

# SCHOOL CHOICE AND THE CHILDREN OF MIGRANTS: UNVEILING EVERYDAY MIGRANTOPHOBIA IN MOSCOW

**Félicie Kempf**

*Félicie Kempf, Migrations and Society Research Unit (URMIS), Université de Paris.  
Address for correspondence: Université de Paris, Campus Grands Moulins, 5 rue Thomas Mann, 75013 Paris, France. feliciekeempf@gmail.com.*

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While many surveys point to widespread xenophobic, “migrantophobic” attitudes among the Russian population, very few studies have so far investigated the ways these attitudes may inform everyday practices and interactions between immigrants and the majority population. This article explores this topic by studying school choice practices in Moscow in the 2010s. Using qualitative methods (a series of semistructured interviews conducted with 32 Muscovite parents in 2015 and 2018), I show the ways in which ethnic and national characteristics of pupils are mobilized by parents when selecting a school. Moscow’s highly stratified educational system led to an unequal distribution of children of migrants from the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus among schools, to the point where some schools came to be known as “migrant schools.” In this context, I analyze the strategies used by some parents in order to enroll their child into a school without children of migrants. I then reveal the underlying beliefs and stereotypes commonly associated with children of migrants. Finally, I explain why parents can use the presence of migrants’ children as a choice indicator even in the absence of any clearly expressed migrantophobic attitudes. I show how, in a complex and rapidly transforming educational system, the relative presence or absence of non-Russian children came to be interpreted by many Muscovites as a reliable indicator of a given school’s quality.

**Keywords:** School Choice; Parental Choice; Children of Migrants; Migrants; Migrantophobia; School Segregation; Racism; Russia; Moscow

In Russia relations between immigrants and the majority population have not been sufficiently studied. In particular, Russian people’s perceptions and attitudes toward migrants and immigration have hardly been examined by sociologists. Large-scale national surveys and opinion polls on xenophobic and migrantophobic attitudes, such as the Levada-Center’s yearly “Monitoring of Xenophobic Attitudes”<sup>1</sup> or the

<sup>1</sup> Most recent results were published on September 18, 2019, in “Monitoring ksenofobskikh nastroenii, 2019 g.” <https://www.levada.ru/2019/09/18/monitoring-ksenofobskih-nastroenij-2/>.

2013 NEORUSS survey,<sup>2</sup> have been conducted for many years. Such surveys consistently conclude that a large portion of the population of Russia adheres to antimigrant views. But as Natalya Kosmarskaya and Igor Savin (2016) have noted, while these results are regularly discussed in the press, they have prompted very few researchers to study this topic in-depth. Academic literature on xenophobia, migrantophobia, and racism in Russia usually embraces a very broad analytic framework by trying to explain how these phenomena have developed in the context of a postcommunist society (Shnirelman 2011; Zakharov 2015), often in a comparative perspective (Malakhov 2007; Demintseva 2013). A “view from above” has remained the norm in this field of study, even in the literature focused on specific areas of public discourse such as the media (Verkhovsky 2007; Regamey 2013; Zvereva 2014; Klimenko 2016), the political arena (Malakhov 2007; Regamey 2010), or the academic world (Karpenko, Osipov, and Voronkov 2002).

As a result, objective information on the general population’s perceptions of and attitudes toward migrants and migration consists almost exclusively of percentages of support for various statements and opinions. This poses a methodological problem, as opinion polls do not indicate how stable these attitudes are, nor how they develop in the course of a person’s life. Sociological studies using qualitative research methods are needed in order to understand how these migrantophobic attitudes manifest themselves in people’s worldview and social life. So far, this research gap has been partly remedied by a qualitative, interview-based survey of Moscow and Krasnodar inhabitants’ perceptions of migrants (Kosmarskaya and Savin 2016; Kosmarskaya 2018). The methodology used allowed respondents to bring up various themes of urban life that were important to them—such as corruption or social, housing, and utility services—without being prompted by the interviewers to discuss issues related to migrants and immigration. These interviews showed that “migrants invariably featured in discussions of these themes—because they embody these ‘sore points’ of Muscovite/Russian social life” (Kosmarskaya and Savin 2016:152). However, in the vast majority of cases, respondents in this study did not express general negative opinions about migrants that would be similar to the statements that opinion polls are made of.

To this day, there is a lack of data on the more concrete dimensions of the Russian population’s relation to migrants: how do these attitudes and interpretations impact daily interactions, practices, and decisions? In order to investigate this question, my study focused on Muscovite parents’ school choice practices. Indeed, a number of compelling studies on school selection and other educational strategies has shown that choosing a school involves much more than academic considerations (such as qualifications of the teachers or the programs offered by the school). As Stephen J. Ball, Jackie Davies, Miriam David, and Diane Reay put it, “choices are infused with class and ethnic meanings” (2002:51).

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<sup>2</sup> This 2013 survey on nationalist attitudes was conducted in several large Russian cities. It was part of the 2012–2016 University of Oslo “NEORUSS” research project on nation building and nationalism in today’s Russia.

Sociological studies in several European countries have revealed that parental knowledge and practices of school choice vary across social classes, just like the criteria underpinning their decisions (Broccolichi and Van Zanten 2000; Ball 2003; Kristen 2005; Van Zanten 2009). While working-class parents do not automatically engage in school choice—even in educational systems where choice is encouraged—middle- and upper-class parents tend to see their children's education as a crucial long-term investment in social advancement and reproduction, thus attaching great importance to the choice of an educational institution. One aspect of their choice-making that is of particular interest here is that, when choosing a primary or secondary school for their children, many middle- and upper-class families pay attention to the pupils' social and ethnic characteristics and try to avoid schools with categories of children they deem undesirable, so as to create or maintain a sense of social homogeneity. For these parents choosing the "right" school represents an effective way of controlling their children's social environment.

Several researchers have emphasized the ethnic dimensions of educational choices, showing both how the process of school choice varies across different racial or ethnic groups and how parents from various groups include considerations about the schools' ethnic composition in different stages of that process. Salvatore Saporito and Annette Lareau (1999) showed that race is a key factor guiding American families' educational choices. According to their study of a school district in the Northeast of the United States, white families tended to avoid schools with higher proportions of African American pupils even when the "white" schools they selected had inferior safety records and test scores and higher rates of poverty than a nearby "black" school. In their study of ethnic segregation in Dutch primary schools, Sjoerd Karsten, Guuske Ledoux, Jaap Roeveld, Charles Felix, and Dorothé Elshof (2003) showed that while both white and ethnic minority parents tended to avoid predominantly nonwhite schools, white parents were more inclined to attach a greater importance to a match between their own ethnic and social background and the pupils' characteristics. Sociological studies in France (Felouzis, Liot, and Perroton 2005) and Germany (Kristen 2005) also noted differences in how ethnic majority and ethnic minority families perceived the school system and the criteria they used in selecting schools, which resulted in the consolidation of ethnic school segregation in both countries.

