

University of Sussex
Sussex Centre for Migration Research

The Lure of London: A Comparative Study of Recent Graduate Migration from Germany, Italy and Latvia

Working Paper No. 75

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July 2014



Abstract

This paper is explicitly comparative and examines the motivations and characteristics of the recent migration to the UK of three highly educated young-adult national groups – from Germany, Italy and Latvia. The research on which the paper is based draws on four doctoral theses which have focused, wholly or in part, on the emigration of graduates to the UK, mainly the London area. Theoretically the paper links to core-periphery dynamics within Europe and to the trope of ‘crisis’ – economic, structural and personal – to help to explain the many reasons why young graduates from these three countries migrate to the UK. Each of the three nationalities represents a different regional economic and geopolitical positioning within Europe. German graduates are moving from one economically powerful European core country to another, traversing shallow economic and cultural boundaries. Italian graduates migrate from a relatively peripheral Southern European country where, especially in Southern Italy, the employment and career prospects for young educated people have long been difficult and have become more so with the recent crisis. They find opportunities in the economically and culturally dynamic London region which are unavailable to them in Italy. Latvian graduates depart from a different European periphery, the Eastern one, post-socialist and post-Soviet; like the Italians, economic motives largely dictate their moves whereas, for the Germans, migration is more related to lifestyle, life-stage, and the wish to experience living in a large, multicultural and cosmopolitan city. Based on 125 in-depth interviews, the paper teases out the main narrative differences and similarities between the three groups.

Keywords

London, Germany, Italy, Latvia, graduate migrants, crisis

Introduction

In a recent report published by the Institute for Public Policy Research, Glennie and Pennington (2014) made the point that one of the European Union’s most significant achievements was granting every EU citizen the right to move around the EU for work, study or lifestyle reasons. They went on to argue that, over the past four decades, free mobility has improved the efficiency of European and national labour markets, created opportunities for educational and cultural exchange, and allowed people to permanently or temporarily relocate to another EU country for employment and career advancement, for family reasons or for retirement (2014: 2). The IPPR report expresses concern that recent opinion surveys in the UK show that a majority of voters want Prime Minister David Cameron to seek to end the right of free movement as part of his proposed renegotiation of the UK’s relationship with the EU. Whilst these opinion polls should, given the nature of democratic society, be treated with the respect they deserve, such collective views are undoubtedly influenced by anti-immigration rhetoric coming from certain politicians and the media, and fail to fully understand the economic forces underpinning most migration flows and decisions. In this respect, it was salutary to witness, at the beginning of 2014, the failure of the alleged ‘flood’ of Romanians and Bulgarians into the UK to materialise, negating the predictions of the

right-wing press that tens or even hundreds of thousands would arrive when the transitional restrictions on the free movement of citizens from these two 2007 accession countries ended on 1 January 2014.

The debate over new arrivals provides a part of the context behind the study presented in this paper, which looks comparatively at the migration motivations and experiences of three highly educated young-adult groups within the London area. Other contextual framings include the increasing tendency for educated young adults to be geographically mobile within Europe for a variety of reasons; the attraction of the UK, and especially the London and South-East regions, in this evolving mobility dynamic; and the way in which these intra-EU migrations are driven both by political events such as EU enlargement, and by economic trends such as boom and crisis. We pay particular attention to the way in which the post-2008 economic crisis has led to enhanced migratory movements from the weaker peripheral countries of the EU to the ‘core’ region of London and its surrounds. Based on interview narratives collected from 125 participants between the end of 2008 and August 2013, we compare how the German, Italian and Latvian interviewees articulate their motivations and experiences differently between these three national groups, one from another part of the ‘core’ of Europe, one from the southern periphery and the third from the eastern periphery. In mobilising the ‘crisis’ trope as another contextual framing device for this comparative study, we find different articulations of this notion between the three groups under investigation. The Germans simply do not use this term when describing their migration to and experiences in the UK. For the Italians, it is less about the recent economic crisis and more to do with a profound structural crisis of graduate unemployment in Italy and the challenges of accessing a hierarchical and tightly controlled professional labour market. Finally for the Latvians, moving from a small Eastern EU peripheral country, the reaction is both to the crisis of the post-Soviet transition and to the economic crisis of 2008-9, which hit this country hard.

Recent intra-European migration: background data

Intra-EU migration has been rising in recent years, although the overall scale of the movement in relation to total population remains modest. Data from Ernst and Young (2014), Eurostat and the UK Office of National Statistics (ONS) evidence the following trends (summarised by Glennie and Pennington 2014: 19). The number of EU citizens recorded as living in another member state rose from 10.2 million in 2007 to 13.4 million in 2012. This latter figure, however, represents just 2.7 per cent of total EU population. In the UK, the proportion is somewhat higher – 3.8 per cent, or 2.4 million people. In fact the UK’s position in the geography of recent intra-EU flows has changed substantially in two stages: since the 2004 enlargement, and again since the 2008 recession. Before 2004, the number of EU nationals entering the UK (excluding returning British nationals) roughly balanced the number of British citizens moving elsewhere within the EU. After 2004, when Britain opened its labour market to instant access for A8 migrants (from the ‘new’ member states), this balance shifted rapidly to large-scale net immigration, of a scale that had not been anticipated. Annual net migration from the A8 countries peaked at 80,000 in 2007 but then dropped to less than half that level after the onset of the financial crisis. Since 2004 Poles have

contributed the majority of A8 entrants, but Latvians and Lithuanians have also been important when controlled for population size of the home country. However, more recently, ONS data show that net migration from the EU to the UK doubled between the year ending in September 2012 (65,000) and that ending in September 2013 (131,000). This time the increase was driven by growth in work-related migration from the ‘old’ EU countries, especially those on the southern periphery – Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece – where job opportunities, especially for new graduates, have shrunk and unemployment has risen. Whilst from a neoclassical economic perspective such international labour flows might be seen as a contribution to aggregate welfare and to the equilibration of spatially uneven work opportunities, some flows became extremely unbalanced. In its 2012 report on European population and migration, *The Guardian* found that, whilst there were around 550,000 Poles living in the UK, there were just 764 Britons in Poland.¹ And concerns were expressed at the scale of emigration of Bulgarian doctors, running at 500-600 per year, equivalent to almost the entire annual graduation of doctors from Bulgarian medical schools (Petkova 2014).

Table 1: Unemployment rates in selected EU countries, 2007-08 and 2012-13

	total unemployment (%)		youth unemployment (%)	
	2007-08	2012-13	2007-08	2012-13
<i>Core countries</i>				
UK	5.4	7.5	14.6	20.5
Germany	8.1	5.3	11.2	7.8
Netherlands	3.3	6.1	5.6	10.4
Sweden	6.1	8.0	19.7	23.1
<i>Southern periphery</i>				
Portugal	8.7	15.7	16.5	37.0
Spain	9.8	25.4	21.9	53.7
Italy	6.4	11.7	20.8	38.0
Greece	8.0	25.8	22.5	56.8
Cyprus	3.8	14.7	9.6	34.3
<i>Western periphery</i>				
Ireland	5.5	13.4	10.8	27.5
<i>Eastern periphery</i>				
Estonia	5.0	10.2*	11.0	20.9*
Latvia	7.2	14.9*	11.9	28.4*
Lithuania	4.5	12.4	10.8	24.1
Poland	8.3	10.1	19.5	27.0
Slovakia	10.4	13.9	19.6	33.3

*figure refers to 2012 only

Source: Eurostat, October 2013

¹ See ‘Europe: where do people live?’ *The Guardian*, 26 January 2012.

Economic factors – in particular the spatially uneven impact of the financial crisis across Europe – have undoubtedly been the driving-force behind recent migration in the UK. The crisis has had its most severe effect in the weaker peripheral countries of the EU, especially those on the southern periphery. Table 1 displays the profile of overall and youth unemployment rates across selected countries of the EU ‘core’ and its three main peripheries – southern, western and eastern – before and after the crisis. The figures taken are the averages of the two years immediately preceding the crisis (2007-08), and for the most recent two years (2012-13). The core-periphery contrast is very clear. In the core countries total unemployment remained relatively stable and low across the crisis; for Germany it actually decreased. Youth unemployment in the core exhibits somewhat higher figures, especially for the UK and Sweden; again Germany registers a decline. For all the peripheral countries, both sets of figures are higher, as is the proportionate increase between the two periods. For total unemployment, most countries show an approximate doubling of their rates, and in the case of a few countries (Spain, Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania), the rate more or less triples. For youth unemployment the rates are roughly double those of overall unemployment, and once again we observe a doubling of the rate between 2007-08 and 2012-13 in many countries, with very high rates posted by the southern EU countries and Latvia for the latter date.

Two further comments on what is left out of Table 1. First, there are some countries which do not fit the unemployment profile of the periphery. The Czech Republic and Malta, for example, seem unaffected by the crisis, particularly as regards overall unemployment rates, which have remained relatively stable at around 5-7 per cent. Second, the peak of unemployment was reached before 2012-13 in some countries. Thus, for example, Latvia’s total unemployment peaked at 19.8 per cent in 2010, whilst youth unemployment was highest, 33.6 per cent, in 2009.

The pressure of unemployment, especially on young adults, in the various peripheral EU countries, is reflected in National Insurance Number (NINo) registrations published online by the UK Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Poles remain resolutely at the top of the list (91,400 in 2013), followed by nationals from Spain (45,500) and Italy (32,800). Lower down the list come NINo registrations from smaller countries – Lithuania (27,300), Portugal (24,600), Ireland (15,500), Latvia (13,600), Slovakia (11,500) and Greece (8,700). By contrast Germany, the largest EU country, has fewer than 11,000. Although NINo statistics are only a crude proxy for migration flows, the comparative scale of the figures presented above is a useful indicator of the presence of different migrant groups on the labour market of the UK.

