

A Biographical account of the researcher

For the sake of openness, I am going to share some biographical information about myself. I feel obliged to do so because of two reasons: first of all, my participants were incredibly trusting in the way that they told the stories of their lives and shared their personal opinion with me, even though I was to them in most cases a mere stranger from another continent on a visit for his academic research. Since their openness was very enriching and inspiring for me both personally and for my research, I am going to follow their example. The second reason is the need for any qualitative academic researcher to situate oneself in the framework of the research.

In order to be more open to learning something new about others, you will need to externalize your own thoughts and beliefs. Otherwise, unbeknownst to you, they will be hiding in the background, pulling the strings of your interpretations, and quietly filling in the gaps of what is unknown. (Hadley 2017: 86)

I was born to German parents and German grandparents. Only my grandmother was born in a neighboring country belonging to a German minority (Sudeten Germans), but spent all of her adolescent and adult life in post-war Bavaria. I grew up in a village of 10,000 inhabitants about thirty kilometers south of Munich. All my family, back to my great-grandparents, with the only exception of my grandmother's relatives, spent almost their entire lives in this region where they have been living and working as employees and civil servants. Nobody in my close family pursued a university degree. All of my family members, including myself, and most of the people I came to know in my early life are Catholics – though religion has come to play a minor role in their lives. German or more precisely a variety of Bavarian German is my L1.

In the course of my university studies, I lived in Berlin for four years and for my master's degree I returned to Munich where I have been living for more than five years. During high school, I went to school in France for four months where I lived with a guest family to study French – this was my first major experience abroad. After my graduation from high school, I spent half a year in South America to learn Spanish, later four months in Morocco for my master's thesis and in total up to a year in Israel. During my first longer stay in Israel of five months, I learned Hebrew in an *ulpan* kibbutz program (see 1), two stays of about three months each followed for field work for this study. I learned English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Hebrew, among other languages in which I am less proficient. I immersed myself in different cultures, but I am culturally rooted in my family's tradition and in the region where I grew up and have been living most of my life.