BETWEEN NEO-NATIONALIZING RUSSIA AND BREXIT BRITAIN
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ABSTRACT – *The article analyses the evolution, during the 2000s and 2010s, of civic engagement and political mobilization of post-Soviet Russian-speaking migrants living in the UK, and highlights the importance of these migrants' inherently transnational position in-between several polities. Transformations of their mobilizations are governed by: the changing context of immigration opportunities in the UK; the technological advancements of new modes of communication; larger political shifts in both Russia and the UK; and significantly, the availability of specific opportunity structures for mobilization. The principal opportunity structures available to these migrants in the 2000s fostered their mobilization as a culturally-defined minority migrant community and encouraged them to become part of a global network of Russian "compatriots". A new opportunity structure emerged in the early 2010s in the form of a transnational protest movement against political corruption in the Russian Federation. However, as the Russian government introduced policies effecting a growing disenfranchisement of Russians resident abroad from political developments in Russia itself, many Russians in the UK have started to look for new ways to engage. The politics of Brexit have become one new opportunity structure for them.*

KEYWORDS – *Russian-speaking migrants, United Kingdom, civic and political mobilization, opportunity structures, transnationalism*

INTRODUCTION

During the 2010s, both Britain and Russia experienced significant political turns, gravely perturbing these countries' political landscapes. Britain has been gradually sliding from centre-left to populist right, especially on the issue of immigration, culminating in the crisis brought about by the nation voting to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum. While an extensive body of political and media analysis has expanded on the growing gaps in the tissue of British society during this period, relatively little attention has been paid to the political involvement in these developments of so-called "new citizens", recently naturalized subjects of the Crown, let alone other migrants in various stages of settling in Britain.

Over this same period, the Russian Federation has gone through its own political turbulence. The unprecedented degree of popular unrest between the December 2011 Duma elections and the March 2012 presidential elections created a vocal anti-government protest movement which continues to trouble the state despite a clampdown on mass demonstrations. Since 2014, Russia has also been facing growing international criticism, following its appropriation of Crimea, its perceived role in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, its military support of pro-government forces in the Syrian war, and its alleged meddling in elections in some Western countries.

Caught up simultaneously in both sets of developments, Russians resident in the UK—to include, however, not only those who had migrated from the Russian Federation, but also a more loosely defined body of those who

identify themselves as "Russian", even if coming from another part of the former Soviet space[1]—have been prompted to respond to them in various ways, especially through online commentary and campaigning, but also through offline civic or political action. Such mobilizations have revealed, even more strongly than before, both the opportunities and the challenges of the distinctive transnational position that migrants assume in the relevant political fields. As we shall see, the transnationalism of the "Russian" migrant body discussed in this article is particularly complex, as it entails, simultaneously, different transnational relationships—those established through the positioning of this migrant body between a "sending" and a "receiving" state (e.g. the Russian Federation and the UK); but also those established in the context of the development of a community of "Russians" which transcends nation-state boundaries as the legacy of a longer history of Russian and Soviet empire-building, waves of emigration, as well as some of the newer, twenty-first-century, patterns of this group's global diasporization. This group's political transnationalism is enacted in a range of different contexts and through a variety of different types of action.[2] For example, those from the former Soviet area living in the West and identifying as "Russian" or "Russian-

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1. It is notoriously difficult to define "Russians" in the post-Soviet diasporic context. It is, of course, important to bear in mind the difference in legal status between those in the diaspora who are citizens of the Russian Federation and those who understand themselves as "Russian", yet come from another post-Soviet country or only ever held Soviet citizenship. It is equally important to distinguish "Russian-speakers" who identify strongly with Russian history, culture and politics, even without ever having lived in Russia, and those for whom their linguistic identity as native speakers of Russian might be quite separate from their national cultural and political self-identifications, and who might, in fact, be rejecting any association with Russia or the Russians. Furthermore, individuals are likely to position and identify themselves in different ways at different times and in different situations, which means that when discussing the political, civic and cultural mobilizations of the migrants in question, it is very difficult to define in advance and in a stable way who and in what way precisely belongs to this group. Of course, certain objective criteria are crucial in certain circumstances: for example, only those with Russian citizenship are able to take part in Russian elections; however, even those without Russian citizenship can still be highly motivated to take part in public debates or protests of concern to Russian domestic and international politics.

2. We here have in mind primarily the participation in political and civic action of migrants in general, rather than, say, the more focused oppositional activities of political exiles, whose political activism is of a more "professional" kind. Of specific interest to the discussion that follows is migrants' collective action, especially action of a social movement type around a set of agendas or issues of political concern in a broad sense, ranging from the politically relevant promotion of a particular cultural identity to different forms of participation in a given state's domestic or international politics. We include here both online and offline activism, not least since these are often closely intertwined. This is not, however, to argue that vocal participation in political debates in the social media is the same as taking part in street protests or organizing and attending public events.

speaker" have been the objects of and participants in actions initiated by the Russian state (such as the various projects of the Russian government to develop politically significant ties with the diaspora). At the same time, Russian migrants' transnational activism has also been taking place through spontaneous and informal networking across national borders, thanks especially to new digital technologies and social-networking infrastructures.

Literature on migrant transnationalism in general has initially focused on questions of the migrants' multiple belonging and conflicting solidarities: collective action by migrants has in this context been examined principally from the perspective of their ethnic self-organization and their efforts to mediate culturally-specific social needs (Pilati & Morales, 2016; Giugni, Michel & Gianni, 2013). With the growing global importance of remittances, increased possibilities of transnational communication, and the general rise in dual and second citizenships, a growing body of literature now also reflects on migrants' widening participation in the polities of their countries of origin (Dufoix, 2002; Byford, 2012). However, scholarship on the activism of migrants in the host countries outside of ethnic-based politics is only emerging (Zapata-Borrero *et al.*, 2013). In this context, the question of the political and ideological integration of settled migrants and "new citizens" in the receiving countries remains poorly conceptualized. For example, while the 2015 report on indicators of the civic integration of immigrants, published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), proclaims that "[b]ecoming actively involved in the host country's society is a key element in immigrant integration" (OECD, 2015, p. 203), this document lists only two core indicators of political integration, both entirely formal and fundamentally individual in nature: the act of naturalization and one's participation in the host country's elections. Such a restricted perspective is also applied to indicators of migrants' involvement in the political sphere of their home country, which is often reduced to voting in national elections via embassies or by other remote means.

