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LIMINAL IDENTITIES: YOUTH MIGRATION AND NARRATIVES OF BELONGING

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THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis captures the outcome of two crucial thresholds in young migrants' lives: moving to the UK and coming of age. It was inspired by personal experience but born out of a need to academically reflect on the growing number of young people who choose to grow up abroad and select the UK as either their temporary or permanent home. The study included both EU and non-EU migrants who moved in a highly transnational context, characterised by flexibility, uncertainty, individuality and openness to the new. It draws on qualitative research conducted online with 27 migrants who came to the UK from a total of 24 countries of origin. Some of them came to the UK to pursue their academic degrees, and some came straight after finishing their degree in their home country. In that sense, migrants of this research have been defined as young, highly skilled and highly mobile.

This thesis aimed to contribute to the growing literature on migrant belonging, and more specifically to offer a perspective on the way young migrants create attachments. It does so by combining and operationalising several theoretical concepts that were broadly described under a transnational framework: social anchoring, embedding and liminality. The research questions reflected areas that contribute towards establishing the feeling of (non)belonging; namely identity, the symbolic and geographical attachment to space, and ultimately, relationships and connections migrants engage with.

This study makes several contributions. (1) It advances the use of the theoretical concepts of social anchoring and embedding in migration research by unravelling - through the analytical lens of liminality – migrants' weak ways of belonging and shallow embedding. (2) It bridges scholarship on individualised practices that characterise youth migration with the relational nature of the concept of belonging, by showing that belonging is individualistically felt, but relationally conditioned. (3) Building on the previous point, it explores the possibility of non-belonging which has so far been neglected in researching migrants' connections post-move. (4) Finally, it emphasises the temporal factor in shaping feelings of belonging,

connected to age at migration and the life-course. (5) Methodologically, it presents a novel way to visually capture the simultaneity of transnational (non)belonging, by inserting counter-mapping as one of the prompts within the qualitative research design. Ultimately, this thesis argues that belonging for young and highly skilled migrants results in an in-between state and suggests that belonging more often than not remains merely a yearning.

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As will later be said multiple times, to belong means to create attachments to people and places. Whilst it took me almost five years to create an attachment to the place where I moved, there are many people with whom the connection was established more easily. So many people were a part of my PhD journey, both 'here' and 'there', and therefore deserve to be given credit.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I was living transnationally long before I knew what it meant to live transnationally - the moment my father started to work for an Italian company in Congo we became a transnational household. Every time my father came home from work where he spent two months following a month at home, he brought a traditional African mask. After about three years, or approximately 12 shifts he worked there, we already had a wall in the house filled with African masks whose meaning we barely understood. He brought other African items as well, such as small statues, a small tripod table and a big wooden pestle and mortar, traditionally used for separating grain from chaff or mixing dough. We never used it, but it still stands in our living room today, marking my dad's transcontinental journey he still embarks on every few months.

When he started to work there in 2008, the oil rigs he worked on did not have a stable internet connection. Consequently, he would call our landline phone only once a week, on Sunday evening. It was a time of the week when at least one of us had to be home, either my mum, my sister or me as otherwise dad might think something happened and he might worry, and of course, it was the only time we had to update each other. The connection was automatically cut off after 10 minutes, with other workers on the rig waiting for their turn to call their families. Rarely, he had an opportunity to call us twice on the same day and on such days my sister and I got to talk to him as well, otherwise it was mostly my mum who engaged in this short and therefore precious transcontinental communication. In case there really was an emergency, we had a number we could call in Italy, from where an operator would transfer the call to Africa. As none of the three of us at home at that point spoke Italian, alongside the phone number written on a small piece of paper, it was also written 'Buonasera, posso parlare con Congo? Grazie."[1], which one of us would almost religiously repeat when we needed our husband or dad. We did not use that option as often as we wanted to, as that was a time before Croatia joined the EU and international calls were quite expensive. As years passed, my dad made career

[1] Eng. "Good evening, may I speak with Congo? Thank you."

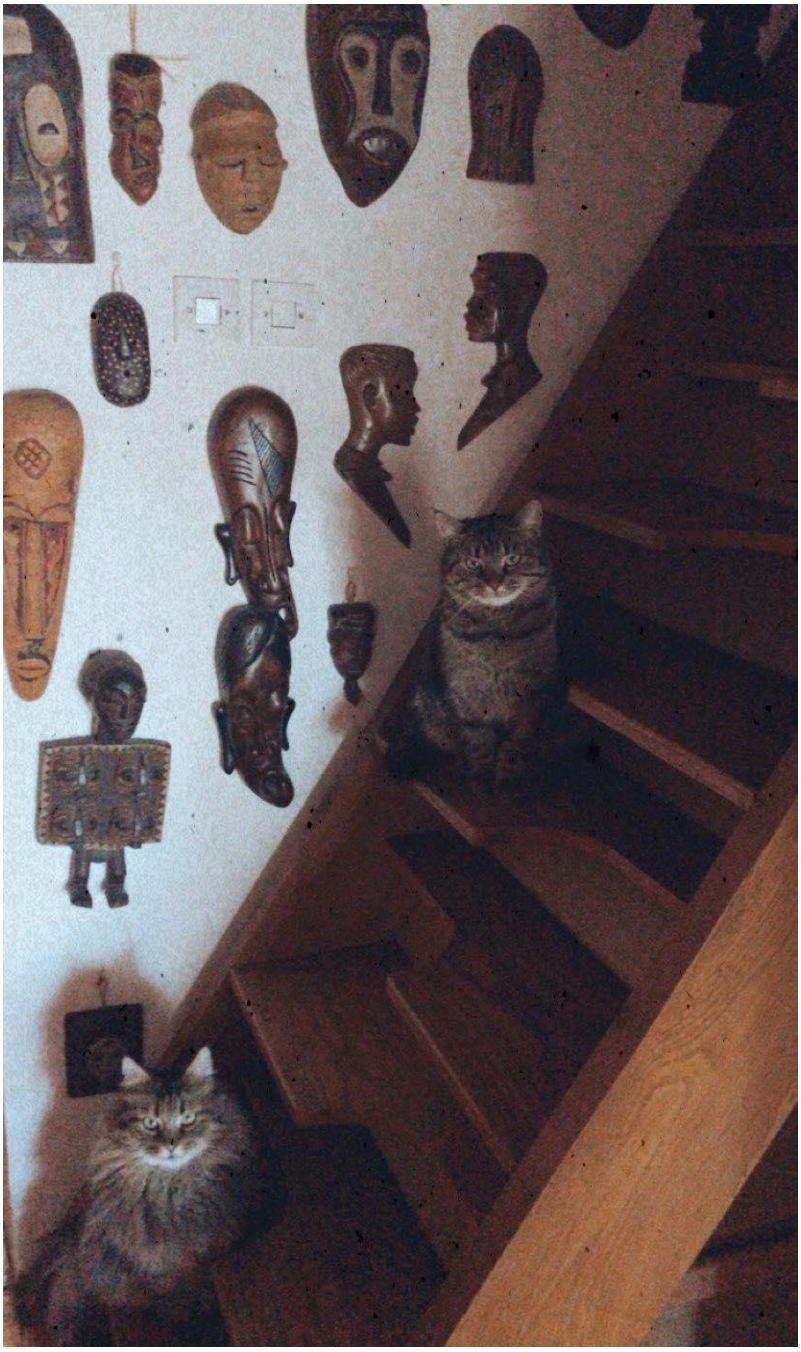

FIGURE 1 AFRICAN MASK WALL

progress that would eventually let him use the phone whenever he needed to, and the internet became available on both oil rigs and other locations he worked at. We created a family group chat, where we could now stay in touch daily and call each other whenever, from wherever, not bound to a landline-wired phone in a corner of our house. As I reached my late teenage years, I started to travel around Europe through the Erasmus+ programme and in 2017, I spent two months in India as an IAESTE[2] intern. During my time in India, my sister was in Spain on a trip and from that point on our group chat became a storage of many transnational and international engagements, with the four of us texting from four different parts of the world. As I moved to the UK, it became more difficult for me to see my dad as my home visits rarely coincided with his one-month leave at

[2] international organisation exchanging students for technical work experience abroad

home. It was the two of us now that spent most of our time abroad, with my mum and my sister back in Croatia, waiting for one of us to come back.

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This thesis explores the lives of young migrants in the UK, whose migratory circumstances are very much like the one described above. With family members and friends waiting for them at home, or others dispersed throughout the world, migrants navigate multiple transnational social fields while being in the UK themselves. Even though slightly different, Favell's (2008) 'Eurostars and Eurocities' have been largely influential for this study, showcasing multinational and multi-sited sample and fieldwork. Whilst Favell (2008) focused on European nationals solely, based in one of three European capitals (Brussels, Paris and Amsterdam), this study includes non-EU nationals as well therefore expanding the mobilities paradigm beyond the EU-centred domain. Even though I reached the UK thanks to Croatian accession to the EU in 2013, by looking around me I realised there are many individuals who moved to the UK alone via other immigration routes as well. Apart from our migratory circumstances, there was another thing my story had in common with most of my participants. We all came to the UK alone and young, with some of the participants coming to the UK to pursue their academic degrees, and some coming straight after finishing the degree in their home country. In that way, we all came to the UK at the very beginning of our adult life, and "[a]ge, in particular the age at migration, appears as a crucial factor shaping an immigrant's motivation for transnational involvement" (Schunck, 2011:267).

Furthermore, transnational involvement, as was described in my story above, is an almost inevitable part of today's migrants' lives. With the internet becoming largely available, and international communication cheaper than ever, most if not all migrants use it to stay in touch with their families and people 'left behind'. As Vertovec (2009:55) argues, "[w]hereas in previous eras migrants had to make do with exorbitantly expensive calls or slow-paced post, they are now able to communicate with their families abroad on a regular, if not day-to-day basis". My main interest was to explore the ways young and highly skilled migrants navigate transnational social

fields and establish attachments in such a context. After describing my personal investment into the topic, this chapter introduces research aims and questions, and outlines the structure of the thesis.

RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

This research aims to contribute to the growing literature on migrant belonging, and more specifically to offer a perspective on the way young migrants create attachments. It also contributes to a greater understanding of flows of migration that are not based on a single national or ethnic group of people. Influenced by my personal experience of moving alone, but also by the way my father's transnational experience changed my family, I wanted to shed light on young people who have moved alone to the UK while keeping one foot in their home country. The goal of this research was to understand their migratory experiences but first and foremost, I was interested to find out how they manage to balance both and ultimately, how growing up abroad affects their feelings of belonging.

Led by previously described curiosity and my personal migratory involvements, the overarching research question emerged from recognised gaps in the literature: *How do young migrants experience belonging in a transnational environment?.* This question was operationalised throughout the thesis by describing migrants' social networks, their motives to move to the UK, the way they perceive their home and feelings of belonging. The question had three sub-questions that helped define migrants' experiences in greater detail and provide more specific answers:

a) In what way do social relationships contribute to the feeling of belonging?
b) How do migrants experience home in a transnational context?
c) How does moving alone when young affect migrants' identities and their positioning in a transnational context?

This research aimed to offer a novel perspective on the way young and highly skilled migrants express their feelings of belonging in a transnational context. It reflects important thresholds in young migrants' lives: moving to the UK and growing up abroad. Ultimately, the goal was to explore the potential for liminal positioning, or any in-betweenness that comes as a result of moving alone and young. To do that, I largely relied on migrants' feelings and reflections, taking into account that belonging is a relational concept that is ultimately felt and construed individualistically.

THESIS STRUCTURE

This chapter presented the personal motivation for exploring the individual migration of young people and introduced research aims and questions. The next chapter will continue where this chapter left off, by situating this research contextually within the existing debates and by unpacking some of the terminology used in this thesis. *Chapter 3* develops the theoretical framework of this study and outlines the literature this thesis aims to contribute. With belonging being a very extensive term, the chapter further scrutinises what constitutes belonging in this thesis by outlining how identity, social networks and symbolic meanings of space affect our attachments. The first part of the chapter then recognises some of the gaps this thesis tried to fill. The chapter also introduces a theoretical framework, which is broadly described as a transnational one as it relies on ways of being and ways of belonging transnationally introduced by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004). It then also explains how other specific tools will be used to answer the research questions – social anchoring and embedding and the concept of liminality. The following chapter, *Chapter 4* outlines the epistemological and ontological standpoint of this study and discusses the research design and methodology implemented. Significant attention is paid towards the positionality of the researcher and reflexivity involved and consequent ethical issues that were born out of the process. *Chapter 5* largely builds on the contextual background described and outlined in *Chapter 2*, as it introduces the participants and the contexts of their move. *Chapters 6*, *7* and *8* are data chapters, and their structure largely follows the

structure of research questions and bodies of literature outlined in *Chapter 3* – the context and circumstances of participants' migration *(Chapter 5),* feelings of home and spatial/temporal representation of moving alone *(Chapter 6)* and finally, building on the previous two chapters, migrants' identity, belonging and navigating the space in-between *(Chapter 7)*. The final chapter, *Chapter 9*, summarises key findings and discusses their contribution to the existing literature and how these ultimately build into filling the knowledge gaps identified in *Chapter 3*. The chapter's original contribution to knowledge shows how feelings of belonging are not necessarily oriented towards a particular nation-state, and describes how growing up abroad has a vast potential to create a state of in-betweenness that relates both to 'here' and 'there'.

CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE SCENE: CONTEXTUALISING CONTEMPORARY YOUTH MIGRATION

INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen an increase in young migrants worldwide (King and Raghuram, 2013). This increase in numbers was then reflected in migration scholarship as well, with many authors switching the focus onto young and highly skilled migrants (see Hughes, 2022; Moroşanu et al., 2019; King et al., 2016; Lulle et al., 2018 among others). This research more specifically, comes at a time when labour markets go through constant change and precarity, migration regimes keep adjusting to those labour markets, and the world is still recovering from the impact of COVID-19.

This chapter serves to set out the current state of the art when it comes to youth migration. It sets out the context that enables and pushes young people to move, but also clarifies some of the terminology that will be used throughout this thesis, such as migration, mobility, highly skilled, and youth. All of these terms might seem simple or even trivial, but they come with heavy baggage, that this chapter aims to unpack – literally and metaphorically.

FROM MIGRATION TO MOBILITY AND BACK

Migratory movements in recent times are inextricably linked to the changing conditions of global capitalism (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994:22). Globalisation, broadly defined as the "widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary life" (Held et al., 1999:2), is seen as one of the main factors that contribute to "more countries to be crucially affected by migratory movements at the same time" (Castles and Miller,

2009:10). It has also caused acceleration of migration, differentiation of migration in terms of types of migrants, and politicisation of migration caused by bilateral and regional relationships of nation-states (Castles and Miller, 2009, also see Czaika and de Haas, 2014). It was then recognised how work, for example, is an important driver for migration, with more and more people in search of work opportunities that span beyond the border of a single nation-state. In addition, a growing number of people move for education purposes as well, many of whom intend to join the labour market in the destination state upon graduation (see Hatton and Williamson, 2005; Parutis, 2014).

The first question that arises is how to frame the young migrants of this thesis - through migration or mobility paradigm? As King et al. (2016:8) highlight too – the answer is both. Whilst young and highly skilled migrants are indeed considered highly mobile, this is ultimately a migration thesis due to the length of participants' stay in the UK, but also due to their various national backgrounds. In other words, all of them stayed in the UK longer than one year, and not all of them are EU citizens. In addition, political ideologies and the host society undeniably place them in the migrant category, highlighting their foreignness and questioning their ability to 'fit in'. These terms require thorough unpacking, as the subtle difference between them implies power imbalance, and raises questions about privilege and class.

Speaking strictly about geographical movements that involve the European continent, the usual distinction between migration and mobility is that "[i]nternational migration refers to movement from outside the EU by people who are not nationals of a member state [and] EU mobility refers to nationals of EU member states – exercising their rights of free movement as EU citizens" (Geddes et al., 2020:4). On a broader scale, and beyond the EU context, mobility in sociological literature often signifies the mere ability to move or relocate but also encompasses meaning beyond geographical mobility, such as social mobility for example (see Bourdieu, 1986), or existential mobility. King and Wood (2013:10) on the other hand, mention mobility as not so different from migration, but rather as a human geographical mobility, "because migration is essentially a mobile, 'narrativised' experience". Such context is also logical when observed from the opposite standpoint,

looking at those who are *immobile* or under conditions of restricted mobility. Immobility then is a lack of possibility to move and in the particular context of international movements, any person without a passport, citizenship or financial assets can be internationally immobile, and such cases are "more common for those bodies that are criminalised, displaced, and/or construed as a security threat to the state and its citizenry" (Cresswell, 2006 cited in Hyndman, 2012:248). From there, those who do have the possibility to move - are mobile. King and Wood (2013:111) for example mention how "[t]he Senegalese are also highly spatially mobile within Italy", highlighting how mobility might happen within the migration itself and includes all types of movements (Hyndman, 2012:248). Whilst within the EU, mobility reflects the free movement between the member states, it can also be connected to the ability to move as it assumes the preconditioned citizenship of one or more member states. On a different note, widely accepted definitions of migration and what constitutes a migrant have relied on temporal factors, with the United Nations defining a migrant as "a person who stays outside their usual country of residence for at least one year" (Koser, 2016:5), whereas mobility implies shorter time-frame and a high probability of return (King and Raghuram, 2013:129).

However, Beck (2008:21 cited in translation in Faist, 2013:1639) has warned that "the most important factor determining position in the hierarchies of inequality of the global age [...] is an opportunity for cross-border interaction and mobility". In that sense, migration implies that migrants stay and challenge the identity and unity of the receiving society, whereas mobility signals that people move on, either back to their home country or onwards to another one (King et al., 2016:9). Students for example, are often talked about in terms of youth-mobility, highly skilled and educated migrants are also considered highly mobile, whereas everyone else, especially low skilled movers are essentially considered migrants. Negative connotations surrounding the word migrant are present in the public discourse too – The Daily Express front page from 2014 titled "Migration is out of control – Outrage as another 201,000 are allowed in from the EU"[3] essentially describes people who

[3] Featured in Koser (2016:76)

come to the UK to look for work. Ironically, by moving to the UK those people would theoretically exercise their mobility rights within the EU free-movement zone. In that sense, highly skilled migrants are depicted as desirable and highly mobile, "who typically make individual decisions of migration to improve their professional career" and "other migrants [are] economically desperate and impoverished individuals exploited by powers of the capitalist neoliberal economy" (Kofman, 2007 cited in Nowicka, 2014:173). The desirability of highly skilled is consequently immensely connected to the conditions under which global knowledge and skills are embedded locally, and exercised through national visa systems that undeniably favour those who are educated and skilled in any way.

Furthermore, the emergence of a global labour market has resulted in a steep rise in secondary and tertiary education which ultimately reflects the prospects of rising skill aspirations and therefore competitiveness towards improved employment and life opportunities (Czaika, 2018; Nowicka, 2014). In relation to migration, Czaika (2018:3) recognised how tertiary-educated people have about three times higher emigration propensity than those who are less educated. Studying abroad has also been shown to result in higher chances of being a skilled migrant at a later stage (Vertovec, 2002:6). It comes as no surprise then that the numbers of international students worldwide have been rising four times faster than total international migration in the last few decades (IOM, 2008:205; King and Raghuram, 2013:127). Highly educated migrants are then almost automatically considered as highly mobile too, and the mobility gap between secondary and tertiary-educated people has been only widening. The gap can also be recognised in previously mentioned visa programmes, which are designed to attract highly educated migrants, interested in professional development, and often reflect the specific skill shortage in the destination country. In fact, the definition of skills within the British visa system has been redefined several times. In 2008 requirements for a Tier2 visa were equivalents of National Qualification 3 which corresponds to A-level education. In 2011 this was raised to a professional diploma and in 2013 to a graduate-level qualification (Mulvey and Davidson, 2019). In addition, the Post-Graduate Work visa gives international students permission to stay in the UK for at least two years after completing a course

in the UK, after which they are required to seek sponsorship to switch to Tier2 (www.gov.uk). For many parts of the world, being highly educated means it is easier to move across borders, and the demand for tertiary education professionals has only increased over the decades (Czaika, 2018:5). Universities are seen as the number one source of skilled migrants, especially among those who have completed a degree abroad or took part in a student exchange programme (Vertovec, 2002). International students then, are an inevitable part of exploring the link between highly skilled migration and youth mobility, as King et al. (2016) have recognised in the Horizon 2020 YMOBILITY project.

Consequently, those who are highly educated have often been considered highly skilled too, due to their high mobility and desirability within the international labour market. However, King et al. (2016) argue that the term 'highly skilled' is problematic as there is no agreement on what exactly qualifies a person or a migrant as either skilled, or highly skilled, and the term is often used synonymously with ability, competence, talent, or human capital (Nowicka, 2014:173). The term could at the same time reflect a possession of a university degree, extensive experience in the field, or income level (King et al., 2016:10), and therefore it would make more sense to emphasise 'learning ability' instead of a fixed and acquired skill. Moreover, as King and Salt (1997:287) argue, "being a graduate is not in itself sufficient to be regarded as highly skilled in labour market terms", and in the context of migration, it was long recognised that migrants' education levels are often not validated in the destination country. In other words, migrants' skills and knowledge acquired elsewhere can remain unrecognised in the host country, therefore pushing migrants into finding low-skilled work even though, theoretically, they may be categorised as highly skilled (see Nowicka's (2014) work on Polish graduates in the UK). Amelina (2018:55) has further noticed that women are more likely to be overqualified for their jobs than men, which together with the gender inequalities and being a non-national makes them 'triply-disadvantaged' (Piper, 2005:2). It is also worth noting that migrants often take jobs that native citizens will not take (Cohen and Sirkeci, 2011:78). Such conditions would then fail to recognise these migrants as highly skilled, but they could make progress through years by "earning employers' appreciation by showing strong work ethic and

the potential for learning new skills and thus moving to a better position in the labour market" (King et al., 2016:11). Moreover, circumstances like that could cause a 'status paradox', with migrants' social status in origin countries increasing due to the fact they moved, but their status in the destination countries decreasing as a result of down skilling or failed recognition of their knowledge and skills (Stock, 2023:2).

To further illustrate the mobility/migration inconsistencies, Czaika (2018:17) writes about the *mobility* of Indian scientists, mobility of physicians, and Moroşanu et al. (2021) write about low-skilled EU *migrants* in the UK. Such narratives reflect the inequality of contemporary international movements, where the words mobility and migration do not in fact reflect migrants' country of origin, but rather profession and class. Mobility of highly skilled people then, is encouraged by most governments, and "lower-skilled workers are often not officially welcome, even where there is strong employer demand" (Castles and Miller, 1998:xi). The term 'migrant' has, as Scheel and Tazzioli (2022) argue, become stigmatised, and whilst mobility is desired, migration "signals the need for control and in public discourse is often raced and classed" (Anderson, 2017:1532).

Academically, Urry's 'mobilities turn' recognises that "transcending geographical and often social distance; as well as the physical, corporeal travel of people, being 'on the move' has become a 'way of life' for many" (Urry, 2002:256; Urry, 2000: Ch. 3). Urry argues how the sociology of migration became too limited to address the newly emerging movement circumstances, and that mobility paradigm is "concerned with the flows of people within, but especially beyond, the territory of each society, and how these flows may relate to many different desires, for work, housing, leisure, religion, family relationships, criminal gain, asylum seeking and so on" (2000:3). Moreover, in denying the linear bipolarity of migration from one place to another with the purpose of staying indefinitely and recognising that some migrants "have multiple experiences of migration as well as settlement in several countries" (Faist et al., 2021:85-86), Engbersen and Snel (2013) coined the term 'liquid migration'. Inspired by the work of Bauman (2000) and liquid modernity, Engbersen and Snel (2013:31) noted how "[d]istinguishing different modes of

international migration gives us an instrument to analyse shifts in migration patterns and in the way migrants settle and survive in their respective countries of arrival". Liquid migration reflects "a gradual decline in permanent settlement and a consequent increase in temporary, at least as regards intention, migration" (Engbersen and Snel, 2013:26), highlighting the fragility, temporariness, and uncertainty of recent migration flows. Similarly, Vertovec argues that in Great Britain super-diversity as a new emerging phenomenon can be "distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade" (2007:1024).

Moreover, "the super-diversity concept might provide a chance to envision a kind of street level cosmopolitanism in which different cultures can be appreciated without making allegiance to one group mandatory" (Foner et al., 2019:6). Cosmopolitan belonging (Jones et al., 2014:5, also see Stevenson, 2016; Beck, 2011) here does not mean cosmopolitan in the same way as it is often understood, that of being 'citizen of the world', but rather highlighting "the realities of differential experiences of mobility, belonging and power, and of citizenship, for different people as they reside or travel through the world" (Jones et al., 2014:5). Cosmopolitan belonging here can also work as a way to take a step back from methodological nationalism (Jones et al., 2014), "in order to recognise that the nation state is rarely the most useful unit of analysis for understanding interconnected social processes" (Jones et al., 2014:5). In addition, as Delanty (2006:27) argues, there is a need for 'critical cosmopolitanism' of the 'cosmopolitan imagination' which occurs when and wherever new relations between self, other and world develop in moments of openness (Delanty, 2006 cited in Jones et al., 2014:6)

The new form of scattered, fragmented, often temporary and largely fluid conception of migration is reflected in migration laws as well, with many countries developing types of visas that offer only short-term or temporary employment possibilities. Among other anglophone countries, the UK has become one of the most desirable migration destinations in the past few decades. There were more than 9

million people in the United Kingdom who were born in a foreign country as of 2019 (Eurostat, 2020). Compared to data from 2006 used by Favell and Recchi (2011), the proportion of foreign-born residents in the UK has grown from 9.0 (% of the total population) to 14.2 in 2019 out of which 8.7 belong to non-EU-born residents[4]. However, the Home Office for a time had an explicit policy to intentionally break the link between migration and settlement (Sumption and Strain-Fajth, 2022), leaving "migrants with only short-term options" (Glick Schiller, 2010a:45). The British government, for example, introduced 'Youth Mobility Scheme' visa, among others, that allows young people to stay in the country for up to two years, and the job offered through the scheme must contribute towards "professional development" of the applicant (www.gov.uk). However, most temporary work visas (such as the Youth Mobility Scheme) do not lead to permanent residency, which forces most of the applicants to either move back to their home country or take part in onward migration, further contributing to diversifying migratory patterns. Moreover, such visas, even though highly desired among young professionals, do not allow for accompanying family members or any other types of dependants which enhances "individualised life strategies" (Engbernsen and Snel, 2013:35). Such strategies are seen as a result of "increasingly flexible global and local labour markets that have redefined employability, or […] a particular form of subjectification governed by neoliberalism" (Yoon, 2014:1015), and only reinforced by visa systems of many popular immigration destination countries.

Moreover, the types of visas that do offer permanent settlements, such is the Tier2 visa in the UK, make potential migrants meet several criteria such as minimum annual salary and sponsorship from a specific employer, which was heavily criticised at the time of implementing these conditions. Such visas make migrants bound to their employers, offer settlement options only after 5 years, and make it very difficult or even impossible for migrants to bring their family members. Since 2020, Brexit has also further reinforced the temporary nature of living in the UK, with EU nationals

[4] More recent data indicates further increase in total number of foreign-born residents in the UK, however due to Brexit, Eurostat's analysis of United Kingdom population stops in 2020. Moreover, 2021 census data by Office for National Statistics offers partial information, without overall insight on the total number of foreign-born nationals in the UK

having to apply to the so-called Settlement Scheme which initially allows them to stay in the UK for 5 years after which they can apply for indefinite leave to remain. The Settlement Scheme also prohibits any status holder from staying outside of the UK for more than 2 years in a row within those 5 years as the applicant risks losing the status altogether.

Previously described academic conceptualisations of contemporary moves also recognise how nowadays every move or potential settlement is "acknowledged as temporary 'until further notice'" (Bauman, 2000:82), and this claim is supported by official statistics. Current data from the Migration Observatory indicates that most non-EU migrants do not settle permanently in the UK and that non-EU migration has become more temporary since the 2000s (Sumption and Strain-Fajth, 2022). In addition, the Office for National Statistics (2023) indicates that approximately half a million people left the UK in the last few years[5], and it is further estimated that more than 50,000 EU nationals left the UK after Brexit.

This combination of global reconfigurations and transnational connections, concerning particular nation-state laws that support short-term stays, leaves migrants with new strategies for navigating life on the move and reinforces the temporal side of living abroad. Young migrants then, embody the spontaneous nature of contemporary moves abroad, and the 'migratory habitus of intentional unpredictability' (King, 2017:np). Ultimately, both the policies and literature note how such migration nowadays often includes young people, who leave their parents and friends behind to look for new opportunities for themselves. Their practices essentially mean 'growing up abroad' (Moroşanu et al., 2019) and create a completely new life-course stage, whilst simultaneously transitioning to adulthood and to a transnational way of life.

[5] These are experimental and estimated numbers of UK international migration that cover the period between 2018 and 2022, but only include the period since COVID-19 measures have eased

Youth migration recently captured the attention of many migration scholars (see Moroşanu et al. 2019 and King et al., 2016 among others), and as will be discussed in greater detail in *Chapter 4,* participants of this research are also described as young and highly skilled. Broadly speaking, youth here signifies younger-age migrants that usually include people aged between 16 and 35 (King et al., 2016). This category reflects those who either moved abroad for higher education (hereafter HE) purposes, therefore leaving their home in their teenage years, or for labour opportunities after graduating from a course in their home country and leaving home in their early twenties. However, whilst the general understanding of who is included by the term 'young' was accepted as those aged 16-35, the term is somewhat contested, as it should not be defined in relation to fixed chronological age, but rather as a "life-course category which is socially and culturally constructed" (King et al., 2016:9). In that sense, with acknowledging that chronological age is not the only or most salient criterion of adulthood, and that adult status requires sets of practical accomplishments and repertoires of behaviour, social markers of adulthood have been accepted as "nest-leaving, stable employment, marriage, parenthood, and financial independence" (Silva, 2013:29).

It is acknowledged that "research on transitions to adulthood has largely been in non-migration context" (Moroşanu et al., 2019:1556), and recent scholarship became interested in how migration impacts the transition to adulthood (see Moroşanu et al., 2019; King et al., 2016; Lulle and King, 2019). Whilst Lulle and King (2019:152) recognised that "youth trajectories and transitions become more complex with the addition of spatial mobility", Moroşanu et al. (2019) found that the relationship between the transition to adulthood and migration can be explained in two ways. Firstly, some young people rely on migration to delay their transition to adulthood. Examples include British youth who study and travel abroad to delay entering the labour market and moving away from their parents permanently (see Waters et al., 2011). This was specifically noticed within the context of the EU free-

movement, through Erasmus exchange programmes which offer HE students to spend a semester or a whole year abroad for either educational or skill-gaining reasons. Secondly, and more importantly for this research, migration is often used as a strategy to accomplish adulthood - instead of transitioning to adulthood gradually in their home country, young people decide to move abroad to accelerate adulthood. In that way, the emphasis on youth and youth transitions in this study is seen as a *process of becoming* (Worth, 2009) and youth, education, labour market and mobility are seen as inextricably interconnected, ultimately creating a more 'complex' outlook of contemporary movements.

Consequently, and taking a step back from geographical mobility, another body of literature has emerged that addresses the fact that a human is a moving being (Salazar, 2021) in combination with youth studies and life-course. Cohen (2020) and Salazar (2021) differentiate between existential and essential mobility in which the former reflects the quality of life and the feeling of getting ahead, whereas the latter reflects movements considered crucial in contemporary society, such as commuting for example. Existential mobility here presents the possibility of 'going somewhere', both geographically and in life, and the geographical move happens as an aftermath of imagining the existential one (Hage, 2009). Similarly, life course as opposed to life cycle, serves as an approach that highlights variations in the timing and sequencing of life events, mostly due to new opportunities as well (Geist and McManus, 2008:285). Combining the life course with existential mobility in order to understand the context in which young migrants of this research moved to the UK serves to see the move as voluntary, but still as a risky decision made in order to increase the quality of one's life. In that sense, by emphasising the notion of possibilities, we are also emphasising the '"forward moving' quality of living towards the future and finding meaningful projects there" (Todres and Galvin, 2010:3). Migration is therefore, as Olena Fedyuk (2011 cited in Pine, 2014:102) argues, a future oriented process that in the present extracts enormous personal cost. Moreover, while the near future becomes reinhabited by forms of punctuated time, more distant future such as the one we envision with the prospect of migration is a place of hope, dreams or intimations on some possible utopia (Guyer, 2007:210 cited in Pine, 2014:98). Following on that

thought and drawing back on the connection between geographical and existential mobility, Carling (2002:5) recognises how migration first involves a wish to migrate, and second, the realisation of this wish and he has called that model the 'aspiration/ability model'. The strength of the model lies in the fact that advances the traditional understanding of who migrates, but also places the involuntary immobility at the centre of the migration process. It also opens the possibility for the images of aspiration to be inadequate and for the "imaginaries of such movements [to] play out in uneven and even contradictory ways" (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013:194-5).

Still, there are several aspects of mobility left to consider. The first one reflects a generational shift which forces us to rethink the privilege associated with being mobile and the second one being the existential (im)mobility. Silva (2013:8) argues how "adulthood is being dramatically reimagined along lines of work, family, relationships, intimacy, gender, trust, and dignity". Similarly to Putnam (2000), Silva (2013) claims that young people nowadays are stuck in an unpromising present and wary of the future, drawing on the neoliberal shift previously described in this chapter. She calls the phenomenon a 'generational shift', with some trivial thresholds that mark the entering into adulthood such as buying homes or having and raising children not being as easily achievable and accessible as for previous generations. Traditional marriage now seems undesirable, she argues, in an insecure world where young people have to put themselves first to survive. The extension of socially constructed category of youth and delayed adulthood was also recognised by King et al. (2016:10), as a "result of external economic and cultural factors which are beyond the scope of individuals to control". The delay includes access to satisfactory work and income, the difficulty of getting on the property ladder, and therefore the generally delayed transition to the 'full adulthood' stage of career, property ownership, spouse/partner, and starting a family.

Forced to be flexible in the labour market, these people have become hardened outside of it (Silva, 2013:17) which resulted in remaking of the social class especially in relation to people on the move. Such shift has also left an impact on the very personhood of young people, where constant job and relationship insecurity results in constant reinvention of the self as well – as opposed to stoic, taciturn, deeply

gendered self of the past (Silva, 2013:18). Therefore, whilst the move of young people nowadays can be seen as voluntary, in order to increase the quality of one's life and one's earnings, Carling (2002:8) argues how "researchers within different disciplines have pointed out that there is no categorical analytical distinction between the 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration, since all migration involves both choices and constraints". In a parallel manner, Hage (2009:98) described 'voluntary' migration as "either an inability or an unwillingness to endure and 'wait out' a crisis of existential mobility", highlighting the decision-making process as well.

Consequently, we need to question Bauman's previously suggested division of movers where one group travels at will and enjoys their travel, while the second group often travels illegally and, if they are unlucky, can be arrested or deported (Bauman, 1999 cited in Nynäs, 2014: 157). Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013:189) have similarly postulated that there are "several different intersecting regimes of mobility that normalise the movements of some travellers while criminalising and entrapping the ventures of others". However, as Beck (2007) and Weiss (2005) point out, most theorists have identified social inequalities (including class) within the nation-state, whereas social positions "are also structured by spatial autonomy and the quality of the spaces to which (migrant) populations have access" (Weiss, 2005:708). In other words, we need to rethink the previous categorisations of privileged versus unwanted movers, together with understanding class as a very nation-state bound category of social stratification. Beck (2007) has argued that the notion of class takes on a completely different meaning in a world characterised by individualisation, for example. In a similar vein Silva (2013) describes the zeitgeist of our time as 'each man on its own', and Beck (2007:686) says now "there are numerous 'individualized class conflicts without classes', that is, a process in which the loss of significance of classes coincides with the categorical transformation and radicalization of social inequalities".

Consequently, the increased mobility and wish for a better life abroad have caused alternative understandings of migratory privilege, and transnational migration created its own status hierarchies in transnational social spaces (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Pries, 1999 cited in Weiss, 2005:709). Simply said, nation-states and their

associated values are best described by container concepts, whereas transnational social systems work as relational spaces, as will be further elaborated in the following chapter as well. In that sense, we are looking at production and reproduction of transnational spheres of activity and inequality (Mau 2007; Vertovec 2006), which are fundamentally different than previous conceptualisations of social inequality and privilege.

This is important for this project in two ways. Firstly, it puts the migrants of this research in a novel socio-economic category of those people who had both the aspiration and the ability to relocate. It also acknowledges the hardships and challenges they go through as mentioned above in relation to the delayed adulthood and mismatched migration aspirations and reality. Secondly, it gives a conceptual backdrop for the unique context of this research caused by COVID-19 during which time many people, including the participants of this research became involuntary immobile. Hage (2009) has described that sense of immobility as 'waiting out' and 'stuckedness', and Salazar (2021) has extensively written about involuntary immobility in relation to COVID-19. In each case, movement stands as an "existential cry against immobility" (Salazar, 2021:22).

In that sense, as migration has the ability to both amplify and alleviate growing economic insecurity that affects life course trajectories, recent findings indicate that social and economic mobility facilitated by migration is mediated by structures of inequality related to neoliberalism and affects mostly middle-class migrants (Stock, 2023). Whilst it is difficult to generalise and position the current generation of young and highly-skilled movers into a single class category, they can be broadly described as 'middling migrants'. Defined as mostly professionals and para-professionals, not 'high-flying' business migrants, they are usually the first generation of tertiary educated people emerging with the significant expansion of university education (Mar, 2005:367). Sometimes also called the 'mobile middle', 'mobile transnational professionals' or 'global middle class' (Jaskulowski and Pawlak, 2022), these migrants are broadly located in the middle class, however with the potential of upward social mobility due to their higher education degrees but also due the ability to transfer their

migration into a 'mobility capital' (see Stock, 2023; Weenink, 2008; Stock and Fröhlich, 2021). The nexus between social and geographical mobility, however, remains a complex one. Still, it is important to emphasise that young and highly skilled migrants often utilise migration as a strategy for not only economic but also social upward mobility and such movements "reproduce the global discourse of 'middle-classness' as intrinsically connected to modernity, autonomy and individual progress" (Stock, 2023:14). Their move essentially, is seen as an 'investment' that "produces benefits which will eventually outweigh the costs of the move" (Sjaastad, 1962 cited in King et al., 2016:6).

Finally, as Harvey (2006) and Stevenson (2016) recognise, neoliberalism has been recognised as the main reason for increased social inequality and international competitiveness of contemporary world. Literature warns, for example, that the individual migrant as we understand it within the neoliberal labour market paradigm, is traditionally assumed to be male – disembodied and disembedded from context such as familial or household relationships (Kofman, 2000:53). In that sense, female mobility is a relatively new and under-explored area of a more equal access to success. Kofman (2000) and Kofman and Raghuram (2006), however, have written extensively about feminisation of the labour market, and the expansion of skilled-migration beyond the male-centred domain. They have pointed out that "increasing number of women are migrating independently as skilled labour migrants and students or as principal applicants" (Kofman and Raghuram, 2006:296), and their professions go beyond caring and welfare. Interestingly, women today represent the majority of new migrants in and across Europe (Anthias et al., 2013:2), but they are still more dependent on their educational qualifications than migrant men who dominate newer and less regulated occupations such as IT and management (Kofman and Raghuram, 2006:296). Gender is however, intertwined with other social relations of power, and while the primary object of study here is not gender(ed) migration, this work unintentionally contributes towards fairer representation of women in recent migration flows and showcases the expansion of gender balance within skilled migration.

CONCLUSION

Describing the contextual background of this research has not been a simple task. Highly skilled, educated, transnational, young, mobile, and diverse – are all adjectives that can describe the participants of this research. This chapter tried to unpack these terms, as they are essentially loaded with different meanings and representations. The participants of this research may be depicted as an "entirely new breed of people, a transcontinental tribe of wanderers, the transit loungers, forever heading to the departure gate" (Iyer, n.d. cited in Urry, 2007:4), but their choices and decisions are ultimately affected by a global setting and grounded locally.

This chapter, therefore, served as a contextual stronghold for outlining the theoretical background in the following chapter, and ultimately to help situate the participants as a global and transnational middle class within a broader trend of youth and highly skilled migration.

CHAPTER 3: BELONGING UNPACKED

"Belonging, in its bareness, is about connection,

attachment, linkages, and relatedness.[6]

INTRODUCTION

Belonging has long been a point of interest for many areas of human expression. In philosophy, for example, Martin Heidegger dedicated his entire last public lecture, "The Principle of Identity" (1957) to different understandings of 'belonging together' (Griffiths, 2017). In art, the TATE museum created a podcast episode in which they gather the stories behind art and belonging, and explore various ways in which art can make us feel part of something (TATE, 2018). In social sciences, belonging reflects a wide variety of meanings and definitions. These definitions share a commonality in that belonging is always constructed in relation to something else - whether it is people we belong with, places where we belong, or the way we reflect upon our identities.

This chapter outlines theoretical debates that surround migrant belonging and introduces the theoretical framework which will allow me to explore the lives of young and highly skilled migrants in the UK. Consequently, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the theoretical premises of what it means, and who gets to belong, starting with defining belonging in its broad terms and examining its role within migratory movements. The first part is then followed by explaining in greater detail how belonging is understood within this research, by focusing on migrants' formation of identities, social relationships, and spatiality. The first part of the chapter concludes by recognising the gaps in literature that this thesis intends to fill. The second part introduces the theoretical framework used for analysing the data on young and highly skilled migrants in the UK. It starts with operationalising the

[6] Sadan and Pushpendra (2021:11)

transnational framework within the given context of this study and introducing three conceptual tools that will further help address migrants' experiences and belonging – social anchoring (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2018), embedding (Ryan and Mulholland, 2015) and liminality (van Gennep, 1960).

BELONGING AS ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY[7]?

Academic interest in what it means to belong increased significantly in the 2000s (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). Many authors explore different dimensions of the concept of belonging, and most agree it reflects a "broad variety of attachments to places, groups, and cultures" (Sicakkan and Lithman 2005 cited in Lähdesmäki et al., 2016:236). Belonging can be applied as both a theoretical and analytical tool and before utilising it in this research, it is important to address it theoretically first. Antonsich (2010:645) for example, focuses on two primary dimensions: "belonging as a personal, intimate feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness) and belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)" (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016:236). Yuval Davis (2006) also differentiates between belonging and the politics of belonging similarly, and other scholars (e.g. Bauböck, 2005; Jones and Krzyzanowski, 2008; Wodak and Krzyzanowski, 2008) "have distinguished between micro and macro structures of belonging" (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016:236) that largely reflect the difference between belonging and the politics of belonging. The difference here lies in the fact that the politics of belonging involve "not only constructions of boundaries, but also the inclusion or exclusion of particular people" (Yuval Davis, 2011:24) by those who have the power to do so. In the specific case of migrant belongings, power can likely be associated with the host society and is generally related to people's entitlement to belong, often based on race, gender, ethnicity, or religion. On the other hand, the personal aspect of belonging reflects

[7] Giddens (1984; 1991)

connections to locations, people's identifications and ultimately, emotional, and intimate attachments.

Before further exploration of migrant belonging, it is important to define belonging as a relational phenomenon. As Anthias (2016) argues, belonging is always related to something outside the self, whether related to place in both a symbolic and geographical sense or to the people we belong *with*. As discussed in the previous chapter, youth migration is increasingly characterised by individualism. One of the challenges within this thesis is to describe how belonging, an essentially relational concept, works in such a context. I argue that the two – the individualised character and the relational nature of the concept of belonging – are not mutually exclusive. Lähdesmäki et al. (2016:241) have also recognised that "[r]ethinking belonging in the context of increased levels of mobility has led researchers to discuss various forms of multiple belonging". Thus, to get a better insight into how individuals construct belonging, it is necessary to unravel the connection between the personal side of belonging and the politics of belonging in greater detail first.

Belonging in the migration scholarship has often been interpreted in relation to collective identities that are then supposedly "strengthened by dislocation from [migrants'] geographical place of origin, with diasporic communities frequently reinterpreting or even reinventing national traditions in a new setting" (Hesse, 2000 cited in Jones and Krzyzanowski, 2011:46). The phrase, 'migrant belonging', captures the simultaneous connection to both home and host country, of being inside and outside at the same time (Fortier, 2000:2), exemplifying how "new forms of attachment can replace or supplement other forms of attachment". In that sense, it is difficult to separate the personal side of the feeling of belonging and its political character, as migrants' feeling of belonging can indeed often be dictated by the politics involved. The way individuals position themselves and the way their belonging is constructed can be both internal (through our alignment with others) and external (by the dominant groups that act as gatekeepers and set criteria of what it takes to belong). In short, belonging can create an uneven, discriminatory, and paradoxical utilisation of the term. Belonging is seldom questioned among the majority population, i.e. the host-nationals, yet is forced upon immigrants and those who need

to *prove they belong* (Blachnicka-Ciacek et al., 2021:3807). Thus, the literature has recognised (see Sijstermans and Favero, 2022 for example) how migrants can be divided into two groups: the 'good' migrants or the 'bad' migrants, or in this specific discourse, those who deserve to belong and those who do not deserve to belong. Blachnicka-Ciacek et al. (2021) argue how participants in their research (Polish and Lithuanian immigrants in the UK) had the constant need to justify their presence in the country with almost deontological examples of 'good' and belonging-worthy practices, i.e. they have a job, they pay taxes, they do not claim benefits, do not commit crimes and are overall 'good' people. The need to prove the deservingness to belong is then connected to the imposed categories of political and ethnic boundaries, which authors highlight are not fixed. It is the 'unfixed-ness' that I aim to address in this thesis.

Migrants' experiences can reflect simultaneous otherness and belonging (Anthias, 2020), and the two are constantly interlaced. Correspondingly, I treat migrant belongings as a process and an outcome of boundary and border crossing and focus on the marks these leave on human experience and modes of identification (Anthias, 2020). Such a viewpoint allows to explore belonging as a dynamic process, which helps situate how and where migrants position themselves in relation to 'where they come from' and 'where they moved' (Jones and Krzyzanowski, 2011:39). This allows a focus on subjective perceptions of the phenomenon, as indicated earlier within the need to connect the individualisation of migration and belonging as a relational concept. Many authors have recognised that viewing belonging as a dynamic process then, often leads to discoveries of contradictory senses of belonging (May, 2011:370), liminality and ambiguity (Anthias, 2020:21), or even not belonging.

