

Fashioning Masculinities through Migration

Narratives of Romanian Construction Workers in London

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■ **ABSTRACT:** The vast majority of literature on migrant masculinities presents situations where migration challenges normative forms of manhood—“undoing gender.” Yet for the Romanians who come to London, migration has the opposite effect, as men are drawn into the wide and lucrative building industry. The article follows constructions of masculinity through an analysis of: (1) the working environment of Romanian men, generally characterized as ridden with risk; (2) the gender dynamics in the household; and (3) the temporariness of the men’s migration in London. The article demonstrates that, in this case, mobility does not entail a “gender compromise,” but a reinforcement of hypermasculine traits, necessary to succeed in an environment seen as highly competitive and risky.

■ **KEYWORDS:** construction industry, gender roles, hegemonic masculinity, low-skilled migration, temporary migration

The present article aims to show that, for migrant men working in London in low- and mid-skilled jobs, migration is a path for fashioning the self as gendered actors striving to improve their livelihoods. The present article describes their experiences of the London labor market, their motivations and aspirations, which confirm Helma Lutz’s (2010) assertion that gender is not only one aspect of migration, “but a *central organizing* principle in the migration flows and the organization of migrants’ lives.” Transnational studies have for a long time had a gender-neutral approach to men, whose gender identity in the migration process was taken for granted (K. Datta et al. 2009, quoted in Souralová and Fialová 2017). More recently, studies of migration have begun to account for the reconfiguration of masculinities through migration, often following men, as “gendered social actors who develop strategies to maintain their material and symbolic privileges and to accommodate changing relations of gender, thus contributing to transformations of models of masculinity” (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016: 5).

While for high-skilled Romanians, gender is not always the main factor affecting the industries where they find work (Moroşanu 2013), the present study demonstrates that, for those taking on low- and mid-skilled jobs, gender makes all the difference: from the motivations to



migrate and their integration into London's migration networks, to their perception of the host culture and their mobility plans. A divided and specialized labor market, characteristic of global cities such as London, produces classed and gendered "warm bodies," assembled transnationally (McDowell 2008; Ye 2014). Similar to Xiuling Ye's study of migrant masculinities in Singapore, I follow the "social reproduction of . . . workers as men, conditioned through their position in the division of labour" (2014: 1015), generating new forms of hegemonic masculinities.

R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt's notion of hegemonic masculinity refers to normative examples of manhood, which subordinate alternative masculinities, and are maintained through cultural consent. Such hegemonies are "configurations of practice that are accomplished in social interaction, and therefore can differ according to gender relations in particular social settings" (2005: 836). There are different ways in which hegemonic masculinities are fashioned transnationally. The migration process itself is a path through which men align themselves with dominant local models of masculinity, as John Berger and Jan Mohr (1975) or Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella (2000) illustrate. For Berger and Mohr's masculine subjects, migration provides "the dynamism that is lacking from the situation into which he was born" (1975: 34), but is necessary for achieving specific masculine roles in the home communities. At the same time, a burgeoning literature on migrant masculinities speaks about the "flexibility" of gender roles in migration, or about "masculine compromise" (Choi 2018), whereby mobility generates transformations of normative ideas of gender. Susanne Choi (2018) sees migration as temporarily challenging to hegemonic masculinities at the place of origin, an argument that is particularly relevant for temporary labor migration. Although in migration, masculinities might be flexible, fluid, fractured, or contextualized, they are not felt as such (Donaldson and Howson 2009). Instead, "in the face of the difficulties, uncertainties and discrimination that they suffer, migrant men often respond by trying even harder to live and act like 'real men'" (Donaldson and Howson 2009: 7). Men's ability to fulfill their role of breadwinner back home means they continue to uphold the hegemonic model of masculinity.

Men perceive their experience of migration in London as temporary, which is often a characteristic of labor migration (Osella and Osella 2000; Pine 2014; White 2008). Anne White and Louise Ryan's (2008) longitudinal study shows that labor migration initially planned as temporary tends to become permanent over time, as networks in the place of migration strengthen, while those with the places of origin weaken. The present study aims to upset the notion of temporary migration as a set measure of time. Instead, temporariness is a way of being in place, an indefinite state (Fedyuk 2012) whereby money and resources tend to flow "back home"—the place where migrants see themselves as living their "real" lives, as opposed to their "work" lives in London (Fedyuk 2012; Levitt 2001; Madiano and Miller 2012; Parreñas 2008; Pine 2014; see also Werbner 2013: 143). A combination of the deregulated job market and open borders across the European Union, with practices of fatherhood and ideas of masculinity that compel men to demonstrate their worth in the home communities, contribute to the felt temporality of the men's migration to London. Return to the home country is not always in sight, and yet London continues to be a place of estrangement: Romanian migrants are reluctant to form self-defined diasporic groups, and they also keep their distance from what they perceive as the local culture.

