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Does Mobility within the European Union Shape Migrants' Identities? The Case of Slovak Migrants in the London Region

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Abstract

This working paper sets out to understand the impact of the free intra-EU mobility and national belonging on shaping the identities of young migrants within the European Union (EU), with a particular case-study of Slovak migrants in the London area. Through exploration of the individual journeys and stories of 19 young Slovak migrants, the paper explores how the process of migration and mobility impacts on migrants' identities and their sense of home and belonging, as well as the role that their national identity and citizenship plays in this process. Results empirically demonstrate that free movement and expanded mobility have on the whole not eroded the distinct national identities and citizenship of Slovak migrants in the UK. Rather, the combination of migration with legal status has facilitated their development of multiple belongings and a temporary mind-set that in turn enables them to differentiate themselves from migrants in the conventional negative sense created by a nationalist discourse. In the final section of the paper I turn to a brief examination of the impact of 'Brexit' on the thoughts and future plans of these migrants, based on some post-Brexit conversations with 11 of the interviewees.

Keywords

national identity, belonging, Slovak migration to the UK, Europeanisation, Brexit

Introduction

Through a critical engagement with scholarly debates on transnationalism and postnationalism, this study aims to assess the role of the nation-state in the seemingly transnational process of intra-European migration and mobility. It seeks to 'bring the state back' to the analysis of migration through the dimensions of citizenship and through the analysis of original research on the migration experience of young Slovak migrants living in England and their understanding of identity and belonging.[1]

The influx of migration into the UK as a result of the post-2004 EU eastward enlargement opened up a heated debate about the socio-economic impact on the host society, especially regarding the threat to social cohesion, the alleged 'failure of multiculturalism' and the strain on social and public services provisions that the new eastern and central European migrants allegedly pose. Rather than tackle these issues, on which there has in any case been a substantial amount of research, this paper will focus on more directly the migrants' stories in order to uncover their motivations, lived experiences and trajectories that continuously shape their identities and ideas of belonging in complex and dynamic ways. It further seeks to consider the different ways in which the State, citizenship and rights continue to influence migrants' identity formation, even in such a seemingly transnational setting as the EU. One of the key questions of this research is therefore whether migrants experience a shift of identity form 'national' to 'European' as a result of their migration experiences and whether 'Brexit' has

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impacted their self-identification in any way. The next sections will start by explaining the rationale behind the research question, and then offer a brief background of Slovakia and an overview of Slovak migration to the UK.

The research problem

The main theoretical objective behind this paper is to bring the issue of national citizenship back into post-national theory (Hansen 2009; Hollifield and Wong 2015; Joppke 2007) through a critical engagement with some of the central postnational theses (Jacobson 1997; Soysal 1994). This paper therefore binds the 'migrant-centred' perspective that focuses on lived experiences of migration and mobility together with the 'state-centred' perspective that considers aspects such as citizenship and national identity in order to uncover how young Slovak migrants in the post-2004 EU enlargement period construct their ideas about home, identity and belonging. Following migrants' trajectories can help us understand not only patters of migration, but also how their perceptions and experiences influence their decision-making and planning, which could be relevant to integration policy at national and EU level.

The terms *mobility* and *migration* trigger powerful discourses that carry positive or negative connotations shaping migrants and mobile people's self-reflection and identification. The interest in migrants' identities in this paper is twofold, as it aims not only to analyse migrants' self-identification, but also to consider how the role of the State can unveil dimensions that are not necessarily consciously reflected by migrants themselves, but which nevertheless powerfully shape their identities. Through examining the different dimensions of citizenship, this paper intends to reincorporate the state into the postnational theory and transnational lens of migration, as well as empirically demonstrate how nation-state discourses actively make people imagine their national identity. Moreover, the recent event of 'Brexit' offers an interesting opportunity to analyse the concepts of identity and belonging with a fresh perspective on citizenship and nationality from the migrants themselves.

Slovakia and migration to the UK

As a part of what was then Czechoslovakia, Slovakia was tucked behind the Cold War's Iron Curtain from 1946 till 1989, when the 'Velvet Revolution' broke the country free from communist rule. Slovakia then became an independent republic after a peaceful 'Velvet Divorce' with the Czech Republic in January 1993. In contrast with the other new countries in Europe such as Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, the new Slovak Republic has been stable and has had a steadily growing economy since its independence, which helped it access EU membership in 2004 and switch to the euro currency in 2009.

The emergence of two independent states was fast and made little noise. Indeed, although a large majority of both Czechs and Slovaks opposed the separation that was decided without a referendum, it can be concluded that its outcome was quite positive. 'Re-creating Czechoslovakia does not even register as a political issue, and Czechs and Slovaks get on better now than they did when they shared a country (Roxburg 2014). Slovaks do not feel marginalised by the economically stronger Czech Republic, and the Czechs do not feel slowed down by an economically weaker Slovakia.

After the split, both nations had to, at least to some extent, redefine their identities. This was easier for the Czech Republic, that historically had a more rooted national identity, than it was for Slovakia. Indeed, this was one of the arguments of Slovak nationalists who requested the split from the Czech Republic in order to create a true Slovak national identity. Czechs and Slovaks were always two different nations with their own separate identities – despite being politically incorporated into one state. Their independence thus did not significantly compromise their respective national identities but merely transformed people's political lives in their countries. The re-established borders did not have any strong effects on migratory movements between the two states, nor on the perception of identities. The split has not driven Czechs and Slovaks apart, as many Slovaks still live and work in the Czech Republic and vice versa, Slovakia's mountains are a popular tourist destination for Czechs, and – thanks to the mutually intelligible language – the two nations still enjoy each other's music, films and TV programmes that are often produced in cooperation.[2] Moreover, the EU integration process has brought the two countries ever closer as it opened up new opportunities and enabled more labour migration and student mobility.

Nonetheless, the ideals and practices of citizenship were marked by historically and emotionally charged struggles for national self-determination, as well as power struggles between the small neighbouring states (Kusá 2013: 24). Slovakia's southern neighbour Hungary ceded two-thirds of its territory after being on the losing side of World War 1, which left large communities of ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries. Slovakia has about 500,000 ethnic Hungarians – about a tenth of Slovakia's population – living within its borders, which is a source of continuing political debate that influences Slovakia's citizenship legislation. In 2010, when the Hungarian government changed its national law and allowed ethnic Hungarians living abroad to claim Hungarian citizenship, Slovakia took this act as a threat to security and abolished the possibility of dual citizenship for its citizens. This in turn influences the rights of Slovaks living abroad. The complex path to independence of the Slovak nation-state not only illustrates the existence of transnational processes throughout the history, but also demonstrates how the nation-state formation and its discourse continue to play a role in a post-national European setting through the dimensions of citizenship and national identity. In sum, the 'Central European reality shows us how closely citizenship and identity are intertwined and how easily they are misused for political machinations that further the egoistic agendas of parties and leaders' (Kusá 2013: 24).

The Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries that joined the EU during its 2004 enlargement triggered a large-scale migration movement to the wealthier European countries in the West. Slovakia belongs to the group of EU8 states with a high level of post-accession migration (Bahna 2012; Kurekova 2011). Slovak immigrants in the UK constitute the third largest group from the EU8 countries after Polish and Lithuanian migrants (Longhi and Rokicka 2012: 12).

However, Slovak migration to the UK and the short-term international mobility of Slovak citizens is not a new phenomenon that occurred only after the 2004 succession. Slovak citizens were eligible to work in the UK before the EU's eastward enlargement with visa and some working restrictions. The au-pair programmes were in particular popular among young graduates (Williams and Baláž 2004). Nonetheless, the elimination of barriers to immigration

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[2] One example – the recent 'Czecho Slovakia's Got Talent' TV show.

from EU8 countries after 2004 undoubtedly increased the number of migrants, as well as the migrants' profile in the UK, in comparison with the migrants from the 'old' member-states (Longhi and Rokicka 2012: 27). The 'new' post-accession migrant flows have been composed largely of young migrants, often with tertiary education (Favell 2008), who were more likely to be employed in low-skilled jobs with unfavourable working conditions and lower pay. Their upward mobility was thus limited, which made their migration more likely to be only temporary.

In anticipation of an increased migration 'flow' of migrants after the eastward enlargement, the majority of the 'old' member-states introduced the so-called 'transit period' that put two-to-seven year-long restrictions on working rights for citizens of the EU8 states on their territory (Geddes 2008: 176). The only exceptions who liberalised their labour markets for the new migrants from EU8 immediately were Ireland, the UK and Sweden. The UK government posed some welfare restrictions to these newcomers (Geddes 2008: 173) to avoid any so-called 'benefit tourism' influx from the less-developed Central and Eastern European states. Nonetheless the two English-speaking countries with opened labour markets – the UK and Ireland – became the favourite destinations for EU8 migrants (Favell 2008). By 2007 the destinations that Slovak migrants opted for were predominantly the Czech Republic, followed by the UK, Hungary and Austria. However, this changed after the beginning of the crisis in 2008 when the number of people going to the Czech Republic, the UK, Hungary and Ireland dropped while the number of Slovaks working in Austria increased significantly (Minarechova 2015).

Theoretical background and literature review

Migration has always been strongly linked to questions of national identity and issues of social cohesion. This has led some migration scholars to adopt an assimilationist perspective, claiming that the transnational ties and identities of migrants will gradually integrate to the national society of the receiving state (Alba and Nee 2003). However, there has been a 'new' trend in migration studies that rejects the nation-state as a starting point of analysis and that no longer focuses purely on questions about integration or assimilation, but emphasises instead that cultures, identities and social networks are not anchored primarily in national spaces. This section will therefore critically engage with some of the main concepts that impinge on the notions of identities and belonging in migration.

Transnationalism

Rather than a theory in itself, transnationalism can be understood as an 'analytical theme' (King 2012: 25) that portrays international migration as a 'transnational process' (Logemann 2013: 4). In other words, transnationalism is a 'process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (Basch *et al.* 1994: 6). It stresses links with the homeland and the notion that migration does not necessarily mean a definitive departure, nor does it imply a definitive return in the mind of migrants (Brettell and Hollifield 2015: 19-20). As such, it pays greater attention to migrants' ongoing ties to their homeland, arguing that new communication technologies and cheap and fast transportation allow migrants to sustain active links to their home countries (Vertovec and Cohen 1999).

Transnational experience thus allows migrants to grow and maintain bonds to both the country of origin and the country of settlement. As such, some scholars have begun to argue that contemporary transmigrants will escape the restriction of political definitions and categorisations such as *migrant* or *citizen* and that transnationalism will 'inevitably lead to a rapid rise of multiple citizenship – creating the phenomenon most feared by nationalists – the potentially divided loyalties of people with an instrumental, rather than emotional attribute toward state membership' (Castles and Miller 2003: 19). Migrants' preservation of their national identities and transnational links is thus often understood as an obstacle to their integration, and therefore as a socio-political problem.

Regarding Slovak migrants in the UK, my research indeed suggests that this migrant group engages in transnational practices. Out of 19 people who were interviewed, each of them visited Slovakia frequently at least twice a year. Depending on the individual financial and time availability, the number of visits varied from twice a year to five to even, in one case, twelve times a year. Strong family ties and friendships are the main reason for the regular visits and communication with those left behind.

Nonetheless, the fact that migrants maintain close relationships with their loved ones and their country is not surprising and, from an analytical point of view, 'adopting a transnational perspective does no more than sensitize scholars to the importance and prevalence of cross-border ties' (Waldinger 2011: 4). Especially in the context of intra-EU migration, the maintenance of home ties among European migrants is 'hardly surprising given policy that did not encourage permanent settlement' (Brettell and Hollifield 2015: 20).

We should not overstate the impact of the transnational approach, as the unfettered rights, entitlements and opportunities to migrate apply only to a relatively small percentage of the world's population, since one's citizenship still largely affects one's rights to international mobility (Hampshire 2013: 115). Exaggerating the importance of transnationalism can result in an inattentive perspective towards the prevailing nation-state influence on migrant trajectories and experiences. Although scholars of transnationalism have to some extent re-evaluated the post-national claims about the decline of nation-states, little attention has been paid to the role of the state in determining migrants' trajectories, especially in the intra-EU context. Nonetheless, transnationalism rightly points out the problematic and often one-dimensional models of migration analysis focusing on assimilation, integration and push-pull factors (King 2012: 25). Only a transnational lens that is attentive to the continuous nation-state influences can help to reveal how the concept of mobility features in migrants' understandings of identity, home and belonging. Although international migration possesses a 'relative autonomy and can be impervious to government policies' (Castles and Miller 2003: 278), migrants' agency should be analysed in relation with the relevant state structures to develop a more nuanced understanding of transnational processes.

As Sassen (1998) argues, international migration is produced and affected by government policies. Therefore, 'people as well as governments shape international migration' (Castles and Miller 2003: 278). States also feature in transnational processes by developing transnational policies and in some cases allowing dual nationality in order to facilitate the presence of their nationals abroad without interrupting their attachment to home (Brettell and Hollifield 2015: 20). Moreover, due to the internationally recognised right to state sovereignty, governments maintain the power to regulate the entry of aliens. Therefore, only those migrants

who are equipped with the material resources and legal entitlements, such as the 'right' kind of citizenship, can be considered *transnational*. Although this power may be limited in liberal democracies due to multilateral agreements and treaties, such as the freedom of movement in the EU, we should keep in mind that these treaties are entered into voluntarily and states possess the power and right to withdraw from them.

