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THE PROMISE OF (UN)HAPPINESS? GENDER, LABOUR, AND MIGRATION

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Abstract: This editorial preface introduces the thematic issue of *Topos*, inspired by the conference “The Promise of (Un)Happiness? Gender, Labour, and Migration,” held at the European Humanities University in September 2024. The volume explores the multifaceted intersections of gender, labor, and migration, with a particular focus on the experiences of women affected by war, political upheaval, and displacement, especially in Eastern Europe. The collection examines both the challenges and transformative opportunities that arise from exile and forced migration. Contributions span diverse methodologies and genres, including ethnographic studies, autoethnographies, and collaborative interviews, highlighting issues such as psychological support for refugees, professional adaptation, gender imbalances in high-tech industries, and the emotional and social dimensions of displacement. By bringing together voices from academia and activism, the issue provides a comprehensive, multidimensional perspective on the quest for happiness and fulfillment amid instability, offering scholarly insights and solidarity to those navigating migration’s complexities.



Preamble

The title of this thematic issue of *Topos* refers to the international conference entitled “The Promise of (Un)Happiness? Gender, Labour, and Migration”, which took place at the European Humanities University in September 2024. This has been the second scientific conference, organized by the EHU Center for Gender Studies in the framework of a long-term infrastructural education and research project *Women in Tech*, implemented with the financial support of the European Union. If, earlier, we explored the intersections of gender and im/material Labour (the outcomes of that conference were also published in a thematic volume of *Topos* in 2023), this time the focus was on gendered aspects of labour and migration. Over two days, scholars from diverse disciplines engaged with a wide array of topics: the challenges faced by women migrants amid wars, humanitarian crises, and political upheavals; the impact of migration on professional identity, career trajectories, and working conditions; the often invisible material and emotional aspects of labour; issues surrounding status, citizenship, and the formation of new identities; the gendered dimension of labour migration, including questions of motherhood and care and many others.

It is worth noting that apart from the articles prepared by the conference participants, the volume also features some texts of the participants of another related project, namely research Laboratory “Exclusion. Her-Perspective”, which was launched by Center for Gender Studies in the autumn of 2024. The Lab researchers examined various forms of gender discrimination in high-tech industries, focusing on Belarusian women working in the IT sector, both in Belarus and abroad. Given that, since 2020 and the onset of Russia’s full-scale war in Ukraine, at least half a million people have left Belarus, and many businesses, including those in the IT sector, have relocated to neighbouring countries, research on gender discrimination has become inextricably linked to issues of political (forced) and labour migration and challenges associated with it. Furthermore, this issue also presents the outcomes of research conducted in the same thematic area by graduates of the EHU Master’s program in Gender Studies.

We would also like to express deep gratitude to Andrea Petó, a feminist scholar and gender historian, from Central European University, for accepting our invitation to contribute to this volume and for sharing with us her reflections on the challenges that feminist scholars encounter in academia vis-a-vis the current political context in Europe.

Conceptual Framework

The conference and the volume's title draw take impetus from Sara Ahmed's inspiring reflections on happiness as an existential "problem", including for migrants. Ahmed's concept of the 'melancholic migrant' – someone who, when confronted with new and often challenging circumstances involving loss, dispossession, and incongruence, views happiness as central to their adaptation – invites us to reconsider the role of happiness and its relationship to good citizenship. For Ahmed, to "see happily" means, in essence, to exist in conditions free from violence, asymmetry, or coercion (Ahmed 2010: 132).

This theoretical lens prompts us to explore aspects of women's migration and labour that are frequently neglected, particularly how work can serve as a source of self-fulfilment and confidence, or conversely, become a site of alienation and deprivation. Although some facets of migration – such as transition, adaptation, and change – may appear gender-neutral in their impact on professional identity and career opportunities, it is often women who experience heightened vulnerability and whose specific needs and lived experiences warrant closer scholarly attention (Danaj 2022; Strelnyk and Hoops 2024). Adopting a dialectical approach to (un)happiness in the context of women's migration and exile, this volume considers how the negative consequences of migration – regardless of their causes – may be accompanied by melancholy, depression, and a profound sense of insecurity. At the same time, as the presented articles show, these very conditions can open pathways to new opportunities, alternative futures, and personal transformation.

Even though the conference's call for papers was not limited to Eastern Europe, it was not surprising that narratives of the migrant female experience from Ukraine and Belarus dominated the programme. On the one hand, the aftermath of political protest movements in Belarus in 2020–21 and the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine caused mass waves of migration from these countries. The topic, therefore, provoked growing interest among conference attendees, primarily female scholars from Belarus and Ukraine. On the other hand, for decades, the European Humanities University, whose institutional history is a vivid example of the functioning of an academic community in exile, has served as a threshold between post-Soviet and Western academic discourses, providing a platform for internationalising post-Soviet scholars. Consequently, the conference's papers were primarily presented by female scholars from Ukraine and Belarus who had been forced to leave their countries of origin and are currently based in Lithuania, Poland, Georgia, Germany, and Sweden.

Several papers were presented by scholars who came from Ukraine directly and shared their personal experiences and research on the phenomenon of internal migration caused by the military invasion and its consequences. Their work, which explored internal migration and return, made a valuable contribution to the field.

As Magdalena Kmak and Heta Björklund note, “the production of knowledge is certainly affected by scholars’ own individual experiences, incidents, stories and emotions that give meaning to their scientific expression” (Kmak, Björklund 2022: 1). The intersection of gender and migration, as well as the exploration of various sites of vulnerability caused by this positionality, was not merely a research focus but a lived experience that contributed to a particularly intimate atmosphere at the conference. However, as noted above with reference to Ahmed, what was fascinating is that, despite the extreme experience of migration as a radical traumatic break in identity and belonging, the new possibilities and perspectives it provides as a liminal state were the focus of the papers. These new possibilities and perspectives also became central in our informal conversations.

Previous scholarship has addressed how migration and displacement can foster unique experiences, particularly for intellectuals. Edward Said observes that exile allows intellectuals to break from conventional career paths focused on established achievements (Said 1994: 62). As a result, the marginalisation that accompanies migration can prompt straightforward career advancement — driven both by necessity and new opportunities — which may transform gender norms under unusual circumstances. For example, when exploring how displacement affects female academics, there is often a tension between heightened traditional family responsibilities and emerging professional opportunities. This dynamic can produce feelings of guilt among women academics while also deepening their awareness of their social responsibilities as intellectuals (Kiselyova and Ivashchenko 2025: 117). Navigating this negotiation and tension forms the central framework of the issue.

The issue’s overview

The issue is divided into several parts, corresponding to the conference sections’ topics. The authors are female scholars of various ages, cultural backgrounds, migration experiences, and professional expertise. They represent diverse migration paths and locations, encompassing both the places they left (or not) and their current residences. Additionally, they come from different academic cultures, particularly

Western and post-ex-Soviet (Ukrainian and Belarusian), and various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, economics, gender and cultural studies. The articles primarily rely on ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth qualitative interviews, and quantitative data. Furthermore, several contributions come from non-academics or individuals who operate at the intersection of artistic practices and engaged research. Consequently, the issue features a variety of voices, methodologies, and genres—such as quantitative analyses, anthropological notes, autoethnography, a forum, and essays — that together provide a multidimensional approach to the topic.

The first section “Feminist Agenda in Migration Research” (a title that reflects the work of the conference’s keynote speaker, Volha/Olga Sasunkevich) focuses on the challenges and needs of migrants and refugees from Belarus in Lithuania since 2020. Yana Sanko’s article, “Seeking and Avoiding: Ethnographic Study of Psychological Help for Belarusian Refugees”, examines how displaced Belarusians encounter, interpret, and sometimes resist psychological assistance. The study emphasizes that psychological support is not a neutral resource but is intertwined with issues of agency, social inequality, and historical legacies. In “Crossing Borders: Social and Economic Deprivations of Belarusian Women Migrants in Lithuania”, Natallia Shcherbina explores the long-term and potentially irreversible migration patterns of Belarusians, particularly noting the significant increase in female immigrants during this period. The research identifies key vulnerabilities and adaptation strategies of Belarusian women migrants in Lithuania, aiming to illuminate the factors contributing to their social and economic deprivation.

The next part, “Displacement and Migration as a Challenge for Professional Career: New States of Labour”, explores the roles of women’s NGOs and internal displacement in Ukraine, focusing on challenges faced by displaced women and the impact on their careers and employment. The contribution from Nadiia Pavlyk and Olena Ostapchuk, “Women’s NGOs in Addressing the Challenges of Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine”, examines how Ukrainian women’s NGOs have supported internally displaced persons, particularly women and children, during the war. The study highlights changes in displaced women’s needs, the challenges NGOs face, and the importance of gender-sensitive, adaptable support. The article “The Impact of Migration on Women’s Professional Identity, Career and Working Conditions: The Case of Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine” by Lidiya Lisovska and Kateryna Protsak also examines how internal displacement from the war affects women’s employment and integration. The study finds that many displaced women bring entrepreneurial experience and

resilience but face challenges such as skill mismatches and limited job opportunities. Viktoriya Kulyk's study, "Addressing Gender Imbalance in IT Companies in Ukraine", explores gender imbalance in the IT sector, highlighting barriers to women's advancement and the importance of inclusive management and digital technology. The section ends with the article "Dealing With Relocation: Problematic Integration of East European Mothers With Preschoolers in Poland" by Anastasiya Selivanava, who examines the experiences of skilled Eastern European migrant mothers in Poland, highlighting the need for institutional recognition and support to facilitate fuller participation and enhance social cohesion.

The third section, entitled "Intellectual Labour: Displaced Female Scholars' Experience", features three closely interrelated texts. The contribution from Andrea Pető entitled "Getting the Best of 'Unwanted Recognition'" analyzes the systematic attacks on Gender Studies in illiberal states, using personal experiences at Central European University to illustrate how academic freedom is undermined through political, institutional, and social pressures. Tania Arcimovich's article "On the Edge of Failure. Stories of Female Migrant Scholars from Belarus" examines the experiences of displaced female scholars from Belarus, highlighting the barriers they face in maintaining their academic identities after migration. The study calls for more inclusive, gender-sensitive support policies tailored to the unique context of Belarusian scholarly migration. Almira Ousmanova in her text entitled "Dis/placement, dis/location, dis/engagement? Feminist reflections on the production of knowledge in exile" discusses the issue of the production of knowledge in exile in both theoretical and concrete planes, drawing on the study of the nomadic history of the Center for Gender Studies at the European Humanities University, embracing both Belarusian (1997–2004) and Lithuanian period (since 2005 till present).

The section "Affective Discourse of Displacement. Emotions, Care and Infrastructure" focuses on alternative networks of care and feminist strategies for supporting migrants, emphasizing agency, solidarity, and collaborative, non-hierarchical support across communities. The article "When Attitudes Become Infrastructure: Artistic Practices at the Limits of Migration Systems and Institutional Failure" by Antonina Stebur analyzes how artists respond to the failures of migration infrastructure by building alternative systems of collective care. Identifying tactics of invasive, fugitive, and counter-infrastructure, the scholar argues that these practices blur boundaries between art and social work, positioning infrastructural art as a force for solidarity and transformation in times of institutional dysfunction. The following contribution, entitled "Creating Spaces of Solidarity: Gender

Perspectives on Migration and Community Engagement” is a collective interview between activists and art makers – Maria (Maro) Beburia, Marina Naprushkina, Amilia Stanevich and Antonina Stebur who discuss inclusive approaches to migration. They highlight the importance of recognizing migrants’ full identities, fostering agency, and building solidarity across communities, while addressing institutional challenges and advocating for collaborative, non-hierarchical support.

The final section, “I am a refugee: Researching on Oneself”, refers to Hannah Arendt’s renowned essay “We Refugees”, written in 1943. It includes articles that rely directly on self-experience and autoethnography. However, as previously mentioned, the boundary between scholarly and personal writing in the context of this volume’s themes – migration and gender – is quite elusive. Hanna Seliarniova’s article, “Emotional Displacement and the Fragility of Belonging: The Meaning of Homing in Its Transition”, investigates how Belarusian migrants and exiles, displaced since 2020, redefine the concepts of home and belonging amid instability. Through a thematic analysis of thirteen interviews, the research reveals that home is not a static place but rather a mobile, emotional practice sustained through care, memory, and daily routines. Margarita Korzoun’s essay, “No Hope – Single Mother Migrants as a New Precariat: An Autoethnographic Case from Batumi, Georgia”, explores the challenges faced by migrant single mothers in Georgia. It illustrates how the intersection of childcare responsibilities and migration results in professional exclusion, social isolation, and a loss of identity, while also highlighting the role of networking in overcoming these challenges.

We invite readers to engage with the insights and analyses presented in this volume, which together shed light on the intricate intersections of gender, labour, and migration, and the ongoing quest for happiness and fulfilment amidst displacement and change. As the editors of this issue, we hope that these texts will reach their audience – some will consider them useful and essential sources of knowledge for their own research, while others will see them as a gesture of solidarity and emotional support during these difficult times. Both responses are welcome.

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SEEKING AND AVOIDING: ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP FOR BELARUSIAN REFUGEES

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Abstract: This paper responds to an apparent public consensus about the need for psychological help for Belarusians who have experienced repression and forced migration. Using data from interviews and participant observation conducted within long-term ethnographic fieldwork, I examine various forms and meanings of psychological help as it was practised, understood and dealt with within the community of Belarusian political refugees who fled to Lithuania after 2020. The article provides an overview of heterogeneous psy encounters in the field, zooming in on two practices that were organised within the community. I argue that informal and community-based psychological help, as it was practised within my field, should be understood as a dynamic entanglement of practices, charged with past experiences and current predicaments. The proposed approach allows us to see how so-called ‘psychological help’ can take various forms even within a relatively small community. Those forms can be entangled with different historical and socio-cultural contexts, state bureaucracies and relationships within the diaspora. The meaning of such help to its recipients, as well as their desire to resist psychologisation, should be taken into account by activists, practitioners, and community members.

Keywords: Belarus, Refugees, Psychologisation, Mental Health, Responsibilisation, Ethnography



Introduction

The need for psychological help among Belarusian political prisoners, refugees and those who suffered from other forms of violence is mentioned in public discourse quite often. Volha Vialichka, psychologist and representative of the Doctors for Truth and Justice initiative, said that incarceration deforms a person's psyche, and after three years, such a change becomes irreversible (Viasna 2023, December 4). A study of recently released political prisoners shows that almost half of the survey respondents mentioned the need for psychological help (Hurnievič 2024, May 24). There are many initiatives and organisations offering free-of-charge psychological services to Belarusians; some work in particular locations, like Poland or Lithuania, while others operate remotely. The words *psychological help* are used in the public discourse as if they are self-explanatory. At the same time, there is little to no discussion of discourses and practices that are mobilised in response to this need. This paper offers an ethnographic perspective on the variety of practices and meanings that a seemingly common-sense idea can inspire. I examined how different types of psychological help were encountered, interpreted and dealt with within the Belarusian refugee community in Lithuania.

This article contributes to recent studies centring on the Belarusian diaspora after 2020, highlighting the individual and collective effects of protests, repression and forced migration (Kazakou & Thomas 2024; Korshunau 2024). Kazakou and Thomas offer an extensive overview of challenges Belarusian migrants face in Lithuania, among other countries; they contextualise mental health issues Belarusians face within a wider well-being frame (2024). Their conclusions are in line with the overall consensus that mental health support is important and needed for Belarusians; however, very little is known about how such support can be practised.

While many studies of psychological discipline mobilisation among refugees and migrants either focus solely on discursive articulations or one particular type of practice, the Belarusian case allows us to examine the diversity of encounters that occur within one community. I suggest this diversity should be appreciated and embraced, similarly to how it became a common understanding that forced migration cannot be reduced to one type of experience (Eastmond 2007; Gatrell 2013). Ethnography offers a particularly good opportunity to approach this subject holistically, contextualising refugees' narratives in their everyday lives and social practices.

I argue that informal and community-based psychological help, as it was practised within the Belarusian refugee community in Lithuania,

should be understood as a dynamic entanglement of practices, charged with past experiences and current predicaments. This case, on the one hand, illustrates the pervasiveness of psychologisation in today's society, but, on the other hand, shows the potential for reflexivity about the ways psy knowledges are instrumentalised. The implications of my findings about this particular community can be generative in the context of current debates of radical transformations of the mental health domain towards a plurality of approaches and community care (Frazer-Carroll 2023).

Analytical Approach

I use the term *psy* offered by Rose for various experts whose authority is based on claims of understanding human thoughts, feelings and behaviours (1999: 10). *Psy* could include psychotherapists, psychiatrists or life coaches. As the idea of psychological help in my field included a mix of these disciplines, and many people saw them as equivalent, *psy* works as a convenient umbrella term, unless a more specific term is needed.

My analysis builds on the tension surrounding the discussion of the politics of mental health. There are arguments for the emancipatory potential of *psy* knowledges, from Fanon's idea of social change through individual liberation (Fanon 1963: 56) to the role of *psy* discourses within the feminist tradition (Illouz 2008; Perheentupa 2019; Wright 2020). However, there is a substantial critique of *psy* disciplines for pathologising experiences of marginalised groups, such as women (Stoppard 2000; Ussher 2011; Neitzke 2016), queer people (Hadjiioannou & Saadi 2023; Jack 2023), neurodivergent people (Chapman 2020; Walker 2021; Dwyer 2022) and refugees (Kirmayer 2003; Eastmond 2011). At the same time, the lack of access to psychological expertise, services and resources is also closely related to class, gender, race and other aspects of vulnerability (Frazer-Carroll 2023). Specifically, when refugees' mental health is problematised, the trauma framework can have a critical role in this process (Ibrahim 2021; 2024). Here, I will employ Eastmond's concept of the *incomplete agency of the refugee* to discuss the meaning of imposed psychological help and psychologisation of suffering in my field.

Further, I will use concepts of psychologisation and responsibilisation to interpret the mobilisation of *psy* knowledges within the field. *Psychologisation* is defined by Madsen as "making something psychological", or transforming social, political and moral categories into questions of psychological factors (2018: 128). Madsen connects

therapeutic culture as a product of total psychologization to the global consumer culture and individuals' need to cope with the overwhelming challenges societies are facing today. *Responsibilisation*, according to Rose, is one of the key technologies that animated the psy domain, producing autonomous subjectivity (1999: vii, 217). This technology of burdening people with responsibility for things beyond their control has been criticised specifically in the context of involuntary migration (Uehling 2015).

The global spread of Western psy knowledges is often criticised as a form of psychiatric imperialism (Watters 2011). Although the concepts I am employing were developed for Western contexts, their extended application remains productive to see how technologies of neo-liberal ideology interact with different socio-political contexts (for example, Duncan 2017; Yu et al. 2018). It allows us to appreciate variations that would not fit the idea of “localisation of a same global trend” (Madsen 218: 25), as soon as local specificity is taken into account. For example, Shchytsova highlights important differences in how concepts produced by the Western psy domain landed in the context of post-Soviet transformations and psychological culture development in Belarus, such as the very limited influence of Freudianism on academic and popular psy culture, de-coupling from the feminist movement, as well as the absence of the so-called anti-psychiatry movement in Belarus (2014). Chulitskaya and Matonyte show that, despite the dominance of paternalistic authoritarian discourse, there was a gradual shifting of states's responsibility to individuals in line with a neo-liberal logic of responsibilisation, particularly prominent in the case of the unemployed (2018). Vazyanau's study of the psychologisation of resistance demonstrates how, in the context of Belarusian protests in 2020, psychologisation had a different logic and outcomes compared to Madsen's conclusions about the logic of consumerism (2023).

Method and Data

The anthropological approach considers psychological and psychiatric ideas as always embedded within social and cultural contexts (Littlewood 1996; Luhrmann 2020; Nehring et. al. 2020). The meanings of these ideas are changing depending on the cultural context into which they are relocated (Kleinman 1981), and ethnographic perspectives help to reveal how people navigate competing psy models of knowledge (Luhrmann 2020), trying to influence, transform or resist the psy domain in different ways (Brodwin 2013; Calabrese 2013; Myers 2015). Long-term participant observation was important in getting

a dynamic understanding of both discursive articulations and social practices related to psychological help, as well as the everyday life context surrounding them.

Building on the idea of a place as a “location that is fixed by all the relationships it involves” (Green 2016: 211–212), I started with a refugee shelter as a point of departure, eventually expanding to other private and co-living spaces, public and family events, as well as volunteering and taking road trips with my study participants. For the participant aspect of participant observation, the monotonous work within various forms of volunteering offered particularly good opportunities for informal conversations and experiential learning. I was able to stay for several weeks in places offering temporary accommodation for refugees, sharing a room with several other women. This experience was invaluable to learn about the women’s social life which is usually hidden from visitors. Additionally, part of my data was collected through sensory ethnography methods (Pink 2015), focusing on smells, textures, temperatures and other sensations accompanying overcrowded co-living spaces.

This paper is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork (2022–2024) with the community of Belarusians who fled from political repression and sought asylum in Lithuania. My study focused on refugees, as well as people who helped them, such as mentors, volunteers and some psy experts. I consider 42 people my informants; their ages vary from 23 to 64. I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews and many more informal conversations. For the interviews with refugees, I employed the limited ‘life story’ approach (Eastmond 2007; Vandevorodt & Verschraegen 2019), beginning with the stories of protest participation, exile, and settling in Lithuania, proceeding to everyday life, self-care, etc. Taking inspiration from the ‘following method’ (Chan 2023), I aimed to interview several participants in the same situation, for example, mentors and people they have been mentoring, or members of the same refugee family, etc.

The data I worked with consisted of fieldnotes, interview transcripts and written documents shared with me by study participants. Those were iteratively thematically coded. The first stage of coding had a wider focus on self-care, looking into different practices and resources that Belarusian refugees considered important to endure their abrupt migration. Later, observing how much emphasis and tension surrounded the topic of “all things psychological”, I did another round of coding to pay closer attention to various instances of psy knowledge and practices mobilisation. Because of this “funnel” structure of the project common to ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson 2019), I was able to contextualise various kinds of psychological

help within refugees' stories of migration and other self-care practices. In particular, I paid attention to both moments of engagement with psychological expertise and psychological, or therapeutic, discourse mobilisations in everyday life, trying to understand the relationships between them.

My positionality as a Belarusian woman with experience of repression and involuntary migration both aided access to the field and created challenges. Just as an ethnographer is always actively positioned by study participants based on categories existing within the field (Angrosino & Mays de Perez 2000; Ringer 2013), I could be seen as “one of us”, as “a student from Sweden” or, at times, as an irrelevant middle-aged woman washing dishes.

Given the scale of repression in Belarus, I had many opportunities to reflect on self-censorship in my attempts to protect study participants' data. Due to high risks related to the Belarusian state's interest in diasporic organisations, apart from standard ethical procedures, such as informed consent and maintaining anonymity, additional data safety measures were implemented to protect both study participants and me as a researcher. In some cases, my interlocutors would prefer to use their real names; however, I decided against it.

Encounters With Psy

To set up the scene for the discussion, I would like to briefly catalogue some of the encounters my study participants had with the so-called psy disciplines during the protests and migration. This list is far from exhaustive; its main purpose is to show the diversity of experiences and practices associated with psy expertise that Belarusian refugees could encounter within their journey.

- A. Prior long-term engagement with a therapist and/or psychiatrist in Belarus. For many, a therapist could be the only person with whom they could discuss the risk of imprisonment or their flight plans. Some psy experts later had to flee the country to protect both themselves and their clients whose personal data the police were interested in.
- B. The psychologist in a Belarusian prison. For example, one of the former political prisoners, Volha Takarchuk, told the story of her interaction with a psychologist working for a prison (Melkaziorau, 2024). In her story, the prison psychologist convinced her to end her hunger strike because protesting human rights violations in the prison, according to the psychologist, was “pointless”.

- C. Involuntary psychiatric treatment remains one of the repression technologies; the human rights organisation Viasna is aware of at least 33 individuals subjected to involuntary psychiatric treatment for political reasons (Viasna, 24 April 2025).
- D. Psy volunteers in Belarus who helped the repressed. Seva, one of my study participants, was temporarily released after some time in detention and was facing criminal charges. Agata, his wife, prepared everything to leave the country; however, Seva refused. Agata told me during the interview: “He did not understand the flow of time, what was happening outside, he was just repeating he was not going anywhere!”. Friends connected them with the psychiatrist characterised as “svoj”,¹ who was able to convince Seva to leave. This likely spared Seva from a serious sentence in Belarus.
- E. Psychologist in the Lithuanian refugee camp. Access is a major challenge in understanding what happens inside prisons and refugee camps. Several study participants shared their impression that the camp psychologist seemed only interested in suicide prevention and did not pay attention to other mental health-related issues people might have. One person, however, told me that the psychologist working in the camp tried to defend them against homophobic bullying.
- F. The Lithuanian State Healthcare System. One of my study participants, Darja, described her interaction with a Lithuanian psychiatrist as “terrible” and “shocking”. She lost her job, had to apply for asylum, and her partner had decided to go fight in the war on Ukraine’s side. According to Darja, the doctor’s first reaction was a question about why she did not join her partner: “... I replied it was dangerous and asked her why *she* [Darja’s emphasis] would not want to go to war”. It is important to acknowledge that this example most likely does not represent the majority of Lithuanian professionals; however, it makes a strong impression and creates barriers for others in the community to seek help.

Finally, the following two encounters will be discussed below in more detail:

- G. Regular group meetings with a psychologist;
- H. Psy volunteers offering services to refugees/repressed individuals in Lithuania.

1 Can be translated as “one of us”; here refers to trust based on both personal relationships and alliance with the protesters.

Most of the items in this list would be called “psychological help”. Most of them would claim certain impartiality or “objectivity”. At the same time, all of them can be associated with different political projects and work towards different agendas, some more problematic than others. Some psy experts I have met emphasised their solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community, others based their solidarity on gender, nationality or other factors.

Often, refugees actively sought psychological help, using very specific criteria. First of all, such help needed to be free of charge, as most of them could not pay for regular sessions. Second, they expected at least some awareness of the Belarusian context. Finally, some women and members of the LGBTQ+ community were afraid to face hostility from psy experts during sessions and wanted their feminist or queer allyship to be expressed beforehand. Although various approaches and schools exist within the psy space, most study participants expressed less interest in such nuances.

Incomplete Agency of the Refugee

“People arrive here wounded”, said one of my interlocutors during the interview, arguing that this woundedness needs certain attention and work to avoid conflicts in the shelter. “Wounded” (Russian: *ranienyi*) was a word I heard often. Reasons for woundedness could differ. If in 2020, protesting against state violence could be framed as a sign of psychological health, repression and border-crossing turned people into potentially “troubled” individuals. One of the volunteers shared her understanding of queer people as being traumatised by society: “You need to understand that such people are wounded in our society by default”. Using this articulation, she acknowledged the existing discrimination, but the outcomes of violence were assigned to individuals in the form of woundedness.

Thinking about how North Korean refugees were considered in need of education on the subject of mental health as part of their integration process in South Korea (Yu et al. 2018), it is hard to ignore the possible role of the authoritarian regime in constructing depressive subjects in Belarus (Shchytsova 2021). The incomplete agency of Belarusian refugees could then stem not only from the traumatic experiences they endured, but from the fact of being foreign to a Lithuanian society, unfamiliar with living in a democratic country. And indeed, comments about Belarusians not knowing how to navigate democratic institutions were common in the shelter, coming from both Lithuanian visitors and other Belarusians.

The idea of “woundedness” is not unique. For example, Eastmond, in her analysis of psycho-medical categories used in relation to Bosnian refugees in Sweden, shows how the idea of the ‘traumatised refugee’ entangles relationships of care and custody to construct what she calls the ‘incomplete agency of the refugee’ (2011). To become complete and participate fully in society, certain work should be performed on them (*ibid.*: 282). The important difference, however, is that in the Swedish case, social workers were tasked with refugees’ ‘integration’, while the Belarusian community in Lithuania relied on unpaid volunteers’ labour to perform a similar role. When a Belarusian refugee was signed out of the refugee camp, mentors and volunteers took ‘custody’ of them and assumed responsibility for potential problems. The majority of those mentors and volunteers had refugee backgrounds themselves. A suicide attempt that happened in the community some time ago marked all other refugees with the potential of self-harm or threat to others, until proven otherwise. While Uehling shows that refugees are not only subjected to state interventions and may eventually take on bureaucratic roles and represent the state (2015), the Belarusian case highlights that such enactment of a bureaucratic mindset may happen informally.

Unlike Eastmond’s observations, in the Belarusian refugee community in Lithuania the relationships between woundedness and incompleteness were not necessarily linear. The idea of traumatic experiences influencing refugees’ agency interacted with notions of gender and the particular source of violence. Pavel, one of the men staying in the shelter, seemed very relaxed about the rules and discipline, as well as any critical remarks about his behaviour. He previously fought in Ukraine against Russia, and women in the community often discussed him as “wounded by the war”, teasing him for his inability to live in a peaceful reality. Josticova and Aliyev, in their study, discuss the high status of Belarusians fighting on Ukraine’s side in the diaspora (Josticova & Aliyev 2024). Pavel seemed fully aware of his high status; he might have been “more wounded” and “less incomplete”, but this enabled him to openly resist any attempt at psychological help.

Where to talk about distress

The sources of distress and what constituted a traumatic or extreme experience varied. It could be experiences of imprisonment, police violence or war,² as well as deportation from another EU country, or

2 Many Belarusians who initially moved to Ukraine in 2020–2021 had to flee again at the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

violence at the border. It could also be prolonged life in hiding, loss of loved ones, as well as abrupt departure from Belarus and the loss of home. Finally, the loss of social status, the need to live in the refugee shelter and work precarious, clandestine jobs, were also described as major disruptions.

Whether these experiences were discussed in psychological terms or not, they were framed as major life events, influencing and individual's sense of self. The impact of these extreme experiences was profound and was seen as located in the body. Teeth, backs and stomachs were most often discussed as affected by distress. Teeth grinding and losing teeth were very common issues discussed in connection with stress that reflected on the body. Many study participants described decreased energy levels, feelings of vulnerability and weakness, leading to an inability to deal with everyday injustices or rejection. Some told me they felt shame for how this state of apathy influenced their ability to maintain relationships, search for work or use other opportunities for "integration".

Narrating stories of violence was a common practice for dealing with extreme experiences. Patel quotes torture survivors who described their pain as part of their life, an enemy, a friend and a witness living in their bodies (Patel 2011: 241). Similarly, one of the study participants explained it this way: "You need to accept that it happened to you and it goes nowhere, it is now part of who you are". In a recent study of Belarusians in Lithuania, a tension between different parts of the diaspora was articulated: "activist" members of the diaspora were perceived by others as being overly focused on politics and constantly discussing the violence they have experienced (Vardamatski & Novikava 2024). As I observed in my field, discussions of violence were pervasive, and almost any small talk could pivot into graphic stories of arrests, torture or violence on the border.

In summer 2025, Siarhei Cihanouski cried, describing the terrors of prison experiences during a press conference organised after his forced deportation from Belarus. His emotional appeal sparked a heated debate in the diaspora about whether it is ethical to allow people to speak publicly in a state of shock, before having "time and help". Not having qualifications to answer this question, I feel it is important to connect this debate to common attitudes towards speaking about violence publicly.

My observation was that attempts to talk about such experiences were often dismissed or interrupted. The tendency to re-frame the effects of violence in psy terms, noticed by Vazyana (2023: 89), was brought to the diaspora and further cultivated there. One of the volunteers who helped more than 100 Belarusians upon arrival told me

she had to learn to disconnect as soon as people started talking about brutalities. In her opinion, such stories belonged to a psychotherapeutic space and exposing others to them was not appropriate or ethical. This tendency was even more prominent when someone was sharing a story perceived as “less terrible”. For example, one interlocutor told me that her short detention and months spent in hiding before exile were not considered “real” suffering within the community. She felt dismissed by others. In this case, a psy expert could be the first person to show compassion and validate their suffering as no less real. But even those who enthusiastically embraced therapy and psy vocabularies as part of their “repair work” still believed that it is not enough, and that being heard outside of the therapeutic process is important too. Building on Patel’s argument that pure psychological focus on the individual effects of trauma often obscures the effects of torture as an extreme form of violence on the community, such as mistrust and fragmentation (Patel, 2011, pp. 245–246), I would add that such fragmentation diminishes capacity for compassion and, by extension, solidarity.

Humour and narrativity became important elements of such stories told in public spaces. For example, I observed one of the women living in the refugee shelter sharing the story of a quite brutal arrest. She was cooking and describing the lack of air in an overcrowded police van, the beatings, the fear. At the same time, she sprinkled the story with funny and absurd details, like the carnival costume she decided to wear to the protests. Maček, in her analysis of Bosnian humour in Sarajevo under siege, concludes that macabre jokes provide a possibility to talk about destruction and humiliation as a shared experience (Maček 2009: 51ff). While Maček interprets dark humour as a form of resilience, I would argue that in my field, it was a tacit strategy to resist the psychologisation of repression. If the psychologisation among protestors observed by Vazyanau moved the focus from the violence itself to the feelings resulting from the violence (2023), my study participants were actively resisting this discursive move: many wanted to talk about what happened, not the resulting feelings.

Seeking Psychological Help

Formally, it is possible for asylum seekers and people with so-called ‘humanitarian’ visas to get free mental health help in Lithuania; however, the process is often complicated and unclear, especially without language proficiency. Maryna was a woman in her thirties who worked in the mental health domain in Belarus. After abruptly fleeing the

country, she became a volunteer managing requests for psychological help within the community. Using her expertise and personal contacts, Maryna organised a kind of ‘triage’ process, wherein all requests for psychological help in the community were redirected to her. She would clarify the request and suggest options from a list of therapists and psychiatrists who work free of charge. This simplified the process of finding help, which was often overwhelming. It also ensured that psy experts would speak Russian and have at least a minimum awareness of the Belarusian context.

When I asked Maryna what kind of requests she received from refugees, she quoted a variety of them describing issues with insomnia, apathy, irritation and self-harm. When talking about her “clients”, she described the differences between people who were imprisoned and those who spent time in hiding. First, according to her, they were lifeless and struggling to make sense of their experiences, while the latter continued to expect something bad to happen. I noticed that she only briefly mentioned psy terms, like anxiety and depression, but mostly avoided them and tried to use less distant, or even more compassionate language.

Maryna’s thinking about the help she provided was interesting in several aspects. First, the informal treatment, common in Belarus and described by Shchyttsova as underground culture (Shchyttsova 2014: 64), implied a gap between state categories of the “norm” and the psy experts’ understanding of what constitutes help. Maryna spoke positively about the psy help provided informally, without a “paper trail”. She was convinced that the discrimination and stigmatisation she observed in Belarus were possible in Lithuania, too. Second, she seemed very humble in terms of the potential for psy help to alleviate suffering:

You need time to feel disoriented and depressed, yes. But at the same time, if you do not use this first time to get back on your feet in practical terms.. You risk finding yourself in an even worse situation later and ending up in the psychiatric ward. So really it is also a bad time [i.e., the first months after arrival] to be depressed... At the same time, people might do a lot of work both in therapy and on their own and still struggle with depression.

Maryna knew from personal experience that the reality of refugees’ lives often offered little space for “processing emotions” when the material aspects of survival were prioritised. Moreover, she volunteered as a way to deal with the intensity of her own experiences, from serious physical injury to the loss of her profession. Such volunteering can be understood as biographical repair, in which volunteering and

utilising competencies from past occupations helps to deal with what is termed as biographical disruption (Hart 2023).

Finally, in Western(ised) psy practice, some discourses work as mutually exclusive (Speed 2011: 127), and the mental health issue must be attributed either to nature (brain) or nurture (trauma). For Maryna, however, refugees' agency in deciding how to interpret their distress played an important role. Her 'triage' questionnaire included the question of whether a person knows what kind of help they would like to find. Apart from the tension between talk therapy and medicalised treatment, Maryna was aware of the mismatch between categories of mental health in the West and Belarus. Having several categories for any phenomenon might have made her more reflexive about knowledge validity in general, something resonant with how Bourdieu describes the habitus cleft (Bourdieu 2000: 64). Being socialised in more than one field and having several repertoires to play with may be inducing reflexivity, the ability to "step out of oneself" (Ingram & Abrahams 2015). So Maryna's approach was "whatever works", and she seemed comfortable choosing one discourse over another or combining them creatively. Moreover, her list of psy experts could include both official Lithuanian psychiatrists or psychologists and therapists from Belarus working informally. This approach, according to Shchytsova, historically was a characteristic of the Belarusian psy field: psychiatrists were eclectically and adventurously acquiring new knowledge and technologies after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Shchytsova 2014: 56ff). I would argue that this historical background, this initial habitus cleft, coupled with Maryna's own refugee background, enabled her to arrange psychological help in a way that would be more flexible, respectful and focused on refugees' well-being.

Avoiding Psychological Help

By the time of our interview with Maryna, about 25 people had approached her for help. The regular group meetings affected many more. These meetings were held in the refugee shelter every other week. During my fieldwork in 2022, I was given a tour. My guide showed me a big room and commented that a group meeting with the psychologist was taking place. He made an inviting gesture to come in. It was a transit space, with several entrances and no doors. Discussions that happened in this space could be heard from the outside. Being used to the idea that any psychological work is very intimate and confidential, I felt like an intruder. My companion, however, considered it a communal matter.

According to Kristina, the psychologist who facilitated these meetings, participation was voluntary. For her, it was volunteering driven by solidarity with Belarusians. She did not consider it real therapeutic work and wanted to avoid tapping into someone's trauma. The attendance might have initially been voluntary, but it changed over time. On numerous occasions, I witnessed people being encouraged or even pressured to attend by other volunteers. In 2024, the following message was posted in one of the community group chats:

It is regrettable that [several nicknames tagged] avoided visiting the psychologist today. [Some people], at least, warned us, although they sprung it on us at the last minute [Russian: *postavili pered faktom*]. I have the impression that the rules are not for everyone.

In digital group chat culture, tagging someone can often be a request or demand for a response. The word “avoided” (Russian: *izbezhal*) has clear punitive undertones. Usually, classes or meetings are skipped, while problems or punishments are avoided. The words “sprung it last minute” also imply that people should have asked for permission to skip the group meeting in advance, which, to my knowledge, was not a formal rule before. This message shifted the positioning of the meetings from voluntary to mandatory. Some people described them as useful, some refused to participate openly, but the majority used different tactics to avoid both the meeting and the confrontation. While some tried to argue that they already have personal therapy, others sneaked out of the building quietly. From my interview with Kristina, I did not get the impression that she would consider it ethical, and she seemed unaware of such dynamics. However, I know that such insistence on therapeutic work is not unique to my field, and some other shelters and support organisations have similar practices.

One woman told me she was convinced that through these meetings, mentors and volunteers receive psychological assessments on refugees to identify possible risks. Later, I was able to ask one of the mentors how he made sense of it when psychological work is expected to be voluntary, and whether he thought it was ethical. He replied: “Of course [it is ethical]! Otherwise, how would you know if they are troubled?!” He then explained that, after one case of a suicide attempt in the community, mentors were scared and decided to learn more about recognising potential PTSD signs. This entanglement of care and surveillance is not new; the history of psy knowledge development is closely connected to governing large groups of people, and to explaining the exercise of power as ethical (Rose 1999: 5–6, 92). Even in the Western context, Härnbro et al. show how in social workers’

everyday interactions with their “clients”, the threat of state violence is ever-present behind the call for self-motivation for improvement (2021). The fact that individual therapy was not considered equivalent to group meetings highlights its focus on management and discipline in the shelter. The incomplete agency of the shelter residents, their woundedness and the potentiality of distress were used to prioritise surveillance over freedom to engage (or not) with psychological help.

I did not attend the group meetings due to ethical issues, so I will discuss their content based on my interviews with attendees and Kristina. Most people described what happens during the meetings as “exercises”. Some of them were related to problem-solving and conflict resolution. Based on an imaginary conflict situation, the group would discuss possible resolutions and how to hear the other person’s perspective. When I asked Kristina whether people ever bring up situations of discrimination, she said it would mostly come up in individual conversations:

But again, we are trying to look at the situation from the other person’s perspective, why they behave the way they behave...

Illouz argues that the potential for conflict increases the relevance of therapeutic modes of communication; conflict stems from ambiguity and misunderstanding, and clarification of motives becomes a solution (Illouz 1997: 49, 56). Not only does trauma make refugees “incomplete”, their unawareness of local ways to live and communicate is also often seen as requiring psy work. Therefore, therapy groups become a technology to make refugees “emotionally and linguistically ready” to access social capital in a new country (Garland et al. 2002). This may be the logic behind Kristina’s volunteering. However, I would like to connect this to Uehling’s suggestion that responsabilisation within psy-infused educational programs for migrants works to displace responsibility and expectations that initially belonged to those in power (Uehling 2015: 1014). The volume of various kinds of volunteer (i.e. unpaid) labour involved in and surrounding this practice cannot be ignored.

The next example helps to explicate the meanings of this practice, shaped by the context of refugees’ everyday lives. One of the exercises the participants often mentioned was the invitation to share the good things that happened to a person during the week. Kristina explained to me that people often tend to focus on the negative, so this was supposed to serve as a reminder to appreciate good things. Some interlocutors agreed that it was a useful reminder; others, however, saw it as useless or even harmful. Zosia, a young woman living in the shelter, told me during our first interview:

Well, imagine we are sitting together, all the people are in conflict with each other at the moment, and I don't think she [the psychologist] knows about it... And we have to share what good happened to us during the week, and I simply do not want to share anything in front of them... She comes with her own plan and strategy. Maybe I don't trust her too... Maybe I am wrong, but it all feels very superficial... There is a wall between us and the psychologist...

“Them” in Zosia’s quotation referred to several major ongoing conflicts. One was related to several young women complaining about being sexually harassed by the men living in and visiting the shelter. The complaint was dismissed, and the women were blamed for “provoking” the men. I later witnessed Zosia being bullied by some of them, referring to information about her mental health. Similarly, the queer residents of the shelter also faced bullying and hate speech. This explains why sharing anything during these meetings would not feel safe or appropriate.

Moreover, the group aspect of group meetings had additional meanings. Living arrangements for refugees often combine overcrowding and a lack of protections, which magnify vulnerability (Martinez 2023: 12). Both refugee camps and private housing can do that, although in different ways. Here, co-living was creating a family-like, intimate knowing of each other, constantly fueling conflicts and tensions. Vital described his memory of living in the shelter:

Misunderstandings, you know, someone behaves [in a wrong way], someone is rude, someone snaps at you when asked a simple question, someone’s socks are stinking, someone does not want to shower... this snoring, oh! It all annoys you so much...

Sharing fridge shelves, wardrobes and bathrooms with others, people craved privacy. An averted gaze, as I learned, was one of the ways to minimise interaction when you cannot be alone. The person who was enthusiastically chatting to me the day before could barely say hi the next day. I soon realised it was a sign that the person wants to be alone. At the same time, one of the mentors I interviewed described to me her approach to evaluating the level of distress in people:

A person can close off, avoid contact or sit somewhere in the corner... And you need to monitor a little bit of what is happening to them...

Ironically, after just one week of living in the shelter, I felt the strong need to avoid contact and sit quietly in a corner. What the mentor

described as a sign of disturbing behaviour seemed like an adequate response to being “a little bit monitored” all the time. It is also important that such understanding of “disturbing behaviour” relies on the neurotypical understanding of the “norm” as the only possible way to co-exist in a social space.

Furthermore, it is also impossible to ignore that this co-living situation echoes the particular forms of violence experienced previously. Overcrowding prison cells is a distinct and very common torture practice in the Belarusian penitentiary system. Some refugees faced further violence during the border-crossing, becoming painfully aware that (not) having privacy or being counted as an individual was directly related to the “right to have rights”, initially Arendt’s idea, later applied to the context of migration (Khosravi 2010: 121).

Finally, the loss of social status associated with imprisonment and/or forced treatment had clear class dimensions. Imposed group meetings were the opposite of individual therapy that middle-class consumers could engage in voluntarily; they coincided with precarious, illegal work for many, while waiting for a permit to work officially. One evening, Lora, another woman living in the shelter, returned from work looking frustrated. She told me she earned 7 euros for 8 hours of hard work and was told that 25 percent would be deducted “for accounting expenses”, a euphemism for additional profit made by people who used her work without paying taxes. It is unlikely that positive thinking or understanding their perspective would help the mental state of a person facing such exploitation and powerlessness.

Knowing all this, the group exercises in positive thinking and conflict resolution did not look innocent or appropriate. I would argue that conflict and focusing on the negative could be an effective self-care tactic in this case. Later on, Lora told me how she confronted another employer who had been withholding several months of her salary (one more common practice, unfortunately). She learned about her rights and threatened to file an official complaint, which helped, and the salary owed was paid in full. This, according to Lora, felt incredibly empowering and improved her mental state significantly.

While Kristina and some of the volunteers worked under the assumption that psychological help is needed by all refugees and that any help is better than none, the refugees disagreed. Lena, a woman in her forties, added her criticism of the group meetings:

I know a thing or two about psychology, and this is not what we need... We would need individual work, of course, but I understand there is no way... Yesterday during the group, a woman shared a story about her brutal arrest, and I understand she needed to spell it out, but I looked

at another woman, and I saw she was all messed up after hearing it... It is not the way to do it...

Resistance to psychological work is often articulated in public discourse as a sign of older age and/or lack of education. It corresponds to the dynamics captured, for example, in Kovtiak's analysis of opinions on depression and antidepressants in Minsk (Kovtiak 2020). However, when Lena says, "I know a thing or two about psychology", she highlights that her criticism has a different origin and comes from a place of expertise. Lisle shows the importance of self-care above the bare minimum when migrants choose from the donated things in a warehouse (Lisle 2022: 33-34). I would argue that the same logic can be extended to not passively accepting "donated" psy work. Neither Zosia nor Lena were eager to accept the role of passive recipients of any psychological help offered to them. They positioned themselves as competent to evaluate which kind of intervention could be useful in their situation.

Finally, there is a need to address a tendency to attribute all bad encounters with a psy to the lack of professionalism of a particular psy expert. Some of my interlocutors saw those group meetings as ineffective and blamed Kristina for it. However, I accidentally came across some people who praised Kristina for helping them to deal with serious conditions. They worked individually, and, according to my interlocutors, her professionalism and ability to help in a crisis were truly impressive. This feedback on Kristina's individual work can be illustrative of how the social context of any psy intervention shapes its meaning and results. Such circumstances cannot be bracketed.

Discussion

Although most of my study participants realised the negative impact of the extreme experiences on their lives, they did not passively accept the discourses of trauma or "woundedness" imposed on them. Seeking, avoiding and resisting psychological help became an important part of their experiences after an abrupt migration. Belarusian refugees were aware of the psy domain being actively political, with psy experts either participating in injustice or resisting it. Their seeking psy experts that would be queer friendly, feminist or "familiar with the Belarusian context" demonstrates that psychological help was not understood as neutral.

I show how talking about extreme experiences generated tension between survivors' need for collective attention and others' insistence

on designating psy as an appropriate space for dealing with such narratives. This contributes to an understanding of the disguised effects that psychologisation of violence can have on communities (Patel 2011). The desire to talk about violence to others would be interpreted as a sign of trauma, serving as one more argument for their “incomplete agency”, which required psychological work. I argue that the “repression stand-up” genre developed by refugees was one of the strategies to resist such psychologisation and maintain communal spaces as possible arenas for their stories.

My study shows how the logic of “woundedness” was flexibly used to construct the incomplete agency of Belarusian refugees. The shelter residents were framed as both ‘wounded’ by their experiences, but also ‘incomplete’ because of being foreign to Lithuanian society. They needed new competencies and vocabularies to do the work of ‘integrating’. As volunteers with refugee backgrounds took “custody” of the people after border-crossing, they related to group meetings as a management technology. The conflict resolution paradigm was guiding people to understand the feelings and motivations behind discriminatory practices, instead of learning to resist them. Meanwhile, the conflicts my study participants faced were based on asymmetries of power, such as sexualised harassment of women, bullying of queer people, or illegal labour exploitation. Positive thinking exercises here were working in tandem with material practices of exploitation.

Encounters with psy can be very unpleasant or even harmful, such as the question about going to a warzone from a Lithuanian psychiatrist that shocked Darja, or mandatory group meetings. Those encounters likely added to the already extensive list of things refugees had to endure. The case of group meetings was particularly important in several aspects. The co-living circumstances and their power dynamics, the previous experiences of imprisonment and resistance to accepting the identity attached to forced treatment constitute critical elements to understand this practice as a continuation of violence. Unintentionally, Kristina was overlooking the context of participants’ everyday lives, their needs and power relations in the shelter, creating a high risk of re-traumatisation. It illustrates how important it is to think not only about the individual qualifications of the psychologist but also about the situatedness of any psy practice. The positionality of the psy experts, the material conditions and political realities surrounding and shaping “psychological help” should always be critically examined. Furthermore, the logic of responsabilisation is prominent not only in assigning the responsibility for working on trauma or for integrating to refugees. It can also be observed in how bad experiences with psy become explained by an individual’s lack of competence,

not the systems that informed, validated and enabled such practice. As we can see from Kristina's example, her practice was perceived very differently by group meeting participants versus people who worked with her individually.

Frazer-Carroll envisions that a radical political approach to mental health would think of plurality as a guiding principle. For her, the liberated future of mental health would be nuanced, contradictory, plural and individualised. People would be allowed to use different, sometimes conflicting, frameworks to describe their experiences and seek help, and "There should be no paradigm or language that everyone has to adopt, no blanket response that can be applied to everyone" (2023). I would argue that the experiences of Belarusian refugees in Lithuania who engage with diverse, contradictory and hybrid projects of psychological help can offer crucial insights into opportunities and risks accompanying such plurality. Community-organised care is often discussed as an alternative to coercive interventions and institutionalisation (for example, Torrents & Björkdahl 2024). In the case of group meetings, however, the core principles of trauma-informed care, such as trust, safety and shared decision-making (Sweeney & Taggart 2018) were compromised. In contrast, Maryna's practice, organised on the outskirts of the official healthcare system, although operated on an individual level, was more focused on community and reciprocal care.

The ethnography of psychological help enables a holistic view of how any project of mental health for refugees should be approached with attention to social setting, power dynamics and existing inequalities. Understanding this would enable activists, practitioners and community members to organise support resources for those who need it and avoid unintentional harm or unethical practices. It would also enable seeing the moments when the best possible help is not psychological at all.

Notes

All study participants' names were changed. Some other recognisable details were omitted or fictionalised to protect their anonymity.

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НЕ(Т) ДОМА: СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ И ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИЕ ДЕПРИВАЦИИ БЕЛАРУССКИХ ЖЕНЩИН-ИММИГРАНТОК В ЛИТВЕ

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NOT AT (A) HOME: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEPRIVATIONS
OF BELARUSIAN WOMEN MIGRANTS IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract: The intensity and structure of the migration flow from Belarus to Lithuania after 2020 indicate that the emigration of Belarusians is already long-term and potentially irreversible. Despite the fact that the main migration flow from Belarus to Lithuania after 2020 was formed by men, the increase in the number of female immigrants (measured as the number of valid resident permits issued for women) during this period was also significant: it increased from 3,064 in 2019 to 9,725 in 2024 (end of period). Women's emigration experience differs significantly from men's, and the adaptation and integration strategies of emigrants become more diverse if women are involved in emigration. As the study showed, the deprivations faced by immigrant women are caused by both the fact of emigration itself and the difficulties in adapting to life in new conditions, as well as limitations in access to social (informational and emotional support, the system of social connections and interactions, health, access to social services and the social protection system, etc.) and economic (work, especially in a specialty, material support, availability of financial services, the presence and possibility of using previously made savings, etc.). Building individual strategies for adapting to life in a new country allows women to restore (in full or in part) access to social and economic resources and reduce the risks of deprivation.



The research goal is to study the situation of women migrants from Belarus in Lithuania, to identify vulnerabilities that lead to social and economic deprivation of women in emigration.

The research methodology was based on qualitative methods, namely, conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with representatives of the target group (Belarusian women who moved to Lithuania after 2020). The qualitative analysis was supplemented by a quantitative assessment of the scale of emigration of Belarusian women to Lithuania after 2020, as well as an analysis of the profile of female migration based on official migration data published by Eurostat.

Keywords: migration, adaptation, integration, social and economic deprivations.

Введение

Нынешняя миграция из Беларуси в Литву принципиально отличается от предыдущей истории переселения. До 2020 г. ее обуславливал традиционный набор выталкивающих и притягивающих факторов, затрагивавший относительно небольшое (в пределах нескольких сотен человек в год) количество людей. После 2020 г. миграция приобрела массовый характер (возросла на несколько порядков), а ее основными мотивами стали политические факторы и гуманитарные причины – поиск безопасности в условиях массовых политических репрессий, охвативших Беларусь. После начала российского военного вторжения в Украину к этому блоку выталкивающих факторов добавились квазиэкономические: целый ряд компаний релоцировал бизнес и сотрудников из Беларуси, что повлекло эмиграцию из Беларуси в Литву высококвалифицированных работников и их семей.

Интенсивность и структура миграционного потока после 2020 г. указывает на то, что эмиграция белорусов в Литву уже носит долгосрочный характер и потенциально является невозвратной. Женский опыт эмиграции существенно отличается от мужского, а стратегии адаптации и интеграции эмигрантов становятся более разнообразными, если в эмиграции участвуют женщины, дети или целые семьи.

Женщины в эмиграции чаще сталкиваются с социальными и экономическими депривациями, которые могут быть обусловлены как внешним воздействием (сам факт эмиграции), так и индивидуальными практиками выстраивания жизни в эмиграции (воспроизводство «новой рутины»).

Цель исследования: изучение положения женщин-мигранток из Беларуси в Литве, выявление уязвимостей, которые приводят к социальной и экономической депривации женщин в эмиграции.

Объект исследования: женщины, которые переехали в Литву из Беларуси после 2020 г., легализованы там или находятся в процессе легализации.

Исследование опирается на:

- (1) теорию *habitus* в интерпретации, применяемой к исследованию стратегий адаптации мигрантов в новой стране;
- (2) теорию социальных деприваций для анализа системных, структурных и индивидуальных факторов деприваций женщин в эмиграции;
- (3) интерсекциональный подход, который позволяет опираться на личный опыт участниц исследования и рассматривать социальные и экономические депривации как результат пересечения различных идентичностей женщин-мигранток, создающие специфические условия для уязвимости в эмиграции.

Работа имеет следующую структуру:

В разделе «Исследования миграции: обзор теорий и подходов» рассматриваются исследования белорусской эмиграции последней волны, систематизируются подходы к оценке и анализу эмиграции из Беларуси после 2020 г. Анализируется вклад феминистских подходов в исследования миграции.

В разделе «Методология исследования: подходы к сбору и анализу данных» представлена методология качественных исследований,

В разделе «*Case study*: Белорусские женщины-иммигрантки в Литве» на основании данных полуструктурированных интервью анализируется опыт эмиграции белорусских женщин, переехавших в Литву после 2020 г.

В заключении на основании результатов исследования представлены ключевые выводы и рекомендации для совершенствования миграционной политики и формирования целевых мер, направленных на сокращение уязвимости женщин-иммигранток, обеспечение их равного доступа к ресурсам и возможностям.

Теоретические рамки

В миграционных исследованиях понятие *habitus* используется как интерпретативная рамка для анализа адаптационных стратегий, трансформации идентичностей и повседневных практик

мигрантов. Миграция запускает процесс переосмысления ранее усвоенных социальных норм и активирует механизмы модификации повседневных диспозиций, через которые мигранты адаптируются к новым социальным, культурным и экономическим условиям (Radogna 2022). Этот процесс может включать как постепенное изменение привычных моделей поведения, так и формирование новых практик взаимодействия с социальной средой (Nowicka 2015). В исследовании Carlson и Schneickert (2021) выделены три возможные модели изменений *habitus* в контексте транснациональной миграции: (1) полная трансформация *habitus*, (2) его разделение на два не совпадающих набора повседневных практик и (3) постепенная модификация, приводящая к адаптивному изменению социальных практик. Применительно к анализу социальных и экономических деприваций женщин в эмиграции в исследовании операционализируется третья модель трансформации *habitus* – постоянная модификация. Данный теоретический подход позволяет рассмотреть, каким образом трансформируется *habitus* женщин в эмиграции через налаживание повседневной жизни в новой стране (выстраивание «новых рутин»), адаптацию к новым социальным и экономическим условиям. Рассмотрение адаптивной трансформации *habitus* в процессе миграции позволяет глубже понять, какие компенсаторные механизмы используются женщинами для снижения рисков уязвимости к социальным и экономическим депривациям.

Дополнением к использованию теории *habitus* применительно к анализу транснациональной миграции является интеграция интерсекционального подхода, который позволяет учитывать множественные и пересекающиеся идентичности женщин-мигранток и их влияние на риски социальных и экономических деприваций. В частности, Francesca Giudici (2022) предлагает объединение теории Бурдьё и интерсекционального анализа для интерпретации мобильности как формы социального изменения. В её исследовании показано, что трансформация *habitus* происходит не изолированно, а в тесной связи с социальным положением, культурным капиталом и структурными ограничениями, которые по-разному влияют на женщин в зависимости от их исходных ресурсов и контекста миграции. Такой подход позволяет не только выявить механизмы адаптации, но и осмыслить, как социальные неравенства воспроизводятся или преодолеваются в процессе миграции. Интерсекциональный анализ, в том числе в работе Amelina и Lutz (2019), демонстрирует, что институциональные и системные механизмы, такие как миграционная политика, трудовое законодательство, доступ к социальным услугам, создают специфические

условия уязвимости для разных категорий женщин-иммигранток и риски социальных и экономических деприваций. Применительно к целям исследования использование интерсекционального подхода позволяет более полно понять сложные и взаимосвязанные факторы, влияющие на социальные и экономические депривации женщин-иммигранток.

Депривации в миграционных исследованиях рассматриваются как потеря либо лишение доступа к социальным и экономическим ресурсам и благам в связи с переездом в другую страну (Ratha, Mohapatra, Scheja 2010). Например, в результате эмиграции люди могут быть лишены адекватного образования, здравоохранения, качественного жилья, достойной работы, достаточного дохода, хорошего здоровья, возможностей для удовлетворения своих потребностей (Norman, Boyle, Rees 2005).

В исследовании деприваций пожилых людей в странах Евросоюза (Musk, Najsztab, Oczkowska 2015) выделены следующие типы деприваций: (1) материальная депривация, которая охватывает «дефицит основных материальных ресурсов и неравный доступ к правам социального гражданства в форме государственных услуг»; (2) социальная депривация, которая включает «социальную изоляцию и отсутствие социальной поддержки, ограниченное соблюдение основных социальных норм и ценностей, снижение вовлеченности в местное сообщество или общество». В данном исследовании под термином «депривация» понимается дефицит социальных и экономических ресурсов, ограничения в удовлетворении социальных и материальных потребностей.

Экономическая и социальная депривации женщин-иммигранток обусловлены множеством факторов, включая неравный доступ к рынку труда, гендерные различия в уровне доходов, ограниченные социальные гарантии в новой стране, а также специфику распределения домашнего и репродуктивного труда.

Постановка проблемы и актуальность исследования

По данным Департамента миграции, на 1 июля 2025 г. действующие виды на жительство (далее – ВНЖ) в Литве были у 52,3 тысяч граждан Беларуси¹, при этом основной прирост иммигрантов из Беларуси, впервые получающих разрешение на проживание в Литве, отмечался в 2022–2023 гг. Согласно данным Eurostat, чис-

1 См. Imigrantai Lietuvoje / 2025 m. liepos 1 d. duomenys.

ленность белорусов, имеющих разрешение на проживание в Литве², увеличилась с 18 665 в 2019 г. до 63 255 в 2023 г. (а за 2024 г. сократилось до 58 632)³. Несмотря на то, что основной поток миграции (измеряемой через число действующих ВНЖ) из Беларуси в Литву формировался за счет мужчин, увеличение численности женщин-иммигранток в этот период также было значимым: она увеличилась с 3 064 в 2019 г. до 9 913 в 2023 г. с небольшим сокращением до 9 725 в 2024 г.

Первичный анализ количественных и качественных данных позволяет сформулировать гипотезу о влиянии внешних (правовые, социальные, экономические условия адаптации и интеграции мигрантов в принимающей стране) и индивидуальных (возраст, образование, профессиональный опыт, семейный статус) факторов на риски социальной и экономической депривации женщин, эмигрировавших из Беларуси в Литву после 2020 г.

Правовые условия легализации мигрантов влияют на возможности для занятости и трудовую мобильность. Например, разрешения на проживание в Литве, выданные на основании трудоустройства, предполагают занятость не более чем у двух работодателей. Смена места работы или дополнительная занятость требуют согласования с миграционной службой, что влияет на трудовую мобильность и возможности получения доходов.

Изменения в миграционном законодательстве страны-реципиента влияют на жизненные стратегии людей в эмиграции и нарушают процессы устойчивой адаптации и интеграции в принимающее сообщество. Кроме того, ужесточение миграционного законодательства может влиять на доступ женщин к легальной занятости, увеличивая риск экономической нестабильности и зависимости. Нестабильность правового положения иммигрантов подталкивает последних к «серийной» эмиграции (из страны в страну), что для женщин, переехавших вместе с детьми и другими зависимыми членами семьи, связано с увеличением бремени ответственности за адаптацию и интеграцию детей, их материальное и эмоциональное благополучие.

- 2 Учет выданных разрешений на проживание в Литве включает в том числе и рабочие ВНЖ, выданные работникам, фактически не проживающим на территории Литвы. Так, на начало 2024 г. 33 000–36 000 белорусов работали в транспортно-логистических компаниях, в основном в качестве водителей-международников, что по сути является вахтовой миграцией. Если отнять вахтовых мигрантов от общего количества разрешений, выданных на проживание в Литве, женщины составят почти треть белорусских иммигрантов в Литве.
- 3 Данные на 31 декабря каждого года.

Социальные и экономические условия в принимающей стране влияют на доступ мигрантов к социальным (образование, здравоохранение, социальная поддержка и т. д.) и экономическим (получение доходов от занятости и ведения бизнеса) ресурсам.

Индивидуальные факторы (возраст, образование и профессиональный опыт, опыт политического участия, семейный статус, наличие детей) могут как снижать риски социальных и экономических деприваций, так и увеличивать их. Например, молодые женщины чаще испытывают трудности с социализацией в принимающем обществе, поскольку опыт эмиграции накладывает на процесс сепарации от родителей и начало самостоятельной жизни. Отсутствие поддерживающей среды (родители, ближайшее окружение) усложняет процесс социализации в новой стране. Кроме того, в эмиграции молодые женщины часто испытывают сложности с профессиональной ориентацией, поиском работы, профессиональной социализацией, что в целом характерно для молодых людей, которые только начинают карьеру.

Профессиональный опыт имеет ключевое значение в процессе адаптации и интеграции в новой стране. Как показали данные опроса, посвященного исследованию адаптационных стратегий белорусских и украинских мигрантов в Литве и Польше (Львовский, Морозов 2024), женщины чаще, чем мужчины, испытывают сложности с продолжением карьеры в новой стране и чаще мужчин вынуждены осваивать новые профессии, которые не соответствуют полученному образованию и достигнутому уровню квалификации в своей стране⁴. Потери в человеческом капитале женщин в эмиграции более существенны, чем у мужчин, что приводит к ухудшению качества жизни женщин, экономической зависимости, воспроизводству патриархального уклада в иммигрантских семьях.

4 В исследовании адаптационных стратегий белорусов и украинцев в эмиграции (Львовский, Морозов 2024) отмечается, что женщины в иммиграции реже, чем мужчины, возвращаются к той же карьере и работают в той же должности, что и до переезда. Согласно данным опроса, в той же карьере и той же должности продолжили свои профессиональные траектории в эмиграции 55% мужчин и 31% женщин. Более распространенной карьерной стратегией в эмиграции для женщин является полная смена сферы деятельности и начало новой карьеры: 43% женщин отметили, что начали новую карьеру в эмиграции. В нашем исследовании некоторые респондентки интервью отмечали сложности в продолжении карьеры в Литве, если эмиграция изначально не была связана с релокацией, поскольку образование, навыки, опыт работы, полученные в родной стране, оказались невостребованными в Литве, см. раздел «Жизнь в эмиграции: доступ к экономическим и социальным ресурсам».

Семейный статус женщин также имеет значение при выстраивании «новых рутин» в принимающей стране. Мобильность и миграция женщин редко являются простым вопросом перемещения через государственные границы «отдельно взятого» индивида. В случае семейной миграции женщины, как правило, играют ключевую роль в формировании и поддержании социальных связей и выстраивании социальных взаимодействий с внешней средой, способствуя тем самым интеграции всех членов семьи в новый социокультурный контекст.

Уязвимости женщин, которые переехали вместе с детьми, зачастую связаны с потерей социальной среды и поддерживающих коммуникаций. Речь идёт о таких проблемах как отсутствие помощи со стороны близких родственников в воспитании детей, потеря социальных связей, которые в родной стране формировали социальный капитал женщин.

Исследование женского опыта эмиграции может способствовать более глубокому пониманию адаптационных стратегий эмигрантов в целом, проблем, барьеров и ограничений, с которыми сталкиваются женщины в эмиграции, повышению осведомлённости о положении женщин-иммигранток, а также стимулировать общественные дискуссии о разнообразии миграционного опыта, проблемах адаптации и интеграции иммигрантов из Беларуси в Литве. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы при разработке мер, направленных на сокращение уязвимости женщин-иммигранток, обеспечение их равного доступа к ресурсам и возможностям, а также для повышения эффективности программ адаптации в принимающем обществе. Результаты исследования помогут стейкхолдерам, занимающимся поддержкой женщин и адвокатированием их прав, представлением интересов диаспоры и поддержкой белорусов в эмиграции (НГО, общественным группам и инициативам), лучше понимать реальные потребности своих целевых групп и продвигать инициативы, способные улучшить положение женщин в эмиграции.

Миграционные исследования: обзор теорий и подходов

До недавнего времени в миграционных исследованиях опыт эмиграции «унифицировался», а традиционные представления о мигрантах зачастую игнорировали женщин либо присваивали им пассивную роль в миграционных перемещениях (Morokvasic 2015). Феминистский подход к анализу миграции значительно расширил

понимание ее факторов за счет признания женщин активными участницами (субъектами) процессов миграции и того факта, что миграция не только влияет на экономическое положение мигрантов, но и трансформирует гендерные роли, а также может влиять на гендерный порядок в принимающих сообществах (Morokvasic 2015). Гендерная оптика позволяет учитывать различия в опыте миграции между мужчинами и женщинами, выявляя уникальные вызовы и преимущества для разных групп, что способствует разработке эффективных и инклюзивных миграционных политик, учитывающих интересы различных групп мигрантов.

