Ethnicity: Fault Lines among "Our People"

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SUMMARY

This paper addresses the extent to which migrants' identity in a new place is contingent on ideas of "ethnicity", using the case study of Serbs in London. It aims firstly to examine what "ethnicity" means, and the different dimensions of identity and circumstance that inform this. It then aims to deconstruct the notion of ethnicity by exploring the different ways in which ethnic markers are used in different spaces, and interactions with "other" ethnic groups in the city. The research methodology consisted of qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 66 Serbian migrants, and participant observation with a further 20 households, in London. The sampling strategy was reflexive in order to ensure the inclusion of a wide range of migrant experiences according to different socio-political, economic and spatial backgrounds. The findings reveal a diversity of conceptualisations of what "being Serbian" means, signifying that this is not a concrete or quantifiable measure. However, certain broad patterns did emerge, in the sense that those who expressed the ability to "choose" their ethnicity were more likely to be those with sufficient cultural, economic, social and human capital that enabled them to negotiate this situationally. Another key feature that emerged was that "ethnicity" may be the easy label given to what are in fact class and migrant status-based identities, depending on where people are positioned within the socio-political matrix. This, and particularly workplace based identities and migrant status – rather than ethnic qualities – also affected the perceived boundedness from ethnic "others" within the city.

KEY WORDS: Serbs, migrants, ethnicity, identity, class, city, language

This paper was adapted from a PhD thesis exploring the lives and identities of Serbian migrants in London, specifically considering their sense of community, ethnicity, and how their social networks both reflected on and shaped these identifications (Mavra, 2010). Using this case study, the paper addresses the possibility and the extent to which migrants' identity in a new place is contingent on ideas of "ethnicity".

Following an outline of the methodology and theoretical debates around the concept of ethnicity, the paper will examine what "being Serbian" means

to respondents themselves. Following this, their "use" of "ethnicity" will be explored through certain ethnic markers and behaviours they display both in the private space of their homes and public spheres, and how and why these are employed, with a view to examining both the similarities and differences that emerge. Finally, the paper will consider respondents' interactions with other ethnic groups in the city, in order to assess how and under what circumstances this may induce re-appropriated versions of identity.

METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork for this study took place between October 2006 and November 2007. The methodology was qualitative, consisting of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 66 people who initially identified themselves as Serbian when responding to the research call, and lived (or had very recently lived) in London (city parameters defined according to the 2001 Census). In addition to the interviewed sample, a further 20 households were engaged with as part of participant observation, hosting the researcher in their homes and inviting her to events as an observer.

The sampling strategy employed was reflexive, in order to ensure the inclusion of a wide range of migrant experiences according to different socio-economic and spatial backgrounds, as well as different motivations for migrating (including students, voluntary, high-skilled migrants, refugee high-skilled or de-skilled migrants, etc). This also involved stratifying respondents by their "waves" of migration into the UK: the first, post-war wave arriving as European Volunteer Workers (EVWs) between 1946 and 1950, including asylum seekers who were against Tito's communist regime at the time; the economically-driven wave from 1960 to the mid 1980s; and the third wave arriving in the 1990s and into the early 2000s. It should be noted that this most recent wave was the most complex and diverse in terms of the "type" of migrants arriving within it. Those arriving in the mid-1990s were largely refugees from the Yugoslav civil war, coming from a variety of backgrounds and professions. Those coming later, in the early 2000s, were part of an economically driven, "voluntary" as opposed to "refugee" emigration, and tended to be high-skilled migrants.

The following section details some of the debates around the construct of "ethnicity".

WHAT IS "ETHNICITY"?

"Ethnicity" has been a much-contested term. It has often been characterised by a certain "muddiness" and tensions between concrete or rooted qualities and more abstract or self-defined ones (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975; Omi and Winant, 1986; Shulman, 1999; Haines, 2007). This has been exacerbated by common conflations of ethnicity with "race" and "nationality" at policy level (Reynolds, 2006: 1090), which brings its own problems. For example, "nationality" itself has proved difficult to define and has been seen by some as an unstable concept prone to re-invention (Anderson, 1923: 12–13; Triandafyllidou, 1998: 594). Another issue has been the relationship between ethnicity as "cultural identity" and race as biological characteristics; this has been seen as particularly problematic where this conflation engenders hierarchies of superiority and inferiority related to the constitution of people's bodies (Grosfoguel, 2004: 315).

These factors highlight the need to deconstruct "ethnicity", especially since, despite these problematisations associated with the term, it has maintained ongoing resonance on political, social and individual levels (May and Modood, 2001; Hutchinson, 2000), as a key identifier of both the self and "others". Ethnicity has been positioned as such through the following key debates: as something "primordial", i.e. inborn; as socially constructed; and as situationally defined according to varying socio-political contexts (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996; Hickman, 1998; Bulmer and Solomos, 1998; Wimmer, 2004; Brettell, 2000; Eriksen, 2001).

What the concepts arguably have in common is the notion that a group of people collectively defined according to certain ethnic parameters, whether these are considered inborn or contextual, will necessarily share certain commonalities. In considering an "ethnic community" of this kind, certain commentators have criticised this assumed sameness (Joppke, 1996: 450–451; Phillips, 2007). Deconstructing the term "ethnicity" disrupts these expectations of homogeneity and enables other identifiers and markers of difference to emerge. This is an important exercise to undertake given the emphasis on ethnicity as a key social dimension, particularly in the migrant context (Connor, 1978; Shulman, 1999; Haines, 2007), and the danger that, "unless one keeps an eye on everything which is not ethnic… scholars, usually against their own intentions, end up confirming a view of the world as effectively made up of competing ethnic groups" (Eriksen, 2001: 19).

What this paper will attempt to do is challenge ethnicity's "ultimate identifier" status by showing how different Serbian migrants conceptualise

and **"**use" **"**ethnicity" in different ways, essentially highlighting the equal importance of other dimensions of identity and structural factors that create both unity and fault lines across the map of Serbs' social interactions in London.

TENSIONS BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND MEANING: "BEING" SERBIAN

Considering the idea that ethnicity may be constructed versus "inborn", alongside other variations such as post-structuralist notions that ethnicity, like other facets of identity, is self-defined, makes language a powerful referent in disentangling what exactly ethnicity means to people (Bourdieu, 1991), and the degree of significance they assign it. This proved to be the case with many respondents in this study, given the way they labelled and construed language itself.

