



# The Politics of Identity and Notions of Home: How Serbian Londoners Perceived Brexit

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper looks at the attitudes of Serbian Londoners to Brexit and at the motives behind their voting decisions at the 2016 EU referendum in Britain. It aims to understand why these people voted the way they did and what this means for their identities and their sense of belonging. Based on two-year-long ethnographic research and in-depth interviews with forty Serbian Londoners, this paper finds that Serbian Londoners were divided on Brexit and that economic status and income were not the most important factors for understanding voting decisions, but rather social and cultural capital. Their differences in attitudes to Brexit and degrees of openness to others can further be explained by Bonikowski's (2017) argument that there may be a common repertoire of dispositions towards the nation that transcends national boundaries, which explains similarities in nationalisms among different countries. The paper also considers whether Spivak's (1987) concept of strategic essentialism can be applied to understanding how Serbian Londoners perceived Brexit. Finally, it sheds light on the ambivalent role of living in London – both a cosmopolitan and a British city – and what impact this may have on these participants' sense of belonging.

**KEYWORDS:** Brexit, identity, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, migration, Serbian Londoners, social class



## Brexit, Migration and National Identity

Studies of public opinion in Britain in the years prior to the EU referendum in June 2016, and in the wake of the vote, show that immigration was a key issue in deciding the June 2016 referendum result (Clarke, Goodwin & Whiteley, 2017). Even in the months after the vote, it was scoring high on the list of main worries for the UK adult population. In August 2016, the UK was reported to be the most concerned with immigration among the countries surveyed by Ipsos MORI (2016).

There has also been an evident hierarchy in terms of how people from different European countries are perceived. A study by Fox et al. (2015) shows that Hungarians and Romanians in Bristol face discrimination based on their Eastern European origin. This is also supported by YouGov (March 2017) data that shows Romanians are very negatively viewed in Britain, unlike, for instance, North Americans and Germans. What seems to have dominated this discussion on immigration in the wake of the Brexit vote in the UK is arguably social class (see Vico, 2017). Fox et al. (2015) find that Hungarians and Romanians in Bristol often present themselves as belonging to a higher social class as a strategy for coping with discrimination. In line with this, YouGov's data from March 2017 shows there is a sharp contrast between how the British public perceives high-skilled and low-skilled immigrants. While the majority look favourably at immigration of high-skilled professionals, they think the immigration of low-skilled workers should be limited.

The European Social Survey (ESS) of attitudes in seventeen countries towards immigration based on race/ethnicity and wealth demonstrates that the British are less accepting of migrants from poorer countries (47% against) than of migrants of different ethnic origin (41% against), and in this respect Britain is less willing to accept less well-off immigrants than most other surveyed countries (the average is 41% against) (Clarke, Goodwin & Whiteley, 2017, p. 223). If we consider all these different insights, we conclude that the "problem" is deemed to be the migration of the less well-off, and, based on this criterion, immigrants from particular European countries. Announced and implemented policies provide further evidence in this regard. The £35,000 earnings threshold for non-EU immigrants in order to settle in the UK was introduced in April 2016 (Ferguson, 2016), while, in an interview on *HARDtalk* in October 2016, Conservative MP Iain Duncan Smith said that only academics, software engineers and comparable others would be welcome, and

the earning threshold for non-EU nationals gaining a work permit also rose from £30,000 to £50,000 in January 2018 (Wright, 2018).

The narrow victory of Brexiteers, as well as several protests held in London and initiatives and petitions against Brexit, shed light on how the nation was divided and polarized on this issue. Many studies of Brexit seem to suggest that social class – particularly income and education – and age category were important determinants of EU referendum voting patterns (Antonucci, Horvath, Kutiyski & Krouwel, 2017; Clarke, Goodwin & Whiteley, 2017; Hobolt, 2016; Ford & Goodwin, 2017). Sara Hobolt finds in her research that there was “a clear educational divide in the Brexit vote. ...Only a quarter of people with a postgraduate degree voted to leave, whereas over two-thirds of those with no qualifications did so” (2016, p. 1269). Ford and Goodwin also state that Brexit voters were mainly working-class, with few educational qualifications (2017, p. 26). Other studies, however, dismiss this argument and claim that people who belong to the so-called squeezed middle class, whose economic status has been in decline, were the more likely Leave voters (Antonucci, Horvath, Kutiyski & Krouwel, 2017). Antonucci et al. challenge the portrayal of the Brexit voter as “left behind” or as an “angry globalisation loser” belonging to the working class, and find that a significant proportion of Leave voters were middle-class people with an intermediate level of education, but a declining financial situation (2017, pp. 212–213). These discussions of the driving force behind Brexit have put more emphasis on the economic status of voters than on their cultural positioning.