Анализ феминистского подхода к исследованию миграционных процессов позволяет сформулировать несколько направлений (или этапов в развитии феминистского подхода), в рамках которых к анализу миграции применяется гендерная оптика. Часть исследований, посвященных гендерным аспектам миграции (особенно в контексте трудовой миграции), фокусируется на трансформации ролевых моделей и гендерного уклада (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000), которая происходит с иммигрантами в принимающих странах. Речь идет об улучшении положения женщин в результате вхождения в сферу оплачиваемой занятости, получения доступа к образованию, улучшении их материального положения и т. д. В этом случае миграция действительно может способствовать расширению прав и возможностей женщин за счет усиления их «переговорной позиции» в семье и в обществе.

В рамках феминистского подхода к анализу гражданства и участия подчеркивается, что расширение прав и возможностей женщин в результате миграции происходит параллельно с процессами ограничения юридических прав и гражданского участия, что требует переосмысления концепции гражданства в условиях транснационального мира (Benhabib, Resnik 2009). Бенхабиб и Резник подчеркивают, что расширение экономического участия женщин-эмигранток в принимающих странах происходит в ситуации «частичного гражданства», когда права и возможности женщин зависят от миграционного законодательства принимающей страны, а многие правовые системы по-прежнему рассматривают женщин-мигранток в рамках семейной зависимости, ограничивая их доступ к независимому гражданскому статусу и политическому участию.

В рамках феминистской критики миграционных исследований с точки зрения гражданства и участия наиболее значимым представляется *«включить требования гендерного равенства в обсуждение четырех других основных принципов, на которые регулярно ссылаются в этой области: свободное передвижение людей;*

необходимость защиты беженцев; юрисдикционная власть суверенных государств над своими границами; и обязательство уважать семейные узы, в том числе путем воссоединения семей» (Benhabib, Resnik 2009).

В целом же феминистская оптика, применяемая к исследованиям миграции, сыграла важную роль в расширении методологии и в установлении ценности историй мигранток о себе и личном опыте эмиграции (Ahmed 2009; Lawson 2000).

Анализ белорусской эмиграции последней волны основывается представлен в ряде актуальных исследований, которые охватывают следующие направления:

- (1) оценка масштабов эмиграции после 2020 г. (Лузгина, Корейво 2023; Kazakevich 2023; Homel et al. 2023; Forti 2023);
- (2) анализ факторов и причин эмиграции (Dambrauskaitė 2022; Kazakevich 2023; Chulitskaya et al. 2022);
- (3) анализ социально-демографических характеристик иммигрантов из Беларуси (Homel et al. 2023; Kazakevich 2023);
- (4) анализ процессов адаптации и интеграции эмигрантов из Беларуси в странах-реципиентах (Dambrauskaitė 2022; Skuciene, Poškus, Kazakevičiūtė 2023; Homel et al. 2023; Львовский, Морозов 2024);
- (5) анализ проблем, с которыми сталкиваются белорусы в эмиграции (Kazakou 2024; Львовский, Морозов 2024);
- (6) анализ положения белорусских диаспор в странах-реципиентах (Alampiyev, Bikanau 2022; Naumau et al. 2023; Коршунов 2024).

Во всех этих исследованиях эмигранты из Беларуси анализировались как группа, которая различается по социально-демографическим характеристикам, причинам и факторам миграции, но имеющая общий опыт эмиграции и общие паттерны адаптации и интеграции в принимающих стране. Понимание гендерных различий в опыте миграции (не просто разделения мигрантов на мужчин и женщин) и осмысление того, как идентичность, социальные роли и ожидания, связанные с гендером, влияют на процессы адаптации и интеграции в новой стране, способны существенно дополнить анализ современной миграции из Беларуси.

Методология исследования: подходы к сбору и анализу данных

В основу методологии данного исследования были положены качественные методы, а именно проведение глубинных полуструктурированных интервью с представительницами целевой группы (беларусками, переехавшими в Литву после 2020 г.).

Метод полуструктурированного интервью был выбран в качестве основного, поскольку он дает возможность получения детализированных нарративов, отражающих индивидуальный опыт миграции, вариативность адаптационных стратегий, разнообразие связанных с эмиграцией барьеров и уязвимостей, которые приводят к социальным и экономическим депривациям беларусских женщин в эмиграции. Собранные качественные данные сформировали эмпирическую основу для исследования структурных и индивидуальных факторов, влияющих на адаптационные стратегии, барьеры в адаптации и уязвимости беларусских женщин в эмиграции.

Для проведения интервью был разработан примерный сценарий (гайд), который включал 10 блоков вопросов, отражающих индивидуальные миграционные траектории участниц исследования. Последующий анализ интервью с использованием интерсекционального подхода, комбинирования тематического и рефлексивного анализа позволил реконструировать индивидуальные миграционные траектории беларусских женщин в Литве и определить ключевые детерминанты и механизмы формирования социальных и экономических деприваций женщин.

При формировании выборки участниц интервью учитывалась оцененная структура иммигранток по возрастным группам и основаниям легализации, основанная на актуальных данных Eurostat. Метод подбора респонденток – целевой отбор, позволяющий учесть (но не воспроизвести) структуру генеральной совокупности по таким критериям как возраст, профессиональный статус, правовой статус, семейное положение. На финальном этапе полевого исследования метод целевого отбора был дополнен открытым обращением к целевой аудитории для добора участниц, легализованных в Литве как высококвалифицированные специалистки (Blue Card). Всего в рамках проекта было проведено 17 интервью с женщинами, переехавшими в Литву после 2020 г.

Case study: Беларусские женщины-иммигрантки в Литве

Миграция не является просто изменением географического положения — она представляет собой сложный социокультурный процесс, в котором параллельно с изменением внешней среды меняется образ жизни, самоощущение и самоидентификация человека.

Жизнь в эмиграции: трансформация повседневных практик и выстраивание «новых рутин»

Трансформация повседневных практик начинается с этапа первичной адаптации, на котором происходит выстраивание повседневной жизни в новых условиях. Несмотря на географическую, культурную и ментальную близость литовцев и беларусов, сложности на уровне повседневных практик испытывают многие иммигрантки из Беларуси. Некоторые участницы интервью говорили об «обнулении» опыта либо его нерелевантности условиям жизни в новой стране:

«Это жизнь с нуля практически, это с чистого нуля... Никакие навыки, которые ты приобретала в своей прошлой жизни — ты «обнуляешься» и начинаешь свой путь сначала. Как бы нам тут не помогли, как бы не старались для тебя что-то сделать, ты все равно начинаешь жизнь с нуля.» (Инна)

«Ты постоянно сталкиваешься с новой реальностью, о которой ты не просил. ... Только ты вроде в чем-то разобрался⁵ — на тебе новенькое...» (Ольга)

«Здесь ты стартуешь с самого начала, ... нужно понимать многие вещи. Здесь просто все по-другому — другая страна, другие законы. ... Там [в Беларуси] ты с этим родился и живешь, ... это понятно на уровне, ну, каком-то, либо у тебя везде есть знакомые, есть друзья — здесь просто нет.» (Инна)

Отсутствие возможности адаптировать накопленный опыт организации повседневной жизни к требованиям принимающей страны увеличивает риск социальных и экономических деприваций среди женщин-иммигранток. В условиях эмиграции привычные алгоритмы взаимодействия с государственными учреждениями и сервисами, такие как запись к врачу, открытие банковского

5 Здесь и далее используются прямые цитаты из интервью, с сохранением рода, в котором участницы говорят о себе.

счета или вызов специалиста по ремонту, требуют новых знаний, времени на поиск информации, консультаций со специалистами, помощи посторонних лиц. Зачастую женщины-иммигрантки полагаются на неформальные сети поддержки, такие как сообщества эмигрантов или помощь знакомых, что облегчает первичную адаптацию, но полностью не снимает проблемы доступа к информации, ресурсам и услугам, которыми женщины без проблем пользовались в родной стране.

Адаптация женщин-иммигранток из Беларуси в Литве включает не только освоение новых условий жизни, но и постепенное восстановление комфортной социальной среды, ключевым элементом которой является ощущение дома. В интервью участниц проекта понятие «дом» приобретает множество смыслов и отражает материальные, социальные, политические аспекты адаптации и «укоренения» в новой стране. Феминистская теория уделяет значимое место понятию «дома», рассматривая дом как социальное, политическое и символическое пространство (Ahmed 1999). Утрата дома в результате эмиграции может означать физический разрыв с привычным пространством частной жизни, разрыв с социальной средой и потерю социального окружения, разрыв связи с географическим местом (дом как территория жизни) и гражданственностью (дом как страна рождения). В историях иммигранток отъезд из своей страны ассоциируется с потерей дома и часто связан с усилением чувства отчуждения и социальной изоляции:

«Все время ощущаешь, что ты в чужой стране. ... Ты здесь никто, ... ты на чужой территории сейчас, как не крути.» (Ольга)

«Ты понимаешь, что ты не гражданин Литвы..., ты можешь только принимать все условия, которые здесь есть, которое дает тебе государство это» (Светлана)

Потеря дома у участниц исследования ассоциироваться как с потерей экономического ресурса, так и символического «места силы»: помимо лишения собственности, с потерей дома женщины утрачивают привычные механизмы социальной защиты, ощущение безопасности и чувство принадлежности к социальному пространству:

«Это место, которое я снимаю, я домом не считаю. ... Это из-за того, что это аренда, из-за того, что у тебя нет уверенности в завтрашнем дне, у тебя нет ощущения принятия в этой стране — нет ощущения, что ты нашел свое место. Ощущения дома вообще нет.» (Оксана)

«Я не ожидала, что у меня и дом, и квартира будут потеряны, ... но это не самые страшные потери в жизни.» (Алена)

Найти новый дом в эмиграции — экономическая и политическая проблема. Некоторые участницы интервью говорят о сложностях с поиском съемного жилья, высокой арендной плате, зависимости от арендаторов:

«Пришлось строить совершенно новую жизнь в новом доме. Было не просто найти квартиру, потому что с ребенком как бы, не все хотят с ребенком. ... У тебя «отягчающее обстоятельство» — ты не взрослый человек один, не двое взрослых в паре, ты — взрослый с ребенком.» (Янина)

Восприятие Литвы как «нового дома» в историях участниц исследования различается, а их отношение к «укоренению» в стране часто определяется внешними факторами: вопросы легализации, изменения законодательства и риски дальнейшего ограничения прав беларусов становятся ключевыми аспектами, формирующими восприятие жизни в Литве. Для некоторых женщин-иммигранток Литва кажется комфортным местом для жизни, однако чувство незащищенности от действий государства вызывает тревогу и неопределенность в отношении будущего.

«Я бы не хотела переезжать из Литвы, мне очень нравится. ... Но со стороны государства я ощущаю свою незащищенность, то есть я не знаю, какое будущее у меня, как у беларуса, может быть здесь, то есть я не понимаю, что мне ждать, не понимаю, какие законы будут еще приняты, будут ли в дальнейшем ущемляться мои права.» (Инна)

Дом как политическое пространство играет ключевую роль в регулировании миграции и становится инструментом политических решений, влияющих на процесс адаптации и интеграции мигрантов в принимающей стране. В публичных дискуссиях о беларусской миграции в Литве периодически поднимается вопрос о том, может ли Литва стать «новым домом» для беларусов, или же их пребывание следует рассматривать исключительно как временный этап.

Право на «дом» в политическом контексте может являться инструментом ограничения притязаний мигрантов на «укоренение» в новой стране. Например, ограничения на приобретение земли под строительство жилья, требования к оформлению ипотеки на

недвижимость, ограничения по банковским операциям, введенные для граждан Беларуси, дискриминационные практики при аренде недвижимости — все это указывает на то, что в контексте взаимоотношений мигрантов с титульным населением «обретение нового дома» является инструментом давления на мигрантов, лишением возможности долгосрочного планирования жизни в новой стране и даже попыткой заставить иммигрантов вернуться домой либо искать свой дом в другой стране.

«Снять квартиру было очень тяжело, потому что ты беларус: «беларусам не сдаем, только литовцам.» Они слышат речь и говорят, что беларусам не хотят сдавать, или тройной депозит.» (Анна)

Для женщин-иммигранток понятие «дом» приобретает значение, связываемое не только с физическим пространством, но и с ощущением стабильности, принадлежности и будущего. Покупка жилья или строительство дома символизируют «укоренение» в принимающей стране, тогда как отсутствие таких планов часто отражает неопределенность, зависимость от внешних обстоятельств и ограниченные возможности. Ограничения доступа к жилью затрудняет процесс адаптации и возможности формирования устойчивых социальных связей внутри местного сообщества, что в конечном итоге снижает успешность интеграции в принимающей стране (Fathi, Ní Laoire 2024).

Как показали истории участниц исследования, отсутствие уверенности в долгосрочных перспективах жизни в Литве заставляет некоторых женщин-иммигранток рассматривать возможность дальнейшего переезда. В таких случаях «смена дома» воспринимается не как свободный выбор, а как вынужденное решение, обусловленное сложностью «укоренения» в принимающем обществе. Для некоторых из них Литва стала промежуточным этапом в эмиграции, а планы семьи изначально были связаны с переездом в третью страну:

«Я не думаю, что Литва станет тем местом, на котором я останюсь. Я думаю, что наша релокация продолжится. ... У всей семьи планы пересечь океан.» (Алена)

Жизнь в эмиграции: доступ к экономическим и социальным ресурсам

Депривации, с которыми сталкиваются женщины в эмиграции, связаны с лишением или ограничением доступа к социальным

и экономическим ресурсам. В качестве социальных ресурсов в исследовании рассматриваются ресурсы поддержки (эмоциональная, социальная, информационная поддержка), социальные связи и взаимодействия. Кроме того, к социальным ресурсам можно относить здоровье — психологическое и физическое самочувствие, возможность заботиться о себе и своих близких и связанные с этим социальные услуги. К экономическим ресурсам относятся участие на рынке труда (профессиональный статус, карьера) и другие виды экономической активности (ведение бизнеса, самозанятость и т. д.), материальные блага (деньги, товары, услуги). Потеря или ограничение доступа к социальным и экономическим ресурсам могут быть обусловлены как самим фактом эмиграции и условиями жизни в принимающей стране, так и индивидуальными жизненными ситуациями женщин-иммигранток. Доступ к ресурсам может быть частично или полностью восстановлен за счет стратегий адаптации к жизни в новой стране.

В интервью участницы исследования называют утрату социальных связей, ограничения в поддержке привычных социальных контактов и взаимодействий наиболее ощутимыми потерями в результате эмиграции. Как отмечается в исследовании социальных сетей поддержки в среде иммигрантов (Heidinge 2024), потеря социальных связей и удаленность от семьи усиливает социальную и экономическую уязвимость женщин-иммигранток. Женщины, оказавшиеся в эмиграции, часто сталкиваются с ограниченным доступом к ресурсам поддержки (эмоциональным, социальным, информационным и др.) со стороны близких родственников и социального окружения, которые невозможно было «взять с собой» в новую страну.

«Остался муж в Минске, работать, жить, охранять, правда, не знаю, что. Охранять ощущение, что можно туда вернуться, наверное. ... Муж приезжал некоторое время, пока у него были возможности, визы. Сейчас ему визу не дают.» (Янина)

«Это твои опорные точки, в какой-то любой момент ты можешь к этому человеку обратиться. ... Здесь точек опоры меньше, ... каких-то нет. Никто тебе не заменит твоих друзей детства, друзей студенческих. ... Это твои внутренние опоры, которых мы здесь лишены». (Светлана)

«Больш за ўсе адчуваецца страта ў людзях, у асяроддзі.» (Даша)

Хотя миграция может ослаблять семейные связи, она также может создавать новые формы взаимодействий, солидарности

и поддержки (Haragus, Ducu Telegdi Csetri, Földes 2021). Это релевантно опыту белорусских женщин, эмигрировавших в Литву после 2020 г. Большинство участниц интервью говорят о выстраивании новых социальных взаимодействий в новой стране, улучшении отношений в семье после переезда, что свидетельствует о «возобновляемости» доступа к ресурсам социальной поддержки и социальных связей в эмиграции.

«Для меня было очень важно уехать в то место, где были свои люди. ... Качество общения улучшилось — ... мое сообщество уже активно покидало Беларусь. У меня здесь нет дефицита общения.» (Люба)
«Вся семья со мной, интересы семьи соблюдены, ничего не разрушилось внутри нашего мира. Может быть, поэтому нет таких сложностей [социальных].» (Алена)

Здоровье как психологическое и физическое состояние и возможность заботиться о себе влияет на самоощущение женщин в эмиграции и определяет возможности женщин-иммигранток адаптироваться к жизни в новой стране. Миграция сама по себе является социальной детерминантой здоровья, поскольку изменяет условия жизни, уровень стресса и физическое состояние, доступ к медицинской помощи и услугам.

«Здесь [со здоровьем] произошел сильный отскок в худшую сторону. Несмотря на то, что я переехала в 23 [года] — казалось бы, такой легкий возраст в плане здоровья. ... Эти первые два года [в эмиграции] были очень тяжелыми, я находилась в тяжелом депрессивном состоянии. И это дало основной «подкос» здоровью и в физическом, и в эмоциональном плане.» (Вика)

Одним из наиболее значимых аспектов депривации женщин-мигранток является ограниченный доступ к медицинским услугам, особенно в области сексуального и репродуктивного здоровья. Исследования показывают, что мигрантки реже пользуются специализированной медицинской помощью по сравнению с местным населением (WHO 2017). Это может привести к ухудшению здоровья как самих женщин, так и их детей, а также к усилению социальной изоляции и экономической нестабильности (Pérez-Sánchez et al. 2024). Ограничение доступа к медицинским услугам может быть связано с неопределенностью правового статуса, материальными ограничениями, отсутствием необходимой информации и понимания, как работают учреждения здравоохранения в новой стране.

В Литве возможности страховой (бесплатной для плательщиков социальных налогов) медицины, как правило, становятся доступными по статусу занятости (официальное трудоустройство, ведение бизнеса, самозанятость), который обеспечивает уплату социальных налогов. В других случаях эмигранты могут самостоятельно приобретать страховой полис, на основании которого получают медицинские услуги. Как показали интервью, на первых этапах адаптации потребности, связанные с сохранением здоровья, уходят на второй план из-за приоритетности других задач, которые стоят перед мигрантами в новой стране, неопределенности статуса легализации и занятости, ограниченности материальных ресурсов.

«Я предпочитала не делать «чекапы» здоровья, потому что у меня не было страховки долгое время. Я предпочитала лучше не знать, что со мной, чем лечиться. ... В Беларуси я могла позволить себе ходить к любому врачу, с любой болячкой, сдавать любые анализы. ... Это несколько не било по кошельку, как любой поход к доктору здесь.» (Вика)

В случаях, когда бесплатная страховая медицина не покрывает дополнительные медицинские услуги, перед женщинами-иммигрантками стоит вопрос приоритетности — стоимость платных медицинских услуг в Литве достаточно высока относительно доходов, которыми располагают женщины-иммигрантки.

«Бесплатно ждать очень долго: тебе иногда надо в моменте, ... и тогда либо ты должен идти в частную клинику и платить втридорога, вчетыредорога, ... либо ждать, что тебя, конечно, не радует.» (Светлана)

«Приходится иногда выбирать, что в своем здоровье чинить первым, ... что в данный конкретный момент тебе лечить.» (Инна)

В условиях эмиграции здоровье может стать еще и значимым экономическим ресурсом. В отсутствие устойчивых социальных связей и институциональной поддержки женщины-иммигрантки, столкнувшиеся с проблемами со здоровьем, оказываются в особенно уязвимой позиции. Для женщин, воспитывающих детей в эмиграции, здоровье становится важнейшим инструментом поддержания стабильности. Женщины вынуждены придерживаться функционального подхода к заботе о себе, поскольку их физическое и психоэмоциональное состояние напрямую влияет на благополучие детей. В таком контексте ухудшение здоровья

может означать утрату финансовой стабильности, ограничение профессиональной мобильности, невозможность осуществлять уход за другими членами семьи, усиление социальной изоляции, что критически важно для «выживания» в новых условиях.

«Чтобы обеспечить жизнь ребенка здесь, я должна работать; чтобы работать, я должна быть условно здоровым человеком и не «запускать» себя.» (Янина)

В эмиграции женщины часто сталкиваются с финансовыми ограничениями в результате изменения экономического статуса, занятости и образа жизни. Сам факт переезда в другую страну является финансовым стрессом и повышает риски экономической депривации в эмиграции.

«Сразу, когда мы переезжали, у нас не было никаких запасов, никаких «подушек». Мы приехали и приехали, все, что было, отдали на жилье, а дальше мы все, что зарабатывали, то и тратили. ... Был первый год такой сложный, потому что сразу все эти изменения глобальные, которые случились, их надо было разгрести.» (Анна)
«У мяне была абмежаваная колькасць грошаў на руках, і гэта турбавала значна. Мне падабаецца разуменне таго, што ў мяне есць нейкі запас, гэта такая мая фінансавая падушка бяспекі, і яна была разлічана на некаторы час. (Даша)

Наличие первоначальных финансовых ресурсов, таких как личные сбережения, семейные накопления или доходы партнеров, может снижать риски финансовой уязвимости, но не решает проблему финансовой устойчивости в долгосрочной перспективе.

«Те сбережения, которые у нас были, они давали стабильное состояние — все эти сбережения ушли на переезд.» (Люба)

Женщины, переезд которых был связан с релокацией компаний, где они работают, менее уязвимы к финансовым рискам благодаря непрерывности дохода от занятости. Однако различия в системах налогообложения, а также изменения в структуре расходов негативно влияют на материальное положение женщин с высоким уровнем дохода.

«У нас нет индексации зарплаты в связи с релокацией, потому что это был выбор человека. ... В целом доход упал, потому что в Беларуси налоги меньше, плюс у меня там своя квартира, мне не

нужно было за жилье платить. Здесь, к сожалению, доход очень сильно упал.» (Ирина)

Для женщин-иммигранток, не имеющих стабильной занятости, вопросы финансовой устойчивости становятся особенно острыми, поскольку отсутствие регулярного дохода ограничивает возможности адаптации и повышает риск социальной и экономической депривации.

«Несколько месяцев — нерегулярные поступления [денег]. Тоже такая проблема. ... Я не могу на это влиять.» (Алла)

Финансовая уязвимость может стать вызовом даже для женщин, которые в Беларуси были финансово независимы и не сталкивались с материальными ограничениями. Потеря источников дохода (работы, бизнеса, доступа к банковским счетам), нестабильная занятость или невозможность быстро найти работу в эмиграции существенно влияют на финансовое положение женщин-иммигранток.

«Сложно было перестроиться на ситуацию, когда мое материальное положение зависит от других людей. В Беларуси у меня как-то так получалось, что всю жизнь я чувствовала себя материально независимой. ... Я привыкла полностью сама отвечать за свои финансы, распоряжаться своими финансами. ... Когда я приехала сюда, такой ситуации не было. ... На самом деле, [когда] я уехала, у меня было 500 евро и моя последняя зарплата на карточке.» (Анжелика)

Различия в стоимости жизни между родной и принимающей страной оказывают значительное влияние на финансовую устойчивость женщин-иммигранток. В процессе адаптации они сталкиваются с необходимостью корректировать свои потребительские привычки, поскольку базовые расходы, такие как аренда жилья, питание, транспорт и медицинские услуги, могут существенно возрасти.

«Стоимость жизни в Минске и стоимость в Вильнюсе — это абсолютно разные вещи, вообще разные. И тут еще растут цены. Но в целом это как будто бы разные деньги: чтобы жить хорошо, ну, или просто нормально, нужно гораздо больше денег.» (Алла)

«Есть тревога. ... С одной стороны, жизнь здесь стала дороже, тебе много приходится оплачивать вещей, включая жилье, которое

у тебя в Беларуси было, а теперь ты вдруг «с нуля». ... С другой стороны, эта ситуация с финансированием [проектов], все будет только ухудшаться. Есть тревога, что завтра надо будет как-то кормить себя и ребенка.» (Янина)

Несмотря на важность доступа к финансовым ресурсам для всех участниц исследования, их ограниченность редко воспринимается как критический фактор, поскольку женщины-иммигрантки демонстрируют высокую степень адаптивности, используя различные стратегии повышения экономической устойчивости и преодоления трудностей. Например, изменение потребительских привычек становится одним из первых шагов в процессе адаптации. Женщины пересматривают свои расходы, выделяя приоритетные и второстепенные траты, оптимизируют бюджет и ищут более доступные варианты удовлетворения базовых потребностей, таких как жилье, питание и медицинские услуги.

«Первый год жизнь была по принципу «тратить только на то, что критически необходимо»: еда, квартира, аренда, вещи какие-то, которых не хватает, ничего не покупать в дом, в съемные квартиры не покупать дополнительную технику, вещи или что-то бытовое.» (Вика)

«Приходится экономить на одежде, на технике, меньше ходить на культурные мероприятия, в кафе.» (Светлана)

«Я экономлю на поездках и отпуске. Последний раз в отпуске я была перед войной. С тех пор поездки у меня были только на мероприятия. Я даже не езжу по Литве почти.» (Алла)

Работа и доходы от занятости — основной инструмент преодоления финансовых уязвимостей и рисков экономической депривации. Ограничения в финансовых ресурсах в эмиграции могут компенсироваться за счет более активного поведения в сфере занятости, чем это было в родной стране, например, за счет увеличения рабочей нагрузки или дополнительной занятости.

«Финансовой подушки в эмиграции не было, можно рассчитывать только на то, что у тебя в кошельке. Из-за этого был страх потери работы, страх неопределенности... Первое время я работала на нескольких проектах, чтобы хоть немного обеспечить себе какую-то «подушку», потому что надо платить за квартиру, коммуналку.» (Вика)

«Трэба было хутчэй працаўладкавацца афіцыйна, как атрымаць Blue Card, каб мець магчымасць атрымоўваць грошы. ... Я думаю,

што галоўнае было пытанне бяспекі фінансавай. Я сама сябе за-
бяспечваю, таму гэта было важна.» (Даша)

Решение сменить карьеру в эмиграции является важной частью как адаптации к новым социальным и экономическим условиям, так и ответом на существующие или потенциальные риски экономической депривации. Во-первых, эмиграция часто открывает доступ к новым сферам деятельности, которые могут быть более востребованными или перспективными, чем в родной стране. Во-вторых, барьеры, связанные с легализацией, подтверждением квалификации, знанием языка могут препятствовать продолжению карьеры в прежней сфере. В таких случаях смена профессии становится вынужденной мерой, позволяющей женщинам-иммигранткам сохранить финансовую устойчивость или легальный статус пребывания в принимающей стране. Кроме того, смена карьеры женщинами в эмиграции часто может быть поиском баланса между потребностями семьи (в случае семейной миграции), финансовыми и профессиональными приоритетами.

В историях участниц исследования причины смены профессионального пути варьировались: для одних это было связано с открытием новых возможностей на рынке труда Литвы, для других — с переоценкой своих потребностей в профессиональной самореализации либо с поиском новых возможностей для улучшения своего финансового положения.

«Я работала, продолжала работу в компании [в которой работала до переезда], но, к сожалению, в компании начались не самые лучшие финансовые времена. И компания не стала удерживать сотрудника, в лице меня, и я начала искать работу, потому что уже не соответствовала моя стоимость как специалиста на рынке.» (Елена)

«Появился новый интерес [профессиональный], и это предполагает, что мне нужны новые навыки, способности.» (Алена)

«Я вижу больше возможностей [в Литве], потому что ... открытая граница во всех смыслах. Есть ощущение, что тебе открыт весь мир. В Беларуси было ощущение, что я все время упиралась куда-то.» (Анна)

«Я только сейчас начинаю «оттаивать», приходит как-то в себя... Больше двух лет прошло. Понимание, что я хочу вообще делать здесь, только сейчас пришло. ... Два года ушло, чтобы просто выжить...» (Алла)

«Я поменяла здесь полностью свою сферу деятельности. Мы здесь второй год, в первый год я нигде не работала, второй год я смогла устроиться в совсем другую сферу. Работаю в ИТ.» (Люба)

Женщины, которые возобновили (или не прерывали) свою карьеру в эмиграции, говорят об изменении профессиональной среды, языковом барьере, который мешает интеграции в профессиональное сообщество Литвы.

«Пока у меня есть работа, есть проекты, в которых я работаю. Эта часть как будто бы есть, хотя она очень сильно изменилась. ... Ты понимаешь, что ты находишься в другой языковой среде. И даже если бы ты хотела заниматься ... «на полуую катушку» и влиться в то сообщество, которое есть здесь, то ты не можешь этого сделать, потому что у тебя есть языковой барьер.» (Янина)

«Такое ощущение, что есть больше возможностей для самореализации, но нет профессионального сообщества, с которыми можно было бы реализовать идеи, нет интеграции в профессиональное сообщество здесь.» (Светлана)

Работа играет ключевую роль в адаптации в новой стране, поскольку позволяет структурировать повседневные практики и включить занятость в «новую рутину» жизни в эмиграции. Работа также служит инструментом снижения финансовых рисков: возможность самостоятельно обеспечивать себя и своих детей позволяет минимизировать зависимость от внешних источников поддержки и снизить уровень экономической депривации. Большинство участниц исследования говорят о работе как о важном ресурсе, который дает ощущение стабильности в эмиграции и позволяет справляться с трудностями.

«Праца дае адчуванне стабільнасці.» (Даша)

Заключение

Депривации, с которыми сталкиваются женщины-иммигрантки, обусловлены как самим фактом эмиграции и сложностями в адаптации к жизни в новых условиях, так и ограничениями в доступе к социальным и экономическим ресурсам. С самых первых дней жизни в новой стране происходит адаптация и выстраивание повседневных практик, на уровне которых ограничения испытывают многие женщины-иммигрантки. Беларусские иммигрантки в Литве среди таких ограничений упоминают «обнуление» опыта либо его нерелевантность условиям жизни в новой стране, проблемы в налаживании быта и выстраивании взаимодействия с различными структурами (сервисные службы, государственные

учреждения и т. д.). Многие рутины, которые «автоматически» воспроизводились в Беларуси, потребовали дополнительных усилий, траты времени на поиск нужной информации, в некоторых случаях — траты денег на оплату консультаций специалистов в различных сферах.

Ограниченный доступ женщин-иммигранток к социальным (информационная и эмоциональная поддержка, система социальных связей и взаимодействий, здоровье, социальные услуги и система соцзащиты и др.) и экономическим (работа, особенно по специальности, материальная поддержка, финансовые услуги, ранее сделанные накопления и т.п.) ресурсам увеличивает риски деприваций. Как показало исследование, индивидуальные стратегии адаптации к жизни в новой стране позволяют женщинам восстановить (полностью или частично) доступ к социальным и экономическим ресурсам и снизить риски деприваций.

Несмотря на то, что исследование фокусировалась на опыте женщин-иммигранток, связанном с проявлениями социальных и экономических деприваций, ограничения, лишения или потери, проговоренные в историях участниц, не выступали в качестве центральной или ключевой характеристики мигрантского опыта. Напротив, участницы исследования чаще говорили о приобретениях и позитивных изменениях, которые произошли в их жизни благодаря эмиграции.

Одним из общих и наиболее важных приобретений для женщин-иммигранток из Беларуси стало чувство безопасности, которое они обрели в Литве. Для многих миграция стала возможностью избежать политического преследования в Беларуси, выразить несогласие с политикой властей, в том числе с поддержкой ими российской военной агрессии против Украины, найти в другой среде среду, соответствующую своим ценностям и видению будущего для себя и своих детей. Для некоторых участниц исследования эмиграция открыла новые возможности для профессионального и личностного роста через расширение карьерных возможностей и перспектив для самореализации. Эмиграция также способствовала переосмыслению личного опыта. Взаимодействие с новым культурным контекстом, получение опыта адаптации в чужой стране и интеграции в принимающее общество позволили некоторым женщинам взглянуть на себя и свои возможности по-новому.

Исследование показало, что анализ женского опыта эмиграций через призму деприваций и приобретений позволяет выявить сложные механизмы адаптации и интеграции, а также очертить направления институциональной поддержки, способствующие

снижению уязвимости и рисков социальных и экономических деприваций. Исходя из полученных данных, представляется целесообразным формулировать рекомендации не как набор инструментальных решений, а как направления трансформации миграционной политики и практик гражданского участия, ориентированных на признание и адвокатирование женщин-иммигранток. В частности, следует:

1. **Переосмыслить концепт интеграции** мигрантов как процесс взаимной адаптации, в котором принимающее общество несёт ответственность за создание условий, способствующих включению женщин-мигранток в социальные и экономические структуры.
2. **Устранить институциональные барьеры**, препятствующие признанию и использованию профессионального, образовательного и социального капитала женщин-иммигранток, включая механизмы признания квалификаций, доступ к трудовому рынку и финансовым услугам.
3. **Развивать инфраструктуру поддержки**, обеспечивающую доступ к информации, правовой защите, медицинским и социальным услугам, с учётом специфики женского миграционного опыта.
4. **Поддерживать политическое и общественное участие** женщин-иммигранток, признавая их право на голос, представительство и участие в формировании повестки, затрагивающей их интересы.

Интеграция этих направлений в миграционную политику и деятельность организаций гражданского общества позволит не только снизить уровень социально-экономической депривации, но и укрепить позиции женщин-иммигранток как полноправных субъектов в принимающем обществе.

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FROM EMPOWERMENT TO EMERGENCY RELIEF: HOW WOMEN'S NGOS IN UKRAINE RESPONDED TO DISPLACEMENT DURING WARTIME

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Abstract. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has profoundly reshaped the role of civil society organizations, compelling them to move from advocacy and long-term empowerment strategies toward emergency humanitarian responses. This article examines how women's NGOs adapted their missions, priorities, and organizational practices under wartime conditions, focusing specifically on their engagement with internally displaced persons (IDPs). Drawing on seven semi-structured interviews with leaders of women's NGOs, the study applies a conceptual framework that combines civil society theory with feminist organizational analysis. Methodologically, it adopts a participatory qualitative approach, involving NGO representatives as both interviewees and co-thinkers, thereby centering their lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and perceptions of displacement-related challenges.

The findings demonstrate that the war constituted a critical juncture, producing rapid humanitarianization of women's NGOs. Organizations that previously specialized in advocacy, education, and women's empowerment



shifted to delivering food aid, temporary shelter, legal support, and psychosocial services. Interview data highlight five interrelated dynamics: the humanitarianization of missions; the gendered dimensions of psychological trauma among displaced women; the reliance on volunteerism and donor-funded rapid-response mechanisms; strained cooperation with state institutions; and the marginalization of long-term advocacy goals. Despite resource constraints and institutional tensions, women's NGOs exhibited resilience by mobilizing solidarity networks and leveraging their experience in gender-sensitive service delivery. However, their strategic capacity for policy influence and gender advocacy has been curtailed, raising concerns about the sustainability of feminist agendas in post-war reconstruction.

The article contributes to debates on civil society under crisis, NGO-ization, and feminist organizational practices. It argues that women's NGOs in Ukraine embody both resilience and fragility: indispensable as frontline humanitarian actors, yet vulnerable to donor dependence and the sidelining of advocacy work. The study underscores the importance of supporting women's NGOs not only as service providers but also as agents of long-term social transformation in Ukraine's reconstruction.

Keywords: women's NGOs; civil society; feminist organizational analysis; humanitarianization; internally displaced persons (IDPs); participatory qualitative research; NGO-ization; war and displacement.

Introduction

The ongoing full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has not only intensified the humanitarian crisis but also profoundly reshaped the landscape of civil society in the country. Civil society organizations have faced unprecedented challenges while simultaneously assuming central roles in providing immediate relief, social support, and psychological assistance to vulnerable populations. Among these, women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as key actors, addressing both gender-specific needs and broader societal vulnerabilities. Prior to 2022, Ukrainian women's NGOs were primarily engaged in advocacy, human rights education, and the strategic empowerment of women; however, the war has necessitated rapid adaptation, emphasizing emergency responses and humanitarian aid (UN Women 2025; ZMINA 2025). As one NGO leader recalled, "Our previous work was more optimistic – we taught women how to write business plans, focused on self-employment and entrepreneurship. Now we are working with women to meet their basic needs, including food packages and clothing" (Interview 2022).

This paper applies a conceptual framework that combines civil society theory with feminist organizational analysis. Civil society theory allows us to examine how women's NGOs operate within broader social structures, negotiate resources, and maintain their role in crisis settings, while feminist organizational analysis emphasizes gendered dynamics, internal decision-making, and the strategies women use to address specific vulnerabilities during conflict (Hrycak 2002). Within this framework, women's NGOs are understood as dual agents: on the one hand, they are part of broader civil society transformations in Ukraine, and on the other hand, they represent specific trajectories of the women's rights movement. The war is analysed as a critical juncture that reshaped both civil society dynamics and gender relations, positioning women's NGOs at the intersection of humanitarian response and long-term advocacy. The findings presented in this article are part of the research "Peculiarities of Service Delivery to Internally Displaced Persons by Women's NGOs and Volunteer Movements" within the framework of the Ukrainian Women's Fund project¹. The study was conducted in cooperation with experts from the NGO "Equal Opportunities Centre "Parity" (Zhytomyr, Ukraine) to better understand the unique aspects of service delivery to internally displaced persons by women's NGOs and volunteer movements, and to further disseminate successful practices. By integrating these approaches, the study moves beyond descriptive accounts to explore the ways in which wartime conditions reshape organizational priorities, networks, and activism.

While prior research has explored the development of women's NGOs in post-Soviet contexts and the phenomenon of NGO-ization (Hrycak 2002), less is known about how wartime conditions reconfigure their strategies, networks, and societal roles. Existing studies tend to focus either on displaced persons or on civil society in general, leaving a gap regarding the intersection of women's activism, emergency response, and broader civil society transformations during war (Mathers 2024; Strelnyk 2025). NGO leaders in Ukraine emphasized the growing role of solidarity and horizontal networks in addressing urgent needs: "I did not think that in the context of the struggle for resources, women would be so tolerant. They self-organize in the queue without arguing or conflict, and they are understanding when food parcels run out" (Interview, 2022). This illustrates how women's NGOs not only provide material aid but also foster social cohesion among displaced populations, reflecting both civil society dynamics and gendered organizational strategies.

1 With financial support from CARE

To analyse these dynamics, this study adopts a participatory qualitative approach, centring the perspectives of women's NGO leaders to capture their lived experiences, challenges, and adaptive strategies. The participatory framework allows for the documentation of nuanced insights that might be overlooked by external observation alone, emphasizing collaboration, mutual learning, and ethical engagement with underrepresented voices (Cornwall 2008). As one respondent noted regarding their role in crisis management: "From experience, people in crisis focus primarily on food security. They seek help with food, but we understand that they also need psychological support – even if they do not ask for it. Therefore, before distributing food parcels, we offered internally displaced persons (IDPs) the opportunity to join an informational session with a psychologist" (Interview 2022).

This article addresses the following research question: How has the ongoing war reshaped the strategies and practices of women's NGOs in supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine, and what does this reveal about broader transformations in Ukrainian civil society? By situating the analysis within the frameworks of civil society, women's activism, and NGO-ization, the study examines both the immediate humanitarian responses and the longer-term consequences for organizational resilience and influence – acknowledging, however, that resilience can simultaneously signify empowerment and systemic strain (Illouz 2020). One interviewee emphasized the adaptation to new realities: "Currently, together with the Equal Opportunities parliamentary group, we are planning to develop a programme to work with displaced women, as I do not see any strategic direction from local authorities" (Interview 2022), highlighting both the NGO-led initiatives and the gaps in state coordination.

The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it provides empirical evidence on the adaptive strategies of women's NGOs in wartime Ukraine, illustrating how they negotiate resource constraints, psychological trauma, and shifting beneficiary needs. Second, it contributes to the scholarly discussion on NGO-ization by analysing how external pressures, donor dependencies, and crisis-driven priorities reshape organizational missions. Third, it offers insights into the evolving role of women's activism in shaping civil society, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities created by conflict.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section outlines the methodology, detailing the participatory qualitative approach and selection of NGO participants; this is followed by a presentation of the results from in-depth interviews with NGO leaders; the discussion section situates these findings within broader theoretical and

empirical debates on women's activism and civil society; and the conclusion draws implications for policy, research, and practice.

Methodology

This study draws on seven semi-structured interviews conducted in May–June 2022 with leaders of women's NGOs in Ukraine. The study is exploratory in nature. It does not aim at statistical representativeness but rather seeks to capture diverse perspectives of women's NGO leaders at an early stage of the war, with the purpose of informing both academic debates and practical responses. Participation in the interviews was voluntary, with interviewees providing informed consent for audio recording and the subsequent use of interview data. Organizations were selected through purposive sampling based on two criteria: prior experience working with internally displaced persons (IDPs) since 2014, and active engagement in humanitarian support following the 2022 full-scale invasion. Focusing on leaders provided access to organizational memory, resource allocation strategies, and decision-making processes, while recognizing that this perspective does not capture the full spectrum of staff and beneficiaries' experiences. Existing research has demonstrated that IDPs in Ukraine face not only material deprivation but also social stigma and prejudice (Bulakh 2017; Rimpiläinen 2017, 2020). While our data cannot directly capture IDPs' voices, the NGO representatives repeatedly referred to these dynamics when explaining the complexity of service delivery, highlighting how displacement intersects with pre-existing inequalities and societal attitudes.

The research employed a participatory approach, meaning that NGO representatives were involved not only as interviewees but also as co-thinkers. They reviewed elements of the interview guide, validated emerging themes, and discussed the practical implications of findings. This aligns with feminist participatory methodologies that emphasize reducing hierarchies in research and amplifying underrepresented voices (Caretta & Riaño 2016; De Oliveira 2023). While the interviews were conducted in a conventional semi-structured format, the participatory element was realized through collaborative validation: insights generated by NGO leaders were subsequently incorporated into the development of a practical guide to support IDPs, co-designed with women's organizations. This ensured that respondents' experiences directly informed broader organizational practices. The choice of a participatory approach was motivated by both methodological and ethical considerations. Participatory methods enhance the credibility

and practical relevance of research by involving practitioners not only as respondents but also as contributors to framing research questions and validating findings (De Oliveira 2023). In crisis contexts such as wartime Ukraine, this helps ensure that analysis remains grounded in rapidly changing realities.

Furthermore, participatory methodologies address power asymmetries in knowledge production. As Caretta and Riaño (2016) argue, feminist participatory approaches create more inclusive research spaces, reducing hierarchies between researcher and participant while amplifying voices that are often marginalized or underrepresented in academic accounts.

Participatory research also carries a transformative potential. Beyond documenting experiences, it can stimulate reflection among participants, generate dialogue about practices and policies, and contribute to organizational learning (Plowman, Nocker & Engeström 2016). This aligns with the aims of the study, which sought not only to analyse NGO responses but also to co-produce knowledge that might support the sustainability of women's organizations in post-war reconstruction.

Formal ethical review was not required under the regulations in place; nonetheless, particular attention was paid to safeguarding the identities of respondents, given the relatively small and interconnected field of women's NGOs in Ukraine. To minimize identifiability, quotations are depersonalized, organizational details are generalized, and sensitive information is aggregated. Participants gave informed consent and approved the use of their statements.

To provide readers with a concise overview of the methodological choices, we summarize the study design, sampling, participatory approach, and ethical considerations in Table 1. Presenting the information in tabular form allows for greater transparency and readability while avoiding unnecessary repetition in the main text. The table highlights not only the technical aspects of data collection but also the epistemological orientation of the research, including our commitment to a participatory and feminist methodology. This format makes it clear how methodological decisions were shaped by both the extraordinary wartime context and the specific features of the women's NGO sector in Ukraine.

Hence, the target group consisted of representatives of women's NGOs with extensive experience in systematic work with IDPs. This article does not claim to represent the voices of IDPs directly, but rather examines how women's NGOs perceive and respond to the challenges faced by displaced populations. The analysis reflects the perspectives of organizational leaders who mediate between international donors, the Ukrainian state, and the IDPs themselves.

Table 1. Characteristics of the interviewees

NGO	Oblast (region)	Role of Participant	IDP-related experience	Main activities before February 2022	Main activities after February 2022
1	Chernivtsi	Manager / initiator	Since 2014	Civic engagement, human rights	Volunteer networks, IDP support, legal and psychological services
2	Khmelnytskyi	Program coordinator	Since 2014	Gender education, advocacy	IDP integration, children's services, community support
3	Kyiv	Program head	Since 2014	Training, empowerment programs, women's development	Crisis consultations, temporary shelters, support for IDPs
4	Lviv	Director / founder	Since 2014	Gender advocacy, training, legal advice	Psychological support, legal services, family assistance
5	Odesa	Coordinator / manager	Since 2014	Social assistance, legal advocacy	Shelter provision, logistics, legal consultations
6	Vinnitsia	Director / project leader	Since 2014	Women's rights advocacy, education, awareness-raising	Humanitarian aid, psychological support, information hotlines
7	Volyn	Project manager	Since 2014	Social support, civic education	Humanitarian aid, coordination, housing for IDPs

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The interviews were conducted online, in Ukrainian, by the authors of the article in cooperation with representatives of a women's NGO Parity with professional qualifications in sociology, psychology, or social work, and significant research experience. The partner NGO Parity only helped with facilitation and data collection, which minimized conflicts of interest and kept the analysis independent.

The interview process spanned seven days during May and June 2022. Our in-depth interview aimed to explore the specific approaches, challenges and good practices of women's NGOs and volunteer movements in assisting internally displaced persons in Ukraine by gathering insights from practitioners with first-hand experience. The guide consisted of seven sections:

- 1) A general information section, where we collected demographic and professional details about the interviewees, including gender, age, role within the NGO, years of experience and categories of beneficiaries served.
- 2) A section dedicated to the experience of working with IDPs, focused on exploring the extent of NGO involvement with IDPs before and after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Interviewees reflected on changes in their work, key challenges, motivations and the social profile of their beneficiaries.
- 3) A knowledge, skills and competences section that assessed the awareness and training needs of women's NGO staff working with IDPs, including financial literacy, mental health support, legal aid and employment services, and identified critical skills and support mechanisms to enhance their effectiveness.
- 4) A "Difficulties and solutions" section that focused on the obstacles women's NGOs face in assisting IDPs, including operational constraints, beneficiary dissatisfaction and conflict resolution strategies. Interviewees discuss key challenges and methods for improving service delivery.
- 5) A case study analysis that described a specific case from interviewee's experience where the outcome was unexpected and reflected on the factors that contributed to success or failure. The aim of this section was to identify patterns and good practice that could inform future strategies.
- 6) A recommendations section, where interviewees provided input on what should be included in a guidebook for women's NGOs working with IDPs, suggesting practical recommendations.
- 7) The conclusion and follow-up section that provided debriefing and an opportunity for further discussion.

This structure ensured a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies used by women's NGOs in providing services to IDPs.

All participants possessed over ten years of experience in the public sector and served as leaders, initiators, or managers of gender-focused projects. Prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by

Russian forces, their primary activities centred on anti-discrimination initiatives, human rights advocacy, and women's rights education. Additionally, some organizations implemented programs to support women's entrepreneurship, offered psychological and legal counselling, and provided advocacy and representation for LGBTQI communities.

Following the onset of Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2014, all participating NGOs expanded their focus to include support for IDPs. Interview findings revealed that the nature of this work has evolved significantly since then. Respondents indicated that prior to February 2022 their efforts primarily targeted the strategic empowerment of displaced women through initiatives such as non-formal education, human rights training, coaching and mentoring, counselling, and employment support. Notably, two out of the seven interviewees had prior experience organizing shelters for IDPs.

The main categories of beneficiaries served by the women's NGOs in their work with IDPs included the following: female members of parliament and public figures; single mothers; women facing difficult life circumstances; internally displaced women with children; women raising children with disabilities; women serving in the military; women with disabilities; women with many children; young women; LGBTQI community members; men of retirement and pre-retirement age. Hence, women constituted the primary category of beneficiaries, often identified by specific social statuses, such as motherhood, disability, single parenthood, lack of awareness, or low income. These conditions often compounded the challenges faced by women, creating a need for additional resources.

The interviews highlighted several key factors that motivated women's NGOs to engage with IDPs during the early stages of the full-scale invasion. First, the sheer social need created by the influx of displaced women into the cities where the NGOs operated generated a growing demand for assistance, particularly in areas such as housing, employment, and basic material support. Second, the availability of rapid-response grants allowed these organizations to scale up their activities quickly, leveraging limited resources to meet urgent needs. Third, a proactive approach was essential, as social service systems and state welfare provisions were often not yet operational, requiring NGOs to act immediately to provide essentials such as clothing, food, and personal hygiene products. Finally, the urgency of the situation compelled organizations to respond swiftly and adaptively, ensuring that support reached those most affected despite severe logistical and operational constraints.

Main results

The history of the Ukrainian women's movement spans over 140 years, encompassing efforts to challenge social customs and laws that discriminated against women, establish women's organizations to support public activism, and reconsider patriarchal notions of gender roles in society (Bohachevsky-Chomiak & Veselova 2005). Women's NGOs in Ukraine began to develop following the declaration of Ukrainian independence actively in 1991. We define women's NGO as a civil union created by women, for women, with the purpose of supporting women in various spheres of their life.

Notably, according to the Gender Profile of Ukraine, prior to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, there were approximately 1,000 registered women's organizations in the country, out of about 160,000 NGOs. The partner networks of the largest stakeholders in the development of the women's movement in Ukraine – the Ukrainian Women's Fund and UN Women – consisted of about 250 and 150 active women's organizations, respectively (European Union, July 2023).

The war in Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated dramatically in 2022, has transformed the role of civil society and its organizations. It has highlighted both their efforts to promote equality and fairness and the results of these efforts in advancing societal knowledge, attitudes, and readiness to build a European society grounded in human rights. At the same time, the full-scale invasion presented new challenges for women's NGOs, such as the need to create support systems with minimal resources to protect the large number of people affected by the war swiftly. Women's NGOs have emerged as key actors in addressing these challenges, leveraging their expertise to provide both immediate relief and long-term support.

The findings from the interviews with women's NGO leaders reveal how the full-scale war in Ukraine has reshaped their work, priorities, and organizational strategies. NGOs have been forced to rapidly adapt to the urgent needs of internally displaced persons, balancing immediate humanitarian assistance with ongoing commitments to women's empowerment and advocacy. The following sections explore five key dynamics that emerged from the data: the humanitarianization of women's NGOs, the fostering of gendered solidarities, shifts in strategic priorities, the role of networking and coordination, and the demonstration of organizational resilience.

Humanitarianization of Women's NGOs. The interviews reveal that the full-scale invasion in 2022 constituted a critical juncture that reshaped the mission of women's NGOs. Prior to February 2022, these organizations concentrated on strategic empowerment of displaced

women through non-formal education, human rights training, and entrepreneurship support. The outbreak of war forced a rapid humanitarianization of their agendas: food aid, temporary housing, and emergency clothing distribution became central activities. As one NGO leader put it: “We stopped all our projects and just started feeding people who arrived at our door” (Interview 2022). This shift demonstrates how crisis conditions redirect civil society organizations away from long-term advocacy towards survival-oriented functions. At the same time, NGOs drew on their pre-existing experience in service delivery and social advocacy to maintain ethical standards in crisis response, ensuring that interventions remained gender-sensitive.

Psychological Trauma and Gendered Vulnerabilities. Respondents consistently emphasized the psychological trauma among displaced women, especially those evacuating with children under emergency conditions. Unlike 2014, when families had more time to prepare, the sudden mass displacement of 2022 created deeper emotional and psychological distress. One woman explained to the interviewee: “I left with my daughter and mother in ten minutes; I didn’t even take documents. I was just crying the whole way” (Interview 2022). Women described themselves as fearful, disoriented, and often lacking basic documents or language skills to move abroad. These accounts highlight how forced migration reproduces gendered vulnerabilities: women disproportionately carry responsibility for children and elderly relatives, and their emotional well-being is inseparable from their caregiving roles. Women’s NGOs became frontline actors in addressing this trauma, combining humanitarian aid with psychosocial support despite scarce resources.

Resource Mobilization, Networks, and Volunteerism. A striking feature of the 2022 response was the activation of dense networks of solidarity. NGOs mobilized rapid-response grants from international donors, engaged volunteers, and relied on personal connections with public figures, business leaders, and parliamentarians. As one director noted: “Without volunteers, we would have collapsed. They came before we even called” (Interview 2022). This networked form of resource mobilization underscores the embeddedness of women’s NGOs within Ukraine’s broader civil society. Volunteers were described as indispensable, enabling organizations to scale up beyond their limited human resources. This dynamic illustrates how crisis reinforces the horizontal character of Ukrainian civil society, blurring the line between formal NGOs and mass volunteer initiatives.

Strained Relations with State Institutions. The role of local authorities appeared uneven across regions. Some interviewees reported constructive cooperation, while others experienced competition and

lack of coordination. One interviewee reflected: “The city administration wanted to control everything, but we were faster, so they saw us as rivals” (Interview 2022). The proliferation of parallel volunteer hubs sometimes resulted in a “tug of war” over resources. This reveals structural tensions between state institutions and NGOs in war-time Ukraine: while both aim to support displaced populations, fragmented coordination risks inefficiencies. Women’s NGOs positioned themselves simultaneously as service providers and as advocates for improved state policies, though the latter role was frequently overshadowed by immediate humanitarian imperatives.

From Advocacy to Marginalization of Strategic Goals. Humanitarianization came at a cost: the downgrading of advocacy, policy development, and long-term strategic programming. One activist admitted: “We have no time for gender policy now. All we do is help people survive the day” (Interview 2022). Interviewees admitted that urgent needs absorbed nearly all resources, leaving little capacity for advancing the women’s rights agenda, influencing peace negotiations, or engaging in systemic gender-transformative work. This trend resonates with broader debates in feminist organizational studies on the tension between NGO-ization and movement sustainability. While the ability of women’s NGOs to respond flexibly in crisis demonstrates resilience, their marginalization from peace and security processes risks entrenching gender inequalities in post-war reconstruction.

Emerging Long-Term Concerns. Despite the immediate focus on humanitarian needs, some respondents identified emerging strategic challenges: the need for permanent housing solutions, integration into host communities, employment opportunities, and professional retraining. As one NGO worker explained: “Women tell us they need jobs, not just food packages” (Interview 2022). This highlights how women’s NGOs navigate both immediate relief and future-oriented challenges, potentially shaping reconstruction and nation-building. The emphasis on language acquisition and cultural adaptation reflects how displacement intersects with identity politics in Ukraine, especially given the renewed salience of Ukrainian language and cultural policies since 2022 (Ahrensberg & Pavlyk 2024). These issues highlight that women’s NGOs are not only crisis managers but also potential shapers of long-term societal integration and nation-building processes.

This study shows that the full-scale invasion of 2022 acted as a critical juncture for women’s NGOs in Ukraine. Key dynamics emerged: humanitarianization of missions, gendered psychological trauma, network-based resource mobilization, strained relations with state institutions, marginalization of advocacy, and long-term integration

challenges. Together, these dynamics illustrate both the resilience and fragility of women's NGOs under conditions of war.

Discussion and conclusions

The findings advance our understanding across three interconnected strands of scholarly literature. First, within civil society studies, they demonstrate how the crisis accelerates humanitarianization that reorients NGOs away from long-term agendas and toward survival functions (Hilhorst 2018). In the Ukrainian context, this resonates with earlier observations of a vibrant, volunteer-driven civic sphere mobilized during Euromaidan and the war in Donbas (Zhurzhenko 2021). Recent work confirms that the 2022 war further expanded civil society's scope in Ukraine, intertwining volunteerism, NGOs, and governance (Mathers 2024; Lutsevych 2024). Women's NGOs were not passive service providers but crucial mediators between citizens, donors, and sometimes reluctant state actors.

Second, within feminist organizational studies, the results echo debates on NGO-ization and movement sustainability. Hrycak (2002) pointed to tensions between grassroots activism and professionalized advocacy, often shaped by donor agendas. As in other conflict-affected contexts (Abu-Lughod 2010; Bernal & Grewal 2014), humanitarian imperatives risk overshadowing advocacy, but they also provide resources that may sustain organizations in the long run. In Ukraine, scholars have shown how women's activism often intensified during crises but struggled to institutionalize gains in the political arena (Zhurzhenko 2001; Stepanenko & Stewart 2025). The Ukrainian case both confirms and complicates this picture. On the one hand, wartime humanitarianization amplifies the risk of reducing women's NGOs to service delivery. On the other hand, the extreme conditions of war show their resilience and ability to leverage networks, thus broadening our understanding of feminist organizing under duress. Following Illouz's (2020) critical perspective, resilience should be seen not only as a strength but also as a social demand that can mask systemic inequalities and transfer the burden of adaptation from institutions to individuals and grassroots actors. From this standpoint, the celebrated resilience of women's NGOs simultaneously reveals their vulnerability within unequal structures of aid and governance.

Third, the article contributes to debates on NGO-ization and donor dependence (Bernal & Grewal 2014). As scholars have shown, NGO-ization describes the institutionalization and professionalization of grassroots activism into formal NGOs, a process that often prioritizes

donor accountability over local constituencies and risks depoliticizing feminist agendas (Alvarez 1999; Jad 2004; Crotty et al. 2023). The war-time context in Ukraine sharpens these dynamics: while rapid-response funding enabled women's NGOs to scale up their activities and provide essential services, it also heightened organizational precarity, as short-term grants absorbed capacities without reinforcing long-term advocacy. This case therefore illustrates how crisis-induced humanitarianization can both empower and marginalize women's NGOs, depending on whether emergency resources translate into sustained political influence.

The consequences for Ukrainian civil society are ambivalent. On the one hand, the responsiveness of women's NGOs reinforces the horizontal, volunteer-driven character of Ukrainian civic activism. On the other hand, the marginalization of advocacy work risks weakening the women's movement in reconstruction processes. As interviewees stressed, humanitarian relief has absorbed most of the resources, forcing women's NGOs to suspend or scale down their strategic empowerment programs. While this emergency shift is vital, it raises concerns that prolonged humanitarianization may undermine advocacy for gender equality in the reconstruction phase. Future research should therefore track whether humanitarianization is temporary or entrenched, and how international donors can support both immediate relief and long-term advocacy.

In conclusion, women's NGOs in wartime Ukraine illustrate the paradox of resilience: they proved indispensable in humanitarian response, yet their strategic visions were curtailed. Their dual role – as crisis managers and as potential agents of gender-transformative change – will be decisive for both the future of Ukrainian civil society and the trajectory of the women's movement.

By amplifying the voices of Ukrainian women, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of forced migration and its gendered dimensions. Future research should continue to document these experiences, ensuring that the lessons learned inform global displacement policies.

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THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON WOMEN'S
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, CAREER,
AND WORKING CONDITIONS:
THE CASE OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED
PERSONS IN UKRAINE

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Abstract: This article examines the impact of forced internal migration on the professional identity, career trajectories, and working conditions of women in the context of the war in Ukraine. The object of the study is the professional adaptation of internally displaced women, including their ability to restore career development and integrate into new socio-economic conditions. The aim of the study is to identify key factors that facilitate or hinder access to the labor market, professional self-determination, and social adaptation of internally displaced women. The main tasks include analyzing theoretical approaches to forced migration and professional adaptation, identifying barriers to employment, assessing the influence of psychological resilience, education, and retraining programs on career opportunities, and examining the role of local authorities' support



and participation in international programs in promoting the integration of internally displaced women. The methodology employs a comprehensive approach, including the analysis of scientific literature and theoretical frameworks, a survey conducted among internally displaced women in four regions of Western Ukraine, and a comparison of the results with international practices in migrant adaptation. The key findings indicate that professional adaptation of internally displaced women largely depends on psychological resilience, access to retraining and upskilling programs, active support from local authorities, and opportunities to participate in international projects. It was found that involving women in decision-making processes regarding integration programs enhances the effectiveness of their social and professional adaptation. Based on the study, recommendations are proposed to improve conditions for professional integration and social recovery of internally displaced women, aimed at strengthening economic stability, ensuring gender equality, and supporting sustainable development of local communities.

Keywords: integration, internally displaced women, migration, professional identity, territorial community

Introduction

The full-scale war in Ukraine has caused one of the largest waves of internal migration in modern Europe, which has significantly affected the socio-economic development of regions and the structure of the labor market. The situation of women who are internally displaced persons (IDPs) requires particular attention, as their professional integration, opportunities to realize their labor potential, and career trajectories are crucial for the economic stability of households and the country's recovery process.

Despite growing scientific interest in the topic of migration, the issues of professional identity of internally displaced women (IDW), their career trajectories, and working conditions in wartime remain understudied. The lack of systematic data complicates the development of effective integration and retraining programs aimed at overcoming barriers to labor market access.

The purpose of this study is to identify the key influencing factors and obstacles that shape the professional identity, career trajectories, and working conditions of IDW in Ukraine during the war, taking into account their experience of integration into a new socio-economic environment.

In this context, it is important to find answers to the following research questions:

What factors most influence the professional integration of IDW in wartime?

What barriers hinder their integration into a new socio-economic environment?

What tools and forms of support are most effective in promoting employment and professional development?

The article is structured as follows: the introduction defines the relevance of the topic, formulates research questions and tasks, and separately provides an extended justification of the relevance of the issue in the form of an analytical section. Next, an overview of scientific literature and conceptual approaches that form the theoretical basis of the study is presented. The next section contains a description of the methodology, sample, and research tools, followed by the main empirical results and their interpretation. The final part includes a summary of the results, conclusions, and practical recommendations aimed at improving measures to support the professional integration of IDW.

Background

Forced internal migration caused by the war in Ukraine has significantly affected the social and professional integration of women, creating new challenges in terms of their employment, adaptation to the labor market, and self-realization in a changed socio-economic environment. IDW constitute a significant proportion of the population, and they are tasked not only with providing for their own families, but also with supporting the country's economy in its struggle for independence.

Migrant women tend to have lower educational status than men and face greater difficulties than men, both during migration and later, with their integration into the labor market of their destination. The war in Ukraine has exacerbated gender issues, because regardless of whether women have remained in Ukraine or been forced to move abroad, they bear an additional burden, in addition to their professional activities, of caring for children and elderly relatives, volunteering, adapting to new conditions, etc. In addition, there have been numerous cases where women and girls have wanted to join the Armed Forces of Ukraine since the beginning of the war, but have faced gender stereotypes that military service is not for women (Hassai 2023).

Research shows that the labor market in Ukraine has undergone significant changes during the war. This is due to a decline in employment, the mobilization of the male population, rising unemployment, migration, and deteriorating working conditions. In conditions

of uncertainty and economic instability, employers often resort to reducing personnel costs, limiting social guarantees, and curtailing activities (Vyshnovetska et al. 2024). This also does not help forcibly displaced women find employment in their new place of residence.

IDW have a positive impact on the economic well-being and employment opportunities of local residents. This is confirmed by research (Koroutchev 2024), which indicates that the situation in Zakarpattia has improved thanks to the creation of new jobs and the arrival of well-established IDW from the rest of the country. Such trends play an important role in formulating decisions and strategies at various levels of government aimed at reducing the inequalities and challenges faced by internally displaced women. They should form the basis for the development of targeted support programs, expanding access to education and professional development, improving employment conditions and economic self-sufficiency, and ensuring access to quality health services and social protection at both the community and state levels.

Current State of Research and Theoretical Approaches

Research into migration and internal displacement issues and the social integration of displaced persons is a relatively new field of study. Academic publications on this topic are closely linked to theories of resilience, empowerment, gender, and livelihoods. However, many scholars agree that this research is developing on a broad interdisciplinary basis in the social sciences, including refugee studies, economics, and development, rather than on core business disciplines (Al-Dajani 2022). In their scientific works, authors use both a reflective approach (Al-Dajani 2022) and the concept of participation (Lokot et al. 2023), as well as a dynamic approach (Balinchenko 2021).

The subjects of study by researchers in the context of women's displacement included various issues such as family formation patterns (Elnakib et al. 2024) and the prevalence and contributing variables of gender-based violence against refugees and internally displaced women (Tadesse et al. 2024; Kelly et al. 2024).

Many authors study external migration (Tumen et al. 2023; Hillmann et al. 2021; Ortlieb et al. 2023; Hernandez 2023, Szczepanikova et al. 2018). Their focus is on the long-term reflection of displaced persons in the socio-economic system of the host country and in the labor market (Ivlevs et al. 2018). It has been proven that the level of external migration decreases when conditions for the integration and employment of internal migrants are created.

The main goal of internal migration is to find a better place of employment in order to increase well-being (Morrison et al. 2011; Hatab et al. 2022; Caliendo et al. 2016). Other reasons for internal migration include unemployment, low economic development in the region of residence, low wages, discrimination, poor living infrastructure, and low expectations for career development (Manandhar 2023). Studies show that internal migration plays an important role in reducing poverty (Salam et al. 2023), and that the general propensity to migrate decreases with age (Thomas 2019). There is also a significant difference between the ideology of planned internal migration, associated with the search for better work or living conditions, and forced migration due to military conflicts and natural disasters (Smutchak et al. 2022).

The degree to which internal migration goals are achieved can be assessed through a gender lens. Researchers argue that gender diversity in teams is characterized not only by creativity and innovation, but also by better financial performance (Shatilova et al. 2021; Wasilczuk et al. 2022). Women are more likely to experience burnout at work than men. In 2021, 42 percent of women often or constantly experienced burnout at work, which is 7 percent more than among men. This is according to the annual McKinsey and Lean In survey, which involved 65,000 employees from 423 organizations (McKinsey & Company 2021).

It is always more difficult for migrants to find decent work, as confirmed by research (Synthesis report 2021: 7). Even in cases where migrant workers have the necessary level of professional knowledge and skills, many of them work in jobs that do not match their talents or skill level, leading to “underemployment” or a mismatch between their skills and the job they have obtained.

Scientists have been studying the characteristics of population migration in the context of the war in Ukraine since the beginning of hostilities in 2014. Some studies describe how armed conflict affects migration (Williams et al. 2021). Other works have focused on screening the strategic efforts that forced migrants make to rebuild their lives (Greta Lynn Uehling 2021), identifying the needs (material and non-material), challenges, and opportunities for social integration of internally displaced persons into host communities (Voznyak, et al. 2023b), attitudes towards IDP status, discussing it and confirming their citizenship in narratives and interactions with the state (Tarkhanova 2023). Internally displaced persons face significant challenges related to social vulnerability (loss of housing, jobs, and consequently income, difficult emotional state due to constant dangers and threats associated with war) (Capasso et al. 2022), and a lack of due diligence with regard to human rights (Khrystova et al. 2021). In particular, researchers have studied the prevalence of war trauma, PTSD levels by symptom

clusters, and whether socio-demographic factors are associated with positive PTSD indicators among urban civilians and internally displaced persons (Johnson et al. 2022).

Some studies address the problems encountered only by Ukrainian urban IDPs in adapting to new geopolitical and life realities and integrating into host communities (Havryliuk 2022), or use the example of only one western region of Ukraine, which is becoming a transit point on the way to leaving the country (Lozynskyy et al. 2024; Voznyak et al. 2023a; Voznyak et al. 2023b).

A significant part of scientific works address the problems of employment of displaced women in host communities (Meekees et al. 2022; Yaroshenko et al. 2023). An important aspect here is the role and tools of local authorities (Roshchuk et al. 2024).

