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Dom/Garachi in Azerbaijan among the Dom Communities in the Middle East and North Africa

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Abstract

The countries of the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia), along with Turkey, represent the only region in the world where all three main subdivisions of the heterogeneous community historically referred to as “Gypsies” — Dom, Lom, and Roma — have coexisted (or, until recently, coexisted) in close proximity. In Azerbaijan, two distinct Dom communities are currently present: Iranian Dom and Kurdish Dom. While both acknowledge a shared overarching identity, they maintain clear distinctions in their everyday lives. This article presents findings from two field research studies conducted in Azerbaijan, through which a preliminary understanding was developed regarding the territorial distribution, lifestyles, socio-economic status, and complex identity structures of these two Dom communities, as well as their interactions with the Roma and Lom populations. The Azerbaijani case is further contextualised within broader historical and political frameworks, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the position of Dom communities across the Middle East and North Africa.

Keywords

Dom, Lom, Roma, Azerbaijan, South Caucasus, Middle East, North Africa, identities.

Introduction

At the dawn of Romani Studies, the first learned society dedicated to the study of communities then collectively referred to as “Gypsies” was established: the Gypsy Lore Society, founded in Edinburgh in 1888. During its early decades, spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries, research primarily focused on the collection of primary materials—historical, linguistic, ethnographic, folkloristic, ethnomusicological, and so forth. This emphasis on the communities themselves remained central until the mid-20th century, when scholarly attention gradually began to shift. Researchers increasingly focused on state policies and, more broadly, on societal attitudes towards these communities, eventually giving rise to comprehensive studies of Antigypsyism / Antiziganism.

More recently, a third shift in Romani Studies has become evident. Rather than focusing on the communities or their relationship with broader society, scholars are now often turning their attention to the works of those writing about these communities—frequently through the lenses of so-called Woke Ideology and Cancel Culture. As a result, the direct study of the communities themselves has increasingly faded into the background.

While it remains difficult to assess the long-term implications of these developments, they are undeniably present and merit recognition. We do not question the legitimacy of emerging research paradigms. Nonetheless, the recent dominance of theoretical interpretation has, in our view, overshadowed the foundational importance of primary data collection. It is this concern that has motivated us to write the present article, in which we return to the early research traditions of the Gypsy Lore Society by presenting current knowledge on the Dom communities in Azerbaijan, supplemented by findings from two short-term fieldwork studies conducted in 2013 and 2022.

State of Art

Along with Asia Minor, the South Caucasus is the historical region where live the representatives of the three main subdivisions, namely ‘Dom – Lom – Rom’, of the communities whose ancestors migrated in the Middle Ages from the Indian subcontinent towards the West and which were known in the past by the generalising term ‘Gypsies’ and nowadays are often brought under the umbrella of appellation ‘Roma’ (although there are reasonable doubts how appropriate, ethical and most importantly, how academically justified this term is for communities that do not wish to be labelled as such).

This division, ‘Dom – Lom – Rom’, has been known in academia for a long time¹, but the studies on the individual subdivisions so far are unevenly distributed. This is understandable and largely natural because the total number of representatives of the ‘Lom’ and ‘Dom’ communities is many times lower than those of the ‘Rom’ subdivision. The vast majority of the research, which is nowadays separated into a multidisciplinary study track, designated as Romani Studies, is dedicated to the communities of the ‘Rom’ subdivision (primarily Roma, but also Sinti, Manush, Cale, Kaale, Romanichals, etc.), living mainly in Europe (and from there they settled in Siberia, the Far East, Central Asia, North and Latin America, Australia).

There are much fewer studies of the ‘Lom’ subdivision (the self-appellation Lomavtik), called in Armenia and Georgia by the surrounding population Boshia and in Turkey – Posha².

The situation is relatively worse with the existing studies of the representatives of the ‘Dom’ subdivision, who live in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Attempts at more comprehensive, synthesising works on specific topics, e.g. the grammar of Domari (the language of Dom)³, are exceptions. With a certain amount of convention, we could also add Kristina Richardson’s book⁴ here, although its content is far from corresponding to its (over)ambitious title. There is also a relatively limited number of fragmentary historical, ethnographic and linguistic materials about these communities, living in different places in the individual countries of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as those devoted to specific topics, e.g. refugees from the war in Syria⁵, the vast majority of whom currently live in Turkey, as well as in Jordan and other Arab countries in the Middle East, and only a tiny portion of them have managed to reach the countries of Western Europe.

¹ TURNER, Ralph L.: The position of Romani in Indo-Aryan. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd Series) V, No. 4 (1926), p. 145-189; SAMPSON, John: The Ghagar of Egypt: A Chapter in the History of Gypsy Migration. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd Series) VIII, No. 2 (1928), p. 78-90.

² For an overview of the scientific literature dedicated to Lom (Boshia/Posha), see MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: *Gypsies of Central Asia and Caucasus*. London, Palgrave Macmillan 2016. See also ÜZÜM, Melike: Posha. In: BAĞRIAÇIK, Metin – DEMİROK, Ömer – ÖZTÜRK, Balkız (eds.) *Endangered Languages in Turkey*. İstanbul, The Laz Institute 2023, p. 104-116.

³ MATRAS, Yaron: *A Grammar of Domari*. Berlin & Boston, De Gruyter Mouton 2012.

⁴ RICHARDSON, Kristina: *Roma in the Medieval Islamic World: Literacy, Culture, and Migration*. London, I. B. Tauris 2022.

⁵ YILDIZ, Yeşim Yaprak: *Nowhere to Turn: The Situation of Dom Refugees from Syria in Turkey. Project Report*. Budapest, European Roma Rights Centre 2015; [NO AUTHOR]: *Dom Migrants from Syria. Living at the Bottom: On the Road amid Poverty and Discrimination*. Ankara, Development Workshop 2016; TARLAN, Kemal Vural: *Discrimination, Isolation and Social Exclusion: Syrian Dom Asylum Seekers in the Crossfire*. Gaziantep, Kırkayak Kültür Sanat ve Doğa Derneği 2016; TARLAN, Kemal Vural: *Encouraging Integration and Social Cohesion of Syrian Dom Immigrants*. Gaziantep, Kırkayak Kültür 2018.

Generally speaking, from these studies it is clear that various Dom communities live in Iran⁶, Türkiye⁷, Iraq⁸, Syria⁹, Lebanon¹⁰, Jordan¹¹, Israel¹² and Palestine¹³. More

⁶ GROOME, Francis Hindes: Persian and Syrian Gypsies. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* I, No. 2 (1889), p. 21-27; SINCLAIR, Albert Thomas: The Oriental Gypsies. In: *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (New Series) I, No. 1 (1908), p. 197-211; KNAPP, William I.: The Soozmanee: Are they Gypsies? In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (New Series) II, No. 2 (1909), p. 275-276 (Letter of 1844 to George Borrow); БОСКАНЯН, Вардан: Цыганский элемент в курдских племенах (некоторые вопросы этногенеза курдов). In: *Iran and the Caucasus*, No. 1 (1998), p. 47-50; AMANOLAH, Sekandar: The Gypsies of Iran (A Brief Introduction). In: *Iran & the Caucasus*, No. 3-4 (1999-2000), p. 109-118; MATTHEE, Rudi: Prostitutes, courtesans, and dancing girls: Women entertainers in Safavid Iran. In: MATTHEE, Rudi – BARON, Beth (eds.) *Iran & Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie*. Costa Mesa, Mazda 2000, p. 121-150; HAMZEN'EE, Reza M.: *Zigeunerleben im Orient. Eine vergleichende interdisziplinäre Untersuchung über die Geschichte, Identitätsstruktur und ökonomische Tätigkeit orientalischer Zigeuner*. Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang 2002.

⁷ BENNINGHAUS, Rüdiger. 1991. Les tsiganes de la Turquie orientale. In: *Etudes tsiganes* XXXVII, No. 3, p. 47-53; ÖZKAN, Ali Rafet: *Türkiye Çingeneleri*. Ankara, T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları 2000; KOLUKIRIK, Suat: Türkiye'de Rom, Dom ve Lom Gruplarının Görünümü. In: ÖZÖNDER, Cihat (ed.) *Türkiyat Araştırmaları*. Ankara, Hacettepe Üniversitesi 2008, p. 145-154; MARSH, Adrian: A Brief History of Gypsies in Turkey. In: UZPEDER, Ebru et al. (eds.) *We are Here: Discriminatory Exclusion and Struggle for Rights of Roma in Turkey*. İstanbul: EDROM & ERRC & hCa 2008, p. 5-20; MARSH, Adrian: Ethnicity and Identity: Who are the Gypsies? In: UZPEDER, Ebru et al. (eds.) *We are Here: Discriminatory Exclusion and Struggle for Rights of Roma in Turkey*. İstanbul, EDROM & ERRC & hCa 2008, p. 21-30; MARSH, Adrian and Melike Karlıdağ. 2008. Study of Research Literature Regarding Turkish Gypsies and the Question of Gypsy Identity. *ERRC. Country Reports Series*, No. 17: 143-164; ÖNEN, Selin: Citizenship rights of Gypsies in Turkey: Roma and Dom communities. In: *Middle Eastern Studies* XLIX, No. 4 (2013), p. 608-622; ÖZATEŞLER, Gül: The "Ethnic Identification" of Dom People in Diyarbakir. In: *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* XIII, No. 27 (2013), p. 279-287.

⁸ SINCLAIR, Albert Thomas: The Oriental Gypsies, p. 197-211; FERNEA, Elizabeth Warnock: "Gypsies" in *Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village*. New York, Anchor & Doubleday Book 1965; KAWAKAMI, Yasunori: The Iraqi Gypsies after the Collapse of Hussein's Regime. In: *KURI Journal* II, No. 2 (2005), p. 1-3; ZEIDEL, Ronen: Gypsies and Society in Iraq: Between Marginality, Folklore and Romanticism. In: *Middle Eastern Studies* L, No. 1 (2014), p. 74-85; AL-HASHIMI, Hamied – KHALID, Rojhat Waisi: A Study in a Pattern of Resettlement of Gypsies in Iraqi Kurdistan Region. *Paper presented at 2024 Annual Meeting of Gypsy Lore Society and Conference on Romani Studies*. Sofia, September 25-27. Sofia, 2024; AL-SARRAJI, Mohammed: Social Acceptance Attitudes of Iraqi People towards the Two Gypsy Groups "Qarach and Kawiliay": Comparative Study. *Paper presented at 2024 Annual Meeting of Gypsy Lore Society and Conference on Romani Studies*. Sofia, September 25-27. Sofia, 2024.

⁹ GROOME, Francis Hindes: Persian and Syrian Gypsies, p. 21-27; SINCLAIR, Albert Thomas: The Oriental Gypsies, p. 197-211; FATHER ANASTAS: The Nawar or Gypsies of the East. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (New Series) VII, No. 4 (1913-1914), p. 297-319; VIII, No. 2 (1914-1915), p. 140-153; VIII, No. 4 (1914-1915), p. 266-280; WINSTEDT, E. O.: Syrian Gypsies. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd Series) XXX, No. 1-2 (1951), p. 78-79; WILLIAMS, Allen: The Dom of the Gaza Strip. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 6 (2002), p. 1-4; No. 10 (2004), p. 1-2; SHAMAI, Shmuel et al.: Identity and Sense of Place of Ghajar Residents Living in Border Junction of Syria, Israel and Lebanon. In: *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* VIII, No. 4 (2017), p. 61-72; JALO, Daisam: The Dom, a Marginalized Community in the Syrian Music Scene. In: *Music and Minorities*, No. 3 (2024), p. 1-31.

comprehensive summarizing studies are only available for the Dom communities in Egypt¹⁴ and Sudan¹⁵. At the same time, the situation is much more complicated in the other countries of North Africa. There is only a relatively limited amount of fragmentary information from the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries about the presence of small groups of ‘Gypsies’ in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and even Chad¹⁶, in some of these cases, it is not clear what communities are being referred to, in others Dom are meant. Also, often, new migrants to the

¹⁰ FATHER ANASTAS: The Nawar or Gypsies of the East, p. 266-280; WILLIAMS, G. A.: The Gypsies of Lebanon. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 2 (2000), p. 1-4; SHAMAI, Shmuel et al.: Identity and Sense of Place of Ghajar Residents Living in Border Junction of Syria, Israel and Lebanon, p. 61-72.

¹¹ EDITOR [Yates, Dora E.]: The ‘Nuar’ in Jordan. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd Series) XXXVI, No. 1-2 (1957), p. 145-147; MOAWWAD, Kamel: *The Linguistic Situation of Gypsies and Turkmans as Ethnic Minorities Living in Jordan: A Sociolinguistic Perspective*. M.A. Thesis. Irbid, Yarmouk University 1999; PHILLIPS, D. J.: An Encounter with the Dom of Jordan. In: *Kuri Journal* I, No. 3 (2000), p. 1-2; WILLIAMS, Allen: The Current Situation of the Dom in Jordan. In: MARSH, Adrian – STRAND, Elin (eds.) *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities: Contextual, Constructed and Contested (Transactions)*. London, I. B. Tauris 2006, p. 205-212; ROY, Arpan: A Space of Appearance: Romani Publics and Privates in the Middle East. In: *Anthropological Theory* XXIV, No. 2 (2024), p. 175-200.

¹² MACALISTER, Robert Alexander Stewart: *The Language of the Nawar of Zutt, the Nomad Smiths of Palestine*. London, Edinburgh University Press 1914; REGENSBURGER, Reinhold: Gypsies in the Land of Israel. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd Series) XXXVII, No. 1-2 (1958), p. 69-70; MATRAS, Yaron: Two Domari legends about the origin of the Doms. In: *Romani Studies* (5th Series) X, No. 1 (2000), p. 53-79; SLEEM, Amoun: Domari: The Society of Gypsies in Israel. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 2 (2000), p. 1-2; SLEEM, Amoun: Stories from a Dom (Gypsy) Woman. Part 1 – The Dom Community of Jerusalem. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 2 (2000), p. 1-3; SLEEM, Amoun: Stories from a Dom (Gypsy) Woman. Part 2 – Settlement in Jerusalem and the Surrounding Area. *KURI Journal* I, No. 3 (2000), p. 1-3; SLEEM, Amoun: Stories from a Dom (Gypsy) Woman. Part 3 – The Family. *KURI Journal* I, No. 4 (2001), p. 1-4; WILLIAMS, Allen. 2001. *The Dom of Jerusalem: A Gypsy Community Chronicle*. Larnaka: Dom Research Center; NOVOSELSKY, Valery: Roma in Israel. In: MARSH, Adrian – STRAND, Elin (eds.) *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities: Contextual, Constructed and Contested (Transactions)*. London, I. B. Tauris 2006, p. 93-96; AUZIAS, Claire (ed.): *Tsiganes en Terre d’Israël*. Paris, Indigène Editions 2013; SLEEM, Amoun: *A Gypsy Dreaming in Jerusalem*. Jerusalem: Macon GA, Nurturing Faith 2014; SHAMAI, Shmuel et al.: Identity and Sense of Place of Ghajar Residents Living in Border Junction of Syria, Israel and Lebanon, p. 61-72.

¹³ MACALISTER, Robert Alexander Stewart: *The Language of the Nawar of Zutt, the Nomad Smiths of Palestine*; REGENSBURGER, Reinhold: Gypsies in the Land of Israel; WINSTEDT, E. O.: Palestinian Gypsies. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd Series) XXXI, No. 1-2 (1952), p. 77-78; WILLIAMS, Allen: The Dom of the Gaza Strip. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 6 (2002), p. 1-4; No. 10 (2004), p. 1-2. AUZIAS, Claire (ed.): *Tsiganes en Terre d’Israël*; ROY, Arpan: *Relative Strangers: Romani Kinship and Palestinian Difference*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press 2024.

¹⁴ SAMPSON, John: The Ghagar of Egypt: A Chapter in the History of Gypsy Migration. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society Society* (3rd Series) VIII, No. 2 (1928), p. 78-90; HANNA, Nabil Sohbi: *Die Ghajar: Zigeuner am Nil*. Munchen, Edition Trickster 2002; PARRS, Alexandra: *Gypsies in Contemporary Egypt: On the Peripheries of Society*. Cairo, American University in Cairo Press 2017.

¹⁵ STRECK, Bernhard: *Die Halab: Zigeuner am Nil*. Wuppertal, Trickster 1996.

¹⁶ THOMAS, C. F.: Dom of North Africa: An Overview. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 1 (2000), p. 1-4.

colonial possessions of both Spain (Cale) and France (Roma and Manush) are meant¹⁷. After the countries of this region gained independence after World War II, these migrants returned to their metropolises. Nowadays, the fragmentary information about ‘Gypsies’ in these countries remains largely uncertain (first of all, it is not clear what exactly is meant by this name – Dom or other nomadic communities)¹⁸, so the current situation with Dom communities in them remains unclear. In the past, many authors have assumed speculatively (i.e. without the presence of concrete historical evidence) the migration of Gypsies (who should have been Dom) together with the Arab conquerors in the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th century. According to modern research, however, there is no trace whatsoever of the presence of Dom among the ancestors of the contemporary Calo in Spain (Gitanos) and Portugal (Calon)¹⁹.

As for the Dom in the South Caucasus, apart from their sporadic mentions in some texts for the 19th century, there is de facto only one relatively more comprehensive presentation of this community – the book by Kekrope Patkanov *Gypsies: A Few Words About the Dialects of the Transcaucasian Gypsies: Bosha and Karachi*²⁰. Nowadays, the situation has not changed, except for the parts about Dom in the summarising book *Gypsies in Central Asia and the Caucasus*²¹ there are only a few reports by human rights NGOs, as well as many publications in the media in Azerbaijan and Georgia, but no other serious academic research.

Historical and Ethnographical Background

Historical information about the presence of the Dom communities in the Southern Caucasus is scarce and fragmentary. Based on the region’s history, we can assume that their ancestors settled on these lands in the 16th and 17th centuries, coming from Persia and the Ottoman Empire, during the wars and the transition of these territories from one state to another.

¹⁷ BATAILLARD, Paul: *Notes et questions sur les Bohémiens en Algérie*. Paris, A. Hennuyer 1874.

¹⁸ AL-HASHIMI, Hamied – BRAHIMI, Sihem: Marginalising the Sub-Cultures: A Comparative Study of the Gypsy's Case in Iraq and Algeria. *Paper presented at 2024 Annual Meeting of Gypsy Lore Society and Conference on Romani Studies*. Bratislava, September 11-13. Bratislava, 2014.

¹⁹ TCHERENKOV, Lev – LAEDERICH, Stephane: *The Roma otherwise known as Gypsies, Gitanos, Γυφτοι, Tsiganes, Tıgani, Çingene, Zigeuner, Bohémiens, Travellers, Fahrende, etc.* Vol. 1-2. Basel, Schwabe, 2004.

²⁰ ПАТКАНОВ, Керопе: *Цыгане. Несколько слов о наречиях закавказских цыган: Боша и Карачи*. Санкт-Петербург, Императорская Академия наук 1887. Parts of the book have been published in English. – PATKANOFF, K. P.: Some Words on the Dialects of the Transcaucasian Gypsies. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (New Series), No. 1 (1907-1908), p. 229-257; No. 2 (1907-1908), p. 246-266, 325-334.

²¹ MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: *Gypsies of Central Asia and Caucasus*.

In the first decades of the 19th century, the Russian Empire conquered the territory of what is now Azerbaijan and included it in its borders. From that time, we have the first reliable information about the presence of the Dom communities in the Southern Caucasus. According to the famous French-Russian explorer of the Caucasus, Jean-Marie Chopin, in Erivan Province (present-day Armenia and Nakhichevan Autonomous Region in Azerbaijan) in 1852 lived, in addition to the local Lom, called by the surrounding population *Bosha*, who were Christians, also representatives of Dom division, who were Muslims, namely 43 *Karachi* families (217 people) who belonged to the Shi'a denomination of Islam and 14 *Myuthryup* families who were Sunni²².

According to the famous researcher of Bosha and Karachi dialects in the South Caucasus, Kekrope Patkanov, there is a village of Karachi in Quba province, in which 131 people live; in Goychay district, 1,750 Karachi people lived in circa 200 tents, and 518 Karachi lived in Erivan Governorate; i.e. in total, in the South Caucasus in 1887 there were 2,399 Karachi (of course, these figures are approximate and incomplete but still indicates the Dom presence there)²³.

Descriptions of Dom's traditional occupations in the Caucasus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries literature are limited. For centuries, the Dom were service nomads, and their occupations were linked to their semi-nomadic way of life, with rented winter accommodation in villages and an active nomadic life during the warm season. Their primary sources of livelihood were begging (often combined with fortune telling) by the women, producing sieves from horsehair by men, and giving public performances with dancing bears and tamed snakes. Men were also known as musicians (including at weddings), and women were highly valued as dancers (also young boys who dance dressed in women's clothes). According to Patkanov, "without their [of Dom living on river Goychay in Baku governorate] musicians (*hokkabaz*), good singers (*chengchi*) and dancing boys (*myutrif*) does not go anyone Tatar [i.e. Azerbaijani – authors note] wedding"²⁴.

Among the surrounding population in the South Caucasus, the narratives are widespread (both in the past and the present day) according to which among Dom, only the women earn a living for the family by begging, and the men stay at home; therefore, at the wedding, the bride swears that she will support her husband for the rest of her life. The same narratives also apply

²² ШОПЕН, Иван И.: *Состояния Армянской области в эпоху её присоединения Российской империи*. Санкт-Петербург, Императорская Академия наук 1852, p. 539.

²³ ПАТКАНОВ, Керопе: *Цыгане. Несколько слов о наречиях закавказских цыган: Боша и Карачи*, p. 70-72.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 74-75.

to Lom and the Lyuli/Dzhugi in Central Asia, but of course, they do not correspond to the actual state of affairs in both places.

From the time of the Russian Empire, only a limited number of illustrations probably depict representatives of the Dom Community. We are not sure whether they all depict representatives of the Dom (the captions on the illustrations only noted them as “local Gypsies”).

In the early USSR, the affirmative policy of the Soviet state conducted in the 1920s and 1930s concerning the “Gypsies” (this term included not only the Roma but also the Dom and the Lom communities, and also the so-called *Lyuli* or *Dzhugi* in Central Asia) did not encompass the Dom. The reason for this was that the authorities in Azerbaijan, when asked by Moscow about the need to conduct such an affirmative policy, simply answered that there are no Gypsies in the Republic (probably in order not to create additional work for themselves or due to neglecting the topic)²⁵. The central authorities were palpable also neglecting Dom despite being clear that they were aware of their existence, as evidenced by the entry of the term ‘Dom’ in the List of Nationalities included in the Dictionary of Nationalities, prepared for the upcoming Census²⁶. Ultimately, however, in the USSR Census conducted in 1939 (as well as in the previous Census of 1926), the Dom were not distinguished as a separate nationality but were included within the general name ‘Gypsies’, and this situation was preserved in all subsequent Censuses during the existence of the USSR (until 1991).

One important circumstance must be taken into account when it comes to the neglect of Dom as a separate community in the early USSR. All Gypsy activists at that time originated from the Roma division; they were concentrated in Moscow and, in practice, only worked with “their own” people (i.e. with the Roma). In the published two Gypsy journals and dozens of books published in the Romani language, there is almost no mention of the “other” Gypsies. Especially for the Dom community, there is a mention only once when the Romani journal *Nevo Drom* (New Way) published a photo of Gypsy women with children from Azerbaijan predicting the future on a thread.

During the mass repressions in the USSR, members of the Dom community also became their victims. In 1936, Armenians, Turks and Kurds living in Armenia and Azerbaijan were

²⁵ MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: *Stalin vs Gypsies: Roma and Political Repression in the USSR*. Paderborn, Brill & Ferdinand Schöningh 2024, p. 28-29.

²⁶ [NO AUTHOR]: *Словарь национальностей. Для разработки Всесоюзной переписи населения 1937 года*. Москва, ЦУНХУ Госплана СССР – Бюро всесоюзной переписи населения 1937).

deported to today's Kazakhstan based on the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR dated December 17, 1936, No. 2123–420ss²⁷. Among them, there is an unspecified number of "Turkic Gypsies" (i.e. Dom). The second such deportation was in 1944 when on 31 July 1944, the State Defence Committee adopted Decree No. 6279cc (marked "top secret") for the deportation of all Meskhetian Turks, Meskhetians, Hemshins and Kurds (excluding women who entered into mixed marriages) living in the border strip of the Georgian SSR (Akhalsikh, Adygen, Aspindz, Bogdanov regions and Adjara ASSR) in Central Asia (Kazakh SSR, Uzbek SSR and Kyrgyz SSR). By 17 November 1941, 25 echelons with 81,324 people were already sent to the east; among them, two wagons with Gypsies, i.e., a maximum of 80 people, based on the NKVD's rules for placing up to 40 deportees in one wagon. It remains unclear from which Gypsy group the deportees originated; Dom were present among them.²⁸

In 1963, all those representatives of Dom Community deported to Kazakhstan were allowed to return to their native places. The authorities in Azerbaijan settled them compactly in the city of Yevlakh, in the so-called *Qarachylar mahallasi* (Garachi neighbourhood).

Dom in Azerbaijan gradually moved to a sedentary lifestyle in the conditions of the USSR. Gypsy nomadism was formally banned in 1956, but by that time, most of the Dom had already settled. Thus, it was not perceived as a repressive measure for the community. Most of our elderly interlocutors don't even remember the sedentarisation decree applied towards them.

Territorial Distributions and Identities

Nowadays, the Dom community in Azerbaijan is relatively tiny. Their number is usually not indicated in the Censuses because, due to their small number, they enter the "others" column (including the last Census in 2019). According to approximate estimates, their number is about 2-3 thousand people; in our opinion, it is more likely 3-4 thousand, maximum of up to 5-6 thousand people.

The local population in Azerbaijan collectively call the Dom community 'Garachi' (in the Azerbaijani language) or 'Цыгане' (in Russian) but still distinguishes them from Roma. However, the identity of Dom themselves is much more complex, multidimensional, and contextual, and in different life contexts, its various dimensions may be expressed or publicly demonstrated.

²⁷ MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: *Stalin vs Gypsies: Roma and Political Repression in the USSR*, p. 112.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 122.

The situation becomes even more complicated given the fact that the Dom in Azerbaijan are not a single community but are divided into two subdivisions, which is due to the different ways of settlement of their ancestors in the lands of Azerbaijan, and which we can tentatively call “Iranian Dom” and “Kurdish Dom”, and which we will present briefly here.

The first is Dom’s “Iranian” division, historically associated with Persia (present-day Iran). Farsi heavily influences their mother tongue, and many are fluent in both languages, which they clearly distinguish and can switch from one to the other when necessary. They also speak Azerbaijani (the country’s official language) and Russian (the language of international communication in the post-Soviet space). Publicly, they prefer to declare themselves Azerbaijanis or Farsi/Parsi (in the sense of Persians/Iranians). Still, they experience themselves as a separate “Parsi Dom” (Persian Dom) community. They do not accept their designation as ‘Garachi’ (in the Azerbaijani language) or as ‘Цыгане’ (in Russian), and they categorically distinguish themselves from Roma (Lom are unknown to them, as they live in other territories outside Azerbaijan).

The second, the “Kurdish” division of Dom, is historically tied to the Ottoman Empire, not the Ottoman Turks, but to its Kurdish population. Publicly, they prefer to declare themselves as Azerbaijanis or, more often, as Kurds (although the Kurds themselves, living in the South Caucasus, categorically distinguish themselves from them). Their mother tongue is strongly influenced by Kurmanji, which almost all are fluent in; when necessary, they switch from one language to another or mix them. They also speak Azerbaijani and Russian, and many master Georgian (those who migrate temporarily or permanently to Georgia). They also categorically reject their designation as ‘Garachi’ (*Qaraçiler* in Azerbaijani) or as ‘Tsygane’ (*Цыгане* in Russian) and firmly distinguish themselves from Roma and Lom. Their identity is Dom within their community, and they have distinguished themselves from the Kurds, including in their language. They have repeatedly told us: “We are not the same” and “Our language is purer”, and they define themselves as Dom-Kurds (*Курдские Дом* in Russian or *Kürd Domlar* in Azerbaijani). Accordingly, the local Roma in Georgia, with whom the Azerbaijani Dom come into sporadic contact, do not consider them Roma because they do not speak their language (Romani) and avoid any contact with them; the Roma consider the Dom to be “wild and dangerous”, especially when it comes to competition for begging (some of the local Roma also beg).

The territorial distribution of the two subdivisions of the Dom, the Iranian Dom and the Kurdish Dom, is practically a mosaic, and their territories often cross. In addition, we have not

visited many regions and settlements in Azerbaijan and cannot be sure which representatives of which sub-division live in them. At this stage, relying mainly on the words of our Dom interlocutors and media reports, the following territorial distribution of Dom in the South Caucasus can be briefly presented.

As their historically “root” territory, the Dom of the Iranian subdivision consider the region of the so-called Zakatal Okrug, which existed as a separate administrative unit in the Russian Empire (today it is three districts – Zagatala, Balakan and Qakh – in Azerbaijan). These are the peripheral border regions with Persia at the foot of the Caucasus, where in the past, during the time of Shah Abbas I (who reigned from 1587 to 1629), a different ethnic and religious population was resettled (a practice that continued in subsequent historical eras). Today, in this region, about 2 thousand Dom live compactly in the village of Gullyuk, Qakh region, which is considered the “Garachi village”, as well as in other settlements in the region – Chobankyol in Zagatala Rayon, Qapychay in Qakh rayon and others. Iranian Dom also live in the region of Quba and the city of Khudatin northern border areas, where they were settled in the 16th-17th centuries. After Azerbaijan’s independence in 1991, parts of the Iranian Dom (mainly from the Zagatala region) moved to the region of Baku capital, often occupying the homes of the emigrating Armenians and Mountain Jews. Today, most live in Surakhani (a suburb of Baku) and other suburbs of the capital. The neighbourhood of Garachi is challenging to find; there is no road to it, you can't see how big it is, and it is unclear how many families live there. The yards have high fences and look a bit like Central Asia. The dwelling exhibits markedly sparse furnishings: linoleum flooring, a single mattress placed directly on the floor, and two chairs—constituting the entirety of its movable assets.

The Kurdish Dom indicate the city of Yevlakh as their historically “root” territory, even though they were settled there only in 1963 upon their return from deportation to Kazakhstan. Currently, several hundred Dom live there, in the so-called “Garachi neighbourhood”, which (at least according to the locals) is almost never visited by outsiders who are not ethnic Dom. According to some (obviously inflated) estimates, this neighbourhood is inhabited by 2500 Dom and has deplorable infrastructure (e.g., only one shop), and the houses are poor and lack yards. From Yevlakh, parts of the Kurdish Dom gradually moved to other regions and settlements of Azerbaijan, such as Gazakh, Mingecevir, Aghdash, Aghdam and others.

Apart from the mentioned settlements, there is a lot of varied and unverified information about other settlements where Dom live in Azerbaijan, e.g. in the regions of Goychay,

Shamakhi, Sumgait, on the outskirts of Baku (Baladzhari, Alatava), in the village of Maraza near the city of Gobustan and others, as well as in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Region (an exclave of Azerbaijan). A small number of Dom lived in Shusha, Dzhabrail and Agdam/Akna in Nagorno-Karabakh until the start of the Armenia-Azerbaijan war of 1992–1994, after which they emigrated from there to other regions of Azerbaijan (and, respectively, the Lom who had been living in Azerbaijan until then emigrated to Armenia). The historical presence of Dom on the territory of present-day Armenia is reflected in the toponymy, more precisely in the names of several villages, such as the Garachili, village in Surmali district. In the historical source, the name of this village was mentioned as “Garachilar Winter Camp”²⁹.

It is necessary to verify all this information further and specify the subdivision of Dom (Iranian or Kurdish) in individual cases so that the complete picture of the territorial distribution of the Dom Community in Azerbaijan remains open.

The relationship between the Iranian Dom and the Kurdish Dom is complicated and ambiguous. Both divisions accept that they are part of the same community, but at the same time, they clearly distinguish themselves from each other. The Iranian Dom argue that the Kurdish Dom do not work but only beg while they, the Parsi Dom, work, which to some extent reflects the actual situation (although there are also beggars among the Iranian Dom). The Kurdish Dom argue with more standard accusations against the Iranian Dom – they are not real, they do not respect traditions and customs, etc. In Surakhani, alongside the Parsi Dom, one encounters Roma populations; crucially, however, the two groups maintain a distinct ethnic boundary, as captured in the Parsi Dom’s remark: “We coexist, but they are fundamentally different.” The term *Sigandar* – a local distortion of the Russian *tsigane* – is used by the Parsi Dom to refer to the Roma. Much more sharply and firmly, however, is the distinction from the Kurdish Dom who, according to them, are “actually Garachiler” (in the sense of meeting the negative mass public stereotypes about the community).

A new “Georgian” subdivision of Kurdish Dom has formed in recent decades. In the past, in Georgia, individual families of Dom lived among the Azerbaijani population in the Marneuli, Bolnisi, and Dmanisi municipalities in the historical province of Borchali, part of the present-day region of Kvemo Kartli³⁰. Attempts to settle Dom from Azerbaijan to neighbouring Georgia began after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and they initially moved to places where a small

²⁹ BUDAGOV, B. A. – GEYBULLAYEV, G. A.: *Explanatory Dictionary of Azerbaijani Origin Places’ Names*. Baku, 2009, p. 326.

³⁰ MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: *Gypsies of Central Asia and Caucasus*, p. 68.

number of Dom already lived (in the municipalities of Marneuli, Bolnisi and Dmanisi). This movement has become more intense in the last decade. Initially, a large part of the Dom tried to settle in Batumi but were expelled by the local authorities and relocated to Kutaisi. For more than three years, five families (about 70 people, including 30 children) lived near the Chavchadze bridge on the Rioni River in shacks without water and electricity (Szakonyi 2008: 8). There are currently about 20 Dom families living in Kutaisi, settling in the abandoned, nearly demolished houses in the Avangard neighbourhood in the northern part of the city, and several families living in the nearby railway junction city of Samtredia. The first 17 families from Dom settled in Tbilisi around 2000 in the Navtlugi district, where about 30–40 families (about 200 people) currently live. Their number is not constant, as some families travel seasonally or at specific intervals to their place of residence in Azerbaijan (mainly to the city of Gazakh near the border). Some of them lived, and others continue to live, in abandoned carriages at the city's railway station, while others managed to rent regular accommodation in the city.

Most of the Dom living in Georgia are Azerbaijani citizens and regularly migrate to their native places (usually during the winter season) and back. In recent years, several families from the Kurdish Dom settled in the city of Belorechensk in the Krasnodar Krai of the Russian Federation.

Some individual families Dom (mostly in mixed marriages) still live also in the place of their former deportation in Central Asia (e.g. Tashkent in Uzbekistan).

This differentiation of the two divisions of the Dom Community is also reflected in their marriage patterns. Both communities are endogamous closed, and if they do accept intermarriage, they prefer to take foreign girls to incorporate into their community. Of course, every rule has its exceptions, and this endogamy (like any other) is not absolute, but in general, intermarriage between Iranian and Kurdish Dom is relatively rare. The same applies to intermarriages with the surrounding population, which occur mainly with ethnic Azerbaijanis and only exceptionally with representatives of other nationalities. This is a direct consequence of the community's low public prestige. It is sometimes claimed in the media that the Garachi are matrilocal and that after the wedding, the young couple lives in the woman's home. Such cases may happen, and perhaps they are not so rare, but this is not a firmly established usual rule, and everything depends on a specific situation.

The Dom are generally Muslim and adhere to basic Islamic norms – observing Ramadan, celebrating Eid (Bayram), going to the mosque on certain occasions, and honouring the main Islamic (or what they consider to be Islamic) holidays, such as Nowruz and Hederlez.

Nominally, they belong to Shi'a Islam (as it is throughout Azerbaijan). Still, none of our interlocutors was able to explain the difference between Shi'a and Sunni Islam, and many are not aware at all of the existence of such division. In the South Caucasus, the local population generally believes that all Kurds are Yazidis by religion. In many cases, the name of this community and the name of the religion are interconnected (Kurdish-Yazidi) and overlap. Therefore, the Kurdish Dom always emphasise their distinction from the Kurds in terms of religion and define themselves as “true Muslims, not Yezidis”.

Both Dom communities living in Azerbaijan are aware of the existence of other parts of their community living in neighbouring countries – respectively, the Iranian Dom in Iran and the Kurdish Dom in Turkey. Our interlocutors in Baku (living in Yevlakh) even mentioned the sporadic arrival in Azerbaijan of beggars from the Turkish city of Diyarbakir. However, this knowledge remains largely abstract, and in practice, both Dom communities do not establish or maintain ties with representatives of their communities living abroad (more precisely, outside the borders of the former USSR) and do not show any special interest in them.

Current Situation in Post-Soviet Realities

During Soviet times, Dom were guaranteed permanent jobs as rural residents on collective farms, while urban residents were primarily low-skilled workers. After the collapse of the USSR, the creation of the newly independent states and the collapse of the socialist economy, the situation changed radically. In both communities, men (and women in the Iranian Dom) are employed when there is an opportunity for low-skilled labour. These opportunities are few, and mostly, Dom make their living from scrap metal collections, sometimes work as peddlers with household items, dresses, carpets, etc., and take various unqualified seasonal jobs. Among the Kurdish Dom, the primary source of sustenance is the begging of women and children. Therefore, they are much more mobile. Many of them travel to the capital, Baku, from where local authorities regularly deport them to their home places. Other parts of the community settle temporarily or permanently in Georgia. In contrast, begging travels in the Russian Federation (in the North Caucasus region, sometimes also in other areas) are conducted mainly during the main Muslim holidays. Women beg, often holding babies together with little girls and boys, and rarely beg also older women or men. If men or boys beg, they show suspected or actual signs of disability to varying degrees. They usually have their own “own” begging places. In Azerbaijan, in the capital Baku, they beg on central streets, markets, and near train and bus stations, from where they are often chased away by the police, who are trying to eliminate, or

at least limit, begging in the capital. Some time ago in Baku in 2010, in the fight against begging, all the personnel of the patrol police service were engaged.

Beggar detection raids were conducted every day. As noted, most beggars come from Yevlakh (mainly), Agsuin, Agdash districts, Shamakhi, and Merezi and are primarily mothers with 7-8 children. By summer, Dom began to live around the capital. As the agency "Trend" reported, only from April 20 to May 9, 2006, more than 300 beggars were removed from the streets in Baku's Nasiminsky and Binagadinsky districts. They were sent to the place from where they came to Baku – in the Aghdash and Aghdam districts, where they reported it to the police of these districts.

In most cases, however, since there are no legal provisions for sanctioning begging, the begging Dom are detained, given an educational talk and then released³¹. Judging by the fact that there are enough Gypsies in Baku today, they have returned³². In Georgia, in the downtown area of Tbilisi, the central begging place is Shota Rustaveli Avenue, and major junctions in the city are where they beg from passing cars and urban markets. In contrast to the mass stereotypes about fantastic revenues from begging, their living standard is lower than that of the surrounding population.

In Azerbaijan, many Dom lack identification papers, and only the elders have old Soviet documents, which were valid long after the collapse of the USSR but no longer. Because of the lack of an ID, many Dom children are not enrolled in school; a lack of documents deprives most of them of access to medical care and social security (even more so when they are abroad, in Georgia). The Azerbaijani state is trying to solve this problem gradually, but acquiring new identity documents has not yet been fully completed.

The Dom public image is largely negative, with high levels of ethnic stereotypes and social hostility towards them, both in Azerbaijan and Georgia. Both in the past and nowadays, they are despised by the surrounding population throughout the South Caucasus as the lowest social stratum. Still, they were generally treated with lenity and even tolerance in the past (except for the inevitable cases of conflict situations). The situation changed after the collapse of the USSR, and not so much in Azerbaijan as in neighbouring Georgia, where the highest

³¹ ИБРАГИМХАЛИЛОВА, Рамелла: Евлах – кузница попрошайек. AZERI.RU, 4 марта 2010; ИБРАГИМХАЛИЛОВА, Рамелла: Virtuozы бакинских улиц приносят огромные деньги.

³² АЛИ, Кямал. 2006. Наши цыганские соседи. Что делают власти для Этого малочисленного народа?; АЛИ, Кямал. 2008. Азербайджанские цыгане: их нет, но они есть; САДЫГОВ, Фарид. 2008. Азербайджанские цыгане не имеют гражданства. Trend News Agency, 8 апреля 2008.

negative public attitudes are towards the Kurds³³; this is because the local population (including Roma) consider the beggars of the Kurdish Dom to be Kurds. They have no serious problems with the law enforcement authorities, who do not limit and persecute them. This gives grounds to the local population (including the media) to talk about a “mafia of beggars” which corrupts local police. Many other stereotypes are widespread, typical of Roma beggars elsewhere: about kidnapping children and making them beg, intentionally breaking their arms and legs, their exploitation by wealthy “bosses”, and an inherited inclination for begging.

Azerbaijan has not adopted a state policy toward the Dom; only individual cases are solved when they reach the respective authorities. The Georgian state is in a complex political and economic situation and does not pay special attention to the Dom and their problems.

The last three decades in the countries of the former so-called socialist camp in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe have been characterised by the rapid development of policies and projects to support Roma and Roma NGOs. After the accession of most of the countries in the region to the European Union, NGO sector activists, with the support of various international organisations and European institutions (primarily the Council of Europe), turned to the encompassing of new territories, including the South Caucasus, where the different communities, once all labelled as ‘Gypsies’, were identified as a suitable target for their activities.

The first in this regard was Georgia, where a series of reports by human rights organisations were published, dedicated to the human and minority rights situation of the Roma³⁴, as under this label was also understood the Lom living in the country (called Bosha by the surrounding population), as well as those who migrated from Azerbaijan Dom (declaring themselves as 'Kurds'). Despite the clear demarcation of Dom (as well as representatives of Lom) from other “Gypsies”, and particularly from Roma (and vice versa) with whom they share the territory in some cities (Tbilisi, Kutaisi), attempts have been made in to integrate Dom and Lom in common regional NGO projects targeting Roma. Such was the case with the project

³³ ДЖАВАХИШВИЛИ, Нино: Этнорелигиозные стереотипы грузинских студентов. In: *Социологические исследования*, No. 3 (2005), p. 107-112.

³⁴ HUMAN RIGHTS INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION CENTER: *People without Rights: Roma Rights in Georgia. Report*. Tbilisi, HRIDC 2003; SZAKONYI, David: *No Way Out? Initial steps towards addressing Romani issues in Georgia*. ECMI Working Paper No. 39. Flensburg, European Centre for Minority Issues 2008; SORDIA, Giorgi: *A Way Out? Initial steps towards addressing Romani issues in Georgia*. ECMI Issue Brief No 21. Flensburg, European Centre for Minority Issues 2009; ELIBEGOVA, Dea: Protection or isolation? On Georgia's Policy Choice towards Roma. In: ELIBEGOVA, Dea (ed.) *Georgian Minorities: Roma, Qists, Assyrians, Ezids*. Rangendingen: LIBERTAS (2009), p. 7-26.

Southern Caucasus of Roma from the NGO Center for Democracy and Civil Integration, presented at the regional conference in Tbilisi on April 8, 2014,³⁵. Despite all efforts, however, no single Dom (or Lom) was willing to work in the network. The reasons for this state of affairs are many and varied, not the least of which is that both the Dom and Lom do not wish to be associated in any way with the Roma, who are relatively new (from the 20th century) migrants in the South Caucasus from Russia (during the USSR times).

In Azerbaijan, several attempts to involve the Dom under the Roma label in such projects were ultimately unsuccessful because the community refused to be involved in such projects and to send its representatives to the project events. On September 20, 2013, a round table discussion on integration problems of ‘Roma’ (used as a politically correct umbrella term) in Azerbaijan was conducted at the office of the Azerbaijan Lawyers Confederation, and an intention was announced to establish an NGO integration to solve these problems. A project for international donors was prepared but has not been supported so far. The participants at the round table told us that no a single Dom representative was present at the meeting. Similarly, during the last visit of the delegation of the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities to the Council of Europe in 2024, the host was unable to secure the presence of Dom representatives at the meetings. So, the hopes of “pan-Roma unity” and the possible place of the Dom from Azerbaijan and in the South Caucasus region in it remains open, and the future is unclear.

Labelling in Policy and Academia

After the accession of the South Caucasus countries to the Council of Europe (Georgia in 1999, Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2001), a new problem arose related to the Dom living in the region – their labelling as Roma in official documents and the public sphere, and from there in academia³⁶. This process of renaming began in the countries of Central, South-eastern and Eastern Europe after the collapse of communist regimes in the region in 1989–1990 and the break-down of the so-called socialist camp. The rejection of old terms and adoption of the designation “Roma” was considered “legitimacy of political correctness”³⁷ and was perceived

³⁵ DOSTA!: *Regional Conference of South Caucasus Roma Network in Tbilisi, Georgia. April 8, 2014*. Strasbourg, 2014.

³⁶ MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: Roma Labelling: Policy and Academia. In: *Slovenský národopis* LXVI, No. 4 (2018), p. 385-418.

³⁷ PETROVA, Dimitrina: The Roma: Between a Myth and the Future. In: *Social Research* LXX, No. 1 (2003), p. 111-161.

as an unavoidable part of the process of democratisation and Euro-integration. The replacement of the old denomination “Gypsies” (in forms used in respective local languages) with the term “Roma” in public and official space ran relatively fast and unproblematically, without big public debates (with only the exception of Romania).

Initially, Dom were not taken into account at all when listing the communities that fall under the label ‘Roma’, e.g. the Fundamental Rights Agency in 2010 defined:

The term “Roma” is used as an umbrella term including groups of people who share more or less similar cultural characteristics, such as the Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Ashkali, and Kalé. These groups also share a history of persistent marginalization in European societies³⁸.

Respectively, the EU Framework of National Roma Inclusion Strategies from 2011 postulated:

The term “Roma” is used – similarly to other political documents of the European Parliament and the European Council – as an umbrella which includes groups of people who have more or less similar cultural characteristics, such as Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Kalé, Gens du voyage, etc. whether sedentary or not³⁹.

For the first time, Dom appeared in official European documents in 2012, when the European Commission started the process of implementation of the EU Framework of National Roma Inclusion Strategies and provided a new definition:

The term “Roma” is used here, as well as by a number of international organisations and representatives of Roma groups in Europe, to refer to a number of different groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom) and also includes Travellers, without denying the specificities and varieties of lifestyles and situations of these groups⁴⁰.

Neither better nor more precise is the definition in the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the Rise of Anti-Gypsyism and Racist Violence against Roma in Europe, adopted on 1st February 2012, and in *Descriptive Glossary of Terms Relating to Roma Issues*, published by the Council of Europe in the same year. It states:

³⁸ FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AGENCY. *The Fundamental Rights Position of Roma and Travellers in the European Union*. Vienna, 2010.

³⁹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *EU Framework for National Roma Strategies up to 2020*. Brussels, 2011.

⁴⁰ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *National Roma Integration Strategies: A first step in the implementation of the EU Framework*. Brussels, 2012.

The term “Roma” used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as “Gypsies”⁴¹.

Attempts to edit and refine the content of the terminology are ongoing, and the latest (so far) such general definitions are as follows:

The term “Roma and Travellers” is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Cale, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term “Gens du voyage”, as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies⁴².

The reference to “Roma”, as an umbrella term, encompasses a wide range of different people of Romani origin such as: Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels and Boyash/Rudari. It also encompasses groups such as Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as traveller populations, including ethnic Travellers or those designated under the administrative term *gens du voyage* and people who identify as Gypsies, Tsiganes or Tziganes, without denying their specificities⁴³.

The main problem here is that it is not in the content of all these definitions, to which many critical remarks can be made. First, they mix up the criteria to include individual communities under the common denominator ‘Roma’ – origin, lifestyle (nomadic and sedentary), cultural specifics, social position (marginalisation), etc. Understandably, the Euro-bureaucracy is trying to work with more general concepts, even if they are not entirely accurate and precise from an academic point of view. Also, if not justified, then at least understandable is the adherence to these definitions by some Roma activists and human rights organisations⁴⁴. For us, however, the main problem lies elsewhere – in the first place, from an ethical point of view, we find it problematic to impose appellation on communities that they do not wish to

⁴¹ COUNCIL OF EUROPE: *Descriptive Glossary of terms relating to Roma issues*. Strasbourg, 2012; COUNCIL OF EUROPE: *Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the Rise of Anti-Gypsyism and Racist Violence against Roma in Europe. Adopted on 1 February 2012*. Strasbourg, 2012.

⁴² COUNCIL OF EUROPE: *Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025)*. Strasbourg, 2020.

⁴³ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030*. Brussels, 2021.

⁴⁴ NOVOSELSKY, Valery: Roma in Israel. In: MARSH, Adrian – STRAND, Elin (eds.) *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities: Contextual, Constructed and Contested (Transactions)*; MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP INTERNATIONAL: *From Crisis to Catastrophe: The Situation of Minorities in Iraq*. London, Minority Rights Group 2014.

accept. On the second place, the fact that political terminology is accepted unconditionally by many representatives of academic circles raises unpleasant thoughts about the ‘policy – academia’ relationship in the modern world⁴⁵.

From this point of view, it is entirely unjustified for us to use the designation 'Roma' in academic texts to refer to the Dom communities in the Middle East and North Africa⁴⁶. This approach, in practice, completely fits into the spirit of the so-called Orientalism⁴⁷, when communities defined by their surrounding population as “Gypsies” are given the name ‘Roma’ without taking into account their self-identification and their attitude towards this appellation⁴⁸. In the case of the Dom communities, it can be said that in general they categorically reject their identification with Roma and the replacement of their public name. The only representative of the Dom communities in the Middle East writing in English to date, Ms. Amoun Sleem, not only never uses the term ‘Roma’ as a name for her community in her texts (instead, in addition to Dom, she also often uses ‘Gypsies’), but in all her public appearances (including in a conversation with us) she has always categorically emphasized that the Dom communities are not Roma, and do not wish to be referred to in this way. The same is the attitude of both Dom communities living in Azerbaijan (and Georgia), and perhaps it is precisely this fear, that by accepting to be defined as Roma, they will lose their identity as a separate community, that is the most important factor that makes them reject any attempts to associate them with Roma in any form.

Conclusion

The lack of sufficient and verified information makes it impossible to create an overall picture of Dom communities in Middle East and North Africa in general, including its distribution, internal segmentation, ethnic culture, etc., and we can hardly speak about any common characteristics and specifics. We cannot be sure whether and how the Dom communities from

⁴⁵ MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: Roma Labelling: Policy and Academia.

⁴⁶ EDGCUMBE, Sarah: “We’re Real Iraqis”: Securing Roma Rights and Integration in Post-conflict Iraq. In: *MERI (Middle East Research Institute) IV*, No. 40 (2020), p. 1-13; EDGCUMBE, Sarah: Roma in Iraq and Syria: On the Margins of IDP Protection. In: *Researching Internal Displacement. Working Paper*, No. 9 (2021), p. 1-24; RICHARDSON, Kristina: *Roma in the Medieval Islamic World: Literacy, Culture, and Migration*; ROY, Arpan: *Relative Strangers: Romani Kinship and Palestinian Difference*.

⁴⁷ SAID, Edward: *Orientalism*. New York, Pantheon 1978; SAID, Edward: *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Harmondsworth, Penguin 1995.

⁴⁸ MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: Orientalism in Romani Studies: The Case of Eastern Europe. In: KYUCHUKOV, Hristo – NEW, William (eds.) *Language of Resistance: Ian Hancock’s Contribution to Romani Studies*. Munich, Lincom Academic Publishers 2017, p. 187-237.

different regions related to each other. At this stage of our knowledge, it is only possible to try to make the picture of Dom communities as comprehensively as possible in general, and we need to leave any more extended and detailed descriptions, comparisons and conclusions to a later stage when more interdisciplinary research will be done.

Current scholarship identifies three principal divisions within Dom communities across the Middle East and North Africa, delineated as follows:

The first division includes those Dom who live in an Iranian-speaking environment. These are the Iranian Dom in Azerbaijan and the Dom living in Iran (in the provinces of Azarbaijan and Khorasan), known to their surrounding population as Karachi.

Due to the lack of sufficient research, the question of the Kowli/Kawli/Kawliya (sometimes called Ghorbati), who live in Iraq as well as Iran, remains open, and it seems more likely that these are nomadic communities who are not of Indian origin and do not fit into the ‘Dom – Lom – Rom’ triad (this also applies to the Lyuli or Dzhughi living in the countries of Central Asia).