The people of one nation may not share the same dispositions towards the nation. What being British means to UKIP members and supporters may not be the same as for the Liberal Democrats, for example (cf. Mihelj, 2011, p. 18). National identity is never completely uncontested and has no uniform meaning (e.g. see Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1987; Morley, 1992). “Rather than assuming that nations possess core values shared by most citizens ... the nation’s meaning [is] ... constructed and fragmented” (Bonikowski, 2017, p.148); thus, there may be more similarities between people from different countries than within one nation. Bart Bonikowski states that it would be wrong to assume that national cultures are coherent; rather, all national identities are heterogeneous and contested to some extent and in some contexts (2017, p. 149). By looking closely at nationalist sentiments in France and Germany, Bonikowski concludes that:

the similarities in nationalism across the two counties suggest that there may exist a common repertoire of dispositions towards the nation that transcends national boundaries... a French citizen is likely to imagine the nation in a manner more consistent with a similarly disposed German citizen than with another French compatriot... (2017, p. 164)

The question of Serbian national identity has always been deeply divisive (see Gordy, 2013). After the Second World War, people in this region were divided into Chetniks and Partisans, the former in support of the monarchy and identifying themselves as Serbs, and the latter backing the real-socialist regime in Yugoslavia and describing themselves as Yugoslavs. Since the fall of Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s and a resurgence of nationalism in the region, this division into communists and Chetniks (royalists) has become much more ambiguous and has largely been replaced by the division into “First Serbia” and “Other Serbia” (see Gordy, 2013; Russell-Omaljev, 2016;), whereby “First Serbia” or nationalist Serbia refers to supporters of Milosević’s regime in the 1990s, while “Other Serbia” refers to the opponents of that regime and represented ‘civic’ Serbia (and often upheld a cosmopolitan outlook).

The social class has also played a prominent role in migration studies and was used as one of the key factors to understanding how migrants go about their lives in host societies. For instance, Val Colic-Peisker (2008) explains differences between Croatians in Australia and America mainly on the basis of their class and income. On these grounds, Colic-Peisker (2008) distinguishes between ‘ethnic transnationalism’ and ‘cosmopolitan transnationalism’, whereby the former is common among working class Croatian diaspora whose lives revolve around ethnicity, and the latter among the middle class diaspora who is oriented to their careers. Recognising this importance of social class in migration studies and the studies of ‘Brexit’, this paper draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of three types of capital – economic, cultural and social, to discuss the class backgrounds of Serbian Londoners and to analyse what role, if any, class has played in their voting choice in the 2016 EU referendum. Bourdieu defines economic capital in relation to a person’s wealth, whereas cultural capital refers to a range of symbolic markers such as taste preferences, education and dialects, and social capital comprises a person’s connections and social ties (1986, p. 47). Bourdieu draws

on the cultural capital thesis to explain differences among students from different class backgrounds. His aim is to show that academic success and failure was not merely based on natural dispositions, even when students from different backgrounds have equal access to a good education. Important for this cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, is that “it always remains marked by its earlier acquisition...” (1986, p. 49).

Starting from there, in this paper, I discuss the motives of Serbian Londoners for emigrating to and settling in London. For instance, Ivana Bajic-Hajdukovic notes that the migration of Serbs to London before 1990 was political, whereas after 1990 it was economic (2008, pp. 30, 46). An economic migrant is an individual who moves from one country to another in order to improve their economic and professional prospects. Hence, the term can effectively be applied to a banker as much as to a low-skilled construction worker. However, the term economic migrant is most often used to refer to the latter – a low-skilled or unskilled person from a developing or underdeveloped country (Semmelroggen, 2015). Meanwhile, lifestyle migration mainly refers to the relatively affluent and privileged, who usually move from urban areas to rural or coastline areas (Benson & Osbaldison, 2014) or to less busy and “human-sized” cities such as Berlin (Griffiths & Maile, 2014) in search of a better way of life (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Benson & O’Reilly, 2015). Some other migration studies challenge any neat class categorisation of migrants, pointing out that some highly qualified people take low-skilled occupations in the new host country (Madianou & Miller, 2012; Parutis, 2011), while others dismiss migration categories altogether as “categorical fetishism” (Crawley & Skleparisb, 2018).

Given that a desire to put a cap on immigration was one of the key motives behind the Leave vote and that, Eastern European migrants in Britain have particularly been viewed unfavourably, as already explained, , I consider Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s (1987) concept of strategic essentialism and Iris Marion Young’s (1990) arguments on the ideal of city life in order to analyse and understand both attitudes of Serbian Londoners to Brexit, and whether and in what ways Brexit may have impacted their sense of belonging. Strategic essentialism refers to a temporal strategy undertaken by marginalised and discriminated groups aimed at mobilising and reinforcing their group identity and group solidarity in order to claim political recognition and subvert politics of marginalisation and discrimination (Spivak, 1987; Naficy, 1999; Georgiou, 2012). In her later work, however, Spivak (1989)

refutes this strategy of essentialising identity, because it follows the norms of the system that it aims to challenge (see Danius & Jonsson, 1993, p. 43).

