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## Leave – Stay – Return: Conceptualizing the Migration Trajectories of Highly Skilled German Migrants as Ongoing Processes

Anke Patzelt

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## **Leave – Stay – Return: Conceptualizing the Migration Trajectories of Highly Skilled German Migrants as Ongoing Processes**

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## **Abstract**

The international competition for the best and brightest has resulted in countries increasingly implementing immigration policies to attract and retain highly skilled individuals. On the one hand, these individuals are seen as “desired immigrants” because they possess high human, social, cultural, and economic capital, and thus, supposedly integrate easily into their new host societies. On the other hand, there is a common understanding that highly skilled migrants are drivers of economic and technological innovation allowing countries to stay competitive in the global economy. Despite this increasing interest in highly skilled migrants, little is known about their actual migration decision-making behaviour and their lived experiences. This is especially true for highly skilled migrants moving between Western Europe and North America. To address this research gap, this paper explores the migration trajectories of highly skilled German migrants moving to and from Canada. Drawing on 48 narrative life story interviews with German migrants during different stages of their migration trajectories (i.e., pre-movement, when settling down and living in Canada and upon return and/or onward movement), this paper specifically focuses on two aspects that are often closely linked: First, the phenomenon of year-by-year planning which means that my interviewees often renegotiated their migration decisions in ongoing processes and determined whether they wanted to stay, or leave and return to Germany or move elsewhere; second, the phenomenon of step-by-step immigration that many interviewees made use of, i.e. slowly transitioning their status from a more temporary to a more permanent one in Canada.

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## Introduction and Background

A look at the development of immigration policies demonstrates that over the past 20 to 30 years, countries have become more restrictive in their immigration policies, progressively closing their borders and restricting admission only to those who are seen as “deserving” of entrance (Hollifield, 2007; Shachar & Hirschl, 2013, pp. 77–78). Boucher and Gest (2018) argue specifically that three broad trends can be observed in migration policies on a global level: 1) a focus on economic migrants while at the same time humanitarian and family-based immigration is limited; 2) an increase of use of temporary immigration programs which limit the rights to permanent residency and staying long term; and 3) declining naturalization rates with fewer and fewer immigrants taking up citizenship. They argue that these three trends are the main characteristics of what they call the “market model” of immigration regimes which sees “immigration as an economic instrument that serves the national interest, rather than an entitlement of people who are fleeing human rights violations, reunifying with families, or simply migrating out of general desire and interest” (Boucher & Gest, 2018, p. 161).

This development of immigration policies has resulted in the preferential treatment of some migrants, i.e., highly skilled and educated individuals as compared to others, i.e., low and lower skilled individuals. Indeed, highly skilled migrants have been increasingly targeted by the immigration policies of many countries (and cities) all over the world as they possess high human, social, cultural and economic capital and are thus thought to not only positively contribute to the economic development of a country (or city) but in fact are needed for these countries to stay competitive in the global economy (Banaś, 2018; Boeri et al., 2012; Boucher, 2016; Shachar & Hirschl, 2013, p. 73). Moreover, being portrayed as a “desirable” group of immigrants makes it easier for states to justify their presence in their countries and to promote their long-term incorporation into society.

As a result of this, Shachar and Hirschl (2013, pp. 72–73) argue that over the last few years “a global race for talent has emerged” as “the demand for highly-skilled migrants has intensified”. Others support this thesis and refer to it as “the war for talent” (Michaels et al., 2001) or highlight that “[t]he competition for global talent has become one of the key policy priorities in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries” (Cerna, 2016, p. 3). In this “race” for the “best and brightest”, countries are increasingly competing against each other in an attempt to not only attract highly skilled individuals, but also retain them in their countries. A few policy strategies in this regard are the use of a points system that allows countries to select immigrants based on their skills or introducing special visa categories allowing highly skilled individuals to enter countries and, in most cases, to either automatically obtain permanent residency or easily apply for it which paves a relatively easy path to citizenship (Kolb, 2014; Koslowski, 2014; Shachar & Hirschl, 2013, p. 83; J. Walsh, 2011).

Based on this information, it becomes obvious that for some time now there has been an increasing focus on highly skilled migrants in the immigration policies that countries implement. This trend is also reflected in many of the political debates on migration around the world. Nevertheless, apart from this policy perspective, this topic has received relatively little attention in the research literature (Shachar & Hirschl, 2013, pp. 73–74). There are two main research gaps that result from the existing literature on highly skilled migration so far: First, applying a policy or economic perspectives on these movements leaves out the human perspective of these migration processes and at best portrays highly skilled migrants as one big unit of rational actors. In fact, in policy or economic debates highly skilled migrants are often seen as a commodity that can easily be moved around from one place to another and can be used to secure a country’s economic and technical development, as well as its competitiveness in the world market, or, to put it in the words of Mosneaga and Winther

(2013, p. 191): “Currently, talent attraction and retention policies are informed by homogenizing and simplistic accounts, at the expense of more holistic accounts about the human facets of talent mobility.” As a result of this, highly skilled migrants are frequently portrayed as highly rational actors who can easily be attracted to a place as long as they are offered the right incentives and conditions. Such an understanding, however, does not allow to consider “mobility within individual and situated contexts” (Chen, 2017, p. 7). Considering the individual and situated contexts, however, is important as highly skilled individuals do not represent a homogeneous group as their experiences of crossing borders and living and working in another country differ significantly depending on, for example, which country they come from, what ethnic group they belong to, their age, gender, and family situation, etc. To capture this diversity of highly skilled migration movements, Smith and Favell (Smith & Favell, 2006, p. 3) argue that “more micro-level, phenomenological studies of the everyday reality of ‘global mobility’” and specifically the global mobility of different types of highly skilled, educated and professional migrants is needed. To do so, research needs to pay attention to the lived experiences<sup>1</sup> of different types of highly skilled migrants and, moreover, needs to consider the emotional, ideational, affective, and relational aspects of these moves, including migrants’ feelings, dreams, the attachments they form both to places and people as well as the impact of chance.

Second, much research on the migration processes of highly skilled individuals focuses on movements from countries of the so-called global South to countries of the “global North”. (Al Ariss, 2010; Alberts, 2017; Blachford & Zhang, 2014; A. Butcher, 2004; Chacko, 2007; Dawson, 2007; Ho, 2011; J. Lee & Kim, 2010; Ley, 2013; Massey, 1987; Radwan & Sakr, 2018; Tyson, 2019). These migration processes are often explained by referring to classical migration theories, using, for example, the model of push-and-pull factors (E. S. Lee, 1966), the ideas of neoclassical migration theories (Hicks, 1932; Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969), or the new economics of migration (Massey et al., 1993, 1998) which frequently put economic factors, such as cost-benefit calculations, at the centre of the decision-making process. Less however is known about highly skilled migrants who originate from highly developed countries. While some studies have examined the movements of highly skilled individuals from countries of the so-called global North who are moving to countries outside of the “Western world” (Ashwini Konanahalli et al., 2012; Boncori, 2013; M. Butcher, 2010; Harrison & Michailova, 2012; Lehmann, 2013; Nowicka, 2007; Peltokorpi, 2009; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Selmer, 2002; K. Walsh, 2006, 2011), research on “migration within the Global North” is at best “an emerging field of research” (Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2019, p. 171; Beaverstock, 2005; Bürgelt et al., 2008; Eich-Kroh, 2012; Favell, 2008; Kennedy, 2016). As a result of this, our knowledge on the lived experiences of these individuals as well as of their reasons and motivations for moving from one highly developed country to another is very limited (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Lederer, 2004; Sauer & Ette, 2007; van Dalen & Henkens, 2007), or to put it in the words of van Dalen and Henkens (2007, p. 37): “What drives the international mobility of people living in high-income countries remains somewhat of a mystery”.

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<sup>1</sup> Lived experience is here to be understood as “a representation and understanding” of the “human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one’s perception of knowledge”. Specifically, the term tries to capture “not only [...] people’s experiences, but also [...] how people live through and respond to those experiences”. In this way, exploring the lived experiences of individuals often focuses on their “everyday life occurrences and self-awareness” as well as “ordinary, everyday events (language, rituals, routines)” which are then used to obtain a better knowledge and interpretation of the world (Boylorn, 2011, p. 490).

Recently, however, this topic has gained some attention in the research literature as a lot of “Western” countries are experiencing high emigration rates, especially of their young and well-educated national-born population (Ackers, 2005; Biacabe & Robert, 2014; Hugo, 2009; Murray et al., 2012; van Dalen & Henkens, 2007). Specifically, the movement of young and highly-skilled individuals belonging to the “upper and middle classes” of countries in the “global North” who supposedly “hold the privilege to enter and exit foreign countries without taking any major risks” has gained some attention (Jansson, 2016, p. 422). These individuals often leave their countries with the realistic goal to potentially and eventually return or move elsewhere. Moreover, there has been an increasing awareness that the reasons for emigration have become diversified, with migration for study purposes, “professional advancement, marriage, retirement or lifestyle” becoming more and more popular (Castles, 2010, p. 1567) and that “migrants, ideas, knowledge, information and skill sets” have become more fluid, with movements often not necessarily being permanent but rather temporary and often involving return visits or moves as well as onward movements to other places (Smith & Favell, 2006, p. 12). This raises questions about the traditional understanding of migration as a one-time event as well as the binary construction of mobility and stasis (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). So far, there exist only few attempts to explain this phenomenon as well as the dynamics of how immigrants moving between highly developed countries decide whether to leave their country of origin, stay (permanently) at a certain place, return to their home country, or potentially move to another place and how these decisions are impacted by their lived experiences. While scholarship has started to pay attention to this phenomenon, empirical studies are rare and classical migration theories insufficiently capture this highly-coveted form of migration (Smith & Favell, 2006; van Riemsdijk & Wang, 2017).