The nation-state and its discourse

As mentioned above, the transnational lens reveals that people can form multiple belongings that can stretch outside the boundaries of nation-states. Transnationalism thus points out the trap of a 'methodological nationalism' that perceives the nation-state as a natural structure of society (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 301-302). However, while pointing out the problematic assumptions of methodological nationalism rightly demonstrates the limits of the nation-state, it should not mean that the nation-state should be omitted at the analytical level. When analysing such abstract concepts as *identity* and ideas of *belonging*, it has to be taken in account that the nation-state discourse influences people's perceptions and consequently reflects on their lived reality. Whether the idea of national community is real or 'imagined' (Anderson 2006), we have to look at the empirical implications that such assumptions about the nation-state have. This section therefore examines the nation-state and its prevailing discourse in relation to migration.

Studies that have analysed how states come to be imagined by society as a territorially characterised space demonstrate that states 'invest a good deal of effort in developing procedures and practices to ensure that they are imagined in some ways rather than others' in order to legitimise their actions (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 983-984). The notions of *democracy*, *citizenship*, *social security* and *national self-determination* are continuously incorporated into territorial boundaries of each nation-state (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 309). These notions are further embodied through the national logic that promotes an ideology of national homogeneity (Zolberg 1983), which consequently problematises migration through its challenge to the nation-state. Such normative assumptions that states seek to impute on their population (Joppke 2010: 30) tend to regard immigrants' continuing transnational involvement and cultural diversity as an anomaly. In some cases, migrants' distinct national identity and cultural values, that presumably make them remain loyal to their state of origin, are even perceived as a threat to the host nation's sense of security and socio-cultural cohesion.

The nation-state formation does not end with a line on a map that defines its borders. States are continually defined through national discourses and performed with 'representational practices' and policies such as border controls that are seen as a vital need for national security and unity (Mitchell 1999). The national discourse thus normalises the nationalist terminology that portrays the nation-state as a container of people with the same national identity, culture and heritage. The control of international population movement is therefore understood as a right to exercise states' sovereignty and as a foundation of each nation-state. This casts a negative light on 'immigrants' who are then seen as 'those who do not belong'. The EU member-states' sovereignty has been partly compromised with the free movement act and as such it contradicts the nation-state discourse and normative beliefs on the sedentary nature of population. European citizenship thus represents a sensitive concept tangled with an ongoing debate between the national governments and the supranational EU system. Its discourse and

terminology seek to normalise free movement and intra-European mobility in order to encourage Europeans to adopt a distinct European identity (McCann and Finn 2006).

The idea of a European citizenship is central to the Europeanisation process of integration, cohesion and harmonisation and it encourages mobility, nowadays taken almost for granted over the past decade and more. Nonetheless, celebrating mobility is not always well-received by nationalists. The evident growth of populist right-wing parties across Europe and the recent Brexit event – that was largely fuelled by anti-immigrant sentiment – demonstrate the extent to which nationalist feelings prevail, even in a supranational setting such as the EU. The next section will discuss what postnational theory says about the concept of citizenship.

Citizenship and national identity in postnational theory

Citizenship 'cannot be divorced from broader questions of substantive belonging' (Brubaker 1992a: 289). As such, citizenship can help in conceptualising how identities and belongings are constructed. Citizenship can be broadly defined as a 'set of rights, duties and identities linking citizens to the nation state' (Koopmans et al. 2005: 7). This means that it is not simply a political and legal status, but also a dynamic socio-cultural process that consists of rights and status as well as identity (Joppke 2007). Werbner and Yuval-Davis (1999: 4) defined citizenship as a 'total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and sense of belonging'.

Given that immigration policies are heavily influenced by the 'myths' about national homogeneity that are in turn 'codified in citizenship and nationality laws' (Hollifield and Wong 2015: 257), citizenship has the power to shape migrants' understanding of belonging and their self-representation. It is therefore necessary to explore the prevailing national discourses fostering anti-immigration rhetoric that can then feature in migrants' own understanding of belonging and associated feelings of inclusion (or exclusion). Citizenship has been historically 'inextricable from national identity – indeed, it has often been understood as the politico-legal expression of a prior cultural identity' (Hampshire 2013: 110). This implies that citizenship and the rights attached to it should be enjoyed by those who share the same national identity – which is typically associated with a shared cultural heritage, traditions, customs, language and values – or in some cases even ethnicity and race. Immigration policies are thus usually based on a 'meaningful concept of citizenship, which divides the world into those who belong and those who do not, and in which legal status overlaps with identity' (Joppke 1999: 101-105).

Brubaker's comparative study of citizenship in France and Germany views citizenship and immigration policies as conditioned by a 'distinctive and deeply rooted understanding of *nationhood'* (his emphasis, 1992a: x-xi). In other words, he sees citizenship policies to be shaped by nation-building practices that are more about national identity rather than attribution of rights. Brubaker therefore argues that the assimilation model of nationhood in France automatically grants citizenship to second-generation migrants, whereas the ethnic conception of nationhood in Germany grants citizenship to German descents living abroad, rather than to 'second-generation immigrants', such as Turks, living on German territory. However, Joppke points out that 'immigration is as much conditioned by as it is involved in redefining nationhood' (1999: 4). Brubaker's view thus cannot account for the recent countervailing changes in citizenship, such as Germany's effort to better integrate the second and third generations of migrants that led to a change from an ethnocultural to a civic-territorial concept of citizenship,

or the French restrictions of *jus soli* for second generation of migrants (Hampshire 2013: 117). Moreover, Brubaker's rather static view fails to recognise the consequences that ascribed identities have on migrants as 'different symbolic labels that nations attribute to migrants directly influence the distribution of material resources to them and their potential for mobilisation' (Koopmans and Statham 1999: 662).

Holding a citizenship of the country of residence thus impacts migrants' opportunities and access to rights as well as their potential for integration and the understanding of belonging and identity. Postnational scholars, on the other hand, have come to rather different conclusions that somewhat downplay the nation-state and national citizenship. Their rejection of the nation-state views the scholarship that equates and explains migration with state and policy perspectives as problematic. For instance, Soysal (1994) argues that international migration has in fact helped to establish a postnational model of membership in which international human rights law and discourse have undermined the importance of national citizenship.

Given that the UK has liberalised its labour markets and granted the EU8 citizens similar rights to those of the UK citizens, many would argue that the free intra-EU migration regime represents a truly post-national phenomenon. As Soysal (1994: 148) puts it, '"European citizenship" clearly embodies postnational membership in its most elaborate legal form'.