The present study was carried out in London, between March 2016 and August 2016, with most interviews carried out before the EU referendum.¹ It included 25 in-depth and 85 semi-structured interviews, along with field notes from Romanian shops and cafes in London, the Orthodox Church, or the participants' workplaces. Forty-four of the interviewees were men who came from different parts of Romania, residing mostly in North London boroughs. The average age of Romanian men was 34, but their ages ranged from 25 to 55. The majority of men were also fathers, with different living arrangements. The newly arrived or those who struggled

to make ends meet left their families behind in Romania and sent remittances. Those who could afford to support their families in London were happy to have their wives and children living with them. The wives could rarely afford to work, due to childcare responsibilities and the high cost of childcare in London, and so, more often than not, they moved between their homes in Romania and London.

Migration research in the UK has been influenced by the growing concern around migration in public debates, and practices of “everyday bordering,” which consist of the “everyday construction of borders through ideology, cultural mediation, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and everyday forms of transnationalism” (Yuval-Davis et al. 2017, 229). The year 2014, when work restrictions for Romanians were lifted, was a pivotal moment, with mass media campaigns repeatedly targeting Romanian migrants. These concerns culminated with the 2016 EU referendum and its aftermath. Beyond what was recorded through interviews and field notes, Brexit loomed over the research process, often affecting the answers and the participants’ willingness to be interviewed. Equally important was the London context, a place recognized by the participants as multicultural and open to migrants.

A Culture of Migration—Romanian Men in the UK

Despite the absence of transnational migration prior to the 1990s, according to a 2015 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, three million Romanians were estimated to be working or studying in another EU country at the end of 2014.² In the 2000s the destination for most Romanian migrants was predominantly Southern Europe (70 percent), and almost half of the migrants declared their intentions to return to their country (Hinks and Davies 2015). Throughout the following decade, as Romanian migration surged, the paths and destinations of migrants changed. Multiple migration—migrating to more than one destination using one’s networks—is a current practice among many Romanians (Ciobanu 2015), and indeed among those in London (approximately half of interviewees came from other migration destinations).

Prior to 2007, Romanians coming to the UK needed an entry visa, and only a small number of low- and mid-skilled Romanians made the journey to London, most of them with the intention to settle (Boswell and Ciobanu 2009). In the 2000s, the UK became a destination for high-skilled Romanians (Csedo 2009; Moroşanu 2013). Although many of them took on jobs below their qualifications, they were pleased to receive higher wages than in other destination countries.³ After 2007, and more intensely after 2014 (the year when work restrictions were lifted for Romanian and Bulgarian citizens), migration networks with London formed quickly. Romanian migration to the UK increased dramatically over a short period, in the context of frequently changing legislation concerning their stay and work. Over two decades, Romanians’ legal status in the UK shifted, between illegal and regularized, “supported by an increasingly buoyant migrant economy of brokerage, kinship and professional networks” (Trandafoiu 2013: 101).

Certain areas in Romania have developed a culture of migration (Massey 1990) where mobility is not solely motivated by financial gains. Consistent with Istvan Horváth’s study, for the Romanian workers in London, migration is “considered to be a typical and acceptable practice for the transition period between the end of schooling and becoming an adult” (2008: 781), in the absence of respectable working-class jobs at the local level. Yet unlike Horváth’s participants, who return to their places of origin,⁴ those working in London continue to work abroad into adulthood. Migration, as a livelihood or social mobility strategy, changes the culture in the home country, opens the possibility of a transnational habitus (Erdal and Pawlak 2017), and

redefines people's aspirations and ideas of gender roles. The construction of Romanian gendered selfhood in London depends on a juxtaposition of "different social orders" (Erdal and Pawlak 2017) developed through journeys not only between "source" and "destination," but passing through various other places of migration too—very often Italy or Spain.

In particular, London attracts men who come to work in the city's lucrative construction industry. In 2017 Romanian men formed more than half of the EU nationals working in construction (Kollewe 2017), and alongside Polish men they are the dominant migrant group in the industry. Their qualifications and class aspirations vary. Most of the Romanian construction workers were educated up to 18 at technical schools set up during the industrialization period of the socialist years (for factory workers or different crafts). A smaller number of migrants have additional qualifications at various levels, including university degrees, but they rarely perceive their situation as one of downward mobility. Indeed, many of them are able to speak English and form lucrative networks, thereby becoming successful on the labor market. These migrants see themselves as entrepreneurs and as able to seize opportunities. Part of the hegemonic masculinity generated among Romanian migrants in London is an appreciation of the flexibility of the labor market as an opportunity for demonstrating one's self-worth.

