Irena Ragaišienė, 'The Eastern European "Other" in Literary Representations of Lithuanian Im/Migrants in Britain'

The results of the Brexit referendum have reminded us, as Baroness Young of Hornsey holds, that '[t]here is a role for literature, so adept at humanising big questions and creating emotional and cultural landscapes, in metaphorically poking us all in the ribs and urging us to start thinking critically and becoming politically active again' (2018, p. xviii). In the broadest sense, foregrounding literature's role in 'creating emotional and cultural landscapes' positions literature as a window to culture as experienced by characters as members of particular cultural groups (Brians, 2003, p. 6). Such a standpoint, combining heuristic and affective orientations, may also be read as embracing a sociological bent underscoring that 'works of literature' are 'products of a time, a place, a culture, and an individual' which 'have the potential capacity to affect, and perhaps even change, the world into which they are introduced' (Dobie, 2012, p. 15). Relating specifically to Brexit, Sara Upstone suggests that 'texts can be socially transformative [...] in the shaping of popular consciousness and the actions stemming from it' (2018, p. 45). She treats '[t]he literary text' as 'a fundamental part of a cultural imaginary − a way of thinking about the world informed and influenced by cultural texts such as literature, cinema and art − that has the potential to contribute to political outcomes' (p. 45), suggesting that literature can generate alternative social and cultural locations for cultural others, and can thus counterbalance their negative positioning in culturally formative discourses. Such a 'utopian potential' of literature, emerging in 'the contemporary novel' manifests 'the possibility of that utopian potential' of literature 'most particularly in relation to questions of race in twenty-first century Britain' (p. 56). Upstone grounds her utopian vision of the role of literature as 'a possible force for good that may shape ideas of diversity and tolerance in positive terms' (p. 56) on the notion of 'utopian realism' (Upstone, 2017). The contradictory term indicates the critical stance, defined as reading that 'positions contemporary English fiction as a mode of writing that, through form as well as thematic concern, is playing an active part not merely in mapping the role of race in contemporary British society, but also in vigorously engaging with the debate as to what that future society should – and could – look like' (Upstone 2017, p. 3). In her later writing, Upstone points out that '[i]f Britain is to remain part of Europe', the role of literature in re-

shaping discourses defining belonging and construction of identity in ways that could impact 'the broader social, political and economic reality upon which it rests' becomes more important than ever before (2018, pp. 56–7).

In the post-Brexit context, the above-discussed potential of literature to affect the reader's perception of the world and the construction of identity raises the question of visibility of national literatures beyond the question of their availability in English. Literary works of Eastern European writers, Vedrana Veličković argues, 'are often marginalized on the global stage of contemporary literature'; on the other hand, their reception 'offer[s] a particular and important account of their positioning in the expanded New Europe' (2019, p. 106). Literature written by writers positioning themselves as cultural translators seem to receive greater acclaim in the Western literary market than literature by writers adoping the role of 'a native informant' since the former, as Veličković states citing Dubravka Ugrešić, translate their 'own reality and the reality of [their] country into a language comprehensible to West European readers' (p. 106). Comprehensibility as a factor allowing access to the international literary arena acquires an added significance in light of Jacob Mikanowski's juxtapposition of Western and Eastern European fiction:

> The Western European novel [...] dramatized the pressure between psychic drives and the strictures of bourgeois mores. [...] The American novel [...] has generally depicted men and women confronted by a space of freedom and a scale of opportunity that overwhelm the smallness of their identity. [...] Eastern European fiction [...] has been about the capriciousness of fate, the inescapability of history, and the general absurdity of life. (2017, n.p.)