On the other hand, Young argues that city life affirms group difference and hence offers a credible alternative perspective beyond the dichotomy between liberal individualism and communitarianism (Young, 2011 [1990], p. 226–227). Young criticises liberal individualism for putting too much emphasis on individuals and neutral standards, thereby disguising the fact that these are the standards of the privileged and that there is an inherent bias towards norms; it disregards persisting underlying inequalities. However, she also contests “the ideal of community” and finds it oppressive insofar as it requires all of its members to conform to the norm, seeking to reduce similarities to sameness. Therefore, both liberal individualism and communitarianism in different ways dismiss social differences. Conversely, city life, as “the being together of strangers” (Young, 2011, p. 237), implies “openness to unassimilated otherness” (p. 227). Indeed, city life allows people to be exposed to different perspectives, to public spaces that enable encounters and interactions with people who hold different opinions or belong to different ethnic or cultural groups, and to different aesthetics (p. 240).

London’s quirky, cosmopolitan and multinational character has arguably attracted more professionals among the group studied and has encouraged a cosmopolitan outlook. On the other hand, as Benedict Anderson (1992) notes, the juxtaposition of people holding different passports living cheek by jowl can also create a climate that nurtures long-distance nationalism. Hence, this paper will also shed light on the role of London in shaping the identities of these participants, and their attitudes to migration and more generally to otherness.

It is important to take all these different perspectives into account in order to understand the bigger picture of how Serbian Londoners perceived the Brexit vote and what it means for their identities and notions of home. As explained, a turbulent recent history in the region of the former Yugoslavia, including the legacy of communism, nationalist outbreaks and the civil war, as well as the constant decomposition of borders in the Western Balkans, democratic transition, and the current endeavours of these countries to join the EU, have all meant that the question of identity is deeply contentious for this group. Drawing on Bronikowski (2017), however, I argue that there are differences among the people of any nation with respect to their repertoires of dispositions towards the nation and that these

transcend national boundaries. This means that we may well find more similarities between similarly disposed Serbian and English voters in the 2016 EU referendum than among Serbian Londoners themselves. Given that social class seems to have played a crucial role in the referendum result, it is also important to first discuss class backgrounds and motives for migration among this group, in order to understand whether the existing debates on Brexit apply to them. Thus, this paper aims to contribute to a wider discussion of Brexit, as well as to migration studies, by supplementing these with novel insights, and thereby contribute to a more holistic picture of Brexit and London's migrant population. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that London predominantly voted Remain. Thus, I consider below the role of London in shaping the identities of this group and their sense of belonging post-Brexit. Before proceeding with the analysis of findings, I first explain how this research was carried out.

## Methodology

This two-year-long ethnographic research project, including online ethnography and semi-structured in-depth interviews, complemented by media maps, was conducted with 40 participants in the period between July 2015 and July 2017. An equal number of men and women were recruited, all of whom had lived in London for at least two years prior to summer 2015 when this research commenced. The sample was also evenly divided into three waves of migration which were identified in a pilot study carried out prior to this formal research. These three waves are 1945–1990; 1990–2003; and 2003–2013. Other factors such as age, profession, class, gender and generation were also taken into account when analysing the data. The participants were recruited through the snowball technique on the basis of their self-identification as Serbs and included both first- and second-generation of migrants. Importantly, these participants came from different regions and republics of the former Yugoslavia: Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, and Macedonia. There were also participants who were born in the UK and some who had lived in different places around the world before they settled in London. I borrow Susan Ossman's (2013) term "serial migrants" to refer to the group of people who had changed several places before settling in London, although my application of the term differs in other

characteristics from Ossman's (2013) original meanings, as will be explained in the next section.

Given that we live our lives both online and offline, with these constituting a seamless continuum in people's lives, we bring our "offline" lives into "online" spaces, and vice versa (see Murthy, 2008, p. 849; Miller & Slater, 2000), I have on a daily basis observed and participated in both offline and online activities and interactions with my research participants on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. In interviews, the participants were asked to show me some of their interactions on instant messaging platforms such as Viber and WhatsApp, but some of the most revealing insights emerged spontaneously from ethnographic fieldwork – while "hanging out" with people in their "natural" settings. The participants selected what interactions they wanted to show me, and they would show me only the latest threads of messages, so my ability as a researcher to thoroughly examine this type of personal interaction was to some degree limited.

Thematic and discourse analyses were applied to interpret the data. I identified six patterns (central themes) in practices and interviews, implicit and explicit (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 10), which were both *data-led* (the coding was led by the topics that emerged from the data) and *theory-led* (the coding was guided by the theoretical framework). These were: London as British, London as cosmopolitan, cultural change, mobility, traditionalists, 'glocalisation' (Robertson, 1995). I also created typologies in order to describe people belonging to each of the three identified waves and the subgroups within these waves (see Berg, 2006).

