

Rethinking Social Exclusion and Belonging in Global Perspective: The Case of Transnational Migrants in Ukraine

Raphi Rechitsky
University of Minnesota

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the impacts of social exclusion in Ukraine on transnational migrant belonging. It draws on ethnographic interviews conducted with Afghan, West African, and other migrant communities in the cities of Kyiv and Kharkiv in 2009. The findings show how experiences with marginalisation—such as barriers to legal residence and work, restrictions on mobility, and racial discrimination and violence—illuminate the formation of identities of belonging not only with respect to the host community, but also to countries of origin and potential alternative destinations. Analysing identities of belonging as emerging out of social exclusion in new destination and transit countries, this paper argues, offers a unique opportunity to re-conceptualize migrant transnationalism and the role of the state in the age of globalisation.¹

Keywords: belonging, globalisation, identity, migration, social exclusion, transnationalism

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Introduction

On 10 March, 2010, top members of the office of the United Nations' High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) flew to Ukraine for an emergency meeting called months earlier by residents of a government-run 'accommodation center' in Odessa. A refugee association's lengthy letter to the commissioner detailed a plethora of problems perceived to wholly exclude Africans in Ukrainian society: lack of access to housing, social assistance, and asylum. They allegedly faced extortion due to corruption in the state Migration Service and life under constant threat of hate crimes and racist street violence. They were, claimed the letter-writers, "considered in the society like garbage."² By way of demanding resettlement of Africans to a third country, they pointed out that 'in most other countries law and regulations are practical. People have a guarantee in their life' foreseeing that, 'the society in these countries is welcoming for refugees and asylum seekers.' These migrants' transnational vision of belonging to alternative destinations—not unlike memories of homeland—were forged through experiences with social exclusion in Ukraine.

Every year, as many as 100 million people cross national borders out of economic or political necessity. Of these, thirty five million people work in a country other than the one that grants them citizenship, and twenty million asylum seekers flee across borders every year (Puri 2004: 227). Today's East-West and South-North mixed labor and refugee mobility is characteristic of a globalisation of migration, or the expansion of receiving societies (Castles and Miller 2003). At the same time, it is the 'politicisation' of international migration and state exclusionary practices that have resulted in the expansion of regulatory practices (Castles and Miller 2003). Both engender transformations not only in migrant belonging in traditional migrant receiving societies in the Global North, but also in new immigration and transit countries as well.

This paper explores the impacts of social exclusion in Ukraine on transnational migrants' sense of belonging. I use interviews conducted in various migrant communities in the cities of Kyiv and Kharkiv in 2008 and 2009 to explore how experiences with marginalisation can illuminate dynamics central to the study of belonging in the age of globalisation, such as restrictions on mobility, racist violence, and barriers to citizenship and work. This paper seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How are the lifeworlds of transnational migrants tied to identities of belonging to different places in the world, and (2) what does this say about the way belonging operates with respect to origin, settlement, and potential alternative destinations?

²'We are in danger: Letter from the Odessa Association of African Refugees to The Regional UNHCR office in Kiev.' Diversity Initiative, <http://diversipedia.org.ua> March 15, 2010.

Why is this research important? Understanding how identities of belonging emerge out of experiences with social exclusion can point the way to understanding changes in transnational migrant identity and the contours of belonging in the age of globalisation.

The structure of this paper is as follows: after reviewing, the case background, the scholarly literature, and the research methods, the first findings section examines the ways migrants experience exclusion in contemporary Ukraine. The second findings section inspects how migrant belonging emerges with respect to communities in destination countries—such as neighborhood, workplace, city, and nation—via experience with exclusion. The third findings section demonstrates how belonging to communities of origin as well as imaginaries of alternative destinations are likewise forged through experiences in new migrant receiving countries. I conclude with a few implications for scholars and policymakers.

Migration and exclusion on the borders of Europe

Until recently, former Soviet countries like Ukraine were emblematic of ethnic (Jewish, German, etc.) and labor emigration. However, since the late 1990s and with the expansion of the European Union's (EU) Schengen Security Area³ to Ukraine's western border (2004-2008), Ukrainian cities are increasingly host to new migrants, not only ethnic Russians and people from the Caucasus and Central Asia of the 'near abroad', but also from South and East Asia and West Africa. The United Nations estimated in 2003 that in a country of 48 million, there are up to seven million foreign-born residents in addition to the 245,000 registered internationals (Pylinski 2008; State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2007). Even considering the international borders created in the dissolution of the Soviet Union,⁴ Ukraine's nineteen per cent foreign-born population is diverse and is the fourth largest in the world (United Nations 2006; Ruble 2008: 2). The global economic recession may slow these changes, but Ukraine's geographic position on the new EU border is posed to continue its growth as a country of immigration even as local economic opportunities worsen. However, popular imagery of migrants as public health risks and criminal foreigners has animated media discourse. This exclusionary dimension of national belonging is changing the dynamics of Ukrainian nationalism, previously relegated to internal fissures of culture wars over language policy between Ukrainian nationalists and Russian-speakers, and regional geopolitical tensions between Eastern and Western Ukraine

³ The 1996 Schengen accords, willing EU member countries agreed to joint policing, development of border controls, and combating 'illegal migration.'