To support his point about the persistent presence of history in Eastern and Central European literature, Mikanowski refers to Czeslaw Milosz, a Lithuanian-born Polish writer and Nobel laureate who left Poland 'as an adult due to the oppressive Communist regime that came to power following World War II and lived in the United States from 1960 until his death in 2004' (Poetry Foundation n.d., n.p.). Based on his own experience of the role of history in the life of an individual and a country, Milosz writes that 'the most striking feature in Central European literature is its awareness of history'. In novels of this region, differently from those

of the West, 'time is intense, spasmodic, full of surprises, indeed practically an active participant in the story. This is because time is associated with a danger that threatens the existence of a national community to which the writer belongs' (cited in Mikanowski, 2017, n.p.). Mikanowski who, as he self-ironically puts it, has been 'teaching and studying the history of that "gray place" for years' reads the afore cited statement as alerting the reader 'that to understand Eastern European fiction, you have to understand Eastern European history' (n.p.).

This chapter intends to show how Lithuanian literary work on migrancy responds to a particular historical event, which is the possibility to 'return to Europe', in Vaclav Havel's phrase, after Lithuania regained independence in 1990 (cited in Parvulescu, 2014, p. 4). The focus is on the literary representation of the return as experienced by an Eastern European migrant. One of the commonly discussed factors hindering Eastern European migrants' adaptation to Western host cultures is the discourse of 'othering' (Williams, 2020; Starosta, 2016; Parutis, 2011). Essentially, 'othering' involves 'differentiating discourses that lead to moral and political judgements of superiority and inferiority between in-groups and out-groups [...], and within groups'. It is constructed 'in social interaction' by difference in 'power relations and the intersectionality of different identity markers' (Dervin, 2015, p. 447). In economic terms, 'othering' of Eastern Europeans can be broadly described as their 'disadvantaged labour market position (in terms of wage differentials, mobility and qualification gaps vis-à-vis native workers)' (Fox, Moroşanu & Szilassy, 2015, p. 729). For Eastern Europeans, their difference from the West is instilled in discourses presenting the region as backward, dependent on the West for social and economic progress (Starosta, 2016). Despite the 'growing sameness', differences last, 'locating these societies in the ambivalent state of spatiotemporal transitionality' (Tsuladze, 2013, p. 1). Maria Mälksoo provides a succinct explanation of the relationship between Western Europe and its Eastern counterpart from the perspective of the Eastern European 'other': 'Eastern Europe has provided the largely West European-dominated "European self" with an important foil-figure: it has functioned as a sort of surrogate, or a more rustic version of it' (2007, p. 77). When this version of Europeanness comes to Britain (or any other country of the Old Europe), bearing the burden of the fifty-year occupation as an essential signifier of identity − as in the case of the post-Soviet states − the migrant is perceived by the dominant culture as different from 'the

normative white subject' because of 'being poor or dressing badly', or because of no or limited knowledge of English (or the language of any other host country), let alone manners and traditions of the host culture (Veličković, 2019, p. 15; pp. 36–7). Because of these markers of identity, the Eastern European becomes associated with 'dirty whiteness' and, building on discourses of (post)colonialism, is racialised, whence the otherness/semi-Europeanness of the (returnee) to Europe acquires connotations of 'semi-alterity' (p. 37; p. 9).

Studies have shown that the negativity directed against Eastern Europeans to an extent determined the Leave vote outcome, especially 'in the areas that received a lot of migrants from Eastern Europe' (Becker & Fetzer, 2017, p. 2). In general, the view on the impact of immigrants from Eastern Europe on Britain is twofold. View one is that they take jobs, reduce wages, are disproportionally likely to become involved in crime and abuse the British social care system (Barathova, 2018). View two counterbalances these claims. Arguments on the latter side are based on evidence that the inflow of immigrants 'may have adversely affected labour market outcomes of British nationals' in the low-skill and low-wage sector (Becker & Fetzer, 2017; Barathova, 2018). Statistics reveal that 'Eastern Europeans were convicted for a disproportionate number of thefts between 2012 and 2016, but were otherwise less likely to take drugs or commit violent crime. British and Irish born people were less likely to steal but more likely to commit violent crime or take drugs' (Giles, 2018, n.p.). Further evidence shows that 'even the lower-paid eastern European workers are making a net contribution' to public finances (Casciani, 2018). However, the persistence of 'the benefits-scrounging migrant' image in the public discourse 'pushed the issue to the top of the political agenda' in the Vote Leave Brexit campaign (Barnard & Ludlow, 2016, n.p.). It is also pertinent to refer here to a study of the impact of the EU labour immigrants on the UK, which points out that when A2 countries (Romania and Bulgaria) joined the EU in 2007, restrictions on the inflow of labour force from the newly joined countries were applied as a reaction to the negative outcomes of post 2004 migration such as 'labour displacement on the local level and [excessive] pressure placed on public services, hospitals and schools' (Barathova, 2018, p. 4).

