect*.

However, dialects do not only come into play in relation to the German autochthonous population; they can also highlight a generational gap among ethnic German resettlers. This gap is often observed between the younger generation, which has learned Hochdeutsch in German schools,

and the elderly (usually grandparents) who maintain the old dialects in German enclaves in countries like Kazakhstan or Russia. Igor reflected on language use in his family, while saying in Russian,

> yes (.) from my grandmother's side (..) there is more German (.) but there is such an accent you know (..) worse than in Bavaria (…) such old old ancient (..) they used to talk it 500 years ago (.) once said (.) you won't find it in any dictionary (.) yes grandmother (..) she speaks more German but my father and my uncle (..) it is easy for them in Russian (.)

I underscored the importance of Hochdeutsch in German integration policies and immigrant narratives, serving as the official language for communication with the state, education, and culture. In the unified linguistic market, the ability to use standard language is expected, while deviations like regional dialects, accents, and language interference can lead to social inclusion or exclusion. Additionally, generational gaps can arise, with younger generations often learning Hochdeutsch in German schools, while older generations maintain older dialects.

## Standard Russian

The concept of standard language also applies to discussions surrounding Russian immigrants often grapple with whether it is appropriate to mix Russian with German and if German words like Termin [appointment] or Kirche [church] can be used in Russian conversation. The word Termin does not just refer to scheduling a meeting but also denotes pre-arranged everyday routines or planning a year ahead using an appointment book [Terminkalender]. This applies to official appointments with government authorities, integration counselors, medical appointments, plumbing services, or even casual coffee dates with friends. Such pre-arrangements reduce spontaneity and manage risks, contrasting with less pre-planned ways of managing daily life. Similarly, Kirche does not just refer to a church building or a religious institution but also carries an association with a specific religious denomination, in this case, the Protestant church. An Orthodox Russian-speaking immigrant would not call the church they attend for Sunday mass a Kirche. This interplay

between the signifier and the signified will be further explored in the following discussions.

The criticism of mixing Russian with German can be contemplated through the concept of language loyalty, which shares similarities with nationalism. This parallel is eloquently expressed by Weinreich as follows:

> A language, like a nationality, may be thought of as a set of behavior norms; language loyalty, like nationalism, would designate the state of mind in which the language (like the nationality), as an intact entity, and in contrast to other languages, assumes a high position in a scale of values, a position in need of being 'defended'… preserving the threatened language…; as a reaction to interference, it makes the standardized version of the language a symbol and a cause (1953 [1979], p. 99).

This citation brings to the forefront the striking resemblance between language loyalty and nationalism, a similarity I have observed particularly in the context of the Russian language. It vividly portrays how language loyalty involves a profound sense of attachment and a fierce protective instinct toward one's language. This perspective positions the language as not just a mere tool of communication but as a vital and distinctive entity, standing apart from all others, and holding a paramount place on the scale of cultural significance.

In the face of perceived interference or threats, individuals and entire communities unite in a collective effort to shield and preserve their language. This defense extends beyond language itself; it transforms the standardized version of the language into a potent symbol and a noble cause that commands passionate commitment and fervent defense. Weinreich's citation underscores the profound emotional and cultural bonds that individuals share with their language. Immigration can magnify these sentiments, further strengthening these ties to one's linguistic heritage. It sheds light on the fervent commitment to maintaining linguistic purity and resisting any form of interference or contamination. Through countless face-to-face and online discussions, I have observed a vehement defense of 'pure' language use by some participants. Individuals passionately advocate for the preservation of their

language's integrity and purity. This deep-seated language loyalty mirrors the fervor often associated with nationalism, emphasizing the intricate interplay between language and identity (Part IV).

Standard Russian and the contexts in which it is used can elicit both positive and negative perceptions regarding deviations from linguistic norms. These perceptions can sometimes lead to generational tensions within families, as illustrated by the example from Katia's family:

> … our daughter is so stubborn (.) as she grew up she started to correct us so we don't put German words in Russian [sentences] which is common among German resettlers (.) let's go einkaufen [shopping] … firstly she didn't want these mischung [mixture] this mixed nonsense (.) secondly (…) she wanted to hear Russian equivalents and that we spoke correctly (…) yes purity (.) when people put these German words (..) it sounds weird (..) I am grateful to her (.) my husband is still annoyed by it (.) well fathers and children (.)

The use of 'fathers and children' [отцы и дети] carries a specific meaning, referring the renowned Russian novel of the nineteenth century, *Fathers and Sons* by Ivan Turgenev, which revolves around a generational conflict. In this context, meticulous adherence to the Russian language can be seen as a protective measure employed by bilingual individuals, as it demonstrates a 'high negative correlation with all types of interference' (Weinreich, 1953 [1979], p. 78).

Furthermore, this differentiation highlights the linguistic practices of ethnic German resettlers who are frequently translanguaging between Russian and German. Studies have indicated instances of language interference among Germans in Russia (Baykova, 2017; Seržanova, 2010). Importantly, it is not exclusive to ethnic German resettlers; many individuals, whether they speak German or Russian, exhibit a difference between the standard language (used in education, literature, and political discourse) and the practical state of languages (languaging). This practical state reflects a diversity of linguistic habitus (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 46) and varying modes of language use and communication. In contrast to the use of standard languages, language interference and

translanguaging becomes a characteristic feature of immigrant language use or language use in the transnational social spaces, as we explore next.

## Translanguaging or Immigrant Language Use

Translanguaging and language use by immigrants, much akin to the disruptive nature of desire and language described by bell hooks (1994, p. 167), transcend established boundaries and steadfastly elude containment. They manifest themselves in ways that permeate and, at times, intrude upon the most private realms of both the mind and the body, underscoring their formidable and inherently uncontrollable influences over individuals' linguistic experiences and identities. An illustrative instance of translanguaging can be found in an excerpt from the interview with Igor, a 28-year-old who emigrated from Kazakhstan. His family relocated to Germany when he was merely 10 years old, benefiting from the late ethnic German resettlers policy.

During the interview, Igor was immersed in professional training as an industrial technician, a transition triggered by workforce reductions at the industrial plant. While contemplating his parents' divorce in the wake of their migration, Igor shared his reflections:

| Russian to English Translation Preserving the Translanguaging Effect | Initial Transcript with German-Russian Translanguaging |
|---|---|
| "*I knew mittlerweile* [meanwhile] (.) *was in der Gesellschaft vor sich geht* [what is happening in the society] *they show it on TV*." | "*Я знал mittlerweile* (.) *was in der gesellschaft vor sich geht там по телику показывают* (.)" |

Like Igor's case (in Appendix, the Column LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LI) exhibited varying degrees of translanguaging between Russian and German, both in terms of influence from Russian into German and vice versa. In most of the interviews (16 out of 22), the primary language of communication was Russian, but there were instances of minor to significant interference occurring between German and Russian. This specific phenomenon is at the heart of my further analysis.

I employ two key terms to illuminate the intricacies of language use in the context of migration. The first term is language interference, a concept coined by the Polish-American linguist Uriel (Weinreich 1953 [1979], pp. 80–82), whose scholarship delved into the study of language across various European contexts and beyond (Weinreich & Labov, 2011). Distinguishing itself from comparable concepts like code-mixing and code-switching (Auer, 2003; Cindark, 2013), language interference places a spotlight on the diverse types of language interventions occurring within specific contexts. These interventions encompass phonetic, lexical, and grammatical aspects, whether they manifest consciously or subconsciously.

The second term I employ in the context of international migration and language use is translanguaging. Multilingualism, inherent in transnational social spaces, thrusts the concept of translanguaging into the spotlight. This concept encompasses the diverse array of discursive practices engaged in by multilingual speakers, drawing upon the resources within their communicative repertoires. This perspective on multilingual communication acknowledges that translanguaging includes phenomena like language interference, code-switching, and crossing while simultaneously transcending them. It extends beyond conventional notions of 'language use in multilingual settings' (Martin-Jones et al., 2012, pp. 10–11). Rather than fixating on language as discrete entities, translanguaging underscores the absence of clear-cut boundaries between languages when people communicate with each other. As Marilyn Martin-Jones et al. aptly stated, if 'languages' are inventions, we must observe closely communication in action' (ibid).

In alignment with these concepts, Igor's sentence serves as an illustrative example of language usage within the context of migration, contrasting with the standard language use, as discussed earlier. Language interference and translanguaging illuminate the strategies of linguistic adjustments, revealing that immigrants' language use is more susceptible to interference than the indigenous one. The influence of newcomers and settlers on the local population and its languages, as highlighted by Werner F. Leopold (2015 [1959]) in his analysis of ten million East European refugees settling in Western Germany (as previously mentioned), demonstrates that linguistic practices are subject to interference not only

during the migration process but also in the case of settled populations. Taking a historical perspective, we must also consider imperial and colonial land conquests and the impact of imperial languages on indigenous populations, including Latin, Spanish, English, Russian, and Turkish.

In considering the impact of standard English in the USA, bell hooks urged us to recognize and remain mindful of 'the link between languages and domination' (1994, p. 168). She asserted that standard English should not be seen as a language of exile but rather as a tool of conquest and domination, concealing the loss of numerous diverse local tongues, including the Gullah and Yiddish, among others. hooks emphasized that the issue lies not with the English language itself but with how oppressors wield it as a tool to shame, humiliate, and colonize (ibid). Furthermore, she highlighted the historical reluctance of white Americans to acknowledge the diverse languages of Native Americans, underscoring the association of standard English with the sounds of 'slaughter and conquest' (hooks, 1994, p. 169). Considering the role and dissemination of the Russian language in the Soviet Union, we can observe clear applications of hooks' idea about the link between language and domination. By the same token, there is very little recognition in Russia of the impact that spreading of standard Russian had on indigenous or local languages in the former Soviet republics. Evidently, in the context of standard languages, coercion and persuasion often worked in tandem.

The investigated linguistic practices, influenced by their migration experiences and the need to navigate a new linguistic landscape, reflect a parallel process of transforming the dominant language. They reshape it to serve as a means of communication, expression, and resistance in the context of their migration and settlement. Just as enslaved black individuals reclaimed English as a tool of resistance, members of the research group harness language interference and translanguaging to communicate their own narratives and experiences, often transcending the boundaries of standard language use. This process underscores the dynamic and transformative nature of language, even in the face of domination and linguistic power imbalances.

Regarding the argument about the susceptibility of immigrants' languages to interference from the mainstream language/s of the receiving society, several potential explanations can shed light on this

phenomenon: first, the novelty of immigrant's environment creates a need for them to acquire vocabulary (Weinreich, 1953 [1979], p. 91). That is especially when interacting with state institutions or discussing culture-specific topics that I demonstrate later. Second, the social and cultural disorientation experienced by immigrants can weaken their resistance to borrowing from the host language (ibid). This is particularly evident in the interviews, where those with higher proficiency in German often exhibited more control or consciously resisted language interference. Third, the incorporation of German words in Russian conversations may introduce a certain level of detachment from the subject matter being at hand. For instance, the German word putzen translates to clean in English. Although not inherently culture-specific, in Russian-speaking conversations, the use of putzen or putz-ала [I was cleaning] in a German-Russian interference assumes a specific job description. This was observed among women who, due to dequalification, found themselves compelled to take jobs out of necessity, such as working as cleaning personnel in private households. Putz-ала impacts a sense of externalization compared to using the Russian equivalent for a cleaner [уборщица]. However, it also shifts the focus from what one is to what one does or is currently engaged in.

Phonetic, grammatical, and lexical interferences are prevalent forms of translanguaging in multilingual contexts, reflecting both individual and group-level language use characteristics, encompassing structural and non-structural aspects (Weinreich, 1953 [1979], pp. 64–65). While capturing phonetic interferences (such as an accent) and grammatical interferences (sentence composition) presents methodological challenges, my analysis predominantly focuses on lexical borrowing, delving into its social implications and semantic nuances. My background as a sociologist has influenced the direction of this analysis, given that sociology has historically maintained uneven relationship with language studies (Pascale, 2019, p. 911). Nevertheless, significant empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions within sociology have shaped the framework of this analysis. These insights draw from the works of scholars such as Natalia Kozlova and Irina Sandomirskaia (1996), focusing on social background and language use, Pierre Bourdieu (2003), emphasizing language and power relations, and Karin Schittenhelm

(2017), highlighting the methodological importance of reflecting on language use during research.

Based on empirical evidence, instances of lexical interference exhibit varying degrees of intensity, spanning from minimal to substantial. An illustrative example of minimal language interference would be:

| Russian to English Translation Preserving the Translanguaging Effect | Initial Transcript with German-Russian Translanguaging |
|---|---|
| […] "*well they gave us sprachi* (.) *yes* (.) *we arrived in May* (.) *May 10* (.) *it was already 20 years* (…) *we arrived and at the end of August we already went to these sprachi* (.) *quite fine sprach course* (.) *it lasted eight months* (…) *intensive courses from morning till night* (.)" | […] "*ну нам* **sprachi** *же дали* (.) *да* (.) *мы в мае приехали* (.) *10 мая* (.) *у нас было 20 лет* (.) *мы приехали и в конце августа мы уже пошли на эти самые* (.) *на* **sprach**-*и* (.) *довольно таки нормальные* **sprach** *курсы* (.) *восемь месяцев у нас это было* (…) *интенсивные курсы с утра до вечера* (.)" |

In this interview excerpt, Katia shares her experience upon arriving in Germany and enrolling in language classes, which she refers to using the German word Sprache [language]. To avoid further explanation, she employs the hybrid word Sprach-и, where the Russian ending и [-i] builds a plural form. When comparing similar cases in other interviews, the term Sprachi [Sprach-и] carries an additional layer of meaning, referring to state-funded German language courses specifically provided to (late) ethnic German resettlers and later Jewish immigrants as a part of the integration policy.

By using Sprachi in this context, Katia is aware that she can be equally understood in both German and Russian. This highlights a communication circle created between the interviewee and the researcher, both of whom are bilingual, with the researcher significantly influencing the linguistic, thematic, and affective aspects of the interview situation. In this configuration, there is limited potential to capture group elements in language use. Selected transcripts of video-recorded meetings from the ethnographic study prove more useful in reflecting on language use and group dynamics. In these cases, a communication circle is formed by participants, where the researcher becomes an additional element. These transcriptions serve as snapshots documenting language use in

various settings: Russian-speaking, German-Russian settings, or flexible linguistic settings. Translation from Russian into German in the presence of monolingual speakers is just one of the examples of the multiple linguistic constellations.

An example of intensive language interference can be observed in the following passage:

| Russian to English Translation Preserving Translanguaging | Initial Transcript with Translanguaging |
|---|---|
| […]"*meistens* [mostly] *we have* (..) *well not with all* (..) *meistens* [mostly] *German of course* (..) *because if we are in der öffentlichkeit* [in public] *then* (.) *dann schon auf Deutsch* [then certainly German] (.) *ansonsten* [otherwise] (…) *in Russian* (.) *in German* (.) *sometimes a little bit rein Russisch* [merely Russian] (..) *and topics* (.) *unterschiedlich* [different] (.) *alltag* [everyday life] (.) *keine ahnung* [I don't know] (..) *was einem gefällt was einem nicht gefällt* [what one likes what one doesn't like] (.) *sorgen* (.) *vorstellungen* (.) *erwartungen* (.) *das was jeder mensch hat (.) so übliche themen* [worries (.) beliefs (.) expectations (.) everything what everyone has (.) usual topics]" | […] "*meistens это у нас* (..) *ну не со всеми* (..) *a meistens по-немецки конечно* (..) *потому что мы in der offentlichkeit если* (.) *то dann schon auf Deutsch (.) ansonsten* (…) *по-русски* (.) *по-немецки* (.) *иногда чуть-чуть rein Russisch* (..) *a темы* (.) *unterschiedlich* (.) *alltag* (.) *keine ahnung (..) was einem gefällt was einem nicht gefällt* (.) *sorgen* (.) *vorstellungen* (.) *erwartungen* (.) *das was jeder mensch hat* (.) *so übliche themen* " # 00:18:23 # |

This passage presents Igor's response to my question about what determines his choice of language in his daily routine. Based on the provided example, the interviewee inclines to translanguaging, particularly between Russian and German. He mentions that in most cases, German dominates, especially in public settings, and he also uses German when interacting with others in the public sphere. However, Igor acknowledges that sometimes he uses a bit of 'rein Russisch' or mainly Russian. This suggests that his language use is influenced by both languages, and he tends to translanguaging between them depending on the context and the people he is communicating with. The interference

appears to be more intense in his case, as he frequently alternates between Russian and German, even within the same sentence.

Throughout the interview with Igor, there was a casual blending of Russian and German, at times making it unclear which language was influencing the other, whether it was German to Russian or vice versa. However, this translanguaging serves as a glimpse into the personal verbal expression of someone seeking understanding, illustrating how translanguaging can also function as a vehicle for conveying thoughts and as an example steaming from the certain linguistic setting. Given Igor's individual story, as exemplified by the earlier mentioned example and the citation in the previous section regarding his family's use of a German dialect and Russian, this type of language interference is not surprising. In the semi-private setting of the interview, such translanguaging was deemed acceptable, in contrast to public spaces [in der Öffentlichkeit], where standard German was expected.

As demonstrated by other observations, the selection choice of language use (standard German or Russian, various degree of language interference, and translanguaging) can be substantially influenced by several factors, including the context in which communication occurs, the linguistic backgrounds of the individuals involved (whether they are monolingual or multilingual), and the specific topics under discussion. This brings us to another essential methodological consideration: the role of multilingualism in shaping the contexts of interviews or observations and influencing language use. Multilingual individuals are more likely to engage in lexical borrowing or language interference (Weinreich, 1953 [1979], p. 71).

In the context of this study, all interviewees or participants had the flexibility to select the language of their interviews or other forms of communication, primarily choosing between German and Russian. Their awareness of being proficient in both languages could lead to translanguaging. This phenomenon might occur when they encounter difficulty expressing something in one language or could happen unintentionally. For instance, during the fieldwork with the hobby dancing group (Part VII), German was frequently used, especially during public

performances when some participants did not speak Russian. Additionally, German-Russian simultaneous translation was employed, particularly during rehearsals involving German-speaking members of the group.

Since the sample predominantly consisted of first-generation immigrants, instances of language interference and translanguaging between German and Russian are more frequent compared to the reverse direction. This tendency is also influenced by the language choice during the interviews (Table A.1 in Appendix, the column L2 THE PREVAILING LANGUAGE OF THE INTERVIEW). Given this context, it becomes compelling to analyze the recurring patterns of German lexical interference within the flow of Russian interviews, which is a pervasive feature across the interviews. These lexical interferences can be considered as signifiers in Barthes' terms (2001), carrying additional meaning beyond their literal implications. Based on my empirical findings, these patterns can be categorized into five themes: (1) governance and state institutions, (2) the educational system, (3) the labor market and employment, (4) nonequivalent culture-bound concepts or idiomatic expressions, and (5) the identification of specific social groups.

(1) One of the recurring themes pertains to state or municipal institutions that immigrants must engage with upon their arrival, and for some, these institutions become the primary source of communication in German. These include the employment office [Arbeitsamt; Jobbörse] for addressing employment-related issues or social benefits in the event of unemployment, the city hall, and district administration [Rathaus; Kreisverwaltung] that play a specific role in facilitating the settlement and integration of citizens and immigrants. For instance, Alex reflects on his experience with the employment office while still in school: "*well then* (.) *I went to my beloved* [ironically] *arbeitsamt* (.) *in the department* (.) *where Sasha worked* (.) *German Sasha* [laughing]…" Alex expressed excitement at meeting someone

with the familiar name Sasha[1] in a state institution since Sascha is a common name in Ukraine, where Alex originated from.

