

# The Impact of Stigmatisation upon Russian and Russian-Speaking Migrants Living in Scotland

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*This article explores the nature and impact of stigmatisation upon Russian and Russian-speaking migrants living in Scotland. It is based upon data gathered from 19 interviews with Russians and Russian-speakers living in the Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire and Central Belt regions of Scotland. Ongoing conflict in Syria and Ukraine has worsened relations between the UK and Russia, while EU enlargement and, latterly, the ‘refugee crisis’ have fuelled hostile attitudes towards migrants. Russians and Russian-speakers living in Scotland therefore face two potential sources of stigma, firstly because of a (perceived) association with the actions of the Russian state and, secondly, because they are often misidentified as Polish and are consequently regarded as threatening the availability of resources such as jobs, housing, benefits and school places (Pijpers 2006; Spigelman 2013). The article explores how people respond to such stigmatisation, emphasising the complexity of engaging with misdirected stigma. It is suggested that stigma – and the way in which people respond to it – is situational and context-specific in that it is significantly influenced by the identity, background and perspective of the stigmatised person. Also investigated is the wider impact of stigma on Russian and Russian-speaking migrants’ lives, highlighting the emotional and social insecurities that can result from stigmatisation. Drawing on anthropological theories of social security (Caldwell 2007; von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2000), the article suggests that robust social support, particularly from people who are local to the host country, can mitigate the negative effects of stigmatisation.*

*Keywords: Russian; Scotland; stigma; social (in)security; immigration*

## Introduction

In recent decades, critical approaches to the study of (in)security have emphasised the need to explore individual experiences of vulnerability (Booth 2007; Philo 2012; von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2000). This article draws upon the findings of research carried out with Russian and Russian-speaking migrants

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in Scotland, in order to explore the emotional and social insecurities created by the stigmatisation of a migrant's (perceived) country of origin – in this case Russia – as well as the stigmatised representation of immigration more broadly. Goffman's (1963: 5) understanding of stigma as an 'undesired differentness' is used to theorise this double-sided experience of exclusion.

Diplomatic relations between Russia and the UK have long been strained, with conflict in Syria and Ukraine further compounding this hostility. British media sources from all ends of the political spectrum have suggested that Russia poses a threat to the UK (Doyle 2015; Soros 2016). At the same time, there has been a significant media and political concern regarding immigration. EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007 prompted an outpouring of anti-migration hostility, particularly from the tabloid press (Dursun-Ozkanca 2011). The impact of such discourse upon public attitudes towards migration is well documented (Beyer and Matthes 2015; Blinder and Jeannet 2014; Dunaway, Kirzinger, Goidel and Wilkinson 2011; Dursun-Ozkanca 2011). While no similar studies have been conducted on the relationship between media and public attitudes towards Russia,<sup>1</sup> recent data suggest that 66 per cent of the British population have an 'unfavourable' view of Russia and 80 per cent report 'no confidence' in Russian President Vladimir Putin (Pew Research Centre 2015). Within this climate, Russians and Russian-speakers have, nevertheless, continued to migrate to the UK. Although Russian migration to Scotland has occurred on a lesser scale than that to England, EU accession in the mid-2000s has facilitated the move to Scotland of increasing numbers of Russian-speakers from the Baltic States, in addition to those from the Russian Federation who have moved for work, study or marriage. As will be discussed, there is limited work on the experiences of Russian and Russian-speaking migrants in Scotland and so the empirical findings of my research substantially expand this area of study.

The article is based on 19 in-depth interviews carried out with Russian and Russian-speaking migrants living in Scotland. The term 'Russian-speakers' is used to denote participants who originated from countries other than the Russian Federation but who identified as ethnically and linguistically Russian. I suggest that Russians and Russian-speakers are subject to stigma in Scotland because of a (perceived) connection to the Russian Federation, within a political context where Russia is regarded as hostile. I discuss the highly contextual and situational nature of stigma (LeBel 2008), arguing that Russians and Russian-speakers are vulnerable to a different form of stigmatisation when they are misidentified as Polish. The article uncovers the complexity of responses to stigmatisation in these differing contexts, identifying the strategies which participants used to challenge or dissociate from stigma.

I then look beyond immediate responses to stigmatisation and focus on the emotional and social vulnerabilities which people experience because of their association with a stigmatised place or migrant group. The discussion draws upon anthropological theories of emotional and social security to explore how people respond to, and cope with, such stigmatisation, particularly focusing on interactions and relationships with other people. Social security encompasses 'a set of resources and strategies – material, social, economic, symbolic – that people mobilise to guarantee their personal well-being and stability' (Caldwell 2007: 69). Rather than focusing upon external threats, this approach explores the emotional dimensions of feeling secure. Relationships and interactions with others are regarded as critical in mitigating vulnerability and promoting feelings of security and belonging (de Bruijn 1994; Reed and Tehranian 1999; von Benda-Beckmann 2015).

The article begins by exploring the theoretical grounding of the paper in more depth, before providing some contextual background to the research and an explanation of the fieldwork methods used. Drawing upon interview data, the article then explores the experiences of Russians and Russian-speakers in Scotland.

## Stigmatisation and (in)security

In his seminal work on the subject, Goffman (1963: 5) defines stigma as ‘undesired difference’. He suggests that the impact of stigmatisation is to ‘taint and discount’ an individual, because of his or her association with a ‘deeply discrediting’ attribute (1963: 3). Such attributes can manifest themselves in various forms, including ‘tribal’ stigma, which stem from a person’s race, national identity or religion. Stigmatic attributes are not fixed; what is perceived to be ‘undesired difference’ (Goffman 1963: 5) can alter depending upon the historical and cultural context (Crocker, Major and Steel 1998; LeBel 2008). Stigma emerges when a person ‘possesses (or is believed to possess)’ an identity that is ‘devalued in a *particular social context*’ (Crocker *et al.* 1998: 505 [emphasis added]).

