Moving out of 'Their' Places: 1991–2016 Migration of Ukrainians to Australia

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Ukraine, like many other Central and Eastern European nations in the 20th Century, went through several sharp turns and endured many tragic twists. This chapter will look into two important historical turning points in the context of the migration of Ukrainians to Australia. The first is the collapse of the Soviet rule in August 1991 and the resulting massive emigration. The second is the 2014 Euromaidan protests and the associated intensification of migration caused by political unrest, economic downturn and the war in eastern Ukraine. These events touched every Ukrainian family deeply and will produce ripple effects for decades to come, both for those who migrated and those who stayed at home.

Ukrainian immigration to Australia has a long history. The first ethnic Ukrainians from western Ukraine are known to have settled in Australia as early as 1860. Then the First World War and the Russian Civil War led to the first massive political emigration, which strengthened the existing Ukrainian communities in Australia by infusing them with people with political, scientific, and cultural backgrounds. During the second wave of political emigration from 1945 through the 1950s, the Ukrainian diaspora in Australia also reasonably increased. The 1990s saw a third wave of Ukrainian immigration to Australia. Today, more than 35,000 people of Ukrainian origin live in Australia, half of whom were born in Ukraine.

Given the dramatic swelling of the Ukrainian community in Australia in the early 1990s and the complete change in Ukrainian migration patterns from 2004 onwards, understanding the larger context of the recent migration flows to Australia is critical. This chapter emphasises the structural variables that shape Ukrainian migration, particularly the events in Ukraine and the shifts in Australian migration policy in the period between 1991 and 2016. Depending on the combination of structural and individual factors, the profile of Ukrainian migrants varies across three periods of migration: (1) 1991–2003, (2) 2004–2013 and (3) 2014–2016. The profile of 1991–2003 arrivals, hereafter called 'transition migrants', is characterised by survival life trajectories and dominated by the arrival of blue-collar working class migrants through humanitarian and family reunion migration streams. Between 2004 and 2013 the character of Ukrainian migration changed towards the arrival of skilled professionals from the white-collar working class families through the skilled migration stream and marriage, and this cohort is addressed as 'dividend migrants'. Since 2014 the profile of Ukrainian migrants in Australia has experienced another shift back towards the dominance of survival aims and mechanisms, and the arrival through the humanitarian and skilled migration stream. These arrivals have been referred to as 'post-dream migrants', a reference to the situation where dreams for Ukraine's democratic and economically sustainable future are being destroyed by a reality that pushes its citizens to migrate.

The post-independence Ukrainian migration to Australia is an understudied phenomenon and this chapter seeks to address this gap. The analysis is based on the author's PhD research project that explored Ukrainian migration to

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Australia between 1991 and 2016. It did so by focusing on the bifurcation of migrant life strategies before, during and after migration. The study used a two-fold methodology. It began with the collection and assessment of secondary data on both Australian migration policy and Ukrainian migration from 1991 onwards. Later, qualitative fieldwork was conducted in Australia (NSW and Wollongong) between October 2012 and May 2013, which involved 51 semi-structured interviews with Ukrainians. A further five interviews with Ukrainians who arrived in Australia during or after 2014 (the Euromaidan protests) were conducted in June 2016. Hence, this chapter relies on a total of 56 interviews. Participants were stratified across Ukrainian regions. Of the participants, 32 were men and 24 were women. Regarding their social origins, 25 of the interviewees were born into white-collar working class families and 29 into blue-collar working class ones, while the remaining two interviewees originated from the class of cultural and scientific intelligentsia.

The empirical qualitative fieldwork garnered rich data that was then used to investigate the differences in migrants' profiles across the migration process as well as over the three time periods. Post-independence Ukrainian migration, our primary focus here, varied depending on a combination of structural and individual factors. Let us first sketch out the structural context and scrutinise the power of emigration dynamics to shape the profiles of 'transition migrants' (1991–2003), 'dividend migrants' (2004–2013) and 'post-dream migrants' (2014–2016) in Australia.

Dynamics of Emigration from Ukraine to Australia: Structural Contexts

The 1991–2003 Migration Context

The analysis of emigration dynamics between 1991 and 2003 are a direct reflection of Ukraine's period of instability and the country's negative economic, political and demographic situation during the first 12 years of independence. Ukraine faced a deep economic crisis, price hikes of basic consumer goods and transport, the commercialisation of education and the elimination of social benefits such as a guaranteed job, free health care and state housing. While these factors made migration more difficult, the economic problems forced people to look for opportunities to survive, which included migration. Hence, the huge difference in living standards between the post-Soviet Ukraine and the countries of the West significantly impacted the level of Ukrainian migration to the West for permanent residency.