In relation to these institutions, German words connected to social benefits and references to *officials* responsible for managing or assigning those benefits find their way into Russian conversations. As explained by Oleg in the context of his experience with unemployment, job searching, and applying for social benefits: "*sozial* [social benefits] *is received there* (.) *also lebensunterhaltungsgeld* [means of subsistence] *and for a flat meaning wohngeld*." In the excerpt, *Wohngeld,* referring to housing allowance, denotes a social security benefit available to individuals with low income who are entitled to apply for a rent allowance (BfJ, 2003, 2013). In this case, there is a straightforward enumeration of social benefits that Oleg had to deal with or was aware of their availability in times of need. In other cases, a reference to the borrowed German word is emotional significance as an exempt from the interview with Eva illustrates:

| Russian to English Translation Preserving the Translanguaging Effect | Initial Transcript with German-Russian Translanguaging |
|---|---|
| "*that downgraded state* (.) *because it is always when a person lacks confidence* (.) *especially in that heim loosely speaking if we tried* (…) *we went to berater-ам* [an integration counselor] *then we were bowing* [imitating a very polite voice] *but please* (.) *well goodbye* (!)" | "*вот какое-то приниженное состояние* (.) *потому что всегда когда человек не уверен* (.) *особенно в том же* heim-*е* (.) *грубо говоря* (.) *если мы пытались* (…) *шли к* berater-*ам то мы вот там вот все расшеркивались* [imitating a very polite voice] *ну пожалуйста* (.) *ну досвидание* (!)" |

In this example, Eva reflected on her difficult emotional condition during her residence in the temporary dormitory [that she called as Heim], provided to newcomers whose arrival is supported and sponsored by German state programs. This is one of the reappearing themes among (late) German resettlers and Jewish refugees, as in Eva's case. This

[1] Based on my fieldwork observations, it appears that the full name 'Sascha' was more commonly given to individuals who were part of the earlier wave of migration during the Yugoslavian war in the 1990s. In Ukrainian or Russian-speaking contexts, Sascha [Саша] typically derives from the full name Aleksander or Oleksander.

statement conveys an emotional vulnerability and reveals distress when dealing with official matters upon arrival. Borrowing German words in the Russian sentence can create a certain emotional distance from an institution [Heim] or its employees [Berater-ам].

To this theme, we can also add activities, procedures, and documents related to interactions with German official institutions. Once again, the pre-arranged protocol in communication between the state and citizens plays a significant role (though this protocol may be unknown or significantly different from their previous experiences). These require a set of skills, not to mention the need for a relatively high level of German proficiency that immigrants must acquire as soon as possible. Unfortunately, for many, these interactions may represent their most intense contacts with the state, involving bureaucratic German language and officials. At times, these experiences can be reminiscent of Kafkaesque situations.

(2) Another significant category of lexical borrowing pertains to state-mediated educational institutions. This type of borrowing sheds light on various themes within the German educational system, encompassing topics such as different levels of education, types of schools, and academic degrees. It is more prevalent in the narratives of individuals who have experienced or are currently experiencing the German education system. For instance, Vlad mentioned, "*I went to the berufliches gymnasium* (.) *a technological secondary school.*" Vlad's borrowing of the term 'Berufliches Gymnasium' to describe his educational background is notable. It reflects his familiarity with the German educational system and the specific type of school he attended. Berufliches Gymnasium translates to vocational high school in English, and it indicates that Vlad pursued a more specialized and vocational track within the German education system. This borrowing serves to provide precise information about his educational path that might not be easily conveyed using only Russian words. It also signifies his engagement with the German education system and his ability to navigate and understand its nuances.

Additionally, individuals who have children in or formerly attended the German schooling system also tend to borrow vocabulary[2] related to education. For example, Anna expressed her concerns about the differentiation in the educational paths for children after primary school:

| Russian to English Translation Preserving the Translanguaging Effect | Initial Transcript with German-Russian Translanguaging |
|---|---|
| […] "*kids who are in school* (…) *let's assume* (.) *mine* [daughter] *is average now* [in terms of academic performance] *and kids* (.) *who perform poorly* (.) *they won't be able to catch up* (..) *with the others* (.) *for me* (.) *as they say this German phenomenon* schubladen (.) *generally speaking* (.) *you know it* (.) *this way gymnas-ты* (.) *this way realschule* (.) *and that way hauptschule* (.) *they are already teaching them* [to differentiate]." | […] "*дети которые в школе* (…) *допустим* (.) *моя* [дочь] *средняя сейчас* (.) [в плане успеваемости]*а дети* (.) *которые плохо учатся* (.) *они же вообще не успеют* (..) *за остальными* (.) *мне* (.) *как говорится этот немецкий феномен* schubladen (.) *как говорится* (.) *знаешь это* (.) *сюда* gymnas-*ты* (.) *сюда* realschule (.) *а туда* hauptschule (.) *вот они их уже и учат* [to differentiate]" |

The last borrowing involving the German word Schubladen [Drawers] in the Russian sentence is related to the idiomatic expression in Schubladen denken, which means to think in stereotypes or pigeonhole thinking in German. Anna uses this borrowing to emphasize the narrow-minded thinking associated with categorizing children's academic performance in the German educational system. The speaker refers to the categorizing that divides students into different types of schools (Gymnasium, Realschule, Hauptschule) based on their grades. This borrowing serves to convey a nuanced meaning that might not be easily expressed using only Russian words. It highlights the complexity of the German educational system and reflects Anna's critical attitude toward the preselection of students based on their school performances. It also reveals several layers of meaning, such as the differentiation between gymnasium, realschule, and hauptschule, which are different

[2] Certainly, in Germany, a federal state, there is a significant difference between nationally managed (Bund) and regionally managed (Land) affairs. Education falls under regional management. This distinction can be challenging for those coming from centralized state-managed systems to understand. However, for the purposes of this discussion, 'Bund' and 'Land' are collectively referred to as 'the state' to simplify matters to some extent.

types of schools in the German educational hierarchy. The expression 'this German phenomenon Schubladen' underscores Anna's discontent with the hierarchical system as something she considers typical primarily in Germany.

(3) The realm of employment represents the third thematic domain that prominently involves linguistic borrowing. Within this sphere, we encounter a multitude of linguistic borrowings encompassing labor market institutions, terminology associated with employment processes, and professional jargon.

In terms of labor market institutions, we encounter terms like chamber of crafts [Handwerkskammer] and 'service agency' [Leihfirma]. For instance, a participant might say, "*I went to the leihfirma* (.) *and they paid very little.*" The recurrent appearance of terms such as 'service agency' or 'temporary work agencies' in the professional narratives and employment trajectories of these immigrants demands further analysis.

The process of gaining employment is another facet within this theme, covering aspects like job applications, interviews, trial periods, and terminations. To illustrate, consider Eva's rationale for her husband's reluctance to change his job, despite it being characterized as low-paying and low-status:

| Russian to English Translation Preserving the Translanguaging Effect | Initial Transcript with German-Russian Translanguaging |
|---|---|
| "[he] *is a person who basically doesn't speak* [German] *sent under the pressure of the vorstellungsgespräch-ов* [job interviews] *now and so on* (.) *that he has to find himself in the new settings* (.)" | "*то есть из человека практически не говорящего сейчас отправить под каток вот этих самых vorstellungsgespräch-ов и всего остального* (.) *то что он должен найти себя в новой среде* (.)" |

In this example, Eva characterizes her husband as someone who initially lacked proficiency in German and was hesitant to face the daunting prospect of job interviews, denoted by the German expression Vorstellungsgespräch-ов with Russian declination. Instead, he accepted a low-status job with poor payment due to his apprehension about the

challenges that might come with a new job and its environment. The inclusion of the German term within the Russian sentence emphasizes the particular context and pressure related to job interviews and the individual's need to adapt to a new setting.

Further Anna told me about her attempts to find a job, which is another example of borrowing in the domain of employment.

| Russian to English Translation Preserving the Translanguaging Effect | Initial Transcript with German-Russian Translanguaging |
|---|---|
| "(…) *and he offered me* (.) *go and try* (!) *they are looking for a draftsperson bauzeichnen and bauingenieur as well* (.)" | "(…) *и он мне предложил* (:) *вот давай* (!) *они ищут там чертежник bauzeichnen и bauingenieur еще* (.)" |

In this example, the speaker employs the German words Bauzeichnen and Bauingenieur within the Russian sentence. These words translate to draftsperson and structural engineer in English. Anna is discussing a job offer or opportunity related to these professions, and her use of these German terms adds specificity to the discussion. It indicates that these job positions or titles are relevant to the German professional experiences being discussed.

Unable to secure a job in her field of qualification as an engineer, Anna decided to pursue her hobby that she had developed while in Germany. She underwent training to become an alternative practitioner [Heilpraktiker] alongside her German friend.

| Russian to English Translation Preserving the Translanguaging Effect | Initial Transcript with German-Russian Translanguaging |
|---|---|
| "*she also graduated from the same school of heilpraktiker* [alternative practitioner] (.) *she is physiotherapeut* [physiotherapist] *and she graduated* [as] *heilpraktiker*" | "[…] она тоже закончила эту школу Heilpraktiker (.) она Phisiotherapeut и она закончила Heilpraktiker […]" |

This borrowing involves the use of the German words Heilpraktiker (alternative practitioner) and Physiotherapeut (physiotherapist) within the Russian sentence. Anna is discussing the professional development of her friend who graduated from the same school as an alternative practitioner and became a physiotherapist. The use of these German terms

adds specificity to the discussion of the friend's qualifications and profession, highlighting the dual roles they hold. This borrowing serves to convey a nuanced meaning that might not be easily expressed using only Russian words.

In addition to the instances of specific lexical borrowing, these connected examples also bring attention to the noteworthy issues: overqualification,[3] and a transition from a predominantly male field like civil engineering to a traditionally female domain such as alternative medicine.

(4) The fourth block encompasses idiomatic expressions and instances of culture-bound concepts in German that lack direct equivalents in Russian. We have already discussed pigeon-hole thinking [in Schubladen denken] earlier, and dilemma [Zwickmühle] is another example, referring to navigating ambiguous situations: '*and as Germans say zwickmühle* (.) *well you went back and forth*.' Another example of context-specific usage arises in Katia's description of gender role dynamics in her family after arriving and settling in Germany. This instance also illustrates a form of professional lexical interference:

| Russian to English Translation Preserving the Translanguaging Effect | Initial Transcript with German-Russian Translanguaging |
|---|---|
| "*and Viktor stayed at home* (.) *he completely took on* [the role of a] *hausmann-a* [house husband] (.) *he was taking care of all household chores because I wrote three bewerbung-a* [applications] *in Germany and in the third* [case] *they invited me to the vorstellungsgespräch* [job interviews] (.) *they hired me.*" | "*и Виктор сидел дома* (.) *он уже полностью перенял* **hausmann-а** (.) *он перенял все домашнее хозяйство* (..) *потому что я написала три* **bewerbung-а** *в Германии и на третье меня вызвали на* **vorstellungsgespräch** (.) *меня взяли на работу.*" |

In the last example, there are several instances of lexical borrowings from German into the Russian sentence. These borrowings serve to provide specificity and capture the nuances of the situation being

[3] The challenge of finding a job matching one's university degree.

described. For example, Hausmann is borrowed to convey the concept of a house husband, which refers to a man who takes on domestic responsibilities typically associated with women. There is no direct equivalent word for the German term hausmann in Russian. The literal translation муж домохозяин means a husband who is skillful and handy at home. To convey the precise meaning of hausmann, it would be necessary to use a descriptive phrase like stay-at-home husband.

Additionally, two more borrowings are present related to employment: Bewerbungen is borrowed to refer to applications, specifically in the context of job applications, and Vorstellungsgespräch is borrowed to refer to job interviews, highlighting the formal nature of the interview process. These borrowings enhance the precision and richness of the narrative by incorporating German terms that are directly related to the experiences and challenges faced by Katia in a German-speaking context. They also reflect the bilingual and transnational nature of the speaker's life and experiences.

(5) Finally, references to specific social groups form another recurring theme in the interviews, encompassing words such as unemployed [Arbeitslose], receivers of social benefits [Sozialhilfeempfänger], guest workers [Gastarbeiter], late ethnic German resettlers [Spätaussiedler], foreigners [Ausländer], and academics [Akademiker]. These descriptions, emerging in diverse interview contexts, collectively illuminate three prominent public discourses in Germany: the welfare state and social benefits, the migration and integration debate, and the educational discourse. The latter encompasses considerations of both educational attainment and family background, making distinctions between families of academics [Akademikerfamilie] and families of workers [Arbeiterfamilie]. These discourses are translated from the German contexts into Russian conversations through the borrowing of missing vocabulary.

In addition to the regular occurrence of German-Russian language interference in the Russian-speaking interviews and the themes it helps construct, there is another noteworthy feature to consider: which part of language is borrowed. Nouns used for naming and describing are

borrowed more frequently than words denoting actions (verbs) or relational attitudes (adjectives). Interestingly, abstract concepts or emotions rarely require lexical borrowings from German.

I discussed several reasons for language interference at the beginning of this section. Additionally, it is worth noting that, firstly, rapid borrowing can maintain the conversational flow instead of wasting time searching for an equivalent word, bypassing standard language norms. Secondly, it can be convenient for conveying precise meanings while preserving nuanced descriptions. Thirdly, interference can connect a speaker, at the very least, with two different linguistic systems, with translanguaging serving as an immediate expression of multiple identities. Language is a shared medium, and bilingualism or multilingualism is a shared experience that occurs simultaneously. While standard national languages may delineate national boundaries (and regiolects may define regional borders), language interference or translanguaging, as a fusion of different linguistic systems, can serve as an indicator of cultural fusion, illustrating cultural pluralism and hybridity in the coexistence of various cultural signifiers merged to express individual and collective agency. As Alex succinctly puts it: "*In the end* (.) *we just express our thoughts* (.) *basically we have similar thoughts* (.) *we just use different translators.*" With language interference or translanguaging, speakers establish a space for intimate and authentic expression. When standard German or Russian fail to provide this space, individuals create a distinct form of language use in the context of migration and settlement, characterized by its raw and unpolished nature. This language use becomes a powerful tool for conveying ideas that go beyond conforming to the dominant societal norms. By adopting languages to their needs, immigrants harness the power of languaging to assert their identities and resist dominant forces (hooks, 1994, p. 174). In a way, it is a form of counter-hegemonic speech that empowers them and allows for liberation through languages via languaging and translanguaging.

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## Part V Summary

In this Part *The Silence of Polyglots*, I challenged traditional perspectives on language, emphasizing its dynamic nature as it unfolds in the context of migration, including languaging, translanguaging, and language interference. This approach created inclusive spaces for diverse voices and expressions, reshaping our understanding of language's impact on knowledge and perception.

Examining language as an expressive element of immigrant agency, I involved two key approaches. On the one hand, I analyzed individual and collective language use within the immigration context, considering the crossing of linguistic, discursive, and cultural spaces. This perspective explores factors like age and language acquisition, foreign language exposure, and cognitive abilities. On the other hand, I addressed group-level aspects of language, including language interference and translanguaging in transnational social spaces, the relationship between social backgrounds and language acquisition, the diverse functions and intimacy levels of language use, the role of emotions and belonging, and the influence of language on social mobility.

Furthermore, I examined the contrast between standard language use, and deviations like accents, dialects, or translanguaging. The discussion also highlighted the five most common themes of language interference among FSU immigrants, exploring the reasons and meanings behind lexical borrowing from German into Russian. These interferences served as signifiers, shedding light on borrowing areas and the nuanced semantics of the signified.

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# Part VI

## Entrepreneurial Endeavors—From Small Ventures to Transnational Networks

# 12

# Migrant Businesses and Post-Soviet Migration

> … production, exchange, marketing, and consumption of food have generated new identities — for foods and eaters alike
>
> (Gabaccia, 2000, p. 5)

I outline the third pillar of immigrant agency theory, namely purposeful actions, an operational element of agency. In doing so I explore entrepreneurial endeavors of the studied group, while examining how migrant businesses often serve specific community needs and are strategically located near immigrant populations. I investigate entrepreneurial activity among post-Soviet immigrants in Germany by focusing on the Mix Markt supermarket chain, a prominent example of immigrant-owned retail that has developed into a transnational business across Europe. Through an in-depth case study, I explore the economic, social, and cultural embeddedness of these businesses within Russian-speaking and East European communities. I analyze how first-generation immigrants and naturalized Germans from the former Soviet Union have built extensive transnational business networks, maintaining connections across Europe and Asia through import–export systems. Empirical data revels how educational and employment backgrounds, as well as local

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labor market disparities, shape entrepreneurial trajectories. By integrating both capital and agency perspectives, the chapter shows how migrant entrepreneurship is not only a response to labor market exclusion but also a dynamic expression of collective identity, cultural continuity, and community-based agency. The Mix Markt phenomenon illustrates how social action reinforces economic integration within a transnational and localized context.

* * *

## Migrant Businesses as Purposeful Economic Actions

Autonomous and collective actions stand as a fundamental feature of human agency (Calhoun, 2002, p. 7). Action can be conceptualized as actio, representing an ongoing acting-in-progress process, or as actum, signifying a completed and achieved action (Schuetz, 1945, p. 539). The terms 'actio' and 'actum' emphasize the temporal nature of human actions, encompassing the past, present, and future dimensions. Besides temporality, social action is not necessarily a linear progression, but rather it adapts and changes in response to the prevailing conditions and circumstances that individuals encounter (Corbin and Strauss 1990, p. 421).

In the context of my study, I employ the term action to denote individual, or collective deliberate behavior that is intentional and unintentional, goal-oriented and adjusted throughout the process of migration and settlement. Reflexivity, as exemplified by Schuetzian's reflective attitude,54F is another crucial facet that distinguishes action from other forms of activities, such as routines or habits. Margaret S. Archer (2016, p. 19) considered the concept of the 'reflexive imperative' as intrinsic to the process of adaptation when migrants transfer ideas, knowledge, and actions, synthesizing them in the new field of application, especially when previous routines are no longer adequate. Mobility may disrupt

established routines, as I observed in my fieldwork, thereby emphasizing the need for reflexivity in actions.

In Part VI, my primary focus revolves around purposeful actions within the realm of entrepreneurship, seamlessly integrated into the mundane transnational social spaces. Specifically, I analyze entrepreneurial ventures undertaken by FSU immigrants who established small businesses upon migrating to Germany. I then scrutinize how these grassroots businesses from the late 1990s evolved into the foundation of the Mix Markt supermarket chain that had its roots in the post-Soviet communities.

Businesses in the context of migration and settlement are analyzed in terms of differences between migrant and ethnic shops. The former refers to first-generation immigrants, while the latter signifies businesses with 'a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction among people sharing a common national background or migratory experiences' (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990, p. 112). I use the term migrant shop to refer to the first-generation entrepreneurs who own or manage the largest share of the stores from the sample. Since migrant or ethnic businesses oftentimes serve the needs of certain immigrant communities, they are in geographical proximity to this population. Terms like ethnic enclaves, ethnic entrepreneurship, or immigrant enterprises reflect this cultural and spatial proximity in research (Leicht & Werner, 2013; Portes, 1995; Volery, 2007). Closeness emphasizes the concentration (enclaves) and relative exclusiveness (niche) of entrepreneurs operating within migrant consumer markets. As a result, research underscores the significance of cultural and social capital for migrant entrepreneurs who strive to survive and advance (Sommer & Gamper, 2015).

Entrepreneurial pursuits are frequently interpreted in the literature as a calculated strategy by migrants to evade unemployment or surmount formidable barriers in the mainstream labor market (Grünheid, 2012; Sommer, 2011). Pieterse underscored that a driving force compelling individuals with foreign backgrounds to engage in entrepreneurial activities in Western Europe is the 'hierarchical integration in the form of segmented labor markets to the disadvantage of migrants' (Pieterse, 2003, p. 37). Conversely, Saskia Sassen (1995) conceptualized immigrants' entrepreneurial endeavors by taking into account local labor

markets and accentuating employment opportunities within localized labor markets, rather than singularly focusing on the broader labor market of the country. From the previously mentioned urban scalar perspective, it is evident that the local labor market in small and mid-sized cities significantly deviates from the opportunities present in larger cities, metropoles, or strategic urban centers at the national or international level. These disparities are also discernible within the context of interviews, where interviewees navigate their precarious labor conditions and experience challenges when transitioning between professional fields. This disparity becomes apparent when comparing the interviewees' educational levels (the EDUCATION column) with their employment situations, particularly noticing the few who secured permanent contracts during the interview period (A-1, the column OCCUPATION IN THE TIME OF INTERVIEW).

In the 1990s, retail shops and other businesses of East European orientation in Germany illustrated both relative closeness and high reliance on the post-Soviet communities. Elena Sommer (2011) depicted Russian-speaking entrepreneurs as 'inconspicuous' and explored business dependence on co-migrants as social capital, examining their ties with their places of origin. In her book *Social Capital as a Resource for Migrant Entrepreneurship: Self-employed Migrants from the Former Soviet Union in Germany* (2020), the scholar analyzed the peculiarities of business activities from the point of social capital and self-employment strategies in the transnational context. She covered interesting and relevant aspects: the positioning of immigrant business in the market continuum is divided into the migrant market for co-immigrants, the mixed market for migrant and local populations, and the mainstream market orienting at all the population (Sommer, 2020, p. 176). This classification illustrates the initial importance to access and to know migrant communities.

