

A mosaic portrait of a woman with a yellow headscarf and a necklace, set against a background of colorful, abstract mosaic patterns. The woman's face is the central focus, rendered in shades of pink, purple, and blue. She has a serene expression and is looking slightly to the right. The mosaic is composed of small, irregular tiles in various colors, creating a textured, pixelated effect.

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC CONFERENCE

**(IN)VISIBLE
RUSSIAN
(ANTI)WAR
MIGRATION.**

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REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE

13-15 March, 2024, Warsaw

On 13-15 March, 2024, an international academic conference ***(In)Visible Russian (Anti)War Migration*** took place in Warsaw with the aim, on the one hand, to summarise the results of the intervention scientific research project [*Crossing borders, building walls. Towards ethnography of Russian war mobilisation*](#) (NAWA No. BPN/GIN/2022/1/00082/DEC/1), on the other hand, to open a broader discussion on Russian migration during the Russian-Ukrainian war. The conference was organised by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology and the Institute of Slavic Studies from the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology and the Faculty of Sociology from the University of Warsaw, in partnership with Bursa Uludağ University, Ilia State University, University of Eastern Finland, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Armenian Academy of Sciences, Tallinn University, and Nazarbayev University. The conference was co-funded by the state budget, granted by the Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Poland, under the programme "Excellent Science II - Support for scientific conferences".

Over three days, participants from more than fifteen countries discussed the significance and multi-layered structure of the mass flows of citizens of the Russian Federation after the Russia full-scale invasion on Ukraine on 22 February, 2022. The working questions of the conference were whether this was a visible or invisible migration, as well as to what extent it was anti-war migration and what this anti-war stance would mean. In addition, special significance was given to a theoretical and methodological framework within which this multifocal phenomenon could be enclosed, as it goes far beyond the boundaries of migration studies.

In her [welcome speech, Zuzanna Bogumił](#) – project leader and chair of the organising committee - drew attention to the discrepancy in human needs and expectations that we are experiencing today, and whose scale we are only just learning about because of the recent geopolitical battering. Russian aggression has had a direct impact on the fate of millions of people who have had to leave their homes, whether due to the imminent threat to their lives, as in Ukraine, or because of increasing political repression, as in Belarus, or dissent at the pursuit of an expansive foreign war policy or fear of being forcibly taken to the frontline, as in Russia. When dealing with the topic of the Russian war and its consequences, especially from the perspective of Central Europe, and therefore also of

Poland, it is impossible to avoid individual entanglements and experiences, which will always intersect with major events in the region. At the conference, all three perspectives - macro, meso and micro - were intertwined in a factual manner, with research from the level of big data being successfully juxtaposed with intimate autoethnography, solid scientific research with an activist perspective, the perspective of the post-Russian countries with a Western view, more distanced by the lack of direct entanglement, which gave us a broader picture of the phenomenon in question.

The conference opened with a plenary session entitled [Researching current migration movements and humanitarian crisis in Europe](#). Referring to the Eastern European situation, scholars researching various migration movements to Europe discussed the particular circumstances of being on the move and the experiences of people forced to migrate. In the case of Ukrainians, Anna Wylegała from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences spoke primarily about the refugee situation, and Ukrainian migrants forced out by the war. She also talked about the ethical dilemmas of using intelligence archives, which are testimony to sensitive experiences at the beginning of the war. The next speaker, Monika Frėjutė-Rakauskienė from the Institute of Sociology at the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, focused on Belarusian migration provoked by what is known as the 2020 Revolution, when Belarusians protested *en masse* against Alexander Lukashenko's regime after the falsification of the presidential election. Massive repression against protesters provoked their huge migration, mainly to Poland and Lithuania, where they are trying to re-shape the foundations of their civil society. Justyna Straczuk from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences talked about the situation of people on the move, mostly Syrians and Afghans, who attempt to cross the Polish-Belarusian border. The researcher argued in favour of the necessity of combining research work with activist work, especially in view of the political problem of 'unwanted', 'difficult', 'uncomfortable' migration and the inadequacy of language use, which dehumanises the human experience of the journey, e.g. through the use of word-stigmas such as 'wave' or 'migration crisis'. Katarzyna Roman-Rawska from the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences summarised a year of research on Russian migration after the announcement of mobilisation carried out within the project "Crossing Borders Building Walls". She pointed out that, depending on the context, it was visible and even sometimes perceived by host societies as a threat (Georgia, Armenia), in other cases visible but safe (Serbia), invisible or hidden (Poland, Finland,

Estonia) and translucent and ambivalent (Kazakhstan, Turkey, Mongolia). The researcher also posited a thesis on the complexity of anti-war attitudes of migrants from Russia, where, for example, being against the war did not always mean a pro-Ukrainian or anti-regime stance and more than once amounted to a statement about the inconveniences of life in exile.