Such a perspective radically narrows down the range of political activities that ordinary migrants are expected to engage in, excluding a whole array of collective and individual actions aimed at altering the social organization and power relations in a given polity (whether "home" or "host"). The OECD document does not specify the mechanisms through which settled migrants (to include those with citizenship) can become more actively incorporated

into the receiving state's political sphere as a group that occupies a distinctive transnational position. In the UK, for example, migrant participation in the civic life of the host society is often reduced to representations of ethno-cultural difference. Britain has long-standing policies designed to support new-comers' ethno-cultural self-expression and community-building. However, this ideology and practice of "multiculturalism" invariably overplays the importance of performances of ethno-cultural identity at the expense of other areas of civic and political life, confining migrants' engagement in the host country to a form of representative "cultural membership". This limited understanding of a group's integration in a given society, liberal as it might seem, masks, often quite effectively, the absence of alternative structures and agendas of civic and political participation for those who come to join a polity from "outside".

As Rainer Bauböck has observed, migration creates "a mismatch between territorial and personal boundaries of polities" (Bauböck, 2003, p. 701). This means that when studying the way in which migrants engage in politics, it is not possible to assume a person's belonging to a single state-bound body politic. Migrants' transnationalism refers to their ability to claim membership of more than just one society. This membership is, however, asymmetrical: the political issues and events that animate migrants the most, the degree to which they engage with them, and the modes of mobilisation that they resort to, will vary from case to case, depending on whether the context is the politics of their "homeland" or the host state.

Migrants' transnationalism certainly creates opportunities for them to take part in the political life of *both* the country of origin *and* the receiving state. However, migrants are often not recognised as belonging legitimately to the body politic of *either* the country of origin *or* the receiving state. What is at issue here are not an individual's legal rights as a citizen of this or that country (e.g. the right to vote in elections, to form political organisations or to join civic campaigns), but a broader understanding of legitimacy that refers to social perceptions (including the migrants' own self-perception)— here the perception of the extent to which someone "truly" belongs to a given national body politic and the degree to which they then have the moral right to participate in its politics. Indeed, those who have left their country to settle elsewhere are often seen as forsaking their moral right to participate in their homeland's politics *as fully as* those who are still living

there. At the same time, recently naturalized "new citizens" are commonly perceived by the members of the receiving society as lacking the required undivided loyalty to the nation (which they have only just been permitted to join) to engage in its politics *on a par with* those born and raised in the country. What is more, these "new citizens" might themselves feel partially dissociated from the politics of the country which they had made their home, especially early on.

This position "between two stools" can become especially pronounced in certain political contexts. For example, the neo-nationalism that currently dominates Russian politics and thrives on a conflictual relationship with the West has tended to question the extent to which those who had left the country are qualified to participate legitimately in Russian political life. From this neo-nationalist perspective, "Russians abroad" are expected to become "compatriots outside Russia", sympathizing with and defending the political interests of their "motherland" (the Russian Federation) in the foreign country in which they now reside (Byford, 2012). If Russians living abroad happen to show initiative to transform the political order in Russia itself (as happened during the 2012 protests), Russian authorities perceive this as a potential threat; they frame it as a form of "extrinsic" influence, the risks of which need to be managed and mitigated.

On the side of the receiving state, Britain's increasingly sour relationship with the European Union in this same period and especially its native population's growing hostility towards immigration, not least that which comes from "Eastern Europe", have forced many Russian migrants to start rethinking their own place in British society—a society in which they had initially been made to feel, on the whole, "welcome". At the same time, to the extent to which Russians living in the UK have been side-lined from Russian politics during the mid-2010s, they have become correspondingly more inclined to mobilize around issues of concern to UK politics, and this despite the fact that the structures of political life in the UK provide, as we shall see, only relatively narrow opportunities for such mobilization. The most recent national turmoil of Brexit is (as we shall discuss at the end of this article) prompting many Russians settled in the UK to start renegotiating the terms in which they define their belonging, as (actual or prospective) "new citizens", in a country in which the forces of anti-immigrant populism appear to have gained the upper hand.

Crucial to studying migrants' political mobilizations in a transnational context is to place such mobilizations (in all their diversity) in the context of wider shifts in the transnational political sphere and to identify conditions in "the [concrete] political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action" (Tarrow, 1994, p. 85), which includes, in particular, the analysis of key "opportunity structures", i.e. factors in the socio-political environment that stimulate or limit, direct and shape particular kinds of collective action (McAdam, 1996; McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001). As we shall argue, both the wider transnational political context and the specific "opportunity structures" for collective action that Russians in the UK were able to rely on evolved and shifted in significant ways across the 2000s and 2010s.

One must also note that the *trans*-nationalism of this activism does not mean that those who engage in it are not discursively enacting a given "national body" (a "body" that is presumed to be sharing a common political past, present and future; Wodak, 2009, p. 30). The manner in which such a "national body" is enacted by transnationally positioned migrant "Russians" will depend, however, on the concrete political context in which this enactment takes place. Moreover, as we shall be highlighting in what follows, changing political circumstances (such as those affecting both Russia and Britain across the 2000s-2010s) are likely to prompt a continuous process of renegotiation of the identity of this "national body".

We shall first provide an overview of post-Soviet Russian-speaking migration to, and self-organization in, the UK prior to 2010. Migrants' relationship towards and interest in the politics of the Russian Federation and the wider former Soviet space at that time was both modest and moderate. Moreover, the majority was approving of Russia's desire during this period to open up to the world and reassert itself on the international stage; and many were happy, in their capacity of "Russians abroad", to be incorporated into this strategy, at least in some way. As for the UK environment itself, Russian migrants tended to limit their civic membership and activities to displays of "cultural citizenship" (Stevenson, 2003; Wang, 2013; Miller, 2002), or more specifically to expressions of belonging to a particular broadly "national" linguistic and cultural community.

We shall then go on to discuss in the two sections that follow how attitudes changed significantly as the political situation started to shift in new directions, roughly from the end of the 2000s and the beginning of the 2010s. While the 2011–12 election protests in Russia sparked collective political action among Russian migrants in the UK, both online and offline, this greater level of activism was nonetheless, from 2014, rechannelled into efforts, by some migrants at least, to become better integrated into the UK political sphere. We shall conclude this narrative by a discussion of how the shock outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum reignited the desire of many UK Russians to reconsider and act upon the implications of their transnationalism in this now entirely new and somewhat disorienting political context, especially given that the unfolding of these developments coincided with a steady and significant worsening of the relationship between the Russian and British governments.

Our analysis is, for the most part, based on data collected between 2010–16 by the first author (Morgunova) in a succession of different projects focused on the role of the digital sphere in contemporary global migration and diasporization. These are: the Mignet EU Project; the e-Diasporas Atlas project of the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (FMSH); the Restart project of the International Migration and Gender Institute and Development of Migrant Youth Identities in Post-Referendum Scotland.[3] The core data was collected online, but was invariably supplemented by offline materials, including in-depth semi-structured interviews, round tables, and digital surveys (full details of methods used and data collected in each of the above project are available on their websites). Data on the 2000s was collected earlier, partly in the context of the first author's doctoral research on Russian-speakers in the United Kingdom, which also focused on early forms of migrant online activity (Morgunova, 2008), and partly based on fieldwork and interviews among UK-based Russian-speakers carried out by the second author (Byford) during 2007–08.

