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IDENTITY FRAGILITY: THE PROCESS OF DISIDENTIFICATION IN RUSSIAN MIGRANTS

2024   **Mikhina Elena**

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IDENTITY FRAGILITY: THE PROCESS OF DISIDENTIFICATION IN RUSSIAN MIGRANTS

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Názov: Identity Fragility: The process of disidentification in Russian migrants
Krehkosť identity: Proces disidentifikácie u ruských migrantov

Anotácia: Predchádzajúce štúdie o utečencoch a prisťahovalcoch poukázali na ťažkosti, ktorým čelia pri navigovaní svojej národnej identity v hostiteľskej krajine. Významná životná udalosť, akou je nútená migrácia, ktorá ohrozuje pozitívne pocity identifikácie a skupinovej príslušnosti, môže viesť k disidentifikácii, t. j.k dištancovaniu sa od ohrozenej identity (etnického alebo národného pôvodu) a k negatívnemu vnímaniu príslušnej identity. Kontext prebiehajúcej vojnyna Ukrajine je však jedinečný a nový, a preto nedostatočne preskúmaný.

Cieľ: 1. Preskúmať vytváranie významov ruských migrantov žijúcich v zahraničív kontexte ich národnej identity a vnímania krajiny pôvodu. 2. Preskúmať súvislosti medzi motiváciou opustiť Rusko, identifikačnými procesmi a well- beingom a rezilienciou imigrantov.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I elaborated this diploma thesis independently using cited literature.

Bratislava   **Signature**

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Abstract

Disidentification and Well-Being: The Case of Russian migrants.

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 caused a wave of migration not only by refugees fleeing war, but also in the case of Russian nationals who left their homes due to disagreement with the invasion of Ukraine, political prosecution, or safety concerns. Previous research conducted on refugees and immigrants documented many difficulties that they face in the process of acculturation and navigating their national or cultural identity in a host country Yet most studies have concerned groups directly feeling violence from the national outgroup perpetrators, and there is a lack of research on identity mechanisms of people that may negatively perceive actions by their ingroup or even disidentify with their country of origin.

Previous studies conducted on immigrants showed that a major life event such as forced migration that compromises positive feelings of identification and group membership can lead to disidentification and perceiving the corresponding identity negatively. According to social identity theory, group members will seek to find positive aspects of an in-group and negative aspects of an out-group, enhancing their own self-esteem.

Thesis consists of two studies. In Study 1, we conducted two rounds of semi-structured in- depth interviews with the aim to examine the meaning-making and experience of Russian emigrants in the context of forced migration with a focus on identity negotiation. 12 participantsresiding in 9 reflected on their self-identification, sense of belonging, and individual definitions of Russian terms used for describing a Russian person.

Study 2, using a cross-sectional design, explored the associations between Russian immigrants' intergroup meta-perceptions, identity centrality and disidentification from the national identity, as well as well-being and resilience. Participants (N=490) filled out an online survey including scales on the above mentioned variables. Correlational and regression analyseswere conducted to uncover the interrelations among variables.

This thesis addresses the critical gaps in understanding the outcomes of negative national identity and disidentification within a unique setting of recently outbroken conflict. The findingsgenerated from this research hold significant potential for informing the practices of field workers, clinicians, and counsellors working with immigrant populations. Through a deeper comprehension of these phenomena, we can better tailor interventions and support systems to foster a sense of belonging and resilience among immigrants, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and effective societal frameworks.

Disidentifikácia a blahobyt: Prípad ruských migrantov.

Vypuknutie vojny na Ukrajine vo februári 2022 spôsobilo vlnu migrácie nielen utečencov utekajúcich pred vojnou, ale aj ruských občanov, ktorí opustili svoje domovy z dôvodu nesúhlasu s inváziou na Ukrajinu, politického stíhania alebo kvôli obavám o bezpečnosť.

Predchádzajúce výskumy uskutočnené na utečencoch a prisťahovalcoch zdokumentovali mnohé ťažkosti, ktorým čelia v procese akulturácie a orientácie v národnej alebo kultúrnej identite v hostiteľskej krajine. Väčšina štúdií sa však týkala skupín, ktoré priamo pociťujú násilie zo stranypáchateľov z národnej outgroup, no chýba výskum mechanizmov identity ľudí, ktorí môžu negatívne vnímať konanie svojej ingroup alebo sa dokonca dezidentifikovať s krajinou pôvodu.

Predchádzajúce štúdie uskutočnené na prisťahovalcoch ukázali, že významná životná udalosť, ako je nútená migrácia, ktorá ohrozuje pozitívne pocity identifikácie a príslušnosti ku krajine, môže viesť k dezidentifikácii a negatívnemu vnímaniu príslušnej identity. Podľa teórie sociálnej identity sa členovia skupiny snažia nájsť pozitívne aspekty vnútornej skupiny a negatívne aspekty vonkajšej skupiny, čím posilnia svoje vlastné sebavedomie.

Diplomová práca pozostáva z dvoch štúdií. V prvej štúdii sme uskutočnili dve kolá pološtruktúrovaných hĺbkových rozhovorov s cieľom preskúmať vytváranie významov a skúsenosti ruských emigrantov v kontexte nútenej migrácie so zameraním na pretváranie identity. Dvanásť účastníkov s pobytom v 9 krajinách reflektovalo svoju sebaidentifikáciu, pocit spolupatričnosti a individuálne definície ruských pojmov používaných na opis ruského človeka.

Štúdia 2 s využitím prierezového dizajnu skúmala súvislosti medzi medziskupinovým vnímaním ruských emigrantov, centrálnosťou identity a dezidentifikáciou od národnej identity, ako aj kvalitu prežívania a odolnosť. Účastníci (N=490) vyplnili online dotazník obsahujúci škály s vyššími uvedenými premennými. Na odhalenie vzájomných vzťahov medzi premennými sa vykonali korelačné a regresné analýzy.

Táto práca rieši kritické medzery v chápaní dôsledkov negatívnej národnej identity a dezidentifikácie v prostredí nedávno prekonaného konfliktu. Zistenia získané z tohto výskumu majú významný potenciál pre informovanie praxe terénnych pracovníkov, klinických pracovníkov a poradcov pracujúcich s populáciou imigrantov. Vďaka hlbšiemu pochopeniu týchto javov môžeme lepšie prispôsobiť intervencie a podporné systémy na podporu pocitu spolupatričnosti a odolnosti prisťahovalcov, čo v konečnom dôsledku prispeje k inkluzívnejším a efektívnejším spoločenským rámcom.

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Introduction

The outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022 caused a wave of migration not only by refugees fleeing war, but also in the case of Russian nationals that left their homes either due to disagreement with the invasion of Ukraine, political prosecution, or safety concerns. According to the Levada Center is a Russian independent, nongovernmental polling and sociological research organization in the first year of the war at least 1 million Russians left the country. However, people were leaving Russian having politicized motivations even before the year 2022, disagreeing with the state's actions and avoiding slow deterioration in the field of civil rights and freedoms. Previous research conducted on refugees and immigrants documented many difficulties that they face in the process of navigating their national or ethnic identity in a host country. Yet most studies have concerned groups directly feeling violence from the national outgroup perpetrators, and there is a lack of research on identity mechanisms of people that may negatively perceive actions by their ingroup or even disidentify with their country of origin.

This thesis delves into the changes in the national identity of Russian migrants, who face an identity threat caused by forced migration and the ongoing war in Ukraine. It aims to understand how the conflict affects self-perception, community ties and cultural connections of Russian migrants, as well as how they face the challenges posed by the ongoing war. It draws upon interdisciplinary approaches using both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of the immediate impacts of the war on Russian migrant identities and contribute to the broader discourse on migration and identity in times of geopolitical conflicts.

In the first study of this thesis, a qualitative approach was adopted, using semi-structured interviews as a data collection method and analyzed using Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2020). The study aimed to explore how participants navigate and construct their national identities and the sense of belonging under threatening conditions. The results of the study are presented in four themes identified as the most significant within the dataset. The second study employs a quantitative paradigm to address the relationship between concepts of subjective psychological well-being and resilience state, which are important for a person to cope with challenges and adapt to changes, and other variables representing factors often described in relation to forced migration and identity threat.

In the first chapter of this thesis, introduction to the identity phenomenon and different identity paradigms is presented. In the end of that section the more detailed context of the research meaning a short description of the history and factors shaping specifically Russian identity is described. The text continues with a description of the concepts related specifically to study 1, its methods and results. Result section is followed by a brief discussion on the qualitative part of the thesis. The next chapter is dedicated to quantitative study. First, theoretical background is presented, and afterwards materials, sample and the results are discussed. The section ends with a discussion on the quantitative results. The thesis ends with a general reflection of both studies, highlighting limitations of the work, practical implications and suggestions for future research.

My decision to explore the threat to identity is rooted in both my personal narrative and the experiences of other migrants from Russia, who are navigating their identities and seek to understand where and why they belong now. I hope that this thesis will bring attention to the complex and often overlooked challenges faced by Russian migrants, and that it will encourage a greater comprehension of how identity is threatened and transformed in times of conflict.

1.   Theoretical background

In this chapter, an overview of the identity concept is presented. Various perspectives on the identity phenomenon and identity research together with the identity theories used in the next chapters as a theoretical basis for the study are discussed.

1.1 Identity

Identity is a multifaceted concept that is unique to each individual and is assumed to remain relatively consistent over time (Buckingham, 2008). It is a quality that sets us apart from others and gives one a sense of individuality. However, identity is not solely an individual characteristic but is also shaped by one's connection to a larger social group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). For instance, the national, cultural, or gender identity is influenced by the similarities with others. This can sometimes conflict with one's desire to express their true self. Ultimately, identity is a culmination of personal history, social and cultural traits, and shared values, which can vary based

on the context and one's motives. While an individual has some control over how they define themselves, external factors can also impact their identity.

The concept of identity is closely related to the concept of self, which typically refers to the individual's subjective experience of being a unique and separate entity (James, 1895). It encompasses various aspects of personal experience, including thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions, and memories. The self is considered the locus of consciousness and personal agency, representing the individual's sense of "I" or "me."

To understand identity from different perspectives, in this chapter we will describe theories and paradigms commonly used to study cognitive aspects of identity.

1.1.1 Identity in cognitive science

The concept of identity has been a subject of interest in traditional philosophy and logic, and was later incorporated into the field of psychology by Freud. Building upon Freud's work, Erikson proposed that identity is essentially the answer to the question of one's own self - "Who am I?" (Erikson, 1994). According to Erikson's theory of identity, this concept is not limited to the individual, but is also collective and social in nature. It encompasses the differences, characteristics, and sense of belonging that emerge from interpersonal and intergroup interactions, and is shaped by the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in various groups or roles (Stets & Burke, 2000).

In the cognitive paradigm the identity has been viewed as an implicit theory of oneself (Epstein, 1998). A self-theory is a cognitive framework of personal beliefs, constructs, schemas, hypotheses, and postulates that individuals use to navigate their interactions with the world. These self-theories help people to organize and encode their experiences, particularly those related to their identity. Individuals create customized constructs to govern their interpretation and organization of environmental stimuli, which are then synthesized into higher-order cognitive structures. Self-theories also include a core of values, standards, epistemological assumptions, goals, and ideals that serve as criteria for monitoring and evaluating one's effectiveness in coping with the demands of daily life. The ever-evolving nature of our world means that previously useful constructs may become invalid, requiring an ongoing interaction between control processes governed by existing

identity structures and regulatory efforts to modify them (Berzonsky, 1994). As individuals mature, adult identity development requires relatively minor adjustments to relatively stable self-constructs within the context of a relatively stable world (Kelly, 2003).

Another model connected to the cognitive aspects of identity and self is self-schemas model (Markus, 1977). This model supposes that individuals organize and interpret information about themselves and their social world through cognitive-affective structures called schemas. They influence how individuals perceive and process identity-relevant information, shaping their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. According to Markus (1977) people form schemas for dimensions of identity that they perceive as important. For instance, one may feel that they are honest, but may be not sure if they describe themselves as lazy. In that case the individual will be schematic for honesty but not for laziness. Within this paradigm concepts of possible and feared selves are described. They refer to the selves that one would like to become or is afraid of becoming. By interaction with each other and the self-schema in a particular domain, they guide the behavior and influence one's choices.

From the point of view of neurobiology, to distinguish 'self' from 'the others', activity of the prefrontal cortex's left hemisphere is essential (Kircher et al., 2001; Turk et al., 2003).The subjective sense of self that many people experience seems to stem from the operations of a left-hemisphere interpreter (Gazzaniga, 2000). This interpreter is responsible for integrating various self-relevant processes from different areas of the brain (Turk et al., 2003). The mental representations individuals maintain about themselves in long-term memory are akin to those held about other concepts but exhibit greater complexity, diversity, and impact on the interpretation of situations and the actions of others than other accessible constructs. Other areas such as posterior cingulate and nucleus accumbens are also activated when talking about self-concepts and self-schemas (Turk et al., 2003).

1.1.2 Social identity approach

This thesis will be particularly building on the social identity approach (SIA). SIA is a framework initially proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) under the Social Identity Theory. Later developments of this approach are known as Social Categorisation Theory (Turner et al., 1987).

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) emphasizes the role of social context in shaping one's social identity as well as one's perceptions of intergroup relations (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). The theory originated based on the findings of an experimental paradigm called 'minimal group paradigm'. In this paradigm, participants are allocated into groups based on meaningless arbitrary criteria, such as the preference of one painting over the other. Participants are then instructed to allocate points to members of their group (the ingroup) and to members of the other group (the out-group). Despite the absence of any meaningful social context, people tended to favor their own group over the outgroup, even when the points carried no value. This finding has been consistently replicated using many different arbitrary group divisions.

Based on this approach, human interactions range from the purely interpersonal to the purely intergroup level. When group category distinctions are salient, people perceptually enhance similarities within the group and differences between groups, resulting in a shift from personal identity to social identity. The motivating principle underlying competitive intergroup behavior is a desire for a positive and secure self-concept. People are motivated to think positively of their ingroups in order to maintain a positive self-concept.

Self-categorization Theory (SCT) is a further development of the SIT that includes both intergroup and intragroup processes (Turner et al., 1987). SCT suggests that interpersonal and intergroup dynamics function at different levels of inclusiveness. The self-concept comprises three levels of self-categorization: the superordinate category of the self as a human being (or human identity), the intermediate level of the self as a member of a social ingroup defined against other groups of humans (social identity), and the subordinate level of personal self-categorizations based on interpersonal comparisons (personal identity).

SCT proposes that there exists a "functional antagonism" between the levels of self-definition. As one level becomes more salient, the other levels become less so. It determines which particular identity will become the basis for categorization in any given context. According to SCT, categorization occurs as a function of both accessibility and fit. A high level of fit is perceived if the category distinction maximizes perceived intercategory differences and minimizes intracategory differences.

A foundation of SCT is the concept of depersonalization. People represent their social groups cognitively in terms of prototypes. When a category becomes salient, people tend to see themselves and other category members less as individuals and more as interchangeable examples of the group prototype. Group identity not only describes what it means to be a group member but also prescribes what attitudes, emotions, and behaviors are appropriate in a given context. SCT considers the notion of depersonalization as a key factor for a range of group processes such as cohesion, influence, conformity, and leadership.

Another development of the SIA is the **Identity Process Theory (IPT)** proposed by Breakwell (1986). IPT offers a theoretical understanding of identity dynamics through the interplay between individual cognitive capacities and social influences, manifested through cognition, behavior, and emotions. The model emphasizes the continuity of identity over time, while acknowledging the reflexive interpretation of one's biography. Identity is conceptualized through content and value-affective dimensions, including both social and personal aspects without distinction. The organization of identity involves centrality, hierarchy, and salience of elements, adaptable to changes in social context and individual agency. Each identity element is associated with positive or negative affective values, which is the subject to constant reassessment based on evolving social norms and personal circumstances.

