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Russian German Identity: Transnationalism Negotiated Through
Culture, the Hybrid and the Spatial

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy (PhD.)

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Abstract

Transnational theories of migration have come to the fore in social science research as scholars have sought to account for the effect of globalization upon the practice of migration. The formulation of transnationalism has not been uncontested and its boundaries are still subject to redefinition. The studies that have utilised transnational frameworks have primarily centred upon circuits of movement flowing through North America. Although the volume of literature countering this focus has steadily increased there are few studies of transnationalism which apply to the migrations emerging from the spaces of the Former Soviet Union. Further, within post-Soviet studies the body of literature questioning the appropriateness of applying frameworks of western derivation to post-Soviet realities has grown steadily.

This study applies transnational concepts to a post-Soviet context. This thesis comprises a case study of the migratory practice of Russian German respondents interviewed in Russia and Germany. The empirical findings are employed to problematise understandings of transnationalism within a post-Soviet rubric. I argue that although Russian Germans' participation in transnational circuits is constrained by local circumstance in both Russia and Germany, study respondents are a part of a Russian German transnational community nonetheless. Their transnationalism is understood in terms of social space, hybridity and culture.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Setting the scene

This thesis sets out to examine the construction and practice of identity within a specific ethnic group and the effect that migration or migratory practice has upon the framing of their identity at individual and group levels. The research presented here takes as its subject Russian Germans resident in the Russian Federation and the Federal Republic of Germany. In order to collect the necessary ethnographic data, I undertook fieldwork in and around Ul'ianovsk, Russian Federation and Berlin, Germany for 9 months in 2006. In-depth, semi-structured interviews provide the data which are the basis for discussion. The analysis then presented discusses the migrant practices within the context of theories of transnationalism. The case study at hand is both explored as a vector of transnationalism and utilised to problematise the concept and boundaries of the transnational model.

The inspiration for this research initially developed from an interest in the increasing body of literature which examined the appropriateness of applying western social science frameworks to studies undertaken in post-Soviet regions (for example, Burawoy & Verdery, 1999; Hann, C & Dunn, 1996; Kay, 2000; Henderson, 2000 & 2001). Questions of identity and belonging were brought to the fore for many over the protracted era of transition which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, many scholars have examined the challenges inherent in, and the processes of reflection and introspection that have informed, post-Soviet (re)negotiations of identity (Ashwin, 2000; Kolstø, 1995 & 1996; Hogwood, 2000a; Kay, 2000; Laitin, 1998; Markowitz, 2000). The collapse of the USSR was accompanied by significant migrations of people who found themselves designated as “foreigners” in the now independent states that had previously constituted union republics of the USSR. The upheaval of relocation and “return” has been the focus of many investigations of the post-Soviet experience (e.g. Pilkington, 1998; Flynn, 2004; Kolstø, 1995; Smith, G, 1999a). The Russian diaspora has tended to be treated as a homogenous group and while the focus on the position of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers (in the English language literature) is, given the numbers involved, understandable, it does not fully reflect the diversity of the migration situation as it has developed in the Former Soviet Union (FSU).

Ethnic Germans resident in the FSU have engaged in migratory movements which have encompassed both the Russian Federation and Germany. Russian Germans have had a long association with the Russian territories, having first moved *en masse* to the Russian Empire at the behest of Catherine the Great in the period beginning 1763. Since then they have enjoyed interludes of favour but have, more often, endured far longer periods of disapproval. Their fortunes in this regard have often been dictated by their association, real and perceived, with Germany and the activities of their ‘German brethren’ have directly influenced the position of Russian Germans over the course of their residency in Russia and other Soviet Republics. In the late Soviet and early post-Soviet period, Russian Germans began to move in increasing numbers from Soviet and post-Soviet Space to resettle in Russia (Russian Federation) and in Germany. Forty three thousand *Aussiedler*¹ arrived in Germany in 1986, 400,000 in 1990. Ethnic German emigration from the East peaked in 1990 when 400,000 persons entered Germany with 37% of the total originating from the FSU (Immigration Law and Policy, §12.4; Dustmann & Glitz, 2005; 7). A quota was allocated in 1991-92 which allowed for the admission of approximately 225,000 returnees, this figure was revised down to 250, 000 per annum in 1993 (see Green, 2000: 91-92) and lowered further to 100,000 ethnic German repatriates and family members annually by the end of 1999. In 2003, 72,885 returnees families were permitted to enter Germany (Immigration Law & Policy, §12.4). A returnee must now be in receipt of an admission notice prior to entry into Germany (Immigration Law & Policy, §12.7).²

Although at the current time, these flows have been curtailed; the Russian Federation is however still home to a number of ‘potential migrants:’ that is to say, ethnic Germans who could, should they wish to, relocate to Germany. In Germany, the ‘return’ of Russian Germans has been a social phenomenon that has given rise to consequences which were unforeseen at the end of the nineteen-eighties and beginning of the nineteen-nineties when this migration began to increase significantly in volume and dynamism. Russian German returnees have been the focus of many studies on migration and its effect, though analysis has focused primarily upon issues of integration within Germany (e.g. Heinrich, 2002;

¹ The term *Aussiedler* or “settler” or “repatriate” designated ethnic Germans coming to Germany after 1950. Up until that point they had been called *Vertriebene* (expellees) in recognition of the mass expulsion of ethnic Germans from the East which had taken place in the post-WWII epoch. The designation *Spätaussiedler*, or late repatriate, was introduced to the lexicon in 1992/93 in §4 of the *Kriegsfolgenbereinigungsgesetz* (Law Concerning the Consequences of the War). All but one of my Berlin respondents (n9) relocated after 1993 thus the, term *Spätaussiedler* is subsequently preferred in this thesis.

² This obligation can be waived in very exceptional circumstances.

Kogan, 2004; Rock & Wolff, 2002; Roll, 2003). There is little work on transnational aspects of German migrations in general (though see Çağlar, 1997 for discussion of Turkish German migration and transnational practices) and still less concerned with the transnational practice among the *Spätaussiedler* (Holst & Schrooten, 2006, look at the remittance behaviours of different migrant groups in Germany; *Aussiedler* and *Spätaussiedler* are included here). It is the contention of this thesis that both Russian Germans in Russia, who are relatively immobile, and those now in Germany, who have a greater mobility potential, are engaging in transnational practices.

1.2 The emergence of transnationalism in migration studies

Migration has been subject to the transforming effects of globalization and students in the field of migration studies have had to grapple with the theoretical challenges that this has created. Globalization viewed from the top down foregrounds the movement of capital through a “boundless” space yet this inevitably affects the labour market and those at the grassroots. Transnational theory thus emerged as a novel discourse within the field of migration theory. Initial utilisations of transnational theory reflected the primacy of transactions of capital. This understanding of the transnational was retained after the framework began to be used in order to explain contemporary migrations. Earlier works which drew upon transnationalism were set among migrants or migrant groups who circulated as temporary labour between South and Central America and the USA (e.g. Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Rouse, 2002) or the networks established by those who sent proportions of their wages back to their kin who, in turn, resided at a home place whence the migrant always intended to return (Basch *et al.* 2003; Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 1999). Circuits of movement centring on North America predominated, as did the focus on the role of ‘the changing conditions of global capitalism’ (Basch *et al.* 2003: 22).

Transnationalism has been much contested but this has not prevented scholars from continuing to elaborate upon the possibilities of its application (i.e. Al-Ali *et al.* 2001; Dorai, 2003; Dossa, 2008; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Al-Ali *et al.* (2001) – for example – discuss the role that refugees play in such networks. However, even now, as the study of transnationalism has begun to exceed the geographic focus on the Americas and the

economic focus on remittance, few studies exist which apply the theory to migratory pattern originating in a post-Soviet context. This study is to be positioned relative to the body of literature concerning post-Soviet realities and to that which centres upon transnationalism and its contribution to furthering understandings of migration in a globalized world. The original aspect of this study is that it marks an attempt to analyse a post-Soviet migration through a transnational conceptual lens. The remainder of this introductory chapter outlines the structure of the thesis. The locations in which data collection was carried out are also introduced.

1.3 Thesis Structure

The theoretical framework utilised in this thesis centres on transnationalism. In Chapter 2, I outline and review literature on migration studies. In so doing, I seek to explain the genesis of the transnational concept and its current position in migration studies. I argue that scholarly approaches to migration studies and the situation of migrants in their “host” societies were fragmented and made assumptions regarding migrants’ intentions and desires and which did not sufficiently account for, or explain many aspects of, migrant practice which were extant (for example, Brettell, 2000). The process whereby scholars sought to reconcile the theoretical literature concerning the study of migration and the lived reality of the process is examined. Furthermore, the “content” of ethnic identity is examined and the salience of migration and migratory processes for identity formation, detailed. The development of transnational approaches to the study of migration is outlined and, subsequently, the refinement of the definition and focus of the transnational concept is explored.

It is posited that the broadening of the definition of transnationalism from a position which prioritises labour migration and remittance to encompass cultural practice and an exploration of its contents, is both justifiable and important. The conjunction of transnational theory and culture is examined with reference to the theoretical genesis of transnational social spaces. Finally, the focus upon culture within the given framework is refined to incorporate the cultural motifs which – on the basis of the empirical data that is subsequently presented – have been identified as crucial to the comprehensive analysis of the activities of a transnational type which are practised by participants in the study at

hand; these motifs are space and place (a symbolic role is played by language) and hybridity.

1.3.1 Methodological approaches

The methodological approach which informs this study privileges the respondent in an attempt to address the power imbalances that inevitably occur in the field. In Chapter 3, I reflect on the theoretical and practical concerns which necessarily inform the development of the methodological approach taken. Fieldwork experiences are employed to illustrate the process of methodological development that was ongoing over the course of data collection, analysis and writing. .

Gaining access to respondents and their milieu was, at once, fundamental to the success of the research presented here and, the most challenging aspect of the data gathering process. Thus, access is discussed both from a theoretical standpoint and as the crucial practical issue for this project. The contrasting experiences in the two field sites are discussed in detail. It is argued that the strength of the methodological approach chosen lies in its flexibility which enabled me to adapt my methodology in an attempt to counteract the obstacles that were encountered in the field.

Further, the multi-sited character of this project is acknowledged and explored. The fact that the study was located both in the Russian Federation and the Federal Republic of Germany affected the methodological choices (particularly with regard to access). From a methodological standpoint, this study can be seen as a contribution to the growing literature on multi-sited fieldwork. Multi-sited fieldwork, it is proposed, is not antithetical to the principles of ethnographic research. Instead, the multi-sited approach is seen as a necessary step in the process of acknowledging and appropriately representing the changing and globalizing dynamic of social worlds.

1.3.2 Historical setting

In Chapter 4, the history of Russian German settlement in the Russian Empire is set out and the subsequent development of Russian German society within the Empire and then the USSR is charted. Particular attention is paid to the episodes in the historical narrative

that study respondents highlighted as crucial to their perceptions of themselves (and others' perceptions of them) in the empirical data. To this end, the changing status of ethnic minorities in the USSR is described and, the role of ethnicity and ethnic identity in the everyday negotiation of the Soviet hierarchy of inclusion, belonging and participation is detailed. The chapter hinges on the effect of Soviet participation in the Second World War upon Russian German status, social position and subsequently their identity, representation and participation. In the post-war period the gradual re-emergence of ethnic Germans from exile to a small part on the Soviet national stage is chronicled. It is my contention that the (recent) history of the Russian Germans (particularly) in the USSR and post-Soviet epoch informs their current transnational practice; their prioritisation of space, place and language emerges directly from the historical discourse of identity formation, belonging and the "benefits" (codified as territorial and cultural autonomy) which accompanied successful negotiation of the Soviet system of minority "privilege."

In the time immediately prior to the collapse of Soviet power, Russian Germans attempted – along with representatives of the German federal government – to negotiate the resurrection of their territorial autonomy. This process is described, and the effect of the failure to secure autonomy on the out migration of ethnic Germans from Russia to Germany is considered.

In the final section of the chapter, the tenets of (native) German perceptions of *Germanness* are presented. It is argued that these tenets informed the culture and attitudes that ethnic Germans took with them when they migrated to Russia in 1763 and after *and* continue to inform both (native) German and Russian German ideas about culture and belonging in the present day.

1.3.3 Findings chapters: empirical data presentation

The majority of the empirical data in this thesis is presented in Chapters 5-7 although Chapters 3 and 4 (which provide the methodology and historical settings of the thesis) also contain findings from field research which are employed to illustrate encounters with issues of methodological importance in the field and, the historical narrative which provides the background to the current study.

Chapters 5-7 present and discuss the findings drawn from the empirical data gathered in both Russia and Germany. Chapters 5 and 6 focus upon the experiences and testimonies of

Russian Germans in Russia and Chapter 7 is concerned with those of study participants residing in Berlin, Germany. The chapters detailing findings from the narratives of Russian based study participants are divided along an axis which recognises the importance of the spatial motif for this analysis. The first chapter examines “physical” manifestations of transnationalism. The chapter is structured to reflect the gradual mobilisation of actors in this arena in search of avenues of engagement with, and connection to, Germany. Networks based on peopled social ties (which are rooted in the mass out migration of relatives and friends to Germany) are seen as fundamental to the practice that is observed. Emergent discourses on compact living, the church (and the relationship that ethnic German parishioners have with their pastor therein) and alternative sites and spaces prioritised by respondents are discussed with reference to the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2. The second part of this chapter looks at the ways in which study respondents have sought to maintain and actualise links with Germany based in understandings of transnationalism which focus on processes of maintaining regularised contact - including physical presence - in Germany.

The second chapter which comprises findings from fieldwork in Russia focuses on “symbolic” aspects of the spatial claims. The role of German language in this discourse is explored here with reference both to German language testing that would-be *Spätaussiedler* undergo in order to attain the right to “return” and as a contributory component in the ongoing efforts to claim the Lutheran Evangelical church in Ul’ianovsk as a ethnic German space and (potential) site of transnational engagement. The hybridised character of respondents’ cultural practice is also discussed in this chapter. It is posited that such practice serves to aid Russian German efforts to negotiate belonging in Russia while – at the same time – maintaining an avenue of cultural contact with Germans in Germany. The same process of hybridisation, cultural code mixing and interest alignment is seen the discourse which emerges around the significance of death, burial and grave sites for this group. The discourse on this topic serves, once again, as a symbolic manifestation of transnational alignment with Germany (one which informants may or may not attempt to actualise).

The final findings chapter explores the discourses that emerged from field data collected in Berlin, Germany. This chapter begins with an examination of the (differing) interpretation of the significance of grave sites for members of this group of study participants. It then develops to discuss discourses of language and associated arenas of employment which have emerged from the empirical data here. The situation that *Spätaussiedler* occupy is

delineated both by their own actions and those of the native Germans around them. It is seen that *Spätaussiedler* have difficulty in negotiating and comprehending social and cultural norms of native German society (it is intimated that some *Spätaussiedler* do not particularly like the native German character); this is illustrated through narratives which foreground motifs of domestic and city space.

Migration networks also function in this study cohort. It is demonstrated that network connections have been utilised in order to inform the relocation decision making process and that these webs of association persist – and are reinforced – post resettlement. Finally, the way in which Russian Germans in this location have affected a “return” to familiar cultural forms derived from Russian / Soviet tradition is discussed. The concluding chapter of the thesis (Chapter 8) then draws together the theoretical and empirical analysis that has been presented. I seek to establish the key areas of discovery that have emerged from the study and to link them to the aims and objectives outlined at the beginning of the thesis.

In the following section the field locations in which the empirical research data for this thesis was collected are introduced. I outline both the motivations for choosing Ul’ianovsk and Berlin as field sites and present contextual information about the respective sites of study.

1.4 Field locations, an overview

The city of Ul’ianovsk, Russian Federation was chosen as the first fieldwork site. The city is located on the Volga and Sviaga Rivers and is one of a chain of towns and cities stretching along the Volga which comprise one of the historic settlement areas of Russian Germans.

The original settlement of Simbirsk was founded in 1648 and the fortified site grew and modernised steadily over time. Simbirsk was renamed Ul’ianovsk in 1924 and is the political, economic and cultural centre of the Ul’ianovsk Oblast. According to local government figures, at the end of 2006 the city had 632, 700 permanent residents, this compares with Moscow’s population of 10, 425 million for the same time period (Moscow City Government).³ This figure included rural residents (Ul’ianovsk City Mayor’s Office).⁴ The central areas of the city (*Leninskii* and *Zheleznodorzhnii* regions) were home to 103,

³ Web source 1.

⁴ Web source 2.

100 and 76, 200 residents respectively. 217, 000 of Ul'ianovsk's citizens reside in the region situated immediately beyond the Volga (*zavolzhskii* region) which is accessible by bridge from the centre of the city.

Economically, the city relies upon its heavy industrial base which specialises in metallurgy and machine building enterprises which have survived into the post-Soviet period (Ashwin, 2006: 8). The average monthly wage of those employed in the cities industries and organisations (excluding any state benefits they may receive) was 8297.30 roubles in 2006 (rising from an average of 6702.80 in 2005 see web source 3)⁵. This figure compares to an average pension for the same year (excluding any additional payments to which the recipient might be entitled) of 2,782.8 roubles.

I had visited Ul'ianovsk on two occasions prior to undertaking fieldwork there⁶ and had, therefore, had the opportunity to establish a considerable network of friends and acquaintances in the city. This network played a crucial role in the process of accessing respondents. The importance of the informal networks for gaining trust and access should not be underestimated. This phenomenon is particularly notable in a Russian context (see for example: Caldwell, 2004; Tartakovskaya & Ashwin, 2006). Ul'ianovsk was selected as a research site as it was hoped that a significant and accessible population of Germans would still be resident in the city itself and the surrounding area. During the early post Soviet period, which witnessed the return of large numbers of ethnic Germans to the Volga region of Russia, attempts were made to resurrect the Volga-German Autonomous Republic (1924-1942) with Saratov as its centre (previously Engels had been the capital). Saratov's residents, however, rejected the Volga Germans' proposals (see Mukhina, 2007; this thesis, Chapter 4; section 4.3.3) with the result that the then governor of Ul'ianovsk, Goriachev, suggested that Germans, who wished to do so, would be welcome to settle in Ul'ianovsk province.

Time constraints were also a decisive factor in choosing the research location and thus the decision to utilise the pre-established set of contacts in Ul'ianovsk was based on the understanding that this could, potentially, be less time consuming than setting up new contacts in and around other potential study sites (Samara, Saratov or a Siberian city).

⁵ According to figures provided by the Moscow mayoralty, the average monthly wage for Moscow over 2006 was 18, 704 roubles and the pension (including city surcharges) 3389.9 roubles per month, see web source 4.

⁶ Most recently from June to July 2004.

Initially, it was hoped that connections forged in the field in the Russian Federation might provide links for the second part of the fieldwork based in Germany. This would have facilitated the development of the translocal and transnational at its most fundamental level (after Rouse, 2002). As the period in the field in Russia progressed, however, it became clear that such links would be very difficult to foster. Although numerous attempts were made to access potential German respondents from informants in Ul'ianovsk (and in some cases this established initial access to informants' friends and relations) this approach was ultimately unsuccessful.

As a result of the absence of prior contacts in Germany, it was decided to make Berlin⁷ the hub of fieldwork in Germany. Considerable numbers of *Spätaussiedler* were settled in the East. According to statistics provided by the Berlin Senate Commission for Foreign Affairs (*Die Ausländerbeauftragte Des Senats*) at the beginning of 2002 there were 32, 609 legally registered foreigners from the successor states of the USSR resident in the city. Of this total, 11,152 were from the Russian Federation. At that time the greatest numbers (1029) were resident in Charlottenburg (see Burchard, 2002) and it was felt therefore, that there was a reasonable chance of making successful contacts. Furthermore, Berlin was an ideal location as other cities with considerable populations of *Spätaussiedler* were within easy reach (for example, Hamburg, Leipzig).

In the following chapter the theoretical grounding for the analysis of the empirical data gathered during field research is presented. The chapter begins by outlining the development of migration theory, and looks at the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches which prevailed. Transnationalism is located within this process prior to a thorough exploration of the potential of the transnational idea within the area of migration studies. Finally, the way in which the transnational concept will be applied in the study at hand is delineated.

⁷ Population 3,416, 000 in 2009, 86% of whom were German citizens, see web source 5.

Chapter 2: The transnational, cultural and spatial in migrant identity: a theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

Ethnic Germans from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) have purportedly been given the opportunity to affect a 'return' to their putative ethnic homeland - Germany. The gates to Germany stood ajar during the later period of the Soviet epoch: they were thrown open in the immediate post-Soviet period and the process of mediation between the Germans of the FSU and Germans of the Federal Republic is still ongoing. At the current temporal distance from the late-Soviet and early post-Soviet origins of this return and an analysis of the discourses which inform the decision making of those who have elected *not* to return versus the discourses of those who have made the journey is necessary, informative and important.

In addition to uncovering and elucidating contemporary discourses of identity and, its construction and praxis in both Ul'ianovsk and Berlin, the conduct of research at two sites is an attempt to foreground through comparison, socio-cultural aspects of transnationalism and its practice among Russian Germans. In this regard, the research was conceived as an attempt to ascertain whether respondents in these groups undertook activities of a transnational type. Furthermore, where transnational engagement was evident, its structure, social regulation and efficacy were to be interrogated. The first part of this chapter comprises a detailed examination of the genesis of transnationalism. I begin by outlining the changing attitudes towards migration and its theorisation. This is followed by an assessment of the interaction between migration and identity. Next, I seek to establish both the contemporary relevance of transnationalism through a comprehensive review of the literature and, further, to situate culture and cultural practice within the broader transnational setting. Language and religion are identified as being of particular importance in this regard (emerging from the empirical research they reappear as crucial in Chapters 4, 5 and 6). The subsequent section of this chapter is focused upon the specific theoretical issues that are used to frame the findings of this thesis. In this regard, ideas of space, place and hybridity are introduced as the motifs of praxis for this group.

As suggested in Chapter 1, the volume of literature questioning early attempts to fit post-Soviet realities into westernised (theoretical) frameworks has grown steadily with time (Kay, 2000; Wedel, 2001; Henderson, 2000 & 2002). The decision to test theories of transnationalism was developed from this position. It will, in due course, be argued that the specific socio-cultural context of the migration of Russian Germans gives rise to a transnational practice which is specific to this community. Further, the ways in which this practice and the constructs underpinning it are articulated, prioritise narratives that exhibit spatialised and hybridised attributes. The notion of hybridity – denoting a state of in-betweenness or dual identity – has much to offer with regard to the exploration and explanation of the cultural expression of *Germanness* (or *Russianness*) as manifested by Russian Germans both in Russia and in Germany. A greater understanding of the social uses and/or role of space has – it is suggested – much to offer transnational analyses of migration. The interrogation of transnationalism through a “spatial lens” emerges from respondent testimony. Space is identified as central to the development of transnationalism and its cultural forms therein. Space is implicitly present in narratives of migrancy (Rouse, 2002); it becomes an explicit actor as a container of social worlds and is shaped by those who utilise it in order to engender identity and belonging. Thus, here (and subsequently in Chapter 4 and findings Chapters 5-7) space is identified as central to Russian German identity and thus to respondents’ practice of transnationalism.

The thesis as a whole takes as its subject actors who are either migrants or potential migrants: people who live either in Russia or in Germany and who by reason of their ethnicity and personal or family history, might claim to belong to one or both societies therein. Theorisations of migrancy, identity and belonging are, therefore, of significance. The discussion of migration theory, however, will be prefaced by an examination of the broader issues of migration and the role of identity and its social and cultural manifestations.

2.2 International migration: shifting the focus

International migration, as Castles and Miller note (1998: 4),

[I]s not an invention of the late twentieth century, or even of modernity in its twin guises of capitalism and colonialism. Migrations have been part of human history from the earliest times. However, international migration has grown in volume since 1945, and most importantly since the mid-1980s.

It has been posited that popular conceptions of international migration and its practice have been mired in nineteenth century models and assumptions (Massey *et al.* 1993: 432). Furthermore, the challenge of conceptualising migration has been approached in such a manner that a ‘single coherent theory’ has not emerged but rather ‘a fragmented set of theories... have developed largely in isolation’ from one another (Massey *et al.* 1993: 432). These perspectives were predicated on a view of the world as one ‘divided by national boundaries and immigration as an event that takes place between... self contained political entities’ (Portes & Böröcz, 1989: 625).

A number of models – focussing upon economic motivation for migration – have been proposed at one time or another¹ and these, predominantly market centred understandings of migration, have done much to shape public opinion of immigration and migrants (Massey, 1993). The majority of migration had been analysed in frameworks which focused upon the interrelationship of labour and capital and which, saw ‘labour flows as an outcome of poverty and backwardness in sending areas’ (Portes & Böröcz, 1989: 607) combined with the attraction of the comparative wealth of the receiving site. Such “push-pull” analyses of migratory behaviour gradually came to be seen as unsatisfactory for a number of reasons; they did not account – for example – for the failure of the majority of would be migrants to move despite prevalent “push” factors (see Portes & Böröcz, 1989 also Gmelch, 1980; Malkki, 1995; Richmond, 1993; Uhlenberg, 1973). The reasons why people migrate are extremely unlikely to be either univariate (Richmond, 1993) or solely economic (Uhlenberg, 1973). Other factors must be duly considered, among them the policy of the recipient country which does much to ‘determine whether movement can take place and what kind’ (Zolberg, 1989: 406 also Brown, 2005).

The tendency to perceive migration as a bi-polar transaction between the countries of origin and receipt and the ‘post-migration situation as localised in the new country of residence’ (Voigt-Graf, 2004: 28) where an immigrant would eventually ‘move up the

¹ Massey *et al.* (1993) provide a useful review (and appraisal) of the salient theorisations of migration; Neoclassical Theory emphasised labour migration determined by supply and demand on a macro level and a cost/ benefit reckoning on an individual, micro level. The New Economic Model posited that migration decisions (though essentially economic) were taken at the household rather than individual level. Dual Labour Market Theory accounted for migration as a natural outcome of the modern industrial era where migration is fundamental to developed industrial economies and their survival. This model gives prominence to pull factors over and above push factors. World Systems Theory views migration as a natural corollary of economic globalization and economic relations between developed and less developed countries where developed industries seek labour and resources in less developed areas. Such systems usually have their basis in colonialism. (Also see Castles, 2000 & Heisler, 2000).

occupational hierarchy, lose their cultural distinctiveness and blend into the dominant culture' (Heisler, 2000: 77) has also been found wanting (Portes *et al.* 1999 also Brown, 2005; Gmelch, 1980; Heisler, 2000; Mazzucato, 2000). (A tendency towards this view was prevalent even though contrary evidence was extant in very early studies of migration; see Brettell, 2000: 97). Such assimilation theory downplays the role of racial prejudice, colonial experience and the centrality of language and culture in the process of migration (Castles, 2000: 21 also Massey *et al.* 1993). As Portes and Böröcz (1989: 625) observe;

[I]f we are to believe the tenets of assimilationism, all immigrants would queue dutifully at the doors of the host society awaiting their turn for social acceptance as a reward for their acculturation.

Yet this does not occur. Even where labour and employment is supposedly the crux of a given migration social links which connect the labourer to others in the place of migration do much to dictate migrants' choice of destination (Portes & Böröcz, 1989: 612 also Massey *et al.* 1993). Networks of ties serve both to draw migrants towards new places and to aid them in compensating for their liminal position once there (Castles, 2000: 20 also Brown, 2005). Even where the causes of migration are ostensibly economic (i.e. the European *Gastarbeiter* or guestworker migrations of the 1960s and 70s), once movement is underway, it is through regional networks that migration is sustained and propagated (Heisler, 2000: 87). Guestworker migration - for example - did not stop in spite of significantly curtailed recruitment from the early 1970s on. Rather, migration to European countries came to be institutionalised on the basis of social, family and community linkages. The original labour migrants were a bridgehead in the initialisation of this process (Boyd, 1989: 640 & 645-646; see also Massey *et al.* 1993). Migration then becomes a process that is both very dependent upon social networks and, a catalyst for their creation (Vertovec, 2002: 3). Social ties that persist across space and time act to bind migrants and non-migrants together in a 'complex web of social roles [often centred upon (immediate) family] and interpersonal relationships' (Boyd, 1989: 639) which do much to inform migration decisions (Boyd, 1989; also see Gmelch, 1980; Portes & Böröcz, 1989) and to shape its outcomes (Boyd, 1989: 639). It shall be argued (section 2.3.2) that the network is central to the transnational conception of migration and the practices evidenced therein.

Thus, migration is conceived not as a single event but an ongoing and pervasive process which has implications for each and every aspect of migrants' life as well as those of 'non-migrants and communities in both sending and receiving countries' (Castles, 2000: 18).

Furthermore, migrants 'experience migration, settlement, ethnic relations, public policies, language issues and identity construction as closely related and overlapping segments of a single [migratory] process' (Castles, 2000: 15-16). These elements must be accounted for in any attempt to assess and/ or conceptualise migrants' position.

2.2.1 Identity and migration

Identity is a slippery concept, one which is perhaps only ever foregrounded when in crisis and subject to doubt or uncertainty (Mercer, 1994: 259). Identities both inscribe, and are inscribed by, the environments in and by which they are produced. The expansive and variable nature of identity as a concept arguably complicates attempts to explain the phenomenon. '[G]ender, age, race, language, nationality and religion are among the ascriptive bases on which people define their identities' (Richmond, 1996: 20). Depending upon circumstance it is possible to suppose that each of these loci may be assigned greater or lesser importance for an identity (either personal or collective). Neither identity nor ethnicity are objective "things" but might instead be thought of as part of a process which revolves around the manufacture of cultural inimitability pursued in order to institute self/ other dichotomies among people (Honig, 1996: 146). It must be remembered, however, that the shape of an identity is not only dependent upon the input and interpretation of its bearer. Identity is as much a product of how others perceive and situate us. And, in the case of migrant identity the perceptions of the citizens of the receiving state do much to influence the social position that migrants occupy and to prescribe the roles that they fulfil (Fouron & Glick Schiller, 1999: 353-354 also Basch et al. 2003: 21-46, particularly pertaining to race and social class; also Zolberg, 1989) in both home and host societies.

The significance of ethnicity or "being ethnic" is difficult to separate from the notion of identity *per se*. Yinger (1976: 200) usefully defines an ethnic group as

A segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/ or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients.

The routes through which one might engage with one's ethnicity could, in many ways, be seen as congruent with those through which one might engage with one's identity. Yinger,

(1976: 200) however, reminds us that the ethnic group is ‘perceived by others in the society to be different in some combination of the following traits: language, religion, race and ancestral homeland with its related culture.’² Furthermore, the individuals who comprise the group also see themselves as different and, as such, they take part in collective pursuits that are ‘built around their (real or mythical) common origin and culture (Yinge, 1976: 200). On the one hand, ‘no group of people is inherently or immutably ethnic. The Irish, for example, were obviously not ethnic in Ireland, but only became so when they migrated to the United States’ (Honig, 1996: 146; also see Brettell, 2000: 113), however, Russian Germans have been ethnicised both in the USSR / Russian Federation (RF) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). This conflation of identity and ethnic identity gives rise to a situation whereby the sites linked by the migratory arc (country of origin and country of settlement) do not represent “home” and “host” environments as they might be understood in other migrations.³

Robins and Aksoy (2001: 687) consider that identity has, ‘functioned as an ordering device ... [and] historically as a device of cultural engineering’ thus, as the carrier of certain identity one, ‘became a particular type or kind of person’ (Robins & Aksoy, 2001: 687). But while they posit that

Identity was about making people who have a sense of ‘belonging,’ about fixing cultures in place [...] the efficacy of the notion of identity has been to do with a project of immobilisation – with suppression of cultural mobility and consequently of what mobility would make possible (Robins & Aksoy 2001: 687-8).

This claim is challenged when we begin to consider the impact of migration upon identity, its formation and practice. Arguably, migration, either on a mass scale or at an individual level, disrupts the ordering capacities of identity. In this regard, much of the scholarly work which has focussed upon migration can be seen as an effort to explain disruption and dislocation. Migratory movements have been framed and re-framed over time as various migratory tides have ebbed and flowed. Moreover, attempts have been made to account not

² Benedict Anderson (2006: 13) recognised the ‘unique sacredness of language’ especially with regard to admission to and membership of a group: his conception of imagined community is predicated upon language as an essential building block of (ethnic) identities.

³ Flynn’s (2004: particularly 34-77) work on Russian return migration in the post-Soviet era draws attention to the multiple and contested discourses surrounding the idea of “home”, “homeland” and “return.” She examines the contextualising role of the state and explores migrants’ own interpretations. The USSR’s contiguity as a landmass adds an extra dimension to migrant understanding of home and return (also see Kolstø (1995) & Smith, G. (1999a) on this point). Voutira (1991) evidences the disjunctions that can occur between the image of homeland and the reality found upon return.

only for the role of the migrant or migrant group in determining their experiences of re-settlement and adaptation, but also for the role of the receiving state and society (acknowledging the role of the “other” in the construction of one’s identity) and, more recently, for the specific, somewhat contradictory effect of globalization upon such movement. As Richmond notes,

The dimensions of immigrant coaptation are also the dimensions of social survival for sedentary populations with whom the migrants interact. Movers and non-movers alike must respond to the endogenous and exogenous forces that are transforming local as well as global systems (1996: 105-6).

Thus, identity, it can be seen, is conceptually enigmatic and yet it functions as one of the founding principles of social organisation and association. Identity arises from the dialogue between an individual and their surroundings. Arguably, awareness of one’s identity will be accentuated as a result of migration, and its associated upheavals and transformations. Whereas, prior interpretations of migration had focused upon how migrants of ‘different social, spatial and gender identities have different interpretations of space and therefore have made migration decisions differently, a recent intellectual current is to see identity as being embedded in mobility rather than locality’ (Lin, 2003: 141; also see Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2003 & 2004). What is more, both movers and non-movers act to affect the frameworks within which one forges an identity (see Hammar *et al.* 1997).

2.3 Transnationalism: a contested framework

The genesis of new approaches to the theorisation of migration resulted in a willingness to *examine* more subtle aspects of the phenomenon, which was viewed as a process and, one which would have ongoing implications both for the migrant and the society they entered (Castles & Miller, 1998: 19; Heisler, 2000: 84). Thus, over the course of little more than two decades, a theoretical shift has occurred in the field of migration studies. Transnationalism has emerged as a framework within which scholars can begin to interrogate the relevance of the expectation that assimilation is necessarily the eventual outcome of contemporary migrations.⁴ As such, transnational theory forms part of the ‘critique of bi-polar models of migration’ (Brettell, 2000: 104). The concept of

⁴ Both Glazer (1993) and Alba & Nee (1997) observe that the concept of assimilation was already subject to a high degree of criticism and had largely been ignored as a potential framework for immigration research for a number of decades.

transnationalism enables scholars to begin to understand how adjustment to a new host society and the alteration in “socio-spatial” awareness might impact upon immigrant behaviour and identity. Thus far, very few studies of transnationalism applied to a Soviet or post-Soviet contexts are available.⁵

Transnational theory was utilised as the major framework in Basch, Schiller and Szanton Blanc’s (2003⁶) study of Haitian and Malaysian migrants and their emerging constructions of remittance networks and ethnically defined organisations in New York City. From this point on, transnational theory rapidly gained currency particularly as scholars were increasingly taken up with the ever growing numbers of people who were stretching the boundaries within which they lived their lives and who, it could be seen, were ‘living dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders’ (Portes *et al.* 1999: 217 also see Basch *et al.* 2003: 7-8). Portes’ description is useful as a fundamental definition of transnationalism and, it (along with the work of Basch *et al.*) is the springboard from which scholars of transnationalism have sought to refine understandings of contemporary migration theory. Although the volume of research examining the concept increased steadily, work which engaged with transnationalism and its practice was focussed primarily upon labour migration and the ongoing circular routes of migration between the USA and workers from Central and South America (Kearney 1995, 2000; Portes, 1999; Smith & Guarnizo 1998; Rouse, 2002). Portes *et al.* sought to capture behaviour that emerged among the migrants who used these circuits and to differentiate it from extant models of migratory movement. Transnationalism, they asserted,

[I]s a process which involves a) a significant proportion of persons in the relevant universe (immigrants and their home country counterparts) b) activities and interests are not fleeting and exceptional but possess a certain stability and resilience over time and c) the content of the activities are not captured elsewhere (Portes, *et al.*, 1999: 219).

⁵ McDowell, (2005) utilises transnational frameworks in her history of Latvian women migrant workers who arrived in post-war Britain from European displaced persons’ camps on European Volunteer Worker (EVW) programmes Baltic Cygnet and Westward Ho! and, subsequently, found themselves permanently resident in the UK rather than temporarily so as they had first imagined. See Mamattah (2006), in which the transnational practice of Russians resident in Scotland is examined.

⁶ The first edition of Basch *et al.* was published in 1994 and is cited in Portes *et al.* 1999 in their work on the theorisation of transnationalism. Basch *et al.*’s work has subsequently become one of the most widely cited works concerned with transnationalism and it is seen as a theoretical cornerstone of the concept.

While underscoring a requisite ‘density’ of participation, Portes nonetheless recognises the individual and his associates as ‘the proper unit of analysis... [and the] most viable point of departure for scholarship’ (Portes, *et al*, 1999: 220). The role of the state in sponsoring transnationalism is acknowledged but as a secondary consideration which developed after governments began to recognise the potential importance of their expatriate communities (Portes, *et al*, 1999: 220 also Basch et al. 2003: 7-8). The participation of the state is not, then, a requirement but an augmentation.⁷

Initially, transnational theory foregrounded labour migration and its outcomes and identified remittance and embedded trade based activities as the crucial requirements that must be present if an endeavour was to be considered transnational in type. However, transnationalism was increasingly applied to movements which occurred outside the US – Latin America or South East Asia circuits of movement to encompass other migrations (Riccio, 2001(Senegalese in Italy); Falzon, 2003(the Hindu Sindhi diaspora); Werbner, 2005 (the Pakistani diaspora in the UK); Voigt-Graf, 2004 (Punjabi, Kannadiga and Indo-Fijian diasporas); Arnone, 2008 (Eritreans in the UK); Mazzucato, 2008 (Ghanaians in the Netherlands); Bloch, 2008 (Zimbabweans in the UK)).⁸ Portes’ definition had been refined in order that scholars might account for a range of activities and behaviours along a scale of engagement. Thus, the processes and practices which comprise transnational activity could be seen to,

[V]ary widely and [further, they] are indeterminate because they depend on 1) the different *contexts* that migrants encounter abroad and in their place of origin 2) the *social capital* they possess; and 3) the social obligations and ties they have with a) their kin, communities and state of origin and b) the society to which they have migrated (Guarnizo *et al*. 1999: 370).

In this way a far greater number of activities came to be seen as transnational in type; examples of which include watching television or movies imported from the country of origin (i.e. Moorti, 2003; Carstens, 2003; Robins & Aksoy, 2001). Moreover, the inherent conditionality of transnationalism is further evidenced by the convention of referring not

⁷ In their volume *Transnationalism from Below* (1999) Smith & Guarnizo (eds.) acknowledge this, developing tangents of transnationalism which emphasise grassroots activities rather than top-down or state-initiated processes of development.

⁸ Heisler (2000: 84) notes that the preservation of home country ties can be seen as rather less unusual in a European context as ‘host countries did not encourage (and often actively discouraged) the permanent settlement of workers’ who were presumed to be temporary. In view of this, the slower uptake of the concept of transnationalism is particularly interesting.

simply to ‘transnationalism’ within any given context but to, for example, Dominican, Haitian, Filipino, or Eritrean transnationalism. Additional nuances to levels of engagement were suggested by Itzigsohn *et al.* (1999) who proposed that both Portes *et al.* (1999) and Basch *et al.* (2003) leave out important practices in their formulations. Instead, they outlined an understanding of transnationalism which designates Portes *et al.*’s classification as a type of “narrow” transnationalism. While recognising its value, they create space for an alternative “broad” practice which is characterised by material and symbolic routines and systems and low or sporadic mobility (Itzigsohn *et al.* 1999: 323).

2.3.1 Countering criticism: refining the transnational concept

The addenda that Portes *et al.* (1999) specify constituted a part of their rebuttal of one of the recurring criticisms of transnationalism which makes the claim that the concept does not denote a phenomenon that is truly new but merely gives a new name to processes that have been ongoing for centuries (Itzigsohn *et al.* 1999; Benton, 2003). The Chinese diaspora, for example, has always been “trade-based” (Ma 2003; also see Kotkin, 1993 for examples of a variety of diasporic networking practices). Benton (2003) dismisses the novelty of transnationalism, illustrating his contention with the narratives of Chinese mariners who worked on ships circulating from China to the UK (Liverpool in this case). They brought culturally specific business ideas (i.e. the Chinese laundry) which were then embedded in the British social milieu. Moreover, Portes and Böröcz (1989) note the tendency for migrations to be based upon historical ties between sending and receiving countries, be they colonial, political, trade or cultural in origin (also Castles, 2000; Gmelch, 1980; Richmond, 1993). It is then naïve to expect that migrations of a transnational type should be any different in this regard.⁹

Basch *et al.* (2003: 24-25) allow for past undertakings of transnational exchange and position their work as a part of a continuous process of development. They take care to emphasise the effect of the ‘unique and pervasive global penetration of capital (Basch *et al.* 2003: 87). The vitality and relevance of the transnational concept is found not in novelty but in the notion that it is an idea whose ‘time has come’ (Basch *et al.* 2003: 7). The models utilised by social scientists to investigate and explain migratory practice that they

⁹ History – as shall be demonstrated – plays an important role in the development of the “type” of transnational engagement participated in.

have witnessed have developed and changed through time (see Malberg 1997: 27-8) and transnationalism can be considered as a stage post in this evolution and a response to the ‘recognition that mass migration is self-perpetuating, transforming, systematic and increasingly driven by global forces’ (Heisler, 2000: 84). The advent of globalization has given rise to a social environment which has heralded transnationalism as the bedfellow with which it shares the ‘historical moment of late capitalism’ (Lionnet & Shih, 2005: 5). The homogenous, mass-mediated environment that globalization portends facilitates the process of movement and return that is fundamental to the transnational concept (Appadurai, 1996: 6) creating an environment in which ever increasing numbers of people ‘seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than [those in which] they were born’ (Appadurai, 1996: 6).

This reimagining is based upon, and fuelled by, the reductive effect that globalization has had upon the world. So, while the global is often defined vis-à-vis ‘a homogenous and dominant set of criteria the transnational designates spaces and practices acted upon by border crossing agents be they dominant or marginal’ (Lionnet & Shih, 2005: 5). Basch *et al.* counter the criticism that transnational theory was not accounting for anything “new” by clarifying requisite factors, the fulfilment of which was, in their view, necessary if a process were to be called transnational. They emphasise that transnationalism is inexorably linked to the ‘changing conditions of global capitalism and must be analysed within the context of global relations between capital and labour’ and the greater and more persistent ‘global penetration of capital’ (Basch *et al.* 2003: 22 & 24). Further, Basch *et al.* specify that transnational migrants in their daily lives, social, political and economic activities generate social fields which cross national boundaries. In living these transnational lives, transnational migrants ‘find themselves confronted with and engaged in the nation building processes of two or more nation states. Their identities and practices are configured by hegemonic categories, such as race and ethnicity; that are deeply embedded in the nation building processes of these nation states’ (Basch *et al.* 2003: 22). Moreover, they caution against a tendency within the social sciences to ‘conflate physical location, culture, and identity’ as it can reduce the researcher’s ability to ‘perceive and then to analyse the phenomenon of transnationalism’ (Basch *et al.* 2003: 22).

