Into and Out of Europe: Dynamic Insider/Outsider Perspectives

Dirk Schubotz, Maruška Svašek, Robert Miller and Markieta Domecka

Introduction

Dutch Elly,[1] who migrated to the UK in the 1990s, was interviewed early on in the Euroidentities project. As a transnational worker who had moved from one EU member state to another, we expected her to have experienced Europe as an arena of relatively easy internal mobility. Indeed in her story she reflected on the ease with which she and her husband had twice relocated to European settings outside the Netherlands. Other story fragments, however, introduced aspects of her life that revealed quite different social dynamics. In March 2009, half an hour into her story, she described how a few months earlier, she and her daughter had been verbally abused by a passing car driver when they were standing outside a bus station somewhere in Britain. She recalled:

> I came from my work and [my husband] would pick us up from the bus station. While we were waiting a car was [passing by] and [the driver] said, 'Woo, woo, woo, woo, woo.' I was laughing. I thought it was funny. But my daughter said, 'Mum, do you know why they did that? Why are you laughing?' ((laughing)) I said, 'It's just funny.' [She] said, 'No, this means 'Indian'. Woo, woo, woo, woo, woo. From India. Paki.' And I felt so bad.

Elly's words highlighted a dimension of 'Europe' that had not been included in the original conceptualisation of the Euroidentities project. Imitating monkey sounds, the driver's utterances were clearly intended as a racist slur, something easily picked up by Elly's daughter. Elly, who was married to a Dutch Caucasian man, was herself of mixed ethnic background. While her father was of Dutch descent, her mother had been born in South Asia and Elly's light brown skin revealed her genealogical ties outside the European

[1] Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees.

continent. At the time when we conducted the interview with Elly, various interviewees had referred to the sometimes-pejorative use of intra-European *national* stereotypes, but racial issues had not yet come to the fore.

Having been born in the Netherlands, Elly strongly identified herself as a majority Dutch person throughout her autobiographical story, but at the same time expressed bewilderment about her self-perception as a 'white person':

> Yeah, it's funny that I really feel white, and think white, I ... yeah, I think white. Can you do that?

During the interview Elly said she enjoyed Dutch traditions, such as the Queen's Day celebrations and *Sinterklaas*, and criticised migrants from the Netherlands who did not nourish their cultural heritage. Interestingly, her part Asian background did not weaken her attachment to Holland, but rather strengthened it, as her parents had underplayed the family's Asian connection when raising their children. This had resulted in an ambiguous sense of self on which she reflected in her autobiographical narrative. 'Europe' was also a relevant space of opportunities to Elly, as she and her husband had lived in several European countries. Her life trajectory had developed within the context of advantageous EU regulations that had allowed her to relocate within Europe without any legal complications.

While 'Holland' as a majority 'white' country was a strong point of reference throughout Elly's account, in some narrative fragments she identified herself with 'Asians'. At one point, she strongly empathised with a particular group of people who had recently arrived in her UK residential area, having migrated from Asia, when describing their encounters with racism, comparing their experiences with her own. In a later passage, she talked more specifically about the impact her mother had had on her own way of being, further developing the extra-European perspective in her story. She described her belief in 'Asian' family values, and contrasted what she saw as more affectionate 'Asian' forms of interaction with colder 'Dutch' and 'British' customs.

The interview with Elly sparked a debate within our project that led to the inclusion of an additional focus on individuals who seemed to be sensitised to 'Europe' because of their (recent or more distant historical) links to places outside the continent. Elly's interview urged us to ask in what ways complex patterns of global mobility, including postcolonial relationships and current dynamics of world trade and labour markets, could affect experiences of and stories about 'Europe'. How would extra-European perspectives inform the life stories and trajectories of people with biographical roots or memories outside the continent? We decided to add two categories of interviewees to the project. The first consisted

of people like Elly, who lived in Europe at the time of the interview but had origins outside the continent. This group of 11 interviewees included individuals from former European colonies, recent migrants, and asylum seekers; their countries of origin included Pakistan, India, Vietnam, Indonesia, China, South Africa, Zimbabwe and the United States. The second category consisted of six people born in European states, having lived outside the continent for a significant portion of their lives, for example, in Japan, Southern Africa, North and Latin America, and New Zealand. All interviewees of the latter group had returned or planned to return to their European countries of birth, such as Ireland, the UK, Germany, Poland and Estonia. While the number of people interviewed was relatively small, and the selected interviewees do not represent all possible types of mobility, their stories throw a particular light on the questions asked by the Euroidentities project.

This chapter explores the ways in which people with life experiences both within and outside EU boundaries described, evaluated and reflected upon their transcontinental life trajectories. Did their histories of migration to and from European territories produce a particular sensibility towards ‘Europe’? If ‘Europe’ was a significant point of reference in their stories, how was it conceptualised and evaluated, and what connections were made to other referential frameworks, be they local, national or transnational? How did their accounts differ from, or show similarities with, the autobiographical stories told by individuals from the other sensitised groups, discussed in the other chapters of this book?

