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# Island hopping as a mode of acculturation: The experience of German sojourners in the American Southwest

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*This study explores how members of a particular group of German sojourners—military and quasi-military personnel and their families—whose acculturative experience occurs largely within the closely-bounded confines of a military base, adjust to life in the American Southwest. I use a mixed-methods approach, including grounded theory, to interpret data produced by short questionnaires, in-depth interviews with eleven German participants, and my personal experience as a German sojourner.*

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As cultural boundaries become more permeable in the wake of globalization, rising numbers of *sojourners*, defined as individuals who “no longer reside in [their] native country, but whose stay in another country is temporary, voluntary, at least six months long, and related to a specific task” (Swagler & Jome, 2005, p. 527; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), enter the United States every year. Such sojourners include international military personnel (Swagler & Jome, 2005).

Upon migration, sojourners typically undergo *acculturation*, a stressful (Ward, 1996) life event characterized by any combination of changes in socioeconomic status (SES), occupation, living conditions, language and communicative behavior, family structure and function, and other transformations (Swagler & Jome, 2005) that may lead to maladaptive behaviors and mental health issues (Berry, 1997). Newcomers develop a variety of affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses, or coping styles, to adapt to their changed environment and to manage the push-and-pull, or dialectical tension, between old and new (Swagler & Jome, 2005). Acculturation invariably affects newcomers’ sense of cultural identity: as they interact with members of other cultures, some sojourners may choose to maintain their own, familiar culture, while others will transform their ethnicity (Lee, 2008; Nagel, 1994).

As the daughter of a German career diplomat who relocated on a regular basis, I experienced both the opportunities and challenges associated with frequent cultural adjustment. Motivated by my personal experiences as a sojourner, my research investigates sojourner adaptation and identity negotiation as mediated by communication. More specifically, I use field methods, including open-ended interviews, to explore the adaptation process of a clearly defined newcomer group—German military (Bundeswehr) and quasi-military personnel (social workers and clergy affiliated with the Bundeswehr) and their respective families—whose members are concurrently

constrained and enabled by the closely-bounded cross-cultural context of a military setting in the American Southwest. The acculturative situation of this sojourner group is particularly intriguing because members must adapt, upon arrival in the U.S., to three new environments: the German ethnic enclave existing near the base, the U.S. military community located on base, and U.S. mainstream (or “host”) society.

## Background

I define *culture* broadly as a design for living, a plan by which society adapts itself to its social and ideational surroundings (Luzbetak, 1976). Designs for living include shared worldviews and behavior patterns as they are manifest in and reinforced by societal structures. These include ways of negotiating and manifesting one’s cultural identity and relating to others. Following the critical paradigm, I see culture as dynamic and fluid, occurring within power structures, and contextualized within issues of class, gender, race, politics, and history (Martin & Nakayama, 2007).

Five cultures are relevant to this study: *Heritage culture* refers to designs for living (composed of worldviews and behavior patterns manifest in and reinforced by societal structures) shared by most Germans. *Bundeswehr culture* signifies designs for living supported by most members of the German armed forces. *U.S. military culture* suggests designs for living associated with the U.S. military community. *Host culture* indicates designs for living espoused by most members of the U.S. mainstream. *Island culture*, finally, describes a *mélange* of heritage, Bundeswehr, and host culture elements shared by most Bundeswehr sojourners residing at Roaring Thunder. These cultures are not always distinct; while some cultural elements differ between groups, others overlap and intersect.

*Acculturation* is a demanding cross-cultural adjustment process characterized by any combination of changes in SES, occupation, living conditions, language and communicative behavior, family structure and function, and other transformations (Swagler & Jome, 2005; Ward, 2006). Numerous acculturation models exist (for an overview, see Padilla & Perez, 2003). Although not the most recent perspective, Berry’s (1988, 1997) *four-fold model of acculturation*, which posits that newcomers acculturate through the processes of *assimilation*, *separation*, *integration*, or *marginalization*, continues to be among the most-commonly used. According to Berry, assimilation takes place when newcomers identify and interact exclusively with the host culture, thereby relinquishing their heritage culture (Martin & Nakayama, 2007). Separation occurs when newcomers reject the host culture, preferring to adhere to their heritage culture (Berry, 1988). Integration refers to newcomers’ identification and interaction with both heritage and host cultures, leading to the creation of a culturally distinct ethnic group functioning within mainstream society. Marginalization, finally, signifies newcomers’ lack of involvement in and rejection of both cultures (Berry, 1997).

*Acculturative stress* is a pathological, physiological, and psychological state caused by the experience of stressors in the environment and individuals' inability to meet the demands of their new surroundings (Kim, 2005; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Such stress manifests in a variety of psychological conditions (Swagler & Jome, 2005; Berry et al., 1987) and may result in maladaptive behaviors, such as premature returns, functional difficulties, and chronic psychological distress (Ward et al., 2001).