In this way the investigations of Basch *et al.* prioritise practices which draw the migrant into activities which have outcomes that are felt beyond the confines of the community and families left behind. What is more, they focus upon the differences in ethnicity and race which – they subsequently argue - are foregrounded in the process of personal and

professional exclusion that immigrants, who become transmigrants, can experience upon arrival in (in their study) America (Basch *et al.* 2003; also see Remenick, 2003 on work, status and exclusion). While one might argue that Russian Germans – and particularly those Russian Germans who have made the trip to resettle in Germany - are of the same ethnicity as the members of their receiving society it shall be demonstrated that they have, nonetheless, been (socially) excluded at both ends of their migratory pathway as discussed in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. Germans in Russia (and the USSR) suffered as a result of their ethnicity and subsequently, in Germany they have been perceived not as ethnic brethren but “Russian” others who have, as Brown (2005: 630) observes, ‘gone through a very different history and a different process of modernisation’ (c.f. Vergeti, 1991¹⁰; also see Gilroy, 1996: 24; Glick- Schiller & Fourn, 1999; Popov, 2003; Voutira, 1997 who discuss the experiences of African-Americans returning to their ancestral lands, Haitian transnationalism and Pontic Greek “return” respectively).

While the contributions of Basch *et al.* (2003), Portes (1999) and Portes *et al.* (1999) to the debate have been acknowledged as fundamental (Itzigsohn *et al.* 1999; Faist 2000a; Glick-Schiller & Fourn; 1999; Al-Ali *et al.* 2001; Riccio, 2001), the volume of literature examining transnationalism as a broader framework within which more amorphous identity constructs - such as culture its forms and products - can be accounted for has steadily increased (Carstens, 2003; Crang *et al.*, 2003; Fann, 1991; Moorti, 2003; Morely, 2001; Robins & Aksoy, 2001). Moreover, groups which might be considered as having minimal opportunity or motivation for transnational engagement began to be analysed as potential transnational actors. For instance, Al-Ali *et al.* (2001) (also see Dossa, 2008, & Dorai, 2003) employ transnationalism as an analytical tool in a study of refugee identity, arguing that the premises dictating that a refugee will inevitably return home or, integrate into the host society appropriating an ethnic identity or, being disowned by the home government can no longer be assumed. And yet, refugees’ place in the hierarchy of the host society can reduce their potential as providers of remittance to the country of origin and their ability to travel between the two regions is also necessarily limited.

While acknowledging the role that remittance and political agency or engagement played as the initialising catalysts in the construction of transnationalism, it was now proposed that ‘now cultural construction [of transnationalism] is underway’ (Itzigsohn *et al.* 1999:

¹⁰ Vergeti examines the experiences of Pontic Greeks. It should be noted that members of the first migratory waves (1920s) did believe that their settlement in Russia was temporary.

336). Furthermore, the extent to which the receiving state permits new arrivals to participate/ integrate into society at large combines with the migrants' own desire to act in these arenas thus affecting the type of transnationalism that results (Guarnizo *et al.* 1999: 367; Al-Ali *et al.* 2001; Itzigsohn *et al.* 1999: 335, Robins & Aksoy, 2001: 693).¹¹ In the following section the joining of transnationalism and culture is discussed. It is argued that, these cultural discourses are particularly important in family centred migrations (and the networks that emerge from them). The concept of space is foregrounded as a transnational (social) arena which can be manifested physically (i.e. church, café, youth club) by migrants and non-migrants alike in their attempt to create linkage between the country of origin and settlement. Space can also be mobile (Kit-wai Ma, 2002) when people are not, thus the utilisation of space provides a forum in which non-movers can find or create avenues of transnational engagement alongside those who have moved.

2.3.2 Transnationalism and cultural engagement

The modification of transnationalism to include culture broadens the potential field of study considerably but it is a valid and important step nonetheless. Moreover, this is especially so the greater the distance that separates the fields (locations) included in any study. As Voigt-Graf point out 'social relations between members of a transnational community in two neighbouring countries tend to be closer than between those living in different continents' (Voigt-Graf 2003: 44; also see Werbner, 2005). Where physical distance or mobility are more significant factors, culture can come to act as a more transportable and accessible commodity. A transnational framework which incorporates culture also helps to shed light on the sphere of social exclusion and migration. Firstly, overcoming social exclusion has been proposed as a catalyst for the genesis of transnational activities among migrants (Basch *et al.* 2003) and theorisations of cultural transnationalism have likewise emerged from studies of communities which have been compelled to negate exclusion through cultural practice (Çağlar, 2001; Moorti, 2003; Werbner, 2005).

¹¹ Portes (2001: 190) suggests that in the USA at any rate transnationalism is a one generation only phenomenon. Other authors' work suggests that, cultural forms of transnationalism at least, may persist beyond the first generation (Hall, 1990; Werbner, 2005, Potter & Phillips, 2006).

The interpretation of transnationalism as a cultural phenomenon generates axes of investigation which can be less formal, including intra-household and/or family and institutional domains (Faist, 2000a, 200b). As such, the social networks within which migrants embed themselves (and are embedded) once again come to the fore, not only as modern modes of communication ‘have shortened the social distance between sending and receiving societies’ but because in so doing the societies of origin and settlement then come to comprise a single arena of social action (Brettell, 2000: 104). In this way, both mobile and immobile actors play roles in the process of migration (particularly as networks are most often formed around the family unit). As a result, the theorisation of transnationalism has been developed to draw in cultural and symbolic forms, and this approach has hinged upon transnational social fields or spaces (Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 1999; Faist, 2000a; Itzigsohn *et al.*, 1999). Such an understanding of transnationalism affords room to acknowledge cultural exchange, once again enmeshing relatively immobile actors in a transnational network (Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 1999; Faist 2000). A transnational social field can,

[B]e thought of as a field of social interactions and exchanges that transcend political and geographical boundaries of one nation and have become the relevant field of action and reference for a larger number of Dominicans [in this case] in their country of origin and in the broad diaspora that it has generated (Itzigsohn *et al.* 1999: 317).

Germans in Russia are citizens of the Federation, but they are neither the titular nor dominant ethnos.¹² However, the manner in which they seek to link the localities with which they are familiar bears the same traits as those ascribed to Dominicans here. Indeed, social fields or spaces can link members of a group both literally and metaphorically and - in this way - they can function as spaces within which migrants *and* immobile actors operate to overcome ‘social and spatial fragmentation’ (Guarnizo *et al.* 1999: 388). In their day-to-day lives migrants may choose to organise and attend events which although based in the host country have a “host” and “home” focus (Al-Ali *et al.* 2001: 625).

The mobilisation of culture within a framework of power relations can be of significance both within a given group and outside its bounds: for example, defining relations with, or

¹² Moreover, as my research demonstrates, not all those who could claim a German nationality / identity choose to do so.

attitudes towards, ethnic others in the host community.¹³ The exploration of cultural modes of transnationalism has become increasingly embedded in the literature (e.g. Çağlar, 2001; Carstens, 2003; Falzon, 2003; Moorti, 2003) where it has been employed to explain the experiences of transmigrants for whom ‘home is no longer limited to the geographic spaces of a single nation state’ (Moorti, 2003: 365). Notably, cultural notions of transnationalism have emerged to fill gaps in constructs of identity and belonging for groups who might not be expected to invest in such endeavours. An example is seen in Çağlar’s (2003) work which examines belonging constructs of Turkish youth in Germany. While the majority of her cohort was born and raised in Germany their uncertain position with regard to their citizenship has meant that they have felt unable to anchor themselves to Germany. Instead, respondents exhibited a tendency to structure their belonging in terms of their city of residence, ‘an urban space rather than a nation’ (Çağlar, 2003: 608). In so doing, they form new cultural spaces which facilitate ‘the development of non-unitary identities... [which] cannot be analysed within a model of immigration that is linear and accumulative’ (Çağlar, 2003: 606).

In this way Çağlar prioritises space in her reading of the constructs upon which she focuses. Indeed, the notion of space is one which runs throughout the testimonies of the Russian Germans who participated in this study. The spaces they refer to are both notional (created by the use of language and the performance of ritual) and concrete: the specific places of the church, their homes etc. Space, claims Kit-wai Ma (2002: 131 - 132), ‘can be highly mobile... space is a social construct that anchors and fosters solidarity, oppression, liberation or disintegration... a container of power through which people’s biographies are constrained and enabled.’ As both metaphorical and physical manifestations of place and space were foregrounded by respondents as they sought to explain their views over the course of interview, both concepts must be investigated further.

2.3.3 A place for space and hybridity in the transnational concept

As is apparent from the above discussion, the genesis of recent social science discourse, and the conscious drawing together of transnationalism and space/place further strengthens the theoretical value of the transnational framework. The genesis of the transnational concept is closely associated with new theorisations of space and place that have emerged in recent social science discourse (Brettell 2000: 104). Space, after all is a crucial

¹³ The situation of Russian German in the USSR/RF means that this is equally true for those who have remained in the RF as they constitute a minority group in their ‘country of origin.’

component in and container of social relations and community practice. The importance of space in this regard has often been overlooked (Lefebvre, 1991; Low, 1996; Watkins, 2005). Kantian and Cartesian understandings of space and their contributions to our social world have, with time, been recognised as inadequate (Lefebvre, 1991; Watkins, 2005; Casey, 1996; Elden, 2004), thus, space is no longer seen as a *tabula rasa*, or the simple container of social interaction. Instead, it has been proposed that spaces, in and of themselves, are the products/outcomes of the very social interplays that they are conceived to contain (Lefebvre, 1991). Space can be seen as fulfilling an important role in our social world. Furthermore, the, ‘act of producing space is recognised as fundamental to our experiences of the world’ (Watkins, 2005: 211). On the global stage this failure to interrogate the role that space fulfils in social life may be seen as resulting from the view of ‘the world of nations... conceived as discrete spatial partitionings of territory... [and] the concept of culture [which] has many connections with that of nation’ (Malkki, 1992: 34); an analysis powerfully affixes culture and territory. Yet the notion that borders can “contain” cultures has been duly questioned (Hannerz, 1996: 8) through a process which can be seen as a consequence of the emergence of transnational processes which ‘put issues of cultural identity and cultural community into a new context’ (Robins & Aksoy, 2001: 708). Migration and space interact in a manner that serves to emphasise ‘the social nature of space as something created and reproduced through collective human agency [... and therefore,] existing spatial arrangements are always susceptible to change’ (Rouse, 2002: 159).¹⁴

Indeed, issues of space and spatial negotiation - in a variety of guises - have informed work focussed upon migrant identity, experience and adaptation (Doughan, 2005; Gross *et al.*, 2002; Huelsebusch-Buchannan, 1979; Kiliçkiran, 2003; Massey, 1992). The tendency among immigrants to attempt the creation or recreation of the familiar in new surroundings and, in so doing, to create a “familiar place” is an observed component of migrant practice. Papastergiadis (1998: 11), for example, recounts that Greek migrants in the Australian suburbs went to great lengths to recreate their “Greek gardens” as,

¹⁴ Places can be thought of as localised spaces. As Casey (1996: 27) points out a ‘given place takes on the qualities of its occupants; reflecting these qualities in its constitution and description.’ The particular importance of place (as distinct from space) lies in the fact that ‘to live is to live locally and to know is first of all to know the place one is in’ (Casey, 1996: 18).

[T]he space of the suburban garden was re-drawn to accommodate a mini vegetable patch. Neo-classical columns were knocked down and replaced with smooth “Roman” arches. Tomato and chilli pepper on one side, ferns and gum trees on the other.

While Hannerz (1996: 148) observes that a similar response to the unfamiliarity of novel and (sometimes) incomprehensible surroundings but in a alternative place;

[F]aster pace and bewildering heterogeneity and strangeness of Amsterdam and other cities, some found it a bit threatening and turned inward to their kin and friendship networks and to the Moravian church they had brought from home.

This reorganisation is undertaken in order to counter the sense of un-belonging which accompanies relocation (and may in fact be worsened under conditions of supposed “return;” Gilroy, 1996; Popov, 2003; Voutira, 1997). Through this process of translocation migrants ‘invent and recreate a local culture and viable community’ (Werbner, 2005: 763). Inevitably, migrants must renegotiate ties (both personal and spatial) during the process of moving from a space or place where the landscape is familiar (e.g. the church steeple) and plays a role in one’s biographical narrative and those of one’s forebears - from a landscape to which one can say one belongs - to one where no such associations are current; such dislocation or discontinuity leaves people in a ‘kind of void’ (Papastergiadis, 1998: 81).

Thus, it can be argued that there exists a powerful tendency to carve out spaces and places which are ‘familiar’ and, furthermore such processes can then lead to the development of hybrid spaces or ‘ethnic melange neighbourhoods ... such as Jackson Heights in Queens, New York’ (Pieterse, 1995: 51; also see Gross *et al.* 2002: 204).¹⁵ Within these spaces rituals such as weddings, funerals, Christmas and Easter (according to Gregorian and Orthodox calendars and celebrated – for example - with traditional German dishes in Russia (see Robins & Aksoy, 2001: 697)) are used as ‘commemorative nodes’ (Featherstone, 1995: 94). Marking these occasions utilises culture ‘to confer agency within a field of power relations’ (Werbner, 2005: 749) and, in so doing, provides a forum for social inclusion. They are also sites of hybrid practice.

¹⁵ The equivalents in modern Germany might be the *kleines Kasachstans* and *neues Moskaus* (mini Kazakhstans and new Moscows) now found in many cities (Brown, 2005).

The notion of hybridity has entered social science discourse as a mechanism to aid the understanding of “difference” in varying contexts. Cultural identity in particular has often in the past been seen as an unchanging, invariable entity but theorists have argued that it is not fixed, essentialised or located outside history. What is more, culture is not ‘a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return’ (Hall, 1990: 226). The diaspora experience, according to Hall (1990: 235) is not one which is delineated by unambiguous characterisations of the diasporic self or community but rather by ‘heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite difference; by *hybridity*’ (also see Bhabha, 2004: 224). Such differences are often only evident once distant “sames” are brought together (Hall, 1990: 227).

Hybridity can be understood as a process whereby cultural forms and practices separate from one another only to reappear, differently combined as a novel form or practice (Pieterse, 1995: 49). Hybridity might be usefully thought of as a process of adaptation and modernisation whereby elements of the old are combined with new products and practices. This process give rise to novel forms which serve to aid cultural practice and which may then, in their turn, become embedded in that practice. In this way it can be seen as the means by which newness enters the world (Hutnyk, 2005; Bhabha, 1994). The concept of hybridity has not been accepted into cultural discourses without contestation. Hutnyk (2005: 80) talks of hybridity as a ‘usefully slippery category, purposefully contested and deployed to claim change,’ and, arguably, all cultures are inherently “creole” (Hannerz’ terminology, 1996) or hybrid thus limiting the explanatory power of hybridity as a concept (Pieterse, 1995: 62; also Anthias, 2001). Although hybridity enables theorists to account for fluidity vis-à-vis cultures and identities, these features are nonetheless anchored in territorial ideas both national and transnational (Çağlar, 1997: 173). But while Çağlar (1997: 172) fears that the utilisation of hybridity, ‘risks limiting heterogeneity to the hyphenated form’, the notion has, nonetheless, been extensively discussed and employed (Hall, 1990; Hannerz, 1996; Papastergiadis, 1998). Furthermore, it has found a particular niche within migration studies to explain the origins of recent migratory flows (Potter & Phillips, 2006) and vis-à-vis the longer term experiences of the second generation and beyond (Clifford, 1994; Mercer, 1994; Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1996; Treacher, 2000). Potter and Phillips (2006) have acknowledged hybrid identity as the platform upon which returnees in their study (of UK-Barbados return migration) premised their “return,” and Mercer (1994: 4-5) has proposed that ‘hybridised identities point to ways of surviving, and

thriving, in conditions of crisis and transition.’ It is in this connection that ideas of hybridity and hybrid identity can be usefully applied to the case at hand.

The above has focused upon and emphasised the spatial element of transnational practice. It has been argued that space is both actor in and product of the social worlds that people create and inhabit. In this way, space is a key element of cultural engagement and, further, it has a role to play in cultural readings of transnationalism, transnational practice and transnational social space. Spaces (and the localised places they become) are recognised as containers of social interaction which can be “more mobile” than the people they contain. Such spaces do, in fact, become containers of social praxis; much of which exhibits hybrid content and centres upon creating a place in which practitioners feel themselves to be socially included. In the following section, I examine the symbolic creation / delineation of space which has language at its crux. Language, it is posited, is employed to denote identity and belonging and to impart social structure thus, it fulfils a defining cultural role and – in a migration context – a micro-level symbolic-spatial one.

2.3.4 Language and the valorisation of (cultural) space

Although Brah is most likely correct in her claim that there is no “correct” definition of culture (1996: 18) it is useful to attempt a designation of some sort. Clarke *et al.* (1983: 11) term culture as ‘the symbolic ordering of social life... [which] embodies the trajectory of group life through history.’ It is somewhat easier to recognise language as a fundamental element of that symbolic ordering. Language is a crucial axis for the construction and “defence” of a culture. As Richmond (1999) notes, ‘language plays a critical role, not only as an ethnic signifier in its own right, but also as a medium through which ethnic consciousness and ethnic groups are formed. [A]t¹⁶ every stage, ethnicity is linked to language, whether indexically, implementationally or symbolically. There is no escaping the primary symbol-system of our species’ (Richmond, 1999: 23).¹⁷

The symbolic power of language and the key function it fulfils in engendering and maintaining social networks and hierarchies has been the subject of a great deal of academic scrutiny. Much of the work seeking to illuminate and explain the way in which

¹⁶ He cites Fishman (1989)

¹⁷ Also see Smits & Gündüz Hoşgör, 2003 & Urciuoli, 1995.

language defines social spaces and interaction has been focussed upon a mechanical exploration of everyday language usage, examining, for instance, the effect of accent or dialect upon access to power and resources (Bourdieu, 2005). Although initially arising from enquiries based in linguistics, the frameworks and theories thus generated can also be usefully applied to studies concerned with language as a social actor where multiple languages ‘compete’ within a single social context (for examples, see Joseph, 2004). Looking at the ways in which languages spoken within a given community are utilised as a tool with which to define and maintain status within a group gives valuable insights into the structuring of identity for members of the group. Furthermore, understanding how and why languages competing in the same interactional space are endowed with varying symbolism at different times and how these variations are conditioned by fluctuations in a broader social milieu, gives a window onto how social identities evolve.

The position that language occupies vis-à-vis transnationalism should also be considered. Portes *et al.*, (1999: 229) for example, note that in the USA at least, ‘it is possible for immigrants to engage in transnational activities without knowing English well and while remaining marginal to [...] the social mainstream.’ Thus, transnational practice enables migrants to maintain a sense of belonging to a place although they are no longer there and language can be seen as central to engendering and operationalising that sense of belonging. In the findings presented in this thesis it can be seen that migrants who choose to affect a “return” often have difficulty gaining access to the cultural space occupied by their assumed ethnic brethren as their inadequate (or out of date) language skills curb their ‘cultural mobility’ (Robins & Aksoy , 2001: 705) within the new space (Vergeti, 1991; Robins & Aksoy , 2001). Yet, even when language is not a barrier in itself there can be other hindrances to mutual comprehension; among them a certain conception of reality and common frames of reference (Richmond, 1996: 25). Language then, combines with cultural and symbolic elements and, as such, is itself ‘the core to self identity’ (Richmond, 1996: 24). The notion that the possession of ‘two passports or legal residence documents equipped [citizens] with multiple cultural identities’ (Ma, 2003: 3) cannot, in fact, be assumed. Where people feel themselves threatened, excluded or misunderstood language can be a crucial axis around which individuals might gather in order to negate their excluded status through the creation of alternative loci of belonging predicated upon linguistic capability.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

This thesis sets out to investigate the contemporary relevance of transnational theory for ethnic Germans from the FSU in Russia and Germany. In this chapter I have sought – through a review of the applicable literature – to position the conceptualisation of transnationalism within the overarching discourses focussing on migration and, to establish the significance of transnationalism for the study at hand, and to discuss the concepts that emerged from the empirical study which help to inform transnationalism and deepen understandings of its practice in reality.

In spite of the (particularly recent) volume and persistence of international migration, scholars have fragmented the field concerning the study of the migratory process (Castle, 2000: 2-26) often placing the connected elements of labour and capital at the centre of their thinking about the topic. This way of thinking, however, began to be recognised as unsatisfactory, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s (i.e. Gmelch, 1980; Uhlenberg, 1973); even labour migration has a social dynamic rooted in the networks that migrants form to ease transition to a new place and/or to guard against exclusion once there. These networks inevitably enmesh non-movers as well as movers.¹⁸ Further, by locating migration/migration decisions within a network allows for the perception of migration as a social product (Boyd, 1989: 642).

Identity then comes to the fore in discussions about migration concepts. Ethnicity must also be considered, as a constituent part of identity *per se* and one which is imbued with more meaning once a migrant has relocated from “home” to “host” society. The role of “the other” (the receiving state bureaucracy or the native citizens in that place) also influences the position of the migrant on both global and local levels.

Transnationalism is seen as emerging from scholarly efforts to address the imbalances and oversights that had been identified as inherent to migration theory as it had developed to this point. It is posited that – despite criticism pertaining to novelty – the concept delivers a framework within which it is possible to take a holistic view and analysis of contemporary migrant praxis. The development of transnationalism to encompass migrants’ cultural practices and the social spaces that contain such practices is beneficial. It is argued that so doing is particularly prescient in cases where migrants’ mobility is somewhat curtailed.

¹⁸ Heisler (2000: 84) notes that the total disruption of ties was never a reality.

The concept of transnational social space then comes to the fore and it is posited that migrants and non-migrants can seek to join their social worlds through the delineation of actual and imagined spaces of social interaction. They achieve this by claiming and reorganising (through traditional and hybrid practice) actual, physical spaces (rooms, buildings, gardens, cityscape) and through symbolic exposition (chiefly denoted by language). In this way, practitioners seek to overcome social exclusion by aligning themselves with their ethnic brethren (it is primarily “non-movers” who act in this way) and their networked kith, kin and community (this is prevalent among “movers”). The emphasis on culture, space and hybridity in transnational practice has emerged from the empirical data upon which this thesis is based. In the following chapters (particularly 4 – 7) findings from the data set are presented. It shall be argued that participants in the study do engage in practices of a transnational type. The character of the transnational practice is shaped by participants’ (recent and more distant) history (individually and as a minority national group) and contributes to their construction of their identity in both “host” and “home” societies.

Chapter 3: Methodological Approach: Finding the Balance.

3.1 Introduction

The self is not so much complete and rounded as partial and multiple
(Coffey, 1999: 35-36)

Investigating the self, or more exactly identity, is necessarily, an inexact process. Research which claims to scrutinise any aspect of identity and the constructs which it comprises must, therefore, reflect this. To propose that identity is not an easy concept to explore is not to declare the project impossible, nor does it indicate a lack of appropriate tools with which to tackle the task at hand. Recognition that any or all aspects of identity are dynamic, unpredictable and sometimes even mutually contradictory (Hall, 1990; Mercer, 1994) does require that the researcher carefully consider the approach to the field and, makes due consideration of the ethical implications therein. Practical issues such as overall methodological approach must be married to an awareness of less tangible concerns such as the role that the researcher inevitably plays in the production of their own data (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) and the repercussions this might have for the later analysis and presentation of their work.

Due consideration must also be given to the place of theory – as a frame of reference for the inquiry – with relation to the epistemological approach or approaches which are utilised; that is to say the way in which methodology will be employed to problematise and advance theoretical understandings of the given subject area.

The issues outlined above are the concern of this chapter. What follows is a reflection upon the process of data gathering, processing, analysis and production. The intention is to outline the genesis and evolution of this procedure presenting the methodological fundamentals which have been employed over the course of the research and, the theoretical justification for their usage. Further, the complexity of combining methodology as outlined in textbooks to a real situation – ‘in the field’ - is discussed. Issues pertaining to the ethics

of field research and the power relations therein are discussed as and when they arise and are, thus, interwoven with the discussion of the methodological evolution of the research process.

3.2 Research design

The use of qualitative methodology with regard to the collection of data in the social sciences has long been the subject of debate. Chiefly, critiques have focussed upon the perceived weakness of non-generalisable nature of qualitative approaches to research (as raised by Carr, 1994; Sandelowski, 1986). In some cases, it has been asserted that there is in fact little to distinguish accounts based on qualitative data from journalism (as raised by Corbin & Strauss, 1998: 28). Yet the value of the qualitative perspective lies in its emphasis upon the way in which the people being studied understand and interpret their social reality and this is one of the central benefits of the qualitative approach (Bryman, 1998: 8).

In addition, a qualitative approach acknowledges the need to afford respondents a degree of control over the data collection process – in terms of what they disclosed, how they chose to express that disclosure and the interpretations placed upon the information. This, combined with the prerequisite that the methods used must be those best equipped to capture the subtleties of identity and culture, informed the choice of methods. Taking an ethnographic approach means that ethnographers ‘must learn the culture of those we are studying. This cannot be done by following standardised [quantitative] procedures’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983: 9).

Questions pertaining to the construction and practice of individual and group identity were foremost at the outset of my research. The method and methodological approach to data collection would, therefore, be primarily directed by this consideration. From the outset an investigative framework based upon qualitative principles was preferred to quantitative approaches. Thus, the research design reflects contemporary preference for the application of qualitative (naturalistic) methods and methodology in studies concerned with identity

constructs and their production and performance in any given setting (Coffey, 1999; Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Lomba de Andrade, 2000).

As Denzin (1998: 2) points out ‘the choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked and the questions depend on their context.’ Here, the aims and objectives of the proposed research are demonstrably well served by a methodological framework which favours qualitative approaches. Put simply, research which seeks to explore identity and the broader social conditioning which underpins the continual changes that identities are subject to over time, does not lend itself to the uniform confinements of closed survey and, as quantitative methodology makes ‘an epistemological assumption that the social world lends itself to objective research’ (Corner, 1991: 719), it cannot be deemed a suitable approach. The inherently complex and often contradictory ways in which narratives of identity are experienced and expressed must, therefore, be captured via alternative means. Ultimately, research methods which

reflected and capitalised upon the special character of people as objects of enquiry... a perspective which emphasises the way in which the people being studied understand and interpret their social reality is one of the central motifs of the qualitative approach (Bryman, 1998: 3&8).

In many ways ethnography can be considered the most basic rudimentary form of social research enquiry, pivoting upon the ways in which people negotiate their place in the everyday (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983: 2). Yet, the simplicity of the rationale should not detract from the potential deductive power of data gathered and analysed within a framework based upon ethnographic principles. Much of the strength of an ethnographic approach lies in its innate flexibility (Carr, 1994; Duffy, 1986), the importance of which it is hard to overstate. As the research which forms the basis of this thesis is concerned with issues of ethnic identity, its genesis and contemporary modes of expression, and relies heavily upon understanding the interplay between individual agents with each other and the broader structures which define their communal spaces, it was important to design a methodology with which one might hope to encompass the potential dynamism and range of the field. While issues of power dynamic in the field cannot be completely defused (Wolf: 1996; Burawoy, 1998) they can be minimised through careful consideration of the

position of the researcher apropos the informants and furthermore, must be acknowledged and reflexively explored as part of the ethnographic process.

Qualitative methods facilitate the researcher in building a picture of the complex patterns and interactions which comprise a social or peopled field through inductive analysis. In this project, data gathering initially focused on the semi-structured interview¹. One of the primary advantages in this connection lies in the fact that it affords the possibility of making a very ‘open’ approach to potential respondents. This, in turn, allows the respondent to remain in their everyday setting and therefore to retain more control over the content and interpretation of the information they reveal to the researcher. Thus, the researcher is able to record a person’s attempt ‘to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings ... [they themselves] bring to them’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 3). What is more, the collection of spoken testimony acts to ‘capture the pasts of less literate and more marginalised groups whose histories might not otherwise be transcribed’ (Wolf, 1996: 8).

Employing such methods does not guarantee that discursive and detailed responses will be forthcoming. Difficulties can arise where ‘respondents refuse to admit the researcher into their “relational world” (Denzin, 1970: 33) or they may endeavour to tell the researcher what they wish to hear rather than the truth of their own experience (Denzin, 1970: 129&135; also Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 20; Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Indeed, this phenomenon has often been observed specifically with reference to migrants (Pilkington & Omel’chenko, 1997). An unwillingness to engage with the research or the researcher was palpable over the course of the period of field research undertaken in Germany. The attempts which were subsequently made to engage with potential informants focussed upon adapting the methodological approach whilst in the field. This flexibility would have been more difficult to achieve had a quantitative approach informed the basis of the methodology.

There is much to be said for ‘letting somebody talk’ as more open approaches can ‘maximise discovery potential (Denzin, 1970: 186). This may be especially relevant in

¹ See Appendix III for list of subject areas/ questions put to respondents in both sites.

research investigating potentially emotive topics which are therefore more easily negotiated through an open interview structure (Denzin, 1970: 130-31). Migration and settlement in a new place can be an intensely stressful experience. Both the circumstances under which the movement is undertaken and the situation an immigrant finds themselves in after arrival are potential sources of distress. Moreover, qualitative approaches to research are inherently multi-method (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 35); the combination, or triangulation, of multiple methods can be employed both in the field and later, during analysis of data, in order to draw out the nuances and complexities of social interaction on individual and group levels. Utilising a mixed methodological approach can facilitate deeper understanding of a given situation, thus helping to generate a greater insight into the social world which is the focus of the research.

3.2.1 The question of access

The issue of access to prospective respondents is often a problematic aspect of fieldwork. Prior to setting out on fieldwork it was expected that gaining access could pose considerable obstacles to the overall progress of the research project. Gaining the trust and subsequently the cooperation of individuals who have anecdotally been described as forming close knit, closed units and communities would be the key to the success of the data gathering phase of research. Access - and the potential for difficulties pertaining to it - was addressed directly in the research design in two ways. Firstly, a location was chosen (in the Russian Federation) with which I was already familiar from previous visits and, secondly, the primary tool of data collection was to be the ethnographic interview (augmented by collection of press material and participant observation).

As I chose my location in order to be able to exploit an extensive network of trusted acquaintances, I could draw upon their contacts – and perhaps most significantly the confidence already established among the key informants within them - to reach potential respondents. Further, it was decided that approaching the field thus would allow researcher and respondents to retain a degree of flexibility in the field thus ensuring that the approach to respondents and their milieu could be adapted to suit the prevailing circumstances. My reflections upon the ideas which initially informed the methodology with regard to access

and the outcomes achieved in the fields, in Russia and in Germany, will be discussed separately.

3.3 Participant observation & field notes in this research

This chapter now focuses upon ethnographic interviewing and chain referral (snowballing methodology) which formed the crux of the methodological approach in this project. Yet, it is also necessary to say something about participant observation which was ongoing throughout the fieldwork period.

In order to integrate into the community at the centre of my research and to facilitate participant observation over the course of the fieldwork period in Ul'ianovsk I attended the Lutheran-Evangelical church (both the religious service and post-service tea and cakes) on most Sundays. Furthermore, I undertook several trips into the area surrounding the city in the company of regular church attendees. A great deal of significant information can be garnered from 'mundane events which the social actors may not even be consciously aware of, and therefore will be unable to recount to the interviewer' (Porter: 1990: 730). The principle value of the participant observation undertaken in the field is seen here. The method is also 'flexible and allows for empathy' (Power, 1989: 44).

In addition to the contacts I was able to make through the church, I augmented findings which emerged from interview data with observations made in this, and other settings. Indeed, other social events were attended over the course of the summer (for example, the German Family Day in a neighbouring village, Oktyabrskii) but the church and associated gatherings afforded the most consistent opportunity for prolonged social interaction in a 'German' context which, in turn, enables the researcher to become familiar with the 'assumptions and rules which animate the social environment under scrutiny' (Porter, 1990: 731; also see Power, 1989) thus furthering the potential for the triangulation of data during analysis and ultimately a fuller description of the social setting under study.

There is, however, some anxiety associated with the use of participant observation, vis-a-vis the relative awareness of participants to the researcher's presence and role in their community (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). It is my view that the possible ethical conflict that might have arisen here was dealt with at the first opportunity. At my second church service attendance (the first was an extremely busy Orthodox Easter Sunday Service) I was introduced to the congregation by a vergger who made clear both my provenance and my intentions in participating in the church services as a researcher, rather than a practising Lutheran. From this point onwards, my interactions with other church-goers almost always resulted in conversations that include reference to broader issues and themes (for example, a child's illness or the acquisition of a new pet) and also queries about my research, or comments clearly intended to contribute to the research process (for example, asking about my progress or suggesting points of possible interest or departure or potential respondents).

In settings away from the church my researcher status was also acknowledged. For example on a trip to nearby woodland for a summer barbeque, I was introduced to two potential respondents (who had not attended church since my arrival) by a third party (regular attendee) and I was subsequently able to interview one of these people. This situation was repeated at the "German Family Day" where I was introduced initially as a journalist during the festivities and was then able to approach people (and clarify my status) at the tea-party afterwards. As I am conspicuously non-Russian² my attendance anywhere drew attention and elicited questions pertaining to what I was doing in Ul'ianovsk, which provided relatively easy ingress into a new social setting.

As part of the process of observation, extensive field notes were made at all points over the course of fieldwork and were used to record and reflect upon day to day events and happenings, my interpretations of them, and the interpretations that were sometimes offered by participants (both ethnic Germans and ethnic Russians). Observations and field notes have been fed into the research both as it was ongoing and over the course of writing the thesis, to inform avenues of inquiry for interview and to contextualise the findings presented here.

² I come from a mixed race background.

In contrast to the extensive opportunities to socialise and become immersed in the community of Russian Germans in Ul'ianovsk, far fewer opportunities to socialise within the *Spätaussiedler* milieu presented themselves in Berlin. I was, however, able to attend an Autumn Ball in the Karlshorst district of the city. However, unlike the situation in Ul'ianovsk, where my role had been clear, in Berlin, it was far from obvious who I was (although my foreign, outsider status was, in this closed context, very apparent). Although some people had been expecting my attendance they avoided me anyway, having been misinformed or believing that I only spoke German rather than Russian which was their preferred language.³ I was present at this event early on in the German part of fieldwork but was unable to capitalise on my attendance from a point of view of research. While people were happy to chat with me (eventually) I was unable to transform their curiosity into participation (interview). Yet, attendance gave me a valuable insight into the closed nature of the community and its tendency towards amalgamated forms of expression (tending towards the Russian).

3.4 Ethnographic interviews: sampling and the interview process

The research relied almost exclusively on snowballing as a method for reaching potential respondents. Realistically this was one of the only avenues open to me as researcher due to the closed and network dependent nature of the communities involved in this study. Although officially rehabilitated as a national minority in 1955 (see Chapter 4; section 4.3.3) many ethnic Germans in Russia are still reticent when it comes to revealing their nationality.

Once access was secured, many respondents in Ul'ianovsk self identified as ethnic Germans though, often, they were from a mixed background (one German parent and the other Russian, for example). Contacting potential respondents in Germany was complicated by the fact that people originating from the FSU are seen by native Germans as a homogenous Russian group and little or no appreciation exists of the heterogeneous composition of groups of recent arrivals which includes considerable numbers of ethnic

³ Over the course of fieldwork it became apparent that few *Spätaussiedler* speak German confidently, see Chapter 7.

Russians and some Russian Jews. Moreover, those who make up the *Spätaussiedler* group consider themselves as Germans (they receive German nationality immediately upon arrival) and, for the most part, do not associate with any of the organisations set up to aid ‘Russians’ with their adaptation to life in Germany.⁴

Interviews took place at a location of the respondent’s choice.⁵ In Ul’ianovsk this was usually the respondent’s home or, occasionally, their place of work. In Berlin respondents preferred to meet in a public space, a café, association common room or office; only four interviews took place in a respondent’s home, others were undertaken in a domestic environment (Marienfelde in Berlin, which was temporary accommodation for recent arrivals). This divergence with regard to interview location is particularly interesting as it echoes one of the primary discourses of discovery presented in the findings here which concerns space and its negotiation and role as a social actor (Chapters 6 & 7). In this regard the contrast between interview locations over the two sites is marked and significant as it arguably reflects the respondents’ respective levels of comfort with or acceptance of the research (me, the researcher and the process overall) and moreover, their state of settledness in the broader environment, i.e. Russia or Germany.

All interviews were conducted in Russian and with the consent of the participant the majority were tape recorded⁶ and later transcribed in full.⁷ Interviews focussed upon the respondent’s identity. It was intended to collect data concerning migrant identity constructs, contemporary expression of German identity, views on Germany and the links (or lack of) which informed these views. Further, enquiries were made in order to identify any links that migrants maintained with their areas and places of former residence.

⁴ Early in the Berlin based fieldwork I spoke with an ethnic Russian journalist who had contacts within the *Spätaussiedler* community. He asked about my efforts to foster links with *Spätaussiedler* thus far and I revealed that I had approached staff at *Russisches Haus* or the Russian House, a landmark Russian cultural centre in the middle of the city. My informant dissolved into hysterical laughter. After some time he gathered himself sufficiently to remark that this was preposterous as *Spätaussiedler* identify themselves as “German” not “Russian”. It is notable that aside from one interview taken on the first visit, the connection with *Russisches Haus* did not result in contact with further respondents.

⁵ Making sure that the respondent chose, and felt comfortable with the venue was a deliberate attempt to address issues of power relations in the field; discussed in section 3.4.1.

⁶ Except in cases where the respondent declined to be recorded or where the location of the interview – walking through a park / along a main road - made this impossible. In these cases, extensive notes were made by the researcher immediately post interview.

⁷ Interviews were transcribed and subsequently analysed in Russian. Extracts were translated as and when added to the text of this thesis. In this way, I hoped to avoid some of the pitfalls associated with conducting and presenting research in a second language; see this Chapter, section 3.7.

It was anticipated that the semi structured interview format would enable the respondent to interpret the questions freely and thus indicate their interpretations and associations to the researcher. The interviews varied in length and quality considerably, some lasting over ninety minutes while others continued for little more than half-an-hour. The depth of the respondents' interest in the area of the research and the affinity established with the researcher were crucial factors in the comparative success or failure of interviews. The contrast in experience between the two research sites was most obvious in this regard. On the whole, respondents in Berlin were less interested in the research and engaged more superficially with the researcher. It was suggested by many key informants (those in positions of leadership or influence at some of the many migrant support organisations contacted, a local council worker, and local councillor) that this was a result of over exposure to social scientists investigating the Russian-German milieu, whose enquiries did not lead to concrete change in the lives of their respondents.

It is notable that none of the informants in official positions, who put forward this viewpoint, consented to a formal interview. While several (particularly two migrant organisation workers in Springföhl and a local council employee in Hönow) gave of their time generously, offered enormous help, and spoke extensively off-the-record, they demonstrated the same reticence as many potential migrant informants when the topic of interview was raised. It is my view that their reluctance to participate in the research formally (even with guarantees of anonymity) was motivated by similar fears (regarding possible damage to their reputation within the group)⁸ to those which they ascribed to prospective informants.⁹

⁸ See footnote § 26, this chapter.

⁹ Few organisations which cater specifically for ethnic Germans were known to me either in Russia or in Germany before I embarked on fieldwork. I was, however, aware of the existence of the Lutheran Church in Ul'ianovsk and the editorial offices of *Rundschau* the bilingual news digest distributed throughout the FSU. It was my intention to identify key informants from the narratives and testimonies of respondents and, where possible to interview those whom *they* identified as community leaders. In the field this approach met with mixed success. In Ul'ianovsk there were several community groups who identified different 'authority figures.' Indeed, community members' discontent often coalesced around these leading lights. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the pastor of the Lutheran-Evangelical Church, the chairwoman of the German Association in Oktyabrskii and the editor of the newspaper. A key informant in Bogdashkino, a village in the area surrounding the primary field site, provided much in the way of contextual information but declined a formal interview as he did not wish to compromise his professional position. In contrast, only 2 'expert' interviews were formally undertaken in Berlin, although many more potential key informers were met. I was able to speak with an ethnic Russian journalist who had links with the *Spätaussiedler* community and the chair of one of the organisations visited. But this interview was dominated by discussion of his chairing role and his personal experience as a Russian-German returnee (eventually emphasising the later). All other potential key informants refused formal interviews outright though we spoke at length vis-à-vis my research and the position of *Spätaussiedler* generally, sometimes meeting at length on several separate occasions.

The issues of engagement raised here have repercussions for several aspects of the research as a scientific process. Where positivism in social research dictates that researcher and researched maintain an objective distance one from another, qualitative and ethnographic methodologies often create data sets which do not conform to standardised positivist norms. On the one hand, enabling respondents to tell their own story reduces distortion but this can occur at the expense of reactivity, reliability and replicability¹⁰ and while the researcher can standardise the questions set, they cannot control for the response (Burawoy, 1998: 13 & 14). The process of gathering ethnographic data is one which accentuates the dialogue *between* researcher and researched (Burawoy, 1998: 7), therefore the information gathered is contingent upon *who the researcher is* (Burawoy, 1998: 1, my emphasis; Wolf, 1996) and anyone attempting to replicate the study would arrive at different outcomes arising from a different data set (Burawoy, 1998: 11). On the other hand, because the narratives which are the product of interview research can be ‘as truncated as forced-choice survey answers or as elaborate as oral life histories,’ (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997: 113) this in itself goes some way to addressing the inherent power imbalance present in all social research. The respondent is able – through verbosity or reticence - to enact some further influence over the experience of the interview and, subsequently, though perhaps to a much lesser extent, the shape of the final written outcomes.

3.4.1 Reciprocity and power relations

At the end of each interview respondents were invited to make any additional comments with regard to any topic which had or had not been raised during the interview but, which they felt to be of interest or importance. On many occasions this led to a fruitful further discussion concerning an issue the relevance of which would not have occurred to me otherwise. Further, respondents were asked if they wished to ask any questions of me, either regarding the research or more generally. Often this resulted in a considerably more wide-ranging conversation about my own life experience, opinions of Russia/ Germany and reasons for interest in the subject area being surveyed. I carried a small album of

¹⁰ Though it is doubtful that a genuinely value free position can, in fact, be attained. Every researcher has a background which inevitably informs their point of view (see Wolf, 1996: 4, also Watts, 2006: 387).

family photographs to all interviews which I showed to some of my respondents if and when the appropriate moment arose. This afforded an opportunity for reciprocity to ‘give something back to participants for the privilege of asking them about their lives’ (Watts, 2006: 387; also see Weem, 2006: 994-995). Furthermore, I was happy to answer any questions which respondents asked about my life and or opinions.

As a result of engaging in a reciprocal approach to research, on three occasions in Ul’ianovsk I was offered the opportunity to visit schools and speak English with pupils studying the language. These opportunities arose as a consequence of conducting interviews with secondary school teachers. I was able to deepen my level of reciprocity to respondents in a general manner as I subsequently recorded readings in English for one of the schools visited. The experience was both interesting and enjoyable and, further, it enabled me to do something concrete for my informants which was current and useful to them in an everyday context. Such an opportunity to engage directly with the wider community never arose during the course of the Berlin based fieldwork. This is arguably a reflection of respondents less favourable attitude towards my presence and purpose within their community. I will, however, provide upon completion a summary of my thesis in German and Russian translation for two organisations alongside a full copy of my thesis in English as they requested.

While Wolf (1996: 35) questions whether any attempt to create “friendship” genuinely acts to shift the power dynamic within what will be essentially be a short lived association which is terminated upon the researcher’s return home, she nonetheless insists that one ‘should not abandon attempts at egalitarian field relationships’ even if, it is unlikely that a panacea to the ethical problems of fieldwork exists (Wolf, 1996: 25).

3.5 The Issue of Generalisability

In many ways the in-depth, semi-structured interview complements research which grows out of snowballing methods (discussed below: 3.6) of data collection (Moore, 1996). Arguably, this is especially the case where family migration is undertaken and migration, therefore, forms part of the familial biography (Halfacree & Boyle 1993, Smith D.P. 2004).

Previous studies of family migration have ‘tended to analyse migration as a one off event... [But a] re-conceptualisation [of this view] of family migration focuses attention on the biographies of family migrants’ (Smith, 2004: 268). Indeed, this approach is being used more and more within migration studies (Smith, 2004: 268). In-depth interviews can be considered

Exploratory conversations between subject and researcher and they have pluses and minuses associated with them... They can give a rich story of descriptive and anecdotal data, which suggests patterns, variable and hypotheses for further study. [Which in turn reveal a great deal about how] migrants live, the problems they encounter, their coping or survival strategies, then the shaping of their identities and attitudes (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003: 190).