As belonging is here understood as a flexible and highly fluid phenomenon, not belonging does not necessarily imply undesirable or purely negative consequences. As our surroundings undergo changes, either spatial, cultural or relational, this is likely to cause a shift in the sense of belonging too. Not belonging can also reflect attachments on the margins or outside of dominant belonging, and can indeed be the case generally with migrant belongings. Belonging that does not 'fit' with a specific collective identity, as was described earlier in this section as the

main assumption of migrant belongings, can therefore also fit the description of not belonging. In that way, any deviation from a presupposed external sameness or belonging to a clear-cut entity can result in a contradictory sense of belonging. However, not belonging has the potential to encourage the exploration of new possibilities and to invoke people's extended reflexivity to take note of their surroundings and try to (re)position themselves within those surroundings. As Jones and Krzyzanowski (2008:46) argue, "new forms of attachment can replace or supplement other forms of attachment", and the concept of belonging has the analytical strength to take into account inherent fluidity and a subjective, individualised and highly selective construction of attachments.

Ultimately, to encapsulate the complex nature of migrant belonging, and to capture the simultaneous presence of both its political and personal side, but also to include the possibility of not belonging, this study broadly focuses on transnational belonging. Drawing on Dahinden (2009; 2012), such an approach allows to emphasise transnational subjectivity, and refers to "the cognitive classifications of a person's membership and belonging in a transnational space" (Dahinden, 2009:1367), or in other words, belonging both 'here' and 'there' or neither 'here' nor 'there'. Similarly, Jones and Krzyzanowski (2008) explore how individuals construct belonging through reflecting on attachments which can be flexible, fluid and plurilocal. Whilst transnationalism will be addressed in several other parts of this chapter too, transnational belonging here reflects the multiple attachments migrants might express, in terms of multiple spaces, people or even official memberships in the form of citizenship.

In addition, a transnational view of the concept of belonging introduces the temporal aspect into the field which further contributes to the unfixed-ness of migrant belonging. Lewis and May (2020:29) argue that belonging "is made up of different facets that are inextricably linked" and try to make sense of the "fluidity and dissonance of time as experienced in everyday life". In the specific context of migration, "the past, present and future rub up against each other at the moment mingling and combining with each other and giving each moment its distinctive hue" (Rahman, 2014:4). Belonging, here, acts as a type of relationship between these

temporal dimensions, marking connections to both past and present societies and environments of migrants and "allows us to […] examine how people engage with social structures in their everyday lives" (May, 2011:368). Such understanding of the concept strongly "demonstrate[s] that it is a fundamentally temporal experience, [yet] there has been little research to date on belonging as a temporal phenomenon" (Lewis and May, 2019:29).

In brief, viewing belonging as ontological security can easily be challenged. Combining the political and personal side of belonging, especially within individual-level data (Bertoli et al., 2013), opens a possibility of belonging as ontological *insecurity*. This work reflects the unfixed, individual, and deeply personal attachments migrants experience upon their move. At the same time, feeling (in)secure is highly dependent on the temporal and political factors, which position migrants between their past, present and future environments, further contributing towards the flexible and ever-changing nature of what it means to belong, and even not-belong. The next part of the chapter digs deeper into areas that contribute towards establishing the feeling of (not)belonging; namely identity, the symbolic and geographical attachment to space, and ultimately, relationships and connections migrants engage with.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BELONG?

As belonging is such a broad term, it is important to further elaborate how the concept will be firstly contextualised, and secondly, used within this thesis. As May (2011:368) argues, belonging is "a sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings", and as such will be interpreted here. This section begins by exploring how the identities of young, highly skilled migrants are constructed, understood and used within migration literature and in relation to belonging. Next, the importance and nature of (trans)national relationships within migratory environments will be introduced and finally, concepts of spatiality and home will be considered as major factors affecting people's feelings of comfort and familiarity.

IDENTITY

"One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs."[8]

As belonging is ultimately about subjectivity, it is important to address how migrants make sense of their status in relation to the receiving society. Therefore, the following part describes the construction of identities within international, and more importantly, increasingly diverse (Vertovec, 2007) environments.

To further emphasise the connection between identity and belonging, I draw on Fortier's (2000) description of the relationship between them, where identity is a momentary positionality, and it is included in the formation of belonging. I depart from Fortier's (2000) portrayal of the way identity bridges to migrant belongings where she focuses on institutional practices of belonging. My focus emphasises the individual narratives of identity formation, once again highlighting the individualised nature of contemporary movers. Unpacking the notion of identity here serves to further clarify the subjectivity involved in the formation of the feeling of belonging, and to portray the concept of identity from a constructivist stance.

Relying on the classical sociological definition of identity, which is described as "knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are" (Jenkins, 2008:5), summarises why identity theories are related to this project: to explore the extent in which migrants recognise who they are and knowing who others think they are and how it affects their belonging. Drawing back on belonging as inclusive of both personal and political aspects, identity, in my understanding, "bridges the gap between the 'inside' and the 'outside' - between the personal and the public worlds" (Hall, 1992b:276), becoming the so-called 'shifting' identity (Hall, 1992b). In simple words, by understanding what others think of us, and therefore including the politics of who 'deserves' to belong, and the potential of being othered by the majority population, we can connect the notion of identity with space

[8] Bauman (1996:19)

and people around us. Hall (1996:2) also agrees that the politics involved in identity formation is largely reducible to location. In that sense, this thesis tries to deconstruct migrant identities, which are both reflective and constitutive in a way that "is not individual or collective, but involves both, in an in-between perpetual state of 'becoming', in which processes of identity construction, authorisation and contestation take place" (Yuval-Davis, 2011:16). Migrants' identities include cultures and groups from the past (i.e. their home culture), and cultures that are foreign but included in the present (Barth, 1969:12). Migrants then, in a way, identify simultaneously through the diachronic axis, which opens the door to the potential in-betweenness and the way they are torn between past and future connections. However, Butler (1993) highlights that identity is built on excess as well as "there is always something left outside, once the boundaries of specific identities have been constructed" (Yuval-Davis, 2011:17), therefore opening a possibility of identifying only partially. By combining past and present, migrants "although still committed to their past and loyal to the home left behind", have the potential to succeed in creating a new home in an unfamiliar setting. Marschall (2017:214) similarly argues how a "journey back home can induce self-reflexivity and lead to deeply significant insights about identity and a shifting sense of self".

However, the constructivist stance on identities has faced certain criticisms. The debate arises when approaching the constructivist stance as an alternative to the essentialist one. In the context of migrant identities, the discourse often reflects the 'hard' dynamics of the term – national, ethnic or race identities, which are broadly deemed as essentialist characteristics of identity. In the attempt to 'soften' the term, the constructivist stance stipulates that identities are constructed, fluid and multiple, which Brubaker (2004:33) claims, can be challenged with the question - why should something 'multiple, fragmented and fluid' be conceptualised as 'identity' at all? Taking into account the criticisms of both essentialist and constructivist approaches to identity, I opt for the constructivist approach in the way that I consider belonging as a relational term regardless of the participants' individualised character. In other words, I do not wish to neglect the essentialist side of identity, as those can truly affect the way migrants see themselves, in the same way that the politics of belonging can

affect one's personal feeling of belonging. Wessendorf (2016:455) for example argues how the ability to go unnoticed in the streets can create a sort of freedom leading to a sense of belonging, and Anthias (2016) describes how racial and ethnic identities largely feed into potential othering and inequality of marginalised groups, which would then mirror the basic definition of identity – the way we see ourselves *and* the way others see us. In addition, the essentialist side of identities cannot be erased as it reflects "either a common origin, or a common structure of experience, or both" (Grossberg, 1996:89), reflecting the characteristics we inherit through our past.

The point that I wish to make is that the constructivist position on identities does not suggest that this model "defines a singular theoretical position or vocabulary" (Grossberg, 1996:90), nor are these positions in any way universal. Constructivist interpretation of identity does, however, reflect the needs of this research, and there are several other reasons for that. Firstly, the criticisms involved with the essentialist view seem to be much more rigorous than the ones related to the constructivist one. Amongst others, lies primarily the fact that "[n]ations and other kinds of belonging are constructed socially" (Strath, 2011:24), or as Anderson (2016) described national communities – *imagined communities*. The biggest issue Malešević (2006:25) recognises, is the fact that different societies perceive the concept of ethnic and national identity in different ways, and in addition, they are often perceived as static, whereas they actually comprise "an extremely dynamic set of relationships". Malešević (2006:24) argues how all three concepts – identity, ethnicity, and nation – are largely complex and "carry a lot of problematic baggage". Moreover, he says that whilst some authors do recognise the distinction between ethnic and national identity (e.g. Smith, 1999), many use the terms interchangeably (e.g. Cameron, 1999; Edensor, 2002). In addition to challenging uses of the term in the academic world, Vertovec (2023:184) warns how public understandings of identity are often posited around its 'singular affiliation' – a reduction of many facets and categories into one, whereas in reality, identities are much more complex and often misunderstood entities.

The use of identity in this work follows its conceptualisation in the post-traditional order of modernity (Giddens, 1991), where it becomes "a reflexively

organised endeavour" (Giddens, 1991:5). It gives way to the reflexivity of the self and gives agency to the subject to re-think, re-invent and re-question who they are. Moreover, the constructivist view matches the aim of this research to focus on individualised and subjective reflections on one's positioning. The essentialist conceptualisation of identities holds a groupist way of thinking, assuming races, nations and ethnic groups are bounded wholes (Brubaker, 2004). On the other hand, looking at the individual re-positioning of self, Hall's (1996) conceptualisation seems appropriate as he "moves the analytical focus from the group to the individual: the effective articulation of an identity requires subjects to 'invest in the position' allocated to them" (Karner, 2007:71). Additionally, Hall's (1996) insistence that individual's attachment to a subject position and summoning into place is only temporary, is in keeping with the fluid identities I want to focus on in this study. In other words, migrants' identities might be capable of readjusting over and over again. They alter their positioning over time, place and surroundings (see Eschbasch et al., 1998; Duncan and Trejo, 2005). The fact that we project 'ourselves' into these cultural identities, at the same time internalising their meanings and values, making them 'part of us', helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective 'places' we occupy in the social and cultural world (Hall, 1992b). The emotional charge that may come with various identifications, in the form of attachments (Jenkins, 2008:7), also makes a significant difference in the hierarchy of identifications and how strongly we feel about something we identify with.

Recently, transnational identities gained popularity as part of the fluid and flexible nature of identities described throughout this section. In that sense, transnationalism expanded its scope from signifying "cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social formations spanning nation-states" (Vertovec, 2009:2) to describing identities, relationships, spaces, and belonging. It further opened the potential for discussing multiple identities, "grounded both in their society of origin and in the host societies" (Glick Schiller et al., 1992:11) which makes viewing the identity discourse within this research through "complex strategies of cultural identification" (Bhabha, 1990:292). Dahinden (2012), for example, writes about transnational belonging as a form of non-ethnic identification, and Bradatan et

al. (2010) about transnationality as a fluid social identity. Such understanding of identity, and in relation to migrants' virtual communities they create through transnational relationships means "their physical locality can be irrelevant for their identity, as they continue to participate in the various dimensions of their home community, regardless of where they (or other people they grew up with) currently live" (Komito, 2011:1084).

Thus, the identities of young and highly skilled migrants in this research cannot be reducible to their national, ethnic or religious memberships. Identities are indeed, much more than that, and this part of the chapter argued in favour of its fluidity and flexibility, but more importantly, highlighted the reflexivity of the self and how migrants upon moving to the UK can have the option to re-invent themselves. Equally, as is the case with belonging, identities can be affected by politics with migrants potentially being othered by the host population, however, the focus will still be on migrants' interpretation of how they see themselves within new surroundings.

SPATIALITY OF MIGRATION AND FEELING 'AT HOME'

Questions in migration-related research often relate to home, as "home is the focal point of most people's lives, both physically and emotionally" (Woodward, 2007:155). According to Sarup (1994:94), home is often "associated with pleasant memories, intimate situations, a place of warmth and protective security amongst parents, brothers and sisters, loved people". Feminist scholars, such as Luce Irigaray and Iris Marion Young on the other hand, explain that "the comforts and supports of house and home historically come at women's expense" (Young, 2005:123). In the lives of young and highly skilled migrants, the story of home "is likely to be complex and multi-dimensional" (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002:8). It is unquestionable, however, that home is tied to forming an identity – "the story we tell of ourselves and which is also the story others tell of us" (Sarup, 1994:95).

More broadly, the story of home is related to the theory of space, as "[b]elonging can […] have both an emotional component of 'feeling at home' or 'yearning for a home', and a political element of claim-making for space and for recognition" (Bell, 1999; Miller, 2003; Scheibelhofer, 2007 cited in May 2011:369). More generally speaking, the boundaries that help define and locate belonging are often spatial and "relate to a specific locality/territoriality and not just to constructions of social collectivities" (Yuval-Davis, 2011:10) which makes spatiality inseparable from the rest of the theoretical background chapter. As Lähdesmäki et al. (2016:236) argue, "migration and mobility may create "multi-sited" spatial belonging", in a very similar way in which identities can be multiple and fragmented. In addition, the spatiality of belonging is related to temporality as well and therefore causes attachments to particular places depending on how much time a migrant has spent there. Consequently, temporality here connects previous place attachments and homes to current and future ones, leaving the phenomenon un-fixed in the same way it was previously described with identities. At the same time, there might be a breach "between home as a place of origin, home as a current domicile, and home as a personal sense of belonging" (Boccagni, 2022:590). A question then arises around how those constructed and sometimes abstract spaces and migrants' attachment to them work in relation to a geographical location. Pries and Seeliger (2012:226) explain that "[i]f one geographic space contains one social space and secondly, each social space requires one geo-space, then the underlying idea implies an understanding of space as passively framing social actions without being subject to social constructions and negotiations". Therefore, I suggest a relational approach to space, a combination of 'socio-geo-spaces', as "[t]he essentialist concept of spatiality presupposes an empty container of space, which can be filled in with different social content" (Amelina and Faist, 2012:1714) in the same way I opt for the constructivist view of identity. People's relationships to place are more complex than either 'rooted belonging' or 'rootless mobility' (Ahmed et al., 2003:3), encompassed by many factors that contribute to the ultimate feeling of belonging and this part of the chapter explains how and why.

It is vital to note that home is both a house and a symbolic place of comfort, however before explaining this in greater detail, it is also important to explain the difference between *a* space and *the* place. *A space* is usually defined as being 'undefined', and it includes areas, a distance between two things or points, or a temporal expanse (Augé, 1995). *The place* then, on the contrary, historically has a symbolic value, takes the sphere of every day, of real, of known. A place can be a safe haven from invasion/difference (Massey, 2005:6), or a space that has been made "cultural and intimate with an emphasis on inhabiting and feeling at home" (Low, 2016:21). In a relationship between place and space, Heidegger's notion of 'dwelling' plays an important role. Explained as a process of space domestication, dwelling creates place through "intentional modification of environment" (Low, 2017:17). Boccagni (2022) has also noted how home needs to be theorised as a verb and introduces homing as "the processual and often incomplete constitution of home" (2022:586). However, Boccagni (2022) notes that homing is not another synonym for homemaking, but rather it "captures the most intimate and existential meaning of home" (2022:590). Nevertheless, for many migrants, "material and imaginative geographies of home are both multiple and ambiguous" (Blunt and Dowling, 2006:202), revealing their commitment and feelings toward more than just one place, and their feelings and memories that shape both their homes and present lives. Home-building is here seen as a way of "building of the feeling of being 'at home'" (Hage, 1997) and can from that perspective be seen as "part of the migrant's settlement strategies rather than an attempt to escape the realities of the host country" (Hage, 1997). Consequently, this can be linked back to the fact that many young and highly skilled migrants move in order to accelerate the transition to adulthood, which in many cases includes creating one's own home and moving away from the parental home.

Construction of home is one of the central focus points within this research and there is a substantive relationship recognised between places and identity (Licari, 2001), therefore it is important to address home building through its spatiality, as home truly is a "peculiar kind of space" (Bonfanti et al., 2022:1). In other words, the discussions on place and space within this chapter fundamentally build on the

previously described relational nature of belonging and constructivist approach to identity. Simply said, along the identification process, "we mirror ourselves with our surroundings: we 'introject' the external environment into us, while we also 'project' or read ourselves onto the external world (Leach, 2002:288). Lastly, we go through a process of 'making sense of place, developing a feeling of belonging and eventually identifying with that place' (Leach, 2002:292), and in this process, we come to understand who we are, both as individuals and as a group of people" (May, 2011:371). About the connection between places and identity, Nora writes (1989) that what we see as 'places of memory' is essentially how we have changed, we see the image of what we are no longer. Drawing on a relational view of spatiality, I suggest that any space can become a place which is entwined with multiple symbolisms, but that in a moment of the move itself, a migrant is travelling from *the* place (something familiar) to *a* space (something unknown). In a sense, a migrant has the ability to transform a space into an anthropological place as "the transformation of spaces into places requires a conscious moment, which may subsequently be remembered as relatively routine" (Appadurai, 1995:213) which allows migrants multiple moves, multiple transformations of space into place, and ultimately multiple homes.

Still, failing to establish either one of previously mentioned connections to a place is also possible, as "[f]ailing to identify with a place can also have negative consequences, such as place- panic where 'we confront the imminent possibility of there being no place to be or to go', feel without place and estranged, and experience symptoms such as homesickness, disorientation, depression, desolation, or 'a sense of unbearable emptiness' (Casey, 1993:x cited in May, 2011:373). On how home is connected to migrants' identities, Blunt and Dowling (2006:256) write that home as a place and "as a spatial imaginary helps to constitute identity, whereby people's sense of themselves are related to and produced through lived and metaphorical experiences of home". Even more, home, as other material possessions and objects, can be seen as an 'extended self' and "very much part of people's sense of self" (Woodward, 2007:145). hooks (2009:2), among others, writes about the sense of homecoming, "a sense of being wedded to a place", but more specifically, how

connecting homeplace to belonging, “one feels a rightness, at-homeness, a knitting of self and world” (Sanders n.d. cited in hooks, 2009:68). As home is not only a house, and is (re)produced by migrants themselves, Boccagni and Duyvendak (2021) ask if home can be reflected in public spheres as well. Being abstract and multidimensional, “[a]s a social experience, home is based on a tentative and emplaced attribution of certain emotions to specific socio-spatial settings” (Boccagni and Duyvendak, 2021:np). Boccagni has previously also questioned the threshold between the private and the public (Boccagni and Brighenti, 2017), saying how “[t]he boundaries between what is public, communal and domestic are increasingly contested and yet remain a crucial issue, especially for minority groups such as immigrant and ethnic communities (Boccagni and Brighenti, 2017:1). Drawing on previously described politics of belonging, if encountered with othering or discrimination, the question on how the public influences the process of homing (Boccagni, 2017), remains present in this research as well.

However, as belonging is ultimately about “an emotional attachment, about ‘feeling at home’” and the complicated relationship between migrants and their homes is “held to be an almost quintessential characteristic of transnational migration” (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002:1), the dynamics of this relationship was challenged with the introduction of COVID-19 related measures. Since the Coronavirus pandemic occurred, access to the public sphere has become very limited and distorted which then raises the question of what happens with the perception of home since the boundary and the relationship between the two and the threshold upon which domesticity is constituted is complex. Place construction and home take on a completely different meaning in the context of a global pandemic and limitations to migrants’ movement. Home started to take the form of an office, a classroom, a gym and somewhere a form of a hospital. Unlike voluntary work from home, “there is an urgent policy need to investigate what effect enforced, (…) homeworking is having on productivity and the mental health of workers” (Reuschke and Felstead, 2020:211), or in this research, of migrants. In this type of circumstance, a place that once represented a safe haven now has the potential to become “like the lap of the possessive mother, a claustrophobic space and [to] lose[s] its homely character”

(Hage, 1997). The four feelings associated with the feeling of home, security, familiarity, community and a sense of possibility or hope (Hage, 1997) now become severely affected, or even completely questionable. In order for a home to keep its homely character, it has to offer opportunities for change and improvement (Lems, 2018). A homely space, ideally, should be open enough so its inhabitants can experience "the opportunity to develop certain capacities and skills, the opportunity of personal growth and more generally, the availability of opportunities for 'advancement' whether as upward social mobility, emotional growth, or in the form of accumulation of symbolic or monetary capital" (Hage, 1997:101). However, many of these opportunities were either reduced or completely impossible in the past year due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic.

Thus, it is important to recognise there has been a growing need within social sciences to "rethink the assumption that 'home', in migration, is simply something we 'leave behind'" (Ahmed et al., 2003:8). As Blunt and Dowling (2006:218) highlight, "other places are also made home as identities are made, re-made and negotiated". From that perspective, not all migration-related research should be based on the country of origin as the "primary site of identification for diasporic subjects" (Ahmed et al., 2003:8) and hostland as a set of new identifications that migrants need to engage with upon their arrival. It is important to mention that the affection towards home is closely related to its temporality and migrants' past, present and future. In that sense, home can be something from the past, causing nostalgia, something migrants build in the present and something they aspire to in the future. Also, at the same time, it is important to "emphasise that feeling 'at home' does not necessarily only generate positive and warm feelings" (Yuval-Davis, 2011:10). It is crucial to underline the key role of emotions in the construction of the perception of the world and senses of place (Massey, 1994), and it is, therefore, possible to feel at times, angry, resentful, ashamed, indignant within the sphere of home (Yuval-Davis, 2011:10). Once again, and bringing the temporal aspect into the picture, migrants might feel like they have not created a suitable home in the host country, but their childhood home might also not feel homely anymore due to their prolonged absence.

In such cases, home can become a negative experience, and remain an empty space surrounded by four walls without its homely and symbolic character.

(TRANS)NATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Many academic works emphasise the connection between the self, society, and the environment in which one habituates. As personal life is "lived in many different places and spaces [...] and it forms a range of connections" (Smart, 2007:29), it is important to acknowledge the different nature of these connections and understand their context. May (2011:363) for instance, "examines whether the concept of belonging can bring something new to sociologists' attempts to understand the link between the self and the social, in particular the effects of social change on ourselves". Within this chapter, the relationship between the self and society is examined in the opposite manner – the way relationships affect our way of belonging. Simmel (1950) and Elias (2001) "both proposed that because neither self nor society can be understood independently of each other, sociologists should be focusing on the relationship between them" (May, 2011:366). In that regard, relationships in migrants' lives can be divided into those across the border (transnational) and within the host country (national).

Relying temporarily on the nation-state frame to map out the types of relationships within the host country, or in this case, the UK, they can be co-national, host-national or multinational. According to Hendrickson et al. (2011) in their study on international students in Hawai'i, students who spent time with their fellow citizens were relatively uncomfortable with their social and physical environment (Pruitt, 1978). These friendships can also adversely affect language acquisition and have negative implications for adjustment (Maundeni, 2001). In Kim's (2001, cited in Hendrickson et al., 2011:282) cross-cultural adaptation theory she posits that "co-national contacts offer short-term support but hinder the long-term adaptation process". Many studies also show that even though international students' friendship

network mostly consists of their co-nationals, they prefer friendships with host-nationals (e.g. Hayes and Lin, 1994; Church, 1982), but "were disappointed and discouraged when their expectations of having local friendships were not met" (Hendrickson et al., 2011:283). Finally, many international students form multinational friendships, based on their common experience of being a stranger in a strange land, which helps establish the initial connection, and later on, a friendship (Hendrickson et al., 2011:283).

Alongside exploring migrants' newly established relationships in the host country, a growing interest in transnational relationships has been noticed in recent years (e.g. Christou and King 2010; Goulbourne et al. 2010; Mazzucato and Schans 2011). Such interest in transnational connections was backed by recognising how "migrants' life spaces […] involve more fragmented and plurilocally situated transnational networks, at least as long as migrants' significant others live far away" (Boccagni, 2010:4). Significant others therefore primarily include family members 'left behind' and childhood friendships, but can also reflect other types of relationships migrants maintain with their home countries. In Vertovec's (2009:67) words, "[migrants] have developed 'a dual frame of reference' through which they constantly compare their situation in their 'home' society to their situation in the 'host' society" (Zontini, 2015:328). The challenge then lies in how to explore such simultaneous relationships and how they affect the migrants themselves (Boccagni, 2010:4). Transnational relationships are therefore often characterised by "bridging-distance practices, e.g. phone calls, money transfers, Internet communication, travels back home" (Boccagni, 2016:7), that try to compensate the absence created by the migratory movement.

However, drawing back on the temporal dimension of establishing and maintaining relationships, many authors have noticed how childhood or youth friendships in the home country tend to fade over time (see Ryan and D'Angelo, 2018). Whilst at the very beginning of their transnational relationships, migrants regularly keep in touch with both friends and family, the more time passes, family relationships are maintained but friendships change as migrants' identifications do over time (Ryan and D'Angelo, 2018). That dynamic is also affected by previously described

relationships in the host country, as "actors are constantly seeking out new ties, and changing the nature of existing ones" (Borghatti et al., 2014 cited in Ryan and D'Angelo, 2018:156). It is important to underline how this shift in transnational friendships comes out of a combination of spatial and temporal progression but also the fact that migrants transition into adulthood in the host country and consequently have less in common with their peers who went through the process *back home*.

One of the factors that unquestionably changed the way scholars perceive transnational relationships, was the onset of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. As nation-states across the globe imposed movement restrictions, international travel became very difficult and in some cases impossible. Simola et al. (2022:46) recognised that the pandemic was a challenge for everyone, but it was recognised how those engaged in transnational interaction "have encountered particular kinds of difficulties". As international travel was not recommended, family visits from either end came to a halt, and questions of whether or not "virtual co-presence is sufficient for generating relational closeness" were raised (Urry, 2002 cited in Simola et al., 2022:47). Castells (2001:126), as one of the leading scholars on globalisation and network societies has long recognised that "geographical proximity in most countries no longer shapes social relationships". Keeping in touch with people across borders creates a potential for a so-called virtual community (Komito, 2011), due to the online nature of such connections. Keeping in touch with people online can contribute to the "annihilation of space" and "death of distance" (Cairncross, 1997 cited in Komito, 2011:1075), making people feel they can participate in both online and offline relationships equally, and be present in both places at the same time. However, Baldassar (2008:252) for example, argued that "longing, missing and nostalgia are best resolved through physical co-presence, actually being bodily present with the longed-for person or in the longed-for place", regardless of virtual connections but Simola et al. (2002) highlight how we still do not know what makes in-person encounters so important.

Consequently, not all types of relationships have equal strength. Within migration research, the usual emphasis is put "on the functions of social networks,

both channelling and adaptive" (Kindler, 2021:513). Kindler (2021:514) for example, combines research on migration and social networks, and in doing so she largely relies on Granovetter's (1973) theory of strong and weak ties. The strength of ties is therefore defined as a "combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy and the reciprocal services which characterise the tie" (Granovetter, 1973:1361). As migration represents an event that "ruptures social relationships and may force individuals (due to a change of residence) to restructure their social networks" (Kindler, 2021:514-515), the ties involved in a life of a migrant largely contribute to a sense of belonging. In that sense, and relating to the previous section, Komito (2011) suggests how strong ties are more connected to transnational relationships, whilst weak ties remain prevalent within host relationships.

Significant attention has also been paid to the role which ties have in migrants' lives. Many authors (e.g. Wegener, 1991; Sanders et al., 2002; Kindler, 2021) have since recognised how weak ties are somewhat more important in certain aspects of life, such as the process of finding a job. In relation to migration research, it was shown how the theory therefore applies more to highly skilled migrants than to the less highly skilled as weak ties "enable and facilitate their migration" (Gill and Bialski, 2011). Strong ties, on the other hand, act as a more personal resource often demonstrated through emotional support (Mulholland and Ryan, 2023). In exploring the meaning behind the relationships that migrants engage with, Putnam's work on bonding and bridging connections has proved to be very useful. Ryan (2011:710) summarised that both types: "bonding – 'ties to people who are like me in some important way' – and bridging – 'people who are unlike me in some important way' – have been taken up in many migration studies". In that sense, bonding ties can be somewhat similar to Granovetter's (1973) description of strong ties and bridging ties can be associated with weak ties. For instance, Bourdieu (1986:52) exemplifies how networking is "the product of endless effort required to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits". Moreover, he says how closed groups act as a non-penetrable social bubble, high in trust and reciprocity which also might result in exclusion and discrimination. Therefore, it can be concluded that not all ties are positive. Co-national relationships, for example,

might hold back expectations and patterns of behaviour from the host country therefore affecting the migrants' establishment in the host country and society whereas those in the host country can be equally hostile and critical (see Furnham, 1997).

However, many scholars have challenged the use of strong and weak ties within migration research, arguing that there are many other factors that affect the way migrants create relationships, such as "age and position in the life course of the migrants who are involved, as well as their intentions regarding their length of stay" (White and Ryan, 2008 cited in Gill and Bialski, 2011:243). Boyd (1989) also calls for "a more dynamic conception of migrant networks, discussing, for example, the influences over migrant networks during settlement and integration and emphasising how the 'network resources' available to migrants change with length of residency and how they also impact upon new cohorts of migrants" (Gill and Bialski, 2011:242). Portes (1995) similarly argues how networks are important, but notes there are "other costs of social interaction", and that "depending on the characteristics of their networks and their personal positions within them, individuals may be […] tightly bound by group-enforced expectations" (Portes, 1995:12).

Still, there are also scholars who were inspired by Granovetter and developed their own concepts building on the idea of strong and weak ties. Most notably, Mulholland and Ryan's (2015; 2023) work on social embedding builds on Granovetter's idea of 'embeddedness' (1985) which emphasises "that individuals' attempts at purposive economic behaviour are embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of relations" (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Ryan, 2022:np). In a call to create and apply a clearer concept to migration research, Ryan and Mulholland (2015) turned the noun, 'embeddedness' into the verb, 'embedding', which offers a different perspective of migrants' social ties, as a way of "capturing the complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional processes of belonging and attachments over time (Mulholland and Ryan, 2023:604). The concept allows us to explore the way social connections affect migrants' attachment and therefore embedding can be defined as "dynamic and contingent social practices through which migrants develop, maintain or

withdraw relations and attachments both in and across time and space" (Mulholland and Ryan, 2023:205). Moreover, in doing so, the. authors emphasise the complex and dynamic nature of social relationships involved in migrants' lives, arguing against the assumed static and fixed nature of strong and weak ties.

Interestingly, another concept has been used almost synonymously with embedding, even though its roots lie in the work of Bauman (1997). Social anchoring, created by Grzymała-Kazłowska (2013; 2016) serves as an alternative to social network theory as it reflects the 'links between individuals' (2016:1132). In addition, it "changes perspective from structural to the interaction and cognitive", by highlighting various footholds migrants create to establish stability and function both 'here' and 'there'. Most importantly, social anchoring focuses on the identity and adaptation of individuals, and - very relevant to this project – encompasses a broader transnational context through "capturing dynamics and complexity of adaptation, belonging and settling processes in the context of changing mobilities and increasingly fluid societies" (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Ryan, 2022:np). The conceptual strength of embedding and social anchoring will further be addressed in the second part of this chapter, together with its significance in relation to this project.

IDENTIFYING THE GAPS

The movement of young people across the globe has captured the attention of many migration scholars, many of whom have already been mentioned in this chapter. Nonetheless, certain areas of exploration have been overlooked that characterise highly skilled, individual, and transnational migration of the so-called mobile-middle, as the participants of this research will be defined in the following chapter. This section then, identifies the gaps in more detail and concerning several other aspects of contemporary migration research.

Generally, there is still relatively little attention paid to transnational youth as primary subjects of investigation, and to their own perceptions of their transnational positioning (Reynolds and Zontini, 2016). Current literature on the topic revolves around intra-EU mobilities, young migrants in the UK and mostly London (see King et al., 2016, Moroşanu et al., 2019). However, this work looks at youth as a broader category of people who utilise migration to facilitate adulthood and master the adaptation to a flexible and transnational post-modern and neoliberal labour market (Yoon, 2014). In that sense, this thesis builds on previous works on youth and highly skilled migration, however advances it through merging the mobility/migration discourse and through paying closer attention to the sense of belonging migrants might develop in the here and now.

More specifically, as belonging links the person with the social and spatial worlds, these connections can indeed occur on an individual level. Therefore, by looking at the politics of belonging, the complex, fluid and constructivist view of identities, and exploring in what way migrants establish attachments to both people and space, this work argues in favour of the individualistic construction of the feeling of belonging. Instead of expressing belonging to a group, or a nation-state, I argue that belonging is still highly relational to other individuals, various places and homes. Therefore, due to the transnational character of such migration, migrants' "identification processes may […] becom[e] bifocal or even 'hybridised'" (Boccagni, 2012:119), and I explore how migrants can, and if they can at all, express their belonging beyond the essentialist categories such as nation, ethnicity, or race. Due to the multiple and transnational social fields, "few of us feel a sense of belonging merely to one group, culture or place but rather experience multiple senses of belonging" (May, 2011:370), as was already mentioned above. Belonging is not a static state but a result of changing and dynamic practices and "our sense of belonging changes over time, partly in response to changes in our self" (May, 2011:372). In that way, as part of tying a person-centred approach to migration research, this work explores and questions in what way migrants create and express their belonging.

Additionally, and following the previous point, this work opens a possibility for not belonging which has been slightly neglected as compared to the concept of migrant belonging. Literature suggests that even though highly situational, multidimensional and a result of many dynamic processes, belonging should be a desirable outcome and tends to be interpreted as a somewhat naturalised part of everyday life (Yuval Davis, 2011). In that sense, those who do not establish that feeling may be marginalised, as May (2011) recognised, or generally, outside of dominant belonging (Probyn, 1996). Hence, this work leaves the possibility of not belonging, and more importantly, questions whether or not such an outcome is indeed a negative one. May (2011:373) has already recognised that "a sense of not belonging can open up new possibilities", or lead "to the development of new narratives of identity" and create a novel understanding of what it means to live in a transnational world. Therefore, the question arises; how can such belonging be explained and contextualised? As it has the potential to result in a certain type of 'in-betweenness', as "[i]n this conceptualisation, belongingness enables a researcher to see an individual in relational terms, without the burden of any fixity or pre-givenness" (Sadan and Pushpendra, 2021:12).

Finally, this study highlights the importance of the temporal aspect involved in migratory movements. May (2016:634) already argued that time is crucial to understand how belonging is construed, "yet there exists to date little research on belonging as a temporal phenomenon". She argues that by bringing temporality into the picture, and thereby viewing the past-present relationship through the homeland - hostland relationship, one can grasp the complexity of belonging within migratory contexts. By combining time and space as two abstract concepts that affect one's sense of self, May (2016:638) explores the effect these concepts have on individuals as "[a] self that remained unchanged through time would be an impossibility". In that way, May (2016:639) brings together "a sense of enduring belonging", and "other forms of temporal belonging that are experienced 'out of time'" that require "studying temporal selves through the lens of the duration of belonging". As it was also recognised that there is "insufficient theorisation of as well as empirical research on the temporality of belonging as experienced by individuals" (May, 2016:636), this

research builds on May's arguments in more than one way. As it was recognised that young and highly skilled migrants often move to accelerate the transition to adulthood, this work reflects on temporality in a way that pays significant attention to migrants' age and life-course. Moreover, as belonging usually reflects an attachment to place, this thesis asks what role time has in building a home, establishing new connections, and maintaining old ones, and more broadly, how the temporality of migratory projects shapes migrants' sense of belonging.

OPERATIONALISING MIGRANT (NON)BELONGING: A TRANSNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

This part of the chapter introduces the theoretical framework of this study, defining it broadly as a transnational one. Applying the transnational framework allows us to explore migrants' experiences in this study by taking into account their connections both here and there, and ultimately how it affects their belonging. As already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, transnational belonging also allows us to examine connections to both past and present societies and environments of migrants, and its ultimately temporal character. Moreover, this study implements two other conceptual tools to further investigate how migrant belonging is forged, and also to help address the gaps identified in the previous part of the chapter. Firstly, this study will utilise the joint use of social anchoring and embedding as analytical concepts to help frame migrants' simultaneous – either weak or strong – attachments to multiple social and geographical settings. Previously used mostly separately, Grzymała-Kazłowska and Ryan (2022:np) brought the two concepts together, as "both anchoring (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2013, 2016) and embedding (Mulholland and Ryan, 2023; Ryan and Mulholland, 2015) aim to capture the processuality and multi-dimensionality of migrants' belongings, social connections and attachments". Secondly, I introduce the concept of liminality as a tool to capture the fluidness of identity and new – partial or complete – formations of attachment in a transnational environment. In that sense, transnationalism as an overarching framework reflects

the spatiality of migratory movement and simultaneous connection to both 'here' and 'there'. Additionally, liminality in its conceptual sense helps reveal the temporal side of both migratory movements but also (non)belonging, which has often been overlooked when exploring the way migrants navigate new surroundings.

Transnationalism as a framework, largely resembles transnationalism as a phenomenon. Both reflect "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Basch et al., 1994:7). Furthermore, transnationalism as a framework allows us to look at migrants through those practices and helps understand potential outcomes of living 'dual' lives that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states. As such, a transnational framework allows us to "analyse the 'lived' and fluid experiences of individuals who act in ways that challenge our previous conflation of geographic space and social identity" (Basch et al., 1994:8). As this research exemplifies a bottom-up approach, one that tries to understand a wider context through small-scale interactions and individual experiences, transnationalism here acts as a lens through which these practices can be observed. In practice, that means that I will look at participants' lives both 'here' and 'there', the way they maintain and establish relationships both in the UK and their countries of origin, what they conceive of the word 'home' and where this places them as the protagonists of these cross-border connections that they themselves have forged. From this perspective, a transnational framework is largely flexible, as it allows for a multiplicity of experiences to come to the front, whether they reflect consistent national loyalties or various extents of disconnection from identifying with a nation-state.

Transnational framework then, brings "to light processes which are still poorly understood in the frame of traditional migration research" (Dahinden, 2017:1481, also see Faist et al., 2013 and Glick Schiller, 2015). In that sense, by looking beyond national containers, transnationalism sheds light on the plethora of networks and traces that migrants leave behind, even if they do not necessarily stay in touch with their home country. To clarify, I understand transnationalism as a 'snail trail' – wherever they go, migrants leave something behind. Be it connections which they establish in the host country and then engage in another migratory journey or return

migration or be it the mere fact they contributed towards diversification of their chosen host country. The fact they moved, establishes a connection between two or more nation-states and builds towards understanding transnationalism as a perspective through which complex new possibilities of migrants' everyday lives can be explored.

To further strengthen the use of the transnational framework of this particular study and to help determine the 'snail trail' that the participants of this research created, I rely on two specific domains of transnational activities that I will utilise as tools: transnational social spaces and ways of being and ways of belonging. Transnational social spaces allow researchers to "study various social processes that contribute to place-making practices, identities, representations and imaginaries" (Glick Schiller, 2012b:25). In that way, whilst transnational social spaces have been previously described in this chapter as a result of cross-border social connections which contribute to forming a sense of belonging, in terms of an overarching framework, the relationships migrants tell me about, those meaningful and less relevant, will add a social dimension to establishing their own positioning and belonging. The use of this narrative will further contribute towards questioning whether all transnational ties are indeed strong ones, or whether they will fade with time, and consequently leave the door open for host-national ties to take the role of emotional and personal support.

Similarly, ways of being and ways of belonging help researchers to more specifically look for and analyse different spheres of transnational practices. Ways of being "refers to the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in rather than to the identities associated with their actions" (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1010). Such fields include institutions, organisations, and experiences that migrants interact with, "but not identify with any label or cultural politics associated with that field" (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1010). On the contrary, ways of belonging "refers to practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group. These actions are not symbolic but concrete, visible actions that mark belonging" (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004:1010).

Observing expressible and vivid ways of being and ways of belonging among young and highly skilled migrants also contributes to grasping the way they connect and experience transnational social fields. Utilising ways of being and ways of belonging might help understand which practices that migrants engage with contribute towards their transnational positioning, and which practices are not as meaningful in terms of their sense of belonging. The nature of ways of being and ways of belonging then "may be better understood by focusing on the relationship between the actors, their relative social location, and their available and realisable resources" (Ryan, 2011:707), and in this work, I want to explore the extent both ways of being and ways of belonging affect one's positioning in a transnational context. However, to successfully utilise transnationalism in a way that will result in a deeper understanding of migrant (non)belonging, several other concepts will be used to strengthen the analytical toolbox of this research – social anchoring, embedding and the concept of liminality.

Embedding and social anchoring have been grounded empirically by combining the life-course perspective, issues of identity and security and migrants' complex networks among European migrants in the UK. Embedding, developed and introduced by Ryan and Mulholland in 2015 as a new way to understand "dynamic and differentiated processes of migrant belonging, identifications and attachments in particular places and over time" (2015:602), came to life as an alternative to the concept of integration. Similarly, addressing the increasing and intensifying diversity in Europe accompanied by transnational flows, but also the inadequate use of the concept of integration in such contexts, Grzymała-Kazłowska (2016) suggested an alternative based on the metaphor of an anchor. The proposed term was social anchoring, and it bypasses the problematics involved with integration by adopting the subjective, but relational approach to attachments migrants form upon the move.

Before delving deeper into the utilisation of these two terms within this research, the problematic nature of integration needs to be addressed, as it seems right to unpack its meaning before offering alternatives. In short, the concept of integration has been the most prominent idea and most adequate term used in discussions on migrants' adjustment and settlement in Europe (Castles et al. 2002;

Favell 2001) which focuses on the participation of immigrants in the life of a receiving society (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Phillimore, 2018:181). However, the biggest issue that renders the current use of integration as a concept lies in its assumption of integrated social and coherent cultural systems into which migrants can and should adapt. Authors of embedding and social anchoring recognise several further issues associated with that assumption: firstly, receiving societies are becoming more and more diverse (Vertovec, 2007), and secondly, integration fails to recognise that not all migrants settle permanently and they maintain a close connection to more than just one country (Faist, 2000; Vertovec, 2010). So instead of measuring migrants' ability to 'fit in' by "getting in synch with the rhythm of the nation" (Favell, 2008:136), embedding and social anchoring pay attention to more subjective ways in which migrants can express and feel their belonging, through moving beyond the rather oversimplistic and normative notion of integration (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Ryan, 2022:np).

More specifically, embedding focuses on individual biographies that reveal the dynamism and interplay of spatial and temporal dimensions of migrants' lives. In relation to this research, which explores young and highly skilled migrants in the UK, and where belonging is understood as highly relational but ultimately subjective, time and space will play an immensely important role in constructing the feeling of belonging. Coming to the UK young, at the beginning of their adult lives and establishing their own space likely for the very first time, Ryan and Mullholand's (2015:6) work will serve as the epitome in understanding the "the process through which [migrants] connect to and interact with a multiplicity of social, economic and political structures through various social relationships/social networks".

Similarly, social anchoring also recognises the intricate connection between subjective/internal and objective/external dimensions of belonging. Briefly, social anchoring "focuses on ways in which the individual establishes and maintains different life footholds" (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2016:1132), but also allows the capture of flexibility and changes in those footholds. With heightened uncertainty of contemporary moves and increased probability of further or return migration,

Grzymała-Kazłowska (2016:1133) recognises how "contemporary individuals are seen as avoiding life-time commitments and limitations while trying to keep various possibilities open", in the same way prolongation of youth and delayed adulthood was described in *Chapter 2*. In this sense, social anchoring embraces multiple attachments of contemporary transnational migrants as well as their intentional unpredictability and fluidity.

Whilst these two concepts have been explored separately, in their recent work, Grzyamala-Kazlowska and Ryan (2022) use the concepts together to demonstrate how they complement one another, but also how their simultaneous use enriches the study's analytical toolbox by offering similar, but ultimately different perspectives. The main difference between social anchoring and embedding lies in the fact that "anchoring highlights the issues of safety and stability, focuses on the migrant agential activity of establishing them and points to particular anchors that are used" (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Ryan, 2022:np). The concept of embedding on the other hand, "emphasises the contexts and contingencies of where and how migrants establish different degrees of attachment in different structural settings" (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Ryan, 2022:np), including labour markets, the complicated notion of politics of belonging and interpersonal relationships. In this sense, utilising both concepts in this research will largely follow Grzymała-Kazłowska and Ryan's (2022) work, by exploring migrants' various and multidimensional anchors which consequently enable them a sense of security. Through these anchors, they can then become embedded into a setting, either here, or there, or transnationally. However, the main strength of the simultaneous use of these concepts is recognising that some anchors might be stronger than others, therefore resulting in either deep or shallow embedding as well. The type of anchor will also play a role in potential embedding, as different spheres of life such as work, friends, family, or even a house or home - lead to differentiated levels of embedding. The fact that these concepts particularly envision the notion of time in their analysis is of extreme importance for this work, as the dynamism involved allows us to explore and unfold the changing contexts of young migrants' lives.

On a similar note, as belonging also emerges in relational terms and is viewed in a subjective and individualised perspective in this case, there is a need for another specific tool which allows to describe and analyse the notion under a transnational scope. Even though the theoretical side of the concept was previously addressed in this chapter, it is important to emphasise once again that belonging has many dimensions. Tied inextricably to identity, belonging is about both formal and informal experiences, a sense of inclusion and exclusion, and identifications migrants establish with both places and people. As a relational term, it reflects the multiplicity of "experiences of being part of the social fabric and the ways in which social bonds and ties are manifested in practices, experiences and emotions of inclusion" (Anthias, 2008:8). In addition, keeping in mind the transnational lens and network spider-web that migrants themselves have knitted, belonging here is understood as an intersubjective relationship that one creates with themselves and the landscape which they live in. Therefore, there is also a need for a tool which offers such a fluid explanation of migrant belongings. In this research, I suggest the notion of rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960) as a concept that allows us to explore the constitutive potency of both geographical and symbolic locations of belonging, and migrants' new and old formations of attachments, whether permanent or momentary.

