INSTITUTE OF ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE STUDIES
WITH ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM
BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

BETWEEN THE WORLDS

MIGRANTS MARGINS SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Vol. 3
2021

BETWEEN THE WORLDS:
MIGRANTS, MARGINS, AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Vol. 3

Maeva, M., M. Slavkova, P. Stoyanova, and M. Hristova (eds.) (2021) Between the Worlds: Migrants, Margins, and Social Environment. Vol. 3. Sofia: IEFSEM – BAS &Paradigma

To cite this e-collection: Maeva, M., M. Slavkova, P. Stoyanova, and M. Hristova (eds.) (2021) Between the Worlds: Migrants, Margins, and Social Environment. Vol. 3. Sofia: IEFSEM – BAS & Paradigma, URL: https://conferenceworlds.wordpress.com/publications/

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e-ISSN: 2683-0213
Designed by Paradigma Publishing House, http://www.paradigma.bg

This e-collection is Conference proceedings number 3 in the publication series 'Between the Worlds'.
First edition 2021
This collection is open access and cannot be sold in any form.

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The publication of this e-collection is funded by Bulgarian Science Fund, Ministry of Education and Science (ДН 20/8 – 11.12.2017).

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All papers are double blind peer-reviewed. We thank all reviewers who kindly advised us during the process of preparation of the volume.

INSTITUTE OF ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE STUDIES WITH ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM
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E-collection of Conference Proceedings

BETWEEN THE WORLDS: MIGRANTS, MARGINS, AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Vol. 3

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Paradigma
Sofia ◆ 2021

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Preface

Mobility and migration are no new phenomena, but their importance and topicality for modern societies presuppose the search for specific interdisciplinary studies and approaches. This procedure is relatively new, but a growing number of novel research in the area is positioned at the crossroads of a multitude of disciplines – history, sociology, political science, demography, geography, law, and economy. In the past decade, an even wider range of humanity and social sciences representatives have joined the efforts, including anthropologists, linguists, cultural, health and local studies, researchers, to build upon the knowledge produced by the main fields. A number of specialised research groups and institutes were formed globally as a result of this multidisciplinary approach. That led to the amplification of academic studies in migration and, logically, to its recognition as a separate scientific field.

Migration studies can be qualified as multidisciplinary – combining the insights informed by different disciplines, but in the past several years, their interdisciplinary character – creating their specific approach, resulting from the blend of various aspects of diverse scientific areas, is even more visible. We can even insist on their transdisciplinarity – systematically integrating knowledge and methodologies coming from different spheres and backgrounds. Alongside all that, the methodology and the theoretical framework have made it possible for migration studies to cover a vast geographical area and, as a result, to accumulate a rich body of multi-layered empirical data.

We stand this volume in the depicted context. It is the result of the rich and fruitful academic debates that formed during the International conference: 'Between the Worlds: Migrants, Margins, and Social Environment' that was held in Sofia, Bulgaria, on the 1st and 2nd of December, 2021. The diversity of the research approaches was predicated by the sociocultural and individual background of the academics, coming predominantly from the humanities and the social sciences such as history, political science, ethnology, musicology, social, cultural, and visual anthropology, folklore studies, and oral history. For that reason, the studies in this volume are based predominantly on qualitative methods through which micro-and macro- perspectives on migration are described and analysed.

Each of the authors in this volume reveal the dynamics behind the processes of movement from the point of view of the researched societies, communities, and groups. In turn, that will assist the reader with following numerous 'images' of our global reality that represent local manifestations of commonly valid models.

Taking the mobile persons, the social answers to their adaptation or lack thereof as a central objective of our research we are motivated to study the dialectics between them and both the sending and receiving countries. In that sense, the approaches in their examinations are not anti-processual. Due to their diverse character and dissimilar intensity through the times, the mobility processes bring to the fore the idea that the migrants are not a homogeneous mass, but a 'patchwork' of diverse groups and communities with specific ethnocultural, confessional, and linguistic peculiarities instead. They are all motivated by a number of political, economic and social factors in the past and now. Therefore, a focus of discussion here are the models of adaptation and integration of migrants, mobile individuals, and their groups and communities, their successfulness or failure in that endeavour, the reasons for that, and, of course, the migrant milieu – positioned at the social periphery or right at the centre of their new communities. We are concerned with how these processes influence the migrants' cultural particularity, their lifestyle and day-to-day life, but also how these intense movements from and to different countries alter the social attitudes and perceptions of migrants and create new stereotypes.

The first part of this volume sheds light on the importance of **migrants as agents of economic, political and social change** that influences both the sending and receiving countries. The settlement of new individuals and groups affects the social dynamics between them and the host societies and provokes a constant rethinking of the movements no matter in and out of the countries. The lack of a unifying model representing these movements once again testifies to their complexity leading to a plethora of consequences on personal, community, national and supranational levels.

A multilayered approach to **migrants' ethnic and gender identifications** (part two) as well as the still-active stereotypes, poses questions and critiques towards the modern world. The 'migration pressure' on both individual and social levels shows that gender, ethnicity, and nationality still evoke negative social processes reflected in stereotypisation, xenophobia and encapsulation. That, in turn, still leaves some migrant groups at the social periphery while other choose to create their own parallel worlds.

The growing numbers of **young migrants** (part three) globally pose the need for research among them. This part of the volume deals with the different models of integration and adaptation of these groups in the host societies, preconditioned by the search for better educational opportunities, their high mobility profile, weak family ties and the global culture. Alternatively, their professional realisation contributes to their transformation into active participants in the social and cultural environment in both the sending and receiving countries.

'Integration and adaptation of refugees' (part four) provides a perspective that combines the policy point of view with one of the migrant communities. The specifics of this relationship shed light on the discrepancies between the expectations and desires of the people and the politics and objectives of the institutional actors. These correlations are namely the reason why in countries similar to Bulgaria's socio-economic, political, and cultural profiles, the local institutional answers (i.e., administrations, NGOs, social services) to the challenges following forced migration show a greater adaptational power than the across-the-board state policies.

The articles in the next chapter look at the **integration and adaptation of migrants** not only by examining these processes on their part but by analysing how they affect the everyday life of the local people. On the one hand, the reader can see the willingness of the newcomers to preserve their identities under the new circumstances and their strategies to turn to traditions bonding them with their home country. On the other, the texts follow the dynamics and balances of identifications – those created in the past and the current ones developing under new conditions and in interaction with different communities and cultures. The processes surrounding these overlapping and nonconcurrent identities model the attitudes between 'them' and 'us'.

In line with the main topics of the present volume, the last part – looks at those mobile people who, despite not being fully immersed in their new environment, become a valuable part of it by engaging with local causes, zealous defenders, and fighters for bettering the community's life. They not only integrate under new conditions, but by standing by social, economic, and ecological causes, they become key actors in the development of their new homes and their respective societies.

From the Editors

Part I

ECONOMY AND SOCIAL RELATIONS IN TRANSITION

Per neoliberal aspera ad astra – Locating hidden entrepreneurship 'heroes' in nostalgic diaspora – development nexus in Bosnia

Nikola Lero

Abstract: The post-war Bosnia heavily relies on capital flows from its numerous migrant communities abroad, resulting in diaspora remittances-centered migration-development nexus. That issue acts as the locus of previous scholarship on the topic, which left the notions of Bosnian diaspora entrepreneurship scarce. This paper examines the characteristics of diaspora entrepreneurship in Bosnia through the conceptual framework that unites diaspora, migrant entrepreneurship, and development. Via semi-structured narrative literature review, it offers an overview of the most relevant studies of the post-1995 period. A more in-depth look into the Bosnian diaspora's entrepreneurship in its homeland is rendered through qualitative content analysis of 2017 onward online media outlets and platforms. An analysis of the regionally popular Al Jazeera Balkans TV show *Hocu Kuci*, among others, is presented, followed by a peek into the Diaspora Invest platform, the most successful long-term systematic project for promoting and supporting diaspora investments in Bosnia. Inquiries of these two cases map the robust presence of complex transgenerational local-hometown and transnational nostalgia-driven homeland investments incorporated in the narratives of 'successful' Bosnians abroad reproducing the neoliberal agendas which celebrate the migrant labour struggles instead of challenging them.
Keywords: Bosnia, nostalgic diaspora, migrant labour, post-war

Introduction

I adore eating burek. Interestingly, in practically every country I visited, I had the opportunity to try this meat pie usually associated with my homeland Bosnia, although originating from the Ottoman and Middle Eastern cuisine. The cause lies in the interlinkages of migrations, diaspora, and development / entrepreneurship, as the Bosnian diaspora that spread worldwide left its cultural footprints in nearly every place where it settled (Valenta and Ramet, 2011). Indeed, migrations are inheritably related to the idea of development on several levels – locally, nationally, transnationally, and globally (Skeldon, 2014).

For over 2 million Bosnians living abroad (Karabegovic, 2017), this bond between migrations and development is critical. Previous studies on ties between Bosnian migration and development are not left scarce. This comes as no surprise as the Bosnian economy positively benefits from the diaspora's capital, which has been in the spotlight of previous regional studies (see Petreski and Jovanovic, 2013). Substantial academic work is done on the subject of migrations and Bosnia's development, including multiple previous and current migratory trends, primarily focused on remittances (see Oruc and Tabakovic, 2016; Oruc et al., 2019). Efendic, Babic, and Rebmann (2014) systematically provided a comprehensive overview of this topic. However, besides Halilovich and Efendic's (2021) *From Refugees to Trans-local Entrepreneurs,* there is a lack of studies that have thoroughly and qualitatively scrutinised the presence of Bosnian diaspora entrepreneurial cases back in the homeland. Keeping in mind that Bosnia's economy relies heavily on capital flows from migrant communities abroad (Jakobsen and Strabac, 2015), and that, as Glick Schiller (2009) stresses out, the development–migration nexus deserves further research attention, this paper multidisciplinary explores the position of diaspora entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs in the Bosnia migration-development nexus nowadays.

This brief study applied two methods: a semi-structured literature review (Snyder, 2019) and qualitative media content analysis (Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017). It initially, somewhat sporadically, investigated post-2015 online media outlets and platforms in the Bosnian / Serbian / Croatian and English language that tackled diaspora entrepreneurship issues in Bosnia, analysing gathered data through emerging themes. Still, this paper's main limitation lies in its scope. It focused on a couple of selected stories by Deutsche Welle, and a regionally well-known TV show by Al Jazeera Balkans called *Hocu kuci* (I want to go home), as they more coherently approach the topic offering an in-depth overview of numerous cases. The Diasporainvest.ba platform, which provides insight into more than 100 cases of small and medium-sized businesses operating in Bosnia, served as a reference point for acquiring a partial insight into the systematic and organised means of establishing diaspora entrepreneurship. It was not researched in-depth. Consequently, this short analysis does not seek to deliver a meta-overview of the Bosnian diaspora's entrepreneurship. On the contrary, understanding its limitations, it delivers a glimpse into the topic that the literature has scarcely examined.

Linking diaspora, development, and entrepreneurship

'The word *diaspora*, from the Greek verb *spiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over), signifying "dispersion of seeds," was originally used in reference to Greek settlers and colonisers in the Mediterranean, followed by use of the Hebrews referring to their exile from Babylon in the 6th century BC' (David and Munoz-Basols, 2011: xi). Since its origins, the term was assigned to those who were forced to leave their homes (Safran, 1991: 83–84). However, nowadays, the diaspora has a broader meaning than decades ago (Cohen and Fisher, 2018). It has become 'practically any population which is considered "deterritorialized" or "transnational"' (Vertovec, 1999: 1).

The debates on how migration affects development have been ongoing for decades. Hein de Haas (2010: 1), in his *Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective*, reveals how 'discursive shifts in the migration and development debate should be primarily seen as part of more general paradigm shifts in social and development theory', contrasting optimistic and pessimistic views on the topic from the 1950s till nowadays. He maps neoclassical theory and developmentalists as favourable views on the topic, which argue that migration magnifies development. From this theoretical approach, migrants are perceived as robust agents simultaneously developing host and home countries. Offering a different perspective, de Haas (2010) maps Causation Theory by Myrdal as a relatively pessimistic view on the matter wherein the negative correlators of the migration–development nexus are the practice of brain drain, increased reproduction of inequality dynamics on a global level, and massive consumption of material gains in the case of return migrants (non-utilitarian spending). Nevertheless, de Haas (2010: 228) does not take a side in this ongoing debate but renders a systematic critique of both views, arguing that:

> We need to see migration as (1) a process which is an integral part of broader transformation processes embodied in the term "development," but (2) also has its internal, self-sustaining, and self-undermining dynamics, and (3) impacts on such transformation processes in its own right.

Entrepreneurship of migrants comes as an inevitable outcome of the previous processes. 'The phenomenon of "migrant entrepreneurship" refers to business activi-

ties undertaken by migrants with a specific socio-cultural and ethnic background or migrant origin' (Sahin, Nijkamp, and Baykan-Levent, 2006: 1). The concept's fundamentals are in the economy's domain, where the notion of 'entrepreneurship' is located at its core. However, further dimensions are inevitable in conceptualising 'migrant entrepreneur' – social, cultural, and political.

Although frequently perceived as a positive shift in a host society, migrant entrepreneurship does not necessarily develop due to the right circumstances. On the contrary, sometimes its roots are in circumstances with a negative connotation. In *The Eclectic Theory of Entrepreneurship*, Verheul et al. (2001: 15) note that 'ethnic minorities often have a backward position in society, because of difficulties with native behavior, language and attitudes'. Similarly, Naude, Siegel, and Marchand (2017), presenting a critical review of discourse and perspectives on migrant entrepreneurs, reflect on the selectivity embodied in the risk-related positionality of the migrant entrepreneur who strives to acquire the knowledge, education, and social capital necessary to participate in the market of the host country. Furthermore, within the complex field of migrant entrepreneurship, diaspora entrepreneurship holds a peculiar position as a transnational endeavour embodying social, economic, and cultural domains of businesses linked to the homeland (Riddle, Hrivnak and Nielsen, 2010).

Still, it is questionable to which extent the notion of entrepreneurship is clear in migration studies. The scholarly perspectives on migrant entrepreneurship vary, not providing a coherent interdisciplinary understanding of it. 'The entrepreneurial activities of migrants do not seem to be prominent within "mainstream" entrepreneurship research' (Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017: 4). This calls for a further theoretical investigation of the concept.

Bosnian diaspora – development nexus

Due to the 1992 – 1995 war and previous Gastarbeiter migration decades before that, there are diasporic communities of Bosnians almost everywhere in the world. Yet, the largest ones remain in European countries such as Germany, Austria, Slovenia, and Sweden, among others, as well as in North America. Commonly, Bosnians are well integrated with the host societies, simultaneously maintaining strong ties with their homeland (Halilovich, 2012; Valenta and Ramet, 2011).

Previous studies on Bosnian diaspora and development mainly concentrated on former refugees and war-generated migrants that became diaspora and their bonds

to Bosnia. Babic (2013) examines the migration-development nexus after 1995 on a local level, noting that the prior literature has already mapped various characteristics of post-war Bosnian society that defy the state's development. She captures the complexities of the socio-political reality that Bosnia is experiencing in its failing transition after the dissolution of SFR Yugoslavia, noting the issues of widespread corruption on multiple levels, the power of elites on a local level, as well as the lack of appropriate development policies. The role diaspora remittances play in the migration-development nexus is heavily acknowledged. Indeed, as Jakobsen and Strabac (2015: 12) note, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina has consistently been one of the world's top receivers of remittance flows from abroad, relative to the size of the economy'. Similarly to Babic (2013), they alert about the problematic and complicated institutional framework that leaves Bosnia's development in the context of migration to make the business climate better or to continue depending on the remittances as the primary type of assets from Bosnians abroad. According to Oruc and Tabakovic (2016), it seems that Bosnia has chosen the first option.

One of the most relevant studies on the diaspora and development of Bosnia was done by Efendic, Babic, and Rebmann (2014). In their thorough examination of the social, human, and business capital of BiH diaspora, they conclude that:

> The BiH diaspora remains to be an important source of financial capital for BiH – it sends more than 10% of GDP remittances annually. These remittances are mainly (81%) used to support current consumption of goods and services rather than to pay off debt, to invest in land/housing, businesses or add to savings. Such structure of remittances suggests that remittances are a short-term stabilizer for (low-income) households' current consumption. We find no relationship between household income level and receiving remittances. Over the last few years, remittances in BiH infused more money than foreign investors. However, some estimates suggest that financial remittances might diminish in the medium to long term (Efendic, Babic and Rebmann, 2014: 77).

The most recent qualitative study that examines the topic of diasporic entrepreneurship is Halilovich and Efendic's (2021) *From Refugees to Trans-local Entrepreneurs*: *Crossing the Borders between Formal Institutions and Informal Practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. They map diverse and multiple exciting diaspora entrepreneurship cases, providing a couple of insights into the current dynamics of dias-

pora-entrepreneurship relations in the Bosnia migration-development nexus. First, it can be seen that there has been a transition from refugee-aid relations to diaspora-investment dynamics. This means that the vast Bosnian diaspora, once marked by the war and forced migrations, has established itself in their home societies' markets, becoming equipped with different forms of capital. Second, via newly acquired positions of economic power obtained abroad, members of the diaspora use those resources to invest in Bosnia. Last, as Halilovich and Efendic (2021) argue, financial benefits are not the primary reason for Bosnian diaspora investments, and other socio-cultural factors should be explored. The next chapter delves into that.

Bosnian diaspora entrepreneurship: *Nostalgia or business?*

In the country's media outlets, stories regarding Bosnian diaspora entrepreneurship are present yet heavily scattered. Nevertheless, several regional media platforms extensively report on the topic, like Deutsche Welle and Al Jazeera Balkans. Similarly to them, Diasporainvest.ba, a web platform of the USAID's Diaspora Invest project, incorporates numerous news, reports, and short stories about enterprises in Bosnia started by Bosnians who are or were abroad.

'I would go back tomorrow'

One of a series of articles about diaspora enterprises in Bosnia was published by Deutsche Welle (DW) in 2019 under the name of *Sutra bih se vratio* (I would go back tomorrow). This DW reportage by Sofic Salihbegovic (2019) presented several businesses initiated by the members of the Bosnian diaspora abroad, which was extended in detail in a series of articles by Dnevni Avaz, one of the most popular daily newspapers in Bosnia.

The first DW story was about Adnan Berberovic's corporation called SEEBA, based in Stockholm in Sweden. This consulting company focuses on digital technologies and has opened a field office in Sarajevo in 2018. Berberovic proudly says that two sisters of Bosnian origin living in Sweden have decided to go back and support the newly opened SEEBA branch office in Sarajevo (Sofic Salihbegovic, 2019). However, Adnan did not come back to Bosnia. On the contrary, he manages the company's activities from Sweden. Nevertheless, in the DW interview, Adnan emotionally records that many Bosnian Swedes dream of returning one day, commenting that most Bosnian diaspora members do that but only when they retire.

Finally, he poses a wistful, rhetorical question: ‘Is it worth growing old and then fulfilling your dream?’

DW’s second story is leaning more toward social entrepreneurship. It is about a Vienna-based Bosnian Emir S., who supports education in his homeland by collaborating with a non-governmental organization ‘Fondacija tuzlanske zajednice’ (Tuzla community foundation). Via scholarships and projects, Emir funded several school investments in local high schools and universities in Tuzla. Like Adnan, he said that he would love to come back to Bosnia, even if that would mean his profit would be less than in Austria. However, the issues of the unhealthy political atmosphere concern him. Still, for him, socio-cultural and emotional gains of return hold a priority to the economic ones, hinting at the deeply personal reasons as primary motivators for opening a business in Bosnia.

The following *Sutra bih se vratio* entrepreneurship case also comes from Tuzla, and it is about Muamer Babajic. Muamer owns a successful company in Munich, Germany, and has worked over a decade in the car industry. Lately, he has been transitioning toward mechanical engineering projects. In Tuzla, he opened a German Center for Robotics. This centre offers an educational platform for youth not just in Bosnia but also across the Western Balkans. Via educational and practical activities, young people from Tuzla and the broader region obtain the necessary understanding of the current knowledge in the field of advanced robotics and programming. Muamer remarks that his objective is to stop the brain drain, not just from Bosnia but also other former Yugoslav countries like Serbia and Croatia, and to invest in youth in the region. Interestingly, Muamer says that it is more profitable to invest in *naši*, than in the expensive labour force in Western Europe. *Naši* is a term that is culturally present in the everyday language of post-Yugoslav countries. It refers to the ‘less nationally minded “imaginative community” in which post-Yugoslav consciousness exists and is sustained in part by the Estrada and tabloid media’ (Archer, 2012: 127). Contrary to other entrepreneurs, which mainly view Bosnia as the only homeland, Muamer’s investment motives might come from still present Yugoslavism in the Bosnian diaspora. Nevertheless, it is unclear did this Yugoslavism – the partially failed idea of a peculiar unity and shared imaginary of former socialist Yugoslavia *narodi* (peoples) (Djokic, 2003), emerge as a result of opening a business in Bosnia, or was already present before the initial development of the entrepreneurship idea. Additional ambiguity rises as Muamer refers to the territory of former Yugoslavia states as the ‘Western Balkans,’ currently the dominant term in the political discourse on the post-Yugoslavia region.

According to *Sutra bih se vratio* stories, some diaspora entrepreneurs demonstrate a nearly melancholic dynamic of opening a business in Bosnia, voicing a desire to return permanently. However, none of them embarked on that journey. This contradiction might be clarified by some comments of these entrepreneurs that the business climate in Bosnia is not as good as in countries where they live now. Therefore, the idea of coming back to live in Bosnia remains trapped in the liminal space of potentiality where the abovementioned entrepreneurs hope the overall socio-political situation in Bosnia will get better. The exception is Muamer's story which does not incorporate a nostalgic impulse but is concretely dealing with current economic and geopolitical issues in Bosnia. Still, the dominant motive stays – that of return.

'Hocu kuci'

Multiple examples of investment and diaspora entrepreneurship of ex-Yugoslavia countries have been presented in the regionally popular video series by the Al Jazeera Balkans named *Hocu kuci* (I want to go home). The show has entered the fourth season of being on the air, presenting more than 60 successful ex-Yugoslavia diaspora members returning to their homelands. *Hocu kuci* includes actors, musicians, academics, writers, people in business, and entrepreneurs that came back, in most cases, after fleeing the region due to the 1992 – 1995 war.

One of the latest episodes called 'Genes and your own home' (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2020a) brought a major success story about a Bosnian entrepreneur Izudin Ahmetlic that founded and developed the HIFA Oil conglomerate with the headquarters in Tesanj, a small industrial town in Bosnia. Izudin, who made it to the *Forbes* list of the world's wealthiest people, spread the HIFA Oil corporation to the so-called sister companies Euro Roal, Euro Metal, Euro Stil, Euro Power Petrobit, Birol Slovenia, and LB. Profile in Germany. He even bought / founded the EuroFly, a new aviatic firm in Bosnia (Klix, 2020). Izudin, who employs around half a thousand people in Bosnia, notes that he aspires to bring highly educated people, both Bosnians and non-Bosnians from abroad, to share and implement their knowledge in his companies. Still, most employees are locals or young Bosnians from Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy, that came back precisely because of Izudin's mission, as they refer to it, which is to help develop his hometown. Nevertheless, HIFA Oil also has a well-established and powerful transnational, primarily European, network of businesses, counting predominantly on collaborating with countries with a vast

Bosnian diaspora, like Slovenia and Germany. Interestingly, while pondering on the so-called 'Tesanj's miracle', as the industrial success of this city is referred to in Bosnia, Ahmetlic says it is not Tesanj's miracle, but the miracle of Tesnjaci, people from that small town. He adds that 'their mothers taught them (young Tešnjaci) not hedonism, but hard work', so they would return to contribute to the local community (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2020a). In this short remark, Izudin merges the notions of gender and motherhood in Bosnia with labour and capitalism, all within the context of the local identity-building process of Tesnjaci.

Another two cases that explicitly mention nostalgia as a driver toward investments in Bosnia are Edin Dacic and Tomislav Ladan. They came back from Switzerland and Germany and opened companies in Bosnia and Serbia (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2020b), demonstrating that diaspora's business endeavours transit the nation-state borders in some cases. They both mention they desired to feel less nostalgic, so they founded companies in their home countries. Edin and Tomislav left Bosnia as children, hence not having a rich memory about it. Nevertheless, they claim they missed Bosnia since they remember. Similarly to them, Milorad Krstic (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2020c) has decided to return from Germany to his hometown Bijeljina in the northeast of Bosnia. He reinvested in a food company that was in substantial debt, as many companies that went through the corrupted privatisation process are. On the contrary to Edin, Tomislav, and Miroslav, Vernisa Rejhan Icindic invested in Bosnia but stayed in Sweden, as that is where she grew up and got her education (Al Jazera Balkans, 2020c). Another Bosnian-Swede is featured in the episode 'IT i Voda' (IT and Water), that of Senad Santic, who has returned to Bosnia to his hometown, Mostar, and started a software engineering and coding company (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2020d). Contrary to the case of Vernisa, this Bosnian-Swede decided to resettle in Bosnia to ensure growth of his company.

Interestingly, in all the above-mentioned cases the topics of the socio-political obstacles of the Bosnian administration and other post-Yugoslav countries, like Serbia and Croatia, have been emphasised. Entrepreneurs mentioned above reflected either subtly and partially or explicitly on the stress and challenges of navigating complex administrative procedures and formal and non-formal interactions with local communities and representatives. Herein lies one of the main issues of diaspora entrepreneurship – the murky in-between spaces of sociopolitical individual – local elites – institution trialogue in Bosnian society. These spaces are marked by specific cultural practices in Bosnia called *štela* and *veze* (connections). Brkovic (2017: 7 – 8)

traces the concept's origins in the local word *svijet* (social world), noting that it is 'a certain kind of sociality "with a purpose,"' where people in Bosnia use *veze* and štele 'in their encounters with public institutions to translate across the bureaucratic language of citizenship and the language of personalized relations and vice versa'. These relationships are legally blurry but culturally accepted. *Štela* and *Veza* can commonly be found in what Efendic, Pugh, and Adnett (2011: 532) refer to as 'mutually endogenous relationship between confidence in formal institutions and reliance on informal institutions.' All three actors in the individual – local elites – institutions myriad engage in semi-official agreements whose aim is to provide benefits, primarily economic or political ones, to all the parties. In *Hocu kuci* cases, some saw mentioned practices as a step backwards and an obstacle for investing. In contrast, others accepted this as nearly a cultural norm required to run any business in Bosnia or the region still suffering from the post-socialist era's systematic cultural, political, and economic failures.

Many diaspora entrepreneurs, precisely while reflecting on the failed transition in the post-1992 period, unravelled additional motive of their investments – Yugo-nostalgia, ambioguous nostalgic emotionality toward the times of SFR Yugoslavia. However, as Velikonja (2013: 362) argues, Yugo-nostalgia in Bosnia and Herzegovina is particular, coming with social criticism of nationalism, corruption, capitalism and transition, among others. It is essential to note that this critical Yugo-nostalgia is a perspective closer to young Bosnian diaspora entrepreneurs. Young Bosnians presented in this study predominantly grew up in the so-called 'western' states as those of the European Union or welfare states of Scandinavia. Therefore, they have not been previously exposed, at least not to such an extent, to sociocultural and political issues common for Bosnia (corruption, nepotism, štela's, etc.). Consequently, coming back to Bosnia, even part-time, introduced them to novel, unfamiliar fields and social strata to navigate.

In contrast to other newly opened businesses, the HIFA Oil case carries additional complexity. It merges the ideas of success that are fundamental to the notion of entrepreneurship and links it to a transgenerational transfer of specific nostalgia blended with the concept of firm local identity, driving the analysis toward translocalism rather than mere transnationalism. Moreover, this case is calling, at least partially, for the understanding of the concept of long-distance nationalism in terms of Glick-Schiller (2005: 570) – as a set of identity claims that connects a group of people living in various countries through the imagination of a specific place as

their ancestral home. Therefore, local and trans-local nostalgia come as peculiar submotives of diasporic entrepreneurship. Simultaneously, the long-distance nationalism is extremely centred toward the fact that almost every case presented in this subchapter detects the vision of investment to one's previous hometown or the hometown of one's parents.

Finally, there is specific binarity in Bosnian diaspora entrepreneurship. While some businesses present transnational investments, the others are only Bosnia-directed. Furthermore, there are those entrepreneurs who return permanently to Bosnia and those who are conducting and overviewing their business through transnational spaces of home and host countries, like in the case of Bosnian-Swedes. Additionally, entrepreneurship appears to be centred on pre-migration places of living, giving us insight into the effect that home, although long lost, has in the decision-making process to invest.

Diaspora Invest: T*oward strategic approach to BIH diaspora entrepreneurship*

Diaspora Invest acts as a USAID-supported initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, aiming to foster investments from Bosnians abroad. The project has three main elements: a) creation of the coherent strategy for diaspora engagement implemented on the country, entity, cantonal, and local level; b) assisting early-stage entrepreneurs; c) networking and community-building (USAID, 2020). According to the Fact Sheet: Diaspora Invest in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020: n/a), until February 2020, 'this USAID project has provided support to 86 diaspora companies throughout the country, generated approximately $9.5 million in new investments, and created more than 277 jobs.'

Further, an online platform Diasporainvest.ba has been established within this project. This website offers assistance to those interested in investing in Bosnia, besides keeping information about the latest ongoing projects. The platform grants users an opportunity to register and get information about applying for potential funding. Moreover, it correspondingly unfolds a chance for supplementary training events and educational activities for potential entrepreneurs. Besides, Diasporainvest.ba provides an updated overview of events and conferences related to the project's networking objectives.

On the 18th of December 2020, the International Day of Migration, Diaspora Invest presented a publication called 'A story about successful diaspora investments in Bosnia and Herzegovina,' where more than 120 companies that the USAID sup-

ported, which resulted in over 350 new jobs, were presented (Business Magazine, 2020). This implies that the Diaspora Invest has continued building progress even in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, according to the Performance Evaluation of the USAID / BIH Diaspora Invest Activity Report in 2019 it seems that the path toward success is not as smooth as it appears in the media. The entrepreneurs from the diaspora have, once again, noted the multiple impediments and difficulties they face when it comes to the investment processes in Bosnia. Table 1, attached below, demonstrates worrying numbers about complicated political systems to navigate, which was the problem for more than ⅔ of the investors. Likewise, more than half of them added issues of the administration's lack of official support and an unfavourable economic situation. Further, around ⅓ of the respondents noted a lack of reliable information on conducting business in Bosnia. Yet, there are no official namings of štela's and veza's.

The reasons mentioned above and presented in Table 1 have profoundly affected the Bosnian diaspora's overall development approaches toward its homeland. These socio-political and cultural barriers have resulted in heavily fragmented and unorganised investment procedures in Bosnia, besides the massive support of the Diaspora Invest initiative. However, there are still numerous cases of diaspora entrepreneurship that managed to overcome systemic obstacles, predominantly in the domain of small and medium-sized businesses, as the project's reports demonstrate.

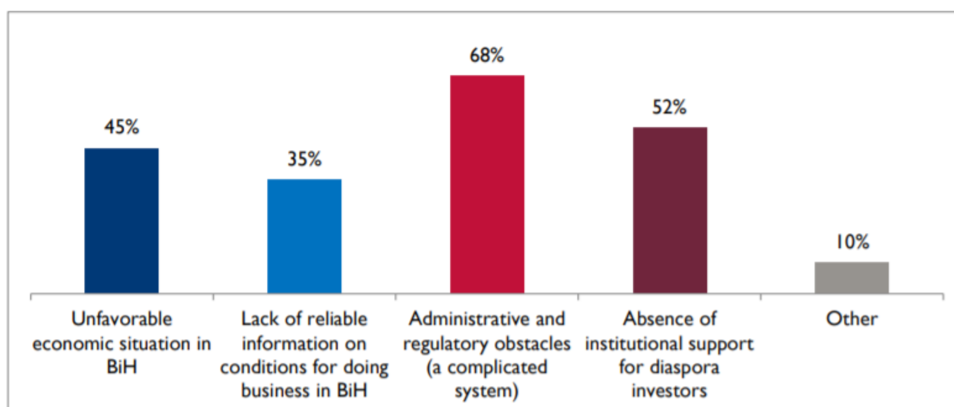

Table 1. Exhibit 38 from the Performance Evaluation of the USAID / BIH Diaspora Invest Activity Report (2019): 61.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, new spaces in the Bosnian migration–development nexus emerged. They have been led by a wave of diaspora entrepreneurs who opened businesses in their homeland, either transnational-operating or Bosnia-centered. Transnational-operating companies present 'moved' or expanded businesses via opening branches or field offices in Bosnia, commonly after being established in host countries. On the other hand, Bosnia-centered companies focus on operating within the national borders of Bosnia, aiming to foster growth state-wide.

Besides typological differences of entrepreneurship, this study mapped two categories of entrepreneurs: development-business oriented and nostalgia-driven. However, the lines between these two groups are profoundly blurred. In fact, nostalgia clearly holds a pedestal role as the primary driver for investment. Interestingly, this melancholic feeling of missing homeland, sometimes embodied in memories about the former SFR Yugoslavia, is present among entrepreneurs who were very young when they left or fled Bosnia. Another marker of diaspora entrepreneurship in Bosnia is long-distance nationalism in the context of translocalism.

In almost all the cases presented in this brief study, what is noticable is the narrative of 'successful Bosnians'. These Bosnians are the 'heroes' who made it abroad through 'hard work, studying, self-sacrificing' and came back to contribute to their homeland, creating a *per aspera ad astra*[1] narrative. However, it appears that these 'heroes' are mostly discursively shaped. In reality, they face multiple barriers of navigating complex in-between spaces of Bosnia's social, political, and cultural melange, which remains marked by unclear administrative strategies and bureaucratic labyrinths marked by štela's and veza's.

Still, diaspora businesses are becoming a turning point in the migration development nexus of Bosnia. Moreover, the multiple successful transnational companies of Bosnian diaspora members imply that this nexus is in the new stages of entrepreneurship-oriented dynamics. However, at the end of this paper, we should go back to the notion of migrant struggle noted at the beginning, and pose a question – why are Bosnian diaspora entrepreneurs being shaped and presented as successful? Is behind this celebration of their achievements a successful economic and cultural integration and navigation of home-host society dynamics or is this heroisation an

[1] Per aspera ad astra is a Latin saying meaning 'through hardships to stars'. This motto emphasises that one must overcome multiple challenges on the road to success.

outcome of doctrines of the neoliberal market, which places the additional burden to the already challenging position of being a migrant resulting in glorifying the migrant struggle, instead of challenging it?

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CHRISTMAS IN SPAIN, ALONE: INDUSTRIAL RESTRUCTURING, FISCAL RETRENCHMENT AND LABOUR MIGRATION IN NEOLIBERAL ROMANIA

*Gerard A. Weber**

Abstract: This paper examines the impact of both the privatisation and restructuring, or outright liquidation, of manufacturing facilities and the prolonged reduction in public spending in the post-communist epoch on blue-collar people in Galati, Romania. It is based upon circa 30 months of anthropological research from 2004 to 2019. Galati, a moderately-sized city in Eastern Romania, underwent economic and demographic expansion during the communist period, the construction of a steel plant and other factories attracting agrarian labourers from villages to perform industrial work that offered higher wages and better entitlements than available from farming. The neoliberal transformation of the economy that began after the 1989 revolution has diminished the city's appeal due to well-paid work in industry all but evaporating and revenue for the public sector drying up – employment upon which working-class people can maintain families is largely gone and state support for housing, healthcare services, education, research and development, infrastructure and more has been severely trimmed. These changes have resulted in blue-collar people being forced to locate work outside the city, often abroad, on terms that can be very unfavourable and for families who live in the city to manage as best they can in spite of reductions in the public sector. The paper presents ethnography of the multifaceted consequences of these shifts, including social fragmentation, marooning of elderly kin, working retirees and more. In conclusion, the suggestion is made that political leaders begin paying closer attention to the conditions of working-class people for the betterment of the entire society.
Keywords: Romania, labour migration, Spain, loneliness, Christmas

Introduction

By the time I met Andu[1] in 2019, he had for some years been living in the United Kingdom, where he was earning a salary with some benefits working in a care home

* The research on which this paper is based was supported by a Fulbright Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship and grants from the Professional Staff Congress at the City University of New York.

[1] All names in this text are pseudonyms. I have also altered minor elements of the lives of people presented here without disrupting the integrity of the accounts in order to ensure their anonymity.

for the elderly, an occupation that labour migrants not only from his home country, Romania, but also numerous other emerging market economies, were performing at the centre in which he was employed. His contract with the facility required 48 hours of work a week, which he split into four 12-hour days, and involved feeding, cleaning and changing the clothing of residents sometimes with support from colleagues and at other times on his own. Despite the strenuousness of the work, he often took on additional hours in order to bring in more money. He also managed his budget by living in a house with many other people, all themselves migrant labourers as well, sharing with me pictures of the place during our first conversation at the home of old friends of mine and his in Galati, a city in eastern Romania where he was born and grew up.

At first glance, his situation seemed a promising one even with the demands of the job, and indeed he was grateful for the opportunity to earn a decent salary compared to what he could earn in Romania, delighted that he would qualify for retirement benefits in the United Kingdom, generally seemed to enjoy the company of the people with whom he lived and had good relations with his workmates, showing me a photograph of a convivial Christmas celebration in which they had all participated. Yet further conversation with him on that first night and later in person and on the phone revealed that the work in England, although one of the best options he could find given scant opportunities in Galati as a result of the privatisation and closure of manufacturing plants, had its downsides. It prolonged his estrangement from a career in industry that had allowed him to apply his training as a mechanic, a process which had begun years earlier when he lost his job due to downsizing. He had initially taken up a position with a security firm in Galati, but the pay was poor and the schedule taxing. Still, he stuck with it because his mother needed his assistance as a result of a long illness, and he was her only child who was available to look after her. It was only after her death that he began searching for work beyond the city and found the offer in the UK. 'There is nothing here', he told me over beer at a café during another visit he made to Galati later that year, meaning that there was no work for him in the city. This had forced him to migrate for at least a moderately decent income, but it entailed leaving behind family, friends and a place to which he belonged, a break that grew even more acute during the COVID-19 pandemic because of quarantining requirements, which, if he had left, would have interrupted his work schedule, undermining the very reason for which he had made the move in the first place. Adding to the sting he felt because of the separation from his life

in Galati, years earlier, Andu had abandoned a dream of becoming a musician, the opportunity to build a career from which was even more limited. Despite being characteristically ebullient and forward-thinking, testament to resilience in the face of immense change, Andu had experienced considerable loss in his life. But not only was work as a carer in a distant country not what Andu had dreamt of, his departure was also a deficit for an economy that had invested in him.

Andu was hardly alone in his relocation from Romania to the UK, many other people from the country having made the same one over the past two decades, including a number of other people I know from Galati. While less than 8,000 people who were born in Romania were counted in the 2001 Census in the UK (OECD, n.d.), by 2019 the figure was an estimated 427,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Already by 2018, people born in Romania made up the second largest group of immigrants in the UK, only Polish citizens outnumbering them (Sandford, 2018). And Andu's primary reason for heading to the country – lack of gainful employment in Romania – was the same as the motivation given by other immigrants to the UK from Romania (e.g., Briggs and Dobre, 2014). And like many of them, he took up essential service work that many non-immigrant citizens would rarely consider accepting, especially given the income he earned from it.

The principal goal of this paper is to present ethnography of the work and social lives of members of the working class from Galati, Romania, in order to illustrate how the transformation to a sharply pro-business variety of capitalism in the aftermath of communist rule has affected them. Based upon a nearly two-decade research commitment in Galati as an anthropologist, it demonstrates the ramifications for working-class people of the momentous shift of the economy since 1989 from one in which large, state-owned industrial enterprises were dominant to one in which manufacturing facilities were privatised and restructured, if not entirely gutted. Rather than gaining *en masse* from this fundamental transformation, working-class people have been compelled to accept threadbare employment in the local economy if they have not succeeded in qualifying for the few, highly competitive viable positions in Galati, or they have been forced to locate work in other regions of Romania or abroad, where opportunities are vaster yet can be undesirable. The ethnography as well includes some examples of the fallout from deep cuts in revenue for the public sector accompanying this transformation, which has further undermined the possibility for working-class families to have reasonably comfortable lives in the city. The paper concludes by briefly suggesting strategies for potentially reversing

the impact of these changes, thereby allowing blue-collar men and women residing in Galati to have more gratifying, productive lives than is currently possible.

Industrial restructuring

Galati is a city with an acclaimed history (Paltenea, 1994; 1995) of approximately a quarter of a million inhabitants according to the most recent national census (Institutul National de Statistica, 2011)[2], its role as a major port on the Danube having been central to its development into one of Romania's most economically important urban centres in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Ardeleanu, 2017), which is evident in the imposing architecture in the centre of the city even if today some of it is in a state of considerable disrepair. The city's significance was elevated further after communist rule began in 1947, when it was chosen by no less than Gheorghiu-Dej, Romania's first communist leader, as a hub for the building of light and heavy industries, including a herculean steel manufacturing plant (Brezeanu, 1980), among the largest in the Soviet bloc. This designation had profound economic and social ramifications. At first, many people who were employed at the plant, in support industries, at the vastly expanded port, in food processing facilities, and elsewhere in the burgeoning industrial sector, commuted from village homes to their jobs on a daily or weekly basis, a phenomenon observed in other parts of Romania (Cole, 1981; Moskoff, 1978), but over time apartment dwellings, hospitals, schools, mass transit, and urban infrastructure were constructed, allowing people to migrate on a permanent basis from their rural communities, resulting in an increase in the population to 325,000 at the time of the revolution from 88,000 in the immediate post-war period (Giurescu et al., 2003). The lives of the vast majority of people throughout Romania were improved in this epoch as well by unprecedented allocation of public goods and services, including training in vocational and technical fields (Gilberg, 1975), consultations and treatment by medical professionals and access to pharmaceutical drugs (Kaser, 1976: 171 – 197), the allocation of pensions and other entitlements (Ghimpu et al., 1998) and much more. The stage was set in the 1980s for revolution, however, when extreme austerity measures were imposed by the Ceausescu regime in order to wipe away the country's mounting debt that had been accumulated to a large extent from loans taken out in the 1970s and early

[2] Plans to conduct a national census in 2021 were postponed until 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1980s to purchase increasingly costly petroleum, which was needed to fuel industry given that domestic sources had dwindled (Pop, 2006). The population suffered due to this policy, basic goods and services becoming scarce, and industry could not remain competitive globally, requirements to substitute imports of technology with domestically-produced varieties as part of the campaign to reduce debt severely diminishing the quality of Romanian manufactures (Ban, 2012).

When the revolution took place in late 1989, Galati was already declining as a result of this austerity, a situation that only grew worse with the implementation of policies generated by a series of post-revolutionary governments that was urged by international institutions (Gabor, 2011; Pasti, 2006; Pop, op. cit.). Instead of stoking the regeneration of lagging industries through appropriate investment, an approach recommended by a diverse committee formed at the national level in 1990 (Government Commission, 1990, cited in Gabor, 2011), factories in Galati were either entirely forsaken or privatised and restructured, the steel manufacturing plant, for example, being sold to the global steel tycoon Lakshmi Mittal in 2001 at a staggeringly low price (Iordachita, 2015: 101). This led to mass unemployment of blue-collar workers in the city as a result of layoffs and early retirements, a process that unfolded in many other industrial centres in Romania (Banica et al., 2017; Kideckel, 2002; Popescu, 2014). Foreign direct investment began coursing into Romania in the mid-2000s (Ban, 2016; Popescu, 2012) after leaders showed their willingness to refashion the economy toward the export of components needed in global supply chains (Haar, 2010). This nudged the country toward a more diverse production profile in the automotive, metallurgical, electrical and related industries, yet the change was not sufficient for ending a disproportionate reliance on labour-intensive industries in textiles, leather, food processing, transport equipment and other light manufacturing that offered jobs of relatively low pay (Stan and Erne, 2014: 15). The large number of blue-collar workers who had formerly laboured in heavy industry making wages on which families could maintain at least a modest standard of living thereby had no place to turn. And the expansion of service sector employment in this period did not make up the difference felt by the loss of employment in light and heavy industries, wages in service work remaining low in comparison to those that were available in economies to the west (Stan and Erne, ibid.). Making matters even more unsustainable for working class people, unions began losing considerable leverage, barriers to negotiations on wages, benefits, schedules and working conditions rising (Adascalitei and Muntean, 2019; Kideckel, 2001, 2008; Stoiciu, 2016).

Fiscal retrenchment

Concomitant with this transformation of the work environment in Galati since the revolution, the city's public services have been deprived of sufficient revenue to meet a broad array of societal needs, a problem characteristic more widely of Romania over this period (Ban and Rusu, 2019). Housing, health care services, education, public transit, social welfare entitlements, urban infrastructure, research and development, the administration of pensions and other social insurance benefits and more all show signs of protracted neglect, lessening the quality of life in Galati and episodically reducing the already limited household budgets of working-class families. As a result, these deficits can be stressors for many urban residents, some examples of which emerge in the ethnography presented in this paper. I have also observed them provoking considerable disdain and even anger toward public officials, who are faulted for misallocating public money, if not outright benefiting from it personally, and thereby draining resources needed to make life better for all urban residents. Examples that follow here of the ramifications of the depletion of the public purse give a sense of the extent of the problem.

One consequential fallout is the relative scarcity of state-subsidised, affordable housing in Romania, mortgages on homes and apartments being out of reach for many people (Briciu, 2016).[3] Although families were given the opportunity to purchase at reduced rates apartments in which they were residing under communist rule not long after the revolution (Pop, op. cit.) – which has played a central role in making Romania the EU member state with the largest percentage of people owning their housing (OECD, 2019) – younger people cannot easily move out on their own, contributing to 2021 estimates that housing is among the most crowded in the European Union and qualifying Romania as the EU member state with the most 'severe housing deprivation rate' in 2018 – 2019 (Eurostat, 2021). I have observed many examples of adult children living with parents or living in households in which they were raised after their parents pass away, which in fact can be a source of security in an otherwise bruising economic environment although it can also make it difficult for young people to start their own families. Public housing is a scarce commodity as well in Romania relative to other EU member states due to a comparative lack

[3] In order to change this, *Prima Casa* (the First House) program was launched in 2009, offering subsidised mortgages to people in search of housing. The success of the program, which remains in effect, is widely debated (e.g., Trimbitas, 2012).

of investment in this sector (OECD, op. cit.), media coverage of the hurdles people must jump in order to qualify for such housing and of its mediocre conditions reflecting this lacuna (e.g., Melinte, 2017; Ravdan, 2017). At the same time, homelessness is calculated to be a growing problem, especially in urban areas (Briciu, 2014).

The public health care system has been hampered throughout the post-communist era due to a lack of sufficient financing, Romania continually spending a considerably lower percentage and amount of GDP on the sector than is the case among other EU members (Vladescu et al., 2016). The implications of this are manifold, including a relative dearth of medical supplies and equipment at public clinics and hospitals; a requirement for patients or their kin to make out-of-pocket purchases from private pharmacies of basic medical supplies needed in their own care or in that of a family member; and, despite an increase in recent years in salaries among health care workers, the persistence of the expectation that one make informal payments for consultations and treatment, a practice that has beleaguered the population for year, sustains (Moldovan and van de Welle, 2013; Stan, 2012; Weber, 2015).

Vocational and technical training in schools has as well been at times forsaken in the post-1989 era, making it difficult for students interested and adept in this area to gain the skills necessary in everchanging local and global employment landscapes. Professional development for teachers is limited, technologically advanced equipment is insufficient and training of instructors in industrial relations is inadequate (Oproiu and Litoiu, 2019). Vocational and technical schools thereby hold a position of low status socially relative to higher-level secondary education (Pantea, 2021). This problem extends into the workplace, statistics on the number of adults who are offered technical training by their employers being considerably lower in Romania than is the case in other EU members (Balan, 2019).

Public transportation has been orphaned in this era, making getting around the city at times a trying affair due to occasional overcrowding and the off-schedule arrival of transit, with which I have had personal experiences on numerous occasions. The deterioration of the city's fleet is further manifest in breakdowns, engine fires, derailments, technical malfunctions and more that are regularly covered in the media (e.g., Baciu, 2020; Melinte, 2020; Miron, 2020). It is a source of considerable grievance on the part of residents as I have learned from comments they have made to me and have written in response to reports of such problems. Even if the rate at which they occur is still lower than in other EU member states (Eurostat,

2020), automobile purchases have risen substantially in Romania, used cars, such as Volkswagen, common on the streets of Galati. The flood of cars has propagated its own problems, however, including crowded streets that make it harder in the absence of bus lanes for public transit to efficiently move people around the city, an increase in climate-altering pollution (although the state offers subsidies for the purchase of electric and hybrid vehicles), sidewalks that are blocked to people with disabilities and a multitude of added expenditures for families.

Administration of the public sector has experienced certain disregard in this era too, austerity measures enacted in response to the global financial crisis in 2008 – 2009 exacting a particularly severe toll on it. They included sharp reductions in positions and wages and the freezing of promotions, which had many ramifications, including corrosion in the quality of services, superficial reforms to the system and an overall drop in consumption by public sector employees who make up a large percentage of the workforce of Romania (Vasile, 2013). A couple I know who work in public administration in Galati have spoken about the hardship especially of that era, pointing the finger at President Traian Basescu's regime at the time for the downturn, as various scholars have done as well (Poenaru and Rogozanu, 2014). Yet even after the crisis, funds for the effective operation of public services remain a trickle, as witnessed for example in the delay in carrying out long-needed reforms of the public pension system, which now serves over five million people and is widely known for its inequitable allocation of benefits. One does though periodically hear of promising reform initiatives (e.g., Radiojurnal, 2021).

The marginalisation of the public domain in the post-communist era is manifest in Galati in innumerable additional ways about which much could be written: from the lack of affordable home health care services for the elderly that we witnessed in Andu's need to be the primary caregiver to his ailing mother to urban infrastructure failures, as occurred in 2019 when, for example, two heavily travelled streets collapsed within days of one another and a watermain break severed access to potable water for a sizeable part of the urban population for about a 24-hour period. From the still minute pensions that working-class retirees earn despite in many cases having committed decades of labour to building society, pushing them to work on the informal market, about which I have written before (Weber, 2014) and portrayals of which I give here. To be sure, these and the other examples I have succinctly referred to here, demand further investigation than this short paper allows; however, the overall point remains that not only have employment opportunities been vastly

altered for blue-collar men and women in the post-communist period – in many cases sending them abroad to perform gruelling work in the absence of kin and community – but the public domain has been deserted in this epoch, adding to the strain that an already side-lined people experience daily. Additional ethnography based on long-term contact I have had with other members of the working class further confirms this point.

Cyclical labour migration

In early 2019, I became acquainted with Tiberiu, an unemployed man in his forties with training as an electrical engineer, who was awaiting word on a temporary position at a meatpacking facility in Western Europe. He explained that he had for long tried to locate permanent, decently paid employment locally, but to no avail, his CVs repeatedly receiving no reply. Soon after our initial meeting, the job at the abattoir became available and, despite some uncertainty as to what the experience would entail, Tiberiu began the long trek by bus to the facility early one morning. As has been documented in cases of other workers in meatpacking and other food processing operations in Western Europe (e.g., Cosma, 2020), the position proved untenable for a number of reasons, however. Among the most serious was that he did not receive the wages he had initially been offered, his earnings a few hundred euro lower without a legitimate explanation. The accommodations he was provided, for which he was charged, were untenable because he was housed with two other men whose schedules were different from his, making it impossible to get a good night's sleep. The plant was frigid, requiring an extra layer of clothing for comfort, yet he forwent purchasing an insulated vest because he wanted to save money, his employers not providing the vests free of charge. As a result of these and other conditions, including that the work was far below his skill level, he terminated the contract early, returning to Galati. Yet this plunged him back into the same situation he was in prior to accepting the position: unemployed and living with his retired parents, which for personal reasons was difficult, with no immediate prospects for work. After some months back in the city, he was gone again, however, to another Western European country, filling a vacancy in a facility that gave him the opportunity to apply his skills. The pay, accommodations and food were all better than those at the meatpacking plant, yet he was only temporarily replacing workers who were on their summer vacations. Consequently, a month

later he was back in Galati, repeating the same effort of finding work abroad and residing with his parents. When I left the city in early 2020, he was still there, hoping for word of yet another engagement abroad. Soon thereafter, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, yet this did not deter him from looking for work abroad, a mechanical engineering job in Spain for which he qualified becoming available. After receiving a negative test for the virus, he was allowed to board a plane, which meant that when I called him on Christmas Day, he was staying alone in a hotel in Spain, colleagues with whom he had shared the room having departed, but it would likely not be long before he would for the third time in less than two years be back again in Galati without work.

Tiberiu's employment experiences were hardly unique, the performance of temporary, low-paid, at times arduous work in agriculture and industry in Western Europe having become widespread among blue-collar workers from the city, reflecting the overall flexibility that has come to define employment among many people of the same social class background from Romania, a pattern consistent with one observed globally in the neoliberal era, to which numerous scholars have attested (e.g., Calhoun and Derluguian, 2011; Harvey, 2005; Rothstein, 2007). And the implications of such work were far beyond the concerns that he immediately shared with me. The positions did not offer pension benefits, portending penury in retirement since it meant that he would have gaps in his contributions to the social insurance system in Romania. The work further made it all but impossible for him to form a stable social life, including starting his own family, which exacerbated a feeling he had that he was a failure. But it was not only out of the question for him to set up his own household. In other insidious ways he was treated to a life on the margins, as for example when he told me he had forgone getting the flu vaccine since his family doctor had run out of them and he could not afford to purchase one from a pharmacy. Harmed as well by Tiberiu's work was his mother, who was left brooding over how he was doing at such great distance in places unfamiliar to him. It was no wonder that religion was a source of succour, as I witnessed on many occasions, including when he invited me to meet him at a Romanian Orthodox Church one day. Entering the church, I found him sitting in silence in what appeared to be deep thought, an appreciated break, it seemed, from an otherwise unstable life.

'I'm Used to Having Them at My Table'

Disquiet about scattered children was a matter I have observed among other retirees. This includes Raluca, a woman I met not long after I began doing research in 2004 and with whom I have stayed in touch since then. Now in her seventies, Raluca had held a career in the textile industry both during the communist period and in its aftermath, an occupation that involved long, busy hours with few opportunities for breaks, even for meals, and put her in close contact with a variety of toxic substances. Meanwhile, she raised three children all but on her own because under the communist regime her husband was employed in construction, which took him to different corners of the country for lengthy periods of time. As a result, in describing her life, Raluca declared at one point that she had been 'both the man and the woman' of her household. She was proud of her accomplishments, strongly believing that she had succeeded in raising her children to be morally upstanding, which included teaching them to carry out work dutifully, and that she had served the state and society loyally through her years of work in the textile mill.

Raluca was, however, discontent and even stressed in the post-communist era. A principal reason for this was that her children had departed Galati, having left for what by 2022 has proven to be the long term. Maintaining a good relationship with them, she received remittances from them and they even treated her to vacations in places she had never imagined visiting. Yet she profoundly disliked that they had not been able to build secure, independent lives in Galati, which was due to the lack of viable employment, a situation that she had hoped would change with Romania's accession to the European Union but that did not, on the contrary, labour migration in general intensifying subsequent to Romania becoming a member in 2007. 'I'm used to having them at my table', she said one day in 2004, but by then they were long gone, leaving her wondering how they were faring so far away. Raluca's life was also stressful because, despite the support from her children, she needed to supplement her pension from greater than three decades in the mill by taking up work post-retirement, pressure that felt especially unjustified to her given her commitment to her job. 'After all the work I've done,' she exasperatedly proclaimed one day, there she was still working, an experience I have seen among other working-class retirees in Galati (Weber, 2014).

More recently, Raluca has spent long periods of time, both prior to and during pandemic lockdowns, between Romania and the country where her children reside

in order to help out with caring for her grandchildren. This unpaid, domestic work brings her in close contact with her children and grandchildren, which brings her considerable happiness. Still, she is discontent about her separation from Romania. 'It's better in your own home,' she let me know, explaining that in the place where her children live, she lacks the deep social connections she built over her adulthood in Galati. Her grandchildren addressing her in a language that is not her own only exacerbates this sentiment. She knows, though, that there really is not much she can do to change the situation since conditions in Galati when it comes to work compared so unfavourably with those in the adopted country.

Besieged by the 'unravelling'

To some retirees separated from children on a near-permanent basis because of work they had taken up at some distance from Romania, Raluca's experiences would have seemed comparatively auspicious. This includes Stefan, whom I met one day while heading across the city on a bus in 2019, a chance encounter that grew into an acquaintanceship, the two of us periodically meeting at cafes in the city.

Stefan was a man in his 60s who had endured considerable adversity in the post-revolutionary years. He had held a job at the steel plant for around two decades but lost it not long before it was privatised, one of the many casualties of its downsizing. This pushed him onto the informal labour market or *la negru*, where he cobbled together an income from uncertain, poorly paid local employment. But less than a decade after attempting to sustain his family in this manner, he faced a mental health crisis, anxiety overwhelming him. It allowed him to qualify, only in his 50s, for a pension *pe caz de boala* or as a result of illness, yet the support he received was too miniscule for managing even basic household expenses. As a result, he spoke regularly about the trials he faced budgeting for essentials, the cost of food, rent, gas canisters for his stove, heat, water and cell phone hounding him as it did numerous other working-class retirees in the city – many far worse than he, Stefan acknowledged – a reality of the post-1989 period that I had encountered in earlier research (Weber, 2009).

In addition to his career terminating earlier than expected, Stefan's family all but broke apart. His marriage ended in the 1990s as a result of domestic strife associated with the bleak economic climate that pervaded society in that decade, and his three children later headed abroad for work. Contact with them was very infrequent,

nor did it seem could they support him with remittances because they appeared to be grappling themselves with basic expenses, the veracity of which was all but impossible for Stefan to determine but which may well have been credible given the marginalised economic situations of many labour migrants in Western Europe. What this meant was that Stefan was largely on his own in managing his situation. He did what he could, though, to improve his situation. This included applying for a recalculation of his pension to a higher grade on account of the conditions in which he had worked, as well as the years he had put in and the kind of work he had performed. He was certain he qualified for an upgrade yet repeatedly ran into impediments when he approached the local pension bureau to have his file evaluated for it, experiences that likely reflected the long-term malnourishment of the public sector described earlier. The psychological ramifications of this were deeply troubling, as I observed one day when I met up with Stefan not long after he had gone to the pension bureau, only to be turned away again, his case unresolved. His was seething and looked broken by the encounter, the last thing he needed in a life already encumbered with chronic stress. It reconfirmed a conclusion he had drawn when I had asked him one day how he would describe the post-Decembrist epoch and he replied that Romania had undergone *destramare* (an unravelling).

But he did not give up, instead trying to bring in additional income by working informally, taking advantage of daywork in construction and refurbishment, farming and delivery services. The work, however, could not be counted on, was often very draining and paid negligibly. Stefan regularly waited for phone calls in the morning to learn about an opportunity for the day, and he had days, some with temperatures over 32 degrees Celsius, in which he carried 40-kilogram bags of cement up ladders, harvested grapes or delivered large sacks of potatoes for derisory amounts of money – from work in construction on one day, for example, he earned 20 RON or the equivalent of about $4.75, too little to even purchase needed credit for his cell phone. It was undeniable that he, like other indigent retirees, was being exploited, local enterprises knowing they could offer little to retirees because pensions were as low as they were, making even a small amount of money matter. Reflecting this, at least one of the local papers regularly had help-want ads for electricians, gardeners, bricklayers and other positions that were directed specifically at retirees. True, the pay they offered, usually 100 RON or $23.75 for a day's work, was more than what Stefan ever described earning, but the amount was still hardly spectacular and may anyway have come with various qualifications that would have to be confirmed with

further examination. Women wanted a man who could offer more financial security than he could, Stefan implied at one point as an explanation for why he was unattached, a source of loneliness for him.

Conclusion

This paper documents the implications of the transformation of the labour market in Galati, Romania and the withdrawal of the state with ethnography I have composed from informal interactions and interviews with working-class men and women I have in many cases known for very long periods of time. Albeit emblematic of the changes that have occurred in this period, this ethnography is but a selection from a much larger pool of people with whom I have had the privilege of spending time, which, for example, includes a family that for the time being at least has closed the door on the city, heading westward, after trying to survive for a period on low wage work and to manage the cost of health care needs in a punishing environment; a young man who copes with an unforgiving work schedule, yet takes comfort in living with his aging parents; a couple who consider heading abroad out of concern that their forthcoming retirement will lead to impoverishment; and a young man who complains about not have time for his family due to a demanding schedule. All of these and other experiences about which I have learned shed much-needed light on circumstances that have largely been overlooked by political leaders or that at the least have not been given adequate attention in developing social and economic policy that will benefit society broadly in the post-socialist epoch. This includes a number of deeply consequential tax policies, such as the enactment of a flat tax rate in 2005 (which, though revised over time, has largely remained in place until 2022), low effective taxes on enterprises (Ban, 2016) and the failure to pass a 'solidarity tax' in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the result in good measure of a drive to make Romania appealing to outside investors. Revenue that could be used to increase investment in industrial development and in a wide range of public services is thereby not as abundant as it could be even if European funds – such as nearly 30 billion euro in grants and loans that are becoming available via the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience (*Planul National de Redresare si Rezilienta,* PNRR) to assist Romania in overcoming the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – are sources of assistance in this area.

As I have shown in this paper, the implications of failure in this area have been substantial. Good-paying work in industry has become a rarity in places such as Galati and other formerly robust industrial centres, requiring people to go to other, more developed parts of the country or beyond Romania's borders to find employment. This has had many social, emotional and practical consequences. Kin are in less direct contact with one another than had been the case under the previous regime as I have seen with older people being left behind in Galati while their children depart for work, resulting in the elderly having to manage their needs on their own. Children have as well been separated from a parent or even two for long stretches of time, which has myriad, often detrimental effects. Meanwhile, cutbacks to the public sector in the post-socialist years have meant that basic goods and services are not available to marginalised sectors of the population or that they come with a cost that is prohibitive for them, health care services, housing and education standing out among those that have taken a particularly significant hit in the post-socialist era. All of this has created an underclass in Romania that cannot seamlessly meet fundamental needs, instead being pressured to cut back on essentials, in many cases experiencing chronic stress as result, while affluence has grown within other sectors of the population, especially well-educated people living in urban areas in Bucharest and Transylvania.

It is not just the social and material implications of these changes that matter to workers in Romania, however. Another major one is the political. Long-term exclusion from the fruits of society can develop an appeal for seductive, yet empty, political leaders and policies. This is arguably what has taken place in the United States with the assent of Donald Trump, who did little for workers while in office – industrial jobs, e.g., did not return to the United States – instead guiding the enactment of policy – the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, for example – that overwhelmingly served the wealthy. Yet, his popularity has remained solid among many in good measure simply because he criticizes the political establishment in language that is without airs. After decades of neoliberal policies generated by members of both major political parties that have exacerbated inequality far beyond levels that existed earlier in history, it is no wonder that such a person would be attractive to those who have been left out. Romania risks going down a similar road leading to rule by an authoritarian populist, its fledging democratic credentials likely to not weather the storm that Trump unleashed on the United States. Policymakers should therefore heed the messages stemming from these stories of all but forgotten people

and devise fiscal, monetary and industrial strategies that work for the entire citizenry of Romania, not just firms and the affluent, so as to move the country away from being a society in which the possibility of a decent life is all but impossible for a large percentage of people.

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UKRAINIAN IMMIGRATION TO BULGARIA IN THE LAST 30 YEARS – FROM MARITAL MIGRATION TO LABOUR MOBILITY*

Petko Hristov

Abstract: The paper traces development of various forms of Ukrainian immigration to Bulgaria over the past three decades. The initial educational migration of Bulgarians to Ukraine in the decades of late socialism was transformed into a reverse marital migration to Bulgaria, which evolved into labour immigration in certain sectors and educational migration of the young Bulgarians from the historical diaspora in Ukraine as students in Bulgarian universities in the early 1990s. Since the beginning of the new Millennium, and especially after Bulgaria was accepted in the EU in 2007, and the opening of the European labour market for Bulgarian citizens, our country has become an increasingly desirable destination for labour mobility – seasonal or permanent, for different groups of Ukrainian citizens. The abolition of the EU visa regime for Ukrainian citizens following 2017, and the deteriorating economic and social picture in Ukraine itself also contributed to this process. The paper attempts to forecast the dynamics of labour movements from Ukraine to Bulgaria in the coming years.
Keywords: labour mobility, immigration, Ukraine, diaspora, the tourist sector

Introduction

Migration has become a key issue and a challenge for Europe, whereby, it has dominated the European Union's policy and the individual member states' political programs for the last 30 years. The double transition process of the East European countries – on the one hand, towards the Western European model of liberal democracy; and at the same time, towards neoliberalism – i.e., the removal of the states' hegemony over the economy – conjuncts with the new phase of the development of capitalism and globalisation. In several countries (such as Bulgaria for example) all this was accompanied by the decomposition of numerous economic, political and social structures, which previously played a crucial role in society for more than forty years (Hristov, 2019: 29). Generally speaking, the integration of the Eastern

* This article is the result of my participation in the project 'Cultural Adaptation and Integration of Immigrants in Bulgaria' (ДН 20/8 – 11.12.2017), financed by the Bulgarian Scientific Fund. My special thanks go to Mila Maeva for the opportunity to publish the jointly collected materials.