*Cultural identity* is created when individuals recognize, categorize and self-identify as members of a particular group (Ward, 2006). Groups share a common "set of traditions, worldviews, history, heritage and descent on a psychological and historical level" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 216). Identity evolves and changes according to the contexts and people involved (Nagel, 1994).

Individuals with diverse cultural identities may form *relational identities*, defined as "a privately transacted system of understandings that coordinate attitudes, actions, and identities of participants in a relationship" (Wood, 1982, p. 76), that arise out of communication (Wood, 1982). According to *identity management theory* (Cupach & Imahori, 1993), intercultural relations typically pass through three highly interdependent, sequential, and cyclical phases: *trial*, *enmeshment*, and *renegotiation*.

With Wood (1982) and others, I assume that *communication* plays a crucial role in both adaptation and identity management, because no human interaction can take place without some form of communication. It is through communicative interaction between sojourners and host society members that the process of acculturation is first set in motion, that acculturative tension is created, diffused, or heightened, and that sojourners maintain or relinquish their heritage culture identities in the face of opposing cultural beliefs and behaviors.

Most research about acculturation and identity negotiation focuses on groups of permanent immigrants. Because of disparity in underlying motives and length of residence, results from those studies cannot be extrapolated to sojourners' adaptive experiences. Findings related to academic sojourners (see, among others, Swagler & Jome, 2005), fail to capture the adaptive experience of what I term *islanders* or *island hoppers*, a migrant subgroup including military personnel, foreign service attachés, educators, and international businesspeople, who are increasingly being referred to as "globalized elites" (Kissinger, 2001). This study is dedicated to their unique experience.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Setting***

The study took place at Roaring Thunder, my pseudonym for an American Air Force base in the Southwest where about 1,500 German

sojourners currently reside. The base maintains two flight centers where U.S. and German aircrews train separately as fighter pilots. The German training center is maintained and serviced by Bundeswehr trainers and technicians who remain in the U.S. for several years with their families and then relocate to another German military base. They are joined by single, usually male, student pilots who return to Germany after completing their training, and by social workers and clergy affiliated with the Bundeswehr, who, because of their quasi-military status, relocate between German military installations.

Additional German sojourners are instructors at the German military school and German employees of companies supplying the German air force. These individuals, considered civilians not affiliated with the Bundeswehr, do not relocate on a regular basis. Although I explored their acculturative experiences as part of a broader study, findings related to this subgroup are not the focus of this paper. I include civilians' comments only as they relate to the experience of military and quasi-military sojourners.

### ***Research Design and Methodology***

Before collecting any data, I obtained approval through the Human Research Protections Office at the University of New Mexico (Appendix C). Following advice about proper protocol on U.S. bases provided by friends in the U.S. armed forces, I contacted the base operator at Roaring Thunder AFB and stated my name, my academic affiliation, and the purpose of my research. The operator then provided me with the telephone numbers of several German military, quasi-military, and civilian personnel. I contacted these subjects by telephone. Speaking both in German and English, I again stated my name, academic status, and the purpose of my study. Three individuals, who later told me that they had decided to participate because of the rapport I succeeded in establishing with them in that initial contact, agreed to take part in my study. They also agreed to engage in snowball sampling to recruit other participants.

That snowball sampling led to the recruitment of eight additional German sojourners, thereby proving to be an effective method to gain access to a community that, due to the sensitive nature of its mission, is not usually open to study purposes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The sample size was adequate for this study because no new data surfaced after eleven interviews had been conducted, which indicating that the saturation point had been reached (Glaser, 1978).

After obtaining informed consent (the consent form is included as Appendix D), the participants—all aged 18 or older—completed a one-minute questionnaire (Appendix A) that allowed me to better contextualize the research, and then participated in 45-minute, face-to-face, open-ended interviews that were conducted in the privacy of their homes.

## *Analysis and discussion*

For spatial reasons, it makes sense to combine analysis and discussion in one section. The interviews centered on a series of questions (Appendix B) related to three research questions: how do German military sojourners adapt to life in the U.S., what factors influence the adaptation process, and how do sojourners negotiate their cultural identity?

I used a mixed-methods approach to analyze participants' responses: qualitative research methods in the form of a modified version of grounded theory (Glaser, 1978) to analyze data generated by in-depth field interviews, and quantitative methods to evaluate a one-minute survey that sought to provide demographical information about the participants. Survey findings showed that while participants did not vary significantly across race or religious affiliation—all self-reported as “white” and “Christian”—they differed across gender, age, marital status, length of sojourn, educational level, language proficiency, country of birth (participants were born in East or West Germany) and profession. Respondents were aged 19 through 48 and included male German educators, clergy, social workers, officers, enlisted personnel, suppliers to the German air force, and dependents of both sexes. Female participants included nurses, physical therapists, and artists. No female Bundeswehr personnel could be located and asked to participate. All except one female participant worked as unpaid volunteers.

