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## **Marriage Migrants in Bulgaria – Aspects of Social Adaptation**

This article is based on first-hand ethnographic data and focuses on two cases of bicultural, bilingual and cross-national couples of Bulgarian women and their migrant husbands (an Egyptian and a Filipino). More specifically, it deals with different aspects of social and emotional adaptation of the male marriage migrants to the receiving country – Bulgaria. The main goal of the article is to present different specificities of their everyday life, socialisation and professional development abroad while still being close to their roots. Since marriage with a local is a crucial factor for this multi-layered process, the role of their Bulgarian wives is also considered. The text contains two thematic sections – the first one focuses on the social adaptation of the immigrants in the context of Bulgarian language acquisition. The process each of the foreigners have been going through is presented by their manners of communication within their own bilingual marriages, the professional environment and the ‘new’ social circle. The second section deals with the place of the immigrants’ home country within their lives in migration and their nuclear mixed families. Their habits and the activities they engage in ‘there’, are also used as a tool for describing a part of their social and emotional adaptation ‘here’.

*Key words:* marriage migration, social adaptation, local language, home visits, co-presence

### **Брачни мигранти у Бугарској – аспекти друштвене адаптације**

Овај рад се заснива на етнографским подацима „из прве руке“ и фокусиран је на два случаја бикултурних, билингвалних и интернационалних парова жена Бугарки и њихових мужева миграната (Египћанина и Филипинца). Прецизније, рад се бави различитим аспектима социјалне и емоционалне адаптације брачних миграната мушкараца у земљу пријема – Бугарску. Главни циљ овог рада је да укаже на различите специфичности њиховог живота, социјализацију и професионални развој у иностранству, док у исто време они и даље остају блиски својим коренима. С обзиром на то да је брак са припадником локалне заједнице круцијални разлог овог вишеслојног процеса, улога њихових жена Бугарки се такође разматра. Текст је подељен у два тематска дела – први је усмерен на друштвену адаптацију имиграната у контексту усвајања бугарског језика. Процес који ова два странца пролазе представљен је на основу начина комуникације у њиховим двојезичним браковима, професионалном окружењу и „новом“ друштвеном кругу. У другом делу рада разматра се место матичне државе имиграната у њиховим животима у ситуацији

миграције и у њиховим нуклеарним мешовитим породицама. Њихове навике и активности којима су се бавили „тамо“, такође се употребљавају као инструмент за описивање дела њихове социјалне и емоционалне адаптације „овде“.

*Кључне речи:* брачна миграција, друштвена адаптација, локални језик, кућне посете, узајамно присуство

## Introduction

When it comes to marital migration, the decision to marry outside the country of origin predetermines changing residence for one of the partners. However, in some cases, the marriage is the intended aim and the migration is the means for achieving it. Whereas in others, leaving of the homeland is a result of ongoing intimate relationship. The former suggests arranged marriages (including the so-called ‘mail-order brides’) with the help of intermediary or international matchmaking agencies, where migrants (mostly women) aim to improve their financial situation and to achieve better living conditions by marrying wealthy(ier) partners abroad (Robinson 2007; Timmerman, Wets 2011; Ricordeau 2018). The second type involves casual personal face-to-face or on-line acquaintances with no (obvious) preliminary aspiration for marriage and/or migration. The current study examines namely the latter, using as an example two mixed couples: the partners of the first met in a work-related Facebook group and of the second – in person.

This article deals with some specifics of the social and emotional adaptation of the two foreign partners (the husbands) in the receiving country – Bulgaria. The main goal is to present different aspects of their everyday life, socialisation and professional development abroad while still being close to their roots. Since marriage with a local is a crucial factor for this multi-layered process, the role of their Bulgarian wives is also taken into account. One of the main focuses of the study is defined by the immigrants’ life outside of their usual native linguistic environment and by being a part of bilingual families. In general, language is essential for basic and more specific communication through which people “construct shared knowledge of each other’s lives and their relationships with one another” (Cheal 2002, 12), as well as they “experience the social world and engage with others” (Eicker 2017, 46). Therefore, there are several aspects of the immigrants’ lives referring to the establishment of linguistic manner of communication on a daily basis.

First, there is the language situation within the home, defined by a couple of factors – the negotiation of a language(s) between the two spouses (see Piller 2002), the role of both parents’ mother tongues in the upbringing of the offspring and the personal strife and need of the immigrant for acquiring the local language. Another aspect is the communication within the extended family – the own kin suggests the usage of the native language, and the contacts with the in-laws require Bulgarian, but also ‘all possible linguistic means’ (like mixing of languages, including the intermediation of the local partner). Second, the linguistic behaviour of the immigrants outside of the home refers to the preferred and avoided languages. Their examination could help understanding not only the foreigners’ manner of commu-

nication within the ‘new’ social circle (consisting of locals, as well as compatriots), but also the attitudes of the acquaintances and friends towards the two men. Third, there is the linguistic situation within the professional environment of the immigrants. Yuxin and Ours (2015) and Eicker (2017) argue that not knowing the local language can prevent foreigners from finding skilled and well-paid jobs, however, the statement cannot be referred to as ubiquitous. For example, there are expats who not only are employees in international companies, but also work with language(s) considered international, such as English, French, and German. The latter also refers to the two husbands in the focus of the current article, having in mind the sphere of their professional development.