The capital approach plays a significant role in explaining how migrants integrate into labor markets and engage in entrepreneurial activities, making it a prominent explanatory framework in migration studies (Faist, 1998; Kyle, 1999; Nohl et al., 2006; Pieterse, 2010; Sommer & Gamper, 2015). The accumulation of economic capital to start a business is a crucial factor, often achieved by migrant entrepreneurs through their savings, loans from relatives, or support

within their migrant community. This process often requires enduring long working hours, modest living conditions, and multiple jobs for several years to gather the required funds (Volery, 2007, p. 38). Migrant entrepreneurs leverage the social and cultural capital of co-migrants to mitigate risks and ensure the success of their ventures. They embrace self-employment as entrepreneurs offering services within communities they are closely aligned with, thereby sharing language and culture.

While Bourdieu's theory of capital (1983) remains relevant as an explanatory framework within migration studies, particularly concerning integration and entrepreneurship, the agency approach, which aligns with my current argument, offers another plausible lens for understanding the experiences of migrants' embedding (Chapter 3), including entrepreneurship (Brettell & Alstatt, 2007). The social capital approach, outlined earlier, underscores the importance of co-migrant or co-ethnic networks in reducing transaction costs, accumulating wealth, and cultivating both in-group and intergroup social and cultural capital (Pieterse, 2003, p. 35). In this context, social capital plays a cumulative and advantageous role for migrant or ethnic enterprises. Conversely, collective agency accentuates reciprocal, active, and interactive connections between communities, migrant shops, and entrepreneurs. It centers on elements of identity formation and culture (cultural pluralism, multilingualism, customs, cuisine), as well as familial and social dynamics that empower migrant businesses within their respective contexts. While the social capital approach primarily considers individuals through the lens of possession as having sources, connections, and contacts (Seukwa, 2005, p. 221), my emphasis on purposeful social action as an operational element of agency centers on processes, interactions, exchanges, cohesion, and engagement (Havlin, 2024). This perspective I illustrate on the example of the Mix Markt supermarket chain.

## A Mix Markt Phenomenon

Typically, when people mention Mix Markt, they are referring to East-European oriented (Russian) grocery stores. These stores evoke a range of familiar associations: condensed milk, Eskimo chocolate-coated ice

cream, potato pastries, and more (Siemens, 2020, p. 10). These associations open one of the interviews with a Mix Markt entrepreneur in *Aussiedlerbote*. Featured as interviews, these ads appear in the rubric *Mix Markt—Наш русский магазин* [Our Russian Shop]. To comprehend the phenomenon of Mix Markt, I investigate its composition and developments that culminated in its establishment. This retrospect lens necessitates an exploration of the collective agency exhibited by immigrants from the former Soviet Union who arrived in Germany during the 1990s. Examining the circumstances that led to the emergence of the Mix Markt chain in Germany helps us to understand the grassroots nature of the Mix Markt phenomenon.

What do the Mix Markt stores stand for, and how do they represent post-Soviet entrepreneurs and communities in Germany? With a total of 179 stores in Germany and an additional 161 in other EU countries, the Mix Markt supermarket chain signifies a pioneering advancement in the realm of entrepreneurial endeavors pursued by post-Soviet immigrants, not only in Germany but also in other regions. In my analysis, I rely on a multimethod empirical study.55F Through the utilization of both real-time and digital ethnography techniques, I strive to gain a comprehensive understanding of the operational dynamics of Mix Markt businesses and their associated entrepreneurs within the context of the mundane transnational social spaces. This process involves a meticulous examination of the collective agency, including entrepreneurial actions, of post-Soviet Russian-speaking immigrants. They leverage familial and communal relationships to establish linkages between stores and entrepreneurs across Germany and beyond. Moreover, the analysis of the statistical and geographical distributions has enabled me to discern and reflect upon the spread of the Mix Markt business across Germany and Europe. This investigation sheds light on how the Mix Markt networks, as well as Russian-speaking businesses and communities, navigate and function within the expansive Eurasian context.

Three distinct features set the Mix Markt chain apart from comparable supermarkets. Firstly, Mix Markt capitalizes on an East European framework to promote an array of diverse cultural elements by creating a marketing strategy of East European culinary fusion. In this context, Eastern Europe spans from Poland, Romania, and Ukraine, through

Russia to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan—encompassing the expansive scope of Eurasia. Sporadically, branding of East European products is tested in the mainstream supermarket retailers such as Lidl, Aldi, Real, and alike. Yet, besides the product marketing, the Mix Markt creates the cultural, symbolic, and transnational space for its respective community on the ground linking to other comparable communities.

Secondly, the strategic placement of the stores mirrors the geographical and demographic distribution of former Soviet Union immigrants in both Germany and Western Europe. The prevalence of post-Soviet migration within Germany in the 1990s served as fertile ground for the emergence of this chain in the country. An interconnected pattern emerges between the distribution of Mix Markt outlets and the settlement dynamics of post-Soviet migration (Worbs et al., 2013, p. 101). For those who are willing to join the network by opening a Mix Markt shop, it is necessary to choose a location with a late resettlers quota of approximately 8–11 percent in the area, as advertised on Mix Markt's official webpage (Mix Markt, n.d.). This pattern extends to other EU countries with a high proportion of East–West European migration. Notably, the largest concentration of Mix Markt stores beyond Germany is observed in Italy, Portugal, and Spain, owing to the substantial Ukrainian and Romanian communities present in Western Europe (Cvajner, 2019; Eurostat, 2011, p. 18; Khanenko-Friesen, 2017).

Thirdly, while initially catering to the demands of the migrant market in the 1990s, the Mix Markt chain subsequently transitioned into the mixed market during the 2000s intending to enter the mainstream market from the 2010s onward. As of 2019, the Mix Markt supermarket, operated by the Monolith Group, holds the 26th position in the German food retail trade based on annual revenues (Lebensmittelzeitung, 2019). For comparison, EDEKA, REWE Group, Schwarz Group (Lidl and Kaufland), and Aldi are positioned at the top of the rating with a combined 62% of the market share in Germany (Business Insider, 2019).

Notably, the quality of Mix Markt shops and their marketing strategies exhibit significant variation on the ground, as do their connections to their respective communities—ranging from primarily appealing to FSU migrants or reaching out to other immigrants and gaining popularity

among the local population. Data illustrates that a shop's attractiveness strongly depends on the owners' positioning and management. The history, as well as the structural organization of the Mix Markt chain (i.e., an integration of separated shops into a business network of support and supply), resembles established, well-known German chains like EDEKA and REWE originating from the first half of the last century. 56F.

The extensive migration flow from the FSU of the 1990s resulted in numerous migrant businesses, named as Ivushka/Viktoria in Aalen, Moskva in Siegen, OstKostMarkt in Rheine, Wiwa in Friedrichshafen, Continent in Düsseldorf, Globus in Günzburg, Swetlana in Wunsiedel (Havlin, 2024, p. 203). Some entrepreneurs started their retail businesses for the first time upon migration; others brought entrepreneurial experience with them since the transition from Soviet socialism to capitalism propelled many people into businesses in the post-Soviet space (Ageev et al., 1995). [1] Many of these businesspeople became entrepreneurs by necessity. In the late 1990s, a share of these businesses joined the Prima-Markt chain before being incorporated into the Mix Markt chain in the late 2000s. Listing all FSU immigrant-initiated businesses in Germany, especially the failed ones, is a nearly impossible task. Nevertheless, by examining the Mix Markt development, we gain an overview of mainly successful entrepreneurial activities. To illustrate the bottom-up nature of the Mix Markt project, I reflect on the individual profiles of a few stores.

In the early 1990s, a family from Kazakhstan founded a retail shop named *Leningrad* in one of the mid-sized cities of West Germany. As the name suggests, the shop positioned itself with an East European orientation. Despite being admitted under the policy for ethnic German resettlers, the family was composed of various cultural origins. Over time, the shop relied on the labor of the extensive familial network of three generations (field notes). From this perspective, the legal possibility that Aussiedler enjoyed, migrating with extended families to Germany, was noticeably an advantage. During the same period, another retail shop specializing in East European products, *Salut* was founded by a family from the Former Soviet Union 600 km to the south of the *Leningrad* shop. At the time of the publication, eight out of nine shop

[1] In Chapter 3, I provided an overview of the entrepreneurial landscape in the Soviet Union.

employees belonged to the family (Siemens, 2018a, p. 10). As in the case of *Leningrad*, family support involving different generations played a paramount role in the shop's development. These two unrelated shops underwent the first rebranding into the *Prima Markt* and, finally, in the 2010s the owners joined the Mix Markt chain. The *Salut* received a registration number with three digits suggesting that the chain had already incorporated over one hundred comparable shops across Germany.

The story of the prototype Prima and later Mix Markt shop also began in the 1990s and was initiated by FSU ethnic German resettlers. In the small town of Oerlinghausen in North Rhine-Westphalia,[2] approximately 600 km to the north of the Mix Markt *Salut* and 300 km from the Mix Markt *Leningrad*, a similar retail shop was established. The current owner reflected in an interview:

> Initially, it was a small shop with retail space around 400 $m^2$. Back then, there were few regular staff. Time passed by, and its retail space increased to 1,000 $m^2$, with the regular staff also doubling (Siemens, 2018b, p. 16).

Many shops from the sample have undergone similar growth patterns. When compared, parallels emerge among the owners' places of origin: These are businesspeople from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, or Ukraine admitted under the policy as ethnic German resettlers, statistically the largest group of post-Soviet migration. Nevertheless, other groups have been involved in the Mix Markt chain: people admitted as Jewish refugees or labor migrants.

Not only do the shop profiles resemble those of *Salut* or *Leningrad,* but their developments also follow a similar pattern: in the 2000s, they were integrated into the Mix Markt corporate structures under the Monolith group. Considering the incorporation processes, we must point out the crucial role of grassroots business networks of FSU entrepreneurs in Germany that served as a platform for a large enterprise such as the Monolith Group to emerge. In this business process, mixed forms of incorporation and ownership appeared; yet ownership

[2] In 2018, Oerlinghausen had 17,286 residents, as reported by Destatis (2018). The analysis shown that 11 percent of the Mix Markt stores in Germany are situated in cities with population ranging from 5,000 and 19,999 inhabitants.

still belongs to the initial entrepreneurs if they or their offspring managed to succeed.

In addition to incorporating dispersed shops, the Monolith Group owes its success to the establishment of factories that produce goods for wholesale trade in Germany. The company distributes these products to mainstream retailers or shops with East European orientation, while also expanding its retail presence within the Mix Markt network. Several store brands distinguish the merchandise in this chain. The Monolith official webpage claims to supply its products to an additional 1,200 independent stores across Germany (Monolith Group, 2020). This number highlights the significant growth potential of the Mix Markt network.

With its own production in Germany, the Monolith business model can withstand the changing geopolitical climate in Eastern Europe, especially considering sanctions and trade embargos between the EU and Russia since 2014. In 2017, a top manager from Monolith discussed this subject in a newspaper interview titled *Baltika instead of Beck's* in the southwest German regional newspaper Schwäbische Zeitung: "Currently, the chain benefits from the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine. Approximately half of all products from the FSU are imported from Ukraine, which served as a granary even during the Soviet period" (Richter, 2017, p. 8). On the other hand, Mix Markt stores commit to selling up to 60 percent of the goods produced or distributed by Monolith as a contractual condition of cooperation. To gain access to and deliver goods to the dispersed multiple East European shops across Germany, as shown above, the Monolith Group integrated some of them as Prima Markt and later rebranded them as Mix Markt.

Besides, the export of the Mix Markt business model across the EU diversified the chain positioning in Europe. Whereas business (import) ties with the Baltic states, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine connect Mix Markt stores with places of origins of entrepreneurs and communities, creating transnational social spaces in ordinary cities. This export–import network across Europe and Asia highlights the global and transnational scale of the Mix Markt chain. Positioning on this scale became possible thanks to the collective agency of entrepreneurs, their families, and co-immigrants as employees, which the subject of the next section covers.

## Family Ties and Co-Immigrant Connections

The entrepreneurial efforts of Mix Markt businesspeople unify the diverse FSU population in Germany by addressing their identity formations and language pluralism,60F specific needs related to food memories and culinary fusion in consumption, as well as their migration experiences and (post-)Soviet backgrounds. Instead of viewing them solely through the ethnic lens imposed by German admission policies, it becomes evident that co-migrant ties have played a significant role in their business ventures. Some entrepreneurs decided to join the Mix Markt chain based on invitations or examples set by other co-migrants, who were sometimes referred to as 'countrymen' [земляки]. Cultural affinity, shared multilingualism, a common past, comparable experiences, and efforts to succeed professionally in the German context have solidified the building of immigrant business communities, as exemplified by the Mix Markt.

In addition to relying on co-migrant ties, an in-depth examination of Mix Markt stores illustrates extensive family engagement in business making. The cases of the *Salut* and the *Leningrad* shops reflect the high levels of engagement from family members and co-migrants who work as employees. Family businesses often give rise to intricate family dynamics, laden with potential conflicts. Furthermore, these dynamics can be influenced by factors such as who initiated migration to Germany, who can prove German origins for admission, and who is included or excluded from the decision-making process (Rosenthal, 2005, p. 315). These conclusions were also evident in the specific case of the family dynamics within the Mix Markt store of Ycity. In the context of migration and family business, decision-making discrepancies often overlapped with the blurred boundaries between family and business making.

Despite the complex family dynamics, some families consolidate ownership of multiple stores, often as GmbH entities, leading to the clustering of Mix Markt shops. This clustering points to the emergence of a prosperous entrepreneurial class capable of accumulating resources and knowledge within a single family across generations. Howard E. Aldrich and Roger D. Waldinger emphasized the importance of family and co-migrant labor for many small migrant businesses:

> Such labor is largely unpaid, and kin and co-ethnics work long hours in the service of their employers. Ethnic entrepreneurs manipulate family and co-ethnic perseverance and loyalty to their own advantage, but they also incur obligations in doing so (1990, p. 130).

These family-business relations are characterized by a high degree of reciprocity and mutual responsibility. However, it is worth noting that the authors primarily described the reality in the United States. When considering the German business landscape in general, it is often family-owned. Authors of the book *Family Businesses—Obsolete Model or Success Type?* (Wimmer et al., 2018)—highlight that family businesses continue to be the dominant form of enterprise in the economic system, reflecting the specific entrepreneurial culture in Germany.

In addition to being employers in the local labor markets and hiring a higher percentage of individuals with foreign or international family backgrounds (as family members or co-migrants), local Mix Markt entrepreneurs are encouraged to participate in or support social initiatives aimed at benefiting the community, such as sports associations and cultural events. Beyond meeting the consumption needs and promoting East European culinary fusion, Mix Markt entrepreneurs offer a wide range of other official and informal services. These include shopping delivery, travel agency services, bakeries, bistros, restaurants, butchers, the retail of cultural, jewelry, and textile goods, construction firms, service providers in catering, elderly care, and cleaning, as well as party services (based on the created dataset *Mix Markt Stores in Germany and the EU*). Apart from offering these services, what actions and strategies enable the Mix Markt supermarket chain to appeal to its customers and thrive in the highly competitive food sector in Germany?

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# 13

# Nourishing Culinary Memories Through Consumption

I examine the role of food retail in shaping community, analyzing how cultural diversity and multilingualism are mobilized through culinary practices. Mix Markt serves not merely as a retail space but as a cultural hub that reflects and reinforces a sense of belonging through food, language, and marketing strategies tailored to mélange identities. My research reveals how Mix Markt caters to a shared yet fluid cultural memory. Its standardized multilingual messages and product offerings highlight the consumption habits that bind communities across different migrant trajectories. While the chain capitalizes on cultural familiarity, it simultaneously fosters spaces where diverse post-Soviet and East European affiliations converge. The chapter explores how food becomes a vehicle for preserving memory, forging continuity, and constructing comfort zones within transnational social spaces. It highlights the agency of post-Soviet immigrant entrepreneurs who use economic and sociocultural strategies to establish businesses that meet both practical and emotional needs. Finally, it argues that Mix Markt does not create community identity but connects and sustains it, functioning as a site

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T. Havlin, *The Dynamics of Immigrant Agency*, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-4755-5_13

of transnational social action. This chapter thus illuminates how culinary consumption contributes to immigrant agency and the symbolic reconstruction of *home* in a migratory setting.

* * *

On the Monolith Group's production factory webpage, the first lines that greet visitors state, "In Germany, more than 12 million residents originate from Eastern Europe and the CIS countries, making them a significant target group" (Monolith Group, 2020). As indicated, Mix Markt's primary target group consists of immigrants from Eastern Europe and successor states of the USSR. This assertion aligns with my fieldwork observations and interviews conducted with owners, as reported in the *Resettler's Messenger* (*Zeitung Aussiedlerbote*, 2014–2020). A standardized farewell message in the stores' bids, *Thank you for your purchase!* in five languages: German, Russian, Polish, Romanian, and Turkish. These languages are presumably reflective of the Mix Markt's linguistic target groups. However, an interview with one of the Monolith CEOs reveals that the top five bestsellers of the Mix Markt chain in Germany are sunflower seeds, Moscow chocolate, black tea, buckwheat, and vodka (Richter, 2017, p. 8). These preferences provide insight into the consumer inclinations of Mix Markt clientele, suggesting that the supermarket chain primarily targets Russian-speaking immigrants. This assumption correlates with the conclusions drawn by René Leicht and Lena Werner who found that FSU immigrant businesses in Mannheim rely more on co-migrant consumers (up to 40 percent) and benefit more from the place of origin compared to Turkish, Italian, and Polish immigrant businesses (2013, p. 226).

While studying Russian-speaking communities in Germany, the USA, and Israel, Ludmila Isurin (2011, p. 97) identified several features that contribute to the cohesion of Russian speakers as a group: shared memories, a common cultural background, including the Russian language, the 'need to pass culture and language on to the children,' shared mentality, and a generational factor (middle-aged and older). Association with this community can also be triggered by the need to create a comfort zone, a

feeling of home, which is reproduced through people communicating in similar languages and sharing daily experiences (Havlin, 2022, [17]).

The establishment of specialized shops is one way to consolidate a community by focusing on their tastes and needs. Furthermore, it can be assumed that Mix Markt stores do not create but rather connect the East European or Russian-speaking communities serving as a meeting point and a cultural reference. Simultaneously, the East European fusion appeals to other clientele who are accustomed to a cuisine heavily based on meat, fish, vegetables, and cereals. Therefore, we need to examine the Mix Markt culinary concept, which the chain exploits to win customers.

## The East European Culinary Fusion

Within Mix Markt's product range, approximately 5,000 variants are produced in Germany, while others are imported from Eastern Europe and other FSU countries. Through these products and marketing strategies, Mix Markt stores craft an East European culinary fusion. Three features characterize this fusion: first, it encompasses *culinary diversity*, a concept initially promoted through the camaraderie among nations in the Soviet era (as one of the brands aptly suggests, *The USSR Cuisine,*). Mix Markt offers recipe suggestions, video tutorials, and cookbooks for various culinary tastes, including Georgian, Jewish, Polish, Russian, Romanian, Ukrainian, Uzbek, and more (Mix Markt, 2020).

The second distinguishing aspect of Mix Markt's culinary mashup is its connection to food memory and childhood. One related advertisement vividly illustrates how this childhood differs from the well-off childhood. In this ad, a child is portrayed in a simple setting: a wooden window frame, a brick wall, and a warm brown blanket draped over the shoulders (Mix Markt, 2018). This depiction evokes a sense of nostalgia, reminiscent of a childhood marked not by prosperity, but by necessity, which naturally appeals more to the older generation. As one of the articles dedicated to Mix Markt aptly contrasts: "The childhood of the

former Soviet Union does not taste of Milka, but rather of Alënka"[1] (Richter, 2017, p. 8). Some Soviet-era products, once elusive, are now readily available on Mix Markt shelves. Whether this provides a sense of social advancement from an individual perspective remains a matter of speculation.

Third, Mix Markt's flexible culinary mashup intertwines with Soviet or retro nostalgia by offering products such as Kiev cake, Plombir [Пломбир] ice cream, Sgushënka [сгущенка] condensed milk, Alënca [Алёнка] chocolate, Zhigulevskoe [Жигулевское] beer, and Sovetskoe [Советское] champagne. These products bear witness to the Soviet period and replicate its visual aesthetics. However, products branded as USSR Cuisine [Кухня СССР] or Soviet Standard [Советский стандарт], available in Germany, merely mimic the Soviet imaginary. This type of consumerist nostalgia is not an isolated example: Ostalgie in Eastern Germany or Yugonostalgia in Southern Europe are comparable phenomena (Banchelli, 2008; Lindstrom, 2005). In this respect, Anna Maria Tomczak pointed out that ethnic food or a culinary mashup "is often treated as the very epitome of cultural memory, with its material, symbolic, and functional aspects co-existing to create a memory site" (2017, p. 229).