It is also necessary to emphasize the important circumstance of displaced women's search for professional identity. Women constantly adapt to the family circumstances and career demands faced by their husbands, striving to maximize their usefulness within these frameworks (Stebur 2023).

A review of the literature shows that the issue of migration and internal displacement is interdisciplinary and covers economic, sociological, psychological, and managerial aspects. Research focuses on the following: the mechanisms of adaptation of displaced persons and strategic efforts to integrate them into host communities; the study of gender-related issues, in particular women's professional identity, their employment and social vulnerability; differences between voluntary and forced migration, the role of the labor market and social policy in reducing the scale of migration; the impact of war on migration processes, mental health, social integration, and the well-being of internally displaced persons.

The literature confirms that integration policies and the creation of employment opportunities reduce the level of external migration and contribute to the stabilization of the socio-economic situation. Researchers pay particular attention to gender aspects, as women are a more vulnerable group and are more likely to experience burnout, violence, and challenges to professional fulfillment.

The issues of migration and the conditions for the formation of an environment for professional identity, career, and working conditions remain under-researched, especially in the context of the adaptation and employment of internally displaced women. To gain a comprehensive understanding of this issue, it is necessary to cover several regions of Ukraine that differ in their economic, social, and cultural characteristics. In addition, it is important to conduct research in a dynamic manner in order to track changes in the processes of adaptation and

integration of IDW into new professional environments. This approach will allow for more thorough conclusions to be drawn, which can form the basis for the development of effective strategies to support these women in employment, career development, and the formation of professional identity.

Presentation of the Study

To reveal the multidimensional nature of the challenges and opportunities faced by IDW as they adapt to their new socio-economic environment in western Ukraine, the results of a structured sociological survey based on questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used. This study was commissioned by the non-governmental organization Women's Perspectives Center with financial support from the United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) as part of the project "Advocacy Support for Internally Displaced Women in Western Ukraine." The survey of IDW was conducted in the form of questionnaires, as this method is the most appropriate for obtaining reliable data and resource costs. The structured survey of IDW was conducted in the form of paper questionnaires for older people and computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI), with the aim of reaching the largest number of respondents at optimal resource costs. The survey was preceded by consultations with experts and representatives of local self-government bodies (LSG), which allowed us to select the most appropriate questions for the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions, which was sufficient to obtain complete information about the needs of IDW without taking up too much of the respondents' time. Open and closed questions with answer options were used, as well as questions with a rating scale (Likert).

The survey of IDW was conducted through direct contact with specially selected and trained coordinators who asked respondents to fill out questionnaires in paper or Google form. Local interviewers – coordinators who work with IDW – were involved in the survey, which helped to increase trust. The survey involved three stages of data collection. Data collection for each stage of the survey took place over three-and-a-half weeks. The survey was conducted in three stages to identify trends in change and how they affect the lives and employment of IDW. The first stage took place from 18 October to 29 November 2022. The second stage lasted from 27 January to 19 February 2023. The final, third stage took place from 8 January to 26 January 2024.

The survey was conducted in places where IDW actually live and where there was a comfortable atmosphere for communication, namely

in special settlements for IDW, assistance centers for IDW, medical and psychological centers, and places of education and retraining for IDPs. Respondents were assured that their answers and the information provided would not have any negative consequences for their emotional or physical well-being, would not threaten their safety, and would remain anonymous or confidential. Paper questionnaires were centrally entered into the survey results database for further processing.

The study covered four regions of Western Ukraine: Lviv, Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi, and Rivne. A multi-stage stratified sample was used to select IDW based on the following criteria: communities with the largest number of IDPs (Table 1). The survey results are representative, as random selection was observed and minimum sample sizes were calculated (at least 400 people in each territorial community (TC)). The accepted confidence level is 95 percent, and the margin of error of 1 percent corresponds to a standard error of 0.5 percent and a coefficient of variation of 10 percent.

Table 1: List of communities and regions that participated in the survey of IDW*

Region	Name of TG	Sample size, persons
Ternopil region	Berezhanska	1060
	Zolotopotitska	
	Kopychnets	
	Podvolochysk	
	Ternopil	
Rivne region	Klevanska	1035
	Dubenska	
	Berezne	
	Zdolbunivska	
Lviv region	Morshynska	773
	Rudkivska	
	Bibrsk	
	Murovanska	
Khmelnytskyi region	Khmelnytsky	1066
	Krasylivska	
	Horodok	
	Dunaivetska	
	Volochyska	
Total	x	3934

* Authors' calculations

Each stage of the assessment had its own objectives. Thus, the first stage examined the problems and challenges faced by IDW in Ukraine in the context of war. In addition, the most important thing in the first stage of the study was to determine the emotional state

of IDW, since emotional state greatly influences the ability to adapt to new conditions, make effective decisions, and maintain professional identity during a crisis. The study also examined the possibility of working remotely while retaining the jobs that women had left behind in their homes. These aspects are particularly important, as remote work allows women to maintain contact with their previous professional environment, reduces economic risks, and helps stabilize their emotional state.

This category of internally displaced women is seen as an asset and an opportunity for local community development, so analyzing these issues was key in the first stage of developing measures to support IDW in their efforts to keep their jobs, adapt to new working conditions, and ensure economic stability for themselves and their families, which in turn contributes to strengthening the country's economy in wartime.

The first stage of the study demonstrated that 7 months after the beginning of the war, IDW have partially adapted to the changes. However, a significant portion found it difficult to determine their emotional state (38 percent), while 33 percent reported feeling somewhat positive, and 19 percent assessed their emotional state as negative.

Most IDW were unable to work remotely at their previous (pre-war) places of employment in host cities. This indicates that, despite partial adaptation, challenges related to emotional stability and employment continuity remain pressing. The inability to maintain remote work underscores the need for targeted interventions aimed at creating flexible employment opportunities and providing psychological support.

Based on the screening results, depending on their emotional state and identified professional needs, local authorities provided different types of assistance and support to different categories of women. Repeat studies in the form of questionnaires made it possible to analyze the effectiveness of the implemented adaptation mechanism through the dynamics of indicators such as emotional state, desire to remain in the host community, and level of integration into the new environment.

Trauma support and counseling are crucial and should be offered before employment opportunities are provided. When providing counseling, it was particularly important to consider that group counseling could help women feel more comfortable talking about their problems.

The objectives of Phase II are related to clarifying the factors of women's professional integration by community. In the second phase, it was found that 37 percent of women managed to find work in their profession, while another 14 percent worked in less skilled jobs than before the war. Another 5 percent of IDW started their own businesses

or obtained better jobs than they had before the war. These data are consistent with the results of another study, which indicate that only 32 percent of IDPs were engaged in either full-time or part-time employment through remote work or other means (Koroutchev 2024).

Consequently, the remaining women had problems finding employment. It turned out that the qualifications and skills of IDW often do not meet the requirements of the local labor market, which creates significant difficulties in their professional integration. In the communities studied – Berezne, Volochysk, Horodok, and Murovany – only about half of women have professional competencies that meet the needs of the local market. This highlights the relevance of retraining and adaptation to new working conditions.

In addition, it was found that women face numerous challenges in the labor market, including limited opportunities for career growth, insufficient social guarantees, and lack of support from local authorities. Women reported discrimination in the form of potential employers refusing to hire them simply because they believe that they plan to stay in the community for only a short time and will return home or move elsewhere at the first opportunity.

The task of the third stage was to assess the dynamics of the identified factors of women’s professional integration. The analysis of the general indicators of the LPR survey in different TG in all the regions analyzed made it possible to identify the regions with the most significant changes in dynamics (comparing the results of the second and first surveys). For clarity, the data is presented in tabular form. Thus, the regions with the most positive changes in dynamics are presented in Table 2, and those with negative changes are presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Positive changes noted by IDW after the third survey, % *

Question	Generalized indicator for all communities	Average indicator for the assessed TG Lviv region	Average indicator for assessed TG Ternopil region	Average indicator for assessed TG Khmelnytskyi region	Average indicator for assessed TG Rivne region
Do you plan to stay in the community for a longer period of time? (“Yes,” “Most likely yes”), %	47	50	48	37	54
How has your emotional state changed over the past six months? (“Improved,” “Significantly improved”), %	56	58	58	65	46

How much more significant has the problem of employment become for you over the past six months? (“Decreased,” “No longer exists”), %	29	30	35	43	22
Has your desire to re-train (change your profession) changed in the last six months? (“I have developed a desire,” “I have already taken certain steps”), %	36	27	34	42	36
Has your desire to start your own business changed? (“I am working in this field,” “I have already started...”), %	24	19	29	28	23
Has your sense of belonging to the community changed over the past six months? (“Improved,” “Significantly improved”), %	51	63	38	47	55

* Authors’ calculations

As can be seen from Table 2, according to the answers regarding women’s plans to remain in the community, Rivne region stood out most positively, as 54 percent of the women surveyed supported this answer. This is due to the fact that these women have moved from eastern regions, it is closer for them to return home, and they hope for a quick end to the war. In the communities of the Lviv region, fewer women want to stay, as this region is a border region and many displaced women move there for a while to then seek a better life abroad. This category usually includes IDPs whose homes have been completely or partially destroyed as a result of military operations. The largest proportion of female IDPs in the Khmelnytskyi region note an improvement in the employment situation, and in these communities, displaced women also note the greatest improvement in their emotional state (65 percent), so it can be assumed that these factors are interrelated. This is also confirmed by scientific research, which shows that women tried to maintain their daily lives and safety in new conditions, continuing to hope for a better future, for example through religion and faith, through education and work, or through play, humor, and optimism (Jolof et al. 2022).

The purpose of the survey was to identify the desire to start one’s own business. The survey results indicated positive changes, but they

are relatively insignificant (no more than 29 percent). This is due to the fact that a significant proportion of women do not have the necessary knowledge and skills, start-up capital opportunities, or consider such activities to be difficult in wartime conditions.

Table 3: Negative changes reported by IDW after stage III of the survey, %*

	Generalized indicator for all communities	Lviv region	Ternopil region	Khmelnytskyi region	Rivne region
Do you plan to stay in the community for a longer period of time?, %	16	13	13	21	15
How has your emotional state changed over the past six months? (“Worsened,” “Significantly worsened”), %	15	6.45	13.6	10.2	23.25
How much more significant has the problem of employment become for you over the past six months? (“Has become more acute,” “Has become significantly more acute”), %	20	10.75	21	17	26
Has your desire to retrain (change your profession) changed in the last six months? (“Lost desire,” “Never had and still don’t have desire”), %	45	58.7	42.19	42.25	43.1
Has your desire to start your own business changed? (“I never had and still don’t have this desire,” “I gave up on this idea”), %	49	5	38	44	49.66
Has your sense of belonging to the community changed over the past six months? (combines the questions “Worsened” and “Significantly worsened”)	7	9	11	4	4

* Authors’ calculations

The survey results revealed negative changes in plans to remain in the community, albeit insignificant (up to 21 percent in the Khmelnytskyi region). This was due to the fact that critical infrastructure facilities are located in this region, making the relevant communities more dangerous to live in, which is where this indicator increased. A quarter of women feel a deterioration in their emotional state in the Rivne region. Also, in this region, the largest proportion of women noted a deterioration in employment levels, which again confirms the

correlation between these two phenomena. More than half of women in the Lviv region no longer want to retrain or start their own business.

The changes outlined above have affected the processes of adaptation and integration, in particular, a small percentage of negative changes was noted (no more than 11 percent in the Ternopil region). This indicates that local communities have done a good job of accepting IDPs. Every community to which migrants have moved (regardless of whether it is external or internal migration) should be interested in helping them integrate as quickly as possible, because failure to do so will lead to a deterioration in the socio-economic indicators of the community. The lack of job opportunities for migrants, the devaluation of human capital, and poorer health are important reasons for the slower adaptation process of displaced persons (Bevelander 2020).

Other studies (Synthesis report 2021: 14) also confirm that women are less likely than male migrants to have the opportunity to participate in work-oriented initiatives such as labor market training, job placement, and job subsidies. To overcome these challenges, various countries have organized special programs, such as Equal Entry and other initiatives, where, in addition to advocacy support, female migrants are given opportunities to travel or receive childcare support (Synthesis report 2021: 14). Between October 2022 and January 2024, displaced women had the opportunity to participate in various integration mechanisms established by local authorities. These mechanisms varied in scope and duration and were funded from the budget of the territorial community, the regional budget, and international donors.

However, the third stage of the study showed only minor changes in the key indicators of IDW's needs in response to the question, "Do your qualifications match the local labor market?" 14 percent fewer respondents said that their qualifications matched. This is due to the fact that some IDW are leaving communities and new ones are arriving to replace them, i.e., there is internal migration of displaced women. The adaptation, integration, and employment of IDW is closely linked to their emotional state, and due to frequent shelling and threats, the emotional state of most remains negative. The results of professional identification were also influenced by the regions of Ukraine and the type of settlement (city or village) from which the new displaced persons arrived, as well as whether they had professional experience before the war.

In the previous stages, most women were unable to answer whether they wanted to change their profession or retrain. However, such changes did occur, and according to the results of the third stage, the leader among such communities is Krasylivska, where 64 percent of

women indicated that they wanted to retrain and had even taken the first steps in this direction. The top five also included the Gorodok, Zdolbuniv, and Kopychyntsi communities and the city of Ternopil. This indicates the favorable conditions created by local authorities, local residents, volunteer organizations, and international projects that contributed to this change in women's desires.

The results of the study showed that there are communities where IDW who are new arrivals do not feel the desire to retrain. This may indicate the following: either the local labor market is unattractive; or women can find jobs and decent wages in the local labor market with the qualifications they already have; or women have the opportunity to work remotely from their previous place of employment. Among such communities, Klevan, Bibrsk, and Murovansk stood out significantly.

The results of the third stage showed that positive changes in the adaptation of female IDPs occurred in all communities studied, where at least one-third of respondents felt part of the community over the past six months. After spending some time in the community, female IDPs begin to adapt to new conditions and integrate into their living environment. The results of the study confirm that there is a direct correlation between positive changes in the integration of IDW and their emotional state. Displaced persons who have been displaced by war have more difficulties adapting due to circumstances, traumatic experiences, and feelings of loss. This is also confirmed by research (Krasilova et al. 2024), which emphasizes the importance of understanding the psychological aspects of adaptation for Ukrainian IDPs, examines the factors that cause difficulties in adaptation, and outlines that the lack of group support and social integration can exacerbate adaptation problems. Social adaptation can be complicated by conflicts between IDPs and military veterans in Ukraine (Singh et al. 2021). Therefore, it is important that local authorities, volunteers, and psychologists work to improve the emotional state of displaced persons. Studying forced migrants due to armed conflicts, researchers note that they are at greater risk of developing mental disorders (Siriwardhana et al. 2014). However, resilience, defined as a person's ability to successfully adapt or recover from stressful and traumatic experiences, has been identified as a key potential protective factor.

A scientific study has been devoted to investigating the factors that influence the resilience of women who have been forcibly displaced as a result of armed conflict (Jolof et al. 2022). Forcibly displaced women face changed living conditions associated with significant discrimination, danger, violence, and the need to survive on a daily basis while caring for their families. Research on the experiences of IDW as a result of armed conflict suggests that they drew on resources for

resilience from their families and social support from women who had been in similar situations. In comparison, Ukrainians who emigrated to the US due to the war in Ukraine have higher levels of resilience. This can be explained by the fact that forced Ukrainian migrants in the US may have higher levels of resilience due to a greater sense of security and satisfaction with themselves and their lives, as well as lower levels of anxiety and other mental health problems, as the results of this study show that the majority (61 percent) of respondents reported avoiding thoughts, emotions, and feelings about the war and the situation (Andrushko et al. 2024).

During the third stage, women were also surveyed about manifestations of discrimination, and the results showed ambiguous dynamics. The study found that IDW experienced discrimination from employers because they believe that displaced persons are temporary residents and may leave the community at the first opportunity. However, the highest number of IDW who no longer experienced discrimination was observed in the communities of Ternopil, Berezhan, and Zdolbuniv.

Discussion

Speaking in general terms about women's intentions to remain in their communities for a longer period of time, there were no significant fluctuations in the respondents' answers during the periods studied. At the first stage, less than half of the women had such intentions, with fluctuations within 5 percent. According to the results of the third stage, the number of people planning to remain in the community for a longer period of time increased overall. The leaders among such communities were, and remain, the cities of Rivne, Dubno, Morshyn, and Berezhan, which are comfortable places to live. There are also communities from which a large percentage of women plan to leave. In particular, this category includes the Pidvolochysk territorial community, where every third woman does not plan to stay, but in this case, there is a positive trend, because in the previous stages, this indicator was higher, and every second woman thought so. However, the situation is different in the Zdolbuniv and Berezne communities, as the number of IDW who do not want to stay in the community has increased significantly over the past six months. This should be a signal to the leadership of these communities.

The results of this study showed that there are leaders among the communities where IDW are working towards starting their own businesses and have even already done so. The Kopychyntsi territorial community tops this ranking. However, we would also like to highlight

the Krasylivska TG, where 38 period wanted and really wanted to start their own business, and half of them have already done so. In the case of the Berezivska community, almost all those who wanted to (41 per cent) have done so. In general, these results can be attributed to the active work of community organizations and the effectiveness of various events that take place in the community and create a favorable environment.

After examining the reasons for the results of the sociological survey, it was found that they were caused by a combination of several factors, which in synergy create barriers or drivers for the professional integration of IDW (Table 4).

Table 4: Factors influencing the professional identity, career, and working conditions of women*

Factor	Strength of influence	Possible consequences	Recommended measures to strengthen/weaken
Level of socio-economic development of the host community	High	More opportunities for employment and integration, access to resources and support	Infrastructure development, investment attraction, implementation of international assistance programs
Place of origin of the displaced woman (city/village)	Average	Level of prior professional training may affect ability to adapt to new environment	Implementation of adaptation programs, particularly for women from rural areas, individual approach
Matching the needs of the local labor market with women's professional skills	High	Difficulties with employment, need for retraining	Cooperation with employers to create retraining courses, implementation of training programs
Previous entrepreneurial experience	Average	Opportunity to start your own business, increase economic independence	Conducting training in business planning, microgrants for start-ups
Psychological resilience	Average	Improved ability to adapt to new conditions, overcome stress	Psychological support, mutual aid groups, educational seminars
Gender stereotypes in the labor market	High	Limited career opportunities, discrimination	Information campaigns on gender equality, strengthening control over compliance with labor rights
Support from local authorities	High	Facilitation of adaptation and economic integration, creation of new jobs	Development of business support infrastructure, advisory centers, grant programs

Participation in international projects	Medium	Expansion of network connections, attraction of additional resources	Strengthening cooperation with international organizations, developing professional exchange programs
Access to housing and social services	High	Reducing social instability, improving quality of life	Creating affordable housing and providing quality social services

*Developed by the authors

Key factors include lack of access to quality retraining programs, limited employment opportunities in rural and small communities, gender stereotypes regarding women's employment, and the psychological consequences of forced migration. These factors are interrelated and require a comprehensive approach to overcome them.

Conclusion

The analysis of the literature allowed us to form a theoretical basis for the study, which draws on several interrelated perspectives. The theory of resilience explains how displaced persons are able to overcome socio-economic challenges and rebuild their lives, while the theory of empowerment highlights the importance of restoring autonomy and agency, particularly for displaced women. A gender approach ensures that the differences between men and women's experiences in migration processes are taken into account, providing a more nuanced understanding of their needs. The concept of livelihoods allows for the assessment of access to resources, employment opportunities, and levels of well-being, while reflective and dynamic approaches facilitate the analysis of changes in migrants' needs and adaptation strategies over time. Finally, the concept of participation emphasizes the significance of involving migrants themselves in the development and implementation of integration solutions, ensuring that interventions are responsive and effective. Thus, the theoretical framework combines social, economic, and gender approaches, creating a comprehensive toolkit for further analysis of the integration of internally displaced persons and the employment characteristics of displaced women.

The process of successful professional integration of internally displaced women is multifactorial and depends on a complex of economic, social, and psychological factors. It has been determined that the most significant of these are the opportunity to find employment in the labor market as a hired worker, the creation of conditions for starting one's own business, access to retraining and advanced training

programs, as well as the overall attractiveness of the economic environment of the local community. The emotional state of women, their level of psychological resilience, previous professional experience, and existing skills are also important factors that determine the speed of adaptation and the ability to realize one's potential in new conditions. The combined effect of these factors shapes individual integration trajectories and determines the degree of socio-economic stability of IDW in host communities.

The results of the study emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach to supporting internally displaced women, taking into account their social and professional integration. It was found that a significant proportion of IDW who arrived in host urban communities had previous entrepreneurial experience or intentions to start a business, which indicates their potential for economic self-realization.

The active development of host communities, support from international organizations, and participation in international projects were found to be factors conducive to adaptation. The openness of local self-government bodies, which promote the integration of women into local economic processes, plays an important role. For example, the Kopychyntsi community has a business advisory center that helps women develop entrepreneurial skills and receive advice on starting their own businesses.

The findings of the study form the basis for the development of policies and programs aimed at meeting both the short-term needs of IDW (housing, employment support) and long-term strategies for their integration. In particular, special attention should be paid to building resilience, developing entrepreneurial potential, and ensuring equal opportunities in the new socio-economic environment.

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ADDRESSING GENDER IMBALANCE IN IT COMPANIES IN UKRAINE

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Abstract. Gender imbalance in the Ukrainian information technology (IT) sector remains a critical issue, with women significantly underrepresented in both technical and managerial roles. In 2024, women comprised only 26 percent of the IT workforce, highlighting persistent disparities despite recent sector growth. This study investigates the socio-professional characteristics of female IT specialists in Ukraine, aiming to identify patterns in employment, career progression, and income, as well as to assess the influence of education, English proficiency, work experience, family status, and organizational factors on professional development.

The empirical basis of the study comprises 26 in-depth surveys conducted with women working in diverse IT companies. The questionnaires collected information on respondents' educational background, employment type, professional role, income, career intentions, mentorship experiences, and perceptions of gender-related challenges in the workplace. Descriptive statistical analysis and correlation methods were applied to examine the relationship between key variables, including age, years of experience, and monthly income. The results indicate that higher education and advanced English language skills are associated with greater access to senior positions and higher income, while income levels are more influenced by company sector and professional role than by years of experience. Mentorship, ongoing professional development, and willingness to



assume managerial responsibilities emerged as important factors for career advancement.

The study emphasizes the role of inclusive leadership, supportive organizational culture, and targeted managerial strategies in fostering equitable workplaces. Digital tools and technologies were identified as enablers of professional growth, providing women with improved access to resources, training, and networking opportunities. The findings underscore the necessity of coordinated efforts among companies, educational institutions, and governmental agencies to address systemic barriers, promote women's participation in IT, and strengthen the sector's competitiveness. By providing empirical insights and practical recommendations, this research contributes to the development of a more inclusive and innovative IT ecosystem in Ukraine, highlighting strategies to reduce gender disparities, enhance professional opportunities for women, and support sustainable sector growth.

Keywords: Career, Gender Equality, Gender Imbalance, IT company, Leadership, Management, Remuneration.

Introduction

The Ukrainian information technology (IT) sector is a crucial driver of economic growth and digital transformation. Despite its rapid expansion and the rising demand for skilled professionals, the industry continues to exhibit a pronounced gender imbalance. Women remain underrepresented across technical and managerial positions, limiting both their professional opportunities and the sector's potential for inclusive and sustainable development (Lagesen et al. 2021).

This persistent disparity results from a combination of systematic barriers, organizational practices, and culture stereotypes that shape career trajectories, influence compensation patterns, and restrict access to leadership roles (Mills 2011; Smith et al. 2020). Consequently, the underrepresentation of women not only hinders individual career development but also restricts the innovative capacity and global competitiveness of Ukrainian IT companies (Kraugusteeliana 2023).

To effectively address these challenges, it is essential to examine the professional and socio-demographic characteristics of women in the IT sector, including their education, work experience, family responsibilities, and perceptions of organizational support. Understanding factors such as career intentions, mentoring experiences, mobility plans, and perceived gender bias provides critical insights for developing strategies to reduce disparities, promote inclusivity, and support equitable career advancement within the Ukrainian IT industry.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the professional and socio-demographic characteristics of women working in the Ukrainian IT sector, to identify patterns in employment, career progression, and income, and to assess the impact of factors such as education, work experience, family status, and organizational environment on their professional development. Additionally, the study aims to explore mentoring practices, career intentions, and mobility plans, with the objective of informing strategies to reduce gender disparities and promote inclusivity in the IT industry.

Review of Related Literature

The issue of gender imbalance in the IT sector has been widely discussed, with research emphasizing socio-economic, cultural, and organizational determinants of women's underrepresentation. Walker et al. (2013) applied the Capability Approach, underlining the need for institutional environments that expand women's professional opportunities, a perspective particularly relevant for IT, where capability development influences career trajectories. Studies also show that external shocks, such as macroeconomic crises, exacerbate inequalities (Annesley & Scheele 2011), while leadership styles shape workplace gender relations (Salminen-Karlsson 2015).

Regional contexts further determine women's participation in IT. Comparative research demonstrates that e-business development pathways in Ukraine and the Czech Republic differ substantially due to local institutional settings (Kulyk & Parmová 2017). Later findings highlight that digital transformation in Ukrainian enterprises can simultaneously increase organizational efficiency and create conditions for inclusivity (Kulyk, Parmová & Jílek 2025). Similar arguments are advanced in Franco et al. (2021) and Baiyere et al. (2020), who stress that digitalization reshapes managerial practices and enhances opportunities for women's advancement. At the same time, Fleisch (2004) cautions about potential risks, while Xu et al. (2005) and Rahmatila (2025) suggest that digital management aligned with inclusivity supports both efficiency and diversity.

Another strand of literature focuses on socialization and role models. Strapko et al. (2016) and Lundberg (2018) show that gender norms influence decision-making and career aspirations, whereas Corneliusen et al. (2019) point to the importance of role models and mentorship in sustaining women's careers in IT. Lagesen et al. (2021) and Smith et

al. (2020) argue that targeted educational programs and degree apprenticeships can mitigate gender disparities by creating structured pathways into the profession. Recent contributions also highlight how ICT can empower marginalized women (Pei et al. 2024), facilitate knowledge sharing (Yan et al. 2023), and strengthen employee engagement in digitally transformed environments (Zahoor et al. 2022).

Overall, the reviewed scholarship suggests that gender imbalance in IT is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by cultural, structural, and managerial factors. It highlights the role of education, English proficiency, family responsibilities, and organizational practices as key determinants of women's professional development, while also pointing to the potential of digital transformation to expand career opportunities. These insights align with the present study's objective to examine socio-demographic and professional characteristics of Ukrainian women in IT, identify barriers and enablers of career growth, and outline strategies for fostering inclusivity at both organizational and systemic levels.

Research Framework

In the Ukrainian IT industry, gender inequality persists, as reflected in the low representation of women in technical and managerial positions. As of 2024, women accounted for only 26 percent of the Ukrainian IT workforce, representing a modest increase from 24 percent in 2019. Despite rapid industry growth, women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles remains disproportionately low, which not only constrains their professional development but also limits organizational innovation, creativity, and long-term growth.

This study focuses on managerial and organizational factors contributing to persistent gender disparities in the Ukrainian IT sector. Evidence suggests that systemic barriers hinder women's career progression, including cultural biases, unequal access to mentorship, exclusionary workplace practices, and limited recognition of women's contributions. Specifically, traditional masculine leadership norms often dominate organizational culture, marginalizing women's participation in strategic decision-making. By clarifying the notion of effective leadership, this study emphasizes leadership approaches that actively promote inclusivity, encourage diverse perspectives, and ensure equitable opportunities for all employees.

The challenges faced by women in IT are multifaceted. Beyond structural barriers, women frequently experience double workloads, balancing professional responsibilities with household and caregiving

duties, a burden exacerbated even in contexts offering flexible or remote work. While technology and digital tools can facilitate collaboration, enhance communication, and provide access to training resources, their potential to empower women depends on organizational support, target skill development programs, and equitable access to these resources. In contrast, men in similar roles are less likely to experience these compounded domestic-professional responsibilities, highlighting the gendered nature of these challenges.

To address these issues, organizations can implement a suite of targeted management strategies, including structured mentorship programs, flexible work arrangements, bias awareness and training initiatives, and investment in digital skill-building for women. These measures not only dismantle systemic barriers but also foster a culture of inclusivity that enhances retention, job satisfaction, and performance. Systemic barriers can be categorized into four main types: (1) cultural barriers, such as stereotypes and gendered expectations; (2) organizational barriers, including leadership styles; (3) resource barriers, like limited access to training or networking; and (4) societal barriers, including family responsibilities and social norms.

Overall, the research framework positions digital technologies, effective leadership, and organizational strategies as interrelated levers to mitigate gender imbalance. By critically examining these factors, this study aims to identify actionable pathways for enhancing women's participation and advancement in the Ukrainian IT sector, thereby promoting equitable organizational growth, innovation, and a more diverse workforce.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods survey of 26 women employed in IT companies across Ukraine, aiming to examine professional and socio-demographic characteristics, career trajectories, and perceptions of gender bias. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling strategy, targeting women with varying positions, educational backgrounds, and levels of experience in the IT sector.

Selection criteria included current employment in Ukrainian IT companies, at least one year of professional experience, and willingness to participate. Participants were recruited through professional networks, online IT communities, and direct contacts with IT companies. Data collection was conducted via semi-structured interviews, allowing respondents to provide detailed answers and ensuring that qualitative insights complemented the quantitative analysis. Each

interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes, and data collection spanned two months.

The relatively small sample size of 26 participants was justified as an initial exploratory stage to capture diverse experiences and perceptions within the sector. While insufficient for making broad generalizations at the macro level, the sample allowed for the application of descriptive and correlation-based statistical methods to identify trends and relationships among key variables, providing a basis for future larger-scale studies.

The survey instrument consisted of four main sections. The first section collected organisational and employment-related information, including the type of company, position held, type of employment (full-time, self-employed, specialist on a gig contract), years of experience in IT, and average monthly income. The second section aimed to create a socio-demographic profile, capturing respondents' age, education, English language proficiency, family status, and offspring. The third section examined career intentions and professional development, with questions such as: “Do you plan to continue working in the IT sector for the next 3 years?”, “Do you continue to improve your professional knowledge?”, “Would you like to hold a managerial position?”, “Did you have a mentor when you entered the IT industry?”, and “Are you ready to mentor colleagues with less experience?” The fourth section addressed experiences of gender bias, asking: “Do you think there are prejudices against women professionals in the Ukrainian IT sector?”, “Have you ever experienced biased treatment by management because of your gender?”, and “Have you experienced prejudice from male colleagues?” Finally, given the current security situation in Ukraine, respondents were asked about their mobility plans: “Are you planning to move to another country in the next 3 years?”

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and graphical methods to illustrate trends across variables. Relationships between metric variables—specifically, monthly income with age and years of IT experience — were examined using correlation analysis. Prior to applying parametric tests, the data were assessed for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which confirmed that the variables met normal distribution requirements. Accordingly, Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to measure associations between these variables. Frequency tables were also used to analyse categorical responses, providing insight into patterns of employment, career intentions, mentoring experiences, and perceptions of gender bias.

This methodological approach ensured a detailed examination of both structural and perceptual dimensions of gender imbalance in Ukrainian IT, aligning with the study's objective to identify factors

affecting women’s professional development, organizational participation, and potential pathways toward a more inclusive IT sector.

Results

During the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with female professionals employed in Ukrainian IT companies. Comprehensive information regarding the sectors and types of companies represented by the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of companies the respondents work for

Type of company	Frequency	%
Business productivity software	6	23.08%
E-commerce & Retail	4	15.38%
DefenseTech	3	11.54%
Fintech & InsurTech	2	7.69%
Gaming	2	7.69%
EdTech	2	7.69%
Martech & Media	2	7.69%
HealthTech & Wellness	2	7.69%
Hardware & IoT	2	7.69%
Logistics & Transportation	1	3.85%
Total	26	100%

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents are employed in companies focused on business productivity software, with six women representing 23.08 percent of the sample. Four respondents (15.38 percent) work in the E-commerce and Retail sector, and three women (11.54 percent) are employed in DefenceTech companies. Other sectors, including FinTech & InsurTech, Gaming, EdTech, Martech & Media, and HealthTech & Wellness, each employ two respondents (7.69 percent). One participant (3.85 percent) works in a company within the Logistics & Transportation sector.

In the Ukrainian IT industry, a significant portion of professionals are engaged not as traditional employees but through alternative contractual arrangements, such as service contracts for registered private entrepreneurs (FOPs) or gig contracts. These employment models are often selected based on organizational strategies for tax optimization, operational flexibility, and individual preferences. Figure 1 illustrates

the distribution of employment types in relation to positions, reflecting the diverse professional arrangements within the IT sector and their potential implications for women's career development.

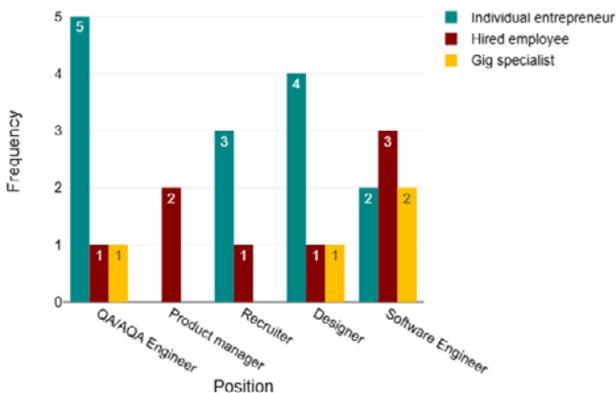


Fig. 1. Type of employment by Position

Fig. 1 demonstrates that among female respondents registered as private entrepreneurs, the majority occupy positions as QA/AQA Engineers (5 participants) and Designers (4 participants). In contrast, women employed under standard contracts are predominantly engaged as Software Engineers (3 participants).

Proficiency in English represents a critical competency for women in the Ukrainian IT sector, often correlating with their level of education. The relationship between participants' educational attainment and English language skills is summarized in Table 2, providing insight into how these factors may influence career opportunities and professional development within the sector.

Table 2. English language skills and Level of Education

English language skills	Education						Total	
	Higher		Still a student		Secondary specialized			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Advanced	3	11.54%	0	0%	0	0%	3	11.54%
Upper Intermediate	9	34.62%	1	3.85%	0	0%	10	38.46%
Intermediate	4	15.38%	3	11.54%	1	3.85%	8	30.77%
Pre-Intermediate	1	3.85%	1	3.85%	3	11.54%	5	19.23%
Total	17	65.38%	5	19.23%	4	15.38%	26	100%

Table 2 indicates that 11.54 percent of respondents possess an advanced level of English in conjunction with higher education, while 34.62 percent hold an upper-intermediate level of English and have also completed higher education. Additionally, 3.85 percent of participants are currently enrolled in higher education programs. Among respondents with secondary specialized education, the majority demonstrate a pre-intermediate level of English. The relationship between educational attainment and professional position is further depicted in Figure 2, highlighting the influence of education and language proficiency on career roles within the Ukrainian IT sector.

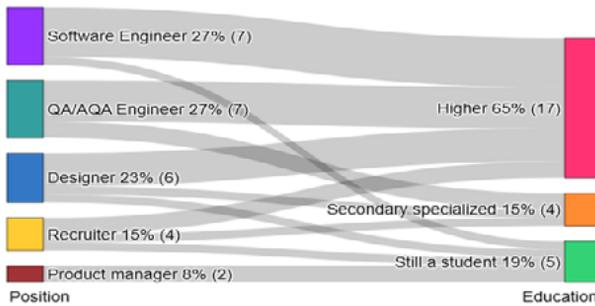


Fig. 2. Position by Education

As illustrated in Figure 2, 65 percent of respondents (17 participants) hold a university degree, which enables them to occupy positions such as Software Engineer, QA/AQA Engineer, Designer, or Recruiter. At the time of the survey, 19 percent of participants (5 respondents) were enrolled in higher education programs. Additionally, 15 percent of respondents (4 participants) possess a secondary specialized education.

To construct a socio-demographic profile of female IT professionals in Ukraine, the study examined variables including family status and presence of offspring. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 3, providing insight into how personal and family characteristics intersect with professional engagement in the Ukrainian IT sector.

Table 3. Family Status and Offspring

Family status	Offspring				Total	
	Have children		Do not have children			
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Married	10	38.46%	4	15.38%	14	53.85%
Single	0	0%	6	23.08%	6	23.08%
In a relationship	1	3.85%	2	7.69%	3	11.54%

Divorced	2	7.69%	1	3.85%	3	11.54%
Total	13	50%	13	50%	26	100%

The analysis presented in Table 3 indicates that over half of the respondents (53.85 percent) are married, while 11.54 percent reported being in a committed relationship. The distribution of respondents with and without children is equal, highlighting diverse family circumstances among women in the Ukrainian IT sector.

The average monthly income among female IT professionals in Ukraine varies according to both the type of company and the position held. Table 4 provides a detailed overview of the mean monthly income of respondents across different industry sectors, offering insights into how organizational context and role influence compensation patterns.

Table 4. Types of companies and Monthly income of respondents

Monthly income, euros	Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Business productivity software	6	23.08%	1266.67	450.19	500	1800
E-commerce & Retail	4	15.38%	1000	336.65	800	1500
DefenseTech	3	11.54%	933.33	321.46	700	1300
Fintech & InsurTech	2	7.69%	950	353.55	700	1200
Gaming	2	7.69%	1050	212.13	900	1200
EdTech	2	7.69%	950	70.71	900	1000
Martech & Media	2	7.69%	1200	424.26	900	1500
HealthTech & Wellness	2	7.69%	850	70.71	800	900
Hardware & IoT	2	7.69%	950	353.55	700	1200
Logistics & Transportation	1	3.85%	900	-	900	900

As presented in Table 4, female employees in companies developing business productivity software receive the highest average monthly salaries, amounting to €1,266.67. In contrast, women employed in the Logistics & Transportation sector report the lowest average income of €900. Compensation levels also vary according to the professional position held. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of salaries across different positions, providing insight into how role and sectoral affiliation influence earning potential for women in the Ukrainian IT sector.

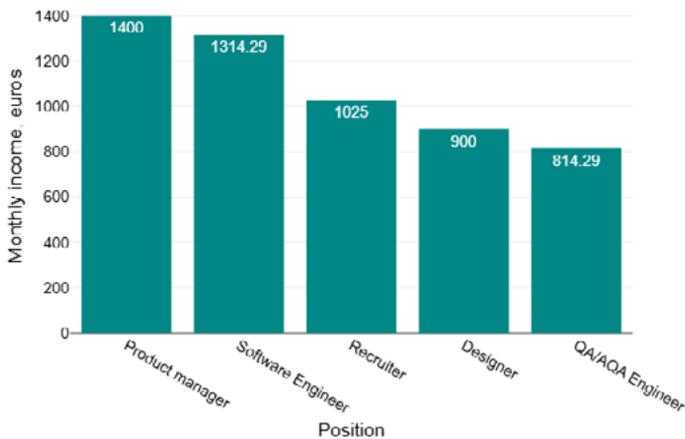


Fig. 3. Monthly income by Position

Analysis of the data presented in Figure 3 demonstrates that the highest average monthly incomes are reported by respondents employed as Product Managers (€1,400) and Software Engineers (€1,314.29). In contrast, women working in QA/AQA Engineer positions receive the lowest salaries, averaging €900.

Beyond gender disparities, the IT sector is also affected by the challenge of ageism. To explore this issue, the study examined the age distribution of respondents and its relationship with average monthly income. The outcomes of this analysis are summarized in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Age of respondents

Indicators	Age, years
Mean	30.13
Std. Deviation	5.01
Minimum	21
Maximum	41

Table 5 indicates that the mean age of the respondents is 30.13 years, with individual ages ranging from 21 to 41 years.

Table 6. Monthly income of respondents

Indicators	Monthly income, euros
Mean	1046.15
Std. Deviation	321.53
Minimum	500
Maximum	1800

The average monthly income among the respondents is €1,046.15, with reported salaries ranging from a minimum of €500 to a maximum of €1,800. To assess the relationship between the variables 'Age' and 'Monthly income,' the Pearson parametric correlation test was employed, as the data satisfied the assumptions of normal distribution. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Results of the analysis using the Pearson test for the variables 'Age' and 'Monthly income'

Indicators	r	p
Monthly income, euros and Age, years	0	.997

Table 7 presents the results of the correlation analysis between monthly income (in euros) and age (in years), including the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) and the corresponding p-value (p). The analysis indicates no significant relationship between respondents' age and their monthly income, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0$. This result suggests that variations in age are not systematically associated with changes in income levels. The p-value of 0.997 further confirms statistical insignificance, supporting the retention of the null hypothesis. Therefore, within the studied sample, age does not appear to have a statistically meaningful impact on monthly income.

Given that the preliminary analysis revealed no significant association between age and income, the study further examined the relationship between respondents' years of experience in the IT sector and their monthly income, recognizing that income represents a critical factor for professional evaluation among participants. Table 8 summarizes the distribution of IT sector experience among the surveyed women, providing the basis for subsequent correlation analysis.

Table 8. Years of experience in IT of respondents

Indicators	Years of experience in IT
Mean	3.8
Std. Deviation	1.63
Minimum	1
Maximum	7

Among the survey participants, the average tenure in the IT sector is 3.8 years, with individual experience ranging from 1 to 7 years. Analysis of the variable 'Years of Experience in IT' confirmed that the data follow a normal distribution. Consequently, the Pearson parametric

test was applied to examine the correlation between these variables and other relevant indicators, as presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Results of the analysis using the Pearson test for the variables ‘Years of experience in IT’ and ‘Monthly income’

Indicators	r	p
Years of experience in IT and Monthly income, euros	0.18	.402

Table 9 presents the results of the correlation analysis between years of experience in the IT sector and monthly income (in euros), including the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) and associated p-value (p). The analysis revealed a low positive correlation between years of IT experience and monthly income; however, this relationship was not statistically significant, $r(23) = 0.18$, $p = 0.402$. These findings suggest that within the Ukrainian IT sector, salary levels are not significantly associated with either the age of employees or the length of their professional experience. Instead, income appears to be more closely linked to the industry in which a company operates and the position held, which are, in turn, influenced by respondents’ education level and English language proficiency.

While income represents an important determinant of professional satisfaction, it is not the only factor shaping women’s perceptions of their workplace. Additional considerations include access to ongoing professional development, opportunities for career advancement, and industry growth prospects. The study also explored respondents’ attitudes toward managerial positions and mentoring, recognizing these as potential avenues for career development and leadership engagement. The results of this analysis are summarized in Tables 10, 11, and 12, providing insights into women’s career intentions, mentoring experiences, and professional aspirations within the Ukrainian IT sector.

Table 10. Respondents’ answers to the questions ‘Do you plan to continue working in the IT sector for the next 3 years?’ and ‘Do you continue to improve your professional knowledge?’

Questions	Do you continue to improve your professional knowledge?				
		Yes		Total	
		n	%	n	%
Do you plan to continue working in the IT sector for the next 3 years?	Yes	20	76.92%	20	76.92%
	No	6	23.08%	6	23.08%
	Total	26	100%	26	100%

The analysis presented in Table 10 indicates that 76.92 percent of respondents intend to remain employed in the IT sector over the next three years. Although 23.08 percent of participants expressed a desire to change their professional field or temporarily pause their careers, all respondents reported actively pursuing opportunities to enhance their professional skills.

Table 11. Respondents' answers to the questions 'Do you plan to continue working in the IT sector for the next 3 years?' and 'Would you like to hold a managerial position?'

Questions	Do you plan to continue working in the IT sector for the next 3 years?						
		Yes		No		Total	
Would you like to hold a managerial position?		n	%	n	%	n	%
	No	9	34.62%	1	3.85%	10	38.46%
	Yes	11	42.31%	5	19.23%	16	61.54%
	Total	20	76.92%	6	23.08%	26	100%

Among the respondents, 61.54 percent expressed a desire to pursue managerial positions. It is noteworthy, however, that not all participants envision themselves in management within the IT sector, as 19.23 percent indicated interest in managerial roles outside the industry.

Table 12. Respondents' answers to the questions 'Did you have a mentor when you entered the IT industry?' and 'Are you ready to be a mentor for colleagues with less experience in IT?'

Questions	Are you ready to be a mentor for colleagues with less experience in IT?						
		Yes		No		Total	
Did you have a mentor when you entered the IT industry?		n	%	n	%	n	%
	No	17	65.38%	3	11.54%	20	76.92%
	Yes	4	15.38%	2	7.69%	6	23.08%
	Total	21	80.77%	5	19.23%	26	100%

Notably, although the majority of respondents (76.92 percent) reported not having a mentor upon entering the IT sector, a substantial proportion (80.77 percent) expressed willingness to serve as mentors for less experienced colleagues.

To explore perceptions of gender discrimination in the Ukrainian IT industry, the study examined respondents' views on potential gender-based biases at multiple levels: within the industry overall (Table 13), from company leadership, and from male colleagues (Table 14).

Table 13. Respondents' answers to the question 'Do you think there are prejudices against women professionals in the Ukrainian IT sector?'

Do you think there are prejudices against women professionals in the Ukrainian IT sector?	Frequency	%
No	19	73.08%
Yes	7	26.92%
Total	26	100%

Table 13 indicates that 73.08 percent of respondents perceive no prejudice against women professionals in the Ukrainian IT sector, whereas 26.92 percent acknowledge the presence of gender-based biases.

Table 14. Respondents' answers to the questions 'Have you ever felt biased by management because of your gender?' and 'Have you experienced any cases of prejudice against you by male colleagues?'

Questions	Have you experienced any cases of prejudice against you by male colleagues?						
		No		Yes		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Have you ever felt biased by management because of your gender?	No	18	69.23%	4	15.38%	22	84.62%
	Yes	3	11.54%	1	3.85%	4	15.38%
	Total	21	80.77%	5	19.23%	26	100%

Table 14 presents respondents' perceptions of gender-based prejudice in the workplace, with 19.23 percent reporting biased attitudes from male colleagues and 15.38 percent indicating similar experiences with company leadership.

Given the unstable political situation in Ukraine, many individuals, particularly women with children, must consider the possibility of relocating abroad. Accordingly, the questionnaire included an item addressing respondents' intentions to move to another country, and the results of this analysis are summarized in Figure 4.

Are you planning to move to another country in the next 3 years?

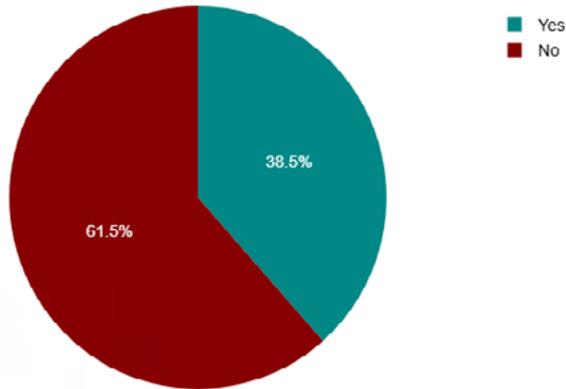


Fig. 4. Respondents' answers to the question 'Are you planning to move to another country in the next 3 years?'

As shown in Figure 4, 38.5 percent of respondents are contemplating relocation to another country within the next three years. This substantial proportion highlights a critical factor that company management should consider when developing strategic plans and designing talent management and professional development initiatives.

The study findings indicate that reducing gender disparities in the Ukrainian IT sector requires coordinated strategies at both organizational and systemic levels. At the company level, effective leadership, transparent recruitment and promotion, mentorship programs, and continuous professional development in digital skills and English can expand women's career opportunities and representation in management. At the systemic level, policies promoting gender-balanced hiring, flexible work, childcare support, and gender-sensitive IT education, alongside public-private partnerships for training and mentorship, are essential. Together, these measures can enhance gender equality, strengthen innovation, and increase the global competitiveness of Ukraine's IT industry.

Conclusion

This study examined the gender imbalance in Ukrainian IT enterprises, highlighting managerial, organizational, and socio-demographic factors affecting women's professional development. An analysis of 26 interviews revealed that women remain underrepresented in technical and managerial roles, with career advancement influenced by

education, English proficiency, family status, and organizational context.

Findings show that income depends more on company type and position than on age or experience, while mentorship, professional development, and willingness to assume managerial roles support career growth. Digital tools also provide access to resources and networking, helping to overcome structural barriers.

Addressing gender imbalance requires a multidimensional approach combining inclusive managerial practices, organizational culture transformation, and technological support, supported by collaboration among companies, and educational institutions. Promoting gender equality is both a social responsibility and a strategic necessity, enhancing innovation, performance, and diversity in the Ukrainian IT sector.

The results suggest that coordinated strategies at organizational and systemic levels – such as effective leadership, mentorship, professional development, gender-sensitive education, and supportive policies – are essential. Collectively, these measures can advance equality while strengthening the innovative capacity and global competitiveness of Ukraine's IT industry.

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DEALING WITH RELOCATION: PROBLEMATIC INTEGRATION OF EAST EUROPEAN MOTHERS WITH PRESCHOOLERS IN POLAND

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Abstract: This research examines the agency and integration of skilled Eastern European migrant mothers with preschool children living in Poland, who relocated through family migration channels accompanying IT professionals. Drawing on 15 semi-structured interviews with women from Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, the study investigates how these mothers navigate structural, cultural, and institutional constraints while reconstructing their professional and social identities in the host society. The analytical framework integrates Anthony Giddens's structuration theory—particularly the concepts of the duality of structure, routine, and reflexive monitoring of action—with Hannah Arendt's notion of agency, Andrea Thuma's four-dimensional model of subject visibility, and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus and capital.

The findings reveal that migrant mothers construct alternative spaces of empowerment within online and offline migrant communities, where their pre-migration cultural and professional capital is revalorized and transformed into social and symbolic capital. These informal networks provide social support and partially compensate for the lack of institutional integration measures in Poland. However, Poland's current migration policy is not geared toward the integration of migrant mothers, and for the mothers themselves, integration is not a priority. Additionally, they feel that Polish society is not ready for integration as a two-way process. Therefore, the potential of habitus is not fully utilized to foster the creation of a multicultural society.



In turn, habitus determines practical activities that, in the absence of effective integration, continue to stem from dispositions formed before relocation. This perpetuation of pre-existing social patterns may contribute to growing interethnic tensions between Poles and Eastern European migrants. The study concludes that recognizing and mobilizing the agency and resources of skilled migrant mothers is essential not only for their empowerment but also for fostering social cohesion in contemporary Poland.

Keywords: migrant mothers, integration, relocation, Eastern Europe, Poland

Introduction

Family migration remains one of the main forms of long-term mobility within OECD countries, accounting for 43% of new permanent inflows in 2023 (OECD 2024). Among these, accompanying spouses of highly qualified professionals, particularly skilled women, remain largely invisible in both research and policy (EMN INFORM 2022; Łodziński & Szonert 2023; Kofman 2000; Riaño 2012). Poland has become a key relocation destination for Eastern European IT specialists due to its EU membership, geographical proximity, and cultural familiarity (Dolińska 2019; Petrakova 2022). Programs such as “Business Harbour” designed to attract IT experts (gov.pl. 2024; Petrakova 2022), along with political repression in Belarus since 2020 and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Korobkov 2022), have spurred migration flows (Alachnovič 2023; Petrakova 2022). As of 2021, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians were among the largest immigrant groups from post-Soviet countries in Poland (Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców 2021).

Many of these migrants are highly educated women whose professional potential remains underrecognized (Kaźmierska et al. 2013; Kofman & Raghuram 2006; Piekut 2013). Their status as “family migrants” obscures their qualifications and sidelines their career aspirations. Prior research has often portrayed migrant mothers as dependent or economically inactive (Schmidt & Jaworsky 2022), reinforcing gendered and structural invisibility (Kofman 2000). Yet, accompanying women are not necessarily passive; they actively reconstruct professional and social identities within new social and institutional contexts.

The research focuses on one group: skilled mothers with preschool children from Eastern European countries (Belarus, Russia, Ukraine) in Poland, who moved there as family members of IT professionals and, by virtue of their status of residence or the status of residence of their husbands, have the right to work in Poland. Speaking of skilled mothers, we will mean mothers who have higher education and relevant

work experience. This study raises the issue of agency and integration of skilled Eastern European migrant mothers in Poland and how the intersection of these two factors can affect social change in Poland. Agency here refers to the capacity to act independently, make choices and transform one's circumstances. We apply Hannah Arendt's notion of agency in the public sphere and Andrea Thuma's interpretation of its four dimensions: the subject's visibility, the capacity to interact and communicate, freedom and the worldly attachment of actions (Thuma 2011). Combined with Bourdieu's theory of habitus and capital, this framework allows us to explore how pre-migration resources such as education, professional experience and cultural dispositions interact with the new constraints and opportunities these mothers encounter in Poland.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This study combines an analytical framework drawn from the works of Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, Hannah Arendt, and Andrea Thuma. Together, their concepts allow for an exploration of the complex interplay between individual agency, structural constraints, and social change in the context of migration and motherhood, employing a qualitative, interpretive methodological approach.

Anthony Giddens's structuration theory (Giddens 2005) provides a macro-sociological foundation for understanding the duality of structure, where social structures serve as both the medium and the outcome of human practices. From this perspective, migrant mothers are viewed as knowledgeable and reflexive actors capable of reproducing and transforming the very social systems that constrain them. Key concepts, such as routine and reflexive monitoring of action, are essential for explaining how daily practices of care, work, and adaptation are organized and reinterpreted after relocation. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus and forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu 2007) enriches this understanding by illustrating how migrants' pre-migration dispositions and accumulated cultural, social, and symbolic capital shape their adaptation strategies in the host country. Habitus, as a system of durable dispositions, elucidates how migrants reproduce familiar behavioral patterns while also highlighting how, under certain conditions, they may activate the creative potential of habitus to adjust to new social fields.

While Giddens and Bourdieu emphasize the interplay of structure and practice, Hannah Arendt introduces an ethical and political dimension to the understanding of human action. For Arendt,

agency is inseparable from freedom and responsibility within the public sphere. She defines it through two essential aspects: “freedom from necessity and from external pressures” and “care for the world,” which signifies an active interest in the shared world we inhabit with others (Thuma 2011). Arendt’s vision thus connects agency not only to individual autonomy but also to participation in the common world—a particularly relevant consideration for understanding migrant women’s engagement in host societies.

Andrea Thuma expands on Arendt’s concept by distinguishing four interrelated dimensions of agency: the subject’s visibility (the capacity to appear and express identity in public), the capacity to interact and communicate (the ability to communicate and build relationships), freedom (the initiative to act or refrain from action), and the worldly attachment of actions (active engagement motivated by a genuine concern for the world and an awareness of the responsibility to care for and consciously shape one’s social environment) (Thuma 2011: 4). These dimensions are particularly relevant for understanding the challenges faced by migrant mothers as they seek agency and for examining how each migrant mother’s agency is both enacted and constrained within the Polish socio-cultural context. Through these practices, migrant mothers negotiate their positions between structural limitations and personal aspirations.

Methodologically, the study follows a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, focusing on the subjective experiences of migrant mothers and their strategies for adaptation and integration in Poland. The main empirical material is based on 15 semi-structured interviews with migrant mothers from Eastern Europe who relocated to Poland with preschool children between 2020 and 2023. The sample included mothers from Ukraine (3), Russia (4), and Belarus (8); however, it does not claim to be representative. The research employs targeted and snowball sampling (Saldaña 2021) to recruit participants who share key social characteristics: higher education, a professional background, and a family migration context linked to the IT sector. Interviews were conducted in the respondents’ first language to ensure comfort and authenticity of expression.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by theoretical categories derived from four authors. Each interview was interpreted through the lens of the four dimensions of agency (Thuma 2011), the dynamics of habitus and capital transformation (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu 2007), and the structuration of daily practices (Giddens 2005; Joas & Knöbl 2009). The analytical process also involved triangulation (De Souza 2015) with statistical and policy data on migration and integration in Poland to contextualize interview findings and strengthen

validity. Participant observation and field notes complemented the interviews, providing insights into non-verbal practices and the material dimensions of everyday life. Through this integrated theoretical and methodological framework, the study positions skilled migrant mothers not merely as subjects of migration policy but as agents whose practices illuminate the intersections of structure, gender, and mobility. This approach facilitates a coherent transition from theory to empirical analysis, ensuring internal consistency among conceptual assumptions, methods, and findings.

This study is grounded in standpoint theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is situated and shaped by the researcher's social position. My interest in this topic is closely linked to my own experiences as a Belarusian professional and mother of a preschooler who relocated to Poland eight years ago amid political and economic instability. Although I was born in Russia, I spent most of my life in Belarus and had previously experienced migration during my studies in Lithuania, which facilitated my adaptation to life in Poland. These experiences provided me with an insider perspective that fostered trust with participants and heightened my sensitivity to the nuances of migrant motherhood and integration.

Agency of skilled migrant mothers with preschoolers in Poland

Migration research has significantly enhanced our understanding of this phenomenon. Post-2020 relocation patterns have been transformed globally by Covid-19 and, in East-Central Europe, by the Belarusian protests following the 2020 elections and the ongoing war in Ukraine. This section explores some gendered aspects of the lives of relatively recent skilled migrants in Poland. It relates to two main themes: barriers, on one hand, and support, on the other, in the pursuit of agency for Eastern European skilled migrant mothers with preschoolers in Poland. The focus is on factors that affect these mothers' social integration into Polish society.

My reasoning stems from the idea that migrant mothers, as social actors, have the potential to become agents capable of transforming their social reality. This transformation can be better understood by analyzing the conditions under which agency can be exercised and the factors that may influence it. It is important to acknowledge that in order to become effective actors, migrant mothers must undergo a period of adaptation in the host country. Giddens and Bourdieu emphasize that actors are individuals who act consciously and "have

an extensive set of knowledge about the conditions and consequences of what they do in their daily lives” (Giddens 2005: 384). As previously mentioned, following Andrea Thuma’s approach, agency unfolds through four key dimensions: the subject’s visibility, the capacity to interact and communicate, freedom, and the worldly attachment of actions (Thuma 2011). These aspects are particularly relevant for understanding how migrant mothers navigate and position themselves within the public sphere in Poland.

Individuals occupy specific positions in social space, and those in adjacent positions—sharing similar experiences, values, and lifestyles—tend to form communities of practice that reinforce shared norms through daily interactions (Giddens 2005; Joas & Knöbl 2009: 550). This logic of proximity explains how and why social groups emerge and acquire meaning. In digital and migrant contexts, online communities reproduce these patterns through shared habitus and mutual recognition. As Thuma notes, public space is “artificial,” created by the human “web of relations” that emerges from continuous new beginnings. Visibility within it depends on one’s ability to occupy a recognizable social position and maintain relationships with others who share a similar social trajectory (Thuma 2011).

In this study, all the mothers interviewed migrated to Poland with their families. The main reason for their migration was the relocation opportunities offered to their husbands, who worked in the IT industry. Consequently, many of these women arrived in Poland “unprepared,” either because the move was abrupt and they did not have time to prepare or because they did not understand what was necessary or possible. None of the informants I interviewed spoke Polish well enough to express themselves and be visible in the Polish-speaking public space. Most of them lacked entry points into the Polish community, such as work, study at a Polish educational institution, participation in public organizations, or Polish friends. As a result, their initial social space was limited to others occupying adjacent positions—other women who shared similar migration experiences, linguistic backgrounds, and family responsibilities. This proximity in the social structure naturally led to the formation of tightly knit online communities. Thus, for each of them, the primary contact upon their arrival in Poland was the online community of migrant mothers from Eastern European countries.

At the very beginning, when I arrived (...) I tried very actively to fit in, so to speak, into the environment. I joined various Facebook groups to find people with whom I could spend time because during the day

everyone works, and I was with a child, and I wanted to communicate with someone. Initially, these were Russian-Ukrainian-speaking groups, where many mothers faced the same issue: when people move, they need to find someone to talk to.

Marta, photographer

In Poland, numerous closed Facebook groups catering to migrant mothers exist in every major city. These groups are characterized by communication in languages that are mutually intelligible to the members, such as Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian, due to their lexical similarities. Some mothers become aware of these groups even before relocating to Poland through online searches, while others learn about them through chance encounters with other migrant mothers, such as at playgrounds. Thus, what begins as a search for companionship within adjacent social positions gradually transforms into the consolidation of a distinct social group—a digital enclave reproducing the social proximity of its members. These online communities, as described in Bourdieu's model of social space, become arenas where habitus is collectively reinforced.

The primary objective of these groups is to foster a supportive community—a circle of people who understand and share the experience of relocating with children. By joining an online community of individuals who share similar interests, experiences, or backgrounds, a person may find a sense of familiarity and belonging that helps reinforce their existing habitus. This can provide comfort and support, as well as opportunities for social interaction and the exchange of ideas and information.

When something happens, you basically don't know where to run. For example, if something happens to the child, where do you take him, to which hospital, where to go in an emergency? Questions about documents arise, such as how to register a child in kindergarten. For someone who has just arrived and has no idea how the education system works in another country, what do you do? The girls helped; they wrote about which kindergartens or nurseries exist in Poland, and that to register, you need to go to a particular site. Help was invaluable at first, especially when you needed to see a doctor, and one of the girls would offer to go with you to translate the process of communicating with the doctor. The girls also helped by watching the child while you went to the doctor. It's just basic support, just to talk, because sometimes you want a living person next to you with whom you can discuss your concerns.

Ksenia, a student

This mutual support exemplifies the social practices that emerge when individuals with similar dispositions occupy adjacent positions. The everyday exchanges among migrant mothers—ranging from practical advice to emotional reassurance—reflect the reproduction of their collective social position within the host society. From Ksenia’s story, we can conclude that gaining visibility in a migrant mothers’ group can be as simple as making a post offering help, proposing an initiative, or sharing useful information relevant to the group. To become visible, it is essential to be socially active, which involves maintaining communication through regular posts or possessing a skill that the group values, such as a rare profession needed by the immigrant community. This illustrates how social capital is generated through micro-interactions within a bounded field. In this context, visibility functions as symbolic capital: those who contribute knowledge or assistance gain recognition and status within the group, which can then be exchanged for other forms of capital.

A notable example is Margarita, who worked as a teacher for children with special needs before her maternity leave. She is the director of the Association of Immigrant Families with Disabilities. Her qualifications were in high demand among immigrant families with disabled children. Additionally, Poland was her second migration experience; her first was relocating to Ukraine with her husband, which provided her with adaptive experience. Margarita’s long-standing commitment to supporting families, combined with her direct experiences of migration, led her to create this organization with other mothers who understood the difficulties of raising children with disabilities in a new country. The initiative quickly grew into a robust association focused on advocacy and support for immigrant families dealing with disabilities. In this way, the group’s interaction extends beyond digital platforms, as members organize real-world meetings, collaborative projects, and shared events. These activities foster the development of friendship circles, interest clubs, and grassroots organizations, resulting in migrant mothers becoming more connected to each other than to the broader host community in Poland.

By fostering a sense of social connection, online communities help skilled migrant women feel less isolated and more confident, ultimately enhancing their ability to fully participate in and contribute to their new communities. Before her first maternity leave, Arina worked as an architect in Russia. During her leave, she focused on studying various maternal practices and took courses on attachment theory at the Neufeld Institute. When she became pregnant with her second child, she and her husband moved to the United States for his job, later relocating to Poland, where they had a third child. In Poland, Arina

began conducting free online and offline meetings for Eastern European migrant mothers on attachment theory, using social networks to inform prospective mothers about these gatherings. Eventually, she completed professional doula training and expanded the topics of her meetings to include the obstetrics system in Poland.

The dense Russian-speaking community provided me with more opportunities than I would have had in Russia. Unexpectedly, I found myself in demand in a new role. I can and want to do this, and I actually shifted my focus from architecture to retraining. Now, after nearly two and a half years, many people already reach out to me—acquaintances, friends, and colleagues of those I've worked with. I've established a reputation, and I focus on processing the requests that come to me rather than promoting my services.

Arina, the doula

Arina's trajectory illustrates how symbolic and cultural capital, initially rooted in her professional background, can be reconverted within the migrant community, acquiring new value and reinforcing her position in the group (Kindler & Wójcikowska-Baniak 2019). This dynamic exemplifies the structural principle previously stated: proximity in social space fosters both solidarity and differentiation, as individuals compete for recognition and influence within their shared field.

Thus, the online community of migrant mothers not only teaches newcomers the behavioral norms in their new environment but also provides a platform for realizing their cultural capital. In this context, the cultural capital of migrant mothers encompasses their language skills, maternal experiences, relocation challenges, and education or work experience in fields where the group has unmet needs. By achieving visibility within the migrant social networks, cultural capital can be exchanged for social capital, resulting in valuable connections that can ultimately lead to economic gain. Therefore, social networks serve not only as a means of support for migrant mothers but also as a tool for social advancement (Kindler & Wójcikowska-Baniak 2019).

Interaction and communication within migrant networks

As we can see from the stories of migrant mothers, “tightly linked to visibility is the capacity to interact and communicate” (Thuma 2011). The community of Eastern European migrants has grown to a record high in recent years due to the war in Ukraine and the political crisis in Belarus (Łodziński & Szonert 2023). Several factors have contributed

to a significant decrease in the need for learning Polish. The communication needs of migrants are often met through diaspora communities. They tend to establish businesses that cater to the demands of their enclaves and migrant markets (Homel 2022), frequently hiring fellow migrants from their own communities. Furthermore, proficiency in English is often required for employment in many international companies, while knowledge of Polish is frequently not mandatory. Most bureaucratic issues can be resolved by hiring a translator, which reduces the necessity for Polish language skills.

Theoretically, you can live absolutely without language – there is a very large community of Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians. Everyone communicates in Russian or Ukrainian. I followed the group “Moms in Krakow”¹, which, in my opinion, already has eight thousand mothers². It’s like everyone has children... Krakow is a very small city; in 40 minutes, you’re already on the other side of the city.

Alla, the florist

However, the military conflict in Ukraine that began in February 2022 has changed the dynamics within the Eastern European migrant community. It has caused communication problems not only among Russian and Ukrainian migrants but also between Russian-speaking Ukrainians and Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians. As a result, many mothers feel unsafe communicating in familiar online and offline public spaces. Margarita, the director of the Association of Immigrant Families with Disabilities, states: “In general, I haven’t followed this group for the last year and a half³, it seems to me that I have been expelled for inactivity. There are some discussions under the posts, but it has become completely uninteresting and not very safe”.

Due to the war, using the Russian language for communication poses risks not only to the physical safety of adults but also to children. Speaking Russian is often viewed as a symbol of support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine, leading to discrimination, harassment, or even violence. Alla, the florist, recounts: “There was a case where a girl from Western Ukraine, a native Ukrainian speaker, mentioned that at the playground, a boy from Kharkov was beaten by other

1 Alla is referring to the social group “Moms in the Park - Krakow” on Facebook.

2 As of 8.05.2023 at Facebook community “Moms in the Park - Krakow” consisted of 2689 Participating. [accessed 2023-05-08] Available from Internet: <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1633926246850611>>.