Lithuanian Migrant Literature

The Lithuanian literary works on migrancy chosen for the present analysis provide insight into forms and reasons of 'othering' of Eastern European migrants in Britain and the different ways of their dealing with social and cultural locations that affect the migrants' negative positioning and self-identification. The analysis reveals two major ways of literary characters' responses to social contexts conditioning their positioning, by extension realignment of identity. One way is represented by what Veličković has named 'a "good" Eastern European worker who pays taxes and contributes to Britain because this leaves the capitalist structures that have brought the economic migrant [...] intact' (2019, p. 14). This way of placing oneself within British society exemplifies the type of the EU migrant whose positive contribution to the host country was used by the Remain side as an argument against Brexit (pp. 14–5). On the opposing side of this depiction is the EU migrant who makes hardly any use of the job opportunities available in the UK labour market and abuses British hospitality, as well as the migrant who becomes a victim of modern-day slavery. This type of im/migrant is behind the British media headlines such as the following one: 'Why is the Baltic state of Lithuania the EU nation with the highest percentage of expats in jail in the 28-member bloc?' (Bird et al., 2016, n.p.). As discussed below, the answer to the afore cited question involves not only the factor of agency available to the EU migrant in the social context of the host country, but there are also discursive and historical circumstances framing the migrant's 'being and becoming' in Stuart Hall's sense (2001, p. 52). Foregrounding the importance of context/history, paraphrasing Paul Brians, allows the reader a glance on literature not as a mirror held up to culture but as a medium embedded in the discourses of a culture that 'may not tell us the whole truth about people' of a particular culture but may impact on how we see them (2003, p. 6). An analysis along such lines may not produce the acute alerting effect, which, as quoted at the beginning of this essay, Baroness Young of Hornsey named as a sensation equalling 'the metaphorically poking [...] in the ribs' which can urge 'us to start thinking critically and becoming politically active again' (2018, p. xviii). As the present analysis reveals, in different way, this has been the intention of the Lithuanian new immigrant women writers Julija Miliūtė, Giedrė Biliotavičiūtė and Kristina Baubinaitė, who are part of approximately 200,000 Lithuanian im/migrants who arrived in Britain to seek new opportunities after the 1990s. Hopefully, their re-presentation of Lithuanian im/migrant experience in Britain will help to dilute the perpetuating generalizations about Eastern

Europeans, the kind of discourses that Sara Upstone names as 'cultural representations that over time cement [...] into what appears a tangible presence' (2018, p. 45). In this regard, Jacob Mikanowski provides a telling example:

> It's always a bit humiliating to read an English-language book with an Eastern European character. You never know if they're going to be a world-weary janitor (a Pole), a captivating fraud (a Hungarian), a post-Communist gangster (a Serb), or a source of erotic awakening for a literary-minded man (a Czech for Americans, any of the above for residents of Ireland and the United Kingdom). (2017, n.p.)

Picking fruit and fighting for a place: Julija Miliūtė's autobiographical novels

The present analysis intends to counterbalance such treatment of Eastern Europeans as 'others', starting with the discussion of Julija Miliūtė's three autobiographical novels, subtitled as stories of an emigrant, which present a fictional history of Lithuanian im/migration to Britain. The first book in the series *Do Strawberries Turn into Ferraris*? (2015) describes illegal im/migrant experience in Britain before Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004.[1] The sequel *Why Am I Still There*? (2016), as the author puts it, narrates her life story as a Lithuanian immigrant in Britain, as well as the stories of her children, relatives and friends after accession.[2] The threequel *How the Dream Turns into Reality* (2018) exemplifies a success story of a persistently hard-working Eastern European migrant who, as Fanni Feldmann would have it, '[a]gainst all odds [...] finds a place and creates a home in the heart of the Western dreamland' (2020, p. 104).[3]

