

MUTATIONS OF A MODERN MYTH: HOW CHANGING DISCOURSES OF MIGRATION, PATRIOTISM, AND PERSONHOOD SHAPE MIGRATION NARRATIVES OF FOREIGN-LANGUAGE STUDENTS FROM PSKOV, 1991–2015

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Based on ethnographic fieldwork among Russian foreign-language students, this article addresses questions of migration, patriotism, and personhood in contemporary Pskov. In this postsocialist city, neoliberal discourse is seen as socially legitimate, and pressures of “marketing oneself” are very real to current students. However, besides viewing mobility as an “asset” of the “winners” of transition, it is simultaneously associated with the “escape narrative,” ascribed to the students of the 1990s. This logic, reflecting currents of nationalist discourse in Russian society at large, classifies migration to the West as a characteristic of the “losers” of transition and turns Russian emigrants into the “new others.” Instead of encouraging to improve their CVs through migration, the “escape narrative” dissuades current students from expressing any intention to migrate at all.

Keywords: Migration; Patriotism; Postsocialist Personhood; Escape Narrative

With physical place as a fundamental building block of the sense of self, migration discourse plays a dominant role in both individual and collective identity formation (Dixon and Durrheim 2000; Neuman 1996; Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983). The emergence of a mobile, border-crossing self in line with a neoliberal ideology serves as a model, causing mobility to emerge as a desirable new layer of identity (Makovicky 2014). Russia of the 1990s was characterized by a remarkably outward-oriented migration discourse. International migration was a socially acceptable way of coping with transition and distinguishing one's own identity from a socialist one. However, as contemporary Russia is steadily “turning inward,” emigration is increas-

ingly framed as a "betrayal of the motherland" (Cadier and Light 2015; Naumova 2005). Whereas formerly a person who could not keep up with the rapid socio-economic changes of the 1990s was seen as a flawed "Homo Sovieticus," today the migrants are the ones who face exclusion (Aleksijevitsj 2014; Sztompka 1993). Migrants run the risk of being labeled "new others," part of the undesirable "fifth column" within the body of the Russian nation associated with the West and perceived as a "major enemy" (Buchowksi 2006; Lipman 2015; Yablokov 2014). Since language itself is a key identifier of national identity and language students tend to be particularly "Westernized," interlinguistic mediators are frequently among the first targets of nationalist rhetoric (Cronin 2006; Rubel and Rosman 2003; White 2005:453). The mediator's role as a "bridge" implies that he or she operates in a liminal space where national loyalty is put to the test (Cronin 2006; Polezzi 2012). Different generations of foreign-language students are therefore prime candidates for examining the effect that postsocialist discourse shifts have on personal narratives of migration and Russianness. The central research question of this study is therefore as follows: How do changing discourses of migration, patriotism, and personhood shape foreign-language students' perceptions of migration?

This article addresses questions of migration, patriotism, and postsocialist personhood at the discursive level. I will demonstrate how, contrary to the outward-oriented migration discourse of the 1990s, today an interplay of patriotic rhetoric and the modern myth of the "escape narrative" places international migration in an increasingly negative light.¹ The "escape narrative" refers to the discursive formation that assumes Russian women want to exchange their home country for a better life elsewhere, escaping both a geographical place and a context of "backwardness." Central to this study are personal stories and self-representations that challenge stereotypes of the "desperate migrant" lacking agency. By comparing migration narratives of students and alumni, I contribute localized and grounded evidence of how changing discourses on migration, patriotism, and personhood shape people's migration perceptions through the creation of "new others" (Buchowksi 2006).

This study is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Pskov, a Russian provincial city located approximately 50 kilometers from both the Latvian and Estonian borders. Pskov is a middle-sized city of 203,279 inhabitants (Federal'naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki 2012) and the administrative center of Pskov Oblast. In the fourteenth century the city gained importance as a locus for international migration and trade and as a member of the Hanseatic League, located strategically at the crossing of the Pskova and Velikaia Rivers. I interviewed Russian students and alumni from the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Pskov State University² who studied

¹ Although the focus of this study is on transnational migration, there is also a significant regional dimension. Due to financial constraints, students are now more likely to study in their home region than outside of it. Contrary to the widespread belief that the whole country does nothing but dream of settling in Moscow or Saint Petersburg, those cities are increasingly unpopular (White 2007). The universities in Moscow and Saint Petersburg have higher entry requirements and fewer available scholarships compared to their regional counterparts.

² Until 2011 called the Pskov Pedagogical Institute.

Dutch language and culture between 1991 and 2015. The Dutch course was founded by Ivan Poda, an autodidact, radio amateur, and language teacher at the Pskov Pedagogical Institute. To contribute to the city partnership between Pskov and the Dutch city of Nijmegen, initiated by the Dutch Women for Peace movement in 1987 to counter Cold War stereotypes, Poda founded an elective Dutch course in 1991. In line with the theory that border regions tend to be more nationalist oriented than the core ones, Pskov Oblast was a bastion for Vladimir Zhirinovskii's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) in the 1990s (Chugrov 1997; Shenfield 2001). This history of nationalist voting, as well as its location approximately 50 kilometers from the European border, makes Pskov an interesting case where to investigate the local implications of changing discourses of migration, patriotism, and postsocialist personhood.

In order to contextualize the Pskov study, this article starts off by tracing an interconnected shift in discourses of migration, personhood, and patriotism in post-socialist Russia. This analysis pays special attention to what function these discourses serve, in order to subsequently trace how they have shaped and continue to shape migration narratives. After describing the methodology, I will proceed by introducing the participants of this study and their views of migration at large. These two sections will contextualize the foundational principle of the escape narrative: a desire to leave versus a desire to stay. On the basis of qualitative data from interviews, I will then analyze this "escape narrative" more thoroughly. By comparing the views of the former generation with those of current students on the three key components of the escape narrative—views on economic migration motives, views on gendered notions of "escape," and views of the "West"—I will unpack this "modern myth."

THEORETICAL SECTION

MIGRATION

The terms "migration" and "mobility" do not only partially overlap but are frequently used interchangeably. Due to its more permanent connotations, "migration" is often defined as a complement to "(spatial) mobility," associated with more temporary forms of relocation (Bell and Ward 2000; Nading 2004; Wallace 2002). Literature on motives for migration distinguishes motivations that propel permanent (long-term) migration and those that drive temporary (short-term) moves (Agadjanian, Nedoluzhko, and Kumsov 2008). However, migration intended as temporary may evolve into permanent and vice versa (Agadjanian et al. 2008). In this article, I define "migration" as a subcategory fitting under the umbrella term of "mobility" (Blunt 2007; Sheller and Urry 2006). Whereas "migration" always implies a one-way relocation to a different environment by at least one individual (Cabana and Clark 2011), "mobility" can also be nonspatial in character, incorporating social and occupational mobility (Salazar and Smart 2011). Although studies of mobility and migration can therefore not be collapsed onto each other, the emergence of mobility as a new layer of identity forms one productive connection between literature on mobility at large and migration more specifically (Blunt 2007). This study discusses views of relatively

long-term professional (nontourist) types of spatial movement. I therefore employ the term "migration" rather than the more general "mobility" when referring to the original data. The term "mobility" is only used when specifically referring to "[t]he ability to move or be moved freely and easily."³

Russia is predicted to have the world's biggest labor deficit by 2030 (*Moscow Times* 2014). Overall, the entire Northwestern region experienced a net outflow of population in the late 1990s (Institut regional'nogo razvitiia... 2010). After the "fourth wave" of mass emigration caused by the onset of perestroika, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the economic turmoil of the 1990s, the number of emigrants has declined every year since 1999 (Federal'naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki 2016).⁴ Similar to the rest of Russia, the number of people leaving Pskov for another country increased during the 1990s, peaking at 1,850 in 1999. This number decreased every year since, down to 244 in 2009 (Institut regional'nogo razvitiia... 2010).

