

2 (Im)Mobile Individuals: Studying Their Biographies

Examining geographical (im)mobility in migration contexts is the central concern of this book. Given the gap in the literature I have scrutinized in the chapter above, it is all the more important that I immerse myself in the “field.” In fact, fieldwork is crucial to my understanding of sociological work, more so as I aim to shed light on an issue that—up until now—has not been widely studied. I am especially interested in individuals’ “transnational biographies” (Apitzsch/Siouti 2007, Ruokonen-Engler 2012, Siouti 2013), and set out to explore the diversity of their (im)mobility experiences and to gain an in-depth understanding of how they lend meaning to them. Investigating migration phenomena through a “mobilities perspective,” I ask the following questions: *How (geographically) mobile or immobile are “migrants” after initial migration and what social implications does this (im)mobility raise?*

- Under which circumstances do various mobilities occur in migratory and transnational contexts?
- What biographical constellations are at play for their development, maintenance, or shifting in individual life courses?
- How is the (im)mobility “after migration” characterized?

The methodology and the data collection method I have chosen for this study qualify as qualitative and interpretative. I constantly reassessed my research questions, initial hypotheses and conceptualizations during the process of gathering, transcribing, and coding the data. My interest in how individuals, who are—in one way or another—embedded in migration and transnational contexts, experience (im)mobility in their lives came about during this very process. In this chapter, I explain how I carried out my research, what my sample looks like, and

how I analyzed the data, which results in an “ideal-typical” typology of *three patterns of (im)mobility*.

2.1 APPROACHING THE FIELD: METHODOLOGY, METHODS, AND SAMPLING STRATEGIES

The micro level of the individual is my point of departure in this study. The qualitative methods of social research I used emphasize a constructivist approach to understanding social phenomena, which refuses to see “social facts” (Durkheim [1895] 1984) as a given “objective truth” independent of human action and agency. It rather promotes the idea that social phenomena are constructed and can therefore be deconstructed, reconstructed, or generally modified. Statements and judgements of reality are socially relative and pertain to specific social contexts, which we need to analyze in order to understand their meanings. Such methodological considerations have a long tradition in sociological thinking as they can be traced back to the ideas of Max Weber (1949), Alfred Schütz ([1932] 2013), Peter Berger, and Thomas Luckmann ([1966] 1992), amongst others (Rosenthal 2014, Endreß 2005 and 2012, Castles 2012). Truth be told, there is a longstanding feud between positivists, who tend to use quantitative methods, and constructivists, who tend to use qualitative methods on epistemological grounds: “Positivists believe in objectivity and constructivists believe that there is no single truth in social phenomena.” (Castles 2012: 12) However, if we put emphasis on how individuals in diverse groups, communities, and societies construct social meanings of the social world they encounter and if we keep in mind the relativity and context-dependence of these meanings, qualitative and interpretative methods lend themselves well to research. That is why this study is framed by the methodology and methods of sociological biographical research.

Accessing Mobilities through Biographical Research

As social constructs, biographies are increasingly used to examine social reality in today’s sociology (Rosenthal 2004: 47). The beginnings of biographical research are ascribed to the publication of the monumental work, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* written by the Chicago sociologists Florian Znaniecki and William Isaac Thomas. They consider personal life stories to be “the perfect type of sociological material.” (Znaniecki/Thomas [1918-1923] 1958: 1832f) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* did, in fact, inspire a boom of qualitative-empirical research based on a biographical approach. Mem-

bers of the Chicago School (such as Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess) further refined and developed this approach. The principles and methods of biographical research of the 1930s were rediscovered during the 1970s and 1980s. The German sociologists Fritz Schütze (1976, 1983, 1984), Werner Fuchs (1984), and Martin Kohli (with Bertraux 1984, 1985) contributed to programmatic and empirical research and helped to institutionalize the biographical approach in Germany. Since then, studying biographies has become an established method for a combined analysis of social and individual factors.

Methodologically, biographical research starts from the premise that current or previous social phenomena concerning individuals should be interpreted and analyzed in the overall context of their life stories (Rosenthal 2014: 176f), instructing us to reconstruct the genesis of the social phenomena. The actions of the individual are important in this context: knowing about both the actors' subjective perspective and the courses of action, by which we are able to grasp what they experienced, what meaning they confer to their actions at that time, what meaning they assign today, and in what biographically-constituted context they place their experiences (*ibid.*: 2004: 49). Therefore, biographical research "rests on a view of individuals as creators of meanings which form the basis of their everyday lives." (Roberts 2002: 6) It emphasizes the process structure of occurrences and life events, and for this study, (im)mobility experiences. Using the biographical approach enables us, as Pries has argued, to overcome:

"[...] the traditional dichotomy of 'subjective orientations of acting' and individual actions on the one hand and 'objective conditions of action' and structural constraints of action on the other one." (1997: 287, my translation)¹

It reveals both structural and individual elements at play in a life trajectory. Thus, we can reconstruct the phenomenon that interests us: how it emerged, how it developed, how it changed, and how it reproduces established structures.