Another major aspect of the adaptation in migration is the way the foreigners deal with distance and adjust to a ‘new’ lifestyle abroad. Ever since both of them have settled ‘here’, the information and communications technologies have been developing rapidly, thus providing them with many tools for staying in touch with their family and friends in the native country and being virtually co-present with them (Urry 2000; 2002; Baldassar 2008). The travels to the homeland, however, are essential for maintaining immediate face-to-face and ‘body-to-body’ communication with the relatives, allowing them to ‘read’ each other’s minds (Urry 2003, 163–164). This helps the migrants to ‘face the place’, to be physically co-present in their homelands and the birth family homes, which also enables them to ‘face the moment’ by being ‘there’ and by participating in some special events or everyday activities with family and friends (Boden & Molotch 1994; Urry 2002; Mason 2004, 422).

Visiting the ‘other’ country has its significance for the Bulgarian wives and their in-laws, too, as it allows them “to build up a history of having known each other over time, and to acquire mutual and shared knowledge of each other... sustained in between times in more virtual ways, over distance” (Mason 2004, 424). Even though the main aim for these visits is to establish and preserve the personal relationship with the relatives, some aspiration for (re-) discovering the historical and cultural heritage of the ‘other’ homeland is also an important part of the overall experience (cf. Stephenson 2002, 391, 393; Lopez 2017, 158–159). Later on, when they return ‘here’, recollections of the meetings and the events ‘there’ turn into both carriers and triggers of memories for emotional encounters (Svašek 2008, 218). At the same time, these travels as well as the activities the migrants/couples engage in are indicative of their lifestyle in general, on the one hand, and on the other, of the differences between the social environments the migrants dwell within in both places. To illustrate this better, the purposes, intensity and some specificities of the visits, as well as the partners’ personal motivations will be discussed on the next pages, too.

The current article is based on first-hand ethnographic data, collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews (in English and Bulgarian) with the couples.<sup>1</sup> The conversation with one of the families was conducted on-line via

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<sup>1</sup> The research was realised within the scope of the ongoing project *Cultural Adaptation and Inte-*

Facebook and with the other – in person in their family home (both manners were chosen by the interlocutors as the most suitable for them). One of the couples was found through a contact of another interviewee of mine, and the other family – via the intermediation of a common acquaintance.

The term ‘mixed’, used throughout the whole text, is considered as unifying in terms of bicultural and bilingual<sup>2</sup>, as well as cross-national. The latter, according to Cottrell (1990, 152) encompasses marriages between external partners where the two of them keep their birth citizenship and maintain connection with their native country, regardless of the place of residence. This refers to both of the immigrants considered in the research. For the purposes of this article, I chose to present the two cases in a comparative perspective, therefore, both common and distinctive features could be found between the two foreign partners and the mixed couples in general.

### The couples<sup>3</sup>

The circumstances of partners’ introduction in both families defer significantly from one another and so does the initial development of their relationships. The *first couple* is of Eva (b. 1987) from Bulgaria and Mohamed (b. 1987) from Egypt. They met in a Facebook group while participating in a common international IT on-line course in 2013. Over time, they started exchanging personal messages and conducting audio(-video) calls via Viber several times a day for a six-month period. This daily virtual communication allowed them to just talk and exchange information concerning ‘nothing in particular’, but also to discuss important topics and issues (Wilding 2006, 131), and in their case – to get to know each other and even make plans for their future together. However, at a certain point Mohamed invited Eva to Cairo, the city he lived and worked at that time. The visit lasted two weeks. A year after they met on-line and six months after they faced each other in person, they made the relationship official during Mohamed’s first visit to Bulgaria, at the end of 2013.

The foreign partner of the *second couple* is of Filipino descent. At the time of their first meeting, Maya (b. 1975) had been working as an English professor in a Chinese university for two years and Jonah (b. 1984) had been studying IT in Dumaguete City, Negros Island, the place of residence of him and his family. Unlike the Bulgarian-Egyptian couple, they did not meet from distance under professional circumstances, but were introduced in person by a colleague of Maya, while on a vacation in the Philippines. In the next year (2005), Jonah took a teaching position in the same university in China. After a year of dating while living in the cam-

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<sup>2</sup> One of the couples are also bi-religious, however, this does not refer to the topic of the article.

<sup>3</sup> The names used in the text are fictional. They are chosen among names typical for the respective culture, but do not correspond with the interlocutors’ birth names.

pus, the couple made the decision to get married and for that matter they did not try to renew their employment contracts, but moved to Bulgaria.