However, conclusions about the postnational character of the intra-EU migration are, for various reasons, rather premature and a number of scholars have since challenged the devaluation of citizenship and the nation-state (Hansen 2009; Joppke 1999; Koopmans *et al.* 2005). Critiques of postnationalism have argued that the European citizenship is a derivative status of national-scale citizenship that creates no new rights or insights (Hansen 2009: 6) and that the 'EU citizenship is not grounded in its own EU nationality law but is secondary to holding the citizenship of a member state' (Joppke 2010:163). In other words, citizenship in one of the EU member-states grants rights in all of the others. This, however, contrary to Soysal's argument, reinforces rather than breaks the link between the status attached to citizenship and national territory (1994: 147). Although Joppke later reassesses his argument and states that the European Court of Justice 'has transformed the EU citizenship from a derivative status into a free-standing source of rights', which makes it 'worthy to be labelled "postnational"' (2010: 164), the recent debates after the Brexit referendum once again contest the claims about the detached nature of European citizenship.

It is certainly true that, ever since the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, intra-EU migrants hold almost the same rights as natives such as freedom of movement, secure residence rights, full access to labour market and even partial political rights that allow them to vote in local and European elections. These rights make migrants from the EU states – to a certain extent – privileged in comparison to the third-country nationals (Koopmans *et al*. 2005: 113) and have contributed to the large numbers of permanent residents or so-called *denizens*, who 'enjoy an increasing number of rights and have to fulfil many duties, although they are not members of the state' (Hammar 1990: 3). Postnationalism attributes this expansion of rights to non-citizens to the 'decline of nation-state' as a consequence of increasing migration (Soysal 1994). For instance, Jacobson (1997) claims that citizenship is being devalued as immigrants are able to utilise international law to demand recognition of their rights. Soysal (1994: 136-137) argues that national citizenship was being replaced by 'a new model of membership, the main thrust of which is that individual rights, historically defined on the basis of nationality, are

increasingly codified into a different scheme that emphasizes universal personhood… [and] transcends the boundaries of the nation-state'. Such a universal conception of personhood, according to Soysal, is independent from particular identity attachments, which means that the nation-state and its national identity became increasingly irrelevant.

The decoupling of identity or citizenship from rights and the universally accepted human rights discourse are thus the pillars of the postnational argument. However, these claims have failed to recognise the extent to which 'citizenship remains a prerequisite to the full rights' (Hansen 2003: 104). Even postnationalists to some extent admit that 'postnational rights remain organized at the national level' (Soysal 1994: 157). Therefore, 'though it is undeniable that legal residents in Europe enjoy a greater degree of security than previously, the sources of this security are domestic, not transnational' (Hansen 2003: 103). As Joppke (1999:4) argues, human rights obligations are not imposed on the nation-state from the outside, rather they are a 'constitutive principle of nation-states qua liberal states'. In other words, the restricted state sovereignty over the issues of immigration, together with the socio-economic rights that immigrants enjoy, derives from the institutions of the liberal democratic state rather than the discourse of universal personhood. It was the British Labour government of Tony Blair that decided to open Britain's' doors to Easten European citizens from the day they joined the EU; it was the Conservative government of David Cameron that allowed the Brexit referendum to take place; and it was the British citizens who voted to leave the EU. These decisions that had, and will, crucially influence migration patterns and migrants' rights were taken at the national level.

As Bauböck (2010: 848) argues, we need to study the citizenship traditions, laws and policies of states as a part of 'intertwined citizenship constellations' – a structure which simultaneously links individuals to several political entities that determine their legal rights and duties. This applies not only to states but also to local governments and supranational institutions, such as the EU, in which 'union citizenship is determined by the nationality laws of the member-states and complements national citizenship with transnational rights of free movement between the member-states and supranational rights of political participation in European Parliament elections' (2010: 848). As such, the citizenship constellation is also generated by migration between the politically integrated states of the union. The legal status and rights of migrants are thus determined both by the laws of their country of residence and the external citizenship acquired in their country of origin.

The postnational scholarship argument that denizenship status has diminished the value of national citizenship does not take into account the fact that 'denizens are at the same time foreign nationals of a country of origin' (Bauböck 2010: 849). This means that migrants' interests and choices are affected by the 'citizenship opportunity structure'. Bauböck therefore argues that it is important to take into account the instrumental and expressive value a citizenship of origin has for migrants as well as the nationality laws of both countries of origin and settlement. The national laws and decisions taken by one nation-state therefore can affect other states' relationships with their permanent residents linked to the former nation-state through citizenship ties. As mentioned previously, the Slovakian citizenship laws influenced by the national act of Hungary affected lives of Slovak citizens living abroad, which is a brilliant example of the citizenship constellation framework. In the current geopolitical world order that was built on nation-state sovereignty, the European citizenship can thus only function as part

of a national framework and, even though sending or receiving states do not fully control the opportunity structures and values that their citizenship represent, together they produce sets of legal statuses and rights that are still significant for migrants and mobile people, and that consequently unveil the inequalities between ethnic groups within a given population.

Moreover, the postnational theory does not take into account the fundamental importance of national citizenship in the understanding of the very process of international migration and mobility, as the right and ability to move across national borders is in fact shaped by one's national citizenship – determining whether one requires a visa or is allowed to enter, work, study or live permanently in any state (Hampshire 2013: 115). As such, migrants' rights to free movement and settlement in Europe are guaranteed only as long as both country of residence and origin are EU member-states. Therefore, the rights of EU citizens living in the UK now depend on the actual form that Brexit will take once the negotiations are over.

This section has demonstrated the prevailing nation-state influence on transnational migration processes and highlighted that migrants' rights are institutionalised in their citizenship that is still anchored in national legal systems. As such, EU nationals' right to international mobility is derivative of national citizenship of one of the member-states. Nonetheless, the freedom of movement and the legal status that the European membership brings to the intra-EU migrants powerfully shape their self-identification and ideas of belonging. It is therefore important to analyse the important role that rights play in defining citizenship – who is and who is not a member – who does or who does not belong – in order to understand migrants' construction of identity.

Methodology

This interview-based research project rests on narratives of migration of young Slovak migrants living, working or (and) studying in the UK. Its aim is to offer a platform where the respondents can share their experiences, personal understandings and constructions of belonging in a new country. Focusing on the migrants' lived experiences and trajectories will help to understand how their identities and sense of belonging are being influenced through the accession to rights and legal status that their citizenship represents. A final twist to this collective story is given by the recent Brexit vote and its – still unclear – implications.

Data collection

This research utilised in-depth qualitative data extracted from semi-structured interviews with Slovak migrants living in London, Oxford and Brighton. Respondents were seven men and 12 women aged 18-39, who arrived in the UK after the year 2000.[3] The initial contacts with respondents were acquired via social networks and social media (i.e. various Slovak groups on Facebook). The snowball technique was also used here as respondents were often helpful in providing further contacts that could contribute to the research. Both face-to-face and Skype interviews were used, depending on the respondents' availability and preference. The interviews lasted 1 hour on average and were all recorded, subject to participants' consent. The research targeted three different categories of young migrants: students, graduate workers, and

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[3] The age limits and temporal definitions were criteria set by the larger YMOBILITY project: interviews could be up to 39 at the time of interview provided their migration had taken place before age 35.

non-graduate workers. Table 1 summarises the main socio-demographic characteristics of the 19 interviewees.