Between 1991 and 2004, many countries experienced an influx of Ukrainian immigrants. According to official statistics, 2,537,400 individuals left Ukraine; 1,897,500 moved to other post-Soviet countries while 639,900 moved to other, mainly Western, states. More geographically distant countries, such as Australia, have only recently (in the second half of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s) become emigration destinations for Ukrainians. Based on the interviews, the choice of migrating to Australia was always associated with family ties, successful migration stories of friends and/or biographical circumstances.

The first five years of independence saw the most intensive flow of Ukrainians to Australia. Later, the flow of immigration decreased slightly, with 11 per cent arriving between 2001 and 2006, and 9.6 per cent during 2007–2011 (DIAC 2013). Between 1991 and 2003 a total of 3519 Ukrainians arrived in Australia with permanent residency status (DIAC 2014). Figure 1 summarises the data.

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Since the 1990s, key changes in Australia's migration policies have shaped the character of Ukrainian migration to the country. From 1970 to 1996 the government had made it increasingly more difficult for unskilled migrants to migrate to Australia outside of humanitarian and family reunion programmes (Larsen 2013). It encouraged family migration because it saw family migrants as bonding agents for the next migration wave, thereby assisting their cultural and economic integration (Larsen 2013). Only after 1996 were the first reforms to family migration introduced, resulting in a shift towards skilled migration, which was perceived to have earning potential (Boucher 2013; Hawthorne 2005; Markus et al. 2009). Therefore, at the beginning of the 1990s, Australia's migration policy created a number of barriers for Ukrainian migration. Given the policy, the majority of Ukrainians in the 1990s arrived as family and humanitarian (refugee) migrants. The UNHCR Statistical Online Population Database shows this clearly (see Table 1).

As the situation of the mid 2000s changed, so did Australia's migration policy and in turn the migration trajectories of Ukrainians.

The 2004–2013 Migration Context

During this period, many Ukrainian citizens tried to find a legal opportunity to leave their country under any pretext—either for work or for permanent residence. Against the background of Yushchenko's myth-making and demagoguery about patriotism, more and more ordinary citizens lost any hope for a bright future in Ukraine and began looking for a better life abroad. The main destinations for Ukrainian labour migrants remained the same. In 2009 these were, firstly, Russia (48.1 per cent) and then the European Union countries (41.2 per cent) (State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2009, 33). However, between 2010 and 2013, migration research and statistics revealed a shift in the migration choices of Ukrainians towards Asia. Due to its geographical distance and the lack of an easy way for Ukrainians to access the country, Australia was still not among the most popular destinations. In addition, since 2004, there have been changes in the number and character of Ukrainian arrivals to Australia.

The number of Ukrainian arrivals into Australia during 2004–2013 decreased. The main feature of Ukrainian migration to the country during this period was the change in the quality of migrants since 2004: the skilled migration stream with permanent status came to outnumber humanitarian and family migrants. Out of the 2470 permanent arrivals between 2004 and 2013, a total of 1312 migrants came through the skilled stream while only 1005 came through the family stream (DIAC 2014)[1]. Between 1 January 2004 and 1 January 2014, only six Ukrainian migrants were granted a permanent visa through the humanitarian migration stream (DIAC 2014).

This shift towards skilled arrivals from Ukraine was triggered by the change in the government's migration policy. In 2009 the Rudd Labor Government announced plans to increase the number of skilled migrants to Australia by 30 per cent compared to the previous year and this trend continues (Boucher 2013; Markus et al. 2009). The growing demand for highly skilled migrants attracted IT professionals and engineers from Ukraine. Hence, Australia's migration policies have evolved from focusing on attracting migrants for the purposes of increasing Australia's population to attracting migrants as temporary and permanent (skilled) workers in order to meet the needs of the economy.

The 2014 – 2016 Migration Context

Since the outbreak of mass protests against the Yanukovych regime in November 2013, Ukraine has been wracked by political and social unrest and violent conflict, especially with the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine. In the years leading to the Euromaidan protests, political instability and pervasive corruption inspired not only a movement for democratisation and greater ties with the European Union, but also the ambition to migrate among a significant portion of the population. The post-Euromaidan events have affected all Ukrainian migration flows, which can be broken down into three main categories: forced internal migration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) by the war in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions; international migration of asylum seekers driven by political motives, as well as the desire to avoid military conscription; and continuous emigration of skilled and professional Ukrainians, along with educational migration driven by a mix of political and economic motives.