As an anthropological term, liminality reflects rites of passage, those that have clear-cut thresholds and distinct starting and ending points. Van Gennep (1960), as one of the first authors to recognise the importance of in-between moments, singled out *rites of passage* as a special category, consisting of three sub-categories, namely *rites of separation*, *transition rites*, and *rites of incorporation*. Van Gennep also called the middle stage in a rite of passage a *liminal period* (1960), as the key in-between moment before adjusting to the new outcome. One of the main examples used in literature is the one about growing up – when a child enters puberty and after a few months (or years) of transitioning through puberty becomes an adult, in which the period of puberty could be called a liminal period. One is not a child anymore, but not an adult yet either. Turner (1970), who then further contributed to its academic conceptualisation, realised that liminality serves not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand the human reactions to liminal

experiences: the way in which personality was shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes-dramatic tying together of thought and experience (Thomassen 2014:87). Turner (1970) then recognised that van Gennep's approach can help make sense of his data and utilised his work as a conceptual and analytical framework to understand religious practices of Ndembu rituals. Again, liminality was a target of many contrasting views. Even though it might seem like an adaptable and flexible concept to explain many ephemeral phenomena, its most commonly addressed flaw is that it explains nothing at all (Thomassen, 2014). That is why the following section represents a "contingent discussion of what liminality is" (Downey et al., 2016:14) and how it is understood within this framework.

The concept was already previously tailored to suit the needs of migration research: Clopot (2016) for example, applies liminality in her research on old believers in Romania, and to describe their in-between identities. More recently, Genova and Zontini (2020) applied liminality to describe Italian and Bulgarian migrants in the post-Brexit UK, more specifically their state of in-betweenness and period of uncertainty followed by the vote to leave the EU. I find all these examples helpful to conceptualise rites of passage within this study. By combining all of them, and taking something from each, I highlight the possibility of in-between identities, temporal characteristics of migrant belonging, and the continuous presence of transnational interactions.

In summary, Van Gennep (1960) emphasises rites of passage as reflecting the potency of the plurilocal and complex nature of migrant belongings. In simple terms, it could be argued that migrants initiate the rite of separation by leaving their country of origin. They then enter the liminal stage of establishing new social connections and creating a new home in the host country, simultaneously maintaining the connection with their previous places of settlement and home countries. However, that leads me to question whether they ever truly enter rites of incorporation. Moreover, participants of this study can be said to initiate the rite of separation in yet another way. As described in the previous chapter, young and highly skilled migrants often choose migration to accelerate the transition to adulthood. In a slightly different manner to the previously described liminal period of puberty, the transition to

adulthood here represents a life-course stage characterised by education to employment transition, moving away from parents and formation of a family.

In this sense, rites of passage in this study serve as a tool to explore the unique situation of complex thresholds – moving to the UK and coming of age. Previously described as a 'process of becoming', the transition to adulthood in relation to migratory trajectories creates multiple latitudes of migrant positionings and might leave the participants feeling in-between in several ways. Concerning the transnational framework, rites of passage, and liminality more specifically can address both the nearness and distance migrants experience at the same time, to both their host country and home country (Simmel, 2008). Simmel (2008:312) conceptualised the unity of nearness and remoteness in the phenomenon of the Stranger: "the distance within this relation indicates that one who is close by is remote, but his strangeness indicates that one who is remote is near". Being physically close to their host country can cause symbolic distance from it, through othering or politics of belonging involved. In the same way, the symbolic closeness they might feel with their home country can often be challenging due to the geographical distance to it.

Likewise, Lähdesmäki et al (2016:237) argue that belonging is never a coherent experience, but "a complex, multiple, and partial, fragmented or segmented relationship", and highlight its temporal, processual, situational, and constructed nature. As previously described, multiple and transnational belonging and identities necessitate situational choices. In certain situations, migrants might invoke certain aspects of their identities, depending on which side of the border they find themselves in. In that sense, as Vertovec (2023:192) argues, an individual stands at a point at which many groups intersect and questions how to incorporate all of these positionings and identities into the sense of self. Probyn (1996:19) for example, explains this by saying that individuals are in such situations caught within wanting to belong and wanting to become, a process that then resembles constant yearning or longing, as opposed to reaching a stable state. This juxtaposition of migrants, between nearness and distance, and multiple sides of identities they navigate, has the potential to cause a certain tension and can be described through liminality. The concept helps

understand both multiple and fragmented belonging, but most importantly, it is a suitable tool to address (non)belonging. As belonging was already a point of interest of many migration scholars as previously said in this chapter, non-belonging also needs to be looked at as a plausible possibility for many migrants. The potential of not belonging neither 'here' nor 'there' unlocks a period of liminality, uncertainty and contingency. Once again, I draw on Simmel (2008:315) and his depiction of the Stranger – "[i]n spite of being inorganically appended to it, the stranger is yet an organic member of the group". Even though they are simultaneously distant and near, being inorganically appended reflects the symbolic distance. On the other hand, being an organic member means that all migrants are physically part of the society they moved into, yet migrants are in one way or another left in-between.

I suggest that in-betweenness as an individual migrant experience, and rites of passage as a useful conceptual lens, support us to better understand migrant belonging. Keeping in mind the transnational framework, rites of passage serve as an analytical lens to describe those complexities, under the scope of the transnational paradigm. By leaving, migrants of this study start the rites of separation after which the liminal period and potential rites of incorporation begin. Liminality then serves to analyse how migrants encounter these thresholds, and in Turner's (1970) words, to understand how personality, identity and belonging are shaped by these rites of passage.

CONCLUSION

Researching young and highly skilled migrants of various origins, based in multiple localities within the UK, required in-depth critical engagement with several bodies of literature that encompass migrant belongings. Starting with a broad definition of what it means to belong, this chapter aimed to demonstrate the current state of the art through a critical overview of relevant literature, but also potentially overlooked aspects of belonging transnationally. In that sense, the first part of the chapter

discussed belonging through both its personal and political lens, and further focused on the social worlds with which migrants engage, both nationally and transnationally. Furthermore, migrants' identities were introduced from both a constructivist and fragmented stance. This chapter argues that transnational practices and belonging can be grounded spatially and in order to do that "locality needs to be further conceptualised" (Smith and Guarnizo, 2006:11). This chapter has therefore critically addressed the construction of places and spaces, and exploration of the boundaries of 'home'.

Whilst migration scholarship has already addressed many of the areas discussed in this chapter, Anthias (2009:7) argues much of the works are still "seeing the processes purely in terms of those encountered in the country of settlement, and other influences linked to what has been accumulated in *the past* in their countries of origin. The continuing interaction and relations to these are either simply missing or under-explored" (Anthias, 2009:7). Therefore, the novelty of this study has been summarised in several points: (1) The study bridges scholarship on individualised practices and relational epistemological positions, by implying that belonging is ultimately a relational phenomenon, and its relation can be expressed beyond essentialist, clear-cut identity categories. (2) Building on the previous point, this study explores the possibility of non-belonging which was previously slightly neglected in researching migrants' connections post-move, and (3) does not neglect the temporal factor and age in construing the feeling of belonging.

In a bid to reflect migrants' multiple and complex positionings and attachments, this study utilises a transnational framework "that moves beyond the national-container model of society by studying transnational networks, connections, and social spaces of 'in-betweenness' that migrants forge by living 'here' and 'there'" (Scheel and Tazzioli, 2022:3). The framework is further bolstered with concepts of social anchoring, embedding and liminality as useful tools to explore the in-betweenness and increasingly individualised character of recent migration flows.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers both the theoretical influences and the empirical experience of fieldwork that shaped this project. Methodology here, "refers to a package of theory, method and other design elements for doing research" (Braun and Clarke, 2022:4). The methodology of this project encompasses several disciplinary influences, most notably from sociology, anthropology and human geography. This chapter, therefore, starts with explaining the research design, followed by defining the methodology of this project in greater detail and describing the methods used. Further on, it considers ethical challenges, sampling and recruiting of participants and post-collection processes of transcription and data analysis. A significant part of this chapter is dedicated towards reflexivity and the way it influenced my relationship with the data collected, as fieldwork tasks often "require substantial personal involvement" (Gill and Temple, 2014:2). It is important to highlight as well, that methods used in this project changed and evolved together with the growth of this research project but also with me as a researcher.

RESEARCH DESIGN

It is important to situate this project's stance within the broader debate on the philosophy of science. This project follows a qualitative set of practices that are embedded within the interpretivist school of thought. Interpretivism, and qualitative research as such, rely on "how people interpret the world around them" (May, 2001:14). Qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011:3). Ontologically speaking, this research can be

broadly described as relativist, highlighting that reality is a subjective experience. As such, this research recognises that "reality is human experience and human experience is reality" and there are as many different realities as there are people (Levers, 2013:np).

Epistemologically, this project is understood to be grounded within the feminist school of thought and more specifically within the works of Rose (1997), Haraway (1988) and Harding (1991). Being characterised mainly by 'situated knowledge', feminist epistemology claims that "positioning is the key practice in grounding knowledge" (Haraway, 1988:587). Due to the way I have recognised myself as an insider within this research, feminist epistemology helped to recognise the part I played in fieldwork as both a researcher and being researched. In other words, as the 'insider' status is "usually associated with researchers who are seen to be members of the same social group or category as those whom they study" (Moroşanu, 2015:np), this 'bias' has the potential to produce a partial, if not distorted picture of migrants' lives and experiences (Moroşanu, 2015). Haraway, however, highlights that it is exactly "partiality and not universality [which] is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (1988:589).

Another reason for grounding this work within feminist epistemology lies in a feeling of 'methodological failure'. As it will be explained towards the end of this chapter, fieldwork left a heavy emotional toll on me and I often felt I could be doing more in terms of reflecting on the data collected, and how I am connected to it. Wolf (1996:1) has warned that "the power dimension is threaded throughout the fieldwork and post-fieldwork process and has created a major identity crisis for many feminist researchers". Indeed, as this chapter will later show, the post-fieldwork process proved to be more difficult than the fieldwork, and Rose (1997:306) argues that failure to produce a particular sort of reflexivity - such was my case - is bound to result in a new type of knowledge. In that sense, my relationship with the participants and my connection to the data collected is ultimately grounded in feminist epistemology which argues for an approach that focuses on process (Gorelick, 1991:461 cited in Wolf, 1996:5). Moreover, the subjectivity and intimacy of migratory movements are at the forefront of this thesis, and feminist epistemology has long accentuated the

importance of understanding the production of knowledge as "limited, specific and partial" (Rose, 1997:307, see also Haraway, 1991 and Harding, 1991) as opposed to universally applicable knowledge. A feminist approach to knowledge has proven useful in understanding migrants' relation to space and consequently, its relation to identity as well, as it introduces the possibility of identifying against a place and not identifying at all (see Rose, 1995). Rose's (2016) and Haraway's (1991) work has also been influential in operationalising visual methods in this work, as they both aim to understand how social relations produce and can be reproduced by different forms of visuality and therefore help us interpret particular social phenomena.

METHODOLOGY EXPLAINED

This project was originally designed as ethnographic research comprised of semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation method and participant observation. The plan was to meet with the participants twice in order to gather in-depth information about them and establish rapport. However, following the start of the pandemic, I redesigned the previously planned in-person data collection. My initial reaction was to keep the planned methods but to move them online, however, due to the limitations brought by an online setting the methods conducted were semi-structured ethnographic interviews with a counter-mapping prompt and photo-elicitation method. Semi-structured interviews were the first method I had identified when I started designing my research project as the method "provide[s] an opportunity for truly private discussions that can reveal beliefs and opinions difficult to access otherwise" (Boellstorff et al., 2012:91). Semi-structured interviews seemed like an appropriate method as they allow a more flexible data collection and I wanted to go into depth about participants' migratory experience, in order to completely understand the paths they were and are still going through regarding moving out of their home country and settling in the UK. The idea of introducing mapping to my research came as perceptions of place, home and generic spatial experience

sometimes cannot be explained through interview questions. Through counter-mapping as part of the interview, participants had an opportunity to visually display what feelings, words or even concepts are connected to which place or maybe space. Photo-elicitation method, on the other hand, was used to highlight the materiality of migration and potentially expose the emotions and attachments migrants have towards different objects. Instead of meeting with the participants in person twice, we met only once through an online platform and the photographs were exchanged via email after the interview. Thus, this research is broadly defined as qualitative as it brings together a variety of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary methods from sociology, anthropology and human geography (Crang and Cook, 2007:vii). It does so by drawing on several types of ethnographic methods, taken from visual ethnography (Pink, 2007; 2013), virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000; Boellstorff et al., 2012), and reflexive ethnography (Aull Davies, 2002; Rose, 1997). The methods and their utilisation will be further explained in detail later on in the chapter.

Moreover, instead of taking that design change as a disadvantage, I decided to view different aspects of online interviews in order to make the most out of it. As Salmons (2016:62) noticed, by being in their home environments, relaxed, at their computers, "participants may be more willing to discuss sensitive or personal matters, such as emotions, addictions, sexuality, or disorders that are hard to reveal in person" which is of extreme importance in my research as I wanted for participants to express their feelings and thoughts about their migration and integration experience. In that sense, whilst there was an obvious limitation in collecting the data online as there was the absence of physical 'meet&greet' and observation of both surroundings and behaviour, there was a good side to it. Meeting participants online meant fewer ethical challenges as I did not enter into anyone's home physically, I did not make anyone leave the comfort of their home and there was no awkwardness that comes with the concept of hosting such as offerings and gifting. In fact, face-to-face interviews can be indeed perceived as intrusive and reactive (Russell Bernard, 2006:257). In addition, as most human interaction was switched to an online setting at the time of my fieldwork, including lectures and supervisions, working from home

etc., using technology has now become part of everyday lives and using online programmes to speak to strangers might not be as strange as before.

I also found these new circumstances to be an opportunity to expand my recruitment of participants throughout the UK. I was aiming to explore transnational spaces that mostly take place in an online setting as "the everyday lives of many individuals more often than not transcend the geographical locations in which classical fieldwork [takes] place, challenging ethnographers to include these social spaces in the demarcation of their fieldwork sites" (Boccagni and Schrooten, 2018:210) which created a good rationale and a solid theoretical background for me to take part and observe such activity through the same medium. Boccagni (2016:2) also advised that in order to do fieldwork in a transnational context, we need a 'relational approach to spatiality' (Amelina and Faist, 2012) effective through alternative forms of contact such as the online space or a transnational social space even. In that sense, this research slightly resembles Marcus' (1995) conceptualisation of multi-sited ethnography, where "[t]he object of study is ultimately mobile and multiply situated, so any ethnography of such an object will have a comparative dimension that is integral to it, in the form of juxtapositions of phenomena that conventionally have appeared to be (or conceptually have been kept) 'worlds apart'" (Marcus, 1995:102). Doing fieldwork online enabled me to connect and combine stories and narratives of migrants who were scattered all over the UK, and their experiences might have previously been perceived as 'worlds apart' and theorised locally or based on their national or ethnic backgrounds. This way, taking a relational approach to space and doing fieldwork online brought these worlds closer together and allowed for the production of a new type of situated knowledge (Rose, 1997).

Subsequently added methods (photo-elicitation method and counter-mapping) also had no obstacles in being conducted online, with participants sharing photographs they took through email, and me sharing my screen when necessary. At this point, it is also appropriate to address the practicalities of my fieldwork. I started the recruitment process in November 2020, by sending messages and emails to my initial contacts for the snowball method and publishing the leaflet on my social media

accounts. The first two interviews took place on 1st December 2020 and the final, 27th interview was conducted on 20th September 2021. All but one took place using MS Teams, and one was being held through Skype for Business.

CONDUCTING FIELDWORK ONLINE: A REVIEW

There are several generic issues addressed by Boellstorff et al. (2012) that impose potential problems in doing online data collection. One of them is the importance of a good internet connection, as trivial as it may seem. Conducting fieldwork from a small country town in Croatia brought certain doubts when it came to internet connection. During one of the interviews, there was a storm followed by ice pellets falling on my roof so loudly that it could be heard in the recording. At that point, I did not want to interrupt the interview, but I kindly asked the participant if they could hear the storm upon which they said they could. I then explained that there was a possibility of the connection being broken and I apologised in advance should such a thing happen. Luckily, I managed to carry out the interview to completion, however, each and every other interview conducted in Croatia came with a dose of uncertainty and a weak internet connection.

Another issue that has to do with conducting fieldwork online is preparing the work environment in order to make the interview and the rest of the fieldwork activities as comfortable as possible. Also due to the fact that most of the fieldwork was conducted in Croatia, where I live with my family, preparing the work environment had its limits. There were situations where I could not anticipate the dog barking in the background, or the mailman knocking at the door, which then my mum handled with utmost respect towards my work obligations and interview schedule. Of course, the pandemic did not hit only Croatia, which made it very easy to mitigate such disturbances during the interview, if and when such occurred. As a lot of people started working from home, mailman at the door and dog barking became parts of everyday lives which were met with understanding and sometimes even, laughter:

- “I have to apologise, that's my dog because there's a mailman at the door and my mum's just opening.”

- “Every dog gets excited at a mailman, that's completely normal!” - Viktorija

However, these small disturbances made all the difference when relistening to recording and creating transcriptions, as that part of my research took part upon my return to the UK. As it will be explained later on, being in the UK and listening to recordings that were made while I was ‘stuck’ in Croatia had an immense emotional toll that was also connected to my insider status within the research. Such geographical relocations, which I would not usually notice as flights and going back and forth become something completely usual within migrants’ lives, were now changed due to the pandemic and embodied in the recordings I made which ultimately had an impact on my wellbeing.

Finally, there was a subtle, but significant connection between conducting fieldwork online at home, and the well-being of the researcher. Boellstorff et al. (2012:76) highlight how fieldwork, when done in person, includes travelling to remote locations and “calls for a change in geolocation” (Chacko, 2004:53). Such fieldwork is usually detached from everyday tasks and responsibilities, as ‘entering’ and ‘leaving’ a field are valid occurrences connected to data collection. Even if there is a physical field that is distinct from a personal geographical location such as home, “field and home [may] have significant areas of overlap, [and] the situation acquires greater complexity” and “researchers may be torn between private and research personas as they move from one setting to the other (Narayan, 1993; Lal, 1996; Nagar, 2002 cited in Chacko, 2004:53).

Therefore, when conducting fieldwork from one’s own home and online, there is no place to ‘enter’ or ‘leave’. Conducting interviews from my bedroom in Croatia, as other rooms were usually occupied by other members of my household, meant

there was little or no boundary between my PhD and my personal life. I could not leave the physical site, as once the conversation had ended, the only way I could 'leave' the field was by turning off my laptop, which I needed and used for personal purposes as well. From this standpoint, I can see the impact of carrying the fieldwork with me much clearer than I was able to see it during 'being in the field'. As Efrat Ben Ze'ev said in her presentation during a conference in Birmingham (2022), we tend to focus on our participants and momentarily neglect the impact research has on us as researchers. That is something that requires further attention within the academic community, as it has the potential to affect the researcher's well-being, especially after sensitive and emotional encounters with participants. One way to mitigate such distress might be to have a separate room in which the researcher is then able to physically exit and close the door behind, symbolically leaving the field in that room and going back to everyday activities.

UTILISING THE METHODS

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews are often described as being open-ended and allowing a dose of flexibility to cover a list of topics (Russell Bernard, 2006:210) whilst having a scheduled activity and following previously prepared questions. The questions I prepared roughly reflected themes that emerged during the literature review, as I wanted to explore the congruence between what I read and what I wanted to find out.

However, interviews are a two-way affair (Boellstorf et al., 2012: 98) and depending on the position we are taking during the interviewing process, there is a chance of us researchers being questioned by the participants. I would always give participants a chance to ask if there is something they do not understand research-wise and with time I started experimenting with opening up which led to participants asking questions about the personal side of me such as my migratory experience or

my career plans. I would always start an interview with 'do you have any questions about the interview or the research and you taking part in it?', which was usually met with a negative reply, however, there were a few participants that after the end of the interview asked to know more about me. These participants were mostly those with whom I had not had previous personal contact but were recruited through either social media or a mutual friend. Nikola, a friend of a friend who moved from Belgrade to London and with whom I held an interview in Serbo-Croatian asked:

> "I wanted to ask you, speaking of which, and sorry as it's not me interviewing, it's you, but what are your plans regarding England? How long do you have left until you finish your PhD, what are your plans afterwards?" (my translation)

Encouraged by my supervisors as well, every following interview I would insert a personal comment or share a piece of information related to my experience of migrating to the UK, which made my participants more open and relaxed. With time, I was able to lead the interview from a conversational perspective and I would subtly let my participants know I can empathise and understand what they are talking about as I have potentially been through the same situation or experienced a similar turn of events.

Another thing that affected the way participants felt during the interview was the fact that for most of them, this was probably the first time being interviewed for a research purpose. Whilst some of the participants had previous encounters with social science research, e.g., doing a Master's that involved empirical data, or even a social science PhD as was the case with very few of my participants, most of them did not know what was it that I 'want to hear' or 'how much information is too much information'. I have indeed been asked a few times if the answer provided suffices my research's needs, as "[w]hen informants are interviewed for the first time, they may not understand our desire to get to the bottom of things, and that we are prepared

to listen patiently for as long as needed" (Boellstorff et al., 2012:96). Aneta, a participant from Czech Republic added upon her response to a question: "Sorry, I'm going off the topic maybe", and Manuela, a Colombian participant said: "I'm so sorry, that should be the longest response that you have for that [question]". It is interesting that both participants also felt the need to apologise, which can be traced back to the authoritative nature of *conducting* an interview. However, in both cases, I found the information provided to be useful and interesting, as it provided a narrative background that contributed to creating a fuller story about the person I was talking to.

Interviews were almost always pleasant, with participants mostly thanking me for the opportunity to have this conversation. They found it to be liberating, sometimes even thought of it as a form of therapy, whilst at the same time I felt grateful for them taking the time to talk to me. The fact that interviews took place online was beneficial here, as I always scheduled the interviews according to participants' availability and preference. That sometimes included having interviews late in the evening (especially as I was conducting most of the fieldwork from Croatia, which is one time-zone ahead of the UK, UTC+1), or during weekends, but it is common that "virtual world activity takes place outside regular work hours" (Boellstorff et al., 2012:72).

I had not anticipated that the questions created would impose any kind of emotional burden on either participants or me, however, a few of the questions made participants increasingly emotional or nostalgic, with one participant crying during the interview. In order to mitigate the impact the interview was having on the participant, I did not want to change the topic, but rather acknowledge the emotions they were going through by emphasising how I could understand why they felt that way as I could empathise with the answer provided by the participant. At the same time, whilst acknowledging my participant's emotions, and explaining the difficulties I had in relation to being a migrant, I was trying to control my emotions as I too was on the verge of crying. In that sense, I felt the responsibility not to break so I could support my participants in whatever way they needed with integrity. Responsibility and integrity in the research process can be linked back to feminist epistemology defined

at the beginning of this chapter, as “we need to recognise and take into account the understandings generated by people […] and the authority that comes from the experience of having studied something […] and paid attention to the reflections of others” (Sprague and Kobrinowicz, 2006:39). Nevertheless, that participant described their interview experience as positive, and added this after I shared how I felt:

> “It actually, it's good, it made me put some feelings in[to] words and realise certain things, you know. Therapy. I feel like you were just talking directly from my heart, you know. Like this is how I feel and it's, it's good to also see that there are people feeling like this and it's okay to feel like that.”

Contrary to that example, there is another possibility of not being able to empathise with a participant to a certain level. With one of the participants, the question I asked was being misunderstood and therefore created a reaction from a participant that was very straightforward and said: “I know what you’re asking, but I think that kind of question is wrong.” At that point, I disagreed with the participant on both personal and professional levels. The question that caused the disagreement was ‘Do you think it’s hard to become friends with British people’ and it was a follow-up question after the participant had said that their friends in the UK were mostly international. As a researcher, I believed the question was appropriate as I wanted to understand the context of their networks in the UK, and from a personal point of view, I wanted to engage in a discussion to justify the rationale behind that question and to show disagreement with them. However, similarly to the previously mentioned situation, as a researcher, I felt the responsibility to neutralise the situation in order to finish the interview and I wanted the encounter to be left on a positive note which is why I listened to the participant as they went on to explain why one of my questions is ‘wrong’. It was important to remember at that moment what is the purpose of the meeting, and to “ensur[e] that time spent in the setting is productive in relation to the research project’s aims and objectives” (Gill and Temple, 2014:2). As with the

previous example, I had acknowledged that opinion, made no comments even though from a personal perspective I wanted to, and continued with the next question.

The interview, it can be concluded then, as a method provides equal opportunities of being fruitful whether conducted online or offline. People can express their opinions and feelings both online and offline as I have demonstrated through the previous two examples. There are certain challenges that online interviewing brings, as was previously explained and will be addressed further in the chapter. Even though "interviewing has been a primary means through which ethnographic researchers have attempted to get to grips with the contexts and contents of different people's everyday" lives (Crang and Cook, 2007:60), the method is not substantial for ethnography if standing alone. Bolstered with other methods, usually participant observation, or types of visual methods, as was the case with my research, creates a comprehensive set of data that support and complete each other.

COUNTER-MAPPING: VISUALISING THE VOICE

Counter-mapping, as an alternative to more traditional forms of mapping, "has the potential to create […] representations of territory and the practices in it. It is an approach that challenges the normalization of spatial knowledge and aims to focus on processes, as well as on the experiences of groups" and individuals (Campos-Delgado 2018:490). On the other hand, counter-mapping can be seen as a form of cognitive mapping or even mental mapping (Campos-Delgado, 2017) which is traditionally used in psychology. However, combining the disciplines and methods can be transformed into a sociologically applicable qualitative method or in this case an activity conducted during the interview, seeing counter-mapping as a psychosocial approach to the study of spatial representations (e.g. Alba and Foner, 2015; Ben-Ze'ev, 2015; Gieseking, 2013). Taking into account that "[b]orders are far more than just physical demarcations, more than lines represented on the maps" (Campos-Delgado,

2017:184), I wanted to explore how can those borders be represented in a way that does not include a physical line on the geographical map.

The activity took place during the semi-structured interview, and unlike the photo-elicitation method, which was introduced towards the end of the meeting, I brought counter-mapping forward at the beginning of the interview, after I had asked a few initial questions. Participants were introduced to two, or more (according to their previous migration experience) word boxes which had the name of their country of origin, the UK and potentially a third country they resided in. They were asked to think of a few words that they can associate with those countries, relating to their feelings, memories and experiences. I shared my screen with them and carried out the task following their verbal instructions and explanations. The words/feelings they thought of were then dragged into each of the possible boxes, with participants explaining why they put that word in that specific box. I have highlighted that not every box needs to contain an equal number of words, as I was going for associations that first come to their minds when they think about the UK or their country of origin.

This approach gives a chance for the participants to think of words and concepts themselves and to explain the relationship they have with countries involved in their own words or feelings. It was therefore interesting to see the ratio of the words used in each box, the connotation they brought, and the way participants talked about placing those words in boxes.

FIGURE 2 COUNTER-MAP EXAMPLE

Even during the activity, I noticed several patterns occurred when participants started to name the words for each box. The reaction to the method was mostly positive, with participants being surprised and caught unprepared. Soon they started to think of a few basic words and concepts such as family, work, and friends. The more time passed, the more words came to their minds, sometimes calling for my intervention to say they did not need to think about more words and that we already had enough. The first thing that I noticed is that the words in the UK box were on average more aspiration-related and rational, and the box associated with their home countries revealed more personal words and feelings that were also slightly more negative on average when compared to the UK word box.

Lastly, it is important to think about these boxes in a methodologically de-nationalist or even a transnational way. The countries and the boxes represent both *here* and *there*, and not a juxtaposition of nation-states participants came from or moved to. In that way, all home-country boxes are analytically on the same level and present a constructed spatio-temporal category. In other words, regardless of what country migrants are talking about, their value will be interpreted through the words associated with them, and not their historical and cultural characteristics. The boxes act as a container for a cognitive activity that resembles an association game more than a geographical border-map. Moreover, by creating a space in-between this prompt resonates with the theoretical framework brought by the previous chapter, in which liminality plays a pivotal role in exploring the potential for non-belonging. This way, the abstract thresholds of in-betweenness in their anthropological sense get their tangible counterparts and a place where participants can locate the ambiguity of their migratory experiences. In that sense, the prompt is highly replicable as it can be applied in various social contexts and geographical locations. It has the potential to give a better understanding of what it means to live a transnational life, but what is more important, of individual migratory experiences.

PHOTO-ELICITATION METHOD

As it is often the job of qualitative researchers to interpret other people's stories, sometimes it is hard to say whose story is it (MacDougall, 1991). One way of letting individuals 'speak for themselves' is to include their quotes and their words in the research report or thesis (Robinson, 1998), but including visual narratives as part of the methodology puts the ownership back into participants' hands. Using photography and other visual methods can help researchers understand and learn about the informant's view of reality (Pink, 2007:11). That way, implementing visual methods can be seen as another way of viewing reality and encountering the collected data through different mediums but also, different sensory systems (Pink, 2015). Whilst interviews rely on auditory sense, even after they are transcribed as they are inevitably verbal in their original form, visual methods offer non-verbal, visual stimuli that require a different type of approach, and inevitably analysis. Drawing back on ethnography being a holistic experience, visual methods bring a 'fresh set of eyes' into the data collection and analysis. Nonetheless, as Pink (2007:21) recognised, using visual methodology cannot be used independently of other methods. Rather, they complement narratives by paying significant "attention to visual aspects of culture" (Pink, 2007:21).

Photo elicitation is "based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper, 2002:13). Even though there are cases of researchers taking the photographs (Rose, 2016:314), I asked the participants to take the photograph themselves and that is why photo-elicitation method is sometimes described as a participatory visual research method (Rose, 2016:317). The photo-elicitation method serves to bolster the data gained from interviews and it is an opportunity not to gain more, but to gain "different insights into social phenomena, which research methods relying on oral, aural or written data cannot provide" (Bolton et al., 2001:503; also see Mannay, 2016). The method was first mentioned before the interview took place, so the participants knew what to expect, but also in the informed consent which they had to sign before we met online. Towards the end of the semi-

structured interview, I asked participants to think about the object that they wanted to photograph and to take some time while doing so. I then asked them to send a photograph via email with a short explanation of why they took a photograph of that object and what it meant to them. As Haraway (1991) and Rose (2001) warn, it is necessary to consider the subjective way of looking at images, and therefore my interpretation might not be the same as participants' interpretation. Receiving a short paragraph about the photograph then, helped create a context behind it as ways of seeing are "historically, geographically, culturally and socially specific" (Rose, 2001:16). I wanted them to pay attention to the object, and contrary to the counter-mapping method, to identify only one object carefully and slowly. By selecting only one photograph, I have given the power of prioritising to the participants, as otherwise, it would have been me who gets to decide which photograph might be more important, which one to include in the analysis and which one to include in the thesis. I was expecting that not all participants would remember to send a photograph and therefore anticipated the need to send a reminder email after a few months had passed from the interview. I received 16 photographs in total that contribute to the overall findings from interviews.

SAMPLING AND RECRUITING

Keeping in mind the transnational framework of this study described in the previous chapter and the various mobilities involved with the movement of young and highly-skilled people, I suggest taking a step back from the epistemic structures of migration studies that tend to follow methodological nationalism and consider nation-states as adequate entities for studying the international world (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002:221). In order to do that, Glick Schiler and Salazar (2013:192) warn how that requires "migration scholars to recover an approach to migration that does not use nation-states as units of analysis but rather studies the movement of people across space in relationship to forces that structure political economy" (Glick Schiller

and Salazar, 2013:192). As mobility "in today's world involv[es] multifaceted aspirations, multisited transnational and translocal networks, diverse destinations and fragmented journeys" (Morad et al. 2024:np), this study utilises a de-national approach in a way that its participants are also multinational, come from diverse global places of origin, and have settled in diverse destinations in the UK. Instead, what they have in common and what makes them eligible for this study has been reflected through other characteristics, i.e. being young, highly-skilled and broadly described as 'middle class'. Thinking retrospectively, de-nationalising the sample in this thesis has contributed to an already existing attempt to de-migranticise migration research (Dahinden, 2016), and to de-naturalise the national in migration methodologies (Amelina and Faist, 2012). This thesis and its sample, therefore, should be seen as an attempt to reflexively provide an insight into how much of the migration studies can be liberated from the nation-state as the most important framework for empirical research on international migration.

To find young and highly-skilled migrants for this research I relied on snowball sampling, also known as the chain referral method, which is frequently used in hard-to-find populations (Russell Bernard, 2006:192). However, the reason for choosing this sampling method lies in its chain connection of people who share common characteristics, including myself. As I was looking for migrants with specific characteristics and specific migration conditions, snowball sampling appeared to be the most efficient way to reach participants.

For the purposes of my research, the term individual migrant was defined as a migrant who has the right to live and work in the UK, whether or not they:

- Have become naturalized citizens (are naturalized British citizens)
- Have previously studied in the UK
- Have family in the UK (that followed after their initial migration)
- Are EU citizens

- Have lived somewhere other than their homeland before moving to the UK (twice migrants/multiple migrants)

The necessary conditions were they:

- Have been born outside the UK
- Have lived in the UK for at least a year at the time of the interview, and moved not more than 10 years ago
- Have moved to the UK alone, i.e. either travelled alone and/or settled alone, without their family, friends or partners

One of the necessary conditions, together with the fact that the migrants had to be born outside of the UK is that they moved to the UK sometime between one and ten years ago. The reason for that is quite practical, so the migrants have had some time to start the settlement process, to create initial contacts in the UK, to establish necessary living conditions (i.e. accommodation, job, health insurance etc.), but also that the conditions regarding staying in touch with their home country have been more or less the same. It was important for all participants to have had equal opportunities to nurture the relationships and connections they had in their home countries, and technological progress made that easier. Therefore, if someone had moved 20, 30 or more years ago, the conditions of the move would not have been the same and it would be hard to compare migrants' experiences. From that perspective, it was important that migrants took part in what Castells (2001) calls the 'virtual community' or 'network society' by having established social media connections, or any other type of virtual connection that allows them to stay in continuous contact with their home country contacts.

Having an initial idea of who might fit my participant profile from my personal networks, I asked those people to "recommend someone from the list whom [I] might

interview" (Russell Bernard, 2006:193). That way the sampling frame grew with each interview. Due to the Covid-19 situation which produced a rationale for interviews to be held online, I could collect data from larger and more diverse networks of people which is why I expanded the sampling to social media as well. I have created a leaflet that briefly but accurately described what I wanted to do and who I was searching for and circulated it across my personal social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn). What I found to be very interesting, was that most of my participants were recruited through a combination of both techniques – one of my social media friends would see the leaflet online, and even though they did not fit the participant profile (in some cases they were non-migrants as well!), they forwarded the leaflet to someone who fitted the profile, and the person got in touch with me.

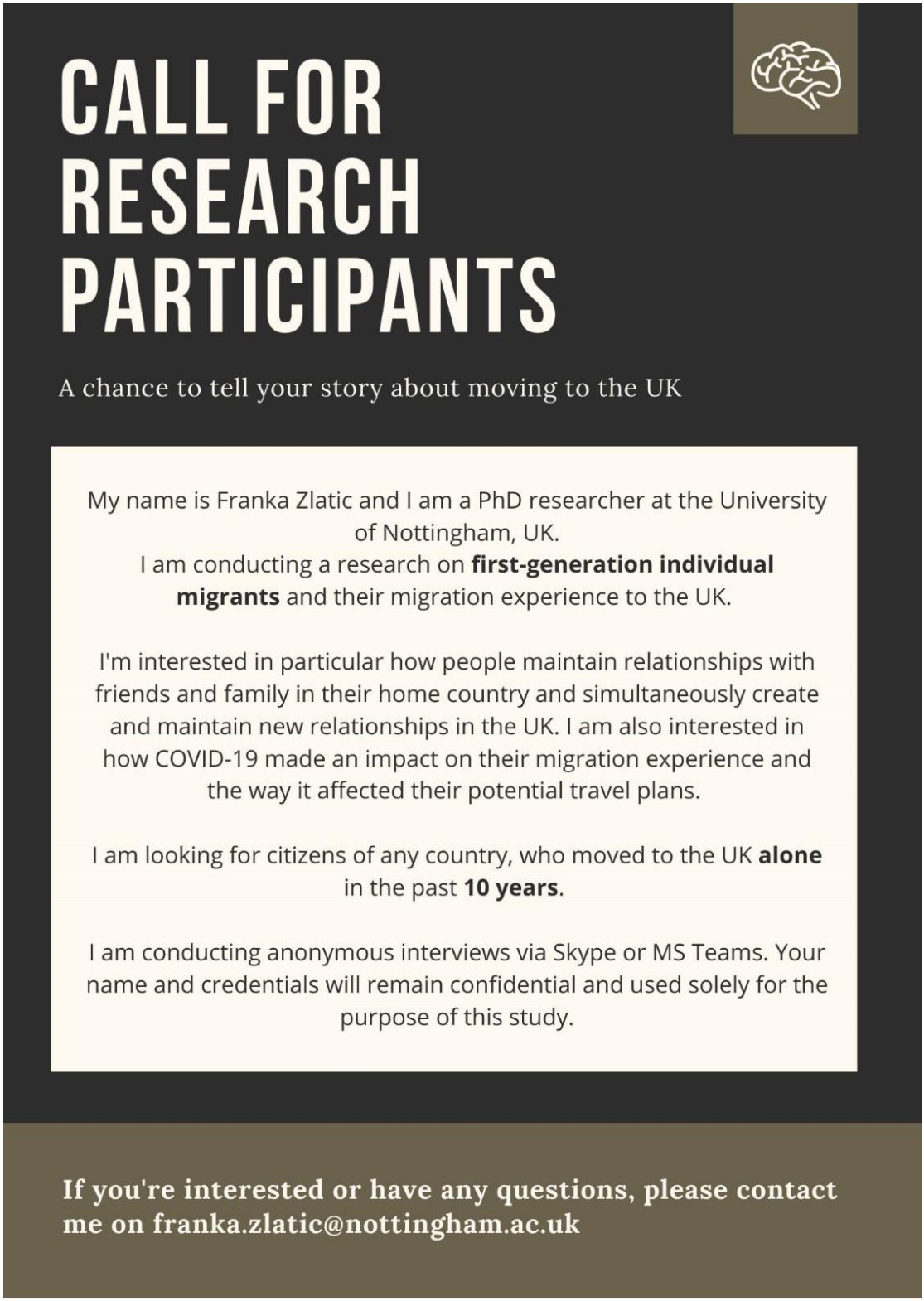

FIGURE 3 CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS LEAFLET

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

I have interviewed a total of 27 individual migrants, even though I have been in touch with many more. As the process of recruitment was an ongoing issue, I would sometimes be in touch with multiple people on multiple platforms at once. I then created an Excel spreadsheet in which I would enter all the necessary information for me to keep up with potential participants' names, countries of origin, the channel we use for communication and similar. Out of approximately 50 people I have been in touch with, I had identified 30 that fit the participant profile, however, have only been able to schedule the interview with 27 of them.

As I wanted my sample to be as diverse as possible, participants who took part in my study came from a total of 24 countries of origin. Sixteen of them came from an EU member country, and 11 of them came from a non-EU country. Regarding the gender ratio, 19 participants identified as female, whereas 7 identified as male and 1 as non-binary. In terms of age, all of the participants were in their 20s and early 30s which reaffirms their positioning as 'middling migrants' – "[t]hey are younger on average, not yet established on their career paths, and often have high cultural, but less economic capital" (Barwick, 2022:470). Their various backgrounds also reflect "a diversity that has increased in parallel with broader economic, social, cultural, technological and geopolitical shifts" (Scott, 2006:1124). Participants have settled in one of the 13 locations in the UK, as shown on the map below.

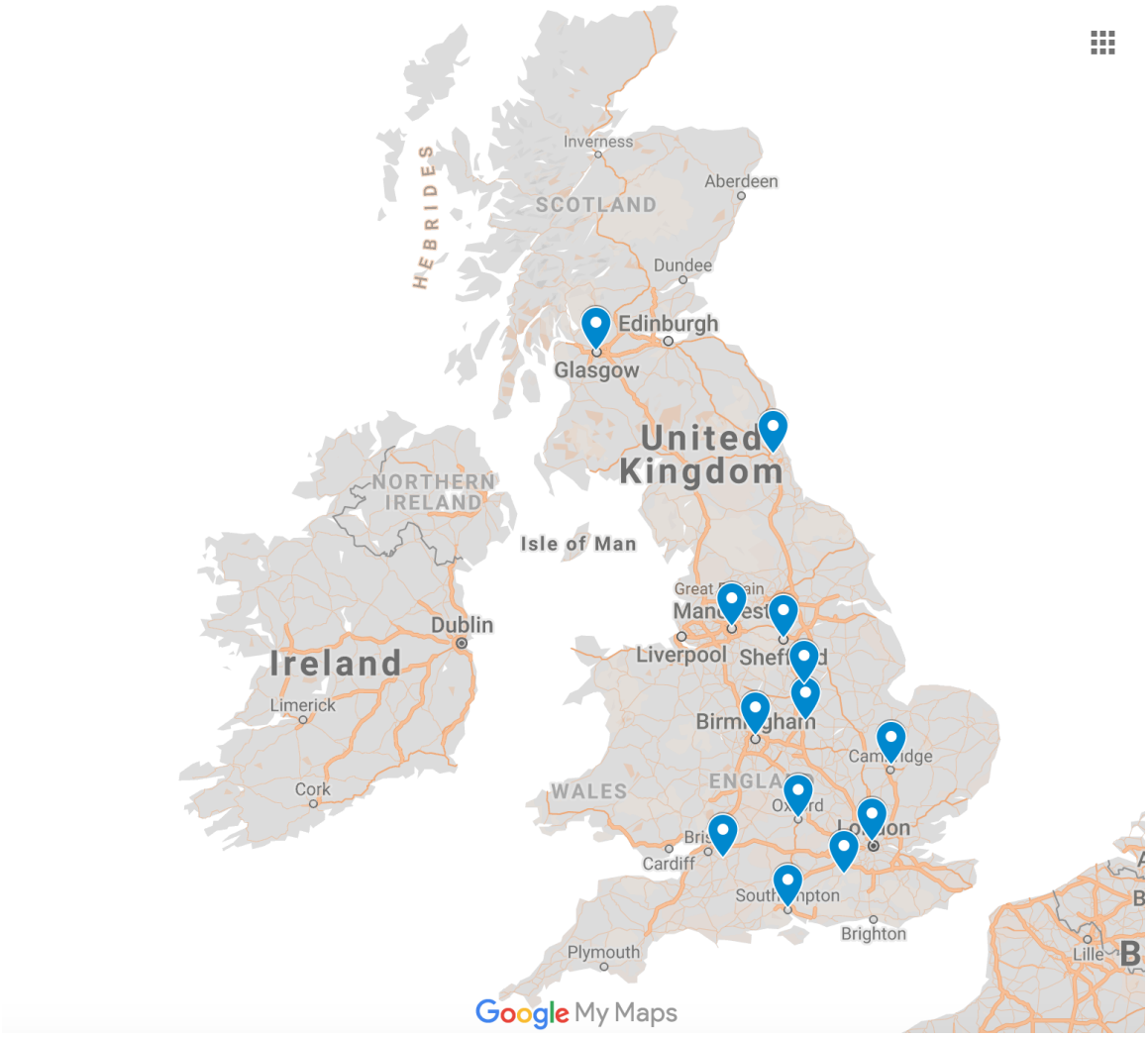

FIGURE 4 PARTICIPANTS' LOCATIONS OF SETTLEMENT IN THE UK, SOURCE: GOOGLE.CO.UK/MAPS, OWN ELABORATION

In terms of my relationship with the participants, I have divided participants into four categories: the ones I had personal contact with prior to the interview (8), the ones that were a friend of a friend and we had a bigger network of people in common but we had not had personal contact (4), friend or colleague of an acquaintance I knew, but not as close as the previous category (8) and lastly, the ones who found out about the research from word of mouth or social media but there were no direct identifiable connections through snowball method (7).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All research involving human participants needs to adhere to specific ethical considerations and regulations. My project abided by the ethical recommendations provided by the University of Nottingham, including obtaining informed consent before the interview and protecting participants' identities. The research, however, did not involve any vulnerable group of people and did not require any additional gatekeeper's permission for access. This section will focus more specifically on several other ethical challenges that emerged, such as negotiated positionality, the emotional toll the fieldwork has had on me as a researcher and the impact of reflexivity upon the knowledge creation process. Regarding the switch to online methods, "[r]esearchers obtain informed consent by online, email, or posted forms and all participants are fully aware of audio or video recordings" (Janghorban et al., 2014:2).

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCTING FIELDWORK

Informed consent does not serve only for participants to agree to take part in the research, it is also a contract that defines "the appropriate relationship between researcher and research participant" (Miller and Boulton, 2007:2199). Together with receiving all necessary information about the research, through informed consent participants are being informed they can opt out at any stage of the research even though they have initially signed the consent. "The issue of informed consent must be taken seriously by researchers in order to conduct research with human subjects, and there are many steps in place to make sure that subjects are protected" (McCormick, 2012:25), such as talking about the research at the beginning of the interview to give participants the chance to ask questions. Even though at that point they had already signed the consent, I wanted to make sure they understood what the research was about and how the information gained from them was going to be used. I have also

always informed them when I started the recording, which did not interfere with the flow of the conversation. In addition, each subsequent question, prompt or method was explained in detail and I highlighted how their consent was an ongoing process and they could opt out or withdraw from the research at any point.

Following the University of Nottingham's Ethics regulations, and because "anonymity and confidentiality of participants are central to ethical research practice in social research" (Crow and Wiles, 2008: para 1), I aimed to ensure that participants' profile and identity remained anonymous throughout the study. I created pseudonyms for the participants and the only information used publicly that can be traced back to the participants is their country of origin. However, as earlier noticed, "anonymisation of data does not cover all the issues raised by concerns about confidentiality" (Wiles et al., 2006: para 4). I made sure that the confidentiality of the data included secure storage of the interview recordings and transcriptions. Recordings have been deleted after they have been transcribed and names used on transcriptions were pseudonyms as for the analysis I relied on printed versions of transcriptions which then I kept in a locked cupboard only I had access to. In terms of visual methods, or more specifically, the photo-elicitation method, I asked participants not to include people in their photographs to avoid possible breaches of anonymity and confidentiality. The photographs contain objects solely and are not possible to be traced back to the participants.