To address these research gaps, this paper explores the lived experiences of highly skilled and relatively privileged migrants moving between countries of the so-called Global North.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper, I refer to these individuals as *migrants by choice*. Similarly to Dietz (2011), who to the best of my knowledge first used this term, I understand migrants by choice as those whose migrations are neither forced by outer circumstances, such as war or natural catastrophes, nor by an unfavorable situation in their country of origin, e.g., social, economic or political crises, but rather these migrations are determined on a more personal level and are undertaken voluntarily. Moreover, based on an extensive literature review on different forms of (more privileged) migration and mobility – including academic mobility (e.g., Bauder, 2015; Hardwick & Tremblay, 2013), international students (e.g., H. Alberts, 2017; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015), expatriates (e.g., Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Andresen et al., 2014), mobile professionals (e.g., Mulholland & Ryan, 2017; Plöger, 2017), lifestyle migration and lifestyle mobility (e.g., Benson, 2016b; S. A. Cohen et al., 2015) as well as travelers, backpackers, tourists or global nomads (e.g., Allon et al., 2008; Kannisto, 2017) – I further define migrants by choice as highly skilled individuals, i.e., individuals who have obtained tertiary education in a variety of different domains and/or are in the process of obtaining tertiary education (e.g., international students), or individuals who more generally work in “science and engineering, architecture and design, education, [or] arts, music and entertainment (...) [as well as] business and finance, law, health care, and related fields” (Florida, 2002, p. 8). As their migration processes are understood as being voluntary, migrants by choice self-initiate their mobility and they have relative control over where they move to. Lastly, their migration is not understood as a one-time event that necessarily results in the permanent settlement in the countries they move to. Much rather, permanent

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<sup>2</sup> The “South” is here used as a synonym for less developed countries whereas the “North” represents developed or highly developed countries (United Nations, 2013).

settlement is only one possible option as their migration is understood as a process that continuously evolves and where the prospects of leaving, staying, returning, or moving onward are negotiated in an ongoing manner.

Specifically, it asks how lived experiences of migrants by choice at their places of destination and the place attachments that they form, impact their future migration decisions with a focus on the choice of prolonging their stays. To explore this question, I draw on the experiences of German migrants by choice moving to and from Canada as a case study. There are three reasons for this: Firstly, Germany is one of the most important source countries of highly skilled emigrants worldwide (OECD, 2015). Secondly, Canada's immigration policy increasingly focuses on attracting the best and most qualified individuals to the country (Griffith, 2013; Root et al., 2014). Thirdly, Canada is one of the most attractive OECD countries for highly skilled immigrants and has long been one of the preferred destinations of Germans and, in recent years, specifically of highly skilled Germans (OECD, 2015; OECD/Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019). Thus, focussing on this case allows me to capture the migration processes and lived experiences of migrants by choice particularly well.

The paper starts by briefly contextualizing this case study by underlining Canada's role in the race for the best and brightest and outlining the role and characteristics of highly skilled German migrants internationally and specifically in Canada. It then highlights the importance of conceptualizing migration as an ongoing process and presents the methodological approaches and considerations that influenced the design of the research study. After that, the findings from the analysis are presented by focusing on two key themes, i.e., the processes of year-by-year planning and step-by-step immigration. The final section of this paper discusses these findings and finishes with a brief conclusion.

### **Canada's Role in the Race for the Best and the Brightest**

In alignment with the trends in immigration policies on a global level, over the past few years, Canada's immigration policy has also increasingly started to focus on securing Canada's competitiveness in the global economic market, or, to put it in the words of IRCC: "Immigration has strengthened, and will continue to strengthen Canada as it helps to keep our country globally competitive by promoting innovation and economic growth through its support of diverse and inclusive communities" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019, p. 12). As part of this aim, Canada has increasingly focused on economic immigrants and has participated in the global race for talent by implementing (permanent and temporary) immigration streams that aim to attract and retain highly skilled individuals.

Regarding permanent admission streams, the Express Entry stream<sup>3</sup>, which was launched on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, is particularly targeted toward skilled workers who want to move to Canada on a permanent basis. The stream is divided into 3 different programs: a) the Federal Skilled Worker Program (for skilled workers with foreign work experience), b) the Federal Skilled Trades Program (for skilled workers who are qualified in a skilled trade),

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<sup>3</sup> Here, it is important to mention that the Express Entry streams work for all provinces but Quebec which has its own selection system for skilled workers who want to become PRs in the province, i.e., the Quebec-selected Skilled Workers program. Like the Express Entry streams, applicants are evaluated based on a points-system ranking individuals, for example, on their level of education and their work experience. However, the criteria for selection also specifically consider the applicant's "potential for integration into the Québec labour market and Québec society" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2019). Similar to the evaluation of points for the Federal Skilled Worker Program, individuals applying to the Quebec-selected Skilled Workers program can obtain most points for their education (level and area) and language skills (Gouvernement du Québec, 2019).



and c) the Canadian Experience Class (for skilled workers who have Canadian work experiences) which all operate with a points-system to determine who will be granted access to the country (Government of Canada, 2018). Points are attributed in six categories, i.e., English and/or French language skills, education, work experience, age, arranged employment in Canada and adaptability, and only those with the highest scores are admitted (Government of Canada, 2019). In addition to these federal admission streams, each province or territory also has its own Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) which allows them to select individuals as PRs based on their own criteria to “address short-term labour shortages that are not currently being met through the federal skilled worker program” (Carter et al., 2010, p. 4). As a result of this, provinces and territories have the possibility to regulate immigration based on their respective economic or immigration needs. In 2018, economic immigrants represented the largest group of PRs that were admitted to Canada, accounting “for 58% of the 321,035 permanent residents” that year (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019, p. 8). It is also important to highlight that in contrast to temporary immigrants to Canada, these individuals, who entered Canada as new PRs, do not only have access to certain settlement services (e.g., employment related services or language training) but they are also presented with a clear path toward citizenship (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019, p. 5).

Regarding temporary admissions streams, there are two main programs: On the one hand, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), and, on the other hand, the International Mobility Program (IMP) (Ci et al., 2018; Coderre & Nakache, 2021; Hou et al., 2020). Examples, of temporary admissions streams within the TFWP that are targeted at (highly) skilled individuals include the Express Entry, the Academics stream, and the Global Talent stream. The IMP includes a variety of different streams such as the International Experience Canada stream which is further divided into a working holiday, young professionals and international co-op (internship) visa, as well as the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWPP) which provides international students with an open work permit and allows them to gain work experience in Canada. Overall, since the 1990, the number of TFWs has rapidly increased and since the early 2000s, the numbers of TFWs entering Canada has outnumbered the numbers of permanent residents arriving in the country (Fleury et al., 2019; Lu & Hou, 2017; Picot et al., 2022). For example, in 2018, there were 321,035 individuals who were admitted to Canada as PRs. Compared to that, in the same year, a total of 696,139 temporary work and study permits were issued (84,229 through the TFWP, 255,034 through the IMP, and 356,876 for international students) (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019, p. 13). However, there is not only a trend towards more temporary admissions in Canada, but also a trend of more and more TFWs transitioning to PR in Canada. For example, in 2018, nearly half of economic immigrants had initially obtained a temporary resident permit (Picot et al., 2022). This process is referred to as “two-step migration” (Hou et al., 2020; Prokopenko & Hou, 2018) and has not only gained popularity in Canada but also in other countries, specifically in Australia and New Zealand (Chiou, 2017; Hawthorne, 2010a, 2010b; Nakache & Dixon-Perera, 2016, p. 3; J. Walsh, 2014). The idea behind promoting two-step migration processes is that individuals who have already gained experience living and either working and studying in Canada, are more familiar with Canadian society and therefore can more easily integrate in the country and make economic contributions (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012; Scott et al., 2015). However, it is noticeable, that this path of two-step migration is not available for all TFWs but predominantly reserved for those who are (highly) skilled, thus, creating a double-edged immigration system where those who are skilled are not only presented with a path to PR but also to citizenship, whereas those with low skills are predominantly excluded from these options. Moreover, research has highlighted the problematic impact of two-step migration as it can result in worker exploitation (Bélanger et al., 2019; Crossman et al., 2020;

González, 2020; Lowell & Avato, 2014).

## German Immigration to Canada

At the same time as Canada is increasingly focusing on the attraction of highly skilled individuals, the emigration of the highly skilled national-born population from Western European countries has increased and has gained more and more attention in both the academic and public debate. This is also the case in Germany where the fear of losing its young and highly skilled population has been particularly present as emigration rates of the national-born and highly skilled population have increased significantly since 2005 (Diehl & Dixon, 2005; Erlinghagen & Stegmann, 2009; Ette & Sauer, 2010; Mau et al., 2008; OECD, 2015). This fear is somewhat warranted as there are currently more Germans leaving the country than returning and the share of those who are young and highly educated among those who are leaving is higher as compared to both the non-mobile German population as well as among those Germans who are returning (Ette et al., 2019; OECD, 2015; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020). In 2018, for example, the average age of those leaving Germany was 34,3 years which is significantly lower than the average age of the non-mobile population in Germany at 45,8 years (Ette et al., 2019; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020). Moreover, 75,5% of the Germans who emigrated held an academic degree compared to only 24,7% of the non-mobile population and over half of those Germans who left are either employed in a leading position or work within academia, whereas this is only true for about one quarter of the non-mobile population in Germany (Ette & Sauer, 2010; OECD, 2015; Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration, 2015).