As we shall be emphasizing in what follows, given the paucity and limited nature of institutions enabling the political expression of Russians and Russian-speakers as emigrants/immigrants in their home and host societies

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3. http://www.mignetproject.eu/; http://www.fmsh.fr/fr/recherche/28020; http://www.epawomen.org/main-en#!__main-en (accessed 15 December 2018).

respectively, *digital* (internet and social media) communication platforms have served as a vitally important environment for migrant social-movement-type activism (Klyueva, 2016; Karatzogianni *et al.*, 2016; see also Tonkiss, 2017; Ramirez-Plascencia, 2016; Leurs & Potanesie, 2018). This is only partially in line with social media becoming, more generally, the political mobilization vehicle of the present. Research shows that specifically migrant political participation is disproportionately biased towards the digital sphere. A 2008 study by the Oxford Internet Institute has concluded that, in the UK, migrants were the only segment of the population where higher levels of education and online participation did not lead to or correlate with offline social participation in neighbourhood initiatives, local campaigns or national political events (Helsper, 2008). This study did not seek to explain why this would be the case, but further light on the matter is shed by some of the findings of the above-mentioned e-Diasporas project,[4] particularly in relation to the case of Russian-speaking migrants. This research has revealed a much higher density of migrants' digital networking across national borders than their participation in the digital sphere of the receiving country itself, suggesting that digital platforms allow migrants to enact their transnationalism in ways not possible offline (Morgunova, 2012).

LIFE IS ELSEWHERE: RUSSIANS IN BRITAIN BEFORE 2010

Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, migration to the UK from the area that was once the Soviet Union did not have a mass character. Britain never introduced larger-scale migration schemes based on ethnicity, as Germany, Greece and Finland would have done, for instance, and the ethnic factor was certainly never salient for either late-Soviet or post-Soviet migration to the UK. It was only when, from 1997, the new Labour government started to relax UK's immigration policy in the spirit of "selective openness" that Russians and Russophones from the former Soviet area began to settle in Britain in more significant numbers. Crucial to this growing number of Russian-speaking migrants in the UK was the raise in the quota of work permits for professionals, followed by the introduction of the Highly Skilled Migrants Programme (HSMP) in 2002. This scheme of privileged migration included non-restricted employment for the highly-skilled migrant, creating an open route to British citizenship. Due to this "filter", post-Soviet migra-

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4. http://www.fmsh.fr/fr/recherche/28020 (accessed 15 December 2018).

tion to Britain at this point was mostly a privileged, middle-class trend with the average migrant being a well-educated, young and ambitious professional. There were, of course, other immigration routes as well, which many Russians benefitted from (e.g. spousal or student visas), but they still, for the most part, belonged to the same social stratum. With the accession of the Baltic States to the European Union in 2004, the number of Russophones settling in the UK started to grow more rapidly (although not all of these would have necessarily been self-identifying as "Russian"). This latter influx added a significant percentage of somewhat less highly qualified migrants to the existing "highly-skilled" pool.

Ethnographic research carried out at the very start of this period, especially fieldwork done towards the end of the 1990s, indicated that the low numbers of Russian-speaking migrants living in the UK at that time did not lead to the formation of larger community structures. Anthropologist Helen Kopnina (2005) noted these migrants' self-isolation and found their social connections locked within localized "sub-communities". Migrant communication networks were, moreover, divided into two quite distinct domains—those of their homeland and those of their new country of residence. Contact with their social circle "back home" remained limited, facilitated mostly through periodic phone calls and occasional e-mail correspondence, relatively rare visits and accompanying gift exchange.

The acceleration of Russophone immigration to the UK, which took place during the 2000s, coincided with the rapid development of new platforms of internet-based communication. The appearance of the first migrant online chat rooms and forums in the Russian-language segment of the internet during the early 2000s allowed post-Soviet newcomers to the UK to start exchanging experiences of migration and opinions about both home and host countries under conditions of partial anonymity (Morgunova, 2008, 2013, 2014). The expansion of online communications facilitated far more interaction across both social and geographical divides, which proved highly important to a growing sense of "community" within this migrant body, given its otherwise amorphous and dispersed character.

Digital links came also to be increasingly relied on by migrants to connect with family and friends back home, as well as with those who might have emigrated to other parts of the world. These new forms of connectedness

provided much more regular access to both formal and informal news from the former Soviet space, even about quite minor events, fostering a sense of continued participation in, and political membership of, the society of origin. This manifested itself mostly through responding to and sharing current affairs items, but at times could also include more concerted action, such as promoting the signing of an online petition or trying to raise money for some philanthropic cause. Those identifying as "Russian" were, moreover, very likely to be following the more widely publicized and discussed political and cultural events in the Russian Federation, even if they had migrated to the UK from one of the other post-Soviet countries.

By contrast, these migrants' connectedness to UK society was confined to relatively narrow neighbourhood and professional circles. The British press and TV informed and orientated them in the new environment, but the impressions and images of the host country that they formed in this way often competed with their preconceived ideas about Britain, shaped by cultural associations formed prior to migration (Morgunova, 2010). Significantly, the Russophone migrants' participation in English-language internet communication in the context of the British digital sphere remained undeveloped. This radically contrasted the degree of internet-based networking in the Russian language, especially, but not only, between Russophones who shared the predicament of migration. This separation of domains of communication went hand in hand with expressions of ambivalence about UK political life, despite the fact that these migrants usually wished to settle in this country in the longer term. In their discourse, the UK often featured as a place in which they were happy to live and work for the time being, a country they wanted to explore and learn more about, but hardly the society where they felt they truly belonged or even wanted to belong. They invariably positioned themselves as observers of, rather than participants in, this society.

And yet, by the end of the 2000s, the analysis of online exchanges among this population reveals the crystallization of a distinctive and quite complex sense of being "Russian in the UK" (Morgunova, 2013). This self-identification was made up, in fact, of a series of quite different, but intersecting, mutually entangled axes: a) continued identifications with native cities, regions and countries (in Russia or other parts of the former Soviet Union; cf. also Pechurina, 2015; 2016); b) a strong sense of a shared political and cultural past and present (though not necessarily the future)—essentially the

history of the former Russian empire and even more so the Soviet Union (cf. Byford, 2009a); c) mutually comparable experiences of migration to and life in different parts of Britain (experiences that appeared to suggest emergent feelings of "belonging" in a given place within the UK, but that still blended, ambivalently, with the recognition of being "different"); d) attempts to reconcile the latter split and work through this ambivalence by identifying with a broader, supra-national civilization, especially that of "European-ness" (Morgunova, 2006, 2010); e) a sense of having an increasingly visible collective presence in the broader British multicultural landscape as one of its distinctive "communities" (Byford, 2014b); and f) a "cosmopolitan" understanding of one's place in the world as a member of a global workforce and consumer of global media and goods, including one's self-fashioning as a fundamentally free, mobile and independent-minded agent.