The second division includes those Dom who live in Kurdish-speaking (and secondary Turkic-speaking, Arabic-speaking and Iranian-speaking) environments. These are the Kurdish Dom in Azerbaijan and the communities living in South-Eastern and Southern Turkey, known to the surrounding population under various names such as Mıtrıp, Karaci, Domlar, etc., as well as Qarach in Iraqi Kurdistan and Suzmani/Sozmani in Iran (Kurdistan province).

The third, largest division includes those Dom communities that live in Arabic-speaking environments. They live in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Sudan, and probably other countries in North Africa, and are known to their surrounding populations by a variety of names – Gurbati, Nawar, Gajar/Chagar, Halabi, etc.

Along with this, one more extremely important circumstance should be taken into account. Dom (as well as Lom and Roma) are not (and cannot be, due to their way of life, which is inextricably linked to the local population) an isolated socio-cultural phenomenon. They are not “un peuple sans patrie”⁴⁹, or “citizens of the world and nowhere”⁵⁰; These are actually mass stereotypes from the era of Romanticism, reflected in modern academia, according to which “Gypsies” are people outside of any social norms and laws, or, in the language of modern social

⁴⁹ STEWART, Michael: Un peuple sans patrie. In: *Terrain. Revue d’ethnologie de l’Europe*, 17 (1991), p. 39-52.

⁵⁰ GHEORGHE, Nicolae – MIRGA, Andrzej: *The Roma in the Twenty-First Century: A Policy paper*. Princeton NJ, Project on Ethnic Relations 1997, p. 54-70.

anthropology, an example of people who master “the art of resistance” and “the art of not being governed”⁵¹. On the contrary, they are a constituent (albeit ethnically distinct) structure of the societies in which they live, i.e. part of the respective civil nation, in the countries in which they live, and possess (in addition to ethnic identity as a community)⁵² also the corresponding civic national identity⁵³. It is true that the countries in the region are relatively “new” civil nations (although some of them are heirs to ancient empires), and the processes of nation-building in them have not yet been fully completed, but this does not negate the general direction of development, and accordingly the presence of the Dom communities as an integral part of these processes.

This explains why the process of building a consolidated transborder Dom meta-community, which would include the individual Dom communities living in different countries of the Middle East and North Africa region, remains uncertain. Regarding the dreams of Roma activists from Europe to build a global Roma nation⁵⁴, at least for now, there are no signs from the Dom communities throughout the region (including the Dom communities in Azerbaijan) of any aspirations to actively engage as part of this process.

⁵¹ SCOTT, James C.: *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven & London, Yale University Press 2009.

⁵² WILLIAMS, G. A.: Dom of the Middle East: An Overview. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 1 (2000), p. 1-6; WILLIAMS, Allen: Dom Ethnic Identity. In: *KURI Journal* II, No. 3 (2005), p. 1-6.

⁵³ MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: Who are Roma? In: MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV (eds.) *Roma Culture: Myths and Realities*. München, Lincom Academic Publishers 2016, p. 7-34.

⁵⁴ MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies. In: BURSZA, Wojciech J. – WOJCIECHOWSKI, Sebastian – Kamusella, Tomasz (eds.) *Nationalismus Across the Globe: An Overview of the Nationalism of State-endowed and Stateless Nations*. Poznan, School of Humanities and Journalism 2005, p. 433-455.

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Illustrations



Persian Gypsy Musicians in Svaneti, Georgia, 1883.



Caucasus Gypsies, 1880s.



Gypsy fortuneteller in Azerbaijan, 1930.



Iranian Dom Family with the authors in Baku, Surakhani rayon, 2022.



Kurdish Dom in Yevlakh, 2013.



Garachi neighbourhood in Yevlakh, 2013.



Garachi in Tbilisi, Georgia, 2013.



From left to right: Elena Marushiakova, Valery Novoselsky, Amoun Sleem, Vesselin Popov
in Jerusalem, 2008.

Fenomén ostalgie v českém a německém televizním seriálu

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Abstract

Ostalgie – a nostalgic longing for aspects of life in former socialist regimes – permeates various domains of social and cultural life, including fashion, consumer goods, music, and popular media. This study explores ostalgie on the cultural level, focusing in particular on contemporary television series. The theoretical framework draws on concepts of collective memory and the culture of remembrance, with special attention to the material dimension of memory. Ostalgie narratives frequently foreground everyday objects, evoking a sense of temporal dislocation wherein the past can only be accessed through selective remembrance. This phenomenon is discussed in relation to the notion of the 'memory of things', as formulated by Jan Assmann and further developed by Arjun Appadurai. Material artefacts from the socialist era serve as vessels of memory, enabling individuals to retrieve personal and collective pasts. The analysis centres on two Czech series – *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me About It*) and *Svět pod hlavou* (*World Under the Head*) – and two German productions – *Ku'damm* (*Kurfürstendamm*) and *Deutschland 83* (*Germany 83*) – offering a comparative perspective on how ostalgie is represented and mediated through televised storytelling in post-socialist contexts.

Abstrakt

Ostalgie – nostalgická touha po aspektech života v bývalých socialistických režimech – prostupuje různé oblasti společenského a kulturního života, včetně módy, spotřebního zboží, hudby a populárních médií. Tato studie zkoumá ostalgie na kulturní úrovni, se zvláštním důrazem na současnou televizní tvorbu. Teoretický rámec vychází z konceptů kolektivní paměti a kultury vzpomínání, přičemž zvláštní pozornost je věnována materiálnímu rozměru paměti. Ostalgické narativy často akcentují každodenní předměty, které vyvolávají pocit časového vykořenění, kdy minulost lze zpřítomnit pouze prostřednictvím selektivního vzpomínání. Tento jev je nahlížen prizmatem pojmu „paměť věcí“, jak jej formuloval Jan Assmann a dále rozvinul Arjun Appadurai. Materiální artefakty z období socialismu zde fungují jako nositelé paměti, které jednotlivcům umožňují znovu navázat kontakt s osobními i kolektivními minulostmi. Analýza se zaměřuje na dva české seriály – *Vyprávěj* a *Svět pod hlavou* – a dvě německé

produkce – *Ku'damm (Kurfürstendamm)* a *Deutschland 83 (Německo 83)* – a nabízí komparativní pohled na to, jak je ostalgie ztvárňována a zprostředkovávána prostřednictvím televizního vyprávění v postsocialistických kontextech.

Klíčová slova

Kultura vzpomínání, kolektivní paměť, ostalgie, nostalgie, východní blok, paměť věcí, generace, televizní seriál, Vyprávěj, Svět pod hlavou, mediální studia

Úvod

Ostalgie, svým prvotním původem německý fenomén, je ve své mnohohrstevnaté podstatě historickým a zároveň populárně-kulturním jevem. Ostalgie se projevuje ve všech oblastech lidské činnosti, od módy, přes hudbu, zboží dostupné na trhu a tím spojené marketingové tendence, po kulturu či zdánlivě jednoduchou přítomnost v lidských vzpomínkách. Ostalgické vzpomínání velmi často klade důraz na hmotné statky, jako by se vzpomínající snažili zachránit něco z času ve kterém se jinak, než prostřednictvím vzpomínky nemají možnost znovu ocitnout. Nabízí se tak propojit fenomén ostalgie s tzv. pamětí věcí, definovanou teoretikem Janem Asmannem¹ a podrobně rozebíranou antropologem Arjunem Appaduraiem.² Pomocí předmětů z dob socialismu si lidé zachovali alespoň část svého dřívějšího života a vzpomínky do těchto předmětů uložené je možné vyvolat i po několika letech.

Zpracování období minulého režimu formou televizního seriálu kombinuje oba pohledy, kterými lze na ostalgiu nahlížet. Dle Aleidy Assmann³ jsou v dnešní době média (a především televize) hlavními nositeli historie. Nenásilným způsobem oslovují milionové publikum, které by se bez současné televizní nabídky historií spíše nezabývalo. Ostalgicky laděné televizní seriály však nesmí být brány jako přesná historiografie. Ač jsou obsahy televizních seriálů inspirovány reálnými událostmi, nesou se na pozitivní ostalgické vlně a tehdejší realitu zkreslují za účelem divácké sledovanosti. Problematika ostalgického vzpomínání bude v následujícím textu rozebírána na dvou českých a dvou německých televizních seriálech. Český výběr je reprezentován televizními seriály *Vyprávěj* a *Svět pod hlavou* z produkce České televize. Jako německý protějšek byly zvoleny snímky *Ku'damm* (v českém překladu *Tančírna na hlavní třídě*) a *Deutschland 83*. Seriály nebyly vybírány náhodně ale tak, aby představovaly alespoň přibližnou česko-německou analogickou dvojici.

¹ APPADURAI, Arjun: *The social life things: commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 1988.

² ASSMANN, JAN: *Kultura a paměť: písmo, vzpomínka a politická identita v rozvinutých kulturách starověku*. Praha, Prostor, 2001.

³ ASSMANN, Aleida: *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*. München, C.H.Beck, 2006.

Cílem je zodpovědět následující otázky. Jakým způsobem odkazuje ostalgie na kulturu vzpomínání a rekonstrukci kolektivní paměti? Při sledování televizních seriálů mě pak zajímá, jak je socialistický režim ve vybraných televizních seriálech vykreslen? Jaké jsou specifické projevy ostalgie ve vybraných českých a německých televizních seriálech a jakým konkrétním způsobem se ostalgie ve snímcích projevuje? Pro praktickou část práce byla zvolena metoda zakotvené teorie, kterou shledávám relevantní z důvodu dobré aplikovatelnosti na analýzu audiovizuálních formátů. Výhodou je i skutečnost, že výzkumník není limitován dopředu stanoveným rámcem již existující teorie.

1. Jak ostalgické seriály formují kulturní paměť

Ačkoliv v dnešní společnosti nalezneme stále ještě vysoký, sociálně relevantní počet jedinců, kteří minulé režimy považují za svou vlastní historickou zkušenost⁴, nelze popřít, že zažíváme období pozvolného vytrácení živých vzpomínek na těžké zločiny a katastrofy, které se ve 20. století odehrály. Generace svědků postupně odcházejí⁵ a tím, jak osobních zkušeností ubývá, je nezbytné ve společnosti doposud přítomné vzpomínky opečovávat, uchovávat a citlivým způsobem předávat nastávajícím generacím.

Živé vzpomínky na historii jsou tak ohroženy zkázou a zapomněním⁶, proto je nezbytné pomocí kultury vzpomínání udržovat ony vzpomínky ve veřejném prostoru stále přítomny. Kultura vzpomínání společně v kombinaci s novými technologiemi a elektronickými médii vytváří efektivní nástroje, jak hravým způsobem promlouvat k tisícům diváků. Zmíněným nástrojem je v této studii myšlen televizní seriál, který svým širokým záběrem a snadnou dostupností zásadním způsobem oslovuje širokou veřejnost. Dle odborníků je v dnešní době řádné zachování vzpomínek a paměti bez médií nemyslitelné⁷. Koncept kolektivní paměti, kultury vzpomínání či mezigenerační přenos vzpomínek, jsou všechno aspekty, které se promítají nejen do scénaristického zpracování televizních seriálů, ale také do způsobu, jakým diváci snímky dekodují. Právě přenos vzpomínek mezi jednotlivými generacemi je klíčový způsob předávání informací na minulý režim, který velmi často balancuje mezi kolektivní a individuální pamětí. Tento způsob předávání informací je velmi subjektivně zabarven, což

⁴ GJURIČOVÁ, Adéla – Michal KOPEČEK: *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie po roce 1989*. Praha; Litomyšl, Paseka 2008, s. 9.

⁵ ŠUBRT, Jiří – Štěpánka, PFEIFEROVÁ: *Kolektivní paměť jako předmět historicko-sociologického bádání*. Historická sociologie [online] [2023-08-28]. <https://doi.org/10.14712/23363525.2017.62>.

⁶ ASSMANN, Jan: *Kultura a paměť: písmo, vzpomínka a politická identita v rozvinutých kulturách starověku*. Praha, Prostor, 2001, s. 16-17.

⁷ GERHARD JENS, Lüdecker: *Kollektive Erinnerung und nationale Identität: Nationalsozialismus, DDR und Wiedervereinigung im deutschen Spielfilm nach 1989*. München, Ed. Text + Kritik, 2012, s. 77.

z ostalgie vytváří mnohohrstevnatou problematiku. Dle Juliane Ziegegeist je diskurz o této podmnožině minulosti stále nejasný: na jedné straně jsou způsoby života bývalých režimů cenzurovány a demonizovány především v politické reflexi; na druhou stranu má v kulturní rovině jistý kultovní charakter, který se obecně etabloval právě pod nálepkou ostalgie⁸.

1.1. Předměty jako nostalgické prvky v televizních seriálech

Ostalgie formou televizních seriálů zásadním způsobem pracuje s pamětí a povahou předmětů, neboť jsou to právě rekvizity, dobové oblečení, tematicky zařízené prostory, které v člověku vyvolávají ty správné vzpomínky na minulou dobu. Předměty jsou pro vzpomínání klíčové, neboť hrají svou roli jak ve vyvolávání již zapadlých vzpomínek, tak v každodenní nostalgii – v prvním případě člověku umožní se rozpomenout, v druhém umožní mít danému vzpomínající svou minulost neustále při sobě. Paměť hmotných předmětů z teoretického hlediska ve svých pracích, především *Kultura a paměť*, velmi dobře přibližuje německý profesor a teoretik Jan Assmann. Od každodenních a v běžném denním životě známých zařízení, jako je postel, židle, jídlo, hygienické potřeby, oblečení a pracovní nástroje až po domy, vesnice a města, silnice, vozidla a lodě, je člověk během svého života obklopen věcmi, do kterých vkládá svou fantazii, pohodlí, estetičnost a v jistém smyslu i sám sebe⁹. Ukládáním vzpomínek do určitých věcí má jedinec svou minulost stále u sebe. Svět věcí, ve kterém se člověk pohybuje, se vyznačuje určitým časovým indexem, který kromě přítomnosti odkazuje i na různé vrstvy minulosti. Lidé si do předmětů ukládají různé představy, pocity a vzpomínky, které věci umí následně i po mnoha letech přivést zpět do živé paměti¹⁰.

Sociální a kulturní dimenzí předmětů se vedle Assmanna zabývá i americký antropolog Arjun Appadurai ve své práci z roku 1986 *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Appadurai zpochybňuje konvenční chápání komodit jako výhradně ekonomických entit. Dle jeho slov komodity nejsou jen pasivní předměty směny, ale aktivně se účastní sociálních vztahů, kulturních praktik a systémů významu v návaznosti na specifické sociální a kulturní prostředí.¹¹

⁸ ZIEGENGEIST, Juliane: *DDR-(N)Ostalgie in deutschen Nachwende-Spielfilmen von 1990 bis 2006. Zwischen Kritik und Kult.* Jahrbuch Für Kommunikationsgeschichte [online] [2025-1-14]. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23346911>.

⁹ ASSMANN, Jan: *Kultura a paměť: písmo, vzpomínka a politická identita v rozvinutých kulturách starověku*, s. 23.

¹⁰ Ibidem, s. 23.

¹¹ APPADURAI, Arjun: *The social life of things : commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, s. 10-15.

Maurice Halbwachs se ve své publikaci *Kolektivní paměť* zabývá otázkou, proč má člověk tendenci k předmětům tíhnout. Ve shonu každodennosti je to pro předměty charakteristická nehybnost, která dodává člověku pocit klidu a řádu, vytvářejí v prostoru dojem stability a trvanlivosti. Každý předmět, se kterým se pravidelně setkáváme, utváří kolem nás jistotu, nehybnou společnost, která nás mlčenlivě doprovází a představuje důvěrný smysl, ve kterém se snadno zorientujeme. I v případě, že už jedinec není součástí specifické sociální skupiny, má možnost skrze předměty navázat kontakt s konkrétní skupinou, skrze kterou se dříve identifikoval¹².

Paměť věcí hraje v ostalgicky laděném filmovém a televizním zpracování významnou roli. Pro bývalé východoněmecké a československé obyvatelstvo předměty a konzumní produkty, se kterými lidé žili léta, vytvářejí tzv. efekt opětovného shledání tím, že je znovu vidí na televizních obrazovkách. S pádem Berlínské zdi a železné opony v roce 1989 z regálů blaskově zmizely pro tuto dobu typické produkty, na které byli lidé zvyklí, předměty každodenního užívání v domácnosti však setrvaly. Ve filmech a seriálech jejich znovupoužití vrací bývalou dobu zpět na mysl¹³. Bezprostředně po pádu režimu vstoupilo velké množství každodenních východoněmeckých výrobků dle Appaduraie do nové fáze své „kariéry“, neboť zboží tolik typické pro tehdejší dobu bylo najednou odsunuto do skladů, hlubin domácích skříní či někdy dokonce na skládky odpadu¹⁴. Devalvace východoněmeckých produktů bylo součástí systematického znehodnocování minulosti NDR. Ukázkovým příkladem se stala východoněmecká značka Trabant, automobil, který býval symbolem hrdosti socialistických dělníků¹⁵, navážeme-li však na Appaduraie a jeho konstatování, že hodnota věcí se proměňuje podle situace a prostředí, Trabant se po přerodu socialistického kontextu na kontext kapitalistický stává klíčovým symbolem socialistické neefektivity, zaostalosti a méněcennosti.

Zde je důležité pracovat s pojmem generace a mezigeneračním přenosem vzpomínek. Předměty z dob socialismu jsou naprosto unikátní svou jedinečnou charakteristikou: byly těžko dostupné a když už dostupné byly, byly vesměs velmi unifikované, nebo si alespoň hodně podobné. O to větší hodnotu nostalgický předmět má, je-li něčím raritním, např. džínové kalhoty. Nedostatek a nedostupnost bezpochyby prohloubila citovou vazbu k hmotným

¹² HALBWACHS, Maurice: *Kolektivní paměť*. Praha, Sociologické nakladatelství, 2009, s. 185-187.

¹³ HOLZER, Michaela: *Die deutsch-deutsche Problematik im Spielfilm: eine Analyse der Komik der Filme Sonnenallee und Good-bye, Lenin*. Saarbrücken, VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2011, s. 74-77.

¹⁴ BERDAHL, Daphne. '(N)Ostalgie' for the present: Memory, longing, and East German things. [online] [2023-09-18] <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.1999.9981598>.

¹⁵ BRUNK, Katja H. – HARTMAN, Benjamin – GIESLER, Markus. Creating a Consumable Past: How Memory Making Shapes Marketization. [online] [2023-06-22] <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx100>.

statkům. Předmětům z dob socialismu dodává nostalgickou rovinu i fakt, že se pro vzpomínající často jedná o předměty z jejich dětství, mládí, nebo jinak pozitivně zabarveného období. Dochází-li v dnešní době k přenosu vzpomínek, potřebuje mladá generace pochopit, že právě naprosto odlišný režim a v něm panující podmínky jsou důvodem, proč některým předmětům dávají vzpomínající takovou váhu. Na druhé straně by mělo být generací, která socialismus zažila, bráno v potaz, že dnešní mladá generace se narodila do zcela jiného společenského a ekonomického systému, kdy je hmotných statků nadbytek.

1.2. Mezigenerační přenos vzpomínek

Primárním kontextem pro přenos vzpomínek v případě kolektivního vzpomínání, jakým je ostalgie, je rodina. Jsou to právě starší generace, které zažily život ve východním Německu či komunistickém Československu na vlastní kůži a nyní předávají své vzpomínky, zkušenosti a příběhy mladším členům rodiny. Tyto vzpomínky, ať už pozitivní nebo negativní, ovlivňují vnímání a chápání ostalgie. Komunikativní zpřítomnění minulosti nepředstavuje pouze sdílení zkušeností či zážitků, jak tomu bylo dříve, nýbrž se jedná i o *[...] společnou praxi, kterou se rodina definuje jako skupina, která má specifické dějiny, na nichž se podílejí jednotliví členové a které se – alespoň v jejich vnímání – nemění*.¹⁶ Společná praxe vzpomínání v rámci rodiny není celistvá a nejedná se o jasně ohraničený soupis po sobě jdoucích událostí, nýbrž jde o zpřítomnění minulosti, které často představuje spíše náhodný výběr epizod, které jsou komunikovány¹⁷. Jednotlivé fragmenty jsou vyprávějícím dle francouzského filozofa Paula Ricoeura uspořádány tak, aby pro všechny zúčastněné strany vytvářely posloupný příběh, který bude posluchačům dávat smysl. Dle Mayer se totiž jedná o „[...] soubor hodnot předávaný z generace na generaci, který nemusí nutně mít mnoho společného s realitou“¹⁸ a ostalgie tak nemusí vždy přesně nutně reprezentovat složitou historickou realitu. Ve výsledku neexistuje jednotné vyprávění, nýbrž tolik jednotlivých verzí příběhů, „[...] kolik mluvčích a posluchačů je přítomno.“¹⁹ Generace, které život v bývalé NDR či Československu nezažily, tak mohou minulost vnímat zkresleně. Dalším zkreslujícím faktorem je, že starší generace vzpomínají na

¹⁶ WELZER, Harald – MOLLEROVÁ, Sabine – TSCHUGGNALLOVÁ, Karoline: *"Můj děda nebyl nácek": nacismus a holocaust v rodinné paměti*. Praha, Argo, 2010, s. 17-18.

¹⁷ Tamtéž., s. 17-18.

¹⁸ MAYER, Françoise: *Češi a jejich komunismus: paměť a politická identita*. Praha, Argo, 2009, s. 33.

¹⁹ WELZER, Harald – MOLLEROVÁ, Sabine – TSCHUGGNALLOVÁ, Karoline: *"Můj děda nebyl nácek": nacismus a holocaust v rodinné paměti*, s. 17-18.

dobu svého mládí, vzpomínky tak můžou často být idealizované a ovlivněné steskem po „starých dobrých časech“²⁰.

Ostalgie není jen touha po minulosti, ale také citová vazba na určitý způsob života. Rodinné vzpomínky zajišťují „[...] koherenci a identitu intimního vzpomínkového společenství [...]“²¹, hrají zásadní roli při utváření citového pouta a ovlivňují pocit identity spjaté s východoněmeckým či komunistickým československým dědictvím a rodinnou historií. Jak v německém, tak českém případě, je stále poměrně velké množství lidí, kteří na dobu minulého režimu pamatují. Komunistická éra byla obdobím jejich dětství či dospívání, nebo dalších událostí důležitých pro formativní věk každého jedince, což velmi často inklinuje k pozitivně zabarvenému vzpomínání²². Vazby mezi ostalgií a rodinnou pamětí napříč generacemi umožňují pochopit, jak je kolektivní paměť konstruována v rodinách a jak ovlivňuje vnímání významného historického období, jako byla existence celého východního bloku.

1.3. Vzpomínky na minulost v prostorovém kontextu

Primárním prostorem, ke kterému se naše mysl obrací v momentě, kdy si chce vybavit nějakou konkrétní kategorii vzpomínek je prostor, ve kterém žijeme, neboť je velmi snadné ho rekonstruovat za každých podmínek²³, ačkoliv v případě (n)ostaglického vzpomínání je možné narazit na problém ztráty kritického myšlení pro citové pouto. Tuto skutečnost rozebírá kulturní teoretička Svetlana Boym ve své knize *The future of nostalgia*, kde popisuje nebezpečí nostalgie ve smyslu záměny skutečného prostoru vzpomínání za prostor imaginární, idealizovaný²⁴.

Způsob, kterým o kolektivní paměti a prostoru smýšlel jak Halbwachs, tak francouzský historik Pierre Nora, lze poměrně dobře vztáhnout k ostalgickému vzpomínání na prostor, který byl velmi konkrétně vymezen státními hranicemi. V případě Německé demokratické republiky se jednalo o prostor vyhraničený v sovětském okupačním pásmu, tzv. Východní Německo, které představovalo specifický prostorový rámec pro přibližně 16 milionů jedinců, kterým pádem komunismu takřka přes noc zmizelo ohrazení státu, skrze který se uplynulých 40 let identifikovali. Ostalgie v tomto případě bývalým východoněmeckým občanům kompenzuje

²⁰ KUNŠTÁT, Daniel a Ladislav MRKLAS: *Historická reflexe minulosti, aneb, "Ostalgie" v Německu a Česku*. Praha, CEVRO Institut, 2009, s. 5.

²¹ WELZER, Harald – MOLLEROVÁ, Sabine – TSCHUGGNALLOVÁ, Karoline: *"Můj děda nebyl nácek": nacismus a holocaust v rodinné paměti*, s. 19.

²² KUNŠTÁT, Daniel a Ladislav MRKLAS: *Historická reflexe minulosti, aneb, "Ostalgie" v Německu a Česku*, s. 5.

²³ HALBWACHS, Maurice: *Kolektivní paměť*, s. 200.

²⁴ ENNS, Anthony: The politics of Ostalgie: post-socialist nostalgia in recent German film. In: *Screen*, iss. 1 (vol. 2007), s. 477.

více či méně přítomnou ztrátu identity, spojenou s přechodem k tržní ekonomice, s převzetím nového právního řádu Spolkové republiky a s celým procesem znovusjednocení Německa. Dle Halbwachse se paměť opírá o trvalost prostoru, což v případě NDR svým způsobem přestalo být možné, neboť došlo k „[...] úplnému zmizení celé země [...]“²⁵. I přes ztrátu území specifického pro tak velkou sociální skupinu, kterou východoněmečtí obyvatelé představují, si podle slov Halbwachse místo uchovává otisk skupiny (a naopak) a není-li již možné pracovat s trvalostí prostoru, je zde stále k dispozici přinejmenším trvalost postoje, který skupina vůči dané části prostoru zaujímá²⁶.

1.4. Kontextualizace české a německé ostalgie: podobnosti a rozdíly

Halbwachsova myšlenka, že prostor nese otisk sociální skupiny, je relevantní metaforou pro pochopení toho, jak se lidé vyrovnávají s proměnou nebo ztrátou své svébytného prostoru. V bývalé NDR je tento „otisk“ patrný v přetrvávajícím kulturním dědictví, památkách, či dokonce v každodenních praktikách, které přezívají i po sjednocení. Na území dřívějšího Československa lze podobný „otisk“ najít například v urbanismu, architektuře či zachovaném narativu o socialistické minulosti, a to i přes to, že prostor zůstal kontinuálně fyzicky přítomen.

Oba zmíněné národy přistupují k ostalgie odlišně hned z několika základních důvodů, jako první lze označit odlišné zkušenosti s komunistickým režimem. Totalitní režim byl nastolen převzetím moci KSČ v roce 1948 a po celou dobu své existence byl vnímán jako diktatura podporovaná Sovětským svazem, což vedlo k širokému disentu, včetně Pražského jara 1968 a následující invaze vojsk Varšavské smlouvy. Tato událost zanechala hluboké trauma a posílila negativní postoj k režimu²⁷. V případě Německé demokratické republiky se jednalo o prostor vyhraničený v sovětském okupačním pásmu, tzv. Východní Německo, které představovalo specifický prostorový rámec pro přibližně 16 milionů obyvatel, kterým pádem režimu takřka přes noc zmizelo ohrazení státu, se kterým se uplynulých 40 let identifikovali. Ostalgie v tomto případě bývalým východoněmeckým občanům kompenzuje více či méně přítomnou ztrátu identity vztahující se ke konkrétnímu ohrazenému území, spojenou s přechodem k tržní ekonomice, s převzetím nového právního řádu Spolkové republiky a s celým procesem znovusjednocení Německa. Prahou narozdíl od Berlína nevedla žádná zeď rozdělující prostor na dva diametrálně jiné světy, následný způsob pádu komunismu a následný přechod k demokracii je dalším z aspektů, který odlišuje český a německý přístup ke vzpomínání.

²⁵ GJURIČOVÁ, Adéla – Michal KOPEČEK: *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie po roce 1989*, s. 7.

²⁶ HALBWACHS, *Kolektivní paměť*, s. 188.

²⁷ MAYER, *Češi a jejich komunismus*, s. 33-36.

Sametová revoluce v roce 1989 byla poměrně rychlým a nenásilným procesem. Následující transformace přinesla nejen politické změny, ale také ekonomickou liberalizaci, která způsobila rychlé a často bolestivé přizpůsobení se tržní ekonomice. Tato zkušenost s vybudováním zcela nového tržního systému mohla u velké části společnosti vést k určité idealizaci stabilnějšího ekonomického prostředí před rokem 1989. Pád berlínské zdi v roce 1989 a následné znovusjednocení Německa znamenaly na rozdíl od ČSR okamžitou integraci NDR do západoněmeckého systému. Pro mnoho Východních Němců tento „pohlující“ způsob integrace způsobil ztrátu vlastní identity a zklamání z rychlých ekonomických změn, které přinesly nezaměstnanost a sociální nejistoty²⁸.

Za další rozdílný aspekt lze považovat rozdílné formování kulturní a sociální paměti. Po pádu komunismu v Československu došlo k intenzivnímu vyrovnávání se s minulostí, které se zaměřilo na oběti režimu a represivní složky (např. StB). „*V české společnosti není v módě mluvit o dobrých vzpomínkách lidí, kteří žili v socialismu a rádi na některé jeho aspekty vzpomínají, protože by to bylo považováno za urážku obětí režimu a sympatizace s ním*“.²⁹ V České republice ostalgie často nabývá hravějších forem, zaměřených na nostalgické vzpomínky na každodenní život, konzumní zboží a populární zábavu. V Německu je ostalgie pochopitelně také spjata s každodenními objekty (např. výrobky značky Trabant nebo Vita-Cola), ale výrazněji je spojována s pocitem ztráty tehdejší identity a bezpečí, které mnozí obyvatelé vnímali v rámci socialistického systému. Ostalgie zde často zdůrazňuje odlišnost východní identity v rámci sjednoceného Německa.

Také role médií a populární kultury sehrává svou zásadní roli. Seriály a filmy z doby komunismu jako např. *Nemocnice na kraji města* či *30 případů majora Zemana* jsou přes značně kontroverzní uvedení na televizní obrazovky dodnes populární, ale často především kvůli nostalgickému pohledu na každodenní život. Ostalgie v českém kontextu je více odosobněná od politického kontextu. Německé filmy a seriály, jako je *Good Bye Lenin!*, *Weissenensee* nebo *Sonnenallee*, se přímo zabývají otázkou identity, ztráty a vyrovnávání se s minulostí. Zpracování vzpomínek na minulý režim pomocí populární kultury představuje problematický bod ve smyslu historické pravdivosti a relevantnosti. Filmový kritik Martin Franc o filmech s (n)ostalgickými prvky hovoří jako o způsobu, který sice možná dobře

²⁸ GJURIČOVÁ, Adéla – Michal KOPEČEK: *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie po roce 1989*, s. 190-194.

²⁹ VÁGNEROVÁ, Vendula: *Interpretace života v socialistickém Československu v porovnání s fenoménem Ostalgie ve sjednoceném Německu*. [online] [2012-11-18].

<https://postfsv.wordpress.com/2012/11/18/interpretace-zivota-v-socialistickem-ceskoslovensku-v-porovnani-s-fenoménem-ostalgie-ve-sjednocenem-nemecku>.

prozkoumává minulou dobu, ale vůbec však neodráží realitu, nýbrž romantizuje nebo bagatelizuje historické události³⁰. Ostalgie je běžně chápána jako oživení pozitivních vzpomínek na život za minulého režimu, dle slov Martina France filmy představují právě až moc pozitivní pohled na dřívější politický režim s absencí vyobrazení strastí každodenního života. Franc zdůrazňuje potřebu vyváženého a jemného přístupu, který uznává jak pozitivní, tak negativní aspekty minulosti. Filmové snímky (konkrétně uvádí např. filmy Jana Hřebejka *Pelišky* nebo *Pupendo*) dle France vůbec neodrážejí realitu, tato kritika však nepopírá osobní a kulturní význam, který Ostalgie může mít pro jednotlivce, kteří prožili dané časy.

Co se týče časového vývoje, německá ostalgie začala nabývat na síle již v polovině 90. let, a to díky filmům, tzv. DDR-party s či Ossi-disco (večírky s východoněmeckou tematikou) a obnovení značek z doby NDR (Spreewaldské okurky, káva Röstfein nebo Rondo, ze sladkostí například Nudossi nebo čokolády Bambina a Schlager-Süßtafel, cigarety F6). V České republice zaznamenala ostalgie výraznější nárůst až po roce 2000, kdy začala být širší veřejností více akceptována. Přispěly k tomu retro pořady jako *Vyprávěj*, film *Pelišky* nebo obnova některých značek spojených s érou socialismu. Ke kulturním značkám, které se dočkaly svého znovuvvedení na trh lze přiřadit Kofolu, žvýkačky Pedro, paštiku Májku, Tatranky, Pribináček (o jehož výbornou reklamu se zasloužila filmová pohádka *Ať žijí duchové*), stavebnici Merkur či značku dětských hraček Igraček. Porevoluční návrat tradičních českých značek nebyl pro Čechy tak dramatický jako pro východní Němce. Výroba mnohdy jen dočasně utichla a byla obnovena po privatizaci. České výrobky většinou nezanikly úplně, na rozdíl od mnoha značek v Německu.³¹

2. Metodologie

Pro analytickou část práce byla zvolena varianta zakotvené teorie, tak jak definoval Anselm Strauss a Juliet Corbinová v 90. letech. Výběr právě této metody shledávám relevantním z několika následujících důvodů. Zakotvená teorie je univerzální metodou, kterou lze velmi dobře aplikovat na různá výzkumná témata a kontexty v sociálních vědách, včetně analýzy médií a audiovizuálních formátů, jako jsou například filmy či právě v této práci zpracovávané televizní

³⁰ GJURIČOVÁ, Adéla – Michal KOPEČEK: *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie po roce 1989*, s. 194-203.

³¹ VÁGNEROVÁ, Vendula: *Interpretace života v socialistickém Československu v porovnání s fenoménem Ostalgie ve sjednoceném Německu*. [online] [2012-11-18].

<https://postfsv.wordpress.com/2012/11/18/interpretace-zivota-v-socialistickem-ceskoslovensku-v-porovnani-s-fenoménem-ostalgie-ve-sjednocenem-nemecku>.

seriály³². Po stanovení konkrétních výzkumných cílů souvisejících s televizními seriály se dostáváme ke sběru různorodé škály dat souvisejících s obsahem zpracovávaného tématu, což v případě televizních seriálů zahrnuje sledování jednotlivých seriálových epizod, analýzu recenzí a kritiky a shromažďování relevantní literatury. Z metodologického hlediska by se práce dala označit i za případovou studii.

Výběr metody zakotvené teorie shledávám pro analýzu jednotlivých seriálů vhodnou i z následujícího důvodu. Při počátečním sběru dat a následném několikařázkovém kódování je důležitým momentem seskupování dat, které se opakují. Důležitý je krok axiálního kódování, při kterém vznikají jednotlivé kategorie a subkategorie. Tímto způsobem má člověk možnost všimnout si paralel a rozdílů v jednotlivých televizních snímcích.

Pomocí otevřeného a axiálního kódování a následného seskupování získaných pojmů jsem v této části práce dospěla k pěti ústředním kategoriím: Nezbytnosti všedního dne, Kultura a zábava, Rytmus každodenního života, Politické a ideologické vyobrazení, Nostalgie jako narativní prostředek. Při postupování zvolené metodologie jsem narážela na několik dalších prvků, ze kterých by jistě vznikla prostřednictvím zakotvené teorie další nová kategorie – např. dobové kostýmy. Je to bezpochyby tvůrci seriálů promyšleně zvolené oblečení, které výrazně poukazuje na tehdejší dobu a které pomáhá divákovi přenést se do období socialismu, nicméně detailní rozbor tohoto prvku byl cíleně vynechán. Seriály samy o sobě obsahují mnoho jiných aspektů, které život v období socialismu trefně vykreslují, že mi oproti nim tento přišel nezáživný, inklinující k jednoduchému popisu. Vzhledem k českému kontextu, ve kterém text vznikl, jsem se rozhodla dát větší váhu českým seriálům oproti seriálům německým. Nikoliv v raných fázích zvolené metodologie (poznámkování, otevřené a axiální kódování) ale až v následné interpretaci.

3. Znázornění ostalgie v českých a německých televizních seriálech

Problematika ostalgie a jejího vyobrazení je konkrétně analyzována na dvou českých a dvou německých televizních seriálech, které byly natočeny v průběhu let 2009–2021. Z řad českých zástupců jsem vybrala dva seriály z produkce České televize: prvním zvoleným je seriál *Vyprávěj* od dvojice režisérů Biser Arichtev a Johanna Steiger-Antošová, druhým je poměrně

³² FIGUREOA, The Grounded Theory and the Analysis of Audio-Visual Texts. [online] [2008-01-22] <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701605897>.

novější seriál *Svět pod hlavou* od režisérů Marka Najbrta a Radima Špačka. *Vyprávěj* je svým zpracováním naprosto ukázkovým materiálem, na kterém se dá tematika ostalgie podrobněji zkoumat, neboť byl za účelem vzpomínání na minulý režim natočen. Televizní snímky nebyly vybírány náhodně, ale tak, aby tvořily alespoň přibližné česko-německé ekvivalenty. Ač lze tedy v českém prostředí sáhnout např. po pětidílném retro seriálu z produkce České televize *Volha*, nebo šestidílné sérii *Bez vědomí* (2019) z produkce HBO, *Svět pod hlavou* se jevil jako nejvhodnější z hlediska následné komparace s německým zástupcem. K českému zástupci *Vyprávěj*, natočeného v průběhu let byl zvolen devítidílný seriál *Ku'damm* (Tančírna na hlavní třídě) režírovaný německým filmovým tvůrcem Svenem Bohsem. Hlavní akcent ve vyprávění v obou seriálech je kladen na příběh rodiny, na všední problémy jednotlivých členů, nikoliv na politiku či jiné významné události řadící se pod tzv. velké dějiny. Ty se odehrávají spíše na pozadí jednotlivých příběhů rodiny Dvořákových a rodiny Schöllack. Hlavním záměrem obou televizních seriálů není analýza či hodnocení historických událostí, ačkoliv jsou pro chování protagonistů klíčové, nýbrž co nejvěrnější zachycení doby a pocitů jednotlivých rodinných příslušníků v konkrétních situacích. K psychologickému dramatu *Svět pod hlavou* byl vybrán žánrově obdobný snímek, špionážní drama *Deutschland 83* od německého režiséra Edwarda Bergera. Děj obou seriálů je zasazen do 80. let 20. století, oba protagonisty spojuje zásadní změna odehrávající se v jejich životech – na jedné straně se časovou smyčkou stává z policisty příslušník Státní bezpečnosti, na straně druhé je rozhodnuto, že se z obyčejného pohraničního východoněmeckého strážníka stane agent v nejvyšším velení západoněmecké armády.

3.1. Hmotné nezbytnosti všedního dne

Navzdory všeobecnému přesvědčení, že za dob minulého režimu bylo „všeho dostatek“, skutečnost byla taková, že nedostatek zboží zásadně ovlivňoval každodenní život. Omezenost trhu reflektuje v první epizodě seriálu *Svět pod hlavou* obrovská sklenice nakládaných okurek, které příslušníci Státní národní bezpečnosti zakusují při sledování televize. Pro diváka může scéna působit úsměvně, poměrně humorná až absurdní připadá daná situace i hlavnímu hrdinovi Filipu Marvanovi, který se v 80. letech octil z budoucnosti, nicméně scéna si v sobě nese mnoho vrstev kontextuálního významu, které odrážejí společensko-ekonomické podmínky a kulturní aspekty dané doby. Kyselé okurky v zavařovací sklenici připomínají nedostatečnou a omezenou nabídku potravin v porovnání s kapitalistickými zeměmi, ve kterých byly nejrůznější pochutiny konzumující se obvykle před televizními obrazovkami snadněji dostupné.

Vedle zachycení socioekonomické reality omezené nabídky potravin má scéna ze *Světa pod hlavou* také kulturní symboliku a demonstruje skutečnost, jak si lidé s nedostatkem poměrně hravě poradili: přizpůsobili se nedostatku tím, že vytěžili maximum z komodit, které byly na trhu k dispozici. Okurky hrají svou specifickou roli i v patnácté epizodě *Vyprávěj*, kdy se z nakládání okurek stává rodinná aktivita po celé odpoledne. Nakládané okurky v obou seriálech symbolizují jistou vynalézavost a přizpůsobivost při maximálním využití omezených zásob potravin. Také reflektují nesoulad mezi propagandou hlásající „že nic nechybí“ a každodenní zkušeností běžných občanů. Pro diváka, který tuto dobu zažil, mohou okurky evokovat vzpomínky na společné rodinné aktivity a navozují dojem soudržnosti a „jednoduššího života“. To vše posiluje nostalgickou idealizaci minulosti, která překrývá skutečné nepohodlí tehdejší doby.

Na nedostatkové zboží je poukazováno i v seriálu *Ku'damm*, kdy Monika, jedna z hlavních hrdinek, uteče jednoho večera na Východ za svým otcem. „*Vůbec mě s tím kufrem nechtěli pustit, mysleli si, že pašuju dámské punčochy nebo kafe [...]*“.³³ Poměrně ironický tón, který protagonistka při vyslovení této věty použije signalizuje, že situace, kdy byla na hranicích kontrolována, jí připadá mírně absurdní, neboť pro ni jsou káva a punčochy denně používaným zbožím. Neuvědomuje si, že zmíněné předměty byly ve Východním bloku poměrně vzácné a na příděl.

V dějové linii německého kriminálního seriálu *Deutschland 83* je z dialogů hlavních postav slyšet o absenci další klíčové komodity, které byl na východní straně nedostatek – zdravotních pomůcek. „*K uzdravení jsou speciální léky ze Západu*“³⁴, kdy rozhovor mezi dvěma ženami poukazuje na rozdíly zdravotní péče mezi Východem a Západem. Socialistický systém bezpochyby často čelil problémům při poskytování alespoň přibližné úrovně zdravotnictví jako tomu bylo v případech kapitalistických zemí.

U televizních seriálů zaměřených na minulý režim je zásadní interakce s nostalgickými předměty. „*Jé, pravý džíný, strejdo ty jsi úžasnej!*“³⁵ Přibližně dvanáctiletá Zuzana Dvořáková dostane džínové kalhoty darem od svého strýce a je z nich tak nadšená, že v nich chodí i doma. Její vazba na džíný naznačuje emocionální a sentimentální hodnotu, která je s nedostatkovým zbožím často spojována.

Džíný v seriálech nevidíme pouze v přímé interakci s hlavními hrdiny, nýbrž i jako kulisu, kdy například leží „jen tak mimochodem“ položené na židli u jídelního stolu v chalupě

³³ *Ku'damm* 56, *It's Alright*, 00:27:20

³⁴ *Deutschland 83*, *Quantum Jump*, 00:07:23.

³⁵ *Vyprávěj*, *Mikuláš chodí v létě*, 00:22:12.

či doma u pracovního stolu a tím se dostávají znovu do záběru. Když se v seriálu *Deutschland 83* hlavní hrdina Martin Rauch dostane proti své vůli na Západ, jako první dostává pokyn „[...] převlékni se, měly by ti být [...]“³⁶ a záběr se stáčí na připravenou hromádku oblečení – červené triko s nápisem Puma, bílé tenisky a samozřejmě džínové kalhoty, ikonický západní symbol. Džíny zde symbolizují proměnu, nucené přijetí nové identity a odloučení od původního prostředí. Jako předmět z každodenního života, který byl v socialismu těžce dostupný, se džíny stávají jedním z klíčových symbolů nostalgie. Pro diváky připomínají touhu po věcech, které byly nedosažitelné, a zároveň jejich spojení se západní kulturou romantizuje tehdejší dobu jako éru, kdy takové symboly měly větší emocionální váhu než dnes.

Oba tyto zdánlivě obyčejné předměty, džínové kalhoty i nakládané okurky, slouží divákům jako mosty mezi individuálními vzpomínkami a kolektivní pamětí. Zatímco okurky připomínají adaptační schopnosti a každodenní kreativitu v prostředí nedostatku, džíny odkazují na aspirace a fascinaci světem za železnou oponou. Nostalgie, kterou tyto předměty vyvolávají, není jen idealizací minulosti, ale také způsobem, jak si diváci připomínají, co pro ně tehdejší symboly znamenaly v širším kontextu kulturní identity.

Tím, že seriály tyto objekty vkládají do děje, umožňují divákům znovu prožívat vzpomínky a přenášet je na nové generace, pro které jsou tyto předměty už jen ikonami minulosti. Takové ztvárnění znovu podtrhuje, že nostalgická paměť není jen o vzpomínkách na fakta, ale především o emocích, symbolech a interpretacích každodenního života.

3.2. V hlavní roli předměty

Socialismus byl bohatý na nejrůznější anomálie, které byly pro tehdejší režim běžnou praxí. Mezi specifické symboly se řadí například fronty, představující názornou ukázkou obrovských mezer centrálního plánování, kdy dle komunistických funkcionářů byl všeho dostatek. V desáté epizodě *Vyprávěj* s názvem *Promoce* sledujeme frontu, která se utvořila před obchodem s domácími potřebami. Karel si na nátlak manželky Evy do fronty stoupne, nicméně v průběhu čekání se dozvídá informaci „že pračky dovezou až zítra ráno“, Karel chce frontu opustit a jít domů, jelikož má následující den promoce. Absurdnost situace je podtržena ve frontě taktéž stojícím starším mužem, který se na Karla obrátí slovy „Kam to jdete, člověče? Říkali, že je přivezou už ráno [...]“³⁷, na Karlovu otázku „To tady chcete čekat celou noc?“³⁸ odpovídá

³⁶ *Deutschland 83*, *Quantum Jump*, 00:16:22.

³⁷ *Vyprávěj*, *Promoce*, 00:19:57 – 00:21:10.

³⁸ *Vyprávěj*, *Promoce*, 00:19:57 – 00:21:13.

„No jasně, vy snad ne? Kdy budete mít takovouhle šanci?“³⁹. Fronta se v případě desáté epizody stává protagonistou, kolem kterého se točí celá jedna dějová linie – kromě závěrečné promoce stráví Karel ve frontě prakticky celý díl.

Vystavené předměty ve vitrínách a na policích, kterých je ve společných obytných prostorech plno, jsou typickým představitelem socialistického kýče. „Každá doba má své oblíbené kýče. Kýče jsou zahradní trpaslíci, [...] lední medvědi jako popelníky, západy slunce s palmami a mořem. Po čase se z kýčů stávají cenné předměty vysoké hodnoty a dají se koupit jen ve starožitnostech.“⁴⁰ Novinářka Eda Kriseová se ve svém románu *Kočičí životy* skrze hlavní hrdinku vyjadřuje o kýči jako o záležitosti jdoucí ruku v ruce se sentimentalitou, kterou mají lidé svým způsobem rádi neboť „[...] v tom přece poznávají sami sebe z té lepší stránky.“⁴¹ V této souvislosti ostalgie obecně může představovat také jistý druh kýče, neboť se jedná o pozitivně zabarvenou selekci vzpomínek na to dobré, co se odehrálo v dřívější nelehké době.

Kýčovitě předměty, často podloženy háčkovaným ubrusem či prostíráním, byly obvykle vystavené v extrémním množství, někdy na poměrně iracionálních místech, jako například keramický popelník s ledním medvědem z dílny Ditmar & Urbach položený na výčepním zařízení v hospodě.⁴² Že se jedná o v podstatě ikonický výrobek své doby se může člověk přesvědčit v Národním muzeu, kde je jeden z popelníků v rámci expozice *Dějiny 20. století* vystaven.

České seriály *Svět pod hlavou* a *Vyprávěj* velmi často pracují s prvkem přehnaného zdůrazňování tehdejších reálií. V domácnosti rodiny Dvořákových se odehrává mnoho scén, ve kterých hrají nostalgickou roli předměty, kterými je domácnost vybavena. Předměty a rekvizity, které v klasických seriálech vnímáme jako pouhou kulisu a máme tendenci spíše přehlížet, vstupují výrazným způsobem do popředí. Příkladem je televizor – v době, kdy se odehrává děj první série seriálu *Vyprávěj* (60. léta), silně nedostatkové zboží. Televize představovala v tehdejší Československu ukazatele životní úrovně, a tak není divu, že když dostane Jana Dvořáková příležitost televizi získat, neváhá ani v případě, že ji pro televizi bude muset zavést z počátku série ne zrovna sympatický ředitel podniku, ve kterém pracuje: „Je v Kolíně, musíš si ji vyzvednout do konce týdne, o polední pauze v elektru na náměstí [...]“⁴³.

³⁹ *Vyprávěj, Promoce*, 00:19:57 – 00:21:18.

⁴⁰ ŠEBO, Juraj: *O socialismu s láskou*. Bratislava, Noxi, 2011, s. 204.

⁴¹ KRISOVÁ, Eda: *Kočičí životy*, Praha, Práh, 2023, s. 289.

⁴² *Vyprávěj, Velikonoce*, 00:38:09.

⁴³ *Vyprávěj, Je to ten pravý?*, 00:09:18 – 00:09:44.

Televize je napříč celým dílem předmětem dohadů mezi manžely Dvořákovými, vstupuje do popředí každou chvíli a stává se tak opět doslova protagonistou celého dílu. V momentech, kdy ve scéně hrají hlavní roli hromadné sdělovací prostředky jako televizor či rozhlasový přijímač, se scéna specificky obchází po většinu času bez dialogů, což ještě víc umocňuje již zmíněné přehnané zobrazování tehdejších reálií. Rozhlasové přijímače hrají velmi výraznou roli v těch epizodách, které odkazují na významné historické události, kterými byl 21. srpen či 16. leden 1969. „*Pusťte si rádio, rychle, právě hlásili že se v Praze nějaký kluk upálil*“⁴⁴, celý pokoj utichá, scéna se tak opět odehrává bez dialogů a sledujeme pečlivý záběr kamery na rozhlasový přijímač značky Tesla.

V některých situacích domácí spotřebiče dokonce zachraňují hlavní hrdiny od hroící domácí nepohody. Když babička Běta zjistí, že se Dvořákoví účastnili pražských oslav 1. Máje, vyhrožuje, že se odstěhuje – ostatně jako vždy, když se jí něco nelíbí. Situaci pak zachrání vysílání rozhlasu „*Máš štěstí Josef, že na Svobodné Evropě právě hlásili, že 1. Máj byl letos v Praze velice svobodomyslný*“⁴⁵ a žádné stěhování od příbuzných se nekoná.

3.3. Vždy důvod k oslavám

Děj televizních seriálů s ostalgickou tematikou je podán způsobem, při kterém divák nabývá dojmu, že důvodů k oslavám bylo vždy plno. V návaznosti na malé rodinné dějiny se vesele slaví narozeniny a jmeniny rodinných příslušníků, společenská setkání v prostorách kanceláří ku příležitosti Vánoc, ve spojitosti s ideologií státu to pak byly kolektivní oslavy 1. máje, vojenské přehlídky 9. května, VŘSR či MDŽ⁴⁶. Hromadné kolektivní oslavy, shromáždění a rituály byly komunistickým režimem často pořádány a podporovány, za účelem podpory pocitu národní a ideologické jednoty. Státem organizované akce a události měly posílit kolektivní identitu, v bezprostřední blízkosti vedle sebe se najednou ocitli dělníci, umělci, pionýři, svazáci, ti všichni šli ruku v ruce v jednom průvodu⁴⁷.

V úvodu seriálu *Deutschland 83* se divák ocitá uprostřed narozeninové oslavy matky hlavního hrdiny Martina Raucha, která se odehrává v jeho domově ve Východním Německu. Dům a zahrada je plná lidí, starší se baví venku na zahradě, mladí uvnitř domu tančí a zpívají. Slyšet je píseň *99 Luftballons* od západoněmecké kapely Nena, protestsong ikonický pro období studené války. I přes těžký obsah rozhovorů, které hlavní hrdinové na oslavě vedou,

⁴⁴ Vyprávěj, *Velká očekávání*, 00:47:28.

⁴⁵ Vyprávěj, *1. Máj*, 00:48:29.

⁴⁶ ŠEBO: *O socialismu s láskou*, s. 157.

⁴⁷ Ibid., s. 157.

jsou podobná společenská a rodinná setkání připomínkou, že život za socialismu nebyl tak šedivý a ponurý, jak si na Západě mohli obvykle představovat. Rodinná a přátelská setkání, jak ve *Vyprávěj*, tak v *Deutschland 83*, vykreslují život na východní straně jako příklad štedré komunitní solidarity a pohostinnosti. Seriál poukazuje na to, že i lidé na východní straně se uměli dobře bavit, měli k dispozici podobné produkty, aktivity, hudbu a obdobné formy zábavy jako lidé na Západě.