DATA MANAGEMENT

During the nine months in which my data collection took place, I collected 29.25 hours of conversation, which roughly translated into 425 pages of transcriptions; 27 counter-maps and 16 photographs. I also had dozens of pages of field notes that I later realised were not very useful. As it was previously mentioned how I struggled to observe, notice and pay attention to the non-verbal, the emotional and the invisible, my field notes are mostly comprised of things participants had said that in that

moment I found to be important. They are of course, not completely useless as they still represent some form of data, as there must be a reason why I considered the information I noted down to be important. However, as previously described feminist epistemology indicates, doing research "allows us to learn about a culture through participation, including making mistakes" (Boellstorff et al., 2012:91). I was immersed in the interviews and even those who know how to take field notes and find them useful after the data collection process, are sometimes encouraged to "put aside camera, notebook and pencil, and [to] join [in themselves] in what is going on" (Malinowski, 1922:21).

Most researchers upon the end of the fieldwork process have to "look back over their major life experience, their field notes, interview transcripts, and memories, as they begin to make sense of their work and search for themes, discourses, and theoretical insights" (Gill and Temple, 2014:13). That process is often messy, as was the case with including reflexivity into the research, but that is quite usual as "the ethnographic experience is unpredictable, uncontrollable, irrational, emotional, unsystematic, and unscientific. It is the interaction and obligatory complexity of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional factors that produce these irregularities, despite systematic planning" (Gill and Temple, 2014:13).

While I was conducting interviews, and other methods as well, I already noticed that the data collected coincided with themes that emerged from the literature review. That was partially due to the fact that I had designed them in a way to reflect those themes, but the answers given also coincided with previously read literature. At some point, I noticed I started creating mental notes about the data received and connecting it to either various existing theories or to other data gained from other participants. During that process, I also sometimes disregarded a piece of an interview, or an entire conversation in fact, to be irrelevant to the analysis, as it did not fit into the mental notes and categories I had created in my mind. This too is a common mistake among social scientists, as "ethnographers might feel that interaction is unworthy of note and thus omit vital details" (Boellstorff et al., 2012:84). This is where the importance of not pre-editing the data came to be important, as once I had those conversations transcribed and once I finished my analysis, I realised

they do bring rich data as much as those interviews I immediately recognised as important.

TRANSCRIPTIONS

When it comes to the transcription of data, I relied on the Automated Transcription Service software provided by the University of Nottingham. I started the transcription process once I had left the fieldwork, thinking that would allow me to immerse myself in the data and analyse it with great care and attention to detail. Even though I used the software, which made the process less time-consuming and much easier, I still had to listen to the recordings and edit potential mistakes the software made. I finished my last transcription more than a year after I started the data collection. Two interviews were held in Croatian and Serbo/Croatian, and I wrote those transcriptions manually. Those transcriptions were not translated in their entirety, but rather I translated only the excerpts used in the thesis.

DATA ANALYSIS

For most of the data collected, I relied on reflexive thematic analysis, in accordance with previously described reflexivity involved. Often strictly defined as one way to deal with data gathered, thematic analysis is actually more of a "broad category of approaches to qualitative analysis that seek to define themes within the data and organise those themes into some type of structure to aid interpretation" (Brooks et al., 2015:206). In that sense, thematic analysis follows several steps in doing so, the first one being coding, or "the building of a set of themes to describe the phenomenon of interest by putting 'like with like' (Morse and Field, 1995 cited in Riley and Hawe,

2005:229). As a reflexive practice, thematic analysis "captures approaches fully embedded within the values of a qualitative paradigm" (Braun and Clarke, 2022:5).

However, as it was I who created the interview questions, there must have been some *a priori* expectations or themes I hoped would emerge. Based on that, some researchers prefer to call the thematic analysis involved a *template* analysis (Crabtree and Miller, 1999 cited in Riley and Hawe, 2005). That would imply that a template analysis is just one of the many possible approaches one can take when implementing thematic analysis, as with template analysis "it is permissible (though not obligatory) to start with some *a priori* themes, identified in advance as likely to be helpful and relevant to the analysis. These are always tentative and may be redefined or removed if they do not prove to be useful for the analysis at hand" (Brooks et al., 2015:203). Organising the themes into clusters and discovering how they relate both to each other and the rest of the data follows the same pattern in any type of thematic analysis, including template. These are often called "'codebook' approaches, where a coding structure is developed from a mixture of a priori interests and initial engagement with the data and then applied to the full data set." (Brooks et al. 2015:206). From codes to finding narrower themes nested within broader ones, to hierarchical relationships between the themes and clusters – thematic and template analysis offer an appropriate approach to the type and amount of data I have gathered.

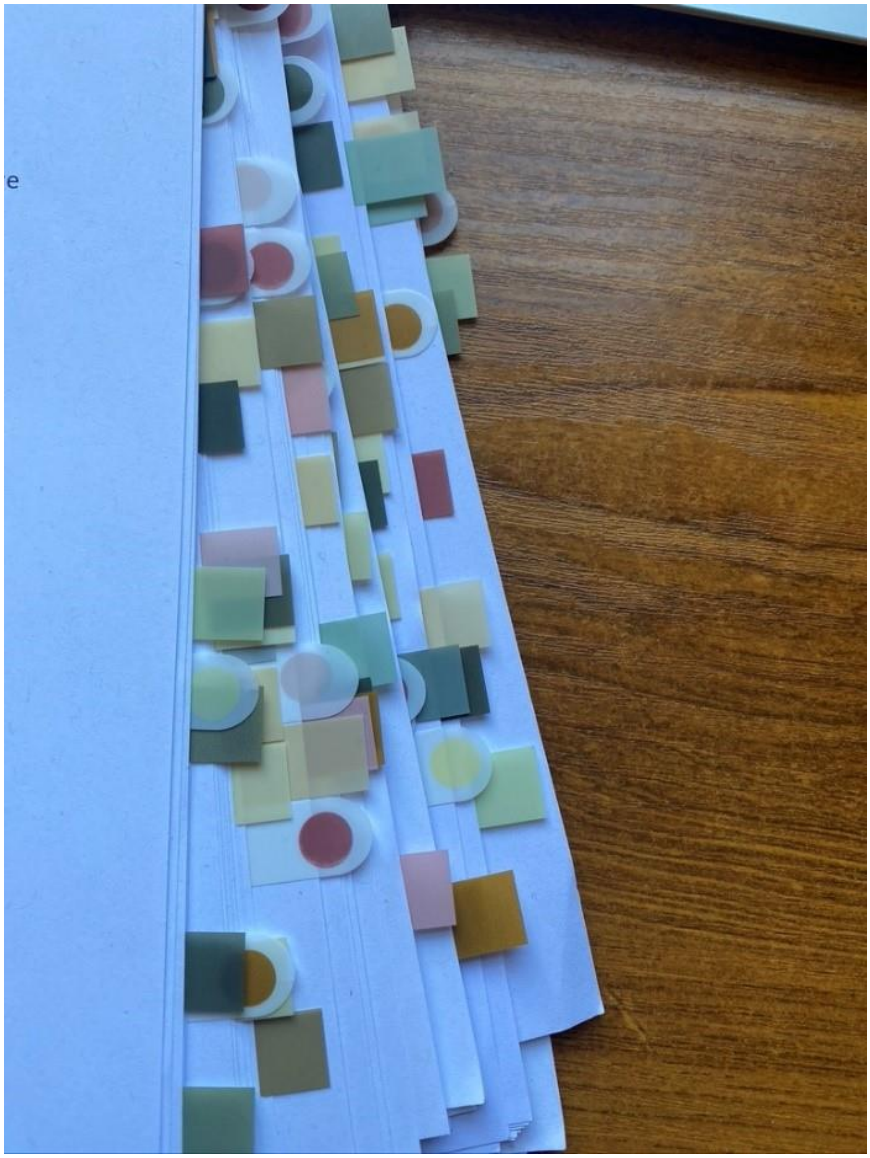

FIGURE 5 STICKY TABS CODING EXAMPLE

As thematic analysis is a broad approach to qualitative data, it "provides a highly flexible approach that can be modified for the needs of many studies" (Nowell et al., 2017:2) and it is upon the researchers themselves to figure out how they will organise their data. First I had in mind the cut-and-paste option, where I would cut out codes out of the transcriptions and paste them together on a sheet of paper. However, as some parts of the text can be coded multiple times, that meant I would need to have several copies for each transcription and that method did not seem very sustainable. As I started to navigate through more than 400 pages of transcriptions, I started

playing with post-it notes and sticky tabs in various colours that would indicate where codes were in the text. I ended up using more and more colours and shapes of sticky tabs to reflect the multiplicity of the discovered codes, and towards the end of the analysis process, I had organised tabs and codes into several main themes, that were later summed into three large groups and assigned to each data chapter.

As for the analysis of other methods and prompts, when it comes to counter-mapping I have organised words into groups in a similar manner and paid attention to their occurrence. I have therefore created a spreadsheet with all words used by participants in a counter-map for easier navigating through the data and used it in tandem with analysing interviews, as will be shown later through data chapters. When it comes to images, "analysis is not a simple matter of interpreting the visual content […] and putting these images into categories through which they will be analysed" (Pink, 2013:143). As the instructions I gave to participants when asked to take part in the photo-elicitation method were quite broad, they assigned meaning to those photographs themselves. With each photograph, I received an explanation of why is the object in the photograph important to them, and these explanations were used in their original form in this thesis, alongside the photograph itself.

THE ACCIDENTAL PARTICIPANT: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT[9] ON REFLEXIVITY AND VULNERABILITY

One way in which data collected through qualitative methodologies can become more transparent is "through reflexive consideration of the relations of power that operate during the fieldwork process" (Mullings, 1999:348). Reflexivity then becomes an important process for situating knowledge within a broader scope of interpretive social science research. Where ethnography aims to be reflexive and intuitive in itself,

[9] Borrowed from Wilkinson (2019): "Imposter syndrome and the accidental academic: an autoethnographic account"

and reflexivity will be addressed towards the end of this chapter, "the term 'autoethnography' is most commonly used to refer to that branch of experimental ethnography that takes the self-reflexive aspect of ethnographic work and brings it to the fore of ethnographic practice" (Luvaas, 2017:250). There is something in the process of autoethnography that makes the research more egalitarian, but it also emphasizes an ethic of transparency between both me and my participants and within the research in general. To do autoethnography is not, however, telling a story about myself, as that would be an autobiography, but rather using my own story and experiences to "situate the story within a larger social occurrence" (Zavattaro, 2020:6).

Being an empathetic listener while also being reflexive and introspective, has the purpose of "understand[ing] a larger cultural phenomenon or structure in which [the author] is embedded" (Luvaas, 2017:249). In that sense, autoethnography can be seen as a "'systematic sociological introspection' or 'emotional recall' in the service of understanding 'an experience I have lived through' (Ellis, 2004: xvii) that can, later on, be transformed into a new type of scientific knowledge which has "become not only a relevant but often the preferred approach to knowledge production" within qualitative paradigms (Matejskova, 2014:18). In this specific research, by acknowledging my own experience as a migrant and reflecting on my observations but also feelings that occurred during the interviews, I am being honest and transparent about my partial and negotiated insiderness and the way it may have influenced my approach to researching migrants. By situating myself within the context of this research, I am embracing personal experience in a contextualised manner to shed light on the chosen subject (Ellis et al., 2011). Whilst this may be seen as a downside of qualitative research, seeming to make the research about the author or this case myself, Ellis et al. (2011:274) have argued that including autoethnography as one of the approaches "acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist". Drawing back on the feminist influence from the beginning of this chapter, retrospective reflection and transparent reflexivity were also highlighted by Rose (1997), and autoethnography should be comprehended

as a method that "orchestrates fragments of awareness—apprehended/projected and recalled/reconstructed—into narratives and alternative text forms which (re)present events and other social actors as they are evoked from a changeable and contestable self" (Crawford, 1996:167). How autoethnography is differentiated from reflexivity can be seen in the way the use of autobiography affects ethnography at several levels of involvement (Aull Davies, 2008:217). As all autobiography is understood to include reflexivity, not all reflexive approaches are autobiographical. As Aull Davies (2008:218) explains: "[the] use of autobiography in ethnography is the consideration of the effects upon the ethnographer of the experience of fieldwork, using others to learn more about and reflect upon oneself".

In preparation for my fieldwork, I took into account various methodological literature as demonstrated above, but more specifically, I came to realise that I am more of an insider than I thought I would be. Prior to entering the fieldwork, I addressed my multiple selves, that of being a researcher, and all those other selves that make me – me. Even though my research did not require any specific formal or gatekeeper's approval to gain access, my access was still not guaranteed by the participants themselves. The questions asked might present a challenge or a painful memory for the participant and it was my role to gain participants' trust as "[g]aining respectful, trust-based, hence effective access into the expected research field is critical to all that comes next" (Boccagni and Schrooten 2018:213).

Attaching the 'insider' label based only on ethnic common ground implies that ethnicity has a primary and prevailing role in the research and all its involved relationships. If other characteristics are included (e.g. age, gender, class, type of migration, social status etc), multiple levels of 'insiderness' can be introduced, or the opposite, expose multiple differences between the participants and myself. In other words, everyone is an insider in one way or another, "given the multiplex nature of identity, there will inevitably be certain facets of self that join us up with the people we study, other facets that recognise our difference (Narayan, 1993:680). That is why I wanted to occupy a 'hybrid' position of being an insider and outsider at the same time (Moroşanu, 2015). In a basic sense, the insider position means "that the researchers share the knowledge of the studied group because of their cultural,

linguistic, ethnic, national or religious association with it, while outsider researchers do not have such a common heritage with their research subjects" (Nowicka and Cieslik, 2014:2). If my research was following Croatian or even ex-Yugoslavian diaspora in the UK, I would be able to achieve multiple levels of insiderness and based on cultural demarcations of one's identity. However, feminist scholarship on positionality (see England 1994; Rose 1997; Chavez 2008; Soni-Sinha 2008; Ryan et al. 2011), highlights that both researchers and participants "negotiate identities in the course of the research" (Nowicka and Cieslik, 2014:2). The insider status thus can never completely rely on the fixed categories of commonality such as race, ethnicity or religion and Nowicka and Cieslik (2014) claim that scholars still tend to use latent national and ethnic categories of commonality when defining their methodologies. In my research, "[b]eing an insider to these experiences had more to do with our common migrant than coethnic status per se" (Moroşanu, 2015:np).

Boccagni and Schrooten (2018:217) remind us that partial insiderness does not need to result in "automatically better or deeper ethnographic engagement". Moreover, multiple identifications allow for "convergence or divergence of views, actions and understandings (Chacko, 2004:52). Therefore, it is only natural for me to prioritise the fact I am primarily a migrant when talking to participants, and to negotiate the insiderness on many different levels depending on the participants' origin or other identity attributes. With one Turkish participant, we were laughing about the coffee pot that is called the same in Turkish and Croatian (cezve/džezva) and that object was an important part of that participant's life in the UK, but also an everyday item in the life of almost every person in the Balkan area. Another participant, knowing I understand Italian, used phrases such as *la dolce vita*[10] without the need to translate or explain the context. Some of the participants, who had their origin in the Mediterranean used phrases such as "you know that Mediterranean vibe" or "you know, that south European loudness", relying on the fact that I come from a Mediterranean country as well and assuming I will understand what they mean

[10] Eng. The sweet life

which in most cases, I did even those assumptions relied on stereotypes and cultural prejudice.

Stacey (1988:24 cited in McCormick, 2012:28) found that "the greater the intimacy, the apparent mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship, the greater is the danger". Even though there was no manipulation from my side due to the previous connection with participants, I partially feel indebted for their time and willingness to take part in my research, especially with participants that were closer to me, my friends or acquaintances. However, the fact that my fieldwork took place online acted as a benefit in one instance in terms of potential ethical challenges. One of the interviewees would have given me a present had the interview taken place in person, as they were showing it to me during our video call. It was common for them to bring small key chains from their home country and give them as a present to various people who entered their lives. They explicitly said I would have gotten one, however, due to physical distance as I was in Croatia at that point, and the pandemic-imposed guidelines, that was not possible. Had such a thing happened, I would have felt even more indebted towards the participant and probably tried to return the favour.

From that theoretical preparation, and due to the multiple nationalities and ethnicities of my participants, I believed that my partial insiderness was beneficial in a way that it would grant me the trust of my participants and help establish rapport, but due to it being 'partial' it would protect me from empathising too much and identifying with their stories. I knew from the beginning that in "order to situate ourselves, it is necessary to make one's position vis-a-vis research known rather than invisible (Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi, 1995 cited in Rose, 1997:308). Haraway (1988) highlights the importance of positioning oneself to create a certain kind of knowledge. Therefore, before starting my fieldwork I positioned myself as a partial insider, a female researcher and although I argued positionality is not a fixed attribute, I fixed mine quite strongly.

I was being immersed into that theoretical assumption that with time and during my fieldwork I failed to notice the rising vulnerability that emerged from my

side. Having experienced personal difficulties during the pandemic and conducting my fieldwork during a pandemic had a much greater connection and was much more interrelated than I ever thought was even possible. In the words of William Sax (2014), I was a 'naïve fieldworker', thinking that preparing myself for data collection theoretically would prepare me empirically as well and spare me from potential difficulties that may come along the way. It was not until one supervision meeting where we discussed the potential outline of my future thesis that I began to express several difficult emotions, or in other words – for the first time I was unable to suppress them. Talking about how my data should be organised and divided into chapters brought feelings that I did not even know existed and an immense personal attachment to my data was uncovered. It turned out that fieldwork is a process of constant reflection, and no literature can teach you that, besides the fieldwork itself.

I recognised three reasons for the situation evolving the way it did. Firstly, the theoretical assumption from the beginning of this text about partial insiderness protecting me through the differences between my participants and myself did not come out to be completely true. Whilst I could not empathise with missing Greece per se or having friends and family that are in a time zone 8 hours ahead of me, I empathised much more than I thought I would with missing home and not being with my family and friends generally. Secondly, the COVID-19 situation throughout 2020 and 2021 while I was preparing for and doing my fieldwork brought mental health challenges that sometimes affected the ability to collect data, but also intensified the similarity between myself and the participants and more specifically, the data collected. My story unavoidably became the story of my 27 participants and listening to them, transcribing the conversations and analysing the data subconsciously took a toll on my wellbeing and exposed my vulnerability and attachment to what I was researching. Thirdly, due to the combination of the previous two explanations, in managing my multiple selves, I have unintentionally slipped from being primarily a researcher to being researched. Irrespectively of my intentions to remain primarily a researcher during my PhD, and at the same time being aware of different dimensions of my identity and potential identifications with different aspects of my participants' identity such as being a woman, being a PhD student, a Croatian citizen, a migrant - I

became a participant, telling a story to the inner researcher that was now inferior to me being a migrant who misses home in a midst of a pandemic or is stuck at home completely isolated from my PhD environment. In other words, the rapport I established with myself as a researcher was preventing me from establishing rapport with myself as a migrant.

This part can be easily grounded within identity theory as the 'shifting self' phenomenon. Even though at the beginning I defined myself as being primarily a researcher, being distinct from my participants, the more time passed the more I became one of them. Due to different axes of identity being primarily relational, "a sense of self depends on a sense of being different from someone else" (Rose, 1997:314). As I kept interviewing more people, that sense of being different from someone else weakened and my understanding of relationality switched from seeing the researched as 'other' (Madge, 1993), to seeing the researched through myself. That is exactly what Aull Davies (2008:220) describes as a characteristic of autoethnography, when "the ethnographer becomes not simply the collector of data about others […], but becomes the other as well as the self of the researcher".

The relationship between the two, the researcher and the participants is rarely a one-way one, and power relations can and often are negotiated. What I want to argue here is, that once the real-time relationship between the participant and a researcher finishes, or the fieldwork is done, that communication does not cease to exist in a metaphysical, relational sense. The data is produced by those participants and even if the researcher is not in direct contact with them, they are in contact with the stories gathered which maintains the relationship and the influence between the two. In a way, such was the case with my research, the data embodies the participants even if they are not physically present at the moment. To me, relistening recordings and transcribing the data was more emotional than talking to my participants the first time and that made me influence the way data is being handled throughout the process of analysis.

Not only did the COVID-19 situation make an impact on participants, as well as on me, but being in the UK and going back to those recordings made in Croatia had

a flashback function I did not expect. Above explained relationship between a researcher and their data was now an everyday part of my life, as I was working with the data that was collected through various situations and localities caused and brought by both COVID-19 and mental health challenges. At that point, I had months in front of me that I was supposed to spend in a close relationship with my data, which more often than not made me cry and that consequently resulted in complete subconscious avoidance of the data. An instinct was to go back to the literature, but this time it was obvious I needed to revisit both autoethnography and native ethnography-related works, but also feminist literature on the subject to help me not only re-position myself in order to make this research ontologically viable, but also to come up with a defence mechanism that would ease the process of analysing the data for the participant self that came to exist along the way.

As Kušić (2020 cited in Kušić and Zahora, 2020) noticed, even though "it was me who read theories, spoke to people, thought about questions, and analysed observation", this research is not about me, nor should it be. In that sense, autoethnography can be seen as a "'systematic sociological introspection' or 'emotional recall' in the service of understanding "an experience I have lived through" (Ellis, 2004: xvii). I knew that even before I started my fieldwork, but I understood that as solely an advantage and a good thing that can be achieved. I was aware of the importance of making my position conscious and I rightfully positioned myself as a researcher who is partially native to what I am researching. I recognised myself as a "transparently knowable agent" (Rose, 1997:309) but what I failed to see is that the job was not done there.

As I have stated in the previous section on what insiderness means in theory, I failed to recognise empirically what it means continuously throughout the fieldwork process. I was able to recognise the impact and existence of reflexive research, but I did not recognise reflexivity as a process and the presence of an ongoing participant observation, which I described as the 'Phantom of the Opera'. Now, I come back to it not only as a researcher, but as a researched as well, relying on the fact that "points of view can never be known in advance" (Haraway, 1988:585), and acknowledging the

process and my vulnerable self, through constant need to rethink, requestion, and rewrite.

The reason why ethnographers and researchers who find themselves in a similar situation should talk more about this is that these "tactics work by turning extraordinarily complex power relations into a visible and clearly ordered space that can be surveyed by the researcher: power becomes seen as a sort of landscape" (Rose, 1997:310). Or, as one of my PhD colleagues accurately recognised conversationally, [not addressing the reflexivity properly] is like pushing all the mess and all the clothes into a closet until that closet becomes so full that everything bursts out and you must fold it first to fit everything back in. Parr (1998) has also noted that research is a messy business and "[t]he imperative of transparent reflexivity assumes that messiness can be fully understood (Rose, 1997:314).

Nevertheless, in the midst of folding the accumulated reflexive mess, literature was immensely helpful. I guess it is right to say that feminists are still not sure how the mutual constitution of their gender, class, race, sexuality and so on, affects their production of knowledge, or if pushed further how can writing about and acknowledging situated knowledge help others situate theirs. I cannot tell why exactly reading literature about situated knowledge helped fold my fieldwork reflexivities into an organised piece of information, but it helped me get there.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered insight into the methodological background of my research project. Since the project was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the original design had to be recreated to fit into the newly emerged sphere of an online world. Being defined as a qualitative and interpretive social research project, the methods involved and planned included semi-structured interviews and two visual methods, all conducted through online software, mostly MS Teams.

A big part of the methodological chapter is dedicated towards the ethical challenges I encountered, more specifically my connection and entanglement with both participants and the data collected. Crucial to those challenges was to carefully address the relevant literature and to position myself critically in order for my involvement to be recognised through "passionate detachment" (Haraway, 1988:585) or even "passionate scholarship" (Du Bois, 1983). In addition, that was where feminist epistemology came to exist in practice and helped me develop a healthy relationship with my data and enabled me to continue working with it without leaving continuous consequences on my well-being. The latest part of the chapter explained the way I dealt with data post-collection and described in detail the transcription and analysis process that helped produce the rest of this thesis.

CHAPTER 5: INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter largely builds upon the previously described contextual background in *Chapter 2* and Vertovec's (2007) idea of super-diverse Britain. It serves to establish the participants of this research as actors in transnational and super-diverse contexts and their corresponding experiences.

In that sense, the chapter provides an insight into the context and pre-migratory circumstances of participants. That section is followed by describing migrants' motivation and reasons for moving to the UK, explaining how the global geo-political scene affects the movement of people at the same time, and ultimately how the move to the UK facilitated their transition to adulthood.

LEARNING TO FLY

Mariana is a young professional who came to the UK in 2017 because she secured a job interview. She got the job and then she stayed in the UK. Her counter-map, as seen below, is an excellent example of words that occurred the most among participants. When asked how she chose the UK, she said:

> "There weren't that many job opportunities in Spain at the time and I was in Greece during Erasmus, I had a traineeship in the International office. […] I had been working previously at a university in Spain as an international relations assistant and I was looking for something similar. And I found it here [in the UK]. […] The position I applied to was a temporary one it was a

short contract for three months and then it got renewed and it got renewed again and eventually I got a permanent position within that team."

When given the two boxes which represented their country of origin on one side of the screen and the UK on the other during the counter-mapping activity, the first word that came into participants' minds was most often 'opportunities'. The participants proceeded to place 'opportunities' into the UK box. The word appeared 10 times in total, and there were many similar words used by other participants that reflect the same thought; job, work, career, ambition and business appeared 9 times, all in the UK word box.

FIGURE 6 COUNTER-MAP BY MARIANA

As was already mentioned in *Chapter 4*, migrants who took part in this research can be described as 'middling migrants', or the 'mobile middle'. In that sense, Mariana, and several other participants as well, followed emerging opportunities by moving across the border (Jaskulowski and Pawlak, 2022). Relocating in order to 'chase' opportunities, "promotes flexibility and movement as crucial aspects of personal development" (Jaskulowski and Pawlak, 2022:2056). It is not unusual then, that many of the participants experienced some form of previous mobility, before trying their luck in the UK. Be it previous migration, or Erasmus, as was shown in Mariana's case, the mobile middle seem to understand the word mobility clearly, and even

more so – they know how to utilise it. Roze for example, ticks all the boxes when it comes to mobility. She participated in the student exchange programme, returned to her home country Lithuania, worked in Cyprus for three years and then decided she wanted to pursue a Master's degree in an English-speaking country:

> "I was studying at university, then I spent a year abroad in Portugal. Then after I graduated, I knew I did not want to stay back home. Not only for the work opportunities as such, because if I moved to the capital city, that probably would have been OK. It's more for the whole outlook of people, living in times where, you know, an Indian exchange student would be looked at funny way and you know, threatened and it just wasn't the environment I wanted to live in. So I knew that when I graduated I wanted to move away and wasn't sure where. So then I made the move to Cyprus, lived there for three years and I decided at some point that I'd like to my Master's degree. And I was thinking what do I want to do? Because I finished my degree in Lithuanian. I'd like to have my Master's in a country which is recognised everywhere. So that was the main reason why I decided on the UK."

However, whilst Erasmus can be said to be within the reach of European students only, mobility has reached those beyond the scope of European borders. João, for example, a Brazilian, moved to Glasgow to study a Master's there, after which they moved to Malta, then to Estonia, back to Glasgow and at the time of the interview they lived in Guildford, but frequently travelled to Sweden as they were involved in a transnational relationship. When asked how long they thought their stay in the UK would be, João said: "I think I had an open mind. I was not totally convinced I was just staying for the Masters. I thought that I could decide to stay for longer. I was not thinking about an X, Y or Z number of years". What connects both European participants and those of non-EU origin, is that they can truly be described as an emerging type of global middle-class migrants (Jaskulowski and Pawlak, 2022:2057),

but also that these opportunities are tightly connected to recent discussions on the importance of globalisation and neoliberal flows in migration practices. As Quan (2020), but also Jaskulowski and Pawlak (2022) argue, whilst neoliberalism is not the main force behind new migration flows described in *Chapter 2*, it certainly creates "new ontological conditions for subjective positions: it disciplines individuals to see themselves as autonomous and entrepreneurial subjects" (Jaskulowski and Pawlak, 2022:2059). Such conditions of societal individualisation (see Beck, 2002) "closely bound up with globalisation-migration or an extended period of travel simply become another possibility open to the individual" (Conradson and Latham, 2005:293).

As such, neoliberalism and new migration laws create a flexible, mobile and adaptable workforce, which makes "so much of the migration activity [is] entrepreneurial in character" (Morawska, 2002 cited in Favell, 2014:287). Favell (2014:285) has described how the profile of such migrants: "a high proportion in their twenties, almost all under 45, mostly highly educated, highly motivated – made them perfect workers". He also addressed the importance neoliberalism has in recent migration movements and argued that a more open labour market can bring benefits to both migrants, the receiving state and even the sending state, "in terms of social mobility, circulation of human capital, skills and education" (2014:278). Whilst such practices have formerly been known as labour migration, the concept of liquid migration might be more suitable in characterising these types of young migrants as it "refers to the emergence of individualised migration patterns in which migrants try their luck in new and multiple countries of destination, benefiting from open borders and labour markets" (Engbersen et al., 2013:960-961). Keeping in mind the neoliberal context and access to a worldwide labour market, having a degree from an English-speaking country was the main drive for migration for Miguel:

> "Cause I've always wanted to go abroad, to be honest, and I was always in love, especially with English-speaking countries and it was something that I

knew that eventually I would want to do. But I just didn't have a plan in mind beforehand."

Miguel came to the UK from Portugal to do his undergraduate degree and at the time of our interview, he had already been enrolled in a Masters programme and started working as a freelance videographer. I came across Miguel whilst working together for a student-led educational agency. I had previously interviewed Miguel and his two colleagues in relation to their videography work as part of my job role at the agency. Miguel told me in both that interview and also in the interview for the purposes of this research, that he would not like to be fixed to a single location. His work, that of making films, requires him to be mobile and at that time he had a project going on in his home country in Portugal. Hearing the experiences of the participants has therefore served "to help develop an understanding of migrant adaptation in so-called 'new' migration, wherein migrants have not settled permanently anywhere, or have close connections to more than one country (Faist, 2000), operating, for example, in transnational social fields" (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004 cited in Grzymala Kazlowska, 2016:1127). Giovanna, an Italian living in Manchester who had also previously lived in France for a significant period of time, recognised that coming to the UK meant reaching adulthood, as opposed to youth which she connected almost instantly to Italy, as shown in her counter-map.

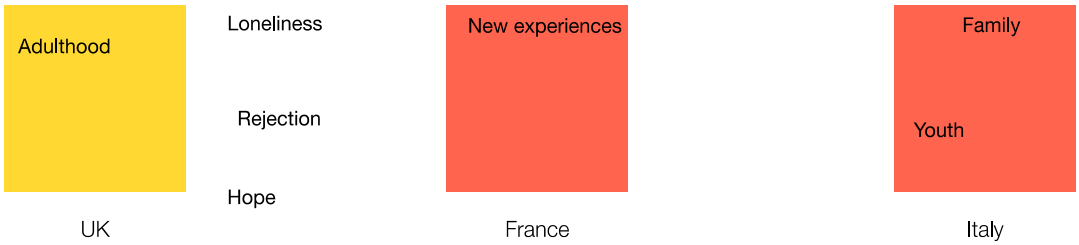

FIGURE 7 COUNTER-MAP BY GIOVANNA

Similar word choice can be also found in Hana's counter-map as well (featured later in this chapter) and resembles the growing-up abroad phenomenon already discussed by many within the migration scholarship. Moroşanu et al.'s (2019) work for example, on Romanian and Italian youth in the UK discusses the meanings of entering adulthood, but also significant lifestyle considerations embedded into the lives of these young migrants. These lifestyle changes include greater autonomy upon moving, and the ability to be yourself more freely as "when you go and live on your own, you grow up" (Moroşanu et al., 2019:1565). Drawing back on Giovanna, following our conversation she also sent a photograph that encapsulates her migrant experience. *Living-in-a-suitcase* turned out to be one of the main characteristics of youth on the move, especially those with previous migration paths as they frequently visited their previous locations of settlement as well. This was her explanation of her photograph choice:

> "Your question was very interesting and it got me thinking about the objects that characterise my life as a migrant. The picture is of my backpack. I bought it during my first year in France and I have used it all these years on the different trips I have done. It has been a constant companion for nine years and a small but relevant portion of my life is there. There are some essential documents, the wallet, a couple of books and it's big enough to fit in more stuff if I need to when I have to travel. I have never used (or even liked!) backpacks before moving to France and then to the UK, but now it seems such an essential item of my daily life."

FIGURE 8 PHOTOGRAPH SENT BY GIOVANNA

Such migration, as exemplified in Giovanna's example above is then "less network-driven" (Engbernsen et al. 2013:961) and more success-driven with migrants not only keeping their feet in both (or more) countries but personifying practices that resemble "transnational commuting" (Engbernsen et al. 2013:961), which can be deeply embedded in a single picture of a backpack.

The graphics below visually represent a transnational social network created by two participants, Roze and Aneta. They first met in Portugal in 2007, during their year abroad. After that, they both moved back to their home countries, Roze to Lithuania and Aneta to the Czech Republic. Aneta developed a "passion for travelling and living somewhere else" so she moved to France for a year, and then to Belgium for a couple of years. Roze at the same time, after graduating in Lithuania, moved to Cyprus for three years as was mentioned previously in this chapter. The two eventually reunited in the UK accidentally, however, they kept in touch all the time after they met in Portugal. As the global middle move around the globe in search of new experiences and better opportunities, they leave a trace that can be seen through transnational networks they create as they leave people behind. Upon each onward migration, the social network became bigger and more complex.

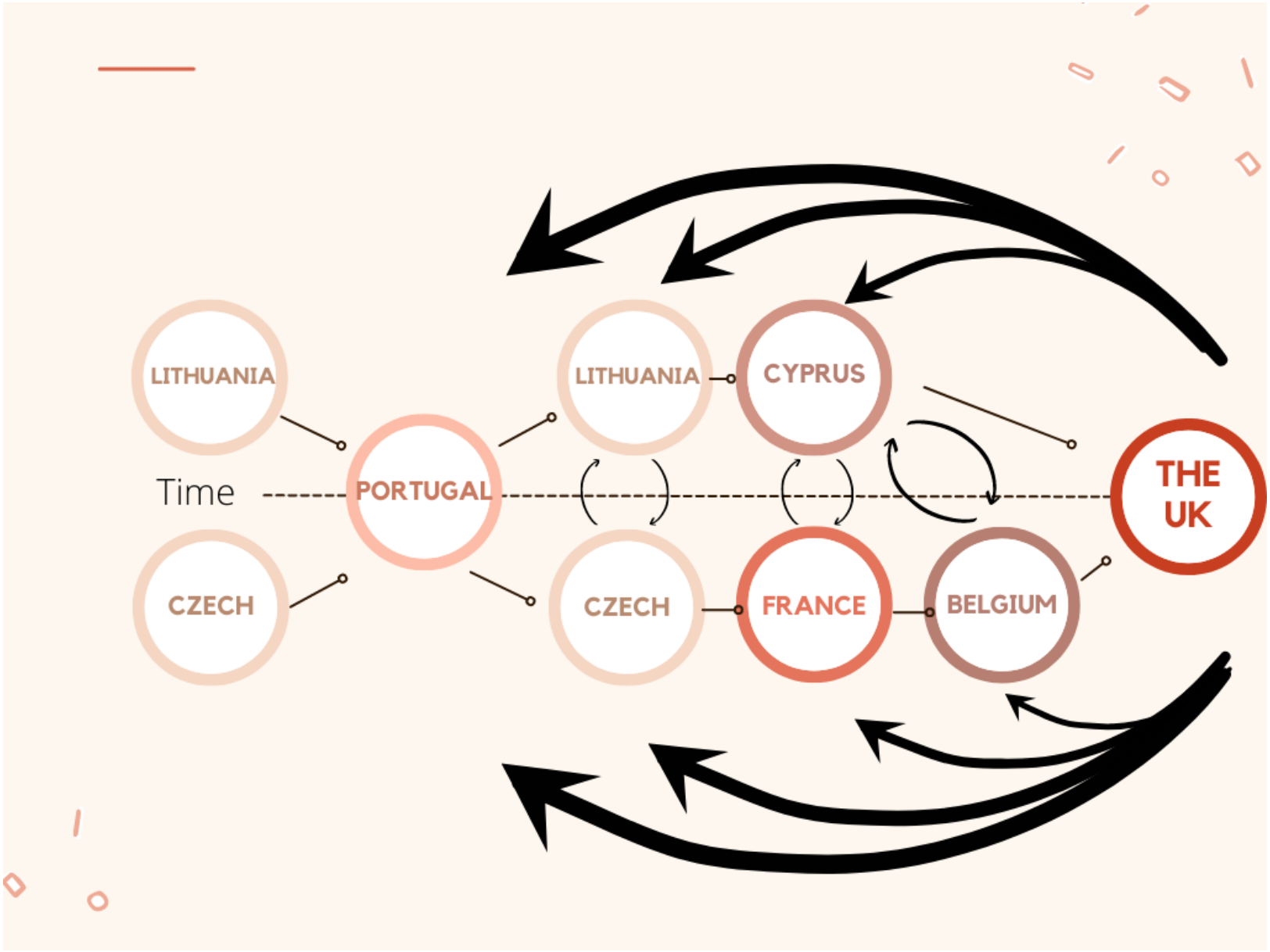

FIGURE 9 VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELDS CREATED BY ROZE AND ANETA, OWN ELABORATION

Several scholars have recognised the gradual flux in onward migration (see Allen, 2015; Krassoi-Peach, 2013; Finch et al., 2009), and the reason behind the multiple migration can be traced back to its neoliberal nature, individual freedom and portability of the capital acquired. Even more, the migration experience becomes a mobility capital in itself, serving as an example of, as Bhachu (2021:8) calls it: "resilience, antifragility and openness to the new".

THE ABILITY TO EXPRESS ONESELF

> "I feel like I'm more capable of what I imagine. Like I'm not stuck inside of the box like, for example, when I applied for universities my best friend from Hungary said to me, 'oh that's a very stupid idea you shouldn't do that' and I was like 'why are you trying to tell me how to live my life?' I think it's a good idea, you know. And she was very pushy, like she was really rude. I feel in Hungary I wanted to be good for everyone. Fulfil someone else's expectations instead of mine. I was always thinking of someone else instead of me and here because I was left on my own I mean, most of the achievements I had it was because of me and I understood that. It's not like opportunity comes to your door and is going to knock and [say] 'Hi I'm here. Do you want to take me?' It's not like that. You have to search for your own and so many people don't understand that. And in Hungary as well, like, the people know very well how to complain about things. But at the same time don't do anything to change that. But in the UK so many people showed me you can do this in a different way. You don't have to complain, or you can complain, but in that case, change that to fulfil the things that you're interested in, and maybe because it's a big if I don't feel happy about my job or about my accommodation I will just tell them: 'Look, this is how I feel, I don't feel appreciated. Or I don't feel like my money's worth my job' or something. […] While in Hungary they don't have these opportunities because they can't change job like that. It's impossible." – Lena

Individual freedom is mentioned previously as part of the neoliberal paradigm. This is also seen in Mariana's counter-mapping (p.107) and does not only reflect the ability of an individual to move freely around the globe. Freedom has in this research, specifically through interviews and counter-mapping been contextualised in the ability to express oneself *freely*. As shown in the extract above in which Lena distinguishes the possibility of making progress without being judged, professional freedom is often followed by its personal counterpart. In other words, whilst the UK truly for most participants truly meant a greater number and variety of opportunities, the consequences of taking advantage of these opportunities often came with a positive change regarding their everyday lives and mindsets.

Moreover, existing research reports that migration can act as both a cause and a consequence more specifically for women's empowerment. It is also more likely to occur when women move from rural to urban areas, separate from a family group and engage in employment outside of their home-countries (Piper, 2005:25). Roze, previously mentioned as a migrant who *ticks all the boxes* when it comes to mobility and migration experiences, mentioned the freedom she has in the UK as compared to being home in Lithuania, even for a visit:

> "You get accustomed to a certain type of service you know, here for example, people don't react to things how you dress, nobody cares. They might look at me, but really nobody ever says anything or cares Back home it's a big deal so you have to be cautious of what you're going to wear and even my mum sometimes will say to me [and] we [are just] going across the road to the shop, like imagine, she'd say to me 'you can't go like this. Dress up.' And it's like across the road. […] You need to look a certain way so it's weird sort of you know. So that makes me a bit anxious when I'm there I have to think 'Oh you know, how do I look, [is it] okay to fly in wearing this?' Or are they going to look at me funny when I get off the plane? You know and it's just like here you don't need to think about these things. People are relaxed. Nobody cares what you're wearing, how you look, how your hair looks or anything you know?"

When participants were exposed to multiple cultures with minimal direct contact with their home country's influence due to moving alone, it usually meant becoming "critical towards the 'parochialism at home' and prejudiced attitudes" (Moroşanu, 2018:168). For many participants, coming to the UK meant discovering who they wanted to be and not making compromises for the first time in their lives. As many of the participants came either to study or work, coming to the UK meant starting adult life and figuring out who they were. Such practices made them more confident and more comfortable as individuals, which again, resulted in balancing the 'new' vs. the 'old' self, such was the case of Hana:

> "I'm a bit different person in Germany compared to in the UK as I said on the [counter] map. I feel a sense of acceptance here for who I am. I feel here in the UK I can be much more who I really am and talk about my interests which might be for example, my spiritual interests which my German friends cannot relate to at all and I feel like they're mocking it sometimes."

FIGURE 10 COUNTER-MAP BY HANA

Expression, acceptance, freedom, openness, growth and even dreams are all the words that found their place in the UK word box more than once. However, the ability to express oneself is not a trait equally available to all. All the participants for whom living in the UK has meant 'being myself', or 'feeling free to express my full self' mostly came from a white background. Although the concept of race, both in theory and in practice is not central to this research, it was impossible not to recognise a pattern that emerged mostly within non-EU participants, in that they had experienced racism. "Whilst their white Europeanness enabled many to rhetorically deny discrimination" (Moroşanu, 2018:167), those of non-white or mixed origin did not enjoy the privilege of protecting whiteness (Lippard et al., 2020). Similarly, Stock (2023) has argued that having the privilege of being able to act as one chooses is linked to being in the middle class. In other words, people considered that being able to choose *not to do something,* or act in a certain way that increases their ability to express themselves was the privilege which distinguished those in the middle from the working classes. This relates to a form of autonomy from the state which is characterised by the knowledge that structural factors can influence actions and choices, but that ones' financial and cultural resources are useful in choosing action or (inaction) that may influence structural conditions and induce favourable change.

Drawing back on racial differences, I found it particularly interesting that discrimination on the one hand, and equal tolerance on the other hand seem to be relational in the sense that some participants felt that Britain was tolerant and multicultural, whereas others experienced how being multicultural does not automatically equate to tolerance as well. This is not to say that white participants will have never experienced any form of discrimination (Brexit had a big impact on this, as will be mentioned later), but that the *mechanisms of exclusion*, as Favell (2008) coined it, rely on various factors and operate on a subjective level. Back (1996) has termed such a phenomenon as a 'metropolitan paradox', which recognises the co-existence of diversity and discrimination. As such, coming from what are generally understood to be less multicultural countries, followed by "increasingly negative rhetoric" (Moroşanu and Fox, 2013) and usually an Eastern-European country, people see Britain as a place that exercises openness to the new and celebrates diversity. Arvo, for example, a young Estonian describes people in the UK as being "much more open

to random connections. So it's easier to kick off with a small talk and then get to know someone than in other European countries, or home. Estonian home." Similarly, Kristina, who holds a Cypriot passport but is of South-East European origin said: "I never felt like a foreigner here, primarily, of course, because of the language. But I think also, the opportunities, and it's just very open and diverse, and I think the people make London, it's such a multicultural place." During the counter-mapping activity, Viktorija has put 'openness to strangers' in the UK word box, and 'intolerant' and 'closed' into the Latvia word box.

On a similar level, like many other mostly European participants, Hana did not think of herself as a migrant until she signed up for my research as a potential participant: "That was the first time that I thought I migrated, that it was really clear to me, 'oh my God, I'm eligible for this study'. Yeah, it's amazing. So thank you for making me reflect a little bit. It's lovely". Although seemingly trivial, such thinking reaffirms another set of inequalities borne out of the migration/mobility paradigm. It reveals a neo-liberal approach to free movement and the EU's internal market, previously discussed in *Chapter 2*, and the subtle distinction between those who are migrants and those who are simply mobile. Engbersen et al. (2017) highlight how the EU itself seems to renounce the notion of 'migration' in relation to 'mobile EU citizens', simplifying the potential complexity of intra-EU mobility, and seeing it as primarily driven by economic motives and involving mostly temporary or circular forms of mobility. Such approach however, neglects the civic stratification between different categories of workers from various member states. Whilst some had free access to the labour market, others needed a work permit during the imposed transitional period thus creating a temporary exception to the general rule of 'freedom of movement' for citizens of the new EU member states (Poland, Romania and Bulgaria).

Contrastingly, people from Asia or the Americas appeared to have a slightly different experience of the UK. Mark gave me a detailed description of his migration odyssey, which had been affected by certain political developments that are in one way or another connected to hostility towards diversity. He left Singapore, his home country at the age of 21 and did his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in the United States. He wanted to stay there, however, by the time he graduated with his Master's,

Donald Trump was elected as president and “the atmosphere for immigrants started becoming very poor”, as he said. He then applied for a very prestigious Master’s studies programme at Oxford University and was accepted. He moved to the UK in 2017. After saying he feels judged while living in Oxford, he continued to explain how things got even worse after the pandemic:

> “Coronavirus restrictions made me actually even more deeply unsatisfied with Britain and British culture. And I think this is a bit peculiar to me, but it's because I saw all of these incongruences… So initially as an Asian person going to a supermarket, I realised that I would get looked at. I would get treated differently. This still happens, it's not as often, but it still happens that sort of subtle racism has increased, but whenever I was in a supermarket I saw these inconsistencies […] For a while I dated somebody who was Lithuanian, she had blue eyes and she had blonde hair, right? She grew up in London, she came when she was eleven. So she sounds like that [British], but right up until like her name get[s] brought up in certain other things, people would say racist things about me to her and other people would assume that she's British. I myself often struggle to see whether or not what I experience is the product of racism or discrimination because it is multi-faceted as you and I are sociologists and we both notice. It's one of those things, it's very hard to tell when it's happened and I only have like a little bit more sensitivity to this because of my time in America.”