European countries into the EU has proved to be both a goal and a means of transformation of pre-existing economic, social and political structures, on the one hand; and on the other, it has served towards the adoption of new symbolic modes of nation-building and the dialog with the 'others', where new meanings and contents are given to national identity (Angulo, 2008: 155).

This process of transformation of the former socialist bloc countries is developing both in-depth as a deepening of reforms, although with different speed and intensity in different countries, as well as a widening of geographical scope. Moreover, this transformation is necessitated by the rationale of the right civilisational choice. The collapse of multinational states such as the USSR or the former Yugoslavia has shown how the idea of the independent nation-state has been revived in place of internationalism and policies to create a 'new man' like the phoenix bird, whereby the citizens are linked in a variety of links, such as a national language, culture, etc. At the same time, after each of these countries gained the status of an independent nation-state, its elite sought ways of becoming a member of one or several transnational structures, such as the EU, for example, led by the administration in Brussels; or the Eurasian Union, dominated by Russia. This choice was always difficult and was not always the best as the tentative politics of Ukraine's president Viktor Yanukovych have shown so far. The rapidly developing globalisation and trans-border migration processes in South-Eastern Europe, as well as the influence of the transnational organisations and institutions, are creating new conditions and are inculcating new symbolic values while the dynamic and transitional national identities are constructed (Angulo, 2008: 154).

Ukraine is no exception to these processes. The formation of new generations of citizens who see the European perspective as an opportunity for a better life through various forms of work outside their country has led to diverse migration strategies among the young. Migration, temporary or permanent, to different EU countries is becoming a vital goal for many Ukrainian citizens of different ages and nationalities. Among them is Bulgaria. Since the beginning of the new Millennium and especially after Bulgaria was accepted in the EU in 2007 and the opening of the European labour market for Bulgarian citizens, our country has become an increasingly desirable destination for labour mobility – seasonal or permanent, for different groups of Ukrainian citizens. The abolition of the EU visa regime for Ukrainian citizens in 2017, the burning armed conflict in the eastern regions of the country, and the deteriorating economic and social picture in Ukraine itself also contributed to this process.

The main questions of our investigation are:

- What is the nature of migration from Ukraine to Bulgaria?
- What is the profile of these migrants?
- Are they strategies for permanent immigration, settlement, and social adaptation in Bulgaria or rather one of the possible destinations for temporary / seasonal labour mobility, a kind of springboard for emigration to Western Europe?

Our research is conducted in the cities of Odesa[1] and Odesa district, as well as in the resort of Albena on the Black Sea and the city of Sofia. It is carried out with Mila Maeva. An anonymous survey was conducted among representatives of the Bulgarian community, citizens of Ukraine, in Odesa and Odesa region in 2013. The total number of respondents was 48, 29 in Bolgrad (10 boys and 19 girls) and 19 in Chyshya village (5 boys and 14 girls), aged 16 – 17, respectively. In 2019, the field research conducted in the cities of Bolgrad, Izmail and Odesa included 5 face-to-face interviews with representatives of Bulgarian associations in Ukraine and the Regional Centre for Bulgarian Culture in Bolgrad. In Albena, the main summer staff in the hotels and restaurants were Ukrainian students, among whom we conducted a survey and in-face interviews. The study also included surveys before the COVID-19 pandemic (2018) and during the measures against its spread (2021).

Historical overview of migrations of Ukrainians to Bulgaria

Emigration from Ukraine to Bulgaria has its own history. Some authors separate four waves of more significant migration movements (Yakimova, 2011: 43 – 44). The first stage includes the period from the Liberation of Bulgaria (1878) to the establishment of the independent Ukrainian state in 1918 when several Ukrainian intellectuals' political emigrants from the Russian Empire arrived in the country and became involved in building the educational institutions of the new Bulgarian state. The most famous among them was Professor Mikhailo Dragomanov, whose daughter Lydia became the wife of the great Bulgarian ethnologist and folklorist Ivan Shishmanov (Hristov and Petrova, 2013: 208 – 214). The second wave arrived at the end of the First World War, after the destruction of the Ukrainian People's Republic and the civil war in Soviet Russia, part of the battles of which were

[1] I prefer to use here the original names of the cities of Odesa, Kyiv, and Kharkiv in their Ukrainian transliteration instead of their most popular English versions – Odessa, Kiev, and Kharkov.

carried-out on the territory of Ukraine. Well-known intellectuals, such as the architect Mikhail Parashchuk, opera singer Ivan Vulpe, the 'father of Bulgarian illustrators of children's books' – painter Vadim Lazarkevich and a lot of others, who all contributed to the development of Bulgarian society between the two world wars, settled in the country. The third wave was during the years of socialism in Bulgaria (1945 – 1989), when what we call 'marriage migration' prevailed – many Bulgarian students who had graduated from reputable Ukrainian universities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odesa returned to the country with Ukrainian brides. Some of these 'Ukrainian brides' in Bulgaria are particularly active in terms of preserving their cultural identity in the country and in 2000 they re-established the association 'Mati Ukraina', which unites the previously existing fraternities in individual Bulgarian towns (Yakimova, 2011: 97 – 99).

The focus of the study is placed on the recent wave of migration from Ukraine to Bulgaria after the democratic changes of the early 1990s and the declaration of independence of Ukraine on 24th August 1991, in the course of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The flow of temporary migrants to Bulgaria initially attracted young people from the Bulgarian historical diaspora in southern Ukraine, who were given the opportunity to complete higher education at Bulgarian universities. In the rapidly developing processes of transformation of national identities in the countries of Eastern Europe, the respective diaspora is given a significant place both in the host country and in the metropolis (cf. Tishkov, 2003: 435 – 490; cf. Vertovec, 2009: 94 – 95). Bulgaria is again no exception: in the last three decades, voices have often been heard in various social circles, often among leading politicians, that the demographic crisis in the country can be solved by 'importing' ethnic Bulgarians from the historical diaspora, and the call has been raised for a 'return to the historical homeland' (Hristov, 2021: 213). The large migratory wave of active population from Bulgaria to the countries of Western Europe as early as the early 1990s provoked in the media and political discourse the discussion of the 'Bulgarian diaspora', and the search for effective policies to attract it back to the country in order to solve the severe demographic crisis in Bulgarian society.

At the very beginning of the democratic changes in Bulgaria there was a debate about education as a tool to attract a young and active population from the diaspora. Young ethnic Bulgarians, citizens of Ukraine and Moldova, were among the first to get the opportunity to complete their higher education in the country with funding from the Bulgarian state. On 31st May 1993, Decree No. 103 of the Council of

Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria was published on the implementation of educational activities among ethnic Bulgarians abroad, which became the legislative basis on which a number of young people from Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, and the Republic of Macedonia are still studying at various universities in Bulgaria. Thousands of young people from Ukraine and Moldova take advantage of this privilege and a significant number of them enter the Bulgarian labour market after graduation. Some of them apply for and obtain Bulgarian citizenship, but the majority of them works in the country with the status of 'permanent residents'. The main problem in their adaptation in Bulgaria is the poor command of the Bulgarian language in its literary norm. Although they speak a Bulgarian dialect bequeathed by their ancestors in their native places (Hristov, 2021: 220 – 221), the main language of public communication remains Russian and this affects their communication in Bulgaria. Bulgarian Sunday schools in many towns in southern Ukraine are insufficient, and efforts by the Bulgarian state to open new schools with Bulgarian language instruction, similar to the famous Bolgrad High School in the Odesa region, have so far not yielded many results.

The investigation

My initial hypothesis, based on personal interviews conducted in 2013 in Odesa, among students studying literary Bulgarian professionally, that life strategies for migration to Bulgaria would be significantly higher, was not borne out. The anonymous survey conducted in 2013 among students from different faculties of Odesa National University 'Ilya Mechnikov' and some other universities and colleges (economics and law) included two types of respondents. One group consisted of 34 students of Bulgarian origin aged 18 – 21 – future historians, ethnologists, economists, medics, who do not study Bulgarian at the university. The other were the students of the last two graduating classes of the specialty 'Bulgarian philology' of the Odesa University, who purposefully study the Bulgarian language. Those of Bulgarian origin among them predominated (18), but not necessarily – some of the students were ethnic Ukrainians (12) and Gagauz (1). The total number of surveyed students was 65 (52 women and 13 men).

The obtained results from the 2013 survey (Hristov, 2021: 222 – 223) confirmed to a significant extent the low migration activity among students in Odesa – of the 34 students with Bulgarian ethnic origin surveyed, only 17.65% (6 peo-

ple – 4 men and 2 women) declared their desire for longer (or permanent) labour migration to Bulgaria, while 38% (13 people – all women) declared their firm unwillingness to emigrate from Ukraine. That percentage turned out to be higher among the students of Bulgarian Philology – Bulgaria was a desired destination for longer (or permanent) migration for 26% (8 people, 3 of them ethnic Ukrainians), with 29% (9 women) unwilling to emigrate from Ukraine. Mass migration desires for emigration to Bulgaria were not declared – only one in four students studying Bulgarian professionally and only one in five students of Bulgarian ethnic origin foresaw such an opportunity for work and life realisation. This is evident also from the answers to the question of which country they considered the most promising for labour migration (temporary or permanent) – Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, the USA, and Russia prevailed (the last two with almost equal positions). Bulgaria was not present in this list – it is still a desirable destination for tourism and leisure (practically in all surveys), for study and specialisation, especially for all students of 'Bulgarian Philology', but not for permanent settlement.

On the other hand, a high percentage (38.5%, i.e., a total of 25 people) of students in Odesa declared in 2013 their readiness for temporary labour migration to Bulgaria after graduation, but no longer than 1 – 2 years. The analysis showed a significant predominance of preferences for educational and labour mobility over final emigration. However, the migratory perceptions of the young did not match the actual destinations for seasonal labour migration among the middle generation of Bulgarians from the Odesa region, the people of active age, whose labour mobility was mainly directed to Finland (90%) or Poland (10%) (cf. Ganchev, 2011: 233). The picture was also different in the Sunday Bulgarian School, where 17 (13 Bulgarians and 4 ethnic Ukrainians) of the 22 respondents (mostly aged between 30 and 45), i.e., 77%, declared a firm and conscious desire for permanent emigration to Bulgaria. Similar to these were the results of the surveys in the Sunday Bulgarian school in the town of Bolgrad, 'Bulgaria is my homeland, where I wish to live! This is my childhood dream!', 'Bulgaria is my historical homeland where I want to live and work!', 'In Bulgaria is the future of my children!' (Hristov, 2021: 219). These attitudes are in line with the general mood among the representatives of Bulgarian communities in southern Ukraine, for whom the maintenance of the memory of the continuity of the connection with the historical ancestral homeland Bulgaria – what Svetlana Koch calls 'memorialisation' and institutionalisation of cultural heritage

and memory (Koch, 2019: 40), is one of the basic elements for the construction of the ethnocultural identity of these communities.

The example of the Bulgarian youth, citizens of independent Ukraine, was very soon followed by the Ukrainians themselves and this is the beginning of a new wave of migrants to Bulgaria, so far mostly seasonal. It has a socio-economic character (Yakimova, 2011: 44) and is clearly distinguishable from previous ones. Social insecurity and low wages at home are among the main reasons why young people – students and not only – seek opportunities for temporary labour migration outside Ukraine (3 to 6 months). However, in the 39 surveys completed in 2018 by ethnic Ukrainians temporarily employed in tourism in Albena – mostly students – the absence of desire for permanent emigration from the country is clearly visible. Such a strategy is primarily observed among the more mature workers, 40 – 50-year-olds, who are however a small percentage of the employed. In this respect, there is no significant difference in migration attitudes to permanently emigrate outside Ukraine among graduates and students of Bulgarian origin in Odesa district (Hristov, 2021: 224).

The possibility of three-month seasonal work in the tourism sector in Bulgaria is relatively recent – according to the amendments to the 'Law of labour migration and labour policy', adopted in 2016, the procedure for hiring foreign workers has been significantly eased.[2] As in 2016 Law on Labour Migration and Labour Mobility (LMLM) was enacted, the employment of foreign workers in tourism was facilitated thanks to the amendments to the Tourism Law (enacted in 2013) of the same year and the facilitation of the issuance of Uniform Residence and Work Permits (VRWP) in 2017 and 2018, including a reduction in the fee for employers, an increase in the allowable percentage of foreigners in an enterprise (from 10% to 20%), a reduction in the time limits for issuance, etc. In the beginning, these were mainly young people and students from Ukraine and Moldova, but in the last 2 – 3 years, intermediary companies are now hiring workers from other post-Soviet countries such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Among the motives for seasonal labour mobility in Bulgaria, the possibility of combining both seaside holiday and additional earnings is widely cited both in interviews and surveys. This is particularly evident in the comparison with the opportunities that Poland offers to Ukrainian citizens.

[2] Cf. comparative data from the Subsequent Impact Assessment of the Law on Labour Migration and Labour Mobility (LMLM) prepared by the Ministry of Labour. Available at: https://www.mlsp.government.bg/uploads/39/sdrmi/ocenka-ztmtm-fin.pdf (accessed 10 May 2022).

The standard answer is, ‘Yes, I would earn twice as much in Poland (600 euro per month) as in Bulgaria (300 euro per month), but I would be working in a cold and wet factory, while here I have both work and sea at the same time’.

The beautiful nature, the warm sea, and the cultural attractions are among the main things those temporary workers like in Bulgaria, although the vast majority of them only have the opportunity to visit Varna, Balchik, and sometimes the capital Sofia, during the three summer months. The importance for our respondents of seasonal employment in the tourism sector in Bulgaria is also evident from the fact that in 2018 when offered a well-paid job in the agricultural sector (cherry-picking), none of them preferred such an alternative. Despite their declared wishes to continue with temporary mobility in the West, in Germany, for example – more than half of them were second- or third-year seasonal workers at the Bulgarian Black Sea resorts.

The main problem for temporary workers in tourism in Bulgaria is health insurance. All of them have compulsory health insurance (mostly from one of the biggest companies in Bulgaria), but in case of an emergency or ailment, they can hardly benefit without the mediation of their employers, especially in the private clinics on the Black Sea coast, and have to pay for their health services. Health insurance does not cover exacerbation of chronic diseases, nor treatment by COVID-19. Most employers indeed offer free vaccinations to incoming seasonal workers from post-USSR countries, but not all young people are willing to take advantage. The pandemic, as well as the social crisis in the country, not only led to periodic border closures and imposed travel restrictions but also affected the country’s industries relying mainly on such labour, especially with seasonal nature. Therefore, according to the Ministry of Labour, the reduction in the number of seasonal employment permits to 90 days in 2020 is most significant.

Similar problems with health insurance and medical care were shared by Ukrainian citizens (mostly women) employed in various companies in Sofia (primarily in the Berëzka chain stores) who ended up in Bulgaria after marrying Bulgarian citizens. All of them complain about the long time (‘years’) they have to wait to obtain the ‘temporary resident’ status, which enables them to be included in the health insurance system. This is one of the constant recommendations to the Bulgarian institutions.

In our research, Bulgaria is not among the priority destinations for long-term labour migration and eventual permanent settlement, but the country’s EU mem-

bership, proximity of culture and mentality, and in many respects – language, are highlighted as pull factors for Ukrainians who decide to seek an improvement in their living standards outside their home country. The introduction of a ‘blue card’ status, i.e., the possibility to work and develop in Bulgaria without contradicting immigration legislation, as in Poland, would facilitate the inflow of highly skilled labour into the country many times over. It’s noteworthy that a number of Ukrainian universities, such as those in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, have had a number of Nobel laureates over the years. The ongoing conflict with Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine could also prove to be a significant incentive for continued emigration from the country in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can summarise that the democratic changes of the early 1990s in Bulgaria and the contemporary social, economic, and political situation in Ukraine have once again transformed the nature and scale of migration and labour mobility between the two countries. If for the decades of socialism Bulgarian students in well-known Ukrainian universities and Bulgarian construction workers on the sites of the then vast Soviet Union prevailed, in recent years Bulgaria has become a desirable destination for seasonal work among young people in Ukraine and, with the formation of certain policies by Bulgarian institutions, a desirable country for emigration. However, the analysis of the responses of young Ukrainians in Bulgaria shows that we are facing a generation socialised in the years of independent Ukraine, which has a high sense of citizenship and loyalty to Ukraine, at least in its declared form.

Improving the policies of the Bulgarian state towards the historical Bulgarian communities in Ukraine and improving the conditions for the adaptation of immigrants in the country would give a significant boost to solving some of the main social problems in Bulgaria and would contribute to overcoming the negative demographic trends in the country. The future will show whether the expressed desire of the Ukrainian citizens for rapprochement and gradual integration into the EU and the individual EU member states will be successfully realised.

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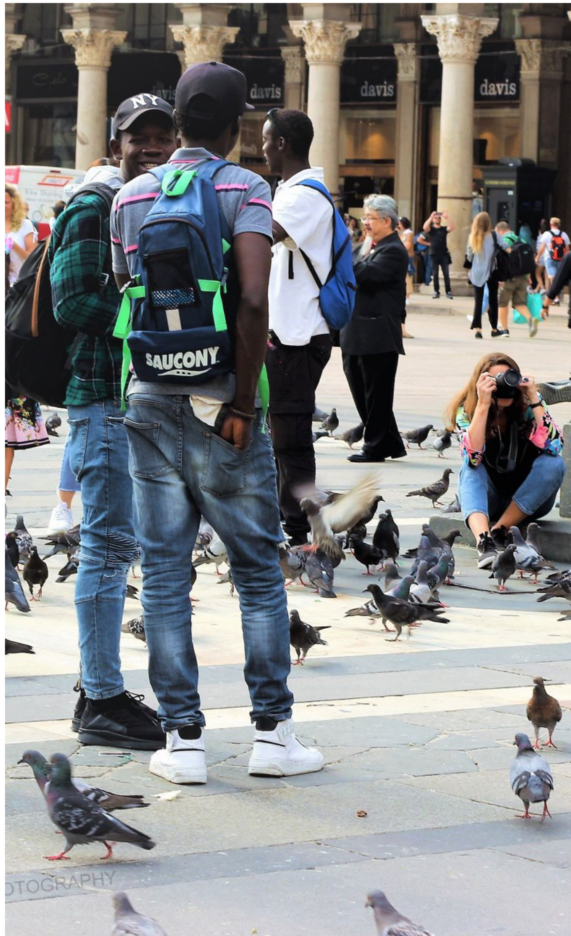
Part II

Gender, Ethnicity, and Stereotypes



THE ROMA AND THE RUSSIAN MIGRANTS IN FINLAND – ETHNICITY AS A MEANS OF STEREOTYPISATION

Kai Viljami Åberg

Abstract: This article explores ethnic stereotypes in interaction with shared identity in the intercultural communication: Finnish, Finnish Roma and Russian migrants in Finland. The key idea is to identify the salient features of ethnic stereotypes with the goal to manage stereotyping in the light of the constructivist theory (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) highlighting categorisation and conceptualisation. The theory is validated by long-term empirical approach among the Roma since 1994 and among the Russian migrants since 2015. I argue specifically in favour of building a shared identity the analysis of which showed the possibility of considerable reduction of stereotypes. Several examples confirm and illustrate how de-stereotyping works and verify my findings.
Keywords: Finnish Roma, Russian migrants, stereotypes, ethnicity

Introduction

A fascinating new phenomenon aimed at redrawing the boundaries of two different ethnic groups Finnish Roma and Russian migrants in Finland is increasingly visible in recent years. Construction and reproduction of ethnic identity proceeds from universal socio-psychological and socio-cultural mechanisms, being an integral part of ontological representations of humans about the binary structure of the world. Particularly, categorisation, stereotypisation and identification permit individuals to localise themselves in social space and feel attached to the social community – state, nation, ethnicity etc. and intergroup differentiation. Central elements, products and results of these mechanisms are images of in- and out-groups, modified continually in the course of social interaction. But why are negative stereotypes so powerful and long-lasting? This paper sets out to do two things: a) to describe the ethnic stereotypes of two different ethnic groups, Roma and Russians in the Finnish context, and b) to conform and illustrate how de-stereotyping works and verify my empirical findings. Thereby I try to connect the general history and theoretical thoughts of these groups to the empirical data I have collected since 1994, as well as material

social media-produced, like ethnic jokes. Entity demonstrates the strength of stereotypes in defining identities.

This paper contains a number of contributions to the images and stereotypes of two ethnic groups in Finland: Finnish Roma and Russian migrants in Finland. Both of these groups have lived in Finland for hundreds of years but still carry the stigma of stereotypes and I have lived most of my life with them. Thereby, my empirical data is long-term fieldwork or better, a way of life. In my opinion, despite increased awareness of a wide range of demographics, the existing theory fails to adequately explain how the stereotypes associated with multiple demographic categories (e.g., black, female, gay, Muslim) combine to influence evaluations of employees. Social distance and especially (mental) traditions have special importance in the perception of otherness. This paper is based on my long-term fieldwork among the Roma and Russian migrants.

The Finnish Roma (Kaale)

Finland has perhaps the most homogeneous Romani population in Europe, with the *Kaale* population comprising groups of the Roma who arrived through Sweden as early as the 16th century. In the 19th century, this group was strengthened by Russian immigrants who have since merged with the Finnish Kaale (Pulma, 2006: 215; Pulma, 2012). The Finnish Roma, nowadays about 14,000 in all, lead a traditional way of life; there are also 4,000 Finnish Roma who live in Sweden, mainly in the Stockholm area (Åberg, 2015: 50 – 56; Markkanen, 2003: 262). The process of estimating the numbers of Roma in Finland is a problematic one. These problems are rooted in the general difficulties associated with counting so-called 'ethnic minority groups, and mobile communities' (Clark, 2006: 19). During the 1990s and 2000s, Finland became more multicultural than ever before. The growing number of foreigners coming to the country raised discussion about human rights, tolerance and discrimination. However, there is still very little information about the old minorities, such as the Roma, in the teaching materials of the comprehensive school, in materials for different occupational groups, or even in teacher training.

The traditional names used by the Finnish majority for the Roma are *mustalainen* south of the line between Savonlinna and Kokkola and *mustilainen* north of it, both derivatives of the Finnish word *musta* (black). Folk dialects contain even more limited derivatives and many playful words, many of them mimicking the

more traditional ones mentioned above. Although the spelling varies, the word mustalainen drew a clear, physical, black and white line between the majority and a minority typically portrayed as aberrant (Tervonen, 2006: 6). In the old literary language, such terms appeared as *musta kansa* (black people), *musklainen*, *lätti (lainen)* (Latvian), *tattari (lainen)* (Tatar), *tattara* and *ta(r)tari* (Novak-Rosengren, 2012: 11). *Nykysuomen sanakirja* (The Dictionary of Modern Finnish), the most comprehensive monolingual Finnish dictionary to date (although it has not been updated since 1961), listed *romaani* and *mustalainen* as synonyms (Granqvist, 2007: 8).

Russian migrants in Finland

The first migratory wave of Russians began in the early 18th century when Finland was part of the Swedish Empire (Socmag, 2007). About 40,000 Russian soldiers, civilian workers, and about 600 businessmen moved to the Grand Duchy of Finland, which became part of the Russian Empire in 1809. When Finland became independent in 1917, many soldiers returned to Russia. Many businessmen stayed, including the Sinebrychoff family. During the Russian Revolution, many aristocrats and officers fled to Finland as refugees. The biggest refugee wave was in 1922 when about 33,500 people came to Finland. Many of them had Nansen passports for many years. During the Kronstadt Rebellion, about 1,600 officers fled to Finland. Russian citizens who moved in these three waves are called 'Old Russians', whose 3,000 – 5,000 descendants live in Finland today (see Socmag, 2007). During Second World War, there were about 69,700 Soviet prisoners of war in Finland, and 200 – 300 children were born to them and Finnish women (Suikkanen, 2016; Wilms, 2010). A second major wave of immigration occurred after the fall of the Soviet Union. Many Russian guest workers came to Finland, working low-paying jobs. In the 1990s, immigration to Finland grew and a Russian-speaking population descended from Ingrian Finns immigrated to Finland. In the 2000s, many nouveaux riche Russians bought estates in Eastern Finland.

Russian speakers represent the oldest and biggest immigrant group in Finland, with the majority of them having migrated to the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Integration is a multifaceted phenomenon that includes immigrants' acquisition of new socio-cultural skills, forming of new social relationships, and psychological adjustment. When looking at integration from these perspectives, Russian-speaking immigrants have adjusted quite well. They form and

cherish ties to both Finnish society and Russian culture and have a positive outlook on their future in Finland. However, there are challenges too; Russian speakers often face mistrust and discrimination in the labour market and other spheres of life. The studies reviewed here show that engaging in positive intergroup contact with the majority of Finns is crucial for the integration of Russian speakers as it promotes their adaptation and fuels positive attitudes toward the Finnish majority and other immigrant groups living in the country.

Ethnicity and the stereotypes

Stereotypes are ubiquitous and typologically greatly vary in social, cultural, national, territorial, political, gender, etc. The most harmful, prejudicial, hazardous and dangerous are racial and ethnic stereotypes. The problem of stereotypes facing academic society today is still waiting for its solution. Since Lippmann's conceptualisation of stereotypes as 'pictures in our heads' (Lippmann, 1922: 3), scholars are concerned with the way to cognise stereotypes and manage them. Sociologists regard stereotypes as cognitions of one social group about another social group (Elligan, 2008) or oversimplification (Moore, 2006: 35 – 39), or reinforcing prejudices constructing barriers in intercultural communication (Bartmiński, 2009: 5 – 21). Researchers (Stewart and Bennett, 1991) reckon stereotypes as units. Thereby Lippmann's 'public opinion' should be considered as a three-dimensional stage, people's notions of this stage and reactions to it, always taking into account the dimensions of time and locality. According to Lippmann (1922: 3; Elligan, 2008; Moore, 2006: 35 – 39), we do not see things that we define, but instead, define things before we see them. That means that we pick things from the disorder of the great outside world that our culture has already defined stereotypically for us (Åberg, 2015; Kopsa-Schön, 1996: 92).

In contemporary society, power is linked to normality instead of domination, as pointed out by Richard Dyer (2002: 178) with reference to Herbert Marcuse (1964). Normality, in turn, is a changing definition and in a world of categories, power can be produced in various ways. In this article, I consider how the majority population has the ability to produce 'Gypsy and Russian stereotypes' associated with culture according to prevailing temporal and local interests. As noted by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), the stereotyping of Roma or Russians in Finland shows how every community or society organises

its reality. That is not just the result of history; the constructions are also related to power relations between societies and communities. But first I will demonstrate how the stereotypes of the Russians and Roma are created by the majority on the background of the history.

On the background (history) of Russians and Romani stereotypes

In European thinking, the commonest representatives of Otherness, i.e., enemies, have been the Turks and the Russians. The negative image of Russia in Europe would seem to date back to the 16th century, when many of the stereotypes connected with Russians, still alive in our own century, were born: even then, Russians were depicted as devious, violent, bestial, lecherous, and drunken barbarians. In Sweden, too, the word 'barbaric' became the most widely used attribute applied to Russians already in the early 17th century. Finland was similarly influenced by these stereotypes concerning Russians, but no widespread ethnic hatred as such can be said to have existed even in the era of autonomy under Tsarist rule. For instance, all through the so-called years of oppression (1899 – 1905 and 1908 – 1917), Finnish resistance was clearly directed against the hated Russian administration and its representatives, not against the Russian people in any general, racist way. However, the way to real racism was being paved among the educated classes through the adoption of German-Swedish ideas on racial thinking, and the contempt shared by politically oriented Finns toward all things Russian. Conflicts and confrontations of an ethnic nature did occur, but these never gained any mainstream status with the majority of the population (Karemaa, 1998; Raittila, 2004).

1919 stands as a kind of intermediary period in the development of the ethnic hatred of Russians: the deep scar formed during 1917 – 1918 was clearly visible, and 'Russky hate' flourished especially among the Whites as Outi Karemaa (1998) writes. However, hatred of Russians was by no means the sole public attitude expressed, albeit it was the most widely spread. The Finnish 'Russky hate' contained fundamental elements of foreign import – specifically, the seeds for racist thinking, and ancient Western stereotypes connected with Russians – but it was the domestic scene, together with the widespread need to hate the Other, that provided the necessary stimulus and created a favourable atmosphere for it to emerge. Thus, the events surrounding the independence struggle were needed to instigate the generation of genuine racist hatred, even if from a European viewpoint its elements were

by no means unique; the cult-like 'Russky hate' which emerged in Finland between 1917 – 1923 correlates fully with the various phases in the creation of Otherness. During the period covered in that time, Russians were irrevocably transformed into representatives of the Other, against whom a major section of the population harboured a deep-rooted ethnic hatred: regardless of their political standing, Russians had become, in the Finnish view, foes forever, fiends eternal, and filthy vermin (see also Karemaa, 1998).

On the background of Romani stereotypes

Dimitrina Petrova (2003: 128) suggests that negative stereotypes of Roma blossomed in 15th century Western Europe and spread eastward. Roma was viewed as intruders probably because of their dark skin, non-European physical features, foreign customs, and association with both magic and the invading Turks. She asserts that the rising tide of the Protestant work ethic condemned vagrancy, idleness, and lenience as well as alms for wanderers and beggars (op. cit. 125). Perhaps most important was the late arrival of Roma into Europe, plus their lack of roots in terms of land and property (Silverman, 2012: 9). Thereby, ultimately the main difference that set the Roma apart was that they were the only ethnically distinct nomadic communities in a civilisation that had been non-nomadic for centuries (Petrova, 2003: 111 – 161).

The English sociologist and Roma researcher Thomas Acton (2004: 3) notes, in turn, that up until 1800 almost all the writing, pictures and noted-down music we have which represent Roma have been put on paper by *Gaje* (NTN – RTMA), some of whom witnessed Roma self-representations themselves, and others of whom worked indirectly from the representations of other Gaje. Acton writes that in the 19th century, however, while the direct contribution of Roma to the written record remains small, there was an increasing professionalisation of Romani self-representation in Europe, in the sense that musicians, fortune-tellers, givers of Gypsy balls and spectacles were able to charge Gaje for attending at their own representations of Romani life, thus obliging the Gaje experts to include this Gypsy self-representation. Acton thinks that they could do so by representing Romani music as 'folk-music' and Romani verbal accounts as folklore, and Romani-made images as 'folk-art' or 'naive art'. They could thus represent these productions as not being the work of individual authors, but rather as collective facts of nature, which only become a concrete representation when in some way authored by the collector, the folklorist.

It is correct that only in the 20th century do we find the individual Romani writer or artist beginning to challenge that easy ascription of cultural products to the great 'anon' and insist that personal creativity is at work. For their pains, such Romani artists are often typified by Gaje as 'unrepresentative' – as if the artist, in the very act of formalising a representation as a cultural product, is not always carrying out an untypical, unrepresentative act (Acton, 2004: 2).

Stereotypes of Russian migrants and Roma in Finland nowadays

Russia is not only home to 144.5 million people, but also world literature, talented classical composers and of course the Russian ballet. Russian culture has an incredibly rich history and is undoubtedly steeped in a long tradition of achievements. This, unfortunately, does not make them any less prone to a fair share of Russian stereotypes. Oddly enough, the vodka drinking, bear wrestling, and serious-natured labels on Russians are not always accurate. Next, I present the key Russian stereotypes I have identified in my empirical work among the Finnish. The following is a short interview with a woman with a Russian background, which is repeated in various forms in the speech of almost all the interviewees:

> Все русские женщины, живущие в Финляндии проститутки. Все русские воруют. Молодые русские женщины выходят замуж за пожилых финов чтобы попасть в Финляндию. У русских плохая рабочая мораль. Русские ленивые и используют социальные услуги в Финляндии. Все русские женщины одеваются красиво, а мужчины покупают дорогие машины хоть у них и нет денег. Все русские – патриоты и живут в Финляндии в своих «ячейках».
>
> All Russian women living in Finland are prostitutes. All Russians steal. Young Russian women marry older Finns to get to Finland. Russians have bad working morale. Russians are lazy and use social services in Finland. All Russian women dress beautifully, and men buy expensive cars even though they have no money. All Russians are patriots and live in Finland in their "cells" (Interview, woman, 54, living in Finland 28 years, 2021).

My own empirical study among Russian immigrants shows that most global Russian stereotypes have permeated the Finnish population's perception of Russians. Like in history, Russians still are for many people depicted as devious, violent,

bestial, lecherous, and drunken barbarians. Key features of toxic masculinity, such as violence and subjugation against women, are also gaining prominence in the speech of women with a Russian background. Violence is often associated with alcoholism. On the other hand, this is often an inevitable consequence of social, cultural and societal change. When the ethos of a Russian man's self-sufficiency in a new cultural and social situation crumbles, he must resort to the values dictated by tradition. Among immigrants with a Russian background, women re-apply for education, learn the language and are more socially active than men. This will undoubtedly lead to conflicts within the family, where traditional values and norms related to gender are changing rapidly. Yet stereotypes are surprisingly tenacious and maintain traditional values despite the changes.

Perhaps the most common stereotype associated with Russian women is related to sexuality. In general, Finns consider all women with a Russian background to be prostitutes. The phenomenon has a history as hundreds of Russian women in the 1990s and 2000s worked as prostitutes in Finland. Although the phenomenon has since subsided, stereotypes have persisted. Also, the idea that young Russian women are happy to marry older Finnish men in order to gain Finnish citizenship is also loosely attached to prostitution. The phenomenon also has a background. I know hundreds of older Finnish men who have 'applied' for a young wife from Russia. Often a marriage ends in divorce or the death of a man. Normally, woman gets citizenship and monetary inheritance. Russian women also dress too ornately and sexy. This also refers to prostitution.

According to stereotypes related to crime, all Russians are thieves. This stereotype has deep historical roots, as similar mentions appeared in the public debate when Finland was under Russian rule. Stereotypes were confirmed in the aftermath of World War II, when Finland joined the war for reasons mainly invented by Russia (there are other interpretations as well).

One of the strong stereotypes associated with Russians in Finland is related to work ethic in accordance with Protestant ethics. They are lazy, do not abide by the collective agreement and in addition steal workplace property. My research partly confirms the existence of stereotypes but only partially. The work ethic of Russians is stronger among Russian immigrants than among Finns.

As is well known, ethnic humor reflects the worldview of its users. In the following, I will take a short tour of the key contents of ethnic humor that Finns also see in Russian immigrants. Stereotypes published on social media are similar to those

mentioned above but endowed with ethnic humor. I have collected the most important stereotypes (also jokes) about the Russians from social media and next I will present you the most popular Russians stereotypes (via internet) also in Finland[1].

Russians say 'na zdorovie' when they drink

First things first, Russians never say *на здоровье/*na zdorovie (cheers) when making a toast. This actually means 'you're welcome' so it does not really make sense in this context. Instead, for casual toasts – *Давай/Davay!* meaning 'Let's do it'; *Поехали/Poekhali!* meaning 'Let's roll', or even *Вздрогнем/Vzdrognem!* meaning 'Let's shudder' – because that is what you do after throwing back a good shot of vodka – are more appropriate. Sometimes after many rounds of drinks, it is normal to start drinking without toasting at all.

Russia is a hard-drinking nation

Russian stereotypes often revolve around drinking vodka and there are even rumours that Russians are the heaviest drinkers in the world. In fact, Russia is comparable to France and Germany when it comes to alcohol consumption. Furthermore, the share of the Russian population who never drink alcohol is 13% which is much higher than France (2%), Germany (5.5%), and Ireland (6.7%), for example. Thereby, though there is an annual celebration for the birthday of Russian vodka (31st January), Russia is no more of a hard-drinking nation than other European countries.

Russians are immune to cold weather

People often think that the temperature in Russia never reaches above zero degrees, meaning that Russians are somehow biologically wired differently to never feel the cold. Though it is true that many places in Russia experience a long and cold winter, due to its size, Russia has a largely continental climate. This means that the temperatures can get pretty extreme – from +45°C in summer in Kalmykia to deathly –64° in Oymyakon in winter.

[1] Tandem. Russian stereotypes fact or fiction. Available at: https://www.tandem.net/russian-stereotypes-fact-fiction (accessed 27 November 2021)

Russians drink tea out of a saucer

Tea in Russia today is considered the de facto national beverage, with the average Russian drinking 3 cups of the good stuff every day. Russian people drink exclusively black tea and leave the other varieties for their guests, as drinking tea is considered a social activity. 'Saucering' is a traditional Russian practice that is also shared among the Chinese and English. The flat surface helps with the cooling of the near-boiling temperature at which the tea is served. This practice used to reflect social distinction where the lower class of society were said to slurp tea noisily from their saucers, while the Russian aristocrats were strong enough to drink their boiling tea straight or patient enough to wait for it to cool. I guess some like it hot!

All Russians have a *dacha* for the summertime

A common Russian stereotype is that all Russians are extremely wealthy. A dacha, or summer home used as a getaway for city dwellers, is generally perceived to be a large manor surrounded by multiple tennis courts. Sounds relaxing, right? In fact, a dacha is usually a small cottage surrounded by a plot of land and a vegetable garden. Russians often spend long days cleaning the house from dust that has accumulated over the winter months and repairing the many broken things at the dacha. Once the house is in shipshape, it is then on to the garden to do a bit of planting and harvesting. It is now easier to understand why less than half of the Russian population own a dacha.

Russians are very superstitious

It can be hard to tell if there is any method to the superstition madness, however, we follow them anyway. Most common Russian superstitions have become habits, including not shaking hands in the doorway of your home. This is where the 'house spirit' is believed to reside and bridging this gap with a handshake is therefore extremely bad luck. Putting empty bottles on the floor is also common practice in Russia to avoid bad luck, whether your drink of choice is water or vodka. To avoid putting a curse on something, Russians will knock on wood, spit three times over their left shoulder, or do both. If spitting is not an option, you can always mimic the sound by saying 'tfu-tfu-tfu'.

Bears roam the streets in Russia

Nope! Though bear walking and bear performing was commonplace in the 19th century, funnily enough, grizzly bears are not generally considered to be socialites and rather tend to avoid loud noises. However, it is not unusual for the odd bear to stumble into a rural village. Speaking of superstitions, in case you ever come across a bear waiting outside a supermarket, it is considered good luck to buy a slice of meat on a bone and throw it to the hungry fellow. Lucky bear and lucky Russian!

Russians are not friendly

This one seems to be one of the most common Russian stereotypes since it even has its own name. 'The Russian smile' as it is commonly known, is the way of expressing friendliness to strangers. It is basically a stern frown. In Russian culture, it is considered impolite to express emotions in front of strangers. Not beating around the bush and getting straight to the point of a conversation is also considered sincere and polite. Russians are not fans of small talk or niceties and will never discuss the weather as a conversation filler. However, once you get to know Russian people on a personal level, you find that they are a very genuine, patient and friendly bunch of people.

I think we can all agree that Russian stereotypes are often exaggerated, but a country where all bears ride unicycles (another common stereotype!) sounds pretty fun to me. Sharing your country's culture and practices with your language exchange partner is not only a great conversation starter but a way to explore and understand different ways of life. Negative stereotypes are threats that arise because of negative stereotypes the ingroup has of the out-group group. For example, if ingroup members believe that immigrants and refugees are aggressive, dishonest, and unintelligent or whatever negative attribute or stereotype you can imagine, they will expect interactions with them to be negative (Gonzalez et al., 2008). In the course of interaction, ingroup members may be afraid that negative consequences will befall them because they have negative expectations of the outgroup (Stephan et al., 1998). This fear can lead to prejudice and negative attitudes. The negative stereotype has been found to be related to negative outgroup attitudes and prejudice (Stephan et al., 2000). The more negative stereotypes an ingroup has of an outgroup, the more feelings of threat and fear they will likely experience towards them. On the other hand, positive stereotypes have been associated with lesser feelings of fear and anger towards outgroups (see Gonzalez et al., 2008; Verkuyten, 1997).

Thus originally, realistic threat, symbolic threat, negative stereotype and intergroup anxiety are conceptualised as the different types of threats explaining and predicting negative attitudes, prejudice and discriminatory behaviour towards outgroups while intergroup conflict, status differences, the strength of identification, knowledge of the outgroup and intergroup contact are conceptualised as antecedents or predictors of threat (Stephan et al., 1996; Stephan et al., 1998) as we can see from ethnic jokes.

According to Leveen (1996: 29), 'ethnic jokes can not only be *not* offensive, they can serve as an important strategy for defining ethnicity positively, and can provide a welcome means for asserting pride in one's ethnic identity'. This aptly describes the humoristic video-clip described above: 'The message being relayed by the ethnic joke-teller is that: "I/My group am/is different from you/your group, although the differences may be laughed at, and we may laugh together despite the differences"' (1996: 52). The clip's social audience, which shares the ethnic joke about Finnish and Russian politics, potentially constitutes a community of laughter and sense of 'we-ness' in laughing with thousands of others who have already seen and even commented positively on the clip. Thus, this ethnic humor video-clip serves as a conflict-soothing mechanism that constitutes a hybrid mode of communication and conciliation.

Lemponen, Martikainen, Zarubin, and Nikitenko (2013) have researched what kind of ethnic stereotypes exist in Finland about Russians (here, ethnicity means nationality). Stereotype is a certain understanding of, for example, groups of people. It is in the nature of people to classify things with the help of stereotypes (Raittila, 2004). Their research material consisted of jokes about Russia and Russians in Finland that they found on the internet. They read all the jokes and divided them into five different groups:

1. politics,
2. alcohol,
3. cars/vehicles,
4. the Soviet Union, and
5. war.

Politics. The jokes about politics most often made fun of the decisions and acts of Russian leaders. Russian politics was considered to be old fashioned.

> Putin comes to the barbershop. The barber cuts his hair and asks all the time about Chechnya. How are people doing there? When does the war end? Putin

gets nervous: – You are moved about this Chechnya far too much, right? – Not at all, sir. For me, it is totally indifferent. – Why do you than constantly ask about Chechnya? – Because each time that I say Chechnya your hair rises up – and it is easier to cut.

Alcohol. The jokes about alcohol dealt with the heavy use of alcohol by the Russians, the impacts of the use and the amount of alcohol used:

Russian Ivan died and came to the gates of heaven. Saint Peter stated:
– Unfortunately, you will go to hell, but you can choose, whether you go to the capitalist or communist hell.
– I want to go to the communist hell, Ivan answered without hesitation.
– Why on earth? Saint Peter asked.
– Well, because I know the system. I know that it is good to be in inferno when there is no coal. If there is coal, the boiler is being repaired. If the boiler is intact, the boilerman is drunk. And if the boilerman is sober, there is no coal.

Cars/vehicles. The jokes about cars and different vehicles dealt with Lada cars and their weaknesses. There were also jokes about how Russians are bad drivers.

Do you know why Arabs have camels and Russians Ladas?
– Arabs were allowed to choose first.

The Soviet Union. The jokes about the Soviet Union made fun of how the time in Russia had stopped to the development level and settings of the Soviet times:

Finnair's (Finnish air company) flight attendant: 'We are landing to Moscow. Please fasten your seat belts and turn your clocks 20 years backward.'

The media and film industry quite often portray the Russian Federation's citizens as enemies, spies or aggressive fighters. The jokes **about war** laughed at Russian army commanders, and the actions of the army carrying out the orders of the commanders:

Once when the Finns and Russians were at war, the Russians heard a shout behind a hill:
– One Finn is equivalent to two Russkis.
The Russian commander sent two men with a special training to deal with the shouter, but neither of them came back. Instead, soon a shout rang out behind the hill:

– One Finn is equivalent to ten Russkis.

The angry commander immediately sent two commando men behind the hill, but besides a couple of gunshots nothing was heard. The men were gone, but a new shout was heard behind the hill:

– One Finn is equivalent to fifty Russkis.

The furious commander sent an elite group of fifty men behind the hill and for a moment gunshots were heard. When the gunfire ceased, not one Russki came back. Instead, a shout was heard:

– One Finn is equivalent to a hundred Russkis.

Not caring about anything in his fury the commander sent a hundred men behind the hill, where a huge gun-fight began. After some time one badly wounded Russki dragged himself from behind the hill and said:

– Commander, those Finns lied. There were two of them!

The jokes included social interaction and comparisons with other nationalities. Often somebody was killed. What makes one laugh at the jokes is how the Russians think of themselves as unbeatable and the best, but in the end, they are the ones who fail. The jokes also make fun of the stupidity of Russians. Russians are associated with the qualities of greediness, greediness for victory and stupidity. Russia is also considered to be a retarded country.

I will be sharing my own thoughts and new understandings and as well as sharing the thoughts of both Finnish and Russians that I interviewed as a part of this research project. I, too, at one time believed the common stereotypical misconceptions that the Russian society is one still stuck in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union: that the government is still run by corrupt dictators and that the country is unable to rise again from the fall in such a way that holds it back from advancing economically, socially, politically, educationally, and even technologically. Furthermore, and mainly due to the film industry and the very little history I knew of the USSR and modern Russia, my perception of the people of this region was fabricated with the ideas that they were harsh, crude, unkempt, suspicious, sly, and perhaps oddly intelligent but only in a way that would allow them to be government spies. I even found myself believing that the most common stereotypes for Russians (they are all alcoholics, they are constantly plotting revenge against the United States, they all smoke) were valid, though I had absolutely no solid information on which to base these thoughts. What further reinforced my ideas of the Russian people was that most people I encountered had the exact same view of the Russian people as I did.

The perception of threat could have serious consequences. Stephan et al. (2015) explain that whenever the ingroup perceives an outgroup as threatening; it affects them cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally. Cognitively, it affects their mental perception of the outgroup and its members which may consequently lead to the perception of negative stereotypes, ethnocentrism, intolerance, hatred, and dehumanisation of the outgroup. On another level, this may also lead to the opposition to any policies, benefits, and privileges that favour outgroups. Emotionally, ingroup members may experience negative emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety and resentment, contempt, disgust, vulnerability, collective guilt, rage, hatred, humiliation, dread, helplessness, despair, righteous indignation, and panic. Perceived threats could also undermine emotional empathy for members of the outgroup and increase empathy towards members of the ingroup. These mental and emotional experiences often lead to behavioural responses such as discrimination, withdrawal, prejudice, violence, aggression, lying, cheating, harassment, sabotage, protests, strikes, warfare, genocides, and other forms of intergroup conflict depending on the type of threat perceived from the outgroup (Stephan et al., 2015).

Stereotypes of the Roma

Current Roma stereotypes are still winged by history: superstition, childishness, crime and alcoholism. It is interesting that the Roma, like the Russians, have their own perceptions of Finns. Mainly Roma global stereotypes follow the same pattern as Russian stereotypes. The following is a summary of the stereotypes experienced by the Roma in Finland (Åberg, 1994 – 2021):

> Kaikki romanit ovat varkaita. He vieroksuvat töitä ja heillä on alhainen koulutustaso. Romanit ovat väkivaltaisia ja epäluotettavia. He käyttävät yhteiskunnan sosiaalipalveluja hyväkseen eivätkä maksa veroja. Heillä on oudot tavat ja pukeutuminen. Ainoastaan musiikissa he ovat lahjakkaita (satoja suomalaisia Kai Åbergin romanihaastateltavia vuosina 1994 – 2021).

> All Roma are thieves. They shy away from work and have a low level of education. Roma are violent and unreliable. They take advantage of society's social services and do not pay taxes. They have strange habits and dress. Only in music are they talented (hundreds of Finnish Roma interviewees made by Kai Åberg in 1994 – 2021).

Danielle Fisher (2012) lists a total of 10 stereotypes that mainly concern Roma in the United States (*Gypsies or Travellers*). These stereotypes are associated with the presumed origin of Roma (the region of Punjab in India), their mobility due to traits of personality, their asocial and criminal way of life, livelihoods and professions (for example fortune-telling), institution of marriage (marrying at an early age), remaining outside the social norms of marriage, manner of dress, lack of education and unemployment (see also Malvinni, 2004). Of the stereotypes listed by Fisher, the notion of the origin of the Romani people traces the original home region of the Roma both linguistically and culturally to the province or region of Punjab in India. This topic was popular for a long while in both scholarship and the arts. In Western universities, this oriental its tradition has been read as part of the linear narrative of tradition, while the arts applied the interpretations oriented towards orientalism to Romani exoticism. This notion is quite presentist and largely based on linguistics. The purpose of the perspective may have been to enhance the status of linguistics within global Romani research. Whether or not this is true, this view based on alterity appears to find a response regardless of the discipline concerned, for musical features of Finnish Roma have also been scraped together from the musical heritage of India. On the other hand, we must bear in mind that not only in the case of the Roma but also many myths, explanations of the world and personal biographies contain similar elements. Commenting on the Roma ethic of yearning for liberty, being unfettered and unattached to a given place, Judith Okely (1983) notes that exotic literature and folklorism – applied as concepts for perceiving the past (see Laaksonen, 1974) – often creates the kind of atmosphere of ideological and symbolic disorder into which Roma are often placed. According to Okely, Roma ae presented in these contexts in either a positive or negative light; their apparent differences from the majority being emphasized for example in the notions and beliefs in which the state of being Roma is equated with a free close connection to nature. Similar lines of interpretation are followed by the French sociologist Jean-Pierre Liégeois (2005) in his interpretation that the mythical nature of Roma is due to them being sufficiently distant from the everyday life of the majority; they become attractive, handsome, beautiful, artistic, symbols of freedom and so on. Therefore, they are also expected to have a command of various elements of folklore, including music, dance, visual arts and circus performances. Liégeois even brings his viewpoint to a head by noting: 'The only good Gypsy is a mythical one – the one that does not exist'. Romani stereotypes have been constructed in similar ways also in Finland, as reflected in

the following observation by lawyer Heikki Lampela: 'A Gypsy is understood as a member of the Romani tribe who commits crime dressed in ethnic costume (…) On the one hand, society believes that the Gypsy does not want to go to school or work, that he idealises freedom and vagrancy, wants to remain outside society and earn his livelihood in dubious ways' (Mustalaiset muiden joukkoon, 1993).

Romani stereotypes in scholarship and art thus appear to go hand-in-hand. Like David Malvinni (2004), Elena Gabor has considered the uses of Roma stereotypes in a film trilogy addressing the novels of Tony Gatlif (1983; 1993; 1998). Gabor sought to identify in the films the cultural elements and feature of Roma on which the director bases his narrative and ideological message. Gabor (2003: 63) observes that a film that contains only positive depictions or stereotypes (or ones felt to be positive) of a minority as discriminated against 'as the Roma' is based on a false depiction. The filmmaker himself relies on theses of authenticity by pointing out that the last part of the film trilogy *Gadjo Dilo* is an absolutely honest and real depiction of the Roma. It is true that in this film, the director steps outside the ethic of the traditional Romani stereotypes such as musical talent, poverty, lack of education and a free way of life, and instead creates his narrative along the axis of a human and egalitarian perspective. Nonetheless, also in this film, stereotypes are constructed in the viewer's eyes on the basis of earlier experiences. For example, a scene in *Gadjo Dilo* in which a young Romani woman dances erotically on a table in a restaurant acquires, instead of a stereotype of general Romani sexuality, a completely different meaning within the community, where the strong *mahrime* codes regulate the position and everyday life of young women in particular. By the mahrime norms, I am referring here to the union of purity and honour that also applies in the culture of the Finnish Roma (Viljanen, 2012: 388 – 399).

In Finnish Romani culture – as in many others – the hierarchy of the human body, the pure upper part and the impure lower part, underline the symbolic dimensions of dirt and purity. The symbolic meanings of different parts of the human body are in turn reflected in the hierarchical structure of the Romani community, in which the highest rank is given to the community's 'purest' and most respected members, i.e. old people. Lowest in the hierarchy are young women of childbearing age. In many cultures, uncontrolled sexuality and fertility are associated with notions of their danger to the rest of the community. As a result, the behaviour of women is regulated more strictly with norms than that of other members of the community (see Viljanen, 2012: 389).

In view of the global nature of Romani stereotypes, it is no wonder that there are also alternative viewpoints. Likely Okely, Acton, Malvinn, Silverman Lee (1998) wanted to criticise and renew the view on the formation of Romani stereotypes. Among other things, Lee interprets the stereotypes as having been formed by the ignorance of members of the majority regarding the history and culture of the Roma. According to Lee, the word *Gypsy* (Fi. mustalainen) alone bears negative stereotypes of content, and therefore it should be replaced by the word Roma/Romani. Lee points out that the negative attitude of Roma towards cultural assimilation is explained by the efforts to preserve their own language and cultural customs, not by a lack of desire to be an integral part of society. Magic and fortune-telling are also stereotypes attached to livelihoods mostly practices members of the majority and, as phenomena, currently professional activities (e.g., conjurers and makers of horoscopes).

Similar interpretations of the mobility of Roma have been presented by, among others, Angus Fraser (1992: 43) and Leo Lucassen (1998: 171) who have noted that mobility has never been characteristic of the Romani population. It is also a fact that in Finland at the turn of the 20th century the itinerant population was variegated and its standard of living was often low. As opportunities to find work outside the towns had become reduced, a large number of beggars and itinerant seasonal workers wandered along the roads and highways in search of a better livelihood (see Nygård, 1998: 49). Concerning ornamental dress, Lee (1998), in turn, notes that any culture will appear colourful when it is marketed with the means of art or explicitly chosen folklore.

The above perspectives on the Romani culture (its customs, practices, art, etc.) relying on the origin and unchanging nature of the culture and the lack of individual orientation disregard the notions of possible change and unpredictability. For example, in the discourse on Romani identity and culture (also) in Finland one notes the frequency of the word ‘tradition’ both within the Roma community and among the majority. I would even claim that scholars, either explicitly or unwittingly apply these stereotypes. A Finnish example is the recently published and widely commended *Suomen romanien historia* (A History of the Finnish Roma) (Pulma, 2012), where stereotypes follow the course of mental imagery and thus repeat themselves.

The stereotypes of Romani music

As mentioned earlier, interest in Roma arose in Finland in the 18th and 19th centuries in both scholarship and the arts. The early interpretations of researchers repeated many of the above-mentioned international Romani stereotypes of scholarship and art; free musical interpretation based on improvisation and emotion, the oriental origins of the music, its rhapsodic character, proximity to nature and virtuosity. The descriptions generate a conception of the unity of the aesthetic ideals of Gypsy music in relation to a free nature. In these descriptions, maintaining the structure of orientalism, Roma is primitive, but talented and oriental in all their combinations, including music. Nonetheless, the rhapsodic nature of the music, the combinations and loans of different styles and customs include implicitly a centuries-old connotation and stereotyping associated with the Roma instead of just the ability to combine the wide range of different genre of music into an original entity. Published research on the relations of loans in Romani music everywhere in Europe implicitly associate the formations of Romani music traditions with one of the earliest and most enduring Romani stereotypes, i.e., theft and criminality. In a negative sense, the abstraction of motifs and lyrics can be considered stealing, which is one of the strongest and most common Roma stereotypes (Fisher, 2012; Malvinni, 2004). Only the manner of performing the music adopted by Roma is regarded as the denominator – according to the emotion stereotype – when defining *Romaniness*. It appears, thus, that research unanimously rejected the notion of national dimensions and focus was directed to forms of expression characteristic of all Romani music. The international nature of Romani music is, in fact, a global Roma stereotype that is repeated in research and art. In the legacy and spirit of Romanticism the impact of the music on its listeners was also evaluated.

Despite this, this interpretation has been cultivated actively until recent years in international rhetoric concerning the cultural history of the Roma, and has been applied in literature, visual and music alike (Blomster, 2012: 291). On the other hand, the critical reception of music has focused attention on the constructed nature of stereotypes and their political and economic associations. In *Romani Routes* (2012) Carol Silverman, an expert on the Romani music of the Balkans, questions the innate nature of Romani stereotypes and focuses on the ability of the majority to create 'Gypsy stereotypes' linked to the music according to prevailing interests. Silverman (2012: 7) notes aptly that the ethnic markers of Romani music, such as

exoticism, emotion and soulfulness are not created only by 'the parties that market Gypsy music' but are also produced by Romani musicians and the performers themselves.

It is obvious that most of the stereotypes are well suited to the music performed by the Roma just as to other art. Later, these notions, that were occasionally very mistaken, have become realised through the migrations of Roma and they have negatively marked the identity of itinerant Roma groups all over Europe. At present, researchers of the Roma more or less agree on the constructed nature of 'Romaniness'. Despite this, the arts produce and reinforce an interpretation that was previously regarded as having documented the essence of being Roma. Partly due to the marginal status of the Roma, the stereotypes created by the majority come back in a boomerang analogy to the majority as the notions of the Roma themselves regarding the special nature of their music. Neither do these stereotypes emerge from any historical void.

Summary

Finnish Roma and Russian migrants have lived in Finland hundreds of years but still carry the stigma of stereotypes. Despite increased awareness of a wide range of demographics, existing theory fails to adequately explain how the stereotypes associated with multiple demographic categories continue to reproduce. I think stereotypes are stronger than change, although with the concept of identity we have tried to change the situation. Shortly: in Finland – as well as everywhere – the idea is often and always repeated: 'Rye (bad nickname for the Russians) is rye even in butter'. This empirical data of mine is also familiar when it comes to the Roma: 'Gypsy is always Gypsy'. We use stereotypes that get everyday life in mental order. As we have seen, popular culture and social media feed the idea of otherness. The key idea here is that we do not perceive the fact that we belong to a tradition even before tradition belong to us. The shackles of essentialism are hard for constructivists to break for acting alone is different from acting in a group.

The people of the many varied cultures of the world have never been able to interact with one another as they are capable of doing today. Alongside this interaction with diverse cultures stands the possibility of ignorance caused by a lack of understanding and knowledge of these unfamiliar peoples and societies, and that deficit sometimes leads to stereotyping. Stereotypes can be damaging to a culture,

especially when they falsely degrade an individual or entire group without any desire to identify or rectify the claim. In the case of stereotypes for the Russian or Roma people and our other national or international brothers and sisters, ignorance is not bliss. Ignorance is a missed opportunity to have a greater understanding of world around us that exist and advances, like agree with it, or not. Specific religious and racial / ethnic groups have stereotypes that vary more dramatically by culture, suggesting the importance of historical and current cultural context to these groups, who are less interdependent.

Russian migrants and Finnish Roma share lot a same kind of stereotypes. Hopefully, my empirical research lays grounds for a theoretical concept of *ethnic fusion in migration.* As Croucher and Kramer (2017) argued, *cultural fusion* is the process through which immigrants adopt behaviors of the local culture in order to maintain elements of their own minority identity and express it by the means of the dominant culture. Thus, newcomers are able to adopt behaviors of the surrounding culture while maintaining and strengthening aspects of their native identity; in the context of the ongoing integration, hybridity, i.e., being located in between two different cultures, constitutes an advantage and strength for the immigrants. They can utilise hybridity and fusion to promote their culture and gain recognition and legitimacy in the new society's public arena. Ethnic fusion and hybridity can therefore function as means for ethnic revival, solidarity, and political mobilisation. All the examples presented in the article demonstrate the apparent pride of the Roma and Russian immigrants in their culture of origin. Hybridity enables these immigrants to become local by adopting elements of the 'indigenous' culture while also cherishing their culture of origin in the new, blended forms. Viewed through the lens of social mobility, this hybridity facilitates immigrants' transition from the margins of the Roma and Russians and culture to its very center – the front stage of the popular Finnish culture.

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Zimbabwean Migrant Women in Cape Town, South Africa: Transnationalism, Space, and the Maintenance of Cultural Identity in a Xenophobic State

Roger Horn

Abstract: Drawing upon qualitative and quantitative research, this article aims to contribute to an anthropological understanding of the daily lives of long-term Zimbabwean migrant women in Cape Town, South Africa. Using the four dimensions of a crucial component of social life, space, as presented by, Mamphela Ramphele (1993) in her research among the migrant labour hostels of Cape Town, a portrait unfolds revealing that through the transnational engagement with their social networks and conflict avoidance strategies migrant women are able to navigate and, in some instances, thrive in a generally xenophobic host nation. Since gaining independence in 1980, Zimbabweans have faced myriad economic and political challenges, culminating in a major economic collapse in 2000. These aforementioned difficulties have led to the migration of approximately 25% of the Zimbabwean population (+/– 3 million people), with a majority seeking refuge in Zimbabwe's southern neighbour and long-time ally, South Africa. Women comprise almost half of those that left following the economic collapse in 2000, but despite these numbers, labelled the 'feminization of migration' (Crush and Tevera, 2010:17), women are still generally overlooked in society at large and scholarly research in the region. My findings demonstrate that despite the large numbers of long-term Zimbabwean migrants entering South Africa, their end goal is often one of a permanent return to Zimbabwe.
Keywords: Zimbabwean migrant women, Cape town, Transnationalism, cultural identity, xenophobia

Introduction

No condition is permanent in this universe, not even the unity of being.
Only the permanence of change in unconditional.
Nyamnjoh, 2017: 1999

This research looks to contribute to an anthropological understanding of the daily lived lives of Zimbabwean long-term migrant women residing in Cape Town, South Africa. Through the employment of transnational activities, these women are able

to adapt and to flourish to varying degrees while holding on to their sense of Zimbabwean identity in a xenophobic society. Influenced by Mamphela Ramphele's (1993) research in the migrant labour hostels of Cape Town, my interlocutor's lives are presented through the four dimensions Ramphele puts forth related to space, unveiling a portrait of women's lives that carefully navigate a generally xenophobic host nation and find ways to prosper through the utilisation of social networks and conflict avoidance strategies. Additionally, I seek to advance, 'a better understanding of migration as a complex social process rather than as a problem to be solved', in opposition to multiple prevailing myths and mass media representations (Berriane and de Haas, 2012: 14). The aforementioned 'complex social process', often presented as a new 'problem', fails to acknowledge the history and research published by progressive researchers in Southern Africa during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, such as Colin Murray (1981), Jane Guyer (1981), and Andrew Spiegel, Vanessa Watson, and Peter Wilkinson (1996), and the significance they hold in the present (Crush and Tevera, 2010: 21). Mohamed Berriane and Hein de Haas (2012), citing de Haas (2007) point out an additional detail of note stating, 'most African migrations are not directed towards the global North, but towards other African countries', continuing, '(this) obscures numerically much more important forms of migration *within* the continent, and contributes to the "myth of invasion"' (1). This research is particularly significant at the moment as the 'feminization of migration' (Crush and Tevera, 2010: 17) is under-researched in academia and government institutions despite the fact that following the Zimbabwean economic collapse of 2000 women make up approximately 44% of the migrants who have left Zimbabwe with the highest percentage relocating to South Africa, thus locating South Africa as the only Southern African country that is not male-dominated in terms of migration (Tevera and Chikanda, 2009: 2).

Contextualising present-day Zimbabwean long-term migration

Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 and despite early economic successes, by the end of the decade, numerous economic and political faults rose to the surface. By the early 1990s, due to increasing economic hardships widely attributed to former liberation hero and the first elected leader of the country, Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF political party, coupled with the dissolution of apartheid in South Africa (Crush and Tevera, 2010: 4) saw migration numbers increase rapidly. The South

African post-apartheid government (1994 –) responded to the increase in migration by tightening restrictions on Zimbabweans and other foreign nationals through the Aliens Control Amendment Act 76 of 1995 resulting in a decrease in movement between the two countries until the passage of the 2002 Immigration Act, which resulted in an estimated 1.25 million Zimbabweans crossing into South Africa by 2008 (Crush and Tevera, 2010: 4). With the passing of the 2002 Immigration Act and subsequent growth in migration, the word 'diaspora' began to take on a meaning unique to Zimbabweans beyond its common understanding of those who left their country: '"Diaspora' doesn't just represent a people – the place itself is known as ku Diaspora. So, people say, 'akaenda ku Diaspora' (he went to the Diaspora)' (Magaisa, 2010 in McGregor, 2011: 49). Though the 2002 Immigration Act provided an increased opportunity for migration, many challenges still existed for those seeking to migrate and those successful in entering the country as 2005 saw over 100,000 Zimbabweans deported and in 2008, over 200,000 (Fine, 2014: 9). Aimée-Noël Mbiyozo, in her article, 'Gender and Migration in South Africa: Talking to women migrants', states that within South Africa a majority of work permits are issued to skilled migrants originating outside the region and, 'Between 2001 and 2014… South Africa issued 96,000 work permits, of which just under 25% were granted to Zimbabweans' (2018: 9). For those allowed to remain in South Africa most find that the: 'South African government's policy towards Zimbabwean immigrants seems to lean more towards temporary stay than permanent residency or citizenship' (Mpondi and Mupakati, 2018: 231), exemplified by the decree issued by the South African Government in November 2021 which stated that the approximately, '200,000 holders of the Zimbabwean Exemption Permit would see their permission to stay in the country expire on Dec. 31. They would then have a 12-month grace permit to apply for alternative permits under the usual immigration framework' (Sguazzin, 2021). The Zimbabwean Exemption Permit is the third permit in a series of permits originally introduced solely for Zimbabweans in 2009 beginning with the Dispensation of Zimbabwean Project (DZP), originally instated to:

> regularize Zimbabweans who were residing in South Africa illegally, reduce pressure on the asylum system, curb deportations, and give amnesty to Zimbabweans using fake South African documents. The DZP was offered to Zimbabweans living in South Africa with valid passports who could prove they were engaged in employment, business or education (Aimée-Noël Mbiyozo, 2018: 9).