Marius was a 36-year-old who worked in Spain, Norway, Finland, France, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and Italy before coming to London to work in construction. He left school at 18, after training in the metal industry, and fought his way up, working in tourism, as a waiter, a bartender, owning his own restaurant and club, and occasionally conducting semilegal activities, until he began working in shipyards. Although he has been working in construction across Europe for many years, his contracts never lasted longer than nine months.

"Here, in London, I proved my worth with the employer, and after one month of working for him, he 'bought' me from the agency. I realized it when, at one point, the boss started giving me jobs that tested my abilities. I used to go back home and I couldn't sleep, I stayed up to do the geometry, the maths. I had these bricks the shape of an L that couldn't be fitted. My wife saw me, it was 3 am and I was searching on the internet for certain designs and materials; I was trying to improvise something. The guy who designed these bricks came to ask why it is taking so long to fit them. At that point I got off the scaffolding, I punched him and told him, 'You fit them if you can.' And then I left. Just before I got to the tube station the supervisor ran after me and brought me back. If it wasn't for him, I'd be back in Romania now. Or who knows where."

By the time we got to this point in the interview, some of Marius's mates came to join the conversation in the Romanian cafe in North London where we met. Such narratives, told with gusto, are performances that demonstrate the narrator's status, and the qualities required for being successful. More than any other job that Romanian men might take up, such as in the food industry, hospitality, cleaning, or car washing, working in the construction industry is seen as quintessentially male. Being successful at getting work in this sector entails not just physical strength but also resilience and wits: the ability to take on long hours of work, to pick up how the job is done in the UK, and to learn a basic level of English quickly. As Marius's story shows, the ideal "hegemonic masculinity" means standing up to others when they want to put you down, and taking risks—including the risk of being jobless. The UK as a destination is considered a good path for successful masculinity, unlike other destinations where men are more likely to work in the hospitality or agricultural sectors, which pay less and are considered to be low status. "England was for the few and for the clever" said one of the interviewees referring to the period prior to 2014, when the majority of Romanians were migrating to Southern European countries.

The migrants who participated in the present study (many of whom work in the construction industry) have a different migration experience from skilled migrants working in professions such as medicine, academia, or banking (Moroşanu 2013), in terms of both the precarious char-

acter of their work and the ways in which they rely on networks to find work. David Kideckel (2004) argues that, in the Romanian postsocialist context, gender patterns evolved in the context of changing class dynamics. For professionals, managers, technical workers, and people working in business (the traditional middle-class core), postsocialism brought opportunities for women's increased presence in the public space. Meanwhile, the disenfranchised working-class groups saw

rapidly changing and uncertain economic environments, high unemployment and under-employment, plummeting standards of living, denigration or condescension by the larger society, and alienation from new standards of consumption. . . . All these processes produce unsettling changes, especially within gender relations. These manifest in a reconfigured family life, in new and different physical and role demands on both women and men, uncertainties about male and female identities, and a dissolution of previously affective close social relationships. (Kideckel 2004: 41)

After Romania joined the EU, migration became the most effective solution to economic upheavals, further altering gender relations and class divisions, visible in their differentiated patterns of migration. As Maria Platt (2017) note, "while precarity is not exclusive to low-skilled labour migrants, their positions are underpinned by uncertainty, insecurity and vulnerability in global labour markets."

"In London, as a man you can easily find work as a builder," explains Irina, a shop assistant at a small Romanian shop in South London. But as a woman, your choices are either cleaning jobs for hotels or working in a warehouse, neither of which sound appealing in terms of earnings. Irina had been doing care work in Italy, where she looked after an old woman for a long time. When she died, Irina followed her sister, who had moved to London after her husband got a job in construction. Many of Irina's customers in the shop are construction workers. Most of the men who come there for their lunch break talk either proudly or bitterly about the long, exhausting hours demanded by the construction industry, and about the ease with which they find jobs. Most of the women have experienced discontinuous part-time work, which many of them judged was not worth doing, especially if they had children in their care. In terms of work, many of them agree that London has much more to offer men.