This pluralistic culinary fusion appeals to consumers on various levels. On an individual level, food can function as a channel for socialization through certain taste palates and cuisine, reconnecting individuals with their past, traditions, childhood memories, and a sense of social belonging (Alibhai-Brown, 2008). On a collective level, food and related rituals can be seen as expressions of cultural group identity or social identity, as noted by Julia Kristeva (2002, p. 100). Through food, social identity can convey a unique history, lifestyle, values, and beliefs. Simultaneously, cross-cultural mingling and borrowing serve as a practical manifestation of lived (culinary) cultural pluralism (Gabaccia, 2000, p. 161). In this respect, an awareness of cultural culinary affinity serves as an advantage for immigrant entrepreneurs: "Servicing these special ethnic consumer needs involves a direct connection with the immigrants'

[1] Original: "*Die Kindheit in der ehemaligen Sowjetunion schmeckt eben nicht nach Milka, sondern nach Alënka*" *Alënka* is an iconic chocolate bar from the Soviet era.

homeland and knowledge of tastes and buying preferences—qualities unlikely to be shared by larger, native-owned competitors" (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990, p. 115). For comparison, in Part VII, I tackle the practical applications of cultural pluralism in the field of leisure and cultural consumption.

## Entrepreneurial Purposeful Actions

The final query I address in this Part pertains to how the Mix Markt phenomenon arises from the collective agency of FSU immigrants. To explore this question, I analyze economic, sociocultural, professional, and transnational actions undertaken by entrepreneurs in their respective locations and communities as Fig. 13.1 depicts.

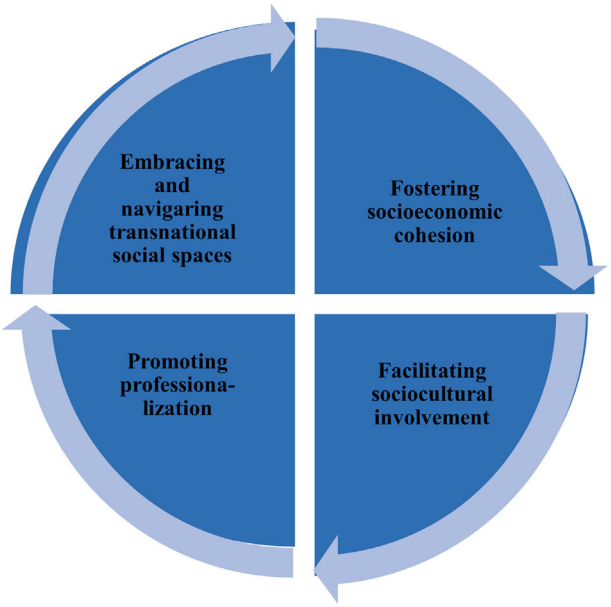



**Fig. 13.1** Purpose-driven entrepreneurial actions (*Source* Own depiction based on the data analysis)

## Fostering Socioeconomic Cohesion

In economic terms, the consolidation of individual small retail stores with an East European orientation across Germany has resulted in the creation of a robust support network, exemplified by the Mix Markt supermarket chain. Such an alliance of retail businesses has offered clear advantages for both the founders of the Mix Markt chain and the entrepreneurs who have joined and managed to thrive within the network. Actor-Network-Theory allows for the depiction of ties and connections within the Mix Markt network as Fig. 13.2 illustrates. On the one hand, such networks 'can reduce the economic risks related to the creation of a new business, thus rendering the decision to become self-employed more attractive from a risk diversification perspective' (Volery, 2007, p. 38). On the other hand, the relatively low barriers of entry into markets where migrant entrepreneurs operate play a significant role. These barriers involve factors such as required capital, educational qualifications, small-scale production, high labor intensity, low added value and intense competition (idem, p. 31).

Mix Markt as a support network with established production, logistics, branding, and expertise allowed small retail businesses to survive and thrive in small and mid-sized cities. Nearly half of the Mix Markt stores (48 percent) are in cities with 20,000 to 99,999 residents, whereas 74 percent of the shops are in small towns, and small and mid-sized cities (Fig. 13.3).

To some extent, following the Mix Markt network provides an X-ray of migrant businesses and FSU communities in these city types (Fig. 13.4). Specifically, the Mix Markt owners from these cities acknowledged the difficulties of running businesses with solely their efforts (from interviews in *Zeitung Aussiedlerbote*, 2014–2020). Perhaps, failed individual efforts explain the Mix Markt stores' median age of seven years, whereas a store life span ranges between 0.5 to 23 years (Fig. 13.5). How can we explain such a median age? First, ownership transition requires a new entry in the company registry as in cases of bankruptcy or inheritance. Second, access to the immigrant entrepreneurial pool increases the network revival capacity to continue with Mix Markt businesses with assistance in marketing, legal counseling, and accounting

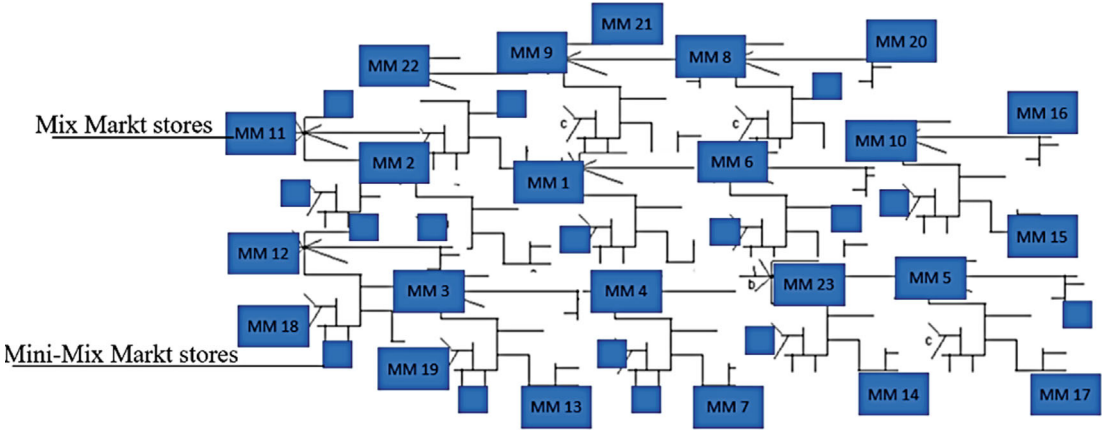



**Fig. 13.2** Unveiling the Mix Markt Store Network Segment (*Note* This figure presents a partial hypothetical estimate derived from the theoretical principles of ANT and the created Dataset *Mix Markt Stores in Germany and the EU* (A.2 in Appendix). It depicts a fragment, not the entire set of 165 stores in the German sample. *Source* Own diagram)

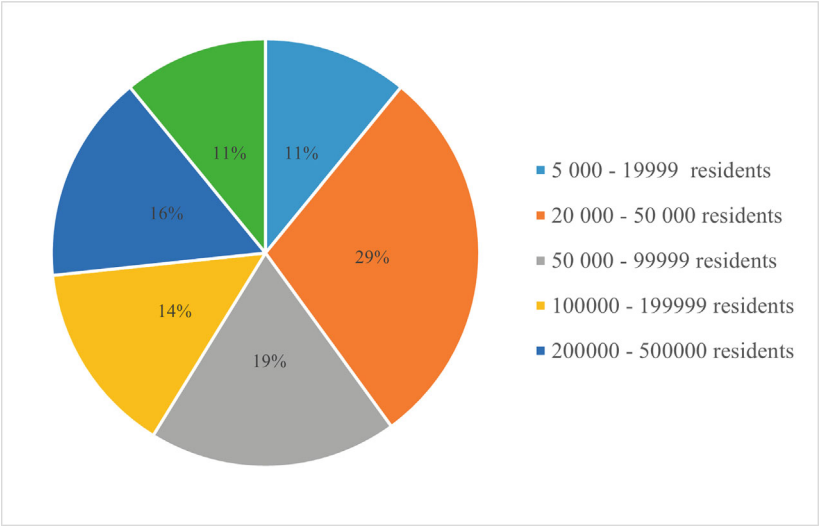



**Fig. 13.3** The Mix Markt Urban Distribution in Germany, 2020 (N = 165) (*Source* Own calculations using the Dataset and data from the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, which includes information on Germany's population and urbanization degree (Destatis, 2011, 2018))

from the Monolith Group as an umbrella organization. Besides, prompt access to the co-migrant pool fosters the hiring of co-migrants. Thus, Mix Markt stores may provide employment opportunities to those who have problems entering the local labor market due to language problems, formal qualifications, or a struggle to overcome high entry barriers (valid also for family members running retail businesses). This is especially important for small and mid-sized cities of this study. Finally, the advantages of having established production facilities in Germany have been described earlier. Additionally, there are trade agreements with other countries related to immigrants' backgrounds from where specific goods are imported and distributed further.

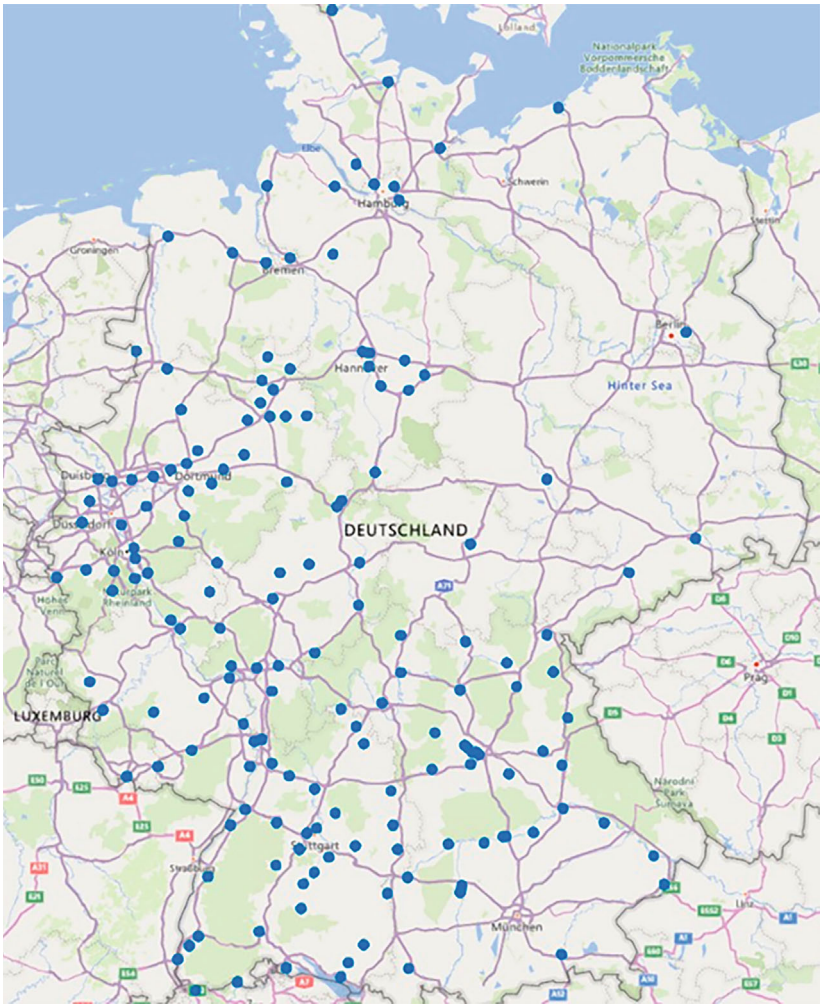



**Fig. 13.4** The Mix Markt Regional Distribution in Germany, 2020 (N = 165) (*Source* Diagram created based on the Dataset *Mix Markt Stores in Germany and the EU*)

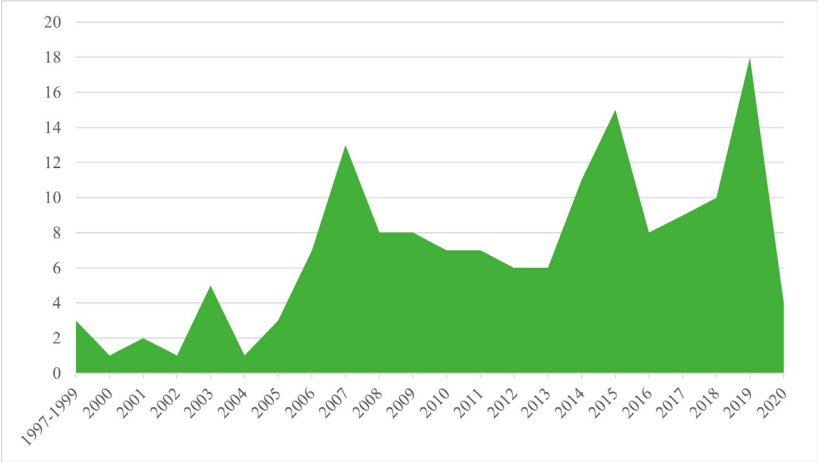



**Fig. 13.5** Mix Markt Openings and Reopenings in Germany by Year (N = 153) (*Source* Own calculations based on the Dataset *Mix Markt Stores in Germany and the EU*)

## Facilitating Sociocultural Involvement

It comprises a series of actions that reflect the underlying reasons for the establishment of the East European supermarket chain. The development of Mix Markt highlights the importance and potential of promoting East European culinary fusion that appeals to a broad audience, including those with migrant or foreign backgrounds. As the company estimates there are approximately 12 million German residents who could be potential customers.

Mix Markt's marketing strategies emphasize the role of multilingualism, flexible representations, and knowledge of cultural contexts in positioning stores in different localized markets. Cultural and linguistic pluralism allows Mix Markt stores to serve the consumer needs of diversified local communities, yet Russian-speaking communities build the core of the entrepreneurial pool and clients. For instance, Mix Markt job advertisements, usually published in German, often specify an additional requirement for language proficiency in Russian, Polish, or Romanian. Apart from serving consumer needs, migrant entrepreneurs appeal to

their respective communities via the engagement and support of social, athletic, cultural, or other local associations.

Established primarily by FSU immigrants from the 1990 wave, the Mix Markt evokes childhood and youth memories, aesthetics, products, and cuisine that resonates with different generations. While the first generation finds Mix Markt more relevant, the active involvement of the second generation highlights intergenerational connections, as some inherit family businesses, and others become customers. Some representatives of the second generation who receive professional training in Germany decide to start a Mix Markt business, as an example of the following businessman demonstrated in his 2009 German and his 2020 Russian interviews (Panorama, 2009; Siemens, 2020). In this specific case, the way to his business was through an internship at Monolith during his studies, writing his final thesis on the subject, further employment in one of the chain stores, and later taking over a Mix Markt store. This start-up required family support: the owner reported that in total seven family members worked in the shop. The second generation appears more professionalized and better equipped for business-making in the competitive German and European retail environment, redirecting to the promotion of professionalization addressed next.

## Promoting Professionalization

The Mix Markt supermarket chain undergoes professionalization as it expands. The Monolith Group positions itself as a provider of necessary services and expertise to local entrepreneurs in the fields of marketing, accounting, legal, technical, and other support. Late supermarket developments strongly rely on analytics for the Mix Markt expansions using statistical analysis, prognosis, and following immigrants' networks with comparable tastes and culinary inclinations across Europe. The Mix Markt chain drifts from a grassroots business initiative as they were in the 1990s, into professionalized retailers by strategic market expansion.

Professionalization is enhanced from the outside by the Mix Markt appeal to professionals who have insights into the German entrepreneurial landscape. The Mix Markt network also attracts those

immigrants who have been employed in the mainstream labor market and then decided to start their businesses with the chain. Some of these businesspeople were previously employed for a long period in large retail companies, others report quitting their (apparently) successful careers elsewhere to start their own business in the Mix Markt retail world. The mainstream businesses (especially in retail) have high entry barriers. Markets occupied by migrant entrepreneurs in turn, 'are typically characterized by lower barriers of entry in terms of required capital and educational qualifications, small-scale production, high labor-intensity and low added value, while cutthroat competition reigns' (Volery, 2007, p. 31) This may result in 'the emergence of a large number of start-ups and, in turn, a high rate of failure' (ibid). As noted earlier, the failure rate is undisclosed; there are indirect indicators outlining the problem. Yet, as discussed before, an extensive co-migrant entrepreneurial pool and involvement of the second generation of migrants secure the resilience and durability of the chain.

Expertise in expansion, application of analytics for market expansion, attracting professionals, and adjusting entry barriers for co-migrant entrepreneurs characterize the promotion of professionalization of Mix Markt.

## Embracing and Navigating Mundane Transnational Social Spaces

A transnational element is evident in the concentration of a significant number of businesses that have expanded the Mix Markt network and diversified its services and product offerings. Furthermore, due to its positive reception within communities, this business model has been exported to other similar socioeconomic contexts, as demonstrated by the presence of Mix Markt stores in Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, and more, as shown in Fig. 13.6. A preliminary analysis of Mix Markt entrepreneurs in Italy, Portugal, and Belgium reveals a similar pattern to that observed in Germany: shops with East European profile have transformed into or joined the Mix Markt supermarket chain, with owners originating from the post-Soviet space.

**Fig. 13.6** The Mix Markt Regional Distribution in Europe, 2020 (N = 294) (*Source* Diagram created from the Dataset *Mix Markt Stores in Germany and the EU*)

Tracking Mix Markt networks allows us to chart extensive transnational social spaces that connect diverse geographic locations and urban areas. These spaces encompass regions of origin in Eastern Europe and Asia, regions of settlement and expansion in Germany and other EU countries, export regions, and a branded culinary fusion as in Fig. 13.7. These transnational social spaces belong to the everyday routine, involving shopping for specific products, meal preparation, and meal rituals, thereby connecting local entrepreneurs with their communities through consumer practices and cultural affiliations.

Small ethnic/immigrant shops specializing in East European cuisine are not a new concept. The East–West European migration of the 1990s and the early 2000s led to an increase in the number of individuals representing various, including immigrants and naturalized citizens with East European affiliations arriving from the post-Soviet area. This critical mass played a crucial role in the emergence of the Mix Markt business model that has proven to be sustainable not only in Germany but also exportable across Europe.

The regional distribution of Mix Markt stores in Germany reveals two distinct clusters: the Mid-West and the South-West (refer to Fig. 13.4). As previously noted, this distribution correlates with the residual locations of people admitted under the policy of ethnic German resettlers (Chapter 2). Furthermore, another Mix Markt cluster is situated along borders, catering to the needs of cross-border communities. This cluster extends along Germany's northwestern borders and even reaches internationally along the Italian French border, considering Mix Markt's international presence.

The Mix Markt supermarket chain serves as an example of an emerging phenomenon where consolidated immigrant-owned businesses, often family-based, evolve into a transnational and competitive business network. This network is characterized by a resilient business model and the promotion of an East European culinary fusion that can be exported across borders. Tracking Mix Markt networks enables the mapping of extensive transnational social spaces that connect regions of origin, settlement, and export, fostering cultural connections through consumer practices and affiliations (Fig. 13.7).

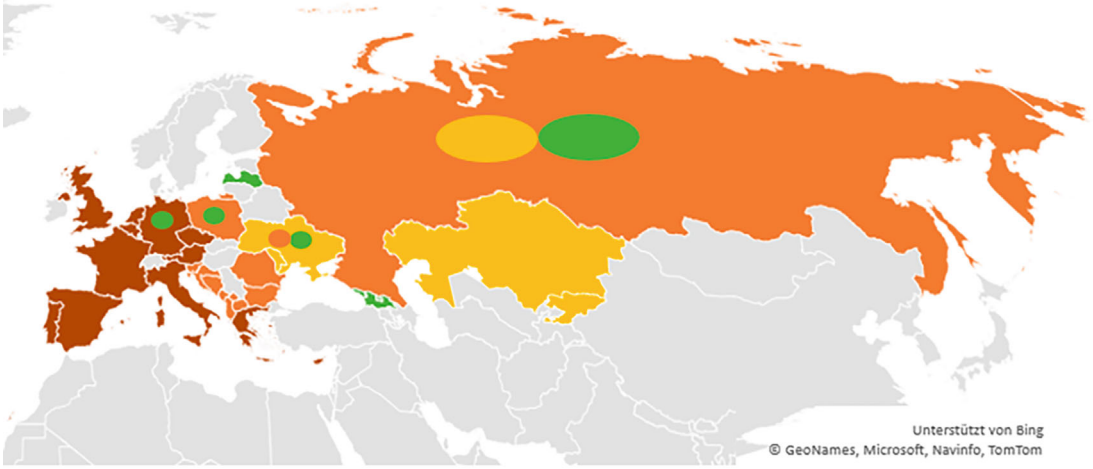



**Fig. 13.7** East European Culinary Fusion and Trade: Mapping Mix Markt's: Transnational Network of Shops, Imports, and Ownership (*Source* Diagram based on the dataset *Mix Markt Stores in Germany and the EU (2014–2020)* (inspired by Havlin, 2024, p. 211). Legend: Orange—East European culinary fusion; Yellow—Country of origin of shop owners; Green—Export of goods; Brown—Mix Markt store locations)

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## Part VI Summary

In this part I provided a comprehensive understanding of the Mix Markt phenomenon, showcasing its deep integration into Russian-speaking and East European immigrant communities, family dynamics, and cultural memories. I demonstrated how (Russian-speaking) immigrants and naturalized Germans from the post-Soviet space have established extensive business networks spanning across Germany and the EU. These networks extend their entrepreneurial, social, and cultural ties across Europe and Asia through a well-developed import-export network. The Mix-Market phenomenon capitalizes on the culinary diversity and cultural pluralism within East European, post-Soviet, and Russian-speaking communities in Germany and Western Europe.