Human mobility: Transit, transformation and identity formation

This chapter proposes a particular conceptualisation of (1) human mobility and (2) European space. Our approach to *mobility* is informed by concepts of transit and transformation as defined by Svašek (2010, 2012) in previous work. *Transit* refers to movement through time and space, a process that is inherent in the human condition. Transit happens in many forms, ranging from movements within relatively small regions, through relocations within the EU, to intercontinental migratory moves that create widely stretching transnational connections, the latter being our focus in this chapter. Individuals in transit are in *transformation* as people are not in constant states of being, but engaged in a dynamic experiential process of becoming, a process that autobiographical narrators often refer to in their stories. The idea of transformation is partly inspired by a phenomenological interest in perceptual dimensions of being-in-and-moving-through-the-world. Conditions of transformation are also influenced by economic and political factors that allow or limit movement through time and space.

Autobiographical stories reveal that people exist in changing environments, frequently facing and creating new situations. Their embodied interactions in previously unknown surroundings may (or may not) create a sense of belonging that feeds specific identity claims. In the following fragment, Adriano, an Argentinean lawyer who studied in the US and South Asia and now lives and works in Estonia, reflected on his experiences in Barcelona and Rome. His perspective had been generated by an unexpected familiarity with his surroundings.

> There are two places, specifically one in Barcelona. There was this place that when I saw it – I had been there for the first time in 2001 – I felt it so mine, it was so familiar, as if I had been living there for my whole life, everything there was super. –aa– The buildings, the people on the street, the way they would walk, the way they would dress, the buildings and the things, it was a strange sensation, more, more sensation that actually something like that remind me, it was just – it felt very familiar, it felt very mine, as if you are coming home right, it was absolutely super strange feeling, very strange feeling and I only felt it in Barcelona and then in Rome, although in Rome was kind of different, because Rome is a very messy place, very loud and so on, it was just like Buenos Aires with some Roman monuments and ruins, but the same shouting, same people greeting each other on the street, the same ice cream parlours, the same stuff, it was just so similar and that was also like the people, but not so much the buildings but more like the vibrant.

This fragment reminds us that, in transit and transformation, people have all sorts of sensorial experiences, seeing new landscapes that may remind them of other places; hearing familiar and unfamiliar languages and dialects; smelling known and unknown scents; tasting local dishes, and having to adapt to climatological conditions. In the interviews, numerous interviewees spoke of heightened multi-sensorial experiences when entering European environments they recognised as similar to or radically different from environments in their countries of origin. These experiences heightened or undermined their sense of home.

Rapport and Dawson (1998: 9) introduced an approach to mobility and belonging where 'home' is 'where one best knows oneself' – where 'best' means 'most', even if not always 'happiest'. Regarding migrancy as a process of both physical motion and cognitive/emotional engagement, their approach disconnects fixed identity-place perspectives, and creates a useful framework to think about identity formation in a world of global movement. Identity, in their view, is 'inextricably tied to fluidity or movement across time and space' because people realise themselves in mobility through historically situated routine practices, habitual interactions, and by gathering

experiences that create the basis for personal and shared memories (ibid.: 4). Individual identity, in other words, is:

> always and everywhere dynamic ... something calling for a resolution that [is] never wholly acquired, because it [is] through the search that the individual *per se* [comes] to be defined
>
> Rapport and Dawson (1998: 3)

The perspective resonates with Bauman's view (2004a: 11–12) that belonging and identity are 'not cut in rock', but are rather 'eminently negotiable and revocable'. Identities, in other words, are developed as a result of dynamic and dialogical processes of situational self-construction, which accounts for both the presence of different referential frameworks in narrators' self-constructions and the occurrence of integrating dimensions in the stories people tell about themselves (Bagnoli, 2007). In autobiographical interviews, multiple and shifting constructions of subjectivity are often produced through references to diverse, changing and conflicting I-positions, we-positions and self-descriptions in the third person (cf. Ewing, 1990). Narrative positioning allows speakers to voice different viewpoints in singular narrative performances, presenting multiple, at times contradictory, claims to belonging and non-belonging (Svašek, forthcoming; Svašek and Domecka, forthcoming).

In Elly's case, her sense of home was influenced not only by Dutch citizenship and trans-European mobility, but also by historical family connections to extra-European space, and experiences of both rootedness and alienation in a multi-ethnic EU setting. This led to a narrative account in which, in addition to verbalised claims to Dutch identity, 'Asia' rather than 'Europe' was presented as a part of her referential framework. Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 4) noted that identity discourses are often 'used by 'lay' actors in everyday settings to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others'. The question in this chapter is whether our interviewees understood their own life experiences in terms of 'European identity', and if so, how this related to other frames of reference. What can the presence or absence of Europe in people's life stories unveil about the lives of people with enduring ties or experiences outside EU territory? What does it reveal about Europe – as discursive construct, arena of lived experience and historically changing field of structural possibilities and constraints?