3 Margarita talks about a social group for Eastern European migrant mothers on Facebook.

children who said, 'Since you don't speak Ukrainian, you should speak Russian; you're a fascist.' She supported this, saying that the child should learn to speak Ukrainian". This situation creates significant barriers for those who speak Russian as their first language or those with limited knowledge of Ukrainian or Polish, making it difficult for them to communicate with others or access basic services.

The challenge is compounded by the fact that many Eastern European migrants underestimate the effort required to learn Polish in order to communicate effectively with the local community. Sonya, the community center coordinator at UNHCR, explains: "I listened to people say that Polish is very easy. It turned out that this is not true; it is not easy at all. You can begin to understand it somehow, but to speak, read, and write... it needs to be taught. It's just 'the same language, but a little different,' as I was told. No, it turns out it needs to be taught very diligently".

For migrant mothers, finding time to study Polish is also difficult, as most caregiving responsibilities fall on them while their children are still small.

About six months after we arrived, I attended an A1 Polish course for one semester. That was my initial knowledge of the language. However, I couldn't continue to the second semester because my daughter was often sick. I could only attend evening classes for one semester, and after a long break, I returned to Polish when I had to prepare for the exam, learning independently at home. (...) I still lack words and semantic constructions to express my thoughts thoroughly. Often, I feel like a dog-I understand almost everything, but I can say much less, and writing is even harder.

Ksenia, a student

Many migrant mothers report that stress exacerbates their difficulties in learning Polish and negatively affects their memory. This may be due to the physiological effects of stress on the brain, such as the production of cortisol, a hormone that disrupts memory consolidation and retrieval (Jiang 2019). Alla, the florist, notes: "It's very hard for me to remember words. I have some vocabulary, and I write one word on my hand and another on the refrigerator... I think it's all due to nerves since we had to move unexpectedly; this was not planned". Learning Polish is undoubtedly important for migrant mothers relocating to Poland, but it is not the only challenge they face in integrating into the Polish community. Even if they become proficient in Polish, cultural barriers may still hinder their communication and interactions with locals. Marta, a photographer, explains: "Among my classmates,

despite our good relations, I sometimes feel out of place. I can't fully understand their jokes, and they may not fully understand mine. When this happens regularly, you start to wonder, 'What's wrong?'"

The attitude toward religion and its role in everyday life contributes to the emergence of a cultural barrier. The majority of Polish society adheres to Catholicism, which significantly influences cultural traditions and public life. Several interviewed migrant mothers express difficulty accepting the impact of this mainstream religion on their daily lives.

One of the main difficulties for me is religion. It's just a pain. I'm frustrated by these monstrous holidays when you can't even buy an egg. You can buy vodka, but not an egg. With three children, I feel very unsafe. I've had instances where my children fell ill during the holidays, and despite waiting for six hours in the emergency room, nothing could be done. It's like you just lie there and die in the queue. (...) Religion permeates everything, and this is one of its manifestations. There's religion in schools, and there are many manifestations: paternalism and misogyny in society—all of these are noticeable and present. This could push me to consider another migration.

Arina, the doula

Effective communication is crucial for the successful integration of migrant mothers into the host community, enabling them to express themselves and assert their agency. As Andrea Thuma points out, "agency is especially vulnerable to external limitations" (Thuma 2011: 4). Migrant mothers who lack adequate language skills and cannot communicate effectively in public spaces may encounter significant obstacles in exercising their agency and fully participating in society. Additionally, the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine has created challenges for communication between Russian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking migrants in Poland. This communication barrier exacerbates the difficulties already faced by these migrant groups, and the resulting societal tensions may lead to inter-ethnic conflicts.

Freedom as capacity for action

Andrea Thuma's concept of freedom emphasizes the agent's initiative, asserting that the essence of freedom lies in the individual's ability to initiate action. Thuma argues that an agent's freedom depends on their capacity to transform their situation and make decisions (Thuma 2011: 4). This perspective highlights not only the availability

of external opportunities but also the internal readiness to act upon them. Thus, Thuma's framework directs attention to both structural constraints and subjective capacities. In this sense, freedom is not merely the absence of coercion but the presence of meaningful possibilities that can be enacted through personal initiative. In this section, we examine how this understanding of freedom applies to the lived experiences of migrant mothers, analyzing the decision-making process and the availability of options among those who participated in our interviews. Freedom will be considered across the key domains that mothers themselves identified when discussing their sense of autonomy: routine, family, and the labor market. The focus is to determine which social, economic, and cultural factors either enable or restrict their ability to exercise agency and make autonomous choices in various aspects of their lives.

Anthony Giddens argues that public order emerges not from spontaneous evolution but from the structured and intentional actions of social actors (Giddens 2005). In his structuration theory, human behavior is viewed as a continuous flow rather than isolated acts, where intention often develops during the process of acting (Joas & Knöbl 2009: 417). Within this framework, individuals continuously monitor and reinterpret their practices through what Giddens calls the reflexive monitoring of action, which "involves controlling not only one's own behavior but also the actions of others" (Giddens 2005: 42). Social structures consist of "rules and resources" that individuals draw upon in their everyday lives (Fours 2002: 421).

Routines play a central role in maintaining ontological security by structuring daily activities, reducing uncertainty, and creating a sense of control. When these routines are disrupted, an individual's basic trust in the social world may be shaken, leading to anxiety and disorientation (Joas & Knöbl 2009: 420). This was evident in the experiences of migrant mothers in the study, who faced unexpected relocation to Poland and were compelled to abandon familiar life patterns. The breakdown of established routines required them to rebuild daily practices and adapt reflectively to a new social environment. Alesia, an associate manager, recalled: "I really love our apartment. And I miss it a lot... There was a lot of anxiety, of course, because we moved with just five suitcases. I really wanted to take as many things as possible from Minsk. But it turned out that I couldn't. I just gave away all my things—some to acquaintances, some to family, and some just somewhere else. And it was an additional worry. It was very stressful, because I had thoughts like, what if something goes wrong?"

Relocation was often rushed, as employers in the IT sector provided visa support for both employees and their families, significantly

shortening the preparation period. Sonya, a community center coordinator at UNHCR, shared: “We basically just packed our bags and left. Honestly, I didn’t really know where Poland was located. I looked it up on Wikipedia and saw that it was in Poland and one of the most beautiful cities, but then I got lazy and closed it”. In the first months after relocation, mothers had to reconstruct their daily lives within a new and unfamiliar set of rules: finding housing, preschools, and doctors while rebuilding everyday routines. As Ksenia, a student, explained: “At first, it was difficult in terms of arranging an ordinary life. In Russia, we already had our own pediatrician, gynecologist, doctors, hairdressers, and a massage therapist—some spheres of ordinary everyday life depend on other specialists. And at first, it was very difficult”.

Thus, relocation disrupted not only external social structures but also internalized behavior schemes. To function successfully, migrants must learn and internalize the rules governing the host society. This process takes time and often deepens anxiety, affecting their capacity to interpret new circumstances adequately. Pierre Bourdieu notes that “since the individual worldview is based on the desire to conform to the social position occupied, even the most disadvantaged subjects try to perceive the established order as natural” (Bourdieu 2007). Hence, for migrant mothers, becoming aware of their social situation in the host country is a necessary step toward integration. Following Bourdieu’s reasoning, those actors who, through their actions aimed at adaptation, become included in and reproduce the social structure become agents (Bourdieu 2007).

Family responsibilities and intensive motherhood

In the interviews, most mothers discussed how, since their husbands were the main breadwinners after relocating their families, most household chores, as well as childcare for infants and toddlers, fell to them during their children’s adjustment to the new country. Arina, the doula, stated: “Management of everything is on me: children’s medicine, food, household chores, cleaning, planning for nannies, arranging help if needed, planning vacations and travel, if any. (...) I have a husband who brings home the bacon, and I do everything else”. Furthermore, since the family’s legal residency often depends on the husband’s employment, any work or social activities undertaken by the mothers are typically viewed as secondary. Daria, currently unemployed, shared: “I don’t work. My daughter hasn’t fully adapted to preschool yet. It’s a work in progress. But I’m preparing... I’m slowly building a portfolio and applying for jobs”.

The choice of the interviewed mothers to practice intensive motherhood significantly impacts their freedom and decision-making abilities. Intensive motherhood posits that a mother's primary responsibility is to foster her child's development and well-being (Hays 1996). Marta, a photographer, expressed: "I believe that a mother should... I don't know... cook well. She should also enjoy spending time with the child and provide opportunities for them. I would say that I am quite an 'assertive' mother in this regard. Although I understand intellectually that I shouldn't overthink it, my perfectionism sometimes gets in the way. I feel pressured to excel in everything, including motherhood". This often leads to sacrificing personal aspirations and goals to prioritize the child's needs.

We initially had a cognitive error, influenced by the paternalistic and patriarchal society I grew up in, which assumed that maternity leave meant the mother was solely responsible for raising the child. I spent many years in intensive motherhood, actively involved with my children, which brought me both fulfillment and, to some extent, depression. A psychiatrist confirmed this. While medication didn't help, non-drug approaches did. I found a job, began to work, and regained my footing.

Arina, the doula

In the countries where the interviewed mothers originated, it is customary for children to be under parental care until the age of three, with preschool education typically starting afterward. As a result, many mothers from Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine choose to take maternity leave until their child turns three, often citing the psychological needs of the child. Ulyana, currently unemployed, said: "In Ukraine, it's normal for a woman to stay with a child until they are three. Staying until six is also accepted; it's seen as investing six years of her life to ensure the child grows up mentally healthy, without going through difficult adaptations".

Although many interviewed mothers aimed to extend their maternity leave, the absence of close relatives in Poland created a significant psychological burden, compounding the stress of relocation and personal adaptation. Consequently, they decided to enroll their children in preschool and return to the job market. Anastasia, a Lead Business Analyst, remarked: "I felt I couldn't handle the psychological pressure anymore. That kind nanny at preschool, who doesn't even speak Russian, might actually be better for my child despite the stress".

However, since the interviewed mothers feel compelled to dedicate all their time to their children when they are not in daycare, they

seek flexible work schedules whenever possible. Nonetheless, situations arise when daycare hours do not align with their work schedules or when children fall ill. In such cases, many mothers, lacking relatives or close friends in their new country, must hire a nanny. This significantly reduces the family's income, but most mothers are willing to make this sacrifice to gain work experience, maintain their qualifications, and secure a stable position in the workplace. Meanwhile, husbands have had to either agree to pay for services that mothers previously provided (such as childcare, cleaning, and cooking) or rethink their division of responsibilities within the family. This economic factor can contribute to the emergence of involved fatherhood in such families, where fathers strive to participate equally in both parenting and childcare. Victoria, a Senior Software Engineer, explained: "For me, we are equal. If I don't do it, he does. For instance, in the mornings, we take turns. If I wake up with the children today, then under normal circumstances, assuming everything stays in place and no one gets sick, my husband will wake up with them tomorrow. To me, that's fair".

The ability for fathers to work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic has played a supportive role in fostering involved fatherhood among the families of the interviewed mothers. Additionally, a law passed by the Polish government in January 2023 continued the trend that began during the pandemic. According to this law, employers cannot refuse requests for remote work from employees who are parents of children under the age of 8, provided the nature of their work allows for it (Mamotoja.pl. 2022). This flexibility benefits families where both partners strive to maintain a collaborative relationship. Tamara, currently unemployed, stated, "As a rule, we have a nuclear family in the classical sense; we are all here in front of each other. My husband often works from home, so we don't experience long periods of separation. We feed off this contact and intimacy. We've learned to juggle our time and try to give the children attention whenever we can".

Remote work is especially valuable during children's illnesses, as it allows parents to share childcare responsibilities throughout the day without requiring one parent to take sick leave.

For example, when the little one fell ill, we sat down to discuss the situation. We decided that, for the next week, he would stay home while we treated him. We coordinated our schedules: on some days, my husband worked from home while looking after the child, and I attended my practical classes. On other days, I had lectures and would copy notes from classmates while staying home with the child.

We try to share responsibilities, and having my husband work from home is incredibly helpful in this regard.

Ksenia, a student

The mothers interviewed chose to practice intensive motherhood, prioritizing their children's needs over their personal aspirations and goals. This choice, combined with the lack of close relatives in their new country, significantly limits their agency and options. The economic circumstances and legal regulations of the host country often dictate the division of household and caregiving responsibilities, which typically fall to the mother. However, the absence of support from relatives and close friends often necessitates external childcare services or a redistribution of responsibilities, leading to greater involvement from fathers. This illustrates how gender roles in migrant families evolve in response to the practical challenges they encounter in a new country.

Labor market participation

In the absence of work opportunities, many surveyed mothers feel vulnerable, unprotected, and helpless. Darya worked as a UX Designer for about four years before going on maternity leave and engaged in eco-activism in her hometown during her leave. When her child turned three, she planned to return to the IT industry but had to postpone due to relocation. To regain their confidence, many mothers who are currently unemployed are actively seeking suitable job openings or retraining for new professions. Ksenia, a student, expressed, "Psychologically, it affects me that I am largely dependent on my husband. Although he does not infringe on my freedom, it feels significant to me that I would like to be a bit more independent and realized outside of family and motherhood".

Since most of the surveyed mothers' husbands hold Blue Cards, the mothers have access to the job market, eliminating the need for them to obtain work permits in Poland when they decide to re-enter the workforce. Margarita, the director of the Association of Immigrant Families with Disabilities, mentioned, "I recognize that my situation is somewhat privileged because I work under specific conditions. I am Russian, and there was a law that could limit our employment. However, since my husband has a Blue Card and we qualify under a regulation for rare professions, I faced no difficulties in finding a job".

All of the interviewed mothers' husbands are highly qualified and well-paid IT specialists, allowing these mothers to be selective about

job offers. They can choose where they want to work and retrain if desired. Ksenia worked as a software tester for over eight years before maternity leave. When her daughter turned two, her husband received a job offer in Poland. She gave birth to her second child there. After seven years of caring for her children and home, it was challenging for her to return to IT, as the industry had advanced significantly, prompting her to pursue her dream of becoming an interior designer. “Psychologically, it impacts me that I am largely dependent on my husband. Despite him not infringing on my independence, I still desire to be a bit more independent and realized outside of family and motherhood,” Ksenia shared.

De-skilling is a common issue faced by mothers with young children. However, in the context of migration, where the stress of relocation, adaptation to new living conditions, and learning new societal norms are added, this problem becomes particularly acute. Alla, a former web designer, found it difficult to bridge the gaps in her skills due to a long maternity leave and forced relocation. Consequently, she decided to pursue her long-standing dream of becoming a florist. Alla, the florist, said, “For example, I created the first designs for BlackBerry when there were no user guides for Android or iOS. Now, I look at job vacancies and see that knowledge of programs like Photoshop, Illustrator, and 3D Max is assumed rather than explicitly stated in the requirements. There are also new programs I am completely unfamiliar with. The IT field is evolving rapidly”.

The highly qualified status of the husbands of the interviewed migrant mothers significantly impacts their freedom of choice regarding work. Since the husbands are well-paid IT specialists, the mothers are not compelled to accept any job that comes their way; they can afford to be selective about job opportunities. This enables them to take their time in choosing work that aligns with their interests and passions or to retrain in a different field if they wish to pursue a new career path. Having the ability to choose where and what type of work they want to do gives these mothers a sense of freedom and agency in their lives. It allows them to pursue their dreams and ambitions, which may have been put on hold due to motherhood or other factors, fostering a greater sense of independence. This freedom of choice is crucial for their self-esteem and confidence, enabling them to realize their full potential as both mothers and professionals.

However, the extent of freedom in work choices enjoyed by these migrant mothers is closely tied to their spouses' employment status, rendering it a fragile situation.

Worldly attachment of actions: contributing to the community

In the context of skilled migrant mothers in Poland, the concept of the worldly attachment of actions and its impact on freedom of action becomes particularly significant. Hannah Arendt's understanding of action and freedom emphasizes the transformative power of actions that have real-world consequences, disrupt established patterns, and maintain a strong connection to the world (Thuma 2011: 5). For skilled migrant mothers, this means that their actions can profoundly influence their surroundings, challenge existing norms, and contribute to social change within the host community.

The active involvement of migrant mothers in transformative processes is driven by their genuine interest in the world, as they recognize the importance of caring for and actively shaping their environment. When asked why she chooses to work, Margarita, the director of the Association of Immigrant Families with Disabilities, explained that she finds her work deeply engaging and meaningful. Even when her children were very young, she felt it was important to stay active and contribute to the community. She volunteered regularly at a nursing home in Kyiv, sometimes bringing her children along, and developed educational programs for elderly residents as well as counseling services for families. For Margarita, staying involved has always been important and personally fulfilling. Together with other migrant mothers, she founded the Association of Immigrant Families with Disabilities and shared her motivation for being actively involved. Currently, their association provides support to 180 families from Ukraine, which they strive to assist systematically. They not only help with food and essential items for daily life but also support adaptation and legalization in Poland. They conduct training courses for East European migrant mothers aimed at helping them enter the job market.

When analyzing skilled migrant mothers' agency in Poland, Bourdieu's framework illuminates how their available forms of capital shape the degree of their freedom of action described by Arendt. Different forms of capital-cultural (education, professional skills), social (networks of support), and symbolic (social recognition)-become key resources through which migrant mothers navigate the new field of Polish society. For instance, cultural capital acquired outside Poland, such as higher education or professional experience, often requires transformation to gain recognition and convertibility into economic capital in the host country. Social capital, built through mutual aid networks or community organizations, compensates for institutional barriers and enables agency despite structural limitations.

Using their skills, knowledge, and experience, migrant mothers strive to alleviate the adaptation period for fellow mothers who also undergo the stress of relocating to a new country. Through various online platforms catering to migrant mothers, the interviewed women actively engage in social activities, providing valuable information about life in Poland and responding to inquiries from newcomers. Additionally, some migrant mothers have established interest-based clubs, such as philosophical, book, and board game clubs. These initiatives foster a sense of solidarity and sisterhood among migrant women, contributing to a smoother process of adaptation and integration. Such practices illustrate how, within Bourdieu's terms, social capital not only provides access to resources but also reinforces symbolic recognition, creating new microfields of interaction where migrant women can redefine their status and sense of belonging.

The sense of belonging to a community of like-minded women empowers migrant mothers, driving their willingness to invest time and effort in aiding fellow migrants in Poland without expecting any remuneration, as they recognize the significance of these acts. However, it's essential to recognize that skilled migrant mothers in Poland face unique challenges that impact their freedom of action and their connection to the world. Language barriers, cultural differences, recognition of qualifications, and access to professional networks can hinder their ability to fully participate and exercise their freedom. These limitations highlights the limits of capital conversion in practice: linguistic competence, as a form of embodied cultural capital, becomes a crucial factor determining access to economic and symbolic capital in the host society. The partial inconvertibility of capitals acquired abroad restricts agency and reinforces dependence on migrant networks rather than facilitating broader social integration.

Consequently, most surveyed mothers were not prepared to assert their agency in Polish public spaces and preferred to remain within the migrant community for the time being. Therefore, it's crucial to establish comprehensive support systems, including language assistance, skill and qualification recognition, and opportunities for social and professional integration, so that skilled migrant mothers can exercise their freedom of action and make significant contributions to the Polish community. Recognizing and evaluating the interests and skills of migrant mothers can empower them to actively participate in shaping their own lives and the lives of the Eastern European migrant community to which they belong, while also contributing to a more diverse, inclusive, and dynamic society in Poland. In this context, the accumulation and transformation of various forms of capital become not only individual strategies of adaptation but

also collective mechanisms of social change, through which migrant mothers reconfigure the symbolic and cultural boundaries of the Polish social landscape.

A lack of effective integration measures risks underutilizing the social, cultural, and professional resources of migrant mothers, resulting in a loss of valuable human capital for the host society. The persistence of structural barriers may reinforce stereotypes that portray migrant women as passive or dependent, deepening their marginalization within both the labor market and the public sphere. Such dynamics not only constrain individual agency but also weaken the broader social cohesion of the host community.

Integration of skilled migrant mothers with preschoolers in Poland

The question of what guides agents in choosing their modes of action remains central to understanding processes of social integration. According to Pierre Bourdieu, an agent's practices are structured by habitus—a system of dispositions internalized through socialization that orients behavior, perception, and action (Joas & Knöbl 2009: 550). These durable dispositions reproduce inherited behavioral patterns, shaping what Bourdieu calls a “lifestyle” typical for particular groups (Bourdieu 2007: 71). While habitus tends to resist change, Bourdieu also attributes to it a “creative” capacity that can be achieved through self-reflection, awareness, and recognition of the laws structuring society (Bourdieu 1986). This transformative potential becomes particularly relevant in the context of migration and integration, where individuals must adapt their previously internalized dispositions to new cultural and social fields.

Most researchers emphasize that successful integration depends not only on migrants' agency but also on the openness and structure of the host community (Phillimore 2012; Waters & Pineau 2015). In Poland, however, as our empirical data show, the integration of qualified migrant mothers remains outside the state's priority agenda. The conditions of reception within the host community directly affect whether the creative potential of migrants' habitus can be realized or suppressed. Migrant women arrive equipped with particular dispositions that shape their adaptation strategies and influence how they perceive the host society's social field. As Bourdieu notes, “the sense of one's place and the similarity of habitus, expressed through likes or dislikes, underlie all forms of interaction: friendships, loves, conjugal ties, associations, etc.” (Bourdieu 2007: 71).

Interviews with migrant mothers reveal that many Poles support migrants' assimilation only insofar as newcomers are willing to dissolve completely into Polish culture. Margarita, the director of the Association of Immigrant Families with Disabilities, stated, "I apologized several times for my Polish, and I was told: 'Thank you very much that you basically speak Polish, for example, and not English.'" Linguistic adaptation thus functions as a marker of symbolic belonging, yet the expectation of full assimilation creates pressure that limits intercultural dialogue. This expectation extends to children as well. Alesia, an associate manager, described how all three of her children attended the same small daycare center, but her youngest daughter refused to speak Polish and avoided group activities. The daycare staff frequently called Alesia to complain and attempted to intervene. The situation became particularly stressful when Alesia learned that a teacher had yelled at a child who wouldn't speak Polish, telling them to speak the language or leave the country, which she suspected was directed at her daughter. Such episodes demonstrate how differences in linguistic and cultural habitus can produce symbolic violence within everyday institutional settings.

According to many respondents, the war in Ukraine and the subsequent influx of refugees have intensified tensions between Poles and Eastern European migrants. Ulyana, currently unemployed, observed that "before, it seems to me, they were more loyal. Now, in view of the fact that many foreigners have arrived, it seems to me that the Poles are already like, 'Come on, will you learn the language?'" This shift manifests in a rise of exclusionary practices: employers refusing to hire "non-native speakers" and landlords imposing impossible rental conditions. Alla, a florist, described how "many of my acquaintances left for Ukraine because they simply could not rent apartments, even with money." These structural barriers reinforce dispositions of distrust and exclusion, constraining the creative transformation of habitus.

Although this study focuses on migrant perspectives, it aligns with research emphasizing integration as a two-way process (Klarenbeek 2019). Host communities cannot serve as the sole standard by which integration is measured; they too must adapt to the presence of new cultures (Carens 2005). As Klarenbeek notes, "More integration does not necessarily equal more harmony, since changing power relations cause social friction. Insiders may feel threatened by a decrease in objective difference and, in response, put extra emphasis on what distinguishes them from 'the Other'" (Klarenbeek 2019).

This dynamic is reflected in Polish workplaces and schools. Alla recalled that her Polish colleagues were "very indignant" when Polish

children began speaking with “Russian endings,” viewing it as a contamination of their language. Despite migrant mothers’ efforts to learn Polish and participate in local life, they frequently encountered a wall of non-acceptance. As Ulyana noted, “It was not possible to find Polish friends to their liking.” Even when employed or studying together, “the Ukrainians stick with the Ukrainians, the Poles with the Poles,” as Alla described. Due to their double workload—caring for children and seeking employment—many mothers lacked the time and energy to cultivate relationships with Poles. Sonya, a community center coordinator at UNHCR, admitted, “I can’t say that my integration into Polish society is successful... I have a social circle that I like; it consists mainly of migrant women.”

As Bourdieu argues, habitus becomes the identity of a group’s members, creating similarity in ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Bourdieu 2007: 71). This explains why migrants often remain within their diasporas, preserving familiar lifestyles. The same mechanisms that once ensured solidarity in the country of origin now hinder cross-group integration in the host society. Most respondents, therefore, maintain communication with Poles at a formal level while building their social circles around those who share language, values, and motherhood experiences.

Without a reflective transformation of habitus on both sides, social practices will continue to reproduce inherited dispositions rather than foster creative adaptation. Consequently, integration remains one-sided: migrant mothers demonstrate adaptive strategies, while the host society largely preserves its symbolic boundaries. Habitus thus serves as both an analytical and explanatory tool, showing how patterns once functional in one social field can become constraints in another. The “creative” potential of habitus can only unfold under conditions of mutual openness, where migrants and hosts alike recognize their shared role in shaping a new social field.

Conclusions

The study demonstrates that skilled Eastern European migrant mothers in Poland occupy a paradoxical position at the intersection of privilege and marginalization. On one hand, they arrive with significant educational and professional capital, often supported by the economic stability of their IT-specialist husbands. On the other hand, the structural, linguistic, and cultural barriers of the host society, combined with the gendered expectations of intensive motherhood, severely constrain their agency and visibility in the public sphere.

Drawing on Arendt's and Thuma's dimensions of agency-subject visibility, the capacity to interact and communicate, freedom, and the worldly attachment of actions—the research shows that these women do not remain passive dependents. Instead, they actively reconstruct their identities within new social spaces, particularly in migrant online and offline communities. Within these settings, their cultural and social capital is revalorized and mobilized in exchange for recognition, emotional support, and, in some cases, professional reinvention—a process that, following Bourdieu, highlights how the value of capital depends on its recognition within a specific social field. These networks become informal mechanisms of integration and empowerment, compensating for the institutional vacuum in Polish migration policy.

However, this integration largely unfolds within the boundaries of the migrant community rather than within the host society itself. Limited proficiency in Polish, cultural distance, and the absence of systematic integration measures prevent migrant mothers from converting their accumulated capitals into full participation in public and economic life. Their agency thus operates in a parallel social field—productive, supportive, yet enclosed.

The findings also highlight that migration can transform family structures and gender contracts. New structural conditions, such as the rise of remote work and the financial independence of both partners, have created opportunities for renegotiating traditional domestic roles. Many skilled migrant mothers leverage these conditions to assert greater agency at home, fostering more egalitarian arrangements and encouraging more involved fatherhood. This trend reflects a Giddensian duality of structure within the private sphere: changes in the broader economic and social structure enable new practices, and those deliberate practices, in turn, begin to reshape established gender norms. However, these shifts remain fragile and contingent on specific economic circumstances.

Ultimately, the study argues that recognizing and supporting the agency of skilled migrant mothers is essential for both individual empowerment and collective social cohesion. Institutional acknowledgment of their resources—linguistic, professional, and cultural—could unlock the transformative capacity of their habitus, allowing integration to become a two-way process rather than a one-sided expectation. This echoes Giddens's view that social structures must adapt alongside agentive change. This shift also resonates with Arendt's notion of taking responsibility for our shared world: by empowering migrant mothers to act as visible, contributing public actors, Polish society would invite them to help shape a common future. Without these changes, the potential contributions of these women will remain

underutilized, and the broader vision of a truly multicultural society will continue to elude realization.

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GETTING THE BEST OF “UNWANTED RECOGNITION”

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Abstract: This article examines systematic attacks on Gender Studies as part of broader anti-gender campaigns within illiberal states, using the personal experience at Central European University as a case study. When Gender Studies was deleted from Hungary's accredited study list in 2017 without consultation, CEU was forced to relocate from Budapest to Vienna in 2020, demonstrating how attacks on academic freedom occur within EU member states rather than distant authoritarian regimes. These attacks transform Gender Studies into “popular science”, where politicians and public intellectuals make authoritative statements without relevant training, paradoxically occurring during renewed public trust in scientific expertise following the pandemic. Illiberal states exploit neoliberal evaluation systems, replacing international peer-reviewed journals with pro-government local publications and reorienting scientific discourse from the Global North toward Russia and China — a twisted form of decolonization that reduces democratic inclusivity.

The article argues that European scientific infrastructure remains unprepared for illiberal scientific institutions that appear legitimate but operate fraudulently using neoliberal language of excellence and impact. Resistance strategies include finding alternative sites for knowledge production, redefining scholarly identities, constituting support networks, and mobilizing internationally.

Keywords: gender studies, illiberal higher education policy, polypore state.



I am probably the best person to write the report as I am three times a loser as a Gender Studies professor at Central European University. In my academic field, Gender Studies were deleted from the accredited study list in Hungary in 2017 without consultation. CEU was forced to move from one EU member country to another to preserve its academic freedom. In the summer of 2020, more than 300 faculty and staff and 1200 students moved from Budapest to Vienna. Third, I had to resign from the Hungarian Accreditation Committee in 2022 as its President demanded that I withdraw my peer-reviewed academic article from the otherwise less publicly known German academic journal of *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (Pető 2021). By now, this article about illiberal academic authorization has become the most-read article in the journal. This process, which Eric Fassin calls “paradoxical recognition”, created a political opportunity to share relevant ideas with the broadest possible audience (Fassin 2016).

My personal story also illustrates that attacks on academic freedom are not happening in “faraway countries we know so little”, to paraphrase Chamberlain when they signed the deal with Hitler hoping to save the peace before the Second World War, but already here and now. These systematic and systemic attacks on Gender Studies are part of anti-gender campaigns associated with the anti-gender movement, a nationalist, neoconservative response to the poly crisis (migration, financial and security, war in Europe and the Middle East) induced by the global, neoliberal world order. It uses “gender as symbolic glue” to create alliances of hate and exclusion, to redefine what is “normal”, and to create livable, desirable alternatives for voters to liberal democracy (Pető 2020). It also uses neoliberal managerial tools to silence critical voices, often using the slogan of free speech and academic freedom. These illiberal movements, while attacking Gender Studies as an academic discipline, are gaining much support everywhere. This war is waged in higher education over liberal values, and illiberal forces also hijack free speech and academic freedom discourse to eliminate critical spaces together with public higher education.

The “gender academy” which is defined as the ensemble of institutions and scholars who have advanced critical knowledge variously focused on women’s, LGBTQI+, and gender generally (Ergas et al. 2022). It can – and, recently, increasingly has – become subject to marginalization, defunding, stigmatization, and even outright closure or de-facto silencing and expulsion. Based on a global survey, a typology was developed for how these critical educational and research spaces are eliminated with bending, forging, breaking, and de-specification. The *forging*, changes that break substantially with a mainstream consensus without necessarily challenging *the rule of law*,

like using existing institutions to eliminate the independence of the Gender Studies research unit. The *breaking* like banning Gender Studies outside the liberal legal consensus like deleting Gender Studies in Hungary from the accredited study list. The *bending* involves the reinterpretation or disabling of existing legislative constraints in ways that are not procedurally illegal but subvert/defy liberal democratic norms, like budget negotiations about GS, ending with leaving GS underfunded. By despecification, we understand the purposeful submersion, or redefinition, of Gender Studies into other programs – such as family studies, the rebranding, and submersion of Gender Studies into other programs, generally under different names, in ways that effectively empty them of critical import.

These four strategies do not happen without violence. Recently, Gender Studies scholars cannot complain about the lack of broader social interest in their work. Faculty members' email boxes are filled with emails inquiring about their research, invitations to public debates in different media outlets, and comments for the press. At the same time, Gender Studies scholars are targeted by online public harassment and have found themselves being listed by name as enemies of the nation on the front pages of national newspapers to silence and humiliate academics.

To resist, first, we need to know what danger we are facing when Gender Studies experience threats, delegitimization, anti-intellectualism, and hijacking of its language- despecification. With Weronika Grzebalska, we call these newly built states *illiberal polypore states*, based on their standard modus operandi (Grzebalska and Petó 2018). The polypore is a parasitic fungus that lives on wood and produces nothing but more polypores. Unlike political scientists who admire the effectiveness of these illiberal states destroying democratic institutions, we argue that polypore states do not have original ideas; instead, they take the ideas of others and use them for their purpose: self-maintenance of their separate world. Polypore institutions mask themselves as “real” academic institutions, i.e., “one of them”. The polypore creates parallel institutions, weakens existing infrastructure, and discredits its activities. The illiberal state also systematically destroys any other existing mechanisms of scientific evaluation, turning emptied institutions into performative formalities, rendering them mere simulacra of the original institutions. Think about despecification. Polypore and state institutions with the same profile differ. The available state funding for the polypore institutions seems limitless now that funds from other state institutions are being pumped into the state-financed polypore institutions, leading to further impoverishment of those state-funded institutions.

Due to the anti-gender campaign, Gender Studies' knowledge production has changed forever as Gender Studies has become a popular science. Politicians, public intellectuals, and even workers having breakfast in a bakery are making self-assured and authoritative public statements on professional issues such as sex education or the curriculum of master's studies without any knowledge or training in Gender Studies. This is happening, paradoxically, during the resurgence of the credibility of science and experts because of the global pandemic. This revival of trust in science has not remained undetected by illiberal actors, leading to illiberal state officials applying the very same toolkit of science in their fight against Gender Studies by citing a hodgepodge of surveys in an ad hoc manner, which allows them to undermine the relevance of gender research and its empirical findings, as well as the value and legitimacy of its scientific endeavors in general.

Illiberal states are developing parallel systems of academic authorization and systematically destroying other scientific evaluation mechanisms, turning higher education institutions into performative formalities and rendering them mere imitations of the original institutions. While the polypore illiberal state hacks quality assurance via accreditation committees, it also mimics the neo-liberalized scientific evaluation system of indices. In Poland, for example, during the recent modification of the evaluation system, international, peer-reviewed English language journals have been replaced on the list of required publications with local Polish journals, whose profiles and editorial boards are pro-government. During this hacking of the quality assurance system, the previous consensus on publishing in English in scientific journals has also been called into question. This signals a change in scientific orientation; instead of the Global North, scientific discourse now orients to the East, to Russia and China. This changing geopolitical focus is, paradoxically, implementing a twisted de-colonization of science, making it less democratic and inclusive. It instrumentalizes the post-colonial discourse and uses it for its hegemonic purpose. For Gender Studies, where the "Holy Grail" had been published among others in *Signs*, *Feminist Theory*, and *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, all those achievements have suddenly been made to disappear, which will have an impact on these journals too.

What can all those Gender Studies scholars do when their field, their work, and their publications are labeled not only worthless and useless but also dangerous, and they cannot or do not want to immigrate to where the shrinking global academic space will soon not offer academic employment anyway? As the authentic study of Gender Studies is blocked by the "science policy" of illiberal states and the study of family policy as a scientific endeavor and a professional

lifebelt has been established, many scholars have seemingly resurfaced as experts in family policy or family studies. This adaptation strategy is well-known to middle-aged intellectuals from the communist era: one may pursue a career and publish only *if* one is not openly against the regime.

The European scientific infrastructure was unprepared for the emergence of illiberal science policy and illiberal scientific institutions, which look like any other scientific institution but, in reality, are not. The Hungarian Accreditation Committee obtained its European license from ENQA after CEU was forced into exile and the two-year Master's program in Gender Studies was struck from the accredited study list. These illiberal institutions use the neoliberal language of excellence, competitiveness, impact, social outreach, and indices; however, they are all fraudulent and empty. One possible strategy has been bringing academic freedom measured by offering Gender Studies in the curriculum as an index in the neoliberal rankings, which would contribute to meaningful change and, more importantly, prevent the spread of illiberal governing practices in higher education.

Attacks on Gender Studies programs and scholars demonstrate their ability to resist and continue working. Illiberal states may use breaking, bending, forging, and despecification to undermine Gender Studies and limit the work of gender scholars, and we can detail forms of resistance. We have seen gender scholars find other sites and means of knowledge production and dissemination, redefine themselves to continue their research and teaching, constitute networks that can provide intellectual as well as practical and political support, and mobilize internationally as well as nationally to demonstrate that activist scholarship is an essential mode of scholarly engagement at a time of global crisis and domestic repression. So, unwanted recognition has advantages.

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ON THE EDGE OF FAILURE: STORIES OF FEMALE DISPLACED SCHOLARS FROM BELARUS

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Abstract: The article examines the experiences of displaced female scholars who struggle to maintain their professional identities due to the challenges of forced migration. It draws on the stories of women who have involuntarily emigrated and experienced setbacks in their success, achievements, and overall happiness – whether through a complete loss of professional status or significant changes to their identities. Notably, the paper focuses on female scholars from Belarus, who were forced to leave the country after 2020. Through semi-structured interviews conducted with these scholars, representatives of host institutions, and the Scholars at Risk program, the author argues that, rather than viewing lack of success as a personal failure, this perspective helps to highlight the complexities of the integration process and reveals existing structural and institutional gaps in the support programs designed for displaced female academics from peripheral societies.

Keywords: scholars-at-risk, displacement, gender, Belarus, Western academia.

Introduction

In July 2024, I began my research as part of the collective project “Protecting Academia at Risk: Towards a New Policy Agenda for a Thriving



Culture of Higher Education in Europe”¹ Specifically, my contributions focus on the experiences of displaced and migrant female scholars from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, aiming to explore the epistemological changes resulting from this displacement.² Since the project’s primary sources are interviews with these scholars, I started creating a contact list of potential interviewees. I sought this information publicly or asked colleagues for contacts. I realised that the status of *a scholar at risk* – defined as a scholar who is unable to continue their academic work in their home country due to war or persecution (FAQs, Scholars at Risk Network) – refers to visibility and is associated with success in some sense, as these individuals have managed to remain in the academic market while maintaining their professional identities. But what about missing data, specifically concerning those scholars who have lost their scholarly status and, therefore, whose narratives which are not included in scholarship on displaced academics? (Vatansever 2020; Burlyuk and Rahbari 2023). According to the scholarship, missing data is not merely about “the number of subjects for whom data are missing” but also about the “number of missing observations” (McKnight et al. 2007: 61). It pertains to cases that remain invisible and unrecognised by scholars but should be considered in data analysis.

- 1 The project is implemented by CEU Vienna, LSE London, SNSPA Bucharest, University of Erfurt and supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation (2024–2026). Generally, this project explores the conditions for displaced scholars who had to leave their home country and adapt to Western host universities. More: <https://shorturl.at/q2U1n>.
- 2 I identify the scholars from Belarus I spoke with as displaced, differentiating them from migrants in accordance with definitions provided by international law. According to UNESCO, migrants are defined as people who move voluntarily or involuntarily across borders for any reason, without specific legal protections attached to migrant status. In contrast, a displaced person is defined as someone who is forced to leave their home due to armed conflict, violence, persecution, or disasters (Migrants, refugees, or displaced persons? 2021). If Ukrainian scholars are considered displaced, then both Belarusians and Russians can be identified as either displaced or migrants. However, Belarusians, including displaced academics, often cannot obtain legal protection and are even refused it in some cases (Addressing the specific challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile, 2023). Therefore, when referring to scholars from Belarus, I will use the definition of displacement to describe their status, highlighting the ongoing political violence and persecution that pose a real threat to these individuals, who have no choice but to leave. This approach should also problematise these definitions, which often do not accurately reflect the real situation. Additionally, I will use “migration” instead of “immigration”, as the former refers to the act of moving and settling in one country. This choice highlights the state of uncertainty that most displaced scholars experience regarding their future residency.

The missing data approach raises the question of why this data is absent, revealing the potential limitations of research.

Therefore, while reviewing the profiles of *at risk* scholars, I reflected on those who are placed outside of this visibility. This does not include academics who are unrepresented in public due to security reasons (e.g. those from Belarus who receive temporary scholarly support but prefer not to announce it in public). However, there may be numerous stories of academics who, due to migration, must radically alter their professional paths. In discussing the migration of academics from ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990s during the Yugoslav Wars, Milena Dragičević Šešić, a professor at the University of Arts in Belgrade, she was about 40 years old at that time, notes that “[academics who left] are working on very low-level jobs [in migration], in factories [...] Being a professor of the Faculty of Music in Sarajevo, he ended up in a small village in Germany as a director of a choral choir” (Interview with Milena Dragičević Šešić, EI 2024). Dragičević Šešić mentions successful stories as well, but these are rather exceptions and mainly involve younger scholars who have obtained their PhDs at Western universities, while there have been almost no opportunities for skilled professionals to maintain their previous status. Indeed, the data on scholars in at-risk (SAR) communities are represented only by a corpus of successful stories that creates a particular positive image of how academic discourse functions globally, even under conditions of forced migration.³

According to the scholarship, female academics remain more vulnerable in global academia (Le Feuvre 2015; Coleman et al. 2023; Zhao et al. 2023). This vulnerability, characterised by heightened risks and limited agency, intensifies during forced migration, surpassing the common uncertainties faced by all migrants and displaced persons, particularly those related to legalisation and integration developed further (Zuccarelli et al. 2025; Chulitskaya et al. 2022). For instance, the intersection of gender, age, and foreignness/ethnicity creates a significant barrier for female scholars in their professional progress, limiting their agency and often resulting in career interruptions or changes (Sang and Calvard 2019; Strauß and Boncori 2020; Coleman et al. 2023). Additionally, women often assume primary responsibility for unpaid reproductive work when they relocate with their families

3 According to the SAR Network Annual Report, in 2023–2024, host organisations established positions only for 149 scholars. Access mode: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/annual-report-2024/#section3>. See also, Monthly Newsletter from SAR Network, Access mode: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/category/news/monthly-newsletter/>.

(Gan and Shin 2024). When discussing the differences in the needs of female and male displaced scholars, one host notes that caregiving infrastructure is central to the needs of female scholars, whereas it is almost absent from the requests of their male counterparts (Interview with Andrei, HI 2025). As one interviewee states, “There are two big differences between moving alone and moving with a child” (here and further, Interview with Nastassia, DI 2024).

There are many different programs to support scholars at risk. All these descriptions are mainly gender-neutral. In reality, these programs most likely address male scholars, as they imply a high level of mobility that is problematic for female scholars who, as was mentioned, remain primarily responsible for unpaid reproductive work (Zhao et al. 2023). In most SAR programs, the notion of care infrastructure is typically either absent or only vaguely acknowledged. There are many stories of families where both partners are scholars, yet it is primarily men who apply for the scholarship, while women are responsible for the family infrastructure.⁴ Indeed, the relationships between gender, migration, and academic discourse require particular attention.

Therefore, this article focuses on the stories of displaced female academics from Belarus who have faced challenges in academic integration – whether these women have completely lost their status or radically changed their professional identity. The aim is to explore the relationships between gender, migration, academic discourse, and the peripheral context of Belarus – both politically and scholarly. The main corpus of the study’s sources consists of 11 semi-structured interviews I conducted with displaced female scholars from Belarus between July 2024 and July 2025 (marked as DI). These interviews are anonymised and based on the preliminary questionnaire (narratives of past, present and future) created by the PROAC team as part of a common methodology. The corpus includes interviews with displaced female scholars who, at the time of our meeting, had changed their professional fields, as well as those who managed to maintain their professional identities. I include all of them in the analyses because, as they themselves

4 For example, Alexei, a scholar from Russia, left the country with his family after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. He mentions that, despite his wife’s professional background in education, he is applying for various short-term scholarships while she takes care of the children and manages their living situation in one place due to school commitments. Alexei explains that his wife accepts this arrangement because there are no other options: “If something happens to me, then the family budget collapses”. This is notable even though there were times in their lives when she earned more than he did. Interview with Alexei, DI 2024.

mention, the boundary between “change” and “manage” is elusive and non-permanent, and the situation could change drastically over time. Those who currently have scholarships may find themselves without any, and vice versa.

The general framework of SAR programmes and the academic labour market is established through semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of host institutions (marked as HI), SAR programmes, and experts (marked as EI) in the field of SAR programmes and higher education systems in general. These interviews may be anonymised or not, depending on the preference of the interviewee. This corpus, also created by the PROAC team and based on a separate common questionnaire, consists of 11 interviews in English, Belarusian, and German. Although I focus on the Belarusian context, the corpus of interviews with displaced scholars from other contexts – mainly Ukraine and Russia, which consists of 25 semi-structured interviews – allows for the development of a comparative framework, thereby revealing local peculiarities (marked as DI). The study is based on the experiences of middle-aged female academics mainly with PhD degrees who migrated with or without their families and children. As mentioned, age significantly influences professional perspectives in migration, as does family status. That is why I portray several of my interviewees in detail to demonstrate the relationships between their answers and these categories. In the bibliography, there are descriptions of all the interviewees I have quoted.

My research focuses on peripheral spaces, in particular Belarus, and seeks to diversify and decentre Western discourse. On the one hand, my personal cultural background – I am a migrant scholar from Belarus – and deep understanding of the events in Belarus in 2020 caused in mass migration enable me to a) find interviewees and gain their trust, and b) comprehend the nuances of their psycho-emotional state when they express uncertainty, unsafety, or frustration during our talk.⁵ On the other hand, the focus on the periphery where these stories came from allows me to disclose an additional dimension, particularly, the hierarchy within the global academic discourse resulting in inequality and disempowerment (Rahbari 2015). Due to

5 Although I identify myself as a displaced scholar, my situation is not officially recognized as 'at risk' because I completed my PhD in Germany in 2024. When I began my dissertation in 2019, I did not plan to remain in Europe; however, I am currently unable to return due to the political unrest in Belarus that began in 2020 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This inability to return is not deemed a valid reason for my status to be classified as 'at risk.' making me merely a migrant scholar. As was mentioned, it rather problematizes the boundary between migrant and displaced identifications.

the marginalisation of Belarusian academic discourse during the Soviet period and after the Soviet Union's collapse, caused by decades of authoritarian rule (Ousmanova 2020; Arcimovich and Reviaka 2026), only a small number of Belarusian scientists can qualify for international SAR programs because of their high-level requirements. "It was completely unrealistic to get into [these programs] with [Belarusian] CVs and our PhDs ... [because] we existed behind the iron curtain absolutely", the host of the EHU Fellowships for Scholars and Teachers from Belarus and Ukraine program, argues (here and further, Interview with EHU Fellowships host, HI 2024). In this context, I will refer to a specific Belarusian situation, avoiding generalisations such as *post-Soviet marginalisation*. The current circumstances for displaced academics from Ukraine and Belarus illustrate that they experience completely different forms of marginalisation and have varying access to resources, primarily due to differing historical developments following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Lavruhin 2012).

Given the broad field of migration studies, I focus on research that has emerged at the intersection of migration and higher education, which has become a significant topic over the last decade. Except for the common challenges caused by migration, which I will discuss later, these studies examine the forced migration and displacement of scholars not merely as a response to "refugee crises" (Kontowski and Leitsberger 2018) but also in relation to threats to academic freedom and democracy that may impact the field of higher education globally (Rahbari and Burluk 2023; Slowey and Taylor 2024). The investigation of various SAR programmes and their impact on the integration of displaced scholars and the reshaping of the educational field is one of the primary topics of these studies, along with the development of new concepts that can describe this new process, for instance, "'academic humanitarianism' as a new regime of governance" (Betül and Karakaşoğlu 2023: 2). Nonetheless, my paper focuses on the side of the stories of female displaced academics that remains "behind every story of success" and may be overlooked as 'missing data' (Halberstam 2011: 88). I analyse these stories from the perspective of their potential to reveal the mechanisms of power discourse and its channels for marginalisation and inequality. My main argument is that it is not the failure of these women, who had to change their professional identity. Instead of viewing their experiences of marginalisation and stigmatisation as a subject's failure, I argue that this approach allows us to identify the complexities of integration and uncover existing structural and institutional gaps in Western academia.

Reasons for Migration: Postponed Until “the Last Moment”

When I texted Nastassia and asked if she would be willing to share her experience with me, she replied that her profile was not suitable because she no longer worked in academia. “Yes, I know”, I responded, as our mutual friend, who had given me Nastassia’s contact, had informed me of this. “Okay then, – Nastassia said, – see for yourself”. A few days later, we called each other via Signal, a platform Nastassia specifically requested to use. It quickly became apparent that she was very cautious and knowledgeable about the safety protocols that had become common for many Belarusians who left the country after 2020.⁶ As we spoke, I could hear children’s voices in the background – there was a playground nearby. Until that moment, I had not known that she had a child. I immediately asked, and she confirmed that she had a 9-year-old son.

We began our conversation. Nastassia was open about her experiences but tried as much as possible to maintain anonymity. This was one more characteristic of interviews with Belarusians. Each time I asked the interviewees about their previous professional experience, the reasons for migration, and the received assistance, I clarified that I did not need names or specific details, as those questions could be alarming for them. All the more, my primary interest was not the period before migration (as I was familiar with the context and the aftermath of the protests in Belarus in 2020), but the transformation that occurred afterwards, particularly why she no longer sees her future career in academia. “At the moment, I don’t believe I’ll be able to continue my profession here”, she says.

Nastassia is 40 years old. She defended her PhD in art history in Belarus and worked at a Belarusian academic institution for a long time. In 2020, she participated in protest actions in Minsk and donated to support political prisoners. After the violent suppression of the protests, all these activities were criminalised. By the beginning of 2025, when this article was written, the search for protest participants was still ongoing, with the security service analysing all visual materials from the protests and gaining access to platforms to identify those who had donated. In 2023, Nastassia was invited to the security service, which discovered her name among those who had donated. She decided immediately to leave, as she was afraid that they had obtained more information about her protest activities. “I became so scared [...]

6 The political persecution or threat of political persecution remains the primary reason for migration for Belarusians after 2020 (Kazakou and Thomas 2025).

I could have gone to jail for a long time, and I have a child”. She had already left her academic institution in 2020 because she didn’t want the direction of the institution to manipulate her as she participated in the protest movements. However, she was unable to find a job in either the academic or NGO sectors. “And I decided to try [migration]”.

Nastassia, like other interviewees, did not plan to move. Another scholar, Janina, 50 years old, who previously worked as a researcher, clarifies, “It was a forced migration. [...] I worked in a museum and thought that I would spend my whole life there” (here and further, Interview with Janina, DI 2024). That might explain why they were not ready—in terms of language competences and other requirements — to the academic market in the West. “This is really when a person has had this desire [to make a career at Western academia] from the earliest years at school [...] to strive, to break through, to want, to dream”, Nastassia notices. Andreas, the host at one Western university develops, “They didn’t need to learn German or English before. Why would they? You know they function perfectly well in Belarusian and Russian in Belarus” (Interview with Andreas, HI 2024). The lack of required competencies should not be attributed to provinciality, but rather to a fundamentally different function of academic discourse in Belarus, which remains influenced by its Soviet heritage and is oriented towards the Russian model. Ironically, these scholars often describe themselves as “classical Soviet Belarusian” or “provincial” scholars. The integration and communication of Belarusian scholars with their Western colleagues did not receive any support from government universities. They must find their own resources to attend conferences or to develop language skills and are better off not informing their institutions about this collaboration.

“[Migration] was delayed until the last moment”, Nastassia says. And “the last moment” occurred when it was no longer a risk but a threat of being detained. Somebody left after being labelled “the country’s enemies” by pro-government media. Others, like Nastassia, left following a call from the security service. Typically, they departed with just one suitcase, unprepared for a long stay. As it was a spontaneous decision, they had no time to research any SAR programs or apply for scholarships. At the same time, there are only three programs for Belarusian scholars at risk, but no assistance is provided with visas.⁷ As a result, visa issues are typically addressed through other aid organizations. Nearly all of them highlight Belarusian solidarity as an

7 SCIENCE AT RISK Emergency Office; Fellowships for Scholars and Teachers from Belarus and Ukraine from European Humanities University; EU4Belarus – SALT II Program to support Belarusian scholars and science.

important factor. Janina states, “These words are very encompassing, you know? If it hadn’t happened, most likely, nothing would have occurred”.

Nastassia tried to find scholarly support and to apply for an international SAR program, but she could not afford the requirements.

They have been asking me – “Find a host organisation, write a 5–10-page project proposal”. Sorry, I am with an anxious suitcase, a child, and the constant trembling uncertainty of whether [the security service] will knock on my door in the morning or evening. And yes, write in English, of course. I told them thank you, of course, but no. Unfortunately, our colleagues don’t realise that we live in a different world – a Russian-speaking world – and we won’t be writing them ten pages about anything. They are unlikely to be interested in anything we write, in any of our petty provincial matters.

Nastassia

Gender and Vulnerability in Migration

According to the scholarship, migration does not merely create risk and uncertainty for migrants and displaced persons, but it is shaped by risk and uncertainty perceived as a liminal state (Williams and Baláz 2012). Nastassia expresses this by saying, “I’m still in a state of limbo. I can’t accept it; I don’t want to”. The interviewees describe a complicated emotional and physical state, highlighting the profound sense of loss they experience. Janina states, “Suddenly, you lose the ground beneath your feet”. Maryja is 53 years old; she defended her PhD in economics, has more than 20 years of teaching experience at a university, and moved with her two teenage children in 2023. She shares, “I’ve just been ripped out of my life. [...] There is an endless loneliness” (here and further, Interview with Maryja, DI 2024). Their previous lives seem intense, vivid, and full of inspiration drawn from their professional experiences. In contrast, their current existence feels limited to daily survival. “I had to come to terms with the fact that life can no longer be planned. [...] I can only focus on being able to pay for next month’s rent”, Safija adds. She is 51 years old, with PhD in history, she moved with one adult child and one teenager (here and further, Interview with Safija, DI 2024). This new reality is traumatic. Maryja reiterates several times, “It is difficult. [...] I can’t accept it, I resist it”. The difficulty in accepting a new reality is tied not only to the act of migration itself but also to the underlying reasons that prompted it. Vera Axyonova describes this condition as “existential non-belonging”,

which arises from “deeply traumatizing experiences”. This state significantly complicates the process of adapting to what is considered “normal life” in a society” (Axyonova 2023: 6).

At this point, these female scholars experience the same challenges as other displaced persons which migration studies connects with uncertainty as “a source of anxiety and fear because of the prevailing conditions of insecurity” (Whyte 2009: 214) when an individual’s sense of “secure belonging” is threatened (Dromgold-Sermen 2022: 636). “Uncertainty as unexpectedness and unpredictability; uncertainty as imperfect knowledge; uncertainty as insecurity and risk of danger; and finally, uncertainty as a temporal experience of waiting and hastening”, Marie Juul Petersen, Sidsel Larsen and Nikolas Feith Tan argue (2025: 2091). The scholars examine the experiences of Syrian refugees with the Danish revocation process, which they characterise as being marked by radical uncertainty. This is because even existing laws cannot guarantee protection, as they are subject to change.

Legalisation remains the primary challenge for displaced academics from Belarus as well, even though they generally have more privileges compared to some other groups, such as Syrian refugees, who often encounter racism (Kazakou and Thomas 2025). However, interviewees highlight financial vulnerability as a significant risk. The lack of income can hinder their ability to secure or extend residency permits, ultimately affecting their legal status (Navumau et al. 2024). Janina remarks, “I started looking for a job, and I realized that the level of work available to me in Poland was the most basic. [...] No matter what you do, you can work as a cleaner, and you will earn a salary every month. For me, it’s just a matter of survival”. Safija explains why she agreed immediately to a job in the SMM sector, “In the case of a migrant, it is impossible to refuse anything”. Due to simplified legalisation processes for Belarusians (e.g., humanitarian visas) that provide a sense of security, countries such as Poland and Lithuania remain the leading destinations for Belarusian displaced persons and migrants, including my interviewees. However, the availability of jobs is an essential condition for long-term residency permits (Chulitskaya et al. 2022; Homel, Jaroszewicz and Lesińska 2023).

The fact that Belarusians, including my interviewees, describe their status as “migrants” while avoiding definitions such as “refugee” or “displaced person” signifies a reluctance to reflect on their status, as accepting these definitions can be very traumatic. This is supported by the fact that, when answering the questionnaire question, “How do you define your new legal status in a host country?”, many of them also avoid the definition of migrant. When I ask how they feel about being a migrant, they often respond that they have not reflected on this at all.

Apparently, this vulnerability increases if they move with children.

I was constantly trying to work part-time. But with a child... well, actually without a child you go to a hostel and work for 12 hours. You won't go to a hostel with a child, you won't be taken in, you won't rent an apartment, you have to try hard to find someone to live with. [...] there are two big differences when you drive alone and when you (sigh) have a child on you.

Nastassia

Nastassia notes that, as a solo mother, her primary task was to find a school for her son and then to build an entire life infrastructure around his schedule. Therefore, instead of mobility being an essential requirement for academic excellence (Gusejnova et al. 2024), a stable environment is necessary for these displaced academics. “[The school] is connected to the address of residency, the address of residency is connected to the rented apartment, and the rented apartment is connected to (laugh) the necessity to pay for it every month”, Safija explains. Some of them express gratitude to the host country “because I would be in jail right now” (Interview with Iryna, DI 2024). However, for others, the experience of migration is so traumatic that they would return despite the threat. Such a perception of migration usually depends on a lower level of integration (language and diaspora) and a lack of support (for instance, being a solo mother). Nastassia says, “I’m still thinking, and if [...] I could have known that I was only punished with the personal restraint, I would have turned back. Well, okay, I will serve a term, adjudicate these years, because [here] I see myself as nobody... no way”.

They fear the question of the future, which for them becomes just about tomorrow. Primarily, they are still waiting for the moment when they can return to their home country.

I don't know anything about the future (pause). As it will be. What can you say here, as it will be. I say, well, I can pay for the next month of life, and that's fine.

Janina

I think I will return home soon. [...] I think I am here while my young daughter is studying. [...] I am a temporary guest here. I will go home.”

Maryja

I don't have the option that nothing will change, and I'll never go back there. Because [...] I have nowhere to live, I have a residence permit for

a year [...] I have no options [...] at 51 ... any job is a problem. Who needs old people?

Volha (here and further, Interview with Volha, DI 2024)

Coming from the Edge: “Who are you, Belarusian researcher?”

Despite considering the stories of these women in the context of missing data, it does not mean there is no chance they may return to research and academic activity. After overcoming the initial phase of migration, which is often the most traumatic, some of them are already learning the language, developing their CVs, and applying for scholarships. However, they mention a lack of time for self-education and feelings of exhaustion. Some do not even attempt to engage due to their age, for instance. Generally, those who are about 50 or older cite age as the primary cause of frustration. “I can go drive a tram (laughs). I can, I could. I don’t have such a wild fear; of course, there is fear, uh... of age, because for some new job, a person over 50 is unlikely to be the best candidate in some fields”, Safia says. Currently, Safia works as an SMM manager in the media sector, but she is also involved in a research project as part of a short-term scholarship. Safia tends to view this work more as a hobby, as there are no long-term perspectives. However, it is essential for her to maintain her research identity, as she mentions its loss as part of the academia-at-risk phenomenon.

If we talk about science, then I don’t see how uh... a Polish institution could be interested in my... what I am doing. [...] I don’t think I could, in the sense of knowing the language first of all. [...] In terms of scientific achievement, I have a platform [as a hobby]. And... in terms of maintaining my financial situation, I have a job.

Safia.

When asked why they did not expect support from specialized academic programs, the interviewees explained that they believed they could not afford it. A significant barrier for them was their lack of self-confidence, which prevented them from applying for these opportunities. For instance, Safija mentioned that she felt held back by her language skills, despite having a B2 level proficiency. Marija states, “I don’t believe in myself, that I could afford these programs, that I could after... could report that I did something”. At the same time, she was not afraid of moving into the IT sphere; in other words, changing her profession completely.

The Western academic system is known for its high standards of excellence, which can be challenging even for established Western scholars. Additionally, Belarusian scholars face language barriers due to the isolation of Belarusian science as the country joined the Bologna Process only in 2015 (Lavruhin 2012). This lack of self-confidence is further influenced by their standing in their home country, where the humanities, along with other fields, are often regarded as having low status. These scholars work hard but earn little, with men typically occupying more advantageous positions in administration. Many of them held additional jobs. “I had part-time jobs in various fields because... how to make money from history?” (Interview with Darja, DI 2025). Despite being knowledgeable in various fields and possessing extensive competencies, female scholars often doubt their professional skills when reflecting on their experiences in their home country. Consequently, they are hesitant to pursue positions in host countries and may view low-level jobs as their only feasible option. Arlie Russell Hochschild addresses this self-perception through the concept of autodiscrimination when women tend to “sooner or later cool themselves [...therefore] inequality is conceived not as the mark of a chairperson’s pen, but as the consequence of a whole constellation of disadvantages” (Hochschild 2011: 19).

Except for gender as a factor, the perception of their positionality as provincial and marginal also plays a crucial role in the formation of self-confidence and self-esteem. “At the moment, I do not think I will be able to continue my profession here or change something. [...] [I was] such a classic Soviet Belarusian art historian, Nastassia says. – And [Western academia] will hardly be interested in what we write, it is our small provincial things”. Marija remembers her attempt to apply for a position at a Polish university, which required experience in managing third-party projects. “Must have experience with projects of €50,000 or more... from where at Belarusian universities?” claims Marija. Another aspect is the awareness of differences between Western academia and the academic requirements in Belarus that implies intense retraining. And age is again considered the main obstacle. “Who are you, Belarusian researcher? Why are you needed here? [...] [Retraining] at 50 is hard for me”, Janina concludes.

Such a self-perception reveals the existing asymmetry caused by Eurocentrism, academic imperialism and English language domination in global science (Alatas 2000), almost entirely ignoring the historical and geopolitical context of *the rest* who just “provide empirical data” (Rahbari 2015: 156). This perception affects SAR programs, the requirements of which also align with Western academic standards, making these programs nearly inaccessible to most scholars at risk, who typically come from non-Western countries. At this point, programs that

are oriented on the particular communities of scholars, for example, EHU Fellowships for Scholars and Teachers from Belarus and Ukraine or SCIENCE AT RISK Emergency Office 2025 mentioned earlier, play a crucial role not only in providing scholars with a (short-term) opportunity to maintain their professional identity but also in integrating them into global academic discourse through mentorship and workshops for professional development.

Nonetheless, referring to the necessity of integration of these scholars and adaptation to the existing requirements that might be linked with resilience as “a normative concept, an ideal type of human agency fit for the neoliberal logic” (Rahbari and Burlyuk 2023: xiii), it is essential to keep in mind the critique on Western academia as a neoliberal industry, and therefore, to consider the refusal of these scholars to enter this field not only as a system’s failure (as migrants and displaced scholars, they need a long-term job to obtain their legal status) but as a personal position (Segal 2021; Axyonova 2023: 5-6). Encountering precarity as a condition, these scholars start to doubt whether they want to be part of this academic discourse. “And you can have almost no permanent contract until retirement, jump around projects, and what about family? Children? Travel around cities and villages like a military man with two suitcases?” (Nastassia). Additionally, as Ladan Rahbari and Olga Burlyuk note, “Not everyone is afforded the same level of resilience [...]. Adapting to change, resisting structural challenges, and preparing for future uncertainties is difficult in the presence of inequality, precarity and the shortage or lack of support systems” (Rahbari and Burlyuk 2023: xiii).

I know I realise what I’m doing, I’m doing right, actually. It’s not because there’s something wrong with me. It’s just that somehow, we were born in the wrong place, at the wrong time... and somehow, we lived in the wrong place, worked in the wrong way. That’s why everyone needs a homeland.

Volha.

The use of the adjective “wrong” in this context is significant and not a coincidence. For instance, Martina Vitáčková, who was born and educated in the Czech Republic, shares her experience of trying to enter Western academia. She states, “I did not consider that I did my PhD on the ‘wrong’ side of Europe”, despite her university being part of the Bologna process (Vitáčková 2023: 43). Axyonova also refers to conducting research in the “‘wrong journals’ and in the ‘wrong languages’” (Axyonova 2023: 6-7). Clearly, the term “wrong” underscores the awareness of the inequalities that these scholars face.

Conclusion

Judith Halberstam reflects on the concepts of success and failure as primary measures of assessment in Western societies, revealing the transgressive potential of these categories. Following the ideas of Scott Sandage, Halberstam argues that instead of stigmatizing those who fail, it is more constructive to view failure as a tool for critique (Halberstam 2011: 88). This perspective can uncover “a hidden history of pessimism in a culture of optimism” (Sandage 2006: 9) and can be transformed into “the weapons of the weak” (Halberstam 2011: 88). Such an approach enables us to critique the neoliberal system represented by “meritocracy-driven Global North universities”, which labels career failures as individual shortcomings rather than addressing them as systemic issues (Axyonova 2023: 6).

From this perspective, the so-called professional failure of female academics from Belarus should be recognized as a) a structural failure (e.g. SAR programs might be designed wrong as they do not achieve their goals) and b) a consequence of existing inequality in terms of gender, age and foreignness/ethnicity/citizenship. When comparing the experiences of women and men, female scholars often encounter greater challenges for several reasons. They typically bear the responsibility for their families, which limits their opportunities for self-education and leads to emotional exhaustion. Many women struggle with self-confidence and self-esteem, often doubting their ability to compete with their male counterparts, even when seeking support for Belarusian scholars, which can also be traced back to the historical and cultural disempowerment of women. As Hochschild points out, “women have acclimatized themselves” to discrimination, resulting in their needs often being overlooked (Hochschild 2011: 19)⁸. To paraphrase Axyonova, while *displaced academics are all in the same boat, their academic career prospects are not equally dim for everyone* (Axyonova 2023: 4). Especially, for those who experience multiple marginalisation, for instance, being a woman, an aged woman, a displaced person, and a displaced person from Belarus.

In conclusion, existing SAR programs play a crucial role in supporting displaced academics, particularly those formats which offer language and skills courses, including CV and application writing, mentoring and supervision. Interviewees who have benefited from

8 See, e.g. Monitoring reports from SAR AKNO for Belarus in 2024 and 2020–2023 indicate that there is a complete absence of a gender approach to addressing the needs of displaced scholars from Belarus. [online] <https://science-at-risk.org/monitoring-reports/>.

such support emphasized that mentoring was vital not only for their professional development but also for human and emotional guidance, which helped them maintain hope and belief in their own potential. Milena Dragičević Šešić notes that in the 1990s, such programs did not exist, and displaced scholars could rely only on their personal networks for support, if they had one which might also explain a lack of successful stories. Fortunately, the situation has improved today, with a wide range of programs now available.

Nonetheless, my analysis indicates that many of these programs are too narrow and homogeneous in their requirements, rendering them nearly inaccessible to various groups of displaced scholars, particularly concerning age, gender, and cultural background. Therefore, these programs should adopt a more gender-oriented approach, which means being aware of the needs of not only female and older scholars but also other marginalized groups. Moreover, these programs need to be adapted to the local realities of the countries from which the displaced scholars originate – realities that may differ significantly from the “normality” in the host countries. Programs such as EHU Fellowships for Scholars and Teachers from Belarus and Ukraine play a vital role in helping displaced scholars maintain their professional identities. The EHU Fellowships host refers to this program as a “local hub” because it addresses the needs of less “prominent” groups of scholars. However, such initiatives remain exceptions that highlight the general lack of success of SAR programmes and signify the need for their contextual reconfiguration.