Many (sociological) studies use this methodology to investigate phenomena of migration.² Already more than twenty years ago, Halfacree and Boyle (1993)

1 "[...] Die traditionelle Dichotomie von 'subjektiven Handlungsorientierungen' und individuellen Handlungen einerseits und 'objektiven Handlungsbedingungen' und strukturellen Handlungsbegrenzungen andererseits."

2 Besides empirical sociology, researchers have also worked with biographical and life course approaches in other disciplines, such as history (Lehmkuhl 2014, Panter et al. 2015, Thompson 2000, a.o.), educational sciences (Krüger/Marotzki 2006, a.o.), psychology (Bar-On 2004, Rosenwald/Ochberg 1992, Straub 1993) as well as transporta-

argued for an alternative conceptualization of migration: one, which would emphasize the situatedness of migration within everyday life. They advised abandoning the view of migration as a contemplative act, and described it instead as something related to an individual's past and predicted future; to use their own words: “[...] migration exists as a part of our past, our present and our future; as part of our biography.” (ibid.: 337) Investigating migration through biographies provides us —according to the authors—with a deeper understanding of the phenomenon than those simple typologies or push-and pull frameworks often used to explain migration. In studying (migrant) transnationalism, however, ethnographic work is dominant. Despite a recent increase in transnational studies, in particular among German scholars (Apitsch/Siouti 2007, Fürstenau 2004, Frändberg 2008, Kempf 2012, Kühn 2012, Lutz 2000 and 2004, Palenga-Möllenbeck 2014, Pries 1997, Ruokonen-Engler 2012, Ruokonen-Engler/Siouti 2013, Siouti 2013, Tulder 2014), biographical research remains underused, yet a crucial advantage lies in its compatibility with the theoretical assumptions and research goals of transnational studies. It addresses both the context of the country of origin as well as the context of the country of arrival (and other given contexts, too) while considering an individual's insider perspective through, for example, *post-hoc* assessments of specific events. Using it to investigate mobility in migration and transnational contexts enables us—I argue—to reconstruct the development of individuals' (im)mobility with respect to other important events in their life courses.

Grasping Mobilities through Biographies

I see mobility as a social practice that is enacted (or not) by individuals during their life trajectories. The advocates of “mobility studies” have increasingly developed so-called “mobile methods” (ch. 1.3) and, in this context, Sheller (2011: 7) mentions the use of autobiographical narratives. However, empirical studies on mobilities that take into account a biographical approach barely exist—with a few exceptions in the way of travel behaviour studies (Lanzendorf 2003, Beige/Axhausen 2006, 2012, Rau/Sattleger 2017), interregional migration and residential mobility (Fischer/Malmberg 2001, Coulter et al. 2016) as well as international and transnational migration (Frändberg 2008, Moret 2015, Wieczorek 2016).

Methodologically speaking, I argue that coming to understand (im)mobility through biographical research is not only possible, but desirable, for three rea-

tion and travel behaviour studies (Hägerstrand 1975, Lanzendorf 2003, Beige/Axhausen 2006).

sons. First, biographies are outcomes of certain processes of life; they are social constructs that individuals produce in the course of their lives. As such, they combine individual and structural elements. Using biographical research, we can reconstruct the experiences of (im)mobility, because they are inherent in peoples' biographies. Second, biographies as social constructs are not fixed to one geographical location, neither to one time period, nor to only one social phenomenon. The biography is always bound to its carrier: at any time, at any place, and on any occasion. No matter where, when, and what individuals do, their biography is always *en route* with them. Biographies are thus as mobile as the individuals—not less and not more than that. If the lives of individuals contain (border-crossing) mobilities, studying their biographies bears the exceptional potential to go beyond considering single nation-states as the unit of analysis, i.e., to overcome “methodological nationalism.” (Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002) Biographical research, I argue, is a “mobile methodology” *per se*. Third, biographies are composed of three dimensions: the *temporal*, the *spatial*, and the *social* dimension.

The Temporal, Spatial, and Social Dimensions

These sociological dimensions, we need to understand, are inherent in both people's biographies and in (im)mobility dynamics. The latter are embedded in the biographies of my respondents as they, indeed, cut through them.

To that end, the temporal dimension of (im)mobility helps us to discover the duration and frequency of the geographical movements. Moreover, it not only enables us to spot relevant points of time in the individuals' trajectory in which mobility practices arise, but we can also trace back practices of (im)mobility to former generations, i.e., in the family histories of the individuals. The spatial dimension, in the same vein, allows us to track the geographical locations to which the mobility practices are directed. Last but not least, the social dimension of (im)mobility provides an analytical entry into the impact of these mobilities on individuals' sociality and how it manifests itself in the lives of my respondents—social relationships, family tie(s), belonging(s) and self-understandings. Conversely, the social dimension also helps us to understand and explain the emergence of (im)mobility in the first place. The temporal and spatial levels can give us information about duration, frequency, and direction of mobility practices, and they can simply be limited to a quantitative account. Examining the underlying social factors can provide us with insights about why a certain mobility duration, frequency or destination arose and not another one, and how the individuals lend meaning to their own practices of (im)mobility. Therefore, I argue that the temporal and the spatial dimensions are indispensable to examining practices of

(im)mobility, but they fall short where it comes to the experiences related to it. This is why I will pay particular attention to the social dimension.

