Special issue article: Urban friendship networks: Affective negotiations and potentialities of care

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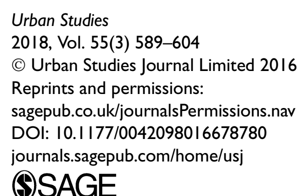
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Friendship in a 'Russian bar' in London: An ethnography of a young Russian-speaking migrant community

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Abstract

Friendship is increasingly drawing attention as a concept used to explain the variety of ways in which migrants develop and sustain local and transnational relations. The advantage of this approach is its focus on social capital and those 'sustaining and inspirational aspects' of friendship that contribute to shaping different aspects of mobile individuals' lives (Conradson and Latham, 2005, Friendship networks and transnationality in a world city: Antipodean migrants in London. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31(2): 301), instead of interpreting migrant sociality and urban conviviality in super-diverse conditions in terms of ethnic communities. At the same time, the focus on friendship suggests the contingent and nuanced character of these close social ties. Drawing upon an ethnographic case study of a group of young Russian-speaking migrants from post-Soviet countries and their social relationships in a London bar, this article explores the role of friendship in a migrant group located within a particular physical and social space. The place served as an important social junction, and its Russian-speaking network of bartenders and regulars was a source of friendly support and empowerment for its members, helping them confront feelings of marginality. However, close and intimate ties were also at times connected with power relations, reflecting social divisions and the reinforcement of ethnic/national stereotypes regarding those excluded from this social network. This article highlights that friendship encompasses a diverse and dynamic range of inclusionary and exclusionary practices, and discusses how migrant sociality can be negotiated through these practices.

Keywords

bar, friendship, London, migration, Russian-speakers

摘要

嗍谊的概念日益受到关注，被用于解释外来人口发展并维系本地和跨地方关系的各种方式。这一进路的优点是强调社会资本以及友谊“既偁倒印槎囑发性的方面”↩ 滀栿这些方面塑造了流动人口生活的方方面面（Conradson 光 Latham↩ 2005, Friendship networks and transnationality in a world city: Antipodean migrants in London. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31(2): 301*↩ 菴倌栿硝根黄蕟躯释外来人口在超级多样状况下的社交性和城市共生状况。同时，对友谊的强调表明这些紧密的社会联系有着偶在性和细微的特点。本文运用对前苏联国家迁移而来的一群年轻俄语人士以及其在伦敦一个酒吧中的社交关系所做的民族志案例研究，探讨了友谊在一个特定物理和社会空间中对一群外来人口发挥的作用。这个场所发挥了重要社会连接器的作用，它那些讲俄语的酒吧侍者和常客网络对于酒吧会员而言是一种友情支持和赋能之源，帮助他们对抗边缘感。但是，亲密联系也往往与权力关系相连，反映了社会分化以及对被排除出这一社会网络者的族群/濕根擦见的强化。本文强调了友谊包含各种动态的包容与排斥实践，并讨论了外来人口的社交性可如何通过这些实践来调适。

关键词

酒吧、友谊、伦敦、迁移、俄语人士

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Introduction

Friendship is increasingly drawing attention as a concept used to explain the variety of ways in which migrants develop and sustain local and transnational relations. The advantage of this approach is its focus on social capital and those 'sustaining and inspirational aspects' of friendship that contribute to shaping different aspects of mobile individuals' lives (Conradson and Latham, 2005: 301), instead of interpreting migrant sociality and urban conviviality in super-diverse conditions in terms of ethnic communities. However, the focus on friendship suggests a contingent and nuanced character of these close social ties that may include a range of inclusionary and exclusionary practices accentuating power relations, social divisions and ethnic boundaries.

Drawing upon an ethnographic case study of a group of young Russian-speaking migrants from post-Soviet countries and their social relationships in a London bar, this article explores the role of friendship in a migrant group located within a particular physical and social space. It starts with a brief theoretical overview, introducing friendship as a unique object for research. It explains how this concept fits into analyses of migrant sociality and helps avoid the limitations of approaching it through the 'ethnic lens'. Here, the concept of friendship is established as non-instrumental and trust-based, but not always constructive. The methodological section includes a description of the ethnographic approach I employed throughout fieldwork in the bar, and is followed by presentation of the empirical results of my fieldwork. I explore the role of friendship for young Russian-speaking migrants, the 'groupness' that it creates, but also the boundaries and distinctions that routinely emerge and are sustained in the bar space, and the power relations that are at play there. This suggests a complex image of migrants' friendship ties, which is an intricate reflection of migrant sociality.

Approaching friendship

Arguments against the essentialising of migrant communities as groups (Brubaker, 2004; Glick Schiller, 2008) call for focusing on the relational aspect of migrant ethnicity, instead of taking social cohesion based on ethnic ties for granted. Recent research in the field of migration studies and transnationalism (Bunnell et al., 2012; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Morosanu, 2013) tends to focus on contemporary migrants' social relationships as dynamic, local and transnational; controversial in terms of providing support and social capital; differing in terms of strength of connections; and as not limited to ethnic or national community ties.