Although Jonah and Maya were living abroad when the relationship started, being outside their usual cultural and linguistic surroundings, they did not find themselves in an extraordinary situation. As clarified during our conversation, she had been there for long enough to find a suitable social environment for herself, and for him the Chinese culture was not unfamiliar or unusual. Most of all, they created a daily routine for themselves, seeing each other and communicating face-to-face every day, which enabled them, as Urry (2003, 163) claims, to “sense directly their overall response”. While for Mohamed and Eva, who throughout the first year of their relationship were living not only apart from each other, but also away, the ‘virtual co-presence’ was such a manner of overcoming the feeling of distance between the partners (Baldassar 2008, 252). Hence, although the initial stage of both couples’ relationships evolved differently, they reached one and the same decision for their future together. Both got married ‘here’ and had small weddings, without any rituals typical for any of the cultures, and without wedding receptions. In both cases, the decision for taking their relationship to a next level was provoked by the desire of all partners to ensure the foreigners’ stay in the country, so they would be able to ‘feel and function like a family’, as Mahler (2001, 584) states. At the time the research was conducted, Eva and Mohamed had no children and Maya and Jonah had two boys (b. 2007 and 2010).

## The place of residence

The families reside in their own apartments in the wives’ birth places. Respectively, the Bulgarian-Egyptian is in the country’s capital Sofia, and the Bulgarian-Filipino – in a smaller town, the administrative centre of a district in Eastern Bulgaria.<sup>4</sup> In the narratives, the reasons for choosing the place for dwelling were outlined as both practical, concerning partners’ future personal and professional development, and emotional, coming to loved-ones.

Mohamed and Eva shared it took them a while to think over which of the native countries would be more suitable for them to settle down. At the time of their introduction, both of them had stable jobs – Eva was a banker and Mohamed worked in the IT sector – professions which they practice till today. The professional development of both of them was pointed as one of the two main motives for choosing Bulgaria as the place of residence.

It was easier for me to come [here] and find a job [...] I can work anywhere [...] For Eva, coming to Egypt and finding a job in a bank without Arabic would [have] be[en] harder.

The second reason, which seemed to facilitate the final decision, was much more personal. It derived from Eva’s close relationship with her mother:

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<sup>4</sup> The exact location will not be specified, since I believe this would make Jonah and his family too recognizable.

[for me] it was harder, since I am an only child [...] it used to be just the two of us [...] if I need[ed] to move, she would [have] stay[ed] all alone.

Eva was trying to avoid worrying her mother by leaving, and most importantly, she felt morally obliged to remain near and to take care of her not only in case of need, but also on a daily basis (see Baldassar 2014, 2). However, this situation seems to have suited the foreign partner, who after the marriage, at the beginning of 2014, left his job in Egypt and moved to Sofia.

The partners in the Bulgarian-Filipino couple found themselves abroad when a decision for their settlement was to be made. Therefore, China was one of the two considered options, however, allegedly it was never really a favourite. The reason for that was mostly practical (but also a bit emotional in perspective) – “[We] had one-year contracts and respectively [our] visas used to be renewed each year”. The instability related to their professional life drew the attention to the possible future inconveniences, when the partners would have had responsibilities for their children, not just themselves. Contrary to the first case, Jonah and Maya considered only one of the native countries as a possible settlement destination and the Philippines was not one of them. A reason was not directly stated, but some circumstantial indications could be found in the narrative. At that time, Bulgaria was considered as more perspective in comparison to the ‘other’ country, given that it was about to enter the European Union (on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2007). However, it also became clear that back then the couple accepted Bulgaria as a temporal dwelling destination, from where they could find another (a better one) to settle down in the foreseeable future: “We did not intend to live here [...] do not know where, but just not here”. By choosing ‘international’ names for both of their children they have reinforced this intention, though it has not been realized yet. At first, staying ‘here’ was regarded as a compromise, a decision which Maya took harder than Jonah. However, in a few years the spouses were able to embrace their lives and found a way to adapt to the socio-cultural environment.

Although the couples had their own motives for choosing the country to settle down, defined by their specific needs and plans for the future, both of them have considered moving abroad. In this respect, Bulgaria has been the place of residence and professional development, but has never been perceived as the final destination. Mohamed and Eva do not rule out the possibility to go ‘somewhere else’ in Europe, but not in Egypt. Jonah and Maya, on the other hand, have occasionally been considering the Philippines as a possible future (temporal) destination, since “especially now, the country is [economically] developing at a fast pace”. These considerations are provoked by the quest for new experiences (for the Bulgarian-Egyptian couple) and the desire for better living conditions in general (for the Bulgarian-Filipino family).

## Language and social adaptation

Both Mohamed and Jonah have established specific linguistic models within their households, the extended family, their social circle and the work environ-

ment. However, these manners for communication could be estimated as more or less developing with the time and influenced by the particular situation. In both cases the foreigners (and their wives) have multilingual behaviour. Despite the fact that Bulgaria is the place of residence, Bulgarian is not recognized as the predominant language for communication by any of the families.

Even though English is not the mother tongue of either of the partners of the *Bulgarian-Egyptian couple*, it has been established as the main one from the very beginning of their relationship. The choice was claimed to be ‘natural’, being the only common language between the spouses. In this respect, they use it not only within the household, but also outside.

There are several factors facilitating this dominance, regardless of the fact that Mohamed has been studying Bulgarian<sup>5</sup> ever since he moved to the country. At first, the learning process took place only at home, where his ‘teacher’ was Eva, however, its usage was rather sporadic than a practice. As Piller (2002, 137–142) argues, the linguistic habit the partners have established at the beginning of their communication could hardly be changed.