The rapid rise in the number of Russophones migrating to the UK during the 2000s also stimulated burgeoning activity of offline self-organization and the emergence of diverse forms of migrant entrepreneurship. The latter led to the creation of a new business niche serving the culturally-specific needs of fellow post-Soviet migrants: from restaurants and shops to legal and medical services. These were rarely "Russian" in the strict and narrow sense, and were usually run by and catered for immigrants from Eastern Europe more broadly. Among the new businesses targeting this growing "marketplace" (Byford, 2009b, p. 58–59) were also a number of newspapers and magazines (Byford, 20014a, p. 128–132; Morgunova, 2013). Particularly visible were Saturday Russian schools offering classes in Russian language and culture for the children of migrants. These emerged in many towns and areas, serving also as key local community hubs and sometimes receiving partial support from the UK local authorities. There was also a proliferation of activity-based social clubs and cultural gatherings, including book fairs, public lectures, concerts and sports meetings. Some of the social networking thrived also within more narrowly defined interest-groups, such as Russophones studying at UK universities or highflying professionals working in the City of London.

The mobilizations of "Russians in Britain" tended, therefore, by and large, to be confined to migrants representing a distinct ("Russian") *cultural identity* within British society. The only other area likely to lead to collective mobilization was the defence of their rights specifically as *migrants*. For example, when in 2008 the UK's Home Office decided to introduce a cap on

immigration and declined a number of visa and naturalization applications that had been made before the rules had been changed, the issue sparked an outcry on Rutalk, the most popular UK-based Russophone online forum.[5] This led a group of British-based Russian lawyers to come together via this same forum and join forces, resulting in a successful collective appeal case (Travis, 2008).

The late 2000s also saw the sharpening of "community politics" within this now considerably enlarged and visible migrant body (Byford, 2014a, p. 132–135). This was manifested mostly through the efforts of certain activists to "unite" the above disparate entrepreneurial ventures and initiatives into an integrated "diasporic community" by establishing an umbrella organization at the level of the UK as a whole. This was supposed to be an organization recognized as an official representative body by both the Russian and UK authorities and therefore able to negotiate and lobby on behalf of "UK Russian-speakers". Notable in this context was the creation at the end of 2006 of the so-called Russian Speaking Community of GB Ltd. or Obshchina, led by Vladimir Bobkov and Natalia Nikolaeva.[6] Nikolaeva also created an organization dubbed the Russian Immigrants Association,[7] which later joined the EU Russian-speakers' Alliance.[8] As it turned out, however, such initiatives lacked the financial means, human capital, social connections and symbolic legitimacy to forge anything resembling a truly representative organ of the purported "diaspora"; indeed, they were largely ignored by the bulk of UK-based Russophone migrants.

In 2007 the Russian Federation developed its own initiative to "consolidate" the UK-based Russophone "diaspora" by inviting some of the migrant activists to establish the so-called Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots,[9] which would serve both as part of Russia's global "compatriot" (*sootečestvenniki*) network and as a local association representing the UK's "Russian-speaking Community" (Byford, 2012, p. 728–730). Many smaller Russophone organizations and activists in the UK showed willingness to

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5. http://www.rutalk.co.uk/forum.php (accessed 15 December 2018).

6. http://www.obshina.org (15 December 2018).

7. https://www.rusemb.org.uk/orgnationals (accessed 15 December 2018).

8. http://www.eursa.eu/ (accessed 15 December 2018).

9. https://www.russiancouncil.org.uk/ (accessed 3 March 2018).

be associated with and become involved in its activities in the hope of gaining extra capital (symbolic and potentially also financial). The timing of the Russian state's efforts to engage the UK's Russophone diasporic entrepreneurs was just right: in the mid-2000s migrant support for the Russian government was high, with the Russian middle classes, both inside and outside Russia, enjoying stability, growing prosperity and cultural freedoms. Russia's vibrant economy and cultural scene, its keen interest in Western culture and lifestyles were evident to migrants who visited their native land for holidays and who kept in touch with their relatives. The Russian government was simultaneously establishing outreach and cultural diplomacy programmes as a means of promoting Russia on the international stage. This included the launching of The Russian World Foundation,[10] for example, and also programmes designed to attract successful Russians living abroad to "reinvest" in Russia—not least scientists and professionals who were being encouraged to see themselves not as never-to-return émigrés, but as transnational citizens who could input positively into Russia's growth even while remaining employed in the West.[11] Consequently, the state-backed initiative of creating a global network of "compatriot councils", which seemed to fall into this same category of initiatives of positively engaging "compatriots" across the globe as a means of opening up Russia to the rest of the world, was initially met with sympathy by many Russians in the UK.

And yet, the Russian authorities' ambition to make strategic political use of this constructed "diaspora" as part of its "soft-power" initiatives was never going to be confined to the promotion and preservation of Russian culture and language. Indeed, as soon as the first significant international tensions arose, namely the war in Georgia in the summer of 2008, Russian embassy officials in the UK encouraged the Coordinating Council of Compatriots to come out, supposedly as a representative organization of the UK's "Russian community", in support and defence of Russia's position—for instance, by making press statements on the topic (Byford, 2012, p. 729). However, such public pronouncements on the part of a loyal *sootečestvenniki* organ remained low profile and were hardly noticed by either the wider migrant body or by the UK press, serving only to confirm the lack of credibility of

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10. http://russkiymir.ru/en/ (accessed 15 December 2018).

11. http://base.garant.ru/12174930 (Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossijskoj Federacii No. 220 from 9 April 2010). (Accessed 15 December 2018.)

such "umbrella" organizations, while also exposing their ineffectiveness as mobilizers of the "diaspora" for any kind of political cause.