The second plenary session, [*Between hospitality and hostility. Local reactions on Russian war migrants*](#), detailed the question of the (in)visibility of Russian migration in individual host countries. It showed the perspective of the societies and political regimes that faced the large migration flows of RF citizens to their countries. In the Polish case, Tomasz Rawski from the Faculty of Sociology Warsaw University spoke about the fact that Russian citizens could only legalise their stay on the basis of humanitarian visas, which were reluctantly issued to RF citizens, and which could be obtained primarily by proving their previous activist, political activities. He also said that Russian citizens felt relatively safe in the country, not least because they could melt into the growing Russian-speaking world, also created by Belarusians and some Ukrainians on Polish territory. Rawski also addressed the problem of the closure of the old diasporas to new Russians who arrived in Poland after February 2022. The same researcher also zoomed in on the perspective of Serbia. On the one hand, this regime gave Russians great facilities to legalise their stay, on the other hand, it did not particularly interfere with the practices of avoiding them, such as the already organised business practice of the visa-run (Serbs offered such 'tours' consisting of crossing the border with a shuttle there and back), or the widespread sale of the taxpayer's identification number for running one-person businesses, which offered the possibility of quickly obtaining permanent residence. Russian civil society appeared to be the most consolidated and visible in Serbia in its anti-war activities, while it was already facing the first manifestations of observation and repression by the Serbian authorities, which remain, to some extent, under Russian influence. Ketevan Gurchiani from the Ilia State University in Georgia presented the perspective of Georgia, which, despite anti-Russian public sentiment, has not closed its borders to Russian citizens and has remained under a one-year visa-free regime. The anthropologist spoke a lot about the perspective of the city of Tbilisi, which has reacted to the Russians with fear of a second colonisation, expressed by Tbilisians in the urban space with strident graffiti on the walls with inscriptions like "Russians go home". She also spoke about the economic aspect of migration, the rise in property prices, rental of premises and prices for food, which was a

side effect of the arrival of so many Russians, and which has significantly affected lives of the indigent Georgian society. The narrative of Turkey's situation centred around the 'irrelevance' of the issue of Russian migration to the country. According to researcher Tamilla Şahin from the Bursa Uludağ University, the reception of Russian refugees has not significantly affected the Turkish economy or society. Reactions from both the Turkish state and grassroots public sentiment have remained seemingly unmoved by the issue. Nonetheless, information from Russian respondents themselves spoke of a temporary tightening of the procedures towards Russian migration, by reducing the number of permanent residence permits issued. The case of Kazakhstan presented by Caress Schenk from the Nazarbayev University was that, first and foremost, there is an understandable degree of uncertainty for Russian migrants, and the status of being non-citizens influences their way of life. One of the most noticeable fears of all respondents is the change of the situation in Russian-Kazakh relations. Such a huge Russian diaspora makes attention from Russia and attempts to control the situation inevitable. Byambabaatar Ichinkhorloo from the Mongolian State University introduced the very important aspect of the multi-ethnicity of post-mobilisation migration in Mongolia. Mostly Buryats, Kalmyks or Yakuts fled to this country, and far fewer ethnic Russians or Russians of Slavic ethnicity. He also added that the Russian war in Ukraine and its mobilisation have affected Mongolian politics and brought fear to the public that Mongolia could be the next victim of Russian aggression in economic and political terms. How Mongolia would deal with the possibility of Russia and China agreeing to block Mongolia was also questioned. As Mongolia is a country sandwiched between these two nuclear powers, would there be any assistance from distant 'third neighbours' of Mongolia in the event of a conflict? Such questions led the Mongolian government to be neutral on the Russian war in Ukraine. However, for humanitarian purposes, the Mongolian government lent its assistance to the Ukrainian people and sent symbolic assistance to the Ukrainian government to welcome in Mongolia Russians who fled from mobilisation. Finally, Raili Nugin from Tallinn University presented an Estonian perspective, and Jussie Laine from the University of Eastern Finland a Finnish one. Estonia was confronted with the recurring problem of a growing Russian minority, which is perceived by the country's authorities as a 'threat' of excessive Russian interference in the country's internal affairs, evoking the situation of Ukraine on this occasion. According to the researcher, Estonian public opinion has reacted coolly to Russian migrants from movements after February 2022. Jussie Laine, on the other hand,

spoke of the change of the Finnish official attitude towards Russian migrants, from mostly liberal to suspicious and unwilling. A few days after the announcement of the partial mobilisation in Russia, Finland closed its border with Russia, also adopting more difficult rules for applying for political asylum.