3.4. Rytmus každodenního života

V seriálu *Vyprávěj* slouží každodenní události a dynamika v rodinném prostředí jako hnací síla děje. Rodinné interakce a peripetie jsou primárním prvkem, kolem kterého se točí celý děj, na rozdíl od detektivní série *Svět pod hlavou*, kde vzpomínky na rodinu a záhadná rodinná minulost pomáhají protagonistovi Filipu Marvanovi při řešení kriminálních případů, důraz na osobní životy a rodinné zázemí postav je však výrazně menší. Každodennost je tak v seriálových zpracováních vyobrazena nejenom skrze okruh rodiny a domova, ale také pracovním prostředím, hrajícím zásadní roli ve všech epizodách seriálu *Svět pod hlavou*.

Atmosféru rodinných rituálů provází řada jak komických, tak dramatických situací, zvláště když se celá rodina sejde při mimořádných příležitostech, jako jsou Vánoce, svatba, nebo oslava narozenin. Vánoce, údajné svátky klidu a míru, jsou u Karla a Evy Dvořákových nejnapjatějším obdobím a nepohodu přenáší i na syna Honzíka. Epizoda zobrazuje, jak mohou rodinné neshody nebo společenská napětí proniknout níže a ovlivnit mladší generace a jejich zkušenosti a vnímání daného období či svátků, zde konkrétně Vánoc. Babi Běta zase před vánočním shonem odjíždí sama na chalupu, aby si od vánočního shonu odpočinula, Josef čelí obžalobě od vlastního bratra. Spletitost rodinných vztahů, osobního růstu a dopadu každodenních událostí v rámci rodiny odehrávajících se na pozadí významných svátků, zobrazuje osobní strasti a radosti protagonistů uprostřed širších společenských událostí. Vyobrazení Josefa, který čelí bratrově obžalobě zrovna ve vánočním čase – „[...] k tomu všemu ty pitomý Vánoce“⁴⁸, který je tradičně spojován s obecným poklidem, symbolizuje vpád náročných výzev do dnů plných domnělé harmonie.

3.5. Politické a ideologické vyobrazení

Politická agenda se propsala i do každodenní jazykové výbavy občanů: „*Umělé hmotě se říká plast, nákupní dům je supermarket [...], tohle je pomeranč – řekneš mandarinka a nikdo ti*

⁴⁸ *Vyprávěj, Vánoce*, 00:25:43.

nebude rozumět“ (Deutschland 83, Quantum Jump, 00:20:48). Některá slova zněla komunistickému vedení státu zřejmě příliš západně, a tak bylo ve prospěch socialistických principů rozhodnuto o nahrazení termínů těmi, které budou více v souladu s oficiální ideologií. Hlavní hrdina seriálu *Deutschland 83* Martin se tak při svém výcviku, po kterém má být nasazen jako špion v západoněmeckém Bundeswehru, učí i pro něj nové slovní zásobě.

Svět pod hlavou je seriálem z kriminálního prostředí, ve kterém sledujeme, jak intenzivním způsobem fungoval systém nepřetržité kontroly a evidence. *Nebylo možné se [...] vyhnout, někde se ztratit, někde nebyť vidět, dostat se do stínu, nechat na sebe zapomenout*“⁴⁹. Již od první epizody dostává mnoho prostoru autoritativní příkazové zacházení ze strany příslušníků Sboru národní bezpečnosti, Marvanův kolega Plachý je vedle své cyničnosti ztělesněním hrubosti a nadřazeného vystupování, na které lze nahlížet jako na souladné s autoritářským a hierarchickým charakterem institucí tehdejšího socialistického systému, včetně donucovacích a bezpečnostních složek.

Nezbytnou podmínkou pro dosažení odpovídajícího účinku filmového sdělení jsou v případě ostalgických témat prvky velkých dějin. Seriáloví tvůrci *Vyprávěj* používají při vyobrazení skutečných historických událostí autentické černobílé záběry. V prvním díle s názvem *Od začátku* sledujeme historické události významné pro 60. léta – americký atentát na prezidenta J.F. Kennedyho, nástup Leonida Brežněva do funkce prvního tajemníka ÚV KSSS po Nikitovi Chruščovovi, Jurij Gagarin jako první člověk obletěl Zemi, celosvětové nadšení a obliba britské kapely *The Beatles* apod. Prvořadou roli sehrají velké dějiny v případě sedmé epizody s názvem *21. srpen*. Tato epizoda se od ostatních dílů celé první série *Vyprávěj* odlišuje nejenom neobvyklou dramatičností, výrazně akčnějšími a vyostřenými scénami, ale také zpracováním – díl je mnohanásobně více tvořen skutečnými dobovými událostmi, které se prolínají napříč celým seriálovým dějem, jsou slyšet i dobové rozhlasové komentáře.

Vedle vyobrazení velkých dějin je to četné množství státní ideologii loajálních postav, které napomáhají detailnímu vykreslení ostalgické atmosféry uvnitř seriálového světa. V podnicích, v armádě, společenských a státních institucích, zkrátka všude byli přítomní kádroví příslušníci. Josefu Dvořákovi a jeho kolegům od první epizody *Vyprávěj* narušuje „pracovní pohodu“ soudruh Karpíšek. První konflikty mezi Josefem a Karpíškem vznikají na základě Josefova „imperialistického“ bratra Mikuláše, který Josefa na pracovišti párkrát navštívil. Spory mezi oběma muži se v průběhu děje rozvíjejí v širším společenském rámci formovaném socialistickou ideologií. „*Soudruhu Dvořáku, já jsem vám přeci několikrát říkal,*

⁴⁹ KABÁT, Jindřich. *Psychologie komunismu*. Praha, Práh, 2011, s. 185.

at' sem za vámi váš bratr nechodí, víte vy, jaký z toho může být malér?“⁵⁰ – Karpíšek naráží na Mikulášovu emigraci do zahraničí, což byl tehdy akt odporující socialistickým zásadám. Zásah socialistického kádry odráží autoritářskou kontrolu, kterou režim tehdy vykonával nad životy obyčejných občanů. V tomto kontextu nebyly rozpory mezi jednotlivci jako Josef a stranickými příslušníky pouze osobní, často pramenily z ideologických rozdílů a lpění na socialistických principech. Josef naopak zásahy ze strany Karpíška vnímá jako zásah do svého osobního života a do jeho vlastních práv.

Ve *Světě pod hlavou* je politická ideologie ztvárněna skrze kontrolní mechanismy a autoritativní jednání příslušníků Státní bezpečnosti. Již od první epizody je jasné, jak důsledně režim sledoval a evidoval své občany, čímž vytvářel atmosféru neustálého dohledu. Tento motiv je často kontrastován s cynismem a hrubostí jednotlivých postav, které ztělesňují drsnost tehdejšího systému. Naopak *Vyprávěj* se k ideologii vztahuje skrze každodenní situace, například účast na prvomájových průvodech či konflikty spojené s rozdílnými názory na politické dění. Tyto situace ukazují, jak politické události zasahovaly do osobních životů a ovlivňovaly rodinné vztahy. Například spor o účast členů rodiny Dvořákových na oslavách 1. máje odhaluje, jak ideologie pronikala i do nejintimnějších aspektů života.

3.6. Nostalgie jako narativní prostředek

Často se opakujícím prostředkem, který je filmovými režiséry v ostalgické produkci používán jsou obrazy z období „mladšího já“. Režiséři a scénáristé seriálu *Vyprávěj* například již od prvního dílu s názvem *Od začátku*, který se odehrává v roce 1964, používají krátké prostřihy, které danou scénu rozostří a tentýž moment je přenesen přibližně o 20 let zpět. Tyto obrazy fungují jako narativní prostředek, pomocí kterého je divákem vnímán celý filmový časoprostor. Volba této optiky je logická, dětství a mládí je ze všech životních etap nejsilněji citově zabarvené, a tak představuje pro ostalgicky laděné vyprávění ideální nástroj pro požadovanou naraci. Dětský, popř. mladistvý pohled ponechává scénáristům větší prostor pro vykreslení příběhu, „umožňuje jim aplikovat hodnotovou nevyhraněnost a smířlivost“ [...], dítě ani adolescent nemusí vynášet kritické soudy, nemusí situaci kolem sebe plně chápat ani ji hlouběji analyzovat.“⁵¹

Názorným příkladem, kdy dítě nemusí plně chápat danou situaci, jít v její analýze do potřebné hloubky a kdy dětská perspektiva umožňuje redukovat rozporuplnosti socialismu je

⁵⁰ *Vyprávěj, Mikuláš chodí v létě*, 00:49:12.

⁵¹ ČINÁTLVÁ, Blanka: Zátíší se sifonovou lahví. Fotogenie ostalgického vzpomínání. In: *Cinepur*, iss. 78 (vol. 2011), s. 58.

scéna z páté epizody *Vyprávěj*. Přibližně dvanáctiletá Zuzka, sestra vypravěče, má za úkol namalovat do školy „největšího člověka na světě“, kterým dle soudružek učitelek byl soudruh Lenin. V novinách, které slouží dívce jako předloha, je na obrázku Lenina uměle upravená nadměrně vysoká postava umístěna vedle výškou „standardního“ člověka, na Zuzky otázku „proč má tak velkou hlavu?“ odpovídá babička Běta „protože toho hodně vymyslel“ a „proč má tak velké ruce?“ „protože toho hodně vykonal“⁵². Dítě se s odpovědí spokojí a následný soud scény a vyobrazeného dialogu je ponechán na divákovi.

3.7. Kolektivní prostorová nostalgie

V českém *Vyprávěj* a *Svět pod hlavou* divák od prvních minut vedle češtiny slyší také slovenštinu, režiséři do scénáře vkládají skutečnost, že se dějem divák nevrací retrospektivně pouze do historie České republiky, nýbrž do celého Československa. Jednu z hlavních postav *Vyprávěj* Evu ztvárnila slovenská herečka Andrea Růžicková, která v seriálových dialogích oba jazyky střídá. Slovenštinu volí v případě vypjatějších scén, kdy prožívá smutek, zklamání, během dohadů s manželem, v rozhovorech se svými na Slovensku žijícími rodiči a příbuznými a také ze začátku seriálu, kdy přijíždí jako mladá studentka poprvé do Prahy. Československo je pro současné diváky symbolem již politicky neexistujícího prostoru, se kterým je možné se identifikovat pouze zpětně a jehož současnou kontinuitu je možné podpořit právě prostřednictvím vzpomínky na historické události. Slovenštinu lze slyšet i v televizním vysílání, oba jazyky se přirozeně prolínají také v pracovním prostředí, v rámci společenských setkání a někdy i jednotlivých domácností. Tak jak to bylo dříve standardem.

Trochu odlišně, avšak pro ostalgicky laděné seriály zásadní, čiší prostorová nostalgie ze vzpomínek Filipa Marvana, hlavního hrdiny seriálu *Svět pod hlavou*. Seriál používá retrospektivní prostřihy, ve kterých se Marvan vrací do dob, kdy byl malým klukem a společně se svým bratrem vyrůstal na panelovém sídlišti. Panelová výstavba ve velkém řešila bytovou krizi, která za tehdejšímu režimu nastala. Marvan se ve svých vzpomínkách často objevuje na dětském hřišti, které stávalo před jeho bydlištěm, na toto místo se vrací i jako dospělý, když se záhadnou smyčkou dostává zpět do 80. let. Zobrazení sídliště a nostalgické návštěvy míst, jako jsou dětská hřiště, mají významnou ostalgickou symboliku. Sídliště, často spojované se socialistickým urbanismem a architekturou, mohou vyvolat pocity nostalgie nebo vzpomínky na komunitní životní prostředí. Návrat na tato místa ve vzpomínkách může symbolizovat touhu

⁵² *Vyprávěj, Je to ten pravý?*, 00:16:56 – 00:17:30.

po komunitním duchu nebo pocitu sounáležitosti, který je s tehdejší dobou často spojován, navzdory všem ostatním nedostatkům.

V německém seriálu *Ku'damm* je východní Berlín vyobrazen jako prostor, který hlavním hrdinům ze SRN skýtá bezpečné útočiště v situacích, kdy si neví rady – Monika Schöllacková utíká na Východ k otci, když se rozhodne, že již nechce žít ve společné domácnosti s autoritativní a panovačnou matkou. Ve dveřích je přivítána slovy „[...] *kolik jich ještě přijde? A pak že se utíká na Západ...*“⁵³. Lehkost, se kterou hlavní hrdinové překračují hranice východního a západního Berlína tam a sem příliš neodpovídá tehdejší realitě, ačkoliv poukazuje na uvolněnější časy a dobu, kdy byl přechod mezi Východem a Západem méně omezený.

Historická přesnost je aspektem, který ustupuje v seriálu *Ku'damm* výrazně do pozadí, aby byl děj pro diváka poutavější. Umělecké produkce si často v seriálech posazených do historické doby propůjčují tvůrčí svobodu, aby dosáhly dramatického účinku nebo aby lépe rezonovaly se současným publikem. V dialogu mezi dvěma protagonisty, z nichž jeden je z Východu a druhý ze Západu se odráží nejednoznačný přístup k překračování státních hranic: „*Co tu děláte? [...] U koho jste byla?*“ „*Byla jsem náhodou poblíž, u příbuzných [...], víte, žije tu můj otec*“⁵⁴. Na jedné straně podezíravý výslech, na druhé straně možnost až skoro náhodného potulování se. Ambivalence v zobrazení hraničních přechodů v seriálu slouží k dramatickým nebo vyprávěcím účelům.

4. Závěrečná reflexe a srovnání

Každý televizní snímek zvolený pro tuto práci a následně analyzovaný je pro pochopení ostalgie klíčový. *Vyprávěj* svým pozitivním narativem vzpomíná na minulý režim výhradně v dobrém, tehdejší socialistický režim představuje dobovou kulisu, do které jsou dosazeny veselé i smutné životní příhody velké rodiny Dvořákových. Ostalgie se v seriálu *Vyprávěj* projevuje především podrobným vyobrazením tehdejší všednodennosti, rodinnou dynamikou bohatou na malé dějiny posazenou do velkých dějin, jejichž významnost je umocněna dobovými retrospektivními prostrhíhy. Tím, s jakou lehkostí je minulý režim ve *Vyprávěj* vykreslen se jedná o typický ostalgický seriál se vším všudy. Velký důraz je kladen právě na předměty, které se velmi často stávají protagonisty dějové linky celé epizody a podtrhují tvrzení Arjuna Appaduraie představené v první části studie: že předměty často nehrají jen v životě lidí pasivní

⁵³ *Ku'damm* 56, *It's Alright*, 00:30:49

⁵⁴ *Ku'damm* 56, *Schatten der Vergangenheit?*, 00:57:44 – 00:58:55.

roli, ale aktivně se účastní sociálních vztahů, kulturních praktik a systémů významu v návaznosti na specifické sociální a kulturní prostředí. Domácí spotřebiče jako například pračka, v 60. letech minulého století nedostatkové zboží, na kterou čeká hlavní hrdina Karel Dvořák frontu celou epizodu, hromadné sdělovací prostředky jako televizor, pro který neváhá maminka Dvořáková jet v nekomfortní společnosti z Pardubic do Kolína a která je předmětem sporů mezi ní a manželem. Džíny, které Zuzce přiveze strýc Mikuláš ze zahraničí jsou ukázkou slov Jana Asmanna, jak si lidé do předmětů ukládají různé představy, pocity a vzpomínky, které věci umí následně i po mnoha letech přivést zpět do živé paměti.

Ve druhém českém seriálu *Svět pod hlavou* se minulý režim projevuje především psychologií hlavních i vedlejších postav. Kriminální drama odehrávající se ve smyšleném městě na severu Čech představuje divákům pohled na minulý režim z pohledu autoritativního a přísného příslušníka Státní národní bezpečnosti, kterému sice nechybí jistý smysl pro humor, ale jedná se postavu se spíše negativními vlastnostmi. Detektivní linka se prolíná s rodinnou minulostí protagonisty Filipa Marvana, i přes zaměření se především na pracovní prostředí má divák možnost nahlédnout do domácnosti hlavního hrdiny, když byl ještě dítě. Zde se lze velmi dobře ztotožnit se slovy Maurice Halbwachse, podle kterého předměty kolem nás tvoří specifickou „nehybnou společnost“. Hlavní hrdina se neobjasněnou časovou smyčkou ocitá v minulosti. Ve svých vzpomínkách se občas retrospektivně vrací zpět do bývalého domova, který pro něj představuje důvěrný smysl, pomocí kterého se poměrně snadno zorientuje i přes prvotní chaos a nepochopení, jak a proč se v minulosti vlastně ocitl. Předměty, které v domácnosti i kolem sebe potkává mu dodávají uklidňující dojem kontinuity, ač on sám už není součástí dané sociální skupiny. Marvan ve své podstatě není osobou žijící v době komunismu, ač se zde časovou smyčkou z budoucnosti ocitá, skrze dříve známé předměty (prolézačky na dětském hřišti panelového sídliště, auta Veřejné bezpečnosti, obsah lednice v bývalé rodinné domácnosti – nechybí tvarohový *Pribináček* či paštika *Májka*) má však možnost navázat rychleji kontakt s konkrétní skupinou, prostřednictvím niž se dříve identifikoval. V předmětech, které dřív patřily k jeho každodennosti nachází Marvan své staré já, v minulosti najednou nachází úlevu před chaotickou současností.⁵⁵

V případě německého seriálu *Ku'damm* je socialistický režim přítomen velmi málo, až se téměř může zdát, jako kdyby v případě seriálových protagonistů [...] *běh velkých dějin neměl na osobní životy pražádný vliv*“.⁵⁶ Hlavní děj se odehrává na západní straně rozděleného

⁵⁵ KRISOVÁ: *Kočí životy*, Praha, Práh, 2023, s. 326.

⁵⁶ ERNAUX, Annie. Roky. Brno, Host, 2022.

Berlína, odkud hlavní hrdinové vnímají druhou stranu města spíše jako problémovou: „*Jste z Východního Berlína?*“ „*Ano*“ „*Jo, právě, až se zavřou hranice, provždy se to vyřeší*“⁵⁷. Dějová linka se dle citovaného dialogu odehrává v době, kdy byla situace ohledně studené války uvolněnější a hlavní hrdinové poměrně často a snadno překračují z jedné strany na druhou. Východní strana je v tomto seriálu vyobrazena jako prostor, který skýtá bezpečí osobám, kterým bylo ublíženo v minulosti, a také lidem, kteří se na Západě necítí svobodně. Děj je zaměřen především na vztahy a malé dějiny jednotlivých hlavních hrdinů, seriál poukazuje na skutečnost, že jak láska a její intenzita, tak přátelství a jeho důležitost, byla i v době studené války na obou stranách stejná. Lidé žijící na východní straně železné opony sice nemohli „*cestovat, chodit do kostela, říkat nahlas svoje názory, [...] kupovat kvalitní zboží, to však neznámá, že [...] žili nešťastně.*“⁵⁸.

S podobným motivem pracuje i druhý německý *Deutschland 83*. Děj je posazen do 80. let minulého století a hlavní hrdina Martin je ze dne na den přinucen opustit svůj dosavadní život ve Východním Německu a stává se z něj agent v západoněmecké armádě. Tím že se Martin Rauch, hlavní hrdina, má stát agentem vyslaným do západoněmeckého Bundeswehru a musí projít náležitým výcvikem, aby byl naprosto důvěryhodným, je snadné zaznamenat rozdíly v chování, smýšlení a životním stylem obou stran železné opony. Politická a ideologická rovina se výrazně promítá do každodennosti i rodinného života postav. *Deutschland 83* ukazuje, jak socialistický systém ovlivňoval jazyk a myšlení lidí, když nahrazoval západně znějící termíny vlastními výrazy (např. „*nákupní dům*“ místo „*supermarket*“). Tento fenomén poukazuje na snahu režimu formovat kulturní identitu prostřednictvím jazyka. Hlavní hrdina Martin Rauch musí při své špionážní misi nejen přijmout novou identitu, ale i osvojit si novou slovní zásobu, což symbolizuje proces ideologické přeměny jednotlivce. Jazyk hraje svou roli i v českých seriálech, ve kterých můžeme slyšet jak češtinu, tak slovenštinu, např. v televizním vysílání. Oba jazyky se přirozeně prolínají také v pracovním prostředí, v rámci společenských setkání a někdy i jednotlivých domácností. Tak jak to bylo kdysi v běžné praxi standardem. Pro dnešní diváky je Československo symbolem politicky zaniklého prostoru, s nímž je možné se ztotožnit pouze zpětně prostřednictvím nostalgických vzpomínek.

Ostalgie vyobrazena v televizních seriálech nesmí být brána jako přesná historiografie. Nostalgické vzpomínání na dobu minulou jsou vždy vzpomínky něčí paměti, které obsahují

⁵⁷ Ku'damm 59, *Der Skandal*, 00:35:55.

⁵⁸ ŠEBO, Juraj: *O socialismu s láskou*, s. 306.

nepřesnosti, neboť paměť je ve své povaze plastická, a dělá si co chce. Nepřesnosti jsou způsobené „jednak hlodem času a jednak tím, že [...]“ člověk minulost vnímá „ze svého přiděleného stanoviště [...] úplně po svém.“⁵⁹. Předávání vzpomínek na minulý režim z generace na generaci je nezbytným procesem, který je součástí kultury vzpomínání a kolektivní paměti. Vzhledem k tolika rozličným úhlům pohledů, s kterými pracují ať už televizní režiséři, scénáristé mluvící k velkému množství diváků či rodinní příslušníci, vyprávějící vzpomínky svým potomkům, dochází k nechtěným a nežádoucím modifikacím vzpomínek, které mnohdy nemusí vůbec reflektovat tehdejší realitu. Verze vyprávějíciho se postupem času stává jen předlohou ke skutečné události a člověk přestává rozeznávat mezi příběhem vyprávějíciho a původním stavem věci⁶⁰. I přes to, že je výklad minulosti ovlivněn plasticitou lidské paměti náchylné k nezáměrným vynechávkám, jsou v tomto kolektivním prostoru témata, na která je potřeba dokola upozorňovat, aby nedošlo k jejich znevážení, potažmo zapomnění v důsledku toho, jak ubývá reálných pamětníků.

Přístupy k mediální reprezentaci socialismu a jejich dopady na společnost se v Německu a v České republice výrazně liší. V Německu byly populární pořady a filmy zaměřené na NDR, jako například *Sonnenallee* (1999), *Go Trabi Go* (1991), naprostý kinohit *Goodbye Lenin!* (2003) nebo *DDR-show*, které se staly masivní součástí kulturního dění a populární kultury. Tato témata byla zpracovávána jak zábavně, tak ideologicky, což vedlo k různorodým reakcím ze strany východních i západních Němců. V České republice se kolektivní vzpomínání na socialismus zpočátku setkávalo s odporem. Seriály jako *30 případů majora Zemana* byly znovu uvedeny za kontroverzních okolností. Filmy jako *Pelíšky* (1999) a *Pupendo* (2003) od režiséra Jana Hřebejka pojímají téma socialismu humorně, ale nezapomínají na jeho negativní stránky.

V kontextu společnosti se německá ostalgie objevila jako reakce na pocit ztráty identity a nostalgii po stabilitě a kolektivním duchu bývalé NDR, který kontrastoval s individualistickou společností SRN. Naopak v České republice má ostalgie méně politický charakter a představuje spíše kulturní či komerční fenomén. Její rozmach je úzce spojen s retro trendem, který oslovuje i mladší generace, jež období socialismu osobně nezažily. Celkově lze říci, že německá ostalgie je výrazněji svázána se specifickou historickou zkušeností rozděleného národa, zatímco česká ostalgie má spíše kulturní a retro povahu. Navíc v českém prostředí není ostalgie tak hluboce propojena s otázkami národní identity jako v Německu.

⁵⁹ VODŇANSKÁ, Jitka: *Voda, která hoří*. Praha, Torst, 2018, s. 11.

⁶⁰ TORČÍK, Marek: *Rozložíš paměť*. Praha, Paseka, 2023, s. 17-18.

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Přílohy





OBR. 3: "PRAVÝ DŽÍNÝ, STREJDO TY JSI ÚŽASNEJ!"

Vyprávěj - Mikuláš chodí v létě, S01E06 00:22:12, zdroj: iVysílání České televize



OBR. 4: ZMĚNA ŠATNÍKU JAKO PROSTŘEDEK K FORMOVÁNÍ NOVÉ IDENTITY

Deutschland 83 - Quantum Jump, S01E01 00:16:22, zdroj: Amazon Prime Video



OBR. 5: UNIFORMNÍ ŠEĎ, KAM SE PODĚLA?

Vyprávěj - Mikuláš chodí v létě, S01E05 00:37:45, zdroj: iVysílání České televize



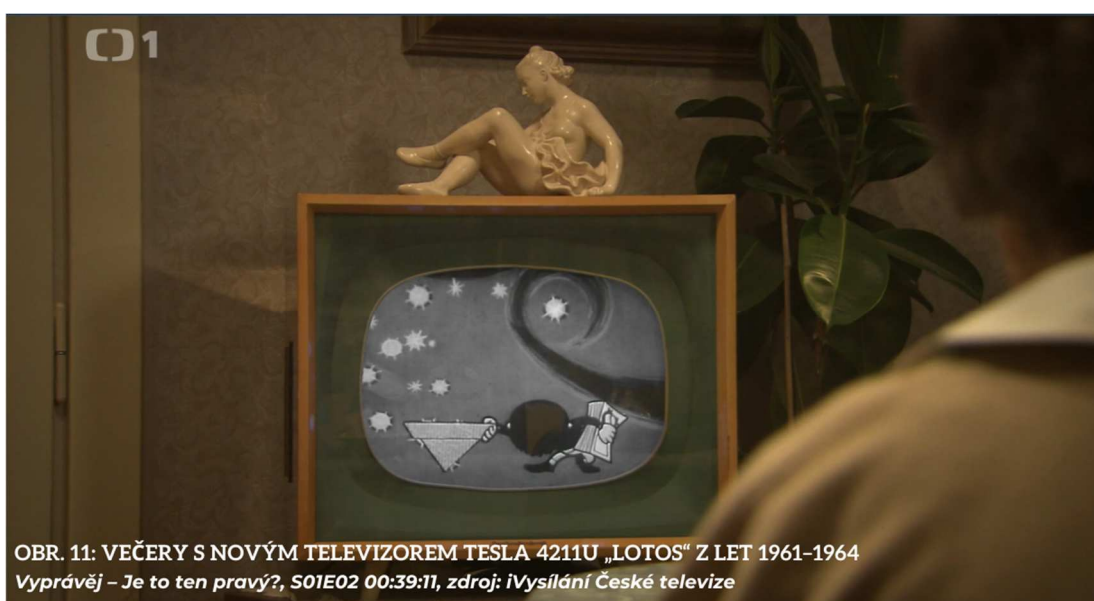
OBR. 6: SIFONOVÁ LÁHEV A KOLORIT KUCHYNĚ ZE 60. LET
Vyprávěj - Vánoce, S01E16 00:14:03, zdroj: iVysílání České televize



OBR. 7: KUCHYNĚ S BĚŽNÝMI SPOTŘEBÍČI TUZEMSKÉ VÝROBY, 70. - 80. LÉTA
Národní muzeum v Praze, expozice Dějiny 20. století, fotografie: K. Kočárková



OBR. 8: IDYLKA V OBÝVACÍM POKOJI
Vyprávěj - Velikonoce, S01E14 00:13:41, zdroj: iVysílání České televize









The Phenomenon of Ostalgie in Czech and German Television Series

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Abstract

Ostalgie – a nostalgic longing for aspects of life in former socialist regimes – permeates various domains of social and cultural life, including fashion, consumer goods, music, and popular media. This study explores ostalgie on the cultural level, focusing in particular on contemporary television series. The theoretical framework draws on concepts of collective memory and the culture of remembrance, with special attention to the material dimension of memory. Ostalgie narratives frequently foreground everyday objects, evoking a sense of temporal dislocation wherein the past can only be accessed through selective remembrance. This phenomenon is discussed in relation to the notion of the 'memory of things', as formulated by Jan Assmann and further developed by Arjun Appadurai. Material artefacts from the socialist era serve as vessels of memory, enabling individuals to retrieve personal and collective pasts. The analysis centres on two Czech series – *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me About It*) and *Svět pod hlavou* (*World Under the Head*) – and two German productions – *Ku'damm* (*Kurfürstendamm*) and *Deutschland 83* (*Germany 83*) – offering a comparative perspective on how ostalgie is represented and mediated through televised storytelling in post-socialist contexts.

Keywords

Culture of Remembrance, collective memory, ostalgie, nostalgia, Eastern Bloc, memory of things, generation, TV series, Wonderful Times, World under Head, media studies

Introduction

Originally a German phenomenon, *Ostalgie* is a complex, multilayered concept that straddles the domains of both historical consciousness and popular culture. It manifests across the full spectrum of human activity—from fashion and music, to consumer goods and their associated marketing strategies, to cultural production and the seemingly mundane terrain of personal

memory. Ostalgic recollection frequently foregrounds material objects, as though the act of remembering were an attempt to salvage fragments of a time that can no longer be inhabited, except through memory itself.

This suggests a compelling connection between *Ostalgie* and what Jan Assmann¹ has termed the 'memory of things' (*Dinggedächtnis*), a notion further elaborated by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai². Through everyday objects from the socialist era, individuals retain traces of their former lives—mnemonic artefacts capable of evoking deeply embedded memories long after their original temporal context has passed.

The representation of the former socialist regime through the format of television drama brings together the two principal perspectives from which *Ostalgie* can be examined. According to Aleida Assmann³, contemporary media—most notably television—have become the primary bearers of historical memory. They engage mass audiences in a non-confrontational manner, reaching millions who might otherwise have little interest in history without such televisual mediation.

Nevertheless, Ostalgie-inflected television series should not be mistaken for accurate historiography. Although inspired by real historical events, their narratives often ride the wave of positive nostalgia, reshaping and distorting past realities in favour of viewer appeal and commercial success.

This study explores the complexities of nostalgic remembrance through the lens of four television series: two Czech and two German. The Czech corpus comprises *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me a Story*) and *Svět pod hlavou* (*World Under One's Head*), both produced by Czech Television. Their German counterparts are *Ku'damm* (*Dance Hall on the Main Street*) and *Deutschland 83* (*Germany 83*). These series were not selected arbitrarily; rather, they were chosen for their capacity to function as approximate Czech–German analogical pairs.

The study seeks to address the following research questions: In what ways does *Ostalgie* engage with the culture of remembrance and the reconstruction of collective memory? How is the socialist regime portrayed in the selected television series? What are the specific manifestations of *Ostalgie* in the Czech and German narratives, and through what aesthetic or narrative strategies does this nostalgia materialise on screen?

¹ APPADURAI, Arjun: *The social life things: commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

² ASSMANN, JAN: *Kultura a paměť: písmo, vzpomínka a politická identita v rozvinutých kulturách starověku*. Praha, Prostor, 2001.

³ ASSMANN, Aleida: *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*. München, C.H.Beck, 2006.

The empirical section of the research employs grounded theory methodology, selected for its applicability to the analysis of audiovisual formats. One of the key advantages of grounded theory lies in its openness: the researcher is not constrained by a pre-established theoretical framework, allowing patterns and interpretations to emerge inductively from the material itself.

1. How Ostalgic Television Series Shape Cultural Memory

Although a considerable and socially relevant segment of today's population still regards the former regime as part of their lived historical experience, it is impossible to ignore that we are currently witnessing a gradual fading of direct memories of the crimes and catastrophes that marked the twentieth century. As the generation of eyewitnesses slowly passes away⁴, the number of individuals with first-hand recollection continues to diminish. In response, it becomes imperative to care for, preserve, and transmit these memories in a manner that is both reflective and sensitive to future generations.

Although a significant and socially relevant portion of contemporary society continues to regard the former regime as part of their own lived historical experience⁵, it is nonetheless evident that we are entering a period marked by the gradual erosion of direct memory of the grave crimes and catastrophes that defined the twentieth century. As the generation of eyewitnesses slowly disappears, the reservoir of first-hand experience is diminishing. In such circumstances, the memories that remain embedded within the social fabric must be carefully maintained, preserved, and transmitted with due sensitivity to future generations.

With living memory increasingly vulnerable to erasure and oblivion⁶, it becomes essential to ensure the continued presence of these recollections in the public sphere through the culture of remembrance. When combined with new technologies and electronic media, this culture of memory generates powerful tools for engaging audiences—often playfully yet meaningfully—on a broad scale. Within the framework of this study, such a tool is represented by the television series, a medium that, by virtue of its wide accessibility and broad reach, engages a mass audience in ways few other forms can. As numerous scholars have observed,

⁴ ŠUBRT, Jiří – Štěpánka, PFEIFEROVÁ: *Kolektivní paměť jako předmět historicko-sociologického bádání*. Historická sociologie [online] [2023-08-28]. <https://doi.org/10.14712/23363525.2017.62>.

⁵ GJURIČOVÁ, Adéla – Michal KOPEČEK: *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie po roce 1989*. Praha; Litomyšl, Paseka 2008, p. 9.

⁶ ASSMANN, Jan: *Kultura a paměť: písmo, vzpomínka a politická identita v rozvinutých kulturách starověku*. Praha, Prostor, 2001, p. 16-17.

the preservation of memory in the modern age has become virtually inconceivable without media mediation⁷.

Concepts such as collective memory, the culture of remembrance, and intergenerational memory transmission are all factors that influence not only the narrative construction of television drama, but also the ways in which these productions are interpreted and decoded by their viewers. The transfer of memory across generations is particularly crucial in shaping understandings of the former regime—a process that often fluctuates between collective and individual memory. This transmission is inherently subjective, rendering *Ostalgie* a deeply layered and multifaceted phenomenon.

As Juliane Ziegegeist has argued, the discourse surrounding this selective remembrance of the past remains ambiguous. On the one hand, the lived realities of former regimes are censored and demonised—especially within the realm of political reflection. On the other, these same realities have acquired a certain cult status within the cultural sphere, a status which has become firmly anchored under the label of *Ostalgie*⁸.

1.1. Objects as Nostalgic Elements in Television Series

Ostalgie, when conveyed through television series, engages profoundly with memory and the evocative nature of material objects. It is through props, period-specific clothing, and thematically reconstructed settings that the viewer is prompted to recall the past. Objects play a pivotal role in the act of remembering: they assist not only in retrieving buried memories, but also in sustaining everyday nostalgia—serving either to momentarily reawaken the past or to allow the remembering individual to carry their history with them continuously.

The memory embedded in material objects is explored in detail by German cultural theorist Jan Assmann, particularly in his work *Cultural Memory* (Kultur und Gedächtnis)⁹. From the everyday and familiar items of daily life—such as beds, chairs, food, toiletries, clothing, and tools—to broader structures like houses, villages and cities, roads, vehicles, and ships, human beings are constantly surrounded by things into which they project imagination, comfort, aesthetic sensibility, and, in a certain sense, their very selves.

⁷ GERHARD JENS, Lüdecker: *Kollektive Erinnerung und nationale Identität: Nationalsozialismus, DDR und Wiedervereinigung im deutschen Spielfilm nach 1989*. München, Ed. Text + Kritik, 2012, p. 77.

⁸ ZIEGENGEIST, Juliane: *DDR-(N)Ostalgie in deutschen Nachwende-Spielfilmen von 1990 bis 2006. Zwischen Kritik und Kult*. Jahrbuch Für Kommunikationsgeschichte [online] [2025-1-14]. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23346911>.

⁹ ASSMANN, Jan: *Kultura a paměť: písmo, vzpomínka a politická identita v rozvinutých kulturách starověku*, p. 23.

Through the process of embedding memory in specific objects, individuals are able to retain a tangible connection to their past. The world of things in which people move is marked by a temporal index: not only anchored in the present, but also layered with references to different strata of the past. Objects become repositories of impressions, emotions, and recollections, capable of reactivating vivid memory even after many years have passed¹⁰.

American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, alongside Jan Assmann, has also examined the social and cultural dimensions of objects. In his seminal 1986 work *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Appadurai challenges conventional understandings of commodities as solely economic entities. He argues that commodities are not passive items of exchange, but rather active participants in social relations, cultural practices, and systems of meaning, contingent upon specific sociocultural contexts¹¹.

In his work *La Mémoire Collective (Collective Memory)*, Maurice Halbwachs explores why individuals tend to gravitate towards objects. Amid the flux of everyday life, it is the stillness of things that provides a sense of order and calm. Objects lend stability and permanence to space. Each item we encounter regularly helps construct an environment of familiarity—a silent community that accompanies us and offers a navigable structure of meaning. Even if an individual no longer belongs to a particular social group, contact with its associated material culture can reactivate a sense of identification with that group¹².

The memory of things plays a central role in Ostalgie-inflected film and television representations. For many former East German and Czechoslovak citizens, the commodities and consumer goods they lived with for decades generate what might be termed a “reunion effect” when re-encountered on screen¹³. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain in 1989, numerous iconic products disappeared from shelves virtually overnight. Yet many of the everyday household items associated with the socialist era remained in private use. Their reappearance in cinematic or televisual contexts frequently acts as a mnemonic trigger, bringing the past vividly to mind.

In the immediate aftermath of regime change, many East German consumer products entered what Appadurai might describe as a new phase in their “careers”¹⁴. These formerly

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 23.

¹¹ APPADURAI, Arjun: *The social life of things : commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 10-15.

¹² HALBWACHS, Maurice: *Kolektivní paměť*. Praha, Sociologické nakladatelství, 2009, p. 185-187.

¹³ HOLZER, Michaela: *Die deutsch-deutsche Problematik im Spielfilm: eine Analyse der Komik der Filme Sonnenallee und Good-bye, Lenin*. Saarbrücken, VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2011, p. 74-77.

¹⁴ BERDAHL, Daphne. '(N)Ostalgie' for the present: Memory, longing, and East German things. [online] [2023-09-18] <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.1999.9981598>.

ubiquitous items were pushed aside—into storage rooms, the backs of wardrobes, or, in some cases, landfill sites. The symbolic devaluation of East German goods formed part of a broader effort to discredit and disassemble the legacy of the GDR. A paradigmatic example is the Trabant car, once a source of pride for socialist workers. In line with Appadurai's observation that the value of things shifts according to context, the Trabant, once imbued with positive meaning, was redefined in the post-socialist capitalist setting as a symbol of inefficiency, backwardness, and inferiority¹⁵.

This discussion necessarily intersects with questions of generation and intergenerational transmission of memory. Socialist-era objects are unique in their defining characteristic: they were often difficult to obtain, and when available, were typically highly standardised—or at least visually similar. This scarcity imparted a heightened emotional value to material possessions. Nostalgic significance increases further when the object is considered rare or exceptional—for example, a pair of denim jeans. Scarcity and restricted access clearly intensified emotional attachment to material goods.

Moreover, such objects are frequently linked to periods in the rememberer's life that are coloured by positive affect—childhood, adolescence, or other formative stages. When memories are passed on intergenerationally, it is crucial for younger recipients to grasp that the distinctiveness of the former regime—and its material conditions—is the reason these objects are granted such affective weight. At the same time, those who experienced socialism must recognise that today's younger generation was born into a radically different socio-economic system—one defined by abundance, surplus, and mass availability.

1.2. Intergenerational Transmission of Memory

Within the context of collective remembrance, such as *Ostalgie*, the primary locus for memory transmission is the family. It is the older generations—those who personally experienced life in the former GDR or communist Czechoslovakia—who now pass their memories, experiences, and stories on to younger family members. These recollections, whether positive or negative, shape how *Ostalgie* is perceived and understood.

This communicative rendering of the past no longer involves merely recounting experiences, as it may once have done; rather, it has become a shared practice through which

¹⁵ BRUNK, Katja H. – HARTMAN, Benjamin – GIESLER, Markus. Creating a Consumable Past: How Memory Making Shapes Marketization. [online] [2023-06-22] <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx100>.

the family defines itself as a group bound by a specific history—one in which its individual members participate, and which, in their perception, remains unaltered over time¹⁶.

Such shared acts of remembering within families are rarely comprehensive or linear. Rather than constituting a clearly demarcated sequence of events, this form of memory transmission tends to consist of a selective recall of isolated episodes that happen to be narrated¹⁷. According to the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, these fragmented memories are arranged by the storyteller in such a way as to form a coherent narrative that makes sense to all parties involved.

As Mayer notes, this process often involves “a set of values transmitted from one generation to the next, which may not necessarily correspond to historical reality”¹⁸. *Ostalgie*, therefore, does not always faithfully represent the complexities of the historical past. Ultimately, there is no single, unified narrative—rather, there are “as many versions of the story as there are speakers and listeners present”¹⁹.

Generations that did not live through the GDR or Czechoslovakia may consequently form distorted understandings of the past. A further distorting factor is that older generations often remember their youth—thus their memories may be idealised or coloured by nostalgia for the “good old days”²⁰.

Ostalgie is not merely a longing for the past, but also an emotional attachment to a particular way of life. Family memory, in this context, provides what has been described as “coherence and identity within an intimate mnemonic community”²¹. It plays a critical role in shaping emotional bonds and influencing a sense of identity rooted in East German or communist Czechoslovak heritage and familial history.

In both the German and Czech contexts, there remains a significant number of individuals who recall life under the former regime. For many, the communist era coincides

¹⁶ WELZER, Harald – MOLLEROVÁ, Sabine – TSCHUGGNALLOVÁ, Karoline: *„Můj děda nebyl nácek“: nacismus a holocaust v rodinné paměti*. Praha, Argo, 2010, p. 17-18.

¹⁷ Ibidem., p. 17-18.

¹⁸ MAYER, Françoise: *Češi a jejich komunismus: paměť a politická identita*. Praha, Argo, 2009, p. 33.

¹⁹ WELZER, Harald – MOLLEROVÁ, Sabine – TSCHUGGNALLOVÁ, Karoline: *„Můj děda nebyl nácek“: nacismus a holocaust v rodinné paměti*, p. 17-18.

²⁰ KUNŠTÁT, Daniel a Ladislav MRKLAS: *Historická reflexe minulosti, aneb, „Ostalgie“ v Německu a Česku*. Praha, CEVRO Institut, 2009, p. 5.

²¹ WELZER, Harald – MOLLEROVÁ, Sabine – TSCHUGGNALLOVÁ, Karoline: *„Můj děda nebyl nácek“: nacismus a holocaust v rodinné paměti*, p. 19.

with childhood, adolescence, or other formative life events—factors that frequently lend themselves to positively inflected recollections²².

The intergenerational links between *Ostalgie* and familial memory thus offer vital insights into how collective memory is constructed within families, and how it influences the interpretation of a major historical period: namely, the lived experience of the Eastern Bloc.

1.3. Remembering the Past in Spatial Context

The primary referential space to which the mind turns when attempting to retrieve a specific category of memories is often the space we inhabit. This is largely due to the ease with which such spaces can be mentally reconstructed under nearly any conditions. However, in the case of (N)Ostalgic memory, this spatial recollection may be complicated by the loss of critical distance, obscured by emotional attachment²³.

This phenomenon is discussed by cultural theorist Svetlana Boym in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, where she warns of the dangers of nostalgia as a substitution of actual sites of memory with imagined, idealised spaces²⁴.

The conceptualisation of collective memory and space as articulated by Maurice Halbwachs and French historian Pierre Nora is highly applicable to Ostalgic recollection, especially with regard to spaces that were once clearly demarcated by state borders. In the case of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), this referred to a territory carved out within the Soviet-occupied zone—so-called East Germany—which constituted a well-defined spatial framework for approximately 16 million individuals. With the collapse of communism, this delineated state, through which identity had been negotiated for over forty years, vanished virtually overnight.

In this context, *Ostalgie* functions as a compensatory mechanism for former East German citizens, who experienced varying degrees of identity loss. This loss was triggered by the transition to a market economy, the imposition of the legal and institutional framework of the Federal Republic, and the wider process of German reunification. According to Halbwachs, memory is anchored in the stability of space—a condition which, in the case of the GDR, ceased to exist, given the “complete disappearance of an entire country”²⁵.

²² KUNŠTÁT, Daniel a Ladislav MRKLAS: *Historická reflexe minulosti, aneb, "Ostalgie" v Německu a Česku*, p. 5.

²³ HALBWACHS, Maurice: *Kolektivní paměť*, p. 200.

²⁴ ENNS, Anthony: The politics of Ostalgic: post-socialist nostalgia in recent German film. In: *Screen*, iss. 1 (vol. 2007), p. 477.

²⁵ GJURIČOVÁ, Adéla – Michal KOPEČEK: *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie po roce 1989*, p. 7.

Despite the loss of territoriality specific to such a large social group, Halbwachs suggests that space retains the imprint of the group, just as the group bears the imprint of the space. When spatial permanence is no longer viable, what remains is at least the permanence of the group's attitude towards that space²⁶. In this way, memory can endure even when geography does not.

1.4. Contextualising Czech and German *Ostalgie*: Similarities and Differences

Halbwachs's assertion that space bears the imprint of a social group offers a compelling metaphor for understanding how individuals respond to the transformation or loss of their distinct spatial environment. In the former GDR, this "imprint" remains visible in cultural heritage, architectural landmarks, and even daily practices that have persisted beyond reunification. In the former Czechoslovakia, a comparable imprint can be traced in urban planning, architecture, and the ongoing narrative surrounding the socialist past—despite the uninterrupted physical continuity of the national territory.

The two nations approach *Ostalgie* differently, for several foundational reasons. First among these are divergent experiences of the communist regime. In Czechoslovakia, the totalitarian regime was established following the Communist Party's seizure of power in 1948, and throughout its existence, it was widely regarded as a Soviet-backed dictatorship. This perception culminated in mass dissent during events such as the Prague Spring in 1968 and the subsequent invasion by Warsaw Pact troops, which left lasting trauma and intensified public opposition to the regime²⁷.

In contrast, the German Democratic Republic constituted a clearly demarcated territorial entity within the Soviet occupation zone—East Germany—which for approximately 16 million citizens provided a defined spatial framework through which identity was constructed. With the fall of the regime, this geopolitical space vanished almost overnight. For many former East Germans, *Ostalgie* serves as a means of compensating for the resulting loss of identity, closely tied to the transition to a market economy, the imposition of the Federal Republic's legal framework, and the entire process of German reunification²⁸.

²⁶ HALBWACHS, *Kolektivní paměť*, p. 188.

²⁷ MAYER, *Češi a jejich komunismus*, p. 33-36.

²⁸ GJURIČOVÁ, Adéla – Michal KOPEČEK: *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie po roce 1989*, p. 190-194.

Unlike Berlin, Prague was never physically divided by a wall separating two ideologically opposed worlds. The relatively peaceful nature of the Velvet Revolution in 1989, as well as the subsequent transition to democracy, represents another key divergence in how the two nations process and narrate their pasts.

The Czech transformation was rapid and largely non-violent. It brought not only political liberalisation but also abrupt economic restructuring. The shift to a market-based system—although necessary—was accompanied by social hardship and uncertainty, prompting certain segments of society to idealise the perceived economic stability of the pre-1989 era. By contrast, German reunification entailed the immediate integration of East Germany into the institutional, legal, and economic structures of West Germany. For many East Germans, this process felt abrupt and alienating, resulting in a loss of identity and disappointment, especially amid rising unemployment and social insecurity²⁹.

Another key difference lies in the formation of cultural and social memory. In post-communist Czechoslovakia, public reckoning with the past focused intensely on the victims of the regime and the repressive apparatus, such as the State Security Service (StB). In Czech society, speaking favourably about the socialist period is often frowned upon, as it may be seen as an insult to the regime's victims or as political sympathising³⁰. As a result, Czech *Ostalgie* tends to assume a more playful form, often centred on consumer goods and popular entertainment rather than political identity.

In Germany, *Ostalgie* is also connected to everyday items—such as the Trabant car or Vita-Cola—but it is more explicitly associated with a sense of lost identity and the security that many felt under socialism. Here, *Ostalgie* often highlights the distinctive identity of East Germans within the broader unified German context.

Media and popular culture play a crucial role in this process. Television series and films from the communist era, such as *Nemocnice na kraji města* (*Hospital at the End of the City*) or *30 případů majora Zemana* (*Thirty Cases of Major Zeman*), remain popular despite their controversial legacy. In the Czech context, however, this popularity is primarily fuelled by nostalgic recollection of everyday life, rather than by political commentary. In contrast, German

²⁹ VÁGNEROVÁ, Vendula: *Interpretace života v socialistickém Československu v porovnání s fenoménem Ostalgie ve sjednoceném Německu*. [online] [2012-11-18]. <https://postfsv.wordpress.com/2012/11/18/interpretace-zivota-v-socialistickem-ceskoslovensku-v-porovnani-s-fenomenem-ostalgie-ve-sjednocenem-nemecku>.

³⁰ GJURIČOVÁ, Adéla – Michal KOPEČEK: *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie po roce 1989*, p. 194-203.

films and series—such as *Good Bye Lenin!*, *Weissensee*, or *Sonnenallee*—explicitly explore themes of identity, loss, and the negotiation of historical memory.

The portrayal of the former regime through popular culture presents a challenge in terms of historical accuracy and relevance. Film critic Martin Franc argues that films with (N)Ostalgic elements may offer vivid depictions of the past, but they often romanticise or trivialise historical reality. While *Ostalgie* is generally understood as the resurfacing of positive memories from the socialist era, Franc cautions that many films present an overly idealised version of the regime, omitting the hardships of daily life. He calls for a more balanced and nuanced approach—one that acknowledges both the positive and negative aspects of the past. Franc cites Czech director Jan Hřebejk's films *Pelišky* and *Pupendo* as examples of works that fail to reflect historical reality. Nonetheless, this criticism does not deny the personal and cultural significance that *Ostalgie* may hold for individuals who lived through those times.

In terms of chronology, *Ostalgie* in Germany began gaining momentum as early as the mid-1990s. This was catalysed by films, themed events such as DDR-parties and Ossi-discos, and the revival of iconic East German brands (e.g. Spreewald pickles, Röstfein and Rondo coffee, sweets such as Nudossi, Bambina and Schlager-Süßtafel chocolates, and F6 cigarettes). In the Czech Republic, the rise of *Ostalgie* was more pronounced after the year 2000, when it became more socially accepted. Contributing to this were retro-themed television programmes like *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me a Story*), films such as *Pelišky* (*Cosy Dens*), and the reintroduction of well-known socialist-era brands.

Among the Czech products that saw a nostalgic revival are Kofola (cola), Pedro chewing gum, Májka pâté, Tatranky wafers, Pribináček dessert (popularised by the fairy-tale film *Ať žijí duchové!*), Merkur construction sets, and Igráček toy figurines. Unlike the East German context, the return of these brands in post-revolutionary Czechia was less abrupt. In many cases, production was only temporarily interrupted and resumed following privatisation. As a result, many Czech products never fully disappeared, in contrast to numerous East German brands that ceased to exist altogether³¹.

³¹ VÁGNEROVÁ, Vendula: *Interpretace života v socialistickém Československu v porovnání s fenoménem Ostalgie ve sjednoceném Německu*. [online] [2012-11-18]. <https://postfsv.wordpress.com/2012/11/18/interpretace-zivota-v-socialistickem-ceskoslovensku-v-porovnani-s-fenoménem-ostalgie-ve-sjednocenem-nemecku>.

2. Methodology

The analytical component of this study adopts the approach of grounded theory, as developed by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin in the 1990s. This methodology was selected for several key reasons. Grounded theory is a versatile research method that lends itself particularly well to diverse subject areas and contexts within the social sciences, including media studies and the analysis of audiovisual formats such as film and, in the case of this project, television series³².

Once specific research aims related to the selected series were identified, data collection began, encompassing a wide array of materials associated with the topic. In the context of television series, this included viewing individual episodes, analysing critical reviews, and gathering relevant scholarly literature. From a methodological perspective, this project could also be classified as a case study.

Grounded theory proved especially suitable for analysing the selected series due to one of its core strengths: the iterative process of coding recurring data points. A particularly significant phase of the methodology is axial coding, which enables the emergence of conceptual categories and subcategories. This process allows for the identification of parallels and contrasts across the different series under investigation.