These trends have been picked up by the UK media. Whilst the tabloids and UKIP leader Nigel Farage rant about Romanians and Bulgarians, with a tendency to vilify the Roma from these countries, most responsible media attention focuses on the recent influx from Southern Europe. In the words of two recent (late-2013) articles in *The Economist*,

British politicians and the press fret about Romanians and Bulgarians... but a far bigger migration is under way from other member states of the European Union. Since 2010 the number of national-insurance numbers issued to southern and western

Europeans has shot up... For the past year more 'old' Europeans than 'new' Europeans have worked in Britain... Yet these new migrants are attracting little hostility.²

A new generation is on the move in Europe, migrating from the fringes of the continent in search of work. The Polish plumber ventured out when his country joined the European Union in 2004, followed a few years later by the Romanian fruit picker. Now it is the Irish graduate, the Spanish engineer and the Italian architect who are packing their bags. For the people of Eastern Europe, migration is a way of catching up with western incomes; for those from the crisis-hit southern and Celtic periphery, it is a means of escaping mass unemployment.³

It seems to be almost a matter of luck whether these new migrants get jobs commensurate with their qualifications and aspirations. Much depends on their English language fluency and the extent to which their qualifications – university degrees and other professional accreditation – are recognised and in demand in the UK. Certainly, as our interview evidence presented later in the paper shows, some came with jobs in hand, or quickly found them, in prestige sectors of the economy such as finance, marketing or academia. Others, and especially the more desperate recent arrivals whose job prospects back home are particularly bleak, are less lucky. They are constrained to take low-status jobs, notably in the hospitality and catering industry, which they either get stuck in, or use as a step towards something more stable, satisfying and remunerative.

Recent migration as an expression of core-periphery dynamics

The discussion above, and in the media, makes frequent reference to the 'periphery' of Europe as being most severely affected by the economic crisis, and thus by the 'new' emigration of highly qualified younger workers. This leads us resurrect the core-periphery model of spatially uneven development as a structuring device to help to explain how these flows come about. This model, also sometimes referred to as 'centre-periphery', derives from the Latin American dependency school of the late 1960s which emerged as a counter-thesis to the modernisation or stages-of-growth theory which dominated much of the thinking about the development process in the early postwar decades. Whereas the Rostowian stages-of-growth thesis assumed or predicted that the less-developed countries of the world would or should move along the same development path as that mapped out by the more-developed countries (modernisation via industrialisation etc.), the dependency school argued that underdevelopment was a more-or-less permanent structural condition imposed on the 'third world' by the exploitative nature of the development process in the rich world. André Gunder Frank's powerful notion of 'the development of underdevelopment' operated through the core countries of the world's economy (North America, North-West Europe etc.) feeding off the resources (including migrant labour) drawn from the periphery, maintaining the latter in a state of dependency (Frank 1969; cf. Rostow 1960).

² See the article 'PIGS can fly', *The Economist*, 16 November 2013.

³ 'They are coming', *The Economist*, 21 September 2013.

Early articulations of the dependency school made little reference to core-periphery structures within Europe, but this was rectified by a group of researchers at the University of Sussex's Institute of Development Studies. In their book *Underdeveloped Europe: Studies in Core-Periphery Relations*, Seers, Schaffer and Kiljunen (1979) looked at development processes in Europe through the lens of the core-periphery framework and analysed the various lines of dependency connecting what they called the 'secondary European economies' with the major European industrial powers. Such lines of dependency included trade, foreign investment, transnational corporations, tourism, and of course migrant labour. Case-studies were made of Portugal, Spain, Southern Italy, Greece, Ireland and Finland – a roll-call of the main countries of large-scale emigration to North-West Europe during the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. Actually, Seers et al. (1979) stopped some way short of a thorough analysis and mapping of the periphery-to-core migration flows; for that one had to turn to the work of geographers such as Salt and Clout (1976) and King (1993). Geographers' flow-maps demonstrated the crystal-clear pattern of periphery-to-core links which, all around the continent of Europe, exhibited an elegant symmetry with the exception of the eastern quadrant, still blocked by the Iron Curtain, a brutally effective barrier to westward migration. Thus, France recruited its migrant workers from south-west Europe – Spain, Portugal and Italy, plus the Maghreb states; Germany also drew on Italian labour plus the south-east European countries – Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey; Britain's main European labour supplier at this time was its western neighbour Ireland; whilst to the north Sweden drew large segments of its migrant labour from nearby Finland. Recent migration flows, since the mid-2000s, represent a reactivation of these same intra-European flows 40-50 years later (with the exception of Finland, which has made the most complete transition from a relatively poor rural country to an advanced post-industrial economy with high welfare). In the interim, other phases of migration have waxed and waned. Our simple chronological summary of the evolution of European migration flows, governed by spatial economic inequality, economic cycles, successive EU enlargements, and migration control policies, runs as follows:

- mass-scale periphery-to-core flows during the long postwar boom of reconstruction and industrial development, lasting from the early 1950s to the early-mid 1970s;
- return migration flows from the mid-1970s to the end of the 1980s, in the wake of the oil crisis, the 'recruitment stop' on future labour migration imposed by the industrialised countries, and return-incentive schemes;
- southern enlargement of the EU in the 1980s leading to the start of mass immigration into Greece, Spain and Portugal, as well as to Italy where immigration flows had started slightly earlier;
- fall of the Iron Curtain, creating new East-West migration flows, mainly of an irregular nature (eg. Albanian migration to Greece and Italy), in the 1990s;
- eastern enlargement in the 2000s, spawning new and enhanced migration flows from East to West (notably Poles to the UK) and also from East to South (eg. Romanians to Italy and Spain);
- economic crisis in the late 2000s, leading to the 'return of emigration' from the peripheral countries, notably the southern periphery and Ireland (but this time of more qualified

workers); the recession also impacts the evolution of newer flows from the A8 and A2 countries.⁴

In terms of today's Europe and recent migration flows, we envisage a hierarchy of centres/cores and peripheries, layered as follows:

- a centre made up of the North-West European core countries of strong economic power and high levels of income, welfare and prosperity (Germany, the UK, France, the Benelux countries, the Nordic countries, Switzerland and Austria) – these are mainly immigration countries;
- an EU periphery made up of several geographical subcomponents: southern (Spain, Portugal, Southern Italy, Greece, Cyprus), western (Ireland), and eastern (A8 and A2 countries) – these are countries which are now involved both in immigration and emigration flows;
- a European outer periphery (or 'super-periphery'; Bartlett and Prica 2013) made up of the Western Balkan states (Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania) and other outer East European states (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus) – these are mainly emigration countries.

In the remainder of this paper we compare UK-bound graduate migration from three countries, each with a different structural and geographical position within the European core-periphery framework:

- Germany, an example of young-adult migration from one core country to another;
- Italy, typical of recent graduate emigration from the EU's southern periphery;
- Latvia, a small peripheral country of the former eastern-bloc A8 states.

Sources and methods for the comparative analysis

The three comparative case-studies that form the empirical content of our paper come from four doctoral theses supervised by the first-named author: one on young Germans in London (Mueller 2013), two theses on young Italians in London and the surrounding region (Conti 2012; Scotto 2012), and one on young Latvians in London (Lulle 2014). All studies involved interviewing research participants who were mostly aged in their 20s or 30s, resulting in a combined total of 125 in-depth interview narratives. With a few exceptions where extensive interview notes were taken, all interviews were recorded, translated and transcribed. In all cases, appropriate ethical procedures were followed: informed consent, permission to be recorded, right to withdraw, right to review the transcript etc. Names are pseudonyms.

As independent studies in their own right, each thesis was an individual, self-contained research project, but since all of the studies involved in-depth interviews with young-adult graduate migrants in the London region, we feel there are ample grounds for fruitful comparison. This is all the more so because each study asked a similar range of questions about home and home-country background, the reasons for and circumstances of

⁴ A8: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia. A2: Bulgaria and Romania.

migration, and the work and other experiences of living in the core region of the UK. The samples drawn on for this paper are not particularly evenly matched in terms of numbers (39 Germans, 68 Italians and 18 Latvians) but we believe that they are sufficient to generate useful, if not conclusive, comparative data based on the thematic analysis of the narratives.⁵ There is an approximate gender balance across all three groups, with a slight majority of females for the German and Latvian samples, and a slight majority of males for the Italians. Further methodological details and the conceptual framings relevant to each study will be introduced as necessary under each of the three case-studies, starting with the German one.

Germans in London: crisis – what crisis?

The German case-study is the only one where the thesis from which it is drawn (Mueller 2013) was focused wholly on the subject-group of this paper, namely young-adult graduate migrants in London. The study was based on 39 in-depth interviews with Germans aged 24-40 who had recently moved to the UK, plus a variety of other ethnographic encounters engaged in by Mueller: working behind the bar in a ‘German pub’, attending church services and other events at the German Protestant Church in West London, going on countryside hikes with German walking groups, attending ‘after-work drinks’ sessions, and other general socialising with the group under study. This combination of a formal sample of in-depth interviews with an ethnography conducted within a range of ‘German spaces’ in and around London yielded rich and detailed narrative, observational and experiential data (for further details on methodology see Mueller 2013: 9-21).

Despite the vicissitudes of two world wars, Germans are a long-standing and quite large-scale presence in the UK, yet estimates of their size as a ‘community’ range widely. Mueller’s ‘best estimate’ is somewhere in excess of 100,000 (2013: 67-68), but not as many as the 250,000 German-born enumerated in the census, which would include the large number of British nationals born in Germany, mainly amongst the armed services personnel.

Middling transnationalism

In terms of a typology of migrants, Germans in London can be regarded as ‘middling transnationalists’ (Conradson and Latham 2005a): a group of migrants described by Favell et al. (2006: 2) as part of the ‘global middle’, or more specifically ‘the skilled and educated [such as] students, nurses, mid-level technical and clerical employees, ambitious or adventurous upwardly mobile middle classes’. Such migrants generally do not feature high on the political agenda, as their movement is relatively straightforward and uncontested;

⁵ A few more details on the relationship of each thesis to this paper. In the case of Mueller (2013), all interviews were with young-adult German graduates – the socio-occupational group that is at the heart of the comparative aspect of this paper. Conti’s (2012) study involved, as well as Italian graduate migrants in London, quota-samples of graduates who had migrated internally within Italy (from South to North), and non-migrant graduates. Scotto’s (2012) thesis was also a triple comparison: young-adult recent migrants to London, older first-generation migrants who mostly arrived as labourers during the 1950s and 1960s, and a sample of second-generation adult children of these early arrivals. The Latvian case is a little different: the interviews with graduates in London were made as an offshoot study of the main focus of the thesis which was on female labour migrants in Guernsey (Lulle 2014).

nevertheless their experiences are highly relevant given their ubiquity in major European and global cities and their contribution to the urban economy and labour market. Whilst this is a relatively accurate portrayal of German young-adult graduates in London, there are two other migration ‘ideal types’ which also impinge on their characterisation. One is Adrian Favell’s (2008) ‘Eurostars’ – a generation of young, highly educated European ‘high-flyers’, who are usually multilingual, interculturally competent (at least within Europe) and highly mobile between key metropolitan locales such as London, Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Milan etc. The second reference point is the ‘lifestyle migrant’ (Benson and O’Reilly 2009), typified by the British retired settler in rural France (Benson 2011; Hoggart and Buller 1995) or Tuscany (King and Patterson 1998). For Germans in London, the attraction is not the peaceful and beautiful landscape of the rural idyll, nor indeed the palm-fringed resorts of the Spanish islands and *costas* (cf. O’Reilly 2000), but the multicultural vibe of London with its cultural attractions, social life and cosmopolitan atmosphere. In reality, as other studies of ‘intra-core’ European migrations have shown (see for example Ryan and Mulholland 2014 on the French in London, or Scott 2006 on the British in Paris), migration is increasingly recognised as taking place for multiple, co-existing reasons – the search for a more fulfilling life experience, work-life balance, environmental attractions, family and friendship considerations, and economic considerations too (since these are rarely completely irrelevant) may all (or some of them) be interwoven in an individual’s decision-making calculus.