The conference was divided into seven sessions in which scholars from different fields presented their first reflections from research on many aspects of Russian migration. In the ***Macro Perspectives*** panel, the audience was able to see a broad perspective, incorporating statistical data, panel survey data and large archives of interviews with Russian migrants. Thanks to this view, it was possible already to see the first macro trends of Russian migration. Based on the quantitative data of three waves of the OutRush panel survey, Karolina Nugumanova from Scuola Normale Superiore drew attention to the fact that it is women who predominate among Russian activists involved in building civil society in exile. The researcher also talked about changes in the attitudes of Russians themselves towards the political situation, their lack of belief in possible political changes in Russia itself, but also a visible growth in positive views on their personal life situation. In turn, Olga Isupova from the Nazarbayev University talked about adaptation and the economic and entrepreneurial strategies of individuals who have left Russia and try to run businesses in host countries. Her research shows that they are more united by their professional sub-identities than by a sense of common Russian identity. Isupova also argued convincingly that Russians are very slow to become independent of Russian employers or to pay taxes there, although migrants express a desire to break away from the motherland altogether. Finally, Alexey Oshchepkov from the Free University of Berlin presented results of a meta-analysis of online search requests of emigration-related words in Google and Yandex, and roaming data from a major mobile-phone operator to show what this Big Data tell us about the Russian mobilisation migration.

The ***Local Responses*** session focused on the issue of the reception of Russians by local communities and the minority perspective. While speaking about her research in Kazakhstan, Amina Gani from the Nazarbayev University drew attention to the reluctance of Kazakh citizens to newly arriving Russian citizens, which increased the need to revitalise a purely Kazakh identity in opposition to the post-Soviet identity shared by Russians and Kazakhs. The researcher spoke of the recent anti-Russian protests dubbed Bloody January 2022 as a turning point in the Kazakh identity story. In turn, the story of

anti-war activism of Siberian peoples by Zbigniew Szmyt from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poland focused on the issues of disenchanting the media image of the over-representation of indigenous peoples of Siberia in the Russian army during the ongoing war. He drew attention to cross-ethnic activities that grouped together several nations that positioned themselves regionally in opposition to ethnic Russians. Another topic of the panel was the little-recognised migration of Russians to South America in the European context. Vladimir Rouvinski from the Icesi University in Colombia spoke about the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the mass migration of citizens from the Russian Federation to the United States on the ongoing migration crisis on the Mexican-American border.

Session three, ***Integration and Adaptation***, was devoted to issues concerning the well-being of Russian migrants in the host countries and how they coped in their new places of belonging. The discussions revealed that the range of emotions experienced by migrants and their strategies for establishing a sense of belonging are highly varied. From feelings in the Armenian case that they are treated as 'their own' and therefore feel 'at home', discussed in a paper by Lusine Tanajyan from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography NAS RA, to feelings of being lost in a new reality, discussed by Oliver Ferrando from the Lyon Catholic University in his research among Russian migrants to Kazakhstan. The spectrum of attitudes towards new places of residence was also linked to confronting the problem of the devaluation of the Russian passport and citizenship, which until recently was unthinkable in the post-Soviet region. Ferrando stressed in his presentation that the recent dream of many Central Asian migrants to hold a Russian passport has turned into a need for Russians themselves to hold another passport, often with the prospect of having to renounce their Russian citizenship. The last speaker in this panel, Florence Fröhlig from the Södertörn University, presented the assumptions of her new project which obtained financial support just before the conference, and which aims to investigate the construction and re-construction of identity by Russian and Belarusian migrants who moved to Lithuania and Poland after the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The panel's debates were complemented by a screening of Alexander Terechov's film *Monument*, as an example of a work that thematises the author's own experience of migration and the associated difficulties of integration, adaptation, identity and longing for loved ones who had to stay in Russia. The film was dedicated to the relationship with his daughter, with whom the director had no live contact for over a year.

