ARTICLES IN ENGLISH

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WHEN DOES A MIGRANT STOP BEING A MIGRANT? (INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS IN BORDER WORK)

The main research question is when and under what conditions a migrant ceases to be a migrant. The most popular theoretical framework for this type of research is integration, which considers the main directions of integration and indicators of integration. This article examines the other side of the bilateral integration process and is dedicated to the study of the perception of migrants by the host society. The main theoretical framework is the concept of borders and border work carried out in relation to migrants. The research focuses on street-level bureaucrats whose professional activities are related to migrants. They draw a border between 'migrants' and 'locals' in their daily routine. The analysis of the informants' rhetoric allowed the author to discern two institutional logics in the production of such borders, i.e. neoliberal and cultural. Here, institutional logics are understood as 'a system of fundamental beliefs that guide and predetermine the behaviour of agents.' Within the framework of cultural logics, a cultural border is created between migrants and locals. This border is ethnic and religious, and it is impossible to overcome. Within the neoliberal logic, the emphasis is on the social border, which can be overcome by abandoning the transnational lifestyle, working hard and efficiently, and by occupying a high position in the social hierarchy. These two logics do not compete with each other but reinforce each other.

Keywords: migration, integration, border work, street level bureaucracy, cultural and neoliberal institutional logic

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When does a migrant cease to be a migrant? What are the boundaries between 'newcomers' and 'locals', who defines them, and can they be overcome? Under what conditions does a migrant become an 'ordinary resident'? These seemingly obvious questions are rarely discussed in public discourse and only occasionally touched upon in academic debates, although answers to them can clarify the social position of migrants in the host society, reveal the problems of 'enclosure,' and bring us closer to understanding the phenomenon of migration. I have decided to turn these essentially rhetorical questions into research questions, and this article is devoted to exploring the notion of when a migrant ceases to be a migrant.

Migration is most often understood as a movement in space and a change of residence, and a migrant as a person making such a transition. There are many definitions of a migrant, each emphasising different aspects appropriate to a particular context or purpose. For example, the glossary of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) defines a migrant as a person who freely decides to migrate for reasons of 'personal convenience' and without external coercion. This definition defines migrants as people who move to another country or region to improve their material or social conditions and prospects for themselves and their families (IOM 2012). This definition underlines the voluntary nature of migration and distinguishes labour migrants from forced migrants and refugees. At the same time, it broadens the concept of migrant to include both individual and family migration projects. Other definitions point to the spatial dimension and present migrants as people who cross international borders or change their place of residence within a country, using the concepts of emigrants and immigrants.

In academic discourse, there are many classifications of migrants based on the purpose and reasons for migration (labour or climate migrants, tourists, etc.), mode of movement (seasonal migrants), and spatial perspective (migrants who have left for good and those who plan to return). The latter are divided into temporary and permanent migrants (Ryazantsev, Pismennaya 2014). This definition is important for the current study because it emphasises the permanence of migrant status: even if a migrant has moved to a new place of residence 'permanently,' he or she continues to be a migrant, which is manifested in the category of 'permanent migrants.'

All these classifications are based on the principles of methodological nationalism (Wimmer, Schiller 2003) and sedentarism (Trubina 2012), in which the social world is viewed exclusively from the perspective of the nation-state, and any mobility is treated as a deviation from the norm. At the same time, researchers argue that social reality in the modern world is largely organized and structured by actual and potential movement (Sheller, Urry 2006).

As a migration researcher, it is clear to me that the term 'migrant' is contextual. For example, for an official enrolling a child in a Russian school, people without Russian citizenship and/or registration will be considered migrants. For a teacher, migrants are likely to be foreigners who do not speak Russian. For the average person, who is negatively attuned to otherness, migrants will be visually different people. In this study, the question of when and under what conditions a migrant ceases to be a migrant was put to experts, i. e. people who encounter migrants in their professional activities and whose actions and practices in one way or another form or maintain the boundaries between the notional migrants and the locals.

Theoretical framework
and methodological foundations of the study

The concept of integration seems to be the most appropriate framework for understanding when a migrant ceases to be a migrant. This concept encompasses a wide range of theoretical approaches and research perspectives. In the 1970s and 1980s, when the category of migrant integration was just beginning to enter socio-political and academic discourse, it was heavily influenced by a positivist approach and viewed within the framework of methodological nationalism and a demographic view of migration as a one-way mass flow. From this perspective, the modern nation-state was seen as an integrated ethno-cultural entity or an imagined 'community of values' (Anderson 2013), and migration was perceived as a process that threatened the integrity and stability of the nation-state. In this context, integration was understood as a mechanism for promoting social cohesion and preventing tensions and cultural ruptures.