I used a combined critical/interpretive approach (Glaser, 1978) to analyze data generated by the interviews. Following the critical approach, I looked for and uncovered structures of domination to better contextualize, describe, and interpret (Martin & Nakayama, 2007) the experience of German sojourners.

According to grounded theory tenets (Glaser, 1978), I acknowledged and incorporated my personal experience into the data. I acknowledged, before I began my analysis, that I am an insider in relation to members of my study population, because I, too, am German and a (former) sojourner. This insider status, coupled with my proficiency in the languages participants communicated in—German and English—allowed me to linguistically, cognitively, and emotionally make sense of participants' experiences in a way that outsiders or non-German speakers might not have been able to do. I sought to minimize potential status-based researcher bias, which might have influenced my interpretation of the data, by constantly focusing on my role—not that of an empathetic listener, but of a researcher. To minimize the possibility of eliciting responses that reflected my own acculturative experiences, I chose to not disclose to participants my own preferred modes of acculturation.

I analyzed the interview data using first open and then theoretical coding, all the while comparing new against old data (Glaser, 1978). Due to spatial constraints, I combine findings from all research questions in the

following section.

Previewing findings discussed in more detail below, my analysis shows that participants acculturate differently depending on the cultural group in which they are seeking membership. Acculturative modes go beyond those proposed by Berry (1988) and others (Padilla & Perez, 2003) to include what I term *island hopping*—frequent relocation between social spaces that are geographically, but not culturally, dissimilar. Manner and pace of acculturation are influenced by factors at the micro and macro level including sojourners' occupation, gender, prior acculturative experience, language skills, and SES, as well as familial, communal, and societal acculturative support and host culture attitudes and institutional policies as they relate to the sojourner group. The cultural identities of most participants do not undergo transformation, because the majority chooses not to engage deeply with host culture members. I elaborate on some of these findings below.

A first significant finding is that the acculturative choices my participants make are informed primarily by the cultural environment to which they are adapting.

Overall, my findings indicate that the experience of Bundeswehr personnel and civilians affiliated with the German armed forces acculturating into the pre-existing Bundeswehr community at Roaring Thunder does not fit Berry's (1997) commonly-used model of acculturation. Contrary to Berry's findings, members of this group do not assimilate, integrate, separate, or marginalize from this culture; rather, like cruise ship passengers, they *hop from one island to another*.

The term *island hopping*, used in anthropology to denote human settlement of islands in the Pacific Ocean (Diamond, 2005), acquires a new dimension in communication studies. I use island hopping to describe the experience of sojourners who relocate regularly to geographically—but not culturally—diverse enclaves situated within larger communities. I conceptualize such enclosed, restricted, and exclusionary social spaces as military bases, diplomatic compounds, “fortified suburbs” (Kissinger, 2001), “fortress cities” (Davis, 1990), some gated communities (McNamara, n.d.), mission-oriented settlements like Los Alamos during the 1940s and 50s, the “closed cities of Russia” (Global Security, 2009), and similar enclaves as *islands*.

Islands are physically distinct from surrounding communities because, rather than growing naturally, they are planned and created by *sponsors*, defined as organizations at the national or international level, such as multinational corporations and alliances or government departments and agencies. They are called into being to serve a purpose (in the case of Roaring Thunder, a military mission) to further the goals of the organization; depend on the organization for direction and funding; and are modified, dismantled, or abandoned after their mission is completed.

A spatial analysis of islands reveals highly-functional planned spaces with all necessary infrastructure, such as housing, administrative buildings,

a post exchange-type store, and churches, assembled in one clearly-bounded area. Islands may also contain a “cultural identity school” that seeks to foster heritage culture values and language (McDonough, 1998; Park & Sarkar, 2007), such as the German Military School at Roaring Thunder. As is the case in German and American embassy compounds that I have visited in Russia and elsewhere, islands may be designed by the sponsor and built using high-grade materials provided by the sponsor. Buildings are generally standardized across island chains and incorporate few, if any, architectural style elements typical of the surrounding communities.

Several participants noted that concentrating basic infrastructure in one defensible area renders islands largely self-sufficient. For example, officer’s wife Else said: “[Roaring Thunder] has everything—we don’t have to leave it unless we want to.”