While 12 respondents chose to be interviewed and respond in English, the remaining 54 spoke their "native" language. Pinpointing exactly what this "native" language was aptly highlighted the Serbian "problem" of ethnicity. What was once known as "Serbo-Croat" – the official language of the former Yugoslavia – was then divided into "Serbian" and "Croatian", reflecting the political and cultural splits during the 1990s hostilities. Although the two remain, to all intents and purposes, the same language, with largely the same vocabulary and grammar, distinguishable mainly by accent, several respondents demonstrated confusion when asked which language they speak most often in their everyday lives and home:

> *I would say Croatian, I would say Serbo-Croat, Croato-Serbian, whatever you like. Considering that we're from Croatia and it's Croato-Serbian, but since it's formally called Serbo-Croat, I mean you don't have that anymore you have Croatian or Serbian* (Djordje).

> *Serbian or Serbo-Croat – that language which we here call "ours". I tend to call it Serbian* (Tanja).

The signposting of "ours" is a key element here. The Serbian word "naši", (*nashe*), when literally translated into English means "our" or "ours". This is a common colloquialism and was used several times by the vast majority of respondents to indicate any combination of the following: those who speak the same language and/or come from the same language-speaking

province; people from any of the other provinces of the former Yugoslavia; people specifically from Serbia; people sharing a similar mentality and/or culture; and, finally, people in the Serbian and/or former-Yugoslav diaspora. The term was usually used in a throwaway manner, indicating an automatic expectation of researcher complicity in understanding and adhering to its meaning.

When those who used the word were specifically asked to analyse what they meant, this was rarely clearly articulated, usually with an expression of surprise and mild irritation at the sudden interruption of the unspoken status quo. For those who did give an explanation, the point consistently made was that if you can understand what someone is saying, both by understanding the actual words they are speaking and also "getting the in-jokes" and cultural idioms, then somehow s/he is of "you", and together "we" are "our people" or "ours" – "naši". While language has typically been portrayed as both unifying and divisive, separating "us" from "them" (Kershen, 2006: 102), the findings that emerge here challenge the notion that "us" and "them" refer to clearly-cut "different" groups, further underlining the complexity of "ethnicity".

This resonates with Bourdieu's argument that the standardisation of language is essentially an artificial creation of nation state-making (1991: 48), significant in light of arguments that Yugoslavia itself was an artificial construct (MacDonald, 2002). Does the breakup of Yugoslavia, then, make this version of "our" people redundant? Bourdieu also points out how the same language can be a marker of social difference: "there exists, in the area of pronunciation, diction and even grammar, a whole set of differences significantly associated with social differences" (1991: 54). Several respondents acknowledged this:

Language is always changing. If you come across someone from Montenegro, you'll see they speak a language that to us is pretty archaic… also, for example, that whole group that arrived with the war in the last 15 years from Vukovar [city in Croatia] *– they speak with their particular language and have their particular customs and differ largely from other groups who came, for example, from Bosnia* (Borislav).

Viewed from this perspective, language complicates the question of a specifically "Serbian" ethnicity, especially if respondents refer to, and include themselves among, the non-Serbian population from the territory of the former Yugoslavia when talking about "our" people.

Examining language both as a labelled entity and as a tool for communication thus highlights how the very idea of a "nation" and potentially homogeneous ethnic "community" is latently contested through everyday linguistic norms. This problematising was extended onto the language used to describe ethnicity in various guises, including ethnicity-as-nationality, identity-as-nation, and ethnicity-as-religion, specifically when the idea in question was being re-moulded by dominant political contexts:

> *I didn't grow up as a Serb. I grew up as Orthodox, but also Yugoslav… in my family that was more part of tradition – celebrating Christmas and Easter – but we didn't go to church regularly, I simply wasn't brought up that way… I say I am Serbian, but I don't experience it as "Serbian-Serbian", I don't know, probably because I never was Serbian – I was just Orthodox. And then I was Yugoslavian. Even today I say I'm from Yugoslavia, the former Yugoslavia. Then when someone asks for details, then I say I'm Croatian – born in Croatia* (Ruža)*.*

Here the respondent covers four identities in one, which are interrelated but also at odds with one another, comprising the "ethnic", the national and the religious – Serbian, Croatian, Yugoslav, and Orthodox. So which is the "real" one? And are all, or some, or none of them "naši"?

This contested identification can, in the context of this study, be seen to operate both with reference to the wider structural forces determining identity, but also to a degree of self-determination that is not always passive. The narratives and experiences of some migrants in this study indicate that they were able to exercise their own agency to a greater degree than others in terms of "choosing" how to identify (notwithstanding that such identification may be subconscious until explicitly questioned). The following section will engage with this, probing how respondents defined what is "Serbian", and contextualising this within their circumstances of arrival, to see whether correlations exist between socio-political forces and personal experiences of "ethnicity".

DEFINING "SERBIAN"

Findings in numerous studies that people will self-identify their ethnicity (Modood et al, 1997: 332) and that, "when analyzing socio-political situations, what ultimately matters is not what is but what people believe is" (Connor, 1978: 380), arguably place the onus on people's subjective understanding of ethnicity rather than pre-determined categorisations into which

others attempt to place them. For this reason, respondents were asked what "being Serbian" means to them, in order to consider how they identify themselves (Haines, 2007: 290) and gauge their subjective understandings of ethnicity rather than ascribe pre-set categories (Cohen, 1978; Barth, 1969).

Interview time codes revealed that this was the question in the interview that most respondents lingered over the longest. Across the socio-economic spectrum, men and women, refugees, economic migrants, students, young and old – all were stumped by the question of what "being Serbian" means, and often said they had not thought about it before. This is a point worth mentioning since "ethnicity" was usually held up as the overt, explicit reason why several of these migrants were forced from their homes and indeed others were prepared to force them away. It therefore seems imperative that this apparently ambiguous but nonetheless powerful concept is probed as it appears in people's everyday subjectivities.