Table 1 – Participants' basic characteristics

Gender	Age	Education status	Year of arrival to the UK
M - 7 F - 12	20-25 - 2 25-30 - 5 30-35 - 8 30-39 - 4	current students - 5 graduates - 5 non-graduates - 9	2000-2004 - 5 2005-2009 - 5 2010-2016 - 9

Interviews were conducted in an informal manner and were loosely structured and divided into several different sections: personal and family background, migration history and motivations, employment experiences in migration, life satisfaction, identity issues, social inclusion, travel and remittances, policies for migrants and future plans.[4] For the purpose of this thesis, I chose to focus predominantly on the emotional data included in the identity issue section where the notions of home and belonging were addressed. The sections on motivation for migration and future plans were also analysed as they reflect the respondents' self-identification as migrants.

Data analysis

Interviews were analysed in an interpretivist paradigm that aims to understand the lived experiences and qualitative aspects of migration; an approach that focuses on meanings rather than a measurement of migrants' social reality (Cohen *et al.* 2007: 19). First the transcripts were read with an aim to pinpoint sections that are related to identities, belonging and self-representation of migrants. The second stage involved re-reading the transcripts in order to capture and summarise common themes that surfaced from individual interviews. Lastly, the data was integrated into the text in order to demonstrate the broader implications. Through examples and quotations of migrants themselves, this paper reflects on some of the concepts commonly referred to in postnational theory and transnationalist approaches such as *citizenship*, *rights*, *identity* and *belonging*.

Given the informal nature of the interviews and my own position as a Czech student-migrant living in the UK, I was perceived mostly as an 'insider' (Spradley 1980: 56), which made respondents keen on sharing their stories. Hence, there were no difficulties encountered during the process of collecting the data. It is worth mentioning that since Czech Republic and Slovakia used to be one country, these now separate nationalities maintain very close relations due to their shared history, similar culture and mutually intelligible languages. As such, I did not encounter any issues with the language or confidentiality in this low-risk research. Aware of the possible biases my own identity as a Czech migrant could bring to this research, I used

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[4] These were the categories of questions and themes prescribed in the YMOBILITY project interview schedule, which I used for the dissertation on which this working paper is based.

the translated and transcribed text made after each interview to identify and correct 'selective inattentions' I may have subconsciously formed (Spradley 1980: 55).

In addition, short follow-up questionnaires regarding the results of Brexit referendum were designed to collect feedback on respondents' views and feelings of these Slovak citizenship-holders living in the UK in the aftermath of Brexit. Eleven out of the 19 respondents were able to return this questionnaire to me on time. In line with the continuation of the discussion presented above, the rest of the paper will focus on the development of identity and belonging as analysed by the 19 Slovak migrants living in the UK.

Migration trajectories

Motivations to migrate

The circumstances under which people decide to leave their home country play an important role in how they give meaning to their self-identification as migrants: whether their journey is driven by economic necessity, cultural curiosity or social mobility, and whether the intention was for it to be a temporary or permanent displacement. All these factors play a role in their identity, home-making practices, and overall sense of belonging.

The existing studies that are concerned with labour migration from the Central and East European region to the West are frequently oriented towards neoclassical approaches that understand migration as a predominantly economically calculated act based on the higher salaries and better employment opportunities in the country of destination as the main determinant for migration (Bauer and Zimmermann 1999: 13). Slovakia's youth unemployment rate indeed stood at 33% in 2004 and has never fallen under 18.6%, with the current rate standing at 24.8% (Tradingeconomics.com 2016).

The neoclassical approach, however, fails to consider factors such as the personal, family and socio-cultural aspects of migration (King 2012: 14). For instance, the migrant social network, defined as a set of 'interpersonal ties that connect migrants, non-migrants and former migrants in a web of kinship, friendship and shared origin' (King 2012: 21), that is in other scholarship called 'social capital' (Morawska 2007: 6), is also an important determinant in migration. It can facilitate the migration process by providing information that lowers the costs and risks of migration (Massey et al. 1998: 42-43). Livia – who arrived in England in 2012 after she finished her degree, and who worked as a shop assistant and later as a manager in a café – and Peter – who arrived in 2010 after dropping out from his undergraduate course in Slovakia, worked as a barista but is now back in full-time education – both talk about what prompted their decision to leave:

> **Livia (29):** I wouldn't personally choose England… It was basically purely for personal reasons – because of my boyfriend [who lived in the UK].[5]

> **Peter (27):** Well my personal life also played a part in this – I had a girlfriend and my relationship with her was falling apart basically. And the same was happening at home with my parents... So, I didn't know what to do. [Pause] I had this bad feeling that I don't enjoy my course … And then, by a complete coincidence, I met someone through

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[5] Livia always had a dream of living in the US. After her relationship ended, she was considering to enrol in further studies at Oxford University, but has moved to the US now.

'Pokec'[6]. So, I met with one girl there, who lived here in Oxford... I said to myself: 'I may lose my girlfriend; I don't enjoy my studies; home is not any better; and this other girl said I should come to Oxford' – so I thought 'why not?'

Peter's story demonstrates the narrowness of the neoclassical model that views migration in rather simplistic terms as driven by a set of economic push and pull factors (King 2012: 13). This is not to deny the economic factors that feature in migrants' decision-making, but to simply point out the economic deterministic shortcomings of the neoclassical approach that often overlook migrants' agency, enabling us here to provide a more nuanced understanding of migration determinants. It appears that, for the majority of my respondents, the choice to leave was not primarily motivated by economic gain per se. Moreover, the financial motivations are changing as the difference between average salaries in Slovakia and the UK has decreased over recent years (Minarechova 2015). Migrants' decisions to leave were often fuelled by a search for independence, new skills and a mixture of perceived cultural and economic opportunities. The experience of life abroad is seen as an enhancement of ones' human capital and personal development – an investment that could help secure a better job when returning to Slovakia. In particular, 'language skills are a major driver behind out-migration' (Palovic and Berghazyova 2016), as explained by Jana, who first arrived in England in 2000 as an au pair:

> **Jana (32):** I knew I needed to learn English and that was the driving force behind my decision to leave. I thought... if I speak English and I had the Maturita [A-level equivalent] … it could help me to find a better job in the future.