⁴ Without minimizing the significance of Ukraine's foreign-born population, it is important to keep in mind that this is partly a case of borders crossing people, not just people crossing borders. Before the Soviet Union's collapse, mobility was strictly controlled, although visitors to the Soviet Union had the right to move across much of Soviet space. While, Ukraine still keeps a privileged visa regime with most of the new countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), mobility across former Soviet space is an enterprise that continues to be transformed. Figures on the proportion of migrants in Ukraine who are from outside the Soviet Union are not available because of the precarious nature of the movement.

(Hrytsenko 2008). The racist xenophobic rhetoric used by parties across the political spectrum in the 2010 election, and the spread of Slavophile ultra-nationalist hate groups from Russia, for example, has much to do with immigrant life in Ukraine.

While international migration to Ukraine (Braichevska 2004: 148-150) is far from novel, today people come to Ukraine for a variety of reasons. As migration becomes more irregular and informal in the post-Soviet period, labor and refugee mobility as well as transit, student, and other forms of international movement, which are typically inter-related and difficult to measure separately, should be seen dynamically as a part of an *asylum-migration nexus* (Castles and Miller 2003). Some migrants come on student visas for inexpensive post-secondary education, but may find it difficult to survive on their savings and work as vendors at street markets. Since the late 1990s, Central as well as East Asian sojourners and immigrants continue to expand their pathways and networks to former Soviet cities in Russia and Ukraine. Tens of thousands of refugees from Afghanistan and other war-torn countries lodge unlikely asylum claims each year in the hopes of being resettled elsewhere. The “stepwise” dynamics of contemporary migration (Anju 2009) make transnational migration and belonging in transit countries ever more complex. This is significant for the future of social relations and migration policy beyond the walls of Fortress Europe. By considering countries east and south of the EU ‘safe third countries’ for asylum seekers and migrants, migration control practices and policies such as those outlined in the EU-Ukraine Action Plan externalize the controlling of the mobility of Europe’s unwanted to poorer countries where they have less opportunity for integration. Ukraine’s role in the European migration system has thus become that of a “buffer zone” to the west, not unlike that of its neighbors to the west in the 1990s.

While Ukraine has been identified by some European policymakers as a problematic “transit country” for illegal transit migration to western Europe, the realities of migration to and through Ukraine are far more complex than a point along a smooth journey west (Düvell 2007b). In addition to quickly transiting clandestine migrants, an unknown segment of these immigrants eventually lose their visa status, and some seek to move on to Western Europe (Düvell 2007b; Düvell 2007a).⁵ Most of those who stay tend to fall through the cracks of an under-funded and corrupt immigration system (Zimmer 2008). A lack of resettlement opportunities, combined with stricter border controls, visa regimes, and readmission agreements with EU countries leave migrants and refugees stranded in a society often incapable of integrating them (Zimmer 2008).

Post-Soviet racial and ethnic relations and nationalism mediate these global changes. Understandings of “black” foreigners as criminal and diseased “others” in Ukraine have emerged alongside a resurgence of a traditionalist Slavic ideologies in the former Soviet Union (Fikes and

⁵This makes Ukraine, like other new postsocialist nation-states in Europe on the other side of the EU border, both a key transit country and bottleneck for migrants and “illegal asylum seekers.” This primary concern of European legislators seeking to seal off the European Union’s external “Schengen Area” border by working within the foreign policy framework of the “European Neighborhood Policy” (Bendel 2007).

Lemon 2002; Sahadeo 2009). The proliferation of these identities is mutually interrelated with state exclusionary practices. State-exclusionary and racial-ideological forces in social life are of critical importance because their symbiosis has life and death implications for migrants and refugees. Human rights organizations have criticized the state for failing to prosecute racist murders. According to Amnesty International (2008), racially-motivated hate crime figures in cities like Kiev are lower than but are beginning to approach those in Russian cities: considering murders alone, at least twelve racially motivated murders of Asian or African decent had been documented (at least seven in Kyiv alone) in 2007. Organized skinhead street violence as well as random attacks, combined with institutional discrimination and attitudinal xenophobia has made everyday existence difficult for migrants and indigenous minorities alike.⁶ As many of the respondents also reported, racial profiling and police extortion are a part of daily life. In the face of routinised violence, everyday visibility by migrants stakes 'a right to exist' in public spaces in Ukrainian cities (Ruble 2008). Thus exclusionary ideologies and practices of both European and Russian origins will relate to the way belonging is expressed not only towards the society of settlement, but also towards homeland and alternative destinations.

Studying migration and belonging in post-Soviet space

The globalisation of migration and the persistent control of international mobility by states demand a transnational conception of belonging. Even more diverse Eastern European and post-Soviet countries are beginning to absorb the 'diversity capital' of transnational migrants (Ruble 2005). One consequence of this change is that neither nationality nor nationalism can be fully understood via the ethnic relations of Eurasian postsocialisms (e.g., Hungarians vs. Romanians in Romania, Estonians vs. Russians in Estonia, Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan). Identities of belonging embedded in the intricate histories of countries like Ukraine in the broader context of Eurasian migration systems may "rebound" to exclusionary nationalisms, rather than being resolved by once a postsocialist 'transition' is complete (see Arel and Ruble 2006; Buckley Ruble and Hofman 2008).