Upon expiration of the initial permits, Zimbabwean Special Dispensation permits (ZSP) were issued which expired in December of 2017, leading to a new permit, Zimbabwean Exemption permits (ZEP), bringing us to the present where many Zimbabweans have one year to, 'make a plan', a commonly used phrase.

Despite the 'feminization of migration' it should be pointed out that migration itself should be viewed as a limited opportunity reserved primarily for urban, educated men as: 'Women who represent the poorest of the poor in rural areas often lack the resources to migrate' (IOM, 2012:1), confirmed by a survey conducted in 2017 by Afrobarometer which found that, 'Respondents with post-secondary (64%) or secondary qualifications (55%) are far more likely to consider emigrating than those with primary school (25%) or without formal education (13%)' (Ndoma, 2017: 4 – 5). As it currently stands it is estimated that approximately 25% of Zimbabwe's population has departed from the country. This mass movement of people has resulted in profound effects upon the region as multiple reports reveal that 90% or more of these migrants remitted to family members in Zimbabwe who were in turn dependent upon remittances for their survival (von Burgsdorff, 2012: 15).

Defining interlocutors

Upon commencement in 2014, the women who took part in my research ranged from age twenty-three to forty-six, with the majority hailing from the capital of Zimbabwe, Harare, and others from multiple smaller cities southwest of Harare including Kwekwe (212 km southwest of Harare), Gweru (277 km southwest of Harare), and the mining city of Kadoma (145 km west of Harare). These women's occupations much like their towns of origin vary greatly, ranging from a primary school teacher assistant and part-time pet store employee to a dental assistant and airline employee, though the majority worked within the domestic sphere as either house cleaners, dog walkers, nannies, or a combination of one or more of these occupations. In order to define the scale of domestic workers in South Africa, Sally Pebrerdy and Natalya Dinat (2005) discloses a national statistic which states that: 'domestic work is the second largest sector of employment for black women in South Africa… and a defining characteristic of domestic workers in Johannesburg is their status as migrant workers' (1). In spite of their relatively large numbers and contributions to society and the work force, migrant women are generally over-

looked in South African society, partially due to their high levels of employment (documented and undocumented) in what are considered low skill level jobs within the aforementioned domestic sphere, but also merely because of their foreignness. It is important to note that not all Zimbabweans in South Africa are uneducated and resigned to service-related jobs, as a large percentage of the interlocutors I worked with had some form of higher education, with several women and their spouses being university graduates and / or enrolled in universities throughout Cape Town corresponding to findings from 2007 which discovered that 45% of Zimbabweans had higher education qualifications, which include engineers, nurses, doctors, journalists, and teachers (Sisulu, Moyo, and Tshuma, 2007: 555 quoted in Onslow and Plaut, 2018: 135).

Research methods

The methods I employed for data collection took place from 2014 to 2018 in Cape Town, South Africa, and Harare, Kadoma, and Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, and included participant observation, casual conversations, informal interviews, unstructured interviews, hanging out, writting field notes, photography, audio recordings, and video (Bernard, 2006: 210 – 213). Initially, researching daily life among my interlocutors proved to be a challenge due to numerous factors, mainly related to their employers, place of employment, and lack of free time. In Cape Town, participant observation for long periods of time during the day was often difficult to achieve as a majority of my interlocutors were employed in the domestic sphere and either they were uncomfortable approaching their employers to seek permission for me to be within the home or their employers denied my presence. An additional roadblock which prevented me from observation in the mornings and evenings was that several of the women resided within the homes they were employed by or lived in small lodgings throughout Cape Town, which were too small for me to take up temporary residence in and in some cases uncomfortable to have me around for long periods of time. My temporal and spatial restriction, similar to the restrictions faced by Ramphele (ibid., 58), led me to mimic her research design through the utilisation of the multiple aforementioned methodologies in order to supplement my data collection. One key supplement was travelling to Zimbabwe multiple times with two separate interlocutors and residing within their homes along with their immediate and distant family members

for the holidays during December – January and with their children, home from boarding school during the June – July holiday break.

University of Cape Town-based anthropologist, Francis Nyamnjoh (2013: 653), advises academics to supplement scholarly texts with fictionalised accounts which take place in a similar reality to those being researched, arguing in his article, 'Fiction and Reality of Mobility in Africa':

> that the physical and social mobility of Africans is best understood as an emotional, relational and social phenomenon captured in the complexities, contradictions and messiness of their everyday realities. In conventional scholarly writing, even when such dimensions are recognized, the standard expectations of what constitutes a scholarly text do little justice to the multilayered, multivocal and multifocal dimensions of everyday negotiation and navigation of myriad identity margins.

Following Nyamnjoh's advice, I supplemented my research methods and scholarly readings with various Zimbabwean fiction films, autobiographies, poetry, novels, and short stories, greatly assisting with my understanding of the lived experiences in Zimbabwe under the Mugabe regime, especially as 'Post 2000 writing by black authors... tends to be fiction, which focuses more on societal problems such as political repression, violence, poverty and disease' (Charles, 2016: 13). With the multitude of approaches undertaken and the scope of my research, I have come to define it as *topographic* as it comprises:

> the anthropology of place and space; of rootedness and displacement, migration, diaspora, and memory; questions of cultural boundedness, locality, and history; colonial and post-colonial struggles for identity; and the study of social life-worlds as they are materially and culturally constructed (MacDougall, 2006: 272).

It is my intention that through the utilisation of the many methods I employed that the information that I have gathered related to female Zimbabwean migration can be of use to multiple organisations in order to better understand the circumstances influencing migration in Southern Africa and the adaptations that are made in order to adapt and in their new homes and maintain crucial ongoing connections in their homelands.

Transnationalism and transmigration

For the Shona people of Zimbabwe personhood emphasises social relationships; to be human is to maintain relationships through acts such as caring for family members or by paying bridewealth (*roora*) (Bourdillon, 1987; Mutambirwa, 1989; Engelke, 1999 in Morreira, 2016: 128 – 129). They believe life is like a heavy load and one should take the group approach to this challenge as it cannot be easily carried alone (Gombe, 1995: 15 – 22 quoted in Chimuka, 2001: 34). The Shona idioms, 'Kuwanda kwakanaka, kwakarambwa nemuroyi (the more we are, the better, only a witch is against being many)' and 'Munhu munhu (a person is a person, viz. no one should look down upon others)' personify their beliefs (Mawere, 2010: 270). The belief, 'the more we are, the better' is exemplified in my research through the support groups that Zimbabwean women actively work to maintain, both in South Africa and in Zimbabwe, what Nina Glick Schiller (1992) termed transnationalism. Schiller (1992: 1) defines transnationalism and transmigrants as:

> the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement…Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders.

The development and maintenance of multiple relations both in Zimbabwe and South Africa has increasingly found the terms transnationalism and transmigrants applied to Zimbabwean migration as opposed to looking at their assimilation into a fictive 'national culture', which is often a primary goal of many programs in the West working with social and cultural integration programs (Crush and Tevera, 2010: 19 – 20). From an African perspective, debates about ethnicity, multiculturalism, and integration lean towards relations between citizens, rather than arriving immigrants, which brings an additional layer to an already complex situation, in stark contrast to Europe where primarily non-citizens bring ethnicity (at least within English discourse – e.g., 'minority ethnic groups') (Bakewell, 2009: 25 – 26).

An observation by France Maphosa among others, which fits the position many of my interlocutors find themselves needing to address is the children of migrants, as they are often the most strongly affected in terms of transnational migration declaring: 'Migrating parents, especially mothers, transfer the care of children, includ-

ing socialisation, to grandparents, other relatives or even domestic workers' (2010: 358). I discovered multiple reasons for the transfer of care of children with one of the more prevalent reasons being an economic necessity. Media, one of my long-term interlocutors stated in 2015:

> I originally thought I would be here for only 6 months, I thought it would be easy to come to South Africa to make money. After 3 months I realised that it was just a dream to return in 6 months and it was painful because I did not think I would be here for two or three years because I left my son behind, but then I had to comfort myself and think when I get money I will go back and see him.

Advances to modes of communication such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and multiple additional online applications which are accessed via cellphones, work and home computers, or internet cafes along with their improved availability, which saw abundant improvements even during my primary research period of 2014 – 2018 allows 'women to meet their normative obligations to family without being physically present' (Rossi and Rossi, 1990). This is interesting to consider in the case of long-term migrants such as Masline, who left her three children behind with family when they were all young and has been living separately for over a decade and the advances in her ability to actually see her children in opposition to when she first left for South Africa and could only watch her children grow on return visits home or through photo delivered to her via other migrant women traveling to and from Zimbabwe.

Prior to moving to South Africa, many of the women that took part in my research utilised their contacts in South Africa, or 'social capital' (Poros, 2011: para 10), which helped minimise risks by moving to places where they know other people and could use these networks to assist with finding housing and employment (van Meeteren and Pereira, 2013: 4). It should be noted that not all of my interlocutors or my personal friends from Zimbabwe had pre-established relationships in South Africa and this lack of contact lead to several obstacles including a feeling of extreme isolation, loneliness, alcoholism, and difficulties finding employment. Masline is one of my primary interlocutors who relocated without contacts and she stated that she found strength and support through keeping a photo of her deceased father in her room:

> So, when I was coming here, I had to take a picture of my dad. You know like in our culture you just feel like if someone dies their spirit will be like you… like wherever you go…every night when I was sleeping was like…like if I look at the picture I would say to my dad, "You know what I am here in South Africa, I don't even know anyone" and then I would… I would feel my heart is like is… my daddy was like looking after me because I don't know anyone here.

In order to situate the lives of Zimbabwean women in South Africa I again turn to the research of Mamphela Ramphele (1993), who offers an insightful concept of space divided into four dimensions, the physical, political-economic, ideological-intellectual, and psycho-social.

The first notion, the physical, can be viewed as both architectural and geographical and places perimeters on the space available for use. This can be utilised as a space to exclude others, and defined as inside vs outside, private vs public, family vs non-family, security vs insecurity, and urban vs rural; the same structuring logic utilised by national boundaries. The social relations I witnessed in Cape Town often took place in one room flats or individually rented rooms in which living and sleeping spaces were transformed into group spaces for maintaining and building new relationships, thus giving the physical space meaning based upon the multiple patterns of social relations. One of my initial research settings was in the small flat rented by one of my long-term interlocutors where I mainly observed the weekly Sunday meetings of a group which consisted of four to eight women dependent upon their schedules for approximately two months before she was forced to move as the owners decided to renovate with the intention of renting the space to European students as the space was in an upscale neighbourhood. During these meetings, the women would engage in small talk, discuss issues related to migratory paperwork and VISAs, debate contemporary issues in Zimbabwe, show photos and messages via Facebook and WhatsApp, and sometimes just sit and quietly enjoy each other's company. These meetings also served as the designated time for the collection of fees for the six members of the groups' monthly savings club (*mukando*). The mukando required each of the women to contribute R3,000 (+/– $300 as of 2015) per month to the group and each month a different member would receive the collected amount of R18, 000 (+/– $1,800). This distribution system ensured that each woman would receive the bulk sum twice a year to send back to Zimbabwe in order to provide money for numerous

family-related additional expenses including but not limited to paying school fees for their children, helping family members start small businesses, and assisting in the construction of houses intended to either be residences for the women upon their return, provide shelter for family or friends in need, and / or to rent to locals in order to generate income. The mukando sought if only minimally to ease the financial pressures on the women. Research reports that in the city of Johannesburg, South Africa, over 40% of Zimbabwean migrants were part of an informal savings club, but over half of all migrants were unable to save any amount of money monthly (Makina, 2010: 237 – 238).

Psycho-social space, delineated by the 'inhabited space' (Comaroff, 1984: 54), is a contested space in which it can be argued, 'one is given certain cues by one's environment that encourage one either to expand or to narrow one's expectations and aspirations in life' (Ramphele, 1993: 7). Media, the long-term interlocutor employed by my family stated of her living space and its changed meaning over time: 'Living in one room was not a home at first. When I arrived, just a bed was ok, but then you buy a TV, then a wardrobe, and as you settle it feels more like home.' The transformation from simply a room to a home made her feel more comfortable with her position in society and in terms of the psycho-social space the fact that she was able to avoid living in one of the townships on the outskirts of Cape Town and instead was able to live within a suburb near the city centre made her feel as though she could aspire to greater success during her time in South Africa. As many of the women I worked with were employed within the domestic sphere, with several additionally residing on the property of their employers these environments had a great impact both positively and negatively on aspirations and feelings of self-worth. On the positive side of this experience, living within homes that were primarily owned by white South Africans or Europeans provided the opportunity to learn about their culturally specific ways of being, essentially giving them insider information, or a chance to learn cultural dos and don'ts through observation which could, in turn, be used to assist the women in their encounters with a South African society, which can frequently be difficult due to the rampant racism and xenophobia. Unfortunately, a couple of the women also found themselves serving as the victims of verbal abuse or passive-aggressive behaviour, culturally demeaning for my interlocutors from both rural and urban areas in Zimbabwe in which age-related hierarchies are enforced through the appropriate addressing of one's elders to knowing when it is socially acceptable to speak and when to listen. Age-related hierarchies were a frequent

source of conflict for one of my interlocutors as she was several years older than her employer who intimidated and verbally abused her; fortunately, she did not reside with this employer and was thus not subjected to these situations around the clock. One of the ways in which abuse from employers and society, in general, is countered and a positive sense of self can be recovered or retained, if minimally, was through pre- and post-work dress, providing an opportunity to be seen in public dressed in clothing that displayed the outward appearance of and contributed to feelings of succeeding in their environment (Dill, 1988: 47).

This leads us to consider Ramphele‘s notion of the ideological-intellectual space, where she defines intellectual space as a: ‘capacity for critical awareness of one's environment and the position one occupies in the power structure of one's society' (1993: 5). As previously stated upon arrival in South Africa many women are exposed to numerous hardships including a lack of sustainable wage jobs, various issues in obtaining and maintaining legal documentation from the South African government (Department of Home Affairs), homesickness, as well as being subject to, ‘ordinary' or ‘everyday' xenophobia (Dodson, 2010: 11). As xenophobia has been broached several times it is important in terms of the ideological-intellectual space to expand upon the terms verbal usage and physical manifestations. Xenophobia is defined in the *South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English* as a ‘hatred or fear of foreigners', and commonly, is used to denote a verbal and physical ‘dislike of foreigners' (Harris, 2002: 170). Zimbabweans are situated in a peculiar place in South African society in relation to xenophobic attitudes as:

> unlike Nigerians and Somalis, Zimbabweans are not associated with any one "national characteristic." Rather, all of the negative stereotypes that used to be applied to "aliens" and "foreigners" in general are now routinely applied to Zimbabweans (Crush and Tevera, 2010: 364)

To the: ‘police and authorities, South African modernity, like its identities, is all about appearances' and being identifiable through their ‘accents, hairstyles, or dressing styles' (Bouillon, 2001a: 38 quoted in Nyamnjoh, 2010: 67) makes foreign nationals susceptible to mistreatment by the police and vulnerable to ‘excessive criminalization' (Nyamnjoh, 2010: 65 – 68). Women's navigation through urban space is largely shaped by fear and risk, and their tactics for avoiding police display not only their resistance to state power but also their vulnerability to it (Kihato,

2011: 75). One of my long-term interlocutors sent me a WhatsApp message in 2016 alerting me that the police were going through the suburb I resided in and forcing people who appeared to be African foreigners to provide passports and VISA documents. Her frustrations towards the end of our WhatsApp conversation regarding her position in society were summed up by the following excerpt as she wrote, '… they only arresting us and why? They allowed us here when things were bad in Zim [Zimbabwe] and now they arresting us.'

In order to address the ideological dimension of Ramphele's (1993) concept of space, language in verbal and non-verbal systems is an aspect that is crucial to understanding the idea of belonging and exclusion in South Africa as it has been a defining factor in South African identity and society at large from the early arrival of Europeans in the Cape. Ngugi wa Thiong'o proclaims, 'any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture' (1986: 13). In the case of Zimbabweans in South Africa, this culturally distinguishing characteristic can lead to additional forms of harassment including a frequently mentioned issue with Xhosa speaking, South Africans refusing to speak English to Zimbabweans despite the more often than not mutual capacity to communicate in English, asserting: 'You are in South Africa now, speak my language'. In terms of non-verbal communication, all of the women that I worked with had seemingly unlimited experiences with passive-aggressive behaviour and verbal and / or physical abuse based solely upon being an 'alien', 'foreigner' or, *Makwerekwere* (meaning 'those incapable of articulating local languages' that epitomise economic success and power) not only in society at large but within their immediate communities. One general population harassment avoidance strategy I was told of related to language was simply to not answer phone calls in public, specifically on public transportation as voicing a Zimbabwean English accent or speaking Shona could be an invitation for harassment. The complications migrants face related to language can vary dependent upon which Zimbabwean cultural group one identifies with. All of my interlocutors, with the exception of one, identified with Zimbabwe's largest group, Shona, and they often mentioned that they have a more difficult time blending into South African society linguistically as *chiShona* (Bantu language) is in a different linguistic categorisation than the Zimbabwean minority Ndeble, who speak *isiNdebele* (Nguni language), which is related to the two most widely spoken South African languages, Xhosa and Zulu. Marion Ryan Sinclair in her research with seventy-seven African foreign nationals, exclaims

that 'hostility towards foreigners has become one of the most significant features of post-apartheid South African society' (1999: 466) and Bronwyn Harris (2002) referring to the 'culture of violence' suggests the postulation of a new hypothesis that could be considered for the contemporary xenophobia violence against black foreigners, which would situate xenophobia within the transition from a racism past to a nationalistic future (2002: 174 – 175).

The political-economic governs the structure within which social relationships are conducted and legitimised, thus access to the political-economic can help pave the way for access to additional resources. Interest in the political and economic dimensions of life in South Africa can be greatly dependent upon status, for example, legal vs illegal. A majority of the women that I worked with had official government permission to reside in South Africa, thus deemed legal by the state and therefore able to live lives in which their engagement with the political-economic was made slightly easier through access to formal bank accounts, often crucial to obtaining 'legal' work. Despite the opportunity to engage with official institutions it was common for the women I worked with to additionally operate in unofficial realms such as the aforementioned monthly savings clubs (mukando). From a political perspective many women, though very informed regarding contemporary South African politics were more concerned with politics as a form of control as a majority were living in South Africa legally on special dispensation VISAs with an expiration date of typically three to five years. In terms of their engagement with Zimbabwean politics they were generally very informed and followed the situation in Zimbabwe closely, especially as all of them sought to return to Zimbabwe as soon as possible, but due to the length of time that former President Mugabe (1980 – 2017) was able to thwart calls for his removal and the violence that frequently follow failed attempts to remove him many had given up on being outwardly politically active in many aspects including voting and were simply, 'waiting for the old man to die'.

Lastly, though I have been speaking mainly of different forms of limitations in an exceedingly unequal South African society, it is crucial to note that within these constraints people have managed to find room to maneuver, cope, and to survive. Due to the sheer number of Zimbabwean women in Cape Town and the close ties to family and friends many of the women I worked with had no issues with finding other Zimbabwean women to form bonds in order to assist each other, key to survival and retaining as sense of their Zimbabwean identity.

Conclusion

Through a brief discussion of Zimbabwe's long history of in and out migration and the ongoing political and economic difficulties a general reference point for the events greatly affecting the mass migration of Zimbabweans has been established. Additionally, transnational actions that greatly influence the degree of feelings of inclusion or exclusion in South African society have been presented through the four concepts of space, as laid out by Mamphela Ramphele: the physical, political-economic, ideological-intellectual, and psycho-social. Maintaining strong contact with family and friends in Zimbabwe, in addition to the formation of new relationships were key factors in maintaining a sense of their Zimbabwean identity in an often-xenophobic host nation in which positive government and general population interactions and depictions can be difficult to come by.

With the current state of Zimbabwe remaining uncertain as the former Vice-President to Mugabe, turned adversary, Emmerson Mnangagwa continuing Mugabe's legacy of corruption and mismanagement, there seems to be no clear end in sight to the forced migration to South Africa as, 'every Zimbabwean working in South Africa supports an average of five people at home', thus the continued presence of migrants essentially stems a greater number of migrants, a paradox of Zimbabwe's recent migration history (Crush and Tevera, 2010: 3). The life of my interlocutors is one that mirrors that of millions around the globe who have been forced to flee their homes; a life that is sometimes filled with pain, loss, and separation, but despite the many challenges can also be filled with joy, love, and celebration as they attempt to find a way to triumph over their circumstance knowing that their journey is on-going, ever-changing, and incomplete. The strength and determination of the women I worked with were exhibited time and time again, all taking place with the hopes of an eventual permanent return to Zimbabwe.

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“I KNOW THE SECRETS OF…” – BLOGGING ABOUT BULGARIA AMONG THE MODERN RUSSIAN MIGRANTS

*Mina Hristova**

Abstract: When it comes to Russians in Bulgaria, there are several defined ‘waves’ of migration with different socio-economical, historical and political motivations. Nevertheless, the one developing under the changed conditions in the past decade provides a different migrant profile. These are predominantly females in their 20s and 30s working in the IT-related spheres who have grown tired of the dissatisfying state of their country in terms of to the quality of life (food, ecology, politics, etc.). As a result, they have decided to move to the Bulgarian seaside (or other cities) with their families to enjoy good weather, better food, cheap flights within Europe, and a better future for their children, who are to grow as legitimate European citizens. What separates them from previous migrant generations is that they often choose to move to the country despite not having a ‘network’ of acquaintances and family. In turn, that serves for new strategies of adaptation to be adopted in their communities and groups. One such is the blogadatation.
Keywords: blogadapting, Russian emigration, Bulgaria, female expats, Instagram

Introduction

The Bulgarian societal attitudes toward Russia are highly divided and are often reactive when external events factor in. Despite that, Russian immigration to the country has a long history, which has nourished a relatively stable and positive environment for those who have chosen to come here. Therefore, the paper looks at the scarcely researched topic of social and cultural integration of the Russian-speaking migrants in Bulgaria via *blogadaptation* (as in Callahan et al., 2020).

The Russian immigrant cohort forming under the changed conditions in the Federation during the past decade provides a different-than-before migrant profile. These are predominantly females in their 20s and 30s working in the IT-related spheres who have grown tired of the dissatisfying state of their country as it comes

* This article is the result of my participation in the project ‘Cultural Adaptation and Integration of Immigrants in Bulgaria’ (ДН 20/8 – 11.12.2017), financed by the Bulgarian Science Fund.

to the quality of life (food, ecology, politics, etc.). As a result, they have decided to move to the Bulgarian seaside (or other cities) with their families to enjoy good weather, better food, cheap flights within Europe, and a preferable future for their children, who are to grow as legitimate European citizens. What separates them from previous migrant generations is that they often choose to move to the country despite not having a previously established 'network' of acquaintances and family. In turn, that serves for new strategies of adaptation to be adopted by their communities and groups. One such approach is the online 'instructions of use' of everyday life in Bulgaria, published predominantly by Russian women on Instagram. Therefore, the paper looks at their adaptation online.

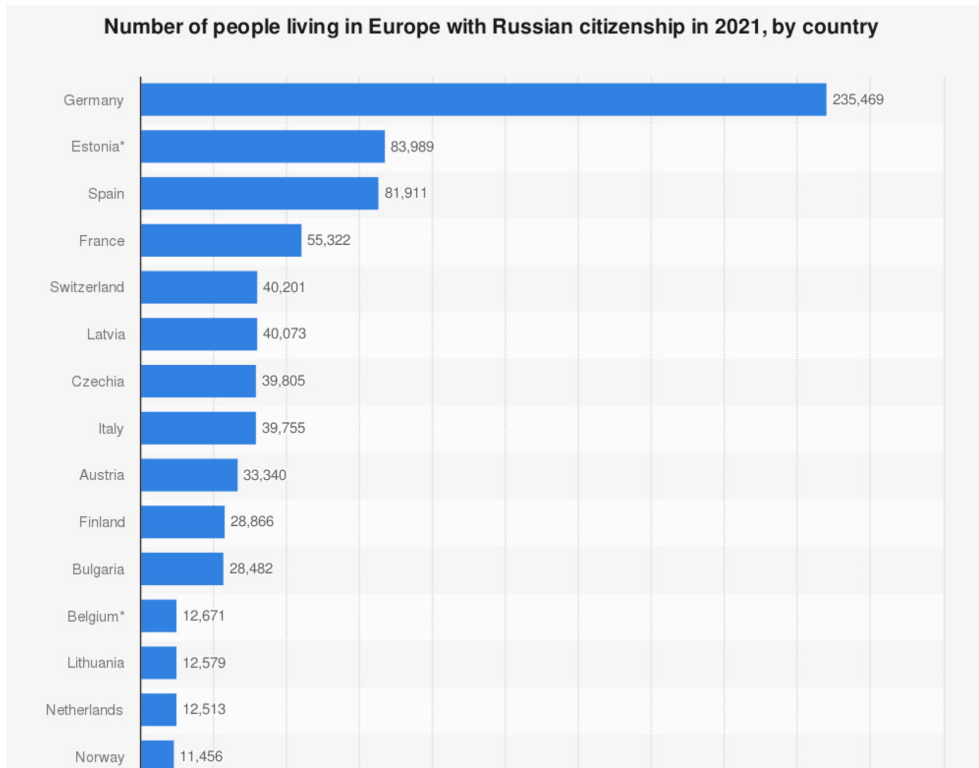
Global and local trends in the Russian immigration: quantitative data

According to IOM, the estimate of migrants globally is around 281 million in 2020, which is 3.6% of the global population (IOM, 2022: 2). For the past two decades, their number has almost doubled (from 150 million in 2000). One of the leading countries contributing to the global migration flows is the Russian Federation, as it is among the leaders in both emigration and immigration. Rounding out the top five countries, it is fifth globally with 12 million international migrants who have chosen it as a country of destination and third, just after India and Mexico, as one of origin – with its 10.8 million who have added up to the global emigrant population (IOM, 2022: 24 – 25).

Additionally, the 'Migrants & Refugees' report argues that, in reality, the number of people who have left the Federation between 2011 – 2017 is nine times higher than what official statistics claim (Migrants & Refugees, s/a). Some online sources point to the fact that only those citizens who have unregistered from their place of residence before leaving the country are entering the statistics, and that is usually not the case. Therefore, the numbers should be regarded as three – four times higher than the official data (Gontmakher, 04.01.2022).

Within Europe, the destination countries for the Russian emigrants are Germany, which is a home for almost ¼ million of them, Estonia, Spain, France, Switzerland, Latvia, Czechia, Italy, Austria, Finland, Bulgaria, etc. (Statista (b); Pic. 1). Conversely, Canada and the United States are at the top and bottom in the classification provided by the Migrants & Refugees Country Report. We have to, nevertheless, recognise a great deal of movement between the countries in the former Soviet

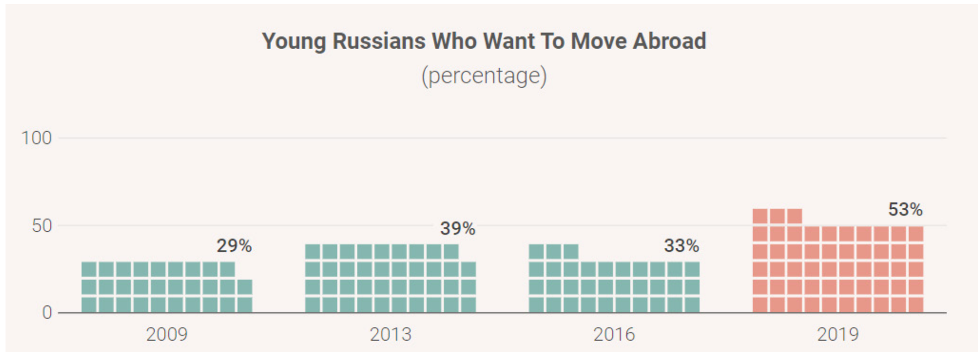
Union that accounts for a significant number of bilateral migrant waves (see, e.g., IOM, 2022: 26 – 27; Statista (c)).[1]



Pic. 1: Russian citizens living in European countries in 2021, by number. The full list and original chart are available at: https://bit.ly/3Qf9pBs (accessed 27 April 2022). Source: Statista.

[1] Some policies taken by Vladimir Putin's government are anticipating an increase in the country's ideological and military influence in the post-Soviet space (namely Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Moldova; see, e.g., Burkhardt et al., 2022; Grigas, 2016) to counter the increasing 'Western' influence (Iovu, 16.11.2020). Others read them as a simultaneous attempt at remedying the demographic crisis in the Russian Federation (Foltynova, 2020). Foltynova gives an example in that respect – 161,170 are the newly issued Russian passports to new citizens of the country between January and March 2020. In April 2020, the latest amendments to the Law on Citizenship stipulated that those foreign citizens who are permanently residing on the territory of the Russian Federation have the right to submit their application for citizenship with a simplified procedure (Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, 2020). These are particularly facilitating the citizenship procedure for the nationals of the former USSR republics allowing them to keep their double citizenships.

Surveys in recent years show that thinking about emigrating is now part of the everyday rationalisation of Russian people, especially in the age group of 18 – 24 years of age. According to Foltynova's article, only in 2018, more than 90,000 Russians were granted EU citizenship or residency permit. She also notes an increase of almost 25% in the desire to leave among the above-mentioned age group in the previous decade (see Pic.2; Foltynova, 19.06.2020).

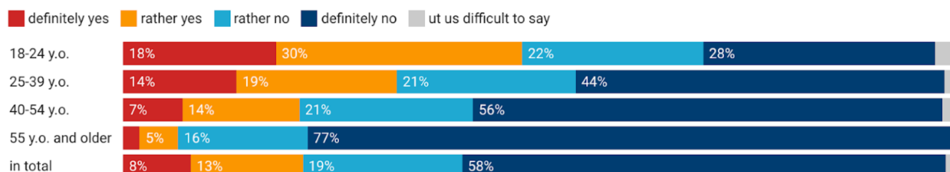


Pic. 2: A graph showing the 10-year change (2009-2019) in the positive emigration attitudes among the young Russians aged 18 – 24. Source: RadioFreeEuropeRadioLiberty. Available at: https://bit.ly/3zwCgdA (accessed 27 April 2022).

In 2021, the Yuri Levada Analytical Center[2] measured that every fifth Federal citizen (22%) who took part in the research would have a positive stance on leaving the country permanently, while 10% were already taking steps in that direction. Noting that this is the highest number, measured since 2013, the analysts point at the young people in the 18 – 24 age group as the most prominent participants in the emigration rationale. 48% (grouped answers: 'rather yes' and 'definitely yes') declared their desire to leave, followed by 33% of the respondents aged 25 – 39. The latter is the age group which is the focus of the current paper. As per the Levada-center results, the aspiration to emigrate measures slow growth, specifically in age groups 25 – 39 years and 40 – 54 years. That can be explained by the fact that this is the age when people reach relative professional and economic stability and life experience needed to act upon dissatisfactions with everyday life and respective desire for mobility. At the same time, there is a slight decrease noted in the emigration wish

[2] https://www.levada.ru/en/2021/07/06/emigration/ (accessed 7 May 2022).

among respondents aged 18 – 24 – from 53% in September 2019 to 48% in May 2021 (Pic. 3).[3]



Pic. 3: Results of the Would you like to go abroad for permanent residence? question, part of the Levada-Center Emigration Study among the Russian society. Source: Levada-Center. Available at: https://www.levada.ru/en/2021/07/06/emigration/ (accessed 27 Maya 2022).

Who are the new Russian migrants in Bulgaria and what motivated them to leave their country?

Russian-speaking immigration to Bulgaria

From a historical viewpoint, there are several well-delimited 'waves' of Russian and Russian-speaking immigration to Bulgaria visible from the research done by the Bulgarian and the former Soviet Republics academia. Most researchers agree on four waves (Kyoseva, 2002; Krasteva, 2018), while some propose seven (Matanova, 2013).

The first migration movement from Russia to Bulgaria is one of the Cossack Old Believers who left the country anathematised by the newly reformed Church for staying true to the Old Rite. They established their settlements around Varna and Silistra (Anastasova, 1998; Erolova, 2008, 2010). The second one is the so-called 'white immigration' or simply 'the whites' – the White army immigration, who relocates to the country after the October revolution fleeing the new Bolshevik regime, along with diverse groups of civil population (Daskalov, 2007; Kyoseva, 2002; Peykovska, 2014; Terzieva and Penkova, 2015).

[3] https://www.levada.ru/en/2021/07/06/emigration/ (accessed 7 May 2022).

The third wave encompasses a longer period – from the establishment of the Communist regimes until their dissolution. During that time, many specialists from different social and scientific fields, as well as workers and students, were exchanged between the countries. This cohort took an active part in the country's political, economic and social life. Another result was many mixed marriages between Russians and Bulgarians who have worked or studied together (Anastasova, 2005; 2009; Kosik, 2015; Matanova, 2016).

The post-socialist wave is the one which seems vastly agreed upon in terms of its continuity between 1990 and now. It is typified by predominantly family migration (Rozhkov, 2009), as well as intensive mobility related to the acquisition of real estate by Russian citizens mostly by the seaside. The latter constitutes a specific segment of Russian speakers who buy properties to spend anywhere from a month to six months in Bulgaria, working from a distance or enjoying a family holiday. It is not rare for retirees to spend the summer months in Bulgaria or for women and children to move to the country while the father works in Russia and sends money to them (same is noticed by Krasteva, 2018). For many, this strategy was motivated by the lower prices, as well as by the appealing weather and social conditions.

Finally, it is necessary to note here K. Anastassova's observation: 'none of these migrations is monoethnic, but is instead consisting of representatives of different national and ethnic communities – characteristic for the multinational Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet states, among which Russians and Ukrainians are prevailing (in number)' (Anastasova, 2015: 12; emphasis in original).

During this period, many Ukrainians and Moldavians[4] of Bulgarian origin were attracted to the country due to the policies adopted to support their higher education (Hristov, 2016). As a result, many have stayed and settled (Ganchev and Lesnikova, 2012; Luleva, 2012).

Modern Russian-speaking immigration to Bulgaria: push and pull factors

T. Matanova (2013; 2016) divides this last period into two – from 1990 to 2000 and after that. The migration during that time was predominantly economically driven and framed by the fall of the socialist regimes in both countries. A. Kratseva

[4] These groups represent a specific migrant cohort that, for the purposes of this article, is not specifically looked at but is rather treated as part of the larger migration processes connecting Bulgaria and the post-Soviet space. Nevertheless, the author recognises that the migrants of these two countries do have specific contexts and relationships with Bulgaria and will be a part of a dedicated study in the future.

(2018) notes that the elements of two types of Russian (-speaking) immigration to the country can be observed in the post-socialist period, divided as described above, one preconditioned by real estate purchases, and another that bears similarities to lifestyle migration.

Evidently, researchers still look at the long period following the democratic changes in Bulgaria in 1989 as coherent having some peculiarities that only build upon each other. In that sense, the seminal year – 2007, when the country joined the European Union – can be treated as an important watershed. It plays a crucial role in the accelerated migration processes, not only between the two countries but between Bulgaria and other countries in the wider Balkan region left outside the Union (i.e., Macedonia and Serbia; see Hristova, 2021). With the proliferation of the (real-estate) market and the positive conception of Bulgarian citizenship – now a union one, many started searching for various tactics to easily access the EU social, economic and political milieu by gaining citizenship rights. The Bulgarian economy (keeping relatively low prices on products, essentials, real estate, etc.) became attractive to foreigners.

After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, many changes occurred in the Russian domestic political and economic situation. In the 2000s, with the first term of Vladimir Putin as President, Freedom House assessed the government as a 'hybrid' – containing both democratic and authoritarian characteristics, which consolidated to be predominantly the latter during his second term in 2008 (Welt and Nelson, 2020: 2). This tendency continued steadily in the following years. In 2022, Freedom House evaluated the Federation as a *consolidated authoritarian regime* with an overall freedom score of 19/100 – assessing 'people's access to political rights and civil liberties' as *not free*.[5]

Furthermore, in 2014 the invasive international actions peaked the approval ratings of President Putin, which went from 69% the previous month to 80% in March. In the following years, the public approval fluctuated and brought a new apex in March 2022, after the initiation of the war against Ukraine. While about 65% evaluated Putin positively in December 2021, their number rose to 83% three months later.[6] We can speculate that this interesting correlation has to do with an increased sense of the social threat posed by an out-group. The latter was visible in the reasoning offered in Putin's speech on the verge of military actions: 'the special military

[5] https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores (accessed 9 May 2022).
[6] https://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/ (accessed 9 May 2022).

operation [aims] at defending the people who for the past eight years were subjected to terror, genocide by the Kyiv regime', reminding that the country will not allow for Ukraine to gain a nuclear weapon, and will not agree to NATO enlargement to the East.[7]

Among the things that created this environment of fear and instability on a societal level combined with strengthened anti-democratic and anti-liberal attitudes in the country is possibly the introduction of amendments to the constitution which included changes to the presidential term limits, as well as excluding of same-sex unions from the definition of marriage and including the belief in God as a part of 'Russia's national character'[8] (Welt and Nelson, 2020: 6; 20), as well as limiting freedom of religion / belief (Welt and Nelson, 2020: 21).

Furthermore, the decline of human rights and freedoms was deepened by a 2014 law that illegalised 'repeat nonviolent participation in unauthorised rallies' (Welt and Nelson, 2020: 18). According to Freedom House, since 2012, the Parliament has adopted a number of laws that limit 'or can be used to interfere with freedom of speech and information' and targeted 'a large variety of groups and people, ranging from individual social media users and bloggers to journalists, political opposition activists, large and small online media outlets, and online businesses' (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Much, if not all information and communication disseminated online can be surveilled. Many were prosecuted for 'extremism' (essentially any anti-governmental or critical of the rule opinion shared online; see Human Rights Watch, 2017). The infamous 'Bloggers' Law, for example, targets all posting or microblogging on social media (i.e., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.), as the account owners are held accountable for comments on their posts and the verification of information. Those with more than 3,000 visitors a day on their social media must register with Roskomnadzor (Russian Communication Supervision Service) and provide their real names, initials and contacts on their pages (further information in Human Rights Watch, 2017).

Last but not least are the changes in the economy of the country post-Crimea. The sanctions at the point, among others, prevented both investments and access to capital by the Russian businesses. That, combined with its heavy dependency on

[7] https://tass.ru/politika/13825671?utm_source=dw.com&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=dw.com&utm_referrer=dw.com (accessed 9 May 2022).
[8] That is also a result of the 2011 – 2012 Putin campaign that brought conservatism and an 'electoral turn to the right – nationalism and Russian Orthodoxy' (Barkanov, 13 March 2014).

the export of oil and gas (it was 30% of the GDP in 2018 and 60% of exports; see Tracey, 12.11.2018), brought a crisis in the Federation's economy, slowed it down to 0.7% in 2014, and brought it to almost – 2% in 2015 (Welt and Nelson, 2020: 28). In December 2014, the Government decided to remove the Ruble band to the US dollar by which it was conducting its exports and transactions. That brought an unprecedented devaluation of the Ruble and required fast measures for stabilisation (OSW, 2015). The Federation persistently searched for ways to conduct its trade in currencies different from the US Dollar and, since the post-February 2022 circumstances – the euro. The so-called 'dedollarisation' is planned to be executed via 'gradual growth in the use of the ruble' and 'increase of the role of the currencies of friendly countries'[9]. Among other results, inflation conveyed another significant change to everyday life. The food market started relying heavily on imports (especially fruits and vegetables) since due to the Ruble devaluation, the farmers oriented toward exporting their production. With limited internal supply, the prices skyrocketed (Tracey, 12 November 2018).

Although this is not an exhaustive review of all the changes in the Russian federation post-2014, it gives a sense of the everyday life disruptions. Based on the push and pull factors described above as well as on my impressions from the in-depth interviews, I suggest a new division for the post-socialist period migration dictated by the changes in the international, regional and local Bulgarian political scene:

- From 2007 – to specifically mark this turning point in Bulgaria's positioning on the migration map in the wider Balkan region (pull factor), up until 2014 – the year in which the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine started following the so-called Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas (push factor).
- The next period continues and captures the following less than a decade from 2014 until now (push factor).

Modern Russian-speaking immigration to Bulgaria: profile of the blogging women

The research presented in this paper is based on face-to-face semi-structured ethnographic interviews done in 2020 at the Bulgarian seaside – in the Burgas municipality (the town of Nessebar, the village of Ravda and the Sunny beach resort).

[9] http://www.cbr.ru/collection/collection/file/41036/ofs_22-1_e.pdf (accessed 10 May 2022).

The respondents were chosen and contacted during a previously carried out online research on Instagram, where their online activity was observed from 2019 through 2021. The initial search was done via hashtags (related to living in or blogging about Bulgaria) and later with observations of the most active profiles in the comment sections. The non-participant observation allowed me to monitor their behaviour, visual and textual practices and (self-)presentations online. This approach reveals the discursively constructed idea of the Russian-speaking immigrants about their host country and about them selves.

After I contacted some of my informants, they connected me with their friends whom they have selected as similar to them in terms of online behaviours (i.e., blogging about their experiences in Bulgaria).

95% of the respondents are women in their 30s and 40s, although there are several exclusions under and above that age group.

Most of them have an IT degree and are either currently working or have worked in the sphere in their initial years upon arrival in Bulgaria. Due to the free form under which they practice their profession, many work from home, usually with Western-European countries, the US or Russia. This circumstance allows them to afford a relatively stable life in Bulgaria (especially during the COVID-19). Aside from the fact that almost all of them have bought their own homes instead of renting, their 'foreign salaries' ensure a good standard in the country, being higher than the median for the country. It is worth mentioning that such a 'wave', consisting predominantly of IT specialists seeking to leave Russia, has been noted by analysers in February and March 2022. B. Grozovsky's early research reports that a third of those who left Russia during that time worked as ITs for international companies. That choice saved them from 'the difficulties caused by the financial sanctions against Russia and the currency export restrictions imposed by the Russian authorities and banks' (ibid., 8 April 2022).

Alongside that fact, it is noteworthy that some of my respondents who worked as ITs found their passions in art (e.g., photography) or business (e.g., opening a kindergarten, an alternative 'flower' shop, tour guiding) after moving to Bulgaria. Among them are also an accountant, a tourist guide and a private business owner. The interviews showed that the researched group holds little connection to the home country and is rarely nostalgic towards it and its cultural elements (such as food, but also social dynamics, holidays, etc.).

Many Russian-speaking women came with their husbands and children, although there are also a few, who are single.

A constitutive element of the researched group's profile is their motivations[10,11] for moving to Bulgaria. In their form, these are lifestyle choices, but in their essence, they are conscious choices made by the respondents to support their narrative about self-identification (Giddens, 1991: 81). In other words: '[F]or lifestyle migrants, the choice made of *where* to live is consciously, intentionally also one about *how* to live' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2015: 21). That points to deeper rationalisations as to *whom* you want to become when you get the chance of becoming someone else or yourself even more than before. Their accounts of the migration 'desire and post-migration practices' (McGarrigle, 2022: 170) open the door to understanding the modern Russian-speaking newcomers to Bulgaria. As we will see, my respondents are following the global democratic trends trying to get further away from any anti-liberal treatment of personal freedoms and issues of global concern. That free choice of where to move to find those things nevertheless poses the question of who you will choose to become at the final destination.

The Russian-speaking migrants in Bulgaria were most commonly identifying **environmental reasons** to move to the country due to the poor conditions in their home countries in that respect (most notably these were coming from Russia). One of the bloggers was coming from an industrial town (the size of Burgas) in Russia where she, in her own words, 'would rarely see a blue sky – it was always gray' (П., woman, around 35, IT, № 1169-III/2021:28). The moment she set her foot in Nessebar, she fell in love with the sunny weather and clean air. She remarked that until now she could never wear her good shoes or clothes outside since they would always get dirty or corroded due to the chemicals they would disperse on the streets to keep them safe from vehicles.

The second was **infrastructural reasons** that would significantly influence their time management, rendering their life – professionally and privately, constantly dependent on traffic jams and long hours of commute. For example, some respondents pointed out that while living in Moscow, they had to commute for more than an hour

[10] The main motives that I present here are also quantitatively established: negative climate, economic and social changes in Russia, as pointed out by the Migrants and Refugees research (s/a), citing ROSSTAT's information from 2018. This leads to both internal migration and population concentration in the Western parts of the country, but also maintains a relatively stable departure trend from the country in the past two decades (Statista (a)).

[11] A more comprehensive version of the this part of text can be found in Hristova, 2022.

in each direction every working day. Therefore, they would spend at least 3 hours a day travelling to and from their homes and never had time to lead a healthy social life. They rarely saw their closest friends or spent time outside the office or home. Since most of my respondents are in their early thirties (up to around 45 – 50), this specific change influenced significantly their psychological well-being (their quality of life).

Respondents have mentioned **the security matter and the socio-political situation** in their home country. Feeling gradually unsafe made some of them look into options to move to a country where they would deal administratively with their moving easier and faster:

> When there was a war in Ukraine [in 2014], many from Lugansk came here. [And] now when everything in Russia is so tough and scary, people are looking for any possibility to leave – it seems – that here, in Bulgaria, there is also a chance for legalisation. [If] years ago someone was postponing it thinking: ‘maybe I will do it in another year’, now they are trying to jump that train (O., female, around 40, Kazakhstan, living in Varna, № 1167-III/2021: 5).[12]

Even though the respondent refers to the beginning of the conflict, international observers arrive at similar conclusions nowadays. Despite not being directly involved in the military actions, those Russians ‘who have left are united by a negative attitude toward the war and toward Putin’s dictatorship’ and don’t expect to come back home anytime soon (Grozovski, 8 April 2022).

Finally, as it is common with lifestyle migration, we have to mention their choice to move to a country with a **lower living standard** and more **affordable goods and services.** For some immigrants, the choice of a better environment for their children and / or parents played a leading role in their decision.

They move to Bulgaria in an attempt to reinvent themselves as part of the globalised world by acquiring Bulgarian citizen permits or citizenship. Their blogging experience usually starts with the aim to help themselves during the adaptation process, but many become widely read and followed due to the valuable insights they provide.

[12] The original language of the interviews is Russian and / or Bulgarian. The translation is by the author. The initials of the respondents are changed and do not correspond to their names to preserve their identities.

The new waves of Russian-speaking immigrants in Bulgaria are (mostly) families searching for a country (at the periphery of the EU) that would provide them with a different experience and status than at home. My respondents are women who are professionals working mostly in the IT sphere and are also blogging about their experiences in their new homes. The profiles of Russian-speaking bloggers piqued my interest specifically because of the platform they chose to share their adaptational experiences. In this sense, Instagram is used as a medium via which they create 'imagined communities' of foreigners of the same origin with relatively similar cultural and social experiences and backgrounds who came to live in Bulgaria.

Russian Instagram users in Russia and Russian-speaking bloggers in Bulgaria

Instagram is currently one of the most popular apps globally (depending on the classification is between 1st and 4th place) with 2 billion monthly users (Facebook has 2.9 billion).[13] In January 2021, the first place by Instagram users is shared by the USA and India with 140 million, followed by Brazil with 99 million, Indonesia with 85 million, and Russia with – 56 million (ibid., 30 May 2022). According to Statista, in February 2022, the active users in the latter were over 64.1 million.[14] The app's audience globally by age is mostly represented by the 18 – 24-year-olds with 29.8%, 35 – 44 y.o. – 16%, 45 – 54 y.o. – 8.1%, etc.[15]

In Russia, as the only Russian-speaking country represented in most quantitative studies due to its substantial number of users, there are 63,924,100 on Instagram in June 2022. These account for 44.6% of its population. According to the

[13] https://www.searchenginejournal.com/social-media/biggest-social-media-sites/ (accessed 15 May 2022).

[14] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1024741/instagram-users-russia/ (accessed 15 May 2022). We also have to keep in mind that Instagram was officially banned in Russia by the Roskomnadzor on 11 March 2022 following a prosecution and court order labelling Meta – the parent company of both Facebook and Instagram, as an 'extremist organization'. The immediate reason was that the social policies of both platforms allowed 'a temporary change to its hate speech policy, allowing the user to post calls for violence against Russian military invading Ukraine' (https://mashable.com/article/russia-instagram-ban (accessed 15 May 2022). This fact was globally perceived as a shrinking of online spaces for a free exchange of information in the Federation and a limitation of the right of free speech. The drop that followed that on the platform can be seen in the global statistics; https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/russian-federation (accessed 10 June 2022).

[15] https://www.searchenginejournal.com/instagram-facts/314439/#close (accessed 15 May 2022).

NapoleonCat statistics, the gender profile is 60.3% women vs 39.7% men.[16] We have to mention that this is along the normal lines of the media usage patterns in the country, as women are more active on the platform both as audience and influencers, bloggers, etc. The local picture represented in Bulgaria follows that trend, as shown previously.

Another element that displays parallels in the 'consumer' patterns of the app in Russia and Bulgaria is related to the age groups involved. In the Federation, the most active and represented are the people in the age group 25 – 34 (32.2% of all or 20, 600, 000) – divided between 18.9% women and 13.3% men.[17] The next most represented group is the one of 35 – 44 y.o. with 25.5%, but marking a bigger difference between men and women, where the latter are 6,000,000 more.[18] Russian-speaking Instagram users in Bulgaria follow these same tendencies, although additional research is needed for full validation.

The platform's popularity among these specific age groups shows the relative openness and romanticism of the younger generations to the Western world. As a visual platform, it provides a 'more reliable' / tangible parallel between the different civilisational models than the text-based comparisons. Its high integration within other social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Tumblr[19] allows its audience to share more widely its image-based content, such as photos and videos in the form of stories (Snapchat-inspired) and reels (a response to Tik Tok). That normalises the influence of the Western values and lifestyle among Russian-speaking immigrants and their compatriots at home. It is also possibly related to the growth of positive emigrational attitudes of Russians in the 18 – 39 age group, especially since they are the primary users of Instagram in Russia (33%; see pic. 3 above). Additionally, all of them have future opportunities to emigrate relatively easy following career opportunities or earning university degrees elsewhere (in the West).

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[16] https://napoleoncat.com/stats/instagram-users-in-russian_federation/2022/06/ (accessed 10 June 2022).
[17] More general studies point to males being more active on Twitter in Russia. Source: https://www.statista.com/topics/6281/social-media-in-russia/#topicHeader__wrapper (accessed 10 June 2022).
[18] https://napoleoncat.com/stats/instagram-users-in-russian_federation/2022/06/ (accessed 10 June 2022).
[19] https://www.statista.com/topics/1882/instagram/#topicHeader__wrapper (accessed 15 May 2022).

Why blogging on Instagram?

On its platform, Instagram is defined as:

> Instagram is a photo, video, and message sharing app with a community of people that use it to connect with each other through their passions and interests. Instagram is especially popular among teens: they use it to capture special moments, relate to one another, and carry conversations in a fun way – using photos, videos, filters, comments, captions, emojis, and hashtags[20].

Counterintuitively to its declared function as a 'photo, video, and message sharing app', Instagram has its own 'life' among Russian speakers. As an American (and globally used) photo-sharing social network, the platform provides a more powerful (visual) tool to introduce Western values and lifestyles in the everyday life than the other social media platforms. Synchronous to that, it nevertheless develops under its own norms supporting the cultural background of the citizens of the former Soviet Union predominantly via their primarily Russian-language posts on the app. The matter of what the 'Russian way' on the internet should look like was highly discussed in the former Soviet space and specifically in the Federation in the early 2000s. H. Schmidt and K. Teubener divide the approaches into two – Slavophiles and Zapadniks (Westerners) (Schmidt and Teubener, 2006: 17). While the former stand behind the idea of the Russian cultural uniqueness that has to be preserved even on the internet, the latter are interested in 'integrating into the global networks and assimilating Western standards' (Alexanyan and Koltsova, 2009: 67). Or put in the words of Koltsova: Western influence 'should be either absorbed and assimilated, or resisted, but cannot be ignored' (2007: 55 cited in Alexanyan and Koltsova, 2009: 68). We can see that middle ground in the social approaches to that matter was possibly reached in the modern blogging on Instagram.

While in Europe and in the USA Instagram is used just for pictures, Russians have a different understanding of it. Most of the blogs on Instagram are written by a Russian-speaking audience that has the habit of not only looking at the pictures on Instagram but reading and sharing their thoughts in the comments and having discussions there.

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[20] shorturl.at/hrQRS (accessed 15 May 2022).

> M.H.: So, you really do have your own approach towards the app, as I have thought.
>
> Yes, I think so. It is characteristic of Russians, and not only to Russians but to the people who speak Russian from the former countries of the Soviet Union. For example, Ukrainians have blogs in Ukrainian or Russian. [The] people from the West – Europe, USA, don't expect that. They usually write one sentence there, hashtags, and that's it, and all the comments below are: "bravo", "super", and "cool". With us, sometimes there are huge discussions in which people argue on different matters. And this is on Instagram – I know that this is not appropriate at all [for the platform], but this is how it happened. [This] is something only among people who grew up in the countries of the former Soviet Union (E., 28, female, IT, Varna, № 1167-III/2021).

Except for the specific way people from the post-Soviet space use Instagram, there is another reason for choosing the platform. Some respondents chose to use visual social media instead of Facebook due to its age-specific audience. For them, the fact that the users of the former are younger makes them more receptive to different opinions and experiences. They are also 'a product' of a more positive online environment that developed under the concepts of community-building and constructive and open-minded conversations on controversial topics in the past several years. During this period, Facebook progressively became a space 'inhabited' by older generations while the younger ones 'moved' to other platforms.

> At that moment, I understood that the audience from Russia on Facebook is toxic. It is specifically there [on Facebook]. They write negative comments, they are unhappy about everything, and everything is wrong for them. I even post the same stuff on Facebook and Instagram. On Instagram, people write: "Oh, thank you so much for the information, super cool!" or they add to the conversation: "Visit that place as well". While on Facebook, they write: "All that's a lie! You are stupid! You don't know anything!" In other words, there are completely different people on both platforms.
>
> [Unfortunately] the Russian-speaking users on Facebook are often pensioners. They are older and position themselves as a more intellectual and more critically thinking audience… And I guess they think they are entitled to hurt a person if they dislike something. In the beginning, that was strange, but now I am used to it (П., woman, around 35, IT, № 1169-III/2021).

What is Instagram blogging?

Blogging on Instagram is different from the traditional one. It can be considered a type of microblogging due to its 2,200 characters limitation in the caption section compared to the no-limit specific blog platforms.[21] The same rule applies to the comment section as well. Due to the 125-character truncation, the unprepared Instagram user can sometimes find it harder to notice or make a difference between blog texts on the platform.

To present some of the general elements of the blogadaptation of Russian-speaking women in Bulgaria, we have to establish some differences between their blog posts on Instagram and what is considered a popular form of blogging on the platform. Looking at the online appearances of the Russian women on Instagram provides several types of resources for analysis of their online identities ranging from visual (photos or videos – reels or stories) to textual – comments, hashtags and captions (Highfield and Leaver, 2014 as in Laestadius, 2017: 574).

Most lifestyle bloggers on Instagram usually post relatively short captions to briefly describe their picture or share an emotion without going into detail. The globally followed influencers and bloggers follow specific rules to create their Instagram accounts and are being extra careful in crafting their online identities. Steps in that direction include: finding a distinctive niche in which they develop their blog entries (food, photography, travel, art, books, politics, etc.); posting attractive pictures that are usually 'the hooks' to bring more followers since many people are on Instagram only for its 'fast-digestible' visual content instead of reading long posts; thinking of and writing ahead of time their content.[22] All these are often done to ensure more followers which, in turn, is monetised via sales or donations.

In the case of the Russian-speaking bloggers in Bulgaria, due to their different-than-usual reasons to post on the app, most of these elements are missing. Since they do not create and share their content to gain followers and use it as a business (although such cases exist) platform, they do not follow the rules at any cost.

Of course, introducing a wider public into your daily life or some more intimate thoughts holds a specific relationship with the ego:

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[21] https://fitsmallbusiness.com/start-an-instagram-blog/ (accessed 10 June 2022).
[22] https://fitsmallbusiness.com/start-an-instagram-blog/ (accessed 10 June 2022).

> I was doing that before – I tried to publish regularly – every day, either morning or night because this is when the people would usually go on Instagram – when they have their morning coffee before work, during their lunch break, or when they are travelling back home. Previously it was very time-consuming. That is why I post more rarely now because Instagram is not the biggest priority in my life after all. [Now] I only post pictures and posts I want, when I want it, no matter if this is the 'right time' and if this will affect my statistics.
> It starts to weigh on you. When I started arranging my photo gallery in a specific manner. It was beautiful, but I became such a perfectionist. I was thinking about my blog all the time... [I was overdoing it] ...There was a moment when, as soon as I would open my eyes in the morning, I would go on Instagram to check my follows and that would significantly affect my mood for the day. [That‘s] how my Instagram began taking up so much space in my head, in my life, in my thoughts, but it became artificial. [I] lost its initial meaning for me – to share *insta* – a moment, an emotion. [There] is no point in doing that if you are not profiting from that blog – then it‘s a job, but if it brings you joy – you are killing the pleasure of it that way. [So] now I don‘t care about this stuff that much. I earn enough money as an IT.
> On another note, this is not good for the followers, too, if your blog becomes more artificial, because our life is not such (E., 28, female, IT, Varna, № 1167-III/2021).

The respondent points explicitly to some of the mental health issues already widely known to be induced by social media. The pressure of leading the perfect life or being liked and supported by the general (Instagram) public brings to the fore a number of important societal questions about the responsibilities brought by platforms providing such an enormous influence for the first time in history. Nevertheless, the Russian-speaking bloggers in Bulgaria usually choose to limit their audience via their online behaviour. I will discuss this further in the text.

On another note, the process of selecting who to follow and trust on Instagram is two-way, and while the bloggers choose how to present themselves, the audience also makes a choice:

> That is nothing close to being an influencer in Russia. There we have so many bloggers who live in hotels for free – just in exchange for advertising it. They are sending them a lot of free stuff. But it happens now that in Russia, people don't trust stars, but common people – the smaller bloggers with 10 – 20, 000 followers

> or like us, the smallest – with 3 – 5 thousand. The people grew tired of these famous faces that do whatever they do just for the money but don't use the products they advertise or actually dislike them. They constantly try to create [some hype]. And even more so, they assemble this fake picture – for example, they are not that wealthy but imitate it. We know people who came here to Bulgaria and led one way of life, but on Instagram, they show something completely different (P., woman, around 35, IT, № 1169-III/2021).

> Yes, there are different people here – some make money by selling apartments, others deal with tourists… I don't make money out of that, but they lie and cheat 'a bit'. They give false information… I don't want to read and support such information for the Russians to see (B., woman, around 32, Sunny Beach, № 1169-III/2021).

Authenticity appears to be highly valued by my respondents, particularly since they take their role as informers of the Russian-speaking Instagram community in Bulgaria and / or Russia seriously. Their self-representations heavily rely on their genuineness which can be observed in online communication as often as untruthfulness. Reese et al. note that the information shared online 'typically does not surface in face-to-face contacts' (Reese et al., 2007 cited by Callahan et al., 2020: 6). Because of the greater number of followers, most of whom are strangers, they feel more freedom to share more on their blogs than on other social media (Callahan et al., 2020: 6). Nevertheless,

> Not everyone starts blogging on Instagram because you can straight away see who he / she are as a person, how they write, what they write about, what photographs they publish, and what are they interested in (P., woman, around 35, IT, № 1169-III/2021).

When asked, most of my respondents agreed that even though they share part of their personal life with a bigger than usual audience, it is still a part that doesn't harm their personal life and privacy. Some have private accounts just for their friends, while others share information that they don't want to stay online for too long as stories that disappear over 24 hours.

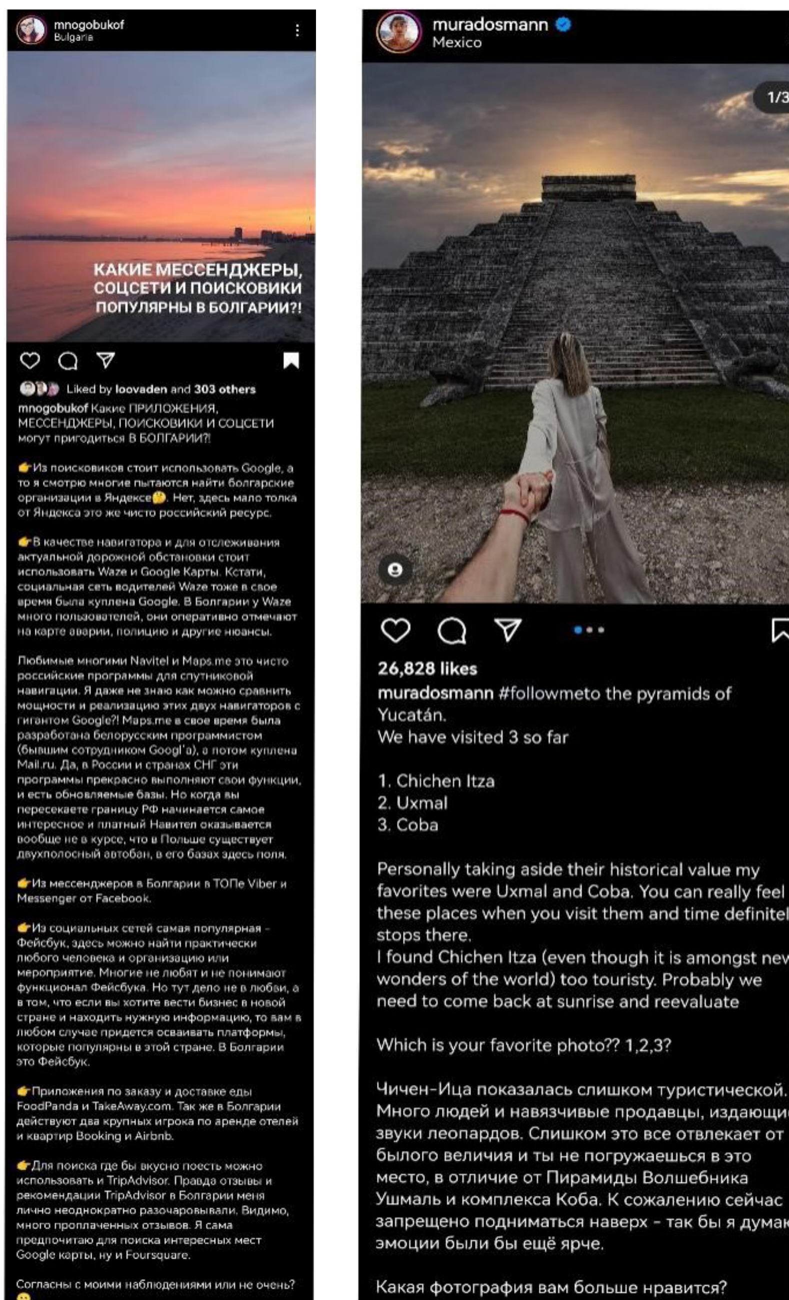
Structurally, the posts follow a simple organisation: a one-liner to get the audience's attention. It should be short enough, so clicking it is not needed to see

the whole caption. Then the actual content follows. In it, they share curious or emotion-inducing facts or thoughts about themselves or their everyday life. That section is commonly broken into paragraphs marked with emojis or icons to help the reader go faster through the content. The last line is a 'call to action' where the blogger or influencer asks the audience to share a similar experience or thoughts on the topic. Picture 4, for example, shows side-by-side posts of the photo blog of the famous Instagram photographer Murad Osmann (on the right) and a blog post written by a Russian – speaking woman having a blog about Bulgaria (on the left).