The significance of social context is evident within work on the stigmatisation of migrants. There is ample evidence to suggest that prejudice towards migrants is group-specific, in that people from different countries are considered to pose different threats to society (Hellewig and Sinno 2017). Migrants from Middle Eastern countries are often stigmatised because of a perceived connection with terrorism (Schech and Rainbird 2013; Sjöberg and Rydin 2014). Conversely, Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants are more commonly regarded as threatening the availability of resources such as jobs, housing, benefits and school places (Dawney 2008; Pijpers 2006; Spigelman 2013). Additionally, these CEE migrants and, particularly, Roma from CEE countries, are often associated with criminality (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2012; Moroşanu and Fox 2013). Russian migrants in Western Europe in the 1990s were similarly perceived as linked to criminal activity (Darieva 2004; Kopnina 2006); however, I discuss whether or not this remains relevant later in the article.

The literature discussed thus far is distinctive in that it focuses upon the stigmatisation of people rather than places. It is Russian, CEE and Middle Eastern *migrants* who are stigmatised, rather than the countries from which they originate. An exception to this trend is the work of Sjöberg and Rydin (2014), which explores the way in which media representations of the Middle East, and of people from this region, have affected Arab migrants living in Sweden. Participants felt that they were depicted as terrorists but that the countries from which they originated were typified as ‘uncivilised’, ‘poor’ and ‘miserable’ (Sjöberg and Rydin 2014: 205). This alternative framing of people and place is worth highlighting, as this article focuses on both the stigmatisation that results from an association with the Russian Federation and on the negative perceptions that emerge when Russians and Russian-speakers are misidentified as Polish. Individuals can be subject to multiple stigma simultaneously, as work on intersectionality makes clear (Crenshaw 1989).

People respond to stigmatisation in a variety of ways. Moroşanu and Fox (2013) found that some Romanian migrants responded to the representation of Romanians as criminals and beggars by transferring this stigma to the Roma, thus creating a hierarchy of migrant identities. Ryan (2010: 367) has similarly highlighted how Polish migrants created a delineation between ‘good, well behaved Poles’ and those who had behaved ‘badly’ as a means of distancing themselves from the anti-social behaviour of some Poles living in London. Another strategy is to emphasise educational and occupational achievements in order to overshadow negative perceptions (Moroşanu and Fox 2013). There is also the possibility of social activism, proactively responding to stigma by challenging prejudice and ‘discrediting’ stigmatisers (LeBel 2008: 416). Like the expression of stigmatisation, how a person responds to being stigmatised can vary depending upon the social and cultural context.

## The emotional and social impact of stigmatisation

Migration is often the first time that an individual is confronted with other people’s perceptions of their identity (Ryan 2010: 365). If the identity they see reflected in public or media perceptions is stigmatised, this can have

a significant and detrimental impact upon their emotional security. In their discussion of the stigmatisation of asylum-seekers, Waite, Valentine and Lewis (2014) stress the impact upon emotional and *ontological* security which essentially encompasses the ‘confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity’ (Giddens 1990: 92). For Waite *et al.* (2014), insecurity is simply the capacity to feel hurt, which encompasses feelings such as pain, anxiety and uncertainty. This article understands security as a broad concept encompassing the material, social and emotional aspects of feeling secure and mitigating vulnerability.

The findings of Moroşanu and Fox (2013) and Ryan (2010) are significant because they highlight that stigmatisation does not only undermine emotional security but can have wider ramifications upon how people interact with others. Ryan (2010: 365) narrates the experience of a Polish participant who was shocked to find that a taxi driver was frightened of him because another driver had been attacked by a Polish man. Similar experiences are recounted in the work of Schech and Rainbird (2013), who focus upon the integration of asylum-seekers and refugees in Australia. They include several quotes from participants that illustrate the way in which stigmatisation could have a negative and harmful impact on everyday life, as the example below demonstrates:

*In all the newspapers and TV it was about asylum seekers and how they could be terrorists. People believe this and then it creates problems. I have experience of this felt from local people who are very careful of me. I will not go [...] anywhere at night because people may get violent because they are afraid of who I might be* (Schech and Rainbird 2013: 114–115).

Media stigmatisation led to a lived experience of vulnerability, where an individual felt that he was unable to leave his house at night because he would be perceived as a terrorist. Crawley, McMahon and Jones (2016) present similar findings in a piece of research that looks at the effect of representations and perceptions of immigration upon migrants from various countries, including Poland and Romania. Participants describe feeling worried that they would be judged by other passengers on public transport and recounted occasions when their children had experienced discrimination at school.

It is evident that stigmatisation creates insecurities. The stigmatised individual is not only impacted upon emotionally but also suffers vulnerabilities in relation to how s/he interacts with people in the wider community. It is here that anthropological theorisations of social security are helpful in conceptualising the different and complex ways that people use formal and informal sources of support to manage insecurity (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2000). Social security-based research has emphasised that developing and drawing upon support networks is crucial as a strategy to ensure individual security and wellbeing (de Bruijn 1994; Reed and Tehranian 1999; von Benda-Beckmann 2015). Caldwell (2007: 69) points out that social security is tied to the notion of social capital – that feelings of security and wellbeing are linked to the quality and resilience of a person’s social networks. Both Kay (2012) and the von Benda-Beckmanns (2000) suggest that the emotional aspects of social security are as important as the material in terms of supporting people during times of vulnerability.

