
MIGRATION AND THE 'CHILDREN OF THE TRANSITION':

Unravelling the experiences of young, highly skilled
Bulgarians in the UK

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ABSTRACT

After years of European integration, Favell's (2008a) 'Eurostars' have been joined by many, who perceive the freedom of movement as a right, rather than a privilege. The first and second wave of Eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007 have thus changed the outlook of the European migratory regime, placing East-West migratory flows firmly at the centre of both public and academic immigration debates across Europe.

This thesis aims to contribute to the growing literature on Central and Eastern European migration to the West by focusing on a relatively understudied group of people – young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK. Adopting a broad definition of the term 'highly skilled', the study focuses on university students and young professionals. The thesis draws on multi-sited ethnographic research with 37 young Bulgarians, born shortly before or after the democratic changes in 1989. Often referred to as 'the children of the transition', this group of people belongs to the first post-accession migratory flows from Bulgaria.

By scrutinising young, highly skilled Bulgarians' experiences of living, working and/or studying in the UK, the study focuses on what happens before, during and as a result of migration. More specifically, the thesis explores three interrelated aspects of the participants' migratory experiences. Firstly, it analyses young Bulgarians' pre-migratory context and the macro, meso and micro factors that underpin their decisions to choose Britain as a destination. Secondly, it looks at how they adjust to the host society and how they respond to processes of othering. The emotion-led approach focuses on the costs and benefits of migration as well as on the variety of everyday, counterbalancing strategies employed by young, highly skilled Bulgarians. Finally, the study scrutinises the implications that migration as a life event has upon their identities and plans for the future.

Ultimately, the thesis argues that the tension created between migration as a *project* and as a *reality* unlocks a period of liminality, which impacts upon migrants' identities and plans for the future. The exploration of the latter reveals the strong prominence of narratives of success with varying conceptualisations of return.

PUBLICATIONS

Genova, E. (2016). To have both roots and wings: nested identities in the case of Bulgarian students in the UK, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 23 (4), pp. 392-406.

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DEDICATION

To the boy from Plovdiv and the girl from Pravets who met and fell in love more than three decades ago while studying in Bratislava.

In other words, to my parents, Stoyan and Nelka Genovi.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------------|---|
| <i>BAS</i> | Bulgarian Academy of Sciences |
| <i>BSS</i> | Bulgarian Student Society |
| <i>BNSI</i> | Bulgarian National Statistical Institute |
| <i>CEE</i> | Central and Eastern Europe(an) |
| <i>DWP</i> | Department for Work and Pensions |
| <i>HESA</i> | Higher Education Statistics Agency |
| <i>HSMP</i> | Highly Skilled Migrant Programme |
| <i>IELTS</i> | International English Language Testing System |
| <i>LFS</i> | Labour Force Survey |
| <i>NARIC</i> | National Agency for the Recognition and Comparison of International Skills and Qualifications |
| <i>NINo</i> | National Insurance Number |
| <i>ONS</i> | Office for National Statistics |
| <i>PBS</i> | Points-Based System |
| <i>SAAS</i> | Student Awards Agency for Scotland |
| <i>SABA</i> | State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad |
| <i>SAWS</i> | Seasonal Agricultural Scheme |
| <i>TOEFL</i> | Test of English as a Foreign Language |
| <i>UCAS</i> | Universities and Colleges Admissions Service |
| <i>UKBA</i> | UK Border Agency |

Introduction

I have always loved airports. They have a life of their own but they are also part of someone's life too – the sad goodbyes of family members sending off their loved ones abroad or the happy holidaymakers at Departures; the balloons, flowers and tears of joy at Arrivals. Not this time. The time is 11:30 pm and I have just arrived at Manchester Airport. My flight to Bulgaria is at 6:30 am and Departures is a completely empty hall as the desks do not open till 4:30 am. It is very quiet, apart from the humming noises of a nearby vending machine. I sit on the only available bench and take out my laptop, thinking that it will be a long night of PhD data analysis. Twenty minutes later I hear the noise of suitcase wheels and soon before me appears, who I thought to be, a young Englishman in his 20s. 'Do you mind if I sit here?', he says, pointing at the other end of the bench. 'No, not all. Please', I quickly reply and resume staring at my screen. After a couple of minutes of silence, he says: 'A bit eerie, isn't it!'. 'Yes', I reply, adding: 'Where are you off to?'. 'Bulgaria', he says, so I turn around, puzzled and ask him: 'Are you going there for a holiday?'. He looks at me, smiles and says: 'I am actually from Bulgaria'. At this point, I switch to speaking Bulgarian and introduce myself.

Kamen (pseudonym used) is a student at Lancaster, who has just finished his studies and is in the process of applying for a job. When I tell him that I am doing a PhD on Bulgarian highly skilled migration to the UK, he says: 'Bulgaria is a heaven on earth but it is governed by the devil. That's why we are here and not there. If you want to have opportunities for career development, the UK is the best place to study and gain experience'. At some point, Kamen adds: 'I would have never guessed you are Bulgarian unless you hadn't told me. You don't speak like

one and you certainly don't dress like one either'. I make a point about my distinctively Eastern European accent, simultaneously looking at my jeans, checked shirt and converse, trying to establish mentally what a 'typical' Bulgarian would wear. Is there such a thing? Later, when we have finally managed to go through border control, Kamen and I have a long chat. We talk about migration, life in the UK and what the English 'typically do'. Our discussion inevitably leads to a lengthy debate about Bulgarian politics. In many ways, this is a 'normal' and 'ordinary' conversation. Unsurprisingly, many of Kamen's comments are shared by my participants. Prior to boarding the plane, he asks: 'What made you decide to study abroad and in the UK?' This is a question I personally have asked many times in my own research. It is a question any foreign student has to answer on numerous occasions in social situations in the UK. Like many of my participants, I have a ready-made answer about the course, the scholarship I got and my plans for the future.

Three hours later we land in Sofia. My parents are waiting for me at Arrivals, may be not with flowers but with our welcoming 'ritual' – banitsa with boza¹. My Dad, who like Kamen is from Plovdiv, greets him with the traditional 'Hi maina²'. As they make small talk, I look at my parents thinking how many times they have been at this airport to either pick me up or see me off. Then Kamen's question about my reasons to study abroad pops up and I know the real, non-rehearsed answer: that I grew up with my parents' stories of their adventures while studying in Bratislava, in the then-Czechoslovakia. When I was little, I could not wait to grow up and become a student, go abroad and have my own adventures. In the few seconds before I re-join the conversation that my parents are having with my newly acquired friend, I realise that among the many things that my parents have taught me, they have given me my first lesson in migration.

¹ Traditional food and drink. See Appendix 1.

² Traditional greeting. See Appendix 1.

This thesis is about a group of young Bulgarians who have chosen to live, work and/ or study in various locations across the UK. It is about the ways in which they make sense of their experiences and choices, and how the latter impact upon their lives and identities. In that sense, the multi-sitedness of this project transcends the firm delineations between ‘here’ and ‘there’. More specifically, although this thesis explores the mobile lives of young, highly skilled Bulgarians ‘here’ in the UK, it is also intrinsically linked with what their lives were ‘there’ in Bulgaria and how these same people relate to the home context while living abroad. The subsequent chapters are about neither ‘here’, nor ‘there’ but about young, highly skilled Bulgarians’ lives in-between Bulgaria and Britain. Ultimately, the thesis is about change and transition, and their corresponding implications.

Academically, this study has been inspired by calls for opening up the field of migration studies by exploring ‘new’ agendas that focus on the experiences of, among many, international students and young professionals (King, 2002). It is also part of the burgeoning literature, theorising the ‘new face of East-West migration’ (Favell, 2008b), which has resulted from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent waves of Eastern enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007. In that respect, Favell’s (2008a) ‘Eurostars and Eurocities’ has been quite influential in capturing the experiences of the West European pioneers of intra-European mobility for whom simply scanning their passports and ID cards is a mundane, everyday practice. However, Favell’s (2008a) book was written at a time when movement across Europe, although still contentious, was arguably seen more favourably. Therefore, there are both similarities and differences between Favell’s (2008a) Eurostars and the participants in this study. While the mobility of young, highly skilled Bulgarians to the UK is part of the newest migratory flows from Bulgaria, they have not been able to enjoy the same privileges of EU citizenship as the citizens of ‘older’ members-states. Indeed, A2 nationals (Bulgarians and Romanians) were subject to a 7-year period of restricted access to the labour market. This forced many of them to go through the procedure of applying for ‘work permits’: yellow (for students and self-employed) and blue (for highly skilled professionals) registration certificates (UKBA, 2011). Furthermore, while Favell’s

(2008a) Eurostars reside in the biggest European hubs (London, Amsterdam and Brussels), my participants not only live (in some cases) in much smaller and less metropolitan towns and cities but they also find themselves in an extremely polarised, Eurosceptic context. However, like their West European counterparts, young Bulgarians' position is one of 'liminality' – transitioning from home society to university context or from the university environment to a work environment. Even those who are young professionals find themselves in an in-between position of securing their first job position and taking the first steps to establishing their career paths. Therefore, for many of them, their choice of living, working and/ or studying in Britain is part of their rite of passage (van Gennep, [1909] 1960) to adulthood. Thus, this thesis offers a snapshot of a diverse group of young people, who having exercised their EU Treaty rights of free movement, are trying to make sense of their migratory experiences in an increasingly Eurosceptic context.

Conceptually, this study is framed around the idea of 'liminality' as theorised originally by Arnold Van Gennep ([1909] 1960), further elaborated by Victor Turner (1967; 1969; 1985) but also considered by Pierre Bourdieu ([1982] 1991), and more recently developed by Bjørn Thomassen (2006; 2014) and Arpad Szokolczai (2009). Although this concept will be further elaborated in the next chapter, it is important to mention here that liminality refers to the crucial, middle stage of a rite of passage (the other two being separation and incorporation), where '[...] initiands live outside their normal environment and are brought to question their **self** and the existing social order through a series of rituals [...]: the initiands come to feel nameless, spatio-temporally dislocated and socially unstructured' (bold in original, Thomassen, 2006, p. 322). Thus, the concept of liminality serves as a suitable analytical lens for gaining an insight into people's experiences of the in-between as a state and its corresponding consequences. Its focus is thus necessarily dynamic, bringing the macro and micro together, highlighting the importance of agency. On a broader level, however, this project has responded to warnings against delimiting the interdisciplinary characteristics of migration by conforming to artificially established boundaries between the social sciences (Favell, 2014, pp. ix-x). Therefore, although the study is preoccupied with some clearly sociological

ideas (agency, experience, othering, identities), it also has some anthropological (visible through the application of liminality and experience) and psychological tenets. It is also very much focused on space and location, which are primarily a concern for geographers but it also takes into consideration economic and demographic arguments, contextualised in their political milieu.

Thus, the rather lengthy personal anecdote at the beginning of this chapter is quite indicative of some of the key ideas presented in this text. Firstly, the story takes place at an airport, which is an epitome of a transitional, physical space that symbolises in-between-ness (Thomassen, 2014). As such, it captures the blurred boundaries between ‘here’ and ‘there’ in a very ‘ordinary’ way such as getting on a plane to go ‘home’. Furthermore, the encounter with Kamen also serves as a way of not only gaining an insight into the phenomenon under study but also of the complex and problematic nature of expressing identity through language, dress and manners. The conversation also illustrates issues and topics that are important and meaningful to young people, who have chosen to live, work and/or study in Britain. Finally, it demonstrates the importance of rituals of reintegration upon return, be it a short-term one.

Although the anecdote has already established my personal motivation for researching this topic as well as my complex position as a researcher, it is still necessary to specify the research aims of the project and to justify its contextual significance. To do so, the rest of this chapter will firstly outline the research questions that have informed this study. Next, an abridged (and rather selective) historical overview of Bulgarian migration as a phenomenon will be provided. This will be followed by a more specific consideration of the particular case of Bulgarian migrants in the UK. The final section will outline the structure of the thesis.

Research aims

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the newest migratory flows from Bulgaria to the UK by providing an in-depth analysis of young people’s

experiences of migration. By focusing on students and young professionals, the goal of the research was to find out how a relatively under-researched group of people navigate through a very dynamic and rather hostile context, how they make sense of their experiences and what the implications are upon their identities and plans for the future. Therefore, this section will: 1) outline the research questions that have informed this study; and 2) note how they have changed over time.

The study was guided by one main, overarching question: *What are the migratory experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians, who are living, working and/ or studying in the UK?* As such, the question aimed to address two key issues identified in the previous section: the importance of context and of migrants' own ways of sense-making. Thus, the goal was to see how context affects migratory experiences, while simultaneously counterbalancing their anecdotal, stereotypical representations in media and political discourses. My understanding of experience in that sense was informed by Ann Gray's argument that the concept is an '[...] important epistemological category [...] that can function as a 'way of knowing' both our own and others' 'way of being'' (2003, p. 25). Therefore, the study's overarching question was deliberately left rather broad, which allowed me to enter the field with an open mind. However, living, working and/ or studying as a foreign national in a host country is a complex and multidimensional experience. Therefore, there were particular aspects of the migratory experiences of young Bulgarians that I was interested in, especially in relation to their migratory journeys, their context, everyday life and the implications upon their identities. Therefore, as a way of navigating through the complexities of migratory experiences, I designed sub-questions, which had three focal points: what happens *before*, *during* and *after* migration. I argue that each one of these key moments is an integral element of one's overall migratory experiences. Thus, to gain a better insight into one's migratory experiences, it is necessary to unravel the nature and characteristics of these three moments and how they interact with each other.

Correspondingly, the first sub-question that explored the 'before migration' aspect was: *Why do young, highly skilled Bulgarians choose to migrate to the UK?*

This sub-question looked in particular at the personal context of the participants, which was at the centre of their migratory story. As such, the research sub-question aimed to contribute to the understanding of the newest Bulgarian migratory flows by uncovering the reasons and factors that motivate young people to pursue education and/ or career development abroad. Additionally, it strived to counterbalance popular media representations of such migrants by exploring their lifegoals and how they aim to achieve them through migration. This was followed-up by the second sub-question: *How do young, highly skilled Bulgarians adjust to and engage with their migratory context?* In particular, this research sub-question aimed to explore two temporal aspects of the participants' realities once they arrive in Britain. On the one hand, the study focused on the initial encounters with the host society. More specifically, the research investigated whether there was a clash between expectations and realities and how migrants adjusted to the host society. Everyday situations and experiences of living, working and studying in Britain were of key importance in that respect. On the other hand, the study looked at the macro conditions, produced by both host and home societies and the ways in which migrants feel affected by them and respond to them. In that sense, an important aspect was the consideration of how migrants engage or deal with dominant stereotypical discourses in relation to Bulgarian migration in the UK. Finally, the third sub-question was: *How does migrating to the UK impact upon young, highly skilled Bulgarians' identities and plans for the future?* As Gray observes, 'experience can be understood as a discursive 'site of articulation' upon and through which subjectivities and identities are shaped and constructed' (2003, p. 25). Thus, the third sub-question strived to unpack the 'consequences' of young Bulgarians' migratory experiences. The focus on identities and plans for the future was both through their self-perceptions and as a result of their interactions with the host society. Consequently, the thus outlined three sub-questions enabled the study to consider key elements of young Bulgarian's migratory experiences, contributing to the better understanding of the phenomenon as a whole.

It should be noted, however, that the three sub-questions presented above have drastically changed in the course of the research. Indeed, although initially I

did recognise that migration inevitably includes a comparative element in both spatial and temporal terms, I rather naively wanted to focus on the ‘now’ as contextualised by the host society. Once in the field, however, I quickly realised the importance of ‘before’ and ‘after’. In fact, what the data was showing was actually the role of liminality or the in-between in the experiences of my participants. Additionally, my original sub-questions aimed to look at European citizenship and the everyday much more extensively, however, in the process of fieldwork these issues assumed the supplementary role of a background against which migrants assessed their experiences. Instead, what came across quite strongly in the process of fieldwork was the simultaneous operation of othering discourses in both host and home societies. This finding then prompted another shift in the research process, which focused on exploring how participants react to and manage internal and external stereotypes. Thus, having a broad research question was quite beneficial as it allowed me to adjust my sub-questions in accordance to what mattered most to my participants. The interview guide followed a similar fashion and it was only indicative (see *chapter 3* for more details).

Finally, it should be noted that given the focus and the scale of this study, it does have its own limitations and as such, it cannot be regarded as a source of generalisation. Rather, it should be read as the compilation of stories of a particular group of people at a particular time. As such, it is merely a snapshot, albeit (hopefully) an insightful one, of a much bigger phenomenon.

Brief historical overview of Bulgarian migratory flows

Crossing borders has always been an integral part of Bulgaria’s history: from the inception of the country when the semi-nomadic tribes of the Proto-Bulgarians (or Bulgars) crossed the Danube and together with the Slavs established the First Bulgarian Empire in 681, to its modern-day airports, which enable the population to travel on daily basis. Located in the Balkan region of South-Eastern Europe, Bulgaria’s strategic significance has also often left the country at a crossroads, both culturally and politically, ‘torn’ between the East and the West. Arguably, the

country is not only where the East *meets* the West but also where, to some degree, the East *clashes* with the West (see for example, Huntington, 1996). While this has had a significant influence upon Bulgaria's culture and traditions, it has also influenced the nature and characteristics of its migratory outflows. For the purposes of this analysis, this section will focus on the features of migration waves during historical periods shortly before and after Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman rule in 1878. These include: the Bulgarian Revival or Enlightenment (late 18th- early 19th century); the years before and after the Second World War; the communist era (1944-1989); the period of transition to democracy (1990- 2007) and the period from Bulgaria's accession in the EU in 2007 – onwards. The nature and characteristics of Bulgarian migratory flows in each historical era will be considered, ultimately arguing that Bulgarian migration to the UK belongs to the newest 'type' of migratory flows with distinctively different characteristics, thus highlighting the significance of this study.

To understand the specificities of Bulgarian migratory flows in the late 18th – early 19th century, it is important to consider the period of the Bulgarian Revival. At that time, although still under Ottoman rule, the country underwent a cultural, educational and social renaissance, which culminated in an organised revolutionary movement for liberation. Analysing the symbolic etymology of the Bulgarian Revival, Daskalov observes that the term *vuzrazhdane* or 'rebirth' was '[...] first employed metaphorically to designate the sudden and profound change experienced by the Bulgarian people, much like a magical return to life (after having been asleep or dead)' (2004, p. 1). Such symbolism is understandable given that at that time, Bulgaria had been under Turkish rule for almost five centuries, which had completely diminished the sense of national consciousness among the Bulgarian population. As an attempt to counterbalance this effect, Paisii Hilendarski, a monk in the Hilendar monastery on Mount Athos wrote a history of the Bulgarian people, highlighting its past imperial glory and encouraging the Bulgarian people to be proud to speak their own language and to identify themselves as Bulgarians (Crampton, 1987, p. 10). This marked the beginning of the renaissance period as Paisii Hilendarski's history was copied and reproduced across Bulgarian territories

and many of his admirers such as Sofronii Vrachanski started promoting secular ideas, similar to the European Enlightenment (Crampton, 1987, p. 10). This coincided with a few social, demographic and political changes across the Ottoman Empire, which led to an expansion of trade with Europe. The latter benefitted mostly Bulgarian producers and led to higher birth rate among Bulgarians over Turks (Crampton 1987, pp. 9-17; 2007, pp. 49-80). As a result, Bulgarian merchants were able to send their children to study abroad, mainly in Europe and in Russia. While still abroad or upon returning, many of those foreign-educated young Bulgarians made a conscious effort to revive the feelings of nationalism through education of their fellow countrymen (Crampton, 2007, p. 50). Daskalov argues that these efforts can be roughly divided into three different, yet interrelated streams: education; a movement for an independent church (preceding armed actions); and revolutionary activity (2004, pp. 151-176). Consequently, this leads to a number of inferences that can be made about the nature and characteristics of Bulgarian migration during this period. Firstly, migratory flows had a predominantly temporary character and were interlinked with return to the home country. Secondly, they were directed either to the East (Russia) or the West (Germany, France) but mostly towards neighbouring countries. Additionally, the purpose of migration was educational (usually those who came from wealthy families), revolutionary (those in exile) or both (those who returned to revive national consciousness and organise revolutionary committees). Finally, in comparison to modern-day migratory flows, those who left Bulgarian-populated Ottoman territories were often subjected to long and complicated travel conditions and less frequent communication with loved ones. Although the Bulgarian Revival is a historical period of a great significance, its impact upon migratory flows from the country has received comparatively less attention.

Before delving into the nature and characteristics of the movement of Bulgarians during the communist period, a brief note should be mentioned in relation to the period prior to and shortly after WWII. Although Krasteva (2014) focuses primarily on the migrations and refugee waves resulting from the displacement of people after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the liberation of Bulgaria, she briefly outlines two further types of Bulgarian migrant outflows:

gardeners and students. In the first case, Krasteva defines gardeners as ‘[...] more of an entrepreneurial, rather than labour migration’ (2014, p. 361). Furthermore, Antova’s (2007) study, which focuses on the ethno-cultural identity of Bulgarians in Slovakia, reveals that there were migratory flows, known as *gurbet* (for more information, see Appendix 1) of Bulgarian gardeners even prior to the Second World War. She admits however, that *gurbet*’s character was seasonal and a Bulgarian migrant community was more firmly established in the 1940s as a result of the ‘Bulgarian gardener’ becoming as prominent as today’s ‘Polish plumber’. However, while both terms are associated with high quality work, the first expression arguably is seen as more ‘prestigious’ in Central Europe: ‘Bulgarian gardening became synonymous to contemporary intensive horticultural production, recognised by Hungarian specialists. Its methodology is still widely taught at agricultural institutes in Hungary’ (my translation, Ganeva-Racheva, 2004, p. 27 in Krasteva, 2014, pp.361-362). Additionally, as Tanchev notes, student migratory flows were incredibly diverse in that period, however most Bulgarians preferred Russia (N= 686), Romania (N=206), Greece (N=128) and the Czech Republic (N=115), while only six people went to study in the UK at that time (1994, p. 6). In addition to the small scale of student migration, Tanchev further notes that due to the scarcity of financial resources many were forced to terminate their studies prematurely and almost half of those who studied abroad did not return to Bulgaria (1994, p.7).

This context sharply contrasts with the nature and characteristics of Bulgarian outflows during communist rule. The latter can be best described as a period characterised by strong state border control, restrictiveness and lack of freedom, which ultimately transformed the possibility to leave the country from everybody’s *right* to the *privilege* of a few (Rangelova and Vladimirova 2004; Chongarova 2010a; Markova 2010a; Krasteva 2014). Moreover, Krasteva goes even further by describing the Bulgarian communist approach to migration in a Foucauldian manner as ‘biopolitics’ in order to emphasise the key role of the communist government in exercising total control over the population’s movements (2014, p.362). Krasteva (2014) notes that some governmental measures included

compiling lists with ‘potential migrants’. Additionally, there were also sanctions envisaged for breaching migration laws at the time: those who did not return within the agreed time period were deprived of their passports and their property was confiscated, while those who attempted to unlawfully leave the country faced a 10-year jail sentence (Krasteva, 2014, pp. 362-363). This clearly shows not only the scale of state control but also the strong politico-ideological context of migratory flows. The key role of the Bulgarian Communist Party also led to framing national sovereignty in terms of border control and in politicizing migration as a phenomenon, regardless of its nature or characteristics. In such a climate, the failure to seek permission and approval from state officials to leave the country acquired affective connotations as it was equated to treason (see Krasteva, 2014, p. 365). Apart from political emigration, limited migratory outflows were thus only possible within the rigidly constructed state regulations: either as a result of bilateral agreements with the ‘brotherly Soviet nations’ or on the basis of party affiliation (Rangelova and Vladimirova 2004; Chongarova 2010a; Markova 2010b). Correspondingly, in terms of nature and characteristics, migratory flows during the 1945-1989 period can be described as highly politicised (patriotic or traitorous and escapist), controlled (legal versus illegal) and emotionally charged. This dichotomous division often meant that those close to the party elite were in a more advantageous position than ordinary citizens. Indeed, in the case of both educational and professional migration, the children of party leaders were given permission to study abroad and priority to choose destination before those places were made available to the public (Antova, 2007), which clearly shows the privileged nature of migration at the time³.

³ The most notable exception is the forceful emigration of Bulgarian Turks in 1989 as part of the ‘Revival Process’. The latter refers to the culmination of the assimilation policy implemented by the Bulgarian communist government between 1984 and 1989. It epitomises the Bulgarianization of ethnic Turks by forcefully changing their names and substituting them with Bulgarian ones, the abolishment of Turkish language and the closure of mosques. This resulted in militant clashes between the authorities and protestors, the death or imprisonment of the latter. In 1989, the government forcefully extradited around 300 000 Bulgarian Turks to Turkey in what became known as the ‘Big Excursion’. For more information, see: Vasileva (1992).

In contrast, the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall is marked by much greater diversity. Focusing on the Bulgarian context, the first years of euphoria in relation to the democratic changes quickly became substituted by disillusionment with how these politico-economic changes were carried out, which prompted some people to migrate abroad with the most popular destinations being USA, Canada, Western Europe, Greece (Chompalov, 2000; Markova, 2010a). Migratory flows in that period continued to have affective connotations, which may explain why the political narrative described migration as an ‘escape’ (Krasteva, 2014, p. 377). Economically, it was framed as capitalist conversion (Krasteva, 2014, p. 377), which also coincided with the collapse of Bulgarian industries in the early 1990s and the rising levels of unemployment (Markova, 2010a, p.8). However, the possibilities for migration in the early years of democratisation were higher in comparison to the period prior to 1989. Potential migrants faced (at least) two significant challenges. Firstly, as Markova rightly notes, Bulgaria was placed in the Schengen ‘black’ visa list in 1993⁴, which resulted in serious immigration restrictions faced by Bulgarian nationals (2010a, p. 8). Secondly, Bulgarian professionals struggled to acquire recognition for their degrees, which led to either de-skilling while in the host countries or the need to re-take exams and qualifications as noted by Krasteva in relation to doctors (2014, p. 388). Additionally, the turbulent changes affected the type and direction of Bulgarian migratory flows in the 1990s. As Markova notes, official emigration to Western Europe dropped significantly in that period, while that to Greece and Italy was largely undocumented (2010a, p. 8). Additionally, in the latter half of the 1990s Spain became a popular destination for low-skilled labour work (Markova, 2010a, p. 8). Thus, it becomes evident that Bulgarian migratory flows in the pre-EU accession period were incredibly diverse in terms of their nature, scale and patterns. Although potential migrants faced some immigration restrictions, they were much less in comparison to the communist period and their character was external rather than internal (i.e. not imposed by the home society). A combination of push and pull

⁴ Bulgaria was officially blacklisted until these restrictions were removed in 2001. See Council Regulation 539/2001, Annex II.

factors (with a precedence of the first over the second) impacted upon the decision of Bulgarian nationals to leave their homeland, often motivated by the desire for professional realisation.

Finally, Bulgaria's accession to the EU marks the newest period in Bulgarian outward migration. While this period bears the 'legacy' of Bulgarian migratory history and is marked by similar factors, it nonetheless features some distinctively new characteristics. Krasteva, for example, describes it as '[...] unburdened by political and ideological narratives and determinants, as drama-free and open-ended' (my translation, 2014, p. 377). Indeed, the underlying process of intensification of European integration, combined with the advent of technology have arguably transformed the EU into an epitome of the 'network state', underpinned by the new forms of interactions between nations-states (Castells, 2004). Intra-European mobility has been strongly encouraged through student exchange programs, the recruitment of professionals from across all the EU member states, the creation of youth political forums and the funding provided for many projects on local and governmental level. The freedom of movement has not only meant visa-free travel but also access to health care and social rights protection as well as cheap travel and accessible ways of communicating online and offline. In that sense, Bulgarians have been no exception. Consequently, this has drastically changed the outlook of Bulgarian migratory flows, which have seen a dramatic rise since the country joined the EU in 2007 (Maeva, 2010). Additionally, such mobility is not only less associated with settlement but it has also taken different trajectories. Thus, the latest data from the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute (hereafter, BNSI) shows a clear shift in the direction of migratory flows to Germany and Britain, away from 'traditional' destinations such as Spain, Italy and Greece (Club Z, 2015), while those leaving the country continue to be predominantly young and highly skilled (Rolfe et al, 2013).

Yet, simultaneously, Bulgarian migratory flows during this period have also been affected by some negative socio-political and economic events such as the 2008 economic crisis and the subsequent recession, which have arguably

strengthened eurosceptic sentiments and resulted in the (renewed) strength of nationalisms (Sierp and Karner, 2017). Therefore, the fact that in 2015 Germany and the UK emerge as top receiving countries for young and highly skilled migrants is attributed not only to the rising popularity of these destinations but also to the negative impact of the financial crisis on the economies of South-European countries (Club Z, 2015). Although this is likely to change given the recent UK vote to leave the EU, the post-2007 period is undoubtedly shaping very dynamic and interesting tendencies in Bulgarian outward migration. Despite that professional and economic motivations continue to dominate in this period, some different factors come to the fore such as cosmopolitan curiosity, epitomised by the desire to travel and to get to know different cultures and traditions (Krasteva, 2014). It is against the backdrop of these dynamic events that the current study should be considered.

Thus, what can be seen from this historical overview is that Bulgarian migratory flows are not a new phenomenon; rather, they have been a constant occurrence throughout the country's history, albeit with different direction, nature and characteristics. The latter have been influenced by the socio-political and economic factors in the country and in Europe. Bulgaria's accession to the EU in 2007 marks the beginning of the latest period in the history of Bulgarian mobility. What is 'new' and different about this migratory period is not the factors that underpin it but that these factors and conditions have continued to exist, recombined in new amalgamations in the context of intensified processes of Europeanisation. What is particularly interesting is how persistent ways of thinking about migration, ever-present socio-economic and political factors become interlinked with the new realities of open borders and freedom of movement within Europe. The latter has not been unproblematic; rather, intra-European mobility has triggered populist and nationalist rhetoric across Europe, covered in a thin veneer of euroscepticism. Contextually, this makes the study of the newest migratory flows from Bulgaria to the UK not only important but also necessary as it offers an insight into what it means to experience migration in such a polarised context.

Having situated the phenomenon under study in its historical and current milieu, the next section will focus more explicitly on the concrete case of Bulgarian migrants in the UK. More specifically, the section will argue that to gain an in-depth understanding of the migratory experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians, it is important to go beyond the ways in which migrants and migration in general are discursively depicted within both the home and host societies.

The case of the *Other Bulgaria* in the UK: semantics and politics

Migratory outflows have a strong discursive presence in the Bulgarian public space. This is unsurprising given the numerical scale of the issue: indeed, due to migration the Bulgarian population has decreased by 6% between 1992 and 2012, which soars to 10% if only the economically active are considered (OECD, 2012). A symbolic representation of the scale of the phenomenon is its reference to the *Other Bulgaria*. The latter is the name of a popular Bulgarian TV show that depicts the migratory stories of Bulgarian nationals, who have decided to settle in countries all over the world. It is also the name of a small political party established in 2009, which claims to represent the interests of those permanently residing outside the country. Most importantly, the *Other Bulgaria* is a term deeply embedded in the Bulgarian socio-political discourse in relation to outward migratory flows. As such, the expression has political and affective connotations: it is associated with diaspora, belonging, settlement and loss. Thus, the term is also inclusive – it aims to highlight the strong cultural connection between those abroad and the homeland, and in doing so, contrary to Hall's (1996) argument in relation to identity, it prioritises roots over routes.

This understanding of Bulgarian migratory flows (as the *Other Bulgaria*) is also evident on a governmental level through a number of initiatives that not only demonstrate the importance of the phenomenon, but that are also clearly directed at strengthening the links between the nation-state and the Bulgarian diaspora. Among them, the 'Bulgarian Easter' was an event launched in 2000 by the Kostov

government to attract Bulgarian highly skilled professionals to return to the country – an idea which failed due to its political affiliation with the ruling government, which lost the next elections (Chongarova, 2010a, p. 8). The importance of Bulgarian emigration was additionally highlighted by the establishment of the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad (hereafter SABA)⁵ and the adoption of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria regarding Migration and Integration (2008-2015). These steps were further complemented by the brief appointment of a Minister for the Bulgarians Abroad by the Borisov cabinet in 2009. Finally, in July 2011, the Bulgarian government adopted a new National Migration, Asylum and Integration Strategy (2011- 2020), where encouraging the return of Bulgarian highly skilled migrants emerges as a key priority (OECD, 2012). Therefore, these initiatives clearly illustrate both the recognition of emigration as an issue and the active efforts on governmental level to liaise and connect with Bulgarian nationals abroad, ultimately attempting to stimulate their return.

However, public opinion about Bulgarian nationals migrating abroad has another, less inclusive side. Symbolically, it is associated with Terminals 1 and 2 of Sofia Airport, which serve to delineate the dichotomous opposition between ‘leavers’ (migrants) and ‘stayers’ (non-migrants). Each one of these categorisations pertains manifold, emotionally charged connotations, which portray migration as a form of escapism at best or as national betrayal at worst. As such, the roots of ‘the stayers versus leavers’ debate can be traced to the dominant understandings of migration in the communist period and in the early 1990s discussed earlier in this chapter. Additionally, it should be noted that the discursive meaning of Terminals 1 and 2 is enveloped in myths about life abroad (seen as easy, good, privileged), which are often contrasted with the difficult realities of living in a country, dubbed as the poorest EU member-state (Bozhidarov 2012). This way of framing Bulgarian migration has more recently resurfaced in the public space, prompted by the after-effects of the economic crisis and the never-ending socio-political liminality exemplified by the transition to democracy (Gruev, 2015, pp. 21-22). Therefore, at

⁵ Originally founded in 1992, it was transformed into a state agency in 2000 under the Council of Ministers.

the beginning of 2013, a series of austerity measures and high electricity prices triggered unrest in the country, culminating in the resignation of the centre-right Borisov government (BBC, 2013). The nationwide protests gained new momentum in the summer under the motto #DANSwithme – a play on words as DANS is the abbreviation of the State Agency for National Security, which sounds similar to the English verb ‘to dance’. Amidst these turbulent events, another, less favourable image of emigrating co-nationals came to the fore in the form of a popular anecdote: ‘Question: What are the two solutions to the crisis in Bulgaria? Answer: Terminal 1 and Terminal 2 of Sofia Airport’ (my translation, Bozhidarov, 2012; Nikolov, 2013). This anecdote clearly demonstrates the rupture between those who stay and those who leave by questioning the identity and belonging of the latter group. The focus on such a dichotomous juxtaposition, places migration processes within the national socio-political framework, disregarding the influence of supranational phenomena such as globalisation, technologisation and intensified Europeanisation. Moreover, such a focus does not take into account the experiences of migrants themselves, who are instead automatically scored low on the scale of national belonging and patriotism.

Similarly to the situation in Bulgaria, migration takes a key place on the agenda of the British public discourse. Most recently, this became evident in the lead up to the EU referendum, which ultimately resulted in marginal, yet significant victory for the ‘Leave’ camp⁶. Arguably in a state of ‘postcolonial melancholia’ (Gilroy, 2006), the British discourse is saturated with anxieties about the inability to cope with larger, globalisation processes and local, regionalisation movements that erode the power structures of the nation-state from ‘above’ and ‘below’. Examples of the challenges from ‘above’ include the economic and refugee crises, while those from ‘below’ can most clearly be seen in the 2014 Scottish referendum for independence. Additionally, Brexit has been interpreted as protest vote against the austerity measures implemented by Cameron’s government or as a sign of the rift between political parties and their electorate (BBC, 2016). The after-effects of

⁶ On 23rd of June 2016, 51.9% voted to leave the EU with a 72.16% turnout. The key areas that voted to remain in the EU were: London (59.9%), Scotland (62%) and Northern Ireland (55.8%).

these events have triggered a process of objectifying anxieties and transforming them into concrete fears, resulting in a resurgence of a defensive national identity. In light of this context, the approach to immigration has been marked by three specific, interrelated tendencies. The first one is a drive for a stricter border control and immigration policy, which has seen (among many) the full implementation of the 7-year period of labour restrictions for Bulgarians and Romanians, the removal of the Post-Study Work visa scheme in 2012 and a much more restrictive Immigration Act in 2016. Secondly, a shift away from multiculturalism can be observed, which has arguably led to a neo-assimilationist turn in the UK's immigration policy. Such a re-orientation has been defined by '[...] populist scapegoating of minorities and migrants for the shortcomings of complex social transformations and its nostalgic sense of "loss" for a mythical cohesive past [...]' (Però, 2008, p. 76). Finally, immigration combined with anxieties about social welfare and crime have fuelled eurosceptic sentiments in the country. This has resulted in not only the rising popularity of the UK Independence Party, which came first in the 2014 European Parliament elections but also, ultimately in Britain's vote in 2016 to leave the EU. Thus, all these socio-political events have shaped a context, hostile to those who have decided to live, work and/or study in Britain.

In light of this extremely polarised socio-economic and political context in Britain, Bulgarian migrants most recently came into the spotlight in relation to the removal of labour restrictions for Bulgarian and Romanian nationals on January 1st 2014. The event was marked by a predominantly negative discourse, which has been even described as 'xeno-racism' (Lentin, 2013). Importantly, Bulgarian migrants have been discussed mainly in relation to the phenomenon of 'Eastern European' migration to the UK. Semantically, the term 'Eastern European migrant' is deeply problematic. On the one hand, a brief glance at the literature reveals the negative connotations of the term, rigidly framed as a poor, badly educated, benefits-driven, potentially dangerous, unskilled migrant (Csedó 2008; Ryan 2010; Fox, Moroşanu and Szillasy 2012; Moroşanu 2013a; Moroşanu 2013b; Moroşanu and Fox 2013). Media representations of Bulgarians, similar to those of their Central and Eastern European counterparts, make no exception. As such, however, these essentialist

representations establish the basis of a stereotype, with markedly negative connotations. On the other hand, the practice of metonymically referring to migrants, whose origin is east of Germany and Austria, as ‘Eastern European’ completely ignores regional divisions and the cultural differences resulting from them, which play a huge role in shaping migratory experiences. This reductionist approach ultimately disregards the myriad of migratory paths and experiences of people who have chosen Britain as their destination.

Thus, the overview of the context facing young, high skilled Bulgarians in the UK reveals that they find themselves in a polarised and socio-politically turbulent environment, produced by the conditions of both host and home societies. As such, the *Other Bulgaria* in the UK, although recognised as significant in both host and home societies is nonetheless subjected to stereotypical, reductionist representations. By focusing on both university students and young professionals in particular, this research offers an insight into the lived experiences of migration of a group of young people in a time when the stimuli and barriers to migration operate simultaneously. Accordingly, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of ‘Eastern European’ migration to the UK by using as a focal point a relatively under-researched group of people (highly skilled Bulgarians) and their experiences as contextualised in a polarised and dynamic context.

Thesis structure

This chapter has highlighted the contextual significance of the research on young, Bulgarian highly skilled migrants by historically positioning it within the newest migratory flows from Bulgaria to the UK. Therefore, the next chapter will explore the theoretical contributions that the research aims to make, while outlining the key literature that has been consulted in the process of making sense of the data. *Chapter 3* will then look ‘behind the scenes’ by focusing on the ‘mechanics’ of the study in terms of research design and methodology. Particular attention is paid to

the multi-sited character of the research as well as key concepts such as location, positionality and emotions. In that sense, the chapter is written in a reflexive manner and ethical issues are considered as and when they have appeared in the research process. This will be followed by three data chapters, which essentially follow the same chronological lifecycle as van Gennep's ([1909] 1960) rites of passage or separation, liminality and incorporation. As such, *Chapter 4* addresses young Bulgarian's pre-migratory experiences by using the concept of a migratory project. The latter allows for the consideration of the participants' personal context as well as their migratory goals as shaped by a variety of macro, meso and micro (subjective) factors. *Chapter 5* in turn analyses young Bulgarians' migration reality through their initial expectations, followed by the processes of adjustment to the host society and reactions to othering. Ultimately, the thesis argues that the expectations encapsulated by the participants' migratory projects and their realities create a tension, which shapes the characteristics of their migratory experiences. Moreover, as *Chapter 6* argues, the discrepancies between the pre-liminal and liminal stage of migration have serious implications for young Bulgarians' identities and their plans for the future. In exploring the impact of migration as a life choice, the thesis outlines the strong prominence of narratives of success and various conceptualisations of return. Finally, *Chapter 7* summarises all key findings in the study, arguing that young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK find themselves in state of in-between-ness. Their liminal lives are shaped not only by the transitory stage of their personal and professional lives but also the socio-political and economic conditions that they find themselves in. Such conditions produce and even 'celebrate' liminality: a condition of in-between-ness, which is both constructive and destructive.

Introduction: *Moveo ergo sum*⁷

Movement is sometimes mundane and ordinary but never trivial. It can be simple but never simplistic. As such, movement in all its forms, be they social, spatial, temporal, cognitive and emotive, is a key organising principle of not only human activities but of societies in general. Importantly, movement in its variety has been argued to capture the *Zeitgeist*⁸ of modern days: we live in the ‘age of migration’ (Castles and Miller, 2009), witnessing the ‘mobilities turn’ (Faist, 2013) where not only our lives are ‘mobile’ (Elliott and Urry, 2010) but also whole continents appear to be ‘moving West’ (Black et al., 2010). Unsurprisingly then, migration and mobility have come to the fore as key phenomena affecting all levels of society from the supranational, through the national and local to the personal and intimate. Recognising that theoretical conceptualisations of the movement of people from one place to another can never be as fluid and as inclusive as the phenomenon itself, they nonetheless provide a useful way of thinking about key questions of why, how and what happens when people relocate.

Thus, while the introduction of the thesis outlined the significance of studying young, highly skilled migrants in the UK, this chapter seeks to complement it by highlighting its theoretical importance. As such, the purpose of this chapter is two-fold. On the one hand, it will locate the research project within the wider academic debates. Consequently, this chapter begins by scrutinising the role of cosmopolitanism and nationalism in triggering and shaping the various processes of

⁷ From Latin, ‘I move, therefore I am’, paraphrased from René Descartes’ famous philosophical postulation: ‘Cognito, ergo sum’ – ‘I think, therefore I am’.

⁸ From German, ‘spirit of the time’.

European integration. The second section will engage critically with the connotations of key terms such as migration and mobility, followed by an outline of the advantages and disadvantages of framing intra-European mobility within ‘liquid migration’ (Engbersen, Snel and de Boom 2010; Engbersen and Snel 2013). Finally, that section will demonstrate the importance of conducting research on Bulgarian migrants by engaging more specifically with the literature on Central and Eastern European migration. In the third section, there will be a consideration of the intersection between studies on youth mobilities and highly skilled migrants. Thus, the first half will not only provide an overview of the key theoretical debates in the field but it will also illustrate gaps and overlooked areas, which have provoked the interest in young, Bulgarian highly skilled migrants living in Britain.

On the other hand, the second half of the chapter will focus on how this study aims to address its research questions by providing an overview of the literature that has been particularly instrumental in analysing the data. A key conceptual idea that offers a useful reference for the analysis of migratory experiences is the notion of liminality (van Gennep [1909] 1960). More specifically, it will be argued that a migratory experience is the outcome of a negotiation of migration as a *project* and as a *reality*, which has its *consequences*, particularly in relation to migrants’ identities and plans for the future. Each of these elements will be explored in turn, indicating key areas of the study’s contribution.

Contextualising intra-European mobility: European integration amidst cosmopolitan and nationalist ideas

The European Union has been described as ‘[...] the world’s best research laboratory on legal, transnational migration’ (Koikkalainen, 2011). Indeed, the end of the Cold War and the intensification of European integration have enabled Europeans to live, work and study freely in other member states, transforming the EU into a prime example of a ‘network state’ (Castells, 2004). However, it should be noted that the European Union bears not only the hopes and strives but also, arguably, the tensions and dysfunctions of the long process of integration. As

Stevenson argues, ‘Europe is actually a site of ambivalence [...]’, a place of ‘[...] both hope and nightmare’ (2012, p. 114) and it has been the negotiation between these two that has woven the nuanced character of European integration. In that sense, Balibar’s (2010) conceptualisation of the border is significant. He describes it as a ‘heterotopia’, or ‘[...] both a place of exception where the conditions and the distinctions of normality and everyday life are ‘normally suspended’ [...] and a place where the antinomies of the political are in a sense manifested and become an object of politics itself’ (Balibar, 2010, p. 316). It is this precise element that European integration has attempted to transgress by stipulating the freedom of movement of goods, capital, services and people. Although the last few decades of intra-European cooperation have led to the institutionalisation of the European idea and the ‘birth’ of European citizenship, the challenges to unity have neither dissolved nor become less divisive. In fact, the recent after-effects of the 2008 economic downturn, the refugee crisis and Brexit highlight the ideological tension between cosmopolitan and nationalist ideas. Therefore, embedding European integration as a process within those debates offers a better insight into the nature and characteristics of not only freedom of movement as a principle but also of intra-European mobility as a phenomenon.

The cosmopolitanism-nationalism debate in its crude terms centres upon the tension created between the nation-state and the challenges that global processes impose on it. The defenders of nationalism highlight the importance of several of its aspects, simultaneously undermining the position of cosmopolitanism and that of European integration and EU citizenship as its ‘by-products’. The first main argument centres upon the claim that the nation-state remains the only legitimate and influential source of power. This statement is clearly supported by the nature of EU citizenship as a concept dependent upon individuals’ nationality. Similarly, advocates of nationalism such as Smith (1995) argue that ‘an essential element of the power of nationalism, [is] its chameleon-like ability to transmute itself according to the perceptions and needs of different communities and of competing strata, factions and individuals within them’ (Smith, 1995, p.13). Hence, the second main strength of nationalism against cosmopolitanism appears to be its flexibility

and adaptability. Smith's (1995) claim directly corresponds to the third central argument in support of nationalism – its long history that demonstrates its stability and provides the framework for the modern world. This claim is best demonstrated through Calhoun's (2002, 2007) work on the subject. He asserts that 'nationalism is pervasive in the modern world because it is widely *used*, not merely found' (italics in original, Calhoun, 2007, p. 28). Consequently, it is an idea that underpins modern-day society and provides meaning and a sense of belonging. Additionally, Calhoun also asserts that nationalism's main tenet is its discursiveness as an integral part of the national matrix that provides not only a deeper understanding about nations but also a 'refuge' from cosmopolitanism's individualistic thought (2007, pp. 25- 40). These three overarching arguments in support of nationalism aim to reaffirm its position within modern society as an integral building block that is both stable and yet, quite flexible in its application. Thus, the 'nationalist' claims question cosmopolitanism's viability and that of European integration as a process as well as European citizenship as a concept.

However, analysing ideas embedded in and defining cosmopolitanism reveal an equally complex mosaic where values, culture and political projects infused with the cosmopolitan spirit aim to address global changes. For instance, Boon and Delanty (2007) provide an invaluable framework for understanding the diverse field of cosmopolitan thought by delineating the three main avenues that ideas diverge into: moral cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitan governance and cultural cosmopolitanism. The first strand forges a universalistic look where 'cosmopolitanism [...] is an overall ethical doctrine about how people should organize their loyalties in a world where we have many types of local attachment, and in which strangers at a distance also seem to demand our concern' (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 403). This universalism comprised of ethical principles and moral codes, not only seems to disregard particular cultures as well as spatial and temporal dimensions (Stevenson, 2012, p. 117) but it also lacks a project that encapsulates those principles and moral codes. In that sense, cosmopolitan governance goes further. This strand of cosmopolitan thought is closely associated with Held (2011) and Habermas and Derrida (2003). While they all see nation-states as incapable of

addressing the challenges of the modern global order, later on, Held (2011) takes a slightly milder position. Ultimately, for him cosmopolitanism is a bundle of ethical, legal and political principles manifested through a cosmopolitan polity with legislative and executive capacities that complement the same responsibilities maintained by the national and regional levels of society (Held, 2011, pp. 168- 174). Such a political project is taken a step further by Habermas and Derrida by forging a view of constitutional patriotism, where ‘the citizens of one nation must regard the citizens of another nation as fundamentally ‘one of us’ – a view encompassed by the EU as a post-national constellation that has the potential of reaching that level (2003, p. 293). This idea captures the spirit that has driven European integration ahead and exemplifies some of the hopes that European citizenship tries to address. Yet, Habermas and Derrida’s (2003) proposed framework fails to take into account the importance of the nation-state. Correspondingly, cultural cosmopolitanism as the third strand represents a rich field of ideas that address the nexus between the local and the global. Importantly, Roudometof and Haller (2007) make a differentiation between cosmopolitanism as a mindset and as a project. While they focus primarily on the first aspect, the latter is best illustrated through Beck’s (2006; 2007) work. Essentially, he identifies ‘cosmopolitanization’ as a process and a project encompassing the move of European tradition towards greater open-mindedness, diversity and equality. The same spirit, applied through an understanding of ‘the Other’, is voiced by Stevenson (2012) and his idea of cultural citizenship, nurtured by education and promoted through the media. Ultimately, the three different strands of cosmopolitanism delineate the ideas that have driven the process of European integration forward. Moreover, they have led to the establishment of European citizenship by paving its way and influencing its nature and characteristics. Thus, EU integration and citizenship as epitomes of the cosmopolitan spirit bear not only its promises and accomplishments, but they are also imbued with the same flaws – a condition, which renders the phenomena ambivalent and controversial.

Finally, an important point needs to be made regarding the position of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in relation to each other and how that affects not

only European integration but also attitudes towards intra-European mobility. As Calhoun has asserted ‘[...] cosmopolitanism and nationalism are mutually constitutive and to oppose them too sharply is misleading’ (2007, p. 13). Similarly, Guibernau claims that the rise of local and national attachments and cosmopolitan ideas are two processes that are parallel (2007, p. 22). While this argument alludes to the simultaneity of the two processes, it offers a limited insight into the ways in which they intersect and work together. Correspondingly, Delanty’s argument is more nuanced, as he claims that while it is wrong to see nationalism and cosmopolitanism as opposing, they actually are in a state of tension that could be regarded even as complimentary (2006, p. 358). It is this state of tension and yet complementariness that shapes the extraordinary nature of European integration and European citizenship. Consequently, intra-European mobility emerges as a phenomenon, firmly embedded in these debates. It epitomises the cosmopolitan ideas of equality and appreciation of diversity through connectedness, simultaneously being bound by and infused with the chameleon-like spirit of nationalism. It is within these conditions that young, highly skilled Bulgarians among many other Europeans, have been able to travel freely between EU member states and to exercise the rights that European citizenship bestows upon them. Thus, the next section will scrutinise in detail the nature and characteristics of intra-European mobility, simultaneously identifying key gaps in the literature that this study aims to address.

Theorising migration within Europe: ‘liquidity’ unbound?

The first and second waves of EU Eastern enlargement in 2004 and 2007 are a clear indicator of the intensification of European integration. As such, they have not only transformed the outlook of the EU itself but also the nature and characteristics of intra-European mobility. Indeed, ‘new’ emerges as the most commonly attributed adjective to such migratory flows and patterns: while migration on the continent has a ‘new face’, so do migrants and their routes, survival strategies and residential statuses (Favell 2008b; Black et al. 2010; Glorious et al.

2013). Therefore, this section will focus not only on the nature and characteristics of this new type of migration regime but also on how it has been theorised. In doing so, the section will begin by reviewing some of the key terminology in relation to the phenomenon, namely the various connotations associated with migration and mobility. Then the text will engage critically with ‘liquid’ migration as a theoretical framework, which will be followed by an overview of overlooked areas in the research on Central and Eastern European (hereafter CEE) migration to the UK.

‘Mobility’ vs. ‘Migration’

Before delving into the theoretical analysis of the ‘new’ migratory flows within Europe, it is important to problematize the definitional boundaries of concepts such as ‘mobility’ and ‘migration’. Broadly speaking, both terms focus on movement, however, they vary slightly in terms of scope, nature and characteristics. The lack of firm delineations between the two notions further complicates their relationship. With regards to scope, while migration has been predominantly associated with spatial relocations, mobility has had a wider application across the field of social sciences. Consequently, for Adey (2010) mobility is understood not only as a movement with a purpose but also as a relation. In arguing for a ‘mobilities turn’, Faist (2013) considers both the spatial and social dimensions of the term as a way of moving away from fixed and static conceptualisations of the modern world. Urry (2000) goes even further: his epistemological understanding centres upon mobility as a new sociological paradigm, underpinned by overarching processes such as technologization and globalisation. Subsequently, he develops and refines his theory further, specifying four aspects of the concept, which include: the movement of people and objects as an act; unruly crowd; social mobility and finally –migration (Urry, 2007, pp. 7-10). This conceptualisation suggests not only the wider scope of application of mobility but it also offers insights into the nature, characteristics and relationship between migration and mobility, where the first is subsumed under the latter.

Focusing explicitly on the spatial dimension of both terms, it becomes evident that migration and mobility have different connotations. The latter are premised on temporal conditions as well as on claims associated with border control and return. Exploring the issue in detail, Bell and Ward claim that ‘temporary mobility is perhaps most readily defined as the complement of permanent migration’ (2000, pp. 97- 98). Evidently, the authors firstly introduce a hierarchy with mobility being subordinate to migration and secondly, the notion of duration is attached to each of them to maintain the strict differentiation. Other scholars such as Favell (2008a; 2008b), King et al. (2010) and Chongarova (2010a) situate their preference of terminology within the context and object of their study. Consequently, Favell (2008a; 2008b) advocates the use of mobility as a concept to denote movement from one EU member state to another. Applying the term to this context encapsulates the unrestricted freedom of movement, the fluidity of spatial relocation and its overall nature of temporariness. Similarly, King et al. by focusing on students, state that they prefer mobility over migration because: ‘[m]obility implies a shorter time-frame for the movement, and a high probability of return [...]’ (2010, p. 7). Despite highlighting the association of mobility with the short-termism, King et al. (2010) nonetheless recognise its intrinsic relationship with migration, particularly in relation to settlement. As Findlay et al. elaborate, student mobility ‘[...] must at least in part be related to subsequent mobility intentions relating to the rest of the life-course’ (2012, p. 122). In her research on Bulgarian students in London, Chongarova argues that both mobility and migration can be used interchangeably as one’s status of a student implies a temporal element (2010a, p. 23). Moreover, she points out that spatial relocation and social advancement go hand in hand as the first is motivated and influenced by key migratory factors such as economic conditions, opportunities, and drive for success (Chongarova, 2010a, p. 23). Thus, evidently, migration serves to denote long-term spatial relocations, which exclude or at least make problematic potential return. As such, the term appears to be less fluid than its counterpart – mobility, which can include multiple (circular, seasonal) journeys and is much more open-ended and unrestricted. Consequently, mobility emerges as a much more encompassing experience, while

migration suggests a particular act. Finally, a few clarifications need to be made with regards to the semantics of the two concepts. Being classified as a mobile person rather than a migrant not only offers the promise of temporariness but it also suggests privilege (in terms of lack of restrictions). Thus, conceptualising the relocation of people as ‘mobility’ rather than as ‘migration’ has slightly more positive connotations, placing the phenomenon within a less threatening framework (King et al., 2016, pp. 8-9).

The study on Bulgarian students and young professionals takes a somewhat different position within the debates on migration and mobility. On the one hand, the participants’ experiences are part of the larger phenomenon of intra-European mobility: they are not subject to border control and they travel freely across Europe. On the other hand, unlike their A8⁹ counterparts, they have been subject to labour restrictions and as it will be argued, return is more of a wishful thinking than a reality. Thus, both terms will be used throughout the thesis, albeit to convey different ideas. More specifically, ‘migration’ here is understood as part of experiencing ‘mobility’: while the first focuses on the particular experience, the latter refers to the overall phenomenon.

From East to West: liquidity or not?

The first and second wave of Eastern enlargement have been recognised as ‘the biggest demographic change’ on the continent since WWII (Favell, 2008b, p. 701). As such, they are seen as a milestone in modern European history, which has resulted in a ‘new geography of migration’, bound by the rise of migratory flows from the East to the West (Engbersen, Snel and de Boom, 2010; Engbersen and Snel, 2013). In light of this dramatic shift, Favell has even argued that ‘[...] the European migration system is probably the most dramatically evolving and changing context of migration in the developed world’ (2008, p. 711). Correspondingly, ‘liquid migration’ has emerged as a prominent theoretical

⁹ The term refers to the countries which joined the EU in 2004: Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Hungary.

framework for the analysis of East-West post-accession migratory flows (Engbersen, Snel and de Boom, 2010; Engbersen and Snel, 2013). Therefore, this sub-section will proceed by critically engaging with the concept through the exploration of its nature and characteristics. Despite recognising its merits, it will be argued that such a theoretical framework is unsuitable for the analysis of the case of young, highly skilled Bulgarians as it does not fully capture their experiences.