Certainly, we can only analytically distinguish the temporal, spatial, and social dimensions, but they are of great help when we want to reconstruct the formation and development of (im)mobility. We need to be aware, however, that all three dimensions interact in a processual way in biographical trajectories, meaning that patterns of actions may change from one particular point in time to another. Biographical research allows us to grasp these actions and the social constructions and orientations that structure and frame them because anything happens at *a given time*, in *a given place*, and in *a given social constellation*. My respondents' retrospective interpretations and assessments of their social actions constitute *post hoc* narratives of (im)mobility experiences that shed light on their construction and meaning. A processual understanding of (im)mobility (ch. 1.3) opens up the possibility of going beyond commonly known migration categories so as to capture constellations and complexities which would otherwise go unnoticed—and thus promises to provide us with significant sociological insights. As such, biographical research responds to both the challenges that the literatures on mobility and migration pose and to the understanding of mobility as relational, constructed, and processual.

Autobiographical Interviewing

In biographical research, the method of data collection consists of narrative autobiographical interviewing. The narrative procedures I used draw on the work of Fritz Schütze, who elaborated them in methodology (Schütze 1976, 1984). He argues that “the structure of experiences reproduces itself in the structure of narration” (1976: 179), in which the individual selects *ad-hoc* the experiences, incidents, occurrences, and notions that are “biographically relevant”:

“[...] if we want to reconstruct what people experienced in the course of their lives and how these experiences constitute their current perspectives and action orientations, we must elicit the *processes of remembering* and their verbal translation into *narrations*.” (Rosenthal 2014: 155, my translation)³

3 “[...] Wenn wir rekonstruieren wollen, was Menschen im Laufe ihres Lebens erlebt haben, und wie dieses Erleben ihre gegenwärtigen Perspektiven und Handlungsorientierungen konstituiert, dann empfiehlt es sich, *Erinnerungsprozesse* und deren sprachliche Übersetzungen in *Erzählungen* hervorzurufen.”

Such a way of interviewing can be characterized as “open.” Indeed, most researchers who pursue this interviewing technique take into consideration the entire life story of the individual, independent of their research questions. In other words, they believe that when we first conduct interviews, we do not restrict ourselves to certain parts or specific biographical phases of the life course. Only after we take the entire life story’s *gestalt* into account, we are able to examine individual realms or phases of a life in the context of an individual’s entire biography (Schütze 1983, Rosenthal 2004). In order to elicit autobiographical *ad-hoc* narrations (*Stegreiferzählungen*, Schütze 1976), we require a specific interview scheme. Experts of the method recommend starting the interaction situation with a preliminary conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee before the actual interview, in which the interviewer presents his or her research interest in such a way that does not affect the results. Apart from confirming data anonymity, it is particularly important to introduce the method to the interviewee because autobiographical interviews strongly differ from other forms of interviews, most of which are characterized by a question-answer structure. The interview then begins with a broadly asked initial question that serves to stimulate a comprehensive narrative on the part of the individual. When the interviewee falls into a narrative mode, the interviewer is supposed to withhold verbal interruptions while signaling an interest in the narrative by nodding and using affirmative expressions. Usually, the interviewee marks the end of his or her narrative by using finalizing phrases. Following the main narrative comes the immanent and exmanent questioning phase. The former aims to elicit further narrative sequences by asking questions that follow up with what the interviewee has already brought up, while the latter aims at assuring that those issues not mentioned by the interviewee, but which seem relevant to the inquiry, will be addressed (Schütze 1983, Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2009, Rosenthal 2004, 2014).

Interviewing Young Adults of Polish Heritage in Germany and Canada

At the start of my fieldwork, I presented my research interests to potential interviewees by saying that I was interested in the immigrant lives of persons of Polish heritage. Obviously, I did not mention that my focus would be on their experiences of (im)mobility, thus avoiding undue influence and pushing their narratives into a thematic direction that would not have been theirs. Again, autobiographical interviewing aims at uncovering topics, themes, events, and incidents, which are biographically relevant to the interviewees, independent of the focus of the research. The advantage of the method is that I learned of the absence or existence of mobility experiences at the same time as they are both in-

herent to the trajectories of my respondents. I explained to my interviewees how I would proceed during the interview, so that they knew I would listen to them rather than posing one question after the other. In order to elicit a process of narration, my initial question went as follows:

“As you know, I’m interested in your life as a person of Polish heritage living in Canada/Germany. You can tell me about everything that comes to your mind. What is important to you, is important to me. Maybe you can start by telling me about your childhood. Where were you born?”