Until recently, friendship has been a relatively marginal concept in the social sciences (Bunnell et al., 2012). Migration research in particular has addressed different topics concerning social connectivity – social capital, cohesion, ties and networks (Hall, 2011; Putnam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2008; Soehl and Waldinger, 2010) – but friendship rarely emerges as a separate research topic. Being closely connected to these concepts, friendship emerges as a particular kind of relationship that has a strong but understudied impact on the lives of mobile individuals. Within migration scholarship, it has started to receive mention as an individual kind of relationship (Bunnell et al., 2012; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Kennedy, 2007; Morosanu, 2013; Ryan, 2011, 2015; Tsujimoto, 2016; Walsh, 2009).

Conradson and Latham (2005) argue that friendship amongst highly-skilled New

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Zealand migrants in London plays a central role in organising and giving content to their mobility, stressing how these bonds shape people's movements. Friendship networks have been presented as relevant for research on mobility and transnationalism because they have important affective qualities, are not limited to bonds of kinship or neighbourhood (Conradson and Latham, 2005; Wellman and Wortley, 1990) and are 'more fluid and less spatially bounded' (Bunnell et al., 2012; Killick and Desai, 2010). In addition, they cannot be reduced or equated to ethnic or national ties. These are relationships that work across space and time as 'globally spanning affective ties' (Tsujimoto, 2016), and inform much of contemporary migration.

Social ties instead of ethnic communities

While speaking about migrants and their social networks as communities, care should be taken so that the term 'community' is used heuristically. This means, according to Brubaker (2004: 11), attending to 'groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable', contrary to taking 'groups' for granted as idealised collective actors. Not all members of a presumed 'community' feel solidarity towards one another (Levitt, 2001: 13; Ryan, 2015). Social groups are characterised by their divisiveness and hierarchical attributes, increasingly so in the conditions of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007). Glick Schiller has been arguing for moving beyond the 'ethnic lens' that obscures the diversity of migrants' relationships, and 'rejecting the unquestioning use of the ethnic group as the primary or exclusive unit of study and analysis in migration research' (Glick Schiller, 2008; Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2006). Presuming that migrant communities are by definition bound together risks ignoring the complexity of relations that connect migrants within local and transnational spaces. As observed by Kennedy (2007: 366), the close interpersonal relationships established by migrants have the potential to challenge national boundaries, make friendships exist 'partly outside and beyond previous boundaries and […] call into question the very possibility of their existence even as imagined entities'.

In this regard, relatively recent research on East European migrants in the UK[1] has been inspirational. These studies focus on social networks and relationships, and approach them as dynamic, diverse and controversial, often not limiting their focus to compatriots or co-ethnics. Many recent studies distinguish ethnic ties from social connectivity, and critically disentangle the nuanced character of ethnicity in addition to the different strengths, uses and values of social ties (Datta, 2009; Garapich, 2012; Morosanu, 2013; Ryan, 2011; Ryan et al., 2008). Relationships with 'others' are an important part of this discourse. Datta (2009) looks at East European construction workers and their interaction with 'others' in London, seeing their cosmopolitanisms as 'neither a cultural project, nor just a survival strategy, but a complex mixture of cultural, ordinary, banal, coerced, and glocalised cosmopolitanisms that are enacted under different spatial circumstances of interaction, subjective positioning, and physical proximity'. Ryan, who in her study of Polish migrants utilises the concepts of social capital, bonding and bridging ties,[2] criticises the oversimplification in the use of these concepts that results in using ethnicity as a means of distinction between types of relationships. She calls for paying more attention to the 'the relationship between the actors, their relative social location, and their available and realisable resources' (Ryan, 2011: 707). Morosanu stresses the complications of sustaining ties both 'here' and 'there' in a study of Romanians in

London, argues against overestimating the role of ethnicity and emphasises the fragmented practice of migrant social lives. Writing about the close and lasting connections which contradict migrants' negative generalisations about home countries and co-ethnics, she explores 'soul friendships' which are 'based on long-term engagement, frequent interaction, shared experiences and affectivity, and have minimal ethnic grounding, showing that the role of ethnicity should not be readily assumed' (Morosanu, 2013: 353).

Social networks and relationships are sustained by migrants locally and across borders; they are dynamic and malleable. Migrant sociality does not have to be and is not directed only at compatriots. At the same time, ethnicity cannot be completely discarded as irrelevant. The focus on friendship responds to the need for detailed research of the complexity of migrant social networks, and such research has to pay attention to social positions and resources, as well as the affective qualities of social interactions.

Friendship as a non-utilitarian relationship

In research on the nature of sociality, the issue of instrumentality is often central. The works of Durkheim and Tönnies describe the opposition within societies between organic and mechanic solidarity, or *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, where the former represent 'traditional' forms of interpersonal relationships and the latter suggest rationalised, exchange-like relationships (Calhoun et al., 2005). Simmel (1949: 54) regarded sociability as a largely idealistic process, an 'art or play form of association, related to the content and purposes of association in the same way as art is related to reality'.