The social research interview is essentially a semi-structured conversation one, which produces narratives which, ‘are constructed *in situ*, or as a product of the talk between interview participants ... both parties [interviewer and interviewee] are *active* ...all [are] making meaning’ (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997: 113, 114, 126). The role of all participants must be acknowledged and the data presented here should be seen as rich and issue specific (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). The justification for viewing the analysis thus, is augmented in the theoretical grounding of this thesis. Findings point to the group specific nature of transnational praxis and therefore, the fact that the methodologies allowed for the generation and collection of biographical narratives, or thickly descriptive information (Geertz, 2000), should be perceived as a strength rather than a weakness or cause for methodological concern.

3.6 Snowballing & in-depth semi-structured interviews: methodological strengths & weaknesses

Snowballing or chain referral (Penrod *et al.*, 2003), was chosen as the preferred method for contacting potential respondents both in Ul’ianovsk and in Berlin and, it is instructive to examine that the issues that arose over the course of fieldwork differed markedly in the Russian and the German contexts. Here, I will discuss the rationale behind the selection of snowballing as the chief method of data generation. Further, I will examine the strengths

and weaknesses associated with the method in both fields of study and the challenges associated with this method for the researcher and, therefore, the research.

Snowball sampling was chosen chiefly because it offers indisputable benefits for research which seeks 'to access difficult to reach or hidden populations' (Atkinson & Flint 2001: 2). Indeed, snowballing is often utilised in investigations of migration, forced migration and refugee experience and identity formation (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Iosifides, 2003). There are multiple reasons for this preference, but caution must be exercised by the researcher in order to avoid the pitfalls - ethical and methodological - which can affect the further analysis of the research data and its later presentation.

I will argue that, for the research presented here, some of the perceived weakness of snowballing has, in certain arenas, actually strengthened the validity of the data collected in this investigative context. Chain referral was less effective in generating responses in the German period of fieldwork. However, a combination of factors meant that few alternative methods for approaching informants constituted valid alternatives.

3.6.1 Access to respondents in Russia¹¹

I had previously undertaken a pilot study focussing on the experience of migrants in the Russian Federation in Ul'ianovsk (June-July 2004), this research focussed upon ethnic Russians, not Germans. Contacts established during this first period of research had, however, indicated that considerable numbers of ethnic Germans had remained in the city itself or moved there and to the surrounding area in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet period. Even at this early stage, it was noted anecdotally that many thought the ethnic German community closed, mysterious and ultimately unapproachable.¹² It was suggested that my status as an outsider with neither Russian nor German roots would be an insurmountable barrier with regard to access, though this is a questionable assertion. Wolf (1996: 15) for example, argues that outsiders may, in fact have enhanced access to local

¹¹ See appendix I for details of respondent numbers and demographic details.

¹² Russian friends and associates made this observation to me, as did a freelance social researcher who had helped me to contact ethnic Russian respondents for a pilot project undertaken in summer 2004.

confidences due to their perceived neutrality. It was hoped that as a fluent speaker of Russian, familiar with the contemporary cultural context, I would be well placed to undertake a role as participant observer and thus become familiar with the routine of community activity and, in so doing, overcome any reservations respondents may have had with regard to participating in interviews. On balance, it was decided that snowballing of interviews would be the most effective strategy with regard to accessing respondents. In retrospect it is possible to add that snowballing did much to uncover the “architecture” of the community in Ul’ianovsk and that this background knowledge was beneficial to the subsequent processes of analysis and interpretation.

Concerns about problematic access were born out by responses made by key informants and gatekeepers to initial enquiries. At the outset of fieldwork, contacts were sought in the Lutheran church in the centre of Ul’ianovsk. The church pastor - an ethnic Russian - indicated that, in his view, the majority of Germans would be unwilling to speak with me. Moreover, Russian-German organisations (specifically a *zemlyachestvo*¹³) with which it was hoped contact could be made had, apparently, ceased to function in the time since leading figures in its organisation and administration had relocated to Germany. Although the Lutheran Church was referred to within the wider local community as “the German Church” it soon became clear that ethnic German attendees were in the minority, many having ceased regular attendance as a form of protest at what they saw as the *Russification* of their church.¹⁴

Although some respondents were contacted as a direct result of church attendance the majority were accessed through wider networks of friends and acquaintances. A rift was evident within the group hinging upon confessional identity and its expression. The feeling of alienation to which this gave rise among a sector of the German community in fact facilitated access to respondents in and around the central area of Ul’ianovsk. As the research progressed it became clear that outsider status, far from arousing mistrust and

¹³ A society of friends from the same area.

¹⁴ After its restoration and reopening in 1994 the church ministers were ethnic Germans sent over from Germany. Services were conducted in German with simultaneous translation. Although few of those interviewed spoke good German almost all were of the opinion that services should be given in German, citing the high numbers of regular church goers (both ethnic Germans and other nationalities said to be “curious” to hear German or improve their foreign language skills) as proof of this fact. The current pastor, however, insists that Russian – as *lingua franca* - should predominate and gives services only in that language; see Chapters 5 & 6 for discussion.

catalysing a closing of ranks, was an advantage as respondents who felt marginalised in the church as a result of its *Russification* and saw the interview as an opportunity to air their concerns centring on this issue.

Certainly, one of the chief benefits of snowballing is that, when successful, it enables the researcher to gain trust by association. That is to say, if potential informants are few in number and a degree of trust is required in order to initiate contact, snowballing can 'imbue the researcher with characteristics associated with being an insider or group member and this can aid entry to settings where conventional approaches find it difficult to succeed' (Atkinson & Flint 2001: 16; also see Bloch, 2007: 234). This was certainly a vital consideration in both Russia and Germany. Indeed, in Ul'ianovsk I received contact details for potential informants through a third party with whom these informants were not on good terms. The third party advised that I should not mention her when asked where I had sourced their names and phone numbers, suggesting instead that I name the church pastor as the originator. I decided against utilising either the telephone numbers or evading naming my source, doubting that I would meet with success. Some time later, however, the same potential informants were named by another person who then acted as intermediary to arrange interviews. That the respondents trusted the mediator was a crucial element in the successful negotiation of access. Both of these sources then provided further referrals, the majority of which led to interviews. This is illustrative of a potential for gatekeepers to play a vital (and in this case positive) role in the data gathering process (see next section for further discussion).

Collecting data thus leaves the researcher open to the claim of bias (Jacobsen & Landau 2003: 195; Atkinson & Flint 2001: 3; Bloch 2007: 234) as there can be a tendency to 'over emphasise the cohesiveness in social networks' (Atkinson & Flint, 2001: 3) and, furthermore, isolates may be ignored as they are not included in the network (Atkinson & Flint, 2001: 2). This then affects the research findings as;

the non-probability basis of snowball sampling means that it is not possible to measure the precision of the sample in relation to the population as a whole... resulting in limitation to the data and the inability to generalise (Bloch 2007: 234).

While it is necessary to have an awareness of these potential pitfalls it should be noted that, for the Ul'ianovsk fieldwork, such networking actually facilitated access to potential informants who would otherwise have remained hidden to the researcher as they were primarily disassociated from the more mainstream or obvious manifestations of German activity in the city (for example, the church and the circuit of activity in and around the village of Oktyabrskii).

In order to overcome or avoid the charge of bias, strenuous efforts were made to maximise the number of start points in the search for potential informants. Thus, in addition to approaching the church as a prospective route source of respondents, I was able to call upon an extensive network of friends and acquaintances. A combination of factors (small size of the contemporary community, non-identification as German by potential informants, caution that people still exercise vis-à-vis revealing their nationality) meant that, relatively quickly, the same people were nominated as informants and/ or gatekeepers by several network members from early on in the research process.

At this juncture it is instructive to consider the (potential) role of the gatekeeper in greater depth. This is not least, because, in certain circumstances, the gatekeepers actions can also impact upon the process of data collection to a considerable extent.

3.6.2 The role of the gatekeeper

Gatekeepers, those who determine and can control access to respondents, are usually of great importance to the researcher with regard to facilitating access in the field. It is, however, essential to take a critical view of their role in structuring the outcome of the data gathering phase of the research project. Directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously gatekeepers necessarily condition the nature of the information gathered. In instances where snowballing is relied upon to draw respondents into the research frame the influence of gatekeeper can be acutely felt.

The role of gatekeepers was particularly prominent with regard to gaining access to communities of Russian Germans resident in villages in the wider Ul'ianovsk region. The villages of Oktyabrskii and Bogdashkino were regarded as hubs of the German community¹⁵ yet gaining access to potential respondents within these community groups was particularly challenging.

While contacts were made with gatekeeper figures relatively early on in the research process, this did not easily translate into access to potential respondents. In Oktyabrskii the reticence and obfuscation of the gatekeeper figure was eventually negated via a second contact made in Ul'ianovsk who was able to recommend me to her circle in the village. The relative proximity of Oktyabrskii and Ul'ianovsk and the regular bus service meant that I was able to make use of the alternative point of access to the network of German residents in Oktyabrskii easily. This approach was not feasible with regard to Bogdashkino; few public transport links ran between Ul'ianovsk and Bogdashkino¹⁶ thus forcing reliance upon the key informant in order to access the village. Moreover, the gatekeeper later on openly admitted that he had approached those he deemed “most interesting” to request an interview. This gave rise to some difficult interview situations and, on one occasion, the gatekeeper cut short an interview (at the third interruption) and then went on to explain *en route* from this curtailed dialogue to the next that, the respondent was “only a driver, and [next proposed respondent] is a far more interesting subject for you.” The gatekeeper’s ‘agenda’ although well meaning, must necessarily have had an impact upon the data gathered and, therefore, the research as a whole. This intervention was not ‘ideal’ but the facilitating role performed by this actor more than

¹⁵ Oktyabrskii was established during World War II and populated by Russian German men conscripted into the work armies. Many of them later brought their families to the area in the post-war era. Bogdashkino was a ‘dying village’ revitalised by investment from the German Government and the Ul'ianovsk administration to provide housing and infrastructure for post-Soviet ethnic German returnees from Central Asia, seeking accommodation, etc.

¹⁶ A bus runs on weekends yet even this information was unforthcoming. I discovered the bus timetable only by chance, phoning/visiting the central bus station garnered information pertaining to services which began their runs on the same side of the Volga as the central bus station. There is a second, much smaller, much less well known station dealing with services originating *za volgoi* (beyond the Volga or on the opposite side of the river from the central area of Ul'ianovsk) in Novyi Gorod at the edge of Ul'ianovsk – several informants who urged “you must go to Bogdashkino of course!” would then add “but, you know there’s no bus, you can only get there by car”. The gatekeeper from Oktyabrskii promised to negotiate access which did not materialise. A colleague later pointed out that, in her view, guaranteeing arrival in Bogdashkino by car was key to motivating the gatekeeper to fulfil her assurances. She argued that our arrival by car would serve to reinforce the gatekeeper’s status within the German community. Although I was sceptical about the reasoning it cannot be denied that once a car was secured this gatekeeper did make the introductions she had promised for so long.

compensated for his later obtrusiveness. Moreover, as he admitted his interventions, they can be acknowledged here along with their subsequent impact upon the research.

Due to the comparatively limited success of snowballing over the course of field research in Germany (discussed below) where no long chains of referral developed, an ethical issue presented by snowballing was avoided, though it was an ongoing concern in the Russian context. Snowballing ‘increases the risk of revealing critical and potentially damaging information to members of a network or subgroup (Jacobsen & Landau 2003: 196).¹⁷ This was a particular consideration among interviewees in and around Ul’ianovsk, who would often inquire after the friend or acquaintance who had passed on their contact details to me. General enquiries were made as members of this group did not gather together on a regular basis but these questions were often reiterated during the interview when respondents would ask how their associates had answered the same question.¹⁸

3.6.3 Accessing respondents in Germany

Although I had few active contacts in Germany prior to setting out to gather data it was felt that a similar approach focussing on the snowballing of semi-structured interviews would be effective and enable comparison across the cases in terms of method and approach. There is a constantly increasing body of literature charting the levels of disillusion, disenchantment, disenfranchisement and social exclusion of the Russian Germans in Germany (i.e. Kogan, 2004; Roll, 2003). Yet I felt that my ability to approach potential respondents (at least initially) within their Russian cultural context would assuage any apprehensions respondents might have sufficiently for a ‘snowballing’ effect to develop within the available timeframe.

Attempts were made to approach potential respondents using both ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ avenues. Official channels - migrant organisations, associated administrative structures - were explored in tandem with efforts to develop leads through the social networks of

¹⁷ As discussed above, the mere possibility of such social contamination was, it was suggested, sufficient to dissuade many in Germany from participating in the research at all.

¹⁸ Wherever possible I avoided all comment by noting that “I could not recall [the response] off hand”. If the respondent persisted I would lead the discussion, temporarily, to a neutral topic that I had spoken about with the person being enquired after, e.g. something they had asked about me or my stay in Russia.

acquaintances in Berlin. Formation of a successful associational network was vital to the success of the research project as conceived, yet engaging with *Spätaussiedler* in Berlin was, despite their apparent high numbers, a challenging process. Arguably, my position as an outsider was as disadvantageous in Berlin as it had been advantageous in Ul'ianovsk but certain aspects of the fieldwork experience indicate that this is perhaps not the case. Expert informants, some of whom had carried out their own research among *Spätaussiedler*, which in some cases had relied upon volunteers from *Spätaussiedler* communities to act as research assistants, reported that they had also found people to be suspicious, changeable and unwilling to cooperate. A proportion of interviews conducted on this period of the field research took place with migrants who had recently arrived (no more than 4 months previously) and were temporary residents of one of the city's housing complexes for newly arrived *Spätaussiedler*. Asked if they wished to give interviews by their (trusted) social worker, all agreed seemingly with few reservations. This situation closely echoed the experience of respondent introduction and data collection in Ul'ianovsk and ran contrary to the general trend of potential respondents' attitudes towards requests for interviews in Berlin.¹⁹

Potential informants approached via the social networks of acquaintances in Berlin were, generally, far less reticent with regard to participation than those contacted through other channels i.e. migrant organisations. Even so, many within this minority population (women married to German husbands) had few further contacts within the ethnic German/ Russian migrant community. Time pressure was often cited as a reason for refusing to participate in an interview. In an attempt to counter these issues a questionnaire was developed. Initially it was hoped that this could act as a precursor to an interview. It became clear, however, that completing a questionnaire was unlikely to motivate the respondent to further engage with the research. The questionnaire was distributed to those in the acquaintance network who did not wish to participate in an interview and also through some of the migrant organisations who sought to persuade their clients to take part in the project.²⁰

¹⁹ Interestingly, some organisations / official structures approached were disinclined to participate in the research. Those who did take part mostly did so upon guarantees of anonymity.

²⁰ Specifically *Heimweh* or Homesickness, an organisation which sought to help Russian German migrants to cope with the challenges they faced in adapting to their new environment while seeking to encourage clients to maintain a level of independence, i.e. not to rely upon migrant organisations for everything. *Heimweh* received local authority funding and had 2 permanent staff members (both *Spätaussiedler*).

In order to expedite the process of data collection in Berlin and in light of the difficulties encountered, the questionnaire was produced as an alternative to the face-to-face interview, not a precursor. Such a step had not been necessary in Ul'ianovsk and it is doubtful that, if instituted, it would have met with success. Indeed, while the questionnaire, notionally at least, provided access to potential respondents who dismissed the possibility of an interview outright, in reality its distribution did very little to increase the response rate. There were also issues with the quality of data thus generated. Ideally, the questionnaire would have been the first step in mixed methods approach (with interview as the natural follow-up) but this was not possible. The questionnaire was administered as potential informants refused to countenance an interview. Further, they agreed to the questionnaire only after considerable persuasion by the gatekeeper in this instance. Acceptance of the questionnaire did not guarantee a response.

After our initial meeting, the project workers at *Heimweh* contacted twenty potential respondents with regard to participating in the research. This led to two interviews, although all others agreed to fill in a questionnaire. Most did subsequently come to the office to collect the questionnaire but the majority either did not complete them, in some cases returning the blank papers to the office, or provided only short answers to some of the questions. Workers at *Heimweh*, themselves *Spätaussiedler*, professed surprise at the unwillingness to participate. It was suggested that unwillingness to analyse a decision (to emigrate to Germany) which had caused unhappiness and/ or family breakdown or had simply not turned out as expected was at the heart of peoples' decision not to take part in the research. In the absence of direct evidence on this point this proposition remains little more than conjecture.

Although I was specifically directed to organisations such as *Heimweh* (by Russians, German Russians and civil servants working with *Spätaussiedler* in Berlin) as a possible route to respondents, the subsequent experience does point to the critical weakness of approaching migrant organisations for access. The clientele of such associations are, to a greater or lesser extent, experiencing some difficulty associated with their adaptation to a new social and cultural order. Thus, to approach them through a migrant organisation is, very probably, to do so at a time of vulnerability and distress. This ethical concern did not arise during the Russian phase of fieldwork for the simple reason that whatever their grievances with regard to their current situation and however strong their attachment to

Germany, the Germans interviewed in the Russian Federation had not uprooted themselves from familiar surroundings.

An issue associated with snowballing methodology and, that must be duly considered by the researcher, is identified by Jacobsen and Landau (2003: 195) is related to the fact that this type of sampling ‘almost always begins with contacting a local body, such as a religious or refugee organisation or an aid agency... a core group of subjects is thus acquired.’ This approach was certainly used over the course of data collection in Berlin²¹ and, its limiting effect must be noted. Burawoy (1998: 6) argues that although an ethnographic approach (specifically the extended case method) affords the opportunity to test the binaries which characterise the subaltern position strenuously and to uncover, ‘multiple processes, interests and identities’ which can then be reconfigured, the efficacy of these approaches can be attenuated if the researcher comes up against the very forces (i.e. organisational bodies) which they sought to circumvent through a grassroots approach.

Efforts were made to overcome the tendency to use organisations as the point of origin for a snowball effect but, ultimately, these attempts were of mixed or limited success. Those respondents contacted entirely outside of organisational frameworks were unable to provide fruitful further contacts. Two respondents contacted through an acquaintance (and subsequently interviewed) were enthusiastic about helping to further the research; however, they were able to persuade only two others to participate (although they had approached many more potential respondents). These referred respondents filled in questionnaires but did not consent to be interviewed. Of these informants, one tried unsuccessfully to encourage friends to fill a questionnaire or to interview and the second refused outright to approach anyone, stating that he ‘had no friends who would be interested in such things.’

Attempts were also made to contact Russians and Russian-Germans who were known to friends and acquaintances of mine directly and were, therefore, outside migrant or other similar organisations. Of the five people contacted in this way, only two responded at all. Subsequently, one aided the research project greatly; effecting introductions and trying to

²¹ See appendix II for details of respondents

generate interest in my project but the contacts that he exploited to do this were, themselves, embedded in Russian-German migrant organisations in Berlin.²² The second response garnered here – a potential informant - agreed in principle to participate and she provided her workplace telephone number. When called a few days later to arrange an interview or the despatch of a questionnaire it transpired that she had left her position and her employer was unable to provide forwarding contact details. It is also noteworthy that among the organisations contacted during data collection a certain fatigue or suspicion of research was palpable. Indeed, I was told by one such organisation that the staff had been forbidden from giving interviews to, or assisting, journalists and researchers.

Research fatigue is also a problem with groups which have been the subjects of multiple studies (see Moore, 1996; Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Indeed, I was warned by a respondent / quasi gatekeeper that my approach to a group of women who met regularly to exchange news and socialise might be rebuffed as they had almost all been approached previously and, moreover, they adjudged that their participation was worthless as their daily lives went on, unchanged by the fact that they had given of their time and effort in a research process (respondent n14).²³

Bloch (2007: 242) advocates a methodologically flexible approach as especially suitable in the study of migration or migrants using mixed methods where possible but prefers face-to-face interviews especially where the respondent's literacy is questionable. While literacy was not an issue with potential respondents, some gatekeepers in Berlin questioned whether or not informants might feel themselves able to articulate their narratives or might even be unwilling to do so in order to avoid confronting the emotional nature of the decision they had made to emigrate.²⁴ This is especially pertinent if the respondent has

²² Interestingly, while his advocacy helped in many ways it was far from a guarantee of success. This was also the case with the majority of other referrals during fieldwork in Germany. This was in contrast with the situation that developed in Russia where referrals were almost always successful. The only exception to this pattern encountered in Russia occurred when I approached a number of ethnic Germans who had lived for a time in Germany before returning to the Russian Federation. All but one of this group declined to be interviewed. The majority comprised legal and medical professionals. While their non-participation in the study means that questions regarding their motivations for returning to Russia remain unanswered, professional difficulties may have been a factor in their decision-making. Indeed this as the reasoning suggested for the refusals by third parties who acted as go-betweens.

²³ Interviews are numbered for identification purposes, those taken in Berlin are prefixed with a lower case i.e. "n1," those recorded in Ul'ianovsk are distinguished with a capital letter i.e. "N1."

²⁴ Gmelch (1980: 140) notes the 'tendency for people to reduce the wide variety of factors which influenced their decision [to migrate] down to one or two overriding reasons...to reduce the cognitive dissonance of psychological discomfort.'

made a poor adjustment to life in Germany. This could explain the low take up levels for the questionnaire and the even lower completion levels (through *Heimweh* only 5 questionnaires were completed from a total of 35 distributed). These completed questionnaires contained perfunctory rather than expansive answers. Bloch's own findings are consistent with this outcome; usually there are fewer non-responses when face-to-face interview methods are employed (Bloch, 2007: 244). Other research supports this assertion. Mangione *et al* (1982: 343-6) found that, when employing mixed research approaches,

the proportion of missing responses was never more than 3% in any of the strategies, but the proportion of respondents who provided complete data was significantly less for data the drop off/ pick up [i.e. questionnaire] strategy [...] [Moreover,] these self-administered methods are, less effective [and], less enjoyable than face-to-face methodologies and result in less complete data.

3.7 Transcription, translation: practical and ethnical considerations and the power of presentation

Further ethical considerations arose concerning the transcription of interview cassettes. The use of native speakers to transcribe interviews was of a great advantage as their interpretation was sometimes necessary in order to clarify certain areas of some interviews. Yet, care had to be taken that none of the transcribers could identify informants from the interview tape in order to guarantee the maintenance of informant confidentiality (see Jacobsen & Landau, 2003: 189-90). In order to counter such concerns a number of steps were taken. Potential transcribers were contacted through an acquaintance based in the REGION Research Centre.²⁵ Consequently, the transcribers who tackled the majority of interview from the period of fieldwork in Russia were fully aware of the ethical considerations inherent in the process of transcription. Interviews recorded directly prior to my departure from Russia were, along with interviews collected where the respondent could be readily identified from the tape, sent to a contact in Germany for transcription. This issue was avoided with regard to interviews recorded in Germany as all of these were

²⁵ REGION is a scientific research centre located in Ul'ianovsk and affiliated to Ul'ianovsk State University. www.regioncentre.ru

transcribed by a doctoral research student at Novosibirsk University in Russia. This was both the most cost-efficient and effective means of ensuring confidentiality for the transcription of these interviews. The German based cohort required noticeably more assurance vis-à-vis anonymity, confidentiality and the potential uses for the outcomes of the research than did any among the Russian cohort. This finding corresponds to those of other researchers in the fields of migration and forced migration (see Bloch, 2007). This, Bloch (2007: 240) contends, is related to the relative security or insecurity of the respondent's status in the new place of residence. It is notable that such a propensity is detectable among Russian Germans in Germany as their migration status is actually secure (they would not have been able to enter the country otherwise). A key research facilitator who worked for one of the migrant organisations approached in Berlin (though he did not consent to a formal interview) suggested that, in Berlin, as elsewhere, Russian Germans were now living in closer proximity to each other and their family members than they ever had before;²⁶ in this new social structure any controversial - real or perceived - act could put one's standing within the group at risk. It was therefore felt that transcription should not be undertaken by anybody who might have connections within the Russian German community.

Tilley (2003) cautions that the transcribers' inference may affect the subsequent interpretation of data and steps were taken to avoid this pitfall. Detailed notes were taken post-interview concerning the setting, and tone of the process (e.g. the respondent's perceived enthusiasm) and the main points of the interview were summarised from memory. I then re-listened to the tape at the earliest opportunity before passing it to the transcriber, noting any areas that needed further clarification and any passages where it might subsequently prove difficult to recall what the informant had been talking about (though clear at the time of the interview). This process also promoted reflexivity over the course of data collection. Although the same interview schema was used throughout the research process, the order in which questions were put to respondents was sometimes altered (although this might also occur spontaneously as a direct response to the course of any given interview). On occasion, questions were re-translated if they had seemed unclear to informants. At this juncture it is useful to consider the implications further, related

²⁶ Before relocating to Germany he and his mother had lived thousands of miles apart. She now lived downstairs and "called for every little problem at all times of day or night" where this had not been feasible when they were both resident in the FSU. He proposed that this insularity meant that one must be on guard at all times. If you were suspected of having done or said anything that could potentially make life difficult for Russian Germans, your reputation would be ruined and in such a tight knit group, reputation is very important.

issues that arise from the research presented here had for the final, written product; that of translation from the language of interview to the language of presentation.

3.7.1 Conducting research in a second language

In order to conduct and subsequently present research in a second language a researcher must address several issues regarding language and translation, which arise throughout the research process. While it has already been accepted that, as far as possible, the researcher should know the language of their research in order to ‘guarantee the integrity of traditional fieldwork and give a bounded field (Marcus, 1995: 101),’ the same cannot always be said for the process of translation. While the researcher’s task and their epistemological effect on the research produced is the subject of numerous studies (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) the part of the translator is often overlooked. Yet their epistemological significance is arguably so great that cross-language data analysis can be thought of as similar to the analysis of secondary data (Temple *et al.* 2006: 1) and can be seen as a form of, ‘colonisation of meaning’ (Temple *et al.* 2006: 6).

In order to best avoid or minimise such an effect several steps have been taken. As I have fulfilled the roles of researcher and translator I have been able to maintain a level of control over both processes thus avoiding the possibility of a third-party translator altering the text during the translation (Wolf, 1996: 23). The translations of interview extracts utilised in this research have been minimally edited in order to retain the authenticity of the original voice (Wolf, 1996: 34). While this may result in a translation that jars slightly for the native English-speaking reader, it is hoped that such an approach guarantees a fairer representation of the exchanges as they actually took place, thus better fulfilling the researcher’s remit to attempt an authentic representation of his or her respondents and, therefore, conveying the power-relational discourse (and all of the implied ethical considerations therein) through to the end product of the research process.

3.8 Conclusion: the emergence of multi-sited ethnographic research

This chapter has been concerned with the methodological approaches which underpin the research presented here. I have sought to explain the research design with reference to the specificities of the case at hand. A primary concern has been to address the power dynamic which inevitably informs the research process and to foreground the roles played by both researched and researcher in the production of data. The strengths and weaknesses of the outlined approach have been explored and the crucial issue of access examined.

In light of the issues concerning research participation discussed above it is both useful and necessary to make explicit a matter that is implicit in the methodology as it has been presented thus far. The research presented here is multi-sited, both in terms of fieldwork sites within Russia (Ul'ianovsk, Oktyabrskii , Bogdashkino) and with regard to the fact that it, necessarily, encompasses two sovereign states. Marcus (1995: 103) argues that there is a paucity of examples of multi-sited research. He suggests that scholars who work with ethnographic methodologies may not wish to 'stretch the field' as this runs contrary to the ethnographic *raison-d'être* and, may ultimately attenuate the power of the ethnographic process which is embedded in locality and local knowledge (Marcus, 1995: 99). Yet it is not the function of ethnography to maintain the status quo through the bolstering of old or persistent modes of understanding and interpretation (Marcus, 1995: 96) but rather to explain what which the ethnographer finds in the field (Marcus, 1995: 96). Globalisation and the increased mobility which has accompanied its genesis means inevitably that ethnography too must engage with global processes (Marcus, 1995: 95; Burawoy, 1998). Just as family ethnographies have 'found it impossible to ignore influences beyond the household' (Burawoy, 1998: 6) so they must surely take on a global – and multi-sited - hue if family members participate in migratory movements. Then comparative aspects of multi-sited ethnography can be seen as developing

[A]s a function of the fractured and discontinuous plane of movement and discovery among sites as one maps an object of study and needs to post logics of relationship, translation and association among these sites (Marcus, 1995: 102).

Actors in migration (and in this case transnational) fields demand a dual sited approach as they draw points of reference, nodes of belonging and modes of being from both 'here' and

‘there’. As such the researcher is bound to follow the lead of his or her informants as they extend the boundaries of praxis and, concomitantly, to expand the accompanying literature.

In the following chapter the historical frame of reference for this study is presented. The chapter centres on the historical events foregrounded in informant testimony and the positioning of the ethnic German population on the Russian territories relative to their ethnic-other neighbours and their ethnic brethren in the remote German territories.

Chapter 4: Germans in Russia: A Historical Overview

4.1 Introduction

The first section of the chapter provides a chronology of the German presence in the Russian Empire/ USSR beginning with their initial settlement and continuing to the present time. The greater part of the section is given over to the events that respondents foregrounded as crucial to their perceptions of themselves as Germans. Brown (2005: 627) reminds us that ‘from the 1920s and throughout the 1930s Germans were simply part of the millions of people deported and displaced during periods of forced collectivisation and dekulakisation;’ they suffered at the hands of the regime but then so did everybody else.¹ The advent of the Second World War (and the central role this event then fulfilled in Soviet identity formation) transformed the status of the ethnic Germans in the USSR both politically and socially. It is certainly for this reason that the war is still a dominant feature in the discourses of the Russian Germans.² Where possible elements of the time line are narrated through respondent testimony; the discussion is interwoven with an exploration of the official discourses which informed national minority experience, particularly in the period from 1917-1945. Discussion of the post-war years examines the gradual rehabilitation of the Germans and their quiet ‘return’ to Soviet society. Russian German attempts (combined with those of the FRG government) to regain full, official status – and concomitantly a territorial space for a republic – is also examined here.

The second section in this chapter examines cultural perceptions of *Germanness* which, I argue, are vital for an understanding of the practices of a transnational type in which respondents in this study engage. Language and religion are identified as key components of Russian German self understanding. This is linked both to their experience as a national minority in the Russian Empire / USSR *and* to German cultural tenets which have persisted from the days of first settlement in the Russian frontier. These discourses also endure in the attitudes that RF and FGR polities exhibit (and the procedures they formulate) vis-à-vis the Russian Germans today thus, the final section of this chapter seeks to make the links

¹ I was frequently reminded of this by non-Germans with whom I discussed my case study over the course of my fieldwork in Ul’ianovsk.

² The war is discussed far more frequently and at length greater by respondents in Ul’ianovsk. The average age of the Ul’ianovsk cohort is higher than that of the Berlin group thus, the war may have more immediacy for them. Additionally, interviewees in Germany were far more reticent when it came to criticising Germany in any way.

between the historical Russian German position and that in which study participants now find and locate themselves.

4.2 Tsarist period: the trusted settler / the loathed foreigner

The Russian attitude towards foreigners has fluctuated over the centuries. It is notable that Germans have been repeatedly caught up in the variable tides of state-sponsored welcome and popular xenophobia. Outbursts of popular hatred against foreigners characterised the early years of Peter the Great's reign (1682-1725); decrees demanding the expulsion of all foreigners or the stringent curtailment of their rights were periodically forthcoming. Indeed, at one point the Orthodox Patriarch 'even wanted to have all the Protestant churches in the German suburb destroyed and was forestalled only when its inhabitants produced a document from Tsar Alexis containing written permission for the existence of these churches' (Massie, 1986: 113). Peter's attempts to transform and modernise Russia attracted large numbers of German and other foreigners to the empire (Fleischhauer, 1986b) but until the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796) foreign influx had been relatively limited. Her Manifesto of July 1763 altered the status quo. A combination of factors was at play here. The economic turmoil prevalent in Western Europe in the period after the Seven Years War (1756-1763) meant that the invitation extended by the Russian state was particularly appealing. As a respondent in Ul'ianovsk acknowledged;

When my forebears came to Russia they were not coming from a good life [...] there was also hunger and poverty [in Germany]. In Napoleon's time when people were forced into the army and [there was] religious persecution, the people who left Germany were not leaving a good life (N9).

The Manifesto

[P]romised to all foreigners who settled permanently as agriculturalists in Russia freedom of religion, non-interference by government bureaucrats in the internal administration of each colony, thirty years' exemption from tax and government services, exemption from military service, with volunteers granted a thirty-rouble bonus and interest free government loans to purchase livestock and equipment, with repayment due only ten years after the receipt of the loan (Long, 1978: 1).

The decree entitled incomers to purchase existing businesses (or to establish their own) and the government would often cover the expenses incurred during the relocation process

(including travel, food and travel within the Russian Empire).³ Import and export (in the case of return migration) was duty free (Mukhina, 2007: 8).

This extensive state backing did little to endear the incomers to the local populations.⁴ German colonists settled in the Black Sea region and in clusters around the Volga. The Black Sea Germans were more visible than their Volga based counterparts who tended to reside in more isolated communities.⁵ This factor did much to protect them from vitriolic nationalist attacks which the Black Sea Germans suffered at the hands of Ukrainians and Russians who were jealous of their comparative wealth (Long, 1978: 3). These people were isolated from the mainstream of Russian society both physically and culturally and this meant that the cultural and spiritual concepts that they brought with them from Europe remained central to their day-to-day lives. The Germans were ‘deeply pious, and their social life revolved around their churches and religious calendars’ (Heitman, 1993: 73 also see Long, 1978). The German settlers (particularly peasants) emphasised not simply a European identity (with religious observance at its centre) but a localised identity which drew on their experiences in their former village or region for its ascriptive content.

The privileges afforded to foreigners began to be eroded (and therefore, the position of Germans vis-à-vis the state altered) during the reforms instituted by Alexander II (1855-1881) in the post-Crimea period. Many of the exemptions which Catherine had guaranteed were lost. Moreover, moves were made to bring Russian German institutions under the auspices of imperial administrative control and to curb considerably the local autonomy that this group had previously enjoyed. To this end all German schools were subordinated to the Ministry of Education in 1897 (Long, 1978: 4).⁶ Though, even as the state sought to check some of the freedoms that had been granted to subjects of German origin, German influence continued to be felt at court (see Fleischhaur, 1986b: 17).

Although the rise of the pan-Slavic current in Russian social and political life during the 1880s militated against German influence, the percentage of Germans in leading political

³ Alexander I (1801-1825) issued a second Manifesto in February 1804 calling for foreigners to settle the recently acquired Black Sea littoral. The composition of this second wave of incomers was far more diverse than the first, comprising Germans from Baden, Alsace, Württemberg, the Palatinate and Hesse plus Greeks, Albanians, Armenians and Bulgarians (see Long 1978).

⁴ It is worth noting that, in contrast to their Russian counterparts, ethnic German peasants had not been serfs, a fact which also helped them to prosper (Sheehy, 1971: 25).

⁵ In 1914 there were more than 200 German villages on the Volga with a total population of over 500,000 inhabitants (Sheehy, 1971: 25).

⁶ According to the census of the same year there ‘were 1,790,489 German speaking Russian subjects of German origin (of the 1,813,717 persons who spoke German or cognate languages)’ (Fleischhauer 1986b: 13).

and administrative positions was still high, amounting to 40% of the army High Command, 62% of the highest ranks in the Ministry of Post and Commerce, 57% in the Foreign Ministry and 46% in the War Ministry' (Fleischhauer, 1986: 18). Some among the urban Germans – mainly in Moscow and Saint Petersburg - assimilated very quickly for the sake of career advancement but many among them preserved links with their motherland and on occasion returned (Mukhina, 2007: 15). Alexander's assassination in 1881 led to a resurgence of "Autocracy, Orthodoxy and *Russification*" among the ruling elite. Nonetheless, the image of the hard-working, diligent and honest German came to be deeply embedded in the popular consciousness (Mukhina, 2007: 22).

4.3 The modern era: The First World War and beyond

For the Russian Germans who participated in this study, it is primarily their more recent experiences, along with those of their forebears that inform their perceptions of themselves as well as others' perceptions of them. The outbreak of World War I resulted in the first deportation of ethnic Germans from their homes within Russia. In the lead up to war, popular protest against ethnic German presence in the Empire gathered pace with the advance towards the outbreak of hostilities. All Germans and other resident foreign nationals were at risk during a period of great upheaval and the state did little to shield ethnic Germans from the increasing violence of the popular onslaught against them. On 26th July, 1914 the Russian Duma sat and heard declarations of loyalty from the Empire's parties and national minority groups. Ethnic Germans were represented at this convocation by a speaker who stated that, 'the hour has come for Germans to show their loyalty; no-one in Russia will be disappointed by their response' (Lohr, 2003: 13). Indeed, ethnic Germans joined the rank and file who fought in the First World War but anti-German sentiment was rife⁷ and, in 1915, the Russian army deported 'approximately 800,000 of their own ethnically Jewish and ethnically German citizens away from the front and other regions under military rule' (Martin, 1998: 818). This forcible evacuation from the theatres of war and the hinterlands of Poland, Volhynia, and the Baltic provinces was accompanied by the removal of approximately 250,000 German colonists from their military posts with the Russian army after the serious defeats along the western front in spring 1915.⁸ The decree

⁷ See Lohr (2003) for an excellent survey of the competing discourses that enmeshed the Russian Germans at this time; while the loyalties of the minority group were doubted, the services of Sivers (Chief of the Tenth Army), Budberg (Siver's Chief of Staff) and General Rennenkampf were nonetheless retained at the front overall, the General Staff was still 15% German in composition (Fleischhauer, 1986: 27). Koch (1972) gives an interesting account of the German experience in the Russian and Soviet Empires which includes vivid description of their wartime experiences.

⁸ Schmaltz & Sinner (2002) estimate that the deportations from the borderlands cost 50,000 lives.

which authorised the expulsion of the Germans from the Volga region was ‘suspended after the February revolution and finally rescinded by the Bolsheviks’ (Sheehy, 1972: 25).⁹

The period 1918-1942 witnessed the precipitous fall of the Russian German “stock” from a group which ‘despite their lack of a large proletarian element was one of the first... to be granted some kind of autonomy in the shape of an Autonomous Workers’ Commune’¹⁰ (Sheehy, 1972: 25) to a point where, as one of the ethnic minorities to endure deportation during the Second World War (1941-45), they (along with other national groups) ‘would have no legal existence, no representative to the Soviet of Nationalities and no mention elsewhere’ for ten years (Carrère d’Encausse, 1992: 91). The grassroots effect of this decline was neatly illustrated by a one man’s thoughts on the position that Russian Germans occupied in the Russian Empire and the USSR;

I can take my grandfather as an example, my father’s father. He volunteered in 1914 - the First War - he was of German stock from both parents. He rose through the ranks to colonel (*polkovnik*) [...] in 1933 he was arrested as a former [tsarist] officer [...] in 1942 he and my grandmother were sent to Kolyma where they stayed (N9).

Several different factors had a role to play in the changing status of Russian Germans in the Soviet Union. In the next section, the Soviet attitude to national minorities is discussed and the development of the regime’s nationalities policy is charted. I consider how the policy affected the position of national minorities in general and of ethnic Germans in particular. The ethno-territorial administrative structuring of the USSR put ethnicity and ethnic identity at the centre of daily life; imbuing it with what Karklins (1986: 1) refers to as “concrete everyday meaning.” The mechanism for this institutionalisation is delineated and the significance of such measures for Russian Germans (specifically Volga Germans) is outlined.

4.3.1 The changing status of national minorities over the inter-war period

⁹ The prejudice experienced by the Germans during this period created a situation where, for the first time, the disparate German colonies began to coalesce and transcend their localised nature. In 1915 the *Volkzeitung*, the main Volga German newspaper began to publish a large section devoted to news from other German colonies and the Baltic region the very first time. In 1917, when the ban on political organisations was lifted, German community leaders moved quickly to form their first national organisations (Lohr 2003: 155-157). Printed media is one of the key elements of Benedict Anderson’s hypothesis regarding the development of national consciousness (2006: 37-47). Thus, the expansion of the print media can be considered very significant in this regard.

¹⁰ This became The ASSR *Nemtsev Povolzh’ia* (Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic) in February 1924.

The positioning of national minorities within its borders was, according to Hirsch (2005: 5), *the* defining issue for the formation of the Soviet Union. The nationalities question had, in fact, occupied the Empire's imperial rulers and would be revolutionaries - be they Bolshevik and Menshevik - for a long time prior to the events of 1917-21 which saw the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party installed as leaders of a nascent workers' state (Smith, J. 1999; Conquest, 1967). The Bolsheviks then undertook to build socialism in 'a vast multi-ethnic landscape populated by hundreds of different settled and nomadic peoples belonging to a multitude of linguistic, confessional and ethnic groups' (Hirsh, 2005: 5). However, in order to consolidate their pre-eminence, it was necessary for the Bolsheviks to somehow resolve the conflicting positions of their anti-imperialism and their determined wish to retain possession of all the lands that had comprised the Russian Empire (Hirsch, 2005: 5).

This predicament was complicated by the fact that, in order to ensure victory in the Civil War against the monarchist Whites, the prospect of national self determination had been held out to minority populations in an attempt to garner their support (either active or passive) over the course of the hostilities (Connor, 1992: 15; Conquest, 1967: 21-22; Smith, J. 1999). Indeed, the spoiling activities of minority peoples to the rear of White forces was recognised as vital to the eventual triumph of the Reds in this conflict (Connor, 1992: 17). While the Civil War was being fought the issue of the right to national self determination 'remained little more than a slogan' and once the Soviets had established power in the non-Russian regions this 'slogan had nothing to say about the tasks faced by the Bolsheviks in the construction of a multi-national state' (Smith, J. 1999: 20). The early years of Soviet rule were marked by the new government's struggle to contain the nationalist forces that the promise of the right to self determination unleashed (see, for examples, Carrère d'Encausse, 1992; Conquest, 1967; Pipes, 1992). In addition, to overcoming the local hostility faced in - for example - Georgia, the communists had to engage the national minorities who 'were not confined to the separate Soviet republics' but comprised a sizable proportion of the inhabitants of Soviet Russia (Smith, J. 1999: 5) in their state building venture. This combination of factors ensured that the national minority issue quickly came to be very central to the Soviet project and, the idea of the nation was 'integrated with the administrative-territorial structure of the new Soviet Union' (Hirsch, 2005: 5).

Eventually, Stalin identified language 'as sufficient to define a nation' (Smith, J. 1999: 27) and linguistic oppression as a root cause of national discontent (Conquest, 1967: 19) as 'a

set of largely improvised policies in the areas of language, culture and recruitment to communist cadre and state structures' (Smith, 1999: 5) were drawn up as the response to the nationalities question. In the early period of Soviet rule there was no concerted effort by the regime to impose a uniform Soviet identity upon the multiple nationalities resident in the USSR. Instead, the new administration 'devoted considerable resources to the promotion of national self-consciousness' among its non-Russian peoples (Martin, 1998: 816); chiefly through *korenizatsiia* or nativisation (a programme of cultural nation building ongoing until 1934). In order to address the nationalities question in the longer term, the regime experimented with a number of federal configurations (see Conquest, 1962: 15-50); the institution of the ASSR¹¹ was one of the ethno-territorial structures that emerged. ASSRs existed 'within the individual union republics [were] independent national states with their own organs of state power (Supreme Soviets) and their own governments (Councils of Ministers)' (Tsamerian & Ronin, 1962: 46). These Autonomous Republics had their own constitutions (subject to confirmation by the Union Republic's Supreme Soviet) and they were directly represented on the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (Tsamerian & Ronin, 1962: 46-47). Notionally,

The organs of government of each autonomous republic posse[ssed] full powers in numerous fields of political, economic, social and cultural life... [ASSRs were granted] a large measure of independence in all fields directly concerned with the national life of their peoples, the decisions taken being merely subject to ratification by the organs of the union republic... [These measures were intended to guarantee] free political, economic and cultural development of each nationality of the Soviet Union, no matter how small in number.