But what does "identity" mean, anyway? The plethora of popular and theoretical understandings of "identity" have often made it a concept with too little, too much, or no meaning at all (Cooper and Brubaker 2005). When I say identity, I am referring to a subjective *self-understanding*, not just identification, or commonality as essentialist or objectivist terms often used to define nationality. Self-understanding is not something that exists a priori of social interaction in the world—by biological inheritance or in consciousness—but should be understood analytically as rooted in the *lifeworld*⁷. In other words, *identities of belonging* should be conceived of as

⁶Crimean Tatars, Jews, Roma as well as settled multi-generation immigrant communities from the Caucasus, Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece and other countries point to Ukraine's diversity and rich migration history.

⁷ The sociological concept of the lifeworld is largely developed from Jurgen Habermas, which can be loosely understood as the realm of the informal and culturally oriented mutual accommodations.

produced and reproduced in negotiation with social forces in particular spaces, rather than labels that exist outside of everyday experience.

Nevertheless, people on the move are typically analysed by where they came from or where they are going, not by what they have been through. Much international migration research has focused either on immigrants' social integration in western settings (Portes 1997), or on how transnational migrants and diasporas maintain ties to home (Levitt and Jarowsky 2007), discounting the in-between spaces and lifeworlds that are integral to understanding international migration as a social process⁸. Historical and contemporary studies of international migration approach research either at the arrival or departure site (Green and Weil 2008). A process-based perspective to *migrant transnationalism*—transformative migrant practices that are both “here” (country settlement) and “there” (country of origin)—provides an alternative to understand migrant identity and belonging in geographic “in-between spaces” (Basch *et al* 1992; Collyer 2007). As Anthony Richmond (1994) argues, repressive migration policies of Global North states⁹ have created a system of *global apartheid* (see also Andreas and Snyder 2000). The experiences of migrant communities particularly in transit and new immigration countries on the borders of “the west” offer a window to analyze the power of the state in transnational perspective (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). Furthermore, such research is called for since the voices of irregular migrants’—those that can illuminate the contours of “race” and “nation” from the standpoint of those most marginalised—have often been unduly overlooked in immigration and refugee studies (Harrell-Bond 2007).

Research methods

This paper draws on 17 semi-structured, immigrant life history interviews and ethnographic observation conducted in NGO offices, street markets, cafes, and over the phone during several weeks in 2008 and 2009 primarily with Central, South, and East Asian as well as African migrants in Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Transcarpathia Ukraine.¹⁰ Most interviews were conducted in English or Russian, with some assistance from Farsi-speaking guides and interpreters.¹¹ The following three sections present some of the findings of this research.

⁸ For one exception see Portes and Rumbaut (2006) for a discussion of how Cuban and Salvadoran transnational migrants experience social conflict in the United States.

⁹ Global North may be broadly defined as Europe as well as European settler colonies, the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel.

¹⁰ I have conducted semi-structured and unstructured informal interviews with Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians, Kurds, Iranians, Vietnamese, Angolan, and migrants from a diversity of West African countries.

¹¹ Despite limitations in language and cultural knowledge, my researcher position as a person rarely perceived to appear “Slavic” as well as my foreigner status largely benefited research access. Respondents viewed both my practical fluency in spoken Russian and background as a former Ukrainian-national and ethnic minority as giving me insider knowledge of ethnic relations and experiences with racism in Ukraine. At the same time, I often needed to emphasize my outsider status as a visitor rather than a resident of Ukraine in order to probe for answers and life

Racial, civic, and legal exclusion

A resurging Slavic nationalism in the former Soviet Union and increasing state control of migration structures much of the lives of transnational migrants. This section describes how both social exclusion and racism and xenophobia ground migrants' identities in a complex sense of belonging to the society in which they live. This paper argues that Ukrainian reception of immigrants since approximately 2002 has altered its ethnic and race relations beyond the Ukrainian-Russian culture wars that characterized the Ukrainian nation-building era.

Popular and scholarly understandings of globalisation tell us that people move freely across migration space through unimpeded "flows," much like goods and capital. Yet, the effects of racism experienced by transnational migrants tell a different story. This paradox exemplified by the social limits on local mobility of a Cameroonian student in Kharkiv:

Cyrus: My first year here affected me very much, so I could not move [around], I just had the feeling of staying at home at my apartment. But then I got used to the environment.

Interviewer: By environment, do you mean just the weather?

Cyrus: Yes, the weather, the people, everything.

Interviewer: What was it that was difficult to get used to?

Cyrus: I cannot say that I am used to Russians. So it's difficult to be black, African... around Russians. It's difficult with the culture.'

Cyrus's negotiation of the way he speaks of the difficulties of acculturation demonstrates that experiences with racism and xenophobia have come to undergird cultural codes of Russian and pan-Slavic identification.