Sometimes at home we say, ‘lets speak Bulgarian, because I should learn Bulgarian’, we start to speak for 5 – 10 sentences and then [we switch] to English.

Therefore, three years later, he started attending language courses, trying to channel the rather passive knowledge he had acquired by then. Nevertheless, Mohamed estimates mastering the local language as significant for his overall adaptation within the place of residence, his work environment as an employee in an international IT company, does not facilitate the usage of Bulgarian, but requires English only. Then, there is also his personal (and the couple’s in general) social circle. When he communicates face-to-face with friends and acquaintances of Arabic origin, the conversations are carried out in their native language.<sup>6</sup> However, there are situations of on-line communication with ‘non-typical’ linguistic manner. ‘It is funny that when we text each other on Facebook and WhatsApp we use English, I do not know why, it is weird [laughter]’. Which brings us back to the previously mentioned factor – the linguistic situation within the work environment – for many of them it is in English and its usage has turned into a habit even between compatriots.

Along with that, there is another group of friends, important for Mohamed’s socio-linguistic adaptation. It consists of Bulgarians, many of whom he knows through his wife. Although such a group should predispose the usage of Bulgarian, English, once again, is pointed as the preferable language in their conversations. However, there is this one friend whose linguistic behaviour defers from the others’.

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<sup>5</sup> Eva does not study Arabic purposefully, she knows and uses a few words and sentences, acquired with the help of her husband. Although she claims a certain interest towards the language, she also notes it has not become a priority for her, yet.

<sup>6</sup> When Eva or others, not mastering the language are not present.

He almost exclusively speaks to me in Bulgarian, he speaks in slang [...] it is difficult for me to understand him [...] I even started to accept this, I started to speak to him [in Bulgarian], I make mistakes, but he corrects me.

Obviously, finding himself in a consistent linguistic situation, even one that does not give much of a choice, may activate freer verbal usage of Bulgarian. In this respect, there is to it and his attempts with Eva's mother which have been difficult since she "speaks Russian, a bit of French and a bit of German" and Mohamed does not. Therefore, their conversations (especially during the first years of his stay) have been either laconic using 'some' English, or through the intermediation of Eva. So, a possible strife for major communication independence could be a motivation for better mastering of Bulgarian (at least verbal).

The linguistic situation of the *Bulgarian-Filipino couple* is quite different, even though English is the main language for communication, as well. Its place within the family is more fundamental, since it is one of Jonah's mother tongues and Maya, being a philologist in English, recognizes the mastering of the language as an important factor for one's self development, especially considering the children. Therefore, since the place of residence predisposes the acquisition of Bulgarian anyway, both parents initially stressed on the 'other' mother tongue in the family, which turned out to be crucial for the linguistic choice within the household. Therefore, having in mind other bilingual couples in my research, Jonah and Maya made an unconventional decision giving priority to the non-local language.

It was important [for us] that the children speak English [...] that is why their language skills in Bulgarian were put on the second place within the household [...] There was this kind of division – at home we spoke only English, outside – only Bulgarian, we never mixed them.

The parents had made up their minds even before the birth of their first son. According to them, the key to acquiring both native languages was the consistency in keeping their usage separate. Otherwise, as Hamers and Blanc (2000, 62) claim, "mixed context... will induce confusion and interference" with the children. This manner of communication was strictly followed by both parents in the rearing of their two boys (cf. Piller 2002, 257–259).

The practice has altered a bit when the older son started school,<sup>7</sup> which inevitably led to more intense communication in Bulgarian (having in mind the schooling program in Bulgarian and the enhanced Bulgarian social environment). Afterwards, in the last a couple of years, the communication in Maya's native language was 'allowed' at home. However, it has been used irregularly, without having the equality of one of the mother tongues within the family and the priority of the official local language. The reason for that derives from the initial manner of

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<sup>7</sup> The children were born about three years apart from each other, so, the practice was followed until they were respectively seven-eight and five-six years old.



communication set by the parents. The children have better acquired English<sup>8</sup> spending most of their time (in this period of their growing-up) with their parents, having the chance to learn and practice Bulgarian only with their grandparents and in the kindergarten. As a result, they have greater confidence in and prefer the usage of English which the parents estimate as a proof of achieving their initial goal and as an undeniable positive for their future development (see Piller 2002, 251–255; Pileva 2018, 225).

On the other hand, there is Jonah, for whom this situation has a dual meaning. He was able not only to teach his children to one of his native languages, but also to practice it daily within the family.<sup>9</sup> However, this has not been in favour of his own linguistic adaptation to the country of residence. Having the comfort within the household, he has not found the need to make extra efforts in speaking Bulgarian. His knowledge rather passive, has not been acquired in a language course since he has never attended one, but is mostly picked up from his surroundings. Even though he understands ‘most of it’, the communication with his in-laws, for example, is not completely independent as it is difficult for him to speak in Bulgarian and they do not know English. In this situation, similarly to Mohamed and Eva’s case, some mediation in the translation is needed. However, this was not reported to be the case in general with the rest of the Bulgarian kin who use English freely.