‘Liquid migration’ is not only inspired by but also firmly embedded in the sociological work of Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2005) on the modern condition. Consequently, the in-depth understanding of the first cannot go without an insight into the latter. The central tenet of Bauman’s work (2000, 2005), in its crude terms, focuses on the importance of change in modern-day society, which accentuates fragility, temporariness and the dissolution of solid forms of social life. His ‘liquid modernity’ is bound by uncertainty and anxiety, where flexibility substitutes stability and permanence, while fragility takes over solidity, and nomadism is preferred to fixity. Similarly, the post-accession migration system in Europe is seen as ‘liquid’, where ‘[t]he fairly stable migration patterns that marked the period 1950-1990 have dissolved into more complex, transitory patterns in terms of transient settlement – transnational or otherwise – and shifting migration status’ (Engbersen, Snel and de Boom, 2010, p. 117). This categorisation of migratory flows within Europe quite clearly denotes not only their changing nature but also their complex characteristics. ‘Liquid migration’ can be quite useful in researching frequent, changing migratory patterns emerging out of freedom of movement in Europe. This explains its popularity in studying, for example, youth mobility to the UK (King and Lulle, 2016a; King and Lulle, 2016b) and CEE labour migration to the Netherlands (Engbersen, Snel and de Boom, 2010). Furthermore, ‘liquid migration’ is strongly related to Okólski’s (2012) categorisation of Polish pre-accession transnational flows as ‘incomplete migration’. However, while both are focused on circular movement of people, they differ significantly according to legal status, where the latter is predominantly undocumented. Consequently, ‘liquid migration’ is seen as a particular way of studying the intersection between ‘new migration’ and Vertovec’s (2006) ‘superdiversity’ as overarching ideas, describing the outlook of

migratory flows within Europe (Engbersen and Snel, 2013, p.31). Using this idea as a theoretical framework has the potential to capture the multi-dimensional and multi-layered reality of intra-European mobility. However, defining migration as ‘liquid’, much like framing modernity within the same framework, is a bold, encompassing claim. As such, while it offers useful ways of thinking about migration (or modernity in general), it inevitably leaves room for critique.

Broadly speaking, attempting to define a complex reality (be it modernity or migration) by applying a single, umbrella term does not fully capture its multi-layered nature. Ironically, it essentially undermines the multifacetedness of the phenomenon by forcefully attempting to simplify it. In doing so, it questions the basis upon which ‘liquidity unbound’ is assumed. Similar to Bauman’s (2000, 2005) ‘liquid modernity’, its migration counterpart rests upon the assumption that ‘[...] ‘thick’ and stable social institutions (class, family, labour, community, neighbourhood and nation-state) are fading away and being replaced by flexible, ‘thin’ institutions’ (Engbersen and Snel, 2013, p.31). Such a claim is highly problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, as the previous section has demonstrated, to conceptualise freedom of movement across the EU as a sign of the (complete) demise of the nation-state would be too extreme. Undeniably, globalisation processes and their by-products (such as European integration) have put pressure on nation-states, which in turn have had to secede some power to supra-national structures. Correspondingly, sociological debates (Urry 2000; Bauman 2000, 2005; Beck 2006, 2007) have valuably sensed that nation-states are no longer the sole organising principle of societies. Yet, as Favell reminds, not everything is in motion and the field of migration/mobility is also inclusive of ‘[...] studying things that stand still [...]’ (2011, p. 392). Moreover, the British approach to managing intra-European mobility by imposing labour restrictions on Bulgarians and Romanians as well as the recent vote to leave the EU are clear examples of the changing, yet prominent role of the nation-state. Secondly, the role of the family is far from fading away; on the contrary, as *chapter 4* will demonstrate, parents and family members continue to have a strong influence upon young people’s migratory projects. Thus, ‘liquid migration’ as a theoretical framework may be useful in

recognising that the world is ‘in motion’. At the same time, it fails to take into account that although the role of nation-states and families in shaping migratory flows has changed, it nonetheless remains important.

The nature and characteristics of ‘liquid migration’ further demonstrate its limitations in capturing the experiences of migratory flows from the East to the West. According to Engbersen and Snel, the movement of people across borders is characterised by its temporality as ‘[m]igrants do not settle but move back and forth from their source country to receiving countries [...]’, which ultimately renders them invisible (2013, p. 33). This short-termism suggests that being on the move is a constant condition and as such, it excludes the possibility of settlement in the future. Furthermore, such temporality is considered separate from other conditions that affect migratory patterns, such as for example the stage of migrants’ lifecycle. Bygnes and Erdal’s (2016) study of Polish and Spanish migrants in Norway demonstrates that for adults, continued mobility impedes their quest for ‘grounded lives’. The latter is defined as ‘[...] the search for the sort of stability and predictability that fluid and liberalised working life context can hinder’ (Bygnes and Erdal, 2016, p. 4). Therefore, ‘liquid migration’ as a theoretical framework ignores migrants’ urge for stability amidst fluidity and change, which in many cases is closely interlinked with the dynamics of a lifecycle. Finally, although the visibility of migratory flows is associated with their duration, there are also other factors that contribute to it. For example, in the case of Bulgarians and Romanians in the UK, their visibility in the host society was arguably much more related to the polarisation of the public debate on migration, the purpose of their stay and the removal of labour restrictions than to the duration of their stay. Thus, defining the European migration regime as ‘liquid’ on the basis of settlement emerges as problematic.

Secondly, ‘liquid migration’ has a very narrow scope. Engbersen and Snel contend that intra-European mobility is characterised by ‘predominantly labour migration’, while student migration is only ‘a minor supplement’ and in fact, the first is seen as the ‘true motive’ behind the latter (2013, p. 33). To support this claim, they make a reference to Ivancheva’s (2007) study, which looks at the experiences

of students, who are working on strawberry fields as part of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Scheme (hereafter SAWS). While indeed for those who undertake low skilled agricultural work the student route provides a loophole that allows access to the labour market, conceptualising ‘liquid migration’ in such a way undermines student mobility as a phenomenon. As it will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, for the majority of my participants it was the motivation to obtain high quality education that was the driving factor behind their migratory projects. Therefore, the desire for professional realisation was secondary and emerged *as a result of* having been educated in Britain. Thus, another limitation of ‘liquid migration’ as a framework is the inability to account for cases when labour migration is a continuation of or the subsequent stage of student mobility. Ultimately, such a theorisation of intra-European mobility does not detect migration as a process (Castles and Miller, 2009), whose goal may or may not change over time, but it rather assumes, a more static and fixed understanding of the phenomenon.

Two other aspects of ‘liquid migration’ concern the destination of migratory flows and legal status. While the first dimension of the new migratory system is defined by unpredictability, the second is characterised by the regularity of migrants themselves (Engbersen and Snel, 2013, p. 34). The role of European citizenship and the principle of freedom of movement upon which it rests have significantly contributed to both of these dimensions. Yet, there needs to be a more nuanced understanding of the remits of migrants’ regularity. More specifically, while all nationals of EU member-states have the right to travel freely across borders, being able to reside and being able to work in any European country differ. Bulgarians and Romanians, for example, have fully experienced this variation in legal status as their mobility was accompanied by restricted access to the labour market of some countries for the first seven years of their membership. Similarly, the level of unpredictability associated with fluid migratory journeys across Europe needs to be considered carefully. I argue that a careful analysis of the socio-economic and political changes in CEE countries can offer an insight into the nature of particular migratory flows. Scrutinising the overarching macro conditions in each sending

country can correspondingly give some idea of the potential trends in terms of destination countries. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, this is certainly the case for young, highly skilled Bulgarian migrants. Thus, while legality and unpredictability are indeed important elements of the new European migratory system, each of them needs to be considered cautiously and in light of its particular contextual conditions.

Finally, 'liquid migration' is seen as a much more individualised life strategy, defined by a migratory habitus that encapsulates 'intentional unpredictability' (Engbersen and Snel, 2013, p. 34-35). Based on the idea that migrants sometimes move from one place to another without fixed aspirations and plans for the future, the notion of migratory habitus contributes to the perceived complete liquidity of intra-European mobility. This assumption is problematic as although people may not have clear plans for settlement or return, this does not automatically mean that intra-European mobility is an aimless exercise in moving across borders. Choosing to experience a different culture is a goal in itself and so is being open-minded about future options. Returning to Adey's (2010) earlier argument, mobility without a direction or in that sense – a purpose, is simply movement and not mobility.

Thus, the critical engagement with the idea of theorising the 'new' post-accession migratory flows from CEE to the West as 'liquid migration' reveals that one size does not fit all. Undeniably, such conceptualisation makes valuable claims in relation to the fluidity and multiplicity of migratory paths and journeys, however neither its key tenets nor its specific nature fully capture the experiences of the participants in this study. Therefore, to further contextualise highly skilled Bulgarian migratory flows, it is important to situate them in the literature on CEE migration in the UK. The review of this particular strand of the literature will enable the outline of certain areas that have been neglected and that this study aims to address.

Where's BG in CEE migration to the UK?

Central and Eastern European migration to Britain has proliferated in recent years and so has the literature on the topic. Despite the growing public and academic interest in this area, there are several gaps that can be noted. Firstly, and most notably, Bulgarian migratory flows are still comparatively less researched than those from countries such as Poland, Hungary and Romania (among many, see Csedő, 2008; Ryan, 2010; Ryan 2011; Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy, 2012; McGhee, Heath and Trevena, 2012; Moroşanu 2013a, 2013b; Moroşanu and Fox, 2013). On the one hand, such a focus can be explained by the differences in terms of scale. As a number of researchers have noted (see Black et al., 2010; Glorious et al., 2013) intra-European mobility has been dominated by Polish migration and in that sense, the UK as a receiving country has been no exception. On the other hand, the more prominent emphasis on some groups of people over others is potentially associated with the nature and characteristics of each wave of Eastern European enlargement. Thus, A8 countries not only acquired the right to travel freely to the UK earlier but they also, unlike A2 countries, were not subject to any labour restrictions. However, even when the focus is on the latter, Bulgarian migrants are only briefly mentioned in conjunction with Romanians. As already argued in the introduction, the latter contributes to an essentialist approach to A2 migrants and Eastern Europeans more broadly, neglecting the differences in the experiences of various groups of people.

Secondly, while some avenues for analysis within the literature on CEE migration to the UK have been explored thoroughly, others have received less attention. Correspondingly, a prominent focus within the literature has been the investigation of migrants' realities once in the host society. For example, focusing on ethnicity, Ryan (2010) has explored how Poles negotiate and construct their identities by engaging or disengaging with Polishness, while Rabikowska (2010) has approached the topic through food rituals as an analytical lens. Similarly, Romanians' identities and coping mechanisms in the host society have been analysed in relation to theories of racialisation in the work of Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy (2012) and Moroşanu and Fox (2013). Additionally, the high-low skilled

divide has been explored thoroughly through the work of Trevena (2013), who has considered macro, meso and micro factors that have led Polish graduates to undertake low skilled jobs, while in comparing Hungarian and Romanian migrants Csedő (2008) has questioned the meaning and connotations of the term ‘highly skilled’. Much attention has also been paid not only to the social networks that CEE migrants forge to navigate the host society realities but also to maintain transnational links (see Moroşanu 2013a, 2013b, Moskal 2013). While this clearly demonstrates the depth and richness of the field, some areas require further engagement. For example, the importance of CEE migrants’ pre-migratory context has been somewhat overlooked as a focal point and there is little information on how it informs people’s migration realities. Furthermore, a more nuanced engagement with CEE migratory flows is required, which takes into account not only cultural similarities but also draws out differences and specificities. In doing so, it is important to consider how overall migratory experiences are influenced by the conditions produced by both host and home societies on a macro, meso and micro level. Evidently, despite the growing interest in researching post-accession EU mobility and CEE migration to the UK more specifically, there are still some areas that require a more in-depth engagement.

Furthermore, consulting the literature on Bulgarian migration to the UK reveals a number of gaps, which require further investigation. Prior to the removal of labour restrictions for Bulgarian and Romanian nationals in Britain, a report was commissioned to assess the potential impact of such migratory flows (Rolfe et al. 2013). Although the document concluded that it is very unlikely that Bulgarians and Romanians will become a burden on the British social and welfare systems, its speculative (i.e. focused on future prognosis) nature offered little insight into the plans, goals and everyday realities of migrants themselves. However, there are a few studies that shed some light on these particular aspects. For example, as already mentioned, Ivancheva’s (2007) ethnographic research focuses on the experiences of both Bulgarian and Romanian students engaging in seasonal low skilled work at strawberry farms in Britain. Exploring student mobility and focusing solely on Bulgarians, Chongarova (2010a, 2010b, 2011) offers an insight into London-based

participants' educational and migratory patterns with a special focus on social remittances. Additionally, while Markova (2010b) looks at both Bulgarian labour and educational migration in London, Brighton and Hove, Maeva (2010) explores the role of Bulgarian community organisations. A common feature of these studies is that they are focusing on the research of young people (mostly students and workers, or both), particularly those who reside in London or the south of England. Additionally, apart from Ivancheva's (2007) study, there is a strong preference for quantitative methodologies – even in mixed method studies, the qualitative element is only supplementary to the quantitative one. These commonalities, however, reveal several aspects that remain under-explored with regards to the newest migratory flows from Bulgaria to Britain. Firstly, although there is a strong focus on student and labour migration, the highly skilled sub-division is less explored, particularly as a way of bridging the gap between both migratory categories. This in turn can lead to a more detailed overview of the mobilities of young Bulgarian people, who have not only chosen Britain as an educational destination but also, subsequently, as a place for professional realisation. Secondly, the focus on Bulgarian migration to the UK is limited in geographical terms as it completely disregards migratory flows to various parts of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. As it will be demonstrated in *chapter 3* and *4* of this thesis, Scotland is a particularly attractive destination for Bulgarian students due to not only the good reputation of its universities but also the financial privileges that they receive as EU citizens. Finally, in terms of the preferred methodological approaches, although quantitative research is invaluable in demonstrating overall trends and the complexity of phenomena, it is less sensitive to in-depth exploration of individual experiences.

Thus, this brief (and rather selective) overview of the literature in the area reveals a number of overlooked areas and particular aspects that require further investigation. It is precisely these issues that underpin both the importance and the significance of exploring the migratory experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in Britain. The value of the research lies within not only its goal to contribute to the field of migration and mobility but also in the ways in which it

aims to do so. Therefore, the study will address the gaps in the literature by looking at a relatively under-researched group of people (Bulgarians) at a particular stage of their lifecycle, who reside in various locations in the UK. The focus of this research is on the nexus between the pre-migratory stage and their migration realities and the consequences that they produce. Essentially, the project offers an in-depth understanding of a group of young people, whose journeys are not entirely ‘liquid’ as they continuously experience both the advantages and the tensions that arise from intra-European mobility.

Intersecting youth mobilities and highly skilled migration

This thesis is concerned not just with young people or highly skilled migrants but, in fact, with the migratory experiences of people who are both. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to explore the complex intersection between the literature on youth mobilities and the debates on highly skilled migration. On the one hand, the mobility of young people is a vast field, which encompasses different categories of migrants with varying migratory projects, grouped together under the ‘loose’ and rather contested notion of ‘youth’ (Arnett 2000; Bynner 2005; King et al. 2016). On the other hand, despite that highly skilled migration is a major and dynamic strand of the literature attracting more and more attention (among many, see Iredale 2001; Raghuram and Kofman 2002; Raghuram 2004; Favell 2008a; Csedő 2008; Ryan and Mulholland 2014), the term remains vague and contested. It is thus important to further elaborate how the term ‘highly skilled’ migrant is understood and employed in this study in relation to young people. To do so, this section will begin by briefly outlining theoretical avenues in conceptualising youth mobilities. Next, there will be critical engagement with the academic literature and UK-specific policies in relation to highly skilled migration, which will point out gaps in understanding that this study aims to address.

The nature and characteristics of youth mobilities as a phenomenon cannot be considered without engaging with two key aspects, namely: 1) defining who can

be considered a young person; and 2) discussing the key analytical avenues for scrutinising youth mobility. Firstly, the definitional boundaries of 'youth' are contested both in terms of specific age range and as a life-course category. As King et al. remind, the notion of 'youth' is not only socially and culturally constructed but also a contextual, a situational and a relational property (2016, p. 9). Thus, there are not only variations of the threshold to adulthood, but also these variations are the result of a negotiation between one's own perception of Self and how they are seen by others, particularly in specific situations. With little agreement on the meaning of 'youth', the way its nature and characteristics have been analysed produces further confusion. The notion of 'youth', usually juxtaposed with 'adulthood' rests on a number of conditions, which have become increasingly blurred due to the changing outlook of societies as a result of globalisation and technologization. These societal transformations have arguably led to a process of 'individualization' (Beck 1992) which, according to Arnett (2000), has established the preconditions for 'emerging adulthood' as a more fluid, bridging phase of one's lifecycle. More specifically, Arnett argues that '[b]ecause marriage and parenthood are delayed until the mid-twenties or late-twenties for most people, it is no longer normative for the late teens and early twenties to be a time of entering and settling into long-term adult roles' (2000, p. 469). Therefore, the 'volitional years' between 18 and 25 are seen as an in-between period, which is 'neither adolescence nor young adulthood' and is characterised by 'relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations' (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). Consequently, applying a human development approach to the notion of 'youth' reveals that young people and their actions (mobility practices including) have been theorised in relation to ideas of agency and transitions from one life stage to another (Bynner 2005; Langevang and Gough 2009; King et al. 2016). While the first idea aims to focus on young people as active agents who make decisions about their lifestyles, the second one emphasises that they also find themselves in a dynamic process of moving from one stage of their lifecycle to another. However, youth transitions as a concept is incredibly problematic not only in terms of its boundary parameters but also in terms of the assumed linearity of one's lifecycle. Recognising these issues

has shifted the focus away from fixed transitions from one phase of life to another and placed it on the process itself. Therefore, what is seen as crucial is not defining the boundaries of various transitions but the key moments within them, often defined as ‘turning points’, ‘ruptures’ and ‘becomings’ (see King et al., 2016, pp. 9-12). Additionally, in critiquing Arnett’s (2000) notion of ‘emergent adulthood’, Bynner rightfully contends that ‘[...] the psychological mode of ‘developmental stages’, [...] fails to recognize adequately that the huge diversity of individual experience is constrained by location in the social structure’ (2005, p. 378). Bynner (2005) thus takes a somewhat middling position, which recognises the importance of agency, simultaneously arguing it needs to be considered in conjunction with the social structures within which it manifests itself. Thus, not only does Beck’s (1992) ‘individualization’ have a limit but it also exists in a symbiosis with and is influenced by a variety of social organisations such as the family, the state.

Considering the discussion of the contested nature of ‘youth’, it is important to define who is categorised as a young person in this study. Driven by a life-span perspective, this research has aimed to include a variety of people who find themselves at different points of the ‘youth’ spectrum but have not firmly established their social roles and are in the process of assuming a more established social position. Recognising that experiencing mobility further complicates and to some extent even challenges ‘stability’ (see Bygnes and Erdal (2016) on grounded lives), such an approach has allowed to include a wide range of people. However, their experiences share the complexities of the ‘youthful spirit’ of being in the process of ‘becoming’ (Worth 2009 cited in King et al. 2016, p.9).

Embedded in the contested notion of youth, the literature on youth mobilities is a vast and equally complicated field. Focusing on its European context, King et al. note that broadly speaking youth mobility is driven by either the desire to study or to work, thus encompassing three types of people: students, low skilled and highly skilled migrants (2016, p. 3). As useful as these categories may be in offering an initial, generic categorisation of youth mobilities, they do little as to provide an

insight into how young people relate to the phenomenon of highly skilled migration. The latter will be considered further in detail below.

Notably, one's skills are an important criterion that determines a migrant's possibility to enter a host country and access the labour market. They have also become a factor that influences one's adjustment or even an indicator of their personality and values¹⁰. As observed by Raghuram and Kofman, the shift in valorising skills as a legal point of entry into the UK began in the 1960s, and by the 1970s it was firmly embedded into the British immigration system (2002, p. 2071). This tendency was further developed through the introduced in 2002 Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (hereafter HSMP), which was then substituted by the much more comprehensive list of criteria under the British Points-Based Immigration System (hereafter PBS)¹¹. According to the latter, classifying one as a highly skilled migrant is based on factors such as age, education, work experience and earnings, which could tilt the scales either way (UKBA, 2011, p.2).

Although directed mainly at third country nationals, Bulgarian migrants have also had to fulfil these criteria prior Bulgaria's accession to the EU in 2007. Between 2007 and 2014, Bulgarian nationals were still subject to restrictions, which regulated not only access to the labour market but also their highly skilled status. Thus, they were required to apply for different types of registration certificates on the basis of their status and purpose of stay: yellow for students and self-employed people; blue for highly skilled professionals and pink (worker accession cards) for those, who could not fit either category. Two key observations can be made in relation to the way highly skilled migrants are defined within British immigration policy. Firstly, there is a very firm delineation between students and workers, which

¹⁰ As seen through the media representation of low skilled migrant workers in the country, who are portrayed as 'thieves' that 'steal' British jobs. For other tabloid representation of Bulgarian migrants for example, see: Brown (2013).

¹¹PBS represents a means for regulating immigration in the UK. The scheme was implemented between 2008 and 2010, designed for non- EU nationals. It consists of 5 Tiers: Tier 1 (high value migrants), Tier 2 (skilled workers), Tier 3 (low- skilled labour, never used and currently suspended), Tier 4 (students), Tier 5 (temporary workers and youth mobility). Two of the categories under Tier 1 have been closed now – the Post- Study Work (PSW) visa since April 6 2012 and the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP). For more information, see UKBA website: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/working/>.

does not capture the experiences of those who can be classified as both. Secondly, these rules and regulations provide a rigid framework based on a variety of criteria such as age, occupation, work experience and earnings. However, in her study on Singaporean transmigrants in London, Elaine Ho argues for a trajectories perspective, which demonstrates that being categorised as highly skilled is an unfolding continuum of experiences, marked by conditions in both emigration and immigration contexts (2011, p. 117). Thus, the brief overview of British immigration policies demonstrates the need for a more flexible, yet precise approach to understanding the experiences of highly skilled migrants.

Within academia, however, a greater diversity can be observed which contributes to the general confusion regarding the term. While Salt (1992) is primarily concerned with people within certain occupations such as professional, managerial and technical migrants who accept job positions adequately matching their skills, Iredale (2001) strives to escape this narrow and limiting approach by developing a rather comprehensive typology to accommodate the various migratory patterns. Essentially, her classification system operates on the basis of five distinct criteria depending on motivation for migration, nature and source of destination, channel or mechanism, length of stay and mode of incorporation (Iredale, 2001, pp. 16-19). Ultimately, she also fails to recognise that being a highly skilled migrant does not represent a given status but rather an outcome of a negotiated relationship between the employer and the employee in migratory contexts. The research of Parutis (2011) problematizes the low-high skilled migration dichotomy by questioning its premises through the case of Poles and Lithuanians in London whose qualifications do not match the jobs they undertake. Although her study makes invaluable contributions such as the recognition of the labour market mobility of 'Eastern Europeans' in relation to cultural capital (i.e. skills, qualifications, aspirations), Parutis (2011) does not elaborate sufficiently on the nature of the relationship between skills and qualifications in migratory contexts. In that sense, Csedő's (2008) study adequately differentiates between highly skilled and highly qualified migrants, where the first group possesses not only general (level of education) and specific (work experience) skills but are also able to successfully

negotiate their credentials in migratory contexts. Additionally, Wolfeil (2009), Chongarova (2010a) and Iredale (2001) contend that students are a subset group of privileged migrants. Evidently, highly skilled migration represents an incredibly rich and yet, problematic stream within migration studies.

Drawing on Csedő (2008), this study adopts a broad definition of highly skilled migrants, which focuses on their (career) aspirations and their ability to successfully negotiate their skills in a migratory context. Essentially, this research includes both young professionals and students. The latter are in the process of obtaining their degree, which is a position that not only demonstrates their aspirations but also one, which they have managed to secure after negotiating their skills against entry criteria. Similarly, students who are employed part-time in low skilled positions are also included as their jobs are not their primary reason for migration but rather a way to support themselves financially while studying. Thus, looking at students and young professionals effectively serves to illuminate the intersection between youth mobilities and highly skilled migration. Moreover, this approach opens up new avenues for analysis that offer an insight into the similarities and differences of migratory experiences of a wider spectrum of young Bulgarians in the UK.

Thus, the chapter has so far contextualised theoretically the phenomenon of young, highly skilled migration from Bulgaria, simultaneously engaging in a discussion on the key terminology employed in the study. The text has also pointed out to some areas that have been overlooked, which not only make this research quite unique but also timely and necessary. Therefore, the second half of this chapter will operationalise the concept of a migratory experience by looking at the theoretical matrix, which underpins it.

Operationalising migratory experiences: liminality and its consequences

The study of migration – its nature, characteristics, forms and implications – draws on a long history of theorising an ever-elusive and constantly changing

phenomenon. Castles and Miller provide a useful model, which centres upon the concept of the migratory process, which ‘[...] sums up the complex sets of factors and interactions which lead to international migration and influence its course’ (2009, p. 21). This model not only emphasises the dynamics of the phenomenon but it also considers the myriad of factors and implications, resulting from the negotiation between migratory projects and realities in an environment, influenced by host and home society conditions. This wide-ranging conceptualisation is useful in analysing migration as a phenomenon from different angles by using various approaches.

Drawing on this broad perspective of migration, this study uses a transnational lens to scrutinise the migratory experiences of young, Bulgarian highly skilled migrants. More specifically, such an approach to migration centres upon the understanding that ‘[t]ransnational migration is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’ (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1995, p. 48). The value of this understanding lies in the fact that it focuses on the *dynamics* of a *process*, underscoring a *multiplicity* (Bauböck, 2010) and *fluidity* (Robins and Aksoy, 2001; Haller and Landolt, 2005) of attachments and belongingness. Importantly, the strength of a transnational stance is demonstrated by the fact that it ‘[...] removes the blinders methodological nationalism’ (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 601) or the understanding that the nation-state is the sole organising principle of societal life. However, unlike the proponents of ‘liquid migration’ (Engbersen, Snel and de Boom, 2010; Engbersen and Snel, 2013) who completely ignore the role of nation-states, transnationalism scholars argue for a reconceptualised understanding of society where state actors continue to shape but not limit the various cultural, political and socio-economic linkages that people forge across borders (Glick Schiller, 2005, p.440).

Furthermore, in the process of refining the theoretical premises of transnationalism several scholars have proposed conceptual tools to strengthen the understanding of the approach. For example, both Faist (2000a; 2000b) and Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) adopt a broad definition of transnationalism. While Faist

(2000a; 2000b) puts forward the idea of ‘transnational social spaces’, which refers to a cross-border domain that prioritises social relations and institutions, Levitt and Glick Schiller’s (2004) ‘transnational social fields’ encompass both migrants and non-migrants. Comparatively, Portes espouses a narrower understanding of the idea, reminding that ‘not all immigrants are transnationals’ but also recognising that higher human capital and by extension – education – increase the likelihood of engaging in transnational social practices (2003, p. 876 and p. 886). Finally, an important contribution is made by Parutis who further builds on the understanding of ‘middling transnationalism’ or the transnational practices of migrants who illustrate the gap between education and occupation but nonetheless actively participate in a cross-border domain of social relations (2011, p. 37).

Taking into account the nuanced character of transnationalism as an approach to studying migration, this study views it as particularly beneficial in understanding how young, highly skilled Bulgarians navigate simultaneously the opportunities, constraints and demands posed by both host and home societies. Thus, the thesis approaches the phenomenon from an agency point of view, i.e. looking at how the people involved in the act of migration make sense of their own experiences, without ignoring the involvement of those left behind. However, a few clarifications need to be made. Firstly, it is recognised that it is only possible to offer an *interpretation* of participants’ ways of understanding their migratory choices (see *chapter 3*). Secondly, experiences have an inherently subjective and personal nature. As Szakolczai asserts:

“Having” an experience implies that something happens to us – and the word “happen” must be taken seriously, as any experience is first of all *an event*. An event exactly because it just happens, it is unique and fleeting; and it involves not just our senses, but our entire existence as well. The consequences are subjectivity and manifoldness. Subjectivity, as existential involvement renders the understanding of our own experiences as one-sided, opaque; and manifoldness, [...] helps us to acknowledge perspective (italics in original, 2009, p.147)

Thus, an experiential approach to understanding migration as a phenomenon focuses on not only how the event of relocation happens but also how it affects one’s entire existence, emotions, values and identities. In fact, it uses the latter as a

gateway to understanding the essence of migration itself. Furthermore, such an approach looks at the unique and personal, simultaneously recognising the similarities and differences experienced by others. Ultimately, the value of such a perspective is that it not only takes into account various factors and implications that arise as a result of geographical mobility, but also that it does so by shifting the focus towards people and their ways of sense-making.

As King rightfully notes, despite that transnationalism is invaluable in questioning simplistic assumptions about the linearity of migration, it should be understood as an ‘analytical theme’ (2012, p. 25). Therefore, it is important to consider the key conceptual approaches that have been utilised in operationalising a transnational perspective on migration. Among the many, a prominent tendency within the field of migration studies, particularly in relation to students, highly skilled migrants or ‘middling transnationals’, has been to use Bourdieu’s (1986) conceptual apparatus. As already mentioned, Parutis’ (2011) study is firmly embedded in Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of capital and its economic (financial and material assets), social (social networks) and cultural (non-economic resources, which influence academic success) forms. Thus, for Parutis (2011) using cultural capital as a key focal point proves quite instrumental in illustrating how East Europeans move between jobs to improve their economic position in the British labour market. Correspondingly, Parutis’ (2011) use of a Bourdieusian framework enables her not only to highlight migrants’ agency but also the dynamics of employment as a process. Although focusing on Polish migrants’ social networks, similar trends can be discerned in Ryan’s (2011) research. In that sense, Tran’s (2016) study employs a much more comprehensive Bourdieusian analysis in exploring the experiences of international students in vocational education and training (hereafter VET) in Australia. More specifically, she argues that VET students’ experiences need to be embedded in the contrasting social fields produced by the intersection of international education and student mobility. Furthermore, Tran notes that students’ habitus, or the set of schemes generated by certain conditions that influence the way individuals think, should also be considered (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, cited in Tran, 2016, p. 1274). She more specifically

argues that mobility should be understood as ‘becoming’, which illustrates ‘[...] international students’ process of capital mobilisation and conversion into positional, economic and social advantages’ (Tran, 2016, p. 1278). Thus, this rather brief overview of (some of) the research that employs a Bourdieusian analytical approach to studying migrants’ transnational practices reveals some undeniable advantages. Namely, the latter include the ability to present a coherent, well-structured way of making sense of migrants’ experiences by highlighting their agency and the dynamics of the migratory process. Yet at the same time, a Bourdieusian theoretical framework also lends itself into a rigidity of analysis by predominantly focusing on the various pools of resources (be they economic, social or cultural) that are available or not to migrants and that migrants are able to draw on or not in a migratory context. Such an approach thus largely overlooks the importance of subjectivities and discontinuities in shaping migratory experiences. Therefore, although this study recognises the value and the suitability of a Bourdieusian apparatus in analysing young, highly skilled Bulgarians’ experience in the UK, it does not explicitly employ it in its analysis. Instead, it uses the notion of liminality (van Gennep [1909] 1960), which not only enables the scrutiny of the dynamics of mobility and the loss and generation of various types of capital but it also captures the subjectivities that are produced in this process as well as its constructive and deconstructive effects.

Thus, drawing on Castles and Miller’s (2009) conceptualisation of migration as a process, the study argues that migratory experiences have dynamics of their own too. To gain an in-depth understanding of them, both (migratory) *projects* and (migration) *reality* need to be analysed in order to assure a better understanding of migration as a phenomenon and its *consequences*. Therefore, the sub-sections to follow will firstly operationalise migratory projects and will draw on key literature that has been instrumental in analysing young, highly skilled Bulgarians’ migration reality. This will be followed by a sub-section that examines the tension between migration as a project and as reality through the prism of liminality. Finally, the migration consequences in terms of identities and plans for the future will be considered theoretically.

Migratory projects: unpacking the notion

A brief look at the literature on migration theories, reveals that the term ‘migration project’ is not a new notion (see for example Hammar, 1989). However, it has gained more prominence from the 2000s onwards to denote the myriad of experiences, pathways and plans of various groups of migrants of relocating from one place to another – even in relation to the continuous and simultaneous everyday connections they maintain transnationally (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc, 1995). Despite the prolific use of migration as a project, it is surprising that the notion has been treated rather uncritically, without any clear definitional boundaries. On the whole, the need of theoretically unpacking the notion of a migration project has arguably been overshadowed by the semantic connotations that the term ‘project’ pertains. Thus, project’s synonymy with a plan of action, a programme, a venture and many others, has led to the belief that migration project is a self-explanatory idea. While this has allowed its widespread application, it has nonetheless contributed to the elusiveness of its nature and characteristics. Therefore, in what follows, I will present three studies which have contributed to an understanding of the concept of migration project in order to draw out some of the assumed characteristics and applications.

Firstly, Carling’s (2002) research on Cape Verdean migration is key. His aspiration/ability model demonstrates that ‘[...] migration first involves a *wish* to migrate, and second, the *realisation* of this wish’ (emphasis in the original, Carling, 2002, p. 5). Neither of these can singlehandedly explain migratory flows but rather – attention needs to be paid to each aspect by taking into account both personal characteristics (micro level) and the overall migration environment and its conditions (macro level) (Carling, 2002, p.13). While Carling’s (2002) aspiration/ability model is particularly instrumental in understanding the key position of immobility – both as a phenomenon on its own and as a factor that can trigger migration, it provides insufficient understanding of the practicalities of planning the migratory project itself. Nonetheless, the model is a good starting

point, especially because it takes into account the socially constructed meaning and moral dimension of migratory projects (Carling, 2002, p. 14 and p. 17).

In that sense, Ferro's (2006) research on skilled Romanians not only recognises the contribution of the aspiration/ability model but also builds on it further by focusing specifically on the idea of the migratory project. The latter, according to her, is a useful tool for understanding the pre-migratory stage of one's experience, which is often overlooked when migratory experiences are considered. Therefore, she contends that '[...] the migratory project is not just the outcome of a simple rationale or economic calculation, but also includes a wide range of motivations and perspectives' (Ferro, 2006, p. 180). Thus, Ferro's (2006) approach entails a cost-benefit analysis of determining factors in migration, followed by an analysis of micro-sociological approaches of pre-migration behaviour. While structural factors and contextual influence take precedence in the first, the second is mostly focused on the individual and their 'migratory knowledge', which is shaped by '[...] networks of relations, circulation of information, ethnic chains to organise, support and enable the integration of migrants' (Ferro, 2006, p.176). This conceptualisation of migratory projects has both advantages and disadvantages.

Firstly, while its strength lies in the fact that it incorporates both the macro and micro level of analysis, it lacks depth in relation to the meso level of analysis or those intermediaries that consist of 'certain individuals, groups or institutions take on the role of mediating between migrants and political or economic institutions' (Castles and Miller, 2009, p. 29). Kofman et al. adopt a broader position: drawing on previous research, they call this second level of analysis the 'migration institution', which includes not only formal structures and institutions (recruitment agencies, mediators and facilitators), but also informal networks such as individuals' households and friendship circles (2000, p. 32). Consequently, this study on young, highly skilled Bulgarians in Britain espouses this definition of the meso level of analysis as it allows more scope for the analysis of the participants' migratory projects.

Secondly, by placing the focus on the individual and their support networks, Ferro (2006) firmly establishes migratory projects as an act of agency. While the latter will be explained in more detail below, it needs to be noted that by focusing on a cost-benefit analysis, however, the study portrays migrants as completely rational actors, leaving little room for the recognition of the role of subjectivity and emotions in their migratory choices.

Finally, Petroff (2016) raises some important points in the case of skilled Romanians in Spain. Using a life course approach, she incorporates all three levels of analysis (macro, meso and micro) and thus, addresses some of the shortfalls of Ferro's (2006) study. Furthermore, a particular strength of Petroff's (2016) research is her focus on life trajectories, which enables her to articulate and accentuate the role of agency in migratory projects. Mentioned by Ferro (2006) but analysed in more detail by Petroff (2016), indeed agency is a central idea that plays a huge role in the nature and characteristics of migratory experiences. As Crockett notes, both psychology and sociology have made significant contributions to its understanding, where the first focuses mainly on the individual in terms of control and the latter emphasises the role of society as the driving force behind individuals' agency (2002, pp. 1-2). Respectively, Giddens' (1984) structuration theory not only argues that the macro and micro cannot alone explain social phenomena but it also reveals 'the duality of structure as structure both constrains and enables the actions of individuals' (Petroff, 2016, p.5). This detailed approach to agency that can be observed in Petroff's (2016) analysis, which, along with the other two components (time and space and linked lives¹²), offer a more comprehensive way of studying migratory projects. However, by claiming that the first stage of migratory projects extends from pre-migration to incorporation, she ultimately fails to recognise the differentiation between migration as a *project* and as a *reality* and the potentially contested nature of their relationship.

¹² The principle of time and space Petroff relates to the structural level of analysis, whereas the principle of linked lives is associated with the meso level of scrutiny (2009, p.5).

Thus, as the brief literature review above has demonstrated, the notion of a migratory project is rather unclear, which undermines its potential for explaining an important component of migratory processes, namely the personal dimension of a collective, contextualised action. Therefore, this study is based upon the view that a migratory project is a personalised (but also collective) and carefully planned, often reactionary plan of action with the aim to pursue a specific goal or purpose which may change over time, which involves spatial relocation and occurs as a result of a negotiation among structural (macro), intermediary (meso) and subjective (micro) factors. Thus, thinking of migration as a project offers the possibility of providing a personal context to the understanding of migrants' journey (emotional, physical and virtual¹³) from a home to a host society, simultaneously taking into account the factors that influence their decisions, and the ways in which they have envisaged, planned and carried out that endeavour. Furthermore, it allows the possibility to not only understand migrants' ambitions and goals but also how they change over time. Additionally, the value of the notion of migratory projects lies within its ability to highlight the specificity of the pathway that each migrant follows, simultaneously drawing on similarities and differences. This allows accentuating the uniqueness of individuality without disregarding the commonalities within a collective. A focus on migratory projects places strong emphasis on the interplay of the macro, meso and micro level of analysis. The first one takes into account the importance and influence of overarching tendencies and processes, simultaneously highlighting their temporal and spatial specificities. The second one centres upon the role of various institutions, organisations as well as networks that not only inform migration knowledge but also direct migratory flows. Finally, the micro level looks at agency by paying attention to the individuals' personality traits that inform and shape migratory decisions as well as how they interact with social structures. All these reasons not only highlight the importance

¹³ Ferro introduces the idea of 'virtual mobility' or 'brains without bodies', whereby individuals are employed by a multinational company and collaborate with colleagues across the globe without leaving their home country but crossing virtual borders nonetheless (2006, p.187).

of a migratory project as a notion in itself but also its ability to serve as a precondition of understanding migrants' experiences in the host society.

Migration realities: otherness, stereotypes and adjustment

An inseparable component of the migratory process is what happens once migrants arrive in the host society and how their migratory projects react with the conditions produced by a new, foreign environment. Looking at one's migration realities then may encompass a variety of elements such as, among many, a focus on the way the macro conditions of the host society affect migrant livelihoods, how migrants react to them, how they interact with the local population or how they maintain links with the homeland transnationally. Regardless of the approach, at its very core, one's migration realities are about the change, produced by the encounter with something new, different and often unfamiliar. A key element of the migratory process then is how that change is dealt with and managed. Becoming part of a host society involves a process of integration, which may involve various state approaches such as assimilationism, segregation or multiculturalism, which stand at different points on the spectrum of appreciation of and tolerance towards the Other (Castles and Miller, 2009). While this research project recognises the importance of state approaches to managing migration in shaping migratory experiences, it focuses instead on the migrant perspective. Thus, the research aims to 1) find out how young, highly skilled Bulgarians adjust to the society and 2) in doing so, how they engage the overall macro conditions produced by both host and home societies. A key conceptual idea that offers an insight into the second aspect is that of the 'everyday', while adjustment needs to be contextualised more broadly in terms of perceptions of migration in both host and home societies. Consequently, it is necessary to engage more thoroughly with the notions of 'stereotypes' and 'othering'. Each of these conceptual ideas will be discussed in more detail below.

One's adjustment to a host society is a complex and multi-layered process. As such, adjustment as a way of dealing with change in a migratory context is a social phenomenon positioned at the heart of the tension between structure and

agency. A developmental emphasis sees it as an ‘exercise’ in ‘resocialisation’ (Taft, 1973), while a focus on cultural differences between societies argues that adaptation to a host society involves a process of ‘acculturation’ (Berry, 1997). Nonetheless, a migrant’s adjustment to a host society is not a straightforward, linear process and it certainly is one that affects the overall perception of one’s migratory experience. As such, it is inevitably a process, embedded in attitudes towards and perceptions of migrants and migration in general. In that sense, as *chapter 1* has demonstrated, the heightened levels of migration within and outside the EU, combined with the effects of the ongoing economic crisis, have not only made the presence of the Other(s) more visible and threatening in host societies but also their absence from the home society – more painful. Thus, one’s relocation abroad has arguably become a catalyst for anxiety channelled into various stereotypes towards migrants, which have subjected them to processes of othering in both societies. Evidently, to understand the contextual significance and importance of adjustment, it is necessary to look at the perceptions towards migration in both sending and receiving societies. I contend that othering and stereotypes are not only intrinsically interrelated but their nature and characteristics also ultimately impact upon adjustment, affecting one’s migration realities. Therefore, in the next few paragraphs I will firstly explore the notion of stereotypes as a way of understanding the basis upon which othering operates. Arguing that migrants – young, highly skilled Bulgarians in particular – are exposed to simultaneously operating internal and external stereotypes, I will conceptualise the idea of double-sided othering, which provides a useful analytical framework for the understanding of migration realities and the corresponding processes of adjustment.

The ontological foundations of stereotypes can be traced to the 1920s when Walter Lippmann defined the concept as ‘pictures in our heads’ (Seiter, 1986, p. 16), thus highlighting the inflexibility of stereotypical perceptions, usually related to images and ideas that are incorrect and rather simplistic. Consequently, stereotypes not only ‘[...] erase a person’s individuality’, but they also ‘[...] control and constrain people’ (Anderson, 2010, p. 19). Evidently, the concept involves the establishment of a power relationship, which impacts on one’s identity. Three

further key points emerge when scrutinising the concept of the stereotype. Firstly, '[...] social stereotypes exaggerate and homogenise traits held to be characteristic of particular categories and serve as blanket generalisations for all individuals assigned to such categories' (Pickering, 2001, p. 10). This observation underlines two of the most prominent characteristics of stereotypes – their metonymic and essentialist properties. Thus, national stereotypes not only 'label' groups of people by ascribing characteristics, but they also claim uniformity of 'packaging'. Secondly, again claimed by Pickering, stereotypes dwell in the realm of the politics of representation and as such, they are sensitive to socio-temporal conditions (2001, p. xiv). While the first argument highlights the intricate relationship between stereotypes and identity, the second one points to the need to contextualise the emergence of such perceptions. The terms stereotypes and the Other will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis as Pickering rightfully observes that both concepts entail the same processes of categorisation and differentiation (2001, p. xiv). These processes of othering, however, require further clarification.

In that sense, providing a thorough ontological and epistemological overview of the notion of othering, Jensen affirms its postcolonial roots, noting that Spivak was the first scholar to use it in a systematic way in 1985 to denote a multidimensional process, involving various forms of social differentiation (2011, pp. 64–65). This observation revolves around the idea of inferiority and subordination which emerge as the aimed result of such processes of categorisation. More modern conceptions of the idea continue this line of thought and describe othering as a 'process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between 'us' and 'them' – between the more and the less powerful – and through which social distance is established and maintained' (Lister cited in Jensen, 2011, p. 65). This definition highlights the mechanics of identity formation which operate within the process of othering. In that sense, the establishment of an 'us and them' rhetoric strongly relies on employing a reductionist approach. The latter is achieved through the use of stereotypes, whose homogenising properties play a crucial role in establishing relations of superiority and subordination. Jensen's (2011) own

definition aims to highlight both the power dynamics and the embeddedness of identity in the process of othering, which entails:

[...] discursive processes by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups. Such discursive processes affirm the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and condition identity formation among the subordinate (*italics in original*, p. 65)

Consequently, the conditionality of identity is located in the power dynamics of the discursive realm of social differentiation. Jensen recognises the need to move away from dichotomous understandings of both othering and identity, which rely solely on binary oppositions (2011, p. 66). Thus, a critical engagement with the process of othering allows the recognition of agency. The latter not only questions the ability of othering to draw the boundaries between superiority and subordination, but it also blurs them by enabling resistance.

Indeed, Jensen's (2011) work raises some valid points with regards to the process of othering such as its nexus with the notions of power and identity. Yet, his analysis remains rather limited due to its narrow contextualisation. As Triandafyllidou has rightfully argued that: 'In a world organized into nations and national states, th[e] absence from the country of origin and presence in a foreign one lead to the exclusion of the immigrant from either society' (2006, p. 287). Evidently, to understand migrant experiences, it is important to consider the context and implications of both dominant external stereotyping discourses (those produced by the host society) and the internal ones (those produced by the home society). Therefore, it is necessary to stretch the concept of othering to allow a wider contextualisation. I argue that a particularly useful critical lens is provided by the concept of double-sided othering, which I define in the following way: the simultaneous processes of external and internal stereotyping, which delineate the contours of a temporally- and spatially-bound discursive realm, based on constant power renegotiations, which impact upon migrants' everyday realities. Besides the centrality of stereotypes, this definition highlights the dynamic nature of double-

sided othering. More importantly, it captures the fluid essence of the power relationships between the Othering and the Othered, which emerge as a result from double-sided othering. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of contextualising the occurrence of double-sided othering to fully understand migrants' experiences. Finally, it becomes evident that double-sided othering is a key element of the context that migrants find themselves in. With this in mind, approaching adjustment from a migrant point of view allows not only the recognition of adaptation as multi-stage process but it also provides the opportunity to take into account what kind of techniques or approaches migrants employ in each stage, simultaneously assessing how one's emotional well-being is affected.

Drawing largely on Karner (2007), I argue that the everyday as a notion offers a valuable critical lens for exploring the variety of ways and techniques that migrants employ in adjusting (or not) to the host society. The everyday, as Karner contends, '[...] may be 'ordinary' but it is not trivial: it is politically charged and sociologically significant [...]' (2007, p. 38). As such, the everyday has (at least) three, interrelated aspects in Karner's (2007) work. Firstly, it unravels the relationship between structure and agency by looking at power and resistance, which demonstrates the political connotations of the term. Secondly, its reflexive properties allow to examine to what extent people engage actively with what happens around them and finally, its historical aspect draws the attention to the importance of positioning contextually the role of the everyday (Karner, 2007, pp. 37-43). Thus, applied to a migratory context the everyday offers a key to understanding one's migration reality. More specifically, analysing migrants' everyday practices provides an insight into the various processes and stages that migrants go through to adjust to the host society. Their adjustment techniques are then revealed as multi-layered, as strategies to engage or not with their context, as a way of resisting or conforming to attitudes and social constructions of migration, produced by both the home and host societies.

Liminality: when (migration) project meets reality

Considering the discussion on migration as a project and as a reality, it becomes evident that migratory experiences can be both personal and collective, subject to a variety of factors and conditions produced simultaneously by both sending and receiving countries. Consequently, the in-between becomes a state in itself with its own dynamics and characteristics, where migrants need to navigate a series of physical, emotional and cognitive transitions. In such a context, change takes a central position and dealing with it contextualises the contested relationship between migration as a project and as a reality, ultimately underpinning the essence of the overall migratory experience. Therefore, to better understand transnational migratory experiences, an in-depth understanding of this state of in-betweenness is necessary. The notion of liminality first conceptualised by van Gennep ([1909] 1960), later developed by Turner (1967; 1969; 1985) and elaborated on by Thomassen (2006; 2014) and Szokolczai (2009) is particularly instrumental in understanding the contextual dubiousness of migration as a phenomenon. Therefore, this sub-section will begin by providing a brief historical overview of the conceptualisation of the notion, paying particular attention to its nature and characteristics. This will be followed by a critical analysis of how liminality has been applied conceptually to the field of migration studies. Ultimately, it will be argued that one's relocation from a home to a host society triggers a period of in-betweenness, characterised by the tenuous relation between migratory projects and realities; thus affecting their overall migratory experiences.

Rooted in anthropology, liminality as a conceptual idea has gradually gained prominence in the social sciences to describe periods of transition and change, and their corresponding conditions, which question the very basis of what constitutes 'normality' and 'stability'. Despite the significance of liminality as a conceptual way of making sense of change, its initial formulation has been described as a 'genuine "false start"' (Szokolczai, 2009, p. 141). Indeed, liminality was first introduced by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 in his seminal work 'Rites of passage' but it was not until much later that the idea gained more prominence through the

work of Victor Turner, who devoted his academic attention to defining and elaborating on the condition of ‘betwixt and between’(1967; 1969; 1985). More recently, Thomassen (2006; 2014) and Szokolczai (2009) have drawn the attention to the conceptual value of liminality as it was originally developed in ‘Rites of passage’. The central idea, which underpins the book is that ‘[t]he life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another’ (van Gennep [1909] 1960, pp. 2-3). Van Gennep further elaborates that within each of these ‘crossings’ or ‘transitions’ is not only marked by a ceremony or ritual but also that within them, three separate but interlinked stages can be discerned: preliminal (separation rites), liminal (rites of transition) and postliminal (rites of incorporation) ([1909] 1960, p. 11). As such, the value of this conceptualisation of rites of passage lies in the strong emphasis on the dynamics of experience. This focus becomes even more evident when van Gennep clearly identifies the middle, liminal stage as the most important one in rites of passage, simultaneously suggesting that territorial crossings offer a useful contextual background for the discussion of rites of passages ([1909] 1960, p. 15). In other words, life cycle transitions not only go hand in hand with physical crossings but the latter can also serve as a way of uncovering in more detail the nature and characteristics of the first. Liminality as an idea then emerges as a very useful conceptual way of evaluating experience, taking into account all factors, conditions and subjectivities that underpin it. Yet, van Gennep’s ([1909] 1960) important contribution on liminality has remained misunderstood and undervalued not only in the scholar’s lifetime but also for many years after his death due to the powerful influence of Durkheimian thought in academia (see Szokolczai, 2009; Thomassen, 2014).

Engaging with the nature and characteristics of liminality further, however, clearly demonstrates not only its robustness but also its usefulness in gaining a deeper understanding of migratory experiences. As van Gennep has noted, liminality’s importance is underpinned by the fact that ‘ [...] life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn’ ([1909] 1960, p. 189). Liminality then is about experiencing change and dealing

with its consequences; it is a state of in-betweenness, of crossing a threshold (physical, cognitive or emotive), which redefines and reformulates one's existence. In a similar manner, migrating from one place to another involves similar transitions, where migratory projects are placed in new realities, often not only redefining migratory goals but also affecting people's identities and their plans for the future. Experiencing migration then is essentially undergoing a period of liminality, which can entail a complex amalgamation of often oppositional feelings and as such, it can be both liberating and entrapping, constructive and deconstructive. Furthermore, as Thomassen elaborates:

Liminality reminds us of the moment we left our parents' home, that mixture of joy and anxiety, that strange mixture of freedom and homelessness; that pleasant but unsettling sensation of infinity and openness of possibilities which at some moment sooner or later – will start searching for a new frame to settle within (2014, p. 4)

Undergoing a period of liminality goes straight to the core of an experience, uncovering its various nuances and opportunities. Essentially it is not only about the loss of frames of reference but also about the process of discovering new ones, which in itself can be both distressing and liberating – even exciting. Liminality entails a complex amalgamation of uncertainty and ambiguity but offers the possibility for reinvention and as Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra (2015) argue it is a combination of 'neither...nor' and 'as well as...'. Finally, as Thomassen (2014) contends, the conceptual value of liminality lies in its malleability: that is, in its anthropological sense, it can not only refer to either temporary and more permanent, longitudinal transitions but it can also be applied to individuals, social groups, whole societies or even civilizations to evaluate the nature and characteristics of transitory periods.

Consequently, migration research has also benefitted from the conceptual value of liminality in gaining an insight into people's experiences. The notion has been widely applied to spaces of uncertainty or individuals, who find themselves in an ambiguous position with regards to their legal status (Menjívar, 2006; Collyer, 2007). Notably, liminality has also served as a useful lens to illuminate the transnational experiences, practices and their implications upon the identities of

various groups of people (Huang, Yeoh and Lam, 2008; Lan and Wu, 2016). As Huan, Yeoh and Lam rightfully note, '[...] transnationals and their family members often grapple with a sense of liminality – a state of ambiguity, openness and indeterminacy of identity – as they negotiate their transnational life courses' (2008, p. 7). This is particularly well demonstrated by Lan and Wu's (2016) study on student migration from Taiwan to China. Specifically, the authors analyse the effect of China's state approach of creating an exceptional membership and privileged autonomy in border crossing for Taiwanese students in order to undermine the political entity of their country of origin (Lan and Wu, 2016, p. 746). Furthermore, Lan and Wu's analysis demonstrates that the privileges offered by China's recruitment policy have not only impacted upon Taiwanese students' identities but that they have also unlocked liminality which leaves them 'negotiat[ing] the frontiers of difference: seeking distinction, seeking assimilation, and cosmopolitanism' (2016, p. 753). Thus, evidently, by drawing attention to the particularities of undergoing transition and its consequences, liminality offers a unique insight into migratory experiences, particularly transnational ones. Therefore, this study draws on the invaluable analytical possibilities that liminality offers in two particular aspects. Firstly, the notion is insightful in contextualising the contested relationship between one's migratory projects and their realities. In that sense, I argue that any type of migration inevitably unlocks of period of liminality. The latter then is a useful conceptual lens that allows an in-depth understanding into how the 'before' and 'during' of migration experiences affect one's very existence. Secondly, liminality is instrumental in providing a better understanding of the emotional consequences that geographical relocation produces (particularly in relation to continuous transnational attachments) and the ways in which this shapes people's identities. The latter will be explored further in the next sub-section.

Migratory consequences: identities and plans for the future

The liminal, contested relationship between migration as a project and as a reality, which underpins one's migratory experiences, ultimately has its consequences. The latter can be both individual and collective, affecting people's identities, sense of belonging and plans for the future. As such, this period of liminality accentuates the dynamic nature of the migration process: whether migrants become firmly embedded in the host society through settlement, decide to return to the homeland or, alternatively, find themselves in a situation when they daily maintain transnational links with both. Additionally, one's migratory project can not only change over time but also lead to the development of a new migratory project in light of one's migratory experiences. While migrants' plans for the future are subject to change, so are the ways in which they construct their identities in light of their migrant realities as already demonstrated in this chapter. Focusing on this particular aspect, this sub-section will elaborate on the theoretical debates and ideas that have informed the data analysis in that respect. Recognising the contested nature of identities, this section will broadly explore the key characteristics of the concept.

Sketching the meaning of identity, Guibernau postulates that it '[...] is a definition, an interpretation of the self that establishes what and where the person is in both social and psychological terms' (2007, p. 10). Correspondingly, Smith (1995) and Medrano and Gutiérrez (2001) stress the differentiation between individual and group identities, whereas the first are multiple and often situational while the latter tend to be more pervasive. Hence, evidently, the contested nature of identity stems from its meaning that is multidimensional and fluid. It is within the synergy between individual and group identities that one of the dimensions of identity construction occurs.

Similarly, identity is also constructed along the axis of defining criteria such as similarity and difference, which underpin the construction of group belongingness. Guibernau claims that '[...] the defining criteria of identity are continuity over time and differentiation from others [...]' (2007, p.10). Likewise,

Jenkins (2008) provides an internal and external dimension to the identification process of identity formation. For the establishment of collective identity, the internal side of it requires active cognitive realisation by the group members themselves while the external element necessitates the same active cognitive element to be performed by others (Jenkins, 2008, p. 106 and p. 108). Following the same vein, Isin and Wood postulate that ‘identity’ is a relational concept, whereby ‘[...] individuals produce and reproduce equivalent dispositions [...]’ which results in a ‘[...] dialogical process of recognition [that] is an ongoing negotiation of habituating, inculcating, defining, redefining and reproducing these dispositions’ (1999, p. 19). Thus, once again, the nature of identity as a concept emerges as multi-layered and fluid. While the differentiation between individual and group identification along the similarity and difference axis reveals a two-dimensional understanding of the concept, it nonetheless represents a simplified understanding of a complex phenomenon. In that sense, the forces of globalisation have changed not only the outlook of societies but also the life courses of many people who have had to navigate through shifting social terrains to constantly ‘reinvent’ themselves (Elliot 2013). In such a setting, flexibility is a highly praised human quality. Therefore, studying identities produced by ‘new’ (migratory) realities requires moving away from binary divisions and exploring different theoretical frameworks that can better accommodate their dynamic, context- specific nature.

This is particularly the case for young Bulgarian migrants in Britain who, navigating through both home and host society contexts, have had to not only adapt to this reality but also to reinvent themselves – processes that affect their identities and plans for the future.

