

Review of: "Post-Conflict Reconstruction: How Social Identity Change Informs our Understanding of the Ukrainian Experience of Forced Migration"

Franck Düvell¹

¹ Universität Osnabrück

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Review

Qeios 1/2024

Susie Ballentyne

Post-Conflict Reconstruction: How Social Identity Change Informs our Understanding of the Ukrainian Experience of Forced Migration

This paper deals with one of the largest refugee movements in post-war history and the staying of Ukrainians in the UK. The UK is now increasingly overlooked in European comparative studies. The paper thus addresses a pertinent topic. It is very well written, clearly structured, and addresses a clear research question. There is some room for improvement, as always, but still, as it stands, the paper is enlightening and recommended to read. Most of my comments are thus in fact less suggesting revisions to the paper but rather to taking future analysis a step further.

Now to my points:

I The concept of 'guest' in the HfU programme requires some more elaboration as it is not legally enshrined in any refugee convention and seems to release the state from some of its responsibility, notably with regards to accommodation. Also, because 'guests' do not have legal rights, such as tenant rights, it may result in a particular precarious status. Further to this, I wonder how the relationship, notably dependency, between hosts and guests impacts on the social identity change analysed in this paper.

II The social identity approach could possibly be related to some other fruitful cognitive theoretical approaches in migration studies, notably on perceptions, aspirations, and imaginations, but I also see links of the analysis in this paper to social and human capital theory. That would help to better integrate this with the wider theoretical developments in migration studies.

III Given that 25% to almost 50% of Ukrainians had pre-war migration aspirations (depending on survey and year) and given that some were escaping from regions not directly affected by occupation, fighting, and bombing, whereas others were from regions not directly affected, this suggests that some of those who left post-February 2022 were truly forced to

migrate, whereas many others may have faced less coercion. This implies that Ukrainians had different room to manoeuvre and thus may have been more or less ready to change their identity. This might contribute to the individuals' subsequent preparedness, capability, and speed to change their identity.

IV On the methodology, the sample is small but could be just sufficient for qualitative purposes. However, how participants were sampled and on which grounds should be explained (was purposive sampling applied, snowball sampling, or was it rather convenient sampling?). A case study such as this, which is de facto on women, is principally fine; however, why no men were sampled, even though there were over 16,000 in the country, should be explained. Also, it should be made clearer from the outset that this is about women only. Also, because "all participants reported to have come from middle-income families" and not higher or lower income families, the findings are likely not revealing as many patterns as possible, notably because in other social-class groups, capabilities and capacities to adapt to a new environment and change one's identities might be different.

V There are three expressions of temporality in the paper, 'change', 'uncertainty', and 'guest'; notably, residence in the UK might very well not be the end point of people's trajectories. The issue of temporality could thus have been carved out more explicitly in the analysis. For example, given the uncertainty with regards to the course of the war, the future migration status, the outcome of the integration process, chances to reunite with family (husbands), and also given that return could well be on the horizon, means that adapting to a new environment, adapting a new identity, and that the notion of change might well also be only temporary. I wonder what this would mean for the paper's topic, analysis, and conclusion?

VI The emergence of a new national identity, its pitfalls and potential dangers (I have in mind Appadurai's concept of aggressive identities in *Geography of Anger*), is fascinating stuff and would, in my view, deserve further elaboration. Here, I also think of the transformation of Ukrainian national identity from multi-ethnic (there were 130 'national' minorities in Ukraine before the war), multi-religious (Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Armenian Orthodox, Muslim, etc.), and multi-lingual (Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian, Romani, Hungarian, Belarussian, and quite a few more) to a less diverse identity, and the tensions this may create at the individual and society levels.