As far as it goes to Jonah’s work environment, English once again is the dominant language. For twelve years he has changed two types of jobs and a couple of employers. Although he used to have a teaching position in China, he has never looked for similar work development in Bulgaria. For the first three years of his stay, Jonah was working seasonally in one of the seaside resorts. Led by his own interest towards cooking, the preferred position by him was as a chef in a hotel restaurant. At the same time, this was a job he could do without any diplomas or previous professional experience in the field. Considering the fact that at that time his Bulgarian language was scarce, he communicated with his colleagues and supervisors mainly in English. Afterwards, he turned to another professional development, which resonated to his education, by becoming a computer designer in international IT companies. Most importantly, he began working full-time from home. This new situation facilitated the dominance of English as the language used daily by him and also narrowed down his social contacts within the place of residence, thus making mastering of Bulgarian even less essential.

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<sup>8</sup> Following the Finnish linguist Tove Skutnabb-Kangas’ ([1984] 2007, 18) statement, it is the first learned, best known and most used language by the children in the family. The proclamation considers the extent to which the offspring (since infant age) is being exposed to a certain spoken language(s) on daily basis.

<sup>9</sup> This does not refer to the Cebuano language, also native to Jonah, which he uses only for intra-ethnic communication, including his birth family in the Philippines. Considered as ‘useless’ in his present living region, he has never spoken it before his children and wife and does not intend to in the future.

In general, Jonah's social circle is quite small and most importantly, it is not in favour of his language acquisition in any way. On the one hand, although his closest friend is of Bulgarian descent, the communication between them is conducted in English. Instead of aiming to verbally improve his linguistic knowledge in the local language, Jonah prefers to make himself comfortable leaning on the well-known native language which almost everyone around him use well enough. On the other hand, it should be noted that the residence in a relatively small town may make it difficult for a foreigner to find other compatriots and to become a part of an immigrant community. Even though the family is acquainted with several other Bulgarian–Filipino couples living in the vicinity, the communication between them is too occasional, since all other migrants are women and it is difficult for them and Jonah to find variety of common topics and reasons to get together more often. Nevertheless, whenever they get in touch with each other they speak in English only. This is because of the different local Filipino dialects native to each of them and because it is easier for their Bulgarian partners to participate in the conversations, too.

As it became clear, both migrants have more or less solid passive knowledge of Bulgarian (mostly verbal, having bigger difficulties in reading and writing). Without some external (such as the family environment and the social circle) or internal (such as their own inner motivation) push-pull factors, however, none of them would be able to put their linguistic knowledge into use entirely. Although Jonah has been living in the country for a longer period of time, it seems like he uses Bulgarian less often than Mohamed does. There are several reasons for this situation – Jonah not only has a very limited social circle, but also his household surroundings are not linguistically predisposing for acquiring and practicing Bulgarian in general. At the same time, Mohamed has at least two people close to him who more (one of his friends) or less (his wife) regularly communicate with him in the local language. It should be also pointed out that so far neither of the migrants have found themselves in an extremely difficult linguistic situation, requiring the obligatory usage of Bulgarian.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, not having mastered the official language of the country of residence has not affected immigrants' opportunities to find jobs in any way. On the contrary, the international IT companies Mohamed and Jonah have been working for years now, do not require the command of Bulgarian, but – the proficiency of English.

As far as the usage of the latter within the household is concerned, in order for the couples to communicate properly, all partners need to master the language on a level good enough, not only for (simple) daily conversations, but also for conducting debates and even handling conflicts. The *Bulgarian-Filipino* couple's proficiency in English is presumed by partners' origin and professional development. Jonah grew up acquiring the language as one of his mother tongues, practicing it all

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<sup>10</sup> A specific exception of this statement is the communication with the state and local administration, however, these cases have not been frequent (enough) during the years, so to stimulate the mastering of Bulgarian, and moreover in these situations the migrants have the linguistic support of their wives.

his life under different circumstances, and Maya studied it professionally, building her entire career on teaching it at Universities and International Colleges in Bulgaria and China. In regard to the *Bulgarian-Egyptian* couple, English is the second language, subsequently acquired as a foreign one.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, neither Mohamed, nor Eva had used it verbally as consistently before they got in touch with each other, as they do afterwards. However, they understand each other entirely communicating in English almost exclusively. In this respect, neither the migrant husbands, nor the Bulgarian wives, regard the main usage of English as a disadvantage of their relationship. Quite the opposite – they even aim at it. This only reinforces the lack of motivation for the foreigners to learn their wives' mother tongue and diminishes its possible necessity in the future.