In *Do Strawberries Turn into Ferraris*?, the first person narrator, 'a jobless, disabled woman, with three children who were only starting to learn the hardships of life', recounts the dilemmas involved in making the decision to emigrate – for what she then thought 'two months' – to earn money for paying 'the bills for [the] flat' (Miliūtė, 2020, p. 4; p. 2). The novel recounts the difficulties involved in finding a job in post-communist Lithuania, the

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[1] *Emigrantai: ar braškės virsta ferariais*? (2015). Translated into English by Solveiga Gaunt in 2020. All citations from this autobiographical novel are from Gaunt's translation.
[2] *Emigrantai: kodėl aš vis dar ten?*
[3] *Kaip svajonė virsta realybe: iš emigrantės gyvenimo*.

illegal immigrants' suffering under precarious working conditions in the British agricultural sector, the job searches, fear of deportation, and longing for the children left behind in the homeland.

Her second book, *Emigrantai: kodėl aš vis dar ten?* (*Why Am I Still There?*) starts with a poem describing immigrant identity as divided into two selves. One side of the self struggles with uncertainties about the future in the new home; the other, a kind of alter ego, associated with the old home 'across the waters', urges the immigrant to set her goals high and to never stop dreaming (Miliūtė 2016, n.p.). The epigraph of the autobiographical narrative points to its main themes, common to those in much of migrant writing: a sense of split identity, diversification of the meaning of home and homesickness, combined with anxieties arising from the fear of failure and a struggle to cope with the life as a foreigner (see Thomassen, 2015). As an afterthought, the poem includes the line 'Jausmus namie užrakinai' (Miliūtė 2016, n.p.).[4] The idea of repression as a prerequisite for economic success and as an inevitable part of labour migrants' everyday reality continues from Miliūtė's first book *Do Strawberries Turn into Ferraris*? where she writes:

> Life threw me a challenge – to leave my family, friends, put away my diploma in technology and, with only a few of the most important belongings in my luggage, travel to a country where nobody was waiting for me. What were the emotions, what did my heart feel? It broke in half. I left with only one half of my heart while the other half remained with my loved ones. I locked my emotions away in a cupboard. All the hard work, the continuous fight for survival, tiredness and my daily evening prayer – all were reminders that I could not give up. (Miliūtė 2020, back cover)

The last stages of preparation to leave the home country in order to generate income for the family's basic needs explicate the emotional cost of emigration. Because of the ambivalences regarding her decision to emigrate, the narrator Julija feels torn between emotional and financial responsibility towards her children. She compares her inner turmoil to a broken heart. At the threshold of emigration, the trope of the divided heart encodes not only inner

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[4] 'feelings had been locked in the home left behind'.

conflicts but also foreshadows a splitting of identity, echoing Iain Chamber's statement that im/migrant identity is 'articulated across the hyphen, the transition, the bridge or passage between, rather than firmly located in any one culture, place or position' (1996, p. 53). On the other hand, the trope of the divided heart may be suggestive of succumbing to nostalgia. As David Gerber defines it, immigrant nostalgia is 'a brooding and obsessive homesickness' which may preclude adaptation to the host culture (2016, p. 291). Miliūtė's autobiographical narrator continuously underscores her determination to deal with any challenges, including cultural and emotional barriers, in order to provide for her family. When overcome by homesickness, she reminds herself that 'Lithuania, the country that [she] loved dearly, was unable to provide [her] a job' (2020, p. 5). In this respect, her perception of homeland departs from associations with what Stuart Tannock calls 'positively evaluated past', which helps the immigrant deal with 'the deficient present world' (1995, p. 454). It is the demands of the present world that make Miliūtė's narrator adapt to the socio-economic and cultural environment of the host country despite the pressing need to return home:

> That year was full of challenges and self-discovery. I fought for a job and a better salary, was afraid of my own shadow and would only whisper in the shop and other public places. I also had spiritual worries which made me restless. How did I end up this way that I left my children, friends and relatives overseas? My flat that I decorated myself with all the amenities was over there and I was dirty and wet over here clinging onto a different life. I had to fight for a place in a gang, for a more productive job and for each pound that kept me here. On top of that I also received unpleasant news from Lithuania on the bad behaviour of my children, They skipped classes at school, started drinking and partying with their friends in the same flat that I redecorated – they were bored of living alone without their parents. […] After work I spent my evenings writing long letters to send home and talking on the phone, which took a lot of my salary but I did not mind if I could solve the problem by doing so. (Miliūtė 2020, pp. 138–9)

The changes happening at home condense, as it were, the idea that emigration can deprive the immigrant of any stable point of reference, including home, commonly associated with 'secur[ing] the need of the sense of who we are when our spatial location can be seen as

compromising that security' (Woodward, 2002, p. 49). The description of Julija's adaptation to the British labour market reverberates with overtones characteristic of Naturalist literature embedded in the ideas of social Darwinism. Following the lead of many illegal labour migrants in Britain, Julija acquires a fraudulent work visa, takes any jobs she can find. She starts by picking strawberries in Cornwall, together with people 'of different ages and nationalities', including 'Polish, Ukrainian, Latvian, Portuguese and, of course, English' (Miliūtė 2020, p. 24). Working in the greenhouse turns out to be 'exhausting, like work in hell' (p. 25). The inequalities that Julija as an illegal worker face make her feel even worse. She notices that the English 'were ignoring the picking requirements and picked everything carelessly', but the boxes that they handed for weighing would be accepted 'without weighing or throwing a glance at them' (pp. 27–8). Conversely, the boxes with 'perfectly sorted fruit' harvested by Julija are carefully inspected, with berries considered to be too small removed. There are also comments that Julia 'did not pick enough second class berries'. Smaller berries yield lower earnings, nevertheless, migrant workers are told not to leave them behind. If they do, they 'had to go back and check through [their] furrows' to 'make sure [they] had picked them all'. Eventually, however, all the berries were 'mixed together' – the unsorted berries picked by the English workers were hidden beneath the sorted berries picked by migrant workers (p. 28).

Because of her status as an illegal worker, Julija accepts the situation for what it is: 'I simply came to terms with the truth that what is permissible for Jupiter is not permissible to a bull'. On one occasion, she breaks this 'golden rule' when confronted with injustice (p. 29). When employed to harvest cabbages and work in an international team, including English workers, Julija is so tired at the end of the first day that she 'could barely drag [her] feet', while in the morning her 'body ached all over' (pp. 104–5). Working in the same field, the English workers cut cabbages in 'the middle of the field and the edges of the field [were] left to the migrants' (p. 109). Julija objects to the unequal working conditions generating unequal pay and positions herself in the same situation as the English. She starts working in the middle of the field, in the furrow next to the English workers, but she harvests 'the whole furrow, including the cabbages in the side of the field and the prettiest ones in the middle of the furrow' (p. 109). She is later joined by a Lithuanian roommate, and her work is positively

evaluated by an English tractor driver who like their harvesting the 'furrows methodically, from the beginning to the end, and not from the middle' (p. 110).

The narrator's opposition to the unwritten rules of the workplace reveals her dissatisfaction with her being positioned as a marginal Eastern European labour migrant with a limited degree of agency. If read from the perspective of Stuart Hall's claim that identity derives from being positioned or positioning of oneself in respect to cultural and historical discourses (2001, p. 53), the narrator's decision to work under the same conditions as the locals may suggest her determination to position herself as the same rather than different / 'other' at least in the work context, where honesty and efficiency rather than the country of origin – in the narrator's view – function as markers of difference. At the contextual level, it is important to point out that in the British agricultural sector, which provides the setting for the first two autobiographical novels by Julija Miliūtė, migrants from EU countries constitute 98% of the 'temporary, seasonal workforce' (Barathova, 2018, pp. 8–9). Despite the much debated effects of migration from the EU on the social and economic spheres of the UK, a recent study of the role of the Brexit vote results on the future of the British agricultural sector reveals that 'it is very important for the UK government to set some system which would ensure the easy and sufficient inflow of European workers in order to fill demand [in food and agricultural sectors] even after Brexit' (pp. 8–9; 11).