Politically, many of the rights that ASSR status supposedly afforded were, in practice, little more than ornament. This was doubly so as effective national minority representation was often sublimated to the desire to ensure the political reliability of the titular representatives (see Conquest, 1962: 32-33). Schmaltz and Sinner (2002: 328) assert that the German ASSR was set up;

[M]ore as a socialist model for Weimar Germany's Communists to emulate than as a permanent basis for ethnic German cultural independence. Many of the...ASSR's high-ranking leaders were actually Russian Communist officials or foreign-born Austrian and German Socialists.

Indeed, neither the democracy nor the autonomy of the ASSR was genuine (Giesinger, 1974: 281) and nor did they shield the Volga Germans (or any other ethnic groups or beneficiaries of autonomous status) from the torment of collectivization which wrought

¹¹ Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

devastation upon rural life over the period of its imposition (1927-1941).¹² Autonomous republic status ‘imparted a far richer cultural life than was accessible to those groups with no territorial unit at all’ (Frankel, 1986: 7). The ASSR boasted 400 schools, hundreds of churches, a national theatre and 25 newspapers/periodicals (Heitman, 1993: 74) yet these cultural ‘concessions’ were not necessarily seen favourably; ethnic Germans were themselves opposed to the introduction of High German as “their” language. Few settlers spoke it, nor did they wish to see their diverse cultures consolidated into a centrally sponsored ethnos under the Soviet banner (Mukhina, 2007: 31).¹³

Nor did autonomous status spare the ethnic Germans from the regime sponsored anti-religious campaigns which began with Soviet rule. Until 1929, the regime was chiefly focussed upon the destruction of the Orthodox Church (Stricker, 2001: 102) but all church property was nationalised as early as December 1917 with the separation of church and state decreed in July 1918, and the prohibition of the ‘teaching of religion in churches’ established in 1924 (Conquest, 1968). February 1918 saw the separation of (state and) education from the church; in the German colonies the two had always been very closely connected (see Giesinger, 1974). Baltic independence (declared 1918, recognised 1920/1921) meant that Lutherans in the USSR lost contact with a theological centre of Lutheranism at Tartu (Stricker, 2001: 102) and, when the communists began to round up Lutheran clergy, believers lost not only their spiritual leaders but their Russian German intelligentsia too (Heitman, 1993: 73).¹⁴ Giesinger (1974: 281-282 & 294) claims minority language rights as the only real freedom granted to the ethnic Germans yet, by 1938, in response to the escalating enmity between the USSR and Nazi Germany, schooling in German was prohibited in the German territories outside the ASSR.

An eventual consequence of the nationalities policy and the manner of its institutionalisation was that ‘ethnicity play[ed] a larger or smaller role in a large number of social and institutional contexts; it ha[d] a structural dimension as well as an attitudinal

¹² See Koch (1972) & Giesinger (1974) for detailed accounts of the experience of collectivization among Volga Germans. Schmaltz and Sinner (2002: 329) estimate that from 1921-25, one third of the Volga Germans ‘perished as a result of grain requisitions and mass executions.’

¹³ In addition to the ASSR ‘a total of seventeen German National Districts were also set up...where there were concentrations of Germans. Six were in the RFSFR, including one in the Crimea and another in Altai, one each in Georgia and Azerbaijan, and nine in the Ukraine.’ Approximately 380,000 Germans lived in the Volga German ASSR (Sheehy, 1971: 25). Thus, a substantial majority of the USSR’s 1.3million ethnic Germans did not live within the ASSR though it would later become a symbolic centrepiece in the struggle against repression and for minority rights (Schmaltz & Sinner, 2002: 328).

¹⁴ 26 pastors were murdered in the years 1917-1929, the last pastor in the USSR was arrested in 1937 and, the last Lutheran church closed the following year (Stricker, 2001: 102). Indeed, the father of a respondent (N7) in this study was arrested in 1937.

one' (Karklins, 1996: 4). Furthermore, national identities were of 'differential "value..."[that was] related to the overall prestige of nations' (Karklins, 1986: 41). As the prestige associated with one's nationality rose or fell, so one's fortunes were affected on an everyday basis; as Karklins (1986: 44) underscores 'ethnic identification within the USSR came to be 'ubiquitous...[providing] the basis for formal and informal ethnic structuring of personal, social and political relations.' All of this had considerable ramifications for each and every ethnic group within the Soviet Union; the Russian Germans were no exception. What is more, the "positioning" of ethnic groups that occurred during Soviet rule (both vis-à-vis the state and each other) continues to resonate in contemporary attitudes, mindsets and inter-ethnic relations.

As discussed above, the rights and privileges which minority status secured, equated in practise to rather 'limited administrative or cultural rights' (Karklins, 1986: 8) for the groups which they benefited. Russian Germans, however, where in a position of "double remove" within the USSR as they numbered among the diaspora nationalities that were resident in the USSR that is to say, they could make claims to a homeland in an independent nation state outside the boundaries of the USSR. (Koreans, Finns, Greeks, Poles and Japanese were also thus designated). Their diaspora status meant that, in the authority's eyes, their loyalties were always suspect (Hirsch, 2005: 274-5). Official anxiety regarding potential for seditious or treasonable acts among the German population led the regime to begin compiling lists of Germans who had ever had any contact with Germany (perhaps as little as an exchange of letters or a parcel) as early as 1934 (Pinkus, 1986: 63; see also Giesinger, 1974: 299). And, in 1937, Stalin ordered that all Germans working in military or associated spheres should be arrested (Mukhina, 2007: 39). That the German population was both aware and wary of the mistrust with which they were regarded is reflected in the increasing rate of emigration and inter-marriage that characterised the interwar decades. Numbers of people declaring German as their mother tongue simultaneously decreased over the same time frame.¹⁵

4.3.2 The advent and effect of the Second World War

¹⁵ Pinkus, (1986a: 62) estimates that from 1923-33, 25,000 Germans emigrated – at a time when the German economy was performing poorly – only 2-3,000 had left the RFSRF in the period 1918-22. According to Schmaltz and Sinner (2002: 337) while in 1926 approximately 95% of 1.24 million Germans in the USSR claimed German as their mother tongue this figure had fallen to 75% of 1.6 million by 1959 and, thereafter, numbers continued to fall.

The colossal suffering that Russian Germans endured as a consequence of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union still resonates in the present day. The subject of the Second World War almost inevitably surfaced during interview, often at the outset;

My mother's was a big family. When war began – on the first day – her elder brother was killed, he was 18. And her younger sister was blown to pieces; they found just the hands and feet [...] [My] granny was hit by shrapnel, her [respondent's mother's] brother hit in the head by shrapnel (N24).

Recounting this manner of horrific experience was – in fact - unusual among respondents; primarily wartime accounts were dominated by the experience of the deportation. (The Nazi invasion - Operation Barbarossa - began on 21st June, 1941 officially, the deportation began and ended in September of the same year). A number of informants began their narratives from here;

Well, you know the story? Why they exiled the Germans? In 1941 when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Hitler [sic] signed a decree: the Volga Germans had no business here. So that – God forbid – they didn't go over to the other side they exiled the lot [...] packed them into wagons and sent them off by the trainload! (N3)

●●●

It's all related to Saratov, father lived in Saratov in the village of Betner [...] He was taken away in '41 – on 30th of June they took him for 40 days but he never came back – and mother gave birth to me on the 14th of July [...] which would have been his 31st birthday as it happens (N14).

●●●

Where should I begin, straight away with the war? Well, the war started and we were all prepared to defend the Motherland (*rodina*) as they say. At the time [...] I was working as a mountain guide [prior to graduation from university]. Then they summoned me to the War Office and said that Soviet Germans – we were so called, then – were being formed into [special] detachments to work at the rear. Well, to put us to the rear of Germany so that we... We all agreed; we were glad to take such an active role. But, it ended up that they packed us into livestock wagons [...] told us how much luggage we could bring and the old, young, everyone [together]...I realised then what sort of “special detachment” this would be (N21).

The horror of the experience of deportation is difficult to overstate. The effects were felt chiefly by the Volga Germans as the *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans of the Black Sea Littoral) quickly found themselves behind enemy lines, such was the speed of the initial German advance into southern Russia (Long, 1978: 6). (Giesinger (1974: 308-310) observes that, under occupation, these Germans enjoyed a brief interlude of “freedom”

during which one of their first requests was for the restoration of religious services). Conquest (1970: 62) states that the deportation of the Volga Germans denoted the ‘failure of Soviet policy in the face of the ties of nationality. [Yet, it was] nevertheless... regarded at the time as an exceptional case.’ The decree which sealed the fate of the Volga Germans’ was published in September 1941 - it outlined the case for the removal of Germans from their residences based upon the supposed presence of “diversionists and spies” living, unreported, in the Volga ASSR under the protection of the Soviet Germans. As such the decree continued;

In case diversionist acts are carried out by diversionists at a signal from Germany, German diversionists and spies in the Volga republic or elsewhere and bloodshed taking place, the Soviet government is required, in accordance with martial law, to take punitive measures against the entire German population of the Volga.

In order to avoid such undesirable events and to prevent serious bloodshed, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR has found it necessary to transfer the whole German population living in the Volga region to other areas, with the promise however, that the migrants (*pereseliaemyie*) be allotted land and given state assistance for settlement in the new regions.

For the resettlement purposes, areas of arable land in Novosibirsk and Omsk provinces, the Altai territory, Kazakhstan and neighbouring regions have been assigned (Alieva 1993: 143).

The wording of the decree suggests that the removal of the Volga Germans from their Autonomous Republic was preventative rather than punitive. However, the experience of deportation was, despite the intimation of contrary intentions, an experience which split families and scarred the ethnic German psyche indelibly. The effects resonated both emotionally and practically;

We hadn’t reached Siberia when my grandfather died. It meant that, when they stopped the train, we asked for a spade and buried him [in that spot before] going on. That was my father’s father who died, my aunts remembered [it]- they were 11, 12, 13 years old, my mother’s sisters – so we went on, they brought us to Siberia, to the village of Otgul’ and that’s it “you’ve arrived!” There were four houses in all so, [people] dug earth shelters for themselves; it was winter – some time in September. When we arrived my mother’s mother, who’d already fallen ill, died. There it was; we’d all been in Saratov and suddenly we were here; grandchildren, children, everyone...[So,] I lived with my [remaining] grandfather in the so called “special settlement,” the police came by every month to do a roll call of us Germans (N14).



We were on the move for a month without predetermined stops, just to get out into the street. We could open the door - just a crack - but thank God it was possible. They knew full well nobody would try to escape, because it was our Motherland! Where were we to go? What for? Well, it was war I understand that... we'll work in a new place, the war will end and normal life will resume (N21).

This respondent was initially deported to Siberia and assigned to a collective farm but, he returned to the Volga region after being drafted into the *trudarmiya*¹⁶ by the War Office at his place of exile;

[They summoned you and said] “So and so, Nikolai Ivanovich, born 1918, mobilised 26th March 1942 to the *trudarmiya*, sent to the Volga Corrective Labour Camp for work.” I was here in the Volga Camp, not so far from here. We built a railway that was vital for the war effort [...] And in June 1943 I was in Vorkuta, Komi ASSR to work there [...] [Then,] I worked there for 45 years - in the mines [...] So, from 26th April 1946 – the war already finished a year – “demobilised from the *trudarmiya*, entered into the *spetsychet* [register of persons subject to restrictions/surveillance].” Demobilised from the *trudarmiya* but nothing changed in the slightest (N21).

Initially, post-deportation, Germans had been regarded as evacuees by local officials. The only restriction placed upon them was that they were prohibited from leaving the region to which they had been transported without special permission.¹⁷ In January 1942, a new law was enacted which stipulated that deportees’ movement should be, ‘restricted to the area to where they were resettled’ and, any further relocation had to be closely monitored (Mukhina, 2007: 67). This law explicitly stated that German deportees who moved without permission should be denied a registration stamp in their new place of residence and sent back to their original place of relocation. In fact, moving without permission could have much more immediate and tragic consequences; they called the role, the respondent quoted above remembered, because Germans;

[W]ere not permitted to go to the other village [...] but I fell gravely ill – I was perhaps 5 or 6 months old – my mother [...] [took me and] went to the next village. There was a woman [there] who could cure [you,] in those days that’s where you went [when ill]. Others said she shouldn’t go, shouldn’t leave the village, that when the roll call came around - and she wasn’t there - she’d go to prison. She [respondent’s mother] said “no they won’t send me to prison, if you’ve a child of less than three years they don’t!” Well, they

¹⁶ The “work army” in which many ethnic German men were mobilised for the war effort; where Russian Germans had been sent to the front in WWI, they were prevented from thus enlisting in WWII.

¹⁷ They were, at this time, supposed to be employed in positions commensurate with their skills and qualifications (Mukhina, 2007: 66).

[the police] came and she wasn't there. They went straight to the next village and asked her where she thought she was going. So, that meant they [...] put her in prison (N14).

This woman's mother contracted typhus and died six months into her custodial sentence.

Though, in January 1945, special settlers were formally accorded USSR citizenship there were limitations; they were stripped of the right to move from their place of residence without permission and subject to numerous security checks (Mukhina, 2007: 81). In November 1948 the law on the Criminal Prosecution for Escape from the Places of Required and Permanent Residence for People Deported to Distant Parts of the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War was enacted. It prescribed 20 year gulag sentences for "escape." Anyone who was late for - or missed - the compulsory monthly registration stamp could be prosecuted (Mukhina, 2007: 81) thus, family reunion and finding employment came to be exceedingly difficult tasks (Mukhina, 2007: 67). Loss of control over their employment and increasing legal restriction meant that Germans went from one of the best educated ethnic groups in Soviet society to one from which manual labour was drawn. Ethnic German opportunities for educational advancement remained severely restricted until the 1950s.¹⁸

From the mid-1930s onwards, official discourse regarding minority nationalities shifted and the regime dispensed with *korenizatsiia* in favour of the unification of the disparate peoples of the Union under a single banner of Soviet socialism (resulting in the term 'Soviet German' and so on) the experience of the second war was drawn upon heavily in the delineation of this identity as Szporluk (1990: 8) contends;

The term "Soviet people" (*sovetskii narod*), was introduced to designate all citizens of the Soviet Union in order to emphasise their unity above differences of nationality... it was also argued that the shared historical experience of building socialism and communism forged the unity of the "Soviet people." Their common historical experience also included the defence of "socialist achievements" against external enemies, notably Nazi Germany in World War II.

Some respondents emphasised this Soviet identity claiming that - as everyone was "Soviet" - it shielded them from anti-German prejudice (N9; N12; N23; N5*).¹⁹ However, Soviet

¹⁸ Heinrich (2002: 81) suggests that this educational deficit was overcome only in the two decades prior to the collapse of the USSR.

¹⁹ Although insistent that anti-German prejudice had affected only her parents 'as we were all "Soviet" anyway,' respondent N12 spoke of workplace discrimination (denial of a university teaching position) arising

culture and society was suffused with the myth that grew up around the war and all things connected to it;

My father could never watch films about the war, well how could he? They were Soviet films in which a lad comes along and takes a whole detachment of German soldiers prisoner; he couldn't stomach it! [...] He'd always wonder why they had to portray the Germans as such fools (n10).

In the post-World War II period, millions of ethnic Germans from the USSR and East Europe became refugees; expelled westward on the basis of their ethnicity.²⁰ Their presence in post-war Germany was one of the compelling forces in the inclusion of 'ethnicity *per se* in laws affecting West German citizenship' (Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2002: 103). Laws were drafted both in order to incorporate recently arrived expellees and to provide a basis for the claims of the 3 to 4 million ethnic Germans who remained in the Eastern bloc.²¹ The out migration of ethnic Germans from the USSR to the FRG increased steadily from 1955 onwards when the German government extended citizenship rights to co-ethnics in the Eastern Bloc. At the same time, Soviet policy permitted emigration on the grounds of family reunification alone (Polian, 2001: 167).²²

4.3.3 Living in the USSR: "rehabilitation" and "rebirth"

From the time of the deportations to the advent of *Glasnost*' ethnic Germans 'maintained a very low profile;' newspaper and book publication never approached pre-war levels (Brown, 2005: 627; Sheehy, 1971: 27), German cultural life was lived out behind closed doors (Brown, 2005: 627). The Soviet Germans were granted a partial rehabilitation in 1955 but, under the terms of the "amnesty," though they were free to leave the special settlement and relocate to south west Siberia (Heitman, 1993: 74) they were neither

from her ethnicity. She added: 'the moment when I realised I was German and not just an ordinary Soviet person, but specifically a German [...] that was not easy of course, either to admit or to understand.'

²⁰ Münz (2003: 261) gives a figure of 12 million expelled between 1945 and 1948.

²¹ It was *Vertreibungsdruk*, or the experience of ethnic discrimination, rather than ethnicity itself which informed the legal basis for the acceptance of expellee-migrants (Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2002). Only one of my respondents spoke of the post-war expulsion as comprising part of her experience (N19). She and her mother were expelled from Polish territory just before the war's end but, in the tumult that followed the Nazi surrender, they were repatriated to Russia almost immediately. The respondent and her mother were resident in a special settlement until her father – who had been in the *trudarmiya* in Ul'ianovsk where he had, by chance, overheard a conversation at the train station regarding his family's fate - made a 500km round trip on foot to look for them.

²² The majority of petitioners were Black Sea Germans who had been forcibly repatriated to the USSR after the war and were able to claim family reunification. As Volga Germans had been deported, they could not claim family ties in West Germany (Heitman, 1993: 77-78). The number of German emigrants from the USSR exceeded 10,000 for the year for the first time in 1988 (Polian, 2001: 164).

permitted to claim compensation for their suffering nor to return to their original homelands (Schultz & Sinner, 2002). The right to send and receive foreign correspondence – which had been denied for 20 years – was also restored. This led to a torrent of letters (many, for want of an address, were sent to the German Red Cross or the newly established *Landmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland* or, The Association of Germans from Russia) some of which led to post-war rediscovery of “lost” family members (Giesinger, 1974: 318).²³

The regime gave more ground in 1964 - the charge of collaboration was dropped –although some cultural autonomy was restored (the *Neues Leben* Weekly began publication) return (to the Volga region) was not on the agenda.²⁴ German representation on local soviets increased sixfold and thus, it approximated their proportion in the total population (Sheehy, 1971: 27).²⁵ The right of return to the Volga region was eventually conceded in 1972 in a decree that was - just as the prior decrees - not widely publicised.²⁶ The authorities finally allowed occasional visits from Lutheran World Federation (LWF) delegations ‘to chosen congregations in former deportation areas’ from the late 1970s (Stricker, 2001: 104). Germans were, however, resident in a ‘country that was characterised by a geopolitical obsession with ethnic boundary drawing... [where they] were remarkable as the largest ethnic group without an official region of any kind’ (Brown, 2005: 627).²⁷

In 1980 the regime permitted the naming of a spiritual leader for the Russian German Lutheran congregation – Pastor Kalnin – his ministry was severely hampered by the terms and conditions that the Soviets imposed (Stricker, 2001: 105). It was only in the latter stages of the Gorbachev era that ethnic Germans began to organise in a politically

²³ The letters also gave an indication of the whereabouts of the German population: the majority were in Asiatic Russia, south-west Siberia, Omsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Slavogorod, Barnaul and the Altai Heights. There were Germans all over Kazakhstan with smaller pockets in other Central Asian cities: Frunze in the Kirgiz SSR, Samarkand and Tashkent in Uzbekistan (Giesinger, 1974: 319-320).

²⁴ As Polian (2001: 163) records, the groundless accusations and movement restrictions in force against the Germans were lifted but the regime was primarily concerned that the Germans remained in the places of resettlement on the basis that, ‘the German population has put down roots in the new areas of residence...,and their former places of abode are settled.’ In fact, German abilities and work ethic were seen as useful to the promotion of the Soviet programme in the less developed regions of the Union in which they resided (Polian, 2001: 164).

²⁵ Schultz (1998: 220) argues that the ‘lack of an autonomous republic hampered Soviet German political representation on the regional and national level’ nonetheless and, for the most part their political appointments of Soviet Germans were confined to the local rather than union or national level.

²⁶ Publication of the 1964 decree was authorised only in 1965. German language press could print the whole document, Russian language newspapers were only permitted to “comment on it” (Schmaltz & Sinner: 2002: 343).

²⁷ A 1979 attempt to institute an autonomous oblast in Kazakhstan failed as a result of fierce anti-German protests in the proposed locality (Polian, 2001: 164).

meaningful way (Brown, 2005: 628).²⁸ The most tangible expression of this organisation was the creation of *Wiedergeburt* (Rebirth/ *Vozyrashchenie*), an All-Union Society which sought to advance the ethnic-German cause in the USSR through ‘the most effective legal means by which it could confront the regime – namely political dissent based on Lenin’s notion of national self-determination’ (Schmaltz, 1998: 215). The *Wiedergeburt* leadership, (part of which - under Hugo Wormsbecher - was concerned with maintaining a distinctive Russian German/ Volga German identity and culture, seen as distinct from Russian *or* German culture or identity (see Schmaltz, 1998)) equated the restoration of the German ASSR with final absolution of the Soviet Germans vis-à-vis Stalin’s accusation of “war guilt;” Soviet Germans were emigrating in increasing numbers ‘not out of political opposition but... because of “broken Soviet principles.” A republic [on the other hand] meant equality’ (Schmaltz, 1998: 218).²⁹ An informant in Ul’ianovsk stated;

As a nation were done for (*unizhenno*). It’s insulting to Germans that to this day [...] every small nation has their national republic etc. [Yet] for us, for Germans – here to this day – we remain un-rehabilitated. It’s the only minority that *to this day*... It’s purely symbolic, additions to the pension, a newspaper [...] but basically, we’re not fully rehabilitated (N11).

Wiedergeburt was established in early 1989 at a time when Gorbachev’s reforms were opening channels of communication between the USSR and West Germany which allowed the West Germans to take an open interest in the situation of ethnic Germans in the Eastern Bloc (Wallis, 2007: 180). For their part, the West Germans were anxious to curb the numbers of immigrants who – taking advantage of the liberally termed policy regarding “return” - were entering the Federal Republic in increasing numbers. The German government was willing to underwrite the cost of ethnic German resettlement in some form of their previous autonomous republic along the Volga (Moses, 1994: 105).

At first, the campaign that *Wiedergeburt* waged seemed to bear fruit and steps were taken towards the restoration of German autonomy; Gorbachev chaired the November 1989 meeting of The Committee for the Problems of the Peoples of the Volga Germans and Crimean Tatars calling for a commission to establish their right to restitution (Schmaltz,

²⁸ An ethnic German “lobby” had agitated for change throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s though their efforts met with little success. Delegations petitioned Moscow in 1964, 65 and 67. Moscow succeeded in preventing a fourth delegation from reaching the capital in the summer of 1972 (Schmaltz & Sinner, 2002: 342-345). Delegations travelled to Moscow on three occasions in 1988 but were not received by any government minister (Polian, 2001: 164). The illegally established *Vereinigung der auswanderungswilligen Deutschen* (The Association of Germans Wishing to Emigrate) also appeared in the early 1970s (see Schmaltz & Sinner, 2002: 342-345).

²⁹ Subsequently, the failure of the West German and Soviet governments to effect promises of an autonomous republic led to an ideological split within *Wiedergeburt* which ultimately proved fatal for the movement (see Schmaltz, 1998 & Schmaltz & Sinner, 2002).

1998: 224). At the same time, Soviet Germans were officially and fully rehabilitated (though this received publicity on a regional level only) (Wallis, 1997: 180-181) imbuing *Wiedergeburt* with the confidence to demand autonomy and ‘a reconstituted German republic within the territory of Saratov and Volgograd’ (Moses, 1994: 105).

Despite these initial steps, however, progress was stalled on a number of fronts. The commission set up to adjudicate upon the Soviet German claim concluded that it was ‘not yet possible to establish such a republic in the vicinity of the former Volga Republic’ and instead suggested ‘cultural autonomy for the Germans without territorial autonomy’ (Wallis, 1997: 181). Identifying a location for any re-formed republic was already becoming problematic. In Saratov, local politicians exploited people’s concerns about the issue to win election to the capital and oblast soviets in spring 1990, making ‘blatant appeal[s] to ethnic hatred and fear’ (Moses, 1994: 106).³⁰ The Russian government vowed to look into the Volga Republic problem - setting up a second commission to do so. This commission proposed the founding of a Soviet German *rayon*³¹ in Altai; pleasing the West Germans but highlighting the differing priorities that they and the leadership of *Wiedergeburt* had – for the latter, the symbolism of the Volga could not be overlooked (Wallis, 1997: 184-185; also see Polian, 2001; Schmaltz, 1998).³²

Russian and German government cooperation continued, culminating in the signing of a Declaration of Joint Intent in October 1991.³³ However, the Russian commitment to resolution of the issue was already questionable. Yeltsin announced that the new republic (to be augmented by *rayons*) would not be located on the site of the old one. The proposed alternative encompassed two areas; one on the Volga, the other at Kapustin Yar - a former military test site - for Soviet Germans and the West German government this was extremely unwelcome news;

³⁰ Slogans such as “no Forth Reich along the Volga” were coined and there were suggestions of KGB collusion with, and agitation amongst, anti-German protesters (Wallis, 1997: 181). A number of outlandish claims were made including one alleging ethnic Germans’ irredentist intentions (Schmaltz, 1998: 223).

³¹ A district.

³² It is estimated that, by 1995, 200,000 ethnic Germans had “returned” to the Volga region in anticipation of a positive resolution to negotiations over the resurrected republic (Wallis, 1997: 190). The vast majority hailed from Kazakhstan where the German population had declined from 946,855 (5.8% of the population) in 1989 to 353,441 (2.4%) in 1999 (Brown, 2005: 626). Mass exodus of non-titular nationals from Kazakhstan (see Brill Olcott, 1997: 560 for figures) was undertaken in response to economic uncertainty and discomfort at Kazakh nation building / the *Kazakhification* of the public sphere (Brown, 2005; Smith, G, 1999b) and ethnic violence – or at least the perception of it. Smith (1999b: 95) notes that such violence as did occur in the region ‘tended to be directed by Central Asians against Central Asians.’

³³ *Wiedergeburt* rejected the Declaration as it did not give a timetable of events, they were also unwilling to accept the locations proposed for the revived republic (see Wallis, 1997: 185).

The last straw was Yeltsin's statement... in '90 or '91. The Germans had requested autonomy and he said we could have Kapustin Yar! Kapustin Yar is a former nuclear [sic] test site. So having lived there for 200 years, having done a lot for Russia over the years, in such an enormous territory they couldn't find anywhere for 3 million people! (n10).

Alternative sites were subsequently offered in response to the outcry (and the German government's threat to withdraw DM50 million of financial assistance) but these locations - although in Saratov and Volgograd - also enclosed former military testing facilities (Wallis, 1997: 184-185). When the USSR ceased to exist on 26th December 1991, the issue of German autonomy was as yet, unresolved.

Yeltsin (who, in August 1991, had made a television appearance in which he stated support for German autonomy) appeared at a meeting in Saratov (in January 1992) and reportedly promised that German autonomy would only be possible where Germans constituted at least 90% of the population (Wallis, 1997: 185). Russian and German governments continued negotiations setting up a Joint Russian-German Commission to consider locations for the republic in April 1992 and issuing a Joint Protocol soon after (Wallis, 1997: 187-188) yet, despite ongoing discussion between 1993 and 1996 no substantive progress was made (Wallis, 1997: 190).³⁴ Opponents of the reconstitution of a German republic in the Volga region continued to object vociferously to ethnic German return, even on the 'step-by-step' basis (Polian, 2001: 166) outlined in the Protocol. By this time the *Wiedergeburt* leadership had long since divided internally and the more strident element of the organisation was now at the helm.³⁵ In recognition, perhaps, of the fading political will (from the Russian side at least) *Wiedergeburt* 'formulated an ultimatum [in which they stated that]... "the only alternative to a German Volga Republic is emigration to the Federal Republic of Germany"' (Polian, 2001: 166).³⁶

In this section, I have presented a chronology of ethnic German presence in the Russian Empire, Soviet Union and Russian Federation. The manner in which belonging and national minority belonging was and is constructed has been presented and analysed with reference to Russian Germans. Not only is ethnic identity strongly aligned with territorial

³⁴ The Protocol was finally signed in October 1992 and ratified by the Russian Parliament in March 1993.

³⁵ Schmaltz & Sinner (2002: 347) note that the uncompromising, assertive and outspoken manner in which then Chairman - Heinrich Groth (1989-end 1992) - pressed ethnic German claims damaged their efficacy considerably, eventually alienating even those with genuine sympathy for the German cause.

³⁶ Wallis (1997: 191-192) suggests that the failure to re-establish autonomy on the Volga was a combination of factors: the turmoil of transition, no financial commitment from the Russians and their unwillingness to implement promises. The naivety of the German government willing to 'throw money at the problem' combined the readiness of the Russian government to accept much needed funds and to make duplicitous but undeliverable promises in order to secure such financial assistance.

space / the restriction of space; it is also a locus for every day interaction and identification. Territorial space is powerfully associated with equality as well as belonging and acceptance. This space is then associated with cultural concessions which benefit the titular minority. Chiefly, these concessions (for Russian Germans) are termed as language and religion.

In the following section I seek to establish 'belonging' from the German side of the equation. To this end, German national identity constructions are interrogated and the manner in which German historical self understanding has informed current attitudes towards immigrants and *Spätaussiedler* is explored. Language and religion are, once again, prominent as key tenets of identity and community identity. This, in turn, feeds back into Russian German foregrounding of the same factors in their own self understanding.

4.4 Culture and belonging: the 'German' context

Germany understands itself as a cultural nation (Bloomfield 2000: 171).

An understanding of this statement is crucial in order to appreciate the way in which belonging is structured in a German context. Culture is at the crux of this perception of self and nation. An obvious consequence of this formulation of belonging is seen in the difficulties which then arise for migrants and their adaptation to the new surroundings in which they find themselves.

The roots of German self-understanding lie, as one would naturally expect, in Germany's unique history. Whereas the majority of modern nation states can be analysed as entities within which identity is aligned with a territorial claim and a culturally defined nation, this link to a homeland or a 'territorially circumscribed space, on the one hand, and to a unified, culture or nation, on the other, has been extremely problematic in the construction of the identities of German speaking peoples residing in geographical units that have been called, successively, Wilhelmine Germany, Weimar Republic, Third Reich' (Borneman, 1992: 45). Indeed, Germany's territorial formation was established relatively late (Hogwood, 2000b; Borneman, 1992) and this fact has manifested itself in the norms of citizenship and belonging that have developed up until the present day.

The effects of Germany's 'delayed' territorial reification were further intensified by the ongoing consequences of Nazi rule and the post-War settlement which, in 1949, saw the German state split between East (German Democratic Republic, GDR) and West (Federal Republic of Germany, FRG). West Germany sought to repudiate the Soviet claim upon East Germany. Indeed the West German state did not recognise the socio-political separation that had been imposed at the close of hostilities and, in order to maintain the notional unity of the German state, pre-war understandings of belonging were retained. The ideal of belonging anchored not territorially but apropos the people, or *Volk*, enshrined in the idea *Völkzugehörigkeit* or German ethnic belonging, was thus preserved beyond the fall of the Third Reich, and thus, the East German state was denuded of legitimacy (Green, 2000). West Germany sought to retain the sole right to the representation of the Germans (*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*) – although this had no basis in law (Hogwood, 2000b: 128) and the German nation endured as an imagined whole (Green, 2000: 109). As such, "Germany" persisted, as she had done for centuries, as a 'psychological and cultural reality rather than a political one; [where] the German language [has been] the most tangible aspect of that reality' (Hogwood, 2000b: 127). Language, as shall be demonstrated in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, has a crucial role to play in the construction of identity, delineation of "space" and the processes of marginalisation that are evident in both cohorts from which the data for this study have been drawn.

The inability to operate effectively in a given language space makes it difficult for immigrants to understand 'culture in depth' and thus, to draw fully on its resources (Robins & Aksoy, 2001: 696). Moreover, lack of access to the dominant culture of the society of residence prompts people to create for themselves, 'a new cultural mobility, one that allows them to experience new forms of encounter, and provokes them to think across cultures' (Robins & Aksoy, 2001: 703). The recent historical experience of Russian Germans in the USSR (and to a degree in the RF), is not entirely incomparable with that of a migrant or subaltern group; they have suffered from prejudice and social exclusion as a result of their ethnicity which has served to set them apart from mainstream society in certain circumstances. The experiences of their recent and distant pasts have combined to condition the strategies and responses demonstrated by Russian Germans to the changes brought about by the collapse of the old order and, for informants based in Germany, the act of migration.

The German attitude towards potential *Spätaussiedler* in the post-Soviet period are rooted in this, historicised, conception of belonging. There exists, however, a fundamental mismatch between the tenet of belonging based upon shared culture and the actuality. To be sure, the construction of *Germanness* outlined above gave rise to a state of affairs whereby Germany was all but bound to propose the return of her ethnic brethren from the Former Soviet Union (FSU),³⁷ but the very principle which led to the extension of the “invitation” also all but guaranteed that the project of “return” could not progress in an ideal fashion.

In addition to this cultural understanding of national belonging, it must be noted that the German state is not conceived as a country of immigration (*Kein Einwanderungsland*). Once again, this declaration does not reflect experience (Hogwood, 2000b; Seifert, 1997) and yet it has been a mainstay of the position expressed in policy and law. The naturalisation guidelines of 1997/8 asserted that ‘Germany is not a country of immigration; she does not aspire to increase the number of German citizens through naturalisation’ (Hogwood, 2000b: 133). The greater proportion of literature on this subject has focussed upon the status of *Gastarbeiter* Turks in Germany (for examples see Çağlar, 2001; Cyrus & Vogel, 2003) and their uncertain status vis-à-vis citizenship and the formalisation of their situation and that of their offspring. Whereas Turks have to overcome considerable obstacles in order to gain full membership of German society,³⁸ the *Spätaussiedler* right to return was guaranteed in the 1953 law concerning refugees and expellees which extended the rights and assurances of article 116 of the Basic Law to include this group (Green, 2001: 91). This provision was made even though few among these cohorts had maintained direct links with Germany, their forebears having emigrated centuries beforehand (Green, 2001: 91). Moreover, the maintenance of links with the country of origin are viewed as detrimental to a migrants’ successful adaptation and as exacerbating the cultural distance between the new-comer and the society into which they seek ingress (Çağlar 2001: 604). Turks are not encouraged to retain associations with Turkey but *Spätaussiedler* are able to retain their Russian citizenship as a matter of routine (Green, 2000: 118).³⁹

³⁷ The initial influx of Soviet/ Russian Germans into Germany was justified in terms of a moral obligation (Wallis, 1997: 179).

³⁸ Since 2000 children born to foreign national parents have an automatic right to German citizenship. At least one parent must have lived in Germany for 8 years or more. The child is entitled to dual citizenship until the age of 23 when he or she must chose German or other nationality.

³⁹ *Spätaussiedler* from Kazakhstan are required to renounce Kazakhstani citizenship as Kazakhstan does not allow citizens to hold a second passport.

The German attitude towards its immigrant populations started to shift in the early 1990s when the government began to realise that its loose definition of German ethnicity for *Spätaussiedler* had created more problems than it had solved (Mukhina, 2007: 165). The introduction, in 1993, of the *Kriegsfolgenbereinigungsgesetz* (law concerning the consequences of the War, KfbG)⁴⁰ which set quotas for ethnic German immigration from Eastern Europe was followed by in 1996 by the introduction of the mandatory language exam for would-be *Spätaussiedler*. The exam has deterred many given its failure rate of 35%. In addition, some monetary benefits were removed or reduced and social integration was emphasised instead (Mukhina, 2007: 166). Furthermore, it can be posited that much of the impetus for this alteration of emphasis derives from the post-Soviet experience of *Spätaussiedler* arrival. While a cultural notion of belonging had been the key to retaining a sense of unity through the Soviet/ Cold War era (and was arguably the vital asset in assuring that a course of East-West reunification was pursued) the appearance of the *Spätaussiedler* made manifest a number of issues. Firstly, although the German polity had conformed to an ethnic based idea of belonging and citizenship which was founded upon ‘a singular bounded notion of “German Culture” (Bloomfield, 2000: 167), the majority of *Spätaussiedler* held cultural values that were even more distant from the West German norm (which assumed a dominant position post-unification) than those of the *Ossis* (a derogatory term used by west Germans in reference to their east German counterparts) (Hogwood, 2000b: 141). Moreover, an additional concern arose for those arriving in the former East Germany; few East Germans had experience of migration or contact with immigrants and over 96 per cent of Germany’s immigrant population resided in the *Länder* of the FRG even in 1998 (Green, 2001: 91). The Return profoundly altered this dynamic, yet the prevailing circumstances point to the almost inevitable social exclusion of new arrivals, one which has its origins in cultural differentiation.

The realisation that *Spätaussiedler* are often less German than members of other immigrant groups has led to policy change which favours foreigners with residency over co-ethnics from afar (Hogwood, 2000b: 134). *Spätaussiedler*, then, can find themselves in a position in which they are sidelined despite their common ethnic derivation. This exclusion occurs because culture is regarded as ‘a kind of genetic inheritance...that fixes a person’s origins

⁴⁰ Prior to the introduction of the KfbG, the position of *Aussiedler* was mediated by the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* of BVFG, the Federal Expellee Law which was introduced in 1953 in order to further clarify the position of Expellees (*Vertriebene*) that had been established in the 1949 Basic Law or Grundgesetz, §116.

and identity and therefore entitlements' (Bloomfield, 2000: 170). Russian Germans can become citizens but they are subject to exclusion due to their lack cultural legitimacy. According to Vergeti (1992; also see Gmelch, 1980) migrants who "return" to a homeland can find themselves doubly isolated as their expectation is one of acceptance due to shared ethnicity and cultural values (whereas migrants who are not co-ethnic often accept that they may not 'fit in,' see Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 1999) yet generations of separation ensures that this is not so.

A self understanding which leads Germans to anchor their identity within a primarily cultural framework in turn foregrounds cultural identity as well as cultural understanding and misunderstanding as important discourses for both groups of respondents in this study. Indeed, while culture can be taken as a critical locus of analysis it is important to note that exclusion legitimated through reference to cultural difference extends beyond these bounds and, 'entrenches [for example] segregation in the labour market, inequalities of access to education, language acquisition and training' (Bloomfield, 2000: 170). Culture may then become doubly important, not only as the "natural" focus of German or Germanised identity but as the only realm in which migrants, for whom place and status in broader society are difficult to attain, can retain a sense of control over the direction that life is taking, especially when deprived of the status derived from the workplace or educational achievement.⁴¹ Paradoxically, this comment is equally applicable to Russian Germans as to the non-ethnic Germans discussed in Bloomfield's work.

4.4.1 Religion as a national community

Anderson (2006: 14) argues that 'languages were the media through which the great global communities of the past were imagined,' a phenomenon that was grounded in religion and its observance. While acknowledging the centrality of religion with regard to identity, Anderson (2006: 14) posits that, 'religiously imagined community waned after the Middle Ages'. Nonetheless, the significance of shared religious observance – although paradoxically often performed as individual ritual – can join together members of an invisible communion in an imagined whole (Anderson, 2006: 35). The interplay of

⁴¹ Those Russian Germans who retained a German identity in the USSR & RF might also be considered here. Although "non-movers" their status in wider society could be adversely affected by their ethnicity. It was, however, difficult for them to find outlets for expressions of cultural belonging / unity.

language and religion cannot be overlooked in the Russian German case. Indeed, Fishman (1989: 7) reminds us that;

The ever-present link between language and religion (what would religion be without language?) not only sanctifies ‘our language’ but helps raise language into the pale of sanctity even in secular culture.

Imagined communities can extend beyond the framework imposed by a (nation) state. The activities of the German Lutheran Church over the period of the Cold War provide evidence for this contention. Religion and its associated spaces and places form a province in which Russian Germans (in Russia particularly) attempt to create a space which is distinctly “theirs”. Even among those who are not directly associated with the church, there persists an understanding that the church is somehow inherently “German” and should fulfil a role as community fulcrum.⁴² This aspect of belief was particularly strongly expressed among members of the Ul’ianovsk based cohort which comprise one of the two research groups in this study.⁴³ It is interesting to consider the possible source of the conflation of national and religious identity. As Borneman (1992: 49) notes,

Up to 1875 entry into one of the provincial communities of the German Reich was regulated by the churches. Anyone could become a member of the community by changing their faith, either to Catholic or Protestant, or, in some communities, to the Jewish.

The consequence of this historical fact, while difficult to determine with any precision, should not be underestimated. The forbears of the Russian Germans who participated in the post-Soviet migrations to Germany and of those who took part in this study would, in all probability, have left the German territories before this date, thus carrying with them this archaic understanding of community and belonging. The tendency of ethnic enclaves, remote from their national territory and the preponderance of their “brethren” to adhere to the outmoded norms which were current at the time of their departure is well acknowledged (Popov, 2003; Vergeti, 1991). Certainly, the attitude of the Ul’ianovsk cohort in this study towards the church would mark it out as the institution which ethnic

⁴² Findings from research conducted through the 1980s showed that 25-30% of USSR-based ethnic Germans surveyed declared that they were religious believers but this percentage did not account for non-believers who, nonetheless, regarded religion as a fundamental part of ethnic identity (Schmaltz & Sinner, 2002: 337).

⁴³ I attended services regularly in Ul’ianovsk. I attended only one church service in Germany. In Berlin, the “Russian” service ran after the regular German language Sunday service. The Service was entirely in Russian and was attended by Russophones rather than exclusively Russian Germans.

Germans invested with communal meaning and looked to for leadership. Indeed, the “ethnic church” has been recognised as a shelter where congregants can meet together and “remain ethnic,” thus emancipating them from foreigner status (Fortier, 2000: 110-113 see Chapter 2; section 2.3.3). Moreover, against this backdrop ministering clergy play a role as reproducers of identity rather than as producers of new identity forms (Fortier, 2000: 110). Fortier’s assertions are strongly reflected in the findings discussed in this thesis.

4.5 Conclusion: the echoes of history

This chapter has focused upon the historical position of Russian Germans – particularly vis-à-vis the USSR and RF alongside more recent developments which have included the FRG. The central tenets of Russian German identity (symbolically religion and language) have been pinpointed and located within the wider discourses that have enmeshed this group. I have sought to establish the events and institutions (particularly under Soviet governance) that have shaped Russian German identity and the attitudes members of this group exhibit towards its present form, persistence and continuation.

The Soviet attitude towards national minorities has played a crucial role in this regard. Official policy towards minority groups meant that ethnicity became (and remains) a fundamental element of day-to-day life through which identity and belonging are mediated (Karklins, 1986). National minorities powerfully equated territorial claims and language maintenance with identity, belonging and/ or acceptance at the most fundamental level (Schmaltz, 1998). Territory and language (which for Russian Germans is also strongly aligned with religion) are spatial claims (physical and symbolic) that national minorities made in the USSR (in the form of the ASSR) and continue to make in the RF (as Autonomous Republics).⁴⁴ Space - as a container of social and cultural practice and a symbolic and political entity - is fundamental to (minority) national identities in the RF. The specifics of the Russian German experience within this framework (and the conditioning role of WWII) have been presented and discussed.

Officially imposed restraints upon Russian German mobility (resulting from Soviet policy and that of the FRG) have it shall be seen – in combination with other factors such as

⁴⁴ Theoretically at least, the fact that ASSR status did not in fact denote much autonomy is a moot point.

financial resources - had some effect upon attitudes towards mobility that are exhibited by the groups that comprised this case study. The findings and analysis that comprise Chapters 5-7 of this thesis are framed within a discourse of space that is, in my view, specifically derived from the unique historical experience of the Russian Germans vis-à-vis Russia and Germany. This, results in a group specific form of transnationalism, located in transnational social spaces which themselves emerge from the historical discourses within which respondents have positioned themselves and have been positioned by others.