## Findings and Analysis

### Serbian Londoners

There are about 70,000 Serbs living in Greater London today, according to some estimates (Serbian Council of Great Britain), but there are no official statistics. Most of the Serbs in the UK live in London (some other widely populated places would be Leicester, Birmingham, Derby and Bradford), especially more recent arrivals. As this two-year long ethnographic research study shows, there is no one single Serbian community in London. Their different personal and family histories and backgrounds make this group remarkably diverse and complex. There are scien-



tists, journalists, librarians, academics, hairdressers, surveyors, architects, artists, doctors, economists, bankers, civil servants, students, unemployed, secondary school teachers, security guards, waiters, marketing professionals, and so forth. As already mentioned, they come from most of the republics of the former Yugoslavia, while some participants were born in the UK, and others were born or had lived in other places before they settled in London, such as Latin America, the US, other European countries, Africa and Asia.

Nor is there one geographically bounded space in London that they occupy. More recent arrivals, since roughly 2003, have increasingly become very scattered around London. Although most earlier arrivals – before 1990 or during the 1990s – predominantly settled in areas of West London such as Ladbroke Grove, Notting Hill, Shepherds Bush, Ealing and Acton, today Serbs live in many different areas, such as Battersea, Clapham Common, Putney, Richmond, Highgate, Blackheath, Honor Oak, Shoreditch, Crystal Palace and South Kensington.

Other migration studies have also contested the notion of diaspora as a homogenous group and have documented the diversity among migrants of the same origin (see Ong & Cabanes, 2011; Sreberny, 2000). Annabelle Sreberny shows there is no one single Iranian ‘community’ in London; Iranians living in London are both geographically spread and internally diverse (2000, p. 185). Sreberny finds that Iranians of different political affiliations and class backgrounds tend to congregate around different areas in London, whereby they constitute multiple local Iranian communities, often dependent on a specific area of London, such as Harrow Iranian Community Centre (2000, p.186). In the case of Serbian Londoners, I have not found the location in London to be the main organising principle of Serbian ‘communities’ in London. In fact, many of my participants, particularly more recent arrivals, do not belong to any Serbian organisation or community centre in London.

Most media and migration studies have emphasised the important role of generational identities of migrants, as well as their gender and age in the ways they identify (Georgiou, 2006; Gillespie, 1995). While different class, professional, age, gender, regional and generational identities of Serbian Londoners are all relevant to understanding their attitudes, repertoires of dispositions towards the nation, and lifestyles, their motives for migration, triggered by some major events in their countries of origin, have the most significant explanatory potential. Communism (i.e. real-socialism) in the former Yugoslavia, then the civil war and the break-up

of the country, followed by international sanctions and NATO bombing, then the democratic transition after 2000, the opening of borders, and the start of negotiations on EU membership, were all major events that triggered different motives for migration. Based on this, I have identified three dominant waves of migration of Serbs to London. The first wave includes people who arrived in Britain after the Second World War and up to 1990, the second wave refers to those who came in the 1990s and shortly after, while the third wave is comprised of those who came to London after 2003.

Each of these waves is also internally diverse. As Figure 1 shows, within the first wave I have identified three groups of Serbian Londoners: royalists or Chetniks are people who were considered enemies of the state and were political refugees or asylum seekers shortly after the end of WWII; 'young adventure seekers', usually people in their twenties who travelled around Europe in the 1970s and 1980s when a Yugoslav passport granted them free entrance to most countries of both the West and the East, and who ended up in London.

The second wave was underpinned by the collapse of Yugoslavia and the civil war. Hence, unsurprisingly, this period saw the greatest influx of people from this region to London, and hence it was also the most heterogeneous wave. Apart from the refugees from the war-engulfed zones, this wave also consisted of young people from urban areas, mainly Belgrade, some of whom were men who tried to avoid conscription and/or the devastating aftermath of the war, while some were women who were taking a gap year before starting university and came to London to work as au pairs shortly before the outbreak of the war and then remained and pursued their education in Britain. Then there are people who arrived in the late 1990s and up to 2002, dissatisfied with the social, political and economic conditions set against the backdrop of the war and the regime of Slobodan Milosevic. They would usually describe themselves as "atypical Serbs" because they do not belong to any Serbian organisations or 'communities' in London, but also often in order to distance themselves from the negative connotations of nationalistic sentiments and the civil war.

The third wave of migration is smaller in scope compared to the previous two waves, and quite distinctive. These are mainly people younger than 40 who came in the period after 2000 to study or to work for international companies, except for the few who moved after marrying a UK citizen.

Most of the UK-born (second generation) in the sample were from the first wave, with the exception of three respondents who were born in the UK but whose families returned soon afterwards to Serbia, so they grew up there and came back to Britain after university. On the basis of when they came to London, one of these was analysed as a first-wave Serbian Londoner, the other two as second-wave and third-wave.

The typology of Serbian migration to London developed here differs somewhat from the insights of Ivana Bajic-Hajdukovic's (2008) and Lidija Mavra's studies of Serbian Londoners. Bajic-Hajdukovic (2008) distinguishes three waves as 1945–1970, 1970–1990 and 1990–2000, whereas Mavra (2010) considers the first wave as taking place between 1945 and the late 1960s. However, my analysis shows that people who arrived in the 1970s, even though they were not political migrants seeking asylum, today have much more in common with earlier arrivals than with, for instance, people who arrived after 2000. The participants who arrived in the early 2000 show much more in common with people who arrived in the late 1990s, because their motives for migration were similar. Meanwhile, the more recent arrivals, i.e. those who have come since roughly 2003 are different in their characteristics and behaviour to the other two identified groups.