A significant difference between the two is the visual content. While among the Russian-speaking bloggers in Bulgaria, it is common to have appealing photos, they are usually much more servicing the text than vice-versa. That means that their images often look like stock photos (except for the photography accounts among them and some that are a hybrid between photography and diary), inscribed with headers announcing the topic of discussion. In the example given below (on the left), the author discusses the most popular search engines, messaging and social media platforms in Bulgaria in detail – with main points and additional details. The post is rich in information and discusses in detail her observation thath 'many are trying [and failing] to find Bulgarian organisations (and businesses) in Yandex' – the main Russian language search engine, similar to Google or Yahoo.

A more general approach is the one seen on the right – the picture itself is the focal point of the post and the text only enriches the user experience by providing added value via the author's comments. The bloggers commonly prefer to use less than 2200 characters on the platform. The use of hashtags is also different. While the former use specific tags relevant to their location (Sofia, Bulgaria, etc.), as well as their self-representation (blogger in Bulgaria) or occupation on the app (blogging, blog about Bulgaria), the latter, are pointed much more to the general public, photography and travels in general.

Having said that, one of the biggest and possibly most important differences is the language in which the posts (and respective hashtags and comments) are written. While the global influencers communicate predominantly in English (or in some cases bilingually) to reach a wider public, the Russian-speaking bloggers do that only in Russian.



Pic. 4: The side-by-side of the blog posts by a Russian – speaking woman, an IT who posts about her experiences in Bulgaria and of the globally-known photography influencer Murad Osmann (on the right). Source: Instagram; screenshots by the author.

> Part of my followers are probably bots, not people. Another part is Russians who live in Russia but are interested in Bulgaria – they either want to move here, come for a vacation or something like that. Some are my acquaintances. Many are Russian immigrants that live here as well and I think they follow me specifically for that [the information she posts about life in Bulgaria]. The rest, who are from different parts of the world, are following me because of the photos. They are just watching them.
> It is in Russian and of course, those following me are doing that to stay informed (E., 28, female, IT, Varna, № 1167-III/2021).

> M. H.: Who reads you the most?
> B.: Russians, who want to come here, plus my friends from Moscow and my friends here.
> П.: For example, in the past seven days, 50% of my readers were from Russia, 27% – from Bulgaria and a little bit from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. They are mainly women – 84%, 16% – men. On my profile, users are mostly in the 35 – 44 years old range, but there are some who are 25.
> [In] Russia, Instagram is more developed, so at the end of the day, about 60 – 70% of the audience that reads me is from there – Moscow, Saint Petersburg, if we look at the statistics by city. About 15% are from Bulgaria – are people who immigrated here or came for a vacation. In the summer this percentage is of course higher. [Nevertheless], my readers are mostly from Russia. That is how I realised that people are interested in everything. What is my experience with hospitals, what my life is like here (B., woman, around 32, Sunny Beach, № 1169-III/2021; П., woman, around 35, IT, № 1169-III/2021).

That strategy selectively targets only users who are either proficient in the language or such for whom this is a mother tongue. Therefore, we can treat it as a 'safe zone' where the immigrant, despite not being at home, still positions herself in her own known linguistic milieu. Considering the above information, we can possibly distinguish four different functions of the Russian-speaking blogs created in and about Bulgaria, but also elsewhere.

The Russian-speaking bloggers, especially the Russians, rarely talk about the domestic and international politics in the Federation. If they do, they conceal it with metaphors or use a different social media platform (e.g., Telegram). They don't discuss topics related to the home culture, traditions, or religion, except if it is not

to compare with the ones in Bulgaria. My respondents often don't feel nostalgic and rarely even bring food or other things back from home when they visit their relatives. The fact that they don't declare a strong relationship with their home culture separates them from their compatriots in the country who came with previous migration waves and still keep a robust cultural identity. Because of the cultural differences, they find between themselves and the latter, and the age gap, they don't feel any need to communicate, form communities or partake in the shared cultural life in Bulgaria. As a respondent put it: 'We are just very fragmented as a community; we are divided into different groups' (B., woman, around 32, Sunny Beach, № 1169-III/2021).

Writing only in Russian directs the message either to people who are 'in the same situation' – immigrants in Bulgaria or elsewhere, those who are interested in leaving their home country, friends or just random people interested in personal experiences no matter their context. It is fair to assume that the engaged audience is the one belonging to the first three groups. Therefore, these posts aim to serve as an informational resource as well as means to provide a shared experience. Thus, they have both practical and emotional value for readers, as well as for the writers. Even more so, it *creates the sense* of a more closely-knit community as it gathers people not only with similar interests and experiences but such coming from the same cultural background.

Nevertheless, these 'expatriate blogs attract a slightly diverse group of followers, consisting of more than just close acquaintances and often including complete strangers' (Callahan, King, and Halversen, 2020: 6). That is why a different matter is that if this community is really 'experienced' by both parties:

> We sometimes meet and they feel me as a friend because they know all about me. But I don't know anything about these people – this is also an interesting experience (P., woman, around 35, IT, № 1169-III/2021).

The way social media works doesn‘t support the idea that influencers and bloggers are personally acquainted with all their followers. The usually higher number of followers predicated by their social function puts them in the eye of the attention of those who *follow* them. Nevertheless, the online communities organised around the blogs of the Russian-speaking women in Bulgaria create weak social ties (as in Granovetter, 1973: 1360 – 1380) that support the adaptation of both parties. The

result is a much wider than before support system between immigrants, which has psychological, professional, and accommodational functions. Many Russian-speaking Instagram bloggers and users help each other and share information about job openings, real estate purchase opportunities, and contacts of local immigrants that can help with administration or something else. Nardon et al. observe: ‘Blogging technology affords new ways of relating to others, accessing adjustment support resources, and means of generating further co-created resources’ (2015: 52).

> I saw a post of a friend of mine (a blogger – M.H.) where she uploaded her A-level certificate in Bulgarian, so I wrote to her and asked: “What about me”. She gave me the contacts and I called there: “Can I start with a friend of mine” – “Yes, you can” (T., woman, around 45 y.o., Nessebar, № 1169-III/2021).

Via the blog posts, the Russian speakers united by their expatriate experience learn from each other and find ‘shortcuts’ to a faster adaptation in Bulgaria. The bloggers share any information from administrative, making lists of needed documents and institutions which the new immigrants have to go through, advice on how to act there; to specific words similar or different in Russian and Bulgarian and recipes for traditional Bulgarian dishes they like. Some posts go into detail discussing the Bulgarian mentality, attitudes and relations. The positive image created by the expat bloggers, constructs, in turn, their own parallel ‘online’ Bulgaria – an appealing and practical place to move to.

Secondly, the blogs target both their immigrant compatriots and those back home. The affirmative picture of Bulgaria the bloggers construct presents the ‘Bulgarian experience’ as both a life and lifestyle choice and an intelligible decision for those who want to move or come for a vacation.

> They are not that many, but among my other acquaintances in Bulgaria, there are also such who moved here because someone came before them and invited them. There were some people, not many, but several who wrote to me to say that I was the one who inspired them to move here (E., 28, female, IT, Varna, № 1167-III/2021).

> I created [my Instagram account] a long time ago – almost ten years ago. There are many people who enjoy looking at photographs. Many relatives and friends who stayed in Russia – are just following us to inform themselves how is our life

> going. That is more convenient than sending pictures to everyone personally… I wrote a lot about my life in Bulgaria. [Many] friends of mine started wanting to come to Varna (O., female, around 40 y.o., Varna, № 1167-III/2021).

> The first year I moved to Bulgaria, five of my friends visited. They thought that it was a village here with horses and gipsies and there was nothing to do. After seeing my photos… They saw here a modern European coastline. [I] showed them that there are many beautiful places here and that the [sea] water is not polluted. My friends came. All of them live in Moscow and came (B., woman, around 32, Sunny Beach, № 1169-III/2021).

The blogs create a transnational connection between Russian speakers and their home communities. Nevertheless, the information flows in one direction – informing the latter on the life of those who emigrated.

Last but not least, they play the role of an adaptational tool for the bloggers themselves. Leaving your country, your social life and your family behind can seriously affect the emotional and psychological state of the immigrant, no matter if the motives for leaving were practical, emotional, or done with or without having a choice. The use of social networks helps deal with anxiety and uncertainty brought by uprooting from the known environment of the home. Making sense of the new environment by talking about it and posting visuals of it makes the immigrants feel more *visible* and seen. Being newcomers and outsiders puts them at the social margins, so being part of a global network seems to compensate both with the feeling of not being alone and counterintuitively with the feeling of being one of the millions of 'invisible' someones (therefore, in a way not alone in that status).

Some of my respondents started being serious about their online presence and about their blogs soon after moving to Bulgaria out of boredom and loneliness. However, they have not started their blogging experience exclusively with the idea to self-adapt but as a way to keep themselves occupied. The realisation followed the actual forming of relationships with others in Bulgaria.

> Most of all, I wanted to share. I was very bored and started my account as soon as I arrived here. During winter it was hard for me. So, I gradually started making friends on Instagram and they were very positive people, friends (P., woman, around 35, IT, № 1169-III/2021).

> Because of Instagram, I met a lot of people here, both Russians and Bulgarians, and the more people you know, the more you adapt because you have someone to communicate with, share similar interests, and help you with something. That's how you start leading a normal life (E., 28, female, IT, Varna, № 1167-III/2021).

> That is how I started meeting more people, not only Russian speakers. I met younger people, some were even ten years younger, but it felt as if I had more to share with them than with those the same age as me. More people started hearing of me. [There] are different Bulgarian groups on Instagram and that's how the Bulgarians could also see my [photos]. [Instagram] helped me adapt to this environment of photographers and artists I find interesting (M., female, around 40 y.o., Varna, № 1167-III/2021).

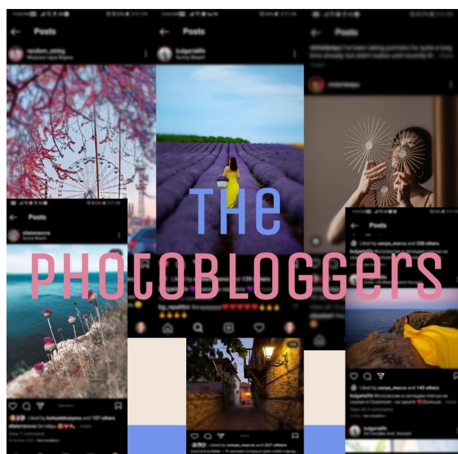
A crucial part of the social identity maintaining process is the feeling of being useful as an individual. That creates the desire and aspiration to adapt and be a functional part of society. My respondents declared their readiness to assist everyone who would need any help with adapting. Many have and are still doing it by answering personal messages on Instagram or through the comment section. For them, maintaining the posts on their blogs has a distinctively social function without which it 'doesn't make sense' to continue. The women often shared that they wanted 'the others' – their friends and compatriots back home, to see how beautiful Bulgaria is.

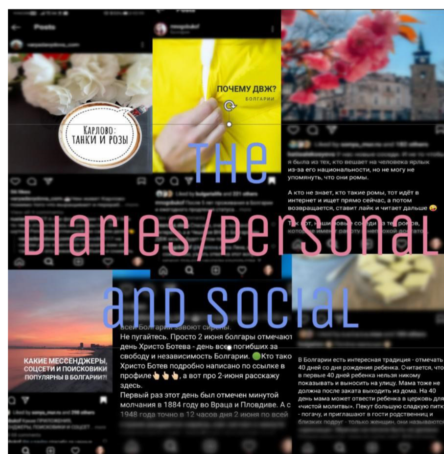
Visual and textual practices of the Russian-speaking immigrants to Bulgaria – summary

As seen above, blogging experiences and appearances of the Russian-speaking immigrant women in Bulgaria are complex and have their specific forms and role individually and socially. By the type of blogs, we can delimit three groups of users. First are *the ambassadors* – those trying to positively represent Bulgaria both as a way to affirm their choice in front of a wider audience and as means to 'educate' their compatriots at home about the peculiarities and the beauties of the country. Second, are the *information holders* – aiming their efforts to gather (all) relevant information for the other Russian-speaking immigrants. They are usually popular among the users and are contacted by them with requests for help and further information. Third, are the *photographers*. They might combine the roles of (1) and (2) or create a more traditional Instagram blog which includes a picture and a short caption with hashtags.

Accordingly, there are three groups of blogs classified corresponding to their content. These are:

1. *Photoblogs.* Their group is diverse and contains the profiles of both professional, semi-professional and non-professional photographers. Among the first, we can see the businesses of the Russian-speaking women who photograph Russian-speaking tourists during their vacations on the Bulgarian seaside in the summer months (up until the COVID-19 pandemic). These blogs are close to the original aim of the platform – photo sharing, sometimes accompanied by short vignettes such as famous quotes or descriptions.
2. *Diary / Self-reflection*. These posts are a shorter form of blogging about personal feelings and experiences during the day, accompanied by pictures of nature (most commonly) or of the blogger during everyday activities.
3. *Diary / Social Function.* These entries are specific in their organisation (with emojis often used to delimit the different points made throughout the text) and informational saturation. They are often 'advertised' with a short description written over a stock photo-type of pictures. Sometimes such posts are daily life stories that contain important information, aiming at supporting the adaptation and acculturation of the readers. Topics can cover everything from communication issues, possible encounters on the streets, via shopping, but also important ones, such as those related to administration and paperwork which needs to be done by the foreigners residing in the country.





Pics. 5 and 6: Examples of the described visual and textual practices of the Russian speaking bloggers in Bulgaria. Source: Instagram. Collages: The author.

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Part III

YOUTH AND IDENTITY

Medical migration to Bulgaria[*]

Mila Maeva

Abstract: The crisis with COVID-19 and the world pandemic have affirmed the role and importance of medical staff not only for health but also for the normal functioning of post-modern societies. Its insufficient number and qualification in the last more than ten years is a serious issue in Bulgaria, and the crisis that occurred in 2020 – 2022 has only deepened it. Therefore, the arrival and accommodation of medical staff here are perceived as an important brain gain for the country.
The study is based on fieldwork research conducted in 2020 – 2021. It presents and analyses individual cases searching for patterns of medical migration to Bulgaria. It also studies examples of foreign students who graduated in medicine and have remained to work and specialise in Bulgaria. The highlights of the research are the migrant`s own projects and processes of adaptation and integration of physicians who come to Bulgaria from different countries – Syria, Greece, and RN Macedonia. Finally, the prospects for attracting qualified medics to the country in view of the state policies towards them are considered too.
Keywords: medical migration, migrant doctor, integration, adaptation, state policy

Introduction

The migration of medical professionals is not a new phenomenon. It the result of the increased levels of social services in highly developed countries, which began in the 1950s and 1960s (Mejia et al., 1979; Oso et al., 2022: 122). In the following periods, these processes intensified by the trends of globalisation that led to increased levels of movements of health professionals between different countries. Labour migration of medical staff is not a neutral phenomenon but has contradictory effects that transform both the sending and receiving countries. In recent decades, some wealthy states, especially in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), have been heavily dependent on the migration of foreign health workers (cf. Gouda et al., 2015; OECD, 2019).[1] They use the migration of

[*] This article is the result of my participation in the project 'Cultural Adaptation and Integration of Immigrants in Bulgaria' (ДН 20/8 – 11.12.2017), financed by the Bulgarian Science Fund.
[1] The reasons for the emigration of medical staff are different: economic situation, internationalisation of medical education, the search for professional growth and improvement, stability for families, etc. (OECD, 2019).

medical staff to address labour shortages due to the mismatch between high levels of retirement, and low levels of production of the national health workforce. Migration contributes to the short-term alleviation of labour shortages, increases available human capital, stimulates innovation capacity, saves educational costs and increases the global competitiveness of economies. OECD countries are projected to remain highly reliant on the high demand for health workers due to the continuing severe shortage until 2030 (Ahmad, 2005: 43). Using data on the health workforce from the WHO Global Health Observatory for 165 countries from 1990 − 2013, a 2017 study predicted that global demand for health workers will grow to 80 million by 2030 with a supply of 65 million health workers for the same period (Lui et al., 2017). Last but not least, low- and middle-income countries are also experiencing a shortage of medical staff as a result of increased movements. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), another 18 million doctors, midwives, nurses and support workers are needed to achieve the goal of sustainable development for universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030 in low- and low-income countries.[2] Despite their severe shortages, less developed countries do not pursue policies to retain their medical staff, as they value remittances, profits and potential investments coming from workers abroad (Feld, 2021). On the other hand, this migration also contributes to the transfer of knowledge and practices when some specialists return back home. However, all this is trivial compared to losses, which include loss of public investment in education, loss of intellectual capital, reduced range of available services, chronic staff shortages and poor health services. In extreme cases, increasing the health gap can lead to reduced productivity, loss of national economic investment and potential damage to economic development (Ahmad, 2005: 43; Bludau, 2022).[3]

As a result of the migration medical staff, the negative processes of brain drain and brain waste are clearly visible. F. Docquier and H. Rapoport (2012) point out that the brain gain effect can occur through migration enhancing or weakening career choices, networking effects (Kanbur and Rapoport, 2005), fertility, educational

[2] https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-workforce#tab=tab_1;https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250368/9789241511131-eng.pdf (accessed on 22 January 2022).

[3] According to O. Ahmad, affected developing countries face difficult choices. They can neither control the flow of skills nor ignore its effects on the larger community. The right of the individual health worker to emigrate must be balanced against the effects of such migration on the well-being of society as a whole. This problem has revived an old debate between those who view skilled *migration as a rational expression* of people's right to maximise their usefulness and those who view the exploitation of poorer countries by richer one (Ahmad, 2005: 43).

subsidies (Stark and Wang, 2002) and brain waste (cf. Pires, 2015; Schiff, 2005). The process of brain waste describes a situation with skills decline in which a person works at a job that requires a level of skills lower than what he / she has acquired (Pires, 2015; Reitz, 2001). In other words, brain waste occurs when a skilled individual bears the costs of education, but he / she does not reap the benefits of acquiring human capital, i.e. a skilled migrant ends up working as an unskilled person. Then, with brain waste, skilled migrants run the risk of not bringing the human capital rewards to the country of destination. If migrants internalise this risk of brain waste, the educational incentives that arise from international migration can be reduced, cutting down the chances of brain gain. The main reason for the brain waste is the low international transferability of human capital because skills are not easily transferred across borders. Therefore, a skilled migrant is more likely to be employed as unskilled (Chiswick and Miller, 2007; Pires, 2015: 2).

Immigrants – health professionals in host countries are often affected by brain waste processes (Efendi et al., 2021). The phenomenon of brain waste among migrant health workers involves the process of eliminating professional skills due to them being unused or underused during their stay in the countries of destination (see Bhagwati and Hamada, 1974; Bourgeault, 2007; Bourgeault and Neiterman, 2013). Foreign health professionals are often exempted from clinical practices due to local or institutional resistance, different job positions, or restrictions from national professional licensing systems. Language barriers, unrecognised academic and professional qualifications, lack of continuing vocational education and lack of professional networks in the host country also contribute to brain waste. This phenomenon attracts considerable attention when such migrant health workers return permanently to their home countries (Efendi et al., 2021; Karan et al., 2016).[4]

Research design and methodology

The present study focuses on qualified immigrants – physicians in Bulgaria. According to A. Krasteva (2014), *migration in white* is the most discussed, most dramatised, and the most complained about migration. That gives the phenomenon special significance in the national and the supranational context (Krasteva and Vasiles-

[4] Apart from doctors, these processes also affect other medical professionals. For example, the loss of nursing skills while working abroad may make it difficult for migrant nurses to return to practice and they may lose their status (Efendi, F. et al., 2021).

cu, 2014). Because of the public importance of their profession, doctors as *mobile stars* or *mobile brains* occupy a central place in it (Krasteva, 2014: 386–387).

The topicality of the issue in Bulgaria is growing due to three factors. First, because of the increased migration from the country, it was left by a significant number of doctors in the period after 2007. According to a 2012 study by the Bulgarian Medical Association, Center for Demographic Research and Training, the NGO Public Health-99, and the Medical University of Varna, about 52% of Bulgarian doctors who emigrate with professional motives prefer to work in England and Germany. According to A. Krasteva, the mobile doctor, is a young man who lives in Sofia. Among those who have intended to migrate, the specialists dominate, and the first places are taken by those in anesthesiology, general medicine, paediatrics, cardiology, pathology, and surgery. Among the potential migrants, the number of young doctors without a speciality is increasing. The emigration levels of medical emigration indicate system problems leading to the loss of the best healthcare professionals, destroying the professional mix of specialists, violating the natural staff process, and reducing the quality of health care (Foteva, 2012). According to the Bulgarian Medical Association (BMA)[5], the number of registered doctors in 2008 was 35,039 and it decreased to 31,366 in 2013. 53.5% of the doctors are employed in-hospital care, and 29% of them are in outpatient care. Statistics for the destination countries of the Bulgarian doctors show that the largest share – 41%, prefer to work in Germany, and 26% – in Great Britain. Other preferable countries are France, followed by Spain, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Italy, and Belgium (Marinova, 2014).[6] A study conducted in 2022 shows the same results. According to the Medical University in Sofia, 60% of graduating physicians declare a desire to leave Bulgaria immediately.[7] However, the main problem regarding the medical profession is related to the gradual ageing of the staff, as among those in Bulgaria, about 33% are over 65 years old.[8] Last but not least, the COVID-19 pandemic further increases the need for doctors in the country (Krasteva, 2014).[9]

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[5] https://blsbg.com/en/ (accessed 20 February 2022).

[6] https://www.investor.bg/analizi/85/a/zashto-emigrirat-bylgarskite-lekari-167642/?page=1 (accessed 20 February 2022).

[7] https://btvnovinite.bg/predavania/120-minuti/rektorat-na-mu-po-vsjakakav-nachin-opitvame-za-za-darzhim-mladite-lekari-v-stranata.html (accessed 15 February 2022).

[8] https://bnr.bg/radiobulgaria/post/101600780/edna-treta-ot-lekarite-v-balgaria-sa-v-pensionna-vazrast (accessed 20 February 2022).

[9] For more details on ‘white migration’ from Bulgaria, see Krasteva and Vasilcu, 2014.

The importance of the topic is provoking a different look related to the ability to attract and accept foreign doctors in Bulgaria. In this regard, the study aims to examine the processes of resettlement, adaptation and integration of newly arrived or starting ther professional career physicians in the country, as well as the resulting benefits of the brain gain in the new country. The immigration process is put in terms of experience, practice and accumulated expertise. The main research aim is to study the impact of migration on the development, specialisation, professional growth, and accumulation of medical practices of medical staff. The study also looks at the social, ethnic, and religious characteristics of immigrants. Cultural practices and experiences among medical immigrants are also traced.

The study uses the term *migrant doctor* as a medical doctor practising in a country other than her / his country of birth. The research tracks push and pull factors influencing the admission of highly qualified professionals, including education, salary, working conditions, specialisation opportunities, host country characteristics, etc. I will quantify the effects of time variables (language, distance, etc.), push factors (governance, public health and economic conditions, etc.) and pull factors (shortage of doctors, employment, levels of income, etc.) (Adovor et al., 2021: 3). Going beyond the terms of brain gain, brain drain and brain waste for sending and receiving countries (cf. Belladi et al., 2014; Rutten, 2009; Schrecker and Labonte, 2004) the study focuses on migrant doctors as authors of their own migrant projects, able to manage their mobile capital flexibly and efficiently (Krasteva, 2014: 402).

The study is a result of a mixed methodology. A review of the literature on the historical development of medical migration to Bulgaria has been made. As part of the research, a round of field ethnographic research was conducted in Sofia in 2020–2021. Object of the study is both immigrants and their colleagues and employers, and the aim is to build a complete picture of inclusion. Classical ethnographic methods, such as observation, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, were used to ‘provide more nuanced understandings of the motivations and struggles with which medical professionals grapple when they consider migrating’ (Sullivan et al., 2010: 240). At the same time, the study is based on an online media survey, including social media data. Three cases of doctors at a large university hospital in Sofia, Bulgaria, were used as referent patterns. These cases show the change in migration flows in recent years, as well as the impact of the pandemic on the movement of physicians in the country.

Medical migration to Bulgaria from a historical perspective

The migration of physicians to Bulgaria has a long history, which dates back to the period after the restoration of the Bulgarian state in 1878. The policy development of migrant doctors' attraction is directly related to the political and economic situation in the country, international relations with sending countries, as well as the specifics of the states from which migrants arrive. The development of medicine and healthcare in the restored Bulgarian state was happening due to specialists who came from abroad (see Anastasova, 2005; Georgiev and Mitev, 2013; Georgiev et al., 2009; Dimitrova and Grigorov, 2016; Kantarev, 1967; Petrovski, 2001; Troyanski, 1974, etc.). However, during the period of the end of 19th and beginning of 20th century, the legal framework suggested that foreign medical personnel be employed only in the state sphere. Changes occurred in the Public Health Act in 1929. It made an exception only for Russian doctors who graduated in Russia before October 1st, 1917, to practice privately, but under a number of conditions as a three-year medical service in Bulgarian state, municipal, or district medical structures, or five years of medical practice in general. The candidate had to be clear of crimes related to medical ethics. However, a significant restriction was introduced – physicians who had started private practice had to give up public service and receive a permit from the Supreme Medical Council of Bulgaria (Peykovska, 2019: 68 − 69).

For the later totalitarian period from the 1940s to the 1980s, the country, as part of the socialist camp, received citizens from conflict zones for study and work, which had a favourable effect on the state economy. As a result of government solidarity with the 'developing' so-called 'people's democracy' countries of the 1970s, Bulgarian universities accepted students and specialists from a number of countries in the Middle East and Africa, some of whom remained employed in Bulgaria. The pull policy brought immigrants from Yugoslavia, Greece, Africa, Asia and South America (Zhelyazkova et al., 2005). In the period 1955 − 1990, Bulgaria accepted about 7,000 African students with higher education in medicine, engineering and economics (Erolova, 2017: 328; Kamenova, 2005). Many of these students, especially in medicine, decided to stay in Bulgaria too after graduation. During that period, migrant doctors settled in Bulgaria arrived through mixed marriages with Bulgarian citizens. They came mainly from 'fraternal' socialist countries such as the USSR and the GDR. Apart from new students, after 1990, immigrants from the Middle East, who had already received their education in the previous period,

already had Bulgarian diplomas, a good command of the language and knew the Bulgarian healthcare system, reached the country. They were attracted by the new political, economic and social conditions, especially after Bulgarian acceptance in the EU.

The reputation of Bulgaria as a country with a good and cheap medical education was maintained after 1989.[10] The movement intensified as the country became part of the EU in 2007.[11] Thus, by the end of 2021, 58% of the medical students in Bulgaria 2021 were foreigners. Slightly lower, but also quite high is their share in dentistry − 43% and veterinary medicine − 31%[12], receiving their education at the medical universities in Sofia, Pleven, Plovdiv and Varna. According to their country of birth, most students are from Greece, Turkey, Serbia and the United Kingdom.[13] According to T. Matanova (2019: 20 − 21), an impressive number of medical students from Germany are trained in higher education institutions in Varna, Plovdiv and Sofia, preferring Bulgaria because there is no restriction on admission. This international education gives many opportunities to young people, but it is also an opportunity for Bulgaria to attract young and qualified staff by providing them with specialisation after graduation. However, it should be noted that the stay of doctors in the country is the result of a purposeful state policy, as well as of the spontaneous migration projects of the migrants themselves (cf. Krasteva, Otova and Stoykova, 2011).

The starting point of the present study is those motives that are the reason why medical doctors, especially young people, plan to leave the country. In the first place is the low salary, as the starting pay is on average BGN 1,000 (500 Euro). Other important factors are the poor material base, the lack of a good health care system and the organisation of work, as well as the difficult development of the staff.[14]

Despite, the statistics report no high incoming migrant flows (Terziev et al., 2019: 257), the fieldwork materials show Bulgaria is an attractive destination for

[10] Par example, according to OECD (2019), 12% of Indian foreign-trained junior doctors (seeking or in postgraduate training) working in Ireland in 2016 graduated in Bulgaria.

[11] http://focus-news.net/opinion/0000/00/00/22679/ (accessed 23 February 2022).

[12] https://bnr.bg/varna/post/101569163/58-ot-studentite-po-medicina-v-balgaria-sa-chujdenci (accessed 30 January 2022).

[13] https://clinica.bg/4742-Vseki-vtori-chujd-student-sledva-medicina (accessed 12 February 2022).

[14] https://btvnovinite.bg/predavania/120-minuti/rektorat-na-mu-po-vsjakakav-nachin-opitvame-za-zadarzhim-mladite-lekari-v-stranata.html (accessed 23 February 2022). Asenikova et al. (2017: 21) summarised the push factors for young health professionals from Bulgaria as follows: low income, organisation of the health system, lack of opportunities for career development, insufficient places for specialisation and training problems, and unstable economic situation.

foreign physicians. According to the Bulgarian Medical Association, 530 medical doctors from 55 countries work in Bulgaria. Most are Macedonian specialists, followed by Turkish and Indian ones. Doctors from Russia are close behind them. There is a large group of Syrians and Greeks who treat Bulgarian patients. Doctors from France, Denmark and Australia, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom also practice in the country.[15]

An interesting example is a couple of migrant doctors. She is from North Ossetia and is an ophthalmologist, and he is a surgeon from Syria, but they practice medicine in Bulgaria.[16]

The topic of foreign physicians in Bulgaria became especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 − 2022. It once again presents the importance of the research topic concerning the different immigrant narratives told in Bulgarian media. There were many examples of physicians – heroes during the pandemic. Impressive examples were migrant doctors at the pandemic frontline, putting their patient's health in first place. A female physician from Afghanistan who graduated and settled in Bulgaria in the small town of Lom worked hard to save a life during the first wave.[17]

During the pandemic in 2021, a scandal involving the director of the hospital in Isperih, a town in Northeastern Bulgaria, broke out. According to the narrative, it concerned a migrant doctor from Iran. He had been treating patients in the country for 16 years and had been the director of the local hospital for eight years. Following changes in the law, he was removed from office during the COVID-19 because he was not an EU citizen.[18] This led to protests from patients and local citizens and a reaction from the Bulgarian presidency. Soon after, the doctor received Bulgarian citizenship and was reinstated to the director position.[19]

Despite the importance of the medical profession, an Eurobarometer survey indicates that Bulgaria is among the most hostile countries toward migrants in the EU: only 15% of respondents gave a positive answer to the question of whether they would accept a migrant as their doctor (Vankova and Ivanova, 2020).

[15] https://blsbg.com/bg/slukhovete-za-lekarska-emigratsiia-sa-silno-preuvelicheni_p3830.html (accessed 23 February 2022).
[16] https://bit.ly/3Hh2dRO (accessed 23 February 2022).
[17] https://www.24chasa.bg/novini/article/8573354 (accessed 23 February 2022).
[18] https://bntnews.bg/news/otstranyavat-direktora-na-bolnicata-v-isperih-zashtoto-e-chuzhd-grazhdanin-1093565news.html (accessed 23 February 2022).
[19] https://news.bg/society/direktorat-na-bolnitsata-v-isperih-poluchi-balgarsko-grazhdanstvo.html (accessed 5 March 2022).

Case study: three migrant doctors in Bulgaria

The study examines three different cases of migrants accommodated in the country working at one of the largest university hospitals in Sofia. The stories of the interlocutors clearly show the current trends of medical migration to Bulgaria and are indicative of the historical prerequisites for the choice of the destination country. Their narratives track the construction of a migration project, predetermined by push and pull factors that define brain drain and brain gain at personal and professional levels. Respondents' profiles are close and are united by several factors: the age group to which they belong – between 30 and 40 years old, their medical education received in Bulgaria after 2007, as well as by their choice to remain in the country and begin their medical career here. Interviewed doctors come from three different countries, born in Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia and Syria, differing in ethnic, social and religious (Christians and Muslims) status. Their countries of origin show clear tendencies in Bulgarian state politics to attract students. The study looks at several important factors that affect the construction of the migration project in Bulgaria: a) individual / professional / family factors; b) organisational factors; c) health care system factors; d) general environmental factors, such as poor economic conditions or poor domestic prospects relative to those in possible destination countries, lack of security, etc.; e) other factors as regulations, recognition of qualifications, etc. (Dussault et al., 2009: 22).

Medical training in Bulgaria

The main factors attracting young people to Bulgaria are several. In the first place are the accessible education and the simplified procedure for students` admission (cf. Matanova, 2019: 21). Lower administrative fees, especially for third-country nationals, as well as student support are important prerequisites for choosing Bulgaria for medical education: 'It is easy to enter your universities' (m., Greece).

As the respondents have completed their education before the introduction of medical education in English, the possibility of Bulgarian language learning after admission to the university was also mentioned as an attractive factor:

> The advantage is that you can apply and learn the language on-site. And not to prepare for one or two years in Syria and then apply, eventually whether they will give you a visa or not (m., Syria).

> We used to be Greeks and Turks, and a few Arabs who were the brave ones who agreed to learn Bulgarian. One year in the Department for Foreign Studies, and then we went to university. Those of us, who survived the hard way, speak good Bulgarian now (m., Greece).

The role of kinship, friendship and ethnic networks, which play a part in migration decisions, is clearly visible in the narratives (cf. Glick-Schiller et al., 1995; Matanova, 2019: 21). They facilitate the processes of adaptation to the new country for the newcomers:

> I had acquaintances who guided me on fees and registration. I chose Bulgaria because I had acquaintances and tuition fees for foreigners from third countries were more acceptable (m., Syria).

> I had many acquaintances here who told me that they were well accepted here and were satisfied with the training itself. And I thought: Why not try?! And it took that! (f., RN Macedonia).

The third important factor is geographical proximity and transport links with the homeland, which are of particular importance for the decision to study in Bulgaria. Opportunities for easily-planned holidays home and visiting relatives and acquaintances are crucial for choosing an educational destination. According to one of the interlocutors: 'Transport convenience with Syria. There were lines that were more appropriate for me. I'm from Aleppo' (Syria).

Although the existence of kinship and friendship networks makes life easier in the new country, the foreigners face difficulties with cultural competence:

> I have been in Bulgaria since 2009 for training and education. I am from Syria and everything seemed different to me – the way of life, education, and language. Everything is different. In general, I had no idea what it was about, and here I learned everything on the spot (m., Syria).

> I did not come to Bulgaria before I decided to study here. I had a strange feeling about life in a foreign country. I did not know if I would manage on my own, but I got used to it (f., RN Macedonia).

The language barrier proved to be one of the main challenges they had to deal with. If for the doctors from Syria and Greece (cf. Matanova, 2019: 21) it was a new and unknown language, for the interlocutor from RN Macedonia, the problem stemmed from the linguistic proximity, which caused a series of confusing situations in Bulgaria:

> They laughed that we did not know Bulgarian, and when I would say something, they would burst out laughing. It was not very friendly. When we needed different things at the university, they were a little more selfish with us, but we got better gradually. Even though they did not treat us well, I thought about staying in Bulgaria and decided to give it a chance. When I started working here, my opinion of Bulgarians changed completely in this hospital (f., RN Macedonia).

The construction of the migration project

According to researchers, the creation of a migration strategy accompanies movement across borders. Often, however, settlement in Bulgaria has happened quickly and without planing. One of the leading factors that united respondents were that both of them initially did not intend to stay in Bulgaria. According to their narratives, they arrived in the country with the idea of graduating and returning back to their homeland:

> I came here for tourism – to get my diploma and get out. Wonderful impressions and thanks for your education at the university. I took my diploma and wanted to disappear. I am never interested in your nature, your streets – are they beautiful, are they ugly, I have never been interested. I have never had such interest. I came as a tourist and became a permanent resident (m., Greece).

> I had not decided if I would stay, but it happened (m., Syria).

Staying in Bulgaria is directly influenced by a number of factors. First of all, the implementation of their migration projects began with their graduation allowing them to work here. The interlocutors themselves admit that the medical education received in Bulgaria puts them on an equal footing with the Bulgarian graduates. On the other hand, they are in a privileged position compared to other foreigners who want to work in the country but need to take exams in Bulgarian and recognition for their qualifications. Secondly, the decision to stay in the country is directly influ-

enced by family, friendship and ethnic ties. The networks built during the training also support the decision to establish in Bulgaria and the implementation itself after graduation:

> When I graduated, I had two options. One option was to return to Macedonia, but I was already used to it here as a way of life, alone. Now to go back to Macedonia, I had to go back to the beginning, to start over, to meet new people. And I thought that was not for me. And I decided to enrol in a speciality, enrolled in emergency medicine. I stayed here in this hospital and I like it (f., RN Macedonia).

Regarding the support of the families for the decision to stay, the situation was not the same for the three respondents. While some encouraged the future migrant doctor, others reacted quite sharply: 'My family accepted very, very badly my decision to stay. At war, because they waited and still wait that I will return one day... It was unacceptable for them to stay here' (m., Greece).

The implementation of the migrant project for the doctors has already been held up by the improved Bulgarian language skills. Knowledge of the language to a good level is becoming one of the prerequisites for staying in the country:

> We have studied the Bulgarian language. When I applied for medicine, I took an exam in Bulgarian. I took a Bulgarian language course because it was difficult for me since I am from the Macedonian southern part and I had difficulties with the Bulgarian language, the accents are different. Those from Eastern Macedonia have no problem, but it was harder for us (f., RN Macedonia).

Reaching language proficiency in the host country is also an important process in adaptation and integration. Through it, the doctors communicate with colleagues and patients at the work level, as well as with friends outside the professional circle.

In the narratives, the settlement in Sofia is identified as an important precondition for the decision for staying in Bulgaria. Respondents are unanimous that they chose the city due to the fact that it is the capital. Living and working in Sofia raises the prestige of the migrant and facilitates the choice, as two of the interviewees emphasise that they come from smaller towns, and the third shares that is used to the big city and does not imagine life elsewhere:

> I like it since I arrived in Sofia. It is very close to my heart. I read a lot about the city and went on tours. When friends from Macedonia come, we gladly walk around to show them something (f., RN Macedonia).

> Bulgaria is a broad concept. I live in Sofia. It's different here… I could not get used to the fact that there is no sea. Everything else is the same to me. There is no sea, but they did not bother to create a single beach… I only miss the sea. Otherwise, everything else is the same in Bulgaria and in Greece (m., Greece).

Settled in the Bulgarian capital, migrant doctors have the opportunity to develop professionally:

> Moreover, I lived in the capital and I am from an island. There are no medical universities on the islands. There are in Crete, but only there. My island is beautiful, but there is no realisation of the profession I have chosen. When I graduate one day – there will be none. There is only if you are an internist and prescribe pills to retirees or if you are a traumatologist – if someone breaks his arm to put a cast on him. There is no hard medicine, no hard surgery. Things are not up to standard. There, things are at the level of survival... They patch you up enough to survive and send you to the big city. As here in a Bulgarian village (m., Greece).

> Big city and different pathology and there is something to see and learn (f., NR Macedonia).

However, the most important element of the migration project is related to professional growth (cf. Chikanda, 2007: 59). For the interviewees, professional development and advancement in the medical field are leading in the settlement decision. The desire for specialisation and rapid growth motivates young people to stay in Bulgaria. The opportunities they seek and find here are put in comparative perspective to their home countries:

> The specialisation in Greece is the same. No difference. Over the years, Bulgaria and Greece have unified everything… Bulgaria and Greece no longer exist, the European Union already exists. There are small differences that the EU has allowed them, and that is who to bring to study. It is harder to study in Greece and is even easier to enter Bulgaria… In Greece, there is a very good communist system that gives everyone the right to specialise, unlike in Bulgaria. There is a

> capitalist system in Bulgaria – those who have money may specialise, and those who do not – do not specialise. They also have an alternative for no money, but it is for a few people. In Greece, the system is communist and everyone thinks they are equal and with equal chances. There you sign up on a long list and sometimes in 5, 10 or 20 years when it's your turn, they call you: "Hello, colleague, it's your turn! Come and specialise!" It is not faster in Bulgaria, but it is luck and money (m., Greece).

For the interviewed migrant doctors, the decision for specialisation also determines the desire to stay in the country. Long training (6 years) and long specialisation (min. 5 years) are the main prerequisites on which migrant doctors begin to build a life in the new country. The specialisation of migrant doctors in the host country becomes the basis of their brain gain. It is associated with the accumulation of knowledge, experience and manuals that are necessary for their professional development.

> I came to study in Bulgaria and decided to continue with the specialisation – the specialisation is a slow and cumbersome story. I started work. Work leads to patients and responsibilities. This is our profession. It is normal only for doctors to stay in Bulgaria because our realisation is a longer process compared to other professions. An example is an architect or an IT specialist who takes his diploma and that's it. With us, getting your diploma is not a big thing. That is the first step. From now on specialisation must be upgraded. One thing at hand is that it is difficult to enter the specialisation. It is separate and long to complete. That is about 5 – 6 years. That is only if you have entered a specialisation. We are talking about 6 years of training and 6 years of specialisation, during which years you start a family and build patients, that you are interested in following. Both good and bad cases. A long, long and painful specialisation that keeps us in Bulgaria (m., Greece).

Young migrant doctors admit that they have the opportunity to develop precisely because they are in a large university hospital. It is the profile and size of the health institution and the different support it receives that create large imbalances in pay by function and speciality in Bulgaria and stimulates the departure of medical staff (Terziev et al., 2019: 259). That is why working for a university hospital gives the opportunity to learn from specialists, work better and gain a lot of knowledge and experience. The three migrant doctors interviewed work in various fields – emer-

gency medicine, orthopaedics and maxillofacial surgery. Although in today's digitalising world, the opportunities for gaining experience and knowledge are made possible by the availability of textbooks, books and videos, daily practical exercises are of particular importance.

> Everyone progresses as much as he can – mentally and manually. We already live in a world where everyone can develop to the highest levels, whether they are good teachers or not. The teacher nowadays will give you the title... You have to read, go to courses, touch, try, work. Luckily for me, this is not my case, because I work with very good teachers. So I have the opportunity to get to a very high level and quality. The level is very high, at least in my speciality, the teachers are very good, and my experience is quite sufficient (m., Greece).

Chances for the development of scientific activity are also considered a prerequisite for choosing a country for settlement. Usually, the homeland is compared to Bulgaria in terms of the opportunities it provides for development:

> From the point of view of specialisation, compared to Macedonia, it is much freer, and one can choose what one wants, not what is free, which is a big plus. There is an opportunity to start a scientific activity, which is a big plus compared to Macedonia. But I do not know what's going on there, and maybe we are a step or two behind Western Europe. The training is at a better level (f., RN Macedonia).

> In Greece, you can wait several years, and Bulgaria acts faster. It is easier to enter for study and specialisation compared to Greece. In every respect (m., Greece).

Integration and adaptation in Bulgaria

Part of the project of migrant doctors is adaptation and integration with the host country. These processes began during the training. According to the respondents their six years education created a model for their future life here. The main prerequisites, such as language and professional adaptation, occur with the completion of education and the beginning of professional development in the country. Firstly, working in the hospital is the starting point for economic integration and the inclusion of foreigners in the labour market. As the number of foreign doctors in the hospital under study is higher, a suitable environment for immigrants has been created here. Colleagues and employers are accustomed to foreigners and support

them in their development. As such, the hospital has a long tradition from the socialist period, not only in education but also in attracting foreign nationals to work. From the 1970s until today, it has employed doctors from countries such as Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, India, the USSR (Russia), the GDR (Germany) and others. The interlocutors are young people and they often gather for various holidays like birthdays or family events, such as weddings. Their stories clearly show the difference from the period of studenthood, during which foreigners were separated from the Bulgarians, without much opportunity to communicate: 'For 10 years, however, we no longer have problems with colleagues – they accept us, we like…' (f., RN Macedonia). Working together and long shifts become a glue for communication and acquaintance, creating a sense of community and strengthening attachment to the workplace. However, migrant doctors share that the relations with their communities are not broken yet:

> There is no Greek society in Bulgaria. There is a Greek company. And I can gather 10 Greek friends and acquaintances, but there is no Greek society. We have no events here, no organisation. They do something sometimes from our embassy, but they do nothing (m., Greece). [20]

Although they rarely gather, each of them shares that they are engaged in one way or another in supporting their compatriots. For example, during the refugee crisis in 2015, the Syrian doctor volunteered for the Red Cross, translating for and accommodating compatriots. In his words: 'I do not communicate with Syrians, because during our war the people divided and we no longer have a place to gather.' The doctor from RN Macedonia shared that she often even motivates her relatives in their desire for education and development by advertising education and work in Bulgaria.

Low payment is one of the major problems for those who have started practising medicine. It is also defined as 'unworthy of the work they do.' For that reason, the migrant doctors have engaged in two or three places of work in order to earn higher income and survive in the difficult financial situation in which they live in the host country. However, this employment in several jobs, which is typical for the rest of the medical staff in the country, can be considered a part of the models of adaptation and integration in Bulgarian society.

[20] For Greek communities in Bulgaria see Fokas, 2017 and Radoynova, 2010.

> Those who graduate because they love medicine, because they like their profession, and because the 1000 BGN (500 euros – m.n., MM) salary that mother Bulgaria gives them is enough, there is a way to meet both ends. None of us works in one place. We work in two, in three, in four places, just trying to make ends meet. And when you work in several places you have enough money according to the Bulgarian standard (m., Greece).

This employment not only brings additional financial resources but also contributes to the accumulation of new experience for their future professional development. However, the practice also fits into the generally accepted pattern showing that immigrants do not differ from locals. However, migrant doctors shared a view that their lives are not just financial dividends:

> We live many times better than them, but not everything counts in numbers. Not everything in life counts in numbers. Who counts life in numbers, yes, we live more miserably in numbers. From a mathematical point of view – we live miserably, and from a non-mathematical point of view – we live perfectly, we live in heaven, but people do not realise it here (m., Greece).

The processes of integration and adaptation are accompanied by a number of administrative difficulties. The interviewees share various stories related to the heavy bureaucracy in the country, which complicates their lives. According to one of them: 'The state does not help with anything, it has rules, you follow them, they look chaotic, but you go your own way. You respect the bureaucracy' (m., Greece).

Last but not least, main problem that repulses other foreigners who want to study and work in the country is related to obtaining Bulgarian citizenship. Although the respondents initially have a permanent residence, it does not solve their problems since these documents are not recognised as legal by a number of institutions. This situation puts migrant doctors in constant explanations about their status in the country. The long and unclear procedure without explicit deadlines is not a good prospect for many young doctors looking for opportunities to live and work in Bulgaria after graduation. They also face a number of difficulties in opening bank accounts, taking out loans or travelling for tourism. The desire for integration in the host country presupposes the decision to apply for Bulgarian citizenship. But receiving it turns out to be a long process, despite the fact that they come from countries with differ-

ent statuses compared to Bulgaria – from Greece (EU) and marriage to a Bulgarian woman, from RN Macedonia (a country that Bulgaria claims a high percentage of Bulgarian origin)[21] and Syria (a country in a long-running military conflict). [22]

> During the waiting process for Bulgarian citizenship, I had problems. It had dragged on for years. I had started working and specialising. Here I had many acquaintances who did not even set foot in Bulgaria, or maybe only set foot once to submit their documents, but received Bulgarian citizenship a few years before me. And we, who are here and work here, have been waiting for years until we get citizenship, and until then, we were permanent residents. It's a little more complicated because we had problems with banks and all kinds of institutions. That is not a Bulgarian ID card. We did not have full rights… I received citizenship only after 10 years (f., RN Macedonia).

> I have a permanent residence and I am waiting for citizenship, but it is taking a long time. Two and a half years have passed. Unfortunately, the biggest problem is that there is an ordinance and there are deadlines, but they are not observed, and when you consult with lawyers, they tell you that it is true, but they are not observed… It is annoying that you are a foreigner with higher education that you have needs for development, for free movement. You have a folder with documents, they do not look at people as personalities, but as a folder. You are a folder in the drawer of the employee (m., Syria).

The future of the migration project is directly dependent on the achieved results. On the one hand, starting a family life shows a prosperous settlement in the host country. On the other hand, for migrant doctors, the successful end of future specialisation opens the way abroad but also puts them at the starting position in their medical realisation:

> As a person who is going through this journey or starting all over again, I would not do it a second time. If there are no serious grounds (m., Syria).

[21] For the migration from RN Macedonia to Bulgaria, see Hristov, 2010. For the process of passportisation and the problems related to obtaining Bulgarian citizenship, see Hristova, 2021.
[22] The problems of asylum seekers and applicants for status, permanent residence and citizenship from Syria are addressed by Erolova, 2022.

> And you become old after you finish: "Should I start all over again or go by inertia – go as you started and move on ?!" Maybe those who stay here are the ones who are driven by inertia (m., Greece).

That is a moral obligation of the country that trained them and provided work and development opportunities (cf. Sullivan et al., 2010). That is why one of the respondents ends our conversation with the following phrase: 'In Greece, we have a saying: "Where there is land, there is Patria, homeland." They trained me here, they fed me here. For me this is the homeland'(m., Greece).

Conclusion

The importance of medical migration is predetermined by its relationship with populations' health and currently with a wide public response in the context of COVID-19. For Bulgaria, a country that has lost a large number of doctors in the last 30 years due to emigration or demographic prerequisites, the immigration of medical staff is still poorly studied, but it is painfully put forward during the pandemic. The study clearly shows how the country's development and EU membership bring young people to study and live here, and the improvement of university programs makes them an attractive educational destination for future doctors from different EU, Balkan and Asian countries. Medical training and good opportunities for realisation are the main ways of brain gain, which are also an important stoke for the country's economy (Pires, 2015: 9). In this way, the migrant doctors are placed on an equal basis with the others, regardless of the country they come from. Training in the Bulgarian language is of particular importance for the doctors remaining in Bulgaria, as it prepares them for professional development in the country and supports their integration into society. Although this practice does not contribute to the international transferability of knowledge and skills, it is of local importance to the Bulgarian state. Besides, the complex administrative procedures before those doctors who wish to work in Bulgaria shake them and put them in choice.

The specific cases of the migrant doctors from Greece, the RN Macedonia and Syria show how education and professional realisation become the basis for the construction of their own migration project, which sets them to achieve personal and professional goals.

The statistics on the departed and planning departure medical staff show strong migration sentiment, primarily provoked by a desire to return to their home countries, but also by the search for better professional and financial resources. Although the researchers' conclusions are that the payment differences between developed and developing countries are very large and cannot be easily overcome (Vujic et al., 2004), it turns out that attractive factors exist. The analysis of the reasons for establishing in the country was made in comparison with the reasons for leaving the homeland of other graduates. Unlike those whose leading desire for moving is a good salary, the motives of migrant interviewees indicate that they are mainly focused on professional development and experience. Financial problems are solved by working in more than one job spot. The settlement in Bulgaria becomes brain gain bringing professional satisfaction to them. Among the main motives for foreigners to live there is the successful completion of the specialisation and practice of prestigious specialities that raise their reputation in their own communities and in their homeland. Thus, in this case, the migration decision is motivated by intellectual curiosity, the desire for specialisation and the implementation of professional skills in an adequate environment (Astor et al., 2005; Chikanda, 2005; DelVecchio et al., 1999; Sullivan et al., 2010: 240). In the studied cases, integration and adaptation go directly through professional recognition. Inclusion in society is conditioned by a successful medical career. It creates a certain prestige for migrant doctors by showing their benefit to the receiving society.

The professional development in the three cases has been discussed in the context of brain gain, not so much for the state, but for the particular doctor migrant, who takes advantage of the opportunities they receive in order to improve their professional awareness. Of particular importance are a number of accompanying factors – job engagement at a large university hospital in the capital with known specialists, an international collegial environment, which manages to attract doctors and successfully include them in friendly and collegial networks. The existence of a supportive social environment is indicated to help foreigners in their integration and is an important factor in migration decisions.

The three studied cases show successful recruitment policies engaging young and ambitious migrants. Therefore, the attraction of migrant doctors should be directed in search of balances, focusing on other factors than wages.

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ALBANIAN YOUTH IN THESSALONIKI: BUILDING A LIFE IN GREECE IN THE DECADE OF 'CRISIS'

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Abstract: This paper exemplifies the ways Albanian youth in Thessaloniki formed and transformed their multiple identities during the economic crisis. Most of the studies on Albanian immigrants in Greece focus either on the first generation or on the plans that the second generation made at the beginning of the crisis in order to design their future. In this text, though the focus is on the way the Albanian youth that lives in Thessaloniki dealt with these new social and economic circumstances in Greece during 2009 – 2019 and how the new conditions influenced their perceptions of national identity. How do the different experiences during migration and the different generations affect the different visions of the future? The article also sheds light on the sociocultural contexts that impact youth identity from a transnational perspective.
Keywords: Albanian youth, migration, Thessaloniki, second generation, identity

Introduction

Since 2009, Greece has been facing a period of crisis characterised by major economic, political, and social turmoil. The combined effects of a prolonged recession, extreme austerity, declining career prospects, and generalised suspicion of institutions and of the political system urged many young and well-educated people to seek to widen their options in the labour market by emigrating. Over the same period, an entire generation of immigrants either born or raised in Greece was growing up and forming their identity through the social, political, and economic dimensions of the crisis. This paper demonstrates how Albanian youth that lives in Thessaloniki dealt with the uncertainty and the difficulties that have arisen in their daily lives due to the crisis and how they planned their future in Greece. Although their parents urged them to return to Albania or to emigrate to another European country in pursuit of better career prospects, as it emerges from their narratives, Albanian youth seemed reluctant to leave Greece and explain how this decision has affected the process of their identity formation in a transnational perspective.

This paper is part of my ongoing postdoctoral research entitled 'Second Generation of Immigrants from Albania and China living in Thessaloniki' and is funded by

the State Scholarship Foundation (IKY). The ethnographic material was collected from August 2020 until June 2021 in Thessaloniki and was based on qualitative research: open informal discussions, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. Due to the pandemic, my research methodology had to be redefined, so that as many of the conversations as possible could take place online, and only recently when conditions allowed it and in compliance with health protocols, was I able to meet the subjects either at their homes or in other locations that are important to them (e.g., places of entertainment or places where they attend educational activities). During fieldwork research, I have conducted seventeen semi-structured interviews with second-generation immigrants (8 were of Chinese and 9 of Albanian origin) and three interviews with children's parents (2 Albanians and 1 Chinese). However, the group of subjects I regularly talked to consisted of thirty-one people (aged 18 to 56). The aim of the research is to study the dynamics of the formation of the second generation of immigrants, their interaction and conflicts with their compatriots and the wider social environment, their relations with their place of origin, their degree of integration into Greek society, their plans for the future, and the gender component of all of the above.

In this article, however, I focus only on Albanian youth identification and its relation to sentiments and representation of (ethnic) belonging. My informants are people who either came to Greece as young children or were born here by immigrant parents; that is, I include informants from both the second and the one-and-a-half generation immigrants. Following the methodological strategy of Michail and Christou (2016; 2018), the age limit for the young informants is set at 35 years, in order to observe how the crisis affected the subjects' life decisions in late adolescence and the early years of their adult lives. Those who were born in Albania had probably experienced the immigration procedure and have memories of the journey and the first years in the host country; hence, one objective of this paper is to illuminate whether these different conditions have shaped a different perception of the host country, their identity and their future plans.

Economic crisis

In 2008, the European economy entered into its deepest recession since the 1930s and the countries of the periphery of Europe faced what, at first, manifested as a liquidity problem, promptly followed by a precipitous chain of events (banks restrained credit,

world trade dropped), making it apparent that a global financial crisis was imminent, and these economies would be confronted with major structural and fiscal problems. Greece especially was forced to external borrowing by signing three bail-out programmes amounting to 241,6 billion Euros from the European Central Bank, the European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund between 2010 and 2014 (Knight and Stewart, 2015: 2). In return, Greece was forced to adopt strict austerity measures imposed by the creditors so as to reduce the national debt. However, those measures proved ineffective and the country was plunged into a severe recession that led to the gradual dissolution of the Greek economy and society. Recession, austerity, unemployment, and the related mistrust of the political system turned most young educated people to immigration (Lowell and Findlay, 2002). This inability of the Greek state to utilise this highly educated workforce conduced to further decreasing the competitiveness of the Greek economy (Labrianidis and Vogiatzis, 2013; King et al., 2016). Consequently, unemployment emerged as one of the hallmarks of the economic crisis. Although until 2008 it was declining, in the following years there was an explosion of unemployment that peaked in 2013 when the rate reached 27.5%. In particular, young people up to 25 years old was the category with the highest unemployment rate in both Greece and Europe (over 30 %).[1] Among those that emigrated, 50 – 60% have a tertiary education, 'the youngest, best and brightest, as the media characterized them' (Triantafyllidou and Gropas, 2014). In fact, it is in Thessaloniki, which is this paper's research locale, where the majority of the unemployed were clustered. According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ΕΛΣΤΑΤ), during the period from 2008 to 2016, there was an increase of 18.6% in the unemployment rate in the Thessaloniki Regional Unit, climbing to 27% in 2016, compared to only 8.6% at the beginning of the period under review.[2] Alongside this, the demographic data of the Municipality of Thessaloniki demonstrate that its population decreased by 13.4% between 2001 and 2011, and in fact, this decrease is particularly pronounced among the young and productive ages. For the age group 15 – 24, it is 25.79% and for the age group 25 – 39, it is 24.01%. [3]

[1] Semi-Annual European Newsletter about Youth Employment. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/file_import/european-semester_thematic-factsheet_youth_employment_el.pdf (accessed 19 August 2021).
[2] Hellenic Statistical Authority. Available at https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SJO02/- (accessed 19 August 2021).
[3] Hellenic Statistical Authority. Available at: https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SAM07/2011 (accessed 19 August 2021).

Immigration emerged as an attractive strategy for those who couldn't make ends meet, but also for those who realised that the career opportunities in Greece were constantly diminishing and wanted to explore their prospects in a global employment market. Most of them felt frustrated with the political, social and economic situation, and pessimistic about the possibility that these circumstances would change in the near future (Labrianidis and Pratsinakis, 2017: 87 – 88). As Michail and Christou note, Greece places fourth in total migration efflux and third in the share of young immigrants (2018: 250 – 251). The emigration rate has since stabilised, but it is still estimated that every year over 100,000 people leave the country (Pratsinakis et al., 2017). This immigration flow consists not only of native Greeks, but also of immigrants who were living in Greece. At the outbreak of the crisis, half of the emigrants were foreign nationals, while the following years Greek nationals constituted more than 50% of the total number of emigrants (Michail and Christou, 2018: 250 – 251).

However, there is a significant percentage of young people (mostly graduates) who have chosen to continue living in Greece, even though both the economic and the social environment are rife with insecurity and uncertainty. Among them are several children of immigrants who either came to Greece as children or were born here. This is the 'crisis generation'; the people whose early adulthood coincided with the crisis. The focus of this paper is on these young immigrants from Albania who lived in Thessaloniki during the decade 2009 – 2019, and on how their socioeconomic circumstances affected both their personal and collective identity.

Albanian immigration in Greece

Albanian immigration to Greece began in the early 1990s, shortly after the fall of Enver Hoxha's regime. During the first years (1990 – 1993), the immigration flow took the form of a mass exodus from the country. According to Albanian scholars, 500,000 people had moved to Greece by 1993, most of them young men, mainly farmers from the southern part of the country (Papandreou, 2013). Though the flow temporarily abated in the following years, the political instability, social unrest, and economic crisis in Albania caused a new massive wave of migration after 1997 (Michail, 2014: 21 – 22). During the first phase of migration, the relocation was financially motivated and of a temporary nature, since many Albanians returned to Albania as soon as they had raised a substantial amount of money, while at the

end of the 1990s migration flows took a more stable and permanent form due to the legalisation processes that were implemented for the first time in 1997 – 1998. The legalisation programs set the main prerequisites of the Greek state with regards to social security and legal employment, finally establishing the basic criteria for obtaining / renewing residence permits and, thus, paving the way for Albanian immigrants to move their families to Greece with a view to long-lasting settlement (Michail and Christou, 2016). Most of the newcomers initially settled near the Greek-Albanian borders and, shortly after, began moving towards the urban centres (Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras, Ioannina) looking for better work opportunities and educational prospects for their children.

As soon as they decided that their settlement would be permanent, Albanian immigrants pursued several strategies for fast integration into the host society, such as using the Greek language in public, hellenising their names and baptising themselves or their children Christian. The choice of a Godparent was of great importance to Albanians, as they held high expectations from him / her in the future.[4] The Godparent had to be a Greek of a certain social status, whom the Albanian could consult about any major decision in the future. The Godparent consolidates the 'social capital' of the immigrant family in the new country and can provide them with opportunities and social mobility (Michail and Christou, 2016: 963 – 964). They hoped that these strategies would improve their children's educational and social prospects compared to theirs. Concealing their original names and restricting the use of the Albanian language, elements that reflected aspects of their national identity, along with the adoption of the linguistic and symbolic standards of the host country, were all parts of an effort to expedite their integration into the new environment and to follow its social standards. As I will describe further below, Albanians in Greece lack places with ethnic characteristics (restaurants, shops, places of worship, schools). The absence of an organised ethnic community facilitates immigrants' effort to integrate into the host community's way of life (Kokkali, 2011; Michail, 2014; Pratsinakis, 2005).

Nowadays, almost 30 years later, Albanians constitute the largest foreign population in Greece. Especially in Thessaloniki, which is the locus of this research,

[4] The ritual of Christian baptism and the choice of the Godparent have traditionally been taken very seriously among Orthodox Christians in the Balkans because it gives rise to ritual kinship bonds, not just among individuals but also among previously unrelated family groups (see Campbell, 1964; Hristov, 2017).

registered immigrants comprise 7.67% (about 48,000) of the total number of population, with the main group being Albanians (at 75%) according to the census of 2011 (Vathi, 2019: 33). There is a whole generation of immigrants who were born and / or raised in Greece that lived through and were affected by the so-called 'Greek economic crisis'. In this paper, I will explore how the Albanian youth that lived in Thessaloniki dealt with these new social and economic circumstances in Greece and how this experience influenced their perceptions of national identity.

Ethnic identity and the sense of belonging

Until the 1960s, anthropology did not regard migration as a potential field of research because it perceived culture as something 'rooted' in a place. As anthropologists began to perceive culture as something fluid and non-sited, they began to approach the issue of immigration differently (Brettell, 2008). Frederic Barth's classic work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969) also contributed to this shift by adding a new dimension to the study of 'ethnicity'. The terms 'boundaries' and 'national identity' took on a new meaning, as the social contexts in which they are formed changed because of migration. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, anthropological interest shifted to the term 'transnationalism' (Basch et al., 1994; Glick-Shchiller et al., 1992; Levitt et al., 2003; Smith, 2001; Vertovec, 1999) as a way to understand contemporary immigration practices (Vertovec, 2010: 3 – 4). Transnationalism emphasises the construction and negotiation of identities at local, national, and global levels, as well as the transgression and reinterpretation of political borders and the (de)construction of socio-cultural barriers. Sassen tries to explain the massive increase in migration at the end of the 20th century by giving attention to the transnational migration of labour. The relationship between the growing transnational expansion of capital and the changing nature of international migration is what Sassen is concerned about (1988). She perceived the emergence of a transnational space in which immigrant worker circulation might be considered one of multiple flows, along with capital, goods, services, and information. Her work is valuable for understanding how transnational immigrant populations reorganise their spatial relations on a global scale (Sassen, 2001: xix).

This article is placed within a transnational context, where immigrants cross geographical and cultural boundaries and are a part of global immigrant workforce in times of crisis. Transnationalism follows a series of changes in the life and iden-

tity of the immigrant. These changes are profound and are a subject to constant negotiation, both individually and collectively, within the family or the wider community. This one-of-a-kind combination of features, on both personal and national level, leads to a better understanding of youngsters' decisions about their future.

Michail claims that Albanian immigration to Greece has a transnational character, mostly due to the proximity of the country of origin to the host country (Michail, 2014: 19). Albanians maintain ties to their home country in a variety of ways, (organising several regular trips, creating transnational enterprises, building houses, helping their family economically) and combine home and host society into a unified field of social action (Margolis, 1995: 29). At the same time, they maintain contacts with relatives that emigrate to Central, Northern Europe and the USA, creating a network of relationships that might be useful to them in the future.

One of the most interesting features of the Albanian community in Greece is that it is not organised as a distinct ethnic group in the way that most other immigrant communities are. When settling in host countries, immigrants strive to create a network and form 'communities' in order to cope more easily in the new context. People that belong to the same group have common bonds, share the same history, the same culture, and perhaps the same experience of immigration. The network they form determines many of the decisions they make. Sharing the same mother tongue is a crucial element that creates intimacy and connects people easily. The new, foreign and potentially hostile setting causes them feelings of insecurity and fear, which the immigrants try to deal with by creating new relationships to share not only their memories and experiences but also important information, which is their new social capital (Kokkali, 2011: 105). This by no means suggests that all these communities are homogenous and static; quite the opposite, they are both dynamic and fluid, replete with differences, tensions, and conflicts, even within groups that might share many common characteristics.