While few participants in this research expressed concern about material insecurity, most experienced social vulnerability in relation to feelings of exclusion, resulting from experiences of stigmatisation. People who migrate to a new place are often removed from the social, economic and symbolic resources that Caldwell (2007: 69) refers to when defining social security. They may be completely new to the area they are living in, potentially speaking a new language, and are often separated from existing support networks. This vulnerability can be compounded by a person’s experience with the host community and whether or not they encounter prejudice and pre-conceived ideas about migration or the country from which they have moved. While there is much work on how migrants respond to stigmatisation, there has been less focus upon the broader coping

mechanisms that people deploy to manage and respond to living with stigmatised identities, particularly in the context of migration. While this article, too, explores how Russians and Russian-speaking migrants respond to stigmatisation, it also explores how people cope with stigmatisation more broadly, highlighting the importance of reliable social networks.

### **Context and methodology**

While there is a growing academic focus upon the experiences of Russian and Russian-speaking migrants in the UK, this tends to be somewhat Anglo-centric. Such research usually also concentrates on issues of identity, rather than looking at engagement with host communities. For example, as discussed later in the paper, in one of the first studies of Russians living in the UK, Kopnina (2005) researched the concept of ‘community’ as it related to Russians living in London and Amsterdam in the 1990s. While she touches upon perceptions of Russian migrants in London and Amsterdam, this topic is not explored in any depth. Other projects have explored the role of the Internet and online communities in the formation of Russian migrant identity (Morgunova 2013), the identification of Russian-speaking communities in the UK as diasporic (Byford 2012) and the role of material possessions in maintaining a sense of Russian identity (Pechurina 2015). More recently, Kliuchnikova (2015) has looked at Russian-speaking migrants’ attitudes towards the Russian language. These studies largely focus upon England, giving only brief consideration to the Scottish case – in fact, the only substantive engagement with Russian-speaking communities in Scotland has been in two theses, submitted for a PhD and a Master’s degree respectively (Judina 2014; Mamattah 2006).

This paper is based upon interviews carried out during 2015 and early 2016, with 19 Russian and Russian-speaking migrants living in Scotland. I have provided demographic information about my interviewees in Appendix 1; however, it is worth briefly discussing the ethnic and linguistic identities of the respondents, of whom 16 were from the Russian Federation and three from other countries in the former socialist space. These latter three had lived most of their lives in Ukraine, Lithuania and Latvia, although they had also lived in Russia for substantial periods of time and therefore felt strong connections to the country. The empirical sections of the article explore how these differing backgrounds affected participants’ responses to negative attitudes towards Russia.

Interviews were conducted in the Central Belt of Scotland, which includes Glasgow, Edinburgh and smaller towns surrounding the two cities, and in Aberdeen City / Aberdeenshire. The chosen research locations each have differing and distinct migration ‘profiles’. Glasgow is the largest city in Scotland and has the highest population of migrants (Vargas-Silva 2013). However, a greater percentage of the population of Edinburgh, Scotland’s capital city, was born outside the UK. Census data indicate that Edinburgh attracts higher numbers of migrants from the European Economic Area than any other city in Scotland (National Records for Scotland 2015a). Aberdeen City and the surrounding Aberdeenshire are also distinctive in Scotland because of the region’s close ties with the North Sea oil industry, which operates as a pull factor for skilled and unskilled migrant workers. The presence of forestry, fishing and farming industries in this region present further employment opportunities.

Scotland offers a distinctive and under-researched context within which to study migration. While immigration policy is reserved to Westminster, Scottish policy-makers are responsible for integration and community cohesion. The Scottish National Party (SNP) has controlled Scotland’s devolved parliament since 2007 and has taken a distinctive approach to migration from that of the UK Government in that immigration is positioned as essential both for economic growth and as a response to Scotland’s ageing population (McCollum, Nowok and Tindal 2014). Key to the SNP’s discourse on immigration is the idea of a civic, rather than an ethnic, version of Scottish nationalism. This is underpinned by the popular belief that attitudes towards

migration are more positive in Scotland than in England (McCollum *et al.* 2014). However, attitudinal data do not wholly support this position. A recent survey on attitudes to immigration revealed that 75 per cent of people in England and Wales wanted immigration to decrease, compared to 58 per cent in Scotland (Blinder 2014). It would therefore be more accurate to suggest that Scots *do* have negative attitudes towards immigration but to a lesser extent than in England and Wales. It should also be noted that Scotland has a far smaller migrant population than other parts of the UK (Blinder 2014).

It is challenging to find reliable and consistent data on the number of Russian and Russian-speaking migrants in the UK. Estimates of the numbers of Russians in the UK range from 60 000 to 300 000, with around 10 per cent of this population presumed to be based in Scotland (Judina 2014). The most recently available census data indicate that 6 001 people in Scotland speak Russian at home (National Records for Scotland 2015b). A specially commissioned table shows that just under 1 000 Russian-speakers lived in Aberdeen City (National Records for Scotland 2015c); however, no such breakdown exists for the rest of Scotland. It is not possible to discern country of origin from these data. Despite the lack of up-to-date population data, social media groups can offer some insight. Facebook groups for Russians in Glasgow, Edinburgh and North-East Scotland have a total membership of around 4 100 people. While such data are not wholly reliable, they are indicative of a Russian community in each city. This is reinforced by the presence of Russian Saturday schools in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen.