Despite overcoming initial culture shock, limits to physical and social mobility were reported not only by Africans, but also Asian migrants. As such, the prevalence of racial prejudice in the social environment is seen from a unique position as a racial minority in a Slavic-dominant society. Speaking about a Ukrainian friend of darker complexion who was attacked (but not robbed) in a park, an Arab respondent told me: 'Every person that does not look Russian feels this.' As a longtime resident of Kharkiv and refugee lamented: 'Che Guevara once said 'where I take my hat off, there will be my people.' But it's very difficult to take your hat off and take your shoes off to sleep like you're sleeping at home when there is such hate.' In addition to a post-socialist and post-internationalist political culture, the over-reliance on global media perpetuates racial imagery. A Nigerian man who has worked in Ukraine for several years, for example,

experiences of respondents otherwise thought to be a commonsense part of my lifeworld as well.

claimed that ninety percent of people in Ukraine did not know where he was from or that the continent of Africa exists at all:

'When I came here, I realized that people here don't even know the meaning of the world. They come at you and just ask you "Where did you come from?" I say "Africa!" They ask you: "Africa?" I ask did you not go to school?!" Many really simply do not know anything. Ask anyone in Ukraine where Africa is, there is no way they could situate it...They don't even know their own politics here, and foreigners know...When they meet a black person, they ask you "are you from America"? I say 'no: there are blacks in other parts of the world besides the United States.'

Cyrus' frustration points to the subaltern position of Africa and the Global South in Euro-centric knowledge system (see Winant 2001), and its extension into Russian worldviews.¹² At the same time, migrants' inability to integrate into society was restricted in what many described as a product of a Russian or Ukrainian cultural intolerance for "blacks" (*chornyje*). This essentialist identity, ascribed to not just Africans—but those perceived not to be of Slavic decent (*Slavyani*), becomes a universal marker for the foreign others (*chuzhiye*). Thus both Euro and Russian-centered racism and xenophobia work in tandem to colonize lifeworlds and belonging identities for migrants in Ukraine.¹³

Indigenous minorities such as Jews, Roma, and Tatars are likewise affected by racist discrimination. Yet, as this article postulates, social and legal exclusion of migrants as foreigners also institutionalises racism and xenophobia in Ukraine. Material deprivation and discrimination leads members of migrant communities to criticize their exclusion from basic rights as non-citizens with migration strategies such as those that stake a pride to work in low-prestige occupations. Most work at street markets is socially stigmatized because of the poor earnings it affords; many work there because it is still the best-paying informal sector work available to people without hard-to-get work permits or citizenship. Requirements of federal labor law combined with the remnants of the Soviet institution of residency permits (*propiska*) formally prevent non-citizens from obtaining primary labor market jobs beyond street markets. For example, Rana is an Afghani single mother of three who works three irregular jobs. She was denied refugee status after fifteen years of legal residence in Ukraine on temporary asylum documents. Speaking from her stand at the market, she explained 'What can I do, be a cleaning lady for some pennies? No I will work here.' Immigration law also prohibits international students from employment. Reacting to the stigma placed on this work, a Vietnamese student insisted: 'Okay I am studying, but what about bread? I still have to make money for food. You know on the television, they say they come here to study but work instead. Am I supposed to starve?' The

¹² This points to the limits on the kinds of worldly knowledge global media produce and consequences for identification and exclusion of those who are racially othered.

¹³ Compare to the diverging politics of tolerance and exclusion of anti-Western xenophobia and internationalism of the socialist period. Racism and xenophobia should be carefully understood in historical and comparative context before they are used conterminously in a particular place and time.

racialised discourse of “foreigners who abuse the nation” that these narratives respond to, become possible only because they are institutionalised through exclusionary laws on work, residency, and citizenship of migrants. As a longtime Palestinian resident of Ukraine explained, ‘racism happens because its racism, not because I have to accuse you...of being a racist to convince you of it. You may not live with them, they may not have even known you, but they may morally accuse you of something without naming it.’

What social forces reproduce legal exclusion? The inaccessibility of social networks to people without citizenship—those who are also racially “othered” —limits access to work and services essential for everyday life. Cyrus, the Camaroonian student who has lived in Ukraine for three years, supports himself by selling shoes at the market. He explains how treatment as a ‘different man’ is related to limits on access to work.

‘When you come to this place, and you live here for five years, ten years, twenty years, [you] would think you have made a home...But there are very few opportunities here. They [Ukrainians] find these opportunities through their wives, like having a shop stand. Here its difficult for them to give you a resident permit as a different man...[Migrants] do not have any real power, they cannot go to a place and to ask and just get things on their own. Its difficult, its very difficult.’

‘Making a home,’ in Cyrus’s terms, has much to do with being seen as ‘different man’ by authorities and the consequential exclusion from social institutions.¹⁴

Even with immigration documents, exclusionary state practices exacerbate problems that result from a lack of viable pathways to refugee status or citizenship.¹⁵ As international human rights groups have reported (Amnesty International 2008), asylum seekers with *spravka* documents from the Migration Service reported to be regular targets of racially-targeted repression, who are also especially vulnerable to extortion by police because of the persistence of a precarious immigration status. The exclusionary side of nationalist politics and state practices can thus be observed through the lifeworlds of migrants in new receiving societies. These experiences have repercussions for how migrants identify with Ukraine, and as this article shows, also with homeland and even alternative societies of settlement.