A strand of more recent research that has contributed significantly to the development of social network analysis (Fischer, 1977; Wellman and Wortley, 1990) drew upon social exchange theory and quantitative measurements to suggest that individuals associate with each other because they gain profit from their associations. Anticipation that the association will be rewarding is the basis of mutual attraction. Fischer supports the choice-constraint model as an explanation of interpersonal relationships as choices made with limited alternatives and resources. 'Network capital' has been approached in the social sciences as making resources available through interpersonal ties, including emotional and material aid, information, companionship and a sense of belonging (Wellman and Frank, 2001). Social networks have been a common topic for migration research that stressed their influence on migration-related decisions, providing information, resources and emotional support (Boyd, 1989; Ryan, 2011).

In contrast, in this article I draw upon an understanding of friendship as a relationship that cannot be reduced to an exchange-based relationship, or just emotional attachment. Bourdieu (1998) is also ambivalent in this regard. He acknowledges the economic side of sociality, claiming that people do describe everyday exchanges as friendship, because the act of designating them as such supports the network of informal exchange of goods and services. However, friendship also becomes 'a place where interest, in the narrow sense of the pursuit of equivalence in exchanges, is suspended' (Bourdieu, 1998: 65). Boltanski (2012) stresses the refusal to exercise critical capacity in regard to relationships. Authentic friendship (*agape*) can develop when the participants of the relationship do not rely upon the anticipated reaction of their companions 'either in the material form of objects or in the immaterial form of requited love' (Boltanski, 2012:

112). Boltanski and Thévenot (1999: 361) write that in the 'ordinary course of common action' people use their abilities to calculate in order to criticise. However, in the affective regime of coordination (which can be used to describe friendship), 'persons actively cooperate in the process of shoving the equivalencies aside in order to render difficult the cumulating and calculation operations which are required to blame and criticise' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999: 362). According to this approach, the conscious denial of the pragmatic or exchange-like implications of friendship is authentic friendship.

Friendships do not exist as a given: they 'require – and may even be defined in terms of – active, ongoing and necessarily reciprocal work' (Bunnell et al., 2012: 494). Trust is one of the key elements of close friendships (Cronin, 2014; Pahl, 2000). These relationships provide social support and make up much of the social capital people use to deal with daily life, seizing opportunities or reducing uncertainties. Pahl underlines the importance of friendship-based solidarity, claiming it can help support the increasingly fragmented social structure (Pahl, 2000: 11). However, not all community ties are supportive (Wellman and Frank, 2001; Wellman and Wortley, 1990). This has also been empirically demonstrated by migration research (Hellermann, 2006; Menjívar, 2000; Morosanu, 2013; Ryan et al., 2008).

Friendship may be regarded as a relationship providing shelter in the face of external threats. In his study of late Soviet friendship, Shlapentokh (1989: 218) writes: 'all other things equal, the lower the sense of security among people and the weaker their confidence in the future, the more intense and vital are interpersonal relationships'. Due to the Soviet state's collective surveillance and discipline, friendships seemed to possess subversive qualities and to bond people together through trust (Kharkhordin, 2009; Shlapentokh, 1984). Kathiravelu (2012) argues that friendship is a coping strategy helping migrants to alleviate the burden of living in a highly controlled, stratified, 'uncaring place'. Using the workplace environment as an example, Cronin (2014) interprets friendship as a 'safe space' that builds upon trust and enables more open emotional interaction. This understanding resonates with the creation of specific intersubjective spaces in stressful and uncertain conditions. This idea may be bridging the experiences of migration and the practices and dynamics of friendship. Indeed, migration does not universally become an easy route for many individuals, despite the globalised and increasingly interconnected world. Friendship may become an opportunity to protect oneself from the tensions and insecurities of the post-migration world, and provide the necessary network capital through social support. At the same time, friendship may be connected with a possible increase in social divisions, exclusive relationships, mistrust, fragmentation of social ties and reinforcement of ethnic or national stereotypes.

Friendship in the migration context can be interpreted as a relatively small-scale, trust-based and calculation-free informal relationship that may be ambiguous in terms of its supportive and divisive qualities. It has the potential to influence people's mobility and everyday lives as migrants who engage in and flexibly negotiate their social connections while living in a global city. As a next step, I will present an empirical case study of friendship among young post-Soviet migrants in a 'Russian bar' in London, exploring how migrants' lives are negotiated through these practices in this social context.

Bar ethnography as research process

I spent over six months in 2009 conducting ethnographic research on routine social interactions in a bar. Ethnography involves

studying 'groups and people as they go about their everyday lives', where the core activities of the researcher comprise 'first-hand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world by drawing upon such participation' (Emerson et al., 1995: 1). This approach allowed me to observe how Russian-speaking migrants[3] practice friendship in 'natural settings'. The bar ethnography was also part of a bigger study exploring the complexities of migrants' friendships in a super-diverse city, as manifesting dynamics and differences that retain some ethnic, national and sociocultural embeddedness yet that cannot be fully accounted for by explanations of common background or transnational connectivity (Malyutina, 2015).