Respondents identified five broad facets to convey what "being Serbian" means, frequently naming more than one individually. They are, in order of popularity, ethnicity as: a sense of belonging to a shared culture (which they defined as Serbian history, music, literature and myths); individual birthright, ancestry or "inborn" mentality; something uncertain or meaningless, where respondents identified more with being Yugoslav or European; religious identity – i.e. Serbian Orthodox; and territorial affiliation, i.e. coming from Serbia.

The most-prevalent understanding, therefore, subscribed to the view of ethnicity as constructed through a shared, collective history, cultural memory, traditions and values. This evokes the importance of symbols in the formation of ethnicity, as expounded by the concept of ethnosymbolism (Smith, 2000). The following are representative quotes of respondents' understanding of ethnicity in this constructed, symbolic sense:

It means knowing where you come from… all our customs and our history (Stanislav).

Being Serbian means respecting some culture of your own, and your tradition and roots. Not in a nationalistic sense, but simply for me because I feel it that way – when someone asks me, that's what defines me ethnically. That culture and tradition, and my respect towards it all (Andjela).

There was some polarisation here between the different waves of migration, with wave one mentioning this most and wave two the least. This ar-

guably hints at the significance of socio-political circumstances in bringing particular constructs of ethnicity to the fore (Haines, 2007). For example, the fact that the second wave gave this as their lowest response out of all three waves reflects a period of time when the overarching context of Yugoslav culture and nation-making were in force, and a specific "Serbian" ethnicity was a less contested emotional and political concept:

> *Tough question! Well it's my nationality, it's belonging to that ethnic group – it doesn't mean anything else to me, I mean it means the same as being Indian or English or Iraqi… I still feel like a Yugoslav* (Vinka).

Echoing this response, several second-wave respondents also said they cared more for universal "human" rather than specifically ethnic values, feeling unsure what "being Serbian" meant or asserting that "being Serbian" was meaningless to them since they still saw themselves as "Yugoslav" (Pistalo, 2002), and did not want to re-negotiate this identity following the breakup of Yugoslavia when that "national" identity became redundant (Nylund, 2006: 3).

Others (also in the second wave) who refused to conform to a "Serbian" ethnic identity saw themselves as "European", evoking the notion of "pan-ethnic" identification (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Haines, 2007):

> *I can't call myself Serbian at all – I still call myself a Yugoslav. But I've become part of it all – the Serbian Society – because I don't feel there's any difference between a Serbian culture and a Yugoslav one* (Donka).

> *Being Serbian… I find that quite narrow – suffocating and narrow – so I would sooner identify as Yugoslav, but since that country no longer exists, then I feel comfortable as a European* (Dobrilo).

> *One of the problems I have with identification is that I feel far more like a Yugoslav because I grew up in that place called Yugoslavia, in which there existed no difference between nationalities. It's hard to define because the feeling of nationality depends on the environment in which a person lives* (Dimitrije).

When subsequently asked if he therefore felt "British", Dimitrije responded that, ultimately, he would identify himself as Serbian, but since he felt accepted in his current environment where nobody questioned him on his background, he never felt the need to "declare" himself. The impact of

wider perceptions on how ethnicity is experienced will be further explored later in this paper. Arguably, it is no coincidence that this man is also an affluent, second-wave voluntary migrant with a well-established professional career. Those who displayed the greatest frequency of thinking critically about their own ethnicity as fluid and context-dependent had largely similar life stories, coming from urban, international backgrounds. They could be seen as "ethnic chameleons" who exercised considerable control over "which" ethnic identity they assumed, and when, echoing the cosmopolitan ethos of the cultural elite (Hannerz, 1990).

These responses – relating to "ethnicity" as meaningless or in fact "non-Serbian" – contrasted sharply with the Serbian notion of "true" ethnicity as valid only in terms of blood origin, with no element of self-identification. This view of Serbian ethnicity, as something inherent and "primordial", was the second most common view espoused by respondents, reflecting an immoveable feature of oneself handed down the generations:

> *I became that through birth – I didn't develop or change into it, I was just born that way* (Vera).

> *I was born a Serb. These are things that can't be changed – even if I wanted to change it I couldn't, we can't change who we are and where we come from* (Ceca).

> *It means my parents, my grandparents, my great-grandparents* (Rada).

This last comment evokes the collective Serbian consciousness, "the cult of ancestors" (Gavrilović, 2003: 724), which was mentioned widely across the migrant socio-economic spectrum. Where a difference can be deduced is from the gradual increase of this view across the waves, with a low occurrence among the first and highest with the third wave, not coincidentally peaking with the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s when the "primordial' representation of Serbian ethnicity in Serbian media and popular culture was at its highest.

In particular, there was a concentration of third-wave, de-skilled refugee respondents who most strongly expressed a "primordial" view of ethnicity, asserting strength and pride in their Serbian identities as a focus of stability in the face of crises which otherwise de-stabilised their lives – a previously observed (Timotijević and Breakwell, 2000) and here ironic phenomenon, given that this facet of their identity was precisely what caused their up-

rooting in the first place (Haines, 2007). What is then arguably surprising is that this was also the group most likely to deem "being Serbian" as coming from a particular territory. This effectively condemned them to a psychological state of non-belonging anywhere, since a return to Croatia was not possible for many, and they had little or no relationship with the "motherland" of Serbia or people from Serbia.

Another example of the interplay of wave of migration and socio-political circumstances – as well as individual imperative – in constructing ethnicity is the way in which religious identity was operationalised. This is here set apart in its own right given other studies' findings that religion can also be construed as ethnicity (Haines, 2007), and especially given the traditionally close alignment between the Serbian Orthodox faith and the Serbian ethnic identity (Bataković, 1996; Gavrilović, 2003) – if you say you are "Serbian" then, traditionally, it is a "given" that you are also of the Serbian Orthodox Church. However, this, too, was mitigated by wider socio-political factors. For example, second wave respondents took a more critical view of this religious identity as defining their "ethnicity":

> *Serbian religion is linked to the Serbian people in a different way to how Protestantism is linked with British identity, but maybe it's all to do with upbringing, as our generation grew up in a country* [Socialist Yugoslavia] *where it wasn't like that – religion wasn't a way in which I would identify* (Jelica).