Chapter 5: Transnational practice among Russian Germans in Ul'ianovsk: part I

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter and the next I present the findings from the fieldwork conducted in Ul'ianovsk RF. Chapter 6 is concerned with the symbolic aspects of transnational practice that study participants engage in. This chapter, on the other hand, is concerned with the 'physical' aspects of their transnational practice; that is to say practice which is located in identifiable and definable spaces such as the village of Bogdashkino or the Lutheran Church.

As discussed earlier (Chapter 2), transnationalism can enmesh actors who are relatively immobile; I argue that transnational engagements of this type are based upon migration networks (see 2.3.2) which included family members who remain in the country of origin and their kin and friends abroad. Such engagement is also strongly cultural and centres on strongly spatialised practice (within which the culture exhibited can be manifested in traditional and hybrid forms; Chapter 6; section 6.2.5). The chapter is structured so as to reflect the way in which these immobile actors attempt to mobilise in search of a space or place within which to express their *Germanness*; while located in the RF the activities undertaken by participants in this study are significantly orientated towards the FRG. I argue that this is a significant form of transnational practice for this group of Russian Germans. Despite their relative lack of mobility they nonetheless seek out, and attempt to actualise, links to Germany. Study participants are not always successful in these efforts demonstrating that, even in this globalized era, the effect of material and state sponsored constraints on fields of social action cannot be ignored.

The chapter begins with an assessment of the attempt to revive a German community in Ul'ianovsk through the reinstatement of a "compact settlement" in the region. "Compact settlement" draws directly upon the ethno-territorial understanding of (ethnic) identity that shaped the Soviet nationalities policy which, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, persists as the foundation of contemporary attitudes towards (ethnic) identity. The revival of Bogdashkino was partially supported by funding from the FRG yet this 'investment' has not paid off in terms of 'fixing' Russian Germans in place; a large exodus has occurred nonetheless (which, at once, lays the foundations of a migration network).

“Compact living” has not had the wished for unifying effect upon this case-study group who have then sought alternative loci for the expression and practice of their identity. The importance of religious observance for Russian German identity has been outlined in the previous chapter. The respondents’ view on the role of the church and religion is further explored here. Respondents see the church as a space and place in which their needs and wishes should be of principal importance and the church pastor, their key ally. The church is discussed in both chapters which present findings from Ul’ianovsk. In Chapter 6 the symbolic role of language usage in the church is examined. Here, attitudes toward the church as a place and space and discourses of access are explored.

Access to the church is, however, not guaranteed and respondents are thus deprived of an avenue of engagement with German kith and kin and/ or Germany (which should also be considered a space to which respondents might wish to gain access). Efforts to create and maintain alternative spaces in the form of a Women’s Club are also explored along with other potential loci of engagement, principally news media and other local events.

The final section of the chapter deals with respondents’ efforts to actualise their links with Germany. This focuses on engagement with activities that are discernibly transnational in type (communication, travel) and the reasons for differing depths of engagement in these arenas are explored. Study participants faced numerous obstacles in their attempts to engage in these transnational activities which points to the importance of local conditions in this regard.

5.2 Compact living: the “half measure” of Bogdashkino and the desire to “live among Germans”

The village of Bogdashkino is located approximately one hour’s drive from the centre of Ul’ianovsk, on the opposite bank of the Volga from the city centre. The village lies 30 kilometres from Oktyabrskii, and is situated in very rural surroundings. It is one of three compact settlements in the region. One, Ivanovskoe, had already been ‘closed’ as ‘everybody went to Germany;’ the remaining settlement (Pervomaiskoe) is located 180 kilometres from Ul’ianovsk (N11).

The local authorities had hoped that the village of Bogdashkino would be revitalised by the arrival of Germans relocating from Central Asia, to the benefit of both the village's remaining non-German residents and the new Russian German arrivals (N16; N11). The ethnic Germans who had done war work in Ul'ianovsk had impressed with their industry, thus;

When we got our “second chance” with the foundation of *Wiedergeburt* and when the USSR collapsed [...] and life [became] difficult for Germans in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Germans began looking for a way out. [The authorities] revived these little villages, first of all it was prefabs [and] Germans came from Kazakhstan, Kirgizia [and] Uzbekistan. Then Germany helped with the building of the houses and soon more and more Germans were coming here from there (N11).

Germans had always been ‘the best builders [...] and [...] specialist, distinguished by their precision’ (N11) and the “style” in which the German sponsored houses in Bogdashkino were built was also much commented upon; they were adjudged to be particularly German. While negotiating access to Bogdashkino with Nina Andreevna¹ she would often remark that, when I got there, I would see the ‘German houses and German school.’² The interview with respondent N28 was preceded by a tour of her house as she wished to show me the way in which the interior décor was different to that of a “Russian” dwelling.

The ideal of “compact living” was raised by some respondents as important for the successful revitalisation of the German community in Ul'ianovsk. This view was expressed with particular vehemence by older participants in the study:

And now, we're perishing as a people [*narod pogibaet kak narod*]. On a day to day basis you can still be called a fascist depending on a person's conscience. But we don't have a community because we don't live together [*u nas net kompaktnogo prozhivania*].

Interviewer: So compact settlement is vital from your point of view?

Yes! Research shows that if [there are] 2,500 or 3,000 families of at least three people [each] they can have their own school, study their own

¹ A pseudonym, Nina Andreevna ran the German Association. She was based in Oktyabrskii and prided herself of knowing every German in the region.

² Interestingly the school's head teacher acknowledged that, while the school was unusually large for one in a rural location he did not think it particularly “German” (N20). The man who gave me a lift to Bogdashkino – an ethnic German from Ul'ianovsk who was particularly keen to see the village – remarked that although one or two of the houses were passably “German” (and pointed them out to me), the rest of the housing stock/village did not live up to his expectations.

language and so on. If they're permitted that is. If it's less [families, then] nothing, in fact I rarely have the chance to speak German to anyone! (N21)

Bogdashkino is held up by informants who live in Oktyabrskii and Ul'ianovsk as the 'ideal' in terms of how Germans should live (i.e. compactly) (particularly N5; N11; N8; N21) if they are to retain their identity. However, it does not appear that the project has borne much fruit in this regard. A number of reasons were proposed to account for the lack of success herein. It was acknowledged that Bogdashkino could not offer sufficient potential employment for would-be residents (N11; N12).³ Furthermore, out migration to Germany was often raised in discussions centred on the topic of Bogdashkino;

Well, before we had the Volga German Republic. We had our own culture there, everything. Well, I don't know. That [the republic] hasn't survived. So, there's Bogdashkino [...] There, there are those Germans from Tashkent, Dushanbe, and the former Soviet Republics. From here [Bogdashkino] ... it's a staging post for them. They've mainly left for Germany now. They built houses for them there, the Germans helped to build them. In fact, they helped with everything but [people] have left all the same. And the revival of the Republic is, no... impossible (N19).



Of course a lot of people are leaving. How do I know? [I know] because I fill out the forms on their behalf, they leave their houses... In spite of the fact that they're leaving their houses, they go (N11).

Indeed, the exodus from the village has been considerable. The school's head teacher estimated that Bogdashkino had a population of 500 and that a further 400 had left during his tenure in the village (which had lasted a little over 3 years by the time I met with him in June 2006). He was the school's third head teacher and both his predecessors had emigrated. The school has 240 places and 33 staff, in the previous academic year (autumn, 2005 – summer, 2006) there had been 53 enrolled pupils. A particular consequence of this exodus has been to deprive the community of its most active members and among them, those who most fervently expressed their German identity (N28). Thus, the people who had been relied upon to organise community events were now absent (N28). Respondents who lived in the village were not of the view that so doing augmented their German identities.⁴ One informant noted ruefully that he had;

³ Most of the people I spoke with supplemented whatever "official" income they earned through small scale agriculture. The village is home to a cheese factory (the start up was sponsored by the FRG) and a mineral water spring had recently been opened nearby (N11) but this did not provide sufficient employment opportunity.

⁴ One informant (N20) had moved at her parents' behest as a minor and professed that she did not feel particularly German.

[W]anted to come [to Bogdashkino] and remind the children of German culture, language...but that's only really on paper [*eto tol'ko na bumage tak*] ... we came so that the children might know about their people [...]There used to be gatherings, we "did" German culture so to speak, [there were] get togethers (*kruzhki*) but now everything's quiet (N29).

Moreover, despite its relative proximity to Oktyabrskii, where a financially more secure and more enduring community is established,⁵ the two groups mingled only occasionally. Transport was an issue; buses run irregularly and the only other option is to borrow the school minibus for which a driver had to be sought. Yet, overcoming these obstacles did not guarantee that a 'sense of community' would necessarily be fostered. When I attended the German Family Day in Oktyabrskii (June 2006) a number of participants had made the minibus journey from Bogdashkino. At the lunchtime buffet the groups sat separately; Oktyabrskii residents at one table and Bogdashkino residents at another. Nobody from Ul'ianovsk had made the trip - though some had been aware of the event - having taken a last minute decision not to attend.⁶ Attendees from Bogdashkino left the buffet after twenty minutes.⁷

The desire to live compactly has been identified as important for minority identity and for contemporary German identity in particular (see Chapter 4). It is one way in which respondents try to delimit a culturally defined, "ethnic" space with the "German mainland" (after Anderson's (2006) imagined community). However, the attempt to do so has not been particularly successful. Many of those who could leave for Germany have done so. On the other hand, those who have remained have met with little success in their attempts to maintain a sense of community. For some, this 'failure' has led to the decision to emigrate. One respondent noted that his 'brother had decided that, come what may, he wanted to live among Germans [implying that this was an impossibility in Russia], the end! Whatever he might find [when he got there]' (N9). A second informant (who was preparing to emigrate imminently)⁸ observed;

⁵ It is unofficially acknowledged that Oktyabrskii was a village where *trudarmiya* recruits were barracked for the duration of the Second World War. Many stayed after hostilities ceased.

⁶ One informant from Ul'ianovsk promised to accompany me to the Family Day but she changed her mind on the evening before the event. When she telephoned to cancel the arrangement I attempted to elicit a reason for her change of heart but none was forthcoming.

⁷ It was subsequently intimated to me that this was very typical of the relationship between ethnic Germans in the two locations.

⁸ She was, however, leaving without her children (it was unclear that they would both be given permission to follow) and her sister was to remain in Russia.

Bogdashkino's there but it's not enough (*no eto - ne to*), it's a half measure all the same (*napolovinu*). I want to live in Germany. I want to know the culture; that's very dear to me [...] [I want] specifically to live among them (Germans), to be infused by the spirit, the music, the folk songs. When I'm in a bad mood I either listen to German folk music or read [something in] German; that's what I do (N12).

On the other hand, the huge exodus of Russian Germans has meant that people now have current and close family connections that are located in Germany thus increasing the potential for network based transnational exchange. This potential is augmented further by the perceived lack of outlets for German culture in and around respondents within Russia. The emphasis that respondents place on culture and cultural practice - particularly in the absence of a defined and/ or successful territory or space is clearly apparent;

The movement for the restoration of the Republic [*Wiedergeburt*] came to nought; Germans couldn't unite [in this way]. And then they began to open cultural centres, national cultural centres.

For this respondent, however, such enterprises could 'not solve the problems of the Russian Germans all the same' (N12), thus leading to her decision to depart for Germany. While it is still possible to leave for Germany (i.e. N12), the probability of so doing has lessened with the passage of time. It has become far more difficult to prove "belonging" to the historical community (N13; N14; N18; N22).⁹ The German governmental position is currently thus codified;

[A]t least one parent has to have been a German citizen or ethnic German; since 7 September 2001, when legislation on the status of ethnic German repatriates went into effect they must also have demonstrated an exclusive identification with the German ethnic community (typically in the form of a declaration of nationality) in their region of residence or have been identified as a German national under the laws of their country of residence. In order to confirm such identification, as part of the application procedure [...] applicants must demonstrate German language skills gained from family members sufficient to conduct a simple conversation in German (Immigration Law & Policy, §12.2).

The requirements set out in the FRG's policy are challenging and, the conditions cannot easily be fulfilled even by those who are able to meet with the language requirements (the

⁹ Paperwork is also required if one wishes to avail oneself of the benefits available from the Russian state for formerly 'repressed' peoples. Russian Germans who suffered as a result of the deportations are entitled to cut price public transport and 2 free rail passages *per annum*. A respondent (N19) was able to claim her benefits once she had received her file from the local archive office. She applied for the file on numerous occasions but obtained it only after her husband - a historian - visited the relevant office and insisted to be allowed to search the records himself. He uncovered the file the same morning thus bringing an 18 month wait to an end.

experience of those who have not met with the minimum level of German language competence is discussed in the Chapter 6). This may in turn result in family separation;

[The German authorities said] I might even have bought my birth certificate! So no, they did not accept that I am German. Because I was orphaned so I don't have [my parents'] birth certificates and papers [to show] that I'm their daughter. So, my sister left, all of my aunties went [too]. My sister [was able to go] because her husband is a German and his mother was there already so she brought all of "her own" over but I was [left] over here. Gosh, for two months [after the refusal of *Spätaussiedler* status] I thought I was in the nut house (N14).¹⁰

The small size of the groups remaining in Ul'ianovsk and the surrounding area, coupled with the awkwardness which characterises relations between them, does much to deprive its members of agency (Höschelmann & Van Hoven, 2003: 748). As access to the "German mainland" is limited, the church is identified as a key locus for German identity in Ul'ianovsk. The church was seen by some as a representation or manifestation of German territory in Russia, 'it was our *Insel*, [island], as one says, our *Vaterland*; a little fatherland' (N23). The attitude exhibited towards the church demonstrates an attempt to make a manifestly "spatial" claim which – for respondents - relates directly to their right to *Germanized* space (which, in turn, derives from their (historical) national minority status). Moreover, it is clear from the testimony presented below (and in Chapter 6) that a direct link between the church in Russia/ Ul'ianovsk and (the church in) Germany is extant for some of the participants in this study.

5.3 The "German Church" in Ul'ianovsk

Initially, in the early to mid 1990s, a palpable optimism infused the Russian German population in Ul'ianovsk. Those who could prove their *Germanness* and wished to do so were able to leave the often chaotic FSU to resettle in Germany. Much early community activity focussed on the re-opening of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Ul'ianovsk town centre. The building was returned to the congregation in 1991 and re-consecrated and reopened in 1994¹¹ (Selezneva-Reder, 2004). Some of the restoration work was undertaken by future parishioners and their often non-German spouses (N13; N21). The first post-

¹⁰ The same respondent recalled that during a relocation interview at the German Consulate in Saratov she had been asked to justify her decision to marry a Russian man rather than an ethnic German. She pondered, "How could they say this to me? There were no men!"

¹¹ A German church architect oversaw the restoration process and Lutheran parishes in Lower Saxony raised money towards the costs of the project. In 1996 a church organ was donated, also from Germany (Selezneva-Reder, 2004: 10-11).

Soviet pastors were German nationals and concomitantly services were read in German with a simultaneous translation into Russian. The congregation comprised Russian Germans who subscribed to the Lutheran faith. However, nominally Catholic Germans also attended as they recognised the Church as the *de facto* centre of the rejuvenated ethnic community (N23).¹² Free language classes - subsidised by the German state - were run in buildings annexed to the Church. Russian Germans also utilised this space for social gatherings which took place outside the regular worship activities (N13; N18; N23). Although the following sections focus on different arenas of participation, the church appears in each discourse to a greater or lesser extent. In the following sections I discuss the process through which respondents have come to feel themselves excluded from the church. I then look at how exclusion deprives them of access to avenues of transnational engagement with Germany and Germans (primarily *korennye nemtsy*).

5.3.1 The role of the pastor: the consequences of the failure of a central relationship

The person of the pastor is seen as playing a crucial role as the communal hub. The majority of respondents in this group recalls the days of the ethnic German pastor with great fondness. Crucially his arrival seems to have been perceived as a signal that a German identity might, once again, have a public facet. An elderly informant who recalled the fear that prevented some would-be signatories from putting their names to the petition to re-open the church and described this apprehension as ‘genetic’ and arising from the years of oppression suffered by the Russian Germans remarked that, ‘Then, Pastor Markus¹³ came from Germany. We socialised [at the church] and everything was normal’ (N21). The respondent’s observation emphasises, once again, the conflation of religion and personal and social identity for this group. His view was echoed by others:

We had Pastor Markus from Germany and you went there [to church] as if going home. The sense of unity was palpable, or in some way that person brought every one very much together. In that way he was some sort of soul (N13).

¹² Other respondents cited their Catholicism as a reason for non-attendance (N5; N11; N19).

¹³ A pseudonym.

The mechanism by which Pastor Markus, (a German citizen), came to be replaced by Pastor Ivan,¹⁴ (an ethnic Russian) who replaced Pastor Markus in 2001, is unclear. Pastor Markus' visa expired after five years and was not renewed. Yet, for those who object to the endorsement of an ethnic Russian candidate as a replacement,¹⁵ the fact that another ethnic German (whom they presumed would re-locate from Germany) was not appointed is something that they neither countenance nor comprehend.¹⁶ It is instructive to contrast belief that a Lutheran pastor *must* be German with the aims of the Lutheran synod. Writing in 2001, the year in which Ivan replaced Markus as pastor, Stricker observes that while the church in Germany is willing to support the Russian church over the period of transition when money and other resources are recognised as being in short supply, it is not the intention of the church hierarchy to sustain this support indefinitely (Stricker, 2001: 106). With regard to the issue of pastor salaries and other expenses associated with the maintenance of a congregation it is noted that

Although people may be willing to meet one-time financial demands they do not have any understanding of the necessity for regularly supporting their congregation (in the form of church tax, for example). Here attitudes of mind characteristic of *homo sovieticus* must be overcome before the church members understand that in spite of present crisis they need to create economic autonomy for their congregation rather than expecting financial help solely from Germany (Stricker, 2001: 107).

The Lutheran hierarchy's desire to encourage a degree of independence and self sufficiency in the recently revitalised diocese in the east is clearly apparent. Yet given the significance that congregants attached to the ministry of a German pastor and his role as an anchor for community activity, these views would seem to be not only opposite, but irreconcilable. In the sub-group of the Russian based participant cohort that was particularly concerned with the role of the church in community life there was even suggestion that the guarantee of a German pastor would curtail Russian German emigration;

[T]hey want to go to Germany and [they] would want a German pastor here, very much so.

Interviewer: Do you really think so?

¹⁴ A pseudonym.

¹⁵ It was suggested by one informant that the congregation had been persuaded to "see how things went" with Ivan but that nobody had ever come back to ask their further opinion in this regard (N13).

¹⁶ A short trip was made to Samara towards the end of the research period. The topic of the non-German pastor in Ul'ianovsk was raised in conversation by some of the parishioners there. They clearly stated that they "would not accept" such a situation in Samara. It is notable that, in Samara, the congregation was much larger, as was the proportion of ethnic-German attendees therein.

Of course! Why do you think? If the pastor here was German lots of people would go to church. It's not so in Germany, in Germany nobody goes to there [to church]. But here people would go and they would socialise. Instead they are excluding us [*otuchaiut nas*]; marginalising us completely [...] we wouldn't even need a room if only the pastor were a German, no room, no nothing. We'd come along, pray and go home. That's all (N23).

Respondents who have ceased to attend church regularly¹⁷ – in part, they say, because their pastor is not German – have made attempts to secure space within the church for (temporary) exclusive use by ethnic Germans from the congregation. According to one informant, members of this group had asked to have a room set aside in which they could meet and socialise after the Sunday service. She claims that, they were asked to pay rent of 15,000 roubles *per annum* which was an impossible sum (N14). The interpretation of another respondent offers an alternative insight into the prevailing situation:

They've banished us from the church. They didn't allow us to meet. We can't, for example, meet in the middle of the week. We're pensioners for goodness sake, we attended on a Sunday and after church we stayed on [...] and then they said "Sunday's a holy day and you shouldn't meet there, come on a Wednesday instead!" Nobody's got that much money and we can't be standing about in a queue [due to age] either (N23).

The informant cited above lived an hour's commute from the church and the extra bus fare, 15 roubles each way, incurred in order to travel to the church on a week day was beyond her means. Indeed, finance plays a significant role in restricting participation in transnational activity on both local and transnational levels; age is another issue to which she alludes. The majority of this group were pensioners. The most senior members of this sub-group of "non-attendees" were in their 80s and it was clearly felt that their health was not robust enough to allow them to travel to the church more often than was strictly necessary (also N14; N21). While the claim that they, as a group, have been banished from the church seems something of an exaggeration of the given situation it is clear that these informants feel that they have been manoeuvred aside in a place which they believe should be "their own" and, which reaffirms an active and current link to Germany.

¹⁷ None of this group was in attendance at any of the services I attended during my 4 month stay in Ul'ianovsk, with the possible exception of my first service (Easter Sunday) which was extremely crowded. One member of this group did attend a Sunday service when I was absent.

The breakdown of the relationship between the would-be congregants and their church pastor has broader consequences. As members of this disaffected group do not attend the church regularly they remain unaware of or excluded from transnational activities which do occur there. Visitors from other towns and cities in the FSU are relatively common.¹⁸ A visiting Lutheran pastor from the United States gave one sermon - in English - and although *korennye nemtsy*¹⁹ do not visit as regularly as they once did, both individual and group visits do still occur. Part of the objection articulated by this group is grounded in their resentment at their exclusion from the information flows which converge at the church. In their view the pastor is responsible for the dissemination of news and information relating to visits; a function which, they allege, he does not fulfil;

It's not that he tells us to stay away, he doesn't tell us "Don't come" but he doesn't phone, and he doesn't say "Well, _____ there's a delegation arriving from Germany come along and have a bit of a chat!" and we'd all go [lists names] and I'd call around all those who live in Novy Gorod. We'd just go and socialise, have a chat. We're not asking for money or anything like that (N23).



It's not our home anymore; ideally it ought to be our home but now. Already now, that's not the case. We phone each other [beforehand] to find out if we'll go but before it [the church] drew you in. On a Sunday you'd meet to talk, each person has their say, who is doing what, what news (N14).

The feeling of exclusion articulated by members of this disillusioned group is increased as a result of their appreciation of the fact that they are unable to exploit the transnational links that flow through the church; opportunities to travel abroad did exist and yet, as they were mediated through the church access was denied to these respondents. A choir had been re-established at the same time as the church reopened; travel abroad on a choir tour was possible. Moreover, friendships had been forged with *korennye nemtsy* who had been involved with this enterprise and who had returned repeatedly to the Ul'ianovsk church. Since its inception, however, the choir had become a more professional outfit and, while it continued its activities, it no longer offered the same opportunities to German congregants for travel to Germany (N3*).²⁰ Furthermore, such opportunities for travel that were still attainable ostensibly favoured younger parishioners (almost all ethnic Russians), who,

¹⁸ I witnessed this on 3 occasions with the arrival of visitors from Kazakhstan & Latvia.

¹⁹ Native Germans, *korennoi nemets* (singular).

²⁰ The addition of "*" i.e. N1* indicates an unrecorded interview.

these informants felt, lacked respect for the church and for elderly ethnic German congregants:

There's our German church [but] [t]he young people, the youth go abroad. Young people come to church until such time as they're sent off abroad. They're [over] there 2 or 3 weeks, a month. They come back and they don't go there anymore - to the church. They don't go. We were born, grew up, we prayed up until [the re-opening of the church] and after but they don't send us [to Germany]. We'll pray in our own language all the same. We'll do that anyway (N23).

It is difficult to state with any certainty whether or not more regular attendance would generate opportunities for travel abroad. It can, however, be concluded that non- attendees do *feel* that they are missing out on opportunities for social interaction both within the local community and further afield. The church as a building (and the spaces it contained) was clearly one to which respondents felt they *ought* to have unfettered access and be able to lay claim as such. This view was advanced by a number of informants (N2; N14; N21; N23). As the more outspoken Russian German parishioners have been manoeuvred away from a central role within the church hierarchy some of those who had been more peripheral to this particular discourse have also ebbed away. The lack of definably 'German' activities was cited by one respondent who told that, although he had called into the church occasionally, he did not feel worthy of his attention anything that was happening there;

There were various people there, not just Germans [...] I understood that there was nothing happening there. I have no interest in it. There are no community projects (*sovmestnykh proektov*), no spirit; if we were a united people (*narod*) we could do something [...] you've asked about community, well there isn't one (N2).

The attitude that these respondents demonstrate towards the church echoes Fortier's (2000; see Chapter 4; section 4.4.1) contention that the ethnic church fulfils a role of shelter and the pastor is viewed as the reproducer of the ethnic identity. Certainly the informants cited here showed no interest in "newness" or the introduction of novel rituals or practices. The church is constructed by those who use, or would wish to use it, as a container for their individual or localised identity and an ethnic shelter (Fortier, 2000; Hannerz 1996). Russian Germans comprise a minority in Russia, a fact that most of them accept but exclusion emanating from within the confines of the church is viewed as a step too far. In parallel to their association with and/ or disassociation from the church members of this

disaffected group have sought alternative places and spaces in which to foster community and engage with *korennye nemtsy* if and when the opportunity to do so arose.

5.3.2 Alternatives to the church: in search of other spaces

In addition to the church a Women's Club was mentioned as an alternative site for gatherings. At the time of data collection the club was defunct as its chief organiser – an ethnic Russian but a fluent speaker of German with close links to the church (she was spoken of fondly by ethnic Russian congregants with whom I discussed my research) - had married a German and emigrated; nobody had successfully stepped into her role. Although the club was organised and attended by ethnic Russians as well as Germans²¹ - it was presented by the informants who alluded to it, as a German venture (N13; N14; N23).²² On at least one occasion the club had hosted a delegation of visitors from Germany (N23);

We even did everything ourselves, when we had the Women's Club we prepared everything ourselves and met people. [It was] all our own money, even the church didn't give us any money [towards this]. We did it all out of our own funds, met people [from Germany], showed them around and prepared [food] (N23).

Though the club was evidently organised outside the auspices of the church and, met with success in terms of providing a forum within which local Russian Germans and *korennye nemtsy* could meet it was, nonetheless, no longer a going concern having descended into personal enmity and recrimination. As the above respondent observed 'we had the Women's Club and they [exactly who is not specified] messed it up for us [*tot nam razvalili*] that Women's Club' (N23). Another respondent went further,

We had the Women's Club, it was _____ [organiser] [...] She's gone now and [there] was _____ [successor as organiser] [...] We had a meeting on the 28th of August – the Day of Commemoration for Victims of Political Oppression – it was like a wake. But now there's nothing. No wake, not even a cup of tea (N14).

The attempt to utilise the Women's Club as an alternative (preferably ethnically exclusive) meeting place can be understood as a reaction to the absence of alternative place or space.

²¹ An ethnic Russian who was instrumental in locating potential respondents did so primarily through her links with the club.

²² After the completion of our interview respondent N23 showed me a photograph purportedly showing one of the Club's meetings. Taken at a *dacha* (country cottage), there were 4 women in the picture – all ethnic Germans – and one man (also an ethnic German) whom the respondent described as an "honorary member."

Although independent of the church, club members retained ties with the church (i.e. the club's organiser) and the Club did not have a defined or definite space in which gatherings could take place (instead meetings took place at members' *dachas* etc.). Thus, although club activities were accessible to Russian Germans (even including men on occasion) the group never replaced the institution of the church within the broader community. Therefore, the majority of informants continued to cite the church as a lost space. The direct link between the need for a defined space (in the absence of the church) and continuation of the community/ community activity was drawn by one informant who spoke of the difference she felt that the acquisition of any space could or would have made to the vitality of the community. Although her own involvement with the broader community was now minimal she repeatedly suggested that this would not be the case if a space (*pomeschenie*) had been obtained early on before the 'money ran out' (N5*). The importance of delineated, separate space for ethnic minority identity construction is seen here once again. Securing such space is seen as vital for local identity and community and as a locus for transnational engagement further afield.

5.3.3 Print media and community leaders

Absence from the church in turn, limits access to sources of information which are also potential loci for transnational engagement. For example, *Luteranskiye Vesti* an information bulletin of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Central Asia and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Ingria on the Territory of Russia, is a free monthly paper distributed through the church. It focuses primarily on the activities of the Lutheran church in the FSU, there is an international news section which reports on the major activities of the LWF. A second bilingual publication *Der Bote/ Vestnik: Journal of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Central Asia* is also occasionally available (again free of charge). These publications conspicuously cater for Russian Germans as part of a broader German communion/ religious community. Given the demonstrable emphasis that Russian Germans place upon religion and religious participation it might be expected that these periodicals (and the wider community they encompass) would be of particular interest. However, respondents did not express interest in these publications as sources of information or connection with other communities of Germans or Russian Germans.

These Lutheran centred publications were not the only ones available to respondents. *Rundschau* (Review), a subscriptions-only news digest available across the post-Soviet

region, has its editorial office in the centre of Ul'ianovsk. Originally named *Nachrichten* (News) the paper had come about when the Ul'ianovsk branch of *Wiedergeburt* was started up (N12).²³ Approximately two thirds of *Rundschau's* output is in German, comprising digest of articles from the current German press, the remainder consists of German language editorial pieces. About a quarter of the content is printed in Russian and focuses on local news, events and jokes.

As the content of *Rundschau* is largely in German few non-speakers of the language read it (i.e. N1; N3; N22) and overall interest towards the paper was uneven. Two informants were enthusiastic about *Rundschau*. One (N12) had worked on the editorial team in her the early post-Soviet years. She credited the revival of her 'German identity' to this period of activity, the other (N21) was a close friend of the editor – Viktor Nikolaevich²⁴ - and had 'written a short article [some time ago, in which] I say that the homeland of the Russian Germans is Russia.' This was, however, untypical of the group as a whole. Interest in the paper and its contents remains low even among German speakers, who cited the fact that, as the paper mostly comprises reprints of German news stories, 'it does not reflect our problems' (N23 also N8; N14).²⁵ This view is, in itself, instructive as it reflects the tendency exhibited among participants in this study to favour social and peopled links and networks over and above abstracted and/ or inert sources of information at all levels of their interaction with Germany and a broader ethnic German community. Furthermore, the cost of subscription (165 roubles or approximately £2.70 per quarter) was also seen as prohibitive (N14; N23). Thus, neither *Rundschau* nor the publications distributed through the church, functioned effectively as conduits of information be it international, national or local.

Rundschau's editor was, along with Nina Andreevna, foregrounded as the most prominent and high profile person within the German community in Ul'ianovsk this is particularly so in the absence of a German pastor. While both Nina Andreevna (N9; N14; N18; N21) and Viktor Nikolaevich (N9; N21) had their supporters who argued that they, at least, were

²³ There is little evidence that *Wiedergeburt* was significant as an organisation among respondents in Ul'ianovsk (see Chapter 4; section 4.3.3). Few non-expert informants refer to it (N4*; N9; N12; N18). Respondent N18 claimed to have tried repeatedly to get involved with the organisation at a local level. However, she never managed to do so despite 'running around in circles' in the attempt. There is no way to ascertain the role of *Wiedergeburt* activities in the decision making processes of those who have already left for Germany.

²⁴ A pseudonym.

²⁵ Respondents N4*; N9 subscribed but seemingly out of a sense of duty rather than interest. Respondent N9 noted that 'I subscribed [...but] they've stopped sending it [*Rundschau*] out.' It was not clear that he had done anything to rectify the situation.

responsible for establishing and maintaining a German cultural presence in Ul'ianovsk, many respondents were uninterested in their activities as the following, contrasting responses illustrate;²⁶

Nina Andreevna is the only one [...] I've been a fan for a number of years (*ia za nei slezhu uzhe mnogo let*) [...] she invited us to [an] Easter [celebration] where children danced - because my daughter danced there too. My daughter and one of her friends but she's gone to Germany now as well. So, our children danced [...] there was also a summer festival and we were invited to that as well. We went along. So, yeah you get the feeling that she's interested (N18).



There's a dance collective or some such thing but here, you understand, such things are not needed. If Pastor Markus had organised [something similar] well, that's a different thing altogether (N13).

The respondent's statement is doubly revealing as she rejects the efforts of a fellow ethnic German to organise the community on the one hand, on the other she reveals that her attitude towards such a project would be entirely other had the project been conceived of or administered by the (German) church pastor (see this chapter, section 5.3.1). This, once again, highlights the importance that study respondents assign to this role within the community and, concomitantly, again draws attention to the wider consequences of the strain which characterises the current relationship between the pastor and some ethnic German congregants.

5.4 Maintaining Contact

The above has centred upon the physical spaces through and in which Russian Germans seek to engage with their local and global community counterparts. It has been proposed that in response to the 'failure' to live compactly, (which is noted *both* by Bogdashkino residents and those located in Ul'ianovsk and Oktyabrskii) participants in this study have sought other avenues through which to generate and maintain their connections with Germany and a wider German community. This section of the chapter begins with an assessment of the 'remote' efforts that participants make in order to retain contact with their relatives and friends abroad. It then continues to explore the efforts made to travel to Germany. Throughout this section factors limiting the extent of respondents' participation

²⁶ Notably, as Catholics both Viktor Nikolaevich and Nina Andreevna attended the church only very rarely.

are evident; lack of money clearly does much to condition activities be they 'remote' or travel based, the stipulations of the FRG regarding entry requirements dominate the discourses that emerge from testimony regarding travel to and from Germany. Here, it becomes evident that transnational engagement can be far from easy and uncomplicated in spite of the (alleged) greater ease that modern technologies and dense communication networks endow.

Transnationalism is seen as a process that develops from a technological basis; the density of available links (telephone, email and postal services) and the immediacy and rapidity with which they function – and the consequent ease of use – is seen as fundamental to the practice of transnationalism. An assessment of the access that residents in Ul'ianovsk, Bogdashkino and Oktyabrskii have to these services is, however, instructive.

All respondents in Ul'ianovsk, Oktyabrskii and Bogdashkino had telephones. Indeed, over the course of field research I first made contact with respondents in Ul'ianovsk and Oktyabrskii on the telephone.²⁷ During subsequent conversations, and from other data, it became clear that while they utilised the phone regularly to call within the city all respondents were unwilling to make international calls on a regular or even semi-regular basis (N3; N19; N23) instead preferring to wait for family members in Germany to call them;

We don't write letters anymore. It's the telephone now; well, of course they phone. If I start talking I don't go on for long, it's very expensive. For them [in Germany] well, my brother called and chatted away. I said "Well, enough of your talking," [he'd spoken for] forty minutes perhaps. But he said "Speak! Speak! I've [a deal to pay] four euro for an hour, so I'll speak for an hour and pay four euro. I earn four euro in 15 minutes at work." So there it is... (N19).²⁸

Use of the internet and email was not widespread among respondents; they accessed the internet rarely or not at all. Those who had computers in their flats or houses (N13; N17; N18) did so predominantly for their children's use (school work) and these computers were

²⁷ The interviews in Bogdashkino were mediated by respondents N16 and N11 who acted as gatekeepers. Thus, I was not required to phone and arrange interviews myself. All but one respondent (N13) in Ul'ianovsk and Oktyabrskii had landlines; N13 used a mobile phone only.

²⁸ Respondent N23 professed that it was too expensive for either her or her relatives remaining in Kazakhstan to phone each other. 'Talking on the phone is dreadfully expensive. It was 40 roubles a minute, now I don't know how much it is so of course contact is disrupted. _____ and _____ [relatives] phone perhaps once a year, it's just so expensive.'

not necessarily connected to the web (N13; N18). More elderly respondents had no interest in computers or the internet (N21; N23).²⁹ None of the respondents interviewed in Bogdashkino had computers at home. There were computers at the school; the majority had been supplied by local sponsors and benefactors. One had been supplied through Putin's initiative to computerise rural schools (N16). The room in which the computers were kept was locked – the school's head master held the key - and the machines covered for the duration of the summer holidays.

Letter writing was something that some respondents had tried (N7; N13; N18; N19; N21) and in which some occasionally still engaged (N7; N21) but they cited lack of time for their diminished activities in this regard. This was also true of respondents in Bogdashkino (N24; N27; N28). Furthermore, it is far from clear that the postal service is entirely reliable. My first attempt to reach Bogdashkino ended in failure as, unwittingly, I caught the bus from the wrong side of the Volga and thus ended up in a village called Bogdashkino but located some 100km away from my target destination. The detour was, however, instructive as I had the opportunity to speak with a number of local residents during my stopover. They told me that it is still quite common – and had been very common - for relatives (from Germany) visiting people in the “German Bogdashkino” to end up “here” instead of “there.” Moreover, for several years after “German Bogdashkino” was revived the post office in the longer established village of the same name ‘received all their mail’ the greater part of which comprised letters from Germany. The post would be stored until such time as it constituted a carload, at which point residents would drive over to the “German Bogdashkino” and deliver it.³⁰

Thus attempts to maintain contact through means that might be conventionally associated with transnationalism and transnational practice are not always, accessible or reliable for the informants who participated in this study. The telephone was, at least for city based respondents, the most widely used mode of communication. However, the issue of cost

²⁹ At the time that fieldwork was undertaken, several “internet cafes” could be found in central Ul'ianovsk in which patrons could access the web for a fee ranging between 10 and 20 roubles per hour. The web connections were, however, somewhat slow and unreliable. Further, the majority of these “cafes” targeted a younger clientele playing loud techno over the speaker systems.

³⁰ My attempts to contact my gatekeeper in “German Bogdashkino” and tell him of my error were noteworthy for the difficulties I had in accessing a telephone on which I would be able to make an inter-district call. My mobile service provider network did not cover the area and nobody I spoke with had access to a telephone on which I could make such a call (the school and town hall telephones were “locked” to prevent employee misuse). I had to wait for the Post Office to open and for the post mistress to book a phone call to “German Bogdashkino” through the exchange.

meant that they were predominantly reliant upon others' motivation to maintain contact rather than their own initiative in this regard.

5.4.1 Travel to Germany

As it is now much more difficult for members of extended family networks to gain permission to emigrate to Germany many make the decision to stay in Russia as so doing is preferable to separating the extended family. Many Russian Germans (and their children) are married to non-Germans and this complicates matters further as their spouse and children are often far less enthusiastic about any mooted relocation (N4; N11; N9). Nevertheless, as many Russian Germans have already left for Germany those who remain behind have friends and family members living in Germany and with whom they would wish to maintain links. In the first part of this section I look at some of the discourses that emerge among those who have received permission to relocate to Germany but have decided to remain in Russia³¹ and, those who have lived in Germany for a time only to make the decision to return to Russia. I then discuss attempts to - and attitudes towards - travel to Germany among informants and the factors which limit respondents' ability to actualise their links with Germany through travel between Russia and Germany. Finally, respondents' views vis-à-vis the accessibility of travel to Germany are discussed.

While some who had visited Germany claimed that they could very easily settle there (N3; N13; N18)³² others have rejected the possibility of permanent settlement. Only one respondent in Ul'ianovsk had relocated from Kazakhstan (N23) whereas all Germans in Bogdashkino had moved from Central Asia (chiefly Kazakhstan, one respondent had come from Uzbekistan); members of this group did not wish to uproot their families and move for a second time (N28; N31). Others felt that, in moving to the Volga region, they had already arrived "home" (N29; N30). For these informants a Russian German identity superseded a German one.³³ Informant N29 had, in fact, considered the possibility of moving but, by the time his application for *Spätaussiedler* status was declined he felt the

³¹ More symbolic elements of this theme are examined in the following chapter.

³² It is perhaps significant that these respondents have spent their time in Germany residing with Russian German friends and acquaintances where they more often than not experience a very Russian life, socialising with other Russian Germans but rarely with the local community (N3; N17). Respondent N23 had just returned from a visit to her extended family in Freiburg. She recalled a conversation with a German man she met at a bus stop. The respondent has an excellent command of vernacular German. Her interlocutor was incredulous and refused to believe that she was a Russian German as she claimed.

³³ See Chapter 4; section 4.3.3. This view was also shared with respondent N21. Explicit acknowledgement of this view was, however, rare among informants.

‘right moment’ for so doing had passed. For another sub-set of respondents the idea of moving to Germany had been abandoned in spite or because of their direct experience of Germany. This group consistently mentions a spiritual (*moral’naia*) reason as the basis of their unwillingness to settle in Germany (N4; N9; N11; N19; N21; N23).

Spiritually, it’s difficult for me. My mother was an intelligent woman. She taught maths in a pedagogical institute. She always said _____ “I’ll never go to Germany,” she didn’t approve. Before she died – for a year or two say – she said “if you want to go, go.” It scares me that everything here gets worse and worse. We’re not rich here and we won’t be rich in Germany, but spiritually; it’s difficult [...] our souls are torn. Russian people are very open hearted, they’ve very broad souls and that really draws you in...It should come from the soul (N11).

● ● ●

I’ve no problem with those who want to go [to Germany] but I have a different understanding, a different view, and different values. [And then] there are my wife’s relatives, my mother’s here – my father died a long time ago. Mother has her health and my sister, and her daughters, my brother and his (N4).

● ● ●

When I went there [to Germany] I lived with an aunt and mainly socialised with locals. On the one hand, that was good, I learnt the language more quickly; understood how things are done there more quickly. But on the other hand it can also be bad; I didn’t have the social circle that I’d got used to here [in Russia]. If I’d lived among my own (*s nashimi*) then emotionally it might have been easier for me. I went over there alone, without my family [...] socially it was mostly at the language school [...] our guys were there (*nashi rebjata*). [...] There’s a different mentality in Russia, different rules of the game and there [in Germany] you have to change all that in order to adapt more speedily [...] some things you like, and some you don’t; some things you can’t get used to (*ne priniimaiutsia*) (N2).

Notably, this man (N2) returned to Russia after two years in Germany. He was not unique in this regard but he was the only one of the ‘returnees’ approached as potential participants in this study to consent to an interview.³⁴ These remarks expose the informants’ tendency towards hybrid forms of identification and practice. They also show

³⁴ An informant (N17) who had intended to relocate to Germany permanently received permission to do so. However, this was granted 7 years after she had submitted her application by which time she was too ill and infirm to undertake the move. She did, however, spend some time living with her relatives in Germany. This respondent expressed her feeling of unease and alienation in terms of linguistic rather than spiritual terms ‘[W]hen I went to Germany I felt as though I were [...] deaf and dumb (*glukhonemaia*). There was news on the TV and they speak very quickly [...] I didn’t understand a thing, I’m sitting there like a fool, watching... straining to hear... I ask my daughter-in-law (laughter) “Translate!”’

that immobility can – on occasion – be preferable to mobility even when the possibility for transnational type activity exists for an individual.

Issues of finance and the long, complex and expensive process of securing an external passport (valid for a term of 5 years) and visa meant that travelling to Germany could be anything but straightforward. A number of respondents had had the opportunity to travel to Germany at one time or another (N1: N2; N3; N4; N5; N9; N11; N12; N13, N18; N19; N5*). Yet those among them who wished to make return visits were finding it increasingly difficult to do so. Finding the money to go was one issue;

Well, of course I'd like to visit it's just not possible. We're pensioners, we've no income. We do get some help from them [relatives in Germany], they put a bit aside but one doesn't want to rely on other. So, it's not possible. They [in Germany] say "we could come and visit you every year" but we don't have such opportunities (N19).

In order to further illustrate the contrasting opportunities for travel open to relatives and friends resident in Germany and Russian Germans in Russia the respondent gave the following example;

[Her] pension is sufficient to that [...] [she] could come here and visit [me] monthly as well as buying food and paying for [her] flat. [She's] enough to do that every month (N19).

As maintaining contact implied a financial liability which Russia based informants could – for the most part - not hope to meet, they had to depend on family members in Germany to visit. Though, even when relatives offered to finance a trip to Germany the proposition was not always accepted on a point of pride;

I don't even have enough money to get my external passport [...] and I'll never have unless I ask. Once again, they [relatives] have their own problems [...] how can I ask that they do all that for me, buy a ticket, send money? [...] it's difficult for them there as well; they all work too (N30).