European space: Global connectedness and European presence

The stories told by our interviewees with extra-European perspectives stimulated us to conceptualise Europe as a historical sphere of influence that has

stretched far beyond the boundaries of the continent. This view acknowledges the significance of historically specific networks, established over centuries, between Europe and other parts of the world, from the expanding Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century, through the establishment of colonial empires, to the more recent intensification of global connectivity through enhanced travel and communication technologies (Inda and Rosaldo, 2002; Osterhammel and Petersson, 2005; Eriksen, 2007).[2] As became clear in the interviews, the intertwining of Europe and other parts of the world affected the ways in which people experienced and talked about their lives. Luke, a 36-year-old Zimbabwean, now based in the UK, recalled white soldiers searching his village for hidden guerrillas fighting against the pre-independence Rhodesian regime. In another interview fragment, he remembered his school years in his home country:

> All of a sudden we're in a bus, school bus, we're going to boarding school. And there were all these white kids, I never grew up with white kids before, so all of a sudden I learnt English that year and told –ehm– So – we were encouraged to speak English and not speak native languages. So we could learn English. All the teachers were white and the only black people there were the ground staff and the kitchen staff. ... And, yeah, so that was a learning curve, learnt Cricket, Rugby, learnt to assimilate at that stage.

Luke's statements demonstrate the legacy of the white British presence in colonial Africa, and its continuing impact on local power relations at the time when he was growing up. In the autobiographical fragment cited previously, he emphasised the distinction between powerful English-speaking whites and disempowered black speakers of native languages in need of English tuition. In his overall story, which also included an account of his stay in South Africa, he suggested that he had already encountered Europe before even leaving Africa.

---

[2] This is of course not a one-way process. During the period of colonial expansion, European countries exported their culture, political systems and institutions with varying degrees of success so that, for instance, particularly with regard to Anglophone North America it is as sensible to talk about a 'transatlantic culture' as it is to talk about a 'European culture'. Cultural influences moved the other way as well, so that many aspects of European national cultures today, particularly in the former colonial powers, originate outside Europe. 'Americanisation', interestingly, can be considered to be evidence for both directions of influence – the (re)export of an essentially European culture to the rest of the world plus the prime example of how a group of the now-united former European colonies in North America influence their mother continent with a vengeance. Economically, other parts of the world, first the United States and now Asia, have emulated and surpassed European industrialisation. Hence, we can talk both about 'encountering Europe in the rest of the World' and about 'encountering the rest of the World in Europe'.

Colonial history was also relevant to Andrew, a 40-year-old white South African migrant who settled in the UK in the 1990s. The colour of his skin revealed European ancestry, but he constructed his European side as something that had been quite problematic. Andrew grew up during South Africa's Apartheid years when his family had been regarded as being at the lower end of the scale of 'Europeanness' as they were descendants of Greek migrants. Cynically labelling his family as '*lower Europeans*', he explained:

> I grew up with a sense of –eh– that part of my European identity, that sort of Greek part, was –ehm– negative. It was sort of, and because there was sort of stereotyping within the white hierarchy in South Africa, you know. Like, so at my school the kids who were like Italian or Greek were sort of teased for being that ... You were sort of seen as dirty and like, you know.

Aware of their lower status, Andrew's older relatives had undertaken different measures to upgrade their social position to 'become more like those dominant so-called white groups', such as altering their surname and teaching the children only English, disregarding their native Greek language. As Andrew grew up and became more politically aware, he started criticising the Apartheid regime, and began to resent his family's attempts to deny their Greek roots. Once migrated to Europe, he purposefully gave his son a Greek name.

While labelled 'Greek' in South Africa, Andrew had genealogical links to Europe that also connected him to Germany and Britain. After his move to the UK, he developed a fascination with his English family line. Migration to Europe was central to his changing sense of home; living in Britain allowed him to rethink his 'Englishness' outside the context of South Africa. 'Europe' continued, however, to be a problematic category with which to think critically about the effects of colonialism. Admitting that, especially after his relocation, he had started feeling 'historically and physically connected' to Britain, he emphasised that his sense of homecoming to Britain had been tainted:

> I remember telling a friend that it felt like a sort of ... not a prodigal son, it was more like a bastard son. Like where you sort of, you come back to where you came from but emotionally ((slowly)) you – there's nothing that connects you.

Ethnicity, racism and prejudice: 'Strangers' in Europe

Feelings of being unwelcome on EU territory (expressed by Andrew through the metaphor of the bastard son) were most strongly expressed by non-white interviewees who had migrated from countries outside of Europe.