During 2014 and 2015 there was a significant increase in the number of applications for refugee status submitted by Ukrainians to the EU countries, the US, Canada and Australia. In 2014, Ukrainians submitted 14,000 applications for refugee status, compared to 1120 in 2013. Given the increase in the number of applications for asylum from Ukrainian citizens in Australia between 2014 and 2015 (DIAC 2015), the country has become more restrictive in granting temporary tourist, study and business visas. Participants from this study who arrived in Australia in 2014 and 2016, mentioned that they know from their own experience and heard from their friends and relatives about instances where temporary visas for Ukrainians were refused. However, there are no open statistics to confirm the increase in the number of refusals from the DIAC.

Among the interviewed males, one of the main reasons for seeking asylum abroad was to avoid army conscription. As the conflict in the east escalated, the Ukrainian government reinstated a general draft with the power to conscript men between the ages of 20 and 27. As a result, many young men used diverse channels of migration to avoid conscription. This included employment, study, training programmes, internships and other available opportunities. It was in these different structural contexts and circumstances that Ukrainians made their decisions and plans to move to Australia. And these contexts have shaped the different migration profiles of Ukrainian migrants in Australia.

Who Are They: Three Profiles of post-Independence Ukrainian Migrants to Australia

As stated above, the main finding of the 56 interviews of Ukrainians in Australia is that there are three waves of post-independence Ukrainian migration to Australia that correspond to three migration profiles: 'transition migrants', 'dividend migrants' and 'post-dream migrants'. These profiles vary depending on a combination of structural and individual factors (values, aims, needs, sense of agency and decision-making).

Transition Migrants

Analysis of the emotional, occupational, and class characteristics of the 'transition migrants' who arrived in Australia between 1991 and 2003, along with their professional, identity and emotional shifts after migration suggests that they created a set of personal and social characteristics which reflected a survival life trajectory. Drawing on the interview data, their survival-oriented, risk-minimising trajectory is mainly characterised by: (1) the aim to escape poverty and starvation and regain job status; (2) material values, values of traditionalism, family well-being, comfort and conformity; (3) the need for security (order and stability, living in a safe environment, avoiding threats), environmental needs (a healthy environment) and social needs (integrity of social and individual values); and (4) weak agency and behavioral passivity (meaning operation within the most accessible and safe opportunities, and not actively transforming their lives by extending their opportunities). These characteristics were found to be shaped in Ukraine before departure, and they are what defines and reinforces the survival life trajectory of 'transition migrants' in the post-migration stages.

The analysis of the motivations and aims for migration typical for 'transition migrants' shows that their choices are

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dominated by migration push factors. In the interviews, 'transition migrants' spoke about economic crisis and political turbulence as a push factor for their migration, and framed their emigration to Australia as being 'more forced than voluntary'. The main migration push factors found in their life stories were: (1) unemployment; (2) lack of occupational work; (3) low wages and arrears; and (4) the suppression of entrepreneurial activity.

The 'transition migrants' cohort mostly used the family reunion and humanitarian migration streams to assist their entry into Australia. The blue-collar workers and suppressed entrepreneurs formed a particular group of humanitarian 'transition migrants' comprised of regular and irregular short-term arrivals who tended to obtain their permanent residency in Australia by claiming asylum. This cohort was identified as using 'conspiracy' and 'maneuvering' tactics to enable their entry into the country and attempts to gain permanent residency. Their effective tactics were found to grow out of explicit social networks. Such networks were crucial for this group as they assisted them in managing the different types of precarity associated with the lack of life and work predictability and security, which affected their financial or psychological welfare.

The family reunion migration stream for 'transition migrants' was the second most popular way of entering Australia. Here, the economic rationale, in the form of a plan to escape poverty and unemployment in Ukraine, was the main driving force behind the participants' choice of family reunion. A connection to family and dependency on the resources that the family provided was found in many cases to encourage dependency on the Australian welfare system in the post-migration stage. It also tended to create a type of comfort zone that favoured the continuation of survival life patterns after migration.