Overall, as mentioned in the introduction, Germany is not only the third most important country of origin of emigrants in all OECD countries and the fifth most important country of origin for emigrants worldwide, but also one of the most important countries of origin of highly skilled emigrants for both regions (OECD, 2015). At the same time, Canada is one of the most attractive OECD countries for highly qualified workers and this is also true for highly skilled and qualified workers from Germany (OECD/Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019). Overall, between January 2017 and February 2020 there were a total of 4,140 Germans who entered Canada as PRs, in addition to 22,840 Germans who obtained a work permit in Canada as part of the IMP, 895 Germans who obtained a work permit under the TFWP and 6,820 Germans who obtained a study permit to study at a DLI in Canada

(Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020c, 2020d, 2020b, 2020a). When looking at the skill level of these German migrants<sup>4</sup>, it becomes obvious that Germans with a tertiary education currently form the majority of individuals in the age group between 25 and 64 years residing in Canada. In total, there were 55,500 individuals residing in Canada in 2016, who were born in Germany, are permanent immigrants in Canada and are between the ages of 25 to 64. While 32,465 (~58.5%) of these have a tertiary education, 8,030 (~14.5%) obtained a trades certificate/diploma or did an apprenticeship, 11,500 (~20.7%) have a secondary education and only 3,510 (~6.3%) have no certificate, diploma or degree (Statistics Canada, n.d.). Especially in recent years, the share of Germans with a tertiary education has increased, as such, the majority of those Germans who came to Canada between 2000 and 2010/11 have a tertiary education level (OECD, 2015). Moreover, the number of Germans with a PhD diploma has increased by over a thousand – from 2,200 to 3,500 – between 2000/2001 and 2010/2011 (OECD, 2015). But Canada is not only attractive to PhD students, but also for university and college professors. In fact, after the US and Switzerland, Canada shows the highest numbers of German professors in any of the OECD

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<sup>4</sup> Data on skill level is only available for the permanent immigrant population.

countries (OECD, 2015). The high level of education and qualification of Germans residing in Canada is also reflected when examining their fields of employment: The majority are working in both manual and non-manual occupations that require a high level of qualification, with the highest share being employed in academic professions (OECD, 2015). Moreover, 90% of German immigrants in Canada who are of working age are employed (OECD, 2015).

## Migration as an Ongoing Process

Migration research often employs a sedentary bias. While migration research actually tries to understand the *movement* of individuals, the theoretical and analytical perspectives that researchers use have predominantly drawn on “sedentarist metaphysics” (Cresswell, 2012; Malkki, 1992). This means that “migration has mainly been studied from the position of fixed locations” which are represented through “the place of origin and the destination” to and from which migrants move and where their experiences are explored (e.g. integration outcomes in the receiving country) (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014, p. 262; Schwarz, 2020; Vertovec, 2009). However, paying attention to temporality in mobility and “temporary sociability is vital to understand migratory processes” as the journeys of migrants are often fragmented and temporary with short stays in phases of transit (Schapendonk et al., 2015, p. 58). This is not only true for refugees whose movements are often fragmented and unfold over several years but also for other, more privileged types of migrants and mobile individuals. As demonstrated above, over the past decades, for example, motivations (e.g. leisure or experience), geographical origins and destinations, actions, education and skill levels, as well as the ways of travel of migrants have become more diverse and new forms of mobility blur the division between the traditional understanding of migration and other forms of spatial mobility, e.g. “travel, tourism, circulation, commuting” (King, 2002, p. 94). This blurring of the boundaries between different forms of mobility (i.e., the realization that many migration processes are temporary and involve several movements back and forth and/or in between different places) as well as the blurring between different migration statuses (i.e., from temporary to permanent or vice versa) has risen the awareness that migration and mobility processes are ongoing processes and need to be conceptualized and analysed as such.

In line with this, Gladkova and Mazzucato (2017, p. 2) promote the conceptualization of “migration as a constantly evolving process which needs to emphasize changes in migrants’ geographical location, legal, occupational, or marital statuses”. Likewise, Rashid et al. (2013), highlight the importance of not seeing migration as a static event that simply involves a point of departure often associated with less desirable conditions and a point of destination where one lives happily after the relocation. Rather, as migration is an ongoing process, and the points of departure and destination are connected through a phase of transition that is situated between pre- and post-migration outcomes (Rashid et al., 2013). The circumstances of migrants’ “pre-migration life”, their experiences, expectations and “decision-making process” prior to their move, as well as their experiences of actually moving and settling at a place of destination all impact the post-migration outcomes. Therefore, migration needs to be explored from a holistic perspective, taking into consideration the lives of migrants “before, during and after immigration” (Rashid et al., 2013, p. 190). Seeing migration as an ongoing process and considering pre-, during and post-migration experiences also allows to understand migration “as a ‘lived experience’” and making it possible to obtain a better understanding of how and why migrants fare in a certain way at their destinations (Rashid et al., 2013, p. 200).

Research in refugee studies has picked up on the idea of conceptualizing migration as a continuous/ongoing process that does not necessarily end at the first place of arrival

but rather might result in the onward movement from the first place of arrival to other locations (Lindley & Van Hear, 2007; Schapendonk, 2012; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schwarz, 2020). Likewise, research on lifestyle migration tends to question the static understanding of migration and seeing it as a “one-off event” (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014, p. 3). Rather, it sees migration as an ongoing process which allows lifestyle migrants to *peu-à-peu* acquire a better “quality of life” (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014, p. 3). This means that in order to fully grasp these processes, it is important to not only look at the reasons lying behind these movements and the immediate immigration and settlement processes but also how the lives of lifestyle migrants develop at their places of destinations, during phases of return or circular movements (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014).

In other areas of migration research, the idea of conceptualizing migration as an ongoing process is only slowly catching up. Among others, research on the international mobility of students and academics has highlighted that migration and mobility are often ongoing processes that do not only need to consider the emigration and settlement processes but also potential return and/or onward movements (Chen, 2017; Gill, 2005; J. Lee & Kim, 2010; Van Mol, 2017; Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). According to Dietz (2011, 71), this was also true for the highly skilled Italian migrants who she interviewed in Northern Ireland. These individuals often moved back and forth between Italy and Ireland multiple times and, thus, their migration decisions were never final “but rather a process”. Yanasmayan’s (2015) study on highly educated Turkish migrants in three major European cities and their decisions of either extending their stays or returning to their country of origin also highlights the ongoing character of migration movements and decision-making. Her research stresses that these decisions are usually made once migrants have reached the end of their initially planned (temporary) residence period in their host societies and are often connected to life course events, e.g., the end of university studies and obtaining a degree or changes to one’s relationship status (Yanasmayan, 2015, p. 23).

Moreover, the findings of this study highlight that these migrants often employed a strategy of “year-by-year planning”, i.e., setting short term goals and re-evaluating their situation and options of staying, returning or moving elsewhere within these regular intervals (Yanasmayan, 2015, p. 26). This practice of year-by-year planning kept “alive the continuous notion of mobility and the feeling of transience” (Yanasmayan, 2015, p. 26). To capture these kinds of decisions the author suggests to use a “compartmentalized approach to migration, which involves specific decision-making mechanisms in specific moments of agency” (Yanasmayan, 2015, p. 22). This approach questions the one-time character of migration and sees the decision of whether to prolong one’s stay or to return back home as another stage of individuals’ migration trajectories (Yanasmayan, 2015, p. 23). Moreover, it allows for a more in-depth examination of the contexts and conditions that lead to these decisions which makes it possible to not only take into consideration the situation at arrival but also how the situation of migrants changes over time and might impact these decisions (Yanasmayan, 2015, pp. 23–24).

Finally, Gomes, Leong, and Yang (2017, p. 7) argue that the definition of transient migrants which is typically associated with the temporary status of lower skilled temporary workers or refugees whose movements are “forced by circumstances” needs to be enlarged and should also include individuals who “voluntarily undertake circular and/or temporary migration for a variety of reasons”. Thus, they define transient migrants as “individuals who criss-cross provincial, state and rural-urban borders in order to study, work, seek sanctuary, live differently, and be with family and loved ones” (Gomes et al., 2017, p. 7). Based on this definition, research on transient migrants does not explore migration processes and the experiences of migrants from a point “of permanence and settlement” which still prevails in much of the literature on migration, but, instead explores its temporary and ongoing nature including “arrival, departure and return, circulation, absence, presence, distance, time,

space and their ruptures” as well as the experiences that transient migrants make during their mobility trajectories (Gomes et al., 2017, p. 8).

Thus, while research is starting to pick up on the idea of conceptualizing migration as an ongoing process, overall, research on repeat migration, i.e. the “regular movement of individuals between their country of origin and multiple other destinations” (Van Mol, 2017, p. 58) and onward migration intentions and processes (Steiner, 2019) remains sparse thus far. One reason for this relative lack in research is that from a methodological perspective it is hard to construct research projects. For quantitative researchers, there are almost no datasets to draw on as transnational mobiles are often simply not captured in statistics (Vorheyer, 2016, pp. 62–63). For qualitative researchers, it would require them to collect data at multiple locations and possibly from a longitudinal perspective both of which are challenging due to limited funding possibilities and time restrictions on research projects. However, since migration is an ongoing process and the experiences of migrants change over time and in different phases of their migration trajectories, I argue that studies that apply these kinds of research designs are needed to obtain a more holistic understanding of migration experiences and decision-making processes.

## **Methodological Approach**

As highlight above, it is important to analyse migration as ongoing processes which can involve different phases (e.g., pre-movement phase, phase of settlement and integration, and phase of return and/or onward movements) as well as possible twists and turns during these phases. Moreover, it does not only need to explore the reasons that cause these movements in the first place but also the everyday lived experiences of migrants and the place attachments they form during the different stages of their mobility trajectory. This is because their initial reasons and motivations might change over time depending on the experiences they make. One way of achieving this is using narrative life story interviews for the data collection as they allow to reconstruct the migration trajectories of migrants as well as to reflect on future mobility intentions. Therefore, I specifically employed narrative life story interviews which were inspired by the life story approach as developed by Bertaux (2016).