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Dis/Placement, Dis/Location, Dis/Engagement?
FEMINIST REFLECTIONS
ON THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE
IN EXILE

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Abstract. This article examines the production of feminist knowledge under conditions of exile through the case of Belarusian gender studies after 2020. Drawing on feminist epistemology and most notably Donna Haraway's concept of situated knowledges, the article conceptualizes displacement as an epistemic condition that reshapes research agendas, methods of study, and modes of engagement. Problematizing the notions of displacement, dis/location, and dis/engagement, the author states that what may be perceived as a disruption in professional occupation and loss of cultural belonging, burdened by uncertainty, precariousness and nomadic life, eventually results into a reconfiguration of feminist epistemic labor and the production of new knowledge on gender subjects.

Keywords: Belarus, displacement, exile, feminist epistemology, gender studies, knowledge production, migration, nomadism, political repression.

Introduction: exile, nomadism, and scholars at risk

Donna Haraway's well-known statement that all knowledge is situated and that it bears the imprint of the place, position, and conditions in



which it is produced has long been central to feminist epistemology (Haraway 1988). Yet the question of what it means to produce situated knowledges under conditions of forced displacement, exile, and political repression remains insufficiently theorized. This text addresses that gap by examining the contemporary situation of Belarusian gender studies after 2020, when mass political repression, imprisonments of thousands of people, liquidation of independent media, NGOs, non-state art and educational institutions, and the consequent forced migration radically transformed not only the life circumstances, but the conditions of intellectual work too for many Belarusian scholars – those who had to leave, but also those who remained in the country, facing the factual ban on their professional (academic) occupation.

In my view, the questioning of the epistemological connection between knowledge production and the politics of location, theorized by feminist and decolonial thinkers, has not only not lost its relevance, but gained new impetus for understanding the political and existential situation in which scholars from Belarus find themselves today. A series of theoretical and practical questions evolve under these circumstances. What knowledge do we produce and for whom? What theoretical frameworks are most helpful for the analysis of current societal changes in Belarus and in the region (more specifically, what role gender studies plays in it)? What methods and instruments are most efficient when the empirical field, archives and statistics are inaccessible? What role does the experience of individual and collective (institutional) exile play in transforming our research interests and scholarly methodologies? How do academic and grass-roots knowledges are interrelated and how can we use that knowledge in order to become the agents of change?

The title of this essay – *Dis/placement, dis/location, dis/engagement?* – marks the tensions that structure this condition. It is deliberately fractured, the terms are disjunct with slashes in a deconstructivist manner, while the question mark invites to reflect on the losses and gains of the displacement of scholars. Rather than describing a linear process of loss, all three terms implicate the challenges that characterize knowledge production in exile. But these keywords are also called to underline the input of many feminist scholars who explored and conceptualized the experience of migration and exile.

Dis/placement signals the ambivalence of forced movement and of deprivation: the necessity to leave, the loss of a home and the impossibility of return (at least, at the present time) for many exiled Belarusians, including scholars. It refers not only to physical relocation (often multiple relocations, due to wars, political turbulences, family problems, work placement and issues with legalization) but also to the

uneven and coercive character of mobility. What the new *placement* will be, where and for how long?

Dis/location implies the loss of a permanent job, habitual institutional setting, cultural habitus, but also it suggests an acquisition of new institutional home (even if temporarily), navigating new spaces, and moving to another “house of being”, that is switching to other language(s) – be it English, German, Polish or French as academic languages, or Lithuanian, Georgian, Ukrainian as the languages of everyday communication, and Belarusian – for all purposes¹.

Finally, *dis/engagement* raises the question of whether exile and life circumstances of migrant scholars (academic refugees) entail withdrawal from political and scholarly engagement, or does it compel an even stronger commitment to professional occupation and the engagement “to think Belarus” from other spaces?

The condition of exile is often perceived on the personal level and conceptualized in theory as negative and traumatic experience (what is fully justified from practical side – emotionally, existentially, financially, juridically, professionally). I would, however, argue that it may also bring some advantages, even if they seem to be unobvious². This condition can be regarded as a formative experience, that opens up new horizons for self-realization, expands research possibilities and fosters the process of better (although sometimes too swift and abrupt) integration to the international academic networks and diverse institutional environments. All of this makes scholars at risk more adjustable and eventually feeling more self-confident on the international academic labor market with the upgraded linguistic, communicative and research project management skills. In other words, scholarship in exile can be conceptualized as a challenging, yet promising epistemic situation that reshapes research agendas, methods of study, and modes of engagement. From feminist perspective, it implies the transformation of epistemic labor rather than its negation.

- 1 When it comes to multilingualism as a challenge of migration(s), I see only gains, not losses. As Rosi Braidotti notes, “My work as a thinker has no mother tongue, only a succession of translations, displacements and adaptations to changing conditions. Nomadism for me equals multilingualism. [...] Accents are the traces of my multiple linguistic homes. They spell my own ecology of belonging, my loyalty to parallel yet divergent lives” (Braidotti 2014).
- 2 This approach underpinned the conceptual framework of the 2024 conference “The Promise of (Un)Happiness? Gender, Labor, and Migration”, organized by the EHU Center for Gender Studies as part of the Women in Tech project, the outcomes of which are presented in this special issue of *Topos*.

Feminist epistemology, situated knowledges, and the displacement studies

Feminist epistemology has long ago questioned the fiction of a neutral, universal, and disembodied knowing subject. In her seminal essay on situated knowledges Donna Haraway dismissed the “view from nowhere”, having proposed, instead, the “privilege of partial perspective” (1988). Feminist objectivity, in this view, does not reside in transcendence but in the recognition of one’s location, embodiment, and relational positioning within structures of power. The already classical Adrienne Rich’s concept of *politics of location* insists on recognizing the position from which one speaks, when advocating global feminist agenda (Rich 1986). Initially formulated as a critique of the ethnocentrism of Western feminism, the politics of location has since evolved into a broader transnational framework that situates knowledge within global hierarchies of power, colonial histories, and asymmetrical mobilities (Brah 1996; Mohanty 2003; Rich 1986). Together, these feminist interventions foreground location not as a fixed point but as a relational and historically contingent condition.

Research on displacement and forced migration has increasingly drawn on feminist epistemology to contest earlier gender-neutral framings of mobility. Feminist displacement studies emphasize that displacement is a profoundly gendered process, structured by intersecting axes of power such as gender, sexuality, class, race, and citizenship (Ball 2022; Baynham, De Fina 2005; Brickell, Speer 2020; Carstens, Bozalek 2021; Davis 2007; John 1996; Morrison 2008; Vatansever 2018). Rather than treating displacement as a singular event, feminist scholars conceptualize it as a process marked by uneven temporalities, emotional and reproductive labor, and forms of “slow violence” (Tyner 2020).

Mimi Sheller’s conceptualization of mobility justice underscores the need to consider not only the right to move, but also the right to stay, to dwell, and to remain immobile without coercion (Sheller 2018). From this perspective, coerced mobility is neither inherently liberating nor evenly distributed. For scholars at risk, mobility is instead associated with precariousness, the loss of institutional protection, and dependence on temporary and often unstable legal regimes.

Rosi Braidotti’s theory of a nomadic subject occupies a special place in feminist reflections on migration and exile (2011 [1994]). It emphasizes becoming, relationality, and multiplicity as alternatives to fixed, sovereign identities. For Braidotti, nomadism is both a philosophical concept and a materially embedded condition: it designates a subjectivity that resists fixity and essentialism, while remaining firmly grounded in embodied, social, and geopolitical realities:

Being homeless; a migrant; an exile; a refugee; a tourist; a rape-in-war victim; an itinerant migrant; an illegal immigrant; an expatriate; a mail-order bride; a foreign caretaker of the young or the elderly of the economically developed world; a high-flying professional; a global venture financial expert; a humanitarian relief worker in the UN global system; a citizen of a country that no longer exists (Yugoslavia; Czechoslovakia; the Soviet Union) – these are no metaphors. Having no passport or having too many of them is neither equivalent nor is it merely metaphorical. These are highly specific geo-political and historical locations – it’s history and belonging tattooed on your body. One may be empowered or beautified by it, or be scarred, hurt and wounded by it. Learning to tell the difference among different forms of non-unitary, multilayered or diasporic subjectivity is therefore a key ethical but also methodological issue (Braidotti, 2014: 179-180).

As I noted above, speaking of exiled scholars, I approach nomadism and displacement not as markers of freedom or autonomy in mobility (which they are not), but as epistemic conditions that demand careful differentiation. Forced migration, exile, and statelessness produce specific modes of situated knowledge that are shaped by loss, trauma, and constraint, but they also foster the formation of new forms of solidarity, creativity, and feminist imagination (Kmak, Björklund 2022; Ball 2022).

Belarusian gender scholars as political nomads

After the rigged presidential elections in summer 2020 and the following mass protests, Belarusians faced with the unprecedented political repressions. Thousands of people were arrested and sentenced to absurd prison terms, dozens of independent media outlets and hundreds of civil society organizations were liquidated (and then, already in exile, labeled “extremist”); universities, research institutes, archives, and publishing infrastructures were brought under direct ideological control of the state, while many university lecturers and academic researchers were fired and eventually forced to exile. Remaining in the country for them became incompatible with their scientific and ethical principles, political views, physical safety and professional work.

Estimates of the number of Belarusian scholars affected by repression and forced to leave the country vary, and no precise statistics are available, although it is generally assumed that the figure reaches several hundred (Rohava 2024; University World News 2025). As for gender scholars and feminist activists, their number is even more difficult

to determine³; however, based on indirect data, it may amount to several dozen individuals.

At the same time, the geography of displacement and the itineraries of dislocation – often multiple and non-linear – are familiar to many Belarusians: Belarus–Poland (with Ukraine serving as a transit country prior to the outbreak of the war), Belarus–Lithuania, Belarus–Germany, Belarus–Sweden, Belarus–the United States, and beyond.

The overwhelming majority of Belarusian gender researchers and feminist activists with whom I collaborated at various stages – including graduates of the EHU Master’s program in Gender Studies – emigrated in 2020–2021. Some left the country later, following their release from prison. Those few who remained in Belarus have effectively disappeared from the public sphere, maintaining a low profile: they do not give interviews, are inactive on social media, do not publish in academic journals, and do not participate in gender-related conferences abroad. If they do, they publish under pseudonyms or participate as AA (anonymous authors). I have no doubt they are taking field notes and writing texts, but we will find out about that later, when everything is over. Paradoxically, invisibility has become a dominant survival strategy for many Belarusian scholars. Anonymity in academic publishing – an anomaly according to conventional academic norms – has effectively turned into an abnormal “new norm”.⁴

Academic mobility is one of the most important factors in academic life and an essential condition for scholarly work. However, forced migration – and especially emergency evacuation (with just a backpack, as many Belarusians experienced, making their way through swamps and forests) – is incompatible with the idea of how mobility contributes to professional academic work. Forced migration is involuntary by default, and this is certainly not a case of “homelessness as a chosen condition” (Braidotti 2011 [1994]: 17).

The situation for Belarusian scholars is also accompanied by the risk of transnational repression, although the Belarusian case is not unique (Dukalskis et al. 2022; Michaelsen, Anstis 2025). Since 2020, criminal cases in absentia, arrests or confiscation of property, pressure on relatives, and digital intimidation have become routine tools of persecution by the Belarusian state. For many political migrants,

3 Some scholars do not identify themselves as scholars in exile; others do not foreground their work in gender studies, positioning themselves instead as sociologists, philosophers, linguists, or historians. Still others deliberately maintain a low profile – even while working abroad – in order to avoid creating risks for family members who remain in Belarus.

4 As one Belarusian female journalist remarked when commenting on her work for “extremist” media operating in exile, “nonames read nonames”.

returning is impossible, and even access to consular services, such as passport renewal, is denied, effectively rendering them stateless.

Belarusian gender scholars and feminist activists form a particular group of targeted repression for Belarusian authorities. Since the 1990s many of us were working and conducting research in the spaces and institutions that were parallel to the state (except some rare cases), but Belarusian “revolution with a female face” that involved many grassroots feminist organizations and brought women of different social groups, professions and ages to the forefront of protest movement, made Lukashenko’s regime particularly attentive to women as agents of social change.

It is therefore no accident that feminism as such has become a “personal enemy” of the regime. Feminist and LGBTQ NGOs – even when operating abroad – are subjected to transnational repression and are routinely labeled “extremist”, while within the country a rhetoric of “traditional” and “family” values has been aggressively promoted. This rhetoric aligns closely with Russian “soft power” and serves the demographic and ideological objectives of authoritarian rule. In the summer of 2025, the Belarusian authorities proposed to criminalize any public mention of homosexual relations, grouping – through a single draft legal provision – “homosexual relations, sex change, childlessness, and pedophilia” as equivalent categories (Belsat 2025). One might also suggest that today the very word gender is permitted in Belarus only within the confines of official reporting on gender equality indices submitted to the UN.

Meanwhile, Belarusian gender scholars, feminist activists and women artists, who found themselves in exile after 2020, have continued their professional engagement abroad – through participating in research projects, engaging in expert activities, developing various media projects, curating art exhibitions and becoming drivers of transnational feminist networks. With the time being (almost 6 years in exile) Belarusian feminists’ work and input on the international academic and art scenes, as well as in Belarusian (independent) media, became much more visible in public and academic spheres than before 2020. This visibility and publicness, however, comes at a cost, including online harassment, misogynistic attacks, and threats that exploit gendered vulnerabilities, and most of all it entails risks of political (transnational) persecution from Belarusian authorities, as it was noted above.

In regards to this, one more problem warrants mention. The vulnerability experienced by Belarusian scholars at risk, including gender researchers, entails – among other challenges – an issue of epistemic invisibility. Erasure of institutional histories and digital archives, the

ruination of websites, the continual reconfiguration of institutional affiliations (often across different countries), the provisional renunciation of authorship, the algorithmic deprioritization of media content in Belarusian language through search engines – these and other factors do not merely affect careers or institutions. They actively shape what can be known, cited, and recognized as knowledge. While these processes may not significantly constrain individual authors publishing in English, they profoundly affect the visibility of Belarusian gender scholarship as a collective intellectual field⁵.

Under such circumstances, Belarusian gender scholars in exile are producing what can be described as feminist refugee epistemologies, that is forms of knowledge grounded in lived experience of displacement, imprisonment, the loss of home and sense of belonging yet also of the retrieval of communities, the beginning of new life and the revision of the meaning of the political. Feminist migrant narratives illuminate the emotional distress of coping with trauma, escape and survival, being at the same time oriented toward care and focusing on the role of solidarity infrastructures and feminist networks in times of wars and political upheavals (Davydzik 2025; Nikolayenko 2021; Sarakavik 2023; Sasunkevich 2024; Stebur 2025; Shparaga 2025; Vazyyanau 2023). These epistemologies challenge conventional academic norms by integrating autobiographical narratives, creative non-fiction, collaborative research, and art practices into the production of knowledge about the Self and the Other (Arcimovich 2025; Biran 2023; Dvorák 2023; Ivanou (Harbacki) 2023; Lashden 2024; Rakava 2025). The stories of Belarusian women intellectuals and artists who found themselves in forced migration in the 20th century or suffered political repression in the USSR have also become an important topic for a new generation of feminist political nomads (Arcimovich 2023; Ivanou, 2024; Ousmanova 2024). Against this backdrop, critical research on the penitentiary system as a core instrument of political repression in Belarus, alongside analyses of the mechanisms of gender-based state violence (long employed by the authorities but rendered normative after 2020) have become particularly urgent (Chulitskaya, Matonyte 2024; Klaskouskaya 2023; Komar 2023; Litskevich 2024; Vazyyanau 2021; Vialichka 2023). Studies addressing the nexus of patriarchy and authoritarianism, and the deconstructing of state propaganda on gender issues also remain crucial for further inquiry (Nikolayenko 2021; Ousmanova 2021; Rudnik 2022;

5 This tendency reveals in that even institutional entities such EHU Center for Gender Studies do not appear in the scientometric data on the evolution of gender scholarship in the region – neither as Belarusian, nor as Lithuanian (Kataeva et al. 2023).

Shadrina 2023; numerous media publications and Telegram-channel “Убок ад мэйнстрыму” by Iryna Sidorskaya 2025).

Thus, feminist scholars engage not only with the history of Belarusian “revolution with a female face” and the distinctiveness of women’s political leadership in 2020 (Gapova 2021; Gapova 2023; Gauffman 2021; Ivanoŭ 2021; Navumau and Matveieva 2021; Paulovich 2021; Sasunkevich, 2025; Shparaga 2021), but also with the dramatic experiences of political persecution, imprisonment, and forced migration. Addressing these themes has significantly broadened the range of research questions, while the production of knowledge about such experiences is vital not only for Belarusian scholars but also for colleagues elsewhere, as it enables comparative analysis across different historical and political contexts. Moreover, this scholarship places Belarusian gender studies on the map of global knowledge production and secures its place in history⁶.

Feminist knowledge production in exile: the case of EHU Center for Gender Studies

In this context the history of the Center for Gender Studies at the European Humanities University provides a unique and particularly interesting example for reflecting on how Belarusian gender studies can exist and develop outside Belarus. The majority of gender scholars and feminist activists whose research was mentioned above left the country individually: prior to 2020, to pursue education and build academic careers abroad; and after 2020, as a result of political persecution. Meanwhile, the Center for Gender Studies, as an institutional entity with a nearly 30-year history (founded by Elena Gapova in 1997), has for the past twenty years operated in another country (Lithuania) while conducting research related to Belarus and implementing educational and infrastructure projects for Belarusians.

The reason for relocating to another country was political, as in many other cases involving Belarusian scholars during Lukashenko’s rule. However, it should be noted that the Center for Gender Studies itself was not then a specific target of deliberate repression by the Belarusian authorities (unlike the Central European University in Budapest, which was forced to close and relocate to Vienna as a direct result of targeted attacks on gender studies). In the 1990s and early 2000s, gender studies and feminist activism attracted little attention

6 Here I rephrase Adrienne Rich’s well-known formulation: “I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history” (Rich 1986: 212)

from the Lukashenko regime, as such activities were conducted outside state institutions, without state funding, and were largely perceived as insignificant.

Yet “the eye of the power”, to borrow Michel Foucault’s formulation, was drawn to EHU as an educational institution that was established and operated during several years outside direct state control over the funding, management and the curricula of the university programs. In the summer of 2004, the authorities revoked EHU’s educational license. A year later, EHU resumed its activities in Vilnius, with the support of the European Union, the Lithuanian government, and international donors.

Thus, the Center for Gender Studies moved to Vilnius together with the university. This case constitutes a history of institutional displacement – a feature that renders it both distinctive and analytically significant. Meanwhile, one of the most remarkable aspects of the CGS is its capacity to persist as an institutional entity despite the absence of a “room of one’s own”, the changing composition of affiliated members, and the wide geographical dispersion of its associate members, spanning Canada and the United States, the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Germany, and Poland. I would attribute this sustainability to three interrelated factors: first, the importance of the Center’s institutional affiliation with EHU (institutions are better prepared to survive⁷); second, the presence of a small but stable core team (three-four people) who are integrated into the university’s academic life, actively engaged in gender research and committed to sustaining the Center; and, finally, an extensive network of alumni of Gender Studies Master’s program and of affiliated researchers linked to the Center through teaching, research, and collaborative projects.

Could the Center for Gender Studies have remained in Minsk and continued its activities under another institutional umbrella, or registered as an NGO (at least, until 2020)? Theoretically, it could, but we bore responsibility for maintaining not only the research and publication activities of the Center, but also for our Master’s program in Gender Studies, that we launched in 2000. This was the first Master’s program at EHU and one of the very few such programs in the region at the time. It played an important role in disseminating feminist concepts and research methodologies, the formation of new generation of gender scholars and the production of new knowledge on Belarus. In June 2004, we held our third graduation ceremony; one month later,

7 The “institutional reality” of gender studies in the universities is a separate issue that I will not touch upon here, although it remains an urgent subject (Braidotti 2011 [1994]: 206–207; Ahmed 2017).

the Minsk chapter of our history came to an end. The key point here is that institutional context, academic environment, intellectual autonomy, and infrastructure matter. From this perspective, further development of the Master's program in Gender Studies in Minsk without EHU was simply not possible.

The EHU Master's program in Gender Studies continues to operate in Vilnius to this day, apart from brief interruptions in 2004–2005 and 2020–2022. Of the program's 130 graduates as of 2026 (approximately 80 per cent of whom are Belarusians) – around 20 per cent have already defended their doctoral dissertations or are currently completing PhD studies. Some have gone on to pursue successful academic careers at universities in Europe and the United States. Looking back to the 2010s, I would note that in Belarus many of our graduates became key actors in both academic and grassroots gender studies, as well as in NGO activities. After 2020, a significant number of them were forced to leave the country. The names of our alumni now frequently appear among the authors of academic and media publications, in English and other languages, addressing gender issues in Belarus after 2020.

This suggests that continuity in knowledge production depends to a large extent on how, and within what institutional and intellectual contexts, emerging researchers acquire knowledge and develop the impetus for research. In this sense, even if the activities of the Center for Gender Studies remained largely unnoticed within Belarus after its relocation to Lithuania⁸, the EHU Master's program in Gender Studies has continued to make a substantial contribution to the development of Belarusian gender studies throughout more than two decades of work in exile.

However, the history of EHU's Master's program in Gender Studies is illuminating also from another perspective. If we consider the production of knowledge on Belarus through the lens of gender studies, the transformation of research topics, methods, and the field as a whole before and after 2020 can be traced particularly clearly through the master's theses produced by our students. What topics and issues attracted young gender scholars in the 2000s, 2010s, and 2020s? How did their working conditions and the broader academic environment change with the development of new technologies and digital tools for data analysis? How do new theoretical frameworks

8 “Despite the rich history and valuable contributions to the field of gender studies and feminist theories within Belarusian discourse, the history of CGS remains almost invisible and overlooked, both locally and in research concerning the development of gender studies in Central and Eastern Europe” (Arcimovich and Reviaka 2026).

intersect with classical feminist theories in their research? How has the concept of “fieldwork” changed in the era of online communication? Is it even necessary to be in Belarus today to conduct research? And, last but not least, how have the events of 2020, followed by displacement and exile, intensified their interest in gender studies and shaped their research choices? Due to the space limitations of this publication, I cannot provide a detailed analysis here and will therefore confine myself to a few brief observations.

An overview of the Master’s theses defended at the Gender Studies program at EHU reveals a clear epistemic shift before and after 2020. An important note: I took into consideration only those theses that were prepared by students from Belarus. Prior to 2020, students’ research was largely oriented toward the analysis of gendered subjectivities, everyday practices, and social institutions within the Belarusian context. Dominant themes included family and intimacy, corporeality and medicalization, gendered labor and professional identities, media and cultural representations, and the gendered dimensions of state policies. Methodologically, these projects relied on qualitative interviews, discourse analysis, and ethnographic approaches conducted under conditions of access to the empirical field(s). From the perspective of feminist epistemology, this body of work exemplified knowledge grounded in embodied proximity, physical co-presence, and sustained engagement with local contexts⁹.

Meanwhile, after 2020, the thematic orientation of students’ research changed considerably. Gendered state violence, political repression and trauma studies emerged as central objects of inquiry, alongside studies of women’s role in political protests of 2020, masculinities under authoritarianism, and the reshaping of gender discourse in Belarusian society and media. Forced migration (in particular of women with children) and psychosocial adaptation in new circumstances became key research areas, as some students themselves experienced displacement and sometimes several relocations. These shifts were accompanied by an increased focus on mediated activism and online infrastructures, as well as by the growing use of autoethnography and digital methods of research. It is also worth noting that during last

9 To substantiate my argument, I will offer several examples of Master’s theses that could only have been conducted when the empirical field was accessible: “Challenging Tradition or Reproducing It? A Study of Minsk Clubs as Gender-Marked Spaces”; “The Socialization of Girls in Residential Care Institutions”; “Sexual Practices of Students in Vocational and Technical Education Institutions in a Contemporary Belarusian Provincial City”; “Invisible Labor: Conceptualizing Care Work for Relatives with Disabilities and Dementia in Belarus”; “Aging Cities: The Infrastructure of Old Age in Paternalistic Belarus”.

years among our students there came more practicing psychologists (2–3 per year), who needed gender studies, as psychological and psychotherapeutic knowledge and skills were insufficient to understand the traumatic situations and depressions they work with. Therefore, one could argue that the master's theses defended after 2020, constitute a form of feminist knowledge produced from displacement, in which exile becomes an epistemic condition rather than a merely biographical circumstance.

Conclusion: situated knowledges under conditions of dis/location

Belarusian gender studies continue to develop, while having been displaced and deterritorialized. Exile has fractured previously existing infrastructures and produced new forms of precarity, yet it also opened the space for alternative research objects, practices, networks, and institutional affiliations. Returning to Haraway's notion of the privilege of partial perspective, I would argue that feminist knowledges produced in exile are marked by a particular ethical and political responsibility. The main question is how to remain engaged with gender research on Belarus while working at a distance and, at the same time, addressing the new challenges posed by relocation – including the gendered dimensions of migrant life.

Dis/placement, dis/location, and dis/engagement thus name not only the radically altered life circumstances and conditions of academic labor faced by Belarusian gender scholars, but also the contours of feminist research on nomadism, migration, and the politics of place. Conceptualizing exile as an epistemic condition makes it possible to rethink the experience of displacement and to reflect upon it within research practice at a situation when remaining in (one) place has ceased to be an available option and when there is no longer any “place like home”.

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WHEN ATTITUDES BECOME INFRASTRUCTURE: ARTISTIC PRACTICES AT THE LIMITS OF MIGRATION SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE

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Abstract: Understanding migration itself as an infrastructure – one that is structurally fragmented, bureaucratically opaque, and often deliberately dysfunctional – the paper explores contemporary artistic practices through the concept of infrastructural art, focusing on how artists engage with systemic failures. Using a case study approach, it analyses three artistic tactics – invasive, fugitive, and counter-infrastructure – that intervene in broken systems not as metaphors, but as operational responses. The article argues that, rather than merely representing displacement, these practices materialise alternative infrastructures of care, education, and integration.

Keywords: Infrastructural art, migration, counter-infrastructure, invasive infrastructure, fugitive infrastructure.

Infrastructure Begins Where Systems Break Down

In 2013, an emergency *Notunterkunft* (refugee shelter) was opened in the heart of Berlin's Moabit district, in a disused school building directly neighbouring the home of artist Marina Naprushkina. The site housed



around 300 people, nearly a third of them children (Naprushkina 2015). Designed as a temporary holding facility – intended to accommodate asylum seekers for no more than three months before their relocation to other federal states and more permanent housing – the temporary housing facility quickly became a symbol of systemic inertia and infrastructural dysfunction. As the bureaucratic machinery stalled, what was meant to be temporary became indefinite. Refugees were stranded in overcrowded, poorly equipped facilities, lacking kitchens, educational access, or adequate sanitation. Showers were only available in the evenings; toilets were locked and could only be accessed with the assistance of security guards. The Notunterkunft was operated by a private company, without meaningful oversight, and with no support infrastructure to speak of.

As Naprushkina later remarked, “No long-term activities were planned, it was a direct response. I was there, I met the people and realized that action was needed” (Naprushkina and Triisberg 2019). This direct response soon crystallised into a long-term counter-infrastructure: *Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit* (New Neighbourhood/Moabit), which emerged at the intersection of artistic practice, social activism, and the sustained development of alternative infrastructures in response to the failures of state-provided support.

Then as now, Germany’s asylum system was marked by chronic delays, deliberate disconnection from civil society, and a political will to keep refugees in liminal, depoliticised spaces (Junghans and Kluth 2023). The so-called “temporal” nature of accommodation was not an unfortunate side effect, but a structural feature of migration governance. Indeed, bureaucratic regimes of waiting in the context of migration function not simply as logistical inefficiencies, but as disciplinary techniques of control and containment – techniques that regulate the mobility, agency, and visibility of migrant bodies within European urban and legal spaces (Philipson Isaac 2022: 948). As Naprushkina and others discovered, the state-operated system was largely opaque, with contracts awarded to private actors and little transparency or public oversight (Naprushkina 2025). Change requests were met with silence. Even local children, entitled to education under German law, often remained without access to schools for months due to the temporary legal status of their families.

Faced with these failures, Naprushkina repurposed her production budget for an exhibition, *Giving Form to the Impatience of Liberty*, at the Kunstverein Stuttgart (2013), into the establishment of a small studio inside the Notunterkunft. In this space, refugee women and children could gather, draw, and begin to reclaim some sense of community. Within two weeks, the studio was overflowing. What began as an

informal intervention evolved into a decentralised support network of artists, neighbours, and activists. “After a few weeks we were already a small group, working on the future programming of our community centre,” she recalls (Naprushkina and Triisberg 2019).

Protests were soon organised by the residents and volunteers, highlighting the inhumane conditions. Although residents were discouraged from participating – warned that protesting could negatively impact their asylum applications (Naprushkina 2025) – the volunteer group continued, attracting media attention and eventually prompting state authorities to conduct the first formal inspection of the shelter. Improvements followed: a kitchen was built, and water systems were repaired. But Naprushkina’s group was banned from the premises. “It became clear that we had to continue our work outside,” she notes. “People began to come to us instead.” (Naprushkina 2025)

From this moment, *Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit* evolved into a grassroots infrastructure that continues to operate today, with over 200 active members from both refugee and non-refugee backgrounds. Its work includes German language lessons, art and cultural programmes, legal advice, and neighbourhood events. It does not operate “for” refugees, but with them. As Naprushkina explains, “My idea was that to influence the situation inside, you should start doing it from the outside.” (Talstou, n.d.)

This paper begins here because *Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit* represents a paradigmatic instance of infrastructural art – a form of artistic engagement that not only critiques failures in migration governance but also materially builds alternative infrastructures. Here, contemporary artistic practices are examined through the lens of infrastructural engagement, with a particular focus on the field of migration. Migration, in this context, is not understood as a neutral flow of people, but as a process often entangled with catastrophe – be it war, environmental collapse, or political repression. These crisis-laden movements expose, on the one hand, the limitations and failures of existing state and logistical systems; on the other hand, they reveal the potential of contemporary art to construct alternative infrastructures, to imagine and enact systems that operate differently (Brusadin 2021: 50).

Building on this case, the article proposes a typology of so-called *infrastructural art* – artistic practices that intervene in, replicate, or construct alternative infrastructural systems specifically within the field of migration. It identifies three recurring tactical formations through which artists respond to the systemic failures of migration governance and support structures:

(1) *invasive infrastructures* that work from within institutions to rewire them;

(2) *fugitive infrastructures* that arise outside or beyond institutional control;

(3) *counter-infrastructures* that build autonomous systems of support and survival.

These will serve as the conceptual framework of the paper, guiding the analysis of the selected case studies.

Case studies were selected according to three criteria:

(1) sustained engagement over at least three years;

(2) direct intervention in or replication of migration-related infrastructures;

(3) the existence of a material and organisational structure beyond representational artwork.

The analysis focuses on *Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit*, *The Silent University*, *Trampoline House*, **foundationClass*, and *Solidarny Dom Kultury 'Stonecznik'*.

As the study combines curatorial and academic perspectives, it adopts an interpretive and situated approach. The aim is not to produce a representative or exhaustive account, but to propose a conceptual framework that captures the complexity and specificity of infrastructural artistic practices. The paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive genealogy or theoretical evaluation of the concept of infrastructural art – its origins, advantages, or limitations. Instead, it focuses on how artistic practices engage with the sphere of migration by proposing alternative infrastructures of care, adaptation, and integration, and by critically addressing the structural limits of migration governance and policy.

This framework allows us to trace how artists and collectives operate at different thresholds of institutional and political systems – from embedded interventions that rewire bureaucratic structures from within, to temporary, improvised infrastructures of care emerging under crisis conditions, to autonomous counter-systems that seek to replace the failed foundations of state support.

How do contemporary artists respond to systemic failures in migration infrastructure not through representation or critique alone, but by materially constructing alternative systems of care, coordination, and survival?

From Institutional Critique to Infrastructural Thinking

To understand the infrastructural role of artistic practices such as *Neue Nachbarschaft*, it is important to shift focus away from

representational aesthetics toward what Susan Leigh Star (1999) has called the “invisible work” of infrastructure. These background systems condition participation, survival, and access. Artistic interventions in contexts of infrastructural collapse do not merely symbolise breakdown or gesture toward solidarity; instead, they often operate within and against these systems, making them visible, negotiable, and, at times, alterable. In what follows, this section moves from a broader consideration of infrastructure as a political and epistemic system to its implications for contemporary art. If infrastructures organise not only matter and movement but also imagination and belonging, then artistic practices can be read as sites where these underlying logics are both exposed and reconfigured.

Though the term “infrastructure” is widely used today about roads, pipes, networks, and platforms, its historical genealogy reveals how deeply it is embedded in regimes of power and control (Barry 2001; Larkin 2013). The infrastructure was not a neutral substrate but a strategic apparatus of war and colonisation (Bratton 2016; Cowen 2020). Its role was to guarantee mobility, control territory, and project power. From this militarised origin, the modern concept of infrastructure inherits a deeply political charge: to speak of infrastructure is to speak of logistics, governance, and domination.

Today, despite its apparent neutrality, infrastructure continues to organise and regulate life in highly uneven ways. As Brian Larkin notes, infrastructures are not simply technological systems, but “matter that enables the movement of other matter” (Larkin 2013: 331). They are relational and performative: they structure space, produce temporality, and shape possibility. Larkin goes further to call them “metapragmatic objects” (Larkin 2013: 337), not only systems of transport, flow, and support, but also signs of themselves, operating semiotically to produce specific ideological and behavioural effects. Infrastructures are not only what moves, but also how we imagine movement, access, and entitlement.

Importantly, this metapragmatic dimension of infrastructure also reveals its role in violence and exclusion. As Bani Brusadin notes in *The Fog of Systems*, “Networked infrastructures have become the main stage for key transformations in society, including the notions of citizenship, public space, democracy” (Brusadin 2021: 8). From border walls and biometric surveillance to content moderation algorithms and fibre optic cables, infrastructure is increasingly the medium through which political life is organised and contested. Its apparent neutrality is deceptive: infrastructures determine who can move and who cannot; who is visible and who remains unseen; whose data circulates and whose is filtered out. The Internet, for example, appears immaterial — reduced to

a sleek device or blinking router — yet relies on buried cables, exploited labour, and extractive supply chains. A compelling example is *Emerald Black Latency* (2024), a project by artist Mario Santamaría. Using what he terms a counter-forensic methodology, Santamaría visualised a 7 km segment of the Medusa Submarine Cable System — an 8,000 km fibre optic line connecting Europe and North Africa — by rendering it in Google Street View. The result is a strange, almost hallucinatory digital journey along an invisible infrastructure, made newly material through artistic intervention. The project makes visible the submerged systems that structure global data flows and militarised communications, pushing back against the abstraction and dematerialisation that so often characterise the digital sphere.

Seen through this lens, infrastructure appears not merely as a technical substrate but as a field of social relations, imaginaries, and affects. It is precisely this expanded understanding that enables a shift from analysing infrastructures to recognising art itself as infrastructural — that is, a system that mirrors, critiques, and, at times, replicates the organisational logics of power. The following discussion therefore turns to how artistic and curatorial practices, informed by institutional critique and participatory methodologies, have begun to operate infrastructurally.

Building on this expanded understanding, the connections between infrastructural theory and contemporary art practices become more legible. On one hand, recent theoretical discussions foreground the complex, planetary scale of infrastructures. Benjamin Bratton conceptualises this as the stack (Bratton 2016) — a layered and integrated planetary-scale computational infrastructure that governs everything from interface design to state sovereignty. Put differently, infrastructures should be considered not in isolation but in their complex interconnections and relations. In this case, the political effects of infrastructures are not always predictable, and a sense of alienation from them arises. Similarly, Bani Brusadin proposes the metaphor of fog to describe the affective and epistemological complexity of infrastructures that are “most of the time beyond the reach of our understanding, or even beyond our imagination” (Brusadin 2021: 8).

Faced with such an unimaginable and incomprehensible scale of infrastructure, contemporary art offers critical instruments, what we might term a form of political imagination (Levitas 2013), to navigate, reimagine, and sometimes resist the dominant infrastructural logics. Speculative and open-ended, art provides tools for engaging these systems not as fixed entities but as malleable terrains of engagement (Salmenniemi et al. 2024). This is one of the important factors in the formation of infrastructure art.

The second important factor lies in re-examining art's autonomy and its socio-political and economic conditions (Berger 1972; Fraser 2012). This shift is echoed by Marina Vishmidt (2017), who links infrastructural art to the legacy of institutional critique. She argues that the move from institutional to infrastructural critique represents a turn from interrogating the museum as a site of "false totalisations" (Vishmidt 2017: 268) to engaging with the structural conditions – labour markets, property regimes, corporate power, and extractive capital – that allow such institutions to exist and reproduce themselves. Such a reframing is essential to the notion of art as an elevated, metaphysical, or autonomous realm, relocating it within the very heart of political economy. For instance, the 2025 collective performance *Our queer is uncomfortably political*, presented at Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw, explored the precarities of artistic labour, the bureaucracies of eurocentrism, and the personal experiences of marginalised art workers. The piece, created by Viktoryia Hrabennikava, Varvara Sudnik, Oleksandr Halishchuk, and Arina Bozhok, unfolded as a public reading of email chains, gossip, and behind-the-scenes stories, weaving fictionalised texts out of lived realities of unpaid work, migration, and queer identity. Here, art functions not as aesthetic object but as self-critique – shaping, exposing, and intervening in the socio-economic processes it inhabits.

In other words, institutional critique leads to an understanding of the arts not as ivory towers, but as infrastructure embedded in the global market, political tensions, corruption schemes, and exploitation (Steyerl 2010). This critical perspective focuses on understanding art itself as infrastructure. Maeve Connolly described this as "becoming-infrastructural" (Connolly 2021), which means to shift the focus from the artist as an individual actor to art as a system of ongoing support, coordination, and socio-material entanglement. It entails recognising that artistic practices do not merely reflect infrastructural conditions but constitute them – historically, economically, and affectively. Thus, institutional critique leads to the understanding that art is not merely an autonomous field of symbolic production but also an infrastructure.

Beyond institutional critique, participatory art and art activism play a vital role in defining infrastructural artistic practice. Nina Felshin (1994) in her foundational book *But Is It Art?* describes activist art not as merely representational or thematically political but as an innovative use of public space linked to changes in the lives of particular communities. These works do not seek only to raise awareness but to create new organisational forms, new publics, and new possibilities of acting together. This approach is crucial for understanding infrastructural art for two main reasons. First, it allows us to reconceive art not

as an autonomous or exceptional sphere, but as a toolbox of practices, methods, and strategies — what Nora Sternfeld (2023) has described as the collective creation of infrastructures. Rather than existing apart from the world, art becomes a set of instruments through which social and material realities can be shaped. Second, this perspective foregrounds the potential of art to foster political and social transformation — not through representation alone, but through collective work. By cooperating closely with communities and intervening in sites of systemic failure, infrastructural art enacts change not symbolically, but operationally: it builds the conditions for solidarity, redistribution, and collective agency.

Participatory art, as Claire Bishop (2012) notes, shifts the role of the viewer to that of a co-author and the role of the artist as a mediator or connector, not a heroic figure. A significant example of how participatory art reconfigures the relationship between artist, artwork, and audience is the practice of Thomas Hirschhorn. Many of the artist's works were created in close collaboration with local communities. For instance, the long-term public project *Gramsci Monument* (2013), in the Bronx. Rather than a static monument to Gramsci, Hirschhorn created a dynamic space for dialogue, production, education, and encounter, co-constructed with local residents and sustained through daily programming that included lectures, radio broadcasts, a newspaper, and a children's workshop. This work was not simply made for a community, but with it. It demanded shared authorship and sustained engagement. His concept of the “non-exclusive audience” is key here: a term he uses to oppose the idea of a pre-determined, self-selecting, and institutionally legitimised public. This thinking is formalised in his *Spectrum of Evaluation* (2008–2010), a diagram in which he maps out the dynamics between three distinct agents: the professional art world — “the experts”, who evaluate, and the “non-exclusive audience”, who judge. His art, as he states, is made for the latter. Thus, participatory art, which rethinks the role and status of viewers and artists, becomes a precursor to infrastructure art, where the position of the artist as a connector or mediator in broken infrastructures becomes so important. And since large systems such as infrastructures cannot be constructed alone, but only collectively, people become not just spectators, but fully-fledged participants in the creation of infrastructures.

It is precisely at the intersection of institutional critique, participatory engagement, and activist aesthetics that infrastructural art finds its origins. Nora Sternfeld calls for a paradigm shift from art as representation to art as “the collective creation of infrastructures,” (Sternfeld 2023). Infrastructural art refers to contemporary artistic

practices that do not merely represent or critique existing infrastructures, but actively intervene in, replicate, or construct alternative infrastructural systems. Rather than producing discrete aesthetic objects for exhibition, infrastructural art engages with the material, social, logistical, and affective conditions that shape everyday life – such as housing, education, communication, migration, or care (Daugaard et al. 2024). These practices operate over long durations, often in collaboration with communities, and are oriented toward building platforms, networks, and forms of support in contexts where official systems are absent, failing, or unjust.

To delineate this field more precisely, *infrastructural art* can be understood as an artistic practice that does not merely comment on or temporarily intervene in existing social systems but operates as an enduring infrastructure in itself. In contrast to participatory or activist art, which often centre on representation, symbolic action, or short-term collaboration, infrastructural art is defined by its long-term duration, systemic embeddedness, and operational function. These practices construct or reconfigure platforms, networks, and systems that sustain collective life – such as education, housing, migration, or care – precisely in contexts where formal institutions fail or withdraw. Their aesthetic and political force lies not in visibility or protest alone, but in the material organisation of support, redistribution, and coordination. Infrastructural art thus defines a distinct field at the intersection of artistic, social, and logistical labour. It is characterised by:

- Temporal continuity: infrastructures that persist and evolve beyond the exhibition format.
- Systemic function: direct engagement with, or substitution of, institutional operations such as education, administration, housing, or communication.
- Collective authorship: production and maintenance through sustained collaboration rather than individual authorship.
- Operational aesthetics: aesthetic value emerging from the design and maintenance of systems rather than from visual form.

This approach stems from an understanding of art not as an autonomous sphere of symbolic production, but as a set of tools for mediating and reorganising the social. Accordingly, infrastructural art is not primarily created to be exhibited within biennial or curatorial frameworks; rather, the process of building and maintaining long-term communities, along with the political transformations it generates, constitutes its very form. In this regard, such practices remain marginal within the dominant politics of spectatorship and display that structure the professionalised art system. Their aim is not to produce

visibility within institutional circuits, but to sustain collective infrastructures of relation, care, and resistance — forms of social composition that unfold over time rather than through exhibitionary moments. In this sense, infrastructural art moves beyond critique toward a constructive institutional imagination — materialising alternative infrastructures capable of redistributing access, visibility, and care.

A paradigmatic example of infrastructural art is *The Silent University*, initiated in 2012 by Turkish-born artist Ahmet Öğüt. The project was conceived in response to the systemic failures of migration and education infrastructures, particularly as they affect displaced people and forced migrants. *The Silent University* defines itself as a solidarity-based knowledge exchange platform, developed and led by people who, despite having professional and academic experience, are excluded from national education systems and labour markets due to their asylum status. The project emerged from the conviction that “everybody has the right to educate” (*The Silent University*, n.d.) — and from the recognition that existing educational structures often fail to accommodate the needs, experiences, and knowledge of those in exile.

Indeed, the platform explicitly critiques the dominant model of education as centralised, hierarchical, and exclusionary. It offers in its place a decentralised, participatory, horizontal, and autonomous modality of education, grounded in mutual learning and a variety of epistemologies (Malzacher et al., n.d.). Its transversal pedagogical programmes are led by lecturers, consultants, and researchers who are themselves displaced. In doing so, it reactivates knowledge that would otherwise be rendered invisible, devalued, or lost entirely. This is especially critical given the epistemic and bureaucratic barriers faced by migrants. Professors, researchers, and teachers who flee conflict or persecution often find their qualifications unrecognised in host countries — not merely due to missing documentation, but because non-European systems of education are structurally devalued or rendered illegible within Western institutional frameworks. For instance, the *Silent University Ruhr* (2015–2020) operates through small-scale, self-organised structures involving artists, educators, and cultural workers. Its activities include workshops, public lectures, and advisory sessions. Instead of a fixed institutional location, the university appears temporarily, adapting to local contexts while maintaining its core principles of hospitality, accessibility, and peer-led education.

Crucially, Öğüt’s role as an artist is not to represent these issues in gallery spaces, but to co-create an alternative infrastructure in collaboration with displaced intellectuals and cultural workers. *The Silent University* does not simply expose the limits of the existing educational system — it proposes and performs a different model: one that

is inclusive, hospitable, flexible, and nomadic. It thus exemplifies how infrastructural art moves beyond aesthetic commentary to become a generative platform of support, redistribution, and systemic reimagination.

Migration as Infrastructural Failure

When infrastructural analysis is applied through a socio-political lens, it often foregrounds the moment of rupture — breakdown, failure, disruption — as a methodological tool to expose the hidden labour of infrastructure. As “infrastructure is a heritage of which we are usually unconscious until it malfunctions” (Robbins 2007: 34). Infrastructure is a relation, not a thing (Star and Ruhleder 1996), and often becomes noticeable only when it fails. Its operations — ordinarily mundane, backgrounded, and taken for granted — surface when something goes wrong. As the cyberfeminist Sadie Plant observes, “all are developed in the interests of man, but all are poised to betray him” (Plant 1995: 58). Failure is not incidental. It is embedded within the architecture itself, waiting to reveal itself at the moment of disruption.

In the 2023 exhibition *If Disrupted, It Becomes Tangible: Infrastructures and Solidarities Beyond the Post-Soviet Condition*, which I curated with Aleksei Borisionok at the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius, we dedicated a chapter to “Disruption as Method” (Borisionok and Stebur 2023). Drawing on Paul Virilio’s concept of the *integral accident*, we explored how every technological system contains within it the conditions for its collapse: to invent the plane is to invent the crash, to invent the internet is to invent the blackout (Virilio 2007). But what happens when infrastructural breakdown is not a crisis to be resolved, but a *modus operandi*? This question becomes central in the context of migration infrastructures. As Dominic Davies asks in *The Broken Promise of Infrastructure*, “What happens when infrastructure failure becomes the norm?” (Davies 2023: 15). Migration infrastructures, immigration systems, asylum procedures, residency regimes, often do not disrupt accidentally. They are designed to fail, or more precisely, to appear to be failing while efficiently serving the goals of deterrence, exclusion, and control.

Contemporary data supports this claim. While the global number of migrants has steadily risen — from 173 million in 2000 to 281 million in 2020 (Ahmad Yar and Bircan 2023) — access to asylum and legal residence has become increasingly restricted. In Germany, for instance, 96 percent of Syrian applicants were granted refugee status in 2015; by 2016, that number had dropped to just 57 percent (Haller

and Yanaşmayan 2024: 1910). In July 2025, the German government announced a full suspension of its voluntary visa programme for refugees (Alipour 2025). These changes are part of a broader logic described by Harsha Walia (2021) as prevention through deterrence – the systematic construction of bureaucratic and legal obstacles to inhibit migration. Within this system, disruption is not a malfunction – it is policy. For instance, the use of temporary residence permits rather than permanent ones, frequent legal revisions, deliberately opaque criteria, and recurring document renewals create a mode of governance based on continuous administrative circulation (Philipson Isaac 2022). Rather than being stabilised by the system, the migrant is produced as a subject in flux.

In the case of migration, disruptions, mistakes, delays, bureaucratic confusion, and administrative obstruction are not accidental malfunctions but structural features of how migration infrastructure operates. These dysfunctions are deployed deliberately to restrict access to asylum, residence, and citizenship. Migration infrastructures are often designed to be opaque, fragmented, and error-prone, thereby functioning as technologies of exclusion rather than support. For many migrants, navigating visa procedures, submitting residency applications, or renewing temporary permits constitutes not just a technical process but a defining aspect of the migration experience (Haller and Yanaşmayan 2024). These procedures actively shape the temporal, emotional, and legal trajectories of individuals. The bureaucracy and paperwork that accompany this form of governance are often characterised by confusion and vagueness, which creates space for interactions based on emotions and ethnic prejudices in decision-making processes (Geoffrion and Cretton 2021).

Migration infrastructure operates through planned failures and disruptions, in which the uncertainty of rules, instability of rights, and bureaucratic overload serve to continuously delay and frustrate the migrant's progress. This leads to a paradoxical system in which the appearance of failure is actually the mechanism of control.

One of the most articulate artistic critiques of malfunctioning asylum infrastructure can be found in *Refugees' Library* (2013–2019) by Marina Naprushkina. This project presents an archive of court drawings and transcripts produced during asylum hearings at the Berlin Administrative Court in Moabit (Naprushkina, n.d.). Naprushkina regularly attended hearings as a silent observer, documented the proceedings artistically, anonymised the names and personal details of asylum seekers, and made the material freely available in multiple languages, translated by volunteers and freelance translators. The goal was to make visible the otherwise opaque workings of a critical yet inaccessible institution.

Although asylum hearings in Germany are formally open to the public (Federal Republic of Germany, n.d.), they are conducted in near-total solitude. Despite the legal transparency of the process, there is a conspicuous absence of public observation or journalistic scrutiny. The central role that administrative courts play in determining whether individuals will be granted the right to remain is exercised largely without witnesses, beyond the judge, legal counsel, and the applicant themselves. This structural invisibility gives rise to what might be called a form of political melancholia — a condition in which the mechanisms of exclusion are technically knowable, but rarely seen, challenged, or collectively felt.

Refugees' Library breaks this institutional opacity. By attending and recording hearings, Naprushkina disrupts this quiet, institutional loneliness, insisting that these hearings do not disappear into procedural abstraction but enter the public archive and the social imaginary. One illustrative example from *Refugees' Library* captures a courtroom exchange from the 2016 case of Afnan — plaintiff, a Palestinian asylum seeker:

Judge: No, I wanted to know why you are only starting your apprenticeship now. Why didn't it work out before?

Plaintiff: I started doing a year of voluntary social service in the hospital, but I broke it off. My colleagues weren't nice to me. Then I found an apprenticeship. But I received less than 200 Euro per month and my brother said that it was too little and that I should look for something else. I tried to complete my high school diploma (MSA) but I didn't manage it. It was too difficult for me. I have now started doing an apprenticeship in a nursing home and I like it a lot!

Judge: Unfortunately, that does not explain the matter. I actually wanted to dismiss your appeal.

Lawyer: We will take back our appeal and then file an action after the plaintiff has finished her apprenticeship pursuant to s. 25b (granting residence in the case of long-term integration). This paragraph did not exist before.

Judge (to the Plaintiff): Make sure that you get your act together and work. Your arguments: "Too hard, too difficult, too little money...*" These arguments are so worn out" (*Refugees' Library*, 2016).

This brief transcript reveals the temporal liminality that defines the lives of many forced migrants: a perpetual state of deferral, impermanence, and administrative suspension. Legal categories such as "tolerated stay," "temporary protection," or "asylum seeker" produce an extended present in which individuals are stuck waiting for decisions,

extensions, or permissions — unable to plan a future or stabilise the present (Boccagni and Righard 2020).

At the same time, we witness how depersonalisation operates through bureaucratic breakdown. The judge's fatigue is palpable: another file, another testimony, another person whose claim is perceived as repetitive. For the judge, this is routine; for Afnan, the process determines whether she will be allowed to stay in a country or face deportation. Her exhaustion is physical and existential. She is compelled to narrate her life repeatedly in ways that fit the logic of credibility, productivity, and performative resilience — while simultaneously being dismissed for lacking precisely those qualities.

This asymmetrical exhaustion demonstrates the infrastructure's dual operation. For the judge, Afnan becomes a procedural burden — an administrative object rather than a subject. For Afnan, the asylum system constitutes an overextended mechanism that not only delays access to rights but demands constant justification for one's presence, value, and future. This suggests that migration infrastructure may be understood as deliberately programmed for dysfunction — a system designed to malfunction in order to regulate access to asylum, citizenship, and social inclusion. Constant legal reforms, vague eligibility criteria, protracted waiting periods, understaffed welfare offices and inconsistent documentation protocols are not anomalies but intrinsic components of how the system governs. The logic of malfunction is systemic.

What does this mean for contemporary art? If failure, error, and disruption are not deviations but constitutive elements of infrastructure, then institutional critique — directed at isolated sites of authority — is no longer sufficient. Critiquing a single court, office, or policy cannot address the structural violence woven into the fabric of the entire system. Likewise, participatory art — often based on short-term representational collaboration — falls short when facing infrastructures whose dysfunction is permanent, dispersed, and normalised. In such cases, it is not a matter of repairing infrastructure, as one might patch a leaking pipe. Unlike a pipe that once worked and now must be restored, migration infrastructures have never functioned equitably to begin with. Their “normal” is already defined by failure. Therefore, they cannot be fixed; they must be reimagined.

It is precisely here that infrastructural art opens new political and imaginative horizons. Rather than striving to represent failure, it builds counter-systems: not to restore functionality, but to articulate alternative logics of operation. *The Silent University*, for example, does not replicate the form of the university — it radicalises it, proposing new foundations for knowledge, authorship, and pedagogy. Similarly,

Refugees' Library is not an isolated project but part of a broader ecosystem anchored in *Neue Nachbarschaft//Moabit*. Its critique of asylum bureaucracy is not aimed at reform, but at constructing other infrastructures of integration, cohabitation, and mutual support at the neighbourhood scale. In this context, infrastructural art does not ask what needs to be repaired, but what needs to be invented. It reveals that in places where official systems are designed to exclude, art can operate as a practice of infrastructural imagination – not symbolic, but material, collective, fragile but sustainable.

Tactics of Infrastructural Art

If we understand migration as an infrastructure whose dysfunction and disruption is not incidental but structurally programmed, then the responses of contemporary art to this condition can also be approached infrastructurally. Within this framework, infrastructural art does not merely represent crisis – it operates tactically within, against, or alongside broken systems. This article identifies three tactical formations that recur across contemporary art practices: *invasive infrastructures*, *fugitive infrastructures*, and *counter-infrastructures*.

While other taxonomies could certainly be drawn, these three configurations reflect recurring strategies that transcend isolated interventions or particular artistic practices. They are not simply discrete but rather materialise in multiple practices, articulating distinctive modes of relation to broken systems – within, together with, or outside of them. What unites these tactics is not a unified aesthetic form, but their shared temporal and organisational commitment to re-configuring infrastructures over time.

Invasive Infrastructure

The first tactic, *invasive infrastructure*, operates by embedding itself within existing institutional or bureaucratic systems and reconfiguring them from within. These practices do not seek to create alternative structures from scratch. Instead, they intervene in the failures and inconsistencies of official infrastructures, redirecting flows of access, authorship, and recognition. If, as Lauren Berlant suggests, infrastructure comprises not only objects but “the patterns, habits, norms, and scenes of assemblage and use,” (Berlant 2016: 403) then *invasive infrastructure* modifies those very patterns from inside existing ecologies.

A compelling example of this tactic is **foundationClass*, established in 2016 at Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin. This educational platform and resistance toolkit was created to support people affected by racism and forced displacement in accessing art education and reclaiming space within German academic institutions (**foundationClass*, n.d.). Founded by artists and educators with migration and refugee experience, **foundationClass* uses the infrastructure of Weißensee itself not as a site of assimilation, but as a terrain of intervention.

**foundationClass* did “not emerge from a democratic process, but is itself the result of social conflicts, struggles and resistance” (Soltani 2021: 38). It does not function as a guest or auxiliary initiative within the Western-domination institution, but as a structural challenge to show its exclusion mechanisms. The project reclaims space through participation, subversion, and direct democracy – not through violence, but through everyday practices of occupation and redistribution. In their own words: “We are far more than Just Students because we operate from an unjust place, we are the consequences of global injustice” (Halbouni 2021: 2).

This tactic is invasive in its material interventions: shared studio space, peer-to-peer pedagogies, collective authorship, and horizontal governance. As participants assert, “a space cannot be taken for granted [...], it still has to be repeatedly claimed, designed and defended, thus becoming part of a long history of experiences and struggles” (Kersten et al. 2021: 14). Here, infrastructure is both a site of contestation and a fragile political resource. In this sense, **foundationClass* reveals the critical potential of invasive infrastructure: it works inside failing or unjust systems, not to repair them, but to transform from within, it intervenes in existing established material and symbolic flows for a more equitable redistribution within the existing infrastructure. However, this embeddedness also implies risk. The project is dependent on the very institution it critiques, vulnerable to institutional fatigue, budget withdrawal, or co-optation. Its survival is never guaranteed – it must be continuously defended, renegotiated, and restaged. Thus, in this context, invasive infrastructure carries a positive connotation, as it intervenes in and disrupts already dysfunctional systems in order to enable fairer, more transparent modes of operation.

Fugitive Infrastructures

Fugitive infrastructures describe alternative, temporary, and often improvised forms of infrastructure that emerge under conditions of exclusion, crisis, or systemic absence – particularly among marginalised communities. These are not simply makeshift responses to institutional

failure; they are practices of autonomy and resistance, shaped by necessity and sustained through collective coordination. Fugitive infrastructures often appear outside official governance, operate informally, and evolve in the shadows of dominant systems. They create material and immaterial forms of support that challenge the spatial and temporal logics of state institutions and repressive management.

This concept is grounded in the work of scholars like Deborah Cowen, who argues that “Infrastructure is not only a vehicle of domination and violence. It is also a means of transformation. Alternative worlds require alternative infrastructures, systems that allow for sustenance and reproduction” (Cowen 2017). Fugitive infrastructures, in this sense, are not only substitutes for absent services; they are blueprints for new forms of life. These formations are often “undocumented,” “unauthorised,” or “invisible,” yet they sustain communities in the face of legal, bureaucratic, or social abandonment. They arise in the interstices of urban space, migrate with displaced populations, and reconfigure what infrastructure can mean beyond state and establishment. As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney suggest in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), fugitive infrastructures are not concerned with restoration or recognition. Rather, they rely on movement, concealment, and repetition — operating outside official protocols, evading governance, and resisting capture. These formations emerge not as utopian projects or mechanisms of repair, but as strategies of survival, withdrawal, and quiet endurance.

Crucially, fugitive infrastructures do not reject the idea of infrastructure altogether. Rather, they intensify and radicalise its latent potential. They take the core principles of infrastructure — distribution, access, maintenance — and rearticulate them through collectivist, solidaristic, or revolutionary aims. Their power lies not only in substituting for failed systems but in reimagining infrastructural logics altogether. In doing so, they often expose the violent exclusions of official infrastructure and reassign its functions to serve those structurally excluded from its benefits.

A notable example of such fugitive infrastructural practice is the initiative *Solidarny Dom Kultury “Słonecznik”* (Solidarity House of Culture “Sunflower”), which emerged in the days following the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Though hosted by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, *Słonecznik* operated independently of institutional planning and rapidly transformed the museum’s administrative headquarters into an emergency solidarity infrastructure. It provided warm meals, medical and psychological aid, clothing, workshops, and informal networks of care — initially entirely through unpaid volunteer work and community donations.

As co-organiser Jakub Depczyński recalls, “The beginnings of the ‘Sunflower’ were so intense and tense that we barely remember anything from those early weeks” (Depczyński 2022). In those chaotic days, the museum space became a hub for artists, cultural workers, and refugees, functioning as a site of mutual aid and political assembly. It was formally authorised, nor prohibited – it simply happened. The place, dormant during the pandemic, was reoccupied and repurposed, not by curators or administrators, but by people responding to crisis. The organisers themselves referred to it as a “metaphorical occupation of the institution” (Stefańska 2024: 167).

Importantly, *Słonecznik* defined itself not as a humanitarian relief centre but as a *Solidarny Dom Kultury* – a “Solidarity House of Culture.” The more common English translation, “Solidarity Culture Centre,” fails to capture the specific resonance of the original term in the Polish context. These cultural centres are reimagined ruins of socialist Poland’s infrastructure. That is why it is important that *Słonecznik* takes the form of a House of Culture – controversial, but potentially emancipatory. It does not simply use it, but appropriates and radicalises its meaning (Kusztra, n.d.). Rather than serving a passive or aesthetic public, it shifted focus to care, support, and protection.

Emphasis on care and hospitality, however, must not be mistaken for apolitical service provision. In the case of *Słonecznik*, care is redefined as a radical and collective practice of solidarity. As Taras Gembik, one of the core initiators of the project, reflects, “I asked myself: what is art and what can I do when war breaks out? Not everyone can fight, but everyone can get involved and do something. I do not mean empty gestures or naive texts” (Mazur 2023). This shift was reflected not only in symbolic terms but in practice: instead of delivering standard public programming, *Słonecznik* offered legal consultations, medicine, and meals. In doing so, it directly contested the illusion of institutional neutrality and redefined the cultural institution as a site of urgent solidarity. This marks the moment where fugitive infrastructure becomes political – not simply a response to crisis, but a radical rearticulation of institutional purpose, audience, and responsibility in times of displacement and disaster.

Counter-Infrastructure

The third and final artistic tactic discussed in this paper is that of counter-infrastructure. In contrast to invasive or fugitive forms, counter-infrastructure entails the deliberate creation of autonomous systems that do not merely resist or bypass state and institutional logics,

but offer structural alternatives grounded in principles of solidarity, horizontality, and mutual aid. These practices emerge not to supplement or repair existing infrastructures but to replace their failed foundations with radically different logics.

Counter-infrastructures operate with a set of distinguishing characteristics. First, they replicate certain core functions of formal infrastructure — distribution, coordination, support — but do so through alternative organisational principles. Rather than relying on hierarchy and bureaucratic rationality, they are typically decentralised, horizontal, and sustained by trust and collective labour. Second, they are inherently political in their orientation: not only do they refuse the technocratic neutrality often associated with state infrastructures, but they actively challenge the ideological underpinnings of those systems — particularly their complicity in processes of exclusion, racialisation, and precarisation. Finally, they are grounded in collective care: their purpose is not symbolic critique, but the redistribution of life-sustaining resources and the construction of communities of survival.

An emblematic example of this approach is Marina Naprushkina's *Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit* case from which this research began. Rooted in Naprushkina's broader critique of existing both migrant and artistic infrastructure, *Neue Nachbarschaft* exemplifies a form of cultural work that consciously positions itself outside the conventional circuits of exhibition-making. As Naprushkina explains, "I have never questioned art itself as a method. But for me its history, institutional and academic field, is a zone of constant critical rethinking. And it is in this process that the initiatives and projects I launched and am involved in are rooted" (Secondary Archive 2022). Rather than seeking to reform existing cultural infrastructures from within, *Neue Nachbarschaft* builds its own — anchored not in the legitimising power of the art world, but in the everyday struggles and solidarities of migrant life.

A second example is the *Trampoline House*, established in 2010 in Copenhagen by a collective of artists, curators, asylum seekers, and activists. The project was conceived in response to Denmark's increasingly restrictive asylum and immigration policies, and emerged from a prior initiative, the *Asylum Dialog Tank*, where asylum seekers were positioned as knowledge producers and experts on their own experiences. The proto project was organized by artists Morten Goll and Joachim Hamou and curator Tone Olaf Nielsen (*Trampoline House*, n.d.a.). The choice of the name *Trampoline House* itself reveals its oppositional logic: as one participant recounted, the Danish Minister of Integration had referred to integration policy as a "stepping stone" into society. In contrast, the participant declared: "After nine years in the camp system, I need more than a stepping stone — I need a fucking

trampoline” (Trampoline House, n.d.b). This refusal to accommodate the minimalism of state provisions reflects the core ethos of the project: to build systems capable not only of resilience but of propulsion – social, political, and affective.

Over the course of a decade, *Trampoline House* became a multi-functional space offering legal counselling, language instruction, childcare, job search assistance, artistic programming, and collective governance via weekly meetings. It was a civic infrastructure constructed by and for refugees, operating in open defiance of the state’s fragmentary and punitive asylum system.

What unites these projects is not only their infrastructural character, but their explicit refusal to align with the expectations of the art world. Like *Neue Nachbarschaft*, *Trampoline House* blurs the boundary between cultural production and social work. This ambiguity, however, is often met with scepticism or erasure within dominant art discourses. As Frida Sandström has noted, projects like *Trampoline House* demonstrate the Janus face of artist-led activism: if your need for the resources that are provided as part of a project is urgent, it might be hard to also experience that project as art (Sandström 2022). Such projects elude clear categorisation within the framework of artistic practice. The traditional approach to art criticism renders these practices invisible.

Yet as Morten Goll, one of *Trampoline House*’s co-founders, argues, such criticism misses the point. The project deliberately dismantles the dominant aesthetic of individual authorship and proposes instead a collective, processual model of art-making. “What if the artwork is made by the audience?” Goll asks. “What if *Trampoline House* was created and is recreated every day by all the people who have ever worked and work in *Trampoline House*?” (Goll et al. 2022: 248). In this formulation, counter-infrastructure is not an art object, nor even an artistic intervention – it is a durable, evolving infrastructure built through sustained collective labour and necessity.

Counter-infrastructure art thus insists on autonomy, not for the sake of withdrawal, but to reimagine the terms of belonging, authorship, and care. It exemplifies what infrastructural art can become when it is not merely embedded within broken systems or hastily mobilised in times of crisis, but built from the ground up as a collective refusal and reconstruction of the conditions of social life.

Conclusion

Across the tactics of invasion, fugitivity, and counter-construction, artists propose to reconfigure the infrastructures of migration from

within and without. Their practices do not merely represent displacement or critique the bureaucratic violence of asylum regimes; they act upon the material and institutional failures that shape the migrant condition. By transforming sites of exclusion into spaces of learning, encounter, and collective agency, infrastructural art operates as both a response to and an intervention within the broken architecture of migration governance.

These infrastructures of solidarity, however, remain fragile and contested. They rely on precarious forms of labour – volunteerism, mutual aid, emotional investment – that both sustain and exhaust their participants. Their existence depends on temporary funding, personal commitment, and collective trust, making them vulnerable to burnout, co-optation, and institutional fatigue. Yet precisely through this vulnerability they reveal a different logic of endurance: one that prioritises care, reciprocity, and interdependence over efficiency, control, and hierarchy.

Returning to the initial question – *How can art operate when migration systems fail?* – the answer proposed here is that art can become an infrastructure itself: a social and affective apparatus that enables collective survival in conditions of displacement. By constructing autonomous networks of education, hospitality, and support, artists and cultural workers develop counter-systems that reimagine integration and belonging beyond the confines of policy and bureaucracy.

In this sense, infrastructural art within the field of migration does not promise a utopia or an institutional alternative; it performs the ongoing work of reassembling the possible. It builds, however provisionally, the worlds that migration regimes systematically deny – worlds of shared responsibility, situated knowledge, and collective care.