Some of this complexity is reflected in the three migratory types that we observe amongst young Germans in London, based on their original migration motives, length of stay, relationships to their country of origin, and plans for the future.

- *Bi-locals* set out with the intention to return after one or two years. They tend to be younger, in their early-mid 20s; not to have moved within Germany before coming to London; and retain close links to friends and family in Germany. Being in London is regarded as a kind of ‘time-out’ from Germany.
- *Multi-locals*: their move to the UK is embedded in a longer trajectory of mobility, either within Germany for university study or work, or abroad before coming to the UK. They are less oriented to visiting or returning to Germany, and are more likely to move on to another place or country. Their mobility is linked to career development, and some approximate Favell’s ‘Eurostars’.
- *Settled migrants* tend to be older, in their 30s, and to have stayed in the UK longer than the other two groups, perhaps coming in the first instance to study at university. They may have a non-German partner who does not want to relocate to Germany. They are likely to be more settled career-wise and to stay long-term in the UK; nevertheless they are ambivalent about an eventual return to Germany.

Key themes from the narratives: cautious migration from ‘boring’ Germany

Although Germans living in London have obviously migrated, it can be regarded as a somewhat ‘cautious’ or ‘haphazard’ migration (Armbruster 2010: 1237). The UK is seen as a nearby destination, ‘different’ from Germany, but not *that* different; it is abroad, but not *that* far away. As interviewee Hannes put it, ‘You don’t have the feeling that you have to leave

everything behind, because you don't spend 12 hours on a plane'. The relatively short distance and the availability of budget airlines make both home visits, and visits by friends from Germany, a frequent possibility. Indeed, in the eyes of many young Germans, a move to England, or intra-EU migration in general, is seen almost as internal migration, endorsing the 'free movement' ethos of the EU. Germans' migration to the UK is unlikely to be a once-in-a-lifetime migration; rather, it likely to be temporally limited. Even if the return, or the onward migration to somewhere else, does not actually happen, the mindset of a short-term move influences the mode of their migration, with them seemingly taking a break out of their regular lives, to which they would return later. Especially amongst 'bi-locals', there is this view of migration to London as a brief episode in their lives, although the initial intention may well change, as the following two interview extracts illustrate:

I said in the beginning I'd like to give it a try for a year, just to have done it, and now it's developed so positively, I've made two years out of one, and now it's open... there's no limit really (Sven).

I quite like living in London... but I kind of know that in the back of my mind, this is not it, and that I can imagine going somewhere else... I'm flexible. When I moved here, I thought, OK, I'll do two years; now it's been four, it'll probably be five; but I think that at some point I'll say... I've done it, I want something else now, [that feeling] is kind of starting now at the back of my head (Henrik).

The economic rationale for migration is largely missing in this sample's narratives, and there is hardly any mention of the crisis, either in Germany or the UK.⁶ Rather, paraphrasing Conradson and Latham (2005b, 2007) in their research on young New Zealanders in London, what is most relevant are the 'affective possibilities' of London as an exciting setting for the migrants' journey of self-discovery and maturation. Among Germans, living in an energetic space of global-city cosmopolitanism, improving their English, and escaping from the 'boring' and 'provincial' German way of life were key factors behind their moves to London. Below, three interviewees articulate different aspects of the dominant cultural and affective rationale for wanting to be in London at this stage of their lives.

I really wanted to live in a metropolis... for me that was the main reason... it wasn't anything career-wise... I was really unhappy with my job [in Germany], and living in that small city, it was awful... So at some point I just said, I'm going to do what I want to do, I'll go where I want to be, where I like it (Sven).

My life in Germany was super-boring... I was really stuck in this routine... You come home from work, like 5pm or so, you sit down in front of the telly, and you watch TV until 10.15 when you fall into bed, and it was like that every day... Even if you went shopping one day, or spent an afternoon on the balcony reading, somehow it was always the same (Sandra).

⁶ This may be seen as somewhat to do with the way that the sample of interviewees was constructed, mainly from contacts in West London. Meier's (2009) study of German professionals engaged in the banking and financial sectors contains explicit reference to salaries and careers.

You know the pettiness... and in [names town] people really stare at you if you are different... Here, no-one cares if there's a frog sitting on your head or... I go shopping in my pyjamas sometimes, I just don't care... Here I can be who I am (Kirsten).

The temporary timeframe for Germans' migration to London meant that this was usually not planned as a career move. Indeed, for some of the migrants, their career progression took a back seat, or even regressed in that they 'traded down' to a job in London which was below their qualifications yet readily available – this was especially characteristic of the female interviewees. More important than direct career advancement (though this could occur upon return to Germany on the basis of greatly improved English) was the more general preference for gaining experience and adventure. The many participants who fell into this category want to be in London for a while yet are happy for a somewhat conditional existence, as a way of being in the new place that is not geared to them building a new life there, but gaining new experiences. Hence the job taken is searched for and accepted quickly, as an easy option. This is not unique to Germans in the UK: both Scott (2004: 397-398) and Conradson and Latham (2007: 235), writing respectively about British in Paris and New Zealanders in London, find the same syndrome: the career is put on hold and regarded as of secondary importance to the broader objective of gaining life experience at a particular life-stage. Much the same interpretation comes from a clutch of studies on Germans in New Zealand, where the distance factor obviously operates differently to those who move to London – not a case of migration driven by proximity but a migration of adventure to the other side of the world. Schubert-McArthur (2009) sees German movement to New Zealand as lying within the 'grey zone' between tourism and migration. Others researching the same group label them long-distance commuter migrants who divide their time between two far-flung locations through a search for adventure, climate balance and quality of life (Boenisch-Brednich 2002; Buergelt et al. 2008; Schellenberger 2011).

In the absence of references to career ambitions in London or the euro-crisis, the German participants talked more about their social lives, visits back home to friends and relatives, and their plans to eventually return home for good (or not). The 'bi-locals' tried to maintain their social life back in Germany as well as develop one in London – a double challenge that most found more difficult than they had imagined. The short-hop flight to their local German airport proved to be not that short, since times for travel to and from the airport, plus security and check-in, had to be factored in. Many interviewees recalled the frustration of delayed and cancelled flights due to the Icelandic ash cloud (April 2010) and snowfalls around Christmas 2009 and 2010. Some bi-locals talked about cutting back on their regular weekends with their family and friends because of the pressure and cost of it all and the fact that, along with hosting weekend visitors from Germany, they had no free time to develop new friendship networks or enjoy the cultural life in London. For example Tilman, a typical bi-local migrant, remarked that his mother had complained to him that she felt like an entry in his diary because of the limited time he spent with her during his 'weekend home' visits in which seeing his friends seemed to take the top priority (for this and other examples see Mueller 2013: 95-98; also King et al. 2013: 15-18).

Other participants, on the other hand, were able to integrate business travel with visits to relatives and friends; these interviewees were likely to be ‘multi-locals’ with more internationally oriented careers. Typical of this group was Lasse, one of the older German participants (he was mid-30s at the time of the interview), who had been mobile as a student, studying far from his home town in Germany and taking a study-abroad semester, as well as spending short periods (a few weeks to a couple of months) in the US as part of his job working in London for an American company. He was back in Germany two or three times a month, for both private and business visits, often mixing the two, for instance staying the weekend with family or friends following a business trip on Thursday or Friday. When asked if he would mind cutting back, he said yes, he certainly would mind.

For the majority of German interviewees, then, connections with family and friends in Germany remained very important. This counter-balanced, to some extent, the general wish not to become part of a ‘German community’ in the UK.⁷ And yet, ideas about return, even for the bi-locals whose original intention and ongoing behaviour reflected a firm orientation to return, were often quite ambivalent. As Conradson and Latham (2005b) found in their study of New Zealanders in London, decisions to return are often postponed and hence made continuously more difficult and ambiguous: on the one hand the wish to carry out the original idea of return and the pull of expectations to do so from family and friends in Germany; on the other the gradual embedding within the new life, and the development of personal relationships, in London and the consequent disembeddedness from home, *Heimat*. Typical of the former circumstance was the case of Maria:

Well... my mum is saying I should come back; and then again, there’s not really anything holding me here. I have a job here, but it’s not that great... it’s not like it’s a great career! And I don’t have a boyfriend... And if I don’t go back soon, my mother worries that the career window will close for me, and I’ll be stuck here.

Actually, *Heimat* does not straightforwardly translate as ‘home’, not least because the latter is a word with multiple, and multi-scale, meanings (Blunt 2005; Blunt and Dowling 2006). Whilst most agreed that the UK was now ‘home’ in the sense of *zu Hause*, none saw it as their *Heimat*.⁸ This latter term denoted the area or region in Germany where they had grown up, a space or place that was replete with memories. In Claudia’s words, ‘*Heimat?* For me that’s where I’m originally from, and the place where I like going back to... I think it’s all the memories from my youth’. This fits in with other research on intra-European migrants where strong attachments were preserved with places where meaningful events took place (eg. Moores and Metykova 2010: 172, 182). Yet it also emerged that, for some interviewees, the idea of *Heimat* was less to do with actual visits or regular connections, and related more to feelings of nostalgia – an imaginary space of the past. So when Claudia was asked whether

⁷ Whilst there was a general view amongst German participants that they wanted to avoid socialising with other Germans, many contradicted this statement by their behaviour, creating and inhabiting distinct ‘German social spaces’ in and around London. This was done partly out of a need to get help to ‘settle in’, especially in the early stages, and partly as a reaction to the difficulty of creating a meaningful social network of British Friends.