Bertaux’s (2016) approach is particularly helpful as it allows to obtain an understanding of individuals’ lived experiences as well as their flows of social trajectories. In fact, his approach employs an ethnosociological perspective which is interested in understanding how a specific social phenomenon works and how it changes over time. The goal is thus to understand social phenomena by examining “the structure of social relations, the situations they generate and their logic, the mechanisms that generate practices, the recurrent logic of action, [as well as] the processes that characterize and sustain it”<sup>5</sup> (Bertaux, 2016, p. 13). However, in contrast to purely ethnographic research which aims at describing a certain context or phenomenon, ethnosociological research aims to abstract from this level and to generalize by examining social actions, situations and behaviour “which could also be present in a multitude of different contexts” (Bertaux, 2016, p. 19). Therefore, the aim of the Bertaux’s life story interviews is not to reconstruct the entire life of an individual but rather to capture a narrative regarding a specific “part of the lived experiences” of individuals which help to explain certain social processes or phenomena (Bertaux, 2016, p. 40). As such, life story interviews put a “filter” on the lived experiences of interviewees and this filter guides the interview process (Bertaux, 2016, p. 42). By comparing the information collected from multiple interviews, it is then possible to recognize patterns,

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<sup>5</sup> All quotes taken from Bertaux (2016) were translated by me.

functions or internal dynamics that are typical for the “social dimensions” of the objects or social phenomena under study (Bertaux 2016, 40).

Inspired by this approach, I conducted 48 narrative life story interviews with German migrants by choice at different stages of their migration trajectories, i.e., in the phase of emigration, the phase of settling down and living in Canada and the phase of return and/or onward migration. Thus, I talked to eight individuals who were residing in Germany, or in two cases in Belgium and Austria respectively, and either had already taken concrete measures to move to Canada or were planning to do so in the future. Eleven of my interviewees had returned to Germany after having lived in Canada for a certain amount of time, while one had moved onward to the Netherlands after the stays in Canada. One interviewee was currently staying in Germany but moved back and forth between Germany and Canada on a regular basis because he was conducting a joint PhD between a German and a Canadian university. As for the remaining 27 interviews, 26 of these interviewees were residing in Canada where they had lived for varying amounts of times ranging from a few months only to 21 years at the most and one interviewee was currently living in the US after previously having lived in Canada.

Interviewees were recruited with the help of different methods: First, I contacted different German and Canadian organisations and associations (e.g., German language schools in Canada, the Canadian German Chamber of Industry and Commerce Inc., the DAAD Info Centre Toronto, different German or Canadian/North American studies departments at universities in Canada and Germany) and asked them to distribute my call for participation among their members. Second, I contacted the German Embassy to Canada and the Canadian embassy to Germany and likewise asked them to distribute my call for participation via their mailing lists and to share them via their social media platforms. Third, I contacted people in my social and academic networks and asked them to distribute my call for participation to individuals they thought would fit the participation criteria. Fourth, I posted my call for participation in different Facebook groups, internet forums and online platforms targeted toward German migrants in general, and specifically those addressing Germans either currently living in Canada or who want to move there. Fifth, and finally, I also made use of the so-called snowball principle. Overall, it was a lot easier to recruit individuals who had moved to and were currently living in Canada as opposed to individuals who were in Germany (or elsewhere) and were either in the process of moving to Canada or had returned to Germany or moved elsewhere. Figure 1 below present an overview of my interviewees’ socio-demographic characteristics as well as their mobility trajectories.

Figure 1: Characteristics and Migration Trajectories of the Interviewees

Name*	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Children	Highest Level of Education	Profession	Mobility Trajectory Throughout the Life Course*
Tobias	M	45	Married	2	PhD	Research associate	
Frida	F	39	Married	2	PhD	Assistant professor	
Annika	F	31	Common-law	2	Master's/diploma degree	Financial manager	
Linda	F	47	Divorced	2	PhD	Unemployed	
Florian	M	27	Married	0	Bachelor	Senior analyst	
Benjamin	M	37	Married	0	PhD	Assistant professor	
Laura	F	35	Married	0	Master's/diploma degree	Tax consultant	
Sophie	F	40	Married	2	Doctor of medicine	Pediatrician	

Helene	F	29	Common-law	0	Master's/diploma degree	PhD candidate	<p>Born in Mexico: Dual German and Mexican citizenship (1988)</p> <p>Move to Germany together with mother (1999)</p> <p>Move to Canada: PhD, study permit (Feb 2014)</p> <p>Return to Germany or onward movement planned after completion of PhD degree</p>
Peter	M	30	Common-law	0	Master's/diploma degree	Real estate development / engineer	<p>Born in Canada: Dual German and Canadian citizenship (1986)</p> <p>Return to Germany together with family (1991)</p> <p>One-year university exchange in South Korea (2010-11)</p> <p>Move to Canada together with partner who starts a PhD (Feb 2014)</p> <p>Return to Germany or onward movement planned after partner completes PhD degree</p>
Leon	M	28	Married	0	Master's/diploma degree	Project coordinator	<p>Move to Singapore: International Baccalaureate at a United World College (2005-07)</p> <p>Exchange semester in South Africa during BA studies (year unknown)</p> <p>Submission of application for PR status in Canada through spousal sponsorship from outside of Canada (June 2014)</p> <p>Receives PR status (Jan 2015)</p> <p>Move to Canada (April 2015)</p>
Emma	F	34	Married	0	Master's/diploma degree	Freelancing: consulting and translation	<p>Exchange semester in Australia during BA studies (year unknown)</p> <p>Several-months internship in the US during BA studies (year unknown)</p> <p>4-week internship in India during MA studies (2008)</p> <p>Move to Canada: Tourist visa (Jan 2015)</p> <p>W&amp;T visa for Canada is granted (June 2015)</p> <p>Activation of W&amp;T visa (Feb 2016)</p> <p>Submission of applications for PR status through spousal sponsorship and extension of work permit (July 2016)</p> <p>Extension for 2-year open work permit is granted; still waiting for decision on PR status (2017)</p>
Paul	M	43	Divorced	0	Master's/diploma degree	Engineer	<p>Exchange in the US: Staying with a host family for a summer (1990)</p> <p>Move to Canada: work permit (March 2008)</p> <p>PR status (Nov. 2011)</p>
Nikola	F	28	Common-law	0	State examination (teaching)	Unemployed	<p>Born in Bosnia (1989)</p> <p>Move to Germany together with family (1991)</p> <p>ESL course in Canada (April - June 2011)</p> <p>Move to Canada: Six-months tourist visa (Nov 2015)</p> <p>Extension of tourist visa (2016)</p> <p>Submission of application for PR through spousal sponsorship (2017)</p>
Marie	F	35	Common-law	2	Master's/diploma degree	Marine biologist	<p>University exchange semester in Canada during BA studies (2003)</p> <p>Move to Canada: MA thesis, study permit (fall 2006)</p> <p>Transition to work permit (spring 2007 - fall 2008)</p> <p>Return to Germany (fall 2008)</p> <p>Starting application process for PR status in Canada through spousal sponsorship from outside of Canada (2010)</p> <p>Obtains PR status and moves to Canada (spring 2011)</p>


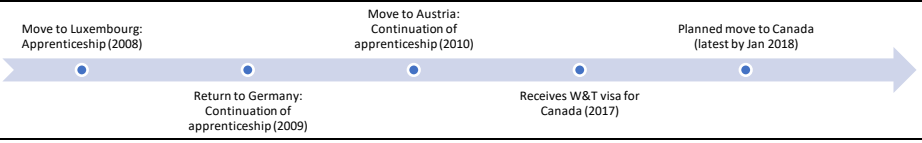
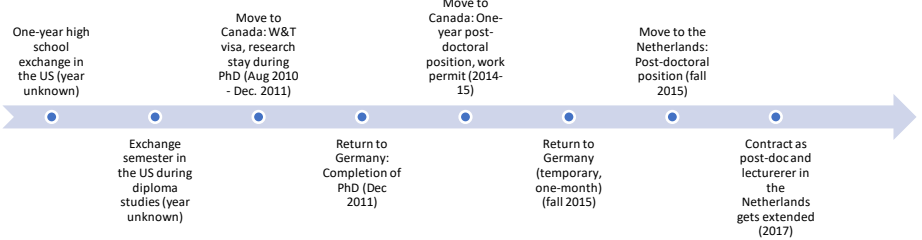
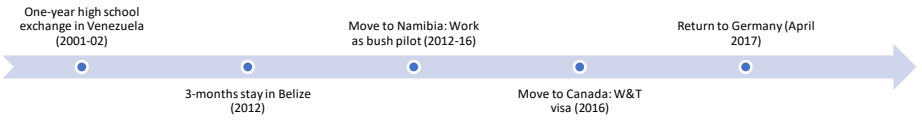
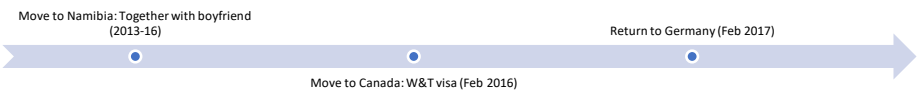