Currently, the understanding of migrant integration has undergone significant changes. Researchers discuss migration from the perspective of emancipation and transformation of migrants' subjectivity, emphasising migrants' agency and autonomous decision-making according to their life strategies (Slany et al. 2010; Anthias 2012). While earlier scholars pointed to the importance of acquiring various cultural and social competencies for integration as a 'part' of the host society, integration is now increasingly seen in the context of overall autonomisation. Integration is understood as a process of everyday life in which migrants learn to live in transnational contexts and build routine interactions through 'daily negotiations' with multiple agents of integration. At the same time, integration processes unfold along multiple trajectories that correspond to specific life situations.

In this paper, I would like to move away from an integrationist lens and look at the problem from the perspective of the receiving society, focusing on the production of borders and border work in relation to migrants. The concepts of borders and borderlands are widely used in social research. In border studies (Wilson, Donnan 2012; Newman 2016), the border is conceptualised not so much as a physical line separating territories and structuring space, but

as a 'line of demarcation that symbolises the power to include and exclude subjects from certain relations,' thus reproducing the power order (Bresky, Breska 2008: 46). The notion of border marks social and cultural differences and helps to understand the formation of social groups (Barth 1998; Lamont, Molnar 2002). The study of the borderland as a space of transit, transition, and mixing of cultures is popular in border studies (Anzaldúa 2004). In English, many terms such as periphery, boundary, limit, and frontier are used to refer to different types of borders, and each of these terms is used in different ways (Lamont, Molnar 2002). There is no such linguistic diversity in Russian.

The concept of borders is currently gaining considerable popularity in migration studies (e.g. Reeves 2014; Nikiforova, Brednikova 2018, Yuval-Davis et al. 2019). A very important study by Nira Yuval-Davis and her colleagues (Yuval-Davis et al. 2019) focuses on the practice of bordering migrants in the UK. They note that this practice has now shifted from the territorial borders of nation states to the 'epicentre of everyday life.' According to the researchers, this shift not only reinforces the state's control over migration, but also has significant implications for the formation of identity and belonging for both migrants and members of the host society.

Border control now involves not only border guards and law enforcement officials, but also those whose professional duties did not previously include the control of migrants. These now include municipal employees, doctors, teachers, social workers, estate agents, landlords, human resources departments and others. In theory, they have nothing to do with border control, but they have to register the presence of migrants, keep statistics, check documents, and report violations. In this way, they become border guards like those who work at checkpoints on the outer perimeter of the borders of nation states. This leads to the decentralisation of border control, its diffusion, and the diversification of professional responsibilities (Persdotter et al. 2021). In this context, border control is defined as the work of producing and maintaining borders that affect the interactions between citizens and migrants in their daily contacts.

It is around the notion of the border that the currently dominant constructivist understanding of ethnicity is shaped (Barth 1994, Wimmer 2009), which in contemporary realities accompanies and is inseparable from the understanding of what migration is. Within this approach, migrant integration should be seen as 'a change in the construction of borders or in people's individual positions in relation to borders' (Warshauer 2023: 387). That is, for a migrant to cease to be perceived as such, there must be a 're-categorisation of particular human and ethnic categories in the space of attributes that indicate their "migrantness" and "locality"' (ibid.: 388), and thus the boundary that separates the conventionally new from the conventionally local must change. This study focuses on the boundary created by street-level officials working with migrants.

Expert interviews were conducted as part of the research on which this text is based. The experts were specialists who work with labour migrants from

Central Asia arriving in Russian cities. Nineteen interviews were conducted with representatives of regional state structures, and seventeen interviews were conducted with employees of state educational and social institutions, including those working with family members of migrants. In total, thirty-six interviews were collected. The research was conducted in Nizhny Novgorod, Moscow, St Petersburg, and Tyumen in 2022. The choice of cities was based on the different migration situations in these regions. The purpose of referring to several cases was not to compare them with each other, but to create a more complete and richer picture of social reality through multi-site research.

All the experts interviewed in this study can be defined as street-level bureaucrats. According to Michael Lipsky (Lipsky 2010), street-level bureaucrats have two key characteristics: first, they act as agents of public policy at the grassroots level; second, they have a high degree of discretion, i.e. a certain degree of freedom in making decisions in specific cases. For example, school administrators can either 'turn a blind eye' to the lack of certain documents of migrant children and admit them to school, or strictly adhere to the requirements of the law.