Most interviewees were recruited via a survey on life in Scotland which is not discussed in this paper. Respondents were asked to provide contact details if they were willing to take part in a follow-up interview. The remaining interviewees were suggested by the original pool of survey-recruited participants. It should be stressed that the purpose of this article is not to provide a representative overview of the experiences of all Russians and Russian-speakers in Scotland. Rather, I emphasise what Llewelyn (2007: 300) terms the ‘messy, fleshy, local subjectivity’ of the experiences participants recounted in interviews, rather than seeking replicability.

The interviews were loosely structured, focusing upon participants’ reasons for migrating and their opinions about life in Scotland. They were primarily carried out in English, but with some discussion in Russian depending upon participants’ language abilities. All communications prior to the interview took place in Russian and I would generally begin the interview in the language. However, most of the people involved in the research had been living in the UK for at least a year (if not significantly longer) and so almost all participants’ English language abilities far exceeded my Russian-speaking abilities. It was therefore often easier to converse in English; however, when concepts were particularly difficult to explain we would switch between English and Russian to facilitate understanding. Despite my lack of fluency in Russian, I found that my experience of visiting Russia and my desire to improve my language skills garnered approval from participants. Many noted that it was unusual for people in the UK to study Russian, or to be interested in the lives of Russians in Scotland.

### **Russians’ and Russian-speakers’ experiences of stigmatisation**

Russians’ and Russian-speakers’ experiences of stigmatisation stemmed from a (perceived) connection with the actions of the Russian state, rather than from prejudices relating to the character of Russian migrants. The timing of the interviews (late 2014 and 2015) meant that media and political discourse on Russian interventions in Ukraine and Syria played a significant role in motivating negative perceptions of the country (cf. Sotkasiira 2018). Anna,<sup>2</sup> a doctor in her early 50s living in Glasgow, explained:

*There are changes now because of Ukraine and the way Russia is presented in light of Ukraine. One-dimensional news stories – that’s upsetting. I mean, we were watching a programme the other day, like an evening*

*of questions and answers. All of them called Russia a terrorist country! And that is scary, because people see you and talk on behalf of you. (...) I was upset.*

Crucially, respondents felt that such perceptions of the country impacted upon how people in Scotland regarded migrants from Russia. Interviewees talked about a ‘sharp inhalation of breath’ or the few moments of hesitation that often followed when they mentioned that they were from Russia. Evgeniya, a participant in her late 30s from Stirlingshire (Central Belt), talked about some of the changes that she had observed following the annexation of Crimea:

*I kind of notice, when you say ‘I am Russian’, there is a few seconds when people try to work out how to behave. I feel a change in attitude; even if it’s a slight pause it’s different from how it was... At the moment, as soon as you say you are from Russia, the association is Putin and what happened in Ukraine.*

Evgeniya’s and Anna’s testimonies are evidence of the stigmatising effect of Russia’s actions upon Russian people living abroad. This article therefore sits at the intersection of what Philo (2012: 2) terms big ‘S’ and small ‘s’ security concerns, whereby globally significant insecurities, such as inter-state conflict, permeate the everyday lives of people quite removed from the physical danger of conflict. Prejudice was not experienced because of an association between Russian migrants and criminality, as was the case in Kopnina’s (2005) work. Rather, as Evgeniya’s recollection makes clear, her ‘undesired’ differentness (Goffman 1963: 5) stemmed from a connection to a poorly perceived host country.

For some participants, this prejudice extended to being held responsible for the actions of the Russian state. For example, Alyona (45–50), who worked in a pub in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, reported the following interaction with a customer:

*There was a story about [Litvinenko] – Russia had been accused. And in fact, they were not speaking like it was the parliament, or president, just accusing the entire country. A drunk guy where I was working asked me about Litvinenko: ‘Why did you Russian people kill that person?’. And I’m like: ‘Yes; I just stopped doing everything and just went to kill somebody’ – that’s ridiculous.*

In a similar case, Pavel, an interviewee who lived and worked in Aberdeen City, recalled that a friend had been asked: ‘Why [did] you invade Syria?’.

Of course, such experiences were dependent upon the person being accurately identified as Russian, or self-identifying as such when asked where they were from. For Goffman (1963: 2) it is by a person’s appearance that stigma is first identified; however, as Kopnina (2006: 195) observes, most Russian migrants are initially able to ‘blend in’ with a predominantly white society. This is particularly true of Scotland where, in the last census, 96 per cent of the population identified as white (Scottish Government 2011). It was therefore the identification of a non-native accent that participants felt the most commonly drew attention to their otherness – however, this accent was often incorrectly identified. Polina, a Russian-speaker in her early 30s living in Glasgow, explained:

*Sometimes they don’t ask ‘Where are you from?’, they ask ‘Are you Polish?’. This is a bit like (...) it’s easy just to say ‘Where are you from’. (...) ‘Where are you from?’ is a different question from ‘Are you Polish?’. You came here because you have problems, the economy, you come here and take our jobs...*

As Polina recognises, the stigma associated with a Polish identity was quite different from that linked with a Russian identity. In this case, ‘undesired differentness’ (Goffman 1963: 5) stemmed from an assumption of economic need and that Polina would be ‘taking’ jobs. Raisa, a participant in her early 30s who lived in North-East Scotland, made a similar observation:

*Lots of people think you’re Polish. If people ask where you come from I’m, like, ‘Not from Poland’. That’s another perception, that’s another stereotype. (...) I don’t know why there is such negativity towards Polish people. But again, that’s the media. Any time you see posts about immigrants, or immigrants getting houses, it would also be Polish people mentioned there.*

The stigma that people encounter is not a fixed certainty but rather, as Crocker *et al.* (1998) emphasise, emerges within particular social contexts. People manage their identities through everyday social encounters (Kanuha 1999) and, as Raisa’s and Polina’s experiences make evident, responding to misdirected stigma can be part of this negotiation process. It should, perhaps, be made clear that none of the participants involved in my research recalled an experience where they had encountered stigma because they were both misidentified as Polish and then correctly identified as Russian within the space of the same encounter. Rather, it was the case that experiences were context-specific, developing from the preconceptions and prejudices of the other person involved in the interaction.