IPT argues that the structure of identity is regulated by dynamic processes known as accommodation, assimilation, and evaluation, which are considered universal psychological phenomena (Hanfstingl et al., 2022). Assimilation involves integrating new components into one's identity, while accommodation entails adjusting the existing structure to accommodate these new elements. Evaluation involves assigning meaning and affective value to identity contents, both old and new. These processes interact to shape the evolving content and value of identity over time, with changes in assimilation often requiring corresponding adjustments in evaluation, and vice versa.

According to Breakwell, identity formation occurs within specific social contexts and historical periods, consisting of interpersonal networks, group memberships, and intergroup relationships (Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000). The content of identity is taken from these structures, which prescribe roles and instill beliefs or values. Additionally, social influence

processes shape the ideological environment for identity construction. While IPT acknowledges the influence of social context, it does not propose that identity is solely determined by it. Individuals have agency in constructing their identities (Neisser, 1994).

1.1.3 Identity threat and disidentification

The impact of changes in a social context on one's identity can vary depending on several factors. It is crucial to consider the relevance of the changes to the individual, the direct impact on the person, the magnitude of the change, and its perceived negativity in order to fully understand the situation. Threats to identity happen when the processes of fitting in and adjusting don't match with the principles of continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Breakwell, 1986). These threats are having a negative impact on people, causing a need to go back to how their identity used to function. Coping strategies may be employed to remove or modify these threats at various levels (intra-psychic, interpersonal, and group/intergroup) depending on the nature of the threat, social context, prior identity structure, and cognitive and emotional capacities (Breakwell, 2021). It's important to note that for someone to take action, they have to realize the presence of threat, and see the difference between being in a threatening position and feeling threatened.

In response to a negative or unfavorable social identity, SIT presents various identity management strategies (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The first one is social mobility strategy that entails the idea of permeable boundaries between social groups. Individuals adopting this strategy can leave their current disadvantaged group and move to another one that promises a more satisfying sense of identity. This strategy improves one's social identity, but the group identity stays the same. Thus a certain level of disidentification with the original group can be observed (Bilewicz & Bilewicz, 2012). Social mobility can be employed by a football player or an employee dissatisfied with their company's position, but in the case of national identity, it might be harder or even impossible to leave the group (Sorokin, 2001).

In the case of impermeable boundaries between social groups, changing the group to improve one's social status is not possible, but people can adopt a social change strategy. Tajfel and Turner identify two categories of strategies focused on achieving a more positive reassessment of the ingroup. The first one is social creativity which comes into play when people perceive their intergroup relations as secure, regardless of whether they are desirable or not. In such situations,

groups may look for new ways to compare themselves to others in order to strengthen their own identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In contrast, social competition strategy occurs when subordinate and dominant groups directly compete on dimensions that are valued by both groups and are subjectively perceived to be insecure. When the legitimacy or stability of the status hierarchy is in question, comparisons may be made with highly dissimilar groups, with the belief that relative statuses can or should be changed (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

SIT recognizes that the experience of threat varies among social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This is attributed to the strength of identification with the in-group (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). It is believed that individuals' level of identification influences how they perceive and respond to threats. High in-group identifiers tend to protect collective identity by increasing out-group derogation and in-group bias, while low identifiers may focus more on protecting personal identity and disassociating from the group (Ellemers et al., 1999).

The way people respond to threats is influenced by their level of identification and the specific type of threat they face, and these factors often interact. Based on SIT, the fundamental human motivation is the "need for positive self-esteem" (Turner, 1982). Hogg and Abrams (1990) suggested that other self-related motives, such as self-consistency, might take precedence over the motive for positive self-esteem. They argued that individuals are motivated to categorize themselves in the most meaningful way according to the context. This process may lead to various behaviors, including intergroup discrimination, acquiescence, intragroup competition, and elevated or depressed self-esteem. Therefore, if it is not realistic to derive positive self-esteem from group membership, other motives, such as the need to maintain a coherent and stable self-concept, could prevent the individual from abandoning the group membership. Conversely, if group identification is weak then the need for stability of the identity should also be weaker. In this case, the individual would be more likely to lower group identification to avoid further experiences of low self-esteem. Thus, the SIT prediction that lowered self-esteem will cause an individual to leave the group would be supported in a psychological sense, even if actual group membership could not be changed.

While negative evaluations of the group membership may create a sense of psychological distance from other group members and a feeling of being different from the typical group member, they don't address the ongoing need for belonging (Gligorić & Obradović, 2024). Previous research done in a SIA framework has indicated that disengagement from a group can lead to self-recategorization, where other identities become more important in shaping one's self-perception (Matschke & Sassenberg, 2010). In the context of national disengagement, minority groups have been observed to strengthen their subgroup identities (e.g. Jewish Russians highlighting and sticking to their Jewish identity) due to disengagement from the majority nation (Maliepaard & Verkuyten, 2018). Conversely, in the case of disengagement from a national ingroup where individuals already belong to the majority (e.g., their national identity aligns with the dominant ethnicity, as in the case of being "russkiy" Russian) and have fewer available subgroups, it is likely that recategorization occurs at a higher level, towards supranational categories (Gligorić & Obradović, 2024).

As was already mentioned above the attempt to leave the threatening identity can result in a disidentification process (Dean, 2008). Becker and Tausch (2014) suggested that disidentification includes three components: detachment from the group, dissimilarity from the ingroups and dissatisfaction with the group membership. Researchers defined detachment as a cognitive separation from the group (Matschke & Sassenberg, 2010), disengagement (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009), or distancing from the ingroups (Ikegami, 2010). Detachment from the group can lead to a range of negative emotions, from feeling alienated and estranged to actively distancing oneself from the group. Even though still technically a part of the group, the person can cut off all psychological connections and commitments to the group. Detachment can take place e.g. when the group violates the basic values of the individual (Glasford et al., 2008). The concept of dissimilarity refers to the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as distinct from the ingroup prototype (Becker & Tausch 2013). This means they see themselves as different from other ingroup members and believe they possess traits that are opposite to those of their fellow ingroup members. This feeling of dissimilarity may be particularly prevalent among members of low-status groups who have managed to integrate into a higher-status group (Ellemers et al., 1999). Feeling dissatisfied arises from a negative evaluation of one's association with a particular group (Becker & Tausch, 2014). It involves being unhappy about being part of the group and feeling

regretful about that membership. Dissatisfaction is influenced by the level of respect and regard the group is perceived to have in society and can be heightened by experiences of discrimination or exclusion (Levin & Laar, 2006).

Migration itself can be threatening for the identity as it impacts individuals on both individual and social levels, challenging various aspects of identity definition, including interpersonal relationships, material possessions, normative beliefs, and values (Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000).

However, the situation regarding the recent migration from Russia is quite unique. Although these migrants are not directly fleeing from the war, we argue that they are still at risk due to the regime, political persecution, and the possibility of being drafted into the military to fight in Ukraine. Others are standing up against the actions of the Russian government and are willing to sacrifice their homes for the sake of free speech and living according to their values. There are also those who are simply terrified by the news and are following their partners who have alreadyleft or are avoiding being sent to the front lines (as is the case for many women who follow their partners). Considering that some members of the ingroup (i.e. Russians) support the actions of the Russian state, which may contradict the moral values of those migrating for political reasons, Russian migrants often face an identity threat. As a result, they are more likely to disidentify with their homeland.

1.1.4 Identity construction

There are different ways to approach the phenomenon of social identity formation. Essentialists hold the belief that specific traits and characteristics are inherent and fundamental to individuals or groups. These traits are commonly viewed as natural, biological, or otherwise unchangeable. According to essentialist thinking, identity remains consistent and unaltered over time, rooted in the core of what it means to be a particular type of person. For example, they may argue that ethnic identity is defined by cultural heritage or ancestry, citing historical continuities as the foundation for such identities (). In contrast, positivists emphasize the role of empirical evidence and scientific methods in understanding identity. They focus on observable, measurable phenomena. Positivists view identity as something that emerges through social interactions and cultural practices, making it fluid and context-dependent.

Another paradigm is social constructivism, which places great emphasis on the active construction of knowledge and reality through social performance, cultural contexts, and language (Berzonsky, 1994). In contrast to theories that see knowledge as something to be discovered, social constructivism suggests that individuals play an active role in co-creating understanding within their social environments. According to Kelly (1955) people make unique constructs that help them in the selection, integration, and understanding of environmental stimuli. A critical element of this framework is discourse, underscoring the function of language as the primary tool for constructing and sharing knowledge. Through discourse, people engage in negotiating meanings and arriving at shared understandings, which in turn shape their perceptions and realities. This process highlights the subjective nature of reality, where individuals interpret the same phenomena in various ways influenced by their personal experiences and social backgrounds.

Anthony Smith (1991) connects social constructionism and essentialist views by defining identity as a result of both "natural" continuity and conscious manipulation. According to Smith, in case of national identity, natural continuity comes from existing ethnic identity and community, while conscious manipulation is achieved through commemoration, ideology, and symbolism. Smith also adds a social psychological dimension, stating that a "need for community" is essential for identity to function. He argues that this unique combination sets national identity apart, making it the most fundamental and inclusive of collective identities.

1.1.5 National Identity

To understand the content of national identity, it is important to outline the differences between ethnicity, nationality and politicized collective identity. Eriksen (2010) defines ethnicity as the way individuals perceive themselves as distinct from others and establish connections based on these distinctions. It constitutes a social identity that fosters a feeling of belonging and kinship to those perceived as similar. In situations where cultural disparities significantly impact group dynamics, ethnicity becomes a significant factor. Ethnicity encompasses both favorable and detrimental elements within relationships, as well as in shaping one's sense of self. It bears practical and symbolic significance, as ethnic communities recount shared narratives of heritage (Eriksen, 2010). Citizenship involves identifying with a nation that embodies modern citizenship values such as equality, rights, responsibilities, and cultural identity. In a globalized world, individuals

typically hold citizenship in one or more states, with national identity forming the basis of their personal connection to their citizenship (Přibáň, 2016).

Nationality can be best described as the imagined community while citizenship is a political construct from people's relationship to a state (Jamieson, 2002). Consequently, national identity is a multifaceted concept, encompassing citizenship, history, community, territory, values, and traditions (Smith, 2011). This includes regulations concerning citizenship, immigration, civil and legal rights, political rights and duties, and socio-economic rights. Smith (2011) argues that the modern nation-state represents a cultural and political bond among a community sharing a common historical culture and homeland. Over time, a state's national identity is shaped through everyday interactions and institutional influences. Citizenship is a key component through which a state can manage its national identity, serving as a crucial link between citizens and the state and promoting social cohesion (Minter, 2011). The state continually seeks to legitimize itself to its citizens, and as a result, the definition of national identity is in a constant state of evolution (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2009).

Another relevant concept of politicized collective identity was introduced by Simon and Klandermans (2001). The concept explains how collective politically-charged identities are activated and maintained. Simon and Klandermans (2001) suggest that the salience of a collective identity depends on the social context and shared problems of the group. For instance, during times of international conflict, national identity becomes prominent, fostering social cohesion among citizens. Similarly, national sports events can also activate national identity. This activation is linked to depersonalization, a concept from SIT, which explains how individuals align themselves with group prototypes and conform to group norms (Hogg, 2016)

The differences and peculiarities of national identity compared to ethnic identity are explained in the next chapter on the example of Russian ethnicity and citizenship.

1.2 Research context: The case of Russian identity

In order to gain a better understanding of the context of our research, it's necessary to delve into the historical roots of the term "Russian" ('russkij' or 'rossiyanin' as it is translated into

Russian language) as well as the various influences that have shaped the national identity of those residing within Russia's borders up to the present day.

Russia has long been characterized by its expansive territorial reach and its diverse tapestry of ethnic, religious, and cultural complexities, both during its tsarist and Soviet epochs. As the largest territorial entity, it hosted a multitude of ethnic groups. However, scholars tended to neglect the narratives of Russia's minorities. This oversight has resulted in a tendency to oversimplify Russian (or Soviet) history, treating the vast multinational state as a homogeneous entity dominated solely by the Russian nation (Livezeanu, 1995). Below we will take an attempt to describe why and how these narratives were constructed, and what are the results of this "Russicentric" thinking.

Historical roots of the Russian nation

The concept of nation emerged in Russia towards the end of the 18th century. By the end of the 19th century, the idea of a nation in Russia had evolved into an ideology aimed at upholding autocracy and the imperial order. During this period, Russian nationalism was characterized by organized groups promoting national egoism, chauvinism, and xenophobia (Pain, 2016, p129).

Prior to the official state nationalism and ethnic understanding of the nation, the civic concept of the nation (1790-1833) emerged, emphasizing popular sovereignty, representation, and constitutional order. This idea was prevalent in Russia for several decades and was embraced by groups such as the Decembrists, who sought to limit autocracy by advocating for a constitutional monarchy or a republican system. However, following events such as the Decembrist Revolt the discourse on the nation and national representation shifted in official circles. There was a rejection of the constitution and national representation, deemed unsuitable for Russia (Pain, 2016, p127-128).

During the era of "official nationality" (1833-1863), the concept of the nation was de-emphasized, and efforts were made to suppress civic nationalism by replacing it with similar ideologies. The triad "Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality," introduced in 1833, aimed to counter European free-thinking and stood in opposition to the ideals of the French Revolution. Conservatives in Russia rejected the concepts of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" and emphasized Russia's commitment to its traditions and distinct path, contrasting it with Western ideologies. This

concept, also known as "the special way of Russia," highlighted the unique spirit of Russian nationality through devotion to Orthodoxy and autocracy (Pain, 2016, p128).

The period from 1863 to 1890 marked the beginning of the ethnicization of the concept of nation, which was associated with the rise of Russian ethnic nationalism. During this time, the term "nationality" was not widely used in the Russian language and in politics. Eventually terminology evolved into the use of terms like "ethnicity" and "ethnic identity" instead of "nation" and "nationality". The concept of "nationality" in Russia came to encompass communities of people who shared a common self-identity, cultural heritage, and ethnic consciousness. The introduction of the "national question" in political discourse initially carried a negative connotation, referring to the perceived threat of ethnic separatism, particularly in Ukraine. While ethnic nationalism of other groups was viewed unfavorably, Russian nationalism was regarded positively. Over time, the focus of the "national question" shifted from civil to ethnic concerns. In the late 1890s, the Slavophiles began promoting the idea of fundamental and enduring differences between the Russian people and Western nations, drawing on the concept of a "national spirit." This concept, influenced by German philosophy, evolved into the notion of Russia's unique path and distinctive national spirit, characterized by qualities such as tolerance, generosity, and sobornost (spiritual community). This perspective contrasted the perceived selfishness and coldness attributed to the Western spirit. From this environment emerged a group known as "Russian nationalists" (Pain, 2016, p.128).

During the final years of the Russian Empire (1905-1917), Russian imperial and aggressively xenophobic nationalism became officially recognized in politics. The "Union of the Russian People" was established as the first legal party of Russian nationalists in 1905, with its primary goal being the preservation of the autocracy and the empire. This party believed it was their duty to ensure that the territories conquered by their ancestors remained an integral part of the Russian state. At the same time, the extreme right wing of Russian nationalism emerged, combining ideas of monarchism with xenophobia and anti-Semitism. They popularized the slogan "Russia for Russians", which later became a common principle for Russian nationalists advocating for ethnic Russians to have preferential rights within the empire (Pain, 2016, p.129).