Albanians in Greece, and in particular in Thessaloniki, have not established an extensive collective network nor places (coffee shops, restaurants, places of worship, markets) and services addressed only to them, which leads to the most numerous immigrant community in Greece being perceived as 'invisible'. According to Vathi, one reason that explains why Albanians are not organised into a collectivity, apart from the proximity to the country of origin, is the hostility they encountered on both the interpersonal and the political levels during the first years of their settlement. At the same time, the Albanians themselves prefer to rely on kinship networks, while

they feel suspicious of and competitive against other Albanians (Kokkali, 2011: 107; Michail, 2014; Vathi, 2019). Most of the youngsters that I interviewed claim that, although they know and respect their family's history and their ancestral origin, they feel closer to the Greek way of life. The fact that during the years of the crisis they chose to stay in Greece is indicative of such a sense of belonging to the country.

During the early years of their settlement, Albanian immigrants were treated with fear and suspicion by the Greeks. Especially in public discourse, Albanians were identified with violence and crime. This stereotypical representation of Albanians as a marginal category also affected the way children were treated at school, where, not only classmates, but even teachers and headmasters considered them inferior (Gkefou-Mafianou, 2003). So, at a time when Albanian children were meant to be exploring and discovering their national identity, they were forced to experience it through the lens of other people's negative attitudes. Thus, some of them would hide their origins and reject anything that could reveal their identity (Vathi, 2019: 34). The visits to their parents' place of origin shaped the image of Albania as a country very different from Greece. The way of life in Albania, but also the political and economic situation there did not attract the second generation of Albanian immigrants. Instead, 'Greekness' was an identity desired by Albanian youth because it was associated with a sense of freedom, independence and consumerism (Vathi, 2019: 36 – 37).

Building a future – shaping an identity during crisis

Since their settlement, Albanian immigrants have been urging their children to acquire a good knowledge of the Greek language and pursue higher education, so they can have better prospects in the future compared to themselves. They dreamt that their children would easily become embedded into Greek society. When Greece entered a period of recession, the construction sector, which employed many Albanian immigrants, was severely affected. Many of the immigrants considered returning to their homeland as their best option but were worried about the future of their children which seemed uncertain. Some tried to persuade their children to return to Albania with them, while others tried to mobilise their social network of relatives and friends in other European countries. The existence of such a network means security and self-confidence for potential immigrants, as it provides them with social capital (financial support, access to information but, mainly, a defined destination) (Garip

and Asad, 2015; Khosravi, 2010: 50; Massey et al., 1993: 448 – 450). Most of my young informants, however, even though they foresaw that Greece would not come out of this difficult situation soon, seemed reluctant to leave the country. Michail and Christou, who did research on diasporic youth identities in Greece, claim the same: the second-generation migrants are unwilling to go to Albania with their parents or to emigrate (Michail, 2013; Michail and Christou, 2018). Elias is a 30 years old civil engineer; he was born a year after his family settled in Greece in the early 1990's. His parents worked in the agricultural sector for many years in villages of Northern Greece and only when their children (Elias and his younger sister Irina) went to high school they moved to Thessaloniki. They wanted to offer their children better educational perspectives so that they could enter university and not end up working under precarious conditions like themselves. However, Elias entered the university the year Greece requested International Monetary Fund (IMF) assistance. He realised quite soon that the years that would follow would be very difficult for his sector. His father advised him to go to Sweden where his uncle lived and where he could have more opportunities to build a career. He himself had gone to Sweden to work with his brother in the construction sector for over a year to raise money. When he returned, he tried to persuade his family to move there. Elias peremptorily rejected this option. He did not want to become an immigrant as his own father once was.

> I know that circumstances are not the same, I am not going to have to walk for six days while hungry and thirsty like my father did, but the idea that I would be an immigrant and everyone would look at me disparagingly terrified me and discouraged me. I chose to stay in the country I was born in, in the city where I have lived most of my life and give it my best to carry it off. Six years later, I think I made the right choice.

Elias' attitude was common among my informants. Several young Albanians were affected by their parents' narrations of the hardships during the process of migrating to Greece. For them, moving to another country and leaving their parents behind was not an option. As Aliona, a 27-year-old school teacher explained, she felt obligated to stay in Greece and support her parents financially as a way of acknowledging all the sacrifices they made so she could study. The story of her family is quite similar to that of Elias's. Her father came to Athens in 1991 and after two years his wife followed him. He worked in the construction sector while his wife took care

of elderly women. Aliona's parents urged her to study a science that would offer her a steady job, ideally a position in the public sector. For this reason, Aliona studied Pedagogy. However, the country's economic recession and subsequent wage cuts prompted Aliona's parents to advise her to leave Greece and move to another European country, but she rejected that idea. Although she knows that working in another European country may be more profitable, making it easier for her to provide for her family, she believes that leaving them would be equivalent to abandoning them. Aliona claims that she stayed in Greece for her parents' sake, but failed to mention the fact that she receives help from her mother with the household chores, as well as with the care of her daughter. Thus, staying in Greece is also a way for her to improve her daily program; not only does she support her parents, but also continues receiving support from them.

For some of my informants, the choice to stay in Greece is linked not to national identity but to urban identity. Yiannis, a 30-year-old PhD student in Physics highlights the fact that he chose to stay in Greece while his Greek classmates left the country.

> When I was in high school, I remember my classmates yelling at me to go back to my country and I was confused because I thought this was my country. Ten years later they were afraid of the economy and ran away from their country, but I stayed. I pay my taxes, I don't hide my income, I am more Greek than any of them. I am more Greek than them.

Yiannis' parents got divorced when he was 5 years old and his father returned to Albania while he stayed with his mother in Thessaloniki. He was visiting his father twice or three times a year and explains that since the first time he went to his village (close to the city of Berat) he realised that this place 'is not and it will not be his home'. Yiannis believes that his choice to stay and work in Greece throughout this difficult decade proves his identity, the identity that some years ago his classmates denied him. When I asked him to define what does it mean for him to be Greek, his answer was slightly different from what I expected: 'I was born and raised in this neighbourhood on the east side of Thessaloniki, I studied here and I hope I will raise my children here'. His answer lacked the elements that would characterise a national identity but outlined an urban identity which indicates the importance of the city in the formation of his belonging. This is not unique though; there is a growing number of studies that point

out the greater significance of the city rather than the country in the building of migrant identity, especially for migrant youth (Ahmed, 2000; Allon, 2013; Soysal, 2001; Vathi, 2019). This attitude may be related to the exclusion Yiannis has felt in public discourse at the level of nationality, which is why he prefers to declare Thessaloniki as a place of belonging. Thessaloniki, and especially his neighbourhood, is the place where he finds a welcome space to interact at the micro-level of everyday life. It was not the Greek identity that kept him in Thessaloniki, but rather the affective ties and the interactions he established in the city that constitute the fundamental points of his identification. Despite the ominous forecasts for the Greek economy, Yiannis opened private tutoring for high school students on the most central street of his neighbourhood in a place that used to be a Greek tavern. In the beginning, his presence, as 'other' in an area interwoven with Greek identity, was considered inappropriate. Gradually, the same people who initially reacted to Yiannis existence in their neighbourhood were the ones who sent their children to him for guidance. His insistence on claiming access and participation in public space and challenging the established hierarchies made it clear that the city is a field where the relations of identity and otherness are not only reproduced but also questioned. In other words, space is socially constructed and the social is spatially constructed.

Finally, there are also those who followed their parents back to Albania, but then returned to Greece. Such an example is Petros, 35 years old. He is a constructor, like his father. When jobs in construction dwindled, his parents decided to return to Albania and Petros followed them. Being 22 years old at the time, he was scared to live alone in a place where he felt unwanted. Although the work in Durres, where they settled, was going very well, after a year Petros decided to return to Greece. His parents disagreed but failed to dissuade him.

> I was trying to explain to them that I did not fit in there. I remembered a few things from the Albania that we left behind in 1990. But I could not be part of the country again. The others saw me as a foreigner and I felt that way. It is ironic that all my life I thought I belonged to Albania and I wanted one day to go back, now I feel the opposite; the years I lived in Greece shaped me, made me who I am and I wanted to return to Greece, to be at home.

In this case, he strives to find his identity which he defines only as of the way he relates to other people. He 'returned' to a place that barely knew and struggled to

negotiate his identity and his position within his family and in the local community. His sense of identity stems from his sense of belonging to a group and is a source of communication with others (Epstein, 1978). Collating the image, they had in mind with reality he realised that most of his beliefs were constructed images that he had made all those years in Greece, a fact that made harder his adaptation back to Albania.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to address questions on the factors that affected and challenged the forming of Albanian youth identity in Thessaloniki during the critical decade for Greece, 2009 – 2019. There are many factors that influence and shape the way these youngsters identify themselves. As explained above, the Albanians do not comprise a unified community, as ethnic immigrant groups usually do; thus, Albanian migrants depend more on family or the personal networks they establish. Local, national, and transnational parameters contribute to the identification of Albanian youth. Transnationalism involves a number of everyday and emotional compromises as well as adjustments in one's life and identity. These changes are significant, yet they must be negotiated constantly, both by the self itself and by the family. The focus of this paper was to designate the impact of transnational paths on the construction of belonging and identity in Albanian youngsters.

Their parents' experiences and memories of the journey to and settlement in Greece, along with their own childhood experiences growing up there, shaped their ambitions and plans for the future during the crisis in the country. At the same time, their presence in public space, their participation in public life and in collectives shift the discussion on the role that the city plays in shaping the identity of an individual, in this case, a young immigrant. Through their narrations, it became apparent that the construction of one's identity is affected by power relationships, tensions and restraints of everyday life. Issues of immigration, relocation, transnationalism, repatriation, separation from relatives, and the fear of unemployment give rise to conflicting emotions within the individuals and influence the decisions of young people in multiple and often contradictory ways. Especially the fact that during this difficult for Greece decade they chose to stay (or to come back to) to this country consists, for them, powerful evidence of their *Greekness* and their belonging to this country, to their neighborhood.

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'We should bring some changes' – Socio-Cultural Adaptation of the British Medical Students in Bulgaria*

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Abstract: The study is focused on the student migration to Bulgaria, in particular, the British medical students at the Medical University of Plovdiv. On the one hand, this university is the one that attracts the greatest number of foreign students from Great Britain in the country, and on the other, the British students at the university form the biggest part of the foreign students there. By analysing their motives for choosing Bulgaria as an educational destination, their notion of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians, their social and cultural adaptation, the organisation of the educational process at the university and its impact on the models of adaptation, and their expectations regarding their professional realisation after graduation, we argue that the British medical students in Bulgaria form a specific group characterised by the active role in the transformation of the social and cultural environment, i.e. their adaptation is realised by the conscious remodelling of the environment after the British model.
Keywords: student migration, Bulgaria, Plovdiv, British medical students, socio-cultural adaptation

Introduction

Despite the COVID-19 disease and the measures which have vastly restricted movement of people across state borders, our world is still in the 'age of migration'. There are so many factors that continue globally to fuel intensive migration processes: labour demands and economic needs, urbanisation and counterurbanisation, local and regional political instability and wars, development projects and climate change. The acquisition of new skills and knowledge also takes its place among these factors. In the recent two decades the movements for obtaining higher education rapidly increased. Although internationally moving students are 'a very small fraction of the total stock of migrants' (King and Findlay, 2012: 259), their numbers have been rising almost four times faster than total international migration (King and Raghuram, 2013: 127). Available statistical data show that in 2000 there

* This article is the result of our participation in the project 'Cultural Adaptation and Integration of Immigrants in Bulgaria' (ДН 20/8 – 11.12.2017), financed by the Bulgarian Scientific Fund.

were 2.1 mm international students, in 2010 – 3.8 mm and in 2018 they are already 5.6 mm.[1]

Generally, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Australia have historically attracted the largest number of international students and remain the most popular destination countries (Bhandari and Blumenthal, 2011: 2). The direction of flows is from south to north, from east to west and from developing to developed countries. However, a closer look at data on international flows of students in the recent decades shows that there are many other countries, where an increase in the number of international students is recorded (King and Raghuram, 2013: 127). In this respect, not only has the number of internationally mobile students grown, but the overall context of global student mobility, in terms of both who is going where, and the mix of host and sending countries, has also changed significantly (Bhandari and Blumenthal, 2011: 1 – 2). International student migration has become a global phenomenon having its significant national, regional, and temporal variations. According to some researchers it is a result of commodification of higher education, which is being sold at the global market (Findlay, King and Stam, 2017: 25 – 27; King and Sondhi, 2018: 178; Raghuram, 2013: 147 – 148).

Therefore, we can observe movement in the opposite of the above-mentioned direction. Bulgaria, ex-socialist Southeastern country, which became an EU member state in 2007, generally is regarded as sending students abroad. However, the country is not an exception from the tendencies mentioned above and the number of foreign students steadily increases. During the academic year 2001 / 2002 the foreign students in the country were 7,585 (3.4% of all students), and in 2020 / 2021 their number increased more than twice – 17,335 (7.9%).[2] The largest groups of foreign students come from Western European countries (in geographical, but also political and socio-cultural terms) – Greece, Great Britain, and Germany are the top three sending countries.

The focus of our study are precisely the foreign students in Bulgarian. We define as foreign those students who have foreign citizenship, had received their second education outside Bulgaria and are currently enrolled in higher education courses in

[1] Data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (Total inbound internationally mobile students, both sexes). Available at: http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=3806# (accessed 18 September 2021).

[2] Data of the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria (Students by educational-qualification degree, citizenship, mode of attendance and sex in the higher schools by kind of ownership). Available at: https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/query.jsf?x_2=840 (accessed 18 September 2021).

the country, i.e. we refer to *degree students*, who migrate to take their entire qualification in Bulgaria – such as a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree, or some other higher education qualification; the so-called *credit-mobile students* on short exchange or study-abroad trips (such as Erasmus+ students) are not considered (see King and Findlay, 2012: 261).

This text presents a particular case study: it is focused on the British medical students at Plovdiv Medical University. On the one hand, this university is the one that attracts the greatest number of foreign students from Great Britain in the country, and on the other, the British students at the university form the biggest part of the foreign students there. The main aim of the article is to examine the patterns of their socio-cultural adaptation to the educational process and university life, as well as to the local social and cultural environment. By analysing their motives for choosing Bulgaria as an educational destination, their notion of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians, their social and cultural adaptation, the organisation of the educational process at the university and its impact on the models of adaptation, and their expectations regarding their professional realisation after graduation, we argue that the British medical students in Bulgaria form a specific group characterised by the active role in the transformation of the social and cultural environment, i.e. their adaptation is realised by the conscious remodelling of the environment after the British model.

Theoretical framework

International student migration draws the attention of researchers from various fields of study – economy, human geography, demography, sociology, anthropology, etc. and it has been examined from multiple perspectives. Simultaneously, 'it has been overlooked precisely because it is not seen as part of "mainstream" migration' (King and Findlay, 2012: 262). Economic approaches explain student migration as part of skilled labour migration and as an important type of human capital flow. Many of the studies within this perspective were focused on international students moving from developing to developed countries and tend to view them as 'global talents' or 'skilled migrants' (Kang, 2013: 2896). Generally, these studies frame the economic and demographic impacts of student migration in terms of a 'brain gain' and 'brain drain' depending on whether international students remain in the host country or return to their home countries after their overseas education. Thus, student migration is perceived as competition for 'the best brains' (Bilecen, 2009: 5; King and Son-

dhi, 2018: 178). Most recently researchers began to use the term 'brain circulation' accounting the multidirectional and complex nature of international student flows and recognising that the mobility patterns or academic exchanges are mutually beneficial for sending and receiving countries, albeit in varying ways (Bhandari and Blumenthal, 2011: 16).

Economic in its nature is the push-pull model. In its classical mode it sees migration as an effect of rational decision-making processes undertaken by individuals (Todaro, 1976). Decisions to move or not are seen as a result weighing up the costs and benefits so that comparison between staying and moving becomes the driving force for migration. Although most research on student migration has distanced itself from this approach, it is clearly visible how pull and push factors operate, and how the decision to move (which may be very much influenced by parents, other family members or friends) is made by an evaluation of the balance between various factors (King and Findlay, 2012: 262 – 263). These, however, are not only economic, but also socio-cultural, political, class, and administrative factors as it will be shown by our ethnographic data.

Therefore, especially proceeding from sociological and anthropological argumentation, the heavily economic views of student migration are criticised for their failure to explain the multiple, complex motivations, connections, and everyday practices of international students (Kang, 2013: 2896). The framework of transnationalism has offered a way of theorising the multiple connections (economic, political, social, cultural, etc.) between sending and receiving places without an overarching sense of linearity or necessary structural relations (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc, 1995: 48). Regarded as transmigrants, international students 'develop their social spaces of everyday life, their work trajectories and biographical projects' in configurations of 'special practices, symbols and artefacts' across space (Pries, 2001: 21). They move and interact within 'transnational social fields', which Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004: 1009) define as 'a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed'. During their education abroad, students anticipate, interpret, perform and subvert the positions available to them as students alongside those as friends, family members, citizens, workers, and activists and they do this through a range of communicative practices across space – sharing information, imaginations, ideas of what student life should be like, what makes good educational institutions and so on (Raghuram, 2013: 149). Thus, the transna-

tional approach allows one to examine how education abroad intersects with other dimensions of the students' social life in transnational settings, such as kinship, friendship, citizenship, ethnicity, religiosity and the making of transnational identities (Kang, 2013: 2897). Lastly, but very importantly for our text, by approaching student migration in such a manner and regarding it as a multidimensional and complex process we can study how migrants refine and define places and key drivers of global and local socio-cultural transformation.

Methodological notes

The general study is based on fieldwork research conducted in the period 2019 – 2020 in four Bulgarian cities – the capital city of Sofia, Plovdiv, Blagoevgrad, and Varna, and seven universities – Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski', Medical University of Sofia, Plovdiv University 'Paisii Hilendarski', Plovdiv Medical University, South-West University 'Neofit Rilski', American University in Bulgaria and the Technical University of Varna. Three main research methods were used – semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups and a questionnaire survey. We developed a basic questionnaire with the main topics for the interviews and focus groups that later became a basis for the online questionnaire survey. This approach contributed to the comparability of the data collected. As a result, we have 21 individual interviews with students in various years and levels of their education (Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes), 5 focus groups with 18 students altogether (first year of education in various subjects), and 65 completed questionnaires of students in different years in Bachelor's and Master's programmes. The present analysis is based on 7 individual interviews and 14 completed questionnaires of British students in different years at Plovdiv Medical University most of whom are of various ethnic origins. It is also complemented with information collected during formal and informal conversations with representatives of the university.

Choosing Bulgaria: push and pull factors

Most of the British students at Plovdiv Medical University are representatives of immigrant communities in the UK, mainly Indians, Pakistanis, and of various African origins. They are first as well as second and third generation of migrants. Most of them have received their secondary education in Great Britain. Their parents usu-

ally have at least a high school level of education, having graduated in their country of origin or the UK. The main reason for the British students to choose to study medicine abroad is the education system in the UK – hard admission procedure and high tuition fees. Our respondents often emphasised that the admission of British citizens of immigrant origin is even harder and that the so-called 'White British' applicants have an advantage. Instead of failing to get into medical university in the UK and wasting a whole year, many prefer to apply directly abroad. Thus, the representatives of immigrant communities who are willing to study medicine become a target group of enterprising agencies recruiting students for universities abroad. Exactly with this kind of agencies works Plovdiv Medical University in order to attract foreign students. In 1996, the university began working with an agency that operated in India, so the first foreign students were mainly Indians who after graduation went to the UK and USA. After Bulgaria joined the EU, the Indians needed visas to study in the country and the student flow from India gradually decreased. Plovdiv Medical University turned its attention towards Great Britain and thanks to a British recruiting agency and its alumni there who promoted the university among the Indian and Pakistani communities in 2013 – 2014 the student flow from the UK significantly increased. Gradually, the British students swept along others by 'advertising' the benefits of studying medicine in Plovdiv. The main reasons for the British students to choose Plovdiv Medical University is the easier access (test in chemistry and biology), instruction entirely in English language, low tuition fees and living costs, and a big British student community. According to the university, today the foreign students are more than the Bulgarian (300 new foreign students per year as against 150 Bulgarians), the biggest community being the British.

Notion of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians

Most of the British students have never been to Bulgaria before. They have little and indirect knowledge about the country, formed mainly by the media and sometimes by friends who study in Bulgaria. Key elements of their preliminary impression about Bulgaria and the Bulgarians are corruption, backwardness, racism, discrimination, good weather, and cheaper life. This impression doesn't really change during their studies. When asked which are the negative aspects of life in Bulgaria, the British students name bureaucracy, corruption, racism, discrimination, rudeness, language barrier. What they find positive are the good weather, nature and cheaper

life. Often, our respondents made parallels between Bulgaria and the country of their ethnic origin by means of which they wanted to lay emphasis on the backwardness and the improbability of staying in a country similar to the one that they or their parents once left. For the British students Bulgaria is just a temporary stop for an easier and cheaper medical education and this preliminary attitude doesn't change during their studies. Almost all of our respondents plan to go back to Great Britain and none of them considers Bulgaria a place for future realisation. There is also an objective obstacle for pursuing a career in Bulgaria: very difficult requirements and high fees for specialisation. The university admits that the procedure for the foreign students to specialise in Bulgaria is very complicated and it refuses to engage. At the same time, even the few students who consider this option give up the idea since instead of paying for specialisation in Bulgaria they will be paid in the UK.

Social spaces of everyday life

The fact that Bulgaria is just a temporary stop is related to the encapsulation of the British students within the frames of their group. They have few contacts with Bulgarians, mainly outside the university circle. Most of them show little interest in learning more about Bulgaria and its culture – they rarely follow the news related to the host country, listen to Bulgarian music, attend cultural events, feasts, and celebrations. Even though they live in a city with an ancient history and travel around the country, they are not quite familiar with the history of the region. The main reasons for that are the organisation of the educational process at the university, their distrust in the host society and their feeling of being other (especially in the case of those of immigrant origin). The university separates the foreign students from the Bulgarians which hinders their mingling. According to the university administration, they recognise this problem and are trying to find a way to bring the Bulgarian and foreign students together. In 2019, a spring ball was intended which had to gather all students together. However, the two groups of students are blaming each other for not being willing to communicate. At the same time, the university does not insist on foreign students having command of the Bulgarian language. The instruction is entirely in English and although the first two years all foreign students have obligatory classes in Bulgarian language, most of them have only basic knowledge and during their clinical training after the second year, their contacts with patients are assisted by interpretation on the part of the lecturer. Although the British

students consider the language barrier as one of the main obstacles in their everyday life, they are not willing to learn it. Even the students who have a better command of the Bulgarian language refuse to speak in it outside the context of the contact with the patients. At the same time, many of our respondents blame the local people for not speaking English, hence making their everyday life difficult.

To a great extent, the preliminary impression of the British students about Bulgaria and the Bulgarians and its confirmation during their stay in the country is the reason for their distrust in the host society. According to the stories of our respondents, as soon as they arrived in Bulgaria they became victims of bureaucracy, deceit, dishonesty and rude behaviour. They were deceived by taxi drivers[3] and had a hard time regulating their stay in Bulgaria and obtaining an ID card, enrolling in the university, and finding accommodation. They complain about the lack of assistance on the part of the university and the rude behaviour of the university staff. The British students prefer renting an apartment to being accommodated at the university dormitory. They require small furnished apartments, preferably in new buildings, close to the university, with well-equipped kitchens. When searching for accommodation they turn to estate agencies but are left disappointed. They believe that the property owners together with the estate agencies purposefully raise the rents and taxes for the foreign students. In their everyday life, the British students often come across situations that compared to their experience in the UK they consider unacceptable. 'Never park on someone's parking spot', said A. L. as a tip for the new foreign students. The tyres of his car had been punched and the wipers broke because he had parked on someone else's spot. And he continues: 'When you stand in a queue people just start jumping in front of you. In the UK it is not normal.' Although Plovdiv is an example of a Bulgarian multicultural city[4], many British students of immigrant origin have the feeling of being other. They complain of being stared at because of the colour of their skin or the way they dress. B. C., one of the few white British students, recalls: 'When I first came, my black friend took me from the station and three people asked to take photos with him on the way. Like an attraction.' Sometimes some of them are mistaken for Roma and become targets of aggressive behaviour on the part of the locals.

[3] The British students use taxis a lot and if in the beginning they were deceived, after some time spent in Bulgaria, they know how to protect themselves. According to the taxi drivers, the students are always prepared before the ride: they know the best route, keep an eye on it using their smartphones and have calculated the cost in advance.

[4] There are various ethnic and religious communities in Plovdiv: Bulgarians, Gypsies (Roma), Turks, Armenians, Jews, Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, Eastern Catholics, Muslims, etc.

Nationhood, civic activism, and local transformation

In this context, the British students have to find the best way possible to adapt. Despite their diverse and mainly immigrant background, the British students consider their nation superior in social and cultural aspects. Thus, one of the main characteristics of this group is their active role in changing the social and cultural environment, that is to say, their adaptation is related to shaping the environment after the 'British model'. Their main target is the university environment, the study conditions and the foreign students' rights. Since the foreign students are not entitled to have representatives in the Student Council[5], they established an informal International Students Council. The initiative belongs to the British students (mainly the Pakistanis) and they are those who manage the Council. The Council is hosted by the Association of International Students, an NGO that B.C., one of the most active British students, established after numerous fruitless attempts to bring the Bulgarian and the foreign students together. 'We should have official channels in the university to address problems and we don't.' (B.C.) The NGO is the only legal way for foreign students to manage money resources. The members of the International Students Council are very active. Their main efforts are directed towards obtaining for the foreign students the right to vote when deciding the allocation of the resources intended for student activities. The British students believe that they are unjustly ignored since they are the majority at the university and pay incomparably higher tuition fees in comparison with the Bulgarian students who are the only members of the formal Student Council:

> I'm President of the International Student Union and we have a Bulgarian Student Union. I feel we have more representation from the Bulgarian Student Union even though the students of the International Student Union are paying a lot more money into the running of the university. But the one that is not recognised is the English[6] students' one. The only recognised is the Bulgarian students'. So, we do not actually have a representation in the Student Council at this moment in time. So, we can't say anything or are allowed to pass certain things (A.L.).

[5] According to the British students, the university and the Bulgarian Student Council do not want the foreign students to have representatives in the Council because the foreign students are a majority and will take over the Council.

[6] Although there are representatives of all nationalities, calling the International Student Union English is very indicative of who initiated it and is running it.

Although Plovdiv Medical University has a new and very high-tech infrastructure with simulation rooms, our respondents share that they are quite unhappy with the university's facilities, especially with the library. Since they are used to spend most of their time studying there, one of their wishes is to have the library expanded, modernised and with longer hours of work. Another constant fight of the British students is to make the university set a devotional place for the Muslim students. Although there are mosques in Plovdiv, according to our respondents they are far from the university. They want to have a place within the university campus where they can pray during their studies. A few years ago, they used to gather for group prayers in one of the lecture halls without permission. The administration of the university put an end to this practice and turned down their request for a devotional place, stating that this is a secular educational institution and could not be engaged with the religious needs of the students. Some of the university requirements related to religious specificities are even specified in the contracts between the students and the university. However, the British students don't accept the stand of the university arguing that since there is an Orthodox Christian chapel in the university's yard the Muslims have the right to have their own devotional place as well. The university once again evades their request stating that the chapel is built for the patients of the university hospital, not for the staff or the students.

The International Students Council initiates also many student activities: for example, various clubs and groups of interest (e.g., Gospel choir, Nepal dancing club, etc.), a university football league, annual balls and various cultural events, celebrations of typical feasts, etc. Even the university administration acknowledges their great activity, especially compared to the Bulgarian students. As B.C. puts it: 'Unfortunately, the Bulgarians have all the money and no ideas and the international students have all the ideas and no money.' According to some of our respondents, the parents of the members of the Bulgarian Student Council are doctors so the students don't dare to rock the boat since they are part of the system. Money is not the only obstacle the British students face. They think the university purposefully impedes their activities.

> The university doesn't help because the more disorganised the students – the less money they ask for and the more money the university has. [...] I'm trying to organise a clinical skills competition for 192 students – half Bulgarian and half English – for free. They [the sponsors] are going to bring a 15 000 Euro simulation table and the hardest part of the organisation is that the university would not give me a room to put the 15 000 Euro table into. (B. C.)

The British students are not only used to demand their rights but to participate in extracurricular activities as well. For example, the university organises a club for Bulgarian traditional dances but only few students take an interest in it. Thus, the university invites the Nepal dancing group to represent it in an annual festival. The President of the International Student Union, A.L., establishes a university football league. One of its aims is to get all students (including the Bulgarian) together. Although every nationality has its own team, the teams are actually more or less mixed, e.g., most of the players in the so-called British team are from the UK, however there are also students of other nationalities.

Beside the university activities, the British students initiate other organisations, groups and networks as well which are a peculiar attempt at fighting the 'bad practices' in the country and aim at making life and adaptation of the foreign students (especially the newcomers) easier. For example, they created an online platform for direct contact between students and lessors whose purpose is to evade the real estate brokers and thus to avoid the deliberate increase in price of the rents for foreign students. It is worth mentioning that the increasing number of foreign students at Plovdiv Medical University leads to a flourishing construction industry. As a response to the increased demand, an intense building of new residential buildings with small apartments in the area of the university began. This significantly changes the environment in the vicinity.

Another example is the initiative of some British students with culinary skills to cook for their colleagues and send the food by taxis. This is largely due to the desire of the British students to preserve their typical food culture and diet. The specifics of the Indian and Pakistani cuisine to which they are used as well as the religious restrictions that many of the students observe in relation to food make the products supply in Bulgaria difficult. That is why most of the British students bring from the UK or their parents send them typical products, especially spices, and often even cooked dishes. Although there are many restaurants and groceries offering halal food, the British students usually distrust them and prefer to cook for themselves. However, they buy the other products from the Bulgarian supermarkets and quite often express satisfaction with the freshness of the Bulgarian fruits and vegetables. But as for the Bulgarian cuisine, generally most of them dislike it because they find it too salty, greasy, cold, and not enough spiced.

Conclusion

Countries that in the past were primarily 'sending' students abroad, such as Bulgaria, have now also developed their own internationalisation strategies to attract foreign students. As it was mentioned above, in the literature international students are often regarded as potential highly skilled migrants who can enter the labour market in the receiving country, and this is part of an official attracting strategy and deliberate policies. In the case researched here, it is not a valid assumption. The global commodification of university education allows less prestigious universities all over the world to attract foreign students primarily for financial and demographic reasons, especially in such highly desired subjects but with limited admittance and fierce competition for places in the sending countries, like medicine in the Great Britain universities. We did not register any special endeavour by the university or state administration in the health system to attract graduated medical students to continue their career in Bulgaria.

On the other hand, British medical students in Bulgaria are aware that they are not coming to 'world class university' (see Findlay et al., 2012: 125 – 126), but for them it is a way to access the dream profession. The EU membership of Bulgaria and the related European diploma, the easier university admission procedures and graduation, the significantly lower fees and living costs and the gained experience of living abroad are the main motives for British students to choose Bulgaria as an education destination. This is closely related, however, with the prevalent attitude to leave the country after graduation and to seek further education, specialisation, and medical realisation back in Great Britain, in other EU countries, or anywhere around the world.

Thus, we can talk of temporary adaptation strategies rather than integration with the purpose of living in Bulgaria; it is an episode (indeed, important one) in their life trajectories. However, it does not mean that their presence in the country is accidental. We can examine their educational movement to the country beyond economic dimensions (which, no doubt, are important) – through socio-cultural lenses. At the same time, their stay is not just tied to the acquisition of special (medical) knowledge, but also to accumulation of social capital and significant life experience in their various everyday roles – of students, kin members, civil activists, etc. In this respect, their identities and everyday activities are constructed within multiple social networks and relationships in transnational social spaces. Therefore, the

effect of their presence in the receiving place is also beyond economic benefits for the university and as the examples above show, foreign students have a significant influence on the transformation of the place they inhabit. In the particular case of the British students, we argue that their practices and manner of integration in Bulgaria are determined by their previous education and life experience in Great Britain as active citizens and hence by their national self-confidence. In comparative perspective, the integration strategies and the influence based on national and / or ethno-cultural affiliation in the cases of various groups of foreign students is an intriguing subject of further study.

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Part IV

Integration and Adaptation of Refugees

Refugees in Bulgaria: Entrapped Between Politics and Policies

Ildiko Otova and Evelina Staykova

Abstract: Although it was asylum that became the earliest institutionalised form of migration, Bulgaria was totally unprepared for the 2012 situation. Resulting from peaking numbers in asylum applications, new arrivals in the country were confronted with a situation of institutional collapse. Despite ostensible normalisation of the situation in the ensuing years, the reception system failed to undergo significant changes. Normalisation was due to factors outside the system, and the few implemented changes came in response to the dominant securitarian reading and anti-immigrant sentiment. The implications of the country's location on the Balkan Refugee Route also abruptly introduced migration into the political debate. This coincide with the freezing of policymaking in the area of migration, integration in particular, or of their failure, while a debate is missing – because the political actors do not seek to propose alternative visions, but to ensure who among them would give migration a more negative representation. The two leading trends can be summarised as erecting of walls – a fence along the border as regards the governance of the flows and halting the integration policies as regards the policies of incorporating migrants into society. The article offers both a reading of the legislation and specific provisions in the field of international protection and the reception system, as well as a discourse analysis tracing politicisation of the topic.
Keywords: migration, refugees, populism, Bulgaria

Introduction

Although Bulgaria has had certain historical experience with migration and refugee waves, and in the years following 1989 it was the refugee phenomenon that became the best-developed aspect of migration policy, Bulgaria effectively turned out to be unprepared for the situation which found it located on the Balkan Refugee Route and faced it with an increasing number of asylum seekers and the mixed migrant flows making passage through its territory. Among the classical lines of differentiation of migration types, one of the most frequently employed is that of political versus economic. Political migrants are often assumed to have unconditional rights to protection pursuant to international law, with economic migrants seen as subject to wider discussions. In the present text, we shall consider how the migration topic is being politicised precisely through the political migration, going over different

historic periods until we arrive at the juncture where the political order in Bulgaria becomes dominated by populism. Migration, populism and their interconnectedness are subjects of great interest in European, and not only, context. The case of Bulgaria presents a challenging subject for analysis regarding the very peculiar process of 'normalisation' of populism, which renders policy-making impossible. Refugees very often fall in the trap of this impossibility to develop effectual and adequate policies on account of the political process in which extreme interpretations vie for supremacy. They are the product not just of the political actors, but also of other power holders such as the media and intellectuals (Bauman, 2016; Inglehart and Norris, 2016 in Campani, 2018). The moment of balance comes via external factors – international and European partners, non-governmental sector, and civil society.

Methodologically, the article offers both a reading of the legislation and specific provisions in the field of international protection and the reception system and discourse analysis produced by different political actors and other power holders. These two entries to the topic mirror the dichotomy of policies – politics, which is essential for the central understanding of the analysis.

The reading of the legislation covers different historical periods. However, it mainly focuses on the post-1989 years. This historical overview is needed to contextualise the current trends in policymaking and the process of politicisation dominated by specific interpretations. The discourse analysis also traces the politicisation of the topic, especially during the so-called 'refugee crisis' in recent years.

Historical context: the fundamentals of ethnocentric reading and the legacies of communism

Historically, Bulgaria has a long record with refugees. During the years, the modern state of Bulgaria (following 1878) has received on its territory a series of migration waves. These include not just ethnic Bulgarians but also representatives of other nationalities. The topic is of particular relevance in the context of the so-called national catastrophes, the losses of Bulgaria in the Second Balkan and the First World War, which had as a consequence between 220,000 and 250,000 refugees entering the territory of the state from Aegean Macedonia, Eastern and Western Thrace, Southern Dobrudzha, the Western Outlands, and Asia Minor (Tsankov, 1998 in Guentcheva, 2012). In 1920 and 1926 were adopted respectively The Law for Resettlement of Refugees and Ensuring Their Livelihood, and the Law of Agricultural Accommoda-

tion of Refugees by means of the resources obtained through the law granted with the consent of the League of Nations (Valkanov, 1979 in Guentcheva, 2012). This is how the original legal definition was given, to individuals of Bulgarian ethnicity originating from Macedonia, Thrace, Dobruszha, the Western Outlands, which have escaped to the territory of the Kingdom (of Bulgaria), because of political changes that took place in the cited regions occurring after 1912 (Tsankov, 1998 in Guentcheva, 2012). The ethnocentric reading of the refugee problem is distinctive, even though Bulgaria having welcomed several waves of political migrants, such as Armenians, Russians, and others. On that occasion Erolova (2017) summarises that Bulgaria is a state which has some historical experience in the temporary and permanent reception and integration of ethnic (Bulgarians) and foreign (Russians, Armenians, and Greeks), as well as of other types of immigrants, such as workforce and students (Greeks, Vietnamese, Arabs, Kurds, Africans), and with respect to the legislative practices and integration in the 20th century. This is a reference to the post-1945 years when, during the period of state communism, the migration-related, along with the political situation, was altered. A peculiar characteristic of the communist society is the inherent absence of openness. What was typical of the migration processes during communism were the high levels of regulatory control and the maximum restriction imposed on human migration. This applied both to the country's own citizens crossing the borders to move abroad, and to foreign citizens moving into the country (Krasteva, 2005; Staykova, 2013). During this period the policy regarding the refugees / migrants was consecutively determined by the two Constitutions of 1947 and 1971 (Erolova, 2017). The conceptual and legal definitions clearly distinguish the political and class interpretations, alongside those that are universally human (Guentcheva, 2012). Thus, for example, the 1947 Constitution specifies that the right of asylum shall be provided to foreign nationals whenever they are being persecuted for defending democratic principles, national liberation, for the rights of working people, or for the liberty of scientific and cultural activities (Guentcheva, 2012). To these, the 1971 Constitution adds racial discrimination and the defence of peace. Similar are the interpretations laid down in the Law of Residence of Foreign Nationals in Bulgaria of 1973 and Decree No. 520 of 1975 on the right of asylum, which were practically in force until 1994 (Guentcheva, 2012). In reality, political refugees were actually relatively few in number, with the main and most substantial group being of refugees from Greece (see Kokinou, 2012).

As already demonstrated, prior to 1989 emigration was banned as a rule, and therefore Bulgarian citizens could move abroad mostly as refugees. About 20,000 Bulgarian nationals have departed from the country between the end of the 1950s and 1989. In contrast to other Central and Eastern European countries which had experienced dramatic refugee outflows, the figures for Bulgaria show that refugee emigration remained stable over time: the number of people leaving the country annually was about 370 (Staykova, 2013; Sultanova, 2006).

The democratic reforms in Bulgaria marked a radical change in the country's migration picture. What became one of the first and most eagerly consumed freedoms was the freedom of movement (Krasteva, 2007; Staykova, 2013). Paradoxically, Bulgaria was transformed into a country of emigration, but migration dropped out of the political agenda for a long time not just in terms of public policies, but on the whole, as an issue of political order, with very few exceptions – precisely the refugee phenomenon was de facto the first to be institutionalised and subsequently became the reason for the politicisation of the topic.

The policies: from the pursuit of democratisation to the border fence

Asylum was the first and best-institutionalised area of the migration phenomenon in the initial years of the post-1989 democratic transition even though the numbers of asylum seekers prior to the 2014/5 refugee crisis were insignificant (Otova, 2020). Several periods in policy-shaping can be identified in the process of policy-making. In the present analysis, we shall adhere to the periodisation proposed by Nakova – 1990 − 2007; 2007 − 2013; and from 2014 until now (Nakova, 2021). The first period relates to the democratisation process, the second includes the years following the commencement of the actual membership in the EU, and the third commenced after the critical increase in the numbers of asylum seekers in the years after Bulgaria found itself located on the Balkan Refugee Route. We shall review these policies at two levels – the first one relates to the access to territory and the second one – to integration.

The introduction of the policy topic requires stating that the numbers of asylum seekers are relatively low. Anna Krasteva (2017) has summarised several levels in the waves based on statistical data. In the years between 1993 and 1998, the numbers of asylum seekers were between 250 and 550 per year. There was a certain increase in the numbers registered in the period between 1999 – 2005. The peak

occurred in 2002 with 2,888 applications for asylum – ten times higher than that in 1993 when statistics began to be registered. Even back then, the scale of the refugee flow was neither threatening nor beyond the capacity of the institutional structure already established for dealing with refugees in Bulgaria. In the years between 2005 – 2011: there were many forecasts that Bulgaria's accession to the EU in 2007 would attract massive refugee waves. This failed to materialise. After 2012 came the actual beginning of the period of the refugee crisis, with the increase commencing at the very outset of this period, soaring almost six times – from 1,387 in 2012 to 7,144 in 2013. The peak was in 2015 when the unprecedented for Bulgaria 20,391 individuals applied for asylum. The next year, 2016, was characterised by a halt in the increase and even a slight decline in the number of asylum seekers – 19,418, but it was still much higher than it was before the peak – 11,081 in 2014 (Krasteva, 2017). We can also include a subsequent period, in which the number begins to decline again (Otova, 2020). These crises, however, were not a product of statistics, but of interpretations and narratives – 'it is a question of "narratives" that has to be understood in the framework of a global and European process of political, economic, social and cultural transformation' (Campani, 2019: 29).

The new democratic constitution of 1991 provides asylum to foreign individuals persecuted for their convictions or their activities in defence of internationally recognised rights and freedoms (art. 27, par. 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria). This provides grounds for some researchers, such as Rossitza Guentcheva, to establish continuity in the understanding of 'refugee' from the previous regime (Guentcheva, 2012). During this first period, Bulgaria slowly began to approximate the international standards in the domain. The state joined the family of asylum-granting countries upon signing the Geneva Convention in 1993 (Otova, 2020), and also signed the New York protocol which effectively rendered the country committed to accepting foreigners seeking asylum without putting any geographical or temporal limitations on the persons in question (Nakova and Erolova, 2019). In 1992 was founded the National Bureau for Territorial Asylum and Refugees at the Council of Ministers. These legislative and institutional introductions are part of the process of democratisation which envisages also the harmonisation of legislation and its enforcement practices in Bulgaria with the international legal standards in the area of human rights, including with regard to asylum granting: 'After 1989, the Bulgarian policy for asylum and refugees was reformulated in accordance with the pro-Western course adopted by the country, and the national legislation was harmo-

nised with the principles of international law' (Nakova and Erolova, 2019). During this period Bulgaria was entered in the list of safe countries (Soultanova, 2006 as in Guentcheva, 2012). In practice, from a country emitting refugees during the years of state communism, Bulgaria was transformed into a country that is expected to provide protection (Guentcheva, 2012). Nevertheless, Nakova and Erolova (2019) write that in the period 1993 – 1999 Bulgaria was to a greater degree a country of origin for a greater number of people seeking asylum in another country than a host country for individuals seeking asylum in it. Citing data from UNHCR, they have demonstrated that for the period 1990 – 1999, a total of 111,618 Bulgarian citizens have sought asylum in European countries, while for the same period 3,618 sought asylum in Bulgaria. In 1994, the first Decree No. 208 / 4 October 1994 for Granting and Regulating the Status of Refugees was adopted by the Council of Ministers, which does not propose its own definition for a 'refugee' but directly supplies the definition provided in the 1951 Geneva Convention (Guentcheva, 2012). The decree introduced the *non-refoulment* principle into Bulgarian legislation. Guentcheva (2012) makes an important clarification about the part played by the international organisations, which in the years ahead has proved extreme to the admission system. In July 1993, the UN High Commissariat for Refugees and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria concluded an official agreement which effectively started the mandate of UNHCR in the country. The trend of harmonisation (of national legislation) to international standards intensified in the process of preparation for EU membership and its factual realisation:

> Beginning in 1995, when Bulgaria made its application for membership in the European Union, the country has been following the common European policy in the field of asylum and refugees and, respectively, started to set its national laws into harmony with European legislation; after 2007, when the country acceded to the EU, it was obliged to obey this legislation (Nakova and Erolova, 2019).

Having started the application process for EU membership, Bulgaria gradually harmonised its legislation with European frameworks in the domain of asylum granting. As we have seen, by the end of the 1990s, the national policy in the area of asylum granting was not regulated by a legal act, being governed instead by regulations and decrees issued in compliance with adopted (ratified) international conventions and in cooperation with international and European organisations (Nakova and Erolova,

2019). In 1999, the 38th National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria passed the Law on Refugees, and in 2002, the 39th National Assembly passed the Law on Asylum and Refugees (Asylum and Refugees Act), with several amendments to it voted later (2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016). After 2007, when it had acceded to the EU, Bulgaria practically became a member of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). As summarised by Nakova and Erolova,

> On the whole, the Parliament of Bulgaria successfully transposed European directives into Bulgarian legislation, and [continual] amendments made to the Asylum and Refugee Act of 2002 indicate that legislators were striving to [conform] current resolutions of European legislation into the CEAS framework (Nakova and Erolova, 2019).

During these two initial periods, the role of international factors is particularly and distinctively evident.

In 1992, the National Office on Territorial Asylum and Refugees was established at the Council of Ministers. In 2000, the Office was upgraded into an Agency of the Refugees and as of 2002, the State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers is designated as the government institution tasked with matters pertaining to the refugee phenomenon. As summarised by Nakova and Erolova:

> During various stages of its process of restructuring, it has always remained the principal body responsible for implementation of national legislation (laws and decrees) on asylum and refugees. Its work is assisted by [other government bodies] such as the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Agency for National Security, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Education and Science, and by various non-government organisations (Nakova and Erolova, 2019: 429).

The admission system also began to be implemented during these initial periods. In 1997, the first centre for registration and reception of asylum seekers and refugees opened in the village of Banya, while 2001 saw the opening of the registration and reception centre in the Ovcha Kupel district of Sofia, followed by the Pastrogor transit centre in the municipality of Svilengrad, southern Bulgaria, in 2008 (Otova, 2020). However, the system turned out insufficiently developed to handle the pressure of events in subsequent years.

The third period relates to policies during the crisis. The government of Bulgaria adopted a plan in response to the mounting migratory pressures on 16 April 2014 – almost a year after the actual onset of the crisis (Otova, 2020). The tendency for fictitious Europeanisation has continued through the transposition of European directives. In 2015, the Law on Asylum and Refugees was amended twice. The Amendment of the act, effective as of 16.10.2015, transposed Directive 2011/95 / EU and Directive 2013/33 / EU. The amendment to the LAR, effective as of the end of December 2015, transposes Directive 2013/32/ EU. Alongside these proceedings, there started belated modifications relating to the construction of the physical reception infrastructure. By early 2013, the total capacity of the reception centres is reported to comprise 805 places (Asylum Information Database (AIDA), 2013). This overall capacity proved rather insufficient with the numbers of arriving asylum seekers on the increase well past mid-2013 (Otova, 2020). To cope with this situation, the State Agency for Refugees opened some new accommodation facilities. None of these facilities was designed to suit the stated purpose, and the living conditions became the target of criticism on the part of human rights organisations. In August 2016, a mass brawl between Afghani and Iraqi asylum seekers erupted in one of the centres. Afterwards, the ethnic principle of accommodation began to be implemented throughout the reception centres all over Bulgaria. After 2016, a new provision allowed for asylum seekers to be placed in closed reception facilities under the jurisdiction of the State Agency for Refugees while the handling of their applications is in progress. This legislative amendment also accounts for the Harmanli riots and the reactions of several political actors. In September 2017, the government introduced the so-called 'statutory movement zones' comprising the geographical environs surrounding any given reception centre (Otova, 2020). As one can see, changes are being made *ad hoc* and reflect the clear tendency of deprivation of rights. One of the tendencies which had already started during the previous period, but in the present is already realised and physically linked precisely to securitisation. Writes Vanya Ivanova:

> The migration policy of Bulgaria has a strong securitisation focus. Driven by the motivation of [acceding to] the Schengen agreement, the country's migration policy [has focused] on building a fence, with the argument of securing the [entire] EU territory (Ivanova, 2018).

On topic, Rossitza Guentcheva has emphasised that although securitarian reading is characteristic to the national state, in Bulgaria it has also been introduced from outside, as in an EU member state (2012). The construction of the fence along the Turkish border commenced in October 2013 and ended in 2017. Writes Nevena Nancheva (2016):

> The analysis of Bulgaria's response to the refugee influx of 2013 – 14, provided below, demonstrates two things. First, security thinking and acts of securitisation (Huysmans 2006: 149) have completely overhauled the human right aspects of asylum, institutionalising a peculiar European Union predicament: policies that aim at protection from asylum seekers, rather than at protection of asylum seekers. Second, these policies reinforce a very visible exclusion of asylum seekers from participation in the political community of the state, spelling a recipe for xenophobia, racism, and segregation, with all their concomitant evils that the European Union has been proclaiming to combat (Nancheva, 2016).

Let us see now what is the development of the policies on inclusion in the political entity of the so-called integration policies. In December 2005 was adopted the first National Program for Refugee Integration in the Republic of Bulgaria (2005 − 2007), which in practice became effective in 2006. There was a follow-up document adopted in 2008 with validity term until 2010, followed up by a third document covering the 2011 – 2013 period. As summarised by Ilareva (2017):

> Between 2005 and 2013, SAR was implementing refugee integration based on the National Program for Integration of Refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria with a three-year programming period. The document, which included steps for the practical enforcement of European legal standards and the integration of asylum recipients in society provided a further basis for coordinating the actions of institutions and nongovernment organisations. Between 23 and 60 people annually were entitled to integrational support up to one year from receiving international protection.

Albena Tcholakova (2012) writes that there are also certain inclusion measures outlined in other documents. Tcholakova also emphasises the significant role of international organisations, such as UNHCR and the non-governmental sector in enforcing and implementing the measures as well as regarding the overall establishment

of the admission system in Bulgaria (Tcholakova, 2012). Thus, with insignificant numbers of protection seekers and status recipients, the state, although chiefly for the sake of its international partners, possessed a less or more efficient system for international protection and reception of protection seekers and refugees. Overall, prior to the crises, Bulgaria's National Program for Integration of Refugees had functioned more or less well. The State Agency for the Refugees surprisingly failed to renew the program for the period when refugee arrivals increased. This provided grounds for criticism from local and international organisations. The Council of Europe, for instance, stresses:

> According to the Law on Asylum, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection should have access to integration programmes on housing, employment and health care. In practice, however, the integration opportunities for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Bulgaria are rather scarce (Council of Europe, 2018),

while the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee wrote:

> The National Programme for Integration of Refugees was in force until the end of 2013, but since then all beneficiaries of international protection have [remained] almost entirely without integration support. This resulted in extremely limited access or [possibility for] these individuals to enjoy even most basic social, labour and health rights (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2019).

In August 2016, the government adopted an Ordinance for the Integration Agreement in connection to the execution of the Asylum and Refugee Act, which delegated the leading role in the integration process to municipalities. However, the document has remained in disuse for 2016 and 2017, as [none of the] local municipalities had applied for the financial subsidy necessary to initiate the integration procedures (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2019). A new Decree was adopted in 2017, which essentially repeated the provisions of the former. Since its adoption, only 13 status recipients have benefitted from integration support, but all of them were relocated with integration funding provided under the EU relocation scheme, and not by the [common] national integration mechanism (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2019). In conclusion, the national policy for integration of foreign nationals who have been granted asylum status or placed under international protection was described by the

Bulgarian Helsinki Committee as a situation of zero integration (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2019).

Sadly, this critical evaluation failed to evoke positive action. On the contrary, it has to be noted that apart from missing real actions in the direction of improvement of the integration policies, with the changes effected in the Law for the Asylum and Refugees at the end of 2020, the situation of asylum seekers has even worsened. The introduced new clauses and the changes effected on others, essentially aiming at the acceleration of the procedure, especially under intensifying migration pressure, undermine fundamental guarantees in the domain of human right protection and seriously impedes the effectiveness of the judiciary system on refugee cases (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2020: 103).

As a definite positive change, there are several noteworthy initiatives concerned with unattended children seeking or receiving protection. These may include the establishment of secure accommodation zones with special conditions for underage or minor individuals or the transference of the representation of children from municipal administrations to the National Legal Aid Bureau. Despite the positive examples, however, it should be noted that there is no explicit reference made to what in particular is covered by the provision of special conditions at the territorial divisions, for example, the need for 24-hour supervision and care. An inspection made by the ombudsman in the middle of 2021 has ascertained extremely poor material and living conditions, unacceptable and unsuitable for children in the designated safe zones (at the quarters of Voenna Rampa and Ovcha Kupel). Concerns regarding the approach to this particularly vulnerable group are raised by data provided by the administration of the International Protection Proceedings Department at the centre for registration and reception in the district of Voenna Rampa, which indicate that in the period between January 1st and August 11th, 2021, 1005 children refugees were registered, while those who left without authorisation were 784. All of them were announced for search, and two were found. The average stay of a child registered at the centre is about 15 days. This is the reason why just 20 kids have been included in the educational process (Offnews, 16 August 2021). This description is particularly worrying in view of the increase of newly arrived asylum seekers by 57% in 2020, which indicates that despite the numerous full or partial lockdowns, enacted within the country and abroad as measures for prevention of the COVID-19 pandemic, the movement of people has not ceased. For all that, in 2020 there were no integrational measures or activities available to recognised refugees or foreigners who were

granted humanitarian status. Thus, the situation of zero integration of refugees in Bulgaria continues for the seventh consecutive year. Owing to the ceaseless effort of the UNHCR, the Bulgarian Red Cross and the Bulgarian Union for Refugees and Migrants, the State Agency for the Refugees has provided for the next year (2021) integrational support for 12 refugee families, to be provided by Sofia Municipality in the districts of Vitosha and Oborishte (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2020: 123).

Politicisation without political debate

Having reviewed the development of the policies, in this part of the text we will analyse the way the political process influences their making or non-making. Guentcheva (2012) highlights a political debate on the refugee topic around the adoption of the democratic Constitution of 1991, and the Parliamentary debates surrounding the adoption of the Law for the Refugees in 1998/9. The first more serious juncture to be cited is around the Kosovo crisis. A media survey from 5 April 1999 is summarised in the following projection:

> Yesterday in the National Assembly Headquarters, Prime Minister Kostov and the leaders of the parties represented in the Parliament discussed "humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in [close proximity] to the national borders of the country". Bulgaria is not in position to receive more refugees than the [number of] Kosovar Albanians already residing in the country. Kostov stated that the [position held by] the Security Council as [presented] to the Government was that [they did] "not wish to see this conflict spill over so that part of it spreads to Bulgaria". Now, there are 122 Kosovar Albanians registered as refugees in Bulgaria. Since the beginning of the Yugoslav conflict, there were 2,300 people staying in Bulgaria. In the opinion of the special services, the majority of those would request refugee status. The government advises that the country should reserve its [assistance] potential for refugees from Yugoslavia, namely ethnic Bulgarians originating from the Western Outlands and refugees from Macedonia. [Pursuant] to international conventions, the country cannot be charged with demands to receive greater refugee quotas since it ranks fourth by the number of refugees received. The demand to accept more refugees would mean "export of conflict through export of refugees". "Even if Bulgaria received 5,000 refugees, it would find itself in a more difficult situation than Norway, who was bound to receive 3,000 refugees, since

> Bulgaria is a much poorer country than Norway… Pensioners in Bulgaria receive [a pension equivalent to] 50 – 60 German marks and it is they that should be treated as refugees", as remarked by Kostov. (…) BSP leader Georgi Parvanov announced after the meeting that there was danger for the severe humanitarian crisis expanding over the Balkans to [develop] into a catastrophe and of its exerting immediate impact on Bulgaria". The leader of the FRM, Ahmed Dogan, noted: "I am afraid that the refugee wave moving towards Macedonia and Albania may entail the expansion of the military conflict and that this may inevitably affect Bulgaria as well. The situation is gruesome. Our country will be facing a serious threat unless the refugee flows from Kosovo are restrained." The leader of the Euroleft, Alexander Tomov, made a stand against "deconcentrating of refugee fluxes". The leaders of the parliamentary parties are optimistic that they would manage to develop and unanimous position of the country concerning the humanitarian catastrophe on the Balkans (Omda.bg).

Apparently, there was no actual debate on whether or not refugees should be received, with Bulgarian politicians demonstrating a praiseworthy consensus on the subject. Apart from the tendency for politicisation without conversation, there are distinctly evident primordialist readings – the contraposition of migrants of Bulgarian origin to those without, as well as welfare nationalism.

This tendency remained unchanged and became particularly visible in the years after Bulgaria found itself located on the Balkan Refugee Route. From the outset of the so-called refugee crisis after 2013 until the present moment, several governments changed, and the state underwent a period of political crises.

Even faced with a discontinuity on such a scale, the overall comprehension of migration has shown no significant differences (Otova, 2020). In the previous section of this text, we mentioned that Decree No 208 of August 2016 on the *Conditions and Procedures for Conclusion, Enforcement and Termination* provides for an agreement on the integration of foreign nationals who have been granted asylum or international protection. The document attempted to implement a decentralised response in the realm of refugee integration, making provisions for the active involvement of local municipalities through which funding would be channelled to carry out refugee integration by providing them with housing, schooling and work. According to some opinions from within the nationalist parties, rather than regulating the integration of foreign nationals who have already acquired a refugee status, the document focused mainly on illegal immigrants. There is a semi-secret decree

of the Council of Ministers concerning illegal immigrants. The issue at hand is that some municipalities should be enabled to accommodate illegal migrants (Frognews, 10 October 2016). The emergent 'front' against the Decree – which, besides nationalists included also representatives of other parties, including the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) – has demonstrated in reality how the making of politics kills policymaking.

The politicisation of migration is not an indigenous phenomenon, and what is interesting about the Bulgarian case is that it happens not in the context of a debate, but within dominant understanding, in a process of normalisation of populism. In order to illustrate how little the political discourse on the topic differs, we shall take as an example the presidential election campaign (September – December 2016). In this period more than ten protest rallies against the settlement of migrants were held in various places, among them refugee centre locations, which were joined by other municipalities. In some cases, the coordination of such protest rallies used straightforward support from representatives of political forces (those from the Patriotic Front; later called United Patriots) or from formal and informal nationalist movements (the National Resistance Group; or groups associated with the so-called 'refugee hunters', which had achieved certain notoriety); other cases involved some representatives of certain mainstream political parties including the BSP. The leader of one of the member parties in United Patriots commented: 'We were not fomenting [unrest]; we organised citizens' protest rallies for them' (Vesti, 28 November 2016). The scope for radicalisation of citizenry was quickly instrumentalised by political actors. Populist and extremist parties were most successful at exploiting the topic. The candidate of the United Patriots, Krasimir Karakachanov, employed a wide array of arguments against the migrants: not a single cent from the taxpayers' pockets should go to immigrants. Bulgaria is not a participant to this conflict (Dnes.bg, 1 November 2016); Bulgaria is in grave danger of being flooded by immigrants. A great part of them is involved with terrorist organisations. Our border must be guarded both through a fence and by a service force (24chasa, 29 November 2016). The BSP-backed candidate, Rumen Radev, general and former military pilot, commander of the Bulgarian Airforce, became the star in the campaign. He had risen to political stardom some weeks earlier and was also quick to seize the moment and to instrumentalise the migration topic. Here is a sample of his position on the topic: we should insist on the revocation of the Dublin Agreement because otherwise, Europe will send back

to our country the migrants registered here; it is necessary to announce a quota for the number of people who can be granted refugee status by our country (Offnews, 26 September 2016); we should know if there is a scenario for permanent settlement of refugees, or to use European funds to finance additionally refugee camps and where our demography can be determined by the import of foreigners; there must be guarantees that modifications of Bulgaria's ethnic composition, values, demography and religion are not forthcoming (Cross, 29 September 2016); as it turns out, the 160-million allotment from Europe is projected to contain serious allocations for the sustenance of migrants; rulers intend to replace our expatriate children with refugees (Bulpress.info, 30 October 2016). There is almost no discernible difference in the discourse of the far-right and the left-wing candidate. It is evident from these statements that both politicians advance ethno-primordialism, welfare nationalism, and securitarian logic. A special emphasis is placed on the 'replacement of the genetic bank' and the substitution of migrants for emigrated Bulgarian children. The candidate of the incumbent government party, Tsetska Tsacheva, having formerly occupied the position of Chairwoman of the National Assembly, in contrast to the vehement anti-European discourse employed by her opponents adhered to different rhetoric expected to sell better with Bulgaria's EU partners but still following the securitarian logic: Handling the refugee crisis necessitates having effective common foreign and security policy – something which is consistently upheld by Bulgarian institutions including the Parliament (Informo.bg, 15 September 2016); the institutions are in their places, acting in coordination with each other. We utilise European solidarity – this is something very important. The loud voice of Bulgaria and its government is heard among the European institutions, and this works in the interest of the citizens (24chasa, 22 October 2016).

Like migration, populism made its way into Bulgarian politics at a relatively late stage but has settled permanently in it, effectively becoming a dominant fixture. Naturally, the refugee topic is more of a litmus test for identifying a much deeper crisis. Bulgarian society is highly polarised, institutions are being perceived as 'vacuous' and a crisis of trust is in evidence. Several circles of factors can be described. The first is related to the formation of the party system, the exhaustion of the transition cleavages and the transformation of party politics into symbolic politics. The second relates to how the market economy was built in the country, with the merging of economy and state, the disintegration of the social systems and the distances

of the citizens from the institutions and the political overall. The third is related to the role of the media and the digital turn. In this environment, symbolic policies and the policies of fear have found an extremely favourable ground. One of the most significant problems, however, is that these conditions have created a closed circuit, wherein less and less real policies and solutions are being offered, which on its part generates more and more distrust.

Following several pandemic waves, and unprecedented domestic political unrest, Bulgaria is on the verge of another crisis. Judging by the statistics from the beginning of 2021, the migration pressure in the country is increasing. There is no surprise – there is usually an increase in the migration fluxes during the summer months, and the dynamic is further complicated in view of the current crisis in Afghanistan. However, the potential crisis is likely to be triggered not so much by the number of those who have entered the territory country, but again, by the way, they will be approached. These approaches include both the missing policies and the narratives with regard to migrants. There is the likelihood that asylum seekers would find themselves one more time entrapped in an institutional vacuum. If in the years of peaking numbers of asylum seekers, after the outset of the civil war in Syria, there was an observable institutional collapse, the increased migration flow in conjunction with a pandemic situation and the events, associated with three parliamentary elections within one calendar year and forthcoming presidential elections, would generate a new situation of institutional vacuum in which there would be no one and no way to launch effective policies. What has been happening and will likely continue to happen at least until a government is nominated, is that, instead of undertaking changes in the existing / current ineffective policies, asylum seekers would be greeted by poor inherited practices. The turbulent domestic political situation has moved the migration problematics away from the government focus and then the issues are being recalled through sporadic attempts to draw political dividends by various political formations. The topic of migration was again mastered and instrumentalised by the GERB party, which had lost its foremost political positions.

During the years of its rule, this party has approached discursively certain extreme narratives mainly through the migration subject matter. Therefore, it was not a particular surprise when in the middle of 2021 GERB deputies started touring the refugee centres in the country outlining an almost apocalyptical picture according to which pressure on migrants had increased 12 times over the course of

one month. Moreover, a post on the GERB official Facebook page states that the provisional cabinet has renewed the so-called Balkan Route for refugees, which was discontinued by the Boyko Borissov government. The politicisation of migration was a signature manner of Mr Borissov's rule, during which migration policies were reduced to border control and the construction of a fence along the Bulgarian – Turkish border. It is interesting to note that the failure of the Borissov governments in migration and pandemic management was precisely what marked the onset of another crisis. By data from the Interior Ministry in August 2021, the refugee accommodation centres at the Ministry of Interior Affairs are working at almost full capacity – over 93 per cent. At the same time, at the camp facilities maintained by the State Agency for the Refugees, occupied places amount to 22 per cent, while 4,000 remain vacant. This is the case because, by law, detained illegal refugees are initially consigned to the centres supervised by the Interior Ministry and after that are resettled at SAR's facilities. As the migration pressure on the country has intensified during the last several weeks, and due to the anti-epidemic measures, the detainees should remain for longer at the Interior Ministry centres and these facilities are already at the limit of their capacity, whereas those run by SAR still remain relatively empty. The rapid filling of the capacity of the centres has generated a multitude of problems with securing basic living conditions, but apart from anything else, it has raised concerns with respect to the increasingly complicating epidemiological situation in the country and the entry into a fourth pandemic wave. It should be noted that the poor management of the COVID-19 crisis has a reflection on the already vulnerable situation of asylum seekers and those who have been granted asylum in the country.