Bureaucrats 'process' people into clients and categorise them, thereby performing border work and creating particular social clusters. Indirect border practices, while not directly constituting border control, affect various aspects of migrants' daily lives (Persdotter et al. 2021). In this respect, research on street-level bureaucrats is important for understanding border work in relation to migrants. In particular, it allows us to find out where and when borders are created between migrants and locals, what kinds of borders are formed, and what is required of migrants to overcome them.

The institutional logics of boundary work

One of the issues discussed in the expert interviews was when 'a migrant ceases to be a migrant.' In their narratives about the practice of working with migrants and in their perceptions of migrants' problems, the experts marked the boundary between migrant groups and the 'general population,' and between the notional 'them' and 'us.' The analysis of the experts' rhetoric allowed us to identify two institutional logics in the production of the border: neoliberal and cultural. These logics were established not so much on the basis of the distinctions between locals and migrants that the experts discussed, but rather on the basis of their proposed strategies for overcoming the border, i.e. what migrants can or should do in order to become 'local.' Two ways of overcoming the border emerge clearly in the interview narratives: eliminating cultural differences or hiding them in the private sphere, or achieving a higher social position through hard work. These strategies correspond to two institutional logics: cultural and neoliberal.

In a broad sense, institutional logic is a set of principles that determine the functioning and development of a particular institutional sphere or field (Shmerlina 2016: 114). In this study, the institutional field is professional work with migrants.

By institutionalised logic, I mean, following A. Friedland and R. Scott, a set of practices and symbolic representations that form and define the principles of organisation of a particular field of activity (Friedland 1991: 248, cited in Scott 2007: 30). Institutional logics can be seen as a system of basic beliefs that guide and predetermine the behaviour of agents acting in this field (Scott 2007: 36).

The turn to institutional logics in this study is inspired by work on the logics of migration policy-making at the city level in four Danish municipalities (Jorgensen 2012). The author investigates the activities and interpretations of 'grassroots officials,' documenting the existence of competing logics in relation to migration.

For the institutional logic to have real impact, it needs agents – 'individuals and organisations that affirm, embody, disseminate and act upon its principles' (Scott 2007: 36). The diversity of logics is linked to different types of actors. For example, the study of institutional logics in health care has identified three types of logic: professional, state, and market. These logics reflect different periods of system development and the influence of different actors: the period of 'professional dominance' (influence of health professionals), the period of state intervention (influence of the state) and the period of the market (influence of private companies) (ibid.).

Discussions with representatives of the institutional sphere of professional work with migrants about when a migrant ceases to be a migrant have revealed two institutional logics in the production of borders: cultural and neoliberal. In what follows, I examine each of these logics in more detail, focusing on what kind of border is produced within each of them and analysing their interaction.

Becoming 'Russian' (cultural/ethicized logic)

This institutional logic focuses on the cultural border. Within this logic, migrants are assumed to belong to a different community of values, where 'the imagined community of values of "good citizens" is opposed to non-citizens, i.e. migrants' (Soloviev 2023). Migrants crossing the territorial borders of the host state are perceived as crossing not only a physical but also an imaginary border, and as an act of intrusion into the space of the local value community (ibid.).

When discussing the conditions under which a migrant can lose his/her status, the informants point to differences in language, traditions, and mentality:

Q: You said Russian traditions, what are they?

A: The observance of holidays. Some kind of mentality. We also have our own mentality. I don't know… I am annoyed when we come to school and speak our own language. I mean, how many times have we suffered in different families. How many times we talked, but we still wear this hijab… But you came to a Russian school, to a school near Moscow. Perhaps we have different traditions. We have an acquaintance who says: 'I worked in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It is normal for them to walk there /in hijab/. But for us it is savage! (I., representative of school administration, teacher, Moscow).

I think this quote is revealing in a number of ways. First, the informant associates traditions with holidays. Then she introduces an abstract and difficult to grasp concept of mentality, which is given special importance. Next, there is a semantic leap and the informant talks about professional problems – the informant talks about work difficulties and violations of school rules that cause frustration. Finally, expertise is transferred to another person in order to strengthen her own position. At the same time, the boundary between the groups is reinforced by a strong negative evaluation – 'wild.'

The cultural border that is created is often interpreted as ethnic and religious. The informants often mention the ethnic characteristics of the migrants as well as their religious affiliation. When it comes to migrants from Central Asia, the informants are sure to mention that they are Muslims.

Adherents of the cultural-institutional logic believe that belonging to a certain culture is inescapable and that it is practically impossible to move to another culture. In this context, the only positive scenario for migrants is 'respect for the traditions' of the host society, which most informants perceive as obligatory:

> I still think that there should be some respect for traditions. If you live on the territory of the state, especially in a public place, I think that you should speak the language of the place where you are (B., school administration representative, Moscow).