Through open and axial coding, and the subsequent grouping of emergent concepts, the analysis led to the identification of five central categories: *Essentials of Daily Life*, *Culture and Entertainment*, *The Rhythm of Everyday Life*, *Political and Ideological Representation*, and *Nostalgia as a Narrative Device*. During the methodological process, I also encountered a number of additional features—such as period-specific costumes—that could, through the lens of grounded theory, have formed new and distinct categories. The deliberate selection of clothing by the creators of the series clearly serves to anchor the viewer in the socialist era. However, a detailed analysis of this element was intentionally omitted. Compared to other thematic layers present in the series, this aspect seemed relatively descriptive and less analytically compelling.

Given the Czech academic context in which this text was written, greater emphasis has been placed on the Czech series relative to the German ones. This imbalance, however, emerges only at the level of interpretation—not during the initial phases of the methodological process, such as note-taking, open coding, or axial categorisation.

³² FIGUREOA, The Grounded Theory and the Analysis of Audio-Visual Texts. [online] [2008-01-22] <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701605897>.

3. Representations of *Ostalgie* in Czech and German Television Series

The phenomenon of *Ostalgie* and its televisual portrayal is examined through a comparative analysis of two Czech and two German television series, all produced between 2009 and 2021. The Czech representatives were selected from Czech Television productions: the first is *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me a Story*), directed by Biser Arichtev and Johanna Steiger-Antošová; the second is the more recent *Svět pod hlavou* (*Under the Surface*), directed by Marek Najbrt and Radim Špaček.

Vyprávěj serves as a paradigmatic example for analysing *Ostalgie*, having been deliberately produced as a nostalgic reflection on life under the former regime. The selection of series was not random; rather, it was carefully designed to create approximate Czech-German analogues. While other Czech examples might include the five-part retro series *Volha* or HBO's six-part political thriller *Bez vědomí* (*The Sleepers*, 2019), *Svět pod hlavou* proved to be the most appropriate counterpart for subsequent comparison with a selected German series.

Paired with *Vyprávěj* is the German nine-part series *Ku'damm* (*Ku'damm – Dance School on the Grand Boulevard*), directed by Sven Bohse. In both productions, the central narrative emphasis lies on the life of a family and the everyday struggles of its members—rather than on political processes or major historical events, which are relegated to the narrative background. These “great histories” are woven into the private worlds of the Dvořák family in *Vyprávěj* and the Schöllack family in *Ku'damm*.

The principal intention behind both series is not to analyse or assess historical events—although these are critical to the characters' development—but rather to offer a vivid, emotionally grounded depiction of the era and the feelings of individuals within specific moments. For the psychological drama *Svět pod hlavou*, a genre-appropriate German counterpart was selected: *Deutschland 83*, a Cold War spy thriller directed by Edward Berger.

Both *Svět pod hlavou* and *Deutschland 83* are set in the 1980s and centre on protagonists undergoing profound personal transformation. In the former, a contemporary Czech police officer finds himself transported into the past, ultimately becoming a member of the notorious State Security service through a temporal loop. In the latter, an ordinary East German border guard is abruptly assigned the role of undercover agent within the upper echelons of the West German military command.

3.1. Material Essentials of Everyday Life

Contrary to the widespread belief that "everything was abundant" under the former socialist regime, the reality was that chronic shortages of consumer goods significantly shaped daily life. This limited availability is thematised in the opening episode of *Svět pod hlavou* (*Under the Surface*), where members of the State Security (StB) are shown munching on an oversized jar of pickled gherkins while watching television. While the scene may initially appear humorous to viewers—and indeed to the series' protagonist, Filip Marvan, who finds himself suddenly transported back to the 1980s—the moment carries several layers of contextual meaning. It reflects both the socio-economic conditions of the time and the cultural realities of daily life.

The pickled gherkins, preserved in a large glass jar, symbolise the restricted food supply compared to capitalist countries, where a variety of snack foods was more readily available for consumption during leisure activities such as television viewing. Beyond representing a socio-economic reality, the scene also functions as a cultural symbol, showcasing the way individuals adapted creatively to scarcity: they made the most of whatever commodities were available. Pickled cucumbers also feature prominently in the fifteenth episode of *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me a Story*), where the entire family spends an afternoon preserving them together. In both series, pickled gherkins come to symbolise resourcefulness and resilience in an era of limited consumer choice. They also highlight the disconnect between state propaganda that claimed "nothing was missing" and the everyday experiences of ordinary citizens. For viewers who lived through this era, such scenes can evoke memories of shared family rituals and a sense of togetherness, reinforcing a nostalgic idealisation of the past that often masks the discomforts of the time.

Scarcity is likewise addressed in *Ku'damm* (*Dance School on the Grand Boulevard*), when Monika, one of the lead characters, crosses to the East to visit her father. "They almost didn't let me through with my suitcase—they thought I was smuggling women's tights or coffee [...]" she remarks. Her tone is ironic, as coffee and tights are for her everyday items, but she fails to realise that these goods were rare and often rationed in the Eastern Bloc³³.

In *Deutschland 83*, the German political thriller, a conversation between two female characters reveals the lack of yet another essential commodity in East Germany—medical supplies. "To recover, you need special medicine from the West," one of them notes,

³³ *Ku'damm* 56, *It's Alright*, 00:27:20

underscoring the disparity in healthcare quality between East and West³⁴. The socialist system often struggled to provide even a semblance of the standards available in capitalist countries.

In series focusing on life under the former regime, interaction with nostalgic objects plays a key role. “Wow, real jeans! Uncle, you’re amazing!” exclaims the twelve-year-old Zuzana Dvořáková upon receiving a pair of denim trousers from her uncle. She is so delighted that she continues wearing them around the house. Her reaction signals the emotional and sentimental value commonly attributed to scarce consumer items.

Denim appears not only in direct interaction with characters but also as part of the mise-en-scène—casually draped over a chair, for example, or left near a work desk, thereby remaining present in the frame. In *Deutschland 83*, when protagonist Martin Rauch is sent to the West against his will, his transformation begins with a simple instruction: “Change your clothes—they should fit³⁵,” accompanied by a shot of a neatly arranged pile of Western attire: a red Puma T-shirt, white trainers, and, crucially, a pair of jeans. The jeans symbolise transformation, the imposition of a new identity, and separation from one’s former environment. As a once-scarce everyday item in the East, jeans have since come to embody a powerful nostalgic symbol. For many viewers, they evoke longings for previously unattainable goods, while their association with Western culture romanticises an era in which such objects held significant emotional weight.

These seemingly mundane objects—denim jeans³⁶ and pickled gherkins—function as bridges between individual memory and collective remembrance. While gherkins symbolise adaptability and domestic creativity amid scarcity, jeans represent aspiration and fascination with the world beyond the Iron Curtain. The nostalgia these items evoke is not merely an idealisation of the past, but a complex form of cultural remembrance, charged with emotional and symbolic meaning.

By integrating such objects into their narratives, television series invite viewers to re-live memories and, crucially, transmit them to younger generations for whom these items exist only as distant icons of a bygone era. In doing so, they affirm that nostalgic memory is not solely about historical fact, but about emotion, symbolism, and the interpretative layers of everyday life.

³⁴ *Deutschland 83*, *Quantum Jump*, 00:07:23.

³⁵ *Deutschland 83*, *Quantum Jump*, 00:16:22.

³⁶ *Vyprávěj*, *Mikuláš chodí v létě*, 00:22:12.

3.2. Material Culture as a Central Narrative Agent

The socialist era was replete with systemic anomalies, many of which came to characterise the everyday experience of life under state socialism. Among these, queues emerged as a quintessential symbol, laying bare the profound inefficiencies of central planning. Despite official proclamations from party functionaries that all consumer needs were being met, queues told a very different story. This tension is vividly illustrated in episode ten of the Czech television series *Vyprávěj* ("Tell Me a Story"), titled *Promoce* ("Graduation"). A lengthy queue forms outside a hardware store; Karel, compelled by his wife Eva, reluctantly joins. Upon learning that the delivery of washing machines has been postponed until the following morning, he attempts to leave, only to be stopped by an elderly man who admonishes him: "Where do you think you're going, young man? They said they're coming in the morning." When Karel protests, "So you're going to wait here all night?" the man replies, "Of course, aren't you? When else will you get such a chance?"³⁷ In this episode, the queue ceases to be mere backdrop and assumes the role of a narrative protagonist; apart from the final graduation scene, Karel spends the entire episode waiting in line.

Objects displayed on shelves and in glass cabinets, common features in shared living spaces, exemplify the kitsch aesthetic typical of the socialist domestic interior. "Every era has its favourite kitsch," writes journalist Eda Kriseová in her novel *Kočičí životy* ("Cat Lives")—"garden gnomes, polar bears used as ashtrays, sunsets with palm trees and oceans. Over time, kitsch becomes a valuable collector's item, sold only in antique shops."³⁸ Through the voice of her protagonist, Kriseová underscores the sentimental attachment to kitsch: "[...] in it, people recognise the best parts of themselves."³⁹ In this sense, Ostalgie can itself be viewed as a form of cultural kitsch—a selective, emotionally inflected recollection of the 'better' moments within an otherwise difficult historical period.

These kitsch items, often resting on crocheted doilies or placemats, were frequently displayed in excessive numbers—sometimes even in illogical locations. A notable example is a ceramic ashtray featuring a polar bear, produced by the firm Ditmar & Urbach, which appears perched incongruously atop a pub's beer tap.⁴⁰ This item has since been canonised as a symbol

³⁷ *Vyprávěj*, *Promoce*, 00:19:57 – 00:21:10.

³⁸ ŠEBO, Juraj: *O socialismu s láskou*. Bratislava, Noxi, 2011, p. 204.

³⁹ *Vyprávěj*, *Promoce*, 00:19:57 – 00:21:13.

⁴⁰ *Vyprávěj*, *Velikonoce*, 00:38:09.

of its era and is now housed in the permanent twentieth-century history exhibition of the National Museum in Prague.⁴¹

The Czech series *Svět pod hlavou* ("World Under the Head") and *Vyprávěj* make extensive use of exaggerated period detail. Domestic interiors—such as the Dvořák family household—serve as stages where nostalgic objects move from background props to central narrative devices. The television set, for example, was a rare commodity in 1960s Czechoslovakia and a potent indicator of social status. In *Vyprávěj*, when Jana Dvořáková receives an opportunity to acquire one, she does not hesitate—even though it requires her to accept assistance from a somewhat unsavoury factory manager. "It's in Kolín," he says. "You've got to pick it up before the end of the week, during lunch break, from the electronics shop on the square."⁴²

The television continues to function as a narrative focus throughout the episode, becoming a literal protagonist in domestic disputes between Jana and her husband. Scenes featuring mass media, such as televisions or radios, are often presented with minimal dialogue, heightening the evocative power of the objects themselves. Radios assume a particularly prominent role in episodes referencing key historical events, such as 21 August 1968 or 16 January 1969. "Turn on the radio—quick! They've just reported that a boy set himself on fire in Prague," one character exclaims. The entire room falls silent as the camera lingers on a Tesla-brand radio receiver.⁴³

In some cases, household appliances function as narrative instruments that resolve domestic tension. When grandmother Běta discovers that the Dvořák family participated in the May Day celebrations in Prague, she threatens to move out—something she frequently does when discontented. The situation is salvaged by a radio broadcast: "You're lucky, Josef, they just reported on Radio Free Europe that this year's May Day celebration in Prague was unusually liberal-minded."⁴⁴ Consequently, the dramatic conflict is diffused, and no move takes place.

3.3. Always a Reason to Celebrate

The narrative structure of television series that engage with the theme of *Ostalgie* frequently conveys the impression that life in the socialist past was replete with occasions for celebration.

⁴¹ *Vyprávěj, Promoce*, 00:19:57 – 00:21:18.

⁴² *Vyprávěj, Je to ten pravý?*, 00:09:18 – 00:09:44.

⁴³ *Vyprávěj, Velká očekávání*, 00:47:28.

⁴⁴ *Vyprávěj, 1. Máj*, 00:48:29.

Interwoven with the tapestry of ‘small family histories’, these series feature scenes of birthday and name-day parties for relatives, festive gatherings in office settings during the Christmas season, and, more ideologically, collective celebrations of 1 May (Labour Day), 9 May military parades (Victory Day), the October Revolution, and International Women’s Day (8 March).⁴⁵ Such state-sponsored festivities served as mechanisms for reinforcing collective identity—workers, artists, pioneers, and youth organisation members would march together in unified parades, embodying the image of a harmonised socialist citizenry.⁴⁶

In the opening episode of *Deutschland 83*, the viewer is transported into the midst of a birthday celebration for the mother of protagonist Martin Rauch, set in their East German home. The scene is vibrant: the garden and house teem with guests, older relatives chat outside while the younger generation dances and sings indoors. The soundtrack features *99 Luftballons* by the West German band Nena, a protest song emblematic of the Cold War period. Despite the serious undertones of some conversations held at the party, such scenes underscore that life under socialism was not necessarily the grey, joyless existence often imagined by Western audiences.

Both *Vyprávěj* and *Deutschland 83* employ familial and social gatherings to challenge dominant post-socialist narratives of deprivation and repression. These scenes portray life on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain as marked by vibrant community solidarity and heartfelt hospitality. They remind viewers that East German and Czechoslovak citizens were also capable of celebrating life, and that their leisure activities, social rituals, and access to cultural artefacts—music, party décor, food—were not entirely dissimilar to those in the West. In doing so, the series reconstruct a world in which moments of joy and conviviality persisted despite ideological constraints, thereby contributing to the emotionally resonant texture of *Ostalgie*.

3.4. The Rhythm of Everyday Life

In the Czech television series *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me a Story*), the daily routines and familial dynamics serve as the principal driving force of the narrative. Family interactions and everyday challenges are foregrounded as the central elements around which the entire storyline revolves. This is in contrast to the crime series *Svět pod hlavou* (*World Under the Head*), where recollections of the protagonist’s family and a mysterious familial past aid Filip Marvan in

⁴⁵ ŠEBO: *O socialismu s láskou*, p. 157.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

solving criminal cases. Nonetheless, emphasis on the characters' personal lives and familial contexts remains significantly less pronounced.

Depictions of everyday life are conveyed not only through scenes situated within the family home but also through the professional environment, which plays an essential role in nearly every episode of *Svět pod hlavou*. Here, the workplace becomes a site where social norms, hierarchies, and generational tensions manifest, reflecting broader societal structures of the socialist period.

Family rituals, such as holiday celebrations or milestone events, are often infused with a blend of comedic and dramatic tones. This is particularly evident when the entire family convenes for special occasions, such as Christmas, weddings, or birthday celebrations. Christmas, conventionally regarded as a season of peace and serenity, becomes the most stressful time of year for Karel and Eva Dvořák. The tensions between them permeate the household atmosphere, affecting even their young son Honzík. The relevant episode poignantly illustrates how familial discord and social anxiety can seep down to younger generations, shaping their experiences and perceptions of festive traditions. Babi Běta (Grandmother Běta), overwhelmed by the holiday frenzy, escapes to the countryside cottage in search of solitude, while Josef finds himself facing accusations from his own brother.

The complexity of family relations, personal development, and the emotional weight of daily events unfolding amidst public holidays offers a nuanced portrayal of the protagonists' inner lives within the framework of broader societal customs. The depiction of Josef's conflict during the Christmas period—voiced through the exasperated remark, "[...] and on top of all this, these damn Christmas holidays!"—underscores the ironic intrusion of personal crises into a season typically associated with tranquillity and reconciliation.⁴⁷ In this way, the series subverts the idealised image of festive harmony, replacing it with a more authentic representation of the lived experience within the domestic sphere under socialism.

3.5. Political and Ideological Representation

The political agenda of the socialist regime permeated everyday language, embedding ideological influence even into seemingly mundane vocabulary. As one character in *Deutschland 83* (*Germany 83*) remarks: "You call plastic 'plastics', a department store is a 'supermarket' [...] this is an orange – if you say 'mandarin', no one will understand you" (*Deutschland 83*, "Quantum Jump", 00:20:48). Certain terms were evidently deemed too

⁴⁷ Vyprávěj, *Vánoce*, 00:25:43.

Western by the regime's officials, prompting a substitution of words with alternatives more aligned with socialist principles. The series' protagonist, Martin, must learn this revised vocabulary during his training as an undercover agent in West Germany's Bundeswehr.

The series *Svět pod hlavou* (*World Under the Head*) offers a crime-narrative setting through which it vividly portrays the intense system of surveillance and control characteristic of the socialist state. It depicts a reality where "[...] it was impossible to disappear, to avoid notice, to slip into the shadows, to be forgotten"⁴⁸. From the opening episode, scenes are imbued with authoritarian commands issued by officers of the National Security Corps. Marvan's colleague, Plachý, embodies not only cynicism but a brutal, overbearing disposition that mirrors the hierarchical and coercive structure of socialist institutions, particularly their enforcement and security branches.

To achieve a compelling cinematic representation of Ostalgie, series creators frequently integrate elements of "grand history" (*Große Geschichte*). In *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me a Story*), authentic black-and-white historical footage is used to illustrate key political and social milestones. The first episode, *Od začátku* (*From the Beginning*), references pivotal 1960s events: the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy, the rise of Leonid Brezhnev following Nikita Khrushchev, Yuri Gagarin's historic orbit around Earth, and the global popularity of The Beatles. The influence of historical events reaches its peak in the seventh episode, *21. srpen* (*21st August*), which is distinguished by heightened drama, more intense scenes, and extensive integration of real archival materials, including period-specific radio broadcasts.

In addition to this historical framing, a range of ideologically loyal characters populates the narrative universe, reinforcing the immersive Ostalgie atmosphere. Within state enterprises, the military, and civil institutions, loyal party cadres were omnipresent. In *Vyprávěj*, comrade Karpíšek continually disrupts the "workplace harmony" of Josef Dvořák and his colleagues from the first episode onward. Their initial conflict stems from Josef's "imperialist" brother Mikuláš, who occasionally visits him at work. These interpersonal disputes evolve against a backdrop of ideological tension. "Comrade Dvořák, I've told you repeatedly not to let your brother visit you here. Do you even realise what kind of trouble that could cause?"—Karpíšek's warning is rooted in Mikuláš's emigration, a violation of socialist loyalty.⁴⁹ His interventions reflect the authoritarian control exercised by the regime over private lives. These tensions were

⁴⁸ KABÁT, Jindřich. *Psychologie komunismu*. Praha, Práh, 2011, p. 185.

⁴⁹ *Vyprávěj*, *Mikuláš chodí v létě*, 00:49:12.

not merely personal but ideological, demonstrating the regime's intrusion into the moral and emotional landscape of everyday life. Josef, in turn, interprets Karpíšek's meddling as an infringement upon his personal rights and freedoms.

Whereas *Svět pod hlavou* conveys political ideology through mechanisms of surveillance and state-enforced discipline, *Vyprávěj* engages with ideology via everyday scenarios—participation in May Day parades, ideological clashes within families, or disagreements over current political affairs. These narrative threads illustrate how political ideology permeated the most intimate spaces of citizens' lives. For instance, disagreements over whether the Dvořák family should participate in the 1st May celebrations reveal the ways in which official ideology penetrated familial dynamics and tested personal loyalties.

3.6. Nostalgia as a Narrative Device

A recurring narrative strategy employed by directors in Ostalgie-themed productions is the visual evocation of the protagonist's "younger self." From the very first episode of *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me a Story*), titled *Od začátku* (*From the Beginning*), set in 1964, the directors and screenwriters frequently incorporate brief flashbacks in which the visual frame softens and the scene is transported roughly twenty years into the past. These retrospective glimpses serve not merely as aesthetic embellishment but as an essential narrative device through which the audience is invited to navigate the cinematic timespace. The logic of this perspective is self-evident: childhood and youth represent emotionally heightened life phases, making them particularly well-suited to the nostalgic framework Ostalgie demands.

The child or adolescent point of view affords screenwriters greater narrative latitude, enabling them "to apply value-neutrality and conciliation"⁵⁰. Children and adolescents are not expected to offer critical judgements, nor must they fully comprehend or analytically process their surroundings. Their naïveté becomes a powerful narrative tool, allowing for the portrayal of the past in a way that is emotionally rich but politically and ideologically unburdened.

A particularly telling example of this narrative mechanism is found in episode five of *Vyprávěj*. Roughly twelve-year-old Zuzka, the narrator's younger sister, is given a school assignment to paint "the greatest person in the world," whom, according to her teachers, is none other than Comrade Lenin. She turns to a newspaper image for reference, which features an artificially enlarged depiction of Lenin standing beside a "standard-sized" person. Zuzka

⁵⁰ ČINÁTLOVÁ, Blanka: Zátíší se sifonovou lahví. Fotogenie ostalgického vzpomínání. In: *Cinepur*, iss. 78 (vol. 2011), p. 58.

innocently asks, “Why does he have such a big head?” to which her grandmother Běta replies, “Because he thought of many great things.” “And why does he have such big hands?” Zuzka continues, to which Běta answers, “Because he accomplished a lot.”⁵¹ The child accepts these explanations without question, leaving it to the viewer to assess the implications of the dialogue and the broader ideological framing it reflects.

In this way, the child’s limited understanding becomes a subtle narrative vehicle for reducing the complexities and contradictions of the socialist system. It permits a form of storytelling that foregrounds personal memory while deferring political critique to the interpretative agency of the viewer. Thus, Ostalgie emerges not solely as a retrospective gaze, but as a carefully orchestrated narrative stance that mediates the past through innocence and sentiment.

3.7. Collective Spatial Nostalgia

In both *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me a Story*) and *Svět pod hlavou* (*World Under One’s Head*), the viewer is exposed not only to Czech but also to Slovak from the very first minutes, as the directors deliberately embed within the script the notion that the narrative is not merely a return to the history of the Czech Republic, but to that of the former Czechoslovakia. One of the central characters in *Vyprávěj*, Eva, is portrayed by the Slovak actress Andrea Růžicková, who alternates between the two languages throughout the series. Slovak is employed especially in emotionally charged scenes—during moments of grief, disappointment, and marital disputes, as well as in conversations with her family in Slovakia, or when she first arrives in Prague as a young student at the beginning of the series.

For contemporary audiences, Czechoslovakia symbolises a politically defunct space to which one may relate only retrospectively—a space whose continuity can now be sustained primarily through recollection of historical events. Slovak is also heard in television broadcasts, and both languages naturally intermingle within workplace interactions, social gatherings, and even domestic life—reflecting a linguistic and cultural coexistence that was once standard.

A somewhat different, though equally essential form of spatial nostalgia appears in the memories of Filip Marvan, the protagonist of *Svět pod hlavou*. The series makes use of retrospective flashbacks, in which Marvan is transported to his childhood years spent growing up with his brother in a panelák housing estate. These prefabricated buildings were part of a mass housing solution implemented during the socialist regime to address severe shortages.

⁵¹ *Vyprávěj*, *Je to ten pravý?*, 00:16:56 – 00:17:30.

Marvan frequently revisits the playground that once stood outside his residence, returning to it both in memory and physically, as he is mysteriously transported back to the 1980s.

The depiction of housing estates and nostalgic revisiting of public spaces such as playgrounds carries profound Ostalgie symbolism. These sites, emblematic of socialist urban planning and architecture, evoke collective memories of community living. Returning to these places in memory may symbolise a longing for the sense of communal spirit and belonging that, despite the shortcomings of the era, continues to resonate with former residents.

In the German series *Ku'damm*, East Berlin is portrayed as a space of refuge for protagonists from the Federal Republic of Germany. When Monika Schöllack chooses to flee from her controlling mother, she seeks shelter with her father in the East. Upon arrival, she is greeted with the words: "How many more will come? And they say people only flee to the West..."⁵² The relative ease with which characters traverse the East–West Berlin divide in the series departs significantly from historical reality. However, it serves to evoke a sense of relaxed border control, alluding to a time when movement between East and West was less restricted.

Historical accuracy in *Ku'damm* is often deliberately set aside in favour of narrative engagement. Artistic productions frequently employ creative license when depicting historical periods to enhance dramatic effect or to better align with contemporary audiences' expectations. A conversation between two protagonists—one from the East, the other from the West—illustrates this narrative ambiguity: "What are you doing here? [...] Who were you visiting?" "I was just nearby, visiting some relatives [...], you know, my father lives here." This exchange highlights both the suspicion typically associated with border crossings and the seemingly casual, even incidental nature of the encounter.⁵³ Such ambivalence is deployed to serve the series' dramatic and storytelling aims, foregrounding narrative resonance over documentary realism.

4. Final Reflection and Comparison

Each of the television series selected and subsequently analysed in this study proves essential to understanding the phenomenon of Ostalgie. *Vyprávěj* (*Tell Me a Story*) presents a decidedly positive narrative that reminisces about the socialist era exclusively in favourable terms. The former regime serves as a historical backdrop, framing the joyful and tragic moments of the Dvořák family's multigenerational life. Ostalgie in *Vyprávěj* is conveyed primarily through a

⁵² *Ku'damm* 56, *It's Alright*, 00:30:49

⁵³ *Ku'damm* 56, *Schatten der Vergangenheit?*, 00:57:44 – 00:58:55.

detailed portrayal of everyday life, the intimate dynamics of family life placed within the broader arc of historical events, and a narrative structure enhanced by retrospective flashbacks. The ease with which the regime is depicted makes *Vyprávěj* a quintessential Ostalgie series. Considerable emphasis is placed on objects that often become protagonists in their own right, reinforcing Arjun Appadurai's assertion that material objects do not merely play a passive role in human lives but actively participate in social relations, cultural practices, and systems of meaning, contingent upon the specific socio-cultural context.

Household appliances such as the washing machine—a scarce commodity in the 1960s—around which the protagonist Karel Dvořák waits in a queue for an entire episode, and mass media objects like the television, for which Mrs. Dvořáková travels from Pardubice to Kolín in unpleasant company, become narrative anchors. The jeans brought to young Zuzka by her uncle Mikuláš from abroad exemplify Jan Assmann's concept of the "memory of things"—how individuals embed memories, feelings, and associations into objects, which can later resurface vividly even after many years.⁵⁴

In contrast, the second Czech series *Svět pod hlavou* (*World Under One's Head*) explores the socialist regime primarily through the psychology of its central and peripheral characters⁵⁵. This crime drama, set in a fictional town in northern Bohemia, offers a view of the regime through the lens of an authoritative and strict officer of the State Security. Though not without a sense of humour, the character is predominantly portrayed with negative traits. The detective narrative is intertwined with protagonist Filip Marvan's family history, and while the show focuses predominantly on professional settings, viewers are given occasional glimpses into the domestic sphere of his childhood. These scenes resonate with Maurice Halbwachs' claim that the objects surrounding us form a "motionless society".

Marvan is inexplicably transported into the past through a temporal loop. His memories frequently return him to his childhood home, a place which offers him familiarity and orientation amid initial confusion. Through objects he once took for granted—playground climbing frames on a housing estate, vehicles of the Public Security, or items from the family fridge such as the *Pribináček* cream dessert and *Májka* pâté—Marvan reconnects with a specific social group that previously defined his identity. Within these everyday items, he rediscovers his former self and finds solace in the past amidst the chaos of the present.

⁵⁴ KRISOVÁ: *Kočí životy*, Praha, Práh, 2023, p. 326.

⁵⁵ ERNAUX, Annie. *Roky*. Brno, Host, 2022.

In the German series *Ku'damm*, the socialist regime is only marginally present, to the point that it appears to have no influence whatsoever on the characters' lives. The plot unfolds on the western side of Berlin, where the Eastern part is viewed with suspicion. "Are you from East Berlin?"—"Yes."—"Exactly."⁵⁶ Once the border is closed, this will be solved for good". The narrative takes place during a more relaxed phase of the Cold War, and characters frequently and easily cross the East–West divide. Here, the East is depicted as a place of refuge for individuals wronged by the past or disenchanted with the West. The storyline focuses on personal relationships and individual histories, highlighting that love, friendship, and emotional intensity were no less present in the East than in the West. As the series suggests, the inability to travel, worship, speak freely, or purchase quality goods did not necessarily equate to an absence of happiness.⁵⁷

A similar theme appears in *Deutschland 83*, set in the 1980s. The protagonist Martin is abruptly taken from his life in East Germany and sent as a spy into the West German military. As he undergoes intensive training to pass as a Westerner, the viewer becomes acutely aware of the ideological and lifestyle differences across the Iron Curtain. The political and ideological dimensions of socialism permeate daily and family life. The show illustrates how the regime sought to shape cultural identity through language, replacing Western-sounding terms with ideologically acceptable alternatives—such as "shopping centre" instead of "supermarket". Martin must not only adopt a new identity, but also internalise a new vocabulary, symbolising the ideological transformation imposed on the individual.

Language plays a central role in the Czech series as well, where Czech and Slovak frequently co-occur—in television broadcasts, in workplaces, during social gatherings, and even within households—reflecting the everyday bilingualism of former Czechoslovakia. For contemporary viewers, this now-defunct state represents a political space that can be reappropriated only retrospectively through nostalgic remembrance.

Ostalgie as represented in television series should not be mistaken for accurate historiography. Nostalgic remembrance is inherently subjective, shaped by memory's malleability.⁵⁸ Memory "does as it pleases", subject to the erosion of time and the fact that the past is always perceived from a specific "assigned standpoint".⁵⁹ The intergenerational transmission of memory is essential to the culture of remembrance and collective identity.

⁵⁶ *Ku'damm* 59, *Der Skandal*, 00:35:55.

⁵⁷ ŠEBO, Juraj: *O socialismu s láskou*, p. 306.

⁵⁸ VODŇANSKÁ, Jitka: *Voda, která hoří*. Praha, Torst, 2018, p. 11.

⁵⁹ TORČÍK, Marek: *Rozložíš paměť*. Praha, Paseka, 2023, p. 17-18.

Given the multiplicity of perspectives—whether from directors, screenwriters, or family members recounting personal stories—unintentional distortions inevitably occur, and may diverge significantly from historical reality. Over time, the narrator’s version may evolve into a substitute for the actual event, blurring the boundary between memory and fact.

Media representations of socialism differ markedly between Germany and the Czech Republic, both in approach and societal impact. In Germany, popular films and series about the GDR—such as *Sonnenallee* (1999), *Go Trabi Go* (1991), the critically acclaimed *Goodbye Lenin!* (2003), and *DDR-Show*—have become central to popular culture. These works blend humour with ideological commentary and have elicited varied reactions from both East and West Germans. In the Czech context, socialist nostalgia initially met with resistance. The re-airing of shows like *Thirty Cases of Major Zeman* was mired in controversy, whereas films like *Pelišky* (*Cosy Dens*, 1999) and *Pupendo* (2003), directed by Jan Hřebejk, approached the topic with humour while acknowledging its darker facets.

German Ostalgie often stems from a sense of lost identity and yearning for the stability and communal spirit of the former GDR, in contrast with the individualistic ethos of the Federal Republic. In the Czech Republic, Ostalgie tends to be less political and more cultural or commercial in nature. It is closely tied to retro trends appealing even to younger generations with no lived experience of socialism. In sum, German Ostalgie is rooted in the historical reality of a divided nation, whereas its Czech counterpart is more culturally nostalgic and retro-oriented. Furthermore, in the Czech context, it is not as deeply interwoven with questions of national identity as it is in Germany.

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Appendices





FIG. 3: "REAL JEANS – UNCLE, YOU'RE AMAZING!"

Vyprávěj – Mikuláš Comes in the Summer, S01E06, 00:22:12, source: Czech Television Broadcasting

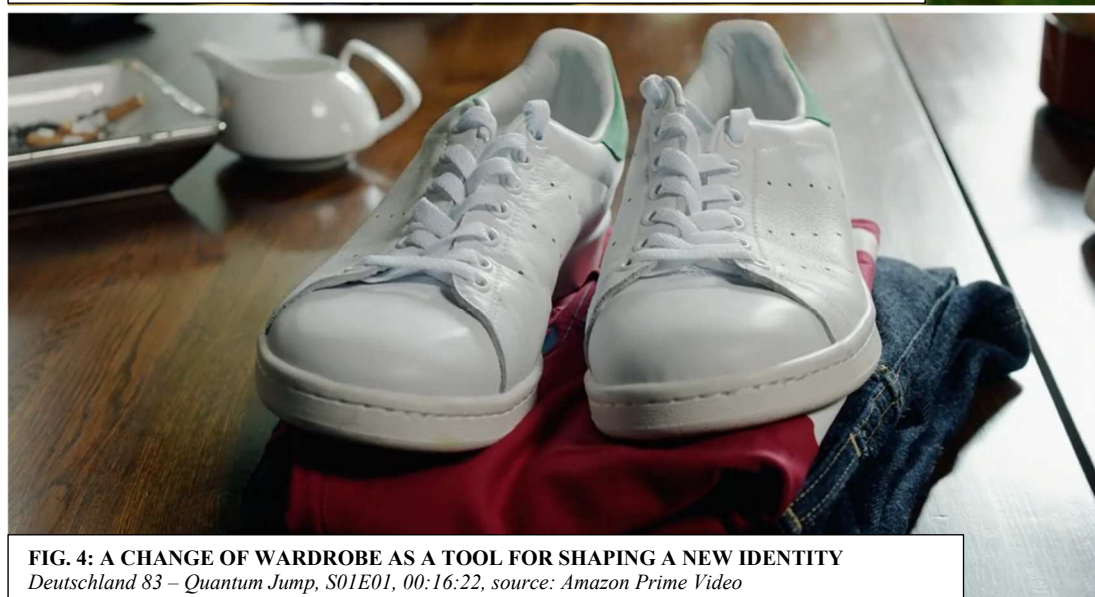


FIG. 4: A CHANGE OF WARDROBE AS A TOOL FOR SHAPING A NEW IDENTITY

Deutschland 83 – Quantum Jump, S01E01, 00:16:22, source: Amazon Prime Video



FIG. 5: THE UNIFORM GREY – WHERE HAS IT GONE?

Vyprávěj – Mikuláš Comes in the Summer, S01E05, 00:37:45, source: Czech Television Broadcasting



FIG. 6: A SODA SIPHON AND THE CHARACTER OF A 1960s KITCHEN
Vyprávěj – Christmas, S01E16 00:14:03, source: Czech Television Broadcasting

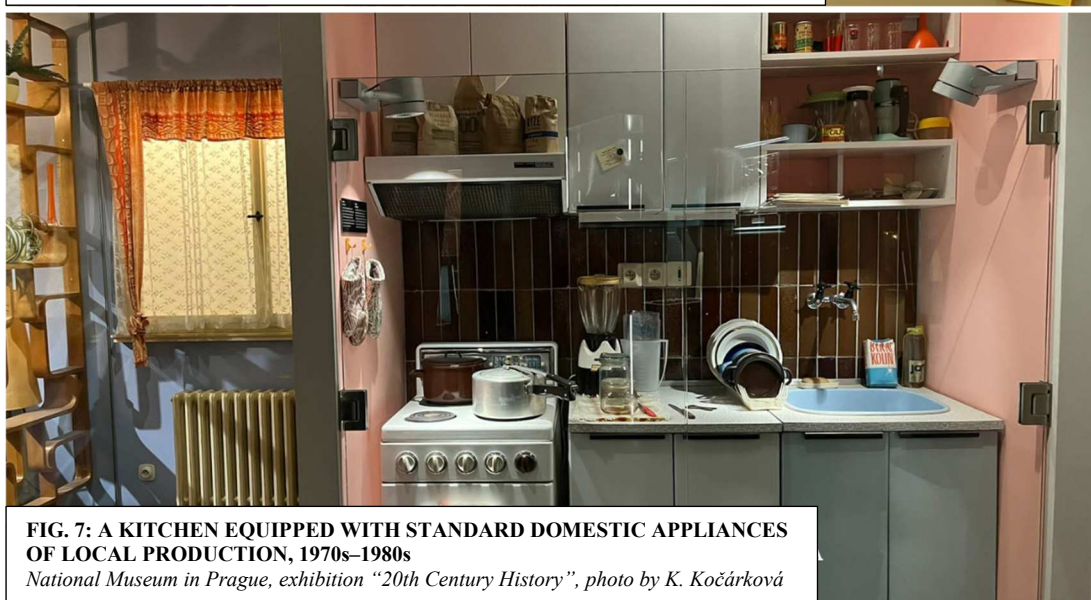


FIG. 7: A KITCHEN EQUIPPED WITH STANDARD DOMESTIC APPLIANCES OF LOCAL PRODUCTION, 1970s–1980s
National Museum in Prague, exhibition “20th Century History”, photo by K. Kožárková



FIG. 8: A DOMESTIC IDYLL IN THE LIVING ROOM
Vyprávěj – Easter, S01E14 00:13:41, source: Czech Television Broadcasting





FIG. 12: A TESLA RADIO RECEIVER IN THE DVOŘÁK FAMILY FLAT
Vyprávěj – Great Expectations, S01E02 00:47:28, source: Czech Television Broadcasting



FIG. 13: COTTAGE LIFE – A UNIQUELY CZECH PHENOMENON
Vyprávěj – Mikuláš Comes in the Summer, S01E05 00:04:59, source: Czech Television Broadcasting



FIG. 14: SO-CALLED SURVEILLANCE DUTY OF THE SNB COMRADES (WATCHING THE TV SERIES THE 30 CASES OF MAJOR ZEMAN)
Svět pod hlavou – Delinquent Youth, S01E05 00:10:53, source: Netflix



FIG. 15: FOR PEACE AND SOCIALISM!

Vyprávěj – My Big Day, S01E15 00:50:15, source: Czech Television Broadcasting



FIG. 16: THE RED CARNATION – A SYMBOL OF SOCIALISM

Svět pod hlavou – The Dead Ones, S01E03 00:09:44, source: Netflix



FIG. 17: NIGHT PATROL OF THE PUBLIC SECURITY SERVICE

Svět pod hlavou – Delinquent Youth, S01E05 00:27:30, source: Netflix



FIG. 18: TESLA 426A "TENOR" – A BROADCASTER OF NEWS DURING THE AUGUST INVASION

Vyprávěj – 21st August, S01E07 00:23:05, source: Czech Television Broadcasting



FIG. 19: "IT STARTS WITH LONG HAIR, ENDS WITH A HIJACKED PLANE"

Svět pod hlavou – Delinquent Youth, S01E05 00:10:59, source: Netflix



FIG. 20: A COMPACT BATHROOM FROM THE 1970s–1980s

National Museum in Prague, exhibition "20th Century History", photo by K. Kočárková

Special Economic Zones in Tajikistan: An Economic Policy Instrument for Development?

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Abstract

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have gained international prominence as instruments of economic policy intended to attract investment, stimulate industrial development, and reduce regional disparities. This article examines the implementation and performance of SEZs in Tajikistan—a low-income, post-Soviet economy marked by structural fragility, high labour migration, and pronounced regional inequalities. Drawing on two case studies, the Sughd and Ishkoshim Free Economic Zones (FEZ), the article demonstrates that while SEZs hold theoretical promise, their practical outcomes are highly contingent on infrastructural quality, geopolitical stability, and broader macroeconomic conditions. The Sughd FEZ has achieved modest success due to favourable location and infrastructure, whereas Ishkoshim FEZ illustrates the limits of overambitious planning in the absence of basic investment conditions. Overall, the contribution of SEZs to Tajikistan’s industrial output remains negligible, and the policy objective of mitigating regional disparities remains unmet. These findings underscore the importance of contextualised policy design and caution against overreliance on SEZs as a one-size-fits-all development tool.

Keywords

Special Economic Zones (SEZs); Free Economic Zones (FEZs); Tajikistan; economic policy; regional development; investment incentives; post-Soviet transition; infrastructure; Central Asia; global value chains; development planning

Introduction

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are designated areas within a country where specific, business-friendly regulations apply. As an instrument of economic policy, SEZs are intended to attract investment in technologically advanced, capital-intensive, and future-oriented ventures. Moreover, they aim to serve as growth poles for economic development, enhance a country's integration into the globalized economy, and contribute to the reduction of regional disparities. This article introduces the concept and illustrates its implementation in Tajikistan through the example of two Free Economic Zones (FEZs).

The term *Special Economic Zone* has emerged internationally as a collective designation for “geographically delimited areas within which governments facilitate industrial activity through fiscal and regulatory incentives and infrastructure support.”¹ The regulatory frameworks of such zones typically include exemptions from customs duties and taxes, state subsidies, and legal deregulations. The use of exceptional regimes for income generation and economic stimulation is not a novel phenomenon. As early as the Hanseatic League, free ports, and overseas outposts of European powers reaped significant revenues through the provision of trade privileges.

In the 20th century, the designation of Free Industrial Zones began to take shape—for instance, in 1959 at Shannon Airport in Ireland, formerly a hub for propeller-driven transatlantic flights. This initiative aimed to revitalize the regional economy in the new era of jet aviation. A diachronic perspective reveals that, with globalization—understood as the intensification of international exchange, mobility, and transnational networks of production, value creation, and supply chains—both the number of SEZs and the number of countries employing this policy instrument have risen steadily. By 2018, nearly 5,400 such zones had been identified across 147 countries, with China accounting for the largest share, operating over 2,500 (see Figure 1). Notable examples of SEZs worldwide include Qeshm Island (Iran) in the Persian Gulf, the Panama Pacifico Special Economic Area (PPSEA) in Panama, and the metropolis of Shenzhen in China.

Diverse Objectives

Low-income countries primarily pursue the development of export-oriented industries and infrastructure by offering business-friendly investment conditions. In doing so, they aim to

¹ UNCTAD 2019, p. 128

integrate into global value chains and create employment opportunities. North Korea, with its currently closed Kaesong Industrial Zone, belongs to this category. Middle-income countries tend to focus on upgrading and diversifying existing industries, achieving deeper integration into international supply and value chains, promoting technology and innovation transfer, and facilitating the transition to a service-based economy. The Dominican Republic, which operated 73 SEZs as of 2019, exemplifies this group. High-income economies often employ SEZs to establish platforms for managing complex supply chains.² Japan, for instance, operates a logistics center with SEZ status on the island of Okinawa.

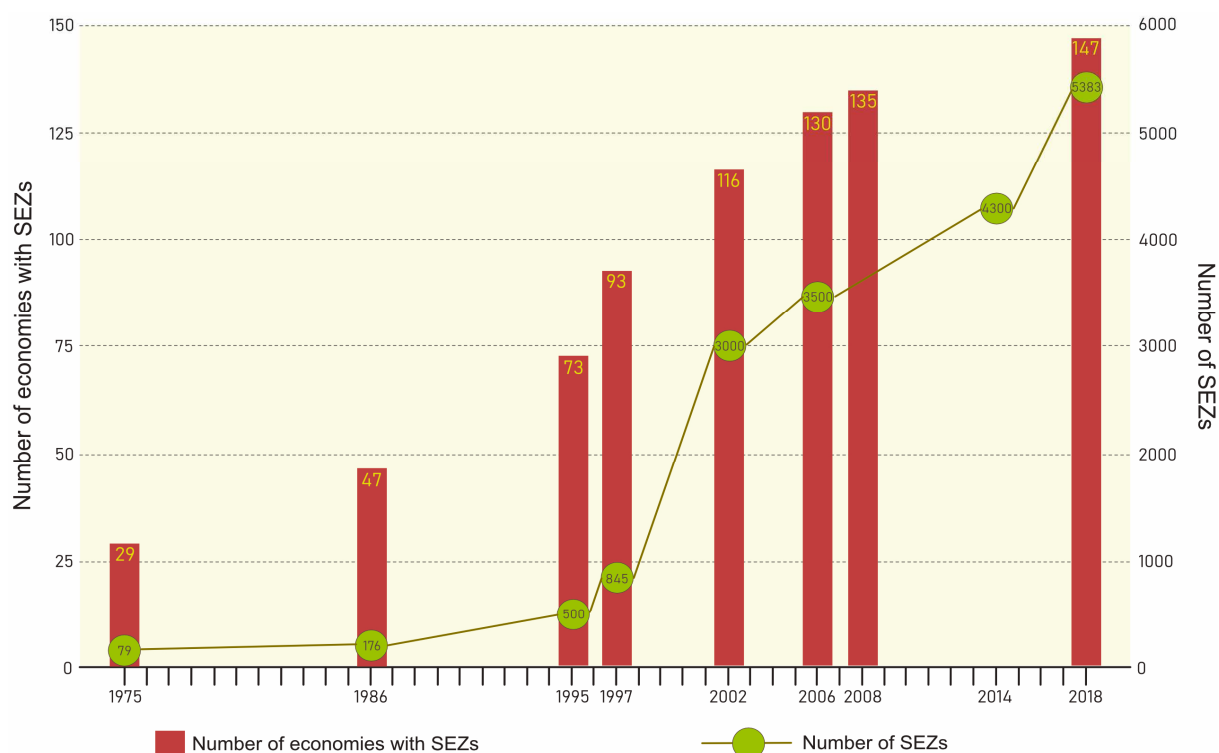


Figure 1. Historical development of the number of countries with special economic zones and the total number of SEZs worldwide.

Source: Author's own design based on UNCTAD 2019, p. 129

Across these categories, four core objectives can be discerned: 1) virtually all zones aim to attract capital; 2) they are designed to support the expansion of export sectors; 3) they serve as instruments for employment generation; and 4) they function as testing grounds for market-liberal policy programs prior to their broader implementation.

This approach has provoked criticism from various quarters. One concern is the accusation of export subsidization, which implies a violation of a fundamental principle of the

² UNCTAD 2019, pp. 141, 148

World Trade Organization.³ Further criticisms include the overemphasis on export orientation and the frequent absence of spillover effects beyond zone boundaries, the prevalence of precarious working conditions, and inadequate state oversight of local processes. The uncertain net effects of SEZs are also highlighted, particularly in light of domestic tax avoidance strategies observed in countries such as China.⁴ Reduced environmental standards raise fears of pollution and public health risks—issues already documented in relation to Mexico’s tariff-free *maquiladoras* and SEZs in Sri Lanka.⁵ Additionally, expropriations and the destruction of established livelihoods have been reported in connection with the establishment of SEZs lacking democratic legitimacy, as seen in the Indian state of Rajasthan.⁶

Special Economic Zones in Central Asia

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent Central Asian states lost the economic support previously provided by the former Soviet center. In an effort to stimulate autonomous economic development, a range of measures were adopted, including the establishment of SEZs in the early 2000s. This development must also be viewed in the context of China’s “Belt and Road Initiative,” as governments in this region—understood as a strategic bridge between China and Europe—anticipate investment from their economically ascendant neighbor (see Table 1). The following section presents two examples to illustrate how the SEZ policy instrument has been implemented in Tajikistan.

Table 1: Regional foreign direct investment in Central Asia in 2018 (in billion US\$, rounded)

Investor (column) / Recipient (row)	Afghanistan	China	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Total investments in the recipient country from the countries of the region
Afghanistan		0.39	-	-	-	-	-	0.39
China	0.005		0.06	0.01	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.08
Kazakhstan	-	8.27		0.01	0.001	-	0.012	8.29
Kyrgyzstan	0.002	1.35	0.18		0.002	n/a	0.002	1.53
Tajikistan	0.002	1.44	0.05	0.002		-	-	1.49
Turkmenistan	-	0.19	-	-	-		-	0.19
Uzbekistan	-	0.85	0.07	-	-	-		0.92
Total investments of the investing country in the countries of the region	0.009	12.49	0.36	0.02	0.004	0.001	0.016	

Source: CAREC 2021, p. 14

³ Moberg 2015, pp. 170–171

⁴ Kerkow and Martens 2010, pp. 12–20

⁵ FIAS 2008, p. 41

⁶ Levien 2011

Special Economic Zones in Tajikistan

Tajikistan is a low-income economy, the smallest in Central Asia, and is characterized by pronounced regional disparities, limited industrial diversification, and a weak secondary sector. It exhibits one of the highest labor migration rates globally and remains heavily dependent on remittances sent home by migrant workers.⁷ Against this backdrop, a law on “Free Economic Zones” was introduced in 2004 and replaced by the current legal framework in 2011. According to this law, Free Economic Zones (FEZ) are defined as areas governed by preferential legal provisions to facilitate business and investment activities.⁸ The primary objectives include the development of regional economic potential, the promotion of export-oriented and import-substituting industries, the establishment of modern production facilities and technologies, and the creation of employment opportunities.⁹ To date, five FEZs have been designated. Four are located in the economically stronger Western and Northern regions of the country, while one is situated in the East (see Figure 2).

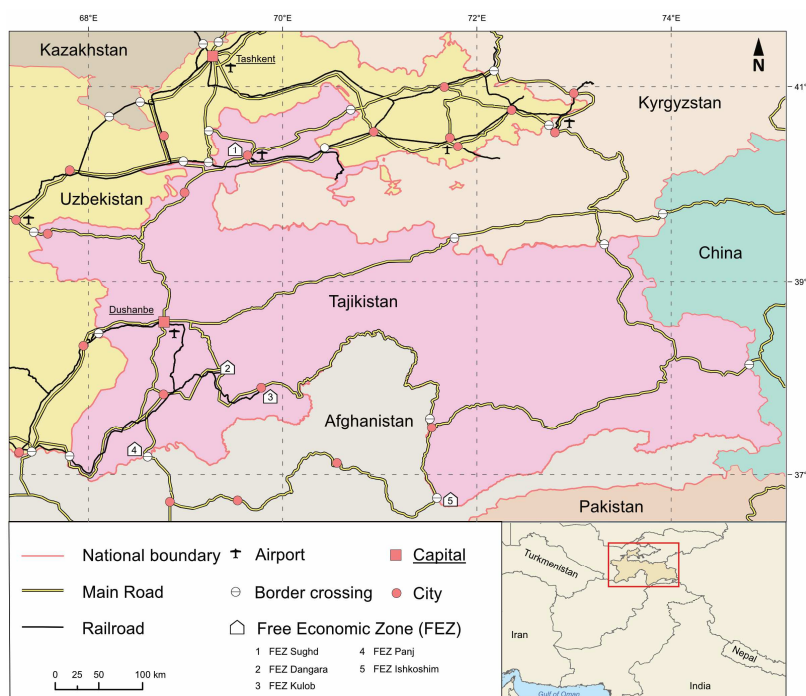


Figure 2. Location and transport infrastructure connectivity of the FEZs in Tajikistan.

Design: A. Dörre 2025

Data available since 2017/2018 shed light on the outcomes achieved thus far. Overall, the results are underwhelming in terms of the number of operating enterprises, job creation, foreign direct investment, and production volumes. While the Sughd and Dangara FEZs exhibit signs of emerging economic dynamism, the outcomes in the Panj and Ishkoshim FEZs appear

⁷ CIA 2021

⁸ RoT 2011, Art. 1

⁹ RoT 2011, Art. 3

stagnated. The absence or low levels of activity in the Kulob FEZ can be attributed to its recent establishment in March 2019 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Selected key indicators of FEZs in Tajikistan

FEZ/year	Registered Enterprises (Industry/Services)			Employment			Direct Investment in Million Tajik Somoni (TJS)					Production Output in Million Tajik Somoni (TJS)***				
	2018	2019	2020*	2018	2019	2020	Before 2017	2017	2018	2019	2020	Before 2017	2017	2018	2019	2020
Sughd	24 (20/4)	29 (24/5)	30 (19/6/5)	519	599	668	n/a	11,35	19,07	9,5	16,9	252,5	80,1	116,1	163,2	165,26
Dangara	27 (21/6)	25 (22/3)	22 (6/16/-)**	456	407	350	n/a	91,09	36,8	129,2	24,3	20,9	19	25,3	36,8	34,5
Kulob			1 (1/-/-)			19					n/a					n/a
Panj	17 (13/4)	16 (12/4)	11 (4/3/4)	49	52	35	n/a	6,2	3,38	3,9	2,1	0,37	0,25	0,29	0,8	0,5
Ishkoshim	3 (1/2)	5 (4/1)	5(5/-/-)	22	14	20	0	0	0,2	3,7	0	0	0	0,04	0,03	n/a
Total	71 (55/16)	75 (62/13)	69 (35/25/9)	1046	1072	1092	1551.9	108.64	59.45	146.3	43.3	273.8	99.4	141.7	200.83	200.26

* For 2020, the ministry does not provide a sectoral breakdown, but a differentiation according to the origin of the established companies (domestic/foreign/mixed participation).
 ** The ministry provides different figures for Dangara FEZ. For this overview, the most detailed figures have been used.
 *** The total volume of services and cross-border trade is said to have amounted to around 25 million TJS since the beginning of the FEZs.