⁸ It should be pointed out that *Heimat* is a potentially contentious term, having been ‘heavily laden with political and contradictory meanings – especially in fascist ideology which mystified the term’ (Huber and O’Reilly 2004: 330).

she still saw her ‘home’ region in Germany as *Heimat*, she said ‘yes’; yet in the same interview she said she actually did not spend much time there, as it got very boring for her. Similarly, when Kirsten was asked if she could see herself living back in Germany, she replied: ‘Well, yes, at some point, but not where I’m from, it’s very rural, and all my friends have moved away, there’s nothing going on, I really couldn’t live there at the moment!’ And similar feelings were expressed by Lasse:

Over the past eight, nine years I’ve learned that Germany as *Heimat*, it doesn’t work, it’s not quite right – not when I’m with my parents, for example... Once I’ve been there for a day or so, I realise I don’t belong there anymore, I no longer feel at home there... Of course it’s nice to be home... but then I feel relatively quickly – that’s not me.

Summing up: voluntary migrations with ambivalent results

If there is one thing that distinguishes the German interview narratives from those of the other two groups considered in this paper (and from other European migrant groups with a significant presence in the UK such as Poles and Spaniards – see Burrell 2009; Jendrissek 2014), it is the lack of a primary economic motive for migration. For the most part, the German participants were not driven to the UK by low incomes and unemployment in Germany. Except for those who came for educational reasons or straight from university, most had jobs before moving and gave up, or put on temporary hold, their German careers. Their work experiences in the UK may or may not have relevance for advancing their careers upon return to Germany, but career progression was not a primary motive for relocating to the UK. Likewise, the German interviewees did not see themselves as ‘expats’ – as people who hanker after an exotic overseas posting for income, career or lifestyle reasons. As the following quote from Sven elucidates, the Germans tend to position themselves as voluntary migrants and as open-minded free-wheelers who move abroad largely for experiential and cultural reasons. Asked if he moved to London for a specific job, he responded:

No, no... I came over completely voluntarily... I was in Germany, I had a safe job, an unlimited contract, and I just handed in my notice... I just didn’t want to do it anymore, and so I decided to look for something here. So there was... there was no necessity; really, I’m not an expat either or anything like that, but I decided on this completely voluntarily... I had always wanted to do this... it was all my own doing... I applied in the English job market as a normal [applicant], as somebody from the outside, and I’ve got an English job contract, and I don’t have anything with Germany anymore... I have no securities if I were to go back, in the sense that I don’t have a job there or anything...

Sven’s case is interesting, and not untypical, because, as we saw in the very first quote which opened up our discussion of German migration to the UK, he initially came as a bi-local migrant ‘just to give it a try for a year’, and now his stay in London is open-ended – ‘there’s no limit really’. Whilst there are some bi-locals who are fully intending to go back and are actively preparing to do so, and other participants who are more definitively settled in

the UK for the longer term (generally those with non-German partners and/or those who have become embedded in UK-based careers), the overarching impression gained from the German narrative evidence is a pervasive sense of ambivalence, ambiguity and uncertainty (Mueller 2013: 198-208). Things happen when they are in the UK to deflect them from whatever original intention they had. Not all these things are positive and several interviewees expressed frustration at the high cost of renting in London and the fact that they had to share accommodation with others. They struggled with the social geography of the city whereby the 'nice' areas to live were too expensive to afford, and the affordable areas were perceived as a bit too 'dangerous' or unpleasant. Their idealised plan to acquire British friends and experience the multicultural atmosphere of the city was often thwarted by the realities of people's busy lives, living dispersed in different parts of London. Later in his interview, Sven related how he had very little contact with English people:

Well... on the one hand it would be nice [to know some English people], just to get an insight into their culture and the life here, because I don't know at all what English people do all day long, what they do in the evenings... apart from going to the pub and getting drunk. But then again on the other side, I'm not forcing it, because I have lots of other friends, and I wouldn't even have time to meet them.

Hence, Sven's failure to acquire any British/English friends is justified by two discursive devices. First, there is the moral condemnation of them as drunkards, all indiscriminately the same; and second another kind of superiority is assumed when he claims that he is too busy to meet them anyway.

Perhaps the greatest sense of ambiguity surrounds the participants' relationship to other Germans in London. German migrants are almost celebratory in the way they claim not to want to meet fellow Germans, yet actually most, like Sven, had German friends and socialised, at least partly, within predominantly German social spaces, even at the same time expressing critical feelings about these German spaces. This ambivalence about fellow German migrants was also found in their own stereotypical portrayal of their own migration as a 'worthy endeavour', emphasising their initiative, creativity and staying power, and the portrayal of others' migration (notably the recently-arrived bi-locals) as ill thought-out and delusory. Sandra used this image of the 'naïve' migrant to position herself against:

...and then there's those Germans who've just moved here... I met one guy for example who was 19, I think he was fresh out of high school, and apparently he had always wanted to live in England, to come to London, and he was here for two weeks and couldn't find a job, but that had been his dream, to come to London and live here, and I think he didn't have a clue about anything, he didn't inform himself in advance, he had never been here before, and then it turned out that two weeks later he was working as a barman in Majorca... So much for his dream to live in London!

The self-construction of Germans as independent and open-minded, anxious to blend in with the English and the wider multicultural mix of London, intersected with a generalised picture of other nations as being more ethnically solid. Participants would often say that

Germans were not like ‘the Italians’ or ‘the Spanish’. Southern Europeans and Latin Americans were portrayed as rejoicing upon meeting co-nationals, speaking their own language, embracing each other, and becoming best friends immediately. According to Andreas,

Well, the Germans, they’re not like the Spanish, or the Italians or the Mexicans, who always hang out together; and that’s a good thing. Germans abroad tend to do their own thing, they try to get in touch with indigenous people... And here in this pub [where the interview took place], there’s a lot of Spanish people working here, and they hang out with each other, as well as after finishing work, and they live with other Spanish people, and then even after 10 years of living here, they don’t speak any English.

Andreas’ blanket characterisation of the Spanish in London is certainly wide of the mark, and was probably based on his superficial observation of the pub workers (who might well have been from Latin America) and picking up common gossip. Jendrissek’s (2014) recent study of young Spanish graduate migrants in Southampton (albeit based on a sample of only 10 interviewees) tells a different story – one of reasonably rapid progression in the labour market and of good ability to learn English. He did find them very sociable, both with each other and with others – such as himself as a researcher. We do not have Spaniards in our three-way comparative study, but we do have Italians, to whom we turn next.

Italians in London: fleeing structural crisis

For our second case study we move from the core of Europe to the southern periphery. Whilst Italy can be considered generally typical of the southern tier of the EU (made up of Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus), in three respects it is a little different. Its general economic welfare indices, such as per capita GDP, put it more on a par with northern European countries than with southern ones. Second, Italy was one of the six founder-members of what became the EU, whereas the rest joined either in the 1980s or in 2004. And finally, Italy remains a country of two ‘halves’, with the South having more in common with the other Southern European countries, whereas the North – geographically, economically and socio-culturally – lies closer to the ‘heart’ of Europe.

Although Italian graduates in London have some similarities to the Germans – they can both be considered as ‘middling transnationals’ moving between countries of similar economic status – there are key differences. First, and evident in all the interviews collected from the Italian group, there is a much more explicit economic and employment motivation. There are very strong structural push factors driving Italian graduate migration; as well as the pull factors of London/UK where the labour market for graduates is seen as more open and meritocratic. Second, the Italian narratives, unlike the German ones but like the Latvian ones, make frequent use of the word ‘crisis’. But this is deployed less as a reference to the post-2008 financial crisis (though this is indeed mentioned by some) and more as a broader understanding of an Italian structural crisis for young graduates and their difficult position in Italian society, especially serious in the South of Italy. Reference back to Table 1 reminds us

that, in Italy across the five years spanning the recession (2007-08 to 2012-13), both total unemployment and youth unemployment more or less doubled, youth unemployment reaching 38 per cent by 2012-13. In some regions in the South of Italy, such as Campania and Calabria, youth unemployment rates have reached 50 per cent and more.

The return of emigration from Italy and other countries of the Southern EU periphery reflects our earlier discussion of the structuring role of migration in European core-periphery dynamics, and in particular the way that this new wave of highly qualified emigrants is but the latest stage in a coherent historical model of Southern European migrations (King 2000). This model has passed through several phases: mass emigration in the late nineteenth century, early twentieth century, and the early postwar years; return migration in the 1970s and 1980s; followed by mass immigration from developing countries and, after 1990, from Eastern Europe. The renewed vulnerability of the Southern Eurozone countries has become dramatically apparent since the 2008 financial crisis: across Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Cyprus, growth has stagnated and unemployment, especially youth unemployment, has soared.⁹ This has provoked serious debate in all these countries about economic strategies to move out of the crisis and about the seeming inevitability of the brain drain northwards. Here we make a few references to the unfolding of these debates in Italy.

First, there is an academic literature dating back at least until the early 2000s (Associazione Dottori di Ricerca Italiani 2001; Avveduto and Brandi 2004; Becker et al. 2004; Cucchiariato 2010; Di Pietro 2005; Morano-Foadi 2006; Nava 2009). What is perhaps most interesting from these studies is the realisation that an increasing trend towards the emigration of Italian graduates is not a recent phenomenon but dates back to the early 1990s, if not before. A variety of data sources deployed by the studies cited above demonstrates both an absolute and a relative growth in the emigration of young, highly qualified Italians for the past two decades.¹⁰ Becker et al. (2004: 1) find a quadrupling of the share of graduates amongst total Italian emigrants during the decade of the 1990s. Italy was found to be unique in the EU in suffering from a ‘brain drain’ as opposed to all other large EU economies which experienced ‘brain exchange’ (France, Germany, the UK and even Spain at this time). Further evidence for a true brain drain effect comes from the simple statistic that there are eight times more recent Italian graduates living abroad than there are foreign graduates living in Italy (Becker et al. 2004: 25). Meanwhile, with regard to internal variations within Italy, Di Pietro (2005) used provincial-level data (there are 103 provinces in Italy) to demonstrate the effect of location: lower employment opportunities locally, or higher unemployment, do indeed encourage young graduates to migrate – *but only if they are jobless* (the effect of local unemployment on those who have a job is neutral across the provinces).¹¹

⁹ Latest figures for early-mid 2014 show that the Italian economy has shrunk by 9 per cent over the past six years, i.e. since just before the economic crisis; youth unemployment has risen to 41.6 per cent overall, and to a staggering 68 per cent in Calabria. See reports in *The Observer*, 23 February 2014, *The Guardian*, 24 February 2014.

¹⁰ Amongst the large datasets mined for these analyses were ISTAT (National Statistics Institute) data on the whereabouts of Italian graduates three years after graduation, the AIRE (Register of Italians Abroad) database maintained by the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as EUROSTAT data.

¹¹ Di Pietro’s analysis is based on graduate *internal* migration, however.