Conclusion

While movement may be simple but never simplistic, experiencing it and making sense of it is neither. Indeed, this chapter has demonstrated the multi-layered complexity of theoretically locating the newest Bulgarian migratory flows to

Britain. Critically engaging with the literature, the purpose of the text was two-fold. On the one hand, it aimed to contextualise the study, highlighting its significance by pointing out areas that require further investigation. On the other hand, a key concern was to demonstrate how these gaps and omissions have been addressed and explored through the research on young, highly skilled Bulgarians.

Bulgarian migratory flows to Britain although not a new phenomenon, have significantly intensified as a result of the processes of European integration. The latter, as the chapter has argued, has not been unproblematic. The cosmopolitan ideas of tolerance, equality and diversity embedded in the freedom of movement and European citizenship have emerged alongside the rise of nationalisms across Europe. In fact, it is the tenuous but simultaneous operation of both cosmopolitanism and nationalism that have shaped the character of European integration. Its intensification in the last twenty years or so has led to the first and second wave of Eastern European enlargement, thus changing the outlook of the European migration regime. Situated in this context, the case of young, highly skilled Bulgarian migrants in Britain stands out for a number of reasons. Firstly, as part of the newest migratory flows from Bulgaria, it offers the possibility to study how the arguably ongoing transition to democracy and the country's westernization have affected young generations and their decisions to live, work and study abroad. Secondly, its peculiar position stems from the fact that while Bulgarians were able to benefit from the freedom of movement, for the first seven years after the country joined the EU, they were exposed to restrictions to the labour market of a number of countries, Britain being one of them. Two key observations have been made in that respect. On the one hand, despite the uniqueness of the case study, the phenomenon of young, highly skilled Bulgarian migration in Britain has remained relatively understudied, especially in comparison to migratory flows from other CEE countries. Furthermore, in the few studies that are exception to this overall trend (see Ivancheva, 2007; Markova, 2010a; 2010b; Maeva, 2010; Chongarova 2010a; 2010b; 2011) the migrant perspective either comes secondary or highly skilled migration is overlooked. On the other hand, the chapter has demonstrated that although invaluable in theorising East-West migratory flows, theoretical

frameworks such as ‘liquid migration’ (Engbersen, Snel and de Boom, 2010; Engbersen and Snel, 2013) do not adequately account for the experiences of young Bulgarian students and professionals.

Instead, by adopting a transnational approach, the study has proposed a conceptual framework centred upon migratory experiences as a way of gaining an in-depth understanding of the ways young, highly skilled Bulgarians in Britain make sense of their journeys, decisions and corresponding implications. Therefore, conceptualising migratory projects and operationalising migration reality in terms of adjustment, stereotypes and othering, the chapter has argued that migratory experiences are conditioned upon the contested relationship between migration as a project and as a reality. Thus, to understand one’s migratory experiences, it is important to gain an insight into what happens before, during and after (or as a result of) migration. Consequently, the chapter has argued that the tension between the pre-migratory expectations and the realities people face when they find themselves in the host society context unlocks a period of liminality – a time of in-betweenness and transitioning – leaving a mark upon migrants’ identities and plans for the future. Recognising that this framework is only a simplified version of a complex reality, this thesis will examine in turn young, highly skilled Bulgarians’ migratory projects, migration realities and their consequences in terms of identities and plans for the future. Before doing so, however, the next chapter will offer some insights into how the project was carried out and the key questions and dilemmas that came to the fore in the research process.

Introduction

The previous two chapters have highlighted the contextual and theoretical significance of studying young, highly skilled Bulgarian migration to the UK. In comparison, this chapter will explore in a reflexive manner the practicalities of carrying out this research. Broadly speaking, reflexivity '[...] means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference', which '[...] refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research' (Aull Davies, 2008, p. 8). Furthermore, as Burawoy observes, it is also an epistemological model of science which, contrary to the positivist tradition, recognises '[...] engagement as the road to knowledge' (1998, p.5). Adopting such an approach, however, requires careful consideration of the researcher's interest in the topic and involvement in fieldwork. This reflexive process not only enriches the quality of the data but it also boosts its credibility.

Although reflexivity is increasingly seen as an indispensable part of every qualitative study, it mostly appears as a final sub-section of studies' methodological chapters. Instead, I have chosen to discuss ethical issues and dilemmas as and when they have appeared in the process of fieldwork for two reasons. Firstly, as *chapter 1* has already mentioned, I had recognised my own personal interest in the topic and my positionality in the research, which required a reflexive approach to ensure the quality and credibility of my findings. Secondly, as reflexivity is an ongoing process, it seemed to me unsuitable to confine it within one section at the end of this chapter. Correspondingly, weaving it through the various elements considered allows me to analyse the evolution of my reflexive thoughts and engagement with the research process. Thus, the chapter will initially discuss the research design and

methodology, followed by a section on accessing and recruiting participants. The latter will also outline the sampling criteria and specify the demographic background of the participants. The next three sections will focus on the importance of location in the project, my role as the researcher and my relationship with the participants and generated data. The final section will draw out key points and lessons learned in the process.

Research design

Before delving into the justification of the research design, it is crucial to clarify the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of my project. As Bryman notes, ‘an epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline’ (2012, p. 27). Correspondingly, epistemology refers to the meaning of knowing or the philosophical framework within which knowledge operates. In a complementary fashion, ontology concerns the nature of existence (Gray, 2004, p. 16). Tracing the roots of ontology to Ancient Greece, Gray recognises that Western thought remains trapped in the tension between two opposing ontological traditions: the Heraclitean one which focuses on *becoming* and the Parmenidean one, which centres upon *being* (2004, p.16-17). Although the second is widely accepted in the West, increasingly debates recognise the limits to truth-seeking and thus take into consideration the ontology of *becoming*. Despite that this study recognises the merits of Heraclitean tradition, its theoretical perspectives are firmly embedded in the ontology of *being*.

More specifically, this research project is framed by an interpretivist approach. As claimed by Mason, its distinctiveness lies within the value attributed to ‘[...] people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings [...]’, which are seen as ‘the primary data sources’ (2002, p. 56). Consequently, ‘interpretivists are concerned with understanding the social world people have produced and which they reproduce through their continuing activities’ (Blaikie in Mason, 2002, p. 56). Such an approach prioritises the understanding of human behaviour and its origins can be traced back to Weber’s notion of *Verstehen*

(Bryman, 2012, pp. 29-30). Consequently, as the primary goal of my project was to understand how people themselves make sense of their own migratory experiences, an interpretivist approach was the most appropriate to capture the essence of the phenomenon. This approach was particularly useful as it is closely interlinked with the idea of the researcher's subjectivity. As Hammersley notes, 'we can never entirely escape our own assumptions about the world' (1992, p. 169). For me as a researcher, this was an important moment to grasp and learn how to manage: although I wanted to go into the field with an open mind, I was simultaneously aware that my own migratory experiences and views about the world informed how I was interpreting my observations and findings. It was clear to me that the way to deal with subjectivity was not to escape it but rather to embrace it and question it continuously.

Furthermore, this project has a constructivist agenda – one, which not only perceives phenomena as socially constructed in specific contexts but also one where '[t]he focus is as much on the assembly process as on what is assembled' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997, p. 127 in Silverman, 2011, p. 183). In line with that approach and drawing on Mason, I use the term data 'generation' rather than 'collection', especially in relation to interviews (2002, p. 64). Similarly, I opted for using the term 'participants', rather than 'informants' or 'respondents' throughout this thesis due to the recognition that data is not an objective reality; rather, it is co-produced in the process of fieldwork, influenced by the presence of both the researcher and the participant. Thus, I was aware that although some of my participants spontaneously shared information related to the aim of the study, on many occasions it was my questions that prompted them to reflect on particular issues that they would have never otherwise questioned.

Finally, my project is also influenced by feminist epistemologies, particularly in relation to critique of disembodied scientific knowledge. Specifically, Donna Haraway's (1988) work on situated knowledges has been quite influential in my understanding of the merits of partiality and embodiment. As she notes: 'The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply

there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly [...]’ (Haraway, 1988, p. 586). Thus, according to Haraway, (feminist) objectivity focuses on partial perspectives, limited location and situated knowledges as ‘[i]t allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see’ (1988, p.583). The credibility of a research project then can be measured against the recognition of the researcher’s own limits, assumptions and understandings through being immersed in the research practice. With respect to the latter, Okely’s claim that fieldwork should be viewed as ‘experienced’ and not ‘conducted’ (2012, p.5) points to the value of embodied knowledge. She further notes that ‘[t]he fieldworker works through the body, emotions and not cerebral distance’ (Okely, 2012, p. 78). Learning through the senses does not preclude objectivity; on the contrary, it helps to build awareness of the phenomenon under scrutiny and our position within it through weaving together knowledge and experience. However, as Scott affirms, ‘experience is [...] not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain’ (1991, p. 797). Hence, recognising my own partiality of knowledge, informed by my own experiences and predispositions, I have tried to immerse myself in the field, to experience it as fully as possible, critically engaging with the research process.

The research on the migratory experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK is qualitative in nature. On the one hand, this was motivated by the scarcity of in-depth knowledge of the newest migratory flows in the country (as indicated in *chapter 1* and 2). On the other hand, it was seen as the best approach to achieve the goals of the project, which were primarily concerned with the participants’ stories and their ways of making sense. More specifically, this design was chosen because ‘[q]ualitative research is particularly well suited to studying context. It also excels at illuminating *process*, whether this is organizational change or individual decision-making, since it allows us to examine how changes affect daily procedures and interactions’ (italics in original, Barbour, 2008, p. 13). Thus, the advantage of qualitative studies lies in their ability to provide insight into the dynamics of a given phenomenon by simultaneously taking into account the context. This enables the scrutiny of the interplay between macro conditions and

micro realities. Indeed, as *chapter 1* has highlighted the complex circumstances produced by both the host and home societies, I was keen to find out more about their impact upon the lives of young Bulgarians who have chosen to live, work and/or study in Britain. Additionally, as aforementioned, I wanted to enter the field with an open mind and to allow theoretical findings to emerge from the data itself. Correspondingly, this study is also primarily inductive in its nature. In that respect, it has been widely recognised (Gray, 2004; Silverman 2011; Bryman, 2012) that there is a degree of incorporation of both inductive and deductive approach in each study, regardless of whether it is qualitative or quantitative. The primarily data-led approach to fieldwork is evident in the process of re-formulation of my research questions, which changed over the course of the research. Additionally, the dynamic context of the research, namely the build-up to Brexit, necessitated not only a flexible approach to gathering data but also an equally adaptive one to making sense of it. Evidently, such a research design is firmly embedded in the aforementioned epistemological and ontological postulations, providing a more extensive opportunity for pursuing the research questions that the project aims to address.

Methodology: Multi-sited ethnography

This study is a multi-sited ethnography, encompassing various techniques both online and offline, aiming to unravel young Bulgarian skilled migrants' experiences. An ethnographic approach to research is often described as an 'eclectic methodological choice' (Falzon, 2009, p.1), 'bricolage' or even 'boatbuilding' (Hammersley, 1999). It is a way of researching a particular phenomenon by incorporating a variety of methods that range from document analysis and literature reviews, through participant observation, interviewing to tasting, smelling, hearing and dancing (Gray, 2003). Although there is not one structured approach to combining methods, the distinctiveness of the methodology lies in that it always involves extended periods of time when researchers can immerse themselves in a particular community with (often) distinctive culture in order to gain knowledge of the phenomenon under scrutiny. The main tenet of this research approach is that it

prioritises depth over scope. However, while ethnographies have been primarily concerned with studying everyday practices and localised ‘cultures’, using in-depth *in situ* observation as a cognitive mode (Crang and Cook 2007; Gobo 2008), the concept of a multi-sited ethnography, as formulated by Marcus (1995), aims to avoid such holistic representations. On the contrary, it is ‘[...] designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations [...]’ that demonstrate ‘an explicit, posited logic of association or connection’, thus allowing the in-depth study of cultural formations (Marcus, 1995, p. 105). Effectively, as Marcus has later admitted, multi-sited ethnography is conceptualised as a challenge to the pillars of what he terms as the ‘Malinowskian complex’, namely, the focused and sustained over a long period of time approach of exploring communities that are distinctively Other and correspondingly perceived as the *objects* of research (my italics, 2011, p. 18). Alternatively, the Marcusian view focuses on mobile ethnographies that displace researchers, encouraging them to follow plots and storylines, which exist in a field organised by distributed knowledge systems (Marcus, 2011, p. 22-23). The latter are described by Marcus as networks that ‘[...] encompass but replace the dominating conceptual role of culture’ and that are mappable only within the subjects’ perspectives (2011, p. 23 and p.25).

Thinking about my own study and its objectives, a multi-sited ethnographic approach was suitable for a number of reasons. Firstly, I anticipated that Bulgarian students and professionals are a group of young people, who are not only geographically dispersed in the UK but also very mobile and that their dynamic lifestyles involve intensive use of virtual social platforms that allow them to craft and maintain an online presence. A multi-sited ethnographic approach correspondingly provided me with the freedom to follow my participants offline (although financial constraints limited me only to relocations within the UK) and online in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their lifestyles, everyday practices and mobile experiences. My displacement as a researcher was thus liberating: it allowed me to be wherever and whenever there was opportunity to experience fieldwork. Secondly, a multi-sited ethnography allowed me to contextualise my participants’ experiences within the wider local, national and

supranational processes. Indeed, as *chapter 1* has outlined, the research was conducted against the backdrop of stronger regionalisation in the UK (the Scottish referendum), political polarisation in Bulgaria (the #DANSwithme anti-governmental protests), the growing euroscepticism in Britain (the build-up to Brexit) and in Europe (the rise of not-so-new nationalisms). Location, in every possible meaning of the term, mattered – it mattered whether one was exposed to London’s ‘superdiversity’ (Vertovec, 2006) or Scotland’s sub-state nationalistic pro-EU agenda (Barker, 2015). Context was both a cause and factor in shaping migratory paths and a multi-sited ethnographic approach allowed me to consider its influence upon the participants’ experiences, viewpoints, values and identities. Finally, such an approach allowed me to benefit from a range of methods, which were field site-sensitive. Thus, through a wide range of ethnographic methods and practices such as interviewing and participant observation both online and offline, I have had the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the migratory experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK.

Similar to any other methodology, multi-sited ethnography has its opponents and their criticisms need to be taken into consideration. Falzon remarks that ‘[...] a programme that proposes to be more routes than roots [...] could well end up throwing out the proverbial bathwater and robbing ethnography of its central tenets [...]’ (2009, p.7). He further proceeds to analyse in detail the specificities of the ‘charges’ against multi-sited ethnography, which include the lack of depth and ethnographic authority as well as not-so-hidden holistic ambitions (2009, pp.9-13). Indeed, one of the most prominent criticisms against multi-sited ethnography is the impossibility of what Clifford (1997) terms ‘thick description’. Therefore, in my own approach I implemented two interchangeable techniques. Firstly, in following the principle that ‘[s]patial routine becomes a route to ethnographic knowledge’ (Falzon, 2009, p. 9), I aimed to stay at a location more than once for a period of time. This was particularly the case in relation to fieldwork in the Midlands, Southern England, Northern England and London. However, due to financial constraints this was not possible for locations further away such as Wales and Scotland. Correspondingly, the second technique was to use virtual participant

observation (of student and professionals' Facebook groups where they discussed everyday issues). Although not an ideal way of achieving depth, such a technique provided me with a lot of background information that helped me to contextualise the participants' experience across Britain. I have also been wary of my role as a researcher, who in following her participants, co-produces spaces (discussed further below). Finally, with regards to the last key criticism, as Falzon (2009) remarks both single- and multi-sited approaches have an equal propensity towards holism, yet simultaneously, I realise that due to the small scale of my project, the claims and concepts put forward are only limited representations of the stories of a specific group of people at a specific point in time.

Among the many techniques that I employed in the process of fieldwork such as document analysis, reading newspapers and watching videos related to the topic, two particular methods (participant observation and interviews) have been central in the process of data generation. Both will be analysed in depth below.

Participant observation

Participant observation is the backbone of every ethnographic study. This method is extremely beneficial as it provides '[...] the researcher with the freedom to go wherever the action is that is relevant to the investigation' (Burgess, 1984, p. 82). Given the multi-sited character of this project, my participant observation included both an offline and an online component. With regards to the offline component, participant observation was carried out in various cities in Scotland, London, Northern England and in the Midlands. Originally, and naively, I had envisaged a structured approach to carrying out participant observation: I intended to adopt the role of a participant-as-observer, limiting my observation to celebrations of Bulgarian national holidays and social gatherings. However, I quickly discovered that the role of the researcher changes constantly throughout participant observation, thus encapsulating the entire spectrum between participation and observation (Burgess, 1984). Additionally, participant observation followed the natural course of events and I often found myself partaking in

unexpected situations that yielded considerable data in relation to the project: everyday situations, spontaneous field trips and last-minute invitations to social gatherings. Therefore, I also realised that to ‘experience’ fieldwork in Okely’s (2012) terms, I needed to carry out participant observation as it naturally occurs. Correspondingly, informed consent was an ongoing process, usually verbally obtained in these situations (see BSA, 2002; ESRC, n.d.). While the ethical issues that arose in such situations will be discussed in more detail in the section on the researcher-participant dynamics, the rest of this chapter will consider briefly a few different locations and situations of conducting participant observation. Furthermore, the role of key participants will be considered in not only providing access to the field(s) but also in engaging thoroughly with the project and its data generation process (Aull Davies 2008; Bryman, 2012, Okely 2012).

Immersing myself in fieldwork revealed an interesting mixture of social events, naturally occurring everyday situations and opportunities to follow my participants’ relocations and daily routines. For example, my stay in Scotland coincided with the celebration of Burns night, which some of participants had planned to attend. This occasion greatly enriched my knowledge about their experiences, simultaneously allowing me to partake in the dynamics of their relationships with non-Bulgarian students. Thus, while I found myself dancing ceilidh, I was not only able to experience Scottish culture the way that my participants did but I was also able to engage in informal conversations about Bulgarian cuisine and traditions and what it meant and felt like to be away from the home country. Sociology student Kamelia in that respect was a key participant. She not only introduced me to a lot of Bulgarian students but also, through her role as a PR of the Bulgarian Student Society (hereafter BSS) at her university, I was able to learn a lot about the society’s dynamics, partnerships, activities and its members’ future plans for the development of the organisation.

Furthermore, participant observation occurred both outside and inside young, highly skilled Bulgarians’ homes. A common practice among students before or after our interview was to take me on campus tours of their respective

university and its facilities. Occasionally, we encountered some of their friends which gave me an insight into their daily routines and experiences. Due to the busy schedules of the young professionals, participant observation took place at social gatherings, popular activities such as shopping, attending a concert/ play/ club, sightseeing, picnics and walks. Additionally, I met with a few of my London-based participants such as Ralitsa and Dessie for lunch or after-work drinks, giving me insight into their daily routines and preferred foods, whilst simultaneously enriching my knowledge about London's popular meeting spots and activities. Additionally, fieldwork home visits complemented my knowledge in relation to young Bulgarians' strong attachment to national cuisine, tradition and habits. A common practice at those home visits was to be given slippers, usually accompanied with comments about how English people walk inside with their shoes on. Interestingly, one of my hosts in Scotland had specifically bought slippers for the occasion. I was usually offered *lukanka*, *sirene* and *liyenitsa*¹⁴ which were either brought personally from Bulgaria or sent in a package by the participants' parents. I was also given information about the Polish/ Turkish/ Continental shops in different cities where I could buy these products at reasonable prices. This example clearly resonates with Okely's (2012) claim that the researcher herself becomes the main instrument for data generation in the field, where everyday experiences enrich the understanding of the participants' values and personalities.

Additionally, the multi-sited character of my study allowed me to follow some of my participants as they relocated or traveled within a city, simultaneously taking into consideration the specificities of different regional contexts and their impact upon the young Bulgarians' experiences. An example is marketing specialist Kalina's decision to move from Oxford where she was working to London where she had a better support network. Her choice to commute every day to her workplace highlighted the importance of location, which contributes to isolation and overall dissatisfaction with the mobility choices one has made. Social networks are therefore important not only in terms of gaining prior knowledge about the host

¹⁴ See Appendix 1.

society but also in relation to the process of adaptation (Ryan, 2011). Thus, Kalina's overall experience improved significantly as she was able to spend more time with her friends (the majority of whom live in London) and to benefit from the variety of choices offered by the City. As she was a key participant and a friend (further elaborated on below), I could carry out observations, comparing and contrasting her experiences in two different contexts, which enhanced my overall understanding of her migratory experiences in the UK.

Finally, my decision to spontaneously carry out fieldwork by visiting places with a high concentration of Bulgarians led to some rather interesting outcomes. For example, when in London once, I found myself with a lot of free time to spare: it was early in the morning and I had an interview scheduled with PR specialist Ralitsa later in the evening. Therefore, I decided to go the Bulgarian embassy to see whether I could advertise my study. There were so many people waiting to renew their passports that they were queuing outside the building. When I finally I reached the foyer of the embassy, I picked up a copy of the Bulgarian newspaper *BG Ben*. At that point the security guard approached me and asked me what I was waiting for and when I explained he said that it is better not to 'waste' my time and that I might get more help from the Bulgarian cultural centre, which was next door. Unfortunately, that was unsuccessful – the lady that opened the door seemed reluctant to help – she was going to be on annual leave the following week in Bulgaria, so they had to count the inventory. Frustrated with my (perceived) lack of success I sat on a bench in the nearby park and opened the Bulgarian newspaper. I noticed an advertisement of a newly opened Bulgarian shop in a North London borough and with a few hours to spare, I decided to go. As soon as I came out of the tube station, I was struck by the fact that everyone around me spoke Bulgarian. There was a café nearby named after Bulgaria's second biggest city Plovdiv and a Bulgarian breakfast place. At the shop, I met the owner and spent a few hours there talking about what it takes to own a business in London, while in (typically) Bulgarian fashion we sat on the crates with mineral water bottles outside the shop, drinking coffee the shop assistant had made for us. Later, taking in the environment, I had a snack at the Bulgarian breakfast place, followed by a coffee at Café Plovdiv

(see *chapter 5*). Later on, when I met Ralitsa I told her I had had a very interesting day in ‘mini Bulgaria’ and describing where I had been, she burst out laughing – she not only knew where the area was but she also had explicitly chosen to live there because it made her feel at home. A few weeks later, I met up with one of my key participants in Nottingham – PhD student Svetla. Besides developing a close friendship, we often discussed my fieldwork and findings and she would often comment on my interpretation, engaging herself further in the process of co-production of knowledge. We discussed at length my experiences in ‘mini Bulgaria’ and she said that I should take her there one day. Surprisingly, a few months later she rang me to invite me for her birthday, which she had decided to celebrate by organising a trip to ‘mini Bulgaria’ in London. She thought that I might like to go back there and that it might be interesting for my study.

Reflecting upon the results of spontaneously carrying out fieldwork and their implications, it became evident to me that this fieldwork episode was significant in a number of ways. Firstly, my experiences at the embassy and cultural centre, although frustrating, were quite indicative of the relationship between state institutions abroad and Bulgarian nationals. My first-hand experiences and conversations with indignant nationals while queuing outside the embassy demonstrated the high level of bureaucracy and inefficiency. Nonetheless, my perceived lack of success accidentally pointed me in the right direction. Secondly, my experiences in what I call ‘mini Bulgaria’ not only contextualised my conversation with Ralitsa but they also provided a very useful basis for comparison of the migratory experiences of various different groups of Bulgarians in the UK, which ultimately enriched my understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, it illustrated how data is co-produced through my discussions about the project with key participants, how the researcher produces fields (Falzon, 2009, p. 10) and also influences data generation in the subsequent visit to ‘mini Bulgaria’ with Svetla. Ultimately, all these examples demonstrate the multi-faceted nature in offline participant observation, which necessitates a flexible and reflexive approach (May, 2001, p.159).

The online participant observation in that sense was no exception. It only had a supplementary role in the study, aiming to provide further contextualisation and insight into what was emerging from the interview data and offline participant observation. Correspondingly, my focus was on the ways young, highly skilled Bulgarians articulate online their experiences of living in Britain as well as the types of information they seek through posts and threads. To achieve that, I mainly followed the Bulgarian professionals' group both on LinkedIn and Facebook alongside Facebook groups 'For Equal Rights for Bulgarian and Romanian Students in the UK'. The latter was formed at the end of 2013 to create a platform for discussion to take measures against immigration restrictions that Bulgarian and Romanian students faced in accessing the British labour market. The group has 5 821 members (08/2016), most of whom joined in late 2013 – early 2014. Its members were quite active shortly before and after the removal of labour restrictions for A2 nationals in January 2014 and since then its character has transformed into a space where members can report work-related injustices and receive and offer help with various legal procedures such as applying for National Insurance numbers and registration certificates. In the process of fieldwork, I was also added to a few Bulgarian societies at various universities. Some of my participants also added me as friends. While I decided not to use information posted on their walls for ethical reasons (see Hine 2008; Aull Davies 2008), they often used Facebook to contact me and alert me to various events and articles they deemed relevant for my study. Thus, I spent on average between 2 and 3 hours a week doing online participant observation, which highlighted the importance of social media for young Bulgarians in Britain. The ways in which they use this platform can be grouped in the following categories: 1) basic knowledge about locality/ university/ job and how to access services 2) opportunity to socialise – information about parties, clubs and activities 3) specific knowledge related to academic courses, job offers and interviews 4) engagement with both the overarching host and home context through a discussion of media reports and/ or governmental policies. This not only contextualised the information gathered through interviews but also helped in building rapport with my participants. Although the nature of online participant observation was only

complementary, it was nonetheless very useful in producing an enriching fieldwork experience.

Interviews

Interviewing, more specifically, semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study as they seek '[...] to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27). This particular type of interview allows the researcher to '[...] have more latitude to *probe* beyond the answers and thus enter into a dialogue with the interviewee' (May, 2001, p. 123). Therefore, I was not only able to explore my participants' experiences but also I had enough freedom to pursue specific themes as they emerged from our 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1984, p. 102). However, as Silverman points out, '[i]nterviews do not tell us directly about people's 'experiences' but instead offer *indirect 'representations'* of those experiences' (my italics, 2011, p. 168). Indeed, this point serves as a reminder about the personalised and performative¹⁵ character of researcher-provoked data, which should be considered cautiously with regards to objectivity and truth-seeking in obtaining knowledge.

My approach to interviewing can be described as a combination between narrative and thematic as I was interested in particular broad themes such as migration, European citizenship, the everyday and identities but I simultaneously wanted to contextualise them in the participants' biographical stories. Building rapport usually took the form of an informal conversation prior to the interview, when we discussed topics of general interest. I also used this time to explain the goals and purposes of my study and to answer any questions that the participants might have, reiterating that they could withdraw at any point in the study. My interview guide was only indicative as each interview took its own course. Indeed, with the exception of the first few questions that aimed to establish biographical

¹⁵ For information on qualitative interviews as drama and performance, see Myers and Newman (2007).

data, none of the questions that followed appeared in the same order and were often phrased differently to make connections with what participants were saying. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and two hours. Initially, I found it particularly difficult to encourage young professionals to comment and reflect upon not only their student experiences but also their professional ones. After conducting my interviews with Emanuela and Kalina, I thought that I had not explored their professional identity enough. However, upon reflection, I realised that neither of them liked their jobs at the time, which perhaps had hindered the development of a particular professional identity, resulting in a reluctance to talk about that topic. This became more prominent when contrasted with Paula's interview who, on a few occasions, shared that she loves being an investment banker and reflected extensively upon her professional experiences. Additionally, considering the turbulent contextual changes as well as some of the initial findings, subsequent interviews incorporated questions, which aimed to explore further emergent themes around stereotypes, the home society attitudes towards migration and friendship circles.

A further issue that requires scrutiny is the use of Skype for five of the conducted interviews (see Appendix 2). These interviews are particularly advantageous as they are time and cost-efficient. However, some of the disadvantages of computer-assisted interviews are that they potentially reduce the richness of data by creating distance without body and language cues (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 149). To avoid that, I insisted that all Skype interviews were conducted as video chats and recorded by a dictaphone. This closely resembled a real-life face-to-face interview. In fact, it created a more relaxed atmosphere as people were at home but away, positively influencing the power balance of interviews. Another problematic aspect of Skype interviews is what Deakin and Wakefield (2014) have termed as the 'drop out problem' or when people do not go online at arranged times. Although prepared for such situations, I never experienced them.

Recruiting participants

Researching Bulgarian migratory flows to the UK is a challenging task both in terms of the complexities of the phenomenon and in terms of identifying and recruiting participants. Focusing on the latter, similarly to their French counterparts (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014, p. 588), the lack of a single systematic mechanism accounting for the number of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in Britain renders them relatively invisible. The unreliability of statistical information is due to both the presence of conflicting data and the constantly fluctuating number of mobile people in the UK. The first aspect is illustrated by the fact that while the Office for National Statistics (hereafter ONS) claims that in July 2012 there were 47,000 Bulgarian-born people in the UK (BBC 2014), the National Institute for Economic and Social Research asserts that their number was 26,000 in 2013 (Rolfe et al., 2013, p. 21). The second aspect (fluctuation of migrant population) becomes evident when ONS data for 2012 (47, 000 people) is compared to information for 2013 (53, 000 Bulgarians) and 2014 respectively when there were 49, 000 Bulgarians residing in the UK (ONS, 2014).

Furthermore, this information lacks detail about the occupation of Bulgarian nationals in the UK. With regards to employed people, both the Labour Force Survey (hereafter LFS) and the allocations of National Insurance numbers (hereafter NINo) to adult overseas nationals can provide data on working Bulgarians in the UK. Correspondingly, in the year ending June 2014, there was an increase in the allocation of NINos to Bulgarians from 9, 900 to 21, 590 in comparison to the previous year (Watkins, 2014, p. 5). According to the LFS, the combined figure for A2 nationals¹⁶ between April and June 2014 was 132, 000 (ONS, 2014). Such statistical information, however, should be treated with caution. Although it may indicate how many Bulgarians are in employment, it is difficult to estimate the number of highly skilled individuals or young professionals. Also, such figures do not account for those who are both full-time students and part-time employees. Finally, the accuracy of the data is severely obscured by the fact that NINo data

¹⁶ Bulgarians and Romanians.

does not guarantee physical presence in the UK due to migrants' non-cancellation when leaving Britain and moving elsewhere or returning back to the home society.

Estimating the number of Bulgarian students in higher education is an equally cumbersome task. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (hereafter HESA), the number of Bulgarian students has steadily grown from 2010 onwards with some marginal fluctuations in 2013/14 and 2014/15: 4 615 in 2010/11; 5 705 in 2011/12; 6 060 in 2012/13; 6 355 in 2013/14 and 6 255 in 2014/15 (HESA, 2016). In comparison, the young Bulgarians admitted to British universities were 387 in 2007/08 (Maeva, 2010, p. 282), demonstrating the growing popularity of the UK as an educational destination. Nonetheless, it remains difficult to estimate how many of these students are undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research. This obscures the precision of the data presented, further complicating the research of the newest Bulgarian migratory flows to the UK.

Access

Undoubtedly, one of the most crucial stages of a research project is gaining access, which often is not a 'straightforward procedure' (Burgess, 1984, p. 45). Therefore, this subsection will outline the process, simultaneously reflecting on its challenges and ethical dilemmas. Despite having prior knowledge of the research group as an 'insider', initially I found it difficult to recruit participants. My original approach was to write to various institutions that could either help me with information or advertise my study. These included: the Bulgarian Embassy in London, the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, professional organisations. None of these replied to my request. As argued by May (2001, p. 158), reactions to negotiating access, or in my case – the lack of such, can reveal a lot about relations and concerns of people. Hence, the lack of response from state institutions could be indicative of the weak direct engagement with the population they represent. Furthermore, this indicated the need to change my approach. Two techniques were particularly helpful in that sense. Firstly, I contacted friends (further elaborated below) and invited them to participate and/ or asked them to recommend potential

participants. Secondly, I contacted the editor of the *BG Ben* – a Bulgarian newspaper issued fortnightly in London. Similarly to Ryan’s (2010) approach in recruiting Polish migrants, I wanted to post a short advertisement about my project.

Although the editor of *BG Ben* expressed doubts about the success rate of



Image 1. Research project advertisement (in blue). Source: *BG Ben*, issue 22 (272), 23 November 2013, p. 2

this approach, he agreed to include a short text drafted by myself (see Image 1), which was published in two consecutive issues of the newspaper. The positioning and the formatting of the text were quite strategic in an attempt to maximise impact.

Correspondingly, instead of being published along with other promotional material in the newspaper, the advertisement was located on page 2 in the bottom left corner. The choice of colour (blue) created a sharp contrast with the bright yellow box on the right, which was advertising promotional offers for

celebrating Christmas day in traditional Bulgarian restaurants across London. The large box above was a calendar of celebratory events titled ‘December in London Bulgarian style’ (my translation, *BG Ben*, 2013, p.2). However, while stylistically speaking, the advertisement was positioned to attract maximum attention, it was nonetheless unsuccessful in recruiting participants. Despite the marketing techniques employed, such advertisements remain impersonal and unlikely to generate interest among the readership population.

To compensate for this, alongside considering that *BG Ben* is mainly distributed across London, the editor provided me with contact details of the editor-in-chief of the *BG Student* newspaper. *BG Student* is a supplement of *BG Ben*, also published online, enabling wider reach. The editor-in-chief of *BG Student* suggested a different approach to recruiting participants: to popularise the study she offered to

conduct an interview with me which, as she quite rightly predicted, would be more likely to engage young people because they would get the impression that they ‘knew’ me. Indeed, this more personalised approach allows participants to relate to both researcher and project more easily, impacting the recruitment process positively. My interview for *BG Student* correspondingly provided information about my project and its aims alongside my personal motivations to pursue education in the UK, my expectations and experiences. On the one hand, this was beneficial because it affirmed my role as an ‘insider’, blurring the lines between researcher and participant. On the other hand, I felt uneasy about providing my own opinion on the topic, fearing this would impose ideas on potential participants. In reality, recognising and expressing my own opinion was beneficial as it not only stimulated the flow of my conversations with participants but also enabled me to notice where our interpretations differed as they would directly refer to some of my points in order to disagree with them. Additionally, I felt uneasy about the ethical implications of some of the statements made by the editor-in-chief in the interview. The title she had chosen was ‘Get involved in Elena’s doctoral project’ (my translation), followed by a brief introduction that said: ‘For the success of her study, Elena needs your help’ (my translation, *BG Student*, 2013). Although it was true – I did need participants’ help to do my research – as a researcher I wanted people to participate because they were interested and not because they were doing a favour to a fellow Bulgarian. Was asking for help unethical? The more I pondered over the source of my unease, the more I realised that what made me feel uncomfortable was that as a researcher I felt that it was not professional to frame my request for participants as seeking help. However, I realised that being a detached researcher was not possible or beneficial for this project.

Furthermore, the *BG Student* editor-in-chief provided me with a list of the Facebook addresses of Bulgarian student societies across the UK. This not only facilitated recruiting participants (by posting the link to the group depending on the security options) but it also gave me a sense of the geographical location of Bulgarian university students and a rough estimate of the size of their student societies. Indeed, many of my student participants who contacted me reported that

they had seen my Facebook post on the timeline of their respective student society, which had sparked their interest in the project.

With regards to recruiting young professionals, access was mainly acquired through snow-balling. Additionally, upon the success of the online recruitment of students I decided to use the same approach with professionals. However, negotiating access with them required different steps: it was a two-stage process as to join the Facebook group one needed to have joined the respective group on LinkedIn. The latter acted as a filtering option as one's LinkedIn profile allows the moderator of the group to ensure that the person requesting membership was truly a professional.

Evidently, recruiting participants for a research project is not a straightforward procedure but a rather long process, where key participants, researcher's contacts and knowledge and gatekeepers matter. Importantly, it is not a process free of ethical dilemmas. Thus, my experience of negotiating access clearly highlighted the need to flexibly employ different techniques as well as the importance of providing personal information, reflexively engaging with the challenges that arise from it.

Sampling criteria

As the previous sub-section suggested, I employed two different techniques: judgement sampling and snow-balling. While the first entails selecting participants on the basis of 'previous experience' and 'special knowledge' and thus consisted of my friends (further elaborated below); the second focuses on creating 'chains of informants' (Burgess, 1984, p. 55). However, in both cases my sampling approach was purposive to counterbalance the effect of the lack of systematic statistical data and to ensure a wide variety of participants based on the following criteria: age, gender, occupation, UK location and length of stay. With regards to age, I decided to include participants aged between 18 and 35 in line with research that suggests that Bulgarian migratory flows consist of predominantly people within that age

range (see Rofle et al, 2013, p. iv-v). I also aimed to include an equal number of men and women in the study. Occupation, however, appeared as a rather difficult criterion due to the elusive character of the term ‘highly skilled’ (see *chapter 2*). Therefore, for the purposes of this project, a ‘broad’ definition was adopted, which included not only current higher education students but also those who had a part-time low skilled job. This presented me with the opportunity to capture a wider spectrum of young Bulgarian migration in the UK, who were either students or young professionals. Furthermore, to allow some representation and account for regional differences in the migratory experiences of participants, I aimed to recruit individuals who were residing in various parts of the UK: England, Wales and Scotland. Finally, I adopted a ‘liberal’ approach to the inclusion of participants in the study on the basis of their length of stay in the UK. More specifically, as I was interested in assessing the significance and impact of Bulgaria’s membership in the EU upon the migratory paths and experiences of young Bulgarians in the UK, I decided to include people who have arrived both before and after 2007 when Bulgaria formally became an EU member-state. Correspondingly, adhering to the outlined sampling criteria and having obtained an indication of the highest concentration of young Bulgarians in the UK, allowed me to not only have a very structured initial approach to recruitment but also to offer some representativeness in spite of the small scale of the study.

Demographic characteristics of the participants

A total of 37 people took part in the research on the migratory experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians. This sub-section will correspondingly outline some of their characteristics in relation to age, occupation, origin, location in the UK, family background and length of stay (see Appendix 2 for a table format of the demographic background of participants and interview location). All names used throughout this thesis in relation to participants are pseudonyms, which have aimed to preserve anonymity and the confidentiality of shared information. Additionally, occasionally throughout the analysis information about their exact location in the UK, the university course they were taking or their employer and precise job title

have been omitted to protect their privacy and ensure no harm is incurred upon them due to taking part in this study.

In line with the sampling criteria, the participants in this study were aged 19 to 32 at the time of conducting fieldwork. The gender split between the young Bulgarians who contributed to the project is almost equal: 19 females and 18 males. Access to students through the Bulgarian student societies in the UK was easier, which explains the slightly higher number of students (N= 21) over that of young professionals (N=16). Also, students have more flexible schedules, which afforded them more time to meet with me and share their stories. Additionally, it was easier to conduct participant observation with them as with professionals this was only possible during weekday evenings and at weekends. Looking at the participants' degree level, 26 either had already obtained or were studying for an undergraduate degree, 7 – a postgraduate taught degree and 4 – a postgraduate research degree. Expectedly, the younger participants had bachelor's degrees. Their high number can also be explained as many had applied for graduate schemes upon finishing their undergraduate studies. Those with master's level degrees are an interesting, mixed group. Emanuela, Hristian and Bilyana all completed their undergraduate degrees in Bulgaria and came to the UK specifically to obtain a postgraduate taught qualification. Maggie followed the same route, however, upon enrolling she realised that the standards were quite different in software engineering and she chose to complete another bachelor's degree before enrolling in a master's course at the same university in Wales. Correspondingly, Ivan and Kalina initially completed their undergraduate degrees, worked for a few years prior to going back to university and completing their postgraduate degrees. For both of them, the master's degree was a way of changing their career paths. Two of the PhD students (Stamen and Simeon) had just begun their studies at the time of fieldwork, whereas Kaloyan had just completed his minor revisions after his viva voce. Six months after my interview with Svetla, she decided to discontinue her PhD and pursue a different career path.

The information on the origin and UK location of the participants not only contributes to better understanding of their demographic backgrounds but also reveals further interesting details about their lifestyles. Thus, image 2 below is a map of Bulgaria, where each golden star represents one participant, marking their corresponding hometown. Evidently, the majority of participants come from Sofia and Sofia region (Botevgrad, Pravets, Trudovets), followed by large cities such as Ruse, Plovdiv, Burgas and Stara Zagora. This is unsurprising considering the best secondary schools in the country, offering intensive English language training, are located in these cities and towns. Thus, although the sample is small, it demonstrates the link between the quality of secondary education in the country and young people's desire to migrate. This will be explored further in *chapter 4*.

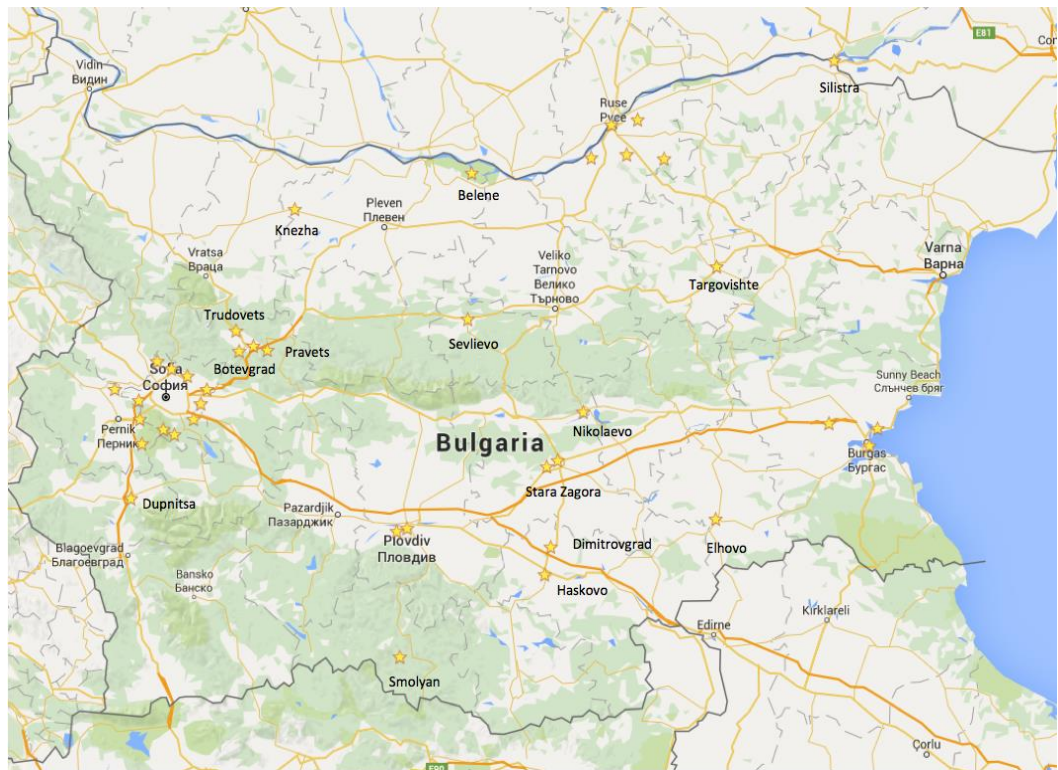


Image 2. Participants' Bulgarian hometowns. Source: maps.google.co.uk and own elaboration

Mapping the location of the participants in the UK demonstrates that the



Image 3. UK location of the participants. Source: maps.google.co.uk and own elaboration

highest number of young, high skilled Bulgarians who took part in the study live in Scotland (N=12), followed by the Midlands (N=10) and London (N=7). Four of the young Bulgarians live, work and/or study in Northern England, 2 in Southern England and 2 in Wales. During the fieldwork, all the participants residing in Scotland were students. The high concentration of Scotland-based participants can be explained by the fact that Scotland is a popular educational destination among

Bulgarians because unlike the rest of the UK, their tuition fees are covered by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), which is a strong pull factor (further information in *chapter 4*). In comparison, the large number of participants based in the Midlands can be explained by the fact that this is a small scale project and given the limited time and financial resources involved, it was easier for me to contact

participants who resided in the same region as myself. Therefore, the demographic data in the Midlands is potentially slightly skewed. Finally, all London-based participants are young professionals. This was an expected outcome given London's reputation as a cultural, social and professional hub. Correspondingly, residing in the capital gives one more opportunities for personal realisation and career development.

Although Images 2 and 3 are instrumental in demonstrating the geographical spread of the participants in the home and host society, they do not capture the complexity of their mobile lives. Thus, Image 4 aims to provide further information illustrating the participants' origin, location in Britain and their re-locations that emerged in the process of conducting fieldwork. Evidently, two of the participants have migrated internally before considering going abroad. Many of the young Bulgarians have also moved both within the UK (for study, job opportunity or lifestyle preference) and outside the UK (mostly on a year abroad as part of their studies). Thus, although not illustrative of their regular transnational mobility, which includes their travels between Bulgaria and Britain for family holidays and occasions, as well as their holiday trips to other destinations in Europe and elsewhere, the map is still indicative of the dynamic lifestyles that the participants maintain.

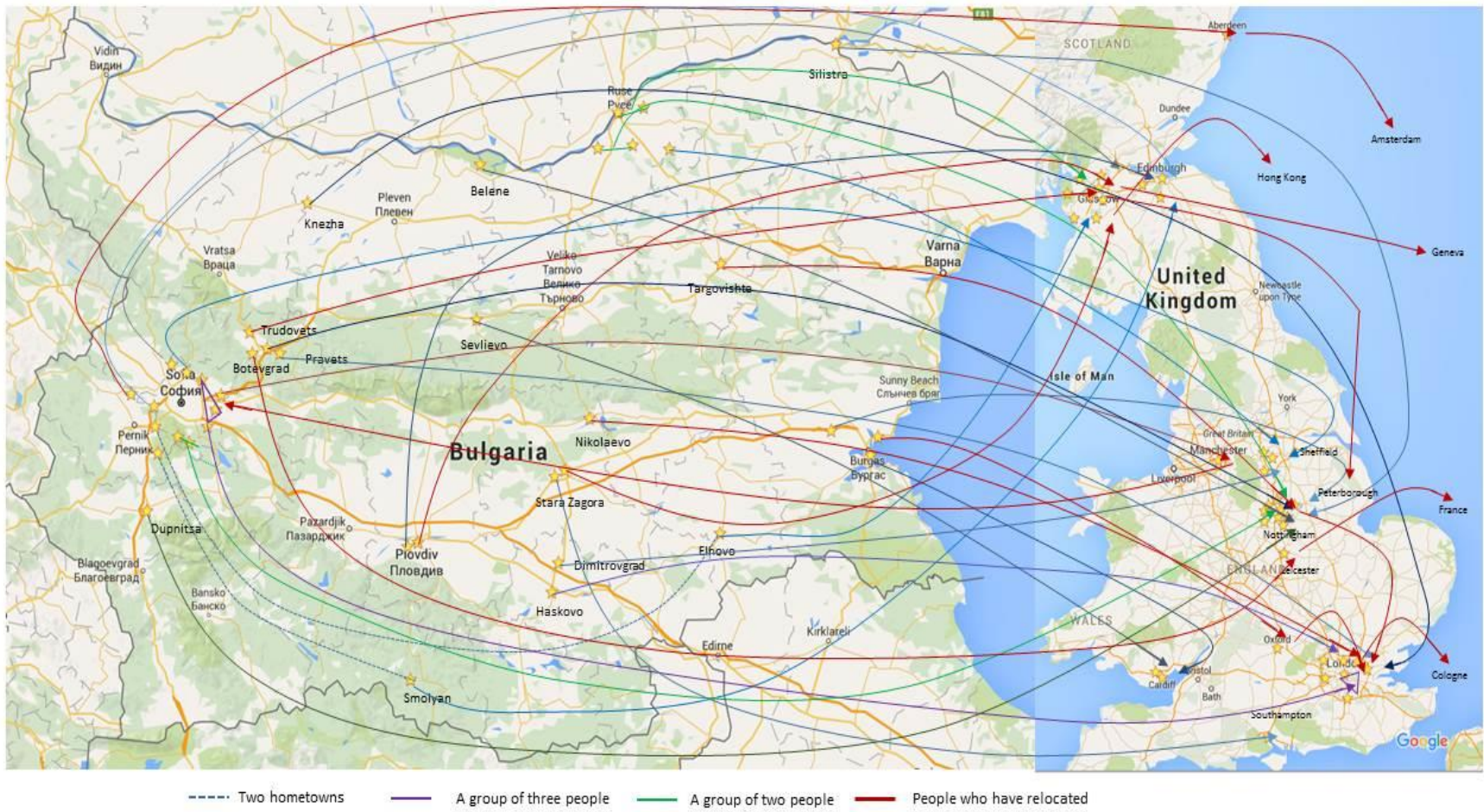


Image 4. Participants' mobility. Source: maps.google.co.uk and own elaboration

Location: the micro-geographies of fieldwork

Spatial context takes a central position in multi-sited studies. *Chapter 1* has already outlined the dynamics of the macro context of young, highly skilled Bulgarians. Location in this section will be considered in terms of the concrete sites where both interviews and participant observation were carried out. Although true for both elements of generating data, Elwood and Martin focus in particular on the physical dimensions of interview venues, arguing that the ‘interview site itself produces ‘micro-geographies’ of spatial relations and meaning, where multiple scales of social relations intersect in the research interview’ (2000, p. 649). More specifically, Elwood and Martin contend that interview sites as microscales of sociospatial relations need to be considered in-depth as they provide the material space for the enactment of power relationships, participants’ identities and on a larger scale – the phenomenon under study (2000, p. 650-655). Similarly, Sin (2003) not only warns against the neglect of the *in situ* nature of interviewing but also highlights that participant observation and interviewing often go hand-in-hand, further motivating the need to scrutinize the dialectic relationship between knowledge and fieldwork sites. Drawing on this approach, this section will consider the micro-geographies of the locations (public, private and online) where data for this study was generated, considering the corresponding sociospatial relations and ethical implications.

There is a strong preference in the literature on methods to conduct fieldwork in public over private places (among many, see BSA, 2002; ESRC n.d; Silverman, 2011; Bryman 2012). The choice of location is firmly embedded in ethical concerns about researcher and participant safety, their respective emotional well-being and the possibility of reversing the power imbalance between them. Academic institutions have adequately responded to these challenges by implementing various ethics procedures and the UoN School of Sociology and Social Policy’s Ethics checklist is no exception. Conducting research in private places or online requires ticking a grey-shaded box, which is followed by space

where researchers justify their choice and explain the safety measures in place. My own fieldwork, however, has identified three main problems with these procedures, approaches and understandings: 1) due to their strong focus on ethics, none of them address the micro-geographies of fieldwork that Elwood and Martin (2000) and Sin (2003) discuss; 2) the perception of public places as safe overshadows the intimacies they produce, often disregarding how non-participants in research are affected by data generation; 3) the line between public and private is not always clear-cut. Therefore, I will elaborate on these problematic areas by contextualizing them in specific situations I experienced throughout fieldwork.

Importantly, letting my participants choose an interview venue allowed me to gain a further insight into their daily routines, lifestyles and personalities. Two particular instances illustrate this point, demonstrating that public spaces, although similar, may generate different dynamics which may occasionally be problematic. The first case reveals how at times participants' convenience and my request for quiet locations clashed, resulting in several interviews taking place at busy cafés and restaurants. Such was the case with young professional Ivan. He works for a large consultancy company in London and he suggested that we meet at the entrance of a tube station in South-West London, which is where he normally changes to a different line of the tube to go home. Unfortunately, the only option for an interview venue was a nearby chain café, which was anything but quiet. We sat at a table for two in the middle of a row of similar tables along the long glass wall of the café. My main concern was whether Ivan would feel comfortable sharing information in such a context, whilst simultaneously worrying about the quality of the recording. Surprisingly, despite our proximity to other people, the sound of coffee machines and the background music (the CD playing was Adele's album '21') created a very 'intimate' atmosphere. Thus, the background noises of a busy public place contributed to data generation, enabling the creation of an 'intimate' material space, where personal information could be shared. While the café noises were beneficial to the flow of the interview, this was not the case when I tried to transcribe the

recording later. Taking advantage of the ‘Background noise reduction’ function of *Express Scribe*¹⁷, I aimed to minimise the sound effects of the setting. Replaying the interview recording later left me puzzled: instead of a ‘clean’ recording of my conversation with Ivan, I was left with the sound of coffee machines and Adele’s ‘Rolling in the deep’. Surprisingly, the only conversation that could barely be discerned in the file was that of the two ladies who must have sat next to us. Unexpectedly, I found myself in the possession of a recording of non-participants’ private conversation. Although their stories and information were not the object of interest of my study, they had involuntarily become participants. Recognising the ethical implications of this, I immediately deleted the recording and resorted to transcribing Ivan’s interview with the background noise, which masked the ladies’ conversation. The significance of this incidence, however, points to an important moment in data generation, namely, the extent to which choosing interview locations affects those who are not participants. Indeed, the ‘danger’ of conducting fieldwork in public spaces is that it may lead to the involuntary partaking by non-participants, which poses ethical dilemmas about informed consent. Most importantly, the presence of non-participants is not only a result of the nature of public spaces but also an example of the micro-geographies of research sites.

The second occasion highlighting the various ways in which non-participants are affected by venue choices for data generation is exemplified by my interview with Boyan. He is a young professional, who works for a major British bank in Southampton. The interview venue, which he had chosen was again a big chain café, which was next to the train station. Despite my initial concerns about the noise level, the café was quiet as there were not many customers at the end of the working day and the background music was very soft. Interestingly, although Boyan was speaking in Bulgarian, which in a British context provides some intimacy, he naturally lowered his voice throughout the interview to match the

¹⁷ Software used to transcribe data.

quietness of the venue. Our conversation took longer than expected and soon we were the only people left at the café. Boyan was sitting with his back towards the staff but I could see how they slowly started getting ready to close. I could clearly see their annoyance at the fact that once they had wiped all tables down and cleaned the floor and bathrooms, we were still there. As much as I did not want to interrupt the flow my conversation with Boyan, I gently urged him to get ready to leave. It was 6:30 pm when we finally left. The café was supposed to close at 6 pm. Thus, this example shows how prioritising research objectives in public spaces affects sociospatial dynamics, leading to inappropriate social behaviour, which affects non-participants. On the one hand, as a researcher, guided by the objective of our meeting, I had focused on building rapport with Boyan and making him feel comfortable to express himself. Similarly, as a participant he had done everything possible to give me full and detailed information. On the other hand, as customers we had breached social norms, which had prevented the café staff to leave their workplace on time. Furthermore, terminating the interview early demonstrates that data generation in public spaces is often the result of a negotiation between awareness of the sociospatial dynamics of the interview venue and the research objectives. Thus, the micro-geographies of particular fieldwork locations affect the process of data generation, and vice versa.

Additionally, the dynamics and characteristics of a research setting can occasionally blur the lines between public and private spaces. An example of this point was my interview with 24-year-old Boris. Working for a small start-up company, he suggested that we conduct the interview at his workplace, which would be empty on a Saturday. We met at a tube station in Central London, a short walk from his office. The company was located in an apartment in a once residential building. Boris initially gave me a tour of the office whose open-plan structure prompted him to talk at length about the company's work ethic of openness and flexibility. One of the rooms of the office was a lounge area with sofas and table football, adjoined to a small kitchen with a fridge and basic equipment. Boris

explained that once one of their clients gave them a sample of their product (a few crates of beer), so they would stay after work, play table football and order pizza, working on the project in between. The choice of interview location then made sense – Boris had chosen a place where he felt comfortable, as a result of its sociospatial dimensions and characteristics. Conducting our interview there gave me a further insight into his company’s work culture, firmly embedded in the material space that encapsulates it. Most importantly, the nature and characteristics of the office were a prime example of how the professional and intimate are often intertwined in the work practices of start-up companies, blurring the firm delineations of public and private research settings. Consequently, conducting an interview at Boris’ workplace on a Saturday had the dual characteristics of both public and private, demonstrating that the nature of a fieldwork site is not always easily defined.

This duality of research sites’ characteristics is further exemplified by conducting an interview or participant observation via Skype. Despite the burgeoning interest in using such online methods for generating data (Hanna 2012; Sullivan 2012; Weinmann et al. 2012; Deakin and Wakefield 2014), location is a largely overlooked aspect when considering the advantages and disadvantages of undertaking this approach. With regards to the micro-geographies of Skype interviews, Deakin and Wakefield implicitly denote the differences in socio-spatial relations between offline and online spaces by mentioning that in the latter case cultural and social greetings (such as handshaking or getting a drink) are bypassed (2014, p. 611). Although primarily focusing on the nature of the Skype interview as a safe space, Hanna alludes to the duality of characteristics of such research sites by describing it as a ‘neutral, yet personal location’ (2012, p. 241). My own experience of conducting interviews via Skype shows that online spaces are neither neutral nor free of distractions that can be avoided (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014, p.609) and in fact, the latter can actually contribute to data generation. Consequently, all five of my skype interviews with participants were conducted when each of us was respectively at home, which to an extent allowed both parties access to our personal,

private spaces. Furthermore, online research sites produce their own micro-geographies that transcend spatial (and occasionally temporal) boundaries. My Skype interview with Scotland-based master's student Hristian presents a revealing example. Upon commencing our video chat, Hristian apologised for the background noises, which I could hear – there was a storm in Glasgow with strong winds and heavy rain. At first I thought that would be an unwanted distraction, however, our conversation quickly progressed into a discussion of how the weather affects one's emotional well-being when living abroad. This clearly shows that synchronous video-assisted interviews produce their own microscale sociospatial conditions that not only blur the firm delineations of public and private but can also transform 'distractions' into useful tools that stimulate the research process.