Sonja	F	39	Married	2	Master's/diploma degree	Development officer	<p>University exchange semester in Norway (2000)</p> <p>Two-months internship in Canada (Sept - Oct 2001)</p> <p>Submitting application for PR status in Canada through spousal sponsorship from outside of Canada (2010)</p> <p>Approval of PR status and move to Canada (Jan 2011)</p>
Anne	F	33	Single	0	PhD	Post-doc	<p>Move to Hungary together with family (1997 - 2002)</p> <p>One-year university exchange in Alaska during diploma studies (year unknown)</p> <p>Move to Canada: PhD, 3-year study permit (Jan 2010)</p> <p>3-year extension of study permit (2013)</p> <p>3-year post-graduation work permit (2015)</p> <p>Planning to apply for PR (April 2017)</p>
Jutta	F	33	Common-law	0	Master's/diploma degree	Economist	<p>BA studies in the Netherlands (2003-06)</p> <p>Exchange semester in Singapore during BA studies (Aug - Dec 2005)</p> <p>Move to Canada: W&amp;T visa (2006-07)</p> <p>Return to the Netherlands for Master's degree (2007-09)</p> <p>Submission of application for PR status in Canada through spousal sponsorship from outside of Canada (2008)</p> <p>PR status is granted (Feb 2009)</p> <p>Move to Canada (June 2009)</p> <p>Application for Canadian citizenship (2013)</p> <p>Receives Canadian Citizenship (Jan 2015)</p>
Vanessa	F	46	Married	2	PhD	Associate professor	<p>9-months stay as au-pair in the UK (1992)</p> <p>Several-months internship in Canada (1995)</p> <p>Move to Canada: MA studies, study permit (1996-98)</p> <p>Transition to work permit (1999)</p> <p>Obtains PR status through spousal sponsorship (year unknown)</p> <p>Obtains Canadian citizenship (Nov 2004)</p> <p>Return to Germany for a one-year sabbatical (2007)</p> <p>Return to Germany for a six-month sabbatical (2015/16)</p> <p>Decision to stay in Canada permanently (Feb 2016)</p>
Marlene	F	38	Single/ Boyfriend	0	Master's/diploma degree	Development manager	<p>Move to Canada: 3-year closed work permit (Jan 2013)</p> <p>Submits application for PR status (April 2014)</p> <p>Receives PR status (Dec 2014)</p>
Till	M	27	Married	0	Bachelor's degree	Student teachers' college	<p>6-months W&amp;T in New Zealand (2012)</p> <p>Internship in China (Aug - Sept 2014)</p> <p>Exchange semester in China during BA studies (Feb - July 2015)</p> <p>Moves to Canada: study permit (July 2016)</p> <p>Plans to apply for PR status in Canada through spousal sponsorship (Summer 2017)</p>

Petra	F	31	Married	0	Master's/diploma degree	Waiting for work permit in the US	<p>6-months high school exchange in the UK (2002)</p> <p>One-year university exchange in Canada (Aug 2006 - Aug 2007)</p> <p>Moves to Canada: W&amp;T visa (summer 2010)</p> <p>Transition to work permit supported by employer (summer 2011)</p> <p>Obtains PR status through spousal sponsorship (Nov 2014)</p> <p>Move to the US: Relocation due to partner's work (Jan 2017)</p> <p>Return to Germany planned for (2018)</p>
Hilda	F	25	Common-law	0	Master's/diploma degree	PhD candidate	<p>Moves to Canada: MA studies, study permit (2012)</p> <p>Extension of study permit to pursue PhD degree (2014)</p>
Nils	M	44	Married	2	Master's/diploma degree	Architect	<p>Exchange semester in the US during diploma studies (year unknown)</p> <p>Moves to the UK: First Job (1999-2005)</p> <p>Moves to Hong Kong: Work and Family (2005-14)</p> <p>Applies for PR status in Canada through spousal sponsorship from outside the country (2014)</p> <p>Obtains PR status and moves to Canada (Oct 2014)</p>
Johan	M	25	Single/girlfriend	0	In the process of completing Bachelor's degree	BA student	<p>One-year high school exchange in Canada (2008-09)</p> <p>Moves to Canada: W&amp;T visa (March 2012)</p> <p>Transition to tourist visa and temporary work permit (March-August 2014)</p> <p>Transition to study permit for BA studies in Canada (Sept 2014 - current)</p> <p>Plans to apply for a post-graduation work permit</p>
Charlotte	F	31	Married	0	Master's/Diploma degree	PhD candidate	<p>One-year high school exchange in the US (2002-03)</p> <p>One-year au-pair in the US (2005-06)</p> <p>Research stay in Burkina Faso during MA studies (year unknown)</p> <p>Move to Canada: PhD, study permit (2012)</p> <p>5,5-months research stay in Cameroon during PhD studies (Dec 2014 - April 2015)</p> <p>Submission of application for PR status through spousal sponsorship (2016)</p>
Anton	M	36	Common-law	0	Master's/diploma degree	Engineer	<p>One-year project work and writing of diploma thesis in Switzerland (2005-06)</p> <p>Several shorter (a few weeks to a few months) work-related stays in Poland, Belgium, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands (2006-14)</p> <p>Applies and receives Young Professional Visa for Canada (Sept 2014)</p> <p>Move to Canada: Activation of Young Professional Visa (early 2015)</p> <p>Receives PR status through Express Entry Program (Dec 2015)</p> <p>Activates PR status (Jan 2016)</p>
Klaus	M	36	Married	1	Master's/diploma degree	CEO of a family run business in the construction industry	<p>Move to Canada: Internship, W&amp;T visa (Dec. 2006)</p> <p>Transition to a two-year closed work permit sponsored through employer (2007)</p> <p>Return to Germany (Oct 2009)</p>

Pia	F	30	Single	0	PhD	Starting post-doctoral position	
Hannes	M	34	Married	2	PhD	Junior professor	
Karl	M	33	Married	2	Master's/diploma degree	Trade union secretary	
Henning	M	34	Married	2	Master's/diploma degree	Engineer	
Nora	F	33	Married	2	Nursing degree	Stay-at-home-mum	
Hanna	F	41	Married	2	Master's/diploma degree	PhD candidate / teacher	

Erik	M		Single	0	Master's/diploma degree	PhD candidate	<p>Internship in Canada as part of diploma studies (Oct - Dec 2010)</p> <p>Stay is extended till March 2012 to work on a research project and to write diploma thesis (Dec 2010)</p> <p>Return to Germany (March 2012)</p> <p>Move to Canada: One-year PhD stay, study permit (2014)</p> <p>Return to Germany (2015)</p> <p>Move to Canada: One-year PhD stay, study permit (2016)</p> <p>Return to Germany (2017)</p>
Christian	M	31	Single/ girlfriend	0	PhD	Waiting to start post-doctoral position	<p>Move to France: PhD in Switzerland (2013)</p> <p>Return to Germany (temporary) (2017)</p> <p>Planned move to Canada: Post-doctoral position, work permit (Summer 2017)</p>
Ida	F	25	Single/ boyfriend	0	Master's/diploma degree	Team assistant (management, commerce)	<p>4-months high school exchange in Canada (2009)</p> <p>2-3-months stay in Canada with old host family (2011)</p> <p>Move to Canada planned in 2-3 years time (April 2017)</p>
Lea	F	36	Common-law	0	Master's/diploma degree	Online marketing	<p>Move to Canada: W&amp;T visa (July 2010)</p> <p>Transition to 2-year closed work permit through employer (2011)</p> <p>Extension of work permit for 2 years (2013)</p> <p>Return to Germany (Oct 2014)</p>
Lukas	M	33	Married	0	Master's/diploma degree	Project manager (IT)	<p>Several 8-weeks stays in the UK as a travel guide (approx. 2003-05)</p> <p>Move to Canada with PR status through Skilled Worker Program planned (end of 2017/beginning of 2018)</p>
Emil	M	37	Married	0	Master's/diploma degree	IT consulting	<p>Planned move to Canada with PR status through Skilled Worker Program (end of 2017/beginning of 2018)</p>
Lena	F	36	Married	2	Master's/diploma degree	Public relations	<p>One-year Master's program in Canada, study permit (2005-06)</p> <p>Move to Canada: one-year work permit (2008)</p> <p>Submission of application for PR status (2009)</p> <p>Receives PR status (2010)</p> <p>Return to Germany (July 2011)</p>
Carolina	F	33	Married	1	PhD	Scientific coordinator	<p>Erasmus exchange semester in Sweden (2006)</p> <p>4-months internship in China (2007-08)</p> <p>4-months research stay in the US as part of diploma thesis (2008)</p> <p>4-months research stay in the US during PhD studies (year unknown)</p> <p>Move to Canada: Post-doctoral position, one-year closed work permit (Jan 2013)</p> <p>One-year extension of work permit (Jan 2014)</p> <p>Return to Germany (Jan 2015)</p>
Greta	F	30	Married	1	Master's/diploma degree	Parental leave / HR	<p>Planned move to Canada: work permit (2018)</p>

Luisa	F	31	Married	1	Bachelor's degree	Parental leave / project management	
Isabelle	F	31	Married	0	Apprenticeship as air traffic controller	Air traffic controller	
Lara	F	33	Single	0	PhD	Post-doc	
Lutz	M	32	Married	1	Pilot	Pilot	
Ute	F	28	Married	1		Parental leave / textile business economist	

\* Interviewees' names were changed and the specific names of the cities where they moved to were left out to protect their anonymity.

All interviews were conducted between March and May 2017 and on average lasted between 45 minutes and three hours. My participants were given the choice to conduct the interview in either English or German and all of them decided to speak in German. Each interview started with compiling a life calendar with each participant highlighting their most important life events in the spheres of education, work, family, place of living/living situation, friends, and social networks, as well as free time activities and community involvement/volunteering. This calendar was then used as a reference point during the interview to obtain a better understating of how the individual migration trajectories were interlinked with events in the life course of my interviewees. The actual interview then started with the open question of explaining the decision for and circumstances of their (planned) move/immigration to Canada. Depending on the stage of their migration trajectories at which my interviewees found themselves (pre-movement, living in Canada, or post return or onward movement), the interview would then focus on trying to repaint the contours of these stages and what they entailed for everyone.

After the interview process, all interviews were transcribed in their entirety and the qualitative data software NVivo was used for the analysis of the interview data. The data analysis followed the three different stages of qualitative analysis as suggested by Gaudet and Robert (2018, p. 139), namely a “vertical, horizontal and theoretical analysis”. During the first step – the vertical analysis – “the material [was analyzed] in its ‘totality,’” i.e., each source was examined in its own right (Gaudet & Robert, 2018, p. 140). The second step – the horizontal analysis – consisted of a comparison of “the different sources of information” (Gaudet & Robert, 2018, p. 140). Finally, the third and last step – the theoretical analysis which is also referred to as “analytical generalisation” – consisted of linking “the pertinent ideas” that were discovered and answering the research question (Gaudet & Robert, 2018, p. 140). While these three general stages guided the analysis, in each stage specifically, I also drew on the suggestions of Bertaux (2016) for the analysis of life story interviews. The analysis below focuses on two aspects of my interviewees’ migration trajectories that are often closely linked to each other, namely: First, the phenomenon of year-by-year planning during which migration decisions are (re-)negotiated in ongoing processes, and second, the phenomenon of step-by-step immigration, i.e., slowly transitioning one’s immigration status from a more temporary to a more permanent one.