The situation of immigrants after the Brexit vote is the focus in the final chapter of Miliūtė's third novel *Kaip svajonė virsta realybe* (*How the Dream Turns into Reality*). The narrator, embodying the immigrant success story, works as a manager in a fruit and vegetables transportation company. She seems to have overcome the challenges of the early stages of relocation: long work hours, accommodation in filthy, crowded caravans, risk of unemployment, little or no knowledge of English and the related insecurities (see Simkunas & Thomsen, 2018, p. 35; Parutis, 2011, p. 263). The Brexit vote means that the narrator again feels uncertain about her future in Britain. The questions linger about whether immigrants will be allowed to stay in the country, whether they will be able to move across borders, whether they will need work permits. The narrator admits that the results of the referendum affect not only foreigners but also the British people and the relationship between the two groups. Although the hostility which increased after the vote seems to have subsided, the narrator feels insecure when surrounded by larger groups of British people. On the other hand, she

feels that her fears are exaggerated and that on many occasions the British treat her as an insider rather than an 'other'. In one particular instance, when waiting at a bus stop, she is approached by a group of British senior citizens who engage her in small talk. Being aware that her accented English betrays her foreignness, by implication her status as 'other', she suggests that the British enter the bus first, explaining that this way it would be more convenient for their group to find seats in close proximity. The people in the group, however, adhere to the queuing etiquette and remind her that she was first in the queue. Delighted by being treated so kindly, she 'įskriej[a] į autobusą' as if on wings and heads to the back of the vehicle, still feeling shy of her foreignness (Miliūtė, 2018, p. 200–1).[5] But the pensioners surprise her by saying that they are grateful to foreigners who work in their country:

> Dėl jų mes galime nemokamai keliauti. [...] Iš viso mes didžiuojamės visais atvykusiais, nesvarbu iš kur, kurie prisideda prie mūsų ekonomikos klestėjimo. [...] Mes gauname pensijas, geras pensijas. Mūsų šalis eina senyn, dirbančiųjų mažėja. Tik emigrantų dėka Anglija klesti. (p. 201)[6]

Episodes like this help the narrator overcome her Brexit-induced 'phobias' and to cherish hope that the country which helped her realize her dreams will also allow her to achieve one more goal. She wants to open a Lithuanian bookstore in the town where she works (pp. 201, 204). In addition to the role of literature as a potential agent of social change mentioned above, several points are notable in regard to this goal. One is that literature can be 'a negotiator between people and cultures even in times of extreme crisis' as it can provide information about significant moments and orientations in different moments of a nation's life (Einhaus, 2018, p.165). Another point is linked to the perception of literature as maintaining ethnic consciousness (Hannerz, 1990, p. 249). Immigrant literature, as Lacroix Chantal holds, 'through its narrative of "between-ness", encapsulates and indeed encourages migrants' transnational affinities and, as such, affects society's integration process' (2010, p. 2). Undeniably, the results of the Brexit vote have left many migrants uncertain about

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[5] 'flies on the bus'.
[6] 'Due to them we can travel free of charge. [...] We are proud of all foreigners who contribute to the economy of our country – regardless of their country of origin. [...] We receive pensions, quite decent ones. We are an aging society; the number of working people is decreasing. It is the immigrants who boost Britain's economy'.

possibilities of moving freely between their home country and Britain. A study of transnationalist orientations among Polish and Lithuanian migrants residing in Britain reveals that after the EU referendum some migrants 'choose not to leave the UK until they [...] can retain the option of returning there freely. [...] [T]hey emphasise the controlled fluidity of the current situation, whereby they monitor the current conditions both where they are and also in other countries and keep their options open' (Klimavičiūtė et al., 2020, n.p.). Miliūtė's narrator, too, says that she would like to stay until she is able to 'padovanoti miesteliui lietuvišką knygyną' as her legacy.[7] She also admits that it is not easy to stay when hearing 'Išeik', 'leave' (Miliūtė 2018, p. 204).