Finally, before a more detailed analysis of private fieldwork settings is presented, a few clarifications need to be made with regards to the safety procedures employed in this study. In line with the School's recommendations, I provided my supervisors with a fieldwork schedule, including location. Additionally, prior to going to a participant's home, I gave the address to a friend whom I would call before and after the interview or participant observation to confirm that I was safe. In case I was in danger, further practical steps were envisaged to let my friend know something was wrong. In planning it, I thought it had to be a procedure that would not only be quick but also seemed related to the project and would not invoke suspicion. Therefore, sending a quick text message seemed the most appropriate approach, where a message saying 'BG' meant 'call me' and 'UK' meant 'call the police', to address uncomfortable or dangerous situations. It should be noted that I never found myself in a situation where I had to resort to this safety procedure.

In fact, conducting some fieldwork at participants' homes was beneficial as it revealed additional information that contextualised some of the interview findings. For example, throughout the interview with Kamelia in Scotland, she largely elaborated on her strong national identity. Once I finished recording, we went to the kitchen and she offered me a snack, which I gladly accepted. When she

opened the fridge, I noticed a plastic bottle of a fizzy drink that contained something else. Enquiring about the contents, Kamelia explained that it was a home-made elderflower juice from her grandfather, who had given it to her and she had brought to Scotland. Later, we were sipping home-made elderflower juice that had travelled more than 1500 miles, snacking on *kashkaval*¹⁸ and *lukanka*¹⁹, while I was asking her about the *party-grill*²⁰'s prominent presence in the kitchen. Similarly, by staying at Kalina's place (further elaboration on the relationships with participants below), I was able to gain a further insight into her eating habits and everyday practices, which exemplify a form of gastronationalism (DeSoucey, 2010). Trying to decide what to have for dinner she contended that the only thing she had was her own home-made yoghurt. What was striking about that incident was not that she makes her own yoghurt, but the process of it. Indeed, elaborating on the practicalities of making yoghurt at home, Kalina explained that she had brought yoghurt from home, containing Bulgarian bacteria (or 'yoghurt cultures'). Then she would put 2-3 tablespoons of it in a jar, top it up with warm milk and wrap it up with a blanket to maintain the temperature, allowing the milk to ferment. This was not simply a well-known traditional recipe for making yoghurt, it was also a cultural marker symbolising national identity and a strategy of 'creating' home, away from home. Although a 'normal' everyday practice in Bulgaria, in the British context it seemed peculiar and unusual. Thus, the micro-geographies of private spaces enriched the process of data generation as the dynamics and characteristics of material spaces have the potential to unlock various unexpected avenues for exploring research themes.

Thus, as this section has demonstrated, location in terms of the settings where research takes place not only matters but it also varies among public, private and online spaces. Drawing on specific examples from the fieldwork, this section

¹⁸ Type of Bulgarian cheese. See Appendix 1.

¹⁹ Bulgarian salami. See Appendix 1.

²⁰ Traditional Bulgarian indoor mini grill. Appendix 1.

has highlighted the microscale sociospatial dynamics of research settings, which not only provide new avenues for data generation but which also highlight issues of power and ethics (regarding both participants and non-participants) in the research process.

The implications of ‘living’ my research

In my fieldwork, I have carefully abided by the moral guidance of ethical research practice, involving: circulating information to potential participants, obtaining informed consent, preserving anonymity by giving them pseudonyms and concealing key information that may reveal their identity as well as maintaining confidentiality related to sensitive issues (May, 2001; Mason 2002; Israel and Hay, 2006; Silverman, 2013). However, following this ethical protocol does not prevent further dilemmas associated with relationships between researchers and participants. Consequently, this section will explore three prominent issues that emerged in my research in relation to positionality, relationships and emotions.

The role of the researcher is usually problematized in relation to the concept of positionality. The nature of the latter, however, is deeply problematic and should be treated with caution. As Merriam et al. note: ‘[t]he notion of positionality rests on the assumption that a culture is more than a monolithic entity to which one belongs or not’ (2001, p. 411). Correspondingly, this observation highlights the need to further explicate the idea of being an insider, especially on the basis of shared ethnic background. In that respect, Moroşanu’s (2015) reflection on fieldwork experiences with coethnic migrants in London is particularly important as it challenges ‘insiderness’ on the basis of ethnicity. More specifically, Moroşanu’s (2015) argument centres upon the understanding that although ethnicity may play a role in delineating the contours of outsidership and insiderness, other factors such as gender, occupational position and migrant status are equally important determinants. Drawing on these arguments, I have considered my

position of an insider carefully within the study. As Aull Davies quite rightly observes: ‘all researchers are to some degree connected to, or part of, the object of their research’ (2008, p. 3). While this is perhaps true for anybody who undertakes research, my personal experience was marked by the fact that I was not only a cultural insider but I also could fulfil every sampling criterion set out by this study. This meant that while I was researching the topic of this study, I was also practically living it by simultaneously personally experiencing it. Yet, in the process of fieldwork, I discovered more commonalities with some participants than others. For example, my experiences were quite similar in many respects to those of sociology student Kamelia, however, I had never lived in Spain as Nikolay did and I never experienced growing up in a British context as Svetla and Viktor did. Furthermore, even if some of the participants and I had similar experiences, we had grown up in different contexts and raised with different values, which created differences that became apparent throughout the fieldwork.

Therefore, although the idea of being an insider was not assumed lightly, this position led to advantages and disadvantages. With regards to the first aspect, ‘living’ my research was quite beneficial in terms of gaining access, establishing rapport and understanding the context. Simultaneously, this also posed challenges to critically engaging with my data. To avoid such pitfalls, I constantly challenged my interpretation of data by either discussing it with my supervisors or by occasionally sharing my observations with my participants and asking them for their opinion. Keeping a research diary also allowed me to revisit my notes on various issues that had been drawn to my attention to ensure the robustness of my data.

The role of researcher, however, cannot be considered without taking into account how it interacts with role of participant. In exploring this nexus, O’Connell Davidson’s (2008) reflections on the development of a close relationship with a key participant in her ethnographic study on prostitution are particularly instrumental in highlighting key ethical dilemmas associated with consent. More specifically, O’Connell Davidson questions the ethics of informed consent by remarking that:

No matter how reflexive, non-hierarchical and ethically sensitive the researcher, ultimately her or his task is to transform research subjects into objects, to fix them in texts' (or photographs or film) that will be exposed to the gaze of, and consumed by, other people (2008, pp. 57-58).

Thus, an inescapable part of any research project is the process of objectification of the participants by the researcher, which not only highlights the power imbalance between both roles but also challenges the ethicality of conducting research in general. Indeed, similarly to O'Connell Davidson (2008), I also ensured that I actively involved the participants in the process, giving them opportunities to comment on my findings. Additionally, in writing up the data, I included vignettes in my chapters, which aimed to reveal more about the participants' personalities and to contextualise their experiences. Despite my efforts, however, there is an element of objectification in this study as intimate details of young Bulgarians' lives are used to illustrate particular points made throughout the analysis. Recognising the implications of researcher-participant relationships, I have aimed to counterbalance the 'objectification effect' by demonstrating the relevance of this study and its findings to the process of sense-making of young Bulgarians' realities against which the ethical underpinnings of this study can be judged (O'Connell Davidson, 2008, p. 65).

Additionally, one of the imminent results of intensive and prolonged fieldwork is the fact that it blurs the firm delineation between personal and professional roles. Developing close friendships with participants is ethically contentious in itself (O'Connell Davidson, 2008; Aull Davies 2008), however interviewing friends is arguably even more problematic. Focusing on the latter aspect, several researchers have discussed this practice (Harris 2002; Taylor 2011). Similarly to Harris (2002), I discovered that the extent of closeness of friendship greatly influenced the nature of the conducted interviews. While she notices that it allows the omission of lengthy introductions (Harris, 2002, p.47), I also discovered that it helped to avoid particularly sensitive topics that would have unnecessarily

upset the interviewee. A case in point is my interview with Boris whom I had known since he was a child. His mother had died when he was much younger. This information would have probably resurfaced throughout my questions regarding family background and his family's reaction to his mobility choice. This would have potentially upset him as it did in the case of other participants where these questions triggered unpleasant emotions related to family deaths and parents' divorces. Therefore, my prior knowledge helped me to avoid a potentially very sensitive situation. Again, similarly to Haris, I discovered that with friendly acquaintances unlike close friends, interviews '[...]' were dynamic and provided both of us with a great sense of mutual discovery' (2002, p. 51). Nonetheless, the question '[...] did I manipulate her [or his] friendship for my own ends?' (Cotterill in Harris, 2002, p. 47) remained a constant reference point throughout my fieldwork.

Finally, a topic that is often disregarded in research with participants, who are not deemed as vulnerable and topics that are not seen as sensitive in their nature (May, 2001, Silverman, 2011; Bryman, 2012) is that of emotions (both of the researcher and of the participants). I argue, however, that this is a serious omission because emotions are an integral part of any qualitative study and their careful consideration '[...] can help to foster intellectual clarity and a deeper understanding of the issue(s) being studied, the research participants, and the researchers themselves' (Blakely, 2007, p. 59). My study on the migratory experiences of Bulgarian highly skilled migrants is no exception. Although comparatively perhaps less sensitive than the experiences of refugees for example, my fieldwork revealed that any relocation away from the home country is laden with emotions (see *chapter 5*). Additionally, asking 'innocent' questions about biographical data occasionally uncovered other sensitive issues such as the death of family members, parents' divorce or difficult break-ups. However, as those events were historic and participants referred to them retrospectively, they all assured me they were comfortable talking about them. The fact that those events had happened in the past and were dealt with ultimately had less impact upon the emotional well-being of the

participants. However, the case of my interview with psychology student Karolina requires special attention. While talking about the difficulties of migrant life abroad, Karolina stated that the most challenging aspect is having a close relationship with her family but being miles away. Admitting this made her emotional and she began crying. Aware of my responsibility for Karolina's emotional well-being (BSA, 2002, point 13), I immediately paused the recording and tried to console her. Once she recollected herself, I reassured her that we could terminate the interview and talk about her feelings without having to worry about the research. However, she insisted upon resuming the interview assuring me that emotions were part of her experiences and that she was okay. Upon finishing the interview, I also provided her with my contact details and those of my supervisors in case she needed further support. Correspondingly, this example demonstrates that the research process is not free of emotions and feelings and that even the most 'innocent' questions can provoke distress. Thus, as researchers we need to be mindful of that and be prepared to react adequately to minimize the negative effects (which are sometimes unpredictable and unavoidable) upon participants' well-being.

Although the researcher's responsibility about the emotional well-being of participants is a widely discussed topic in research guidelines (see BSA 2002 for example), much less attention is paid to the emotional experiences of researchers themselves²¹. The latter is epitomised by the term 'researching the researcher' (Campbell 2001, in Blakely, 2007, p. 59), which considers the role of affect in undertaking research. As Blakely further remarks, '[t]he research process can be affective, emotional experience in which researchers attune to the feelings of their research participants and to their own, inevitably shaping the research itself' (2007, p. 61). My own experiences closely resonate with this claim. Indeed, as I uncovered sensitive issues in relation to my participants' lives I felt uncomfortable about invoking unpleasant memories and negative emotions particularly when they cried

²¹ I am indebted to the SSSP PhD research community, in particular to Rupal Patel, for drawing my attention to this issue.

or spoke about break-ups, divorce and family death. In many ways, quickly changing the topic was not only a way to mitigate the effects of these discoveries but also a way to deal with my own emotions in the situation.

I felt the same level of discomfort on another occasion. Upon saying goodbye to Boyan at the end of the interview, he said he wanted to give me a present – a magnet in the shape of a bagpipe with the Bulgarian flag on it – to say thank you for researching this topic. He also quickly added that it was good that there was somebody who finally would write positive things about Bulgaria. I felt very uncomfortable due to the tension between Boyan's expectations and my responsibility as a researcher. I also felt that his gift (both the magnet and his time) were undeserved: I could not fulfil his expectations to write only positively about Bulgaria because my duty as a researcher dictated that I should critically engage with the phenomenon under study, which also included a dose of critique. In hindsight, I should have made that clear to Boyan, however, in light of the unexpected emotions, I simply said 'thank you'. This incident was a learning curve in the research process, which clearly demonstrated the importance of engaging with emotions. Acknowledging them is a step towards strengthening the credibility of the study and its findings.

Dealing with the data

This chapter has so far considered various aspects of the process of data generation and the corresponding dilemmas and concerns that have accompanied it. The focus of this section, however, shifts to the steps that follow once the majority of fieldwork has been completed. Taking the (already generated) data as a central point, in the next few paragraphs the key question that will be considered is: how was the data dealt with? To respond to that query, four key elements (or stages) will be considered: data collection, transcription, translation and analysis.

The practical side of gathering and storing information generated throughout fieldwork is an important element of every study and the approach to it depends on

the nature of method used. For example, to make sure I have a detailed account of my interviews, I decided to record them with a dictaphone. I also acknowledged that some of the participants may not feel comfortable with our conversations being recorded, so this approach was implemented only after the purpose of the recording and storing procedures had been explained and consented to. Recording an interview, however, can be both advantageous and detrimental. The main benefit is that it allows the researcher to focus on the interview dynamics, while still having access to a recorded file that has captured all the information. Arguably, however, the presence of a recorder during an interview can also have negative effects. More specifically, on the one hand, there is a possibility that the researcher is distracted by it due to continuously making sure the device is working, while on the other hand participants might feel nervous and wary of the fact that the interview is being recorded. To avoid such distractions, I made sure that I replaced the dictaphone's battery prior to each interview and double-checked whether it was working properly. My first experience of interviewing Emanuela demonstrated, the avoidance of the recorder effect was not always possible but a technique I developed in subsequent interviews was to locate the dictaphone somewhere close to the participant but preferably out of sight. Maintaining eye contact with participants throughout our conversation was also a particularly useful 'distraction' technique.

As Bryman observes, '[b]ecause of the frailties of human memory, ethnographers have to take notes based on their observations' (2012, p. 447). Indeed, field notes are an important instrument in the 'data logging process' (Lofland and Lofland, 1984 in May, 2001, p. 160). It has been widely recognised that this process of gathering data generated throughout participant observation takes many different forms from mental notes, through quickly jotted down ones through fully typed field notes (Gray 2003; Gray 2004; Aull Davies 2008; Bryman, 2014). The dynamic nature of participant observation as a method in itself requires the researcher to rely on all three types of notes. In my own fieldwork, I had a journal that I always carried with me, however, I also sometimes found myself jotting down

information on loose pieces of paper, napkins – I even used the back side of a restaurant bill a few times. I also had to constantly make mental notes, which were ‘particularly useful when it is inappropriate to be seen taking notes’ (Bryman, 2012, p.450). This was the case during activity-driven events such as the ceilidh dance in Scotland, lunches, shopping or watching a film with participants. I also aimed to write up full fieldwork notes at the end of each day, systematizing and detailing them as much as possible. Finally, a particularly useful approach has been to incorporate ‘headnotes’ or as Ottenberg defines them ‘[...] the notes in my mind, the memories of my research’ (1990, p. 144). Therefore, headnotes are very important as they can point out key events and themes that have emerged throughout the research. Although a rich source of impressions and occurrences, such notes are also subjective in their nature as they are susceptible to distortion and exaggeration, which hides potential dangers as they may lead to development of stereotypes about one’s participants (Ottenberg, 1990, p. 144). As suggested by Ottenberg I have used them cautiously, employing an approach where my headnotes and field notes are in a constant dialogue (1990, p. 146). Thus, given the multi-sited nature of this study, the process of gathering data also required the use of a wide variety of techniques and approaches, dependent on the method for data generation employed.

There are a few considerations that need to be made with regards to the transcription of interviews. Generally, there are two approaches to tackling this stage of the research: either to transcribe an interview as soon as possible after it has been recorded or to complete that procedure once fieldwork has ended. Although the first method is quite beneficial as it allows the researcher to remember a lot of detail while it is still fresh in the memory, I opted for the second one. The motivation behind my choice was that the distance of time could counterbalance the effects of being an ‘insider’. Transcribing all my interview after fieldwork was complete allowed me to not only immerse myself fully and intensively in the data but also to look at it with ‘fresh eyes’. This made it very easy for me to notice themes and spot details that I had not noticed while interviewing. This choice, however, had its

pitfalls. As already mentioned, the quality of some of my recordings was poor, which made it difficult to transcribe. This would have been easier if I had done it shortly after the interview was recorded. Moreover, this prolonged the transcription process, which also delayed the process of writing up the data. Nonetheless, the benefits outweigh the negatives of this approach as I found it very stimulating to be able to distance myself from the data and then to re-engage it with it again. I transcribed all interviews verbatim, with the exception of one, which was given to a friend to save time. I chose an interview which did not contain sensitive information. All transcripts were then anonymised. I also envisaged sending a copy of the transcript to the corresponding participants in order to give them the opportunity to comment and change anything they wanted. However, most of them were not interested in receiving them, so I only sent them to those who specifically asked for them.

Translation was a key issue in the process of dealing with the data. Although all my fieldwork notes were in English, 33 out of 37 participants chose to be interviewed in Bulgarian, which they justified in a variety of ways. While some of them thought it was unnatural to speak to a co-national in English; others felt their native language could give them a better range of expression, allowing them to convey information more accurately. Young professional Nikolay, who lived in Spain prior to arriving in the UK, commented that his Spanish was better than his English. Thus, a significant part of my interview data was in Bulgarian. As I am fluent in both Bulgarian and English, I chose to transcribe the interviews in the language in which they were conducted and to analyse them in English. Nonetheless, translation was unavoidable and the main challenge was to ensure that meaning is not 'lost' in the process. Translation in research is either carried out personally by the researcher or undertaken by a team of translators who cross-check their work, using back translation to minimise the implications of the process (Birbili, 2000, Temple and Young, 2004; Larkin et al., 2007). However, given the small-scale of the project, it was my responsibility to ensure that meaning is

conveyed as accurately as possible in English. A challenge in that respect was not only that my participants used their native language but that in doing so they often relied on colloquial expressions, which had no equivalent in English or referred to culturally-specific events and occasions. Recognising the role of the translator as a 'cultural broker' (Temple and Young, 2004, p.171), it was evident to me that indeed there is a balance between language proficiency and cultural knowledge (Larkin, 2007, p. 471). More specifically, 'the solutions to many of the translator's dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities, to literary forms and to changing identities' (Simon, 1996, p. 137 in Temple and Young, 2004, p. 165). Taking advantage of my role as native Bulgarian speaker, I ensured that home society-related references are further contextualised in footnotes whenever possible. I also left some Bulgarian terms in original but I included a glossary with a full explanation. Additionally, as I was translating quotes from participant interviews, I cross-checked colloquial expressions with English native speakers to ensure these quotes conveyed their meanings as fully as possible.

Dealing with the data was particularly challenging, especially in terms of analysing all the information I had gathered. Indeed, this process, especially in terms of ethnographic research, is an ongoing practice that begins before the official data analysis stage (Gray, 2003, p. 146; Silverman, 2013, p. 233). Therefore, while transcribing and throughout participant observation, I noticed certain patterns and themes emerging, which I recorded in my diary. Nonetheless, when I decided to focus solely on analysing all the information that I had generated in the span of almost a year and a half, I realised that I had not only acquired a data set that was voluminous in size but also eclectic in nature. I had more than 45 hours of recorded and transcribed interview data, three field journals, newspaper articles, YouTube videos, electronic field notes, leaflets, photos, souvenirs and other objects acquired in the process of fieldwork. This multiplicity of form, shape and size of material led me to the decision to undertake a mixed approach to scrutinising the data, combining

elements of thematic and narrative techniques. As Riley and Howe note, while thematic analysis involves ‘[...] the open coding of the data, i.e. the building of a set of themes to describe the phenomenon of interest by putting ‘like with like’’, narrative analysis not only takes the standpoint of the storyteller but it also scrutinises the dynamics of how they make sense of story they are telling (2005, p.229). Elements of both of these techniques were important to me as I wanted to focus on the most important themes as deemed by the participants, to capture their personal stories and how they interpreted their own experiences alongside how they presented them to me (see Appendix 3).

Further drawing on Gray’s (2003) approach, I carried out a three-stage data analysis process, which incorporated various techniques. Therefore, in the first stage, I decided to write up ‘portraits’ of the participants, which enabled me to focus on their stories and the corresponding dynamics, what they deemed important and valued the most. Unlike Gray (2003), who used this technique to present the data, my portraits were part of the data analysis and consisted of two parts. The first focused on providing a summary of that participant’s migratory experiences and biographical background alongside my impressions of their personalities and how they came across during fieldwork. To counterbalance the subjective nature of that description (which had elements of analysis), the second part of the document contained key interview quotes, contextualising them within data from my online and offline participant observation related to that person. This created an embedded portrait of each participant. The second phase involved coding the interview data and organising this thematically. One of the potential dangers here, however, was that ‘codes become fixed and the data static’ (Gray, 2003, p. 168). To avoid that, in the third stage I thematically re-analysed the data by comparing the participant portraits and interview data, juxtaposing it with themes from the literature. Thus, this three-stage process of data analysis ensured the rigorousness of the findings. This is also evident in the data chapters that follow, which contain various levels of analysis through the use of interview quotes, vignettes and fieldwork memos.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological design and approach of my research project. Although not free of ethical dilemmas, this study has explored these contentious issues as and when they arose in the process alongside how they were dealt with to minimise their negative implications. The detailed reflexive manner in which those were considered was deemed as the key approach that can ensure the credibility of the study.

In a nutshell, this project is an empirical, inductive qualitative study with an interpretivist and constructivist agenda. As a multi-sited ethnography, it employed a variety of methods such as participant observation (online and offline), interviews as well as consulting relevant documents, including, but not exclusive of, policies and newspapers. The practicalities and lived experiences of fieldwork have served as a learning curve that brought to the fore a number of issues such as the importance of flexibility and reflexivity in research. Additionally, crucial is the consideration of location, both in terms of overarching context but also the micro-geographies of research sites. Important elements are also the implications of positionality, relationships and emotions as well as the multi-faceted process of dealing with data. All these key components shape not only the research framework of the study but also the experience of researching the phenomenon.

Although no claims can be made in relation to the generalisability and representativeness of the findings, the data presented in the next few chapters offers an in-depth insight into the migratory experiences of a specific group of people at a specific point in time. This snapshot of the phenomenon under study is nonetheless a useful indication of some of its characteristics and prominent features.

Introduction

Sitting in a newly opened café and sipping our coffees, I asked Bilyana how she landed a prestigious and highly competitive place in a graduate scheme. *'It's a long story'*, she said and little did I know that she was right. It turned out that her story is not only a long one but a complicated one, too. She was doing her undergraduate degree at the Technical University in Sofia when she decided to apply through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Scheme (SAWS) to work for the summer and save money to do a MA degree in Britain. She got sent to a potato and strawberry farm in Scotland, where soon she was given more responsibility as her employers realised that she *'had something between her ears'* and could speak English. The year was bad (there wasn't much produce) and she soon managed to relocate to a broccoli farm in mid-summer. However, she could not save enough money but it was *'so much fun'* nonetheless, and she met a boy. Upon her return, her dream to do a MA in the UK did not disappear – it only got stronger. She soon managed to get a job through another agency, which was recommended by her boyfriend's brother. Despite her parents' objections, Bilyana left to work in a mushroom farm in Southern England. She eventually saved enough and completed her MA in London. After that she realised that she did not have any work experience in Bulgaria, so it was better to look for a job in Britain. It was a long and tedious process and she nearly gave up, however, her parents encouraged her to stay as the economic crisis had hit Bulgaria and the country was tormented by months of anti-governmental protests. While looking for work, she had two part-time jobs, and eventually managed to secure her current position.

What lies at the very core of migration as a phenomenon is the movement of people from one place to another. The pervasiveness of the processes of planning, organising and carrying out this endeavour as well as their implications both for migrants and their families, and the respective home and host societies have been the object of research of many disciplines from human geography, economics, politics and sociology to the humanities and anthropology (Brettell and Hollifield, 2015). Making sense of migratory stories therefore, requires not only

contextualising them temporally and spatially but also considering the various processes that shape, direct and impact upon migratory paths.

In that sense, Bilyana's story clearly demonstrates the complexity of migration as an experience, indicating its dynamic and multifaceted nature. Moreover, Bilyana's story highlights that while migrants plan their journeys aiming to achieve a specific goal, the latter not only does not follow a linear path of realisation but it can also ultimately change as a result of the migratory experience. Therefore, the decision to depart from one's home society leaves a mark on one's life course, affecting their worldview and the very core of who they are (in terms of values, perceptions, identities, belonging, everyday practices, and lifestyle choices), and how they relate to others (relationships with families, friends, colleagues, the host and home society). As Castles and Miller argue: 'Migration is a collective action arising out of social change and affecting the whole society in both sending and receiving areas' (2009, p. 20). Furthermore, while migration may be a *collective action*, it nonetheless has a *personal dimension*: that is, everyone involved in and affected by the migratory endeavour experiences it 'intimately'.

It is precisely this 'intimate' side of migration that needs to be taken into consideration when analysing migratory experiences. Therefore, the main goal of this chapter is to provide an understanding of young, highly skilled Bulgarian migrants' personal context. Respectively, three main questions frame the contours of the participants' personal context: who are they; how have they planned their journeys and why have they chosen to come to Britain. While the first question suggests the predominantly descriptive nature of this chapter, the latter two delineate the contours of migration as a project. As *chapter 2* has argued, a migratory project in this thesis is understood as a personalised (but also collective) and carefully planned, often reactionary plan of action with the aim to pursue a specific goal or purpose which may change over time. Two further conditions underpin the essence of a migratory project: a spatial relocation, prompted and influenced by the simultaneous operation of structural (macro), intermediary (meso)

and subjective (micro) factors. I argue that the concept of a migratory project serves as a useful analytical lens for the better understanding of the experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK.

Consequently, the rest of chapter will scrutinise participants' migratory projects in several aspects. Firstly, it will consider their profiles, mainly focusing on drawing out their personal traits and characteristics, which to a large degree, as it will be argued, inform their migratory project. This will be followed by a careful examination of how the participants have initiated and planned their migratory projects by considering the factors that have contributed on macro (structural), meso (intermediaries) and micro (subjective) levels. The final section will argue that the combination of elements that have triggered the participants' migratory projects have made their mobility choices an ordinary practice, which nonetheless involves extraordinary experiences.

The human face²² of migratory projects

The experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians are part of what Favell (2008b) has termed 'the new face of East-West migration', whereby the fall of the Berlin Wall and the processes of Europeanisation have led to, as King (2002) has noted, new motivations for migration that have blurred the lines of the old binary dichotomies of migration. Yet, the migratory projects of the participants in this study are different to the denationalised ones of Favell's (2008a) Eurostars. Instead, young Bulgarians' mobility practices are firmly embedded in and influenced by national discourses and conditions in both host and home country. On the one hand, in Bulgaria, these young people are often referred to as the 'children of the transition'. This term implies their liminality, which stems from having grown up

²² The term is borrowed from Smith, M. P. and Favell, A (eds.). (2006). *The Human Face of Global Mobility: International Highly Skilled Migration in Europe, North America and the Asia- Pacific*. London: Transaction Publishers.

in a time of turbulent socio-economic and political changes (Gruev, 2015). On the other hand, arguably, Bulgaria's transition to democracy has left a mark not only upon young people's worldviews and values but also upon their perceptions of migration. More specifically, the young people born shortly before and after 1989 are perceived as a generation unburdened by Bulgaria's communist past. As such, they have been categorised as 'new Bulgarians', or 'carriers of new values', among which most prominent are individualism, pragmatism, cosmopolitan openness and refusal to adhere to traditionalism (Mitev in Chavdarova 2006, p.57-60; Mitev and Kovacheva, 2014). Consequently, my participants belong to a generation of young people, who have mostly grown up at a time when freedom of mobility across Europe has been made more accessible, if not a banal practice. However, their aspirations and how they make sense of the 'normality' of free movement within the EU remain a rather challenging theoretical task, which requires further investigation.

Broadly speaking, the migratory projects of the participants in this study can be organised according to the main purpose of migration²³ (Fig. 1). Focusing on the student part of the sample, participants usually follow the path of academic progression: they initially do an undergraduate degree (UG), which is followed either by a postgraduate taught (PGT) or postgraduate research (PGR) one. However, there are also exceptions to this path. For example, 25-year old Hristian is the only one, who arrived in Scotland to pursue a PGT course, while Kaloyan completed his UG degree before arriving in England to do a PhD. Further elaboration on these participants' stories is provided below.

There is a greater diversity among the young professionals. The largest group is of those Bulgarians who have had a 'full UK experience', i.e. they have initially come to do their degree and then stayed to pursue a career realisation. The

²³ The model presented in fig.1 is limited due to the small sample of the study. Such a model excludes, for example, cases of love migration (see King 2002) where studying and/or working may be secondary factors, shaping migratory projects.

young professionals clearly demonstrate how migratory projects change over time. Much less are the representatives from the ‘mixed’ and ‘family migration’ groups. While the first have completed either part or all of their tertiary education elsewhere (in Bulgaria or in USA), the migratory path of the latter was pre-determined by a family decision to relocate to Britain. Consequently, their migratory projects have developed post-factum, resulting from their parents’ decision to seek better life opportunities for the entire family abroad.

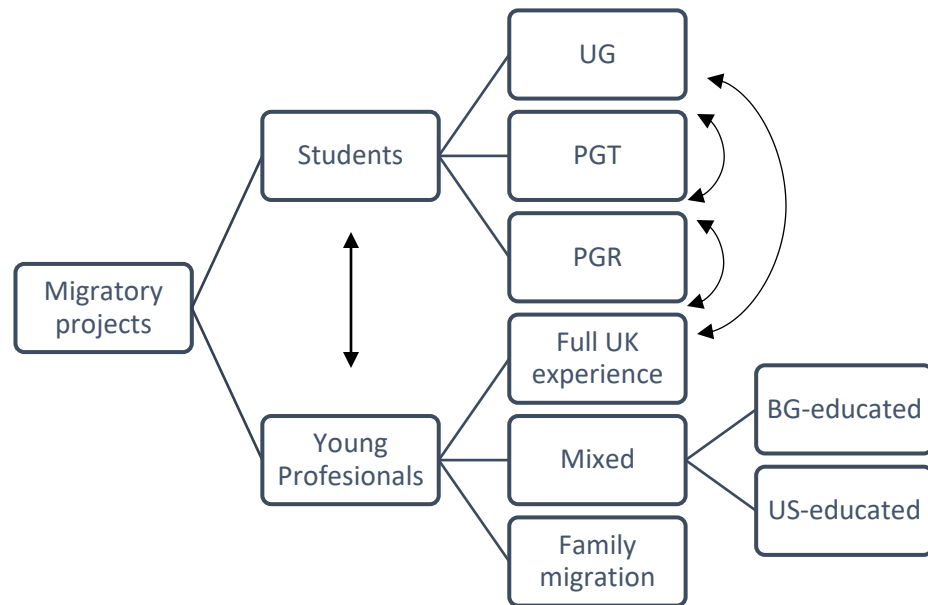


Figure 1. Types of young, highly skilled Bulgarian migrants in the UK according to their migratory project. Source: own elaboration

While this schematic representation of the participants’ key migratory goals provides a general overview of (some of) the migratory projects of young Bulgarians in the UK, it is nonetheless too simplistic. Behind every migratory path there is a personal story that illustrates the various realities of migratory experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to provide an in-depth insight into the personal context of the participants’ migratory projects. This will allow the acknowledgement of difference in a seemingly similar migratory plan of action. Therefore, this section will focus on providing the personal context of the students and young professionals in this study. It will do so by looking at the personal stories

of the following participants: UG students (Kiril, Marko and Delyan); PGR students (Kaloyan, Stamen and Simeon); ‘full UK experience’ professionals (Vasil, Ivan, Natalia, Kalina, Dessie, Boyan and Sava); ‘mixed’ young professionals (Nikolay and Teodora) and cases of family migration (Svetla and Viktor).

The research participants are an extremely heterogeneous group of young Bulgarians living in Britain. Partially, this can be explained by the fact that the sample upon which this study is based consists of two related, yet different groups: students and young professionals. As I have argued previously (*chapters 2 and 3*), this does not necessarily mean that the study consists of two samples. In fact, I contend that both students and young professionals in the UK belong to the same broader category of young migrating Bulgarians. Yet, at the same time, there are noticeable differences in their experiences, which account for the fact that they find themselves at different stages of their lifecycle and of their migratory projects. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a within-group evaluation of their personal context. This nonetheless reveals a further internal heterogeneity, resulting from the unique and specific nature of the individual circumstances, which underpin the participants’ journeys.

Focusing on the students, the comparison of their stories is significantly hindered by the rich diversity of personal backgrounds, values and perceptions, the length of their stay and the type and level of degree that they are pursuing. For example, Kiril is a first year student, who has been living in England for only five months. While 19-year old Kiril has travelled a lot with his grandmother around Europe, which has made him very open-minded and tolerant, this is the first time he has lived away from his family. His parents – a father, who is a lawyer and a mother, who is an economist – played a huge role in the ‘design’ of his migratory project. During the interview, Kiril admits himself that he is more interested in the social aspect of university life than the academic side. His drive for personal development and independence nonetheless comes to the surface as he shares that this goal is ‘*to get better education*’. He adds:

[...] there comes a time when one should leave the parents' house. You just have to go. [...] If I have to be honest, I just did not want to stay in [home town]! Because I can't imagine that [...] when I graduate that I will still be at my parents' and my Mom will be cooking for me. I just can't! (my translation).

Migration for him is also a 'rite of passage' (van Gennep, [1909] 1960), a pathway to growing up and proving he can be independent. My continuous participant observation has confirmed Kiril's strong desire for personal development, which clearly shows ambition and determination. Ironically, his independence does not necessarily apply to cooking as he shares that he relies mostly on take-away food and on his housemate – a Bulgarian girl that cooks for the whole house, while the two boys (Kiril and his friend) supply the ingredients. Therefore, the personal context of migratory projects reveals the continuation of gendered practices, whose occurrence is evident in Kiril's account of his pre-migratory context.

Looking at the other end of the educational spectrum, the participants pursuing a postgraduate research degree find themselves situated in a completely different context. Despite that the story of 28-year old Kaloyan reveals that the migratory projects of PhD students are similar to those of other students:

Kaloyan takes me on a tour of his University, proudly showing me all the facilities and excitedly talking about his research. I have managed to arrange the interview with him a day after he has submitted the minor corrections to his thesis. *'You are already a doctor, congratulations'*, I say, to which he modestly replies: *'[...] hopefully in a few weeks I will be a free person'*. We have to pause the interview a few times to move to a quieter spot at the location he has chosen— his university's Students' Union. I am wary of how that will affect the interview and quickly jot down a note in my research diary. To my surprise, he seems unaffected and excitedly speaks about the highs and the lows of his study. The latter was particularly ostensible at the end of his first year when his Dad died of cancer. Kaloyan reflects on this in the following way: *'Then I felt homesick but I never really asked myself: 'What the hell am I really doing here?'. No.'* His desire to do learn and research clearly shine through: from his undergraduate studies in Bulgaria through this account of the most difficult time in his family life to his viva. Nearly an hour and a half later, I walk out of the building, thinking that I certainly know more about genes and embryonic development than I did before but I am not entirely sure what all this means for my own project. A few hours later I realise what this is: it is who he is—someone passionate about learning and discovery, about education. I quickly open my research journal and add: *'Students' Union as the perfect location to summarise who he is—he thrives in that environment'*. (Memo, February 2014)

The vignette above clearly demonstrates that the personal context of postgraduate research students is largely determined by the nature and characteristics of their research projects. While Kaloyan has come to the end of his educational journey, for him that is only the beginning of his research career, and perhaps a migratory project with a new goal, which will nonetheless be motivated by his interests and academic zeal. The same passion is exhibited by 24-year Stamen who shares: *'Ever since I was little, I wanted to make robots [...], probably since I was four-five years old. So when I was in eighth grade [...], I started looking into how I can make this happen'* (my translation). Pursuing his childhood ambition has led him to do his undergraduate degree in the south of England, only to be reunited with his friend Simeon in Scotland to do research. Stamen and Simeon not only used to sit on the same desk at school but they have been best friends since then and now they live in the same house. As students, they used to motivate each other to study

hard, however Simeon was always more interested in mathematics and informatics. Simeon comes from a family of academics – both of his parents do research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (hereafter BAS). Furthermore, Simeon is someone, who could be described by what Beck (2002) terms as ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’, someone who has both ‘roots and wings’. The latter describe his everyday: sharing Bulgarian food with his international friends, dreaming of opening his own university one day. While the leitmotif in all three PhD student stories is their passion for learning and research, it is quite evident that their migratory projects have been influenced by different personal contexts.

While the examples above illustrate the two polar opposites of the educational continuum, even looking at the experiences of the students ‘in the middle’, that is, undergraduate and master’s students, reveal an even greater complexity and multidimensionality of personal experiences. For example, many of my participants chose Scotland as a destination (see Appendix 2) because as EU students their fees are covered by Student Awards Agency for Scotland (hereafter, SAAS). While both Marko and Delyan are of similar age (22 and 21 respectively) and study Politics in Scotland, analysing their personal contexts highlights certain differences. Both, for example, are very motivated and driven young men. However, while initially both came to study alone, Delyan’s sister has recently joined him, studying on a different course at the same university as her brother. Delyan also demonstrates stronger attachment to Bulgaria in comparison to Marko, who has just returned from his year abroad in Hong Kong. While Delyan loves Latin music and dance, Marko is very passionate about debating and public speaking, which have strongly enhanced his critical thinking skills. The differences between the two of them become even more evident when their attitude towards moving abroad to study is considered further. Although Delyan reluctantly decided to migrate, it was still seen as the only opportunity to achieve personal success and career development. Conversely, while for Marko studying in Scotland was not his first immediate choice, his decision was the result of a long and carefully thought through process.

Although he admits that due to the influence of his friends he ‘ [...] *got really enthusiastic about the possibility of studying abroad*’, nonetheless he ‘ [...] *was still very keen on staying in Bulgaria and continuing [his] education in International Relations in Sofia University- that was [his] primary choice*’. Indeed, many of the participants share that they have had different initial plans, however due to the fact that the UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) application process begins much earlier than similar processes in other European countries, many students later on abandon plans to apply elsewhere.

Similar trends of heterogeneity emerge in the case of the young Bulgarian professionals who took part in the study. Interestingly, at the time of conducting the interviews, seven of them were based in London, while nine resided and worked elsewhere in the UK. The majority of the professionals (nine) work for large companies, followed by four in medium-sized enterprises, while two were based in small companies and one of them has his own business. A common feature in the migratory projects of the majority (but not all) of the young professionals is the fact that they have a degree from a British university. This again highlights the fact that the participants from both groups (students and professionals) do indeed belong to the same sample, even though they find themselves at a different stage of their migratory path and lifecycle.

Those Bulgarians, who have had a ‘full UK experience’, that is – they have obtained their degree from British universities and upon completion have joined the UK labour market, have very diverse migratory projects. For example, the stories of 23-year old Vasil and 24-year old Ivan are rather interesting. They are both originally from Sofia and have studied at the same university. However, while Ivan’s background is in Philosophy and Law, Vasil has a degree in Management. While Ivan had a clearer migratory project from the onset, Vasil’s dream was to be a volleyball player. He was intensively training volleyball in school and did not even think of doing anything else until he was 17. Two key factors played a huge role in directing him to study abroad. On the one hand, it was Vasil’s grandfather’s

influence that made him interested in Management studies. On the other hand, peer pressure played a significant role as Vasil's friends were applying to universities abroad, which made him realise that this is a possible option. The trajectories of Vasil's and Ivan's migratory paths may be quite different, however, they not only studied at the same university but also now work in two different branches of the same auditing company. The latter was particularly helpful as both Vasil and Ivan were able to share knowledge and information on how to successfully go through the application process. These two stories provide an excellent example of how migratory projects are never linear and simple. Evidently, the personal context of each is an important factor in shaping the direction, characteristics and nature of the participants' ambitions. Moreover, what comes to the fore is the importance of migrant knowledge (Petroff, 2006) through all stages of the development of the migratory project.

As mentioned earlier, most of the young professionals who participated in this study originally came to study. For example, Natalia and Kalina both belong to the same friendship circle but they met at university, unlike Dessie and Boyan who were in the same class in secondary school. All four of them work for medium to large companies and live in London (apart from Boyan who lives in Southern England). Looking more closely at the personal context of their migratory projects, however, reveals the richness and complexity of the participants' experiences. Kalina can easily be classified as a 'Bulgarian Eurostar' in a Favellian (2008a) manner as her migratory project is strongly embedded in the processes of European integration. She was part of the first wave of student migratory flows to the UK in 2007. Raised in a family of doctors, her passion has always been economics. Upon completing her degree in the Midlands, she worked for a year in a small company but then decided that she wanted a career change and went on to do her masters in Northern England. What underpins her experiences is mobility both in spatial and social terms as after working for a fairly large company in Southern England, she finally relocated to London to be closer to better job opportunities and to her friends.

One of them is Natalia, the daughter of an English teacher, who has always been there for her both emotionally and financially. Comparatively speaking, Kalina has always been very determined to pursue her career goals, often choosing not to focus on the hardships, whereas for Natalia the difficulties abroad have always been a focal point of her own understanding of her experiences, helping her to become more resilient. Twenty-three-year old Boyan emphasises the fact that his secondary school classmates were very driven and ambitious, which motivated him to do his best. Nonetheless, upon finishing his degree, he still struggled finding a job in London. For Dessie, however, it was not only her peers that were motivating her to study English and do her best; it was also her sister, who by completing a degree at the American University in Bulgaria, served as a role model and a source of inspiration. Unlike Boyan, the fact that Dessie had done an internship in her company while still studying led to a job offer after she graduated. These stories reveal the importance of participants' personal context and networks in shaping the course of their migratory projects. The latter emerge as a complex amalgamation of strong aspirations, embedded in close-knit supportive networks and overarching processes and structural conditions.

Among those with a 'full UK experience', however, Sava stands out because his strive for independence led him to establish his own company for web and graphic design. Sava comes from a family of five. While his mother works at the Customs Department of the Ministry of External Relations, his father, who is a policeman by education, has spent most of his life working as a pottery maker and a dance teacher. Although his family has always been supportive of his decision, Sava made the decision to study abroad himself. His motivation to migrate came from the disappointment he experienced with the quality of education in Bulgaria, which led him to leave his undergraduate course after 6 months, work for a year and apply abroad. Upon finishing his degree in the UK, he realised that '*[...] my parents had been supporting me, I had a loan, so I didn't want to go back and [...] be dependent on them*'. He thus founded his own company. What Sava describes as the

best part of his job is its internet-based nature, which allows him to maintain a dynamic lifestyle and travel a lot. Consequently, his migratory project and daily life exemplify a different type of virtual mobility to the one described by Ferro (2006). Unlike Ferro's (2006) participants, Sava's entrepreneurship allows and even fosters spatial movement – a case study that contributes to the understanding of virtual mobility as a phenomenon.

Finally, the migratory projects of those young professionals who belong to the 'mixed' group need to be considered in order to highlight the myriad of personal contexts that underpin the choices of young Bulgarians to come to Britain. Although for the representatives of this group study and work abroad have always been the goal, the UK was never their primary destination: 27-year old Nikolay and 32-year old Teodora both studied in Bulgaria. Although Nikolay was quite happy to stay in Bulgaria, he decided to join the rest of his family who had been living in Valencia for 14 years. However, with the unemployment rate for young people peaking at 25%, after two years of fruitless job searching, he gave up and went back to Bulgaria. He started working for a translation company, which soon relocated him to their office in the Midlands.

Thus, Nikolay's migratory project bears some similarities with the one of Teodora: both did not originally want to leave their home country but did so to be reunited with their families. However, as it becomes clear from the vignette that presents Teodora's story below, this is also where the resemblances stop as unlike in Nikolay's case, Teodora's family was already in Britain. Nonetheless, the migratory paths of Nikolay and Teodora illustrate quite clearly the intertwined nature and the importance of structural factors, family networks and personal goals in shaping the migratory projects of Bulgarian young professionals in Britain. This

highlights that the macro, meso and micro levels of analysis all need to be taken into consideration to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

'I did both my bachelors and masters degree at the Technical University and that 'opened the doors' to coming here. I sent my degree certificates to their organisation here [most probably NARIC] and [...] they recognised it and I did not have to take any additional courses', says Teodora when I ask her to tell me a little bit about herself. Thinking about her migratory path, I quickly scribble in my diary 'straightforward?' and 'easy?' (Memo, March 2014). The choice of a question mark at the end of those two words turned out to be quite apt as Teodora started talking about her family: '[...] My brother was 19 when an opportunity came up for him to come here [UK], I mean, he knew he would not come back if he liked it here. The idea was for him to come here for 3 months, I think it was a language course [...]. Then the following year, my Dad arrived with the excuse to visit his son and never came back. Later on, my Mom, two-three years later, she came because as a wife, she did not have issues with the visa. [...] I lived in Bulgaria by myself for two years, while my family was here. I did not have the right to come here [in the UK] until 2007'. Importantly, prior 2007, Teodora did not even wish to migrate to the UK. She was in the midst of a postgraduate course and had started working as an electrical engineer at a construction company. The business was booming; she absolutely loved her colleagues and her life in Bulgaria. She did miss her family though but none of them could come back to visit, fearing that they would not be able to return to the UK. Her brother was still eligible to be drafted to complete the mandatory military service, so his friends had told him to 'not to set foot on Bulgarian soil'. Teodora's tourist visa application was refused multiple times on the grounds that her entire family had migrated to the UK. Instead, she had to meet up with her brother on 'neutral' ground – in France.

The participants' personal contexts described above reveal that not only do migratory projects have a human face but that it is an incredibly diverse one. Moreover, their stories bring to the fore that the decision to live, work and/ or study in Britain has been the result of a carefully planned and in most cases – long-awaited, strongly desired, personal choice in the search for opportunities to develop their talents or pursue their dreams. This has been a personal choice supported by and in some cases even initiated by their loved ones. Consequently, migratory

projects emerge as very individual, private and intimate as well as collective and shared. However, two particular stories stand out as they do not necessarily fit the overall trend. Svetla who is a 29-year old PhD student and 25-year old software engineer Viktor both never made the decision to come to Britain themselves. Rather, they were part of their parents' migratory project. As Svetla puts it, thirteen years ago: *'I got made to come [...]. Blaga [her Mom] [...] and my Dad put me on the plane and there was no choice'*. Reflecting upon her initial experiences, she adds: *'I really hated it. I didn't wanna stay here for a moment. I even told my parents I'll kill myself if they don't send me back to Bulgaria!'* Interestingly, Svetla's experiences differ quite a lot in comparison to her fellow Bulgarian PhD peers as her arrival was part of her family's migratory project. The latter was nonetheless carefully planned (as at the time Bulgarian citizens were subject to visa restrictions), pursuing a specific goal – better job opportunities for her parents and a chance for a better future for Svetla. Interestingly, this collective migratory project had its own personal dimensions for each family member. While her parents eventually separated and Svetla's Dad went back to Bulgaria, both mother and daughter slowly adjusted to the new environment. Svetla's negative attitude towards her parents' migratory decision eventually was substituted by a gradual adjustment to the host society. She met her now ex-husband Rob and they had a daughter Audrey, who has been one of the main factors in deciding to stay in the same city as Rob and pursue a PhD. Similarly to Kiril's story, migratory projects often reveal the presence of strongly gendered practices and decisions. However, in Svetla's case it not only influences her everyday but it also plays a role in her decision as to whether to relocate or not.

Similarly, Viktor was part of his parents' migratory project. His adjustment was difficult and yet, less laden with negative emotions. In fact, a certain degree of appreciation can be detected when he explains his parents' decision:

My folks have had me and my brother in mind, because I have a brother who is seven years younger than me. I mean, they have

done it [migrating] because of us, so that we can have a better future here. (my translation)

Interestingly, it was Viktor's mother, a nurse, who migrated first in 2004 to work as a carer in a retirement home, while the rest of the family followed six months later – an example that falls under the broader trend of the feminisation of migration (Kofman et al., 2000; Castles and Miller, 2009). Furthermore, Viktor's personal context is quite different as his family migrated to the south of Wales, where *'it was I bit difficult for me initially as people speak with a thick accent, however, when you are young, it is easier to learn a language, so I learned it quite quickly'*. He has not only learned the language well but Wales has also become an integral part of his personal history as he also decided to do his undergraduate degree there. The latter helped him to uncover his passion for programming, and he now works as a software engineer in a small company in South West England.

Thus, the overview of the participants' personal context reveals a rich diversity of migratory projects, which are not only goal-driven but also underpinned by an array of macro, meso and micro factors. The latter will be discussed in more detail below.

Planning the migratory project: motivations and factors

Migratory projects are a complex endeavour, whose nature and characteristics are underpinned by an intricate amalgamation of factors, motivations and practicalities. Therefore, each of these will be analysed in turn.

Migratory projects as a balancing act: structural factors

The overall macro context discussed in the introduction to this thesis has highlighted the significance of three interlinked processes that underpin the socio-political and cultural outlook of Bulgaria: 1) turbulent socio-economic and political

changes post-1989; 2) westernisation, and 3) Europeanisation. On the one hand, the cumulative effect of these trends has made migratory projects a viable option for pursuing one's ambitions and professional realisation. On the other hand, this combination of processes has produced several structural factors that simultaneously pose advantages and disadvantages to the pursuit of individual achievement plans.

One of the dualistic structural drivers of migratory projects that emerge from the data is education. Correspondingly, the imperfections of the Bulgarian educational system such as its outdated approach is one of the reasons why the participants have decided to migrate. Samuil, for example, notes that high schools in Bulgaria offer good educational possibilities, however, it is mainly tertiary level education that cannot compete with universities abroad. This opinion is shared by many participants who classify the Bulgarian approach to higher education as 'outdated' and reminiscent of teaching styles of the socialist era. A case in point is Vasil's experience of studying for a year in a Bulgarian university, prior to applying in Britain:

All modules at [University] were incredibly voluminous, almost impossible to learn. Also, the marking system is [inadequate] because they expected you to know 100% [...] You are expected to reproduce something that has been written in some really old textbooks, which is not even thematically organised. And you not only have to learn it but you also must reproduce it for a certain amount of time [in exam conditions]. (my translation)

The thus outlined problems of the approach to higher education in Vasil's university compromise the quality of education offered, ultimately stimulating the decision to migrate by making foreign education more attractive. Nonetheless Vasil recognises the value of receiving a lot of information, which helps to build a solid basis of knowledge. His main concern, however, is related to the fact that such a basis does not allow any scope for the development of practical skills which are crucial to a well-rounded education. UG student Roza echoes these arguments but focuses mainly on the lack of embeddedness of critical thinking skills in both

secondary and tertiary education. She is also highly critical of the university application system, which requires students to sit for various exams, which not only vary from university to university but also are dependent on the degree that prospective students apply for. She indignantly remarks: '[Applicants] *need to learn everything by heart and write it all as it was in the textbook. This diminishes your individuality and it just tells you "study what we have taught you and do not even try to think!"*' (my translation). This structural aspect of learning is yet again another element to the outmoded and outdated approach to education, which not only questions its quality but also motivates the participants to consider studying abroad.

While the quality of Bulgarian education emerges in the narratives of the participants as a motivation to leave their home country, equally, its British equivalent serves as a pull factor. Several elements contribute to the attractiveness of British education such as its reputation and the availability of information, and the low cost of tuition fees – all associated with the structural composition of higher education in the UK.

Unsurprisingly, the reputation of world-renowned British universities is the most common reason for young Bulgarians to pursue their education in the UK. This closely resonates with Findlay et al.'s study (2012) on British students enrolled at universities abroad. Drawing on survey and interview data, the authors found that many of their participants '[...] alluded to the existence of a global hierarchy of universities. They tended to rationalise their choice of study locations in terms of being at a 'world-class' university' (Findlay et al., 2012, p. 125). This socially constructed perception of university excellence not only serves as an indication of an order of preference among students but it also attracts a higher number of them in particular locations (Findlay et al., 2012, p. 128). Similarly, Ivan explains his choice of destination in the following way: '*This is the best country where you can study in Europe*'. This is a common opinion reached after careful planning where all options are considered and the maximum amount of information is gathered. However, unlike their British peers, none of the young Bulgarians report having

attended university open days. Building migration knowledge that can enable their migratory projects then is significantly aided by the abundance of information such as university rankings, brochures and websites. In fact, choosing to apply for a particular university is largely based on how high the applicant's choice of an undergraduate degree ranks in the country and in Europe. For instance, UG student Nayden shares: *'So before I applied through UCAS, I looked at "Guardian's" rankings which indicated that the [department] at [university] is really good'* (my translation). Similarly, Roza comments on her choice to study in Scotland: *'When I saw how high the university was ranked, I was really impressed and I just decided that this was the best place to study abroad'* (my translation). Thus, university prestige is not perceived as abstract but tangible because it is measurable.

However, in hindsight, 20-year old student Maria highlights the problematic nature of rankings: *'I don't understand why there are statistics. I was quite young then and did not fully realise that they are not that important'* (my translation). Interestingly, the ageist reference to support her statement about the unimportance of university rankings symbolises not only Maria's lack of knowledge and inexperience but also the inability of statistics to convey in-depth knowledge about the quality of British education. This is often compensated by consulting a lot of information on the internet about the structure of a particular course or the type of modules and opportunities that are available to students. For example, Marko, who was also considering studying in his home country, had spent days at his prospective university in Bulgaria struggling to obtain information about his chosen course. He contrasts his experiences with the British educational system in the following way:

Simultaneously, I went on the website of [...] University and checked my curriculum in the future four years and got extremely happy that [...] I am free to choose my modules and actually I will be able to go abroad almost certainly. Because of the great partnerships the university is having. And I made my choice to go to [there].

This example clearly highlights the structural differences between higher education in Bulgaria and in the UK. The freedom of choice as opposed to a more inflexible

course programme highlight the dual nature of the quality of education as a criterion that sways the migratory scales either way. Ultimately, the balance between the enabling and disabling features of structural factors (Kofman et. al, 2000, p. 31) comes to the fore as one of the drivers behind young Bulgarians' migratory projects.

Another important element of British education that needs to be considered is the so-called 'value for money'. Most participants not only note the quality of higher education in the UK but also its affordability, which stems from their EU status. This means that Bulgarians not only pay at the same fee rates as home students but also that they are entitled to bank loans. In fact, Scotland in particular is a popular educational destination due to SAAS, which covers tuition fees that do not have to be paid back, as Leda explains: *'You graduate without debt. I mean, they simply sponsor your education'* (my translation). Undoubtedly, this is a very strong factor that tips the scales towards pursuing education abroad. In fact, Marko comments that: *'[...] me and my parents calculated the expenses that I would have to have in [Scottish city] and in Sofia and we came up with a figure that wasn't significantly different from one another'*. Evidently, the structural conditions of the British context make education not only attractive but also affordable. The careful planning of the participants' migratory projects reveals that they are very pragmatic about their choices.

The data suggests that the other crucial aspect in planning migratory projects is the consideration of opportunities for personal development in each context. The structural conditions for advancement can serve both as a barrier and a facilitator for developing one's potential and progressing in their career. More specifically, the perception of lack of such opportunities in Bulgaria is necessarily measured against the corresponding view of their abundance in the UK. Respectively, this motivates young Bulgarians to migrate:

To be honest, if Bulgaria was a country that offered you everything you needed and if it was a fair country, I would have never left it. But it isn't.

And it won't be in the time when I am under 60 or 40-years old (Kalina, my translation).

The opinion of marketing specialist Kalina is quite interesting as she suggests that the structural conditions in Bulgaria limit one's chances. Her reference to the lack of fairness also points to a perception of social inequality as a result of the socio-political and economic framework of the country. Additionally, talking about being under 40 to 60 years old points to the importance of personal development in the years considered to be one's active working life. This statement also conveys a dose of pessimism in relation to the possibilities for improvement of the working and living environment in the home country, thus endorsing migration as a solution. The latter is further explained by Maria: *'If we had adequate job opportunities, adequate salaries and adequate education; if everything was okay, then there wouldn't have been a mass emigration of people'* (my translation). This suggests that there is a mismatch between the structural framework and people's desired lifestyles, which ultimately affects chances for personal development and career progression. It also points to the disabling features of macro conditions in relation to agency. Migratory projects then emerge as an attempt to counteract the limiting nature of the socio-political and economic framework in Bulgaria.