Meanwhile, in describing apocalyptic scenarios, once again participate the parties of the nationalist spectrum, while President Rumen Radev, the main focus of opposition to former ruling party GERB, convened for the first time in more than a year (although by Constitution he is obliged to do this on a regular basis) consultative council on the national security precisely on the migrant topic. The chorus of extreme interpretations also includes representatives of the provisional government, appointed by him. In view of political instability and the forthcoming presidential electoral campaign in the autumn of 2021, there is a high likelihood for migration to be among the main topics employed for the mobilisation of the electoral resource.

Conclusion

The process of making refugee policies is oftentimes seriously politicised and in recent years this has been happening in the context of dominant populism. The process of politicisation of the topic is not taking place within a broad public debate with a multitude of viewpoints in evidence, but on the contrary – in the process of reproducing negative discourse. More often than not its originators are to be found not just among the extremist political parties, but also among the mainstream political actors, media and various 'power actors', as the only balancer in this discourse ultimately turns out to be international and non-governmental organisations. Although the refugee phenomenon was the earliest to be institutionalised after 1989, the State of Bulgaria proved unprepared for the precipitous rise in the flow of asylum seekers. Harmonisation of legislation with European legislative acts has failed to affect a radical improvement in the incumbent asylum system in the absence of political will and most frequently remains just on paper or is being exhausted with the tendency to acquire funding. The discontinuity of the political process does not affect a radical change in the logic of public policies, while the political process and the instrumentalisation of the topic have even rendered policy-making impossible. Thus, refugees in Bulgaria have been entrapped between politics and policies, Bulgarian citizens are kept in permanent anticipation of a critical situation, and the state is rendered ill-equipped to handle future migration situations, requiring a stable and effective system.

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BEYOND THE LOCAL INTEGRATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS / REFUGEES: A CASE STUDY OF HARMANLI, BULGARIA

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Abstract: Since 2013, asylum seekers / refugees are among the most discussed and vulnerable immigrant groups in the different member states of the European Union. Their integration is a multifaceted legal, economic, social, and cultural challenge both for themselves and for the host society. Refugee integration, determined as 'a multi-dimensional two-way process' and / or 'processes of mutual adaptation with the host society' is a cross-cutting issue of different policy approaches applied on national, regional, and local levels in the receiving countries.

Since 2014, a combined centralised – decentralised mechanism for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees has been formulated in Bulgarian policy. The paper draws attention to the integration (im)possibilities identified within an ethnological study (2017 – 2020) conducted in the town of Harmanli where the largest Bulgarian reception centre for asylum seekers is located. The analysis relies on the empirical materials collected among asylum seekers and refugees, volunteers and representatives of the NGO sector, local communities, and institutions. Special focus is placed on the initial conditions for the refugees' integration at the local level (access to legal assistance; housing; employment; education and training; cultural orientation); their specific needs based on heterogeneous ethnocultural characteristics (language, religion, customs, food, etc.); and the social attitudes towards their presence and integration.

Keywords: refugee integration, refugee accommodation, social attitudes

Introduction

The 'refugee issue' is well known in Bulgarian society mainly as a debate on two-way movements to and from Bulgaria. Despite the historical experience of state institutions and public attitudes toward the reception of ethnic Bulgarian refugees and migrants during the first four decades of the 20th century and political migrants, students, and workers during the socialist period, at the end of the century, Bulgaria

* This article is the result of my participation in the project 'Cultural Adaptation and Integration of Immigrants in Bulgaria' (ДН 20/8 – 11.12.2017), financed by the Bulgarian Scientific Fund.

was established as a refugee sending country rather than a receiving one because of communist dissidents and especially because of the exodus of the Turkish population to Turkey in May − August 1989. In the early 1990s and in terms of accession to the European Union during the next decade, a new stage in the reception of refugees began in line with international norms and agreements. Since the ratification of the so-called 'Geneva Convention' and the New York Protocol in 1993 by the Bulgarian Parliament up to and including 2012, a total of 21,267 foreigners applied for asylum in Bulgaria. Of these, 1,539 are granted refugee status and 4,773 – humanitarian status, or a total of 6,312. In the context of increased refugee inflow from the Middle East to economically developed European countries, between 2013 and 2016, 58,034 people have sought asylum in Bulgaria. A total of 16,410 people were granted refugee / humanitarian status; refugee status was granted to 10,817 people and humanitarian status to 5,593 (SAR). I held a survey integration and adaptation of refugees in the case study of the small town of Harmanli, where the largest accommodation centre for asylum seekers was built. The normative conditions, government programs and decisions, the attitudes of the Bulgarian host society, and expectations of the asylum seekers / refugees themselves at the local level were examined in the period 2017 – 2020.

Speaking of refugee integration, we should bear in mind that there is no fixed definition, but there is a concept that is generally related to their adaptation as a foreign vulnerable community with a specific legal status. Refugee, integration is seen as a 'multi-dimensional two-way process' (Castles, Korac, Vasta and Vertovec, 2002); by means of local integration (Crisp, 2004); or mutual adaptation with the host society, of which the key indicators are employment, housing, education and health (Ager and Strang, 2004). Based on these, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) elaborated the following definition in 2005:

> local integration in the refugee context is a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process, which requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and to meet the needs of a diverse population' (UNHCR, 2005);

in 2007, the definition was developed in a European context:

> The integration of refugees as a durable solution is an important part of the commitments of States under the 1951 Convention. UNHCR encourages the EU Member States to include refugees in general integration plans and policies, while also providing targeted actions for refugee-specific needs. Integration can also be enhanced through reception policies for asylum-seekers which promote social inclusion, rather than isolation and separation from host communities. There are also compelling reasons to align the rights of persons granted subsidiary protection with the rights of refugees in several areas, including access to the labour market, integration support, and family reunification. Drawing on these considerations, UNHCR encourages the EU to develop further its policies and practices on integration, to the benefit of persons in need of international protection and their host communities in the Member States alike (UNHCR, 2007).

In 2013, the UNHCR designed an evaluation tool on refugee integration that includes over 200 quantitative and qualitative indicators, provisionally grouped into four strands or areas of integration: general considerations (impact of reception conditions on integration, inclusion of refugees in common policies, etc.); legal integration (right of residence, right to family reunification, etc.); socio-economic integration (housing, employment, access to health services, etc.); socio-cultural integration (language learning, social inclusion, etc.) (UNHCR, 2013). In Bulgaria, the UNHCR conducts yearly surveys on these indicators, but a more detailed and in-depth analysis has not been conducted yet.

Refugee integration under legislative frameworks and government programmes

The state-regulated reception of foreigners seeking asylum in Bulgaria is managed by the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers (SAR). Currently, four accommodation centers with an open regime (3 in Sofia, 1 – in the village of Banya, Nova Zagora region, and 1 – in the town of Harmanli) function as a part of the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers. Their total capacity is approx. 5,130 places. As mentioned above, in the period 2013 – 2016 the total number of submitted asylum applications was 58,034. These figures show the limited reception possibilities for asylum seekers, which also has an impact on their initial adaptation and integration after their accommodation in the camps, in the period until they obtain status. From 2013 to 2016 the state institutions were faced

with the challenge of organising the entire asylum procedure and formulating humane strategies for the integration of the newcomers remaining in the country. The conditions in the refugee centres between 2013 – 2017 can be defined as basic or minimal to cover the living needs of the residents, even the position of Bulgarians' standard of living. However, a more worrying fact is the attitude of state officials towards foreigners, criticised in reports of international organisations, among which is the UNHCR's call in 2014 not to return refugees to Bulgaria (under the Dublin Regulation) because of their inhumane treatment (UNHCR, 2014).

According to a 2015 amendment to the Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR) from 2002, the SAR has the responsibility to

> organise the reception and temporary accommodation of aliens who have applied for international protection; provide them in cooperation with the Bulgarian Red Cross and other non-governmental organisations with assistance to adapt to the Bulgarian environment and organise Bulgarian language courses jointly with the Ministry of Education and Science (LAR, Art. 53, Para. 1).

In practice, the concentration of the most important decisions related to the reception, accommodation, and initial adaptation of foreigners seeking asylum is in the hands of the SAR Chairman, which defines and emphasises a centralised approach in this first stage of refugee reception in Bulgaria and their initial adaptation here. Asylum seekers have the right to reside in the accommodation camps until they are granted refugee or humanitarian status; after that, they have to leave them and the state institutions have no responsibility for their housing, education, and feeding.

According to the LAR, aliens with a refugee status have the rights and obligations of Bulgarian citizens, except the right to participate in elections for state and local bodies, in national and local referendums, as well as to participate in the establishment of political parties, and membership in such; to hold positions for which Bulgarian citizenship is required by law; to be a military serviceman; other restrictions expressly provided by law. An alien with granted humanitarian status has the rights and obligations of an alien with permitted permanent residence in the Republic of Bulgaria (LAR, Art. 32). A foreigner with granted international protection may acquire Bulgarian citizenship under the conditions and by the order of the Law on Bulgarian Citizenship (LAR, Art. 38). However, only 426 refugees acquired Bulgarian citizenship for the period 2001 – 2017 (as cited in Tashev, 2018:

164 – 165) which is also an indicator of their intention to permanently settle and therefore integrate.

After being granted refugee status, the normative option for refugee integration is the so-called 'integration agreement', which is expected to be concluded between the local municipal authorities and the adult refugees with status. This instrument was first set out in the National Strategy for the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection in of Bulgaria (2014 – 2020), adopted by a Decision of the Council of Ministers in 2014, and to date, it has also been introduced in asylum and refugee legislation. One year later, the government adopted the next National Strategy on Migration, Asylum, and Integration (2015 – 2020). It reiterates the general guidelines and principles of the national asylum and refugee policy of the previous strategy. The results that are expected to be achieved are not specified, nor are measures formulated for its implementation in the short and long term. The role of the integration agreement with the municipalities as the main tool for integration is reaffirmed.

> Municipalities declare their readiness to accept a certain number of persons with protection, taking into account the state of the labour market, available qualifications, demographic trends, prospects for municipal development, and the existence of communities of foreigners, in order to avoid segregation and concentration, which pose risks to the socio-economic stability and security (National Strategy on Migration, Asylum, and Integration (2015 – 2020): 47).

The agreements are expected to be concluded by the demographic trends in the respective municipalities, but it is not considered under what financial conditions these agreements are expected to be implemented. The Strategy (2015 – 2020), as well as the previous management programs, emphasises that the Bulgarian state provides to foreigners seeking protection on its territory a fair procedure for granting refugee status, the right to social and health insurance, free access to education, conditions for retraining and employment to better integrate them into society. As a result of the implementation of this strategic document, the acceptance of an Ordinance on the terms and conditions for concluding, implementing, and terminating an agreement on the integration of foreigners with asylum or international protection is adopted by the Decree of the Council of Ministers No 208 / dated 12 August 2016 (State Gazette, 2016, issue 65). It was repealed by a Decree of the Council of Ministers

No. 77/3 April 2017 within the caretaker government (State Gazette, 2017, issue 28), but in the same year, the next regular government adopted a new Ordinance on the terms and conditions for a conclusion, implementation, and termination of the agreement for the integration of foreigners with asylum or international protection by Decree of the Council of Ministers No. 144 / 19 July 2017 (State Gazette, 2017, issue 60). Through this ordinance, normative conditions have already been created for decentralisation of the integration process by stipulating the conclusion of bilateral agreements between the representatives of the local government (represented by the mayors of the municipalities) on the one hand and the refugees on the other. However, in practice, no agreement has been concluded under this Ordinance until the beginning of 2018, and several agreements concluded later have failed, which is an indicator that the main integration instrument, consistently approved in the Strategies of 2014 and 2015, and regulated after that, is currently rather inoperative.

The refugee integration at the local level. The case of Harmanli

The case of Harmanli is an illustrative example of the fact that the adaptation and integration of refugees should start while they are accommodated in the camp, and the measures that are implemented should not only be directed within the camp but between the camp and the city, i.e. between the foreigners and the local population. The Harmanli refugee camp, located in Southern Bulgaria, is the largest camp with an open regime in the country. It has been reconstructed from a former military barrack into residential buildings at the end of 2013 and 2014. Its capacity of up to approximately 3000 – 3200 people represents almost half of the reception capacity on a national level. It includes several buildings where the Afghans are accommodated separately from the Kurds and the Arabs. Families are separated from single men.

Refugee attitudes

The majority of the foreigners themselves, coming mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq after 2013, who have sought and received international protection in Bulgaria also do not see opportunities for their integration here. They prefer to settle in West or North European destinations. A large part of the respondents shared, that when they were leaving their home country for Europe, they intended for a different destination for settlement than Bulgaria – i.e., Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, or England. Those who 'fall' in Bulgaria, in their majority are determined to settle

in another country. They go through proceedings for international protection here, most often not waiting for the decisions of the SAR, as evidenced by the statistics of the Ministry of the Interior and SAR for detainees at exit points and the high number of registered incoming inquiries from various European countries under the controversial Dublin Regulation. The reasons for leaving Bulgaria should not be sought only in the refugees' preliminary intention to settle in a different country, but also in their attitudes towards integration. Those who decide to stay in Bulgaria, most often settle in Sofia, where they find housing and work mainly through social ties with other refugees and compatriots.

A large part of the accommodated in the Harmanli camp, regardless of their family status and the country they come from, try to preserve their everyday cultural habits such as dress style, food preferences, and behavior. The rooms where they are accommodated, become a place for sleeping, cooking, eating, having guests, and so on. Also, the same rooms are used as a place where Muslims hold their prayers. The camp residents are generally provided with daily food, but it is not entirely relevant to their dietary tastes and health concerns. Many of the foreigners prefer to prepare food according to their habits in the rooms in which they are accommodated, taking only water and bread from the state-provided supplies and buying produce from local shops. According to the observations made, annually several people, who have been granted refugee / humanitarian status or are in the process of being granted it, rent accommodation in the town of Harmanli, and two lived permanently hiere. However, the majority are accommodated in the camp and face the same problems that foreigners have in Sofia – low wages, address registration, and lack of state assistance after being granted status.

According to interviews with asylum seekers in Harmanli, the most important conditions for their integration in Bulgaria are housing, employment, and access to education.

> We are in a place where there is no possibility of finding work and it is difficult for our families to survive... The other problem is that as refugees, it is difficult for us to find an apartment to rent....we face discrimination just because we are refugees (male asylum seeker, Harmanli, 2018).

They face different problems with lack of employment or low payment, and with address registrations required for issuing an identity document. As of 2019, about 10 people, housed in the camp, work in the local textile, food, and construction sectors.

Respondents consider that the state has to provide financial assistance after they are granted refugee or humanitarian status. In the town of Harmanli as of mid-2018, only 3 cases of applications for one-time assistance for the issuance of an ID card on request to the Directorate of Social Assistance at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy are known. The reasons for the low interest in using the opportunities for social assistance are most likely due to the lack of information and the lack of knowledge and skills for interaction and communication with the involved institutions.

In 2019, 25 children visit Bulgarian schools on the territory of the municipality of Harmanli. Most pupils attended schools in their native countries, and for their parents, it is very important their children's education to be continued. Two educational initiatives for asylum seekers' children were created in the buildings of the accommodation centre – the so-called 'Afghan School' and 'English School'. Until 2019, mathematics and the Bulgarian language are taught by Afghan and Bulgarian teachers. In 2019, SAR hired a Bulgarian language teacher who focuses on teaching Bulgarian language and literature. Today, the school is called the 'Bulgarian School'. In the so-called 'English school', set up by British immigrants in Bulgaria, refugee children learn English and play games. In the case when asylum seeker' application is canceled, they are detained in a centre with a closed regime of the Ministry of Internal affairs, and the education of the children is stopped.

A number of integration education and social activities are performed among refugees by the Bulgarian Red Cross, IOM, Caritas, and other NGOs. These activities are mainly social, helping foreigners to adapt to the camp environment rather than outside life.

Attitudes of the local population of Harmanli

In the public space at the national level, refugees are defined in various ways, ranging from 'refugees', 'economic migrants' to 'Muslim invasion', 'Gypsies', 'Taliban', etc. These terms often are expressions of negative attitudes towards the 'newcomer Other'. Generally, three types of attitudes towards refugees are observed in Bulgarian society – apathy, hostility, and empathy (Erolova, 2017: 338 – 340). The imposition of an anti-refugee narrative based on ethnic, religious, and cultural attributes in the public statements of a number of high-ranking officials, the suggestions of incorrect media representations, the position of St. Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (See Special Address of St. Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church-BP, 26 November 2016) ultimately lead to persistent negative perceptions

and attitudes of Bulgarian society towards refugees. The population of Harmanli shares the main trends in attitudes towards refugees.

The number of the residents of this small South Bulgarian town is between 10 – 12,000 people as almost 'everyone knows everyone'. I was impressed that for locals it is more normal to speak out against refugees than in their support. On the one hand, a majority of the population has negative attitudes, formed because of the fear of the high number of foreigners, and their cultural and physical-anthropological 'otherness'. These attitudes are encouraged by nationalist parties in Bulgaria who are represented in parliament during this period and participated in government. In Harmanli, the citizens' protests against refugees started in 2014 and several conditions were set for their presence in the town (BNT, 22 March 2014). In September and October 2016, like in the capital Sofia, many civil protests were also held here with demands for the closure of the camp.

After 2017, the camp in Harmanli is often half-empty and the population returns to its usual pre-2013 daily rhythm, and for some townsmen, this is the preferred situation of a homogeneous ethnocultural space. Alongside the negative public attitudes in the town, there is also a positive attitude of empathy towards foreigners among ordinary people, and businesses (in the food and beverage sector, the hotel industry, and taxi services). For them, the presence of refugees in Harmanli is an opportunity that could also lead to the improved economic development of the area. Several philanthropic and volunteer initiatives have been organised by individuals, but they do not wish to publicise these either locally or nationally, as they fear that this would embed their relationships with the 'negative' fellow residents. The negative public attitudes are dominant and they are so strong that even a few voices of empathy are 'silenced'.

The relation of local authorities to refugees

Despite frequent contact between Municipality representatives and foreigners residing in the camp, the attitude of local officials is rather negative. Until nowadays, no integration agreement has been concluded between the Municipality of Harmanli and *refugee /* humanitarian *status holders.* The reason for the lack of such integration agreements is based both on the Municipal employees' negative attitudes and the prevailing negative attitudes of the local population. According to an employee at the Municipality of Harmanli:

> So, we are used to living with our Gypsies enough, and we are not the racists they think we are. I'm telling you the town felt very threatened at that moment when so many of them [asylum seekers] poured out (female, Municipality of Harmanli, 2017).

In Harmanli, however, in November, this year, public tensions spilled over into the camp when a group of Afghans was quarantined on suspicion of having leishmaniasis, which was later not proven. The lack of accessible information among the quarantined led to protests and clashes with law enforcement. Residents of the town and representatives of the local Municipality point out that the report of infection was false and was made as part of the provocations in the course of the election campaign of a municipal councilor from one of the nationalist parties VMRO.

According to the field materials, although some municipal officials have a positive attitude towards the refugees, believing that they have an interesting culture and delicious food, they do not contribute in any way to the inclusion of the camp residents in the city's general cultural events, e.g., *Na Harmana*, an annual festival in which local food is promoted.

At the time of the study, there were more than 100 full-time and part-time employees working in the SAR accommodation center, who were both from the town and the surrounding villages. My observation of their attitude towards the foreigners from the camp, in their presence or absence, is that the staff realise that it is better if the camp is not empty as they could lose their jobs. At the same time, the demonstration of cultural superiority on the part of the administration in the SAR reception center towards the accommodated foreigners can be noted. In some cases, they even keep their contact with the camp residents to a minimum because of the language barrier and thus do not get to know even a small part of their cultural, social, and health needs.

Conclusions

Since the beginning of the 1990s, in the context of the developed and constantly updated legal conditions, the admission of foreigners seeking asylum in Bulgaria as a 'safe country', as a member state of the European Union competent to receive and examine applications for international protection, has started. The increase in refugee arrivals from 2013 to 2016 is leading to a rethinking of national asylum and

refugee policy. The controversial situation of 'open European, but closed national, doors' with regard to the reception and integration of asylum seekers is largely due to the inconsistent Bulgarian policy, conceived, on the one hand, in the spirit of the Geneva Convention and European democratic values but influenced, on the other hand, by modern nationalist populism. This situation results in a formal implementation of the existing government programs for refugee integration and in the failure to assign the responsibility of it to a specific state institution. While formally it is fulfilling its international commitments, in reality, the nationalist parties involved in the ruling governments are taking a different approach, imposing hate speech and provoking civil protests. Informing the Bulgarian population about the refugee issue mainly through the media does not provide access to up-to-date information, which leads to real ignorance regarding legislation, international engagement of the country, financial and social aspects in the reception of refugees, the actual number of refugees with granted status, etc. The Bulgarians' lack of awareness of the standard of living, culture, economy, etc. of pre-war Syria and Iraq, the placing of Arabs and Persians under a common denominator, leads to the formation of a common image of the refugee who is more troublesome than we are, who we should be afraid of if meet them in the Harmanli town's park, and who we ultimately do not want. So public attitudes become convenient for political manipulation and grow into civil anti-refugee protests. Allowing hate speech in the public party narrative influences the formation of a negative perception of the refugee, which in turn leads to lasting negative public attitudes. The case of Harmanli shows that noisy negative reactions against refugees are 'natural', they also reflect the attitudes of the majority of Bulgarian society, which we know about from the media. In this context, the empathy and help towards the foreign 'guests' shown by ordinary people, non-governmental organisations, and some religious institutions go unnoticed and their public discussion is muted and self-censored.

In this context, the refugee home in Bulgaria, whether in or outside the camps, looks like a kind of home in-between their home country and the marginalised space of the host country. Looking at the parameters of the integration of refugees who arrived after 2013 and remained in Bulgaria, it can be said that they do not integrate into Bulgarian society, but integrate into their social networks in Bulgaria. The reasons for this are their inadequate adaptation in the camps to the SAR accommodation centers and the dysfunctional combined centralised-decentralised integration model that blurs the responsibility between SAR and municipalities.

The issues of the path to refugee integration should more often be studied from different research perspectives that would bring new nuances to the public debate on refugees and would contribute to rethinking the state's vision of refugee integration.

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School experiences of children of Roma migrant returnees and refugees from the Middle East[*]

Magdalena Slavkova

Abstract: Based upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted amongst families of Bulgarian Roma returnees and refugees from the Middle East in Bulgaria, this paper discusses the problems of adaptation, which children face in elementary and secondary schools. Using a dialogical approach as the main strategy of fieldwork, I interviewed Roma returnee parents and children from different settlements, on the one hand, directors, homeroom teachers, and school staff, on the other, as well as experts in education. I conducted research amongst refugee families from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Iran in the southern town of Harmanli, where a refugee camp was set up in 2013. I am specifically interested in the children's enrollment for the school years 2017 – 2018 and 2018 – 2019 when, for the first time, refugee pupils are enrolled in larger numbers in public schools, as a result of the introduction of Ordinance No. 3 of 2017. On the basis of the fieldwork material and reviewed documents, I state that the approaches to returnee and refugee students can be called 'mainstream' and 'specific' approaches. Under the mainstream approach, the pupils are categorised as 'children of Bulgarian citizens living abroad' and none of them are specifically labeled as 'Roma'. The attitude towards them is similar to that of children of other Bulgarian return migrants. A special (targeting) approach is adopted for refugee children, who are included in the same group of 'vulnerable' students along with Roma pupils, assuming that both do not have a good command of the Bulgarian language and are at risk for unsuccessful adaptation at school.
Keywords: Roma returnees, refugees, children, education, public schools

Introduction

The main aim of this article is to present the specific school experiences of the children of return migrants of Roma origin and of the children of refugees. The focus is on pupils who have had little or no experience of going to school in Bulgaria. I have taken the case of ethnic Bulgarians and Roma as examples in order to present the common and specific schooling problems of Roma migrant children. Based on my

[*] The ethnographic data used in the paper is collected within the project 'Cultural Adaptation and Integration of Immigrants in Bulgaria' (ДН 20/8 – 11.12.2017), financed by the Bulgarian Science Fund.

review of literature and relevant normative documents as well as my own fieldwork, I have identified two approaches to the topic – 'mainstream' and 'specific'. The former studies Bulgarian and Roma migrant children as a uniform category, regardless of their ethnic origin. Thus, it is assumed that the Roma children, like other children of migrants from Bulgaria, have learning difficulties in Bulgarian schools because they have previously studied in foreign schools in one or more foreign countries. The 'specific' approach perceives the Roma children as ethnically, culturally and socially different. Similar to the Roma, refugee children began arriving in our country in great numbers after 2013, accompanying their adult relatives from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. They are treated with special interest by the Bulgarian institutions and are placed in the same category as the Roma because their mother tongue is not Bulgarian, they have not been socialised in a Bulgarian environment and are consequently at risk of failed adaptation in school. It is assumed that vulnerable pupils have greater learning difficulties for various reasons, including the fact that they were born abroad, and Bulgaria is not their native country (in the case of refugees) or that their sojourn abroad has aggravated their learning difficulties (in the case of return migrant children). In both cases, the education institutions fail to take into account that the Roma are a heterogeneous ethnic group and that not all of them have a Roma identity and speak the Roma language. In the former case, however, this proves to be a positive thing because the children are treated equitably with regard to the migrant children while in the latter case they are assumed to be 'lagging' in their learning because they are defined as 'Roma'.

The fieldwork research approach

The main strategy guiding my fieldwork among Roma and refugee families was the use of the dialogical approach. This means that, when identifying the problems in the field and discussing them, I included various stakeholders – parents and children on the one hand, directors, homeroom teachers and school staff on the other, and also education experts. I have been conducting fieldwork among return migrant Bulgarians and Roma since 2010. The focus of my attention in 2017 and 2018 was migrant children; in those years I did open ethnographic interviews with families returning from Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Germany, and the UK. They are living in Sofia and some smaller cities, like Sandanski, Nova Zagora and Karnobat, with populations of less than 30,000 and located in Southwestern, Central and Southeastern Bulgaria. I also

visited some of the surrounding villages. I conducted interviews with families belonging to the *Dasikane Roma* (Bulgarian Gypsies), *Xoraxane Roma* (Turkish Gypsies), and *Erlii* (locals); with representatives of communities that have a Turkish, not Roma, identity, and who present themselves as *Millet* people; and the Romanian-speaking *Rudari*, who also do not identify as 'Roma' but have a Rudari / Romanian identity. I conducted interviews with refugee families and families of returning Bulgarians and Roma in Haskovo and Harmanli, including the nearby villages, with schoolteachers and school principals where Bulgarian, Roma, and refugee children study together.[1] There are some unaccompanied children among the refugees coming to Bulgaria, but these are not a subject of analysis in this paper (Rizova, 2012: 293 − 306).

Return to Bulgaria

The financial crisis of 2008 hit many European countries. The families of Bulgarian citizens of various ethnic origins, who had been living and working abroad until then, returned temporarily or permanently to Bulgaria at that time, together with their children. Similar to the reasons for going abroad, the reasons for returning, in most cases, were based on economic considerations (Ivanova, 2012: 237 − 255; Mintchev and Boshnakov, 2017; Nonchev et al., 2020; Ruspini, Richter and Nollert, 2016: 7 − 20; Slavkova, 2013b: 111 − 163).

The model of migrating together with children, which we observe among the Bulgarian Roma, is similar to that followed by other Bulgarian citizens. Like the Bulgarians, the Roma are active participants in the emigration flow and in the return flow. They create their own migration networks based on ties between relatives: they migrate to places where their families have settled (Cherkezova, 2018: 91 − 127; Marušiakova and Popov, 2008; Slavkova, 2008; Tomova, 2013: 150 − 180). The return to Bulgaria follows a specific behaviour pattern. The whole family returns to their hometown or village, but after a while, the parents travel again to the same, or some other, destination. The schoolchildren remain with their grandmothers and grandfathers until the parents find jobs and are settled. The elderly people see to it

[1] I wish to thank all the families, school principals, teachers and educators I worked with during my fieldwork at the schools in Sandanski, the village of Damyanitsa (near Sandanski), Nova Zagora, Karnobat, the village of Krumovo Gradishte (near Karnobat), and Sofia. My thanks go also to the school principals and teachers, parents, and children, who gave me their cooperation in all the schools in Harmanli. Special thanks to the school principals in the villages Balgarin, Biser, and Ivanovo (near Harmanli).

that the children go to school regularly, study for school and do their homework, while the parents' control is exercised through daily conversations over the phone or via the Internet. While the parents are in Bulgaria, they attend parent-teacher meetings and talk to the teachers about the children's performance; but the school staff sees them only when they are in Bulgaria. The elderly people, not very educated themselves, cannot really help their grandchildren, who have studied abroad and now have problems with the Bulgarian language, history, or geography.

The other migration model is for parents not to settle permanently abroad but to maintain regular labour mobility between Bulgaria and one or more destinations in Europe – doing seasonal work in Greece or construction work in Germany. Although the smallest share of Roma follows this pattern, there are such cases. Thus, parental supervision of the children's schooling is not constant and there are periods of the school year when the children have to interrupt their studies while moving back and forth between a foreign country and their native place.

Forced migration

The flow of thousands of refugees leaving regions of conflict in the Middle East passes through Bulgaria. The civil war that began in Syria in 2011 was one of the main critical moments resulting in a large influx of refugees to various European destinations, including Bulgaria. For children coming from the Middle East in Bulgaria, school is experienced as the most important place of social contact with members of local community, playing a role of 'bridge' in establishing relationships supportive of their integration (Ager and Strang, 2008: 7). Civil organisations were often the first to provide educational support for those kids (Crul, 2017). In some publications, refugee children are analysed not merely as vulnerable and marginalised groups of the displaced population, but as one that possesses a certain agency for progress (Pace and Sen, 2018).

The situation of refugees from the Middle East in Bulgaria has already been well researched (Erolova, 2017: 232 − 345; Erolova and Nakova, 2019: 425 − 454; Nakova, 2019: 525 − 544), but overall, little attention has been paid to refugees who are minors (Mancheva and Nonchev, 2012: 307 − 330; Mancheva et al., 2015; Nakova, 2021: 87 − 97; Rizova, 2012: 293 − 306) and to their access to education (Mancheva and Nonchev, 2012: 307 − 330). Their educational problems have also been presented in various applied-scientific publications (Raynova, 2019: 498 − 507; Shobash and

Sheytani, 2021: 29 − 34; Slavkova, 2020: 13 − 16; Slavkova, 2021: 6 − 9). According to data from the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, the number of people applying for protection increased considerably between 2013 and 2017, surpassing the total number of those who applied before or after that period. In 2013 the number of refugee families was 7,144 and in 2015 the figure attained an impressive 20,391. During the period 1993 – 2021, the greatest number of applicants was from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq (Darzhavna agentsiya za bezhantsite, 1993 – 2021).

Most of the refugee children arrive together with family members. While in most cases the people in question are fleeing military conflicts, some are motivated by serious economic problems they have in their countries of origin. The profile of these people shows them to be mostly male, but this is gradually changing and families with children are joining the stream, which necessitates that the integration policy of the State Agency for Refugees be aimed at the younger ones along with the adults (Mancheva and Nonchev, 2012: 307 − 330). People are finding accommodation not only in Sofia but also in other places, where special homes, of a closed type, for temporary accommodation of foreigners have been opened. These immigration detention centres (in Busmantsi and Lyubimets) are attached to the Migration Directorate of the Ministry of Interior. There are also registration and reception centres of an open type attached to the State Agency for Refugees (Sofia, Harmanli, the villages of Banya and Pastrogor). In some cases, the families are travelling together due to financial or other reasons. For instance, a mother might travel together with all or some of her children. In other cases, she or the father might be travelling alone, hoping to be granted refugee status and then launch the procedure for uniting families. Some personal reasons for fleeing pointed out in the interviews, are an ailing child or the loss of a father. Most of the arrivals do not intend to settle permanently in Bulgaria and have made multiple attempts, sometimes successfully, to move on to other European countries, like Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, etc., relying on help from relatives who have already settled there.

Educational policies towards child migrants and refugees

Mainstream approach

Under the mainstream approach, Roma pupils are put in the same category as the other migrant children. The normative documents refer to ‘children of Bulgarian citizens abroad’ and do not divide the children by ethnic, religious or any other

trait. It is not quite clear, however, what number of children are leaving their native schools and going abroad together with their parents. Acceding to data from the National Statistical Institute, the majority of those who have resided abroad (145,238) have lived there without children (101,172), and fewer people were there with two of their children (21,419).[2] This is true for the Roma as well, as more than half of the return migrants (64%) had travelled abroad without their children (NSI, 2011). The majority of Roma who has resided abroad (2,962) have lived there without kids (1,908), those with two of their children are 472, and those with three or more children are 318 in number.[3] In the Strategy for Reducing the Share of Dropouts from the Education System, it is pointed out that a growing number of pupils are leaving school because of moving to a foreign country. In 2008 – 2009, their number was 3,769, and in 2011 – 2012, 5,367 (Strategiya za namalyavane dela na prezhdevremenno napusnalite obrazovatelnata sistema, 2013 – 2020: 20 − 21).

The implementation of educational policy for Bulgarian citizens is led by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), which conducts its activities within the country and abroad, and the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, which has the competence to implement educational policy for Bulgarian communities beyond the borders. Two educational laws have been published (Zakon za narodnata prosveta, 1991; Zakon za preduchilishnoto i uchilishtnoto obrazovanie, 2015) and several normative documents have been adopted, concerning access to education in foreign countries in the framework of the so-called ‘Bulgarian Sunday school’ and the possibility of reintegration within elementary and secondary education in our country. A key step was the creation in 2009 of the national program ‘Native Language and Culture Abroad’ (Roden ezik i kultura zad granitsa, 2009). By introducing it, Bulgaria demonstrated its commitment to preserving the Bulgarian culture, language and identity of pupils whose origin is from Bulgaria. The program points special attention to the so-called ‘outlying’ teaching in foreign-country Sunday schools. At the time when the two education-related laws were published, in 1991 and 2015, many Sunday schools specially designed for the children of Bulgarian citizens were opened in EU countries, the UK, and the US. After the implementation of Decree No. 334 in 2011, some of the schools received targeted funding under it and others

[2] Persons who have resided abroad after 1990, by education level, ethnic group and number of children according to Census 2011 (NSI, 2011).
[3] Persons who have resided abroad after 1990, by education level, ethnic group and number of children according to Census 2011 (NSI, 2011).

were subsidised under the national program. Decree No. 334 of the Council of Ministers concerns not only our historical diaspora in Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Outlands but also the new migrant communities. It covers all pupils who wish to study in our schools abroad (Postanovlenie № 334, 2011: 1 – 2). The Bulgarian state has declared its intention to provide accessible education to the second generation of migrants, to maintain their ties to the Bulgarian language, history and culture and to facilitate their subsequent schooling in Bulgaria. These educational structures are important for maintaining the children's connection to their native country and the mutual socialisation between children of various ethnicities whose parents are all Bulgarian citizens (Slavkova, 2013a: 65 – 87). The basic problem, however, is the schools in question cannot ensure achievement of a certain level of education but can only certify completion of a grade.

> Art. 2. (1) Bulgarian Sunday schools in foreign countries provide completion of training in Bulgarian language and literature, in history and geography of Bulgaria, for a certain grade, and do not provide achievement of a level of education (Postanovlenie № 334, 2011: 1).

The second basic problem is the discrepancy between the level of training children get in foreign schools and the respective level in Bulgaria; true, with time, the learning program is improving and being adapted to the needs of the children whose mother tongue is Bulgarian but who are living in a foreign language environment. Since 2017, the MES has introduced a regulation according to which children studying Bulgarian abroad can take online tests in the Sunday schools in order to have their level of knowledge certified. After passing the tests successfully, they can receive a diploma for level of knowledge of Bulgarian as a foreign language from the Language Training Department of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridsky. Decree No. 334 was revoked in 2018. A new decree, No. 90 of 29 May 2018, was passed, aligned with the new law on education, which concerns providing funding from the state budget for schools in foreign countries (Postanovlenie № 90, 2018: 1).

The access to education of the returning pupils was regulated in our country by the Ordinance for Recognition of Completed Stages of School Education, of 2003, and its amendment of 2014 (Naredba № 2, 2003; Naredba za izmenenie i dopalnenie na Naredba No. 2, 2014). These documents divide the responsibility for deciding which grade the children will be enrolled in between the school principals of re-

ceiving schools (which after the amendment to the Ordinance have the authority to recognise a degree of education up to the 6th grade inclusive) and the expert commissions at the Regional Directorates of Education (who are competent to recognise education levels for higher classes and universities). The main idea of this document is that children who have studied abroad, attended Sunday school, received a document for completed education and are of the age of 4th-grade pupils or above, do not sit equivalency exams in the basic subjects, such as Bulgarian language and literature, geography, history. But education in the respective subjects received in Sunday schools is not necessarily equivalent to a competed grade; there are often problems in this respect, as pupils, despite having these documents, are obliged to pass equivalency exams or are enrolled in the same level grade as the one they have completed abroad. Such measures are applied in case these children do not know the Bulgarian language well and lack basic knowledge of the main subjects.

The return of child migrants to their native land appears to be a rather complex process, to which a number of studies have been devoted. Schoolchildren who have never lived in their native land have serious problems in adapting to the culture and the social and educational environment. Some authors have called such children 'educational refugees' because they are not in an equal position with regard to learning in school. They have gaps in terms of the local standard education that other children in their native country have had access to (Fry, 2009: 367 − 383). Their adaptation problems depend on their age, on whether they were born in the destination country or in their fatherland. Their situation might be additionally made difficult by the illegal status of their parents in the destination country, by segregation in the schools they attended abroad, or other problems that their parents may have faced in navigating between different educational institutions (Glick and Yabiku, 2016: 201 − 228).

The reintegration of pupils returning to Bulgaria and passing through the educational system here is still not being widely discussed in society. There are no special programs and strategies to facilitate these children's adaptation. During a 2017 interview with an expert from the Directorate of Education of Bulgarians Abroad and the School Network State, it was made clear that the term 'children of returning migrants' refers to those of wealthy Bulgarian citizens, children who have returned from a foreign country and have been enrolled in prestigious schools, and not the children of unskilled workers. It is assumed that those children who have studied in Sunday schools are well trained – the Ministry of Education and Science has

contributed much to this by creating adapted programs and textbooks and by exercising control over the schools in connection with state funding. Regarding these children, a Ministry expert points out that their 'connection with the native country is very strong'. In other words, it is currently assumed that the children of returning migrants have no problems and need no special attention.

The special approach

In a number of normative documents, we can notice a special approach is meant to be applied to Roma children, who are perceived as 'vulnerable' and in some cases as 'lagging behind' pupils; yet the migration problem is generally not placed on the agenda. The Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Students from the Ethnic Minorities (CEICSEM) was created in January 2005. The Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from the Ethnic Minorities 2015 – 2020 was the first to direct attention to the children of migrants. The strategy acknowledges the existence of a migration-related problem that Roma pupils, together with children from other ethnic communities, are leaving secondary school and going abroad with their parents:

> Every school year, an average of around 4,000 pupils, including some from the ethnic minorities who were enrolled at the beginning of the respective year, leave the national educational system due to "departure" for a foreign country (Strategiya za obrazovatelna integratsiya na detsa i uchenitsi ot etnicheskite maltsinstva, 2015 – 2020: 10)

In accordance with the special approach, Roma pupils are placed in the target group of 'vulnerable' pupils, together with refugee children. The State Agency for Refugees is the institution that takes care of the foreign non-native population coming to Bulgaria; the children of these people must be schooled and included in Bulgarian schools. The refugee pupils are the target of special policies together with the Roma, because it is assumed that such children have difficulties integrating into education, for various reasons, including the fact that Bulgarian is not their native language. This special approach is reflected in a number of documents, including National Strategy for the Child (Natsionalna strategiya za deteto, 2008 – 2018) and the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Study in the Republic of Bulgaria. One of the aims of the framework is, 'the educational

integration of children and pupils from vulnerable groups, including Roma, of those who seek or have received international protection, and migrants' (Strategicheska ramka za razvitie na obrazovanieto, obuchenieto i ucheneto v Republika Bulgaria, 2021 – 2030: 30). In an interview for the morning information show of Bulgarian National Television from 26 March 2018, Petya Parvanova, chairperson of the State Agency for Refugees reported that the number of children refugees enrolled in Bulgarian schools in 2017 / 2018 was 200, of whom 115 were actually attending school (BNT, 2018). As of September 2018, the number of 'children from the camp' in Harmanli was 78 persons. The unaccompanied minors and underage youths were 18 in number. According to information supplied by officials of the Bulgarian Red Cross in Haskovo, there were 23 pupils living in the camp while waiting, together with their parents, to obtain status, and enrolled in schools in the territory of the municipality of Harmanli for the school 2017 – 2018. Of them, 8 were girls and the rest were boys from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Iran. In the following school year (2018 – 2019), 33 children were enrolled. Of them, 15 were newly enrolled. The girls attending school were 9, and the boys, 24. According to an official of the Bulgarian Red Cross, Haskovo, as of December 2021, 17 refugee children were enrolled in public schools, and in the previous year, only 9 children had graduated from school.[4]

The refugee children to whom educational integration is addressed fall into three categories: those whose parents have applied for protection; those whose parents have the status of refugees, and those who have humanitarian protection status. The Law on Asylum and Refugees provides them with the right to study in our schools in accordance with certain procedures, which are the same as those applied to children of Bulgarian citizens (Zakon za ubezhishteto i bezhantsite, 2002, last amended 2020). The biggest problem is that some of them (mostly those coming after 2013 and newcomers whose parents have applied for protection) lack a certificate for a completed grade or stage of education, do not speak Bulgarian, and their parents in some cases declare a false age for them. By the implementation of Ordinance No. 3 of April 2017, their access to educational institutions is facilitated. A key provision of this ordinance is that children can be enrolled based on age and the assessment of the schoolteachers, regardless of whether they can present a document for com-

[4] My special thanks to the director of the BRC-Haskovo and its employees, who devoted time to help me in my research. Thanks also to all refugee families and employees of the registration and reception centre in Harmanli, who also provided assistance in my fieldwork.

pleted grade and whether they have command of the Bulgarian language (Naredba № 3 za usloviyata i reda za priemane i obuchenie na litsata, tarseshti ili poluchili mezhdunarodna zakrila, 2017).

Before the Ordinance came into effect, the enrollment requirements were that the child should have school documents from his / her country of origin and have attained a beginner's level of Bulgarian. That is why the strategy envisions two stages: a preparatory stage, in which the State Agency for Refugees takes part, as well as various NGOs, such as the Red Cross and Caritas Sofia (which provide language courses and school training), funded by the UNHCR and other donors. The children are enrolled in schools situated in their place of residence (the largest number of pupils is in Sofia). The second stage is related to the schooling of the refugee children. After they are enrolled in school, they study according to the study plans applied for Bulgarian children; currently, additional training in Bulgarian is envisioned for the refugees.

Adaptation problems among child migrants and refugees

Cultural shock

The process of adapting to the school environment is difficult for all children coming from a foreign country because they experience cultural shock. During my fieldwork, in their conversations with me, children and parents mentioned that it took the children one or two years to get used to the situation in class. Some parents related that their children felt uncomfortable not knowing anyone in school and that the way the local children communicated between themselves was different from what the newcomers were used to revealed. A mother and child of Bulgarian origin, who had returned to Bulgaria from Cyprus in 2015, mentioned that her boy was 'shocked at the aggressiveness of his classmates'. A pupil of the Rudari ethnic group, from Karnobat, who had studied in Greece, had similar impressions, 'We were used (to the rule) that one cannot use a phone in school, you should behave respectfully towards the teacher and your classmates, but here things were different'.

The problems of the refugee children are somewhat different. One of the great challenges for them is that they are not accepted. This attitude towards them in Bulgarian society is linked to the traditional stereotypical attitude towards the 'other', who is 'different', and also to the fact that these children speak in a language the

others do not understand, and that they have an unfamiliar culture (Erolova, 2017: 323 – 346). The fact that refugees were placed in camps, including the one near Harmanli, arouses discontent among residents of the respective town – people are troubled by their presence. Of course, there are cases of empathy, especially towards families with children, because according to the Bulgarian respondents, 'they are fleeing war' and 'the children are not to blame in any way'. During their time of residence, which may range from several months to several years, the refugees also shared various impressions concerning the local population, the cultural environment, the representatives of the state institutions. Their first impressions of the Bulgarians were not always positive. There is a contradiction between their expectations of what they would see in a European country like Bulgaria and the actual living conditions and standard of living, which additionally motivates them to seek asylum more in the West.

Enrolling in school

The administrative procedure for the enrolment in school of children coming from abroad is an additional burden for the situation of these children. The parents must supply a set of documents that are translated and legalised, such as a birth certificate, academic record of completed grade, certificate of school scores (if the change of schools occurs in the middle of the school year), and documents certifying the training received in Sunday school, which are not obligatory and do not guarantee passing into the next grade. In some cases, albeit exceptional, the parents do not know exactly what documents they need in order to enrol their children, so they have not obtained them by the time their children have to go to school in Bulgaria. Such a case is mentioned by the principal of a school in Harmanli, in which most of the children are Bulgarians and Roma, but, in some classes, there are refugee children from Syria and Afghanistan, which complicates the work of the teachers. A girl whose mother tongue is Romany / *Romanes*, who had studied in that school up to the second grade, had left with her mother to a foreign country; upon returning, the child was 'sought out' at her place of residence in accordance with the Mechanism for Inclusion and Keeping within the Education System (Postanovlenie № 100, 2018). The child had lived for a while in Spain with her parent and had not returned to school upon returning, because she did not have the needed documents. The girl was enrolled in fourth grade but, according to the school principal, was not adapting well because she was older than her classmates. The principal had to

transfer her to fifth grade. Subsequently, the girl became quickly socialised with her older classmates and made good progress in the Bulgarian language.

After the parents supply the documents, the next step is to decide which grade the children will be enrolled in; according to the rules of the educational system, presenting a document of competed grade abroad is insufficient. The age criterion is usually not applied, in contrast with the case of refugee children. In some cases, the school principals show understanding of the situation of returning children and give the parents time to procure the required documents. But the biggest problem remains that the children are customarily enrolled in the same grade or a lower grade, regardless of the documents for completed grade: the justification for this is that the children do not have sufficient knowledge of Bulgarian. In most cases, these are pupils who have not attended Sunday schools. For instance, a girl from Harmanli had left for Spain when she was eight years old. She was enrolled in an upper grade because of her age. At first the girl had great difficulties in mathematics and in Spanish, and the mother was too tired after work to help the child in her schoolwork. The child relied on help from an elderly neighbour. The child would help the neighbour in her housework, and the female neighbour, in turn, helped the girl prepare her lessons and improve her Spanish. When the child returned to Bulgaria at the age of 12, her grandparents looked after her. She repeated fifth grade, even though she had all the necessary documents, translated and legalised – the reasons were that she had not attended Sunday school and there were differences between the school systems of Bulgaria and Spain. It was deemed best for the child to be enrolled in a class with children of her own age.

During my fieldwork in the region of Haskovo, I came upon a case where pupils had been enrolled two grades below their age. Two related families, from the Dasikane Roma group, lived in the small village of La Peraleja, in the region of Castile-La Mancha. The children of one of the families attended the state school. Upon returning to their native village, the parents presented documents certifying completion of third and fourth grade; but the children were enrolled in first and second grade at the advice of the principal, because they did not speak Bulgarian well and had serious gaps in their knowledge of grammar. In many cases, the children are enrolled in the next grade based on supplied documents or are enrolled after successfully passing the equivalency exam or maturity exam, as parents from Sandanski and Karnobat told me.

Training in school

The pupils have various adjustment problems. Communication in school is not merely a matter of language proficiency. There may be a lack of understanding in a broader sense: some children speak Bulgarian well but have serious gaps in certain subjects because they have studied abroad, while others do not understand the Bulgarian historical and geographical context and hence are not really aware of what the subjects refer to. The most difficult subjects for migrant children are the literature, history, geography, and economy of Bulgaria. Their level of knowledge of written and spoken Bulgarian is not good, and this gives some parents reason to choose (at the advice of the school staff) to enroll their child in a lower grade, in the hope that this would help the child adapt more quickly. As a rule, those who have attended Bulgarian Sunday school are assumed to have some knowledge of these subjects. In most cases, they really do orient themselves in the new environment and in assimilating the material. Otherwise, students, who have not attended classes in Bulgarian abroad, have more problems in their initial adaptation and in the understanding of the study material. A good example of this is related to a boy from the Millet group in Harmalni. He had been enrolled in a class in Spain when he was four years old. The boy had remained with his family in the town of L'Olleria (Valencia) up to the sixth grade. His grandfather and father worked in a glass production factory and his mother worked in a restaurant. The boy's sister was born in Spain. The family returned to Bulgaria in 2009. The boy remained with his grandmother in Harmanli when his parents and grandfather left for Great Britain. He was enrolled in fifth grade, although he had completed sixth grade in Spain. He studied in the village school, where his greatest difficulties were in geography: he did not even understand what was explained to him, had no idea about geographical locations and had not even heard of some rivers and mountains, of which he been taught nothing in the Spanish school (there pupils acquire knowledge about Spain and possibly Latin America, but not about Eastern Europe).

The following is a similar case. In 2017, I interviewed an 18-year-old boy from the Xoraxane Roma group in Southwest Bulgaria. He had studied for five years in a Greek state school. There, he had been enrolled in the fifth grade at the *dimotiko* (primary) school in Greece, attending extra classes in grammar together with first-grade pupils because he lacked sufficient command of Greek. He was enrolled in a class whose teacher was of Bulgarian origin, married to a Greek. She paid him special attention to help him make progress in school. The most difficult subjects for

him were mythology, literature, ancient Greek, and religion. Returning to Bulgaria with his parents, the subjects he found most difficult were Bulgarian language and literature, and history, because although he spoke Bulgarian properly, he had missed a lot of material in Bulgarian literature and grammar. Eventually, he graduated from the Agricultural Vocational High School as a private student and also worked in a sewing enterprise to assist the family budget.

Migrant children need the teacher's special attention, but some parents shared that the teachers did not always provide it. Others gave some positive examples of teachers who do. The teachers' point of view is also interesting. During my fieldwork, I came across cases in which a homeroom teachers or other teachers understanding the children's need for help, had worked purposely with them during the regular or additional school hours. A teacher of Bulgarian language and literature in Karnobat shared that two children from the Romanian-speaking Rudari group, having returned from Greece, were included in the 'Your School Hour' program – not because Bulgarian was not their mother tongue, but because the teacher saw they had the desire to progress in school. They needed more exercise in the language than the regular school hours can provide. Teachers in Bulgarian language and in history shared that pupils coming from an upper grade or who were older than their classmates, had difficulties keeping up with teaching because they had long been away from Bulgaria, unlike children who had studied in Sunday schools. The teachers also pointed out that it matters which country the children are returning from. They stated it was easier to work with children coming back from countries like Spain, where there are many Sunday schools – such children have some basic knowledge that can be built upon. It was also easier to work with children coming from Greece, a country located closer to Bulgaria, which made it more likely the children to spend their summer vacations in their native towns and associate more actively with their peers. It was said to be harder working with pupils coming from countries like England, where most of the Sunday schools are centred in London, so it is less likely a child will have attended one. This creates difficulties for the child's teacher in Bulgaria.

School children coming from foreign countries are usually not thought to have potential and their knowledge is not used for the general progress of teaching in class; they are usually considered to be in need of assistance and additional training. The only exceptions are children coming from the UK because English is taught everywhere in Bulgarian schools and they might possibly help their classmates with

the language. There was one child from a mixed marriage – Bulgarian and Roma, from southwestern Bulgaria, who had lived with his mother and sister in England for a year and, upon returning to Bulgaria, was enrolled in the same grade he had already completed abroad. He had not attended a Sunday school, although he settled with his family in London. Back here, he had difficulties with writing in Bulgarian only during the first one or two months, as well as in math, because he had studied other material in the latter subject. One of the reasons he has no major problems is that he had only lived abroad for a year. The greatest help for the child came from his homeroom teacher who devoted special attention to him. He was enrolled in the 'Your School Hour' program and attended classes in Bulgarian and mathematics. He was an advanced pupil in English classes and the teacher asked him to write on the blackboard and to speak English with his classmates in order to help them with studying the language. This is a rare case: where children of return migrants are perceived as pupils with potential who can help in the teaching process for certain subjects. It is also a rare practice that the knowledge and experience such children have acquired abroad is further developed.

Specific problems

Some problems related to education are considered more typical of Roma children than of Bulgarians. School principals and teachers assume that there is a great distance between the school and the Roma family environment, a distance that creates difficulties for such children in learning the school material. According to school principals from Sofia, Sandanski, Nova Zagora and Karnobat, Roma children attend school unwillingly, do not do their homework regularly, are often absent from class, and have no general study habits. One of the stereotypical assumptions is that their parents do not have a positive attitude to school and that is why the children do not attend regularly (Kyuchukov and New, 2016: 629 – 634; Zachos and Panagiotidou, 2019: 13 – 23). Some pupils talked about discrimination and a bad attitude towards them based on ethnic origin – this was mentioned by a schoolgirl from the village of Krumovo Gradishte (near Karnobat), who had returned from Cyprus after completing fourth grade there. She succeeded in passing her maturity exam and was enrolled in fifth grade. Her classmates called her 'black' and 'Kopanarka' (female trough-maker). Later on, when they came to know her better, things changed. She shared that her classmates' attitudes had become positive and she had made many friends. After completing secondary school, she continued her education by enroll-

ing at Oxford Brooks University in the UK in 2020, a happy event that she shared with her friends on her Facebook page.

Respondents mentioned the communication problem with pupils whose mother tongue is Roma or Turkish as a serious difficulty in the teaching process. Children whose mother tongue is Romanian are mentioned more rarely. According to the school personnel, children who have gone through migration have additionally lost their schooling habits. According to teachers in Sandanski, Karnobat and Nova Zagora, some of the families doing seasonal work abroad do not enrol their children in school (or at least do not supply the respective documents, especially in cases when they travel between destinations in the middle of the school year); when the family returns, the children must repeat the grade. The teachers believe this is why some of them drop out of education. Dropout from school is considered to be a specific Roma problem; this is true for other countries besides Bulgaria (Alvarez-Roldan, Parra and Gamella, 2018: 113 – 127). However, I came across many positive examples during my fieldwork: some pupils not only do not drop out but even go on to enrol in higher education in Bulgaria. I have encountered such cases among the Rudari who had lived and worked in Greece. In one case, a boy had enrolled in economics at Burgas Free University, and in the other, a boy had gone on to study at the Medical University in Varna. They chose to study in their native land Bulgaria because higher education is less expensive here. In some cases, they had to attend intensive language courses in Bulgarian and only after that apply for university because their learning gaps were serious enough, as they themselves stated.

In Harmanli and the nearby villages, where Bulgarian, Roma and refugee children attend the same school, the teaching and communication problems arise not only for the Roma-speaking and Turkish-speaking children but also for refugee pupils, who cannot speak a word of Bulgarian when they arrive here. The citizens of Harmanli expressed strong opposition to the refugees during the first (2017 – 2018), and at times the second (2018 – 2019) school year, when refugee children for the first time were enrolled in larger numbers in the Bulgarian schools. For instance, in one of the elementary schools in Harmanli, there are approximately 300 Bulgarian children and approximately 150 Roma children. When Afghan and Syrian children were to be enrolled for the school year 2017 – 2018, parents expressed serious discontent, and the school principal was worried about a possible outflow of pupils from her school. Principals have held many meetings with parents and ultimately achieved appeasement and consent that refugee children be accepted in classes. For

instance, in the village of Balgarin, where several meetings were held with parents, at one of the last meetings a grandmother of Roma origin said the following to the school principal, 'We will accept these children when the others accept our children'. The teachers also find it hard to teach their subjects in mixed classes where Bulgarians, Roma, Turks and refugees study together. The communication problem is very important but not the only one. The problems vary but are mostly related to the refusal of parents of Bulgarian children to have pupils from the Middle East study in the same classes as their children. This leads to unwillingness on the part of pupils to associate with refugee children. The same is true for children from different ethnic communities, such as the Roma and Turks, who at first behave with reserve. The effect of playing and studying together, however, is that children become closer and distances between them are reduced. Other problems are the lack of teachers trained to work with pupils who have had traumatic experiences and the lack of adapted schoolbooks. During the second school year (2018 – 2019), the reception of children from the Middle East was less problematic because the refugee children and their parents had adapted to the culture and language environment to some degree and the local residents had gotten to know them.

Refugee parents are not well-informed about how the teaching process is conducted and about the different forms of teaching; this is also a problem as concerns the interaction between parents and refugees. The parents are afraid to enrol their children out of concern that something bad might happen to them or that someone might take them away. For instance, a refugee mother in Harmanli accompanied her children to school for a while, getting on the school bus with them in the morning. She was afraid the children might be led away without her knowledge to the immigration detention centre in Lyubimets, where she had been placed for a while and of which she had very bad memories.

During my visit to the registration and reception centre in Harmanli in September 2018, I visited the Afghan school supported by the UNHCR, the Bulgarian Red Cross and Caritas-Sofia. The principal of this school is a former principal of a mathematics school in Kabul, Afghanistan. Here, she teaches in the Dari language; children who have only spoken Farsi until they learn Dari in class. The other voluntary school is housed in the 'Syrian section' and is funded under the Caritas project 'We Play and Learn'. In the so-called 'Syrian school', English is the language in which children and teachers communicate. Both schools offer classes in Bulgarian. Although such classes were conducted in the camp even before 2017, intensive

courses were organised starting from that year for children who wanted to attend or who had the desire to enrol in a Bulgarian school later on. For instance, I attended a class in the Bulgarian language where the teacher made the children familiar with the tales 'The Enormous Turnip' and 'Little Red Riding Hood'. She explained the unknown words to the children who are of various ages and then asked them questions about the plot of the stories. The teacher has a positive opinion of the children, although she knows it is very difficult for them to fit within the new linguistic and cultural environment. According to her, 'these children are well-behaved and have respect for the teacher'. The Afghan school still exists in the camp, but the form of training there has changed. The children have only one teacher in Bulgarian, because the school principal no longer lives in Harmanli. One of the last problems faced by asylum-seekers and their children is the challenge of online education and the quality of teaching. NGOs like the Bulgarian Red Cross, Caritas, and others, support these processes by providing rooms for training and access to technical equipment for the children. This is the case in the refugee camp in Harmanli. Additional courses in Bulgarian, provided by NGOs, also use distance learning forms at times when it is impossible for the children to be physically present in class.

Conclusion

The overview of the national normative documents shows that the challenges faced by migrant children are not considered problematic except when the migrant (Roma) children are treated as dropouts from education. However, the situation is considerably more complex than this. In some documents, the children who have studied abroad are treated differently (in some cases their citizenship is taken into consideration; in others, their ethnic origin) and they are placed in different categories of educational policy targeting. This indicates the approach is not uniform. In most cases, the Roma children are accepted on an equal standing with the Bulgarian children and it is assumed they have educational difficulties because they have studied abroad. An inclusive approach to migrant pupils, regardless of their ethnic origin – Bulgarian, Roma, or other – would contribute more to their integration in school. From this perspective, the educational policies for inclusion must take into account the migrant experience and not the ethnic origin of the pupils returning from abroad. Lifting the barriers to inclusion in the school system in Bulgaria would be an advantage for all migrant children. They would all, regardless of ethnic origin,

like to contribute to the success and development of their local school communities, but they would like to see their own place in this complex and multi-aspect process.

Sometimes, Roma pupils are treated stereotypically – regardless of whether they were migrants or not; it is presumed they are children who have greater difficulties in school because of the family cultural environment in which they were raised. The fieldwork results show the widespread opinion that Roma parents are not interested in their children's education is false. As they are thought to be 'vulnerable' pupils, they are placed in the same target group as refugee children; it is assumed they have the same educational needs and are at risk of unsuccessful integration in school. The examples presented above, however, illustrate the complexity of these children's specific needs, and that they cannot, therefore, be generally defined as 'vulnerable' pupils. This exclusive approach rather makes integration in school even more difficult. What is needed is a dialogical approach to migrant children and refugee children, an approach that involves different stakeholders (parents and children, on the one hand, school principals and teachers on the other), and also policy-makers and policy-implementers. We found that the fastest and most adequate educational response to integration policy is towards children from the Middle East. They participate successfully in the school system, despite the dynamics of their reception and premature departure from school when they leave the country. Although most of them look upon their stay in Bulgaria as temporary, going to school here is an important way for them to spend their time and preserve their study habits. That is why their parents have a positive attitude toward their children attending Bulgarian schools.

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Part V

INTEGRATION AND ADAPTATION OF MIGRANTS

Little Bulgarian School in Chicago – Cultural Heritage and Integration*

Mariyanka Borisova

Abstract: 'Little Bulgarian School' in Chicago was established in 2010 and is registered as a non-profit organisation for the purpose of 'conducting a learning process and events to preserve and promote the Bulgarian language and culture'. When a team of the 'Cultural Heritage in Migration' project visited it in 2015, 'Little Bulgarian School' was already the largest (with over 350 students) among the 11 Bulgarian schools in Chicago and included early language training at the 'Winnie the Pooh' Children's Academy. Despite its name, 'Little Bulgarian School' is one of the largest Bulgarian schools abroad. In 2021 the school has its own building, unites branches in Chicago and its suburbs, publishes its own textbooks for education, and educates children aged between 2 and 18 years, as well as adults. The building purchased with a big loan and donations made by the Bulgarian community in Chicago is nowadays home to two schools, dance clubs, and various Bulgarian cultural and sports activities. 'Little Bulgarian School' maintains a website and Facebook page, where it currently promotes its activities and has donation campaigns to replenish the fund of the school library. This research aims to answer questions such as: How does 'Little Bulgarian School' use the educational and social policies of the sending and receiving countries? How does it maintain the cultural identity of school children of Bulgarian origin? Which elements of the cultural heritage are emphasised in its activities? In what way does it follow but also create models for successful adaptation and integration?
Keywords: cultural heritage, Bulgarian school abroad, migrant community

Introduction

Intensive migration flows are among the clear manifestations of globalisation, along with the movements of capitals, goods, symbols and services. The powerful migration processes of recent decades have been the subject of multiple studies with a different emphasis: political, socio-cultural, demographic, and economic (see e.g.,

* The paper is the result of research under the project 'Cultural Heritage and Institutionalization of the Bulgarian Historical and Contemporary Communities out of Europe' (КП-06-Н30/3), carried out by Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The project is funded by the Bulgarian Science Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Bansak, Simpson and Zavodny, 2015; Brettel and Hollifield, 2000; Castles et al., 2014; Elliot and Urry, 2010; Smith and Favell, 2006; Zimmermann, 2005).

In the Bulgarian context, the migration processes were stimulated by the political and socio-economic changes that happened in 1989. As a consequence, there is an unprecedented growth of Bulgarian migration, as large-scale migrant communities are emerging in a number of destinations. It does not take long for the researchers to notice and start analysing these processes (Borisova et al., 2017; Gergova, 2017; Karamihova, 2004; Krasteva, 2014; Maeva, 2017; Maeva and Zahova, 2013; Penchev et al., 2017; Slavkova, 2014).

The United States is perceived as one of the attractive overseas destinations for the Bulgarian migrants and as a result the migrant communities there are large. The greatest Bulgarian immigrant community in Chicago[1] (Ivanova, 2016; Ivanova, 2017; Velichkov, Dinev, and Stoilov, 2014; Vukov and Borisova, 2016) was formed by several migrant waves between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 21st century. Each of these waves has a different profile with regard to structure, qualification, age and gender. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, there was Bulgarian *labour* and *educational migration* in The Windy City – mainly men: craftsmen and students. Later a part of them returned to Bulgaria. The first wave consisted of predominantly low-qualified immigrants of the adventurous type. The next wave happened after World War II and included the political immigrants – the so-called *non-returnees* (Vukov and Borisova, 2016). More students and highly qualified immigrants could be noticed later, as well as thoroughly better-organised immigration. The majority of the immigrants arrived at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century as a result of the start of the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program in 1990 (Ivanova, 2017: 285; Karamihova, 2004: 39 – 41). This is the so-called *New Migration*: labour, educational, and predominantly family migration with a clearly set strategy (Vukov and Borisova, 2016). The city turned out to be an appealing immigrant destination for various reasons (growing industry, employment opportunities, etc.). The growing Bulgarian presence facilitated easier access to social networks of co-nationals after arriving and settling up appeared to be of major importance (Ivanova, 2017; Vukov and Borisova, 2016).

[1] Between 100,000 and 300,000 Bulgarians lived in Chicago in 2015. The mentioned data is based on different unofficial sources. The number of Bulgarian immigrants in this community is great, but at the same time, it is relatively modest given the size of Chicago (see Ivanova, 2017: 284).