Zimbabwean Luke, who lived in a part of Britain that housed hardly any people of African descent, gave numerous examples. In one interview passage he recalled:

> One time I was jogging and then this little child about five, four, was standing by the gates of a Leisure Centre and said, ((imitating child's voice)) 'All niggers are good for is running.' There is no way that kid would have made that up, it must have heard it from her parents, you know? ((short laugh))

While Luke had also been confronted with racist attitudes in his homeland Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, having to deal with it as migrant in a majority UK environment presented new challenges. In the following interview extract he explained how he had learnt to switch off, trying to ignore people's reactions:

> I developed a sense of – blank, you know, like the thing about a waiter when you're room service, you just walk in and you don't look at anything, you just. So, I created this blinkered mentality where I just didn't take too much notice of people staring.

Chinese William, who was born in Hong Kong and had moved to the UK as a political immigrant in the 1990s, claimed that, although Chinese migrants had settled in the United Kingdom for many decades, people of Chinese background were still not expected to call the UK their home:

> People ask: 'Where are you coming from?' I would say, '[City in the UK]'. 'Oh, [name of city]?' And I say, 'Yes, [name of city], it is my home.' So –eh– the people, you know, sometime when I leave it, you know, –eh– you can see the eye, you know, a little bit, you know, question me.

Other autobiographical narrators originating from continents outside Europe also remembered feeling unaccepted by locals; their situational experiences of non-belonging influenced their sense of 'home in Europe'. Simmel's notion of the 'stranger' sheds a useful light on this process. For Simmel (1908), strangers are people who are perceived 'not as individuals, but as strangers of a particular type', as people who are among us, but not of us (Simmel, 1908: 407). While living in close proximity, the stranger is viewed as culturally distant or alien. Perceptions of otherness may feed dormant feelings of anxiety, emotions that can be capitalised on by an anti- foreigner politics of anger and hatred (ibid.: 406).

It must be noted that in all our interviews where experiences of xenophobia were recalled, the narrators also talked about affectionate interactions with locals. Luke, for example, was happily married to a white British

woman, and William spoke of his friendship with non-Chinese colleagues. Despite narrations of positive belonging, however, it cannot be denied that Europe is rife with ethnic tensions, some of which are particularly directed at migrant groups who have arrived from countries outside its (differently conceived) borders. As Jenkins (2008) noted, Eurocentrism has continued to dominate thinking about Europe, where the ambiguous term of 'race' has been recoded into other categories, such as 'minority ethnic', 'asylum seeker' and 'immigrants', terms associated respectively with culture, political nationalism and the economy.

Stråth (2002) maintained that the creation of European 'insiders' through a common market and free movement for the citizens within the European Union ultimately implies the exclusion of non-European or not-yet-European 'outsiders'. This creates a paradox in which humanistic ideals within Europe, such as 'equality', 'freedom' and 'pluralism', come into conflict with the urge to exclude. Bagnoli (2007) found empirical evidence that young migrants experienced Europe as a 'fortress' in which migrants from outside Europe are frequently constructed as criminals. She observed that the extent to which migration translates into the reconstruction of lives and identities does vary significantly and depends on socio-economic background and privilege.

Differentiating between the stranger who comes and goes and the stranger who comes and stays, Simmel argued that the position of the stranger 'stands out more sharply if he settles down in the place of his activity, instead of leaving it again' (Simmel, 1908: 403). In some of the biographical stories, this realisation led to a passionate claim to Europe as a multi-ethnic space of diversity. Luke, for example, having started a family in the UK and established his own business, had no intention of leaving, and stated that he was 'as European as the next European'. Taking what could be described as a constructionist perspective on identity formation, he said that European identity was 'more than about pigment, it's about a state of mind'. He added: 'I have made a conscious decision through my experiences that I belong to this place.' In other interviews we also found that 'Europe' was most strongly present as a frame of reference when presented as a claim to a transcultural space of belonging that had historical links outside the European continent. Through biographical narration, these speakers connected long-term political histories of intercontinental connection to their personal transit-related transformations.