Emigration from Russia during previous waves was characterized by people who predominantly intended to leave for good, as they annulled their residence registration in Russia. Throughout the 1990s, the emigration of academic professionals specifically was overwhelmingly permanent (Weinar 2014). Russians today are permitted a maximum stay of 180 days a year in Europe, which they can split between several countries. Present-day migration is increasingly temporary, circular, and characterized by "flexible citizenship," making concepts such as integration and return migration largely redundant as the lines between extended holidays, seasonal work abroad, and long-term migration blur (Ong 2006; White 2014). Unlike the old migration paradigm, characterized by research on large-scale demographic trends, analyses of push and pull factors, and a focus on economic motives, the academic shift referred to as "the mobility turn" aims to describe these new regimes of migration (Castles, Miller, and Ammendola 2005; Faist 2013; Favell 2008; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). Ever-growing numbers of people "settle in mobility" while remaining connected to Russia by renting out their apartment, owning a business in Russia, or just working for a Russian company online (Castles et al. 2005; Morokvasic 2004). These types of migration remain largely unrepresented in official statistics. Other countries register 20 percent more emigrants from Russia than the Russian registration system itself (Andrienko and Guriev 2005). Numbers of female migrants, who are more frequently involved in undocumented work abroad, are especially likely to be much higher than

³ *Oxford Dictionaries*, s.v. "Mobility", accessed August 18, 2016, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mobility>.

⁴ The Federal State Statistics Service's figures show a massive increase in emigration after 2011. However, in that year the Federal State Statistics Service changed its definition of an immigrant and through this also its definition of what constitutes an emigrant. Previously a foreign citizen had to spend a minimum of twelve months in the country to be considered an immigrant, and therefore an emigrant when leaving. Since 2012 foreign citizens who registered for a stay of nine months are also included in the definition. This means that since 2012, foreigners whose registration has expired after nine months are counted as "persons who left the Russian Federation" in the Federal State Statistic Service's figures (Meduza 2014).

documented by the Federal State Statistics Service (Riazantsev 2010). Another type of migration that falls outside of the Federal Statistics Service's radar is student migration. Although the plunge of the ruble has discouraged all forms of migration, short-term language studies specifically tend to be extremely sensitive to shifting foreign exchange rates (ICEF Monitor 2015). Outbound student mobility in Russia in tertiary education decreased in both 2012 and 2013, for the first time in at least 14 years (UNESCO UIS 2016).

PERSONHOOD

In postsocialist Russia the introduction of neoliberal discourse required a change in the very foundation of what it meant to be a person (Dunn 2004; Makovicky 2014). In academic literature inflexible communist citizens unable to adapt to the new neoliberal context are referred to as "faulty citizens" or "transition losers" marked by a "lasting cultural syndrome" (Buchowski 2006; Mytna Kurekova 2011; Sztompka 1993). It is debatable to what extent the discursive formation of this "syndrome" is related to any real distinction in character. Robert J. Shiller, Maxim Boycko, and Vladimir Korobov (1992) argue that the transition problems experienced by postsocialist countries are situational problems, not attitudinal ones. The American sociologist Laurence McFalls similarly states that the notion of a continuing cultural conflict between competitive, individualized Westerners and Easterners longing for solidarity is "simply a fiction" (quoted in Clarke 2002:70).

Unlike the "Homo Sovieticus" who only possessed static labor power, contemporary individuals are required to view themselves as a "collection of assets" that requires constant development (Martin 2000:582). They are incited to make a "project" of themselves within "the marketplace of life" (Makovicky 2014; Martin 2000; Rose 1996; Rose and Miller 2013). The discourse shift towards a neoliberal understanding of personhood is described in literature on "enterprising selves" in Britain (Rose and Miller 2013), "flexible citizens" in Asia (Ong 2006), "choosing subjects" in Poland (Dunn 2004), "mini-corporations" in America (Martin 2000), and "marketing selves" in Hungary (Junghans 2001). Since this article focuses on the discourse transformation in postsocialist Russia, I will make use of Nicolette Makovicky's definition of neoliberalism as "a particular technology of governance (and self-governance) implemented and expressed through the gradual economization of social and institutional life under the guise of postsocialist structural transformation." Part of the "gradual economization of social and institutional life" is the view of mobility as an "asset" (Makovicky 2014:6). As employees do no longer demand long-term settlement or naturalization in the country of work, "[f]lexibility, migration, and relocations have become practices to strive for rather than stability" (Ong 2006:501). People are encouraged to (temporarily) leave "peripheral" regions in order to acquire education, skills, and experiences in the "core" ones (Wallerstein 2004). Even the moving itself becomes significant, as physical travel is connected to progressive existential movement, turning the mobile, border-crossing self into a role model (Hage 2005). The second generation of migration literature largely focuses on agency, aiming to "locate" transnationalism. However, transnationalism in these debates is of-

ten presented as a blow against the capitalist, nation-state centered order of things, emphasizing transnational actors' resistance and freedom in its conceptualization of "agency" (Appadurai 1990; Favell, Feldblum, and Smith 2007; Neumann 1999). In contrast, Alexei Yurchak (2006) argues that the agency-focused logic of the enterprising self does not necessarily conflict with nation building and patriotism, but that the two can coexist as they did under late socialism. During this late socialist period, the "West" had become an idealized construct of Russia's "elsewhere" (Yurchak 2006). The fact that international travel became increasingly accessible during the 1990s fueled migration desires (Caldwell 2004). The "fourth wave" of emigration was the result (Denisenko 2012).

Because men are generally more mobile than women, the latter are not frequently the topic of migration research (Morokvasic 2004; White 2004). Even though the common Russian word for migrants, *gastarbaiter*, is of masculine form, women constitute around half of all emigration out of Russia and even made up 57.7 percent of the skilled emigration in 2000 (Docquier, Lowell, and Marfouk 2007; Riazantsev 2010). Scholarship on East European au pairs who use the au pair program of "cultural exchange" as a migration strategy also reflects a gendered notion of "escape" (Búrikova and Miller 2010). However, most literature on female Russian emigrants focuses on Russian "internet brides" and documents how these women are viewed as the "losers of transition" in the global cultural economy (Johnson and Robinson 2006). Instead of looking for local husbands, they "turn their attention to foreign males, who could both improve their shaken material conditions and fit their image of an ideal husband" (Johnson and Robinson 2006:113). Online advertisements that capitalize on the myth of the traditional Russian woman are rooted in orientalist discourse (Sveraljuk 2009). The stereotypical Russian internet bride is untainted by feminism, has low expectations of men, and is traditional, docile, and sexual (Chun 1996; Johnson and Robinson 2006; Mitina and Petrenko 2001; Sveraljuk 2009). Scholars writing on Russian internet brides describe the phenomenon in economic terms, referring to international marriage as a migration strategy or survival strategy (Chun 1996; Johnson and Robinson 2006). Internet brides are claimed to seek "to escape economic hardships, instability, and lack of choices to pursue meaningful relationships" (Johnson and Robinson 2006:113). The narrative of the internet bride makes Russian students living in Norway face the "stigma of prostitution" (Sveraljuk 2009:137). As this study will show, existing stereotypes of both orientalized and impoverished women do not only influence the way in which Russian students are received abroad, but also contribute to an aversion of the female migrant image among Russian women at home (Sveraljuk 2009).