Another key finding from these statistical and survey-based studies is that there is migration selectivity *within* the graduate population. Migration propensity is higher amongst those with top-class degrees, with postgraduate qualifications, and from the more prestigious universities (Becker et al. 2004: 25-26; Di Pietro 2005: 20). Becker et al. (2004: 25) also identify a tendency for more graduate emigrants to leave from the North of Italy than from the South. This somewhat cuts across the finding of Di Pietro (2005) that there is a strong link between unemployment and migration propensity. But Di Pietro's study was on inter-provincial (i.e. internal) graduate migration, so one interpretation of this apparent contradiction is that, whilst graduate emigration is highest from the North, out-migration from the South is disproportionately internal migration, perhaps partly to fill graduate labour market opportunities created in the North by emigration. This 'replacement migration' hypothesis cannot be easily proven, but there is anecdotal and circumstantial evidence from qualitative research that this could be the case, not least because very few northern graduates move to take jobs in the South (King and Conti 2013: 41).

Another change noted by the most recent commentators on Italian graduate migration is a shift in the type of job graduates are willing to take when they move abroad. According to an article unedifyingly titled 'PIGS can fly' in *The Economist*, 16 November 2013,¹² the pre-crisis graduate migrants arrived in London to take well-paid jobs in London's banks, hedge funds and consultancies, or to study, research and teach in Britain's universities. Now the migrants are more numerous, and more desperate. According to the *Economist* article, 'most new arrivals tend to start out in poorly-paid work and live in the cheaper bits of inner London. Getting professional qualifications approved is expensive and finding good jobs takes time. Work in the catering industry, by contrast, is plentiful. Britain's Italian restaurants... are once again hiring Italian waiters'.

Mention of Italian restaurants reminds us of the long history of Italian migration to London and the UK, which has been the subject of several academic studies (eg. Colpi 1991; Sponza 1988). After early, small-scale waves linked to art, architecture, finance and trade (London's Lombard Street being named after the Lombardy bankers there in the middle ages), a larger community took root in the nineteenth century composed of artisans, organ-grinders, and somewhat later, ice-cream sellers. Thus evolved Italians' long-established involvement in the catering and food sector, evident today in the thousands of Italian restaurants the length and breadth of the country. After World War Two, another important immigration took place of factory and brickyard workers – Bedford and Peterborough being the main destinations. Interestingly, few of the recent graduate arrivals interviewed as part of this paper had much knowledge of, or contact with, these earlier generations of Italian migrants. Currently there are 130,000 Italian-born people living in Britain according to the 2011 census, but most estimates put the real size of the Italian-origin population at more than 200,000 – an opposite situation to the German case where the German-born exceeds the 'real' German population by roughly the same order of magnitude.

¹² The unfortunate acronym PIGS refers to the four southern EU countries: Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain.

Our own evidence used in the rest of this section of the paper comes from two Sussex doctoral theses, by Conti (2012) and Scotto (2012). Conti's study included in-depth interviews with 38 Italian graduate migrants in the London area and was designed to elicit their main reasons for leaving Italy and relocating to London and the UK. The thesis was a three-way comparative study of graduate international migration (to London/UK), graduate internal migration from the South to North-Central Italy, and non-migrant graduates living in their 'home' cities and regions. Here we draw only on the London-based interviewees, whose ages ranged from mid-20s to late-30s (see Conti 2012: 83-105 for further methodological details).

Scotto's thesis included in-depth interviews with 30 migrants from what he calls the 'new wave' of recent migrants to London, most of them graduates within the same age range as those interviewed in Conti's study. Scotto's was also a threefold comparison; the two other groups being the 'old' emigrants who migrated to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s as labour migrants (these were mostly poorly educated, from rural Southern Italy), and the UK-born second-generation offspring of the 'old' emigrants. Here we only draw on interviews with the 'new' migrants. Scotto's study was mainly focused on identity and political participation, but includes several interview questions, and hence narrative responses, pertaining to motivations for moving to the UK (for further methodological details, see Scotto 2012: 51-64).

No country for young people

In November 2009 Pierluigi Celli, head of one of Rome's leading private universities, wrote an open letter to his graduating son in *La Repubblica*, a major national newspaper (Celli 2009). Entitled 'My son, you must leave this country', he wrote:

This country, your country, is no longer a place where it is possible to live with pride. This is why, with my heart suffering more than ever, my advice is that you, having finished your studies, take the road to abroad. Choose to go where they still value loyalty, respect and the recognition of merit and results.

He was referring to a whole constellation of structural obstacles ingrained in Italian society and the labour market which block the ability of young people to get a decent job and income, build a career, buy a flat, get married, have a family, thus forcing them to live with their parents until their 30s and even beyond. Many other prominent public figures have also weighed in with their particular diagnoses of the deep-rooted problems of Italian society for young people. According to the former prime minister Enrico Letta the biggest problem of the Italian economy and labour market is that Italian society is 'based on the combined elements of the Indian caste system with that of the medieval guilds' (quoted in Hooper 2011). One factor highlighted by Stephan Faris in an article in *Time Magazine* is the way that so many important posts in Italian businesses, universities, politics and the public sphere are monopolised by older men.¹³ Together with the lack of meritocracy referred to by Celli above, Italy is characterised by 'gerontocracy', or rule by the elderly (Faris 2010). Moreover, argues

¹³ The recent (February 2014) nomination of Matteo Renzi, aged 39, as Italy's new prime minister, the youngest in the country's history, signals an obvious exception (see Kington 2014).

Faris, too many economic resources are geared toward looking after older Italians, maintaining some of the highest pensions in Europe, while the country spends relatively little on housing, unemployment and childcare – expenditures the young depend on to launch and develop their careers.

Unsurprisingly, these issues featured prominently in the two sets of interviews that were carried out by Conti (2012) and Scotto (2012). Arianna, aged in her mid-20s, gives a typical account:

Because there is a socio-political situation in Italy that I really don't like... Italy is an old society folded in on itself... There is no investment in young people and you can see this from the politics, and what happens when you look for a job... It seems like they are doing you a favour in giving you a job.

Unable to progress their careers and achieve economic independence in Italy, young Italians are faced with a stark choice: either stay with their parents and draw on the safety-net of family support, or emigrate to a place like London where a reasonable income and an independent lifestyle are more achievable. Eurostat data for 2011 show that 85 per cent of Italian 18-29 year-olds live with their parents, higher than almost any other EU country (Malta, 89 per cent, can be considered an exception because of its small size and limited housing market), and contrasting sharply with the UK, 26 per cent, and Germany, 23 per cent.¹⁴

Another common theme discussed at length in many of the interviews with London-based Italians which echoes one of the remarks of Celli's letter to his son is that of meritocracy. London, and the UK in general, is seen as a more 'open', meritocratic society where young Italians' ambitions, stifled at home by conservative values and entrenched structures, can be realised. Sometimes, as in the quote from Veronica below, it is about blocked access to a specific career, in her case the entertainment sector; in other cases (Mirco's quote, second below), it relates more to a general feeling that only by going abroad, and especially to England, can a wider project of self-realisation be developed.

I appreciated very much that, in my opinion, there is a lot of meritocracy in England. They don't care about who you are, where you're from, which language you speak: if you can do what they're looking for, you're in. In Italy it's all about who you are the son of, all these things... I always wanted to work in the entertainment sector and in Italy if you weren't 'recommended', you couldn't even clean toilets... (Veronica).

I had always lived at home [during university]; I wanted to live away from home... I wanted to do something extra, and to do it on my own, without anybody to help me or else someone to tell you 'Call me if you have a problem'... It's a test... you say to yourself: 'Ok, but are you capable of doing something on your own?' (Mirco).

¹⁴ See the special report on 'The dependent generation', *The Guardian*, 25 March 2014.

Raccomandazione and mentalità

Two Italian words which recurred time and again throughout the Italian interviews were *raccomandazione* and *mentalità*; for both, the literal English translations, ‘recommendation’ and ‘mentality’, do not succeed in conveying the true depth of meaning of the Italian words, which we explore with some further interview quotes below. Together these two keywords sum up the diagnosis of despair that young Italian graduates hold about their home country and particularly their life-chances there – not just getting a decent graduate-level job, but also a whole host of related issues which combine to make what most people regard and aspire to when thinking about a full transition to adulthood and financial and family independence. These profound disenchantments with the way Italian society and the job market are organised lead to a kind of ‘rejection’ of Italy and, amongst some of the interviewees, almost a ‘disidentification’ with the country of their birth, upbringing and education. This disaffection with the home country, which constitutes for many interviewees the main reason to migrate, has no parallel with the German case just considered. There are some similarities with the Latvian evidence, as we shall see, but also differences.

In one of the quotes given above, Veronica lamented that you needed a ‘recommendation’ even to get a job cleaning toilets. The culture of doing favours, ‘pulling strings’ and needing a ‘patron’ to press your case to get a job (or a business licence, building permit, or almost anything of financial or symbolic value) is pervasive in Italy, especially, it is often claimed, in the South where such resources (above all, jobs) are scarcer than in the richer North. Although most jobs, business tenders, public works contracts etc. are required to be advertised by law, in practice everyone knows who will get the job or the contract – the person who has ‘links’ to powerful people such as politicians, directors or administrators who make the decisions or who have the power to influence decisions. Hence, *raccomandazione* is so much more than being ‘recommended’ for a job; it is a culture of power brokering, nepotism and ‘favours’ in which the best candidates frequently fail to get the post they rightfully deserve. Rita summed up the situation perfectly:

If you stay in Italy, the only way to get a job is through *raccomandazione*. When you go for a job, everyone tells you that you need a *raccomandazione*. If you stay in Italy and try to get work without a *raccomandazione* then you are a fool because you either make it your life’s goal to go against the system, or you end up living at home with your parents until you are 50.

Academic research on what Dorothy Zinn (2001: 167) calls the ‘Italian societal embarrassment’ of *raccomandazione* approaches the phenomenon from two angles. The simpler interpretation is that it is a kind of ‘natural’ outcome of the structural problem of too many people chasing too few jobs. Because this mismatch between the supply and demand for employment, especially qualified jobs, is greater in the South of Italy than in the North, *raccomandazione* is seen as a phenomenon which is more ‘developed’ in the South – from Rome down to Calabria and Sicily, where it is particularly associated with a ‘mafia’ mentality. Angela, originally from Calabria, points to the widespread nepotism and favouritism which she sees as endemic to the South of Italy:

The working environment in the South is de-qualifying. For me it was a devastating experience. I felt I virtually had to thank my employer for giving me a job paying 300 euros a month!... Employers in the South really take advantage of people... they take advantage of the hunger that there is for jobs, especially amongst graduates. [...] The problem is the culture of *raccomandazione*... you really need to be connected to someone powerful... because if you have connections, at least you have a chance. The few jobs that there are, get hijacked in this way... There are five jobs available, and they are all already allocated, that's how it is.