Islands are also exclusive; they are typically accessible only to islanders or privileged, authorized others. A tangible manifestation of islands’ exclusivity are the high-technology fences, walls, and guarded entrances that serve to separate, and sometimes protect, residents against what these view as the “other”—the local community that surrounds them like a body of water—and “others”—host culture members whom islanders perceive as different in terms of nationality or SES.

Roaring Thunder AFB is surrounded by fences and walls and guarded by armed posts. Non-base members must follow base protocol when attempting to contact military personnel, as I did when I recruited participants for this study. Like me, they must sign in and submit valid identification before being allowed to enter (on some bases, visitors must be escorted by an armed guard). Interestingly, similar entry requirements exist in embassy compounds and in gated communities, which are accessed only via pass codes, and in island towns, like Los Alamos, which contains several checkpoints built in response to the 2001 terrorist attacks.

Participants’ statements support my conceptualization of bases and similar enclaves as islands. I cite the comments of Kara, a Bundeswehr officer’s daughter, as an example: “[The base] is our own little world. It’s easy to forget there’s a whole other world outside the gates, one kilometer from where you live.”

In addition to fences and other highly visible markers of separation, I noted subtler dissimilarities between islands and host communities that arose out of interview data and my personal experience. Disparities became evident, for example, when islanders communicated their ability to access better quality basic human resources like food, water, shelter, and power (Collier, 2005). Several participants stated that they felt they had higher standards of living, better access to resources and technology, and more effective crime control than the host community. For example, social worker Karl compared the high standards of living on base to those of the surrounding state, which he called the “poorhouse of the nation.”



Soldier Knut and others spoke of lower crime levels on base and attributed them to greater cohesiveness and social control (Meier, 1982) within the German military community: “The people [on base] look out for one another. We all know one another and you’re not going to do something wrong. You don’t do that kind of thing in this community.”

Perceived or real lack of safety may lead entire groups, who have the agency—and the financial means—to choose where to reside, to live in areas perceived as “safe,” thereby voluntarily segregating themselves from the host culture (Lowe, 2001). All participants stated that, upon arrival in the U.S., they followed the advice of German community members already living at Roaring Thunder and sought housing in so-called “German areas” located near the base. The reasons participants gave for choosing residential segregation support Lowe’s (2001) claim that such behavior is often rooted in individuals’ perceptions of elevated levels of crime, poverty, violence, and ignorance existing outside their residential areas. For example, Else’s comments about higher safety levels on base suggest that she views the base as a refuge:

Yes, it’s very safe here. There’s no crime. When I go on base, I can leave my keys in the car. As a woman, I can walk around alone on base in the evening and feel safe.

I know it’s not that way off base. I always lock my car when I go into town.

Islands are also dissimilar in terms of jurisdiction: in addition to underlying host culture legislation, islands are subject to laws and regulations governing the sponsoring countries or organizations. For example, military bases and diplomatic installations typically underlie the jurisdiction of their native countries.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, my findings show that islands differ from surrounding communities in terms of culture. Islands are characterized by shared, blended cultures that combine, to a greater or lesser degree, organizational culture (e.g., Bundeswehr culture), heritage culture (e.g., German culture), and a limited number of carefully selected host culture elements. I call such cultures, *island cultures*. Similar blended cultures exist on every island that is part of a particular island chain or *archipelago*, resulting in cultures that are uniform almost to the point of appearing cloned. The sameness of culture across Bundeswehr bases is exemplified by officer’s wife Else’s comments:

You know, one [German] base is like another—the same routines, the same daily round. Even the same types of events—we celebrate Oktoberfest the same way we do in Germany, the same way we do on every base.

Soldier’s wife Tina explained the benefits associated with island culture, noting how the uniformity of military life and the presence of like-minded people provide comfort and reassurance in alien surroundings:

It makes me feel relieved to know that when I come here, to a new country, so much will be the same. It's not easy for me to make friends, but it helps to know that there are people here like me—Bundeswehr wives and mothers of young children—who are in my same situation.

As previously noted, the culture of German military sojourners at Roaring Thunder blends German military culture, German culture, and some American culture elements. This culture, which is replicated across bases and consists of a mission to fulfill, rules and regulations to live by, social events to enjoy, (imported or replicated) native cuisine, housing, education, and social support, and is characterized by frequent relocation, is, in many ways, similar to the experience of cruise ship passengers, who are provided with a purpose, structure, familiar fare, lodging, and entertainment as they hop from one island to another. German military culture--not unlike military culture elsewhere--is characterized by safety, support, cohesion, discipline, routine, accountability, and commitment (Smrekar & Owens, 2007). Officer Johannes, who stated that he and his family support Bundeswehr culture, described it as static and predictable:

The army is always the army. The outside world may change, but here on base, things are the same. Although the people themselves change, the ranks are the same. You know where you stand. It's the same discipline and order. It's what we're used to; it's what we know.