The place where that research took place[4] was not an explicitly Russian bar, with neutral décor and 'European' cuisine and drinks. The owner was Russian, and most of the staff were from former Soviet countries, as were a large group of regular visitors – ex-bartenders, friends of the staff and friends of friends, most of them in their 20s. Their countries of origin included Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. Most of them were in low-skilled occupations. Some had a university degree from the country of origin. Some were studying in London and combining it with work. At the time of my research, a few people working there were illegal migrants. The labour conditions could be considered precarious: people could work overtime, and admitted that they were paid less than the UK minimum hourly rate.

Being a Russian-speaker from Russia has, I believe, shaped my experiences of fieldwork and had an impact on getting access, establishing rapport and maintaining relationships with informants. At the same time, this ethnography demonstrated that neither commonalities of language, nor ethnic or national origin can ensure trustful relationships and eliminate insider/outsider issues or a power imbalance resulting from the intersecting aspects of difference. This has prompted an approach to potential ethical dilemmas that is grounded in concerns about researcher positionality and a need for reflexivity (Malyutina, 2012).

My informants were aware that I was doing research on the bar. Mostly, they were friendly and curious about my work, and had no objections to me coming to the bar, talking to them and taking notes. A snowball recruitment technique worked well in these conditions.[5]

In the course of this fieldwork, I observed and spoke to people about working in the bar and its visitors, but my primary interests were the social relationships taking place. I looked at routine interactions between the owner and staff, among bartenders, between staff and customers and among customers. The participatory nature of my research allowed me to take part in these mundane interactions. I usually spent several hours in the bar once or twice every week. Most commonly, I came on Friday evenings, when the bar was open till late and there was a chance to see more Russian-speakers. I would normally sit at the bar, have a drink and chat with the bartenders and other Russian-speakers. I took fieldnotes, aiming to create an 'accumulating written record of these observations and experiences' (Emerson et al., 1995: 1), and then analysed them.[6]

In a way, the experience of bar ethnography was consistent with 'friendship as method' (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) in the development of research relationships. Both fieldwork and friendship:

> involve being in the world with others. To friendship and fieldwork communities, we must gain entrée. We negotiate roles […], shifting from one to another as the relational context warrants. We may experience our ties as developmental, passing through stages […] We navigate membership, participating,

> observing, and observing our participation [...] We learn insider argot and new codes for behaviour. As we deepen our ties, we face challenges, conflicts, and losses. [...] One day, finite projects—and lives—come to an end, and we must 'leave the field'. (Tillmann-Healy, 2003: 732)

I found the work of Spradley and Mann (1975), a bar ethnography from a waitress' viewpoint that demonstrates bar culture and the informal establishment of power distribution, quite inspirational for my case study. I had a chance to observe the functioning of the bar as a member of the network, aiming for an 'immersion in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important' (Emerson et al., 1995: 2). Some insider aspects of the bar have been disclosed to me. I have been to the 'staff only' areas and helped the bartenders to turn over the chairs at the end of the evening. They offered me drinks for free, shared gossip and jokes and occasionally let me hear unpleasant comments about the owner, her son and visitors. I followed the requirements of ethnographic fieldwork in order to 'share first-hand the environment, problems, background, language, rituals, and social relations of a more-or-less bounded and specified group of people', gaining a richer and more complex account of the studied culture (Van Maanen, 1988: 3).

I found ethnography an effective way of studying social life, because it attends to it as constituted by ongoing and fluid processes, and is sensitive to the emergence and dynamics of meanings, understandings and interpretations shared by the people (Emerson et al., 1995: 4, 14). This sensitivity allowed me to see friendship as a process, not as a static picture. It was a way of developing critical accounts of migrant friendship, sometimes through personal experience of such relationships.

'The meeting place cannot be changed'

Bartenders said that many Russian-speaking customers who happened to be in The Bar for the first time noticed that the staff communicated in Russian, and initiated small talk. A bar can be a place for lonely people seeking company, understanding and support; the opportunity to speak a native language can be seen as comforting. What brought migrants together in the bar was often described as a feeling of marginality and loneliness, and an opportunity to escape it for a while by talking to fellow migrants who may share this feeling. The desire to speak a native language might be a good reason to come to The Bar, some of the migrants told me when asked what brought people there. Here, conversations were started, acquaintances made, contacts established and social groups shaped. Eventually, friendships were developed.[7]

The Bar was usually referred to as a traditional meeting place, but its role went beyond that. It was a place where encounters between Russian speakers occurred and became meaningful, and friendship bonds were established and sustained. 'This is the place where everybody meets', said the migrants. There was a cultural reference in their narratives of meeting each other: *The meeting place cannot be changed*, a name of a popular 1970s Soviet TV series. The same phrase was often cheerfully uttered by a Russian-speaking migrant upon entering the bar and seeing his/her companions inside:

> Whenever you come to The Bar, you are very likely to meet someone Russian.[8] Even if they are not friends of staff – it is very easy to make acquaintances, I mean, everybody is sociable and if they see you are Russian – it is very likely that a conversation will occur. (Nadya, 24)

The Bar was a junction connecting a vast and dispersed network of migrants. It was a unique space in the geographies of the city for a number of Russian-speakers. Non-Russian visitors were the majority: they were either tourists, or those who worked or lived nearby. Although most of the Russian-speaking regulars lived or worked relatively far from the place, they frequently travelled to The Bar. They found there something they were not able to find in other spaces. This probably could be a feeling of 'home from home' (Mass-Observation, 1987: 133) – a close relationship between the pub and the drinker, a 'state of affairs in which they are part of an institution to which they belong, like the members of a political organisation … or a congregation to its church'. The Bar provided migrants with the feeling of belonging to a community of friends, highlighting the role of localised and situated sources of sociality, and sharing a convivial environment (Ryan, 2015).