Some interviewees reflected on the unwillingness of some Europeans to accept *particular* ethnic or religious groups on EU territory. Current debates about religious symbolisms in Europe are a similar reminder of the difficulty of incorporating non-Christian-based identities into mainstream European identity constructions, particularly in the case of Islam (Adamson, 2011; Hansen, 2011; Triadafilopoulos, 2011). Hameet, of Pakistani origin, commented on the preconceptions he has faced in Poland, his current country

of residence. He blamed the Western media for providing a one-sided view of Muslims, complaining that the Poles he met frequently perceived him 'as a terrorist or a threat'. He reported encounters of verbal abuse and swearing, and described an incident where he was asked to pay a higher price for hostel accommodation because of his background. He also talked about endless discussions about his faith and the role of women in Muslim families with fellow students at his university in Poland, constantly having to deal with stereotypical views. He explained that, in his experience, it was easier to gain a sense of acceptance in some European localities than in others. He suggested this could partially depend on the level of familiarity locals had with non-European-looking outsiders. Being a Pakistani national who had resided both in the UK and Poland, he said:

> I as soon as I was coming out from –errr– the airport –um– I had suddenly realised something that there are people staring at me, looking at me. It's not in a bad manner but they are staring at me and I got so I didn't know what to do. I thought OK, it might be just this town or this bus. But people were looking at me like I was something out of this world they've never seen before. Now this is, in one way sometimes you can it depends how you take it because nobody ever gave me any bad look. There were one or two incidents as well later on but they were different. –um– They –um– would stare at me and either I could take it that either I have something on my face ((laughing)) I should take it that no I must be looking really good so that's why they're staring. But anyway my friend she um explained it to me that there are not many foreigners here and many of the Polish people they haven't been outside Poland itself.

Europe's legal boundaries

Some of the biographical accounts revealed the speakers' confrontations with structural boundaries posed by national and EU laws. Zula was a young woman born of Vietnamese parents who lived in Germany whose overall account indicated that she felt at home in a multicultural Europe. In the following fragment, she first identified with her German-based rebellious friends, but then, prompted by her father, reflected on her different legal position in the EU, as she lacked German citizenship:

> I had a rebellious phase, and then had friends who were, –eh–, punks. Who found Germany shit and so forth. And then I myself have then too, well, one joined in, right? And my father said then, 'So, –eh–, listen, right. We are guests here. And the way you walk about and what you say, you are more being paid attention to. And you are not allowed to do that. Somehow you have to keep yourself small.' And over the years I got to know, my father has, when one gets older, –eh– one gets a bit

> more told by the parents. And my father said too, –ehm–, 'We are simply in a different position. We are treated differently. We haven't the same privileges either.' That was also the time where I noticed then, well we haven't got German passports.

While identifying as 'critical German youth' and enjoying travelling throughout Europe, Zula was acutely aware of her still uncertain residence status. Her father's reference to the term 'guest' is a reminder of the loaded term 'Gastarbeiter', migrant workers (mainly from Southern Europe and Turkey) who were invited to Germany to work in the 1970s, but who were also expected to return to their homelands. In her story, Zula talked about the hassle of needing a visa, at the same time distancing herself from her irritation through the upbeat claim that this had given her a realistic insight into the legal reality of Europe:

> In the meantime I have applied for the German citizenship. That is still in the final phase. –ehm– but I have always dealt with Schengen, right? I always had to, I had to know about which countries are in it, right? ((giggling)) So that I know which country I can enter. And for which countries I need a visa. That has fascinated me every time, when I talked to people, 'Yes, I need to –ehm– I need to organize a visa.' 'What, you haven't got a German passport? 'No.' So that –eh– I felt it as enrichment, that somehow I was also forced due to that to deal with ((giggling)) European politics. That I need to know about –ehm– about residence, well these home affairs, right? And about –ehm– such –eh– European regulations, right?[3]

Interviews with citizens from formerly colonised countries demonstrated that in certain cases, the earlier colonial links assured easier entrance into Europe. Luke used his status as a Commonwealth national to move to the UK to study. He extended his stay, got married and gained a permit to '*live to remain*'. Yet he also recalled encountering legal boundaries when registering to get married to a woman who had British citizenship, when immigration officers came to their home to check whether he truly lived with his wife-to-be.

The lack of an EU-country passport meant that crossing internal EU borders was problematic for some interviewees. Chris, one of our male African interviewees who had settled in Northern Ireland but lacked a British or Irish passport, recalled how he had been stopped when crossing the border to the Republic of Ireland. Ironically, he had made a lot of effort to feel at home in

---

[3] As she acutely observes, while Europeans living in other EU-countries are not expected to assimilate, outsiders are: 'nobody says to them, "Integrate yourself now".'

the Irish setting as he was quite proficient in Gaelic, the official first language of the Irish Republic. With a sense of humour, he recalled:

> Without a passport, I've been stopped and detained. [I: Really?] Yeah. [I: What happened?] –eh– I was going to a concert, an Irish concert, because I sing in Gaelic you see. And they [Irish Customs] stopped me and they said, –ehm– 'Where are you from?' And I said, 'I'm from the North'[4] ((laughing)). They said, 'No, no, no, what country do you come from?' And then I started speaking to them in Irish and ((amused)) they didn't speak Irish.[5]

Like some other interviewees of non-European descent, Chris recognised the importance of language as social tool. He had purposefully learned Irish Gaelic to embed himself in the Catholic Irish section of the Northern Irish population. His choice had an interesting historical dimension. Coming from a former British colony in Africa, he identified himself with the Irish nation, introducing a 'we-perspective' in his narrative, identifying both himself and the Irish as co-victims of the former British Empire. As a perceived stranger, he used language strategically to claim home in Europe, not only for himself but also for his mixed-race children. At the same time, his story about the incident with the Irish border guards was meant as a cynical comment on the constructed nature of national identity.