Soviet period

Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks were opposed to nationalism, viewing it as a reactionary and bourgeois phenomenon that went against the interests of the working class and the communist revolution. In the early years of the Soviet state, Lenin emphasized the distinction between proletarian, socialist patriotism and bourgeois nationalism. While he defended the right of all nations to self-determination and the unity of workers within their nations, he also condemned chauvinism. In that period, the Soviet government took steps to improve the social status of various ethnic groups, establishing union republics within the USSR to provide autonomy and protection to national minorities. Furthermore, Lenin encouraged the representation of communists from various nationalities in the country's leadership and urged non-Russians to join the party in order to balance out the Russian majority (Pain, 2016, p.130).

The USSR failed to solve the national question and Stalin brought a new socialist theory contradicting communist principles (). During World War II, Soviet patriotism and Russian nationalism were closely linked as the war was seen as a struggle for national survival. After the war, the Soviet government's appeal to Russian nationalism decreased. Khrushchev promoted the unification of the peoples of the USSR into a single "Soviet people" without rejecting their ethnic identities. This was met with resistance, as many non-Russian Soviet citizens saw it as a cover for Russification. The Soviet Union faced economic and political challenges in the 1970s and 1980s, leading to a rise in anti-Soviet sentiment among both Russians and other peoples. Gorbachev's efforts to solve these problems were unsuccessful, and nationalist sentiment was one of the factors that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Russian identity after the USSR

The community of citizens of the Russian Federation of different ethnic, religious, social, and other affiliations based on the historical Russian statehood has developed into a historical and socio-political community, a political, or civil nation, named Russians [rossiyane], Russian people [Rossiyskiy narod], Russian nation. This community has a complex ethnic and religious composition, including more than 190 ethnic communities, of which over 80% are Russians (2010 census data). 99.7% of Russians speak the Russian language, and about 70% of Russians consider themselves Orthodox Christians. Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and other religions are also

widespread in Russia. In the modern meaning ("citizens of the Russian Federation"), the polytonym "Rossiyane" became widespread in the early 1990s. In particular, the address "Dear Rossiyane!" was used by Russian President Boris Yeltsin in his speeches in order to neutralize ethnic characteristics and stereotypes. This term refers to Russian citizens regardless of ethnicity.

Current Russia through the prism of the SIT

Similarly to the strategies employed by individuals when identity is perceived negatively, national political leaders may use identity management strategies to boost national self-esteem (Clunan, 2012). As mentioned in section 1.1.2, SIT distinguishes three types of strategies: social mobility, social competition, and social creativity. Social mobility involves a lower- status nation accepting the norms of higher-status nations in the hope of joining that group (Larson & Shenchenko, 2010). Social competition accepts the criteria for assessing status among nations but aims to improve the negative ranking of the lower-status nation (Clunan, 2011). Social creativity involves seeking positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefiningor altering the elements of the comparative situation (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). This can be achieved by revising the interpretation of the dimension on which nations are ranked or byshifting the focus of comparison.

Sharafutdinova (2020) analyzed Russian identity in the perspective of SIT. She argues that effective leaders tap into emotions and grievances related to national recognition and help individuals raise their self-esteem through adapting different kinds of strategies (Fukuyama 2018). While Brezhnev's leadership adopted a social competition strategy, introducing the concept of the socialist way of life to address the Soviet Union's lag in economic development compared to the West (Tolz, 1998), Mikhail Gorbachev later focused on social creativity and "new thinking" to elevate the Soviet Union's status and promote innovative solutions to global issues (Evans, 2015). Gorbachev aimed to integrate the Soviet Union into the community of states committed to Western democratic values, abandoning the pursuit of military competition with the United States. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Boris Yeltsin focused on social mobility and sought acceptance of Russia by Western democratic nations (Donaldson and Joseph Nogee, 2014). He prioritized the relationship with the United States but also expressed Russia's expectation to be regarded as a great power. When Vladimir Putin became the top leader in 2000, he emphasized that great power status

was essential for Russia's survival and made its restoration a central goal of foreign policy (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010).

Putinism is an example of leadership that generated public support by relying on group emotions and making national identity central to Russian citizens' sense of self (Sharafutdinova, 2020). The intensifying focus on foreign policy issues, politics of resentment, and the promotion of a narrative construct of Russia as a victim at the hands of the global West are central to the process of collective identity politicization (Bershidsky 2017; Simon and Klandermans 2001). The annexation of Crimea was a crucial point in the modern history of Russia that added political potency to such a strategy (Hopf 2016). The Kremlin's swift and decisive action in Ukraine fit well with the evolving elite discourses of Russian national identity. Russia's president gained popularity and influence at home, as a leader of the country that can stand up to the West and defend the Russians "trapped" outside Russia. The potency of the state-controlled television and its targeted discussion of specific countries for constructing perceived enemies was already clear after the war with Georgia in 2008 (Levada Center: https://www.levada.ru/2009/01/29/otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-ssha- es-ukraine-i-gruzii-yanvar/). One of the effects of the centralized media campaigns was to increasethe centrality of national identity in Russia. The Russian leadership promoted patriotism as the "sacred duty" of the Russians and Russia's "only national idea" (Rozenas & Stukal 2019). The ways the Russian media framed Putin's assertive foreign policy actions, and the annexation of Crimea in particular, worked not only to make the national identity more salient but also to boost the collective self-esteem by providing a positive emotional valence associated with a sense of belonging to the Russian nation (Levada center: www.levada.ru/2014/08/19/ekspertiza-rossiyane-napodeme/.) Sharafutdinova (2020) explains Putin's popularity after 2014 by describing a positive national identity linked to Vladimir Putin. She argues that individuals prioritize political and economic matters based on their identity, even if these priorities conflict. When individuals transition from a personal to a collective identity, their attitudes change. In the post-Crimea Russia context, wherePutin is viewed as the embodiment of national identity, discussions about Putin can evoke a senseof national identity (Sharafutdinova, 2020). Also this shift to a collective identity can result in conforming attitudes and predispositions as people adopt views they perceive to be widely accepted in society. In post-Crimea Russia, these views may be related to the annexation of Crimea, collective memory, Russia's foreign policy, and other issues emphasized by state-

controlled media. Lastly, group members are likely to be hesitant to express views that differ from the collective narrative, leading to increased group cohesion and favoritism. Those who do not conform, such as not supporting Putin, may engage in self-censorship to avoid marginalization or aggression.

The research context: after February 24

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 led to the biggest since the Bolshevik Revolution 1917 emigration from Russia. By July 2023 it was estimated that up to 1 million of people have departed Russia since the full-scale war in Ukraine began (https://re-russia.net/en/review/347/), relocating to various countries. The primary destinations for Russian emigrants were understandably visa-free countries, particularly former Soviet states. These countries offer easy entry regulations, a relatively low cost of living, and a prevalence of the Russian language. Among other countries migrants also frequently chose Turkey, Serbia and Monte-Negro. Significant part of people emigrating from Russia had Jewish ancestors and thus repatriated to Israel (https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/reports/year_rus_ukr/he/year_russia_ukraine_war.pdf). The reasons for leaving varied from fear of political oppression and avoiding military service to concerns about Russia's increasing isolation and poor economic prospects. Russian emigrants find themselves dispersed as temporary residents in nations like Turkey, Serbia, and several former Soviet republics, as asylum seekers in the United States and the European Union, or in a perpetual state of movement among several visa-free destinations across the globe.

The panel study OutRush has surveyed more than 10 000 people who emigrated after the outbreak of the war (Kamalov et al., 2022). The survey shows that the individuals who left Russia are predominantly young, highly educated, and coming from a relatively good economic background (back in Russia), They are mostly employed in intellectual and entrepreneurial fields such as IT, data analysis, and science. Many of them fear a decline in living standards and potential economic vulnerability due to migration. A significant portion of the respondents intend to stay in their host countries and continue their education, with a majority expressing a willingness to learn the local language. Additionally, a majority of respondents fear facing discrimination due to their Russian citizenship in the near future. In Russia, respondents were politically active individuals, often persecuted for their political views. For the majority of respondents, returning to Russia

means a severe decrease in the quality of life. Almost half of respondents said they feared persecution for posting information, 20% reported potential lack of access to medications.

1.3 The present research

As individuals in exile with a complex national background, Russian migrants oftentimes face threats to their sense of identity. They may feel alienated in a country where their home nation is not viewed positively, and returning to their country of origin may not be an option. Recent political events can also challenge their values, leading to a need for identity negotiation. In this work we draw on the Social Identity Approach and the disidentification phenomenon.

This thesis addresses the critical gaps in understanding the outcomes of negative national identity and disidentification within a unique setting of recently outbroken conflict.

In study 1 we use the social constructivist approach to data, analyzing qualitative data with Interpretive Thematic Analysis method which allows researchers to take participants' perspective and gain a better understanding of the individual experience. In study 2 we use quantitative methodology to approach the insights gained from the interviews with an idea to see a bigger picture, understanding the general dynamics in the relevant sample.

The findings generated from this research hold significant potential for informing the practices of field workers, clinicians, and counselors working with immigrant populations. Through a deeper comprehension of these phenomena, we can better tailor interventions and support systems to foster a sense of belonging and resilience among immigrants, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and effective societal frameworks.

2. Study 1

2.1 Introduction

Study 1 used qualitative research methods to explore how Russian migrants construct their social identity in light of changes following the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Many people in Russia were forced to leave their homes due to political prosecution or open

disagreement with the regime. The aim of this study was to examine the meaning-making of Russian emigrants with a focus on identity negotiation. The interviews were conducted in two rounds, which also allowed us to observe how their narratives of Russia and of their national identity evolved between the two interview sessions. We were additionally interested in whether and how participants construct the difference between two terms used to define a Russian person in the Russian language ("Russkiy", referring to ethnicity, and "Rossiyanin", belonging in terms of citizenship; described in more detail in chapter 1.2).

In this study we adopted a constructivist perspective on identity that suggests that individuals actively shape their understanding of themselves and the world around them by creating personal constructs that shape the way they interpret their experiences (Kelly, 1995). These constructs are not inherently meaningful, and a person's reality is based on their interpretations rather than the events themselves (Berzonsky, 1990). However, people may not always be consciously aware of the constructs they hold about themselves, as these beliefs can be acquired indirectly from various sources such as parents, peers, and cultural influences, thus not always being able to articulate these beliefs and constructs about themselves (Berzonsky, 2011). These constructs formed the basis for the interpretation of our data. Other researchers found this approach suitable for studying migration experience (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015; Fedi et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2017; Weishaar, 2008) and identity threat (Jaspal & Coyle, 2009; Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000), aiming to understand participants' identity negotiation and reconstruction.

There were three research questions we aimed to answer with this study:

RQ1: How is Russian national identity constructed by Russian emigrants?

RQ2: What strategies are used to negotiate national identity under conditions of identity threat?

RQ3: How do participants describe their sense of belonging after emigration?

2.2   Methods

2.2.1 Procedure

The research consisted of two rounds of semi-structured interviews. While the first round was more exploratory in nature, the second round of interviews was more specific in terms of national identity constructions and how they developed since the first interview, complemented by author's observational notes and information from the shored demographic questionnaire, including the information on the origins and feeling about being a Russian citizen shared by participants, provided by participants to identify and describe relevant context. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Participants were asked to reflect on their migration experience (reasons to leave Russia, emigration hardships, and feelings about living abroad) to give researchers a deeper understanding of their life situation. Afterward, interviews delved deeper in the topics of self-identification, sense of belonging, and construction of national identity, Russian identity, and their understanding of the meaning of words "Russkiy" and "Rossiyanin". The ultimate goal was to obtain contextually richdata about how participants construct their identity in light of war and migration. Additionally, wewanted to explore what participants describe as the content of their national identity and sense of belonging.

The first round of interviews was conducted between March 2023 and July 2024, and the second in January 2024. Interviews were conducted either virtually via Zoom and were recorded using the program's internal tools, or in person with a manual voice recorder. After each interview, the recording was manually transcribed and translated into English, allowing for collaboration with researchers who didn't speak Russian, and preparing data for coding. After transcription, all audio recordings were deleted for security reasons. Participants were given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity.

The English interview guide was translated into Russian by the author of this thesis, who is a native Russian speaker. Because of the specific dynamics of the semi-structured questions, data were enriched with spontaneous comments and anecdotes. To capture the researcher's assumptions and impressions before, during, and after the conversations, a field journal was maintained. Additionally, a brief demographic questionnaire was administered.

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Informatics, Comenius University in Bratislava, and participants provided informed written consent.

2.2.2 Participants and recruitment

In this research, we had an opportunity to speak with individuals who hold an anti-war stance and have emigrated from Russia within the last decade.

The participants were Russian citizens between the ages of 23 and 67, who hold an anti-war stance and have emigrated from Russia within the last decade (see Table 1). By the time of the second round of interviews, all participants had lived abroad for over a year. This provided valuable insights into how their identities had evolved during the emigration period. While the time spent abroad varied from 1 year and 5 months to 9 years, we found this range to be both diverse enough and optimal for considering migrants who left Russia due to disagreement with the regime.

Table 1

Shortened data from the demographic questionnaire using pseudonyms

Participant	Age	Place of residence	Time in emigration (2nd round)	Self-identification	Feelings about being Russian (Rossiyanin) - short answer
Lara	34	Riga, Latvia	6,5 years	Muscovite	never felt **that** Russian before the war, shame
David	43	Bar, Montenegro	1 year 3 months	"Name, Surname", concept of nationality is outdated	tiredness and worry
Eva	67	Yerevan, Armenia	1 year 9 months	stateless/European	disappointment, disagreement, like being an orphan
Ruth	23	Brno, Czech Republic	5,5 years	Russkaya/From Russia - lighter term according to the participant	feeling sad and injustice, "I wish I was born somewhere else"
Nina	28	Yerevan, Armenia	2,5 years	Astrakhan	–

Participant	Age	Place of residence	Time in emigration (2nd round)	Self-identification	Feelings about being Russian (Rossiyanin) - short answer
Alexandra	35	Yerevan, Armenia	1 year 2 months	Russkaya	"sad, would be nice to be born in another country, but have to live with that"
Agnia	35	Tromso, Norway	2,5 years+6 months before	North-Norwegian from Russia, but **never** Russkaya	acceptance, sometimes irritation, as if had to feel guilty (doesn't feel guilty, but thinks about it)
Leonard	33	Riga, Latvia	6,5 years	"queer national identity" - participant's term, depends on the context	"oh shit!"
Lilia	49	Bratislava, Slovakia	1 year, 10 months+4 months before	Russkaya	anger, shame because of being a citizen of the aggressor country, 'a representative of "barbarian", who is strong and destroying
Nathan	26	Almaty, Kazakhstan	1 year, 3 months	Turk	doesn't feel 'Russkiy", identifies as "Rossiyanin" only because of passport, feels irritation to be part of it
Daria	36	Paris, France	10 years	Parisienne	irritation, embarrassment, doom
Sofia	24	Belgrade, Serbia	1 year, 3 months	doesn't have a word	"it's like with parents that you love but they are alcoholics"

The recruitment of participants for the study involved a chain sampling method utilizing acquaintances of the author of this thesis, as per the approach outlined by Parker et al. (2019). To introduce a greater level of conceptually relevant diversity, the sampling approach incorporated elements of theoretical sampling. The objective of this approach was to represent a variety of identity negotiation contexts, including people having mixed origins, having non-Russian ethnicity (e.g. Kyrgyz), with different triggers to leave (outbreak of the war; political persecution; the announcement of global mobilization; unwillingness to live in Russia because of the disagreement with Russian politics even before the war, etc). Additionally, the approach sought to provide

representation for individuals from different hometowns, with a higher proportion from Moscow being representative for the migration wave from Moscow and Saint-Petersburg (Kamalov et al., 2023).