Based on these findings—and given how prevalent xenophobic and migranophobic attitudes seem to be in Russia—we can hypothesize that some parents in Russian cities are likely to carry out various strategies and make decisions to ensure that their children will not find themselves in a class or a school with children of migrants—or with "too many" of them.

Several studies of the social patterns of school choice and of the various dimensions and criteria of this decision-making process have been conducted in different regions of the Russian Federation, particularly in big cities, where the size and diversity of the educational market make these issues all the more relevant. Larisa Shpakovskaya (2015) investigated the issue of class differences in school selection in

Saint Petersburg by conducting semistructured interviews with parents. She found significant differences in choice strategies and educational requirements depending on her respondents' social class. In particular, middle-class parents were insistent on finding a school with pupils of a similar social and cultural background, striving, for example, to avoid schools with so-called *gopniki* (a derogatory term for low-income and poorly educated families).

Daniel Alexandrov, Ksenia Tenisheva, and Svetlana Savelyeva (2018) used a different methodological approach: they conducted a questionnaire survey in order to analyze the social patterns of school choice in two districts of Saint Petersburg. They demonstrated the role of family characteristics such as parents' educational background and professional status on various aspects of school choice (for example, choice criteria and the types and number of schools considered), while also stressing the impact of the local context (such as characteristics of the local educational offer and demographic composition of the neighborhood). About a third of their respondents in both districts did not take any specific action to select a school. Among those who did, the most important criteria tended to be the qualities of teachers, school proximity, school status, and well-equipped facilities. Cultural background of classmates and school's ethnic composition were also selected by many respondents, although very few of them (4.3 percent) chose ethnic composition as their most important criterion. In another questionnaire survey conducted with parents of preschool-aged children in Moscow (Sobkin, Ivanova, and Skobeltsina 2011), an identically low number of respondents (4.3 percent) selected "contingent, social background of pupils" as a parameter they took into consideration when selecting a primary school. Alexandrov and colleagues (2018) additionally found interesting patterns in criteria combination: parents who were the most likely to select cultural background of classmates and ethnic composition of the school were the ones who selected school effectiveness (the school's USE<sup>3</sup> performance) as the most important parameter of their choice. Interestingly, ethnic composition was also very important to parents who sent their children to an "ordinary" school without considering any alternative options.

These studies show that the social, ethnic, and cultural characteristics of pupils are one of the criteria mobilized by some families when selecting a school in Russian cities. But several questions about this aspect of school choice remain unanswered: Which parents are most likely to take ethnic composition into account when selecting a school? When a desire to ensure ethnic homogeneity is present, in what ways does it orient parental perceptions and decisions in the process of school choice? How important is it for these parents, compared with other choice criteria and considerations? And finally, what are the reasons behind these preferences?

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<sup>3</sup> The Unified State Exam (USE, *EGE*) was introduced in the early 2000s and gradually put in place in all schools. This exam takes place at the end of secondary school and is required for entrance to a university or professional college.

## METHODOLOGY

To answer these questions, I conducted 32 semistructured interviews with Muscovite parents. This qualitative approach was chosen because one of the study's objectives was to reconstruct the process of school choice and to comprehend exactly how and in what circumstances the desire to avoid migrants' children played out in this process. Another crucial aspect of the study was to document the exact language that parents themselves use when talking about this matter, in order to understand the meanings these strategies of avoidance held for them. Direct questions could give informants the impression that they are being considered "racist" or "xenophobic" by the interviewer and lead to insincere answers or feelings of awkwardness. For this reason, the study was presented to the informants as research on school choice in Moscow, without further details: I made no mention of my specific interest in the exclusionary and self-segregative dimensions of that choice, at least at first. The goal was to let interviewees bring up that topic only if and how they found it relevant, in order to obtain the most spontaneous discourse possible. No direct questions were asked about this, and in each interview I used the categories evoked by the informant herself, such as "migrants," "*gastarbeiter*," "Russians" (*russkie*), "Caucasians," "Muslims," and so on. This allowed for a better grasp of how ethnic and racial labels and meanings are embedded in everyday interpretations and practices involved in school choice. This draws on the experience of Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea (2008), who, while studying ethnicity in a Transylvanian town, avoided making any mention of it in discussions with their informants. In some instances, however, when the interviewee did not bring up the issue herself, I asked a more direct question about children of migrants near the end of the interview.

Interviews for my study took place in 2015 and 2018. The average interview lasted between 60 and 80 minutes. Due to both the subject and objectives of the study and its methodological limitations, the sample is not representative of the population of Moscow as a whole. Its sociodemographic characteristics break down as follows:

- Most informants were women; only four men were interviewed for the project.
- All were permanent residents of Moscow (defined as people who had been living in Moscow for a minimum of five years). The majority had spent their entire life in the city, but a few came from other regions of Russia and from other ex-Soviet republics.
- Most interviewees were ethnically Russian, but four of them identified as being of another ethnicity: two as Georgian and one each as Azerbaijani and Jewish.
- Participants came from diverse occupational and socioeconomic backgrounds, but informants with high educational levels were overrepresented compared to the general population.

Informants lived in a wide variety of neighborhoods, covering all Moscow districts. The schools they selected were also diverse, ranging from "ordinary" schools with poor reputations to some of Moscow's top educational institutions according to official school ratings published each year by the Ministry of Education of the Rus-

sian Federation and the city's Department of Education. Additional interviews were conducted with school directors and teachers—four and seven, respectively.

I chose to focus—although not exclusively—on the choice of a primary school at the first-grade level. For many parents this is actually the biggest choice they make, as their child will remain in that same school until the end of secondary education. Besides, this is a moment when parents are likely to base their decision on a broad range of considerations, including the school's social and ethnic composition. Subsequent decisions, such as moving their child to another school at the secondary-school level, are more likely to be based on strictly academic considerations.

Some informants were interviewed shortly after the choice and the enrollment process—their child was in first grade at the time of the interview—or while they were still in the midst of this process. But parents whose children were older were included as well, because they could speak about the primary-school choice as well as later educational decisions such as a change of school or class. Moreover, many interviewees had two or more children; in this case, the interview centered on the youngest child, but prior decisions regarding older children were discussed as well. This, as well as the inclusion of parents who had chosen their school a few years before the interview, allowed me to gauge how the practices of school choice evolved since the 2000s.

## **CHOOSING A SCHOOL: MAKING SENSE OF A COMPLEX AND RAPIDLY TRANSFORMING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

Even though Russia has been experiencing significant flows of immigration since the end of the Soviet Union and Moscow has become the main center of attraction for "guest workers" from the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus, the capital's urban space shows an absence of ethnic or national enclaves and ghettos (Vendina 2009; Demintseva 2017). It is also characterized by a relatively high level of social diversity, despite the progressive differentiation of the city's neighborhoods along socioeconomic lines since the 1990s (Vendina 2002).