Community, nation, and citizenship

Despite often insurmountable difficulties with social exclusion, longtime residents often identified positively with places in their workplace community, the cities where they lived, and sometimes

¹⁴ Contrast to perspectives diaspora and migrant identity that often overlook formative features of experiences during migration as process.

¹⁵ Despite having long-signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Refugees, less than two percent of the thousands of filed and recognized asylum cases are processed in Ukraine every year (Düvell 2007a).

even Ukraine as a nation. This section details ways in which migrants' identity and sense of belonging operates with respect to the receiving society.

Few geographically-concentrated migrant ethnic enclaves exist in both Kyiv (Ruble 2003) and Kharkiv, despite the two cities' divergent histories with diversity.¹⁶ Nevertheless, workplaces constitute a large part of migrants' local identities or belonging as a place of community. Places such as street markets tend to be viewed by migrants as a safe space from the violence of everyday life, despite visible contradictions to the contrary. The following vignette from a field journal entry begins to illustrate this point:

'Kharkiv's Barabashova boasts the largest open-air market in Europe. Exiting the subway, over three square kilometers of open stalls and mini-malls line endless makeshift parking lots where you can find everything from clothing to hardware to food...Passing an atypically vacant corner of a market, I hear a security guard raising his voice at a Vietnamese man about having standardized locks at a small indoor section of the market. Nevertheless, others see this is a safe space. When asked about treatment by police at the market, Salaudid, a recent Afghan refugee tells me, "cops treat us like locals (*svoi*) here, they don't check papers." However, Barabashova is also filled with clearly visible borders. As I walk by a clothing stand, I overhear a Ukrainian salesperson announcing "I don't sell to blacks" at an East Asian man walks by her tent—who hardly turns his head after hearing her remarks. Throughout I hear at least six different languages freely spoken along one stretch of stalls.'

Some find community via their workplace, and others find a safe space away from racism in their neighborhoods. Take for example the case of Shamila, an Afghan single mother who has lived without permanent residency in Ukraine for fifteen years. The following conversation took place at the small clothing stand where she works:

Interviewer. Are there any places in your life where you feel safe and relax?

L: No, I don't have any place to go. I am here sun-rise to sunset...

R: What about here at work, do you feel it's like a safe space?

¹⁶ Despite its historic claims as the center of ancient Rus of the 9th century, Kyiv is by all practical measures a young city, rebuilt anew since its near-destruction in WWII. Consequently, its newer native population has urbanized largely over the last two generations, is less educated, and is thus be susceptible to xenophobic sentiment in the post-Soviet era due to a lack of familiarity with foreigners, as evidenced by higher rates of hate crimes in Kiev. As a key urban studies scholar points out, "more and more Kyiv stands out—even in comparison with other large Ukrainian cities such as Kharkiv and Odessa—as a city which nurtures an antagonistic environment for foreign migrants" (Ruble 2008: 14). Kharkiv is the second largest Ukrainian city in the Russian-centric east-central part of the country. By contrast, the city is three times as small as Kyiv (1.48 million in 2006), but is technically over 350 years old with a history that stretches to its role as a trading post on the silk road. Kharkiv is populated by a more rooted urbanized native population and has retained substantial portions of its intelligentsia. Furthermore, it is famous in the region for its diversity as a host of international workers and students at its countless plants and dozens of higher education institutes.

L: Yes, it's better than at home. Our neighbors, they don't like Afghans at all. They don't like Jews, they don't like anyone. And I'm not even home at all...And the kids they are all watching this. You feel sad for the kids. They see all this. I used to have to bring them to work.

The safety of workplace and hopelessness of conflict-ridden neighborhoods illustrates the complex spatial boundaries of place and exclusion in everyday life.

By contrast, not all migrants experience the city as an exclusionary space. Identification with the city where one resides constituted another scale for belonging in the receiving society. Rashid, a 37 year old Palestinian, married in Kharkiv when he returned to the city after studying there as a student in the 1990s. In the following passage, he strongly identifies with Kharkov as a cosmopolitan *world city*.

'Kharkov is not a Ukrainian city, it is not a Russian city. It is not either. Kharkov is an international city...This city is very dear to me. It is like my second home town. I sometimes believe what they say in that song is true: 'the best city on earth is the city of Kharkov.'

Such remarks are often tied to representations of eastern Ukrainian cities like Odessa or Kharkiv. Yet, beyond discourses of place-based cosmopolitanism, Rashid's identity is driven more by an attempt to move beyond the national boundaries of Ukrainian-ness or Russian-ness, expressing both a local and international sentiment of belonging. While respondents in Kiev communities did not identify with their city of residence, the pride in their city expressed by residents of Kharkiv may be tied to the multi-national communities of older post-Soviet cities that were not leveled during WWII.

Negative experiences working in other destination countries also shaped migrants belonging to Ukraine as a nation. One longtime Afghan resident of Kharkov praised religious and ethnic relations in Ukraine because of his experiences with racism in Russia. 'I wanted to stay in Russia for work for a few months, so I have seen what it is like there. In Ukraine there are wonderful relations to my religion too, there are no problems with people...only the police are the same when they stop and ask for documents and accept only money.' Here, inclusion in Ukraine as a nation appears as a contrast to his experiences with state repression in Russia.