Correspondingly, Britain is seen as a place that offers more chances for people to achieve their goals and ambitions not only to progress in their career but also to ensure that they have a good standard of living. One of the key elements of the British context that draws young, highly skilled Bulgarians to Britain is the better chance to find a job. Svetla mentions: *'Certainly, for professionals, there are much more opportunities, yeah. Much **better** opportunities as well'* (my emphasis). This clearly shows that it is not only about the quantity but also about the quality of opportunities – a combination of structural conditions that makes the UK an attractive destination. Although Ignat adds that he thinks that it is easier to find work in the UK, he admits that this is also dependent on individual efforts and qualifications as much as it is about structural conditions. Nonetheless, perceptions

about the availability of opportunities in Britain as opposed to those in Bulgaria are related to particular sectors and areas that young highly skilled Bulgarians plan to progress into. For example, both Ignat and Vasil note that London is the business and financial centre of Europe, which automatically makes Britain an attractive destination. Similarly, environmental studies student Leda points out that in comparison to the UK, the renewable energy sector in Bulgaria is rather underdeveloped, which would make her professional realisation very difficult. Finally, Sava, who is the only entrepreneur in the group of professionals, reflects that in hindsight he would not have started his own business if he was in Bulgaria. This clearly demonstrates the duality of conditions in relation to opportunities in both host and home societies.

The Bulgarian case, however, needs to be contextualised in its wider economic milieu, which takes into account the changing nature of the labour market worldwide. This means that there is an expansion of the service sector while heavy industries are struggling, which leads to limited options for professional realisation. Interestingly, however, Svetla's perception of the lack of opportunities in Bulgaria suggests that this overall trend is more prominent in some contexts than in others: *'When you are in Bulgaria it doesn't matter how much you study, you still end up at the same place. You're still gonna be a waiter, it doesn't matter what you are doing'*. This statement puts forward the idea that there is a strong sense of inequality, which motivates people to pursue better opportunities elsewhere. Additionally, the sense of lack of opportunities is accentuated by the related perceptions about widespread corruption, nepotism and heavy bureaucracy in Bulgaria. Expectedly, these are contrasted with their mirror images with respect to the socio-political environment in Britain. For example, in relation to corruption, Sava remarks there are some similarities between both countries, however, *'[m]aybe corruption is much more obvious in Bulgaria and that's what puts me off personally'*. For him this results in uncertainty about the ability to capitalise on the time, effort and money he has invested in his own business. Similarly, Ignat, comparing the job application

processes in both Bulgaria and the UK claims that the British approach relies on more transparency than the one in the home society. These comparative reflections ultimately give the participants a sense of British society as fair and honest, which is contrasted with its binary oppositions in the Bulgarian context.

Another reason that accentuates this perception of lack of opportunities in Bulgaria and inequality cited by young, highly skilled Bulgarians is the presence of nepotistic relationships in their home country. For example, Emanuela comments that ‘[In Bulgaria], *you have to know people, it is almost mandatory. I see the people around me, they all have connections*’. It is important to note here, however, that while the participants are not oblivious to the fact that this is a Bulgarian-only phenomenon, they do claim that when compared to the British context, nepotistic trends appear as more prominent, thus contributing to their decision to migrate.

Importantly, the unfavourable structural conditions in Bulgaria prevent many participants from returning upon graduation as they risk devaluation of their skills. For example, young professional Kalina, explaining her decision to not return, exclaims: ‘*Where would I work? How would I pay my student loan with a [monthly] salary of 500 leva?*²⁴’. This clearly demonstrates concerns in relation to devaluation of skills and inability to maintain the same standard of living. Kalina’s story also shows how although migratory projects change across time and space, structural conditions in both host and home societies continue to play a significant role.

Thus, this section has demonstrated the importance of host and home society macro conditions in shaping the migratory projects of young, highly skilled Bulgarians. The careful examination of structural factors related to education and opportunities for professional realisation reveals that they can serve both as barriers and platforms for personal development. However, through the demonstration of the enabling and disabling features of structure, the analysis also suggested that

²⁴ Lev (pl. leva) is the Bulgarian national currency. 500 leva is approximately £200.

leaving the home society can be seen as way to counterbalance the first, while capitalising on the latter. Migratory projects then emerge as an act of agency, which involves pragmatism and careful planning. This idea will be further explored through the scrutiny of the role of intermediaries such as various institutions and loved ones (meso level) in the planning of migratory projects.

'Raising a generation of pilgrims, future immigrants': the role of intermediaries

Two of the most prominent ways to describe young, highly skilled Bulgarians, as already pointed out, are 'the children of the transition' or the 'new Bulgarians' (Mitev (2005) cited in Chavdarova, 2006; Mitev and Kovacheva, 2014). While the first one accentuates the importance of structural factors in shaping their mind-sets, the second one refers to the views, values and ambitions young people hold dear, which are arguably fundamentally different to those of previous generations (Chavdarova, 2006). To understand how and why that is the case, it is therefore important to analyse factors that have shaped young Bulgarians' worldviews. Recognising the significance of one's upbringing, Politics student Marko goes even further: he not only implies that one's family affects one's values and perceptions but he also argues that they have contributed to what he terms as 'raising a generation of pilgrims, future immigrants'. To unpack this phenomenon, this section will not only argue that friends and family, previous educational institutions, university fairs and consultancy agencies act as intermediaries by shaping migratory projects, but also that 'new Bulgarians' as a label should be treated with caution.

With regards to the role of the family, none of the participants shared that their parents oppose the idea to leave Bulgaria. However, the reported level of involvement and engagement significantly vary. At one end of the spectrum, there are participants who independently made the decision to study in Britain. While Sava did his own research and then informed his parents of his intentions, Ignat

insists that his family ‘[...] *did not discuss this much. They neither encouraged me to come here [UK], nor to stay there [BG]. I made that decision entirely on my own*’ (my translation). In both cases, migratory projects emerge as very individualistic, where their families, while supportive, played only a secondary role in the participants’ plans for the future. These two cases, however are exceptional as the majority of young Bulgarians highlight the crucial engagement of their families in the migratory endeavour. At the other end of the spectrum then, there are a few cases when family members in fact were the main trigger of migration. Besides Svetla and Viktor’s cases of family migration, Delyan mentions that he was not very keen to study abroad: ‘*this is not my thing I don’t feel great when I am not in Bulgaria*’ (my translation). However, after numerous conversations with his parents who ‘[...] *dreamt of giving me the best possible education*’, he realised it was almost a necessary step: ‘*Eventually I decided [to study abroad] but it is not like I came to that decision by myself*’ (my translation). This example clearly demonstrates that family members can also assume the role of intermediaries by not only supporting but also initiating migratory projects.

One’s family dynamics then come to the fore as one of the triggers of mobility where young people fulfil their parents’ ambitions of providing the best possible personal development for their children. This is the case with Nayden, whose story reveals how ideas of mobility are planted from an early age and nurtured through the years: ‘*They [parents] started mentioning it [study abroad] to me ever since I was in eighth-ninth grade and by the time I was in tenth-eleventh grade, it was quite clear that I will go to England*’ (my translation). Migratory projects are clearly very well organised and in some cases – carefully cultivated as part of one’s upbringing, simultaneously emphasising the role of the family as facilitators of such ideas and plans for the future. Importantly, Nayden’s mother decided to go and work in Germany in order to make sure that she can financially support her son’s study abroad. On the one hand, this reveals an interesting insight into the ‘feminisation of migration’ as a phenomenon (Kofman et al., 2000; Castles

and Miller, 2009). On the other hand, it shows that the process of planning and initiating study abroad can in turn trigger other auxiliary migratory projects (of parents), which enable, assist and support initial migratory plans (related to their children). This clearly demonstrates the key position of family units as facilitators, mediators and occasionally – initiators of migratory projects.

Having considered the two extremes of the parents' involvement in the migratory plans of their children, it is important to also analyse the experiences in the middle, that is, the different nuances of mediation and facilitation. The analysis of this aspect reveals that support for migratory projects varies according to type (financial, emotional and advisory), characteristics (gendered and generational) and reasons underpinning it (personal ambitions and dissatisfactions versus parental responsibilities). Although different forms of support can be discerned, it should be noted that migratory projects are the result of a combination of all of them, where in some cases certain types prevail over others. Unlike young professionals, among students there is a stronger emphasis on financial support. While sponsoring a migratory project is one of the key elements of its initiation, for some families it was more difficult to do so than others, as such support largely depends on parents' professional background, thus highlighting the importance of class in migratory flows (Waters, 2006). This also affects to the extent to which financial support is noted as important in participants' narratives. Correspondingly, those whose parents were doctors, lawyers and businessmen focused more on the role of the family in providing advice and guidance. Those on lower income conversely recognised more explicitly the financial burdens that mobility poses on family members who stay behind. Natalia's story here is interesting:

My mother is an English language teacher. [...] I come from a family that is not particularly rich, so it was tough for us. My Mom had to withdraw a bank loan. My father, well, they are divorced, so that is why I speak mostly about my mother because the bank loans mostly put pressure on her. It was mostly thanks to her that I was able to come here [in the UK] (my translation).

This example reveals that family dynamics, when combined with class issues, further complicate the provision of financial support. It also emphasises the crucial role of family support in enabling migratory projects.

Another type of support directly related to the practicalities of planning study abroad or professional realisation is families' provision of advice and guidance. The latter two stem from the dual role that family role model assumes in their children's lives: as parental authorities and as professional experts. With regards to the first one, migratory projects come to the fore as collective decisions on the basis of discussion of the best options for one's personal development. Stamen illustrates this case quite vividly: '[My parents] *really supported me as they have acquired quite a lot of life experience and know that [study abroad] is a better long-term option than staying in Bulgaria*' (my translation). The initialisation of a migratory project then is a result of a negotiation between the options for one's development, available both in home and in host societies, facilitated by discussions in the family. Similarly, young professionals experience the same process as testified by Teodora's story of her brother's encouragement to follow the rest of the family in the UK. The advisory role of family members is further supplemented by their educational and professional experiences, which put them forward as reliable sources of information and guidance. Such is the case with Kiril's parents who were adamant that he should not stay in Bulgaria. He explains:

[...] I decided to consult my parents because I believe that they were more knowledgeable about universities than I was because both of them have studied at an English high school and speak English fluently. They work closely with English and Russians [so they know the context better] and correspondingly my Dad was constantly surfing the Internet to gather more information, whereas I wasn't really doing this (Kiril, my translation).

This shows that family members' expertise is a valuable and trustworthy asset when planning migratory projects. Migration knowledge then is cumulatively obtained and based on experiences acquired throughout one's life course in the home society. Moreover, in Kiril's case it suggests a certain degree of passivity on his part, even

though he is the one that is expected to carry out the migratory project. Nonetheless, this advisory aspect of family members provide accentuates the important role of intermediaries that they play in the pre-migration stage. Furthermore, some parallels can be drawn between the discussion of the financial and advisory role of young Bulgarians' parents and those of students from Hong to Canada in Waters' (2006) study. She rightfully notes the '[...] importance of *immigration* as an 'educational' strategy incorporating multiple family members', where '[...] parents' socio-economic status and possession of different forms of capital' play a vital role (italics in original, Waters, 2006, p. 181 and p. 182). However, while for Hong Kong students this is an escape mechanism which prevents failure in home educational system but renders them passive, this is not necessarily the case of young Bulgarians. The latter instead not only do appear to have comparatively more choice but also perceive education in Britain as a better way to capitalise on and further develop their educational achievements. Nevertheless, in both the Hong Kong and Bulgarian cases, it becomes evident that, as Waters argues, '[...] 'parental choice' in education is ever more closely aligned with spatial mobility, which in turn is a reflection of social class status' (2006, p. 188).

Additionally, emotional support provided by family members is not only a key ingredient of young, highly skilled Bulgarians' migratory projects but also a significant factor that influences the trajectories of migratory experiences. The data shows that loved ones' attitudes towards the idea of migration in the form of presence or absence of encouragement can also influence the prospects of carrying out migratory projects. While the participants reported an overwhelming presence of such support, Kamelia's case should be discussed as it reveals some nuanced differences. Her parents are divorced and while her mother unconditionally supported Kamelia's desire to study abroad, her father had his reservations. In fact, that was the key reason why she did not go to study as an exchange student for year in the UK while she was in secondary school. The fact that she finally managed to leave for Scotland to pursue her undergraduate degree was the result of a negotiation

and to some extent – opposition to her father’s opinions. She explains the situation in the following way:

My father has always doubted this [study abroad] and some of the best things have happened to me because I decided not to [listen to him]. It’s not that he does not support me. His favourite phrase is “You are a winner!”, however when it came to me coming here [Scotland], he was not very much up for it, simply because he was not convinced that was the best option (my translation).

Evidently, emotional support can be complex as it may entail both encouragement and discouragement. The father’s opposition in this example is not the result of his doubt in Kamelia’s abilities and the idea of migrating in general, but rather whether or not this is the optimal and most appropriate way to ensure successful personal development. Despite its dubious nature, however, emotional support not only shapes migratory projects but it also helps young Bulgarians to carefully consider the options before them.

While the scrutiny of the role of the family in the conceptualisation of migratory projects reveals the interconnected and simultaneous ‘operation’ of various types of support such as financial, emotional and advisory, the data shows the ways in which such assistance is provided can be gendered and generational. Thus, participants noted that while their families were very supportive of their decisions to migrate, various family members reacted in different ways. Samuil, Kamelia, Nayden and Kiril comment that there is a vivid gender difference in supporting migratory projects – they stress the fact that mothers in particular, although supportive, found it very emotionally difficult to let their children be away from them. Such a claim should be treated cautiously. While it indeed highlights some gendered characteristics of support for migratory projects, it should not be assumed that fathers did not react emotionally to their children’s decisions to study, work and live abroad. Their feelings were perhaps simply articulated in different ways. The different attitudes towards support among various family members can clearly be discerned in Marko’s account:

Obviously, when I get in particulars, my Mom wasn't extremely happy that I will be living abroad and far away. My grandparents, especially the ones from my village, didn't really like the idea either. I mean, it's not as if they were unsupportive – they were just sad, as in every family which is quite close-knit as ours and has been used to spending [time together]. [...] There was an element of sadness because I was going to be the first person to actively leave the country for four years.

Again, dynamics and relationships within the family impact upon not only the initialisation but also the attitude towards migratory projects. It becomes clear that the level of closeness among family members emotionally complicates one's decision to go abroad. This excerpt also highlights that different generations (and their corresponding views of the world) are an integral part of the perception of what is best for one's personal development. Ultimately, besides highlighting gender- and generation-related nuances, Marko's story also emphasises that migratory projects are not only personal but also collective and above all – emotionally contentious.

The close involvement of family members in facilitating the direction and planning of the pre-migration stage raises questions in relation to the idea of 'the children of the transition' as 'new' Bulgarians. This nexus becomes particularly problematic when the motivations of family members-as-mediators are considered. Undoubtedly, the overarching reason for initiating or supporting young Bulgarians' decisions to migrate centres upon the specific caring responsibilities of parents, epitomised by the desire to ensure the best possible personal development for their children. However, a more in-depth analysis reveals a subtler, but pervasive motivation, related to family members' own ambitions (due to their personal experiences and background) and dissatisfactions (as a result of the socio-political changes in Bulgaria). In relation to personal experiences and background of the parents, the data shows that those participants, who came from families that had a previous history of some form of migration, were more likely to want to study or work abroad. An interesting example is young professional Boris' account of his father's support:

My Dad was actually really keen about the whole idea and I remember that towards the end of 12th grade for some reason I started having doubts. I am not sure why but the last few months I said “nah, what’s the point of going abroad?”. I had been accepted at [University in Bulgaria] and I said to myself that it is better to go there because it is easier. And actually, it was my father who persuaded me to stick to my original decision that here [London] will be better for me, and has supported me ever since. He also studied abroad. He studied in Kiev, Ukraine back in the day. (my translation)

This interview excerpt clearly shows the active engagement of parents in their children’s migratory projects. It can be also inferred that the previous experiences of Boris’ father, along with his parental duties and responsibilities, motivate him to actively mediate the process of following up on the originally agreed course of action. This clearly demonstrates the crucial role of the family as mediators and initiators of migratory paths.

Related to the parents’ previous experiences and background are their personal ambitions and dissatisfactions with the Bulgarian reality. As Kalinova and Baeva (2006) comment, the prolonged period of democratic transition in the country along with related turbulent socio-economic changes has divided the Bulgarian population into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, i.e. those who have and those who have not benefitted from these contextual processes. This, in turn, has resulted in very specific ambitions and dissatisfactions, which can be easily discerned in the narratives of the participants about their parents. This suggests that potentially family support for migratory projects is a way to deal with the parents’ own frustrations and ambitions. For example, a number of young Bulgarians such as Emanuela share that her parents ‘*were extremely happy that I will study in the UK*’ (my translation), especially her mother who is very interested in history and culture. Similarly, Marko remarks: ‘*I think for my parents, the important thing was that I was going to get a diploma from the West*’. These two quotes suggest a certain tendency for the parents to romanticise a foreign degree, which can be directly

related to perceptions of ‘the West’, built on the basis of life on the other side of the Berlin Wall.

Additionally, the data shows that parents’ dissatisfactions have resulted in urging and actively supporting their children to relocate abroad. Samuil, for example, observes how his father’s comments about the situation in Bulgaria have been a driving force behind his and his brother’s decision to migrate:

There are days when my father comes home absolutely shattered and says: ‘Leave this country! Don’t even think about staying here!’. I know he gets good money but he often says that he will retire the moment when we find good jobs and become independent. He works for us now but he can’t stand the situation in Bulgaria. (my translation)

Examples such as this one where parents explicitly tell young Bulgarians to leave the country are abundant in the data. The parents’ frustrations and everyday difficulties then become translated into strong financial, emotional and advisory support for their children’s migratory projects. This not only highlights the parents’ key role as intermediaries but also questions the categorisation of young people in Bulgaria as ‘new Bulgarians’ with different values and worldviews. Indeed, their views as fundamentally different are challenged by the key role of their parents’ ambitions in their upbringing.

Finally, as the vignette below demonstrates, the difficulties family members have had to experience living under communist rule and shortly after, along with the pro-Western propaganda in the first years of democratisation, have arguably left a mark upon parents’ views of life in Bulgaria. This, in turn, has been translated into some of their children’s migratory projects, ultimately questioning the extent to which young Bulgarians are people with new, fundamentally different values, unaffected by the burden of communist rule and its corresponding consequences on the mentality of people.

Migration in the name

I meet with Marko at his university library. From our brief conversation prior to the interview I have already gathered the impression that he is very outspoken. His background is in Politics and he has been a member of the debate club for many years, both of which have made his critical thinking skills very strong. I begin by asking him to tell me how and why he decided to pursue his education in Scotland. His answer, however, is unexpected: *‘I’ll start with, like, a small anecdote that me and my parents have been having and been telling. It’s actually, I mean, it’s an anecdote but it’s relatively sad as well. My granddad is called Marin. It’s like a traditional Balkan/Bulgarian name, like, coming from the word “marine”, something from the sea. And I am called after my granddad – Marko. And when I asked my parents: “Why didn’t you just call me like straight after him- Marin, as well?” And they were like: “Because it’s easier to pronounce in English!” And basically, I mean, [you can see] what the disillusioned parents of our generation thought: that they are bringing up pilgrims, future immigrants’.* I quickly write down and underlie the words ‘story’ and ‘anecdote’ and an hour and a half after Marko has left, while still at the library, I add: ‘Marko’s use of an anecdote signifies the deeply internalised narrative of migration. It is almost as a predisposition that is inevitable and an integral part of his upbringing. The latter signifies the role of the family in one’s plans to migrate. It is almost rehearsed and taken for granted’. (Interview & memo, January, 2014).

As the analysis so far has demonstrated family members-as-mediators play an important role in the pre-migratory stage of young, highly skilled Bulgarians. The latter are, after all, their parents’ children.

Turning the critical gaze towards the role of the participants’ friendship circles reveals similar tendencies to those of family members (as role models and sources of information) but also points to some slightly different variations (such as peer pressure). Indeed, young Bulgarians’ friends simultaneously discourage staying in Bulgaria and encourage leaving to study abroad. Many participants knew people who were already studying in the UK, who could give them reliable information about the practicalities of applying and student life in general. This emerges as a viable way to build migration knowledge. Additionally, Natalia points

out that it was quite stimulating that she had classmates who were considering studying abroad. She affirms that it was easier to face the challenges of applying together as a group. Similarly, Simeon and Stamen, Samuil and his twin brother as well as Roza and Karolina applied together, which they categorise as hugely beneficial as they motivated each other in the process. Karolina emphasises that one's friendship circles can also serve to discourage staying in Bulgaria: *'I had friends who were older than me and had gone to study at Bulgarian universities. They weren't particularly satisfied with the quality of education'* (my translation). This ultimately tipped the scales for her towards choosing to study abroad.

Another potent motivation, which highlights the importance of friendship circles in planning and initiating migratory projects, is peer pressure. Young professional Natalia reminisces that this was particularly strong in her school and thus study abroad was not only an attractive option but also seen as the best option. Vasil shares similar experiences. He was actively training volleyball and not seriously considering his plan of action after graduation from secondary school: *'[...] all my classmates were applying abroad, so I said to myself "no way, I should too". So I got pumped up and after prom I sat down to study English hard for four months so I can pass IELTS'* (my translation). The peer pressure from Vasil's friends along with his own fear of missing out and lagging behind then emerge as the key driving factors behind his migratory project. Ultimately, these examples clearly illustrate the role of friendship circles as mediators in the process of shaping and directing migratory flows from the country.

A further component that not only plays a vital role in shaping young, highly skilled Bulgarians' mind-sets but also their migratory projects are the schools they attended. While the previous section analysed education from a structural point of view, here the focus shifts to the meso level of analysis – that is, scrutinising the impact that education, in terms of information and content, has upon the process of planning and initiating migratory projects (Findlay et al., 2012). More specifically, the data suggests that the participants' former secondary schools provide a vibrant

environment that not only broadens their horizons but also nurtures their ambitions to pursue personal development abroad. Thus, secondary schools, especially those that provide intensive English language training, also act as intermediaries that facilitate the process of what Marko describes as ‘raising a generation of [...] future immigrants’.

The formative influence of previous education, both in terms of young Bulgarians’ upbringing and plans for the future, is clearly evident in Kamelia’s words: ‘*I am very thankful for what my Foreign Language High School has given me because that was my first conscious [...] encounter with the world abroad*’ (my translation). What can be inferred from her experiences of secondary education is their positive influence on her life. Thus, Kamelia’s school has not only provided an enriching environment but has also acted as a mediator that has facilitated her migratory project by equipping her with the necessary skills and knowledge to make her transition to living in a foreign context. This is further explained by Natalia, who has studied at one of the most prestigious English language high schools in Bulgaria. She affirmatively contends that it was her school that ‘*definitely played a huge role in [her] decision to come here [in the UK]*’ (my translation). When prompted to elaborate on her statement further, she explains how thorough the process of learning English has been: not only was almost every single class she had in English (except for Bulgarian literature) but also the whole curriculum was designed to immerse the students in British culture and traditions. She then summarises her experiences in the following way: ‘*The school simply **prepares** you for migration*’ (my translation and emphasis). The intensive process of learning English language evidently not only shapes the views and perceptions of young Bulgarians but it also provides them with the tools to plan and initiate personal realisation abroad. Previous education in the home country, therefore, emerges as an integral part of building migratory knowledge. Secondary schools, influenced by the socio-political restructuring of the country (macro conditions), also act as intermediaries that lay the foundations of young, highly skilled Bulgarians’

migratory projects. Secondary education does so not only by broadening their horizons but also by providing a fruitful environment where that curiosity is nurtured.

Finally, the meso level of analysis of the young, highly skilled Bulgarians' migratory projects puts forward the strong influence of what I refer to as the 'business with education'. This phenomenon is related to the proliferation of consultancy agencies and university fairs in Bulgaria, which aim to facilitate (but also generate profit from) the process of applying for universities abroad by providing information, assistance and guidance. As such, the 'business with education' is thus not only linked to structural conditions associated with education but it is also part of what Kofman et al. call the 'business with migration', epitomised by the impact of recruitment agencies that play a key role in labour migration (2000, p. 31). While the focus will be mainly on student migratory flows, the role of recruitment agencies will be nonetheless briefly considered.

A recurring theme in the data was the participants' experiences of encountering consultancy agencies and university fairs when applying abroad. More specifically, the analysis reveals that consultancy agencies function as a mediator and facilitator of the direction of migratory flows of prospective students. Simeon sheds light on how one of the biggest and most renowned consultancy agencies in Bulgaria, operates:

[Agency] has university partners where you do not pay an application fee. I went there and said I wanted to study something that has to do with computers, maths, physics and ten other things. The consultant was a bit puzzled but said: 'We have some really good partners – Bedfordshire is in top 40, Staffordshire is in top 50'. So, I was like, 'Okay, but isn't there anything that is in top 10-20?'. So, he said: 'OK, you can apply to these five universities. It is also good to have a plan B, something that is more ambitious but might not work out. Edinburgh is really good in that area but they are not our partners, so you must pay the corresponding fee'. I then said: 'If you say it [Edinburgh] is good – fine then. What about Cambridge, Oxford?' He just said: 'Oh, no, it's very difficult [to get in] there, there are also exams. They don't really

accept that many people'. So, I said, 'Fine, then, if they don't take [students] in'. (my translation)

Simeon's experiences epitomise how the 'business with education' operates and how it shapes and influences migratory flows. With regards to the first aspect, the example illustrates the nature and some of the characteristics of the role of consultancy agencies as intermediaries. More specifically, the services that they offer emerge as driven by their financial arrangements with specific institutions. In Simeon's case this also suggests that they do not always necessarily accommodate the goals and ambitions of their clients (Simeon's desire to apply to Cambridge or Oxford) but pursue their own professional goals (to fulfil their partnership agreements). Additionally, as Simeon's friend, Stamen, points out that also means that consultancy agencies do not necessarily work with the best universities but with those that have agreed to be their partners. This suggests that information can potentially be biased in terms of what advice is given. Participants express similar concern in relation to the nature of university fairs, where, as PhD student Stamen notes, representatives aim to boost their image and '*paint the picture of a bright future*'. This contributes to the clash with reality and suggests that such mediators both enhance and limit prior migratory knowledge.

Moreover, the profit-driven business model of educational intermediaries ultimately affects the characteristics and the quality of their services. With regards to the features of consultancy agencies, the data demonstrate that they capitalise on their image of knowledge experts. This helps to navigate young people through the specificities of the application process by acting as mediators, advising on the best course of action. It also means that such agencies are often approached in their capacity of experts in the field which is confirmed by the experience of not only Simeon but also that of Kiril, Ignat and Natalia, who were initially unsure how to go through the application process. However, the quality of the services provided by such intermediaries is judged against young Bulgairans' experience as benefactors from the actual service provision. Respectively, Natalia is highly

critical as she describes agencies as ‘*rubbish*’ because ‘*they told [her] to pay a lot of money so that they fill in an application instead of [her]*’ (my translation). This opinion is shared by many others who had resorted to using consultancy agencies and who now regret having used their services. Ignat remarks:

Now I wouldn't have gone through an agency because paying for that service was pointless – they didn't help me that much. They gave me information about different universities but I found [my university] myself. The agency didn't even have any contacts established with that university but it was ok because you apply through UCAS anyway. (my translation)

The dissatisfaction with agencies’ services is thus associated both with the quality of advice that they give and the actual level of expertise that it requires. Understandably, the latter two also shape young Bulgarians’ attitudes to the role of agencies and fairs as mediators of their migratory projects. It is interesting to note here that Denitsa was the only one who was content with the offered service, mainly because she appreciated the fact that her agency assisted her in meeting other prospective students who had applied to the same university. Overall, however, the data suggest the presence of markedly negative attitudes toward the quality of advice and the overall role of agencies.

Applying to a British university is not a formal requirement; it is a service, which although a direct consequence of the ‘business with education’, is optional. This ultimately gives participants the opportunity to act as free agents. This is not necessarily the case when labour migration is concerned. In fact, due to strict immigration regulations, work mobility, especially in the case of low skilled labour, is more restricted. Bilyana’s experience of coming to Britain through SAWS is important. Her story clearly shows not only that recruitment agencies play an important role but also that, in fact, migratory projects are only possible through their partnership agreements. Comparing recruitment and consultancy agencies demonstrates that the role of agencies-as-intermediaries varies. Moreover, that role and the associated power with it are embedded in a larger macro context of

immigration regulations but also its micro aspect or people's involvement and ambitions. This clearly shows that macro, meso and micro factors do not operate independently from one another but instead are intricately intertwined, cumulatively influencing the course and shape of migratory projects.

Subjective factors

The analysis so far has unpacked the participants' personal context by looking more closely at how they plan their migratory projects. Consequently, the macro and meso level of analysis have brought forward some key characteristics of young Bulgarians' migratory endeavours such as pragmatism and careful planning. These features put forward the idea that on a micro level, migratory projects symbolise an act of agency. However, this section will question the rationality often associated with pragmatism and planning by critically evaluating the act of agency. In fact, the analysis of the migratory projects of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK reveals that there are several subjective factors that inform, shape and characterise their decisions to migrate. Therefore, this section will focus more specifically on unravelling those factors in two particular aspects: 1) the range of subjective motivations that underpin the choice to pursue education and/or professional realisation in Britain and 2) the emotive responses that migratory projects provoke.

Before delving into the various aspects of subjectivity in the planning of migratory projects, it is important to question the link between rationality and agency. As the vignette below demonstrates, their nexus is not only dubious but also contentious, and requires careful attention:

Sava and I are sitting in a pub very close to the train station in the town where he lives. It is quite late in the evening and he has just come back from London, where he was meeting with clients. He has already told me a little bit about himself and his company on the way, so I have managed to quickly write down in my diary ‘rational’, ‘pragmatic’ and ‘very well organised’ before we begin the interview. Unsurprisingly, my subsequent questions confirm my initial observations – talking about choosing his university, he says: *‘All the universities I researched myself and I’m actually obsessive – I like to research most of the options I have before I make the decision’*. What he describes as an ‘obsession’ is, in fact, the importance he gives to being very well informed, which ultimately included consulting rankings, friends and universities websites. However, he then pauses and adds: *‘What I didn’t realise was that there were two universities in the city’*, to which I jokingly reply: ‘Did you apply to the ‘wrong one’?’ He pauses again and says: *‘Yes, I did, yeah’*. (Interview & Memo, February, 2014)

Clearly, pragmatism and careful planning have their limitations. Organising migratory projects, even when based on logic and rationality, does not necessarily prevent individuals from making ‘mistakes’. In Sava’s case, however, what was the ‘wrong’ university in terms of prestige, turned out to be the right decision in terms of course and knowledge that he acquired. His story then demonstrates not only that rationality can be subjective but also that migratory knowledge, even when based on a variety of sources, remains partial.

A micro level of analysis uncovers a number of individual and emotive motivations, which contribute to planning the migratory projects of young, highly skilled Bulgarians. These subjective factors are particularly evident when participants considered their choice of location in the UK. When choosing a university, young Bulgarians also rely on previously developed personal preferences in relation to their hobbies, interests and opportunities that both the educational institution and its location offer:

Well, I am a massive football fan and I know it is difficult to say [what a city looks like] from photos because every city in England looks nice on photos but I was really impressed. It is a slightly bigger city, so in a way there are more opportunities for having fun because, to be honest, I am not one of those people who studies all day. (Kiril, my translation)

Evidently, when first-hand experience is unavailable, prospective Bulgarian students rely on their own preferences and pastimes. In fact, for those participants, who are actively involved in sports, the respective opportunities to continue their engagement are a key determinant in choosing a particular location. Such is the case with 20-year old student Nayden, who admits that he *'even took the TOEFL²⁵ exam twice'* because he *'[...] wanted to come specifically to Sheffield because of my passion for snooker. Here [in Sheffield] is where the World Championship takes place and I wanted to watch it'* (my translation). Nayden's determination to choose a particular university is intimately linked to his personal preferences and interests rather than based on more pragmatic considerations such as the opportunities for personal development. This, in turn, clearly shows the impact of subjective factors upon initiating migratory projects.

Another personal motivation for pursuing education abroad is associated with the participants' curiosity and desire to expand their horizons. This is particularly the case for young people such as Leda, who have never left their home country before: *'I was quite happy [to study abroad] because I wanted to see the world because before that I had never left Bulgaria [...]'*(my translation). Migratory projects then act as a platform for nurturing curiosity and as a learning curve in terms of expanding one's knowledge about different contexts. Similarly, Kamelia notes that her decision to leave Bulgaria was also a chance to travel and explore the world around her, while Karolina shares: *'I just wanted a change. I wanted to see the West and to get to know people from different cultural backgrounds. [...] It was this adventurous side of me that motivated me'* (my translation). The reference to an adventure points to the idea of migratory projects as an opportunity to explore the unknown – in this case, the collective idea of 'abroad', epitomised by the 'West'.

²⁵ Applications to British universities from non-native speakers require a proof of language proficiency, so prospective students are required to take either TOEFL or IELTS exam.

Studying in the UK is not simply pursuing a degree; it is also a chance for new experiences, which lead to personal enrichment.

Additionally, among the subjective factors, key places take personal associations and intuition. Twenty-four year old modern languages student Denitsa provides a good example of how personal aspirations and dreams influence one's decision: *'Ever since I was little, inexplicably for me, I wanted to be in England, to study in England. I really can't explain it, it is an internal feeling'* (my translation). This clearly demonstrates that it is not only very difficult to make sense of one's own feelings but also that migratory projects are underpinned by reasonable considerations as much as they are driven by inexplicable feelings. Intuition is an important element that shapes the direction of migratory flows. Additionally, given that the Scotland-based participants justify their preference of location for financial reasons, it is quite interesting to explore the motivations of those who choose other destinations within the UK. Subjective factors again come to the fore as Nayden explains it in the following way: *'This was the right choice. I just had a hunch. [...] I made a decision on the basis of what sounded better and I thought that England sounded better, purely phonetically better, than Scotland'*. This once again reaffirms that internal feelings play an important role in migratory projects. It should be noted however, that this example does not necessarily mean that those, who choose Scotland as a destination are entirely pragmatic. In fact, Psychology student Karolina admits that *'choosing Scotland was a bit of joke'* (my translation). Describing her decision as a 'joke' here serves to accentuate her not entirely rational decision.

Finally, while there is a wide range of personal and individualistic motivations behind the decision to migrate, it is also important to consider the variety of emotional responses that such a decision produces. Indeed, migratory projects are highly emotionally charged and those feelings are not always necessarily positive. Despite the overall impression so far that the majority of participants were very keen and excited to have the opportunity to go abroad, there

are others who had mixed feelings. For example, Delyan admits that he was torn between the opportunities that Britain offered and the possibility to stay close to his family and friends: *'I made an informed decision that the best compromise is to be here [in the UK]. You always have to compromise – there is no such thing as full happiness'* (my translation). Categorising his migratory project as a 'compromise', Delyan suggests leaving one's home country is not an easy decision but rather a process of deliberation. It is a balancing act between the comfort of the dear and known and the possibilities of new and unexpected. Personal success and development often require leaving one's comfort zone. This also hints at the idea that planning and initiating migratory projects may be an emotionally charged experience, leading to personal discomfort. Participants' determination and aspirations do not always succeed in managing their emotional reactions to being far away from loved ones. In fact, some of them view their migratory projects as a struggle, which is *'not easy'* in Vasil's words and it *'requires a lot of time and energy'* according to Leda's explanation but as Samuil points out: *'[...] you have to sacrifice something in order to get something else in return'* (my translation). This perception of migratory project as a sacrifice not only reveals the importance that emotions play in deciding to migrate but it also serves to justify that choice. The latter then appears as necessary for achieving one's goals and ambitions. Finally, the reference to migratory projects as a sacrifice also uncovers the strengths of one's character through the ability to give something up and endure difficulties.

Thus, a micro level of analysis brings to the fore the role that subjective motivations and personal feelings play in shaping the migratory projects of young Bulgarians. The data shows that personal aspirations, dreams and intuition should not be ignored as they contribute to migratory flows as much as more pragmatic thinking. While the decision to leave the home society is undoubtedly an act of agency, it is nonetheless charged with a lot of emotions, which are not always necessarily positive. The consideration of such negative feelings is very important as it provides an insight into how migration is understood and experienced.

Discussion and conclusion: mobility as ordinary yet complex

The thirty-seven young people, who took part in this study are only a small fraction of the newest migratory flows from Bulgaria to the UK. Yet, as this chapter has demonstrated, their stories are rich and diverse, revealing a complex personal context that informs and shapes their upbringing, worldviews, goals and ambitions. Young Bulgarians' stories then not only explain why people choose to move but also how they do it and whose help they seek, and how they feel about their choices. This demonstrates not only that migration does have a human face but also that, in fact, it is this human face that is at the centre of it. The personal context of participants shows that moving to Britain is more than a trivial, pragmatic endeavour – it is rather a physical and emotional journey that affects both individuals and their support networks, changing the life course of everyone involved in it.

Therefore, the pre-migration experiences of young Bulgarians in the UK are an important starting point of building a comprehensive understanding of the essence of their mobility practices. Correspondingly, this chapter has argued that a particularly useful concept in that respect is that of a migratory project as it allows the careful consideration of migratory decisions as they occur in their context. Bearing this in mind, this chapter then focused on two aspects: young, Bulgarian highly skilled migrants' personal contexts and the factors that shape them. Based on the analysis, two key conclusions can be made: 1) mobility is *complex*; 2) mobility is *ordinary*.

Mobility is complex. This is undoubtedly the main point that can be inferred from the participants' personal contexts. Indeed, while some similarities could be noted, their paths have not been linear and straightforward. This chapter focused also on the variety of factors and processes that shape young, highly skilled Bulgarians' personal circumstances, which ultimately trigger their migratory

projects and the phenomenon of youth mobility as a whole. Correspondingly, the data demonstrates that there are several structural factors, meso level motivations and subjective feelings and emotions that contribute to the planning and initialising of mobility ideas in the pre-migration stage. Each one of these reasons has a dual nature – both stimulating leaving and discouraging staying. Among the structural conditions, key elements are the structural composition of education and the socio-political establishment epitomised by corruption, nepotism and inequality, which affect one's opportunities for personal development. Focusing solely on the analysis of the structural factors as drivers of migration suggests that migratory projects are carefully planned endeavours, based on a 'classic' understanding of push and pull forces.

However, the meso level of analysis reveals a much more diverse picture. There are several agents that act as intermediaries and thus shape and direct migratory flows: family networks, friendship circles, schools and consultancy agencies. Family support for mobility is a combination of help mechanisms that encompass different financial, emotional and advisory aspects. These three types of support not only stimulate young Bulgarians' migratory projects but they also enable them. This finding enriches the understanding of Carling's (2002) aspiration/ability model, highlighting the dual role of mediators. Family support or what Petroff (2016) calls 'linked lives' are also affected by gender and generation-related differences and embedded and influenced by family members' own ambitions and frustrations. Additionally, the role of friendship circles (in terms of peer pressure and information) comes to the fore through the participants' narratives. This is supplemented by young Bulgarians' schools, which provide a fruitful environment for nurturing curiosity. While family, friends and schools all contribute to the phenomenon of 'raising a generation of [...] future immigrants', the booming 'business with education' is another element that is designed to accommodate and facilitate their migratory ambitions. As such, those intermediaries

both enable and restrict migratory flows, which is reflected in the participants' experiences and attitudes towards using their services.

Finally, there are a number of subjective factors that impact upon migratory projects. On the one hand, this micro level of analysis questions the principle of rationality in agency, revealing that contrary to what the macro and meso level of scrutiny show, participants are not necessarily driven by entirely pragmatic reasoning. On the other hand, subjectivity also helps to unveil the emotional side of migratory endeavours. Mobility then can not only be positive and exciting but it can also be laden with mixed feelings, when uncertainty and reluctance are side by side with curiosity and adventurousness. Thus, importantly, migratory projects are not simply a cost-benefit analysis of advantages and disadvantages as a result of push and pull factors. Rather, they are a complex amalgamation of opportunities and constraints posed by macro conditions, influenced by a large array of intermediaries and a number of subjective factors.

Mobility is also ordinary. This argument largely draws on cultural sociology and more specifically, Raymond Williams' ([1958] 1989) claim that culture is ordinary. Although this text was written to address the issue of culture as a lived experience, there are nonetheless some important parallels that can be made with mobility. More specifically, Williams argues that: 'A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested' ([1958] 1989, p.93). In a similar manner, what can be inferred from the data is that youth mobility in the Bulgarian case is the result of a process of 'raising a generation of [...] immigrants', who then embark upon their migratory decisions as a way of carrying out and testing the meanings of that process. Indeed, as the 'children of the transition' the participants have grown up not only in a liminal context, but also one, where going abroad is not an extraordinary feat of overcoming strict immigration regulations. It is rather a form of banal Europeanism (Cram, 2009). While indeed going to Britain is a carefully planned endeavour, it has nonetheless become an integral part of their

upbringing, a stage of their life cycles. They have grown up in a country, where Terminal 1 and 2 are perceived as a counterbalancing reaction to the uncertainty and inequality of the home context (Bozhidarov, 2013). These young Bulgarians have attended schools that through intensive language training have prepared them for life abroad and equipped them with the necessary transferable skills to successfully transition to a host context. They come from families who not only support but also actively encourage their mobility choices. They have friends, who either do the same or have similar plans to theirs, and finally, there is a proliferation of intermediary agents that stimulate and mediate the process. Unsurprisingly then, while migratory projects are a direct result and a reaction to these contextual conditions, when young people talk about leaving Bulgaria, they do so in an ordinary and banal way. Mobility for them may not be trivial but it is nonetheless deeply internalised, it is an integral part of their life cycle.

However, arguing that mobility is ordinary also raises questions in relation to the categorisation of that particular generation as ‘new Bulgarians’ (Mitev 2005 in Chavdarova 2006). While indeed the data shows that the participants can be individualistic, open-minded and arguably pro-European, they can hardly be classified as carriers of fundamentally new values and perceptions about the world. Such assumptions need to be treated with caution. Indeed, the participants are comparatively less burdened by the legacy of the communist past but they have grown up in context largely bound by the aftereffects of the period prior 1989. Furthermore, these young Bulgarians are nonetheless the children of their parents. As the data show, in some cases young Bulgarians’ migratory projects provide an avenue, a coping mechanism for the parents and other family members to deal with their own frustrations and ambitions. While the two generations differ, when it comes to mobility there are points of convergence. The concept of a migratory project then is quite instrumental in highlighting those differences but also pointing to some similarities. Thus, the notion comes to the fore as a useful way of evaluating

the pre-migration stage of each journey and the variety of factors, reasons, motivations and even values that underpin the whole process.

Accordingly, the story of Bilyana at the beginning of the chapter highlighted that young highly skilled Bulgarian migrants arrive in the UK only with a carefully planned migratory project but they also have to alter it and to negotiate it in the conditions they face in the host society. In fact, I argue that migratory experiences are the result of a process of negotiation between migratory projects and migratory realities. Thus, to provide a deeper understanding of young highly skilled Bulgarians' migratory experiences in the UK, the next chapter will analyse in detail their migratory realities.

Chapter 5

MIGRATION REALITIES: EMOTIONS, OTHERING AND EVERYDAY COUNTERBALANCING STRATEGIES

Introduction

£960

Throughout our skype chat, 24-year-old PhD student Simeon insists that he embodies the ‘classic stereotype’ of someone with a background in mathematics and informatics, that is, someone with poor social skills. Our conversation, however, is flowing and he does not need any prompts to elaborate on anything he has said. His demeanour is relaxed and he often throws a joke in his responses, even when asked about his expectations when he first arrived in the UK: *‘It was a long time ago [...] once upon a time when I was young, I remember being really scared when I first arrived. I went to my student hall [...] and I was quieter than a mouse’*. ‘Why?’, I ask and he continues: *‘I don’t know. I just said to myself: “Right, I am here now. I have a task to accomplish and I need to make it happen!” Because my situation was not very optimistic. I arrived in this country with the gross sum of £960. This was all my money and after it was gone, I had to manage on my own. When you think about it, it’s not that bad. I did have money, if I didn’t, it would have been shit. But you know, I was a teenager, still in puberty. When you are 18 and you go to another country and you are all on your own without any help and you know you have limited resources and that they will finish quickly, it is quite stressful. I just needed to mature and that is what happened in the past 4 years thanks to studying and hard work’*. (my translation)

A migratory project often begins with a dream or a goal, the achievement of which requires one to move abroad, and as the previous chapter has demonstrated – it may involve years of careful planning. While crossing a border is an inevitable part of the process of migration, it is not until people find themselves in the receiving country that they become ‘migrants’ – a transition in its own terms, which can have long-lasting implications on the individual, national and international levels. What

lies at the centre of the migratory experiences is how one's pre-migratory plans, dreams, goals, knowledge and expectations become translated in the host society context. Correspondingly, Simeon's story provides a snapshot of this initial experience of arriving in the UK. His story reveals the complex entanglement of economic and emotional aspects of migration as a life event (Mai and King, 2009, p. 297 in Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015, pp. 76-77). Thus, emotions are part of not only one's pre-migratory context but also an integral element of one's migration realities.

Focusing on the emotional, affective side of one's migration realities also offers an insight into the nature and characteristics of the latter as multi-stage experiences. Furthermore, the transition from a sending to a receiving context is a complex node of the continuous migration process, which centres upon the impact of and attitudes towards change. Respectively, the vignette demonstrates that arriving in the host society unlocks a period of liminality, which leads to uncertainty, associated with the success of carrying out one's migratory project. According to Turner, this period of in-between-ness can be categorised as '[...] the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise' (1967, p. 97). This conceptualisation of liminality speaks directly to van Gennep's original focus on the transformative nature of crossing a threshold ([1909] 1960, p. 189). Yet, while van Gennep's ([1909] 1960) main concern is with the uncertainty associated with liminal periods, Turner's approach centres upon its positives by pointing out that '[u]ndoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns' (1967, p. 99). Consequently, Simeon's retrospective narrative offers a glimpse into the various aspects of transitioning – both positive and negative, constructive and deconstructive. Liminality is not only personal – in the sense of Simeon's own transition from puberty to adulthood but it is also contextual in the sense of moving from the home

to host society. Thus, while the previous chapter began unpicking the personal contexts of young, highly skilled Bulgarians and the role they play in their migratory projects, this chapter will delineate the various nuances of the migration realities of the ‘children of the transition’. More specifically, the nexus between migratory projects and migration realities will be explored through a focus on how the participants deal with change and how they engage with their context, produced by both host and home societies.

Structurally, this chapter is divided into two key parts. The first one focuses on young, highly skilled Bulgarians’ initial encounters with the host society. Adopting an affective analytical approach to the participants’ initial migration realities (Svašek, 2012; Anderson, 2014; Anderson 2015; Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015; Merriman and Jones, 2016), the first part scrutinises in detail their emotions, attitudes as well as strategies to managing their new realities. In a complementary fashion, the second part of this chapter slightly shifts the focus to the later or subsequent stages of young, Bulgarians’ migration realities. Namely, it pays attention to how the participants deal with their migratory context as shaped by both host and home societies. More specifically, the second part argues that ‘the children of the transition’ find themselves exposed to a process of double-sided othering, characterised by the simultaneous operation of external and internal stereotypes. While the analysis engages with double-sided othering’s nature and characteristics, a focal point will be the everyday strategies of resistance that the participants employ to counterbalance negative essentialist representations of their lifestyle choices. Ultimately, this chapter will demonstrate that what lies at the centre of one’s migratory experience is the negotiation of their migratory projects with the host society realities, which unlock a period of liminality that impacts upon Bulgarian students’ and young professionals’ values, identities and future plans.

Initial encounters with the host society: emotions, outcomes and adjustment strategies

Emotions are an indispensable part of human mobility (Conradson and McKay, 2007; Svašek, 2012; Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015; Bolognani, 2016). In fact, an account of migratory experiences, which does not take into consideration the role of emotions, is bound to be incomplete, partial and limited. Geographical relocations are thus firmly embedded in the affective realm of emotions: migration processes produce a broad range of sometimes contradicting feelings among migrants, their families and the local population of the host society. Focusing on the intersection between subjectivities and geographical mobility, Conradson and McKay critically engage with the contested nature of both affects and emotions, arguing that the latter are '[...] the conscious perception of particular affects' (2007, p.170). This conceptualisation not only offers a nuanced understanding of the two terms but it also provides an insight into their intricate relationship. Furthermore, this statement affirms that an understanding of emotions requires an affective approach to their analysis. Particularly instrumental in that respect is the work of Anderson (2014; 2015). He explains that '[...] affect is an umbrella category that encompasses qualitatively distinct ways of organizing the 'feelings of existence'' (Anderson, 2015, p. 735). This broad definition of the term not only points out to its multi-layered but also to its rather elusive nature. Importantly, however, Anderson also remarks that affect is '[...] an expression, reflection and enactment of specific relations within some form of relational configuration' and as such it cannot exist on its own (2014, p. 10 and p. 13). Thus, it becomes evident that an affective approach to analysis should also take into consideration the contextual circumstances and socio-spatial relations within which affect actually occurs. Such a focus, as Merriman and Jones argue, would account for the 'variable capacities for different bodies to affect and be affected' (2016, p. 5). This is particularly evident in Bolognani's (2016) work, which explores the resilience of a 'return fantasy' among British Pakistanis. By adopting a psychosocial approach, she

focuses on the return-thinking process to demonstrate how fantasising about return is not only an integral part of the migration process that can be either acted upon or not but also how it is an important stage in migrants' strive for well-being (Bolognani, 2016, p. 199). Evidently, an affective approach is particularly instrumental in unravelling migrant subjectivities. Recognising that the latter have a deeper, psychoanalytic dimension (Bolognani, 2016), this thesis focuses on their explicit emotional manifestations in their corresponding relational configurations.

Respectively, Svašek's work highlights the dynamic, relational characteristics of emotions in contending that they are '[...] processes through which individuals experience and interpret the changing world, position themselves vis-à-vis others, and shape their subjectivities' (2012, p. 3). Firmly embedded in this understanding of emotions, Boccagni and Baldassar have argued that '[t]he migration process is a powerful catalyser of change in emotional life', further accentuating the dynamic nature of feelings (2015, p. 74). Evidently, while people are mobile, their emotions, too, are 'on the move'. However, while Boccagni and Baldassar (2015) have argued that migration is a useful point of reference to the understanding of emotions, I contend that the opposite is also true. Indeed, an emotion-led analytical approach offers the possibility to understand the initial encounters of newly arrived migrants in the host society.

In that sense, I argue that the British realities for young Bulgarians are complex, emotive and multi-layered. Their initial experiences then emerge as journeys of making sense of their choices and the impact upon their migratory projects. Researching Chinese students on a US campus, Lin remarks that culture shock is an imminent part of intercultural adjustment – a process, which involves various stages and results in feeling comfortable in a new cultural environment (2006, p. 119). Cultural markers then emerge as important sources of identification and socialisation, impacting upon one's ability to navigate the norms, customs and moral postulations of a given social environment. Respectively, the act of migration can be perceived as point of rupture of already established cultural meanings,

unlocking a new search for cultural meaning. Through migration one is thus exposed to different cultural norms and traditions, which may be significantly different to one's already preconceived cultural markers.

Therefore, the concept of culture shock offers a useful way of analysing dealing with (cultural) change in a migratory context. First used by Oberg (1954; 1960), the notion has been defined in multiple ways over the years (Lin 2006; Zhou et al. 2008). Notably, Winkelman recognises culture shock as a 'multifaceted experience', which occurs as a '[...] consequence of strain and anxiety resulting from contact with a new culture and the feelings of loss, confusion, and impotence resulting from loss of accustomed cultural cues and social rules' (1994, p. 121). The value of this definition lies at its emphasis on emotions, invoked by the clash between familiar and unfamiliar cultural frames of 'normality' (Goffman, 1971). Furthermore, in recognising that adjustment is a process, Winkelman identifies four distinct and yet interrelated stages of culture shock and its resolution: 1) the honeymoon or tourist phase; 2) the crises or cultural shock phase; 3) the adjustment, reorientation phase; and 4) the adaptation, resolution or acculturation stage (1994, p. 122). Although these stages are seen as sequential and cyclical (Winkelman, 1994, p. 122), such a conceptualisation of culture shock is problematic for three main reasons. Firstly, it simplifies that complexity of emotions, assuming that individuals deal with change in a linear manner of progression. Emotional phases or periods need to be treated cautiously by recognising the lack of clear-cut boundaries between them. Secondly, Winkelman's framework disregards the fact individuals respond to (cultural) change differently. Therefore, migrants may not necessarily experience all four stages: some never go through the honeymoon phase or alternatively, they may never enter the final, adaptation stage due to premature return. Additionally, a closer look at the nature and characteristics of each stage reveals that while the first two phases focus primarily on the affective consequences of cultural shock (positive or negative emotions), the third stage centres upon attitudes (return or adjustment) and the final phase is characterised by strategies to

ensure adjustment. Despite these weaknesses, Winkelman's (1994) model is instrumental in demonstrating the prevalence of certain emotions over others as well as how they change over time.

Considering this nuanced understanding of Winkelman's (1994) stages of culture shock, the next few sub-sections will scrutinise how young, highly skilled Bulgarians deal with cultural change upon initially arriving in the UK. Therefore, the first sub-section will focus on emotional responses, characterised by a honeymoon period for some and/ or disillusionment for others. Then their attitudes will be explored and finally, the variety of strategies that young Bulgarians employ to adjust and adapt to the host society will be discussed. Ultimately, this part of the chapter will demonstrate that one's migration realities are multi-stage experiences, laden with emotions, which illustrate the (often) ongoing negotiation between the participants' migratory projects and their realities once they arrive in Britain.

From honeymoon to disillusionment: the emotional benefits and costs of migration

Some of the participants' stories clearly indicate a *honeymoon period* when they are exploring the new opportunities that a life in the UK presents to them. For Winkelman, this stage is '[...] characterised by interest, excitement, euphoria, sleeplessness, positive expectations, and idealizations about the new culture' (1994, p. 122). He further specifies that this initial reaction to encountering a different culture is typically experienced by those visiting a country for a short period of time (such as honeymooners, business people and vacationers), who are less likely to engage with local culture either in a meaningful way or 'on its own terms' (Winkelman, 1994, p. 122). Evidently, such conceptualisation of the honeymoon period suggests that positive reactions upon encountering a host country result from the duration of the migratory journey itself. Its short-termism then is argued to be a key factor in determining one's reactions to being exposed to different cultural norms and traditions. However, my fieldwork reveals that some participants,

particularly those, who arrived initially as students experienced the same positive emotions as a result of moving to Britain.

One of the most prominent cases in that respect is the account of modern languages student Denitsa. She has always had a very strong, inexplicable desire to live in the UK, which to a large degree explains her excitement of the realisation of her long-desired wish:

Everything in the beginning is very interesting, everything is new. [...] I didn't even feel homesick, even though it's not like I did not want to keep in touch with my friends [back home] or my family but I just did not feel homesick. [...] You are too busy with what is new, different. You end up discovering the world every day and this involves many new people and new experiences. (my translation)

As the interview excerpt shows, the novelty that characterises these initial experiences in the UK is very exciting and stimulating. Emotionally, Denitsa not only felt happy but also comfortable in the different context that she found herself in. Her first experiences in Britain were marked by the euphoria related to novelty and the realisation of a dream that had finally come true. Therefore, for her this was more than a honeymoon period – it was a discovery stage, which occupied her time, preventing her from fully realising the implications of her migratory decision.

However, not all participants explain their initial positive emotions as a result of not fully realising the implications of their lifestyle choices. In fact, they see the honeymoon phase as a way of mitigating and counterbalancing the emotional costs of migration. 23-year old young professional Ralitsa works in the PR industry and lives in London, having completed her undergraduate degree in the Midlands. Ralitsa's account of her initial experiences demonstrates the complex, conflicting and extremely dynamic nature of emotions. Reminiscing about the first time she arrived in Britain, she shares that she arrived in England '*armed with enthusiasm and excitement*' and '*just adored the novelty*' (my translation). Questioning whether being away from family and loved ones affected her, Ralitsa further elaborates: '*[...] I met so many amazing people and they somehow compensated all that I was*

missing from Bulgaria, and they showed me a new, different world and new different things [...] (my translation). This comment offers a more nuanced understanding of the honeymoon period by suggesting that although the prevalent feelings may be markedly positive, the emotional costs of migration are an integral element of living abroad. Furthermore, Ralitsa's observation also suggests that one's individual reactions and interpretation of their realities rather than the duration of the stay may be key triggers of a honeymoon period.