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CREATING SPACES OF SOLIDARITY:
GENDER PERSPECTIVES ON MIGRATION
AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract: This interview brings together three practitioners working at the intersection of migration, gender, and art to examine how cultural practices become forms of resistance in contexts of displacement. Through reflections on community organising, feminist pedagogies, and the politics of fear shaping contemporary Europe, the conversation highlights the gendered dimensions of migration, the risks of institutional instrumentalisation, and the transformative potential of art for visibility and agency.

Keywords: migration; gender; community; art; solidarity



This interview was the echo of the conference *The Promise of (Un)Happiness? Gender, Labour, and Migration*, held in 2024 within the Women in Tech Academic programme. It brings together the voices and practices of women activists, researchers, and artists who work directly on the ground in contexts shaped by displacement, war, and structural inequality. Their situated knowledge – formed through daily engagement with migrant communities – offers insights that are often absent from institutional narratives and academic frameworks. The conversation highlights how gendered labour, care, vulnerability, and resistance unfold in migratory contexts, and how cultural and artistic practices can become counter-infrastructures of support.

The interview features three contributors whose work spans humanitarian support, artistic practice, and research. Maria (Maro) Beburia is a cultural, humanitarian, and community worker from Odesa, now based in Warsaw, co-founder of the BLYZKIST collective and the Solidarity Community Center “Słonecznik,” and currently a Program Specialist at Polish Humanitarian Action. Marina Naprushkina is a Berlin-based feminist artist and activist, founder of the Office for Anti-Propaganda and co-founder of Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit, whose long-term practice centres collective self-organisation and migrant-led infrastructures. Amilia Stanevich (name changed) is a researcher and cultural worker based in Poland, offering critical insights into institutional practices, political instrumentalisation, and the gendered dimensions of migration.

By foregrounding these grounded, practice-based perspectives, this issue of *Topos Journal* extends its academic boundaries, integrating voices that are rarely centred in scholarly debates yet essential for understanding the lived realities of migration, gender, and cultural work today.

Antonina Stebur: Could you share what brought you into this field? What personal or political experiences led you to engage with questions of migration, displacement, and community work?

Amilia Stanevich: My work in the field of migration was shaped by my own experience of displacement, which began in February 2020 and continues to this day. Migration – especially when this experience is lived through alone – places a person in conditions where it is very easy to lose one’s grounding and motivation to act. My activities are primarily focused on integration and on creating opportunities for collaboration between migrants and cultural institutions in Poland. Many state institutions remain, in practice, “inflexible” due to

extensive documentation requirements and the absence of procedures adapted for working with migrants. This is linked to several factors: legal ones (such as the lack of experience in employing migrants), resource-related constraints (underfunding, shortage of specialists), cultural differences, as well as insufficient understanding of the specificities of migrant communities. For this reason, I see the need to foster dialogue between migrants and institutions, to develop adaptive support mechanisms, and to cultivate practices that take into account the diversity of cultural experience and contribute to successful integration into Polish society.

Maro Beburia: I have been working in the cultural and NGO sector for years. As a migrant and the daughter of a migrant, I am deeply committed to promoting social justice, cultural inclusion, and community resilience.

In 2020, together with Taras Gembik, we created the BLYZKIST collective (from the Ukrainian word for “closeness”), which focuses on constituency engagement, particularly among people with migration and refugee backgrounds, as well as other marginalized communities. I am also a co-founder of the *Solidary Community Centre “Sunflower,”* established in the early days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a crisis centre for solidarity and mutual aid.

Marina Naprushkina: My involvement in this field emerged not from a planned artistic project, but from a very direct encounter with the realities of displacement. In 2013, a refugee shelter was opened in a disused school building next to my home in Berlin-Moabit. Many families with children were placed without kitchens, with limited sanitation, and without access to education. My first contact was with the mothers living in the shelter. As a mother myself, it felt natural to engage, to listen, and to respond. What followed was not a “project,” but a spontaneous form of responsibility: I used my exhibition budget to open a small studio inside the shelter where women and children could gather. Within weeks, this informal intervention grew into *Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit*, a self-organised community of neighbours, artists, and newly arrived migrants working together to create support structures the state failed to provide.

I am often asked whether my own experience of migration shaped my sensitivity to these issues. It is a complicated question. I am not a refugee; my experience as a migrant cannot be equated with the experiences of, for example, Chechen mothers arriving with ten children after fleeing war. The differences in conditions, histories, and vulnerabilities are profound. Media narratives often tried to collapse these

distinctions, to fit me into a neat representational category: the migrant woman who now works with migrants. Such simplifications are politically convenient, but they obscure more than they reveal.

Yes, certain aspects of my background – my own encounters with bureaucracy, the feeling of being outside established structures – may have made certain forms of injustice more visible to me. But *Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit* was never about my personal story. The initiative grew through the involvement of many people, including those with diverse migration histories – from post-Soviet migrants who arrived in Germany as children in the 1990s to neighbours who engaged because they recognised that state institutions were failing. Their knowledge and experience were essential, and often invisible to those who had never confronted the complexities of asylum procedures, residency permits, or systemic neglect.

Antonina Stebur: Given that this issue of our journal focuses on migration and gender, could you reflect on how gender shapes migration trajectories? In your experience, how do gendered expectations and forms of socialisation influence the processes of displacement and adaptation, and the additional forms of labour that migrant women often take on?

Marina Naprushkina: Gender profoundly shapes the experience of migration. For individuals raised within forms of female socialisation, the migration process differs significantly from that of those socialised as men. For many women, the pressures and expectations are amplified at multiple stages of displacement – regardless of whether they have children. Women are often burdened with greater responsibility, both socially and within the family, and many arrive from contexts characterised by patriarchal norms, authoritarian state structures, and strong familial control.

Migration can sometimes offer hope – the possibility to renegotiate one's position or to imagine a life with greater autonomy. Yet in practice this hope often collides with intensified forms of control. In a new country, without established networks of support and often without immediate access to employment, many women find themselves monitored even more closely, sometimes by relatives who are not physically present but who exert remote oversight over their movements, decisions, and relationships. This creates what I would call a “social hunger”: the loss of support structures combined with heightened pressure and isolation.

These dynamics are especially pronounced among women from strongly patriarchal or clan-based societies – such as some groups

from Chechnya — or from contexts where women’s freedoms were historically limited. Even when women migrate to societies with more liberal gender norms, the migration process itself can produce a counter-reaction: families or communities may become more conservative as a protective mechanism in a new environment. Research has shown that migration can, paradoxically, reinforce traditional gender roles, and I see this frequently in practice.

At the same time, women often carry a disproportionate share of communicative, emotional, and bureaucratic labour in the migration process. They are frequently the ones who navigate administrative systems, manage family affairs, and enter the labour market earlier or under more pressure than male family members. All of this demonstrates that gender is not an auxiliary factor but a structuring force that profoundly shapes how displacement is lived, negotiated, and resisted.

Antonina Stebur: How do you see these dynamics unfolding in Poland, especially in light of the recent reports and data from the Ocalenie Foundation? What trends or concerns do you find most pressing?

Maro Beburia: We are now seeing the first effects of the new liberal government after eight years of PiS rule. While there are some improvements, much remains the same, and in some cases, things have even worsened. Polish society has long been shaped by a divisive narrative of “us” versus “them,” with the definition of “them” shifting over time. Poland has always been multicultural, but only now has that diversity become too visible to ignore. It’s becoming clear that neoliberalism is willing to align with fascist tendencies when it suits political interests. The current government’s attempts to adopt right-wing rhetoric in order to appeal to conservative voters, but it doesn’t work in their favour: leftists see it as a betrayal, and the right sees it as a weak and inauthentic attempt. The government’s new policy on temporary restriction on the right to apply for international protection at the Belarus border did nothing to stop migration but significantly worsened the humanitarian crisis.

There is a growing sense of dissatisfaction with Ukrainians and fatigue with the ongoing war. Meanwhile, Ukrainian war refugees in Poland are working, paying taxes, and have significantly contributed to the country’s GDP growth in 2024 (UNHCR, 2025). Yet for many, these facts aren’t enough. They remain convinced that difficulties in accessing healthcare are not the result of deep systemic underfunding, but rather because Ukrainians are “taking up space” in the queues.

Antonina Stebur: Amilia Stanevich, as a researcher, how do you relate the current migratory processes to historical patterns of displacement in Poland? What continuities or ruptures do you see when comparing interwar and contemporary migration?

Amilia Stanevich: It is rather difficult for me to answer this question, as my research does not directly focus on migration; the topic appears only indirectly in my work. I can note, however, that while contemporary Belarusian migration to Poland is shaped by political or economic motives and constitutes an unorganised and individualised process, migration in the Polish territories historically (here I refer to the border regions with Belarus, that is, Podlasie, and extend the period from 1915 to 1946) was forced and systematically organised. One of the most traumatic experiences was the *bieżeństwo* of 1915 – the mass evacuation of predominantly Orthodox populations to the eastern and central governorates of the Russian Empire. The second significant and undoubtedly traumatic event in this context was the population exchange between Poland and the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), which was directly related to the establishment of a new political border. Both of these processes are described in the books of Polish journalist and publicist Aneta Prymaka-Oniszk (2016, 2024).

An interesting observation in this context is the choice of Białystok as a new place of residence for many migrants from Hrodna and other regions of Western Belarus. This may indicate not only geographic proximity but also the presence of historical and cultural memory connected to pre-war and interwar cross-border relations, shared linguistic and confessional backgrounds, as well as family ties – all of which play a role in shaping migration trajectories.

Antonina Stebur: Across Europe, conservative and right-wing political actors increasingly use anti-migration rhetoric as a political bargaining chip. Why do you think migration has become such a potent symbol in current political struggles? What are the gendered implications of this turn?

Marina Naprushkina: The political centrality of migration in Europe has intensified dramatically in the past year. In Germany, this shift became especially visible during the most recent political crisis, when migration was elevated to the defining issue of the election campaign. The rapid rise of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) triggered a reaction across the political spectrum: centre-right and even centrist parties moved sharply to the right, adopting restrictive positions that would have been unthinkable only a few years ago. The

result is a broad political consensus around measures that fundamentally undermine constitutional rights and the right to asylum – changes that, despite their severity, have faced surprisingly little resistance or even public debate.

Part of the problem is the collapse of distinctions. Migration is increasingly conflated with questions of terrorism or internal security, even though these are entirely different issues and are recognised as such by refugees themselves. This conflation makes migration an easy target: a single, simplified narrative allows politicians to mobilise fear, define an externalised “other,” and forge cohesion through exclusion. Economic inequality, lack of affordable housing, or infrastructural decay are far more difficult to address – migration becomes the symbolic shortcut.

This dynamic has deep historical roots in Germany. After reunification in the 1990s, far-right groups attacked Turkish guest workers; families were murdered in arson attacks such as the 1993 Solingen fire (Hille 2023); and, between 2000 and 2010, the National Socialist Underground (Engelhart 2017) carried out a series of killings targeting mostly migrant families. These patterns reveal a recurrent mechanism: during periods of social or economic uncertainty, migrants become the focal point onto which societal anxieties are projected.

As for the gendered dimensions, they are fully embedded in this political turn even if not always explicitly articulated. Anti-migration rhetoric often reinforces patriarchal imaginaries – constructing migrant men as threats and migrant women as subjects in need of surveillance or control.

So, migration is powerful as a political symbol not because it explains social crises, but because it offers an emotionally charged, easily manipulable narrative.

Amilia Stanevich: In recent years, the world has been increasingly plunged into a state of crisis, and the number of international migrants continues to grow – developments that have directly led to the deliberate use of migration as a political instrument. A prolonged process of targeted mythologisation, aimed at constructing, in the public imagination, the image of migrants as a threat, has activated widespread anxiety and fear within society. Fear, in turn, is instrumentalised by right-wing political parties, allowing them to position themselves as “protectors” of national security and the societal values upheld by a given state. The politics of fear is a highly appealing and effective strategy for those in power: it actively exploits emotions for the purpose of societal mobilisation, emotions that are far easier (and more politically advantageous) to trigger than rational thinking. Such

a politics enables authorities to keep society under control and to influence its psycho-emotional state.

With regard to gendered consequences, anti-migration policies contribute to the remilitarisation of masculinity and the strengthening of traditional gender roles. In such contexts, the female body often becomes a symbolic object of “protection,” one that is perceived as requiring heightened regulation and control.

Antonina Stebur: What, in your view, makes art an essential tool for community engagement, political intervention, or emotional healing in migratory contexts?

Maro Beburia: For me, art is a tool, a medium to bring people together and build connections. Art becomes a pretext to meet, engage, and share stories and experiences; it can also be therapeutic. Art is still needed as a tool to speak about something as unimaginable as war. It is also an instrument for building community, working with society, and forming human relationships. Art teaches empathy and how to recognize pain.

Art and culture might not be the first needs of migrants after arriving in a new country, but they are essential for long-term integration, for both migrants and the host society. The presence of migrants in cultural institutions is especially important, as they broaden perspectives and bring unique experiences that enrich the cultural landscape.

Culture and art do not stop war; only weapons can do that, but they help us process the emotions and pain we experience daily. But also, to connect with our culture, our memories, while being away from home.

Amilia Stanevich: First and foremost, art becomes an effective instrument in migration contexts because it renders migrants visible within public space. Artistic practices and their presentation create conditions for self-representation, enabling migrants to articulate their own narratives in opposition to dominant discourses, which often frame their experiences through politically conditioned categories. Moreover, the presentation of artistic work creates opportunities for direct dialogue between migrants and the wider society, reducing stereotyping and opening pathways toward demythologisation and critical reflection. The possibility to tell one’s own story is an important and often transformative process that restores a sense of agency.

Art is also a means of reinterpreting trauma and enabling emotional healing. Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, art-therapeutic theatre activities – *theatrotherapy* – have become a fairly

common practice in Poland. These initiatives use theatre as a tool for relieving stress, restoring mental health, and supporting the integration of migrants. A significant feature of such initiatives is that they are conducted by migrant women for migrant women, which helps create a safe and trusting environment. Within such spaces, it becomes possible to engage delicately with vulnerable experiences, to offer mutual support, and to reframe trauma through creative expression.

Antonina Stebur: Could you share some examples of the artistic or cultural methodologies you use in your work? How do these practices center the voices and experiences of migrants, especially women and gender-diverse individuals?

Marina Naprushkina: In my experience, the most important methodological principle is to create a physical space in which people can genuinely meet one another. Working offline, being present together in the same room, is essential. Whether we are learning a language, cooking, making art, or discussing politics and history, these activities all function as forms of education, reflection, and dialogue. The space itself becomes a shared learning environment rather than a service offered “to” refugees. From the beginning, *Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit* was never conceived as a project for migrants but as a space in which neighbours – including newly arrived migrants – could encounter one another on equal terms.

This required careful attention to hierarchy. Even seemingly small asymmetries – such as who speaks the local language, who understands bureaucratic structures, or who has lived in Germany longer – can shape power relations. We worked deliberately to minimise these imbalances by avoiding frontal teaching formats or top-down knowledge transmission. Instead, we created a constellation of overlapping practices: cooking sessions, language groups, art workshops, reading circles, music evenings. These activities intersected and allowed people to participate in different ways, without being reduced to a single identity category such as “refugee” or “teacher.” This heterogeneity was crucial for centring migrant voices and building shared agency.

Artistic practice played a significant role in this ecology. For several years, linocut workshops formed one of our core methods. Linocut is an accessible technique – easy to learn and immediately gratifying. People could carve, print, and see a result within minutes. This opened a pathway for self-expression, especially for women who might be new to artistic processes. We also developed collective wall drawings and created collaborative text pieces across a large wall in our space. A literary group formed naturally, and it became an important site for

storytelling, reading, and writing across languages. Rather than privileging one artistic medium, we worked with whatever forms emerged from the community and supported people in developing their own practices.

Over time, as the initiative grew and became more complex, we began articulating our methodology more clearly. In 2019, we turned to historical models of progressive education — particularly Black Mountain College. We were interested in how art can function as a central mode of learning, enabling transdisciplinary forms of knowledge production. Black Mountain resonated strongly with our situation: it was also founded by refugees, and it operated as a non-hierarchical learning environment where teachers and students shared not only lectures but daily life — cooking, farming, organising communal activities. This model helped us articulate our own understanding of *Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit* as a space of collective learning, care, and self-organisation.

Antonina Stebur: What ethical and political challenges do you face when using artistic tools in these highly vulnerable contexts?

Maro Beburia: The basis of the Russian genocide against Ukrainians lies in a culture war: the appropriation of Ukrainian artists, the theft of art from museums in occupied territories, all used later to support a narrative that Ukrainian culture doesn't exist, and therefore, that Ukraine itself doesn't exist.

This includes both the looting of museums in occupied territories and the destruction of places and institutions vital to our culture (including UNESCO heritage sites), as well as symbolic theft — the appropriation of works or figures from the Ukrainian cultural canon as part of Russian culture. Paradoxically, artists once rejected by the Soviet regime (like Malevich, who was tortured by Soviet police) are now used as symbols of “great Russian culture.”

In recent years, great effort has been made by Ukrainian professionals working in Western cultural institutions to debunk these narratives and to decolonize them. Russia seeks to diminish the significance of our culture, language, and state — both physically and symbolically.

Right now, Ukrainian artists are on the front lines (Artslooker, 2025), providing humanitarian aid or creating works during air raid alarms or without electricity. At a time when war is also being waged on the cultural front, when museums and theaters are being destroyed, artworks are being stolen, and art is being appropriated by the aggressor both literally and symbolically, it is our duty to defend and promote Ukrainian culture and art.

Amilia Stanevich: I do not work directly with artistic media, but based on my observations of how cultural institutions engage with migrants, I would like to highlight several problems and challenges linked to the vulnerability of migrant communities. One of the key issues concerns representation and asymmetries of power: who speaks, on whose behalf, and in whose interests? It is crucial to ask whether trauma is being aestheticised or exploited, and whether a person's tragic experience is being reduced to an artistic "product." There is also the risk of institutional instrumentalisation of migration, whereby projects carried out under the banner of integration and solidarity serve to strengthen the public image of cultural institutions or to fulfil external normative and societal expectations — without any real redistribution of resources or structural change within the institutions themselves.

Another essential aspect is adherence to principles of care and non-violent interaction with individuals who have experienced displacement. In the implementation of artistic projects that engage with traumatic experience, it is vital to consider the risk of retraumatization, particularly in intercultural contexts where local artists and curators collaborate with displaced artists. Unfortunately, in practice these principles are often sidelined in pursuit of more compelling or impactful outcomes.

It is also important to acknowledge the rapid shifts in the themes that capture public and institutional attention. Under conditions of perpetual crisis, we observe a high degree of reorientation, in which the concerns of certain groups lose visibility as soon as a new "urgent" agenda emerges. Such instability results in the fragmentation and short-term nature of many cultural initiatives.

An additional issue is the creation of a kind of migrant "ghetto" within the cultural sphere — a situation in which content is produced primarily for an internal audience, without the participation of members of the host society and sometimes even without basic translation into the host country's language. Such enclosedness reinforces isolation and hinders dialogue, and may also become a pretext for right-wing populist forces to construct anti-migration narratives appealing to the idea of an alleged "unwillingness to integrate." In this context, it is crucial to strive to move beyond one's own community and to create inclusive spaces of interaction.

Antonina Stebur: From your experience, which practices or approaches are most urgently needed today to foster more inclusive, feminist, and anti-racist responses to migration?

Maro Beburia: People often see migrants, including refugees, solely through the lens of their migrant identity, which is a precarious one, often temporary identity tied to trauma. Over time, it can become a core identity, but that depends on many factors. When you're viewed only through this narrow perspective, it can lead to alienation and a loss of self.

The solution is to engage with other parts of one's identity, those rooted in personal or work interests, hobbies, joys, and roles beyond migration. This broader perspective helps reconnect with the fuller self and fosters a sense of dignity and belonging. I believe the most valuable support we can offer people with migrant or refugee experience is to help nurture their sense of agency and independence.

Amilia Stanevich: Based on my experience, one of the key conditions for fostering a more inclusive approach to migration is the need to rethink and deconstruct existing institutional models of engagement with migrants. This concerns, first and foremost, a shift away from hierarchical and paternalistic practices toward horizontal forms of collaboration in which migrants are regarded not as objects of assistance but as full participants in cultural and social processes.

In migration contexts – particularly in cases of relocation from post-Soviet or Middle Eastern countries to Western European states – we observe a phenomenon of the erasure of pre-migration experience. Professional competences, social status, and cultural capital accumulated prior to migration often become invisible or unacknowledged within the new social and institutional environment. This can lead not only to professional marginalisation but also to a profound crisis of identity, which requires a rethinking of one's position within the new structure.

Antonina Stebur: What does “solidarity” mean in your work? How do you approach building sustainable, mutual forms of solidarity between migrant and non-migrant communities?

Maro Beburia: Solidarity is strongest during the first act of a crisis. But urgency fades, as a crisis becomes a permanent state. And solidarity fades.

It's crucial to build connections not only within Ukrainian communities but across shared struggles, with people from Belarus, Georgia, Iran, Palestine, and beyond. We're all constantly being put into boxes and forced into what we call the “genocide Olympics”, fighting each other for media attention, humanitarian funding, and cultural grants, when in fact we should be building alliances, not competition.

For me, solidarity means shared responsibility. It's more than offering a room or a meal; it's speaking up against xenophobia and racism, and looking out for one another. True solidarity is found in everyday actions, not just in times of crisis, but in the long haul, as crises become a constant reality.

Advocacy work is like pushing Sisyphus' stone, but each effort matters. When we can no longer do it, someone else will pick it up, building on our work. That's why we must act together to make our voices louder and our impact stronger.

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EMOTIONAL DISPLACEMENT
AND THE FRAGILITY OF BELONGING.
THE MEANING OF HOMING
IN ITS TRANSITION

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Abstract. This study investigates how Belarusian migrants and political exiles reconfigure the meaning of home and belonging following forced displacement after the 2020 political crisis. The object of inquiry is the emotional and symbolic reconstruction of home in exile, shaped by practices of homing, relational care, and identity negotiation. The main task is to examine how migrants experience and enact belonging in uncertain sociopolitical landscapes, and how emotional geographies and symbolic rituals serve as coping mechanisms amid loss, mobility, and precarity. This study asks: how is home performed beyond physical space? What makes belonging possible in contexts of rupture? The study employs a qualitative methodology, grounded in reflexive thematic analysis of 13 in-depth interviews with Belarusian migrants living in Lithuania, Poland, and Georgia. Data were coded to trace patterns in affective spatial practices, identity transformations, and diasporic community formation. The analysis draws on theoretical frameworks from diaspora studies, emotional geography, and feminist theory, particularly the works of Brah, Ahmed, and Blunt & Dowling. Findings reveal that home is not a static location but a mobile, affective infrastructure – reassembled through sensory cues, symbolic objects, and everyday rituals. Belonging emerges through emotional labor, repetition, and relational investments, often despite legal and spatial instability. Participants describe homing as a dynamic process: making



spaces livable through routine, care, and memory. Communities in exile are revealed as fluid emotional cartographies rather than fixed social networks. The study concludes that emotional displacement creates both fragility and opportunity: while rootedness is undermined, new forms of resilience, identity, and political imagination emerge. These insights contribute to migration scholarship by foregrounding the intimate, embodied, and relational dimensions of belonging, offering a nuanced understanding of exile not only as loss but also as a site of becoming.

Keywords: Belarusian migration, homing practices, emotional geography, belonging, exile, identity transformation, diaspora communities.

Introduction

Although my academic background lies in the fields of human genetics and gender studies, my recent scholarly trajectory has shifted toward the interdisciplinary domain of migration research. This transition is not incidental, but reflects a deeper epistemological and ethical commitment: to use academic inquiry as a means of exploring questions that are at once structural and intimate, theoretical and lived. In contexts of displacement and uncertainty, research becomes more than a method — it serves as a mode of orientation, a way to engage with the gendered, emotional, and existential dimensions of uprooted life.

This engagement is grounded in a set of recurring questions that emerge in moments of rupture: Where is home now? How is home performed and perceived? What conditions make homing possible? How do we inhabit space amid instability? And what symbolic anchors and relational practices guide us in constructing a sense of belonging in exile?

These questions are explored through the lived experiences of Belarusian migrants who left their country in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election — a political turning point that triggered one of the most significant waves of repression and forced migration in the country's modern history. In the months following the election, the Belarusian regime initiated a crackdown on civil society, journalists, academics, artists, and ordinary citizens participating in peaceful protest. The brutality of state violence — including arbitrary arrests, torture, and forced disappearances — resulted in a humanitarian crisis and a mass exodus. By the end of 2021, tens of thousands of Belarusians had fled to neighboring countries such as Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, and Georgia, with many continuing on to Western Europe or North America.

This wave of migration was not driven by economic necessity or long-term planning, but by rupture, trauma, and survival. As a result, the question of home became not merely logistical, but deeply existential. Displacement disrupted not only geography but also networks of meaning, identity, and attachment. The loss of home was multilayered: the disappearance of physical space, the severing of communal ties, and the collapse of a political project rooted in democratic aspirations.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretivist design aimed at exploring how Belarusian migrants and political exiles construct meanings of *home* and *belonging* in contexts of rupture and uncertainty. It follows the epistemological premise that knowledge about displacement is co-produced through affective, situated, and dialogical engagement (Mason 2002; Haraway 1988). Reflexivity, empathy, and attention to emotional geographies are treated not as bias but as critical instruments of inquiry (Ellingson 2006; Rose 1993).

Research Design

The study is grounded in a reflexive thematic analysis (TA) as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). TA was chosen for its flexibility in identifying both patterned and nuanced meanings within subjective narratives. The analysis moved iteratively between inductive coding (emerging from participants' lived accounts) and deductive attention to theoretical constructs drawn from Brah, Ahmed, and Blunt & Dowling. This double movement allowed the research to maintain fidelity to participants' voices while situating them within broader conceptual debates on emotional displacement.

The analytic process followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase model:

1. Familiarization through repeated reading and memo-writing;
2. Initial coding (semantic and latent) of meaning units across transcripts;
3. Theme generation via clustering of related codes into conceptual patterns;
4. Reviewing themes in relation to theoretical framing and whole dataset coherence;
5. Defining and naming themes; and
6. Producing the narrative synthesis integrating theory and empirical illustration.

Throughout, analysis was conducted reflexively, acknowledging the researcher's dual role as both observer and participant in the wider Belarusian diaspora. This positionality was used as a resource rather than an obstacle, facilitating interpretive depth and affective attunement to the field.

Participants and Data Collection

The empirical material comprises 13 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Belarusian migrants residing in Lithuania, Poland, and Georgia. Participants were recruited through community networks and snowball sampling to ensure diversity of age, gender, occupation, and migration status (e.g., humanitarian visa, asylum, temporary protection).

Interviews were conducted between 2024 and early 2025 in Belarusian or Russian, each lasting 45–90 minutes. They explored three thematic blocks:

1. Meanings of home and belonging;
2. Mobility and displacement;
3. Symbolic practices, identity, and social relationships.

Fieldwork was designed to elicit both narrative and sensory dimensions of homing. Participants were invited to describe spaces, objects, smells, and gestures that evoked safety or estrangement – an approach inspired by *emotional geography* (Davidson, Bondi & Smith 2005) and *material culture* methods (Tolia-Kelly 2004). Notes on tone, pauses, and non-verbal cues were recorded immediately after each interview to preserve emotional texture.

Data were analyzed through an iterative, inductive process of coding and interpretation. Key thematic clusters emerged around:

- Practices of Homing (domestic routines, spatial practices, sensory familiarity);
- Belonging and Community (diasporic networks, social care, mutual support);
- Symbolic Anchors (objects, memories, rituals, language);
- Spatial Navigation (housing precarity, transience, interaction with host environments);
- Emotional Geographies (feelings of loss, safety, alienation, hope, and rootedness).

Ethical Considerations

Given the political sensitivity of the topic and the emotional vulnerability of participants, the research followed strict ethical guidelines (European Commission's Horizon 2020 ethics framework and Belmont Report (1979) principles). Informed consent was obtained in all cases, with participants given the option to withdraw or skip any question. Attention was paid to emotional cues during interviews to avoid re-traumatization, and participants were offered the opportunity to review or amend their transcripts. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout.

Analytical Rigour and Reflexivity

To ensure the credibility and transparency of interpretation, the study followed Tracy's (2010) framework for qualitative quality, which emphasizes *credibility*, *resonance*, and *sincerity*.

- Credibility was achieved by grounding interpretations in rich, verbatim data and by cross-checking thematic patterns through peer debriefing with migration scholars. These discussions helped challenge assumptions and refine category boundaries.
- Resonance refers to the extent to which findings evoke recognition and meaning for readers and participants. This was supported through participant feedback on transcript excerpts and through the inclusion of vivid, contextually situated narratives that communicate emotional depth.
- Sincerity involved ongoing reflexivity about the researcher's positionality within the Belarusian diaspora, documented through analytical memos that traced interpretive decisions and emotional responses throughout the process.

The methodology thus balances *emotional proximity* and *analytic distance*: it is not a neutral recording of migrant experience but a reflexive engagement with the politics of belonging as it unfolds in the everyday life of exile. Visual tools such as thematic matrices and mind maps were used to identify connections, contradictions, and silences within and across narratives. This approach made it possible to analyze not only pragmatic strategies of adaptation, but also the emotional and symbolic labor of sustaining meaning and presence in unstable conditions.

By integrating personal trajectories, theoretical insight, and grounded empirical material, this study contributes to contemporary debates on displacement, identity, and belonging. It shows how

Belarusian exiles, far from being passive victims of rupture, engage in continuous, affective world-making – crafting homes that are not inherited but improvised, not fixed but foldable, not merely remembered but actively lived in.

Conceptual Grounding

The theoretical architecture of this study interlaces Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space, Sara Ahmed's affective orientations, Blunt and Dowling's feminist geography of home, and complementary frameworks such as Morley's notion of home as a mobile constellation, the broader field of emotional geography and Yuval-Davis's distinction between emotional belonging and the politics of belonging. Together these perspectives conceptualize home as a mobile, affective infrastructure continually negotiated through emotion, embodiment, power and political recognition rather than a fixed territorial condition.

Brah (1996) characterizes diaspora space as an intersection of diaspora, border and displacement. It is not only about migrant communities but a confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes where the histories and identities of migrants and those deemed indigenous intersect. Within this space, home and displacement coexist; belonging is always contested. Adopting this lens foregrounds the migrant experiences studied here as part of a wider field of intersecting positionalities and power relations.

Ahmed's phenomenology of emotion translates spatial belonging into embodied affect. She argues that emotions involve orientation toward objects: feelings “stick” to sensory cues and orient bodies toward or away from places, people and ideas. Home is experienced through such orientations – through gestures, textures, smells and proximities that align bodies with spaces. Conversely, estrangement arises when orientations are interrupted, producing disorientation. Importantly, Ahmed distinguishes between affective orientations and affective conditions; the former refers to directional feelings, while the latter describes general emotional climates shaped by structural forces. In migrants' narratives, hope appears as an affective orientation to the future, whereas precarity or cruel optimism exemplify affective conditions that permeate everyday life.

Blunt and Dowling (2006) extend this analysis into the everyday. Their feminist geography of home reconceptualizes home not as a fixed shelter but as a matrix of social relations and emotions with wide symbolic and ideological meanings. Homemaking is a form of emotional labour and moral geography: the repetitive and ethical work through

which people make livable worlds despite instability. It encompasses practices of care, hosting, arranging and maintaining that reassemble belonging under conditions of displacement and reveals how gender, class and power shape domestic space.

Complementary frameworks further nuance this study. Morley's idea of home as a mobile constellation emphasises that homemaking is both relational and symbolic: a network of practices, attachments and mediated meanings that travels with migrants. Emotional geography shows that space is not simply inhabited but felt, structured by affective relations of safety, memory and intimacy. Yuval-Davis distinguishes between emotional belonging and the politics of belonging: while emotional belonging refers to attachments, the politics of belonging concerns the maintenance of boundaries that separate those who belong to a community from those who do not. This distinction links migrants' affective attachments to regimes of recognition, exclusion and inequality.

By weaving these strands together, the study situates itself within a feminist-phenomenological strand of emotional geography. Home is understood as a mobile infrastructure of feeling and belonging as an ongoing negotiation across spatial, political and temporal boundaries. This conceptual scaffolding guides the qualitative design—a reflexive thematic analysis of Belarusian migrants' narratives — and informs the sampling strategy and analytic coding. It illuminates how, under conditions of political exile, diaspora space becomes not only intersectional but affectively circular, refolded through routine, imagination, digital proximity and the interplay between affective orientations and affective conditions.

Within this framework, the research explores how Belarusian migrants construct home and attachment through everyday routines, symbolic references and social relationships in politically charged, transnational settings.

Findings

The interviews revealed that homing practices were among the most immediate and tangible ways in which participants negotiated their sense of belonging in exile. While the loss of home was frequently described as profound and destabilizing, many respondents responded by engaging in small yet symbolically rich acts that recreated a feeling of safety, presence and identity in new environments.

The first cluster, Practices of Homing, focuses on the embodied, sensory, and relational dimensions of how participants created

domesticity, ritual, and meaning — often from fragments, emerged through repetition, improvisation, and a careful balance between familiarity and adaptation. As such, they offer a valuable lens through which to understand how displaced individuals reclaim a sense of self and place in unfamiliar or temporary contexts.

1. Practices of Homing: Embodied Domesticity and Affective Anchoring

For Belarusian migrants in exile, *homing* emerged as an embodied, improvisational response to spatial and emotional dislocation — a practice through which the familiar was reassembled under precarious conditions. While many experienced the loss of home as a rupture of stability and meaning, they simultaneously engaged in creative strategies to make spaces feel livable. Through sensory routines, symbolic artifacts, and spatial agency, participants reassembled feelings of familiarity and control, often in provisional or precarious housing situations. These gestures — arranging objects, maintaining rituals, re-establishing sensory familiarity — constitute what Blunt and Dowling (2006) describe as the *emotional labour of homemaking*: the daily work of turning uncertainty into coherence.

Defining Home: Affective Anchors and Imaginative Assemblages

“Home is what you truly are — how you feel right now”.

Participants’ narratives revealed that *home* was less a fixed container and more a relational process enacted through repetition and sensory alignment. Ahmed’s (2006) notion of *orientation* helps conceptualize this — homing as the bodily act of turning toward stability within a disoriented world. The smell of baked bread, the feel of linen, or the presence of a lamp became vectors of affective direction — moments when self and space briefly “faced” each other again.

Material anchors such as inherited books, textiles, or tools often functioned as mnemonic devices stabilizing subjectivity across places, carrying the residues of what Brah (1996) calls *diaspora space* — a terrain where memory and belonging intersect with displacement. Home also acted as a *zone of autonomy*: several interviewees described domestic space as “a place that works by my rules,” echoing Ahmed’s (2006) argument that orientation is political — it defines which bodies can shape space rather than merely inhabit it.

Hosting others became a performative assertion of belonging. Participants spoke of *home circulation* – the willingness to share one’s home with those in need, and the recognition that home can be shared, lent, or recreated across contexts. Hospitality, here, was not only generosity but a form of spatial citizenship: the power to include others within one’s affective domain. This fluidity complicates static models of domesticity, revealing home as a distributed network rather than a singular address. Ultimately, homing in exile was less about restoring the past than rehearsing presence – a diasporic ethics of maintenance (Brah 1996; Blunt & Dowling 2006).

Home was also framed as a space of psychological safety and expressive freedom, particularly in the context of full embodiment – including LGBTQ+ identity, self-care, and vulnerability. It was frequently described as a base: “a place I can return to if I lose everything”, or “a space that restores me”. For some, it was metaphorical or abstract – “messy, fragmented, and improvised” – while for others, it was anchored in tangible details: a bed, a table, a corner to drop one’s belongings, a handwritten address on an envelope.

Evolving Concepts of Home and Belonging

Over time, participants’ understandings of *home* transformed from fixed and inherited notions into fluid, mobile practices. In contrast to the homes of their childhood or pre-exile life – which were often associated with stability, family rituals, and material presence – their current experiences of home were shaped through intentional acts and affective investments, a mobile practice, something learned and re-imagined across borders. This transformation exemplifies what Yuval-Davis (2006) calls the *politics of belonging*: the continual negotiation of emotional attachments within shifting boundaries of recognition.

Early narratives contrasted the given home of the past with the constructed home of the present. In Belarus, home was remembered as materially grounded – a locus of kinship and predictable rhythm. In exile, homemaking required what Ahmed (1999) terms *affective re-orientation*: turning toward unfamiliar environments until they began to “feel right.” Participants described the process through embodied cues – arranging beds, planting herbs, or restoring small domestic rituals – as if each act recalibrated their inner compass toward safety and agency.

“Between routines, *life happens* – and that’s when you notice it”.

Belonging, however, remained unstable, emerging as a rhythm rather than a destination. This sense of *temporal belonging*, grounded in

repetition rather than permanence, resonates with Brah's (1996) idea of *diaspora space* as performance. Even minor routines, such as coffee or lamp-lighting, served as signposts of the right to inhabit space despite legal precarity, unresolved documentation, and shared housing. Declarations like "I have a right to be here" articulate what Ahmed (2006) calls *orientation toward futurity*: the bodily stance asserting one's place in the world, *visibility, existence, and the possibility of futurity* in exile.

Hospitality again surfaced as an ethical gesture. Inviting others or sharing rooms enacted inclusion and solidarity reminiscent of the 2020 protests. Across accounts, participants described learning to "build from fragments" – a *craft of domesticity privileging* adaptability and care over permanence. This included granting themselves "permission to expand the suitcase", both metaphorically and literally, carrying the symbolic elements of home wherever they relocated.

Belonging, however, remained a more elusive and emotionally complex domain. For some, it emerged through the development of routines, through the feeling of being "emotionally and creatively in love" with a community, or through familiarity with routes and automatisms of daily life. These rhythms of life – catching the same bus, visiting the same bakery – gave shape to a quiet sense of embeddedness. At the same time, many spoke of an ambiguous, often *liminal* experience of *belonging* or as a learned competency, an ongoing affective negotiation between displacement and attachment, aligning with Yuval-Davis (2006) and Ahmed (2004). *Belonging* became a set of layered moments, not an arrival. Crucially, many emphasized that *belonging* is not something one simply enters into – it is cultivated. It grows through repetition, emotional effort, and care.

In some narratives, the memory of childhood rituals – of how one's parents hosted or maintained routines – offered a template for how *belonging* could be practiced again, deliberately and with tenderness.

Children in exile, too, were described as growing up in a world where the boundary between past and present homes was increasingly blurred. Their sense of *belonging* was often described as *fluid*, evolving with their parents' capacity to construct home anew, even in the face of instability.

In sum, participants' evolving concepts of *home* and *belonging* point to a dynamic interplay of *autonomy, care, memory, and improvisation*. *Homing* and *belonging* were not destinations but ongoing negotiations – emotionally laborious, at times fractured, yet full of imaginative potential. As one participant summarized:

"Home is collapsible. You carry it and unfold it wherever you need".

2. Mobility and Displacement

For many participants, mobility after 2020 was not a voluntary adventure but an *affective condition* — a way of living marked by movement, repetition, and the absence of closure. Displacement reconfigured not only geography but also the temporal structure of life. Everyday routines became provisional, plans suspended, and even the sense of future fragmented into visa cycles or school terms. In this rhythm of uncertainty, *home became a choreography of temporary stability*, repeatedly assembled and disassembled.

“Every time I moved, it felt like leaving a possible future behind”.
“I always tried to return the place to its original state and leave behind a symbolic seed — a small gift for the space”.

The inability to shape a rented space, or the choice to buy a beautiful but ultimately disposable object, reflected a tension between impermanence and presence. As one participant said:

“At first, I had no influence on my surroundings. The way the space was, that’s how it stayed”.

Living in Transit: The Aesthetics of the Provisional

Participants described long sequences of relocations — across borders, rented apartments, and temporary accommodations. This “life with a suitcase” epitomizes what Malkki (1992) terms the *national order of things* disrupted: people once categorized as sedentary citizens were thrust into mobile, uncertain statuses. Yet within this rupture, many cultivated what Ahmed (1999) calls *affective orientation*: subtle bodily adjustments that make transience bearable. They created micro-environments of comfort — arranging notebooks, lighting warm lamps, or keeping symbolic objects visible — to restore continuity between body and space.

“I had a year of travel with one suitcase. Everything essential plus embroidery threads, red and white, like the folk patterns — fit inside”.

This everyday labour of adaptation carried both exhaustion and beauty. Participants noted that “the hardest to lose are the processes, not the furniture,” signalling that mobility unsettles habits of embodiment rather than possessions. Cleaning, cooking, or decorating newly rented flats became acts of spatial claiming — small assertions that “I am

here.” Through such gestures, displacement became *felt* as both loss and creation: a practice of maintaining coherence amid fragmentation.

Emotional Weight and the Politics of Temporariness

Displacement entailed profound emotional costs: grief, fragmentation, financial uncertainty, and existential fatigue. Many participants struggled with the sense of a collapsed future, describing a world with no imaginable trajectory forward. They mourned not only their lost homes but also the ability to plan, to hope, to fully relax into life.

Repeated moves, legal precarity, and indefinite waiting produced emotional fatigue — what participants described as “living in suspended breath” — alert, adaptive, but never fully present. These accounts illustrate *the emotional geography of liminality* (Bondi et al. 2005): migrants remain alert and adaptable, yet rarely at rest. Many could imagine catastrophic futures but struggled to envision ordinary continuity. This incapacity to project oneself forward reveals how displacement alters temporal belonging; the future shrinks into administrative intervals.

The inability to control timelines or return to closed homes weighed heavily. People spoke of frozen apartments, spaces gone dormant, and the phobia of abandoned homes. Some said it was painful just to imagine their empty homes, and they longed to send someone to “add presence to the void”.

The condition of living in constant alertness — unable to simultaneously feel both safe and mobile — shaped their emotional rhythms:

*“You can’t live in both states at once. In the tense state, you can act fast.
In the relaxed one, you can see beauty”.*

Other narratives revealed how resisting the feeling of being at home could delay hard decisions — a way to remain in limbo:

“If I let myself feel at home, I’d have no excuse not to take the next big step”.

“I’m stuck in-between — I don’t have to decide anything yet”.

One of the most painful experiences reported was the inability to return home:

“What hurts most is not being allowed back. I don’t have the right to live or build a life there”.

“In Belarus, I didn’t need to defend myself. We were equals”.

Mobility Connections: Holding on across Distance

Emotional geographies of exile are not defined solely by absence; they are sustained through *distributed presence*. Participants maintained transnational attachments via digital communication, familiar recipes, or cherished objects. These connections formed what Brah (1996) describes as *diaspora space* – a network of overlapping homes that coexist in memory and imagination rather than geography. Through photos, playlists, and inherited heirlooms, they enacted a form of *affective archiving* that kept past and present intertwined.

Social media, for example, functioned as both connective tissue and emotional burden: it allowed visibility but also reminded migrants of what was lost. Still, many preferred this liminal form of belonging to the erasure of silence. They lived “between absences,” constructing a sense of continuity across dispersed locations – an echo of Morley’s (2000) argument that contemporary homes are increasingly *mediated and mobile*.

“Being Belarusian now is a choreography through uncertainty”.

Participants also carried a wide array of physical and emotional items from home to home – what some called *portable rituals* or *anchor objects*. These included tea sets, children’s toys, national embroidery threads, letters, photographs, and even protest symbols. For many, these were more than objects; they were vehicles of *continuity, care, and identity*. The act of laying out a familiar object, or simply remembering the layout of a past apartment, offered emotional grounding in uncertain contexts.

Displacement Adaptation: Grounding and Improvising or Fragile Balance of Motion and Stillness

Relocation transformed participants’ relationships to *home* and self. The metaphor of standing on a two-legged stool, needing a third leg – *groundedness* – recurred in several accounts. Some emphasized the freedom not to rebuild a full home each time, instead enhancing the everyday:

“Just because it’s temporary doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be beautiful”.

Adaptation often relied on what participants called “building a shell” – an interior space of control amidst external instability. For some, this took material form in decorating; for others, it manifested through

internalized rituals like morning yoga, tea ceremonies, or curating playlists for new cities. Such practices exemplify Ahmed's (2006) concept of *affective alignment*: through repetition, bodies learn to inhabit the unfamiliar until it begins to "feel like home".

Yet even within this temporal compression, participants resisted despair through aesthetic and affective improvisation. Participants described resisting large purchases, instead investing in *temporary beauty*: a monthly bouquet, a warm lamp, or a carefully prepared meal represented what Morley (2000) might call *acts of re-domestication* – efforts to make the mobile life symbolically inhabitable. Such choices assert agency over space and time, contesting the passivity often ascribed to displaced populations. Routines and rituals – especially those tied to sensory pleasure or bodily comfort – helped ease this *in-betweenness*.

"The hardest to lose are the processes, not the furniture – the little systems that grounded me".

"Every time I arrive in a new place, I want to clean it, to claim it as mine".

Mobility, paradoxically, also expanded horizons of self-definition. Several participants reported feeling more expressive and autonomous abroad, echoing the emancipatory potential within displacement noted by Brah (1996). Migration disrupted normative boundaries of belonging, enabling experimentation with identity and lifestyle. The road, however uncertain, became a site of self-making rather than mere loss.

Ultimately, the interviews reveal that displacement produces a double consciousness: the desire to move and the longing to stay. Participants lived in tension between fluidity and rootedness, a state that Ahmed (1999) might describe as *being in movement without direction*. Many expressed the wish to "drop the bags" – to inhabit slowness and permanence – even while recognizing that mobility had become integral to their sense of self. This paradox marks the emotional grammar of post-2020 Belarusian exile: *a belonging sustained through impermanence*.

Mobility here is not a temporary disruption but a durable condition of life. Through repetitive gestures of adaptation, these migrants practice what can be called *affective endurance*: a resilience built not on certainty but on the capacity to keep reorienting, to find livability in motion. In this light, displacement becomes both geography and method – a way of continually composing oneself amid the instability of the world.

Participants frequently expressed the inner shift from defining *home* purely as place to recognizing it as an active process — a shell, a cocoon, a composition of rituals, things, and care work.

“My home is where I am and my child is”.

Others spoke of growing out of *minimalism* and *mobility*: while earlier in life they prided themselves on flexibility and lightness, later experiences underscored the need for *rootedness*, *stability*, and *creative agency*.

This evolving relationship to displacement — from survival to strategic adaptation — underscores the complexity of exile. It is not only about losing a place, but about negotiating the terms of living, feeling, and *belonging* across fragmented spaces and timelines.

What emerges from these narratives is not a singular trajectory, but a *kaleidoscope* of techniques and emotions — ranging from grief and improvisation to ritual and aesthetic reclamation. Together, they map how migrants recalibrate their sense of *self* in motion.

3. Identity and Social Relationships

Reassembling the Self or Becoming Otherwise: Identity through Rupture

Migration forced participants to renegotiate who they were and how they belonged. Displacement unsettled pre-existing categories of nationality, profession, and gender, generating what Hall (1990) describes as a *diasporic subjectivity* — a self constantly produced “through difference and through transformation.” Many reflected that exile marked a clear *before and after*, echoing Gilroy’s (1993) notion of double consciousness: seeing one’s culture simultaneously from within and from the outside.

Rather than a loss of identity, this in-betweenness often became a site of reflexive growth. Participants described feeling both detached from Belarus and newly capable of interpreting it. Through political trauma and relocation, they developed an awareness of their own moral and civic agency — what one might term a *post-sovereign selfhood*, decoupled from the authoritarian state yet rooted in shared ethical memory.

Participants spoke about *identity* as a process shaped by rupture, loss, discovery, and relational transformation. Migration catalyzed personal growth but also introduced periods of grief, confusion, and

existential recalibration. Many described a deep internal shift – the feeling of having “grown up so much that I no longer belong to anything”.

Some embraced this dislocation, describing it as a source of insight:

“There are hard periods, but when you look at the full picture, it’s a fascinating experience”.

Others reflected on how memory works as a bridge, enabling them to relive happiness even in retrospect:

“I already know what I will look back on and say, ‘I was truly happy in that moment’”.

Traumatic or transformative events – particularly the Belarusian protests – served as key *identity markers*:

“It was a before-and-after moment. That movement made us realize who we are, what we can do, what injustice means”.

This process was profoundly affective. As Ahmed (2004) argues, emotions “stick” to bodies, shaping collective attachments. Anger at repression and nostalgia for community became not private feelings but organizing forces of identity. The protests of 2020 persisted as affective touchstones: they bound participants to a transnational moral landscape even when geographical proximity was impossible.

Care, Reciprocity, and the Affective Politics of Belonging

In exile, relationships became the principal medium through which identity was sustained. Acts of care – hosting friends, sharing apartments, exchanging emotional labour—operated as micro-politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006). Through these gestures, participants performed what Ahmed calls affective alignment: orienting themselves toward others who “feel right”.

Such ties were rarely stable. Communities formed around projects, creative collaborations, or mutual aid initiatives and then dissolved, revealing what Brah (1996) would term the fluid temporality of diaspora space. Belonging here was not a permanent state but an ongoing negotiation of proximity and distance. Friendships that began as survival networks evolved into what participants called post-families – chosen constellations of intimacy that substituted for kin left behind: *“Georgia became the place where my family and post-family could actually meet”.*

At the same time, caring too much could become exhausting. Several respondents described the need for *emotional budgeting* deciding when and how to give support as care and attention became *scarce resources*, managed with the precision of donation metaphors:

“Helping is like donating. You’d better give a little than regret giving too much. I want to help 100 percent, and that means knowing when I have the capacity”.

Participants described *relational budgeting* – listening only when fully present, refusing to multi-task emotional labor, protecting intimacy by intention “*now I listen only when I’m not doing anything else. Because if I divide myself, it all falls apart*”.

A recurring theme was being “married to the country by love and by pragmatism”, suggesting both emotional investment and compromise – emotional connection fluctuated, affected by instability, relationships, and fear of loss. This mutuality, sometimes fragile, sometimes deeply affirming, helped counterbalance the isolation of transience, which echoes feminist scholarship on affective labour (Hardt & Negri 2000; Berlant 2011): emotional energy itself becomes a scarce resource in conditions of precarity. Within these negotiations, belonging was both nurtured and rationed, revealing its economic as well as ethical dimensions.

Otherness and Emotional Distance

Despite new connections, participants frequently encountered an enduring sense of *otherness* – a feeling of being “almost at home but not quite”. This liminal affect underscores Ahmed’s (1999) concept of *stranger encounters*: the moment when the migrant body becomes the surface on which difference is read. Being a guest in Georgia or Poland meant continuous translation – linguistic, emotional, and moral.

“In this new city, I’m just a deep tourist. My foreignness follows me out the door”.

Experiences of *otherness* ranged from fleeting to profound. Participants felt like outsiders in both intimate and systemic ways. Some described becoming emotionally self-sufficient – a defense against instability. Others said their hearts were “cast in plaster” to avoid future loss:

“Here, I can’t fall in love. It feels too childlike, like adults solve problems for me”.

Isolation was most acute during illness or vulnerability, when the absence of unconditional care exposed the fragility of exile. Yet this solitude also fostered autonomy: many learned to treat self-reliance as a survival skill. Some adopted *hyper-independence* — “a team of one” — but admitted this was fragile:

“If I get sick, the system collapses. I have to remember how to reboot it”.

For others, depression arrived after the early euphoria of migration faded. One participant called it “*the post-party crash*”. Yet they still saw their trajectory as positive: “it’s all part of moving toward something better”, or stating that “*the inability to be at home is part of the forward motion*”.

In this sense, the experience of not belonging generated a paradoxical form of *agency through distance*. Migration gave space to shed past pressures and claim new freedoms:

“Back home, being publicly visible was scary. Here, it’s easier to express myself”.

The inability to return, or to be fully included elsewhere, produced reflective subjectivities — individuals who could critique both homeland and hostland from the threshold between them.

Community as Emotional Cartography

Participants described *new communities* not as permanent affiliations, but as *fragile formations* around projects, proximity, or care, functioning as *affective laboratories* — spaces for trying out togetherness in temporary forms, even without guarantees. Recognizing the fragility of these ties — without denying their value — became a form of *diasporic wisdom*. These were improvisational, temporary, and shaped by emotional alignment more than shared histories “*communities here form around specific projects—and then dissolve*”. While across contexts, the diaspora is described not as a bounded group but as a moving emotional geography — a network traced through memory, digital media, and shared affect.

Friendships stretched across continents through chat groups and collaborative projects. These diffuse connections exemplify what Morley (2000) terms *transnational home territories*: spaces of belonging created through mobility rather than rootedness.

Some described *emotional maps* — inner geographies stitched from memory — that helped them belong to cities:

“In Minsk, I carry the city inside me. In new places, the emotional skin grows slower”.

Familiar streets of Minsk were re-imagined in Vilnius or Tbilisi. Emotional maps overlapped – landscapes from Minsk, Batumi, and Lviv reconstructed in memory: “I see the Swedish forest, but I imagine I’m at Park Čaliuskintsev”.

Recognition and contribution replaced proximity as the primary markers of community. Offering artistic work, professional skills, or civic activism became ways to “earn” presence within the diaspora space. This *ethic of contribution transformed* belonging from inheritance into praxis – a form of affective citizenship enacted through doing rather than being.

Practising Hope: From Survival to Creative Agency

Resilience appeared not as stoic perseverance but as a deeply relational phenomenon. Participants repeatedly described drawing strength from care networks – friends, collaborators, digital communities – that redistributed emotional load and validated their presence. These alliances illustrate Yuval-Davis’s (2006) distinction between the *emotional* and the *political* dimensions of belonging: affective attachments become the ground on which new political subjectivities are rehearsed.

Hope, in this sense, was not a feeling but a *techne* – a cultivated skill. Participants spoke of “*training the muscle of asking for help*” or “*relearning how to rely on others*”. The act of asking for help – once seen as a weakness – became a sign of *emotional maturity*:

“It’s very hard to ask for help, but I’m training that muscle. It’s important to have a circle where you support others and where they support you”.

Such gestures constitute the micro-pedagogies of endurance that feminist theorists have long associated with *affective labour* (Hardt & Negri 2000; Berlant 2011). Through care, humour, and mutual support, exiles collectively produced the emotional surplus that allowed life to remain livable.

Skills that Do Not Burn: Emotional Capital and Cultural Continuity

Across accounts, migrants identified a repertoire of *unsinkable skills* – *professional competencies*, *creative abilities*, and *emotional tools* and *relational capacities* that travelled with them – abilities they could rely on no matter where they landed.

“I know what I can do. I’ve gained separation, creative ideas, and I enjoy making them happen”.

These competencies acted as *affective capital*: resources that could be re-activated across contexts, reaffirming agency within structural precarity. One participant described rediscovering self-worth through cultural work: “I realized I had created something here, something appreciated”. Resilience was not just about survival — it was about the capacity to imagine and pursue *purpose*. One participant spoke of a deepening commitment to Belarusian cultural identity, describing it as both *resistance* and *reconstruction*:

“I want to mine Belarusian-ness — to make it richer, more visible, more appealing. To contribute to something that hundreds started before me, and that hundreds will continue after”.

This echoes Brah’s (1996) observation that diasporic existence entails not only rupture but the production of *new cartographies of competence*. The Belarusian case extends this argument: dispossession generates a heightened reflexivity about what can be carried — emotionally, symbolically, and materially — when everything else must be left behind. Such reflexivity constitutes a form of epistemic resilience: knowing how to rebuild the world from fragments.

Imagining Futures: Between Cruel Optimism and Radical Tenderness

Hope in exile oscillates between aspiration and ache. Participants often articulated what Berlant (2011) terms *cruel optimism* — the attachment to futures that may never arrive, yet remain necessary for survival. Some participants described a kind of *hopeful stubbornness* — not quite optimism, but a defiant belief in transformation:

“I have this naive, silly certainty that everything is going in the right direction”.

For many participants, migration became a paradoxical journey through *loss* into a form of *existential gain*. While others expressed it through radically expanded horizons:

“From a place where nothing was possible, I moved to a place where anything is. I can be anywhere on this planet and do what I want”.
“At this point in my life, I’ve realized — I can do anything”.

Hope and emotional endurance were not abstract ideals — they emerged from *grounded, embodied routines, collective memory*, and the *affective labor* of making life livable in uncertainty. Across interviews, hope appeared not as something possessed, but as something *practiced*: a skill honed through repetition, imagination, and relational constancy.

Affective Futurity and the Re-Temporing of Belonging

The temporal horizon of exile is discontinuous: it loops between suspended presents and speculative futures. Participants reported widely variable planning horizons — from weeks to years — shaped by documents, housing, finances, or emotional readiness. Many lost long-term perspective after the political upheavals of 2020 and the pandemic:

“*Planning collapsed. Since then, I live from one visa deadline to another*”.

Yet within this discontinuity, participants articulated a slow re-temporing of belonging — what might be called *diasporic futurity*. Futures were plotted not as linear progress but as *repetitive hope*. Even when not immediately attainable, the *image of a future home* functioned as a psychic horizon — something to move toward.

This dream coexisted with a humble, everyday *practice of resilience*: morning playlists for different cities, yoga mats in rented flats, warm lamps in winter evenings. One interviewee put it simply:

“*Freedom is chaos — unless you build the structure that shapes your day*”.

These micro-temporalities align with Tolia-Kelly’s (2004) concept of *re-memory*: embodied repetitions that stitch affect to material practice. In this light, Belarusian migrants demonstrate how futurity itself becomes a homing practice — an ongoing attempt to “*make the future livable*”, even when the coordinates of return remain absent.

Reclaiming Temporality as Agency

Ultimately, the narratives of hope and endurance reveal that *time*, rather than space, becomes the primary terrain of belonging. To persist through delay, to imagine while waiting, is to perform what could be described as *temporal sovereignty*: reclaiming authorship over the rhythm of one’s own unfolding. These migrants inhabit an expanded

field of potentiality – fragile yet generative – where belonging is composed not through possession of place but through continuity of affect.

In this sense, Belarusian exile offers a paradigmatic case for rethinking emotional geography: it exposes how *hope operates as spatial practice*, how care and imagination literally construct the coordinates of a livable world. What endures is not certainty but orientation – an embodied movement towards possible futures.

Conclusion

This study explored how Belarusian migrants and political exiles after 2020 reconfigure their sense of home, belonging, and selfhood in contexts marked by rupture, displacement, and precarity. Through a reflexive thematic analysis of thirteen in-depth interviews, it traced how *homing* emerges not as a spatial endpoint but as an affective and ethical practice – a continuous negotiation between loss and creation, memory and movement. By positioning the analysis within diaspora studies, emotional geography, and feminist phenomenology, the research advances an understanding of exile as an *emotional architecture*: a mobile infrastructure through which life becomes livable when territorial belonging is denied.

The findings reveal that neither home nor identity is fixed – both are continuously reassembled through practices of care, creativity, memory, and embodied routine – as an affective infrastructure: a foldable, mobile constellation of sensory cues, symbolic objects, and relational rituals. *Belonging* emerged not from legal status or physical presence, but through emotional investments, accumulated routines, and the courage to remain present in the face of impermanence. At the same time, many participants experienced ongoing feelings of *otherness*, intensified by social fragmentation, linguistic barriers, and the inability to access care in moments of vulnerability.

Rather than viewing mobility as purely dislocating, this study shows that it can also produce new subjectivities, temporalities, and solidarities. Participants navigated short-term planning horizons while cultivating long-term imaginaries – dreams of groundedness that coexisted with adaptive strategies for survival and expression. Emotional resilience, as expressed in this research, is not a static quality but a form of *affective labour* – sustained through mutual support, creative agency, and the maintenance of transnational connections.

These insights contribute to broader discussions in migration and diaspora scholarship by foregrounding the *emotional and relational geographies* of displacement. The Belarusian case illustrates how

individuals under political pressure respond not only with flight or nostalgia, but with innovation, resistance, and a radical reimagining of home. As this community continues to negotiate exile, their practices of homing, belonging, and becoming offer a lens into how the future is not simply awaited — but actively composed, one gesture, one room, one connection at a time.

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NO HOPE? — SINGLE MIGRANT MOTHERS AS A PRECARIAT: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY CASE FROM BATUMI, GEORGIA

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Abstract: Childcare dramatically affects careers, opportunities, and happiness in migration. Single migrant mothers (solo moms) face additional difficulties (exclusion factors), which make them unhappy and overworked, lacking motivation, hope, and professional identity, and on the way to becoming a member of the precariat. The complex intersection of solo parenting combined with a migration has not been thoroughly researched yet, especially in relation to Belarusian migrants, but there are some connecting issues in the field of higher education, academic, and art careers. This autoethnographic study analyzes the experience of a single mother living with a three-year-old boy in migration in Batumi, Georgia from February 2022 to July 2023, highlights exclusion factors, and shows some examples of inclusive practices for single migrant mothers in Georgia.

Keywords: Autoethnography, single mother, exclusion, happiness, migration, women labour.

Introduction

Childcare dramatically affects careers, opportunities, and happiness in migration. It takes a significant amount of a mother's time and energy, even when living in one's homeland in a family with two parents supported by other relatives. Migration creates additional social barriers



to education, healthcare, social support, and labour. Single migrant mothers (solo moms) face all these additional difficulties that lead to their exclusion from professional life (i.e., exclusion factors). This autoethnographic study analyzes my experience as a single mother living with a three-year-old boy in migration in Batumi, Georgia from February 2022 to July 2023 after social collapse in Belarus and war near the Belarusian border. I, like thousands of Belarusians, was forced to migrate by external pressure without any serious preparation.

As a method, autoethnography uses personal experience to describe and interpret cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (Adams & Herrmann 2023). This text focuses on my personal experience and the social practices I observed and personally participated in. The method has three main components. The first, *auto*, involves the author using their experiences, reflections, and theories in the manuscript (Adams & Herrmann 2023: 2). Here, the researcher becomes the research tool, incorporating their mind, body, emotions, and beliefs (Adams & Herrmann 2023: 4). For example, while I am writing, I have a child with me, and I need to divide my attention between typing, editing and communicating with him, inventing a game for him, all of which influences my research and the story I write. The second component *ethno* pushes us outside of and beyond ourselves to identify/challenge cultural expectations, beliefs and practices (not only mine, but also other solo moms I have met in migration, and our interactions with social institutions), and then, facilitate a nuanced understanding of these cultural phenomena. And the third component *graphy* – with attention to the process, quality, craft, and ethic of representation, including storytelling devices – means rules for describing experience and cultural phenomena around how to tell about it; thus, storytelling, the form of presentation, is very important. However, I choose not to include the names and pictures of my Belarusian subjects because of personal security concerns. By incorporating creative elements – such as vivid personal anecdotes, emotional reflections, and narrative structure – I make the lived experiences of single migrant mothers more relatable and accessible. This approach helps to highlight the emotional and practical complexities of migration and solo parenting, which might otherwise be lost in a more traditional academic format. The creative style invites readers to empathize with my journey and to understand the nuances of exclusion, precarity, and resilience from an insider's perspective.

This study demonstrates how both childcare and migration serve as additional barriers to professional life for single mothers. Consequently, single mothers experience unhappiness, overwork, and social isolation. They often lose motivation, hope, and a sense of professional

identity, leading to self-accusation and a transition into the precariat, characterized by insecure, unpredictable employment and income without long-term stability. The issue of the conjunction of solo parenting and migration has not been thoroughly researched yet, especially for contemporary Belarusians, but there are some connecting issues in the fields of higher education, academia, and art careers (Binuya 2016; Hauber-Özer 2019; Kurz & Davis & Browne 2021; Leyser 2014–2025). This research does not aim to present a complete picture. Instead, it highlights specific ways in which single migrant mothers can address uncertainty and precarity, such as by gradually building personal support networks in both physical and digital spaces, and by advocating for greater awareness of the unique needs of solo parents in migration. One of the ways to maintain a professional attitude is to participate in networking events. Such participation is important for career development (especially in information technology, IT) since it results in fruitful networking, social capital growth, learning about new technologies, and bringing overall positive emotions and motivation. However, single mothers often find themselves excluded from networking opportunities because of the factors mentioned above. One of the ways to address this problem is to create a more inclusive environment and/or provide additional financing to enable their participation.

This research examines inclusive practices for migrant single mothers in Georgia, also considering the economic aspects of their experiences, including transportation, accommodation, food, designated spaces, care, and activities for children.

My story

My personal story serves as the starting point for this study. In February 2022, just before the full-scale Russian invasion, my son and I came to Georgia. My son was three years old at the time, and a friend of mine, who was facing health problems, asked for my assistance in relocating to Batumi. It is necessary to mention that Belarusians still have a deep emotional memory of survival in wars: my grandma told me how she ran with babies under warplanes and hid in swamps for months, my mother told me about hard hunger and cold in the evacuation. Every Belarusian family has such stories — thirty percent of our population was killed in World War II. The anti-government protests felt very nerve wracking and frustrating because of deep generational trauma. Additionally, there were no tickets for direct flights. Our route was to go from Minsk, Belarus, to Dubai, UAE, to Tbilisi, Georgia, and,

finally, to Batumi, Georgia. This journey took us through frosty winter to hot summer and again to an unexpected snowstorm, followed by seven hours of nighttime driving in the Caucasus mountains.

At the time, I worked as a part-time university teacher and decided to reserve one week of travel to the “warm and peaceful South”. I thought I would come back to Minsk afterwards or continue my job online as I did during COVID, when I created a distance learning university course... And it will be OK... And maybe I will find a kindergarten for my son in Batumi and that will also be OK... But the reality was very far from my expectations. It was an extremely cold and windy night when the three of us came to Batumi into a very small, cold room on the forty-fifth floor of ORBI City with a nice view of the raging sea through the snowy fog. It took two days to warm up the room with a heater and look around. My friend begged me not to leave her alone in such a situation. We were happy enough to find the necessary support from friendly locals, who advised us on where and how to buy food and other necessities, how to solve everyday problems... I am very grateful, but still not sure if it is safe to name these people publicly.

Unexpectedly, the Belarusian Ministry of Education canceled distance learning at universities, so my employment immediately ended. And what to do? How to live, what to eat, how to survive... how to take care of my child?.. Usually, the answer is to do it by myself. Help yourself on your own. I hoped that my strong employment and educational background would give me the opportunity to continue my successful career, whether offline or online, in migration. Indeed, I have the right to introduce myself as an experienced project manager and business analyst, producer and art manager (theater, street arts festivals, sound therapy art, marketing events etc.), university teacher, and independent researcher. I am a three-time graduate of Belarusian State University, having majored in radio physics and electronics, cultural and social studies, and financial management (MBA). I held successful international internships in the UK, USA, Germany, Lithuania, and Poland. I worked on EU, USAID, UNDP international projects, as well as for NGOs, universities and business organizations. But hundreds of attempts over several months were followed only by endless applications, written tests, multilevel online interviews, the preparation and translation of additional documents (mainly at night, when my son slept); and waiting for a final answer. Sometimes I received messages, saying, “Thank you for applying, you were among the three finalists, but the hiring manager decided to choose another candidate” but other times, I heard sometimes nothing at all... Every time I asked for feedback, I never got it. Imagine, never! Not a single time! Imagine how frustrating it was!