Working in The Bar was not simply a job; it was a lifestyle. The social network, which included Russian-speaking colleagues and customers, was crucial for many bartenders. One former bartender called her past experience of work in The Bar 'almost a whole life', recalling her memories related to the bar-based network. This community of young post-Soviet migrants shared the feeling of relatedness to the bar as a centre of communication and support:

> Nina [Belarusian bartender] has just finished her shift and is sitting at the bar. She looks tired; tells me that she is exhausted after working for three weeks without weekends and is going to work like that for one more week.
> Nina says that the week was very successful for The Bar: at the beginning of the week they were told that they had to make a certain amount of money, and they have already done it, although it's only Saturday. She also complains that 'nobody ever says thank you': the bartenders have been working hard, but no appreciation has come from the owner.
> She continues: she never ever woke up in the morning with a feeling that she didn't want to go to work. Although she works hard in a low-paid job, despite the lack of gratitude, Nina says she likes her job, primarily because of the company and her friends who work here. I ask about the support she receives from them. She repeats they are the main reason she works in The Bar.
>
> She speaks about the owner again: 'she knows that not everyone will agree to work in these conditions, so she forgives many things. For example, we drink while working. Obviously, she knows it, because she's watching the cameras. But sometimes we can't work without it. After working the whole day I feel that I do not recognise people and do not understand what they are asking for. In these cases, a drink helps'.

The precarious nature of work in The Bar was widely acknowledged. In these conditions, friendship emerged as a shared 'safe interpersonal space' that shaped people's experiences of the workplace context. Cronin (2014: 7) describes these as 'distinctive intersubjective spaces in which people allow themselves to be open with others, but also allow themselves to be open to the emotions that are generated in that space between friends'. This 'safe space' spread beyond workplace relations, because the social network did not only include colleagues. This excerpt also demonstrates how involvement in bar life was deprived of economic rationality: instead, Nina stressed the value of her close relationships despite the lack of money or acknowledgement by her employer. Friendship was presented as a non-utilitarian relationship. The idea of The Bar as a space to find company and compassion was recurrent in the narratives of its regulars.

> It was funny on Boxing Day, on December 26. It turned out that the majority of people [Russian-speaking friends] left London, and those who could not go home, naturally, stayed here. Most of my friends left and I was here completely alone. Everybody left, even my flatmates. So, I could only go to The Bar

> and I went there. And all the people who were sad and lonely came there that evening. There were Russians sitting along the bar; just poor sad people who could not go home due to some circumstances, and very upset that they had to celebrate New Year here. And they felt better. Me too. […] I remember there were many of them sitting there, chatting, some were working. And I liked that. I was happy for them. (Nadya, 24)

Friendship with compatriots seemed to play a special role for these young post-Soviet migrants. It helped them cope with the feeling of marginality in London, be it a result of exploitation of their labour or a feeling of loneliness. It fitted with the idea that friendship is relevant to contemporary migrants, because, in spite of globalisation trends such as the development of international travel and the increase in transnational lifestyles and practices, migration is often a source of problems and uncertainties. Friendship has the potential of reducing stress and helping people live through complications. However, the role of ethnic, national or linguistic ties is not as obvious as it may seem.

Affordances of Russian friendship: Us and Them

Relationships with Russian-speakers and with non-Russian-speaking Londoners are negotiated in migrants' everyday lives. Friendship can play a protective and supportive role; however, it may be employed as an explanation for social distinctions. Juxtapositions of Russian-speaking friends with 'others' were common. Social interactions taking place in The Bar involved not only Russian-speaking bartenders and their friends: the social space was an intersection of various networks. The Bar was attended by the Russian owner and members of her family, some of the staff were non-Russian-speaking and the majority of the visitors were locals or tourists. Power relations were also at play in The Bar, as demonstrated by dialogues and interactions that routinely took place. For example, relationships between Russian-speaking and non-Russian speaking staff could be described in terms of friendly cooperation. However, the dichotomy of Us and Them was recognisable in the Russian-speaking staff's perceptions within the working team. Utterances like 'those guys' and 'non-Russians' mark the boundary defined by language and ethnicity/nationality. This was evident even when personal qualities and workplace relations were acknowledged:

> The bar is closed, it's 2 am. Katya [Belarusian bartender] is sitting on a chair, having a drink after work. She is speaking about John [English bartender] who is somewhere in the kitchen at the moment.
> - I like him – although he is English, he works *like us*, 50 hours a week! And he's a nice person.
> John returns. Katya addresses him:
> - John, I'm saying I like how you work! Really, I enjoy working with you. If I were offered a chance to work only with those who I want, you would have been among these two or three people.