As this ethnographic research shows, the old division into royalists and communists has maintained some relevance for the first two waves of the Serbian di-

<p>First wave (1945–1990)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Royalists (Chetniks)</li> <li>• Young adventure seekers – the 1970s and 1980s</li> <li>• UK-born</li> </ul>
<p>Second wave (1991–2002)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugees and asylum seekers</li> <li>• Urban youth – early and mid 1990s</li> <li>• Self-proclaimed “atypical Serbs” – the late 1990s and early 2000</li> </ul>
<p>Third wave (2003–2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students and young professionals</li> <li>• Married to a UK citizen</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Typology of waves of migration of Serbs to London

aspora in London insofar as there are some people within these two waves who still express strong support for the monarchy, while others often express Yugo-nostalgia. However, there is not necessarily a sharp line between them, whereas the difference between the supporters of the so-called “First” and “Other” Serbias is much more prominent.

## Categories of migrants and social class revised

Recent studies have demonstrated that the old class system constituted of three classes – working class, middle class and upper class – is no longer tenable in Britain and has been replaced by a much more complex schema (see Savage et al., 2015). The findings of my study also contribute to this altered picture of social class in twenty-first century Britain. Although most participants across the three waves belong to a broadly defined middle class, their economic capital do not always correspond to their cultural or social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and vice versa. Ong and Cabanes (2011) also reveal this discrepancy between different types of capitals among elite Filipino migrants in London. The authors find that there are differences in economic and symbolic capital among postgraduate Filipino students in London, whereby the self-funded ‘economic elite’ is often looked down upon by the Chevening scholars, those with more symbolic capital (Ong & Cabanes, 2011, p.213).

This study further shows that traditional categories of migration, such as economic and lifestyle migrants, are not entirely applicable to the case of Serbian Londoners, because of the mix of interrelated motives that underpinned their migration project, as other migration studies also document (see Crawleya & Skleparisb, 2018; Madianou & Miller, 2012). It then concludes that economic capital was not the key indicator of voting intentions among Serbian Londoners in the EU referendum and is not the most important factor for understanding how well these migrants integrate into British society.

Other studies of migration have also revealed that some migrants are over-qualified for the jobs they undertake in Britain (see Madianou & Miller, 2012; Parutis, 2011), so there is a disparity between their cultural and economic capital (see Bourdieu, 1986). On the other hand, there are examples in my sample of people without a higher education degree who managed to start their own busi-

nesses and by the time of this research had gained considerable economic capital. Boundaries are very often blurred and permeable, which often contests some of these established categories.

Bajic-Hajdukovic (2008) posits that the migration of Serbs to London before 1990 (first wave) was political, whereas after 1990 (second wave) it was economic. On the other hand, most of my participants who arrived in the late 1970s and the 1980s were mainly people in their twenties, most of whom did not have higher education degrees, who were travelling around Europe and ended up in London. On the basis of their social class they could be considered economic migrants; however, their migration project was not necessarily driven by improving their economic prospects and finding a job, but rather by having an adventure.

Likewise, it can be argued that the migration after 2003 (third wave) could be broadly defined as lifestyle migration. However, in contrast to dominant trends in lifestyle migration studies that point to urban migrants moving to rural or coastline areas (see Benson & Osbaldison, 2014), or to less busy and more “human-sized” cities such as Berlin (Griffiths & Maile, 2014), this research shows an opposite dynamic. These people chose London as a big cosmopolitan city with many career challenges. As Mila’s (33 years old, third wave) account – talking about her holiday in California – illustrates:

It was nice, but I thought I would like California more. I had a plan to move there, but I was disappointed. ... I liked San Francisco, but it was small compared to London. I guess I like London more as I am getting older. I feel at home here. Whenever I go abroad, I get bored. ... I came to study... I loved people. Everybody was talking to me in the streets. It happened once that when I was entering the tube, someone gave me his ticket because he did not need it. ... It’s like Belgrade; it is full with people at 3 am. Before, I had been going to Germany every summer, and it had always been dead there at 10 pm, and no one ever talked to you, or cared about you... So, I completely fell in love with [this] place.

Similarly, Jonathan (36 years old, third wave) was born in the UK, but shortly afterwards his family moved back to Belgrade. Although they moved around Europe and lived for a short time in other places, he spent most of his childhood and adolescence in Belgrade. He studied in Italy and then, in 2006, decided to settle in London:

It seemed like the best option in terms of what I wanted to do professionally. It seemed like the only place where I could find what I wanted to do. I started in a small research consultancy and then moved to big media companies.