Talking about migration as 'an ongoing emotional journey' (Ryan 2008, 301), the majority of 'transition migrant' interviewees emphasised the role of psychological discomfort and the depression that was induced by the social and economic conditions arising from post-Soviet unrest before migration that threaded through their post-migration life. The majority of 'transition migrants' showed disappointment, guilt, nostalgic depression and homesickness caused by their separation from home and those they left behind. Most of the stories expressed partial satisfaction with migration and demonstrated precarity, emotional insecurity and opportunism. These emotions were a deterrent to the success of their integration into and adaptation to Australia.

Influenced by occupational insecurity and 'structural disempowerment' (Mrozowicki 2011), a typical work experience for the 'transition migrants' was an occupational downgrade alongside an economic upgrade. Using Mrozowicki's (2011) terminology of 'dead-end careers', the occupational experiences of the majority of 'transition migrants' proved to be shaped by employment in non-professional jobs (dead-end careers) which were associated with the absence of occupational mobility in the new, changed environment. Thus, the survival life trajectory of the 'transition migrants' was reflected in their experience of a sharp downgrade of professional and social status after migration.

This cohort demonstrated a low level of English proficiency and a strong national identification with Ukraine, which created barriers for successful social adaptation and integration into Australian society. As the most powerful and important motivation to work, material orientation facilitated their quick economic adaptation to life in Australia. 'Transition migrants' tended to start their employment in the first available job, typically a manual job in construction, painting, or teaching Ukrainian at the Ukrainian language schools. Material values were also found to guide their behaviors and consumption practices.

Being born into blue-collar working class families and in majority having a secondary education, the 'transition migrants' do not attach much importance to professional growth and self-development. However, all of them mentioned that back in Ukraine they would never have believed that they would have had to wake up at 4 am in the morning and work as hard as they did in the construction industry, with only short breaks for holidays. Furthermore, the future plans of 'transition migrants' tend to be retrospectively oriented towards their past life in Ukraine. They continued to invest money in Ukraine and some of them cherished plans to return to the country for their retirement.

Dividend Migrants

On the contrary, the 'dividend migrants' who arrived in Australia between 2004 and 2013 approach their migration as

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a kind of investment. Their narratives show that their choice of Australia as a destination was informed and driven by calculated advantages–socio-economic dividends from migration – i.e. social, ethical, cultural, aesthetic, educational and civic capital.

Unlike 'transition migrants', 'dividend migrants' are motivated by Australian pull factors. Economic push factors are not the primary ones for these migrants—they all come from the class of professionals or scientific and cultural intelligentsia, and said they felt economically secure back in Ukraine and only went abroad seeking, to use one interviewee's words, an *upgrade in life.* Here, an 'upgrade' means professional growth and self-realisation, better money and an improvement in the quality of life, with interesting work with social mobility. The life trajectory of this cohort is defined as achievement life strategy.

Based on the interviews, the achievement life trajectory of 'dividend migrants' is characterised by the following: (1) long-term aims for professional success and self-realisation oriented at opening new opportunities (extensive goals) and the extended recreation of social and economic status; (2) socially-oriented needs for professional and cultural success and individually-oriented needs for creative self-expression and professional self-realisation; (3) instrumental values, aimed at achieving the goals accompanied by a set of non-material values, such as the prospects and opportunities for self-realisation and a favorable environment for developing their own initiative, freedom and independence.

Compared to the 'transition migrants', financial welfare comes second and is a minor value. 'Dividend migrants' demonstrate strong agency that is expressed through their active life position and the internal capacity to take responsibility for themselves instead of relying on external circumstances. Youth (the average age of the cohort was 30) also played a role in their active life position and determined their focus on high performance and the ability to live and work in conditions of uncertainty and risk. 'Dividend migrants' value originality, as well as access to a variety of choices of cultural styles and ways to implement them. The cohort is dominated by the young IT-skilled migrants from Ukraine who chose to be globally engaged through migration and used this strategy to achieve better pay, professional development and future alternative employment opportunities.

'Dividend migrants' arrived in Australia through the skilled and family migration streams. Both streams reflect how this cohort was affected by the lack of opportunities for development and professional self-realisation in Ukraine. Skilled migration during the 2003–2014 period was found to be mostly male and structured by IT market growth in Australia and Ukraine, as well as the international exposure of Ukrainian professionals, linked to global orders, services and corporations, to parts of the IT industry outside their country. Marriage migration in the cohort of the 'dividend migrants' is characterised by the involvement of highly educated (Master degree and PhD), middle-aged (in their 30s–40s) women in highly skilled professions such as law, banking and research. Despite the elite character of the participants' marriage migration, this cohort expressed their suffering from being stereotyped as 'mail-order brides'.