Source: MEDTRT 2021, own calculations

Modest Successes in Sugd

Established in 2008, the Sughd Special Economic Zone is located in the eponymous and economically most advanced province of Tajikistan, in close proximity to the major city of Khujand, several border crossings with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as key infrastructure such as cross-border road networks, railway lines, and an international airport (see Figure 2). The regulatory framework for this 320-hectare zone reiterates the goals and functions outlined in national legislation and defines light and biochemical industries, construction materials, mechanical and domestic engineering, and services as its core sectors.¹⁰ Incentives include extremely low rental and lease rates: US\$ 5/m² per month for enclosed warehouses, US\$ 3/m² per year for production and office spaces, and as little as US\$ 1/m² per year for open areas. Further benefits include full exemption from customs duties and partial tax relief. Foreign investors and employees are offered support in obtaining visas. Strikes are prohibited.¹¹

To date, the zone's performance can be described as a modest success. Thirty enterprises have been established, twelve of which involve foreign participation. By 2021, Turkey leads with four ventures, followed by China with two, and Kazakhstan, Cyprus, Poland, Uzbekistan, Canada, and Kuwait each with one.¹² Total investment amounts to approximately 97 million Tajik Somoni (TJS), significantly below the projected 244.5 million TJS. The workforce comprises around 670 employees, 90% of whom are local, and who earn an average monthly

¹⁰ RoT 2008, Arts. 1, 3

¹¹ RoT 2008, Arts. 8–12

¹² AFEZ-S 2021a; AFEZ-S 2021b

wage of 1,200–1,500 TJS—well above the national average. However, this figure also falls short of the targeted 1,200 jobs. In terms of production—particularly of construction materials, furniture, children’s toys, and dried fruit, primarily for the domestic market—the zone has demonstrated steady growth when measured in TJS. In 2020, it accounted for approximately 11% of the annual industrial output of the city of Khujand, and 1% of that of the Sughd province. Since 2015, exports of these goods have been confined to Central Asia and have also shown continuous growth.¹³ Yet when both production and exports are measured in US\$, the picture changes considerably, primarily due to the declining exchange rate of the national currency (see Figure 3).

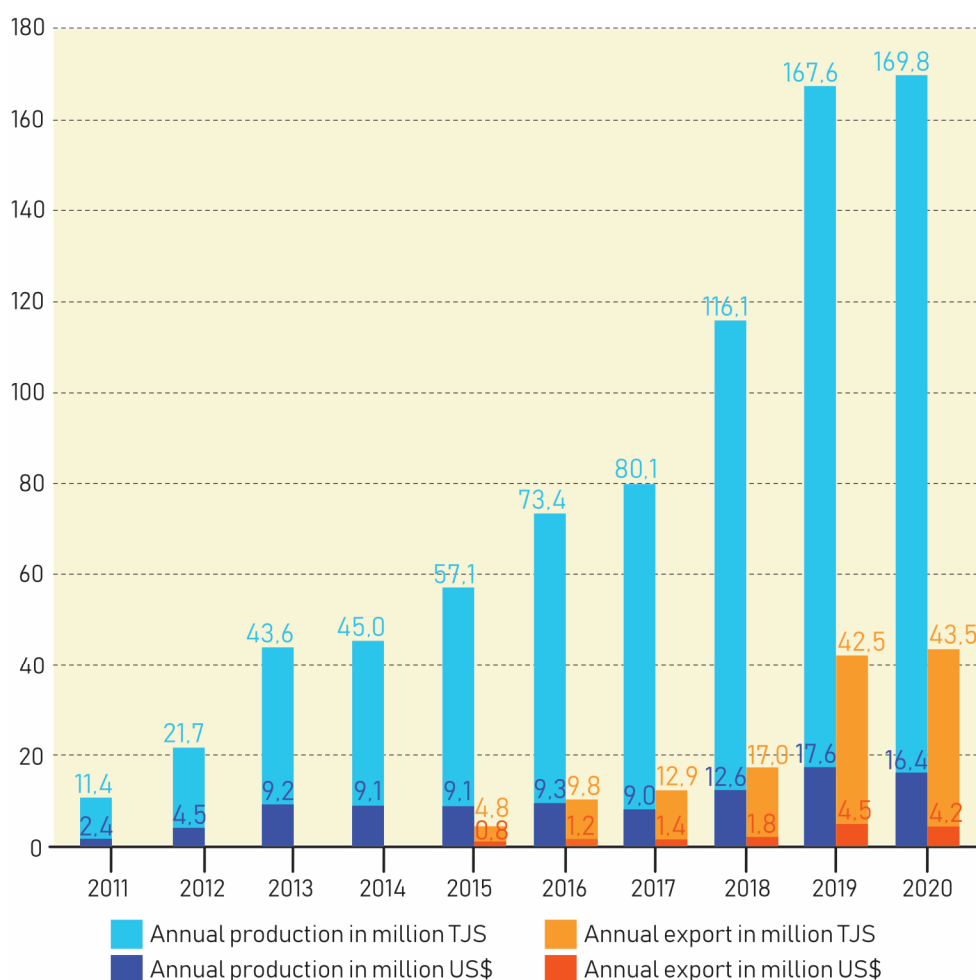


Figure 3. Development of annual production and export volumes in the Sughd FEZ.

Source: Author’s own design based on AFEZ-S 2021 a

At present, the zone does not host any innovative or forward-looking technological enterprises.¹⁴

¹³ AFEZ-S 2021a

¹⁴ AFEZ-S 2021a

Stagnation in Ishkoshim

Established in 2011, the Ishkoshim FEZ spans 200 hectares and is located in the Autonomous Province of Gorno-Badakhshan, in the easternmost part of Tajikistan, directly bordering Afghanistan. The site was chosen at the initiative of local entrepreneurs who aimed to establish a commercially viable trade and production hub in what was perceived to be a strategically advantageous location. The objectives included cost-efficient trade in regional goods, revitalization of the peripheral high mountain economy, and the diversification of local income opportunities. The zone's purported advantages include direct access to the road network of Afghanistan, a nearby Soviet-era airfield, and the proposed road connection to the “China–Pakistan Economic Corridor” via the Dorah Pass at the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the yet-to-be-opened Tajik-Afghan border post at Langar Kikhn, and the Wakhjir Pass linking Afghanistan and China.¹⁵



Figure 4. Public billboard near the main gate of the Ishkoshim FEZ.
Photograph: Dörre 2018

¹⁵ AFEZ-I 2020; Barratt 2016, p. 17; Levi-Sanchez 2017, p. 101



Figure 5. Land use concept of the Ishkoshim FEZ.
 Design: Dörre 2025 based on the Public billboard (Figure 4)

The goals, incentives, and sectoral priorities outlined in the regulatory framework largely mirror those of the Sughd zone. Emphasis is placed on the processing of agricultural

produce, regionally sourced wool fibers, animal hides, and natural stone, as well as tourism and health-related services.¹⁶ These priorities align well with local conditions, including a nearby mine producing spinel (a gemstone used in jewelry), livestock farming, and a number of thermal springs considered suitable for health tourism.

However, what most characterizes this FEZ—described locally as a crossroads of four nations—is less the actual economic output than its ambitious vision and the detailed conceptualization of its perceived development potential. A publicly displayed land-use concept outlines planned facilities for agricultural production, animal husbandry and processing, light and construction industries, gemstone refining, and even renewable energy generation (see Figure 4, and Figure 5).

A closer look behind the perimeter fence, however, reveals stagnation. Only a handful of local entrepreneurs have registered operations. Production, job creation, and cross-border trade remain minimal. In its current state, the Ishkoshim FEZ represents a “white elephant”—a failed investment project (see Table 2; Figure 6).



Figure 6. Open space within the Ishkoshim FEZ territory.
Photograph: Dörre 2018

¹⁶ RoT 2010, Arts. 1, 3, 8–12

According to various sources, the unsatisfactory performance can be attributed to four primary factors: 1) Instability in Afghanistan, which renders substantial cross-border movement of goods and people, as well as stable cooperation and exchange relationships, unfeasible. 2) High transport costs persist due to poor road conditions and the lack of renovation and reactivation of the airstrip, hampering the swift movement of inputs, products, and people. 3) The absence of basic infrastructure, such as water supply, electricity, and internet connectivity, deters potential investors. These deficiencies require significant additional investment in what should be basic provisions supplied by the FEZ administration, leading to project delays. 4) A shortage of qualified personnel and the overall lack of appeal of Ishkoshim as a place to live further diminish its attractiveness to investors.¹⁷

Conclusion

The examples presented illustrate that while SEZs in the context of Tajikistan may initially appear to be promising policy instruments, their implementation does not necessarily guarantee success. Incentives alone are insufficient to persuade potential investors if regional and local conditions render engagement too risky or unprofitable. The performance of SEZs appears to be closely linked to the strength and competitiveness of the host economy. This helps explain why, unlike in Kazakhstan—a middle-income country—major foreign investments have thus far bypassed Tajikistan's SEZs. In 2020, FEZs contributed less than 1% to Tajikistan's industrial output, offering little in the way of momentum for broader economic growth. The objective of reducing regional disparities through such zones thus remains a distant goal. At the local level, however, a more nuanced picture emerges. The Sughd FEZ, benefitting from robust infrastructure, a location within the country's most economically dynamic region, and integration into the urban economy of Khujand, possesses locational advantages that have enabled modest success. In contrast, in Ishkoshim, overly ambitious concepts and aspirational planning collide with investment-detering realities. Taken as a whole, it must be concluded that outcomes to date have fallen short of expectations.

¹⁷ AFEZ-I 2020; Barratt 2016, p. 17; Khurramov 2020

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Governing by Checkpoints: Everyday Mobility and Control in Wartime Amhara

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Abstract

This article examines the everyday governance of mobility in the conflict-affected Amhara region of northern Ethiopia, which has experienced escalating violence and fragmentation since 2020. In a fragmented and militarised landscape, checkpoints—erected by state forces, paramilitary groups such as Fano, and informal actors—have emerged as the dominant infrastructure of rule. Drawing on original fieldwork conducted in March 2025, the article explores how individuals navigate a fluid terrain of ad hoc control, where power is enacted not through institutions but through glances, silences, and bodily performances. Through the lens of “vernacular governance by passage,” the study reveals how movement becomes both a site of vulnerability and a modality of political negotiation. Theoretically, the article contributes to debates on fragmented sovereignty, affective governance, and the embodied dimensions of state power. It argues that governance in Amhara has not collapsed, but has migrated into movement itself—where checkpoints are not merely barriers but stages upon which authority is improvised, contested, and endured.

Keywords

Amhara, Ethiopia, mobility, checkpoints, sovereignty, vernacular governance, affective control, everyday state, conflict, anthropology of power

Introduction

“I never know who will stop me today. Sometimes it’s the army, sometimes it’s Fano, and sometimes it’s someone I’ve never seen before. I walk with my head down, I say nothing, I just try to pass.”

(Interview with T., 26-year-old woman, Lalibela, March 2025)

Movement—once a banal and unreflective part of daily life—has become a deeply political act in northern Ethiopia. In the Amhara region, escalating armed conflict since 2020 has produced

a fragmented system of control in which multiple actors—state military, paramilitary groups such as Fano¹, and informal militias—establish checkpoints, patrol urban peripheries, and monitor rural roads. For ordinary citizens, negotiating these overlapping regimes of scrutiny is not merely a question of navigation, but of survival.

This article explores how everyday mobility is governed in wartime Amhara, not through formal institutions or codified laws, but through a mosaic of ad hoc checkpoint regimes. Far from uniform or stable, these regimes are marked by shifting rules, rotating enforcers, and opaque logics. Yet for residents of towns like Lalibela and the surrounding countryside, checkpoints have become the dominant mode through which power is encountered, interpreted, and endured.

Drawing on original interviews conducted in March 2025, we examine how individuals adapt to this unpredictable terrain.

We ask: How is movement both regulated and moralised in a landscape where the state is simultaneously present and absent, and where the line between protection and threat is persistently blurred? By analysing the micro-practices of avoidance, compliance, and embodied fear, we offer a grounded account of how governance materialises in the everyday.

Our theoretical approach draws on scholarship on fragmented sovereignties², state performativity³, and the affective dimensions of control.⁴ While recent research has emphasised the role of state fragility in shaping African political orders, we shift attention to how individuals themselves perceive, interpret, and tactically engage with the diffuse apparatuses of wartime power.

Ultimately, we argue that governance in Amhara has not disappeared—it has migrated into movement. Power circulates not through formal institutions, but through the intimate choreography of checkpoints, where gazes, silences, and bodies become instruments of rule.

¹ FISEHA, Assefa. Federalism, Devolution and Cleavages in Africa: Do Institutions Matter? In: *Federalism, Devolution and Cleavages in Africa*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024, pp. 185–289. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50426-6>

² HANSEN, Thomas Blom and STEPPUTAT, Finn. Sovereignty revisited. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2006, **35**(1), pp. 295–315. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123317>

³ MITCHELL, Timothy. The limits of the state: Beyond statist approaches and their critics. *American Political Science Review*, 1991, **85**(1), pp. 77–96. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1962879>

⁴ FASSIN, Didier. The embodied past. From paranoid style to politics of memory in South Africa. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 2008, **16**(3), pp. 312–328. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2008.00045.x>

Theoretical framing: Governing in the Absence of Governance

In much of the political science literature, governance is often equated with the presence or absence of functioning state institutions. A fragile or failed state, by this logic, represents a void—a collapse of order, security, and legitimate authority. In such contexts, especially during armed conflict, governance is assumed to retreat while violence takes its place.

Yet from an anthropological and spatial perspective, governance rarely vanishes; it reconfigures. This reconfiguration does not necessarily involve new institutions or ideologies, but new terrains and techniques of control—often embedded in the everyday. As Das et al.⁵ argue, the state is not simply what is written in law, but what is performed, perceived, and contested in the intimate spaces of daily life. It is precisely in these marginal and crisis-afflicted zones that the state may be most acutely felt.

One of the most visible sites where such governance crystallises is the checkpoint. In places like Myanmar, South Sudan, and Afghanistan, checkpoints have become improvisational infrastructures of control, shifting with militia movements and localised power dynamics.⁶ In Palestine, by contrast, checkpoints form part of a more formalised and bureaucratised system of surveillance and territorial separation.

Yet across these contexts, checkpoints are not simply tools of military control; they are arenas of sovereign performance^{7, 8}.

They dramatise the presence of power, even in its fragmentation, and create affective atmospheres—of fear, submission, hope, or defiance. Checkpoints thus not only regulate space, but also shape subjectivities, requiring individuals to embody particular roles: the obedient civilian, the silent woman, the trustworthy local.

In the Ethiopian region of Amhara, this dynamic is particularly stark. The state's capacity to deliver services or security has been severely weakened by ongoing conflict. Yet its authority is not absent. Rather, it has been outsourced, fragmented, and reterritorialised into the bodies and behaviours of those who operate and confront checkpoints—be they national soldiers, Fano fighters, or ununiformed local men with guns.

⁵ DAS, Veena, et al. Anthropology in the Margins of the State. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 2004, **30**(1), pp. 140–144.

⁶ NEIL, Tony; CHIT, Saw Day. *Beyond the 'rebel' territorial trap: governing logics and armed group sovereignty*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2024.

⁷ PARIZOT, Cédric. Temporalities and perceptions of the separation between Israelis and Palestinians. *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem*, 2009, **20**.

⁸ ZUREIK, Elia. Strategies of Surveillance: The Israeli Gaze. *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 2016, **66**.

Building on these insights, we propose to understand movement itself as a site of governance. The act of walking down a road, choosing a route, or deciding when and whether to speak at a checkpoint becomes a moral and political negotiation. In doing so, we move beyond static notions of state sovereignty to what Hansen and Stepputat⁹ call “sovereignty as a practice”—a shifting and situated process, enacted through social relations and spatial performances.

But we go further. We argue that in Amhara, governance has migrated into the very fabric of mobility. Movement is not simply something the state restricts—it is where the state is enacted. Through the regulation of movement, power no longer needs a centre; it flows through checkpoints, through glances, silences, and the calibrated performances of bodies attempting to pass.

In this way, governing by checkpoints is not a sign of failed authority but the birth of a new, intimate mode of rule—one that is both precarious and penetrating, improvised yet systematic. It is a form of spatialised governmentality that turns every road into a potential theatre of power, and every traveller into a political subject.

The checkpoint thus becomes a threshold—not only spatial, but ethical and existential. Passing through it requires more than compliance; it demands a performance of self, calibrated to ambiguous expectations. Averted eyes may signal deference or suspicion. A calm tone may reassure or provoke. Bodily comportment becomes political currency, and fear itself becomes part of the choreography of survival.

Such encounters are not only shaped by authority, but by what James C. Scott¹⁰ called the *moral economy*: the deeply felt ideas of fairness, dignity, and legitimacy that ordinary people bring to their interaction with power. In Amhara, our interlocutors rarely spoke of the law. Instead, they spoke of what is “right,” what is “expected,” and what is “humiliating.” These moral evaluations shape their routes, their silences, and their strategies. Governance, in this sense, is not only external—it is negotiated internally, through emotion, memory, and improvisation.

This points to a crucial theoretical shift: governance as affective navigation. Here, statehood is not measured by the presence of ministries or mayors, but by the palpable need to

⁹ HANSEN, Thomas Blom and STEPPUTAT, Finn. Sovereignty revisited. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2006, 35(1), pp. 295–315. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123317>

¹⁰ SCOTT, James C. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

anticipate, sense, and tactically respond to unstable forms of control. Ademe¹¹ has shown how control regimes work not only through force, but through the management of emotion¹². In Amhara, fear is not just a consequence of violence; it is a modality of rule.

Crucially, this affective mode of governance is not totalising—it is porous, inconsistent, and often resisted. People learn, adapt, mistrust, and even manipulate checkpoint actors. This improvisational dynamic, what we call “vernacular governance by passage,” is central to understanding the political geography of Amhara today. It redefines statehood as a distributed process, enacted through contingent relations in space rather than static institutions in capital cities.

These dynamics are not unique to Ethiopia. In many conflict-affected or postcolonial contexts, we find that governance increasingly emerges not through durable state institutions but through the unstable regulation of movement. What Amhara offers, then, is not an exception—but a sharp lens through which to rethink the spatial and affective infrastructures of power.

Setting the Scene: The Amhara Region in Wartime

The northern Ethiopian region of Amhara has long occupied a central place in the country’s political and cultural imagination. Home to iconic churches, imperial legacies, and a dominant strand of national identity, Amhara has often been framed as the “heartland” of the Ethiopian state^{13, 14}. But in recent years, it has become a fractured and fracturing landscape, where allegiances shift, armed groups proliferate, and everyday life is haunted by uncertainty.

Since 2020, Ethiopia has been engulfed in a complex, multi-sited war that began as a confrontation between federal forces and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), but quickly metastasised into overlapping conflicts across multiple regions^{15, 16}. While international attention focused on the Tigray war, the Amhara region—directly affected by the TPLF’s

¹¹ ADEME, Solomon Molla. Demystifying the causes of the Amhara people’s protest in Ethiopia. *Third World Quarterly*, 2022, 43(4), pp. 916–935. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2030701>

¹² PRITZKER, Sonya E., Janina FENIGSEN and James MacLynn WILCE, eds. *The Routledge handbook of language and emotion*. London/New York: Routledge, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367855093>

¹³ ABBINK, Jon. Ethnic-based federalism and ethnicity in Ethiopia: reassessing the experiment after 20 years. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 2011, 5(4), pp. 596–618. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2011.642516>

¹⁴ TRONVOLL, Kjetil. *War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia: Making Enemies of the State*. Suffolk: James Currey, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781846157769>

¹⁵ TRONVOLL, Kjetil. The anatomy of Ethiopia’s civil war. *Current history*, 2022, 121.835: 163–169.

¹⁶ NYADERA, Israel Nyaburi; OSEDO, Census. Civil war between the Ethiopian Government and the Tigray people’s Liberation Front: a challenge to implement the responsibility to protect Doctrine. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 2023, 23.1: 35–59.

offensive in November 2020—was undergoing its own transformation: from a relatively stable administrative region to a contested and militarised frontier of the Ethiopian state¹⁷.

One of the most consequential developments has been the rise of Fano—a loosely organised, largely Amhara-identified armed movement that presents itself as both a protector of the people and a challenger to federal authority^{18,19}. In some areas, they fight alongside government forces; in others, they clash with them. This fluid alignment has left civilians navigating a maze of shifting loyalties, murky hierarchies, and unpredictable rules.

A local message we received from Lalibela in March 2025 illustrates the affective and spatial uncertainty that now defines everyday life:

“Here we are fine surviving under his protection God. The ongoing conflict last Tuesday the war here in Lalibela around the north location. The situation has worsened more people are dead. The war has been for seven hours.”
(G. & G., WhatsApp message, March 2025)

It is in this context that the checkpoint becomes not merely a security device, but a node of power, ambiguity, and risk. In towns like Lalibela and throughout the rural highlands, checkpoints proliferate—not only those set up by federal forces, but by Fano fighters and, increasingly, by informal local actors^{20, 21}. These are not permanent installations with clear chains of command; they are mobile, improvisational, and often personally negotiated.

For example, one respondent told us about a local driver—recognised by foreign researchers and visitors—who was killed in recent fighting:

“He also brought you to the hotel the last day you left. I’m pretty shocked. I think he was killed because he was a member of Fano.”
(R., WhatsApp message, March 2025)

The consequences are immediate and intimate. Women fear harassment. Young men fear conscription or arbitrary arrest. Farmers delay travelling to markets. Teachers have been abducted and executed. According to residents interviewed by *Addis Standard*, “many civilians

¹⁷ ACLED 2023

¹⁸ SIGATU, Kaleab Tadesse. From Security Provider to a Security Risk? The Abrupt Withdrawal of Ethiopia’s Decade-Long Peacekeeping Mission in UNISFA. *Hadtudományi Szemle*, 2022, **15**(4), pp. 69–91.
<https://doi.org/10.32563/hsz.2022.4.5>

¹⁹ CRISIS GROUP. *CrisisWatch Ethiopia* [online]. International Crisis Group Report, 2023 [cit. 10-4-2025]. Available from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia>

²⁰ ACLED. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project [online]. 2023, 2024 [cit. 10-4-2025]. Available from: <https://acleddata.com/>

²¹ interviews, March 2025

have been killed in crossfire,” with some reports describing stray bullets, burnt fuel trucks, and entire kebeles falling under militant control²².

“The militants abducted teachers, accusing them of teaching. They took them from their homes and executed them. The first teacher was killed while entering the school gate.”
(Merawi resident, Addis Standard, 2025)

Meanwhile, the state's official narrative paints a conflicting picture: the Ethiopian army claims to have “destroyed” more than 300 Fano fighters in two days of fighting, while Fano representatives claim to have killed over 600 federal soldiers²³. These competing figures reflect not only the intensity of the violence, but also the degree to which truth itself has become a contested battleground.

As state infrastructure withers and military engagements displace administrative order, the capacity to control movement has become one of the few remaining indicators of authority²⁴. But unlike traditional state border posts, these checkpoints do not delineate inside from outside. They divide neighbourhoods, villages, even market roads—turning familiar routes into political frontlines. Many residents described facing different checkpoint rules within the span of a single kilometre, depending on who was present that day.

In this fragmented landscape, power is not exerted from the centre outward, but diffused through a thousand micro-territories of control, most of them unmarked, unauthorised, and unaccountable. The checkpoint, in Amhara today, is less a line than a performance—a moment in which authority is enacted, negotiated, and, for a fleeting second, stabilised.

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“Honestly, what’s happening now is very sad, but we’re used to it all now. So it’s nothing new. All we can do is see the dead and only pray.”
(R., WhatsApp message, March 2025)

This sentence—spoken with quiet resignation rather than drama—captures the emotional texture of life under wartime mobility control. Death is not shocking, only

²² Addis Standard, 25–27 March 2025

²³ AFP 2025; Reuters 2025

²⁴ SCOTT, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300252989>

continuous. In a region where governance migrates through bodies and checkpoints, mourning becomes a form of endurance, and prayer a gesture of sovereignty that remains untouched.

Methodology: Listening to the Checkpoints

This article is grounded in qualitative fieldwork conducted in Lalibela and surrounding areas of the Amhara region in March 2025. In total, we conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with local residents, including women and men of varying ages, occupations, and social positions. The selection of respondents was shaped by availability, safety, and the willingness to speak about movement and control—topics often laden with risk, memory, and fear.

Our aim was not to produce a representative sample in a statistical sense, but rather to gather rich, situated accounts of lived experience. We sought to understand not only what people do in the face of checkpoints and violence, but how they feel, interpret, and narrate these encounters—in other words, how power is made meaningful through mobility.

Interviews were conducted in Amharic, with the assistance of a local interpreter and fixer deeply familiar with the region and its sociopolitical tensions. In many cases, conversations emerged informally—from walks through the town, visits to homes, or time spent sitting quietly during power cuts. In other instances, respondents reached out via WhatsApp, sending spontaneous voice messages or typed reflections in their own English—messages that, though grammatically imperfect, carried profound emotional clarity. For example, one resident wrote:

“Today no power, no bread, people fighting again. We are tired, but what can we do? Only wait and see what next.”
(WhatsApp message, March 2025)

All respondents were anonymised for safety, and all identifying details—names, specific locations, professions—have been altered where necessary. Conversations involving trauma, loss, or sensitive political affiliation were handled with particular care, and no audio recordings were made unless explicitly requested and approved.

Given the dangerous and highly changeable nature of the conflict, fieldwork conditions were fluid, requiring flexibility, caution, and constant recalibration of movement and intent. As researchers, we were not exempt from the very dynamics we set out to study. We too negotiated checkpoints, adjusted routes, and relied on rumours to assess safety. This reflexivity forms part of our analytical lens: to study the politics of movement while moving through a politicised landscape.

Finally, this research recognises the role of faith, fatigue, and fatalism as analytical categories. When a respondent writes, “*All we can do is see the dead and only pray,*” we do not interpret this merely as resignation, but as an ethical framework of survival—a moral map for navigating a terrain where maps have lost their bearings.

This research was shaped not only by proximity, but by positionality. The author of this article is a young Amhara woman, raised in an urban setting and educated within the Ethiopian system, yet with close personal and academic ties to European colleagues. This dual orientation brought both access and ambivalence: access to voices and silences that are rarely shared with outsiders, and ambivalence toward the expectations of “objectivity” often demanded by foreign academia.

In the field, I was both an insider and an interpellated observer. My respondents shared with me not only what had happened, but how it felt—how they breathed under tension, how they measured each day not by the hour, but by the sound of gunfire, or the absence of it. And yet, through frequent exchanges with European researchers—many of whom were visibly shaken by the sudden collapse of order they witnessed—I became more attuned to what had become normal for us, but shocking for others.

*“It’s extremely stupid,” M. told us—referring not to one event, but to everything: the checkpoints, the killings, the fear, the boredom.
(Interview, Lalibela, March 2025)*

His words were not emotional, nor even angry. Just tired. And that fatigue—shared across many of our respondents—became a form of knowledge. Through European eyes, this fatigue often appeared as apathy; through ours, it was the clearest sign of survival.

Rather than attempt to neutralise this tension, I bring it into the analysis. This article is not written from a place of detachment, but from a place of partial immersion—a space between shared grief and structural critique. My aim is not to speak *for* Amhara, nor to explain it to the world, but rather to trace how power moves through roads, gestures, rumours, and unspoken calculations, in a land that is at once deeply familiar and increasingly unknowable.

Scenes of Passage: Checkpoints, Bodies, and the Politics of Movement

This section examines how governance in wartime Amhara is experienced through fragmented infrastructures, embodied encounters, and moral economies of movement. It begins by mapping the proliferation and variability of checkpoints, which function less as fixed barriers and more

as unpredictable arenas of discretionary and sometimes violent power. Respondents described being arbitrarily detained, humiliated, or physically assaulted, often without any explanation. Power here is not only performed—it is wielded abruptly and without accountability.

The analysis then turns to the embodied nature of passage—how gendered and affective performances shape interactions at these sites of control. From posture to voice modulation, individuals calibrate their behaviour in an attempt to read and pre-empt the intentions of the armed men they face.

Finally, attention is given to the stratification of mobility itself: while some individuals pass with ease, others face interrogation or threats depending not on law, but on appearance, accent, or access to informal networks. Taken together, these observations reveal a system in which authority circulates not through institutions, but through improvisation, domination, perception, and the daily choreography of survival.

Checkpoint Landscapes: Fragmented Infrastructures of Power

On maps, the Amhara region appears as a continuous territory—outlined in administrative borders, crossed by roads, and dotted with settlements. But for those who live there, space is experienced less as geography and more as a fluid patchwork of control, uncertainty, and shifting threat. One respondent summarised it bluntly: *“There is no safe road anymore. It depends on the hour, the rumour, and who is holding the gun that day.”*

In Lalibela and its surrounding highlands, the number and nature of checkpoints have multiplied dramatically since mid-2023. No longer confined to federal army outposts, checkpoints are now established by various Fano factions, localised militias, and even loosely organised village groups. Their appearance varies—from sandbags and concrete blocks to nothing but a man with a rifle standing at a crossroads.

“Sometimes they ask for ID. Sometimes they don’t. Sometimes they ask you to speak. Sometimes they just look at you and decide.”
(Interview with H., farmer, outskirts of Lalibela)

This variability is not random; it reflects the absence of a unified logic of control. One day, a checkpoint enforces a curfew. The next, it is gone. Some are extortionary—used to collect informal fees. Others are symbolic, used to perform presence or mark territory. For residents, these shifting configurations mean that no route is ever neutral.

The topography of movement becomes layered with moral geographies: routes are remembered not by distance, but by risk. One woman described how a simple walk to the market became a negotiation of identity:

| *“They ask: are you Amhara? Do you speak Amharic? Do you support Fano? It is not a checkpoint; it’s a question point.”*

In such spaces, there are no clear rules, but strong expectations. People learn to anticipate what the person with the gun might want to see or hear—not because it has been declared, but because survival depends on playing the role of the “harmless citizen.” These are what we call tacit scripts of compliance—socially learned behaviours that are rehearsed, repeated, and adjusted, not to express truth, but to reduce danger.

In this sense, the checkpoint is not just a site of physical filtering; it is a theatre of conditional belonging. One must signal trustworthiness, neutrality, or alignment, but in the absence of clear indicators, even silence becomes a political performance.

The spatial logic of these checkpoints reflects a new infrastructure of power—improvised, volatile, and deeply performative. Unlike state-built checkpoints, which signal bureaucracy, these checkpoints signal discretion. Decisions are made on the spot. Authority is not codified but embodied—by the posture of the guard, the tone of his voice, the look in his eyes.

In this landscape, maps are no longer reliable instruments of navigation. Instead, people rely on whispers, on mobile phone updates, on collective memory. As one interviewee put it:

| *“We don’t follow roads. We follow information.”*

These checkpoint regimes do not replace the state, but become the state as it is lived—diffuse, unstable, and carried in the bodies of those who enforce and endure them. While performance and affective navigation shape many encounters, several respondents stressed the sheer unpredictability and raw violence embedded in these moments. One man described being forced to kneel for half an hour without explanation; another witnessed a fellow villager beaten after failing to answer quickly. These were not ambiguous forms of control, but explicit demonstrations of domination. As one interviewee said bluntly:

| *“It’s not a play. Sometimes it’s just fear.”*

In these situations, power is not negotiated—it is imposed.

The Body at the Border: Gendered and Embodied Control

At a checkpoint, a person is not simply a traveller. They are a body to be read—for signs of danger, suspicion, or subordination. In Amhara, where uniforms are inconsistent and rules opaque, the politics of passage is deeply embodied. Who you are—or rather, how you appear—is often more consequential than what you say.

One young woman from Lalibela explained:

| *“I walk with my head down. I say nothing. If they think you’re strong, they stop you. If you look afraid, they stop you. If you speak too loudly, they stop you.”*

This illustrates a central paradox: any gesture can be misread, and any non-gesture can be interpreted as concealment. The checkpoint thus becomes a place where individuals must perform an identity that is neither too visible nor too invisible—a narrow corridor of acceptability, navigated not through legal documents, but through posture, tone, and silence.

Gender plays a critical role in shaping how people experience these encounters. Women tend to emphasise fear of harassment and bodily vulnerability. Several described adopting strategies of self-effacement—avoiding eye contact, walking slowly, hiding their hair. As one respondent put it:

| *“I dress like an old woman now. It’s better if they don’t look at you.”*

Another woman described how she deliberately travelled with her younger brother, not for protection, but because “having a man next to you makes them look at him, not you.” Some mentioned changing their gait, flattening their voice, or using local dialects to appear less urban, less outspoken, less noticeable. These are not just performances of gender, but of calculated vulnerability.

Men, in contrast, spoke more often about fear of detention, interrogation, or forced recruitment. Young men, especially those with a certain build or speech pattern, were often preemptively treated as suspects—potential fighters or dissidents. One man told us:

| *“They said I was Fano because I didn’t smile. What kind of reason is that?”*

These experiences show that the checkpoint does not merely screen for weapons or documents—it screens for bodies that fit or deviate from implicit expectations. The result is a form of affective profiling: fear, fatigue, or defiance are read as indicators of guilt.

Over time, these interactions shape how people inhabit their own bodies. Women shrink themselves. Men become performatively passive. Children are taught to walk without looking around. As one mother said:

| *“I told my son: never answer first. Wait. And keep your voice low.”*

In such a regime, the body is not only vulnerable—it becomes a strategic instrument, trained to comply, to defer, to survive. This is governance not through laws, but through the disciplining of movement, emotion, and flesh.

And yet, not all bodies are read the same way. While locals must carefully calibrate their appearance and tone to avoid suspicion, foreigners—especially visibly white visitors—often interrupt the script entirely. Their presence can shift the tone of the interaction, soften aggression, or even produce surprising forms of hospitality.

One of us recalls a moment on a rural road near Lalibela, when a minibus was stopped by armed Fano fighters. As silence gripped the vehicle and passengers lowered their gaze, one of the men noticed the foreigner:

| *“Tourist?” he asked in English. When the reply came—‘Yes, just travelling’—his tone shifted. He smiled faintly, asked where the visitor was from, then, after a short exchange, pulled out a scrap of paper: ‘Here’s my number. If you have any trouble, call me. I can help.’”*

The irony was stark. While locals concealed phones under floorboards and braced for interrogation, the outsider was offered protection by the very forces others feared. This was not an isolated episode. Throughout our fieldwork, we encountered multiple instances where foreigners were either waved through without question or addressed with exaggerated politeness—sometimes even reluctance, as if their presence complicated the usual choreography of power.

| *“They never asked for your passport,” one local recalled. “But they asked me where I was going, who I knew, and why I was travelling alone.”*

These moments do not negate the violence of the checkpoint regime. But they reveal that power, in Amhara, is relational, not absolute. The checkpoint is not a fixed space of authority, but a stage where identity is interpreted in the moment—contingent on how one is seen, heard, and placed within the conflict. The foreign body, especially when white and male, defies easy categorisation. It can be feared, resented, or used—but it is rarely ignored.

In this way, governance becomes conditional and comparative. The same checkpoint that strips one person of dignity may grant another a smile and a phone number. This asymmetry

reflects not only visible hierarchies of race and foreignness, but the deeper truth that sovereignty here is not just fragmented—it is negotiated, person by person. These fleeting privileges of the foreigner, however, are not without cost. Elsewhere, the same visibility attracts suspicion, opportunism, or overcharging. Mobility here is never free—it is always negotiated, in different currencies.

Mobility as Privilege: Knowing the System, Surviving the System

In Amhara, movement is not only restricted—it is unevenly distributed. While some people shrink their presence to avoid attention, others move through the same landscapes with a measure of ease. The difference lies not in legality, but in knowledge, language, connections—and above all, perception.

“My brother is in the army. They never stop me,” one young man told us with quiet confidence.

“If they ask me questions, I just call someone. I have the numbers. They let me go.”

Others described how they avoided checkpoints altogether—not through force, but through routes known only to locals, or by paying drivers who knew when and where to pass.

“There are back roads. They cost more. But they are worth it if you don’t want problems.”

Mobility, in this sense, is not just a physical act—it is a form of capital. Knowing who to call, what to say, which accent to use, or even how to frame your family background can mean the difference between arrest and safe passage.

In several interviews, people spoke of learning how to talk like someone from “nowhere”—to erase clues that might suggest loyalty to one side or another.

“I never say where I’m from. I say: I’m just going to the market. That’s it. I speak soft Amharic, no village accent. I wear plain clothes. It helps.”

Others relied on social currency—a cousin who worked at a nearby base, a friend who knew a local commander. One man even showed us a voice message he played at checkpoints, recorded by a relative in the security forces, saying he was “cleared”.

Meanwhile, those without such networks or skills were far more vulnerable—especially rural women, displaced persons, or ethnic minorities whose speech or dress marked them immediately. One woman who had fled from Kobo told us:

“I didn’t know the roads. I didn’t know anyone. I just followed others. When they stopped us, I froze. I couldn’t speak. I just cried.”

These testimonies illustrate a central point: governance by checkpoint creates a hierarchy not only of ethnicity, class, or gender—but of mobility itself. The right to move is not universal. It is earned, bought, or borrowed. Those who master the informal codes of movement transform themselves from subjects into navigators. This produces not just inequality, but moral tension. Several respondents acknowledged feeling guilt or discomfort about their relative freedom:

“Others are stopped and searched. Me—they just wave me through. I feel lucky. But also ashamed. Why me?”

In such a system, mobility is not just survival—it is privilege. And privilege, in the Amhara conflict, is not fixed or inherited. It is performed, negotiated, and sometimes simply guessed.

Discussion: Controlled Mobility as a Political Tool

Throughout this article, we have argued that mobility in wartime Amhara is not simply constrained—it is governed. But this governance does not take the form of clear laws, visible administrations, or predictable sanctions. Instead, it operates through a dispersed, relational infrastructure of checkpoints, bodies, rumours, and performances. In this system, movement is neither free nor entirely blocked—it is conditional, negotiated, and precarious.

This aligns with and extends the idea of “sovereignty as a practice”²⁵, where state-like power emerges not from institutions but from everyday performances of control. Checkpoints in Amhara are not only tools of territorial enforcement. They are technologies of power that produce moral hierarchies, spatial boundaries, and emotional atmospheres. They transform roads into theatres, and travellers into actors.

Yet unlike conventional state sovereignty, this system is characterised not by stability, but by volatility. There are no fixed rules—only expectations. And those expectations shift depending on time, place, and identity. As we have shown, people must read the situation and adjust accordingly. They draw on tacit knowledge, embodied scripts, and networks of informal protection.

This improvisational character does not mean that governance is weak. On the contrary, it makes it more intimate, more affective, and more difficult to resist. You cannot appeal to the law if there is no law. You cannot plan a route if maps have lost their meaning. This leads to a

²⁵ HANSEN, Thomas Blom and STEPPUTAT, Finn. Sovereignty revisited. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2006, 35(1), pp. 295–315. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123317>

fundamental paradox: a government that cannot guarantee safety governs instead through uncertainty.

In such a context, fear is not a byproduct of violence—it is a modality of rule²⁶. It penetrates the body, shapes behaviour, and disciplines movement. Women walk with their eyes lowered. Men erase their smiles. Children learn to wait before speaking. As one respondent told us: “*We don’t move with our legs. We move with our judgment.*”

At the same time, the checkpoint is not only a site of subjugation—it is also a space of negotiation, of micro-resistance, of improvisation. People leverage contacts, disguise their origins, feign neutrality, or play roles. Even the presence of foreigners can disrupt or soften the power play, as we saw in cases where armed actors performed hospitality in the presence of an international guest.

What emerges is a form of vernacular governmentality—not imposed from above, but enacted through daily encounters, shared rumours, and collective intuition. In Amhara, mobility is not just something to be regulated. It is where governance happens.

Conclusion: The Intimacy of Rule

This article began with a simple act: a person walking down a road. In ordinary times, such an act would be forgettable. But in wartime Amhara, movement has become a diagnostic of power. It reveals who is trusted, who is feared, who must speak, and who must keep silent. It transforms a footpath into a filter, a glance into a command, and a checkpoint into a stage.

We have argued that governance in Amhara has not collapsed—it has migrated. It now lives in the interstices of movement: in the way a woman lowers her eyes, in the way a man rehearses neutrality, in the way a boy learns to walk without curiosity. Checkpoints are not simply obstacles on a road. They are intimate infrastructures of rule, governing not by decree but by discretion, not through bureaucracy but through bodies.

What is perhaps most striking is not the presence of violence, but the absence of clarity. Rules shift. Logic dissolves. Maps mislead. In this environment, people learn to govern themselves—through anticipation, through affect, through fear. This is not a passive condition. It is a form of political learning, of survival choreography, of what we have called *vernacular governance by passage*.

²⁶ FASSIN, Didier. The embodied past. From paranoid style to politics of memory in South Africa. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 2008, 16(3), pp. 312–328. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2008.00045.x>

And yet, this is not merely a story of subjugation. Amid the fragmentation, people manoeuvre. They disguise, negotiate, leverage networks, and sometimes even laugh in the face of fear. Foreigners, too, find themselves woven into this mosaic—sometimes as spectators, sometimes as shields, occasionally as welcome disruptions. A smile, a joke, a gesture of politeness offered by a fighter may not signify peace—but it reveals that power is never pure performance. It is also relational.

One of our interlocutors described the situation with quiet fatalism: “*We are used to it now. All we can do is see the dead and only pray.*” But in that statement lies not resignation—it is a moral grammar. To pray is not to accept. It is to endure, to wait, to preserve the sense that the current order is temporary, unjust, incomplete.

Because what checkpoints do not check is the memory of how things once were—and the hope for how they might be again. Movement is not only a site of control. It is also a trace of life, of persistence, of the refusal to disappear. Even the smallest act—crossing a road, keeping silent, whispering directions—becomes a form of survival.

What Amhara teaches us is that governance does not require a capital city or a constitution. It can be enacted one checkpoint at a time, through whispers, hesitations, and the trembling calculus of whether to speak or stay silent. It shows that sovereignty, in its most granular form, may not always—or not only—reside in the state, but in the quiet, invisible techniques by which people adjust their steps to survive.

To understand political control in conflict zones, we must therefore look not only at wars and ceasefires, but at how people walk, wait, and pass. Not at what the state declares, but at what it demands without speaking. Not at what power looks like, but at how it feels.

Because in Amhara today, power is not only visible at the checkpoint. It *is* the checkpoint.

And the body is not only controlled—it becomes the map.

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When Graves Speak: Script Choice, Identity, and Cultural Memory in the Armenian Cemetery of Plovdiv

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Abstract

This article explores the symbolic power of script choice in shaping diasporic identity and memory within the Armenian community of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Focusing on the city's Armenian cemetery—an exceptional site of visual and cultural inscription—it examines how gravestone epigraphy, script usage, and linguistic aesthetics contribute to the construction and reinforcement of a collective sense of Armenianness. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork and informed by the anthropology of writing, the study argues that Armenian script functions not merely as a means of communication but as a potent visual and ideological marker of ethnic continuity, distinction, and resilience. In a context where the Armenian language is increasingly endangered, the cemetery emerges as both a commemorative space and a semiotic battleground, where orthographic inconsistencies, aesthetic choices, and ideologically loaded inscriptions reveal the tensions between linguistic erosion and symbolic permanence. The article further considers how writing practices—particularly those surrounding sacred memory and death—mediate the community's relationship to its imagined homeland and to the dominant Bulgarian society. Ultimately, it offers new insights into how material inscriptions serve as enduring vehicles of minority identity, cultural pride, and mnemonic resistance.

Keywords

Armenian Diaspora, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, Script Choice, Armenian Alphabet, Linguistic Landscape, Armenian Graveyard, Collective Memory

Introduction

The Armenian diaspora in the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv constitutes the largest and most institutionally developed Armenian minority in both Bulgaria and the broader Balkan region. This is due in no small part to the city's Armenian school and a long-standing presence that dates back to Byzantine times. The community is well integrated into the Bulgarian host society and is characterised by a high level of educational attainment. It contributes significantly to the socio-economic and cultural life of Plovdiv. A substantial proportion of today's Armenian population are descendants of survivors of the Armenian Genocide perpetrated in the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1916. According to official Bulgarian statistics,¹ Plovdiv is home to approximately 2,000 Armenians out of a national total of 5,567. Unofficial Armenian estimates, however, place the number at around 4,000 in Plovdiv and 20,000 across the country.

For Armenians in Plovdiv, as elsewhere in the diaspora, issues of identity are inextricably linked to the question of language maintenance.² Furthermore, the Armenian alphabet, which is unique in the world due to the shape of its letters, is considered by the diaspora to be an essential part of the identity of the language. Nevertheless, the current use of the Armenian language, both spoken and written, is very limited in the Plovdiv diaspora, and the scenario for the future linguistic situation seems rather discouraging. The Armenian language of Plovdiv belongs to the Western branch of Armenian and can be defined as a non-territorial minority language. It is not recognized anywhere as a state language and has no place as a language of administration and public life.³ In addition, it has never enjoyed any real official protection by the state in any other country, which makes it a highly endangered language whose speakers are particularly exposed to linguistic assimilation.⁴

With regard to the Armenian script and the importance attached to its public use in the diaspora, an important clarification must be made here. The Armenian alphabet enjoys a special prestige, due primarily to the divine inspiration by which Saint Mesrop Mashtots is said to have visualized the letters of the alphabet in the early 5th century AD, an event described as a true miracle.⁵ Mesrop Mashtots developed this unique writing system to translate the Holy Scriptures into the local Armenian language, but also to prevent the danger of assimilation of

¹ BULGARIAN CENSUS 2011: [www.nsi.bg].

² SELVELLI, *Language Practices and (Trans)National Identity Construction among the Armenian Diaspora of Bulgaria* & ARAKELYAN, "The role of language in the preservation of Armenian identity".

³ DERMERGUERIAN, "Espaces de fonctionnement des deux branches de l'arménien littéraire moderne".

⁴ AGBU, "The Armenian language as an endangered language in Europe. A contribution to the European Roadmap for Linguistic Diversity"

⁵ MAKSOUDIAN, *The Origins of the Armenian Alphabet and Literature*.

Armenians by Persian and Greek forces. Contemporary rhetoric about the importance of the Armenian alphabet similarly depicts the current situation, in a context where assimilation dynamics are increasingly affecting the global Armenian diaspora.⁶ The history of the Armenian alphabet is thus explicitly a social fact, demonstrating that writing is not just a simple mechanism for transcribing the sounds of the language, but also functions as a primary symbolic system that still contains immediate cultural and identity-forming meanings.⁷

The Armenian cemetery in Plovdiv is an appropriate place to reflect on individual and collective memory, identity orientations and their relationship to public writing. The graves of the ancestors represent a history that cannot be forgotten, as most of the people buried there were survivors of the Genocide or descendants of those who were forced to leave their homeland forever. The individual pain over the loss of loved ones is combined with collective suffering in the memorial dedicated to the genocide.

The specific focus on the minority cemetery is part of the empirical, qualitative research on the processes of collective commemoration that continue to shape the Armenian public landscape in Plovdiv that I conducted among members of this community. Methodologically, the data collection involved ethnographic observation of the spaces in the city of Plovdiv described in this article (cemetery, church-museum, monuments, etc.) and all public inscriptions. This work was carried out by familiarizing ourselves with the discourse on memory and identity disseminated by the main local Armenian institutions through their media over the years.

Since my initial engagement with the Armenian diaspora in Plovdiv in 2010—when I conducted a year of field research within the community as part of my master’s thesis—my involvement has remained continuous. In the years that followed, regular visits to the city, the cultivation of both personal and professional relationships with members of the community, and sustained engagement with local publications—particularly the newspaper *Parekordzagani Tzain* (“Voice of Benevolence”) and books issued by the community’s Armenian publishing house—have enabled me to gather substantial insights into how official discourses have shaped the linguistic landscape of Armenian memory in the city. The research methods of the present paper are based on ethnographic fieldwork and the theoretical assumptions of Giorgio Raimondo Cardona (1982, 1986, 2009), which were fundamental for the development of an

⁶ CHAHINIAN & BAKALIAN, “Language in Armenian American communities: Western Armenian and efforts for preservation”

⁷ CARDONA, *Antropologia della scrittura*.

anthropological approach and a sensitivity to issues related to writing systems and public writing practices.

The importance of the written word in minority spaces: the Armenian case

Since the shift from oral to written speech is essentially a shift from sound to visual space, here the effects of print on the use of visual space can be the central, though not the only, focus of attention. (...) ⁸ Writing had reconstituted the originally oral, spoken word in visual space. Print embedded the word in space more definitively. ⁹

My first visual encounter with the Armenian alphabet in Plovdiv occurred during an exploratory visit in the autumn of 2009, prior to my relocation for fieldwork, at a time when I still knew relatively little about the community. As I walked along one of the streets encircling the old town, I paused and noticed, with quiet satisfaction, a striking indication of Armenian presence. It may sound unexpected, but this realisation came to me through a dense row of obituary notices affixed to a wall—most of them written in Armenian. I was genuinely surprised: it was immediately clear to me that Armenians lived here, that this wall marked the threshold of their “territory”, and, above all, that they wrote in their own script.

I continued through the narrow streets of the upper town and, before long, came upon the heart of the community: a walled compound comprising a cultural centre, church, chapel, bell tower, and school—an enclosed and symbolically charged space, where children were playing in the courtyard.

I also immediately noticed that there was a lot of writing in this space, in the form of memorial plaques, monuments, plaques, painted lettering on the walls, etc... almost all in Armenian, but also bilingual in Bulgarian and in one case also in English (near a *khachkar* stone commemorating the victims of the Genocide). A large “inscribed space”, which was waiting to be read by me.

Armenians show a special sensitivity and affection for all objects written with their alphabet, and so when they have the opportunity, they naturally “mark” their space first with written objects or writing on walls, etc. Although only a minority of community members have mastered the Armenian written language, it would be unthinkable not to use it to mark spaces

⁸ ONG, *Orality and Literacy. The technologizing of the Word*, 115

⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

and places of the greatest symbolic importance; it would hardly occur to them to write in public spaces using only another alphabet, such as Bulgarian Cyrillic or Latin.

Petrucchi notes: “Unlike languages, the graphic systems in use today seem to be very impermeable to each other, often, if not mainly, for ideological and political reasons of prestige and national identification”.¹⁰

This also leads to the conclusion that, in most cases, the Armenian script is not truly “read” but merely observed, grasped visually; nevertheless, the effect will be equally strong through this visual familiarity, inevitably creating a situation of emotional identification and participation, as an Armenian can hardly remain indifferent to the presence of the letters of their alphabet. This, in turn, affects the importance attached to everything written, which contributes to the preservation and spread of “Armenianness”. Therefore, schools, magazines and books play a key role in fostering a collective imagination through the valorization of the alphabet, which is a symbol of the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the Armenian people. However, all these elements could not be as effective in spreading a positive rhetoric about the alphabet if they were not supported by an important visual component, namely the images and objects in which the Armenian script is present and spreads its equally high symbolic value. The images and the various surfaces on which the alphabet manifests itself thus become active participants in the construction of the discourse on national identity, which is based on a transtemporal and translocal sense of belonging to an ancient and culturally rich Armenian identity of which this community's members are inevitably very proud. It also follows that in most cases the Armenian scripts are not really “read” but only looked at, grasped by the eye, but the impact will be just as strong in this visual knowledge and will in any case create a situation of emotional identification and participation, since an Armenian can hardly be indifferent to the presence of the signs of his alphabet. This, in turn, affects the importance attached to everything written, which contributes to the preservation and spread of Armenian.

I therefore consider it interesting to analyze how the alphabet is used in public and private spaces through the image of its table reproduced on different surfaces, which becomes a recurring decorative component with symbolic and aesthetic value, as well as through many other objects, spaces and monuments inscribed with Armenian characters and used exemplarily. In this way, the importance of written objects and the inscription of places in the processes of “symbolic cultivation”¹¹ of Armenian identity in the diaspora becomes clear: they

¹⁰ PETRUCCI, *Prima lezione di Paleografia*, 52.

¹¹ SMITH, *Ethnosymbolism and Nationalism*.

are models for the appropriation of space by this culture, act as “context markers”¹² and allow us to see writing as an activity that is dense with identity-creating and ideological meanings and that sometimes also leads to the production of certain artifacts. It is therefore important to try to locate inscriptions and written objects in their anthropological reality: to grasp their function and use without forgetting the meaning they have for people, and not to isolate them from their wider cultural-historical context. In fact, every act of writing can produce effects when read, and these effects cannot be reduced to the transmission of the written message alone, but result from the way in which a statement is presented to the reader:¹³ in the Armenian case, as we shall see, reading is not always understood as a phonetic decipherment of the letters, but often consists in a mere visualization of their presence, which in any case conveys a message of cultural identity. Through the aesthetic form of the letters, their positioning in space and the characteristics of what they cover, we learn how the Armenian community perceives their writing as an inalienable link to their original homeland, which in most cases is only imagined and never visited in the course of their lives: It is precisely because of the level of imagination generated by emotions that people need effective, immediate symbols.