Moscow's educational system, however, is highly differentiated and hierarchized. Up until recently, schools in Moscow were very diverse in terms of curriculum, status, and reputation. Some schools taught the standard program only, while others offered advanced learning of one or more subjects, such as math or foreign languages. General education schools existed alongside schools with a special status, such as lyceums and gymnasiums, which offered a higher level of teaching at the secondary-school level. A study of about 1,500 schools in three regions of the Russian Federation (including the city of Moscow and Moscow Oblast) found a correlation between the official status of schools and their pupils' average performance at the Unified State Exam (USE): pupils from gymnasiums and lyceums performed better than those enrolled in schools with advanced learning, who in turn had better grades than pupils from ordinary general education schools (Froumin, Pinskaya, and Kosaretsky 2012; Kosaretsky, Grunicheva, and Pinskaya 2014). The same study also discovered that differences in school performance tended to overlap with the socioeconomic characteristics of the school body. In other words, schools whose pupils came from relatively

privileged families offered a higher than average level of instruction, as measured by their success rates and average grades on the USE (Froumin et al. 2012). Galina Čeredničenko (2000) explained that this stratified educational system emerged in Russian cities in the 1990s, when governmental authorities started to promote parental choice. This led to the diversification of schools to meet the demands of families. Competition developed among schools, and many started to select their pupils as early as the first-grade level. David Konstantinovsky, Victor Vakhshayn, and Dmitry Kurakin (2008) noted that receiving quality education in present-day Russia necessitates cultural and financial resources that many families do not possess.

Other researchers observed that the social and academic polarization of Russian schools was accompanied by their pupils' segregation along ethnic or national lines. In Saint Petersburg, Daniel Alexandrov, Vlada Baranova, and Valeria Ivaniushina (2012) showed that children of migrants from the former Soviet republics tended to be concentrated in some schools while other, neighboring, schools had very few of them. These results were found in the absence of any significant urban segregation along ethnic lines, which could have explained this phenomenon. Since the 2000s, in Moscow and other large cities the media—both printed press and television newscasts—have been reporting extensively about the so-called invasion of Russia's schools by children of migrants. Some of these reports cited far-fetched numbers and dubious facts, like schools where half or even 70 percent of the pupils did not speak Russian or classes with almost no Russian children. Such high numbers, however, are inconsistent with the available research data. A survey conducted by the Center for Migration Studies in Moscow estimated the overall number of foreign children living in Moscow in 2012 at 32,300, if counting legalized migrants only (Zayonchkovskaya et al. 2014:57–61).<sup>4</sup> This is equivalent to the numbers published by the city's Department of Education, according to which the total number of foreign pupils in Moscow schools was 30,000 in 2012.<sup>5</sup> Researchers at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow supplemented these results with a qualitative study looking at the situation in several "socially challenged" schools of the Moscow suburbs. In these schools—some of which suffered from a poor reputation due to the presence of migrants' children—they estimated the number of pupils from the CIS countries as follows: two–four per class at the high-school level, five–six at the middle-school level, and seven–nine at the primary-school level (Deminsteva 2018:8).

<sup>4</sup> Six hundred permanent inhabitants (that is, inhabitants who had been living in Moscow for at least five years) were surveyed, as well as two hundred labor migrants. The study's sampling was representative, based on the 2010 census of the Moscow population (for permanent residents of the city) and the Federal Migration Service's data (for labor migrants), and respondents were surveyed in various neighborhoods of the city. The survey showed that among migrants who declared having one or more children under 18 years of age, only 22 percent were living with their children (in the vast majority of cases this meant one or two children) in Moscow. The children of most migrant respondents had "stayed behind" in their countries of origin. Besides, over 80 percent of the surveyed permanent residents of Moscow with school-aged children declared that there were no children of migrants in their child's class.

<sup>5</sup> Estimates produced by the Federal Migration Service the same year were much higher (around 70,000).

Despite the fact that non-Russian children represent only a small minority of pupils in most schools, the share of migrants perceived by the local inhabitants seems to be much higher, and some educational institutions started to be designated as “migrant schools” in contrast to the neighboring, almost totally “migrant-free” schools. These “migrant schools” are often the ones that struggle the most to enroll enough pupils due to their poor reputation. The unequal distribution of non-Russian children, it seems, has compounded and exacerbated the preexisting socioeconomic and academic differentiation of Moscow schools.

In fact, the schools’ reputations and levels of performance became so contrasted that by the end of the 2000s a typical situation in most neighborhoods was that some schools found it difficult to enroll enough pupils to survive while others were highly sought after and received too many applications. Remedyng this problem was one of the objectives of an important educational reform implemented in Moscow since 2011. Among other measures, the reform involved the creation of new “educational complexes” based on several existing schools and preschools. Quite often, a new complex was made of schools whose reputations before the merger differed starkly. This transformation of Moscow’s educational system impacted many schools’ reputations and level of resources. It also affected parental practices of school choice, especially since another measure was put in place simultaneously: parents now have to enroll their child through an online platform, and acceptance is guaranteed only to a selected number of schools based on the family’s place of residence. Parents still have the right to apply to any other school in Moscow, but their child will be accepted there only if there are unfilled places.

These recent transformations of the educational system in Moscow must be kept in mind when reading the following analysis: the majority of interviewees have chosen their child’s school in an extremely unclear and rapidly transforming educational landscape. Some of their neighborhood schools were being merged into new complexes while others remained the same as before. In some cases the creation of a complex led to a profound reorganization of school life, such as redistribution of pupils and teachers among the buildings; in other cases the changes were of an administrative nature only and did not have any obvious impact on the children’s learning environment. As a consequence, both the educational institutions’ characteristics (such as their level of performance and the social characteristics of their pupils) and their admission rules were rather unclear to most parents.

In such a context, many parents sense that choosing the “right” school for their child is a complex and crucial task. A bad decision can have serious consequences: a common opinion among informants was that the level of instruction in many schools does not allow pupils to successfully enter a university—unless the family resorts to additional paid services such as individual lessons with a hired tutor. Learning how to make sense of, and orient in, Moscow’s differentiated and rapidly transforming educational landscape becomes a critical stage in the decision-making process for these parents. To gain that knowledge, most of them rely on informal discussions with other parents:

How am I choosing? Looking at websites is useless, you won't find any real information there. Then you can look at the teacher's face, but that won't tell you much either.... Personally, since I live in this neighborhood, I... Let's say you go to the clinic, and you see a mom with an eight-year-old sitting next to you, well you just ask her directly, "So which school are you going to?" And that's it, you ask parents' opinion everywhere. On playgrounds... (Maia)

We had a *community* [says in English] in the neighborhood. We would meet with other moms and children, and we would tell each other everything: "Here you have to pay to enroll, and then each month you have to give money, to make gifts to the school" ... So, I gathered information like this for a few years, and then I finally decided. (Elena)

This is what Stephen J. Ball and Carol Vincent (1998) termed "hot," informal knowledge, in opposition to "cold," official knowledge emanating from the schools themselves—on websites and during meetings and open days—and from governmental sources, such as the ratings of Moscow's and Russia's best schools. Many informants felt they needed to base their decision on other parents' firsthand experience, which they consider much more reliable, up-to-date, and relevant to their own concerns than the available official information. This reliance on "hot knowledge" can help explain why so many of my interviewees paid attention to children of migrants, in one way or another, during the school choice process.