PATRIOTISM

The dissolution of the Soviet empire in 1991 unleashed waves of self-doubt in many quarters of Russian life. Throughout the 1990s Russians felt disempowered, politically adrift, lacking a sense of national dignity, and afraid of ending up on the "margins" of the world (Clowes 2011). Post-Soviet Russia has seen an aggressive resurgence of ultranationalist and neoimperialist thinking (Granholm, Malminen, and

Persson 2014). Artificially created supranational symbols of the Soviet Union appeared to have less mobilizing potential than the national mythical complexes that still resonated with local and national identities (Conversi 2014). Under President Vladimir Putin, the restoration of Russian authoritarianism implied a capitalization on the distinction between a Russian "us" and a "morally depraved West," encouraging isolation to preserve culture and society (Dubin 2002; Granholm et al. 2014). Similar to the Western creation of an oriental "other" in the East associated with danger and threat, Europe has for centuries been one of the "significant others" in Russian identity formation (Neumann 1996; Patino 2005; Said 1979). As current Russian leadership focuses on the West as a threat, many Russians rediscovered their former sense of being a "besieged fortress" (Aron 2013; Dubin 2002; Granholm et al. 2014). A strong anti-Western consensus became increasingly prominent during Putin's second term in office. Both emigration and immigration have become highly politicized. Given the mass emigration of the 1990s and continuous labor deficit, it is perhaps unsurprising that emigration is actively discouraged by the Russian government. In his annual address to the Russian parliament in December 2012, Putin called on the Russian people to "turn inward" to protect the Russian state. Instead of reaching out to the world, "real Russians" should "look inward and even physically move inward, deep into the Russian provinces, the repositories of 'Russianness' (*russkost*)" (Cadier and Light 2015:50). In 2014 the government specifically recommended that security and law enforcement officers refrain from traveling abroad (D'Amora 2015). Since the terror attacks in Paris and the Middle East, 70 percent of Russians think it is too dangerous to travel abroad. Twenty-five percent of the respondents to a survey agreed that it was "long past time" to stop going abroad, while a further 45 percent said overseas travel had temporarily become too unsafe (*Moscow Times* 2016).

METHODS

Among the new generation of migration researchers there has been a call for attention to qualitative research, expressing the need for ethnographic studies (Baláz and Williams 2004; Favell 2008; Favell et al. 2007; Jiang 2014). In addition, geopolitical tensions are usually analyzed through lenses of international relations and politics, focusing on macro-level research through large-scale surveys (Granholm et al. 2014; Heller 2010). Ethnography is the only available tool that allows for insight into how wider questions of Russia's image on the global stage shape a sense of place among Russians. I therefore conducted ethnographic fieldwork. The qualitative data for this research were gathered through one-on-one interviews with Russian foreign-language students who studied (or are still studying) Dutch at Pskov State University.⁵ During a two-month stay in Russia in the summer of 2013 I got to know some of the students as well as the current teachers of the Dutch course. These initial contacts served as brokers by introducing me to more students and alumni.

⁵ Dutch is an elective course. These students all study at least two foreign languages besides Dutch.

In total, I conducted 30 interviews: I interviewed the founder of the Dutch course Ivan Poda, 27 (current and former) students, and two people who are active in the organization of the sister city partnership. Most interviews (20) were conducted during two one-week stays in Pskov (January 9–15 and April 11–19, 2015). Three interviews took place in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Five took place through Skype and two were obtained through written correspondence. Pskov State University's foreign languages department has a strong pedagogical focus. Considering the fact that in Russia teaching is a profession that is typically feminized (White 2005), it is no surprise the majority of the foreign-language students are women.⁶ Although no official records are kept, Wim van Dam, the long-time Dutch examiner in Pskov, claims that less than 5 percent of the estimated 350 Pskovites with a diploma from the Dutch Language Union are men. As a result, this study is based on the migration perceptions of overwhelmingly female participants: 24 out of the 27 interviewees were women. Since men tend to be more mobile than women (Morokvasic 2004; White 2004), face different gender stereotypes, and are expected to fulfill a different role in Russia's nationalist project (Ashwin and Lytkina 2004; Riabov and Riabova 2014), this study's findings cannot be generalized to incorporate men. The students who participated in this research form a coherent group. Besides their common gender, almost all of them grew up in the city of Pskov or Pskov Oblast and have travelled abroad. The main variable is age, as women participants were aged from around 18 to 41.

The interviews were of a semistructured character, took place in public spaces, and lasted an average of 60 minutes. All participants consented to being audio recorded. The interview questions revolved around the three themes outlined in the first part of this study: migration, personhood, and nationalism. Questions related to the first theme focused on migration motives and experiences abroad, while those linked to the second theme concentrated on career plans, as well as on neoliberal and gendered notions of a "mobile" self. Finally, questions fitting within the third theme concentrated on national pride and views of the "West." Each of my questions related to one of the three themes (patriotism, migration, personhood). Connections between the themes were not present in the question wording but emerged from the participants' replies.

All interviews were transcribed in their entirety, with an average length of around 2,000 words. Transcripts were analyzed in a two-part process. The initial categorization focused on the relation between the three themes of migration, patriotism, and personhood as reflected in the interview questions and age division. The second phase consisted of more detailed analyses of the interplay between the three themes. The language of the interviews was mainly Dutch and English, with occasional use of German and Russian. Some students had difficulty expressing their feelings in a second language, which limited the depth of these interviews. During the analyses, full statements were therefore used to indicate the presence of a certain theme rather than specific words or sentences. We agreed on a system of reciprocity in which I helped them with their Dutch pronunciation and they took part in my research. The fact that

⁶ The students' personal interests in language and cultural studies coupled with the foreign language proficiency requirements for study abroad programs may account for the relatively high proportions of Russian women studying abroad (Mahmoud 2015).

I am roughly the same age as many of the students and that I was studying in a foreign country myself during the time of this research contributed to the friendly and informal atmosphere during the interviews. My research benefited from the openness that this informality provided.

At the moment there are over 350 Pskovites with a Dutch diploma from the Dutch Language Union, making Pskov the East European city with the highest percentage of Dutch speakers (Davids and Schulpen 2005). This number should be regarded with certain caution, as the official figure of 350 includes students who once completed a beginners-level exam but did not continue with Dutch. The 19 people whom I interviewed in Dutch constitute a large proportion of the students from Pskov who can actually *speak* Dutch. These students provide the most interesting group for this study on migration perceptions, as they have the option of migrating to a country of which they already speak the language.