The analysis of writing in relation to public and private space draws attention to the written elements of an environment and the way in which inscriptions constitute, control and delimit it. Furthermore, writing can be viewed from two sides: from the perspective of the reader and “consumer” and from the perspective of those who commission certain inscriptions or create certain written objects. In this way, we can find a partial answer to the two questions we pose from the perspective of the anthropology of writing: “What do we do with writing? And what does it make us do?”¹⁴

The Armenian spaces of the city thus come directly into the citizen's field of vision and trigger a kind of mechanism of approach, of interest in them. From the reader's point of view, they catch the eye and invite the passer-by, the observer,¹⁵ whose “visual sense” was stimulated to decipher it. The choice of language reveals a lot about people's sense of identity and their target group. In this context, it is important to keep in mind the fact that the context in which Armenians move is that of a city that is not Armenian, but Bulgarian, and that therefore the inscription of the space is also a way of symbolically appropriating a place, of giving it its own cultural marker that makes it visibly “different” compared to the rest of the city. The ideal

¹² BATESON, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 335-337

¹³ FRAENKEL, “Writing acts: when writing is doing”, 36.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ MC LUHAN, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 6.

audience of Armenian scripts is therefore not only the members of the community, but also from the outside, from anyone observing a space where something about another cultural identity is obviously conveyed through the immediacy of a different writing system.

The Armenian graveyard: what the graves tell us

“The inequalities among men, produced by the control always and in every case exercised over the social use of writing, were and are so manifold that one may be excluded from it. This proves true not only with regards to the direct practices of writing and reading, but also(...) on the occasion of the final event of individual existence, death. .Indeed,even in the face of death, the practical achievements, the places and forms of representation, their ideology and their languages continue to reveal (...) differences in culture, social class and income; so that , (...) written death continues to highlight differences.”¹⁶

When we look at writing in the context of the cemetery, it is important to keep in mind that this place is both public and private, in a sense it stands at the intersection of both, and because this very reason it is extremely interesting for the study of the practices of writing and self-representation embedded in the broader context of the positive ideology of literacy in the Armenian language promoted by the community in various ways. In short, it is a place where we can reconstruct the ways in which certain ideologies took hold early on, and where we can get practical feedback. So here we also take the side of those who receive such ideological messages and react to them more or less positively and accordingly.

Since the cemetery is a place where the public and the private meet, we can focus here on the interaction between the “cultural elites” and the other sections of the population in order to analyze how the ideals and messages disseminated by the former contribute to creating a sense of national identity and practical achievements among the people. The motive for the use of symbolic resources is in fact the willingness to support ideologies and collective actions¹⁷.

Nations require ethno-cultural resources to create themselves as supportive communities, especially given the crucial importance of the subjective dimension for a sense of national identity: in the Armenian case, the written language is precisely once again a medium in which much capital from symbolic value¹⁸ is concentrated.

In order to study written culture understood in a broad sense for the Armenian community, it is important not to overlook any area in which it manifests itself “publicly.” In

¹⁶ PETRUCCI, *Prima lezione di Paleografia*. 46.

¹⁷ SMITH, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism*, 16.

¹⁸ BOURDIEU, “Social Space and Symbolic Power”.

the interview conducted with Rupen Chavushian, then president of the Parekordzagan/AGBU in Plovdiv,¹⁹ it emerged how such a place is of relevance to both writing and reading the Armenian alphabet. The Armenian cemetery is not separate from the general cemetery but is exclusively Armenian, the only in Bulgaria. There is also a small church built thanks to the charity of donors, at the entrance of which there is an inscription in both Armenian and Bulgarian:

“Everything is written in Armenian as you see, here this is an important thing because people write it down and so that way they exercise on the written language, to read the names. It is the most beautiful cemetery in Plovdiv. Here is the grave of our Tiutiundjian people who made our school. This fact of our cemetery is important because you can find so many inscriptions and everyone can read them”.²⁰

Mr. Chavushian highlights a fundamental fact here: namely, the fact that the graves are important not only for writing, but above all for reading (and thus presuppose an audience), both in the place where they are located and on the website he maintains: some of them even find virtual space on the website of the Plovdiv branch of the Armenian organization AGBU. Upon entering the cemetery, even before glancing at the graves, one immediately notices the proliferation of Armenian inscriptions: two further lengthy inscriptions appear on the inside of the door (which would then serve as the exit), exclusively in Armenian, as well as on the outer walls of the small church, where various engraved plaques, also bilingual, commemorate significant events such as the construction of the building in 1924 in memory of the Tomasian family. Another plaque in front of the ritual hall reminds us that this room was built to commemorate the victims of the Armenian genocide 80 years after the tragedy in 1995.²¹

While exploring the tombs and their inscriptions, I immediately notice something very significant: By reading the inscriptions, we can gain a wealth of information — not so much about the names of those who lie there, but rather about how history influences the way they are written, precisely through the use of the alphabet and the choice of script. There are some graves that look very old and have a big impact on the viewer; they're really aesthetically pleasing - the oldest ones are from the 1880s, when the cemetery actually opened. All the graves from this early period have inscriptions written exclusively in Armenian characters.

¹⁹ SELVELLI, “The role of the newspaper Parekordzagani Tzain and its related institutions in the preservation of language and identity in the Armenian community of Plovdiv”

²⁰ Personal interview to Mr. Rupen Chavushian, November 2010

²¹ SELVELLI, “Preserving the Postmemory of the Genocide: The Armenian Diaspora’s Institutions in Plovdiv”



Figure 1. Gravestone of the Hindlian family with inscription in Armenian script, Plovdiv Armenian Cemetery.

The grave above belongs to the Hindlian family, which is the same historic Plovdiv family of merchants who named a street in the upper town and whose house is preserved as a museum in this part of the city.

I have read that there are graves inscribed in Turkish using Armenian characters in Bulgaria²². Unfortunately, I must admit that I have not managed to find or identify them, which I consider a great pity, as they would be extremely relevant to my study. Among the newer tombs, I notice one with a bilingual Armenian–Bulgarian inscription: the family name in Bulgarian is *Arsenian*, but in Armenian it appears as *Arsentzan*. How can it be, I wonder, that the two inscriptions are not transliterated consistently?

Analyzing the photo taken some time later, I realize that the only possible and consequential explanation is the following: the person who executed the Armenian inscription must not have known it that well, because it seems obvious that he mixed up the letters Յ with Յ, since they may vaguely resemble each other, though only in their capitalized form. The engraver evidently did not know Armenian well.

²² MICEVA, *Armencite v Balgarija*, 154.



Figure 2. The Arsenian Family Grave.

This impresses me greatly, and in pondering what such a fact might entail, I come across a note in the Mc Luhan book, in which it is stated that gothic writing is difficult to read: “it is as if the written page was to be looked at and not read.”²³

May it be the same case for Armenian writing for the Plovdiv diaspora community? By whom then should it be looked at? By someone, as is the case with most Plovdiv Armenians, who cannot instantly decipher the Armenian alphabet correctly, otherwise they would immediately notice the error. Thus a certain type of “audience” is assumed: the “engraved” word is thus the harbinger of an intense and visually oriented awareness.

For this reason, we are by no means in a situation in which the alphabet is used for the pure purpose of phonetic transcription, as should be its main function according to classical Aristotelian and Augustinian doctrine,²⁴ that is: letters are signs of sounds. “When it is written, it is not a word, but the sign of a word which, by presenting its letters to the reader's eyes, shows to his mind the sounds he has to make verbally. What do letters actually do if they do not show themselves to the eyes and, moreover, show words to the mind?... and thus written words (...) are to be regarded as signs of words. Words do not show themselves to the eyes through themselves, but through the signs that are their own”.²⁵ The definition of letters proposed by Augustine proceeds from an implicit phonological analysis, which forms the classical basis for the conception of written language as dependent on the orality of pronunciation. As Saussure similarly observed: “Language and writing are two distinct systems

²³ MC LUHAN, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, citing E.A.Lowe.

²⁴ TODOROV, *Teorie del simbolo*, 65.

²⁵ Ibid.

of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first.”²⁶ However, as the following examples show, in the context of the Armenian diaspora, the fundamental correspondence between sound and sign is disrupted, and another level of interpretation is imposed — namely, the symbolic one. In practice, it looks as if an ideographic aspect is recovered:²⁷ ideographic scripts transcribe thoughts (ideas), not speech, and so it seems to me that the presence of Armenian characters reveals to some extent more than sounds to be pronounced, precise ideas of Armenianness to be preserved...

Further observations on the writing choices on the gravestones

By looking carefully at the graves of the Armenian ancestors we can thus deduct many important information on the symbolic use of language for this minority community throughout its recent history.

In another case, the same Յ character, that earlier in its capital lettering had been confused with Յ is rendered in its lowercase form, but in the wrong context because the rest of the word is instead in capital letters. It is rendered in its lowercase form “յ” but in capital letters as “J,” thus a letter that is not present in the Armenian alphabet. It follows that the person who made the engraving - we cannot know whether he/she was an Armenian or not - did not know the correct form of the letter. This was also the case with the stonemasons of classical antiquity, who were craftsmen and not philologists and therefore made mistakes, even if it was only when copying proposed models. In any case, this seems to me to confirm once again that knowledge of the alphabet is usually very imperfect, but does not hinder its practical application. From this observation I draw the conclusion how much we are in the realm of self-representation practices in the visual realm and that the cemetery is not a neutral space, but is charged with the will to impose a sign on visitors. And so, in this context too, the Armenian alphabet proves to be a strong symbol of identity that people often cannot and do not want to escape - even if they may not know it.

In the case of the already-mentioned grave, there is another very interesting detail that this time refers not only to the final part of the typical Armenian surname “ian.” The spelling of a surname in 1962 (written as “Sop’taian”²⁸) and 1980 (as “Soft’aian,” the correct version of the surname, derived from the Ottoman title “softa”) do not match: On the first inscription,

²⁶ SAUSSURE, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 23.

²⁷ See SELVELLI, *The Alphabet of Discord*, 182, 271 for a similar consideration in relation to the use of the Glagolitic alphabet by Croats in contemporary times.

²⁸ From the Ottoman title “Softa” (Sukhta), an undergraduate in a madrasa.

the letter “Փ” was used instead of the letter “Ֆ” This can be explained not only by the vague similarity of the letters in their capitalization in Armenian, but also and especially by the fact that this Armenian letter, pronounced as /ph/, matches in its graphic form with the Bulgarian letter, which is read as /f/. It is the same letter, namely “Փ” in uppercase form, a letter that comes from the Greek alphabet. This probably led to a confusion in the first person responsible for engraving this surname.

Furthermore, in the second spelling from 1980, when the Soviet Eastern Armenian spelling had already been introduced among the Bulgarian Armenian community, the letter “Գ” (pronounced as /t/ in Western Armenian) is replaced by the aspirated /th/ “Թ” (in both Western and Eastern Armenian), although the reasons for this are unclear. If the intention in 1980 was to comply with the rules of Soviet Armenian orthography, then “Գ” should have been replaced by the letter “Տ,” which is read as a non- aspirated /t/ in Eastern Armenian.

A dense graphic history can emerge from a single marble testimony, since technique, ideology and practice coexist and influence each other on all levels. As a consequence, it is possible to find three different spellings of the typical ending of the Armenian surname “-ian” on one and the same gravestone: once with the letter "յ" (+ “an”) (again incorrectly with a lowercase letter), another time correctly with the letter "Յ" (+ “an”) in capital letters according to Soviet orthography and finally another time with the letter "Ե" (+ “an”) according to the current (post-socialist) orthography of Western Armenian.



Figure 3. The Softaian Family Grave.

Armenian writing seems to position itself in this field as a kind of “context marker”, in the sense that it is clearly deemed necessary to make Armenian identity immediately visible to visitors to the site: a message conveyed by the form that remains engraved on the stones, thus exemplifying the permanence of letters in contrast to the transience of sounds.²⁹

Letters thus allow us to distance ourselves from the construction of the “now” that weighs on the spoken word, and writing enables us to take into account not only the “other time” but also the “other space.” Writing was also invented to be able to communicate with the absent, and it is defined by its complicity with absence. In the Armenian case of the diaspora, absence is also the absence from and of the territory understood as the nation-state, and in the cemetery, of course, the absence of the people who are no longer there.

In a way, then, writing plays the role of connecting, of creating passages between worlds, between spaces and times, which can thus communicate. It is appropriate to consider writing practices in a given alphabet as the result of the interaction between writing technologies and ideologies of literacy, which are themselves part of a larger ideological system that constitutes political, economic and cultural systems of thought. Certain ideological foundations can initially determine the respective technical and linguistic principles: in this case, the Armenian alphabetic system or the Bulgarian Cyrillic system.

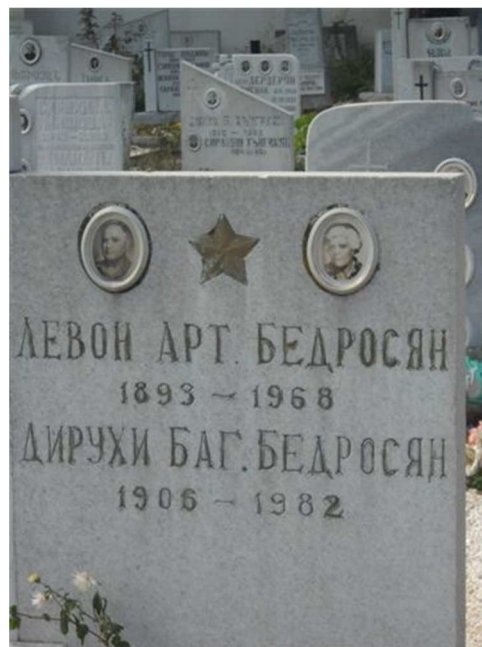


Figure 4. The Bedrosian Family Grave.

²⁹ In his *De doctrina christiana*, Saint Augustine stated: "Since sounds disappear immediately after passing through the air and do not survive their reverberation, their signs have been fixed by letters" cited in TODOROV, *Teorie del simbolo*, 66

It is interesting, for example, that on the graves associated with the times of the peak of Bulgarian communist repression of minorities a red star can be seen are written only in Bulgarian Cyrillic script. Writing is obviously a communicative technology: its transfer of language into a visual form always has a significant impact on society. The visualization of language and its reification in text promotes certain values and ideologies rather than others: In this case, it was perhaps important to show the writing in Bulgarian and to use the communist star during the critical years of the regime's violation of minority rights (including the ones of the Armenian minority in Plovdiv, who suffered the closure of its school) of minorities. In this case, we can contextualize such decisions in the years of communist ideologies: perhaps the owners of this gravestone wanted to show their willingness to write in Bulgarian and to use the red star as a strong political symbol.

“Changes in the signs are the signs of change,” Petrucci quotes Malcolm Parkes as stating: in fact, each of the graphic systems has its own more or less long history, characterized by modifications, adaptations and sometimes outright graphic revolutions. All these phenomena are symptoms and consequences of profound social, economic and cultural changes.³⁰

Certainly, new practices can emerge from the interaction between technological developments and existing ideologies.³¹ For example, today new modes of literacy are developing in the context of Internet technologies, and they are changing to some extent the perceptions that young Armenians have of their endangered language.

Inside the cemetery, in addition to the graves, there is an extremely important element, namely a memorial to the victims of the genocide. This monument is truly impressive, and at its base there is a plaque bearing Armenian inscriptions on three of its four sides. Unfortunately, two of the three inscriptions are quite weathered, making them difficult to decipher, apart from the name of the famous Soviet Armenian poet, Silva Kaputikian. Nevertheless, the visual impact remains striking. On the best-preserved plaque we read the names of the Anatolian towns from which the Armenians were physically eliminated (Urfa, Muş, and others).

On the fourth side, however, there is an inscription in Bulgarian: “In memory of the 1.5 million Armenians from Turkey and Western Armenia who died on the path of forced exile due to the barbaric persecutions from 1915 to 1918.”

³⁰ PETRUCCI, *Prima lezione di Paleografia*.

³¹ FIELD, "Literacy and language ideologies in a European situation of language loss", 97.

Remembrance here is inevitably linked to writing. The graves of the ancestors of the Armenians of Plovdiv represent the signs of a history that cannot be forgotten, as most of them are descended from those who had to leave their homeland forever: a place where the meaning of memory is even more palpable: I would say memory upon memory. These memories truly consecrate the cemetery; the memories of each individual contribute to the sacredness of the place. Individual feelings for deceased loved ones combine with the collective suffering that materializes in the Genocide memorial, in which everyone recognizes a part of themselves and feels Armenian.



Figure 5. One of the four sides of the Armenian Genocide Memorial at the graveyard.

These sites can be seen as particularly important places of inscription, because it is around and through them that memory asserts itself and presents itself as an instrument for strengthening the bonds of a social community.³² This also confirms the importance of symbols and rituals in the construction and maintenance of national and ethnic identities.³³ Indeed, ethnic communities can survive in a form similar to their original one if the succeeding generations of their members continue to identify with the enduring memories, symbols and

³² LINKE, "Collective Memory. Anthropology of".

³³ SMITH, *Ethnosymbolism and Nationalism*.

traditions.³⁴ Ethnic survival does not require the maintenance of an intact culture or even a homeland, as the case of the Armenians shows, but the exercise of a particular memory.³⁵

Conclusions

As anthropologist Giorgio Raimondo Cardona has stated³⁶, since writing is in direct contact with thought, it can acquire some of its power: propositional, active, creative, depending on the ideologies that underlie it. In the case of Armenians, the strongest ideology the one linked to the memory of the past and to the exercise of an ethnic and cultural memory. Thus, in the case of Armenians in the diaspora, writing conveys not only communicative but also of a highly symbolic nature, which are a suitable subject for anthropological investigation.

According to Barth's theory, an ethnic group also defines itself in relation to others, and in the case of the Armenians of Plovdiv, I believe that identity is defined through interaction with the Bulgarians, who incidentally represent the great assimilationist threat. However, I would like to add that this is also the case with another minority, the Turks, with whom the Armenians do not want to be confused. In both cases, the alphabet proves to be extremely important and helpful. For even in the past, Armenians defined their ethnic identity in a "Barthian" way through their alphabet, using it as a "mark of distinctiveness," a symbolic and defensive barrier that separated them from other groups with whom they risked being mixed up if they did not have their own script.

The alphabet represents a symbol of the antiquity of the Armenians, and it is at the same time also the instrument through which they brought forth their uniqueness and distinction, their being a "chosen people": its characters were and continue to be, therefore, symbols that bind them to God.³⁷ It is presented as an element of the ethnic configuration invested with symbolic meaning, made the object of symbolization also and especially because it has the task of making ethnicity appear as an "eternal" entity³⁸.

Such factors must be taken into account when we try to reconstruct the desired effects of the so-called acts of writing, as they are to be interpreted as significant cultural processes: writing politics are not a sterile act, but is meant to disseminate values, to convince people of the merits of the institutions' (in this case Armenian) policies and their essential function for

³⁴ SMITH, "Chosen Peoples: Why ethnic groups survive".

³⁵ FABIETTI, *L'identità etnica*.

³⁶ CARDONA, "Introduzione", 5.

³⁷ SMITH, "The power of ethnic traditions in the modern world", 329.

³⁸ FABIETTI, *L'identità etnica*, 150.

community cohesion. It is part of visual strategies, using central places of exposure to pursue a communicative policy aimed at both the literate and illiterate population³⁹. This explains the importance of the visibility of the Armenian language and its writing system in Armenian memory and in Armenian identity practices in the multiethnic and multilingual context of the city of Plovdiv, despite the limited knowledge of writing and reading in this language on the part of the speakers in everyday life.

The importance that the Armenian writing has for Armenians all over the world is reflected in the enormous value attached not only to books and manuscripts, but also to all monuments and works of art that can bear its traces and manifest its presence in history and space, since it is a writing system of its own and unique. The enemies of the Armenian people seem to be well aware of this, because the first thing they do after occupying a site is to erase the Armenian inscriptions in the Armenian monuments in that site. Several examples can be cited of the relatively recent attempts by Azeris and Turks to destroy evidence of Armenian identity from historical monuments⁴⁰.

Anthony Smith's ethno-symbolist approach⁴¹ argues that cultural elements such as symbols, myths and memories are as much a part of a people's social reality as any other material or organizational factor: in fact, social reality is inconceivable without symbolism. He emphasizes how wrong it is to present the “symbolic” to people as something purely constructed from the outside, because it is rather part of their inner world, and that is why elites and intellectual constructors of national discourse use these elements to achieve an emotional involvement of community members.

Symbols and myths ensure a certain degree of collective consciousness, if not cohesion, in times of crisis and change by providing the community with a symbolic repertoire that helps it to distinguish itself from other similar communities in the eyes of its members and outsiders. At the same time, this shared symbolic tradition continues to define the community and ensures a sense of continuity with previous generations.

³⁹ BEROUJON, “Lawful and unlawful writings in Lyon in seventeenth century”, 194.

⁴⁰ MAKSOUDIAN, *History of the Armenian Alphabet and Literature*, 129, as well as the recent cases of destruction of Armenian heritage in Artsakh by Azerbaijani forces.

⁴¹ SMITH, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism*, 25.

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Rekonstrukce identity žen uprchlých před válkou z Ukrajiny

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Andrea Preissová Krejčí je odbornou asistentkou na Ústavu veřejné správy a sociální politiky Fakulty veřejných politik Slezské univerzity v Opavě, kde se věnuje výuce multikulturní výchovy, antropologie, sociální práce s menšinami a diplomových seminářů. Ve své vědecké činnosti se dlouhodobě zaměřuje na témata identity, sociální exkluze, multikulturalismu, krajanských komunit a vzdělávání dětí uprchlíků. Publikuje v českých i zahraničních recenzovaných časopisech, spolupracuje na mezioborových projektech a je autorkou či spoluautorkou několika odborných monografií, zejména k problematice české menšiny v Chorvatsku.

Abstract

In the Czech Republic, there is regularly updated quantitative data on temporary protection holders from Ukraine, which gives us a fairly good overview of their age, gender or economic activity. However, it does not allow us to understand the complexity of the processes and changes taking place in the lives of individual refugees. We therefore focused our attention on the stories of women who fled the war in Ukraine and who found refuge in the Czech Republic. Using qualitative research methods, we recorded and analyzed 15 narratives in which we trace the transformation of the identity of the female narrators, consisting in the deconstruction of their existing identity—national (e.g., related to the Russian language), social (related to education and occupational prestige) and class (related to economic status) and the construction of a new identity of a refugee. We identify aspects of this new identity that enable refugees to experience feelings of acceptance and belonging in their new society, from newly constructed social networks and community life to support in their current place of residence provided by work colleagues, neighbours or others who help them adapt to their new environment and life roles.

Abstrakt

V ČR máme k dispozici pravidelně aktualizovaná kvantitativní data o držitelích dočasné ochrany z Ukrajiny, která nám poskytují poměrně dobrý přehled o jejich věku, pohlaví či ekonomické činnosti. Neumožňují nám však pochopit složitost procesů a změn, které se odehrávají v životech jednotlivých uprchlíků. Svou pozornost jsme proto zaměřili na příběhy žen, které uprchly před válkou na Ukrajině a které našly útočiště v ČR. Pomocí metod kvalitativního výzkumu jsme zaznamenali a analyzovali 15 narací, v nichž sledujeme proměnu identity našich narátorek, spočívající v dekonstrukci jejich dosavadní identity – národní (např. spojené s ruským jazykem), společenské (ve vazbě na vzdělání a prestiž povolání) i třídní (související s ekonomickým postavením) – a konstrukci identity nové – identity uprchlíka. Identifikujeme aspekty, které uprchlicím v této nové identitě umožňují zažívat pocity přijetí a sounáležitosti v nové společnosti, od nově vybudovaných sociálních sítí a komunitního života až po podporu v místě jejich současného bydliště poskytovanou kolegy v práci, sousedy či dalšími osobami, které jim pomáhají v adaptaci na nové prostředí a životní role.

Klíčová slova

migrace, rodina, dočasná ochrana, pracovní trh, nejistota, životní aspirace

Úvod

Tento výzkum vychází z hluboce osobních výpovědí žen, které opustily domov kvůli válce. V jejich zkušenostech se odráží obecnější otázky přináležitosti, rekonstrukce sebeobrazu a každodenní snahy o stabilitu. Cílem této studie není pouze popsat změnu identity, ale i ukázat, jak tato změna probíhá v konkrétním společenském kontextu, včetně možností i překážek integrace.

24. února 2022 došlo k vojenské agresí a invazi Ruska na Ukrajinu. Následkem těchto událostí z Ukrajiny v následujících dnech, týdnech a měsících emigrovalo mnoho milionů obyvatel. Dočasná ochrana je nástroj Evropské unie, který je upraven směrnicí Rady o dočasné ochraně 2001/55/ES. Jedná se o krizový mechanismus EU, který se aktivuje za výjimečných okolností v případě hromadného přílivu osob s cílem poskytnout jim kolektivní ochranu a zmírnit tlak na vnitrostátní azylové systémy zemí EU.¹ EU aktivovala mechanismus dočasné ochrany pro uprchlíky z Ukrajiny v březnu 2022. Naposledy byl mechanismus prodloužen do 4. března 2026. Aktuálně je v EU registrováno 4,49 milionu uprchlíků z Ukrajiny k dočasné ochraně.²

K 31.12.2024 bylo v České republice evidováno celkem 388 067 aktivních registrací dočasných ochran. Celkově vydaných dočasných ochran bylo za období od začátku konfliktu (24. 2. 2022) do 6. 10. 2024 celkem 651 457. Česká republika je dlouhodobě státem EU, který hostí nejvíce ukrajinských uprchlíků v přepočtu na velikost populace. V září 2024 jich v zemi bylo přibližně 35 na každých 1000 obyvatel, tvořice tak v České republice 3,5 % populace.

Nicméně Ukrajinci v České republice žijí i s přechodným (92 843) a trvalým pobytem (108 546), takže v součtu k 31.12.2024 žilo na území republiky 589 456 občanů Ukrajiny z celkově 1 094 090 cizích státních příslušníků. Tvoří tedy nejpočetnější cizineckou komunitu.

Většinu uprchlíků tvořily ženy a děti, mezi všemi držiteli dočasné ochrany tvoří aktuálně (k 6. 10. 2024) ženy 61 % a muži 39 %, z nich je 28 % dětí (do 18 let) a 4 % seniorů (65+).³ Podobně je tomu v celé Evropě. Výzkum realizovaný v minulém roce na vzorku uprchlíků

¹ Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky: *Čtvrtletní zpráva o migraci za III. čtvrtletí 2024*. [online] [2025-02-01]. <https://mv.gov.cz/migrace/clanek/ctvrtletni-zprava-o-migraci-za-iii-ctvrtleti-2024.aspx>.

² Evropská rada/Rada Evropské unie: *Jak EU pomáhá uprchlíkům z Ukrajiny*. [online] [2025-02-01]. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/cs/policies/refugee-inflow-from-ukraine/#0>.

³ Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky: *Čtvrtletní zpráva o migraci za III. čtvrtletí 2024*. [online] [2025-02-01]. <https://mv.gov.cz/migrace/clanek/ctvrtletni-zprava-o-migraci-za-iii-ctvrtleti-2024.aspx>.

z Ukrajiny napříč zeměmi EU, zachytil v demografickém popisu vzorku tyto události: 81 % z uprchlíků byly ženy, tyto měly průměrně 39 let, tedy byly z většiny v produktivním věku a 68 % z nich mělo ukončeno terciální vzdělání, tedy vysokoškolský diplom, více než polovina z nich uprchla s jedním a více dětmi, jejichž průměrný věk byl deset let a 20 % z nich doprovází senioři. Tento výzkum realizovaný organizacemi EUAA a OECD v polovině roku 2023 na více než třech tisících respondentech jednoznačně odpovídá také české populaci uprchlíků z Ukrajiny.⁴

Většina ukrajinských uprchlíků v České republice žije ve velkých městech, zejména v Praze, Brně a Plzni, a převážně se jedná o ekonomicky aktivní a vysoce kvalifikované osoby. Podle údajů Českého statistického úřadu (ČSÚ) bylo k 31. prosinci 2023 v České republice evidováno 320 042 pracujících občanů Ukrajiny, z toho 285 545 osob v zaměstnaneckém poměru a 34 497 osob podnikajících na základě živnostenského oprávnění.⁵

Mezinárodní organizace pro migraci (IOM) zveřejnila souhrnnou zprávu za rok 2023 o socioekonomické situaci uprchlíků z Ukrajiny v České republice, výzkum, z něhož vychází je založen na analýze dotazníkového šetření s více než pěti tisíci respondenty ze všech krajů České republiky, včetně Prahy. Respondenty byly z 80 % ženy, 46 % z nich má alespoň jedno dítě, 39 % z nich se stará alespoň o jednu osobu s vážným zdravotním postižením a 28 % je osobou starší 60 let nebo s ní žije. Skupina byla rozdělena na pracující a nezaměstnané, mezi pracujícími byli zastoupeni ze 48 % vysokoškolsky vzdělané osoby, u nezaměstnaných pak až z 51 %. Výzkum ukázal, že 49 % respondentů v produktivním věku mělo ukončené terciární, tedy vysokoškolské vzdělání. Ukrajínští uprchlíci v České republice však často pracují na špatně placených manuálních pozicích, které neodpovídají jejich dosažené kvalifikaci. Až 68 % ukrajinských uprchlic, které před odchodem působily jako manažerky či odbornice, pracuje v České republice pod úrovní své kvalifikace; u mužů jde o 50 %. V době šetření bylo 77 % respondentů ve věku 18–64 let ekonomicky aktivních (zaměstnaných nebo aktivně hledajících práci), zatímco 23 % bylo ekonomicky neaktivních. Z této skupiny neaktivních respondentů více než polovina (57 %) uvedla, že se stará o jiné členy rodiny — děti, seniory či osoby se

⁴ EUAA: *Asylum Report 2024* (2024). [online] [2025-02-01].

https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2024-06/2024_Asylum_Report_EN.pdf.

EUAA/OECD: *Voices in Europe: Experiences, hopes and aspirations of forcibly displaced persons from Ukraine* (2024). [online] [2025-02-01]. https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2024-03/2024_03_05_Voices_in_Europe.pdf.

⁵ ČSÚ: *Zaměstnaní (MPSV, MPO) a bydlící (ŘSCP) cizinci podle státní příslušnosti k 31.12.2023*. [online] [2025-02-01]. https://csu.gov.cz/docs/107508/05742040-44ca-1f91-bbd5-b2959aa5a726/290027240304.pdf?version=1.0&utm_source=chatgpt.com.

zdravotním postižením.⁶ Zajímavým zjištěním je, že Ukrajinci mají mezi zaměstnanými cizinci v České republice nejnižší medián hrubé měsíční mzdy. Medián hrubé mzdy českých zaměstnanců činil 39 421 Kč, zatímco u nejpočetněji zastoupených skupin cizinců byly hodnoty následující: Ukrajinci 31 308 Kč, Bulhaři 36 748 Kč, Rumuni 37 089 Kč, Poláci 38 827 Kč a Slováci 45 377 Kč.⁷ Další šetření provedla společnost PAQ Research,⁸ Výzkum ukazuje, že mezi ukrajinskými uprchlíky v České republice existují výrazné rozdíly v pracovní aktivitě v závislosti na znalosti českého jazyka. Mezi těmi, kteří ovládají češtinu, pracuje 70 % respondentů; pokud uprchlíci znají alespoň základní úroveň jazyka, pracuje 51 % z nich; zatímco mezi těmi, kteří češtinu neovládají vůbec, je zaměstnaných pouze 38 %. Znalost češtiny tedy výrazně zvyšuje šanci na pracovní uplatnění i na výkon kvalifikovanějších profesí. Lucie Macková a kol. poukazuje na to, že ukrajinští uprchlíci často přijímají zaměstnání pod úrovní své kvalifikace, což u mnohých vedlo k profesnímu sestupu, prověřilo jejich odolnost a změnilo jejich životní aspirace, přičemž tento proces byl často provázen individuální ontologickou nejistotou. Autoři shrnují, že sociálně-ekonomický status ukrajinských uprchlíků je podmíněn kombinací jazykových dovedností, uznáním dosaženého vzdělání, rodinnou situací a schopností zotavit se z napětí a traumat prožitých před útekem, během něj i v exilu. Tyto faktory pak významně ovlivňují jejich rozhodování o setrvání v České republice nebo návratu na Ukrajinu.⁹

Tento článek se zaměřuje na ukrajinské ženy, které často v roli matek či samoživitelek vstoupily v exilu na český pracovní trh a více či méně úspěšně se adaptovaly na nové životní role. Navazuje na předchozí studie, jež analyzovaly migrační zkušenost ukrajinských uprchlíků v České republice, jejich aspirace, ambice a životní plány v nové zemi, včetně aspirací jejich dětí.¹⁰

⁶ IOM: *Česko: Socioekonomická situace ukrajinských uprchlíků: Zpráva za rok 2023*. [online] [2025-02-01].

⁷ Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí České republiky: *Informace a statistiky o průměrném výdělku*. 1. pololetí 2024. [online] [2025-02-01]. https://www.mpsv.cz/documents/20142/636498/ISPV_242_MZS.pdf.

⁸ PAQ research: *Hlas Ukrajinců: Práce, bydlení, chudoba a znalost češtiny*. [online] [2025-02-01].

https://www.paqresearch.cz/content/files/2023/02/Hlas_Ukrajinc-_Bydlen-_Pr-ce_P--jmy_Jazyk_oprava.pdf.

⁹ MACKOVÁ, Lucie – MEDOVÁ, Nikola – FRLIČKOVÁ, Barbora – JIRKA, Luděk: 'The plan is no plan': Ontological security and resilience of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech labour market. In: *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, roč. 61, č. 1 (2025), s. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2024.024>.

¹⁰ KAMIONKA Mateusz – MACKOVÁ, Lucie – JIRKA, Luděk: "Fear for children", Mother-Child Dyad and Future Mobility Trajectories of Displaced Ukrainians in Czechia and Poland: Children as a Factor for Fleeing and Living after the Full-Scale Invasion. In: *Migraciones*, č. 61 (2024), s. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.14422/mig.2024.027>.

MACKOVÁ, Lucie – MEDOVÁ, Nikola – FRLIČKOVÁ, Barbora – JIRKA, Luděk: 'The plan is no plan': Ontological security and resilience of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech labour market, s. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2024.024>.

HLAĐO, Petr – ŠEĐOVÁ, Klára – OBROVSKÁ, J. a kol.: *Adaptace ukrajinských žáků na vzdělávání v českých základních školách*. Studie SYRI, 2023. [online] [2025-02-]

Zaměříme se na popis životních strategií, které naše narátorky využívají ke zvládnutí integračních procesů v České republice, dále na rekonstrukci jejich identity ovlivněné migrační zkušeností a na zachycení životních aspirací uprchlíků po téměř třech letech strávených v exilu.

Teoretická východiska

Identita

Sociální vědy, jako jsou kulturní a sociální antropologie, kulturní studia a další, pokládají od 90. let identitu za kulturní či sociální konstrukt. Je paradigmaticky přijímáno, že osobnost se utváří v procesu enkulturace – identita tedy nese diskurzivně-performativní charakter. „Existovat jako osobnost neznamena vlastnit nadčasovou podstatu, ale spíše schopnost plastičnosti, proměnlivosti a specifické reakce na sociální a kulturní kontext.“¹¹ Přidržíme se antiesencialistického modelu, který zdůrazňuje, že identita je dynamickým procesem bez ustálené podoby. Identitu nelze chápat jako odhalení nadčasové podstaty; je spíše vystavěna na podobnostech a odlišnostech vůči druhým. Stejnost a difference, základní prvky konceptu identity, jsou sociálními konstrukty. „Identita je průběžně posouvající se popis nás samotných.“¹² Není třeba hledat jednotící či určující identitu; základ naší osobnosti tvoří spíše proměnlivé, posouvající se, mnohačetné či roztržité identity. Identita je dynamická: její jednotlivé vrstvy a složky vznikají a proměňují se po celý život svého nositele. Nové životní události nás často nutí naši identitu redefinovat. Identita je zároveň mnohvrstevnatá – kategorie, s nimiž se během života identifikujeme, mohou být definovány různým způsobem: genderově, etnicky, národnostně, sociálně či nábožensky. Průnik těchto kategorií utváří naši komplexní identitu. Identita je rovněž hybridní: dítě vyrůstající v multikulturním prostředí, například v důsledku odlišného etnického původu rodičů, může sdílet dvojí nebo smíšenou identitu.¹³ Stejně tak ani přistěhovalci nemusí opustit svou původní identitu, mohou zůstat loajální a solidární k zemi svého původu, k etnické či národní příslušnosti, a přesto na základě nové zkušenosti, zkušenosti spojené s migračními procesy, se jejich identita transformuje. Mluvíme o transnacionální identitě přistěhovalců, tyto „mohou mít vysoce partikularistický

01]. <https://www.syri.cz/data/uploadHTML/files/PUBLIKACE/adaptace-ukrajinsky-zaku-na-vzdelavani-v-ceskych-zakladnich-skolach-syri.pdf>.

BITTNEROVÁ, Dana: Kritické temporality: Vzdělávací trajektorie dětí uprchlíků z Ukrajiny. In: *Národopisná revue*, roč. 34, č. 2 (2024), s. 79–90. <https://doi.org/10.62800/NR.2024.2.01>.

¹¹ BARKER, Chris: *Slovník kulturních studií*. Praha: Portál, 2006, s. 75.

¹² Tamtéž.

¹³ MOREE, Dana: *Základy interkulturního soužití*. Praha: Portál, 2015.

charakter, nemusí přesahovat národní, etnické a náboženské identity, tyto jedinečné identity pouze propojují do souběžně existující konstelace vztahů transnacionálních sociálních polí.“¹⁴

Od skupinové příslušnosti se navíc odvíjí také individuální sebe-pojetí. Je to právě skupinová identita, která lidem poskytuje jakési ontologické bezpečí, neboť zakořenění do skupiny, s kterou nás často pojí společná historie nebo jazyk apod. nám slibuje překonání konečnosti individuální existence.¹⁵ Etnická identita je pak chápána jako určitý „imperativní status, připsaný aspekt osobnosti, z něhož se nelze zcela vyvázat.“¹⁶ Eriksen se však domnívá, že stejně jako je v Listině základních práv a svobod uvedeno právo na národnost, měla by zahrnovat i právo se dané národnosti zřeknout.¹⁷ „Nakonec bychom měli mít na paměti, že ani etnické skupiny, ani národy nejsou věčné. Objevují se, vzkvétají a mizí.“¹⁸

Diaspora a komunita

Vyjdeme ze sociologie vědění, podobně jako Mijić Ana, která zkoumala re-konstrukce identit a sounáležitosti po nucené migraci,¹⁹ což je také náš případ. Na počátku sociologie vědění, pod kterou spadá problematika sociální konstrukce reality, stáli Peter L. Berger a Thomas Luckmann. Sociologie vědění přistupuje k lidské realitě jako k realitě vytvořené sociálně.²⁰ Mezi premisy jejich úvah patřily: Realita každodenního života je sdílena s ostatními. Tedy je intersubjektivní.²¹ Sociální řád existuje pouze jako produkt lidské činnosti.²² Tedy společnost je výtvorem člověka. Společnost je objektivní realitou. Neboť vztah mezi člověkem, společností a realitou je dialektický, je také člověk výtvorem společnosti.²³ Podobně jako Mijićová nás bude zajímat základní sociální dialektika mezi jednotlivcem a společností, tedy problematika identity a sounáležitosti, komunitního života, která se významně dotýká problematiky migrace. Avšak „všechny společenské reality jsou nejisté. Všechny společnosti jsou jen konstrukty čelící chaosu“²⁴. Lidská identita je v důsledku sdílení reality každodenního života s ostatními tvořena během sociálních procesů. „Jakmile je utvořena, je udržována, obměňována, dokonce i

¹⁴ SZALÓ, Csaba: *Transnacionální migrace: proměny identit, hranic a vědění o nich*. Brno: CDK, 2007, s. 114.

¹⁵ BARŠA, Pavel: *Národní stát a etnický konflikt. Politologická perspektiva*. Brno: CDK, 1999, s. 69.

¹⁶ ERIKSEN, Thomas Hylland: *Etnicita a nacionalismus. Antropologické perspektivy*. Praha: SLON, 2012, s. 25.

¹⁷ ERIKSEN, Thomas Hylland: *Antropologie multikulturních společností: rozumět identitě*. Praha: Triton, 2007, s. 61.

¹⁸ ERIKSEN, Thomas Hylland: *Sociální a kulturní antropologie: příbuzenství, národnostní příslušnost, rituál*. Praha: Portál, 2008, s. 350.

¹⁹ MIJIĆ, Ana: (Re-)Construction of Identity and Belonging after Forced Migration: A Sociology of Knowledge Approach. In: *Journal of Refugee Studies*, roč. 35, č. 3 (2022), s. 1107–1125. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feac020>.

²⁰ BERGER, Peter L. – LUCKMANN, Thomas: *Sociální konstrukce reality*. Praha: CDK, 2001, s. 116.

²¹ Tamtéž, s. 34.

²² Tamtéž, s. 56.

²³ Tamtéž, s. 64.

²⁴ Tamtéž, s. 104.

přebudovávána sociálními vztahy. Sociální procesy, jež se podílejí na formování i udržování identity, jsou dány sociální strukturou.“²⁵

A tak společnosti prožívají své dějiny, v jejichž průběhu vznikají určité lidské identity, avšak dějiny těchto společností jsou vytvářeny lidmi s určitou identitou.²⁶ Jak člověk otevírá sám sebe světu, jak se v něm uskutečňuje, tak také vytváří svět, v němž se uskutečňuje, stává se skutečným tvůrcem svého světa, konstruuje svůj svět a promítá do něj své vlastní významy.²⁷ Berger a Luckmann jsou přesvědčeni, že tomu tak musí být, neboť člověk nemůže existovat v nečinnosti, uzavřenosti do svého nitra. Člověk se musí neustále uplatňovat a sebepotvrzovat (externalizovat) v činnosti, otevřenost člověka světu a pro svět je jeho „antropologickou nutností“.²⁸ Z tohoto úhlu pohledu komunita a diaspora mohou poskytnout nezbytnou obranu proti chaosu a desorientaci jedince v procesu migrace i v exilu. Poskytují bezpečný přístav. Mijićová upozorňuje na to, abychom nezjednodušovali koncepty identity a sounáležitosti na národní identity (případně komunitní), na národní sounáležitost. Naopak lidé stále více žijí ve složitých, multiuzlových sociálních světech, které pokrývají více lokalit a prostředí, kultur, všechny pak ovlivňují konstrukce a reprodukci dílčích sociálních identit, v tomto ohledu hovoříme o transnacionalistickém přístupu, který zohledňuje nejrůznější formy překračování hranic národního státu nebo kolektivity.

Barša proto soudí, že moderní člověk je postupně vykořeněn, a to tou měrou, v jaké stále více lidí současného světa žije ve více světech zároveň, a z toho důvodu nejsou úplně doma v žádném. Migrant nebo příslušník menšiny, současník, je nucen neustále překračovat hranice mezi dvěma a více kulturami, které často nejsou převoditelné na společného jmenovatele.²⁹ Tzv. překračování hranic je nedílnou součástí objektivní i subjektivní reality migranta, a tedy i jeho identity. Pod těmito hranicemi rozumíme nejen hranice v prostoru a čase, ale také sociální, ekonomické, mocenské aj. Takto pojímaný transnacionalismus – jako stálé překračování hranic a životní transformace – může být významným zdrojem sebepojetí migranta a re-konstrukce jeho identity. Jak rozumět transnacionální migraci? „Když migrující překračují státní hranice, nezanechávají za sebou svůj původní domov úplně. Spíše naopak, vytvářejí a udržují přeshraniční ekonomické, politické a kulturní vazby, které propojují jejich původní a nové domovy.“³⁰

²⁵ Tamtéž, s. 170.

²⁶ Tamtéž, s. 171.

²⁷ Autoři přiznávají mimo jiné ovlivnění H. Plessnerem a A. Gehlenem.

²⁸ BERGER, Peter L. – LUCKMANN, Thomas: *Sociální konstrukce reality*, s. 56.

²⁹ BARŠA, Pavel: *Národní stát a etnický konflikt. Politologická perspektiva*, s. 171.

³⁰ SZALÓ, Csaba: *Transnacionální migrace: proměny identit, hranic a vědění o nich*, s. 25.

V demokraciích západoevropského typu se dlouhodobě mluví o tom, že členové marginalizovaných skupin, např. právě přistěhovalci, jsou vystaveni životu mezi světy, z něhož plyne také jejich podvojný sebeurčení, „tyto skupiny si z různorodých světů, v nichž žijí, vytvářejí hybridní identitu. Protože jejich kultury povstávají vždy z několika heterogenních zdrojů, sama jejich existence je vyvrácením esencialistického bludu o identitě jako ukotvené v jednoduchém a homogenním počátku.“³¹ Jiní autoři označují schopnosti jedinců nebo skupin efektivně fungovat ve dvou kulturách současně za biculturalismus. DomNwachukwu považuje „schopnost lidského rodu efektivně fungovat na více než jedné platformě za vrozenou“.³² Uvádí, že některé ženy jsou např. přirozeně zároveň učitelkami, matkami, manželkami apod., nebo že „někteří lidé mají rádi šťouchané brambory s omáčkou a krocana k večeři, a také milují sushi“. To jsou dle něj lehce prokazatelné příklady, co znamená žít bikulturně. Tyto skupiny byly z mnoha důvodů nuceny přijmout odlišná kulturní dědictví, a přitom si zachovávají svou, od většinové společnosti odlišnou totožnost. Jedinci z bikulturních komunit však mají znalosti a vzdělání z obou kulturních okruhů, „cítí se přirozeně v obou kulturách, které jim jsou vlastní, a mají silnou touhu v obou fungovat“.³³ Ve světle Bergerova a Luckmannova přístupu tito lidé zažili či zažívají dvojnásobnou primární socializaci, enkulturaci, tedy si osvojili kulturní vzorce z obou stran. Integrují se do hostitelské společnosti. Migrace je ale také významným sociálním tmelem v nové společnosti. Prožitek kolektivně sdílené zkušenosti, v tomto případě spojené s válkou a nucenou migrací, se ztrátou jejich dosavadního sociálního i ekonomického kapitálu, sociálních sítí a sounáležitosti v zemi původu, kolaps důvěry a sociálních jistot, to vše vytváří příležitost k participaci na nové kolektivně sdílené identitě diaspory. Mijićová uvádí, že pro nucené migranty z válkou postižené země, tuto sdílenou krizi v jejich životech lze popsat jako kompletní kolaps jejich světa, objektivní reality, v níž byli socializováni i jejich symbolického vesmíru. Zkušenost z rozbití jejich každodenního života na kusy sebou nese masivní pocit nejistoty. Tato sdílená zkušenost, kulturní podobnost a sdílené hodnoty pak zakládají novou představu o své identitě – konstrukci identity se zkušeností z války a migrace. Tvorba sounáležitosti s druhými, společné identity, která je založena nejen na kulturní podobnosti a

³¹ BARŠA, Pavel: *Národní stát a etnický konflikt. Politologická perspektiva*, s. 171.

³² DOMNWACHUKWU, Chinaka Samuel: *An Introduction to Multicultural Education: From Theory to Practice*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010, s. 64.

³³ MANNING, M. Lee – BARUTH, Leroy G.: *Multicultural Education of Children and Adolescents*. 5th. ed. Boston: Pearson, 2009, s. 25.

jazyce, vede k rozvoji vztahů v komunitách exulantů – uprchlíků. „Tyto vztahy mohou často sloužit jako jakési kotvy – spojení s komunitou.“³⁴

Životní aspirace

Aspirace migrantů, ať již v nich převažují kognitivní nebo emocionální podněty (individuální poznání a emoce), se primárně orientují na rozhodnutí, zda bude lépe odejít nebo zůstat. V rámci migračních studií jsou termíny „aspirace“ a „touhy“ běžně užívány jako synonyma, naproti tomu koncept „hnací síly migrace“ je analytickou kategorií, která odráží konkrétní chápání toho, jak svět funguje, nicméně tyto tři koncepty jsou propojeny, souvisí s tím, čím je migrace iniciována, jak je prožívána a reprezentována.³⁵

Podle Mackové a kol. se aspirace migrantů skládají z ambicí, postojů, očekávání, záměrů, plánů, preferencí, přání a tužeb, snů, nadějí, ale také z úvah o budoucnosti, z nejistoty, ustrnutí, čekání, představ, potřeb, závazků a ochoty migrovat.³⁶ Aspirace v sobě zahrnují jak racionální, tak emocionální složku rozhodování. Podle Carlinga J. a Collinse, F. tyto koncepty můžeme zjednodušit na „to, co migranti chtějí“.³⁷ „Válka narušila jejich životy a jejich budoucí status zůstává nejasný.“³⁸ V tomto ohledu přiblížili Macková a kol. aspekty, které uprchlíkům bránily v pocitu sounáležitosti a bezpečí, patří mezi ně i dočasnost jejich pobytu v exilu, víra v ukončení konfliktu v krátkém časovém horizontu nebo rodinná situace, to vše vyvolávalo tzv. narušení ontologické jistoty a bránilo jim vytvořit si vhodný životní plán.³⁹ Budoucí aspirace uprchlíků jsou závislé (v korelaci) na prožívané nejistotě v současnosti. „Čas/temporalita je aktér, který naviguje migranta a směřuje ho na někdy neočekávané stezky. Časové režimy, jež jsou spojeny s jeho začleňováním do struktur státu a společnosti, na něho mohou vytvářet tlaky a činit ho zranitelným.“⁴⁰ Uprchlíká zkušenost vstupuje do jejich životních drah a přerušuje je, přesněji mohou v nich i uvíznout nebo jim dává jiný směr. „Některé migrační režimy ve

³⁴ MIJIĆ, Ana: (Re-)Construction of Identity and Belonging after Forced Migration: A Sociology of Knowledge Approach, s. 1107–1125. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feac020>.

³⁵ CARLING, Jørgen – COLLINS, Francis: Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration. In: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, roč. 44, č. 6 (2018), s. 909–926. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134>.

³⁶ MACKOVÁ, Lucie – MEDOVÁ, Nikola – FRLIČKOVÁ, Barbora – JIRKA, Luděk: ‘The plan is no plan’: Ontological security and resilience of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech labour market, s. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2024.024>.

³⁷ CARLING, Jørgen – COLLINS, Francis: Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration, s. 909–926. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134>.

³⁸ MACKOVÁ, Lucie – MEDOVÁ, Nikola – FRLIČKOVÁ, Barbora – JIRKA, Luděk: ‘The plan is no plan’: Ontological security and resilience of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech labour market, s. 1. <https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2024.024>.

³⁹ Tamtéž.