Affinity and distance from Ukrainian national identity surfaced when problems related to obtaining citizenship became apparent. In one extended interview, a Palestinian asylum seeker criticized the Ukrainian state's lack of viable naturalization procedures, laying claim to a social belonging to the nation, despite being denied legal citizenship: 'I have lived here for sixteen years, and I have not received not a green card, not citizenship, not refugee status.' Rejecting the OVIR state agency's policing regime in Orange Ukraine, he continued:

'I do not go to get my spravka anymore because I am tired of their laws, these news laws...I have already handed in my documents six years ago to receive refugee status. And do you know that in a month I will be getting my own national passport? Because I am damn sick of this. I have to go to Kyiv every month and stand for hours in line just to extend my [referral]. I can spit on their referrals

(*spravka*). I don't want to spit on Ukraine because I respect Ukraine. But I spit on OVIR and all the police that have created this.'

While articulating an alternative nationalist sentiment, such narratives criticize the state for perpetuating racism and xenophobia in the immigration system, while simultaneously staking a right to social citizenship and civic participation in national life in resistance to exclusion from the nation. Belonging is often narrowly conceived as related to a coupled nation-state. However, as this evidence shows, conceptions of the nation-state need to be decoupled for more complete analysis of membership and migration. Identities of belonging in destination countries take many complex shapes at the level of community, neighborhood, city, workplace, the nation, and the state.

Remembering home, imagining alternative destinations

There is a rich literature on the social, political, cultural, and religious transnational ties between migrants' destinations and sending countries that persist after migration (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Migrant transnational belonging is typically conceived of by scholars in a dual manner between societies of origin and reception. How migrant transnationalism is linked to imagery of alternative destinations at the same time as it is tied to memories of home and societies of origin has not been explored.¹⁷ This section analyses how migrants' lifeworlds in new immigration countries are linked to both ends of the migration process through memories of a past in places of origin and imagery of an alternative place of settlement. That is, it demonstrates how migrants understand their social membership with respect to diasporic affinities and understandings of social life in "the west." I demonstrate that these transnational forms of belonging are structured by experiences with exclusion in new societies of settlement like Ukraine. Specifically, this study finds three forms of belonging reaching beyond affinity to institutions in the host country: (1) worldly conceptions of belonging, (2) diasporic nationalisms and disassociations from homeland, and (3) imagery of host country citizens' own experiences with exclusion abroad (especially in migrants' homeland).

Given their precarious circumstances, it should not come as a surprise that migrants excluded from home, settlement, and alternative destination countries articulate notions of justice that identify with a broader *worldly sense of belonging*. Rashid espoused western liberal discourses of tolerance and diversity when he explained:

'I am not religious. But I am human. The most important thing is human life. I don't care if they are Jewish, Muslim, Christian we were all born from our mother who held us in her stomach for nine months, whether you were black or yellow.'

¹⁷ However, like memories and ties to home, people on the move also look forward to other societies of reception. In other words, in addition to social, political, and cultural links and belonging to societies of origin, transnational migrant identity is also tied to social imaginaries of alternative destinations.

When asked if he feels at home, one middle-aged Iranian salesperson in Kiev replied, 'I don't believe in borders. All of humanity is the same for me.'

Worldly conceptions of belonging, however, went beyond liberal notions of cosmopolitanism. Some migrants, such as John in passages quoted earlier, pointed to global power inequalities—such as the poverty left in the wake of colonialism in West Africa—and could explain why people like him are pushed to move onto alternative destinations in Europe for work or education opportunities: 'People do not travel for adventure, they go to better themselves because they have nothing left at home,' he elaborated.

Despite these differences, both a liberal and critical worldly sense of belonging were characterized by imagery of a more tolerant west. Specifically, experiences with exclusion in Ukraine—not only sending countries—encouraged imagination of a better life elsewhere. When Yusuf and Rita left Afghanistan, they hoped for for their daughters to have a better life. Their inability to obtain residency for themselves and therefore their daughter in Ukraine, drove them to hope for opportunities for their children in the west. 'If there was Europe, she would be able to go on, she wants to be a doctor,' Rita explained. 'But here, there is nothing for her,' Yusef added. She was not able to continue on to college because of their inability to afford the bribes to buy permanent residency status. An Afghan woman with a large family told a similar story:

'My son, he wants to play soccer. But there is no money. My girl stays at home. How long is this going to go on? It's bad. They can't even study any further. I just heard that in Europe, kids do what they like. If they want to play soccer, they can continue to do that, to study and to play. But here it is impossible.'

Like for Rita and Yusef and other refugee residents of Kharkov, narratives of opportunities for their children become central to their imagining of the west and hopes of being resettled to Europe by the U.N.. Salaudid—the single mother of three who works at the market—imagined the wealth of the west in contrast to the poverty of her living conditions in Kharkiv:

'three families in one apartment hardly making it. There are not that many people, if they would just go ahead and resettle us to the U.S. or to Canada. It is not hard there. Go there. There are millionaires. And here the people are starving. The whole day kids stay hungry. It is very difficult. For example, I will sit there and not eat because I have to feed my kid—she goes to college'.