THE MYTH-MAKING GENERATION

The Dutch-language course is often seen as one of the biggest successes of the sister city partnership (Davids and Schulpen 2005). The initiative came from Ivan Poda, a (now retired) language teacher at Pskov State University. Poda is an autodidact who came to master Dutch through Radio Moscow, a radio station that aimed to spread the Soviet view on international affairs (Winek 2009). At its height in the 1970s it reported in 82 different languages (Dijkstra 1994). In the early years of the partnership, between 1987 and 1993, Poda's work as a radio amateur provided the only fast and trustworthy connection between Nijmegen and Pskov.

The radio amateurs were very important for Pskov and for Nijmegen. Back then you could not easily call the Netherlands, you ordered a phone call and sometimes had to wait for two days. You did not know when the call was going to take place. There were certain things that you had to communicate quickly to Nijmegen or from Nijmegen to Pskov. For radio amateurs that was easy. Just turn on the transmitter. We [the radio amateurs] would agree upon certain dates and times and on which frequency we would be so we could talk. (Ivan Poda)

In order to further contribute to this new East-West cooperation, Poda started teaching Dutch to a small group of tour guides in Pskov. When he discovered the enthusiasm for Dutch among students at the university, he started an elective Dutch course there in September 1991 with Dutch assistance through the partnership. Course materials were brought to Pskov by Dutch and German humanitarian convoys and by Wim van Dam, a (currently retired) teacher from Nijmegen who annually examines Russian students on their knowledge of Dutch. The students take exams designed by the Dutch Language Union that provide them with an internationally recognized certificate. After Poda retired in May 2007, his former students Iuliia (41), Anastasiia (40), Irina (41), and Elena (41) continued teaching Dutch.⁷ Although An-

⁷ All names, except for those of public figures, are pseudonyms.

astasiia migrated to the Netherlands and Elena recently started working as a secretary, Irina and Iuliia continue to teach Dutch today. Poda has turned into a legendary figure over the last few decades. The stories of his former students form the basis of the escape narrative in Pskov. Anastasiia's narrative (paraphrased) below is an example of such a story:

Anastasiia was 17 when she started her studies at Pskov State University in 1991. Saint Petersburg was out of the question, as her family did not have the money to support her away from home. Initially in doubt whether to continue her semiprofessional career as a rhythmic gymnast, she eventually decided to study foreign languages as this provided her with more financial security for the future. The possibility of a visit to the Netherlands as part of the program persuaded Anastasiia to start attending Ivan Poda's classes. At the age of 19 she first visited the Netherlands and immediately felt at home. Back in Pskov, she started translation work for the sister city partnership. At the end of her third year Anastasiia met a Dutch medical technician in his forties who was visiting Pskov with a group of Dutch doctors. They immediately liked each other, but because he was still married the two did not plan on meeting again. At the end of her third year Anastasiia visited the Netherlands a second time to accompany a Russian football team as an interpreter. During this trip she met the Dutch technician again. He arranged an internship for her in 1994. After a final six-week trip to the Netherlands as part of a university exchange in 1996, Anastasiia's graduation, and the Dutch technician's divorce, Anastasiia decided to migrate. It was a far-from-easy choice, as she had never considered migrating and had trouble leaving her parents. However, as her Dutch husband would not be able to work in Pskov, Anastasiia moved to the Netherlands in 1997.

Anastasiia's story represents a larger trend among students in the 1990s. For these young women who grew up under socialism going abroad was an intense experience and the desire to leave Pskov was shared by many. The fact that the Dutch program in Pskov provided the opportunity to visit the Netherlands made it extremely attractive: "Back then, it was really the only possibility for us; we thought that maybe we could go abroad, if we could speak the language, and that would really be the only possibility to see how people lived and how everything worked over there" (Iuliia). This eagerness to take on any chance was widespread among Russian women in those years, as illustrated by one woman quoted in *USA Today*: "[e]very women [sic] knows now is the time to get out.... We all want a chance to live well before it's too late" (quoted in Chun 1996:1173). Poda, when talking about the experiences of his students, highlights that most students were impressed by the quality of life in the Netherlands:

I remember very well, one student came back [from the Netherlands] and I spoke to her. I asked her how it had been, and suddenly she was, well ... not really angry but she said to me: "Why did you allow me to go to the Netherlands? I have seen everything now! I will never forget it! But in my life I will never experience something like that here! Why did I see this? I do not always want to look back at it from now on and think here it is different, here I cannot have all that..." (Ivan Poda)

Disappointment with Russia at large after a visit abroad was a common phenomenon. Having grown up under socialism, the students were used to promises of a communist utopia that was never achieved. They got the impression that the state was deceiving them and experienced their visit to the “West” as a rude awakening (Yurchak 2006). This disappointment resulted in a desire to distinguish their identity from the Soviet one they grew up with. Former students frame their migration ambitions of that time as fitting within the emergence of a new model of mobile, post-Soviet personhood. They describe their decision to (temporarily) migrate as a conscious move to improve their career prospects, not as a desperate flight. Neoliberalism became the socially and ideologically legitimate discourse among postsocialist generations of Russians, pushing the “Homo Sovieticus” into a corner with the “losers” of transition. The labeling of personality traits as “socialist” or “capitalist” quickly found its way into development discourse, popular culture, and the workplace (Dunn 2004; Makovicky 2014). Characteristics associated with the ideal “enterprising” person such as independence, individualism, autonomy, risk taking, entrepreneurship, flexibility, and mobility were praised while ties to the Soviet past were abruptly broken. With Russia no longer being the central hub of the Soviet empire, many Russians worried that their country would be pushed to the world’s periphery (Clowes 2011). As Viktor Pelevin joked in his 1993 novel *The Life of Insects*, after 1991 Russians wondered whether Moscow was still the “Third Rome” (*Tretii Rim*) or, instead, had slipped into the “third world” (*tretii mir*) (quoted in Clowes 2011:1). Students shared a desire to escape not only a geographical place that they felt had been pushed to the periphery but also an overall context of “backwardness”:

There were rumors about what was on offer in which shop, and then you went there to buy these products, even if you didn’t need them at that moment. Maybe you could use them later or exchange them for something else. It was really trading like in the Middle Ages. (Anastasiia)

However, chances to go abroad were rare. Bureaucracy proved a problem, as it was extremely difficult to obtain residence permits. This is reflected in the accounts of Marina (61), who ran a small au pair business in the 1990s. Marina’s office successfully sent 15 students of Pskov State University to Germany. Nataliia (31) and Elena both went to the Netherlands as au pairs. However, problems occurred when the first two students from the Pskov Volny Institute⁸ went to Germany. After three months of work, when the young women received a residence permit for a year, they left their host families and continued to stay in Germany illegally. After that incident, Marina had to close the au pair bureau. Whereas the opportunity of international travel attracted students to the au pair program, it is hard to tell whether students deliberately made use of this arrangement as a long-term migration strategy from the moment they left or whether they changed their mind once they were in Germany. Similar situations are described in the literature on internet

⁸ Since 2011 Pskov Volny Institute is part of Pskov State University.