Temporary dimensions of migration

It is crucial to look at the temporary dimensions of 'migration', as many people who went abroad, in fact, never intended to stay. And yet, 'temporary migration can morph into permanent settlement, as migrants who intended to stay for a limited period of time continually postpone their return until it never happens' (King 2012: 8). The expanded mobility and economic integration that came with the EU presented people with an opportunity to move freely and make a living and a 'home' somewhere else with relatively few obstacles. As such, migration often happens in spontaneous ways, often without clear-cut plans of settling or returning. Young people often move with no intention of settling and they arrive in the UK with a temporary mind-set (Anderson 2013). The perception of temporariness, along with the lack of language skills, often lead to acceptance of low-status jobs, that are then seen as a compromise for earning better wages than in Slovakia. This initial downward mobility, nonetheless, appears to motivate migrants' self-improvement. Many of my participants experienced career advancements throughout their migration experience that were often enhanced by their choice to enrol and complete tertiary education in England. Indeed, an expansion of the original migration timeline appears to be quite a common narrative among the participants of this research. For instance, Petra represents one of the many young Slovaks who arrived before the 2004 enlargement to work as an au pair.

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[6] 'Pokec.sk' was the biggest social network in Slovakia before Facebook.

Petra (37): Well, I met my boyfriend then and he always wanted to go abroad and learn English. So, he sort of persuaded me to join him. So, I joined him three months after he left and hmm… I said 'yeah, why not… I will go and improve my English'. Our initial plan was to stay for a year….

Twelve years later, Petra works as an office manager after completing her BA degree at a UK University and is considering buying a house in Oxfordshire with her (now) husband. These stories demonstrate that the causes and circumstances of migration are not static and often change. Furthermore, the temporary mind-set can also shape migrants' self-identification. Eva, who came in 2007 after she finished her MA degree in Slovakia and now works as an office assistant, showed a strong resistance to the term 'migration' despite living and working in the UK for nine years:

V: At what age did you migrate?

Eva (33): Hmm, I would not call it migration [laugh] … I think that in the beginning it was more like a trip. You know, in the sense that you want to earn some money but also have an experience. But it's definitely not migration because I was never planning to stay here this long. The initial plan was to stay here for three months and then to go somewhere else.

V: Let's talk about your employment experience in migration…

Can we call it differently? [laugh] I don't see it as migration. I would say it's some kind of... a stay... [laugh]. Stay in the UK [laugh]. Because I think migration would be if I stayed here...

Interestingly, the resistance to self-identification as a migrant echoed directly or indirectly throughout a number of interviews. One of the reasons was that the respondents were often reluctant to identify with the conventional discourse that classifies migration as some kind of a social problem. As mentioned above, a substantial literature on migration, as well as the general rhetoric in the media and public arena, depicts economic gain as the main determinant for migration. However, this research demonstrates that the motivation of migration for young Slovaks is varied and often depends on individual, personal or circumstantial aspects. The term *migrant* itself carries negative connotations; thus people, including migrants themselves, often associate it with someone who is problematic, illegal, unable or unwilling to integrate, someone who is forced to leave their country out of economic necessity, or someone who imposes a burden on the welfare state.

Identity formation is a 'relational process' that is constructed in an opposition to the 'other' (La Barbera 2015: 4). The influence of migration on identity formation is thus very complex, as people can adopt or reject identification based on factors such as their motivation to migrate, their future plans regarding a place where they want to settle down, their immigration status, nationality, culture, language, social class, education, employment status, religion, race, sexuality, gender and many other aspects. Migrants' construction of identity is thus constantly renegotiated in an opposition to multiple other groups of people, including other migrants. This allows some migrants to differentiate and detach themselves from the classification of 'migrant' and embrace other forms of identification. European citizenship and

the rights of free movement and settlement are some of the aspects that allowed my respondents to differentiate themselves from those whom they saw as migrants in the conventional, negative sense.

The reluctance over the term migrant might also be a result of the Slovak language and the communist history of the country. The word *emigrant* is, still today, strongly associated with people who were fleeing political prosecution when Slovakia was a part of the Eastern bloc. The word *migrant* is thus not commonly used to refer to modern migration as we know it today. Slovak migrants therefore refer to themselves simply as 'Slovaks living in the UK', which certainly has an impact on their self-identification. The following section examines whether migrants experience a shift from a national to a European level of self-identification.

Remaining in England – reflections on belonging and identity

Leaving the home country and settling in a host country, whether temporarily or permanently, often means leaving behind ones' family, friends, social networks, social status and image, and as such, it 'often requires a complete reconstruction of identity' (La Barbera 2015: 3). Living away from home thus comes with certain risks and disadvantages. The most frequently cited shortcomings of migration mentioned by the informants were detachments from their support networks, being away from family and friends, losing time with ageing parents, leaving everything behind and having to start from the beginning. However, despite realising the downfalls of migration, participants were also aware of the advantages that their experience brought. These included particularly the advancement of social 'soft skills' such as coming into contact with their own independence, being forced to rely on themselves, taking responsibility for their own lives, and gaining more resilience in comparison with their peers left behind, who are more dependent on social networks.

The new skills, social interactions and experiences lead to a dialectic interplay between migrants' self-representation and social categorisation, which in turn changes their values and re-negotiates their identities (La Barbera 2015: 3). Nonetheless, the detachment from family and friends – especially in the early stage of migration – can lead to feeling isolated or socially excluded, which does not reflect the idealised image of the receiving country that migrants often form before their arrival. Therefore, migrants may go through a process of 'disillusionment and nostalgia' that in turn contributes to 'idealizing the country of origin' (La Barnera 2015: 3). Consequently, when migrants visit or return to their home country again, they can often experience a disillusionment with their home country. 'To some extent, migrants live between idealization and disillusionment both in the receiving country and in the country of origin, [that] generates an unfinished condition of not yet belonging "here" but no longer "there"'(La Barbera 2015: 3). This condition was indeed expressed by many of my respondents, when reflecting on their sense of belonging.

> **Eva (33):** When I go back to Slovakia it takes me weeks to adapt… I don't feel like I belong anywhere. Well, maybe not anywhere but more like both here and there… sometimes I feel like I live both here and there… it's like having a double life. I live everything twice…

> **Gabika (30):** I don't feel like I belong anywhere [laugh]. No, I feel like I am stuck between those two countries and those two cultures. So I am no longer a Slovak, but I

am not English either. I guess I am trying to say I have two homes… But on the other hand… It's just different character traits of the two cultures combined in me – but in such a way that makes me not fit into either of those cultures completely [laugh].

The sense of belonging appears to be a crucial step in the process of identity formation. The majority of my subjects continue to identify primarily as Slovaks although they recognise that their behaviour and character traits have changed due to living in a more multicultural setting and due to their gradual adoption of some of the values and characteristics of what is perceived to be an 'English way of life'. Respondents often found the subject of identity and belonging difficult to express and some talked about an 'identity crisis' or in other words no longer feeling fully Slovak, but not being fully English either. Some, on the other hand, phrased this issue as having 'two homes' or living a 'double life' and belonging in both places.

Janka (37): Hmm, most of the time I feel like I belong in Oxford now. This is my home, this is where I live, where I go to work and I love it here. But my origins are in Slovakia, so I can say that it will always be my home, you know. Because it's where I was born, where I grew up…. But the thing is that I don't feel I really belong there anymore because this experience – living abroad – has changed me a lot.