2.2.3 Analytic approach

Data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021). TA is a qualitative research method that involves identifying, analysing, and reporting common patterns found in the data. Our analysis approach was constructivist in nature, which entails basing the findings on the participants' perceptions of their personal truths. We refrained from using predetermined patterns when handling data. Additionally, we took a contextualist perspective, acknowledging the limitations of language in fully conveying the truth (Madill et al., 2000). To be able to collaborate with other researchers, all the interviews were translated into English using an automatic translator DeepL, however, while analyzing the data, the original Russian version was always compared with the translated one. All the codes were formulated in English. Codes are the most basic units of data that carry meaning (Clarke & Braun, 2021). We used an open coding without any pre-set codes. Parts of the transcripts that were relevant to the research questions were coded. Afterward, subthemes corresponding to the second level of analysis were generated from the codes and subthemes were organized into themes reflecting the third level of analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2021).

The initial themes, which are meaningful and coherent patterns relevant to the research questions, were developed from the data. These tentative themes were then reviewed and refined by writing brief summaries for each theme and giving them titles. Finally, an analytic narrative was created by integrating notes from the journal and additional information from the demographic questionnaire (Clarke & Braun, 2021). This process organized the themes in a way that they provided responses to each of the research questions.

2.2.4 Credibility and reflexivity

The author of this thesis and interviewer was a female coming from Russia having lived abroad for seven years due to disagreement with Russian politics. We recognize that varying levels of

familiarity and the gender of the researcher could potentially impact participants' willingness to share their viewpoints. However, the interviewer's background closely mirrors the experiences of the participants. Additionally, a practicing psychologist guided the interviewer in handling difficult interactions. Ultimately, it is important to note that TA does not consider researchers' subjectivity as a problematic issue that needs regulation. Instead, it underscores the importance of the researcher's subjectivity as an analytical tool and their reflective involvement with theory, data, and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2019). To ensure a rigorous approach, we employed reflexive journaling during both the data collection and analysis phases. This approach prompts researchers to consistently challenge their assumptions and methods throughout the entire process (Clarke & Braun, 2021).To make sure that all the viewpoints were captured correctly, after transcription of each interview, the transcript was shown to the participant for member checking (Nowell et al., 2017).

2.3 Results

We developed four themes, describing different aspects of Russian identity narrated by Russian migrants. The first theme revolves around the idea of homeland and statehood identity. This theme speaks of the relationship with the country that is both loved and threatening, just like in abusive relationships with people. In the analysis we explore how participants navigate being a person from Russia. The second theme speaks of the content and perception of the word "Russkiy" referring to Russian ethnicity, even though the definition is very vague and used in many different ways. Sometimes discussions of Russian identity were extrapolated to the identity definition in general, talking about who, how, and why defines one's identity. Third theme describes the participants' constructions of other Russian people, with the focus on the attributed values and priorities of those staying in Russia. The last theme focused on the sense of belonging, which was already tackled in other themes. Here, however, we went into more depth, starting from explorations of the content of the word to the conditions in which the sense of belonging is salient, and coming back to the sense of belonging in and to Russia, and the idea of a homeland.

"*This is **my** country, in terms of these stupid things - these are **my** birches, these are **my** rivers... This is what I'm talking about, not... absolutely not about the state, I had only bad things to say about the state.*" Nathan, 26 y.o., Almaty, Kazakhstan

2.3.1 Theme 1: Love-hate relationship with the state-identity

Figure 1

Theme 1: Love-hate relationship with the state-identity
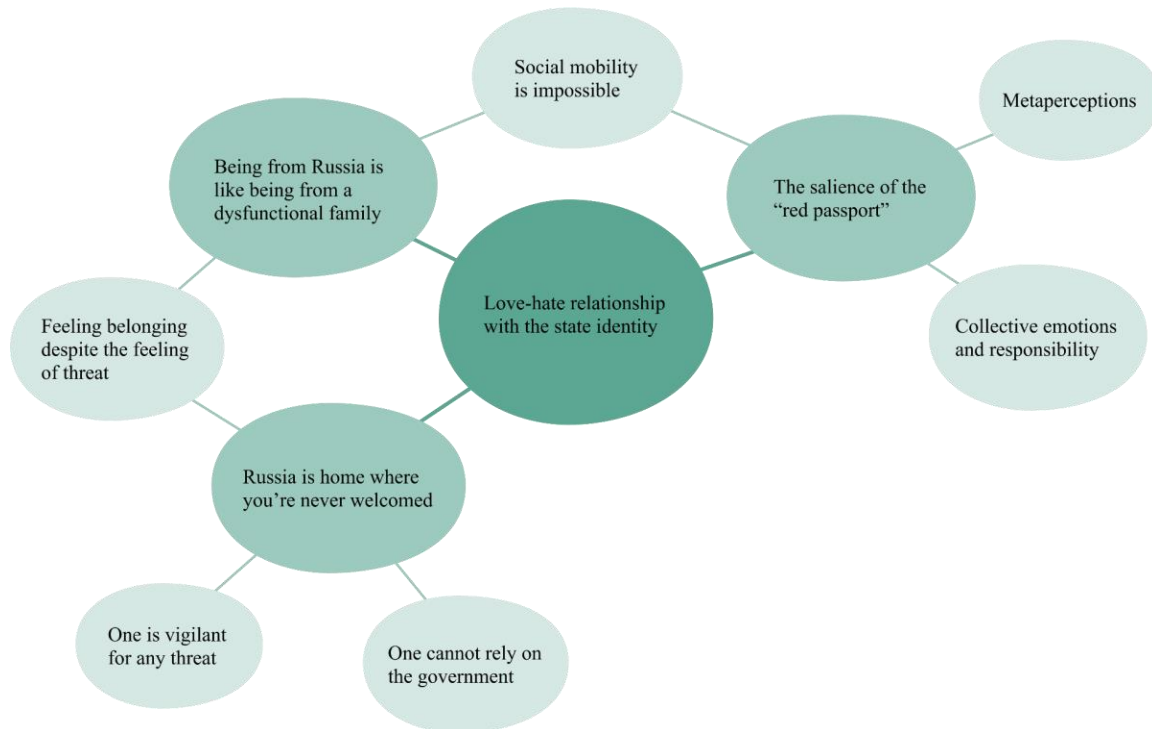
Participants described complicated feelings about their relationship with Russia, which they metaphorically compared to how one might feel towards an alcoholic parent, abusive partner, or mentally ill relative. Some individuals claimed they didn't feel any love for their country of origin and may have even wished to disassociate from it, but they found it difficult to sever ties with the identity that is inherited in nature and escape the burden of being Russian. Others may have chosen to keep their national identity a secret in irrelevant situations (when not explicitly asked to show the identification document). Some still love Russia despite acknowledging the complexity of their situation, which is similar to that of a dysfunctional family where one may love their parents but face challenges that require effort to overcome.

"*I think about it a lot, about my feelings about Russia, I think it's most like when you've been in a marriage, or in a difficult relationship with someone, and you finally break up with them, with*

blood sweat and heartbreak, and you realize that you still can't get him out of your life, and he's still beloved, and you're sick about him, you're sad about him, but you can't be together." Lilia, 49 y.o., Bratislava, Slovakia

"*I wish I had nothing to do with this country. Figuratively speaking...I'm going to try to use an extended metaphor. I feel like I've been married to an abuser for a very long time who I haven't loved, or never loved at all, and I've suffered a lot from him, and now I'd like to divorce him for good. I've already managed to separate from him, but I'd like to divorce him for good, and that's absolutely impossible. Well, let's say I have his last name or something like that. I would give a lot to have as little as possible of what's going on in this territory, including emotionally.*" Eva, 67 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia

"Q: *Are these thoughts about the status of "Russkiy" or "Rossiyanin" associated with any negative emotions for you?*

A: *I think not... I mean, it's not negative emotions, it's more like complicated parents…for example, alcoholics: you love them very much, but you have to sort it out…..but like, you can't change them, I love them, and like … I am working on it (laughs).*" Sofia, 24 y.o., Belgrade, Serbia

Interestingly, certain participants talked differently about their relationship with Russia between the two rounds of interviews. The concept of belonging is approached from varying perspectives (as will be discussed later in section 2.3.4), but it is commonly defined as 'not indifference' towards a particular place. For example, Eva and David initially expressed a "careless" attitude towards Russia's future and a desire to distance themselves from the country. However, during the second round of interviews, they acknowledged that they were not indifferent to the fate of Russia and its current situation.

"*… but I am even more out of place where I came from [Russia]. That is why it is difficult for me to apply the word "emigration" to myself. Recently, during the last long period, not days or months, but probably years, when I was in Moscow, I had a strong sense of the city under occupation. I felt like I was in an occupied city. This is why I would use this term, I would say the word "stateless," because at this moment, the way I feel today, I cannot imagine a location on this globe that I could call my home.*" Eva, 67 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia; first round (May 2023)

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In the first quotation Eva speaks about being out of place in Russia, defining herself as "stateless", however, a couple of months later, she reflects on her emotions about being Russian and agrees with still being associated with Russia and not being indifferent.

"Q: *Would it be correct to say that you still associate yourself with Russia?* O: *It's actually a very difficult question. Because of the...the passion with which I reject the association of myself with Russia, by the vehemence with which I talk about the joy with which I would like to leave this country, not to have this citizenship, not to have anything to do with this country. By how fervent it is for me, you can probably tell that to some extent, yes, I associate myself with this country. Otherwise, I would probably treat this possibility or impossibility of severing all ties more indifferently. **And I am not indifferent to it.**"* Eva, 67 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia; second round (Jan 2024)

"*I am not worried about Russia's future. Probably due to some kind of breakdown of my own associations with it.*" David, 43 y.o., Bar, Montenegro; first round (Mar 2023)In the first round David says that he is not worried about Russia's future, and then, in the second round, he contradicts himself, using the same expression as Eva did, he says that he is not indifferent. He highlights that he has been actively detaching from Russia, but it doesn't mean that he is completely careless.

"*Well, we talk about it all the time, so it comes up first and foremost, and maybe I try to feel it less, but **I am not indifferent to what is happening in Russia**. I make some conscious efforts to contain it, but it's not that I don't care at all. And about the Russian language separately, it's a certain area where I have a sense of belonging and some indifference*." David, 43 y.o., Bar, Montenegro; second round (Jan 2024)

Complexity of the relationships with the state identity, country and self-identification as a Russian is also reported by participants who were actively detaching from Russia. For instance, Daria, who emigrated almost 10 years ago and intentionally distanced herself from the Russian news and Russian politics, claimed that she doesn't care for people in Russia *("Let them eat themselves")*, but for her parents, and also mentioned that it's easier for her to say that she is a "Parisienne" which can be treated as a social creativity strategy introduced by SIT earlier (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, in the same interview she contradicts herself saying that it's impossible

to detach completely and just like other participants above – she metaphorically speaks of Russia as of an alcoholic relative, *"still a relative"* – she says.

*"I've cut, I've cut, I've walled off everything that could relate to it, and as a result, I don't know what's going on there. That is, I may be in this way - if I am put on some spectrum - I am on the spectrum of those people who "my parents are fine - the most important thing, all the rest - burn it down", the most important thing for me is that my parents are healthy, all the rest... Let them [Russians] eat themselves, it's not my problem"; but; "As if in every hour, every minute I can't feel it, it's easier for me to say that I'm a Parisienne and to function. But I don't have the feeling that I cut ties, I haven't and I never will - I've lived there for 25 years, I had my whole childhood there and so on. It's like such a distant relative who's an alcoholic. It's **very pathetic** (laughs), but you can't do anything about it. You don't even have to send money, because he'll drink it away. Still a relative."* Daria, 36 y.o., Paris, France

Other participants used a metaphor of owning some useless things to compare their feelings about being from Russia. For instance Alexandra emphasizes that *"Russia is still my homeland"*, she still has a house (or even "home" as in Russian there is missing difference between two terms), but it's inaccessible. *"It's still **my** suitcase"* - she emphasizes the word "my".

*"Russia is still my **homeland** and Moscow is still my **hometown**. Absolutely, I consider it my places. It's very difficult. Here I still have a house there, but I know I can't go there. It's ridiculous. It's like a kettlebell, you can't get rid of it, but you can't get to it. It's a very useless suitcase with no handle. But it's still **my** suitcase."* Alexandra, 35 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia

Talking about living in Russia before emigration, participants often reported feeling unwelcome and uncomfortable. Many of them talked about the need to constantly remain vigilant, both on the bigger level as per laws that can be used against you any time your government wants it or on the lower level as for instance inaccurate parking of the car. They highlighted that when you don't have other examples one just accepts this way of living, not thinking of the opportunity to change it, because this is how things are and they say it feels normal to keep humble.

"Look, you don't think about it. 'Is this the way it's supposed to be?'. You were born this way, you grew up this way, and you live your whole life this way. That is until you're shown that you

can do it differently.....Well, there's a lot of stress, a lot of those shoulders up to your ears [meaning taking a defensive pose], but you don't realize it, you don't think about it. That I'm not Russian, yeah, I thought about that. And the fact that I don't feel like I'm comfortable in the city ....I thought that was normal." Daria, Paris

"*I'm forty-three [...] I've lived in Russia and in Moscow almost all this time, so forty years of experience of living in the country, even though it has changed a bit, it's quite a strong habit and quite a deep understanding of how things work there, which gives such an ease and a certain automatism that is a characteristic of home. Well you can't help but overlay that, of course you can't help but look at it through the sense that it's a home where you're not exactly welcomed, for the last twenty years at least, maybe all the years I've given it any thought. Although I think things weren't quite okay in the nineties either, but in a different way*." David, 43 y.o., Bar, Montenegro

"*I didn't really feel myself, belonging to the country when I lived in Russia…Yes, that was my main feeling, that I didn't count on anybody in Russia, that I Q: Did you have a sense that this was your country? A: This is the country I live in. This is the country I live in. Why do I live here? Well, it's just the way it is. That this is my country, that this is my native country[...] In Russia, I didn't count on it [the state], again, if you continue with this analogy, I didn't see any other options, I thought that everyone lived like that, as long as children live at home, they understand that the world works like this, and no one thinks of regretting that it rains in the fall…it's simple, and if the world works like this, you get used to it, you survive in it, you learn, you know the laws, and you live until you make a fatal mistake and die, or die of old age.*

And when I came here [to Bratislava], I saw that the world is actually organized in different ways, and that people can choose how it is organized, if they are not satisfied with something there, and the main thing is that it can be **voluntarily** *arranged well, it is strange that people there did not chew out their rights, that they did not demand it with sweat and blood and got it, took it away and appropriated it for themselves, but that they* **just sat down, thought and did it in a way that would be better for everyone***, this is what strikes me most of all, that it is possible, it turns out ...*" Lilia, 49 y.o., Bratislava, Slovakia

Participants mentioned particular situations, when they felt that their nationality was more salient, causing negative emotions and self-reflection. One example of such instances is facing the

bureaucracy in the host countries. Participants claimed feeling this salience particularly when they had to show their passport, in such situations as when passing a border control or dealing with documents related to their legal status in a foreign country. Participants reported feeling shame and guilt, even though they admitted that they didn't have to feel it, but fear of being perceived as a "bad Russian" [supporting the war and the current regime] was both inevitable and irritating. What participants describe could be considered as negative collective emotions frequently experienced by group members in response to some events that don't have an impact on the individual level (Mackie et al., 2000).