By employing a transnational methodology and the flexible ethnic boundary-making approach, I moved beyond methodological nationalism and denaturalize ethnicity (and, by the same token, nationality) as the primary drivers of community building within nation-states. Within the Mix Markt context, these categories emerged prominently in the form of East European culinary fusion, multilingualism, and flexible cultural marketing strategies that resonate with post-Soviet, Russian-speaking, and East European immigrants. Given this broad spectrum of cultural identities and affiliations, we may refer to Russian-speaking or East European communities that the Mix Markt supermarket chain caters to and, to some extent, unifies.

The Mix Markt chain embodies a remarkable success story within the context of migration and settlement for the studied group. It represents the culmination of grassroots businesses uniting to form a cohesive East European supermarket. Furthermore, the Mix Markt phenomenon serves as an exceptional illustration of the simultaneity hypothesis, exemplifying an integration-oriented and transnationally situated entity. Amidst its challenges and successes, this narrative highlights collective agency driven by social actions that foster socioeconomic cohesion, enable intergenerational sociocultural engagement, promote professionalization and growth, and adeptly navigate transnational social spaces. This story chronicles the transformation of scattered community-based migrant shops into a robust transnational business network spanning

Eurasia. The East-West migration to Germany since the 1990s has been a driving force behind this entrepreneurial endeavor, and the collective agency of FSU immigrants serves as a testament to the multifaceted purposeful actions that are essential for establishing and sustaining the Mix Markt.

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# Part VII

## Unveiling Auto-Exoticism through Cultural Associations: A Study of Serious Leisure

# 14

# Scheherazade, an Immigrant Dancing Group

> … it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history - subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement - that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking… the affective experience of social marginality … transforms our critical strategies…
> (Bhabha, 2007 [1994], pp. 246–247).

I further explore purposeful actions in the field of serious leisure within cultural associations, exemplified on the case of a hobby dance group Scheherazade. Founded in the 1990s by two Russian-speaking women originating from Kazakhstan, the group includes both regular and occasional participants from diverse backgrounds. Their performances reflect a multicultural form of auto-exoticism and exemplify cultural pluralism as a space of belonging, creativity, and identity formation. Scheherazade illustrates how the Soviet legacy of the *camaraderie of nations* finds continuity in transnational contexts through shared aesthetic forms and cross-cultural collaboration. While registered cultural associations are a well-established and well-documented feature of German civil society—with about 6,000 devoted to music, dance, and theater—Scheherazade

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T. Havlin, *The Dynamics of Immigrant Agency*, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-4755-5_14

operates informally, making it part of a more elusive yet vital segment of civic engagement. Such grassroots initiatives, though harder to trace, play a significant role in fostering inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and social cohesion. The chapter argues that immigrant-led leisure groups, whether formalized or not, adopt and adapt organizational models to become visible contributors to community life. Scheherazade's story reveals how immigrant agency manifests through artistic expression, collective memory, and community-building beyond institutional frameworks.

* * *

"*Flamboyant: The performance of Kazakh belly dancer L. Bardo on Saturday…*"

*"The dance ensemble Scheherazade from Uzbekistan showcasing its Spanish-oriental dances…" "The dance troupe Scheheresada made a dazzling entrance in their flamboyant costumes…" "Is it possible to have some borscht? Liza Bardo presents Russian-German cuisine at the conference…."*[1] These are some captions from local newspapers reporting on community appearances of the Scheherazade dance group between 2009 and 2014. They were described as being from Kazakhstan on one occasion, from Uzbekistan another time, and once they presented Russian-German cuisine at an event organized by ethnic German resettlers.

This ensemble, known for their captivating performances of Spanish-oriental and belly dances, appears to be skilled in the art of cultural transformation. Adding an extra layer of intrigue, the cultural association Scheherazade is comprised of German citizens, each with diverse backgrounds and cultural affinities. The name *Scheherazade* is drawn from the renowned collection of Middle Eastern and Indian folk tales known as *One Thousand and One Nights* or *The Arabian Nights* (Alf laylah wa Laylah), which gained popularity in the European context during the

[1] In the original titles in their original languages and as printed: "Farbenprächtig: der Auftritt der kasachischen Bauchtänzerin Liza Bardo am Samstag…" Kruse (2009); "Die Tanzgruppe Scheherazade aus Usbekistan mit ihren spanisch-orientalischen Tänzen…" krh (2012); "Die Tanzgruppe Scheheresada trat in farbenprächtigen Kostümen…" [N/A] (2014); "Darf's etwas Borschtsch sein? Liza Bardo [anonimized] serviert bei der Tagung russland-deutsche Speisen…" Sudermann (2014).

eighteenth ... during the eighteenth century, Scheherazade, a female character celebrated for her intelligence and wisdom, is known for her efforts to save lives by recounting tales to the ruler Shahryār tales for 1001 nights (Britannica, 2020). Her weapon was her unparalleled storytelling abilities, which transported listeners into 'a myriad of worlds' (Shaykh, 2011, pp. 10–11).

Many groups, whether they consist of autochthonous or migrant populations, or diverse communities, form such associations (registered or not) to organize their leisure time. People come together in these groups based on their worldviews, interests, educational backgrounds, or shared hobbies to collectively pursue their political, social, artistic, and sporting interests (Priemer et al., 2017). Despite a certain decline, associations have been a longstanding tradition in Germany (Nipperdey, 1976). Some representatives of minority and immigrant groups adopt the organizational patterns of the indigenous population and establish registered associations. By doing so, they become visible public participants in the dialogue between citizens, minority groups, and the state. They initiate projects, secure funding, and contribute to peaceful coexistence.

## Establishment of Scheherazade, a Hobby Dance Association

Scheherazade, an immigrant dance group based in Xcity, was founded by two women, Lisa and Diara, who originally immigrated to Germany from Kazakhstan during the 1990s. Lisa, along with her extensive extended family, was admitted as an ethnic German resettler, while Diara, who identifies herself as Russian, relocated with her husband and his extended family, admitted under the resettler policy. The group also included three other women who were regular participants and an additional seven women who participated sporadically, representing diverse ethnic backgrounds, including native-born Germans, Ghanaians, and Moldavians. From a German perspective, cultural associations like Scheherazade are not uncommon, as there are approximately 6,000 registered cultural associations in Germany dedicated to music, dance, and theater, comprising 36 percent of the total (DAKU, 2020).

When the future members of Scheherazade migrated in the 1990s, there was still a significant interest in belly dancing among the German public. This interest had its roots in the aftermath of the 1970s feminist movement (Shay & Sellers-Young, 2005, pp. 11–16). It manifested through various courses and training programs offered by community centers, as well as numerous dance formations and their performances. Rediscovered during the second wave of feminism and later embraced by the body-positive movement, belly dance became associated with body positivity, spirituality, and sexual liberation. Advocates popularized this folkloric dance style through their courses and publications (Buonaventura, 1998; Karkutli, 1983, 1989).[2]

The establishment of the Scheherazade dance group, with its focus on belly dance, can be seen as a legacy of *the Oriental fascination* of the early 2010s. This occurred within the local context of Xcity, where other similar Orient-focused groups had already existed. In the case of Scheherazade, the Oriental fascination represented a blend of German (West European) and post-Soviet influences. The Soviet version of orientalism was transmitted by Diara, who had received training in choreography at the state artistic college in Karaganda. Her studies included folkloric dance, which encompassed belly dance as an ethnic tradition of North African and Asian peoples.

Scheherazade, as a hobby dance group, is comprised of semi-professional and amateur dancers who engage in this activity during their leisure time, after work, and apart from their family commitments. In the essay collection *Belly Dance. Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy* edited by Shay and Sellers-Young, various aspects of belly dance are explored. Among these aspects is the idea that belly dance was promoted as a form of self-expression for women of 'all ages, shapes, and vocational backgrounds' who sought to embrace this exotic dance (Shay & Sellers-Young, 2005, p. 16). It also aimed to empower women by encouraging them to be active, rather than passive, in their

[2] The book *Belly Dance. The Snake and the Sphinx* by Wendy Buonaventura (1998) was a gift from Liza Bardo. Liza not only introduced me to the group but also ensured that I felt warmly welcomed during my fieldwork. Her generosity and kindness extended far beyond this gesture, and I am deeply grateful for the knowledge, understanding, and connections I gained through her support.

self-expression, challenging restrictive notions of physical expression and fostering a liberating attitude of sexual self-acceptance, as seen in the free movement of the pelvis (idem, p. 15). Furthermore, the body positivity movement highlights the significance of belly dance in achieving a balance between physicality, self-expression, spirituality, mental and physical well-being, stress relief, relaxation, and addressing inner fears (Kieft, 2014). These elements, which are discussed in the context of belly dance, are also relevant to the Scheherazade dance group and serve as motivation for their engagement in this activity.

Remarkably, engaging in such a hobby involves a multitude of organizational tasks to ensure its continued existence. These tasks encompass securing rehearsal spaces and carving out free time amid work and family commitments, cultivating expertise in the arts of dance, choreography, and music, crafting dance costumes and acquiring necessary equipment. Besides other tasks are to coordinate logistics for reaching rehearsal or event venues, bolstering public relations through participation in community-oriented events to garner visibility and support by establishing and nurturing local networks, including institutional connections like the adult educational center VHS (Folk high school) or conventional schools with their facilities (including Russian schools). Understanding these organizational intricacies is vital for grasping the group's development and network connections (Chapter 16).

Looking at this extensive to-do list, it becomes clear that Scheherazade is not primarily focused on recreation and casual socializing but rather functions as an actively engaged community through artistic expressions of serious leisure. The latter is characterized as 'recreational activities that demand deep and committed engagement over an extended period, typically with the goal of developing specific skill sets' (Moe, 2012, p. 202). Furthermore, this type of leisure entails 'continual participation and networking within defined communities, allowing the acquisition of necessary knowledge, equipment, and proficiency' (ibid).

What insights did my access to the Scheherazade dance group provide regarding the intersection of leisure and collective immigrant agency within the context of social purposeful actions? Additionally, what does it reveal about the sociocultural context within which the group operated?

## Dance in the Sociocultural Context

The Scheherazade dance group embodies an Eastern Oriental dream, showcasing a profound fascination with the belly dance tradition and its contemporary fusions that incorporate diverse dancing vocabularies. Through their dance performances, music, choreography, costumes, and visual transformations, Scheherazade's members actively experiment with this art form. In doing so, they exhibit cultural adaptability and a rich folkloric imagination that embraces change and the exploration of personal boundaries. Figure 14.1 provides a glimpse of one of their public performances during the Intercultural Week.

### Dance and Its Vocabulary

When exploring the history of belly dance, we discover that it was initially a term used by natives and non-natives to encompass all solo




**Fig. 14.1** Scheherazade Performance, Intercultural Week, Xcity 2014 (*Note Dance style*: Belly dance fusion with feather boas. *Music*: *Yallah Habibi*[3] (2008) by Feruza Jumaniyozova (Uzbekistan). *Source* Fieldwork)

[3] Despite its Arabic title, the song is based on Uzbek lyrics.

dance forms from across regions from Morocco to Uzbekistan. These dance forms incorporate movements of the hips, torso, arms, and hands, involving undulations, shimmies, circles, and spirals (Shay & Sellers-Young, 2005, p. 1). Belly dance, from the historical perspective, is not 'a single dance but a complex of movement practices or vocabularies' (Shay & Sellers-Young, 2005, pp. 1–2).

Distinct belly dance schools have developed over time, such as the Egyptian, the Turkish, the Lebanese, and others, each associated with specific indigenous regions. These styles have not only drawn inspiration from their cultural roots but have also been influenced by American tribal dance,[4] Hollywood, and Bollywood variations. Across these styles, a shared dance vocabulary is characterized by pelvic movements, shoulder and hip shimmies, and the isolation of various body parts. Dancers may incorporate level shifts that involve bending forward or backward. The Scheherazade dance group skillfully integrates these classic and modern belly dance fusions into their performances. In their public shows, choreography takes center stage, with rigorous training and rehearsals spanning several months before each event. While solo performances or improvisations are infrequent within the group, the focus lies on honing techniques, perfecting choreography, and achieving synchrony in their dance routines.Even members like Diara, who have received professional training, or self-taught and highly skilled dancers like Liza, prefer to perform as part of the ensemble.

For the group members, belly dancing, accompanied by music and adorned with distinctive costumes, serves as a multifaceted art form. It provides them with a platform to acquaint themselves with diverse dance styles, experiment with contemporary variations of the dance, and explore the rich tapestry of Eastern folkloric traditions. Additionally, it offers a unique lens through which to examine how these traditions have been perceived and interpreted in the Western world and how Eastern and Western elements have been skillfully fused.

[4] American tribal belly dance, born as a product of the social revolutions of the 1960s, is a blended form of belly dance styles that gained popularity in the USA (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005, p. 16).

## Cultural Pluralism

Within the diverse range of belly dance styles and vocabularies, Scheherazade's approach tends toward a fusion of Turkish and Lebanese traditions, incorporating elements of Indian, American tribal, and Spanish oriental styles. Additionally, they have integrated Romany-styled elements into their dance. Throughout my fieldwork, the group's repertoire encompassed a wide variety of folkloric dances presented in modern arrangements. This included Spanish oriental dance and flamenco-styled Malagueñas, an Uzbek dance, two Romany dances, an Alps polka, along with belly dance fusions like a dance with Chinese fan veils, an Isis-Wings dance, an Egyptian Saidi-styled dance with a cane,[5] a dance with a feather boa, and Indian tribal dance. These selections underscore the group's cultural pluralism and are substantiated by an array of musical choices, dance equipment, and costumes, which draw from various cultures across the world. These public performances narrate captivating stories to their audience, leading them into a multitude of interconnected and fused intercultural worlds (Shaykh, 2011, 10; 11).

In this regard, Scheherazade dance group's activities resemble the strategies employed by Scheherazade with her tales from *One Thousand and One Nights*, stories that have captivated the European continent for centuries. It is not surprising that local newspapers have struggled to pinpoint the group's precise geographic, ethnic, or cultural identity. In addition to its artistic, cultural, and ethnic significance, belly dance touches upon various other dimensions, including gender, age, the body, and non-verbal expressions (Thomas, 1995, p. 6). These aspects warrant special attention and can be approached through intersectional and post-colonial lenses. As previously discussed in the methodology part, the video method is ideally suited for capturing and reflecting on non-verbal body language. This topic is inherently engaging for discussion, particularly when contrasted with verbal language.

In the upcoming chapter, I predominantly focus on social actions contributing to the consolidation, cohesion, and engagement of the

[5] Belly dance with a stick, known as Raks Assaya, is an Egyptian folkloric style (Shay (2005, p. 52)). It features acrobatic stick handling and manipulation, typically accompanied by a costume that includes a beledi dress with a hip belt and a headscarf.

immigrant dance group and their respective community. This chapter takes on the character of an archeological expedition, with the objective of empirically comprehending collective action in its purposeful, routine, and micro-situational aspects. On the one hand, this micro-empiricism traverses the domains of ethnomethodology and resonates with Giddens' comprehensive analysis of routine's role in daily well-being, thereby emphasizing the interplay between structure and agency. On the other hand, it aligns with Ulrich Oevermann's conceptualization of genetic structuralism, which delves into the emergence of the new (1991), whether it the form of new routines or new practices. Oevermann highlighted that novelty is inherently motivated, setting it past from the known and the routine (idem, p. 304). Given that immigration signifies a significant disruption to daily routines and a nearly jarring exposure to the new, the following exploration seeks to fathom how the new routine of serious leisure is established by combining pre-migration and post-migration experiences.

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# 15

# Fostering Group Unity and Integration

This chapter explores the social and cultural practices employed by the Scheherazade dance group to foster cohesion, growth, and integration over time. Central to understanding their unity are questions about how these women—sharing migration backgrounds but diverse life trajectories—organize their collective leisure. What drives their commitment to the group, and which actions nurture both unity and integration? I first examine individual motivations, then move to the routine, purposeful, and micro-situative actions sustaining group cohesion. Motivations for dancing vary widely: artistic passion and revival, professional ambitions, managerial strengths and desire for personal liberation, stress relief, or temporary escape from daily hardships. Together, dancing forms a space for cultural expression, bodily mastery, and mental well-being. Through an intersectional lens, the chapter highlights how gender, age, migration background, and body type shape experiences within the group, often overlooked in scholarly discourse. For women aged 41 to 60, belly dance becomes a lived fantasy—offering a momentary escape into the enchanting allure of the Orient through auto- exoticism. Ultimately, the group's cohesion emerges from collective actions spanning purposeful development, structured rehearsals alternated with occasional public

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performances, and the significance of casual presence in micro-situative actions.

* * *

Numerous questions arise when attempting to comprehend the cohesion within the group: How do these women, who share migration experiences but have taken different paths after arriving in Germany, organize their leisure activities? What actions foster unity and integration within the group? What drives them to invest their time, resources, and dedication in the betterment of the group? Initially, we will delve into individual motivations before scrutinizing the purposeful, routine, and micro-situative actions that bolster contributing to the group's cohesion.

Motivation for dancing varies vigorously on an individual level, just as their journeys into dancing differ considerably. Liza and Diara's examples, the group's leading team, prove the point. Both have had a deep passion for dancing throughout their lives. Diara, at the age of 43, began taking dance classes and performing at the tender age of three. By the time she turned 21, she had graduated from an art college, specializing in choreography. When I inquired about how many of her fellow students from the art college were still actively involved in professional dancing, she responded that none, except for her and one classmate who had emigrated to Canada. She remarked: "*you know back in the 1990s* (.) *when we graduated from the dance studies* (.) *no one cared about culture.*"

Upon her arrival in Germany, Diara did not find opportunities for professional dancing. Instead, she had to take on various jobs, often referred to as necessity jobs, such as cleaning, caregiving, or a range of part-time jobs, including work in cafeterias or on assembly lines. Occasionally, she was able to pursue her childhood passion by participating in event management and performing at semi-public gatherings. The financial challenges her family faced and her experiences with precarious employment were central to her self-presentation within her close-knit circle. For her, that was an existential struggle, and she openly discussed it. Even in their small family apartment, which housed a couple and two teenage children, Diara managed to set aside a space with a large mirror

(an essential element for dance practice) where she continued to hone her dance skills.

Liza, at the age of 57, embarked on her dance journey as an adult. She graduated from university in Karaganda with a degree in physical training. Later, she held a high-ranking managerial position at a school. Upon her arrival in Germany, she pursued a career change and became a physiotherapist. For an extended period, she was self-employed in this field. Liza occasionally emphasized the demanding nature of her work as a self-employed, divorced, single mother of two young children working eight-hour shifts, providing massages without breaks, and weekends off. This rigorous schedule eventually took a toll on her health.

One significant turning point occurred when she sought medical attention for her health issues, which led to an unexpected change in her life. She married the doctor who treated her and moved into his city villa. This change brought new challenges as she navigated the world of the local upper class while striving for financial independence to support herself and her two daughters from previous marriages. Liza also engaged in community work and took on the responsibility of founding and nurturing the dance group Scheherazade. While she cherished her current life, she never forgot the hardships she had faced in the past.

Diara and Liza first crossed paths during a community-based event, and it was their shared passion for dancing that eventually led them to establish the group in 2010. In this endeavor, Diara brought her artistic expertise, while Liza contributed her strong managerial skills and her adeptness at navigating various social contexts. Consequently, their collaboration in dance held diverse meanings for each of them. For Liza, dancing represented a means of breaking free from the social constraints imposed by her marriage to a professional with a highly regulated upper-class lifestyle. Her charismatic personality naturally drew her toward the limelight, and she often assumed the role of spokesperson during public performances. On the other hand, for Diara, who grappled with a perpetually precarious situation, this hobby of dancing held a profound significance as a source of professional fulfilment.