Having an MA degree in Sociology himself, Mark tried to understand the background of experienced racism from a theoretical and conceptual point of view. However, his experiences, particularly when considering his ‘protected-by-whiteness’ girlfriend, only reinscribe the existence of the metropolitan paradox as described by Back (1996). Diane, an American of Hispanic origin explained how she got “the same type of racism as back in the States”, and João experienced uncomfortable situations at the UK border:

> "I feel like it's a very, very racist country. I started to reflect more and more with my experiences of police surveillance and like officers in the border patrol and it's so horrible it's so bad. It might be one of the reasons for me to leave this country because I just despise the way they treat us […] just because of the colour of our passports, it's disgusting."

Similar thoughts were expressed by several participants when I asked about the impact of Brexit on their transnational lives. Participants have expressed how their feeling of being comfortable in the UK has now been severely influenced by Brexit (see Mas Giralt, 2020; Zontini and Però, 2019), as it created a new rhetoric that resembles the one Mark mentioned when he spoke about remaining in the US after Donald Trump was elected as president. Viktorija, even though she holds British citizenship, said how hatred increased against "people like us" and that the "occasional abuse in the streets" she experienced now feels like a more common occurrence after Brexit, even though her word box for the UK looked very different in comparison to the verbally described experience. In that sense, the politics of belonging and political memberships do not necessarily indicate a more intimate and established feeling of belonging. Citizenship, which can be seen as an individual contractual relationship between the person and the state as liberal theory sees it (Yuval Davis, 2011), does not unfortunately provide a similar relationship with the domicile society which detains the power of exclusion. This can then be explained through the deservingness to belong, as introduced by Blachnicka-Ciacek et al. (2021). Various levels of exclusion that occur regardless of the political membership, make migrants feel like they constantly need to prove they deserve to belong in the host country. This became more difficult with "the establishment of the Conservative government, [and] the anti-immigration and divisive rhetoric enter[ing] the mainstream of political and social debate" (Blachnicka-Ciacek et al., 2021:3816). Such primacy of the deservingness discourse has the potential to create a sense of alienation, and further reinforce the already unstable plans for staying in the UK more permanently. It can then, also create a liminal space of belonging, with even those

'ideal migrants' (Blachnicka-Ciacek et al., 2021) seeing themselves as positioned outside or on the margins of society.

Similarly, Jin, although she is South Korean, and Brexit has not impacted her legal rights to stay, live or work in the UK, described how when she came first to the UK, she had a feeling of coming to the EU, rather than coming to "a country with a border". Moreover, Brexit impacted Jin's experience in the following way:

> "I think I became more aware of my foreignness to this country. A great number of people voted to make sure I am a foreigner. […] So I think Brexit was kind of a point I realised that now the boundary is going to be as narrow as the UK and the UK is going to make sure who belongs to the UK and who doesn't".

The sense of freedom, therefore, experienced by coming to the UK is highly affected by the global geo-political scene and subtle signs of exclusion mechanisms that have an immense power to turn into the politics of belonging. Whilst on the one hand, the UK provides more opportunities for professional development, on the other hand, it is dependent on interactions on both micro and macro levels. From the implementation of Brexit to everyday interactions on the street, the UK truly resembles the 'metropolitan paradox' (Back, 1996), offering both a 'safe haven' and a challenging, sometimes even hostile, ability for progress.

CONCLUSION

The circumstances and migratory context of 27 people who took part in this project were represented through roughly fifteen short excerpts and anecdotes, which can be applied to the majority if not all participants. These carefully chosen participants and their stories have been used to shape the context for future chapters, and largely build on *Chapter 2*, where the context was set out theoretically. This chapter turned

the theory into practice and showed how indeed young people nowadays tend to move to accelerate adulthood. Moreover, their migrations are important drivers for establishing themselves as autonomous adults, as in the UK they can truly be who they want to be, and care less about the expectations they might face in their home countries. Counter-mapping has immensely bolstered the narrative data in that aspect, showing that young people's perception of the UK is largely connected to their age and future aspirations. This chapter has also shown that 'being free' or 'feeling accepted' does not apply equally to everyone and that politics of belonging truly have an impact on the more generic feeling of attachment to either place or people. Building on that thought, the next chapter focuses more deeply on the people migrants keep in contact with, both within and across the borders of multiple nation-states.

CHAPTER 6: MAKING OF NEW AND MAINTAINING THE OLD: NETWORKS AND RELATIONSHIPS

INTRODUCTION

"I feel it's generally easier to maintain contacts that are physically here, I find it easy to maintain relationships with people that are here. But I'm finding it increasingly difficult with my relationships, with people that are not here, maybe because I'm growing older and growing less patient, I don't know. But I'm also starting to feel that I think it's an age thing. But having said that, I think it's an age thing, growing older and having less patience for having extended friendships and having a lot of friendships like we had in high school and stuff like that. Or in the early years of university. Where you have so many different friends and so many different groups of people you hang out with. But for the people who are not here it's a lot of effort to be in touch with them. Even family at times and you want to be in touch with them and you want to be close to them. But it's a lot of work because when let's imagine a situation where Covid doesn't exist. You would meet with your friends over the weekend. Or maybe you would hang out at a friend's house after work on a weekday, things like that, whereas when it's with people who are not here there's a time difference, for example. So you need to make sure that when you are going to arrange a call with them it's going to be a reasonable hour. For example, if I finish work around five or six it is 2 hours ahead in Cyprus. So I can say I'm gonna have a shower. Have some dinner and then all my mom. I can't call her at 9:00 PM at my time because it will be 11:00 PM for her so I need to schedule it differently. For example, with my best friend who is in Ireland. I wish I could talk to her more often than I do, but when? In lockdown is a bit easier, but when I have, let's say a normal life where I have a physical social life as well, it gets more difficult to allocate my time because things that are immediately around me tend to take precedence." – Androula

Androula's extract represents major themes that emerge within participants when it comes to their (trans)national relationships, both friends and family. Living in the UK with newly established connections and trying to maintain the old relationships in the home country or any other country for that matter, can be a big challenge for young people. That being said, Androula also rightly recognised that age seems to have a big role in socialising activities both within and across the border. The purpose of this chapter is to sketch out the circumstances, context and quality of migrants' relationships - from professional to personal ones, and from present to past ones. In doing so, the chapter will rely on previously described concepts of social anchoring and embedding to understand these practices. In that way, social anchoring, combined with embedding serves as a conceptual background in this research, that helps understand the transnational social field created by the 27 participants of this research. Therefore, "it can be said that in the case of migration, anchoring is about connecting migrants with a receiving society and maintaining connections with or disconnecting from the society of origin" (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2016:1134).

BEFRIENDING THE NEW

Regarding the everyday interactions migrants maintain, one of the questions I asked during the interview was to explain the circumstances of the social connections participants had in the UK. Consistent with previous literature on the topic, most participants expressed how the majority of their networks in the UK came from people they work with. Unlike the previous types of migration flows, where "settlement and integration processes are influenced by kin and friendship ties, village-based networks and customs (such as festivals), membership in ethnic associations and shared cultural and ethnic origins" (Boyd, 1989:651), young migrants do not follow the same path upon coming to the UK. Regardless of how much time participants spent in the UK at the time of the interview, the people they worked with provided day-to-day contact with the host society that often served as a basis before establishing alternative forms of relationships. Grzymała-Kazłowska (2018:638) found the same to be the case in her research on 40 Polish migrants in the UK, that the "[w]ork played a crucial function in

enabling connections between the participants and British society. It provided not only financial means for living but also regularity and stability which were of key importance, framing migrants' time, increasing their agency, confidence, self-esteem and feeling of safety." However, unlike Grzymała-Kazłowska's participants who found most of their non-work friends among other Polish migrants, participants of this research found work to be one of the main sources of potential *anchors* in the UK. It is not only convenient but also relatively easily accessible to establish relationships in a work domain, however, both scholarship and participants themselves notice how these relationships are usually unstable: "those networks tend to be temporal as constantly reshaped and modified in the latter stages" (Boyd 1989; Ryan 2011 cited in Park and Gerrits, 2021:np). When asked to describe the networks and connections he has in the UK, Adrian, who came to the UK from Greece first said:

> "So I do have like a lot of people from work that we are like relatively close and we like are kind of good friends, so yeah. That does happen a lot in the UK, like people operate like that and it's funny cause I'm like when someone links all the work [people], obviously you like, lose contact with most of them, right? I am very close with a guy from work, [he] is Cypriot and we are very close. Maybe because culturally I'm close with him. […] You can have like acquaintances and meet people from different events, but I wouldn't like, consider them like friends.. But I think that's like how things are, especially here, like, you kind of like more easily have acquaintances for like this period of time. And then you just change out of each other's lives. I think that's how it happens here, and I'm fine [with it]. I'm adaptive in a way. Let's say I think that's how it usually is in the UK. So I'm fine with it."

Such relationships are "adaptive, localised and situational, formed very quickly and often structured around specific practices that migrants would not necessarily feel an affinity to in their origin countries" (Gill and Bialski, 2011:242). This is not to say that migrants would not befriend their work colleagues were they to stay in their home countries, but rather that migrants, having little or no connection to the host society

upon initial stages of settlement try to make a connection where possible and accessible. The temporal nature of such relationships "is associated with Granovetter's notion of "weak ties", which highlights […] an individual's desire to integrate into the society" (Granovetter, 1973 cited in Park and Gerrits, 2021:np).

Giovanna from Italy spent seven years in France before coming to the UK. She did her Master's and PhD degrees there and moved to Manchester in 2017 where was granted a fellowship. When she described the context of her connections in the UK, she reflected on how such relationships are often superficial:

> "Usually people from work and science and yes, they are mostly people from work, perhaps people my age so postdoc. With some of them, there is strictly a colleague relationship. [With] others a relationship seems a little bit more personal in the sense that we might discuss things that are not strictly work-related. I am not completely sure that these are very nice. I enjoy talking with them […], and I'm not sure that I would define them [as] friendship in the same way that I would think I consider my friends when I was outgoing. The relationship Is good, but it is perhaps more superficial."

In that sense, the relationships Giovanna and Adrian described, but many other participants as well can be described as weak ties. The role of weak ties is to reduce the self-encapsulation of networks and expand the opportunities available to the network. Strong ties consist of those in which there is an important emotional linkage and/or frequent, routine interaction and are similar to primary relationships. Weak ties are less encompassing linkages, similar to specialised contacts within formal organisations, or between clients and service providers, but include ties among individuals that simply lack emotional strength (Granovetter, 1973). Weak ties are considered to be powerful elements of social structure because they are considerably more likely to serve the important bridging function than strong ties. The significance of weak ties, then, would be that those which are local bridges create more, and shorter, paths. From that follows, even though weak ties can be defined as superficial,

they are mostly beneficial for young and highly skilled migrants, especially in the initial stage of their development (see Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2005; White and Ryan, 2008). In addition, "the highly skilled tend to favour weak associational ties […] [and] the literature in general has been positive about weak associational ties" (Gill and Bialski, 2011:243).

Moreover, work on its own has shown to be an important anchor in young migrants' lives, regardless of the predominantly weak ties that characterise workplace connections. In a way, whilst co-workers may indeed present a weak, but useful and resourceful connection, being employed and working as an important everyday activity turned out to have a major role in migrants' lives and their connection to the UK. As interviews have touched only upon specific groups of people that surround participants of this research, data gathered through counter-mapping provides a completely different but valuable perspective.

FIGURE 11 COUNTER-MAP BY MIGUEL

Words such as job, work, or even career show up seven times in the UK word box, and when combined with the word opportunity, they reach 18 occurrences. As the main task of the counter-mapping was to come up with as many words as possible in as little time as possible, work was one of the first, and therefore most relevant words to appear in participants' minds. In that sense, jobs that migrants have in the UK serve

as anchors tying them to the UK and as an institutional setting that enables a context in which the process of embedding takes place. Both being essentially dynamic processes, social anchoring and embedding here provide a deeper understanding of participants' circumstances. As analysis of only verbally described social connections may imply superficial or shallow embedding, a different data set such as the one achieved through counter-mapping indicates the underlying importance that the workplace holds in migrants' lives. Going back to the previous chapter, and describing participants as active agents primarily in search of opportunities, work was the number one reason for their move to the UK to begin with. Therefore, regardless of potential weak ties with fellow colleagues, work and employment remain a dominant dimension and an attachment in a transnational setting of young and highly skilled migrants.

What makes Miguel's counter-map (above) even more interesting, is that he put the word 'friends' also in the UK word box. Friends remain one of the most complex themes among the participants, and some of them have described UK-based relationships outside work as superficial as well, expanding the weak ties from professional to a personal domain, as Viktorija did:

> "In the UK I find it easy to form easy friendships like where you are, you're not close friends, but you are friends. You're friendly and you're good acquaintances and you have fun and you sort of get to that really easily with people. People are open to [it], it's sort of, not superficial is not the right word because it's got a lot of negative connotation, but that sort of easy convenience friendship."

Migration is often conceptualised as a process of network building. Massey (1988:398) also says that migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that link migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through the bonds of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin. From that point of view, when asked about relationships beyond the work scope, participants said that

there were some alternative forms of finding and establishing new friendships, usually through sports and leisure activities. Aside from the more common activities such as going to the gym, Viktorija and Mark take part in rowing training, and Ivana for example, signed up for sword dancing practice. When Ivana mentioned sword-dancing, she must have seen my facial expression change as I was slightly surprised at her taking part in such an activity so she went on to explain: "Yes, it is as crazy as it sounds, but it is also so good, the people there, I fell in love with them as they remind me of an orchestra I used to play in when I was in Croatia" (my translation). Such activities give newcomers more possibilities of establishing more meaningful and less superficial friendships, and sometimes even give them a sense of belonging, "due to the tendency for people to choose friends who are similar to them" (Mouw et al., 2014:337). That might exactly be the reason why the word 'friends' was more common in the UK word box rather than in the home country box. Whilst in the home country, the word appeared only four times, in the UK it was mentioned twice as much.

Here it is very important to reflect on these network building practices through the transnational lens. Viktorija, Mark and Ivana, by engaging in activities that are likely to increase their networks in the UK, do not necessarily become more embedded into the society. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004:1006) point out in their distinction between ways of being and ways of belonging, there is a need for an approach to the study of transnational social life that distinguishes "between the existence of transnational social networks and the consciousness of being embedded in them". Utilising this approach within this study helps distinguish between activities and behaviours that enact *belonging*, or those that simply come as part of *being*. Participants' local networks form only a small part of their daily lives, and their daily rhythms and activities almost always respond simultaneously to various social institutions and confirm their involvement in a transnational social field. They, as Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) point out, exhibit a transnational way of being instead of belonging.

Taking into account that migrants often initiate establishing new connections in a host society, it was no surprise that all participants expressed how most of their relationships aside from work were made with people of non-British origin.

Internationals, as participants called them, are “more open than British people”, as Diane said. Being very careful when answering the question about the nature of their relationships in the UK, most participants felt the need not to sound too harsh when they wanted to say international friends are easier to befriend. Mariana used an interesting description when I asked her if she finds it difficult to establish new contacts in the UK: “If you mean British people – extremely hard. Other people no because they’re in the same shite as you.” Wanting to express how sharing the experiences of being a migrant in the UK made them connect on an empathy level, Mariana, and many others as well expressed how such friendships were much easier to get going. Similar findings were expressed by Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2016) and Jones (2013) as “development of affective relationships of mutual understanding with other migrants, rather than natives, particularly in the context of perceived class-based similarities” (Moroşanu, 2018:167) is very common among newcomers within a host society. The explanation for this, as Mariana has put it, lies in the fact that “cross-ethnic friendships could be founded around similar interests, lifestyles or life experiences” (Moroşanu, 2018:167), such is the experience of moving to the UK. Migrants then, “find the like-minded people who may feel the same agony, share every day’s thoughts and feelings, and re-establish their own social ties” (Park and Gerrits, 2021:np). It could be said that due to sharing the experience “[a] degree of integration emerges, not necessarily because newcomers share social and institutional spaces with long-time natives but because diverse newcomers inevitably share them with each other (Crul, 2016 cited in Foner et al., 2019:6).

Finally, being physically close is also one of the conditions that made some friendships easier, such as the one described at the very beginning of this chapter. The vicinity and convenience of such friendships were an important factor for participants, and Jess, a young Canadian who spent three years in London before going back to Canada summed up relationships she had in the UK as all types previously mentioned in this chapter: “[Most] were from work. And then I got involved in some organisations you know for young professionals to meet each other […]. I just met people through other friends sometimes […], so people living near me physically. So yeah, those three things I would say”.

Two factors that largely affected the dynamics of establishing new friendships and connections were participants' age and life-course and COVID-19. Whilst the above-mentioned situations of establishing new connections can be said to be common regardless of age, profession and other life conditions in migrants' lives, becoming older and COVID-19 changed the way migrants perceive and realise their social connections. One of the first things I recognised is that participants who graduated from university in the UK on average have bigger social circles than those who have moved to the UK in search of a job and upon graduation. At the time of interviews, four participants were enrolled in full-time Bachelor's or Master's programmes, and thirteen other participants had already finished either undergraduate or postgraduate degrees in the UK. Miguel and Hana for example, both students at the time of the interview both mentioned their university friends when I asked about what kind of connections they established in the UK. The biggest difference between finding friends during university and finding friends from work is that university friends come in 'chunks' as Miguel described. Zimmerman et al. (2007) also found that finishing a degree in the host country makes immigrants feel more integrated and more connected to the host country. Eleni for example, after she graduated from the University in Canterbury, moved to London but still regularly met her friends from her university days. However, even though it might seem easier to connect with people during university days, those people are still mostly described as internationals, as Hana explained:

> "I feel like especially in uni, I've found it much easier to be friends with people who were also coming from a different country because even though we weren't from the same countries we had this kind of shared experience of being foreigners and I actually found it really difficult during my undergrad degree to connect to people from Scotland. And that only happened through joining the climate movement, which was mainly led by people from Scotland."

Contrastingly, as it is easier to make friends in university, the harder it gets in later stages of life, as Androula has also mentioned in her story at the beginning of the chapter. In that sense, people who were PhD students for example during the time of our interview, even though they were students, they could not relate to having a group of friends from their university cohort. Giovanna compares how she felt making friends in France where she migrated at a younger age, and making friends now in the UK, being older:

> "In France, I actually had a few friends, a couple not a lot. But they were a bit closer because we were younger. […] To be honest, no, I don't have that kind of friends [now]. Probably related to a shift in age. Also, the fact that I was starting to look better to know the people around me before lockdown came, so to meet people, to talk with them outside the work all extremely reduced."

Though age and life-course will in greater depth be addressed in the next chapter, coming to the UK after graduating from university and shortly before lockdown significantly reduced the potential of migrant social anchoring. Of course, as Gill and Bialski (2011:242) recognised, length of residency and new cohorts of migrants also affect the 'network resource' available to migrants, which Giovanna is aware of and said how she is going to 'pick up' her networks once that becomes possible. However, doing research during times of COVID-19 and while the lockdown was in place in Britain, had a significant impact on the data collected. Although I could clearly envisage the migrants' opportunities for socialising would be significantly altered because of COVID, such a shift in dynamics of keeping in touch calls for a wider discussion on transnational connections. As previously, migrants kept in touch digitally only with people in their home countries and countries of their previous settlements, now they had to keep in touch digitally with people they met in the UK as well. All previously mentioned relationships, from work-based and university-based to social activity-based, all ceased to exist in an offline sphere. From that point of view, previous research that argues how offline relationships are on average stronger than

online relationships (see Komito and Bates, 2009; Boyd and Ellison, 2007), came to be seriously questioned. As Park and Gerrits (2021:np) write, "online social networks should be understood as being composed of more instantaneous, light and diverse relationships, in line with the proliferation of 'network individualism'". However, since the introduction of COVID and keeping in mind the strength and importance of transnational connections as well, almost all day-to-day social interactions of individual migrants in this research were maintained through an online form. João told me their story of making friends, and I could personally relate to it very much:

> "But it was very difficult to make friends in the beginning […] as a PhD student. I was 29 years old when I joined. There was this very like, big age gap and, a lot of my PhD mates are in areas or I don't know they have their families. They have their lives. They don't want to be friends, so it was a bit hard in the beginning. The first months after I got here they were a bit challenging. Boom and then Covid so not many opportunities to make friends either and now I'm the president of the postgrad society, so since then I met a few people. There were a couple of PhD mates who already defended their thesis, so they're gone, however, we're really, really good friends. […] And it was horrible, it was really difficult when I was starting to meet new people. That was six months after I joined then the pandemic exploded and then there was everyone in their houses and I didn't have good housemates either back then. I mean these are quite nice the previous ones were not nice. Yeah, it was very hard. I was doing a lot of Zoom calls I guess, but mostly with my friends from Brazil, some of them with people from here, but it was really awkward. No, it was just bad."

The ability to make friends then depends on an individual's resilience to difficult situations and persistence in establishing new connections, even if it means going out of your way to achieve so. In João's case, even though they were 29 when they started their PhD, they joined the Postgraduate Society and became its president, only to meet new people. Mahmoud, a PhD student from Egypt said that regardless of having

online encounters with people from his work, these could not replace his networking and going out in pre-COVID days:

> "But at the same time, I could say that many of my friends travelled. So I don't see them these days like some of them even travelled more than one year ago I didn't see them they didn't come back now. But I could say that before the pandemic I was meeting people every day and every weekend. My networking was like I could say that every weekend I'm meeting new people and I'm having new friends, but now it's not… now I could say that, okay, I could see new people also from I'm teaching at the university online, but I could say that that makes me know like, some students and maybe like some new tutors, but at the same time I couldn't say that we are having like really good bonding these days. Like with the new people that I'm meeting because only could be a virtual meeting. Yeah, but still I think I have a good connection with others like that, I could say the people in the accommodation we sometimes go outside with each other we go shopping with each other."

Mahmoud's experience also talked to me in various ways. I have, as Mahmoud's friends and as was mentioned in *Chapter 4*, also travelled back home at the very start of the pandemic. Some participants, like Androula, expressed how they also would have travelled home during lockdown if it were not for their partners as otherwise, they "wouldn't have any people around [them]". However, since all interactions switched online, both people who travelled back home and stayed in the UK had to maintain their UK-based relationships online during lockdown. In that sense, I, who spent several months back in Croatia, had the same opportunities for social integration during lockdown as Mahmoud and João who stayed in the UK, for example. Another aspect that is highly specific to both the situation, but also the types of migrants in this research, is that the lockdown gave them more time to cherish and nurture their transnational relationships not only in their country of origin but all over the world.

BINATIONAL, TRANSNATIONAL AND BEYOND: MAINTAINING THE OLD

Even though the relationships participants in the UK have seen a major change once they were switched to an online setting, the relationships they kept with friends and family beyond the border have always been online. Therefore, while some migrants truly maintain binational networks, the one between the UK and their home countries, most participants in this research, mostly due to their previous migration experience, maintain multiple transnational connections. Having friends everywhere, or at least, at several places, helped participants maintain a balanced and regular social interaction during COVID times. Even more so, it seems like during COVID they had more time to dedicate towards these relationships, as they require scheduling and advance preparation.

Androula's extract at the beginning of the chapter once again served as an appropriate introduction to this section of the chapter that will be dedicated towards relationships participants have outside of the UK. In that sense, as many of them had experience of previous migration, whether for university, work or as part of student exchange, led to many participants having friends in different countries, time zones and continents. Jin, for example, finished her studies in the United States. Being a South Korean, and maintaining relationships in North America while being in the UK herself, Jin created a transnational social space that she has been maintaining since she moved to the UK in 2012.

> "It can be challenging sometimes because I live in three different time zones. Here in Cambridge, my two best friends, one is on the East Coast which is I think 6 hours behind and another friend in San Francisco which is 9 hours behind and my parents in South Korea, 10 to 11 hours ahead, so one thing that definitely changed my lifestyle is I always turn off my phone so my phone never rings when I'm sleeping."

Naturally, problems related to time zone differences were more frequently expressed by non-EU participants, compared to the EU, even though they are not exclusive to non-EU migrants. In that sense, "it matters greatly whether migration proceeds along a north-south or east-west axis, as the first keeps time zone differences down and the second expands them. […] But the more global the migration, the more likely that time zone differences impede convenient communication" (Waldinger, 2015:72). Such findings, closely related to multiple migrants, and the newly-emerged group of highly mobile people, question the so far presumed fact "how migrant networks are often highly localised" and often exclusive (Gill and Bialski, 2011:242). Gill and Bialski (2011) but also Grzymała-Kazłowska (2005), for example, write about Polish communities in the UK and how those are "not always welcoming to newcomers" (Gill and Bialski, 2011:242). On the contrary, data gathered from young migrants in this research who moved alone to the UK shows that individuals are always open to newcomers, as they do not have a network of co-nationals that acts as a safe net and provides social background. As was shown through João's example of joining the Postgraduate society, and even through Viktorija, Mark and Ivana joining rowing and sword dancing practices and Hana joining the climate movement – moving alone means seeking various ways to establish new connections and such migrants are not hostile to any form of new connections. However, balancing friendships both in-person and online has shown to be exhausting, with some participants saying how they feel pressure or even guilt for not keeping in constant touch with their friends online. Lingel et al. (2014) have also recognised how social network sites (such as Facebook for example) can have both positive and negative impacts on transnational lives. On the one hand, they let migrants stay in touch with their loved ones, but on the other hand, migrants feel obligated to use such sites on a daily basis. Moreover, having friends everywhere means also frequent visits to one another and balancing whether they are going to visit friends or family during holidays. Therefore, since COVID restrictions came into place in the UK, most of them had more time to balance out the relationships on both sides of the transnational axis, as Mariana explained:

> "For one thing, this Covid situation has been helpful in that respect because everybody would contact you on the same device, so everybody I would see

through the phone. And so that's been helpful to balance that out, but I do remember pre-Covid times that sometimes it was a bit hard when you know I have plans with friends here or '[let's go] to this place' or 'let's have dinner here' and also had friends back home saying 'Hey, how are you? Can we chat?' This year has been different because I had all my friends on the phone and I could probably combine them a bit better than before."

So whilst COVID-19 has negatively impacted so many areas of the lives of both migrant and non-migrant populations, it acted as a positive strategy to keep in touch transnationally. As both Androula and Mahmoud have described, "[g]iven, the rigid, hectic, work-oriented schedules of the immigrants, weekday evenings may not afford the time or peace of mind needed to call relatives at home" (Waldinger, 2015:72).

Such practices of spatially dispersed social networks are often seen in migration studies as dis-embedding. Literature suggests negotiating embeddedness happens at a local level in the destination society, and Hess (2004) for example, has seen embeddedness as inherently spatial and territorialised. However, embeddedness needs to take into account the transnational dimension, and that transnational mobility and connections do not represent dis-embedding, but rather a process of transnational network building or embedding, creating relationships of trust at various interrelated geographical scales (Ryan and Mulholland, 2015). In that sense, embeddedness is about connections between actors regardless of their locations, and practices described by the participants in this study reaffirm the possibility of being embedded transnationally.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

It was not only friendships that improved during COVID-19 times for participants of this research. Many of them said how relationships with their families have improved since they moved to the UK in general. Whilst on the one hand, it is hard and sometimes heart-breaking being away from their loved ones, the lack of being near

them has on an everyday basis improved the quality of their relationships. Moving alone for most participants meant leaving all of their family members behind, with some of them having close family members (usually siblings) living abroad as well. Social technologies and social media "in the lives of these families make immigration 'more acceptable than ever before', giving 'distant individuals the means to not only manage and maintain their connections but also to negotiate their roles through time'" (Aguila, 2009:100 cited in Bacigalupe and Cámara, 2012:1427). Many participants have therefore expressed how they have a family group chat in one of the social media apps, to "break the distance and time limitations that prevented ongoing family communication" (Bacigalupe and Cámara, 2012:1427).

As most participants moved upon entering the 'adult' stage of their lives, i.e. starting higher education, or finding their first jobs in the UK, moving to the UK also meant becoming more mature. In that sense, the relationship they had with their parents especially, matured as well. Hana, who feels she can express herself more in the UK feels like the relationship she has with her mom developed a lot:

> "I think the relationship with my mom, especially improved. I think we have deeper conversations and a more honest and critical and reflecting about things together. I also feel a deeper relationship to my grandparents, especially because beforehand, before I moved, we weren't super close, but ever since I lived here, they're much more expressive about how proud they are. How much they love me. So, I feel like not having me around made them realise that they miss me. And yes, it's a nice feeling, to actually hear 'I love you', which they never told me before. […] If I would capture it in one word, it would be like one phrase would be, it changed my family dynamics as in, and we're having a deeper, more authentic relationship."

When she sent her photograph after the interview for the photo-elicitation method, Hana provided a very sentimental explanation of the photograph, which is closely

related to the previously described improved relationship with her mom and grandparents:

> “What really reminds me of home and induces that lovely hometown feeling for me are my kitchen utensils, particularly my bread baking tin, my cake tin, and my coffee mill. I got the bread tin from my granny when I left Germany. Bread is a very popular product in Germany and I genuinely miss good bread as I'm not a fan of the UK's toast culture. In my eyes, German bakeries are hands down one of the best things/places ever! □ Therefore, I also love my cake tin which I use a lot. It's quite popular in Germany to have cake and coffee in the afternoon - a tradition I really enjoy. So occasionally, I love to just bake a cake for my flatmates and me. Usually, I am met with a mix of gratitude and confusion by my flatmates. Their first reaction always asks: who's birthday is it? Even greater is their excitement when I say I just felt like baking for us. I included one photo of a German cake mixture. Before Brexit, my mom often sent me surprise parcels. They always included some German food products like this baking mixture with the intention to 'send me a bit of home'. Lastly, the coffee mill. At home in Bremen we have a really old coffee mill which already belonged to my great-grandmother. I grew up with the lovely scent of freshly ground coffee which most likely primed my love for coffee. Therefore, my mom decided to gift me my own coffee mill for Glasgow to have a more enjoyable, home-resembling coffee ceremony.”

FIGURE 12 PHOTOGRAPH SENT BY HANA

Such relationships, those with family members across the border, define a transnational family, and such families "live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ''familyhood'', even across national borders" (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002:3). However, having a phone and internet connection does not completely replace in-person interaction and time spent together and "[i]nstead, they provide new opportunities for constructing a 'co-presence' despite of distance" (Bacigalupe and Cámara, 2012:1432). Roze explained it as "Now I'm not there, meaning when I come back it becomes more like an occasion and a party rather than me helping out with things at home". Baldassar (2007, 2008), then argues how due to distance and communication provided solely through technology, both parents and children can hide problems, or even illness to protect the other side from feeling guilty for not being there. Giovanna said: "When you see them once in a while there is also pressure to be happy. Yes, sometimes we will have to not act, but to hide certain things I feel". However, one of the reasons for improving their relationship

while apart, for transnational families in this research usually was the fact that they appreciated each other more. Being physically together meant valuing the presence of each other, as it only happens a few times a year, in the best-case scenario. For Eleni, her move to the UK matured the relationship she had with her family:

> "We used to have a lot of issues when I was a teenager. […] I think it was an opportunity to actually have a better, more healthier relationship and it also gave me the opportunity to see things from a different perspective and mature in my own way. […] And I think it has helped me a lot and my parents to build a better relationship and now we have that kind of very healthy adult relationship."

Hana, Roze, Giovanna and Eleni in their stories above demonstrate another common pattern. They confirm what previous research on transnational communication between families has shown – that "migrant women contribute to the development and maintenance of transnational families and communities in ways that go beyond the role of productive labour" (Zontini, 2004:1117). Whilst participants of all genders frequently kept in touch with their family members back home and are in one way or another involved in 'kin work', women tend to do more, and feel greater responsibility for providing care from afar.

Living in a transnational family also meant that many participants had their family visit them in the UK, or become more acquainted with the British culture by migrants bringing gifts from the UK. In that sense, it can be said the young and highly skilled migrants of this research almost all experienced some kind of upward mobility, whether cultural, social or economic, but I found it interesting that most of their families also experienced some kind of upward mobility due to their family member being in the UK. Zontini (2010:818) has argued how families and family relations can serve as sources of social capital and such practices have been marked positive as they "allow people to mobilise collective resources for personal benefit". Moreover, even though this work recognises that "individuals are increasingly fragmented as a result

of social change" (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1996, 2000 cited in Zontini, 2006:326), families remain an important factor in young migrants' lives and prove "capable of adapting to different circumstances" (Zontini, 2006:341).

Family visits then, "help to strengthen the transnational networks established by immigrants, which link various societies and nations" (Cwerner, 2001:23). In other words, spatial mobility of individual migrants, but also their families who started travelling because of the initial move of my participants, induced social mobility in both as well. Such movements have previously been described as the 'escalator effect': "the move of younger citizens from the rural or provincial location they grew up into the metropolitan city […], it is a spatial move linked to a social mobility outcome" (Favell and Rechhi, 2011:53). Indeed, most participants have moved from rural area to urban areas, with some exceptions, mostly within non-EU participants. However, even those participants can be said to follow the South-North direction of global migration, coming from Brazil, Egypt, Singapore, Colombia and China. In that sense, for participants who came from those mentioned countries, even though they lived in cities, some even in capitals prior to their move to the UK, "development refers to personal development meaning upward social mobility connected with an individual or familial journal through the accumulation of education qualifications and migration to the Global North to experience a good life" (Kalemba, 2021:3). Existing literature on the subject has so far reflected the case of transnational families and social mobility mostly in terms of frequent visits to the country of origin (see Boyd, 1989), parents who left their children behind (e.g. Schmalzbauer, 2004), or family unification in the host country (see Bryceson, 2019). However, short-term family visits to the host society, or trips taken together outside of home or host country truly do affect the overall upward mobility of both individual migrants and their families. Irem, who finished a degree in the United States after which her sister followed her there too, vividly described the 'bridge' as she called it, that was created between her home country, Turkey, the UK and the States and how her family changed after her move:

> "Definitely it has in this sense, created this bridge out of Turkey into the UK. My two years in America almost did that because my sister followed me to

America. She finished her high school there and then she also struggled. And when I was in my second year she moved to the UK for University as well, it almost kind of created like a family migration. And currently, my mum absolutely loves the UK and she doesn't speak any English, but it opened her mind up to like… She started taking English lessons. She started being more interested in foreign media like shows and books and music. So it definitely changed in the sense, like they realised the more often they came here they realised there's a different way to live and we suited more. I know I said my family's conservative, but they're not conservative in a way that's like closed minded there actually rather open-minded people but… It's in the sense like, I wouldn't be able to sit down with my mum and dad and have wine because they're religious or like I couldn't tell them that I used to have spent like overnight visits with my boyfriend at the time, so it's that kind of difference, not any not in any way that you know... Like they didn't mind that he's English. Even though seeing the acceptance here, seeing how people are free to be however they want here made them realise, they've also appreciated it. Changed idea, opened up their minds into different lifestyles. And how that is also valid. There's not one single way. Basically, they understood that."

Of course, frequent visits of both participants and their families came to a halt during COVID-19, after which they had to, as was previously described regarding their social relationships in the UK, switch completely online in order to keep in touch. Again, similarly to situations described in previous sections of this chapter, where participants had more time to take part in transnational connections upon lockdown and work-from-home policy, they also had more time to stay in virtual touch with their families. João's picture they sent after the interview, reflected the way they keep in touch with their connections virtually:

"Here is the picture I promised. This little elephant is a mobile phone holder so you can video chat with people from abroad without using your hands to

hold it. I started to use it after the first lockdown to keep in touch with my family and friends in Brazil while doing other things (cooking, drinking, watching a film together). It helps me to connect with my home."

FIGURE 13 PHOTOGRAPH SENT BY JOÃO

Cabalquinto and Büscher (2022) argue that COVID-19 has intensified virtual mobilities in many ways. For many, including João, this meant managing spatial and temporal immobility, while using digital media to enact care practices for those who are

immobile somewhere else. In that sense, as Cabalquinto and Büscher (2022:864) point out, virtual and physical mobilities of translocal care during the pandemic are shaped by collective existential mobilities and "whole families and support networks, distributed across the globe can be on the move together, depending on the physical mobility of some".

COVID-19 has caused all sorts of issues for young and highly skilled migrants in the UK, most of which have already been described in the previously mentioned article written by Simola et al. (2023). Kristina for example, moved to London in 2019, to work at an NGO that works for education for women. A child of a mixed-ethnicity marriage, her parents moved from the Balkans to Cyprus where she grew up and which citizenship she holds. After getting a degree in development studies, she spent half a year working in Cambodia and was planning to go to Libya, however, that plan did not work out. Instead, she ended up in the UK and that did not make her very happy as it was her second choice and she wanted to continue her career in developing countries. Nevertheless, she knew the move to London still represented a new chapter and that it was an opportunity not just to start a new life, but to establish important work connections and it was "a chance to get [her] foot in the door". However, when asked where she sees herself and how she feels now that she lives in London, Kristina is still not sure: "Living here, [initially] I realised you know this is a place I could see myself living for a longer while. But you know, with everything that is happening, a lot of priorities change. So now if you ask me how long I see myself here – I don't know. I think for another year for sure. Maybe two years, but I don't think I see myself here for the long-term future. For now, I think, for work and to gain opportunities and to just live a full life, I think London is a really good place for that."

When it comes to the future, for many of us it is a new feeling to negotiate, but "there are many in our society for whom such uncertainty has been a familiar companion for some time" (Hughes, 2017:np). The concept of time will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapter, however, the presence of COVID-19 increased the feelings of uncertainty largely due to the fact migrants started to feel the urge to be close to their families. Consequently, this was the first time some of the participants started to think about the idea of return migration. What happened to be the most prominent occurrence when talking about future plans and projections

is that, together with it being uncertain, migrants mostly talked about short-term futures. When asked if they could see themselves staying in the UK permanently, the answer was often indeterminate. Even those who could have imagined themselves in the UK for a long-term future, are not so sure anymore since the introduction of COVID-19, which, as Cwerner (2001:21) argues is quite reasonable as "[i]mmigrants typically face a constant re-examination of their objectives, which are now contingent on external factors".

Drawing back on the neoliberal context described in *Chapters 2* and *5*, global capitalism also resulted in current age of economic insecurity and cultural uncertainty in which young migrants structure their future and the kinds of adults they are growing *into* (Silva, 2013:16). Future will be differently imagined in different political and economic context, times and places, Pine (2014) warns. In that sense, we can hope for a particular future, but we do not know with certainty it will realise itself in the way we desire. With COVID-19 acting as an external factor in narratives gathered within this research, it is therefore easier and more logical to be able to imagine only a near future, rather than a distant one. Jin, for example, said "I have a concrete plan to stay in the UK for the next one to two years.", after which she hopes to make another re-examination of her objectives, in Cwerner's (2001) words. Xiuying, when imagining her future follows the same example, amplified by the fact that she is an only child and considers the move back to China as one of the possible scenarios:

> "I'm not so clear about my future plans, but at least in the next 3-4 years probably I will still be here. Many things may change and I really don't know, I think about everything. I came here for a PhD. I thought I won't stay here, but so many things happened in the past year now and because I'm the only child, I don't have any siblings and now I see my parents getting old and I just feel I can't leave them alone in China anymore. I just started to think I may move back to China in the future. Eventually. I didn't make up my mind yet."

Xiuying raises a few important notions that were recognised among other participants as well. The fact that many of them came to the UK without a clear picture regarding the length of their stay, clearly locates individual migrants, at least those within my sample, in the category of the new emerging and highly mobile youth. In that sense, migration can be seen as "a tactic of creating futures" (Cole, 2010 cited in Griffiths et al., 2013:np). Migrants, therefore, tend to leave their options open, such was the case with Mahmoud: "My plans are more open, but I can say before COVID my plans were - if I could get a job opportunity I would stay, yeah." In the same way migration to the UK, when it took place, represented an uncertain, but hopeful future, COVID now increases the uncertainty and takes the imagining of the future towards not so optimistic stance anymore.

I have known Maria for a while as she was a part of a group of friends I had while living in Leicester. After she agreed to take part in my research, it was a bit strange for me to ask her questions that I already knew the answers to. I knew she moved from Romania to Spain with her mum about 10 years ago and that, in that sense, after moving to the UK she had become a twice-migrant (see Bhachu, 1985). However, her answers provided information that was beyond my initial knowledge as such a detailed description of our migratory experiences was never a topic of our informal get-togethers. For her, COVID-19 was the main reason why she started thinking about the long-term future and the way she feels in the UK:

> "Right now, I feel like I've never really felt like I wanted to stay there forever. And with this COVID situation, it's made it even harder to picture yourself living in a country where you don't really know anyone. So, I think the answer would be no – right now I don't see myself living in the UK for the rest of my life, I think it's more of a temporary thing for me."

As the COVID-19 situation calmed down, Maria stayed in the UK while frequently making long visits to both Spain and Romania. Her job was quite flexible in terms of her working location, and due to her EU status, she was allowed to spend up to 6

months a year outside of the UK. At the end of 2023, as we continuously stayed in touch she announced she was moving back to Spain permanently, to which news none of us who heard it were very surprised. Drawing back to existential mobility, where "the essence of mobility lies in all the ways in which we are called into the panic possibilities of moving forward with time, space, others, mood and our bodies" (Todres and Galvin, 2010:5), a sense that one is 'going somewhere' in life has the possibility to affect the geographical mobility as well. In other words, Hage (2009) argues that it is when people do not have this imaginary sense of existential mobility that they start contemplating actual physical mobility, as Maria did when she started to question her migration to the UK.

Similar to how João symbolically described their settling down through therapy and plants, Aneta noticed it might be her time to do the same: "You see, getting older as well, I feel like I want to put my roots down somewhere. I don't want to travel again and disrupt the whole network I've built in 8 years. I just find it harder, to be honest, it was harder and harder to move." Aneta's path was described in the previous chapter in comparison with her best friend, Roze. She moved from the Czech Republic, and Roze was Lithuanian and their paths kept intertwining all across Europe. At the time of the interview, she had a long-term relationship in the UK, upon which COVID-19 left a positive impact as it brought them closer together. She also clearly expressed she would not like to abandon what she built in the UK in the past 8 years, and later on I found out she got engaged and then married in the UK. Kley (2011:478) has found in her research on life-course and migration that women's migration decisions more specifically than men's, are more strongly influenced by the life-course domain of partnership. Living with a partner, having children and having strong ties to relatives and friends all diminish the odds of considering future moves.

On the contrary, some of the participants, like Lena below, want to explore what is it like to live in places beyond the UK, but is not sure if they have the time:

> "Now I want to stay here probably, I was thinking too, I really wanted to figure out what New Zealand looks like or how Canada is. But to be fair at

> that age, I'm 29 years old now, I'm not sure if I want to start everything from the beginning again in another country and I'm really enjoying myself here in the UK. I'm not sure if I'm staying in London, but I'd like to definitely stay there for a year or something […] So maybe I can find a job globally to go to live in Canada for a year and then come back. Or stay there for half a year, things like that, so yeah. That's the plan."

Seeing yourself as too old to pursue an idea or to satisfy the curiosity of living somewhere else can be seen through the perspective of perceiving time as a resource, "a commodity that one can have too much or too little of" (Griffiths, 2014:2003). In that sense migrants whose parents were older or who were only children and therefore felt the responsibility to care for them, felt they had less time to figure out how to plan their future and felt pressured to make decisions sooner rather than later. This is how Eleni thinks about the future: "You are just aware of time. That your parents and your grandparents…. and people are leaving and coming and changes are happening, but actually you're outside, you're not included in that so every time I go back to Cyprus I look at my grandfather and I'm like, 'Oh my God', you know he's getting older. Am I gonna be able to see him again?" Mariana, whose dad had health issues, felt her 'time had come':

> "A few months ago, I did consider going back home but not because I didn't feel at ease in the UK, but because I thought you know my time had come simply to go back to my family. My family situation is, I mean for everyone who is in their 30s or 40s, it's just really hard to be away from your parents when you know that they are ageing and that now you will run out of time at some point and that you will not get to enjoy those moments with your parents, you know."

However, later in the interview, Mariana said that even though she would very much love to go back to Spain, due to the high unemployment rate there and complications

imposed by COVID-19, she is not planning to move anytime soon. Mariana has indeed stayed in the UK, got married, bought a house and is expecting her first baby. She is therefore, one of the very few participants of this study who accomplished a full transition to adulthood while living transnationally. Indeed, as was previously said that adulthood and coming of age is nowadays seen as delayed due to various socio-economic factors, we also need to see adulthood as dramatically reimagined, along lines of work, family, relationships, gender and dignity (Silva, 2013). Goldstein and Kenney have recognised back in 2001 that there is a steady decline in marriage rates, and that marriage is now more increasingly being substituted with cohabitation. Still, the overall decline in marriage rates has also been interpreted through postponing the marriage to older ages, which is largely affected by increased education of women (Oppenheimer et al., 1995). Mariana has indeed confirmed this theoretical postulation, as she graduated from university, changed several jobs and accommodations in the UK, before she settled down and got married well in her 30s.

On another note, similar thoughts on potential return migration are very common among young migrants and such situations can be viewed as postponed temporalities. Barbara Adam has written extensively on the importance of imagined futures, "which she describes as the 'not yet' (Adam, 2010). The future is not a homogenous period but can be split in various ways, including between the near future and a longer-term horizon" (Griffiths et al., 2013:np). Even though migrants know their parents and even grandparents are getting older, it is still difficult for them to act upon such fears and most of them wait for 'things to get better', or something to change and push them to make a decision.

LOSING THE CONNECTION[11]

With every single participant saying they keep in touch with their family members regularly, most of them weekly and some even daily, usually through the aforementioned family chat groups, the situation changes when it comes to keeping

[11] Borrowed from Waldinger (2015: ch. 4)

in touch with friends in their home country. Whilst participants also keep in touch regularly with friends they made in countries of a previous settlement, such as the US as was the case with Irem, Jin and Mark, friends in their countries of origin tend to fall out of the loop. Regardless of the "tendency of immigrants to maintain long-term ties and contacts with friends and family members in their origin community" (Mouw et al. 2014:331), sometimes such connections become less regular, and some eventually fade completely. As "communication depends on both means and motivation; the latter is not always in place" (Waldinger, 2015:68), and participants have expressed how since they moved to the UK, they have less and less in common with their home country and childhood friends. Even though my initial thought was that individuals fall out of contact with childhood friends after a long time spent abroad, such was the case of Giovanna for example, people who have spent less amount of time abroad expressed the same. Giovanna said she has no interest in going back to Italy [permanently] as she has been away for too long and even when she goes for a visit she has less and less reason to look back as there are not so many friends left in the place where she grew up. "If I didn't have my parents, I wouldn't go much home", she said. However, Miguel who was still a student at the time of our interview has expressed exactly the same and it made me wonder why young migrants, such as Miguel, do not keep in touch with their home country friends:

> "I think regarding friends, I feel like it sounds so depressing, but I feel like I don't have many friends in Portugal. It's probably my bad because I just didn't really identify with a lot of people there I suppose. So I didn't really keep much contact there obviously. Like there, there's people […], it's really different from the UK."