For instance, Leonard speaks of feeling discriminated against, but fairly, which might be interpreted as having a strong centrality of the statehood identity, as he shows the internal agreement with being shamed for Russia's actions because of being a Russian person. He recognises the existence and fairness of collective responsibility even though it doesn't have anything to do with his individual's actions.

"*I feel like I'm kind of being shoved, like, you're Russian, so drink from that fountain over there, like in the heyday of racism in America. - Do you feel it as discrimination or do you feel it as.... - I feel it's discrimination, but fair one, if there can be such a thing. I mean, do I enjoy it? - No. Do I personally deserve it? - No. Is there collective responsibility - yes. Do I wish I didn't have to stand in that line at the dirty water fountain? - I do*." Leonard, 33 y.o., Riga, Latvia

Ruth describes her feelings of being seen as Russian that elicit negative emotion without any particular reason or trigger from the side of her behaviour. This importance of how others think of her can be considered to be an importance of metaperceptions, eliciting negative emotions, as she emphasizes how she hates crossing the borders.

"*...I get a lot of echoes of negative attitudes towards Russkiye and Rossiyane, and it affects me personally, because now **I hate to cross the border**. I **really shudder** every time I have to cross the border, when I give them a Russian passport and... **hate to do it**! I mean, I guess the fact that I'm afraid to do it doesn't just happen, it happens because of some experiences, because of some stares when I'm holding a red [Russian] passport, thrown at me in line, or when we're standing there... very often when you're standing in line in Europe, you're standing in line for people with non-European passports, and there are Ukrainians in front of you, Ukrainians behind you, and I*

*just see **those eyes** of the border guard when I give him that Russian passport, and I think, FUCK! [...] A lot of times I feel ashamed. Because I won't explain, I don't think it's necessary for the person in line who sees my passport to explain my political views. Nevertheless, because I start to think that they might think that I support it, I feel ashamed, and if they ask, I would tell them to fuck themselves, because I don't have to explain anything to them! And actually, I think this question is **really weird** if we're not close people and if we don't talk about this subject. And it's not anger, but it's such a feeling of injustice. Why does someone have Swiss citizenship, and someone has Russkiy citizenship?! Rossiyskiy (laughs - confuses the words "Russkiy" and "Rossiyskiy")*" Ruth, 23 y.o., Brno, Czech Republic

Ruth mixed up "Russkiy" and "Rossiyskiy" - which would be a correct Russian adjective for the "Russian passport" which illustrates the general confusion already mentioned in this thesis and indicates how even Russian people are confused when forced to distinguish the use of those words.

2.3.2 Theme 2: Complexity of being "Russkiy"

Figure 2

Theme 2: Complexity of being "Russkiy"
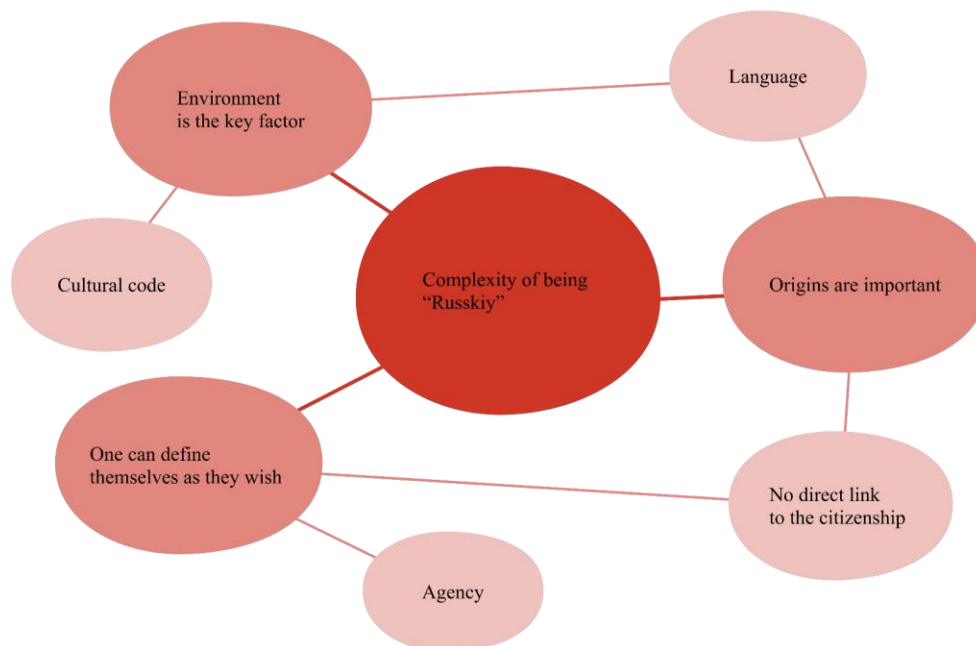
While almost everybody agreed that "Rossiyanin" is a term reflecting some formal attributes, for instance, Russian citizenship or writing in a nationality field the word "Russian" when submitting documents for a visa, the question of who is "Russkiy" and who is not turned out to be a more complex issue to reflect on. Participants had different opinions on what is essential and what is not so crucial for one to be called "Russkiy". Some people gave more actors freedom for one being able to choose what to be. In particular, some of them emphasized that any person who identifies as "Russkiy" can be called like that, while others would say that even your commitment to Russia as a new country, affection for culture and language, and your wish to be Russian don't make your claims of being so, true.

"Well, some people identify themselves as elves... in general, what's stopping them? You can do anything, I think you can. That is, each person is free to identify himself as he wishes. If a person was very fond of, for example, Russian culture, read books, and they were so close to him, he felt that this is it, this is my homeland. Let him think that this is his homeland, that he is Russkiy, why not?" Alexandra, 35 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia

"It's complicated, just like last time... I think that a Russkiy person is someone who first of all identifies themselves as Russkiy, in principle, and then it depends on what they base their identity on: someone on the fact that this is the way it is in the family, someone on the language, someone on the culture, and so on, so it seems to me that it's very individual." Agnia, 35 y.o., Tromso, Norway

While Alexandra and Agnia give anyone agency to define themselves as they wish, David claims that a French actor having Russian citizenship and even living *"another twenty years"* in Russia cannot make himself Russkiy.

"And how, I mean, can Gerard Depardieu live another twenty years in Russia and say he's Russkiy? Well, no, I guess not. Probably not, some kind of origin... it's very difficult to measure, it seems to me, but even some phenotypic features can be distinguished that are rather peculiar to Russians, it seems to me so, that is some kind of quiet ethnic story too." David, 43 y.o., Bar, Montenegro.

Among attributes defining Russkiy person, participants named Russian conventional culture, meaning also cultural code shared among many post-soviet people, Russian traditions and the language. Other participants felt that one cannot be Russkiy without having Russian ancestors, saying that having a Russian blood is crucial and even more important than culture, as a person could be raised in another country but keep being Russkiy. Those of non-Russian origin especially highlighted that speaking the Russian language and being raised in Russia is not enough to be identified as Russkiy, especially if talking about **others** identifying someone as Russkiy. Overall, the discussion of what the identity is based on can be treated as a case of the social creativity strategy defined by SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), because our participants tried to find the criteria of the national identity that would be the most beneficial for their own identity.

For instance, Leonard recognizes that he is in an "identity crisis now" trying to find out who he isand trying on new identities, which doesn't always work as in his example of Jewish culture. Alsothe war context is described as conditioning the negative perception of the word "Russkiy", potentially leading to the identity threat. In the quote below, Leonard refers to the hit song of the Russian propagandist singer Shaman "Ya Russkiy" (eng. "I am Russian"). He also mentions Stalin and feelings of collective emotions that manifest because of the actions of other people from Russia.

"For me, when I hear the word "Russkiy", now it's conditioned, the main association that overridesall the others is the imposed 'Russian world', which the Russian army is carrying with it now, absolutely wrong and wrongful in its decisions, not very effective. I had a feeling before that the Russian soul is not the most effective as it is, but soulful at least, about some good, and now it is also doing evil, and somehow some significant part of Russians support it, and I feel bad about it.For me Russkiy is also about Stalin, about Stalinism and about the unification of a large state around one ethnos [...] if I try to move this strongest association, Russkiy, for example, for me is about the depth of feelings, and these slightly titillating things about the Russian soul, they resonate in me, where there... I don't know... as people who are frowning and not smiling on the outside, but will not abandon you for anything, and will help you, and are ready to empathize, first of all, to empathize with you... this is also about Russian. For me, Russian is probably also a separate layer, it's about culture. If I can associate myself with some folkloric things, culture with the exception of movies, literature, music... probably there is some special definition of culture not

*as works of art, not art and culture, but culture as some **cultural code**.*" Leonard, 33 y.o., Riga, Latvia

Ruth speaks of the already mentioned cultural component of national identity. She says that despite having a little percentage of Russian roots, she feels Russian because of being born and raised in the corresponding culture.

"Q: *Did I hear you correctly that the main component of Russian identity for you is Russian culture?* A: *For me, probably yes. Even **exactly** yes. I feel I am Russian [Russkaya], even thoughI have 25% Russian blood at max, most likely I don't have any. But when asked if I'm Russian, I'dsay yes. Because I was born and raised in Russian culture.*" Ruth, 23 y.o., Brno, Czech Republic

The complexity of the concept of nationality, ethnicity, and the role of the environment and the language are highlighted by Nathan who was born and raised in Moscow, but has Kyrgyz origin and is now residing in Kazakhstan.

"*... there are many people here who are not carriers of Kazakh blood, if we can say so. But they are definitely Kazakhs, they call themselves Kazakhs, it's cool, it's super cool, it's a positive example, in my opinion. There are Germans who say we are Kazakhs, Russkiye who say we are Kazakhs. And in my opinion it's a lot more positive things that unite than some other things. And they are different, the Russkiye who are here are very different from the Russkiye who are there in Russia. It's funny, not that it's unexpected, but it's funny. Different mentality, differentupbringing, everything is different. And to answer your question, whether it is possible to be Russkiy without a drop of Russian blood - yes, I think it is possible. A person who grew up in suchan environment, with such a mentality, will be different.*

Q: *You specified "a person who grew up in Russia" at the beginning of your answer to this question. Does this mean that a Russkiy person is a person who grew up in Russia, first of all? A: It turns out so. It turns out that yes. It turns out that it's really important because the conditions of growing up, the environment affects*" Nathan, 26 y.o., Almaty, Kazakhstan

Eva shows a strong desire to detach from Russia and her Russian citizenship, it's important for her to emphasize her origins. This might be the case of employment of social mobility strategy when the person is trying to rely on an alternative identity, or even searching for an overarching

identity they can relate to. In Eva's case, she identifies herself as "stateless" even though formally speaking she has a Russian nationality. As the demographic questionnaire shows, she also identifies as "European" which can be an example of this higher group Russian people can bind to. For Eva identity is strongly defined by the language, however, she acknowledges the activerole of the "identified", as she notes that she would call someone 'Russkiy' only if they don't mindit. Eva's example illustrates an attempt at disidentification from both national and ethnic identity,as she highlights both her origins and the absence of "special love for this location".

"I don't have a drop of Russian blood in me, to put it mildly. Me, like the vast majority of those living on earth, have very mixed ethnic roots, but there are no Russians there. That's the first thing. And the second is that I have never, in fact I have never had any special love for this location, for this culture, for these landscapes, for example, I have always felt mostly disgust for the landscapes. If we're talking about me, it's really hard for me to even say anything about it, so much so that I don't feel Russkaja, and I haven't felt Russkaya. If we talk about what the definition of "Russkiy"is for me, who I would consider a Russian person, I'm afraid it will be the same here: a person who has the same native language [Russian]. I'm willing to consider him a Russian, if he doesn't object himself. Because, obviously, there are a great many people in other countries whose mother tongue is Russian. So, if the person himself does not mind, I would consider it an opportunity for me to consider this person a Russian." Eva, 67 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia

For other participants, assumptions made based on the language seem to be offensive and inappropriate. Nina grew up in Astrakhan, Russia, but her father is Armenian and she reportsbeing discriminated against a lot based on her appearance or surname while living in Russia. Thusshe has never been identified as Russkaya and repatriated to Armenia, which can be an example of the social mobility strategy employed. However, after some time she started questioning her alternative identity.

"I mean, for example, when someone says, "Look, the Russians are coming", I don't know, "These guys, they're Russians", my eye twitches a little bit, because, well, you don't know if they're Russian or not, and it's quite strange to call a Russian-speaking person Russian by default. Like I think it violates their boundaries a little bit, and whatever else. That kind of thing, I guess." Nina, 28 y.o., Yerevan, a repatriate of Armenian origin.

2.3.3 Theme 3: Victims of the regime

The third theme speaks about migrants' constructions of other Russians. Even though the interviewer was actively avoiding differentiation between other migrants and people staying in Russia, participants often spoke about those who are frequently associated with the Russian state and the government , being perceived as evil – citizens that do not want to or cannot leave. While people in Ukraine being in physical danger are under obvious threat are "legitimately" called victims, people from Russia (and especially *in* Russia) face prejudice and are lacking sympathy and compassion from both foreigners and Russians who incorporated collective guilt and now project it to their compatriots. Those people often blame those who stayed for not leaving, and those who left for not doing enough (or even not having done enough e.g. in the protests against the regime, when they were still possible).

The majority of participants acknowledged that it can be difficult to stay updated on what's happening in the country while living abroad. They also made it clear that they couldn't speak for other people, giving them agency and recognizing their biased perspective. Interestingly, many participants talked about feeling detached from Russian news and those living in Russia. Some even made excuses for not being up-to-date with the latest developments in the country. However, after giving it some more thought, the participants described Russians as being in survival mode, regardless of where they lived.

When sharing their insights, participants mentioned factors such as uneasy economic conditions, political instability, and propaganda, which continue to affect people's lives. Many also acknowledged that a significant portion of the Russian population lives in extremely challenging conditions, with poverty being a major issue. As a result, the participants recognized that it is difficult for people to take action or reflect on political actions in their current circumstances. This can be interpreted as a way of navigating their own identity, as they might justify and describe Russians in a better way in order to construct a better self-concept that is threatened when their compatriots are seen in a bad light.

Figure 3

Theme 3: Victims of the regime
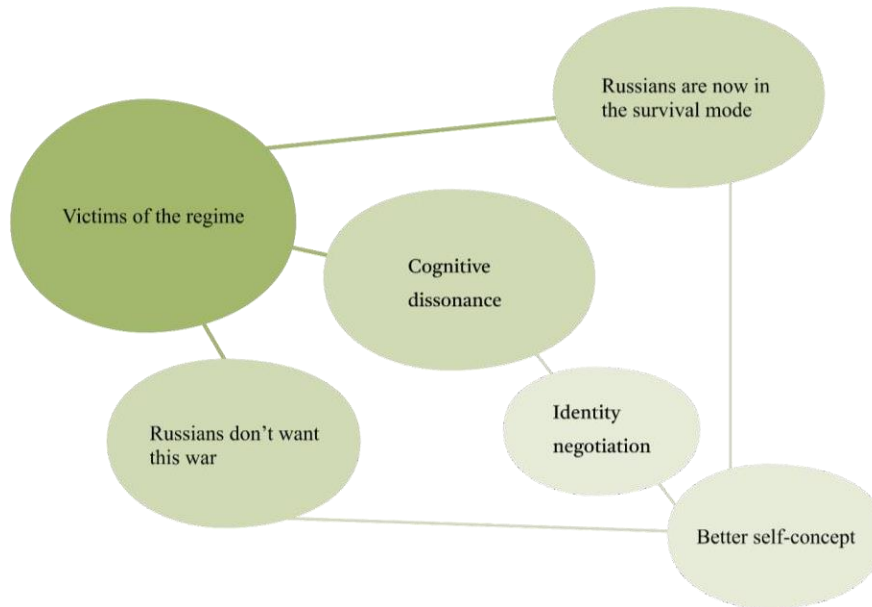
Two participants below describe the conditions many Russians live in. While Alexandra talks about how the situation gets worse in the time of war, Eva talks about the implications, saying that when one's basic needs are not met, they cannot think about greater values, but about food and having a roof over their head.