### **Responding to stigmatisation**

I have established that Russian and Russian-speaking migrants living in Scotland encountered stigma both because of their association with the Russian state and because they were often misidentified as of Polish nationality. I have suggested that this demonstrates the highly situational nature of stigma. In this section of the article, I move on to explore the similarly contextual nature of *reacting* to stigma, exploring the strategies that participants adopted to respond to prejudiced assumptions about their identities.

Responses to stigmatisation because of a perceived association with the Russian state tended to correlate with participants’ attitudes towards Putin, and the domestic and foreign policies of the Russian government. It is helpful to revisit the comments made by Anna, the participant quoted in the previous section, who was distressed by comments made about Russia on BBC Question Time. For Anna, the stigma she experienced was the result of the *misrepresentation* of the conflict in Ukraine. She described pride in Putin’s handling of the conflict, aligning closely with Russian public opinion at that time (Simmons, Stokes and Poushter 2015). Anna’s anxiety stemmed from a feeling that the Scottish and British public had been misled by media coverage and she described sending her Scottish friends articles about the conflict to challenge their misperceptions. Her response to stigma can be conceptualised as proactive (LeBel 2008) in that she acted to persuade others that Russia should not be regarded negatively and nor, by association, should she.

Other interviewees, such as Pavel, who was mentioned in the previous section, had more complex responses. Pavel is a distinctive case because he initially recounted occasions when he had responded proactively to negative comments about Russia, becoming involved in long arguments with people at bus stops or in shops who had asked about his accent and consequently made negative comments about Russian foreign affairs. In such cases, his responses were akin to Anna’s, taking an active stance in challenging perceptions of Russia and trying to offer an alternative, non-stigmatised viewpoint of the country. However, throughout the course of the interview, Pavel explained that, when talking to academic colleagues, he would often share in their criticisms of Putin’s handling of the Ukraine crisis, seeking to distance himself from the Russian government. Pavel explained that he felt more comfortable criticising the Russian state when conversing with ‘educated’



people, because they had a better understanding of the complexity of Russian politics. LeBel (2008: 419) points out that it is often assumed that people consistently rely upon the same strategy to respond to stigma; however, he argues that those with stigmatised identities adopt varying responses depending upon the social networks they are interacting with. This is evident in Pavel's case – his preconceptions about education levels and knowledge of international politics influenced whether he responded proactively or dissociatively to stigma.

Dissociative strategies are well documented within the literature on stigma, particularly in relation to migrant groups. However, within such literature it is generally the case that a group of migrants will seek to disassociate themselves from others within the same group who are perceived to merit stigma – for example, Roma (Moroşanu and Fox 2013), 'badly' behaved Poles (Ryan 2010: 368) or Albanians who have been involved in crime (King and Mai 2009). However, in the present case, disassociative strategies took place between the individual and their perceived country of origin. The qualification 'perceived' is important here because, of course, some participants did not originate from the Russian Federation and this further facilitated disassociation from the country. Polina, who we have already heard from, explained:

*I think I'm more Ukrainian because I went to Ukraine when I was 16... So now I say I'm Ukrainian and I think, especially with the situation (...) when you ask about Russia, if you compare Russia and Ukraine, I think attitudes to Ukraine (...) I think because of the war, people are, like, 'Oh that's a pity', but Russia – they're, like, 'Ohhh [adopts negative tone] Russia, Putin, no, no'.*

Polina had been born in Ukraine, but moved to Russia when she was a baby, and remained there until she was 16. Her parents had then returned to Ukraine, where she lived until she migrated to Scotland at the age of 30. Kosmarskaya (2011: 63) notes that, for Russian-speakers, identity is complex, formed as it is of competing and intertwining identities. For Polina, the current 'situation', as she phrased it, meant that she was more inclined to identify as Ukrainian. This allowed her to remain distant from the negative reactions that she felt would result from an admission of Russian identity.

The discussion thus far has focused upon responses to stigmatisation resulting from a connection to the Russian Federation. However, I have also established that Russians and Russian-speakers sometimes encountered stigma when they were misidentified as Polish. In such cases, my participants adopted similar strategies to those identified above – challenging or dissociating themselves from stigma to varying degrees. Polina and Raisa, who were quoted in the earlier discussion on this topic, both challenged the stigmatisation of CEE migrants. Polina explained that it was ridiculous that migrants from this region were typified as 'stealing jobs', because Scottish people would refuse to work in most of the industries populated by CEE migrants. Similarly, Raisa lambasted negative press coverage of CEE migrants, suggesting that the purpose of such media engagement was simply to provide a scapegoat for the housing crisis in the UK. However, not all interviewees responded in this way. Discussing instances when he had been misidentified as Polish, Maxim, an interviewee in his late 20s from Edinburgh explained:

*I do make sure that I make [people] aware of the fact that I am from Russia... I opened the door to my postman... and I had to spell my name and he was annoyed – but I say 'Russian, not Polish' and it's all sorted – shiny smile. I mean, that prompted me to study the situation a little bit and, from the time when the EU accepted Poland (...) it's, like, one million people came over – obviously not all of them were well behaved.*

In this case, the disassociative strategy more closely reflects that discussed in the pre-existing literature on the topic (Moroşanu and Fox 2013; Ryan 2010) in which stigma is transferred to another group of migrants.