⁴⁰ BITTNEROVÁ, Dana: Kritické temporality: Vzdělávací trajektorie dětí uprchlíků z Ukrajiny, s. 79–90. <https://doi.org/10.62800/NR.2024.2.01>.

vztahu k určitým časovým plánům posilují u migrantů pocity, že nepatří nikam, že jejich životy nemohou probíhat v zemi původu, stejně jako je nelze, nebo je není nutné obnovit na novém místě. Jindy ale uvíznutí může mít potenciál vyčkávání na dobrou příležitost. Jedná se o čekání, které není promarněno, ale naopak využito pro získávání informací, promýšlení strategií atd.⁴¹

Zůstat v České republice plánují častěji mladší uprchlíci: v nejmladší generaci do 30 let chce v ČR setrvat 65 % respondentů, zatímco ve skupině nad 50 let je to přibližně 40 %. Vyšší ochotu zůstat vykazují také ti, kteří jsou v České republice zaměstnaní (64 % oproti 49 % mezi těmi, kteří v ČR nepracují). Obecně jsou tedy k trvalému pobytu v České republice častěji nakloněni ti uprchlíci, kteří jsou finančně stabilnější a kteří si zde našli pracovní uplatnění.⁴²

K podobným závěrům dospívají také Borselli M. a Toon van Meijl při popisu životních trajektorií uprchlíků ze Sýrie, mnozí přizpůsobili své aspirace a zvolili si nové cesty k úspěchu v reakci na zkušenost z války, migrace a dlouhého přerušení jejich životních trajektorií. Věk a rodičovství jsou dle nich pravděpodobně diskriminačními faktory v procesu vytváření nových životních trajektorií. Svobodní mladí lidé inklinují k dlouhodobému vzdělávání a budování kariérních plánů, zatímco rodiče dávají přednost ekonomickému zabezpečení svých rodin před vlastním osobním rozvojem. Úspěšné integrační strategie, založené na vzdělávání a kariéře, tak častěji volí mladí lidé bez závazků. Podobný trend lze pozorovat i mezi uprchlíky z Ukrajiny žijícími v České republice.⁴³

Metodologie

Náš výzkum jsme podložili kvalitativním přístupem ke konstrukci dat, které nám podkládají sumarizované závěry. Realizovali jsme polostrukturované rozhovory s ženami – ukrajinskými uprchlicemi, které přišly do České republiky po začátku ruské invaze na Ukrajinu v únoru 2022. Podmínkou rozhovorů bylo, že naše narátorky budou mít dlouhodobou pracovní zkušenost na českém pracovním trhu, mezi dílčí cíle patří i popis jejich zkušenosti s hledáním zaměstnání a pracovním uplatnění v České republice. Necílili jsme pouze na tzv. vysoce vzdělaného migranta, tedy migranta s terciálním vzděláním, ale s jedinou výjimkou měly všechny naše narátorky minimálně terciální vzdělání. Za terciální vzdělání považujeme vysokoškolské vzdělání ukončené minimálně bakalářským titulem. Celkem jsme provedli 15

⁴¹ Tamtéž.

⁴² PAQ research – UNICEF: *Integrace ukrajinských uprchlíků: 2 roky poté a výhled na 2024+*. [online] [2025-02-01]. https://www.paqresearch.cz/content/files/2024/02/PAQ_Hlas_Ukrajincu_Dva_roky_pote-2.pdf.

⁴³ BORSELLI, Marco – MEIJL, Toon van: Linking Migration Aspirations to Integration Prospects: The Experience of Syrian Refugees in Sweden. In: *Journal of Refugee Studies*, roč. 34, č. 1 (2021), s. 579–595. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa043>.

polostrukturovaných rozhovorů. Rozhovory se uskutečnily v období od srpna do listopadu 2024 a natáčely se na záznamové zařízení, rozhovory proběhly tváří v tvář, s jedinou výjimkou, jeden rozhovor proběhl online prostřednictvím aplikace Teams. Respondentky žijí v různých krajích České republiky, nejvíce jich bylo z kraje Olomouckého, neboť autorka práce zde má největší kontakty s ukrajinskou komunitou, ale zastoupeny byly i města v Čechách, hl. město Praha nebo Brno. Všechny naše respondentky splňovaly výzkumná kritéria: byly dlouhodobě zaměstnané v ČR a byly držitelkami dočasné ochrany. Respondentky jsme vybírali náhodně, případně metodou sněhové koule, kdy jedna respondentka nabídla či doporučila rozhovor s dalšími Ukrajinkami. Rozhovory probíhaly v češtině, ukrajinštině, ruštině a angličtině na základě preference účastníků. Do rozhovorů byl zapojen také tlumočník, který je v případě potřeby překládal do a z ukrajinštiny. Při rozhovorech byly dodrženy všechny etické normy u této činnosti obvyklé. Naše narátorky se rozhovorů účastnily dobrovolně, byly informovány o anonymizaci rozhovoru a jeho cílech. Nemusely odpovídat na otázky, které jim byly nepříjemné, rozhovor mohly kdykoliv ukončit bez udání důvodu. Součástí přípravy rozhovoru byl také informovaný souhlas podepsaný jak tazatelem, tak narátorem, tento měli účastníci s dostatečným předstihem k dispozici, aby mu porozuměli a mohli se rozhodnout, zda rozhovor podstoupí. Informovaný souhlas byl bilingvní česko-ukrajinský. Součástí informovaného souhlasu byl také souhlas s nahráváním rozhovoru a popis uchování jeho záznamu. Tento postup se řídí legislativou České republiky.

Rozhovory byly následně ručně přepsány nebo přeloženy do češtiny a přepsány. Poté jsme provedli otevřené kódování v programu Atlas-ti. Věříme, že díky pravidelné kontrole audio záznamu a přepisu tlumočnickem došlo k minimálnímu zkreslení získaných informací i přes jazykovou bariéru. Narátorky byly na základě chronologického pořadí rozhovorů označeny jako N1, N2 atd. Rozhovory byly polostrukturované: základní otázky byly připraveny předem, avšak respondentky měly možnost rozvést rozhovor vlastním směrem. Na základě průběhu rozhovoru byly kladeny doplňující otázky, čímž byl získán komplexnější kontext. Při zpracování okódovaného textu jsme postupovali metodou kvalitativní obsahové analýzy. Text jsme selektovali do tematických celků (kódových tratů), které jsme dále třídili, systematicky analyzovali a vyjádřili v podobě kategorií a subkategorií, mezi nimiž jsme hledali vztahy a souvislosti.

Všechny narátorky byly ženy, jednak proto, že muži, kteří tyto ženy mohli doprovázet často zůstali na Ukrajině, neboť nemohli opustit Ukrajinu a vztahovala se na ně branná povinnost, jednak proto, že ženy většinou přišly s dítětem nebo dětmi, o které měly v zahraničí

pečovat, a i propojení péče o dítě a zaměstnání v ČR bylo pro nás nosným tématem. Muži, kteří tyto ženy v několika případech legálně doprovázeli, se tak stávají pouze těmi, o kterých se ženy zmiňují, tedy součástí např. sociálních sítí narátorek.

Údaje o našich narátorkách, včetně jejich věku a místa původu, včetně místa pobytu v době rozhovoru v České republice jsou uvedeny v tabulce č. 1 (přílohou). Všechny naše narátorky přicestovaly v prvních měsících invaze, tedy v ČR žijí již třetí rok.

Významnou součástí vyhodnocení dat získaných s pomocí polostrukturovaných rozhovorů s narátory bylo jejich srovnání s daty vyhodnocenými v podobně strukturovaných / analyzovaných / zacílených výzkumných šetření. Změny exulantů – uprchlíků – v jejich životních aspiracích souvisí s délkou pobytu v cizině, zkušenostmi z pracovního trhu nebo integrací svou i rodinných příslušníků do české společnosti, a časem absorbovaly významné hodnotové posuny, související s délkou nuceného exilu, který se pro mnohé z nich již nejeví jako dočasný. Popis těchto změn považujeme za významný dílčí vedlejší cíl našeho výzkumu.

Analýza

Faktory, které rozhodly o útěku do bezpečí

Ačkoliv se mnoha uprchlíkům zdá, že se „*věci odehrály rychle*“ (N8), tak rozhodnutí zanechat vše za sebou a utéct s nejn nutnějšími věcmi osobní potřeby, protože žádná z uprchlic neměla než příruční zavazadlo, nejčastěji batoh pro sebe a děti (N10, N8, N9, N7), bylo učiněno až v momentě, kdy se pro ně život na Ukrajině stal nesnesitelným, narátorky propadly zoufalství, některé panice, všechny strachu o život svůj a svých dětí. Vzpomínají na dny strávené v podzemních prostorách, na válku za okny, některé zažily hlad a viděly umírat druhé. Ti, kteří utíkali již podruhé, se většinou rozhodli rychle, naopak jiní nemohli než utéct až v ohrožení života nebo z okupovaného teritoria. Traumatické zážitky ze složité cesty do bezpečí nejsou výjimkou (N2, N15, N13, N5, N14 atd.). Zvuky války je provází po dlouhou dobu i v ČR (N8). V několika případech se s válkou a dny okupace pojí úmrtí rodiče následkem válečných útrap, jako nepřímý dopad války, u našich narátorek se jedná o smrt matky. „*Maminka zemřela následkem strachu a z válečných hrůz kolem...*“ (N12), další narátorka vypráví, jak nepřesvědčila ani pod nátlakem matku, aby utekla s ní a dítětem, v následujícím období pak matka zemřela, nemohla jí ani na pohřeb (N13), další narátorka matka umřela ještě před válkou, avšak na následky stresu z války na Donbasu, také v tomto případě se k umírající matce nedostala narátorka včas a ač se jí následně podařilo matku převézt do bezpečí a najít pro ni

odpovídající péči, už bylo pozdě a umřela (N14). Často se dozvídáme o opuštění domácích zvířat, které museli ponechat v místě, také tyto ztráty se zapsaly do vzpomínek.

Naše narátorky jsou, až na dvě dívky a jednu babičku, která se starala o vnuka, matkami a s nimi do bezpečí exilu unikalo minimálně jedno dítě, častěji více dětí, proto nepřekvapí, že jedním z významných faktorů vedoucím k rozhodnutí o odchodu z vlasti byl strach o děti a jejich budoucnost. Nesnesly ohrožení života svých dětí (N15, N8, N7, N6). Mezi ženami byla i migrantka, která emigraci neměla v plánu, byla v době vypuknutí války na dovolené v Evropě i se svou dcerou, domů už se nedostaly (N4).

V důsledku prožitých traumat se některé narátorky v prvních týdnech a měsících po příchodu do bezpečí exilu zcela izolovaly a například půl roku se s nikým nestýkaly (N10). Další narátorka popisuje, že si po celou dobu cesty do exilu i v prvních týdnech v České republice připadala jako postava v knize: *„Jako nevěřila jsem, nevěřila jsem, že to všechno se děje se mnou. Jako v nějakém takovém, vidíte, jako taková kniha, kde vidíte něco jako běžný život, ale povídá se to jako... no on šel tam a zemřel a tam byla láska a tam něco. Ted' se to všechno dělo se mnou a kolem mě.“* (N7), další narátorka vysvětluje, že po příjezdu nebyli schopni ničeho: *„Nikam jsme nechodili, ani do obchodu, nikam. Seděli jsme v bytě, protože jsme se báli.“* (N1), tedy ani zajištění svých základních potřeb, byla odkázána na pomoc druhých.

Nic jim nezbylo...

Narátorky zanechaly na Ukrajině vše, co po většinu života budovaly, domy, byty, firmy, nemovitosti po rodičích na venkově, zanechaly za sebou i rodný kraj, domov, který milovaly, často v tomto kontextu vzpomínají moře (např. N10). Tyto ztráty jsou různého druhu, jedny už ví, že přišly o všechno, vzala jim to válka (N11, N10), druhé neví, v jakém stavu jejich majetek na Ukrajině zůstal, neboť byl například na dříve okupovaném území (N11, N15), další domov ztratily už po roce 2014, ale ne méně z nich ví, že jsou jejich nemovitosti v pořádku, buď v nich žije manžel nebo jiný člen rodiny, případně se jim o ně někdo stará. Už se smířily s tím, že o svůj majetek mohou přít, ale jeho definitivní ztráty se bojí (N15, N7). Jedna z nářatek to komentovala: *„Lidé, kteří nepřijmou realitu a jsou v myšlenkách stále ve starém životě, to je pak těžké. Starý život se už nevrátí, oni to ví, ale sní o tom“* (N6). Na druhou stranu tyto ztráty vyvolaly v další nářatek reflexi toho, jak málo jí stačí k životu: *„Vše, co jsem potřebovala, jsem tu měla do měsíce“* (N5). Velmi zajímavou část příběhu o zachování alespoň nějaké

hodnoty věcí k užívání popisuje uprchlice, která přes Gruzii a tamní kontakty získala zpět své auto, které bylo již v mezičase odvečeno do Ruska (N10).

Proč Česká republika?

Na České republice migrantky hodnotí především to, že je tu bezpečno (N9, N10, N4), dále také dostupnou lékařskou péčí, sociální a zdravotní pojištění (zvláště zdravotní pojištění, které na Ukrajině není), možnost finančního zajištění, ale například také českou kulturu a kulturní blízkost (N14). Oceňují pozitivní náladu na pracovišti, usměvavé obyvatele na veřejnosti i v práci, podporu dětí v škole (N14, N6). Jsou vděčné za možnost obživy – tedy za to, že mohou v ČR pracovat a bydlet – a oceňují také blízkost velké části Evropy, která jim umožňuje cestovat a podnikat výlety jak po České republice, tak do okolních států (N12).

Polovina z námi oslovených uprchlic se na Ukrajinu z řady důvodů nechce vrátit, další mají pro pobyt v ČR dočasné zdůvodnění, které se ale okolnostmi může proměnit v trvalé. „*Dokud je válka, tak se nemohu vrátit... Já nerozumím, jak tam mohou lidé žít! A když budu mít na Ukrajině práci a tady ne. Práce a válka – to jsou dvě podmínky* (N8).“ Jedna z našich narátorek se v prvním roce války pokusila vrátit do rodného města, z této reemigrační zkušenosti vyvodila závěr, že pro její návrat nestačí nějaká forma příměří mezi Ukrajinou a Ruskem, ale „*válka musí úplně skončit*,“ jinak se s dětmi nevrátí. „*Už jsem se jednou vrátila a rychle jsem opět prchala do bezpečí – zpět do Česka. Nechtěli jsme znovu do Česka, ale na té Ukrajině je nám tak, tak těžko, že do toho Česka musíme odjet. Musela jsem znovu utéct, protože na Ukrajině je to nebezpečné pro naše děti. Člověk nemyslí na sebe, myslí na své děti.* (N12)“.

Základním argumentem pro nový život v emigraci je u části z migrantek negativní vývoj událostí v jejich domovině, pokud Rusové zvítězí, tak se nevrátí (N7, N10): „*Do Ruska já nepojedu* (N10).“ „*Nebudu žít pod Rusy* (N7)“.

V případě opakované uprchlické zkušenosti už často vůbec nevidí možnost návratu. Uprchlice z Donbasu emotivně popisuje: „*Už od roku 2014 nemám domov. Nevím, co bude zítra. Tam to už není moje vlast...*“ (N14). Podobně paní, která přišla o všechno za okupace: „*Nemám už domova. Já jsem se rozhodla, že můj domov je tady. Snažím se zapadnout. A naučit se co nejlíp česky. Tady je budoucnost pro mne i pro mé dítě* (N13)“. Některé z žen v půlce života nechtějí začínat opět „od nuly“, proto vůbec nepomýšlí na návrat, protože už se nemají kam vrátit: „*My tam máme dům a před deseti lety jsme ho nově zrekonstruovali a oni nám ho celý rozbili a já mám 40 let. A jak dlouho bych byla schopná ještě tam potom nějak fungovat, když bychom se vrátili... To, to už by nešlo.*“ (N2). „*Když jsem se rozhodla opustit svůj domov,*

tak jsem věděla, že ho opouštím navždy. Věděla jsem, že už se nevrátím... (N13)“. Podobně rozvedla další z narátorek svou reemigrační zkušenost: *„O prázdninách byli mé děti šťastné, že jsou u babičky s dědou, ale jen jako návštěva (N5).“*

V ruskojazyčných regionech, které na začátku války padly do rukou Rusům se obyvatelé dodnes cítí zrazeni, že za ně nikdo nebojoval, také tento trpký pocit je důvodem pro trvalé setrvání v exilu: *„Neplánujeme se vrátit na Ukrajinu, protože nemůžeme zapomenout, že tam za nás nikdo nebojoval, nikdo se nestaral (N15).“*

Děti jsou často zásadním argumentem pro trvalou emigraci, a i pokud se rodiče chtějí vrátit na Ukrajinu, neplánují návrat svých dětí (N5), mimo jiné proto, že po třech letech v ČR už neumí ukrajinsky tak, aby obstály ve škole, protože doma mluví rusky a nyní chodí do české školy (N12). Jedna maminka myšlenku rozvádí hlouběji: *„Mám dvanáctiletého syna, brzy bude dospělý, Rusi jsou naši sousedi, nevíme, kdy ta válka skončí a nedokážeme už vůbec předvídat, jak to bude dál, hodně maminek má strach z toho, že kdyby zůstaly na Ukrajině, tak by jejich děti musely bojovat. (N12)“*

Proti návratu do vlasti se staví také délka pobytu v cizině, k tomu jsme zaznamenali velmi předvídavý komentář jedné z uprchlic: *„Jsem Ukrajinka – tady nemůžu zapadnout, protože jsem cizinka. Ale kdybych se vrátila domů, tak už bych tam taky nezapadla, cítila bych se tam úplně stejně jako cizinka (N13)“.* Usuzuje tak proto, že monitoruje sociální síť v rodném městě a je v kontaktu s vrstevníky v místě a sleduje, jak se rozchází s vývojem myšlení těch, kteří neemigrovali, jak se jí její město stává k nepoznání cizím, a to jak hmotnou devastací za války, tak také v myšlení jeho obyvatel. Všechny tyto argumenty, které vedou uprchlice k usazení se v cizině, jsou ještě podpořeny, když na Ukrajině z příbuzných už nikdo nezůstal (N10).

Život v ČR – ... V plánu je žít tady a teď

V průběhu tří let, po které všechny oslovené narátorky pobývají v exilu v České republice, se jejich život změnil a můžeme říci, že všechny žijí v podmínkách, s nimiž jsou spokojené. Ačkoliv v počátcích přijaly například ubytování přes KACPU, případně jiné organizace, spolubydlení nebo bydlení v ubytovně či v hotelu, v současnosti převažuje komerční pronájem bytu (N7, N5, N14). Dvě narátorky bydlí s novým životním partnerem, jedna s novým manželem. Po ubytování v nevhodných lokalitách v prvních měsících exilu často uprchlice upřednostnily bydlení v blízkosti spádové školy pro své děti a zaměstnání (např. N5).

Ovšem ani na ubytování v ubytovnách pro sezónní dělníky nebo ve velkých penzionech, kde žilo pospolu několik desítek ukrajinských rodin, nevzpomínají ve zlém, ačkoliv tam třeba na šedesát ubytovaných připadla jedna kuchyňka, pozitivní bylo, že se všichni poznali navzájem, takže každý věděl o situaci toho druhého, co se mu přihodilo, odkud pochází apod. Tento komunitní způsob života vyzrál do podoby komunitních center, kde se zvláště ženy, které se často cítí osamělé, setkávají, a kde se jim od druhých dostane podpory (N6): *„Pro nás je hodně důležité, že si můžeme své myšlenky a emoce sdílet v rodném jazyce. My sami sobě rozumíme, víme, jak je to těžké, jak to bolí, když necháme své rodiče nebo třeba i děti na Ukrajině.“*

Čeština jako klíčový problém integrace

Ukrajinské maminky si velmi seriózně uvědomují, jak souvisí jejich pracovní úspěch na českém pracovním trhu i úspěch jejich dětí v české škole s překonáním jazykové bariéry. *„To je prioritní číslo jedna (N7, N13)“*. Za základní faktory ovlivňující zvládnutí českého jazyka narátorky považují socializaci sebe i dětí v české společnosti, pokud pracují v českém kolektivu (N9), kde nutně potřebují český jazyk k výkonu zaměstnání (*„...musela jsem mluvit s učiteli česky. Prostě jsem musela mluvit, tak jsem se naučila“* N6), pak překonávají jazykovou bariéru lehčeji, než jiní. Další cestou bylo využívání českého jazyka jako nástroje komunikace v české domácnosti (N9, N13), pokud ji Ukrajinky v průběhu exilové zkušenosti sdílely s Čechy a konečně také zapojení se do jazykových kurzů. Také úspěch svých dětí v českém vzdělávacím systému pojí s jejich schopností najít si kamarády mezi Čechy, např. zapojení dětí do volnočasových aktivit s českými dětmi vede k jejich úspěšnému zvládnutí jazyka mnohem rychleji, než u těch, které si na škole nenajdou žádné české kamarády (*„Vnuček by se chtěl vrátit na Ukrajinu. Protože zde prakticky nemá žádné kamarády“* N11). Mnoho z matek bezpodmínečně podporuje výuku češtiny u svých dětí, přípravné kurzy v ČJ pro přijetí na VŠ pro středoškoláky nebo obecně doučování ČJ na škole volí jako alternativy, pokud jejich děti díky sociální izolaci ve škole nepřichází k jazykovým dovednostem přirozenou interakcí s českými dětmi. Cílem žen je v současné době, tedy po třech letech v emigraci, složit zkoušky pro jazykový certifikát na úrovni B1, některé už toho dosáhly, pokud se začaly učit od počátku exilu a intenzivně, tak se již dnes díky svým jazykovým schopnostem cítí v české společnosti mnohem komfortněji (N9).

S nabýváním nových zkušeností v cizině se hlásí o slovo v myslích žen také kritické myšlenky, setkali jsme se s verbalizací nepochopení pro krajany, kteří jsou v České republice už mnoho let a dosud nezvládli český jazyk, *„protože nechtějí“* (N13). Stejně tak je

konstatována zkušenost, že se s ukrajinskými dětmi často na škole nikdo nedomluví, protože nikdo z učitelů neumí ani rusky, ani ukrajinsky (N6).

Práce

Všechny ženy, s nimiž byly vedeny rozhovory, měly v ČR dlouhodobou pracovní zkušenost, ta byla podmínkou realizace rozhovoru. Náhodným výběrem jsme ale našly ženy, které až na jedinou výjimku, na Ukrajině dokončily terciální vzdělání, tedy byly vysokoškolsky vzdělané, v kombinaci s jejich snahou po nezávislosti a uplatnitelnosti na českém pracovním trhu neudivuje, že je pro ně zaměstnání „*životní potřebou* (N7)“. Část z nich měla štěstí a v průběhu tří let v exilu si našla práci, která jim dává vyšší smysl, většina začala pracovat na nižší až mnohem nižší pozici, než měly na Ukrajině, několik z nich mělo na Ukrajině i mnohem vyšší příjem. Jedna z uprchlic si však na své nové práci přes sociálně-ekonomický pád cení klidu a možnosti pomáhat druhým (N15). Pro další je velmi důležitá jistota zaměstnání, která je dokonce spojena u dvou z narátorek s ubytováním, což jim sice snižuje pracovní flexibilitu, ale naplňuje potřebu jistoty obživy. Proto dělají práci, kterou jak sami říkají „*Češi dělat nechtějí. Protože je to moc těžká práce*“ (N12).

Část z žen začala hledat práci v ČR neprodleně po příchodu, jiné v prvních měsících v exilu čekaly, že se vrátí nebo se učily česky, všechny se ale zapojily do zaměstnání do jednoho roku od příchodu do republiky. V současnosti již má většina z nich nostrifikované diplomy, tedy uznané vzdělání. Ty z nich, které byly na Ukrajině učitelkami, jsou dnes nejčastěji zaměstnány jako asistentky pro ukrajinské děti, pro pracovní postup potřebují vykonat jazykové zkoušky, všechny o ně usilují. Učitelské povolání je často považováno za poslání, ne jinak tomu je i na Ukrajině, s hořkostí jedna z narátorek uvádí, že je to ale na Ukrajině práce málo placená. Již není výjimkou, že některé z uprchlic vykonávají kvalifikovanou práci ve svém oboru, první si ale uvědomuje, že je v Česku šťastná a její život je krásný, což nebere jako standardní v její situaci (N8), druhá dělá kvalifikovanou práci na univerzitě, neboť je lingvistkou, učí tedy anglicky (N4), pro většinu je práce nejen cestou k nezávislosti na státu nebo příbuzných, ale také psychickou oporou: „*Bez práce by to bylo nesnesitelné*“ (N4). Námi oslovené ženy jsou se svou prací spokojené, mnoho z nich v ní pomáhá svým krajanům, jiné se již uplatnily ve své profesi nebo jsou díky práci nezávislé, pracovní uplatnění u nich často podmiňuje i budoucí návrat na Ukrajinu (N4). Lepší znalost českého jazyka vidí všechny ženy jako cestu k lepší, případně kvalifikovanější, práci.

Ale lidi jsou lidi... Všude jsou lidé dobří i zlí...

S otevřenou diskriminací na veřejnosti se naše narátorky nesetkaly často, přesto zaznamenaly např. u personálu v ZOO, který poznal, že návštěvníci jsou cizinci, změnu v chování, stejně tak jako u zaměstnanců České pošty, nicméně častější jsou verbální útoky na veřejnosti nebo na sociálních sítích (N13, N14, N7). Jedna z narátorek často pročítá komentáře na internetu, tak vnímá změny v české společnosti z hlediska přijetí a solidarity. Proč? „*Protože se nebojím špatných zpráv. Nemám jako iluze, že je život nějaký zvlášť dobrý* (N7)“. Narátorky zaznamenaly také konfliktní chování Romů nebo nařčení, že Čechům berou práci. Na druhou stranu se Češi Ukrajinské maminky v konfliktní situaci také zastali.

Každá z žen v průběhu rozhovoru opakovaně ocenila pomoc, kterou Češi na začátku jejich migrační zkušenosti nabízeli. Nezapomněly ani na to, že proklamovaná pomoc skutečně fungovala, státem zpřístupněná veřejná doprava pro uprchlíky zdarma, výuka českého jazyka zdarma, škola pro děti zdarma, dostupné rekvalifikační kurzy zdarma, to jsou oceňované momenty v jejich migrační trajektorii, cennější než peněžní dávky, které jim pomohly v nouzi (N9). Ještě více si však cení pomoci jednotlivců, velká část maminek s dětmi na počátku svého pobytu v ČR využila možnosti přijetí u české rodiny (N12, N13, N6, N10, N9, N8), mnohé české rodiny toto ubytování poskytly zadarmo, jiné za pomoc v domácnosti. Právě pobyt v českých domácnostech byl pro ženy spouštěčem prvních kroků v adaptaci – počátků učení se jazyku a vyrovnávání se s kulturními odlišnostmi. Přijetí pomoci od druhých bylo pro mnohé spojeno nejen s velkou vděčností, ale také restartem jejich životů v cizině (N8: „*Jeden krásný moment. Paní Alena (paní domácí) řekla, že našla pro nás hezký byt.*“, N9: *Náš bytný – prostě k sobě přijal cizí lidi. Chtěl jim pomoci. To bylo prostě skvělé.*). Ceněná byla také pomoc jednotlivců, kteří uměli rusky, zvláště v hostitelské rodině (N8). V jiných případech s ubytováním a budováním nového života pomáhala např. Charita, firma, která jim poskytla zaměstnání i s ubytováním, různé skupiny dobrovolníků, Ukrajinci usedlí v ČR dlouhodobě i jednotlivci. Neboť na Ukrajině často nechaly to nejčennější, tak vyhledaly i pomoc kamarádů nebo dobrovolníků, kteří jedné narátorce přivezli její dva psy (N4) a jiná narátorka (N6) si postupně nechává přivést, co ze svých osobních věcí chce zachránit. V případě, že na Ukrajině zbyl, kdo by se uprchlícím mohl postarat o jejich věci, mohou být tyto zaslány i poštou, respektive autobusy na dálkových linkách z Ukrajiny (N9). Přijmout pomoc nebylo pro uprchlíky samozřejmostí, často se o sebe snažili postarat nebo postarali zcela nezávisle s využitím úspor nebo s pomocí rodiny. Mnozí si zajistili práci tak rychle, že již na podporu v nouzi neměli nárok (N2) nebo usoudili, že nejsou ti nejpotřebnější (N10). Narátorky se dříve

nebo později zapojily do pracovního života (nejdéle po roce) a postupně se na pomoci od druhých nebo státu staly nezávislé. V současnosti naopak některé vidí jako zásadní vrátit přijatou pomoc komunitě. Jedna z žen se specializuje dalším studiem v oblasti psychologie na pomoc zranitelným osobám, další se snaží být oporou pro ukrajinské děti na českých školách, skládají jazykové zkoušky, aby jejich práce mohla být kvalifikovanější, pomáhají si navzájem. Jsou zaměstnány v pomáhajících organizacích, ať již církevních nebo komunitních, jako asistentky na školách nebo pracují s uprchlíky (N1, N5, N7, N6, N9, N14, N15). Ukrajinky myslí také na ty, které opustily, takže podporují zbytek rodiny na Ukrajině, případně rodiny přátel, kteří padli nebo byli zraněni ve válce, (N5) doslova: *Z každého našeho přivýdětku jde nějaká jeho část na Ukrajinu.*

Po třech letech – nový život

Tři roky v exilu často přiměly exulanty přehodnotit dočasnost svého pobytu v ČR. Mezi základní znaky adaptace na české prostředí patří smíšené partnerské vztahy s Čechy, upuštění od výuky online na Ukrajině a zaměření se na překonání jazykové bariéry, zvláště pokud děti přerostly věk základní školy a chtějí se uplatnit na českých školách v sekundárním a posléze i terciálním vzdělání. „*Musíme zvládnout ČJ*“ (N8). „*Zaměřili jsme se už jen na české školy – vnuk měl už dvojku z ČJ*“ (N11). První ukrajinští studenti již na českých středních školách odmaturovali, paradoxně se tak mohli stát nejmladšími studenty na českých vysokých školách, a tak se také stalo, syn jedné z narátorek nastoupil na univerzitu v šestnácti letech (N7). Třetím významným faktorem v adaptaci je připsání si reality: *Nemám se už kam vrátit, po dvou válkách, líbí se mi tu a miluji svého partnera – Čecha* (N1).

Diaspora

Až na výjimky válka rozdělila početné rodiny. Dlouhodobé odloučení manželů, kdy muži nesmí opustit Ukrajinu a do bezpečí odešly pouze ženy a děti, je nejběžnější formou transnacionálního rozdělení rodiny. Ale neplatí obecně. Dlouhodobé odloučení také v nukleární rodině urychluje ochladnutí vztahů mezi partnery, zejména pokud již dříve procházely krizí: „*Nechal mě odejít i s dítětem*“ (N13). Často se setkáváme také s oddělením rodiny od prarodičů nebo dokonce nejstarších dětí, chlapců, kteří museli zůstat a narukovat, případně dosud studují nebo děvčat, které nechtěly své partnery opustit (N5, N14, N11: „*Mladší dcera mohla odjet s námi, ale ona na Ukrajině nechtěla nechat svého přítele...*“). Z vyprávění plyne, že ne každé dvougenerační soužití v exilu mělo úspěch, starším lidem se stýská více a adaptují se na nové prostředí hůře,

tak se také dříve rozhodnou pro návrat (N6). Jedna z migrantek zažila i to, že se na Ukrajinu za tátou vrátila jejich dcera, nezvykla si a otec jí moc chyběl, nyní si ji čas od času předávají na ukrajinsko-slovenských hranicích v době prázdnin nebo volna. Komentuje: „*Nerozumím tomu, jak to tam moje dcera zvládá. Nechápu to. Nechápu jak v tom strachu, který tam dnes a denně panuje, mohou lidé žít*“ (N8).“ Sama však návrat nezvažuje, protože se v ČR usadila s dospívajícím synem, který studuje. Další příběh se vztahuje k ženě, která utekla se synem a je v exilu jako jediná z široké rodiny, nicméně neplánuje se vrátit, dokud nebude na Ukrajině zcela bezpečno pro ni i pro syna. „*Dokud je tam válka, tak se vracet nebudu. Jednou se ale vrátím*“ (N11). Podobné pocity má i další z žen: „*Rodina zůstala na Ukrajině, jsem jako stromek, který vzali a přesadili*“ (N5). Poukazuje tak na ztrátu kořenů a rodinného zázemí. Rodiny jsou rozptýlené po Evropě (N9), odloučení zasáhlo i ty, kdo byli na separaci zvyklí: „*Jsmo rodina námořníků, ale válka celou rodinu rozdělila, rozptýlila ji po celém světě*“ (N10).

Identita

Vzhledem k tomu, že naše narátorky – až na výjimky – pocházely z oblastí přímo zasažených válkou nebo žily na okupovaných územích, není překvapivé, že většina z nich uvádí ruštinu jako svůj mateřský jazyk. To ale neznamená, že se považují za Rusky, naopak ozbrojený konflikt u mnoha z nich zvnitřnil národní cítění: „*Jsem Ukrajinka, ale všichni u nás ve městě mluví rusky*.“ (N12)“; „*Nemám asociace, že jsem Ruska, Oděsa je ukrajinské město, ale mluvíme tam rusky, to je naše historie...*“ (N13)“. Zachycujeme i jiná vysvětlení: „*Národnost jsme měli jen v sovětském pase, tam jsem měla napsané, že jsem Ruska*“ (N7).“ Ovšem zvnitřnění ukrajinské identity nastalo u narátorky právě v exilu: „*Celý život jsem mluvila rusky, teď už mluvím jen ukrajinsky, už nemluvím rusky vůbec*“ (N7)“. Jazyk jako identito-tvorný prvek v životě může však být uchopen i zcela opačným způsobem: „*Nikdy jsem nemluvila rusky, ani nikdo z mé široké rodiny nemluví rusky, všichni mluvíme ukrajinsky. Až když začala válka, tak tady v Česku, když jsem se chtěla domluvit, tak jsem začala mluvit rusky*“ (N6)“. Velká část z uprchlic deklaruje, že ač jejich rodným jazykem byla ruština, tak všichni v jejich regionu umí oba jazyky (N12, N13, N14, N15). Vzpomínají také směs ruštiny s ukrajinštinou tzv. suržyk, kterou se na Ukrajině běžně mluví: *prostě úplně čistou ukrajinštinu neuslyšíš, snad jen ve škole* (N9). Jedna z respondentek rozvedla svou identitu obsáhleji: *Ztratila jsem všechno, vše, co jsem měla. Ta válka je mezi politiky, ne mezi lidmi. Ruština je pro mne jen jazyk komunikace... maminka je Ruska, otec Ukrajinec...* (N15) Z její odpovědi vyvěrá nejistota, identita se formuje, lépe re-formuje. Stejně tak si i ostatní ženy nejčastěji stojí za tím, že „*jsou Ukrajinkami, ale*

mluví rusky, většina však umí i ukrajinsky (N2, N5, N7, N9, N11, N12, N13, N14, N15). Vyjádřeno jejich slovy: *Žili jsem a mluvili jsme rusky. Ale teď, když začala ta válka jsem se upřímně sebe-identifikovala jako Ukrajinka. Nezávisle na etnickém původu, protože moji rodiče pochází z Ruska* (N7).

Čeština jako klíč k pracovnímu uplatnění a integraci

Na začátku exilu mnoho uprchlic nemělo žádné vize pro sebe a své blízké, často se soustředily jen na bezprostřední budoucnost, na další dny místo měsíců či let. Jedna z žen to vyjádřila: *„Když myslím na budoucnost, začnu brečet.* (N4)“ V současnosti už ale mnoho z nich plánuje svůj život a chce se aktivně podílet na jeho průběhu. Pro některé z nich není jednoduché rozhodnout se, zda zůstat v ČR, nebo se vrátit na Ukrajinu. Ty, které svou volbu obhájí, vidí, že podmínkou úspěchu je zvládnutí češtiny (N1, N14, N12: *„Chci se naučit lépe česky, pak si myslím, že mi bude v Česku více pohodlněji, víc komfortněji. Bude to lepší při domluvě s lékařem, ve škole, na třídních schůzkách.“*). Jedna z narátorek to formovala jednoznačně: *nechtěla jsem zůstat, protože jsem neznala jazyk, ale dnes už cítím stabilitu, protože se domluví* (N15). Druhá přiznává: *Našla jsem tu nový život. Můj syn tu chce zůstat na 100 %. A díky tomu vidím budoucnost spíš tady než na Ukrajině* (N8). Nostrifikace diplomu nevede ještě ke kvalifikované práci, jak by se na první pohled jevilo, podmínkou řady zaměstnání je státní zkouška z češtiny, ta je tedy cílem několika z našich narátorek (např. N5 nebo N14). Naučit se dobře česky vidí druhá z žen také jako cestu k normálnímu životu: *Chci normálně žít ten český život...* (N14/285). Životní cíle uprchlic jsou často v korelaci s jejich vírou ve vítězství Ukrajiny: *Jestli Rusové zvítězí, pak doufám, že mi mé schopnosti, dovednosti, zkušenosti pomohou tady najít uplatnění... například při práci s ukrajinskou komunitou, která je největší etnická komunita v Čechách* (N7). Ještě obezřetnější je narátorka, která si přeje, aby její děti zůstaly v ČR i pokud Ukrajina zvítězí, protože *„ještě bude dlouho trvat, než se vybuduje nová Ukrajina.* (N11)“ Samozřejmě mezi sny ukrajinských žen patří i ty, které můžeme pojmenovat jako vyšší cíle: *„Chtěla bych, aby děti, a nejenom moje děti, ale všechny děti, když jdou večer spát, tak věděly, co bude další den, do čeho se probudí, aby žádné děti nemusely žít ve sklepě, aby válka skončila a aby nejen děti, ale i dospělí lidé, měli ty jejich ztráty minimální.* (N14)“ nebo *„Přeji si, abychom si my, co jsme v zahraničí, uvědomili tu hodnotu naší země, našich tradic, a až se vrátíme na Ukrajinu, abychom ji udělali ještě hezčí, než byla předtím... Je důležité, aby naše děti neztratily kořeny, aby v sobě uchovávaly naši kulturu, původ, z kterého byly vytrženy. V tom je podporuji a mám podporu na naší škole, a rodiče vidí, že v tomhle je*

smysl (N6)“. Ale představy o budoucnosti mohou být i zcela intimní, pro někoho ji může naplňovat manželstvím završený nový partnerský vztah (N8) pro druhého to, aby jeho rodina byla opět pospolu, a aby žili tam, kde chtějí žít (N10). Samozřejmě pro mnohé z žen je stále těžké cokoli plánovat v exilu: „*Od začátku války si už budoucnost neplánuji, ale chybí mi moře...* (N9)“ nebo „*Nemyslím na budoucnost a žiju teď. Co není v mých silách, to neřeším.* (N4)“

Několik žen svůj postoj k budoucnosti ani po třech letech v emigraci nezměnilo, neplánují budoucnost, nepřemýšlí nad ní, protože vůbec neví, co bude dál (N3, N12, N10, N9). Mimo jiné jsou vize spojené s návratem spojeny s myšlenkou na nový začátek: „*Zatím nevím, Nemyslím na návrat. Když se vrátím, tak musím začít zase všechno znovu* (N10)“.

Aspirace

Po třech letech v exilu, kdy většina z našich narátorek začínala z ničeho (N2/175, 174), a začínaly svůj život tak říkajíc „*od nuly*“ a i zpětně vidí, „*že to ze začátku bylo hodně těžké, strašné* (N2)“, mnohé z účastnic výzkumu pocítují hrdost, že to zvládly. Pozitivní přístup ukazuje nezlomnost nejedné z nich, věří, že když si vybuodovala sama svou práci dobrý život na Ukrajině, vybuduje si ho stejně tak v ČR. „*Když tu budu brečet a mít svěšené ruce, to mi k ničemu nebude, takže musím takto věřit sobě a stejně tak podporovat svoje děti.* (N15)“. Některé z oslovených žen si již uvědomily, že jejich minulý život je minulostí: „*když začala válka a já jsem přijela sem, tak jsem si uvědomila, že to všechno už je historie, že to se stalo kdysi a že je potřeba pokračovat dál* (N6)“. Některé si jsou již jisté, že zde našly nový domov (N14), jiným emigrace způsobila paradoxně pozitivní změnu v životě, díky níž se jejich život zlepšil a zlepšuje dál (N8). Věří, že mohou začít nový život, kterému dají smysl (N6). Věří, že když se naučí dobře česky a tím zvýší svou kvalifikaci, tak si najdou práci, v níž budou šťastné (N14). Za podstatný v novém domově považují pocit bezpečí pro jejich děti (N6, N13). Jejich aspirace se tedy často pojí s možnostmi vedení dobrého života v ČR. Jedna z narátorek chce pracovat na Univerzitě a chce sepsat dějiny Ukrajiny neovlivněné ruskými narativy, chce se tak i s manželem zapojit do obnovy Ukrajiny (N5). Další naproti tomu považuje život v ČR za velmi dobrý, český jazyk za krásný a stejně tak se jí líbí česká města a obce (N7), proto tu chce žít. Naděje spojené s budoucností shrnula uprchlice, která vedla na Ukrajině život vyšší střední třídy: „*Můj sen je prodat všechny naše nemovitosti na Ukrajině za dobrou cenu a koupit něco tady. Můj sen je, abychom já i moje děti dobře mluvili česky, dál tady žili a pracovali. Mám*

strach z toho, co bude dál... Můj sen je, aby tady nebyla nikdy válka. Můj sen je, abyste měli s námi trpělivost a aby Češi pochopili, že ne všichni Ukrajinci jsou špatní.“ (N15)

Diskuse a závěr

Cílem našeho výzkumu bylo zaměřit se na konstrukci a rekonstrukci identit žen–uprchlic. Inspirací pro naše zkoumání byla rovněž práce Any Mijić, která se ve svém výzkumu věnovala uprchlíkům z občanské války v Jugoslávii. Respondenty oslovila po třiceti letech jejich migrace do Rakouska a sledovala proces utváření různých aspektů nové identity v kontextu dlouhodobého exilu. V souladu se sociologií vědění Petera L. Bergera a Thomase Luckmanna vychází z předpokladu, že sociální realita je tvořena lidmi, kteří jsou současně jejím produktem. Identita je v tomto pojetí jak reflektovaná, tak reflektující – představuje klíčový prvek subjektivně prožívané reality.

Rozdíl mezi třemi a třiceti lety strávenými v exilu je samozřejmě zásadní. Přesto jsme v našem výzkumu zaznamenali náznaky formujícího se komplexního procesu nové sebeidentifikace mezi ukrajinskými ženami v exilu.

Pokud Ana Mijić akcentuje propojení identity a pocitu sounáležitosti, pak právě tento aspekt vystupuje v komunitách uprchlíků jako klíčový. Ženy, často izolované, nacházejí oporu v komunitních centrech, kde mohou sdílet své zkušenosti, myšlenky a emoce v rodném jazyce – a tím vzájemně posilovat své vazby (N6). Zdá se, že se v rámci ukrajinských komunit postupně utváří přijetí uprchlické identity jako součásti nové životní reality.

O důležitosti směny fyzických věcí na dálku mezi příbuznými v rámci transnacionálních ukrajinských rodin dříve psaly Khrenová a Burrellová.⁴⁴ Připomněly, že udržování blízkých rodinných vztahů podporuje i materiální směna. Zasílané balíky jsou důležitou součástí nadnárodního rodinného života a mnohem více než ekonomickou pomoc ztělesňují rodinná pouta, podporu a pocit společné přítomnosti, nabízí hmatatelnou péči a pevný důkaz, že na ně blízcí nezapomněli. Již v této studii se jako přepravní kanály popisují soukromí kurýři a sítě přátel, protože jsou levnější, rychlejší a často spolehlivější. Také naše narátorky na podobnou směnu či přepravu věcí na dálku spoléhají. *„Pro mne jsou důležité šaty mojí praprababičky, které mají 180 a víc let, takže ty si vozím a také ty knihy, které napsal můj dědeček. Prostě ty vyšívání košile, šátky a sukně také. Protože ten oděv, ... ty vzory, které měly, které na sobě*

⁴⁴ KHRENOVA Lyudmyla – BURRELL, Kathy: Materialising Care across Borders: Sent Things and Family Ties between Sweden and Ukraine. In: *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, roč. 11, č. 3 (2021), s. 250–261. <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.399>.

nosily, to je hodně velká tradice na Ukrajině. ... Pokaždé, když jede nějaká kamarádka na Ukrajinu, tak ji poprosím, jestli by mi nějaké šaty přivezla a také knihy, pro mne jsou důležité ty knihy, co napsal dědeček a ty šaty po prababičce a starší. (N6)“ Ať už jde o zasílání osobních věcí do České republiky od příbuzných a přátel na Ukrajině, o záchranu rodinného bohatství představovaného například sbírkami starých krojů či knih, nebo o převoz domácích mazlíčků – v našem případě psů –, tyto formy materiální směny hrají v životě uprchlíků významnou roli. „*Moje rodina jsme my s dcerou a naši dva psi (N4).*“ Na druhou stranu neméně významná je pomoc těm, co zůstali na Ukrajině, v tomto případě jde především o finanční podporu svým dětem, rodičům, přátelům, kteří ve válce ztratili zdraví nebo obživu, doslova: *Z každého našeho přívýdělku jde nějaká jeho část na Ukrajinu (N5).*

Kamionka M. a kol. uvádějí, že hlavní motivací emigrantů z Ukrajiny, s nimiž vedli rozhovory, byla válka a snaha zajistit bezpečnost svých dětí,⁴⁵ k témuž závěru jsme došli také: naše narátorky se ve většině rozhodly pro útěk z domova až když se pro ně život na Ukrajině stal nesnesitelným, strachovaly se o život svůj a svých dětí (N15, N8, N7, N6). Výše zmínění autoři také upozorňují na nepřipravenost uprchlíků na exil. Začali nový život v neznámém prostředí s nejistotou a nepředvídatelností. To mělo za následek také získání horšího zaměstnání. Také tato zjištění odpovídají našim závěrům. Všechny ženy, s nimiž byly vedeny rozhovory, měly v České republice dlouhodobou pracovní zkušenost. Náhodným výběrem jsme přitom oslovili ženy, které až na jedinou výjimku dokončily na Ukrajině terciární vzdělání. Část z nich měla štěstí a během tří let v exilu si našla zaměstnání, které jim přináší vyšší smysl, většina však začala pracovat na nižších či výrazně nižších pozicích, než jaké zastávaly na Ukrajině. Některé navíc ztratily i dříve dosaženou úroveň příjmů na Ukrajině.

Své závěry konfrontujeme také s prací Mackové L. a kol., kteří se zamýšleli nad ontologickou bezpečností a odolností ukrajinských uprchlíků na českém pracovním trhu. Mezi jejich zjištění patří i to, že mnozí uprchlíci při příchodu do České republiky zažili sociální mobilitu směrem dolů – vzhledem k tomu, že všichni jejich respondenti měli vysokoškolské vzdělání, bylo tento jev možné očekávat. Tento závěr tedy potvrzujeme. Ačkoliv autoři uvádějí, že spokojenost v zaměstnání a pracovní uplatnění v preferovaném oboru může vést k aspiracím setrvat v České republice, většina jejich respondentů, přestože se učila česky, zdůrazňovala dočasnost svého pobytu a naději na budoucí spojení rodin po skončení války na Ukrajině. Shrnují, že uprchlíci si v exilu nevytváří vhodný plán pro život, žijí v nejistotě, kdy je jejich

⁴⁵ KAMIONKA Mateusz – MACKOVÁ, Lucie – JIRKA, Luděk: “Fear for children”, Mother-Child Dyad and Future Mobility Trajectories of Displaced Ukrainians in Czechia and Poland: Children as a Factor for Fleeing and Living after the Full-Scale Invasion, s. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.14422/mig.2024.027>.

nejistá společenská pozice v hostujícím státě vyrazuje z úspěšného začlenění na pracovním trhu. Neboť jsme náš výzkum realizovali s více než ročním odstupem od popisovaného výzkumu, můžeme si dovolit se závěry této studie nesouznít. Již není výjimkou, že některé z uprchlic vykonávají kvalifikovanou práci ve svém oboru, první si ale uvědomuje, *že je v ČR šťastná a její život je krásný*, což nebere jako standardní v její situaci (N8), druhá dělá kvalifikovanou práci na univerzitě a učí v angličtině (N4), pro většinu je práce nejen cestou k nezávislosti na státu nebo příbuzných, ale také psychickou oporou (N4). Námi oslovené ženy jsou se svou prací spokojené, mnoho z nich v ní pomáhá svým krajanům, jiné se již uplatnily ve své profesi nebo jsou díky práci nezávislé, pracovní uplatnění u nich často podmiňuje i budoucí návrat na Ukrajinu (N4). Lepší znalost českého jazyka vidí všechny ženy jako cestu k lepší, případně kvalifikovanější, práci. Jedna z narátorek pracovala ve velmi vysoké pozici, měla v jeden den pod sebou nejen sekretářky a podřízené, ale i řidiče, který ji s rodinou vezl na hranice a za týden stála u stroje v továrně v pracovním oděvu, ani na tuto zkušenost však dnes nenahlíží negativně, vrátila se do kvalifikované pozice a na základě předchozího vzdělání se uplatnila v nižším managementu pomoci uprchlíkům v ČR. Stojí si za tím, že myslet pozitivně je důležité (N15).

Závěrem můžeme konstatovat, že tři roky v exilu často přiměly exulanty přehodnotit dočasnost svého pobytu v ČR. Mezi základní znaky adaptace na české prostředí patří smíšené partnerské vztahy s Čechy, upuštění od výuky online na Ukrajině a zaměření se na překonání jazykové bariéry, zvláště pokud děti přerostly věk základní školy a chtějí se uplatnit na českých školách v sekundárním a posléze i terciálním vzdělání (N8, N1). Třetím významným faktorem v adaptaci je připuštění si reality, byť nevratné ztráty domova (N1). Zatímco dříve uprchlice žily jen přítomným okamžikem, bez vize pro budoucnost (*„Když myslím na budoucnost, začnu brečet.“* N4), dnes už mnohé z nich znovu nacházejí odvahu plánovat a aktivně utvářet svůj život.

Pro naše narátorky není vždy snadné rozhodnout se, zda se chtějí vrátit na Ukrajinu, nebo zůstat v České republice. U těch, které si svou volbu dokázaly obhájit, je kariérní i životní trajektorie průhlednější: jasněji vidí svou budoucnost a chápou, že klíčem k úspěchu je dobrá znalost českého jazyka. (*„Chci se naučit lépe česky, pak mi tu bude pohodlněji.“* N12). Některé původně plánovaly odjet, ale změnily názor: *„Nechtěla jsem zůstat, protože jsem neznala jazyk, ale teď se cítím stabilně“* (N15). Jiná (N8) říká: *„Našla jsem tu nový život, můj syn chce zůstat na 100 %.“* Nostrifikace diplomu často nestačí k získání kvalifikované práce, nutná je státní zkouška z češtiny (N5, N14). Naučit se dobře česky proto mnohé vnímají jako cestu

k normálnímu životu: „*Chci normálně žít ten český život...*“ (N14). Po třech letech v exilu, kdy začínaly od nuly, pocítují hrdost, že to zvládly. Některé si tu již našly nový domov (N14), jiné vidí v emigraci paradoxně pozitivní změnu v životě (N8) nebo věří, že se mohou uplatnit a být šťastné, pokud zlepší svou kvalifikaci (N14). Klíčový je pro ně pocit bezpečí pro děti (N6, N13) – jejich aspirace se tedy často pojí s představou dobrého života v ČR.

Jedna z respondentek přirovnala samu sebe ke stromku, který byl přesazen. Tento obraz shrnuje dilema, jemuž tyto ženy čelí – jak navázat nové vztahy, přijmout nové prostředí, a přitom neztratit svou minulost. Jejich výpovědi tak nejsou jen osobními příběhy, ale i svědectvím o přeměně identity v podmínkách nedobrovolného přesunu.

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Reconstructing the Identities of Women Who Fled the War in Ukraine

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Abstract

In the Czech Republic, there is regularly updated quantitative data on temporary protection holders from Ukraine, which gives us a fairly good overview of their age, gender or economic activity. However, it does not allow us to understand the complexity of the processes and changes taking place in the lives of individual refugees. We therefore focused our attention on the stories of women who fled the war in Ukraine and who found refuge in the Czech Republic. Using qualitative research methods, we recorded and analyzed 15 narratives in which we trace the transformation of the identity of the female narrators, consisting in the deconstruction of their existing identity—national (e.g., related to the Russian language), social (related to education and occupational prestige) and class (related to economic status) and the construction of a new identity of a refugee. We identify aspects of this new identity that enable refugees to experience feelings of acceptance and belonging in their new society, from newly constructed social networks and community life to support in their current place of residence provided by work colleagues, neighbours or others who help them adapt to their new environment and life roles.