These insights show us that professional reasons, such as career advancement, which are often associated with economic migrants (Semmelroggen, 2015), are for these migrants tightly linked to a desire to explore new places and a vibrant cultural scene, which are integral parts of the “self-development” and “pursuit of a better way of life”, characterise lifestyle migration (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009).

For second-wave Serbian migrants, especially those described as “atypical Serbs” and “urban youth”, socio-cultural reasons for migration such as cultural milieu in their country of origin, are intrinsically intertwined with political context. For example, Liam (47 years old, second wave) came to London in 2001 because he could not adjust to the mentality and prevailing public opinion in Serbia, which was set against a backdrop of a decade of Milosevic’s regime, international sanctions, NATO bombing and cultural decay. In line with this, Crawleya and Skleparisb also find in their study of Syrian refugees and migrants that their economic reasons for migration cannot be understood without reference to the devastating conflict and political turmoil in their country of origin (2018, pp. 53–54).

Moreover, there are examples of people from the first and second waves who came from smaller towns in the former Yugoslavia mainly for economic reasons, but who today – now they have moved up the social ladder – put more emphasis on “quality of life” in London. Thus, we need to account for these dynamics and fluidity within migration groups, rather than perceiving class and migration categories as set in stone. As Crawleya and Skleparisb emphasise, “dominant categories fail to capture adequately the complex relationship between political, social and economic drivers of migration or their shifting significance for individuals over time and space” (2018, p. 48). Once this has been made clear, we can get a better understanding of the role of social class in the Brexit vote and overall identities of this group.

Throughout this research, and particularly when respondents were asked about their voting intentions in the UK referendum on the EU and/or their opinions on Brexit, it became apparent that their openness to others did not primarily depend on their economic capital, but rather on their system of values, which

belonged much more to the domain of cultural and social capital. While the education of this group is an important factor, it is less important when taken alone than when coupled with their social capital, i.e., social ties and connections. Based on insights from fieldwork and interviews with their social circles, such as family, friends and co-workers, including analysis of online interactions and social ties, it is clear that their family histories play a major role. For example, those who backed a more civic or “Other” Serbia were passionate Remainers, whereas those who identified more with a nationalistic or “First” Serbia were mainly committed Leavers. Another important factor in this respect was whether they worked for international companies or ran their own businesses, with the former case usually related to more open viewpoints. For instance, Norman is a second-wave, middle-class 40-year-old man who came to the UK first in the early 1990s as a teenager. He did A levels in England and then moved to London to pursue BA and MA degrees. He now runs his own business. Ethnographic research on his online and offline activities shows his quite salient Serbian identity. He also voted for Brexit, because, in his words, he did not like the influence of other cultures on the British tradition.

### The politics of identity and notions of home: The ambivalent role of London as both a British and a cosmopolitan city

Another important factor to take into account in order to understand the degrees of openness and identities among these research participants is whether they have lived in other places before moving to London. This is especially the case for the third wave and to some extent for the second. There is a noticeable trend among these people to identify more with cities than with countries and, at the same time, to consider themselves cosmopolitan. I borrow Robertson’s (1995) term ‘glocalisation’ to describe this phenomenon when local and global identities are much more prominent than national (see Beck, 2002). Hence, my application of Robertson’s term is somewhat different from his original meaning that refers to the incorporation of locality within globalisation, i.e. that global and local processes are happening simultaneously, and more similar to David Conradson and Dierdre McKay’s (2007) term ‘translocal subjectivities’. ‘Translocal subjectivities’ implies that most transnational migrants have primary sense of belonging to specific places within the nation and to particular people in these locations, such

as their, rather than nation-states (Conradson & McKay, 2007, pp. 168–169). In a similar vein, Ong and Cabanes find that some Filipino migrants have attachments to their hometowns and kinship networks rather than a loyalty to the nation-state (2011, p.202). Georgiou, similarly, finds that most of her participants of Arab origin in London identify both with a transnational Arab community and as Londoners (Georgiou, 2013, p.102).

Saskia Sassen (2005) also highlights how cities are the spaces where global and local directly interact, often bypassing the national. For example, Helen (50 years old, second wave), who was a strong Remain voter, was born in Belgrade and then lived in several other countries in Europe, Africa and the US. She moved to London in 1996.

I identify as European. Any sort of nationalist insularity, whether it is Serbian or British, is something I really have trouble accepting and identifying with. There are several identities that are important to me and actually what is perhaps more important to me than countries are cities. There are certain cities that I care about, because I lived there or because I have strong links to them. So, one of those cities is Belgrade. I feel much more strongly related to Belgrade than I do to Serbia because I travelled very little within Serbia itself and when I do go to Serbia it is always to Belgrade. And, most of the people I know in Belgrade are people I can relate to, who are not insular, who are not xenophobic, who are not racist, who are open to the world and world's culture, who are democratic in outlook and who believe in rights of all people regardless of their race, gender, etc. I have a strong link to Munich and to Geneva. I don't like Switzerland. I don't feel Swiss, even though I have a Swiss passport. And I feel very strongly about London.