Maxim's wording is an almost verbatim reflection of the 'badly behaved' Poles discussed in Ryan's (2010) work. What is particularly distinctive about Maxim's testimony is that, unlike any of the accounts discussed thus far, he describes his Russian identity as an asset in this context.

While participants acknowledged that Russian literature and culture were held in high regard, it was rare that they felt that the Russian identity was regarded in broadly positive terms. In fact, the only two occasions when such comments were made were in the context of the stigmatisation of CEE migrants. I had this interaction with Sasha, an interviewee in her early 30s from the North East:

*Sasha: Sometimes, people from Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, I hear [Scottish people] don't like these people because they (...) don't like work. To have benefits only. But about only Russians, [they] like. [They] love Putin. Some people don't see the difference between Polish and Russian people. Some people ask me 'Are you Polish?' – 'I am not, I am Russian'. It is a different reaction.*

*Interviewer: Are people more negative to Polish people?*

*Sasha: Sometimes, yes, I hear it. My husband is Bulgarian but his mother is Russian. When Scottish people ask him where he is from he says 'Russia'. Because he says to me 'When I say I am Bulgarian, it's a different reaction'. All the people love Russia.*

Sasha's wholly positive account of Scottish attitudes towards Putin and Russia was, like Maxim's, framed in the context of highly prejudiced attitudes towards CEE migrants. For Sasha's husband, identifying as Russian was preferable to admitting to Bulgarian identity. Sasha herself was a Russian-speaker from Lithuania but, as she explained, she would identify as Russian when asked where she was from. Her perspective on perceptions of Russian identity interlinked with the way in which she saw Lithuanian and Bulgarian migrants to be perceived in Scotland. This is directly comparable to Polina who, conversely, felt that identifying as Ukrainian was less likely to invoke a negative response than if she identified as Russian. However, Romanians and Bulgarians have been subject to particularly virulent hostility in the UK press (Fox *et al.* 2012; Vicol and Allen 2014) – unlike Ukraine, which has been represented sympathetically following Russia's intervention in the region (Tsirkunova 2016: 409). There is a complex hierarchy of stigmatisation emerging here whereby, in some contexts, a Russian identity was regarded as less stigmatised than other identities and, for some, as more likely to invite positivity. However, the organisation of this hierarchy appeared highly dependent upon individual experience and the varying situations in which people encountered stigma.

### **Stigmatisation as a source of (in)security**

The article has thus far focused upon participants' immediate responses to stigma. In this final section I explore how Russians' and Russian-speakers' experiences of emotional and social security were affected by stigmatisation, which I suggest is a source of emotional and social vulnerability which can be mitigated by robust support networks.

Waite *et al.* (2014) define emotional security in relation to a person's ontological security – the security that they feel in their self-identity. Ontological security stems from predictability and a trust in one's place within the world (Silverstone 1994). Waite *et al.* (2014) further refer to a person's capacity to feel hurt, pain and anxiety when defining emotional security. We can recall Anna's description of watching the television as 'upsetting' and 'scary' because of the way in which Russia was portrayed. She talked about the frustration of other people 'speaking on behalf of [her]'. This was a feeling also expressed by Alyona, in response to the

suggestion that she was in some way responsible for the assassination of Litvinenko. Of concern to Alyona was the idea that she was held *personally* responsible for Russian policies and actions that she did not condone. Both Alyona and Anna had been ascribed a version of Russian identity with which they did not identify. Polina and Raisa were similarly assumed to be Polish and consequently subject to a barrage of assumptions about their identities.

Such experiences could make life in Scotland challenging and unpredictable, because stigmatisation was generally experienced in banal, everyday settings. Recall that, when Raisa was asked who it was who thought she was Polish, her response was ‘People, just people on the street’. Pavel and Alyona were subject to prejudiced opinions at a bus stop and in a pub, respectively. Anna was simply watching the television in her own home. There are echoes here of the testimony of a Polish man, discussed in Ryan (2010) who was shocked to discover that a taxi driver was frightened of him, simply because he was Polish. Discussing the emotional and ontological insecurities experienced by migrants, Georgiou (2013: 12) points out that “‘big’ politics’ is often turned into ‘personal experiences and emotional pain’”. This aligns with Philo’s (2012: 2) analysis of the intersection between big ‘S’ and small ‘s’ security concerns. Macro-level security concerns, such as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, or global migration trends, can permeate the minutiae of day-to-day life.

Such experiences also carried potential social implications. Migration often removes a person from their existing support networks (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2000) and therefore building relationships within one’s local community is a key aspect of integration (Ager and Strang 2004). There is a debate within the literature as to what kind of relationships people form and how they form them when they migrate to a new place, but there is a consensus that forming social networks is important (McGhee, Heath and Trevena 2013; Ryan 2011). Relationships provide emotional (and often material) support in times of hardship (Kay 2012). Goffman (1963: 31–32) suggests that people will often turn to ‘their own’ when they are subject to stigma, seeking comfort in shared experiences. However, a notable theme that emerged from this research was the importance of friendships and relationships with Scottish, rather than other Russian, people.