In most cases, the initial question stimulated and encouraged my respondents to fall into a narrative mode that provided me with a longer episode of a narrative sequence. Interviewing was not always easy, particularly because some would not respond to the initial question in an “ideal-typical” way, which may have been influenced by many different factors, such as interview location, sympathies between interviewee and interviewer, establishment of trust during the interaction, current moods and individual character traits. Fortunately, difficult interviews remained the exception as most of my respondents warmed up during the “uncommon” situation of being interviewed. The interviews I did lasted from approx. 45 minutes up to 3.5 hours.

Research Design and Sampling Strategies

I conducted the study in three investigation areas in two different countries: Montreal and Toronto, Canada and Berlin, Germany. I chose metropolitan cities as the target regions because they are often important hubs for migrants. There, migrants encounter more work possibilities, social diversity, anonymity, and dense migrant networks (which can facilitate the first phase of settlement) than in provincial towns or regions. Selecting large cities as investigation sites also creates a spatial-structural comparability within the research design. Generally, migrants currently living in these areas have come across very different contexts of arrival depending on their immigration phases. Such a constellation facilitates the comparison of structural impacts and frame conditions within the different contexts and generates differentiated analyses of their impact on the experiences of (im)mobility. A comparative research design thus enables us to grasp country-based specificities and differences between the regions, it acknowledges different frame conditions and social realities, and it sheds light on the heterogeneity of migration experiences.

Herméneutique-Croisée and the Sociological Field

Being of Polish heritage myself, I already had a basic “everyday knowledge” of this group in the German context. Deciding to start my fieldwork in Canada, I followed the comparative methodology of *herméneutique-croisée* (Lehmkuhl/McFalls 2012), which is based on the epistemological principle that the gaze of an outside observer, who is (at first) unfamiliar with the research context, will open up a new dimension that allows for an uncovering of hidden histories, as the researcher views his or her field of interest through the knowledge of another context. *Herméneutique croisée* is therefore a way to create multi-perspectivity. It may elicit the process of continuous interpretation and entanglement of different contexts, discourses, and social fields (*ibid.*). In a specific sociological sense, *herméneutique croisée* can facilitate the identification of social mechanisms, dynamics, or patterns when applied, for instance, during fieldwork. Sociologists then observe and examine their research interest in a specific context (e.g., through biographical interviewing or ethnographical work) from a certain country/context perspective that they take on (including all social, cultural, and national specificities) through the lens of the country/context perspective of the individual (who, most often, includes specificities of the context that s/he is embedded in, in narrative form). Applying *herméneutique croisée* thus implies a constant change in perspective that enables the researcher to broaden his or her own perspective to such an extent as to uncover phenomena that would not have otherwise appeared. Accordingly, it helps to establish a comprehensive knowledge of one social context through the other.

If I can easily have access to the life-worlds of people of Polish heritage through my own experiences, what I discovered in Canada—including contextual differences between francophone Quebec on the one hand and anglophone Ontario on the other—was new to me. It allowed me to uncover hidden themes I would not have been aware of beforehand and therefore might have not regarded as relevant for the interpretation of the biographies. These include, for instance, the issue of Polish schools in Canada and the fact that attending it influences social dimensions such as language, cultural negotiations, community life as well as the ethnic self-understanding of some of my Canadian-based interviewees. Returning to Germany for fieldwork with new insights in mind, I again discovered issues and differences I was previously unaware of, e.g., language being an important issue as well, but completely different in its biographical genesis in the life stories of my German-based interviewees.

Sampling Strategies

My field studies lasted about one year. I chose to do my first explorations in Montreal (Oct. 2013—Dec. 2013) and, after a few months, I moved on to Toronto (Dec. 2013—Feb. 2014). A few weeks later, I continued in Berlin (Apr. 2014—Aug. 2014). Multi-sided ethnography (Marcus 1995) and the “mobile methods” advanced by scholars in mobility studies imply the researcher’s geographical mobility as well as the respondents. My empirical research required geographical mobility on my part. I travelled to Canada, to Montreal and Toronto, returning to Germany, but leaving my city of residence in order to be in Berlin. For the sake of the study, I gained mobility experiences myself.

Entering the field and conducting interviews followed the logic of so-called “snowballing,” which is an established method for identifying and contacting the target population (Atkinson/Flint 2001, Noy 2008). Using a snowball sampling strategy offers practical advantages, particularly with regard to this study’s explorative aim as it can produce in-depth results relatively quickly (Aktinson/Flint 2001: 2). It is a technique for finding subjects based on the idea that “[o]ne subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of the third, and so on.” (Vogt/Johnson 2015) This strategy relies on the help of identified respondents, providing the researcher with an expandable set of potential contacts. It thus takes advantage of the respondents’ social networks; it is “essentially social” because it both uses and activates existing social networks.” (Noy 2008: 332) Not only is “snowballing” a social procedure, but it is also a repetitive process; it usually takes time before it evolves into the metaphorical “snowball” effect.