The same holds for other regular members. For Mila, who is in her early 50s, dancing serves to alleviate stress and maintain her body fitness. This is particularly essential in her role as a hospital nurse with irregular

working hours. Alia (41), employed as a cleaning lady out of necessity, uses dancing to reignite the passion she held since her youth. Tania, a self-employed single mother caring for a handicapped teenager son, sees dancing as a temporary escape from the daily challenges of her entrepreneurial endeavors as an event manager, and so forth. Dancing together not only enables them to forge connections with each other but also provides a platform to convey their artistic message to their community. It offers a channel to express their cultural imagination, demonstrate their mastery of belly dance, and maintain both their physical and mental well-being. Moreover, it represents a way to assert control over their lives.

From an intersectional perspective, it is crucial to consider the interplay of factors such as gender, age, migration background, and body type (ranging from able/disabled, aging, overweight/fit). The age range within the group varied from 41 to 60 years old at the time of fieldwork. This age group, especially when considering their socioeconomic and migration status, often remains overlooked in the public sphere, and there is limited scholarly attention paid to them as well (Shinozaki, 2012). Alternatively, it is plausible that belly dance serves as a lived fantasy, allowing them to momentarily disconnect from the harsh realities of life and immerse themselves in the alluring dream of the Orient (Adra, 2005, p. 42). Their motivation stems from past experiences and is closely tied to an individual's unique situation. It varies, contradicts, and complements, but what truly brings unrelated or loosely connected individuals into a group as a community player and as a network maker are the actions they collectively undertake.

## Purposeful Actions: The Perspective of Development

The social world is arranged in a way that individuals are inherently oriented toward action, with an innate ability and often a desire to continuously challenge themselves. Scheherazade, through its public performances and community engagements, collectively exposes its members to a continuous stream of challenges, all undertaken voluntarily during their free time. As Goffman (2009 [1967], pp. 229–230)

noted, while some individuals shy away from action, others embrace risks and act with purpose, setting goals and seizing opportunities that open up new perspectives for development that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

Certainly, one such risk and source of opportunity is the purposeful action of organizing, maintaining, and promoting a voluntary and free time dance group. Although the leadership of Scheherazade rests primarily on the shoulders of Diara and Liza, other core members such as Mila, Alia, and Tania actively contribute to the group's sustainability. They participate in decision-making processes related to costumes, choreography adjustments, purchasing dance equipment, logistics arrangements, and carving out precious free time for the group amidst their busy lives. Additionally, they often perform together at various community events, further cementing their commitment to Scheherazade's shared purpose.

Having a clear vision of development is instrumental in setting a purpose and has played a pivotal role in the group's progress. This purpose is closely intertwined with goal setting, which occurs on various levels, ranging from small, day-to-day tasks to more substantial and enduring endeavors. To illustrate this, I would like to delve into the process of costume making, which can be seen as a long-term project rooted in goal setting and subsequent actions. This reconstruction sheds light on the intricate work undertaken by the group to craft the Romany-styled costumes they collectively decided to create. It serves as a testament to the group's dedication to their craft and their ability to set and achieve collective goals. This costume-making process encompassed various stages, including the initiation of discussion (sequence 1), exploring costume options and models (sequence 2), refining fabric choices and dress models (sequence 3), coordinating fabric selection, and making online orders (sequence 4), securing support at the tailor's shop, aiding the tailor, and completing sewing tasks (sequence 5), addressing challenges and negotiating prices (sequence 6), conducting fitting sessions (sequence 7), fine-tuning additional details (sequence 8), participating in a photoshoot with the new costumes (sequence 9), and, ultimately, presenting them in a public performance. The chronological reconstruction of these sequences spans seven months of discussions, decisions,

fabric matching, selections, purchases, sewing, assembly, exchanges, and additions.

Actions like the costume-making process or mastering a new choreography are characterized as long-term, purposeful actions. These actions entail significant duration in terms of both time and space. In contrast, they stand in juxtaposition to temporary, short-term actions, which encompass routine activities such as informal conversations during practice breaks or regular rehearsals. The former necessitates extensive planning, strategic goal setting, systematic adaptation, and negotiation, while the latter are relatively brief, occurring within the confines of rehearsal durations and even spanning mere minutes or seconds. These routine actions are explored in-depth next, while micro-situative actions follow afterward.

## Routine Actions: Rehearsals Versus Performances

Frequently repeated social actions gradually evolve into routine actions, instilling a sense of security and predictability in activities. As Anthony Giddens elucidated, "Carried primarily in practical consciousness, routine drives a wedge between the potentially explosive content of the unconscious and the reflexive monitoring of action with agents display" (1984, p. xxiii). Destruction of daily routine is caused by occurrences of major structural transitions as discussed in Chapter 3, but also by war, migration, job loss, or a divorce. Many members of Scheherazade have experienced several of these life-altering events in a relatively short span. Consequently, their pursuit of re-establishing routine is quite comprehensible (Giddens, 1984, p. 41).

In the context of Scheherazade, routine activities manifest in the form of weekly rehearsals, conducted habitually and eventually becoming ritualized. These practice sessions stand in stark contrast to their sporadic public and semi-public performances, intermittent interviews with local newspapers, and participation in talent shows or collaborative projects. As previously mentioned, I attended approximately 35 rehearsal practices during the fieldwork, which generally followed a similar structure

(Table 15.1). Rehearsals were meticulously organized, marked by repetition, and undeniably constituted a cornerstone of the regular members' weekly routine. Typically, rehearsal practices occurred twice a week, spanning 2–3 hours each session, commencing at 5–6 in the evening and concluding around 8 or 9 o'clock at night.

Table 15.1 outlines a rehearsal flow, showcasing the routine actions and phases followed by Scheherazade members. Each phase contributes to the group's cohesiveness and their pursuit of dance excellence. While public performances are primarily focused on engaging with the audience, establishing community contacts, building, and sustaining networks, and strengthening connections, rehearsals take an inward approach, prioritizing the well-being of the group itself. In contrast to public performances, which are aimed at achieving publicity, visibility, and audience connection, rehearsals serve as a means for group members to become better acquainted through shared activities and a structured routine. This involves continuous practice and repetition of choreography and dance techniques. Engaging in these routine activities, particularly during dry rehearsals, can be physically and mentally demanding. It requires a genuine passion for dance, as well as dedication. Not all newcomers or irregular members may be able to cope with the rigorous demands of these sessions or fully appreciate their significance.

## Micro-Situative Actions: The Casualty of Presence

Based on the rhythm of rehearsal, I define *a micro-situative action* (MSA) as a brief interaction focused on specific spoken or unspoken matters that are relevant to the group in the moment. These matters may relate to questions, dancing movements, emotions, reactions, events, and more. It is important to note that while a single micro-situative action may not significantly change the course of events, the cumulative effect of a series of these actions, or 'a series of micro-events,' can have a greater impact (Collins, 1981, p. 91). These actions are termed situative to emphasize their context-specific nature. They are rarely planned and often arise unpredictably, unintentionally, or casually. Metaphorically, these actions

**Table 15.1** Rehearsal flow—a routine action

| Activity | Duration | Content |
|---|---|---|
| Arrival at the location | Between 20–40 minutes | Carpooling was a common practice among the members, as not everyone possessed a driver's license or a readily available vehicle. Throughout the fieldwork, I heavily relied on these shared rides. The commute, averaging 20 minutes one way, presented a valuable opportunity for us to forge deeper connections. Rehearsals and practice sessions rarely allowed for extended personal conversations, making these car rides a valuable chance to bond with individual members. While logistics might appear secondary, it necessitated ongoing coordination and consensus due to the dispersed residences and practice venues across the city |

(continued)

**Table 15.1** (continued)

| Activity | Duration | Content |
|---|---|---|
| Metamorphosis | Between 10–15 minutes | Rehearsals began with members changing into dance attire, complete with vibrant, comfortable, and stylish costumes. This time also facilitated discussions, showcasing new dance-related purchases, or sharing health and beauty tips |
| Warming-up | Approx. 10 minutes | Diara led comprehensive warm-up exercises and practice sessions, focusing on specific belly dance movements, music, and order. The warm-up included exercises for various body parts or the entire body, setting the stage for the rehearsal |

(continued)

**Table 15.1** (continued)

| Activity | Duration | Content |
|---|---|---|
| Rehearsing practice | Approx. 60 minutes total divided into 2–5 minutes sequences | The core segment is dedicated to learning, mastering, repeating, and synchronizing choreography. This involved practicing both new and familiar routines, with dry rehearsals for technique refinement and music-infused rehearsals for synchronization. During a typical practice, the group would focus on 3–4 different dances: a new one, in mid-progress, advanced. New or relatively new choreography primarily included dry rehearsals with fragmented and repetitious learning. These rehearsals often included discussions related to techniques, movements, and corrections. In contrast, music rehearsals were characterized by the absence of interactions, focusing solely on synchronization |

(continued)

**Table 15.1** (continued)

| Activity | Duration | Content |
|---|---|---|
| Breaks | Between 1–5 minutes | Occasional pauses allowed for quick recovery, hydration, snacks, equipment adjustments, and rest. During longer breaks, members engaged in casual conversations, reviewed pictures or videos of their performances, and offered feedback |
| Closing part and departure | 10 minutes | The rehearsal concluded with members changing back into regular clothing. Some, with late shifts or family responsibilities, departed early. The remaining members confirmed future appointments before parting ways |

resemble notes on the margins. Thematically, a MSA can indicate role division, problem-solving (often in a step-by-step manner), knowledge exchange (sharing opinions, memories, experiences), emotional connection, rule establishment, and acceptance of leadership. As mentioned earlier, the concept of studying 'micro-events' and routinized actions is deeply rooted in and supported by ethnomethodology, which views macro-theoretical concepts as interpretations of a series of microevents (Collins, 1981, p. 91).

Building on the GT coding procedures, ten micro-situative actions were identified. These actions play a crucial role in shaping the intricate intergroup dynamics that contribute to the cohesion and solidarity of the Scheherazade dance group. These micro-actions are of outmost importance for the collective agency of the group and serve to nurture a sense of unity and shared purpose. Consequently, when viewed from an external perspective or during public performances, the group appears

as a harmonious and cohesive entity, conveying a unified cultural and artistic message.

Micro-Situative Action (MSA) 1—*Leadership, Following, and Autonomy*. As the founders of the group, Diara's and Liza's roles are neither discussed nor questioned. An example of this is shown in Fig. 15.1 which illustrates the process of learning a new Romany-styled dance with the babushka.[1] Five sequences demonstrate how Diara consults her choreography notes to guide the group's progress. Amateur dancers are encouraged to build their confidence through the rehearsal routine and regular practice. This preparation enables them to perform autonomously and in sync with the group during public appearance.



**Fig. 15.1** Leading and following in a new choreography: micro-situative action (*Source* Fieldwork recording. Sequence 1: Learning New Choreography without Music—A Romany Dance. In this sequence, Diara stands at the front, studying her choreography notes, trying to determine the next movement. The rest of the group waits in silence. The following dialogue is primarily in Russian)

[1] 'Babushka' [бабушка] is a cherished traditional headscarf from Eastern Europe. In the selected sequences chosen, only Diara and Alia wear these headscarves adorned with green and red patterns. The remaining members of the group opt for temporary substitutes, such as silk veils borrowed from another choreography.

Micro-Situative Action 2—*The Decision-Making Circle.* Questions related to routine matters as agreements, meetings, costumes, logistics, and other pertinent topics or upcoming events are briefly discussed and decided upon regularly when participants stand in a circle between practice sessions. This pattern of interaction involves standing in a circle, facing each other while making short-term decisions. Here, all symbolic boundaries disappear, leaving only a working situation and a face-to-face confrontational modality. Various matters fall within the purview of this decision-making circle: agreeing to perform at a certain event, initiating work on new costumes, planning a trip to a fabric store, or discussing a visit to the wellness center. Although presence and participation may seem casual at first glance, regularity and consistency play a paramount role in having a say, in agreeing or disagreeing with decisions.

MSA 3—*Circle of Appreciation.* Gradually, some celebratory rituals have been established: mutual birthday celebrations, exchanging small presents during the Christmas period, celebrating victories at talent shows, or successful performances. These celebration rituals create a circle of appreciation and celebration. The circle was dedicated to Diara's birthday, with brief congratulations before the rehearsal. Its purpose is to boost the group's spirit and express gratitude to a specific member. Joint lunches or grill events in private settings fall into the same category, strengthening the group's spirit and inviting each other into the private lives of individual members.

MSA 4—*Feedback and Improvements*. Spending time together and analyzing videos and images of their performances is a shared practice among group members. Its purpose is to evaluate their publicly performed gigs, think about advancements, discuss mistakes, and provide each other with feedback. These discussions are often accompanied by a light sense of humor, mockery, and playfulness. After assessing errors, a corrective process begins to master choreography; agreed-upon improvements are put into practice. Additionally, more experienced members share their suggestions and offer strategies for coping with difficult situations that may arise during a performance, such as incorrect placement, nervousness, or stage fright.

MSA 5—*The Close-Knit Circle*. This micro-situative action pertains to more intimate interactions primarily involving core members of the

group (five out of twelve). Topics within this close-knit circle are highly personal and encompass issues such as job situations, family struggles, child-rearing, motherhood, and losses. All five core members have two children each, spanning different age groups from 6 years old to 35 years old. Two of them are already grandmothers. Another common subject of discussion is the comparison of their experiences with motherhood in their home countries and Germany. Given the personal nature of these themes, a trusting atmosphere, emotional support, outreach, and empathetic connections are especially necessary. Some members find it easier to demonstrate trust and vulnerability and are more open about their issues, while others may find it more challenging and choose to wait for the right moment. It became evident to me that trust is not something to be taken for granted when conducting research with immigrants or when observing and studying relationships among fellow migrants (in the context of this investigation). It is worth noting that there can be pathological distrust and initial suspicion that needs to be overcome. This distrust may have originated from the Soviet experience when individuals had to be extremely cautious about what they said and to whom they said it.

MSA 6—*Moving Wall*. Cohesion processes within the group influence significantly members' readiness and capacity to confront risks together. This includes overcoming feelings of despair, fear of failure, or a lack of confidence in public, addressing errors made in public, facing audience judgments, and dealing with occasional threats. A notable incident involving a 'moving wall' took place during a rehearsal in response to an external threat, when an unauthorized person entered a rehearsal facility. This event prompted explicit communication of a new rule: the last person to arrive at a rehearsal is responsible for locking an entrance door to prevent unauthorized access.

MSA 7—*Reciprocal Acts of Kindness*. This micro-situative action revolves around helping and reciprocity among group members when needed. Dancing together involves an exchange of skills: Diara shares her professional expertise as a dance instructor, working on bodily flexibility or boosting confidence; Liza, a sports trainer and physiotherapist, shares her skills in rehabilitation and physical well-being. Mila provides transportation to rehearsals; Tania, as a self-employed individual in the

catering business, gladly organizes grill gatherings at her country house; Alia (before she began performing in public) assisted other girls before performances. This mutual support is built on reciprocity when promises are made and kept.

MSA 8—*The 'Pioneer's Salute.'* In the context of dancing, such a salute demonstrates how learning something new often references shared experiences or knowledge. While practicing body rotations with the lifted right hand holding a veil in front of the forehead, the Pioneer's Salute they learned 30 or 40 years ago, memories resurface. In the case of the 'Pioneer's Salute,' this knowledge appears to have lost its relevance in the current context. Nonetheless, the memory of this past gesture and bodily posture is associated with the period of their school or university years, reconnecting them with memories of childhood and youth. The 'Pioneer's Salute' is a form of greeting used by the Soviet pioneers, a youth organization for ideological education established by the Communist Party of the USSR. In some forms, pioneer organizations still exist in Russia and Belarus.

MSA 9—*'I was There.'* In contrast to the previous MSA, which reflects on experiences from their home countries, this one connects the participants' experiences upon their arrival in Germany. Depending on their specific personal situations, economic hardship is an experience that everyone can relate to, either because they experienced it firsthand or because they are still struggling to make a living or find a reliable job. Financial difficulties are not the only commonly shared experience upon arrival. Settling down in the admission dormitories, dealing with fears and uncertainty, and facing communication problems with state institutions are some other examples. Chapter 11 discusses the semantics of lexical borrowing from German to Russian, providing a clear reference to the institutional component.

MSA 10—*Focus and Situative Adjustment*. This last MSA depicts a few aspects. On the one hand, it points to a possible clash of roles as a dancing mate and as a mother who must bring a child to a rehearsal for two hours. It happened rarely but when it occurred, it highlighted something taken for granted: mothers of small children must negotiate and arrange their evening time, so they are free to pursue their dancing interests. On the other hand, it shows the patience and understanding

of other group members in tolerating the noisy distractions of an active six-year-old child, constantly moving around, and rolling balls around the dance floor. Perhaps, the fact that all women of the core group have two children each makes them more resilient in these situations, bringing more acceptance and adjustment to the situation.

These ten micro-situative actions are not exclusive; they may emerge in other contexts, including different players, or address different issues. Aside from the enjoyment of dancing and maintaining a positive mindset, Scheherazade is also about pushing individual boundaries, mastering skills, and gaining confidence through collective actions. It involves joining forces, teaching, and learning from each other, helping one another, relating to each other, and getting to know each other. Evidently, not all micro-situative actions contribute to group well-being and cohesion; some may have destructive potential, causing destabilization or even disintegration. Structural differences, such as living in a rented apartment versus home ownership, holding a precarious job versus a tenured position, as well as age or generational gap, character differences, individual ambitions, and conflicts of interest, lead occasionally to clashes. During the fieldwork, I sensed some friction in this respect. On the one hand, individual members sometimes comment on their dancing mates in face-to-face settings (such as in the car on the way to rehearsal), perhaps trying to gauge my reaction or maybe seeking my favor. On the other hand, open confrontations were avoided in front of me. This seemed to be a form of self-censorship that the group members had imposed on themselves, likely because they were aware of my presence and my camera. At that moment, presenting a united image appeared to be more important for them than expressing discontent. From an ethical standpoint, it required effort on my part to maintain an impartial stance, avoiding taking sides or passing judgment on certain situations.

In total, these micro-situative actions shed light on Scheherazade's inward-oriented interactions, leadership style, decision-making processes, and cohesion practices, such as getting acquainted and intimate, helping one another, and working through challenges. These micro-situative actions demonstrate how relationships were established within the group and which aspects had a bonding effect in overcoming obstacles or dealing with difficulties. In short, they illustrate a collective

agency on a basic level of interaction. While the migration backgrounds of the members certainly influenced the dynamics of this creative group, I further narrowed the focus to specifically capture immigrant agency. In the next chapter, I finally reflect on Scheherazade's place in the context of their community.

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# 16

# Community Engagement and Networks

I finalize my study on cultural association with the detailed examination of the networked practices of Scheherazade, highlighting the complexity of their collective agency and local engagement. By tracing the group's connections with various community players, I explore how their creative and social efforts are embedded to surpass structural constraints. Particular attention is given to the group's resourcefulness in securing costumes, rehearsal spaces, and performance opportunities, which reveals their capacity to navigate constraints while pursuing their artistic passions. To visualize these relationships, I created a network map that outlines the group's interactions across five key clusters: educational and municipal collaborators, artistic and cultural collaborators, costume crafting and equipment procurement facilities, community and business partnerships, family and friend support, positioned centrally in the map to reflect the foundational emotional and logistical support that members receive from their personal networks. By illuminating these interlinked relationships, the chapter underscores how Scheherazade's actions is not merely performative but deeply rooted in reciprocal community involvement, strategic alliances, and various solidarities. These networks

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serve as both enablers and expressions of cultural resilience and social embeddedness.

* * *

My first encounter with the group took place during their public performance at the *Market of Encounters* [Markt der Begegnung] in 2012. At this event, Scheherazade performed a Spanish oriental dance as a part of the annual celebration of the multicultural community of Xcity. These performances provide an opportunity for the dance group to establish its presence within the community—the community they have been a part of for decades. The group positions itself in the public context as open and welcoming to new female members, regardless of their cultural background, skill level, ability, age, and body shape.

As an amateur dance group, Scheherazade has continuously strived to secure public performances, consistently applying for events and celebrating every new article in the local newspaper dedicated to or mentioning them. The group is characterized by their presence, activity, and visibility in their community. While their performances may appear captivating and easy-going, the behind-the-scenes efforts to sustain the group are far from simple. Like many non-commercial and voluntary initiatives in the field of art or sports, they must overcome numerous obstacles to ensure the regularity of their rehearsals, creatively assemble costly dance costumes, engage with the community to gain public support and integrate themselves into the adult educational structures of their city. The group's continued existence relies heavily on its connections within the local community and the support it provides. This support is built on a safety net of reciprocity within their German- and Russian-speaking or mixed networks. Given their limited financial resources, the group must rely strongly on their individual and collective resourcefulness to achieve their goals, including volunteering and exchanging favors. Reciprocity of favors is widespread within immigrant communities, serving as a form of 'interchange currency.' This practice can be paralleled with the 'barter system,' an informal and cash-free exchange of services and goods that was prevalent in the post-Soviet space in the 1990s, both in individual and business contexts (Seabright, 2000).