On a positive note, most interviewees felt that their friends could tell Russian people apart from the actions of the Russian state, and did not let their opinions of Russia impinge upon the friendship. Stigma was encountered almost exclusively during encounters with people that my interviewees did not know, rather than those with whom they had close relationships. Anna, in her early 50s and from Glasgow, explained:

*Unfortunately our Scottish friends still follow the media; well that’s the way they were brought up in this country, with the fear and scepticism about Russia. They don’t treat you in a negative way, they kind of separate us from the politics of Russia.*

Although the fear that Anna’s friends had of Russia was troubling for her, she felt that this negativity did not filter into their relationships. A similar sentiment was expressed by Vladimir, a student who had moved to Glasgow with his mother in his mid-teens. Vladimir considered Putin to be the main source of consternation for his Scottish friends, saying, ‘When it comes to “Oh you’re a Russian man” – that’s alright, that’s fine, but see that Putin guy – he’s crazy’.

Furthermore, I found that relationships with Scottish friends or partners could mitigate the vulnerabilities experienced as a result of stigmatisation. Such relationships, perhaps unlike friendships with other Russians or Russian-speakers, served to make people feel included in Scottish society and secure in the knowledge that there were some people who would not engage in stigmatising behaviour. Ager and Strang (2004: 18) have emphasised the importance of building social ‘bridges’ between communities, suggesting that such relationships connect people from different backgrounds, increasing social cohesion. It was mentioned earlier that several Russian women who had married British citizens took part in the research. A notable finding from

conversations with these women was that they often identified their relationship with their (Scottish or British) husband as important in terms of dealing with stigma. For example, Raisa explained:

*People have very stereotypical views, but my partner, I don't know if it is because he lives with me, but he is very supportive of Russia and Putin (...) we talk, we watch both sides of the news.*

For Raisa, her partner's willingness to listen to her perspective and watch Russian television was significant in terms of providing an antidote to the 'stereotypical views' she encountered in day-to-day interactions. As an aside, it is also worth noting that Raisa also referred to a close group of Russian-speaking friends who had also married Scottish men; she explained that they would often socialise together as a group. This provided an opportunity to share her concerns with friends who had similar experiences, reflecting Goffman's (1963: 31–32) emphasis on the importance of shared experiences.

The importance of close relationships in mitigating the emotional and social vulnerabilities created by stigma was a recurring theme within the interviews. On one occasion a Scottish husband, Cameron M. and his Russian wife Zoya F., both in their early 30s and from Aberdeen, were interviewed together and it was clear that the former was highly supportive of his wife's indignation towards the representation of Russia, as well as towards the negative coverage of migration from Eastern Europe. We had this conversation regarding perceptions of Russia and CEE migration:

**Zoya:** *They've no idea... Like, this woman came to my house. She has a Polish husband and she said 'Oh we're travelling to Poland by car but you can't travel to Russia by car because people will shoot you in the road!'. I was, like, 'What? What are you talking about?'. So, so stupid. People have no idea what happens. And every single media almost, even this stupid programme...*

**Cameron:** *Over the past 15 years or whatever, with the freedom of movement in the EU, you've got this badge 'Eastern Europe'... So people have a kind of default opinion of Eastern European people and a lot of people don't give a toss whether that means Polish, Lithuanian, whether it means Moldovan. (...) And then you do have things that are specific to Russia and again I would refer back to that series that Reggie Yates did on BBC 3. So there's almost two sides to it. There's the generic Eastern European, 'Oh immigrants again, they probably live, like, 10 of them in a shitty apartment, in a one-bedroom flat, horrible part of town. Don't speak to anybody else, don't have proper jobs, just work for cash and don't pay taxes and just cream off...', and then with the Russian side of it. And that's the negative stuff that's going on really from Vladimir Putin.*

Cameron's observation essentially encompasses the focus of this article – that there was the potential for his Russian wife, Zoya, to experience prejudice both when she was mistakenly identified as 'Eastern European' and also if she was accurately identified as Russian. Cameron sharing in Zoya's frustration was a clear source of reassurance and support. Indeed, when I expressed surprise and concern at some of the comments that Zoya had received from local people, like that quoted above, she gestured to her husband and said 'It's OK, I have huge support'. Similarly, Polina, who was also discussed in the previous section, identified her husband as a source of support in the face of anti-immigration feeling:

*My husband had joke today (...) he said 'How can someone come to steal our jobs and to take benefits at the same time – how is that possible?'. You have to choose what we are taking – benefits or jobs!*

Earlier in the interview Polina had also explained that her husband previously worked in Lebanon and was critical of BBC coverage of this region. He had reassured her with this information when she was troubled by the way in which Russia was represented in the press. The fact that Polina's husband had grown up in the UK and could explain the way the press functioned was key in bridging a connection between Polina and Scottish society (Ager and Strang 2004).

There were two participants in the research sample who did not appear to enjoy this level of support and it was evident that this could further compound the vulnerabilities caused by stigmatisation. Vera, a participant in her early 30s who had recently moved to a small town near Edinburgh, explained that she could not rely on her husband for support when she encountered hostility. She recalled a few upsetting experiences in the local shop where she worked, when people had made insulting comments about Russia or assumptions about her character on the basis that she was Russian. Vera had telephoned her parents in Russia for support on these occasions. She explained:

*[The conflict in Syria] is the reason I always fight with my husband – he told me that, in Russia, you never know the truth. I told him, 'Who knows what is true?'. I don't like to talk about politics with him because I get annoyed or if he is watching the news he is 100 per cent clear that what is in Russia is [wrong].*

Even within her own home, Vera could not trust that her understanding and experience of Russian politics would be believed and taken into account. It appeared that there was limited acceptance of her conceptualisation of Russian identity by either her husband or her mother-in-law (with whom they lived). Vera could not rely on her relationship with her husband as a resource to mitigate emotional and social insecurities (Caldwell 2007). She could not benefit from the trust and predictability – so intrinsic to emotional wellbeing – that other participants could depend on.