Mavra (2013) also observes that some Serbs in London identify as European and do so in lieu of identifying as Yugoslavs, given that the country no longer exists. However, for my participants, as Elena's account demonstrates, European identity signifies a sense of 'glocalisation' – urban (local) and cosmopolitan identity. Likewise, Mia (40 years old, first wave) was born in the UK, but her family moved back to Belgrade when she was two. They returned to England in 1989, when she was 12, just before political turmoil and the fall of Yugoslavia. She came to London to pursue an MSc degree and has stayed ever since. She also voted Remain.



I think the EU is a good thing. I like the idea of a free movement of labour. ... I am not concerned about the UK as much as for Europe. I am afraid that the UK has not set an example that other countries might follow. The EU is actually the only salvation for Serbia, if the EU falls apart, Serbia might go backwards a hundred years.

[I am] a Londoner, definitely. I have struggled for a long time about identity, and then I realised I don't have to be a Serbian, or British, or anything. I do not need to put myself in a box. I can just be me, and that is why London is basically home because everything goes in London, you don't have to be of a particular nationality, or dress in a particular way, or behave in a particular way.

The juxtaposition of these two quotes from Mia not only provides us with an insight into the motives of people in this group who voted Remain but also shows the contextuality of identities (see Hall, 1990 ) and why London is home for most of these participants regardless of Brexit. While she identifies as a Londoner and a cosmopolitan in terms of how Brexit may affect her life prospects in Britain, she does consider what impact this may have on Serbia and thus also expresses a national identity in this more global context.

London is not only home for those – mainly third wave and some from the second wave – who mainly voted Remain, it is also home for those who voted Leave, mainly from the first wave and some within the second wave. Although all of the participants show a fascination with the city, unlike the Remain voters, who primarily perceive London as cosmopolitan, the Leave voters appreciate London as British. As an account from one participant illustrates: “London can be everything and anything, whatever you make of it” (Alexandra, 40 years old, second wave), evoking the words of Peter Ackroyd in his biography of London that “one could become anybody [in London]” (2000, p. 775). “It is in the nature of the city to encompass everything... It is illimitable. It is infinite London”, writes Ackroyd (2000, pp. 778–779). Given these limitless opportunities and ways in which people can be in the city and live in the city, in this study London has the ambivalent role. The findings seem to reaffirm Young's arguments about “the ideal of city life” as “the being together of strangers” (2011, p. 237) that accommodates all different ways of life and being, and what Kevin Robins implies about London as “a cognitive model” or “a tool for thought”: a certain way of thinking about differ-

ence (2001, p.87). This explains London's ambivalent role and, importantly, why London is home.

In the summer of 2017, I was invited for dinner at Ivan's home in South-West London. Ivan (50 years old) came to London in the early 1980s when he was in his twenties. Today he runs his own company and enjoys a middle-class lifestyle. A Serbian satellite channel was on television in the background. At the dinner table, he was recalling his adventures from around Europe and suddenly exclaimed: "The problem you have when you live in London is that every other place becomes boring". However, if this comment is observed in context alongside other insights from my fieldwork, one is able to see the bigger picture and come to understand that London is primarily seen and appreciated as "British", as his following comment may reveal: "Whenever I go to Serbia, I eat eggs with bacon and beans, which most people there don't understand". This was, then, followed by further comments about his views of Brexit:

I voted for Britain to leave the EU. This mess has to stop. This city has changed so much in the last two decades. Now you have ghettos all around London.

Likewise, Norman (40 years old, second wave), already introduced in this paper, is also fond of London, but it is the "British aspect" of the city that he appreciates, as the following quote exposes:

When I arrived here there was almost no place where you could find espresso; there were only pubs. Now you have too many cultures here that have changed London and Britain. I like British tradition, but it's been fading away. There are too many influences of other cultures. That is why I voted for Brexit.

When I met Kate (29 years old, second wave) a few weeks before the referendum, she told me she was into two minds about how to vote, but her mother and sister, who also lived in Britain, were decided and would be voting to leave the EU. She then added she was more likely to vote to leave too. On the same occasion, she was telling me that her family enjoyed British tradition and customs very much. The whole family moved to the UK in the mid-1990s, when she was young. Some of her social media posts, such as of those about attending the Henley Regatta



Figure 2: Kate, Henley Regatta. Source: Instagram

(see Figure 2)<sup>1</sup>, also reveal an admiration for British culture as well as her insider position as someone who can experience a high-class British lifestyle.

These insights may suggest that an opposite dynamic to Spivak's (1987) strategic essentialism is at play here. Even though there is some evidence that migrants, and in particular (South-)Eastern European migrants, have been subjected to discriminated since the early 2000s (Fox et al., 2015) and arguably especially so, in the wake of the Brexit vote, this did not lead to an expression among this group of strategic essentialism as conceptualised by Spivak.