Appreciation may be clear; but 'you are like us' makes the distinction obvious. Katya's message transforms as she repeats it for different audiences: the distinction is in the words directed at her Russian-speaking interlocutors, and is absent in what she says in English later to the other addressee. Language becomes an instrument of power relations (see Butler, 1997). Its use assigns privilege to those who belong to the Russian-speaking circle, and others are excluded from it. To a large extent, this also applied to relationships with customers: bartenders could openly discuss those who they didn't like or who, in their opinion, did not behave appropriately. They could swear or

joke at them, unsuspected, and this was also part of maintaining the informal hierarchy established in The Bar.

The practice of joking is one of the instruments which shows and reproduces the distinctions and power distribution. Spradley and Mann (1975: 87–101) write about joking relationships as a common feature of routine interactions between members of staff, focusing on the distribution of power roles between genders. In their case, joking relationships, being intended to strengthen the bond between workers at opposite ends of the hierarchy, served to maintain the system that kept female workers in an inferior status. In The Bar, there was comparably little difference between male and female bartender roles, but it was non-Russian-speakers who became objects of collective joking practices.

> John and Anatoly [Latvian bartender] are working, I am sitting at the bar with Sergey [Latvian bartender who has just finished his shift]. There are no new visitors, so John pours himself a glass of water and leans over the table behind the bar, sipping water and observing the bar. Sometimes he exchanges a few phrases with Anatoly. But Anatoly speaks with us more, in Russian. John goes to the kitchen. As soon as he leaves, Sergey bends over the bar and points at a bottle of Tabasco. Anatoly pours some sauce in the glass, stirring it. John returns. He leans over the table again, takes his glass, takes a sip. Then a smile appears at his face, he rapidly pours himself a glass of water and drinks. The bartenders burst out laughing. John is drinking milk from a bottle, still smiling, not looking offended.

The presence of spectators is important for this performance. Spradley and Mann (1975) underline that a bartender will not tell any jokes with sexual implications to a waitress if there are only two of them at the bar. Apparently, Anatoly would not have had any intention or motivation to do anything if other Russian-speakers had not been sitting at the bar, observing his actions and demonstrating implicit or explicit support and approval. At the same time, the situation cannot be explained exclusively by ethnic or linguistic reasons: John was also a relatively new employee, while Sergey and Anatoly had been working together for a longer time. He was not part of the informal social network that existed in The Bar. As a result of a combination of factors, a certain distribution of power transpired in this particular setting, where inclusion and exclusion were underpinned by both ethnic/linguistic background and friendship patterns.

Russian-speaking clients were sometimes distinguished from other visitors. Boundaries between the roles of bartenders and customers were blurred when they were part of the network of friends. Importantly, at the same time, this did not automatically extend to random Russian-speaking visitors. A random visitor might engage in a longer conversation in Russian with the staff. A friend, on the other hand, might not be charged for his drink, might be served long after the last call and stay until closing time, taking part in occasional drinking rituals with bartenders after work. The conversations between a bartender and a friend were personal, showing the history of their acquaintance and the closeness of their relations. A bartender, in turn, brought a much more personal attitude into the process of his interaction with a friend. Bartenders often provided their friends with some privileges, like free drinks. Besides, if one brought in a Russian friend who was unfamiliar to the staff, most probably this friend would get the same privileges. Gender was also involved: by giving out free drinks, often followed by flirting and sexual innuendos in conversation with female visitors, a bartender exercised his power role in the bar, in terms of both workplace and gender relations:

> We come to The Bar with Zhanna. Anatoly gives us two overly decorated cocktails for

> free, then another two. Nastya [Russian bartender] passes by and sarcastically notes that a mojito does not have to look like a flowerbed. […] Anatoly is bored, so he spends a lot of time chatting with us. Every time somebody stops in front of the bar, deciding whether to go inside or not, he makes a tired face, bends forward and grumbles something like: 'Nooo, don't come in … Fuck!'. He swears a lot when he speaks about work and customers. At the same time, he is constantly trying to flirt with Zhanna whom he sees for the first time.

Alcohol supported social interactions occurring in The Bar, being an integral part of a communication process. The practice of drinking, as noted by Shlapentokh (1984: 226), is a special domain of friendship, a 'social event in which people can release themselves from various fears and troubles and pour out their souls'. In The Bar alcohol was one of the material indicators of informal relationships between members of this group. While making a drink for a friend, Russian-speaking bartenders got beyond their professional role and became emotionally involved in this interaction. Sometimes it was alcohol that showed the distribution of power and drew a boundary between Russian-speaking regulars and others. One of the most notable examples was an experience of being served after last orders, with a few customers still there who were refused when they asked for the same. The bartender told them that I had already paid for my drink, while in reality I got it (and the previous ones) for free.

