

A CASE STUDY ON THE POWER OF GLOBAL CRISES TO BUILD OR DIVIDE  
COMMUNITIES

Tepavcevic, Sanja. *Global Crises, Resilience, and Future Challenges. Experiences of Post-Yugoslav and Post-Soviet Migrants*. Hannover-Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2024, 270 p.

The main purpose of this study, as Tepavcevic indicates, is the impact of the collapses of the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia on migration trajectories of their population and their resilience in consecutive global crises. Among these successive world catastrophes are the fall of the Socialist bloc, the global financial crisis, the COVID-19 epidemic, and the conflict in Ukraine. Because of these processes and socio-economic breaks, post-Yugoslav and post-Soviet communities and individuals are often on the move. The study examines how the political, economic, and security regimes have created their resilience through migration and the migrant experience. This book aims to reveal the relationships between global crises, the challenges they generate among individuals and communities, and the patterns of resilience they produce.

The pro-democratic upheavals in the socialist nations of Central and Eastern Europe served as the impetus for the fall in 1989 of the post-World War II bipolar world system manifested by the competition between two super-powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, which collapsed in 1991. In the 1990s, several regional conflicts of dissolution mostly afflicted post-Yugoslav and some post-Soviet areas. These wars, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in the Balkans, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the Caucasus, and (Nagorno-)Karabakh in Azerbaijan, remained frozen, unresolved, and perhaps to intensify. Concerns with group identities, including national, ethnic and religious factors, significantly impact the

paths of these disputes. The most recent conflict in Ukraine originated from Russia's annexation of Crimea. This battle also represents, in many ways, the continued fallout from the fall of the USSR, especially regarding collective identity, of which the most controversial is national identity. Furthermore, a series of "color revolutions" occurred in post-socialist Europe and Eurasia between 2000 and 2005 as part of a parallel process. These revolutions might be viewed as an extension of the democratic uprisings of the 20th century, which first took place in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary during the Cold War and then in the post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav areas.

A small number of academic studies have methodically examined the intricate relationship between migration and crises. In addition to being two unique field studies, evaluations of post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav migrations typically concentrate on different facets of migration and integration in various settings. The attention of distinguished academics and most discussions about post-Yugoslav migrations have focused on tragedies connected to the problems of shifting identities and forced migration, plus other cultural and psychological facets of integration and migration. On the other hand, post-Soviet migration experts tend to concentrate more on socio-economic issues, even though in their writings, they also discuss cultural and psychological problems and the institutional elements of integration and migration in host nations.

Due to comprehensive research and extensive analysis of the subject, consulting a broad spectrum of literature, and conducting ethnographic research with more than 200 people/migrants, the conclusions presented by Sanja Tepavcevic are very relevant and valuable. For the author, vulnerability (being exposed to death threats) and resilience (an ability to survive and continue living) are essential components of researching migrant issue(s). In migration studies, the concepts of vulnerability and resilience are profoundly interrelated. Human migration has been one of the most widespread adaptive mechanisms in response to various crises, including natural disasters and violent wars. Different threats require different behavioral modifications to maximize the chances of avoiding death.

In addition to the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 of the first part examines the factors that influenced migration from the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia during the Cold War. This chapter explores the history of Soviet and Yugoslav migration communities and their diasporas, highlighting the unique motivators as well as emerging patterns and types of allegiance within these communities. The formation of division lines during the fall of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia is analyzed in Chapter 3, along with how these events affected decisions to migrate or remain in the country. According to this analysis, the crises following the two breakdowns were multi-exclusive by their nature. In contrast, Chapter 4 explores the causes

and mechanisms underlying the migration paths associated with the collapses of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. As a result, this chapter adds to the body of knowledge on migration by offering a more complex source of resilience-based migrant community typology instead of the three already established varieties. The chapter also highlights relationships between these typologies and the many loyalty types demonstrated among the immigrant populations.

The book's third part focuses on lessons learnt from the breakdowns, particularly how the experiences of resilience from the post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav immigration are applied in later world crises. Chapter 5 examines the impact, results, and effects of the Great Recession on people's personal, professional, and geographic life paths taken by post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav citizens. Chapter 6 details the difficulties faced by post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav immigrants and their communities, as well as their tenacity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reactions related to the challenges and hardships brought on by Russia's continuous invasion in Ukraine are analyzed in Chapter 7. Additionally, it provides information about the new types of resilience among immigrants from the former Soviet Union, with a comparative analysis of immigration from Yugoslavia. Chapter 8 places the findings in context, within the body of current literature, the practical ramifications of the analysis, and recommends directions for additional study. A review of early post-World War II emigrations from Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union during the Cold War shows that exclusions are a powerful tool for authoritarian administrations, creating societal rifts and motivating many of the most alienated to flee. The violent battles that preceded and contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union, as well as the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, caused the existing "imagined" groups (B. Anderson's concept) to become more divided, keeping some individuals from previously established communities and leaving out others. Typically, these divides occur across the lines of crisis-generated potential allies and are perceived as actual threats; therefore, a number of views about relations with other nations are partially reproduced to survive these threats.

In times of global crises and systemic breakdown, workers and citizens are frequently evicted from the communities they formerly belonged to. This fact suggests a far-reaching theoretical inference, indicating that exclusion tends to change an individual's sense of belonging and modify their loyalty and identification with a community or collective identity. Many post-Yugoslav and post-Soviet migrants displayed *soft resilience* because they lacked commitment to their home communities, resulting in the choice to emigrate and the *concrete resilience* demonstrated by emigration itself.