In contrast, third-wave migrants who arrived as refugees in the early 1990s (rather than those arriving more recently in the 2000s), were more likely to name religion as part of their "ethnic" identity. These points support the notion that ethnic identities are created by wider forces and that "the creation, maintenance, shift or dissonance of any racial/ethnic boundary is not explained without reference to the historical and situational context in which it is happening" (Wallman, 1978). However, it is still the case that more affluent and mobile migrants displayed a much greater degree of defining "ethnicity" on their own terms; that is, without reference to land, myth or ancestry. Given these findings, it may be argued that the perception of being Serbian or not varies to a significant degree according to the circumstances and wider context of these migrants' lives, specifically in this case the circumstances of war and political instability, where primordial understandings became more important.

Another way of probing migrants' attachment to their "ethnic" identity is by considering the degree of cultural reproduction. Studies of migrant groups including respondents from subsequent generations (rather than waves) born in the UK indicate varying degrees of the transmission and absorption of "ethnic" identity by migrants' children (Burrell, 2005; Smith and Jackson, 1998; Reynolds, 2006). This was also taken into account and respondents were asked concretely how they did or would bring up their children with regard to cultural norms. The most frequent response was that some element of Serbian "ethnicity" would be present in their child's upbringing, to a greater or lesser degree. "Getting the best of both worlds" was also a prominent motif. In particular, first-wave migrants emphasised that they took great pains to ensure their children had the latter opportunity:

My husband often says that I haven't taught our children to feel Serbian. And perhaps he is right there, I'm not saying that it's not true, but I didn't insist on them feeling Serbian because I knew they were going to live all their lives here so I wanted them to feel part of this set-up here (Mira).

I would like my children to… feel comfortable, this is their country. I came as an asylum seeker, a refugee, and I don't want them to feel as if they are refugees because they're not (Tomislav).

The latter comment in particular indicates a superseding of "ethnic" identity specifically with that of being an accepted citizen as opposed to a perceived stigmatised asylum seeker or refugee. In this context, "the legal status of 'refugee'" pushes out other understandings of that person's identity (Hitchcox, 1993: 157). "Being Serbian" in this sense therefore takes on meanings other than "ethnic" and highlights the way in which associated identities take precedence depending on which life experience made the biggest impact on the respondent.

Interestingly, this changed by wave three, where migrants who had arrived as refugees in the mid-1990s and socialised mainly with other Serbs were the least likely to say they would or did bring up their children in a way enabling them to "get the best of both worlds". This may also be owing to the fact that they had spent less time in the new environment than first wave migrants and therefore had fewer opportunities to acquire non-Serbian based social capital. One woman depicts this upbringing:

As much as my children follow everything that goes on in England, so I try to lead them into the Serbian remit, although they are little Englishmen. It's quite difficult for them to understand, but I do try, I bake Serbian cakes, we have Serbian TV, I have many Serbian books for kids which I use to teach them Cyrillic and everything – I try (Ceca)*.*

The contrast between this response and Tomislav's, above, may also reflect an important difference between these two "sets" of refugees, in that the exiled EVWs had a more structured reception and subsequently a higher degree of social integration with their new environment.

Ceca's approach also presents a contrast to second and third-wave, highly-skilled respondents arriving in the early 2000s from international, urban backgrounds and/or with English spouses/partners, most of whom said that they had brought up their children as British or English, or as "cosmopolitan". They were also most likely to say they would or did bring up their children free of any set ethnic identity:

My son is absolutely and utterly British… I never really brought him up in terms of being Yugoslavian, I never felt that I had to do something specific for my son so that he knows he is from over there which he isn't, he was born here (Mila)*.*

We didn't bring him up either as a Serb or a Brit, but as a citizen of the world. That's how I would like to see myself too (Sara)*.*

It is clear from the diversity of conceptualisations of what "being Serbian" means that this is not a concrete or quantifiable measure, in keeping with ethnicity's elusive nature. While certain overarching themes persist, the complexity of each individual and their unique life circumstances make clear-cut generalisations very difficult and, indeed, undesirable. In particular, a tension between the language and the "real" meaning respondents attempted to convey when describing what "being Serbian" and "naši" meant, conveys a problematising of the self in relation to one's location on the "ethnic" spectrum. However, certain broad patterns did emerge with regard to which migrants were more likely to indicate a self-defined version (or versions) of ethnicity, and which migrants were more likely to perpetuate an "inborn" or given view. That is, those who express the ability to "choose" their ethnicity are those with sufficient cultural, economic, social and human capital that then enables them to negotiate this as they feel the

situation demands it or, indeed, allows them not to conform to situational demands.

One latent feature that is steadily emerging from these findings is that "ethnicity" may be the easy label given to what are in fact class and migrant status-based identities, depending on where people are positioned within the socio-political matrix. Gaining a deeper understanding of the extent to which these migrants do or do not manifest their "ethnicity" through concrete markers or rituals in their everyday lives can help probe this further.

MARKING ETHNICITY

Ethnic "markers" have been seen as key symbols of "belonging" to an ethnic group (Gavrilović, 2003: 727). These include, typically, the production and consumption of food, garments or religious icons, language, and social behaviour "marked" by certain rituals (Burrell, 2006; Kershen, 2006). Ethnicity is also thought to be brought to life by interactions in the (imagined) community, particularly considering "how far new traditions can thus use old materials, how far they may be forced to invent new languages or devices, or extend the old symbolic vocabulary beyond its established limits" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983: 7). This idea that ethnicity is expressed as a collective phenomenon in families, clubs, church and so forth, and arguably cannot be sustained as an individual position alone, is also a good place to comment further upon the disjuncture between practice and personal feeling where the "ethnic community" is concerned. That is, the tension between needing to "create" an ethnicity to acquire status or as a survival strategy (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975; Kelly, 2003), and an individual's subjective relationship with this ethnicity, i.e. what different migrants are seeking consciously to represent, and how they aim to be perceived (Bourdieu, 1991: 220-221).

This section examines both the private, public and overlapping "ethnic markers" observed in respondents' homes and through participant observation in public spaces, taking respondents' own appropriations of these markers as evidence (i.e. where they themselves refer to something as being "ours" or "typically Serbian"). The presence of these markers was also sought through the interviews when respondents were asked how, if at all, they maintained Serbian culture in their everyday lives and how important this was to them. They were free to define "Serbian culture" as they wished, considering that "culture is complex and multifaceted, what matters for the content of national identity are not people's 'objective' characteristics, but their subjective perception of these traits" (Shulman, 1999: 1014).