While relationships with Russian-speaking friends can mitigate negative effects produced by migration, they might also reinforce exclusions and social distinctions. At the same time, relationships at The Bar should not be interpreted only in ethnic terms. They involved negotiating different aspects of identity: gender, age, occupation or co-worker status. Seeing the community at The Bar as a network based upon ethnic ties bears a risk of overestimating its boundedness and internal solidarity. The next section of this article will concentrate on the divisions among Russian-speakers.

Constructing distances among Russian-speakers in the bar

Researchers of East European migration (Eade et al., 2006; Morosanu, 2013; Ryan, 2011) discuss the closeness of relationships that migrants have with some compatriots, while simultaneously distinguishing these from the wider ethnic 'community' and noting the suspiciousness and mistrust that migrants exhibit towards compatriots more generally.

What seemed to be a Russian-speaking network of friends located at The Bar was not all-inclusive. The bar owner's 19-year old son Volodya, who occasionally worked in The Bar or came for a drink, although being of Russian origin and only a few years younger than the bartenders and their friends, was in a different position in the bar power hierarchy. A British citizen living in London with his parents, he occupied a higher position on the social ladder than the other bartenders. Being the owner's son was one of the main reasons why he was excluded from the network of friends, while his age and perceived lack of maturity also mattered. Volodya was probably more worried about the reputation of the bar than any other bartender, and demonstrated it. Once, a customer who wanted to order wine asked for advice. Volodya readily recommended him some wine, delivering a whole speech describing its qualities, giving a detailed account of its taste, pouring a little into a glass and offering it to try. This was the first time I saw such service in this bar. Apparently, any other Russian-speaking bartender would have avoided the hassle and confined him/herself to saying that the wine is good.

Volodya's kinship provided him with additional power resources, but also some

resentment from staff. He presented a constant threat of informing about the staff's inappropriate actions to the owner:

> Met Nastya and Sergey in the bar. Anatoly and Volodya are working. Someone told me previously that Volodya had a habit of snitching to the owner on everything the staff did. If he had not been there, Anatoly would have given us drinks for free. Nastya and I go to the shop, buy a small bottle of brandy, Anatoly brings out 2 takeaway cups and they pour the brandy in them. Then they close them with lids, bring inside and sip like tea. It's strong, so they ask for Coke and pay for it. As soon as Volodya leaves the bar for a minute, Anatoly quickly gives Sergey a glass of Jagermeister which looks like Coke. When the glasses are empty, they go out, pour the rest from the bottle into our glasses and return.

Anatoly depended on Volodya's kinship-based power while he was near – giving drinks for free would have immediately been denounced. But as soon as the surveillance disappeared momentarily, Anatoly quickly got rid of this control by doing an improper action, thus performing the subversive part of friendship. In this situation, Volodya was on the opposite side of the barricades. His Russian origin and language did not automatically integrate him into this informal Russian-speaking group, because his other qualities could directly affect the position of others and hence he could not be trusted. He was clearly not a favourite: there were scornful jokes told behind his back. In this case, jokes served to integrate the community of Russian-speaking bartenders further, and set a distance between them and Volodya. Volodya, thus, was in a kind of marginal position – actually being a Russian-speaking bartender, but being excluded from the informal Russian-speaking community related to the bar.

Belonging to a friendship network is not solely based on common origin and immigrant status: as suggested by Ryan (2015), friendship networks' homophily cannot be narrowly defined by an ethnic lens, but rather by fluidity and a multiplicity of shared identities that help forge links and build relationships. Russian-speaking migrants demonstrate the intersectionality of complex inequalities based on multiple categories of distinction (McDowell, 2008), including class, gender, age and legal status, among others. These parameters often serve as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Mutual 'Russian-ness' played contradictory roles in The Bar: it often prompted acquaintance and communication, and corresponded to some group boundaries. It was expressed rhetorically in cultural references, reflections on ethnic/national stereotypes and racialised comparisons between perceived qualities of relationships of Us and Them. At the same time, 'Russian-ness' was not enough on its own to become a foundation for a friendship.

Friendly relationships are not disengaged from ethnicity or linguistic commonalities; however, they arise from a combination of factors. The inner diversity within migrant populations contributes to this. Friendship can coincide with reinforcing boundaries between co-ethnics and 'others', or between bartenders, regulars and other customers. Friendship can accordingly be part of power relations, be it an exercise of power or an attempt to subvert it.

Conclusion

In this article, I have concentrated on friendship in a small community of young post-Soviet Russian-speaking migrants frequenting or working in a bar in London. I drew upon an understanding of friendship as an important affective relationship. Friendship is flexible and less spatially bounded in comparison with kinship and neighbourhood relations, and has the potential of shaping different aspects of mobility by its 'sustaining and inspirational aspects' (Conradson and

Latham, 2005: 301). Friendship is clearly a valuable concept for migration research. The limitations of the focus on kinship in many studies of transnationalism, or the tendency to look at migrant social networks through the 'ethnic lens', or the focus on 'community' and 'neighbourhood' (Bunnell et al., 2012) result in the need to see beyond spatial, ethnic or cross-border connectivity, and instead approach the relationship per se.