"*Worrying about the basics, about what Maslow imposed on us, about the lower rungs, it becomes more and more salient, it takes up more and more time and energy in life. And at the same time it turns out that cultural events are receding, there is less and less energy left for that.*" Alexandra, 35 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia

"*But I do know that a huge part of the RF [Russian Federation] population lives in near-survival conditions. For them, probably, the value is the possibility to eat normally, to have relatively normal housing, to have a toilet not on the street, in the Russian climate. And I do not treat this with disdain. I understand perfectly well that when your basic needs are compromised, satisfying them is a value without any jokes.*" Eva, 67 y.o.,Yerevan, Armenia

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Participants shared a common belief that nobody in Russia desires war, and everyone longs for a peaceful existence. They acknowledged the role of propaganda in shaping people's opinions and persuading Russians to support the regime. However, they also recognized that such support could be detrimental to one's well-being regardless of one's political stance.

"*It seems to me, and maybe it's somewhere between 'seems' and 'I want to believe', that Russians in general still value and prefer a peaceful life and have some desire for the quality of this life. It is clear that everyone somehow desires quality of life, but let's say in more prosperous countries the feeling of this need is not so vivid, it seems to me that in Russia the feeling of the need for quality of life should be relatively more vivid: that houses should be heated, that there should be food, and so on. There is a Soviet joke about a repatriate to Israel being asked why he left, and he says: "I'm fed up with the holidays" - "What holidays?" And he says, "You know, you bought toilet paper - holiday, you bought sausage - holiday." That's it. In general, yes, I'm turning things around a bit, but I think Russians in general would like to have fewer 'holidays', perhaps except for the most prosperous residents of megacities.*" David, Bar

David explicitly speaks of his wish to believe that Russians prefer peace over war. It can be seen as a strategy to navigate his own national identity in search for a positive self-concept.

"Q: *What is important for Russians now?* A: *Mmm.... Stability? You know, like literally? *smiles* Being able to be sure of the future or something...? Because I think they're just tired. They - the people who live there - are just tired of tons of nightmare news that nobody was prepared for, and everybody just wants to live their lives in peace, like I guess people throughout history want to just live their lives in peace...*" Nina, 28 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia

During our discussion, we touched upon the topic of communicating with people staying in Russia. It was pointed out that engaging in political discussions or related matters with someone from abroad could potentially put those on the other side of the border in a compromising position. The participants acknowledged that they couldn't fully comprehend the pressures faced by those still living in Russia, and as a result, they were hesitant to engage with them freely. This pressure ultimately leads to conversations that are less authentic and restricted, as the elephant in the room remains unaddressed.

"*The Russians that I talk to, that are in Russia, I think they are trying to preserve themselves somehow, and it's not even very clear, because...we don't discuss politics anymore, because I think it's hard for them to talk about it, it's probably a little bit scary for me to talk to them about it, because I don't understand how things work there, how much. I'm afraid of framing them, if I can talk freely from here, from there... I stopped.   if before we could discuss some news, some article, some interview, now I don't give them links, because I'm afraid of framing them, and they don't give links either, because, probably, they're afraid for themselves. As a rule, we don't discuss it unless they talk about it first, but they talk about it less and less often.*" Lilia, 49 y.o., Bratislava, Slovakia

Leonard describes his impression of the understanding of values negotiation in order to avoid cognitive dissonance and adapt to the current reality in those staying in Russia for multiple reasons. We can observe justification of something usually treated as inappropriate or incorrect, that can potentially help thinking of other Russian people in a better way.

"*But I can say that it seems to me that the tendency that I see in my close friends living in Russia is a certain tendency towards self-preservation and what psychologists call cognitive balance, when you have a contradiction with beliefs, reality and facts, and you cross them out so that there is no cognitive dissonance. And, for example, these are people who have been consciously supporting Navalny and going to rallies all their lives, and they can't, for example, or don't really want to leave Russia, and their political position, their moral position is actually softened and bent a little bit so as to incorporate the existing reality, this whole story. Well, Putin, of course, is evil, but why are they building their [military] bases? And these are not third handshake people, but the first hands and quite dear to me people. [.   ] it seems to me that if you can't or don't want to leave, you either live in super constant tension, which is impossible, or you still find some positive agenda in what's happening now, and that's why... Lisa Glinka [humanitarian worker and charity activist, who saved children in the occupied regions, while denying Russian occupation of Crimea] was very good.   and it's about the ability to negotiate with yourself, and unconsciously, I think, in many ways, in order to survive in such conditions, which are quite tough.*" Leonard, 33 y.o. Riga, Latvia

In their answers, participants also reflect on how the topic of national identity and the idea of "Russianness" is misused by the current discourse guided by propaganda. Some of them are even saying that the word 'Russianness' or 'Russian identity' becomes a new pillar of the national idea that is driving the regime and spreading the narrative of a Great Russia that is saving the world from the nazism in Ukraine.

In the following quote, Lara emphasizes the difference between "their values" (meaning the values of other people in Russia) and the values imposed by propaganda. She justifies that people are not consciously evil because they are using ideas from propaganda without applying their critical thinking.

"*I'm afraid that the ideas I have are not their [of other Russians] values, but the position formed by propaganda in the spirit of "otherwise they [Ukrainian forces - widely spread narrative in Russia] would attack us", and then they think that it's necessary to defend the country, to defend the country from whom?... and this question inevitably puts them in a dead end, and then this phrase from the propaganda follows as an answer.. and then it's as if you could say that their values include this kind of perverted patriotism and support for their country, no matter what, no matter how wrong it is*." Lara, 34 y.o., Riga, Latvia

2.3.4 Theme 4: Shades of belonging

The last theme explores the belonging of those who left their home, but - using the words of participants - the home you're "not welcome in".

In the interview participants mainly talked about lower-level belonging, as opposed to high-level belonging, talking about bigger structures like countries, planet Earth, or humankind. Lower-level of belonging was mainly unfolded in two directions: belonging to the close ones and belonging to the local places: flats, districts, towns at most. Participants oftentimes contrasted high attachment to "their" places to the absence of belonging to the "giant Russia".

Figure 4

Theme 4: Shades of Belonging
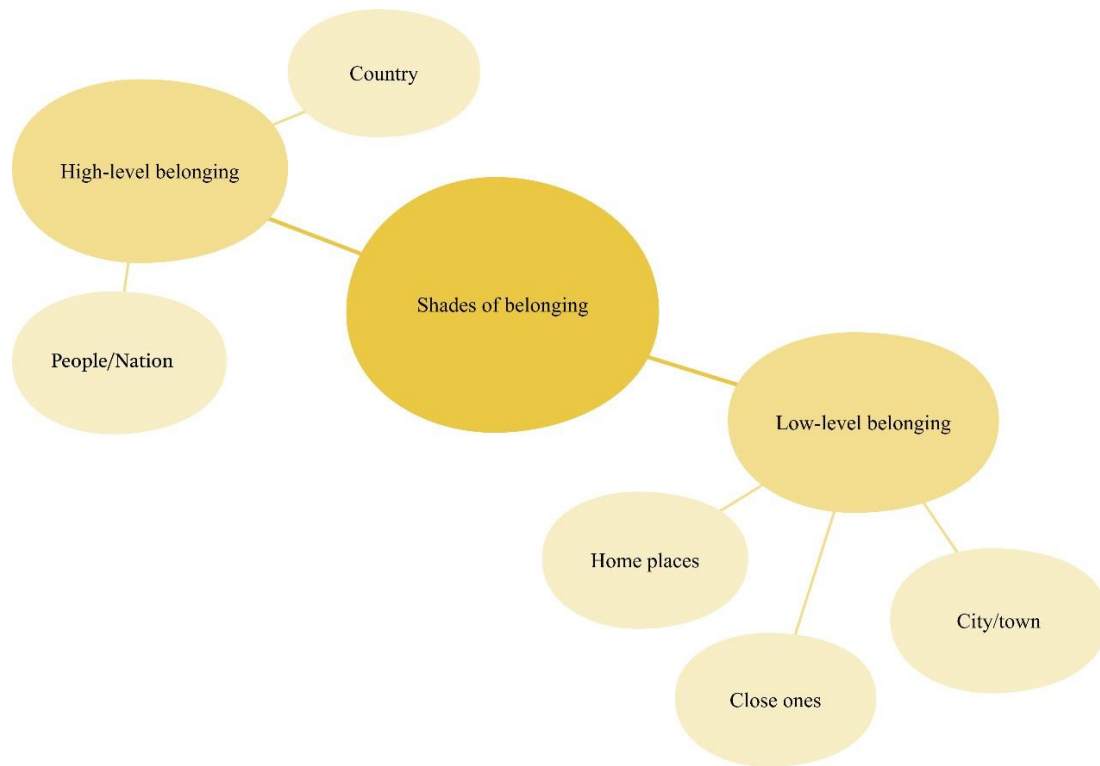
Nina highlights that she doesn't have a particular feeling towards Russia as a whole country, but particular places elicit strong emotions and willingness to go there. She also talks about places being bound to people she used to be surrounded by, and she claims that this combination gives her this feeling of belonging.

"Q: *What do you feel in relation to Russia?* A: *Nothing in relation to Russia. I mean nothing in relation to Kamchatka, nothing in relation to Tuva, nothing….but in relation to St. Petersburg ... two hours ago I was crying because I was just thinking of it. And it's been like this plus or minus every day for two years now. Sometimes more often, sometimes less. I just want to go home, and my home is not some giant Russian Federation on a map, it's specific places, streets, people and how I imagined my life there when I lived there and had a chance to plan"* , *"Q: Where do you see your home? A: Metro station "Chernaya Rechka".*" Nina, 28 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia

In a similar way it is perceived by Lara, who feels belonging to the city and not to the whole country, and Alexandra, who describes it as belonging to some "*pieces of the country*":

*"... I have to admit that Moscow is not Russia (laughs). I don't feel Russia as a state, I don't feel Russia as a country, as a set of lands, nationalities and so on, as something of my own. I mean, of course I'm from Russia, I never turn my tongue to say otherwise, but of course **I'm mainly from Moscow**. And I feel myself like that. And if we talk about some kind of patriotism, I feel it in relation to Moscow, **not Russia**."* Lara, 34, Riga, Latvia

"Q: *Do you have that feeling extrapolated to the rest of the country?* A: *Rather, its individual pieces. I really liked a place in the Kaluga region where there was... and is... an art park, and I went there many times, both with my students and with my husband, and just for fun. And it just gave me the feeling - oh, what a great park, this is my place, this is exactly my place. But I can't do it for the whole of Russia, it won't work that way, so it's just some parts, some places.*" Alexandra, 35 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia

Ruth defines a sense of belonging as a sense of being validated and supported, which according to her words cannot be applied to the country, as she never experienced it. It also resonates with what people described in regards to Russia in the first two themes, however, Ruth doesn't describe any crucial changes in that feeling after emigration.

"...probably a place where you're validated. Where you're supported. You just said 'a sense of belonging', and I realized that for me it will never be a country, I guess. For me it will always be about some smaller structure. Because a country can support you, but I haven't lived in such a country, and I'm not sure I ever will. The Czech Republic doesn't fit as a country that supports its citizens. Well, at least in my mind. Yeah, so I think it depends a lot... but it's not a country for me." Ruth, 23 y.o., Brno, Czech Republic

Daria emphasizes the differences between the sense of belonging in her hometown Moscow and in the city where she has lived for the last 10 years, Paris. It's important to note that she left Russia about ten years ago. For her in Moscow, the low-level belonging manifested in the very special local places where she felt the way she can feel in Paris as in a whole city. However, neither Russia nor France evoked similar feelings.

"In Russia, it was like small points, well, in Russia, in Moscow. Some small points: a club where your acquaintances play, an anti-cafe that your friend has opened, a place at your friend's house where you can go for tea. And it's like you're running between them. Here you belong a little bit, here you belong a little bit, and in general you don't really belong. In Paris I feel much more... I have a strange feeling - it sounds very grotesque - that I belong to the city. That I don't have to know this person in this place to be accepted here. I can sit here in a café and, uh. I'm fine." Daria, 36 y.o., Paris, France

For participants who defined themselves as more "belonging to people", it is important to be in the right supportive circle to feel they belong. For instance, Alexandra describes that she getsthis feeling when she is with her friends, however not with her family members that don't share her values and hold an opposite stance regarding the current Russian politics.

*"[I have this feeling] When I meet friends, when friends come to visit me. With some of my colleagues at work it also occurs, we work together quite closely, we spend a lot of time together at work. I would say that they can already be written down as friends too, because they have become more than colleagues. What is interesting is that this feeling **does not** arise with my sister and my mom [laughs]"* Alexandra, 35 y.o., Yerevan, Armenia

Observations of participants' definitions of belonging are also reflected in Tab.1. While some participants call themselves ethnonyms related to the lower level - for instance, "Moscovite" or "Astrakhan", others say that they associate their identity with a bigger group suchas "Turk" in Nathan's case.

2.4. Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate how people who emigrated from Russia see the Russian national or ethnic identity, what strategies they use to navigate it and how they describe a sense of belonging after being away from home for some time.

While their main reasons for leaving varied - ranging from reuniting with family to avoiding mobilization in September 2022 - all participants emphasized the influence of Russian politics on their choice to emigrate or stay abroad to stay in emigration was highlighted by participants. Participants further described what can be considered different degrees of detachment from Russia

and other people living in Russia. Russians, they also had different origins that also influenced their identity transformation. However, all of them would say that something has changed in them and in their self-perception after migration and after the outbreak of the war. For some of them changes were more pronounced, some participants emphasized the change in their self narratives, while some reflected on the changes on them for the first time during the interviews.

Participants seemed to be involved in identity negotiation and reconstruction processes. They sought continuity and maintained their self-esteem, as defined by Identity Process Theory, but faced different obstacles while trying to adapt one of the coping strategies. Some participants attempted to adopt an alternative identity as they potentially had one: e.g. defined by the origins - being Armenian or even by the absence of Russian origins. However, this social mobility strategy was questionable, because national identity boundaries seem not permeable enough.

Among others, participants would name culture in a broad sense and native language being crucial for national identity formation, and those components are predefined and unlikely to change, even with an active intention. Thus we could observe some controversies in the participants' talks about their associations with and attachment to Russia and Russian people in general. While disidentifying from Russian identity and actively shaping a new one (as in the case of Daria, who intentionally calls herself "Parisienne"), some participants still talked about not being able to break all associations with Russia. Others didn't have a potential alternative identity, so they would shape their narratives around social change strategy. They were either eager to find new ways to approach the content of the Russian identity, to make the positive traits more salient and emphasize their importance, or searching for a new way of social comparison.

This could be also observed in the third theme, where participants shared their feelings about other Russians. In many cases they mentioned the extremely disadvantageous social status of the majority of Russian people, justifying their indifference towards politics or even support for the current regime. This definition of Russians "being in a survival mode" might have indicated an attempt to change the identity component used for social comparison.