All the interviewed 'dividend migrants' have successfully adapted and integrated into Australian society both socially and professionally. They have an Australian and/or cosmopolitan identity, high levels of English and complete satisfaction with migration, with future plans to succeed in terms of professional self-realisation, career growth and personal development. Given their capacity to successfully maintain their social status after migration, they are the group of migrants who are positively contributing to Australian society in terms of social cohesion, innovation and economic production.

Post-Dream Migrants

For 'post-dream migrants', the most recent cohort to arrive in Australia between 2014 and 2016, survival life trajectories dominate. The values, needs and aims that were found in the five stories of the 'post-dream migrants' were very much similar to those of 'transition migrants', where material values dominated and family welfare and security, financial freedom and independence came first. The popularity of security needs, along with the needs for self-realisation and self-expression, are explained by the fact that before migration, the interviewees supported the 2014 Euromaidan protests and were investing emotionally and financially in Ukraine's democratic future.

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Significantly, this cohort is dominated by people under the age of 29 from the white-collar social class. Due to the absence of the promised reforms and changes in Ukraine, they experienced disappointment and the loss of hope for future changes. Ultimately the reality of their faded dreams pushed them to migrate. Such a reactionary behavioral response, spontaneous choice of migration and short-term aims drive the lives of the interviewed 'post-dream migrants'.

All participants in this cohort mentioned that their decision to migrate was reactionary and quick, rather than strategic. 'Conspiracy' and 'maneuvering' tactics to turn their Australian temporary visas (study and business) into permanent ones was the case for the majority of the interviewed 'post-dream migrants'. Their emotional sphere is threaded with precarity, emotional insecurity, opportunism and concerns about the future of Ukraine, as well as their future in Australia. Despite the negative attitudes and emotions associated with the events in Ukraine, all the 'post-dream migrants' express satisfaction with their choice to migrate. They enjoy their new life in Australia and do not plan to return to Ukraine.

'Post-dream migrants' have cosmopolitan identities as well as a rediscovered Ukrainian identification. Social networks played the most important role in their integration. In Australia they often found new acquaintances and first jobs through relatives or friends. 'Post-dream migrants' tend to settle with or near Ukrainian friends and Ukrainian neighborhoods in Sydney. Their involvement in primary groups is also high, as with the 'transition migrants'. The effect that all the interviewees experienced is a rather slower integration into Australian society compared with the fast and successful integration of the 'dividend migrants'. Moderate and high levels of English language proficiency dominate and play an important role in the first years of the 'post-dream migrants'' lives in Australia.

Conclusion

The post-independence Ukrainian community in Australia is a mixed group. Based on 56 interviews, three profiles of Ukrainian migrants were identified and described as 'transition migrants', 'dividend migrants' and 'post-dream migrants'. These three profiles vary depending on the combination of individual values, aims, needs, agencies and the structural factors at the time of the migrant's departure from Ukraine.

A key point is the discovery that Ukrainian migration to Australia has changed since 2004, when the representatives of the professional class and the class of the cultural and scientific intelligentsia began using the skilled and marriage migration stream. At that point, Ukrainian immigrants in this group outnumbered the blue-collar working class and entrepreneurs of the earlier period who arrived through the humanitarian and family reunion programmes. In 2004, for the first time in the history of Ukrainian migration to Australia, the number of skilled arrivals outnumbered those who arrived using the family reunion and humanitarian streams. The 2014 post-Euromaidan events also impacted on the life trajectories of Ukrainians, whose motives for migration into Australia underwent another shift, this time towards survival: economic, political and physical. As a result, the number of asylum seeker applications from Ukrainians increased in 2014 in comparison with the last ten years. Hence, the changed structural context of Ukraine in 2014–2016 has again reshaped the profile of Ukrainian migrants and their migration pathways in the last two years.

Given the small scope of the study and the number of respondents, the findings presented here should not be regarded as exhaustive. Migration situations are mobile and dynamic, and further research is needed on post-independence Ukrainian migrants, their profiles and adaptation to the structure of contemporary Australian society.

Notes

[1] As per the DIBP Settlement Database (SDB) data (extracted on 30 April 2014), the total number of Ukraine-born arrivals granted a permanent visa in Australia between 1 January 2004 and 1 January 2013 was 2470 people, out of which 1312 were skilled migrants, 1005 – family migrants, 6 – humanitarian migrants and 147 unknown.

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