## Adaptation in motion

The way these two immigrants deal with the distance from their relatives and their birth place in general, is also a part of their adaptation to the country of residence. In this respect, there are tangible and intangible manners (through conveyance of goods and object of sentimental meaning), as well as communication from distance (audio/video calls and exchanging of messages through on-line communication tools) and personal meetings. However, the focus of this section is the physical co-presence 'there'. The visits to the husbands' native countries (the purposes, frequency, planning, activities etc.) affect more or less Mohamed and Jonah's lifestyle, and vice versa. The travels, on the one hand, could be accepted as physical and emotional journeys back to both migrants' birth families and ethno-cultural roots (see Nguyen & King 2002, 221; Stephenson 2002, 392), giving them the opportunity to be "literally seeing, being co-present" (Mason 2004, 424) with their loved-ones living abroad. On the other, the cultural origin of the immigrants becomes a sensible part of the mixed couples' background, which has a reflection on both Eva and Maya's curiosity towards the 'other' country. These travels, however, are inevitably influenced by various social and economic, as well as personal circumstances.

The visits to Egypt of the *Bulgarian-Egyptian couple* could be regarded as vacation travels, since they usually take place in accordance with the partners' annual leave from work with a tendency to establish some relative frequency – every (other) year. They are not provoked by extraordinary circumstances or the participation in special events, therefore, are not burdened with the execution of any kind of specific socio-cultural rituals. These travels, entirely planned by Mohamed and Eva, aim to serve two main purposes in which each partner has a role to play.

The first derives from their emotional attitudes and is related to 'there' – the migrant's longing for his relatives and birth place, as well as his wife's desire to get to know her in-laws. In this sense, the motives are somewhere in-between the so

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<sup>11</sup> Piller (2000, 75–104) distinguishes the roles of the first (L1) and the second (L2) languages used for communication between the partners of bilingual couples.

called ‘routine visits’ (“staying in touch, maintaining family”) and ‘special visits’ (“ease the heartache”), as defined by Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding (2007, 139–140). Therefore, on the one hand, the essence of these travels is to maintain the palpable emotional and physical connection between Mohamed and his parents, siblings (and friends) by spending quality time with them, and ‘just’ being at home. These meetings and the stays in the parental house are (in)tangible indicators of the migrant’s past life in the native country and his preserved family ties. At the same time, the visits allow Eva and her in-laws to create a face-to-face relationship, to acquire some personal impressions and to create memories of each other, as she claims, “Every time we go, I feel like I am going home”. Ever since their first meeting, however, they really started to get-to-know each other, to ‘see’ each other and to conduct conversations about things that excite them all.

The physical co-presence engenders intimacy between the actors (Urry 2003, 164), facilitating the setting of a certain routine anticipated in the future visits, such as the debates between the daughter- and the father-in-law concerning religions and rituals. Sometimes ‘here’ memories of these gatherings and common events are being called to mind as times well-spent. Hence, the establishment of more personal and complex relationship brings emotional comfort to every member of the extended family.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, this enhances Eva’s desire and motivation for the realization of such family visits. On the other, the travels, the face-to-face communication and the good relationship between his wife and parents facilitates Mohamed’s emotional adaptation in migration. First, by creating relatively balanced presence in his two homes – ‘here’ the new one and ‘there’ the native place, and second, by finding comfort in the mutual acceptance and understanding within the extended family.

The second purpose follows from Mohamed’s own curiosity about the history and cultural heritage of the homeland, as well as his wife’s interest towards the ‘other’ culture, history and nature. These desires are being satisfied by self-organised tours around the country. For Mohamed and Eva visiting different touristic sites in Egypt is a well-established practice, showing their preferred types of experience – sightseeing and discovering (new) sensations (like sand boarding), and places (like Alexandria). The consistency and the pure touristic objectives allow the partners to plan ahead: “Next time we plan to go to Luxor and Aswan because of the monuments and the Arabian artefacts”. Therefore, for Mohamed these tours are a way to introduce his foreign wife to the ethno-cultural and historical diversity of his native country, while he discovers pieces of it himself. However, most importantly, the travels leave a trace in the minds of both partners, the experiences give them joy not only at the time of the events, but also afterwards, when they return to their everyday life ‘here’.

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<sup>12</sup> Including Eva’s mother, who at first had some reservations towards Mohamed’s origin (as the different religious affiliation causes some fear within the parents, see Rodriguez-Garcia, Solana-Solana, Lubbers 2016, 525–534). Her perceptions has changed for the better, firstly, due to her personal interactions with the son-in-law, secondly, thanks to the relationship her daughter has built with his relatives.

Generally, touring shows perception of the couple for leisure and their love for travels, a practice which they also have established in Bulgaria. The short trips they organize for themselves, heading to different natural, cultural and historic sites,<sup>13</sup> have the same meaning as the travels around Egypt, but the partners' roles are turned. However, for Mohamed they are mostly significant for getting to know the country of residence, meeting different people and getting acquainted with some of the ethno-cultural specificities that more or less have become a part of their life 'here'.

Even though the main aim of the travels of the *Bulgarian-Filipino couple* is spending time with the Filipino relatives, each of the visits has its specific reasons. All of them are defined by the (lack of) travel opportunities and some important aspects of the initial stages of the mixed couple's life together. The trips have been irregular and the configuration of the travellers varied. From 2006 until 2019 there were only three visits – in one of them Jonah was completely alone. Two of the travels took place in the first years of their relationship (2006, 2008) and the last – ten years later. Therefore, unlike Mohamed and Eva's trips, they cannot be classified as vacation visits. In one way or the other, the motivations and obstacles behind each of them have relevance to Jonah's adaptation in migration.