brides. Janet Elise Johnson and Jean C. Robinson (2006) note that over 80 percent of marriages between Russian women and American men end in divorce, as the often much younger women are ready to move on and start a new life immediately after they receive their residence permit. Vladimir Baranovksy and Sergey Utkin (2012) write that Russians frequently feel discriminated against, as bureaucratic procedures simplified for EU citizens are extremely difficult for them. For Nataliia obtaining a residence permit in the Netherlands as an au pair proved too complicated. She was determined however to leave, even temporarily, "peripheral" Russia. Even though she initially did not want to continue her studies, the student visa that studying at a university provided persuaded her to reenroll. The fact that it was extremely hard to go abroad makes the former students recall their time at university with a strong feeling of nostalgia. Looking back at their 18-year-old selves they describe a certain melancholy about their past naiveté. They stress the fact that they grew up in a totally different world from the one they were studying, unlike today's students:

Today they [the students from Pskov going to the Netherlands] are not surprised, because it is the same. Back then I did not have a mobile phone, and everyone here [in the Netherlands] did. That was.... Yes and now I go there [to Pskov] and they have a better model than we have here! Or a better model of this or that or furniture or whatever. That is not a big difference. (Nataliia)

Because of this difference the former students perceive themselves as somehow superior to present-day students. They share a perception that when they were still at university, students had stronger motivations, worked harder, and spoke better Dutch. This first generation of students studying Dutch gained legendary status in the city of Pskov. Nina Glick Schiller and Noel B. Salazar describe how migration always "presupposes some knowledge or, at least, rumours of 'the other side.' Imaginaries of such movements play out in uneven and even contradictory ways" (2013:195). This is exactly what happened in Pskov. The first students who migrated abroad formed a myth-making generation that transmitted knowledge and rumors from "the other side" to prospective students. Poda, as well as his successors, frequently used success stories of these mobile alumni who found work abroad to promote the language course. Igor' (26) explains: "I think that [more people migrated abroad in the 1990s] because we heard the names of these people, in conversations between us we have heard that, well, that some person migrated there, to continue their studies there." Boris Dubin describes collective myth making as a process in which "the diverse elements that constitute the deeds of one actor and of the various 'others' related to him, their groups and strata, are transformed through semantic processing into symbolic characters and their life scenarios" (2002:18). A similar transformation occurred in the stories of the students from the 1990s in Pskov. Their experiences merged into the modern myth of the escape narrative, which was subsequently transmitted to new generations of students. Initially, the positive myth of success and mobility turned re-

cent alumni into post-Soviet role models, attracting more students with similar ambitions to go abroad to the Dutch program. However, their stories eventually began to be viewed in an increasingly negative light. Although the escape narrative is rooted in real experiences, I will now proceed to look at the discursive role played by this modern myth.

TODAY'S ENTERPRISING STUDENTS

The reasons to choose Dutch as an elective course are varied but have one thing in common: they do not have anything to do with the Dutch language in particular. Many ended up learning Dutch because other classes were already full or because they joined friends who had signed up. The natural career path for students graduating from the language faculty in Pskov is teaching. However, even though foreign languages are something of a prestigious subject at university, it is not compensated accordingly. Teachers' salaries in contemporary Russia often lag far behind the average national salary and barely cover the subsistence of one person (Nau-mova 2005; Paticeo 2005). Due to this low remuneration, students who decide to go into teaching are forced to take up additional jobs. Iuliia, for example, started working in the city administration alongside her job as a teacher. Elena, a former student of Ivan Poda who taught Dutch for years, quit teaching for purely financial reasons. In order to secure an additional job, students have to positively distinguish themselves from other applicants by developing and "marketing" their human capital in an uncertain Russian labor market (Martin 2000). Andzhela's (24) remark illustrates this uncertainty: "I think life is extremely uncertain, especially in Russia.... So I can propose, but it is better not to propose, the history changes every day. You do not know what will happen in a certain period." Between 1991 and today the focus of the international labor market has shifted from job security in "jobs for life" to a much more dynamic, fluid, and uncertain market in which personal success depends on training, gaining experience, and CV building (Favell et al. 2007; Rose 1996). This change is described in literature based on research in Western capitalist countries, but it is, arguably, even more pronounced in the case of postsocialist countries (Makovicky 2014). Recently graduated students frame their work experiences in career-oriented terms, reflecting on the transferable skills gained in their career. Current students also view developing their "assets" as the best way to secure a stable financial future.

When I started, I had to learn a lot of new skills for my job that I never learned before in my life. Yet I succeeded in increasing my knowledge and improving my Dutch, and now I can grow further in my career ... I think that nowadays it is not just important but absolutely necessary to speak a foreign language well. Knowledge of a foreign language used to be a bonus during job interviews. Now it is not just a bonus anymore but a requirement. People who do not speak a single foreign language have fewer career possibilities than people who know just one foreign language. (Viktoriia, 27)

As demonstrated by Viktoriia's quote above, knowing a foreign language is regarded as an "asset." The more foreign languages you know, the greater your career prospects. For this reason, picking up a relatively marginal language like Dutch is a strategic career choice. As more and more Russians master English, students view Dutch as a unique asset that will distinguish their CVs from those of their competitors in future job applications. Additionally, students are convinced that studying Dutch increases their "assets" by much more than just language proficiency. Contrary to the tendency to view human capital as consisting of only formal training and education (Baláž and Williams 2004), the students in Pskov take a much broader understanding of the term. Students enjoy learning something entirely new because it requires discipline, which is regarded as essential for self-development.

Another popular strategy to cope with the low salaries and limited job opportunities in Pskov is to move to Saint Petersburg or Moscow. Nataliia, who currently lives in the Netherlands, emphasizes the difference between provincial Pskov and the big cities: "I thought about going back to Russia, but Pskov is not an option. If you're talking about Russia ... I prefer Moscow or Saint Petersburg, there you have opportunities. Pskov ... I don't know, go back in your salary this much [points downwards]? It is possible, and of course you can survive, and keep your friends, but ... so that's it." The move to Saint Petersburg to find a job is a common one, as one out of four migrants leaving the Pskov region moves to that city (Ioffe and Zayonchkovskaya 2010). Students of Dutch have the possibility to get a well-paid position with one of the 75 Dutch companies located in the city (Consulate-General of the Netherlands... 2013). The massive difference in Gross Regional Product (GRP) between Pskov and Saint Petersburg explains the attractiveness of this move. The GRP of Pskov Oblast is by far the lowest in the North-Western Federal District (Europa Publications 2016). In 2014 the GRP of Saint Petersburg was 2,652,050 million rubles against just 121,303 million in Pskov (Territorial'nyi organ Federal'noi sluzhby... 2016).