As previous findings also show (e.g. Gill and Bialski, 2011:244), the longer migrants live in the host country, "their networks of friends and acquaintances consequently evolve considerably since their initial arrival". In other words, once migrants expand their connections in the host society, they transitionally switch towards that group of friendships and slowly detach from the transnational connections they nourished at

the very beginning of their settlement, as "greater host country commitments affect the capacity to maintain ongoing home country ties" (Waldinger, 2015:78). Such findings are also consistent with Ryan and d'Angelo's (2018) work on social networks, that in this particular context can be explained through prioritising different anchors and shifting the embedding from one social setting into another. More specifically, as Mulholland and Ryan (2023) pointed out, migrants can experience disembedding somewhere and simultaneous embedding elsewhere in particular aspects of their lives, including the context of local networks and transnational connections.

Such examples were given above by Androula and Mahmoud, when they explained how COVID-19 allowed them to dedicate an equal amount of time towards both local and transnational relationships they had. However, the majority of the participants who have not spent such a considerable period of time in the UK express how they fall out of contact with their home country friends, mostly due to the fact they do not have as much in common anymore. Of course, that is not the only reason for that as "[a] variety of factors [...], helps explain how and why these home country ties weaken, sometimes entirely falling away" (Waldinger, 2015:71-72). Mark for example, almost never keeps in touch with his friends in Singapore. He would send a message when 'they get married, have a kid or something' but that does not happen so often. Arvo said such a turn of events is expected and it is normal for one to turn towards the host society and slightly drift away from previous relationships:

> "It's very difficult but I don't judge myself on that. So, for example, now when I speak to many of my Estonian friends anymore, I just accept it for what it is and I don't really judge myself that I have to, because why would I? I'm not there anymore and you got to make some sacrifices and some relationships weaken and that's part of the game. And one day when I go back there then I have the luxury of finding out whether they are there or not."

Jess was the only participant who had relocated permanently to Canada, her country of origin at the time of our interview. During her time in London, she used to visit Canada occasionally, and she had the opportunity of experiencing the luxury Arvo talked about, to find out whether her Canadian friends were still there or not. She compared the relationship with her friends during her visits, and after she relocated for good:

> "I sort of felt I had this new experience that I couldn't really talk about with anyone. They didn't really understand, so a lot of my friends you know, didn't really do a lot of travelling, they just kind of always stayed in Toronto. So I had this new experience that I couldn't even talk to them about. […] Now that I moved back it's very nice to actually be able to fully connect with my friends. Because I think by living abroad it's really difficult, but now like that I moved back and fully been able to be connected to people, develop relationships with them."

On the other hand, those few home country friends who are still part of migrants' transnational networks are the type of friends that do not require constant contact. Such friendships were described by several participants, highlighting the strength of such bonds, which do not require continuous maintenance. Mariana calls such friends – unicorn friends:

> "The friends I've kept are those friends that I called unicorn friends. A unicorn friend is a friend that you rarely see, it's almost like it's an imaginary friend but when you see this friend it's magic. So I've kept my unicorn friends and so when I go back everything is great. Um, you don't need that many friends anyway, so good friends I kept, I don't feel like I'm missing out. If I lived in Spain, I wouldn't live in the same city as all of them, so we would still be missing out on parts of their lives and hopefully when there are big things I can be there."

The argument here can be traced back to the very beginning of this chapter. By 'learning to fly' and using the 'ability to express themselves freely', participants seem to have understood how to prioritise not only their time, priorities and career choices but the relationships they invest in as well. By drifting apart from some of their friends from their home countries, individuals surround themselves with people who are beneficial and supportive of their progress. As some of the participants described they feel judged or even envied by their home country peers, they have little or no need to stay in touch with other people from their country Gill and Bialski, 2011:246). It has previously been argued (see Pahl, 2000), that in the context of a de-traditionalised, individualised and self-reflexive society, friendship has become a key element of self-identification and development" (Conradson and Latham, 2005a:294).

CONCLUSION

Relationships migrants maintain both in the UK and across the world play an inextricable role in construing the feeling of belonging. Moving young, either for education or career purposes, for many migrants meant growing up abroad and therefore renegotiating power relations with both their friends and family. Whilst family and friends left behind often remember us migrants the way we were before we left, therefore neglecting the change in identity and personality that happened post-move, this chapter has also shown that childhood friendships tend to fade over time. Instead, new anchors in the host country, or more generally those that migrants have more in common with, take over as new connections towards which young and highly skilled migrants turn their attention. Keeping in touch has also proven to be very time-consuming, and regardless of how many connections they might have, most contact-keeping must be pre-planned and scheduled in advance. This chapter has also for the first time in this thesis reflected on the impact COVID-19 had on young migrants' lives. Even though it has improved many pre-existing online relationships, COVID-19 had catastrophic consequences in migrants' embedding in the UK physically

as those relationships switched online as well. Conclusively, participants of this research have demonstrated the possibility of being embedded transnationally, with anchors both here and there. Social anchoring and embedding have proven useful then, as their value lies in the fact that it acknowledges simultaneity in different space, including transnational and virtual, multilayerness and unevenness (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Ryan, 2022)

CHAPTER 7: LEAVING, COMING AND 'GOING BACK': SPATIALITY AND TEMPORALITY OF YOUTH MIGRATION

"I had to leave for certain
I like to come back now and then
Maybe I'm just returning
So I can leave again"[12]

INTRODUCTION

Most of us who have moved somewhere at some point in our lives get asked the same question: *When are you going back?* Even though on a personal note often pressuring and uncomfortable to hear, the question raises two important notions, those of time and space. Although the relationship between time and space has been examined by philosophers and geographers for several decades (Harvey 1990; Lefebvre 2004; Massey 2004; Thrift and May 2001), and Urry (1995) argued that the academic neglect was more marked in the case of space than time, time remains relatively under-theorised in relation to migration and mobility (Griffiths, 2014:1992). In addition, most existing time-related research on migration concerns the legal status of migrants, whereas I want to approach the concept of time from a personal and emotional perspective.

This chapter addresses the way time has affected migrants' relationship to their home and host countries, but also the way time has influenced the way migrants construct their feelings of home. Frequent visits to their home countries, for example, for migrants often mean 'going back' both spatially and temporally, which affirm the non-linear perception of time within their transnational practices. In addition, the use of technology and being virtually present in several places at once brings the discussion even further as adding temporality into the picture, or "global

[12] Lyrics to '*Go, Love*', a 2012 song by Mark Knopfler, listed on his 7th solo album '*Privateering*'

synchronisation of time" as Griffiths et al. (2013) call it, makes migrants wish they can live in two places physically as well (Baas and Yeoh, 2019:163). More specifically, this chapter will recognise how some migrants 'cannot stay *home-home* for too long' or how with time, they lose the feeling their *home country home* is theirs. Moreover, it will take into account visions of uncertainty the future brings when leading a transnational life, and question how COVID-19 has influenced those visions and homely feelings. In that sense, and as can already be noticed, home will be addressed through many different terms and will reflect various settings. Whether it is *home-home*, *home-away-from-home*, *back home*, or simply *home*, sometimes it is clear if it is the house migrants talk about, or a metaphorical sense of *feeling at home*. Sometimes it is both, and sometimes it remains unclear, in which case explanation is not even necessary.

Structurally, this chapter will not separate the question of time and space but address the interplay of both in all sections. It starts with 'the pace of life', or how life seems to be slower in some places, and faster in others, followed by migrants' visits to their home countries, feelings towards their home country home and ultimately, feelings towards home in general. Throughout the chapter, as was the case in the previous one as well, the influence of COVID-19 will be taken into account, as sometimes it played a crucial role in discussing time and space in migrants' lives.

THE PACE OF LIFE

When I asked Maria how she feels when she goes back to Spain, or even Romania, to visit her friends and family, she gave me something to think about:

> "With really close friends, in a way, it's true what they say that it feels like things have not changed because we've been apart for a lot of time, but if the friendship is strong then when you see each other, everything is really good and almost the same. But with regards to family, it does feel

> sometimes that I'm missing out because I go home every year and I see my grandparents older, and I go home and hear other people talking about things that they have done and I was not there. So yeah, that's more difficult, I guess. Emotionally it's just a bit uncomfortable to think like, 'oh I'm missing out on important things'."

Although it is quite reasonable that time does not stop at the location we have left, sometimes it seems that way and is hard to comprehend how much are we really *missing out* on. As many of the participants highlighted how the pace of life is faster in the UK compared to their home country, there is nonetheless the issue of time passing by in the home country, whether slower or not. Boyarin (1994) introduces an interesting distinction to help us grasp the passing of time while away. He suggests the difference between "'simultaneity', which refers to the 'sense that others are doing at the same time things that are meaningfully related to your own experience', and 'meanwhileness', a 'mere awareness that there *are* others going about their separate business at the same time as you are'" (Boyarin 1994:17). In that sense, what happened with friends in Maria's case could be easily described as 'meanwhileness', which is separated from our own lives while in the UK and less emotional to experience. On the other hand, what she went through with her family is clearly a case of 'simultaneity' which consequently causes the feeling of *missing out*.

Most of the participants described some kind of time-related dissonance when it comes to comparison between the UK and their home countries. For some, time goes slower back home, and for some, even the UK is too slow. Some feel they are missing out on things, some feel nothing has changed while they were away. As time in migration is never linear, Robertson (2018) describes it as 'biographic time', "which refers to the imaginaries of pasts, present and futures, as well as everyday lived time. Her use of the concept of 'staggered' migration pathways in itself marks an important intervention in questioning the linearity and unidirectionality of migration pathways" (Baas and Yeoh, 2019:165). From that perspective, and understanding of time as imaginaries of past, present and future, migrants' return visits in some cases indeed represent a visit to the past. Equally, the terminology used by most participants,

including myself, seems to overlap over the spatial and temporal dimensions of migratory experiences. In that way, when talking about 'back home' the word *back* in most answers provided by participants meant spatial return, but also a temporal return that was recognised later during the analysis stage. Diane, for example, whose family migrated from Venezuela to the United States when she was seven years old feels like "nothing has changed" when asked how she feels when she visits her family in Orlando. "I just go back to my *old* life" (my emphasis), she says. Going back to the *old* in some cases takes time. Mahmoud, says that at one instance when he had to spend a whole year in Egypt before coming back to the UK, it took him "two or three months to return to [his] *old* life".

Even though talking about these visits and writing about it seems straightforward in terms of the direction migrants are going, i.e. either 'back home' or 'back to the UK', or any other formulation that would indicate a spatial or temporal shift, "[t]he messy reality of life means that moments cannot be taken out of context and nor can they be reduced to the two-dimensional world of movement forwards or backwards" (Griffiths et al., 2013, np). In that sense, while away, migrants keep the people and things they left behind both in memory and in everyday practices through transnational social fields they created and by being embedded transnationally. Equally, while visiting home, they keep in touch with their lives in the UK that they have left in most cases, only temporarily, and "it is a combination of all those that are present in the lives of individual immigrants that is particularly interesting for analysis" (Cwerner, 2001:23). However, the number of things they miss out at home while being in the UK is apparently not the same as the number of things they miss out in the UK while visiting their home countries. According to several participants, time goes *slower* back home. Similarly to Mahmoud, Jess took a while until she completely adjusted to her Canadian lifestyle. After spending three years in the UK she decided to move back to Canada permanently, however, that move did not go any smoother than her move to the UK:

> "It's interesting because when I came back, when I finally moved back to Canada I felt really strange like… I felt strange when I went to Canada for a

> visit and came back to the UK and I also felt really strange when I moved back here a year ago. It took me a long time to adjust. Actually, just because things are a lot slower here [in Canada], so it just took me a really, really long time to adapt. I would say, I think actually, I've only adjusted to be back in Canada quite recently so, took me about a year to come to terms with the fact that I was living in Canada and life is just different."

It is not strange for migrants to feel that way, as Cwerner pointed out, "within a week, the days have a different physiognomy, structure, and tempo of activities, and these may vary across cultures and countries" (2001:20). Triandafyllidou (2022) described time as heteronomous, as it can be determined by others and lived as alienating, and Hughes (2022) as complex and multidimensional, involving factors such as tempo and duration. Ultimately, as Hughes (2022) argues, time is experienced individually, and what Jess considers to be a 'long time to adjust' might not seem that long to someone else or in hegemonic clock time. Talking about time as being slower or faster has recently been connected to the rise of "new information and communication technologies or transport technology such as air travel (Griffiths et al., 2013: np) as described in *Chapter 2*. In addition, the motivation for migration that was described in *Chapter 5* as success-driven instead of network-driven and backed up by neoliberal flows in migration practices (see Favell, 2014) has contributed to life seeming fast-paced. Indeed, what my participants define as 'too slow' can often be linked to a lack of "fast-changing opportunities" (Griffiths et al., 2013:np) that they are exposed to in the UK. For Chiara, that was the reason to leave her home country in the first place:

> "I left because the life was too slow. Bear in mind, I left from an island and the island is already too slow [compared to the mainland]. The life there… I need something you know, to challenge me, to push me to do experience, you know. I was younger [then], so now sometimes I miss the quality of life [and] things going slow. But sometimes too slow is the mentality that I don't get. It is frustrating. Too much."

As the interview extract shows, Chiara left Sardinia as she needed something to push her and challenge her, which Sardinia, an Italian island in the middle of the Mediterranean could not offer. Similarly, being fast-paced and acceleratory, seems to be a characteristic tied to the UK, as Diane highlighted when she talked about rushing through London:

> "You can tell who lives here or works here compared to a tourist. It's happened to me, there's been times I've just been so frustrated, like I just need to get somewhere, they're [tourists] all in the way and I'm like, 'Oh my God. Just walk faster!' and my friends are like, 'Yep, you're now part of London!'".

Indeed, the pace of life "is embodied in habits such as greeting, walking, eating and turn-taking" (Cwerner, 2001:19). In addition to daily rhythms incorporated through walking across London for example, migrants keep temporally adjusting on a cyclical level as well. As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, migrants' frequent visits, transnational ties and temporal aspects of action become important elements of the assertion of their cultural and social identities. Moreover, constant adjusting, as it was shown through previous few interview excerpts, happens in multiple directions, and all these various "sets of times bear upon the lives of immigrants *simultaneously*" (Cwerner, 2001:18).

HOMEWARD BOUND: A TOURIST AT *HOME*

Located at the intersection of migration and tourism (Marschall, 2017), return visits *home* of diasporic communities and transnational migrants have recently sparked the attention of various scholars (e.g. Basu, 2004; Meethan, 2004; Basu, 2005; Marschall,

2015). Where visits that reflect 'roots and personal heritage tourism' involve second or even third-generation migrants, first-generation migrants visit home for different reasons such as visiting friends and family, fulfilling commitments such as attending a wedding, a funeral or celebrating a holiday (Marschall, 2017). Some migrants even include visits to their dentists or hairdressers back home as one of the things they must do during their stay as 'they know how to do it'. Whatever the reason for the visit, 'return visits' are central to "maintaining social and cultural ties with the homeland" (Marschall, 2017:214) and such visits are often termed as 'visiting friends and relatives' (VFR) practices.

Going home is above all, a return to the place and the people that were held in memory whilst away. While away, migrants foster memories of their back-homes and often create their home-away-from-home "at their current place of residence through cultural practices, images and artefacts in the home, memory-based routines, or the establishment of dedicated organizations for remembrance (Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Hung et al., 2013 cited in Marschall, 2017:215). As Stephenson (2004) found in his study on Afro-Caribbean immigrants in the UK, a trip 'back home' should serve as a reminder of a sense of belonging and cultural rootedness, as opposed to alienation felt in the UK. Similarly, Iarmolenko (2014) found that Ukrainian migrants in the US visit Ukraine to help them cope with migration-related stress caused by alienation in the host country (Marschall, 2017:215). Contrastingly, and as Zontini (2015) has noticed in her research on Italian migrants in the UK, I argue that in the case of young and highly skilled migrants, frequent return visits can backfire and instead of serving as a coping strategy or reaffirmation of identity, remind the migrants why they left in the first place and cause ambivalent feelings towards their homeland. Temporary return travels often bring nostalgia and notions of cultural familiarity, but in the case of young migrants, frequent return visits sometimes cause emotions of boredom, frustration, and anxiety as well.

Furthermore, the trip highlights the change of identity that has consequently taken place since the last time migrants were home as homecoming "rarely seems to fulfil that search for a singular home and stable identity; instead, migrants often express a continued ambivalence on return, recognising that they have changed, as has the place they had imagined so unproblematically as 'home'" (Ralph and Staeheli,

2011:522). Being the only ones who left in the first place, young migrants often feel like foreigners upon their return back home and experience alienation among their old connections and relationships they had and kept maintaining while away. As Marschall (2017:220) argues, "[f]amiliar environment prompts them to notice changes and developments" and "their attempt to reconnect with remnants of their pre-migration life leads to the discovery of changes within themselves".

In most cases, visiting home feels comfortable in the first few days, as migrants see their friends and family after a few months or even years, however, the longer they stay, the more negative feelings arise. As the literature on VFR has so far been "analytically limited by too often focusing on migrants and ethnicity" (Humbracht, 2015:641), temporality helps shed light on underrepresented aspects of migration and return visits. In that sense, as will later be more thoroughly addressed in the following chapter, migrants can feel as alienated in their home country as they felt when they first came to the UK. Interestingly, during the counter-mapping prompt, the word appeared only once in the UK and only once in the home country word box. Instead, as was already mentioned, the word family had a dominant presence in the home country box, subtly hinting that *a home* migrant left *back home*, does not always feel like *the home*.

Hence, the work of Tie et al. (2015) on the significance homeland has in forging new and hybrid identities is useful here, as they highlight how "the myth of return places too much emphasis upon the relationship between the diaspora and their homeland, ignoring collective and hybridised identities that may be constructed in the host countries" (Tie et al. 2015:206). Such focus on the potential negative outcomes of visiting the home country within migration scholars is not new or unfamiliar, however, it has been shadowed by the literature highlighting the reassertion of cultural identities by migrants' return visits. Thompson (1980) has thus, more than 40 years ago described how the Italian diaspora in Australia "found that the lifestyle had substantially changed from what they remembered resulting in a reinforced connection with their 'new' [Australian] home" (Tie et al., 2015:207). Similar findings were reported by Kibria (2003) and Louie (2004), as in all cases "[a] shared sentiment was that [migrants] did not feel a sense of belonging to their homeland, rather a sense of being 'out of place' and 'out of time'" (Tie et al. 2015:207). This identity shift can

be analysed through the connection of identity construction and liminal positionality, as outlined in *Chapter 3*. Beech (2011) recognised that liminal process starts with a 'triggering event', which in this case can be the temporary return to the home country. Turner (1967) has also seen the liminal person as 'interstructural', which is in this case presented as migrants being literally in-between the life they created in the UK and the 'oldness' of their home country lives. The conversations migrants have with their family and friends back home then, create an internalised dialogue within the self, and more specifically a centripetal orientation based on an internalising perspective through which the self draws meaning in from external sources in the society (Bebbington et al., 2007 cited in Beech, 2011:288). Being reminded of what they left, and what they created since they have been gone splits the momentary identity positioning and leaves migrants in a liminal space. A similar feeling was described by Miguel, a Masters student at the time of the interview who left Portugal to do his undergraduate degree in the UK:

> "Usually in the first few days, I feel good. Because obviously, I haven't seen my family in that long time. So [in the beginning] I feel okay to not being productive then the longer it goes, the worse I start feeling because I start getting into that Portugal mindset and I start feeling weird. […] It's always that kind of feelings that start accumulating, like the longer it goes, then I start remembering why I left so [then I think to myself] 'let's just go away again' I guess."

Chiara has spent the last 12 years in the UK and feels the same when she visits Sardinia: "I feel like a foreigner. And when I start to feel like home-home, it's time to leave." When hearing the response, I asked her to explain a bit more why would she want to leave if she feels comfortable and the answer can be traced back to '*the pace of life*':

> "Let's say when you feel comfortable is the right time to leave. When you start to feel calm, too comfortable, it's getting too boring, and you understand why you left in the first place. I'm not used anymore to the life there."

Boredom is a common theme among individuals visiting their homelands. Coming to the UK for many migrants meant establishing new routines, becoming independent and leading life the way they wanted it. Therefore, going back home can sometimes be challenging as there are compromises to be made and other people's needs met. Correspondingly, many of the participants prepare schedules or itineraries before their return visits, in order to fulfil everyone's wishes and to respect the free time of their friends and family back home. Tied again with forming a hybrid identity and negotiating belongingness, "[b]orders of identity and place are not drawn through predetermined subjectivity but based on how hosts and guests perceive each other within the context of the visit, which begins with planning" (Humbracht, 2015:645). Jin, a South Korean PhD student says how all of her friends in South Korea work, some of them got married and have kids and they need to figure out when to meet in advance because most of the time it's not just one person, but a group of people hanging out together. From that example, even though she is coming *home*, Jin reinscribes herself as a *visiting migrant* even before she has landed in South Korea. In that way, visiting back home can seem like a to-do-list where upon completion and ticking off all the items on the list, migrants feel bored or lost in time and space as was described by Arvo: "I feel good but basically the story of me going back is always like, I love it for three 2-3 weeks and I feel like I have met everyone, everyone's met me. I've had it all and now what? And then I get bored. And then I want to go back [to the UK]."

The onset of COVID-19 has in most cases only deepened the feeling of strangeness while visiting their home country, as migrants had to reduce the number of visits due to consequences created by the pandemic. Be it economic reasons caused by various and multiple tests required, lockdown or simply the risk of infecting their loved ones, migrants' frequent visits were interrupted and some of the

participants did not visit their friends and family for more than a year, or in extreme cases such as the one of Xiuying, more than three years.

FIGURE 14 COUNTER-MAP BY ADRIAN

In a way, the previously mentioned to-do list can easily then be interpreted as a must-see list every tourist makes before their trip, especially after such a long time of being away. In fact, while conducting the counter-mapping activity, I noticed that participants tended to use tourism-related words for their home countries. For instance, the word 'holiday' is the fifth most common word used in the home country word box. Words such as 'summer', 'sea', 'beach', and 'road trip' can also be found in the same box, as seen in the example below, which clearly demonstrates how migrants themselves perceive their return visits from a tourist perspective.

'IT IS MY PARENTS' HOME'

Understanding the practice of migrants' return visits is a complex process. Such is the notion of home as well. Previously described return visits often mean visiting and staying at a former home, or parents' home as middling migrants (see *Chapter 4*) rarely get to own a property in their home country after they leave. In addition,

parents seem to play an important role in young migrants' lives and often act as a stepping stone in migrants' decisions to either stay in the UK or move to the UK at all.

Continuing on the feeling of alienation, boredom and urge to leave after a few weeks spent back home, many participants mentioned how such feelings are in one way or another connected to the fact they have to spend those few weeks at their parents' place. Keeping in mind the same timeframe proposed in the previous paragraph, that of two to three weeks until one desires to leave again, going back as an adult to live with your parents can be challenging. Going *back home*, for youth on the move often means they "reconnect with their former lives, manifested in ordinary and familiar material traces and social relations, yet the visit reveals what kind of person the migrant has become; for some, it induces awareness of a self-transformation that can never be reversed" (Marschall, 2017:221). In addition, "migrants' memories of the past dwelling places have much to reveal on their implicit conceptions of home" such as "what values and lifestyles are associated with it" (Boccagni, 2017b:73). Hana, a Masters student describes how moving to Scotland actually made it easier for her to become vegan as her mum always highlighted how Hana becoming vegan is going to 'make things more complicated' and that has held her back from fulfilling her goal. Becoming vegan was just one of the changes she implemented since moving to the UK and visiting Germany she says, can be quite stressful:

> "Whenever I am back in Germany I stay with my mum, which is lovely but also takes so much from my independence and freedom. So I'm always looking forward to kind of getting back into my own space, like my own choices like what I'm going to cook for the day and not really needing to tell anyone what time I'm gonna be home."

Interestingly, the phrase 'my own space' as used by Hana in the example above, was a common occurrence among the participants. On the one hand, as a young and highly skilled migrant myself I could see what participants meant when using the

phrase, on the other hand, I was curious about how and when one loses the feeling of 'my own space' in a home where they have spent a significant amount of life living in (in most cases, at least 18 years). Boccagni (2017b:66) recognised that "[a]ppreciating the temporal bases of home entails a time-sensitive perspective – indeed, a longitudinal one, whenever possible". Longitudinally speaking, as was previously mentioned in this chapter, temporary return visits do not take place only spatially. Staying at their parents' place while visiting their homeland for some migrants indeed represents going to the past, as was explained by Jin:

> "I don't feel totally at home when I visit my parents' place in South Korea. I don't know when would I start calling my parents' place where I spent my entire life until the mid-20s my parents' home rather than my home. […] I think that there is old Jin still probably living in my parents' place. I left all my childhood stuff over there, but physically speaking I don't have my room there anymore. My parents have now changed the use of my room for their own purposes. […] I don't know when it started, but my parents' place in South Korea is more like a holiday home or my childhood memory deposit."

Home was indeed already defined as a "memory machine" firstly by Douglas (1991), and then by Boccagni (2017b), which is consistent with thinking how "a fundamental aspect of the relationship of a person to his or her home is residential history" (Lawrence, 1985:130 cited in Boccagni, 2017b:72). Consistent with the idea of how time goes *slower* in their home countries, some even have a feeling time has *stopped* there, which is demonstrated through the way migrants are being treated upon their return visits, as Irem, a young Turkish professional told me:

> "I still experience it. I'm 30, I'm almost 31. My birthday is coming soon and [I'm going to be] 31 years old. When I go back home now, I feel like a teenager, and I hate it. It makes me feel so infantilised the way they treat me. Like where are you going? Who are you meeting? When are you gonna

be back? Blah blah blah, it's like nothing's changing. They still treat you like how they treated you when you left."

Some of the participants felt very strongly about their parents' home being just that, and nothing more, and Viktorija kept correcting me every time I used the phrase 'going back home': "That's not quite the right term. I don't tend to use it in the term 'back home'. I tend to use phrasing like 'visiting my parents'. Or 'visiting Latvia'. 'Back home' is a phrase I use for here [the UK]." Whilst at the time of the interview, I could not switch completely to Viktorija's terminology regarding home, during the analysis such notions exemplified how "the movement away from home-as-origin becomes the vector for reinstating [elsewhere] the ideal of 'home' as a site of familiarity and control is an empirical question, all the more so for international migrants" (Fortier, 2001:412 cited in Boccagni, 2017:74). Drawing back on the previous chapter, Viktorija's experience is a clear example of how switching anchors (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2018) from one locality to another affects her embedding as well, by not thinking of Latvia as home anymore. Sara Ahmed (1999) has also emphasised the relationship between time, more specifically past, and home and she argued that "[t]he question then of being at home or leaving home is always a question of memory, of the discontinuity between past and present" (Ahmed, 1999:343). Androula acknowledges both the good sides and the bad sides of the visit, however with amplification of the bad sides after those two weeks: "If I go there and I stay more than two weeks […], I tend to start getting really frustrated about not having any sense of control of my space and also my time so there are things that I enjoy and things I don't enjoy." Androula also highlighted how it is also things, not only people who contribute to the feeling of home: "I don't invest in it as much as here, like, here [in the UK] I have my own décor that I bought for the place. I have a bunch of plants that I take care of, so I guess this space feels like mine whereas in Cyprus it doesn't feel like my space". Boccagni, in the same manner, argues how "[d]omestic artefacts, appliances, and decorations can also contribute to reproducing a deep if not necessarily a realistic sense of the past home" (2017b:71). The importance of material objects and how they contribute to the construction of home will be addressed in greater detail in the following section of this chapter.

When it comes to a 'sense of control' or 'lack of own space', as was confirmed by many participants, it seems that both the control and owning space while escaping those who are gone got into the hands of those who stayed. Control is in fact, one of the three most basic attributes of home, as argued by Boccagni (2017b), together with security and familiarity. "[A]utonomy in using a certain place according to one's needs and tastes" (Boccagni, 2017b:7) plays a significant role in how one negotiates home. As such, whilst participants felt they did not have control of the space, at the same time they highlighted how some members of the household had too much control and they had to adjust to that. Cwerner (2001) highlighted how "migration is also a temporal process which runs parallel to the life course of those involved in it" (Boccagni, 2017b:68) and as was mentioned above, time keeps running both *here* and *there*. In that sense, even though migrants have left their childhood homes, some stayed and kept the relationship with that home in both physical and metaphorical sense. João, a young Brazilian said how if they had to spend the lockdown in Brazil, that would have been "the biggest challenge of [their] life", especially after a few years they spent living on their own: "My mum is very… she needs a lot of space. And then I get very, very tiny when I'm around her and I don't like it." Relatedly, Chiara's mum has set clear boundaries when it comes to space division in their Sardinian home: "One thing that I don't do when I'm at home, I'm not entitled to stay in the kitchen. [It is] my mum's kingdom." The point, here, as argued by Boccagni (2017b:66) is that "whether we understand home as a place, a set of embedded relationships, or a deep emotional experience, it still and anyway shifts over time" (Boccagni, 2017b:66). It shifts while we as migrants are away, it shifts while we are there. It is entwined with various factors, including the people and things that inhabit it.

In that way, as migrants' families largely began to own the metaphorical home they inhabited prior to their migration to the UK, participants slowly shifted their home-building practices to the UK. As home is "purposively negotiated and reproduced – it is not simply out there – and can be emplaced, understood and experienced in different ways and locations over the life course" (Boccagni, 2017b:4), it is very difficult for migrants to pinpoint or locate where they feel at home. Taking into account that home emplaces memories towards the past, and aspirations

towards the future, the next part of this chapter will discuss where migrants feel at home, if it is not at the home they left behind.

THIS HOME, *THAT* HOME… WHERE IS HOME THEN?

Roze was a colleague of mine in Leicester. During that time I even visited her at her British home in Birmingham and since I last saw her, she and her boyfriend bought a house. At the time of the interview, they had just moved into that house and talking about where she felt at home was a bit complicated for her. After I asked her what home means to her, she said straightaway that home is where her mum is. However, a bit later she said that home is with her boyfriend and their dogs as well. The answer got even more complicated when I asked how she feels about home since COVID-19 emerged:

> "You see, this is a difficult one because we moved like six months just before the lockdown here. So that home was a new home as well, so it was not home yet because we had a lot of work to do. Still, you know, and it still felt like we moved into somebody else's house, so it took a while and then [COVID] happened. […] So, I feel like for me, it [has] probably gone worse cause I feel like now it's harder to separate home from work. You know, cause I had this room where I was working, at least I had the room, so that's nice for me because I don't have to sit in the kitchen, you know, so I feel like when I leave the room I can leave the work behind, then I can then enter the living room where we all sit, then eat and watch films together. And you know, or the kitchen where we cook together. That's more of a home now so, that one room it's more of a work [room] so I have that little bit of separation. But I think you appreciate your home more when you are away. And [in] that sense, for me at least when I was working, I just couldn't wait to come home because it's just once you enter a home, you have this sort of relaxation that it doesn't matter how you feel, how you look, you can relax. Have a cup of tea, you know, and it sort of has this effect that you feel

> like you took off a really heavy coat [and] then you can breathe. Now [that] you're always here, there's no such thing. You know, [I] feel like it's refreshing to be out. You know what I mean? So, everything, sort of shifted."

After having demonstrated how migrants' childhood home increasingly becomes their parents' home or with some even a holiday home, a central aspect of this section will be "[h]ow is it, if at all, that migrants re-enact a sense of home over time, against the spatial and temporal separation from what used to be their home?" (Boccagni, 2017b:74). As it was argued in *Chapter 3*, home is more than a house, and migrants' complicated relationship with it has been under spotlight in migration scholarship for a while now. In that sense, and within this part of the chapter, home will be perceived as twofold: firstly, as a physical place migrants inhabit, and secondly, as a lived experience. Whilst in some cases, it is very clear whether the topic of the conversation is either a house or a lived experience of a home, sometimes the boundaries are not as clear, and home truly becomes an abstract concept. In that way, even though most young migrants follow similar living arrangements while in the UK, i.e. they live in a rented house or a flat, usually with housemates and/or partners, their conceptualisations of home fall beyond the thresholds of a physical property. Thus, this chapter shifts the focus "from the built environment per se to individuals' privileged emotional relationship" (Boccagni, 2017b:4) with their home[s], while introducing and acknowledging the influence and challenges brought by COVID-19.

It is mothers that seem to be one of the unbreakable bonds between participants and their homes. Even though mothers have been already mentioned in this chapter as those who seemingly take up much of a space in the context of home country home, when asked what comes to their mind first when they think of the word 'home', several migrants said "mum" or "home is mum". Being uncertain where she feels at home, and still in the home-making process of her home in the UK, Roze said what first came to her mind when she thought of home: "It's a thing… […] You know, for me, it's back home in Lithuania. At my mums. Even though it's not my home physically for many years now." Hana for example, who previously expressed how she feels that every time she comes to Germany it is a bit stressful, emphasises:

> "It is a good question where I feel at home. Right now it would be Glasgow for me, so the UK, because I feel like here I can be more myself […], but at the same time Germany, my hometown in Germany will always… Home is where my mother is."

Whilst keeping the feeling of home in memory when being asked the question, "[f]amily ties and affective relationships are central to the ongoing emplacement of home (Allen, 2008 cited in Boccagni, 2017b:12). Such thinking of a home, that of being where we are not can be connected to the notion of the extended self (Belk, 1988). Simply put, "concept of the extended self suggests that we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves" (Noble and Walker, 1997:30). Possessions here include all that we consider ours, such as personal belongings, persons, places, or anything that can help us define our identity. Home that is geographically distant, but still feels like home and a place of identification here represents a meaningful possession that migrants might cling to. It serves to preserve a past life and to provide some sense of continuity in the new locale (Belk, 1992 cited in Noble and Walker, 1997:34). However, as Noble and Walker (1997) warn, such clinging to the past creates a temporally liminal space in which migrants are once again torn between their past and present. Neither here, nor there was a common theme among participants who tried to describe their feelings and location of home. From that perspective, both mum in Lithuania and her boyfriend and dogs in the UK make Roze's home. Androula, when asked if the objects play an important part in her everyday home-making, talked mostly about people:

> "They do. I think maybe more so when it comes to this home here in England. But I think people are also really important. But right now, I live alone, so I can't really say for this home. But people don't necessarily contribute as much to this house because it's just me, but back in Cyprus home is very much my family who lived there but also the kind of experiences that we have in the place like cooking is a big one, having

dinner. Even things that don't actually involve the house itself, for example, taking the dog for a walk I also associate as part of home even though it's not inside the house."

In trying to clasp most observations regarding my participants' attitudes towards home, I find Sara Ahmed's (1999:330) thoughts to be the closest in reflecting the gathered narratives: "[t]he journey between homes provides the subject with the contours of a space of belonging, but a space which expresses the very logic of an interval, the passing through of the subject between apparently fixed moments of departure and arrival". In that sense, Lena, a 29-year-old Hungarian living in London at the time of the interview says that: "Home is everywhere and nowhere. My family is in Hungary, so it's hard to say my home is here in the UK, but at the same time I'm planning to stay here and to have my family here […]".

Similarly, Adrian, who moved from Greece to the UK in 2017 for work, says "I don't feel like I have a home if that makes sense. It's kind of more like a journey rather than having a destination". Mariana, who spent a similar amount of time in the UK says that she does not feel at home 100% while in the UK and when asked if that percentage is higher when she is in her country of origin, Spain she says, "not all the time". The difficulty of locating home, or even expressing what first comes to their minds when thinking of home, was a common occurrence among the participants. It is, indeed, such "transnational journeys of subjects and others that invite us to consider what it means to be at home" (Ahmed, 1999:331) as was the case in this research as well. Hearing my participants express their various and sometimes vague feelings towards a concept that in sedentary and non-migratory contexts usually represents a safe haven, induced the process of questioning and reconceptualising the notion of home even with me, the one who asked those questions.

Interestingly, some of the participants had difficulties locating home or feeling at home in the UK due to, what I termed, various 'micro-locations'. Whilst on a generic level, I talked to participants in the context of *UK home* vs. *home country home* (such was the setting of the counter-mapping activity as well), some participants expressed

the importance of the particular locale in order to be able to feel at home. As I have experienced myself, most migrants who move to the UK, in the first few months or even years end up moving around until they settle permanently, if they ever do. Since I came to the UK in 2018, I have lived at two locations in three different houses and listening to my participants talk about the process of moving and reconstructing home several times, sounded very familiar and in some way, even felt uncomfortable. As moving itself is a frustrating business, full of logistical preparations, it causes a consequence in migrants' home-building practices as well. Eleni for example, says she tried, but she does not feel at home in the UK at all:

> "Because I changed so many places, I've changed more than 10 homes so if you're putting a wall every time, you're not allowing yourself to feel that place as your home, but I try to make it more homely. I tried to build experiences and build memories, using the environment in a way that fits my needs so, I will go downstairs and have my coffee and talk with my housemate and it does make it more homely. But then again, I don't label it as home. Because I know that it will end."

In that sense, temporal limitations and short experiences of living in a house that will soon be inhabited by someone else represent a symbolical spatial limitation, as well as it is very hard for migrants to immerse themselves into the process of *homing* (Boccagni, 2017b:xxvi). Upon explaining how often she moved around, Eleni told me she used to live in Canterbury before moving to London, and Canterbury felt more like a home than London as it is more secure and London seems to be a bit *too much*. Nikola for example, moved from Belgrade to London in 2014 and has since moved houses every consecutive year. Because they move around so often, young migrants have learned to live 'lightly'. When asked if objects around them contribute to the feeling of home, most of them immediately said 'no', without any hesitation. Even though most of them moved with only a suitcase or two, my participants have said that they have learned not to cumulate many possessions as that would complicate

things should they move again. Moreover, as a few of my participants said – they can just get new stuff from Amazon. In that sense and linking back to the 'décor' of a home, there are a few minor objects that participants kept mentioning they like to own, however, they are not crucial in making a home – home. Whereas in the case of Androula and her describing how in the UK she can arrange the looks of her home, as compared to her parent's place in Cyprus it was more about controlling the space rather than its aesthetics, most common things migrants mentioned they like to have in order to increase a homely feeling were books, plants, photographs, blankets and incense.

Finally, it is impossible to look for homes in either home or host countries without the context of COVID-19. The pandemic and the effect it had on international borders "left many migrants stranded at destination countries, at origin or also, for some, while in transit. People found themselves unable to go back to their countries of origin as international transport systems came to a halt" (Triandafyllidou, 2022:4). In essence, the closure of many international borders made many migrants stay for a prolonged period of time either *here* or *there*, depending on where they were when the measures were introduced. In Carling's (2002) words, COVID indeed brought the age of involuntary immobility. Whilst his contextualisation of (im)mobility mostly referred to the lack of development, funds or education and modern-day migration control policies as barriers to migration, the aftermath of applying the concept remains the same. The massive extent of unfulfilled dreams about migration needs to be addressed separately and the limitations to the assumed liquid mobility need to be recognised. Additionally, widespread frustration over immobility is an important backdrop to explaining actual migration flows (Carling, 2002:6), and why some people decide to either stay or move. In the context of this research, involuntary immobility brought significant changes and shifts on the meaning of home with devastating effects on the transnational lives (Shakuto and Baldari, 2020).

As Triandafyllidou (2022:6) argues, "[t]he pandemic and related international border restrictions have emphasized the existence of different layers of membership within each country". Staying in the UK for many migrants meant they were left with their hands tied and had limited options for manoeuvring different levels of

membership. Therefore, the only option migrants had was to make changes that are within their scope of agency, in order to feel more comfortable and homely. As most participants described their home in the UK as a place where you used to come, eat, sleep and then leave, the pandemic has changed the dynamics of that relationship. Similarly to what Roze has previously described, home now became a space where you come, eat, and sleep but rarely leave, and in addition, where you work, study, workout and socialise. In order to be able to serve as such a multi-purpose space, in most cases, it had to be reinvented, as João described:

> "I think I started to pay more attention to these objects that kind of invoke this home feeling and it was really important for me to have, like, for example, a plant. […] I was doing counselling for some time during the very start of the pandemic, a kind of therapy for many months and I had this conversation with my therapist, and he said 'it's about time that you create some roots. You're always travelling around from one place to the other. And now it's time for you to create some roots' and then the next week I told him I bought some plants and it's something that is very 'rooty'. It's interesting because I think that for me carries this metaphor of something more connected to the ground more connected to the soil and the soil is physical, so it's difficult because we felt more lonely or isolated. We felt that everything was trembling apart during the pandemic and so easy to travel before even though it was costly, I could get a flight the next day for I don't know 800 pounds to visit my family if I was desperate and then we couldn't do it anymore. So the feeling… the home, the far away home was so far away that we had to create some feeling of home in the place that we were."

What I found to be particularly interesting is that João, thanks to the pandemic and the fact they were UK-home-tied for a while, symbolically made a connection between settling down and feeling comfortable within their four walls. Baas and Yeoh (2019:163) have argued that "increasingly, migrants leave 'home' with the idea of a

transnational lifestyle in mind" and as it was said in the previous chapter, many migrants are actually twice-migrants, maintain transnational relationships and networks within more than two countries and 'creating roots', as João's therapist said, often remains only wishful thinking. With the introduction of the pandemic, and limited options of living transnationally in a spatial sense, e.g., fewer visits to the homeland or other countries they had ties with, migrants had to invest into what they had, and that were the four walls in the UK. In the words of Arvo, "home is a place now where we spend so much of our time, personally my mindset was 'spend very little on accommodation and so-called home because I leave early in the morning with my backpack and I'm at work, meeting people and just out and about'. But now my mind has shifted to 'I'd rather spend a little bit more on home because now it's my home office and I want to spend more quality time at home'". Hage (2009) has described such practices as compensation for the inability to move in relation to existential mobility. Where the involuntary immobility reflects the lack of agency, migrants had to make do with snatching agency where they could in the very midst of its lack. Hage (2009) has also pointed out how there is a certain level of heroism in waiting out the crisis, as migrants had to be "resilient enough to endure stuckedness, or, to put it in a way relevant to us here, able to wait out [their] stuckedness". Aneta, for example, found herself buying "candles or stuff like that to make it more homey" as that is the place she has to spend all day in. Some participants, at the very start of the pandemic, realising it would probably last a while, moved into a different property as the previous one could not offer all one might need, as was told by Kristina:

> "Well, I definitely moved out from my previous place because it was just very small and I had a dog and my roommate was just not a nice person so I had to move and now I'm like living in a house with my boyfriend so you know, we tried to make it as comfortable as it can be. So yeah, that's something that the lockdown actually urged us to do, otherwise maybe we wouldn't have moved in together."

However, as was already mentioned home is not only a house, but rather can be experienced as a wider geographical and lived experience as well, COVID-19 brought negative changes in that aspect. The way migrants feel in their 'micro-locations' has gravely influenced how they perceive their home in the UK, through lack of experiencing the wider geographical area which makes one feel familiar with their surroundings as described by Giovanna: "I stopped experiencing Manchester I enjoyed in the past, like going for a walk, going to see a movie, having dinner out, that make you feel like you are experiencing the place, you are living in it". That is not to say that the two perceptions of home – a house and a locale – are separable, but rather largely intertwined, as shown through Mahmoud's story:

> "The first thing I did, I changed the room [where I was living]. It was better for me to stay in a studio than a small room. The second thing, I was struggling to settle down and to work and study from home. […] The center was totally dead like the Market Square was like, only birds. So even when I was going outside I was feeling more sad because seeing the spaces like that […] dead."

Such action resembles the concept of panic mobility, as Cohen (2020) described the behaviour of people who move in crisis. Stemming from existential mobility, the destination of panic movers is likely to be somewhere that is familiar and associated with a womb-like comfort. Whilst I travelled back to Croatia, fully fitting into the Cohen's (2020:np) description of the concept in which people "often head 'home' or to their families, people with whom they have the most intimate connection", Mahmoud and Kristina experienced existential mobility through finding the next best possible solution. However, as Salazar (2021) warns, 'panic mobility' practices have the potential to unravel many existing (im)mobility inequalities, as not everyone will have the means and options to move. Salazar (2021:24) further indicates there is an important difference between panic mobility and survival migration (Betts, 2013), "a term referring to (more permanent) migration resulting from a range of crises which pose an existential threat" (Salazar, 2021:24). In that sense, young and highly skilled

migrants of this research by the mere fact they could afford the move in the times of crisis, further reaffirm their privileged position that defines them as 'middling migrants'.

COVID-19 has, therefore, acted as both a push and pull factor at the same time, pushing migrants into making the decisions they otherwise would not have made, such as João and Kristina showed through their examples. On the other hand, it pulled them into making the most out of the situation they were put in, consequently making them feel more comfortable as they invested in the four walls they inhabit while in the UK. However, not only did COVID-19 make an impact on the way participants adjusted their homes in the UK or the decisions they made regarding their living arrangements. COVID-19 has also made migrants question their overall priorities and raised several questions about their transnational futures. And so, while amending a few material details within a house in order to make it more comfortable, and while being an emotional task it is still easily solvable, adjustments that will be the topic of the next section might not be as easy to grasp.

'GOING BACK'… PERMANENTLY?

As mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, but also briefly in the previous one, the question of 'going back' is somewhat a recurring instance in every migrant's life. What makes this notion interesting is that the context of moving to the UK as was previously described, remains uncertain and open to change. Consequently, I was interested to hear if my participants had plans of 'going back' in the future, or if that possibility remains uncertain as well. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, whilst with some participants there was an obvious desire to return mostly caused by the pandemic, that desire seemed to conflict with initial motives for their migration, which in most cases was – career prospects. What then happens is, as Cwerner (2001:12) describes, a paradox "between the migrants' will to return and the forever delayed return" which I recognised on several occasions while interviewing the

participants. The paradox then, "creates a particular problem and exercises a direct influence on [migrants'] time perspective" (Elchardus et al. 1987:146). Migration is by definition forward looking, as Triandafyllidou (2022:3850) warns: "it involves expectations from the migration project (of achieving specific goals) and plans (whether to stay or to return)". The nature of youth migration is in that sense very existential, and can be a risky move if aspirations and reality do not align.