## AVOIDING CHILDREN OF MIGRANTS: A COMMON PREOCCUPATION

The most obvious and noticeable result of this study is that the majority of interviewees (19 out of 32) spontaneously raised the issue of migrants' children during interviews. This is true for parents with varied occupational statuses and levels of education; what differentiates informants of different socioeconomic backgrounds is whether, and how, the desire to avoid children of migrants was acted upon in the process of school choice.

In order to analyze these differences, my informants can be classified into two groups depending on which type of school they opted for. Some parents enrolled their child into an "ordinary" school, whose reputation did not extend beyond its immediate surroundings—usually this was the school located closest to their home. Others—more numerous—decided to look for what they called a "good" or "decent" school, even if that decision entailed a longer daily walk or drive to school.<sup>6</sup> The family's level and structure of resources—financial, educational, social, spatial—were always a key factor orienting parents towards one type of school or another.

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<sup>6</sup> A third category, comprising few informants, includes more atypical educational choices, such as a religious school, a private school, or home schooling; but this article focuses on the two main categories of choice: the "ordinary" and the "good" school.

### SETTLING FOR THE “ORDINARY SCHOOL”

What informants called an “ordinary” school (*obychnaia shkola*) is a school that offers the standard program only and does not fare particularly well in official ratings. These schools usually have a closer geographical perimeter of enrollment and are not known beyond their immediate environs.

Only a few informants enrolled their child in an “ordinary” school due to a real, conscious preference. This was the case of a parent who herself had been schooled there in the past; another already knew the primary school’s teacher and found them competent and friendly. Others considered the “ordinary” school as a perfectly acceptable option for the primary-school level but were planning to find another, “better” school when their child reached secondary-school level (fifth grade). For most parents who enrolled their child in this type of school, however, the very possibility of choosing between several schools was not an option that came easily to mind. To them, enrollment at the nearby school was an almost automatic decision. Interview materials show that these parents tended to have a weaker and less up-to-date knowledge of Moscow’s educational system. Differences in curriculums, reputations, or rank in the school ratings were often unknown to them. A last subgroup of parents has opted for an “ordinary” school only as a last resort or because practical constraints prevented them from going to a “better” school.

In many cases the relatively poor reputation of an “ordinary” school is closely tied to its alleged high number of children of migrants. One of the schools where the research was conducted was in this situation. Several people—including parents, a teacher, a former student, and a cleaner—said that the school is viewed as a “migrant school” in the neighborhood. Due to many “ordinary” schools’ reputation as “migrant schools,” parents whose children go to these educational institutions could be expected to be less prejudiced against migrant children, compared to parents who chose another type of school. The interviews consistently showed, however, that this is not true. Admittedly, some informants were rather indifferent and did not look unfavorably on the presence of migrants (“It’s nothing, they are adapting,” said one interviewee). Muza, whose child goes to a school known as a “migrant school,” declared, “We are all identical, we all share the same blood,” and clearly opposed parents who, according to her, held xenophobic views. More frequently, however, parents resigned themselves to a situation which they considered undesirable but unavoidable—either because they had no opportunity to turn to another school or because their poor knowledge of the educational system made them think that children of migrants are present in all schools in similar numbers:

I don’t know, I can’t say that there are a lot [of them] here, compared to the neighboring schools, for example. The number is identical. At least, I think so. Yes, there are many of them, I would like it if there were more Russians [*russkie*]. But if I got it right, it isn’t only in our country that there are many immigrants. [Laughs] I think it’s everywhere now. But in truth, of course we would like them to stay in their countries. (Aleksandra)

## IN QUEST OF THE “GOOD SCHOOL”

“Good” (*khoroshie*) or “decent” (*prilichnye*) schools (once again, these are the perceptual categories used by the informants themselves) can be defined as institutions whose geographic area of enrollment is larger than “ordinary” schools. Lyceums and gymnasiums are always considered to be in this category and so are many schools with advanced learning of a subject or with a high rank in the school ratings. A “good” school is usually more difficult to get into than an “ordinary” one, due to the high number of applications and because many of them possess a more or less formal selection process even at the first-grade level. This may involve an interview with a teacher and/or a psychologist, or priority may be given to children who attended the school’s preparatory classes<sup>7</sup> the year before entering first grade.

Among these “good” schools some are more sought after than others and could be termed “elite” schools. Many are renowned in the whole district or even throughout Moscow. Such schools usually have a very restrictive selection process: for example, in order to get into one of Moscow’s “elite” schools at the primary-school level, enrolling in the (paid) preparatory classes is mandatory but not sufficient, as children undergo an additional selection process during this preparatory year.

Interviewees who opted for a “good” or “elite” school tended to have a higher educational level and more financial resources than parents who chose an “ordinary” school. Although the size of the sample does not allow to draw general conclusions, it does support the results of a survey conducted among parents of preschool-aged children in Moscow that found that the choice of a school with the standard educational program (as opposed to schools offering advanced learning of some subjects) was more frequent among parents with a lower educational level and fewer financial resources (Sobkin et al. 2011).

Parents in this category are the ones who put in place a clear strategy to select and compare several schools in order to determine which would be the best fit for their child. The first phase of the quest for a “good” school is prospection: parents use different sources and channels of information in order to shortlist a small number of schools, according to their time, mobility, and financial constraints, as well as their specific desires and expectations towards the schools. This is the phase when most parents rely on “hot” sources of knowledge by talking to other parents, family members, and friends. At this stage some schools are eliminated because they suffer from a bad reputation for different reasons: usually either because their level of teaching is supposed to be lower than in neighboring schools or because they are known as schools for “difficult” children (children with behavioral issues, children from very disadvantaged families, children of migrants). A few informants explained how they did not even take some schools into consideration after having discussed them with other parents who had described them as “migrant schools.”

<sup>7</sup> In “good” schools these classes have to be paid for. The cost varies depending on the school. It is a way for parents to maximize their chances of having their child accepted into first grade at this school. Also, following these classes for a year allows them to get to know the school and its primary school teachers better and to reassure themselves that they made the right decision.