The literature on transnational masculinities questions the way migration changes the construction of gender identities (Bell and Domecka 2017; K. Datta et al 2009; Erdal and Pawlak 2017). Does migration enable hybridity, "flexibility" (Batnitzky et al. 2009)? Or does it allow the reproduction of more traditional gender roles (Batnitzky et al. 2009; Osella and Osella 2010), allowing men to demonstrate that they can take risks, earn, and ultimately support their family? Justyna Bell and Markieta Domecka (2017: 13) argue that, although migration may trigger changes in the performance of gender identity, this depends on how different the gender models encountered in the country of destination in relation to those already held by the migrants are. In the case of Polish migrant families in Belfast, women are channeled "towards part-time, temporary, unqualified jobs allowing for modest income and little chance for advancement," leaving them to fulfill the main caring and housekeeping roles in the household—a situation which resonates with that of Romanian women in London. "The structural opportunities and cultural repertoire offered in the new context seem to favour more the maintaining of the traditional gender roles taken from Poland than challenging them" argue the authors (Bell and Domecka 2017: 13). The effect of migration, therefore, is that of "doing' gender rather than undoing it" (2017: 14). Yet the authors also acknowledge that such traditional roles are not always the norm in Poland either. By this account, gender roles change with migration toward a model where

women's roles become more restricted to care and the private sphere than they were in the country of origin.

Romanian low-skilled migrants in London encounter a similar situation to that of Polish workers in Belfast. In London, their migration is driven primarily by the opportunities offered to men of earning money from construction work. The majority of the Romanian men interviewed were family breadwinners, whether their families lived with them in London or in Romania, where they received remittances. By contrast, the women were either housewives who worked occasionally, or, in the case of those in their early twenties, worked long hours and lived independently in London.⁵ Aside from the absence of reliable, well-paid work for women, insufficient maternity pay and the lack of childcare provision in the UK do not allow women to substantially contribute to the family income. These gender models did not necessarily confirm ideas of womanhood or manhood present in the home culture, where women tend to be in employment.⁶ The availability of childcare provided by grandparents or the state, the necessity of another income, and the culture developed during the socialist years have pushed women outside the private sphere and into employment. In the first years of postsocialism, women were the first to lose jobs (Watson 1993: 80), leading many to engage in labor migration, challenging the assumption whereby men are the first (in a couple or a community) to take on the risks of migration.

In the 2000s, large numbers of Romanian women took on work in the care industry in Italy,⁷ assuming the role of breadwinner, while simultaneously fulfilling the "affective labour" of caring for children or elderly parents from a distance (see Fedyuk 2012; Parreñas 2008). In the context of precarious low- and mid-skilled employment both in Romania and elsewhere, the work of *badante* in Italy was full-time and for the long-term. Such a change to labor activity within the family affected expectations of gender roles back home. As other opportunities arose in the UK, some of the migrants moved, encountering different labor conditions that favored men. Half of the interviewed men had worked in various other countries, but declared that the higher pay and continuous supply of work made London a preferable destination. In many cases, couples who had migrated together were driven to come to London by the men's work opportunities. The movement from the home country to Italy and then to the UK meant dealing with different structural opportunities for performing gender roles. Unlike in Romania or other destinations, in London families relied on the man's job.

One of the interviewees, Maria, owned a successful flower shop in Romania, but in 2003 she wanted to go abroad. She was not facing financial pressures, but instead felt encouraged by the opening of borders to explore other possibilities. She and her husband, Mihai, went to Italy together, where she very soon found full-time work in housekeeping. Mihai's work in Italy was sporadic, and the two ended up living with the family where Maria was working. When personal conflicts arose with the employers, Maria and Mihai decided to go to London. After years of irregular jobs in construction, cleaning, and the security industry, Mihai found a permanent job as an engineer in maintenance for a hotel. Childcare responsibilities meant that Maria took a break from work, and was, at the time of the interview, working flexible hours in housecleaning for a handful of clients. In the course of migration and as they became more established in London, Mihai became the breadwinner in the family. In the story of the couple's migration, it was Maria who took on the initial risks, and was positively motivated by her spirit of adventure, even though she ran her own successful flower business back in Romania. Once in London and once they became parents, the dynamics changed, with Mihai providing a stable income in a traditionally masculine area of work. Compared to theirs and others' experience of working in Italy, domestic work in London was not enough to support the family, and compared to their situation in Romania, Maria was not in the position to run her own business (although she wished

to do that in the future). The higher salaries for men working in low- and mid-skilled jobs are thought to be a direct measurement of the “risk” they entail, while women’s work is considered to be lacking in risks (Maclean 2015).

In the case of Romanian migrants, gender “flexibility” when it comes to work is necessarily experienced in migration, but often in the “home” context. Cornel trained and worked as a nurse, and then as somebody’s personal assistant, and said he thrived in both careers because of his social skills. In London, he wanted to work as a nurse, but the language test was a barrier. He started working in the construction industry, where jobs were readily available and profitable, and in which he set up his small business. His story has much in common with other construction workers, who previously worked in diverse industries while in Romania or elsewhere.