The tendency for relatives to visit Russia from Germany (rather than the other way around) was marked. Respondent N15 was, at the time of interview, on a return visit from Germany, N19 was expecting her cousin and N22 was hosting her grandmother's summer long return when we spoke.³⁵ However, financial concerns are not the only curb on

³⁵ When we spoke, respondent N23 had recently returned from her first ever trip to Germany for which she had saved up herself. Even so she noted that 'money was tight.' It was her first visit to Germany since the majority of her extended family had moved to Freiburg in the early post-Soviet period.

respondents' potential for mobility (or that of family members') as obtaining a visa is not a foregone conclusion;

I arranged my daughter's visa and invitation. I phoned [the consulate] -you have to call at a predetermined time, on a prearranged day. Then two weeks went by so, she went [to the consulate] and it was all sorted in three days. [However] they refused my son-in-law [but], permitted my daughter so they didn't go because it splits the family; you don't get a holiday at all. Granddad wanted [them to come]... they're young... they wanted to go as a kind of present for him. He [son-in-law] had never been there, to see our motherland. But, nothing came of it (N18).



My mother fell ill for example and my brother sent an invitation but this took a month to process, I couldn't get [a visa]. So, they said mama had cancer and they're going to do this and that. And so they'll need someone to look after her, to nurse her. I went every day [to see if the invitation had been processed] until the day that we buried mama. Forty days and the invitation arrived only now there's no one there for me to take care of [...] After that we got a fax, got the bit of paper [...] but when we arrived [at the embassy to submit the invitation for processing] they said "When is the funeral?" and we said that we weren't sure, she'd only been dead a week [...] we need [everything to be done] as speedily as possible, really quickly. [...] we had the fax with a tracking code and it was only because of this [the code] that they were able to arrange the visa. We got it the next day but others [relatives] didn't get [visas] because they didn't have this [tracking number] [...] but all of a sudden you're a dupe, a swindle, they have to check you out (N13).

The rationalisation of ties in terms of caring for an elderly or infirm relative occurred in other testimonies (N3; N13). Respondent N3 had (due to failure of the language test) been unable to join her father in Germany. The respondent articulated both her sense of injustice at this decision and, hinted at her hope that the denial of her *Spätaussiedler* status might be overturned, in terms that foregrounded her duty to her father;

And now my father and I can see each other only once every 2 or three years on a guest visa [...] Thank goodness they let me in. Papa's 66 years old and I realise that each year might be his last, he'll be no more [...] God forbid [but] he [could] be in such a condition that I'll have to look after him and if that happened, if I had to go and live there, we'd just go! (N3)

The difficulties that members of this group face with regard to sustaining their ties to Germany through travel emerge from two distinct sources. Limited monetary resources cause respondents to rely upon family members in Germany to subsidise their visits (or fund them entirely), in addition family members must issue a visa invitation and accept

financial liability for their visitor over the duration of any visitors' stay. German conditions of entry are stringent and one must invest time and funds in order to negotiate them with no guarantee of success. In spite of these obstacles informants still expressed the wish to actualise their ties with Germany and to visit on a (semi) regular and sustained basis;

I'd very much like to visit Germany, to go from time to time [and] have a look how they live [...] it's difficult to tell from the newspapers (N29).³⁶



If it was up to me of course I'd make the process simpler so that I could go [to Germany] easily [and take] members of my family [with me] for a month or so. So that at any time – for instance, once with one person, another time with someone else [...]. No more than a month mind you, we don't need longer, just to be able to look after dad and tend mum's grave (N18).

Here, the interplay between transnationalism and its practice, globalization and the limiting influence of local conditions and material constrain are clearly illustrated.

5.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter findings from field research in Ul'ianovsk have been presented. The first half of the chapter centred upon discourses bound up in the physical spaces that Russian Germans prioritise locally and the way in which they seek to claim these spaces as their own. Firstly, the "space" of Bogdashkino is discussed. The village has been seen by some as an 'ersatz autonomous republic' whence Russian Germans might live in close proximity one to another and, thus, better maintain their ethnic and cultural identity. However, the effort to revive community through compact living is not regarded as particularly successful. The community there has been depleted by out migration and those who remain are remote from other German communities in the area (Ul'ianovsk and Oktyabrskii), their potential for active engagement with the local and transnational German communities curtailed due to poor connection to communication/ information flows and financial constraint which results in low (local) mobility. The out migration does, however, have the effect of laying the foundations of family centred networks between RF and FRG (see Boyd, 1989).

³⁶ Similar sentiments were also expressed by N5* and N6*.

Networks are central to the practice of this group and they operate on both local and transnational levels. The church is the second space to which Russian Germans in this study attach very great significance. It is evident that they wish to claim the space as “theirs” locally and to access avenues of contact with the broader German community through the church. Their attempts in this regard have met with limited success. The break down of the relationship between the church pastor and ethnic German congregants is key in this regard. Exclusion from the church has led respondents to seek alternative avenues of identity expression and contact with Germany. The Women’s Club was one such endeavour. However, the Club did not survive the outmigration of its original organiser. It is instructive that, although news media are available to Russian Germans (through the church and outside), they are rarely taken up. For the majority of this group then networks must be based on active and / or peopled social ties.

The constraining effect that FRG policy has on informants’ mobility is clearly apparent throughout the chapter (particularly 5.4.1 also Zolberg, 1989). The obstacle that German state policy presents to respondents’ mobility is further amplified by their own lack of financial resources. While these factors conspire to constrain mobility they neither prevent contact or movement entirely nor account fully for the unwillingness to engage with German based networks/ Germany. Respondents rely predominantly upon their German based relatives and friends to maintain contact and return visits *from* Germany (from family and sometimes *korennye nemtsy* visiting the church) are more common than visits *to* the FRG. For some informants the opportunity to visit or move to Germany has or does exist yet they chose not to go. Some give their reasons for rejecting the prospect in terms of “spiritual” unease, where for others it is simply that they do not wish to accept relatives’ offer of financial support.

This chapter has charted the ‘gradual mobilisation’ of the non-moving ethnic Germans in Ul’ianovsk, RF. Ethnic German respondents in this location have sought out/ been drawn into engagement with Germany. This has occurred because many relatives and friends have made the move to Germany and because the locally based resources available to them have been ineffective with regard to meeting their proposed requirements (based in their understanding of national minority rights/ privileges which emphasises designated spaces for minorities to claim). It can be seen that the context within which migration and migration networks are formed and function is extremely important for their efficacy (see Uhlenberg, 1973). The difficulties that respondents encounter in their attempts to maintain contact/ actualise links to German through travel do not, however, put them off. Indeed,

informants persist in their efforts to gain access to “mainland Germany” and have clear ideas regarding the way in which they would wish such avenues of access be allowed to develop in future.

Chapter 6: Transnational practice among Russian Germans in Ul'ianovsk: part II

6.1 Introduction

The data presented in this chapter is also drawn from that which was collected in and around Ul'ianovsk. Here the analysis is concerned with the symbolic aspects of the transnationalism practiced by this group. Language is identified as central to the processes of *Germanization* which respondents utilise to position themselves in relation to Germany (the FRG fulfils an arbitrating role in this negotiation through the denial or confirmation of *Spätaussiedler* status), to each other and to Russians in Ul'ianovsk.

In the first section of the chapter, I establish the theoretical grounding for the focus on language and language proficiency. Findings from the research data are then presented. Reasons that respondents give for the demise of German are discussed (WWII is revisited here and examined with regard to language) and their current views on the 'revitalisation' of German are considered.

Much of the ongoing discourse on the subject of German language is termed in relation to the *Sprachtest* – the language proficiency test that would-be *Spätaussiedler* must pass in order to be acknowledged as such – I explore this aspect of identity construction with reference to the construction of individual identities and to engendering a sense of belonging which brings informants into a broader German community (defined by language, see Chapter 4; section 4.4). Once again, the role of the migration network is evident in this discourse; German language is seen as conferring future advantage upon potential speakers (see this chapter; section 6.2.1). The (none) usage of German in a church setting is then discussed. This, it is posited, is an example of Ul'ianovsk Germans' attempt to define and claim space through language; a continuation of the church centred discourse discussed in the previous chapter (section 5.3) but here the effort to claim space (the church) is made through symbolic (language based) avenues.

Further, the shape and content of (religious) festivities are discussed. It is posited that these events are hybrid in form. They function to enable the continuation of German(ized) cultural practice within the participant community and denote ethnic difference. As such these cultural nodes constitute a part of the same symbolic spatial claim that is in evidence

vis-à-vis language usage yet, local, Russian motifs are also incorporated. Such occurrences help respondents to differentiate themselves from locally resident ethnic others and make claims to the same cultural space as *korennye nemtsy*. Hybrid elements arise from family narratives located in the USSR and RF. Finally, the way in which respondents link (or separate) gravesites (spaces) in Russia, Germany and Kazakhstan as a way of claiming (or denying) belonging and current network based links is investigated. These symbolic transnational practices are (just as the realised practices presented in Chapter 5) enabled and constrained by study participants' actions *and* the allowances and limitations of the environment within which they are necessarily carried out.

6.2 The dominant language

Recalling the process by which the French language was constituted as the dominant language of France, Bourdieu writes:

The official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and its social uses. It is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for the constitution of a unified linguistic market, dominated by the official language. Obligatory on official occasions and in official places (Bourdieu, 2005: 44).

Where dialects exist which deviate from the norm created by the official language the speakers of this language are automatically placed at a disadvantage with regard to accessing resources and seeking representation. Concomitantly, those who command the official language are able to access the loci of power. Subsequently their own positions are bolstered, as command of information sources through their 'mastery of the instrument of expression' (Bourdieu, 2005: 47) naturally dictates.

The notion of the dominant or official language is an important consideration for addressing the situation of Russian Germans. On the one hand expediency dictated that, as they lived on the territories of the USSR, Russian Germans would benefit from some knowledge of Russian which was accepted as the *lingua franca* for inter-ethnic communication and was *de facto* the language of the state. This knowledge was, however,

far from guaranteed. A combination of factors - the Soviet system “privileged” minority languages (see Chapter 4; section 4.3.1) and furthermore Germans had tended to reside in ethnically defined, monoglot, settlements - meant that among older generations knowledge of Russian was often poor. Most respondents recalled that their parents or grandparents had indeed spoken German as part of their every day social interactions and that German had been spoken in the home when possible. Although, a non-German spouse or non-German speaking guests would preclude this (N2; N3; N7; N12; N13; N18; N19). On occasion interviewees noted that the standard of Russian spoken by this cohort was poor (N19; N2*).

6.2.1 Language as a community marker

After decades of social exclusion the German language has suddenly become a currency of considerable value. Its ‘worth’ is evident both within the Russian German community which is scrutinised here, and with regard to the negotiations which members of that community undertake with others (most notably the German state). Naturally, the Russian language also has a role to play; indeed the changed and changing status of Russian which results from the reinstatement of German as a (quasi) dominant language (Bourdieu, 2005) within the given community must be considered in order to fully appreciate the role that language plays in the given study. The situation which has developed in the Russian German community from within which the data for this study was gathered is further complicated by the historical obstacles that Russian Germans resident in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) have had to negotiate in order to survive at all. Even those who once conversed with more or less monolingual parents or resided in villages with majority German populations now regret that they are unable to hold a conversation in the language they consider to be their native (*rodnoi*) tongue (N3; N7; N13; N17; N18). A common response to the enquiry regarding the level of a respondent’s German language abilities can be summarised thus:

I can understand [German], I can say what was said but putting a sentence together is difficult for me because I haven’t had the practice, haven’t conversed for so many years. In [19]41 they forbade us from speaking German (N17).

Most investigations of the effect of language on ethnic group cohesion identify the speaking of a separate language as an aid to group unity. Language is seen as an ‘essential element of the cultural heritage of an ethnic group ... [something] that aids in transmitting ethnic identity to the next generations. Speaking a separate language helps to strengthen ethnic attachments’ (Smits & Gündüz-Hosgor, 2003: 829). However, in order to survive the Soviet period, Russian Germans were forced to surrender their language almost completely. The level of the above respondent’s German language was in fact sufficiently accomplished that she successfully passed the *Sprachtest* and had been granted permission to emigrate to Germany, yet her words signal one of the issues central to the genesis of Russian German identity in Ul’ianovsk at the present moment. For Russian Germans in the USSR pragmatism dictated that

“[F]orgetting” is a requirement for successful inclusion into a new culture, as language sets up conditions for belonging and exclusion, for assimilation or acculturation (Baez, 2002: 123).¹

The history of the ethnic German populations of the FSU made the forgetting of the German language an expedient, even desirable undertaking. As a result the Germans who remain in Russia today are, by their own admission, one of the few ethnic minorities who have not “kept their language,” a fact that is noted by many with considerable regret (N1; N3; N13).² The collapse of the Soviet Union has, however, given rise to a situation where the “forgotten” language has come to be seen as a blessing instead of a long-forgotten curse. Yet, as many who identify as Russian German do not in fact speak the language, the dynamic of language usage which has sprung up in the post-Soviet epoch is complex and multifaceted (evident on individual and group levels and also with regard to the wider German community of *korennyye nemtsy* which is mediated by the German state) which have informed the data which are analysed here.

6.2.2 Turning points: from WWII to the post-Soviet era, an ethnic signifier lost and regained

¹ Eindhaim (1969) notes the tendency to conceal one’s ethnic identity when social stigma is attached to it; in his case study the minority language was confined to the home.

² Respondents often compare themselves to the Chuvash and Tatars although, unlike the ethnic Germans, these minorities had their own autonomous regions throughout the Soviet period.

To claim that the loss of language experienced by the Russian German diaspora is due solely to the consequences of war would be to oversimplify the prevailing circumstances. When Germans first began to settle in Russia they did so in compact groups defined by religion and regional dialect. These distinct groups rarely mixed subsequently with the result that, should Germans from two different villages choose to marry, it was entirely possible that their respective families would each be unable to understand the vernacular spoken by the other (see Schmaltz & Sinner, 2002; Mukhina, 2007: 21 & 31; Chapter 4, section 4.3.1 also N5). The natural consequence of this linguistic diversity within German has been that the passing of the language to the next generation was far from assured. Nonetheless, Soviet entry into World War II changed the position of the Russian Germans within Soviet society to a very substantial degree (see Chapter 4, section 4.3.2) and was, in the view of many, the trigger for the loss of the German language among Russian Germans.³

I remember this much, papa always cursed Hitler. “He alone,” he said, “is responsible for all of our sins!” and he [father] was exiled. What were they [the authorities] afraid of? (N17)⁴

It was no longer prudent to speak German and in some cases parents went to great lengths to hide their ethnic origins from their children. An example of this is seen in the experience of one woman who did not discover that she was ethnically German until she was required to complete forms in order to receive her internal passport at the age of sixteen. Her mother warned her that she might “be surprised” at what she was about to learn of her family history. The respondent discovered that upon arriving in Ul’ianovsk, after fleeing Saratov in 1943, her father had paid a bribe to the relevant official in order to Russify the family surname through the addition of “ov”. Further, she recollected that she had been in the German language set for foreign language at school and had struggled terribly with homework assignments. ‘I was *so* stupid at German yet my mother never once offered to help me’ (N2*). The respondent had, throughout her childhood, ‘always wondered why my mother spoke such bad Russian’ the standard of which she frequently compared with that of her school friends’ parents (N2*). In such circumstances Russian, unsurprisingly, came to replace German not only as the language that Russian Germans used to communicate with other non-German groups.

³ Lohr, (2003: 137) argues that WWI similarly affected the position of German subjects on the territory of the Russian Empire, giving rise to the first expressions of common identity among Germans. Mukhina (2007) cites WWII as the crucial moment *vis-à-vis* the formulation of a common Germanic identity. She also argues that language is not necessarily crucial to ethnic unity while admitting that the lack of a language ‘makes cultural and ethnic assertion difficult.’ Language was nevertheless prioritised by respondents in this study.

⁴ Interview had 2 respondents, the second is speaking here.

Advertising one's German identity - in Russia at least - remained taboo well into the 1980's. A respondent who relocated to Russia from Kazakhstan in 1975 as a young girl recalled that prior to the family's arrival in Ul'ianovsk,

[W]e lived in Kazakhstan we lived in a village where every third person was German, my grandmother [...] sang me songs and recited nursery rhymes. I repeated these [verses] without knowing what I was doing, running about, speaking German (N3).

Yet after moving to Ul'ianovsk the opportunity to converse in German was lost. It can be seen that the above respondent was initially able to 'live a German life' which included exposure to the spoken language but this did not continue after her arrival in Russia. It is clearly the informant's view that this impasse was a consequence of the hostility felt towards Germans which resulted as a direct result of the Second World War.

We came to Russia and you couldn't speak German. As soon as they found out that I was German at school I became the "fascist"... I was the 'the odd one out' I tried never to admit my nationality if it could be at all avoided (N3).

During fieldwork the networking method I employed most often and to the greatest effect involved snowballing to uncover prospective interview candidates (see Chapter 3; section 3.6). This relied upon accessing people through contacts with whom I had become acquainted over the course of previous visits to Ul'ianovsk.⁵ It is instructive to note that many of these initial contacts were not at first aware that they had any connection with the Russian German community. The respondent cited above is a case in point. The mutual acquaintance who instigated contact had not been aware of her friend's ethnic origin, something the acquaintance – an ethnic Russian - attributed to their shared Soviet upbringing (see Chapter 4, section 4.3.2). The respondent, however, spoke of fearing discrimination throughout her interview and many times during subsequent meetings in informal settings.

The demise of openly spoken German had ramifications for the community at large when in the post-Soviet period the expression of one's German identity has undergone something

⁵In June-July 2003, and June-July 2004.

of a renaissance.⁶ A sea change in attitude towards the German language has occurred both within and outside the community of Russian Germans in Ul'ianovsk. With the collapse of communist power Russian Germans were presented with the possibility of 'returning' to their German homeland. Thus, suddenly and unexpectedly German language could, for the first time in decades, be used to their advantage. The effect of this volte-face has been manifold. The ramifications of this change in emphasis have been played out in several different ways within the Russian German community in Ul'ianovsk; many of them are connected to language usage both implicitly and explicitly. (This will be the subject of the following section.) On the one hand, there are good practical reasons to know German. The language can be an investment of considerable emblematic significance. The changing symbolic value of German is implicit in the attitudes of those Russian Germans who do not speak the language themselves. Having unsuccessfully attempted to learn German herself, one would-be German speaker has gone out to great lengths to try and ensure that her son has every opportunity to master the language stating;

I only had English language when I was at school, I studied just English. But now, when I sent him to school I went round all the nearby schools finding out in where they taught German. And when I came to this school and asked "do you teach German language?" They said to me, "yes, we have a fantastic German teacher!" but parents have all gone out of their minds, they're all only interested in English, everything is being Americanised (N3).

It is particularly interesting that the same informant went on to observe that her child, who was born in a mixed marriage [her ex-husband is an ethnic Russian] is according to German law not considered part of the German ethnic community in spite of his mother's ethnic heritage. She continues, 'they wanted to preserve the bloodline, of the Aryan type and so didn't marry "out." Those born in a mixed marriage would not be accepted as German' (N3). The insistence that her son learn German as a foreign language at school in spite of the fact that – in her view - he will never be able to relocate to Germany is not wholly inexplicable. As Li (2006) points out, the maintenance of multi-lingual practices within families is dependent upon parental confidence in the value of taking a culturally/linguistically different approach. Although, this family is now unable to fulfil dreams of emigration, they do have relatives who have successfully relocated to Germany. Visits to these family members affords an opportunity for her son to improve his German

⁶ Some did continue to speak the language and pass it to their children e.g. respondent N5,.Others speak the language N11; N12; N19; N21 but their children do not.

this, in turn, gives him an advantage in his school work ‘there are some elementary things that he doesn’t know but he has the chance to test his language there – he feels [as though he’s] a bit more advanced (*povishe*) alongside them [his classmates] he is sure [of himself]’ (N3).⁷ Should the perceived value of the German language as a social tool continue to increase within the ethnic community this respondent’s son would be in an ideal position to capitalise within the framework of linguistic capital developed by Bourdieu.

The above has focused upon Russian German usage of and attitudes towards the German language. To begin with, the “loss” of language as termed by this group is explored. This discourse is centred upon the (perceived) effect of that the Second World War had upon the German minority and the potential for language retention therein.⁸ The difficulties that this “loss of language” has caused for some informants are the subject of the following sections (the theme of the ethnic signifier is also relevant here). However the above testifies to informants’ attempts to revive the German language as a tool which may then serve to confer future advantage upon its bearers. It is notable that, this advantage is not – in the respondent’s view – confined to the local community but, instead, spans both local and transnational sites. (Though the informant’s son may never be able to live in Germany, speaking German increases the possibility that he will maintain contacts in Germany over time). This, in turn, reminds us that (network based) migration enmeshes movers and non-movers across space and, migratory movement itself should not be conceptualised as a single event but seen as a social product (see Chapter 2; section 2.4).

6.2.3 The Sprachtest: an obstacle to inclusion and a symbol of status

The following sections focus on other arenas in which language plays a role both as community marker and status symbol within the community. Here, German language (or lack of language) can be seen to limit opportunities vis-à-vis permanent relocation to Germany (the role of the FRG in setting the terms of this limitation is crucial) yet, on the other hand, passing the *Sprachtest* does not necessarily result in migration. For those study participants who do speak German but have not moved to Germany, language serves to set them apart in the local community. Furthermore, some members of this group (along with non-speakers) see their language (and its usage) as integral to their claim on the Lutheran

⁷ The informant’s son’s educative experience is entirely contrary to his mother’s; where she was bullied at school for her perceived German connections, he is praised.

⁸ Although, as noted in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.1) the German language was not a single, uncontested, unifying entity even before the intervention of WWII.

church in Ul'ianovsk (a continuation of the discourse explored in Chapter 5, section 5.3); thus the discussion of language recalls, and contributes to, understandings of the attempts made by study respondents to assert their right to a *Germanized* space. In this way, these discourses form part of respondents' efforts to promote and access links to German which – it is argued – characterise their transnational practice.

The *Sprachtest* - introduced in 1996⁹ - acts as a language barrier which not only keeps Russian Germans who are perceived to have failed to retain their culture out of Germany but also plays a role within the community as a marker by which those who have passed the test but decided not to emigrate can differentiate themselves from those who have simply failed and are, therefore, denied the opportunity of making any kind of choice in this regard. Language testing has, in recent years, become more stringent. In the initial post-Soviet period it was sufficient for the head of the family to pass the exam. Once they had done so, member of the extended family were able to 'leave on the coat tails' of the person who had passed the test (N22). More recently, however, failure of the *Sprachtest* is quite commonplace. Of the respondents participating in this research, four had failed the test (N3; N13; N18; N22).¹⁰ Even where the family member taking the test is thought to have reasonable command of German they have not always managed to negotiate this obstacle;

[B]asically, our mother... well, let's say they didn't understand each other [at the *Sprachtest*]. It's possible to say that mama can converse [in German] very well but she does swallow certain words, she swallows the endings and doesn't speak clearly [*ne dogovarivaet*] [...] in Russia it's not like that. You don't learn these words... Well, for this reason we didn't pass the exam and so we didn't go (N22).

While a reasonable knowledge of German is necessary in order to pass the *Sprachtest*, the opportunities which were open to would-be German speakers to learn or improve their

⁹ Prior to this date a test was taken upon arrival in Germany. After 1996 passing the test became a requirement to be fulfilled *before* the right to entry was granted (see Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2002: 112-13 & Senders, 2002: 87-88). Documentary evidence of German heritage must also be provided, e.g. birth certificate. Should a would-be *Spätaussiedler* fail to provide sufficient documentary evidence regarding their belonging to the ethnic community they can be refused permission to emigrate e.g. respondent N14 (see Chapter 5, section 5.2).

¹⁰ The test is 'administered by a civil servant who starts with a relaxed conversation and then moves to the actual test [...] the applicant must be capable of carrying on a conversation about the simple facts of daily life [...] [the conversation] may be either in High German or in dialect. The questions are not rote but are improvised by the examiner for each case. The examiner writes down what questions were asked, whether the applicant understood the question, and whether the question was answered,' as well as what language or dialect was used (High German, dialect or Russian) (Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2002: 112-113).

language have, with time, become increasingly limited.¹¹ Language classes which were once free of charge now require would-be attendees to pay fees from their own pockets, a luxury few are able to afford (N3, N22). Moreover, as the older generation (many of whom spoke German) have already left so the opportunity to improve one's language through interaction with its speakers has diminished (N3, N22). It is also clear that the emphasis placed on language proficiency is resented by those who have failed the test. In their view the significance attributed to linguistic ability is misplaced as it does not acknowledge the difficulties associated with maintaining the German language in the War and post-war eras (N3; N27; N22).¹²

However, the assumption that all respondents had a negative experience vis-à-vis the *Sprachtest* is incorrect. Although in the minority, there were cases where the *Sprachtest* had been successfully negotiated and the necessary permissions had been obtained yet the family had chosen to remain in the Russian Federation. On occasion, success in the *Sprachtest* could be elaborated to an unusual degree. Indeed, analysis of this narrative arguably points to the increased symbolic status of German language within the ethnic community as speaking German permits speakers to claim a place in a notional hierarchy *in situ*:

[S]o, I went to Saratov to do the language [test]. I arrived and they [other test candidates] are all standing there, shaking [and] worrying (laughter). And they ask me "What? Are you not worried?" and I reply "What should I be worried about?" I say "Nothing!"

Referring to the process of the test itself, the respondent continues,

I entered [the room] and there was a man, it was actually interesting for him to talk to me. All sorts go there [who have no grasp of the language beyond] "A, B, C" [...] they can't say anything [...] well, then, I began to converse with him [the examiner] fluently. He asks a question and I answer it; in literary language naturally. He liked this a great deal. We came out [of the

¹¹ Though it is possible to pass the test speaking a dialect form of German (see respondents N14; N19 & N7a) this can be problematic if the candidate is successful in their application to move. This was point was raised by a *Spätaussiedler*/ migrant group worker with whom I spoke in Berlin. He remarked that he'd heard of people who had passed the test when they, 'in all honesty, spoke something more similar to Dutch than German' and recounted that his own mother, who spoke dialect, had 'taken a couple of years to learn German' sufficiently well to be able to cope her affairs after she had arrived in Germany.

¹² Senders (2002) reports that this argument has been successfully employed in order to overturn a case of refusal to attribute *Spätaussiedler* status, he cites a court case which took place in Germany; the judgement for which was handed down in September 1994. The author uses this example to problematise concepts of belonging along the native German / *Spätaussiedler* axis.

test] and [he invited me to] lunch. There were lots of people standing there but he said to me “Let’s go and eat.” We speak in German and everyone is agog!” (N19)

For this respondent the fact that a *korennoi nemets* took a specific interest in her and noticing fluent German took the unusual step of singling her out from the crowd of other Russian Germans is clearly a source of pride.¹³ Here, the decision not to emigrate was hers alone; the potential for relocation is extant. There is an implicit acknowledgement of the fact that the same cannot be said other Russian Germans who attended the *Sprachtest* on that day; this respondent may claim belonging to a wider German community - a possibility denied to others. On her only visit to Germany, the same informant found herself in conversation with a customs officer. ‘He forgot that there were other people [in the queue]. He was talking to me, “are you coming here to live?” [I replied] “No just to visit,” he said “but why? You speak fluently, come over! (*sovsem perezhaite*) I say, “We’ll see how it goes.” Her experience demonstrates the emphasis upon and, equation between, language and culture and language and belonging (Chapter 4; especially section 4.4).

It can be seen that much of the discourse arising from negotiations within and between local groups of Russian Germans has developed along discernibly linguistic lines. This discourse is continued within the arena of the church. Here, language is the symbolic focus of the strained and contested relationship between some of the ethnic German congregants and the pastor. Language (again, an ethnic signifier) is central to the ongoing struggle over space and access. This issue then adds to the sense of exclusion that Russian Germans feel in connection to the church and, simultaneously serves to limit the possibility of transnational engagement through such opportunities to actualise links with Germany that are mediated through the church (see Chapter 5; section 5.3).

6.2.4 Language and the church

As discussed in Chapter 5, since 2002 an ethnic Russian pastor ministering at the Evangelical Lutheran church in Ul’ianovsk, although conversant in German, Pastor Ivan reads Russian only services. Dual language hymn books are still in use but only the

¹³ Interestingly the respondent thinks of German as her mother tongue (*rodnoi iazik*) yet insisted that she thinks almost exclusively in Russian (N19).

Russian translations of hymns are sung.¹⁴ The pastor argued that the purpose of the church is to welcome all Christians¹⁵ to a place of worship and, therefore, the use of German would be divisive and exclusionary (N6).¹⁶ His detractors countered that they were being outnumbered and overruled in their own church (also see Chapter 5, section 5.3). They pointed out that the congregation had been much larger when the service was read in German, swelled, for example, by the curious and any number of language students seeking to test their knowledge of the language (N13; N14). Both German and non-German speakers who have ebbed away from the Church since 2002 cite the language issue as directly or indirectly contributing to their decision. Many non-speakers felt as strongly as the speakers of German that the service should be in German regardless of the fact that it would be incomprehensible to them. Furthermore, in spite of their hands-on role in rebuilding the church, those who had given of their labour, ‘have not been selected for the church council’ (N21). Some even suggested that ethnic German council-sitters had been deliberately sidelined and then removed from their position as the church was allegedly *Russified* by the current pastor (N8; N14).

The struggle for community influence and/ or leadership played out in a church setting has been recorded in previous studies, for example Huelsebusch–Buchanan’s (1979) investigation of language and identity among Haitians in New York in which she records the conflicts which arose as congregants who wished the services to be read in Creole vied for control with others who wished French to be the dominant language. Buchanan concluded that the two key campaigners in the pro-French language camp were using the battle to reinforce their own leading positions within the community and to push themselves forward as spokespersons for Haitians in New York. While the issue of leadership is relevant to the case study discussed here it is very interesting to note that the corresponding figures in this research who were among the most insistent on the service being read in German could not understand the language. This situation would indicate a desire to hear German being used as a tool for the designation of the church as a German or

¹⁴ This is a sharp contrast with the situation elsewhere. Towards the end of the fieldwork period I briefly visited the German community in Samara. Here a German national pastor still presides and a mixed German / Russian service is provided. At this far larger church congregants sing hymns in whichever language they prefer thus accommodating both Russian speakers and German speakers.

¹⁵ All non-German worshippers self identify as Lutheran. The Catholic contingent within the congregation exclusively comprises ethnic Germans who viewed the church as a space where ethnic Germans could gather together. Some ethnic Germans derisively referred to non-German church goers as “orthodox” (N23).

¹⁶ His predecessor, a German national had reportedly also subscribed to this view ‘Pastor Markus, he always warned us. There was a time when there were a lot of Germans and you’d say it was a ‘German Church’. But he said, “It’s not a German church, not a Russian church, it’s a Lutheran-Evangelical church.” Ok, everything’s clear. But now you can calmly call it [a] Russian [church] (N21).

Germanized space. (This in turn informs the discourse on church and claim of space as discussed in the previous chapter; section 5.3).

For some the church also occupied the crossroads where discourses centring upon migration to the FRG and the *Sprachtest* converged. When the process of determination of *Spätaussiedler* status was still ongoing meetings at the church allowed people to exchange current information regarding migration. For one study participant, the church had served both as a testing ground for her attempts to (re)learn German and – after her failure to gain *Spätaussiedler* status – a reminder of “lost opportunity;”

I discovered the church for myself – there was a pastor from Germany there [and] [h]e read the services in German with an interpreter alongside. It was possible to hear German and to test yourself “Have I understood correctly or not?” so I started to go there [...] We still had community then, [...] we all gathered at the *Kirche*¹⁷ but it was very difficult for me. I’d already received a refusal¹⁸ but the others were still at the stage of gathering their documents and preparing for the exam. And every conversation was about just that, for me that issue had already been decided and what’s more very painfully. Well for me it was painful. But they asked me constantly: what sort of questions do they ask at the exam? Which documents? Where to stay [in Saratov]? What it’s like there, how much money to take with you? It was awful. Well, they also talked about God, worshipped, prayed; we asked [*procili*]... for Germany. It’s so difficult and I began to separate myself from the community (*otkhodit’ ot obshchiny*), to walk away, walk away. And in principle, everyone’s left (N3).

The German language has once again come to fulfil a central role in the formation of German ethnic identity in this community. Above, the way in which poor command of the language has operated to exclude study participants from local and transnational networks have been exposed. The imposition of the *Sprachtest* restricts Russian German potential for return, yet the presence of family members in Germany means that transnational networks are laid. The local issue of language usage in the Lutheran church seen in this study has also been explored. The current preference for Russian has led many ethnic German congregants to stay away. In addition, failure to achieve *Spätaussiedler* status has also discouraged church attendance. The church has fulfilled a broader function as a place for information exchange in this location yet, nonattendance means that respondents do not capitalise on these flows of knowledge and news. As such, they have been unable to become deeply involved in this arena of transnational activity.

¹⁷ Note the use of the German word *Kirche* rendered into Russian – *кѣрх* / *kirkh*. This was common among Germans and non-Germans alike.

¹⁸ The respondent failed the *Sprachtest* and, was thus refused permission to emigrate to Germany.

However, in spite of the consternation that has surrounded the church and its function in this location, the space has served to contain the festivities, religious high days and holidays. These occasions – it shall be demonstrated – are hybrid in form. Their composition shows the transportability of culture and the process of retaining “cultural nodes” (Featherstone, 1995; see Chapter 2; section 2.3.2) which has evolved to encompass local traditions and markers. In retaining such practices respondents have sought the continuation of cultural community and adaptability to local conditions (i.e. mixed marriage). As such, they have been able to survive and thrive in an often challenging environment (Mercer, 1994).

6.2.5 Hybridity and Russian *Germanness*: delineating difference

While a subset of respondents were very firmly in favour of the church retaining a German character it is interesting to note that they did not object to the practice of marking major religious holidays and events in duplicate. Coincidentally, I first attended a service at the church on Orthodox Easter Sunday.¹⁹ This service was by far the best attended service over the course of the fieldwork period (which encompassed two communions; services which were also marked by much higher attendance). Indeed celebration of both sets of holiday was seen as something of a boon;

We do all the holidays twice, everything twice. So we paint eggs twice, all of it on two occasions. It's better that way [*u nas vygodnee vse*] ... so, that's how we live, how we lived and how we live; in both worlds (N13).

The services which marked holidays were seen as important. Thus, those who did not attend the church on a regular basis usually made an exception on these occasions. The “interweaving” of traditions (also described by Robins & Aksoy, 2001) which is seen here is further explained by revelations of another respondent who noted that

I'm a Lutheran but the children, well I gave them freedom to choose and they said “Well, we live in Russia so we'll go to Orthodox Church, so

¹⁹ Protestant Easter had been celebrated the previous Sunday. Notably, Germans who would not normally attend services came to the Easter Sunday services but, on the occasion that I was present, did not stay for tea afterwards.

they're orthodox and I won't reproach them for that because there's one God all the same and the main thing is to believe [...]. We celebrate two Easters; they have mum's Easter and Orthodox Easter, that's theirs. When it's mum's Easter mum makes all the effort, cooks, they come to me and when it's their Easter, mum sits by (N30).

Respondent N21 also spoke of his “multi-faith” family had come about as a consequence of his mixed marriage. His children had taken his wife's Orthodox faith. While the hybridity practiced among this group may not generate a “platform for return” (Potter & Phillips, 2006) which is actually realised, it does function to differentiate Russian Germans from the ethnic others who reside in the same location on the one hand. On the other, Russian Germans at this location do not align themselves consistently with *korennye nemtsy* who thus play the role of other, implicitly more ‘German’ Germans - against whom the majority of Russian Germans interviewed measure themselves in some capacity or other. The ways in which people spoke about *Germanness* have immediate consequences for the way in which they live their Russian German lives. It was notable that cleanliness, orderliness and a tendency towards hard work are highly prized attributes which respondents use to distinguish themselves from the other ethnic groups (though primarily, the Russians) alongside whom they live (N2; N17; N22). This concept of *Germanness* highlights a symbolic link between Russian Germans and *korennye nemtsy* based on (perceived) common behavioural attributes. The act of enumerating such traits enables study participants – consciously or unconsciously – to align themselves with Germans in Germany.

As one respondent, a woman of 79, recalled;

Our father was very hard working (*rabotiaschii*). It was a big family. We *all*²⁰ worked. I hadn't yet started school and mother took me with her to the allotment and I had to prune the side shoots from the grapevines [...] it's all by hand. And we worked, we all worked. I was only little and so... I hadn't even started school they [our parents] woke us up at 4am (N17).

The tendency to emphasise such symbolic “German” aspects of one's character did not necessarily evidence the desire to relocate there; for some, the bond to Russia was too strongly felt. The ties which such respondents' cite as anchoring them to Russia centre mainly on the family unit. One woman who has extended family members living in Germany with whom she is in contact and from whom she receives occasional financial help refused absolutely to countenance the idea of relocation;

²⁰ My italics.

Well, my mother didn't want to go there [to Germany] under no circumstances. She said "I was born in Russia and I want to die in Russia." Well, naturally once she stayed we did too. Then my father died and afterwards my mother and they are here "over there" [indicating the location of the cemetery]. I'll never leave them. Then my husband's parents are there also. So why go there now, to die? [...] Where (*k komu* / literally, "to whom") would I go there anyway? (N19).

The opinion that one cannot abandon the graves of one's forebears is also expressed by other respondents. Indeed, the discourses that emerge around the ideas of duty towards the dead and dying are multifaceted. Insights into the construction of identity can be gained by examining the different threads which emerge from the analysis of data. For some forebears' gravesites constitute an obstacle to departure while for others (far fewer among the Ul'ianovsk study participants) the passing of previous generations produces a forward momentum which facilitates their departure. Moreover, the migration to Germany has now been underway for a sufficiently long time period and high density, for the deaths of loved ones located in Germany to enter into the discourse.

6.3 The significance of death and burial: the view from Ul'ianovsk

Someone should stay and too look after the graves (N17, second respondent).

Varying degrees of connectedness to Russia, Germany and, where applicable, former Kazakh or Siberian homelands are articulated through commentaries about the dead and their places of rest. The cultural significance of dead bodies is explored by Katherine Verdery (1999) and, while the author frames her main argument with reference to significant historical figures who have been disinterred and moved into or within East Central Europe²¹ the frameworks that are generated can be usefully applied to the case at hand.²²

²¹ Examples are the reburial of Imre Nagy in 1989 or the return of the remains of Inochentie Micu, a Romanian archbishop who died in 1768, and whose remains were returned from their resting place in Rome in 1997.

²² Flynn (2004: 57) reports migrant narrative which emphasises the forced abandonment of gravesites as the cause of particular distress for respondents.

The space which the dead occupy is noteworthy because the ritual of burial involves ‘digging into the very dust of spaces and territories in which the bodies lie’ (Verdery, 1999: 98). This is a rite which brings the deceased person quite literally into (presumably eternal) contact with their land or place. Furthermore, in the post-socialist epoch it can be argued that the dead have a capacity to anchor the identities of the living in a period of overwhelming change. As Verdery (1999: 50) speculates, dead bodies can be seen as ‘one of the many vehicles through which people in post-socialist societies reconfigure their worlds of meaning in the wake of what ... [can be] regarded as a profoundly disorientating change in their surroundings.’ The idea that the dead should be interred in their native soil is neither novel nor confined to East-Central Europe or the Former Soviet Union (Verdery, 1999: 47) yet, given that Russian Germans – some of whom originate from Kazakhstan/Uzbekistan – can lay claim to two or possibly three places as their homeland the manner in which they discuss their dead can be considered as doubly revealing with regard to their sense of belonging in, or to, one place.²³ It is also, I will argue, a strong indicator of the existence of a distinct Russian German identity which, while rejecting aspects of the ‘Russian’ identity does not constitute a wholly ‘German’ German identity either.

While the respondent cited above (N19) claims that she is unable to leave for Germany, and would not want to, as so doing would mean that she abandoned her deceased parents, others did not demonstrate such attachment to the location in which their relative was buried. A respondent who was due to relocate to Germany at the time of interview was preparing to leave members of her nuclear family – both living and deceased – behind in order to make the move. She expressed her desire to be in Germany in terms of a need to be immersed in German culture (primarily language) and noted that her mother, ‘a speaker of the language,’ died last year and her father is now 90 years old and in poor health. Given the respondent’s clear attachment to German culture and language and the function they fulfil as “pull” factors in her case the fact that she terms the passing of her mother as that of a ‘speaker of the language’ is enlightening especially in view of the above discussion of the role of language in community and identity formation. Arguably, such a categorisation

²³ Mukhna, 2007: 54 notes a consequence of the ethnic Germans’ deportation: the trauma caused by their inability to bury those who died *en route* to exile. Although it was sometimes possible to bury the dead during short stopovers on the steppe, more usually, bodies were simply cast out of moving railway cars (or overboard from a ship/boat). Thus, relatives were denied both the opportunity to mark the passing or to note the place of final rest.

reconfirms the importance of language as a crucial node of identity and belonging for speakers.

The respondent referred again to her mother's decline and eventual death - in part response to a question about the successful retention of German language in her family – and the significance of burial is clearly apparent;

She [mother] died last year, we fought for 6 years but nothing came of it. Papa is on his own now and he really feels somehow that, of course, he wants to die here so that he can be buried next to mama. So that's how it's all worked out. Mama wasn't against [emigration] really but papa for some reason was always opposed to leaving. He wasn't going anywhere even if all his relatives had been living in Germany for ages (N12).

Even though her mother is interred in Russia and it would mean leaving her father in Russia, for this respondent the pull (*tiaga*) of Germany was such that it overrode her reservations about leaving her family (although she hoped that her children would join her at some point in the future).²⁴ She clearly expressed her desire to spend the rest of her life in Germany.²⁵

It is particularly instructive that, while respondents expressed an inalienable interest in Germany, or a connection to Russia, in terms based upon family ties which included grave sites/ spaces (N3; N13; N17; N18; N19) the same was not true of relationships that existed with Kazakhstan. One woman who left Kazakhstan for Russia at age 9 had, until recently, relatives who were still living – and were now buried – there. Yet, there is no discussion of a desire, much less a necessity or duty, to return in order to look after graves there. Instead, a far more pragmatic and less emotive attitude was exhibited. When asked about current links with and / or the nature of her current interest in Kazakhstan the respondent observed that since all her relatives had left and the aunt who remained there had died so had her interest in the country. The consequences of her aunt's death were recounted in terms of reconfiguring the respondent's life in Russia;

²⁴ The respondent's son had been refused permission to enter Germany as a *Spätaussiedler*. Her daughter had received authorization but was having second thoughts in light of her brother's refusal. The respondent's sister 'did not feel herself a German' and reportedly had no desire to leave Russia.

²⁵ Interestingly this respondent disclosed her wish to travel the world from her base in Germany, an opportunity she had never had in Russia.

I've only got this flat because she [respondent's aunt] left me hers in Kazakhstan. Naturally, you don't wait for the death of a loved one - never! You want them to go on and on but death comes along sooner or later. She died the year before last and I went to Kazakhstan and sold her flat [...] I put the proceeds together with the money I got for my one room flat [and was able to purchase my current flat][...] but I had to wait for my aunt to die in order to move into my own place (N3).

When asked to further elaborate her current attitude towards and connections with Kazakhstan the respondent insisted that her interest in the country had waned, especially as 'I no longer have any relatives there.' While admitting that she had been pleased to note any increase in pension provision allotted by the Kazakh government as it indicated an increased income for her now deceased aunt, she made it clear that she considered her connection to the place of her birth to be obsolete. Of those interviewees who had lived, at some point, in Kazakhstan none designated their connection to the place in terms of the 'claim' which one might expect of a place where so many had lived and died. Although the initial circumstances of resettlement in the steppe were did not always contribute to happy memories (N23) generally, respondents recalled their time in Kazakhstan fondly (N7; N9; N13; N18; N3; N23).²⁶ In view of the fact that connections to both Russia and Germany manifested themselves in ways which foreground an 'entitlement' based on just such family ties and 'rootedness,' this is an omission worthy of remark.