In parallel with all this mentioned above, I had to take care of a small child: his food, health, skills, language, education, emotions, physical and mental development, his environment, clothes, friends, toys, books, documents, habits, daily routine, childhood whims, games, happiness, etc. The relocation was followed by climate and food change, new illnesses (COVID, flu, Coxsackie, tonsillitis, otitis, enterovirus, rotavirus, allergies, etc.) accompanied by extremely high temperature, very fast and dangerous dehydration, nutrition restrictions, regular visits to the hospital, doctors and pharmacies, as well as endless calls to insurance. It took a lot of time, money, and energy. I never knew in advance if I would be able to work tomorrow or not. My planning horizon became narrow – just a day or a few hours. I felt overworked, always tired, socially isolated, unsuccessful and unhappy. My motivation and hope decreased, my professional identity was nearly lost, my self-respect became self-accusation, and I found myself on the way to the precariat, asking for any available sporadic job – teaching math or English; doing sound therapy and tea ceremonies; translating tours; editing blogs; short-term consulting, etc. I met other solo moms doing similar things, babysitting, cleaning, selling things...

This very impactful and difficult experience, without any possibility of furthering my professional career, gave me an understanding of what I feel, what other mothers may feel, how to help me and them, and what I can do. I thought about other solo moms and spoke to them. I have come to understand that both childcare and migration become additional exclusion factors due to the barriers they create for single mothers, for their careers, for their professional development, and for their happiness.

From the very beginning I started to look for information. At first, I contacted all my Georgian colleagues to ask for advice or a friendly meeting. Thanks to such friendly informal communication, I have been introduced to reality and cultural differences. It became clear that a manager's position is practically impossible for me without speaking Georgian and without wider local connections. So, I paid for and took long language and culture courses twice per week and did my best to participate in local events.

Second, I saw that there were families with small children playing at the shore nearly every day in any weather. We spoke to each other, shared contacts and experiences: how to find a better kindergarten or a job, what about documents, how to help each other... Our children played together, and mothers had a moment to breathe, think about themselves, look at the sun, sea, flowers; calm down, relax a bit, find people, and build their own support network.

Third, there still are a number of very useful social media groups and communities started by earlier relocated people. Often such communities are based on off-line activities, such as Eco-run, Tea People Batumi, Batumi Tea Party, Chorus Batumi, Cinema Club, and Morning Yoga. I would like to mention especially, the very active and useful Moms-of-Batumi Telegram/Instagram group, which organizes meetings for different childcare needs.

I looked for any communities – formal, informal, online, off-line; regular or occasional; small or big; led by locals or migrants – that could help me to undertake single-mothers childcare challenges in migration. In the end, this brought me to ABF Batumi, a part of the globally known network of Swedish educational circles. It has its own small space in Batumi. I was happy to find it quite quickly and volunteered to organize a circle for parents with 2–7-year-old children where moms can meet, help each other, educate their children, and exchange ideas, cloths, toys, things and important information about children, and spend own time with their children in community (more information below). Because of this, I can analyze more than my own experience. This step has opened a door to other support organizations considering the special needs of solo migrant parents (most often, mothers).

We eventually left Batumi because of the need to change my son's passport, which can only be done in Belarus, and we could not return to Batumi without permission to go abroad from his absent father, who never wanted to see my son, but that is another story.

The exclusion of single migrant mothers from professional life: Outcomes

As my story shows, childcare dramatically affects careers, opportunities, and happiness in migration. It takes a significant amount of a mother's time and energy even when living in one's homeland in a big family with many relatives (Binuya 2016; Leyser 2014–2025). Single migrant mothers (solo moms) face additional difficulties that lead to their exclusion from professional life (exclusion factors)..

Both childcare and migration become additional exclusion factors from professional life due to the barriers they create for single mothers.

The barriers created by childcare are as follows:

1) additional time (when compared to a single person or to a large family) dedicated to a child's health, education, games, going to bed, speaking, reading, sports, etc. or example, any illness requires

time spent on contacting the insurance company in another country, waiting for an answer about the approved hospital address, going to the hospital by taxi, waiting in the hospital for documents from insurance (sometimes for hours), speaking to a doctor, going to analysis, waiting for results, waiting for the doctor's diagnosis (sometimes for hours), waiting for documents (sometimes for hours), going to the pharmacy (sometimes more than one), planning the next visit to the doctor, not sleeping, trying to give water literally by drop every half hour, etc.;

2) additional payments for the child's needs, kindergarten, babysitter, school, food, clothing, accommodation, furniture, insurance, doctor, medicines, transportation, travel, visa, child socializing, events, toys, books, etc. For example, one solo mom started her own travel agency business and had to pay a day-and-night babysitter when she worked as a tour guide, while I paid the kindergarten for additional working hours and double payments for COVID tests;

3) psychological factors, such as containing emotions, sharing feelings, support, solving problems, losing one's interests due to the focus on raising a child (the strongest one for me personally), always being with the child, always speaking to him, always taking care of and helping him, additional anxiety and fear, always crushed life-work balance, etc. For example, when I was driving, I always had to speak to my son, answer his questions, react to his words, invent and play word games or sing with him.

The barriers created by migration are as follows:

1) double and additional documents: taking care of passports, permissions, visas, power of attorney, bank account, legal status, etc. For example, we had to leave Batumi because of the expiration date of my son's passport and could not come back because of a lack of permission to cross the border; or the unpredictable practice of crossing the border once per year to make staying in Georgia legal ("VisaRun"); or the necessity of expensive power of attorney, including official translation and apostille;

2) cultural differences: language, women's social role, acceptable behavior, different climate, etc. For example, my son's long and difficult acclimatization to Batumi;

3) everyday conditions: no real property, no equipment, no experience, no support from family and old friends, etc. For example, the online interviews I did in big hotel lobbies or in hotel yards with access to public Wi-Fi with unpredictable noise around.

The barriers from childcare and from migration have a doubling effect and multiply each other, producing a kind of negative synergy. For

example, I was unable to find an offline job because I did not speak the local language, and I was unable to work online regularly because of the additional time spent on childcare and urgent situations. It seems that the digitalization of work accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic brought more opportunities for single parents, but it also crushed work-life balance, transforming home into office. This preliminary list of barriers is incomplete and may be extended by other single migrant mothers. For sure it is a subject for future research. As a result of these barriers, single mothers become unhappy, overworked, often socially isolated, frustrated, losing motivation, hope, and professional identity, turning to self-accusation on the way to becoming a member of the precariat. This complex question has not been thoroughly researched yet, especially for Belarusians, but there are some connecting issues in the field of higher education and art careers (Binuya 2016; Hauber-Özer 2019; Kurz, Davis & Browne 2021; Leyser 2014–2025).

Thus, Catherine Tungol Binuya (2016) dedicated her research “to all the working professionals, all the mothers, ... foreign-born nationals, ...all the Others whose identities leave them in the marginal fringes of society” (Binuya 2016: iv). She wrote about the extremely challenging multiple roles (“intersectionality of their multiple identities” (Binuya 2016: 36)) of working mother students, who “often frustratingly find themselves falling short in one area in order to meet demands in another area” (Binuya 2016: 4). In doing so, she provided insight into factors that contribute to life-balance challenges, and recommended implementing support services.

Melissa Hauber-Özer (2019) illustrated “everyday struggles to navigate interactions through perplexing layers of access and exclusion ... to build a life in a new country” (Hauber-Özer 2019: 1), writing an autoethnography of forced migration. Ella Kurz, Deborah Davis and Jenny Browne (2021) offered a theory of women’s ‘mother-becoming’ and transformation: “birth, including the challenging and destabilizing parts, is ... also a site of women’s ‘becoming’” (Ella Kurz, Deborah Davis & Jenny Browne 2021: 135). The *M/Others Who Make* (MWM) initiative, started by Matilda Leyser (2014–2025) for “creative mothers and careers”, has become an international movement for women and non-binary people “to sustain their creative identities while also holding caring roles” offers events, a blog, space for communication, and motivation.

Like I have, all these researchers of exclusion problems faced by women looked for solutions, but still have not offered a strategy to overcome exclusion.

How to maintain a professional attitude: Inclusive practices for single migrant mothers in Georgia

As I have mentioned in the introduction, one of the ways to maintain a professional attitude is to participate in networking events. Such participation is important for career development (especially in IT) since it results in fruitful networking, social capital growth, learning about new technologies, and bringing overall positive emotions and motivation. However, single mothers find themselves excluded from networking opportunities because of the factors listed above. One of the ways to address this problem is to create a more inclusive environment (Binuya 2016) and/or provide additional financing to enable participation. I encountered some examples of such inclusive practices for single migrant mothers in Georgia (e.g., when event budgets included transportation, accommodation, food, special space, care, and activities for children) through ABF Batumi, Interakcia Agency and Office of European Expertise and Communication (OEEC).

My way to further professional development in migration started with building connections with different people and volunteering, as described in my story. I also started a small ABF study circle which has grown into several circles for children and adults, providing new connections, opportunities, support and the possibility of influence. It is necessary to mention that usually small children are not welcomed at conferences, shows, round tables, discussions, lectures, games, business meetings, etc. because of noise, unpredictable behavior, and outrage from other participants. Special inclusive spaces for children as organized in ABF Batumi for the first common study circle gave a chance for new free activities where children may play with or near moms:

- 1) M&M's: Teach & Study by Game for children and significant adults – moms, dads, grannies, children 2–7 years old met once every one – two weeks on Tuesday evenings;
- 2) Children's club Kigurumi worked on Sunday morning and turned into a new circle with a new leader after its completion;
- 3) Club 5–7 years old met 2 times per week Monday/Wednesday;
- 4) Home economics of the XXI century met every Friday evening;
- 5) The science of happiness met once a week on Tuesday afternoons;
- 6) Mini-hikes, picnics, excursions (supported by ABF), joint holidays and outdoor walks were announced at the initiative of the participants;
- 7) Exchange of information, toys, and things.

Kigurumi, Home economics of the XXI century, and The science of happiness were organized for adults, but there was still a place for children within and around the events, so solo moms might participate in these activities. The learning circles model is very fruitful not only for education but also for socializing, self-realization and psychological support.

In ABF Batumi I met a representative of Interakcia and had a chance to speak to her personally about the difficulties faced by single migrant mothers. A number of networking events were organized in Batumi by Interakcia with the purpose of building connections between Georgian and Belarusian NGOs and activists. The events offered a space with activities for children nearby, so migrant solo moms could participate, establishing a wider local network, discussing social problems, and planning possible co-operations.

The Office of European Expertise and Communication (OEEC) continued these inclusive practices and took special care of solo moms by providing a budget for transportation, accommodation, food, special care, and activities for the children of solo moms participants. There was also a special working group organized where participants discussed the issue of migrant solo moms as a vulnerable group that requires special conditions.

I'd like to mention that all organizations and initiatives described here were started by Belarusians and quickly responded to expats' challenges. However in 2025, ABF Batumi and OEEC no longer work in Georgia, and the problems faced by single migrant mothers are still invisible for social institutions.

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TOWARDS A CONCEPTUALISATION OF 'ALTERNATIVE' POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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Abstract. This paper conceptualises 'alternative' political participation. The lack of definition for 'alternative' political participation overlooks various political actions that do not fit the conventional-unconventional distinction. The present study offers a definition of 'alternative' political participation and the challenges facing civil societies in the digital era. The definition is based on Sairambay's (2020) reconceptualisation of political participation, taking into account the role of civic engagement. Various examples, arguments, and sources for 'alternative' political participation are discussed. Responding to Marcin Kaim's call, this paper further elaborates the topic of 'alternative' political participation.

Keywords: 'alternative' political participation, political participation, civic engagement.

Introduction

Political participation is a central core of citizenship and democracy (Dalton 2008; McCaffrie and Akram 2014). It can be defined as "any action by citizens that is intended to influence the outcomes of political institutions or their structures, and is fostered by civic engagement" (Sairambay 2020a: 124). Traditionally, scholars tend to divide political participation into 'conventional'/'formal' versus



‘unconventional’/‘informal’ forms of political actions (e.g., Verba and Nie 1972; Barnes and Kaase 1979; Kaase 1999; Van Deth 2001; Linssen et al. 2011; Lamprianou 2013; Riley et al. 2013; Akram et al. 2014). While the former involves actions such as voting, campaigning, and contacting government officials, the latter includes actions such as protests, boycotts, and riots. With such a dualistic understanding, observing and conceptualising political participation becomes difficult (Kaim 2021: 64). Iasonas Lamprianou also criticises the dualistic (formal and informal) categorisation of political participation as “outdated” and requiring to be “radically redefined” due to the emerging new forms of political participation, because signing petitions or participating in demonstrations “have increasingly become acceptable – and definitely much more widespread across the political spectrum” (Lamprianou 2013: 27). Apart from dualistic distinguishing political participation (conventional vs. unconventional), there has not been any clear demarcation of ‘alternative’ political actions.

The conceptual and theoretical framework of this study is based on Luhmann’s (1997) system theory, Kaim’s (2021) notion of alternative political participation, and Sairambay’s (2022) reconceptualisation of political participation. To understand observed reality, dualistic differentiations such as government-opposition, institutionalised-non-institutionalised, and public-private are utilised (Luhmann 1990; 2002). For instance, Luhmann (1990; 1997) conceived of the government-opposition distinction as typical of democratic political systems in attempts to differentiate their environments. Drawing on Luhmann (1997), Kaim argues that “the unconventional represents features opposite to those dedicated to the conventional” (2021: 52). According to this logic, “the unconventional is always defined as the opposite of conventional” (Kaim 2021: 59).

Alternative political participation is thus “neither a substitute for conventional [political] participation nor a synonym for unconventional [political] participation, but rather an alternative to the division upon conventional and unconventional [...] It is everything in between the two opposites that constitute the conventional-unconventional distinction” (Kaim 2021: 52).

Luhmann (2002) argues that it is necessary to acknowledge social reality as constructed and at the same time understand how such construction reduces understanding of complex reality. Such approach of critical analysis is important for challenging harmful social norms and identifying social inequalities (see Paxton 2008; Strolovitch and Townsend-Bell 2013; McNay 2014; Kantola and Lombardo 2017). Kaim argues that “only through understanding how reality is constructed does it become possible to counter the adverse effects of such

construction” (2021: 65). Scholars (e.g., Paxton 2008; Strolovitch and Townsend-Bell 2013; Rowe 2015; Kantola and Lombardo 2017) also argue that social inequality and unequal representation may result from the exclusionary and reductionist nature of the dualistic distinction. According to Luhmann (2022), dualistic distinctions allow us to comprehend complex reality, even if they are exclusive. Here, Kaim claims that the paradox is that “we want to make sense of reality but in consequence reduce our perspective, which does not allow us to understand the whole picture” (2021: 65). It is therefore important to highlight the shortcomings of dualistic distinctions that do not encompass forms of political participation other than traditional and non-traditional ones.

Based on Niklas Luhmann’s (1997) system theory, it can be argued that the apprehension of political participation in relation to dualism is reductive because “it overlooks those acts of participation that do not fit the conventional-unconventional distinction” (Kaim 2021: 50). The following activities exemplify the issue: connective action (Bennett and Segerberg 2012), lifestyle politics (Portwood-Stacer 2013), the Indignados movement (Eklundh 2014), participatory theatre (Chou et al. 2015), and information activism (Halupka 2016). Although some scholars (e.g., Norris 2002; Ekman and Amnå 2012; Van Deth 2014) have proposed new ways to categorise political participation, “they tend to politicize specific modes of participation while excluding others” (Kaim 2021: 54). Responding to Marcin Kaim’s call (2021: 66), my paper further elaborates the topic of ‘alternative’ political participation.

Some scholars such as Marsh (1990), Bourne (2010), and Rilley et al. (2010) characterise barricading a community as ‘elite-challenging’ political participation, shooting at police officers as ‘unorthodox’ political participation, and electronic dance music culture as an ‘alternative’ political participation (Lamprianou 2013: 25–27). The existing literature suggests the “proliferation of new developments and alternative forms of political participation” (Chou et al. 2015: 607). The importance of ‘alternative’ political participation has already been emphasised (Bang 2009; 2011). It might well be challenging for scholars to measure ‘alternative’ political participation without a clear concept that “facilitate[s] systematic measurements of new forms of political participation in the broader repertoires of citizens” (Sairambay 2020b: 219). It is important to study ‘alternative’ political participation not only to address such measurement issues but also to improve our ability to reason and make inferences in the research field. We should pay equal attention to these new forms of political participation, as we do to formal and informal ones, because political regimes, resources, and the experiences of ordinary people vary greatly across time and space.

Various Examples of 'Alternative' Political Participation

The earlier work on unconventional political participation can be traced to *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* by Barnes and Kaase (1979), which has launched a wider research into 'alternative' forms of political participation. In addition to new social movements, Kaase (1999) argues that since the 1960s there has been a rise in 'non-traditional' forms of political participation.

Representative democracies around the world consider 'alternative' political participation as an additional component to its existing models (Kovalev et al. 2021: 214). "There are special models of new [alternative] political participation in Brazil, Germany, Switzerland, and Uruguay" (Kovalev et al. 2021: 204). Similarly, various political actions beyond voting are occurring in South Korea, which are "evidenced by the candlelight vigils of 2008 and the ones from 2016 to 2017, the latter of which led to the unprecedented impeachment of Park Geun-hye" (Kim et al. 2020: 1). Lam argues that the study of political participation in Hong Kong must also take into account alternative and local expressions (Lam 2003: 491). Ordinary citizens' communication of preferences with politicians can be emphasised by other forms of political participation and learnt more "through alternative participation than through voting" (Mathisen and Peters 2023: 199). Political participation in a non-voting or alternative activity by young people "can be a valuable source of political education, politically relevant knowledge, awareness, understanding and skills" (Roker et al. 1999).

The classical 'civic culture' approach of Almond and Verba (1963) has been updated somewhat by the addition of *contestation*, which "represents challenges to the political order" and "is particularly important in less open and more autocratic societies" (Sairambay 2021: 116–117). In autocracies, citizens might be less inclined to challenge governments through formal political participation compared to people in democratic societies (Junisbai and Junisbai 2019: 40). However, 'alternative' political participation, such as self-actualisation through popular music (Isaacs 2019; Insebayeva 2019) and hashtag activism on social media (Kosnazarov 2019: 264; Sairambay 2022b), is growing in such countries. The Russian war in Ukraine, for instance, "has contributed to the emergence of more alternative (and perhaps new) ways of political participation through new media that avoid and defy state punishment" (Sairambay 2023: 45).

'Alternative' political participation such as *monstration* – a youth march with elements of carnival – is becoming more popular among young people (Sairambay 2022c: 60). *Monstration* has been organised

in Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova, Thailand, and Ukraine (Janusz 2019) as well as in Belarus and Bulgaria. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, only within Russia in 2019, *monstrations* were organised in 30 cities and towns (Pavlova 2019), and after that they have been organised online, including in Kazakhstan (vedomosti.ru; Sairambay 2022b: 167). A 25 years-old librarian from Barnaul (Russian town), Milana, argues that *monstration* “is not just an artistic and entertainment action as pro-state media warn, on the contrary, a monstration is used as an option to reach out the authorities and the Russian people with current issues Russia faces today” (Sairambay 2023: 104).

Apart from *monstration*, various ‘alternative’ political actions such as circulating political songs, jokes, humour, painting graffiti, using flying paper airplanes during political events, and performing oral folk songs on musical instruments are “very important in youth political participation and new-media tactics especially in high-risk political climates” (Sairambay 2023: 104). Such ‘alternative’ ways of political participation, which challenge political order, further extend Scott’s (1987; 1990) ‘hidden transcripts’ and Lee’s (2018) ‘hidden tactics’. In his seminal book entitled *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James C. Scott (1990) identified ‘hidden transcripts’ as forms of resistance and dissent that remain safe outside the purview of those in power and might, however, come to the surface during conflicts. Similarly, Lee argues that young social-media users rely heavily on ‘hidden tactics’ in navigating contentious politics and expressing dissent, and finds that such tactics are “for the most part, *by design*, non-violent, non-disruptive, and non-conventional” (Lee 2018: 4110). Hidden transcripts and tactics have long existed, for example, in American slave society (www.diggitmagazine.com), “family histories told only to kin” (Rotenstein 2019), and the peasantry (Atkins 2021).

Various Arguments for ‘Alternative’ Political Participation

Despite a decline in traditional political participation, there has been an increase of ‘alternative’ political actions that work outside conventional arenas (e.g., Occupy, Avaaz, and MoveOn) (McCaffrie and Akram 2014: 47). “The ways in which citizens express themselves in the political realm have changed dramatically” (Marien et al. 2010: 187). Norris argues that “like a swollen river flowing through different tributaries, democratic engagement may have adapted and evolved in accordance with the new structure of opportunities, rather than simply

atrophying” (Norris 2002: 216). Some scholars such as Harris (2001) and Gill (2007) have argued that a relative decline in traditional political activities has been matched by a rise in ‘alternative’ political participation, such as being a member of the grrlzine/gURL scene movement. This movement, for example, is about “creating one’s own spaces in which to live out alternative values, shifting political participation to the ‘everyday’ individual or informal group level” (Riley et al. 2010: 347). The extent of political participation is less not only because of citizens’ disengagement but also because of governments, which “must learn to utilize and involve citizens and accept that they mobilize in varied ways” (McCaffrie and Akram 2014: 53). This point also shows a growing interest in conceptualising ‘alternative’ political participation.

‘Alternative’ political participation, such as boycotting, monstrosities, squatting, hacking, ping-pong, and X-led mobilisations, exemplifies that “rather than disengagement, the repertoire of political action is broadening” (Dalton 2008: 93). According to many scholars (e.g., Flinders and Wood 2018: 3), the political participation of citizens, especially young people, is changing from traditional forms to non-traditional and ‘alternative’ ones. For example, “[y]oung Europeans have become increasingly alienated from parties and politicians, but are active in ‘politics’ in a broader sense” (Sloam 2013: 850). In other words, this shift might not show apathy but ‘alternative’ choices in citizens’ political repertoire. Dalton argues that citizens have moved from conventional ‘duty’ based participation to unconventional and ‘alternative’ ‘norms of engaged citizenship’ (Dalton 2008: 88).

We also need to distinguish between political participation and civic engagement because some actions might not be political participation, but rather a form of social engagement with no intention to influence the outcomes of political institutions or their structures (see Sairambay 2020b: 220). For example, for some scholars (e.g., McRobbie 1994; Malbon 1999; Pini 2001; Wilson 2006) electronic dance music culture (clubbing, raving, partying) can be seen as ‘alternative’ forms of social engagement. This overlap between political and social actions signals not only the need for a proper conceptualising of political participation (Norris 2002), but also for a clear definition of ‘alternative’ political participation.

Using electronic dance music culture, Riley et al. suggest that one useful concept for understanding ‘alternative’ political participation might be ‘everyday politics’, which “involves a personalizing of politics and an ‘aloof’ stance regarding official institutions” (2010: 345). The authors of this proposition claim that personal lives and youth/musical subcultures (e.g., ‘the ‘identity politics’ of feminism; gay/lesbian liberation and black power; and aspects of musical movements such as

soul, punk, reggae and hip hop') have earlier been the basis for 'alternative' political participation (Riley et al. 2010: 346).

In recent decades, the literature on political participation has recognised the diversification of participation repertoires (Karpf 2010; Vromen and Coleman 2011; Sairambay 2020a). New media, such as information and communications technologies and social media, are cited to cause the most significant changes in political participatory actions (please see Vegh 2003; Bang 2009; Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010; Bennett and Segerberg 2012, Sairambay 2022a), deepening globalisation and shifting centres of political power (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Oates 2006; Barnes et al. 2007). New media could provide citizens not only with alternative information, but also with alternative ways of connecting, creating and distributing, selecting and popularising sources as well as other numerous actions such as 'liking', 'disliking', and/or 'commenting'. Such alternativeness of using new media positively affect new-media-led political participation (Sairambay 2023: 137).

It is important to conceptualise 'alternative' political participation as the forms of people's political engagement are changing and/or are complemented by new perspectives. ICTs, social media, and AI have brought new developments also in political participation. We can observe increasing cyber activism such as signing/proposing e-petitions and online interference during elections worldwide. Citizens play a significant role in such actions. People are equally able to create or be involved in various political activities online. In times of crisis, under governments' restrictions and surveillance as well as censorship, people tend to find new possibilities which can be described as 'Nu, Pogodi!' – the title of a cartoon from the Soviet time –, in which the wolf (the government) never catches the hare (politically active people). One good example could be a virtual private network (VPN), which allows people to use social media and the Internet in certain restricted zones.

In the realm of 'alternative' political participation, some "private institutions, such as university administrations and businesses, are also targeted for political actions because they can pose challenges to existing rules, norms and practices" (Lam 2003: 491). In fact, citizens might take advantage of any opportunity to reach political institutions or their structures, and this can sometimes be done through private institutions and regarded as political participation. Depending on situation, gatekeepers and influencers might be both private or public political intuitions or their structures, and political issues sometimes do require the interference of private institutions. Political actions take place in various private and public institutions and simultaneously

target various social, economic, and political actors (Micheletti 2003; Forno and Graziano 2014). Thus, our concept of ‘alternative’ political participation must take this growing complexity into account (Norris 2002; Fox 2014), because non-governmental organisations, charitable organisations, private businesses (e.g., oil and gas companies) along with central and local public institutions can be the targets of citizens’ political actions.

Capturing the contingent nature of political participation, Norris argues that “rather than eroding, political activism has been reinvented in recent decades by a diversification of the *agencies* (the collective organisations structuring political activity), the *repertoires* (the actions commonly used for political expression) and the *targets* (the political actors that participants seek to influence)” (Norris 2002: 215–216). If new *agencies* here include other interest groups (e.g., 38 Degrees, MoveOn) apart from parties and new *repertoires* include ‘alternative’ political participation, the new *targets* of participation incorporate, for instance, “multi-national corporations like Shell or Microsoft, global governing bodies like the World Bank, or non-governmental organisations like Oxfam” (Flinders and Wood 2018: 2).

The importance of political participation is usefully captured by Van Deth, who argues that “actual conclusions about important changes in democratic societies depend on the participation concept used” (Van Deth 2014: 350). He suggests that “actual conclusions about important changes in democratic societies depend on the participation concept used” (Van Deth 2014: 350). Thus, “what is ‘included’ and ‘excluded’ from a definition of political participation (that is, how it is operationalised) is critical for understanding the implications we draw from empirical analysis of participation dynamics” (Flinders and Wood 2018: 3).

Towards a Conceptualisation of ‘Alternative’ Political Participation

Considering the lack of conceptualising for ‘alternative’ political participation and recent reconceptualising of political participation by Sairambay (2020), the following definition of ‘alternative’ political participation is developed in this article:

‘Alternative’ political participation is any action by citizens that does not fit into the conventional-unconventional dualism and is aimed at influencing the outcomes of private or public political institutions or their structures, and is encouraged by civic engagement.

This definition is based on Sairambay's (2020) work. Sairambay's (2020) reconceptualisation of political participation has a number of advantages and can also be very useful for conceptualising 'alternative' political participation.

First, when one classifies political participation, it is necessary to consider whether the action fits within the distinction between conventional and unconventional political actions. If the action does not fit into this dualism, then such political participation should be considered as 'alternative' political participation. This is particularly noticeable in high-risk political environments where citizens attempt to use alternative channels, groups, platforms and activities to engage in politics. All this means that before we call any action 'alternative' political participation, we need to first check and ensure that it is political participation, and then we can distinguish whether the action is conventional, unconventional, or 'alternative' political action. This is done to avoid overlapping of political actions with social/civic actions, which may represent a wide range of citizen actions. Alternative action does not always mean social action. Political participation can also be alternative; and alternative actions usually mean new, innovative, and 'not-seen-before' actions, which might challenge political order, elites, and outcomes.

Second, the targets of 'alternative' political participation can be both private and public political institutions. In most cases, public political institutions and their structures are the targets of conventional and unconventional political participation. Apart from public institutions, political actions directed at private institutions might well represent 'alternative' political participation with(out) 'hidden' intentions to influence the political institutions or their structures.

Finally, the distinction between political participation and civic engagement is vital because the two concepts may overlap due to the variety of citizen activities in the digital age. The presence of civic engagement as a stimulating part of the definition gives us an understanding that civic engagement is often a precursor to political participation, including to alternative one. Here, I should also mention that the recognition of 'alternative' political participation is not solely dependent on the actions of those engaging in them, but also on how such actions are perceived and attributed by various observers. Drawing on Luhmann's (1997; 2002) importance of observation within social systems, it is crucial to acknowledge that meaning is constructed not only through action but through its interpretation by others. In this sense, 'alternative' political participation is shaped through processes of attribution by multiple actors. I argue that these may include the general public, the state, the media, academic observers, and political

opposition, all of whom may ascribe different meanings, intentions, and/or levels of legitimacy to such participation. What one such actor interprets as a meaningful 'alternative' political participation may be dismissed by another as disruptive and/or illegitimate. Here, I should note that attribution is not a neutral or automatic process but is contingent upon the position, interests, and normative frameworks of the observers. For instance, the media can amplify or diminish the perceived legitimacy of an 'alternative' action depending on how it is framed, whilst state responses may reflect strategic interests in the long-term perspective rather than an objective assessment of democratic participation. It highlights the relational and communicative dimension of political participation, whereby visibility, recognition, and the framing of actions play a central role in their political importance. Therefore, understanding 'alternative' political participation requires us to consider not just what is done, but how it is observed, interpreted, and acknowledged across different segments of society.

The following examples illustrate what 'alternative' political participation means in this article:

- If one paints graffiti with a political message or spreads political jokes, humour, or songs, then such actions should be considered 'alternative' political participation, since they do not correspond to either conventional or unconventional political participation, but the intention is still to influence the outcomes of political institutions or their structures.
- If one hashtags, comments, or shares a political post with the intention of influencing the outcomes of political institutions or their structures, then such actions should be regarded as 'alternative' political participation and without such intention they should be considered civic engagement.
- If a meme or humorous song become widely circulated and interpreted as a critique of political authorities, they could be retrospectively classified as 'alternative' political participation based on how others attribute meaning to them.
- If clubbers at a music event are perceived by authorities or media as expressing political dissent (e.g., dancing and gathering against restrictions or social norms), then such actions could be considered 'alternative' political participation because of these external attributions.
- If one engages in clubbing or partying through electronic dance music without any intention of influencing political institutions or their structures, then such activities should not be considered either political participation or 'alternative' political participation.

Examples of the Developed Concept of 'Alternative' Political Participation

In what follows, I give examples of the developed concept on various real political actions of citizens. Distributing songs with political content to influence the outcomes of private or public political institutions or their structures can be a good example of 'alternative' political participation. Political songs such as the Italian protest folk song 'Bella ciao' (*Goodbye beautiful*) and its various versions, the Kazakh song 'Jyie' (*System*) by Marhaba Sabi, and the Soviet song 'Hochu Peremen!' (*I want changes!*) by Viktor Tsoi are used by ordinary citizens not only for singing and listening, but also for dissemination on social media: sometimes intentionally in order to somehow influence some political results. I argue that scholars can measure such intention by asking whether citizens intentionally circulated songs or not. Otherwise, these types of actions might also constitute purely civic engagement on the Internet.

In the same vein, new media such as social media and digital tools offer endless opportunities for political dissent. It is difficult for scholars to label various online activities as conventional or unconventional political activities because they can be disguised as broad online citizen activities without clear political content or direction. Yet, sometimes only deeper analysis can reveal the real intentions and consequences of such actions. While some users write comments, 'like' and share posts to support or save them, others might do so to influence their peers or followers by adding their own voices.

Wearing Harris or Trump T-shirts or badges that convey a political idea or statement can signify both political participation and civic engagement. I argue that we, as scholars, need to work on mechanisms that clearly differentiate the actions of citizens to avoid conflicting outcomes in the research field. Those who wear T-shirts, badges, or similar items without any direct intention or reason should not qualify for political participation: we all know that some people can simply wear such things without political stance or intention. But when people do so with a clear political stance and intention, then we can consider such actions as 'alternative' political participation. Likewise, considering purchasing fair-trade products as an 'alternative' political participation should be approached with caution. In practice, many people do not pay attention to whether the products they purchase are fair-trade or not, although some people deliberately check and purchase such products. As a result, only those who intentionally purchase fair-trade products for political reasons can be considered to be participating in politics.

Veganism and vegetarianism as an environmental stance can be both a creative form of political participation and simply citizens' practice of living. It is therefore important that citizens' actions meet all three parts of the presented definition of 'alternative' political participation. The fact that veganism and vegetarianism do not fit into the conventional-unconventional dualism is not enough to take it into account as 'alternative' political participation; the second part of the definition, which requires actions be aimed at influencing the outcomes of private or public political institutions or their structures, is also important. For instance, the activities of individual shoppers and organisers involved in the French alternative food movement and American farmers' markets can be seen as 'alternative' political participation because they actively promote certain lifestyle choices (Brown and Miller 2008; Dubuisson-Quellier 2015).

Table 1 below shows some examples of conventional, unconventional, and 'alternative' political actions by citizens.

Table 1. Examples of political activities

Actions	Conventional	Unconventional	'Alternative'
Voting	+++		
Contacting public officials	+++		
Campaigning	+++		
Protesting		+++	
Boycotting		+++	
Singing (e)petitions	++	++	
Circulating political songs, jokes, humour			+++
Painting graffiti on political topics			+++

As can be seen from the table above, voting in an election or party campaigning are formal types of political participation, while protesting and boycotting refer to informal political activities. Both forms are very important because citizens' political participation is the 'heart' of democracy. The widespread practice and long-lasting history of such actions firmly emphasise the importance of them also in distinguishing as conventional and unconventional political participation. Here, I argue that 'alternative' political participation should also gain equal importance because of new forms of political participation expressed by ordinary people in different terms.

Actions such as protesting give voice to certain issues, emphasising the importance of unconventional forms of political participation: the governments act to listen to or suppress protestors; NGOs and opposition also react; citizens start discussing, supporting or rejecting the protests. I argue that ‘alternative’ political participation should also receive such attention from different parties because unconventional political participation can simply be dangerous in some political regimes. ‘Alternative’ forms of political participation can sometimes be the only way to deal with politics because (a) conventional forms do not work (well); (b) unconventional ones lead to prison or other types of punishment; and/or (c) people have some reasons to indirectly affect politics due to various threats (e.g., employment).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the paper has set out to conceptualise ‘alternative’ political participation. The definition developed in this paper has a number of advantages. It helps us study different political actions of citizens, which are often called ‘alternative’ political participation. It is clear from the definition that in order to distinguish ‘alternative’ political participation, one needs to check it against the formal and informal political actions. The concept also emphasises the civic engagement of citizens to avoid overlap with social actions. It is believed that the presented definition will allow scholars to pay due attention to various political actions that do not fall under the conventional-unconventional distinction. Moreover, the developed definition encompasses both private and public institutions or their structures as targets of political actions.

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NARRATIVE TOLERANCE
IN THE FRAMEWORK OF CONCEPTUAL
TOOLS OF THE NARRATIVE THEORY
OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE¹

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the elaboration of the concept of narrative tolerance as a conceptual and methodological tool for processing the past, based on such conceptual grounds of the narrative theory of historical knowledge as constructivism, methodological openness, instrumentalist approach to the understanding of historical narrative, revisionism and perspectivism. Narrative tolerance is proposed to be understood as a refusal to impose one's historical narrative on others (in accordance with the principle that "history is written by the victors"), as well as the possibility of including the voices of different historical agents in the narrative and taking into account different points of view without reducing the overall conclusions of the investigation to a "common denominator", especially in situations with long-term historical conflicts.

It is pointed out that the historical past – the historical reality as we know it through historical works – is always, to a large extent, an "augmented reality" to the real past. The components that a historian "adds" to the real past, creating the historical past in the process of researching, explaining and interpreting the available material, include theories, methodologies, and conceptual apparatus that are modern and regularly updated. The main mechanism for creating and changing the historical past as an

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augmented reality is the historical narrative. Thus, a set of historical narratives can be viewed as a way and mechanism of narrative engineering, a permanent process of re-description and re-evaluation of existing historical knowledge in the light of new data or theoretical and methodological approaches within the contemporary humanities.

Keywords: narrative, narrative theory of historical knowledge, past, tolerance, “piecemeal engineering”.

Introduction

The fundamental principles of a democratic rule-of-law state are guaranteed by the force of law. It is a widely recognized thesis. But laws are written and followed by people who live in a particular historical and cultural context. In this regard, it is interesting to examine whether the narrative theory of historical knowledge can also be a foundation for the development of democracy and a culturally inclusive state, as well as contribute to socio-cultural (historical and religious) reconciliation in modern fragmented societies and between societies. I argue that the narrative theory of historical knowledge provides us with a whole system of effective conceptual and methodological tools for dealing with conflicting narratives and contradictory historical information, especially given the practices of modern hybrid information wars.

The narrative philosophy of history within the analytic tradition emerged in the works of Arthur Danto, Louis Mink, and Hayden White as a response to the attempts of some early analytic philosophers to automatically apply positivist methodology to the study of the past. The natural sciences have benefited from its employment, and this fact has inspired philosophers such as Karl Hempel (Hempel 1942) and William Drey (Dray 1959) to try to implement the basic positivist principles (empiricism, the unity of science and scientific methods, the principle of verification, the objectivity of scientific knowledge, and the possibility of studying human society using scientific methods) in a more “softened” form in the methodology of studying the past. In this way, they strived to preserve the idea of the unity of science and to protect the scientific position of historical disciplines in the face of the popular neo-positivism of the Vienna Circle with its theses about the primacy of experiential knowledge (based on what “is directly given to us”) and the method of logical analysis (which should be applied to empirical material), which set a certain limit to the content of legitimate science (Karnap & Han & Neirat 2012: 105).

In a broader context, the emergence and development of the narrative theory of historical knowledge meant a fruitful attempt to help historians to restore the dignity of history as a science. The main role in this process, of course, was to be played by historians, according to Hayden White. In his opinion, the “burden of the historian” in our time is to restore the dignity of the historical studies on a basis that will make them consonant with the goals and objectives of the modern intellectual context, that is, to transform the historical sciences in such a way as to be able to positively participate in the liberation of modernity from the “burden of history” (White 1966: 124). Before the First World War, historical studies were at the center of humanitarian and social research, and great hopes and expectations of an almost enlightened nature were pinned on them. However, the unprecedented destruction of the two world wars and the crimes against humanity that accompanied them clearly demonstrated the futility of such expectations. Therefore, it is quite understandable that history has become a major target for criticism by scholars and philosophers, as well as artists and writers. Hayden White writes about this as follows:

“The First World War did much to destroy what remained of history’s prestige among both artists and social scientists; for the war seemed to confirm what Nietzsche had maintained two generations earlier. History, which was supposed to provide some sort of training for life, which was supposed to be “philosophy teaching by examples”, had done little to prepare men for the coming of the war; it had not taught them what would be expected of them during the war; and when the war was over historians seemed incapable of rising above narrow partisan loyalties and making sense of the war in any significant way (White 1966: 120).

White states that in the middle of the twentieth century historians found themselves in a very difficult situation and had to admit, first of all to themselves, that it was an impossible task to explain the world wars for strictly historical reasons (White 1966: 120). Moreover, history deals with the study of the past; it does not provide any mechanisms for predicting the future. Arthur Danto makes this point quite clearly in his books and essays. Such ambitions as predicting the future, in his opinion, are the ambitions of the substantive philosophy of history, which he considers to be an inherently false way of thinking about the past, since it claims to be a complete description of all history (both past and future), which is significantly different from even the most extensive historical texts (Danto 2007: 4, 15). Danto means that substantive philosophers of history tend to take the works of professional

historians as data (factual materials) for their constructions, applying narrative structure and practices of interpreting past events in a similar way to historians. But whereas historians study only the past and become interested in the future only when it has become the past, substantive philosophers go further and often extrapolate their narrative structures into the future, telling the story in advance, i.e., they try to write a story before it can be told in principle. In essence, they try to write a history of events before they have even happened and provide an account of the past based on a “fictional” understanding of the future (Danto 2007: 11, 13).

In this aspect, Danto’s view is in line with Karl Popper’s criticism of historicism regarding the falsity and illegitimacy of the idea of predicting the future development of human history. Popper proceeds from the following statements: the course of human history is strongly influenced by the growth of human knowledge, we cannot predict the future development of our scientific knowledge using rational or scientific methods, and therefore we cannot predict the future course of human history. Popper considers the following thesis to be self-evident: if there is such a thing as growing human knowledge, then we cannot anticipate today what we will know only tomorrow (to prescribe in advance, as Danto would say). Thus, no society can scientifically predict the future state of its knowledge and the course of history. Any prediction is possible only as a retrovision, that is, after the events themselves have taken place (Popper 1986: vi-vii).

Danto elaborates a project of an analytical philosophy of history, where he provides a classical definition of narrative, its structure, and its purpose as an alternative to the substantive philosophy of history. If the purpose of history as a science is to order historical events, organize the past into temporal entities, and explain historical changes, then the goal of the analytical philosophy of history is to provide a systematic philosophical analysis of the ways in which historians organize and order the past (narratives). That is, Danto emphasizes, the analytical philosophy of history is not just related to philosophy: it is the philosophy that is used to solve special conceptual problems that arise in the practice of historical studies (Danto 2007: 1, 15, 255).

Nevertheless, not all critical remarks on historiographical practices have received sufficient attention within the narrative theory of historical knowledge. In particular, Popper’s critique of the tendency to reduce human history to political history and to construct narratives of national and world history around wars, conquests, and violence remains relevant to this day. In his seminal *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper highlights the fact that the content of world history, as taught in schools and universities, is usually reduced to the

history of international crimes and mass murder. He stresses the following:

“There is no history of mankind, there are only many histories of all kinds of aspects of human life. And one of these is the history of political power. This is elevated into the history of the world. But this, I hold, is an offence against every decent conception of mankind. It is hardly better than to treat the history of embezzlement or of robbery or of poisoning as the history of mankind; for *the history of power politics is nothing but the history of international crime and mass murder* (including, it is true, some of the attempts to suppress them). This history is taught in schools, and many of the greatest criminals are presented as heroes” (Popper 2013: 475).

Popper’s thought seems to be a kind of continuation of Walter Benjamin’s reflections on how history is made to work for politics and on the barbarism that is passed down from generation to generation as a result of this. This is remarkably interesting fact, given that Benjamin and Popper represent fundamentally different philosophical approaches. Nevertheless, Benjamin also wonders who gets more empathy from adherents – the conquerors or the defeated – and comes to the conclusion that, as a rule, the conquerors. The reason for this is that history protects the victors, and all rulers see themselves as heirs to those who conquered before them. The defeated are usually seen as “cultural treasures” belonging to the victors. Thus, it can be argued that all contemporary (and future) conquerors and “greatest criminals” are inspired and justified in this way before themselves and the world. Therefore, Benjamin underlines that every proof or testimony of civilization is at the same time a proof and testimony of its barbarism. Moreover, just as the evidence of civilization is not free from barbarism, the very way in which it is passed from one owner to another is also “poisoned” by barbarism (Benjamin 2015: 248). In other words, history documents both the development of human civilization and its barbaric manifestations, and often passes all this in a mixed form from one generation to the next without placing accents, which can also be considered barbaric to some extent in our time.

Despite the fact that in the second half of the twentieth century, given the devastating experience of the two world wars, a number of fairly successful attempts were made to change the way history was written and taught (including class, religious, and gender perspectives), the national historical narrative not only did not lose its position, but also strengthened its leading role in historiography. As Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz aptly point out, the situation has changed little in

understanding the practical functions of historical education since the early nineteenth century. Solid historical education (the canon) has as its main goal the unification of society, the integration into the “nation” of even those who seem to be unwilling to integrate (migrants, refugees, i.e. people with different cultural backgrounds). Accordingly, despite the fact that national history has been repeatedly declared “dead” over the past century, the belief in the salutary practical results of national history education remains relevant (Berger & Lorenz 2006). Thus, we are faced with a *dilemma*: on the one hand, writing national history will remain an important way of history writing for a long time to come, and on the other hand, we must realize that since the nineteenth century, national narratives have been reactionary and extremely dangerous in their consequences (they have typically been used to legitimize wars and genocides) (Berger 2007: 66).

National and world histories are still written primarily as political histories, i.e., they focus on political issues (creation and collapse of empires, wars, formation of political blocs and military alliances). The victorious wars in the history of one’s own country and the expansion of its territories through the capture and occupation of the lands of other (often neighboring) nations are usually glorified. Only those who have encroached on the integrity of “our” state are recognized as “invaders”, i.e., only violence against our own country is condemned, while the aggression of “our” state against all others is considered correct and justified by the goal of state development, strengthening its influence and power. When such approaches to writing history do meet, which usually happens in a situation with complex traumatic pages of the past that exist in the history of every nation in relation to its closest neighbors, we get a long-term politicized historical conflict. It, in turn, becomes a source of permanent return of this conflict to modern relations between states, its reinvention or modernization, provokes tension and hostility in the attitude of peoples to each other in our time without so-called “real” reasons that remain deep in the past, which is not here and now. The age of the information society and information manipulation (post-truth), as well as the largely globalized world, only increase the danger posed by the controversial past, or rather, its contradictory versions and explanations (narratives). Therefore, in my opinion, the usual way of writing history should be changed so that history provides not only an educational and practical function (education of loyal citizens), but also, as White emphasized, performs a humanizing role – serves to humanize the experience of social life (White 1966: 134).

The narrative philosophy of history can help us with this. By gradually and permanently changing the way history is written, we can

change the fundamental national narratives, shaping them as narratives of cultural convergency (in the sense of interaction). An important principle and conceptual tool in this regard, in my opinion, is a narrative tolerance².

Conceptual Grounds of the Narrative Theory of Historical Knowledge

The narrative theory of historical knowledge is actually a set of separate, often competing, conceptions of the narrative philosophy of history of the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The terms “narrativism” and “narrativists”, as Eva Domanska notes, were first used by William Dray to refer to history theorists who pay serious attention to the nature and role of narrative in historical studies (Domanska 2012: 30). According to Dray, narrativists are philosophers who emphasize “the centrality of narration in history”. He also provided the main arguments of the critics of the narrativist approach, who view narrative as a way for historians to simply “record” what they have discovered in the course of their own historical investigation (Dray 1971: 153-155). From Maurice Mandelbaum’s point of view, narrative inevitably simplifies the past. This concerns the rigid linear and plot sequence of a historical work that a historian constructs when writing a narrative history. Moreover, attention to the narrative aspect of historical works distracts philosophers from studying those features of history that make it a form of research or cognition (Mandelbaum 1967: 414-416).

Among the critics of the narrativist position, Leon Goldstein should also be mentioned, who asserts that history is a way of knowing the past, not just a mode of discourse, so narrative cannot be considered the essence of history. Like Mandelbaum, Goldstein believes that the focus of history theory on the narrative form of historical account

- 2 It is important to make a distinction between a master narrative as a framework for writing national and international history (broad understanding) and a narrative as a tool or form of organization and representation of historical knowledge – a model for describing and explaining a certain aspect of the past (epistemological understanding). The historical narrative of cultural convergency is a model of the master narrative, which should be constructed as a narrative of successful interaction between a large number of ethnocultural and religious groups (who historically lived and still live in a particular state or between states) and the settlement of conflicts between them that have occurred in the past and may arise in the future, based on the idea of protecting equal human rights and freedoms, unconditional respect for human dignity and tolerance of cultural differences.

leads to a decrease in research attention to the study of the epistemic features of history as a type of knowledge (Goldstein 1976: 17, 154). But at the same time, in his reflections, he actually proceeds from the same premise of the indirectness of historical knowing as the narrativists, and also thoroughly develops a constructivist theory of historical cognition, creating an epistemological basis for the development of the narrative theory of history. Therefore, there is a reason to believe that Goldstein puts himself in fundamental opposition to the narrativists, primarily because of the limited understanding of the concept of historical narrative and its purpose by some early narrativists, that is, as a historical work in narrative (literary) form, the plot of which revolves around the description of the change of someone or something. Goldstein sums up: “What narrativists demand is that the historian tell a story in the course of which the change is seen to have occurred and is rendered intelligible, being necessitated by the requirements of the story itself” (Goldstein 1976: 171).

Here we should partially agree with Dray and Goldstein’s criticism of narrativists, because the category of “historical change” is indeed important for classical narrativists. For example, in Danto’s concept, the explanatory function of narrative is associated with the explanation of “change” in the development of events and processes. The reason for this is that the narrative creates a natural context in which the event acquires historical significance (Danto 2007: 141, 234). Danto’s idea of narrative as a mode of explanation specific to historical studies is further developed within the modern analytical tradition by Paul Roth. He argues that only a narrative can explain events that are stated in the form of narrative sentences (which may also contain an evaluation of these events) (Roth 2017: 43, 50).

Returning to the issue of the emergence of the narrative theory of historical knowledge, it should be stressed that its main ideas were formulated in the 1960s and 1970s in the works of such philosophers as Danto, Louis Mink, and Hayden White, and were significantly complemented later by Frank Ankersmit (Ankersmit 1983). It is worth noting that in his later works, Ankersmit addresses the topic of historical experience, revealing a fundamentally different perspective in the theory of history (Ankersmit 1994). Nowadays, the narrative philosophy of history provides a powerful theoretical foundation for contemporary historical studies. Controversies and discussions between the different conceptions of narrativist philosophers, as well as between narrativism and other theoretical approaches in the contemporary philosophy of history (for example, the position of “internal realism” by Chris Lorenz, the postnarrativist approach by Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, the pragmatists view by Veronica Tozzi, or certain history theorists

such as Goldstein) stimulate the further development both philosophy of history in general and the narrative theory of historical knowledge in particular, as the conceptual basis of the modern historical studies.

The conceptual grounds of the narrative theory of historical knowledge include the following: (1) constructivism in the theory of knowledge, which underlines that historical reality is constructed or created by historians; (2) methodological openness, which means wide possibilities for successful combination of ideas and methodological tools of different philosophical traditions and approaches, which also means openness to criticism; (3) understanding a narrative as a form of organization of historical knowledge that is most suitable for the purposes of history as a scientific discipline (description, explanation and interpretation of the past); (4) revisionism, which consists in permanent revision – “re-description and re-evaluation” of the existing historical knowledge in connection with the discovery of new facts or new approaches to their understanding and explanation, which should serve the purposes of humanizing history and contribute to the therapeutic function of history; (5) perspectivism, which is the theoretical understanding of the concepts of “point of view”, “time perspective”, and “cultural context”, which allows for a scientific analysis of the ideological and value dimension of historical works, and not just reject it as something “non-scientific”.

The constructivist position in the narrative theory of historical knowledge was first most clearly reflected in the works of Danto, in particular in his concept of the “narrative sentence”. The concept of “narrative sentence” was proposed by him to mark and explain a very interesting feature of historical knowledge. We get the full amount of knowledge about a particular event from the past through knowledge about events that are in the future in relation to this event, that is, depending on what later historical events we connect it with (Danto 2007: 17). While narrative sentences can be found in various types of narratives and everyday language, Danto considers them to be a specifically historical type of sentence. These are sentences in which the historian refers to at least two events separated in time, but describes the chronologically earlier event by means of the later event (Danto 1962: 146). In the case of narrative sentences, the following points are important: first, the events referred to in the sentence actually took place (i.e., there is evidence of them in historical sources); second, the historian draws a direct (causal) or indirect connection between them; third, it is the historian who also chooses the events that he or she connects in this way within the historical narrative (Roth 2017: 47, 50).

The real constructivist stage in the narrative philosophy of history begins in the works of White, who believes that traditional “chronicle”

and “story” are “primitive elements” of historical narrative that serve to select historically significant material. White postulates a deeper – metahistorical – level of historical thinking (or consciousness), at which the historian or philosopher of history chooses conceptual strategies for explaining, interpreting, and representing historical material, performing a prefigurative act (White 1975: x, 5-6, 427). He writes: “On this level, I believe, the historian performs an essentially poetic act, in which he prefigures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he will use to explain “what was really happening” in it” (White 1975: x).

According to Eugen Zelenak, the narrative approach most fruitfully develops and popularizes the constructivist position in the philosophy of history. Within narrativism itself, he distinguishes two versions of constructivism: representationalism (historical texts are representations of the past) and non-representationalism (historical texts are the result of specific practices). But both of these positions are characterized by an understanding of historical texts as complex constructions, not just descriptions of the past, and by an emphasis on the active creative role of historians in shaping points of view or generating interpretations of the past that do not directly reflect past events. As a result, Zelenak states, the narrative theory of historical knowledge has contributed the following ideas to the general context of the modern philosophy of history: rather than merely finding the facts, historians invent specific concepts and theories to explain the date from the sources; rather than copying a preexisting order of things, historians impose their narrative or other organizational structures to provide meaningful presentations of past human actions; viewing such concepts as the French Revolution or the World War I as original tools for dealing with the past or as historian’s special techniques to organize and communicate chaotic information about past events; understanding historical texts not as mirrors (not even selective mirrors) or approximate maps of the past, but rather as creative constructions offered by historians to account for what happened in the past (Zelenak 2015: 209-210).

This also points to another attribute of the narrativist approach: *methodological openness*, which means a broad possibility of successfully combining and implementing conceptual tools from different philosophical traditions. A striking example of methodological interdisciplinarity is White’s narrative theory of history, who in one of his early works, *The Burden of History*, calls for the methodological cosmopolitanism of historical studies, for wider involvement of the newest tools from the theory of literature and philosophy of science in the contemporary philosophy of history (White 1966: 126). From

White's point of view, history has always been a multidisciplinary field of knowledge, similar to bricolage in terms of its methodology. Historians always borrow objects of study from other disciplines simply because these objects "live" in the same world as the main objects of the historian's analysis. For example, historians often study economic phenomena and artistic phenomena alongside the political and social structures that primarily interest them. Thus, they draw on as much expertise from other disciplines as they deem necessary to properly justify the results of their investigations. Such a bricolage is much more congenial to the professional historians' community than any attempts to import the methodology from "outside" (Domanska 2008: 14). Therefore, in his theory of history, White tries to fruitfully combine the achievements of the analytical and continental traditions in the philosophy of history, in particular, he thoroughly explores the epistemological findings of Michel Foucault, one of the leading French poststructuralists (White 1975: 1, 3). Jerzy Topolski, for example, emphasizes the deep interconnection between White's fundamental philosophical ideas of White on the one hand, and those of Foucault and Roland Barthes on the other (Topolskyi 2012: 96).

An important example of the methodological openness of narrativism is the elaboration of Veronica Tozzi's narrative pragmatist-oriented philosophy of history, which aims to implement the ideas of pragmatism in the modern narrative philosophy of history. Tozzi emphasizes that this alliance (of narrativism and pragmatism) will reinforce the former's most provocative — and therefore, more productive — thesis: that the means of production of historical writing are central to clarifying controversies about the past. In Tozzi's pragmatic conception, narrativism argues that the meaning of discourse about the past is not revealed as a result of its representative relationship to past reality, but rather in terms of the future consequences of accepting such discourses as answers to problems that have arisen in the context of our current research practices (Tozzi 2016: 170). Such practical consequences do not imply utility, but instead are related to the future procedure of justification and imply acceptance of responsibility for our future actions. Therefore, the idea that historical interpretations can be ethically neutral is indefensible. The pragmatic notion of "practical" (and "practical meaning") would help us understand how historical ideas (narratives or interpretations) produced by academic historiography, literature, or lay people are incomprehensible without considering their practical implications. Thus, Tozzi concludes, a dialogue between narrativism and a pragmatic philosophy of meaning would be very productive in two ways: a pragmatic approach would build the necessary bridges between the various forms of appropriation of the

past by academic historiography, literature, and life, while at the same time strengthening the narrativist program as the most appropriate for discussing the social, ethical, and political role of academic history (Tozzi 2018: 66).

The instrumentalist understanding of narrative as a form of organization of historical knowledge that is most suitable for the purposes of history as a scientific discipline (description, explanation, and interpretation of the past) is found primarily in Danto's concept. It is reflected in his program statement: "The difference between history and science is not that history does and science does not employ organizing schemes which go beyond what is giving. Both do. The difference has to do with the *kind* of organizing schemes employed by each. History tells stories" (Danto 2007: 111). Danto compares historical narratives and scientific theories as universal schemes for organizing knowledge. The task of a historian, even based on the nature of his or her work, should not be a simple reproduction of the past, but a certain organization of the past. Hence, a historical narrative is a way of organizing the past into temporal wholes by describing and explaining large-scale historical changes using a temporal perspective linguistically reflected in narrative sentences (Danto 2007: 102, 255).

This instrumentalist definition of historical narrative allows us to consider it as a kind of functional equivalent of a theory in science, which structures and explains historical material, and also requires verification and factual confirmation. However, as Danto notes, we should take into account the fact that, unlike general theories, historical narratives are always tied to the place and time of their writing, representing answers to specific historical questions (Danto 2007: 11, 137). Louis Mink also demonstrates an instrumentalist approach to understanding the nature and tasks of historical narrative. He argues that the narrative form cannot be equated with fairy tales, myths, or novels, because "narrative is a primarily cognitive instrument — an instrument rivaled, in fact, only by theory and by metaphor as irreducible ways of making the flux of experience comprehensible" (Mink 1978: 131).

An extremely significant step in the theoretical understanding of the role and functions of the historical narrative is made by White. According to White's concept, a historical work is a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that claims to be a model of past structures and processes in order to explain what they were by representing them (White 1975: 2). He proposes to distinguish the following levels of conceptualization in the historical work: (1) chronicle; (2) story; (3) mode of emplotment; (4) mode of argument; (5) mode of ideological implication, and makes an essential clarification:

"I take "chronicle" and "story" to refer to "primitive elements" in the *historical account*, but both represent processes of selection and arrangement of data from the *unprocessed historical record* in the interest of rendering that record more comprehensible to an *audience* of a particular kind. As thus conceived, the historical work represents an attempt to mediate among what I will call the *historical field*, the unprocessed *historical record*, *other historical accounts*, and an *audience*" (White 1975: 5).

This understanding of the historical narrative as a discursive model of the unfolding of historical processes, events, and phenomena that is aimed at creating the "effect of reality" is of great conceptual importance. Since it is a historian who is its constructor, he or she "processes" selected events from chronicles and other historical narratives into a story, using certain narrative tactics of explanation and interpretation to create the "effect of reality". These narrative tactics or ways of narrativization (explanation and interpretation) include the following: first, explanation by emplotment; second, explanation by argument; third, explanation by ideological implication (White 1975: 7). White stresses that we cannot talk about science in the modern sense without a theory, and probably the essential sign of the modernity of a particular field of scientific work is that it has a division into "theoretical" and "practical" (or "applied") dimensions (White 2014: 44).

Perspectivism and revisionism as conceptual grounds of the narrative theory of history are outlined and thoroughly analyzed by Danto, who believes that they are rooted in the very nature of historical knowledge. The inherent perspective of historical research and, accordingly, the permanent revision and reassessment of its results are necessary conditions for the functioning of history as a system of knowledge. At the time of actions, we often do not realize the significance that we assign to them later. This is a key feature of the historical ordering of events: historical events are constantly being re-described, and their significance is being re-evaluated in the light of later information. With this information, a historian can say a little more about events than witnesses or contemporaries of those events. This is a common feature and a significant advantage of the historical view of the world. Danto puts it this way: "The whole truth concerning an event can only be known after, and sometimes only *long* after the event itself has taken place, and this part of the story historians alone can tell. It is something even the best sort of witness cannot know" (Danto 2007: 151).

For this reason, historical knowledge can never be complete or unchangeable. Danto points out that we are always revising our ideas

about the past, and to assume that they should be “unchangeable” would be unfair to the spirit of historical inquiry (Danto 2007: 143, 145). A historian has the unique privilege of seeing events in a temporal perspective, therefore, as Danto repeatedly stresses, it should not be considered a disadvantage that a historian, being temporally distant from the events he or she studies, is unable to know them as eyewitnesses would, because he or she does not have to know them in this way. “For the whole point of history is not to know about actions as witnesses might, but as historians do, in connection with later events and as parts of temporal wholes. <...> Men would give a great deal to be able to see their actions through the eyes of historians” (Danto 2007: 183) .

In addition, we should always remember that a historian, like any other person, has beliefs, worldviews, and specific interests. This does not prevent or diminish historian’s ability to achieve his or her “minimal goal”, as Danto calls it, which is to express truthful statements about the past. Historical narrative is always selective, it draws attention to something as more important in the context of research, and leaves something out of consideration as less important. However, besides this, a historian may have other motives for talking about some events and not mentioning others. Our way of organizing the past, Danto insists, is causally related to our particular interests (Danto 2007: 30-31, 33). “We cannot conceive of history without organizational schemes, nor of historically organizing schemes apart from specific human interests” (Danto 2007: 111).

For White, there is no non-ideological basis on which it would be possible to objectively examine the various conceptions of the historical process and historical knowledge appealed to different ideologies. Therefore, one cannot claim that one conception of historical knowledge is more “realistic” or “scientific” than another without showing a certain bias as to what a specific historical or social science should be. In his conception of the theory of history, he tries to show how ideological beliefs are incorporated into the historian’s attempts to explain the historical field and construct a verbal model of historical events or processes in the narrative (White 1975: 26).

The practical interest of a historian is analyzed in detail by Chris Lorenz, who successfully implements Hilary Putnam’s conception of internal realism into the narrative theory of history. According to Lorenz, the normative aspects related to the choice of perspective of seeing the past are the most important in historiography because historians argue about them the most. Similar to descriptive statements, normative assertions in historical narratives do not exist alone, but appear one after the other, as they are interconnected on a conceptual level. Just as descriptive statements are based on theories of

observation, so normative assertions are always based on theories of morality, which obviously act as background knowledge. Therefore, Lorenz states, it is better to openly agree on the normative perspectives of historians from the very beginning (declare and subject to scientific analysis, rather than to judge from the position of “ethical neutrality”), which will eventually strengthen the rationality of historical discussions (Lorenz 1994, 317-318, 321-322).

Taking into account the above-mentioned conceptual grounds of the narrative theory of history, we can also speak of *narrative tolerance* as an integral part of the narrative approach in the philosophy of history. Here, narrative tolerance is proposed to be understood as a decisive refusal to impose one’s historical narrative on others (in accordance with the principle that “history is written by the victors”), as well as the possibility of including the voices of different historical agents in the narrative and taking into account different points of view without reducing the overall conclusions of the investigation to a “common denominator”, especially in situations with long-term historical conflicts. However, it is important to underscore that this does not apply to proven cases of crimes against humanity and violations of international law.

Narrative Tolerance as a Conceptual and Practical Tool

The philosophical basis for the concept of narrative tolerance is the idea of multiplicity of pasts proposed by Paul Roth, as well as the common understanding of historical fact as an event under description, shared by Danto and White.

Roth argues for the plurality of pasts that is possible because the constructing of the past always depends to some extent on socially mediated negotiations about the match between our descriptions and experiences. Roth states that the past is constructed (rather than found) and emphasizes the priority of classification over perception in the order of understanding and verification of historical knowledge. Such things as events, facts, actions, kinds exist and have explanation only in a theory. From Roth’s point of view, the temporal distance in the case of history may accentuate some of the problems of understanding others and what they did in the past, but the problems raised are not unique to the theory of knowledge as such (Roth 2012: 333-336). Roth notes that the constant changes in the way we describe and narrate past events do not change “the past itself,” but only change our appreciation of what happened. He maintains:

“Given alternative modes for structuring what happens, changes in description can alter relations among events imputed to a past, and so how a past thus structured impacts what becomes possible going forward. A plurality of pasts results because constituting a past depends to some degree on socially mediated negotiations of a fit between descriptions and experience. Even what we take to mark what can change and what cannot itself depends on the possibility of descriptive change or reclassification, human histories will continue to reveal a multiplicity of pasts” (Roth 2012: 339).

In other words, most of the categories that we usually use to construct the past are largely dependent on the socially determined narrative strategies of the present. This view of Roth’s is in line with Danto’s position that the past itself does not change, but the way we organize it does. Nothing can happen to the past in itself to change it or make it “false,” but over time we increasingly feel the need to add new or more “fresh” descriptions of certain events and processes (Danto 2007: 166–167, 180). Thus, the “temporal wholes” into which the historian organizes historical events by means of a narrative are permanently changing, and therefore, the results of any historical research are open to ongoing re-description in accordance with changes the descriptive strategies.

Roth grounds his idea of the plurality of pasts in the thesis of the existence of two fundamentally different dimensions of the past, proposed by Goldstein. In *Historical Knowing*, Goldstein proposes to distinguish between the real past, which exists outside the totality of historical texts and direct experience of historians, and the historical past (the totality of historical texts or narratives), which is created by historians (Goldstein 1976: xix-xxi, 136). He also stresses that the historical fact is not found in the past because a fact is a statement about the past formulated by a historian on the basis of his research. “Historical facts are the products, or outcome, of historical research. ... We have simply no approach to the human past other than by means of historical research” (Goldstein 1976: 88-89).

The idea that historical facts exist only in thought, language, and discourse is not new to the narrative theory of history. The conceptual distinction between a historical event (a state of affairs that took place in a certain time and space) and a historical fact (a statement about that state of affairs) was clearly drawn by White. Events happen and are more or less properly reflected in historical texts, while facts are theoretically constructed in thought and/or imaginatively in the imagination. In an interview with Eva Domanska, White admitted that at this point he adopts Danto’s position that the historical fact is

the event under description (Domanska 2008: 5-6). According to Danto, a historical fact is an event under the narrative description, and thus the same event can form the basis for a large number of historical facts (Danto 2007: 235). However, this does not mean that relativism prevails. White emphasizes that the historian always deals with “real events”. These events are real not because they occurred but because they were remembered and are capable of being fixed in a chronologically ordered sequence. To qualify as historical, an event must have at least two narrations of its occurrence. Unless at least two versions of the same set of events can be imagined, there is no reason for a historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account of what really happened. Thus, history as a science belongs to the category of what can be called “the discourse of the real” (White 1987: 20).

Thus, we come to two paradoxical conclusions: first, the past, as it is given to us, is constructed, multiple, and at the same time real, and second, that our knowledge of the past can be both contradictory and true. This situation requires us to develop additional conceptual and methodological tools for dealing with the historical knowledge. The notion of narrative tolerance is one of such tools.

Narrative tolerance, as a strategy for historical research, implies a refusal to impose one’s own national historical narrative on other (neighboring) countries and gradually replace it with a transnational perspective or with a narrative of cultural convergency (Mishalova 2019: 52-53). Narrative tolerance as a methodological tool is a way of writing a historical narrative that involves at least two points of view on a certain sequence of historical events, except in cases of violations of international law and crimes against humanity. For example, there can be no explanation of the Holocaust or the Holodomor from the point of view of the organizers of these crimes – the Nazi and Soviet regimes, respectively. This also implies avoiding the use of expressions that provoke hate speech in the practice of historiography, such as “old enemy”, “endless enmity”, and “glorious victory”, as they serve as triggers for the resumption of past conflicts and encourage hostility and belligerence.