Language as mediator of home and identity

Interviewees with extra-European experiences made frequent references to the significance of language in home making. Chris's account made clear, however, that claims to belonging through language can be easily overruled by legal restrictions. In Chris's case, he was able to circumvent those restrictions as the Irish-Northern Irish border can be crossed without much effort.

Single life stories can produce quite contrasting opinions about a particular language, as illustrated earlier in this chapter by Luke's account. On the one hand, recalling his childhood memories, he portrayed the English language as a symbol of colonial domination that had suppressed his Zulu mother tongue. However, he took another position when discussing intercontinental mobility, explaining that his knowledge of English had actually facilitated a sense of belonging in Britain.

---

[4] He means 'Northern Ireland'. The term 'the North' is predominantly used by people who support the reunification of Ireland.

[5] Even though it is only spoken in everyday life by a small proportion of the Irish population, as the official first language of the Irish Republic, its Customs officials are obliged to speak it.

In contrast to Luke and Chris, Felicia, a French woman whose mother came from Ivory Coast, had grown up in Europe. She was born in France, where her parents took pains to suppress the African part of her heritage to the extent that her mother's tongue was 'a secret language' spoken only between her parents. Trying to make up for her inability to communicate in her maternal ancestors' language, Felicia stressed that she had consciously incorporated other elements of 'African culture' into her daily life, for example, by cooking West African style dishes for her children. Cooking and eating, in other words, was a social sphere in which she consciously appropriated aspects of her non-European family history. This transformative process was part of a complex negotiation of multiple identities, expressed through shifting notions of self in the autobiographical narration. The ambivalences of heritage, colour and national identity found their expression as Felicia, who had moved to Germany in her thirties, also recalled how she had become actively involved in an association of French expats. One of the aims of the association was to provide a platform for its members to stimulate their children to learn and speak French. Felicia projected her own sense of cultural loss, when insisting on the importance of the intergenerational transmission of language, in this case French. As a symbol of both national identity and global interconnectedness, her references to the French language served to both emphasise and dissolve tensions of belonging in her life story.

Europe from a distance: Travellers' experiences outside the continent

Most of our *European-born* interviewees reflected on the fact that living or travelling outside of Europe had made them think of themselves as 'Europeans' for the first time, and in some cases, confrontations with an unfamiliar non-European language stimulated this transformative process. Johanna, a Dutch woman who resided in Britain but who had spent considerable time in Asia and Africa, commented on the difficulty of communicating and finding her way in China, not knowing Mandarin:

> I suddenly felt very European, something I did not really experience when I worked in Ghana for half a year, communicating easily in English.

Some interviewees also commented on visible differences between themselves and the majority populations outside Europe. Marie, a young white French woman who had extensive experience of working in Europe and further afield, said:

> It's –eh– it's just completely different, so you find yourself staring at people and –eh– realising that you're different.

She noted that meeting other Caucasians outside Europe had increased her perception that there was something like a 'shared western culture':

> And –ehm– or you would meet some westerners and there you look at people and ... I like that when you walk in the streets and –ah– you see a westerner and –ah– you look at each other and your eyes lock for a second ... and then you move on but you know –ah– that person knows exactly what I'm feeling. And that person thinks exactly the same. –eh– You don't necessarily stop –ehm– but you feel you're a westerner and that you have a different culture.

She welcomed the fact that being outside the European continent had transformed her outlook on intra-European national differences:

> [S]o everybody's [European] history is mixed together. –ehm– You know you are European, you're not French because you may have some people coming from different parts of the world. So everybody's really, really the same. But when you go to Japan or Korea people look completely different. –ehm– They think different. Their culture is different. Their way of behaving's different. It's a lot more ceremonial.

She also reflected on the ways in which she had tried to deal with her initial feelings of alienation, describing herself as someone who had made an effort to connect with the locals, respecting and overcoming cultural differences:

> Well, I was trying to adapt and to make sure that I was not making any faux pas in that country, but I really, really enjoy that. –ehm– So that's, so that's a great part to it, to be able to see something else and to know that –ehm– you've got a different origin and you ... you can make those two mix.

While presenting 'Asia' as a space of cultural interaction and mixing, 'Europe' was the main reference point of belonging in her story. Her perceptual transformation into a 'European' was presented as a pleasant revelation.