Experts believe that migrants have the right to preserve their cultural identities, but this is often perceived negatively:

> If they /…/ preserve their ethnic characteristics within the family, they do not socialize. They continue to exist quite autonomously (U., employee of the migration service, Moscow).

Other experts argue that the expressions of identities should remain hidden or should be pushed into the private sphere:

> No, maybe they have cultural peculiarities, I don't know, some events. So let them gather together with their, so to speak, tribesmen. What can we do? (L., migration service officer, Moscow).

> …if they speak Russian well, if they share in principle… Maybe they preserve something, some traditions, but in principle in the public sphere they behave normally, as average people, they are not perceived as migrants, no one feels any negative emotions towards them (U., representative of the migration service, Moscow).

In this case, integration is understood primarily as the compliance of migrants with certain requirements, both written and unwritten. While this may contribute to seamless coexistence, the boundary between migrants and natives remains. In Russian society, otherness and cultural diversity are not seen as values. A migrant must conform to an imaginary 'average' society, which in

reality does not exist. The responsibility for integration is placed primarily on the migrant himself: '*there must be respect*' (B., representative of the school administration, Moscow), '*psychologically, at the level of attitudes, he must want to*' (Y., representative of social service, St. Petersburg).

It should be noted that the experts recognise the participation and importance of the host society in the process of integrating migrants, as evidenced by the above quote. However, it is not a question of a real movement to meet halfway, but of the preservation and reproduction of the border. Within this logic, migrants remain culturally alien even when certain requirements are met. The temporary perspective of integration within this logic does not work either. For example, a representative of the school administration says:

> I have families whose children were born here. Yes, but for Russians they are still migrants. So the children themselves say: 'I am Russian. I may be someone there, right? By nationality. But I live here, I'm Russian.' So this is our rejection anyway! (Z., Nizhny Novgorod).

It should be noted that in more radical cases, the cultural boundary between migrants and conventional natives is racialised. Although in public communication, such as interviews, the open expression of racist views is still considered unacceptable, such statements do sometimes occur:

> We were just laughing. It was the ninth-grade graduation, the presentation of certificates. I said: God, I feel like I'm sitting somewhere in Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, where there is only one Russian surname or two. And appearance, respectively. It's a shame, of course, that the Slavs have been exterminated… (B., school administration representative, Moscow).

Without delving into the discussion of who and why 'exterminated the Slavs,' it is important to emphasise that relations between 'newcomers' and 'locals' are built not only through opposition or competition for resources, but also through the issue of displacement and substitution.

Becoming prosperous (neoliberal logic)

Another institutional logic is less obvious. I was able to identify it by working closely with the notion of 'taking root,' which was often heard in the experts' narratives. In their statements, there were expressions such as '*putting down roots*' (D., social services representative, Nizhny Novgorod), '*cutting into society*' (ibid.), '*establishing a way of life*' (K., social service representative, Tyumen).

On the one hand, rootedness is related to the feeling of being detached from home. For example, one informant argues that as long as migrants have the intention of returning home, they remain in the category of migrants: '*But as long as they have the idea that they have arrived and that they will still go back after some time, back, we can say that they are categorised as migrants.*' (R., representative of the Committee for National Policy, Tyumen).

On the other hand, rootedness is associated with the accumulation of social capital and gaining experience of life in the host society: '*They already have Russian friends, Russian connections. They have already joined the society; they are fine here. Why go there*?' (D., social service representative, Nizhny Novgorod).

The expectation of a migrant to build a life exclusively in the new place or, as one informant put it, '*to live a stable life without looking back and without being oriented towards the sending society*' is linked to the sedentary optics of the nation-state. This perspective assumes that stability and sedentarisation are the norm, while permanent mobility and living in two or more homes are perceived as disruptive. This view is rooted in experts' perceptions: it is easier to manage and control those who are settled, as they are easier to account for. In contrast, migrants who support others, who live in more than one country at a time, and who have transnational lifestyles, are difficult to control and account for. In this regard, expert narratives often perceive Russian citizenship as a key indicator of a migrant's 'localisation.'

Within neoliberal logic, the process of migrant embeddedness is often described using metaphors of path, road, and movement. In contrast to cultural logic, which focuses on immediate and visible changes in behaviour and compliance with cultural norms, neoliberal logic emphasises a gradual process of change. In order to describe this process, a temporal and generational perspective is introduced: '*In general, in our country as elsewhere, it is assumed that when people have lived for ten years, they will have changed. I think it is somehow generally accepted*' (O., representative of the Committee on National Policy, Moscow).