The second interpretation of *raccomandazione* draws on what are argued as deeply embedded 'southern' social characteristics arising out of a long history of colonisation, exploitation and marginality of the region and its population. Following Banfield's (1958) controversial diagnosis of the problem of the structural backwardness of the South as 'amoral familism' (the prioritisation of self and family over all else so that society as a whole functions 'amorally'), we can observe and 'explain' the social and political behaviour of local and regional elites who strive to control all aspects of the local economy through networks of clientelism and brokerage, often backed up by implicit (or sometimes explicit) threats of reprisals or violence (see also Faraoni 2010; Piattoni 2001).

Alongside *raccomandazione*, the other key word in the Italian graduates' narratives was *mentalità*, implying a multifaceted critique of Italian politics, society and way-of-life. We identify three scales at which this notion of *mentalità* is conceptualised and expressed.

- At a *structural* level, the *national character* of Italy is seen to be one dominated by patriarchy, clientelism and bureaucracy, producing a society incapable of change and inimical to progressive life-courses for young people, who feel they have no control over their destiny. This 'mentality' of 'cheating the system' (and each other) is internalised by most Italians who observe how politicians behave and follow their example – seeking favours and kickbacks, avoiding paying taxes, resorting to underhand methods to achieve goals etc.
- At a *local/regional* scale, Italians exhibit a *provincial mentality* whereby they are strongly linked to their city, province or region; these geographical units are themselves inward-looking, with weak links to a national identity, giving their inhabitants a narrow and provincial outlook.
- And thirdly, there is the *mentality of family*, which expects loyalty to the family and immediate social circle at all costs – amoral familism again (cf. Banfield 1958). In practice this means that adult children are expected to follow family rules, even on choice of career, stay close to their parents, whilst getting married and having children of their own, and ultimately to be prepared to care for their parents in the latter's old age.

The following two quotes, both from graduates from Southern Italy, exemplify many of the aspects of *mentalità* listed above.

The argument is not only about getting a job, it's about realising your own life; because in my case I was having a 'good life' [in Italy], but I did not feel at ease... I

disagreed with the local values, with the *mentalità*... At a certain point, I couldn't take it anymore. It was OK to have a good life, but in fact it was not a good life – I was not happy... (Andrea).

There are two factors, actually three [that caused her move to London]. First, the economic factor that, whether you like it or not, is a major pull; the second one is the career factor... career satisfaction; and then there is the *mentalità*, that I still notice today, probably even more when I visit home... Somehow I cannot see myself there anymore, neither myself nor my husband... You feel like a fish out of water... like you have nothing in common with the people there... Here [in London] we identify much more with the way of life, with their lifestyle models (Rita).

Summing up: economic migrants who 'disidentify' with Italy

Evidence collected from the 68 narratives of young-adult Italians in London and the South-East leaves no doubt that, compared to Germans, their migration to the UK is overwhelmingly economically motivated. We nuance this generalisation in two ways, however. First, regional origin in Italy is something of a differentiating factor. Those graduates who come from the South have a stronger economic push factor behind their migration, reflecting the extremely high unemployment rate in Southern Italy and the sense of hopelessness associated with this and with the culture of *raccomandazione* which is seen to be more widespread in the South than in the North of Italy. Graduates from the North of Italy, especially those from prosperous cities like Milan, are migrating to London more for career enhancement reasons: rather than simply escaping unemployment, more often they leave their jobs in order to take another job, or to seek job opportunities, which are more rewarding, either financially or in terms of the type of work and hence the longer-term career opportunities it affords.

The second refinement to our analysis is to stress that, behind the economic factor lies another, more psychological process – one of 'disidentification' with Italy and the Italian way of life. Unlike their German counterparts who still, on the whole (although there were some exceptions, noted earlier), have a high regard for their home country and plan on returning there some time in the future, Italian participants' profound disillusionment with Italy leads them towards an abandonment of part of their Italian identification. We stress the partial nature of this disidentification since they still identify as 'Italians', but as those who have left the country out of frustration and a deep critique of what the country has become and stands for. Returning to the key importance of *mentalità* once again, the Italians in London see themselves as a different 'kind' of Italian – as having a different *mentalità* to those who stay behind in Italy. They self-identify as more adventurous, more keen to engage in a project of self-development, more critical of the culture of *raccomandazione* and nepotism, and thus as morally superior to those who simply stay at home with their parents and have an 'easy life'.

Latvians in London: from small-scale periphery to metropolitan urbanism

Our third case study takes us to the Eastern periphery of Europe. Latvian graduates migrate from a peripheral context which is quite different from the southern one, both geographically,

being situated in the north-eastern or Baltic periphery, and geopolitically, in that Latvia is a post-socialist as well as a post-Soviet state of the EU. The other defining characteristic of the Latvian case is the small scale of the country, which adds a further dimension to the conceptualisation of the periphery. The population, 2 million in 2011, down from 2.3m. in 2001, is clearly much lower than the other countries considered in this paper (Germany 82m, Italy 60m, UK 62m.), and more typical of the other Baltic states (Estonia 1.3m, Lithuania 3.0m.) as well as Slovenia, 2m.

The Latvian case-study sample was smaller-scale and constructed rather differently from the other two. Eighteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews were collected during 2012, with some repeat follow-ups in 2013. This survey arose in the margins, rather than a core part of a larger-scale project carried out by Lulle (2014) on Latvians in the UK and Guernsey. The sample of participants referred to in this paper was developed from three interviewee snowballs: Latvian graduates employed in the City of London (usually children of wealthy parents); those involved in the arts and media; and finally ethnic-Russian Latvians. This latter group constitutes one-third of the total Latvian population and, as we shall see, are an important ethno-linguistic subgroup amongst emigrants as well.

Latvia's class and ethnic-language background thus has a strong influence over the patterning of migration. Latvian society lacks a traditional elite – this class was either killed or exiled in earlier turbulent times. The so-called 'new elite' arises out of privatisation and post-socialist business enterprise, creating a *nouveau riche* amongst whom is a small class of 'super-rich'. On the whole, this wealthy class is not cosmopolitan or multilingual, but it achieves elite status with the emigration and success of their children, who embody eliteness through private, often international education and high-flying careers abroad. This early-life trajectory, backed up by parental wealth, generally makes the children independent, self-confident and multi-lingual.

Amongst the Latvian interviewees, the 'crisis' trope was quite prominent, reflecting two temporal scales:

- the general crisis of the initially liberatory but then difficult exit from the Soviet Union (1991) and subsequent transition to EU membership (2004);
- the financial crisis of 2008-09, when Latvian banks failed and the country had to resort to IMF rescue funds to bail out the banks, a strategy accompanied by widespread wage and welfare cuts, unemployment due to downsizing of the public-sector payroll and the failure of many private enterprises, renewed poverty, and emigration.

Recent emigration from Latvia thus took place in two waves: that in the mid-2000s resulting from the opening up of the new 'time-space of possibilities' (Lulle 2014) consequent upon accession to the EU; and that triggered by the financial crisis and sudden spike in unemployment in the late 2000s.¹⁵

¹⁵ The Latvian trajectory of post-accession boom, followed by the 2008 'bust' and then subsequent recovery, has been 'forensically' examined in a recent Brookings paper by Oliver Blanchard et al. (2013). Some of the statistics of the boom-bust-recovery cycle are remarkable. GDP increased by 90 per cent between 2000 and

Underlying these emigration trends has been a reshaping (or rather, distortion) of Latvian society as one marked by increasing inequality – between the aforementioned super-rich class benefiting from the marketisation of the post-socialist economy, and a kind of submerged ‘iceberg’ of widespread poverty. Whilst this poverty and unemployment have been the driving forces behind the economic migration of Latvians from all parts of the country who now work in low-status jobs in the UK and Ireland, young graduate migrants are mainly drawn from the more wealthy families.

Low ceilings for high-flyers

Within the overall narrative arc of economic and personal crisis, there was constant reference to Latvia being a small peripheral country – in one interviewee’s words, ‘a small, small, narrow place’. This subnarrative of smallness contains two elements within it, one economic and the other cultural. The economic arguments about smallness are well-known: economies of scale in production and marketing are limited, and the labour market is ‘truncated’ and insufficiently specialised to absorb all the skills and specialisms of graduates’ aspirations for rewarding jobs. The cultural arguments are perhaps less researched but equally relevant as framing motives for migration: the country is seen by its own inhabitants as small, provincial, conservative, culturally closed and prone to racism and homophobia. London is seen on the one hand as a financial, educational and employment powerhouse where jobs, incomes and educational opportunities are all way above what are available in Latvia; and on the other hand as an open, sophisticated, tolerant and culturally diverse metropolis. Yet this contrast is counter-balanced by another one drawn by some of the interviewees: between London as a huge city of dense population, noise and traffic; and Latvia which is quiet and relaxing and where, from Riga, a short drive takes you to the countryside or the seaside. Latvia is thus seen as a kind of base-place, a mooring to which one can periodically return to recharge batteries but not, for the foreseeable future, settle back for good; whereas London is seen either as the new, possibly permanent destination, or as a stepping-stone to other global centres like New York or Singapore, or perhaps, as mentioned by some participants, a move to Sweden or another Nordic country seen as closer to ‘home’. The globalised appeal of London and the peripherality of Latvia are well articulated in this following quote from Alex:

I was working in [names bank, which went bust in the crisis], the salary was good and my work was interesting, but I always knew I could achieve more... London is the closest financial centre and it’s in Europe, the other centres are in the US or Asia... I knew that in order to develop contacts I had to study at the London Business School... it costs £30,000 but it’s an entrance ticket to the society – you have a network of your course-mates and an important line in your CV... London is a very central place globally. My parents live in [names town, in the most remote Latvian

2007, then fell by a quarter during 2007-09, recovering by 18 per cent by the start of 2013. Unemployment mirrored these trends – moving from 14 per cent in 2000 to 6 per cent by 2007, then 20 per cent in 2010, falling back to 11.4 per cent in mid-2013 (Blanchard et al. 2013: 1-2). Whilst the success of the recovery can be debated (see the argument over this between Latvian prime minister Valdis Dombrovskis and economist Paul Krugman quoted by Blanchard et al. 2013: 1), one of the accompaniments of the recovery (some would say, rather, an indicator of the failure of the recovery strategy) was large-scale emigration.

region]. If I go to visit them... it takes more time than to go from London to New Dehli. Honestly, I went to a wedding in Delhi recently and it was a faster trip than to [names a town in Eastern Latvia].