Since the students master at least three foreign languages and attach a high importance to money, prestige, and advancement, they might be interested to find a job in more economically advanced countries.⁹ Zuzana Búriková and Daniel Miller (2010) state that their interviewees reflected a striking "readiness to migrate" and consciously used their au pair work abroad as a stepping-stone to future employment in a Western country. However, the students from Pskov are not ready to migrate at all. Galina (18) for example determinedly stated: "I would like to go to the Netherlands as a tourist but not to work or study. I also do not want to go to Germany. I want to live in Pskov, in Russia, not in the Netherlands or Germany or any other foreign country." Current students predominantly prefer to use their knowledge of for-

⁹ When talking about student migration, students from Pskov predominantly consider their opportunities to go abroad *after* their studies. The number of students studying abroad *during* the course of their program declined from 12 in 2014 to just 2 in 2016, but these numbers are negligible in the student population of around 10,000 students (Pskov State University, personal correspondence, July 6, 2016).

eign languages in Russia. Anne-Wil Harzing (2004) confirms these findings. She writes that Russians demonstrated one of the lowest levels of inclination to work outside their home country. This is also reflected in a recent opinion poll from the Levada Center, which indicates a lower readiness to move among the respondents compared to previous years (Levada Center 2015). New Russian nationalism contributes to this increased desire to stay in Russia. The portrayal of the West as Russia's morally depraved "other" and active discouragement of emigration by the current Russian leadership can clash with students' ambitions to master Dutch. Maia (22) explains: "I notice that my friends are now more proud of Russia. I am afraid, a little bit. Sometimes they are a bit too proud. They insult me a little bit, they mock me, more like joke, about that I want to go to the Netherlands. They don't understand why I study Dutch, why I don't go there."

Most students associate nationalism with others. They view themselves as untainted by the influence of anti-Western propaganda. The way Dutch and Russian media report on the events in Ukraine frequently contradict each other. Many students read news articles in different languages and experience these contradictions firsthand. Ever since the era of Soviet propaganda, Russians have rejected the idea of "objectivity" or even "balance" in their mass media (Dubin 2002; Feklyunina 2010; Oates 2007). As many Russians believe that no media system can be free from the influence of political or financial patrons, they assume that both Russian and Western media outlets are biased. The students' critique of the media is primarily directed at television, which is considered as especially untrustworthy. Students prefer to read news online, as this allows them to evaluate multiple perspectives and make up their own mind. Tat'iana (27) even describes how specifically they, as students of foreign languages, will be able to facilitate peace in the future:

I think this time it is more important to have some relationship with another country. Because now many Russian are like: "Oh we are Russians and we don't need something else and we are more important in the world," but I think in these difficult times we really need relationships with different cultures, because it is a way without conflict, and they, for students it is really difficult, some changing, some information changing, because ... the knowledge from the Soviet Union is something unique, the experience it was ... I think it is our generation's problem because we must to do [sic!] something! ... [S]cience can work for peace, because what is peace? It is science, students, and some relationships. (Tat'iana)

Just like today's students associate nationalism with "others," they similarly distance themselves from the escape narrative. First of all, they actively use the escape narrative to describe people from other, more impoverished geographical locations in order to "defend" their home country. Andzhela's remark is illustrative of this tendency: "[I am] not like African people who have these problems; they have to think how to survive, they go to another country. I have not got the same situation." Mariia's (28) opinion corresponds to Andzhela's: "I know a lot of people from ... Belarus and Ukraine also, mostly girls, who just want to migrate. They al-

ready had a boyfriend there but they could barely speak Dutch. But they just wanted to move. But maybe that is quite understandable, in Ukraine and Belarus life is even worse than here ... there mostly where the girls [are from], from Poland also." Viewing Africa as the ultimate backward "other" is also reflected in the ethnographic research by Jennifer Patino (2005). Her interviewees, whom she spoke to in the late 1990s, considered living conditions in Saint Petersburg so poor that they could be compared to those in "Africa," which stood for the most primitive lifestyle of all. In contrast to the perceived similarity of Russian and African living conditions in the 1990s, Andzhela considers Russia today to be much more developed. Besides projecting the escape narrative on to inhabitants of other countries, the escape narrative is associated with a former generation, including the students who studied Dutch in the 1990s:

They wanted to move. That is kind of a mindset of an older generation. They think life is better there, that living is better. Yes, but you can also make it better here; it depends on what you're doing and what you want.... But the group before, before us, I think they just wanted to move to the Netherlands, because almost everybody moved as far as I know, from the older students.... Young people are open, and they want to watch for themselves. They want to go there and check ... they still have parents who tell them it is better there, and you have to migrate and blah blah blah.... Yes, they are divided, I think, in two groups: those who still think it is better there, and that their child better moves to Europe. And those who are kind of pro-Russian, they think it is better here. (Mariia)

In the final section of this article I will unpack the modern myth of the escape narrative based on the stories from the 1990s. This discursive formation dissuades the expression of migration intentions among current students.

UNPACKING THE ESCAPE NARRATIVE

It was really a period, 1992–1993, in which we had completely different levels of economic development, so of course everything surprised me.... Everything was strange and surprised us. Because we came from the completely other side of the world.... During my last year at the university I thought I was going to go to the Netherlands. (Iuliia, 41)

I stay in Russia, I think it is more natural. We had different periods in our country. When the Soviets came many people who had a different position or a different view ... they feel bad in this period, and they felt the need to *quitter*¹⁰ the country, to go [to] France, many Russian people went to France or other European countries. But it was the need. They do not feel good, they had a miss of their native country. It was the tragedy of their lives for this people ... I do not have the need to leave the country. (Andzhela, 24)

¹⁰ Andzhela is currently working on her dissertation on the French language in Brussels. For this reason she occasionally used French words while speaking English.

So far I have analyzed the very foundation of the escape narrative: the desire to leave versus a desire to stay in Russia among two generations. The two quotes above sum up the escape narrative as it developed in Pskov: whereas the first quote illustrates the desire to leave widespread among students of the 1990s, the second illuminates the current tendency to express feelings of being just fine in Russia. Using contrasting quotes from the two generations as reference points, I will unpack this "modern myth" according to its three main components: a view on economic migration motives, on gendered notions of "escape," and on "the West" at large. The analysis below demonstrates how it is precisely at the intersection of the three themes of migration, patriotism, and personhood that the escape narrative emerged.

VIEW ON ECONOMIC MIGRATION MOTIVATIONS

It was unreal! Russia during the early 2000s and today is such an enormous difference, in terms of material things. Of course it is attractive, when you see everything here [in the Netherlands] and all shoes and clothes and everything.... Stupid things, now I don't even understand, I think, "Why was I so stupid?" But it makes sense when you remember that you didn't have anything, and here I could have it all. There is just a larger choice of things you can buy, that's it. (Nataliia, 31)

I have not the aim to live in another country. For the reason that I feel comfortable in my country. I do not have the sense of "hungry" to find work or how to survive. (Andzhela, 24)

Among the generation who studied Dutch in the 1990s, reasons to leave Russia were primarily economic. The 1990s were an economically tough period in Russia. Especially concerning material culture, the escape narrative therefore shows an uncritical glorification of the Western way of life (Sztompka 1993). However, current students do not express economic motivations for migration. In Pskov the discursive strength of the escape narrative results in present-day students shying away from mentioning economic factors as their drivers, thereby countering the stereotype of Russia as a "backward" country at large. As the current political leadership in Russia is promoting Russian nationalism under the guise of patriotism, the negative image of their country in the West is seen as unjustified (Feklyunina 2010; Grahholm et al. 2014). My informants' views contradict those of the au pairs interviewed by Zuzana Sekeráková Búriková (2014), for whom expressing economic motivations was the only socially acceptable way of justifying migration.