Within the neoliberal logic, another border is erected, which is more social. This logic assumes that a migrant in a new place 'resets' his/her social status and starts climbing the social ladder anew, regardless of his/her previous experiences, qualifications, etc.:

> I was in a taxi the other day. I'm talking to a guy – he speaks well. /.../ He has a higher education, but he came here and works as a plain taxi driver. They work at construction sites and as repairmen (G., representative of the Committee on Migration Policy, St. Petersburg).

Embedded in the metaphor of the path is the idea of labour. According to neoliberal logic, in order to stop being a migrant, a migrant must work hard – 'strive,' 'toil' and so on. The emphasis on work is explained by the fact that migration is often legitimised through work and earning money. In an earlier interview in another project, a primary school teacher described how she combats xenophobia in her class: '*I always explain to the children that they come here to make our city cleaner….*'

According to the informants, a migrant integrates through labour activity and can become a local resident if he/she follows the '*path of the guest worker*;' raising and changing his/her social status through hard work. The main achievement of a migrant, which allows him/her to cease to be a migrant, is to integrate into the middle class of the host society:

> I have a good doctor who operated on my hand. He's a Tajik. 'No,' they shouted, 'we don't need him… We'll go to another one, because…' He says: 'I've been living here for a long time. I'm forty years old and I've been working here all my life.' – 'No, you're not Russian.' That's exactly our perception. And he's already working as a surgeon! They are not migrants; they love Russia already! (F., representative of the education sector, Nizhny Novgorod).

In this case, the informant justifies their position by saying that the migrant has worked long and hard, and as a result has taken a worthy place in the social hierarchy of the host society, has earned his status, and is trustworthy. This institutional logic unfolds within the framework of neoliberal ideology, which redefines the notion of the migrant by focusing on self-sufficiency and the work ethic. According to this logic, the migrant's transformation into a local is a kind of 'samurai journey' through hard work and individual responsibility for one's own well-being, since neither the institutions of the receiving nor the sending society will support this process.

Individualisation is associated with the rejection of a transnational way of life, which implies the elimination of networks and ties with fellow countrymen, and the construction of oneself as a 'settled person' who implements a 'stable way of life.' Moreover, within the framework of neoliberal logic, a person has to prove his or her efficiency, which is not only measured by the amount of money earned, but also by the position in the social hierarchy.

This institutional logic creates a social boundary between migrants and natives, which, according to experts, can only be overcome through years of hard work. It is important to note that a migrant initially occupies a low social position in a new society, which is especially true for people who come to work from Central Asian countries. An additional condition for overcoming this border is the rejection of a transnational way of life and the orientation towards life exclusively in the host society.

Correlation of institutional logics (instead of conclusion)

The study revealed the existence of two institutional logics – cultural and neoliberal. Within the first logic, a cultural boundary is formed between migrants and locals that is virtually impossible to overcome. Migrants can only coexist with locals by 'hiding' all manifestations of their identity in the private sphere. The second logic emphasises the social border, which can be overcome by abandoning the transnational lifestyle and working hard.

The existence of multiple logics in an institutional field is often associated with the actions of different actors, each of which is the bearer of its own logic. Different logics can compete with each other when one logic replaces the other. The uniqueness of this research case, in my opinion, lies in the fact that these two logics coexist and do not conflict with each other. Moreover, the carriers of both logics are the same agents – migration officials, school administrators,

teachers, social workers, and psychologists. Furthermore, both logics were often manifested in the same interview and did not contradict each other. The two logics seem to reinforce each other and work together to strengthen the border, making it virtually impenetrable.

Can these logics compete and can the neoliberal one win? I think it is possible, but on the condition that there is a normalisation of mobility and that otherness is seen as a value. For the time being, the discretion in the work of bureaucrats and practitioners on the ground, i.e. the ability to act at their own discretion in each case, is predetermined and limited by the institutional logics revealed in the interviews. The integration of migrants faces almost impenetrable boundaries erected by the host society.

To conclude this article, it is worth returning to the key question posed in the title: when does a migrant cease to be a migrant? So far, there is no positive answer to this question, since the institutional logics identified tend to reinforce the boundaries between migrants and natives. However, we can assume the existence of another logic that is difficult or impossible to capture within the framework of traditional sociological interviews. This humanitarian logic involves an individualised approach in which the grassroots bureaucrat or practitioner focuses on the individual rather than his or her social category. This institutional logic can help to overcome or redefine boundaries, creating space for a more flexible and humane approach to integration. Analysing the content of this humanitarian logic and its implications is a topic for further research.

Acknowledgment

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