Nevertheless, the lack of consideration of the implications of one's migratory choices in the initial phase of excitement and discovery often makes the honeymoon period short-lived. Indeed, the data demonstrates that the initial positive emotions from the first contact with the host society are quickly substituted by a transitional, reflexive phase. Karolina comments on this emotional 'mobility' in the following way:

It wasn't so difficult for me initially. Later on, I realised that living abroad is not something temporary, it is not like you are on a holiday. It is a permanent choice and you have to be persistent and you have to work hard to make it work. (my translation)

In her gradual realisation of her circumstances, Karolina compares the honeymoon period to the experience of being on holiday, which closely resonates with Winkelman's (1994) theoretical conceptualisation. Her reflexive engagement with the nature of her positive emotional experiences not only identifies a temporal element but it also suggests that because of it engaging with the host society culture requires less efforts. To emphasise this point, study abroad is categorised as a 'permanent choice', which hints at the long-term implications that such a decision bears upon one's life. The transition/ reflexive period then is categorised by the full realisation of one's migration reality, which requires not only a lot of hard work and determination to achieve one's ambitions but also equal dedication to managing the emotional effects of living in a foreign context, away from family and friends. Importantly, the 'boundaries' of the transition between honeymoon and culture shock are conditional, fluid and very personal.

Nonetheless, the participants' stories demonstrate that their initial experiences inevitably include a period of *disillusionment*, which encompasses the clash between their expectations and the host society realities. 21-year old student Leda explains the essence of this clash in the following way:

Many people get disappointed – they have wanted to come here all their lives and once they come they expect that it will be the same as it is in Bulgaria. I just wanted to come here and see for myself. I never lived with such expectations (my translation).

Leda's observation not only demonstrates that there is a clash between young Bulgarians' expectations but also that the source of disillusionment is the realisation that life in the UK is culturally different from that in Bulgaria. The interview excerpt also highlights that difference not only disrupts 'normality' but it can be also rather daunting, especially for people who do not like change. Expectations are also seen as 'common' and imminent but almost always unrealistic. As IT professional Boris summarises: '*You always have expectations but they are rarely close to reality*' (my translation). The clash with reality then emerges as a prominent feature of the initial experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK, suggesting it leads to disappointment, which in turn unlocks a process of disillusionment.

Exploring the nature and characteristics of the participants' expectations when they first arrive reveals that the source of disillusionment stems from the realisation that pre-migratory knowledge is limited. The latter leads the participants to build unrealistic and romanticised perceptions of British society as a whole. This is quite evident in Marko's account below:

On Britain of Wilde, Churchill and Harry Potter

Sitting on a sofa at Marko's university library, I ask him about his initial expectations of life in the UK. He smiles at first and then there is a heavy sigh. The change in his body language even before he has spoken is quite telling and I make a note of it in my diary. He then says: *'First of all, what I knew about English culture and what I knew about Britishness came from my interest in history and literature, and also music. So, basically those were the three core sources of information I had about Britishness. I read Byron in high school, I read "Dorian Gray" and other things by [...] Oscar Wilde [...] I was extremely interested in Churchill as a historical persona, and also colonialism as an experience and the idea of Empire. The idea of enlightened sophistication that stemmed from all that you read as a foreigner about the UK...I mean I was coming to Scotland, which is the place where almost every single invention that had been devised during the 19th century had some relation to it- one way or another. The place where Alexander Bell came from, where Lord Kelvin was working, where Adam Smith wrote his thesis! Where amazing gothic architecture, which is in every movie, comes from! The place where Harry Potter was studying, you know, in the North of Scotland, you know. I came with a very, very, like a well-established image of, err, society, which had achieved things that Bulgaria had failed in achieving. [...]. So, I wanted to see, I wanted to understand what— why, why did this happen and see their perspective, see what they think about all these things. What I saw was not exactly, didn't exactly live up to [my expectations]. (memo and interview, January 2014)*

Marko's academic interests have evidently enriched his pre-migratory knowledge, which as *chapter 4* has argued, is a stimulating factor in planning migratory projects. Simultaneously, this has helped him to build a 'well-established' image of the country, which is limiting in the way it affects his expectations. Thus, the vignette not only demonstrates the clash between reality and expectations but it also portrays the limitations of prior migration knowledge based on education, popular culture and personal interests. Marko's romanticised perception of Britain focuses on the richness of culture, disregarding its everyday aspects. The encounter with everyday reality not only does not match his expectations but it also produces a clash that leads to disappointment and disillusionment. Finally, this vignette highlights the

discrepancies between migration as a project and as a reality, uncovering their tenuous relationship.

The mismatch between expectations and reality also become evident when specific locations in the UK are considered. For example, Boris points out that London in particular is one of those places in the UK where one's expectations always clash with reality because the opportunities and diversity that the city offers make its atmosphere ever changing and dynamic. As he says: *'You have to come and see it for yourself in order to understand'* (my translation). While Boris' expectations may have differed from reality, they hardly clashed or produced negative experiences or emotions. This is not the case for Roza who moved to Glasgow, which she only gradually grew to like. She summarises her first impressions of Glasgow in the following way: *'I expected that it will be more interesting, more charming. [...] I had big expectations and I didn't like it in my first year. [...] Maybe I had higher expectations about the level of cleanliness'* (my translation). Indeed, Glasgow lacks the medieval charm that Edinburgh for example can offer. Below is a photo from my fieldwork in the biggest Scottish city, accompanied with some of my reflections from my research diary. Image 5 was taken a few days after I had arrived in Glasgow, having completed fieldwork in Edinburgh.



Image 5. Glasgow street. Photo taken by the researcher in January 2014

One of the first most noticeable things about Glasgow was the fact that its level of cleanness was much lower than that in other cities in the UK. Glasgow at the end of January looked particularly gloomy, making deprivation even more apparent. However, the scattered rubbish around the lamp post, the council houses in the distance and the wet patchy roads strangely reminded me of Sofia's streets and blocks of flats. Thus, although not as glamorous as Edinburgh, Glasgow feels more homey. I can see why the participants feel at home here (memo, January 2014)

Initial expectations of particular locations in the UK evidently do clash with reality, producing an array of emotions, which not only highlight the limits of pre-migratory knowledge but also lead to, in some cases, *disillusionment*. In exploring the latter further, it is important to note that it is not always preceded by a honeymoon period. In fact, for some of the participants, it is their initial response to the realities of the British context, which results from their first encounters with British cultural practices and the language. Therefore, it is important to engage thoroughly with both the factors that trigger culture shock and the corresponding

emotions that it produces. This in turn allows the in-depth evaluation of the emotional costs of migration.

Correspondingly, some of the participants associate their initial difficulties in the UK with the tension produced by the different cultural practices at home and abroad. Reminiscing about her first impressions upon arriving as a student, young professional Natalia describes her experiences in the following way:

[It is] a culture shock because after all you have to get used to living in a new way, especially because we arrived into an absolutely different culture. See, if I had gone to Serbia perhaps it would not have been so strange and shocking but it was because you had to leave behind all these things that you love and that you are used to. That's it. Then everything becomes blurry, your brain no longer knows what is normal and what isn't. (Natalia, 24, my translation)

The reference to Serbia as a symbol of similarity clearly shows that there is a clash between one's migratory project and the host society reality, associated with the different cultural context. Natalia's account of her initial experience alludes to a process of uprooting – thus, leaving (the home country) is effectively leaving *behind* (family and friends). Strong relationships with loved ones in the home country make detachment from one's context very difficult, contributing to experiences of disillusionment in the host society and accentuating the effects of undergoing culture shock. More importantly, as Natalia's account shows, disillusionment also leads to a process of questioning one's choices and their corresponding consequences. Defining 'normality' in such a context becomes problematic and contested. Correspondingly, in the case of young, highly skilled Bulgarians, making sense of one's migratory choices initially emerges as a struggle.

Additionally, everyday situations and drinking habits further highlight cultural differences, which lead to disillusionment. Kiril's story in that respect is rather interesting. His initial observations of the British ways of interaction left him puzzled:

What was quite strange for me in the beginning is this politeness because, to be honest, I don't know whether this is the case in the whole of Bulgaria but in [hometown] people are not very polite [...]. When they get on a bus, no one says "thank you" to the driver or the conductor. No one says that, so I wasn't saying it here either in the beginning. So some English people have said to me: "You, from Bulgaria, you are always very grumpy, always very impolite" and I always tell them that I am not.

Everyday situations evidently highlight a difference in manners between home and host country. Banal practices such as getting on a bus then become transformed into extraordinary initial experiences of the migration reality, which once again blur the firm boundaries of 'normality' associated with socially accepted behaviour. Interestingly, as Kiril's case demonstrates this affects perceptions of locals towards foreigners and of Bulgarian migrants towards locals. While in the first case this is interpreted as a sign of one's nature and associated with poor manners, in the second instance, it is equally incomprehensible and dismissible. This not only highlights the initial complexities of migrants' lives but it also clearly shows the clash between expectations and lived experiences, highlighting the limitations of pre-migratory knowledge.

Additionally, the experiences of disillusionment become particularly prominent when young, highly skilled Bulgarians engage with elements of everyday life with markedly cultural connotations such as drinking. Stamen, Roza and Natalia share that their personal dislike of British drinking practices made them feel detached and unable to initially connect with fellow British course mates. Insisting that what Marko experienced was not necessarily a culture shock but rather disappointment, he elaborates on his initial encounters with everyday culture, practiced by the locals:

I'm not abstaining from alcohol; neither am I sexually conservative but erm. The first week, the first two weeks of Freshers week and after that there was still not too much uni work going on, were not particularly...They made me rethink whether I had made the right decision [to come to the UK].

This interview excerpt clearly demonstrates the serious impact of Marko's 'disappointment' upon his initial experiences. More importantly, his observations about Freshers week in the UK clearly signify the mismatch between pre-migratory expectations and migration realities. The clash between the two thus triggers negative emotions among some of the participants making them feel 'out of place'. This is also a state of multiple crises, characterised by the loss of frames of 'normality' (Goffman, 1971). This not only underpins the participants' inability to fit in initially but it also makes them question their migratory choices.

Although emotions are complex and conflicting, looking at migrants' feelings through the prism of the honeymoon period and the phase of disillusionment is beneficial for several reasons. Firstly, such an approach allows an analysis of the conditions that trigger the prevalence of one emotion over another at given point in time. Secondly, an affective approach to migration highlights the dynamic nature of feelings, offering an insight into the emotional benefits and costs of geographical mobility. Thus, the initial encounters of young, Bulgarian highly skilled migrants with the British host society emerge as deeply emotive journeys of making sense of change and of the implications of one's migratory choices.

To stay, or not to stay?

Migration as a project and as a reality not only differ but also, as the previous section has also demonstrated, the complex relationship between the two produces a wide range of emotions. As Winkelman (1994) argues, the resolution of culture shock involves a phase of recovery and adjustment during which migrants learn how to manage the effects of moving to a new host society. It is a period of re-assessment of one's migratory choices and the possible avenues of dealing with the state of (personal) crisis. In concurrence with Winkelman's (1994) theoretical conceptualisation, the fieldwork conducted with young, highly skilled Bulgarians demonstrates two approaches to managing the implications of the costs and benefits

of migration: return or adaptation. Therefore, the nature and characteristics of both approaches will be explored in detail below. Ultimately, it will be argued that although personal attitudes towards adaptation and premature return vary, participants' positive or negative evaluation is largely dependent on the impact of each approach upon the successful realisation of young Bulgarians' migratory projects.

One of the possible approaches to managing the (initial) emotional costs of migration is return to the home society. While premature return is underpinned by an inability to cope with the emotional distress caused by cultural differences, it essentially precludes one from achieving their migratory project. Although none of the young people, who took part in this study chose this option as a way of dealing with negative emotions, it was a possibility they all either considered or had very strong opinions about. This was particularly the case for PhD student Svetla, who initially did not want to come to Britain and felt forced by her parents to do so. Premature return was also a viable option for young professional Natalia who found the cultural differences between Bulgaria and the UK too wide to bridge over. In that respect, Kiril and Simeon's reflections provide further understanding into not only the participants' perceptions of early return but also the nature and characteristics of their migration realities. For example, asked to elaborate on young Bulgarians' initial encounters with the host society, Kiril explains:

There are many Bulgarians here who are suffering initially. There was even a girl who went back after the first semester of first year – she could not cope! Simply could not take it anymore! But I said to myself – even if it is not for yourself, you have to do it for them, for your parents. Of course it is important to prove to yourself first that you can do it [...] but it also important to prove it to your parents [...]. (my translation)

This interview excerpt quite clearly characterises migration as a struggle, which has serious emotional costs for those who choose to study abroad. The focus on 'suffering' and 'coping' serves to accentuate the scale of difficulties associated with life in the UK. However, what is striking about this comment is that the return of

Kiril's friend is sharply contrasted with his own behaviour. As such, this contrasting example validates Kiril's own perseverance and determination in light of the harsh realities, simultaneously portraying return as lack of strong will. In that sense, Simeon's comment about the early stages of one's migratory realities is very explicit:

You cannot rely on Mummy and Daddy – you know, they will send you money, no problems and everything is okay. It is a matter of survival because there is no money, there's no one to send you money and if you don't earn it – you lose, you have to go back. It's not the end of the world but it's still failure because you have ambitions, you have a goal and if you have to go back not because you want to but because you have to, is something that you don't want to happen. So you fight and it's a matter of survival. Well, it's not as dramatic as it sounds but from my point of view, it [staying] is an achievement. (my translation)

Evidently, by choosing to live, work and/ or study abroad migrants need to face several emotional, cultural and practical challenges. While Kiril's comment highlights the subjectivities of migration, Simeon's reflection focuses on the practicalities. Nonetheless, emotions are at the centre of both accounts, simultaneously portraying migration as a struggle. Yet, the two accounts of early return vary slightly. In Kiril's narrative, premature return is detached (i.e. presented through a story about a friend) but it is a choice actively sought. In Simeon's interview, however, early return is not only personalised but it also emerges as an undesired outcome. Nonetheless, premature return has strong negative connotations, regardless whether it is actively chosen as an emotional coping mechanism or whether it is a consequence of one's financial circumstances. As such, premature return as an approach to dealing with change is stigmatised and stigmatising – that is, it emerges as an undesired outcome, which tars the image of those who opt for it. What lies at the centre of the negative perception of early return is its strong association with the achievement of one's migratory project. While going back to Bulgaria may mitigate the negative implications of students' and young professionals' migration realities, it is inevitably associated with failure.

Thus, even though none of the participants have chosen this option, the prominent presence of the notion in their narratives serves to portray their choices in a positive light. The premature return of friends and acquaintances not only justifies the migratory choice of these young Bulgarians who choose to stay but it also accentuates their own skills and abilities to adapt and continue pursuing their migratory projects.

Consequently, adaptation is another possible approach to dealing with the (subjective or practical) challenges, posed by the host society. Although all participants have chosen to manage the emotional implications of their realities by adapting, attitudes and understandings of the process and its dynamics vary significantly. For example, while Ignat recognises the clash between cultural traditions upon arrival, he nonetheless perceives adaptation as an important part of the migration process. He thus contends:

Well, of course it's important to be who you are and to be proud of it but at the same time you have to adapt to the environment. It is egotistical not to adapt and to impose your opinion or values on everyone else (my translation).

Ignat's remark points to the contentious nature of adaptation, which requires a negotiation between the cultural norms and traditions of both host and home societies. It is not a process of 'either...or' but one of 'as well as'. Adaptation in that sense is justified on moral grounds. 24-year-old young professional Ivan, who works for a consultancy company in London, however, points out that adaptation as a process is not underpinned by one's ability but rather by one's desire to adjust: '*I think we, Bulgarians, we adapt at least in 95% of the cases but I think this is down to desire to do so and not opportunity. I know many who choose not to adapt*' (my translation). The reaction to one's initial migratory realities then emerges as an act of agency, which is strongly individualistic. As such, it is premised on migrants' efforts to pursue it, rather than it being dependent on the host society conditions.

Furthermore, adaptation is not only an individualistic and rather contentious but also an ongoing process, which is not limited to initial encounters with the host society. Although over time young, highly skilled Bulgarians build networks and establish friendships in the host society, each relocation within the UK triggers negative feelings, which require adaptation. Natalia's story is a case in point: after completing her degree in the Midlands, she managed to find a job in London. Moving to a new city however, not only triggered negative emotions but it also highlighted the necessity to adapt:

The environment is so different, you know when I came to London, it is a completely different culture shock again and it takes a while until you build...I mean, when I was in [town in the Midlands] I started feeling comfortable towards my second-third year. Then here [in London] I had to go through the same drama until I adjust because it is very difficult in London, it's a very alienating city but I think I have finally managed to overcome these feelings [...] (my translation).

Evidently, although adaptation may be seen as an approach to dealing with the initial challenges of life in the host society, it also a rather dynamic and ongoing process of one's migration realities. As such, it can be triggered by any change of context – either location or role – and it requires mitigating the consequences of the loss of frames of normality (Goffman, 1971). Furthermore, Natalia's comment suggests that for some participants adaptation is not only a very long, gradual process as it took her two to three years to feel comfortable but also one, deeply embedded in emotions (as her reference to 'drama' points out). Finally, this interview excerpt illustrates that migrants' adaptation may not be preceded or accompanied by positive emotions – rather, its positive connotations stem from its close association with the achievement of migratory projects.

Thus, this section has unravelled the nature and characteristics of the two most prominent approaches to young, Bulgarian highly skilled migrants' initial encounters with the host society. Premature return and adaptation emerge from the accounts of the participants as deeply interlinked, albeit opposing choices. Their

respective negative or positive connotations are embedded in the personal context of the participants and their individual choices. More specifically, premature return is seen as failure as it terminates not only migrants' stay in the UK but also the possibility of achievement of their migratory projects. Correspondingly, adaptation comes across as a necessary component of the migrant experience but one which is complex and very dynamic.

Adjustment strategies

Unravelling the complex nature of adjustment requires a careful analysis of the variety of strategies that migrants employ to engage with the (initial) challenges posed by their social and cultural context. Correspondingly, the fieldwork with young, Bulgarian highly skilled migrants in Britain reveals that adjustment is neither a straightforward process, nor one where participants are passive. Using Goffman (1972) in her research with Polish migrants in the UK, Ryan remarks that '[m]oving to a new geographical location and social situation requires identifying and following new rules so that normality can be re-established' (2010, pp. 360-361). Although Ryan (2010) focuses predominantly on the implications of this process upon migrants' identities, this observation is useful as it highlights the normalising function of adjustment strategies. It is precisely this aspect that this sub-section aims to tackle, evaluating the ways in which Bulgarian students and young professionals aim to mitigate the emotional costs and benefits of their migratory choices. In doing so, this sub-section looks at two different but complementary strategies: a segregationist and an integrationist one. The nature and characteristics of each strategy will be considered in detail below. Ultimately, it will be argued that while the segregationist strategy aims to recreate normality and thus minimise the emotional costs of migration, the integrationist one capitalises on the benefits by normalising difference.

One of the most prominent strategies of adjusting to the initial challenges posed by the host society is what I have loosely termed as the ‘mini Bulgaria’ phenomenon. In its essence, it is a segregationist approach as it aims to help the participants recreate normality by making their context more Bulgarian and correspondingly less different. Although this approach to adjustment focuses on what Putnam (2000) has termed as bonding social capital or the social networks between homogenous groups, it also goes beyond the ways in which the participants foster strong relationships with other co-nationals to minimise the negative emotional effects of the host society. The ‘mini Bulgaria’ phenomenon encompasses a wide range of techniques such as forming strong friendships with co-nationals; establishing, joining and actively participating in Bulgarian student societies; and relocating to areas where there is not only a strong Bulgarian community but also access to Bulgarian facilities and forms of recreation. Therefore, to gain an in-depth understanding of the ‘mini Bulgaria’ phenomenon, its nature and characteristics will be considered below through an analysis of the different techniques that it encompasses.

One of the key ways for the participants to mitigate the costs of migration upon arrival is to establish close friendships with other Bulgarians in the same town, university and job. Making friends with fellow co-nationals diminishes the negative emotional consequences of leaving the home country. The fieldwork reveals that this is particularly the case in areas where there is a strong Bulgarian community such as in Scotland. As Samuil remarks: *‘In the beginning when I met all the Bulgarians, I had the feeling that I have not left Bulgaria’* (my translation). Consequently, focusing on bonding capital when initially encountering the host society not only alleviates the emotional costs of migration but it also completely diminishes them. Surrounding oneself with fellow co-nationals thus prevents culture shock by minimising exposure to the local culture and traditions. Correspondingly, this segregationist technique essentially ensures adjustment without requiring adaptation. Scotland-based student Karolina explains this in the

following way: *'I [have always] lived with Bulgarians so there wasn't a drastic change for me. [...] So the very fact that coming from Bulgaria I came across Bulgarians made me feel I was on my own turf'* (my translation). As Karolina's comment demonstrates, surrounding oneself with fellow co-nationals not only blocks difference but it also gives her a sense of empowerment and inclusion. However, Marko, who lives in Scotland but has a more diverse group of friends points out that it depends on one's individuality: *'It actually took some time for me to socialise and yeah, it was definitely kinda easier at first to kinda speak Bulgarian but I wanted to escape this actually'*. Marko's observation about the segregationist approach to adjustment once again demonstrates that relying on familiarity is an easy way of counterbalancing the negative effects of dealing with the culture shock upon entering the host society. However, his comment also alludes to the potential consequences of doing so – the reference to 'escape' suggests that a segregationist approach to adjustment can also be disadvantageous as it prevents migrants from engaging actively with the host society. The latter then requires effort, determination and going beyond one's comfort zone.

Similar trends are illustrated by another key component of the 'mini Bulgaria' phenomenon: the participants' active engagement with Bulgarian Student Societies (BSS). Established by Bulgarian students in their respective universities, BSS belong to the cultural strand of Student Unions, which aim to promote and support diversity. To provide an in-depth understanding of the role that BSS play in the process of adjustment, it is important to analyse the nature and characteristics of these organisations as well as students' motivations for actively engaging with them. With regards to the latter, Delyan's story is quite interesting. He was not only the President of the Bulgarian Student Society at his University at the time of his interview, but also its founder. He explains his motivation for establishing a BSS in the following way:

I was sure that I will miss Bulgaria. So, after a year, it was clear to me that I either have to go back home or create my own Bulgaria in

Scotland. [...] My motivation and that of others was that there are many of us and we miss it [Bulgaria] and we need to get together regularly to preserve our culture (Delyan, my translation).

Establishing Bulgarian student societies quite clearly emerges not only as an adjustment strategy but also as a coping mechanism, which alleviates the emotional costs of migration. Evidently, the focus on preservation of cultural traditions in Delyan's account is way of recreating 'normality'. More importantly, it is a way of dealing with change, which not only signifies an act of agency but it also ensures the successful completion of the migratory project. Thus, establishing and engaging with BSS comes across as driven by personal motivations, which nonetheless benefit the whole migrant group. As such, it is an important component of the 'mini Bulgaria' phenomenon.

Exploring the nature and characteristics of Bulgarian student societies, however reveals their dualistic function. On the one hand, BSS foster within-group integration by creating a sense of community. On the other hand, these organisations ease the process of engaging with the host society. While Delyan's motivation for founding a student society at his university has already hinted at the first aspect, PhD student Samuil elaborates on it more explicitly:

[B]eing part of the Bulgarian society makes it easier. I mean, [...] when you go abroad, you need an 'anchor' because when you arrive in a new environment, you meet people you don't know, there is a cultural and a language barrier. So [BSS is] this solid base, where you can always go and feel safe when things go badly. (my translation)

Samuil's reference to an 'anchor' and a 'solid base' in relation to Bulgarian student societies clearly demonstrates that such organisations assume the role of a mediator that helps Bulgarian students to deal with the emotional consequences of their migratory choices. Moreover, student cultural organisations provide young Bulgarian migrants with a sense of community, simultaneously enriching their bonding capital. Thus, Bulgarian Student Societies diminish the effects of culture shock, pre-empting premature return and supporting students' migratory projects.

More specifically, BSS offer a platform for the exchange of information in relation to the practicalities of life in the UK. In that respect, the fieldwork demonstrates that the events organised by the most active BSS (usually the ones with large membership such as those in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Manchester, Sheffield and Nottingham) range from airport pick up of new students, to welcome meetings to share knowledge about student life. Specifically, Simeon explains that student societies give the opportunity to '[...] *pass down the knowledge, which you have acquired the hard way [...]*', to share '[...] *know-how on how to be an emigrant, tested empirically*' (my translation). By communicating with fellow co-nationals, recently arrived students have the opportunity to stimulate their migration knowledge, which diminishes the negative effects of culture shock. While engaging with and actively participating in BSS has positive effect on the emotional well-being of newly arrived young Bulgarians, there are also certain disadvantages. Simeon's reflexive account of the nature and characteristics of Bulgarian student societies is quite interesting. He remarks that it is '*a bit ironic*' that while BSS aim to help students to integrate in the host society, such organisations ultimately help newcomers '*to integrate in the student society itself*' (my translation). At welcome events, Simeon thus warns first year students: '*One of the mistakes that you will make is that you will allow the society to suck you in*' (my translation). This suggests that one of the disadvantages of engaging in BSS activities is that the strong focus on within-group integration can hinder adjustment to the host society. Therefore, the active engagement with BSS is an important segregationist technique, which is part of the 'mini Bulgaria' phenomenon. The dualistic nature and characteristics of student societies reveal that there are both advantages and disadvantages of being actively engaged in their events. While in the first instance they offer the possibility to minimise the negative effects of culture shock, this simultaneously may lock people in within their own community, preventing them from engaging with the British host society.

Finally, re-creating Bulgarian-ness in the UK as an adjustment strategy may also take the form of relocating to areas with a predominantly Bulgarian ‘outlook’ in terms of facilities and population. Although an integral part of the ‘mini Bulgaria’ phenomenon, this approach to adjustment goes beyond building upon bonding capital. It essentially entails either living in or visiting areas that re-create everyday practices associated with the home country. Doing so offers the comfort of familiarity through enabling participants to access Bulgarian shops, cafés and restaurants. This was particularly the case for PR specialist Ralitsa, who upon finishing her degree in the Midlands found a job in London. She decided to move to a borough in the city where she could feel ‘at home’ while abroad. Ralitsa further explains that she managed to adjust easily to her new environment precisely because she lived in an environment that closely resembled her life in Bulgaria. The participant observation I carried out in the borough where Ralitsa lives confirms this finding. Below are photos taken during my fieldwork as well as some excerpts from my research diary detailing two of my visits in the area.



Image 6. Bulgarian cafe and breakfast place in North London. Photo taken by the researcher in August 2014

Walking out of the tube station, the first thing I hear is Bulgarian speech as two men walk past me. Searching for a newly opened Bulgarian shop, I can ostensibly smell the aroma of *banitsa*²⁶ in the air. I look up and see the nearby Bulgarian breakfast place, which uses the colours of the national flag to accentuate its ethnic character. Right next to it there is a Bulgarian café/ bar, which is named after the second biggest city in Bulgaria [...] (memo, London, August 2014)

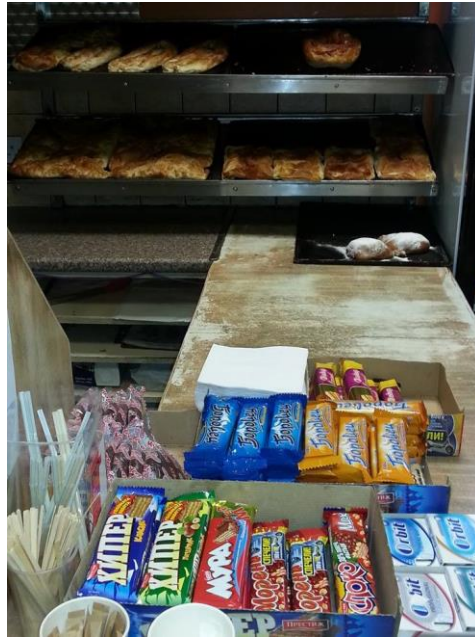


Image 8. Interior of the Bulgarian breakfast place, which features Bulgarian wafers at the front and banitsa at the back. Photo taken by the researcher in August 2014



Image 7. Interior of the Bulgarian breakfast place: noticeboard area. Photo taken by the researcher in August 2014

I decide to have breakfast at BG Zakuska. As I walk through the entrance, on the right hand side, there is a noticeboard with handwritten ads in Bulgarian from people offering services, selling cigarettes and looking for housemates (Image 7). There is a TV with Bulgarian channels on and a stand that offers free Bulgarian newspapers. It is a small place, which has a little bit of everything – they sell *boza*, *banitsa*, wafers, *kebapcheta*²⁷ and traditional Bulgarian meatballs (image 8). *Banitsa* with *boza* costs £2. The shop assistant (female, early 20s)

²⁶ Type of food. See Appendix 1.

²⁷ See Appendix 1.

explains that this is a chain shop and there are three more in London. She also says that she does not speak English but has recently started going to classes. She could not find a job in Bulgaria and decided to come to London because she already had some friends (=> chain migration) (memo, August, 2015).



Image 9. Cafe Plovdiv floor plan as drawn by the researcher. Photo of the researcher's diary.

After my breakfast, I go next door to have a coffee. As I enter, I walk straight to the bar to order a coffee. The puzzled waitress says that they do table service (just like in Bulgaria), so she asks me to sit down. Speaking in Bulgarian, she remarks: 'Sometimes I forget that I am abroad! I speak Bulgarian all the time'. Before I head to one of the tables, she asks: 'What coffee do you want? Normal? 'Long coffee' (Bulgarian version of Americano) or cappuccino'? I opt for a 'long coffee' and sit down on one of the long leather sofas with low, black marble tables. There is a 2 x 2.5 m photo on the wall of the most iconic sight in Plovdiv – its Roman amphitheatre. The coffee costs only £1.20 – the same as it would in Bulgaria. BG music is on and there is a big Bulgarian flag in the smoking area. I feel as if I am in Bulgaria (memo, August, 2014).



Image 10. Menu of the Bulgarian restaurant in North London. Photo taken by the researcher in November, 2014

It is Svetla's birthday and she has decided to celebrate it by going to 'mini Bulgaria' in London. She has booked a Bulgarian restaurant, named after a popular Bulgarian seaside resort. [...]The restaurant inside is quite 'standard': many small tables, a bar, two big Bulgarian flags hanging from the walls with some decorative ships to maintain the seaside theme. [...] The most impressive feature of the restaurant is the fact that walls inside represent a massive painting of the Black Sea beach strip. The menu of the restaurant features meals that can be quickly prepared in a foreign environment: salads, grilled food and *parlenka*²⁸. [...] I look at the menu: no. 30 is 'Bulgarian breakfast' and no. 31 is 'English breakfast'. Above are featured three traditional soups: *tarator*²⁹ (no. 26), soup with meatballs (no. 27) and tripe soup (no.28). [...] Even though we expected some *chalga*³⁰ to be playing, the music is quite mellow and it is predominantly Bulgarian – the classic Bulgarian evergreens played traditionally at restaurants. The staff is friendly but the majority of them speak little English (memo, November, 2014).

²⁸ Type of bread. See Appendix 1.

²⁹ Type of soup. See Appendix 1.

³⁰ Bulgarian music genre. See Appendix 1.

The thus presented fieldwork data reveals that the ‘mini Bulgaria’ phenomenon has also its spatial dimensions. The facilities in this London borough and the manner in which people interact make the people who work there and those who visit and live there feel ‘at home’ even though they are away from home. Sameness is recreated not only through everyday interactions but also through social spaces and practices such as eating, drinking and shopping. Bulgarian-ness is achieved both through the exterior and through the interior design of these places as images 6, 7 and 8 demonstrate. Familiarity is established through the ways in which cafes, shops and restaurants are decorated. Yet, at the same time the presence of Bulgarian national flags is a reminder that this is a ‘mini Bulgaria’ created in the UK. Ralitsa’s choice to live in that area as well as Svetla’s desire to celebrate her birthday in that area capture the essence of this segregationist strategy to adjustment. More specifically, it diminishes the emotional costs of migration by minimising exposure to the culture differences presented by the British host society context. Thus, it becomes evident that the loose term ‘mini Bulgaria’ encompasses a broad range of adjustment techniques, which capitalise on sameness, recreated through close friendship with fellow co-nations, active participation in Bulgarian Student Societies and visiting or living in areas that closely resemble the home country.

Conversely, the integrationist adjustment strategy capitalises on the emotional benefits of migration. As such, it includes techniques, which build on what Putnam (2000) has termed as bridging capital or the establishment of social networks between socially heterogeneous groups. In doing so, this strategy normalises difference. The data demonstrates that students and young professionals achieve adjustment mostly in two ways: either by joining various extracurricular activities with non-ethnic/ cultural character or by working part-time while studying. With regards to the first aspect, for example, a number of the students share that playing a sport or joining various societies has helped them to expand their friendship circle, which in turn has led to their successful integration in British society.

Consequently, an important element of the integrationist approach to adjustment is engaging with many extracurricular activities while studying. For example, both Vasil and Adrian played volleyball while studying. Vasil shares that it was precisely playing sport that ‘*created a lot of international contacts and acted as a catalyst for my quick adaptation*’ (my translation). Indeed, each one of the participants actively took part in a number of societies or sports at their respective universities. Besides the volleyball team, Marko for example also joined a number of other societies and he even was a Study Abroad Ambassador, member of the Debate Society and of Model United Nations. Similarly, Nayden as a member of both the BSS and the Pool and Snooker societies initiated a number of joint events that helped him to expand his friendship network, simultaneously engaging with the local students. This illustrates that young Bulgarians often combine a number of strategies that allow them to not only mitigate the negative effects of migrating but also to benefit from the advantages of being abroad.

Similar tendencies can be observed in relation to the second aspect of integrationist techniques. Young professional Bilyana reflects upon her work experiences while studying for her PGT degree:

I used to do evening shifts in a bar. This opened my eyes about English culture [...]. It was one of the oldest traditional working men’s clubs. Our club was 150 years old. So once upon a time, women weren’t allowed; it was only for men, who would go there after work, have a pint, play darts and cribbage. I am addicted to cribbage now – only old people play this card game. [...] I worked there for almost three years, only evenings and Saturdays during the day. It opened up my eyes about their [English] culture, I mean, their everyday habits as I was able to observe. Most of the people there were in their 50s, so you see what manners and habits used to be once and then sometimes their children would come and you can see the difference. It was quite eye-opening! (my translation)

Evidently, working part-time while studying allows Bilyana to actively engage with the host society culture by not only observing how the local population interacts but also by taking part in popular recreational activities. Thus, casual

employment provides an avenue for learning more about the culture and the habits of British people, simultaneously normalising cultural differences. As the interview excerpt demonstrates this has had its impact upon Bilyana as she now loves playing cribbage. Similarly, Vasil, who as a student was a President of his BSS at some point, remarks: *'I used to work at [name of bar], which helped me to make a lot of friends, which ultimately helped me to get out of the entirely Bulgarian environment'* (my translation). Vasil's observation reveals a more nuanced aspect of integrationist adjustment strategies, namely, that they can not only serve as an avenue for adapting to the host society but also as a way to counterbalance the negative effects of segregationist techniques. Furthermore, Vasil's example demonstrates that young, highly skilled Bulgarians do not rely only on one particular approach to adjustment. The latter, rather, requires a complex combination of both segregationist and integrationist techniques, which simultaneously manage the negative consequences of migration and capitalise on its benefits.

Thus, the analysis so far has demonstrated that adjustment to the host society is not a straightforward process. Furthermore, the participants' initial reactions to their migration realities question their migratory decisions and the viability of their migratory projects. Ultimately, young Bulgarians find themselves in a 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1967) position where they are forced to reconsider the basis of their migration knowledge and simultaneously construct new avenues for making sense of their migration realities. This aspect will be further explored below through the analysis of young Bulgarians' responses to the process of double-sided othering in the later stages of their migratory experiences in Britain.

Later stages: othering and being othered

The understanding of young, highly skilled Bulgarians' migrant realities would be incomplete without considering how they engage with the macro conditions in both host and home societies. As *chapter 1* has already demonstrated,

the participants find themselves in a very hostile environment. While in Bulgaria their migratory choices are interpreted negatively as a form of escapism or treason, in Britain they are subjected to negative representations under the broad umbrella term ‘Eastern European’. Consequently, in the Bulgarian context this suggests strong divisions along the lines of those who stay and those who leave the country. In Britain, arguably, this leads to a reductionist approach where all Central and Eastern European migrants are cumulatively represented as the Other. Therefore, as *chapter 2* has argued, young, highly skilled Bulgarians find themselves in a liminal position, trapped between the simultaneous operation of both external (produced by the host society) and internal (produced by the home society) processes of stereotyping. More specifically, as argued in *chapter 2*, the concept of double-sided othering is particularly useful in grasping the essence of Bulgarian migrants’ in-between-ness. As such, it not only captures the simultaneous function of both external and internal stereotypes but it also outlines the contours of a temporally- and spatially-bound discursive realm, based on constant power renegotiations, which impact upon migrants’ everyday realities. Therefore, this section will engage with the context of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK by exploring whether and how double-sided othering affects their experiences. Both external and internal stereotypes are considered. More specifically, the data will highlight the problematic nature of the term ‘Eastern European’ and the importance of location in the case of external stereotypes as well as the deepening rift between stayers and leavers in the case of internal categorisations. Finally, this section will consider the variety of everyday strategies that the participants employ to counterbalance the negative effects of double-sided othering.

External stereotypes

Unsurprisingly, initially many of my participants respond that despite being aware of negative stereotypical representations of Bulgarian migrants in Britain, they have not been affected by them. This could be explained by the fact that unlike

Datta's (2011) 'last hired and first fired' participants, young skilled Bulgarians tend to find themselves in less precarious positions both while at university and at the workplace. In fact, 20-year-old student Maria shares that she has experienced a lot of positive attitude precisely because she is Bulgarian. She further elaborates that she has been approached by an Englishman, who wanted to launch a website with information for Bulgarians, who wish to come to the UK after the removal of labour restrictions in January 2014. Maria in turn explains that she was pleasantly surprised by this person's willingness to help her fellow co-nationals. Other participants, such as young professional Vasil demonstrate a very understanding attitude toward external othering: *'I have not been affected directly. [...] I do think however that this [othering] is because their country, Britain, has had a lot of negative experience with immigration'* (my translation). Although such a rational reaction is demonstrated by the majority of participants, their reasoning varies. While Maria cites the power of the media to frame discourses, marketing specialist Kalina sarcastically remarks: *'They envy us! Because we are so pretty and smart, they envy us for being so poor!'* (my translation). Kalina's sarcasm in this statement, however, suggests that the economic disparity between Bulgaria and Britain is seen as one of the key triggers of external stereotypes. Instead of denying it, she validates and internalises it, thus justifying the existence of external stereotypes. However, the data highlights that while reactions to the presence of external stereotypes tend to be balanced, actual daily experiences are more nuanced. More specifically, the data points to either subtle (*perception of discrimination/ condescending attitude*) or direct effects (*experiences of discrimination*) of external stereotypes. In the first instance, the subtle effects refer to young, Bulgarian highly skilled migrants' heightened sensitivity towards the presence of stereotypes, which leads them to interpret everyday situations as condescending or discriminatory. In the second case, some participants report having directly been exposed to processes of othering in the host society. In fact, a prevalence of the first over the second can be noticed.

In relation to the subtle effects of external stereotyping, the story of 23-year-old professional Dessie is quite interesting. She works for a multinational corporation in London, after having completed her business degree at a university in Southern England. Dessie shares that when she arrived in England, she was quite aware of external stereotypes about foreigners, and Bulgarians in particular. Furthermore, she adds that such stereotypes had initially established an *expectation* of discrimination, which resulted in low self-esteem. This feeling was additionally strengthened by one of her university friends, who was mocking her accent. Interestingly, when Dessie confronted her friend, he justified his actions as a way for him to manage his own self-esteem as he felt intimidated by her achievements. Evidently, discourses of othering, whether or not they result in differential treatment, produce a range of sensitive reactions, often compromising the emotional well-being of those subjected to them. Another case in point is Natalia's account of looking for a job, shortly prior the removal of labour restrictions for Bulgarians and Romanians in January 2014:

I was really afraid. I mean, [the negative media rhetoric] was really difficult for me to deal with, especially when I started looking for a job. I was so nervous about it that in spite of my strong patriotism, for a split second, I did consider whether or not to delete from my CV the fact that Bulgarian is my native language because I was very nervous about the effects of [the external stereotypes] but I also really wanted a job. And I thought, okay, maybe if I want to at least make it to an interview, I need to do this. I felt like that for the first time in my life. It affected me subconsciously [...] (my translation).

The prominent negative media discourse in relation to A2 nationals made Natalia feel stressed and anxious, leading her to believe that this would affect her chances to find a job in the UK. Consequently, this interview excerpt quite clearly illustrates the negative emotional consequences of external stereotypes. Similar to Dessie's case, Natalia's consideration whether to remove information about her native language signifies her anticipation of potential discrimination. Interestingly, deliberating whether to mask her nationality or not is justified as necessary in light of the potential negative effects of external stereotypes. Although Natalia did not

remove the information from her CV and was still invited to go to interviews, the narrative suggests that she felt ashamed and guilty of even considering this option. Finally, her categorisation of the effect of stereotypes as ‘subconscious’ serves to illustrate the subtle nature of the effects of dominant negative stereotypes. Thus, this example demonstrates that for some participants, living in a context, which is hostile to migrants, results in a heightened sensitivity towards their background and an expectation of being discriminated against.

In a similar manner, Bilyana found herself in situations where attitudes toward her changed as soon as she mentioned her nationality in light of the increasingly negative portrayal of Bulgarians in the media. Consequently, the presence of external stereotypes has strengthened Bilyana’s own perception of experiencing condescending attitude as the vignette presented here illustrates.

The café that Bilyana and I have chosen for the interview regularly organises various events. There was a poetry reading the day we went there. Immersed in our conversation, we only realised what was going on once it had already begun. We lowered our voices and I quickly asked my final questions. Upon exiting the café, we had the following conversation:

Bilyana: *‘You probably didn’t notice but the lady sat behind you was giving us nasty looks’.*

EG: *‘Really?’*

Bilyana: *‘Yes! It was because we were speaking in Bulgarian. Such a good example of condescending attitude!’*

EG: *‘Did you not think that was because we were disrupting their event and not because we were speaking a foreign language?’*

Bilyana: *‘Maybe, but it felt like it was because we were speaking a different language’.* (Memo, March 2014)

Given the context of this everyday situation, it is very likely that the annoyance of the lady in the café was provoked by our lack of consideration for the ongoing poetry event. Nonetheless, Bilyana interpreted it as a condescending act rather than as a reaction provoked by our socially inadequate behaviour. This episode clearly demonstrates how the negative macro context has increased participants’ sensitivity to othering. The realm of the everyday thus transforms into

an arena where social interactions in a public space blur the line between perceptions of othering and actual experiences of discrimination.

Although less, my participants reported a few experiences of direct effects of external stereotypes. Interestingly, they do not interpret it as resulting from being members of a specific national group. Rather, they view it as stigmatisation associated with the socially constructed image of the migrant as a foreigner. While Bulgarians remain relatively ‘invisible’ in terms of phenotypic markers, the most obvious difference that becomes a tool for othering is their accent. Emanuela, reflecting upon the process of looking for a job, mentions that a few potential employers terminated scheduled phone interviews as soon as they heard her accent. Once she was told by a prospective employer that *‘there is no point in continuing this interview. The experience that you have is great but my clients are not gonna be impressed by the fact that you’re Eastern European’* (my translation). This clearly highlights how in social contexts ‘Eastern European’ is used as a catch-all phrase. Furthermore, young professional Ivan adds: *‘Actually, I think that Eastern European is used as a term with a derogatory meaning, which is not right’* (my translation). Therefore, many of my participants claim that the term is a metonymical referral with negative overtones to a very large group of people with different cultural, social and national backgrounds.

Additionally, the data accentuates the importance of the spatial dimensions of external stereotypes. For example, while working at large company in the Midlands, Emanuela recalls a particularly distressing case when one of her work colleagues repeatedly asked her to pronounce words containing the letter ‘r’. Imitating her accent, he commented: *‘You [migrants] all need to learn how to speak with a **normal** accent ‘cos **you** have chosen to come here [...]’* (participant’s emphasis, my translation). Emanuela recollects that her manager excused her colleague’s behaviour with the fact that as a Northerner he has had limited communication with foreigners. In this particular instance, regional differences in levels of diversity emerge as factors influencing the attitude towards foreigners,

even if the latter are highly skilled. Bilyana makes a similar point reminiscing about living and working in Southern England. In contrast, London is described by 23-year-old young professional Boris as a ‘*transmission centre*’ and a ‘*hub*’, where people not only ‘*come for a while and leave*’ but also where one experiences a lot of diversity, which results in less visibility and exposure to stereotypes. In line with Barker (2015), the Scottish context appears as more migrant-friendly as my participants describe the locals as more ‘*warm-hearted than the English*’ in Stamen’s words. Final year student Marko explains that ‘*Bulgarian students in Scotland as European citizens are treated equally to Scottish students and are not required to pay tuition fees*’. This not only makes them feel welcome but it also diminishes the symbolic boundaries between them and locals.

Evidently, the socio- political regional differences, combined with ascribed personality traits of the locals, emerge as key factors in positive attitudes towards migrants in Scotland. Regardless, students who both study and work part-time appear more likely to experience condescending attitudes. An example is provided by Delyan, an undergraduate student who works part-time at Subway, where on a number of occasions customers have made derogatory comments upon hearing his accent. He thus shares:

I have experienced condescending attitude from customers, predominantly the elderly on the basis of being an immigrant. But then again, it is the same in Bulgaria – those, who are 65-70, perhaps younger, they tend to be very conservative and they just don’t like difference (my translation).

Thus, migrants’ skills and status are automatically judged on the basis of a setting, where people can expect to find low skilled labour. Nonetheless, this is not perceived as host society-specific form of othering; rather, it is seen as a generational difference. Interpretations of such incidents, however, remain very individualistic. Overall, the data reveals that external stereotypes have increased the participants’ sensitivity toward differential treatment. While the cases of perceived outweigh those of direct effects of external stereotyping or discrimination, the

findings point out that location in the form of specific contexts plays a key role in determining the Other.

Internal stereotypes

The previous section has outlined the nuanced nature of daily experiences of external stereotypes. In that sense, internal ones differ slightly on two accounts. Firstly, as the data demonstrates, reactions to and experiences of othering in relation to young, highly skilled Bulgarians' migratory choices are much less varied. Secondly, unlike external stereotypes, internal ones transcend spatial boundaries – that is, the participants find themselves exposed to them regardless whether they are in Bulgaria or in the UK. Both of these aspects will be scrutinised in this subsection.

The contextual significance of internal stereotypes stems from divisive discourses in relation to the choice to migrate versus staying in Bulgaria. The semantic meaning of Terminal 1 and 2 of Sofia airport not only transforms them into physical liminal spaces but also into symbolic ones. Correspondingly, the data reveals that internal othering occurs not only when young, highly skilled Bulgarians return for short periods of time in the home society but also when they engage with Bulgaria-oriented activities in Britain. An example of the latter is presented by the account of final year student of Politics Yaroslava. Speaking to her shortly after the most active months of the 2013-2014 #DANSwithme anti-governmental protests (see *chapter 1*), our conversation naturally steers towards her opinion about the political situation in Bulgaria and the occupation by Bulgarian students of the Sofia University in support of the protest. The latter was widely supported by Bulgarian students across the world, who to show solidarity with their fellow students in Bulgaria, were sending photos, messages and videos of support. Yaroslava explained at length that she had been reading very carefully all news related to the issue and when the Bulgarian student society in her Scottish university decided to

organise something in support, she decided to join in. She recounts her active engagement in the following way:

In [Scottish city] we organised a protest to show solidarity with the students [in Bulgaria]. There was a Facebook event and supposedly 70 people had said that they'd attend but there were only 15 in the end. Anyways. I spoke to [University] Student Television and they said they will come and report the event, I was a reporter. Anyways. So we went, took photos and uploaded the photos on Facebook, created a page [...]. So the next day, I was really surprised to see this comment under one of the photos, which featured huge Bulgarian flags and banners, somebody from Bulgaria had written a comment [...], which was "So where in Bulgaria is [Scottish city]"? (my translation).

This rich interview excerpt is illustrative of the dynamics of young, highly skilled Bulgarians' political activism and its online and offline nuances. Although these are important elements in themselves, what comes across quite strongly is that migrants' active civic engagement with the Bulgarian political life is unable to neutralise internal stereotypes, associated with one's migratory choices. More importantly, the demonstration of strong national belonging of Yaroslava and her fellow students de facto invokes and accentuates negative reactions in relation to one's absence from the home country. Yaroslava's account in that sense reveals how deeply such stereotypes and understandings are embedded in Bulgarian popular discourses, ultimately questioning Bulgarians' national belonging. Thus, internal stereotypes unlock processes of othering, which stigmatise migrants' decisions to choose Terminal 1 and 2 of Sofia airport.

Moreover, similar to Moroşanu's (2013a, 2013b) account of the experiences of Romanians, internal stereotypes lead to feelings of estrangement upon return to the home country. Such is the case with Svetla when she goes back to Bulgaria. She recalls a situation when after spending only a year in England, upon going back to her hometown a friend told her that she spoke like an '*English girl*' and with an accent. Similarly, Law student Adrian and young professional Emanuela recollect that upon returning to their home town for the holidays, family friends often ask them: '*How long are you **visiting** for?*' (my translation, my emphasis). The

implication that Adrian and Emanuela are visitors rather than people who were born and raised in their corresponding towns provides a very subtle, yet palpable form of othering. Thus, the examples from Svetla, Emanuela and Adrian demonstrate that questioning migrants' belonging to Bulgaria or their home towns in such everyday situations firmly establishes migration as a reason for exclusion. On another occasion, 32-year-old professional Teodora recollects her frustration at the impossibility of buying a return ticket for the metro, which is a standard practice in London and anywhere else. The cashier's response of – '*You can do that when you go back in London. Now you are in Bulgaria*' – not only made Teodora feel judged but also out of place. Furthermore, this story reveals that everyday situations upon return often provide contexts, which exacerbate the division between migrants and non-migrants, often generating stereotypes on both sides.

In that sense, while external stereotypes generate more emotional reactions, the internal ones were categorically dismissed on the basis of narrow-minded thinking and lack of understanding of the difficulties that one encounters in migration. With regards to the latter, Ivan contends:

Firstly, I can bet anyone who lives in Bulgaria that they couldn't do what many here have experienced, and secondly, it's not as easy as they think. I mean, most of my good friends here have not only studied hard but they have also had two jobs while doing so to support themselves (my translation).

This demonstrates that negative internal stereotypes are not only dismissed on the basis of lack of knowledge but also that the experience of migration is seen as a rite of passage (van Gennep ([1909] 1960). To leave Bulgaria, for many of my participants such as Kalina and Ivan, requires courage, determination and strong will. Furthermore, as Ivan's remark suggests, while migrants are being othered, they themselves rely on sweeping generalisations to respond to dominant discourses. Aiming to neutralise the stigmatising function of internal stereotypes, the participants implicitly or explicitly undermine their fellow co-nationals' choice to stay in Bulgaria. For example, investment banker Paula remarks: '*There are a few*

quality people of those who have decided to stay in Bulgaria, I think. Those who have stayed are those who for some reason could not leave' (my translation, my emphasis). Evidently, internal stereotypes reveal that othering is two-sided, simultaneously highlighting the presence of a strong cleavage between stayers and leavers.

Comparatively, the participants' reactions to and experiences of othering produced by the home society are less varied than attitudes towards similar processes in the host society. Those two simultaneous processes nonetheless affect young Bulgarians' experiences of migration. Moreover, the process of double-sided othering leads to a number of reactive, counterbalancing strategies which allow the Othered to renegotiate and reverse the power dynamics of 'us' and 'them'. This aspect will be explored in detail below.

Double-sided othering: counterbalancing strategies

The analysis of the effects that double-sided othering has on young Bulgarian highly skilled migrants in Britain, reveals four key strategies that they employ to respond to stereotypes: assimilationist, segregationist, integrationist and proactive approaches. Although each one of these strategies will be considered below in turn, it should be noted that the participants often use a combination of them to manage the simultaneous operation of both internal and external stereotyping.

Those of the participants who utilise an assimilationist strategy to counterbalance double-sided othering focus their efforts on adopting elements of the host society culture. This often entails an attempt to diminish obvious markers such as accent, cultural practices or name, which increase visibility and thus could potentially serve as the basis of othering. Svetla relies on such an assimilationist strategy, trying to avoid potentially being othered on the basis of being a foreigner. Thus, she considers her marriage to Rob as a turning point:

The biggest difference I saw was when my [last] name changed from Petrova to Jones. People think you are from here [...] You are not so much a foreigner [...] As far as jobs are concerned, the name makes a big difference.

Consequently, for Svetla the change of a family name has meant mostly an opportunity to be treated equally. Moreover, it has helped her to camouflage her background, thus protecting her from being exposed to various processes of othering. This is also the reason why even after getting divorced, she has decided to retain her ex-husband's family name. This assimilationist strategy allows her to blend in without being judged on the basis of her nationality.

Another technique for counterbalancing double-sided othering that emerges from my data is segregation. It entails a practice whereby some of the participants try to actively disengage from compatriots in order to avoid stereotypes attached to this migrant group in Britain. A similar practice is observed by Ryan (2010) in the case of Polish migrants in London. Young highly skilled Bulgarians, however, drawing on their professional background, predominantly disassociate their migration experiences on the basis of class. This leads marketing specialist Kalina to remark that she does not feel as a migrant as this is: '*[...] someone who has come here in order to stay here to have a better life but a bit lower class in general. Someone who works at Tesco's*' (my translation). Kalina's remark hints at the varied class dimensions of migration and to what extent the latter can lead to social mobility. Her disengagement with compatriots employed in the service sector is also quite evident in the vignette presented here.

I was visiting Kalina for the weekend. She had already moved from a town in Southern England to a very ethnically diverse area in London, popular among young professionals. It had convenient transport links with Central London and the housing prices were going up but Kalina was lucky to have found a shared property with other professionals for a reasonable price. She suggested that we grab lunch from the local Turkish takeaway. We were speaking in Bulgarian while deciding what to order and then the girl at the till, also Bulgarian, introduced herself. While we were waiting for our order, the girl came over to ask us whether we knew any other Bulgarians who were looking for a job. Kalina quickly replied: *'I already have a job and I don't know any other Bulgarians'*. Interestingly, her body language also changed, signifying annoyance with the girl's presence. When we left I asked Kalina why she was so reserved towards the girl, which she explained in the following way: *'I just don't like it when people just come over like that and act as if they know you just because you are both Bulgarian. I don't want anything to do with those people'*. (Memo, August, 2014).

The fact that Kalina felt very uncomfortable in this situation, combined with the effort of establishing a boundary, signifies that membership in the same ethnic group does not presuppose similarities (Moroşanu, 2013a). Furthermore, it can be inferred that shared experiences of moving abroad instead of diminishing class divisions, further accentuate them. Thus, this segregationist strategy in relation to co-nationals suggests that the processes of othering affect negatively inter-ethnic cohesion, deepening class divisions.

Furthermore, such a segregationist approach can be also observed in relation to other CEE migrants, tarred by the same stereotypical social constructions. In an attempt to disassociate themselves, many of the participants draw on cultural markers and everyday practices to emphasise differences. Ivan, for example, remarks:

We have more in common with Greeks and Turks than with Poles and Lithuanians, despite language [similarities]. On the whole, there is a huge difference. [...]. I usually accentuate the fact that Bulgaria is not in Eastern Europe, it is in South-eastern Europe, and as a result we are quite different to other [CEE] nations [...] (my translation).

He goes further to point out a range of reasons that outline this divide: from differences in the climate, through the fact that ‘*we drink more like the French and Italian*’ to the fact that Bulgarians are much closer to Turks, Serbs and Macedonians in terms of mentality than Romanians and Lithuanians. Notably, all these reasons serve to counterbalance metonymical representations of ‘Eastern Europeans’. Similarly, Emanuela emotionally exclaims: ‘*I hate it when people say I am Eastern European. I am from the Balkans!*’ (my translation), stating that the difference between the two lies within the fact that Balkan people have ‘*more passion*’ and ‘*a great sense of humour*’. This suggests the presence of a regional ethno-centrism, which is accentuated by dominant external stereotypes. Such an approach serves as a way of helping young Bulgarians to make sense of a complex reality. While they see such a shift in association as a way of counterbalancing negative discourses in the UK, it remains questionable whether it does so in practice. Nonetheless, this segregationist strategy questions the appropriateness of the umbrella term ‘Eastern European’ migrant, unveiling its deeply embedded reductionism.

With regards to external stereotypes, another strategy to not only manage the effects of social categorisations but also to counterbalance them is the integrationist approach. Unlike the other two strategies, participants who adopt this approach neither belittle their cultural background nor disassociate themselves from others, they accept both. Instead, they rely on diminishing stereotypes through openly talking about them in the form of jokes with friends and colleagues. This strategy allows participants such as Nayden, Ivan, Boris and Ralitsa to negotiate their place in the host society environment.