The fourth theme aimed to unfold the way participants navigated their sense of belonging. Some of them recognized it changed after emigration and many of them were speaking about differences in the sense of belonging to the state versus belonging to the country. Findings

presented by this theme partially overlapped and were in line with our observations in the theme 1. Speaking about belonging to Russia, participants often acknowledged some indifference towards this country and talked about a certain level of nostalgia and attachment, either on the bigger level of the country and culture or on the lower level of their neighborhood, places they used to call home etc. Particularly, we could observe how participants stressed upon the difference between higher-level and lower-level of belonging, contrasting their feelings being associated with a country versus hometown, feeling belonging to a certain circle of like-minded people versus to the Russian people.

This study has certain limitations. First of all, the migration time can significantly influence feelings of being detached from the country and people. Usually more time spent in another country contributes to the higher level of detachment and experiences of people who spent more time abroad are not always comparable with people in the initial stage of adaptation to the host country. Speaking of the duration of migration, we also have to acknowledge that formal criteria, such as having a permanent resident permit or obtaining a citizenship, contribute to identity shifts and provide people with new directions for identity navigation.

Another limitation of the study was the environment selected for the interview. At first we aimed to conduct interviews in person, as it provides better connection with a participant and people might feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings when meeting one on one. However, because of the diverse locations of our participants, it was not always possible to travel and meet them, especially in the second round of interviews. During the recording of the interviews done online we faced some technical obstacles, caused by the program set up and technical devices used. These factors could have an impact on the participants' willingness to go in depth and cause some negative emotions associated with the interview process, affecting the results.

Finally, participants were recruited from the circle of the interviewer, which means that their familiarity with the personality of the researcher could have changed the attitude they approached the interview with. On the other hand, additional context that the researcher had when conducting and analyzing the interviews could cause biased selection of the information that we were interested in.

3. Study 2

3.1 Introduction

As previously mentioned, social group membership can play a significant role in identity formation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While some groups may be seen in a positive light, others may elicit feelings of dissatisfaction or even pain (Levin & van Laar, 2006), leading individuals to conceal or detach from these identities. In particular, individuals may disidentify with groups that are stigmatized or discriminated against (Branscombe, Fernandez, Gomez, & Cronin, 2011) or ingroups that violate personally important moral standards (Glasford et al., 2008).

For instance, Russian migrants holding an anti-war stance may feel conflicted due to the actions of their home country, which may be seen as violating their moral norms. The influence of government propaganda and support for the general regime may further complicate matters, leading to a mixed impression of the "average position" leading to disidentification from Russian people and not from the state only.

Drawing from the results of Study 1, it can be inferred that disidentification may occur to some degree within the sample. However, the present study also sought to examine the interrelationships between disidentification and other relevant variables, which are discussed below.

According to the IPT, the content dimension of identity is organized in terms of hierarchy, saliency and centrality of the aspect of identity (Breakwell, 2019). Drawing from Cameron´s (2007) three-factor model of Social Identity, this thesis also explores a centrality dimension involved in the changes of migrants´ identity. Cognitive centrality reflects the amount of time spent thinking about being a group member (Gurin & Markus, 1989). Centrality can be assessed from the perspective of frequency with which the group comes to mind (Gurin & Markus, 1989); and the subjective importance of the group to self-definition (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). This research aims to explore the centrality of national identity, specifically the Russian identity, as represented by the terms 'Russkiy' and 'Rossiyanin'. In the conducted survey both terms are employed, as previous qualitative data has indicated that people with Russian background perceive different meanings associated with each term.

Another concept that can be studied in the context of social identity threat is the one of group-based emotions. In general, emotions are a natural response to situations that present significant challenges or opportunities (Levenson, 1994). In order to close the gap between our current state and our desired state in achieving certain goals, our minds engage flexible response systems. Emotional processes occur at two levels: individual and group-based. According to intergroup emotions theory (Smith & Macki, 2008) group-based emotions are triggered by events that impact groups with which individuals identify, even if the events do not directly affect the individual (Mackie, Devos, 2000). Group-based emotions play a mediating role between intergroup perception and actions. For instance, the action strategy to move against an outgroup is mediated by group-based anger (Smith et al., 2021). These claims are supported by extensive evidence from various studies (Mackie & Smith, 2008).

The importance of a salient group membership for experiencing group-based emotions has been demonstrated in several studies (Dumont, et al., 2003; Gordijn, et al., 2001). These studies indicate that an event affecting a salient ingroup triggers group-based emotions, while the same event affecting another group leads to fewer group-based emotions. Smith, Spears, and Oyen (1994) showed that perceived disadvantages of a salient social identity lead to feelings of collective relative deprivation. It is also suggested that group-based emotions affect identification with an ingroup. For instance, individuals who feel strong group-based guilt might reduce their identification with their group (Doosje, et al., 1998).The authors suggest that high identifiers reduce feelings of guilt by using identity management strategies, whereas low identifiers do not have the strong need to cope with this negative emotion toward the ingroup.

Additionally, we employed measurements of metaperceptions, that is an important component influencing positive self-concept (Laing, et al., 1966). When meeting someone for the first time, people spend a considerable amount of time thinking about their traits, such as whether they are friendly, arrogant, polite, or rude. Understanding how we are seen by others may be one of our main social goals, as awareness of our social status is crucial in social situations. Studies have shown that people do worry about how they are seen by others (Sheldon & Johnson, 1993)

As outcome variables we decided to study concepts of the subjective psychological well-being and the state of resilience. Negative perceptions of identity can significantly impact an individual's

psychological well-being, which is influenced by positive self-conception, esteem, and possession of valued social identities (Sharma & Sharma 2010).. Conversely, psychological disorders have been linked to threats to self-worth. Multiple studies have shown that threatened identities predict low collective self-esteem or poor group well-being, exacerbating existing mental health problems (Burke 2004; Dickerson et al. 2009; Haslam et al. 2009; Sharma and Sharma 2010).Therefore group self-esteem was also measured.

Identity resilience, as defined by the IPT, refers to an individual's ability to adaptively cope with threat or uncertainty, absorb change while retaining subjective meaning and value, and cope with trauma without experiencing permanent undesired change (Breakwell, et al., 2021). It is characterized by a relatively stable self-schema based on self-esteem, self-efficacy, positive distinctiveness, and continuity. Since threats to these factors are often associated with perceived identity threat, resilience is closely linked to well-being. Studying well-being in discriminated minorities and people coming from authoritarian regimes, researchers often investigate the positive effect of collective action that helps people cope (Fosterm 2014; Molero & Bos, 2016; Sohi & Purnima Singh, 2015; Wlodarczyk, et al., 2017, Uluğ & Acar, 2018). We also included questions on collective action in the questionnaire and analyzed its associations with other variables.

Study 2 was exploratory and aimed to answer two research questions.

RQ1: What is the relationship between resilience on the one hand, and disidentification, collective self-esteem, group-based emotions, metaperceptions, identity centrality and collective action on the other hand?

RQ2: What is the relationship between subjective psychological well-being and disidentification, collective self-esteem, group-based emotions, metaperceptions, identity centrality and collective action?

3.2 Methods

Study 2 aimed to explore the associations between motivation to leave Russia, perceptions of national identity and identification processes, and Russian immigrants' well-being and resilience. The role of collective action in maintaining well-being and resilience was also explored. Study 2

was reviewed and approved by the Ethical Committee of the Institute for Research in Social Communication of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

3.2.1 Sample and Recruitment

For Study 2 we recruited migrants from Russia residing abroad no more than 10 years. Using the snowball sampling method (Parker et al., 2019) we recruited participants through social networks and thematic chats on the popular Russian messenger Telegram. Participants could close the browser when filling out the questionnaire, and in that case, their data were not used for the analysis. The final sample consisted of $N = 490$ people, currently residing in 42 different countries (see Image 1). 300 participants identified as females, 175 as males, and 15 identified differently. Age range of participants was from 18 to 67 years old, with a mean age $M = 31$ ($SD = $) y.o. More than half of the sample (52,7%) had a university degree equivalent to a master's level, which corresponds to the average overall education level of Russian emigrants outlined by the results of a panel studies of the OutRush project (Kamalov et al., 2022) and is muchhigher than an average education level of the whole Russian population. 53,3% of our participantsreside abroad having a temporary residence permit/long-term visa, 67% indicated 5-7 out of 10 onthe subjective social-economic scale, which can be considered a relatively high level (Kamalov etal.,2022). 278 of our participants identified as "Russkiye", 36 identified as Jewish or Jewish Russians, 37 reported a mixed origin (more than 2 ethnoses or non-defined), and 15 identified as Ukrainians. Other 13 nationalities also appeared within the sample.

Figure 5

Map representing the countries our participants are currently residing in. Numbers in the scheme indicate the number of participants in the accordingly colored countries.
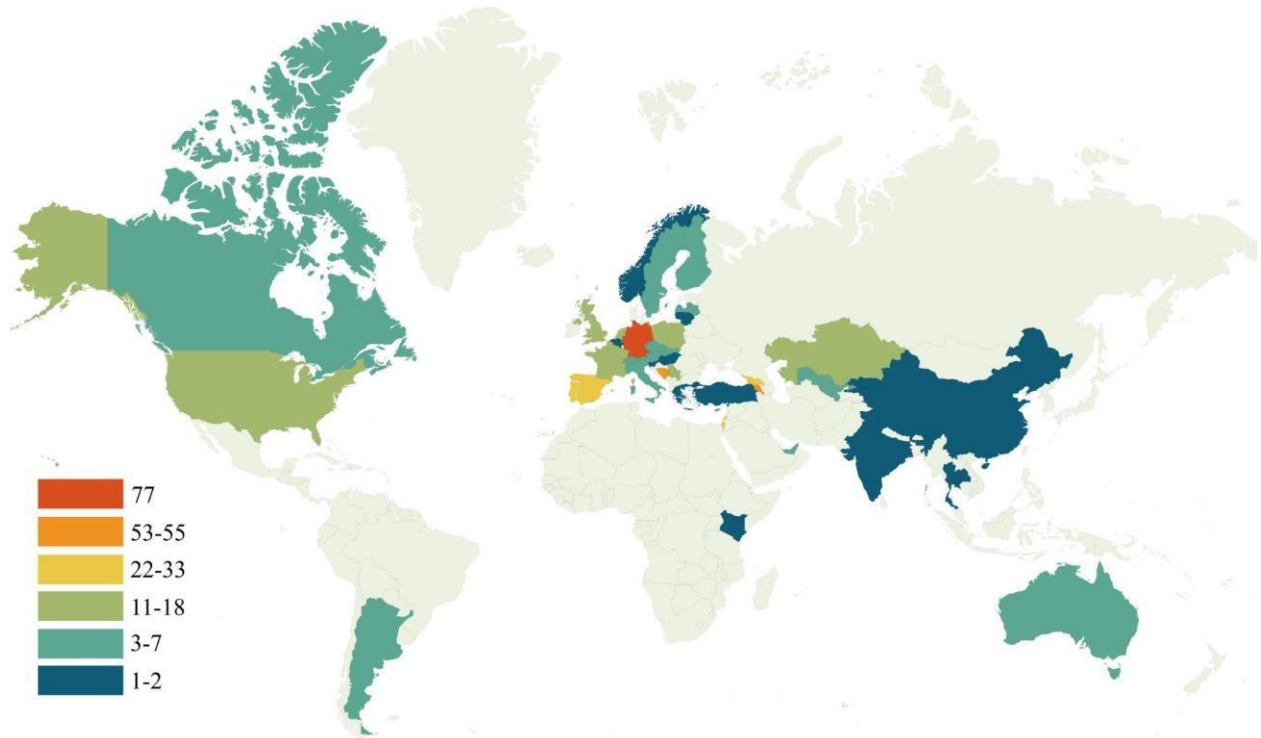
3.2.2 Procedure and measures

Participants received a link to this web-based study, which was announced as a study about Russian immigrants. Participants were asked to read an informed consent and to fill out a short demographic questionnaire, including information about the age, gender, country of residence and subjective socioeconomic status: participants were shown a ladder that represented where they stand in terms of social level and economic status (1 = the lowest 10 = the highest), and were asked where they would position themselves on the ladder ($M = 6.0$, $SD = 1.59$).

The second part of the questionnaire contained the following **measures**.

Disidentification from the national identity. Measured with 11 items adapted from Becker & Tausch (2013) (e.g. "I feel detached from russkiye/rossiyane"; α =0,90/0,88) on a 7-point Likert scale. Higher values indicate higher disidentification.

Politicized motivation to leave Russia. Measured with 3 items (e.g. "I disagree with the actions of Russian government." $\alpha =0,03$) on a 5-Likert scale. Higher values indicate the higher politicized motivation.

Identity centrality. Measured with 7 items adapted from Cameron (2004) (e.g. "In general, being Russian is an important part of my self-image", $\alpha =0,88$) on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher values indicate higher identity centrality.

Intergroup metaperceptions. Measured with 3 items from the collective self-esteem scale by Luchtanen & Crocker (1992) (e.g. „In general, others think that the social groups I am a member of are unworthy", $\alpha =0,78$) on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher values indicate worse metaperceptions.

Collective action. Measured with 7 items (e.g. "I participated in rallies against war/against the regime/after Navalny's death" $\alpha = 0,80$) on a 5-point Likert scale (from never to whenever there was such an opportunity). Higher values indicate higher frequency of being engaged in a collective action.

For exploratory reasons only the following measures were employed. **Group self-esteem.** Measured with 4 items from Ellemers (1999) (e.g. „I think people from Russiahave little to be proud of", $\alpha = 0,73$) on a 7-point Likert scale. Higher values indicate more higherlevels of group self-esteem.

Group-based emotions. Measured collective guilt, anger, and shame regarding the war in Ukraine as well as hope. adapted from Goldenberg, Saguy & Halperin, 2014 (e.g. "When I think about the war in Ukraine I feel guilty regarding the behavior of Russia", $\alpha =0,80$ for the construct of group-based emotions). Higher values indicate more negative group-based emotions.

3.3 Results

After the reliability analysis we excluded one item from the metaperception scale. Additionally, there was a ceiling effect in our measure of politicized motivation to leave Russia, with extremely high number of people indicating a very strong politicized motivation ($M = 4,75$, $SD = 0.673$), which might have happened due to the convenience sample we used in our study and

overall high politicized motivations in Russian immigrants. Therefore, we didn't use this variable in the following analyses.

Intercorrelations between the rest of the variables described in the part 3.2.1 are depicted in Table 2.

Wellbeing mean value was equal to 3.26 and was relatively high in the sample. Resilience value was slightly lower and equal to 2.94 out of 5. Mean value of disidentification was equal to 2.63, while centrality of the state identity was 2.92. Mean value of identity centrality for the ethnic identity (being Russkiy) was slightly lower and equaled 2.74 on the 5-point scale. Mean value of the group self-esteem was relatively high in our sample and was equal to 3,62. Group-based emotions mean value was equal to 5.19 out of 7, indicating the high level of negative group-based emotions. Metaperceptions mean value was equal to 3.45 and was also relatively high, while the mean value of collective action was relatively low and equaled 2.11 on the 5-point scale, which means that participants were not often engaged in the opposition collective action. Well-being and resilience were moderately negatively correlated with disidentification ($r = -.09$ and $r = -.14$ accordingly), meaning that the more participants disidentified from the Russian national identity, the worse well-being and resilience they reported Moreover, disidentification had a strong negative correlation with identity centrality; for both ethnic identity centrality and statehood identity with no big difference among r ($r = -.29$, $r = -.27$ accordingly). Group self-esteem was also negatively associated with disidentification ($r =-.72$), indicating that disidentifiers had lower group self-esteem. In contrast, the higher disidentification levels were strongly associated with anti-regime collective action ($r = .20$) and strong experience of the negative group-based emotions ($r = .43$). The higher disidentification was also strongly negatively correlated with the intergroup meta-perceptions ($r = -.20$), whereas more positive metaperceptions were connected with higher resilience and well-being ($r = .23$; $r = .22$), and higher group self-esteem ($r = .13$; $r = .13$). Resilience and well-being had a strong negative correlation with group-based emotions ($r = - 0,21$; $r = - 0,280$).