VIEWS ON GENDERED NOTIONS OF "ESCAPE"

You were thinking about the people you knew, who is it going to be? You are in this situation where many Russian men are macho and drink, and you also don't want that. So you could say, they [Dutch men] were a good catch. You could say you saw it like that, yes. And also your parents. They thought it was sad [that I would leave for the Netherlands], but they also saw, he loves you, so much, and

he is just going to do everything for you.... I never thought that I would live in the Netherlands. Even when we got married we discussed: "Are we going to live in Russia or in the Netherlands?" My parents were in Russia, I didn't know how everything would go, if I would even get a permit to leave in the first place. (Anastasiia, 40)

Makeup, many clothes in their wardrobe, high heels, and beautiful body shapes are important to Russian women. On the other hand, I know there is also a very bad opinion about Russian women. For example, like they are looking for a foreigner to marry all day and all night. Also that many Russian women are very open to sexual advances. Well, I want to say that of course these women exist, but what I find very sad is that this has already become a prejudice of all Russian women. For all Russian girls and women whom I know, such behavior is also not normal. So, I assume that people are not like that. For me personally it is completely unpleasant that such an opinion exists. (Viktoriiia, 27)

In sharp contrast to the stereotype of a Russian woman as helpless and desperately looking for a way to leave her home country, Russian women regard themselves as professionally active individuals. Although Anastasiia's quote above emphasizes that a Dutch man was clearly a "good catch," it was never obvious for her that she would leave Russia for good. Even after she got married to a Dutch man, she did not want to leave her parents alone. As findings of Victor Agadjanian, Lesia Nedoluzhko, and Gennady Kumsov (2008) suggest for Kyrgyzstan, in Pskov too migration intended as temporary often evolves into permanent over time. Current and former students from Pskov are (retrospectively) well aware of the stereotypes that exist about Russian women, which in turn influences the way they articulate their migration motives. Viktoriiia's quote above illustrates the link between internationally attributed stereotypes of Russian women and migration. The Russian woman "looking for a foreigner to marry all day and all night" is a common stereotype in Western popular culture that capitalizes on the desire for "escape" among Russian women (Chun 1996; Johnson and Robinson 2006; Mitina and Petrenko 2001; Sverdljuk 2009; Zare and Medoza 2012). However, to young Russian women this stereotype is an odd, distorted, and inadequate image (Sverdljuk 2009). Anne White's (2005) study demonstrates how Russian students actively counter modern stereotypes. Although her research focused on the internal, Russian attribution of gender stereotypes, my findings suggest that internationally assigned gendered stereotypes are also strongly rejected by young Russians. In order to distinguish themselves from this negative caricature, they are hesitant to mention personal relationships as their motivations for studying Dutch or migrating. Unlike the neo-liberal motives for language learning and migration, drivers related to personal relationships are not socially accepted (Búriková and Miller 2010). Polina (22) is an example of a present-day student who actively counters the gender aspect of the escape narrative. Even though she started learning Dutch directly after she met her Dutch boyfriend, she denies the link between those two events.

VIEWS OF "THE WEST"

For me it was not like I was visiting the Netherlands specifically, for me it was just "abroad" that mattered.... It was like a dream to work there. (Ekaterina, 35)

I like it [Dutch multiculturalism], but sometimes there are serious exaggerations, a little bit sometimes.... A little bit harmful for the culture, for the original Dutch culture, that can sometimes be a real danger, I think. (Maksim, 21)

During the 1990s, foreign goods and lifestyles were valued precisely for their *foreignness* (Caldwell 2004:7). The students of that decade thought of the Netherlands as part of a larger, homogenous "West" and were convinced that other Western countries would have evoked similar feelings of enthusiasm and awe. Their experience of the "West" is similar to Yurchak's concept of the "imagined West": "A local cultural construct and imaginary that was based on the forms of knowledge and aesthetics associated with the 'West,' but not necessarily referring to any 'real' West" (2006:34–35). The fact that Poda himself never visited the Netherlands contributed to the "imagined" character of the Netherlands in the minds of the students. Students describe that when still at university, they viewed the Netherlands as a fairy tale or a dream. For many, moving to the Netherlands remained a fantasy because most students did not have adequate funds to support (temporary) migration. Simultaneously, people found worth in the "skills and hardiness that come from living under more adverse conditions," referring to civilization as "spoiling" those assets (Patino 2005:488). Realizing that the West is somehow "ordinary" and not that different from Russia can in these cases still come as a surprise, as it contradicts the image of a decadent West (Dubin 2002; Halbwachs 1992). "[You can migrate westwards] if you just want comfort," Nataliia claims. Evgeniia's (28) comment illustrates this opinion:

Russian people are really smart. They work much better than for example in Belgium, I am sure about that. They [Belgians] are a little bit lazy, they don't want to, they're having time off.... They have more possibilities to sleep a little, they have more time, they don't have to travel to their work for two hours and two hours back, they don't understand.

Current nationalist discourse builds on these narratives by promoting certain character traits as distinctly Russian features, opposing a Western "other." On April 17, 2014, Putin claimed that a people that lives on a territory has a common culture and history, and a certain climate develops certain distinct traits. He argued that Russians are morally superior because they faced hardships not present in the West (President of Russia 2014). What actually constitutes this "West" remains fluid. Although the Netherlands is generally considered a "Western" country, some students remarkably do not classify it as such:

You know, I don't think that the Netherlands is counted by the Russian people as bad Western Europe and all that, I don't think it is applied to the Netherlands. It is more to Germany, I think, and to England maybe, and maybe to France. But not to the Netherlands, I think, I have never heard of it. (Dasha, 20)

However, while building on the stereotype of a “decadent” and “imagined” Europe, the “uncritical obsession with the Western way of life” of the 1990s is being replaced with a renewed enthusiasm for Russia as a unified nation (Sztompka 1993). With this growing patriotism comes a more negative attitude towards the Western “other,” although arguably of an equally “imagined” character as the idealized Western “other” of the 1990s. The majority of Russians today agree with the statement that Russia is better than other countries in the world (Levada Center 2014). As the events in Ukraine unfolded in 2014, Russia viewed its Western “other” in an increasingly negative light. Until the start of 2014, most (60–70 percent) Russians expressed a positive attitude towards the EU. By March 2014, however, less than 50 percent of respondents indicated a positive attitude, while the share of Russians who felt negatively towards the EU had increased from around 20 percent in 2012 to over 40 percent in March 2014 (Granholm et al. 2014:31). Conservative Russian public discourse states that “the methods European countries have been choosing in order to reach their current stage of development represent a bad example for Russia” (Baranovsky and Utkin 2012:66). Russian media, for example, frame the European response to its current migration crisis as “misplaced tolerance” (Tolz and Harding 2015:467). In Pskov as well the contrast between European liberalism and Russian conservatism surfaces. Alisa (27) comments on Dutch liberal attitudes towards sexuality: “The Netherlands speak freely about all themes,¹¹ about everything directly, and [are] more open about sex. We only discuss sex in our circle of friends, and other themes. In the Netherlands I get the impression that they can talk about these things just like that. Also in comparison to us, [the Dutch have] more freedom in opinions.”