Michaela (32): Ah, it's an identity crisis I would say [laugh]. I don't know. Me myself, I don't… I can't identify myself as British, because I am not and I recognise that I am different. But again… when I go back home [pause] I don't feel that [pause] …I don't feel that Slovak anymore.

Belonging to multiple affiliations or living at the 'borderland' (neither here nor there) has been described as a 'deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject' (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 18). Indeed, there are different levels of belonging that are intertwined with multiple and overlapping identities that can problematise the relationship of the nation-state with the territory. There is no simple dichotomy in the matter of belonging or non-belonging, as one can feel one belongs in multiple places as well as having plural homes. Home is depicted as a safe place in which feelings of belonging can be nurtured. This can of course be several locations, such as the place where one was born or grew up, where the family lives, or where one lives and works. Home can be broadly defined as a 'geographical, historical and emotional space that has political implications connected to material and symbolic resource allocation' (La Barabera 2015: 4). The idea of home is thus associated with a place where power-relations can be performed and where one can have 'some degree of control' over her/his actions that comes with the power of including or excluding others from it (Cresswell 2004: 24). This brings us back to the legal aspect of belonging – citizenship. As mentioned before, the sedentary terminology that tends to depict people as 'rooted' to a certain place is inherent to the nation-state discourse that actively makes its population perceive itself as a community. Our understanding of belonging is therefore 'inherently spatial' (Anderson 2006; Malkki 1992). Nationalism thus plays a 'crucial role in the popular politics of place-making and in the creation of naturalized links between places and peoples' (Ferguson and Gupta 1992: 12). Although the idea of national community is somewhat artificial, one has to look at the empirical implications that assumptions about the nation-state have in order to unveil the dimensions that are shaping

migrants' identities and belongings. Migrants thus often internalise their nostalgia of home as a responsibility to the nation-state.

The impact of intra-EU mobility on migrants' identities

As seen above, some of the ways in which participants characterised themselves reflected their ambivalent identity. The national identity element continues to play a strong role in their perception of belonging. Despite the development of new values and a sense of belonging that arose during the process of migration, the recognition of national identity seemed to remain an important factor of self-representation and something to be proud of. The majority of the participants, including the highly mobile individuals, perceived their nationality as a personality trait, something that could not be denied or forgotten. In the eyes of participants, abandoning their national identity would imply a loss of culture, traditions and respect for one's roots. The mother tongue and historical struggle of the Slovak nation on its way to independence were also perceived as important markers of national identity that shaped Slovak culture. The Slovak nationality was thus generally perceived as 'cultural'. Some participants also mentioned cognitive aspects such as knowledge, education and abilities, as well as socio-emotional dimensions – both negative and positive aspects – when reflecting on the Slovak nation in comparison with the British.

Despite not having fully replaced their national identity, the majority of participants indicated having adopted an additional, broader identity such as some form of notional European or global citizenship. Nonetheless, it must be noted that in several cases, participants identified as 'European only' after they were prompted by a question that specifically asked about it. But they often expressed it somewhat reluctantly, or even explicitly rejected it.

V: Would you say you feel European or as a world citizen?

Matej (30): Uhhh, if I had to stick a label on it, then yes, I would say I feel European.

Dusan (38): Sometimes I feel European. But not as English. But as European – because we have the European Union now… I don't have to apply for a visa, I can go where I want to go …

Gabika (30): I've never considered myself European… I mean… I do, because Slovakia is in Europe but I wouldn't call it a European identity – it's kind of being forced on me now – with all this Brexit referendum happening. But hmm… I would never describe myself as European – I am Slovak and Slovakia happens to be in Europe [laugh] – that's the only time the mention of Europe comes in.

This could, however, suggest their loyalty to their national identity, rather than a denial of Europeanness per se. As we will see below, their Europeanness was expressed indirectly throughout the course of the interviews, without necessarily being verbally articulated as an explicit European identity.

Others expressed their Europeanness by a process of elimination, when they were not able to fully identify as Slovaks anymore, but realised that they are not British/English either. Interestingly, a common reply to the question 'where do you feel you most belong?' was in

reference to the national identity, which again suggests that identity and space are indeed incontestably linked.

> **Imrich (36):** Hmm… I don't know. I'm definitely not Slovak anymore. That's for sure – I am not fully Slovak anymore, but I am not English either. So I'd say European.

> **Ondrej (31):** Well, so I think I am… I am a European, but I still feel as a Slovak and I still don't think I have a British behaviour… And I am not religious, so I don't have any other kind of identity. So I am a European Slovak.

> **Dusan (38):** I belong in Slovakia. Definitely. I am a Slovak, I was born in Slovakia and I will stay a Slovak. I haven't changed in this sense. When it comes to my nationality I would definitely not say that I am English. I am a Slovak, I was born a Slovak and I will die a Slovak. Or you know what? I would even say that I am a Czechoslovak.

As mentioned before, the respondents expressed their European identity in a non-verbal manner by embracing their rights as European citizens and by celebrating the multicultural and vibrant settings of their place of (temporary) settlement. The expanded mobility and freedom of movement were almost taken for granted, and most migrants did not feel constrained by a territorially bounded space of only one nation-state in their sense of belonging. The sample revealed that, although some form of European identity was formatted alongside the process of migration by a majority of informants, it did not completely replace their national identity. Rather it was merely taken alongside their Slovak identity as an extra layer to express their belonging – as European Slovaks.

Being mobile, or, in other words, having access to unfettered cross-border movement, is an important aspect of the migration experience that plays a role in how migrants construct notions of identity and belonging. The post-2004 Slovak migration to the UK is a representative case of migrants' expanding mobility. Given the history of Slovakia and other former Eastern bloc countries that were completely cut off from the rest of the world and had severely limited mobility opportunities, the 'new' Slovak migrants in England have taken advantage of the possibility to take part in the freedom of movement and embrace more flexible migration trajectories. The freedom of border crossing for EU members seems to be having an impact on how migrants understand their belonging. These political-economic factors can therefore explain not only the determinants of migration (Morawska 2007: 3), but also migrants' identity construction that cannot be understood in isolation from institutional frameworks such as 'migration policies, citizenship regimes, hegemonic cultural norms and values and categories of both the receiving country and the country of origin' (La Barbera 2015: 7). The elimination of administrative barriers to immigration in the European labour migration system has made the possibility to stay indefinitely easier, as intra-EU migrants are no longer required to have visas or work permits, and do not face deportation if they stay longer than initially anticipated. European citizenship allows Slovak migrants in the UK not only to stay, but also to create homes and nurture the feeling of belonging in England, while simultaneously being able to sustain their national identity and have close links with their country of origin. In other words, free movement, rights recognition and the legal status of Slovak migrants in the UK appear to have an impact on their self-representation, their sense of belonging and their integration patterns (La Barbera 2015: 4-5). Slovak migrants thus often demonstrate 'non-enforced

temporariness' (Anderson 2013: 85). Out of the 19 people interviewed, six people of mixed age, gender, education status and varying lengths of migration, completely ruled out the option of returning to Slovakia. Another six respondents were not entirely sure about their future plans; they did not want to return to Slovakia in the near future, but admitted that if they found a good job opportunity meeting their qualifications, they would probably return. Their return would be either job-dependent or family-related. Many mentioned they would consider the influence or the condition of their parents or their partners' nationality/willingness to live in Slovakia. The remaining seven participants indicated their desire to return back to Slovakia under the condition of career stability or the return for a retirement. Only one participant admitted they were considering applying for a British citizenship and willing to give up their Slovak nationality.