Kavita Datta argues that the study of masculinities needs to account for “how gendered identities travel and how these identities are remade at each stage of the migration project in relation to a range of different and often contradictory gender regimes encountered in different places” (K. Datta et al. 2009: 857). Yet the transformations need not be from a “traditional,” stable gender model toward a more “flexible” one. I argue that, in the case of Romanians in London, structural opportunities mean that men take on jobs that are deemed more “risky” and are rewarded as such, and thus are sites of performing hegemonic masculinities.

Men’s work trajectory prior to their arrival in London often involves more flexible models of masculinity, as men coming from different places in Romania are trained in a variety of trades (including nursing, jewellery making, deejaying, or baking), or are part of families where migrant women are the breadwinner. Once in London, the structure of the labor market for low- and mid-skilled migrants encourages hypermasculine hegemonic models, as men are attracted toward the construction industry. The availability and flexibility of jobs makes it possible for them to work in stints and earn comparatively well, and to sustain transnational families as breadwinners. Within this industry, masculine identity means a demonstration of prowess, risk taking, and competitiveness.

Risk

A house in South London is being refurbished. A group of Romanian workers are in charge of the painting, tiling, structural alterations, fitting doors, rewiring. What looks like one team made up of six are, in fact, two separate teams, both made up of Romanian workers, aged between 30 and 48 years. The work they do has been subcontracted to the main team manager by one of the big letting agencies in the area. The team manager subcontracted part of the work to another team manager, and employed two other men. As team managers and administrators, they are in charge of finding jobs, purchasing materials, and handling all the logistics. Neither of them works with permanent employees. They both assemble teams within a few days of learning about a new job. All of the workers are self-employed. The construction industry is a world of subcontracting, self-employed work, and verbal arrangements.

The sector absorbs migrants to work at all levels, from low-skilled workers to managers. For low-skilled jobs, such as cleaner or laborer, migrants often obtain work through agencies, usually on zero-hour contracts. Many use their networks of relatives, neighbors, or friends that stretch between London and their homes in Romania, which means that most migrants already have a job in place when they arrive in the UK. Some of the workers with more experience in the industry set up their own businesses and take on bigger jobs (as managers) assembling teams, often with other Romanian workers. Workers rely on what seems to be a constant flow of work, but without the security of a permanent contract. As Platt and colleagues (2017: 697) note, risks

and uncertainty in the labor market of construction workers are “systematically passed on to workers who are dependent upon a continuous flow of short-term, contractual work to ensure income stability. Consequently, a subcontracting system relieves the main contractor of contractual obligations to the workforce.”

Although they depend on their networks, migrants survive in a highly competitive environment. There is an acknowledged hierarchy between those who have been working in London longer, and the newcomers—especially those who arrived after 2014. More experienced workers “train” younger men who join them while working on certain jobs. Alternatively, workers are “brought over” to London by others who are in a position to offer them a short-term job. “Bringing someone over” is also a way of creating networks of obligation. More than the job, the new migrant receives help with obtaining certificates, a National Insurance number, opening bank accounts, and registering with a doctor. Managing these complex relationships mitigates migration risks.

Despite the reliance on other Romanians for obtaining work, migrants are highly suspicious of their compatriots: “Anyone offering to help you wants something from you” is what most migrant men say. Similar to Michael Herzfeld’s (2004) study of apprenticeship among men in Greece, it is a culture where the young are socialized to be competitive and that discourages cooperation, even at the point when the young are trained by those who will become their peers. Participation in unions is extremely low among migrant workers (see Eldring et al. 2011, enhancing the competitive, hierarchical labor market in which each worker has to prove his own worth).

When asked about the precariousness of their contracts, Romanians usually reply that “there is plenty of work, for those who want to work.” The culture of migrant construction workers is fueled by ideas of aggressive, market-oriented masculinities promoted in postsocialist Romania. The work is described as ridden with risks and extremely hard, with some workers taking on ten or twelve hours of continuous work. In their migration narratives, these hardships demonstrate their desire to work: “If you mind your own business and really want to work, you will thrive.” The hegemonic masculinity of Romanian migrant men is defined by muscle and mental strength, but also by ambition and self-sacrifice (taking pride in working to exhaustion, or in confronting the hardships of working abroad).