The home was chosen as a significant site for observing these markers, given the autonomy this space allows the individual to reflect upon what is meaningful to them (Appadurai, 1986), evoke past geographies, and the prevalence of this past in the present (Tolia-Kelly, 2006: 149). The home also enables the power to construct one's own version of ethnicity and national belonging precisely owing to the small-scale, personalised nature of the space and the markers themselves. These then situate migrants "effectively as agents of their own national identity, rather than passive participants in a wider display of national consciousness" (Burrell, 2006: 76).

However, not all of these markers or rituals were found to be enclosed in the "private" space of the home, or indeed purely in public – a blurring of the two became apparent. The following table illustrates this, as well as the frequency with which these markers were observed in different spaces and mentioned in interviews:

Table 1.   Frequency of "ethnic markers"

"Private" markers in respondents' homes	"Public" markers in social spaces
Serbian media (newspapers, Serbian/former Yugoslav satellite channels, etc.) – 55	
Traditional Serbian food/ingredients – 48	
Observing customs, e.g. the Slava, Serbian New Year and others – 40	
Traditional Serbian hospitality – 40	
Serbian popular culture (films, art, music, books, etc) – 39	
	Serbian Orthodox Church attendance – 23
Serbian Orthodox religious iconography – 13	
Décor – 11	
Serbian political iconography – 5	

Source: Fieldwork with total sample, 2006 – 2007

The blurring of the two was particularly apparent when considering the traditional Serbian Orthodox "Slava". This is a family's Saint's day celebration, which, in its most traditional guise, is celebrated in one's home but with the doors open to anyone who is aware it is that family's Slava, i.e. with no formal, private invitations (although in current, urban practice, the

latter is more often the case). This blurring also occurred with other markers, such as what many defined as typical Serbian hospitality enacted in the more "public" space of the living room, and other markers that moved between both public and private, such as celebrations.

Church attendance is here also depicted as a "marker" owing to certain concrete indicators of re-appropriated ethnicity that it generated; namely, "invented" tradition (Talai, 1986; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Brah, 1996). For example, observing the congregation during Sunday services, I saw some of the younger women wearing headscarves and kneeling. These signs of deep piety, I learned later, were not originally Serbian Orthodox traditions. They were, in fact, inspired by the Russian Orthodox Church, initially attended by many migrants who had largely arrived as refugees from Croatia in the mid-1990s, and had at first had been unaware of the existence of the Serbian Orthodox Church in London. Through our conversation, one of these women indicated that she and others arriving in this situation had transferred these acts of "deeper devotion", as they perceived them, to the space of the Serbian church in a simultaneous bid for individuality and approval amid the collectivity. That is, they had attempted to assert new, yet still recognisable identities – in this case, religious ones – in place of previous aspects that had been erased, such as belonging to a Croatian nationality.

The two most prevalent ethnic markers common to nearly all respondents were those enabling ethnicity to be consumed, whether physically or mentally. Most common was the consumption of Serbian media, be it over the Internet, through newspapers/magazines, or the transmission of Serbian (and former Yugoslav) television channels. This is here depicted as both public and private, given its public and political nature, but also the fact that the choice of watching a particular channel or reading a particular newspaper is "private".

What stands out in terms of people's reasons for following this media is that, while a desire to generally keep in touch with events was most common, those who arrived as refugees most frequently said they were motivated by anxiety over the fate of Serbia and felt personally involved in events there, even though (or especially because) many were unable to return. In particular, first-wave migrants who considered themselves "exiled" from their former country were avid followers, supporting theories suggesting the centrality of television in "the making of exile cultures" and as a vehicle through which migrants can construct a common identity among themselves in the new place (Naficy, 1999: 538–539).

Consuming traditional Serbian food was the second most common marker, echoing findings from other studies relating to the significance of food eating and preparation in maintaining a collective, diasporic memory (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 212). I often saw and smelled dishes such as "gibanica" (a cheese pastry), "sarma" (minced meat wrapped in a special kind of pickled cabbage), "proja" (a baked cornmeal pie) and "žito sa slatkim" (cooked wheat served with a particular kind of sweet preserve), simmering away in respondents' kitchens. These were also often served to me during visits, Slavas, and at public events such as those at the Serbian church. Interestingly, making these dishes proved an exercise in resourcefulness for many, as (at the time of fieldwork) there was no one dedicated "Serbian" shop in London. Instead, respondents often bought ingredients from Polish, Albanian, Armenian and Turkish establishments to make them. This suggests that considering everyday ethnic markers can potentially reveal how the boundedness (Barth, 1969; Wallman, 1978) of ethnic groups may be subverted and, with it, the notion of ethnicity itself as constructed according to rigid demarcations of difference. What it also hints at is that "Serbian food" may be more a construct of migration and/or exile than a clearly defined cultural marker.

Closely linked with the making and sharing of traditional Serbian food was another marker specifically appropriated as "Serbian" by many respondents across the migrant spectrum: "our" hospitality. This was conveyed both verbally through interviews and conversations, and reinforced through the generous portion of a dish "spontaneously" whipped up to serve me, their guest, or the bed given up for me for the night if I stayed late and my hosts did not deem it suitable for me to return home by the night bus. This was most strongly adhered to by migrants who were less affluent and had arrived from smaller towns or villages, reflecting, to an extent, the expectation of stronger bonds and feelings of responsibility towards one another inherent to living in a smaller area where close-knit ties are the norm (Jamieson, 1998). This suggests that different migrants have different understandings and practices of "ethnicity"; in this case, the less affluent are more focused on hospitality explicitly as a cultural marker.

Differing uses of ethnicity were most strongly emphasised when comparing the objects and décor in people's homes. First-wave migrants were significantly more likely than any others to have markers in their homes denoting the "old homeland" in memory, rather than as it currently stood. The objects recorded in their homes evoked the by-gone era of *četnik* fighting and loyalties – a framed portrait of the general Draža Mihajlović was a

fixture on many mantelpieces, as were numerous icons of Serbian Orthodox Saints. Image 1 illustrates the latter. Such markers are a clear example of the way in which the space of the home can encapsulate the past and inscribe a particular, in this case politicised identity (Tolia-Kelly, 2006: 170), denoting a "strong sense of the everyday as ideological", as found among comparable EVW groups in the UK (Smith and Jackson, 1999: 374).