To trace the connections with different players involved, I have recreated a network map, as presented in Fig. 16.1. This figure is intended to visually represent the group's relationships and involvement in their local community. These *connections* are based on various matters or involve specific activities, including:

1. Rehearsal locations and institutional affiliations.
2. Performances at public events organized by communal institutions.
3. Performances in private or semi-private contexts.
4. Participation in talent-show contests.
5. Acquisition of dance equipment and costume making.
6. Joint projects with comparable artistic organizations or other associations.
7. Organizational and recreational gatherings in private settings.

The network connections in Fig. 16.1 represent a range of activities and affairs involving different actors. The recreation of this network helps illustrate the group's embeddedness in their community and their resourcefulness in achieving their goals, reaching out to others, or adapting to changing circumstances. These various actors demonstrate the group's interdependence and relationships with a wide spectrum of local players, including regular or adult schools and their facilities, Russian weekend schools and their rented facilities, and city hall initiatives aimed at facilitating cross-cultural spaces of interaction.

Unlike the visualization of the Mix Markt network, the arrangement of the Scheherazade network involves grouping players. It is important to note that this differentiation is a theoretical depiction and does not aim to reproduce how a network interacts in terms of horizontal and vertical connections or the strength of ties. Instead, I provide a visual representation of the network's composition. In what follows, I differentiate five groups within the Scheherazade network, highlighting their interconnections at various levels and through different activities, intensities, and frequencies of connecting nodes.

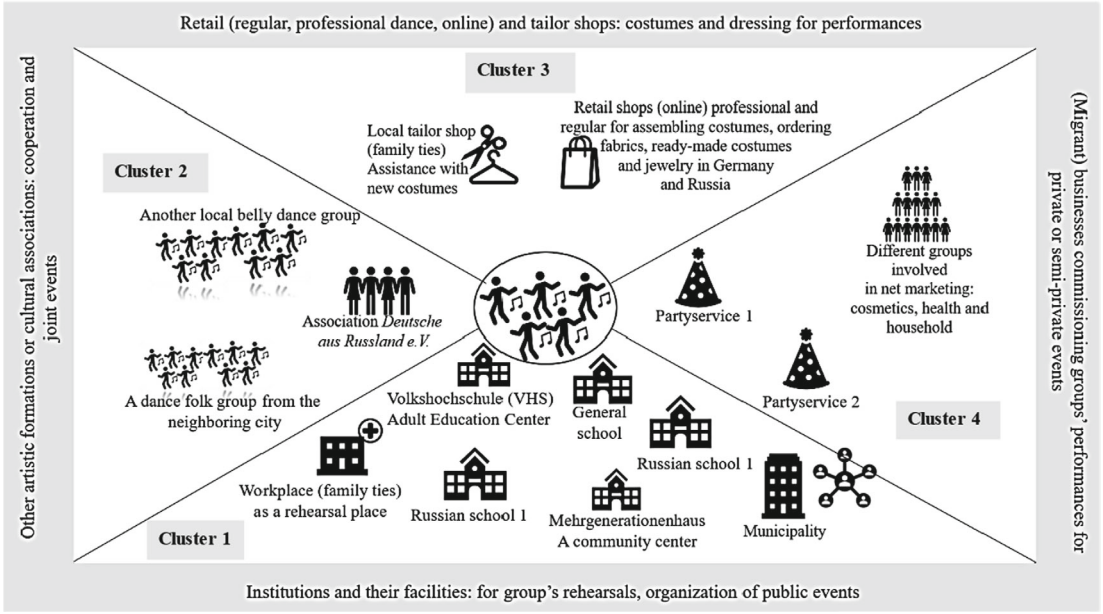



**Fig. 16.1** Network analysis of scheherazade dance group

## Educational and Municipal Collaborators

Cluster One consists of educational institutions and municipal organizations that provide facilities for rehearsals and play a pivotal role in organizing public events. These institutions not only offer rehearsal spaces but also play a crucial role in enhancing the group's visibility, promoting their activities, and opening doors to various resources. Rehearsal spaces have been generously provided by several organizations, including the Adult Education Center (VHS), one local regular school, and a Russian school that initially rented space from the local Protestant church before relocating to a more central facility.

Furthermore, municipal entities such as the city hall, the *Network Migration-Integration*, and the community center *Multigenerational House* [Mehrgenerationenhaus] have taken charge of hosting public events where Scheherazade eagerly sought opportunities to perform. These events include the annual *Intercultural Week* and *Russian Days* that have been instrumental in showcasing the group's talents and cultural contributions to the community. It is worth noting that some group members have been actively engaged with the Network Migration-Integration, a municipal organization acting as a bridge between the local government and the immigrant communities. This connection with communal politics underscores Scheherazade's role in contributing to the community's cultural diversity and pluralism.

## Artistic and Cultural Collaborators

*Cluster Two* comprises various artistic organizations and cultural associations, most of which are registered entities, with whom Scheherazade cooperates for mutual benefit. These collaborations involve knowledge sharing, experience exchange, and the planning of joint events. The shared areas of expertise encompass dancing techniques, costume-making, choreography, and organizational know-how. This group is characterized by its pluralistic cultural composition, emphasizing inclusivity and the absence of isolation based on ethnicity.

Notable collaborations within this group include interactions with other German-speaking belly dance groups, such as the Ursel's group led by a woman originating from Xcity. This cross-cultural exchange enriches Scheherazade's repertoire and enhances its understanding of diverse dance forms. Additionally, Scheherazade has established connections with *Sudarushki*, a Russian-speaking dance group from a neighboring region.[1] During the fieldwork, the two groups began planning a joint concert, which showcases an example of cross-regional collaboration.

Liza, a key member of Scheherazade, actively participates in the local branch of the registered association *Germans from Russia* (LMDR, 1955). Her involvement occasionally extends to other group members, leading to participation in events such as the *250 Years Migration of Germans to Russia* conference held in Xcity and a similar conference in Augsburg. This social engagement with the association of ethnic German resettlers provides opportunities for involvement in cultural events at the local, national, and even transnational levels (including occasional visits to Russia or Kazakhstan).[2]

Shortly after this conference, Liza co-organized the Harmonica festival, where she took on responsibilities ranging from concert moderation in German to performing with Scheherazade in the 'dance' category. The bilingual festival, which popularizes the harmonica as a musical instrument, is an annual event held at different locations across Germany. It aligns with the LDMR network and features a bilingual presentation in German and Russian. Alongside the harmonica section, the festival includes categories such as 'dancing,' 'solo singing,' and 'choral singing.' This event not only provided Scheherazade with a platform to showcase their talent by winning third place in the 'dance' nomination but also expanded their network.

[1] Sudarushki, derived from the Russian word 'сударушка,' is a plural form used to address women respectfully, akin to 'sudarushka' for an individual woman.

[2] Once I accompanied Liza Bardo to a notable LmDR event in Augsburg, comparable in scale to the *250 Years Migration of Germans to Russia* conference. This event showcased German-speaking participants on stage, with a substantial Russian-speaking presence behind the scenes. It drew the attendance of cultural, political, and social figures who identified with or had affiliations to ethnic German resettlers. Many of them had connections to the post-Soviet space.

## Costume Crafting and Equipment Procurement

Cluster Three encompasses retail and tailoring shops dedicated to the assembly and creation of costumes as well as the acquisition of dancing equipment. These shops serve as crucial channels for obtaining the necessary attire and gear. Scheherazade explored various avenues, including professional dance shops, both physical and online, to source their costumes and equipment. Professional belly dancing costumes are known to be quite costly, with prices ranging from 100 to 150 Euros and more. Considering the individual socioeconomic situations, family arrangements, and other financial commitments of the group members, this expense posed a considerable burden. Additionally, since each dance routine required a new costume, they often had to resort to customizing their outfits.

To create their costumes, Scheherazade employed a mix-and-match approach, carefully assembling pieces from different sources. This ranged from acquiring items from professional shops to more budget-friendly options like KIK or TEDY, the supermarkets specializing in textiles and decoration. On one occasion, the group decided to commission Romany-styled costumes for a new dance from a tailor shop, leveraging Diara's family connections within Russian-speaking networks. Despite the commission, group members were actively involved in the process, which included collaborative decisions on dress design, fabric selection, fabric checking at larger M-city shops, online fabric ordering, and sewing various decorative components. This entire process spanned a lengthy seven months.

Costumes and accessories played a significant role as an additional form of artistic expression for Scheherazade. They were meticulously tailored to match the dance style, choreography, and the age and body complexion of the performers. These outfits encompassed a wide array of elements, including jewelry, wigs, makeup, shoes, and various dancing accessories such as babushkas, veils, belly dance belts, cloth belts, isowings, canes, regular fans, or Chinese-styled silk fans. Preparing these costumes and accessories demanded a substantial investment of time,

individual efforts, skills, and creativity. Additionally, it requires financial resources to cover expenses related to fabric and tailoring. At times, the group resorted to ordering accessories and costumes from Russia or Ukraine through familial and friendship connections. This practice was more widespread among creative groups observed in Ycity, which emphasized Russian symbols like kokoshniks (headdresses) or sarafans (costumes). However, for Scheherazade, whose dances had no reference to Russian folkloric traditions, these symbols were irrelevant. In contrast, when assembling costumes for the Alps polka dance as a homage to the local tradition, they had to procure items from a wide range of sources.

## Community and Business Partnerships

Cluster Four encompasses local small businesses, primarily those operated by Russian-speaking migrants alike Mix Markt retail stores. These businesses often revolve around party planning and catering services, specializing in events like *Russian Night*, *Autumn Ball*, *April Fun*, which are particularly popular within the Russian-speaking migrant community. Notably, these events tend to attract individuals in their 40s, 50s, and older from the former Soviet Union, marking a generational divide compared to the more glamorous 'Russian discos,' which primarily cater to the 1.5 or 2nd generations of migrants. The contrast between these leisure preferences, as seen in the Russian disco versus the Russian ball, presents an intriguing area for further research.

Unlike events like *Russian Days*, these parties are commercial endeavors, typically charging entrance fees that vary depending on the services offered. Consequently, members of Scheherazade would anticipate compensation for their performances, albeit often more symbolically, considering the effort involved. These events typically feature a Russian-speaking concert program, with 2–3 dance intermissions performed by Scheherazade and further disco-style dance slots. Scheherazade's performances at these semi-public gatherings, as well as public events, are highly interactive, with enthusiastic support from the attendees. The audience often claps, sings along, encourages the dancers, and ululates. Many guests take multiple photographs or record video

clips during the performances, and some rush to take more pictures at the end, often posing with the colorful dancers. These photos frequently find their way onto social media platforms such as Odnoklassniki, Vkontakte, and occasionally Facebook.

The group has also collaborated with representatives from various multilevel marketing firms specializing in cosmetics, household goods, and health products. On one occasion, Scheherazade was commissioned to perform at the corporate event of an American-based firm with a local branch in Xcity. In other instances, Scheherazade assisted in organizing marketing events for similar companies, helping attract audiences as potential clients and providing event spaces.

## Family and Friend Support

The final cluster represents the valuable network of family resources and close friendships, which every member brings to Scheherazade. This group would be strategically positioned at the center of the network map, underscoring the centrality of family support within the group's dynamics. The support offered within this network ranges from the ability to carve out precious free time outside of the demanding work and family spheres (a luxury not always afforded by those with young children) to assistance with both minor and major favors. An essential aspect of this support is the acceptance and tolerance of the individual's choice to spend their time on belly dancing, a hobby that, as studies have shown, can be gendered and stigmatized due to its potential sexualization (Moe, 2012, p. 201). Supporting this hobby requires open-mindedness and trust from spouses or other family members.

For some dancers, the lack of spousal approval or overwhelming family responsibilities, including childcare and household tasks, led to their decision to quit the group and belly dance. Conversely, support for the hobby choice entails both verbal encouragement and practical assistance. Examples include moral support, such as Diara's husband appreciating the grace of their dance movements or Liza's husband celebrating their appearance in the newspaper. Once, Diara pointed out: "*my husband is far away from the dancing world* (.) *but he likes a lot how we twirl*

*our skirts,*" referring to the Romany-styled attires. Liza proudly noticed: "*my husband said to me yesterday* (:) *look* (.) *you are in the newspaper again with your dance group.*" Practical support can manifest in various forms, such as providing access to backup rehearsal spaces (in the case of medical facilities of Liza's husband), driving dancers to rehearsals or performances, creating free time by looking after children, and assisting in the creation of new costumes.

The five clusters that I revised provide valuable insights into Scheherazade, shedding light on the group's dynamics, resilience, and role within the community. Collectively, these groups paint a picture of Scheherazade as a community-oriented dance group. They demonstrate Scheherazade's commitment to cultural and linguistic diversity, artistic exchange, resourcefulness in pursuing their passion, and the crucial role of family and friends in supporting its members. Overall, these groups reveal Scheherazade's multifaceted engagement within its local community, demonstrating its positive impact and collaborative spirit.

Scheherazade's engagement with and recognition by the community have strengthened the sense of belonging among group members, fostering a strong sense of camaraderie that underscores the importance of collective agency. The group's outreach efforts, openness to new members, and the diversity of their network connections—both weak and strong—highlight the rich social and cultural tapestry within the group. As Bruno Latour aptly noted, "Strength does not come from concentration, purity and unity, but from dissemination, heterogeneity and the careful plaiting of weak ties" (Latour, 1996, p. 370). Additionally, the community-like spirit of Scheherazade generates strength from its cross-cultural ties, enabling the group to achieve remarkable outcomes with limited resources.

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## Part VII Summary

In the final part, I provided a comprehensive examination of immigrant agency in the context of free time, with the Scheherazade dance group serving as a case study. I examined the social and cultural dynamics, actions, strategies, and symbols employed by the group for both short-term and long-term planning, as well as growth and development. The group's internal cohesion and inward-oriented actions were juxtaposed with their public engagements and performances.

It is worth noting that group dynamics are not static, and changes can occur over time. As of the writing of this conclusion, the group continues to exist, albeit with another name. My analysis has primarily focused on group development during a phase when the group members emphasized an exotic persona, epitomized by the name Scheherazade, reflecting a form of auto-exoticism. The group's current name signifies a stronger connection to the German cultural context. Nevertheless, their choices in dance styles, music, and costumes remain as diverse as ever.

In addition to the insights presented here, a thorough examination of Scheherazade's network connections, their interactions with various community groups, and their resourcefulness in obtaining costumes and equipment have further illuminated the multifaceted nature of their immigrant agency. These elements underscore the complexity of their engagement within their local community and their ability to navigate the challenges of pursuing their artistic passion.

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# Part VIII

## The Immigrant Agency Theory

# 17

# Immigrant Agency Theory—Conceptual Foundations and Practical Implications

Das Neue ist immer motiviert

(Oevermann, 1991, p. 304)

In the final chapter, I present the culmination of my study examining the dynamic transition of human agency within the complex contexts of migration and settlement. The core concept—immigrant agency—is explored through interdisciplinary, structural, and non-structural perspectives, attending to both individual and collective dimensions of migratory experience. Adopting a transnational lens and an interpretive methodological framework rooted in grounded theory, the research conceptualizes immigrant agency as a multifaceted analytical construct. The theory integrates three key dimensions: the *representational* (identity formations frameworks), the *expressive* (language practices, translanguaging, and multilingualism), and the *operational* (socially purposeful actions). This comprehensive view is supported by a multimethod, open research design, enabling an empirically grounded theorization of immigrant agency. The resulting Immigrant Agency Theory contributes a novel analytical model that captures the simultaneity of integration and transnationalism. By doing so, it offers a framework for understanding

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how migrants actively shape their trajectories, institutions, and host societies while maintaining meaningful cross-border ties. This theory not only advances migration scholarship but also provides practical insights into policy and social work, emphasizing agency as a dynamic, situated, and context-sensitive process.

* * *

In my research, I explored the dynamic transition of human agency within the complex milieu of migration and settlement. The central focus of my study is agency, examined from interdisciplinary, structural, and non-structural angles, considering individual and collective experiences throughout the migration and incorporation. This inquiry employs a transnational lens and an interpretive approach, grounded in the rigorous methodology of Grounded Theory. Empirically grounded Immigrant agency is conceptualized as a multifaceted analytical tool encompassing *representational* aspects (identity formations and frameworks), *expressive* dimensions (language use, the acquisition of voice, translanguaging, and multilingual practices), and *operational* elements (social purposeful actions). Using a versatile multimethod open research design, my research culminates in the development of an empirically grounded Immigrant Agency Theory (Fig. 17.1). Through the migration and settlement lens, this theory engages the simultaneity hypothesis, bridging the realms of integration and transnationalism.

The Immigrant Agency Theory takes shape through an in-depth case study of immigrants from the former Soviet Union who migrated to Germany in the 1990s and early 2000s. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics within these immigrant communities, I employed both transition and postcolonial frameworks to elucidate the prevalence of the Russian language and the consequences of cultural Sovietization/Russification within a diverse range of immigrant groups admitted under various policies in Germany, including ethnic German resettlers, Jewish refugees, family reunification, labor migrants, or students. The research explored the establishment, unification, and differentiation of Russian-speaking communities among FSU immigrants, with particular emphasis on their identities, language practices,

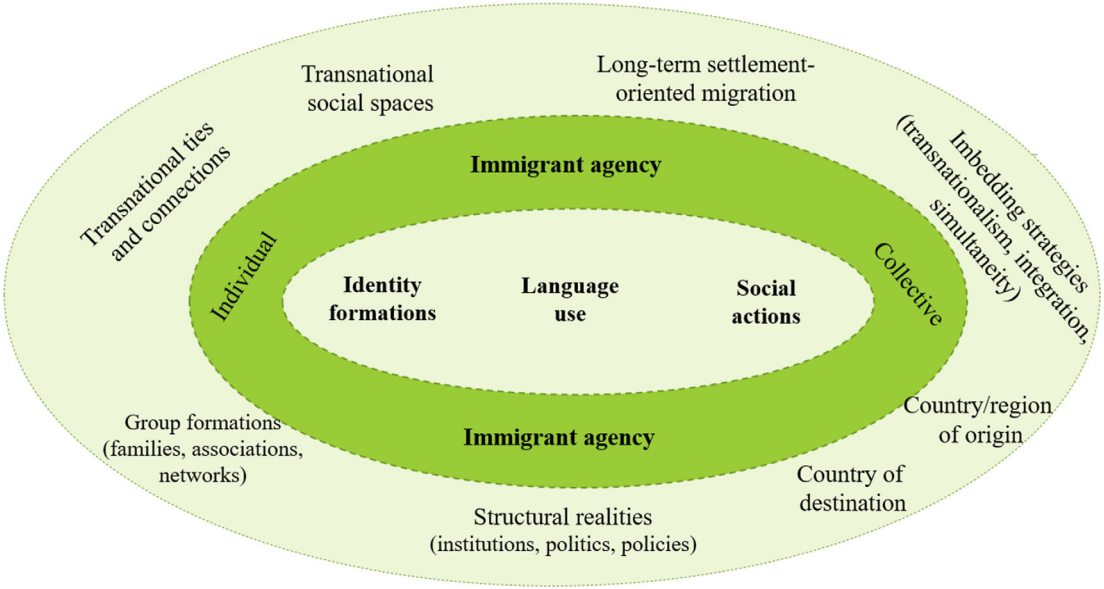



**Fig. 17.1** The dynamics of immigrant agency (*Source* Author's Own Diagram)

and a wide spectrum of actions spanning from business to leisure. Instead of constituting a homogeneous diaspora, these Russian-speaking communities evolve into networks of dispersed groups and communication pockets, shaped within a multicultural and multilingual context. This transition results in a unique cultural blend and pluralism, which is evident in phenomena such as the 'russaki' identity framework, the fusion of the East European culinary traditions, and the practice of Russian-German translanguaging.