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING: A RUSSIAN SPRING IN THE UK

The early 2010s saw a significant shift in the way Russians in the UK mobilized politically, in direct response to the events in Russia itself and as part of related mobilizations in other parts of "Russia abroad" (Kliuchnikova, 2013). Work on the Mignet EU project by the first author (Morgunova) during 2010–2012 coincided with this critical period of political uplift—the formation of an anti-government protest movement in the wake of the December 2011 Duma elections and the run-up to the March 2012 presidential elections. The Mignet EU project had, in fact, identified the Russian-speaking diaspora's responses to the Russian government's policies as something essential to monitor even before the 2011 Duma elections and certainly in the build-up to them. It was clear that Russians living abroad were at this point starting to engage increasingly actively in various online chat rooms with burning questions surrounding Russia's political present and future.[12]

When street protests began in Russia in December 2011, following widespread reports of election irregularities, Russians living abroad, including the UK, were stirred into oppositional action—action that was, based on evidence from the 2000s, far from typical of this group. Mobilization was generated through the intertwining of online and offline activism: events in one domain prompted activity in the other, and vice versa, the two reinforcing each other through a positive feedback loop. Offline protest, such as street demonstrations, emerged mostly out of prior online mobilization. Interviews with participants and a related digital survey have shown that only a tiny minority did not systematically combine online and offline activism (Karatzogianni *et al.*, 2016; Morgunova, 2013). The two forms of protest were in fact impossible to separate: the effect of street demonstrations depended hugely on the sharing of pictures of the events via social networks or blogs affiliated with mass media outlets. Important to note here was that established diaspora organizations played no role in this mobilization. The two organizations that had previously claimed to be "representing" the UK

12. http://www.mignetproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/MIGNET-WP-10-Thematic-Report.pdf (accessed 15 December 2018).

Russian-speaking "diaspora"—the aforementioned Compatriots Council and Obshchina—did not initiate any actions during the protests.

A distinctive aspect of this activism was its transnational nature, with protests being sparked across different countries. Among the most visible were the protests in London and these had impact well beyond the UK, becoming one of the most searched items on the Runet more generally. Types of protest events and activities, as well as the language of protest, were borrowed, adapted and recycled between different global locations, inspiring and reinforcing one another in ways that were hardly coordinated (Kliuchnikova, 2013). It is worth noting that these mobilizations also often included non-Russians: many of the protesting Russians were inspired to share their newfound political enthusiasm with their colleagues and neighbours, inviting British or European friends to join them in street demonstrations. The internet, or, more precisely, certain online hubs, such as Rutalk, served as vital "aggregators" or "synthesizers" of this transnational protest activity. Nearly 50% of the longest and most viewed threads on Rutalk across late 2011 and early 2012 were focused on the topic of the elections and the associated protests. They included a mass of uploaded photos and videos, both those that the participants had created themselves and those reposted from the media. These materials were usually immediately subjected to intense commentary, generating further discussions and uploads.

The vote of Russian citizens resident in the UK in the March 2012 presidential elections starkly contrasted the ultimate result of the election. When the UK votes were counted, it was the billionaire businessman Mikhail Prokhorov who came top with 57.52%, while Vladimir Putin came second with a mere 22.51%. The ultimate electoral count was, however, 63.6% for Putin and just 8% for Prokhorov. This striking discrepancy was immediately highlighted by the London-based blogger Konstantin Pinaev, whose blogs at that moment ranked 78th in popularity on the Runet as a whole.[13] More significantly still, the political activism of "expats" during this period had a direct and immediate consequence on the Russian officialdom's attitudes towards "Russia abroad".

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13. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17178830 (accessed 15 December 2018).

The diaspora's election behaviour in 2012 led to significant changes to the way the votes of "absentee" Russian citizens were to be counted in the next Duma elections, due in 2016. In the 2012 presidential elections the votes of 1.9 million Russian citizens registered with diplomatic missions globally were shared between just six Russian voting areas, including Moscow and St Petersburg. In the 2016 Duma elections "absentee" votes were redistributed across as many as 75 constituencies in over 30 different voting areas, in such a way that the overall share of the votes from abroad would never be more than 10% of the votes in each constituency (Kornia, 2015). The votes of UK-based Russian citizens were allocated to the city of Tomsk in Southern Siberia (Central Election Committee, decree no. 304/1740-6). According to Boris Ebzeev, a member of the Central Election Committee, behind this decision to "dilute" the votes of absentees was the fact that "Russians living abroad can think in a very different way [to those resident in Russia]" (Ushakova, 2016). Indeed, the rules were changed with a view to "protecting" national borders from the "extrinsic" political influence of overly "liberal" expatriate circles.

Since 2012 one can also see a further shift testifying to the Russian authorities' interest in distinguishing the expat (in the sense of citizen of the Russian Federation living permanently outside Russian borders) from the Russian citizen resident in Russia. On 4 June 2014 the Russian Duma ratified a new law criminalizing failure to declare the possession of a foreign passport or residence permits for all those who were *not* formally registered as residing "permanently" outside Russia. Yet another measure separating these two categories of citizen is that which obliges only Russian citizens with registered residency in the Russian Federation to report all movements of funds to and from foreign accounts that they hold,[14] something that does not apply to those registered as living permanently abroad. Both these laws have created a strict dividing line between citizens who belong squarely to the Russian polity (and are subject to the above controls) and those based outside it. While these measures appear not to be targeting Russians living outside Russia, they are designed to diminish precisely the transnationalism of Russian citizens, which runs counter to the neo-nationalist ideology and the "nationalizing" state project (Brubaker, 2011) on which the defence of Russia's present regime is built. Closely related to this new strategy of the Russian state is also the controversial policy to label all Russian organizations

14. http://ivo.garant.ru/#/document/71287602 (Postanyvlenie Pravitel'stva Rossijskoj Federacii, No.1365). (Accessed 15 December 2018).

receiving grants from international funding bodies and charities "foreign agents", which are for this reason prevented from collaborating with Russian state-funded bodies.[15]

The introduction of all these measures has created a serious dilemma for Russians resident abroad: no longer at the forefront of Russia's "opening up" to the world, these migrants now find themselves forced to choose where their loyalty ultimately lies, given that living permanently outside Russia's borders appears to make their political trustworthiness inherently questionable. This has led many UK-based Russians to change the way in which they are responding to political events in and around Russia. Interviews that the first author (Morgunova) conducted during 2012–2014 with migrants from different countries of the former Soviet area have shown that those from the Russian Federation discussed the political situation in their home country reluctantly and were mostly sceptical about the likelihood of a significant political change taking place there.[16] This contrasted the attitudes of interviewees from other post-Soviet countries, such as Ukraine, Latvia or Georgia, who seemed keener to discuss the social and political developments in their homelands, even though the political situation was by no means rosy there either.