In his essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin offers an interesting metaphor of the “angel of history”, which very aptly reflects the constructive character of the work of every historian. Benjamin writes:

“A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one

catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to say, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress” (Benjamin 2015: 249).

The historian constructs and reconstructs the historical past, supplementing the existing view of the past with new facts or new approaches to their interpretation, thus enriching our knowledge of the past in itself. Collingwood argues that history as a scientific discipline is constructive by its very nature (Collingwood 1946: 240). Popper underscores that there can be no history of the past as “what actually happened”. There can only be historical interpretations, none of which are final. And each generation has the right to form their own interpretation. However, in his opinion, this is not only a right, but also a kind of obligation (Popper 2013: 473).

That is why it is extremely important to develop and promote the notion of narrative tolerance as a principle (a basic framework) and methodological tool in the historical studies, including in history teaching. We must recognize that the historical past, as we know it through historical works, is always to a large extent an “argued reality” to the real past. The components that a historian “adds” to the real past, creating the historical past in the process of researching, explaining, and interpreting the available material, include theories, methodologies, and conceptual apparatus that are modern and regularly updated. The main mechanism for creating and changing the historical past as an augmented reality is the historical narrative. So, a set of historical narratives can be viewed not only as a way of existence of the historical past (metaphysical dimension), but also as a method and/or mechanism of narrative engineering (epistemological dimension), a permanent process of re-description and re-evaluation of existing historical knowledge (as Danto points out it) in the light of new data or theoretical and methodological approaches within the contemporary humanities.

In turn, narrative engineering, which is actually practiced by historians, can be considered by analogy with Popper’s piecemeal social engineering or even as a component of the latter. By social engineering, Popper means the planning and design of institutions for the purpose of social changes (delaying or controlling, or subduing the next historical development) (Popper 1986: 45). He accentuates:

“The only course open to the social sciences is to forget all about the verbal fireworks and to tackle the practical problems of our time with the help of the theoretical methods which are fundamentally the same in all sciences. I mean the methods of trial and error, of inventing hypotheses which can be practically tested, and of submitting them to practical tests. A social technology is needed whose results can be tested by piecemeal social engineering” (Popper 2013: 428).

In view of the above, narrative tolerance as a conceptual framework and methodological tool can be seen as a kind of narrative technology aimed at enabling and conceptually supporting piecemeal narrative engineering – “piecemeal tinkering” in Popper’s terms, that is, progressive changes in the descriptions and explanations of controversial and/or conflictual pages of the past. Long-lasting historical conflicts are necessarily reflected in historiographical traditions and result in contradictory historical conclusions, making them difficult to resolve overnight, even if there is political will to settle the conflict (which is actually sometimes lacking in such situations). According to Popper, one of the most important tasks of any technology is to point out what cannot be achieved (Popper 1986: 58, 61).

Narrative tolerance as a tool for progressive changes in the historiography simultaneously shows the possibility of changing our vision of the past (through changes in the narratives) and the limitations associated with this, namely, the gradual nature of these changes, the contradictory results, etc. Just as the course of the historical process can never be theoretically modeled, since the end result will always differ from the rational project (Popper 1986: 47–48), narrative tolerance cannot guarantee one hundred percent effectiveness either. However, it can lay the groundwork for this and, in White’s words, transform historical research in such a way as to allow historians to participate positively in liberating the present from the “burden of history” (White 1966: 124).

Finally, it should be stressed that narrative tolerance as a conceptual and methodological tool cannot be considered separately from the methodological canons of the historical profession, in particular, Leopold von Ranke’s method of source criticism, based on the rational critical tradition of the New Age. The “piecemeal tinkering” within Popper’s concept of social engineering should be used in conjunction with critical analysis, which, in his opinion, is the best way to achieve practical results in both the social and natural sciences (Popper 1986: 58).

In this context, the position of critical rationalism, with its focus on arguments and experience within the epistemology of history, can

be seen as a kind of continuation of the Rankean critical approach at the conceptual level, i.e., the level of theoretical and moral and ethical assumptions of scientific work. The basic principle of this position is as follows: “I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort we may get nearer to the truth”. And according to Popper, this principle is very close to the scientific approach, as it is associated with the idea that everyone can be wrong, so either the scholar or other researchers can identify their mistakes through criticism and self-criticism (Popper 2013: 442). It is a mechanism for the development of science, the growth and clarification of academic knowledge, based on the scientific method and academic objectivity as intersubjectively recognized research results in the natural sciences, engineering, and humanities. Popper notes: “What we call ‘scientific objectivity’ is not a product of the individual scientist’s impartiality, but a product of the social or public character of scientific method; and the individual scientist’s impartiality is, so far as it exists, not the source but rather the result of this socially or institutionally organized objectivity of science” (Popper 2013: 426).

Within the analytical philosophy of history, Goldstein, like Popper, emphasizes the important role of historians’ prior theoretical beliefs and the intersubjective nature of the scientific method in history. He argues that the historian’s description is true because it is reasonable to believe that some part of the past had such characteristics, and not because it corresponds to an real event as a witness may have observed it, but it does not mean the subjectivity of historians as historians constitute the historical past. Historical knowledge is relative to the discipline of history in the same way that any sort of knowledge is relative to the disciplined way in which it is produced. According to the methodological approach, historical objectivity is an intersubjective agreement between historians. In terms of methodology, historical objectivity is an intersubjective agreement between historians (Goldstein 1976: 211–213).

Critical rationalism leads to another interesting conclusion, namely that everyone has the right to be heard and to defend his or her position, that guarantees the right to tolerance. Popper formulates this as follows: “Rationalism is therefore bound up with the idea that the other fellow has a right to be heard, and to defend his arguments. It thus implies the recognition of the claim to tolerance, at least of all those who are not intolerant themselves” (Popper 2013: 443). Popper insists that the adoption of rationalism implies that there is a common means of communication – a common language of reason. This establishes a kind of moral obligation towards this language, an obligation to maintain its standards of clarity and to use it in academic studies

and discussions in such a way that it can retain its function as a means of argumentation, i.e., to use it as a tool for rational communication rather than as a means of “self-expression” (Popper 2013: 443).

However, critical rationalism tells us that we have an obligation not only to listen to the arguments of our opponents, but also to respond accordingly, i.e., to respond simply and tolerantly. However, absolute tolerance leads to the disappearance of tolerance, which is known as the “paradox of tolerance”. Here, Popper calls on us to demand that in order to preserve tolerance, we should not tolerate the intolerant. We must demand that any movement that preaches intolerance outlaws itself, and we must make incitement to intolerance and persecution criminal, just as we must make incitement to murder, kidnapping, or the revival of the slave trade criminal. For if we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them (Popper 2013: 581).

Therefore, narrative tolerance must also be limited, i.e., it cannot apply to “alternative” justifications for proven crimes against humanity (the Holocaust or the Holodomor), violations of international law (Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 or Russia’s full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022), or ideologies such as Fascism, Nazism, or Stalinism. Following the principle of narrative tolerance, as well as determining its limits in each specific research case, is a collective effort and responsibility of the community of historians. In order to be able to adequately perceive and deal with the plurality of visions of the past, which implies the contradiction of positions as a “norm”, we need not only critical but also tolerant historical thinking.

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Нягледзячы на беспярэчную апрыёрную істотнасць дадзенай галіны для філасофскіх ведаў у цэлым, даволі працяглы час аналітычная эпистэмологія (г. зн. адпаведны раздзел суадноснай традыцыі) існавала калі не на маргінезе, то, прынамсі, у адрыве ад іншых даследаванняў англа-амерыканскай школы, быўшы інкапсуляванай у своеасаблівым канцэптуальным тупіку — у пераважна бясплённых дэфінітыўных высілках адказаць на пытанне, пастаўленае ў 1963 г. у аднайменным артыкуле Эдмунда Гецье: «Ці ёсць абгрунтаванае праўдзівае перакананне ведамі?» («Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?»). Нагадаем: у сціслым, але надзвычай уплывовым тэксце Гецье прапануе спачатку, што датыхчасовая філасофія менавіта так азначала феномен ведання, а пасля падае прыклады адваротнага — у некаторых абставінах чалавека, які мае праўдзівае перакананне і яго лагічна кагерэнтнае абгрунтаванне, мы не можам ахарактарызаваць як ведаючага. Меркавалася знайсці мадыфікацыю, або дадатак да зыходнай дэфініцыі («абгрунтаванае праўдзівае перакананне»), якія далі б магчымасць ахапіць усе феномены, азначаныя намі як веды, і не мелі б аналагічных вылучэнняў або контрпрыкладаў. Дзесяцігоддзі аддадзеныя на падобныя спробы, якія так і не далі адназначнага і здавальняльнага выніку, аддалілі аналітычную эпистэмологію ад іншых тэарэтычных пошукаў і адасобілі яе ў эзатэрычны і глухі да іншых філасофскіх патрэбаў абшар.

Але апошнім часам аналітычная эпистэмологія перажывае сапраўдны рэнесанс, або — для аматараў больш сціпрых



фармулёвак — знаходзіцца ў інфляцыйнай фазе, для якой характэрнае імклівае пашырэнне канцэптальных прэтэнзіяў, пранікненне ў суседнія дысцыплінарныя абшары, выбухны рост новых тэорыяў і паняццяў. Бадай, не выпадкава, што падобныя нечуваныя раней рост звязаны з дзвюма тэорыямі, якія аналагічна разгортваюць класічную эпістэمالогію ў больш практыка-арыентаваны бок і нітуюць яе з этычнымі праблемамі. Гэта, па-першае, так званая эпістэمالогія цноты (*virtue epistemology*), якая прапануе разглядаць эпістэмічныя феномены ў якасці кагнітыўных дасягненняў, дзе поспех у пазнанні, нягледзячы на пэўную варыятыўнасць адносна вонкавых акалічнасцяў, грунтуецца найперш на ўнутраных дыспазіцыях і ёсць, такім чынам, вынікам папярэдняй эпістэмічнай працы. Па-другое, кажам пра такую субдысцыпліну, як сацыяльная эпістэمالогія, якая не толькі даследуе адметныя рэжымы пазнання сацыяльнага, але і разглядае веды ў цэлым у якасці супольнага і калектыўнага дасягнення.

Менавіта пра сацыяльную эпістэمالогію пойдзе размова ў далейшым. За яе развіццё ў папярэдня дзесяцігоддзі не ў апошнюю чаргу трэба падзякаваць Мірандзе Фрыкер (*Miranda Fricker*) і прапанаванай ёю канцэпцыі «эпістэмічнай несправядлівасці», разгорнутай у аднайменнай кнізе (*Fricker 2009*).

Сцісла нагадаем — у якасці асноўных тыпаў эпістэмічнай несправядлівасці Фрыкер прыводзіць:

i. Несправядлівасць у адносінах сведчання (*testimonial injustice*), калі сведчанням асобы сістэмна адмаўляецца ў належнай ступені даверу на падставе распаўсюджаных у грамадстве стэрэатыпаў (такіх як класавыя, гендарныя, нацыянальныя і да т. п.).

ii. Герменеўтычную несправядлівасць (*hermeneutical injustice*): адсутнасць у культуры патрэбных канцэптальных сродкаў і інтэрпрэтацыйных механізмаў, якія не дазваляюць пэўнай (як правіла, маргіналізаванай або сацыяльна прыгнечанай) групе выказаць свой адметны досвед, пазбаўляючы яе чальцоў магчымасці адэкватнага самаразумеання і пашырэння ведаў аб перажываным імі.

Як бачым, паняцце «эпістэмічнай несправядлівасці» было адразу сфармуляванае ў адмысловым перакрываванні ўласна эпістэмічнага і этыка-нарматыўнага абшараў: узнятыя праблемы не абмяжоўваюцца вылучна акадэмічнай значнасцю, але нясуць і характэрны маральна-палітычны пасыл. Фрыкер не толькі актыўна пазычала прыклады з сучаснай сацыяльнай крытыкі (найперш феміністычнай тэорыі і *Black Studies*), але і разлічвала на зваротнае ўздзеянне, то бо прыдатнасць уведзенага ёю канцэпту для самой сацыяльнай крытыкі. Паняцце «эпістэмічнай несправядлівасці» сапраўды напаткаў акадэмічны поспех — яно было падхоплена

шматлікімі даследнікамі, сярод якіх прадстаўнікі (і прадстаўніцы) не толькі ўласна эпістэمالогіі, але і фемінісцкай філасофіі, і гендарных штудыяў, посткаланіяльнай і дэкаланіяльнай тэорыі і іншых напрамкаў сучаснай сацыяльнай крытыкі, якія развіваюць яго і ўшыркі (дадаючы новыя прыклады таго, як герменеўтычныя і сведкавыя трансакцыі могуць быць ахарактарызаваныя як несправядлівыя), і ўглыб (прапануючы разглядаць у якасці такой несправядлівасці іншыя сітуацыі сацыяльнага-эпістэмічнага ўзаемадзеяння).

Характэрны эпістэмічна-нарматыўны сінтэз, на якім грунтуецца паняцце, патрабуе яго практычнага прачытання: істотна не проста засведчыць наяўнасць эпістэмічнай несправядлівасці, але і прапанаваць шляхі яе выпраўлення. У самой Фрыкер знаходзім канцэпт дзвюх адмысловых эпістэмічных цнотаў, вылучаных паводле двух тыпаў несправядлівасці:

«Цнота справядлівасці ў адносінах да сведчання» (virtue of testimonial justice) – прадугледжвае свядомыя мадыфікацыі, якія мы ўносім у нашу ацэнку надзейнасці чужых сведчанняў, у якіх бяруцца пад увагу і па магчымасці нейтралізуюцца сацыяльныя прыхмі.

«Цнота герменеўтычнай справядлівасці» (virtue of hermeneutic justice) – калі мы карэктуюем наша меркаванне аб непаслядоўным аповедзе або цяжкасцях суразмоўцы ў фармулёўцы свайго досведу, зыходзячы з таго, што гэта можа быць вынікам не ягоных кагнітыўных або рытарычных абмежаванняў, але структурнай нястачы адпаведных інтэрпрэтацыйных рэсурсаў.

Характэрна, што Фрыкер застаецца ў сваіх прапановах на ўзроўні праблемы індывідуальнай рацыянальнасці: якім чынам трэба мадыфікаваць нашы эпістэмічныя трансакцыі, каб праз сацыяльныя асіметрыі і ідэалагічныя перашкоды не прамінуць істотных сведчанняў. Але: што рабіць у выпадку ўжо адбылых эпістэмічных узаемадзеянняў, якія рэтраспектыўна знаходзім несправядлівымі? І ці можа эпістэمالогія прапанаваць выпраўленні не толькі на індывідуальна-асабістым, але і структурным узроўні, на якім, уласна, і караняцца згаданыя несправядлівасці?

Агулам, не толькі ўведзены Фрыкер канцэпт «эпістэмічнай несправядлівасці», але і звязаныя і дэрывацыйныя ад яго паняцці «эпістэмічнай шкоды» (epistemic harm) і «эпістэмічнай крыўды» (epistemic wrong), таксама папулярныя ў сучаснай сацыяльнай эпістэمالогіі, зеўраюць пытаннем: якім чынам можам даць рады падобным несправядлівасці, шкодзе і крыўдзе? Калі ёсць адмысловы эпістэмічны від шкодаў, то мусіць быць і карэляцыйны ім від кампенсацыяў, г. зн. дзеянняў, скіраваных на аднаўленне

пашкоджанага статусу эпістэмічнага агента або на ўзнаўленне эпістэмічнай справядлівасці ў грамадстве.

Уласна, гэту канцэптуальна-практычную лакуну і паклікана закрыць паняцце «эпістэмічных рэпарацыяў» (epistemic reparations¹), якое ўводзіць у двух артыкулах вядомая прадстаўніца сучаснай сацыяльнай эпістэмолагіі Джэніфер Лакі (Jennifer Lackey).

«Эпістэмічныя рэпарацыі», карыстаючыся дэфініцыяй, якую падае Маргарэт Уокер (Margaret Urban Walker) для рэпарацыяў як такіх («свядомая чыннасць перадачы дабротаў тым, хто быў пакрыўджаны»), Лакі вызначае як рэпарацыйныя чыны ў форме эпістэмічных дабротаў, аддадзеных эпістэмічна пакрыўджаным тымі, хто прызнае гэтыя крыўды і чые рэпарацыйныя дзеянні скіраваныя на тое, каб іх выправіць (Lackey 2022: 62–63, 70).

Дзеля абгрунтавання прапанаванага ёю новага тыпу рэпарацыяў Лакі, па-першае, спасылаецца на наяўную таксаномію рэпарацыйных чынаў (Lackey 2022: 63), сярод якіх прынята вылучаць: (i) палітычныя, (ii) псіхалагічныя і (iii) маральныя рэпарацыі. Падзел грунтуецца на тым, што павінна аднавіць кампенсатыўнае дзеянне, і ў якасці такога аднаўляючага разглядаецца найперш агентнасць асобы (групы) у трох вымярэннях (палітычным, псіхалагічным і маральным). Як заўважае Лакі, поруч і паралельна з тым мы выступаем і ў якасці эпістэмічных актараў, і наша інтэгральнасць і годнасць можа быць парушанай акурат з гэтага боку, што патрабуе асобных эпістэмічных рэпарацыяў (Lackey 2022: 64; Lackey 2025: 396).

Па-другое, Лакі спасылаецца на міжнародную праўную практыку (Lackey 2022: 59–60; Lackey 2025: 396–397) — на засведчанае Камісіяй ААН па правах чалавека ў дакладзе 1997 г. і дадатку да яго 2005 г. і прызнаванае за ахвярамі і блізкімі ахвяраў грубых правапарушэнняў і злачынстваў, здзейшаных дзяржавай або сацыяльнымі групамі, «права ведаць» (пра сам акт злачынства, пра ягоныя абставіны і акалічнасці, пра ягоных ахвяраў і злачынцаў, пра месца і час здарэння і пра далейшыя лёсы ахвяраў). Падрабязна аналізуючы тэкст дакладу, Лакі заўважае, што «права ведаць» у ім разглядаецца як (i) неадэмнае (яно ірэlevantнае да канкрэтных культурных і палітыка-юрыдычных кантэкстаў), (ii) надзеленае індывідуальна-калектыўнай прыродай (аб злачынстве маюць права ведаць не толькі непасрэдная ахвяра і яе блізкія, але

1 Адзначым, што ангельскае слова «reparations» мае больш шырокі сэнс, чым ягоны беларускі адпаведнік, і можа кантэкстуальна перакладацца як «кампенсатыі», «загладжванне», «аднаўленне», але для дэфінітыўнай строгасці ў далейшым мы будзем прытрымлівацца аднастайнага перакладу.

і грамадства як такое), (iii) частка трыяды: «права ведаць», «права на справядлівасць» і «права на рэпарацыі» (пры гэтым, як заўважае Лакі, менавіта першае, як правіла, грунтуе два другія; Laskey 2025: 399).

Пры гэтым Лакі лічыць сённяшняе міжнароднае права недастатковым, бо ў дадатак да засведчанага ў ім «права ведаць» неабходна ўвесці яшчэ адно — «права быць знаным»².

Лакі ўказвае на шэраг характэрных сацыяльна-псіхалагічных фактаў: (i) быць знаным іншымі — шуканая і шанаваная сацыяльная даброта (Laskey 2022: 58); (ii) менавіта тое, як мы ўспрымаем ся іншымі, дакладней, тое, як мы бачым сябе ў якасці ўспрыманых іншымі, адыгрывае істотную (калі не вырашальную) ролю ў канстытуванні нашай самасці (Laskey 2022: 58); (iii) як правіла, ахвяры значных злачынстваў або буйной несправядлівасці жадаюць быць пачутымі і знанымі ў якасці такіх ахвяраў, і нярэдка сам акт падзеленага з іншым праз аповед траўматычнага досведу і сам акт прызнання з боку другога маёй чалавечай годнасці як носбіта ведаў аб перажытым мной дае магчымасць часткова загаіць нанесеную мне траўму (Laskey 2022: 55); (iv) нават пасля задавалення стандартных юрыдычных працэдураў узнаўлення справядлівасці (адпаведная пастанова суда і эканамічныя або сацыяльныя кампенсацыі) ахвяры выказваюць жаданне быць пачутымі і знанымі ў якасці ахвяраў (а мы прызнаем за імі такое права). На падставе (i–ii) можна выснаваць, што быць знаным ёсць асобнай (эпістэмічнай) дабротай і варта паставіць пытанне аб тым, наколькі такая даброта і карэлятыўны ёй цяжар, або эпістэмічная праца «знаць іншых», роўна размеркаваная сярод розных чальцоў грамадства. Бо ж адказ на апошняе відавочны — ані выгода быць знаным, ані цяжар знаць іншых і быць сведкам перажытага імі досведу не размеркаваныя эквівалентна, Лакі ставіць наступнае пытанне: наколькі такая няроўнасць ёсць несправядлівай? На падставе (iii–iv) можна выснаваць: права быць знанымі самамэтнае для ахвяраў, і мы прызнаем за імі такое права. Такім чынам, прынамсі, у выпадку ахвяраў буйных злачынстваў адмаўленне ім у праве быць знанымі

2 Тут і далей мы карыстаемся адметным для беларускай мовы дублетам (які не мае аналагаў у ангельскай) дзеясловаў «ведаць» і «знаць» і іхных лінгвістычных дэрыватаў. Трэба браць пад увагу, што ў абодвух выпадках ідзеца пра пераклад аднаго і таго ж ангельскага «know». Мы карыстаемся гэтай спецыфічнай для беларускай мовы сінаніміяй для развядзення (таксама ўласцівага і думкам Дж. Лакі) двух феноменаў: прапазіцыйнага ведання, г. зн. такога, якое можа быць разгорнута ў форму прапазіцыйнага стаўлення «А ведае, што ф», і міжасабовага ведання-як-знаёмства, якое фармалізуецца ў выглядзе «А знае В».

ў якасці ахвяраў трэба разглядаць як несправядлівае, і задачай як дзяржавы, так і грамадства ёсць спрыяць аднаўленню зняважанай справядлівасці.

Пры гэтым, настойвае Лакі, феномены «быцця знаным» і наяўнасці сведак, з якімі я магу падзяліцца перажытым досведам, маюць эпістэмічную прыроду (Lackey 2022: 56). У тым ліку падобнаму знанню ўласцівая свая адметная верытатыўная прырода: нельга «памылкова» знаць чалавека (Lackey 2022: 56).

Асобна трэба адзначыць, што, як правіла, грубыя правапарушэнні з боку дзяржавы або сацыяльных групаў суправаджаюцца кампаніяй па замоўчванні і адмаўленні самога факту злачынства, дыскрэдытацыяй ахвяраў і прыніжэннем значнасці перажытага імі досведу. Падобная эпістэмічная дэпрывацыя з'яўляецца канстытутыўнай часткай самога злачыну і нанесеных сацыяльных траўмаў.

Лакі прапануе ўласную тыпалогію эпістэмічных шкодаў, якімі суправаджаюцца грубыя і буйныя правапарушэнні (пры гэтым першыя не проста суседзяць з другімі або выступаюць іх апраўданнем, але і з'яўляюцца іхным структурным элементам). Яна вылучае: нябачнасць (invisibility), ачарненне (vilification), дэманізацыю (demonization) і сістэматычныя скажэнні (systematic distortion; Lackey 2022: 56, 64; Lackey 2025: 400).

У якасці прыкладу нябачнасці яна прыводзіць сітуацыю, калі ў навуковым калектыве супрацоўнікі-мужчыны праз свае сексісцкія забабоны не проста не надаюць сведчанням сваёй калегі-жанчыны належнага даверу, але наагул адмаўляюцца бачыць у ёй навукоўцу, то бо цалкам адмаўляюць у статусе магчымай крыніцы сведчанняў (Lackey 2022: 65). Ачарненне і дэманізацыю Лакі ілюструе гісторыяй генацыду ў Руандзе, калі прадстаўнікам тутсі адмаўлялі ў чалавечай годнасці, разглядаючы іх у якасці «прусакоў і змеяў» (Lackey 2022: 66).

Падобныя выпадкі яднае тое, што ў іх ахвяра пазбаўляецца статусу эпістэмічнага агента, чальца супольнасці і асобы, якая заслугоўвае павагі і даверу (Lackey 2025: 405). Гэта больш глыбокія віды эпістэмічнай несправядлівасці (і шкоды), чым тыя, аб якіх разважала Фрыкер, і іх нельга выправіць на ўзроўні карэктываў індывідуальных суджэнняў.

Пералічаныя шкоды маюць адметны эпістэмічны характар (прынамсі, па меркаванні Лакі), таму і адказам на іх мусяць быць уласна эпістэмічныя рэпарацыі — у тым ліку прызнанне праўды, публічныя выбачэнні, ушанаванне памяці і інтэграцыя адпаведных гісторыяў у змест адукацыі (Lackey 2022: 70). Але ўсім падобным дзеянням мусіць папярэднічаць больш зыходнае і фундаментальнае здавальненне права быць знанымі (Lackey 2022: 71).

Каб падкрэсліць адметны дэанталагічны характар эпістэмічных рэпарацыяў у форме быцця сведкам для ахвяры, Лакі прапануе параўнаць іх з «эпістэмічнай добразычлівасцю» (epistemic benevolence): нехта можа выслухаць гісторыю іншага ў якасці простага акту дабрыві. Каб падобны акт стаўся рэпаратывным, яму мусіць папярэднічаць эпістэмічная шкода, якая прызнаецца сведкам і часткова здымаецца ў самім акце выслухвання: я — у адрозненне ад тых, хто намагаўся ператварыць цябе ў нябачнага, скажаў і дэманізаваў твой вобраз, спрабуючы вылучыць цябе з самой эпістэмічнай супольнасці, — прызнаю тваю годнасць як носьбіта адметнай веды, у тым ліку і найперш — тваю неад’емную і выточную асвядомленасць адносна самой адбылай несправядлівасці.

Лакі супастаўляе два розныя выяўленья ёю правы: права ведаць і права быць знаным. Яна мяркуе, з аднаго боку, што яны юрыдычна эквівалентныя, а значыць, легальныя адметнасці, выяўленья для першага, можна пашырыць і на другое (Laskey 2022: 62). Права быць знаным таксама трэба разглядаць як неад’емнае і індывідуальна-калектыўнае. З другога боку, у іх розныя ўласна эпістэмічныя профілі: у той час як права ведаць кажа аб адносінах індывіда да прапазіцыі (або іх сукупнасці), права быць знаным апісвае адмысловы міжасабовы і непрапазіцыйны тып ведаў. Для права на веды не істотна, хто або што ёсць крыніцай ведання, права быць знаным — павінна зыходзіць ад непасрэднай крыніцы досведу. Толькі сама ахвяра можа разумець прыроду перажытай ёю несправядлівасці ў неапасродкаваны спосаб, мае неадзыйны эпістэмічны аўтарытэт у дадзеным пытанні.

Лакі разглядае канцэптуалізаванае ёю права быць знаным як (i) міжпакаленчае: бо ж эпістэмічная шкода можа быць спадкаванай, чалавек (супольнасць) можа патрабаваць адпаведных эпістэмічных кампенсацыяў за шкоды, здзейснення ў адносінах ягонных продкаў (Laskey 2022: 68), (ii) такое, ад якога можа адмовіцца носьбіт права, — ахвяра можа пажадаць застацца нязнанай, і мы мусім здаволіць гэта яе жаданне (Laskey 2022: 74).

Азначаныя правы адлюстроўваюцца ў адпаведных абавязках.

Праву ведаць адпавядае абавязак казаць праўду, шанавець праўду і спрыяць яе распаўсюду. З боку дзяржавы (ураду) гэта прадугледжае адказнасць за стварэнне, захаванне і перадачу ведаў аб тым, што здарылася і хто быў датычны да падзеі.

У выпадку права на быццё знаным мы кажам пра абавязак «слухаць, улічваць галасы ахвяр, ствараць для іх пляцоўкі, дзяліцца іхнымі гісторыямі» (Laskey 2022: 72), мы павінны прызнаваць і ўмацоўваць іхны эпістэмічны аўтарытэт адносна ведання сябе і сваіх пакутаў. Знаць ахвяраў, помніць аб іх і быць для іх сведкамі — гэта

адметная эпістэмічная «праца». Істотна не толькі тое, што мы ведаем аб тым, што ў злачынства былі ахвяры, але і тое, што мы знаем персанальна іх (Lackey 2022: 55).

Як сказана вышэй, права на быццё знаным носіць індывідуальна-калектыўны характар — такі ж падвоены статус маюць і імплікаваныя ім абавязкі. Калі непасрэдняя віноўнікі злачынства (ідзеца аб грубых і буйных правапарушэннях, за якія нясуць адказнасць дзяржава або сацыяльная група) адмаўляюцца прызнаць іх і аддаць належнае ахвярам, то часткова справу эпістэмічнай кампенсацыі могуць узяць на сябе чальцы грамадства, да якога прыналежыць ахвяра, — мы можам выслухаць яе, надаць яе голасу значнасць, прадставіць пляцоўкі для выказвання, дзяліцца яе гісторыяй праз медыі і г. д.

Пры гэтым дэанталагічная логіка абавязку «знаць ахвяру» дзейнічае па-рознаму ў адносінах да непасрэднага віноўніка і чальцоў грамадства. Па аналогіі з дасканалымі і недасканалымі маральнымі абавязкамі (perfect and imperfect moral duties) Лакі падзяляе эпістэмічныя абавязкі на дасканалыя і недасканалыя. Прыкладам «дасканалых» маральных абавязкаў можа быць абяцанне — яно дзейнічае ў адносінах канкрэтнай асобы (якой дадзена абяцанне) і мае канкрэтны змест (уласна абяцанае). Недасканалыя абавязкі, узорам для якіх могуць быць міласэрнасць або дабрачыннасць, маюць дыскрэтную прыроду і прадугледжваюць пэўную свабоду дзеяння. Для іх, як піша Лакі, характэрная дыз'юнкцыйная прырода: я магу ажыццявіць свой абавязак дабрачыннасці ў адносінах А, альбо В, альбо С і некалькімі спосабамі (Lackey 2025, 413–414).

Карыстаючыся гэтай аналогіяй, можна зразумець і эпістэмічныя абавязкі: выпраўленне шкодаў, наяўных у маёй эпістэмічнай супольнасці, — мой недасканалы абавязак, у той час як эпістэмічны злачынца звязаны з сваёй ахвярай адмысловымі стасункамі і не можа пазбыцца сваіх (эпістэмічных) абавязкаў перад ёю.

Напрыканцы адзначым, што канцэпцыя Лакі прадугледжвае і досыць значныя карэктывы для сучаснай (аналітычнай) эпістэ-малогіі ў цэлым. У адрозненне ад Міранды Фрыкер, чые прапано-вы па выпраўленні эпістэмічнай несправядлівасці заставаліся на ўзроўні індывідуальных нормаў рацыянальнасці, Лакі настойвае на тым, што нам трэба перагледзець некаторыя падставовыя па-стулаты дысцыпліны.

Завяршаючы адзін з сваіх артыкулаў (Lackey 2025), Лакі за-даецца рэфлексіўным пытаннем: адкуль падобныя размовы пра злачынствы і шкоды ў эпістэ-малогіі, якая, паводле канвенцыя-нальнага яе разумення, му-сіць абмяжоўвацца пытан-нямі праўды, ведаў і перакананняў? Але падобныя феномены (праўда, веды,

перакананні), як мяркуецца, імплементауюць пэўны абавязак — мяне перад самім сабой, абавязак дбаць пра праўду, веды і перакананні і развіваць іх у сабе. У той жа час, аднесены да «вонкавай», сацыяльнай сферы майго ўзаемадзеяння з іншымі, той жа абавязак нібы носіць вылучна маральны характар.

Замест такога, — якое яна лічыць штучным, — разрознення эпістэмічнага і маральнага ў залежнасці ад скіраванасці на асобу (я ці іншыя) Лакі прапануе ўвесці «тэзіс аб парытэце» (parity thesis): калі нейкая мэта разглядаецца як эпістэмічная адносна мяне, то такую ж эпістэмічную прыроду яна мае і тады, калі дастасаваная да іншых.

У артыкуле 2022 г. яна таксама крытыкуе так званую «эпістэмалогію часавых адцінкаў» (time-slice epistemology; Lackey 2022: 76): нібы нормы рацыянальнасці патрабуюць ад нас суадносіцца толькі з тымі перакананнямі і сведчаннямі, якімі мы валодаем у дадзены момант часу. Такім чынам, лічыць Лакі, мы зводзім рацыянальнасць да псіхалагічных крытэраў.

Аўтарка прапануе нам разгледзець наступны прыклад: уявім сабе расіста, які паслядоўна пазбягае сітуацый, дзе ён мог бы сутыкнуцца са сведчаннямі, якія супярэчылі б ягонай ідэалогіі, — нішто ў ягоным досведзе не разыходзіцца з ягонымі перакананнямі, адпаведна, у сваёй свядомасці ён не знаходзіць нічога, што касавала б ягоныя погляды. Нягледзячы на гэта, характарыстыка такога ўяўнага расіста як рацыянальнага падаецца нам праблематычнай — гэта наша нежаданне лічыць яго цалкам рацыянальным сведчыць аб тым, што апроч пытання, якія сведчанні ён сабраў, трэба ставіць і пытанне аб тым, якія сведчанні яму б варта было сабраць (Lackey 2022: 77). Трэба, такім чынам, браць пад увагу нарматыўныя крытэры, якія маюць нелакальную тэмпаральную прыроду. Эпістэмалагічнае абгрунтаванне, такім чынам, датычыць не толькі ментальных станаў, у якіх мы знаходзімся ў дадзены адцінак часу, але і тых, якія нам варта мець у часе (Lackey 2022: 77).

Нашы эпістэмічныя абавязкі, як мяркуе Лакі, сягаюць за сферу, акрэсленую нашымі перакананнямі, і ўлучаюць у сябе і тое, што мы робім (Lackey 2022: 78). Наша нарматыўна-эпістэмічная параза можа датычыць не толькі няздольнасці мець перакананні, адпаведныя наяўным сведчанням, але і распаўсюджвацца на няздольнасць сабраць сведчанні, якія нам варта было б мець. Сюды ж можна ўлучыць і наш абавязак знаць іншых як ахвяраў грубых правапарушэнняў — ён прадугледжвае не толькі пэўныя перакананні, але і актыўныя дзеянні, такія як слуханне, распытанне, запамінанне гісторыяў і распаўсюд інфармацыі аб іх (Lackey 2022: 78).

Падвядзём вынікі.

Па-першае, Дж. Лакі прапануе новую катэгорыю рэпарацыйных чынаў — поруч з вядомымі і засведчанымі ў літаратуры палітычнымі, псіхалагічнымі і маральнымі рэпарацыямі яна настойвае на існаванні адметных эпістэмічных рэпарацыяў, якія вызначае як свядомую перадачу эпістэмічных дабротаў тым, хто быў эпістэмічна ўшкоджаны, і якія ажыццяўляюцца тымі, хто прызнае факт шкоды і разглядае такую перадачу як яе выпраўленне.

Па-другое, яна прыводзіць прыклады двух канкрэтных відаў эпістэмічных рэпарацыяў, узаемазвязаных з двума канцэптуалізаванымі ёю правамі: ведаць і быць знаным. Першае можна знайсці ў дзейных дакументах міжнароднага права, другое — уласная канцэптуальная інавацыя Лакі — прадугледжвае, што ахвяры буйных правапарушэнняў мусяць быць выслуханымі і падтрыманымі ў якасці эпістэмічных аўтарытэтаў адносна перажытай імі несправдлівасці.

Нарэшце, па-трэцяе, увядзенне падобных правоў і звязаных з імі рэпарацыйных чынаў прадугледжвае, па меркаванні аўтаркі, некаторыя досыць значныя тэарэтычныя змены, якія варта ўнесці ў эпістэмалогію: адмаўленне ад тэмпаральнай лакальнасці патрабаванняў да рацыянальных перакананняў і пашырэнне яе канцэптуальных прэтэнзіяў за межы вылучна індывідуальных ментальных станаў на некаторыя сацыяльныя дзеянні.

Можна з верагоднасцю меркаваць, што канцэпцыі эпістэмічных рэпарацыяў Дж. Лакі лёсавана напаткаць значны акадэмічны інтарэс і яна, падобна да тэорыі Міранды Фрыкер, знойдзе як сваю актыўную практычна-эмпірычную інструменталізацыю, так і далейшае тэарэтычнае ўдасканаленне. Падставай для такога нашага меркавання ёсць, па-першае, тое, што тэорыя Лакі закрывае досыць відавочную канцэптуальна-прагматычную лакуну (калі ёсць эпістэмічная шкода, то мусяць быць і адпаведныя ёй выпраўленчыя чыны). Па-другое, падобную лакуну ўсвядоміла не адна толькі Лакі: у акадэмічнай літаратуры знаходзім шэраг аналагічных паняццяў, звязаных з тымі ж канцэптуальнымі патрэбамі: «эпістэмічнае паляпшэнне» (epistemic amelioration) Бена Альмасі (Almassi 2018), «эпістэмічныя выпраўленні» (epistemic amends) Сынхён Сон (Song 2021), «эпістэмічныя кампенсацыі» (epistemic redress) Джорджа Хала (Hull 2022).

Нарэшце, нягледзячы на тое, што абодва разгляданыя намі артыкулы былі апублікаваны досыць нядаўна (2022 і 2025 гг.), уведзенае ў іх паняцце эпістэмічных рэпарацыяў знаходзім задзейнічаным у цэлым шэрагу свежых тэкстаў, звязаных з дэкаланізацыйнай і феміністычнай тэорыяй, Black studies і з даследаваннямі калектыўнай памяці.

На жаль, памеры дадзенага агляду не дазваляюць прааналізаваць тут усе выпадкі выкарыстання паняцця (падобнай задачы мы плануем прысвяціць свае наступныя публікацыі). Спынімся на адным тэксце, які – хоць у ім і не выкарыстоўваецца паняцце «эпістэмічных рэпарацыяў» і не змяшчаецца спасылка на Дж. Лакі, – бадай, як ніякі іншы ілюструе думкі даследніцы. Кажам аб артыкуле Дар’і Цымбалюк (Tsymbalyuk 2023), дзе яна асэнсоўвае свой досвед даследніцы Украіны і даследніцы з Украіны – падчас поўнамаштабнай вайны.

Нітуючы дасведчаную самарэфлексію з паэтычнай жарснасцю тэксту, Цымбалюк апісвае ўласны досвед прадстаўніцы заходняга акадэмічнага свету, якая, нягледзячы на ўсе адпаведныя стылістычныя патрабаванні і навуковыя ўмоўнасці, не можа заставацца нейтральна-аб’ектыўным і бесстароннім эпістэмічным прадуцэнтам і замест таго, міжволі, дзеліцца адметнай ведай, якая паходзіць са спакутаванага цела, ад чалавека, які не можа не турбавацца лёсамі сваіх блізкіх і сваёй краіны. Вынікам ёсць не «прыгожыя» тэорыі з дакладнымі адказамі, але надзея на ўзнаўленне справядлівасці, якой вартыя жыцці, пражываныя тут і зараз. Цымбалюк піша аб тым, што разглядае казанае і пісанае аб Украіне як адметную форму плачу, як перадачу ведаў, якія паходзяць з жарсцяў целаў, якія прагнуць справядлівасці.

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RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS, IRRESPONSIBLE STATES: SHOULD
CITIZENS PAY FOR THEIR STATES' WRONGDOINGS?

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Нават сціслага пераказу дастаткова, каб патлумачыць і маю цікаўленасць у кнізе, і маё жаданне падзяліцца ўражаннямі ад яе з чытачом часопіса. Авія Пастэрнак не толькі аналізуе «гарачую» для нашага кантэксту тэму калектыўнай адказнасці, але і абірае ў якасці асноўнага аб'екта тое яе ўвасабленне, якое і ўзвірыла ўсходнееўрапейскую публічную прастору: наколькі насельніцтва краіны адказнае за ейныя палітычныя «ўчынкi», і ці можа быць апраўданая з пункту гледжання этыкі практыка, калі цяжар выпраўлення злачынстваў дзяржавы падае на плечы яе грамадзянаў? Нават тых, хто не ўдзельнічаў у спрычыненні шкоды або актыўна з ёю не пагаджаўся і ў меру сваіх сілаў пратэставаў? Болей за тое, у якасці асноўнага прыкладу аўтарка выбірае ваенныя рэпарацыі, спагнаныя з краіны-агрэсара. Бадай, немагчыма знайсці разважанняў болей блізкіх да тых, якімі аруплены ўсходнееўрапейскія інтэлектуалы апошнім часам, і фактычна толькі год выдання (2021) тлумачыць, чаму сярод разгляданых прыкладаў не фігуруе расійскі кейс¹.

У той жа час адказы, якія чытач знойдзе ў Пастэрнак, наўрад ці прыйдуцца да густу большасці ўвязаных у спрэчку ўсходнееўрапейскіх інтэлектуалаў. З аднаго боку, аўтарка прызнае наяўнасць

1 Сама Пастэрнак найчасцей спасылаецца на пяць прыкладаў: рэпарацыі ахвярам нацыстаў з боку ФРГ, кампенсацыі Кувейту з боку Ірана, выплаты Чылі ахвярам рэжыму Піначэта, кампенсацыі Канады для прадстаўнікоў карэннага насельніцтва, і — ніколі не сплачаныя, але, па меркаванні аўтаркі, палітычна патрэбныя і этычна апраўданыя — рэпарацыі ЗША за ваеннае ўварванне ў Ірак.

калектыўнай адказнасці, дакладней — адказнасці калектыву, і разглядае дзяржавы ў якасці інстытуалізаваных маральных агентаў, падлеглых этычнаму асуджэнню, і лічыць, што, прынамсі, у некаторых выпадках на грамадзянаў краіны апраўдана накладаць цяжар кампенсацыі за правіны іхнай краіны. З другога боку, гэту выснову яна нюансуе шэрагам умоваў і агаворак, якія фактычна вылучаюць выпадак сённяшняй Расійскай Федэрацыі (або Рэспублікі Беларусі) з шэрагу этычна-легітымных аб'ектаў рэпарацыйных патрабаванняў.

Аўтарка пачынае свой аналіз і не раз спасылаецца ў далейшым на характэрны канфлікт між нашымі этычнымі інтуіцыямі, з аднаго боку, і як штодзённымі, так і палітычнымі (у т. л. міжнароднымі) практыкамі — з другога. Першыя кажучь: вінаваціць людзей, безадносна іх сапраўднага ўдзелу ў злачынстве і фактычнай ролі ў спрычыненні шкоды, па факце іхнага грамадзянства, якое яны найчасцей не выбіралі, — неабгрунтавана, калі не наўпрост амаральна. З другога боку, мы не толькі штодня вінавацім тыя або іншыя сацыяльныя супольнасці, але і міжнароднае права і дзейнасць адпаведных інстытутаў грунтуюцца на пакаранні дзяржаваў як самастойных актараў і патрабуюць спагнання адпаведных кампенсацый з іхнага насельніцтва. Наколькі такая супярэчнасць ёсць трагічнай, але непазбежнай дыхатаміяй нашых перакананняў і практыкі, або яна можа быць развязаная з дапамогай канцэптualaнага аналізу? Па меркаванні Пастэрнак, слушна апошняе: канфлікт этыкі і рэчаіснасці ў дадзеным выпадку толькі ўяўны і ёсць вынікам непаслядоўнага размежавання паняццяў і няслушнага дэдуктыўнага разгортвання нашых інтуіцыяў. Існае на сёння міжнародная практыка, каб адпавядаць паслядоўнай маральнай пазіцыі, патрабуе не суцэльнага этычнага асуджэння, але некаторых карэктываў.

Па-першае, неабходна разрозніць паняцці віны і адказнасці. Апошняе прадугледжвае, што на агента — крыніцу маральнай шкоды накладаецца пэўны абавязак, які ён нясе перад ахвярай. Гэта абавязак выпраўлення шкоды, кампенсацыі ахвяры і дзеянняў, скіраваных на прадухіленне паўтору падобнага. Адказнасць, такім чынам, скіраваная ў будучыню і звязаная з аднаўленчай дэанталогіяй, «віна» жае пра мінулае і псіхалагічныя станы (знарочнасць учынку), якія робяць агента легітымным аб'ектам асуджэння. Паняцці віны і адказнасці раздзяляюць дзве розныя оптыкі і два розныя пытанні: у выпадку першай нас цікавіць, каго мы маем права вініць, у выпадку другой — якіх учынкаў мы маем права чакаць ад сябе і іншых. Адказнасць жае не пра тое, за што трэба ганіць іншых або супраць чаго трэба шукаць аргументаў аб уласнай

недатычнасці, але аб (дэанталагічных) матывах будучых дзеянняў. Нягледзячы на іхную пераблытанасць у штодзённым маральным дыскурсе, прызнанне адказнасці не азначае аўтаматычнага прызнання віны. Адпаведна, нават калі мы прызнаем грамадзянаў адказнымі за злачынствы дзяржавы, гэта не азначае прызнання іхнай віны ў такіх злачынствах.

Па-другое, агенты маральных учынкаў, падлеглыя — у выпадку іхнай шкоднасці — адказнасці, могуць быць рознымі. Ці, прынамсі, такога меркавання прытрымліваецца ўсё большая частка прадстаўнікоў аналітычнай этыкі. Апошняя пачыналася колісь як паслядоўны і безапеляцыйны метадалагічны і нарматыўны індывідуалізм (чалыцамі маральнай супольнасці могуць быць толькі і вылучна індывіды; адзіна апелюючы да індывідаў, этыка можа быць канцэптуальна паслядоўнай), але ў апошнія дзесяцігоддзі ў ёй усё большую папулярнасць заваёўвае ідэя: прынамсі, некаторыя з сацыяльных групаў і калектываў могуць быць адметнымі і самастойнымі маральнымі агентамі.

Варта падкрэсліць: сама паслядоўна асэнсаваная ідэя калектывнай адказнасці прадугледжвае — яна не распаўсюджваецца аўтаматычна на ўсіх уваходных у калектыв індывідаў. Калі б адказнасць калектыву складалася з проста сумы паасобных адказнасцяў ягоных чальцоў, то этычны халізм нічым бы не адрозніваўся ад этычнага індывідуалізму: размова пра адказнасць таго ці іншага калектыву азначала б проста часовую абрэвіятуру, скарачэнне для паслядоўнага пераліку правінаў усіх уваходных у яго.

Сама ідэя калектывнай адказнасці змяшчае ў сабе: непасрэдна вінаватым у спрычыненні шкоды ёсць калектыв як такі, сацыяльнае цэлае, пры гэтым некаторыя ягоныя чальцы маглі не толькі не прымаць удзел у правіне і не ўхваляць яе, але, да прыкладу, наогул не ведаць аб яе здзяйсненні. Такіх бязвінных можа быць большасць — у выпадку, калі рашэнне аб учынку, насуперак меркаванням большасці, прымала фармальнае кіраўніцтва групы. Імаверная і сітуацыя поўнай дысацыяцыі: адказным у злачынстве прызнаецца калектыв як сацыяльнае цэлае, пры гэтым у ім не правінны ніводзін з яго чальцоў.

Праблему маральнай агентнасці калектываў і іхнай адказнасці прынята зводзіць да пытання магчымасці прэдыкацыі ім рэпрэзентатыўных станаў: мы можам лічыць аб'ектам этычнай ацэнкі толькі тое (таго), чаму можна прыпісаць асобныя матывы, намеры, перакананні і рацыянальнасць. Менавіта наўмыснасць паводзінаў робіць іх дзеяннем і магчымым аб'ектам этычнай ацэнкі, якая, у сваю чаргу, прадугледжвае, што першасныя рацыі могуць быць зменены пад уплывам вонкавага меркавання: што калектыв як сацыяльнае

цэлае адгукаецца на ацэнку сваіх учынкаў і прымае такую да ведама ў сваіх далейшых паводзінах (25).

Пастэрнак спасылаецца на тэорыю Пітэра Фрэнча (Peter A. French). Апошні прапанаваў вылучаць сярод сацыяльных групаў іх асобную разнавіднасць — карпарацыі. Для апошніх уласцівы ўнутраная структура і працэдуры прыняцця калектыўных рашэнняў, нарматыўныя стандарты паводзінаў індывідаў і прадпісаная сукупнасць роляў і акрэсленых паўнамоцтваў іхных чальцоў — гэтыя рысы, па меркаванні Фрэнча, робяць калектывы легітымным аб'ектам этычнай ацэнкі і магчымых прэдыкацый адказнасці. Сваю задачу Пастэрнак бачыць у тым, каб давесці: дзяржава — адзін з канкрэтных відаў «карпарацыяў». Яна згадвае такія характэрныя для многіх сучасных палітычных рэжымаў рысы, як наяўнасць канстытуцыі, сістэму стрымак і процівагаў, інстытуты галасавання і рэфэрэндуму, наяўнасць сілавога апарату (і, адпаведна, прымусу грамадзянаў да канформнасці) і ідэалогіі — усё гэта дазваляе казаць аб тым, што рацыянальнасць, уласцівая дзеяннем дзяржавы, адасабляецца і адрозніваецца ад развагаў яе грамадзянаў або кіруючых асобаў (23).

Але паслядоўнае разрозненне дзеяў, рацыянальнасці і адказнасці дзяржавы і яе грамадзянаў, неабходнае для канцэптуалізацыі першай у якасці асобнага маральнага актара, ператвараецца ў новую этычную праблему. Апрыёры тэзіс аб віне дзяржавы ў спрычынненні шкоды нічога не скажа нам аб адказнасці грамадзянаў: яна можа распаўсюджвацца на ўсіх, на некаторых або наогул не закранаць ніводнага (28). Адылі нельга пакараць абстрактную краіну, не закранаючы ейнае насельніцтва. Любая санкцыя за правіны дзяржавы непазбежна кладзецца цяжарам на прынамсі некаторых з яе грамадзянаў.

Зыходная праблема вяртаецца ізноў: калі спаганяць санкцыі з грамадзянаў паводле іх прыватнага ўнёску ў спрычынненне шкоды, то тэзіс аб тым, што «насамрэч» вінаватая дзяржава і караецца ўласна яна, ператвараецца ў экстравагантную, але збыткоўную метафізіку. Дапусцім, маральныя (або эканамічныя) санкцыі падаюць на чалавека як на грамадзяніна сваёй дзяржавы — у якасці прадстаўніка апошняга, а не асобнага індывіда. Але: што ў ягонай дзейнасці ёсць уласна грамадзянскім, а не прыватным? Якім чынам можна апраўдаць такое распаўсюджанне адказнасці дзяржавы на яе грамадзянаў, калі грамадзянства ў большасці выпадкаў не было іх вольным выбарам? Уласна, гэты набор этычных пытанняў і ёсць асноўным для кнігі Пастэрнак. Можна сказаць, што яе рупіць не столькі этыка-метафізічнае пытанне, наколькі шырока можна трактаваць паняцце маральнай агентнасці і ці можна

ўлучаць у яго дзяржавы (свой станоўчы адказ Пастэрнак успірае на тэорыю П. Фрэнча), колькі своеасаблівая этыка-эканамічная праблема: якім чынам адказнасць дзяржавы канвертуецца ў адказнасць яе асобных грамадзянаў, і як можна абгрунтаваць такі перанос? Найбольш агульная праблема кнігі, такім чынам, гэта размеркаванне этычных абавязкаў групы.

Дзеля развязання азначаных праблемаў Пастэрнак прапануе шэраг канцэпттуальных інавацыяў. Па-першае, яна ўводзіць дыхатамію адказнасці «з адсочваннем віны» і «без адсочвання віны» (або прапарцыйнай і прапарцыйнай адказнасці). У першым выпадку цяжар маральных санкцый падае на грамадзянаў прапарцыйна іхнаму персанальнаму ўнёску ў правіну, г. зн. толькі на тых, хто так ці інакш непасрэдна ўдзельнічаў у злачыне. У другім — кладзецца роўным цяжарам на ўсіх. Першы тып прадугледжваў бы, напрыклад, што ў выпадку паваеннай Германіі сродкі кампенсацыі ахвярам трэцяга Рэйху былі б спагнаныя не з усяго насельніцтва ФРГ (як гэта мела месца ў рэчаіснасці), але былі б канфіскаваныя ў былых чальцоў нацысцкай партыі (7). Другі тып прадстаўлены акурат прыкладам рэпарацыяў, накладзеных на краіну ў цэлым.

Пастэрнак не шукае нейкай абстрактнай і вылучна этычнай аргументацыі для адказнасці «без адсочвання віны». Яна адзначае, што ў яе няма апрыёрных довадаў супраць паслядоўна індывідуалістычнага падыходу і яе сімпатыі на баку тых, хто жадаў бы прапарцыйнага размеркавання санкцыяў. Праблематычнасць такога падыходу яна бачыць у яго ўтылітарнасці. У рэальных варунках праект пошуку вінаватых, вызначэння і паслядоўнага доказу іхнай віны будзе азначаць у большасці выпадкаў празмерныя выдаткі часу і фінансавых сродкаў (34, 39). Пры гэтым неабходна ўлічваць наяўнасць ахвяраў, чые пакуты патрабуюць неадкладнай і сувымернай кампенсацыі. У такіх абставінах недыстрыбутыўная адказнасць аказваецца «найменшым злом» (44), да якога мы змушаны звяртацца дзеля прагматычных меркаванняў².

- 2 У той час як вырашальнымі Пастэрнак лічыць утылітарна-эканамічныя рэцы, яна прыводзіць і дадатковы, уласна этычны аргумент на карысць прапарцыйнага размеркавання: першая мадэль грунтуецца на катэгорыі віны (або рэтраспектыўнай адказнасці), яна звернутая ў мінулае і вылучае ўнутры дзяржавы асобную стыгматызаваную групу, якая аказваецца стымуляванай да рэсентыменту, да марнавання сілаў на самаапраўданні і папрокі іншым, замест таго, каб пачуць галасы ахвяраў і знайсці на іх годны адказ. Другая мадэль кажа аб (перспектыўнай) адказнасці, то бо звернутая ў будучыню і патрабуе ад грамадства стварэння новай, болей справядлівай структуры (38–39).

Другая і, бадай, самая істотная канцэптуальная інавацыя Пастэрнак — паняцце «свядомых грамадзян» (intentional citizens), якім уласцівы адмысловы «намер удзелу» (participatory intention). «Свядомы» грамадзянін разумее сваю імаверную ролю ў ажыццяўленні калектыўных мэтаў — пры гэтым ён можа не падзяляць тае канкрэтнае мэты, выкананнем якой аруплена дзяржава ў дадзены канкрэтны момант, дастатковая наяўнасць самой інтэнцыі ўдзельнічаць у агульнай справе.

Пастэрнак мяркуе, што мы можам і мусім разглядаць грамадзянства не проста як юрыдычную катэгорыю, але і як форму калектыўнага ўчынку (46). Фактычна грамадзянства — гэта тое, што мы робім разам, і яго можна ў пэўнай ступені разглядаць як наш агульны лёс (91). Яно прадстаўляе — лічыць Пастэрнак — прыватны выпадак канцэптуалізаванай Крыстаферам Куцам (Christopher Kutz) калектыўнай дзеі, якую ён вызначае як такую, у якой яе агенты кіруюцца падзялянымі інтэнцыямі (47). Па меркаванні аўтаркі, гэта завузка або занадта патрабавальная дэфініцыя: істотна не поўнае супадзенне інтэнцыяў і рацыяў групы і яе чальцоў, але наяўнасць у апошніх жадання зрабіць сваю частку працы. Пастэрнак прапануе мадыфікаваную мадэль, якую называе мінімалістычнай: для калектыўнага дзеяння дастаткова таго, каб кожны з яго ўдзельнікаў жадаў бы зрабіць сваю частку дзеяння, неабходную для супольнага поспеху. Такое жаданне яна называе намерам удзелу (participatory intention, 49).

Індывід свядома ўдзельнічае ў групе, калі мае намер выконваць сваю частку ў рэалізацыі агульных мэтаў або, прынамсі, разумее сваю інструментальную ролю ў дасягненні агульных вынікаў і такі ўдзел — шчыры (не змушаны і не навязаны супраць ягонай волі, 66).

Пакуль індывід выконвае сваю частку або ролю, прадпісаную калектывам, разумеючы, што тым самым ён прымае ўдзел у ажыццяўленні калектыўнай мэты, патуль яму можна прыпісаць суаўтарства ў калектыўнай дзеі.

Намер удзелу азначае, што індывід пагаджаецца садзейнічаць карпарацыі, нават ведаючы, што чыннасць апошняй можа ў некаторых выпадках прадугледжваць дзеянні, з якімі ён не згодны або нават не ведае аб іх (71).

Як піша Пастэрнак, само паняцце чалавечага дзеяння прадугледжвае, што мы цешымся выпадковымі, але шчаснымі вынікамі сваёй чыннасці і атрымліваем няславу або сплываем за дзеі з бліжэйшымі вынікамі, нават калі нас нельга ў іх непасрэдна звінаваціць (60). Свядомыя ўчынкі ёсць своеасаблівай формай закладу, дзе стаўка — атрыманне выгодаў або аплачванне незнарочных коштаў ўчынку

(60). У той жа час, калі мы абіраем дзеяць разам з іншымі, мы тым самым адмаўляемся ад часткі кантролю таго, што ўчыняць гэтыя іншыя і якім будзе супольны вынік нашай працы (61). Фактычна мы прымаем, што будзем цешыцца станоўчымі наступствамі нашага агульнага намагання і будзем разам несці цяжар адказнасці за негатыўныя вынікі.

Карыстаючыся гэтымі разважаннямі, Пастэрнак паўтарае за Майклам Уолцэрам (Michael Walzer) фармуліроўку: грамадзянства — гэта агульны лёс, і ніхто не можа пазбегнуць наступстваў благога рэжыму, нават ягоныя апаненты (41).

Менавіта праз канцэпт свядомага грамадзяніна Пастэрнак знаходзіць магчымасць адказаць на пытанне аб этычнасці недыстрыбутыўнай адказнасці. Бо ж чалавек як «свядомы грамадзянін» пагаджаецца ўдзельнічаць у агульнай справе дзяржавы, ён пакліканы прымаць удзел і ў аднаўленчых чынах, звязаных з яе правамі — то бо спрыяць узнаўленню справядлівасці і інфраструктурным зменам, якія скіраваныя на прадухіленне шкоды ў будучым. Паколькі ён або яна лічаць і бачаць сябе саўдзельнікамі сваёй краіны, пастолькі яны не проста забавязаныя (але не «вінаватыя») спрыяць аднаўленню маральнай інтэгральнасці сваёй дзяржавы, але і наўпрост зацікаўленыя ў ёй.

Наконт дадзеных разважанняў трэба адзначыць тры адметныя іх рысы. Па-першае, грамадзяніна нітуе з адказнасцю за правіны сваёй дзяржавы адмысловы тып сувязі. Гэта не фізічна-каўзальнае, але тэлеалагічнае лучво (52). Кажучы пра адказнасць грамадзяніна, мы тым самым не пастулюем ягоную непасрэдную датычнасць да здзяйснення злачынства, але ягонае «суаўтарства» ў дзяржаве, якая прызнаецца крыніцай маральнай шкоды. Калі свядомы грамадзянін у нечым «вінаваты», то толькі ў існаванні самой дзяржавы, і менавіта на гэтай падставе з яго спаганяецца кампенсацыя за ейныя правіны.

Па-другое, як і ў пытанні магчымай агентнасці дзяржавы, у адказе на праблему непарцыяльнай калектыўнай адказнасці Пастэрнак звяртаецца да інтэнцыйных станаў (або, меней тэхнічнай мовай — намераў). Грамадзянін падпадае пад абсягі паняцця калектыўнай адказнасці не дзеля, напрыклад, атрыманай ад злачыну персанальнай карысці³ ці іншых «фізічных» прычынаў, але менавіта на падставе сваіх псіхалагічных станаў. Істотная на-яўнасць добраахвотнага і рэфлексіўна ўзважанага намеру ўдзельнічаць у справах дзяржавы.

3 Гл. крытыку Пастэрнак канцэпцыі адраблення ненаўмыснай злачыннай карысці як падставы калектыўнай адказнасці (140).

Па-трэцяе, высновы Пастэрнак маюць магчымасць сваёй фальсіфікацыі і носяць рэдукцыянісцкі характар. Яны рэдукцыянісцкія, бо этычнае пытанне калектыўнай адказнасці фактычна зводзіцца да сацыяльна-псіхалагічнага факту пашыранасці адпаведных намераў удзелу ў справах сваёй дзяржавы сярод яе насельніцтва. Слушнасьць жа падобнага абгрунтавання калектыўнай адказнасці аказваецца залежнай ад таго, ці можам мы прыпісаць «свядомае» грамадзянства прынамсі большай палове насельніцтва краіны.

Асноўная працоўная гіпотэза кнігі: для сучасных дэмакратычных рэжымаў уласціва большая доля свядомых грамадзянаў, г. зн. тых, хто добраахвотна і згодна з уласнымі рацыямі пагаджаецца ўдзельнічаць у агульнай «справе» дзяржавы. Таму і пакаранне апошняй за ейныя ўнутрыпалітычныя або міжнародныя правіны, якое аднолькавым цяжарам кладзецца на ўсё насельніцтва, не з'яўляючыся цалкам вольным ад пэўных калатэральных ахвяраў, усё ж этычна апраўданае. Сярод магчымых калатэральных ахвяраў Пастэрнак згадвае: нацыянальныя меншасці з моцнымі сепаратысцкімі настроямі, прыгнечаныя сацыяльныя групы або тых, хто пазбаўлены грамадзянскіх правоў, і ў цэлым усіх, хто адчувае глыбокае адчужэнне ад дзяржавы (109–112). Адносна недэмакратычных рэжымаў — пра якія сама Пастэрнак згадвае, што яны складаюць большую палову прадстаўленых на сённяшняй палітычнай мапе свету краінаў (11), — аўтарка мяркуе, што наяўнасць механізмаў маніпуляцыі масавай свядомасцю і пагрозы палітычнага гвалту ў адносінах да апанентаў не дае магчымасці разглядаць іхнае грамадзянства як нешта самастойна і рацыянальна абранае.

Сама Пастэрнак лічыць такія абмежаванні перавагай сваёй тэорыі — менавіта тут выяўляецца яе рэвізіянізм адносна дзейснай сёння практыкі. Невідушчасць сучаснага міжнароднага права адносна механізмаў прыняцця калектыўных рашэнняў і структураў улады ёсць тым яе элементам, які варта, па меркаванні аўтаркі, змяніць.

Вяртаючыся да самой калектыўнай адказнасці грамадзянаў у правах сваёй дзяржавы, — яе этычнае абгрунтаванне Пастэрнак бачыць як «умоўнае» (*conditional justification*, 66), бо для ягонаў слушнасьці мусяць быць здаволены тры патрабаванні:

а) выяўленне канкрэтных вінаватых у злачынне і вызначэнне ступені іхнае правіны патрабуе празмерных выдаткаў, а недыстрыбутыўнае спаганне кампенсацыі з насельніцтва краіны, нягледзячы на некаторыя свае невыгоды і лакальныя несправядлівасці, апраўданае ў святле карысці для ахвяраў шкоды і аднаўлення справядлівасці;

б) грамадзяне свядома ўдзельнічаюць у дзейнасці дзяржавы;

в) удзел грамадзянаў у агульнай дзяржаўнай справе шчыры (яны не змушаны да яго супраць сваёй волі).

У якасці падрахунку вернемся да асноўнага пытання: ці можна разглядаць абгрунтаванне Пастэрнак для непарапарцыйнага размеркавання адказнасці за дзяржаўныя правіны на ўсіх яе грамадзянаў у якасці слушнага і канцэптuallyна паслядоўнага? Наколькі задума такога абгрунтавання прадугледжвае (як сказана вышэй) злучэнне нашых маральных інтуіцыяў і дзейснай практыкі міжнароднага права ў адзінае кагерэнтнае цэлае, настолькі канцэптuallyную стратэгію Пастэрнак трэба прызнаць недастатковай.

Магу скарыстацца выгодамі таго, што кніга, выдадзеная некалькі год таму, ужо паспела атрымаць некаторыя водгукі. Як правіла, каментатары ў крытычнай частцы выяўляюць характэрны патэрн: калі іхнія сімпатыі і навуковыя цікавасці схіляюцца да індывідуальна-маральных праблем, яны наракаюць на тое, што аўтарка патрабуе ад грамадзян замнога. Тыя ж, хто сыходзіць з процілеглага — дзяржаўна-юрыдычнага боку, — наадварот, схільныя лічыць, што Пастэрнак чакае ад грамадзян замала.

Прывяду ў якасці ілюстрацыі дзве рэцэнзіі.

Солму Антыла (Anttila 2022) крытыкуе Пастэрнак за тое, што (а) яна не падае дакладных крытэраў, якім чынам вызначыць той момант, калі выдаткі на адсочванне канкрэтнай віны аказваюцца празмернымі ў параўнанні з законнымі патрабаваннямі ахвяраў (141); (б) сацыялагічныя дадзеныя аб пашыранасці эмацыйнай прывязанасці да сваёй краіны, на якія яна спасылаецца ў падмацаванні тэзісу аб распаўсюджанасці свядомага грамадзянства, не тоесныя рацыянальнаму разуменню і прыняццю адпаведных абавязкаў (142); (в) «свядомае грамадзянства», як яго канструюе Пастэрнак, прадугледжвае не дыхатамію (яно ёсць або яго няма), а хутчэй градыент розных прамежкавых варыянтаў, адпаведна, яно не можа быць апірышчам для аднолькавага этычнага стаўлення.

Джэф Кінг (King 2024) зыходзіць з таго, што неабходнасць, каб дзяржава мела бесперапынную юрыдычную адказнасць на працягу даўгіх адцінкаў часу, — інтэгральная частка самой функцыі дзяржаўнасці, і яе нельга рабіць залежнай ад суб'ектыўных крытэраў (616). У тэорыі ж Пастэрнак юрыдычная пераемнасць дзяржавы аказваецца фактычна залежнай ад псіхалагічных станаў яе насельніцтва. Калі Пастэрнак лічыць патрэбным вызваліць недэмакратычныя краіны ад рэпарацыйных прэтэнзіяў, ці не азначае гэта, што ім таксама нельга выдаваць крэдыты, бо іхны ўрад не мае права спаганяць іх аплату з сваіх «несвядомых» грамадзянаў, — рытарычна пытае Кінг.

Адным словам, тэорыя Пастэрнак не задаволіла ні этыкаў, ні юрыстаў. Адылі, на мой погляд, гэта не касуе яе беспярэчнай тэарэтычнай годнасці, а хутчэй сведчыць аб складанасці праблемы, якая не мае адназначных і простых адказаў.

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