Finally, some participants employ proactive approaches that aim to not only promote the rich cultural heritage of Bulgaria but also to counterbalance both internal and external stereotypes. With regards to the latter, this strategy involves a conscious effort to demonstrate positive personal characteristics. A prominent example of this practice is exemplified by sociology student Kamelia, who shares: ‘[...] *I always explicitly say that I am Bulgarian. I almost view it as a cause. [...] I*

try to be the best version of myself and of a Bulgarian that someone can meet (my translation). Evidently, in her case, there is a conscious and purposeful effort to present herself positively. Moreover, for Kamelia, Maria, Simeon, Nelly and Maria this proactive approach involves sharing meals and national celebrations with their international friends. The practice of raising awareness of the cultural richness of Bulgarian traditions aims to counterbalance the overall negative British media rhetoric in relation to the country and its nationals. The process of othering in the host society has its emotional implications, namely shame, upon the experiences of my participants. Consequently, highlighting one's nationality and focusing specifically on the positives serves as a way to promote a better image of the entire migrant group.

Another proactive strategy, specifically directed toward internal stereotypes involves justifying migration as necessary step towards enriching one's personal skills, which will then enable return to the host society to make a difference. This is illustrated by the observation that Politics student Delyan makes: *'My goal is [...] to get the best possible education and one day to apply it in such a way which will benefit my people'* (my translation). Evidently, the improvement of the self is a necessary step in the achievement of making a difference. What makes an impression in Delyan's speech is the use of a possessive pronoun 'my' in relation to his fellow countrymen. This alludes not only to a strong sense of national belonging but also to an understanding of his educational choice almost as a cause – as a mission in the pursuit of counterbalancing internal stereotypes.

Overall, the participants rely on a wide range of techniques that can be used either interchangeably or in conjunction with each other to react to double-sided othering. While the assimilationist, segregationist, integrationist and proactive strategies do not exhaust the list of possible ways that these young skilled Bulgarians in the UK employ to manage stereotypes, they nonetheless highlight some prominent tendencies. More importantly, these strategies demonstrate how the

everyday can be transformed into a site of resistance (Karner, 2007), which challenges dominant discursive practices of othering.

Discussion and conclusion: mobility as multidimensional

The understanding of migration as an experience would be incomplete without a careful consideration of what happens when one migrates to a host society. Therefore, this chapter has explored the migration realities of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK. More specifically, two key lines of analysis were considered: 1) the participants' initial experiences of dealing with (cultural) change; and 2) their subsequent engagement with dominant stereotyping discourses, produced by both host and home societies. While in the first case the analysis centred upon the dynamics of adjustment and its specificities, the second aspect scrutinised the dynamics of double-sided othering or the simultaneous operation of both external and internal stereotyping as experienced by young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK.

Correspondingly, adopting an affective approach (Svašek 2012; Anderson, 2014; Anderson, 2015; Boccagni and Baldassar 2015; Merriman and Jones, 2016) the chapter has revealed that initial reactions to change in the cultural context are complex and individualistic. Indeed, emotions are never linear and sequential. However, to unravel the emotional costs and benefits of migration, this chapter has focused on the prevalence of certain feelings over others in particular moments by using Winkelman's (1994) stages of culture shock and its resolution. Thus, the chapter has revealed that while young, highly skilled Bulgarians in Britain may or may not experience an initial honeymoon period of excitement, they nonetheless undergo a phase of disillusionment. The latter refers to experiences of culture shock and a clash between expectations and realities. These experiences signify the limitations of pre-migration knowledge, which become visible only when young Bulgarians find themselves in the host society environment. Therefore, the data has

shown that the two possible ways to deal with negative feelings and frustrations are either premature return or adaptation. Correspondingly, the first approach has markedly negative connotations due to its close association with failure (of the migratory project). Adaptation, however, has emerged as a complex, ongoing process that has required young Bulgarians to employ several adjustment strategies. The latter can broadly be divided into segregationist and integrationist techniques. While the first draw on bonding capital (Putnam, 2000) and capitalise on the emotional costs of migration, the latter are rooted in bridging capital. Ultimately, the chapter has shown that young, highly skilled Bulgarians' initial encounters with the host society are multi-stage and strongly emotionally charged experiences of making sense of their migratory choices.

Equally, the later stages of the participants' migration realities are also strongly emotionally charged. Using the concept of double-sided othering as an analytical prism, the data has demonstrated that reactions and experiences of external (produced by the host society) and internal (produced by the home society) stereotypes vary. Thus, the participants' awareness of stereotyping discourses towards foreigners and 'Eastern Europeans' more specifically have accentuated the expectation to be treated differently. Although perceptions of discrimination outweigh discriminatory incidents, this has nonetheless made young Bulgarians more sensitive. Much less variation can be found in responses to internal stereotypes. Although the latter are categorically dismissed, they still make Bulgarian students and young professionals feel out of place. Finally, and similarly to the initial stages of their migratory realities, the participants are not passive recipients of differential treatment. Rather, the fieldwork has demonstrated that they utilise several everyday strategies, which aim to counterbalance the negative effects of double-sided othering. More specifically, through the assimilationist, segregationist, integrationist and proactive approaches they employ in their everyday lives, they respond to and neutralise stereotyping processes. In doing so, however, they rely on othering to differentiate themselves from either low skilled

compatriots or from other CEE migrants. Thus, it has become evident not only that othering is a two-way process but also that ‘Eastern European’ is a broad umbrella term that requires further engagement.

Therefore, based on the analysis presented in this chapter, there are three interrelated conclusions that can be made: 1) mobility is multidimensional; 2) there is a discrepancy between migratory projects and migration realities; and 3) as a result of their tension, migrants find themselves in a liminal position (van Genneep, [1909] 1960), which has both deconstructive and constructive characteristics (Thomassen, 2014).

Firstly, the participants’ accounts have revealed the importance of temporal, emotional and spatial dimensions of human mobility. These aspects not only do matter but they also intertwine in the participants’ narratives about their migration realities. Consequently, the temporal and emotional elements in the stories of young Bulgarians can be discerned not only in the focus on their initial and subsequent experiences but also in looking at the various emotional stages that the participants go through in encountering the host society. Notably, the chapter has also drawn out the importance of the spatial dimension in human mobility. Indeed, the participants’ location is key in both initial and subsequent stages. In the first case, the spatial dimension can either accentuate or diminish the clash between expectations and reality, particularly in relation to associations with various areas. Furthermore, location emerges as a key element of the ‘mini Bulgaria’ phenomenon, which epitomises segregationist strategies to adjustment. Similarly, there are regional differences in experiences of double-sided othering in the subsequent stages of one’s migration realities. This is particularly evident in the case of external stereotypes, where young Bulgarians may feel more or less othered depending on regional attitudes towards CEE migrants. Thus, to understand the nature and characteristics of human mobility, it is important to consider its multidimensionality by looking at its temporal, emotional and spatial dimensions.

Secondly, as the chapter has demonstrated, people's perceptions of their migratory experiences are the result of the ways in which their migratory projects become translated in the host society context. Therefore, the multidimensional nature of mobility has uncovered the complex, tenuous nexus between migration as a *project* and as a *reality*. The latter is largely due to discrepancies between expectations and realities, which highlight the limits of pre-migratory knowledge. Additionally, the overarching stereotyping discourses that young Bulgarians find themselves exposed to not only question the successful realisation of their migratory projects but their decisions to migrate in general.

Therefore, I argue that the clash between migratory projects and realities unlocks a period of liminality, when Bulgarian students and young professionals find themselves 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1967) the familiar and unfamiliar, exposed to othering by both. However, as Thomassen has rightly noted, '[L]iminality explains nothing. Liminality *is*. It happens. It takes place. And human beings react to liminal experiences in different ways' (2014, p. 7). Therefore, to think of young, highly skilled Bulgarians' position as liminal does not offer an analytical lens to their migratory journeys. Instead, it serves an illustration of the clash between migratory projects and realities, which in turn allows the in-depth understanding of the participants' reactions and perceptions to their in-between-ness. The latter in turn informs the ways in which they experience migration. Bulgarian students' and young professionals' liminality in that sense emerges from the pre-migratory context (due to having grown up in a country transitioning to democracy) and it continues when they arrive in the host society. The latter encapsulates not only their physical but also their emotional transitions as well as their exposure to double-sided othering. As Thomassen remarks, '[L]iminality opens the door to a world of contingencies where events and meanings – indeed 'reality' itself – can be moulded and carried in different directions' (2014, p. 7). This aspect of liminal states in the case of Bulgarians demonstrates the dynamic nature of migratory projects and the fact that they are subject to change. Essentially, liminality can be both

deconstructive and constructive, and the case of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in Britain is no exception. In that sense, the deconstructive aspect of young Bulgarians' liminal position has been explored through the negative effects of culture shock and double-sided othering, which challenge not only the participants' migratory projects but also their decisions to relocate abroad as a whole. Simultaneously, the chapter has also shed some light on constructive aspects of their liminal position by looking at the everyday strategies, which they employ to counterbalance the negative effects of the emotional costs of migration. Ultimately, what can be inferred from the stories of the 37 participants is that liminality (van Gennep, [1909] 1960) is part and parcel of their experiences once they arrive in the UK. It is a period of in-betweenness that results from the discrepancies between migratory projects and realities and as such, it impacts upon migrants' identities and plans for the future. The latter two will be explored further in the next chapter.

Introduction: reinventing the Self

I take my seat on the last train to Nottingham and I wave goodbye to Sava, who has walked me back to the railway station after our interview. As the train slowly leaves the platform, I glance at the 25-year old man whom I had met nearly four hours ago, at that same railway station. Then he was simply a young entrepreneur, who was coming back home after meeting with clients in London. Throughout our interview, I had discovered that there was a lot more to the ambitious young man, who owned his business. Now I know he is also a passionate baker, who loves making lots of different types of bread. He is also a keen hiker, who enjoys photographing nature. The train is already in full speed as I scribble in my diary ‘multiple identities’. Then I take out my recorder and replay the part when he is talking about the way in which migration has impacted upon who he is: ‘[...] when I came [to the UK] I had the language barrier and I had the new cultural environment. I had no friends. Zero. I came here knowing nobody in this city. And you don't have your family. So, you lack the security, you don't have anybody to give you love, you don't have anybody to necessarily give you understanding and to take care of you. So, you've lost basically ground under your feet almost, you've lost your identity, if you wish. You are allowed to build up a completely different identity from what you had in Bulgaria and your home because nobody knows you’. I quickly add to my diary a note: ‘identities as the art of crafting oneself’ (Memo and interview, February, 2014).

Migratory experiences affect one's life course and in doing so, they ultimately impact upon the ways in which migrants see themselves and envisage their future. In other words, there is an undeniable link between migration and people's identities. More specifically, migration serves as a useful lens through which people's sources of meaning and understandings of Self can be evaluated and their plans for the future understood. As such, migration not only contextualises but

also characterises new routes of identification by questioning previous, sometimes taken for granted, sources of meaning. It is precisely this aspect that this chapter aims to tackle in detail.

Although the nexus between migration and identities is evident, its nature and characteristics are far from apparent or simplistic for two main reasons related to the nature of both concepts. On the one hand, as the previous two empirical chapters have demonstrated, mobility is not only complex but also multidimensional, which poses a serious challenge to evaluating its impact upon people's identities. Furthermore, *chapter 5* has revealed the tension between pre-migratory and migratory contexts – a tension, which unlocks a period of liminality. The latter has not only deconstructive characteristics in challenging taken-for-granted cultural norms and exposing young Bulgarians to double-sided othering but also constructive elements, evident through the various counterbalancing strategies that they employ in their everyday. On the other hand, as *chapter 2* has briefly outlined, the contested nature of 'identity' is rooted in its multi-sided and rather fluid character. In many ways, however, the vignette at the beginning of the chapter illustrates the intersection of both aspects. More specifically, the presented story captures the liminality, which characterises the clash between pre-migratory and host society contexts, as well as its implications. Thus, Sava's reflection shows that migration as a life event not only questions previously internalised sources of identification but also that by doing so, it opens up new avenues for seeking meaning. Essentially, the vignette captures the dynamism embedded in identities by revealing both the deconstructive and constructive, entrapping and liberating aspects of the process of identification.

Therefore, this chapter aims to build on the previously presented findings in relation to the constructive aspect of liminality and further complement them by analysing the ways in which the participants' counterbalancing strategies not only serve to justify migratory choices but also affect young Bulgarians' perceptions of Self and their plans for the future. To do so, however, it is important to provide

further information about the ways in which ‘identities’ and ‘identification’ are applied in this project.

Importantly, this study is premised on the understanding that migratory contexts illuminate and further stimulate the fluidity associated with the nature of identities. Bauman remarks that:

‘Identity’ is a name given to the escape sought from [...] uncertainty. Hence ‘identity’, though ostensibly a noun, behaves like a verb, albeit a strange one to be sure: it appears only in the future tense. Though all too often hypostasized as an attribute of a material entity, identity has the ontological status of a project and a postulate (1996, p. 19).

While this statement provides an insight into the dynamism implied in ‘identity’, it also highlights the complex nature of the concept. Therefore, ‘identity’ emerges as a notion that is not only ontologically ambivalent but also epistemologically contested. Thus, Bauman’s (1996) argument highlights the complex nature of ‘identity’ as a point of fixture and meaning (or a ‘postulate’) and yet one, which is constantly developing (as the reference to ‘project’ suggests). This asserts that the elusiveness of the concept stems from the fact that identity building is an ongoing process, which needs to be embedded in its context. Therefore, to understand one’s identities, it is important to scrutinise further the essence of the process of constructing meaning itself. In that respect, Hall’s (1996) work is particularly useful as he applies a discursive approach to identification, which sees it as ‘[...] a process never completed’ but rather one, ‘[...] lodged in contingency’ (Hall, 1996, p.2 and p3.). This argument resonates quite closely with Bauman’s (1996) observation, simultaneously accentuating the multidimensionality of identification. Indeed, as Hall further explains, ‘[i]dentification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption’ (1996, p.3). This definition captures the dynamic nature of the process, which enables the construction of a coherent self-narrative. Identification emerges as a process, which encapsulates the art of crafting the Self by drawing on a variety of elements, which serve as sources of meaning. Thus, according to Hall, ‘identity’ refers to:

[...] the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us (italics in original, 1996, p. 5).

The value of this definition lies in the fact that it highlights the dynamic nature of identities by accentuating the roots of their fluidity. Furthermore, Hall’s (1996) categorisation not only prioritises the influence of difference over sameness in identity building but it also points out that an understanding of these processes would be incomplete without a careful consideration of their context. The emphasis that Hall’s (1996) discursive approach places upon ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’ essentially brings to the fore an understanding of identification as an act of agency. Further operationalising this aspect, Jensen (2011) maintains that identity formation in light of discourses of difference or othering is not only a passive categorisation of people but it can also result in an expression of oppositional agency. More specifically, Jensen identifies two forms of agency, which entail resistance: while capitalization appropriates elements of othering discourses, refusal focuses on distancing from categorisations of difference (2011, p. 66). Although this discursive understanding of the process of identification is useful in accentuating agency, it also has its limitations as it does not account for cases when capitalization and refusal operate simultaneously. Therefore, I argue that the notion of reinvention is particularly useful as it allows a more thorough approach to identification, which takes into account the ability of the Self to react to discourses by both capitalising on them and refusing them. To illustrate that point further, the origin of the idea of reinvention will be discussed below.

Broadly speaking, ‘reinvention’ is deeply rooted in the sociological observations, which aim to disentangle and understand the conditions underpinning the ‘fabric’ of social relations in the 21st century. Respectively, Bauman maintains that the core principle of postmodern life strategies is ‘recycling’, rather than

‘creation’, which was the case in modernity (1996, p. 18). He further emphasises the primacy not of ‘[...] identity building, but [of the] avoidance of fixation’ (Bauman, 1996, p. 24). This observation directly corresponds to the already discussed at length in *chapter 2* idea of ‘liquidity’ (see Bauman 2005, 2007). Thus, identification is conceptualised as a condition of restlessness and insecurity in light of fast-paced societies where flexibility, change and quick action lead to social progression, albeit not without the corresponding emotional costs.

Similarly, Elliott (2013) engages with the ways in which global processes transform the contours of societies across the world, however, he does so by centring his argument around the idea of ‘reinvention’, focusing on its impact upon people’s identities. More specifically, Elliott argues that the times we live in, permeated by the forces of globalisation, condone a lifestyle where ‘the art of reinvention is inextricably interwoven with the lure of the next frontier, the break through to the next boundary, especially boundaries of the self’ (2013, p. 4-5). Restlessness in that sense lies within the thrill of new challenges and in the opportunities to start anew; it lies within constant change, achieved through recreation and rediscovery. The pursuit of happiness essentially entails exploring different options instead of finding contentment with what already has been achieved. This is largely because once it has been achieved, it is not only not new but it is also static. Therefore, restlessness is a condition that paves the way to progression, whereas stasis is perceived as decline – a mantra, echoing the words of Faist (2013). Thus, in the conditions of advanced globalisation, ‘[...] we find the drive to reconstruct, recalibrate, restructure and reorganize social practices, as well as the identities of agents that perform such practices’ (Elliott, 2013, p. 94). What Elliott (2013) emphasises is the incessant need to renew and re-do, which he goes on to demonstrate through the reinvention of bodies, persons, careers, corporations, places and networks. However, such reinvention produced by advanced globalisation has its emotional costs. The latter comes in the form of what Elliott and Lemert (2009) have called the ‘new individualism’, which is characterised by

four institutional drivers: self-reinvention, instant change, speed or social acceleration, and short-termism. These factors delineate the contours of life choices in 'the age of reinvention' (Elliott, 2013). Moreover, these life choices celebrate the triumph of transformation over traditionalism; they prioritise experimentation over following an already established path. As Elliott further argues: 'Reinvention is thus, in effect an experiment with possible versions of the self, an experiment with alternative versions of social life. From this angle reinvention can be enabling, indeed freeing; it can however be disabling, even pathological' (2013, p. 93). Defining 'reinvention' in such a way, however, has both its advantages and disadvantages. For example, similar to Bauman's (2000, 2005) idea of 'liquidity', Elliott's (2013) 'reinvention' makes the same bold, all-encompassing claims and as such, it risks oversimplifying unnecessarily complex phenomena. Yet, its value lies in its ability to capture the dynamic, fluid and multi-faceted nature of identities as they are embedded in their context. Therefore, this study draws on Elliott (2013) cautiously by adopting a narrower understanding of reinvention, which emphasises the dynamics of identification, particularly in light of their discursive context. Conceptualised in such a way, reinvention offers the possibility for an agency-led analysis of people's new routes of identification, which both capitalise on and refute negative discourses, simultaneously justifying people's life choices.

Ultimately, drawing on Hall (1996) and Elliott (2013), this chapter argues that young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK use a combination of three different and yet, interrelated routes of identification to reinvent themselves, which allow them to make sense of and justify their migratory choices. Importantly, these are not ideal types but rather points of reference, which demonstrate the prevalence of certain characteristics of identification over others in particular moments. For example, the (new) Enlightener as form of identification is rooted in the reinvention of national identity, while the Cosmopolitan one emphasises open-mindedness and diversity. Furthermore, to analyse the route of identification that prioritises professional/student identities, this study draws on Miller's (2014) idea of the Muppet. Although

the latter will be explained further below, a Muppie is a term to denote the group of 'highly-educated, social, outspoken 22-35 year olds that might, in a previous era, have been called 'Yuppies'' (Miller, 2014). Each one of these 'routes of becoming' (Hall, 1996) will be scrutinised in detail, simultaneously considering how success and plans for the future are understood within the frameworks of meaning they provide. Moreover, it will be argued that these lines of identification signify an act of agency, which combines both capitalisation and refusal of negative discourses. The final section summarises the findings, reiterating that the participants rely on a combination of identification routes, which signifies the multiplicity and fluidity of their identities.

The (new) Enlighteners and the reinvention of national identities

One of the most prominent routes of identification that young, highly skilled Bulgarians draw on to justify their migratory choices in light of their negative discursive environment is rooted in the idea of the (new) Enlightener. Its conceptualisation is clearly exemplified in the vignette below:

When I ask Boyan about his opinion of the negative perception of migration both in Bulgaria and in Britain, he just smiles. Then he tells me that he has a theory. ‘What is your theory about?’, I ask but I don’t quite expect the answer he gives me: *‘About the Second Bulgarian Revival’*. I look at him a bit confused and he elaborates: *‘[...] So, I quite like the idea of the first [Bulgarian National] Revival. Why? Because it changed a nation that for five centuries had been uneducated; a nation that had been under Ottoman rule and a nation that suddenly, for two generations changed drastically. Back then, the Bulgarian merchants were sending their kids to study abroad. [Similarly,] we [Bulgarian migrants] go anywhere abroad – from Japan to Canada. So, in a way we experience different systems of governance. For example, in Western Europe, there are mostly developed democracies and I think that most people, who are now returning [to Bulgaria] are trying to change precisely this. They are trying to implement the knowledge that they have acquired – and by this I mean – the knowledge about the lifestyle, not so much the knowledge they have acquired at university. It is very difficult to do this, of course. These are people, our age, who do not have any capital, any power and are not organised very well. I think it will take time but I think this Revival is developing in a very organic way’* (my translation, Interview, June, 2014)

Evidently, drawing on the late 18th – early 19th century parallel (see *chapter 1*), the idea of the ‘Second Bulgarian Revival’ centres upon organising all foreign-educated young Bulgarians and enticing them to return to Bulgaria to bring about change. Therefore, besides focusing on learning more about Bulgarian history, culture and folklore, Boyan is actively involved in and keeps regular contacts with many Bulgarian organisations – from student societies to young professional groups and citizen initiatives. He also seeks different opportunities, which allow him to expand his knowledge such as start-ups and trustee boards. Boyan also keeps a diary where he writes down all ideas that he has come across or that have occurred to him, and spends time thinking about how they can be modified and implemented in Bulgaria. Thus, Boyan’s everyday practices and his conceptualisation of the (new) Enlighteners are an important route of identification that also serves to justify his

migratory decision. In a nutshell, the idea of (new) Enlighteners centres upon going abroad to study or work in order to eventually return back to Bulgaria to implement those ideas and to make a difference in order to ‘revive’ the nation. Thus, the new Enlightener as a line of identification is a reinvention of national identity. Furthermore, the idea of the new Enlightener justifies one’s migratory projects by capitalising on ‘old’ narratives of migration, embedded in Bulgarian history in order to refute both internal and external stereotyping discourses.

To understand the essence and characteristics of this route of identification, this section will first contextualise the idea of the Enlightener, focusing mainly on how it has developed over the years in Bulgaria. This will be followed by an analysis of the characteristics of the new Enlighteners (and similar variants) as a line of identification by looking at the participants’ everyday practices, perceptions of success and future plans.

While *chapter 1* has already discussed at length the importance of migration during the Bulgarian Revival/ Enlightenment, less attention has been paid to its significance as a historical period, which marks the country’s transition to modernity by introducing the idea of Bulgarians as part of a nation. As such, this historical period is an integral part of the Bulgarian ‘grand narrative’. This, in turn, has embedded the image of the Enlightener in a strong mythical narrative, which often idealises and romanticises the deeds of the people, who took part in the Bulgarian Revival. While originating in modernity, this idea has been successfully extrapolated and transmitted over the centuries, often romanticised in the process. Notably, however, the idea of the Enlightener has not remained static. Rather, it has evolved over the years, acquiring a few very specific modern-day features. To understand this process, it is important to explain its link to another emblematic image in the Bulgarian national discourse – that of the Saviour. Even though essentially referring to different ideas, both the Enlightener and the Saviour share several similarities such as the association with strong leadership, caring functions and varying degrees of messianism. However, their origins in the Bulgarian ‘grand

narrative' are quite different. Correspondingly, the Saviour is traditionally seen as a strong external figure, looking after the Bulgarian people. Until 1989, this image was embodied by Russia for two main reasons: 1) *gratefulness* in the post- Ottoman period as the 1877 – 1878 Russian-Turkish war ultimately led to the liberation of Bulgaria; and 2) *commonality*, asserted by the Russian politics of pan-Slavism, which strengthened the Russian influence over the Bulgarian communist regime.

More recently, the image of the Saviour has become firmly embedded in the political populism that has characterised the period from the late 1990s onwards. As such, the Saviour is usually associated with political messianism, most prominently embodied by the return of the former Bulgarian king Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Relying on populist rhetoric, his newly-established party not only won the 2001 parliamentary elections but it also attracted many foreign-educated young Bulgarians, who returned to take key ministerial positions in Saxe-Coburg-Gotha's cabinet. Thus, a new term to refer to this category of people appeared in the Bulgarian public space – that of the 'yuppie'. Interestingly, the term 'yuppie' does not convey the same negative connotations in its Bulgarian parameters as it does in its 1980s Western context. While the arguably unsuccessful Saxe-Coburg-Gotha government tarred the image of the Bulgarian yuppies, the term is still predominantly used with positive connotations. Therefore, the yuppies of the early 2000s emerge as the modern-day political version of the image of the Enlightener. More recently, an attempt to return to the more patriotic roots of the notion has coined the idea of the 'new yuppies' (bTV, 2012). The latter refers to foreign-educated young Bulgarians, who have returned to their home country to take up key positions in the developing third sector (bTV 2012). Among the reasons for return such as patriotism and a strong sense of belonging (bTV 2012), what emerges is the 'mechanics' of reinvention, and success conceptualised as making a difference. Thus, it could be argued that these 'new yuppies' are essentially the (new) Enlighteners, who have already returned. Evidently, the idea of the Enlightener not only has a strong presence in the Bulgarian national discourse but it also has various

dimensions. Therefore, it is rather unsurprising that some of the participants follow this line of identification to justify their migratory choices.

Correspondingly, it is important to analyse the nature and characteristics of the new Enlightener as a route of identification, as perceived by young, highly skilled Bulgarians in Britain. As Boyan comments, the new Enlightener identification route is premised on study abroad to acquire good education that will not only ensure career development but also a much more valued experience that can make a difference in Bulgaria. Therefore, this process of identification entwines success firmly with the home society, signifying that return, although distant, is a viable option. Thus, this route of identification enables the participants to not only explain their migratory choices but also to justify them against the backdrop of double-sided othering by employing integrationist and proactive counterbalancing strategies (see *chapter 5*). What emerges from the data, however, are two different but related dimensions of the new Enlighteners, which are analysed in detail below.

The first type of identification that some of the participants adopt places stronger emphasis on refuting internal stereotypes framing migrants as traitors and escapists. As such, this identification process draws strongly on national identities by capitalising on the ‘classical’ understanding of a Bulgarian Enlightener. This approach characterises migration not only as a justifiable but also a necessary choice. Respectively, Psychology student Karolina remarks:

People like Levski³¹, Botev³² and [...] Karavelov³³ had received their education abroad prior to coming back to Bulgaria and making a difference. They managed to inspire people and contributed to the development of the Bulgarian nation as a people, so that our country could exist. [...]. And I believe that many people, who study abroad [...] are here [Britain] because they want to go back afterwards and to contribute to the development of our country. Therefore, I don't think that people, who have come here are running away from the situation in Bulgaria (my translation).

The direct parallel between the Bulgarian Revival and current migratory outflows clearly establishes the idea of the Enlightener as a source of identification that helps Karolina make sense of a complex reality. Moreover, it frames migration almost as an act of patriotism, delineating the contours of an identification with caring characteristics, which diverts attention from the Self. Therefore, the reinvention of the Self here is not the ultimate goal, it is simply a means to an end, the latter being a contribution to the common good. Additionally, the idea of making a difference in the home society through the implementation of practices and notions acquired abroad, accentuates the presence of a very strong national identity. The

³¹ Vasil Levski (1837-1873) is a Bulgarian revolutionary and a national hero. He spent time in Serbia and in Romania, gathering support for a Bulgarian rebellion. He is mostly recognised for establishing a network of secret revolutionary committees across the country. He is perhaps the most idealised and romanticised representative of the Bulgarian Revival. For more information and critical appraisal, please see Crampton (1987; 2007); Daskalov (2004, pp. 181- 183).

³² Hristo Botev (1847-1876) is Bulgarian poet and a revolutionary. Upon completing his secondary education in Bulgaria, he was sent by his father to study in Odessa. He later spent a few years in exile in Romania, where he met many revolutionaries, including Vasil Levski. He described that period in many of his literary works and poems. An ardent patriot and arguably a romantic socialist (Daskalov, 2004, p. 184), he became the leader of a guerrilla group that crossed the Danube from Romania with the aim to instigate an uprising once on Bulgarian territory, however, tragically died soon after that.

³³ Luyben Karavelov (1834-1879) is a writer and a revolutionary. He is a controversial figure, criticised for turning away from revolutionary work towards the end of his life and dedicating his efforts to education (Daskalov, 2004, p. 179). He studied in Edirne and Constantinople. While at the University of Moscow, he was influenced by Russian revolutionaries and took part in a few student riots. He spent a lot of time in Serbia, Romania and Austro-Hungary. In Romania, he started publishing a few Bulgarian newspapers and befriended Hristo Botev, who later dedicated a poem to him. He also befriended Vasil Levski, however, after the death of the latter, Karavelov was quite disheartened. He decided to abandon active revolutionary work and dedicated himself to journalism and publishing scientific books, which led to much criticism from Botev. For more information see: Fol et al. (1981).

latter in turn directly corresponds to and rejects the Bulgarian stereotyping discourses in relation to migration.

The various nuances of the new Enlightener as a process of identification also reveal the migrant narrative as a story of reinvention, driven by success. The latter, although conceptualised as improving the home country, ultimately entails a reinvention of the Self through a reinvention of the understanding of national identity. This confirms Karner's observation that national identity is '[...] subject to ongoing negotiations involving competing visions of social order, alternative interpretations of history and delineations of national self' (2011, p. 21). Interestingly, however, the new Enlightener as a form of identification responds not only to internal but also to external stereotyping discourses. This allows the participants to not only see themselves as carriers of change in their home society but also as people, who promote a more positive image of Bulgaria. Thus, the second variant of the new Enlightener is that of the idea of Ambassador. This sub-type of identification route entails mostly proactive strategies to counterbalance external stereotypes. One of the most prominent characteristics of this identification route entails the strong focus on one's personal academic performance and work ethic. Consequently, 19-year old Samuil ardently remarks: '*For me it is important to prove myself*' (my translation). Gaining recognition for him, however, has a purpose beyond personal success, which is building a good image of the Bulgarians in the UK. Therefore, for the Enlighteners- as- Ambassadors their success and good performance is perceived as a force that counterbalances the negativity associated with the country in the British public discourse.

A related, yet slightly different approach to promoting a better image of Bulgaria, which characterises the Ambassadorial line of identification, involves the active effort of some of the participants to portray themselves positively in social situations. While many participants, who demonstrate a precedence of the new Enlightener or the related Ambassador characteristics are students, there are also some young professionals, who also draw on this form of identification, such as

Vasil. While his ambition associates him with the Muppie form of identification, he also has a very strong national identity that relates him to the idea of the Enlighteners and the Ambassadors. He explains the latter in the following way:

When I find myself in a situation when they ask me where I am from, I always say that I am Bulgarian. For me this is a way to wipe away the shame associated with being Bulgarian. I do exactly the opposite. I am proud to be Bulgarian. I mean, it is not very pleasant that people associate Bulgarians with [something bad]. If you'd seen me in the street, you'd never tell that I was Bulgarian. But the moment I say I am Bulgarian, people's first association is negative [because of the negative media rhetoric]. However, if I demonstrate the opposite, they'd stop associating it with something bad (my translation).

This passage clearly signifies the discursive nature of young, highly skilled Bulgarians' identities. The process of identification through reinvention has its emotional implications, namely shame, which Natalia also alluded to in *chapter 5*. Consequently, highlighting one's nationality and focusing specifically on the positives serves as a way to promote a better image of the entire migrant group. In that sense, Vasil's identification approach closely resembles that associated with an Ambassador of Bulgaria. This approach is quite proactive and aims to change people's attitudes by counterbalancing the negativity associated with host society by focusing on the positives. Vasil also displays many of the characteristics of the new Enlightener as he also actively tries to make a difference in Bulgaria, albeit from a distance. He does so by being actively involved in various initiatives that aim to attract highly skilled young Bulgarians to work in Bulgaria. Moreover, he does so despite being very career-driven and focused on self-reinvention with the aim of achieving success. Thus, he demonstrates that young, highly skilled Bulgarians' identification routes are not clear-cut. While it is possible to indicate the precedence of certain forms of identification over others, the participants' narratives also highlight that identities are multiple, fluid and multidimensional.

As previously mentioned in *chapter 5*, another manifestation of the Enlightener-as-Ambassador identification demonstrated by the participants is the

fact that many of them take every opportunity possible to promote Bulgarian culture and traditions in order to raise awareness about Bulgaria's rich heritage. Kamelia's mission of 'enlightenment' through drawing on the idea of an Ambassador of Bulgaria serves as a good example here. This is how she celebrates Baba Marta³⁴:

I do celebrate [national] holidays, yes, and I try to involve as many people as possible. When I am in the mood, I will celebrate the holiday in a proper way. I have been doing these things since I was in primary school. So, for the 1st of March I will wear white and red. So, last year I went to a language café, which is part of the International society. So, I went there wearing white jeans and a red jumper and had a bag full of martenitsi. I'd sit there and when I get talking to someone, I will say "By the way..." and I would tie a martenitsa on their wrist and tell them about the holiday. I tell everyone about the traditional holidays and explain to them where the tradition comes from (my translation).

The way Kamelia celebrates Baba Marta is indeed very typical of how primary school students celebrate the day, which involves not only exchanging martenitsi but also wearing a matching outfit. It is interesting that this childhood memory has become a firmly established practice for her, although she is no longer neither in a primary school student nor in Bulgaria. Moreover, given that she is located in a host society context, that becomes an important practice that not only affirms her identity but it also allows her to spread awareness about her country of origin's culture and traditions. In fact, with regards to Baba Marta, Bulgarian student societies in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Sheffield, and Manchester feature collective efforts to promote Bulgarian culture through organising martenitsa workshops, later giving them out to other students on campus and explaining the traditions. In Sheffield, Nayden even shared that he employed all his non-Bulgarian housemates to make martenitsi, which later the Bulgarian society was selling for 50 pence for a martenitsa. The collected money they decided to donate to an orphanage in Bulgaria in order to 'make a difference for the children'.

³⁴ National holiday. See Appendix 1.

The young Bulgarians, who follow the Ambassadorial type of identification also use everyday situations to express their oppositional agency to external stereotypes. Indeed, everyday conversations may establish a firm us-them line of division, leaving many participants feeling as the Other. The latter becomes evident in everyday talk about popular shows, practices, activities and food very typical for young people growing up in Britain. While for many of the participants this reaffirms their otherness, Vasil's strategy to manage such situations essentially turns them into an opportunity to tell his friends more about Bulgaria:

I usually tell them [British friends] that Bansko is great for skiing. I usually talk about the difference in weather conditions because a conversation about the weather is the easiest you can start here. I always use it as an opportunity to turn around and say: "Well, it is not the same in Bulgaria. The temperature varies from minus 10 to plus 40, so the day can start with 10 degrees and end in 30". They always get shocked about this [...] but yes, these are the type of things I share with people – everyday things, not [historical] facts (my translation).

Thus, sharing information about everyday peculiarities associated with Bulgaria allow the participants to dispel myths about the country and its nationals. This example clearly demonstrates that the reinvention of national identity through the idea of the Ambassador capitalises on negative discourses, simultaneously refuting them. Evidently, all these characteristics of the Enlightener/ Ambassador route of identification that the participants draw on, ultimately help them to make sense of their complex realities and justify their migratory choices. Making a difference is, therefore, seen as success, conceptualised in terms of altruistically contributing to the common good –either by promoting a positive image of the home country or by gathering experience to be implemented upon return.

Finally, a desire to make a difference can be easily seen in the plans for the future of those participants, who draw on the ideas of the Enlightener/ Ambassador. Karolina shares:

My dream is to change, to inspire, to help children. I want to give hope [...]. [C]hildren are our future and by helping children I can give a

chance for a better future [...]. This is what motivates me to go on (my translation).

Evidently here, success is framed in a rather altruistic, collective spirit that will contribute to the common good. It is also rather interesting that her dream takes the form of plans for the future. Additionally, for 20-year old Kamelia, success is conceptualised not only as a justification of her migratory choice but as a path to future happiness, largely associated with return home:

[My dream] is to be happy with my life. I mean, I hope that I will have great time as a student and that I will learn a lot and travel a lot and then after that, when I go back to Bulgaria. To go back to Bulgaria does not mean that I will stop getting to know the world; it means that I will start very determinately working towards my goal which is to achieve something. To make a difference there (my translation).

Therefore, the return to the home society is a necessary and yet, distant option, which also does not exclude a dose of cosmopolitanism. In fact, this is part of the participants' reinvention, driven by the desire to bring about change. However, this type of identification while affirming young Bulgarians' patriotism and moral values, does not go uncriticised. Discussing the nature and characteristics of the new Enlightener as an act of oppositional agency with Kalina, who as a young professional, combines characteristics of both the Cosmopolitans and the Muppie forms of identification, reveals that such a life path may be considered as unrealistic and naïve. This largely due to the fact that the association with Enlighteners appears 'disconnected with Bulgarian reality', as Kalina explains it. Not all the participants, who display Enlightener characteristics fall in that category. Delyan, in fact, demonstrates an awareness of potential negative reception of the idea of the Second Bulgarian Revival:

When I came here in the beginning my plan was to finish my education, to go home and to become a prime minister by the time I am 40. However, I realised afterwards that people see us – those of us, who study abroad – they see us as outsiders that come from somewhere with the pretence to rule them. [...] It's almost as if those, who have once left are not counted [as fellow citizens], it's as if they have already given up once. But it is not like that. Many people, who have studied here are

here precisely because they want to go back. They might not be many but there are such people (my translation).

This interview excerpt clearly demonstrates the external dimensions of identities, which pose a challenge to reinvention as an oppositional agency. Nonetheless, framing success as making a difference in the home society emerges as an important element of the new Enlighteners as form of identification. Unlike premature return, the promise of return home upon completion of studies or the accumulation of ‘enough’ experience and is perceived as a factor that counterbalances double-sided othering. Thus, it becomes evident that through the idea of the new Enlightener the participants reinvent the concept of national identity by both capitalising on and refusing stereotypical representations of their migratory choices. The latter helps to not only justify decisions to leave but it also serves as a motivation and a reason to carry out the migratory project.

The Muppie and the reinvention of professional/student identities

25-year old Paula is the perfect example of a high-flyer: she has a successful career and when not abroad for business meetings, she goes on holidays to exotic destinations with her, also very successful, boyfriend. In fact, she's so busy that the only opportunity to interview her was on a flight to Bulgaria, which we both happened to be on. As we speak, it becomes evident that she certainly knows how to 'close a deal', never taking 'no' for an answer, always fighting for what she wants. She tells me a few stories that clearly demonstrate her determination: when a teacher refused to tutor her for the SATs, Paula found the prep books herself, studied hard and aced the exams. Similarly, when at university in America she got refused to move to a more advanced Spanish class but she found a way around it – by applying to an external exam board. Listening to her, I jot down a note in my diary: 'strong narrative of reinvention, which turns failure into success'. She then tells me how she got her current position. She had just arrived in London when the recession hit the banking sector, which cost her her job. She started going from bank to bank and leaving them CVs. She then met her current boss, who after a series of interviews, told her that because of the recession, he cannot offer her a position. She simply said: *'Ok, fair enough. Given that I will probably not have any luck finding a job in the next two months, how about I come and work for you for free, just so you can see my work ethic'*. She got a call offering her the job the next day (Interview and memo, September 2013).

Paula's story emphasises the restlessness – both social and spatial – of another source of identification for young, highly skilled Bulgarians, captured well by what Miller (2014) describes as the idea of the Muppie. The latter encapsulates oppositional agency, which capitalises on student or professional identities, thus completely dismissing stereotyping discourses. It does so by prioritising career success and a form of new individualism that focuses on seizing career opportunities. More specifically, Miller (2014) defines the Muppies as the 'post-financial crisis millennial take on the yuppie lifestyle', who are 'driven by ideals of success, status, power and the search to do and be what is "important" [...]'. As such, the idea of the Muppie is very close to Elliott's (2013) conceptualisation of self-reinvention: in terms of bodies, careers and lives. Success comes to fore again rather

prominently; however, it is measured by personal achievements and career progression. While material security is important, it is not seen as an end goal but rather as a means that has an enabling power. Thus, success ensures the sustainability of a dynamic lifestyle, where change is perceived as liberating and even empowering. As Miller (2014) argues a Muppie is someone, who is ‘set about establishing new guidelines for what constitutes the Desirable Life’. Defining this form of identification in this way essentially establishes the Muppie simply as a reinvented version of the Yuppie, who is focused entirely on material success, albeit pursuing that in new, inventive ways. While some of those characteristics are indeed relevant to the participants, defining the Muppie in this limited way diminishes the negative implications of double-sided othering. Therefore, borrowing the term from Miller (2014), this study views the Muppies as a form of identification, which focuses on self-reinvention that frames success within a neoliberal agenda of career progression. While the notion of Muppie ‘identity’ tends to be more individualistic and professionally/academically motivated than the Enlighteners and the Cosmopolitan ‘identities’, it also does not disregard friends, family and traditions. The data also reveals that the young Bulgarians, who draw on this route of identification rely predominantly on segregationist and integrationist strategies to counterbalance double-sided othering. Therefore, this section will illustrate the essence of this line of identification through the accounts of the participants. The desire for self-reinvention, driven by success will be demonstrated by focusing on the manifestations of young Bulgarians’ student/ professional identities and their thoughts on the idea of the job-for-life. Finally, their plans for the future will be scrutinised, arguing that they display a more individualistic and pragmatic approach to life where dreams are viewed as irrational and only goals are seen as realistic.

The essence of the Muppie identification route is firmly embedded in achieving success both in professional and in personal terms. Referring to her fast-paced life and career in London, PR specialist Ralitsa remarks: *‘I feel that I am 23 and that I am already going somewhere. I feel that I don't have time to waste’* (my

translation). This sense of direction highlights the importance given to career progression, which is conceptualised as success. Restlessness in such an environment accentuates mobility and transforms time into a value. Similarly, in the span of a year and a half, Kalina relocated from Oxford to London. Consequently, she negotiated with her employers to work two days from home, one day with their clients in London, which left her commuting to Oxford two days a week. Recently, she undertook a career change accepting a job position in the financial sector. Her story epitomises constant change as reinvention in the pursuit of success. Also, it suggests that in such context flexibility, mobility and determination are necessary requirements.

Moreover, the Muppie route of identification is very much a by-product of the capitalist tenets of globalisation, which place stronger emphasis on self-worth, individualism and competitiveness. Therefore, the negative effects of double-sided othering are dealt with in a very pragmatic way. Although Vasil's views and everyday practices suggest that he identifies with the idea of the new Enlighteners and the Cosmopolitans, his approach towards the stigmatisation of Bulgarian migrants points to some Muppie characteristics as well. His individualism is quite evident when he remarks: *'For me it is not important what people think. What matters is how I feel and how I understand things to be'* (my translation). This comment suggests a strong focus on self-reinvention, which completely refuses to engage with stereotypical discourses. Thus, for Vasil focusing on one's self-perceptions is the best approach to following one's path without being influenced by the context. Vasil's neoliberal logic becomes evident when he comments that there are two types of people: *'those who can and those who can't'* (my translation). This suggests that one's skills are deemed as the tool that helps one navigate through reinvention in the pursuit of success. The focus is very much on one's determination, motivation and perseverance. Additionally, Vasil shares:

[...] Luck happens all the time. The question is whether you have the skills to seize the moment because opportunities appear all the time. The

question is how much you have developed. Luck can happen one level below you and then you can will say to yourself: 'If only I was a little bit closer...' Then you keep on growing and growing and then luck happens a little bit below you and you say to yourself 'ok, this is my luck', so you grab it because this is your opportunity (his emphasis, my translation).

Therefore, to be successful one needs to be at the right place at the right time. Interestingly here, luck is not conceptualised as an idea independent of the self, rather – it requires agency and strength of character. Therefore, the essence of the Muppie route of identification entails hard work, determination, strong will and perseverance.

While the participants are influenced by the implications of their neoliberal context, this does not mean that they are passive or unaware of it. Self-analysing her lifestyle, Ralitsa shares: *'Now it's fast-paced, I learn quickly, it's fine'*, yet at the same time, *'I don't want my kids to be growing up in a capital where everyone is just a working zombie'* (my translation). This suggests that even though constant self-reinvention is necessary for building a successful career, it is not necessarily something that she wants to be doing for the rest of her life – it appears only as a stage in climbing the professional ladder. Moreover, Ralitsa believes that

Our generation is the generation of the unsatisfied people. We will never be satisfied because we always want more, better, faster, stronger...and it's a mixture of things. It is because you have so much information and that's great because this information has made us realise that there is so much available out there; there is so much we can do but basically there is no limits. There is no end goal, which you will achieve and you will be finally happy. After you achieve that goal, there will be another one and another one. And it's the same thing advertising does – there is always more successful, yeah, it is capitalism and we are the kids of capitalism and I think it's just how we are raised and I think there is so much opportunity but because there is so much opportunity, we are constantly trying to overachieve (my translation).

This critical account reveals the tensions that self-reinvention produces. It is necessary and constant, leading to anxiety in the same way that Elliott (2013) describes it. Success in itself is never achievable, it is only a temporal condition.

The lifestyle, framed by a Muppie route of identification is compared to an advertising campaign, which can be both enabling and disabling. However, the critical awareness that Ralitsa demonstrates suggests an act of agency despite the sometimes limiting conditions that capitalism produces. The disappearance of the job-for-life is substituted by ‘job hopping’ as a way to ensure salary increase and a chance for a better and calmer life at a later point. Thus, what comes to the fore is the significance of adaptability in the form of transferable skills, which mediate the effects that job insecurity can produce. Additionally, job fluctuation is understood not only as a learning curve but also as a way to receive recognition for one’s skills and abilities at another place. With regards to the first aspect, the opportunity to learn, Dessie’s story is particularly instrumental. She works for a big international company. As she is on a graduate scheme, she not only moves from one department to another every six months but she also works on short-term projects and once she finishes, she needs to apply internally for a new one. This short-termism, however, is perceived as a chance to learn more and develop her skills. By reinventing her skills, she thus increases her chances for building a successful career. Kalina’s and Emanuela’s career paths allude to the fact that ‘job hopping’ results in a sense of recognition, respect and dignity by being valued by other employers for their skills and education. Therefore, the conceptualisation of success within a Muppie identification in professional terms has many different dimensions, which necessarily require self-reinvention.

The drive for reinvention, however, requires prioritising carefully and establishing discipline in daily activities. Investment banker Paula leads an extremely dynamic life that requires structure. She describes her daily routine in the following way:

My life in England is very structured. My parents say that it is more like a boot camp but I like it. [...] I get up at 5 am. At 5:20 am I am at the bus stop. I arrive at work at 5:50 am and at 6 am I am at my desk, my morning call is at 6:30. My morning duties are from 7 am till 12 pm. [...] At 1 pm I go for my lunch and for my boss’. Lunch is till 1:30 pm.

[...] *technically, we are not allowed to have a lunch break but my colleagues and I take turns covering each other. [...] I finish at 5pm and at 6pm I am at home. I go to the gym at 6:10 pm till 7:30. Then I come back, take a shower, eat and I go back to bed at 9 pm. Next morning it starts all over again. There are days when I have client entertainment, which is after work* (my translation).

Interestingly, establishing a routine and a daily pattern emerges as a key strategy to manage an extremely dynamic life. While flexibility at the work place is a necessary requirement to work under pressure, the way to manage it is through establishing a structure. The reinvention of the Self involves a reinvention of the body in the form of de-stressing by exercising at the gym at the end of a long day. It also highlights the importance of maintaining a certain image, which in this sector is also vital for career progression. Importantly, the ‘client entertainment’ events signify a blur of the line between work and leisure as Paula is expected to attend occasionally cocktail dinners with prospective clients in her free time. Unsurprisingly then, this requires a pragmatic approach to life that necessitates self-discipline. Vasil takes a similar approach to his very active life. Consequently, he has established a list of priorities that are most important and valuable to him: ‘*work comes first and maintaining my body comes second*’ (my translation). Interestingly, with regards to his second priority, playing volleyball is perceived as an opportunity to reinvent his body. This entails a chance to ‘switch off’ from his work mode and to maintain his physique. Thus, the reinvention of the body in the form of maintaining a level of fitness serves not only as a strategy to manage the high stress levels but also to increase work productivity. The latter in turn results in better performance at the work place and higher chances of success.

Finally, the plans for the future of the participants, who draw predominantly on this type of identification, once again reaffirm the strong focus on self-reinvention in the pursuit of success. Correspondingly, dreams are seen as foolish and child-like. Instead, plans for the future reveal pragmatism, and in a neoliberal fashion, they are often perceived as specific goals that need to be achieved.

I don't really dream. I set myself goals. [...] I have been raised that way – that if you are good enough, and if you believe in yourself, there are no such things as impossible things and I cannot imagine what can be so impossible that I have to dream about it. When I was a [high school] student my long-term goal was to come here. Now my long-term goal is to go back. The more long-term goal is not only to go back but also to make a difference (my translation, Delyan).

Notably, Delyan, who displays more Enlightenment characteristics, essentially bridges the two categories of success as making a difference and as achieving self-reinvention. By focusing on goals, rather than dreams, he implies that the first are considered as realistic, whereas the latter are child-like and close to the realm of the imaginary. The belief in the Self suggests the precedence of rationality and pragmatism over wishful thinking – dreaming is simply impractical. Similarly, Paula sarcastically remarks: *'I have goals, not dreams. What does a "dream" mean?! I want to ride a unicorn in the clouds, that's my dream'* (my translation). This clearly signifies that dreaming is perceived as childish and impractical. Hence, within the Muppie 'identity', plans for the future come across as prioritising either acquiring material goods or experiences that are associated with prosperity, status and reaching new frontiers. As such, they are not wishes, they are aims. For Paula that involves a villa at the Aegean Sea, whereas for Samuil that is becoming an astronaut or going on an excursion in space. Finally, while many of the participants, who draw on this type of identification are young professionals, there are also some student examples. This idea of success as self-reinvention associated with prosperity is most clearly captured by Economics and Finance student Ignat:

I have goals, not dreams. I do not dream a lot because I don't want to get disappointed. I have goals – short-term goals, one after the other. I imagine myself being successful, with a house and perhaps a family, yes, perhaps this. Either that, or the American dream (my translation).

Therefore, within the Muppie route of identification, success perceived as self-reinvention places stronger emphasis on one's individual personality with plans for the future, which focus predominantly on acquiring material goods, building a career and being prosperous. The migratory journey is justified in individualistic

terms – as a necessary path, unrelated to national identity. For many of the participants, who draw on the Muppet form of identification the lack of opportunities in Bulgaria exclude return to their home country. Thus, evidently, oppositional agency entails a reinvention of the Self, which capitalises on academic/professional identities.

The Cosmopolitan route of identification

Denitsa speaks 7 languages and shares that languages sometimes ‘inspire’ her to do one thing or another. Her love for British accents hence motivated her to come and study in the UK, where she never felt homesick as she was ‘too busy getting to know the culture and the people’. She could barely hide her excitement when she spoke about her year abroad when she *‘lived and travelled in three different countries, which I found very helpful because I had to start my life anew, back to square one. Everything was new – new environment, new friends [...]’*. Unsurprisingly, she often finds herself surrounded by friends from all over the world, swiftly switching from one language to another because *‘each sound has its own meaning’*. (Interview and memo, September 2013).

The final route of identification that comes across quite strongly through the data is associated with espousing strong cosmopolitan values such as open-mindedness, tolerance and appreciation of diversity. As such, this is a form of oppositional agency, which is underpinned by restlessness, driven by the desire to get to know new cultures, to discover new experiences and to travel to many places. Denitsa’s story in the vignette above captures the essence of this form of identification.

Similar to the idea of the Enlighteners, the Cosmopolitan identification is not based upon rootlessness. Indeed, the Cosmopolitan idea also incorporates a capitalisation on national identities, however, those participants, who find it as a source of meaning focus on learning and re-discovering and not teaching and

bringing awareness as it is the case with the new Enlightenment idea. Thus, a Cosmopolitan identification helps the participants to justify their migratory decisions within the idea of freedom of movement, which accentuates the fluid character of the latter and thus negates both internal and external stereotypes. Therefore, intensified Europeanisation and globalisation emerge as the factors that frame the participants' experiences, where constant reinvention is a chance to lead a transnational life. Success in such a context is conceptualised as the opportunity to enrich one's life culturally and socially. While many of the young, highly skilled Bulgarians, who draw on the idea of the Cosmopolitan want to make a difference, bringing about change is usually not the main driver; the focus is on cultural enrichment. Therefore, this section will focus on the essence of this route of identification as my participants view it. Their reinvention and the way they understand success will be scrutinised in their daily practices and plans for the future.

The central tenets of this type of identification entail a firm belief in the freedom of movement, open-mindedness and quick adaptability, which in turn allow the participants to reinvent their life histories, thus accentuating the constructive aspects of liminality. An interesting case is Vasil, whose personality emerges as particularly multidimensional. His cosmopolitanism becomes evident when he remarks:

I believe that the world is one place and the fact that there are borders is simply a temporary restriction. I believe that these things will disappear in 100- 200 years if necessary, but they will disappear. Languages will merge and people will start communicating in the same way. It is only a matter of time [...] (my translation).

Vasil's perception about the world is romantically universalistic. The idea of the world as one place also suggests open-mindedness and a belief in humanity, while at the same time borders are perceived as artificial – in opposition to Balibar's (2010) concept of the border as an institution. In Vasil's case, similarity is preferred over difference, which is seen as a bonding strategy. Nonetheless, the Cosmopolitan

route of identification also espouses an appreciation of difference. Young professional Ivan not only feels as ‘*a citizen of the world*’ but for him it is also important to ‘*downplay*’ his national identity. The latter serves as an approach that allows him to learn more about other cultures. This suggests that the idea of the Cosmopolitan as a form of identification includes characteristics such as an ability to adjust quickly to different environments and natural cultural curiosity. This suggests that participants, who identify with this idea adopt mainly integrationist adjustment strategies. Reinvention then takes the form of cultural enrichment, whereas success appears more subtly in the form of seizing opportunities that allow such reinvention. The latter is quite evident in the stories of students such as Denitsa, who have had the opportunity to study abroad as part of their course. Thus, Marko’s year in Hong Kong, Maria’s and Yaroslava’s in France are seen as routes that have allowed them to experience new cultures, enrich their friendship circles and practice their language skills. Therefore, such initiatives not only satisfy their desire to travel but they also nurture their cosmopolitanism even more.

Moreover, the lifestyle, associated with a Cosmopolitan route of identification envisages strong transnationalism. The latter emerges as both a factor that motivates participants’ migratory choices and as a by-product of moving from one place to another. With regards to the first aspect, Yaroslava’s transnational family lifestyle not only stimulates but it also justifies her migratory project:

My family, we travel a lot in general. Every year we would hop in the car and go on a Euro trip. We would visit, for example, my auntie in Italy and then we would go on holiday somewhere else. Then on the way back we go through Paris or something like that. So, we would spend a lot of time travelling around although I know that visiting a country and living there are two very different things. However, I don’t know, I’ve always loved travelling and thus, I have always known that I would go somewhere else, I just didn’t want to stay in Bulgaria (my translation).

Evidently, in this case maintaining transnational family ties stimulates a further desire to travel and the ability to adapt to new environments – something that is nurtured from an early age. Identification is achieved through a reinvention of the

family and success is encapsulated in staying in touch with relatives. For other participants such as undergraduate student Maria, transnationalism is a result of her migratory journey. While actively studying French and preparing for her year abroad, she has also been involved in many European youth initiatives. One of them required her to coordinate a team from Bulgaria to go to a seminar in Romania while she was still in the UK. She then resorted to using Skype, which also helps her to maintain daily contact with her family. Thus, social platforms and devices serve as tools that facilitate and enable transnational connections. Furthermore, they allow young, highly skilled Bulgarians to stay informed about opportunities that would allow their cosmopolitan reinvention.

Moreover, the need to reinvent one's cultural experiences has a strong presence in the daily activities of the young Bulgarians, who lead a cosmopolitan lifestyle. For example, as already mentioned, Sava loves hiking and exploring nature. He not only tries to practice his hobby whenever he is free in the UK but also every time he goes back to Bulgaria. Furthermore, he often organises hiking trips to various destinations in Europe in the search of new experiences. This signifies a reinvention of everyday practices such as hobbies in the search of new challenges and experiences. Therefore, crossing borders is seen as a mundane practice as everything is '*just a flight away*' as Ivan claims. Unsurprisingly, those participants, who associate themselves with a Cosmopolitan 'identity' have friends from all over the world with whom they organise traditional cultural dinners. For example, Maria shares that she lives with many international students and they take turns to cook traditional food for each other, which allows for an everyday cultural reinvention that broadens young Bulgarians' horizons. Thus, even the everyday activities that the participants, who draw on a Cosmopolitan route of identification, engage in, are intimately linked to a spirit of exploring cultures and traditions.