However, before presenting the analysis, it is important to briefly reflect on my own position in the research process and in which ways my position might have influenced not only the data-collection process, but also the analysis of the data (May, 2011; Warren, 2000). As a doctoral student in Sociology with a particular interest in ethnic and migration studies and having done my undergraduate and graduate studies in such fields as Social and Cultural Anthropology as well as International Migration and Ethnic Relations, I am familiar with the concepts, theories, and methods I am using. Thus, even though I aimed to analyse the data in an inductive way, the ideas and concepts I identified in the interview accounts were somewhat influenced by my academic background as well as the literature review I conducted as part of this research project.

Moreover, as a German having moved to Canada for my doctoral studies as well as having been internationally mobile throughout my life with returns to Germany in between, I was an insider to the group of highly skilled German migrants by choice that I studied and I presented myself as such to them, i.e., a young female PhD student who is originally from Germany and moved to Canada for her studies. Not only did I share certain cultural, historical, and linguistic backgrounds with my interviewees, but I had also gone through the process of deciding whether to stay in Germany, move to Canada or move elsewhere. These similarities made it easy to recruit interviewees and to establish rapport with them as it enhanced communication in general and made it possible for me to understand certain nuances during the interview process as well as to relate to their experiences and accounts and for them to relate to me. Moreover, considering that my interviewees were highly skilled and that most of them had obtained university degrees and even pursued graduate studies, they were familiar with academic research, and, thus, were not sceptic about participating in a research study but rather open and willing to do so. Many also

thought that it was an interesting research topic because there was not a lot of information about the immigration process from Germany to Canada, and, thus, they willingly told me their stories in the hopes that it might enhance the experiences of other people who might plan to do so in the future.

While being an insider certainly helped with the recruitment process and establishing rapport, it also required a notion of caution during the research process. First, I needed to be careful in not making any presumptions about the situation and experiences of my interviewees. Specifically, I needed to be aware that my experiences do not necessarily correspond with those of my informants. Everyone makes different experiences and, moreover, interprets these experiences in a different way depending on their personal situation and characteristics. Thus, it was important to carefully listen to my interviewees and to critically examine their accounts, trying to separate them from my own experiences. By using narrative life story interviews, I tried to avoid asking leading questions and having any particular answers in mind, instead giving my interviewees the possibility to stress what they felt was important for them. Second, I also needed to be careful to explain cultural, historic, and linguistic nuances in the analysis part of the research to avoid bias and make it possible for readers with a non-German background to understand certain expressions or references, for example. Overall, to avoid upcoming bias, I tried to reflect on my own position as a young female student and a German national currently living in Canada as much as possible in any step of the research process and especially, while conducting the interviews and analysing the data. By these means, as well as by thoroughly outlining and explaining the structure of my research design and the development of my research project, I tried to avoid upcoming bias as well as making it possible for the reader to follow the research process.

## **Analysis**

As stated above, the analysis of this paper focuses on how the lived experiences of my interviewees at their places of destination impacted their migration decisions. Specifically, it examines how my interviewees' stays in Canada can be interpreted as mini trajectories and in this regard, focuses on two processes and experiences that many interviewees went through, namely: a) that initial migration intentions are re-negotiated and -evaluated in ongoing processes over time and are impacted by lived experiences at their places of destination as well as life course events, and b) that immigrating to Canada often is a "step-by-step" process.

## ***Year-by-Year Planning***

Many of my interviewees, especially those who did not move to Canada to join their Canadian partners, initially moved with the intention of only staying in Canada for a limited amount of time, e.g., often only for a year or for the duration of their work contracts, because they wanted to gain international experiences and/or because they moved for an internship or an academic position as a post-doc, for example, which is usually limited to a certain time period. Consequently, several of the interviewees highlighted that their migration intentions were temporary when they moved initially. Klaus (36), for example, who went to Canada for an internship said: "Well, the plan was [...] I will return after a year" and later he emphasized: "Well, the intention was never to say: I will spend my life there [= Canada]." Likewise, Hannes (36), who went to Canada for his post-doc, emphasized: "In the beginning, my original plan was to go there [= Canada] for a year and then immediately to return afterwards." These examples reflect those of others who initially had planned to stay in Canada for a limited amount of time only.

Others highlighted that they moved to Canada on what could be described as a "trial-and-error" basis. They went over with an open mind, the idea of seeing how things would develop

once they were over there and the knowledge that they could always return to Germany in case things did not work out the way they were hoping for. Marlene (38), for example, emphasized that while she transferred from Germany to Canada within the framework of her company and initially only had a three-year work permit, she did not go over on an assignment that was limited to a certain amount of time. Instead, she received a permanent position, and, thus, it was up to her to decide whether she wanted to stay in Canada longer than those three years or return to Germany. In contrast to that, Henning (34), who had also received a job offer from Canada and decided to move to Canada together with his wife (back then girlfriend) stated that it was an easy decision for them to take because they never had the intentions of emigrating to Canada permanently. Rather, they planned to just go over and see how things would work out for them and return after a year, or, in case they faced problems, earlier than that. The fact that they initially went over on a work and travel visa also made it easier for them to just go for a year or a few months as this visa required relatively little investment and was not binding them to anything. Likewise, Annika (31) who moved to (name of city in Canada) to be together with her partner told me:

And I always told myself that if I am not happy then I can simply return. It's not as if I can't reverse this [= the move to Canada]. Well, I thought, I will simply do it and it'll be a good experience and in the worst-case scenario, I speak French and return to Germany. [...] Well, really, in my head it was like 'Okay, I will try it now and then we'll see, maybe I will return in two years'.

Many other interviewees likewise stated that they had a “plan B in their pockets” and that they would be able to easily return to Germany in case things did not work out or they changed their minds. This was also the case for those who had plans of staying in Canada long term. As such, Hanna (41) who moved to Canada with her husband and two children because they had fallen in love with the country during previous trips also stated that while they were planning to settle in Canada long term, they knew from the beginning that they would always have the security of being able to return to Germany as the working contract of Hanna's husband in Germany allowed him to work for another company for the duration of eight years during which he would have the possibility to return to his German employer and start working there again. Likewise, Hanna, who was a public servant in Germany, would be able to start working in her old profession should they have to return. Others such as Florian (27) who moved to Canada to be together with his wife (back then girlfriend) highlighted that while he intended to stay there long term, he would always have the possibility to return to anywhere in Europe if things would change because of his German passport.

Irrespective of what my interviewees' initial intentions for immigration to Canada were – temporary, permanent, or open to either option – often they re-evaluated and -negotiated these intentions over time on a year-by-year basis. This process of re-evaluating and -negotiating was impacted by their lived experiences in their places of destination in Canada as well as by life-course events and either resulted in the interviewees deciding to prolong their stay in Canada beyond the initially intended time period, or, in the case of some who had planned to stay for a longer time period or long-term, the decision to return to Germany or move to other places. The decision to prolong their stays at their places of destination in Canada was often caused by the perception that my interviewees had only just arrived fully at their places of destination (i.e., understood how things work in Canada/at their places of destination, established their social networks and close friendships, started to feel comfortable and at home, etc.) at the time that they had initially planned to return and/or that things were going well for them, they were feeling at home and enjoying life, and, therefore felt that it did not make sense to give up everything they had achieved in their places of destination by returning to Germany.



This is captured particularly well by Lea (36) who had moved to Canada together with her boyfriend at the time (now ex-boyfriend) on a one-year work and travel visa and emphasized these factors when she told me:

But essentially, I really liked my job, the apartment that we had was somehow really nice, it was big. Then with Wuffy, that's our dog, it was also kind of great and back then we simply felt, I really felt very comfortable in my life there. [...] And then I didn't wanna go back. Well, the first year somehow passed by really quickly and then we'd only kind of furnished the apartment after a year. I kind of started to get the feeling 'Okay, now I know where everything is kind of, or at least the most important things.' And then I thought 'To return now feels totally bananas because essentially you have put a lot into this, and, somehow, if you now give all of this up again that does kind of not make sense.' And then, exactly, we simply stayed on.

For others it was a combination of factors that ranged from their relationship to their places of living/housing arrangements or their age and family status that made them decide to prolong their stays in Canada and/or stay there long term. Marlene (38), for example, initially moved to a major city in Canada where she lived and worked for three years. During that time, she met her Canadian boyfriend who was living in a different part of the country. She eventually decided to join him in (name of city in Canada) and to move in with him. When reflecting on her plans for the future, she told me:

Yes, it's kind of strange, but I think, I am simply ready to put down roots. I think, it's just time for me. Well, I am 38 years and I have the feeling that becoming a bit more settled would be quite nice. And I really love, I love this house [= her boyfriend's house] and my boyfriend and this place here is, well, it is in the mountains [...] and it is a bit like (name of place of birth in Germany). Well, the landscape is similar.

This quote draws the attention to the impact of relationships and families as well as my interviewees' stages in their life courses as well as significant events in their life course which also impacted the re-evaluation and -negotiation processes of their initial immigration intentions. For example, especially those who had children and were in a relationship with a Canadian, highlighted the importance of giving their children a sense of stability and security by staying in the same environment during their children's formative years. In other cases, important life course events, such as a particularly negative experience, the birth of a child or losing one's employment also significantly impacted decisions of staying or leaving. The example of Vanessa (45) underlines the importance of life course events for the re-evaluation and -negotiation of migration decisions and how these processes can take place over a long period of time. Vanessa, who was married to a Canadian, told me that after her children were born, she started to regret having moved to Canada. Not only was she missing the support from her family, e.g., not having anyone close by who could come to babysit or help with things, but she was also sad because she could not expose her children to more of a German environment culturally speaking. She told me that until one year before the interview she always wanted to return to Germany and investigated different options of moving back, such as applying for positions there, because as she said:

I never really, yes essentially, I did not, suddenly I did not feel at home [in Canada] any longer. Or rather in between two chairs, you know? Always like: 'Okay, I do like it here, but I miss my family, I miss my culture, the language and I, the weather'.