In her study of Polish construction workers’ visual culture, Ayona Datta argues that ethnic and gender identifications are mutually constitutive and take shape in specific ways on the construction site, as a result of material, bodily interactions (A. Datta 2009). The construction industry is a site of performing masculinity for British workers (Hayes 2002) as well as for migrants (K. Datta et al. 2009). Toughness, physical strength, and resilience are seen as quintessentially male attributes (Lutz 2010). Historically, the worker’s profile in the construction industry in Britain was one of “respectable working-class male identity—where skill, craft and workplace control equated manliness” (Hayes 2002). The physical risk involved in the job was also one of the features that defined the workers’ sense of masculinity. For instance, even though it improved conditions and workplace safety, health and safety legislation was seen by the British workers of the 1980s as emasculating, and an attempt to control them, argues Hayes (2002).

As others have noted, risk is intertwined with the performance of masculinity (Maclean 2016) and can be seen as an opportunity. Discursively, it can be used as a kind of yardstick, allowing the comparison of “risky” situations otherwise unrelated (Day 2000). In this way, the construction industry is “risky” at more than one level, as the construction site entails physical risk as well as the risk of a highly flexible work environment. Subcontracting and self-employment are perceived as entailing risks that need to be overcome. Migrants usually accept this not only as a feature of the labor market, but as something pertaining to their condition of migrants:

their lack of rights and the pride of taking fate into their own hands from the moment they leave home. Such attitudes are partly an expression of the market-driven model of masculinity associated with postsocialism (A. Datta 2009), where risk is seen as opportunity for fashioning the self and demonstrating one's worth. As new migrants to the UK, Romanians see the flexible labor market as their chance to get work by undercutting pay. Yet it is also a source of distress, and for some of the interviewees, it was the reason they considered sending their family back to Romania and maintaining a long-distance relationship with their partner and children.

All men are quick to say: if you are good, there will always be more work coming, and people will want you. This migrants' mantra brings home Herzfeld's (2004) findings that ideal manhood emerges in competition. Those who have been working in London for a long time claim to have seen things change for the worse, as good jobs become harder to come by and salaries go down. The more experienced migrants blame it on newly arrived migrants who have "oversaturated" the market: "Every morning when I pick up my supplies from B&Q there are eight or nine Romanians waiting in a line asking me to give them some work," says Costică, one of the team managers working on house refurbishments. This was not happening ten years ago, when he first arrived in London to work on a job that his cousin had found for him. Those who have been working in the profession for a long time are frustrated by newly arrived co-nationals.

Costică tells me that he gets most of his jobs through his acquaintances, but also on the internet, where he tries to find clients. Somewhere between 1 percent and 3 percent of his applications lead to a job, and he needs to do these applications about 10 times a year. This means a lot of time spent filling in applications—time that does not count as "work." Most of these jobs are for one month. "I rarely lose jobs in the negotiation stage, the prices I offer are very competitive," he says. But this also means that unexpected costs are not covered; in those cases, instead of making a profit, he ends up owing the workers money. Although he feels he has learned a lot since he first started working in house refurbishments, the process of getting the jobs has become harder. When I ask if, after ten years in the profession, he thinks he should be entitled to work stability or at least sick pay, he says he doesn't want that: "When I can't work, I get no money. I just spend what I've saved." He proudly tells me he has had no work accidents, and that, even though he's been working here for a long time, he is still not registered with a GP. "I don't want to either. I don't want any money spent on me from the British state. Even though I myself give the state lots of money." This point of view is shared by many of his co-nationals, who pride themselves on their independence and their ability to take on risks.⁸ This is not always the case: one of the interviewees who was a rough sleeper at the time of the interview admitted to claiming benefits, despite being able to get a low-paid job. He was well aware of breaking an unwritten rule of masculinity, and framed it as proof of his cunning, rather than victimhood.

To the Romanian men, risk taking extends to the entire work environment. Working as self-employed comes with no sick pay, in an industry where the risk of injuries is high. As body strength is essential for taking on work, an injury means a period of no income, in a city where the cost of living is exorbitant. Costică's refusal to mitigate this risk resonates with Hayes's account of British construction workers refusing to implement health and safety measures, which were seen as emasculating through disciplining. For Costică, risks are managed and accounted for by the individual. At the same time, the perceived temporariness of his stay in London is also reflected in a refusal to "receive" from the state. As discussed below, the Romanian men in my study see London's multiculturalism not just as a sign that all are welcome here—in fact, Brexit proved exactly the opposite—but that people of all ethnicities are here to make their fortune and then leave. The resistance to mitigating risks by belonging to a community is a ramification of the perceived temporariness of men's migration to London.