Through the empirical research, I conducted systematic analyses of identity, language use, and social actions across various spheres of daily life of the immigrant communities under investigation, allowing to introduce novel insights in this thesis:

1. By differentiating between identity formations and identity frameworks, my analysis highlights the ambiguity and differences between self-identification and identification of co-immigrants (Part IV). The distinction is exemplified through various identity formations, such as identity renegotiations, legitimizing identity, professional reinvention, identity of difference and multiple belonging, mélange identity, and temporary escapism. On the other hand, a semantic assessment of russaki presents an in-depth examination of an identity framework that have been developed in some Russian-speaking communities in Germany. While the concept of identity formations depicts the nuanced character of self-identification, identity frameworks highlight the generalized (and, at times, stereotypical) perception of related other.
2. Furthermore, I undertook a thorough examination of language use in multilingual settings. This involves focusing on the processual nature of language use as languaging and translanguaging within the context of Russian-speaking communities in Germany. In doing so, I contemplated clusters and reasons for language interferences (especially lexical ones) between German and Russian (Part V). The multilingual and translanguaging practices of Russian-speaking communities involve other languages besides German and Russian. These practices exemplify the contextuality of language use, highlight language hierarchies and coloniality of language use in everyday settings.

Besides other language hierarchies became apparent as standard versus vernacular, majority versus minority languages.

While language use and identity formations or frameworks encompass various aspects of the lives of research subjects, the subsequent practices are associated with social actions rooted in specific spheres of communal life, such as business and leisure. Therefore, I provided an in-depth examination of social actions within these spheres:

3. I contributed to an understanding of entrepreneurial actions of post-Soviet immigrants that led to the establishment of a transnational supermarket chain operating in the EU-context and on a Eurasian scale from small and mid-sized cities in Germany. This section explored the emergence of the Mix Markt transnational supermarket chain generated from the family-based entrepreneurial activities of the Russian-speaking immigrants (Part VI). This phenomenon also outlines the establishment of and demand for the East European cross-cultural culinary fusion as a marketing concept that was created in Germany and exported to the wider EU context (Part VI).
4. An in-depth examination of leisure activities *was* exemplified by investigation of cultural associations founded by research subjects, which highlights community engagement, tendencies to self-exoticism, and inclinations to cultural pluralism. I delved into activities of the Scheherazade hobby dance group, a cultural association established by the immigrants from the former Soviet Union (Part VII). Such cultural associations belong to a wide range of creative and recreational free time activities that characterize research subjects in their pursuit of active leisure activities.

These findings illuminate the interplay of language use, identity formations, and social actions in shaping immigrant agency. In the context of migration and settlement, I studied how such agency influences strategies of individual and collective transition, engagement, boundary-making, and the maintenance of difference through auto-exoticism and cultural pluralism. Besides the practical implications, this study makes a significant contribution to multiple areas or research,

enhancing our understanding of human agency, migration studies, and reflexive knowledge production.

## Contribution to an Understanding of Human Agency

In my study, I explored theoretical and methodological approaches to overcome structural determinism. By employing agency as an analytical tool, this research challenges conventional explanations that rely on structural determinism to understand human actions in the context of long-term migration. I emphasized the significance of recognizing structural realities while avoiding the oversimplification of immigrants' behaviors as mere outcomes of external forces like migration and border regimes, admission policies, historical events, or geopolitical transformations. Instead, I delved into the complexity of networks and horizontal connections that emerge within immigrant communities.

The study enriches individual perspectives by acknowledging that migration broadens immigrants' social horizons, leading to multifaceted identities and positionalities. It delves into identity renegotiation, professional reinvention, multiple belonging, social closeness/distance, and other aspects of identity formation and frameworks. Furthermore, it underscores the multidimensional nature of identities and positionalities, considering factors such as ethnicity, gender, nationality, and class, recognizing their role in shaping social positionalities within the research context. The research also highlights the interconnectedness of individual and collective agencies. In addition, human agency involves individuals navigating changes, transiting between societal entities in their places of origin and places of destination that may differ in terms of political arrangements, economic conditions, and ideological setups. Through such transitions, human agency must grapple not only with different opportunities but also with challenges to adjust.

## Contribution to Migration Studies

By adopting a comprehensive perspective, I provided a holistic view on post-Soviet East-West European migratory processes during the 1990s and early 2000s. Instead of isolating individual factors, I considered the broader context of personal transitions within evolving societal landscapes. This approach—based on the examples of studied cases—acknowledged migration as a transition from closed to open borders, from a totalitarian state to liberal democracy, from planned to market economies, and from communist internationalism to the ethnic pluralism of nation-states. With my study I encompassed the entire migration journey, examining decision-making processes at the places of origin, experiences throughout the migration process, settlement, and the establishment of transnational networks. I emphasized the significance of contextualization and historical awareness in migration research. Moreover, I recognized the dynamic influence of evolving geopolitical settings on migration.

In my study, I examined the connections and networks established by immigrants from the former Soviet Union within the nation-state, transnational spaces, and urban settings, employing both structural and non-structural perspectives. I assessed the influence of structural factors like admission policies and labor market conditions alongside non-structural aspects, as horizontal ties and connections that form local and transnational networks. This multidimensional analysis contributes to an in-depth understanding of migration at various sociospatial spaces, from local to supranational, distancing from solo macro, meso, and micro understanding of social processes. In overview, my study provides a versatile framework that contributes significantly to the fields of human agency, migration studies, and reflexive knowledge production. It encourages a more holistic and nuanced understanding of migration processes in an ever-changing world, addressing the complexities of immigrant experiences and the intricate relationships between individual and collective agencies.

My study limitations are contained in the following five aspects: first, this study primarily focuses on the experiences of first-generation immigrants, with minor implications for the second generation. Second, the

research is delimited to a specific chronological wave of East-West European migration, which is linked to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It also focuses on individuals' and collective experiences within a range of 7 to 30 years after migration. Third, my study's primary focus is on individual and collective immigrant experiences, with a reduced analysis of international and state agencies, institutions, and policy-making processes in the context of migration and settlement. Fourth, the research primarily centers on individuals who affiliate themselves to some extent with the Russian language and Russian-speaking communities in Germany. Finally, it is important to note that the empirical study took place before the commencement of the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine in 2022. These dramatic events have been causing an numerous amount of war refugees from Ukraine but also from Russia (Havlin, 2024). The events have a profound impact on the dynamics within the studied subjects on the ground, surpassing the impact of earlier events such as the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the protracted hybrid proxy war waged by Russia in Ukraine. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and may influence the generalizability of the results to broader immigrant populations and different migration contexts. However, it is crucial to note that these limitations were significant in documenting and understanding a specific historical period, namely the post-Soviet transition, which had an immense impact on the further development of Ear-West European migration.

Based on the findings and limitations of the current research, future research can potentially be developed in several directions:

***Second-generation immigrant agency***: While this study primarily focuses on first-generation immigrants, future research could delve into the evolving immigrant agency patterns and experiences among second-generation immigrants. Exploring how the children of immigrants negotiate their identities, language practices, and social actions in a transnational and postmigratory context would be insightful.

*Comparative cross-country analysis*: Extending the scope of research to encompass multiple destination countries beyond Germany can offer valuable insights into the variations in immigrant agency within diverse

socio-political and cultural contexts. A comparative study of the experiences of immigrants from the former Soviet Union in various European countries, North America, or Israel, for instance, could reveal nuanced agency dynamics influenced by distinct geographical settings.

*Transnational entrepreneurship and immigrant businesses*: While the current study briefly touches on entrepreneurial activities, particularly the Mix Markt transnational supermarket chain, future research could conduct a more in-depth examination of the development and sustainability of such immigrant family-driven businesses. This research could explore the economic, social, and cultural factors contributing to their success or challenges and investigate their broader community impact.

*Investigating the impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the rising number of Ukrainian refugees on Russian-speaking communities in Germany*: Future research should aim to explore the profound consequences of the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war and the increasing influx of Ukrainian refugees into Germany. This study should analyze the multifaceted impact of this significant event. The research can shed light on how this war has transformed or impacted the dynamics within the Russian-speaking communities in Germany, focusing on the implications for identity formations, language practices, and social actions among both Russian-speaking immigrants and Ukrainian refugees in Germany. This investigation will contribute to understanding the evolving landscape of immigrant agency within the transforming geopolitical climate in the post-Soviet space and in the face of forced migration because of these transitions. These research areas and extensions can build upon the foundations laid by this study, further enriching the field of migration studies and contributing to a comprehensive understanding of immigrant agency in an evolving European context.

The presented findings offer practical insights into the complex dynamics of immigrant communities, which can inform policies, programs, and initiatives aimed at enhancing social cohesion and integration, fostering multilingualism and effective language acquisition, entrepreneurship, and cultural diversity within the transnational social spaces. The practical implications of these findings and the immigrant agency theory are as follows:

The research highlighted the ambiguity of identity formations and frameworks among Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany, both in terms of self-identification and how they are identified by their co-immigrants. This insight can be valuable for policymakers and organizations working with immigrant communities. Understanding the complexity of identity can lead to more tailored and effective integration and support programs that respect the diverse ways immigrants identify themselves and are identified by others.

## Practical Implications

The study emphasized the significance of multilingual and translanguaging practices among Russian-speaking immigrants, which involve both German and Russian languages as well as other languages. Recognizing the contextuality of language use, language hierarchies, and the processual nature of language as languaging can inform language education and integration strategies. Educational institutions and language programs can take these findings into account to promote effective language acquisition and cultural maintenance. Understanding the role of language practices and cultural pluralism among immigrants can lead to language policies that promote multilingualism. These policies can facilitate communication and social inclusion among immigrants. They can also promote the preservation of languages and cultures, enriching the cultural diversity of the host country.

Policymakers can use insights from the Immigrant Agency Theory to inform educational strategies. Recognizing the multidimensional subjectivities and positionalities of immigrants can lead to inclusive educational programs that address diverse needs. For example, strategies that support identity renegotiation, professional reinvention, and multiple belonging can be integrated into education and vocational training programs.

The emergence of the Mix Markt transnational supermarket chain, driven by family-based entrepreneurial activities of Russian-speaking immigrants, has implications for the business and culinary landscape. It showcases the demand for East European culinary concepts in Germany and the EU. Entrepreneurs and policymakers can explore opportunities

to support and integrate such ventures, potentially enhancing cultural diversity and economic growth.

The study highlights the importance of everyday cultural pluralism and auto-exoticism within immigrant communities, as exemplified by leisure activities and cultural associations. Understanding and appreciating the cultural diversity and creativity within immigrant communities can promote social cohesion and cultural exchange. Local governments, cultural organizations, and community centers can use these insights to foster cultural pluralism and facilitate cross-cultural exchange.

At last, as the immigrant agency theory emphasizes the transnational character of immigrant agency, policies can be developed with a transnational perspective. This may involve collaboration with countries or regions of origin and acknowledging the interconnectedness of immigrant communities across borders.

* * *

Overall, the significance of this study lies in the development of a comprehensive theory of immigrant agency that encompasses both individual and collective components, thoughtfully navigating structural and non-structural factors in the transnational urban and social spaces. The Immigrant Agency Theory challenges structural determinism in the study of immigration. By emphasizing the agency of immigrants, it moves beyond traditional explanations that treat migration as a derivative of objective factors. This shift allows for a more nuanced understanding of how immigrants shape their own experiences and networks, breaking free from deterministic frameworks. The theory provides a multidimensional perspective on immigrant agency. It considers individual and collective agency, as well as the interplay between them. This comprehensive view recognizes that immigration is a complex and interdependent process influenced by a variety of factors, from individual identities to societal structures. The Immigrant Agency Theory encourages researchers to consider the entire migratory journey, from decision-making at the place of origin to experiences throughout the migration process. This approach recognizes migration as an ongoing and evolving process, embedded in a specific historical and geopolitical

context. It highlights the importance of contextualization and historical awareness in the study of migration, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of immigrant experiences. Additionally, this research significantly contributes to the field of East-West European migration studies and adopts a transition perspective to comprehensively grasp the experiences of individuals undergoing migration amid the complex backdrop of social, political, and economic transitions.

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# Appendix

See Tables A.1 and A.2.

Thematically the dataset included five core categories as depicted in Table A.2. The official Mix Markt webpage provides limited information about the functioning stores together with their addresses, the country of their location, their official store number, a type of legal ownership, sometimes owners' or managers' names, and their contact details. Official store numbers are significant as they provide insight into the sequence of store openings. For instance, it is highly likely that Mix Markt store No. 5 was registered during the initial wave of Mix Markt consolidation, in contrast to Mix Markt store No. 145.

Table A.2 depicts these categories of data as well as indicates the data sources. The subcategories highlighted *italics* were accessible on the official Mix Markt webpage. This background information served as a scaffolding, further information on a specific shop was checked, accumulated, and added from other dozen sources. All this information was collected from publicly available sources, in the period between January–August 2020.

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**Table A.1** The Interviewees' Profiles

| Pseudonym | Age | CoO[1] | Gender | Arrival[2] | Admission[3] | Family status | Children | Education[4] | Occupation at the time of interview[5] | Language proficiency L1[6] | L2[7] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eva | 39 | RU | F | 2002 | JR | 2nd marriage | 2 | Law UD / CoO<br>Social work UD / CoS | Social worker (NT) | RUC2, DEC1, HEA2 | RU |
| Katia | 51 | RU | F | 1992 | JR | Marriage | 1 | Engineering economics UD / CoO<br>Business administration PT / CoS | Self-employed, sales<br>Job seeker for T/NT job | RUC2, DEC1, ENGB2, HEA1 | RU |
| Tania | 53 | KZ | F | 1994 | MLEG | Divorced | 2 | Art design CD / CoO | Self-employed, catering | RUC2, DEC1 | RU |

[1] Country of origin (CoO): AR—Armenia, KZ—Kazakhstan, RU—Russia, UA—Ukraine.

[2] Year of arrival in Germany.

[3] Reason for admission: JR—Jewish refugee, LEG—late ethnic German resettler, MLEG—married to LEG, L—labor migrant, S—studies, MNG—married to a German national, AS—asylum seeker.

[4] Education: CoS—a country of settlement; UD—university degree, CD—college degree, PT—professional training (German 'Ausbildung' 2-3 years). NF—Not-finished university degree, undergraduate.

[5] Occupation: T—Tenured position, NT—Not tenured, MJ—Mini-job, a state program to reintegrate the long-term unemployed.

[6] Language proficiency (L1) with the estimated level: A1-A2 basic; B1-B2 independent; C1-C2 proficient user ((Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 24–27)). ARM—Armenian, DE—German, ENG—English, F—French, HE—Hebrew, JP—Japanese, RU—Russian, S—Spanish, UA—Ukrainian.

[7] Language of the interview (L2). Some elements of translanguaging (RU-DE or DE-RU) were recorded in almost all interviews.

| Pseudonym | Age | CoO | Gender | Arrival | Admission | Family status | Children | Education | Occupation at the time of interview | Language proficiency L1 | L2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Martha | 21 | KZ | F | 1998 | LEG | In relationship | – | Teacher training UD (NF) / CoS | Student | DEC2, RUC1, ENGB2, SB1 | DE |
| Diana-Anoush | 46 | AR | F | 1999 | AS | Divorced | 2 | Teacher training UD / CoO | Social benefits due to chronic illness<br>Cleaner (unofficial) | ARMC2, RUC2, DEC1 | RU |
| Liza Bardo | 57 | KZ | F | 1991 | LEG | 3rd marriage | 2 | Teacher training UD / CoO<br>Physiotherapy PT / CoS | Physiotherapist (NT)<br>Trainer (NT) | DEC2, RUC2, ENGB1 | RU / DE |
| Mila | 46 | KZ | F | 1994 | LEG | Marriage | 2 | Medical nursing PT / CoO | Nurse and caregiver (T) | RUC2, DEC1 | RU |

(continued)

**Table A.1** (continued)

| Pseudonym | Age | CoO | Gender | Arrival | Admission | Family status | Children | Education | Occupation at the time of interview | Language proficiency L1 | L2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Diara | 47 | KZ | F | 1993 | MLEG | Marriage | 2 | Choreography CD / CoO | Assembler (MJ)<br>Cleaner (unofficial) | RUC2, DEB2 | RU |
| Anna | 41 | UA<br>RU | F | 1995 | MNG | Marriage | 2 | Civil engineering UD / CoO<br>Construction planning PT / CoS | Housewife (not willingly) | DEC2, RUC2, FB1, UAB2 | RU |
| Galina | 55 | KZ | F | 2001 | LEG | 2nd divorced | 1 | Teacher training UD / CoO | Social worker (T) | DEC2, RUC2 | RU |
| Alona | 50 | RU | F | 2005 | MLEG | 2nd marriage | 1 | Economics PT / CoS | Job seeker/ Housewife | RUC2, DEC1 | RU |
| Ksenia | 39 | RU | F | 2008 | LEG | 2nd divorced | – | Economics UD / CoO | Kitchen assistant (MJ) | RUC2, DEB1 | RU |
| Elena | 27 | RU | F | 1997 | LEG | Single | – | Engineering UD (NF) / CoS | Student | DEC2, RUC1, ENGC1, JPA2, SB2 | DE/RU |
| Liubov | 30 | KZ | F | 1996 | LEG | In relationship | – | Sales PT / CoS | Sale assistant (T) | DEC2, RUB1 | DE |

| Pseudonym | Age | CoO | Gender | Arrival | Admission | Marital status | Children | Education | Occupation at the time of interview | Language proficiency | L2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Matilda | 48 | RU | F | 1999 | MNG | Divorced | – | Teacher training UD / CoO<br>Business administration PT / CoS | Job seeker after PT | RUC2, DEC2, ENGB2 | RU |
| Stella | 59 | RU | F | 1989 | MNG | Marriage | 1 | Teacher training UD / CoO<br>Translation PT / CoS | Self-employed in translation; Housewife | RUC2, DEC2 | RU |
| Alex or Al | 31 | UA | M | 1997 | JR | Single | – | Engineering UD / CoS | PhD student | DEC2, RUC2, ENGC1, UAC1, JPB1, HEB1 | RU |
| Nikita | 22 | RU | M | 2010 | RU | Single | – | Engineering UD (NF) / CoS | Student | RUC2, DEC1, ENGC1 | RU |
| Igor | 28 | KZ | M | 1990 | LEG | Single | – | Handcraft PT / CoS | Student (to increase qualification) | DEC2, RUC1 | RU/ DE |
| Vlad | 23 | KZ | M | 1994 | LEG | In relationship | – | Engineering UD (NF) / CoS | Student | DEC2, RUC2, ENGB2 | RU |

(continued)

**Table A.1** (continued)

| Pseudonym | Age | CoO | Gender | Arrival | Admission | Marital status | Children | Education | Occupation at the time of interview | Language proficiency | L2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Oleg | 38 | UA | M | 1999 | JR | Single | – | Engineering UD / CoO<br>Industrial work PT / CoS | Industrial worker (NT) | RUC2, DEB2 | RU |
| Taras | 45 | UA | M | 1996 | L | In relation-ship | – | Engineering UD / CoO<br>Handcraft (electro) PT / CoS<br>Engineering UD / CoS | Engineer (T) | UAC1, DEC2, RUC2, ENGB1 | UA |

**Table A.2** Classification categories and data sources for the created dataset

| General characteristics | Urban scale | Entrepreneurs, management | Social ties | Business ties |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Address, official store number type of legal ownership* (MMP) | Location—city type (Destatis) | *Name* (MMP, AB, LN) | No. of family members working in business (FW, AB, LN) | Other businesses through ownership (FW, HR, AB, MMP) |
| Opening or reopening year (HR, FW) | Residents: Number (Destatis) | Country of origin/ year of migration (AB, LN) | Customers (AB, LN, FW): Native German, co-migrant or co-ethnic | Monolith group[8] (ND, MMP) |
| Store age (FWiss, HR) | *Country where a Mix Markt located* (MMP) | *Gender* (MMP) according to the gendered form of owner's/manager's name | Employees: from migrant pool or natives (FW, AB, LN) | Region of origin: Export (MMP, AB, LN) |

(continued)

[8] Since1998, the Monolith Group focuses on the wholesale and retail trade of the Eastern European products or branded like Eastern European products (Monolith, 2020).

**Table A.2** (continued)

| General characteristics | Urban scale | Entrepreneurs, management | Social ties | Business ties |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Store size (AB, LN) | | Education (AB, LN) | Local community engagement | |
| No. of employees (AB, LN, FWiss) | | Professional/ business experience (AB, LN) | Links to social projects, civil sector, political organizations (FW, AB, LN) | |
| *Contact* (MMP) | | Transition to Mix Markt business (AB, LN) | Social media presence (SM) | |

*Sources* FW / Own fieldwork, Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis, 2011a, 2011b), MMP/ Mix Markt Web-Page (Mixmarkt.eu, 2020), HR / Handelsregister (Unternehmensregister, 2020), FWiss (firmenwissen.de), LN / Local newspapers, AB / Aussiedlerbote (*Zeitung Aussiedlerbote*, 2014–2020), ND/ (Northdfata), CH / (CompanyHouse), SM / social media (esp. Facebook, Vkontakte, YouTube)

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