In addition to being acknowledged in Business Studies, compelled loyalty is a feature of monopolies and authoritarian political regimes. Tepavcevic offers a new

concept related to the form of loyalty, that of “loyalty of ignorance”. *“This concept differs from the other four – already mentioned loyalty of coercion, commitment, convenience, and contended – in a way that it can be further classified as strong, but not as positive or negative because it is produced as unconscious persuasion by the regime”* (page 247). In contrast to disloyalty or indifference, which in the majority of the examined cases frequently resulted in “exit” or emigration, the loyalty of ignorance usually did not cause any change in the status quo for people, who did not realize they were unhappy but were nonetheless unhappy. *“As a result, this lack of awareness made them resilient under the pressures of an authoritarian regime. This characteristic still exists among many Soviet-era emigrants and post-Soviet citizens. The presence of this form of loyalty, combined with loyalty of coercion and the unavoidable fear it generates, has contributed significantly to the longevity of Putin’s regime”* (page 247).

According to Tepavcevic, one intriguing and surprising conclusion drawn from the analysis is that throughout the Cold War, Soviet immigrants lived in Eastern Europe. At the same time, Yugoslav emigrants resided in Western Europe and the US. Most likely, they were more devoted to convenience and felt loyalty to the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia compared to their post-Cold War emigration fellow citizens. Reshaping the identities of individuals and groups can be seen as a form of soft resilience, recognizing that the modifications of identity also lead to changes in objects and forms of loyalty. These immigrant groups serve as conduits for resilience, attracting fresh allegiances to supplement the already discussed ones. Thus, despite staying in host nations for an extended period and occasionally being born there, most post-Yugoslav and post-Soviet immigrants still consider themselves as the ‘others’ compared to the majority societies where they are settled.

The advent and widespread usage of social media networks, which promoted the embeddedness of communities, has been one of the most significant resilience mechanisms in the most recent and ongoing worldwide crises of immigrant populations in their home nations and other immigrant populations at different immigration locations. Digital technology has given this phenomenon a new form and nature – translocality. These virtual or digital migrant communities add a new dimension to B. Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined’ communities, highlighting their dynamic and changeable nature. Socio-cultural transnational activities cover various social and cultural transactions through which ideas and meanings are exchanged. Recent research has established the concept and importance of social remittances that provide a distinct form of social capital between migrants living abroad and those who remain at home. To say that immigrants build social fields that link those abroad with those back home is not to say that their lives are not firmly rooted in a particular place and time. Indeed, they are residents of their new community as much as anyone else. Individuals may migrate to seek a better

life and avoid poverty, political persecution, or social or family pressures. Often, a combination of factors may play out differently for women and men. Gender roles, relations and inequalities affect the decisions of those who migrate and the impacts on migrants themselves.

The profile of the post-Yugoslav and post-Soviet labor migrants unfolds in the vast expanse between the poles of “euro-plumbers” and “euro-stars”. The jobs of the first group often fall under the term “3D” – Difficult, Dirty, and Dangerous. Migrants from these two groups are a typical reflection of the dual labor market theory, according to which the foreign workforce fills sectors that are not attractive to the locals. Such sectors include construction, tourism, hospitality, domestic help, care for older people, etc. The second category of migrants has been given a different label, “brain drain”. This category of migrants is at the center of political and academic discourse in all countries. “Brain drain” is a severe curse to fragile economies because it disempowers the most highly qualified and innovative segment of the workforce. Sanja Tepavcevic has an indisputable capacity in her future research to contribute significantly to exploring the “brain drain” category. Despite the problems of terminology, the transnational approach is very fruitful for conceptualizing not only the migration history of the post-socialist countries but also the overall history. This does not mean that all social phenomena should be conceived as transnational or even that there was anything “transnational” before the nation was “imagined”.

Applying autoethnography as a method of analysis, Tepavcevic’s position as the author is of great significance. In this study, even though the author is an “insider”, she is aware that maybe she is burdened with the so-called “double insider syndrome”. This means that despite sharing her daily life and habits with a community, the author also retains scientific objectivity, which, in a way, represents a lawyer in the “scientific dispute” for her community. As a Yugoslav citizen born in the later stages of the Cold War, she saw and recorded the differences between Yugoslavs living in her homeland (of which she was a part at the time) and Yugoslav migrants, such as her family, friends, and kin. In her social circles, professional mobility – or the experience of working overseas – was highly regarded as a soft talent despite the fact that these groups were comparable in terms of citizenship, origin, culture, education, and background. She was forced to relocate with her family to post-Soviet Russia as a teenager in the early 1990s when the war tore Yugoslavia apart, and she experienced every phase of assimilation into post-Soviet Russian society. This path included beginning with a rudimentary Russian language instruction and, nine years later, landing a job as an anchor and reporter for a Russian television network. She naturally assimilated into Moscow’s immigrant groups as a journalist and a migrant. The profession later brought her to Hungary, where she became actively

associated with post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav immigrant populations, mainly in Spain, Germany, Austria, and Hungary, but also extending globally and within the European Union (EU).

The main theoretical point of Tepavcevic's research is that global crises have the power to create new communities and divide the existing ones. While those who experience isolation from mainstream society in times of crisis are likely to migrate, those who feel included in communities inside their settlement tend to stay. Therefore, migration turns into a quest for reintegration. The boundaries of post-Yugoslav and post-Soviet societies, including their immigrant populations, seem tightly tied to the system or rule that excluded them. As the analysis proposed in this book demonstrates, identity reveals the intensity of loyalty among these communities.

Sanja Tepavcevic's book provides a valuable and captivating window into the realm of global crises, resilience, and challenges related to Migration Studies that are inaccessible to most of us. The courage of a woman to "catch up" with such a sensitive, deep and broad topic, and at the same time, comprehensively, analytically and synthetically shed light on phenomena and processes, is to salute and "bend to the knees". Therefore, I highly recommend that ordinary readers, experts and social scientists (especially) read this book.