Image 1. Hallway display of first-wave respondent

Source: Fieldwork with total sample, 2007

Reiterating these motifs of the first wave, less economically and socially established de-skilled refugees and economic migrants coming from towns and villages tended to have religious icons dotted about their living rooms, and affirmed their regular adherence to religious customs and days, celebrating the Slava in the traditional way, church going, and so forth. Image 2 illustrates this by showing how, in a third-wave refugee family's home, the icons of Serbian Saints are placed above the television alongside family photos, representing their centrality to that household, and strongly echoing the shrine to homeland and religion as depicted in the first-wave home in Image 1.

Image 2. Living room of third-wave family's home

Source: Fieldwork with total sample, 2007

These features in third-wave refugee migrants' homes were thus used explicitly to assert and enjoy the "Serbianness" of that household.

In contrast, the homes of voluntary, high-skilled migrants from both the second wave and those who arrived in the 2000s among the third wave, mainly contained history, literature and art-related Serbian and other formerly "Yugoslav" cultural markers. These were positioned as aesthetically pleasing or intellectually stimulating works rather than points of pride and emotional investment in an ethnic or national identity, and thus were not used as a "cultural tool" in the same way (Kershen, 2006: 107). Comparing images 3 and 4 with the previous two further demonstrates this. Images 3a and 3b depict the self-designed interior of a second-wave migrant's home, stylistically very different from either the first or third-wave respondents' homes. Material affluence is significant here as is, of course, the fact that interior fashions may simply have changed from the first wave down. Image 4, showing the central staircase in another second wave migrant couple's home, depicts art by Serbian, former Yugoslav and other European artists that is not designed to be evocative of an explicit religious or "ethnic" affiliation but, rather, is art for art's sake, collected where the occupants happened to have lived before (in this case, Belgrade). Moreover, the symbols

in this home of a more explicit "Serbian" identity are sidelined in miniature by a bookcase in a spare room, as shown in image 4b, in contrast to the pride of place assigned them in image 2.

Image 3a and 3b. Hallway and open plan interior of second wave couple's home

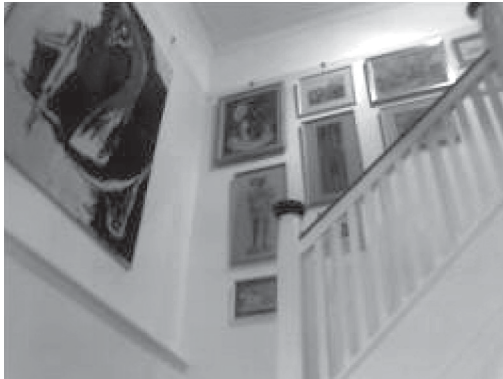*Source: Fieldwork with total sample, 2007*

Image 4a and 4b. Main staircase and spare room bookcase in second wave couple's home

Source: Fieldwork with total sample, 2007

However, it is important to emphasise that the material cultures displayed here should not necessarily be taken at "face value", remembering Bourdieu's caution that how objects themselves are appropriated and the motives behind this, can be highly individual. Thus, in the second wave migrants' case, it could equally be argued that the sidelining of the Serbian

iconography may in itself reveal deeper attachments to an ethnic conscious-ness precisely given that they are kept more private and therefore, poten-tially, deemed more precious.

These selected case studies and the wider findings from which they are drawn reiterate the importance of considering the wider context with-in which ethnic markers are positioned. They reveal that ethnicity is not "used" the same way among all migrants; the biggest discrepancies were broadly aligned with motivation for migrating, as well as of course dif-ferences in personal and generational tastes. This evokes one of the tenets of ethnosymbolism, which underlines the importance of ethnic symbols, myths and memories in the formation of ethnicity, but also how these sym-bols, while unchanging in themselves, can be applied for different purposes in varying contexts and time periods (Smith, 2000).

The findings here also suggest the existence of internal "others" within an ethnic group, i.e. the group as not being a comprehensive, homogeneous whole, but having groups within groups whose representations and inter-nalisations of ethnicity blur and also distinctly separate from one another.

Glimmers of overlaps with "external" groups have also become appar-ent, such as through the blurring of the "ethnic" marker that is food. Re-spondents' relationships with "others" in the city will now be examined.

PERCEIVING AND BEING THE "OTHER"

This section engages with the idea that ethnicity is conceived of in rela-tion to some "other" (Modood et al., 1997; Woodward, 2000; Hickman 1998; Triadafyllidou, 1998; Barth, 1969; Wallman, 1978), and that the perception of discrimination is central to how migrants will fare in their new envi-ronment (Brah, 1996; Maxwell, 2009; Sponza, 2006: 57). In the context of this study, the meaning of being "European" and the ability to assume this identity through racial characteristics, i.e. being white, is something to be challenged, remembering that boundaries of power and prejudice operate within "whiteness" also. With regard to this, the following analysis will consider what tension may exist between Serbs as "insiders" in British soci-ety on account of their white European identity, and those remaining out-siders in the cultural and class sense. It will consider whether respondents themselves felt "ethnically marked" by others around them, and what their own practices of ethnic boundary drawing were.

To begin to gauge the felt and lived experience of ethnicity contingent on wider perceptions, respondents were first asked whether or not they felt

part of a minority in London; i.e. migrants' own experiences of "being perceived" were taken as the benchmark. Just under two-thirds of respondents stated that they did not feel part of a minority, while one quarter unequivocally did; the remainder said they both did and did not, depending on the context in which they found themselves. There are two broad explanations for the majority not feeling like a minority, the first relating to individual based reasons, and the second to their wider societal context. Respondents who referred to the former explained that they simply felt comfortable with their own identity, had a happy life, or felt at home everywhere owing to prior migration experiences:

For me it's a question of feeling and security or, better put, individual insecurity. But I've never felt a minority anywhere. I just have that attitude – I am my own wherever I am! (Dara).

Maybe that's part of me because I'm capable of adapting and talking to any generation and nation, so I don't feel in the slightest bit a foreigner here, or as though people somehow treat me differently (Kristina).