By comparison, Estonian Kati had a more cynical and pragmatic understanding of Europe, stimulated by her experiences in China. Reporting on her time in Asia, she noted that, because of her Caucasian looks, she had been able to exploit her 'Europeanness' (tellingly also including white Americans in her use of the term). Her aim had been to hide her Eastern European background to increase her chance of finding a job:

> ((Sarcastically)) Now I know that I have to start lying from the beginning, because you don't get a job with honesty. So then I would lie and say I was American or British or whatever or German, because the main thing is that I'd have work, because survival was like more important.

Unlike Marie, who imagined 'Europe' as an undivided cultural whole, Kati had been confronted with hierarchies that distinguished different types of Europeanness. Like South African Andrew, she used the occasion of the autobiographical interview to critically reflect on the political discourses underlying the distinctions. Kati did, however, associate herself with the European continent as place of origin in ways quite different to Andrew, who noted reflectively:

> I don't think I will ever be – I don't think I ever see myself as a European – ehm– I will always see myself as a South African. –ehm– But I've grown to understand that part of my South Africanness is also linked ... here.

For Andrew, who had started a family in Britain, marriage and reproduction had been a transformational process through which he had interwoven his own life history with the lives of his Europe-born wife and son. He was conscious that this inescapable reality strongly affected his changing sense of home.

> –ehm– And it was the sudden realisation that by marrying somebody and having a child I am now linked to [Europe] and like I can't – you can't emotionally escape that, you know.

This process did not, however, result in an inclination on Andrew's part to consciously identify himself as 'European'.

Homecomers: Returning 'home'?

While perspectives of home changed in various ways as our interviewees left or migrated to Europe, a return to their countries of origin further affected their sense of belonging. Various interviewees explained that, after an extensive period of living in a different country or on a different continent, going back to the place of origin had not been as easy as they had expected. Interestingly, when South African Andrew reflected on his feelings of non-belonging in Britain, he suggested that colonial Britons would have felt similarly alienated when returning to their home country after years of living outside Europe:

> I almost imagined experiences similar to the colonials who went out to Africa and lived there for four or five years or ten years. And then came back to England and suddenly felt like they didn't quite belong because somehow they had become a bit native or whatever.

Alfred Schütz (1945) introduced the notion of the 'homecomer' who anticipates returning to 'an environment of which he always had and – so he thinks – still has intimate knowledge'. Contrary to people who arrived from

other countries and were surprised by unexpected recognition, as discussed earlier in the chapter, some returnees who expected complete familiarity were astonished by feelings of alienation.

Johanna recalled her initial irritation after her return to the Netherlands from India with what now seemed to her an overly structured society, something she had not noticed at all before her departure. Having met people of many different nationalities during her trip, she continued making friends with people of various backgrounds, some of whom resided in the Netherlands but had arrived from elsewhere. Her newly gained extra-European perspective, in other words, strongly influenced her post-travel sociality, as her trajectory of intercontinental mobility became intertwined with the trajectories of individuals with similar histories of transit and transformation.

The return to Europe can be highly alienating, especially when those who have been away are regarded as strangers upon their return. The sense of being different to others, having another outlook on life, wanting to realise other dreams, can also be a driving force for people to leave in the first place. Interestingly, many of the interviewees included in the Euroidentities project, (not only the sensitised groups in this chapter, but also Europe-born individuals who moved *within* Europe for reasons of education, work or choice of partner), talked about feelings of non-belonging in their country of birth. A sense of being different, in other words, can be intimately bound up with mobility, even without international or inter-continental transit. Consequently, returning to one's country of origin after many years abroad can be extremely destabilising.

A good illustration of the homecomer's dilemma is the case of Hameet who, after a few years of living in the UK, decided to go back to Pakistan, to the town where he was born and where he had spent most of his life. He recalled:

> I went back to Pakistan and ... left everything with full hopes that OK, I'll make things work again. But I couldn't make the things work there. Now I, the difference is so much that I got so much used to living outside like in Europe that even if I tried I couldn't settle down in Pakistan anymore due to the cultural differences like the rules and regulations. There's too much corruption as well. And these are there's not ... proper procedure for everything. So, and I was so used to it that I got really frustrated. I finished with my wife we got divorced and then I started thinking what to do.

For Hameet, his home town had stopped being a friendly and welcoming place, and the divorce only increased his sense of non-belonging. In his view, staying in Pakistan was no longer an option. For legal reasons, going back to the UK was also out of the question. His solution was to settle in a different

European country in Eastern Europe. Ironically, his lack of knowledge of the local customs and language and his experiences of xenophobia, transformed him into a stranger yet again.

Other substantial barriers may spring up *behind* a person who has moved between continents. Chinese William, who lived in the UK at the time of the interview, had never planned to stay. His original plan had been to qualify as a lawyer and then return to his homeland, using his expertise to campaign more effectively for human rights. He said:

> I learn a lot, you know, from the Western world ... And I would like to contribute back to my home country.