However, I tried to sample my target population in such a way as to limit the chance of constructing an (overly) biased data set. In so doing, I used various ways to search for people and to establish an entry into the field. I mainly used three recruitment techniques. First, I established contacts who would later become my gatekeepers (among them were often professors and other researchers). Second, I attended events organized by the Polish community. And third, I disseminated research inquiries on community websites, such as those of Polish organizations, cultural associations, student associations of higher educational institutions by way of the social media platform, *Facebook*. The latter recruitment technique was a particularly successful way of reaching my target population of young adults of Polish heritage. I focused on them as I desired to reach a diverse sample, including various “migrant generations” of Polish people abroad. Targeting young adults would most likely ensure the inclusion of different generations, especially those who are commonly referred to as the first generation, generation 1.5 (Rumbaut 2012), the second and—if possible—third generation. I did

not restrict the selection of interviewees to any other pre-fixed determinants, yet one limitation of my sampling strategy, however, lies in my inability to reach those young ethnic Poles who no longer see themselves as Polish.⁴

Lessons from the Field

As pleasant as I find fieldwork to be as part of the sociologist's task, it did not come without frustrations. First of all, it felt like an eternity until the snowball procedure started to turn into an avalanche. In each investigation area, I needed to lay the foundations for "snowballing" anew, a lengthy process that certainly tested my patience. But the most challenging part was yet to come. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it was not until fieldwork that I developed an interest in experiences of (im)mobility within migration contexts. When I first started out, I was interested in the transnational activities of young adults of Polish heritage. Yet, asking my target group to tell me their life stories, I came across many narratives in which such tendencies seemed manifest, in others it was rather latent or absent, and in yet other narrations there seemed to be a deviation of what scholars classically refer to as (migrant) transnationalism (ch. 1.2). This was a challenging moment during which I simultaneously realized that my respondents' narratives included diverse mobilities. Here I was, faced with unexpected issues that I could not immediately make sense of. In a way, this corresponds to what Robert K. Merton has brought into discourse on the sociology of knowledge as serendipity, describing an "unexpected observation which bears upon theories not in question when the research has begun [...]." (Merton 1968: 158) At the end of the day, it caused me to question and modify my initial research questions, hypotheses, and conceptualizations so as not to run the risk of "sampling on the dependent variable;" a research practice that is often critically related to studies of (migrant) transnationalism (Salazaar/Smart 2011, Østergaard-Nielsen 2012). The lessons I have learned have to do with the need for flexibility on the side of the researcher. Flexibility, as Castles points out, implies:

"[...] 'adaptability': the willingness of the researcher to respond to the lessons of the field and to hear what respondents are saying by changing the research strategy. This may well involve concluding that the original research question was not the best one, or that the starting hypothesis was mistaken." (2012: 16)

4 I also tried to sample in non-ethnic *Facebook* groups, but had little success.

Unfortunately, the need for flexibility and reflexivity on the part of the researcher during the actual research process often remains unmentioned in published empirical studies.⁵ In fact, listening to what our respondents tell us and how it shakes our initial assumptions is to see “the research as a collaborative process between you and your respondents in bringing out a part of the social world.” (Shih 2012: 571) It is the strength of qualitative research and its most challenging part, bearing as many frustrations as joys.

2.2 LEAVING THE FIELD: SAMPLE, NARRATIVES, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A TYPOLOGY

Flexibility and reflexivity during fieldwork engendered an open process of collecting and assessing my data in which I combined elements of “grounded theory” (Strauss/Corbin [1990] 1996) with elements of an inductive approach. I pursued the principle of theoretical sampling, which tends to enhance and contrast inductively generated hypotheses, categories, and concepts until a theoretical saturation is reached. I subsequently left the field when I did not come across new insights; i.e., when I believed I had reached a theoretical saturation as new aspects in terms of the relevant theoretical statements did not arise anymore from the interviews (Corbin/Strauss 1990: 419).

Characteristics of the Sample

While I will discuss six life stories in-depth in this book (ch. 3, 4, 5), I was able to interview 47 young adults of Polish heritage overall. They are between 20 and 43 years old: the average age is 26.9 years. The gender division varies to a small extent: I interviewed 26 females and 21 males.⁶ I could attain a balanced gender division in Canada (13f and 14m), while I had difficulties putting together a sample of male interviewees in Germany (13f and 7m). According to distinctions of “migrant generations” commonly used in migration studies, the majority of my interviewees belongs to the category of the “generation 1.5” (Rumbaut

- 5 An impressive exception in transnational studies is provided by Goldring and Landolt (2014). Shih (2012) also wrote a worthwhile contribution on this issue when studying the impact of race, ethnicity, and gender on the careers of Asian immigrant engineers in Silicon Valley.
- 6 I use the binary construction of gender due to reasons of sensitivity related to it. There is no intention to deny other possible gender constructions such as intersex, a.o.