Unable to provide better livelihoods for their families, refugees and migrants imagine the west as a better destination than Ukraine—many of whom earlier considered Ukraine to be "Europe."

Nevertheless, most experiences with exclusion were not caught up in romantic images of the west as a bastion for tolerance. Rather, they conjured up positive associations to place and nation, whether in Ukraine or migrants' homeland. John, a Nigerian man in his forties has lived in Ukraine for two years after following his mother who came in the late 1990s. 'What other Nigerians don't understand,' he explained, 'is that Europe is not a paradise. Instead, wherever you live is paradise. I have a family here, stability.' John rejects the trope of a tolerant west by

laying stake to his family's belonging to a society that he nonetheless criticizes for social exclusion. Similarly, outside a very brief work trip to Nigeria, the only places Cyrus has ever lived are in Ukraine and at his hometown in Cameroon. However, after two years of experiences with discrimination in Ukraine, this to-be engineer has little desire to try to move on to work in western Europe: 'I have been talking about Ukraine, but I do not think its any different in Europe, or Western Europe, or anywhere else. I want to work in my community because I do not think there is justice in Europe, it is very difficult.' In this way, migrant experiences with exclusion in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union themselves drive worldly forms of diasporic belonging that transform membership with respect to potential destination sites.¹⁸

Which experienced places do migrants identify with? Migration stories of longtime Ukrainian residents—particularly of asylum seekers and refugees—often reflect diasporic sentiment to countries of origin that is forged through experiences with war and occupation. After studying and living in Ukraine for over a decade, Rasheed moved back to Gaza City after 2002, only to be forced to flee back to Ukraine due to the intensification of conflict in the occupied territories:

'I came back to Palestine once. Then war started for us back home, and then it became dangerous. My parents were against me coming to Palestine again. I am a human being, and as a human being I wouldn't be able to just sit there, and watch my people suffer. And that's why I stayed here in Ukraine. The government that now holds power in Palestine is not any better than Israel. The occupation is unbearable. That's why I came here. I have been here for about six years. And recently I have handed in my application to receive refugee status.'

Rashid links his displacement with a Palestinian national identity through a refugee story that puts homeland liberation struggles at the center of his own life narrative. His identity as a Kharkiv resident detailed in the previous section is thus largely an extension of homeland belonging. This also demonstrates that migrant identities are not just experienced as an affinity to kin and community in receiving societies alone, but that belonging is linked across borders by diasporic nationalisms.

At the same time, many refugees may not identify with their societies of origin or their nationality, often because of the fragmentation of family ties caused by the wars that displace them. A sense of exclusion from receiving societies leads to a feeling of being trapped. Let us return to Shamila, the Afghan woman who has lived in Kharkov since leaving Afghanistan in the 1990s. After describing of her family's impoverished situation and experiences with racial discrimination, she noted:

'I just got used to life here because I am in a hopeless [безвыходное] position. Where should I go? Afghanistan? I have nobody to go to? I have no parents. Nobody lives. I have no one...The citizens, the Ukrainians; they at least have their own apartment. And what do I have here?'

¹⁸ For a great overview on the formation of pan-African consciousness across post-Soviet and African spaces see Fikes and Lemon (2002).

Without actual opportunities for resettlement due to increasingly restrictive EU entry policy, this feeling of being trapped between origin, settlement, and alternative destinations complicates an analysis of belonging as much as migrants' tumultuous journeys themselves. Previous research has shown how refugees and migrants in Ukraine experience being caught in a society without opportunities to integrate and without access to protective regimes in the west (Düvell 2007b; Uehling 2004). My research supports these findings, and adds that a feeling of being trapped *also* has much to do with an inability to return to home societies.

Perhaps most starkly, migrants of a diversity of backgrounds, triggered by their experience with xenophobia, expressed a unique sense of homeland belonging by recalling tolerance towards foreigners and migrants in their own countries of origin. For example, one West African respondent understood his exclusion by comparing the treatment of foreigners in West Africa and the former Soviet Union:

'What can you do, you're in their country. If you do anything, the police will come, and take money from your pocket, they will take money from you. There is no justice in this country, you cannot change the culture of the people.'

Interviewer: And do you think it is similar or different in other parts of Europe and other parts of the world?

John: For me it is very different. Because in my country police give a lot of respect to foreigners, protect foreigners. But here it is different. If you call the policeman here, it is going to be in favor of the Russians.'

Similarly, Rashid's recollection of a better treatment of foreigners in his homeland is driven by his discontent with his legal exclusion in Ukraine:

'I am tired of these laws...It will be another hundred years until they learn to behave...And I remember. At home in my country Palestine—when I meet people they say that it's the third world. No that is the first world, this [Ukraine] is the tenth world.'" At home, we would never stop foreigners, they get fed for free, we drive them around for free. So its strange [here.]"

Thus, a sense of belonging in the here and now often spills into a comparing of memories of inclusion in a migrants' homeland.