Contrary to the first case, Maya was introduced to Jonah's family and a great part of his relatives before the wedding, in 2006 while still living in China: "There was this family gathering, all of them were there, they were celebrating something. His sister, parents, basically all of his aunts and uncles were there". At that time, the partners had been knowing each other for two years and had already made the decision to move to Bulgaria in order to get married and have children. In this respect, the first visit to the 'other' country as a couple was mostly essential for Maya meeting the Filipino kin. This way the future relatives by marriage were able to set the foundation of their personal communication which has continued until this day, though from distance. The first impressions of one another the actors had acquired without the means of mediation (by Jonah or communicational tools), the absence of language barrier allowed them to express their thoughts freely avoiding misunderstandings.

The next and so far the last family visit had a very special meaning for all actors – the mixed couple and Jonah's relatives. It was about a year after the birth of their first child and the aim was the introduction of the new family member to the father's kin. This allowed the grandparents and the aunt to be physically co-present for the boy, feeling him through "all the five senses" (Baldassar 2008, 282). Although having just a couple of weeks and only this one time together, the Filipino kin was able to create memories with the little boy which they have preserved over time and distance. However, the stay was of no real significance for the child, since he was a baby and has no memories of either the visit or the interaction with his relatives, let alone experienced the country and the culture in any way himself.

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<sup>13</sup> Veliko Tarnovo, Etara, the Rocks of Belogradchik, the Seven Rila lakes, etc.

On the other hand, the stay was combined with some activities of more practical importance for Jonah, who remained ‘there’ for a few more months after the departure of his wife and son. It was due to the arrangement of some papers and the graduation from a professional course. In a way his solo stay could be classified as ‘routine’, referring to the work-related part of the definition given by Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding (2007, 140). The activities Jonah was engaged in were of importance for his future professional development and overall settlement in Bulgaria. However, though it also was among the main purposes of this particular visit, the establishment of emotional personal connection between the kin and the new-born member of the extended family defined the stay in general.

Ten years later, in the summer of 2018, Jonah’s solo travel was entirely about sustaining the family, ‘reviving’ the personal face-to-face connection between him and his relatives (and friends) ‘there’. Being alone allowed him to give them all his undivided attention, and to receive theirs. During the couple of weeks stay, he had the opportunity to spend some quality time with the people he grew up with – his childhood friends and many cousins, consisting the social circle he prefers. The activities Jonah engaged in helped him to ‘go back’ to his life before the migration, giving him the feeling of being at home (see Rapport, & Dawson 1998, 9). The importance of meeting family members and long-time friends was also expressed by many photographs from this last trip, published on his social media profile.

Among the activities during the family trips are some tours around the country. However, unlike Mohamed and Eva, for whom traveling ‘here’ and ‘there’ is a usual way of spending time together, for Jonah and Maya they prove to be an exception. For example, their trips ‘here’ are rather limited to the close vicinity of the district they occupy and the adjacent one. Two reasons were stated for that matter – the partner’s busy work schedules and Maya’s general reluctance for touring and sightseeing, “I have never even travelled around Europe [...] I do not feel like going around and looking at castles and galleries”. Therefore, touring the Philippines was not a purpose for their visits, but more of a side activity. For Maya it was not ‘just’ a way to experience the country and the local culture, it was described as “the best vacation ever” during which the couple was able to visit different cultural and natural sites. Her detailed description of the places (islands, jungles, ethno villages etc.) and the activities (dolphin watching, camping on the beach) are another confirmation of her positive perception of the ‘other’ country and experiencing it. Among the recollections, the beach was outlined as a preferred and a special place for the partners (for Jonah more than Maya), since they both grew up near it. While ‘here’ it is a place for sunbathing, a usual practice for Maya and her sons and disliked by Jonah, ‘there’ it is a spot for social events and gatherings. As described, ‘Bringing lots of food, drinks, guitars, hammocks and making picnics in the shades’, a shared experience along with family and friends, a preferred way for Jonah (and Maya) to spend the free time while in Dumaguete. Hence, the beach and the gatherings are among the places and events the migrant ‘faces’ when visiting the Philippines. However, it is not a typical activity for Jonah in Bulgaria, since, on the one hand, the beaches ‘here are different’ from the ones he grew up with, on the other, he does not have the close social circle to spend time with the way he does

‘there’. Therefore, the memories for these experiences are among the most cherished ones (and looked for) throughout the years by both partners, and the stories about them are narrated with the greatest enthusiasm.