However, almost complete lack of interest which is outlined above was not indicative of all views. Indeed, other respondents with Kazakhstan based 'heritage' expressed opinions which were in sharp contrast with the one explored above. Other 'returnees' from Kazakhstan pointed out that they watched news of developments in Kazakhstan with particular interest and followed the country's achievements in the arena of sport 'when there's an Olympics we cheer for our own [Russia] then for Kazakhstan and after that for Germany' (N13). Not all of the Russian Germans who had resided in Kazakhstan felt that their current interest in events there was anything more or less than an interest they might have in keeping abreast of developments all over the world. The desire to follow developments abroad is, however, often linked to the presence of friends or family in that place; 'Before I was less interested [in news from abroad] but now I've friends and

²⁶ It is interesting to note that all respondents cited here are, with the exceptions of N7 and N23, under 50 years of age.

relations everywhere so... well, personal ties. And what goes on is [of interest] in general' (N9).

The consequences of a bereavement for a family who have been split by the exodus of ethnic Germans from the post Soviet space was discussed in length with a respondent whose mother had recently passed away. The great majority of the respondent's family members had resettled in Germany already and she and her family had been refused permission to relocate despite several attempts to do so. This woman's parents had, along with other relatives, moved to Germany and settled there. Subsequently, her mother had been taken ill. The informant describes the progression of processing her invitation and the receipt of the visa in great detail. Such was the delay that, there was a possibility that she would miss her mother's funeral. However, the consulate official with whom she dealt remained intransigent;

We don't know these [*korennye nemtsy*] customs it's not the same as here. Here, she'd have been buried 10 times in [the] week [since her mother had died] but there they have those fridges and the like. We didn't know any of this [...]. He [the official] harangued us [...] wanting to know when the funeral would go ahead; what was the hurry? But we said "Can you get a move on?" We still weren't sure whether or not we'd get the visa at all. These Germans, these official (*delovye*) types, they don't give a damn about your grief (N13).

This speaker is clearly of the view that compassion could and, indeed, should, have overridden procedure on this occasion. The discourses retold here recount various emphases that respondents placed on death and burial. Notably, they are aligned exclusively along a Russia-Germany axis. Links to Kazakhstan, where they exist, were not characterised in terms of the remembrance of the dead or connections to family members buried there, yet Russian Germans resident in Ul'ianovsk often invoked discourses concerned with death and burial to articulate aspects of their relationship to Russia and, implicitly or explicitly, Germany thereafter. For some the fact that relatives were interred in Russian soil meant that they themselves could not leave (N17; N19), this factor was not an impediment for others (N12) though they recognised that others would never leave precisely because they wished to be buried in Russian soil.

In contrast to the attitude displayed towards Kazakhstan within this framework the prevalent opinion regarding Germany is articulated in terms which claim inalienable rights to access based upon the presence of deceased relatives. However, the presence of these

relatives has not translated into unfettered right of entry, and this denial is spoken about in terms which highlight differences between Russian Germans and the *korennye nemtsy* whom they nonetheless claim as their ethnic brethren. The emphasis on grave sites forms part of a discourse of symbolic claims that encompass both Russia and Germany thus, these sites become a location of transnational linkage. The cultural attitudes exhibited are hybridised (i.e. the desire to get to a funeral in Germany but understanding the funeral ritual from a “Russian” point of view); a factor which in turn complicates the negotiation of the relationship or claim made.

6.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have discussed the symbolic elements of identity which operate within the group of participants in this study. The ways in which language and festival practices have functioned to anchor group members’ identities both locally and transnationally has been explored alongside the issues that have served to limit the potential efficacy of such practices.

The increased “value” of the German language to - and within - the community has been investigated, the difficulty of language maintenance as an outcome of recent historical events has been highlighted by respondents. Nevertheless, those who do not speak German have sought to attempt to learn it or, to ensure that their children have the opportunity to do so. Poor command of German has not deterred study participants from trying to negotiate the *Sprachtest*; their failure to demonstrate sufficiently good mastery of German has “fixed” them in the Russian Federation as they are unable to realise *Spätaussiedler* status. Others, however, have experienced the *Sprachtest* positively and recount their remembrance of it in a manner that both indicates symbolic belonging to a broader German community and affords status in their current locality. The contribution that language makes to community belonging at the local and transnational level has also been discussed vis-à-vis the church. Here, discourses pertaining to the symbolic use of German as an ethnic signifier and an agent for the creation of and/or claiming of a *Germanized* space are in evidence. The absence from the church which has occurred (in part) due to the preference for Russian language serves to distance ethnic German congregants from the avenues of transnational engagement which converge in that space.

Further, the hybrid character of Russian German cultural practice has been presented and explored. Hybridity enables study participants to adapt their cultural practice to local conditions thus, allowing them to ensure the continuation of cultural community in challenging circumstances and to emphasise the characteristics which denote symbolic belonging to a broader German group. Yet it can also be seen that Russian Germans' identification with *korennye nemtsy* is conditional and far from unproblematic. Aspects of the complex junction of these two German identities have been further explored with reference to death and burial. The multi-layered discourse which emerges here strongly suggests Russian German identity which its carriers reference differently from their local (usually) Russian and remote German 'compatriots.'

Chapter 7: Russian German identity: forging a sense of belonging after 'return'

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the transnational practices of Russian Germans in Ul'ianovsk, RF have been explored. It has been argued that immobile people can take part in transnational exchange. For the participants of this study, transnationalism is centred upon spatial claims through which they seek to join their social worlds with those of kith, kin and friends in Germany. Furthermore, religious observance and the attempt to maintain and continue traditional culture (often manifested in a hybrid form) i.e. Christmas and Easter, celebrations number among the ways in which respondents attempt to orientate themselves towards Germany. The advent of a globalized era does not guarantee that engagement in transnationalism is undemanding. The regulatory constraints of the receiving society (FRG) have been shown to play a crucial role here along with would-be transmigrants' personal resources. Such links as do function are embedded in peopled social networks. The analysis presented in this chapter focuses upon the fieldwork data collected in Berlin, Germany.

Berlin based study participants interviewed for this study fall into two groups. Of a total of 28 respondents, the researcher interviewed 23 and a further 7 consented to fill in a questionnaire as a substitute to being interviewed. Of the 23 who met directly with me, 6 were recent arrivals who had been in Germany for 4 months or less. They were, at the time of fieldwork, housed in temporary accommodation provided by the German state at Berlin, Marienfelde. While resident there paperwork was finalised and new arrivals received assistance with regard to finding permanent living quarters, work, registering with a doctor and for the German language courses to which they were entitled. Each individual or family group – while assigned a social worker¹ - is encouraged to negotiate their own business with the various departments and offices they are required to visit. The team at Marienfelde work to ensure that new comers are aware of their rights and the services available to them. It is, however, seen as the responsibility of the each individual or family group to make full use of the resources at their disposal (n9).

¹ Some - though by no means all - of the social workers employed at Marienfelde spoke (some) Russian. Officially, all business was conducted in German although Russian was in fact often used to for the sake of expediency.

The chapter is constructed to mirror respondents' own prioritisation of concerns, it is instructive that these are thematically similar to those issues which emerged from data collected in the RF and yet the inferences that respondents draw from their experiences can be quite other from those which prevailed in Ul'ianovsk. Language, the influence of WWII and the *Sprachtest* are all present in the discourse. For these study participants, however, the interconnected issues of language and work (and education) predominate. The Russian Germans who took part in this part of the study noted the social security benefits of life in Germany yet social inclusion – which it can also be seen to have motivated their relocation at some level – has not resulted from “return.” The work – language nexus operates here and space is discussed; thoughts concerning exclusion and difference are expressed through spatial metaphors and spaces are claimed to counter respondents' liminal position in wider German society. Russian Germans often reside in close proximity to one another. They rely upon networks of acquaintance formed in the RF and/or FSU to inform their decision to relocate and are socially embedded in these networks upon arrival. The spaces they create are Russianised in character and content. Hybridity is evident as the activities and practices contained within these social spaces draw upon both German and Russian tradition for their cultural content. In this way, it is argued, respondents create familiar social spaces through which they seek - through cultural switching - to join their social worlds with those they left behind in the RF. In so doing, study participants also create spaces of social inclusion which contrasts to the discourses of exclusion they articulate vis-à-vis wider German society (and the space it inhabits around them). It will be argued that this group does not foreground explicit transnational activity yet, their practice highlights their (partial) exclusion (Brown, 2005), is embedded in networks which span the FRG and RF/ FSU, is hybrid in content and has strongly spatial elements; as such it might be considered the as beginnings of a more clearly expressed and sustained future transnational practice.

This chapter begins, however, with an exploration of the discourse involving burial and belonging which emerged in Berlin. The theme is shared with study participants in the RF but the attitudes exhibited in the Germany based group encompass a broader discussion of landscape and emphasise historicised ties to Germany.

7.2 Burial, landscape and belonging: the view from Berlin

The symbolic significance of grave spaces for Russian Germans who participated in this study has been established in the previous chapter. It has been argued that, the manner in which people talk about grave sites is illuminating as it serves as an articulation of the claims that they make vis-à-vis belonging to particular spaces and places. The discourse concerning this topic that developed in Berlin is instructive as it differs significantly from that which developed among the non-movers who spoke on the subject in Ul'ianovsk; Berlin respondents who raised the subject highlight the grave sites of distant forebears' over and above those of more recently deceased relatives. Where some respondents recalled the family members who had died within the FSU (n10; n11; n19) the fact of their interment there evidently had not present an obstacle to relocation. Separate threads of interest are discernable in this discourse; they include the recently deceased and long dead ancestors who comprised the original German settlers in Russia and their places of origin. In Berlin a tendency was exhibited to locate deceased immediate relatives (i.e. one's parents) as remote from the respondent even prior to the move from the FSU to FRG was undertaken;

My parent's graves are there [in Kazakhstan]. When the Germans started leaving the Russians there lost it a bit (*psikhovali*), something wasn't quite right. They started wrecking the memorials in the cemetery, digging up the headstones ... I've my parents and two brothers buried there [...] you've these fools who don't understand the ins and outs of the history. Well, I went [to Kazakhstan] and replaced all those things, bought new ones (n16).

The subject of family gravesites was raised by this informant in answer to a question intended to ascertain what, if any, contemporary, ongoing connections he had with Kazakhstan. The speaker had spent his working life in Tolyatti, RF, before leaving for Berlin. The act of replacing gravestones - carried out during the year before departing for Germany - can be seen as fulfilment of a final duty towards his deceased kin prior to leaving. The remoteness of gravesites – and implicitly the impossibility of tending them in the traditional manner - was also raised by another study participant who recalled that;

Russia is the country where the remains of my ancestors lie. And actually, they're all over the place in Kazakhstan, in Russia ... all over the world (*po vsemu svetu*) (n10).

However, this discourse is developed in a manner that does not, however, emphasise duty to the dead but instead focuses on the future and the living. The speaker continues,

[A]nd here's what I think, who of ours (*iz nashikh*) so infuriated the Good Lord that we have to live all our lives as outsiders (*chuzhimi*)? Well, maybe for our children and grandchildren things will be a little bit different (n10).

A second respondent who spoke on this subject also highlighted his sense of duty to himself (and his living relatives) rather than an obligation to deceased family members;

As it turns out, we're the last [of the extended family] to leave. Because our age is such that to stay only means that your grave will be forgotten somewhere (*mogilka budet gde to zateiana*) [...] I feel, really feel the change in climate, that can really affect you at a certain age – I'm 79 – but I think I'll take the risk because all the same you only die once – you won't have two deaths (n11).

The possibility of gaining acceptance in wider society is clearly apparent in the words of the above informant (n10). Who equates leaving Russia - and therefore her dead relatives – to the living of a normal life, as an 'insider,' among her 'own' people. This respondent was not alone in making this connection. A Marienfelde resident, who had relocated to Germany 3 months prior to the interview, described her decision to do so thus;

I thought to myself, "Enough is enough!" You'll have to go where your ancestors came from and there, you'll be able to feel like a normal person (n17).

The fact that an informant's ancestors came from Germany two centuries ago thus overrides the sense of a specific obligation to the more recently deceased (n10; n16; n17; n19). Among study participants based in Berlin, return emigration is seemingly adjudged a more fitting memorial than remaining *in situ*. It is notable that the respondents interviewed in Germany often displayed a great breadth of knowledge concerning the distant historical origins of their forebears. Moreover, this knowledge sometimes affected the migration decisions that families had made. As such, in some cases emigration was framed as a return not only to a historical homeland but a locality which had resonance for the family's history;

In general, I want to end up in Bavaria. In principle our forefathers are from there – from Bavaria ... and it's nice there too (n19).

Here the informant is echoing the construct of belonging typical of Germans in the USSR prior to deportation. Mukhina (2007: 150) notes that the majority of Germans residing in villages on Soviet territory prior to deportation identified themselves by the place in Germany or elsewhere where their ancestors had come from (i.e. Bavaria). In this way a framework for return is constructed around a longer historical view which prioritises a sense of belonging which transcends the spatial boundaries suggested by Verdery (1999) while nonetheless attributing importance to spatial claims. A 'forward' dimension is added in which the dead act as catalysts for change as opposed to a rationale for stasis. This is seen again in a discussion concerning the renaming of villages on the Volga. Here, a detailed family history is once again referenced and, although the setting is Russian, the inferences drawn foreground a strong sense of belonging to a Germanised milieu which is rooted in alleged similarities of immediate surroundings and territory;

When [...] my relatives came from (indecipherable) to Russia they settled on the Volga [...] 17 families settled there and the village was called Tonkoshurovka. Of these 17 families the majority had the surname Fahnenstein and they didn't want a Russian name [for the village]. So the local government gave them permission to change it and they changed it to Fahnenstein [...] [Later] they moved to the banks of the Volga [...] A tributary of the Volga where the banks were very steep and when they stood and looked at the local surroundings it reminded them of [...] Mariental on the Rhine [...] so they changed the name again, this time to Mariental. So, whether we like it or not a bit of that lives on in us. I think it's impossible to deny that just as it's impossible to deny your mother or your parents [...] when we lived there we considered all the same that we were part of the German nation that's here (*schitali sebia chastui nemetskovo naroda, kotorii zdes*'). We lived there, were citizens of this country [the USSR] but we were always as proud as the citizens [of the achievements] of that country [Germany] [...] we always thought of ourselves as one of them (n10).

Two notions of belonging are in evidence here. The first places emphasis on familiar landscape and the claim made upon the landscape by renaming the new village of residence in honour of one left behind. The act of renaming thus 'brings the past into the present' (Alderman, 2003: 163) and provides a locus for a continuation of belonging to the national community left behind. Such continuity is furthered through the alliance expressed as an interest in German achievements; a source of 'national pride' among non-citizen 'citizens'. These frames of reference connote belonging to a German or Germanised (social) space which persists in spite of the reality of spatial remoteness and, which is given further credence by the supposed topographic resemblance of one village to another.

It can be posited that the move to Russia was made without – in many senses - leaving Germany. The preference for more distantly historical places and spaces (around which a sense of belonging constructed and articulated) suggests that Russian Germans who have moved from the RF or FSU to Germany perceive their *Germanness* somewhat differently to those who do not move. Study participants in Berlin linked sites and spaces that were outside the bounds of living or recent memory. And it is these links that some have actualised in order to aid and justify the negotiation of their relocation.

The above provides an insight into the way in which some of the Berlin based study participants have constructed a platform for return to Germany. Over the course of fieldwork in Berlin, however, it became clear that such platforms do not guaranteed trouble free ingress into wider German society once the proposed relocation had been undertaken and thus, study participants have found themselves occupying a liminal, socially excluded position in the FRG. Language – it shall be demonstrated - is fundamental to this discourse. The language narrative exhibited sites German language as the language of social exclusion. Furthermore, the issue of language contributes to and affects other aspects of study participants' lives in Germany; chiefly access to work and education. This, in turn, highlights the role that receiving state has in positioning the migrants upon arrival and afterwards.

7.3 Language and Work: the (almost) impossible projects

Question: What, in your view, are the main issues for those who come here?

Interviewee, her mother and husband (chorus) - *Language!* That's the first. Then work, they won't take you all the same. Language is the main thing though! Without it you can't even ask for your stop (n20).

Appreciation of the issues, which surround work and language, is vital when seeking to understand the position that German Russians currently occupy in German society. The first section of this chapter will focus on these questions although, as will become apparent, these issues resonate through all the discourse themes explored here. While some of those interviewed outside the Marienfelde complex had a good to excellent command of the German language (n1; n2; n3; n4; n9; n10; n13; n14) it was notable that others still

struggled with this aspect of life in Germany (n6; n7; n20; n21; n22) and overall, those interviewees who were living at Marienfelde (n11; n15; n16; n17; n19; n1*) possessed superior language skills to some who had been living in Germany far longer (some of whom had entered the country prior to 2005 thus avoiding the new regulations which require all members of the family to pass the *Sprachtest* i.e. n12 & n20). However, overall a constructive view of the need to learn German was apparent. Nonetheless, the particular difficulties encountered by Russian Germans with regard to maintaining their linguistic heritage in a Soviet and post-Soviet context and the obstacle of the *Sprachtest* were raised by some over the course of their interview (though fewer than half of respondents in Berlin raised the issue of the test).² There was some dissimilarity in the views expressed by Marienfelde respondents who without exception cited language as the key to inclusion and securing a ‘good life’ in Germany and, some of the less able speakers who were contacted through other channels and, who lived their lives with minimal contact with the *korennyye nemtsy* (n1; n6; n12). Members of the latter group had seemingly resigned themselves to never “fitting in” to wider German society around them; in some cases study participants protested that they were simply, ‘too old’ to come to grips with German (n6; n12 aged 25 and mid-30s respectively).

Even among the cohort who state unequivocally that language learning plays a role of utmost importance for the *Spätaussiedler* migrant community and, who are adamant that the responsibility for learning the language lies solely with the individual, the difficulties of retaining language in the specific context of the USSR are recalled;

To begin with most of us [children] started speaking in German but then ... well, after the War in Russia – in the former Soviet Union – that wasn’t welcome. Our parents worried that everything would be OK at school. We went [to school] ... and everything was in Russian but at home our parents spoke with us in German we understood everything and answered them in Russian... Also, there were still a lot of parents who spoke dialect depending on where they’d come from when they’d come to Russia (n10).

² It should be noted however that respondents in the Berlin cohort were far less keen to participate in the study than had been the case in Ul’ianovsk. Indeed, many of those contacted by the researcher or on the researcher’s behalf refused to take part in the project. On several occasions interviews were cancelled after initial agreement had been reached, something which never occurred in Russia. Berlin respondents were extremely concerned to clarify the exact nature of the guarantee of anonymity; something about which the Russian cohort was far less concerned. This extended to people approached as “experts” almost all of whom refused to speak “on the record”. Respondents in Germany were very circumspect with regard to answering questions which they considered ‘political’ or which may have elicited a response which might have been interpreted as a criticism of Germany or the Germans. This is compatible with others’ experiences of working among migrants see Bloch, 2008.

The validity and fairness of the *Sprachtest* was also called into question within this framework, respondents laid the blame for the discrimination that Russian Germans had suffered in the USSR/ RF squarely upon the German nation. While recognising that, on the one hand, the institution of the *Sprachtest* was a logical necessity it was, nonetheless, seen as a ‘contradiction of the very idea of inviting migrants’ to “return” (n4). Although the *Sprachtest* had not, in this speaker’s view, been particularly demanding (he had passed easily) he observed that;

Migrants come here because they suffered as a result of the War, as Germany says; on Germany’s account (*po vinye Germanii*). If Germany hadn’t attacked my parents would have continued to live on the Volga, I’d have been born there, lived there. But we suffered, and lost our knowledge of the German language because of Germany! Therefore, why the test? It doesn’t make sense (n4).³

Yet, even good command of the German language has, it would seem, done little to guarantee a place in society for *Spätaussiedler*. Those study participants who were either well able to communicate in German on arrival in Germany (or after the completion of a 6 month language course) have not necessarily found that their willingness to work and ability to express themselves in German has been recognised as they would wish. The benefits of speaking German are not disputed but the discourse as a whole is not focussed upon language as a marker of community belonging. On the one hand poor language means that people were unable to communicate well with *korennye nemtsy* yet, it was notable that this in and of itself, did not seem to be a priority. Even those with an excellent grasp of German reported having few close friends who were native (n10; n13). Instead, commentaries concerning language were constructed in terms which foregrounded the ways in which linguistic competence configures access to other areas of social and economic life.

7.3.1 Language and employment opportunity

The language issue permeates almost every aspect of the Russian German milieu to some degree. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many respondents raised the issue in connection to work and employment prospects. Although some respondents had qualifications which were recognised in Germany (maths, the sciences) (n4; spouse of n10; n18; n19), others have

³ Interestingly, this respondent also questions the *Sprachtest* examiners’ objectivity.

suffered from the fact that their qualifications fall into the bracket of those not recognised by the German state – particularly the humanities and social sciences – on the grounds that the Soviet, socialist view of these discursive topics had necessarily been inaccurate.

Among working age informants in this cohort few have been able to find work at any time since their arrival beyond the confines of the network of *Spätaussiedler* support organisations which has sprung up in Berlin as numbers of *Spätaussiedler* have steadily increased. Indeed, possessors of ‘technical degrees’ were found among those employed within the *Spätaussiedler* organisations. One informant - a specialist in laser technology - had managed to find employment in his field but the job had lasted only 2 years before the firm went bankrupt. Even so, he numbered himself among the fortunate few who had been able to find such employment albeit for a limited period. Indeed, his wife, a physicist, had ‘never worked a day’ since moving to Berlin although she now runs her own business selling Russian souvenirs online. Running this enterprise, he observes she ‘is [now] independent, earns money [...] [and has] settled down, before, well, she almost went mad!’ (n4). Narratives of similar experiences were also aired by other respondents in this study. A woman whose husband was a qualified vet expressed bafflement at what she perceived as intransigence on the part of the German authorities. In this case the issues of work and language were clearly conflated,

My husband is a vet; he trained at the Moscow Veterinarian Academy. His degree is also unrecognised. In order to treat animals he has to pass 17 German language exams so that’s a 1 in a 1000 chance let’s say! (n10)

As he was unable to find work as a vet the respondent’s husband had taken a minimum wage job in another migrant organisation. The way in which access to work and re-training is structured was also criticised.⁴ The same informant’s view on state provided programmes, which aim to aid *Spätaussiedler* in their efforts to re-qualify and compete in the German jobs market, are telling. While opportunities to retrain do exist they are evidently thought inadequate;

⁴ The introduction of the KfbG in 1993 altered the structure of benefits and entitlements available to *Spätaussiedler*. Monetary benefits are now means tested and *Spätaussiedler* must finance their own further training and education. Moreover, ‘it is no longer possible to combine two or more qualification measures, e.g., language and a professional training course, so that *Aussiedler* now have to choose between the two’ (Heinrich, 2002: 82).

These training courses (*meropriiatiia po intergratsii v professionalnuiu zhizn'*) to get practical training (*Ausbildung*), I know people who go from one course to another then they get to 25 or 27 and they don't have the right to undertake anymore [training], they have nothing to do! And for people who came here with a specialism there's the opposite; from qualified people they make unqualified [people]! People with a higher education wash floors! People with a higher education work as carers or whatever! Just to get a job, just so that nobody can say that we're beggars here [...] such is the system! (n10)

The restrictions placed upon migrant's mobility also have an effect here. *Spätaussiedler* are required to remain in the region to which they are directed for a period of 3 years after relocation.⁵ They can move only if they are offered work and are, thus, able to support themselves; welfare support is withdrawn. Berlin and East Berlin in particular have high rates of unemployment with the obvious attendant ramifications for migrant employment opportunities. Indeed, one man who participated in this study went so far as to suggest that, if he and his wife had been directed to settle in the south of Germany, both would have been able to find work commensurate with their qualifications and both, therefore would have made a greater contribution to Germany and German society (n4). It is interesting to note, however, his claim that his wife had, in fact, been offered work in Munich. If so, he and his family should have been able to relocate however, the respondent did not explain this seeming contradiction when pressed, offering only that

If they oblige you to live in 'that' place you can only leave during the first three years if you've found work, so if you can pay for your own accommodation then you can go! But how can you find work sitting in a village somewhere! This is a problem of course (n4).

The above suggests that the administrative system currently in place is structurally flawed and unresponsive. There is, however, some evidence that the system is not as inflexible as some would imply. For example where previously it was not possible to volunteer for work experience in your field of expertise (something which respondent n4 attempted to do upon arrival in Germany in 1993) one can now do so. This enables a migrant to familiarise themselves with German work culture. While critical of the perceived flaws in the

⁵ The *Wohnortzuweisungsgesetz* (or Residency Allocation Law *WoZuG*) was introduced in 1989 to address the imbalance in the distribution of *Aussiedler* across *Länder* in West Germany. Disproportionately high numbers of returnees were concentrated in of Lower Saxony, Northrhine-Westphalia, Barden Württemberg and Bavaria due to family determined migration networks (Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2002: 110). *WoZuG* was intended to remain in effect for 3 years but has been repeatedly modified and remains in effect; it has most recently been extended until 31st December 2009 (Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2002: 111).

structuring of access to education the same respondent revealed that he and his wife had succeeded in sending their elder son straight to a Gymnasium (thus ensuring the possibility of successful university entrance upon graduation from high school), ‘without knowledge of German’ and that he had ‘managed to bear up’ to the challenge (n4).

7.3.2 The experience of work and employment in Germany

Most of the migrants who were interviewed for this study revealed that they had been made aware of the precarious employment situation prior to their move - primarily through contact with relatives already *in-situ*. This admission reinforces the importance of the network in migrant decision making and demonstrates that such webs of exchange exist, and are utilised, by actors in the current case study. Nonetheless, the reality they encountered came as a surprise;

I knew that not everything would be recognised because my relatives had come to Germany earlier on but nevertheless I hoped I’d be able to achieve something. All the same I hoped on... there should be such [a thing] I knew that it’s [speaker’s degree] not recognised but all the same there was hope that an opportunity would present itself for highly educated people (n10).

Those who had found employment had done so as a result of the adaptations they had been willing to make, taking opportunities to retrain (n9; n10; n13) or changing their career trajectory when an unexpected opening arose (n14).⁶ All acknowledged that they had, to some degree been lucky. Others recognised that they would most probably be able to find work as a cleaner or similar but they feared that this would then limit their future opportunities;

I could go and clean, I’ve no problem. But if I go and start as a cleaner I’ll be categorised at the Job Centre, agh! I was a secretary but they’ll label me “she can go everywhere and clean” but I don’t want that! I’m still young and want to work somewhere using my qualifications (*po spetsial’nosti*)! Or to retrain (*poluchit’ Ausbildung*) if they don’t need secretaries here with my

⁶ One woman illustrated her point thus, ‘[I]n Russia there’s a parable about two frogs. Two frogs fall into a barrel of cream they flounder and flounder. One says, “why all this wallowing about? I’ll drown all the same” she sinks to the bottom. The second frog flounders, struggles [...] rests for a while and then continues paddling then she feels herself rising to the surface. She’s whipped up a little island of butter and with that butter she can stay afloat (n10).

Russian language... Maybe my written German is better grammatically than somebody else's but you don't have to prove that. Nobody calls you [for interview]! I don't know, either I'll have to retrain... there are enough sales assistants here! (n20)

An analysis of the Soviet attitude towards work and status offers interesting insights into the discourses pertaining to this issue and prevalent among the participants of this study. Ashwin and Lytkina's (2004: 192) observation that 'work is central to the Soviet project and was defined by the 1918 constitution as "a duty of all citizens of the republic"' exposes the importance of work for the Soviet ideal and by inference to Soviet identity. Yet, as Ashwin, Lytkina and others (Kay 2000, Remennik 2003) argue the consequences for the post-Soviet mind-set of this deeply held socio-political expectation are complex and multiple. Students of gender studies have focussed on this area and while the gendered aspects of this debate are relevant, it is the resonance that work, and the achievements of a working life, have for social standing that are of particular interest here. Again the echoes of a Soviet past are audible. In the official absence of other modes of social distinction 'work-based divisions replaced aristocratic hierarchies, while gender and ethnic differences were emancipated by generic citizenship' (Caldwell, 2004: 130). This may explain the unwillingness of some in the Berlin based cohort to enter a work place for which they feel unqualified or, in which they are unable to utilise the qualifications that they have. The irritation expressed by some of those who have found work but who believe that it does not allow them to make full use of their abilities can also be accounted for.

It is also noteworthy that three (n11; n16; n17) of the respondents interviewed during fieldwork in Berlin had retired before leaving the Russian Federation. In so doing they had sidestepped a potentially hazardous area of tension. One woman, who had spent her working life as a doctor in Russia, claimed that she took the decision to emigrate when she began experiencing difficulties in a new job. Although the informant did not definitively state that she did not intend to resume her career in Germany the inference can be drawn from her words,

I had a job and at my age [60] it's difficult to up and leave to Germany. Work ... I've got my degree but you have to undergo adaptation there, professional retraining, preparation etc. That put me on my guard. I had an interesting job [...] isn't that the main thing for a person? You work normally [And so] you live normally and you receive a more or less normal wage. When you don't have that [...] a person starts to contemplate things, to make some decisions in order to get things sorted [...] I changed

job, things were complicated, difficult and I said to myself “all in all, enough!” (n17)

The parallels drawn between satisfaction in one’s working life and contentment with life as a whole are clear, as is the supposition that had this woman not become dissatisfied with this area of her life she may have come to a different decision with regard to her emigration. Arguably the discourses concerning work and language crystallise as a discourse of belonging. The difficulties that arise for Russian German migrants in these areas result in their full or partial exclusion from mainstream society. Unable to work, or confined to low wage they live in low rent areas of Berlin which in turn become Russianised spaces. Without work as a platform, entry into and engagement with wider German society is difficult.⁷ Thus, retirement becomes one way of overcoming the liminal position that *Spätaussiedler* can find themselves in connection to work. Migration decisions are often termed as conferring advantage upon future generations. However, the problem of access or acceptance which pertains to employment is not confined to those who arrive in Germany with qualifications that are deemed inappropriate; school age migrants may also find that their long term prospects affected by initially poor German. Children who are young enough at the time of emigration to enter the school system at the lower echelons – affording sufficient time to grasp the language – are seen to be at an advantage (although they too may have considerable difficulties adapting to their new environment (n20). They will, it is hoped, be bi- or tri lingual once their education is complete (n2; n3; n13; n14; n18; n20)) but those who arrive as teenagers run the risk of finding themselves in a *Hauptschule* a general secondary school which offers no hope of entry into tertiary education. Furthermore, while placing Russian-German teenagers together in this way allows the authorities to focus their curriculum, so doing gives rise to a situation whereby large numbers of Russian speakers are grouped together; this places limitations upon their opportunity and motivation to learn German (n4; also see Heinrich, 2002: 80 on the reifying effect of Russian language in this context). As migrants often frame their resettlement experience in terms of bettering their children’s future (also see Flynn, 2004; Brown, 2005; Voutira, 1997, this discourse was foregrounded in the testimony of N15) limitations placed upon a child’s advancement are keenly felt.

Much of the discussion concerning the timing of emigration focuses not on the state (i.e. the delay caused by the very drawn out application process) but on key life stages. Just as a number of respondents had recently retired (n11; n16; n17), others had started families

⁷ For those respondents with children an alternative avenue is apparent yet this is not always exploited fully.

(n14; n18; n19; n20) in the periods immediately prior to or post relocation. In Germany the discourse as constructed emphasises the need to make the necessary choices in order to maximise one's opportunities and attempt to improve one's standard of living and prospects.

7.4 A space to 'belong' in?

The following sections will examine how Russian Germans understand their new surroundings and, further, how they construct and negotiate those surroundings through networks established both before arrival and in the (immediate) post-resettlement period. Interpretations of the attitudes displayed by members of wider German society are also investigated with reference to discourses on acceptance and belonging. Belonging emerges as an area of uncertainty as respondents, having established their appreciation of the benefits – social and economic - of living in Germany, begin to characterise the country according to a series of traits which they contrast with generally less favourable sketches of Russian society.

The structuring of space is first of all established utilising a very literal interpretation of belonging in a space; examining the negotiation of space through the prism of mapping and understanding of the cityscape and environs of Berlin. The broader social implications of these understandings are then introduced into the discussion, focussing particularly upon how fundamentally divergent ideas with regard to spaces and their uses become loci of difference and alienation. I also examine at the ways in which migrants tend to distance themselves from *korennye nemtsy* and how *korennye nemtsy*, in turn, sometimes act to 'marginalise' members of the migrant community.

7.4.1 Lost in (city) space: the familiar, the unfamiliar and life in a new place

German society is perceived as a safer and infinitely more civilised than the Russian or Central Asian equivalents which have been left behind. A number of respondents alluded to the benefits of spending one's retirement or raising a family in a more stable social

environment found in Germany (n11, second respondent; n12; n18; n17; n20; n22). Russia, in this regard, was constructed as explicitly uncivilised. The Russian Federation is characterised by corruption and carelessness and further accused of needlessly squandering natural resources (n11; n16; n17) which could or should be used to the benefit of her people (n11, second respondent). The ability to secure existence or subsistence in Russia today is questioned, this occurs particularly among respondents of post retirement age who note that living off a pension is not viable (n16; n20, second respondent) especially when ill health or other such problems arise;

Believe you me the medicines that they prescribed for me, that I should take – I wouldn't have enough pension therefore I was on the federal list [...] I got them for free. But they promise a lot in Russia and deliver nothing. [...] Here [in Germany] I can get all the drugs I need for a month for 7 Euros. I pay 10% from my pension. In Russia they'd have given me one or two and I'd run out in a fortnight [...] Therefore, from a social point of view in Germany... well, there aren't words (n16).

For almost all study participants a rudimentary form of socio-economic pull factors can be seen to be in operation with regard to their relocation. Germany is seen as organised, caring, socially responsible, modern and forward thinking (n11; n16; n17; n18, n20). However, the perceived comparative ease of life in Germany – understood from the standpoint of socio-economic infrastructure – while appealing is not always straightforwardly comprehended and negotiated. In some cases this was expressed in terms of surprise and bemusement at just how high standards in Germany are,

The thing that's really surprised me here and, what I really couldn't have imagined for myself; it's the roads and transport in Germany. You can set your watch by the trains and buses (n16).

Yet, finding your way around this maze of options on a daily basis has been as far from easy. This is especially the case where people have moved to Berlin from smaller and / or more rural communities in the RF or FSU. One man who raised this issue believed himself to be in a 'privileged' position as he had arrived in Berlin from Moscow,

Our family lived there for a long time; I spent almost my whole life there although I was born far off in Russia. I studied and worked [in Moscow]. Therefore, we arrived in a large city but at least we weren't afraid of that, of the metro, the tram or the bus ... a lot of our people – and we've witnessed

it ourselves - they arrived from the countryside. I knew one family, they just cried! They stood on the platform and at the *Eisenbahn* (train) and didn't know where to go! (n4)

Even with the advantage afforded to him in hailing from Moscow, this informant reported that during the first months after his relocation to Germany he developed a tremor which he attributed to stress. It is instructive to note that a generation gap is apparent here; while the young – children and teenagers – are expected to cope with a new situation as they find it (n10; n19; n20) the same is not true of the elderly or retired;

It's very difficult to get used to something after the age of, say, 50 if a person hasn't had to do such things before. If I take my own relatives as an example, they live in Berlin but they haven't quite got their bearings except for in their local area... Because they always lived in a small town and they never left it. So they can manage round and about where they live but if they have to go somewhere, well, you absolutely *must* accompany them. They can't go "just so" (n10).

In fact, this sense of disorientation is not only confined to people of a "certain age" but was just as strongly expressed by respondents who were considerably younger than 50 years of age,

Well, we arrived from a town where there were only buses but here you've got the tram, the S-Bahn, the U-Bahn. Good Lord! And with that map [the S & U Bahn route planner] ... what are you supposed to do with that? Turn it inside out? I don't know (n20, aged 36 at the time of interview, 33 on arrival in Germany).

While study participants admit to difficulties adapting to both the pace and the scale of life in Berlin they are essentially positive about the way in which things are run. Generally, respondents were and are willing to accept that they may never 'fit in' completely on the grounds that they may provide a better future for their children (n4; n9; n10; n12; n13; n14; n15; n18; n20; n21; n22).

The miscomprehension of space is not confined to understandings of organised public places but is carried over into one-to-one social interactions. While respondents were

loathe to admit that they found ‘German ways’ cold and unfathomable⁸ – although references were made to Russian openness and Russian soul (n19; n20) - differing attitudes towards fundamental aspects of life were expressed in discourses which draw attention to contrasting perceptions of space and its potential uses;

Of course, we have neighbours ... and in the summer... we’ve got a patio, grass, there are tables and so on. So the neighbours gather there with their families, we get on well with the neighbours [speaker knock on wood at this point]. When we arrived here I thought ... well the children can do as they please at home [*u nas* meaning in Russia] dash about and such like but here ... Here they told me that it should be quiet. There must be quiet and that if something’s not to the neighbour’s liking they can make a complaint! Such are their rules [*zakoni*] we should observe them so, this is how we live here! We didn’t come here with our *samovar* [...] I wanted [...] well they were little [...] what can you do with children if they’re at home? Well, [let them] run about. Where’s the harm in that? (n20)

As they, ‘did not bring their *samovar*’ this family had clearly intended to ‘fit in’ to their new social setting. Indeed, they have striven to do so, ceding to their neighbour’s expectations. This informant is keen to emphasise her willingness to follow the rules, yet, the request made is clearly at odds with the her own ideas of child rearing and norms of behaviour. This woman also expressed disbelief at the absence of *lavochki* - the benches found at the entrance to every Russian apartment block - from the German cityscape. As the neighbours do not sit outside socialising into the late evening and, thus, a vital forum of (potential) social exchange is lost. Yet, paradoxically, fear at the prospect of social interaction with *korennye nemtsy* is also apparent. The extract below is taken from a longer discussion between the interview’s main respondent and her mother (2nd respondent). Where her daughter put forward the view that the streets are safer, and the public more kindly disposed towards one another than is the case in Russia, her mother disagreed, outlining her rebuttal thus,

Well, how long did I live [in Russia] I don’t know but nobody ever spat at me but here, they spat! A young woman no less! I [did] absolutely nothing... I was walking past and she was walking along with a young man. I came out of a shop and there was just some sort of mood. I didn’t say anything I just overheard as I passed by, she started to laugh at me ...and immediately... I felt something... I thought, “Maybe she spat?”[...] I glanced and I’d spittle on my sleeve! To this day it’s an unpleasant thought. I’m of a certain age. I thought, “My God! God will judge you! Would you

⁸ This was not the case in the Russian leg of fieldwork some, who had visited Germany, stated that they had found the Germans to be distant and less friendly than they had expected (N2; N11; N13; N19).

spit on your mother?” Then I was ill for the rest of the day (n20, second respondent).

In answer to her daughter’s point - that such a thing could conceivably happen in Russia - a second incident was recalled,

I think [it’s also because] I’m of a certain age. They wouldn’t do such a thing to other young people because they’d answer back but I immediately became very distraught, but that... that’s not the only incident here. I was going along and some youths (2 girls and a boy) were walking by, they laughed out loud. Well, never mind. A bit of high jinx, they’re young. Then, the boy pushes one of the others into me! Either to cause me to fall or... When I see young people, I cross the road. That’s a problem. (n20, second respondent)

It is not entirely clear whether the respondent means to specifically highlight discrimination against Russian Germans or, less controversially, to foreground a facet of youthful behaviour which she finds distasteful and unfamiliar. While subsequently conceding that such instances might occur in Russia the respondent is nonetheless adamant that as Germans do not, for example, automatically make a seat available to you on the bus, this – in her view – points to something which is essentially different about the Russian Germans and *korennye nemtsy*. Her daughter did however (n20) admit to sometimes hiding in her hallway rather than exiting her flat if she could hear neighbours in the stairway as she may be required to speak to them, something that she would sometimes rather avoid. Although the neighbours have been generous and welcomed the family they ‘don’t have close contact.’ Language is the crux of the issue as expressed in this case yet something “spiritual” (*moral’no*) is also hinted at. Other opinions, while focussing on language, also suggest a deeper disjunction vis-à-vis Russian German and German characters which Russian Germans claim as an almost insurmountable barrier to their wider social inclusion,

Now, [sighs deeply] now I feel OK because I work among Russians in the Russian House but I’m afraid that they’ll send me off to work with Germans in line with my qualifications [...] and I’m frightened that they’ll force me to work with them [*korennye nemtsy*]. That’s an obstacle for me, I wouldn’t want to! [...] Even though I’ve been here since ’99 and until February 2006 I worked with an all-German collective, despite those years - 7 years - I couldn’t learn German perfectly [...] I can’t say everything I would want to in German. My feelings, [I express] in Russian (n1).

Here, again, language is proposed as the barrier between the respondent and her German contemporaries. The notion that this woman belongs among Russians is clearly expressed (this respondent professed that she had not felt a particular sense of belonging to a wider German community before relocation). While, on the one hand some respondents chose to minimize their association with a broader society to which they felt they did not belong (n1; n12; n22) others felt that they had made an effort only to experience rejection at the hands of society at large. This is apparent in the debates that arose around work and status, and was strongly expressed by educated respondents who felt they were undervalued. The theme of difference or exclusion was not, however, confined to a workplace environment. While on the whole positive about the reaction towards them since their arrival, some difficulties had been encountered. These, in turn, raised doubts about society's view of the *Spätaussiedler* / migrant community.

The above has sought to demonstrate the ways in which Russian Germans negotiate the spaces and places – both literally and metaphorically and / or socially – that they find themselves in post relocation. The disjunctions between expectation and reality have been explicated in tandem with the areas of coincidence. It can be posited that migrants' sense of belonging is often undermined by the difficulties and challenges that they encounter rather than being reinforced by common understandings. The difficulties that I experienced with regard to accessing study respondents (see Chapter 3; section 3.6) along with some reported re-emigration from Germany *back to* Russia or places in the FSU (discussed with a *Heimweh* employee) also indicate that the difficulties faced following migration cannot always be successfully overcome. The following section explores the ways in which Russian Germans have established their own networks in the city. These networks are primarily based upon contacts forged with other Russian German migrants; relatives and friends who have relocated. The role played by the German authorities and wider German community in structuring these networks – restricting or conditioning access to the workplace for example - is also explored.

7.4.2 Networking among *Spätaussiedler* in a German setting

As has been discussed above, the majority of respondents sought to highlight the potential benefits conferred upon those who were able to relocate to Germany (expressed in terms of the benefits their multi-lingual, German educated children would reap or their approval of the social safety nets in place in Germany) social relationships had been less easily developed. Only 4 respondents (n2; n3; n9; n13) included *korennye nemtsy* in their social circle outside of the workplace (it should be noted that two of these respondents are married to *korennye nemtsy* (n2; n3)) While all among the most recent arrivals – the Marienfelde cohort – claimed that they would do their utmost to forge relationships with locals this is a claim that cannot be verified here. Further, it is instructive that, all of those who had been in Germany for 4 months or less referred to networks of relatives or friends from Russia and/ or Kazakhstan and who had made the trip ahead of them. Thus, even for those who had ostensibly arrived alone, a support network comprising Germans from Russia was already in place;

Imbers is a 'German city' it's made up of those who were sent there by Stalin in '41 and survived [...] Next to Imbers there's _____ [inaudible]. There are Germans there, also exiled under Stalin. The village Krasnoturisk ... and since I worked there as a senior physician [...] lots of people were in and out of the [my] hospital and in '91 there was the law which recognised that we had been repressed [...] and then people left for Germany in their hundreds. 127 from this village [Krasnoturisk] alone and those are the people I know. There are even more who know me. There are 170 just in Berlin! (n17)

Naturally, these acquaintances are the first point of reference for new arrivals. Moreover, the information that people gathered with regard to the actualities of life in Germany prior to their arrival was collected principally from this network rather than from official sources. While some study participants claimed that this preference for 'informally' gathered information was forced upon them as the information available at their point of origin / departure was insufficient (n11; n20) others regarded it as a natural consequence of the current circumstances i.e. knowing other Russian Germans in their place of destination. This later group also emphasises self-reliance in terms of uncovering information they may need, however, they prioritise their personal contacts over the state in their fact finding (n9; n13; n17; n19). This discourse highlights the usage of personal networks in order to access information which aids migration decision making. It also demonstrates an axis of transnational practice among study participants; one which precedes their actual migration but has consequences of their subsequent life in Germany, post relocation.