In a similar case, Alyona explained that her husband was very critical of the annexation of Crimea and regarded Russia as an aggressive and threatening state. However, Alyona was older than Vera and had lived in Scotland for over ten years. She appeared more annoyed than upset about her husband's opinions, but it was evident that she lacked the support that other participants, like Raisa and Polina, benefited from. Alyona explained that she would think about returning to Russia when her children were grown up and, indeed, was the only participant who was married to a British citizen and had children in Scotland who mooted a return to Russia as a possibility. While this was not solely because of her husband's attitude, his lack of support appeared to feed into a broader feeling of discontent with and alienation from Scotland. It became evident, therefore, that having a partner or friends to 'vent' one's feelings to and who did not judge the individual on the actions of their country of origin, was significant in fostering a sense of security.

## Conclusion

Drawing on Goffman's (1963: 5) definition of stigma as 'undesired difference', this article has argued that Russian and Russian-speaking migrants in Scotland can be subject to 'tribal' stigma – that based on their race, nationality or religion – for two reasons. The first is because of their perceived association with the Russian Federation in a context of poor diplomatic relations between Russia and the UK. The second is because they are often misidentified as Polish, which results in stigmatisation because of a perceived threat in relation to the availability of resources such as jobs, housing and benefits (Pijpers 2006; Spigelman 2013).

The article has emphasised that the two forms of stigma are not necessarily experienced simultaneously but emerge within different social contexts and situations. I have suggested that the ways in which people respond to stigma are also situational, identifying occasions where participants sought to challenge preconceptions

about Russia or Polish migrants, as well as discussing cases where my interviewees described disassociative behaviour. The article has highlighted the complexity of disassociating from stigma, building upon the work of Ryan (2010) and Moroşanu and Fox (2013) to explore some of the hierarchies that can emerge when trying to put forward a non-stigmatised or, in some cases, less-stigmatised identity.

The article has engaged with the broader emotional and social vulnerabilities that can be created by stigma. In this regard, the work of Philo (2012) and Waite *et al.* (2013) has been helpful in conceptualising the challenges to ontological security and emotional wellbeing that can result from having a stigmatised identity or identities. I have suggested that this further undermines migrants' social security (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2000), influencing their ability to build social networks within a new community. Drawing on the idea of relationships as a 'resource' in managing emotional and social insecurity, I have highlighted how important close relationships with people from Scotland are in mitigating such insecurities. I have suggested that such relationships operate as a source of reassurance, trust and predictability when the subject is faced with often unpredictable and unexpected stigmatisation in seemingly banal contexts.

A direction for future research would be to explore the extent to which Russians' and Russian-speakers' experiences of stigmatisation have been affected by Britain's decision to leave the European Union. It is foreseeable that there could be significant implications for those Russian-speakers who originate from EU member-countries. There is the further possibility for comparison between the experiences of Russians and Russian-speakers in England and in Scotland (where the majority of the population voted to remain in the EU). The research also has potential implications for the study of the 'refugee crisis'. Future studies could explore the experiences of asylum-seekers and refugees, who also originate from poorly perceived countries of origin. A case that springs to mind is the way in which Syrian refugees could be stigmatised both because of their status as refugees and because of the potential stigma associated with their countries of origin, due to the influence of ISIS in the region and the resulting perceived threat of terrorist activity. There is scope to explore how these different forms of stigma interact and, more broadly, how they intersect with other forms of stigma related to characteristics like age, gender and class identity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> However, this research is part of an ESRC-funded PhD research project (reference *ES/J500136/1*) entitled *Russia in British Media and Public Discourse: How Does this Affect Russian Migrants Living in the UK?*, which explores the representation of Russia in the UK press and UK public opinion towards Russia and Russian people. In addition to interviews with Russians and Russian-speakers, the research also involved a discourse analysis of seven British/Scottish newspapers, a survey with 500 Scottish and Russian respondents and interviews with 24 British/Scottish participants.

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for all respondents.

## Conflict of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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**Appendix 1****Table 1. Characteristics of participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Current occupation</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Reason for migrating</b>
Alyona	45–50	Female	Hospitality worker	Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire	Marriage
Anna	50–55	Female	Doctor	Central Belt	Marriage
Boris	35–40	Male	Research assistant	Central Belt	Work
Ekaterina	40–45	Female	Stay-at-home mum	Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire	Marriage
Evgeniya	35–40	Female	Interpreter	Central Belt	Marriage
Ivan	50–55	Male	Not disclosed	Central Belt	Not disclosed
Larissa	30–35	Female	Retail worker	Central Belt	Work
Ludmila	50–55	Female	Retail worker	Central Belt	Husband's work
Maxim	25–30	Male	Student	Central Belt	Study
Nikolay	50–55	Male	Hospitality worker	Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire	Work
Pavel	30–35	Male	Lecturer	Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire	Work
Polina	30–35	Female	Stay-at-home mum	Central Belt	Marriage
Raisa	30–35	Female	Administrative worker	Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire	Marriage
Sasha	30–35	Female	Stay-at-home mum	Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire	Husband's work
Svetlana	25–30	Female	Student	Central Belt	Study
Vera	30–35	Female	Retail worker	Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire	Marriage
Vladimir	25–30	Male	Retail worker	Central Belt	Work
Yuri	45–50	Male	Scientist	Central Belt	Work
Zoya	30–35	Female	Retail worker	Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire	Marriage