The notion of a 'low ceiling' was mentioned by several interviewees, both as a reason to leave and as an obstacle to return migration. Below are three typical quotes, all from young graduates in their 20s:

I was working as a journalist in a leading Russian-language newspaper in Latvia... I was 24 and already head of the news department, I had a good salary according to Latvian standards. But the ceiling is just too low in Latvia; it is such a small country and so few newspapers (Nika).

I was also trying to get a job in Latvia, I sent out my CV, I thought I could be a brand manager of some big company. I got offers but the salary was so low, 400 lats (£500 approximately) per month. Then I understood that... there is no point in thinking about return, no chance... You simply understand that, due to many things, including social things you have achieved, you just simply cannot go back (Santa).

Nobody has invited me to return back to Riga and I am not sure I would ever be able to do it. My problem is that I am used to my level of salary here and the quality of life. Moreover I like people here, whereas in Latvia I see that people are hostile; sometimes I feel that they almost hate me... I understand of course that it is related to differences in income (Katrina).

We take next a more detailed exploration of the case of Reinis, in his mid-20s, an example of an intra-company transfer route to London. Reinis' interview contains a good illustration of many points which arose in a more fragmented way in other participants' stories – namely the role of the crisis as a 'trigger' for migration, the opportunities that London offers for personal growth and self-realisation, the contrast between London as a global city and Latvia as 'simply too small', and the prospects for return or moving on. Whilst some of these aspects are unique to the Latvian setting, others resonate with what we have also heard from the German and Italian interviewees. We quote at length from Reinis' narrative, starting with the reasons for his move.

Since childhood, I was always interested in living abroad, I was always interested in other people, other cultures. I always tried every chance to speak English... But I was studying in Riga and had a very good job in banking and then consultancy, and I felt that the time was not right yet, I can actually grow and learn faster in Riga [referring to the economic boom period]. And then, during the crisis, my work partners said there is a chance to go to London, and I said yes! It was a win-win situation.

[...]

Of course, London is very cosmopolitan, it is like a state within a state. I know that England is not like London, but I like it here a lot. In my team we are 19 people, and

between us we speak 12 or 13 languages. Language knowledge is so important here: you are appreciated if you speak several languages...

[...]

There were many new things to get used to here, for example sharing flats. I had never done this before in Latvia, but here it is normal that professionals also share flats. There are many Latvian professionals in London and I share a flat with one of them... in the evening we can watch a film together or play cards.

The section of the interview where he stresses the prospects for self-improvement offered by being in London and working in an open professional environment runs as follows:

I am trying to educate myself to prepare for further studies. For example, I attend free lectures at the London Business School and use the library there... I am trying to learn as much as possible. In Latvia I never had time for this, I was too busy with friends, parties, sports. Here I am investing in myself... I want to stay in the workplace I am currently at because I can learn a lot; I want to learn the maximum I can here. I also study to improve my English... The language is difficult, not just the grammar, you really have to be here.

In the final section we quote from, Reinis tells about keeping in frequent touch with Latvia through his transnational business trips, his prospects for return, and his other plans for the future.

I am going often to Latvia; I try to combine when tickets are paid for by the company so I can go home for free. [...] If I return to Latvia, I want to do a job which is very international; probably three or four days per week outside of Latvia, or at least several times a month. The worldview is so different here [in London], much wider. And I want that taste of different cultures, diversity, colours...therefore I think that my aim is further than Latvia. I would be happy to get a job in Kuwait, Abu Dhabi or Singapore... why not?

Latvia could be a base-place for me, but it is not possible to have a serious entrepreneurship there, Latvia is simply too small... What Latvia lacks is pleasant, positive communication, constructive discussion, sharing ideas and opinions. In Latvia it is often seen negatively if you want to discuss; people think that you reproach them if you say something critical... constructive critique is really lacking there... here people know how to communicate in a positive way.

Philanthropic views of Latvia

A narrative theme which emerged more strongly in the Latvian interviews than in those with German or Italian graduates (where, indeed, it was mostly absent) was a desire to contribute something to the development of the home country – either in terms of economic growth or more charitable work. Unlike the less educated labour migrants who work in low-status jobs in the UK and Ireland and who have emigrated partly to support family members back home,

the Latvian graduates in London do not send remittances. As we have noted, most of them come from wealthy backgrounds and some of them will have received ‘reverse remittances’ – supported by their parents whilst studying or setting themselves up in a career in England. Hence their support to Latvia is not via remittances but more through philanthropic contributions.

Again as we have noted above, part of the problem of the economic development of Latvia relates to the small scale of the country and its business environment. But, according to some interviewees, there are other problems, linked to culture (see the final remarks from Reinis, above), and the inability or uncertainty of the Latvian authorities on how to formulate a policy for maximising the potential of migrants to contribute to economic growth. For example, Armins, who worked in a London business consultancy, was critical of the Latvian state for not seeing the potential to ‘mobilise’ its emigrants:

I think that Latvia does not use the potential it has [with its emigrants]. There are many, very smart, very talented and determined Latvians in London. They have studied in very good schools and are making millions for local and international companies. And many of them truly love Latvia, they would like to help as much as they can. But the state does not know, first, what to do with them, and, second, these people are usually very busy. But if Latvian state representatives would approach them individually, I think people would find some time to devote to Latvia, for common interests to develop Latvia. For example, we could help to draft an economic development plan... just an idea. But then again, there is the feeling that this is not needed in Latvia.

Other participants, who were mainly females, were more orientated to charity-led contributions to Latvia’s social development. Santa, who was not from a particularly privileged background, had first gone to England to see a friend who was studying at university in a town in Southern England. This visit prompted her to follow suit, so she studied intensively to improve her English, prepared all the documents, worked hard ‘doing typical guestworker jobs’ to support her studies at the same university as her friend, and eventually landed a job in an advertising company in London. She saw her future resolutely in England:

I just have to stay in London where I can see my career going straight up. If I stay here another 10 years I will build opportunities for my whole life. I will have my own flat, then my own house, and I will live a fully developed life thereafter, wherever I go for work, but I know it will not be in Latvia. It will never be in Latvia, and that actually hurts a lot.

But her guilt at not contemplating a return to her home country – for very rational and objective reasons (low salaries, limited work opportunities, lack of welfare for families and the elderly etc.) – is assuaged by a charitable wish to help remove some of these deficiencies in Latvian society:

I am now thinking that I may launch a charity fund in Latvia, a cancer fund to get better medical treatment for the elderly... it's absurd how it is now in Latvia, that you cannot get adequate treatment and medicine.

Another participant with strong charitable feelings was Katrina, late 20s, who had been internationally schooled and had graduated from one of the UK's top universities. Her parents were well-known millionaires in Latvia although their businesses had suffered during the crisis. Currently she works in the City banking sector in emerging markets. Now married to a British man, she still visits Latvia regularly, every two or three weekends, 'because I have a small brother and I want to see him growing up and knowing that I am his sister... I have many relatives and a big family in Latvia'. Katrina had been impressed by the sense of philanthropic responsibility in Britain and got involved with this whilst still at university:

The English are obsessed with charity work, so I also got involved in this and this is what I now want to do for Latvia. I have already organised charity balls in London to collect money for children in Latvia. I want to donate to those who lack resources in Latvia, those who are not supported by the Latvian government... I also want to help pensioners in Latvia; it is a big difference how average pensioners live in London and how they have to survive in Latvia.

Ethnic Russians: turning disadvantage into advantage

Latvian society, politics and the media are divided between the Latvian-language majority and the Russian-speaking minority. This divide is replicated throughout the Baltic states, although it is sharper in Latvia than it is in Estonia or Lithuania, and also exists in other post-Soviet territories such as Moldova and Ukraine. After regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Latvian was declared the only state language, which meant that young Latvians did not learn Russian anymore, yet young Russians were required to learn Latvian. In practice, many young Russians have decided to prioritise English as their preferred 'foreign' language, seeing their futures not in Latvia or Russia, but in Europe and globally. Meanwhile, their unique status as native-Russian-speaking EU members gives them a comparative advantage in the London-based global labour market where knowledge of emerging-economy languages is important. Alex, who was the first participant quoted in this Latvian section of the paper, went on to expand on his particular qualifications for the job he now holds in an international insurance company:

They saw my CV, but the main question was whether I was willing to work in emerging markets. I said yes and got the job. The most important thing for them was that I could speak Russian fluently and that I know the [Russian] culture.

By the same token, Latvians who do not speak Russian may be denied career opportunities in London. Arta, who works in international banking, was one who found herself disadvantaged in this respect.

I have almost no contact with the East European region at work because I am not fluent in Russian. I have had several proposals to undertake projects there but I

always say no... But if I were able to speak Russian, that would have been a definite advantage for me in London.

Other interviewees who were from the Russian minority expressed frustration at the nationalistic direction being taken by the post-Soviet governments in Latvia. Unsurprisingly, there is a huge debate on this in Latvia, as well as an extensive academic literature (see Cheskin 2013 for a useful summary). What has been described as the ‘memory war’ centres on two distinct interpretations of history, especially the period surrounding the Second World War. Cheskin (2013: 288-289) summarises these opposing historical narratives as follows:

From the official Latvian perspective the Soviet Union brutally occupied and tyrannized Latvia through thousands of deportations and also with a targeted and ruthless policy of ‘Russification’ which involved the relocation of hundreds of thousands of Russian speakers to the republic. From this point of view, Russian speakers and the Russian language are seen as a threat to Latvia’s core values, language, and integrity; they are also perceived as remnants of occupation and disloyal to the Latvian state. In contrast the Russian perspective emphasises the heroic role of the Red Army in liberating Latvia from fascism, and points a finger at the harsh, uncivilised and un-European discrimination against Russian speakers in Latvia.

The result of this conflicting discursive interpretation is the production of two idealised cultural stereotypes: *homo Latviensis* (Zepa 2006: 74) and *homo Sovieticus* (Peschel 1998: 304). The former must speak Latvian, maintain ‘Latvian’ cultural values, display loyalty to the Latvian state and not challenge the official narratives and interpretations of Latvian history. The latter does not (and is not allowed to) subscribe to these views and is alleged to harbour ‘neo-Soviet’ narratives consistent with the ideals and interpretations of the Russian Federation (Cheskin 2013: 289-290) – seen as increasingly dangerous in the current climate of Russian neo-imperialism in Ukraine and potentially elsewhere.