This shift in attitude among Russians in the UK was evident also in the almost complete disappearance of street protests there after 2012. There were no mass public demonstrations of solidarity with the 2013 Bolotnaya Square demonstrations in Moscow, for example. There was also no echo in the UK of the anticorruption protests that took place in Moscow, St Petersburg and other Russian cities in April 2017.[17] The decline of appetite for political action among the Russian diaspora during this period was evident also in online forums, such as Rutalk. The analysis of the most active Rutalk threads that the first author (Morgunova) carried out in August 2016 revealed that while political events affecting Russia still seemed to be of considerable interest and concern to those in the diaspora, they were, crucially, not generating mobilisation as such on the part of those contributing

15. http://base.garant.ru/70204242 (Federal Law 121-FZ, 20 July 2012). (Accessed 15 December 2018.)

16. Project Restart, Grundtwig Partnership GRP/12/188P.

17. This contrasts with increased mobilizations of Ukrainian migrants over Euromaidan in 2014 (Malyutina, 2014).

to the forum. The most popular thread by far was devoted to the relationship between Russia and Ukraine; next in popularity was a thread on Putin (who was, following the Runet convention, referred to exclusively through euphemisms and abbreviations—Pu, Vo and Vova); third was, tellingly, the thread called "Depoliticized topics"; and fourth was a thread about sports. Typical of these threads were fragmented and meandering commentaries that did not focus on any one political event or key issue, and certainly never coalesced into anything resembling a political campaign, let alone movement. Discussions included a wide spectrum of views, but rarely produced sustained debates. Most common was the ironic tone and the non-normative writing style typical of the Runet subculture more generally (online Russian slang based on grotesque orthographic and grammatical distortions, dubbed *žargon podonkov* or *padonkaffskij âzyk*, translatable as "scumbag lingo", and also *olbanskij iezyg*, translatable as "Olbanian lingige").

THE FESTIVAL OF INSIGNIFICANCE? UK RUSSIAN MIGRANT MOBILIZATIONS BEFORE AND AFTER BREXIT

The evident reluctance of Russians living abroad to take collective action to effect political change "back home" after the failure of political activism in 2012 was not simply the consequence of their disillusionment in Russia's potential for liberal-democratic development, but also of a sense that oppositional activity from abroad was powerless to effect change. Political ambivalence among Russians abroad grew further in the context of the disorientating rifts in the "national body" following the conflict in Ukraine from 2015. At the level of online communications (e.g. migrant forums), one notes, over the course of the 2010s, an increase in the above-mentioned tactics of ironic detachment, avoidance of straight talk, and deliberate linguistic distortions. At the level of offline action, there is, since the mid-2010s, a retreat to once again placing culture (theatre performances, musical events and language learning), at the forefront of diasporic activity.

In addition to this, however, some Russians living in the UK—especially those who have become naturalized British citizens or have been granted the permanent right to remain—have started to look for a more meaningful place for themselves within the *British* political sphere. To the extent to which "belonging" to a polity is a performative effect of participation in it, this rerouting of political activism from the Russian to the British socio-po-

litical domain is indicative of a certain rebalancing of the Russian migrants' socio-political transnationalism, which in the 2000s, and even more so the early 2010s, was, as suggested above, oriented rather more towards the country of origin.

Both online data and the interviews gathered prior to 2012 show that while Russian migrants displayed a degree of interest in and awareness of the social and political life in the UK, relatively few took an active part in it, even after becoming naturalized citizens. This applies both to local civic initiatives and to political events of national significance, such as elections. The only way in which Russians participated more visibly in British civic life (and this especially during the late 2000s) was as "representatives" of a particular culture—the "Russian culture" which they valued as part of their own identity; which they performed as distinctive, even exotic, in the UK context; and finally, which they understood to be rightfully commanding respect and deserving attention as one of the major "world cultures".

The reason for this was that British public life offered migrants (as "political strangers") only this one type of "opportunity structure" for mobilization and collective action (McAdam *et al.*, 2001): as "newcomers" they were enabled, and even encouraged, to form a *culturally-framed* minority "community" and to perform a given cultural identity which would be incorporated into the UK's expandable multicultural patchwork. This was the opportunity structure that most Russian diasporic entrepreneurs took advantage of during the 2000s when devising their social, cultural or commercial projects. As we have seen above, though, many also tried to combine this *British* opportunity structure with opportunity structures offered simultaneously by the *Russian state*, such as the "compatriots project" and other cultural diplomacy initiatives.

What we see happening in the mid-2010s, however, is the attempt by at least some Russian migrants to seek out and/or take advantage of other kinds of opportunity structures in the UK's political sphere, such that would not reduce their participation in the British polity to sheer "cultural membership"—in other words, structures that would enable alternative forms of political participation by allowing "new citizens" to capitalize on being from "elsewhere", yet making a meaningful contribution to the mainstream political life of the host society.

One example of this form of mobilization would be the group dubbed the Conservative Friends of Eurasia—a political activist network created in 2015, which combines support for the UK's Conservative Party with origins in the former Soviet Union or its successor states.[18] The founder and leader of the group is Botagoz Hopkinson, a naturalized Briton of Kazakhstani origin, a Russian-speaker born in the USSR, who had been a member of the Conservative Party for over twenty years.[19] The "patrons" of the group are Conservative MPs and established party activists, some of whom are interested in former Soviet "Eurasia".[20] However, Hopkinson set up this group specifically to mobilize settled immigrants from the former Soviet area to support the Conservatives on a platform of broadly defined "conservative" ideals, including both the privileging of free enterprise and the market economy and the valuing of "family" and "tradition".[21]

This political support group represents a relatively novel structure for migrant mobilization (at least for those coming from the former Soviet Union) insofar as it transforms these migrants into sympathizers of a major UK political party. The group clearly serves the function of expanding and diversifying the Conservative Party's base of support; but it also allows these "new citizens" to contribute to political life specifically as individuals with origins in a geographically very large and politically and economically not unimportant part of the world. The "former Soviet" zone is here redubbed "Eurasia", which has the effect of downplaying the significance of individual national cultural, political and economic agendas, as well as the Russia-dominated geopolitics of this region. Having said that, Hopkinson recruited the group's members by promoting her initiative across already existing post-Soviet diaspora circles, primarily via Russian-speaking community organizations, cultural centres, churches, professional and personal networks. The Conservative Friends of Eurasia interact through Facebook and a mailing list, using Russian alongside English. Its members are, however, mostly mobilized to support Conservative political campaigns, such as, for example, the 2016 London mayoral elections.

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18. https://www.cfeurasia.com/ (accessed 3 March 2018).

19. https://www.cfeurasia.com/people/botagoz-hopkinson-chairwoman (accessed 3 March 2018).

20. https://www.cfeurasia.com/people/type/Spokesperson (accessed 3 March 2018).

21. https://www.cfeurasia.com/membership (accessed 3 March 2018).