The second step entails visiting the shortlisted schools, which is usually the most decisive moment in the decision-making process. This can be a spontaneous visit in order to “take a look” inside and around the school or a more formal visit during an “open day” event or following a meeting organized for prospective parents. Parents use visits to evaluate the schools according to different criteria.

A crucial criterion for many parents is the pupils’ and their parents’ characteristics. For most parents in this category a school can be “good” or “decent” only if the school body is acceptable to them. Some said that they assessed the other parents’ “level” as they were taking a look at the school:

So, how did I compare the schools’ level, concretely? I guess that at the time I looked at the school ratings, I read stuff... And I talked with parents whose children went there... In a way I sensed the parents’ level, approximately. (Elena)

As this quote shows, the “level” of a school is inseparable from the “level” of its pupils and their families. Depending on the informant, this term evokes a wide range of characteristics such as the parents’ profession, cultural capital, level of income, or lifestyle. The presence or absence of pupils perceived to be children of migrants is also used as a key barometer of the school’s “level”:

***Were the kids in the school important for you when you were choosing?***

It is important, yes. It is important. When I was looking for a school, I put the emphasis on that. Because kids are prepared differently... [Silence] Well, kids whose parents arrived recently. Migrants. They are less prepared for school, less interested in studying... (Ania)

Many interviews such as this one showed that children of migrants, together with other “undesirable” children such as *gopniki*, were avoided because informants associated them with a low socioeconomic status and educational level. But for other interviewees this was not the only reason for their desire to avoid these children. In fact, several parents clearly stated that they paid attention to the children’s ethnicity but not to their social status, suggesting that for some parents the search for ethnic homogeneity actually prevails over the search for socioeconomic homogeneity:

***When you visited the school, what did you pay attention to?***

I saw primary school teachers. I talked with them, I looked at the kids, I walked around the school a little bit... That’s it.

***What do you mean, you looked at the kids?***

The kids? Well, what kind of kids go there... [Silence] Not to see how they are dressed, uh? That’s not it. But how they talk to one another, what kind of atmosphere, whether or not they are rather independent and self-confident... And also, when it comes to the kids... Well for example, in the school I went to, there is... [Silence] Well, Chechens, Armenians, those... [Laughs] I mean, this ethnic minority... There are no Russian [*russkie*] kids. (Ol’ga)

Kirill, another interviewee, explained that the social characteristics of the students do not matter to him (as he said, he himself came from a “poor family”), but their ethnicity does. He considered ethnic minority children as a potential danger to his daughter, especially since he heard that a girl had been raped in a nearby school by Chechen teenagers.

No informant explicitly stated that they asked the school personnel about the ethnic or national composition of the school during their visits. But several teachers I interviewed affirmed that this is a frequently discussed topic with prospective parents. More often, however, it seems that parents evaluate the presence of migrants’ children themselves using clues such as their “non-Slavic” physical appearance, the language they speak, or their accent.

Conversely, parents who settled for a rather elitist school often did not actively ensure that there were no children of migrants in the school, because, according to them, these schools’ highly selective enrollment process and highly demanding academic requirements make them de facto inaccessible to most migrant families:

***Are there many migrants’ children in this school?***

No. In this school, no. There is a boy from Ukraine who arrived recently, but he comes from a wealthy family. But there aren’t any simple migrants. You need a certain intellectual level to learn Chinese... (Elena)

In our class we don’t have that. We have a little girl whose parents have “hot blood” [*laughs*], people from the South... But they are very wealthy people, not to feel sorry for, you know.... Nothing dangerous can come from people like that. And they’re the only non-Russians [*nerusskie*]. We can’t have migrants’ children in the class, because it’s very unlikely for migrants to send their children to a theater school. But in the neighboring schools, there are. (Irina)

For these parents the presence or absence of migrants’ children did not play an active role in the choice process, like it did for many informants who opted for a “good,” but less elitist, school. This does not necessarily mean that it was not a preoccupation for them or that they do not adhere to negative stereotypes about migrants; but the schools they took into consideration were so selective that they did not have to worry about social, ethnic, or national homogeneity. Irina actually made the above remarks after explaining why her neighborhood was relatively safe due to the low number of immigrants. Svetlana, another informant, also illustrated this position very clearly. Her interview was punctuated with derogatory remarks about *gastarbeiter*, whose increasingly noticeable presence in her neighborhood she resented for various reasons. But she did not bring up their presence as a factor in her school selection process—probably because the only schools she considered for her son were extremely selective institutions, all known as some of Moscow’s top schools. Her animosity towards *gastarbeiter* clearly suggested, however, that their presence in a school could have constituted a rejection criterion in and of itself.

What this research shows is, thus, that the intent to avoid schools with children of migrants is not a prerogative of any social class or group. Parents with different

socioeconomic statuses and who opted for very different types of schools expressed a desire for no—or fewer—“non-Russian” kids, although not all of them could or needed to actively act upon this desire.

## STEREOTYPES AND UNDERLYING MOTIVES FOR ACTION

During interviews my informants expressed a variety of stereotypes and other types of beliefs and fears that contribute to their desire to avoid children of migrants and “migrant schools.” A stereotype can be defined as a widely shared idea about a social group or category of people that is believed to represent every individual of that group or category.

### “IT’S A VERY LOW LEVEL”

One of the most frequently expressed stereotypes holds that children of migrants are, by default, “bad,” weak pupils, unable to achieve good results. Many informants maintained that these children speak Russian poorly or even do not know any Russian at all,<sup>8</sup> which generates difficulties for the other children in the classroom, since the teacher (usually not trained to teach non-Russian speaking kids) has to spend more time with children of migrants at the expense of pupils who are native Russian-speakers:

Nearby there are many very bad schools. Ordinary, bad, weak, where children of migrants go. Ultimately, what was important for me was that the level of education be normal.... Because when there are migrants’ children, it’s... They speak Russian very poorly. It’s a very low level. Of course they should go to school! But separately. Because it’s not possible to teach everyone at the same time. (Elena)

The language barrier is not the only cause for these children’s alleged poor academic achievement. Several informants also pointed to migrant children’s social origin and living conditions as serious impediments to their success. Indeed, migrant families are perceived almost exclusively as having precarious and unstable lives. These conditions are supposed to result in a lack of academic support at home: migrants cannot pay for the school’s preparatory classes, nor can they afford individual lessons when their children encounter difficulties with the curriculum. Yet another explanation for migrants’ supposed academic failure was their lack of intelligence,

<sup>8</sup> This insistence on children of migrants’ poor command of Russian corresponds to the ideas found in the Russian press about children of migrants and the problems they supposedly create in schools. It also corresponds to the wider media discourse about migrants’ integration in the Russian society: Klimenko (2016) studied the contents of the *Rossiiskaia gazeta* newspaper from 2000 to 2014 and found that in the majority of articles dealing with this topic migrants’ exclusion from the Russian “host” society is attributed to linguistic and cultural barriers. Other potential explanations for their exclusion, such as society’s rejection, political and administrative obstacles, socio-economic factors, or discriminatory practices, were mentioned much less often. For a broader analysis of the Russian media’s coverage of immigration and interethnic relations, see Verkhovsky (2007).

but only a very small number of informants (two) mentioned this. Many interviewees also brought up the argument that children of migrants are not “motivated” to study and behave badly in school. Some parents were afraid that their kid would adopt the undesirable behaviors of their migrant and other socially disadvantaged peers.