Keywords

migration, family, temporary protection, labour market, uncertainty, life aspirations

Introduction

This research is grounded in deeply personal accounts of women who left their homes because of the war. Their experiences reflect broader issues of belonging, the reconstruction of self-image, and the everyday struggle for stability. The aim of this study is not merely to describe changes in identity, but to illustrate how these changes unfold within a specific social context,

including both opportunities for and barriers to integration. On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a military aggression and invasion of Ukraine. As a result, millions of Ukrainian citizens emigrated in the days, weeks, and months that followed. Temporary protection is a mechanism of the European Union, governed by Council Directive 2001/55/EC on temporary protection. It constitutes an emergency EU instrument activated in exceptional circumstances involving a mass influx of displaced persons, with the objective of providing collective protection and alleviating pressure on the national asylum systems of EU member states.¹ The EU activated the Temporary Protection Mechanism for refugees from Ukraine in March 2022. The mechanism has most recently been extended until 4 March 2026. Currently, 4.49 million Ukrainian refugees are registered under temporary protection within the European Union.²

As of 31 December 2024, there were a total of 388,067 active registrations for temporary protection in the Czech Republic. Since the beginning of the conflict (24 February 2022) until 6 October 2024, a total of 651,457 temporary protections had been issued. The Czech Republic has consistently been the EU member state hosting the highest number of Ukrainian refugees relative to its population size. In September 2024, there were approximately 35 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, making up about 3.5% of the Czech Republic's total population. However, Ukrainians also reside in the Czech Republic under other legal statuses, including temporary residence (92,843) and permanent residence (108,546). Thus, by 31 December 2024, a total of 589,456 Ukrainian nationals were living in the country, out of an overall foreign population of 1,094,090. Ukrainians therefore constitute the largest foreign national community in the Czech Republic.

The majority of refugees are women and children. As of 6 October 2024, women represented 61% and men 39% of all holders of temporary protection; among them, 28% were children (under the age of 18) and 4% were seniors (aged 65 and over).³ A similar pattern can be observed across Europe. A study conducted last year among Ukrainian refugees across EU countries captured the following demographic characteristics of the sample: 81% of the refugees were women, with an average age of 39 years, meaning that the majority were of working age. Moreover, 68% of them had completed tertiary education, holding a university

¹ Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky: *Čtvrtletní zpráva o migraci za III. čtvrtletí 2024*. [online] [2025-02-01]. <https://mv.gov.cz/migrace/clanek/ctvrtletni-zprava-o-migraci-za-iii-ctvrtleti-2024.aspx>.

² Evropská rada/Rada Evropské unie: *Jak EU pomáhá uprchlíkům z Ukrajiny*. [online] [2025-02-01]. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/cs/policies/refugee-inflow-from-ukraine/#0>.

³ Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky: *Čtvrtletní zpráva o migraci za III. čtvrtletí 2024*. [online] [2025-02-01]. <https://mv.gov.cz/migrace/clanek/ctvrtletni-zprava-o-migraci-za-iii-ctvrtleti-2024.aspx>.

degree. More than half had fled with one or more children, with the children's average age being ten years, and 20% of the respondents were accompanied by elderly relatives.

This research, carried out by the EUAA and OECD in mid-2023 with a sample of more than three thousand respondents, closely mirrors the demographic profile of the Ukrainian refugee population in the Czech Republic.⁴

The majority of refugees in the Czech Republic reside in major urban centres, such as Prague, Brno, and Plzeň, and are predominantly economically active and highly qualified individuals. According to data from the Czech Statistical Office, as of 31 December 2023, a total of 320,042 Ukrainians living in the Czech Republic were employed, of whom 285,545 were in regular employment and 34,497 were self-employed holders of a trade licence.⁵

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) published a comprehensive report in 2023 on the socioeconomic situation of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic. The research is based on an analysis of a survey conducted with more than five thousand respondents from all regions of the Czech Republic, including Prague. Women accounted for 80% of the respondents, 46% of whom had at least one child, 39% were caring for at least one person with a serious health condition, and 28% were either over the age of 60 or living with someone who was. The sample was divided into employed and unemployed groups. Among the employed, 48% held a university degree, compared to 51% among the unemployed. The research showed that 49% of respondents of working age had completed tertiary or university education.

Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic are often employed in low-paid manual jobs that do not correspond to their educational qualifications. Up to 68% of Ukrainian women who had previously worked as managers or specialists are employed below their qualification level in the Czech Republic, compared to 50% of men. At the time of the survey, 77% of respondents of working age (18–64 years) were economically active (either employed or actively seeking employment), while 23% were economically inactive. Of those 23% who reported being unemployed and not seeking work, more than half (57%) had caregiving responsibilities for

⁴ EUAA: *Asylum Report 2024* (2024). [online] [2025-02-01].

https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2024-06/2024_Asylum_Report_EN.pdf.

EUAA/OECD: *Voices in Europe: Experiences, hopes and aspirations of forcibly displaced persons from Ukraine* (2024). [online] [2025-02-01]. https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2024-03/2024_03_05_Voices_in_Europe.pdf.

⁵ ČSÚ: *Zaměstnaní (MPSV, MPO) a bydlící (ŘSCP) cizinci podle státní příslušnosti k 31.12.2023*. [online] [2025-02-01]. https://csu.gov.cz/docs/107508/05742040-44ca-1f91-bbd5-b2959aa5a726/290027240304.pdf?version=1.0&utm_source=chatgpt.com.

other family members (children, elderly persons, or individuals with disabilities).⁶ An interesting circumstance is that Ukrainians have the lowest gross monthly wage among employed foreigners in the Czech Republic. The median gross monthly wage for Czech workers was CZK 39,421, while for the largest groups of foreign employees by nationality it was as follows: Ukrainians CZK 31,308, Slovaks CZK 45,377, Poles CZK 38,827, Romanians CZK 37,089, and Bulgarians CZK 36,748. Further research conducted by PAQ Research indicates significant differences in employment rates among Ukrainians in the Czech Republic depending on their knowledge of the Czech language. Among those who are able to communicate in Czech, 70% are employed; among those with limited Czech language skills, 51% are employed; and among those with no knowledge of Czech, only 38% are employed. Thus, refugees with Czech language skills are nearly twice as likely to be employed and are better able to utilise their qualifications.

Lucie Macková and colleagues observe that Ukrainian refugees tended to accept employment below their level of qualification, experiencing professional downgrading. This tested their resilience, altered their life aspirations, and often led to individual ontological insecurity. They summarise that the socio-economic status of Ukrainian refugees depends on their language skills, diploma recognition, family situation, and their ability to recover from the stress experienced before, during, and after displacement. All of these factors influence their prospects for either long-term integration in the Czech Republic or returning to Ukraine.⁷

This article focuses on Ukrainian women who, often as mothers and sometimes as single mothers in exile, entered the Czech labour market and have navigated their new life roles with varying degrees of success. It builds upon previous research describing the migration experiences of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic, their aspirations and ambitions in the new country, and those of their children.⁸ We will describe the life strategies employed by

⁶ IOM: *Česko: Socioekonomická situace ukrajinských uprchlíků: Zpráva za rok 2023*. [online] [2025-02-01].

⁷ MACKOVÁ, Lucie – MEDOVÁ, Nikola – FRLIČKOVÁ, Barbora – JIRKA, Luděk: 'The plan is no plan': Ontological security and resilience of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech labour market. In: *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, roč. 61, č. 1 (2025), s. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2024.024>.

⁸ KAMIONKA Mateusz – MACKOVÁ, Lucie – JIRKA, Luděk: "Fear for children", Mother-Child Dyad and Future Mobility Trajectories of Displaced Ukrainians in Czechia and Poland: Children as a Factor for Fleeing and Living after the Full-Scale Invasion. In: *Migraciones*, č. 61 (2024), s. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.14422/mig.2024.027>.

MACKOVÁ, Lucie – MEDOVÁ, Nikola – FRLIČKOVÁ, Barbora – JIRKA, Luděk: 'The plan is no plan': Ontological security and resilience of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech labour market, s. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2024.024>.

HLAĐO, Petr – ŠEĐOVÁ, Klára – OBROVSKÁ, J. a kol.: *Adaptace ukrajinských žáků na vzdělávání v českých základních školách*. Studie SYRI, 2023. [online] [2025-02-01]. <https://www.syri.cz/data/uploadHTML/files/PUBLIKACE/adaptace-ukrajinskyh-zaku-na-vzdelavani-v-ceskych-zakladnich-skolach-syri.pdf>.

these women to navigate integration processes in the Czech Republic, focusing on the reconstruction of their identities shaped by their migration experience and on the life aspirations of refugees after almost three years in exile.

Theoretical Framework

Identity

Since the 1990s, the social sciences — including cultural and social anthropology, cultural studies, and related fields — have increasingly regarded identity as a cultural or social construct. It is now paradigmatically accepted that our sense of self is shaped through the process of enculturation; identity thus possesses a discursive and performative character. „To exist as a person does not mean to possess a timeless essence; rather, it involves plasticity and changeability — the ability to respond specifically to the social and cultural configurations of one's circumstances.”⁹ We adhere to this anti-essentialist model, which emphasises that identity is always in the process of becoming. Identity cannot be uncovered as a fixed underlying essence; rather, it is constructed through similarities and differences with others. Sameness and difference — the fundamental features of the concept of identity — are themselves social constructs. “It is a continually shifting description of ourselves.”¹⁰ There is no need to seek an overarching or definitive identity; rather, our foundation lies in shifting, evolving, multiple, or fragmented identities. Identity is dynamic. Its various layers and components emerge throughout the lifetime of the individual. New life events often compel us to redefine our identity. Identity is multilayered. The categories with which we identify during our lives are defined in a wide variety of ways — by gender, ethnicity, nationality, social status, or religion. The intersection of these categories forms our identity. Identity is hybrid. A child growing up in a multicultural environment, for instance due to the diverse backgrounds of their parents, may develop a dual or mixed identity.¹¹ Similarly, migrants do not necessarily have to abandon their original identities. They may remain loyal and show solidarity towards their country of origin, their ethnic or national affiliation, and yet, through the new experience associated with migration processes, their identity may undergo transformation. We speak of the transnational identity of migrants, which “may have a highly particularistic character, not necessarily

BITTNEROVÁ, Dana: Kritické temporality: Vzdělávací trajektorie dětí uprchlíků z Ukrajiny. In: *Národopisná revue*, roč. 34, č. 2 (2024), s. 79–90. <https://doi.org/10.62800/NR.2024.2.01>.

⁹ BARKER, Chris: *Slovník kulturních studií*. Praha: Portál, 2006, s. 75.

¹⁰ Tamtéž.

¹¹ MOREE, Dana: *Základy interkulturního soužití*. Praha: Portál, 2015.

transcending national, ethnic, or religious identities, but rather linking these distinct identities into a simultaneously existing constellation of relationships within transnational social fields.”¹²

Moreover, individual self-conception is also shaped by group affiliation. It is group identity that provides people with a sense of ontological security, as belonging to a group — often linked by a shared history, language, or other commonalities — promises to transcend the finitude of individual existence.¹³ Ethnic identity is thus understood as a kind of “imperative status, an ascribed aspect of the personality from which one cannot fully disengage.”¹⁴

Eriksen, however, argues that just as the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms grants the right to a nationality, it should equally include the right to renounce a nationality.¹⁵

“Ultimately, we should bear in mind that neither ethnic groups nor nations are eternal. They emerge, flourish, and disappear.”¹⁶

Diaspora and Community

We draw upon the sociology of knowledge, similarly to Ana Mijić, who examined the reconstruction of identity and belonging following forced migration — a framework relevant to our case as well. At the origins of the sociology of knowledge, particularly in relation to the social construction of reality, stand Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. The sociology of knowledge approaches human reality as a socially constructed phenomenon.¹⁷ Among the premises of their thinking were: the reality of everyday life is shared with others — it is intersubjective;¹⁸ the social order exists solely as a product of human activity¹⁹ — society is the creation of humankind; society is an objective reality — as the relationship between the individual, society, and reality is dialectical, so too is the individual a product of society.²⁰ Following Mijić’s approach, we are interested in the fundamental social dialectic between the individual and society — specifically the issues of identity, belonging, and community life, which are profoundly affected by the experience of migration. However, “all social realities are precarious. All societies are merely constructs facing chaos.”²¹ Human identity is formed

¹² SZALÓ, Csaba: *Transnacionální migrace: proměny identit, hranic a vědění o nich*. Brno: CDK, 2007, s. 114.

¹³ BARŠA, Pavel: *Národní stát a etnický konflikt. Politologická perspektiva*. Brno: CDK, 1999, s. 69.

¹⁴ ERIKSEN, Thomas Hylland: *Etnicita a nacionalismus. Antropologické perspektivy*. Praha: SLON, 2012, s. 25.

¹⁵ ERIKSEN, Thomas Hylland: *Antropologie multikulturních společností: rozumět identitě*. Praha: Triton, 2007, s. 61.

¹⁶ ERIKSEN, Thomas Hylland: *Sociální a kulturní antropologie: příbuzenství, národnostní příslušnost, rituál*. Praha: Portál, 2008, s. 350.

¹⁷ BERGER, Peter L. – LUCKMANN, Thomas: *Sociální konstrukce reality*. Praha: CDK, 2001, s. 116.

¹⁸ Tamtéž, s. 34.

¹⁹ Tamtéž, s. 56.

²⁰ Tamtéž, s. 64.

²¹ Tamtéž, s. 104.

through social processes as a result of sharing the reality of everyday life with others. “Once it has been formed, it is maintained, modified, and even reconstructed through social relationships. The social processes involved in the formation and maintenance of identity are shaped by the social structure.”²²

Life Aspirations

Migrants’ aspirations, whether they are predominantly driven by cognitive or emotional stimuli (individual cognition and emotions), are primarily oriented towards the decision of whether it is better to leave or to stay. Within migration studies, the terms “aspirations” and “desires” are commonly used interchangeably, whereas the concept of “migration drivers” represents an analytical category that reflects a particular understanding of how the world operates. Nevertheless, these three concepts are interconnected, relating to how migration is initiated, experienced, and represented.²³

According to Macková et al., migrants’ aspirations are composed of ambitions, attitudes, expectations, intentions, plans, preferences, wishes, dreams, hopes, as well as reflections on the future, uncertainty, inertia, waiting, imaginings, needs, obligations, and willingness to migrate. Aspirations thus encompass both rational and emotional elements of decision-making.²⁴ According to Carling and Collins, these concepts can be simplified as “what migrants want”.²⁵ “The war disrupted their lives and their future status remains unclear.”²⁶ In this regard, Macková et al. highlight aspects that hinder refugees from developing a sense of belonging and security. These include the temporary nature of their stay in exile, the belief in the imminent end of the conflict, and family circumstances — all of which contributed to a disruption of ontological security and hindered the creation of coherent life plans.²⁷ Refugees’ future aspirations are closely linked to the uncertainty experienced in the present. “Time/temporality acts as an agent that navigates the migrant and directs them onto sometimes unexpected paths. Temporal regimes associated with their incorporation into state and societal structures can exert pressures

²² Tamtéž, s. 170.

²³ CARLING, Jørgen – COLLINS, Francis: Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration. In: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, roč. 44, č. 6 (2018), s. 909–926. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134>.

²⁴ MACKOVÁ, Lucie – MEDOVÁ, Nikola – FRLIČKOVÁ, Barbora – JIRKA, Luděk: ‘The plan is no plan’: Ontological security and resilience of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech labour market, s. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2024.024>.

²⁵ CARLING, Jørgen – COLLINS, Francis: Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration, s. 909–926. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134>.

²⁶ MACKOVÁ, Lucie – MEDOVÁ, Nikola – FRLIČKOVÁ, Barbora – JIRKA, Luděk: ‘The plan is no plan’: Ontological security and resilience of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech labour market, s. 1. <https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2024.024>.

²⁷ Tamtéž.

on them and render them vulnerable.”²⁸ The refugee experience enters and interrupts individual life trajectories; more precisely, individuals may become trapped within them or be redirected onto new paths. “Some migration regimes, in relation to particular temporal frameworks, reinforce feelings among migrants that they belong nowhere, that their lives cannot continue in their country of origin, nor can they necessarily or meaningfully be re-established in a new place. However, being ‘stuck’ can sometimes hold the potential for waiting for a better opportunity — a form of waiting that is not wasted but rather used for gathering information, strategising, and planning.”²⁹

Younger refugees are more likely to plan to remain in the Czech Republic. Among the youngest generation (under 30 years old), 65% expressed an intention to stay, whereas among those aged 50 and above, the proportion was approximately 40%. Similarly, those who are employed in the Czech Republic are more likely to plan to stay (64% compared to 49% among those who are not employed). In general, those who are financially better off and have found employment are more inclined to remain in the country.³⁰

Similar conclusions are drawn by Borselli and Toon van Meijl in their descriptions of the life trajectories of Syrian refugees. Many adapted their aspirations and chose new paths to success in response to experiences of war, displacement, and prolonged disruption to their life courses. According to their findings, age and parenthood are likely to be significant discriminatory factors in the process of forging new life trajectories. Single young individuals tended to pursue long-term education and career plans, whereas parents prioritised the economic security of their families over personal development. Successful integration strategies based on education and career ambitions are therefore more often chosen by younger individuals without caregiving responsibilities — a pattern that similarly appears among Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic.³¹

Methodology

Our research was based on a qualitative approach to data construction, which underpins the summarised conclusions presented herein. We conducted semi-structured interviews with

²⁸ BITTNEROVÁ, Dana: Kritické temporality: Vzdělávací trajektorie dětí uprchlíků z Ukrajiny, s. 79–90. <https://doi.org/10.62800/NR.2024.2.01>.

²⁹ Tamtéž.

³⁰ PAQ research – UNICEF: *Integrace ukrajinských uprchlíků: 2 roky poté a výhled na 2024+*. [online] [2025-02-01]. https://www.paqresearch.cz/content/files/2024/02/PAQ_Hlas_Ukrajincu_Dva_roky_pote-2.pdf.

³¹ BORSELLI, Marco – MEIJL, Toon van: Linking Migration Aspirations to Integration Prospects: The Experience of Syrian Refugees in Sweden. In: *Journal of Refugee Studies*, roč. 34, č. 1 (2021), s. 579–595. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa043>.

women — Ukrainian refugees — who arrived in the Czech Republic after the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

A precondition for participation was that the narrators had long-term work experience in the Czech labour market. One of the secondary aims of the study was to describe their experiences in job seeking and employment in the Czech Republic. Although we did not exclusively target highly educated migrants, with only one exception, all of our narrators had completed at least tertiary education, defined as holding a university degree at least at the bachelor's level. In total, we conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews. The interviews were carried out between August and November 2024 and were recorded using audio devices. With one exception — a single interview conducted online via the Teams platform — all interviews were conducted face-to-face. Respondents were living in various regions of the Czech Republic; the majority were from the Olomouc Region, where the author has the strongest contacts with the Ukrainian community. However, respondents from cities in Bohemia, including Prague and Brno, were also included. All participants met the research criteria: they had been employed in the Czech Republic for an extended period and held temporary protection status.

Respondents were selected either randomly or through snowball sampling, whereby one participant recommended others. Interviews were conducted in Czech, Ukrainian, Russian, or English, depending on participants' preferences. An interpreter was present when needed to translate between Ukrainian and Czech or English.

All ethical standards commonly observed in such research were strictly followed. Participants took part voluntarily, were fully informed about the anonymisation of the interviews and the research aims, and were told that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without providing a reason. Informed consent was obtained in writing from both the interviewer and the participant in advance, allowing participants sufficient time to review it and decide whether to participate. The consent form was bilingual (Czech–Ukrainian) and included agreement for recording the interviews and information about data storage. This procedure complied with the legislation of the Czech Republic.

The interviews were subsequently transcribed manually or translated into Czech and then transcribed. Open coding was carried out using Atlas.ti software. We believe that regular cross-checking of audio recordings and transcripts by the interpreter ensured minimal distortion of information despite language barriers. Narrators were anonymised and labelled

chronologically as N1, N2, and so forth. The semi-structured interviews were guided by pre-prepared core questions, but participants were encouraged to elaborate freely, and supplementary questions were posed as necessary to capture a broader context. In analysing the coded text, we applied qualitative content analysis. Texts were sorted into thematic units — code clusters — which were further classified and systematically analysed, leading to the identification of categories and subcategories and the exploration of the relationships between them.

All narrators were women. This was partly because men who could have accompanied them often remained in Ukraine due to military conscription obligations, and partly because many women arrived with children whom they needed to care for abroad. The connection between childcare and employment in the Czech Republic was a central theme of the research. Men who legally accompanied some of these women appear only indirectly in the interviews, as parts of the narrators' social networks. Data about the narrators, including their age, place of origin, and current place of residence in the Czech Republic at the time of the interview, are presented in Table 1 (appendix). All narrators had arrived during the first months of the invasion and had thus been living in the Czech Republic for their third year at the time of the research.

A significant part of the data evaluation consisted of comparing our findings with those of similarly structured, analysed, and targeted studies. Changes in the life aspirations of exiled refugees were linked to the length of time spent abroad, experiences in the labour market, and the integration of themselves and their family members into Czech society. Over time, substantial shifts in values associated with prolonged exile became evident, with exile increasingly perceived not as temporary but as potentially permanent. Describing these shifts constitutes an important secondary aim of our research.

Analysis

Factors Determining the Flight to Safety

Although many refugees felt that “things happened quickly” (N8), the decision to leave everything behind and flee with only essential personal belongings — none of the women carried more than a piece of hand luggage, most often a backpack for themselves and their children (N10, N8, N9, N7) — was made only when life in Ukraine became unbearable. The narrators experienced despair, some fell into panic, and all were gripped by fear for their own lives and those of their children.

They recalled days spent in underground shelters, the war raging outside their windows; some experienced hunger, and several witnessed death firsthand.

Those who were fleeing for the second time tended to decide more quickly, while others were forced to flee only when their lives were in imminent danger or when they were trapped in occupied territories. Traumatic experiences during the journey to safety were not exceptional (N2, N15, N13, N5, N14, etc.). The sounds of war continued to haunt them long after arriving in the Czech Republic (N8).

In several cases, the war and the days of occupation were linked to the death of a parent — specifically the death of a mother — as an indirect consequence of the conflict. “My mother died from fear and the horrors of war around her...” (N12).

Another narrator described how, despite her efforts, she could not persuade her mother to flee with her and her child; subsequently, her mother passed away, and she was unable to attend the funeral (N13).

A further narrator reported that her mother had already been gravely affected by the stress of the war in Donbas prior to the full-scale invasion; although she later managed to bring her mother to safety and secure appropriate care, it was ultimately too late (N14).

Memories also include accounts of leaving behind domestic animals, losses that left lasting emotional scars.

Except for two young women and one grandmother caring for her grandson, all our narrators were mothers fleeing to safety with at least one child, often more.

Unsurprisingly, one of the decisive factors leading to their departure was fear for their children’s lives and futures; they could not endure the threat to their children’s survival (N15, N8, N7, N6).

Among the women was also a migrant who had not initially planned to emigrate — she had been on holiday in Europe with her daughter when the war broke out, and they were unable to return home (N4).

As a consequence of the traumas they had experienced, some narrators became completely isolated during the first weeks and months of exile, avoiding contact with others for up to six months (N10). Another narrator described feeling like a character in a book:

“I couldn’t believe it, I just couldn’t believe that all this was happening to me. It was like... you see... like a book, where you read about ordinary life, but then you hear stories like... he went there and died, there was love, something happened there. And now all of it was happening to me and around me.” (N7)

Another explained that after arrival, they were unable to function:

“We didn’t go anywhere, not even to the shop, nowhere. We just sat in the flat because we were afraid.” (N1) Thus, even the basic necessities of life had to be secured with the help of others.

Nothing Was Left to Them...

The narrators left behind everything they had built over the course of their lives in Ukraine — houses, apartments, businesses, rural properties inherited from their parents. They also left behind their homeland, their cherished homes, and in many cases, particularly noted, their beloved seaside regions (e.g., N10).

The losses varied. Some women already knew that they had lost everything, taken from them by the war (N11, N10). Others remained uncertain about the state of their property, especially those who had lived in formerly occupied territories (N11, N15). Some had already lost their homes following the events of 2014.

A few knew that their properties were still intact, being cared for by husbands, family members, or acquaintances. While many had reconciled themselves to the possibility of losing their assets, they nevertheless remained afraid of the final, irrevocable loss (N15, N7).

One narrator reflected: “People who cannot accept reality and remain mentally trapped in their former lives — it is hard for them. The old life will not return. They know it, but they still dream about it.” (N6)

On the other hand, these losses prompted another narrator to reflect on the simplicity of her needs: “Everything I needed, I had here within a month.” (N5)

A particularly striking story of salvaging some value from possessions came from a refugee who, through contacts in Georgia, managed to retrieve her car after it had been seized and taken to Russia (N10).

The Czech Republic as a New Home

In their evaluations of the Czech Republic, the migrants most often highlighted the sense of safety (N9, N10, N4), along with accessible healthcare, social and health insurance (especially health insurance, which does not exist in the same form in Ukraine), financial security opportunities, and appreciation for Czech culture and cultural proximity (N14). They valued the positive atmosphere at workplaces, the friendliness of people both in public and at work, and the support their children received in schools (N14, N6).

They expressed gratitude for the possibility of earning a livelihood — being able to work, live, and travel across the Czech Republic and neighbouring European countries (N12).

Half of the refugees we interviewed do not plan to return to Ukraine for various reasons. Others currently frame their stay in the Czech Republic as temporary, although circumstances may transform this into a permanent resettlement.

“As long as there is war, I cannot return... I don't understand how people can live there! And if I have a job here and not in Ukraine — work and war are the two conditions” (N8).

One narrator described how she attempted to return to her hometown during the first year of the war but concluded that a mere ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia would not be sufficient — “the war must end completely” for her to return with her children.

“I already returned once and had to flee quickly back to safety — back to the Czech Republic. We didn't want to go again to the Czech Republic, but life in Ukraine was so difficult that we had no choice but to leave. I had to flee again because Ukraine was dangerous for our children. You stop thinking about yourself, you think only about your children.” (N12)

For some migrants, negative developments in their homeland, particularly the possibility of a Russian victory, represent a fundamental argument against returning (N7, N10):

“I will not go to Russia” (N10).

“I will not live under the Russians” (N7).

For those with repeated refugee experiences, the prospect of returning home is often no longer viable. A refugee from Donbas described her feelings emotively:

“Since 2014, I have had no home. I don't know what tomorrow will bring. That is no longer my homeland...” (N14).

Similarly, a woman who lost everything during the occupation reflected:

“I no longer have a home. I have decided that my home is here. I am trying to fit in and learn Czech as well as possible. Here is the future for me and my child.” (N13)

Some women, reaching mid-life, reject the idea of starting over “from scratch” and therefore do not even consider returning, as they no longer have anything to return to:

“We have a house there, newly renovated just ten years ago, and they destroyed it completely. I'm 40 years old. How long would I even be able to function there if we returned? It just wouldn't be possible.” (N2)

“When I decided to leave my home, I knew I was leaving it forever. I knew I would not return...” (N13)

Another narrator described her re-emigration experience similarly:

“During the holidays, my children were happy to visit their grandparents, but only as visitors” (N5).

In Russian-speaking regions that fell under Russian control early in the war, residents still feel betrayed because no one fought for them — this bitter feeling is another reason for permanent exile:

“We do not plan to return to Ukraine because we cannot forget that no one fought for us, no one cared” (N15).

Children are often the key reason for permanent emigration. Even if parents consider returning, they do not plan for their children to return (N5), in part because after three years in the Czech Republic, their children no longer have sufficient proficiency in Ukrainian to succeed in school, speaking primarily Russian at home and now attending Czech schools (N12).

One mother elaborated further:

“My son is twelve years old; soon he will be an adult. The Russians are our neighbours; we don't know when this war will end, and we can no longer predict anything. Many mothers are afraid that if they stayed in Ukraine, their sons would be forced to fight.” (N12)

The length of stay abroad also acts as a barrier to return. One refugee insightfully remarked:

“I am Ukrainian — here I can't fully fit in because I am a foreigner. But if I returned home, I would no longer fit in there either. I would feel just as much a foreigner.” (N13)

She based this conclusion on observing social media from her hometown and staying in contact with friends, noting how her thinking had diverged from that of those who remained, and how the city itself had become almost unrecognisable — both through wartime destruction and changes in its inhabitants' mentality.

All these arguments in favour of settling abroad are reinforced when no relatives remain in Ukraine (N10).

Life in the Czech Republic – ... The Plan Is to Live Here and Now

Over the course of the three years during which all the narrators have been living in exile in the Czech Republic, their lives have changed significantly, and it can be said that all now live in conditions with which they are largely satisfied.

Although in the early stages they accepted accommodation arranged through centres such as KACPU or other organisations — often involving shared living spaces or stays in

hostels or hotels — today, most of them rent flats on the commercial housing market (N7, N5, N14).

Two narrators live with new partners, and one with a new husband.

After initially living in unsuitable locations during the first months of exile, many of the refugees later prioritised finding accommodation close to their children's schools and their workplaces (e.g., N5).

Nevertheless, even their memories of staying in hostels for seasonal workers or large guesthouses, where dozens of Ukrainian families lived together, are not entirely negative.

Although facilities were limited — for example, one small kitchen for sixty residents — the positive side was that people got to know each other well; everyone was aware of others' stories, experiences, and backgrounds.

This community-based way of life has evolved into the formation of community centres, where women — particularly those who often experience feelings of loneliness — meet and offer one another support (N6):

“For us, it is very important to be able to share our thoughts and emotions in our native language. We understand each other; we know how hard it is, how painful it is to leave your parents or sometimes even your children behind in Ukraine.”

Language Barrier – A Major Obstacle to Integration

Ukrainian mothers are keenly aware of how closely their success in the Czech labour market and their children's success in Czech schools are linked to overcoming the language barrier. “This is the number one priority” (N7, N13).

The narrators identified socialisation — both for themselves and their children — within Czech society as fundamental to mastering the language. If they worked within Czech-speaking environments (N9), where Czech was essential for performing their jobs (“...I had to speak with the teachers in Czech. I just had to speak, and that's how I learned” N6), they overcame the language barrier more easily than others. Another factor was using Czech as the primary means of communication in households shared with Czechs during exile (N9, N13), as well as participation in Czech language courses.

They also associated their children's success in education with their ability to make friends among Czech peers. Participation in leisure activities with Czech children significantly accelerated language acquisition compared to those who did not build Czech friendships: “My grandson would like to return to Ukraine because he has practically no friends here” (N11).

Many mothers actively supported their children's language education, enrolling them in preparatory courses for university admission or arranging additional Czech tutoring if natural language acquisition through peer interaction was insufficient.

Currently, after three years in exile, many women aim to pass the Czech language exam at the B1 level; some have already achieved this milestone. Those who began studying intensively from the start of their exile now report feeling much more comfortable within Czech society (N9).

As the women's experiences abroad grew, some began to express critical reflections. They verbalised a lack of understanding for compatriots who had lived in the Czech Republic for many years without learning Czech, suggesting that this was "because they don't want to" (N13).

They also noted difficulties their children faced at school due to the lack of Russian- or Ukrainian-speaking teachers: "Often no one at school can communicate with the Ukrainian children" (N6).

Labour Market Integration

All the women interviewed had long-term work experience in the Czech Republic, which was a precondition for participating in the study. Through random selection, we found women who, with only one exception, had completed tertiary education in Ukraine, thus holding university degrees.

Combined with their strong desire for independence and employability in the Czech labour market, it is not surprising that employment is seen as a "basic necessity of life" (N7).

Some of the women were fortunate enough to find jobs during their three years in exile that provided a deeper sense of purpose, although most initially worked in positions significantly lower than those they had held in Ukraine. Several had previously earned much higher incomes in Ukraine.

One refugee, despite the socio-economic fall associated with her new job, valued the peace and the opportunity to help others (N15).

For others, job security is of primary importance, with employment in some cases being directly tied to accommodation — a situation that reduces their flexibility but fulfils their need for a stable livelihood.

As one narrator remarked: "We are doing the work that Czechs don't want to do because it's too hard" (N12).

Some of the women sought employment immediately upon arrival, while others initially waited — hoping to return home soon or focusing first on learning Czech — but all of them entered the labour market within one year of arrival.

Today, most of the women have had their qualifications officially recognised (nostrification).

Those who had worked as teachers in Ukraine are now mostly employed as teaching assistants for Ukrainian children. Career advancement for them is dependent on passing Czech language proficiency exams, which all are striving to achieve.

Teaching is often regarded as a vocation, both in Ukraine and elsewhere; however, one narrator expressed bitterness at the low pay teachers receive in Ukraine.

It is no longer exceptional for some of the women to be employed in qualified positions in their original fields. One woman acknowledges how fortunate she feels: “I am happy in the Czech Republic, and my life is beautiful,” a sentiment she does not take for granted given her situation (N8). Another works as a qualified linguist, teaching English at a university (N4).

For most, employment represents not only a path to independence from the state or relatives but also an important source of psychological support:

“Without work, it would be unbearable” (N4).

The women we interviewed were largely satisfied with their jobs; many help their fellow countrymen through their work, some have found employment in their professional fields, and others have achieved independence through work.

Employment is often a key factor in their decisions about whether or not to eventually return to Ukraine (N4).

All of the women see improved proficiency in the Czech language as essential to achieving better — and more qualified — employment.

People Are People Everywhere – Good and Bad Alike

The narrators rarely encountered overt discrimination in public spaces, although they did observe changes in behaviour, for example among zoo staff who, upon recognising them as foreigners, altered their attitude, as well as among employees of the Czech Post. More frequently, they experienced verbal attacks in public spaces or online (N13, N14, N7).

One narrator regularly read online comments in order to perceive changes in Czech society's attitudes towards acceptance and solidarity:

“Because I am not afraid of bad news. I have no illusions that life is particularly good” (N7).

The narrators also noted occasional confrontations involving Roma individuals or accusations that Ukrainians were taking jobs from Czechs. Nevertheless, there were instances where Czechs stood up for Ukrainian mothers during conflicts.

Throughout the interviews, every woman expressed repeated gratitude for the help they had received from Czechs at the beginning of their migration experience. They recalled that the promised assistance had indeed materialised: free public transport for refugees, free Czech language courses, free education for children, and access to retraining programmes — all of which were valued more highly than the financial allowances that supported them during times of need (N9).

Even more appreciated was the personal assistance provided by individuals. Many mothers with children initially stayed with Czech families (N12, N13, N6, N10, N9, N8). Some Czech families offered accommodation free of charge; others provided it in exchange for help around the house.

Living with Czech families often marked the first steps toward adaptation — learning the language and coping with cultural differences.

Accepting help from others was not taken for granted; it was associated not only with deep gratitude but also with the restart of their lives in exile.

As one narrator recalled:

“One beautiful moment. Mrs. Alena (our landlady) said she had found a nice flat for us” (N8).

Another said:

“Our landlord simply accepted strangers into his home. He wanted to help. It was just wonderful” (N9).

Help from individuals who spoke Russian was particularly valued, especially within host families (N8).

In other cases, assistance came through charities, employers who provided both jobs and housing, groups of volunteers, long-settled Ukrainians in the Czech Republic, and other individuals.

Since many had left their most treasured possessions behind, they sought help from friends or volunteers who, for example, transported one narrator’s two dogs to her (N4), while another (N6) gradually arranged for the retrieval of her personal belongings.

If there were relatives remaining in Ukraine, some possessions could be sent by post or via long-distance bus services (N9).

Accepting assistance was not always easy; many refugees tried — and in some cases managed — to support themselves independently using their own savings or help from family members.

Some secured employment so quickly that they no longer qualified for emergency aid (N2) or considered themselves less deserving of it (N10).

Over time, all the narrators became economically independent, typically within a year of arrival.

Today, several women view giving back to the community as essential.

One is specialising in psychology studies to support vulnerable individuals; others work to assist Ukrainian children in Czech schools, striving to pass language exams to enhance their qualifications.

They work in various helping professions — in church organisations, community centres, as teaching assistants, or directly with refugee populations (N1, N5, N7, N6, N9, N14, N15).

Ukrainian women also maintain strong ties to those they left behind, supporting family members or friends wounded or killed in the war.

As one woman stated:

“From every bit of extra income we earn, a part goes back to Ukraine” (N5).

After Three Years in Exile – Rebuilding a New Life

Three years in exile have often led refugees to reconsider the temporary nature of their stay in the Czech Republic.

Key indicators of adaptation to the Czech environment include entering mixed partnerships with Czechs, abandoning online schooling through Ukrainian institutions, and focusing on overcoming the language barrier — particularly crucial as children move beyond primary school and seek to succeed in Czech secondary and eventually tertiary education.

“We must master Czech” (N8).

“We have focused only on Czech schools — my grandson already got a ‘B’ in Czech” (N11).

The first Ukrainian students have now graduated from Czech secondary schools; paradoxically, this has allowed some to become among the youngest students at Czech universities. Indeed, one narrator's son entered university at the age of sixteen (N7).

A third significant factor in adaptation is the acceptance of reality:

"There is nowhere left for me to return to after two wars. I like it here, and I love my partner — a Czech man" (N1).

Diaspora

With few exceptions, the war has divided large families. Long-term separation of spouses — where men are not permitted to leave Ukraine and only women and children have fled to safety — represents the most common form of transnational family separation. However, this is not a universal rule. Prolonged separation within nuclear families has often accelerated the cooling of relationships, particularly where the partnership had already been under strain:

"He let me leave with the child" (N13).

Family separation has also frequently affected relationships with grandparents or even with older children — boys who had to stay behind to enlist or continue their studies, and girls who chose not to leave their partners (N5, N14, N11:

"The younger daughter could have left with us, but she didn't want to leave her boyfriend behind in Ukraine...").

Narratives suggest that not all multigenerational living arrangements in exile were successful.

Older people tended to miss home more acutely and adapted to new environments with greater difficulty, often deciding to return to Ukraine earlier (N6).

One migrant woman recounted how her daughter eventually returned to Ukraine to be with her father, having failed to adjust to life in exile. Now, during holidays and breaks, the daughter is handed over at the Ukrainian–Slovak border.

The mother commented:

"I don't understand how my daughter manages there. I really don't. I don't understand how people can live day-to-day under such fear" (N8).

Despite this, she herself does not consider returning, as she has settled in the Czech Republic with her teenage son, who is studying there.

Another story concerns a woman who fled with her son and is the only member of her extended family in exile. However, she does not plan to return until Ukraine is completely safe:

“As long as there is war, I will not go back. But one day, I will return” (N11).

Similar sentiments are expressed by another woman:

“My family stayed in Ukraine; I am like a little tree that was taken and replanted” (N5), highlighting the sense of uprootedness and the loss of family background.

Families are now dispersed across Europe (N9), and even those accustomed to separation have been deeply affected:

“We are a family of seafarers, but the war has divided and scattered our entire family around the world” (N10).

Identity

Given that our narrators — with few exceptions — came from areas directly affected by the war or lived in occupied territories, it is not surprising that most of them listed Russian as their mother tongue. However, this does not mean that they identified as Russians; on the contrary, the armed conflict has internalised a strong sense of national identity for many:

“I am Ukrainian, but everyone in our city speaks Russian” (N12);

“I have no associations with being Russian. Odesa is a Ukrainian city, but we speak Russian there — it’s our history...” (N13).

Other explanations also emerged:

“Nationality was something only recorded in our Soviet passports — there it said I was Russian” (N7).

For one narrator, the internalisation of Ukrainian identity occurred specifically in exile:

“All my life I spoke Russian, but now I only speak Ukrainian. I no longer speak Russian at all” (N7).

Yet language as a marker of identity can also be approached in an entirely different way:

“I never spoke Russian, nor did anyone in my extended family. We all spoke Ukrainian. Only after the war started, when I needed to communicate here in the Czech Republic, did I start speaking Russian” (N6).

A large proportion of the refugees declared that, although Russian was their native language, everyone in their regions understood both languages (N12, N13, N14, N15).

They also recalled the widespread use of *surzhyk* — a mixed language blending Russian and Ukrainian — noting that “pure Ukrainian is rarely heard, perhaps only at school” (N9).

One respondent elaborated on her sense of identity more extensively:

“I lost everything, everything I had. The war is between politicians, not between people. Russian is just a means of communication for me... My mother is Russian, my father Ukrainian...” (N15).

Her answer reveals an underlying uncertainty — identity is being formed, or rather re-formed.

Similarly, most of the other women consistently maintained that “they are Ukrainians, but they speak Russian,” although the majority also speak Ukrainian (N2, N5, N7, N9, N11, N12, N13, N14, N15).

In their own words:

“We lived and spoke Russian. But now, with the war, I have sincerely self-identified as a Ukrainian — regardless of my ethnic background, because my parents are from Russia” (N7).

Future Prospects and Language Skills

At the beginning of their exile, many refugee women had no visions for themselves or their families, often focusing only on the immediate future — on the next few days rather than months or years.

One woman expressed this poignantly:

“When I think about the future, I start crying” (N4).

Today, however, many of them are actively planning their lives and want to shape their own trajectories.

For some, deciding whether to stay in the Czech Republic or return to Ukraine remains difficult.

Those who have justified their decision to stay see mastering the Czech language as a condition for success (N1, N14, N12):

“I want to learn Czech better; then I think it will be more comfortable for me in the Czech Republic. It will make communication with doctors, at school, at parent-teacher meetings much easier.”

One narrator put it clearly: she had not wanted to stay because she did not know the language, but now she feels a sense of stability because she can communicate (N15).

Another admitted:

“I have found a new life here. My son wants to stay here 100%, and because of that, I see the future more here than in Ukraine” (N8).

While the nostrification of diplomas does not automatically lead to qualified employment, many professions require a state examination in Czech, which is a goal several of our narrators are striving towards (e.g., N5, N14).

Another woman described language learning as essential for living a normal life:

“I want to live a normal Czech life...” (N14/285).

The refugees' life goals are often closely linked to their hopes for Ukraine's future.

“If the Russians win, then I hope my skills, abilities, and experience will help me find a role here... perhaps working with the Ukrainian community, which is now the largest ethnic minority in the Czech Republic” (N7).

Another narrator was even more cautious, expressing a wish for her children to remain in the Czech Republic even if Ukraine wins the war:

“It will take a long time to build a new Ukraine” (N11).

Of course, among the dreams of Ukrainian women are also those we might call higher aspirations:

“I would like children — not just mine, but all children — to go to sleep knowing what tomorrow will bring, waking up in peace, so that no children have to live in basements. I wish for the war to end, so that not only children but also adults have minimal losses” (N14).

Another said:

“I hope that we, those of us abroad, will realise the value of our homeland, our traditions, and that when we return to Ukraine, we will make it even more beautiful than before. It's important that our children do not lose their roots, that they preserve their culture and heritage, and I have the support for this at our school; parents see that there is meaning in it” (N6).

Visions of the future can also be deeply personal. For some, it involves a new partnership culminating in marriage (N8); for others, the hope of reuniting the family and living where they truly wish (N10).

Naturally, for many women, planning anything while in exile remains profoundly difficult:

“Since the start of the war, I no longer plan for the future, but I miss the sea...” (N9);

“I don't think about the future — I live in the present. If something is beyond my control, I don't worry about it” (N4).

Several women, even after three years in exile, have not changed their stance: they do not plan, nor do they reflect on the future because they simply do not know what will happen next (N3, N12, N10, N9).

For many, visions of returning are tied to the idea of beginning again:

“For now, I don't know. I don't think about returning. If I return, I will have to start everything over again” (N10).

Aspirations

After three years in exile, during which most of our narrators started “from nothing” (N2/175, 174) — rebuilding their lives from scratch — many now express a sense of pride in their resilience.

Looking back, they acknowledge that “it was very hard, terrible at the beginning” (N2), but their positive attitude demonstrates the perseverance of many.

They believe that just as they built a good life for themselves through hard work in Ukraine, they can do so again in the Czech Republic:

“If I sit here crying with my hands in my lap, it won't help me at all, so I must believe in myself and support my children in the same way” (N15).

Some women have realised that their previous lives are firmly in the past:

“When the war started and I arrived here, I understood that everything back there was already history, that it had happened and that it was necessary to move forward” (N6).

Some are already certain that they have found a new home (N14); others, paradoxically, experienced positive life changes through exile, with their lives improving as a result (N8).

They believe they can begin a new life, one imbued with meaning (N6), and they trust that by mastering Czech and improving their qualifications, they will find work that will bring them happiness (N14).

A crucial aspect of their new lives is providing a sense of security for their children (N6, N13).

Thus, their aspirations are often tied to the possibility of building a good life in the Czech Republic.

One narrator dreams of working at a university and writing a history of Ukraine free from Russian narratives, envisioning herself and her husband contributing to the future rebuilding of Ukraine (N5).

Another narrator, however, emphasised her satisfaction with life in the Czech Republic, describing the Czech language as beautiful and expressing her fondness for Czech towns and villages (N7), which strengthens her desire to stay.

The hopes connected to the future were summarised by a refugee who had previously lived a higher middle-class life in Ukraine:

“My dream is to sell all our properties in Ukraine at a good price and buy something here.

My dream is for me and my children to speak Czech fluently, to continue living and working here.

I am afraid of what the future holds...

My dream is that there will never be war here.

My dream is that you will have patience with us and that Czechs will understand that not all Ukrainians are bad” (N15).

Discussion and Conclusion

Our aim was to focus on the construction and reconstruction of the identities of women refugees. A particularly insightful contribution to this theme was made by Ana Mijić, who, in her research, studied refugees from the civil war in Yugoslavia. She approached these individuals thirty years after their migration to Austria.³² She examined the process of shaping various aspects of the respondents’ new identities in the context of long-term exile.

In line with the sociology of knowledge developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, her research is based on the assumption that social reality is created by people who are simultaneously its product.

In this conception, identity is both reflective and reflexive — it represents a key element of subjectively experienced reality.

Of course, the difference between three and thirty years in exile is substantial.

Nevertheless, in our research, we observed signs of an emerging complex process of new self-identification among Ukrainian women in exile.

If Mijić emphasises the connection between identity and a sense of belonging, it is precisely this aspect that appears crucial within refugee communities.

Women, often isolated, find support in community centres, where they can share their experiences, thoughts, and emotions in their native language — thus mutually reinforcing their bonds (N6).

³² MIJIĆ, Ana: (Re-)Construction of Identity and Belonging after Forced Migration: A Sociology of Knowledge Approach, s. 1107–1125. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feac020>.

It seems that, within Ukrainian communities, the acceptance of a refugee identity as part of their new reality is gradually taking shape.

The importance of exchanging physical goods across distance among relatives in transnational Ukrainian families had previously been discussed by Khrenova L. and Burrell.³³ They reminded us that maintaining close family relationships is also supported through material exchange.

The parcels sent are an important component of transnational family life, and far more than providing economic assistance, they embody family bonds, support, and a sense of shared presence; they offer tangible care and firm evidence that loved ones have not been forgotten.

Already in this study, private couriers and networks of friends were described as preferred channels of transport, as they are cheaper, faster, and often more reliable.

Similarly, our narrators continue to rely on such forms of distant exchange or transport.

“For me, the clothes of my great-great-grandmother, which are over 180 years old, are important, so I bring them here, as well as the books my grandfather wrote. And those embroidered shirts, scarves, and skirts too. Because the clothing... the patterns they had, the ones they wore — that is a very important tradition in Ukraine.

Every time a friend travels to Ukraine, I ask if she could bring some clothes and books for me — the books written by my grandfather and the dresses from my great-grandmother and earlier” (N6).

Whether it concerns sending personal belongings to the Czech Republic via relatives and friends from Ukraine, rescuing family heirlooms such as collections of traditional costumes or books, or even the transfer of pets — in our case, dogs — it represents a vital part of maintaining family identity and continuity:

“My family is me, my daughter, and our two dogs” (N4).

Conversely, equally important is the help provided to those who have remained in Ukraine, particularly through financial support to children, parents, and friends who lost their health or livelihoods during the war:

“From every bit of extra income we earn, a part goes to Ukraine” (N5).

Colleagues Kamionka M. et al. have noted that among the emigrants from Ukraine they interviewed, the primary motivations for leaving were the war and the desire to secure the safety

³³ KHRENOVA Lyudmyla – BURRELL, Kathy: Materialising Care across Borders: Sent Things and Family Ties between Sweden and Ukraine. In: *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, roč. 11, č. 3 (2021), s. 250–261. <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.399>.

of their children.³⁴ We arrived at similar conclusions: most of our narrators decided to flee their homes only when life in Ukraine became unbearable and they feared for their own lives and the lives of their children (N15, N8, N7, N6).

The aforementioned authors also highlighted the refugees' lack of preparedness for exile.

They began new lives in unfamiliar environments, marked by uncertainty and unpredictability, which often led to their acceptance of lower-quality employment.

These findings correspond closely to our own observations.

All the women interviewed had long-term work experience in the Czech Republic.

Through random selection, we found that — with only one exception — the women had completed tertiary education in Ukraine.

Some were fortunate enough to find meaningful employment within their three years in exile, while the majority initially took jobs at significantly lower positions than they had held in Ukraine; several had also earned much higher incomes in their country of origin.

We also confronted our findings with the work of Macková L. et al., who reflected on the issues of ontological security and resilience among Ukrainian refugees in the Czech labour market.³⁵ Among their conclusions is the observation that many refugees experienced downward social mobility upon arriving in the Czech Republic — unsurprising, given that all of their respondents had completed higher education.

We unequivocally confirm this conclusion.

Although the authors suggest that satisfaction with work and employment opportunities in their preferred fields may lead refugees to aspire to remain in the Czech Republic, the majority of their respondents — despite studying Czech — continued to stress the temporary nature of their stay and the hope of family reunification in Ukraine after the war.

They concluded that refugees often fail to create a suitable life plan in exile, living instead in a state of uncertainty, with their precarious social position in the host state impeding successful labour market integration.

Since our research was conducted more than a year after the study mentioned above, we feel justified in diverging from some of its conclusions.

³⁴ KAMIONKA Mateusz – MACKOVÁ, Lucie – JIRKA, Luděk: “Fear for children”, Mother-Child Dyad and Future Mobility Trajectories of Displaced Ukrainians in Czechia and Poland: Children as a Factor for Fleeing and Living after the Full-Scale Invasion, s. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.14422/mig.2024.027>.

³⁵ MACKOVÁ, Lucie – MEDOVÁ, Nikola – FRLIČKOVÁ, Barbora – JIRKA, Luděk: ‘The plan is no plan’: Ontological security and resilience of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech labour market, s. 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2024.024>.

Today, it is no longer exceptional to find Ukrainian refugee women working in qualified positions in their fields.

One woman acknowledges that she is now happy in the Czech Republic and considers her life here beautiful — which she does not view as standard in her situation (N8).

Another is employed at a university, teaching in English (N4).

For most, employment is not only a path to independence from the state or family support, but also a vital source of psychological resilience (N4).

The women we interviewed expressed satisfaction with their jobs; many assist their fellow Ukrainians, others have re-established themselves professionally or have become self-sufficient.

Employment often shapes whether or not they consider returning to Ukraine (N4).

All women identified better knowledge of Czech as the key to securing better or more qualified work.

One narrator had once held a very senior position, managing staff and even a personal driver — who later drove her and her family to the border.

Within a week, she found herself working on a factory floor in uniform.

Yet even this experience is not perceived negatively today; she has since returned to a qualified role, applying her skills in the management of refugee assistance in the Czech Republic.

She maintains that a positive attitude is crucial:

“Thinking positively is important” (N15).

In conclusion, we can state that three years in exile have often led refugees to reconsider the supposed temporariness of their stay in the Czech Republic.

Key indicators of adaptation include mixed partnerships with Czechs, abandoning online education linked to Ukraine, and focusing on overcoming language barriers — particularly for children seeking success in Czech secondary and tertiary education (N8, N1).

A third crucial factor is the acceptance of reality, even in the face of the irreversible loss of their original homes (N1).

Whereas earlier the refugee women lived only for the present, without visions for the future (“When I think about the future, I start crying” — N4), today many have regained the courage to plan and actively shape their lives.

For our narrators, choosing whether to return to Ukraine or stay in the Czech Republic is not always straightforward.

Those who have justified their decision find their career and life trajectories clearer, recognising that mastering the Czech language is the key to success:

“I want to learn Czech better; then I will feel more comfortable here” (N12).

Some originally intended to leave but have since changed their minds:

“I didn’t want to stay because I didn’t know the language, but now I feel stable” (N15).

Another added:

“I have found a new life here; my son wants to stay here 100%” (N8).

Diploma nostrification alone often does not guarantee qualified employment; a state language exam is required (N5, N14).

Learning Czech well is therefore seen as the pathway to living a “normal Czech life” (N14).

After three years in exile, beginning from nothing, many women now feel pride in what they have accomplished.

Some have found a new home (N14); others view exile as a paradoxically positive change (N8) or believe that, with improved qualifications, they can succeed and find happiness (N14).

A crucial motivator for many is ensuring security for their children (N6, N13) — thus, their aspirations are often tied to building a good life in the Czech Republic.

One respondent likened herself to a tree that had been transplanted.

This image captures the central dilemma these women face — how to forge new relationships and embrace a new environment without losing touch with their past.

Their testimonies are not just personal stories; they are also powerful accounts of identity transformation under the conditions of forced displacement.

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