Military personnel and their families collaborate with a host of social forces ranging from the sponsor (via what I term *island chiefs* — base commanders, corporate managers, senior diplomats, and other officials), health care (in the form of Bundeswehr health care professionals), and society (the Bundeswehr community) to religion (Bundeswehr clergy), education (instructors at the German military school), and the criminal justice system (German laws, military tribunals), to recreate and maintain Bundeswehr culture on a daily basis.

Bundeswehr families also maintain German cultural elements; the most significant of these is native language (Park & Sarkar, 2007). All Bundeswehr parents who participated in this study stressed the importance of providing a strong counterweight to their offspring's immersion in the host culture by preserving native language skills. They noted that they are supported in their efforts by German educators, clergy, and members of the German ethnic community, which includes military, quasi-military, and civilian German sojourners.

Participants stated that the German ethnic community at Roaring Thunder fulfills two main purposes: first, its members facilitate acculturation by welcoming newcomers, organizing orientations and other social events, and providing spiritual and psychological aid. There is a constant need for this type of support at Roaring Thunder, an area of high mobility where

incoming personnel, who need various types of acculturative support, constantly replenish departing sojourners.

At the same time, community members maintain heritage culture by involving newcomers in events that celebrate (and thus perpetuate) its various aspects (Dutkova-Cope, 2003). For example, social worker Karl said: “The German community reaches out to Bundeswehr families and involves them in social and ethnic celebrations . . . I’m not really into ethnic events, but I realize that they are important for many people.”

Quite often, such events involve reconstructing lapsed or occasional cultural forms that are then refurbished and reintroduced into contemporary culture (Nagel, 1994). Soldier’s wife Tina gave an example: while she and her family don’t celebrate “Fasching” (similar to Mardi Gras) in Germany, they do so when they are stationed abroad.

Officer’s daughter Kara related ethnic events to participants’ cultural identity: “I think it’s definitely important to celebrate German holidays overseas. You want to hold onto something that you’re used to. It’s part of who you are.” Soldier’s wife Tina agreed: “The German way of celebrating . . . makes me feel like I’m connected to Germany and I know it fosters a sense of unity among the [German] people here.”

Numerous studies support a connection between availability of native foods and sojourner adjustment (Dutkova-Cope, 2003). Newcomers, who miss the foods they are accustomed to, tend to import them or seek to duplicate them using ingredients that are at hand. My data support these findings: all participants stated that they frequently purchase German products in a special German store on base, which requires them to show Bundeswehr identification. They also noted that they strive to keep German culinary habits alive by serving native cuisine at social gatherings and encouraging sojourners to cook ethnic dishes.

Prior studies suggest that educational institutions that support heritage culture and language, called “cultural identity schools”, and native (in this case, German) instructors at such schools play a significant role in sojourners’ acculturation (McDonough, 1998; Park & Sarkar, 2007; Smrekar & Owens, 2003). My results support these findings; educators at the German military school fulfill vital social and educational functions within the Bundeswehr community. They are deeply invested in the educational needs of German students attending the school, who are mostly offspring of Bundeswehr personnel. Because the school is accredited with the German Department of Education, the financial and educational success of the school itself (as well as that of individual educators) depends on following as closely as possible a standardized curriculum developed for German military schools worldwide. This curriculum is designed to allow students to transition easily into other German military schools as well as into schools in Germany. Therefore, classes do not vary significantly between locations, and modifications to the curriculum by individual institutions or educators are not encouraged.

Educators also function as guardians of heritage culture values, as officer's wife Else's comments illustrate:

I wanted [our children] to learn about and practice German culture, not just at home, but at school, too. The teachers at the Bundeswehr school work very closely with the parents to ensure that the children are learning the same values and we reinforce one another.

Although, as I noted above, various social forces join together at Roaring Thunder to maintain German culture, island chiefs may discourage sojourners from openly manifesting some heritage culture elements. These are typically behaviors that, due to historical events or ongoing social, political, economic, or religious issues, chiefs believe may disturb or offend host culture members. An example that several participants referenced is engaging in discussions about so-called "taboo" topics, such as politics and religion. Officer Johannes said that, at a newcomer orientation held by senior Bundeswehr personnel, he and other attendees were told to avoid discussing politics with Americans. He added that, since then, he has not talked about politics with host culture members.

In addition to elements from Bundeswehr and heritage cultures, island culture contains some host culture elements. Usually, only those elements that the sponsor (via the island chief) considers desirable are permitted to become part of island culture. Such elements may include what islanders perceive as "native" garb or "authentic" (Hsieh and Chang, 2004) customs or celebrations. Thus, German military sojourners at Roaring Thunder celebrate Independence Day and (occasionally) eat fast food, thereby engaging in behaviors that are not part of their social repertoire.