In simple terms, migrants' attitudes towards their home country are deeply affected by their economic and social achievements in the host society which they cannot put aside regardless of the potential desire to return. The issue of return whether it be "projected, planned, desired, postponed or impossible, thus plays a fundamental role in the migrants' temporal experience" (Cwerner, 2001:12). In many cases, it was career prospects that kept migrants in the host country, as Adrian steadily argued: "I will never, never consider going back to Greece as an employee. […] I cannot see myself working in Greece like that. Now, if the conditions change or under different circumstances, I'm open [to the possibility] but I think the percentage [for that happening] is small." As such, Adrian's idea of going back to Greece can easily be seen as a retirement plan. Several other participants also expressed the wish to go back to their home countries, but not as working people. In that sense, retirement "[f]or some is a time to go home, including migrants whose life earnings have been secured and saved in metropolitan centres of the global north. The traditional view sees Greeks, Italians, Turks and West Indians, among others, returning from diaspora to their homelands" (Ley and Kobayashi, 2005:120) upon ending the working stage of their lives abroad. Even though many participants shared such thoughts about their career prospects, some started thinking about return migration at an earlier stage, as in the case of Androula:

> "It makes me really sad, but at the same time, I know that it's not enough of a reason for me to go back. Like I don't know, if something happened to my parents then maybe I would consider going back or something but thinking about these things, about the future makes me really sad, but I know that I have to be abroad because I still need to sort out my career and what I'm

> going to do before I even consider going back because there's not very many career options for me.“

Young migrants are in such cases torn between wanting a better future for themselves and their careers and feeling a responsibility to provide and care for their families and to be physically close to their ‘old’ lives. As was previously mentioned the simultaneous presence of both host and home countries makes migrants feel they want to be in both places physically as well, the question of the future brings some very difficult decisions, which is highlighted, as in the previous case of Xiuying, within migrants who are a single-child, such is Lena: “I'm just scared of that thing when my parents grow old that I have no brothers or sisters and siblings to take care of them. So, in that case, I will need to be in two places at once, which will be very difficult.” Strong family bonds and a feeling of responsibility were common themes among my participants, but more frequently expressed by women participants. Sánchez-Domínguez and Guirola Abenza (2021:515) have noticed how even though the reconciliation of work and family life has been found to be a challenge for all female workers, female migrants are likely to face specific challenges. They also warn how the burden of care many female migrants carry can oftentimes only be absorbed by terminating their employment in the host-country. Moreover, research has shown how some societies carry bigger burden of care than others. Baldassar (2011) found how “[a]mong Italian migrants in Australia, for instance, strong family bonds and the moral obligation to care for ageing parents, understood as part of ethnic and national identity, is the most important reason for embarking on return journeys, even for second generation migrants” (Marschall, 2017:216). In the case of Eleni, even though she is aware of how important career is in the case of young people, she admits how COVID-19 has changed her perspective:

> “It’s a mixed feeling. Because in my area of work, in Cyprus things are quite underdeveloped. So they are still developing my area of work. I’m working with people with disabilities and autism and mental health. […] I would like to take my knowledge and develop it in Cyprus and work with organisations

> there and at least contribute in some way to that process of thinking. Initially, I was thinking you know, I might stay for another 10 years for example. But then I changed my mind when Brexit happened and the COVID has changed that perspective, you know. It made me think of the important things in life. Is it important for me to continue in the UK? […] It was just a rollercoaster of emotions. It made me think 'Okay, now with COVID, what if something happened to my parents? What would I do if my family was not okay?' And I was just thinking maybe *I* can develop things in Cyprus, be with my family which is important for me and to actually contribute in my field of work [there]."

When I emailed her a few months after our interview, to ask her for a photograph needed for the photo-elicitation method, Eleni told me she had moved back to Cyprus. For migrants who do embark on a return journey to their home countries, often "the memory of immigration becomes the source of their new identities as returned migrants. […] The memories of immigration are expressed in individual and collective narratives and stories of displacement and adaptation, success and failure, settlement and return" (Cwerner, 2001:25). It is no wonder then, that some of those who are still in the UK, but think about going back, feel like going back to their home country would mean going backwards symbolically as well, as was described by Miguel:

> "This is a question that, to be honest, is going through my mind all the time, because I feel like, from a realistic point of view, it doesn't have to mean that I'm taking a step back just because I'm going back to Portugal, but I have the feeling that in my point of view I guess that I would kind of feel that way."

As Marschall (2017) has recognised when she wrote about African transnational migrants residing in South Africa, in some cases the move represents upward mobility as well in a way that migrants feel their progress only upon returning to their home countries. She also recognised the danger of sounding judgemental, or arrogant,

however, in cases such were mentioned in this chapter, migrants had no ill thoughts when talked about why they could not see themselves moving back permanently, or why some visits are more stressful than others. Linking back to migration temporalities, "[r]eturn migration extends the linear model of migration to a circular model with an imputed readjustment and assimilation to the country of origin" (Ley and Kobayashi, 2005:112). In that sense and keeping in memory the progress they have made since they moved out of their home country, migrants such as Miguel feel moving back permanently would be a step back as well.

PRESSURE TO COME BACK

The pressure of potential return in most cases manifested through emotionally subtle manipulation, as Viktorija described it, where parents and more specifically mums, keep trying to portray the UK as a very bad place to live, and contrastingly, the home country as a very nice place. Even more, Viktorija's mum is a linguist, which then in combination with the previous section of this chapter, where the use of language was described as one of the factors affecting the issue of belonging, puts additional pressure to 'come back to the roots':

> "I've been definitely experiencing actual pressure like emotional pressure from my mum. Where every once in a while she'll go... 'being in Latvia would be so much better. So, so, nice. Now wouldn't it be so nice?' But I'm not there. I'm not going to be there, but you know that sort of pushing my buttons. I don't think she does it on purpose like, upsets me, but, yeah, it's a bit tough. […] Then I'm trying to actually convince anyone, but there's not much point in them trying to talk me out of it. Kind of emotional blackmail that we have. […] I was quite torn about some aspects of staying here and then obviously there's been all the emotional blackmail from my mum and some of her... She's a linguist, so of course she's very upset when my Latvian goes out the window. And she's been part of the emotional blackmail on the

> questions [such as]: ‘But which language do you dream in?’ Ohh, I got asked those sorts of things that actually make me think. And I've also chatted with another friend with whom I lived in Edinburgh, she was kind of in a very similar situation in the sense that we cannot imagine going back there now.”

Viktorija added that she still has not told her grandma that she does not intend to move back to Latvia. Gillespie et al. (2022a:118) have written about the relationships between migrants and their families as well, explaining how we “might expect return migrants to be particularly likely to be motivated by family—more so than onward migrants". The authors also highlight how the relevance of family networks and the consequential pressure they put on migrants changes with time, or rather, with the life course. Mahmoud explained his relationship with his parents: “Before when I was doing my Masters, they were not accepting [it], they wanted me to return. But now, I’m thinking that because I stayed here for too long, at a certain point, I’m not returning [back], so I feel they got adapted to the situation.” In that sense, for a few participants parents were expecting their migration to be only temporary at the beginning, however, the longer the migrants stayed away, the more disruption it brought to the family relationship, as Ivana explained:

> “… my mum, she always rambles something about why am I in the UK and then I tell her that I do not miss Croatia for Croatia, I miss the people. [...] My mum is not happy that I’m in the UK and then I try to explain to her that here I have a chance to be independent. If I were in Croatia, I would still be living with my parents. […] Basically, everyone accepts the fact I am in the UK except my mum. During my undergraduate studies, I studied in the capital so I wasn’t home either. Then I spent a semester in Poland, which was a bit bigger step, then I went to Sheffield to do my Masters and that was an even bigger step. But I think she never complained before because there was this transition of a few smaller steps so she never thought it was permanent. […] I just have to stop reacting to her provocations like ‘Croatia

> is great, England is horrible'…I have to stop reacting, where would I be if I were a people pleaser, even if it's your family that you're trying to please. It annoys me that she cannot understand that, but lately if she starts talking about it, I just end the conversation and say 'we're not talking about this again'." (own translation)

Such occasions are relatively frequent among young migrants, as "young adults are also in the life course phase of transitioning to independence, which comes with entering and finishing tertiary education and entering the labour market" (Gillespie et al., 2022a:119). From the opposite perspective, the transitioning to independence is seen as *leaving the nest*, but in migration research parents are often termed as those *left behind*. Majority of research that focuses on those left behind instead of migrants themselves, includes children of migrant workers or spouses, therefore imposing a heteronormative and nuclear family standard. Still, several findings (see Cohen et al. 2015) indicate that parents of adult migrants are more likely to experience depression, loneliness and anxiety than parents with no migrant children. More specifically, mothers – such is the case with Viktorija and Ivana – are more likely to experience negative emotions and put pressure on their children due to a different bond with their child, but also due to their domestic role which might prevent them from establishing and maintaining non-family contacts (Thapa et al., 2018)

CONCLUSION

Whether it is a short video call with their friends or family or a visit to the home country – participants of this research stay in constant touch with '*back home*'. This chapter has, therefore, given an insight into how time and space are perceived by young and highly skilled migrants in the UK, through reflecting upon their frequent visits, the notion of *home* and their imaginaries of futures.

In brief, the conclusions of this chapter can be summarised within three main points. Firstly, the analysis has shown that frequent visits to their home countries can cause equally negative feelings as they can cause positive ones. In addition, the home they visit and stay at while in their homeland, is by most participants described as their parents' home, where they cannot feel fully themselves anymore, highlighting the "multi-layered, 'hybrid' identity that reflects (and perhaps shapes) their experience of home, self and belonging" (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011:521). Secondly, the topic of home within participants as much as it "raises interesting methodological challenges" (Boccagni, 2017b:29), raises empirical and theoretical challenges as well, as it is highly problematic placing the notion of home within a single conclusion. Most of them find it difficult to locate a home, as many agree it is people who make a home and not a geographical location. Moreover, leaving family behind in their home countries makes it challenging to perceive their home in the UK, however, the home in their home country is not fully home as well. Interestingly, the only unquestionable conclusion regarding home is the one imposed by COVID-19, as it has made participants connect more with their physical home in the UK, which has consequently made them *feel at home* metaphorically as well. Finally, the question of imagining a future remains uncertain among many young and highly skilled migrants of this research. Coming to the UK with no clear vision regarding the length of their stay, the pandemic has made that vision even more blurry. It has made my participants re-evaluate their priorities in life, including the importance of their permanent or long-term stay in the UK. Most participants have, therefore, expressed thoughts that relate to their potential return migration, however, in most cases that option remains a not-yet, postponed type of future.

CHAPTER 8: YEARNING FOR YESTERDAY, AWAITING TOMORROW: WHERE DO WE BELONG?

"Each year of my life as I went home to visit,
it was a rite of passage to reassure myself that I still belonged,
that I had not become so changed that I could not come home again.
My visits home almost always left me torn:
I wanted to stay but I needed to leave,
to be endlessly running away from home." [13]

INTRODUCTION

After describing the circumstances of youth migration, reasons for the move, participants' multiple relationships, their homes and the temporal side of their move, this chapter will centre around [be]longing. Having moved alone, participants have often experienced difficulty when trying to describe where they feel they belong. Sometimes feeling affiliated with multiple places or locations, sometimes with none, this chapter highlights the ambivalence described by participants of this research in many aspects, encompassing both joy and sadness, excitement and loneliness. The question mentioned in the previous chapter, that of 'going back', invokes the feeling of longing regardless of the current position of where the question is being asked. In that sense, this chapter builds on the previous one, expanding the notion of home into a sense of belonging.

Whether it is in the UK, or the country of origin, or anywhere else – participants seem to always be longing for the other. Longing for peace of mind and freedom while not being in the UK, or their friends and family while not being in their home country. In that way, such longing resembles the division of what I call *mind vs. heart* and that was mentioned in the previous two chapters as well. Even though staying in the UK offers greater opportunities and career prospects, and sometimes

[13] bell hooks (2009:17)

even a future for transnational relationships participants are involved in, there is a piece of them always longing for *home*. However, it is important to highlight how longing in this chapter is distinguished from nostalgia, which is traditionally connected to "linking people to place, identity to territory" (Gustafson, 2001:670), as Malkki (1992) points out. In this case, longing is not connected to the usual nation-based nostalgia, missing the homeland, or connected to one's national identity. Dahinden (2012) has already criticised "the lack of attention given to transnational forms of identification and belonging in favour of processes of incorporation into "host" societies" (Tošić, 2012:114), as they neglect "all types of mobility that go beyond migration-cum-settlement as a one-way process and have varied effects on migrants' sense of belonging and identity" (Dahinden, 2012:118). This chapter will, therefore, reflect on the consequences of youth migration, and how situations described in the previous two chapters ultimately affect participants' sense of belonging.

TO BELONG OR NOT TO BELONG?

The previous two chapters already gave a sense of where migrants might feel they do *not* belong, yet it would not be correct to assume that not belonging somewhere increases the belonging elsewhere. Moreover, in the case of participants of this research, it is very difficult to talk about the duality of belonging, as it is in most cases, the multiplicity of it that is the case. In that sense, this chapter works towards 'conceptualising simultaneity', in the words of Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004). Being in constant touch with more than one country, social network, or even language, all on a daily basis, works towards obscuring the clear meaning of the word *belong*. The challenge, Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004:1011) argue, "then, is to explain the variation in the way that migrants manage that pivot and how host country incorporation and homeland or other transnational ties mutually influence each other", as Aneta described:

> “All these different cultures… So on the one hand I love it, I enjoy it and that's I think that's why I don't really want to return back home to the Czech because I think I would massively miss that, massively, you know. But yeah, there's this other, the flipside of it, the other side of the coin where I feel I don't belong anywhere. I just feel like I'm in the middle of it and I don't... Yeah, I don't know, where I belong. […] I think I am on another path, on a journey. Where I am discovering myself. And basically, through all this mess around me I hope that yeah, I am positive, I am optimistic that I will find myself maybe or find where I belong. But I feel honestly like at this moment I don't feel complete anywhere if that makes sense. […] That word (belong) I think for me it's a very strong word. For me, belonging means really like blending in seamlessly. And I don't think I blend in seamlessly. I blend in this certain way. But you know what, like, I do feel as a foreigner. I think I always will.”

Similar findings were reported by Skoovgard-Smith and Poulfelt (2018:138), whose participants also said that “[d]iversity is an important characteristic of their shared social space”. Later on, during the counter-map activity in our interview, Aneta tried to explain something to put in the Czech word box. Whilst admitting that being alone in the UK sometimes meant feeling lonely, or even struggling, there was something else she wanted to put into her home country word box: “I would say for the Czech, as well, even though it’s calm and peace, at the same time it’s this longing, longing for something else. Like not being able to stay there, like, when you have itchy feet, you know. You love it, it’s calm and peace and sanctuary, but you still don’t want to stay, you know.”

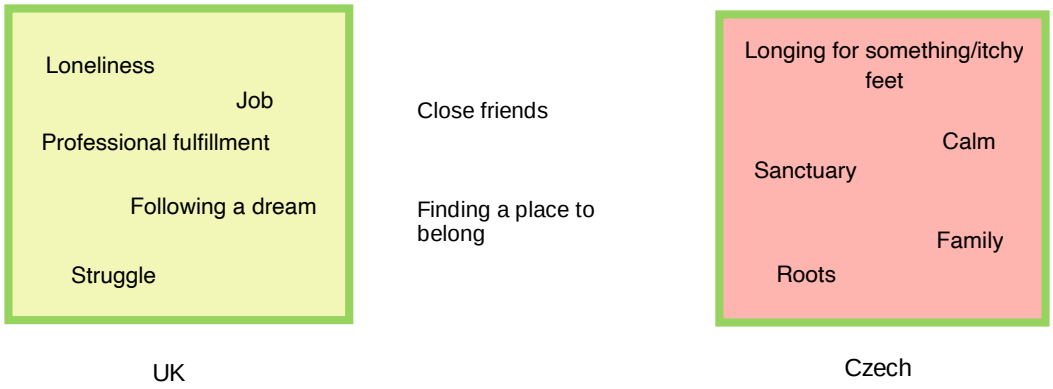

FIGURE 15 COUNTER-MAP BY ANETA

Therefore, after putting the word 'longing' in the Czech word box, she put 'finding the place to belong' in the middle, together with close friends as she associates those with both countries. Finding a place to belong, from Aneta's example, is not in the UK, nor is it at *home*. It floats and navigates the space in-between, remaining a wish and a hope that she eventually will find a *place* where she belongs. In that sense, Aneta's perception of her belonging resembles the way transnationalism operates, beyond the scope of nation-state boundaries. Located in-between two countries, her 'finding a place to belong' transcends both the borders of the Czech Republic and the UK and hence, works in the same way as transnational social fields. Previous scholarship on transnational migration has also noticed the similarity between transnational forms of belonging and transnational social fields (see Dahinden, 2012), as "[t]his view suggests that to be transnational involves a mode of acting and performing (i.e. building up transnational social relations and practices) as much as it does thinking, feeling and belonging" (Dahinden, 2012:120). Dahinden (2009:1367) has indeed, offered the possibility of belonging *in* the transnational space, and Yuval Davis (2011) has also talked about social locations in relation to belonging. However, unlike Dahinden's participants (2009) from a small town in Switzerland who first expressed their belonging in relation to culture and ethnicity, and then enunciated the idea of cosmopolitanism, my participants have not voiced the connection between ethnic, national or cosmopolitan forms of belonging. In fact, several of them have described

their belonging in portions, highlighting its individualistic, yet relational character. Miguel, similarly to Aneta said he does not know where he belongs but could determine that being in the UK enhances the feeling more than being in Portugal:

> "I don't know like, to be honest like I have no idea where I belong and I feel like I don't belong in Portugal, but I don't know if I do belong in the UK. I feel like right now from the places that I've lived this is definitely the place that I like the most. But I've only lived in Portugal and here, so I feel like that's kind of a question that I'm still in search of an answer I guess. But I think that if compared to Portugal, I'd definitely feel like I belong here way more than I do in Portugal."

As Yuval Davis (2011:19) argues, "[p]eople can 'belong' in many different ways and to many different objects of attachment", and it remains a dynamic process. In that way, as Aneta hopes she will find a place where she belongs, Miguel is equally in search of an answer. Sometimes it seems to be easier to identify where we do *not* belong, rather than pinpoint the place where belonging is exercised to its maximum capacity. Whilst for Aneta it is *not* Czech, for Miguel it is *not* Portugal, for Viktorija it is also *not* Latvia: "I belong in the UK a lot more than I belong in Latvia. […] Yes, I don't belong anywhere. But if the scale was sort of, you know from which one, it will be closer to the UK, significantly closer to the UK." As the title of the chapter hints, belonging can thus, remain in the form of yearning, as "individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than positing of identity as a stable state" (Probyn, 1996:19). The yearning, or the desire to belong is not however "a fixed condition; motions, emotions and affects […] often generate differing articulations of nostalgia, belonging, and attachment according to the given historical situation" (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016:237).

By exploring the everyday lives and experiences of young and highly skilled migrants, which were described in the previous two chapters, an insight is provided into "the processes by means of which identity and belonging are "lived" and

negotiated, created and transformed by migrants as agents" (Tošić, 2012:114). These processes are nonetheless connected to the previously mentioned rise of neoliberal opportunities, and these developments "have been crucial in shaping and structuring some of the central characteristics of contemporary politics of belonging" (Yuval Davis, 2011:30). As participants of this research have been described in relation to rising globalisation movement, and their transnational practices as dependent on the expansive use of social media and information technology, the next part of the chapter will reflect on the concept of belonging in relation to participants' 'transnational commuting' practices. Starting from describing the (non)belonging in the country where they come from, to (non)belonging in the UK, the next part positions the participants as main actors in experiencing the transnational belonging through 'conceptualising simultaneity'.

STRANGER WHERE I COME FROM

The simultaneous presence of two or more countries has, as was previously pointed out in this thesis, been theorised through transnationalism and practices that involve transnational activities. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004:1009) have provided a transnational social field perspective on such phenomena, that describes the "array of social relations linking those who move and those who stay behind". Transnational social fields also question the division of local, national, global, and transnational and put the emphasis on the individuals – their daily rhythms and activities that usually exist across borders.

However, moving out of their home country oftentimes results in partial or metaphorical exclusion from the sending society, and at the same time their UK membership – whether political or social –and can also be partial or incomplete. Moreover, with feeling foreign both in the UK and in their home country, for some of them belonging remains wishful thinking, which in turn, "becomes a sense of unbelonging which seems to reach into their past as well as their future selves" (Mas Giralt, 2020:42). Androula came to the UK in 2013, by a chance as she initially planned

to go to the US to pursue higher education. However, she did not get the scholarship and came to the UK. Androula mentioned belonging on several occasions throughout our conversation. But it was not until I directly asked about belonging that she said it was a difficult thing to think about. She summed up her experience, which also in a way, sums up the main point of this chapter:

> "Because I do when I go back to Cyprus, I feel like a stranger. And when I'm in the UK again, I feel like a stranger so… But at the same time I feel a sense of belonging in both places, so it's kind of strange. […] When you're different in a different country, then it's normal because you're not from there [but] when you feel different in your own country then I guess it's not what you would expect to be normal. Even though it's hard to define normal. Like that, that's where you grew up, and that's where you're from so I didn't have a sense of, feeling like the others. […] Difficult to say, I think. Belonging is an internal thing and you can feel it pretty much anywhere. You are very situational and it definitely relates to mental health. In my experience, like if I'm in a stage in my life where I'm feeling good about myself and my well-being is good, then my sense of belonging is better. Having said that, I haven't lived a lot of time as an adult in Cyprus so I can't say what that would be like, I can only say what it would be like in the UK, but it also depends on the people around you, like if I'm surrounded just by a group of English people, I don't feel a sense of belonging [but if I'm] surrounded by my friends who are very international then I do feel a sense of belonging. Because I feel like we're all different, and it's okay to be different. But when I'm surrounded by a lot of English people then I feel different from them. And I feel like I'm outsider there and when I have that feeling I don't feel a sense of belonging."

Androula's story, even though exemplifies (non)belonging to both Cyprus and the UK, introduces a very interesting notion. Whereas many participants said they feel they do not belong in the UK nor in their country of origin, Androula recognised how the

former is quite expected however, the latter is what is unusual. Viktorija has similarly to Androula, recognised how feeling like a stranger in her own country is not the same as feeling like a stranger in the UK: „Because in Latvia I'm very much an outsider. I'm very much an outsider here, but because I am, I am an outsider here. That's okay whereas feeling like an outsider where I guess I shouldn't feel like an outsider, so […] I don't want to be there." These participants recognised how it was probably them who were *at fault* for not feeling they belonged in their home country, as they were the odd ones out who as, Eleni said, "feel like an alien" where they come from. On the other hand, "feeling like an alien" in the UK is not their fault, as it is normal not to belong in a foreign country, and it is therefore not a reason for concern, as Giovanna summed up:

> "No, I don't feel that I belong in the UK, to be honest, and to be fair, didn't have the feeling of belonging in any other place I have lived including in the town in which I was born, and lived for 30 years. It's probably mostly me. Probably easier here because I have objective reasons to think that I don't belong. I don't have to question whether it's me. It's because I am not from the UK so I don't belong. It's fine. It's not something to think too much about."

Whilst some participants expressed how they never felt they belonged in their country of origin, for some it was the migratory experience that made them not fit into the old or previous container of belonging. Diane said she never felt like she belonged in the US, however, she did not spend a significant amount of time in Venezuela as well, where she was born. Unlike many others, she feels the UK is where she is supposed to be. Xiuying on the other hand, says that her 'Chineseness' is not the same in the way it was before she left China, which brings back the temporal element of moving away. As she spent a significant amount of time outside of China, she does not feel Chinese-Chinese anymore, and at the same time, "definitely not British". In that sense, and linking back to Levitt and Glick Schiller's (2004) conceptualisation of simultaneity through ways of being and ways of belonging, there seems to be a switch

among the participants from one to the other. What used to feel like a way of belonging, does not anymore due to the move to the UK. At the same time, activities and foreignness in the UK do also not correspond with action and awareness that would indicate a sense of belonging. In other words, being embedded in a social field does not automatically include modes of identification with any label associated with that field. Therefore, most of the participants who reflected on their sense of belonging, mostly exhibit a transnational way of being only.

In the case of Nikola, whose mum and brother live in Germany, they have been balancing their family life between the UK, Germany and their home country Serbia for years. When asked if he feels like he belongs in the UK he said:

> "No, but I don't think I ever felt like I belong in some greater aspect to Serbia, either. I still don't and actually I think that all that being away and maybe even introspection really helped me to realise that I don't need to feel I belong anywhere, as long as I feel I belong if there's someone dear to me and someone whom I love." (own translation)

However, sometimes even going to see friends and family does not erase the questioned belonging, nor the longing. The photograph Androula sent following our conversation has also in a way reflected her understanding of belonging from the beginning of this section, but also the previously mentioned 'transnational commuting'. Mix of emotions she described are therefore present regardless of the fact she is going to Cyprus, to visit her friends and family, and resembles the ambivalence present within transnational actors:

"It is a photo of me on a plane, which I feel like represents my migratory journey: travelling to see family and loved ones. What particularly encapsulates my migratory experience is the mixture of emotions on the flights - happiness, sadness, nostalgia, FOMO..."

FIGURE 16 PHOTOGRAPH SENT BY ANDROULA

KNOWING THE LANGUAGE

One of the aspects of becoming a stranger at home is by many participants described in the way they perceive and exercise their mother tongue. It seems that the more time they spend not being in touch with their mother tongue, the more it starts deteriorating which consequently causes feelings of frustration, questioning and sometimes even a crisis of identity.

As “[i]dentity and power are embedded in any community’s communication systems and, as a social rule, language is an important component to group membership because of its intricate connection to identity” (Goitom, 2019:396). Even though this chapter does not evolve around group membership as it was clarified at the very beginning of it, the quote highlights the connection between language and identity, and even metaphorically represents the broader question of belonging. Whilst speaking English on a daily basis in both their professional and personal lives, their mother tongue remains present only within the domain of transnational communication. As many participants said they more often text, rather than speak to their friends and family back home, the use of their native language is being minimised, in some cases even neglected. Participants then, end up talking in their mother tongue, verbally, only a few times a week. Using the mother tongue, “thus signals relationship cues and, taking into account migrants’ connections to their homeland, can be a way to (re)construct and maintain identities and shape return-thinking processes” (Goitom, 2019:396). Personal relationships play a significant role in language use, and if most of them are international, one has little chance to speak in their native language, as Androula highlights:

> “Now that also my boyfriend is Italian, so we're speaking in English as well. I am speaking less and less Greek, which sometimes I find myself not knowing. I mean I've always had trouble not knowing a lot of words in Greek because all my education has been in English, so I didn't know a lot of advanced vocabulary in Greek beyond what was spoken in everyday language. But now I find myself forgetting words that are even used in everyday language or hearing a word and knowing that I knew that word, but I no longer know it, you know? So this is something new for me that I've been experiencing more recently that I think of a word in Greek and I kind of know what it means, but I'm not sure. But I know that I used to know that word. So I'm catching myself forgetting stuff when it comes to language.”

Without the need to enter the domain of sociolinguistics, or even semiotics, the language here represents the overall feeling of (non)belonging. The longer they stay out of their home country, participants start to feel their mother tongue is deteriorating, however, it does not mean that their English is improving at the same time. Braidotti has also recognised how "a person who is in transit between the languages, neither here nor there, is capable of some healthy scepticism about steady identities and mother tongues" and how "being in between languages constitutes a vantage point in deconstructing identity" (1994:12). As was said earlier in this chapter, how not belonging somewhere does not increase the belonging elsewhere, in terms of language skills, participants are also left not mastering either language, as Roze exemplifies:

> "After so many years living abroad now I feel like I don't speak any language anymore because my English is not amazing but also my Lithuanian is deteriorating greatly because, you know, I'm not writing in it and it's not an easy language to write and you forget words. Sometimes I feel like I would speak with my mum and I can't recall a certain word and I remember it in English rather than in Lithuanian, and so it starts to be difficult sometimes in order to communicate things. And yes, I think that it's not as easy as it used to be when you know you first just leave and then you come back you don't feel so disconnected from all of it, you know. [With my mum] I'll say, anyway I'll say [it] she'll just understand what I meant anyway, doesn't bother her but you are a bit more cautious when you're around people you don't necessarily know."

As many participants have wanted to come to the UK because of the language in the first place, as was described in *Chapter 5*, the dominance of the English language can be traced back to contemporary neoliberal movements, and its presence worldwide. That way, by being exposed to the English language even before their move to the UK, and with many participants being multiple migrants as well, which meant they had to know English as it is an imperative for the global workforce, it is not strange that their

mother tongue starts to deteriorate with time. Therefore, this mixing of multiple languages and simultaneous local and distant interactions binds these subjects to a world of recombinations of their communicative, cultural and social practices (Jacquement, 2010). Viktorija for example, created a mix of two languages, English and Latvian that she uses with only certain people, which is then, connected to previously discussed generational matter:

> "You should hear me talk to my best friend. We talk in 'latglish' yeah. I'm sure you do exactly the same thing when you talk to Croatians in the UK. We completely, fluidly mix the two languages, and you'll start sentence in Latvian, have 3 words in the middle in English. […] But switching languages in the context of where I actually have to speak Latvian - not latglish - is a bit tricky like I can very easily speak with my parents but I'll occasionally just not have the right words. I have to think what Latvian words are and I know like my parents really don't feel like when I do it […] I'm pretty sure they thought I was kind of emphasising 'Oh, I'm living in abroad now' and not realising that I'm just out of practise. So now, especially when I'm chatting with my closest friend in Latvia it drives me nuts that she speaks she uses lots of English words in her language, because I'm trying to speak Latvian and I need to practise [I think to myself] 'Can you just stop randomly throwing in English words and trying to do this in Latvian?'"

Such attempts, that Viktorija described have previously been described in the transnational linguistic scholarship, as "strategic ideological retreat to defensive position" through "re-identification with cultures of origin, reliance on symbolic membership in strong counter-ethnicities, a revival of cultural integralism and traditionalism and defence of the 'purity' and 'integrity' of their 'communal' language" (Jacquement, 2005:263). Braidotti (1994:11) has also described such attempts as a web of hyphenated English dialects: "Italo-Australian, Franglais, New Yorkese Parisian patois, Dutchlish and many others". However, the fact that English is widely spoken and not limited to the boundaries of English-speaking nation-states

makes it harder for participants to reconnect to their mother tongue in certain situations and maintain the integrity of their mother tongue. As mixing languages, or inserting English words into another language is increasingly common, and not only among migrants, it is quite reasonable for those who are not in constant touch with their mother tongue to have reduced vocabulary, that is then not easily retrievable or renewable. Moreover, the global omnipresence of the English language makes it easier for young people to express themselves, which ultimately, drives them even further apart from their native language. Language then, has an "enormous semiotic potential through which people can articulate far more different identities, subjectivities and speaker positions" (Blommaert, 2010:5 cited in Goitom, 2019:397), as was described by Arvo:

> "I don't feel very comfortable in Estonian language anymore. It's not that I can't speak it, I can still probably up to 99% degree speak it like before, but it's more about, I think it's a difference of languages. I find it so much easier to explain yourself in English because there is better like sayings and better words and better ways to describe your kind of vibe and feelings. And in Estonian that it's a little bit limited for some reason. Or it just sounds weird for me now. I don't know why."

The previously mentioned mixture of languages, and feeling more comfortable expressing oneself in English, is a consequence of the fact that "the world is now full of settings where speakers use a mixture of languages in interacting with friends and co-workers" (Jacquement, 2010:63). Such findings, those of use of language in transnational spaces and practices have been identified as transidiomatic practice, as they are "activated by people needing to operate in multiple, co-present and overlapping communicative frames" (Jacquement, 2010:63). As English is present in almost every combination of languages in transnational social spaces, Jacquement (2010) argues how any other number of languages can be included depending on the previous transnational practices of actors involved. That way, languages that spread beyond national territories through transidiomatic practices, create identities that are

based on "multi-presence, multilingualism and decentered political/social engagements" (Jacquement, 2010:63). Language, then, plays an important role in the identity construction of transnational actors, such are the participants of this research. In the same way that their English skills do not become perfect, and their mother tongue starts deteriorating, "sometimes identity reconstruction can be partial or incomplete" (Beech, 2011:287). These transidiomatic practices, however, do not only concern the mobile agents, "but also the lives of people with whom these mobile people interact, both near to them and in the deterritorialised environments of late-modern economy" (Jacquement, 2010:64).

'I'M A LEGAL ALIEN'[14]: STRANGER IN THE UK

Even though English as a language might provide a better range of options in which one can express oneself, compared to using mother tongue, English vocabulary does not have the power to personify belonging while being in the UK. As was already briefly mentioned in the previous section, feeling alien in the UK seems to be quite self-explanatory to many participants. It is normal they say – as they really are strangers in the UK and the feeling of not belonging there comes rather naturally.

Schinkel (2018:np) argues that "[d]espite all mobility, there is still a 'society' that is not mobile, that can be circumcised out of the super-diverse chaos of movements, trajectories, backgrounds and origins". In that sense, migrants are in relation to the native society still perceived as - foreigners. Yuval-Davis (2011:81), as was previously argued in *Chapter 3*, says how recognition of the diversity of origin does not necessarily reduce the pressure of the receiving nation-state to try and 'fit in'. Jess for example spent three years in the UK before deciding to permanently move back to Canada, and she said how she felt accepted in the UK. She acknowledged how that might be due to the historical connections between Canada and the UK and their

[14] Lyrics to *'Englishman in New York'*, a 1987 song by Sting, listed on his second solo studio album *'... Nothing Like the Sun'*

shared Anglophone origin, however, when describing what was important for her to feel accepted she said:

> "I think just a place where the country gives you the opportunity to be able to pursue what you want to pursue. I think my job was very crucial to that. Like being able to get a job and you know, just being accepted there as a *foreigner* was really important." (own emphasis)

Regardless of feeling accepted, Jess interestingly used the phrase 'accepted as a foreigner' highlighting what was previously said by Androula and Viktorija. Regardless of how well they spoke the English language (in this particular case, Jess was a native speaker), or even if they met the requirements of becoming a British citizen (as Viktorija did), that does not change the fact they were still foreigners in the UK. Many authors have asked whether transational involvement and increasing mobility and diversity challenge the way migrants adapt in the receiving society (e.g. Engbersen, 2018; Favell, 2010). Indeed, as was argued in *Chapter 5* how participants of this research came to the UK without having a plan in mind regarding the length of their stay in the UK, and having experienced previous international migration as well, partial and temporal adjustment and attachment seem to be a characteristic of contemporary migration movements. However, this is where belonging and politics of belonging (Yuval Davis, 2006) play a central role, as regardless of how adjusted or attached migrants might become, the receiving society still retains the possibility of exclusion, as Giovanna explained:

> "Living in a different country, being a migrant means that you are always a migrant and a foreigner regardless how much time is spent in that place. Even though one day I will have perfect English, I will never have the perfect [accent]. We've always been identified as a foreigner and it's okay with first years, it becomes more difficult after a few years because you're starting to perceive yourself as more rooted to the place, while for the other people around you're always a foreigner. This shift between how you are gradually

> perceiving yourself, which is OK, I am not from here but I live here and I can see myself here, and the others like, always see you as someone from outside and sometimes this is difficult because people tend to make you know to remark that. People often ask me 'when are you going back? So when are you going away?' […] Of course, when you feel part of the place part of the culture in which you are living, it makes it more difficult to feel at home, feel like I am appreciated or valued because I always think well, people are saying that - this means that they perceive my presence here is temporary, and perhaps if that's what they want when they expect so, it makes their relationship that I'm trying to build with a place within the context surrounding me much more difficult, of course. You can generalise, but yes in general makes the situation more complex. I mean for me being a migrant is always doing a sort of mediation between who you are in the place where we are living [which] makes this process of mediation much difficult."

Through a prism of social anchoring and embedding (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Ryan, 2022), such an experience can be understood as a form of dis-embedding triggered by an unsettling of migrants' sense of acceptance and belonging in British society. The conceptual strength of anchors is useful to understand the need for security and acceptance, especially in contexts of mobility and uncertainty. In Giovanna's case, being asked when is she going back or when is she going somewhere else only reaffirms the notion of unwelcomeness and the already existing uncertainty that comes with contemporary movements. In like manner, Roze feeling more like herself in the UK - as in Lithuania she is expected to look a certain way - creates a sense of "freedom [that] enabled informants to develop a sense of belonging and feeling socially accepted" (Wessendorf, 2016:455). However, interaction with the host society affects the sense of belonging equally, further leading to a sense of alienation and non-belonging. As Giovanna explained, whilst on a personal level migrants might develop a sense of familiarity and belonging, it is the interaction with the host society that affects the overall sense of belonging and the new-forging identity. Grzymała-Kazłowska (2016:1124) has already argued how identity became an important notion

in relation to belonging and a "fundamental category which mediates between individuals and society".

Wessendorf (2016:454) argues that "it is not just the existence of commonplace diversity and patterns of conviviality which shape the way in which they experience the area in which they settle, but it is these concrete ways in which people interact and, especially, in which other people relate to them, which facilitates their settlement and sense of belonging". That way, working in a diverse environment, with international clients, Aneta feels comfortable and 'not weird'. Similar findings were reported by Genova and Zontini (2020:56-57), whose participant "felt OK at his workplace which he considers 'international' but feels that, in other contexts such as the pub or in the countryside, he stands out as different, creating uneasiness". As Foner et al. (2019:6) found as well, "a degree of integration emerges, not necessarily because newcomers share social and institutional spaces with long-time natives but because diverse newcomers inevitably share them with each other". However, even after spending almost 10 years in the UK at the time of our conversation, Aneta says:

> "I've experienced a couple of times being in like purely British environment and I don't know, I do feel a bit odd or weird or that I don't belong. I do feel it even after that many years. And I don't think British culture is that massively different from Europe. […]. But it just feels different."

Similarly, João says they feel like an "outsider, an *Other*" in the UK. In that way, as different circumstances provide different feelings of belonging or comfort, it can be said that partial and temporal attachments represent a new form of exclusion borne out of super-diversity. Moreover, following both Grzymała-Kazłowska (2018) and Wessendorf (2016), being in touch with foreigners functions as a way of belonging (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004) and being in touch with the host society, or the British in this research strengthens the sense of alienation, participants of this research have once again reinforced the idea of a 'metropolitan paradox' (Back, 1996). Urry argues that "mobility is the greatest challenge to society today and the

greatest source of change" (Christensen and Jansen, 2011:147), which is demonstrated here in relation to super-diverse forms of migration and (non)belonging.

REMAINING IN-BETWEEN

Mahmoud's story is largely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and every question I asked had a 'before the pandemic' and 'due to COVID-19 situation' answer. However, being in the UK, with or without COVID-19 keeps you away from where you come from and Mahmoud reflected on that:

> "Staying away from your country in another country would make you feel that you are in between and that means that you [don't] belong to that or belong to that and that's the most feeling that I think that I have, at a certain point, like in Egypt, okay, you feel at a certain point, many people forget you or if you go there, it wouldn't be the same and everything… [But] also here when you are living in a foreign country or a different country you would feel that place is nice and people are good and everything. But you feel also that you are foreign. So you are not like, you're not like a citizen like a British citizen, so you will also feel that it's not your country, so I think spending maybe more than a year out of your country would make you feel that you are, I don't know, that you are a bit lost, not lost but as I told you like in between. So in your country that people already forget you and in the other country you are still not belonging to that country."

Mahmoud's story, as that of many other participants, indicates that remaining in-between and transnational identification can arise as a reaction to a negative experience of incorporation or as a result of discrimination or negative perceptions of the receiving society (Dahinden, 2012). Feeling foreign in the UK

and not fully accepted in the country of origin then recreates the transnational belonging, with only partial embedding in both places. Following on previous two sections, how migrants feel foreign both in their home countries and in the UK, "[t]he focus here is on the change process, and in particular when a person is in between two identity constructions: when they are neither one thing nor the other" (Beech, 2011:286).

In the case of young migrants, that period of time spent living in their home country usually reflects their childhood and teen ages, sometimes early adulthood, however only a few of them have experienced living a full adult life in both the UK and their home country. As Park and Gerrits (2021:np) argue, that duality often means negotiation in terms of "the norms and values that shape the identity in the home society and those prevalent in the host society, which nudges migrants to be constantly aware of who they are and how they present themselves in various situations" and often results in "binary being in (or beyond) home and destination society" (Park and Gerrits, 2021:np). Consequently, migrants go through "longitudinal experience of ambiguity and in-between-ness within a changeful context" (Beech, 2011:288). Wessendorf (2013) has also argued how "in creating transnational social ties and cultural identifications, these migrants may engage in discourses that serve to construct an in-between space or trajectory for speaking that they use to subvert the dominant discourses of both their native and adopted countries. It is also in this 'border zone' that they may mobilise their subject positions in different social systems and cultural fields to forge new grounds for defining themselves in relation to both their host and home societies" (Reynolds and Zontini, 2016:382).

The lives of participants in this research therefore follow "[d]omestic politics abroad, diasporic politics at home" (Smith and Guarnizo, 2006:221). Whilst in the UK they remain foreigners, oriented towards keeping in touch with their friends and family in their country of origin, once they come to the country of origin, they are nothing more than those 'who have left'. In that sense, when asked how they feel about the constant balancing of the simultaneous presence of both their home and host countries, most of the participants said it is – overwhelming. Being a foreigner here and there, but also feeling partial or complete belonging both here and there becomes difficult to navigate, as Aneta described:

> "I think this is the inner contradiction that I think… Maybe I will always have because I feel like if I left the UK now and went to live back home - you see I call it home, still, back home you know? I always will do you know? - But yeah, I feel like if I left the UK and went back to Czech, part of me would always be missing and the same is the other way around. Like, I don't think I can ever fall one place, a home and be complete. It's just that contradiction. This is difficult to answer. I do feel home but I don't at the same time. And every time I go back to Czech every time I find it really hard to leave everything, every time I cry, I get emotional and then coming back to UK it takes me takes me a couple of weeks to settle back and adjust, always you know it's just… It never, it doesn't get easier with time kind of thing."

As Aneta has previously said she is optimistic about her finding a place to belong, her situation can be recognised in terms of Cwerner's (2001:27) work on transnational migrants who "are always 'making up their minds' […], reflecting their ambivalent status in the host society. […] They are 'betwixt and between' all the recognised fixed points in the space-time of structural classification, […] as they establish and shun commitments in both the homeland and the host society" (Cwerner, 2001:27). Being in-between, or being in a liminal stage is, therefore, one of the possible options of participants in this research, and largely reflects the transnational nature of their migratory experiences. As they literally navigate transnational social spaces between two or more countries, their identity positioning and therefore belonging, tend to get stuck in-between as well. João has also explained their life in the UK as such:

> "I think the UK is probably one of those spaces in between. Now it's not totally home, but it's not totally unfamiliar. I know a lot of like how the rules work in this country and how things are expected to be and I have some knowledge of like politics and culture and society, but I don't think I would

> call it home. I don't think I'll ever call it home. It's so different from it, so different from the way I am, the person I am."

A transnational identity and belonging "can then develop only among those who not only master both languages (host and origin), but also come into contact and have the social skills to establish connections with people and communities from both the host and origin country" (Bradatan et al. 2010:174). Such practices highlight how identity and belonging consist of "various simultaneous place attachments: migration and mobility may create 'multi-sited' spatial belonging, but also feelings of ''in-betweenness'' (Huot et al., 2014 cited in Lähdesmäki et al. 2016:236). Perhaps unsurprisingly, "for many, these liminal times remain with them even after they return, a situation that often prompts another `return', this time away from the homeland itself, intensifying the feeling of being `neither here nor there'" (Turner 1967:97 cited in Cwerner, 2001:28), as is often the case when migrants return to the UK after visiting their home country. Coming back to the UK for many participants, including Miguel, means coming back to their own peace and routines:

> "I don't know if that sounds so clingy but I always get the feeling that I'm basically going back to my life I guess. Because I feel like the way that I'm putting Portugal in this call it's almost like hell or something, like I do like Portugal, but it's like we were saying, like instead, I have a different way of living there. I think that when I do come back to the UK, it's always almost super excited to be honest it is just going back to the work regime. Just meet everybody again and then just get back on track on stuff that I was doing."

Similarly, Kristina says she feels "relieved to come back because you know, at the end of the day, like this is [where] you have your own space, you know." As Androula has previously made a connection between belonging and well-being, in a sense that her belonging is exercised positively when she feels good about herself, Lena has made a

similar connection about feeling *at home* and feeling happy, saying how balancing everything sometimes feels:

> "Overwhelming. Yeah, it feels like sometimes when I'm in my sad place I feel like I'm not belonging anywhere but at the same time when I'm happy and everything is just in place and I feel like I belong everywhere. So it's like the world is our home, that's why it's weird and hard to answer for that as well, where I'm feeling more home because […] wherever I'm going, I should be at home because my home is inside me, but at the same time I feel…. so what is really important? But maybe I feel about here more home. Like I never had the financial stability at home in Hungary. And I think about that stability every single day. […] It's really frustrating. While in the UK I thought that of course in the beginning and there are situations when you are lower financially, but at the same time it's just more stable, and that's very important."

Drawing back to the concepts of social anchoring and embedding, Mulholland and Ryan (2022:611) note how "relational embedding is key to migrants' sense of belonging, fulfilment and security". Having multiple anchors both in the UK and in their home country, but also being embedded with various levels of attachment both here and there, unravels dynamic, multi-layered and multi-dimensional processes of belonging and attachment, among which migrants often remain simply in-between.