In other words, this article's calibration of friendship as a relationship advocates a focus on the dynamic, diverse and spatially dispersed character of migrants' social networks, grounding the analysis of migrant sociality in actual relationships, and considering the contexts of interactions in terms of resources and affective qualities (Datta, 2009; Ryan, 2011; Ryan et al., 2008; Morosanu, 2010). It asserts that friendship should be approached as a non-utilitarian relationship that may be a source of social support and strengthen social ties, and at the same time may be combined with reinforcing social divisions and the (re-)drawing of boundaries, including ethnic ones.

This ethnographic study of a bar-based social network explored the routine social interactions of a Russian-speaking network of bartenders and regulars. Friendship ties that connected the members of the social group in the bar were perceived as a source of support and empowerment for young migrants, and admittedly helped them confront feelings of marginality. Close relationships were also at times connected with power relations, reflecting social divisions and the reinforcement of ethic/national stereotypes of those excluded from the social network. However, the 'ethnic lens' did not prove to be sufficient for explaining these divisions. The various facets of social identity, age, gender, social position and the perceived emotional qualities of a relationship were also entangled in the processes of establishing 'groupness'. Friendship encompassed a diverse and dynamic range of inclusionary and exclusionary practices.

After all, even a simple act of a bartender serving a free drink to a friend may involve a variety of meanings. It can be a gendered affirmation of power in an interaction with a female visitor, a subversive act opposing the control and surveillance of the bar owner or a practice establishing a racialised boundary between customers. Either way, this will also be an act demonstrating how the enactment of friendship depends on the contingent aspects of affinity, distancing and power being at play within the geographical and social space of The Bar.

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Notes

1. In 2004, eight Central and Eastern European countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and two Mediterranean countries (Malta and Cyprus) joined the European Union, which was followed by increased migration from some of these countries to Western Europe, and to the UK in particular. Romania and Bulgaria joined in 2007.

2. Ryan introduces the prevailing understanding of the two types of ties: 'bonding involves close ties with "people like us" while bridging involves links beyond "group cleavages"' (Ryan, 2011: 707). More specifically, she suggests: 'both bonding and bridging capital appear to have quite complex relationships to ethnicity. Rather than attempting to differentiate bonding and bridging on the basis of how similar or dissimilar people are, it is more useful to think about the nature of the relationship and the resources available' (Ryan, 2011: 721).
3. According to the 2011 Census data, 66,271 people who consider Russian as their main language lived in England in 2011, 26,603 of them in Greater London (Office for National Statistics, 2013). The numbers of migrants from post-Soviet countries in the UK increased since the break-up of the Soviet Union, especially at the beginning of the 21st century. The largest national groups are from the Baltic states: migration to the UK from these countries rose since the 2004 EU accession. The other relatively numerous national groups are Russian and Ukrainian. Smaller populations are from Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Belarus. Byford (2009) describes the Russian-speaking migrant population of the UK as characterised by a fluidity of boundaries, a high degree of social stratification and different extents to which migrants rely on the migrant community.
4. Since fieldwork was conducted there in 2009, the place has changed, and the observations hold true for that period. The name and location of the bar are not disclosed to preserve anonymity: it will be called The Bar in the article.
5. I had a clash with the bar owner once, which prompted me to think about the ethical issues of a researcher with a supposedly 'insider' position doing qualitative studies. I concluded that it did not have a negative impact on the results or hinder the research process, but rather showed how mistrust and divisions occur among Russians in London. This was discussed in Malyutina (2012).
6. Since I aimed to get an image of how people behave in their 'natural settings', doing jottings openly could preclude me from participation in the routine sociality in the bar, and make my behaviour look unnatural. I tried to act in a less formal way in order not to disrupt the routine flow of conversations. I never used a recorder in the bar, aiming for informal discussion rather than interview or inquiry. I tried to take fieldnotes contemporaneously so that initial impressions and subtle details are not blunted by long-term participation (Emerson et al., 1995). Sometimes, I wrote down my observations in a notebook while sitting in the bar, using pauses in the conversations when people's attention was not directed at me. This happened when I felt an important conversation had occurred that needed to be described in detail. More often, I recorded my thoughts when I came home the same evening or immediately the following morning. Quotes from Nadya are from a recorded interview; the rest are fieldnotes. Respondents' verbal consent was obtained, and all of them were anonymised.
7. I concentrated on a social network of particular social composition that was spatially located in The Bar. This gave me some ideas about Russian-speakers' attitudes to fellow migrants in general, co-ethnic friends and some 'others', but also prompted me to expand the scope of research for understanding social relationships among diverse and stratified Russian-speakers. While ethnography resulted in a detailed analysis of one particular network, the bar network could be just a part of someone's range of relationships. I followed up with a set of interviews to explore how migrants develop a variety of social connections (Malyutina, 2015).
8. Nadya meant 'Russian-speaking': sometimes migrants use this term and 'Russian' interchangeably.

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