In addition to characteristics that define islands, such as spatial organization, levels of safety, standards of living, jurisdiction, culture and others, my data evidences additional traits that tend to be shared among islanders. Chief among these are similar SESs. Islanders typically consist of a largely homogenous group with comparable SESs based on similar professions and levels of income, education, or expertise. This holds true for my participants, who are primarily German military, quasi-military, or civilian personnel.

Islanders' SESs may differ significantly from those held by host culture members. Participants confirmed these findings, noting that their incomes are higher than those of host culture members, who live in what social worker Karl called "the poorhouse of the nation." Several participants attributed their perceived higher standards of living to the fact that Bundeswehr installations are funded by Germany, whose economy is ranked by purchasing power among the top five worldwide (Economy Watch, 2008).

Social disparities between the island and the surrounding communities are not unique to Roaring Thunder; based on my personal experience, a similar situation exists on at least one other island, the formerly "secret

city” of Los Alamos. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (American Factfinder, 2007), Los Alamosites, who are for the most part Caucasians with graduate degrees employed at Los Alamos National Laboratory, possess higher SESs than the average New Mexican. For example, in 2007 median household incomes in Los Alamos lay at \$101,098, compared to \$41,509 for New Mexico (American Factfinder, 2007). Also based on my experience, comparable disparities exist with diplomats and other “globalized elites,” whose SESs are usually equal or higher than those held by host culture members.

Perceived privilege may lead some individuals to set standards and categorize others (Collier, 2005). Categorization occurs, for example, when officer Johannes described the surrounding communities as poverty-stricken: “This is a very poor area here, you know that. I’m not saying that’s the people’s fault—it’s the recession and politics and this state has always been poor. But you have to keep it in mind.” Categorization is also evident when supplier’s wife Adelheid called host culture members “politically uninformed” and “apathetic,” and when clergyman Arndt described them as “ignorant” and “conservative.”

As I have sought to explain above, island hopping results in unique acculturative experiences. What is interesting at a deeper level of analysis is that such experiences vary between separate groups of island hoppers. For instance, I uncovered significant acculturative variance between male and female island hoppers, especially between male Bundeswehr personnel and their spouses. Contrary to their husbands, military wives suffer considerable acculturative stress as they negotiate frequent relocations, job searches, and separations when their spouses are deployed.

Because U.S. employment policies restrict access to the job market for German sojourners seeking paid employment outside the base, wives are typically forced to give up their professions and livelihoods, and with that, personal agency, economic independence, and professional and personal validation. For example, almost all the wives I interviewed stated that they had interrupted or abandoned their careers to focus on their families’ well being (only one wife reported that her German certification as a physical therapist was recognized in the U.S., and that she was able work because there was a dearth of physical therapists in the area). Wives also voiced their dissatisfaction that their social status and access to social groups and military services was largely derivative, because it depended not on their own achievements or efforts, but on their husbands’ status and performance in the Bundeswehr.

For all these reasons, many Bundeswehr wives experience feelings of anger, powerlessness, frustration, and boredom, which may lead to mental health conditions (Berry, 1997) and marital problems. For instance, Karen, a 30-year-old wife who is not permitted to work as a nurse in the U.S., said that she began experiencing conflict with her husband arising from frustration,

boredom, and loss of purpose: “I would ask myself, ‘What am I doing here?’ Sometimes, I would start a fight [with my husband] just to feel alive . . . for some time, I didn’t leave the house. All I wanted to do was sleep because there was nothing else to do.”

Health professionals affiliated with the Bundeswehr stated that they are aware of the challenges Bundeswehr wives face and admitted that the financial compensation and social and spiritual support provided by military authorities is not, at present, sufficient to recompense wives for loss of income, purpose, and validation. Social worker Karl described the wives’ situation in a nutshell when he noted that “... the women’s lot is very hard.”

Conversely, military husbands, who continue to work within the same occupation and organization when they relocate, experience less stress upon relocation. I attribute these findings largely to continuing gendered structures of domination within the German armed forces that are perpetuated by the male-dominated nature of the Bundeswehr. Despite a ground-breaking ruling on equal rights handed down by the European Union’s highest tribunal in 2001 that opened all Bundeswehr positions to women, the German armed forces are still overwhelmingly male-dominated—currently, more than 93 percent of Bundeswehr personnel are men (which explains why I was unable to locate any female personnel for this study).

Findings related to how German sojourner groups adapt to the U.S. military community support Berry’s (1997) four-fold model. German military and quasi-military personnel all identified separation as their preferred mode of acculturation (Berry, 1988). However, high-ranking (male) Bundeswehr officers tend to integrate into the U.S. military community because they interact and collaborate frequently and meaningfully with their U.S. counterparts.