CONCLUSION

This study produced some insights into how changing discourses of personhood, migration, and patriotism have shaped foreign-language students’ migration perceptions since 1991. I traced an interrelated shift in all three above-mentioned discourses and revealed how this gave rise to the development of a modern myth that I have termed “the escape narrative.” A desire to leave Russia based on magnified experiences of Russian emigrants from the 1990s forms the core of this narrative. For current students in Pskov the escape narrative is embodied in the migration stories of previous generations of students. Initially, their success abroad served as an example to other students, fitting within the emergence of a new role model of mobile, post-Soviet personhood. However, under the influence of changing discourses of migration, personhood, and nationalism, their stories gradually evolved into the escape narrative. This modern myth paints a darker picture, in which these women were desperately looking for a way to exchange the “backwardness” of Russia for an idealized and imagined “West.” Unlike the students from the 1990s, today’s students do not show readiness to migrate at all. Despite their neoliberal attitude and the emphasis they put on the need to improve their CVs, current students do not express a

¹¹ *Tema* or “theme” refers to Russian slang for gay, as in “he’s on the theme” meaning “he is gay” (Essig 1999).

desire to literally expand their horizons by (temporarily) moving abroad. I have argued that the discursive strength of the escape narrative dissuades current students from expressing a desire to migrate. Instead, students distance themselves from the escape narrative by projecting it onto their geographical and generational "others," thereby distancing themselves from all negative connotations of "backwardness" that it entails. The recent revival of Russian patriotism fuels nationalistic sentiments and a critical view of the West among today's "enterprising" students, enhancing their desire to stay in Russia. The migration perceptions of foreign-language students from Pskov provide an on-the-ground example of how the self-image of Russia as a nation is reflected in everyday lived experiences of young Russians.

Since this study's findings are predominantly based on the migration narratives of women, further research could look into the transgenerational transmission of migration narratives among men. Furthermore, we cannot predict if the students who at this moment seem determined to stay in Russia will act accordingly. Whether their desire to stay in Russia is "genuine" or "imagined" was beyond the scope of this research, as I analyzed the escape narrative as a discursive formation. Individual migration intentions are often ambivalent and conditional, especially in circumstances of great uncertainty about the future (Agadjanian et al. 2008). Many of the former students who are now living abroad did not intend to leave Russia as students. A follow-up study could shed some light on this potential difference between words and deeds.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEWS LIST

Current and former students

Name	Age	Place of birth	Studied Dutch	Occupation and location at the time of the interview	Interview date	Interview language
Ivan Poda	~70	Ukraine	Started first class in 1991	Retired language teacher, Pskov	January 10, 2015	Dutch
Marina	61	Pskov	1 month in 1991	Tourist agency employee, Pskov	January 10, 2015	German
Elena	41	Estonia	1990–1995	Secretary, former Dutch teacher, Pskov	April 16, 2015	Dutch
Iuliia	41	Pskov	1991–1995	Language teacher, city administration employee, Pskov	January 14, 2015	Dutch
Anastasiia	40	Pskov	1991–1996	Primary school teacher, Nijmegen	December, 2014	Dutch
Ekaterina	35	Pskov	1996–2001	PhD candidate, Pskov	January 14, 2015	Dutch
Irina	41	Pskov	1998–2001	Language teacher, Pskov	January 13, 2015	Dutch
Ol'ga	32	Pskov	2000–2001, 2015–present	Housewife, former language teacher, Pskov	January 16, 2015	Dutch
Nataliia	31	Pskov	2000–2004	Housewife, Nijmegen	April 10, 2015	Dutch
Evgeniia	28	Pskov	2000–2009	Help desk employee, German and English tutor, Saint Petersburg	May 5, 2015 (Skype)	Dutch
Mariia	28	Pskov	2003–2008	IT, Saint Petersburg	April 14, 2015 (Skype)	Dutch
Viktoriia	27	Pskov	2005–2009	Help desk supervisor, Saint Petersburg	May 4, 2015 (Email)	Dutch
Igor'	26	Pskov	2005–2010	Help desk employee, Saint Petersburg	April 25, 2015 (Skype)	Dutch
Alisa	27	Pskov	2005–2010	Projects with disabled people, Pskov	January 14, 2015	Dutch



Ul'iana	26	Pskov	2005–2010	PhD candidate, Nijmegen	April 7, 2015 (Skype)	Dutch
Valeriia	25	Pskov	2005–2010	Manager assistant, Pskov	January 15, 2015 (Skype)	Dutch
Andzhela	24	Pskov	2007–2011	PhD candidate, Saint Petersburg	January 13, 2015	Dutch/English
Vladislava	34	Pskov	2009–2011	English teacher, Pskov	April 14, 2015	English
Maksim	21	Pskov	2009–2012	Student, Pskov	January 12, 2015	Dutch
Maia	22	Pskov	2011–2014	Museum employee, Pskov	January 14, 2015	Dutch
Galina	18	Pskov	2013–present	Student, Pskov	January 13, 2015	German/Russian
Polina	22	Pskov	2014–present	Student, Pskov	January 11, 2015	English
Anton	18	Pskov	2014–present	Student, Pskov	January 13, 2015	English
Nadia	18	Pskov	2014–present	Student, Pskov	January 10, 2015	English
Oksana	23	Pskov	2014–present	Student, Pskov	January 12, 2015	English
Larisa	54	Pskov	2014–present	English teacher, Pskov	January 14, 2015	Dutch
Dasha	20	Tashkent	2014–present	Student, Pskov	April 16, 2015	English
Tat'iana	27	Saint Petersburg	2015–present	Student, Pskov	April 14, 2015	English

Other interviewees

Wim van Dam	72	Nijmegen	NA	Dutch examiner in Pskov, former director of Pskov-Nijmegen partnership, Nijmegen	December 2014	Dutch
Kevin Smits	32	Nijmegen	NA	Director of Pskov-Nijmegen partnership, Nijmegen	May 12, 2015 (Skype)	Dutch

МУТАЦИИ СОВРЕМЕННОГО МИФА: КАК МЕНЯЮЩИЕСЯ ДИСКУРСЫ МИГРАЦИИ, ПАТРИОТИЗМА И ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЙ О ЛИЧНОСТИ ОПРЕДЕЛЯЮТ НАРРАТИВЫ О МИГРАЦИИ ПСКОВСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ, ИЗУЧАЮЩИХ ИНОСТРАННЫЕ ЯЗЫКИ (1991–2015 ГГ.)

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В статье, основанной на этнографическом полевом исследовании российских студентов, изучающих иностранные языки, автор обращается к вопросам миграции, патриотизма и представлений о личности в современном Пскове. Под давлением неолиберального дискурса сегодняшние студенты вынуждены постоянно соотносить свою жизнь с понятиями развития и миграции. Возможность мобильности, с одной стороны, воспринимается как «капитал», полезный в переходный период, с другой – ассоциируется с «нарративом бегства», приписанным студентам 1990-х годов. Такая логика, отражающая характерный для сегодняшнего дня дискурс о национальном в российском обществе в целом, классифицирует миграцию на Запад как поступок «проигравших» и превращает российских эмигрантов в «новых других». «Нарратив бегства» удерживает нынешних студентов от выражения сколько-нибудь серьезных намерений эмигрировать.

Ключевые слова: миграция; патриотизм; представления о личности в постсоциалистическом обществе; «нарратив бегства»