These responses were highest among women, particularly those in the second wave who had moved to London to learn English and seek new experiences, driven by a spirit of self-belief and embracing new challenges. Their responses lend themselves to the notion that some migrants may be a self-selecting group by virtue of already willing to place themselves in new situations (Korinek, Entwisle and Jampaklay 2005), and therefore have the internal mechanisms in place to mitigate feelings of minority in a negative sense.

The majority of respondents who said they did not feel part of a minority did so on the basis that they felt their environment was manageable and conducive to "foreigners", given the cosmopolitan nature of London:

In London no, I don't feel like a minority because it's such an international community (Bojana).

I feel very much part of London's international, cosmopolitan mixed-up culture, so… no, I don't feel like a minority. I like a mix, it's one of the attractions of London. I don't think I would be comfortable in a homogeneous place – in fact I know I wouldn't be because I've lived in homogeneous places and I haven't been comfortable in them, because I just find that a) I don't fit in, and b) I don't particularly want to! (Spomenka).

Overwhelmingly, this response was given by third wave respondents coming from international, urban backgrounds who were previously accustomed to a cosmopolitan ambience and considered it "normal" to be accepted as one of many minorities making up the majority. However, this was by no means exclusive to this group, as half of all respondents coming from village and town backgrounds from Serbia or the former Yugoslavia also appreciated London's diversity:

I think this is the ideal environment for migrants, here no-one feels discriminated against – so far, not at work or anywhere else have I experienced anything unpleasant (Lazar).

Many of these migrants also stated that they could not feel like a minority given the presence of so many other perceived minority groups. All but a handful of respondents said they had regular interactions with people from other ethnic groups, including "native" White British people, as they defined them. These interactions occurred through their friendships, work or study spheres, with a substantial number also reporting that they lived with non-Serbian housemates.

Work also played a part, evident through the fact that migrants who were of working age and employed were much less likely to say they felt like a minority than the unemployed. As one explicitly stated:

I justify myself here just like they justify themselves for being in America or Canada – I haven't taken anyone's job because my trade has never been in any deficit, so I don't feel like I've come and taken something away from their people; rather, I've contributed something they need (Milan).

In contrast, unemployed refugee women from the third wave were most likely to feel part of a minority in London. Given that some of them had, by the time of fieldwork, gained British citizenship, this suggests that the feeling of acceptance or non-acceptance extends beyond an official "stamp" of belonging. Moreover, all the female migrants in both waves one and three who had arrived as asylum seekers and refugees claimed they felt part of a minority, in contrast to refugee men, of whom less than half stated feeling part of a minority. Examining the reasons behind this discrepancy shows that the refugee women, most of whom were unemployed and/or the primary child-carer in their home at the time of interview, were alone and

often house-bound, accompanied solely by daytime TV and tabloid papers that disseminated negative messages regarding particular "ethnic minorities", including at one time Serbs, which these women were unable to mitigate through wider social encounters.

However, these house-bound women were not the only ones who expressed some negativity about how they felt perceived. Men and women who had moved as refugees and had been de-skilled on arrival, working in elementary, casual employment, were also less likely to say they felt accepted, echoing notions of which immigrants are deemed "desirable" and which are not. In particular, this occurred among migrants in this situation who also lived in social housing in areas considered to be more deprived, where local economies were suffering. This has been noted in other debates: where economic migrants live in a poorer area and are seen as "taking jobs" where resources are scarce (Hudson et al., 2007: 33), "white" ethnicity takes on a whole new problematic dimension.

For example, several third wave respondents recounted experiences of being grouped into the generic "Eastern European" category that was aligned with the "scrounging foreigner" stereotype, propagated by the media and creating concern in public debate (Mayor of London, 2003; ICAR, 2004).

I've had more unpleasantness because people have thought I'm Polish! Someone heard me talking on the phone on the street, this man, and thought I was speaking Polish and just came up to me and basically yelled, "go back to your country, what do you want here!" I didn't even try to explain, I just hurried away. But he wasn't in the right and that stayed with me for a long time (Ana).

We bought an ex-council flat, which was in a decent block, but our neighbours were absolutely horrible… And of course they thought… at the time we'd already got British citizenship and were on some kind of income support but only for a short time. And so what happened — they made our life hell. I don't know, at that time the image of our country was catastrophic in the media and I think they linked that to us… they knew where we were from… they probably thought that we just got that flat (Tanja).

While there is evidence in the latter reply of her feeling negatively perceived owing to negative associations with Serbs at that time, this is sandwiched in between her perception that being seen as a foreign benefit claimant was the really damaging factor. This indicates strong class politics at

play in determining neighbourhood interaction (May, 1996) and negative "othering", in this instance arguably fuelled by homogenising assumptions of the white "Eastern European" migrant identity.

Probing this further reflects on the way in which ascriptions of and associations with a particular "ethnicity" have been altered within the context of the new European migration. At the time when the first-wave EVW migrants arrived, there was anxiety in public discourse regarding their "'unassimilated' alien presence as a threat to social and political stability" (Kay and Miles, 1992: 122). However, they then came to be viewed as less threatening compared with subsequent West Indian or Asian arrivals who did not possess the correct "assimilable" features (Kay and Miles, 1992: 124; Weber-Newth, 2006: 77), and consequently came to be discriminated against.

Moving through time to the third wave and the current context, it can be argued that the same "racialised hierarchies" (Kay and Miles, 1992) persist – they have just been transposed onto the context of the threat of an "influx" of white workers usurping jobs. It is perhaps significant that, through respondents' accounts, it emerged that those working in high-skilled jobs were more likely to encounter people from international, non-European backgrounds, while those working in jobs such as construction or catering tended to have experience working with predominantly "white" migrants from Southern Europe, former Eastern bloc countries now in the EU such as Poland and Lithuania, and also with those coming from outside the EU, such as Albanians and people from Kosovo. Serbs working in the latter occupations were most likely to record feeling like a minority, and occasionally negatively perceived.

This, in turn, challenges assumptions about the degree of "assimilability" of a category of people supposedly positioned better to identify with the host society owing to their "whiteness", deconstructing the "myth of cultural homogeneity" that Hickman, for example, found to be applied to Irish immigrants into Britain in the 1950s (1998: 299). Arguably the same applies on a more specific level – moving from the racial category of "whiteness" to the "ethnic" category of "Serb", it is evident that assumed shared ethnicity does not translate into shared experience but, rather, that this is strongly determined according to where migrants are positioned economically and socially.