When he attempted to move back to China, however, his return was thwarted by the political climate. William's involvement in human rights work both in China and in Europe had transformed him into a *persona non grata* in his home country and virtually a political asylum seeker in the UK. To him, Europe was an alternative place of complex belonging as it provided not only an opportunity to freely pursue his political beliefs but was also a setting in which he was confronted with xenophobia.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the ways in which EU-based individuals with life experiences outside Europe described, evaluated and reflected upon their transcontinental life trajectories. It explored the degree to which autobiographical narrators made claims to 'European identity' in their stories, and how such claims were justified by them. It further examined how references to Europeanness appeared in connection or disjunction with other discourses of self and belonging. In addition, it aimed to find out how European realities structured autobiographical accounts indirectly, even if direct references to Europe were completely absent.

Three interrelated perspectives helped to throw light on the shifting and at times ambiguous perspectives presented in the stories, namely (1) the notion of home as subjective experience of belonging, transit and transformation, (2) the definition of European space as a stretching historical sphere of power and influence, and (3) the concept of the stranger as a product of situational acts of othering.

With regard to transit and transformation, confrontations with new situations when crossing cultural and geographical contexts was a biographical challenge that all of our interviewees faced. Accounts of transit into and out of Europe were structured by embodied memories of new sensorial life worlds, valued as attractive, recognisable, confusing or alienating.

The Europe-born individuals whom we interviewed noted that confrontations with 'non-European' life worlds had given them an outside

view of themselves as 'Europeans', a perspective which produced new understandings of internal differences within Europe. While some of our interviewees presented their transformation as a revelatory experience of unproblematic singular Europeanness, others were more cynical as they were affected by perceived hierarchies of Europeanness.

Migrants from outside the European continent vividly remembered their first sensorial experiences on the European continent that were partially influenced by their perceptions of Europe prior to migration. Various interviewees had been attracted by stories about Europe as a space of economic wealth and freedom, which had fed their desires to escape local realities of poverty or political oppression. Yet while Europe did live up to the stories as a place of opportunities for our interviewees, experiences of xenophobia led some to critically reflect on life within EU borders. One reaction was emphatically to claim European identity, constructing it as a historical space of transcultural hybridity.

Perspectives of home and identity expressed in singular stories were changeable and contradictory, revealing the complexity of identity formation in a world of interconnectedness and mobility. With varying degrees of success, narrators shifted and made connections between and among various I-positions and we-positions, creating an overall account of their lives. In all cases where Europe was mentioned as a source of identification, competing frames of reference such as family, regional attachments, nationality and transnational communities appeared in other parts of the stories.

As there is no single 'European' language, it is not surprising that, when talking about language issues in their life stories, interviewees referred most often to regional identities, national identities and colonial links, rather than to an imagined single-space Europe. Language use can be an important indicator of belonging and identity at local, national and transnational level, providing points of reference that compete with or completely ignore narratives of Europe.

While Europe was a reference point in many but not all of the accounts, the legal realities of EU-regulations impacted upon all life trajectories as they allowed for different degrees of mobility. At one extreme, citizens of EU countries in ownership of EU-state passports could move easily within the boundaries of EU territory, and return after intercontinental sojourns. At the other extreme, people lacking these documents were often hampered by these regulatory structures. This had clear consequences for their sense of home in Europe.

The historical legacies of colonialism and conflict mean that as long as there has been a part of the globe that has been identified as 'Europe', 'Europe' has defined, and continues to define, itself in relation to the rest of the globe. The approach to Europe taken in this analysis acknowledged that the legacies of patterns of population movement during the time of colonial empire, coupled with modern-day relationships, exploitations and

disparities, are reflected in present patterns of migration and transnational working between Europe and the rest of the globe. It is not surprising that the presence of European influence in other parts of the world was reflected in some of the stories as the extension of European influence beyond the immediate European space, notably in economy, politics and culture, has continued to remain a goal of European governments and the European Union.

One of the major tensions in accounts by non-Caucasian migrants was between the narrators' internal desire to lose the label of 'stranger', and the external unwillingness of others, including governments, to accept them. Another tension was the discrepancy between the internal wish to belong to the new locality and the reluctance to accept the permanence of migration – to give up dreams of permanent return to their homelands.

While many of the issues raised in the stories of inward and outward inter-continental migration in our interviews resonate with material collected in this project by other authors in this volume, it is the legal framework of equality and freedom of movement within its boundaries that the European Union provides for the citizens of its member states, but not to the same extent to those who have migrated to Europe from outside, that is specific to our interview cohort. This reminds us of the notion of 'Fortress Europe' and the existing ambiguities about what counts as European. In addition to the 'ordinary' biographical challenges that all of our interviewees have had to face, it is this underlying ambiguity and uncertainty reflected in the stories we collected that is key to the 'external to Europe' perspective.