To sum up, informants often perceived children of migrants as an obstacle to their own child’s academic success.

### **“THEFTS,” “VIOLENCE,” “DISEASES”**

Another widespread idea expressed by parents was that the presence of children of migrants at school is incompatible with native children’s well-being and safety. These fears usually revolve around the idea that children of migrants are capable of displaying aggressive or otherwise dangerous behavior. Whereas the belief that children of migrants are unable to perform well in school seemed to apply more to children from Central Asia, fears about violence were primarily directed at children from the Caucasus (both from the South Caucasus and from the Russian Federation’s Caucasian republics).

Caucasians too, they behave like ... like bandits. How many of those kids have we had...! Real criminals. It’s like they come from a zoo, they have absolutely no motivation for school, only for vandalism: stealing, breaking things, fighting...  
(Nadezhda, school’s cleaner)

Chechens were by far the most stigmatized group when it came to violence. Several informants attributed to Chechens (children included) a natural aggressiveness inherent in their “culture,” their “mentality,” or even running in their “blood,” to the point where they were defined as a “race of warriors.”

And then there is a difference of mentality, and regarding Caucasian kids, for example, it’s serious, and unpleasant. I was at the hospital with my son, and next to us in the room there was a boy, I don’t know what he was, a Chechen I think, his mother was great, but he kept playing cutting heads off, he took a knife and he pretended he was cutting off people’s heads, it was his game. And he was five! And so when I told his father, “What is your son doing?!” the father just laughed. [Laughs] You know, it’s really two different cultures... (Maia)

They don’t assimilate. Let’s say, Chechen kids... If a conflict arises, then I think that they are able to ... to kill. [Silence] Well, maybe I put it too strongly, but quite simply, Chechens are warriors... They always were warriors and they always will be. (Ol’ga)

Less often informants associated this trait of aggressiveness not with Chechen children but with “Muslims.” A few interviewees explained children of migrants’ alleged violent behavior by their living conditions instead of their “mentality” or “culture”:

They feel inferior here, because, well, yes, they are considered inferior. And that’s where ill will, theft, and envy come from. It’s a very bad feeling, envy... It leads to thefts, violence, burning cars.... And of course, it’s understandable that their

kids want something better. Just look at my son: well-dressed, with a nice haircut, the coat, everything... Of course there is envy, and they are going to wait for him at the street corner to take all that from him. (Svetlana)

The perceived danger does not come exclusively from characteristics attributed to children of migrants per se. Some informants thought that ethnic diversity in itself was a bad thing because it engendered hostile, "clannish" attitudes and conflicts among pupils. Irina deplored "interracial quarrels" that take place in some schools. According to her, hostile attitudes among children could develop on both sides, but the root cause of these conflicts was found in migrants' incapacity or refusal to integrate into the school collective:

In the neighboring schools however, there are some [children of migrants]. They aren't left to themselves, their families aren't bad, but they know very little Russian, even if they live in Moscow... That said, our little French boy [a pupil in her daughter's school], he was speaking Russian fluently after only six months, without an accent. But it's another mentality. It's just another mentality. With his French mentality, he integrated very easily into the Russian reality, and the other kids helped him a lot, because he's a very open-minded boy. Whereas in the neighboring schools, there are kids with Southern blood, their mentality is different, and at home they speak in ... in their Tajik language. And it leads to problems at school, because they're in a difficult situation at home. And so, these kids, they can't blend in with the group, and conflicts start to arise, interracial conflicts, all those prejudices. So of course, parents say "No" and take their children away from the school. (Irina)

Another security concern regarding children of migrants was brought up by only two informants: that they carry and spread diseases. Nadezhda, who worked as a cleaner in a "migrant school," attributed the recurrent epidemics among pupils to migrants' children. She believed that their families purchased the medical attestation necessary to enroll a child in school without actually undergoing the examination.

### **UNWELCOME IN RUSSIA: MIGRANTS AS AN UNDESIRABLE SOCIAL CATEGORY**

Clearly, the negative stereotypes expressed in the interviews concern not only migrants' children in schools but the migrant population in general. For example, several interviewees viewed the presence of migrants in a neighborhood as a risk factor:

We're not a poor neighborhood, it's the Northwest... Middle class, upper-middle class. I mean, there are neighborhoods in Moscow with people who are slightly below average... Well, we're a bit above average. [Laughs] We don't have any newcomers [priezzhie].... That is, we really have a minimal number of people from the south of Russia, as we say. [Laughs]

***And that's good?***

It's very good. Very good, because it's safe here, more or less.

***And there is a link between safety and the newcomers?***

A very strong link, yes. (Irina)

And yet, that same informant admitted that her daughter's fear of "black men" stems not only from a real, concrete danger but also from circulating stereotypes against migrants: "I think she hears the conversations, anyway... All the 'Don't go there, don't speak to strangers, beware of men of such and such nationality...'"

A few parents expressed not only fears or negative stereotypes but also a real animosity towards migrants. This hostility partly stems from parents' dislike of migrants' essentialized characteristics such as their language (one interviewee said that Central Asian languages are "ugly, not like French or Italian") or the above-mentioned aggressiveness attributed to people from the Caucasus. But I encountered another explanation more frequently: many informants disapproved of the way migrants were integrating into the host society. According to them, every newcomer to Moscow has to "assimilate," that is, to lose all the behavioral and cultural characteristics distinguishing them from "true Muscovites" (*korennye moskvichi*):

***And you're saying that those ethnic minorities, they cause a problem for other children?***

Let's say I noticed that they don't assimilate here. People come here, and there is no assimilation. So... I don't know. In a way, I want there to be Russian [*russkie*] kids. And I want them to be the majority. That is, I'm not against the fact that there are Tajik or Chechen kids at school. But when there are too many of them, you no longer know where you are. In Russia or...? [Laughs] (Ol'ga)

When I arrive at school, those parents are here to pick up their kids, and none of them speaks with them in Russian. They leave the school and start speaking in their own language. There's Uzbek language, Tajik language, Caucasians, and others, and others... Lots of Caucasians. (Nadezhda)

Both these quotes express the same underlying idea: migrants' refusal to assimilate into the Russian society, to abide by its rules. An informant referred to the host-guest metaphor (used very commonly in Russia<sup>9</sup>) to characterize the relationship between migrants and natives:

Do you know the phrase "You don't go to a foreign monastery with your own rules" [*So svoim ustavom v chuzhoi monastyry ne khodiat*]? Let's say I come to your place, and at your place one has to wear slippers, but I tell you, "No, I'm going to walk on your carpets with my shoes on, that's how it's done at my place." Well it's the same story with migrants. They arrive and they dictate their rules to teachers and to other parents. I overheard a conversation: a teacher was ex-

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<sup>9</sup> Zvereva (2014), for example, showed that in Russian media outlets that hold a xenophobic view of migrants countries tend to be presented as more or less comfortable "houses" and migrants are described as "neighbors" who, unwilling to stay in their less comfortable houses, "invited themselves" in Russia.

plaining to a parent, "You need to speak more often in Russian with your kid, make him read books in Russian, so that his grammar gets better." And he replied, "No, at my place I do what I want, and you don't get to order me around." (Irina)

For one interviewee this idea was so strong that it developed into a real fear for the survival of the Russian language and culture—and even the Russian population itself:

As a rule, I always behave very humanly with everybody. For example, we have a sweeper in our courtyard, an Uzbek boy, and I always greet him. You always have to greet people, show your education. But then, when you realize that in the streets of Moscow you no longer hear pure Russian language... You know, we have new rules on the pronunciation of certain words, on their gender... And, to me, it's horrible, because we are adapting. They're not adapting, we are.... You've got one person coming, and then they get a whole bunch of people from their families to come as well, and they make even more kids, they reproduce like... It's horrible, pretend I did not say that, but: like cockroaches. Right? It's not possible. (Svetlana)

Interview materials show that native Moscow inhabitants define and identify migrants using mostly ethnic, and even racial, characteristics. The fact that so many informants indifferently and fluidly go from talking about Central Asians to making remarks about Armenians or Chechens (among others) indicates that their perception of these people does not depend primarily on their nationality or citizenship status, or even on their social and economic status, but on their cultural and racial "otherness," which renders them undesirable both at school and in the Russian society at large.

## THE "CHILDREN OF MIGRANTS" FACTOR IN THE SCHOOL CHOICE PROCESS: A CLOSER LOOK

Interviews with parents showed that while the presence of children of migrants was not the most central aspect of school choice for them, it did play a part in most informants' school choice process. As mentioned above, the majority of them raised that topic either spontaneously or in answering a general question about the role of pupils' characteristics in their decision (this question did not mention any specific characteristics such as ethnicity, nationality, social status, or behavior).

Some parents did not mention children of migrants as a factor involved in their own decision; in these cases I raised the topic at the end of the interview in order to hear their opinion about other parents' ethnic avoidance strategies. At that moment, a few informants stated that this had not been an issue for them (either because they lived in an area with few perceived migrants or because they considered only highly selective schools, which are inaccessible to most migrants) but that it might have been had they lived in another neighborhood.

The salience of this theme in most interviews seems rather surprising when considering the findings of surveys on similar topics such as the one conducted in Moscow by Sobkin and colleagues (Sobkin et al. 2011), according to which only a small minority (4.3 percent) of parents of preschool-aged children indicated that the social characteristics of pupils played a role in their decision. This can be explained by methodological differences. Indeed, interview materials reveal that the “children of migrants” factor can intervene in two different ways during the process of school selection: as a choice criterion in and of itself or as an indicator informing parents about other school characteristics.

For some parents the (relative) absence of ethnic minority children at school represents a specific choice criterion: for the various reasons examined earlier, migrants’ children represent an “undesirable” company for their child, and their presence constitutes an eliminatory criterion. These parents typically shared common negative stereotypes about migrants and displayed migrantophobic attitudes, although some feared the consequences of ethnic diversity among pupils more than supposed negative characteristics of ethnic minority children themselves.

Other parents used the presence or absence of children of migrants as an indicator, that is, a source of information about other qualities of the school, such as the level of teaching, the socioeconomic status and educational level of the pupils’ families, or the probable “atmosphere” and nature of the relationships (more or less harmonious) among the children. For many informants these were the qualities that they were actually looking for when they strove to avoid so-called migrant schools, when they paid attention to the children’s physical appearance or languages they spoke, or when they asked school personnel about the number of non-Russian children in the school. Some of them actually did not display any overt migrantophobic ideas at all, even when they considered the presence of children of migrants as one of the key sources of information that allowed them to make the “right” decision. When they brought up the topic of “migrant schools” or children of migrants, a few insisted that they did not mind ethnic or national diversity among children. As one parent, Elena, exclaimed: “Those schools the children of migrants go to, they are... It’s a low level. Very, very low. *Why would I want to go there?*”

These two scenarios are not mutually exclusive. A parent’s decision can involve either one of them or both; but it is easy to understand how survey questions asking parents to select and/or rank the criteria that were relevant to them can miss out on the ways the presence of children of migrants can intervene as an indicator in school choice. Table 1 below lists the various school characteristics mentioned by informants as choice criteria,<sup>10</sup> beside ethnic characteristics of pupils, and shows how common stereotypes about children of migrants or migrants in general can influence

<sup>10</sup> These criteria are listed in no specific order. This study’s qualitative methodology does not allow to precisely hierarchize choice criteria like surveys do. Parents were not asked to rank their choice criteria according to their importance; instead, a processual approach was favored, whereby parents told how they undertook the selection process and which parameters came into play at each stage of the process.

the way parents assessed whether a school possessed the said characteristics. In other words, it shows the reasons why parents may use the presence of children of migrants as a useful indicator of various school qualities.

**Table 1.** Choice Criteria and Related Stereotypes about Children of Migrants (CMs)

Choice criteria (other than ethnic characteristics of pupils)	Associated stereotypes about CMs
Good teacher, quality of teaching	CMs speak Russian poorly and have a low academic level; it is difficult for teachers to teach a very diverse group, and they spend too much time helping CMs and not enough time with Russian pupils
School status or reputation	Migrant families are so socially and culturally disadvantaged that they are unable to enter a "good" or prestigious school
Social characteristics of classmates	CMs come from extremely disadvantaged families with high precarity and few economic, cultural, and linguistic resources
Children's safety	CMs tend to display problematic or even violent behaviors; they can carry diseases such as tuberculosis
"Atmosphere," quality of relationships among children	Ethnic diversity causes tensions and conflicts among children
Proximity to home	<i>No associated stereotypes</i>
Specific teaching or extracurricular activities	<i>No associated stereotypes</i>
School success objectified by official data (rank in school ratings, USE results, and success rates)	<i>No associated stereotypes</i>
Difficulty of enrollment process (selectivity, official and nonofficial fees)	<i>No associated stereotypes</i>

As the table shows, commonly shared stereotypes about children of migrants can make their perceived presence an eliminatory factor because many parents worried about, for example, the school's level of teaching or safety—even if these parents do not express overt antimigrant sentiments or fears regarding ethnic diversity. We can easily imagine why such parents, when responding to a survey questionnaire, would not likely select "ethnic composition" as a relevant choice criterion; but this does not necessarily imply that it was not a parameter in their choice.<sup>11</sup>

Obviously, children of migrants are not the only factor used by parents during the search for a suitable school. Many other sources of information are available, such as the parents' own school experience, the opinions of family members, friends,

<sup>11</sup> Another possible explanation as to why the topic of ethnic minority children came up more frequently in interviews than in surveys is that avoidance strategies are a delicate topic for some parents, who may fear being judged negatively by the researcher. In such cases, it is possible that the relative freedom more open-ended interviews offer them to bring up this topic in their own words and to explain their thoughts and behaviors can make mentioning it easier than when answering direct questions about it in a questionnaire.

or other parents, or the information offered by the schools themselves. Why, then, did the presence of migrant children come up so often during interviews? As mentioned above, informants selected schools in a very complex and quite unstable educational market. To many of them, children of migrants were one of the very few indicators of school quality that were both easily accessible and highly reliable in that context.