Temporary Londoners

During the ten years he has been working in London, Costică has never attempted to make the city his home. Most of the time his living arrangements consist of a small room or a bed in a flat share. He goes to Romania several times a year. He has been supporting his family for ten years from afar. Now that his children have grown and he has managed to settle the major family debts, he plans to spend less time in London in the future. Relying on work he may find in Romania is not part of the plan; instead, it will be a slow, partial retirement: “Now I spend 80 percent of my time in London and 20 percent back home. I want to reach 50-50, half of the time here, half of the time there, with my wife.” While most of the Romanian workers on building sites declare they plan to return to their home country, for many this return is not planned as a permanent return. Many view themselves as commuters between their homes in Romania and London.

Living together as a family in London is not only economically unviable for many of the interviewees; it is also undesirable. Romanian construction workers speak in negative terms about their host city, adding that they do not believe it to be a good place to bring up their children. Often the reasons are connected to the perceived impropriety of the local culture, to do with a negative experience of London’s ethnic diversity, the acceptance (and display of) homosexuality, and excessive drinking. The white English fellow construction workers are perceived to be lazy, because they refuse to take on shifts that are longer than the standard eight hours a day. They are criticized by Romanian workers for excessive drinking: they “always go to the pub after work,” instead of organizing barbecues and including their families too. These complaints spell out different moralities and cultures of manhood in London.

For these Romanian men, normative masculinity is connected to how much one can work and earn, and the majority say that “making money” is the only purpose of their migration. Money translates into relationships kept with those at home and demonstrates their worth. There is an underlying patriotism in the phrase: they often repeat that they would not have left their country if they didn’t need to. Marta B. Erdal and Marek Pawlak (2017) find similar responses among Polish construction workers in Norway who have no intention to settle. Yet, as Berger and Mohr (1975) remind us, migrants are often pushed forward by a desire to change, often by social mobility—breaking away from the old class relations, and making a better future for themselves.

In Horváth’s study, young Hungarian migrants explain that they would not accept doing the same menial jobs at home, but they are willing to take on such jobs abroad. Horváth’s argument is that such working-class jobs pay little at home, and the employees tend to be treated disrespectfully. Such jobs, in other words, are seen as denigrating. When they pay well, they can confer respect. Similarly, Romanian laborers or male cleaners emphasize they “are not ashamed, they earn their money honestly.” Moreover, the present study shows that another aspect that enables class mobility for the migrants is the clear separation of local (English) and Romanian cultures, which allows for a certain level of anonymity in work relationships—even when the Romanians are part of Romanian migration networks. While abroad and away from the “home” social context, taking on work below one’s qualifications does not result in lack of prestige. The Romanians’ social distancing from what they perceive to be the local (English) culture, means they are not part of the English class system. Meanwhile, the money they earn allows migrants’ families to thrive back home, where gifts made to the children, house refurbishments, and other signs of plenty translate as prestige for the migrant worker. “Back home I can offer my daughter everything she wants, and she grows in a healthy environment,” tells Marcel, justifying the decision to relocate his wife and children back to their small Romanian town, after living with

them in London for a few years. “Here, what can you do when you get back home from work and your child asks, ‘What did you bring me, Daddy?’ and I have to say ‘Nothing, we can’t afford gifts all the time.’”

To the Romanian workers, the “English” are a homogeneous group, and they remain imperious to class distinctions within the host society. For the low- and mid-skilled migrants, class is experienced in terms of ethnicity, whereby different ethnic groups occupy different positions and occupations. Social distancing also allows the Romanians to act as individuals competing on the labor market, where they undercut pay and work conditions for the local English workers, and other ethnicities, without fearing social repercussions.

Studies focused on Polish migration also discuss processes of social differentiation. Magdalena Nowicka (2018) argues that some of the most important factors that influence social differentiation are to do with the place of origin, and the place of residence and work. As A. Datta demonstrates, the construction site is such a space of social differentiation, as it “forms the nodal point of concrete social relations and a conceptual or discursive space of gendered ethno-national identification” (2009: 196). Her study shows that the Polish develop as an integrated group by contrast with the English “other,” through the recognition of cultural traits, such as language, forms of socialization, and shared humor. These constructions of Polish masculinities illustrate “how EU expansion after 2004 has shaped perceptions of difference within workplaces of manual labour” (A. Datta 2012: 206). Romanian masculinity is similarly constructed in opposition to Englishness, and equally in relation to other ethnicities. Some of the migrants’ narratives reproduce the state anti-immigrant discourse, which they direct against other ethnicities (see Nowicka 2018).