Modes of acculturation vary across sojourner groups when they adapt to U.S. mainstream society. At Roaring Thunder, as on many other islands, island chiefs hold orientations and informational sessions on local customs, provide foreign language training and other acculturative support, and encourage intergroup friendships, which my findings show may lead to intercultural relationships and “relational identities” in the sense used by identity management theorists (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; a more detailed discussion follows). Such encouragement may spring from genuine intercultural sensitivity or be based on strategies of cross-cultural rapprochement the sponsor pursues with an aim to facilitate economic, political, diplomatic or military collaboration between islanders and mainstream members.

Still, most military personnel prefer to remain separate, although a small number of individuals integrate into the host society by working with or sharing interests with host culture members. For example, some sojourner wives, who choose to fill their time as unpaid volunteers, integrate by forming intercultural relationships with their American coworkers.

In addition to impacting sojourners’ acculturative choices, such relationships also influence how sojourners negotiate their cultural identity.

That identity may undergo transformation as cross-cultural relationships cycle through various phases. In the so-called *trial* phase members learn about one another's cultures and support and confirm the other's cultural identities (Lee, 2008). For example, Karen, who volunteers her time with the American Red Cross, noted that frequent interactions with her Hispanic female coworkers caused her to overcome her initial preconceptions of Hispanic culture. As time went on, Karen entered the *enmeshment* phase: she visited her coworkers in their homes and invited them to hers, and shared her cultural identity with them while embracing theirs. After several months, in the *renegotiation* phase, a transformation of both parties took place and Karen's new cultural identity, based on her relationship with her coworkers, was created, which blended elements from heritage and host cultures. Other participants (both male and female) who reported transitioning through a similar process noted that their relational identities were created as the result of intercultural relationships based on shared interests.

Social workers reported integrating into the host society due to their frequent and meaningful interactions with host culture members. Although German clergy reported having positive attitudes toward Americans, their interactions typically remained confined to the professional level due to time constraints and a strongly-felt sense of duty exclusively toward their German parishioners and students.

I interpret the tendency of most participants to not integrate into the host society as most likely linked to their sojourner status: previous studies have found that, unlike permanent immigrants, sojourners continue to maintain close cultural and social networks with their countries of origin and reside abroad for only relatively short periods of time—factors which have been linked to a lower probability of assimilation or integration (Maykovich, 1976). In addition, German sojourners at Roaring Thunder are strengthened in their efforts to maintain their heritage cultural identity by the Bundeswehr and other social forces, making it less likely for them to re-evaluate or transform their cultural sense of self.

The data fail to support Berry et al.'s (1987) assumption that certain modes of acculturation correlate with particular acculturative outcomes and associated levels of acculturative stress. For example, Berry et al. (1987) argue that integration typically constitutes the least stressful style of acculturation, while separation and marginalization are generally associated with greater trauma. While my research uncovered high levels of stress in female participants constrained by restrictive institutional policies and in individuals whose acculturation is hampered by language barriers and lack of prior acculturative experience, such stress is not related to the mode of acculturation these individuals choose.

On the contrary, the data show that participants who separate generally experience no more stress than do those who integrate. These findings may be attributed to the conditioning effect that the extensive familial, communal,

educational, social, and spiritual support network that the Bundeswehr, in collaboration with other social forces (see previous discussion), provides. That support network functions as a protective cocoon that lets those who are allowed access remain separate on their island without experiencing significant stress or other harmful psychological, social, or economic consequences that other studies have identified as the result of remaining separate.

The data reveal various factors both at the micro (individual and group) as well as at the macro (societal) level that affect adaptation. These factors vary between individuals and sub-groups, making predictions regarding successful acculturation difficult. Micro-structural factors include, at the individual level, the psychological traits of the acculturating individual. Participants' responses empirically support previous findings that individual psychological traits significantly impact acculturative outcomes. Newcomers who embrace novel experiences and are ready to transform themselves when necessary (Swagler & Jome, 2005) generally adapt less stressfully, while individuals with highly neurotic traits are less likely to adjust well (Berry, 1988).

A significant individual-level trait affecting the acculturation of German military sojourners at Roaring Thunder is SES. As citizens of an economically powerful nation and because of their high educational levels and high-prestige occupations, the participants in this study generally possess equal or higher SESs than host country members. Most participants are aware of their high status and, in part because of this positive self-concept, frequently feel entitled to set standards and categorize others (Collier, 2005). They approach host culture members from a locus of equality or superiority and feel empowered to decide whether, at what level, and how frequently they wish to interact.