Cultural heritage abroad

As Magdalena Elchinova (2010) emphasises, the constitution of the cultural heritage beyond the borders depends on various factors such as reasons and circumstances for migration, policies towards the cultural diversity in receiving society, and policies of the sending country. The majority of the Bulgarian migrants in Chicago are highly qualified professionals, families voluntarily seeking economic security. They represent the Bulgarian cultural heritage in Chicago metro region and are supported by the receiving society, successfully preserving and transmitting it in this new environment. The cultural heritage that Bulgarian migrants transfer, construe, valorise, and preserve outside the national country, is passed onto their descendants and popularised among various audiences in the host country. It includes elements such as language, literature, history, traditions, music, dances, and festivities. This heritage is concurrently a reason and a result of the migrant community's consolidation into formal and informal migrant unions – schools, folklore dancing and singing groups, orchestras, church communities, clubs, associations of writers and artists, museums, cultural centres, media, theatres, libraries and so on (Gergova, 2017; Penchev et al., 2017). Different consolidation forms, activities and leaders stand out in the dynamic development of the migrant community.

Since the first Bulgarian migrant wave, there have been Bulgarian newspapers and gramophone records with Bulgarian music (Velichkov, Dinev, and Stoilov, 2014: 26 – 31). Later on, the migrant waves developed and enriched the Bulgarian consolidation forms and since 2015[2] the Bulgarian community in Chicago maintains a lot of formal and informal unions[3] (Borisova, 2015; Vukov and Borisova, 2017: 20 – 21): eleven schools, two Orthodox churches, one Evangelical church, two folklore dancing ensembles, Bulgarian-American Association, Bulgarian-American Centre of Cultural Heritage, Bulgarian Museum Association in Chicago, Union of Bulgarian Writers in the USA and around the world, Bulgarian artists abroad Asso-

[2] Nikolai Vukov and Mariyanka Borisova carried out fieldwork in a number of Bulgarian migrant institutions in Chicago in 2015 as part of the team under the project 'Cultural Heritage in Migration. Models of Consolidation and Institutionalization of Bulgarian Communities Abroad' (DFNI – K02/19), funded by the National Science Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria. The audio and photo materials from the study were filed at the National Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum – BAS.

[3] Consulate General of Bulgaria in Chicago also operates in the city.

ciation, football teams, motorcycling club, restaurants, bars, grocery stores, media – newspapers and websites.

In 2021, the picture of the Bulgarian migrant consolidation forms in the Windy City is dynamic: there has been a tendency to enlarge the present Bulgarian institutions in cultural centres with a good deal of activities (schools, folklore dancing groups, sports teams, theatrical clubs, music and art clubs, libraries). Little Bulgaria Center[4], Bulgarica Center[5], Magura Cultural Center, Bulgarian American Heritage Center and Library[6], Bulgarian Cultural Center Chicago[7] are emerging as multifunctional Bulgarian cultural centres in the megapolis. As a result, the transmission, transfer and use of the Bulgarian cultural heritage in Chicago are stimulated, and the migrant social networks are expanded, which is a prerequisite for maintaining the cultural identity and also for an effective adaptation. This enlargement makes the Bulgarian migrant institutions more visible and recognisable for the migrant community itself and for the receiving community as well. A functional parallel could be observed between these centres and the Bulgarian cultural institutes[8] in a number of European countries. A significant difference is that the Bulgarian cultural institutes abroad are official state institutions funded by the Bulgarian state, while the Bulgarian centres in Chicago are initiated, organised, funded and maintained by the migrant community itself and run by its leaders.

The School

Undoubtedly, the most popular Bulgarian migrant consolidation form abroad is the school – it is aimed at Bulgarian children and children of Bulgarian origin. Bulgarian schools abroad are subject of a number of studies (Ganeva-Raycheva, 2004; Gergova, 2017; Gergova and Borisova, 2015: 215 – 229; Gergova and Borisova, 2021: 558 – 578; Gergova and Gergova, 2016: 29 – 40; Ibáñez-Angulo, 2008: 154 – 188; Koulov, 2014; Koulov and Borisova, 2017: 99 – 110; Kyurkchieva, 2017: 213 – 227; Maeva, 2017: 150 – 160; Matanova, 2017: 355 – 371; Penchev, 2016: 18 – 28; Raeva, 2017:

[4] https://www.bghubusa.com/listing/център-малката-българия/ (accessed 16 August 2021).
[5] https://bulgarica.org/ (accessed 17 August 2021).
[6] http://www.magurabcs.com/ (accessed 17 August 2021).
[7] https://www.firstbulgariancenter.com/ubw/ (accessed 17 August 2021).
[8] Bulgarian cultural institutes abroad are managed by the Ministry of Culture state institutions established for the expansion of bilateral relations and cooperation in the field of culture. They operate in accordance with intergovernmental agreements: http://mc.government.bg/files/1609_240_kontzeptzia_za_bki.pdf (accessed 28 September 2021).

228 – 249; Yankova, 2014). Education in the Bulgarian migrant schools is voluntary, i.e., Bulgarian migrant education is parallel to the local education system and additional. On the one hand, this volunteering is an obstacle – many Bulgarian children abroad are not included in Bulgarian schools. On the other hand, voluntary training is attractive: it provides communication with other Bulgarian children with similar cultural backgrounds, it stimulates knowledge of the Bulgarian language and culture and the connection with Bulgaria, and it provides new opportunities for development.

Registered in the host country, licensed or not by the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria, member or not of the Association of Bulgarian Schools Abroad (see Velkova, 2017), Bulgarian school abroad is an incubator of Bulgarian cultural heritage. Along with the teaching of Bulgarian language and literature, Bulgarian history and geography, Bulgarian schools abroad (so-called *Sunday schools*) offer a number of extracurricular clubs related to Bulgarian cultural heritage – folk dances and singing groups, classes for traditional customs; applied activities related to cultural heritage (workshops for *martenitsa*[9], *survachka*[10], Easter egg painting), and organise celebrations of Bulgarian holidays.

Goals and methods

The conservation, usage and conveyance of the Bulgarian cultural heritage at Bulgarian schools abroad stimulate the self-confidence and self-esteem of the children of Bulgarian origin. This is why the current study focuses on Bulgarian migrant schools, and a specific example is the 'Little Bulgarian School' in Chicago.

The study is based on the theory of Canadian intercultural psychologist John Berry (2019; Sam and Berry, 2006) about acculturation. The need for migrants to adapt to different life contexts in the host countries: cultural environment, hierarchies, way of life, resources, and social and emotional relationships (Rot s/a: 3 – 4) leads to acculturative stress. Acculturation as a transition to the new life context and overcoming acculturative stress requires the implementation of various strategies. John Berry analyses the possible individual and group acculturative strategies, taking into account two factors – engagement with the native culture and with the

[9] Bulgarian martenitsa consists of twisted white and red woollen threads. They symbolise the wish for good health and are given as gifts. The holiday (*Baba Marta*) is celebrated on March 1st.
[10] Survachka is a decorated dogwood twig, with which, according to Bulgarian custom, people *survakat* each other usually after New Year's Eve, on January 1st, lightly hitting their backs with wishes for health, happiness, and well-being.

culture in the host society. Depending on the presence or absence of one or both factors, the Canadian intercultural psychologist identifies four acculturative strategies: integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalisation. Acculturation is the most successful in cases of integration, where migrants maintain their cultural identity and at the same time strive to fit into the new cultural environment. This acculturative strategy is the most difficult to achieve. A complicating circumstance is the fact that among migrants the choice of acculturative strategy is unconscious, i.e., not subject to control. The situation is different at migrant institutions, where maintaining the Bulgarian cultural identity and fitting into the American cultural environment can be a purposeful policy. The present research analyses the practices of the 'Little Bulgarian School in Chicago', aimed at actively managing the Bulgarian cultural heritage and at the same time leading to integration. The research aims to answer questions such as: How does 'Little Bulgarian School' use the educational and social policies of the sending and receiving countries? How does it maintain the cultural identity of school children of Bulgarian origin? Which elements of the cultural heritage are emphasised in its activities? In what way does it follow but also create models for successful adaptation and integration?

The methods applied in the work on this paper include observation, structured and semi-structured face-to-face and online interviews.

'Little Bulgarian School'

The headmaster of 'Little Bulgarian School' Zhivka Bubalova says[11] that since her arrival in Chicago in 1999 she has been organising school activities at the Bulgarian church *Sv. Ivan Rilski* (St. John of Rila). Subsequently, she retired and in 2005, because of parents' requests, she started educating up to 8 children from different age groups at home. In 2010 Zhivka Bubalova expanded her activities and registered 'Little Bulgarian School' as a non-profit organisation for the purpose of 'conducting a learning process and events to preserve and promote the Bulgarian language and culture'.[12] At this time, the school was housed in the library at Elk Grove Village. The rapid growth of the school led to its relocation to the local high school building, where it operated at weekends.

[11] In an online interview conducted on March 11, 2021. All later references to the respondent in the text are from this interview and refer to Zhivka Bubalova, unless otherwise stated.
[12] https://www.mbuchicago.com/информация-за-мбу (accessed 20 August 2021).

When a team of the project ‘Cultural Heritage in Migration’ visited ‘Little Bulgarian School’ in 2015, it already was the largest (with over 350 students) among Bulgarian migrant schools in Chicago and included early language (4 – 7 years) training at the first private kindergarten for Bulgarian children Winnie the Pooh Children’s Academy[13]. Today ‘Little Bulgarian School’ is one of the largest Bulgarian schools abroad, despite its name. The godmother of the school is Rayna Mandzhukova[14] who gave it this name during the Meeting of the Bulgarian media in Chicago in 2006. The school logo is a yellow flame – ‘a symbol of knowledge’ (Petrova and Kisyova, 2014: 201).

The organisation ‘Little Bulgarian School in Chicago’ includes ‘Little Bulgarian School’, Bulgarian School ‘Aleko Konstantinov’[15], Saturday Nursery *Chudnoteka*, school branches in other states: Main (in Ogunquit and Wells[16]), as well as in Wisconsin (in Milwaukee[17]). The schools are registered with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria and with the Illinois State Board of Education in the USA. Although branches in Main and Wisconsin are closed in the school year 2021 / 2022 (for complex reasons, including the COVID-19 pandemic), the way to open new branches in near or far states has been worked out. For the school year, 2021 / 2022 ‘Little Bulgarian School’ and Bulgarian School ‘Aleko Konstantinov’ train 450 students[18] and are funded by the Ordinance No. 90 of the Council of Ministers (introduced in 2018[19]). Little Bulgaria Center is not funded by the Bulgarian state, but by the two schools (‘Little Bulgarian School’ and Bulgarian School ‘Aleko Konstantinov’), that are housed in the Center building and are registered with and funded by the Bulgarian state. Ordinance No. 90 of the Council of Minis-

[13] See https://azbukari.org/директорката-живка-бубалова-петров/ (accessed 20 August 2021).
[14] She was a co-founder of the Association of Bulgarian Schools Abroad (2007) and president of the State Agency for Bulgarians abroad (2010 – 2011).
[15] From November 1, 2021 – The Enlightenment Leaders Day – Bulgarian school ‘Aleko Konstantinov’ is named ‘Little Bulgaria’. According to the Pedagogical Council, in this way, the name of the homeland is present for the first time as the name of a school in North America: https://www.facebook.com/mbuchicago/posts/4687685474659578 (accessed 7 November 2021).
[16] The branch was initially opened in Ogunquit and later moved to Wells. From the school year 2021 / 2022, the branch was closed due to a lack of building and the withdrawal of one of the two teachers.
[17] From the school year 2020 / 2021, the branch has not been working, and the students have transferred to distance learning at ‘Little Bulgarian School’ in Chicago.
[18] According to data from the Ministry of Education and Science. See: https://www.mon.bg/bg/174 (accessed 22 August 2021). Outside the official statistics are children under 4 years of age, educated in preschool groups.
[19] Ordinance No. 90 of the Council of Ministers (introduced in 2018) repeals Ordinance No. 334 of the Council of Ministers (introduced in 2011).

ters regulates the functioning of Bulgarian schools abroad – human and economic resources, recognition of diplomas. According to it, students receive a certificate of education, they are evaluated by the Bulgarian educational model, and the teachers need to meet certain criteria. The studied disciplines and extracurricular activities improve the knowledge of Bulgarian history, literature, festivity, language, and traditions. In 2021 the nursery Winnie the Pooh Children's Academy, which operates 5 days a week, is also registered with the Ministry of Education and Science as an educational institution and is funded by the Ordinance No. 90 of the Council of Ministers. Although formally Winnie the Pooh Children's Academy does not belong to the Little Bulgarian School in Chicago, it is led by the same headmaster – Zhivka Bubalova – and prepares children for 'Little Bulgarian School'. Since 2019, the organisation 'Little Bulgarian School in Chicago' has its own building – 'Little Bulgaria' Center, as the building was purchased with the help of a large loan, and 10 % of its value was donated by the Bulgarian community. The formal reason for acquiring the building was the relocation of the Bulgarian School 'Aleko Konstantinov'.[20] In the school year 2020 / 2021, both schools are housed in the 'Little Bulgaria' Center. The organisation 'Little Bulgarian School in Chicago' is governed by a Board of directors, and its schools are run by headmasters and a parent's advisory council, as is the practice in Bulgarian schools abroad. 'Little Bulgarian School' educates children aged 2 to 18, and publishes its own textbooks in Bulgarian language and history.[21]

Having its own building allows it to educate not only at weekends, as is the practice when renting an American school building, but also on weekdays. A solution for the costs of paying for the building and its maintenance is the introduction of additional activities. Little Bulgaria Center is a home of the two schools; different Bulgarian cultural and sports activities: folklore dance club, volleyball club, football club, rhythmic gymnastics club, and architecture club. Premises in the building are rented to American and Russian initiatives. 'Little Bulgarian School' maintains a website and Facebook page as channels of communication, where it promotes its activities and fundraisers – to build a parking lot for the building and to replenish the fund of the school library.[22]

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[20] See https://littlebg.com/малката-българия-в-чикаго/ (accessed 24 August 2021).

[21] https://www.mbuchicago.com/авторски-учебници (accessed 25 August 2021); https://azbukari.org/директорката-живка-бубалова-петров/ (accessed 25 August 2021).

[22] The 'Cultural Heritage and Institutionalization of the Bulgarian Historical and Contemporary Communities out of Europe' project team sent a dozen books – mostly IEFSEM editions – to the library at the Little Bulgaria Center.

Bulgarian language

Migration is a multigenerational process (Bansak, Simpson, and Zavodny, 2015: 130). For migrant children of the first and 1.5 generations, the Bulgarian language is native. For children – second-generation immigrants, the Bulgarian language is their mother tongue, but not their native (Gergova, 2017).

Early language training is especially important for the development of language skills in the conditions of migration. The Bulgarian state regulates and funds (by Ordinance No. 90 of the Council of Ministers) early language training of 4 – 7 years old children in pre-school groups at schools abroad. A good example of early language learning is Bulgarian nursery Winnie the Pooh Children's Academy with five days of studying during the week that develops Bulgarian language skills of the second and third-generation immigrants. Later on, they enrol at Little Bulgarian School with a well-mastered Bulgarian language.

The first students of Zhivka Bubalova in Bulgarian School 'Sv. Ivan Rilski' in 2000 were children in 5th grade, who had just moved to the USA. They were first-generation migrants, fluent in Bulgarian. The respondent describes the more complex language situation with children second-generation immigrants in the period 2011 – 2012 who experienced serious difficulties with communication in Bulgarian. The reason for this can be found in the disbalance between the large number of children of Bulgarian origin in Chicago and at the same time the insufficient number of Bulgarian migrant institutions where they can develop their language skills. The Bulgarian community reacted in a timely manner, creating new schools, cultural centres, and folklore groups, regularly organising Bulgarian events. All these activities include a large part of the Bulgarian community in the Windy City and provide greater access for American-born Bulgarian children to the Bulgarian cultural heritage. In 2021, the level of proficiency in the Bulgarian language is much higher and it is possible to study with textbooks designed for students in Bulgaria. The interlocutor links this process to the growth of the Bulgarian community in Chicago and the area: if in 2021 the total number of children in all the Bulgarian schools in Chicago is 1,200 – 1,300, in 2010 in all schools no more than 400 children were educated. The Bulgarian community in the Chicago metro area is growing as well as the interest in the Bulgarian schools. The number of first-generation immigrants decreases, but the number of second-generation immigrants increases in 'Little Bulgarian School', while maintaining a relatively high level of proficiency in the Bulgarian language.

Writing and issuing textbooks tailored to the study of Bulgarian as a second language is also a priority of 'Little Bulgarian School'. Until 2021 six textbooks have been issued – two in history and four in the Bulgarian language. They are used in education together with the textbooks published in Bulgaria. Early language training, issuing of textbooks and extracurricular forms are defined by Zhivka Bubalova as the main prerequisites for successful education in the Bulgarian language at the Bulgarian school abroad. Another mechanism for mastering the Bulgarian language and literature is reading. The well-organised library of Little Bulgaria Center has over 1,000 Bulgarian volumes. The library fund is enriched through donations. For example, after organising a workshop for making martenitsi and later selling them, the students bought books to fill the library.

Initiatives for improving the spoken Bulgarian language are the organised summer language camps in Burgas (2017, 2018)[23], arranged after an agreement between the Municipality of Burgas and 'Little Bulgarian School' for student language exchange and joint events. Children from the school visit landmarks (in Burgas, Sozopol, and Nessebar), schools, and participate in student concerts, and workshops. They get to know the Bulgarian cultural and historical heritage, communicate with students in Bulgaria and improve their language skills in an attractive and fun way.

Important progress of the Bulgarian community in Chicago is the fact that the Bulgarian language is officially recognised in the state of Illinois as a part of the bilingualism program 'Seal of Biliteracy' since 2017. Diplomas / certificates of a high level of language competence and the Seal of Biliteracy are obtained by the interested students after passing a language test approved by the Department of Education in Ilinois. The test is made by the Department of Language Education at Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski' and consists of four parts: reading, writing, speaking and listening in Bulgarian with a total duration of four hours. Successful students receive an internationally recognised diploma and Seal of Biliteracy which can be useful for college admission and recognition of college classes, as well as for a future profession. They are an achievement for both the students and the respective Bulgarian schools. The recognition of the Bulgarian Language Program is a serious step toward successful integration. It motivates children of Bulgarian origin

[23] https://www.burgas.bg/bg/posts/view/31473/ (accessed 26 August 2021); https://www.eurochicago.com/2017/07/malko-balgarsko-utchilishte-burgas/ (accessed 26 August 2021); https://www.periscop.bg/balgarchetata-ot-malko-balgarsko-uchilishte-se-varnaha-v-burgas/ (accessed 26 August 2021).

to complete the entire course of study at the Bulgarian school and pass the exam to receive the Seal of Biliteracy, which expands the prospects for development. Zhivka Bubalova is proud to share that the teaching team of 'Little Bulgarian School' already includes a Bulgarian Sunday school alumnus, who graduated in Elementary Pedagogy in the United States and received the Seal of Biliteracy. This is an example of continuity in the Bulgarian educational institutions in Chicago. The Seal of Biliteracy is an expression of the policy for promoting cultural diversity and it stimulates both the maintenance of the Bulgarian language for children of Bulgarian origin and the successful integration into the host society.

The ability for intercultural communication (Rot and Rot, 2007) is a way to effective development. Flexible in its policies, 'Little Bulgarian School' opened a new educational format in the autumn of 2021: a language school for 4 and 5-year-old children to learn English and Bulgarian. The aim is to develop parallel skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in both languages. The children study five full days a week. Early mastering of both languages is a prerequisite for maintaining cultural identity and successful integration.

Festivity and traditional culture

Another manifestation of the cultural heritage abroad is festivity. The Bulgarian festivity in conditions of migration is an expression of national affiliation. The festivity preserves cultural memory and cultural identity. Each Bulgarian holiday celebrated at 'Little Bulgarian School' consists of events, symbols and rituals.

As an educational institution 'Little Bulgarian School' celebrates solemnly the literacy festivities (the opening of the school year, Enlightenment Leaders Day (1st November), the Day of the Saints Cyril and Methodius, of the Bulgarian Alphabet, Education and Culture and of Slavic Literature (24th May), the end of the school year)[24], as well as the Bulgarian Liberation Day (3rd March), traditional festivities (Christmas Eve, Easter) with solemn processions, spectacles, and concerts. Children from other ethnic or minority groups are not presented in the school. However, Zhivka Bubalova explains that in the reading and literature classes, in which the children are acquainted with traditions and religious holidays, the non-Orthodox ones are also talked about.

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24 See Borisova and Kulov, 2017: 399 – 410; Vukov and Borisova, 2017: 18 – 37.

'Little Bulgarian School' celebrates the Day of the Holy Brothers Cyril and Methodius, of the Bulgarian Alphabet, Education and Culture and of Slavic Literature (24 May) through the jovial procession and solemn concert with numerous audiences. The anthem dedicated to the Thessalonian brothers is played. The students participating in the festive procession carry Bulgarian flags and posters of Cyril and Methodius. Being one of the few schools in Bulgaria and abroad that celebrates the most solemn educational holiday on May 24th with a procession, 'Little Bulgarian School' attracts audiences from both the Bulgarian community and the host society and thus achieves clearer visibility.

'Little Bulgarian School' not only organises a number of holidays and events but also participates in holidays and events of the Bulgarian community in Chicago in cooperation with other Bulgarian institutions. The students from 'Little Bulgarian School' annually (19 February) lay flowers at the monument (unveiled in 2015) of Bulgaria's national hero *Vasil Levski*, and take part in the Olympic[25] in Chicago, dedicated to the 'Apostle of freedom'. The raising of the Bulgarian flag on Daley Plaza on the national holiday March 3rd is an event for the entire Bulgarian community in the Chicago metro region and 'Little Bulgarian School' participates in the annual holiday concert with songs, recitals and traditional dances.

Every spring 'Little Bulgarian School' participates in the *Verea* Folklore Dance Festival, which takes place in Chicago and brings together Bulgarian schools and amateur folklore dance groups from North America[26].

Among the elements of the Bulgarian cultural heritage is the traditional culture: the customs, the folklore music and dances and the verbal folklore, which the migrants perceive as a 'living connection with the roots' (Gergova, 2017). Continuity with the tradition has a consolidating effect and is an expression of preserved cultural memory. The extracurricular forms at 'Little Bulgarian School' are aimed at preserving and valorising the traditional culture: dance folklore groups, custom classes, workshops for making martenitsi, survachki, for egg painting, for making *banitsa.*[27] The respondent notes that while in 2010 she had to explain to second-generation immigrant children the meaning of the martenitsa, there was no need for an explanation in 2021. This is a result of the growing Bulgarian community, its

[25] Festive and competitive format in which the Bulgarian schools in Chicago participate.

[26] https://sportandlife.net/за-девети-път-в-чикаго-се-проведе-фолкл/ (accessed 28 August 2021). See next footnote, too.

[27] Banitsa is a very popular dish in Bulgaria, prepared with sheets of phyllo dough, Bulgarian white cheese, and eggs.

number and active institutions and social networks, and the opportunity they have created to see and buy martenitsa in Chicago nowadays. The Bulgarian education in Chicago and the intensive networks in the community strengthen the connection with the Bulgarian cultural heritage. Indeed, the Bulgarian community has its flaws, but each of the many migrant institutions (schools, cultural centres, churches, folklore groups, clubs, restaurants) attracts certain migrant circles and maintains the Bulgarian cultural identity.

The choreographer Konstantin Marinov[28] leads folklore dance groups for children and adults. He created a music room and a small ethnographic museum at Little Bulgaria Centre. Winnie the Pooh Children's Academy also has a folklore dance group. The dance groups are regular participants at school concerts and at the opening of exhibitions at the Little Bulgaria Center.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic some children choose to skip the school year in the Bulgarian school. The other ones choose to study in person or remotely in the 2020 – 2021 school year. 'Little Bulgarian School' also offers distance learning, in which children are present at the school building, from where they connect online with their teachers. These are the children of the Bulgarian migrants employed on the first line in the fight against the pandemic. While they are at work, their children are taught remotely, being supervised by teachers in the school building. The pandemic also affects festivities as an element of the cultural heritage. Inter-school events that promote successful integration – charity concerts and international evenings at American schools have been greatly reduced.

Conclusion

'Little Bulgarian School' uses flexibly the educational and social practices of the sending and receiving countries: financial mechanisms and facilitating procedures. The policy of the school is to preserve the cultural identity and connection with Bulgaria through various elements of the Bulgarian Cultural Heritage (language, literature, festivity, traditions, music, and dances). At the same time, the school creates prerequisites for effective integration in the host society: bilingual classes and education in general human values. The cultural memory and the cultural heritage are even more necessary for the Bulgarian migrant community in Chicago due to

[28] Leader of the Folklore group Verea, creator and organiser of Verea Folklore dance festival for Bulgarian folklore dance groups in North America.

the fact that the American mentality, way of life, and thinking, are different and the integration there is harder than in Europe (Vukov and Borisova, 2016).

Chicago School of Sociology focuses its interest on migration and the city and builds its theory on processes such as migration, urbanisation, and industrialisation (Krasteva, 2014: 129). Megapolises as large melting pots of races and cultures, on the one hand, weaken local migrant ties; on the other hand, strengthen them, as they provoke the preservation of migrant's cultural identity. 'Migrants adapt to the cities in which they settle and transform them', notes Anna Krasteva (2014: 129). The Bulgarian migrant community in Chicago fits into this model. 'Little Bulgarian School' is one of the many Bulgarian migrant institutions in the metropolis that withstands the assimilation processes and influences the environment by emphasising the Bulgarian cultural heritage in its various forms. At the same time, the school encourages its graduates to successfully develop and integrate into the local cultural environment.

In conclusion, 'Little Bulgarian School' embodies policies of both establishment and usage of cultural heritage, and integration. The interweaving between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' policies is proving fruitful. 'Little Bulgarian School' and Bulgarian schools abroad in general are developing mainly thanks to the policies created in a 'bottom-up' manner, the efforts of the migrant community and its leaders. Co-financing and the methodological support from the Bulgarian state are also important.

'Little Bulgarian School' wins followers and graduates for a number of reasons: flexible policies, modern teaching methods (through play, music, performance), various initiatives, consistency (to the extent of exceeding the institutional framework) in the conduct of early language training, publishing textbooks. A significant part of the Bulgarian community recognizes Little Bulgaria Center as its place and contributes to its development – it is proved by the migrant donations, by the fact that 'Little Bulgarian School' is the largest Bulgarian school in North America, by the number of initiatives and followers. The education in the 'Little Bulgarian School' treats the cultural heritage as a solid basis for cultural identity, integration and successful intercultural communication.

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ROMANIES IN MICHIGAN — A PORTRAIT OF A COMMUNITY THROUGH THEIR OWN VOICES

Martha Aladjem Bloomfield[*]

Abstract: Because of prejudice and persecution, Hungarian-Slovak Romanies, many of them descendants of famous Romani musicians, primarily, from Kassa, Hungary (now Kosice, Slovakia) immigrated with other immigrants, particularly Hungarians, to Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois in the United States in the early 20th century to work in steel mills. They performed traditional Romani music in Hungarian restaurants and bars. They then followed Hungarians to Delray, Michigan for economic and labour opportunities when industrialist Henry Ford was seeking immigrants to work in his automobile factories, and offered five dollars a day, twice as much as the wage at Andrew Mellon's steel mills in Pennsylvania. Romanies not only worked in factories but also performed music in Hungarian restaurants and bars in Delray. Their hard-working ethic, musical talents, family bonds, culture, and resiliency empowered them to adapt to their new life. However, the 1967 uprising in Detroit, the construction of a major Interstate which cut them off from Detroit, and heavy-duty factory pollution forced them to move from Delray to other Detroit suburbs. Demand for Romani music did not exist there. To accommodate to changing opportunities, they performed jazz. Some moved again to pursue music prospects in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, and recreated Romani communities.
Keywords: Romanies, Hungarian-Slovak Romanies, oral history, Delray Michigan, immigrants

Introduction

Michigan is a composite of many different ethnic, cultural and racial groups who came as immigrants including refugees escaping ethnic and religious persecution

[*] I would like to thank: Steve Balkin, Professor Emeritus of economics, Roosevelt University in Chicago who introduced me to Steve Piskor, author of *Gypsy Violins*, who introduced me to the Hungarian-Slovakian Romani in Michigan; Professor Emeritus Ian Hancock, retired Director of the Romani Archives and Documentation Center, University of Texas at Austin and foremost scholar of Romani studies nationally and internationally, who guided me in my research and ensured accuracy of my materials; Chris Dancisak, who provided editorial critiquing; the many Romani who allowed me into their lives to interview them; and all the librarians and archivists who found many documents, photographs, newspaper articles and books to help me with my research for my book *Romanies in Michigan,* the first one to include oral histories of Romanies in the United States and specifically in Michigan (published by Michigan State University Press, 2019). The foundation and information and content for this paper originates from and is necessarily based on my book.

and war, and migrants in different eras. It is a microcosm of different states within the United States. Some came directly to Michigan from Europe while others first immigrated to one part of the United States and then migrated to Michigan for economic reasons. Romanies, who travelled near and through the Upper and Lower Peninsulas in Michigan for more than one hundred years, had come from Eastern and Central Europe.

Pic. 1. Gypsy Camp in Michigan, early 20th century. Photo courtesy of State Archives of Michigan.

The Hungarian-Slovak Romanies, the focus of this paper, originally emigrated from Europe to western Pennsylvania, Cleveland, Ohio and Chicago, Illinois and then migrated to Delray, Michigan near Detroit. Knowing historical facts and events locally, nationally and internationally is critical to understanding the past. However, discovering people's personal stories through their own voices, and not through other people's voices, is essential to gain a more complete, authentic picture and understanding of a people. Historical facts contextualise the stories. Only stories or historical facts are not enough; they are necessary to validate each other.

Discriminatory laws and racial profiling by the police and media, and negative advertising against the Romanies and their ethnicity and culture, are pervasive and complicated worldwide and specifically in Michigan. Degrading stereotyping has impacted them socially, politically and economically – their civil and human rights, residency, employment opportunities, and freedom of speech. However, once we engage in conversation with the 'other', the Romanies, it is difficult to maintain our original prejudices, of which we are all guilty. The 'other' is no longer a number but is human just like each of us, with a unique personality, social identity, and history. Oral histories, which I gathered and share from Michigan's Hungarian-Slovak Romani community, reveal a different image of Romanies than that presented by the media or police. They are the first oral histories of Romanies who lived in the United States that are published in a book in the United States.

Who are the Romanies?

Romanies are a huge, complex, diverse group. While some perpetually travel, others live as a segregated minority with family and friends and insulate themselves from the outside world. The origins of the Romanies and their language lie in northern India. Beginning in the fifth century, they began to migrate to Europe. They first arrived in Ægyptus Minor (Little Egypt) in the western Byzantine Empire while the Ottoman Empire was expanding. People confuse this with Egypt and erroneously believe that is their country of origin (Hancock, 1980: 441).

> During their twelve-hundred-year sojourn from India, the Gypsies have endured as landless travellers through the world, subjected to dominant group hostility and violence. Moving from territory to territory, either by desire or force, approximately eight to ten million Gypsies have survived as citizens of the world, living in forty different countries (Sway, 1988: 45).

> To survive, many Romanies do not assimilate with other cultures. We cannot generalise about their complex beliefs or religious identity globally or individually. Some maintain traditional, spiritual beliefs while others have branched out to other religions. Many believe in Romani spirituality. Some are Catholics. Others are Lutherans. "Lost Rom Gypsy Americans are Eastern Orthodox. Today, around the world, Christian fundamentalist revival movements have been sweeping through Rom, Romanichal, and other groups of Gypsies" (Heimlich s/a).

While Europeans initially welcomed Romanies, eventually they rejected and persecuted and hung them. Discrimination propelled migration and once again they encountered prejudice and were forced to migrate. 'Being Non-White, having no country, alien in language, dress and religion, they were quickly and easily targeted as scapegoating' (Hancock, 1995, updated 2021: 1). During the Holocaust, before killing Jews, the Nazis rounded up, sterilised, exterminated up to 1.5 million Romanies and deported others. 'Ironically, on the one hand, the Nazis were killing Romanies – on the other hand, they were listening to their music' (Dregni, 2008: 79).

According to historian Raul Hilberg, discrimination against Romanies in Germany began long before World War II. The Germans created many agencies to address 'Gypsy matters' to persecute them. As early as 1899, the Bavarian government began to track Gypsy migration – fingerprinting them and gathering data about them. By 1929, the German Criminal Commission designated the Munich Office as the Central office for combatting Gypsies. The German Nazis rounded up, tortured, and killed them. German agencies, along with countries which they occupied or with whom they collaborated, were not the only initiators of lethal measures against Gypsies (Hilberg, 2001: 272).

> The Romanian record vis-à-vis Gypsies mirror Romanian activities against Jews… Yugoslavia was another major scene of actions against Gypsies… In Serbia on 30 May 1941 the German military commander issued a decree against Jews and Gypsies…Croatia arrested most of its Jews in 1941 and killed them in Croatia camps. Then, in 1942, the roundup of the Gypsies was ordered on 19 May, and in June thousands of them were transported to the Jasenovac camps, where the large majority eventually perished… Men, women and children died as result of hunger, disease, bullets, or gas because they were Gypsies (Hilberg, 2001: 276 – 277).

Romanies migrate to and within the United States

Many kinds of Romanies exist who came to the United States through a variety of complex migration patterns from Europe. We cannot cover all the Romani groups, their migration paths and all the eras in which they immigrated to the United States, but several sources provide us some information and insight. Some left Europe directly for the United States; others first went to South and Central America, then migrated north to the United States. Hancock said it was hard for Romanies to enter the United States, but that Russian Gypsies bought, 'Argentinian documents

and entered the United States as nationals of that country,' then migrated 'overland along the Pacific coast into the USA' (1987: 108). Some Romanies came by ship from Buenos Aires to New York. Some Romanies also went to Canada first and then entered the United States (Stephens, 2003: 14, 39).

> Romani people commonly known as Gypsies, have been in the Americas since 1498 when Columbus brought some on his third voyage to the West Indies… During the colonial period, Western European countries dealt with their 'Gypsy problem' by transporting them in large numbers overseas; the Spanish shipped Gypsies to their American colonies (including Spanish Louisiana)…; the French sent numbers to the Antilles, and the Scots, English, and Dutch to North America and the Caribbean. Cromwell shipped Romanichal Gypsies i.e., Gypsies from Britain) as slaves to the southern plantations (Hancock, 1995, updated 2021: 1).
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> In the 1700s, Portugal became the first country to deport Romani slaves to work in colonies in India, Brazil, and Africa (National Geographic Education: 2).
>
> In the 1880s…More and more Southern and Central Europeans came to the US, coming from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, from Italy, Turkey, Greece, Russia and Romania…Many Roma came to the States via Cuba, Canada, Mexico or Southern America, from where it was easier to immigrate (Project Education of Roma Children in Europe s/a).

Many Hungarian-Slovak Romani musicians followed Hungarians to Braddock, Pennsylvania, outside Pittsburgh, to work in the steel mills. Some then migrated to Cleveland, and eventually Delray, Michigan, just outside of Detroit. Romanies also followed Hungarian and Serbian immigrants to the Southeast Side of Chicago who worked in the steel mills in the late 1800s until World War I. While they did not want to work in factories, they performed music familiar to these immigrants. The *Mach-waya* came from Serbia and parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with Serbian populations such as Croatia and Vojvodina. The *Kalderash* Gypsies also followed Hungarian immigrants to Chicago (Sway, 2005). 'Gypsies' living in Chicago also migrated to Delray. In the late nineteenth century, Romani band musicians came from Hungary and performed in the 1893 Chicago World's Fair (Bill and Sue…). They also performed in the Great Lakes Exposition (known as the World's Fair) in Cleveland in 1936 (Piskor, 2012: 76).

By 1980, more than half a million Romanies were living in the United States and Canada. Now, 'the largest concentrations of Gypsies are in major urban areas such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Boston, Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Seattle, and Portland' (Sway, 1988: 5). About one million Romanies live in America but hidden from mainstream life. 'Their culture too is insular, and intentionally so, to protect what's theirs. Yet in rented dance halls and event centres, for weddings and anniversaries and birthdays and Super Bowl parties across the United States, American Romani are celebrating with their music' (Dregni, 2008: 250 – 251).

Prejudice against Romanies in Michigan

Racial profiling by the police and media, negative advertising, and discriminatory laws against the Romanies and their ethnicity and culture, have been pervasive and complicated, worldwide. Extensive evidence of discrimination exists in these venues around the world, within the United States and specifically Michigan. The press smears the Romani creating fear and distrust in others. They have been singled out for labour discrimination as a result of prejudicial advertisements for work at fairs. They have also experienced infringement of their First Amendment right of Freedom of Speech. The laws have perpetuated misrepresentation and ignorance and white mainstream society's racial dominance (Mayal, 2004: 275).

> Discrimination against Romanies ("Gypsies") in America dates from colonial times…Romanies were shipped as slaves to Virginia, Jamaica and Barbados from England and Scotland (Dawson, 2001), and to Louisiana from France and Spain (Hancock, 2007: 2).

Stories such as these appeared in local newspapers back in 1913 in the *State Journal*: 'Drive Gypsies from Village, Fowlerville Marshall Succeeds in Getting Rid of Objectionable Band.' Advertisements in entertainment magazines such as *The Billboard* for people to work at county fairs, said, 'No Gypsies, No Drunks or Grifters (scam artists).' Old laws in Michigan included ones such as this: It is 'unlawful for any band of gypsies…to camp in tent, wagon or otherwise, on any public highway in state.'

According to the now late Sandra Ballman-Burke, who stopped at a Michigan campground while on vacation back in the 1980s, while 'Romanies were allowed

to camp, the park rangers and tourists treated them poorly. They described them as dirty. Observation did not support this. Gypsy camp sites were neat and clean' (Ballman-Burke, 1989: 71 – 72).

Travelling has always been a way of life for Romanies who, without their own country, often have had to flee from persecution. They have travelled perpetually from the time they left India. They lived in tents and travelled in wagons or *vardos*. In Europe, they travel by wagon or car. In Michigan, they now travel by automobile. Law enforcement constantly tried to stop them from camping and to quickly move them along to get out of town and the state.

Discrimination and degrading stereotyping have impacted them socially, politically and economically–their civil and human rights, residency, employment opportunities, and freedom of speech for well over one hundred years in the United States. Some laws which unfairly singled out Romanies established early the 20th century are still in existence today. For example,

> Wherever…gypsies shall be located with any municipality…the county department of health or joint county department of health shall have power…to order such (gypsies…) to leave said municipality within the time specified (Pennsylvania Title 53: municipal and Quasi-Municipal corporations, Chapter xvii, Section 3701 (Hancock, 2007: 3).

> Any person may demand of any…gypsies that they shall produce or show their license issued within such county, and if they shall refuse to do so…he shall seize all the property in the passion of such (Gypsies) (Pennsylvania Statues, Section 11803) (Hancock, 2007: 3).

Romanies were and still are frequently discriminated and/or convicted in the press. For example, the *Escanaba Daily Press*, July 12, 1929, reported that 'Gypsies in Town, Travel Right Through,' 'In Gladstone Officer Torval Kallerson assumed the duties of guide, conducting the nomads to the city limits and advising them briefly to be on their way.'

Anti-Romani sentiment is deeply ingrained among police in the United States. Romanies are often presumed guilty of theft by the police and convicted by the legal system without representation or due process. Sergeant William Bradway (now retired), Michigan State Police Detective, and Chairman of the Michigan State Police Gypsy Criminal Activity Task Force in 1985, said 'A "gypsy" is a "wandering

group of people whose main reason to live is to steal"' (Chargon, 1985: 3A and 7A). Similarly, in 2019,

> In October, The Oregonian / OregonLive obtained a flier for a class hosted by the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office and scheduled for December…The class, called "Without Mercy: Criminal Gypsies / Travelers & the Elderly," was canceled shortly after. The Oregonian / OregonLive inquired about it (Acker, 2019).
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> On July 16, 2012 attorneys for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Colorado demanded that Arapahoe County Sheriff J. Grayson Robinson rescind a Sheriff's Office alert titled "Gypsy Scams" that could have resulted in the racial profiling of persons described by the Sheriff's Office as "Gypsies…Similar discriminatory bulletins targeting Gypsies have resulted in litigation against other police departments" (ACLU Colorado, 2021).

Pic. 2. A sign displayed in Escanaba Tourist Park (south Park) in northern Michigan restricts 'Gypsies' and peddlers from camping, reflecting discrimination. Photo courtesy of Delta County Historical Society, circa 1930s.

In a study, conducted by FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University, 2020, Romanies talked about discrimination they experienced because of their origins.

> The extent to which anti-Roma discrimination pervades education, employment, housing, and, most of all, policing, is staggering. In measuring discrimination in the 12 months prior to our survey, we learned that one-third of Romani Americans interviewed had felt discriminated against because of their Romani origins (Matache, 2020: 7).

Hungarian-Slovak Romanies migrate to Delray, Michigan

Hungarian-Slovak Romani families, many of them descendants of famous Romani musicians, began to immigrate to the United States from Europe in the 1880s to escape persecution and seek better economic opportunities. They came from the village of Kassa, Hungary (now Kosice, Slovakia) and other communities, and followed the Hungarians who had settled in Cleveland and Youngstown, Ohio, and in Braddock, Pennsylvania. Along with other immigrants, they worked in the steel mills, in stores, pharmacies, groceries, restaurants, taverns, and the entertainment industry (Piskor, 2012: 1 – 6).

They were attracted by the job opportunities in factories, foundries, and manufacturing plants during a particularly brisk industrial boom in the region. Originally from small and economically disadvantaged rural villages in Hungary, they first tried their luck with farm work in the United States and Canada or worked in mines in West Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Some of them left factory jobs in Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana (Huseby-Darvas, 2003: 17).

More information is known about the Hungarian-Slovak Romanies who migrated primarily from Braddock, Pennsylvania, to Delray than other Romanies who travelled around and through Michigan over many years, often in caravans. In the course of my research, Steve Piskor, originally a member of this community who had migrated to Cleveland, Ohio, introduced them to me to foster trust. They then willingly made themselves available to my conducting oral history interviews with them believing I would respect them and do justice.

> The group commonly referred to in the United States as Hungarian Gypsies represents only one of Hungary's four major Gypsy groups. Most Hungarian Gypsies emigrated [*sic*] to North America from northern Hungary (now Slovakia) during the first two decades of this century (Michigan State University Museum, 1989: 48). These were "the Bashaldey" or "Hungarian-Slovak Roma". They are by far outnumbered in Michigan by the Vlax Roma and Romanichal Roma (Hancock, email: February 2016).

Hungarian immigrants worked for Henry Ford for five dollars a day—more than they had earned in the steel mills in the Pittsburgh area – and opened up restaurants and bars where the Romanies who migrated then played their music.

> Delray…was a magnet for Windsorites (from Canada), who crossed over to Detroit by bridge, ferry-boat and tunnel, to visit relatives, to attend churches or church-functions, to dine and dance at favourite hot-spots (Ne Tovabb, Kovacs Bar, Hungarian Village and so many others) to the beat of Gypsy orchestras (Janos Brenkacs, Ziggy Bela), to buy imported foods from Hungary (preserves, paprika from Szeged, salamis, etc.) and of course to attend the movie theatre which featured Hungarian film stars such as Javor Pal, Kabos Gyula (Huseby-Darvas, 2003: 24).

'Sometimes they also performed music in Windsor, Canada, and in turn, those Romanies who lived in Windsor sometimes came to perform in Delray' (Huseby-Darvis, email, 2017). In 1936, sociologist Erdmann Doane Beynon studied Hungarian immigrants and then the Romani immigrants in Detroit and wrote a rare documentation of them.

> The avowed purpose of the Hungarian Gypsies in their migration to Detroit was… to furnish music for the various entertainments, which constitute the major part of the leisure-time activities of a Hungarian group... This situation led to an increased migration of musician Gypsies to Detroit, to a raising of the fee for their services, and to an effort by Gypsies who were not already professional musicians to share in this lucrative employment (Beynon, 1936: 364 – 9).

Gene Scott of the Detroit Retired City Employees Association wrote about the challenges of coping with Detroit's environmental pollution, specifically in Delray.

> From the beginning, the people of Delray struggled daily to survive in the midst of heavy manufacturing, everything from copper pots to trains, in the factories along West Jefferson (then called River Road). A large section of the village was developed for the International Exposition Grounds – a favourite amusement centre for Detroiters in the 1890s and in 1894, the Michigan State Fair. But the fun didn't last long, not with pervasive factory fumes in the air. A soda-ash processing plant went up on the old fairgrounds…During the Great Depression people came from all over to hear the Gypsy music on the streets of Delray, but by the 1940s, most of the older groups were moving away (Scott, 2001: 27).

Robert Takacs, (a non-Romani) whose parents emigrated from Hungary, said he enjoyed listening to the Romani perform music in Delray at weddings, picnics, and dances and at Estral Beach on Lake Erie in the summer.

> I'll tell you, growing up in Delray – it was a good life. The people working all the time. They kept the area very neat. The streets were nice and clean. People kept their grasses cut nice and everything, and you would see them outside, sitting on the sidewalk on the nice warm days…There were no problems, no crime, nothing. You didn't have to worry about walking the streets at dark, leaving your home open. You could go to church and you could leave your stuff on the stove being cooked, and nobody would ever enter your home or nothing like that. People were always friendly with one another…The kids – we'd go out and play in the field… We'd build our own skating ponds in the winter.

Hungarian-Slovak Romani musicians settle in Delray

During the 20th century, the Hungarian-Slovak Romani community of Delray supported a rich musical scene. While musicians originally played traditional Romani and Hungarian music, over time, they adapted to the changing demands, requests, and opportunities from the larger society and expanded their repertoire and venues. They showed amasing versatility and innovation as they learned all kinds of music for a variety of audiences. They played at festivals, weddings, funerals, picnics, and old-time dance music for Henry Ford's events and his radio shows, and for the Hungarian Radio Hour, in restaurants and bars (many of them Hungarian), on records, and in concerts for the Federal Music Project as part of the United States Works Progress Administration. 'Music is the vehicle for enacting social relationships and enhancing status. It is also a commodity to sell to non-Roma and other Roma' (Silverman, 2012: 4).

Romanies have played the violin but also other instruments, including keyboard instruments, guitar, saxophone, and the cimbalom. The cimbalom is an elaborate stringed instrument of the dulcimer family used in small ensembles by Central European Romani (Piskor, 2012: 14 – 15).

Industrialist Henry Ford, who founded the Ford Motor Company and developed the assembly line technique of mass production, had an affinity for dance music and Romani musicians. In 1924, he created the 'Henry Ford Old Fashioned Dance Orchestra' to try to preserve old-fashioned music and counteract the new wave of jazz.

> The orchestra consisted of a violin, a sousaphone (tuba) or bass fiddle, a dulcimer, and a cimbalom…The cimbalom player was a Gypsy from Braddock by the name of William Hallup; the Gypsies called him "Skinny." Hallup was one of the first Roma to move to Detroit from Braddock Pennsylvania (Piskor, 2012: 135 – 136).

Eugene J. Farkas, an immigrant from Kald, Hungary, became an engineer for the Ford Motor Company. Ford asked him to find a cimbalom player for his music band, which he did. During an oral history interview conducted in 1954, Farkas reminisced,

> They started to play some Hungarian pieces, which was all right. It was all nice music, but it didn't impress Mr. Ford very much I noticed. So, I said, if Mr. Ford had any particular pieces that he would like to hear, these boys could play anything. He had some sheet music of different things that probably these fellows never heard of before. I remember one very well, "When you and I were young, Maggie." Right away they started to play that, and they played it beautifully. I could see the expression on Mr. Ford's face was entirely different…The Romani musicians worried that they could injure themselves working in the factory and then they would not be able to play their music. Initially some of them worked in the plant, but eventually they no longer had to. Mr. Ford suggested that we take the whole band and put them to work in the factory. Well, they weren't very enthused… "Well, we can't work on machines. Suppose our hands got hurt. We'll never be able to play again." They were perfectly right (The Reminiscences of…, 1954: 333 – 343).

Romanies played music in Hungarian restaurants and bars and on the streets of Delray as early as 1907. Kovacs Bar, a neighbourhood bar and restaurant, was a regular venue for Romani musicians, established around 1944 by Hungarians who had migrated from Ohio to Delray.

> In the 1930s the Hungarian population of Detroit was growing as well as the Gypsy population. Hungarian restaurants and clubs were opening, such as the Hungarian Village Restaurant. Gypsy music was in demand…Many of the young Gypsy musicians from Braddock (Pennsylvania) were now adult Gypsies in Detroit. This new era of Gypsies in Detroit would go on to produce some of the finest Gypsy musicians (Piskor, 2012: 129).

Multitalented, multigenerational Romani musicians have a rich history in Michigan. They told stories through their own voices about their memories, identity, prejudices and challenges.

Pic. 3. Hungarian Village Restaurant, Delray, Michigan, 1930s. Photo courtesy of Burton Collection, Detroit Public Library.

Their stories and lives do not resonate with images portrayed in the media. Ziggy Bela (name and spellings vary), whose real name was Julius Margitza, was the most famous violinist from the Delray community who performed traditional Romani music. As a child, Ziggy moved from Braddock, Pennsylvania, to Delray. In the 1950s, he started his famous 'Gypsy Picnic' Concerts which attracted national attention and hundreds of people attended (Piskor, 2012: 131).

Musical talent and abilities often run multi-generationally throughout Romani families. Ziggy's nephew, Richard Margitza, a violinist, studied at the Detroit Institute of Musical Arts with Carl Chase, a Detroit Symphony violinist. He then studied with Mischa Mischakoff who was one of the greatest concert masters with conduc-

tor Arturo Toscanini with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. Margitza performed all over the world and played in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for almost forty years. He also played with the Motown Record Corporation with Michael Jackson and the Supremes. Eventually, he developed severe arthritis in his hand and retired to the Las Vegas area where a community of Romani live and perform.

Gus Horvath was a famous cimalom player, born in Braddock, Pennsylvania in 1916 and moved to Delray. Horvath's cimbalom skills were among the best, and he was known throughout America, Canada, and Europe (Piskor, 2012: 133).[1] His daughter, Elaine Horvath Moise, now in her eighties, reminised about growing up in Delray.

> We'd go out at night. We'd get all dressed up and go out. We'd walk down the street, and everybody would call out. It wians coming over my house. They would have drinks, play the music and enjoy that. That's was just enjoyable, living there. This is what we heard all the time, was Gypsy music…You never were alone, there was always somebody coming or going, and we would just enjoy all of them. We always had musicians. My father loved music, so he always had the older men musichat they loved to do, that was their thing, to play their instruments. Mostly Gypsy. Hungarian-Gypsy music…He was a perfectionist.

For years now, well-known guitarist and vocalist Billy (Slepsky) Rose (stage name) now in his eighties, played traditional Gypsy music and jazz and has performed in Delray, Downtown Detroit, and throughout the Midwest. As an adolescent, he even played with Bob Hope. Today, he plays in the Metro Detroit area with his son, Chris Slepsky, a multi-instrumentalist whose primary instrument is drums, and his granddaughter Lauren Slepsky-Chicko, a contemporary jazz vocalist, in her twenties.[2] While the Slepskys are a family of musicians, some have day jobs while others do not. Billy Rose's Dad worked for General Motors. Billy Rose had his own hot dog stand for a few years but played music all his life. His son, Chris, now sixty, who performs in restaurants, played music in Las Vegas and worked as a dealer at a casino. He also does heat and plumbing work now. One relative is a doctor, others are

[1] One of his recordings is: https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00ITGTCBU/ref=dm_ws_tlw_trk1 (accessed 31 August 2021).

[2] He can be heard on YouTube. 'Rare Hungarian-Slovak Gypsy Concert in Detroit', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgXED2Hrxo4; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfvZluerjtk and 'Soon You'll Leave Me' / tango: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5RdJXr6xhQ (accessed 31 August 2021).

nurses, one is a dental assistant, another worked in payroll. One of Chris' cousins, Justin Shandor, is an Elvis Presley impersonator in Las Vegas.[3] The Chris Rose Quintet can be heard at the Montreux Jazz Festival.[4]

Billy (Slepsky) Rose reminisced about his musical career.

> It was about 1947. I was playing in Downtown Detroit in a beautiful Italian restaurant called Giovanni's on Temple and Woodward Avenue. We used to play there from two until five o'clock in the morning, when all the other bars and restaurants would close. I met a lot of great entertainers that would come in there. When I was 17 years old, we even played alongside Bob Hope. He and his singer, Billy Farrell, would come in all the time. Many great entertainers and movie stars would come there as well, including Anthony Quinn.

Pic. 4. Chris Slepsky (left), Lauren Slepsky-Chicko and Billy Rose (stage name) practice their music in Dearborn, 2016. Photo: M. A. Bloomfield.

[3] http://www.justinshandor.com/ (accessed 31 August 2021).
[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tdE6Uth9pY and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5Rk-KzKEaOo (accessed 31 August 2021).

> Our life revolves around family, food, and music. I especially love our traditional Gypsy music. Our Gypsy music used to thrive, as we would play in large ensembles and orchestras, extending back many centuries. For many years, I used to perform with many large ensembles. Our Gypsy music has been passed down for generations. My father, Arpad Slepsky, was also a musician. He played the viola and performed the role of a second violinist. His father, John Slepsky, was also a musician who would perform in New York and Slovakia. My maternal grandfather, Louis Rakoczi, was a violinist and orchestra leader who performed with a large Gypsy orchestra in Braddock, Pennsylvania, where most of our Roma community settled in America once they emigrated from Europe in the 1890s. Our culture and music really thrived in Braddock, Pennsylvania, where I was born, and also in Delray, where our community settled once we migrated to the Detroit area in the 1930s and 1940s.

Multitalented keyboard musician Don De Andre had an eclectic, extensive musical career. Born in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, he moved to Cleveland, then Chicago and Delray and now lives in the Las Vegas area. His father was a musician who played violin and bass fiddle and who had a day job in a factory. From the time Don was nine years old, he played the piano and then the accordion with his father in the Polish bars and halls, Hungarian houses and Mexican clubs on weekends while still going to school during the week. As an adult, he played in hotels, bars, and restaurants and performed 'backup' for many celebrities – for comedians such as Joey Bishop and Phil Tucker. He performed at Motown, played at famous nightclubs including Chez Paree in Chicago, and on the ferry from Detroit to Boblo Island in Michigan. When his name was on the marquee, 'That was one of the biggest things in my life! Vegas, headline!'

De Andre's daughter, the late Renee Andrea Bandy, a vocalist, was born in Chicago, moved to Delray and then Las Vegas. She became a cosmologist, managed Ginopolas, a restaurant in Greek Town, Detroit, raised her children and was a caretaker for her mother and father. Her mom was a cocktail waitress, a waitress, coat check girl at the Ponchtrain Hotel in Detroit and bartender at the Town Grill in Dearborn. 'My mom would tell me as a little girl, "Don't you go out of the yard. The Gypsies will steal you.", I wouldn't go out of the yard, because I feared the Gypsies and I was a Gypsy! But we are different. Like I said, there's more education involved.'

Not all Hungarian-Slovak Romanies were musicians. Casey Kanalos who was born in 1937 in Delray, Michigan, grew up there and currently lives in Lebanon

Pennsylvania. His family were 'Zemp' Gypsies, who emigrated from Slovakia to the United States in the early 20th century and worked for the steel industry for Bethlehem Steel in Pennsylvania. They lived in Lyndora. Then, his family moved to Delray, Michigan, to work in the burgeoning automobile industry. He served in the United States Air Force for twenty-one years, travelled to thirty-two countries, worked in the Fire Protection Service for eighteen years and worked with the Boy Scouts of America for seventy years. He now lives in Pennsylvania. He said,

Pic. 5. Casey Kanalos (furthest left) with friends in Delray, Michigan, circa 1946. Photo courtesy of Casey Kanalos.

> My father, Steve Kanalos, was the *primas* violinist, who played in the Steve Kanalos Band. My family worked in factories and music was a secondary income. They had their horse and buggies to drive to their gigs. They were a close-knit family and took care of each other. We never locked. We had block parties. We were poor but we did not know it. Most of my family lived on three streets in Delray – 65% of the people were related. I am proud of who I am. I am proud of what my parents had given me and my grandparents. They have given me love. They've given me tradition. Oh, they've given me respect for others. Now, we didn't know much about ethnic groups, where we were raised. To us, we were known as two things: you were either Catholic or Protestant and that was all we knew. Now we're known as Gypsy.

Discrimination in the Hungarian-Slovak Romani Delray community

Several interviewees talked about prejudice against Romanies and shared their experiences. For several years, Lauren Slepsky-Chick worked in a hotel in Dearborn and is now pursuing her dreams and talents, teaching voice at Guitar Center, an American national music store with 294 locations. She talked about the challenges growing up because of her minority ethnicity as a 'Gypsy' in a multi-ethnic community in the Dearborn area.

> If something goes missing at work or if there is a problem that is not of our own doing, we are the ones who are going to be blamed because all that is in people's minds are the stereotypes. Most of the people we went to school in Dearborn and Delray that our parents and grandparents grew up with, knew we were Gypsy. However, you go out into the world today and they're not exposed to our culture, and it's just too foreign for them to understand. If they ask what your ethnicity is, and you tell them, all you hear about are the stereotypes: "Wow, are you a traveller? Are you a fortune teller?" The other reaction is that they have no idea what it means, and people respond with something such as, "You're a Gypsy? What is that? What do you mean you're a Gypsy, is that a real thing?" Sometimes, they just think you're joking or being sarcastic and just laugh and smirk, "Yeah right, you're a Gypsy." It's just very difficult and frustrating to respond to any of these reactions. How do you explain your whole culture and your whole being in a couple of sentences to someone you've just met? In most instances you feel that you already have to defend yourself that you're a real person, with real morals, and a real culture that explains who you are and that it's not anything like the stereotypes. Most of us won't say we're Gypsy to the outside world because if we do, we are looked upon and judged differently. All of a sudden, we're so different than we really are, and so different than everyone else.

Richard Margitza's son, Rick, a well-known, international saxophonist, performer, composer, and music professor, lives in Paris. He was born in Delray and moved with his family to Dearborn. He attended Wayne State University, Berklee College of Music in Boston and the University of Miami. Eventually, he moved to New Orleans to play, then New York. He has performed and/or recorded with many famous musicians including Miles Davis. His most recent recording, *Bohemia*, on the French label Nocturne, is his most personal, in which he explores his Gypsy roots by

tracing Romanies' origin from India across Eastern Europe. YouTubes are available to listen to him talk and perform.[5]

> I think for a long time, in our culture we were just told just say you are Hungarian. Don't say you're Gypsy, because when you say that people immediately assume that you steal, and you tell fortunes and stuff that you see in the movies. There are definitely some misunderstood aspects with the Gypsies, especially…in Romania. Anti-Gypsy sentiments still are in Germany and Austria. It's pretty sad to see that. But, in general it's not as misunderstood as it is in the States. I think that's because there hasn't been that much correct information or information in general about where the Gypsies really are and where they came from. It's just ignorance, which means uninformed; maybe they're not as curious.

Victor Moise was a Senior Vice President at several Wall Street firms and is currently retired. He played hockey at the University of Michigan. He is the grandson of the famous cimbalom player, Gus Horvath. He attended the Holy Cross Hungarian Catholic Church grade school where there was tremendous angst between the Hungarians and the Gypsies. He said,

> I was an altar boy, so I served mass with the pastor all the time…my Gypsy cousins were not focused on scholastics studies, they didn't make their grades, 'cause they were focusing on music. Their parents had them playing music all night, they didn't care about school 'cause they had to be there. But I was different, I was focused on scholastics…I got all A's. And he would hand out the report cards to the whole class. Start off by saying, would all the Gypsies stand up? He would ostracise us. My cousins would all stand up, and they all had horrible grades and he would just rip 'em. "No good Gypsy, your parents don't care, I don't know why you're in this school, why can't you get good grades, you guys are all dummies…" and then I'll never forget when he came to me, he gave me a look and said, "You're not a Gypsy." I stood there, now think about this, I'm probably fifth grade, here's the pastor, this great figure of authority, right? "No, I am Gypsy." After that I was never afraid to tell anybody. And he just shook his head and handed out my report card. He couldn't say anything, 'cause I had all A's. And then, when he died, my brother and I served that mass. Served his funeral mass. After

[5] https://youtu.be/Sg1qGoDY1Eo; https://youtu.be/f0eYudp9TlU; https://youtu.be/YcvGLgRtNHM; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPahOOW7k2g and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mblJnzPQpZE (accessed 31 August 2021).

> we went to the cemetery and they did a little service there and they were putting him in the ground. I was emotional and there were lots of clergy and some family members. And I said, "Father Jacobs, I just want to let you know, that it's a Gypsy here today, putting you in that ground. May God bless you." And that was it and everyone looked at me. It just came out. I had to tell him. I want to remind you that it's a Gypsy putting you in that ground 'cause he was so prejudiced against the Gypsies, yet he accepted me.

The Delray community fades

Over the years, sadly Hungarian-Slovak Romanies along with other immigrants moved again this time out of Delray, particularly to the Dearborn area, including Allen Park, Southgate, and Warren, and to Nevada and California. The demand for Romani music faded but they adapted and perform jazz in hotels, nightclubs, and bars. Both external and internal factors of a cultural, economic, and transportation nature caused the Romani music community to disperse. First, Interstate 75 was constructed in 1964, which cut Delray off from Detroit, limiting people's mobility and ease to traverse the city (Maidenberg, 1969: 4B). After the 1967 Detroit uprising, many immigrants and their businesses moved to other communities. The intense factory pollution factor also pushed people out of the community (Trauth-Jurman, 2014: 124).

Delray, now a very run-down community, once had about 23,000 people, mostly immigrants, and now has about 2,300 people. As the community aged, most of the younger Romani generation has been moving away from music careers. While the Romani community from Delray is now dispersed, they still have strong bonds with each another and remain in close contact and still travel back and forth to Braddock, Cleveland, and Chicago, Nevada and Los Angeles to visit, attend family and friends' celebrations, and perform music gigs.

The original Hungarian restaurants such as the Hungarian Village Restaurant have been demolished. Kovacs Bar was destroyed on November 6, 2017, to make way for the construction of the Gordy Howe Bridge to Canada (Dudar, 2017). Many younger people have also not wanted to carry on the tradition playing Romani music. Today, some Romanies still perform in different ethnic restaurants – Middle Eastern, Italian, Cuban, and others in the Dearborn area and downtown Detroit. Restaurateurs also realised it was cheaper to have background recorded music in

restaurants rather than hire live performers. On rare occasions, it is possible to hear musicians perform Romani music in Dearborn, Chicago, and Cleveland.

The Slepsky family once lived in Delray and moved to Dearborn along with most members of the Romani community in the 1960s and 1970s. The community thrived in Dearborn, up to the early 1990s. Some have migrated to Las Vegas. They talked about the disappearing community of musicians, but still the importance of coming together for family celebrations. They, like other Romani, mourn the loss of the vibrant music and community who once lived close together. Lauren Slepsky-Chicko said,

> I grew up seeing a lot of our grandparents' and parents' generations and remember them visiting each other's homes very frequently, hearing our traditional gypsy music, cooking the traditional Eastern European cuisine, attending large funerals with tons of musicians, huge weddings where people would have a great time and enjoyed lots of dancing to both traditional and more contemporary music. Even the older generation of women, after you'd have dinner at a wedding, they'd begin the dancing… the Chardas – it's a dance they did in a circle – while a large number of traditional Gypsy musicians played their instruments. It was just very and cultural, so beautiful. Their generations grew up hearing our music played constantly in their homes by musicians in their families. Their parents were first- or second-generation immigrants so it was normal then, that you heard that kind of music all the time. So, growing up, I always thought this was all going to be a part of our lives and culture forever. And then, we started to see all of these things die out as the older generations passed on. My generation watched most of our culture fade in Dearborn and Las Vegas partially because there are not a lot of opportunities for live music and musicians anymore, because our people are meeting growing desires to excel in other fields, were better able to meet financial obligations and allow for greater success and assimilation into American society.

Her father, Chris Slepsky, said,

> My father (Billy Rose) taught us how to play the American jazz standards when we were kids. Other cultures of people used to love to hear our traditional music and would come to hear them perform and seek out our musicians for parties and entertainment. However, the audience and desire to hear the traditional music of that era just kind of died… it's sad that it's dying here in America. After the last of my father's generation, it will be gone.

Billy Rose sadly agreed,

> Our music is gone here. Nobody listens to it. There's nobody to play it for. We used to play when our people would get married; there would be many musicians playing as the bride would be processing out of the house and going to the church, playing by the church as the wedding party processed, or at funerals – the same thing. Many musicians would play at the funeral parlour for the deceased, and they would follow on the way to the church in a procession of musicians, and then to the cemetery We played at Hungarian parties, Jewish bar mitzvahs, parties and weddings throughout Detroit because people loved the music. I loved to play Hungarian music with the orchestra, the Gypsy orchestra. No one wants to hear this music anymore, and many don't even know of it. Soon it will be gone forever.