2012), which describes “migrants,” who were born in one country, but came of age in another. Their experiences differ from both those who migrated later as (young) adults and of those who were already born in their parents’ country of arrival. Almost 50% of the sample belongs to the “generation 1.5” while the division between the first and second generation is balanced (each at about 25%). The question of generation, however, gives interesting insights into the comparative perspective: I sampled a very small number of interviewees who belong to the first migrant generation in Canada while 50% of my interviewees in Germany belong to it, and only two interviewees belong to the second generation. Arguably, we can explain these discrepancies with the differing emigration waves from Poland into both countries. There has not been a significant wave of Polish migration to Canada in the last two decades while Poland’s entry into the European Union triggered a wave of Polish immigration into Germany (excursus in part II), and significantly to Berlin. The “second generation” living in Germany may not perceive themselves as Polish (anymore) and thus did not respond to my research inquiry. In Canada, I observed that the ethnic heritage is socially more keenly valued than in Germany. The different immigration and integration policies in both countries seem to play a role here. Interestingly, we can observe cross-country differences in terms of citizenship, too: the clear majority of my Canadian-based interviewees has dual citizenship while only less than 50% of my German-based interviewees have dual citizenship. Arguably, the status of the “migrant generation” and the attainment of dual citizenship correlate. If the recent settlers (first generation) are not likely to have dual citizenship; the restrictive German nationality law may be another explanatory factor. If they do not need another citizenship for free movement as EU-citizens, they would do so for comprehensive access to social services and suffrage.⁷ Needless to say, this sample provides a basis for comparability and theoretical saturation, but not for representativeness.

A Privileged Sample

It is widely known that the more people are educated, the more likely they are to take part in scientific studies. My respondents confirm this trend. They are (relatively) highly educated: the vast majority have a (first) university degree (B.A. or diploma), a smaller portion attained a secondary one (M.A. or Ph.D.) and the

⁷ For more information on the German nationality law, see the homepage of the Federal Government Commissioner for Foreign Resident Affairs in Germany: <http://www.bundesauslaenderbeauftragte.de/einbuergerung>.

minority either graduated high school or attained the German *Abitur*.⁸ The sample is privileged in other aspects too. In terms of citizenship, they all enjoy a secured legal status, in terms of race/colour they are “white,” and in terms of their socio-economic status they belong to (lower, sometimes higher) middle-class milieus. Sampling such a privileged group happened not by intention; it is rather the result of the sampling strategies and the opportunity structures that I came across in the field. Studying this group, we need to be aware of their relatively privileged conditions, but we must not mistake them as being of the “elite.”

Analyzing Biographical Narratives

There are heterogeneous forms of living post-migratory lives and the objective of this book is to shed light on them. They consist of a variety of biographical constellations. From a sociological perspective, I am interested in which constellations lead to the development of specific types of experiences, i.e., the patterns of (im)mobility. If this is the case, I wonder what kinds of patterns emerge and which social dynamics underlie the mobilities in the lives of my respondents, and whether and how they may change over time. How we, as researchers, make sense of our biographical material strongly depends on how we analyze and interpret it. This section explains how I was to handle it.

In the first step, I reorganized the biographical interviews sequentially as a way to reconstruct the “life history” as opposed to the “life story” (Rosenthal 2004) in order to produce “biographical anamnesis” (Schmeiser 1994), which are chronological descriptions of the individuals’ life courses. It was advantageous in that I became more familiar with what happened in my respondents’ lives. At the same time, this step laid the foundation for “contrasting case comparisons” (*kontrastiver Fallvergleich*, Schütze 1983) and for constructing a typology once I had an overview of how my interviewees’ lives proceeded over the years. In a second step, I made a thematic analysis. I drew on the reconstructive approach of “grounded theory” (Strauss 1987, Glaser 1978, Corbin/Strauss 1990) and by way of open, axial, and selective coding I analyzed in various stages: I first identified relevant phenomena, and then labelled and later classified them (Strauss/Corbin [1990] 1996: 44ff). The stages helped to reveal a number of phenomena, such as various kinds of mobilities (e.g., commuting, travelling and holidaying, internal and international mobility) and (periods of) immobility as well as other central social dimensions such as educational/ professional conditions and aspirations,

8 The *Abitur* is the German school examination usually taken by the end of the 12th or 13th year and equivalent to the British A level or the American SAT exam.

language (e.g., lack, acquirement, and use), (reasons for) cultural negotiations, differing self-understandings, the shape of social and familial networks, and the structural conditions that likely influence the biographical dimension as well as the individuals *ex post* reflections of (current and past) situations and prospects for their future. I further classified the descriptive concepts into more abstract categories. In the last step, I compared them with each other and with the literature (Strauss/Corbin 1998: 188f, see also Nowicka 2013: 30f). The result of my analysis was to identify three main types—which would later become the *patterns of (im)mobility*.⁹ But there was more to it than that.

In view of the new insights, I returned to the individual to analyze some selected cases in-depth to reconstruct the experiences of (im)mobility within the respondents' life stories so that I could better compare them with one another as Schütze proposed with his notion of "contrasting case comparisons." (*kontrastiver Fallvergleich*, 1983) I first started comparing one life story with another that contrasted only minimally, until I subsequently compared cases with a maximal contrast in view of detecting similarities and differences that are theoretically relevant (Schütze 1983: 287). Not only was I able to better compare single life stories, but also to test the types.