Thus, migrant political mobilization is here being integrated with the very heart of the British political establishment. The political activism that this type of network fosters radically contrasts both the public display of cultural identity that dominated diasporic mobilizations of the late 2000s, and the homeland-oriented performances of political protest, emblematised by the anti-Putin demonstrations of the early 2010s. At the same time, however, the Conservative Friends of Eurasia framework cannot avoid considerably limiting its members' scope for autonomous political action. Members of this group are being mobilized as a) Conservative supporters and b) as "British Eurasians". The term "Eurasian" says very little in itself, but still appears to frame the group as a quasi-minority. For sure, the performance of a distinctive "culture" is not relevant here and is in fact nullified by the vagueness of the term "Eurasian". However, *difference* is still prominently there; a "difference", though, which is to be overcome, or rather "bridged", through the supposedly common values of broadly understood "conservativism". It is these values that are expected to enable the immigrants in question to politically integrate into British society by actively supporting the Conservative Party.

And yet, the interest that this group has for the Conservative Party lies primarily in its potential for providing contacts with, and expertise in, the various countries of the former Soviet geopolitical area. In other words, this party group as an opportunity structure thrives on a *dynamic of exchange of social and political capital* between the Conservative Party and a network of "new citizens" from a strategically important part of the world. However, it remains unclear whether those mobilized to join this group are ever likely to be more than a collection of individuals engaged in such an exchange of capital, as opposed to a collective mobilized to effect political change of relevance to it precisely as a collective.

A very different example has been the response of Russians living in the UK to the shock outcome of the Brexit referendum in June 2016—a seismic political development, in which the topic of migration has played, and continues to play, a critical role. The manner in which the UK is going to dissolve its ties with the EU is (at the point of writing this article) yet to be negotiated, but migrants of all national backgrounds are already actively revising their narratives of belonging in Britain, as well as taking individual and collective action in response to the referendum result. This also applies to those who identify themselves as "Russian", irrespective of the fact that

only a portion of them would have citizenship ties to the EU itself (namely, migrants from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, as well as those previously settled in other EU states, such as Finland, Germany or the Czech Republic, who had received citizenship of these countries). Indeed, the consequences of Brexit on the situation of Russian-speaking migrants in the UK is more complex than that, and the situation is not exclusively related to changes to the freedom of movement between the UK and the EU. For example, while migrants from the Russian Federation can still keep their Russian citizenship, even if they become naturalized Britons, Russian-speakers who have come to settle in the UK from Latvia or Lithuania, Ukraine or Belarus, Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan must choose between one or the other citizenship. Their choice could potentially have serious practical consequences, including increased risk of deportation in some situations (BNN, 2017), prompting, moreover, added dilemmas of national self-identification and sense of belonging.

Furthermore, the issue of Brexit is not simply a technical matter of the UK's legal and economic relationship with the EU, but a major social, political and cultural battleground in which the anti-immigrant neo-nationalism of UK's "Brexiteers" is locking horns with a liberal movement for "Open Britain"—a movement that was designed to mobilize Britons who voted Remain in the 2016 referendum, but that is also proving to be a natural political home for non-British immigrants—EU citizens first and foremost, but also many other migrants, including Russians.[22]

The positioning of UK Russians in this movement and their identification with it requires, however, some unpicking if the motivations behind their mobilization are to become clearer. The ethnographic research that the first author (Morgunova) carried out pre-Brexit has shown that Russians immigrating to the UK have tended to identify strongly with what they presented as "European-ness" (Morgunova, 2006, 2007, 2013). This has been the case already in the early 2000s, when "European-ness" was invoked as a means of transcending the previously dominant Cold War binary of the "Soviet Union" vs. "the West" (the latter being emblematised especially by the USA). Crucially, however, Russian migrants' identifications with "European-ness", while being mostly cultural and civilizational (e.g. Christian rather than Muslim), also carried racial connotations—it allowed Russians arriving in

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22. http://www.open-britain.co.uk/.

the UK to distinguish themselves from immigrants coming from places like Asia, Africa or the Middle East (Morgunova, 2006, 2007, 2010).

Thus, "European-ness" connotes for Russian migrants a certain symbolic claim to the legitimacy of their immigration, a "moral right" of being in the UK—a right that (supposedly) not all immigrants can claim in equal measure. This moral right to immigration to the UK, which the Russians might root in their "European-ness", competes, however, with alternative claims. Indeed, migrant groups whose origins lie in the former British Empire or the Commonwealth as its successor are likely to use this historic connection to claim their own moral right to immigrating to and being in the UK. What is more, they would use this claim to favourably distinguish their right to immigration to the UK from the "illegitimate" incursions of "East Europeans" from behind the former Iron Curtain.

UK Russians have also always sought to exempt themselves from types and forms of immigration which they would construct as either illegitimate or inferior, especially immigration which is construed as failing to "contribute" to the UK as the receiving society (for instance, the immigration of asylum seekers). In fact, Russians living in the UK would often share, both offline and online, their concern that the levels of immigration to the UK were unsustainable. They would regularly voice support for broadly right-wing policies aimed at reducing excessive immigration flows, especially the immigration of those not "contributing" in an obvious way. They would also be incredulous or dismissive of the fact that one could find Russians among asylum seekers or illegal immigrants, apart from in relatively rare cases of individuals with criminal backgrounds and connections.

That said, Russian migrants were usually highly critical of the British hard right, since these groups indiscriminately labelled all immigration, even that of legitimate labour, as inherently bad for Britain. At the same time, however, Russians would regularly try to avoid being identified with "East European migrant labour" (emblematised in the UK principally by "the Poles"), given that this group is among the prime targets of the British anti-immigrant right which has been on the rise since the end of the 2000s. In order to avoid being (con)fused with that category of migrant, Russians living in the UK have shown an increasing tendency to affect a distinctly "cosmopolitan" status. Indeed, the sense of being "rightfully" in the UK as a migrant has become

dependent on them self-identifying as, in reality, "citizens of the world" (something made easier by the fact that the majority belong to the educated, professional middle class). This is why, over the course of the 2010s, increasingly popular among UK post-Soviet Russophone migrants has become their self-identification as "global Russians"—a development that can also be seen as a diasporic response to the above-discussed post-2012 neo-nationalist retrenchment of the Russian Federation.

However, anti-immigrant neo-nationalism that has been sweeping the UK in the build-up to and immediately after the Brexit referendum, and which appears to be turning all foreigners, including West Europeans, into undesirable aliens, has clearly had an impact on post-Soviet Russophones living in the UK, including those with secure British citizenship rights. In reaction to the agendas of the "Brexiteers" (or "Leavers"), whose position is dominated by the anti-immigrant rhetoric of regaining "control of our own borders" and the neo-nationalist narrative of "restoring Britishness" and returning to "Britain as it used to be" (Hobolt, 2016), many Russian settlers to the UK have also seen an opportunity to align their "global Russian-ness" with a British political cause by joining British "Remainers" who, for the most part, emphasize the positive contributions that immigration has historically made to the UK economy and society.