However, for making trips back home, migrants and their spouses need to deal with time and financial means, and to be able to intertwine the direct connection with the relatives living in the homeland with their lifestyle ‘here’. In this respect, the travels to Egypt have no obvious obstacles, they do not require visas or any kind of preceding paperwork. Despite the fact that there are no direct flights from Sofia to Cairo, those with only one change (in different cities like Athens, Istanbul etc.), mainly taking time between 5 and 9 hours, are the most comfortable for the couple. Even though the travel expenses vary greatly – from 700 to 1800 leva (330–900 euros), there are quite affordable prices for Mohamed and Eva, allowing them to make their trips together. As for Jonah and his family, visiting the Philippines from Bulgaria is significantly more difficult, because of the huge geographical distance between the two countries and the accompanying conventions. So far, they have chosen a combined way of travel – taking a bus to Istanbul and then a flight to Dumaguete. Traveling with a bus makes the trip a bit less expensive, but prolongs the duration (about 12 hours in each direction) and since there are no direct flights, the two changes in Abu Dhabi and Manila add between 21 and 56 more hours in a direction. Along with the long journey, the travel expenses for a family of four may reach up to 10 000 lv (about 5 000 euros) and more (when overnight stays are included).

## Some concluding thoughts

As it turns out, having in mind these two cases – Mohamed and Jonah’s personal and professional realisation ‘here’ – the time spent residing in a foreign country proves to be not significantly essential for the extent of adaptation, especially referring to the acquisition of the local language. First of all, within their households they have established a linguistic approach found appropriate and sought by every member of the nuclear families. This, however, means that the family environment does not encourage the acquisition and usage of the majority language. Though there are attempts for enhanced bilingual communication between the partners in both couples, including ‘any’ Bulgarian, they are not regular enough for the establishment of a pattern. The initial linguistic ‘habit’ turns out to be a major obstacle for the determination of clear and constant rules for the better command of the mother tongue of the Bulgarian spouses. This refers especially to Jonah’s family. The children, instead of ‘pushing’ him to learn the local language in order to better communicate with them, become a factor facilitating the usage of his own mother tongue, drastically diminishing his motivation for mastering Bulgarian.

While in both cases the family linguistic environment is quite similar, Mohamed’s social circle is an advantage to his multiple language usage as well as the acquisition of Bulgarian. On the one hand, it is so thanks to its linguistic diversity (Bulgarians, Arabs, people from different European countries), on the other, there is the active social life the couple has been leading from the very beginning of their

marriage. The spouses prefer to spend their free time outside, in the company of their friends, celebrating feasts together, exchanging visits and being active in sports and tourism. This lifestyle predisposes the development of Mohamed's personal need to be more independent when travelling around Bulgaria and conducting conversations with locals. While Jonah and Maya prefer the comfort of their home and do not have a common circle of friends. In general, rarely do they spend time outside together, engaging in different activities and interacting with people of different origin. When they do so, the usage of Bulgarian is mostly avoided, since Jonah (supported by Maya) seeks the comfort of English. Therefore, his own curiosity and desire for developing his language skills are once again severely limited. Nevertheless, this does not seem to bother neither of them, nor their children and extended family, so as no indications for any kind of social difficulties have been reported.

Following Rudiger and Spencer's (2003, 23) statement that 'integration into the labour market is a key element of the overall process of inclusion' and having in mind that Mohamed and Jonah's jobs correspond to their educational qualifications and provides them with financial stability, both of them could be considered successfully professionally adapted to the country of residence. In this respect, Yuxin and Ours (2015) and Eicker's (2017) claim about the language barriers and the finding of well-paid jobs is completely untrue for the two considered cases, since the sphere in which the migrants have been developing professionally not only does not require command of Bulgarian, but also demands and encourages usage of English. The linguistic situation in their work environment is more than facilitating for both of them, since it spares them the extra efforts for learning the local language (especially in Jonah's case). In general, English seems to be an 'alternative' to Bulgarian, not only for the labour market, but also for the household and social environment.

Throughout the years of marriage, Mohamed and Eva have managed to take advantage of the opportunities to travel to the 'other' country and to engage in different activities, incorporating these into their lifestyle as a couple. Therefore, Mohamed has established a more *mobile* type of adaptation in migration with the support and the active participation of his wife. The certainty that he can always go back (when his and Eva's work schedules allow it) gives him a sense of certainty that he can be physically co-present for his relatives even for a little while. The intentions of the couple for keeping viable this kind of direct connection with the Egyptian kin and the country are more than adamant, considering they have already arranged their next travel. Not just that, but the partners have expressed their intentions of taking Eva's mother to Egypt in the near future, for meeting the relatives and getting-to-know the local culture. This shows desire for deepening and strengthening the ties within the extended family and mixed couple's physical co-presence in the 'other' country. Having in mind the immigrant and his wife's perception of the visits, this case confirms Urry's theory (2002, 258) that the meaning and the need for travels will not be soon substituted by virtual co-presence.

For Jonah the visits are irregular, leaving him, his family and relatives in the Philippines insecure for the time of their next meeting, due to the several cir-



cumstances described above. However, there are some intentions for a family trip in the near future, but the couple has not made any plans or arrangements, yet. In this respect, the virtual co-presence through on-line conversations and messages, shared photos and videos concerning interesting and important events, or just everyday activities, has greater importance for Jonah, Maya, their children and the Filipino kin (see Baldassar 2008, 256–257; Svašek 2010, 868). The sporadic visits and the couples' lifestyle 'here', however, also show their not-so-mobile behaviour, referring to a more *settled* type of adaptation in migration for Jonah.

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