Restaurants, Independence and Emancipation: Giedrė Biliotavičiūtė

The transnational orientation of central characters pursuing a dream to open a restaurant of ethnic food in London provides a theme in Giedrė Biliotavičiūtė's autobiographical novel *Tarp Kauno ir Londono* (*Between Kaunas and London*) (2017). Like Miliūtė, Biliotavičiūtė's novel employs a narrative structure characteristic of 'a traditional immigrant narrative' described by Natalie Friedman as beginning in the home country, followed by the depiction of the journey to the country of destination, and then featuring 'the assimilation of its characters to [the host culture]' (2004, p. 80). The paratextual components of Biliotavičiūtė's novel, the preface and the acknowledgements, feed into the novel's subtext as they serve as explicit empowerment for women to seek financial independence, and by extension, freedom to make decisions that suit their personal goals. The novel tells the story of Asta and Kristina, women in their thirties who, after much deliberation, take the decision to leave for Britain in order to earn money for starting a restaurant as business partners. An additional impetus for leaving their homeland is the desire to escape unfulfilling relationships and confining gender roles. Kristina is married with two children, the sole financial provider who also does all of the family's chores. She has to cope with her husband's prolonged unemployment, manage their pre-teen children, walk the family pet, and take second jobs in order to support her family. Asta, a single woman, has to deal with what Suzanne Leonard calls 'pathologization of singlehood' (2007, p. 102). Albeit implicitly, Asta's parents – kind and loving village people – keep reminding their daughter of her unmarried status, much to her embarrassment. Having

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[7] 'donate her town a Lithuanian bookstore'.

experienced failed relationships, Asta and Kristina, embrace singleness, not as a deficiency but, to borrow a phrase from Stephanie Harzewski, as 'a state of readiness, of openness and self-sufficiency' (2006, p. 39). Being polar-opposites, '[k]aip ugnis ir vanduo' (Biliotavičiūtė 2017, p. 12), they function as a type of an androgynous entity, understanding and responding to each other's needs.[8] In London, both women find jobs, and immerse themselves in work, never seizing to think about the loved ones left behind. Their tenacious pursuit of their joint goal yields desired outcomes. They open a Lithuanian restaurant in Walthamstow and, inspired by the restaurant's success, cherish hopes to open another one. The determination to work hard and to succeed is the characteristic which allows their (self)identification as European. According to Anca Parvulescu, compliance with a number of criteria suggests to Eastern Europeans that they might be considered fully European rather than a semi-alterity/'other':

> The contemporary counterpart to the history of producing 'Eastern Europe' in its relation to Europe is the process of applying for EU admission and subsequent EU funding, a process that facilitates these countries' '*return* to Europe'. [...] Are you making enough progress? Are you modern enough? Civilized enough? Hardworking enough? Multicultural enough? Conditions for EU 'admission' aside, the paternalistic undercurrent is suggestive: European parents scolding prodigal East European children. One is reminded that the European civilizing mission has been premised on colonial generosity at helping colonies catch up with the great civilization. 'Eastern Europe' thus slides into Transitland Europe – a quasi Europe forever in transit toward Europe. (2014, p. 4; emphasis in the original)

Biliotavičiūtė's central characters are optimistic to transition into mainstream Europeanness when they compare themselves to people who left an indelible mark on the urban landscape of London. Walking in Central London and admiring the sights, the women take pride in being part of the city, which suggests an emerging sense of their belonging to the place. They also feel empowered by the realization that it is people like them who create the marvels of the city. Asta tells her friend Kristina: 'Na žinai, juk visus juos sukūrė ir pastatė žmonės. Tai jeigu

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[8] '[l]ike fire and water'.

jie sugebėjo sumąstyti tokias grožybes, sukurti jas, vadinasi, ir aš galiu, ir tu. Tik reikia nenuleisti rankų, užsispirti ir dirbti.' (Biliotavičiūtė 2017, p. 253).[9] As a result of working multiple jobs in hotels and restaurants, among others, the women save money to buy a rundown house and make it a home for themselves and their families. They refurbish the house themselves, sometimes self-ironically comparing the process of homemaking to a form of high art (p. 380).