IT ONLY GETS MORE DIFFICULT

Kristina moved to the UK in 2019. At the time of our interview, she had already been living in London for almost two years. When I asked her to describe how her migratory experience changed her family she said she does not know where to begin. Starting

with her parents' move to Cyprus, her brother living in the Netherlands, and her multiple migrations, Kristina explained both the good and bad sides of living transnationally, and sent a picture that reflects that experience:

> "But there's also negative sides of migration, of course, which is like, you know having to sacrifice a lot for your kids in terms of you know what you can provide to them. You have to work so much and you know you sometimes don't have time to be with your kids. And you lose certain things in that. But that can also bring you closer at some other stage in your life, so it's I think it's just constant learning. And you get to learn so much through moving around and I mean for me, having the experience that I've had and the opportunity to be able to move around and you know, to travel not only to like London. But you know study in the Netherlands and then, you know, be able to like move to other countries like that's, you know, I'm so grateful that I have that because it's gotten me to where I am now, […] I think I'm going in the right direction of my job. I'm not sure, but yeah. You need it, also like you know you meet the people that you're meant to meet on your journey, and if I never moved to like Cyprus I would have never maybe even moved to London, you know, I would not have ended up seeing Cambodia, maybe move somewhere else, so I think it all sort of kind of adds to your journey of where you are now. […] So this stone reminds me of like, it actually reminds me of a sea or like a dolphin. I don't know. But it has all of those…. Firstly when you hold it, there's this sense of power that you feel, and the smell of the sea and also how it's like indented with different like hues and like bumps you know, that sort of reminds me of like, my journey and just how life is in general."

FIGURE 17 PHOTOGRAPH SENT BY KRISTINA

Once again, the understanding of young migrants' belonging would be incomplete without considering its temporal aspect. As most quotes captured during my interviews with participants and presented here in the thesis reflect only one moment in time, contextually conditioned and in fact, largely affected by COVID-19, I started wondering if the information I gathered would still be relevant to this day. However, as that would not be possible due to time and financial constraints, one of the ways

in which the temporal aspect can be implemented into this section of the thesis is by looking at data from a different angle, that of life-course.

Even though the experiences of most participants and emotions that reflect belonging and feeling at home echo in a similar manner, I noticed that among some participants, especially those who are in their 30s and who are multiple migrants, another theme emerged. Relistening to recordings of interviews, and rereading the transcriptions showed how contrary to some expectations, moving, migrating and settling gets more difficult with time. Similar to how one would expect that super-diverse societies are easier to blend in but sometimes they result in a type of exclusion, moving multiple times does not mean each subsequent move will become easier. On the contrary, the sense of belonging seems to get more blurred by both time spent away and how many times one has moved around. From that point of view, Arvo's feeling of belonging became questionable only once he left Estonia:

> "It doesn't really have like it doesn't affect me that I don't have a strong feeling of belongingness, but definitely more each year to the UK. Yeah, but I don't feel I belong in the UK though, it's just like a temporary kind of stop. It is weird. Yeah, I don't have a home. I think I don't feel home-home anywhere. Before coming to the UK, I definitely felt that Estonia is my home-home, but now I'm not so fully sure."

Arvo indeed moved on from the UK a couple of years after our conversation. His temporary stop in the UK led him forward towards Costa Rica, from where he now frequently travels to other destinations for his work. Such cases, of onward and multiple migrations challenge the assumptions of duality (rather than a more complex multiplicity) and dichotomisation of 'home' vs 'host' countries. It can also be argued that onward migration journeys of young and highly skilled migrants indicate strong migration aspirations that have not been met by existing migration realities.

Equally, moving in your 30s is not the same as moving in your 20s and as was exemplified in *Chapter 5*, migrants who move younger, and for education purposes tend to have bigger social circles in the UK. In that sense, Maria, who moved from Romania to Spain when she was 19 and a decade after that to the UK says the two experiences cannot really compare:

> Me: "Would you say that your move from Romania to Spain went more… ?"

> Maria: "Smoothly? Yeah, I would say so, yeah, but I was only 19 then and now I'm 30 so it's not the same thing going to uni, making friends with moving to a new country when you're 30 and just having a job and work colleagues, is it?"

Such findings were earlier reported among EU migrants in the UK, arguing how age, job security and family obligations play a big role in potential onward and/or return migration. Genova and Zontini (2020:59) in their work with Bulgarian and Italian migrants have therefore found that age and life-course might make migrants become "'less fluid' – in terms of getting permanent jobs or having their children start school". Whilst none of the participants in this research had children at the time of our interview, there was a certain difference in attitude towards migration trajectories that can be associated with age differences. Likewise, among participants who were in their 30s and in serious relationships, living with their partners instead of housemates and having stable and permanent jobs, a pattern of guilt and responsibility was recognised, that was either less present or non-existent among those of younger age. When I asked Chiara if COVID-19 has disrupted her feelings toward home or family relationships she had, she said it is nothing related to the pandemic: "I feel guilty that I left. They always thought that I was coming back but I didn't, so it's more guilty than anything else". Similarly, Roze who is also an only child and left only her mum behind said it is "horrible, it's really bad. You feel guilty, you feel horrible and you feel helpless. That's probably the word to use, isn't it?"

Drawing back to social anchoring, Grzymała-Kazłowska (2016:1129) recognises how "varied types of transnational identities of immigrants that can be anchored in family obligations […] when people anchor themselves in diverse transnational, strategically-imagined communities as a sort of defensive mechanism". These are some of the negative consequences of transnational identities, as migrants cannot live physically in more than one place at a time, however by staying in touch virtually makes the impression they can. Authors have already highlighted "the fractured relationships and the changing family dynamics over time that result from transnational relationships means that life in transnational social fields can have a negative effect on migrants' view of themselves" (Reynolds and Zontini 2016:385). Moreover, such disruptions and fractured relationships are further exercised through "family visits 'home' to the homeland [which] can lead to young people experiencing a sense of dislocation, for instance, when their friends and kin treat them as 'foreigners' in what they had up to that point considered their homeland" (Reynolds and Zontini 2016:385) and which was addressed earlier in this chapter.

Becoming less fluid, a characteristic connected to older migrants of this research was also evident in terms of their plans for the future. As was already mentioned in previous chapters, how most of the plans migrants have remain highly uncertain and defined as no-yet futures, several factors play a role when deciding the next steps. Boccagni (2017a:np) has pointed out that "labour emigration stem[s] also from an interiorised and socially legitimated view of the future as amenable to progress – of course, on a specific condition: that the bet is made to go and live elsewhere for an expectedly limited, but typically undeterminable time span" – connecting the prospect of future with the notion of existential mobilities. Chiara, even though she feels guilty for leaving her family, has no intention of going back to Italy, she thinks about finding a place someday that will feel like home. However, she is not sure she will be able to do that, as she misses the girl she used to be, when she moved around Europe in her 20s:

> "You should find a place where you have the same work opportunity that you can give me so how I feel now... okay my job position and the possibility

> you know to grow more, which I'm doing finally. Now after so many years of challenging, struggling…. And missing the Dolce Vita of Italy, you know? And I don't know what it is. I don't know, maybe can be another town in England that I've never been before, who knows. I always wanted to move back to Spain. […] I miss being that person, not being scared of doing the move. Well, now I'm thinking I miss that girl that arrived in the UK that she was. She did this so many stupid choices but she was not afraid of doing it because there was no other option, so just take an embrace and leave. So I hope to be that girl one day again. So yeah, don't know where but I know it is a common feeling for most people, Italian or not Italian, there is always… we stay here because we got comfortable to stay here. Not because we love the UK."

Chiara's experience therefore remains a not-yet future. Whilst she yearns for who she was when she came to the UK, wishing to be brave enough for another migratory experience that might give her a better sense of belonging and 'feeling at home' somewhere in Spain, she almost accidentally got comfortable in the UK. Moreover, Chiara has revealed another phenomenon previously introduced in *Chapter 2*. Chiara misses her fluid and procedural character (Bauman, 2004), that was ascribed to most contemporary youth on the move. In fact, when I last saw Chiara accidentally one weekend, she told me she bought a house in the UK that she is now decorating and invited me to a housewarming party. However, her getting comfortable in the UK or buying a house does not on the other hand, indicate strong footholds or anchors in the country, or anchors that indicate a truly solid and lasting identity (Bauman, 1997). It indicates lack of agency in the same manner Hage (2009) has defined stuckedness in the times of a crisis. Chiara yearns for the fluidity and flexibility of her previous versions of self, which can then easily be understood through her life-course. Coming to the UK in her mid 20s, Chiara confirms the outlook of young and highly-skilled migrants and their career-driven migration aspirations. Whereas coming of age is delayed nowadays due to wider socio-cultural transformation of contemporary societies (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2016:1124), migrants are still capable of achieving

adulthood. It may not fulfil all their migration aspirations, and their anchors in the destination country may not be very strong, but at some point, as Chiara noted, they get comfortable enough to settle down.

Still, multiple and ambivalent positionalities of participants can be said to result in liminal space, of neither/both at the same time. As they start to feel more comfortable in the UK, especially while in contact with other migrants or while being in an international surrounding, they will always remain a foreigner in the eyes of the native British society. At the same time, even though their origin and time spent living in their home country might orientate their belonging through the national or ethnic lens, neither the participants nor their peer nationals in their home country see them as such as they also remain foreigners where they come from. In that sense, "[t]heir liminal character stems in part from their marginality, and in part from the temporariness of their experience" (Cwerner, 2001:28).

CONCLUSION

Exploring migration usually comes in relation to either home country, host country, societies and actors that surround migrants, their legal status and relationships that surround them, however not as significant amount of research has been dedicated towards exploring the consequences of all that, or in other words, how migrants navigate feelings and positioning that come with migration. This chapter has therefore built on the previous two chapters that focused on describing migrants' life circumstances, by paying attention to their own feeling of belonging, and how they feel among either home or host society. To do so, this chapter has once again relied on Grzymała-Kazłowska's social anchoring theory, in addition to Dahinden's (2009; 2012) proposal of 'belonging transnationally', Levitt and Glick Schiller's (2004) simultaneity and Mulholland and Ryan's (2023) embedding. I argue that belonging 'transnationally' in practice means belonging neither here nor there, or in other words, exemplifies liminal positioning and non-belonging. However, even though

most participants in this research expressed they do not know where they belong and described the concept as an active search, one they hope to end someday, it is also important to "stress that transnational identities are not homogeneous" (Reynolds and Zontini, 2016:385). That way, even though I describe participants, their identities and belonging as transnational or liminal, there are differences among them, related to their age, gender and family dynamics. Such differences are most notable when it comes to participants' age, which was expressed in the final part of this chapter, among participants who once they achieve a more permanent type of settlement, move in with their partners and get permanent jobs, seem to lose the fluid-ness that comes with contemporary migration.

Consequently, their belonging remains a wishful thinking, something they long for, in the same way they long for their home country while away, and the UK while at *home*. The analysis has shown that regardless of their yearning for belonging, it might not be as easily achievable, and on the other hand, it has shown how transnational belonging is indeed connected to a certain amount of temporariness and uncertainty that comes with this type of migration. Comparing migrants based on their age has shown that even those who lost the fluidness of their moving capabilities have not found where they belong, which ultimately might indicate that their 'feet are not going to stop being itchy' as Aneta said. The moment they left home, as Arvo explained, the only home they knew stopped being that and caused a reaction that might leave the complete feeling of home and belonging only in memory. Once participants started their journey, it made them search for where they belong, yearn for where they used to belong and hope that someday they might be as rooted as they were before they left.

CHAPTER 9: MOVING ALONE – DISCUSSION

"It seems to me that I would always be better off where I am not,
and this question of moving is one of those
I discuss incessantly with my soul."[15]

INTRODUCTION

The lives of young and highly skilled migrants have recently started to gain attention in migration scholarship (see Hughes, 2022; Moroşanu et al., 2019; King et al., 2016; Lulle et al., 2018 among others). In fact, the experiences of participants in this study are not so different from Grzyamala-Kazlowska and Ryan's (2022) participants for example, nor from Eurostars featured in Favell's (2008) book. Favell asks Alan, one of his participants who moved to Amsterdam from the UK about plans for the future and Alan says he is constantly thinking about leaving. Alan also gave himself a timescale of five years to act on those thoughts (2008:114) in the same way many of my participants' plans for the future were described as a 'not yet' future. Likewise, Grzymala-Kazlowska and Ryan (2022:np) describe 'Agnieszka's dilemma' in their work – Agnieszka is a Polish migrant in London who wants to return to Poland but knows she would miss London and therefore keeps postponing the move. The experiences of Alan and Agnieszka perfectly summarise the experiences of my participants as well – they "reveal the embodied, emotional experiences of migrants straddling multiple places" (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Ryan, 2022:np). As *Chapter 5* has shown, young and highly skilled migrants' moves truly are temporary, intentionally unpredictable and spontaneous, also consistent with many previous findings on young migrants in the UK and especially in London. Youth mobility is, as both previous and this study showed, predominantly work and study-driven, and the coming of age abroad is seen

[15] From Charles Baudelaire's poem, *XLVIII Anywhere Out of the World*

as the constant process of becoming (Worth, 2009) and characterised by constant re-examination of migrants' objectives (see Cwerner, 2001; Griffiths et al., 2013).

Yet, the novelty of this study lies in the fact that it takes these experiences and asks how they affect or even help construct the feeling of belonging. By exploring the intersection between being young, highly skilled, alone and abroad, this study builds on previous works of similar focus and offers a snapshot of what it means to belong in such a context. In doing so, this study enriches the conceptual understanding of temporal and spatial dimensions of belonging, and relevance of life-course and unravels the possibility of non-belonging that ultimately reveals its liminal momentum. Correspondingly, this thesis ultimately contributes to the literature on belonging, as it explores the notion from a slightly different point of view, as explained above and in doing so brings several conceptual and empirical contributions to the field. It does so by drawing on rich qualitative data, collected online during the COVID-19 pandemic through a span of nine months, and therefore brings several methodological novelties as well, which will be explained in greater detail later on. However, it needs to be noted that much of the content of this thesis is context specific and whilst it contributes to existing literature in several ways, it is very time and place bound. Firstly, this research was done during COVID-19 and it is appropriate to assume the data gathered would have been different if data collection took time in pre-COVID times. In simple words, it would be easy to assume social anchoring and embedding of migrants might have been differently felt and experienced if this research took place before the pandemic. Secondly, this research took place in the UK, and even though it provides an in-depth insight into the lives of participants who took part in it, there is a need to question whether young and highly-skilled migrants in other parts of the world experience the move in the same way. Finally, the participants of this research belong to a very specific demographic category – that of being young, highly-skilled and largely middle class.

Original contributions to knowledge then can be summarised in several points and such is the structure of this chapter as well: (1) The study advances the current state of the art on young and highly skilled migrants, by unravelling their weak ways of belonging and shallow embedding through the analytical lens of liminality. (2) It bridges scholarship on individualised practices and relational epistemological

positions, by implying that belonging ultimately is a relational phenomenon, and its relation can be expressed beyond essentialist, clear-cut identity categories. (3) Building on the previous point, this study explores the possibility of non-belonging which was previously neglected in researching migrants' connections post-move, (4) Highlights the temporal factor and age in construing the feeling of belonging. (5) This thesis methodologically contributes to discussions on reflexivity and relationality and advances the use of visual methods within qualitative research.

BELONGING WEAKLY, EMBEDDING SHALLOWLY – THE BEGINNING OF IN-BETWEENNESS

This thesis essentially encapsulated the construction of belonging through two crucial thresholds in young migrants' lives: moving to the UK and coming of age. In doing so, it focused on young, highly skilled people who chose the UK as their next either temporary or permanent home, after moving alone initially. It was then recognised that both terms young and highly skilled are somewhat contested, as there is generally no consensus on what youth exactly means, nor what characterises someone as highly skilled. In that sense, this research framed the term 'young' not in relation to chronological age, but around the life-course perspective in the same way King et al. (2016) and Moroşanu et al. (2019) did in their work on youth migration. Ending full-time education, moving away from parents' homes or getting a job were all characteristics of young people involved in this research. Moreover, the term highly skilled reflects both their HE degrees, but also the ability to adapt, and transform the migration experience itself into 'mobility capital' (see Stock, 2023).

I then roughly framed the people of this research as 'middling migrants' and around the 'free movers' category, even though the term's mainstream meaning reflects the EU policy that enables its members to move freely between the member states. As Stock (2023:14) recognised, even though practices or backgrounds of transnational middle-class, young and highly skilled migrants are very context-dependent, they show similarities, "in that they are related to reactions to the

restrictions to autonomy and freedom that globalised capitalist and migration regimes impose on different sections of today's population in different local and national contexts". Similarly, drawing on many recent works such as Robertson's (2018) research on *mobility* in Asia and Australia, therefore beyond the European continent, but also due to recognising how participants of this research are not so different from previous depictions of young and highly skilled EU migrants in the UK, this research merges the discourses of mobility and migration. Normally scholars separate the two, aligning mobility with EU-origin and highly skilled migrants, and migration with everyone else. *Chapter 2* has shown how recently developed visa systems, global labour markets and increasing transnational connections (Glick Schiller, 2010a; Vertovec, 2009) created a category of people that are globally mobile, and less restricted by their national backgrounds than before as their skills and degrees enable their occupational and therefore bigger geographical mobility. Such findings are also consistent with Stock's (2023) findings on transnational middle-class migrants and the 'transnational capital' that increases social mobility across borders. Consequently, fragility, uncertainty and flexibility are some of the main features of migratory movements of young people nowadays, that create new strategies of navigating transnational lives and are reflected in academic concepts of super-diversity and liquid migration, among others.

Respectively, *Chapter 5* did not only introduce the participants of this research and their reasons for moving to the UK, it also portrayed them as independent actors in a neoliberal world driven by labour markets. Drawing on *Chapter 2* which described the contextual background of this research, *Chapter 5* describes what these processes look like in practice. Diversification of migrant flows, new forms of visas, uncertain paths and success-driven migration are all present in the stories of Jess, Aneta, Mariana, João and many others who were mentioned in the chapter and exemplified the nature of contemporary moves. By inserting these stories into a larger narrative of global structures, and also reflecting on their personhoods, we acknowledge that "an individual's decision to migrate is situated in his/her entire biography, and is made in the context of the individual migrant's past, present and projected future" (Findlay and Stockdale, 2003: 5). In that sense, experiences and stories from *Chapter 5* largely resemble participants and findings of King and Raghuram (2013) or Moroşanu et al.

(2019), who focused on the mobility of highly skilled and educated migrants around the world and young European migrants' transitions to adulthood in the UK.

Conceptualising the simultaneity of transnational practices and the importance they have in the construction of attachments in this study relied largely on the works of Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004). Their ways of being and ways of belonging have served as a conceptual tool to understand how not all practices young transnational migrants engage with enact or represent their belonging. What Povrzanovic-Frykman (2010) noticed drawing on Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), is that we, as researchers, often interpret certain actions of migrants as ways of belonging because we conceptualised the actors involved primarily based on their foreignness or ethnic backgrounds. In other words, by seeing participants as primarily and predominantly migrants, our understanding and analysis of their actions will almost naturally seek ethnic markers and their symbolic value. If, on the other hand, we conceptualise migrants as people who take part in transnational social spaces by both creating and maintaining them, we have the opportunity to look at their actions as mere ways of being, without necessarily assigning them a symbolic or identitarian value.

In that sense, many of the actions and people, and even locations involved in participants' lives and described in previous data chapters do not qualify as ways of belonging as much as previous literature might have led me to expect. For Hana for example, whose family sent her baking utensils and a coffee mill from Germany (see *Chapter 6*), baking cakes is associated with a popular practice in Germany to have a cake in the afternoon – a 'tradition [she] really enjoy[s]'. Similarly, she grew up with the 'lovely scent of freshly grounded coffee' and frequently uses her coffee mill in the UK. What Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004:1010) warn is that people such as Hana, "have the opportunity to act or identify at a particular time because they live within the social field, but not all choose to do so". For Hana, baking and using the coffee mill is expressed as a mere habit, rather than a conscious connection to her German heritage. As Povrzanovic-Frykman (2010) also found in her research on Croatian migrants in Sweden, objects and actions can be important simply because of their personal connection, practical use or 'everyday-ness' of their presence. Such practices

represent transnational ways of being instead of belonging (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004) that represent the continuity and simultaneity of living transnationally.

Relatedly, the sphere of home can be interpreted from the same lens. As *Chapter 7* has extensively described participants' home-building practices, many, if not all of those can be said to represent ways of being instead of ways of belonging. If taken outside of the migration discourse, all of the participants seek comfort, familiarity and continuity which is something that applies to non-migrants as well. From this perspective, Eleni saying how she does not feel at home in the UK due to her frequent moves and inability to stay in one place for a longer period of time does not enact failed ways of belonging, but rather transnational ways of being in the same way Hana's baking has little to do with her ethnic background. What that means is that to create a home we need specific material conditions, much of what is perceived as an 'ordinary life' (Boccagni, 2022:591) that in Eleni's case was simply not met. A home in Eleni's example does not represent a space of memory or hopes for the future, but the experience of habitation in which objects, practices and identifications come together in present experience (Povrzanovic-Frykman, 2010:51). Home in that context makes an empirical and experiential category (see Boccagni, 2014; 2017b), that especially in relation to COVID-19 as data has shown, has little to do with migrants' conscious connection to a particular group or an institution.

What these examples demonstrate, particularly from a transnational social spaces point of view is a deconstruction of 'here' and 'there' that is in most migration literature often put in juxtaposition. By looking at the way migrants live transnationally, and the spheres of their practices, there is a clear need to put 'and' instead of 'or' between these analytical pairs. One way to do that, and to create an open dialogue between 'here' and 'there' is to look at migrants' positionings as anchors that provide them security and the ability to be embedded into a transnational social space. Grzymala-Kazlowska and Ryan's (2022) work on uniting the concepts of social anchoring and embedding was of key significance to conceptualise and understand how various practices, people and locations participants engage with build on their potential attachments.

Based not only on rich interview data gathered in this study, but also on photographs received and counter-maps created, work and career seem to be the strongest anchors in the transnational lives of young and highly skilled migrants. Such findings are consistent with previous literature on youth mobility, most notably Moroşanu et al.'s (2019:1557) work on young migrants in London, who utilise their migration in order to find "greater economic security and opportunities to build independent adult lives". Such findings are vastly dependent on a thorough spatio-temporal analysis as such perspective unravels how migration may advance youth transition in the spheres of work and living independently, but severely delays or suspends others, such as marriage or having children (Moroşanu et al., 2019:1558). Indeed, most of the participants in this research were either single or in a relationship that gained significant advancement only due to COVID-19.

INDIVIDUALISED, YET RELATIONAL

Living here and there at the same time geographically and metaphorically after moving alone has shown to be the primary proviso of young and highly skilled migrants in the UK. Encompassing their highly individualised lives, relationships in the UK and back home, and their ambivalent, unfixed and multiple homes, *Chapter 8* has summarised how all of these feed into the notion of belonging. Tied closely to the third specific research question, *Chapter 8* turns to migrants themselves and digs deeper into their internal affiliations, metaphorical and literal search for roots and for the first time introduces the possibility of remaining in-between.

Describing identities in *Chapter 3* as transitional and always producing itself through the processes of being and becoming (Yuval-Davis, 2006:202) and introducing the concept of belonging as individualistically felt, but relationally conditioned, reflected in most of the participants' experiences described in *Chapter 8*. The alignment of subjective/objective affiliations turned out to be of major importance in the process of establishing attachments, just like Yuval-Davis (2006; 2011) described in her differentiation of belonging and politics of belonging. After recognising that migration, visiting home and having friends and family both *here* and *there* can cause a surge of both good and bad emotions, *Chapter 8* started with further addressing the

ambivalence involved. It was there that counter-maps proved most useful, as they offered the participants a visual and metaphorical way of expressing their feelings and attachments, which turned out to be very hard to verbalise. By having two boxes, one representing their home country and the other UK, counter-mapping provided an abstract space in-between. Reminiscent of transnational social fields, and the way they operate, counter-maps provided a space that is neither here nor there, and participants used that space to voice the ambivalence of their belonging. Love, loneliness, hope, memories and finding a place to belong – were all found in the space between the word boxes. Drawing on *Chapter 3*, where the literature review already showed that it is possible to *belong transnationally* (Dahinden, 2009; 2012), or not belong (Yuval Davis, 2006) data reinforced that notion, with most participants being unable to align their belonging fully to either nation-state or, society. In fact, the chapter has argued that belonging more often than not comes in portions, or is exercised only partially. Therefore, belonging truly is a dynamic process, a wishful thinking, and a yearning – with participants wanting, but being unable to belong.

Drawing on Thomassen (2014), Beech (2011) and Genova and Zontini (2020), *Chapter 8* concludes how belonging is possible to be felt in-between, and then creates a perpetual state of yearning borne out of temporariness and uncertainty of contemporary moves. Going 'home' then, is a feeling where the world of who we are clashes with who we used to be, but at the same time clashes with how others remember us.

HERE, THERE, NEITHER – EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF NON-BELONGING

Giddens' (1984) question of viewing belonging as ontological security opened *Chapter 3*, and by now it Is becoming evident that belonging can indeed take a form of ontological *insecurity*, making migrants question their place under the Sun, feeling partial belonging to certain spaces and people, and none to others. As suggested in *Chapter 3*, and later described through participants' stories in *Chapters 6, 7* and *8*, belonging among young and highly skilled migrants who move alone remains a

process - multiple, fragmented and in some cases non-existent. Through the analysis of their anchors and the level of embedding, but also seeing their everyday practices as ways of transnational being rather than belonging, a question remains – how do we make sense of young migrants' positioning in a transnational context?

Therefore, one of the most important conceptual contributions of this thesis is taking the previously described and analysed experiences further, and looking it through the prism of liminality. Although these concepts make an invaluable contribution towards understanding the experiences of living transnationally, especially in the context of youth and highly skilled migration, social anchoring, embedding or even transnational ways of being and belonging do not offer a comprehensive conceptualisation of what it means to belong transnationally. In other words, what Grzymala-Kazlowska and Ryan (2022) describe as shallow embedding, or weak anchoring - in the case of my participants happens both 'here' and 'there', and I conceptualise that experience as liminal positioning.

Liminality was already applied to fit the needs of migration research. Similarly to Genova and Zontini (2020) for example but also Waerniers and Hustinx (2020), this thesis has pointed out how belonging within young migrants can remain and it often does, an in-between state. However, the mentioned works do not reflect experiences of belonging transnationally among young and highly skilled migrants, but rather the positioning of EU migrants after Brexit, legal statuses in Belgium and betwixt and between identities of old Russian believers of Romania.

In that sense, liminality here serves as an analytical lens to understand the literal and metaphorical in-betweenness of young and highly skilled migrants in the UK. Due to their contextual background and individualistic and unpredictable migration strategies, young people in this research have developed tactics to help them navigate multiple transnational social spaces they occupy. Those strategies have resulted in shallow or superficial connections in the UK, both spatially and temporally, but also proved to weaken the connections in their home countries, also spatially and temporally. As they continue to grow up abroad, young and highly skilled migrants develop a yearning, that Rosi Braidotti described as a "desire not to preserve, but to change" (2014:174) in her depiction of "Nomadic Subjects".

By moving away from their home countries, migrants have opened a spatial and temporal portal, of who they used to be and who they are becoming. The former is connected to *back home* and serves as a reminder of the journey they embarked on. The latter, however, remains a process in the same way belonging remains a yearning. That duality informs the constant negotiation of identifications and invites the politics of belonging too upon landing in the host country. In that sense, many migrants came upon this realisation only during interviews which then made them realise their 'inner contradiction', as one of the participants highlighted in *Chapter 8*. That realisation has previously in literature been recognised as dawning. Borrowed from Levi-Strauss (1966), dawning refers to 'coming to realise' that things are different typically in response to a 'confounded expectation or a turning point', which leads to a 'heightened noticing' of a new meaning. Simply put, dawning happens when migrants notice any kind of change or abnormality in their identity positioning, in terms of shock, anxiety, surprise, tension, self-questioning, or when they simply realise they are not who they used to be. For many migrants, this research increased their consciousness about the circumstances of their move, and their lives in general as many did not realise they were migrants in the first place, and for many, the interview served as a reflection point to everything they have been through and are going through at that given moment. In that sense, the constructivist approach to identity and addressing belonging as a process rather than a state in *Chapter 3*, made it possible for participants' self-identification and their identity positioning to be situated at the core of this research.

Moreover, with this thesis providing a snapshot in time, a current state of the art of young and highly skilled people who found themselves in the UK at the time of my research, I propose another conceptual possibility. As all of the participants have been in the UK for more than a year and most of them at least 3-4 years, they have already gathered a sense of what it feels like to live transnationally. But also they understand what it means to loosen the ties back home whilst not necessarily building new strong ones in the UK. What I then suggest is that participants by entering the liminal stage, have also opened up a possibility of moving into a state of perpetual liminality. This means slightly stretching the conceptual boundaries of the original social anthropological use of the term liminality, in order to better understand the

identity shift within young migrants who are structurally in between (Ybema et al., 2011). A permanent form of liminality has previously been presented by Szakolczai (2014) as well, however, it would be slightly inaccurate to call something permanent without the proof it will always stay the same. In fact, calling the unpredictable and intentionally flexible character of contemporary movers permanent in any way, shape or form would truly pose a contradiction. Still, by entering the liminal stage and by invoking belonging as nothing more than a yearning, there is a high potential for that stage to remain in-between for a prolonged period of time. In other words, if a stronger attachment has not yet been formed to either home or host country, and there is a constant need to re-question the priorities or future moves, or even itchy feet as one of the participants described her life - the yearning is not very likely to reach its end.

Therefore, liminality in migration research reflects the alternative – "the space between the opposites, the third possibility, the transition between inside and outside, the 'neither…nor' or the 'as well as…' space of hybridity" (Giesen, 2015:61). It then also draws back on several previously mentioned authors such as Bhabha (1994) or many authors who emphasize the same attributes within transnational social spaces and consider the possibility of multiple identifications, belonging, homes, or none at all. Moreover, liminality is undoubtedly inseparable from time, highlighting the ambiguous present as a result of transitioning from a once stable past towards an uncertain future. Liminality here comes as a solution to "a fundamental ambiguity or indissoluble remainder that resists any attempt at unambiguous classification" (Giesen, 2015:62-63). Liminality here acts as one of the solutions, outcomes and consequences of moving alone and young, that does not fall under the previously well-established categories of migrant inclusion/exclusion. The concept is useful in a way that tries to make "sense of both protracted period of in-betweenness and of the strategies that people employ to navigate such contexts" (Genova and Zontini, 2020:48) and adds up to the long list of anti-essentialist categories.

Age and time were at the centre of attention in *Chapter 7*, alongside discussions on home and space. By answering the second specific research question *How do migrants experience home in a transnational context?*, the chapter has argued that time and space are inseparable in migration research, and both equally feed into the feeling of belonging. The reason for this is manifold. On the one hand, the previously mentioned neoliberal paradigm has contributed towards the 'global synchronisation of time" (Griffiths et al., 2013), and created an illusion that migrants are in fact living in two places at the same time. By being constantly in touch with their home countries in real-time, or even friends and family dispersed in various locations in the world, the fear of missing out (FOMO) is minimised. On the other hand, going back spatially often means going back temporally as well, and that was one of the main contributions of the chapter. Frequent home visits have resulted in various conclusions in migration literature, with some recognising how 'going back home' should remind us where we came from and open the door towards cultural rootedness, as opposed to unquestionable feeling of strangeness in the UK (see Marschall, 2017). However, data has shown that participants of this research feel equally foreign in their home countries too, and those findings are consistent with Marschall's research on African transnational migrants. The phenomenon is explained as follows: while away, migrants keep their home country *home* in memory, unintentionally idealising it as a whole, and reflecting on its significance through synthesising of remembered experiences in a personal narrative. Then, a slippage occurs when upon landing home, search for that "familiar environment prompts them to notice changes and developments and – more importantly – when their attempt to reconnect with remnants of their pre-migration life leads to the discovery of changes within themselves" (Marschall, 2017:220). In other words, frequent *home* visits then serve as a reminder of why they have left in the first place, the time passed in between and mark a hollow in a place and time where the word 'home' had an unequivocal meaning. These findings are also reminiscent of Ritivoi's (2002:31) notion that 'mental visits' to the past home then "become a way of adjusting to change and coping with difference" and Zontini's (2015) Italian participants whose frequent visits resulted in an even bigger gap between them and their home country connections.

One of the biggest contributions of *Chapter 7* however, was recognising the role home has in migrants' lives and how the meaning of home shifted due to COVID-19. Home became an emerging focus in migration studies, together with recognising that migrants often struggle to feel at home in both receiving and sending societies (Boccagni, 2014:277). Where data aligned with such previous findings, it also indicated that the pandemic has changed the way they perceive a *home* in the same way it has affected relationships young migrants maintain. Relying largely on Boccagni (2014; 2017b; 2022) and his conceptualisation of home-building practices among migrants, data has confirmed that "homing reflects the processual and often incomplete constitution of home" (2022:586). Participants did not invest much into their British homes and their British houses, mostly due to the uncertainty of their move and the unfixed length of their stay. 'Living lightly' as some of them called it, is one of the main characteristics of young and highly skilled migrants' lives, because you never know when you will have to pack everything and embark on an onward journey. Since COVID-19, they realised that homely feeling needs to be invested in, not just materialistically, but emotionally too. Those findings are consistent with new homing tactics described by Boccagni (2022), within which time carries a vital weight. Due to the increased amount of time migrants were now spending at their British homes, home became one of the few left areas in their lives in which they still had agency regardless of seemingly 'enforced domesticity'. Not being able to go to work, for example, let alone fly back to their home countries, made participants realise that adjusting the four walls that surround them is probably the only way to make them feel more comfortable. Home is therefore, even though a spatial phenomenon, massively shaped by the temporality of migrants' stay and created a tension between past- and future-oriented views of feeling at home. With migrants navigating several *homes* at once, and by combining past and present, they keep re-imagining the perfect home and it often remains a never-full achievement (Boccagni, 2022:596).

Correspondingly, this study contributed towards seeing age, and more generally the concept of time as highly contextual and situational. Age and life-course, time and space are inseparable in order to fully grasp what it means to grow up abroad. However, as suggested by Hughes (2022), but also Griffiths (2014) and Cwerner (2001), time as a concept tends to slip from many academic

conceptualisations of current migration flows. Data has supported the view that time and age have an implicit connection with subjectivities involved with the move, and that the "intersection between immigration status and time produce[s] a complex landscape for young people to navigate during their transitions to adulthood" (Hughes, 2022:192).

The fact they moved to the UK young and in order to establish their adulthood, also left a significant impact on the way migrants create anchors in other areas of their lives. Whilst work and career serve as a stronghold that keeps them in the UK regardless of their potential plans and hopes for the [so far] delayed future, family, friends and even partners seem to represent less strong connections. Staying in touch with friends and family proved to be an inevitable part of the everyday lives of participants in this study, as it is exactly those practices that make them transnational migrants. However, losing touch with friends back home after a significant amount of time has passed, feeling like a stranger during the home visits, or even delaying the return migration even though it has been on their minds the whole time during the pandemic proves how those types of anchors ultimately become weaker and fewer. Such findings are contradictory to what Grzymala-Kazlowska (2018) and Ryan and Mulholland (2015) discovered in their work, as for their participants family and friends represented important parts of their lives, and served as anchors that enabled strong social embedding in a transnational context, and sometimes even as a pull factor to embark on return migration. The reason for such distribution of strong and weak anchors that ultimately pose a condition for either strong or weak embedding lies precisely in the age of the participants and life-course. However, even though participants of Grzymala-Kazlowska (2016), for example, were also all based in the UK and arrived between 1 and 10 years ago, they were on average ten years older than my participants. Yet, at the same time as expressing lower levels of embedding in their home countries, participants did not express higher or stronger levels of embedding in the UK either. Their jobs did serve as a major anchor providing them security and in some cases having a partner enabled them to feel more deeply embedded or even settled in the UK, however most participants envisaging their stay in the UK for the foreseeable future was either very weak or completely absent.

In *Chapter 6* for example, data showed that COVID-19 made migrants think about return migration for the first time since their move. Even those who could have imagined themselves in the UK for a long-term future, are not so sure anymore since COVID-19, which, as Cwerner (2001:21) argues is quite reasonable as "[i]mmigrants typically face a constant re-examination of their objectives, which are now contingent on external factors" (Cwerner, 2001:21). With COVID-19 acting as an external factor in narratives gathered within this research, it was quite expected that it will leave an impact on the increasing uncertainty, which was there even from the beginning. On the other hand, *Chapter 6* by reflecting on the first specific research question has also argued that COVID-19 turned all types of relationships, both host-national and transnational into online relationships, which gave migrants more time to nurture them. Given migrants' often hectic schedules, working long hours and being in different time zones than their loved ones, COVID-19 has forcefully slowed down the pace of life which ultimately freed much of the time in migrants' lives that can now be dedicated to staying in touch.

The fact that many of them came to the UK without a clear picture regarding the length of their stay, clearly locates migrants of this research in the category of the new emerging and highly mobile youth. In that sense, migration can be seen as "a tactic of creating futures" (Cole, 2010 cited in Griffiths et al., 2013:np). Migrants, therefore, tend to leave their options open, such was the case with most of the participants in this study. In the same way migration to the UK, when it took place, represented an uncertain, but hopeful future, COVID-19 now increased the uncertainty and took the imagining of the future towards not so optimistic stance anymore. Migrants are in such cases torn between wanting a better future for themselves and their careers and feeling a responsibility to provide and care for their families and to be physically close to their 'old' lives. Therefore, *Chapter 6* has argued that relationships in a transnational context are anything but simple, and it recognised that age and life-course play a crucial role in the process, as "migrants become more embedded in local social relations the longer that they stay in one social setting" (Korinek et al., 2005:795).

Similarly, UK-based ties within young and highly skilled migrants' lives mostly consisted of other young and highly skilled migrants with similar life paths, as was

previously already acknowledged by White and Ryan (2008) and Gill and Bialski (2011). Very few of the participants felt comfortable befriending the majority population of the UK, or – the British people. However, all of them were very careful in phrasing their answer, and their conclusions were not negative. Data has shown that participants actually expected that to be the case, as locals already have established relationships and are not in search of new ones, while migrants are. In that sense, findings that relate to types of relationships migrants create in the UK are consistent with previous literature that claims it is very common to befriend people with similar circumstances, rather than natives, and "cross-ethnic relationships could be founded around similar interests, lifestyles or life experiences" (Moroşanu, 2018:167, also see Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2016; Jones, 2013). In the cases of students, most of their friends were their academic peers (see King and Raghuram, 2013 and Moroşanu, 2018 for example), whereas people who moved to the UK after their full-time education found it more difficult to establish core friendships (see Gill and Bialski, 2011). At the same time, participants expressed how strong ties from their home countries at the beginning of their move tend to gradually fade away, as time goes by and as migrants get older. Ryan et al. (2015:211) have also illustrated how "prolonged separation can rupture shared social experiences or the 'common world of signification'", as the frame of reference changes for those who move and stays the same for those who do not.

METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

COVID-19 left an impact that ultimately widened the methodological contributions of this thesis. As described in *Chapter 4*, doing fieldwork online has made me realise there is not enough academic literature to prepare the researcher for all the implications of it. In a sense, entering and leaving fieldwork has virtually been impossible while doing fieldwork online, which left an immense impact on my well-being. Whilst current literature on doing qualitative research online (see Salmons, 2015; 2016; Beneito-Montagut, 2011) refers to its technicalities and practicalities only, more specific, emotion-related literature is difficult to find in migration studies

(see Paechter, 2012 for example, and her work on researching sensitive issues online in a study on divorce support website). *Chapter 4* has, therefore, presented an intense overview of reflexive online ethnography, even though the study was described only broadly as *ethnographic*. Moreover, COVID-19 has increased the similarity between me and my participants who were stuck in the UK in the same way I was stuck in Croatia, which was previously described as *involuntary immobility*. Not being able to move across borders, worrying about our future and trying to make a *home* out of the place we were stuck in, resulted in heavy, sometimes even tearful conversations after which I could not leave the field. In that sense, this thesis contributes further to the feminist literature on the insider-outsider negotiation and provides a deeply personal, yet practical overview of tackling the difference between myself as a *researcher* and myself as *researched*. Looking back to that time almost three years later, I now realise I have done everything I could have done to protect both myself and my participants from any emotional weight that might have arisen during the interviews. However, as I highlighted already in *Chapter 4*, even though feminist literature on the subject was immensely helpful, a lot more needs to be done to prepare young researchers for the field, and more importantly, to prepare them for the possibility of becoming researched and 'other' themselves.

Finally, another contribution has been made in a methodological sense by combining several qualitative methods within a broader scope of ethnographic research. Whilst interviews, and visual methods such as the photo-elicitation method have served as a cornerstone of doing qualitative research for years, by creating counter-mapping out of several other methods I have managed to 1) put the story back in my participants' hands and 2) open the door to certain areas outside of the scope of my interview questions. As I have highlighted elsewhere (Zlatic, 2021), I have always kept in mind David MacDougall's (1991) question: "Whose story is it?". The dominance of the author's or researcher's voice in ethnographic descriptions, as MacDougall highlights, means it is a challenge to find ways to give the ownership back to the participants themselves. Counter-mapping gives participants very little time to reflect in great detail on their choice of words and it therefore allowed participants to express themselves not only freely, but also spontaneously. Ironically, it turned out that putting words into boxes allowed my participants to think outside

of the box, and resulted in a completely new set of data that was immensely useful in understanding the simultaneity, uncertainty, and partiality of their migration. Counter-mapping has made it possible for participants to play with associations, and it made me realise that belonging can be expressed in so many ways and that it can, in fact, find its place outside of those two word boxes.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As with any other research, this study presents a snippet, or in modern terms – a *screenshot* of the transnational lives of 27 young people who found themselves in the UK at the moment of my research. It would be interesting to see whether doing a similar study would be viable in researching internal migration, and more specifically rural-urban migration. As this thesis was created in an international context, an argument can be made (and was already suggested to me during one of the annual reviews) that people might feel freer in the UK because they moved from towns into bigger cities. In fact, literature shows that people who move internally go through the same process of decision-making (see Bhattacharya, 1993) and current research on the topic is very focused on the global South (see Barrios, Bertinelli and Strobl, 2006 on researching rural-urban migration in sub-Saharan Africa, or Ishtiaque and Ullah, 2013 on researching the same phenomenon in Bangladesh). In that sense, it would be interesting to explore the notion of belonging, the ability to express oneself and individualised life practices within a certain national context, from a rural-urban axis.

Additionally, drawing back on creating temporary screenshots of the current state of the art, I would love to come back to the 27 people I interviewed at some point in the future. The uncertainty and flexibility all work well in theory and have served this research greatly in trying to set out the context of contemporary movers and understand their experiences. However, doing the same research in a few years would actually provide additional information to see how many of them stayed in the UK, embarked on forward migration or returned back to their home countries after all. Providing a longitudinal perspective would also give a greater insight into whether

or not perpetual liminality is possible, and if it can serve as a conceptual explanation for future research as well. I already know that some of the participants moved back home, and some moved somewhere else regardless of the fact that in the interview they expressed they feel they do not have much time left to keep exploring the world and try out their options. On the other hand, some got married and bought houses in the UK, without even thinking that would be an option years ago when they first landed in the country. Longitudinal research would give us a better insight into tracking the prospects of young and highly skilled and mobile migrants, and help us to better understand the phenomenon of contemporary migration.

In conclusion, this thesis began with a personal story about the role migration had in my life. As I was growing up, the stories of those who moved abroad intrigued me and after 2013 when Croatia joined the EU they became an almost everyday occurrence. My story of moving to the UK inspired the overall design for this study, but it was also told over and over again, through the narratives of 27 people involved in this research. Modern-day circumstances have created new possibilities and options for people to move, but also to belong. Instead of expecting migrants to belong either *here* or *there,* I took my own experience of *neither* and started exploring. Still, to say that this thesis offers a definite and unquestionable presentation of how young people belong across borders would not do justice. Again, the stories of these 27 people who decided to try out their luck in the UK, together with my own, present a snapshot of contemporary conditions that can ultimately only deepen the existing knowledge on human migration. This thesis argued in favour of flexibility, fluidity and individuality that characterise youth on the move and in doing so kept an open mind towards the possible consequences of those moves. Five years after I started my PhD journey, I am too, like many of my participants still in the UK, with some plans for further migration, some *not-yet* futures, but with no general idea of where I want to *grow up*, except for knowing it is going to be *abroad*.

APPENDIX 1: DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS

	Name	Gender	Occupation	Move to the UK	Level of education	Country of origin	Location in the UK
1	Chiara	W	YP	2009	Masters	Italy	Leicester/Nottingham
2	Hana	W	S	2016	Masters	Germany	Glasgow
3	Arvo	M	S/YP	2016	Masters	Estonia	Nottingham/London
4	Mariana	W	YP	2017	Masters	Spain	Leicester
5	Ivana	W	YP	2017	Masters	Croatia	Sheffield
6	Maria	W	YP	2018	Masters	Romania	Leicester
7	Roze	W	YP	2011	Masters	Lithuania	Birmingham
8	Giovanna	W	YP	2017	PhD	Italy	Manchester
9	Nikola	M	YP	2014	Masters	Serbia	London
10	Aneta	W	YP	2012	Masters	Czech Republic	Birmingham
11	Miguel	M	S/YP	2018	Masters	Portugal	Southampton
12	Lena	W	S	2016	Bachelors	Hungary	London
13	Eleni	W	YP	2013	Masters	Cyprus	London/Canterbury
14	Androula	W	S	2013	PhD	Cyprus	Bath
15	Kristina	W	YP	2019	Masters	Serbia/Montenegro/Cyprus	London
16	Jin	W	YP	2012	PhD	South Korea	Cambridge
17	Jess	W	YP	2016	Masters	Canada	London
18	Diane	W	YP	2018	Masters	Venezuela/USA	London
19	Viktorija	W	S	2010	PhD	Latvia	Oxford
20	Irem	W	YP	2011	Masters	Turkey	London
21	Xiuying	W	YP	2014	PhD	China	Newcastle
22	Mark	M	S	2017	Masters/PhD	Singapore	Oxford
23	Adrian	M	YP	2017	Masters	Greece	Nottingham/Bournemouth
24	Mahmoud	M	S	2016	PhD	Egypt	Nottingham
25	Xiao	M	S	2016	PhD	Canada/China	Cambridge
26	Manuela	W	S	2019	PhD	Columbia	Manchester
27	João	Non-binary	S	2017	PhD	Brazil	Guildford

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