Finally, the plans for the future within a Cosmopolitan route of identification once again signify the reinvention of lifestyles, associated not only with bold dreams but also with unusual destinations. Interestingly, framing plans for the future in

terms of dreams for this particular group of people demonstrates a sign of reinvention in itself – a way to picture a future version of the self, a future new experience. Hence, Psychology student Roza exclaims: *‘I think everyone should have a dream’*, suggesting that dreams are an important ingredient of the imagination, associated with this type of identification. However, a Cosmopolitan ‘identity’, does not necessarily associate plans for the future or success with return to the home country. For example, Roza’s plans centre upon making a difference by helping children with mental health issues. While her plans have the same philanthropic tenet present in the Enlightener ‘identity’, in a cosmopolitan fashion, she does not limit herself to the boundaries of her own home society. Additionally, plans for the future framed as dreams can be rather unusual such as Nikolay’s desire to go to Costa Rica to pick oranges. This alludes to the fact that some of the young Bulgarians, who associate with the Cosmopolitan idea value a carefree, stress-free life, which would allow them to reinvent their life stories in new and creative ways. Similarly, Yaroslava shares:

I would very much like to reach a stage of my life when I can settle in Guadalupe, the French Caribbean. I had the chance to visit it and [...] it will be a dream come true for me to settle in such a beautiful, calm place (my translation).

Her fluency in French and the desire to lead a stress-free life, nurtured by a cosmopolitan openness clearly emerge as the motivational factors behind this choice. A very different nuance of the Cosmopolitan personality reveals Sava when he talks about his dreams:

I would have to feel secure but have challenges in my life. I would never want to stop learning and I would never want to feel like I don't have anything to work towards and to build, bigger than me and I would always want to have the opportunity to enhance myself and develop myself for what I think it's better. And I would like to be healthy and for the people around me to be healthy, and I would like to live in a beautiful place [...] and...live in a simple way but in a rich way and be surrounded just by people, who make me feel at home, while I am with them they challenge me, they don't necessarily just sit and nod heads

around me, they provoke me to think and to question the things that I believe in.

The need for reinvention quite clearly emerges in the young entrepreneur's account. Challenges are not only welcome but also necessary to stimulate his desire to learn and develop. Moreover, what this passage alludes to is a characteristic that lies at the core of the Cosmopolitan form of identification, namely – the need for never-ending enrichment. Success is seen as leading a simple but satisfying life, and being surrounded by loved ones. Consequently, close and meaningful relationships emerge as a value, especially when they stimulate and nurture one's desire to learn.

Thus, the Cosmopolitan route of identification refutes double-sided othering by ignoring it and focusing on the urge to travel and (re-) discover. The open-mindedness, firm belief in the freedom of movement and cultural curiosity shape the contours of reinvention of experiences, where success is measured by the stamps in one's passport, the different cuisines tried, the new friends made, the new challenges taken and the new memories made.

Conclusion

Geographical mobility brings about change – in terms of context, culture and everyday practices. Thus, as migrants navigate new and complex realities, they ultimately also discover new ways of making sense of their migratory decisions and of who they are and how they envisage their future. Consequently, this chapter has demonstrated that the 37 young people, who took part in this study are no exception. In that sense, the chapter has focused on exploring further the constructive aspects of the liminal position of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK by analysing the ways in which they perceive themselves and their plans for the future. To do so, this chapter has applied Hall's (1996) discursive understanding of the process of identification, which not only contextualises it but also captures the dynamism embedded in it. More specifically, the analysis has adopted an agency-led approach

(Jensen, 2011) by using a narrower understanding of Elliott's (2013) concept of reinvention to evaluate the participants' new routes of identification that both capitalise on and refute stereotyping discourses. It was thus argued that these lines of identification provide young Bulgarians with the opportunity to not only make sense of but also to justify their migratory choices.

Correspondingly, the analysis has demonstrated that the participants rely on three different, yet interrelated routes of identification, which encapsulate the principle of reinvention. For example, one of the prominent ways for some of the participants is comprised by the idea of the (new) Enlighteners. As a form of identification, it is underpinned by a reinvention of national identity that capitalises on 'old' mythical narratives of migration to refute the negative consequences of double-sided othering. Therefore, on one end of the spectrum, the new Enlightener as a line of identification allows the participants to conceptualise migration as a necessary step, which would lead to personal realisation that will enable them to make a difference in the home society. Simultaneously, the related concept of the Ambassador aims to use the same argument to diminish negative perceptions about Bulgarian migrants in the UK by excelling academically and professionally and by raising awareness about the rich culture and traditions of the home country. Conversely, borrowing from Miller (2014) the idea of the Muppet gives an insight into the process of identification, which capitalises on academic/ professional identities and refuses to engage with double-sided othering. Such route of identification serves to illustrate oppositional agency through the reinvention of the Self. Comparatively, the Cosmopolitan route of identification takes an in-between position as a form of identification, which disengages with negative stereotypical discourses by adopting principles such as appreciation of diversity, tolerance and open-mindedness. What comes across the three routes of identification is that each one of them enables the participants to emphasise different aspects that justify their migratory choices: for the new Enlighteners as an idea, the focus is on teaching and

promoting; while a Cosmopolitan ‘identity’ highlights abilities to learn and the Muppie one centres upon doing.

Finally, and quite importantly, the analysis points to three key conclusions. Firstly, the presented routes of identification are not ideal types. To the contrary, as it was demonstrated throughout the chapter, young highly skilled Bulgarians draw on each one of them, albeit to a different extent. Indeed, the fact that some participants’ accounts, such as Vasil’s, appear in all three groups of identification highlights the multidimensionality and fluidity of identities. Secondly, each route of identification is premised on a different conceptualisation of success. The latter in the case of the idea of the new Enlighteners is associated with making a difference in the home society, while within the concept of the Muppies success is individualistically framed as personal and professional realisation without external projections. In turn, success features more subtly in the form of seizing opportunities that result in new encounters and chances to develop as part of the Cosmopolitan route of identification. Related to the various conceptualisations of success is also the final inference that can be drawn on the basis of the analysis, namely, the various perceptions associated with return. Expectedly, return at a later stage when the key goal of the migratory project is achieved does not carry the same negative connotations as its equivalent in the initial stages of the migratory experiences. Despite its more positive and rather nuanced understanding, return remains more of a promise rather than a real possibility. Ultimately, the different avenues of identification that young skilled Bulgarian migrants in the UK draw on, serve to illustrate that migration is a life-changing experience, which often entails the reinvention of the Self.

Introduction

I have always loved airports. I think they bring people together, even if sometimes it is to say goodbye. My parents and I are at Departures of Sofia Airport. It is noon and we have arrived early. 'Not as early as last time you travelled', says my Dad reminding me of my trip six months ago, when I met Kamen. We have a send-off 'ritual' as well: my mum is on a mission to buy me a few Bulgarian newspapers I can read on the way back, while I am given banitsa with boza to eat and drink before I go through Security. This time it is slightly different as we are waiting for Maya (pseudonym used), one of my parents' best friends whom they met while studying together in Bratislava. Originally from Sofia, Maya has always worked abroad. Unlike my parents, she never returned. Maya happens to be in Sofia that day and as she wanted to see me too, we have decided to meet at the airport. As my mum victoriously returns with five different newspapers, Maya appears and gives all of us a huge hug. We decide to sit at the café and catch up before I go through Security. I am quietly drinking my coffee and listening to Maya's adventures since she last saw my parents. This is followed by another one of their glorious stories from the time they were students 30 years ago. I know the story well, I have heard it so many times, so I politely wait for Maya to finish and I say: 'Yes, I know, my parents may have mentioned this story a few too many times'. My mum looks at me and says: 'Well, the thing is, these experiences of living abroad, they never leave you, regardless how many years it has been. They just become a part of your story. Even though we came back to Bulgaria, I think part of us will always be in Bratislava'.

An hour later, I am already at the gate but the plane is still not boarding. I sit on one of the empty seats and taking advantage of the free Wi-Fi, I scroll through my Facebook. Suddenly I think of Kamen and I re-read the last message that he sent me – that he finished his degree but he could not find a job in the UK, so he was going back to Bulgaria. ‘I am not sure how it will work out’, he had said. I go to his profile and I can see that it has worked out. His status makes me chuckle – he had ordered a black tea with milk at a café in his hometown and to his amazement, the puzzled waitress had brought two separate cups – one with black tea and one with warm milk. The status ends with #massivefail #Britain. As I press the ‘Like’ button, my mum’s words about her student experiences come to my mind and I cannot help but think: Would my participants feel the same way? Would Britain always be part of their life stories, regardless what they do and where they go? Boarding begins and as the flight attendant hands me back the scanned boarding pass, I know that part of each one of my participants will always be in Britain. I know that part of me always is.

This thesis focused on a group of young people, who were born in Bulgaria but have chosen to pursue their education and professional realisation in Britain. They are a particularly interesting case study as their migratory histories are deeply embedded in the ambivalence of wider processes such as Bulgaria’s transition to democracy, its westernisation and subsequent accession to the EU. These events have had very ‘practical’ consequences for their lives. As ‘children of the transition’, the participants were among those, whose childhood was marked by the excitement of getting ‘Toblerone’ from the Corecom (a chain store, see Appendix 1). Yet, they also belong to the generation, who listened to Spice Girls and Backstreet Boys and perceived ‘getting a McDonalds’ as a treat. Most importantly, the young, highly skilled Bulgarians, who took part in this project were among the first to start studying English intensively, contemplating the possibility of living, studying or working in the land of Shakespeare, Churchill and Harry Potter. Thus, the participants in this study are also some of the people for whom Terminal 1 and

Terminal 2 of Sofia airport (and their corresponding discursive connotations) have become an integral node of their lives 'here' and 'there', of their mobility. The latter has been facilitated by visa-free travel within Europe, availability of cheap flights and affordable tuition fees in other EU member-states. In other words, the experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK are part of the newest migratory outflows from the country, which have resulted from Bulgaria's EU accession. Located at the intersection between youth mobilities and highly skilled migration, this research project has demonstrated the incredibly diverse and complex nature of the migratory experiences of 37 individuals, who find themselves in an increasingly hostile context, shaped by processes of othering in home and host societies alike. Focusing on the perspective of the participants themselves, this thesis has revealed that young people's mobile choices are seen as ordinary and yet, multifaceted and liminal. However, young Bulgarians' in-between-ness has been both deconstructive and constructive, revealing new avenues for making sense of their everyday migratory realities and choices and thus, redefining their perceptions of Self and plans for the future. Ultimately, aiming to untangle the dynamics of migration as a process, this research has demonstrated that making sense of one's decision to move abroad is neither a straightforward, nor a simple task, but certainly one, which leaves its mark upon people's life course. Making sense of the impact of migration upon one's life, however, is an ongoing process, which opens up new possibilities and life opportunities. Thus, the thesis is only a 'still picture' of a very dynamic and ever-changing phenomenon, experienced by a particular group of people at a given point in time.

Consequently, instead of providing a 'conclusion' to the young Bulgarians' stories, this chapter will offer some final remarks and insights into their migratory experiences, based on the conducted research. In doing so, this chapter will return to the research questions, which inspired and shaped the course of the study. This will highlight the key findings and overall themes that emerged throughout the fieldwork process. This will be followed by a section that emphasises the

significance of the study by focusing on its conceptual and empirical contributions to the literature on Central and Eastern European migration to the West more specifically, and the field of migration and mobility in general. However, this research project has also raised a number of questions, which highlight avenues for future research, which will be considered next. Finally, the chapter ends with a few final, reflexive thoughts about the research journey as a whole and the phenomenon under study.

Revisiting the research questions

This thesis set out to unravel the migratory experiences of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in Britain. Recognising the contested nature of both ‘youth’ and ‘highly skilled migration’, the study aimed to include a wider range of the youth mobility spectrum, which would enable a more insightful perspective into migration as an experience. Therefore, the choice of focusing on university students and young professionals was motivated by two main theoretical postulations. On the one hand, adopting a life-span perspective, a young person was defined as someone in the process of ‘becoming’, i.e. someone, who is in the process of assuming an established social role (see King et al., 2016). On the other hand, in light of Ho’s (2011) study, it was recognised that being ‘highly skilled’ in migratory contexts is not a static, given status but rather a dynamic, unfolding continuum of experiences. Drawing on Csedó (2008), a broad definition of the term was adopted. More specifically, the study espoused the view that a ‘highly skilled’ migrant is someone, who not only has qualifications and experience but also someone, who manages to successfully negotiate them in the host society context. It was thus argued that students can also be categorised as highly skilled migrants because they have managed to successfully negotiate their skills, knowledge and experience in order to attain acceptance at British universities.

As the main, overarching research question was rather loosely framed and aimed to unpack Bulgarian students’ and professionals’ experiences of migration,

the study was anchored by three focal points. The goal of the latter was to explore what happens *before, during and as result of* geographical relocation, simultaneously considering the importance of context. Therefore, each one of these three focal points was addressed by one research question.

Firstly, attention was drawn to the pre-migratory context of the participants. By looking at *why young, highly skilled Bulgarians choose to migrate to the UK* (first research sub-question), the thesis aimed to go beyond the obvious reasons implicated in their status of students and/ or young professionals. Thus, the first research sub-question explored the personal context of the participants, which had underpinned their decisions to leave Bulgaria. Additionally, this question probed not only the reasons but also the factors that had influenced young Bulgarians' migratory projects, simultaneously unravelling the nature and characteristics of the latter. Secondly, particular attention was drawn to students' and professionals' migratory realities by focusing on *how they adjust to and engage with the migratory context* (second research sub-question). In doing so, the fieldwork explored not only initial reactions and responses to arriving in Britain but also attitudes towards and experiences of dominant negative discourses, which result in rigid, stereotypical and rather reductionist representations of migrants in both host and home societies. Finally, another key aim of the study was to investigate *how migration impacts upon the participants' ways of constructing their identities and their plans for the future* (third research sub-question). More specifically, the research explored the effects of the contentious relationship between migration as project and as a reality upon young, highly skilled Bulgarians' perceptions of Self, their dreams, goals, values and opinions on return to the home country. Thus, drawing on Castles and Miller's (2009) argument that migration is a multifaceted process, the three research sub-questions were designed in such a manner as to probe further and disentangle the participants' views of the dynamics of their geographical mobility. This approach contributed to the thorough exploration of three specific but interlinked aspects of

the experiences of Bulgarian students and professionals of migration as a life event. Each one of these aspects was addressed by the empirical *chapters 4, 5 and 6*.

Correspondingly, in highlighting the importance of considering one's context prior to migration, *chapter 4* not only introduced the participants but it also provided further information with regards to their personalities, goals and family background. More specifically, it was argued that the notion of a migratory project is particularly useful for the in-depth understanding of how and why young Bulgarians migrate. Thus, recognising 'the human face of migration' (Smith and Favell, 2006) necessitates considering the ways in which migrants' personal context (who they are, what families they come from and why they choose particular destinations over others) informs, reacts with and shapes their migratory projects. Furthermore, this helps to reveal the dual nature of migration as both a *personal* and a *collective* endeavour (Castles and Miller, 2009). Correspondingly, the analysis has demonstrated that the migratory projects of the 37 young, highly skilled Bulgarians are incredibly diverse and goal-driven, underpinned by a number of macro (structural), meso (intermediaries and family/friendship networks) and micro (subjective) factors that operate simultaneously.

In exploring the impact of macro factors upon migratory projects, the analysis pointed out the influence of three interrelated phenomena: Bulgaria's transition to democracy post-1989 and the subsequent processes of westernization and Europeanisation. These tendencies, as *chapter 4* has argued, have in turn influenced the nature and characteristics of overarching structural conditions, highlighting their important role in shaping migratory decisions. For example, the imperfections of the Bulgarian educational system are sharply contrasted with the good reputation of the British higher educational system, tilting the scales of migratory decisions more favourably towards the latter. Similarly, perceptions about opportunities for personal development exhibit dualistic, even binary characteristics. While nepotism, unfairness and deskilling are seen as widespread within the Bulgarian context, the UK is perceived as a country, which can provide

the necessary structural prerequisites for the achievement of one's goals and ambitions. Thus, the data has pointed out that macro conditions operate on a push-pull basis and as such they can serve as both barriers and facilitators of mobility flows, confirming Petroff's (2016) claim that structure can be both an enabling and a disabling factor. Respectively, Bulgarian highly skilled migrants emerge as rational actors, who carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing education and/ or professional realisation abroad. However, as *chapter 4* has argued this view is too simplistic without the careful consideration of the role that meso- and micro-level conditions play in shaping migratory projects.

Specifically, the research has uncovered that loved ones (family and friends) as well as various institutions and events (secondary schools, recruitment agencies and university fairs) stimulate young Bulgarians' decisions to move to Britain. With regards to the first aspect, the data has demonstrated a wide spectrum of involvement of one's family in the corresponding migratory project. The different levels of parental engagement vary from cases when parents do not participate in migratory decisions to situations when they emerge as the main trigger of migration. In the latter case, as it has been demonstrated, young Bulgarians' migratory projects are a way for the parents to deal with their own dissatisfactions with Bulgarian realities. Overall, however, the role of parents in migratory projects encompasses a combination of financial, emotional and advisory support. Similarly, young Bulgarians' friendship circles act as strong stimulants of the decision to migrate. This was particularly evident in relation to cases of peer pressure or situations when friends act as reliable sources of information and as role models. Additionally, overarching processes such as Bulgaria's westernisation and Europeanisation had contributed to the transformation of the Bulgarian secondary educational system into an environment that not only nurtures but also stimulates young people's ambitions to pursue education abroad. This phenomenon is further enhanced by university fairs and consultancy agencies, which help prospective students to apply

to educational institutions abroad. As such, these organisations and events emerge as important stimulants of the participants' migratory projects.

Finally, an important part of young, highly skilled Bulgarians' decisions to migrate to the UK are their individual and personal emotions, associated with their hobbies, interests and opportunities that both the university and the particular UK location can offer. The exploration of the role of micro-level factors in the pre-migratory stage has also revealed that decisions to relocate abroad are strongly emotionally charged and not necessarily positive. This finding has challenged the view that migrants are entirely rational actors. Instead, one's migratory projects have emerged as a complex amalgamation of several interlinked macro, meso and micro factors. Therefore, the participants' stories have demonstrated that the decision to relocate to Britain is a carefully planned endeavour, which is a pragmatic and rational act of agency as much as it is a result of personal preferences and emotions.

Considering the participants' pre-migratory context was important also in contextualising their realities once they arrive in Britain. In that sense, *chapter 5* has addressed the second research sub-question by exploring participants' emotional reactions and attitudes towards their migration realities as well as the everyday counterbalancing strategies that they employ.

On the one hand, the exploration of the participants' initial encounters with the host society employed an affective analytical approach (Svašek, 2012; Anderson, 2014; Anderson, 2015; Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015; Merriman and Jones, 2016) to scrutinise the process of adjustment. It was argued that at its very core adjustment entails dealing with change, where differences in cultural frames of reference become apparent and question 'normality' (Goffman, 1972). Furthermore, it was recognised that adjustment as a process is deeply emotive, producing an array of sometimes conflicting feelings and reactions. Therefore, using Winkelman's (1994) conceptualisation of various stages of culture shock and

its resolution was instrumental in drawing out particular emotions and engaging more deeply with their contextual significance. Thus, the data has revealed that some participants initially experience a honeymoon period, characterised by a sense of discovery and excitement of novelty. Although this overwhelmingly positive response to change for some participants is a signifier for the lack of realisation of the consequences of one's migratory decisions, for others it is a conscious coping technique. Additionally, it should be noted that not all participants have experienced an initial phase of excitement. Nonetheless, as *chapter 5* has demonstrated, the honeymoon period is short-lived and is quickly substituted by a reflexive stage, characterised by a full realisation of the implications of one's migratory decisions. Inevitably, however, all young, highly skilled Bulgarians who took part in this study, whether they have reacted initially positively to the host societies realities or not, undergo some form of disillusionment. The latter results from the clash between pre-migratory expectations and host society realities. The period of disillusionment is strongly interlinked with experiencing a culture shock, when differences in cultural practices and social norms become apparent, illustrating the costs of migration. Ultimately, Bulgarian students' and young professionals' initial experiences in the host society emerge as very strongly emotionally charged journeys of making sense of their migratory choices.

Additionally, the initial encounters with the host society can also question the migration project as a whole. This was quite evident when the responses to the process of disillusionment were considered. More specifically, the fieldwork has uncovered two potential ways to deal with initial frustrations: premature return or adaptation. On the one hand, perceptions in relation to early return are largely negative due to its association with failure of the migratory project. On the other hand, although adaptation is required to ensure that one's goals and ambitions are fulfilled, it nonetheless emerges as a long and complex process. Moreover, it is a process, which includes (a combination of) different strategies. In that sense, the fieldwork has uncovered a broad range of segregationist techniques, loosely termed

as the ‘mini Bulgaria’ phenomenon. These techniques include a strong focus on bonding capital (Putnam, 2000) through maintaining close links with fellow Bulgarians, Bulgarian student societies or relocating to areas with strong Bulgarian presence. As such this range of strategies not only mitigates but also diminishes the emotional costs of migration by re-establishing normality through re-creating familiarity. On the contrary, integrationist techniques capitalise on the benefits of migration. As such, these strategies include playing a sport or engaging in part-time work as a way of building bridging capital and expanding one’s social network. Interestingly, as *chapter 5* has demonstrated, young Bulgarians employ a combination of both segregationist and integrationist strategies, revealing that adjustment to the host society is a complex process, laden with emotions.

Furthermore, through the conceptualisation of the process of double-sided othering, the thesis has explored the reactions to and perceptions of the simultaneous operation of both external and internal stereotyping discourses. The analysis of the participants’ experiences of external stereotypes has shown that although direct experiences of discrimination are rare, expectations or perceptions of being discriminated against are abundant. Thus, it has become evident that the hostile environment in the host society has increased the participants’ sensitivity to instances of differential treatment. Interestingly, location plays an important role here. As demonstrated by the data, pro-European and more cosmopolitan places such as London and Scotland emerge as locations, where the effects of external stereotypes are less ostensible than those in less diverse areas in Britain. Comparatively, internal stereotyping discourses produced in the home society lead to much less varied reactions. They also transcend spatial boundaries as the participants find themselves treated differently on the basis of their migratory choices regardless whether they are in Bulgaria or in Britain. Thus, the thesis has demonstrated that Bulgarian students and young professionals find themselves situated in an increasingly hostile discursive realm, produced by both host and home societies. However, they are not passive ‘victims’ of othering – rather, as *chapter 5*

has argued, they employ a number of reactive strategies, which aim to reverse the power imbalance established by the ‘us-them’ line of division in different ways. For example, the assimilationist technique camouflages any markers of difference in order to prevent exposure to othering, while the segregationist one focuses on active disassociation with any compatriots or other CEE migrants in order to avoid the effects of the negative connotations implied in the term ‘Eastern European’ in the British context. Alternatively, the integrationist and proactive techniques openly and positively engage with stereotyping discourses by joking about them in the first case and by promoting Bulgarian culture and traditions in the second case.

Essentially, the analysis of young, highly skilled Bulgarians’ adjustment to the host society and responses to double-sided othering has unveiled the tenuous relationship between migration as a project and as a reality. This places the participants in a liminal position, which has both deconstructive and constructive characteristics. While *chapter 5* explored the first aspect in detail, the second one was a key focal point for *chapter 6*. More specifically, the final data chapter centred upon the analysis of the impact of migratory experiences upon young, highly skilled Bulgarians’ identities and plans for the future. Thus, it was argued that the variety of counterbalancing strategies that the participants employ in their everyday, simultaneously enable them to pursue (a combination of) different routes of identification that serve as sources of meaning. For example, the ‘new Enlighteners’ route serves to justify migratory choices through framing the latter firmly within a strong national identity, premised on an understanding of migration as a necessary step that will better the home society. Personal success within this line of identification ultimately is also perceived as a success for the homeland. Furthermore, drawing on the arguments of both Jensen (2011) and Elliott (2013), the ‘new’ Enlightener as an aspect of the process of identity construction is premised on an act of agency that relies on the logic of reinvention. In comparison, the Cosmopolitan line of identification is a more (although not completely) de-nationalised source of meaning that rests upon principles of dignity, diversity and

respect. Success in this line of identification is embodied through restlessness and constant discovery. As such the Cosmopolitan route encapsulates an act of agency, which prioritises capitalisation (Jensen, 2011) of one's opportunities, which enable cultural enrichment. Finally, the last prominent source meaning is conveyed through the idea of the Muppie. The latter is a perception of the Self that draws on professional/ student identities, which focus on success as personal enrichment. Furthermore, in Jensen's (2011) terms this is an act of agency that justifies migratory decisions by refusing to engage with them. It does so by emphasising individualism in life choices.

Essentially, *chapter 6* has illustrated that young' highly skilled Bulgarians' identities are multidimensional and fluid. Thus, despite the fact that some participants rely more on certain avenues of identification than others, the majority of them employ a combination of 'new' Enlightener, Cosmopolitan and Muppie characteristics to justify their migratory choices. In doing so, while they ascribe different connotations to success, return remains more or less a distant option in their plans for the future.

Ultimately, the migratory experiences of the 37 young people, who took part in this research are a small but important part of the Bulgarian migratory flows to the UK and of intra-European mobility as a whole. In many ways, however, while the participants' stories are remarkable in their specificities, they are also not uniquely 'Bulgarian' and as such their exceptionality should not be exaggerated. Indeed, young Bulgarians' migratory projects bear striking similarities with those of young Greeks, Lithuanians, Romanians, Poles (Ryan, 2010; Parutis, 2011; King and Lulle, 2016a, 2016b; Moroşanu 2013a, 2013b) or even those of Favell's (2008a) 'Eurostars'. Similarly, the period of liminality, unlocked by the tension between migration as a project and as a reality follows the same patterns that any European or not migrant experiences in a host society. However, what is quite interesting in the case of young, highly skilled Bulgarians is how their experiences combine together 'old' (pre-EU accession) and 'new' (freedom of movement) narratives of

migration. Thus, their stories contribute further to the rich mosaic of intra-European mobility, highlighting the complex (dys)functions of European integration. Furthermore, the process of double-sided othering experienced by young Bulgarians and their respective ways of counterbalancing it provides an important insight into the ever-changing nature and complexities of intra-European mobility. Thus, the next section will outline more specifically the novel ways in which this study has contributed to the knowledge in this area.

Original contribution to knowledge

Post-EU accession migratory flows from Bulgaria to the UK are an integral part of the 'new East-West migration system' (Favell, 2008b, p. 702). Yet, as both the introduction and the overview of the literature have demonstrated, the mobile practices of Bulgarians have received less academic attention in comparison to those of Poles, Romanians, Hungarians (among many, see Csedő 2008; Ryan 2010; Moroşanu 2013a, 2013b). Additionally, the few studies that have considered Bulgarian migration have done so mostly in quantitative or mixed method manner, focusing on a particular location, and paying less attention to the highly skilled strand of migratory flows (Ivancheva 2007; Markova 2010b; Chongarova 2010a, 2010b, 2011). Therefore, the value of this study lies in the fact that it looks at a group of people, who have received relatively less academic attention (Bulgarian highly skilled migrants in the UK), who find themselves in an increasingly hostile context produced by both host and home societies. The significance of the research is further accentuated by the fact that it draws on rich data gathered through multi-sited ethnographic work (Marcus 1995; 2011) with both students and young professionals, who reside in various locations in England, Scotland and Wales. Thus, both the research focus of the study and its methodology highlight not only its importance but also its complementary nature for the better understanding of East-West European migratory flows in general and those to the UK in particular.

Furthermore, the data presented in this thesis has made several conceptual and empirical contributions to the field of migration and mobility studies, which will be considered in detail below.

Firstly, the importance of this research project is evident in the conceptual contributions that it has made. More specifically, by identifying problematic areas in the theoretical understanding of migratory flows, this research project has also enriched the conceptual understanding of the following notions: migratory projects, double-sided othering and migratory experiences.

As argued in *chapter 2*, despite the fact that the term ‘migratory project’ features prominently within migration literature, its nature and characteristics remain rather contested. The overview of the literature that employs migratory projects as a concept reveals that the idea is far from self-explanatory (among many, see Hammar 1989; Ferro 2006; Petroff 2016). Although each one of these studies makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of the notion of a migratory project, ultimately, they do not fully capture the complex and nuanced nature of the concept. Therefore, a migratory project for the purposes of this study was defined as a personalised (but also collective) and carefully planned, often reactionary plan of action with the aim to pursue a specific goal, which may change over time. As such, a migratory project essentially involves spatial relocation and occurs as a result of a combination of structural (macro), intermediary (meso) and subjective (micro) factors. The value of this conceptualisation lies in the fact that it captures the dynamic nature of migratory projects. Thus, although they originate in the pre-migratory context, their nature and characteristics can also evolve and change over time in light of one’s migration realities. Defining migratory projects in this way also allows to consider the variety of factors that can influence decisions to engage in mobile practices. As such, this understanding of migratory projects complements Carling’s (2002) aspiration/ability model by providing a conceptual tool for the analysis of people’s wishes to migrate. Thus, the wide-ranging applicability of the

conceptualisation of migratory projects provided in this thesis can be quite useful for other studies, which take pre-migratory contexts into consideration.

Another conceptual contribution to the knowledge in the field is the notion of double-sided othering. Drawing on Triandafyllidou's (2006) argument about the simultaneous exclusion of migrants from both host and home societies, the thesis has argued that migration is a salient public concern in both Bulgaria and Britain. Furthermore, migration debates in both countries frame migratory choices in a negative light, thus establishing stereotypes, which tar the image of those, who choose to relocate geographically. Correspondingly, the thesis has traced the nature and characteristics of othering in relation to migrants in both Bulgaria and Britain. In the first case, as demonstrated in the introduction, the migration narrative in Bulgaria is infused with ideas of escapism and treason, which are remnants from the period of communist rule in the country. Equally, migration is a very prominent topic in Britain, where the public discourse is saturated with anxieties and frustrations, resulting from both global and more local and national socio-economic problems. To capture the essence of young, highly skilled Bulgarians' context, double-sided othering was defined as a discursive realm with temporal and spatial boundaries, where both internal (home society-related) and external (host society-related) stereotypes operate simultaneously. Embedded in this process of double-sided othering are constant power renegotiations, which impact upon migrants' everyday realities. As such, double-sided othering as a concept is useful in capturing and analysing the dynamics of the discursive context that migrants find themselves in. Although inductively conceptualised in relation to this study, this notion is also applicable to other research, which takes into consideration the effects of dominant stereotyping discourses upon migrants' experiences.

Finally, and importantly, the distinctiveness of this research lies in the way it has addressed the question of understanding migratory experiences. This is particularly evident in the design of the study and its research questions, which have considered both the temporal (what happens before, during and as a result of

migration) and spatial (host and home society) dimensions of human mobility. More specifically, throughout this thesis it has been argued that migratory experiences can be understood and analysed as the result of a negotiation between migratory projects and realities, which ultimately impacts upon people's identities and plans for the future. This conceptualisation builds upon Castles and Miller's (2009) argument that migration is a process, simultaneously allowing the analysis of its multiple aspects and effects. Although inductively conceptualised, this understanding of migratory experiences can offer a useful model for the analysis of the ways in which other migrant groups perceive and make sense of their practices and feelings as they occur in their context. Furthermore, the approach to migratory experiences put forward in this thesis is particularly instrumental in highlighting the importance of both pre- and post-migratory contexts, simultaneously focusing on the dynamic relationship between them. This focus avoids assumptions about the unproblematic nature of realising one's migratory projects in a host society, simultaneously accounting for the ways in which migratory goals can change over time and how that impacts upon people themselves.

Additionally, this research has made several contributions that have enriched the empirical knowledge about CEE migrants in the UK and East-West migratory flows in Europe in general. With regards to the first aspect, this thesis has been cautious in applying umbrella terms such as 'new Bulgarians' (Mitev (2005) in Chavdarova 2006; Mitev and Kovacheva 2014) and 'Eastern European' migrants to refer to the participants, whose stories were captured by the research. In fact, drawing on empirical data, I have argued that such blanket generalisations prevent the in-depth understanding of people's goals, values, motives and migratory projects by not only neglecting similarities with other generational groups but also by obscuring the specificities of the participants' migratory experiences. In that sense, the analysis of the variety of factors that underpin young, highly skilled Bulgarians' migratory projects has demonstrated the strong influence of their family and friendship networks, education as well as several structural factors.

Correspondingly, to argue that ‘the children of the transition’ are completely unburdened by the communist past of the country would be imprecise. As *chapter 4* has shown, in many ways, their migratory projects emerge as deeply embedded in national processes of making sense of the communist legacy. Furthermore, looking at their identities and the values in *chapter 6* has revealed that along with cosmopolitan and professional/ student lines of identification, young Bulgarians also draw on ‘older’ national discourses of the Bulgarian Enlightenment to justify their migratory choices. Thus, it has become evident that the term ‘new Bulgarians’ should be treated cautiously: what is ‘new’ are not necessarily their worldviews and perceptions but the ways in which they recombine ‘old’ narratives and sources of meaning in light of the ‘new’ conditions presented by Bulgaria’s membership in the EU.

Similarly, on the basis of both the already existing literature and the empirically gathered data, the thesis has argued that more critical engagement with the term ‘Eastern European’ is required. The problematic nature of the term stems from its essentialist characteristics, evident in its application. More specifically, ‘Eastern European’ is a categorisation with metonymical properties used to refer to all migrants, whose countries of origin are east of Germany and Austria. This results in a reductionist approach that ignores cultural, linguistic, socio-economic and political differences that have shaped not only the history of the region but also people’s migratory journeys. Moreover, ‘Eastern European’ migration has arguably acquired negative connotations in the British context (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy, 2012; Lentin, 2013). It has thus become evident in *chapter 5* that young, highly skilled Bulgarians not only recognise the stereotypical nature encapsulated in the term ‘Eastern European’ but also that they aim to avoid it by actively disassociating themselves from it. The latter is achieved through employing a segregationist strategy, which aims to counterbalance the negative connotations of the term by accentuating cultural differences between various migrant groups.

Furthermore, this thesis has enriched the understanding of post-accession European mobility empirically in at least three respects. Firstly, the findings have questioned the conceptualisation of East-West migratory flows as ‘liquid migration’ (Engbersen, Snel and de Boom 2010; Engbersen and Snel 2013). Indeed, the case of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK has pointed out that nation-states continue to play an important role in the regulation of migratory flows. In Bulgaria, this has become evident through the strong prominence of structural factors such as the imperfections of the educational system and the lack of opportunities for professional realisation, which have prompted young people to migrate. In Britain, however, the imposed seven-year period of labour restrictions as well as the polarisation of immigration debate in light of Brexit have further accentuated expectations of discrimination. Additionally, while friends and family continue to be an important stimulant for migration, return to the homeland although not completely dismissed emerges only as a distant option. Thus, although ‘liquid migration’ as a conceptual framework offers valuable insights, the latter do not necessarily apply to all cases of intra-European mobility. Ultimately, the case of Bulgarian students and young professionals suggests that post-accession European migration is much more multi-layered than ‘liquidity’ can account for.

Secondly, the data has supported the view that migratory experiences, regardless of the privilege implicated in them, involve a period of liminality (van Gennep [1909] 1960; Turner 1967; 1969; 1985; Szokolczai 2009; Thomassen 2014). The latter serves as a useful analytical lens that allows an in-depth understanding of the (cognitive and emotional) in-between state of migrants, which results from territorial passages from one country to another. As Thomassen has argued, liminality ‘[...] ties together the micro and the macro, operating from the ‘middle’ (2014, p. 7). This understanding enables the analysis of the ways in which macro conditions impact upon individual perceptions, thus affecting one’s view of their migratory experiences. As Thomassen rightly contends, ‘[t]o experience something, etymologically, means to *go through* something. Any discussion of

liminality must therefore engage with experience' (italics in original, 2014, p. 5). Equally, I argue that any discussion of migratory experiences must therefore engage with the nature and implications of the state of 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1967). As the case of young, highly skilled Bulgarians in the UK has demonstrated, the participants' in-between-ness is produced by the tension between migratory projects and migration realities. This is particularly evident in their initial encounters with the host societies in light of dealing with the cultural aspects of change. It also comes to the fore in the later stages when the participants find themselves exposed to double-sided othering. Liminality, however, helps to uncover the process of challenging of previous sources of meaning and the corresponding process of finding new ones (van Gennep [1909] 1960). Indeed, for young Bulgarians their liminal state is both deconstructive and constructive. While 'normality' for them is questioned once they arrive in Britain, so are their migratory projects. Therefore, they employ several counterbalancing strategies in their everyday, which help them to restore 'normality' (Goffman, 1972). Essentially, as demonstrated in the thesis, they also draw on a combination of avenues for identification, which are intricately related to future plans and narratives of success. Thus, the 'new Enlighteners', 'Cosmopolitans' and 'Muppies' lines of identification demonstrate the constructive implications of young Bulgarians' liminality by unveiling the complex, multi-dimensional sources of meaning that they draw on. Ultimately, considering the liminal stage of Bulgarian students' and young professionals' migratory experiences enables a more accurate and in-depth analysis of the nature, characteristics and implications of their mobility practices.

Finally, albeit modest, the research has also offered some important empirical conclusions about the nature and characteristics of intra-European mobility, which enrich the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. More specifically, the thesis has demonstrated that mobility is perceived as an ordinary life choice, which gives one the opportunity to pursue personal and professional realisation. Indeed, the 'children of the transition' have grown up in a context, which

has transformed work and study abroad from a privilege to a commonplace pathway to personal enrichment. Yet, mobility's multidimensionality signifies that its ordinariness should not be taken for granted as it nonetheless includes extraordinary experiences, which lead to both liberating and entrapping consequences. Thus, in spite of the small scale of the research, it nonetheless offers useful insights that enrich the conceptual and empirical knowledge about Bulgarian migratory flows and European mobility.

Future research agendas

Research, as the previous section has demonstrated, enriches our knowledge about the social world. Yet, academic studies are only an abstraction of social reality and as such, they also map the way forward for further exploration. The project on young, highly skilled Bulgarians and their experiences of living, working and studying in the UK is no exception for two main reasons. Firstly, the account of the migratory experiences of the 'children of the transition' is part and parcel of what Favell (2008b) has termed 'the new face of East-West migration'. The outlook of intra-European mobility, however, is ever-changing due to its susceptibility to the influence of dynamic socio-economic and political conditions that underpin immigration policies and people's motivations to move. Secondly, while the qualitative design of this project offers an in-depth analysis, it simultaneously limits its scope, both in terms of the wider phenomenon of Bulgarian migration to the UK and in terms of the variety of aspects that underpin migrants' experiences. Thus, although the research has made some valuable contributions to migration and mobility studies, it also raises some questions in relation to future developments as well as issues that were beyond the scope of the current study. Both aspects require further investigation.

With regards to future developments, it has been argued throughout this thesis that overarching supra-national and national processes are of a key

significance as they contextualise migratory flows, influencing their direction, nature and characteristics. Consequently, Britain's decision to leave the EU will undoubtedly affect not only potential (European) migratory flows but also the experiences of those already residing in the country. It is quite likely that European migration will become (an even more) controversial topic once the cabinet of Prime Minister May triggers Article 50 of the 2007 Lisbon Treaty. The latter formally launches the process of withdrawal from the EU, which entails a two-year transitory period of negotiations (see Treaty of Lisbon, art. 50, para. 3). This will be a period of liminality and the associated with it uncertainty for prospective migrants and for those, who are already in Britain. Therefore, future research should explore not only the legal but also the social implications of this process upon the experiences of European migrants in Britain. Furthermore, it is quite likely that Brexit will affect the nature and characteristics of intra-European mobility as well. In the case of Bulgarians, it would be thus interesting to explore the ways in which future British immigration policy will affect the participants' migratory projects, particularly in terms of professional realisation. Another question that needs to be investigated is whether Brexit will trigger a re-orientation of the direction of prospective Bulgarian migratory flows.

With regards to the Bulgarian context, the effect of the country's membership in the EU has been discussed at length both in terms of its emancipative (freedom of movement) and restrictive (labour restrictions) aspects. It will be thus interesting to investigate the impact of Bulgaria's continued membership in the EU upon future migratory outflows. As demonstrated in *chapter 4*, the migratory projects of the participants were shaped by a combination of macro, meso and micro factors. An interesting question to consider then would be whether Bulgaria's EU membership would strengthen the influence of personal motivations over structural push and pull reasons. Additionally, future migration research should explore whether the discursive division of 'stayers vs leavers' (the negative connotations of

Terminal 1 and 2 of Sofia airport) would retain its resonance in relation to decisions to migrate.

Furthermore, there are several issues, which this study has alluded to but which were beyond its scope and thus require further engagement. For example, this thesis has argued that ‘Eastern European’ migrant is a metonymical representation of a large group of people, which essentialises them, neglecting the importance of various cultural and historical markers that play a key role in migratory experiences. Therefore, more critical engagement is required with ‘Eastern European’ migration, which could be achieved through a comparative study of A2 and A8 nationals that focuses not only on the similarities but also on the differences between them. Such a study can explore whether other migrant groups (apart from the participants in this project) have negative perceptions of the umbrella term ‘Eastern European’ and whether they aim to disassociate themselves from such categorisations by drawing on more particularistic identities. Additionally, this thesis has argued that the case-study of Bulgarian students and young professionals belongs to the newest post-accession migratory flows. Although the contextual differences were considered at length, it was beyond the scope of the current project to do the same in terms of people’s migratory projects. This can most accurately be achieved through a future comparative study, which could elaborate further on the differences between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Bulgarian migration.

Finally, there several issues that were noted throughout the thesis, which due to the limited scope of the study, were not thoroughly explored. More specifically, these concern the impact of gender upon migratory projects as well as class upon migration realities. The fact that the study coincided with the 2013 anti-governmental protests in Bulgaria also highlighted the importance of Bulgarian migrants’ political activism. The essence and implications of the latter, however, need to be explored further. In recognition of the limited focus of this project both in terms of time frame and sample, there are two similar projects that could be carried out. On the one hand, a follow-up study with the same participants can be

conducted in ten years' time. This would allow the analysis of the long-term effects of their liminal experiences in Britain as well as an evaluation of the 'success' of their migratory projects and how they have changed over time. On the other hand, another study could be carried out, which explores the same research questions but within a much broader sample that includes various types of tertiary students (not only full-time students but also part-time ones, Erasmus exchange students and those who come on student brigades through SAWS) and workers (senior professionals and low-skilled migrants). In light of these suggestions for future research agendas, it has become evident that a single research project can never fully unravel the specificities of a social phenomenon – in many ways, it is only the beginning.

Final (reflexive) remarks

This thesis began with a short story about one of the many Bulgarian students whom I met accidentally at an airport. Our conversation highlighted many of the themes, which have shaped young, highly skilled Bulgarians' lives in the in-between-ness of the contested 'here' and 'there'. In that sense, the story at the beginning of this final chapter is about a rather deliberate meeting with some of the many once-students. My conversation with Maya and my parents thus demonstrates that their lives are shaped by the even more contested 'now' and 'then'. Although migration may be influenced by different processes, events and conditions, migratory experiences nonetheless remain deeply ingrained in people's life histories. Moreover, while migration may be a dynamic, ongoing process, so is making sense of one's experiences of living, working and studying abroad.

Additionally, both stories have clearly illustrated the roots of my personal interest in researching young, highly skilled Bulgarian migration to the UK. Inevitably, my own experiences in Britain have impacted upon the research design, my analytical approach and the interpretation of the data. Consequently, I do agree

with Mason (2002) and Barbour (2008) that knowledge in qualitative research is always co-produced and so are the spaces, where it takes place (Falzon, 2009). Although I have aimed to present the participants' views throughout this thesis, I am wary that the seven chapters ultimately convey *my interpretation* of their lives. Similarly, as I much as I have tried to avoid Bulgarian students' and young professionals' objectification (O'Connell Davidson, 2008) in the thesis by employing vignettes, I do recognise that albeit more detailed, their stories illustrate specific arguments I have made in the chapters. Therefore, to claim that the data in this work is an objective representation of young, highly skilled Bulgarian's realities, would be inaccurate, if not insincere. Indeed, this thesis has been a quest for the understanding of the migratory experiences of my participants as much as it has been of my own. However, as Haraway has argued: '[s]ubjectivity is multidimensional so, therefore, is vision' (1988, p. 586). Recognising the partiality of knowledge as well as its situated nature, therefore, are steps forward to producing credible research accounts of human experience, which place strong emphasis on participants' agency. The research process may indeed inevitably involve objectification and appropriation (O'Connell Davidson, 2008, p. 65), yet at the same time, it opens up space for debate. Therefore, the value of knowledge lies not in the 'static' accumulation of insights but in unlocking a process of discovering. Thus, while the opening story has recognised that my parents have given me my first lesson in migration, the concluding story demonstrates that I continue learning.

Migration and the 'children of the transition' thus offers an insight into the experiences of a group of young people, who, prompted by a variety of conditions, factors and goals have decided to pursue educational and professional realisation in Britain. Although in many respects they are the pioneers of Bulgarian post-accession mobility, their migratory projects are far-less denationalised than those of Favell's (2008a) 'Eurostars'. Right on the contrary, the pre-, during and post-migration experiences of the 37 participants are infused with both nationalist and cosmopolitan tenets that operate simultaneously. Captured at a particular moment

in time, their reflections upon their mobile decisions and practices highlight the fleeting nature of experiences of migration and yet, their far-reaching, persistent consequences. Indeed, as I am writing the final lines of this chapter, many of the participants' stories have already changed: some have returned to Bulgaria; others are elsewhere in Europe or in the world; some have bought houses, settled down and acquired British citizenship while others are not yet ready to have 'grounded lives' (Bygnes and Erdal, 2016). Thus, the stories of these people also reveal that transitions continue to be part of their lives. These transitions continue to be dynamic and multi-dimensional, personal, collective and ever-changing. The migratory experiences of the 37 young people discussed here are thus only one chapter in their life histories.

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF BULGARIAN TERMS AND EXPRESSIONS

B

Baba Marta – a traditional holiday celebrated in Bulgaria on the 1st of March to mark the beginning of spring. The name of the holiday means ‘Granny March’, which refers to a mythical folklore temperamental figure responsible for the changing weather conditions.

Banitsa – traditional pastry that is made with filo dough, eggs and white cow’s milk cheese. The eggs and cheese mixture is layered between the sheets of filo dough and baked in the oven. Banitsa is traditionally served for breakfast, however, it can be eaten as a snack at any time.

Boza – a popular beverage that is made from fermented barley. It is thick and beige in colour and has a sweet, slightly acidic taste. Usually consumed with banitsa.

C

Chalga – Bulgarian music genre, often referred to as ‘pop-folk’ or popular folklore. It is pop music with oriental, folklore motives. It became very popular in Bulgaria in the 1990s. It has attracted a lot of criticism for promoting loose morals through its sexually explicit lyrics.

chubritsa – summer savoury (lat. *satureja hortensis*). It is one of the “staple” Bulgarian herbs, added almost to every traditional dish.

Corecom – a chain of hard-currency stores in Communist Bulgaria, which

sold Western goods (such as Toblerone, Kinder Surprise eggs, which became known as Corecom eggs, VCRs, jeans etc.) at much lower prices. The stores accepted US dollars, which were scarce and except for foreigners and diplomats, it was mostly those part of the political elite that had the opportunity to shop in these stores.

D

Dalavera – sneaky deal, jiggery-pokery.

G

Gurbet – a Turkish word, which means ‘absence from home’, living far from the homeland. It has slightly negative connotations associated with impossibility or difficulty of return. Synonymous with ‘exile’, mostly associated with labour migration in Bulgaria.

K

Kashkaval – traditional Bulgarian yellow cheese, which is most often made of cow milk (Vitosha variant) but there are other types such as the Balkan variant made of sheep milk. The Preslav kashkaval is made of both cow and sheep milk.

Kebapche – Bulgarian grilled minced meat (pork and veal) with herbs (chubritsa, salt, pepper and cumin) in the shape of a sausage.

L

Liytenitsa – a traditional Bulgarian spread made of ground roasted peppers and pureed tomatoes, which are then boiled together. Although readily available in shops, many families prefer to make their own liytenitsa over an open fire and to conserve it in jars for the winter period. In some regions in Bulgaria, other roasted and ground vegetables are added such as aubergine or carrot.

Lukanka – a semi-dried traditional salami in a flattened cylindrical shape. It contains minced pork and veal, flavoured with salt, black pepper and cumin stuffed into a cow's intestine and dried for a few months. Usually thinly sliced and served as an appetizer.

M

Maina – a popular expression that has a similar meaning to 'mate'. It is commonly and almost exclusively used in Plovdiv. It also refers to somebody who was born in Plovdiv.

martenitsa (pl. *martenitsi*) – interwoven red-and-white strings that look like bracelets or tassels, exchanged among friends and family to celebrate Baba Marta (see above). They are meant to be worn for luck and good health until the first signs of spring appear: a blooming tree, spring flowers, a flying stork. Then people take the martenitsi off and tie them to a fruit tree for good harvest.

P

Parlenka – traditional flat bread, baked in a stone oven.

Party-grill – an electric mini-grill, which is tin-made rectangular box (without a front wall). The electric wires are on top and the bottom has a tin rack with a detachable handle, which is used for grilling. It is approximately the size of a waffle maker and it is used primarily for making grilled sandwiches such as printsesi or a buttered slice of bread with a mixture of eggs and minced meat, flavoured with salt, black pepper and savoury.

R

Rakia – strong alcoholic drink, like brandy but usually homemade. It is quite popular on the Balkan peninsula. Although each country uses different type of fruits and herbs to brew it, it usually involves the same process of fermentation. In Bulgaria, it is usually made out of plums, grapes or pears.

S

Sirene – white brined cheese, similar to feta cheese. Made from cow's, sheep's or goat's milk and usually served in salads, as a topping or as an appetizer.

T

Tarator – traditional Bulgarian summer soup (a soup version of tzatziki), made out of yoghurt, water, grated cucumber, garlic, salt and pepper.

APPENDIX 2: DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS

| No | Name | Sex | Age | Occupation | Length of stay in the UK | Level of education | Location in the UK | Interview location |
|----|-----------|-----|-----|------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | Emanuela | F | 25 | YP | 2 years | Masters | Midlands | Researcher's home |
| 2 | Paula | F | 25 | YP | 4 years | Bachelors | London | Flight to BG |
| 3 | Kalina | F | 25 | YP | 6 years | Masters | Southern England/ London | Participant's home |
| 4 | Svetla | F | 29 | S | 13 years | PhD | Midlands | Participant's home |
| 5 | Denitsa | F | 24 | S | 5 years | Bachelors | Midlands | University café |
| 6 | Vasil | M | 23 | YP | 4 years | Bachelors | Midlands | Café |
| 7 | Ivan | M | 24 | YP | 5 years | Masters | London | Café |
| 8 | Maria | F | 20 | S | 2 years | Bachelors | Midlands | Skype |
| 9 | Hristian | M | 25 | S | 4 months | Masters | Scotland | Skype |
| 10 | Leda | F | 21 | S | 2.5 years | Bachelors | Scotland | Pub |
| 11 | Kamelia | F | 20 | S | 2 years | Bachelors | Scotland | Participant's home |
| 12 | Ignat | M | 20 | S | 1.5 years | Bachelors | Scotland | University café |
| 13 | Samuil | M | 19 | S | 5 months | Bachelors | Scotland | Participant's student hall |
| 14 | Yaroslava | F | 23 | S | 4 years | Bachelors | Scotland | University library |
| 15 | Marko | M | 22 | S | 3 years | Bachelors | Scotland | University library |
| 16 | Roza | F | 21 | S | 2 years | Bachelors | Scotland | Participant's home |
| 17 | Karolina | F | 21 | S | 2 years | Bachelors | Scotland | Participant's home |
| 18 | Delyan | M | 21 | S | 2 years | Bachelors | Scotland | Skype |
| 19 | Simeon | M | 24 | S | 4 years | PhD | | Skype |
| 20 | Nayden | M | 20 | S | 2 years | Bachelors | Northern England | Participant's home |
| 21 | Kaloyan | M | 28 | S | 4 years | PhD | Northern England | University Student Union |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|---------|---|----|----|-----------|-----------|------------------|-------------------------|
| 22 | Sava | M | 25 | YP | 6 years | Bachelors | Northern England | Pub |
| 23 | Stamen | M | 24 | S | 4 years | PhD | Scotland | Skype |
| 24 | Dessie | F | 23 | YP | 3.5 years | Bachelors | London | Participant's home |
| 25 | Boris | M | 23 | YP | 3.5 years | Bachelors | London | Participant's workplace |
| 26 | Sabina | F | 22 | S | 4 years | Bachelors | Midlands | University café |
| 27 | Adrian | M | 20 | S | 1.5 years | Bachelors | Midlands | University café |
| 28 | Kiril | M | 19 | S | 5 months | Bachelors | Midlands | University café |
| 29 | Natalia | F | 24 | YP | 4 years | Bachelors | London | Café |
| 30 | Bilyana | F | 29 | YP | 7 years | Masters | Midlands | Café |
| 31 | Nikolay | M | 27 | YP | 6 months | Bachelors | Midlands | Café |
| 32 | Teodora | F | 32 | YP | 7 years | Masters | London | Park |
| 33 | Boyan | M | 23 | YP | 4 years | Bachelors | Southern England | Café |
| 34 | Ralitsa | F | 23 | YP | 4 years | Bachelors | London | Café |
| 35 | Maggie | F | 29 | YP | 7 years | Masters | Wales | Restaurant |
| 36 | Nelly | F | 23 | S | 4 years | Bachelors | Northern England | Café |
| 37 | Viktor | M | 25 | YP | 11 years | Bachelors | Wales | Skype |

- ❖ **NB1:** Status - 'S' stands for 'student', whereas 'YP' stands for young professional
- ❖ **NB2:** Age and length of stay in the UK- the data provided is at the time of the interview

APPENDIX 3: THESIS STRUCTURE ACCORDING TO KEY EMERGENT THEMES

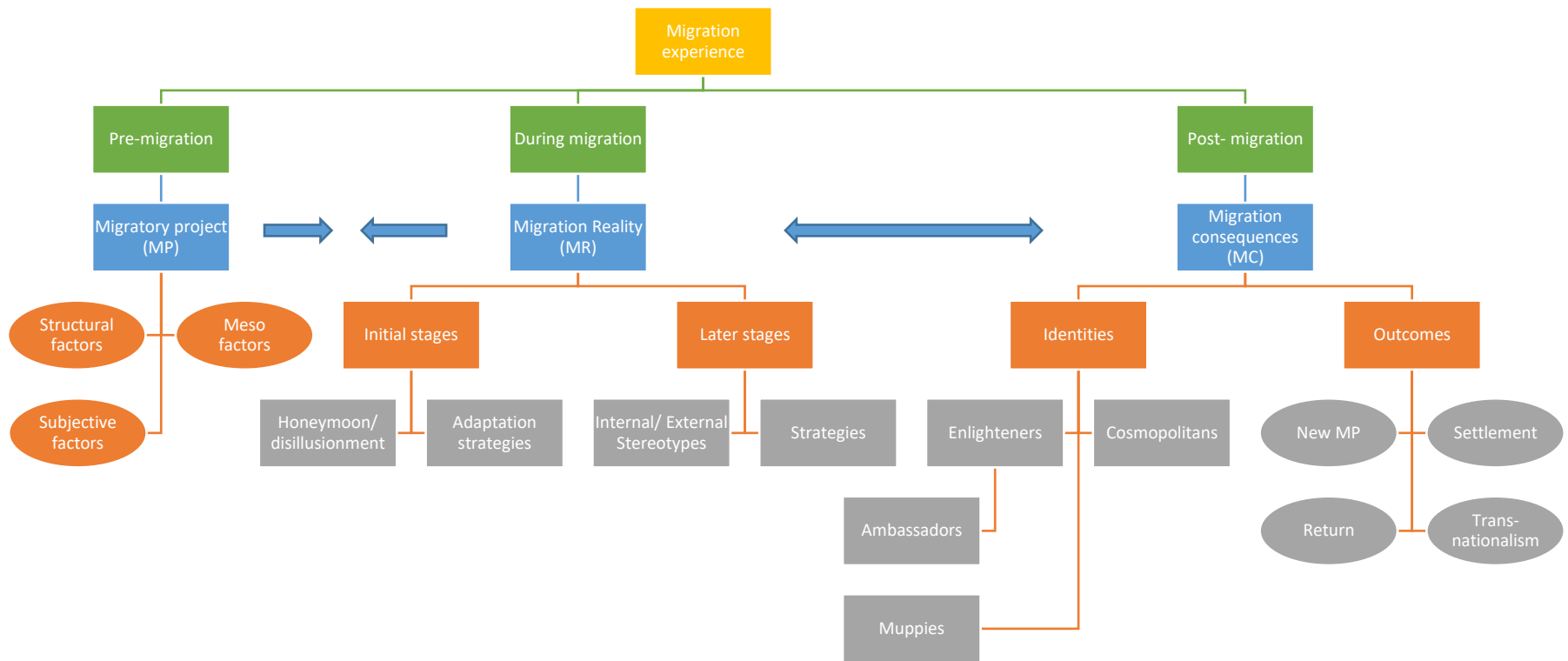


Figure 2. Relational map of key themes. Source: own elaboration

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