In the run-up to the EU referendum, many of my interviewees thought a vote for Brexit unlikely: “They may not want us here, but they need us. Look around you at 8 am on the bus to work: the majority there are migrants. They know they need us.” The statement shows that the relation is reckoned simultaneously in terms of class and ethnicity. In the wake of the Brexit vote, many emphasized that they wanted to leave London, but that they will do it when they choose to, convinced that their status gave them the right to remain for as long as they wish. Refusal to become incorporated into the local culture is a way of expressing this power. One of the more middle-class interviewees, who owned a building company and expressed his low opinion on Romanian workers because of their lack of interest in becoming “integrated,” said, “All of these people have no interest or respect for the country they have come to. They all want quick money and nothing else. No wonder the British hate us and want us out, I don’t blame them at all.” Planned temporariness becomes a form of willful resistance to incorporation into the local culture.

Conclusions

Ethnicity, gender, and class articulate themselves to generate a specific transnational culture of masculinity among Romanian construction workers in London. The building site, as A. Datta (2009) has argued, is where hypermasculinity is performed, while the precariousness of the building industry helps to generate a culture of risk, which the workers take on if they are to be successful migrants. The building site is also where cultural distinction and boundaries between workers of different ethnicities arise: most markedly between the English and the Romanians. The competitive environment discourages the formation of bounded Romanian groups, or of full-fledged diasporic groups. London and the building site remain provisional places, while the workers continue to be invested in their places of departure. Despite having a wide range of

work trajectories and taking on more flexible gender roles in Romania and other destinations, workers are pulled toward London's construction industry, where models of hypermasculinity dominate. For those who have family responsibilities in particular, gender roles become fixed, with men as the breadwinner, as difficulties with childcare arrangements and precarious and less lucrative jobs for women pushes them out of the labor market.

For those Romanian men who take on low-skilled jobs, maintaining a distant relationship with the "English" (as employers) allows men to perform low-status jobs for the foreign "other" without jeopardizing their masculinity, while aspiring to a raised social status at home. Patriotism, dissatisfaction with the quality of life in London, the difficulty attaining property ownership in London,⁹ and the perception of the local culture as improper are some of the reasons that migrants give for wanting to remain "temporary." Home is where they demonstrate successful masculinity through fulfilling their role as breadwinner and ensuring the prosperity of the family.¹⁰

Romanian men's experiences of migration are characterized by an interplay of relative inclusion and exclusion, and so the construction of ethnic masculinities and the disassociation from local "English" forms of masculinities contribute to the general sense that home is elsewhere. Migration to the UK and its effects on Romanian masculinities needs to be seen in the context of two decades of migration flows to other European countries, which have challenged gender models, not only among migrants in destination countries, but also in their home communities. At the same time, multiple processes of migration and the frequent movement of people within the EU challenge notions of "home" and "destination" as stable places. If migration to Southern Europe has generated a culture whereby women can be mobile and take on the role of breadwinner, recent migration to the UK—and London in particular—has reversed this trend, encouraging less "flexible" gender roles and practices.

More "flexible" gender roles, such as those developed during other migrations, proved temporary, especially because men did not take on child-rearing and affective labor in the absence of the mothers. London's construction industry facilitates and enforces more "traditional" masculine hegemonies, with ideal males imagined as able, resilient bodies, highly competitive, and able to manage relations with others to their advantage. It is a masculinity model that reinforces gender and class inequalities, justified by neoliberal discourse in both the country of origin and destination.

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■ **NOTES**

1. In addition, two in-depth interviews were conducted in May 2017.
2. A study conducted by the Romanian think tank IRES found that in 2015 an average 46 percent of the Romanian population had a close member of family working abroad, with a higher percent in rural areas. Of these, 72 percent declared that the migrants in their family return home once a year or more. See <http://www.ires.com.ro/articol/306/profilul-romanilor-plecati-in-strainatate>.

3. Based on information from those interviewees who arrived in London before 2007.
4. These were secluded Hungarian villages in Romania who maintain cultural links to Hungary.
5. Outside London, interviews with women working in agriculture and stories about women working as caretakers paint a different picture, where women do earn enough to send remittances. I have not found it to be the case in London, although my sample is not representative of women working in hospitality and care industries in London.
6. In 2017 Romania had the lowest gender pay gap in Europe. See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics.
7. Care workers in Italy working in informal circumstances are called *badante*. In Romania, the name is now associated with the wave of migrant women who take on these jobs.
8. For example, the respondents were reluctant to use the National Health Service (NHS). See Sabina Stan's (2014) work on Romanian migrants in Ireland who choose to return to Romania for health checks and treatments.
9. Home ownership is very important for Romanians. It is the country with the highest rate of home ownership (over 90 percent) in the EU.
10. There are exceptions to this, such as when migrant men choose to come and settle in the UK with their families (see Moroşanu 2013).

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