Conclusion

Today, Romanies from Delray, who came from other mid-western states and before that from Hungary and Slovakia, still migrate across the United States from the Midwest to Nevada, California, Texas, and elsewhere to live close to family and friends or for jobs. Those who had once lived in Delray moved to the Dearborn area and Las Vegas to work or retire. Sometimes, they return to Michigan where their friends and family live. When a relative or friend dies or gets married, Romanies travel long distances to attend these life-cycle events. Some perform traditional Romani music at the occasions. While they originally came to the United States to flee prejudice and seek better employment opportunities, they migrated within the United States for economic reasons and to be close to family. Despite their constant moving, they always maintain close family ties and are amazingly resilient and culturally identified.

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Rescuing animals in Bulgaria – or foreigners with causes*

Plamena Stoyanova

Abstract: In 2000, the first 'Dancing Bear Park' was opened in Bulgaria. Located on the southern side of the Rila Mountains, in the vicinity of the town of Belitsa, it became a sanctuary for nearly 30 bears that had been rescued from a life of street entertainment. The park was created with the active participation and support of the French actress Brigitte Bardot and was one of the first examples of animal sanctuaries built with the help of a foreign citizen. The world-famous star never lived in Bulgaria, but today many expats who have settled or reside in the country also have a special attitude towards the animals here and Bulgarian nature in general. Moreover, for some, taking care of local street animals has become a mission. This paper will explore their reasons for devoting themselves to the care of street animals and to the preservation of Bulgarian nature. The research will also try to answer the question: 'What do Bulgarians learn from these foreigners?'
Keywords: migration, pets, animal shelters, rescue animal organisation

Introduction

Volunteering has become an increasingly popular topic in recent decades (McFarland, 2005; McKee, 2007). The causes are diverse, and the willingness of more and more people to donate some of their free time, skills, and efforts are creating a specific kind of culture (Boneham, 2015; Budd, 2009; Lanham, 2015; Woods, 2010). Today, many people support causes and spend months or years of their lives travelling and volunteering. It is a great way to integrate into a new country, make new friends or express your own beliefs for a better world. In 2000, when the French actress Brigitte Bardot opened the first 'Dancing Bear Park' in Bulgaria, she did exactly this – expressed her belief in a better life for these wild animals. Located on the southern side of the Rila Mountains in the vicinity of the town of Belitsa, the park became a sanctuary for nearly 30 bears that had been rescued from a life of street entertainment. The park was created with the active participation and sup-

* This article is the result of my participation in the project 'Cultural Adaptation and Integration of Immigrants in Bulgaria' (ДН 20/8 – 11.12.2017), financed by the Bulgarian Science Fund.

port of the world-famous star Brigitte Bardot and was one of the first examples of animal sanctuaries built with the help of a foreign citizen. Bardot never lived in Bulgaria, but today many of the expats who have settled or reside in the country also share a specific attitude towards the animals here and the Bulgarian nature in general. Moreover, for some, taking care of the local street animals has become a mission. This paper will explore their reasons for devoting themselves to the care of street animals and the preservation of Bulgarian nature (frognews.bg, 2020; bnr.bg, 2019). It is an attempt to shed some light on this little-studied issue by describing an intriguing aspect of foreigners' lives in the country. I will share a few examples of this particular group of expats in Bulgaria and will try to answer the questions: Who are these people, and what drives them? Why do they choose Bulgaria for their activities? How do they collaborate with local organisations in the country? What are the differences between the approaches of foreigners and Bulgarians regarding animal welfare, and what can we learn from them? To answer these questions, I will use press publications about foreigners rescuing animals in Bulgaria, as well as interviews with volunteers and representatives of street animal organisations, along with my personal experience since this is a cause that is close to my heart as well.

Despite the fact that this paper starts with a story about rescued bears, its focus will be on pets and street cats and dogs in Bulgaria. The topic of wild animals will also be briefly discussed since it is an important aspect of the Bulgarian policy towards animals as a whole. The time period covered in this paper starts after 2007 when Bulgaria became a member of the European Union. At that time, the first animal shelters in Bulgaria were found, and a more humane attitude towards stray animals was adopted. Many shelters and animal rescue organisations were created thanks to the funds, regulations, and expertise of the European Union. These institutions were set up to deal with the rising populations of street cats and dogs in a more humane way. During the socialist period in Bulgaria and until the political changes in 1989, this problem had a radical solution with the local authorities periodically killing stray cats and dogs throughout the country. At that time, the dancing bears and monkeys on the streets of Bulgaria, which were the main income of the Romani group called *Rudari,* were seen as just an exotic attraction. However, everything started changing after the fall of communism in Bulgaria when some of the old practices were abandoned, others were forbidden, and still, others had to be transformed. Killing animals started to be viewed as a non-effective and barbaric way of controlling the street animal population. The new practices required the neutering of

stray dogs (later cats, as well), as well as chipping and returning of nonaggressive animals to the areas where they were captured. Another approach included neutering and providing medical care to stray animals, which were then kept in the animal shelters, waiting for adoption.

However, it took time before the implementation of the new practices started to produce results. That is why, within just a few years, Bulgaria became 'flooded' with street animals. Many people were even attacked by 'gangs of street dogs' (dw.com, 2012; mediapool, 2012). In 2012, for example, 400 people from the capital city of Sofia needed medical attention after being bitten by dogs (mediapool, 2012). Among them was Botio Tachkov, a professor from Columbia University, New York, and a former advisor to the United Nations. He was a famous economist whose published books can be found in the most significant libraries around the world. The professor was practically mauled to death by a pack of dogs in broad daylight in one of the capital's suburbs, Malinova Dolina (24chasa.bg, 2012). After this serious incident (sadly, neither the first one nor the last) 81% of Sofia's citizens agreed that the neutering and returning of stray animals in the same area by the Animal organisations should not be the only approach to this serious issue and that the aggressive street dogs had to be euthanised (mediapool, 2012 a). That same year, the street dogs' problem was singled out as the most pressing issue in the capital (ibid.). People blamed the government for being irresponsible, and the animal protection organisations – private or run by local government agencies, like Ekoravnovesie – were accused of being corrupted. However, none of these incidents and the resulting public outrage led to a solution to the problem of stray animals in the country.

Foreigners who choose to help

Three years after the above-mentioned events, in 2015, a young German girl named Rozalina received a job proposal in Bulgaria. She had majored in Bulgarian Philology at her university in Germany and the unexpected opportunity appealed to her. She accepted the job and has been living in Sofia, Bulgaria, ever since. Rozalina shared that one of her first impressions of the Bulgarian capital was the significant number of stray animals: 'First, naturally and unfortunately, it struck me that there are a lot of dogs on the streets. Coming from Germany – this is not a common sight there', she says (dnevnik.com, 2021).

In Germany, stray animal populations are under control. The strict rules for pet neutering, as well as the laws against the abandoning of pets, are giving good results. However, despite the fact that many similar laws and regulations have also been adopted in Bulgaria, the results here are quite different. For Rozalina, the street dogs of Sofia quickly became a mission. She decided to help as many street dogs as she could to find homes, helping at the same time many people to find a pet and a friend for life (ibid.). With this in mind, Rozalina started volunteering at a dog shelter in Gorni Bogrov, one of the three shelters in the municipality of Sofia run by the local government agency *Ekoravnovesie*. Well known to be big and crowded, it has the capacity to accommodate 1500 dogs, most of which are living in cages, which makes them feel frustrated and sad. The shelter is open for volunteers every day of the week from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., when people can come to help with various activities, including daily dog walks and dog adoptions (ekoravnovesie.com). Rozalina admits that most dogs find homes abroad since there is a strong stigma in Bulgaria against stray mixed-breed dogs, which makes it harder for them to be adopted in the country. However, that is not the case in Germany and in the Netherlands. Most of the dogs at the Gorni Bogrov shelter (bnr.bg, 2012), including many disabled animals, who have almost no chance of finding a family in Bulgaria, are luckier abroad. One of these puppies adopted from Bulgaria – Mina – was even declared a hero in Germany after she rescued her seventy-five-year-old owner during a fire accident (mediapool, 2019). The dog was adopted in 2016 with the help of the Bonn Animal Protection Movement. According to the information given by the local animal shelter there, every month, three dogs from various Bulgarian shelters arrive and find new homes in Germany (ibid.).

Many animal rescue organisations throughout the country share the same experience – more street animals are adopted in the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, and the UK. Every month buses with dozens of animals leave Bulgaria for adoption abroad. For example, in the last ten years, Animal Rescue Sofia – a big animal protection organisation – helped with the adoptions of 7017 street animals, mostly in the Netherlands. And this is only one of many such associations in Bulgaria. Among the volunteers, there are many foreigners living in Bulgaria. They help with raising funds, providing foster care, and adopting local street animals. There are foreign volunteers practically in every animal protection organisation in Bulgaria. Some of them even partner with locals to find new animal protection associations. For example, *Dare 2 Care Animals* was founded in 2014 by a man from Turkey and his

Bulgarian wife. They work with many foreign volunteers, who, as M. says: 'are also shocked by the huge population of street cats and dogs in Bulgaria' (M., woman, 38 years old, Sofia, December 2018).

> 'To be honest', adds her husband, there are plenty of street animals in Turkey as well, but the culture of taking care of them in our society is totally different (O., man, 40 years old, Sofia, December 2018).

Turkey indeed has a different approach towards street animals. There are many popular Youtube videos and articles about Turkish people not only feeding the strays but also letting them spend the night in their shops during the coldest season. The public love of animals in Istanbul has even attracted the attention of some documentary filmmakers, and a few years ago, a touching documentary titled 'Kedi' ('The street cats of Istanbul')[1] gained huge international popularity. As the movie explains:

> In Istanbul, the cat is not just a cat. Without the cat, Istanbul would lose a part of its soul. They aren't pets, but they aren't feral either. And they have the whole city taking care of them.[2]

Communities are taking it upon themselves to feed the cats, placing food and water on sidewalks and in stores. They even take the cats to the vet when they get hurt. (ibid.)

In 2021, one more documentary was released, this time dedicated to the street dogs in the ancient city, called 'Stray' (washingtonpost.com, 2021). As the author of the movie Elisabeth Lo shares: 'People really see dignity in the dogs, they see them as fellow citizens, as belonging to their streets and communities' (ibid.).

But the public is not alone in taking care of the street animals in the cosmopolitan city. Istanbul is home to some 400,000 to 600,000 stray dogs and cats that are under the official care of the veterinary services working for the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. Their staff leaves food at hundreds of locations around the city, carries out spay-neuter operations, and performs surgeries on injured dogs and cats (washingtonpost.com, 2021). On the streets of Istanbul, you can often see special vending machines that accept plastic bottles for recycling and in return, they dis-

[1] See 'Kedi' at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbOwxitIEW0 (accessed 20 August 2021).

[2] Ibid.

pense water and food to stray dogs and cats. These days these machines can be seen in Sofia as well. Sadly, they are not always welcome by the citizens of the Bulgarian capital. For example, after a businessman installed one of those vending machines near the municipal building of Triaditsa, Sofia, the local authorities soon started receiving complaints. One of the complainants even tried to remove the vending machine by force (nova.bg, 2022). She argued: ‘I am also taking care of my pets, but at home, not on the streets’. This case shows some differences between Bulgaria and its southern neighbour in their public attitudes towards the strays. According to Omer, the founder of *Dare 2 Care Animals*, the main difference is that the Bulgarians do not know how to properly take care not only of their street animals but also of their own pets.

> They think that if you feed and love your cat or dog, that’s enough. But it is not. Food is not enough; love is not enough. To really take care of a pet, you have to move to a different level. The pet should be neutered, the windows of the owner’s home should be safe; the pet should visit the vet once every six months, etc. This is what real care means (O., man, 40 years old, Sofia, December 2018).

Dare 2 Care Animals conducts rescue operations, provides medical care, and helps to adopt stray cats from the streets of Sofia. The adoption candidates need to be able to prove that they can provide a safe and comfortable home for their adopted cat. They also have to sign a legal document requiring them to inform the organisation if at some point in the future they are no longer able to take care of their adopted pet. These are the guiding work principles in most international Animal Rescue Organisations, which try to provide maximum good care and security for the adopted animals. To finance its activities before the COVID-19 pandemic, *Dare to Care Animals* used to organise charity bazaars.

> That is how things work here. Bulgarians still don’t have the habit of regularly donating a percentage of their income to charity. However, if they can pay and receive something in return, they are ready to do it (ibid.).

At one of those charity events in 2019, I met three international vet students in Bulgaria. Two were from the United Kingdom, and one was from Cyprus. All of them had adopted street animals during the first year of their studies in Bulgaria. The two Brits had adopted dogs, and the girl from Cyprus – a cat. They were all planning to

return home with their new pets after graduation. When I asked them why they had adopted animals in Bulgaria when they knew they would be here for four years only, their answer was the following:

> We are used to having pets. Always. After all, we are studying to be vets. And there are just so many street animals everywhere in Bulgaria. There are so many strays here that you can just take an animal home without having to go through any animal rescue agency, without having to sign any adoption papers (K., man, 26 years old, December 2019).

The responsibility of bringing their adopted pets with them to their home countries was not viewed as some kind of an inconvenience by students but rather as the most natural thing in the world. I had observed the same philosophy a few years earlier while interviewing a young lady who was just settling down in the village of Hotnitsa, Veliko Tarnovo region. The village is well known for its strong community of expats who have bought a property and have settled there, which is what had attracted Loren in the first place. In 2018, she immigrated from Australia with her two dogs and a cat. By the time we met, she was already taking care of one Bulgarian street dog and a few local cats (L., woman, 34 years old, Hotnitsa, May 2020).

The expats in Bulgaria who are adopting the strays are doing it with full awareness of their responsibility for the animal. They accept their adopted dogs or cats as members of their own families that could not be abandoned under any circumstances. However, this is not the case for some Bulgarian pet owners, for whom their cats or dogs constitute a mix between a cute toy and some type of entertainment. These are the kind of pet owners who end up being the main contributors to the constant flow of newborn animals flooding the Bulgarian streets – scared, dejected, and disoriented kittens and puppies. These are the same pet owners who choose not to neuter their pets either because they don't want to spend money on the vet fees or because they believe that it is the 'right' of every animal to be given the opportunity to produce offspring. However, these same people easily abandon newborn kittens and puppies on deserted roads and near rivers, far away from their moms. That is one of the main reasons why, despite the numerous Animal Rescue organisations in Bulgaria, the problem is constant, and the population of street animals remains big. The lack of success in controlling this kind of irresponsible pet owner behaviour could be partly explained by the fact that animals in Bulgaria are not properly pro-

tected against the cruel treatment of people. The official laws view cruelty towards and the killing of animals as crimes. However, for many years, there was no proper institution to oversee the following and implementation of the law. It was only in 2018, after a lot of public pressure on the government, that the first Animal Police in Bulgaria was founded. Its main role was to intervene in situations of cruel treatment of animals and, in general, to protect animals in vulnerable situations. Its work, however, is insufficient. As Katherine Zomer says:

> In Bulgaria, puppies are often thrown away in plastic bags, and newborn kittens are left on the street. They are often subjected to cruelty and suffer from hunger and cold (dw.com, 2020).

Katherine is from Switzerland. She works as a consultant in a health insurance fund and dedicates much of her free time and a lot of her money to the homeless animals in Bulgaria: 'Life is not easy for many of the people here, let alone for the animals' – she says' (ibid.).

She works with the Swiss animal protection organisation 'Herzblut', which maintains its own shelter for stray animals, located about 3.5 hours away from Sofia. The seven members of the team, who work on a voluntary basis, take care of the abandoned animals, which are often in very poor condition. Currently, there are about 60 dogs and cats kept there. Their medical care and food are paid for almost entirely with the help of donations from Switzerland. Many of the animals are available for adoption in the Alpine country. So far, more than 300 homeless animals have found new homes in Switzerland.

Another case of an expat in Bulgaria whose mission are the local street animals is the Australian Teri Kael, who has built a large animal sanctuary in Kostinbrod. Instead of cages, the animals in Teri's shelter live in courtyards, lounge on couches, and socialise with people. This new home for the strays is about 25,000 square meters big and is the first of its kind not only in Bulgaria but on the entire Balkan Peninsula. Ten years ago, when Terry Kyle arrived for the first time in Bulgaria, he was struck by the locals' negative attitude toward the homeless dogs. A few years later, in 2019, he started building the largest dog reserve in Bulgaria and in the Balkans.

> I used to volunteer in dog shelters in Bulgaria. They are all made for the convenience of people, not with the dogs in mind. The dogs live in small cages. It's horrible, both emotionally and physically, they get depressed and aggressive. So,

> I decided to create a different model of a shelter where they are free and have a place to play. We call it a "sanctuary" because the word "shelter" has a negative connotation. We feed the residents the highest quality food, and they are cared for by a vet and a psychologist. It's important for us to socialise them with people too – says Kyle (bgonair.bg, 2021).

A psychologist who works with the four-legged residents at the sanctuary analyses their behaviour and helps them adapt both to people and the other dogs living there. The visitors can enjoy a walk with a puppy on the outskirts of the place. The sanctuary is divided into several yards. The largest one is 2000 square meters big and the smallest ones are 400 square meters. There are 80 dogs living in the shelter and every year more than 20 of them are adopted abroad. The building is planned to be completely renovated, for which the team will rely on the help of volunteers.

And while this sanctuary is meant for dogs, this next initiative I want to talk about is dedicated to cats. In 2021, Anastasia, a 22-year-old Latvian girl living in Bulgaria for nine years, opened the first cat Café in the sea capital of Bulgaria, Varna. The original idea comes from Japan, where people have learned to relieve the stress from their everyday lives by patting and playing with cats. The Café has a special cat room with seven cats ready to play and interact with the visitors while they enjoy a cup of coffee or tea. All cats in the café have been rescued by Anastasia and her family as kittens. Specially trained staff explain to the visitors how to take proper care of their pet cats at home. According to Anastasia, this takes much more effort than just feeding the animals (bnr.bg, 2021; btvnovinite.bg, 2021; varna24.bg, 2021).

> People are asking all kinds of questions and that's good. We want to help them to take good care of their pets. I think that in this way we will be able to contribute to the solution of the problem with the street cats in Varna because if people know how to take care of their pets, there will be fewer kittens thrown away on the streets, explains Anastasia (ibid.).

According to the European regulations regarding cruelty against animals, every cat should have at least six square meters of space. That is why the new Cat Café can have only 10 cats at the moment. However, Anastasia is working with her team on a Program for adoption that will allow visitors the chance to adopt cats from the Café, thus freeing space for new kittens to be rescued by Anastasia.

Those were just a few examples of the animal rescue efforts of expats in Bulgaria. As we can see, they create their organisations and often work together with the local communities. So, what kind of people are they and why are they so active? The answer to the first question is that these expat volunteers come from different countries and different backgrounds and walks of life. What unites them is their love of animals and their wish to help. The answer to the second question probably lies in the fact that the problem with the street animals in Bulgaria is huge and dramatically different from the situations in the home countries of these expats. Most of them want to help just because they can. As Rozalina says: 'I feel useful since I am doing something important not only for the animals but also for society as a whole' (dnevnik.com, 2021).

The constant problems

As mentioned earlier, foreign volunteers in Bulgaria often work with local organisations. Today there are many such organisations as well as many private animal clinics. Some of them offer special discounts for the treatment and care of street animals and even help with finding new homes for them. Despite existing controversies surrounding the work of some of the shelters (btvnovinite.bg, 2022), the Bulgarian animal rescue organisations do proper work when it comes to neutering, providing medical care, and helping with the adoption of street animals. Online, one can easily find a number of animal organisations active in Bulgaria, such as *Animal rescue Sofia; Dare 2 Car Animals; Animal Care Volunteers; Adopt a Kitten,* as well as many Facebook pages dedicated to the work with street animals in Bulgaria, such as *Alongside a Kitten; Homeless dogs and cats looking for, homes, help, and foster homes; For animals without a home and their humans; Animals Help Kozloduy; Together Against Animal Abuse; Lost found and looking for homes dogs and cats*; alongside foundations such as, *Fluffy Paws of Bulgaria; Four paws; The wild animals,* etc. However, regardless of the seemingly endless number of such animal protection organisations in Bulgaria, they are still not enough, especially during the summer, when the pages of animal rescue Facebook groups get flooded with news about abandoned kittens and puppies. Here are only a few examples from the summer of 2022:

> Hello, these little babies (kittens) are urgently looking for a home because they are in danger of being dumped in a few days in a wooded area, with no chance of survival. I am asking for your kind sharing and assistance. City Sofia[3] (3 July 2022).

[3] https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=7586539731387264&set=pcb.1418044342041699 (accessed 3 July 2022).

> A new unwanted Bobcho (baby dog), at whom people throw firecrackers and who lives behind the garbage bins...Please share, so we can find him a home!!!
> He‘s dewormed and fed, but I have a horrible neighbour… I‘m afraid she will put poison in the food bowls! I feed several gentle, neutered dogs and cats in front of my apartment block...[4] (2 July 2022).

> Since I cannot take care of them, I had to leave the black & white and white kittens in a box on the road between the town of Elin Pelin and the village of Grigorevo, in an empty space, on the right side of the road, in the direction of the traffic. There is a gas station there. Please, if someone passes by and can take care of them temporarily or permanently, I would be very grateful...[5] (29 June 2022).

As we can see, there is a serious problem with animal cruelty and irresponsible pet ownership in Bulgaria. Unfortunately, there are even accounts of sadistic acts towards street animals (bntnews.bg, 2021a). Despite the existing laws, the truth is that currently there are no effective ways of enforcing them in Bulgaria. For example, everybody has heard about the Bulgarian Animal Police, but many volunteers working in animal rescue organisations joke that nobody has ever seen them. Apart from the inadequacy of the official institutions, it has to be pointed out that even people who genuinely want to help (and there are many Bulgarians who are trying to do so) (bntnews.bg, 2021; gabrovonews.bg, 2022; lovechtoday.eu, 2015) have little chance of success because the street animals are just too many. During the active summer season, the shelters are full and one has to wait for days to be able to see a vet. My personal experience with this was last June when I was trying to help a street cat in a very poor condition and I only managed to arrange a vet appointment after five days of waiting. Meanwhile, it was impossible to find a place for the cat, even in a paid clinic in Sofia. They were all full. That is the result of not neutering animals and then throwing away their offspring to die, survive on their own, or be rescued if they are lucky. That is the reason for the permanently high numbers of dogs in the capital, as well. Today it is a public secret that if you want to get rid unnoticed of one or several animals, you can easily do it in the capital. We call it a problem with the street animals, but it is actually the people who are really causing the problem. Some

[4] https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=5741534299203865&set=pcb.5741534755870486 (accessed 3 July 2022).
[5] https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=5732441686779793&set=a.481242388566442 (accessed 3 July 2022).

people need strictly enforced laws to follow, and others just need proper education on the topic. That is why many animal rescue organisations are trying to educate people on how to take care of their pets. For example, *Dare 2 Care Animals* recently started educational classes for young children. The motivation behind the introduction of these classes comes from understanding the crucial importance of educating the next generation about how to respect, how to take care of, and how to defend the weakest in our society (O., man, 40 years old, December 2018).

It is important to mention that while the private vet clinics work only with professionals, Animal rescue organisations often rely for at least some of their work on volunteers and their enthusiasm and love for animals. That is how the shelters in Gorni Bogrov, Divite Zhivotni, etc. function. Many people believe that the work of protecting animals is important and they are committed in their efforts to help by volunteering in various animal rescue organisations. But even if they are not actively supporting such organisations, some Bulgarians care for stray animals and try to help in their own small ways. In every street, in every suburb, and in almost every big apartment building, there are people who take care of the neighbourhood stray cats and dogs. And even if their care is not always perfect or sufficient, at least they feed these stray animals and try to find homes for their offspring. The expats, on the other hand, especially those from Western countries, bring with them their experience and knowledge of the practices of the Animal Rescue organisations and vet clinics in their own countries, as well as their personal awareness of the importance of having a respectful attitude towards animals (pets and strays) for the health of the whole of society. They know that it is not enough to be nice to your pets. Real responsibility means taking care of the health of the cats and dogs in your home in the same way you would do it for a family member and not abandoning them under any circumstances. A striking example of this kind of responsibility and care are the recent Ukrainian refugees who are fleeing their homes and the war in Ukraine with their pets, even when they have to carry them in their arms for days and weeks while travelling in constant danger (24chasa.bg, 2022; offnews.bg, 2022; peta.org.uk, 2022).

It is a fact that most of the pet cats and dogs in Bulgaria are properly loved by their owners. However, the same cannot be said about the dogs kept in people's yards as guard dogs, many of whom are kept chained their entire lives, which often makes them aggressive and dangerous, thus leading to many incidents when such dogs manage to escape. The same dangerous accidents happen with pet dogs

that had not been properly trained, especially those of larger and more aggressive breeds. Many of the dog accidents in Sofia mentioned earlier in the text were not caused only by street dogs but by poorly trained pet dogs as well. Sadly, in Bulgaria, there are no working regulations for that kind of behaviour either.

The lack of widespread pet neutering practices in Bulgaria has already been mentioned in this paper, but it is worthwhile pointing it out again since it is the main reason for the overpopulation of street cats and dogs in the country. The cruel practice of throwing away newborn animals comes as a shock to the expats residing in Bulgaria. The Animal rescue organisations in Bulgaria, despite their significant number and the good job they do, don't have the capacity to handle the pressing situation with the street animals in the country without real support from the local institutions and, most of all, without the locals' readiness to assume real personal responsibility. Unfortunately, to this day, the EU requirements for the humane treatment of animals are often viewed by the average Bulgarian as extravagant and irrelevant.

Here lies the importance of the role of the government and its laws that have to provide clear and strict rules for the citizens to follow. However, despite some efforts in recent years, not only is the pet owners' awareness of their own responsibility still an issue in Bulgaria but also any real discussion about the serious problem of animal cruelty in the country is still viewed as irrelevant or unnecessary by the public as a whole. That is why the support and involvement of the government are important. A future governmental strategy should focus on educating the public about the issue of aggression towards animals and our shared responsibility as humans towards all animals.

Sadly, the official institutions in Bulgaria are among the ones not following their own rules. One such example is the small-town zoos around the country. Most don't have the capacity to take care of big animals, but that doesn't stop them from keeping such animals like lions, cheetahs, and panthers in captivity. Animals that are accustomed to daily running and covering kilometres in the wild are forced to spend their entire lives in small cages where they can barely move around. That is the case with the Zoo in the town of Kyustendil, which became notorious throughout the country for the depressed roar of its lion during the night. 'Kill the lion, release him from his suffering' (mediacafe.bg, 2021) urged several articles about the depressed predator, but the answer of the local authorities was only to close the Zoo to visitors. A year later, the lion is still there. That is what one of the animal groups on social media wrote:

> Did you forget the lion from the Kyustendil zoo? He is still struggling. Along with the other animals there. I heard it this morning... Roar full of anguish... KYUSTENDIL DOESN'T CARE ABOUT IT !!! What's important for them is to keep the cherry festival going....... PITY... ! WE ARE NOT EVEN A STEP FORWARD FROM WHERE WE WERE. WE ARE SO FAR FROM EUROPE! (29 July 2022)[6].

It is true that some requirements of the European Union related to the treatment of animals, are followed just because Bulgaria has no choice but to do so. At the same time, a significant part of the Bulgarian society not only does not believe in them but perceives these requirements as some kind of an obstacle or intrusion. That is a cause for serious concern. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, 'The greatness of a nation is measured not only by its treatment of animals but also by its treatment of the elderly and the children'. According to Yavor Gechev of the Four Paws Foundation, the treatment of these three groups in Bulgaria is equally unsatisfactory. He adds:

> When it comes to stray animals, we need to be aware that these animals are the result of our irresponsibility, the irresponsibility of pet owners, who are the source of the stray animal population (bnr.bg, 2015).

Conclusion

What is the role of the expats living in Bulgaria in the strive for more information, awareness, responsibility, and humane attitude toward animals in Bulgaria? According to my research so far, most of them are helping because they see a very serious problem and are just trying to contribute to finding a solution. Their efforts are aimed at helping strays in Bulgaria to have a better life but also at educating and informing people on the subject of pets, street animals, and nature. In their mission, they complement the efforts of many Bulgarians, who are also trying to help with their volunteer work and with their efforts to reach and educate the other still unresponsive part of the Bulgarian society. Meanwhile, Bulgaria's dogs and cats continue to find homes all over the world. Such is the case of Shushka, a dog adopted by another world-famous star – Jarrett Butler (dariknews.bg, 2018). 'Thankful for a

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[6] https://www.facebook.com/groups/696180880750942/posts/1709531939415826/ (accessed 3 July 2022).

new wee doggie in my life. She was a stray while I was filming up in a mountain in Bulgaria. Stole my heart'[7] – wrote the Hollywood actor on Instagram. At the same time, a new positive trend can be observed in Bulgaria. In recent years, the number of people who prefer to adopt a dog from a shelter instead of buying it from a kennel or a pet shop has been growing (actualno.com, 2017; bntnews.bg, 2017; mediapool, 2021). And this is a promising step in the right direction.

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Active Organisations, Foundations and Animal Rescue Groups in Bulgaria

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Bulgarians in New Zealand – Adaptation and Integration Models

Tanya Matanova

Abstract: Bulgarian emigration to New Zealand dates back to the second half of the 20th century. As of May 2019, between five and six thousand Bulgarians live on both islands of the state. Some community leaders of the successfully adapted first and second-generation migrants take part in the organisation and management of Bulgarian migrant institutions (schools, church communities, dance groups, the mass media, etc.).
The aim of this research is to outline the characteristics of the social and economic adaptation and integration strategies of Bulgarians in New Zealand. Therefore, on the one hand, the text will present stories of Bulgarians who had integrated into the host community through their own professional skills in the spheres of entrepreneurship, commerce, arts, and sport. On the other hand, it will show examples of integration on the community level showcased by the participation of Bulgarian institutions – such as folklore dance groups and Bulgarian radio- and TV programs – in multiethnic events or multicultural environments.
For the purpose of the study respondents' answers to online questionnaires will be analysed, as well as selected pieces in Bulgarian online media (radio broadcasts, newspapers), Facebook and internet sites and groups. Additionally, the data will be enriched with archived empirical data gathered during fieldwork in May 2019.
Keywords: Bulgarian migrants, Bulgarian community in New Zealand, migrant institutions, adaptation and integration models

Adaptation and integration

Socio-cultural adaptation is the process and the result of the active adjustment of an ethnic group or an individual in a new cultural environment of a host society. Socio-cultural adaptation has three (interconnected and complementary) dimensions (see Stefanenko, 2003: 315; Yuzhanin, 2007: 72): psychological, ethnocultural, and socio-economic. Important for the socio-psychological adaptation is the totality of inner processes, introduced with the stepping into the foreign ethnic environment and connected with the settling in the new cultural context and the expression of the own ethnocultural identification. The ethnocultural adaptation encompasses the multitude of behaviour models (language acquisition, the celebration of holidays of the host society, nutritional adaptation, learning of daily activities) of people due

to which they could solve mundane socio-cultural situations in a family, domestic, educational, professional, or other environments. Socio-economic adaptation refers to practising (or not practising) of a job and the attainment of material prosperity in the new cultural and social environment. In their togetherness these dimensions showcase the bipartite character of the socio-cultural adaptation in a foreign ethnic setting: its 'inner'-side – expressed by the socio-psychological self-identification of the adapting individuals, the perceptive images of the new milieu; its 'outer'-side – reflects the degree of their involvement in the social and cultural activities of the host society, as well as their interaction with the local, native people (Stefanenko, 2003: 318). According to some researchers, the cultural adaptation is preceded by a 'pre-adaptation' – phase, i.e., the time before the migrants contact the new (socio) cultural environment, the time when they gather primary knowledge and construct notions of the future new environment (see Sarapas, 1993; Triandis, 1994).

Precise indicators for successful adaptation (conforming to both the inner and outer sides of adaptation) are the individual psychological contentment with the current position in the new environment and the free movement in it. These are the acquiring of values, norms, behavioural standards and traditions of the host society, finding a job, proficiency in the language, parity communication and interaction with members of the receiving country, etc. (see Shpak, 1992: 22; Yuzhanin, 2007: 75). On a community level, this is observed when migrants participate in multicultural events, organised by the host society, as representatives of their migrant institutions and manifest their tangible and intangible cultural heritage through activities in the sphere of cooking, dancing, celebrating, etc.

There are four basic strategies of interethnic interaction applicable for the adaptation on the community level: 'ghettoisation', cultural colonisation, assimilation, and integration (acculturation) (see Yuzhanin, 2007: 76). Ghettoisation is more characteristic of ethnic minorities and migrants (including refugees) living in cities. It could be observed when after immigration people prefer to contact more compatriots than locals and as a consequence create a micro-world characterised predominantly by the migrants' ethnic culture and traditions. Cultural colonisation manifests when the 'newcomers' behave ethnocentric and intolerant toward the native culture and try to enforce their ethnic stereotypes, worldview, and way of life to others. The strategy of assimilation presumes a (voluntary or forced) denial of the native culture and the complete identification (dissolution) with the new ethnocultural environment. Integration is the most preferred and the most successful strategy

for adaptation as migrants who interact with members of the host community preserve their own culture and internalise also foreign cultural attributes. Further, the socio-cultural integration of every individual is influenced by different (micro-level) factors, for example, personal characteristics (age, education, communicability, motivation, life experience, etc.) but also (on a macrosocial level) by the political and socio-economic situation in the host society, its immigration and ethnonational government policy, the presence (or absence) of migrant community organisations, the scope of their activities, etc. It is just the positive and beneficial unity of all these factors that ensures the successful socio-cultural adaptation of a migrant in a foreign ethnic environment (see Yuzhanin, 2007: 76 – 77).

The following will be examined through the Bulgarian's success in their ethnocultural and socio-economic adaptation in New Zealand. On the one hand, the individual perspective will be preferred for the analysis of personal biographies of Bulgarians who live in New Zealand and use the English language in their work in the spheres of entrepreneurship, commerce, arts, sport, etc. On the other hand, the focus will be put directly on how integration happens on a community level, i.e., when Bulgarian institutions (schools, folklore dance groups, media) present the Bulgarian cultural heritage (language, traditional and official holidays, folklore music, songs and dances, believed and practised religion, literature, art, etc.) through activities in the context of multiethnic and multicultural events organised by the host society (or other migrant communities).

Methodology

Empirical data for the study is gathered through online synchronous (screen-to-screen) or digital asynchronous (chat or podcast) interviews with Bulgarians in New Zealand, altogether 10 interviews with 12 people (part of the interviews are recorded by the Bulgarian language radio program 'Bulgarian Success Stories' of PlainsFM radio) and an online questionnaire 'Aspects of the Bulgarians' life in New Zealand' that as to August – September 2021 was filled out by further 29 Bulgarians living on the islands (or altogether 41 Bulgarian migrants). These materials were enriched with interviews and narratives recorded during fieldwork in May 2019 (in the frames of the project 'Cultural Heritage and Institutionalization of Bulgarian Historic and Contemporary Migrant Communities beyond Europe', financed by the Bulgarian Science Fund of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education

and Science).[1] In order to get secondary data were analysed postings in Facebook groups, maintained by Bulgarians in New Zealand. Therefore, the online research method was the predominant one.

Bulgarians in New Zealand

In contrast to the Stats NZ, the official data agency in New Zealand, which reports about just 636 Bulgarians (median age 40 years) living in 2018 on both islands[2], according to research on Bulgarian migrants in New Zealand, as of May 2019 between five and six thousand Bulgarians live there, mainly in or close to Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch (see Avdzhieva and Penchev, 2021: 44). Bulgarian emigrants in Auckland are 'the most numerous – over three thousand people (Avdzhieva and Penchev, 2021: 44).[3] The number of Bulgarians in Christchurch is estimated by themselves – between 50 and 100 people. At all mentioned places function informal Bulgarian groups and formal Bulgarian associations.

Considering their age and social status, most of the interviewed Bulgarians[4] are aged between 45 and 50 years.[5] They are first-generation migrants, who came to the land because of a signed contract with a company before immigration or who found a job soon after immigration.

Residing in New Zealand for between 2 and 33 years[6], they live seldom alone but, in a partnership, or with close family members (children, parents). There are few cases of student migration and almost no retiree migration. A quarter of the

[1] The text is written as a part of the project too. Field materials are archived in the Archive of the National Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, with pressmark FnAIF No 3012, FnAIF No 3126 (phono archives), FtAIF No 1787 (photo archives), PVAIF No 1243 (video archives), AIFVI No 304, AIFVII No 3 (archive sections of the NCICH), recorded by Aneliya Avdzhieva. This project is a kind of extension of AIFI No 608. National Fund project 'Cultural Heritage in Migration: Models of Institutionalization and Consolidations of Bulgarian Communities Abroad' (2014−2017) the results and the established methodology of which is used as a basis for the current project (for more information see https://www.migrantheritage.com/).
[2] https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/bulgarian (accessed 15 May 2022).
[3] The 2018 Census data show too that in those cities and regions Bulgarians are the most numerous.
[4] In the text will be analysed only representatives of first-generation Bulgarian migrants who live or have lived for more than two years in New Zealand.
[5] At the time of their emigration, they are sometimes 'accompanied' by a wife / husband or / and child.
[6] The 2018 Census reports also that most of the Bulgarians have lived for at least 5 or 20 years or more (https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/bulgarian (accessed 15 May 2022).

respondents whose answers were analysed for the study moved to New Zealand because of interethnic marriage. As New Zealand is very distant from Bulgaria and Europe as whole such intercontinental acquaintances happen rarely in Bulgaria or Europe. Partners in mixed marriages and partnerships usually meet in New Zealand, the UK, the US, Canada, or elsewhere.

The 2018 Census gives information that a very small number of the Bulgarians (0.5% – 1.5%) were born in Australia, the UK, North America, the Middle East, and Africa. Most of them (almost 80%) name as birthplace Europe supposing that they were born in Bulgaria (Europe and not Bulgaria is given as an answer option in the questionnaire).[7] 66% of them are aged 30 – 64 which means that they are first-generation migrants and among the other 34% (except for the 2% aged over 65) they are young migrants who came with their parents or other relatives (1.5 generation). Regarding those Bulgarians born in New Zealand, 66% are aged under 15 years, ca. 20% are in the age 15 – 29 and almost 14% of them are aged 30 – 64. Depending on the origin and time of migration of their parents they are supposed to belong to the second, third or fourth generation of Bulgarian migrants. The latter should be descendants of Bulgarians who came at the beginning of the 20th century to work as gardeners, foresters, or sheep breeders.

Individual adaptation

Important for the pre-adaptation and adaptation processes is the learning, understanding, and using of the national language of the host society, in this case – the English language.

Respondents shared that they acquired English language knowledge during childhood by watching American or other movies in English and learned it during secondary school. Some of them had lived in the US, the UK, or other English-speaking countries.[8] The respondents' answers about their language knowledge and proficiency vary from: 'We didn't know the language. Just basic level'; 'I had a medium language knowledge level, but it proved to be very insufficient. The local dialect is difficult for every newcomer!'[9] – to a level at which people come through

[7] https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/bulgarian (accessed 15 May 2022).

[8] Half of the respondents lived abroad before moving to New Zealand.

[9] AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.

the day with basic skills but enrich their knowledge with language courses: 'My husband had a medium English level. The children and I did not speak at the beginning. I went to language courses organised by the government'; 'I went just to an IELTS course'.[10] More than half the Bulgarian respondents are fluent in English and did not go to language courses after immigration: 'I have IELTS 7.5 from Bulgaria and haven't visited language courses in New Zealand'; 'I acquired my English language knowledge during the secondary school in Bulgaria and didn't go to extra courses'; 'I have excellent language skills. I studied Bulgarian and English philology'; 'I went to an English secondary school and have a Cambridge certificate. Then I worked on a cruise in an English language environment for seven years'[11]

It looks like language knowledge is not a stumbling block for starting a job. More problematic for some of them is to exercise their profession and to have their diplomas acknowledged than their language proficiency: 'I graduated in English philology and didn't go to language courses. My pedagogical training was not recognised, so I completed real estate courses. I worked as a real estate broker'; 'Despite 100% English language knowledge, I couldn't start to exercise my profession right after coming but after four years of suffering privations'.[12]

For able to work Bulgarian migrants the socio-economic integration, respectively working – for a salary or for free – belongs to the mundane routine as it is one of the main ways of normal social living in a foreign (and native) country. Despite the difficulties connected with the adaptation period (another language, another culture, another climate, etc.), Bulgarians stay in New Zealand and find a way to earn their living in the host country, to secure their peace and that of their family and to feel integrated.

Many respondents exercise the profession they learned before moving to New Zealand regardless of their language level: 'I found a job in my speciality after two months'; 'Yes, I was hired after five months'; 'Yes, I started to work in my speciality right away. Nevertheless, I enrolled in the local university so that I could get a local diploma'; 'I graduated and started to work in the sphere of insurance immediately after coming'.[13] There are, however, numerous examples of Bulgarians who retrained: 'I could not exercise the profession I learned. These are the sacrifices I

[10] AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.
[11] AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.
[12] AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.
[13] AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.

have made to be able to live normally'; 'I found work in another professional sphere and still work there'; 'No I couldn't exercise my profession and chose another, similar one'.[14] Some of the women change their professional interests after being housewives and mothers of small children for several years. 'I did not work, as my children were very young. When the grew up I started to work in another sphere'; 'My children were small and I had to be with them at home. After that, I found a job in another sphere'.[15]

There are many other cases of socio-economic integration of Bulgarians, for example, Bulgarian trainers who work in New Zealand sports clubs. Some New Zealand children are trained by Bulgarians. Tsvetan Ivanov, director of the football team 'FC 2011' in Christchurch and Svetoslav Mateev in Auckland train New Zealand and several Bulgarian children.[16] In this regard the world champion in rhythmic gymnastics Dilyana Georgieva (now Klincharova) could also be named. She had worked for seven years as a trainer of the New Zealand national team in rhythmic gymnastics. Nowadays she and her husband (also an ex-sportsman) manage a family (not ethnic Bulgarian) restaurant in Wellington.[17]

Because of the small number of Bulgarian residents in New Zealand cities or for any other unknown reason, there is no Bulgarian restaurant serving Bulgarian cuisine. Facebook publications[18] inform about a Bulgarian owning a shop and selling self-distilled *rakiya* (Bulgarian brandy). Another Bulgarian manages the company Marpen Trade Ltd which imports, wholesales and distributes quality Bulgarian and Mediterranean foods and a variety of organic and vegan products (including Bulgarian cheese, filo pastry, Bulgarian spices, etc.). On their website, they share recipes for *tikvenik*, *banitsa*, *baklava* and the Bulgairan *Shopska* salad.[19]

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14 AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.

15 AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.

16 https://accessmedia.nz/Player.aspx?eid=4234c2d8-0239-4830-8151-d49fbb361f09&fbclid=IwAR3b7w3EZ8Ff7Pws_xcSSEptylP7AFn9224u3TOxG7pe1jc0j1QPzQw6ZQQ; https://accessmedia.nz/Player.aspx?eid=2da16731-f422-4b46-96e1-3e3379b72513&fbclid=IwAR3xZFmRCQJgcJvebiqTyMK6SZk98FirEnWB25TIbXYROGI-XtjJu8JVzI4 (accessed 20 July 2021).

17 https://fbgr.org/8-novinite/660-29-08-2918-g-velikite-imena-na-balgarskata-hudozhestvena-gimnastika-dilyana-georgieva-doidoh-vidyah-pobedih (accessed 20 July 2021).

18 Bulgarians in New Zealand. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/45199677805/?multi_permalinks=10159923275172806¬if_id=1630397286780242¬if_t=feedback_reaction_generic&ref=notif (accessed 22 August 2021).

19 https://www.springblue.nz/mediterranean-food/ (accessed 20 July 2021).

Bozhidar Yankov (with a migrant experience as a student in Germany) works for several years in the touristic sphere starting in a catering establishment and finishing his career in a five-star elite chain hotel company where he meets and learns from good professionals in tourism and cookery.[20] Another individual's story worth mentioning is that of Antonia Petkova, who lived in other countries before moving to New Zealand and began working as an engineering specialist in a production company applying and developing her previous experience from Europe and the US. At a given moment she decides to turn her hobby into business and starts to implement all ideas she kept to herself for very long:

> I like to make gateaux, cakes, and baked dishes. Gateaux allow much creativity. I make savoury and sweet pickles which I sell at different places in Christchurch on specific days. My whole family is engaged as I wanted it to be a family business, to learn my children to work. I taught my husband to cook like me and I can fully rely on him. He and I are the main cooks and sometimes we work simultaneously at different places.[21]

Other Bulgarians work as nurses, teachers, jazz singers, brokers, IT-specialist, and entrepreneurs of various companies (boat-building companies, bath accessories shop, etc.). Just ten per cent of all respondents (4 persons) say that they have Bulgarian colleagues: 'Yes, a teacher'; 'Yes, but in different departments / towns'; 'In the company I work there is another Bulgarian citizen'; 'Yes, I know four Bulgarians working as brokers in other real-estates'.[22] A Bulgarian woman working as a manager in a winery comments that, 'In the company, there are no other Bulgarians, even East-Europeans since the "import" of a specialist of these European territories is a little restricted because of the visa-regime in New Zealand' and comments the working environment in the following manner:

> When I came from Bulgaria for the first time, I had a slight cultural shock considering the working manner. In contrast to Bulgaria, the people here are very calm and they know that when a man works, he makes mistakes and do not make you feel guilty. Another thing is that the people working in the industry are more open-minded and share their experiences. In Bulgaria, you must "steal" a craft

[20] FnAIF No 3126, a. u. 11 – 12.
[21] FnAIF No 3126, a. u. 10.
[22] AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.

> and here, if you are at the right place, everything is explained. Actually, in the winery, we have an annual cycle, we do not make wine every day and that's why sharing experience is our way to learn.[23]

Last but not least, an example of an individual adaptation – simultaneously representing a kind of a Bulgarian community spirit and a Bulgarian language media – is that of Magdalina Dilley and her program 'Bulgarian Success Stories' on Plains FM radio:

> I visited different courses in Christchurch. One day a representative of the radio said that they do not have a Bulgarian or Macedonian journalist who can represent his ethnic community. I worked as a TV journalist in Bulgaria many years ago. They said that it will be a voluntary job. I accepted it and it helped me to overcome some personal problems. I decided to call it "Bulgarian Success Stories" as I was tired to hear that Bulgarians are second-hand [people]. [People] here ask me if Bulgaria is a part of Germany or [Canada]. [Thus], the program is oriented towards successful Bulgarians regardless of their place of residence. And they must not be successful in their profession as success is sometimes to just get up on the next day.[24]

For more than a year now through her program she has successfully presented individual stories of Bulgarians in New Zealand and elsewhere and thus broadening the social network of the Bulgarian migrants and making the Bulgarian community visible to the locals and to everyone listening to the radio.

Community integration level

Besides the above-mentioned radio program nowadays, on both New Zealand islands, few other Bulgarian institutions function.

In Auckland, there is the Bulgarian Society 'St. St. Cyril and Methodius' with a Bulgarian Sunday School (the only one in New Zealand) and a dance group. In Wellington, the Bulgarian Society 'Horo' with a dance ensemble HORO are also registered. In Christchurch, there is a newly registered 'Bulgarian Society – South

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[23] FnAIF No 3126, a. u. 9.
[24] AIF I No 608, a. u. 1.

Island New Zealand'[25], whose members meet weekly to learn and perform Bulgarian traditional ring dances.

According to one of its chairs, the Bulgarian Society in Auckland was formed by neighbours and friends with young children who met at Long bay on Boxing day in 1999 and decided to find the society. Since then, members gather for Easter, 24th May (the Association's patrons' day), go to the Central regional library (where a Bulgarian shelf is being organised) where children recite verses in Bulgarian, go to the beach, and boys play football, ball game (played by two teams which involves hitting the players with the ball), etc. (see Penchev and Avdzhieva, 2021: 55, 59).

A part of it is also a Bulgarian Sunday school of the same name, formed in 2007, which receives financial support from the Bulgarian Ministry for Education and Science's National Program 'Native language and culture abroad'. Initially, it functioned informally – parents brought their primary school-age children to the house of Emilya Demirdzhieva – who taught them the Bulgarian language voluntarily (Penchev and Avdzhieva, 2021: 55). Nowadays, lessons are taught to children aged 6 to 10 (1st to 4th grade) every Sunday in Glenfield Intermediate School, in Glenfield, North Shore. The pupils take part in all competitions organised by the State Agency for Bulgarians abroad and win awards and prizes.

The folklore dance group 'Bulgarian Roses' was formed some years later. It happened as a realisation of the idea of Sonya Arabadzhieva, who once invited the guests of a Bulgarian birthday party for a lesson in Bulgarian folk dances: 'Initially they were four women. It was in 2006. [Then] the group rose. Costumes were from Bulgaria. They made contacts with other known organisations and with the responsible local authorities for cultural communication which in New Zealand are numerous' (Penchev and Avdzhieva, 2021: 59). Their first public 20-minute performance with 42 dancers at the Auckland International Cultural Festival in February 2007 ended with the longest horo-dance in New Zealand. In the following years they won the 'Viva Eclectic' festival cup, performed theatre spectacles, recorded a DVD, celebrated national holidays with demonstrations of Bulgarian traditions such as the making of *martenitsa* (handcraft ornaments and bracelets made from red and white tread for good luck and good health), a martenitsa-tree, cooking of Bulgarian dishes, etc. Since then, the group participated in Bulgarian, local, Danish, Indian and other immigrant groups' events and festivals (Penchev and Avdzhieva, 2021: 47).

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[25] Bulgarian Society – South Island New Zealand. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/BSSINZ/about (accessed 23 July 2021).

On 8th May 2021, two days after St. George's Day, at Becroft Tennis Club (Bond Crescent, North shore) a tennis tournament was organised in Auckland. Due to the holiday, the main menu consisted of a roasted lamb with garnish. For such Bulgarian gatherings, musicians from Balkanika play only Bulgarian or Balkan music.

Bulgarian traditions and aspects of the cultural traditions could also be seen on the first school day at the 'St. St. Cyril and Methodius' Bulgarian Sunday school, where children are welcomed with a Bulgarian flag, bread, and honey. At the festivities organised for 24th May – the school patrons' day – guests could hear children's recitations of Bulgarian verses, buy Bulgarian books and souvenirs, eat *kebapcheta* (grilled minced meat in an oblong shape), etc. Bulgarian Christmas celebrations gather babies, children and their parents, and grandparents.

An informant summed up the role of the organisations in Auckland (that actually receive a grant from the local municipality) as follows:

> Three pillars of the Bulgarian community were created with the Bulgarian society, the ensemble and the school, which was and is still financed by the Bulgarian state and which contributed to the growth not only of the number of pupils but also of the whole community. [What] happened is not in the power of a man. It could be realised just by a broad group of people espousing an idea. That is why things worked. Many children, elderly people, and families trusted each other and we were open to the wishes and needs of others and things happened.[26]

The Bulgarian Society HORO and Dance Ensemble HORO in Wellington were founded in November 2018 by members of the Bulgarian community in Wellington in order to preserve and foster the Bulgarian language, culture, and customs in the region. Its members try to maintain a community spirit and promote unity and friendship among themselves and between members of other communities in New Zealand.[27] They organise folk dance lessons, martenitsa workshops, egg-dying workshops, feasts for Bulgarian Independence Day (22nd September), for the Day of Slavonic Alphabet, Bulgarian Enlightment and Culture (24th May), Bulgarian Christmas Festivals and parties and other gatherings (picnics, dance lessons) with

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[26] AIF I No 608, a. u. 4.

[27] See Bulgarian Dance Ensemble HORO Wellington. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/271931296579412/ (29 July 2021).

Bulgarian food (freshly baked bread, *banitsa* (filo pastry with cheese), Bulgarian cheese, *lyutenitsa* (a paprika and tomato spread),[28] *baklava* (rich sweet meat of flaky pastry and nuts), *mekitsa* (a batter fried in deep oil), etc.).[29] During school-free periods, there is a holiday program to 'give the kids a great experience and taste of the Bulgarian language with games, songs, dancing, art and a puppet show' (Horo News, 2020). The folkdance group Horo has short appearances as a participant in international events like the Multicultural Council of Wellington Race Relations Day Festival, the Wellington Polish Christmas Market, and the Wellington Christmas Parade. In frames of the Newtown Festival in the capital in 2019, they make a Bake Sale Fundraiser with yummy homemade Bulgarian sweet and savoury baking in order to get enough money and purchase beautiful original handmade costumes from Bulgaria so that the dancers can represent the traditional Bulgarian dances with them.[30] Bulgarians in Wellington area sometimes meet for national holidays at restaurants to watch a Bulgarian documentary or to just meet other Bulgarians and enjoy speaking in Bulgarian and interacting with compatriots.[31]

The 'Bulgarian Society – South Island New Zealand'[32] in Christchurch is the youngest Bulgarian association – 'born' in October 2020. Since then, it brings together the Bulgarians in the region by organising folk dance lessons every Sunday and thus offering space for (offline) communication with compatriots, listening to Bulgarian traditional music, and enjoying delicious Bulgarian snacks. They meet also on or close to Bulgarian and other holidays.

Local New Zealand people or other migrants who are married to Bulgarians and enjoy their partner's culture also attend the events organised by the different Bulgarian institutions. Guests of some anniversaries, for example, are representatives of national and municipal institutions. Even somehow invisible, Bulgarian entrepreneurs with shops or catering establishments in Wellington, Auckland, and Christchurch contribute to the preservation and spread of Bulgarian food and cook-

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[28] Den na bukvite / Bulgarian Culture and Literacy Day. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/events/1505944639742845/?ref=newsfeed (accessed 8 August 2021).

[29] Recently, they meet rarely due to the circumstances of COVID-19-pandemic.

[30] They would have also participated in the SlavFest 2021 in Wellington, planned for summer 2021. but postponed for February 2022 because of the COVID-19-pandemic. See https://www.eventfinda.co.nz/2021/slavfest-2021/wellington (accessed 8 August 2021).

[31] See for example 22 September – Bulgarian Independence Day. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/events/497191870849234/?ref=newsfeed (accessed 20 August 2021).

[32] Bulgarian Society – South Island New Zealand. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/BSSINZ (accessed 20 August 2021).

ing traditions, as they produce or import and sell products and ingredients for their preparation (cheese, filo pastry, etc.).[33]

In other words, the preservation and the transmission of Bulgarian cultural heritage happens in informal settings – for example, during picnics or small sports events but also in an institutional form – festivals, celebrations, and other happenings (see Penchev and Avdzhieva, 2021: 53). The latter is also evidence for the collective integration of the Bulgarian migrants in New Zealand who through their participation in multicultural events organised by the locals and other migrant ethnic groups show and spread the knowledge about the Bulgarian culture and folklore.[34]

Integration and return intentions

Of course, all these examples of successful adaptation of the Bulgarian migrants make evident the positive consequences of New Zealand's multicultural policy expressed through a festival culture and possibilities for participation in manifestations of different cultures and their heritage (see Penchev and Avdzhieva, 2021: 52). All these aims to create an inclusive society, understanding, respecting, and acknowledging all traditions and cultures by celebrating cultural diversity and race unity. In this regard, the foreigner-friendly behaviour of the local people is of great importance. This is confirmed by some respondents as well: 'The state contributes to the light and easy integration of the foreigners. At least in my case, everything happened very naturally'; 'Yes, as far as I know, Auckland is a very multicultural and multinational city, which makes the integration much easier. It is a multi-nuanced process without end in the time to be accepted by the New Zealanders.'

[33] See, for example the website of 'Spring Blue', a shop managed by a Bulgarian in Auckland and online (https://www.springblue.nz/mediterranean-ingredients/, accessed 14 August 2021). As Bulgarians living in New Zealand comment, there are no restaurants offering Bulgarian cuisine but there are catering establishments owned by Bulgarians that sell Italian or other Mediterranean dishes. Factory producing *lukanka* (a kind of dried sausage), *sudzhuk* (a typical Bulgarian Salami in a U-shape), *pastarma* (dried meat) functiones in Christchurch. A Bulgarian sells in his shop self-distilled *rakiya* (see Bulgarians in New Zealand. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/45199677805/?-multi_permalinks=10159923275172806¬if_id=1630397286780242¬if_t=feedback_reaction_generic&ref=notif (accessed 10 August 2021).

[34] It is noteworthy that New Zealand has rich multicultural policies expressed through a festival culture and possibilities for participation in manifestations of different cultures and their heritage (see Avdzhieva and Penchev, 2021: 52) where the Bulgarian dance group in Auckland wins the cup several times (see https://accessmedia.nz/Player.aspx?eid=79fe1163-5ee9-4165-9947-d8cd598f676c; https://accessmedia.nz/Player.aspx?eid=6f3dddce-eb3c-4a0e-9458-e51b797e8c22 (accessed 20 July 2021).

> In the beginning, I had an element of culture shock. We came from Burgas, which had 300 thousand citizens. Auckland has a million more. In the beginning, everything seemed very big – highways, buildings, streets, quarters. It was difficult to learn where we live and how to find it. [About] our adaptation, I can say that the New Zealanders were and are still very friendly. They always ask where we come from, and show a real interest in that and that helped us to feel well accepted.[35]

> New Zealand is a very settled country, especially in comparison with Bulgaria and, to a large extent – Asia, which is a big plus. You always know where you stand in relation to administration, what the rules are, and what is expected from you. You can do everything on the Internet. It's easy. The people are very friendly and open-minded to new cultures despite prejudices. I tried successfully to find a job in the sphere of marketing and communications, which means lots of work, language use, writing, editing, etc. So, there are areas with obstacles that need to be overcome, but in general, it is a very predictable country, and integration is not difficult. It is far away; that is the good and the bad of New Zealand. You have to travel three days to Bulgaria, but it is far away from all the crazy things in the world. You feel safe, except for the earthquakes. They have a good education system and opportunities for development.[36]

Regarding the emic point of view or how Bulgarians see their integration into the New Zealand society, the answers show that a few respondents do not feel integrated: 'No, I do not feel integrated. I do not celebrate local holidays and do not have many local friends'; 'No, because I do not have a permanent job yet'; 'I do not feel and I do not think I will integrate in the New Zealand society one day'; 'I don't think I will integrate even after 15 years here'.[37] The majority of the respondents however feel adapted and well in the host country: 'I know my rights and my obligations and I feel like a full member of the society. I vote in local elections, participate in volunteer activities, pay taxes, work at the school in the town where I live.'

> I felt integrated some years ago after I overcame the language barrier after graduation. Improving my English, willingly or under duress, helped me a lot. Afterwards, I officially became a New Zealand citizen and now I have a passport. May-

[35] FnAIF No 3126, a. u. 11 – 12.
[36] FnAIF No 3126, a. u. 13 – 14.
[37] AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.

> be it is a psychological moment, and I had to start thinking as was one of them. I learned to stand my ground, something I should have done in Bulgaria as well.[38]
>
> Yes, I am integrated into New Zealand. I have my social network and friends. I feel very good. I am fully integrated. I have a good job, good standard of living and friends; I came to become a local citizen; Integration into a foreign society, especially when you are 42 years old, is not easy and not short at all. [I] have a family, children.[39]

Proving that integration is possible when a person does not neglect his ethnic culture but tries to keep it alive, many Bulgarians (over 75% of the respondents, 31 persons) say that they contribute to the preservation of Bulgarian cultural heritage as migrants in New Zealand. Some of them speak in Bulgarian and celebrate Bulgarian holidays 'just in the family', when they are at home: 'I speak and read to our children only in Bulgarian. They go to a Bulgarian school here. We watch Bulgarian TV and celebrate Bulgarian holidays'; 'We contribute to the preservation of the Bulgarian culture heritage by respecting the Bulgarian traditions and talking about them'. Others talk with the locals about Bulgarian traditions and history, cook and share Bulgarian dishes with them: 'All our friends know about Bulgaria and already love the Bulgarian cuisine and banitsa is their favorite'; 'I cook Bulgarian dishes, speak about Bulgaria, our rites, traditions and sayings'; 'People, who communicate with me had the chance to learn more about the country I come from'.[40] Third group of people say that they preserve the Bulgarian heritage by gathering with other Bulgarians: 'We, a group of Bulgarians, gather every Sunday and learn Bulgarian folklore dances'; 'We gather for national holidays, for kebapcheta and Bulgarian songs ;-)'; 'I preserve the Bulgarian cultural heritage by visiting folklore dance courses with my children. At home, we speak only in Bulgarian'.[41]

To the socio-cultural integration besides language proficiency (Anniste and Tammaru, 2014; Bilgili and Siegel, 2017) and orientation toward migrants' own culture (Bilgili and Siegel, 2017) refers to the informal social contacts with natives as well (Anniste and Tammaru, 2014; Gherghina et al., 2020: 515; Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes, 2006). The social networks created by migrants with the locals are

[38] AIF I No 608, a. u. 1.
[39] AIF I No 608, a. u. 4.
[40] AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.
[41] AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.

systems of social relations that reflect upon their involvement in the community in which they live. Good and strong relations provide an appropriate setting in which migrants can develop a sense of belonging. In this sense, the questionnaire results show that one-tenth (or three) of all Bulgarian migrants in New Zealand do not communicate with fellow countrymen at all. One-sixth of them (or five persons) suppose that 50% of the people in their social networks are Bulgarians. For the rest, more than twenty respondents, we can say that many have more social contact with the locals, including Maori (2 to 80%), and other foreigners (between 1 and 80%), than with Bulgarians.

Actually, the better the contacts with the host community the greater the sense of belonging and the more likely the decision to continue living in that society. In some cases, even negative social conditions in the immigration context do not influence the Bulgarians to go back to their native country. They feel accepted by the host society in spite of their differences. In this sense, the gap between the native and the local culture narrows and reduces the return intention to the country of origin.

Even among the respondents who like to travel to Bulgaria and speak with love about their homeland, almost no one is ready to go back. The majority of the respondents have lived in New Zealand for at least 4 – 5 years to 25 and even more than 30 years. Even though some researchers state that more time spent in the host society can have a positive impact on the intention to return since migrants may acquire financial capital close to the expected or calculated level (Bonifazi and Paparusso, 2019; Hinks and Davies, 2015; Makina, 2012), that could not be applied for the Bulgarian respondents as they prefer to stay in New Zealand even after they have reached the desired financial capital or after retirement. Several people answered that they may return as retirees but only if they find a way to transfer and receive their New Zealand pension in Bulgaria. The working Bulgarians (all except for one respondent) do not intend to go back ever: 'There was a time when my son did not want even to fly over Bulgaria'[42]; 'I don't want to go back unless a miracle happens and there is no corruption. I am ashamed of our government and the arrogant division [of people and goods]'; 'With the greatest pleasure only if there was a normal state government'; 'I would like very much to go back, but not under the current conditions'; 'I would go back if I find a job that satisfies me both financially and emotionally.'[43]

[42] AIF I No 608, a. u. 1.
[43] AIF I No 608, a. u. 6.

> Even though we have left our homeland, we have a right to our homeland. Some of the funds we earned here we send to Bulgaria. No one should deprive us of this right to have a homeland. We are Bulgarians, we are not non-returnees, most of us. We want to work for a fairer and more prosperous Bulgarian country that stays side by side with the developed countries.[44]

As it could be seen the respondents wish to go back to a more well-structured homeland, as a family decision or when their children become adults.

Conclusion

Regarding the adaptation and integration of Bulgarians in New Zealand, we can conclude that on an individual level, most of the respondents adapt successfully to the host culture and society and feel integrated because they have a job, an interethnic social network consisting of local and compatriot friends, colleagues, neighbours. Because they have New Zealand citizenship, they feel safe in the country and at the same time succeed to internalise foreign cultural attributes while simultaneously preserving the attachment to their own culture as the majority of them use the Bulgarian language to communicate with compatriots offline and online, cook national dishes and celebrate national holidays. In addition, they like the political and socio-economic situation in the host society and the immigration and ethnonational governmental policies in contrast to those of their home country. As a consequence, in most cases, regardless of their education, life experience and length of their stay in New Zealand, they do not intend to return to Bulgaria.

Considering the adaptation on a community level and the four basic strategies of interethnic interaction mentioned in the beginning, the strategy of integration is the one appicable and observed in this study.

That is so, since the Bulgarian respondents answer to the cultural specificities of the host society and maintain contact with the Bulgarian culture and heritage through gatherings with other compatriots in informal or institutional settings visible also for the host society through organised festive events.

[44] See https://accessmedia.nz/Player.aspx?eid=fc014ca3-71a8-4500-b02e-6dcec37c5dcd (accessed 8 July 2021).

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e-ISSN: 2683-0213