In the weeks and months immediately after arrival when living in state provided “sheltered housing” Russian Germans establish early contacts with others from Russia or the FSU, who will, at least initially, be resident in the same city and surrounding area. Furthermore, almost every new arrival takes the opportunity to sign up for a state funded German language course. Course tutors are quite often *Spätaussiedler* themselves. Migrant organisations and social groups⁹ have in some cases been founded by local Germans but in this research, contacted organisations were almost always run by a *Spätaussiedler* staff. Indeed, seven of the total number respondents interviewed for this study held jobs which were in some way connected to the *Spätaussiedler* groups and organisations in a social, educational, or cultural capacity. Once on a language course, a recent arrival is again in the company of other *Spätaussiedler* / migrants from the FSU who number among their first contacts in a new place. These contacts often persist after the language programme has been completed (n12; n20).¹⁰ Thus, the intention to join in with the activities of local population can be genuine yet, it rarely comes to fruition. This is true even for those respondents who laid claim to a greater sense of belonging to the broader German community prior to their arrival in Germany and have managed to find permanent employment (n9; n13; n22).

The propensity towards creating and/ or maintaining links embedded within Russian German networks is reinforced by other factors. Successful completion of a *Sprachkurs* does little to guarantee success in the jobs market. Accented speech means that even when their qualifications are appropriate and their German language of a necessary standard, jobs are difficult to secure;

And with my accent I know *I will never ever work in a school!* But when I came here I was already over 40. Practically speaking, for whoever starts speaking a language at that age the accent will remain. Yet I’ll go to the *Arbeitsamt*¹¹ and they offer me ‘retraining’ as a saleswoman or some such thing. I cannot understand it! [...] I can do it; I’ve already done it! I can perfectly well work with children. OK, if I don’t lead classes but I can work in a pastoral capacity [...] Sometimes I think to myself “well sod it I’ll go

⁹ Examples visited; Pro Migrant, Heimweih, Lyra .e.V. Kiel Haus (which is open to all migrants to Germany but runs groups specifically for *Spätaussiedler*).

¹⁰ This was also the experience reported by respondent N2 in the Russia based fieldwork whose social circle and acquaintances were primarily drawn from people he met on his *Sprachkurs*.

¹¹ Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) equivalent.

like the rest of them [to work as a cleaner]” but it’s a shame that I’ve studied all those years, to throw all that experience away, to cross it all out. That is very difficult, of course (n10).

The speaker in the above case had, at least initially been able to find contract work in line with her qualifications and experience. That she had not subsequently been offered the position on a permanent basis when the opportunity arose was a source of considerable hurt and irritation. Yet for some, securing even a short contract has been impossible;

Well, you know yourself that I can speak on the phone [in German]. But a while back I called up [in response to a job advertisement] and they asked “which position are you interested in?” and I say, “painter-decorator” they reply, “hold on, I’ll put you through...” They transfer me and “Woher kommen Sie? ... Ah! Olga vor dem Volga!”¹² And that was it, they put the phone down! And I said to myself “I won’t do this any more! ‘Ah, Olga vor dem Volga!’” (n22)

Yet without work, respondents have very little opportunity or motivation for continued improvement of their language skills. This is particularly the case as most of their socializing is done within the Russian speaking community. As many marriages are ‘mixed,’ spouses are more often than not ethnic Russians (n10; n11; n13; n14; n16; n19; n20) or Russophones (n12) and thus Russian remains the language of domestic communication. The desire to maximize the future potential of one’s children also leads people to prioritise the speaking of Russian in a domestic setting (n10; n13; n14; n20) even though this at times proves difficult as children may have started to prefer the use of German at all times (n20).¹³ This clearly suggests that Russian German children are well able to ‘fit in’ to the society which their parents can find difficult to understand. Indeed, this corresponds with academic findings on inclusion and second-generation immigrants (Alba, 2005; Bauer et al. 2005; Li, 2006; Pagett, 2006).

Social interaction then is mostly confined to the *Spätaussiedler* / migrant community. Indeed, such contact, it has been established, can begin before emigration as information about life in Germany is sought through extant networks of friends and relatives. Again language and the ways in which it structures access to work – a locus for expanding the

¹² “Where do you come from? ... Ah! Olga from the Volga!”

¹³ Many households subscribed or had subscribed to Russian cable TV at some time since relocation (n1; n5; n6; n10; n12; n13; n14). However, respondents who had cancelled the subscription (n6; n13; n14) claimed to have done so to aid their family’s efforts to learn or improve German.

extent of one's interaction with broader German society- is crucial. The negative responses that migrants have encountered from *korennye nemtsy* mean that they are often excluded, further increasing the likelihood that they will construct work and social networks built upon familiar Russian German focal points, minimising the contacts generated with a wider German milieu even where a respondent's command of the language is good.

The exclusion of Russian Germans which has been explored in the first part of this chapter – emphasising disjunctions in expectation and reality and focussing upon the twin challenges of work and language - does not result in complete alienation from a sense of German national belonging. Indeed, the discourse on burial and belonging (this chapter, section 7.2) signals motivation for return based on historically located narratives of national belonging. Yet, it is also apparent that – in spite of these connections – Russian Germans are often excluded from mainstream social discourses and find themselves predominantly in the company of other Russian German returnees. It is instructive to examine the contents of the social interaction in which they engage.

7.4.3 A return to “Russianness:” the emphasis on Russian identities among *Spätaussiedler*

In her study on migrancy and home making Kiliçkiran (2003) develops the idea of ‘migrant homes’ a concept that she uses to explode and explicate contemporary theories of migration and identity in order to question (Western) ideas of a ‘natural tie between peoples, identities and particular geographical territories’ which is grounded in a ‘Western’ ideology of sedentarism (Kiliçkiran, 2003; 102 & 108). Although Kiliçkiran focuses on domestic interiors examining the nexus of interior decoration, home-making and identity construction in a new place, the central question ‘how do identities...become re-inscribed in space for the construction of a new-home place?’ (Kiliçkiran, 2003: 101) can usefully be asked and answered referencing the wider geographical constructs cited by the above respondents. While belonging within Russian borders was constructed by inscription as renaming (n10), constructing belonging thus also left an avenue open to the German nation located in Germany (n10). The link to the modern German state, in the second instance (n19), takes the form of (an as yet unrealised) return to a specific location although a full account of the landscape is absent here.

While almost none of the interviews based in Berlin took place in a domestic setting - in contrast with the Russian leg of research - instances which suggested that Russian cultural products and production permeated the social and domestic lives of the Russian German population were plentiful. An Autumn Ball which I attended took place at the LYRA e.v. Cultural Centre. It began as a celebration of both cultures that encompassed the singing of national songs and poetry readings (including both Goethe and Pushkin) but it ended as an entirely Russian affair with a disco playing Russian language pop. Russian was the *lingua franca*.¹⁴ Such events demonstrate tendencies towards hybrid forms of cultural practice which, in this case, are exhibited during a transitional phase of the practitioners' lives (see Chapter 2, section 2.3.3). It is instructive to note that – even so – a preference for cultural forms of traditional Russian derivation is seen (such as is also apparent in the discussion of conduct in a domestic setting as discussed above). This 'switching' of cultural preference was acknowledged by an informant in Berlin, who noted that;

There was a wedding [...] and his [the groom's] parent's witness says "Leda, when we went to your wedding in Russia it was a German wedding, with German music, German songs but now I see a Russian wedding!" So it's a paradox! On the one hand it's the merging of cultures and on the other it's a paradox (n10).

For study participants in Berlin return to Germany has, in matters of culture, resulted in a return to familiar Russian forms and practice. Such activity, once again foregrounds tendencies to claim space through cultural expression and, highlights the lasting effects of kith and kin networks post migration (it is evident from the quotation that the speaker had known her friend in the USSR or FSU).

7.5 Concluding Remarks: Ach, mein Kind, hier sind werde fluchte Deutsche und dort werden die russische Schwein sein!¹⁵

This chapter began with an assessment of the narrative concerning burial, grave sites and landscape that emerged from the data collected in FRG. On the one hand, graves are an issue here – as they had been in the RF – but on the other, graves and the need to tend them had not been interpreted as an obstacle to study respondents' relocation. This different interpretation suggests that people who *do* migrate can do so (partially) on the basis of the

¹⁴ Most attendees were aware of whom I was and the reason I had come to the Autumn Ball. Almost everyone with whom I had a conversation noted, "Oh, you speak Russian. I thought I'd have to speak to you in German!"

¹⁵ "Ah, my child, here we're cursed Germans and there, we'll be Russian pigs." Respondent n10 recalling her father's words when she first suggested investigating the possibility to moving the family to Germany.

different answers they arrive at to similar sets of questions that they and non-movers face. Study participants in Berlin exhibited the tendency to set the discussion of grave sites (and the tangential issue of landscape) in the distant past. In so doing, informants created a claim (based in topography and space) to help justify their desire for relocation.

Language was a crucial issue for Berlin based respondents. These study participants had (when necessary) evidently overcome barriers to their relocation which were founded on issues of language proficiency. However, doing so had not led to social inclusion upon arrival in Germany. Instead, local policy, conditions, attitudes and assumptions interact with those that *Spätaussiedler* have carried with them, to construct the environment within which *Spätaussiedler* must operate (see Bloomfield, 2000). Furthermore, issues of cultural understanding (primarily explained vis-à-vis interpretations on and of domestic and city space) play a role in these discourses. Here, respondents talked of finding these spaces confusing and difficult to negotiate; they expressed differing views on the appropriate use of (domestic) space from those they assigned to their *korennye nemtsy* neighbours; some of their testimony evidences the fact that informants in this group do not find *korennye nemtsy* particularly likable. For this group, the dichotomy of speaker/ non-speaker distinguishes Russian Germans from *korennye nemtsy*. In fact, Russian language provides a locus for unity within the *Spätaussiedler* community.

Transnational networks have played a role in the initiating the process of emigration from the RF or FSU to Germany and these webs of kin and acquaintance have persisted in the new place reinforced by the way in which *Spätaussiedler* social ingress is begun (language school and “sheltered housing” such as Marienfelde).¹⁶ The transnationalism exhibited by this group of respondents is of the symbolic-spatial variety. It is focussed upon gathering together with other Russian Germans in Berlin in Russianised spaces, through which informants can bridge the gap between their social world and that which they left behind. Such symbolic linking – along with the effects of re-emigration to Russia (this chapter; section 7.4.1) – are the foundations of a transnational network. Thus, the transnational concept is very relevant to this group.

¹⁶ Neither the difficulties encountered during data gathering in Berlin (discussed in detail in Chapter 3) nor the significant proportion of interviews were conducted with recently arrived *Spätaussiedler* can be ignored. Study participants of less than four month residence in Germany could speak only of brief experience and subsequent, yet untested, intentions.

Chapter 8: Transnationalism: a case study of Russian German practice

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has set out to discover whether or not respondents amongst the study participants engage in activity which can be called transnational in type. It has been argued that transnational engagement is evident among Russian Germans who took part in this case study both in Russia and in Germany. Thus, the modes of construction have been presented and analysed. Moreover, it has been found that the types and levels of engagement are different at both ends of the migratory arc that has been under discussion. In this concluding chapter the final analysis of the theory and findings which comprise this thesis are presented. In the following, I review the theoretical discourses that have been employed in the framing of this thesis; transnationalism as a cultural phenomenon with an emphasis on space, place and hybridity. The first section of this concluding chapter draws the theoretical grounding of the arguments together with major findings presented in the thesis. To this end, elements of Chapters 1- 4 are drawn upon to establish the justification for the theoretical approach that has been taken; the way in which this has been utilised to frame the empirical data presented in the findings chapters (Chapters 5-7) and, how these theoretical/conceptual themes emerged from the empirical findings is discussed therein. A brief review of the empirical data which has been presented in these chapters precedes a discussion of the significance of the argument presented here for the study of migration within the conceptual framework of transnationalism. It is argued that transnational behaviour is highly nuanced and that significant differences occur within and between communities of migrants; many dissimilarities arise from specific localised circumstances. Further, a consideration of history must comprise part of the analysis of transnational activity. Finally, areas of interest for potential further study are identified and discussed.

8.2 Reviewing the analytical framework

Theoretically, transnationalism has been identified as an “idea whose time has come.” In Chapter 2 of this thesis I have sought to establish the foundations for the current role of transnationalism in migration studies and to set out the reasons for the interest in transnationalism as pursued in this thesis. The development of theories concerning the study of migration has been outlined. It has been seen that much of the scholarly work on migration and migrants has viewed labour, and associated economic issues, as *the* central

concepts and questions in need of explanation. Yet, the focus on labour and capital has not accounted for the unpredictability of human agents who have undertaken to move. While (sending and) receiving states – and by extension the policies they develop – do play a vital role in defining and regulating potential theatres of migrant activity and/ or engagement (i.e. Zolberg, 1989), these policies do not disempower migrant actors completely (i.e. Boyd, 1989; Brettell, 2000; Castles, 2000).

In the literature (see Boyd, 1989; Castles, 2000 for examples), it has been argued that, through the establishment of networks – which draw upon kith, kin and acquaintanceship – migrants are and are able to counter state led efforts to dictate and constrain their mobility, identity and activities and, to depart from the roles and functions that state-led initiatives had attempted to “pre-determine” on their behalves. This process is also evident in the case study presented here. Migration then is not only a product of economic growth and capital penetration but a social invention, the evolution of which must be duly accounted for and afforded space in the theoretical literature (see Chapter 2; section 2.2). The social aspects of migration function in both sending and receiving states – drawing in “movers” and “non-movers” alike – migration networks are founded on such linkages and, this is consequential for both sending and receiving societies. Moreover, migration affects identity by putting it under scrutiny in both societies; migrants “become ethnic” (Chapter 2; section 2.2.1) in a way that they (under ordinary circumstances) have not been in the sending state. This change in focus – from capital and labour to the social network – has resulted in alternative conceptualisations of migration as a phenomenon.

The concept of transnationalism it is argued initially developed from a position which foregrounded labour migration yet, it subsequently developed to encompass and examine migrant and non-migrant activity in more esoteric fields grounded in cultural practice. However, this broadening of the transnational concept has not weakened the explanatory power of the idea. Understandings of transnationalism are embedded in – and the bedfellow of – globalization (Lionnet & Shih, 2005). The concept of globalization acknowledges the worldwide pervasiveness and flexibility of contemporary socio-political and economic discourses. Globalization can be approached and examined from both macro and micro perspectives, each of which can draw upon economic and cultural discourses for analytic purchase. Cultural framings of transnationalism are important as the significance of the majority of ordinary, everyday migrant activity cannot be appreciated without it. Few migrants or migrant groups are sufficiently empowered – or motivated – to act on the macro stage. Although the consequences of mass movements may be felt at all levels of the

sending and receiving societies' polity, at the individual or grassroots level, it is the more subtle effects of culture which (in combination with financial issues of the prosaic variety) condition and determine individual and smaller community biographies and life chances.

Culture – it has been suggested – is mobile and transportable along with the spaces within which it is contained (Chapter 2; sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3). Conceptually, this has been recognised in the theorisation of transnational social space. Transnational social space is an element of migrant networking and its 'creation' means that activities that are undertaken in fixed spaces and locations (i.e. the church or the reconstruction of the village of Bogdashkino) might come to be seen as components in a broader socio-cultural-spatial practice through which participants seek to join up their social worlds in "host" and "home" societies. In this conception of transnational space, spaces, places - and the cultural contents of the practices ongoing within them - can come to be seen as vitally important. It is argued that space – interpreted both physically and metaphorically – is crucial for transnational practice. Space is the container of our social worlds and needs to be entered into the analysis as an active rather than a passive agent or actor (Chapter 2; section 2.3.3).

For the case study at hand, the focus on space is developed from both theoretical and historical perspectives. The critique of transnationalism which has evolved from an analysis of earlier migrations is seen as misplaced; migratory movements most often evolve along historically significant trajectories (i.e. linking countries which share common historical ties be they colonial or trade based etc.) and this is no different for the case under study. Moreover, understanding the impact of (recent) historical events upon study respondents' biographies – and therefore their attitudes and those of others' towards them – is essential if one is to comprehend the structure, regulation and efficacy of their current transnational activity. Neither sending and/ or receiving states nor migrants (and the non-migrants family members and friends who stay behind) are acting outside of history. Indeed, the discrimination that Russian Germans have suffered on account of their ethnicity had ramifications for this research from a methodological standpoint. This was, for example, evident in Russia where potential respondents were often cautious when in came to revealing their ethnic identity (see Chapter 3; section 3.4).

It has been demonstrated that the emphasis on space in this thesis can be justified from *both* theoretical and historical perspectives. Thus, the concept of transnational social space contributes to the scholarly understanding of migrants' negotiation of their liminal position in the "host" society and, in the case of migrants affecting a "return" and who have been in

the minority in the society of origin, their exclusion in the “home” society might also be usefully examined through a transnational lens. Furthermore, historically – for this case study group – space (as territory and as ethnically defined spaces / places for cultural activity) is crucial to their conception of how to be - and what it is to be - Russian German and, more broadly, as an indicator of belonging and acceptance in their place of residence. Culture is also dependent upon and derived from history. It has been argued that Russian Germans brought their culture with them to Russia (see Chapters 2 and 4; esp. section 4.2) in the 18th century. Subsequently, Russian Germans used their culture and cultural identity (language and religion) to claim and define separate spaces for themselves; they did this with the encouragement and support of official policy in the Russian Empire and, afterwards, Soviet bureaucracy (see Chapter 4; particularly sections 4.2 and 4.3). More recently, the process of social and political exclusion that Russian Germans experienced as a consequence of Soviet entry into the Second World War is identified by respondents as pivotal to their own experiences and, it informs their identities and practices both locally and transnationally.

The treatment meted out to Russian Germans post-1941 has catalysed and defined (at least initially) the process of return (Chapter 4, sections 4.3.3 and 4.4); this is reflected in respondents’ opinions and the policy positions of the FRG. Crucially the echoes of this event aid us in the understanding of contemporary preference for certain spheres of action and influence (i.e. the desire for the restoration of a German Republic which is equated with full rehabilitation). In addition, the consequences of the War – along with the transformative effects of time – have led to the hybridisation of cultural practice in Russia which, it has been posited, arises from attempts to survive in a hostile environment (Mercer, 1994). The corresponding process uncovered in Germany was based upon respondents’ tendency towards the celebration of German and Russian cultural nodes (Featherstone, 1995) and established a preference for familiar Russian forms and practices. It is instructive that, the traits which served to differentiate Russian Germans from ethnic others in Russia (see Chapter 6; section 6.2.5) have not been a platform for common comprehension among study respondents in Germany (Chapter 7; section 7.4). Indeed it can be posited that *Spätaussiedler* find *korennyye nemtsy* ways of being alien and even irritating. Common ethnicity then is not sufficient to guarantee social inclusion, instead social and cultural factors are of far greater influence (Brown, 2005; McDowell, 2005).

The local circumstances which prevail in respondents’ everyday lives are also of vital importance with regard to shaping the form and extent of any transnational activity that

they undertake (after Uhlenberg, 1973). In this thesis, many of the discourses presented in the findings (particularly Chapters 5-7) point towards the limiting effect of local circumstance; seen in Russia particularly with regard to the financial restrictions which act upon the potential for transnational engagement (Chapters 5-6) and the strained relationship between the church pastor and some of his ethnic German congregants which, in this study, has done much to contain, inform and constrain study participants' access to avenues of transnational processes and activities.

Thus, even though study participants attempt to engage in, and on, transnational arenas and stages they can be thwarted in their efforts by material, administrative and identity-derived constraints. That many Russian Germans have already left Ul'ianovsk and Ul'ianovsk region has deprived the remaining community of critical mass (seen as vital vis-à-vis successful compact living. See Chapter 5; particularly section 5.2) which has consequently, reduced their potency and that of their ethnic-space-claiming agenda in, for example, the church. These (localised) constraints demonstrate that the supposed benefits of globalization have not, or are not, equally felt, enjoyed and accessible to everybody. Yet, on the other hand, such has been the scale of Russian German exodus from the Russian Federation to the Federal Republic of Germany that the foundations of a migration network have necessarily been laid (Boyd, 1989).

8.2.1 Reviewing the empirical data

It has been demonstrated that for study participants in Ul'ianovsk peopled, social ties which centre on kin and acquaintance networks comprise the focal point of this community's transnational activity. The same is true for Berlin based informants but the orientation and exploitation of these networks is somewhat different. Chapter 5 focuses upon the 'physical' aspects of the Ul'ianovsk study respondents' transnational activity. The chapter is constructed to reflect the importance of the spatial motif for the practice of transnationalism in this group. It is posited that the attempt to generate ties with Germany is based on the family network which has, in turn, been laid down by the mass exodus of ethnic Germans from the RF/ FSU. For some study participants, the failure of the attempt to live compactly – either in a reformed German Autonomous Region or in a village site identified for the resettlement of Germans from Central Asia – has motivated their efforts to move to Germany in order to “live among Germans.” Increasingly, however, receipt of *Spätaussiedler* status has been fraught with difficulty and would-be returnees have been frustrated in their attempts to relocate (this issue is revisited in Chapter 6 vis-à-vis

language and the *Sprachtest*). In the absence of a successfully claimed territorial space (which functions as they would wish) within which they are able to manifest their German identity and create a common cultural community with Germany, study respondents have sought alternative outlets and spaces in which to express their identity and generate links with, and seek avenues of common practice and/ or access to, Germany.

The church is seen as the logical locus for this endeavour yet it is a contested space that Russian Germans – in this location – have been unable to claim successfully. Other modes of claiming space have been attempted yet they too have met with little success (i.e. the Women’s Club) or muted interest (*Rundschau* or community activity led by Viktor Nikolaevich or Nina Alexandrovna). As a consequence of the networks which have emerged from the mass migration to FRG, active links to Germany do now exist and – despite the efforts of the FRG to “fix” those they view as would-be *Spätaussiedler* in place in Russia – respondents nevertheless make persistent efforts to access Germany and have explicit ideas about the ways in which they would wish future access potential to develop. In addition, it is noted that, despite the difficulties imposed, visits to and from Germany do occur. Some study participants come back to Russia simply because they do not have the right to remain, others – some of whom could have stayed in Germany – return as they do not “feel right” there (evidence of a steady remigration *from* Germany was apparent during fieldwork; Chapter 7; section 7.3.2) Thus, it is clear that the potential for the development of dense and physically realised (in terms of regularised travel) transnationalism is extant. At the current time, however, financial constraints combine with the limitations and the proscriptive approach codified in FRG policy to curtail opportunities for extensive practice of this type of transnationalism.

Chapter 6 focuses upon the symbolic elements of the transnationalism practiced by respondents in Ul’ianovsk. Chiefly these are centred upon issues pertaining to language, religion and loci of ritual and culture therein. For members of the ethnic German community who participated in this study, language serves both as an ethnic signifier (particularly vis-à-vis the church) and status symbol within the community *and* – for those who do not speak it - an obstacle to inclusion in the broader German community (usually termed as passing the *Sprachtest* and gaining *Spätaussiedler* status). My analysis has shown that language has functioned as a transnational compass for Russian Germans. Non-movers have attempted to employ language in order to generate both symbolic belonging to a wider German community (after Anderson, 2006) as well as a way to set themselves apart from ethnic others and those ethnic Germans in their Russian locality who are not

proficient in the language. While German does not and cannot function as the dominant language (Bourdieu, 2005) in Ul'ianovsk, respondents have acted to promote its usage on a smaller scale. The widely held belief, among members of this group, that German should be used in the church affords further evidence of the endeavour to define and assert claims upon spaces and places through language.

The desire to hear church services read in German has not, however, discouraged respondents from engaging in hybridised cultural practice – containing and referencing both German and Russian cultural elements – in the space of the church (Christmas and Easter services according to the Gregorian and Orthodox calendar) and beyond. It has been argued that so doing is analytically significant as it derives from informants' desire to ensure that their cultural separateness persists in a sometimes hostile environment (Russia). This, in turn, aids inclusion at a local level while also providing (along with language) a symbolic platform for common engagement with *korennye nemtsy* through imagined community (see Chapter 4; especially section 4.4.1). Finally, this chapter examines the discourse on grave sites (spaces) that emerged from the empirical data in this location. Through discussion of grave sites informants sought to claim (or deny) symbolic links with – and through them belonging to – wider communities. Notably, these claims are all orientated towards Germany while such claims as could be made vis-à-vis Kazakhstan are unrealised. As such, gravesites are interpreted as a constituent part of this group's symbolic transnational practice.

In Chapter 7 the findings from field data collected in Berlin, Germany are presented. It has been demonstrated that, although similar thematic arenas are discussed by informants in Berlin, the *way* in which these study participants view and interpret them can be quite different from those in the Ul'ianovsk based cohort. Indeed, it is clear from their presence as *Spätaussiedler* in Berlin that these respondents have managed to overcome obstacles to relocation which had proved insurmountable for some informants in Ul'ianovsk. These obstructions were both state (the *Sprachtest*) and self (the attitude towards family grave spaces) imposed. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, while the attitude exhibited towards gravesites has provided a platform for return (Potter & Phillips, 2006) in this group, success in the *Sprachtest* has not translated into unproblematic ingress into the new society and social space. For Berlin informants, language is also a barrier to inclusion which then acts to cement segregation in other arenas of everyday life and social interaction (i.e. employment or education; see Bloomfield, 2000; Chapter 4; section 4.4).

Study respondents' interpretation of, and response to, their new surroundings and changed social position has included a spatial aspect. Some *Spätaussiedler* have tended to close themselves off from wider German society¹ and – when they have “ventured out” – they have encountered confusion in the very different social and cultural landscapes that now surrounds them. Notably, even those Russian Germans who speak German well do not have many friends and acquaintances among *korennye nemtsy* instead preferring the society of other *Spätaussiedler* and cultural expression which centres upon Russianised practice and is negotiated in Russian language. Ironically, the practical arrangements that the FRG provides for *Spätaussiedler* serve to reinforce their “isolation” in certain ways; for example, post-arrival accommodation of *Spätaussiedler* together in temporary housing such as Marienfelde and the possibility of 6 months of German language instruction alongside other *Spätaussiedler* means that initial contacts made by new arrivals are most likely to be with other *Spätaussiedler*. It has been argued that although the testimony of study participants in Berlin does not foreground transnational discourse in the same way as do respondents in Ul'ianovsk, some forms and elements of transnational practice are apparent and the transnational concept is nonetheless very relevant for this group. Even so, the difficulties regarding access to respondents encountered in Berlin and the issues associated with interviewing migrants contacted through migrant organisations (Chapter 3; section 3.6.3) should not be forgotten. Further, a proportion of the data included in the analysis drew upon the testimony of recently arrived *Spätaussiedler*; a factor which necessarily has an analytical effect.

Transnational migration networks have played a role in determining respondents' migration decisions prior to coming to Germany. The *Spätaussiedler* with whom I spoke had accessed information regarding resettlement in Germany primarily through kith and kin networks. Further, it was clearly thought preferable to relocate to an area of the FRG where one had contacts, acquaintances and networks already in place (Chapter 7; section 7.3.2 also Chapter 3, section 3.7 for the problems that might arise as a result). Thus, although respondents who comprised the Berlin study cohort did not highlight transnational practice in the same ways as those in Ul'ianovsk, they did make symbolic transnational claims (Chapter 7; section 7.2) and transnational linkage had played a role in their relocation processes. Although their current levels of engagement are seemingly limited to processes of hybridisation/ Russianisation of cultural practice and cultural switching through which informants seek to join their social worlds with the familiar ones

¹ The difficulties that I encountered vis-à-vis respondent access (discussed Chapter 3; particularly section 3.6.3) can be seen as resulting from this tendency.

they left behind, it is my contention that their activities denote the beginnings of a nascent transnational practice which arises from their liminal position in Berlin (after Brown, 2005).

8.2.2 Significant features of the Russian German case study

This thesis has applied the conceptualisation of transnationalism to the individual and group practices of Russian Germans who have – since the opportunity to “return” to Germany arose – either moved to Germany or stayed in Russia. The thesis sets out to discover the appropriateness of a framework of western derivation for the analysis of a post-soviet social phenomenon. Further, it was hoped that the study might address some of the areas of conceptual contestation within transnational theory, testing the boundaries of the idea.

The focus of the analysis has been spatial and cultural and, it has been proposed that – for this group – practices of a transnational type can be both physical and symbolic in manifestation; the concept of transnational social space is applied here. The characteristics of the transnationalism of these groups of study participants are derived from their specific historical biography and the constraints that they encounter in their everyday lives. This factor points to the group specific nature of transnationalism. Within a single ethnic group sub-sets will occur depending upon local conditions. Furthermore, a community’s history must be duly considered if their migration practices are to be truly comprehended; in this way a group’s history comes to comprise part of the theoretical model of their transnationalism.

Where local conditions prevent actualisation of transnational links, symbolic expressions of transnational practice can develop to compensate for lack of other opportunities to realise transnational desires. The practice of transnationalism and the extent of engagement with transnational opportunity can vary at each end of the arc of migratory movement. The multi-sited element of this case study has revealed different practice in Ul’ianovsk (RF) and Berlin (FRG). It can be posited that transnational activity takes time to develop – the speed of this evolution is dependent, once again, on local conditions which dictate a migrants’ social position – and, the supposed advantages of globalization (fundamental to the transnational idea) do not benefit everybody equally.

8.3 Directions for future research

In this section I suggest some directions for future research. These suggestions emerge from aspects of the findings in the study presented here. Tangents of investigation are put forward which address areas of the empirical findings in this thesis that would benefit from further development. These potential studies are located theoretically vis-à-vis transnationalism and migration studies more generally.

8.3.1 Development of the multi-sited dimension of this study

This study was multi-sited by design. There is considerable potential to address this issue further and thus, to fill gaps in the methodological literature on the practice of multi-sited ethnography and to focus on a dimension of practice which was hinted at over the course of the research but which has not been developed here.

The discussion of divergent Russian German senses of identity, belonging and practice *within* the Russian Federation, has been confined to a discussion of the differing levels of engagement with local and transnational networks and fields among respondents in Ul'ianovsk, and the villages of Oktyabrskii and Bogdashkino. Although I have alluded to a brief visit to the German community in Samara, the constraints of a limited timeframe meant that only short periods of participant observation, informal discussion and a few short interviews were achieved. And, thus, the data collected on this visit is only alluded to in the findings presented here.

My observations in Samara and Ul'ianovsk and its environs were sufficiently diverse to persuade me that there is considerable scope for an in-depth exploration of the different experience of *Germanness* in differently located sites within the Russian Federation. Such a study could be framed as a comparative analysis *between* sites within the RF and / or between these sites and the Federal Republic of Germany. Any such work would be a valuable addition to the literature on multi- sited research. Moreover, it could be utilised to

further develop the literature on transnational, trans-local and migrant practice among this group.

8.3.2 The phenomenon of “reverse return”

A second area field which offers the potential for fruitful further investigation is that of return migration of Russian Germans *from* Germany *to* the Russian Federation. This phenomenon became apparent to me during the course of my research (respondent N2 was the only informant who fell into this category and agreed to participate in the research) but remained undeveloped as I was unsuccessful in gaining access to potential respondents. Any such study might therefore be complicated by ethical issues associated with access and researcher / researched power relations therein. However, it is my view that were these issues to be successfully negotiated, valuable insights could be gained into dimensions of migrant adaptation and, possibly, into “reverse transnationalism;” that is do return migrants maintain links with the place of former re-settlement if the attempted relocation has been reversed?

8.3.3 Longitudinal study of resettlement

Some studies of a longitudinal type do exist, Kogan, (2004) for example includes Russian Germans among the migrant cohorts that she studies in relation of migrant employment dynamics in Germany. Recently arrived *Spätaussiedler* were among the study participants interviewed in Berlin. Their greater openness, optimism and enthusiasm for the possibilities afforded them by a new life in Germany were palpable and contrasted sharply with the reticence encountered among respondents contacted outside Marienfelde and the sometimes negative elements of the testimonies they gave.

Issues of time, funding and commitment, from both the researcher and the researched, would have to be negotiated, but further study in this direction (even if the duration were only a year) would potentially give huge insight into realms of migrant adaptation and the negotiation of status in transition. Such work might contribute to the literature on migration

studies as well as to studies which focus on post-Soviet negotiations of change (after, Burowoy & Verdery, 1999; Shevchenko, 2002).

8.3.4 Inter-generational variation of resettlement experience

Some of the findings presented in this thesis suggest members of the same nuclear family group can experience or interpret migration and resettlement very differently. This is apparent even in cases where the family is resident in the same area of town in their new place of residence. Generation is strongly implicated in this phenomenon and, were it possible, a comparative case study of this type could serve to nuance and contextualise understandings of migrant adaptation thus giving valuable insights into differing discourses within the process of family migration.

In this chapter I have sought to draw together the theory, empirical findings and analysis which have comprised the body of this thesis. I have identified the significant features of the case study that has been presented and, linked them to the transnational framework which has underpinned this research. Thus, for Russian Germans who participated in this study, a combination of history and current limitation conditions their transnational practice. The explanatory power cultural conceptions of transnationalism should not be underestimated, just as the input of historical biography on contemporary activity should not be overlooked. Finally, I have suggested some areas of for further investigation based upon the conclusions drawn in the present analysis.

Appendix I: interview demography, Ul'ianovsk, Russia

Interview ID	Year of birth	Occupation	If moved, where from	When	M/F	Interview location
N1	1967	Designer	Kazakhstan	1993	F	Ul'ianovsk
N2	1956	Doctor/therapist	Barnaul / Germany	Lived Germany, 1991-93	M	Ul'ianovsk
N3	1967	Teacher	Kazakhstan	1975	F	Ul'ianovsk
N4	1948	Lecturer	n/a	n/a	M	Ul'ianovsk
N5	n/a	Editor	n/a	n/a	M	Ul'ianovsk
N6	n/a	Pastor	n/a	n/a	M	Ul'ianovsk
N7	1928	Retired physics teacher	Kazakhstan where lived since '66	1986	F	Ul'ianovsk
N8	Not given	Not given	Siberia	1994	M	Ul'ianovsk
N9	1961	Doctor	Kazakhstan	1990	M	Ul'ianovsk
N10	1958	unknown	Kazakhstan	1966	M	Oktyabrsk
N11	n/a	Teacher, chair of German Association	Born Siberia, raised Ul'ianovsk, had lived in Kazakhstan	unknown	F	Oktyabrsk
N12	1958	Teacher	n/a	n/a	F	Ul'ianovsk
N13	1962	Sometime nanny	Kazakhstan	1988	F	Ul'ianovsk
N14	1943	Retired nurse	Saratov	1963	F	Ul'ianovsk
N15	1945	Retired, various jobs	On return visit from Germany	Left in 2002	F	Oktyabrsk
N16	n/a	Head teacher	n/a	n/a	M	Bogdashkino
N17	1930, second respondent early 50s	Unknown & retired soldier	Kazakhstan, exiled 1941	Unclear	F & M	Ul'ianovsk
N18	1958	unknown	Kazakhstan via Leningrad	1983	F	Ul'ianovsk
N19	1938	Retired administrator	n/a	n/a	F	Oktyabrsk
N20	1975	Lawyer	Kyrgyzstan	1991	F	Bogdashkino
N21	1922	Retired mine geologist	Ukraine-Russia, exiled Siberia		M	Ul'ianovsk
N22	1980	Seamstress	Kazakhstan	1984	F	Ul'ianovsk
N23	1947	Retired	Kazakhstan	1987	F	Ul'ianovsk
N24	1950		Kazakhstan	1997	F	Bogdashkino
N25	1923	Unknown	Kazakhstan	1997	F	Bogdashkino

Interview ID	Year of birth	Occupation	If moved, where from	When	M/F	Interview location
N26	Late 40s Early 50s	Driver & Farmer	Kazakhstan	unknown	M&M	Bogdashkino
N27	Not given	unknown	Kazakhstan	1995	F	Bogdashkino
N28	Early 50s	Retired	Uzbekistan	1996	F	Bogdashkino
N29	Not given	Retired	Kazakhstan & Sakhalin	Unclear	M	Bogdashkino
N30	1951	Retired	Kazakhstan	Unclear	F	Bogdashkino
N31	1931	Retired combine driver	Kazakhstan	Unclear	M	Bogdashkino
N1* (not taped)	1935	Retired	n/a	n/a	F	Ul'ianovsk
N2* (not taped)	1943	Retired, worked at telephone exchange	Saratov	During WWII	F	Ul'ianovsk
N3* (not taped)	1951	Retired	n/a	n/a	F	Ul'ianovsk
N4* (not taped)	1978	Doctor	n/a	n/a	F	Ul'ianovsk
N5* (not taped)	late 30s	Shop assistant	n/a	n/a	F	Ul'ianovsk
N6* (not taped)	Mid 40s	Farmer & school cook/ caretaker	Kazakhstan	Not given	F	Fed'kino, a village 1hr from Ul'ianovsk

NB. Interviews N5, N6, N11, N16 (tabulation in bold type) were “expert interviews” thus biographical data is not recorded unless part of their testimony is cited/ quoted in the findings of the thesis Otherwise, “n/a” denotes “not applicable” as respondent did not move.

* Most respondents volunteered their year of birth when asked. Others gave an approximate age, indicated by, for example, “mid 30s,” others declined to answer the question indicated as “not given”

Appendix II: interview demography, Berlin, Germany

Interview ID	Year of birth *	Occupation	Where from	When	M/F	Interview location
n1	1979	Administrator	Russian Fed.	1999	F	Berlin
n2	1965	Stay at home mother; former translator	Russian Fed. Saratov	2001	F	Berlin
n3	1972	Music teacher	Russian Fed. Saratov Oblast'	1996	F	Berlin
n4	Not given	Works with migrants to aid adaptation ; former physicist	Russian Fed. Moscow	2000	M	Berlin
n5	47 at time of migration	Runs own language school	Russian Fed. Barnaul		F	Berlin
n6	1980	Various contract work	Kazakhstan	2000	M	Berlin
n8	In 50s	Handy man	Kazakhstan	Not given	M	Berlin
n9	1961	Social worker; former teacher	Kazakhstan	1993	F	Berlin
n10	In 50s	Works in migrant community; former university lecturer	Russian Federation	1997	F	Berlin
n11	1927 Second respondent in 40s	Retired & not given	Russian Federation	2006	M/M	Marienfelde
n12	Mid 30s	Unemployed, most recently a cook	Kazakhstan	2002	F	Berlin
n13	Mid 50s	Language teacher, own school	Kazakhstan, North	1997	F	Berlin
n14	1970	Works in migrant community	Kazakhstan	1992	F	Berlin
n15	1968	unknown	Russian Fed.	2006	F	Marienfelde

Interview ID	Year of birth*	Occupation	Where from	When	M/F	Interview location
n16	1948	Retired engineer	Russian Fed. Tolliati	2006	M	Marienfelde
n17	Mid 60s	Retired doctor	Russian Fed. Svedlovsk	2006	F	Marienfelde
n18	Mid 30s	Unemployed; former chemist	Russian Fed. Novosibirsk	2006	F	Berlin
n19	1975	Doctoral student	Russian Fed. St Petersburg	2006	M	Marienfelde
n20	Mid 30s second respondent, her mother	Unemployed; former secretary	Russian Fed.	2003	F	Berlin
n21	1950	Various low paid jobs, former saleswoman	Kazakhstan	2002	F	Berlin
n22	Mid 40s	Migrant adaptation worker	Kazakhstan	1998	F	Berlin
n23	31	Unemployed	Kazakhstan	2002	F	Berlin

Questionnaire ID	Year of birth *	Occupation	Where from	When	M/F	Location
Q1	Not given	Not given	Uzbekistan	2002	Not given	Berlin
Q2	Not given	Not given	Uzbekistan	2002	Not given	Berlin
Q3	1927	Pensioner	Kazakhstan	Not given	F	Berlin
Q4	1939	Pensioner	Kazakhstan	1995	F	Berlin
Q5	1976	On maternity leave	Kirgizia	1999	F	Berlin
Q6	1964	Teacher	Russian Fed.	2002	M	Berlin
Q7	1978	Student	Russian Fed.	1998	F	Berlin

* Most respondents volunteered their year of birth when asked. Others gave an approximate age, indicated by, for example, “mid 30s,” others declined to answer the question indicated as “not given.”

Appendix III: Interview schedules (Russia and Germany)

At the beginning of each interview biographical data was collected from the study participant; including place and year of birth, occupation. Where respondents had migrated, the pattern places and times of their migration was ascertained and recorded. Permission was asked to record the interview; recording began after the collection of the above information. Below the interview schedules employed in each study site are outlined, the order in which questions were put was subject to change depending upon the contents of each, individual interview. In some interviews supplementary questions were asked if a particularly interesting or unusual line of enquiry emerged. Here, the questions which were put to all¹ respondents are recorded; bracketed after some questions are the prompts which were used as necessary in some interviews).

Russia: for respondents in Ul'ianovsk, Oktyabrskii and Bogdashkino

- Can you tell me how you have come to live in Ul'ianovsk?
- Do you think that there is a German community in Ul'ianovsk? (What sort, what activities)
- Do you participate in community activity?
- Do you speak German?
- Do you maintain German traditions/ mark holidays?
- Did you do this in the past?
- Do you read the German paper that is available (*Rundschau*) or any other publications?
- Do you have any contacts with Germany? (What sort, with whom or which organisations?)
- Have you visited Germany? (Did you enjoy your stay? Would you like to visit?)
- Do you keep abreast of what is happening in Germany? (Why? Why not? Which channels?)
- Have you ever considered moving to Germany as a *Spätaussiedler*?
- Why have you not done so?
- Or (if status was granted) why did you not move?
- Where do you consider your fatherland (*otechestvo*) to be?
- Do you think that the Russian government does enough for ethnic minorities?

¹ Though the questions pertaining to links with Central Asia (Kazakhstan) were only asked when the informant hailed from the country.

- Do you think that the German government should support Russian Germans in Russia?
- Do you maintain links with your former place of residence (usually Kazakhstan)?
- What sort of links? In which arenas?
- Do you (have you) visit(ed) Kazakhstan? Would you like to?
- Are you interested in what is happening there? Do you follow the news?
- Did you encounter anything which you did not expect when you moved here? (to the RF from Kazakhstan; asked of respondents who relocated in the late Soviet/early post-soviet period)
- Do you have anything to add to what has been said? Is there any topic that has not been covered but which you believe to be important?
- Would you like to ask me any questions, about my research or myself?

Germany: for respondents in Berlin

- Can you tell me how you ended up in here/Berlin?
- Did you move here alone or with other people?
- Who made the decision to move here? Were you involved in the decision making process?
- Can you talk about how the (personal) decision to apply for *Spätaussiedler* status was made?
- Can you describe the process?
- Did you feel that enough information was available to you before you came here?
- Where did you turn for information about Germany/ return migration?
- Had you visited Germany before you moved here? (when, where & who visited, did you enjoy your stay)
- Did you have any contact with Germany before your move?
- When you lived in RF/ FSU did you keep abreast of things going on in Germany (politically, culturally, socially)?
- Do you speak German?
- Did you speak German before you moved here?
- Where do you consider your Fatherland (*otechestvo*) to be?
- Did you/ your family maintain Germany traditions before in Russia/FSU?
- Do you know many *korennye nemtsy* now that you are in Germany?

- Do you think that the German authorities do enough to support Russian Germans who arrive in Germany?
- Do you think that the German authorities should support Russian Germans in RF/FSU?
- Do you maintain links with your former place of residence?
- What kind of links are these? (news, social, TV, visits, visitors)
- Do you visit Russia/ FSU?
- Have you kept your Russian passport?
- Is there anything that has occurred here since your move that you did not expect?
- Is there anything you wish you had known before your arrival here but did not know?
- Do you have anything to add to what has been said? Is there any topic that has not been covered but which you believe to be important?
- Would you like to ask me any questions, about my research or myself?

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