The data also show that high-status holders, such as officers, educators, and health care professionals, generally adapt more quickly and less stressfully to novel surroundings than do low-status holders, such as enlisted personnel. High-status holders' successful acculturation occurs, in part, because smooth adaptation, along with other social skills, constitutes a peripheral role element expected of members of this sub-group (Weinstock, 1963). Simply put, people in prestigious positions adapt better because the world expects them to. Lack of expectations explains, in part, why lower status holders generally acculturate only "to get by," but no further (Weinstock, 1963).

At least within the military and business environments, successful adaptation is also a function of privilege, because high-ranking individuals are significantly advantaged over low-status holders in regards to acculturative training. For example, employers typically invest more intercultural and language training in officers and businesspeople than they do in enlisted personnel. Soldiers and their family members receive little or no support when attempting to access such training as may be available to them, while the Bundeswehr and German supplier companies provide complimentary training, support, and encouragement to "globalize" officers



and businesspeople, thereby expanding the ranks of the “globalized elites” (Kissinger, 2001).

Additional factors at the individual level are prior acculturative experience, time spent in the host country, and—perhaps most importantly—foreign language proficiency. My findings show that while former West Germans who speak some English are likely to approach and interact with U.S. Americans, those who do not (i.e., former East Germans) tend to feel uneasy or inadequate when they encounter host culture members (see also Swagler & Jome, 2005; Berry et al., 1987) and to shy away from them. Because Bundeswehr members from former East Germany tend to be low-ranking personnel, they are not expected to possess linguistic and intercultural skills and are, thus, not provided with the complimentary language training and support made available to high-status holders. Therefore, low-ranking East German-born soldiers, who were not exposed to the English language under the Communist school system, remain linguistically disadvantaged in the Bundeswehr. They are consigned to acculturating with much greater individual effort and thus, much more stressfully (Weinstock, 1963).

Group level factors include the nature of the acculturating group, the voluntary nature of stay, maintenance of heritage language, and familial, communal, and educational support. Macro-level factors include host society ideology. My research confirms a link between host society ideology regarding cultural diversity and acculturative outcomes (Berry, 1988, p. 104). In part because of their ability to support the local economy due to their high SESs, German sojourners generally encounter affirmative attitudes toward their group from host culture members. Such experiences facilitate positive acculturative outcomes (Berry, 1988). Negative experiences are rare and related, in most cases, to disagreements over political issues. At the same time, German sojourners are aware that other (economically disadvantaged) cultural groups fare less well in the same surroundings (for similar findings, see Berry, 1988).

Structural constraints in the form of restrictive institutional policies (Freedman, 2001) are macro-level factors that significantly influence the acculturation of some sojourner groups. Bundeswehr wives wishing to work in the U.S. are constrained by restrictive employment policies that lead to acculturative stress, mental health issues, and interpersonal conflict. Individuals charged with administering to the psychological and spiritual well being of Bundeswehr personnel, such as military social workers and clergy, realize that the Bundeswehr’s current handling of this dilemma leaves much to be desired. However, these individuals also admitted that they are not influential enough to redress fundamental structural problems of the Bundeswehr, such as lack of recognition for the contributions women (female soldiers as well as military wives), make to the German armed forces and are unable to compensate wives for their loss of financial independence, professional validation, and self-esteem.

The data failed to support Berry's (1997) suggestion that sociocultural adjustment, which is contingent on cultural knowledge, degree of interaction with the host society, and intergroup attitudes, usually improves linearly over time. Rather, findings showed that German sojourners' acculturation tends to progress linearly until a "comfort zone, "life rhythm," or "balance" is achieved. When and how this balance is reached varies between individuals and groups and is, therefore, difficult to predict.

## Limitations

The main limitation of this research lies in the restricted generalizeability of the results due to the small sample size and the specificity of the context. Furthermore, this study is not longitudinal and so cannot account for the fact that acculturation and identity negotiation are processes with separate phases (Lee, 2008; Ward et al., 2001). Also, the study does not fully examine sojourners' prior psychological, emotive, and sociocultural functioning, which impact their acculturation and is likely to vary among individual members and may change over time. Another limitation lies in Berry's (1997) theory of acculturation, which I used as a starting point for my analysis as it continues to be one of the most commonly used perspectives on acculturation. Berry's theory is, in some cases, too narrow and in others, tends to essentialize constructs and concepts.

## Suggestions for Future Research

This work serves as an agenda for future research in the field of intercultural communication, particularly in relation to acculturation and identity negotiation. Because the phenomenon of island hopping is gaining in importance and frequency in the wake of globalization, findings from this study also lay the groundwork for future research on islanders whose frequent relocations represent geographical rather than cultural shifts. Finally, this research offers a glimpse of the obstacles military wives encounter as they struggle to adapt to new surroundings and may thus serve as a foundation for future work in gender studies.

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