The significance of class as a more important marker of the "other" versus the "insider" was made clear also by respondents in professional occupations, who stated that ethnicity was not the issue determining how they interact with people:

I have to tell you, among cultured people there is no difference in race or natio-nality, but there is a big difference in the same race between a cultured and un-cultured person… if you ask me who I feel closer to, a cultured Indian is much closer to me than an uncultured Serb (Branimir).

When asked to define what he meant by "cultured", he referred to edu-cation as a major factor and, by extension, the cultural and social capital one can attain, which then supersedes any ethnic or national distinctions. This is significant in light of wider, current debates about immigration and, more specifically, who "desirable" migrants are; that is, those of a certain "class", as reinforced through the language of the points based entry system (Home Office, 2009), suggesting that this is an important factor mediating "ethnic" and specifically "minority" status.

This echoes certain culturalist Marxist critiques which aimed to show how "ethnic" groups "were *reproduced as a specific class category*" (Brah, 1996: 239–240), recalling the distinction between implicitly low-skilled "im-migrants" and exotic, professional "foreigners" that has appeared in other debates (Massey et al., 1993: 447). Here the argument could be made that popular representations of derided "immigrants" become associated with a particular ethnicity or nationality, and that this "category" of people in turn becomes stigmatised in the public imagination, masking what is in fact a class bias. This is a factor that has not been paid enough attention in stud-ies of migrant groups, and often comes too late, for example in the wake of aggression. Writing of British Muslims in the aftermath of the Bradford, Oldham and Burnley riots in 2001, Deborah Phillips states that: "the nega-tive associations of the ethnic inner city are… not only racialised but class based. 'Middle-class' British Asian households from suburban areas such as north Heaton are less likely to be pathologised" (2006: 34).

In the current study, this can also be inferred from the fact that no high-skilled respondents felt their "Serbian" ethnicity was negatively perceived owing to the way in which it intersected with their work identities. This, as well as findings relating to Serbian migrants who moved for different socio-political motivations and into different economic circumstances, demon-strates the significance of possessing the right amounts of the right capital, and moving in diverse enough circles, to how one's ethnicity will be experi-enced in a new place, and the extent to which one may feel like an "other".

CONCLUSION: ASCRIBED IDENTITIES?

The idea that it is impossible to "develop any coherent understanding" of people until they are separated into ethnic groups (Haines, 2007) evokes the widespread, and long-held, notion of ethnicity as a kind of grand, "meta-identity" which informs a person's behaviour, mentality and culture. What emerged from deconstructing Serbian migrants' views, experiences and enactments of ethnicity was that this certainly did not apply to all. "Ethnicity" here is seen to be much more complex once viewed from "within", as well as in relation to "others".

Where ethnicity did appear as a major, self-conscious aspect of identity, it was firstly complicated by the notion of "our people" encompassing a "pan-Yugoslav" or even wider identity. This is a clear reminder that "cognate populations lumped together by the opposition or categorisation of others do not necessarily begin to identify together… the more likely effect will be a proliferation or enhancement of sub-boundaries within" (Wallman, 1978). Certainly, in the case of the Serbs in London, the interplay of class, gender, age, spatial origin and migration motivation demonstrates that ethnicity is not always the overriding identifier by which migrants negotiate their way in the new place, or indeed by which the new place positions them. While tightly bound with these features, ethnicity remains just one aspect of fluid, shifting identities (Nazroo and Karlsen, 2003; Halpern and Kideckel, 1983: 388).

In particular, "ethnic" identity was most prominently refracted through the prism of class, creating a complex and more dynamic understanding that takes into account social and economic dimensions. These often emerged as a more prominent marker of "otherness" than ethnicity on its own, both among Serbs perceiving other Serbs, and in the way some migrants felt perceived by "external" others in their new environment.

However, the findings also demonstrate the power of wider public perceptions of a particular group to instigate, or re-awaken, what are revealed actually to be strong attachments to "ethnicity" which do not emerge when considering the social and class context of migrants' lives alone. This also indicates that an "ethnic" identity is an aspect not always left to individual choice. Political forces and external representations can induce an individual to re-examine their cultural views and practices, and, by extension, the "ethnic" component of their identity, emphasising that "ethnicity" is "a living construction of the terms of social life, identity and participation" (Calhoun, 2001: 10).

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Etničnost: linije razdvajanja među »našim ljudima«

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SAŽETAK

U radu se istražuje do koje je mjere identitet migranata u novom prostoru određen idejama o »etničnosti« koristeći se studijom slučaja Srba u Londonu. Autorica najprije želi ispitati značenje »etničnosti« te različite dimenzije identiteta i okolnosti koje na njega utječu. Zatim nastoji dekonstruirati pojam etničnosti istražujući različite načine na koje su upotrijebljeni etnički markeri u različitim prostorima i interakcije s »drugim« etničkim skupinama u gradu. Metodologija istraživanja sastojala se od kvalitativnih, polustrukturiranih dubinskih intervjua sa 66 srpskih migranata i promatranja sa sudjelovanjem u dvadeset kućanstava u Londonu. Strategija uzorkovanja bila je refleksivna kako bi se osiguralo uključivanje širokog spektra iskustava migranata sukladno različitome društveno-političkom, ekonomskom i prostornom porijeklu. Rezultati otkrivaju različitost konceptualizacija onoga što znači »biti Srbin« pokazujući da to nije konkretna ili kvantitativna mjera. No na vidjelo su ipak izašli određeni opći obrasci u smislu da su oni koji su izrazili sposobnost da »izaberu« svoju etničnost vjerojatno bili oni s dovoljnim kulturnim, ekonomskim, društvenim i ljudskim kapitalom koji im je omogućio da to svladaju situacijski. Sljedeća ključna karakteristika koja se pojavila jest da »etničnost« može biti lako pridodana značajka identitetima utemeljenima na klasi i migrantskom statusu, ovisno o tome gdje su ljudi smješteni unutar društveno-političke matrice. Navedeno, a posebice identiteti vezani uz radno mjesto i migrantski status – a ne etničke kvalitete – također je utjecalo na percipirano ograničenje od etničkih »drugih« u gradu.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Srbi, migranti, etničnost, identitet, klasa, grad, jezik