Ethnographic fieldwork carried out both offline and online by the first author (Morgunova) in 2016–2018, which included observations of explicit discussions about Brexit among the UK Russophone community, has revealed that many post-Soviet migrants took active part in lively anti-Brexit street demonstrations, especially those in London, and have also been particularly keen to sign the petition for the EU referendum to be repeated.[23] Motivations for such actions lie arguably less in the belief that this protest will make an actual difference to the outcome of Brexit. Rather, through acts of participation in movements such as "Open Britain" these migrants are materially demonstrating their belonging to a British polity as made up of an "extraordinarily complex, differentiated population", rather than existing (as the "Brexiteers" would have it) as "a fictive singularity" dubbed

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23. Levels of offline activity (street protests) were highest in London: many London-based respondents talked about their own or their friends' participation in anti-Brexit marches. Scottish respondents, by contrast, although actively discussing and unambiguously opposting Brexit in Russian-language online platforms, were not as active offline.

"The People" (Reeves, 2016); and it is precisely this concept of the British polity—as complex and differentiated, in other words as including them as newcomers—that they are explicitly campaigning for.

CONCLUSION

Russians (and post-Soviet Russian-speakers more broadly) who have found themselves as migrants in the UK over the past couple of decades have been attracting sustained interest among researchers in the social sciences and the humanities, with a number of ethnographic studies being produced on the topic, especially as PhDs. While the time-period in question is not long in absolute terms, the political landscape of the two countries, as well as the specific context of migration to and settling (or not) in the UK, have been changing in significant ways between the late 1990s and the late 2010s. This article has re-examined the case of "Russians in the UK" by focusing on the evolution of their political mobilizations and civic participation across the British and Russian polities—a topic that has so far been largely neglected. The transformations of broadly defined civic and political engagements of Russians based in the UK during this period were governed by the following key factors that we have discussed above: the changing context of immigration opportunities in the UK; the technological advancements of new modes of communication; significant political shifts in both Russia and the UK; and (last, but not least) the availability of specific opportunity structures for mobilization, limited as these are bound to be, given the migrants' inherently transnational position in-between at least two and likely more distinct polities.

The 2000s—the period of exceptional economic growth, stability and openness to the world of both Russia and the UK—was the decade in which the migration of Russians to the UK (by no means only those coming from the Russian Federation itself) boomed, leading, by around 2006–2008, to a situation where there was suddenly far greater possibility for collective mobilization within this migrant population than would have ever been the case previously. However, during this period, only two basic kinds of opportunity structures for civic mobilization were made available to these migrants—the structure needed for developing a form of culturally-defined minority migrant community on the British multicultural model; and the

structure enabling Russians in the diaspora to become part of a global net-work of Russian "compatriots" and thus turned into an instrument of Russia's foreign relations.

Many activists in the UK's Russian diaspora did their best to make use of both these types of structures, often simultaneously, but without much lasting success. The "presence" of "Russians in Britain" was marketed loud and clear, but the majority of Russians living in the UK were unlikely to take a particularly active part in either the British or the Russian polity. For sure, many enjoyed the role of mediators or performers of Russian culture abroad, but otherwise they acted mostly as passive observers of, rather than active participants in, both the sending and receiving societies. The reason for this was that the two opportunity structures available to them were, in reality, quite restrictive, keeping them strategically on the margins of the two polities, while greatly limiting the range of possibilities of effective par-ticipation in them.

Things changed dramatically in the early 2010s, with the unexpected emergence of a new opportunity structure—the spread of a significant transnational protest movement against political corruption in the Russian Federation, a movement sparked by the evidence of serious irregularities in the Russian Duma and presidential elections between the end of 2011 and the spring of 2012. At this point, Russian politics spilled onto the streets of many a Western metropolis, including, prominently, London. New technologies, social media and internet communications helped catalyse, synthesize and amplify offline protest activities both within individual countries and across national borders.

As an opportunity structure, a protest is never meant to last, though—it is supposed to bring about the desired political change and then either disap-pear or transform into some other form of mobilization. Ultimately, the 2012 protests against electoral fraud, especially those which took place abroad, failed to achieve their wished-for impact. More importantly for our analysis, in the UK, this movement proved to be very short-lived and did not grow or transform into a sustained opportunity structure for continued political mobilization. While a political opposition movement has managed to survive in mainland Russia, and there are also oppositional activists operating from abroad (e.g. Open Russia), there is little evidence of continued protest among

the wider diaspora, at least in the UK. The absence of a collective movement here is not, of course, an observation about individual migrants' views on Russian politics. What is relevant to the analysis presented in this article are not the political beliefs, hopes and opinions of those in the diaspora, but their wider, collective political mobilization as Russians living abroad.

As discussed above, the Russian government has since introduced a series of policies effecting a systematic separation and growing disenfranchise-ment of Russians permanently resident abroad from political developments in Russia itself, leading to a potential rift between "mainland Russians" and "global Russians". This, as we argue, has prompted many Russians in the UK, especially those who have ended up settling there permanently, to look for new ways in which they could become more engaged in the UK's own political and civic sphere, without, however, reducing this participation to the sheer representation of a culturally defined community (i.e. as de facto representatives of their home country or culture) on the model that was dominant in the latter half of the 2000s. Certain alternative opportu-nity structures for participation in UK's political life (such as the political party group Conservative Friends of Eurasia) have been embraced by some migrants around the mid-2010s; however, these, as discussed, have inherent limitations and serve relatively narrow functions.

As the 2010s are drawing to a close, it is the politics of Brexit—so closely tied to the issue of citizenship, migration, diversity and the identity of "Britain" and "Europe", which has become a significant new context and opportunity for at least some Russians living in the UK to mobilize as part of the British polity—and this for a cause that is both very British and emi-nently transnational. And yet, the position of "Russians" in a neo-national-izing Britain, in a context where it is the latter's relationship with the EU, rather than Russia, that is centre stage, remains politically peripheral. The progressive dissociation of "Russians in Britain" from Russia itself is also making this migrant body appear increasingly marginal in the international relations spats between Russia and the UK which have been ratcheting up in this same period. Time will show if and what further opportunity structures for political and civic participation might become available to Russians liv-ing in Britain, and how precisely this will shape their future mobilizations. What is clear from the above analysis is that structures of mobilization that favour migrants' activism and make the most of it are those in which their

transnationalism comes to the fore. What form, role and relevance this trans-
nationalism will take across the contexts of a nationalizing Russia and Brexit
Britain remains an open question.

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