Accessible, because parents were able to easily identify their presence (or, more precisely, the presence of racialized and ethnicized children) in a school, without even having to ask the school staff or other parents about it: they can resort to paying attention to visible or otherwise easily noticeable traits in children, such as their “non-Slavic” physical appearance or the language they speak. This is much easier than forming a reliable estimation of the school’s general level of instruction.

Reliable, because local educational markets were transforming so fast at the time most informants engaged in the school choice process that relying exclusively on the schools’ reputation among parents of the neighborhood or even on indicators such as USE grades and success rates was considered risky. In this context, evaluating the characteristics of schoolchildren and their families was a more reassuring strategy for many parents, because they felt they could safely base their decision on that of other educated and socially privileged parents who had enrolled and kept their children in that school. Since circulating stereotypes about migrants involve the belief that they speak no or poor Russian and live precariously in extremely disadvantaged conditions, migrants come to represent the exact opposite of a parent whose educational choices should be trusted and emulated.

## CONCLUSION

School choice goes beyond strictly academic considerations. It involves a willingness to create or maintain social boundaries in order to protect the children and their families from undesirable “others” and to maintain a “decent” social environment. Racialized ethnic minority children tend to become the main target of these self-segregation practices because, due to widespread stereotypes about migrant families, they come to embody the exact characteristics that many families want to distinguish themselves from. This is accentuated in a complex and stratified educational system where choice is encouraged, such as contemporary Moscow, because using simple strategies to identify a school’s quality through the visible characteristics of its pupils can be one of the few easy and seemingly reliable ways for parents to make the “right” decision.

My findings speak in favor of qualitative studies to analyze educational choices: such methods provide a precise understanding of how the different phases and steps of the choice process unfold, and they inform the ways in which various parameters (including the informants’ resources, the stereotypes and other beliefs they adhere to consciously or unconsciously, and contextual parameters) are likely to come into play in that process. These findings also show the importance of using qualitative methods when studying the majority population’s relation to migrants and ethnic minorities—not only in the context of school choice, but in other social situations as

well. Interviews on school choice revealed that migrantophobia cannot be understood simply as a set of ideas expressible through explicit antimigrant and anti-immigration statements and measurable with quantitative surveys. Some interviewees did not seem to adhere to such ideas (or to have any clear-cut opinion regarding immigration, for that matter), but the various ways they mobilized the presence of children of migrants in order to interpret and orient in the school market show that they still internalized many stereotypes about migrants—both negative stereotypes carrying a form of judgment and seemingly “neutral,” purely descriptive stereotypes, such as the idea that all children of migrants come from low-income families. These practices and modes of reasoning are an integral element of migrantophobia and of the ethnicization and racialization processes<sup>12</sup> observable in contemporary Russia, especially as the children who are impacted by parents’ avoidance strategies are not children of migrants per se, but children considered as ethnic and racial “others,” whether their families come from another country or have actually spent their entire life in Moscow. These practices of school choice have direct consequences for the levels of ethnic and social school segregation as well, and for social inequalities between migrants and the majority population.

As the implementation of recent educational reforms in Moscow has been completed, research on this topic must now take a different direction. With the generalization of big “educational complexes” each offering several curricula and levels of teaching, the question of school choice is not so acute and relevant for Muscovites as it used to be. Many parents are now choosing a specific class or curriculum, instead of a whole educational institution. This raises two main questions. Firstly, what transformations do educational choices and strategies undergo in this renewed context? And secondly, how do parents now put their desire for social and ethnic self-segregation into practice in these educational choices?

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<sup>12</sup> The growing interpretation of the social world in ethnic and racial terms by individuals and institutions.

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## **ВЫБОР ШКОЛЫ И ДЕТИ МИГРАНТОВ: АНАЛИЗ ПОВСЕДНЕВНОЙ МИГРАНТОФОБИИ В МОСКВЕ**

**Фелиси Кемпф**

Фелиси Кемпф, Группа по исследованию миграции и общества (URMIS), Университет Парижа. Адрес для переписки: *Université de Paris, Campus Grands Moulins, 5 rue Thomas Mann, 75013 Paris, France. felicie.kempf@gmail.com*.

Исследование проводилось при финансовой поддержке Центра франко-российских исследований (*Centre d'études franco-russe*) в Москве.

Несмотря на то, что многие опросы указывают на широко распространенные ксенофобские и мигрантофобские установки у населения России, исследования, показывающие, как эти настроения отражаются в повседневных практиках и взаимодействии между мигрантами и большинством населения, немногочисленны. В статье анализируется практика выбора родителями школ для своих детей в Москве в 2010-х годах. Используя качественные методы (полуструктурированные интервью, проведенные с 32 московскими родителями в 2015 и 2018 годах), я показываю, как этнические и национальные характеристики детей мигрантов, учащихся в школах города, влияют на выбор родителями учебного заведения для ребенка. Стратифицированная система образования в Москве привела к неравному распределению детей мигрантов из бывших советских республик Центральной Азии и Кавказа между школами, в результате чего некоторые школы стали называть «мигрантскими». Исходя из этой ситуации анализируются стратегии, используемые некоторыми родителями для записи ребенка в школу, в которой нет детей мигрантов. Я анализирую основные стереотипы, существующие у местного населения по отношению к детям мигрантов. Наконец, я объясняю, почему у родителей наличие детей мигрантов в школе может быть одним из основных факторов при выборе школы, даже при отсутствии у этих родителей четко выраженных мигрантофобских

установок. Я показываю, как в сложной и быстро трансформирующейся системе образования незначительное присутствие или отсутствие нерусских детей в школе стало восприниматься многими москвичами как один из важных показателей качества предоставляемых ей образовательных услуг.

**Ключевые слова:** выбор школы; выбор родителей; дети мигрантов; мигранты; мигрантофобия; школьная сегрегация; расизм; Россия; Москва