Rather than perceiving some of these participants' views of Brexit as an opposite dynamic to Spivak's strategic essentialism, I would argue that their attitudes may, in fact, be just another (negative) face of this strategy, similar to as Spivak (1989) was later concerned about. Older migrants can start viewing newer migrants unfavourably, partly as a strategy for reinforcing their own membership in a host society and reasserting their status as insiders – a strategy for coping with difference. In this way, they strive to reaffirm their position as “British”.

As a South-Eastern European myself, since early December 2015, I have experienced discrimination three times on the basis of my origins. Just a few days after the EU referendum vote, I was at the Wimbledon 2016 tennis tournament, waiting for a match to start. There was a couple in their early sixties from continental Montenegro sitting next to me. We started talking, and they mentioned that they had immigrated to Britain in the 1980s. In spite of having migration histories themselves, and in spite of having similar origins, they did not look at me favourably when I said I was not in London only for a short visit. In fact, they then followed up with a comment that I might have to leave the country.

The first time I had a similar experience was in December 2015, before the referendum vote. At a business Christmas party, a gentleman in his seventies approached me and asked if I was a Pole or a Romanian because of my accent.

He then continued by complaining that the London underground had got very crowded because of all the Eastern European migrants who were pouring into the city, concluding with the remark that I should go back “because my country needs me”. In her study of Serbian Londoners, Mavra notes that some of her participants reported they were discriminated against because they were grouped into the generic ‘Eastern European’ category, and because of their Slavic accent some thought they were Polish while they were talking on the phone in the street (2013, p.29).

Shortly after the referendum, in mid-July 2016, I was travelling to coastal Montenegro from Gatwick airport and while queuing for check-in was having a pleasant chat with an English couple in their sixties about travels, until they realised that I *actually* lived in London and would be coming *back* after a short summer vacation in Montenegro. Then they suddenly changed their tone, all the playfulness and light-heartedness disappeared in the blink of an eye, and we started to talk about Brexit.

In their study of Hungarian and Romanian diasporas in Bristol, Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy (2015) find that these people often deny that they have experienced discrimination and instead embrace the meritocratic values of a higher social class than their own and point towards their higher racial status as White Europeans, in order to “...reposition themselves more favourably in Britain’s racialised status hierarchies” (2015, p. 730). However, they conclude that while these coping mechanisms may help navigate through this hierarchical system of the privileged, they are more likely to legitimise than to challenge discrimination in the long term. This is why the strategy is normatively and effectively different from strategic essentialism as conceptualised by Spivak (1987) or from the politics of difference, as set out by Young (2011 [1990]), which essentially aim to reassert difference as a positive cultural identity, because everyone is just as specific as everyone else (Young, 2011 [1991]).

However, this theory alone cannot account for the Remain and Leave votes, because people have different dispositions towards the nation. No identity is uncontested (see Bonikowski, 2017; Hall, 1990 ; Gilroy, 1987; Morley, 1992), and Serbs have always been divided in terms of their national identity. As explained, before 1990 they were divided into supporters and opponents of Tito’s regime (Chetniks and Yugoslavs), in the 1990s into supporters and opponents of Milosevic’s regime

(First and Other Serbias). Hence, these findings reaffirm Bonikowski's argument that people within one nation may be differently disposed towards the nation.

## Conclusion

This paper has made three main arguments. First, it has shown that migrants, like nations, are not a coherent whole. There is no one single Serbian diaspora in London. Due to their different personal backgrounds, complex motives for migration and disparities between different forms of capital and social class, any attempt to categorise these people as economic or lifestyle migrants would be an oversimplified and inaccurate representation of the richness of their experiences and identities. In relation to the question of Brexit, differences among Serbian Londoners mean they were divided on Brexit.

Second, this paper has argued that the Leave vote was much more motivated by cultural changes than by economic positioning. In contrast to the data available about the general UK adult population and subsequent studies on Brexit, income was not the main determinant of voting intentions. In most cases, a more significant factor was a system of values that was more closely related to cultural and social capital. Education as one form of cultural capital also cannot explain the voting choice on its own but has to be analysed in relation to social capital. In this sense, the division into "First" and "Other" Serbias is a much better explanatory variable, with those who identified with the former more likely to support Brexit, whereas the latter were more in favour of Remain.

Finally, this paper has drawn on these insights to explain whether and how Brexit may have influenced the way these people identify and their sense of belonging. Most of my respondents consider London their home or one of their two homes (along with Serbia). While Remainers tend to emphasise London's cosmopolitan character, Brexiteers appreciate London's Britishness. Hence, London's ambivalent role is what enables the city to be perceived as home in the context of Brexit. The paper has also considered whether Spivak's (1987) concept of strategic essentialism can be applied to understanding attitudes and identities of these research participants in the wake of Brexit. It has tried to explain the Leave vote by drawing on the already-mentioned division into "First" and "Other" Serbias, but also as a strategy for coping with a fragile position of in-betweenness. The paper

has argued that the underlying aim among some Leave voters was to reinforce their “insider position” as British and their membership of British society.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Henley Royal Regatta is an annual summer rowing event taking place on the River Thames in the town of Henley-on-Thames, England.

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