Several respondents made even more specific references to the belonging of foreigners in their countries of origin: pointing to how Ukrainian emigres are treated elsewhere. This is exemplified by a story told by Anatoliy, a middle-aged Chechen refugee, who identifies with an expanded conception of belonging based on religion, language, and nationality across post-Soviet space:

There are all kinds of people in the world. Some just come up to you and say: oh you are a Muslim. You are the enemy...You must also see this on television: "terrorists, terrorists." They show it on TV and people stuff it into their heads...For example, yesterday a woman comes in to pick up her son. My son is working with his friend, who is Ukrainian. His family moved back [to Ukraine] from

Tashkent—so they speak Russian well. And this woman starts at me: ‘why are you not speaking Ukrainian? All you people from the Caucasus coming [*nayehali*] here will never speak Ukrainian.’ ‘Lady,’ I tell her, ‘you live here for a few years and you forget that the same thing is true with your people. In the thirties—after the revolution—many Ukrainians came to live with us and stayed with us [in Chechnya, у нас]. Even when Chernobyl exploded, many lived with us.’

This story ties Islamophobia and exclusionary nationalism in a way that allows Anatoliy to mobilize a contrasting memory of a homeland inclusive of Ukrainians in order to contest interlocking ethnic, linguistic, and religious exclusions in Ukraine.

One may expect that migrants from the “near abroad” such as Anatoliy carry understandings of belonging that stress common experiences of migrants across post-Soviet space. However, migrants from the “far abroad” outside of post-Soviet space also articulated such subjectivities. Cyrus, the Cameroonian student, made a similar connection as Anatoliy: ‘they say go to your country, go back to your country. I should tell them that there are also Ukrainians in other countries, and they are treated not the way foreigners are treated [in Ukraine].’ Likewise, after describing his treatment by authorities in Ukraine, a long-time Nigerian resident claimed that there are ‘30,000 Ukrainians working in Nigeria,’ and that their treatment contrasts with that of Africans in Ukraine. ‘There are no countries where there are no Ukrainians,’ he noted. In these ways, feelings of not only one’s own, but also of host country nationals’ belonging develop from migrants’ real-life exclusion in countries of settlement and memories of home. Such identities of belonging of migrants—even those from beyond the ‘near abroad’—point to a unique migrant subjectivity and sense of justice in the age of globalization.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the relationship between social exclusion and identities of belonging of a diversity of Asian and African migrants and refugees in Ukraine. I have argued that social exclusion structures not only the way migrants and refugees identify with their communities of settlement, but also how belonging to societies of origin and alternative destinations is grounded in everyday experiences with exclusion. Belonging is thus not just a product of collective memory and social imaginary, but is structured by membership in migrant-receiving societies. Slavic nationalist and Euro-centric racism and xenophobia along with a lack of options to regularize legal status leaves migrants and refugees in Ukraine unable to integrate into society. Belonging to the nation, the city of residence, as well as neighborhoods and communities is negotiated by way of these subaltern lifeworlds through both accommodation and resistance. Furthermore, transnational migrant belonging to homeland and alternative destination societies are not just prefigured by diasporic memory and media imagery, but are also grounded in everyday experience with social marginality.

This paper has substantial corrective and expansive contributions to studies of migrant transnationalism and belonging. Most research on migrant identity has conceptualized social, political, and cultural belonging as a dualism between society of origin and country of settlement

(Levit and Jaworsky 2007). The research findings presented in this paper suggest two changes to this approach. First, belonging to societies of origin is not just a diasporic cultural identity that exists independent of the lifeworld, but is imagined as a result of real-life experiences in the society of settlement. Second, migrants—perhaps especially those in newer receiving countries like Ukraine—may express different feelings of belonging towards alternative destinations based on their lifeworlds in current societies of settlement. In sum, social belonging to “back there” is intimately related to inclusion and exclusion in the “here and now”.

There are several limitations to this paper. In focusing the scope of this paper on transnational belonging, the social contexts of the political and historical complexity of membership in Ukraine, the former Soviet Union, and the borders of Europe may be better situated. The geopolitical relations of Ukraine, the former Soviet Union, or Imperial Russia to Afghanistan and West Africa, for example, may tell us more about the place of migrants’ belonging in the context of contemporary Ukrainian or Slavic ultra-nationalisms. Further research on belonging should investigate what such identities reveal about the changing boundaries of nationality and membership in Ukraine and the former Soviet Union in historical context.

The importance of understanding migration across post-Soviet Eurasia has been stressed in other scholarship (Buckley, Ruble, and Hofman 2008). However, the policy implications of this paper span beyond Ukraine’s borders and post-Soviet space. The exclusion experienced by migrants in countries on the new frontiers of Europe such as Ukraine should thus be viewed in a broader context of repressive migration policies towards those displaced through wars and uneven development. As Ukrainian migration experts explain, ‘the presence of large and growing communities of non-traditional migrants in Kyiv and Ukraine is in part a consequence of restrictive Schengen policies’ (Braichevska et al 2004). The social consequences of state policies that create a new iron curtain at the gates of Fortress Europe contrast to popular discourses of globalisation that imply universal social inclusion and unimpeded movement across borders. The way transnational migrants demarcate the scope of their belonging points to the need for human rights-based migration policies at the borders of the Global North.

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