Constructing an Empirically Grounded Typology

Having described how I analyzed the biographical interviews, I will now go into more detail about the typology as such, i.e., the *patterns of (im)mobility*. I have constructed the patterns based on all life stories, not only the six that will be discussed in the second part of this book (ch. 3, 4 and 5). The patterns abstract certain post-migration (im)mobility practices, ultimately culminating into patterned experiences which came about after an initial migration, or the migration of earlier generations, in the lives of my respondents. If the patterns of (im)mobility include various mobility practices such as travelling, commuting, or what Greenblatt called "cultural mobility" (2009), my focus lies on (*temporary-restricted*) *internal or border-crossing relocations of one's life center in the physical sense* that evolved after "immigration." Each pattern indicates a specific type of mobility experience based on similar geographical practices, albeit the individuals' lives and biographies sometimes greatly differ.

Methodologically, my respondents' biographies are the foundation upon which the typology is built. Hence, we need to be aware that they are *not* completed (yet). *Per se*, the biographies examined in this study are active ongoing

9 Given the high amount of data I collected, I used the analysis software ATLAS.ti.

processes, whose endings are open—as opposed to, let us say, a historian’s work with biographies. They are only complete after an individual passes away. For all that, the typology does not represent a snapshot at a given point in time of the individuals’ lives, but it is constructed upon the life courses of individuals—and that is certainly only possible up until the point in time when the interviews were done. As it were, the typology is to be understood through the lens of an incomplete life course. I therefore explicitly present the typology as open-ended and subject to revision, as—to use Crowder’s words—“an invitation to dialogue rather than a final word.” (2013: 35)

The *patterns of (im)mobility* can only be typologically and analytically distinguished as such in the biographical material I have gathered. This means, in other words, that no individual biography represents one type. The patterns are “ideal types”: each always indicating a mixture of biographical experiences that cut across various individual life stories rather than completely complying with one of them—as will be illustrated by the biographical narratives in the second part of the book. Methodologically speaking, it was one of the founding fathers of sociology, Max Weber (1864-1920), who developed the notion of the ideal type. As such, the patterns are theoretical constructions (*theoretische Gedanken-gebilde*) that condense certain relationships and historical events—or biographical events for this study—into one systematic complex. The ideal type is not to be mistaken with a description of reality; yet, it aims to give a means of expression to such a description. Neither is it a hypothesis; yet, it offers guidance for the construction of hypotheses (Weber 1949: 88ff). Ideal types are central for interpretative sociology, and Weber instructs us on how to construct them:

“An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct (Gedankenbild). In its conceptual purity, this mental construct (Gedankenbild) cannot be found anywhere in reality. It is a utopia.” (Weber 1949: 90)

Many (non-sociologists) find it hard to understand that an ideal type never corresponds to empirical reality, but it merely represents an “idea” (*Gedanken-ausdruck*) of the social phenomenon under scrutiny. They are neither an image of reality, nor are they to be understood as ethical imperatives: they are “ideal” not in the normative sense, but in the strictly logical sense of the term (*ibid.*: 92). As such, ideal types are—as Weber emphasizes—“not ends but are means to the end of understanding phenomena [...]” (*ibid.*: 106); means to be “used as con-

ceptual instruments for comparison with and the measurement of reality,” for that “[they] are indispensable.” (ibid.: 97) As “tools” they serve to fulfill the sociologists’ heuristic purposes.

Once constructed, ideal types, are exceptionally suited for comparison with further empirical phenomena. Certainly, this comparison will reveal—at times more or less pronounced—shortcomings of the analytical construct, for, conversely, the exact purpose of ideal types is to show *what’s missing*. Then, the ideal types generate new insights and further developments of analytical constructions. Weber reminds us in one of his own constructed ideal types—the types of legitimate domination—to keep in mind that “the idea that the whole of concrete historical reality can be exhausted in the conceptual scheme [...] is far from the author’s thoughts as anything could be.” (Weber [1921] 1978: 216) I see similarities between Weber’s notion of ideal types and the *patterns of (im)mobility* in two ways mainly: (1) both are theoretical constructions and as such they cannot be found in empirical reality—even though they are based on empirical data—and, (2) both are not designed to capture the social phenomenon in its entirety, but rather to serve as “tools” for further investigations. Unlike Weber’s own work on ideal types, the patterns do not have historical validity as they are not grounded upon historical material.

Inspired by Weber’s methodology, the patterns of (im)mobility illustrate how experiences of (im)mobility can be constructed by the sociologist, yet, they differ on how individuals assess and evaluate their own experiences. For that matter, they express the *hiatus irrationalis*; the tension between notion and reality (Endreb 2012: 56). We had better be careful, however, not to underestimate the significant role that individuals play in the Weberian types as Thériault notes: “If individuals occupy a central place in the foundations of the program of Weber’s sociology, one finds them most often in his substantive writings in the guise of the ideal type [...].” (2013: 46) As in the case of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ([1904/1905] 2010), Weber presents one individual, Benjamin Franklin, who “contributes to the construction of the ideal type of the ‘spirit’ of capitalism.” (Thériault 2013: 46) So too did the respondents of my study: they shared their life stories with me and contributed to the construction of the patterns of (im)mobility. That is why I decided to place the life stories of some of my respondents at the center of this book.