As a result of these feelings, she took her family to Germany as often as possible. Being a professor at a university meant that she had the possibility to spend longer periods of time in

Germany with her family during her sabbaticals. Vanessa highlighted that for her it was a long process of negotiating back and forth with herself about what she really wanted and where she wanted to live. In fact, for her it was a process that took sixteen years as it was only after her last sabbatical in Germany in 2015/16 during which she and her children made some negative experiences that she reached a turning point in this process of re-evaluating and -negotiating her options of staying or leaving. She explained this decision by reflecting on the negative experiences – rants by Germans against foreigners, one of her sons being called the N-word because he had a slightly darker skin tone among other reasons – which made her realize that her “children are not at home in Germany” and that they as a family “are not welcome in Germany right now due to the political circumstances”. As a result of these very significant events in her and her children’s life, Vanessa finally decided that Canada was the better place for her and her family to live which helped her to accept it fully as her home. Likewise, Linda (47) who at the point of the interview had lived in (name of city in Canada) for fourteen years, emphasized how an important life course event can impact a re-evaluation and -negotiation process. In her case, this process of reconsidering whether to stay or leave was started because she lost her job in the year before the interview:

[...] there was a time where I said: ‘I could absolutely not imagine, especially with the children, to return, or to move back to Germany’. In the meantime, I feel a bit more neutral about this, among others because I do not have a permanent position here any longer. [...] and realizing that social benefits don’t work the same way as in Germany makes it [= to return to Germany] at once pretty attractive again.

While Linda ended up staying in Canada for her children’s sake, this example nevertheless shows how unexpected life course events can impact migration decisions and their re-evaluation and -negotiation even if people have lived at a place for a long time. This goes hand in hand with the statement of several of the interviewees who at the time of the interview were relatively settled in Canada and were planning to stay long term but emphasized that they could imagine returning to Germany in case they would no longer be able to guarantee their financial security, their parents in Germany got sick, or their perspective on life in Canada and feeling at ease and comfortable there would change. Anton (36), for example, said that he did not have any plans of moving back to Germany as he and his partner felt very good and comfortable in their life in (name of city in Canada) and he did not want to give up everything he preferred about his life in Canada. However, he highlighted that if this should ever change, they would reconsider their decision.

### ***Step-by-Step Immigration***

As these examples show, many interviewees did not necessarily have the intention of staying in Canada for a longer period of time and/or went to Canada on a trial-and-error basis initially. However, over time, they re-evaluated and -negotiated their initial intentions and in many cases decided to prolong their stay in Canada. In some cases, these re-evaluations and re-negotiations only resulted in prolonging their stays by one or two years in addition to their initially planned time in Canada, whereas others prolonged their stays multiple times throughout their stays and/or decided that they wanted to stay in Canada permanently. This process of only slowly and over time making the decision to stay another year, years or permanently is also reflected in the visa and legal status trajectories of the interviewees. In fact, only a minority of my interviewees moved to Canada with the status of permanent resident. The majority came to Canada on temporary visas, such as visitor visas, work and travel visas, study permits, or temporary work permits and only over time either prolonged these visas/permits, transformed their status to a more permanent one or were intending to do so. Anne (33), for example, who moved to Canada in January 2010

to conduct her PhD, arrived on a three-year study permit. Realizing that it would take her longer than those three years to complete the PhD, she was able to prolong the study permit for another three years which gave her enough time to successfully defend her PhD thesis. After having finished her PhD studies she decided to stay in Canada and applied for a post-doctoral position. At this point she had the possibility to apply for a post-graduate work permit in the province that she had completed her PhD studies. This meant that she was able to obtain a three-year open work permit which allowed her to work as a post-doctoral fellow. When I interviewed Anne, she mentioned that she would not be able to extent this work permit but that the next step for her would be to apply for permanent residency which she was aiming to do in the next month. She explained:

Yes, well I aim to do that [= apply for PR status] next month. Well, that involves different steps to do so and all in all it also costs about 2,000 dollars. And because of that, after my PhD I wasn't sure if I wanted to stay or not. And I thought: 'Okay, I can get the work permit in any case after, then I can still think about whether I want to have residency or not.'

Others, such as Charlotte (31) or Hilda (25) had also arrived in Canada on a study permit and were able to either prolong this permit as in the case of Hilda, or eventually to apply for permanent residency as was the case for Charlotte who was sponsored by her wife.

Several interviewees arrived on temporary work permits which they were either able to extent or to transform into a more permanent status if that was wished. Hannes (34) and Carolina (33) who both moved to Canada on a one-year work permit for a post-doctoral position. Both were able to extent their permits for another year as they decided to prolong their stay before returning to Germany. Others, such as Paul (43) or Marlene (38), who initially moved to Canada on a closed work permit which was sponsored by their respective employers, both applied for their PR status as soon as that was possible. While Paul made use of the PNP in the province where he was living, Marlene did not specify through which program she applied. Frida (39) and her husband Tobias (45) first arrived on a three-year work permit which they were able to extent one time for another two years. After that, they decided to apply for permanent residency to be able to stay in Canada beyond five years. For them, this was a long elaborate process. Living in the province of Quebec, they first had to apply for the *Certificat de sélection du Québec* which required Frida as the main applicant, among other things to prove her French language skills by taking a language test.

Those of the interviewees who arrived on a tourist visa or a work and travel visa made use of different possibilities to either prolong their visas and/or transform them into more permanent ones. Klaus (36), for example, who arrived on a one-year work and travel visa for an internship, was able to extent his stay because his employer offered him a job as well as to sponsor him for a two-year closed work permit. Others, who made use of a tourist or work and travel visa to join their Canadian partners, often made use of the option of family sponsorship to transform their status into a more permanent one. Emma's (34) case exemplifies this. She moved to Canada to join her Canadian boyfriend and told me that when she first arrived in January 2015, she held a visitor visa. While she obtained a work and travel visa in June of that same year, she chose to first prolong her visitor visa and only activated the work and travel visa in February 2016. Emma explained that she did so to have some time to look for employment and, thus, not lose that time on the one-year work-and travel visa. She and her boyfriend got married in the summer of 2016 and subsequently applied for her PR status through spousal sponsorship. At the same time as they submitted the application for her PR status, she also applied for an extension of her work permit and was granted a two-year open work permit to bridge the time until her PR application was processed. At the point of the interview, Emma was still waiting to hear back about her PR application and highlighted that it was a long and tedious process. However, not everyone who moved to Canada to join their Canadian partners made use of the family sponsorship. Annika (31)

and Benjamin (37), for example, both applied for permanent residency on their own through the skilled worker program of Quebec.

Those relatively few of my interviewees who entered Canada with a PR status had predominately been sponsored through the family sponsorship by their Canadian partners and had submitted their application from outside of Canada. This was the case, for example, for Leon (28), Sonja (39), Marie (35) and Jutta (33). Most of these interviewees however, had previously been in Canada for shorter periods of time already. Consequently, they had previously made use of temporary visas or permits such as study permits or work and travel visas, to navigate their relationships. Therefore, their migration experiences can also be classified as a step-by-step process. One exception to this was Hanna (41) and her family who received PR status through the skilled worker program prior to moving to Canada.

This trend of a step-by-step migration process could also be observed among those interviewees who had not yet moved to Canada but were planning to do so in the future. The majority of them were planning to move to Canada on temporary visas or work permits, whereas only two of them Lukas (33) and his husband Emil (37) had plans of making use of the express entry system and apply for permanent residency through the skilled workers program before moving to Canada.

Finally, it is important to highlight that even though almost all interviewees went through a step-by-step immigration process and over time transformed their status from a more temporary to a more permanent one, this did not necessarily mean that they would stay in Canada indefinitely. This is demonstrated by the example of one German couple who arrived in Canada with work and travel visas eventually obtained Canadian citizenship but after several years still decided to return to Germany.

### ***Summary of Findings***

The analysis of the interview data explored how the lived experiences and the place attachments that highly skilled German migrants in Canada formed impacted their future migration decisions with a focus on the choice of prolonging their stays in Canada. Two processes that were closely linked to each other were identified in this regard, namely a) the so called “year-by-year planning” (a term that I am borrowing from Yanasmayan (2015, p. 26)) and b) step-by-step immigration.

Year-by-year planning refers to the process by which my interviewees re-negotiated and -evaluated their initial migration decisions (whether to stay or leave) in ongoing processes, often though not necessarily always on a yearly basis during their stays in Canada. In fact, in many cases, the initial migration intentions of my interviewees were either temporary (i.e., for the duration of a year or two to gain international experience) or on a “trial-and-error” basis (i.e., they moved to Canada with an open mind and the knowledge that they could always return to Germany at any point). Regardless of what their initial migration intentions were (temporary, permanent, or open to either), these intentions were often re-negotiated and -evaluated over time and resulted in prolonging their stays. These decisions were impacted by their lived experiences at their places of destination in Canada as well as by life course events. In many cases, and specifically for those who moved to Canada to gain international experience, decisions to prolong their stays at the end of their initially planned stays were associated with positive lived experiences at and place attachments which they had developed to their places of destination in Canada. Decisions to prolong one’s stay were also impacted by factors such as having bought property, relationship/family status, or the place in one’s life stage. For others, significant life course events such as losing one’s job could start these processes of re-negotiating and re-evaluating migration decisions even after a long period of time and when being perceived as relatively settled at their places of destination. These findings demonstrate and underline the importance of seeing

migration movements as ongoing processes that evolve and change over time and are never necessarily final.