Cheskin’s focus-group research with Russian-speakers in Riga (students, postgraduates, and older residents) broadly challenged these historical and discursive narratives, and found that the research subjects were able to integrate various competing positions into their ongoing sense of Latvian-Russian identity. What does this mean for young graduate emigrants from the Russian ethnic minority in Latvia? Two things, both illustrated in the interview narrative of Dimitrij, a Russian-speaking interviewee who now works for an engineering company in London. The first point is that the Russians’ sense of marginalisation and frustration in Latvia is a contributory factor in their decision to emigrate. In Dimitrij’s words,

The problem in Latvia is that it is moving in the wrong direction [towards ethno-nationalism]. I am Russian but I am a citizen of Latvia. The world is globalised... why are Latvian politicians thinking so narrowly?

The second point is about how Russian-speaking Latvians position themselves in relation to Latvia, Russia, Europe and the world in terms of their regional identities and future migration fields. Cheskin’s focus-group participants, especially the younger ones, who are also highly

educated, see themselves as distinct from Russians in Russia and able to integrate, at least at a pragmatic level, many aspects of Latvianness, without, however, fully embracing Latvian culture, which is not ‘their’ culture (2013: 308-309). One refuge from this cultural and identificatory dilemma is to resort to a wider regional, European or global identity, part of which is used to differentiate ‘backward’, nationalistic Latvia from progressive, open, multicultural Europe, as Dimitrij does in the quote above. The ‘backwardness’, smallness in size and nationalistic provincialism of Latvia combine in the eyes of these interviewees to make it an unfeasible place to return to. In this next extract from his interview Dimitrij describes firstly how being in London had helped him to appreciate the Latvian side of his background, and secondly how he has started thinking of a wider Baltic and Scandinavian space as his reference-point for the future:

Here [in London], I started to appreciate the Latvian language more. It’s great to have a conversation with somebody in Latvian here, to feel you are with your own people. I want to start something on my own in Latvia or maybe in the Baltics, combining Latvia with Estonia because my father now lives in Estonia. We [together with his Latvian girlfriend] are already planning a small printing and publishing business. As a second plan, we may go to Sweden for a while, or maybe stay longer there. After London, I really started appreciating our region, our culture... In Scandinavia the environment and nature are similar to Latvia in my experience.

Summing up: Latvia as mother and England as a new family

The financial crisis featured more prominently in the Latvian interviews than in those with Italians and Germans. The severity of the crisis and its disproportionate impact in such a small country caused many Latvians, both working-class and high-flyers, to become dislodged. For some, who lost their jobs, emigration was virtually a survival necessity. For others, it provided an opportunity to test new ground rather than take a cut in pay and working conditions. What was noticeable was that, unlike the Southern European graduates who see themselves as victims of crisis (our own Italian case-study, and see also Jendrissek 2014 on the Spanish), Latvian informants never victimised themselves due to crisis, but rationalised it as an opportunity to ‘do something’ abroad. In any case the small size of Latvia and also its limited cultural horizons induced many to move to London not just for better employment opportunities but also to broaden their life experiences. This cultural motive was especially prominent in the subsample who were artists, musicians and media professionals (or who aspired to these careers); but actually it was present to a greater or lesser extent in all other interviewees’ accounts too.

Ieva, late 20s, who now works in the field of NGO humanitarian aid and is a part-time musician, articulated many of the circumstances described above.

I started in England with my Master studies. Before that I was working in a Ministry in Latvia, and I felt that I needed to take a break, I wanted to do something more intellectual. I missed that in my job, and I wanted to study abroad. The ministry agreed to pay me 10 per cent of my salary, and I would come back after a year. But

then the whole crisis started; I came back and there was no work for me any more. I was offered a lower-level job... but I was thinking if I can't get anything decent in Latvia then I might as well go back to London... And so everything started when I made the decision to build my career in London. Also, I needed that atmosphere of the metropolis, I need music, I want to play and listen to the saxophone [her hobby]. It was not easy at first: it took me seven months to find the job I am currently doing in London... It was difficult to get interviews... I was going to interviews, sending out CVs and working in a restaurant, it was really tough... but in my third interview I was very lucky to get this job.

Like the German and Italian case-studies, Latvian participants expressed ambivalence about the possibilities of return and their ongoing emotional relationship to their home country. Ieva continued her interview in the following vein, saying that for the time being she is bored with Latvia and sees no future there; but who knows what might happen in the future?

Four, five days in Latvia and I already want to go back to London. If I go back to Latvia, I tell my mum and friends that I will go back when I am 40 and [according to Latvian law] I can become president of the country. It's a joke, but actually, in the long run, I do not rule out going back to Latvia, but I see myself only in politics. For the time being I am not that strong, I need to mature here [in London] as a personality. And then the other choice would be international affairs, I guess that is where I am heading...

Perhaps it is more common amongst migrants from small countries to possess a stronger emotional link to their home country, with its more neatly defined and tangible identity and its compact physical and social characteristics. Despite the 'small country' syndrome as a general push factor for people to emigrate to earn a living and develop themselves abroad, some participants also expressed a sense of nostalgic attachment to Latvia and the 'natural environment' of the country. Beate, who started out in banking but now worked in London as a singer in a band, summed this up rather well when she compared Latvia to her mother and England to her new family:

I have a clear idea now how I feel about Latvia. Latvia is like a mother; you don't have to live together but you can still love her and respect her and be grateful to her from afar. And I am grateful to mother Latvia because I received a great education there... the music college in Riga was the best possible... Eastern Europeans have very good musical education, ballet, opera singers; many are outstanding. Besides, Latvia gives you, how to put it, survival skills, and this is related to creativity... And England is like my new family.

Conclusion

This paper has had an ambitious conceptual and empirical agenda, and we commence our concluding remarks by summarising what we have set out to achieve. Located within the

geographical and legislative space of EU citizen free movement, and within the temporal domain of the years spanning the financial crisis, we have rejuvenated the core-periphery spatial framework of uneven development and structural inequality to help shed light on recent migration dynamics of young-adult graduates. We have done this by empirically examining three national-origin flows of graduates to the London region as the key magnet for this type of highly-educated mobility. Each of the three flows represents a different geo-economic positioning within the centre-periphery framework: Germans migrate from one EU core country to another; Italians migrate from the Southern or Mediterranean EU periphery; and Latvians are exemplars of the Eastern-periphery A8 accession countries, given free rein to roam the EU in search of work and adventure only after 2004. The relevance of the financial crisis in migration decision-making and behaviour emerged unevenly across the three samples: hardly mentioned at all by the Germans; featuring frequently in the Italian narratives, but more in the sense of a semi-permanent and deeply embedded structural crisis of Italian society offering so few opportunities to graduates seeking secure employment; and occurring as a common element in the Latvian accounts where the suddenness and severity of the 2008 financial crisis was a trigger for many young adults to migrate to the UK and elsewhere.

We need to reiterate, however, that most migrations take place for multiple and co-existing reasons, rather than for one single reason. Both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors enter into the decision-making process. Whilst most participants across all three groups stress the ‘lure of London’ as a key pull factor, referring not only to its employment and career opportunities but also its attractions in terms of lifestyle and a cosmopolitan, multicultural atmosphere, the strength of home-country push factors was more variable. Economic push factors featured hardly at all in the German participants’ stories of why they moved to London, whereas for both the Italians and the Latvians economic considerations were generally paramount. For these latter two groups, migrating to London was about getting a decent job, increasing personal income, and developing better long-term career prospects. For the Germans, it was more about taking ‘time-out’ from Germany and then returning to resume the home-country life and career at a later stage, although this initial plan was often found to be delayed or compromised by circumstances which occurred after the move to England. For all three groups, the migration was also explained with reference to cultural factors: compared to the cosmopolitan excitement and global-city atmosphere of London, Germany was seen as ‘boring’, Italy was seen as stifled by a traditional ‘mentality’ which was inimical to the progress of young people, whilst Latvia was seen as ‘too small’ and provincial to satisfy people’s aspirations or to be attractive enough to return to.

Whilst these generalisations above seem to be reasonably robust in terms of evidence to support them from 125 interviews, other aspects of the phenomenon of graduate migration within Europe need more survey-style data to uncover the relevant patterns and processes. First, there is the issue of how international mobility intersects with employment transitions – for instance, from unemployment or education to employment; from low-status, low-paid employment to better employment status; from one high-status job to another (eg. via an intra-company transfer); or, because of wage differentials across Europe, or non-recognition

of qualifications, including language barriers, from a higher-status job in the home country to a lower-status (but better-paid) job in the host country. These do not exhaust the list of possible transitions. Some German interviewees revealed instances of ‘trading down’ in order to be able to find a job quickly and in the perspective of only staying one or two years in London. Another trajectory is a stepwise one, where the migrant initially accepts low-grade work whilst waiting for a better job to materialise, perhaps after language improvement and the acquisition of skills and experience. Latvian interviewee Ieva had to work for several months in a restaurant before getting her desired job working for an NGO in the humanitarian field. Whilst migrants are not the only graduates to suffer from the syndrome of brain waste or skills mismatch – it can also affect native graduates in a tight and recession-affected labour market (Tijdens and van Klaveren 2012) – the various trends and transitions listed above do need to be verified and quantified by hard survey data.

Another set of questions explored in the interviews – more open questions this time – concerned plans for the future. Simplifying the categories of potential movement, four main pathways can be specified: stay on in London/UK; return to Germany/Italy/Latvia; move elsewhere, either in Europe or overseas; adopt a transnational or nomadic life pattern, living in more than one place and moving back and forth. Once again, survey evidence could be illuminating, always remembering, however, that mobility intentions do not necessarily turn into reality. Our findings from the interviews, admittedly with unbalanced sample sizes, indicate that, amongst all three national-origin groups, there are at least a few who plan to ‘stay put’ indefinitely and others who definitely plan to return. Our qualitative data also suggest some inter-group contrasts: Germans (especially the ‘bi-locals’) are more return-oriented than the Italians (at least that is the impression gleaned from the interviews); Latvians likewise mostly see themselves as long-term economic exiles from their homeland. All three groups express deep levels of ambiguity and uncertainty about the future, even to the extent of not really wanting to talk about it. This ‘narrative silence’ itself is quite revealing, and indicative of a broader question-mark over the degree of permanency of these new intra-European skilled migrations.

Acknowledgements

This paper was first presented at the IMISCOE YAMEC (Young Adult Mobility and Economic Crisis) workshop, held at the University of Lisbon, 27-28 February 2014. Thanks to João Sardinha and Sandra Silva for their initiative in organising this IMISCOE research network and the start-up workshop, and to the other workshop participants for their interest in this important topic.

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