One thing is for sure: whether and how mobility or immobility experiences emerge and what they mean depends on the biographical experiences the individuals have during their life course and on the contextual conditions, e.g., the structural constraints or possibilities they face in *certain places* at certain *points in time* in certain *social constellations*. Although often mentioned, the patterns of

(im)mobility are merely “nude types” for now: they are not completely (theoretically) conclusive yet because they have not been brought to life through my respondents’ stories. Sharing them will be the focus of the upcoming part, but I would like to make clear on which grounds I selected which stories to present first.

Selecting Life Stories

My respondents and their stories embody the patterns of (im)mobility and that is why it is important for me not to lose sight of them in my work. I could have presented the empirical analysis, for instance, in a thematic order, yet not only would I have felt that I neglected my respondents but also I was afraid to break through the logic of how I constructed the patterns in the first place, namely upon the logic of the life course. Sharing and examining the life stories of my respondents enables me to better work out the contextual effects, which play a crucial role in the emergence, maintenance, and shifting of the patterns of (im)mobility; as we will soon see. Such a presentation also facilitates the identification of both the individual and the structural factors, and of how the individuals coped with the constraints and possibilities they encountered. The geographical political, social, and cultural contexts are extremely important for the interpretation of the life stories, their inherent (im)mobility experiences, as well as for understanding the social practices and orientations of the respondents, i.e., their agency in the overall context of their life. Only when we contextualize the interviewees’ biographical experiences, can we attempt to understand and explain their (im)mobility practices and what they mean—not least because contextualization provides comparability: within and across the patterns.

Out of 47 autobiographical-narrative interviews, I have chosen to share and discuss six of them in-depth in this book. Analyzing the biographical material, particularly the evaluation stages of coding and the “contrasting case comparisons” have helped me to select the life stories I am to present. The selected life stories are, on the one hand, *typical representations* of the distinguished (im)mobility experiences, and on the other hand, they contain *contextual specificities*, which enable me to invoke a comparison that is context-bound according to my interpretative endeavour. That is the reason why I chose to share the following life stories in this book (table 3).

Table 3: In-Depth Analyses of Life Stories

Names (changed)	Country/ City	Age	Gender	Citizen-ship	Highest Degree	Profes- sion
Anja	Canada (Toronto)	38	f	dual (Canadian/ Polish)	B.A. choreography	choreographer
Sandra	Germany (Berlin)	31	f	dual (German/ Polish)	secondary education	paralegal
Janusz	Germany (Berlin)	33	m	German	M.A. history	Ph.D. student
Oscar	Canada (Montreal)	29	m	dual (Canadian/ Polish)	M.A. cinematography	cinematographer
Malinka	Germany (Berlin)	34	f	dual (German/ Polish)	Diploma in psychology	job seeking
Francis	Canada (Toronto)	25	m	dual (Canadian/ Polish)	B.A. finances	realtor

Source: Own elaboration

The life stories are all *typical* for the mobilities they represent, and *specific* to the contexts in which they arose. However, we must not mistakenly try to find all characteristics of one type in one life story. Types may only be found in combining some of them. As becomes obvious in table 3, I have sought to preserve a balance in terms of gender and “countries of arrival.” For the purpose of readability, I present the interpretations of my respondents’ biographical narratives in three empirical chapters that, taken together, form the second part of the book. The chapters reflect the *patterns of (im)mobility: immobility* (ch. 3), *transmobility* (ch. 4), and *cosmobility* (ch. 5). By focusing on the individuals and their life stories, I hope to arouse the readers’ interest in getting to know more about some of the “flesh-and-blood individuals lurking behind these formal constructs” (Thériault 2013: 48) as it has always been my interest.

I have fully transcribed the interviews; all the following quotes are taken from these transcripts and are provided with line numbers. Of course, I changed the names of my respondents in order to keep their anonymity and the promise I have given them; indeed, some of my respondents would not have participated in my study had I not assured them anonymity. As this study integrates two countries in three regional contexts, the interviews were conducted in two different languages: English and German. In addition, many interviewees used Polish expressions during the interviews, as well as French expressions, particularly those respondents who are based in Montreal. Some of the interviewees therefore included references in four different languages in their narratives. Working with different languages when doing fieldwork is a challenge that we need to be aware of when we study migration and mobility phenomena. I have decided to translate the quotes of the interviews I have conducted in German into English for the sake of readability. I include, however, the original German quotes in footnotes as I have used the original transcripts as the basis of my interpretation of the material. If we take a look at the original German quotes, we will notice that they are in High German, even though many people living in Berlin speak the Berlin dialect. The individuals I have interviewed, however, spoke—without exception—in High German. It can be a result of a bias, induced through my presence and my use of High German, i.e., it is not unlikely that the interviewees have linguistically adapted to me. Generally, we need to be aware that this kind of intercultural research requires a huge workload and it demands a high degree of reflection, not least because the researcher not only translates from language to language but also from one culture to another.¹⁰

10 For more detailed methodological reflections about the ‘limits of understanding’ when doing intercultural research, see Mijić 2013.