Group self-esteem was strongly correlated with identity centrality (for both ethnic and state identity with $r = .24$ and $r = .30$ accordingly). Identity centrality of the statehood (being "Rossiyanin") had a moderately positive correlation with the collective action ($r = .14$), while the

correlation of collective action with identity centrality of ethnicity (being "Russkiy") was not significant.

Collective action strongly negatively correlated with intergroup metaperception ($r = .21$) while strongly positively correlated with group-based emotions ($r = .36$). Other correlations were non-significant.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Variable Intercorrelations

	resilience	well-being	Disidentification	centrality statehood	centrality ethnicity	group self-esteem	group-based emotions	intergroup metaperceptions	collective action
well-being	.656***	–							
disidentification	-.138**	-.089*	–						
centrality of the statehood	-.165***	-.119**	-.265***	–					
centrality of ethnicity	-.135**	-.102*	-.293***	.603***	–				
group self-esteem	.130**	.124**	-.715***	.241***	.296***	–			
group-based emotions	-.280***	-.210***	.320***	.150***	.029	-.313***	–		
intergroup metaperceptions	.219***	.231***	-.207***	-.073	-.015	.231***	-.178***	–	
collective action	- .087	-.068	.204***	.135**	-.020	-.199	.364***	-.211***	–
M	2.94	3.26	2.63	2.92	2.74	3.62	5.19	3.45	2.11
SD	0.918	0.753	0.905	0.975	1.02	0.820	1.12	0.770	0.809

Note. $* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001$.

As a second step, we performed a regression analysis in order to investigate the relationships between two outcome variables – well-being and resilience, and their potential predictors i.e.

disidentification, centrality of the state identity, centrality of the ethnic identity, group self-esteem, group-based emotions, metaperceptions and collective action.

The R squared value of the model with resilience as outcome variable was equal to 0.141, which means that approximately 14.1% of the variance in resilience can be explained by the predictors in this model. This variance is very low but we don't aim to explain the overall resilience concept, but the relative importance of our variables of interest. According to the p-value, only associations with group-based emotions and intergroup metaperceptions were significant. Lower resilience was predicted by higher levels of negative group-based emotions (b = -.22 , $p < .001$) and higher resilience was predicted by the higher scores of metaperceptions - thinking of being perceived positively (b =.20). The b-coefficient for centrality of statehood was -0.10, with a p-value of 0.06. This is marginally significant and indicates a potential negative relationship with resilience (higher importance of state-identity predicts lower levels of resilience), but it does not meet the conventional 0.05 significance threshold. Other variables were not significant predictors.

Table 3

Regression model using resilience as an outcome variable

Predictor	b	SE	p
Intercept	3.8352	0.4883	< .001
Disidentification	-.0643	.0644	.3180
Centrality (statehood)	.0993	.0521	.0570
Centrality (ethnic)	-.0566	.0492	.2510
Group self-esteem	-1.31e-4	.0070	.9990
Group-based emotions	-.2170	.0410	<.001
Metaperceptions	.1982	.0536	<.001
Collective action	.080	.0533	0.136

Results of the regression analysis with the well-being as an outcome variable, R squared value of the model with well-being outcome was equal to 0.101, which indicates that approximately

10.1% of the variance in well-being can be explained by the predictors in this model. Just as in the resilience case, the low value can be explained by the fact that many more factors influence well-being, however they were not the focus of our research. The b-coefficient for group-based emotions was -0.14, which is highly significant ($p < .001$). This suggests that negative group-based emotions have a strong negative impact on well-being. The prediction of well-being by metaperceptions was also strongly significant ($b = 0.1848$; $p < .001$). This indicates that positive metaperceptions are associated with higher well-being. Other variables didn't have a significant effect on well-being.

Table 4

Regression model using well-being as an outcome variable

Predictor	b	SE	p
Intercept	3.1883	.4074	< .001
disidentification	.0313	.0537	.5610
centrality_statehood	-.0380	.0435	.3820
centrality_ethnic	-.0541	.0411	.1890
group self-esteem	.0573	.0587	.3290
group_based_emotions	-.1356	.0345	<.001
metaperceptions	.1848	.0447	<.001
collective action	.0523	.0445	0.241

3.4 Discussion

Results of the study 2 revolved around the intercorrelation among variables and the predictive models of resilience and well-being. Results indicate that the more pronounced the identity centrality the worse well-being and lower resilience were indicated, which corresponds to our hypothesis. Interestingly, the correlation with centrality of the state-identity was more pronounced than with an ethnic identity centrality, highlighting the importance to separate those concepts (and take into account that not all "Russian people" are Russkiye (plural from "Russkiy") by origin.

Also it suggests that the conflict with Russia as a state or with the Russian government is not merged with a conflict of being Russkiy and participants' feelings about their ethnic identity are much more neutral than their feeling about belonging to the Russian state. The fact that better intergroup meta-perceptions strongly correlated with higher levels of well-being and resilience are also in line with our predictions. These findings indicate that the worse people think of how they are viewed by others the lower well-being and resilience they have. Interestingly, the high levels of identity centrality correlating with group self-esteem may indicate that overall identifiers think good of themselves, which might be a result of applying a social change strategy described by SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, strong desidentifiers have a significantly lower collective self-esteem, meaning that compared to identifiers they don't think good of Russian people in general. Negative group-based emotions such as shame and anger were strongly correlated with both disidentification and the centrality of the statehood, which means that the more people think of themselves as Rossiyane (plural from "Rossiyanin") the more anger, shame and guilt they feel because of the actions of the government (that can be viewed as acting *from their part*), however disidentification strategy to cope with the negative perception of identity did not help with experiencing of negative emotions. That can be explained by the fact that social mobility in the case of national identity is not fully possible, which means that even strong disidentifiers are still affected by the Russian politics and representation of Russia as a state. However, no group-based emotions were associated with the ethnic identity centrality, which again highlights the difference between self-perception of "Russkiy" and "Rossiyanin".

Collective action had no correlation with well-being and resilience levels, which is against our predictions. However, from the results we can make a conclusion that stronger disidentifiers and people with higher identity centrality of the statehood were more engaged in a collective action. The second can be explained by the feeling of personal responsibility and the need to do something about the situation causing a negative perception of the state identity. Results also indicate that people showing lower collective self-esteem and more pronounced experience of negative group-based emotions are actively participating in collective action, probably as a way of coping with these kinds of feelings.

The regression analysis reveals that among the predictors, group-based emotions and metaperceptions are significant determinants of both resilience and well-being. Group-based

negative emotions have a strong negative impact on resilience and the well-being levels, while positive metaperceptions significantly enhance resilience and improve well-being. Other factors, such as disidentification, centrality of statehood, centrality of ethnicity, group self-esteem, and collective action, do not show significant relationships with neither resilience nor well-being in this model. The model explains 14.1% of the variance in resilience, which suggests that there are other factors not included in this model that may be important in explaining resilience.

Taken together our results support literature on identification (Becker & Tausch, 2014) but seem to differ from the effects of the collective action described by other researchers (e.g. Uluğ & Acar, 2018). It could be potentially explained by the specificity of the collective action in the Russian context. Protest rallies are forbidden and other forms of collective action are actively suppressed by the police, people risk their freedom even signing petitions or sharing any anti-governmental or anti-war information on their social media. This could lead to the loss of hope in the efficiency of collective action and therefore weaken its effect on well-being.

The main limitations of the study are embedded in the nature of the convenience sample, prompting to participate people with a strong politicized motivation for emigration, as well as a lack of expression of different views of the people belonging to the minorities residing in Russian Federation, as it could have impacted the results to the greater extend, than it shown. Another limitation concerns the content of the survey. Some of the scales used in the study didn't have a Russian version validated by other studies and had to be translated and adapted for this study. Some questions as for example one's for variable "politicized" motivation to leave' were specific for the current study and have not been found in the literature, which could cause a biased result. In the future, we would suggest relying on the validated variables and going deeper in the coping strategies choice as well as use more complex analytic approaches

Discussion

The aim of this master's thesis was to examine identity negotiation and related processes among Russian migrants in the context of Russian-Ukrainian war. Apart from the novelty of the research explained by the fact of the recent outbreak of the war and the new migration wave, our study contributes to the general understanding of identity processes in conditions of identity threat. We argue that covering this gap in the research is important for both addressing new policies concerning at least 1 million of displaced people worldwide, counting only people from Russia, and providing those people with information and tools to effectively overcome identity crisis and reach higher levels of resilience and well-being.

Drawing on the existing literature (Becker, et al.,2014) we chose a mixed-method approach, starting with conducting in-depth interviews and qualitatively analyzing them, and in the second step developing the hypotheses for the quantitative study. Our research questions addressed the problem of identity content of Russian national identity, negotiation processes evoked by the identity threat and the sense of belonging formed by Russian emigrants in the current context.

To answer those questions four themes were formulated. In the first theme we observed a negotiation of the state-related identity and belonging to the country. While some people adopted a disidentification strategy, oftentimes our participants reported ambiguous feelings towards Russia and their identity as a statehood affiliation. In the second theme we identified some patterns and negotiation strategies used to reshape the national or ethnic identity. We explored the content of the word "russkiy" that our participants reported and found signs of employing both social mobility and social change strategies described by SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the third theme participants' perception of other Russians was explored. In the results we could see that all people from our sample perceive them as being their ingroup members at least to some extent, showing empathy and compassion, trying to change the saliency of the groups' attributes in order to neglect negative perception. It could be also explained by the lower chances to radically disidentify or to move from one social group to another, when talking of national identity. In the last theme we analyzed participants' content of sense of belonging and changes in this sense that were caused by the war and emigration. We identified people with a tendency to belong to groups of people rather than places, and people with the sense of belonging evoked by places. Among both groups there

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were people who felt belonging on the lower level: family circle and apartment or even bench in a park, contrasted to the higher level of belonging to the whole Russian people or country.

After obtaining the qualitative results we formulated hypotheses that we would like to test using quantitative methods. When choosing the concepts for this part of the research we based our assumptions on the literature described in the part 3.1. of this thesis. In the end, we agreed on the list of variables that were included in the survey. The main variables that we explored in relationship to each other and additional variables, were disidentification, identity centrality and well-being. First, the reliability analysis was conducted, and some constructs were excluded from the further analysis. The correlational analysis revealed significant associations between the key variables and an important difference between identity centrality of the statehood and identity centrality of the nationality/ethnicity, highlighting earlier introduced differences in the content and perception of the Russian words "russkiy" and "rossiyanin".

In conclusion, results of the two studies revolve around the content of Russian identity and coping strategies our participants engage into to manage the threat caused by both migration and the ongoing war.

4.1. Limitations

Apart from the limitations described in the corresponding chapters 2.4 and 3.4 the whole research was conducted in a certain timeframe. In the case of such historical events that are taking place now in Russia and Ukraine, a couple of months can make a crucial difference when speaking about public opinion and the dynamics of the identity processes. For instance, all the interviews were conducted before the death of the Russian opposition leader and political prisoner Navalny, which had a big impact on the Russian anti-war community. On the other hand our survey data collection took place after almost one year from the first round of interviews, which is a significant delay. The OutRush project conducts a panel study, investigating changes in migrants' feelings and opinions regarding Russia, Russian community, local community etc. According to their data, between Feb 2023 and Apr 2024 many people decided to return to Russia, which could have impacted our sample. Other than that, the research could have been targeting more specific groups of emigrants, for instance collecting data only from people emigrated between the outbreak of the

war and the announcement of global mobilization. That could have given a clearer picture, however limiting the diversity of the data. From the interviews with our non-Russian (Russkiy) origin participants and comments on ethnic background in the survey, we concluded that our research didn't give enough attention to those non-Russian identifiers. This is a significant problem in general Russian research, as discussed in chapter 1.2, due to mixed definitions of nationality and a gap in the representation of Russian minorities. Therefore, although we addressed the surface of the problem, much more investigation of Russian citizens not identifying as Russkiy is needed. Finally, our research included mainly people with a strong antiwar stance and strong politicized motivations for emigration (a couple of outliers were identified in the survey results). This meant a very limited diversity of the results with no alternative opinions on some questions.

4.2 Implications

The implications of the current research are twofold. First, our findings could inform policymakers, counselors working with Russian migrants and non-Russian media to provide the general public with more reliable information and better understanding of the situation. In the interviews our participants were mentioning that they faced a very wrong image of a Russian person in the countries of their current residence. In some countries, the local population struggled to understand the reasons for migration due to widespread support for Putin. In other examples, our participants faced discrimination for being seen as representatives of an "aggressor state", despite actually being affected by the actions of Russia. When discussing the content and the perception of Russian people, comparing two Russian terms "Russkiy" and "Rossiyanin", our participants always highlighted, that for foreigner this difference is not understandable, as in the majority of European languages there is just one word describing Russian nationality, and being "from Russia" automatically means being "Russkiy". As mentioned previously, this issue has not received adequate attention from scholars, policymakers, and journalists, allowing Russian imperialist policies to affect the lives of its citizens, even those residing abroad. We believe that drawing attention to these problems, explaining identity mechanisms and giving more context for the current wave of migration can lead to the more inclusive and supportive policies to be implemented and the real problems of migrants to be addressed. We also emphasize the importance of viewing people's in depth-perspective, acknowledging multidimensional concepts of identity

and insisting on being careful when making any general assumptions or applying stereotypes. It should concern any person, but with our results we hope to emphasize the diversity of opinions and backgrounds of Russian migrants and provide some tools for understanding their decisions and behaviors, promoting inclusivity and support from the members of the host community.

Secondly, our results might be interesting for other migrants from Russia, who want to understand what is happening to them in the psychological sense and why they might feel or not feel something in regards to their identity, their home or host country, Understanding concepts of disidentification, identity centrality and salience of particular aspects of one's identity, as well as personal sense of belonging and the correlations of the variables described in the study 2 with subjective well-being, can provide migrants tools to cope with their hardships more efficiently and understand themselves better. Many of our participants reported the fact of receiving regular psychological help and/or undergoing psychiatric treatment. We believe that our research can be used as an additional information for self-reflection and consciously initiating some changes in oneself in case of life dissatisfaction.

To sum up, we hope that the evidence from other studies provided in the introductory sections of this thesis coupled with the results coupled with the present research can be useful for both Russian population and people frequently being in contact or working with migrants from Russia.

4.3 Future Directions

Both studies presented by this thesis had rather explorative character, therefore the future investigation of the topic is needed. We would suggest conducting more interviews with regards to the country of residence and migration wave. This way it would be possible to compare the views of people who emigrated triggered by different events and explain some strategies chosen to cope with the identity threat, taking into account the politics, linguistic environment and the economic status of the host country. Another direction would be to conduct the interviews and to survey people having different opinions on the current Russian politics. These people can be found both among migrants and those staying in Russia, which would be another interesting comparison. As was already mentioned multiple times further research representing opinions of Russian citizens with identifying as a different ethnicity would be important. We would particularly suggest

comparing social mobility and social creativity strategies in those having an alternative identity, to see how these processes work in different levels of identification with the ethnic identity alternative to Russian (Russkiy) – as our results show only processes connected to Rossiyskiy and Russkiy ones. As individuals staying in exile, the process of adaptation and acculturation starts (Smeekes&Jatten, 2019). We suggest studying acculturation strategies employed by Russian migrants, taking into account their self-identification and processes described in this thesis. Results of such a research may significantly influence our understanding of problems faced by both migrants and host societies and importantly complement findings and implications of the present study.

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