The topics of panel three moved seamlessly into reflections on *Identity and Belonging* in session four. Kristina Jonutyté from Vilnius University continued the theme of the identity of Russian citizens who were not ethnic Russians. She took up the topic of the migration of Buryats to Mongolia, who were confronted with the need to produce a new hybrid identity based on their minority ethnicity, Russian citizenship and new Mongolian belonging. A similar theme was tackled by Klaudia Kosicińska of the JENA-Cauc project, who looked at Russian citizens but not ethnic Russians in Georgia. Here, the anthropologist highlighted, among other things, the limits of the stereotype of Georgian hospitality and the friction between Russian-speaking and Georgian activists. The second researcher in the Georgian context, Mariam Darchiashvili from Ilia State University in Georgia, spoke about the two sides of the existing situation, where Georgians perceive the influx of Russians into Georgia as another form of occupation, leading to a reluctance to engage with Russians. In response, Russians adopt a strategy of parallel, less visible, and (in)visible lives, spaces, and practices, opting for a cosmopolitan lifestyle that avoids revealing any strong ties to a specific culture and instead emphasises belonging to a more global identity. The panel also featured the Estonian case, with Raili Nugin from Tallinn University, focusing on the sense of belonging of new, anti-regime migrants vis-à-vis the local diaspora of Russian-speaking Estonian citizens.

Panel five dealt with *Milieus on Exile* and focused primarily on the question of how Russians reorganise their creative and activist communities in exile. Katarzyna Syska from the Jagiellonian University looked at theatrical circles, focusing in particular on the theatre and Lubimovka festival, which have been forced to exit outside of institutional structures. Bella Ostromooukhova from Sorbonne Université looked at individual activist actions of migrants in France who expressed their anti-war attitudes using performative means of expression, which proved to be a broader pattern of making dissent visible among migrants in Europe deprived of political opportunities in Russia. Tigran Amiryan of the Cultural & Social Narratives Laboratory in Armenia, on the other hand, pointed out that despite the open-door policy and the one-year visa-free regime for Russians, his country has failed to ensure an adequate cultural policy aimed at developing a cultural dialogue between such different societies, which inevitably leads to tensions and misunderstandings within Armenian civil societies.

The sixth *Implications* panel gave voice to activists and researchers politically engaged in the current situation. Mongolian activist Zolzaya Nyamdorj of the Freedom Wing NGO talked about how to implement tools for the protection of Mongolian ethnicities, such as the Buryat, Kalmyk and Tuvan, whose representatives sought refuge in Mongolia before their compulsory conscription for the war in Ukraine. Veronika Vichová from the Office of the Public Defender of Rights in the Czech Republic focused on presenting the situation of Russians who were living in Ukraine until February 2022 and who decided to flee there because of the full-scale war waged by their state. The panel concluded with a presentation on the recruitment of Russian citizens who, as volunteers, decided to fight against Russia on the side of Ukraine. Sociologist Denis Sokolov presented the results of surveys and interviews conducted with Russian volunteers fighting on the side of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which were conducted before and during their stay at the front. He pointed out, among other things, that the categories of self-identification of volunteers before participation in war, such as political preferences, lose their meaning after the first experience of participation in warfare, where new value systems and alliances are subsequently formed in the face of fighting a common enemy.

The seventh panel, entitled *Uncertainty*, was conceived as a prelude to the debate summarising the entire event. Here, the perspectives of autoethnography of a migrant presented by independent researcher Vadim Syrovoy, who settled in Serbia, contrasted with the reflections of scholars searching for a new theoretical and methodological framework for the phenomenon of Russian migration. Yakov Lurie from the George Washington University discussed how Russian migrants' unstable and uncertain economic and social condition influences their status and identity, as well as their positioning, within fellow communities. In turn, Caress Schenk from the Nazarbayev University pointed out that so far existing migration theories do not offer good tools to study such an unexpected phenomenon as the mass migration of people fleeing military mobilisation. Factors such as uncertainty must therefore be taken into account in the next step, which is the search for an appropriate framework for the detailed study of particular aspects of migration.

During the three days of the conference, a number of positions clashed, such as Western-centric with Russian-centric, post-imperial or post-Soviet with ethnocentric, state-centred with transnational, or finally engaged with distanced, which revealed the urgent

need to go beyond postcolonial theory in relation to the post-Soviet territory and the territory bordering the former USSR, and to develop a new regional theory that understands other forms of dependency than those in the post-Western-centric world, while at the same time not establishing them as extremely oppositional to gazes from elsewhere. The future task for researchers of the issue of Russian migration and related phenomena will therefore be to construct a theory that does not close borders and build walls, but also protects its own interest located somewhere in between everything.

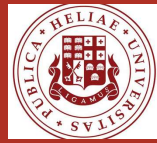
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