The process of step-by-step immigration is closely connected to the process of year-by-year planning because the practice of continuously re-evaluating and –negotiating initial migration intentions also impacted my interviewees’ visa and legal status trajectories. As a result of the fact that many of them initially moved to Canada with the intention of only staying on a temporary or a trial-and-error basis, the majority of them moved to Canada on temporary visas (e.g., visitor visas, work and travel visas, study or work permits) and only over time either prolonged their statuses or transformed them into more permanent ones. To do so, they, for example, were able to extend their work permits with the help of their employers, made use of different provincial nominee programs to apply for their PR status or drew on the possibility of family sponsorship to obtain their PR status. While some went through this process of step-by-step immigration while they were living in Canada, for others, it involved a process of moving back and forth between Germany (and possible other countries) and Canada on temporary visas or permits several times before they finally obtained their PR status in Canada (often through spousal sponsorship). Overall, this process of step-by-step immigration was the most common way of immigrating to Canada with only few entering (or planning to enter) the country with the status of a permanent resident.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Both of the above listed findings are in line with the results that Yanasmayan (2015) found in her study on highly educated Turkish migrants in three major European cities and their decisions of either extending their stays or returning to their country of origin. Moreover, they do not only underline the ongoing character of migration decision making processes but also how, as a result of this, the boundaries between temporary and permanent migration movements are becoming increasingly blurred, something which research is slowly starting to acknowledge (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014; Gladkova & Mazzucato, 2017; Kordel & Weidinger, 2019; Rashid et al., 2013). This challenges the traditional understanding of migration as being a one-time event that results in the permanent settlement of individuals at their places of destination.

More importantly, however, the above presented findings seem to contradict the understanding of highly skilled migrants as rational actors (or at least as rational actors driven by economic considerations) which is a premise that guides much of the policymaking around the attraction of these migrants. This results in a dissonance between policy intentions and the actual behaviour of migrants. Specifically, as outlined in the introduction of this paper, many of the policies aimed at attracting highly skilled migrants assume that as long as these migrants are offered the right incentives countries will be able to attract and retain them (Banaś, 2018; Beaverstock & Hall, 2012; N. Cohen & Kranz, 2015; Florida, 2002, 2005, 2006; Mosneaga & Winther, 2013; Shachar & Hirschl, 2013; Zweig, 2006). However, the findings of this paper showed that such considerations did not seem to play a major role in the migration processes of highly skilled German migrants as they did not move to improve their economic standing and did not mention migration policies or certain incentives offered by either country as a factor impacting their migration decisions. Moreover, many of them only had the intentions of moving to Canada on a temporary basis or without a specific timeframe in mind, while knowing that they could always return to Germany. For most, their migration processes were more an accidental result of their life courses which evolved and changed over time rather than something that had been planned in all its entirety for a long time.

Consequently, with few exceptions, their migration trajectories to and from Canada were not straightforward but rather reflected a pattern of step-by-step immigration, i.e., they moved to Canada with a temporary visa or work permit and only over time and if they were happy with the

experience they made, they either prolonged their stays by extending their visa or work permits or transferred them to more permanent statuses and, in some cases, even obtained citizenship. While these migrants obviously did not act outside of migration regimes, as they were still dependent on the visa and permit options that Canada offers, it seems as if they were able to leverage from the options available. Specifically, as highlighted above, most initially either had the intentions of staying only on a temporary basis or were not sure how long they wanted to stay in Canada. Thus, drawing on temporary modes of entry and only transferring them to more permanent statuses over time seemed to be perceived as an advantage for most rather than a disadvantage. This is because it gave them the possibility to simply try out life in Canada and see how things were going rather than having to go through the lengthy process of applying for permanent residency when they did not necessarily have intentions of staying there long-term when they first moved.

Seeing these positive aspects of step-by-step immigration is in contrast to much of the literature on two-step migration which examines this process critically because it can result in worker exploitation as migrants might be restricted to work for one employer only on whom they are then dependent to obtain the work experience needed to apply for PR status or being sponsored by them. This might result in these migrants accepting low salaries, long working hours or other precarious working conditions even if they are (highly) skilled (Bélanger et al., 2019; Crossman et al., 2020; González, 2020; Lowell & Avato, 2014). In Canada, their situation is made further precarious by the fact that they are “ineligible for federally funded settlement services” (Gates-Gasse, 2010) and that they do not have access to public health care (Bélanger et al., 2019). This is particularly critical as countries, including Canada, increasingly draw on this process of two-step migration as a pathway for highly skilled migrants to obtain PR and a perspective to stay in the country permanently (Gates-Gasse, 2010; Nakache & Dixon-Perera, 2015). While I am not arguing against these findings, it is noteworthy to highlight that in contrast of using two-step migration as a conscious strategy from the beginning to obtain PR status in Canada, for most of the highly skilled German migrants who I interviewed drawing on this process rather reflected/matched the change to their migration intentions which often only evolved over time. This might explain the rather positive outlook that most interviewees had regarding their legal status trajectories. This positive outlook may further have been supported by their relatively privileged position compared to other groups of less privileged highly skilled migrants who make use of the two-step immigration process. Not only did the German migrants by choice in this study indicate that they perceived that they were welcomed and seen as respected members of society irrespective of their actual immigration status<sup>6</sup> but also many of them stated that if things did not work out for them, they could simply return to Germany where most of them still had some sort of social and economic stability system. This puts them in a privileged position where they have relative freedom to decide what to do next without having to be too worried about any major economic or social impacts of their decisions.

These observations are in line with recent research that highlight that preferential treatment is not only related to migrants’ skill level but is also linked to migrants’ “country label”, i.e., the country they originate from and the “set of beliefs about a country’s cultural, social and economic characteristics that defines its passport holders in the eyes of the host community (Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2019, p. 172). As a result of this, being white, highly skilled, belonging to the middle class, and originating from a Western European country is often associated with being the “ideal immigrant”. In fact, immigrants from Western countries are often thought to easily integrate because they supposedly can effortlessly find employment and their

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to say though that the German migrants by choice who I interviewed did not experience any challenges at all as in fact many of them went through a phase of initial adjustment during which they had to learn new social and cultural norms, bureaucratic processes, and in some cases had difficulties forming social networks and finding friends, as well as experienced de-skilling or difficulties finding employment.

assumed high level of education as well as their “socio-economic background [...] is seen to warrant (sufficient) cultural proximity particularly in terms of having ‘modern’ views”, i.e., sharing the same values and norms as their receiving societies (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2018, p. 895). In contrast to that, “non-Western”<sup>7</sup> immigrants are often assumed to be poor and lacking “skills and education” (irrespective of their actual level of education) which then is also associated with adhering to “traditional norms” and supposedly puts them at a further “cultural distance” to their host societies (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2018, p. 895). Ultimately, this means that “non-Western” immigrants are “assumed to be unfit for ‘integration’ in terms of education and skills as well as norms and values” (Bonjour & Chauvin, 2018, p. 7). Thus, not only the context in which “Western” and “non-Western” immigrants migrate differs, but also the climate of reception that they face in their countries of destination is vastly dissimilar. While the former are seen as “desired”, “welcomed” and their presence is not questioned, the latter are often confronted with xenophobia, racism and they have to prove their “worth” of residing in their host countries by demonstrating their extraordinary integration outcomes and, ideally, even surpassing the host country’s expectations toward them. As such, the former are disproportionately privileged compared to the latter and their overall migration, integration and settlement experience need to be examined and understood as such.

Based on these observations, it thus seems as if migrants by choice go “with the flow” so to speak or rather have the privilege to go “with the flow”. They take the opportunities that come their way or try to find opportunities for themselves to get what they want. This is also reflected in the behaviour of those who received their PR status or even took up Canadian citizenship which did not necessarily mean that these individuals planned on staying in Canada indefinitely and wanted to put down their roots there (though some did). In fact, several of the German migrants that I interviewed and who returned to Germany or moved elsewhere were holding either a PR status in Canada or even citizenship when they returned to Germany or moved onwards to another country. Some highlighted that having obtained Canadian citizenship meant that they would have the option of returning to Canada in case they were not satisfied upon returning to Germany, a phenomenon that White (2014a, 2014b) refers to as “double return” and that others have also identified among East European migrants moving to and from the UK (Parutis, 2014).

This raises questions about the loyalty of these migrants to the countries to which they move. Taking up PR status and/or Canadian citizenship can thus not necessarily – or at least not only – be seen as a commitment to their host country but also needs to be interpreted as a strategy to have all options at their disposal. This seems to be in line both with the findings of the aforementioned ongoing research by Bélanger, Lefèvre and Fleury as well as with the idea of strategic citizenship which Winter, Madularea and Sauvageau (2016) explored. In fact, they found that while the term citizens of convenience – a term that refers to “[p]eople who get Canadian citizenship but lack [a] ‘genuine connection’ with [the] country” – is usually associated with “naturalized citizen[s], mostly non-white, non-Western and Muslim/Arab”, it was in fact, those typically “the least associated with this kind of behaviour”, i.e., “immigrants from Western Europe and the US” that made use of Canadian citizenship in this way (Winter et al., 2016). For these migrants, obtaining Canadian citizenship was mainly seen as something that was convenient to them as it made their life easier, e.g., in terms of traveling and entering/exiting the country as well as it provided them with more opportunities to flexibly decide if they wanted to stay in Canada or potentially return to Europe/the US temporarily or on a longer basis (Winter et al., 2016).

To conclude, highly skilled German migrants, while obviously being dependent on the migration regimes in which they move, also seem to be players of the game. As such, they seem to have the resources to successfully navigate through these systems and find the options that

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<sup>7</sup> “Non-Western” is here to be understood as individuals who either originate from countries outside of the so-called global North or, while holding citizenship of a country belonging to the “global North”, differ from the majority societies of these countries in terms of their skin colour, ethnicity or religious beliefs.

best work for them and their migration processes which typically blur the lines between temporary and permanent migration.



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