The interviews for this research were carried out between December 2015 and early June 2016, thus in the immediate period leading to the Brexit referendum. My participants appeared up-to-date with the heated political debates that were in the media, but none of them expressed any real anxiety, since they believed that the UK would vote to remain a part of the EU. The unexpected result of the referendum thus caused a wave of panic and uncertainty for the many EU migrants living in the UK, Slovaks included. This prompted me to conduct additional short questionnaires and re-contact my participants in order to see whether their views and feelings of belonging had evolved. The questionnaires were sent towards the end of July 2016 – over a month after the referendum. Eleven of the 19 original interviewees responded.

The data revealed that none of the eleven expected the outcome of the referendum and they all admitted to feeling shocked and disappointed at first. They all believed that the decision would be potentially damaging for the UK as well as for the wider EU economy. Nonetheless, they did not express any strong worries about their own future ability to remain in the UK.

> **Janka (37):** I am not worried at the moment. I believe the UK government will keep those EU migrants who have made Britain their home more than five years ago…

Nor did their sense of home and belonging change in any way. Those who felt more at home in Slovakia and planned their return regardless of the referendum results, merely had their decision affirmed. Those who do not plan to return to Slovakia, either at all or at least in their mid-term to long-term futures, did not indicate any change of their sense of home and belonging due to Brexit, and continue their plans of living in England. None of the follow-up data suggested, for the time being, migrants' desire to apply for British citizenship despite their potential eligibility.

> **Ondrej (31):** I do not want to lose my Slovakian passport and as Slovakia does not allow double nationality, I did not think about applying [for British citizenship]

> **Matej (30):** Not immediately, this might change in the future. At the moment, it seems that my life in Britain is unaffected as an EU citizen only.

> **Lenka (29):** At the moment no. Maybe eventually I will apply for a resident permit.

Given that the Article 50 of the European Treaty has not yet been triggered and that the negotiations are not over, not much has changed for Slovak migrants at the moment, and most are waiting to see what form Brexit will take and how much is it going to affect their lives. For

the moment, it seems that their lives in Britain are unaffected if they remain EU citizens, although the ongoing discussions over a 'hard' versus a 'soft' Brexit introduce some uncertainty. The post-Brexit sample findings revealed that, although migrants feel disappointed, they do not necessarily feel that their right to remain in the UK is threatened, at least for the time being. This suggests that they in fact attribute their rights not only to European citizenship alone, but to democratic and liberal norms of the British government. Moreover, the UK government has released a statement in the Slovak language that there has been no change to the rights and status of EU nationals in the UK as a result of the referendum, ensuring those who have been in the UK for over five years an automatic permanent right to reside, with no need to register for any documentation to confirm their status (Gov.uk 2016). According to this statement, the EU nationals who have lived in the UK for less than five years 'continue to have a right to reside in the UK in accordance with EU law'.

It remains to be seen what changes Brexit will bring for those EU nationals living in the UK. However, for the time being, it appears that the initial wave of panic is over and their migration trajectories, rights and identities continue to be unaffected by Brexit thus far. There is, however, a lot of uncertainty surrounding Brexit and to comprehensively understand its effects on migrants' identity and sense of belonging would require further research revisiting the question once the negotiations are over.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated the extent to which Slovak migrants living in the UK shape their identities and senses of belonging through the expanded mobility that their European citizenship allows. My research aim was to assess the transnational intra-EU migration and mobility processes together with the continuous role of the nation-state and national citizenship in shaping migrants' self-identifications and notions of belonging.

I gave a historical overview of Slovak nation-state formation in order to demonstrate the creation of a national identity through the struggle for national self-determination, which influenced the citizenship legislations that are, until today, intertwined with a perception of nationality as territorial belonging. While citizenship can be officially understood simply as the attachment to the state at the institutional level, I have empirically demonstrated how the nation-state discourse makes people imagine they belong to a national community with a shared culture and values.

This has given a better context to my research question and argument against the claims of postnational scholarship that attributes rights to supranational organisations and the universal human rights discourse and, as such, diminishes the value of national citizenship (Jacobson 1997; Soysal 1994).

My study has argued that rights are still primarily derived from the national laws of sovereign nation-states, and institutionalised through the concept of national citizenship that allows states to expand or extract rights of migrants through the politics of sovereignty and citizenship. This points out that states are sovereign actors that are capable of closing as well as opening their doors to migrants, and that the citizenship regimes of both host and sending countries determine migrants' rights, that consequently shape their senses of belonging and identity.

The nation-state discourse contradicts the inclusiveness created by European membership and mobility, as it functions to reproduce nationalist discourses which prevent migrants from getting detached from their home country. On the other hand, the inclusiveness of a European citizenship that gives EU migrants legal status, allows migrants to develop multiple belongings and to maintain temporary mind-set, as well as enabling them to differentiate themselves from migrants in the conventional negative sense created by the national discourse.

European citizenship allows Slovak migrants in the UK not only to stay, but also to develop a feeling of belonging in England, while simultaneously sustaining their national identity and close links with the country of origin. These multiple allegiances create an 'unfinished condition of not yet belonging "here" but no longer "there"' (La Barbera 2015). Young Slovak migrants are thus presented with both opportunities and barriers to belonging.

The freedom of movement for EU members seems to be having an impact on how migrants understand their belonging. Migrants' identity construction thus cannot be understood in insolation from institutional frameworks such as 'migration policies, citizenship regimes, hegemonic cultural norms and values and categories of both the receiving country and the country of origin' that facilitate migrants' rights (La Barbera 2015: 7).

The post-Brexit findings further revealed that migrants' senses of belonging and identity have not been affected, at least thus far, as they do not necessarily feel that their right to remain in the UK is threatened. This suggests that Slovak migrants in fact attribute their rights mainly to the democratic and liberal norms and of the British government[7] rather than European citizenship alone. As such, studies of citizenship and nation-state should be always considered in theories of international migration.

Acknowledgements

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[7] Even if these 'democratic and liberal norms' seem to be somewhat under question as the UK government appears to shift to the 'Eurosceptic Right' in its ongoing rhetoric over the true nature of 'Brexit'.

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