One thing that is notable by its absence in Biliotavičiūtė's central characters' adaptation to and integration in the host culture is a discourse of failure. The final scene of the novel features a bustling, always fully booked restaurant, with the owners, Asta and Kristina, snaching a moment for a quick cup of coffee. Coffee is one of the more frequently used words in the women's lexicon. In most cases, it is taken to help them get through the day after sleepless nights spent at work, commuting to the homeland, or looking after the two small children born to Asta in Britain. In the context of Brexit, the results of the immigrant women's hard work is suddenly at risk from an increase of prices in the ethnic food business, as well as uncertainty about 'food import tariffs, [and] lack of access to staff' (Hui, 2019, n.p.). By 2020, '[a]ccording to estimates by the Office for National Statistics, there are about 186,000 Lithuanian-born residents in the UK' (Abromaitis & Špokas, 2020, n.p.). The chairwoman of the Lithuanian Community in the United Kingdom Dalia Asanavičiūtė explains that '[s]urveys show that more than half of nationals are considering a return to Lithuania, however not necessarily in the short term' ('Breaking Point'). In the novels, it is these contextual factors that lead Julija Miliūtė's protagonist to think about opening an ethnic bookstore, or opening a restaurant as depicted in Biliotavičiūtė's novel, representing the immigrants' desire 'to make the UK feel like "home"', to borrow a phrase from Kathy Burrell (2016, p. 14). Such ambitions and desires are driven by the discourses of globalization and of the EU underscoring intercultural dialogue and equality of opportunities for citizens of all member states (see 'Living Together As Equals in Dignity' [2008]). However, when these discourses materialize to become markers of individual success such as ethnic shops or restaurants, they are perceived by Leave voters as '"taking the place over"' (Szirtes, 2018, p. 198).

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[9] 'You know, all of this is human-made. If they could conjure up such ideas and create such beauty, both of us can do this, too. We just need to persevere and never to give up'.

Immigrants and crime: Kristina Baubinaitė

Brexit has triggered a closer scrutiny of the relationship between the West and 'the rest' of Europe, exposing to critique the dichotomization of Europeans into 'civilized and proper Europeans' and 'presumably criminal, uncivilized, and strangely audible and visible new Europeans' (Veličković, 2019, p. 36). However, such analyses based on an East-West dichotomy tend to highlight the marginalization of Eastern 'others', thus frequently falling into the 'trap of presenting the subaltern Eastern European as virtuous and always the victim, but never the victimizer' (p. 9). It is very likely that, in the Brexit referendum, the Eastern European in the latter role served as a cause of 'nation-thinking [that] would want the migrant to disappear' (Cheyette, 2018, p. 71).

The question of antisocial behaviour and crime features heavily in Lithuanian migrant literature. Julija Miliūtė's *Do Strawberries Turn into Ferraris*? describes pre-accession Lithuanian labour migrants navigating immigration restrictions in order to get into Britain and find employment. Their actions are justified on the grounds of their precarious financial situation. Biliotavičiūtė's novel describes anti-social behaviour of tenants in the central characters' rental property. Judging by their behaviour, style of dressing and their cars, some of the tenants are likely to be associated with the criminal world. Dealing with them frequently involves intervention of fellow countrymen or the police.

Kristina Baubinaitė's novel *Slėpynės Anglijoje* (*Hide and Seek in England*) (2019) depicts how im/immigrants in turn become victims of organized crime. The thematic concerns of the novel bear many similarities with novels which Vedrana Veličković identifies as 'educational tool[s] […] mak[ing] claims to alerting Eastern Europeans to the dangers' lurking in immigration (2019, p. 59). In an interview, Baubinaitė describes the message behind her novel:

Modern slavery is the scourge of emigration – and this book is intended to help prevent it. After having lived in Britain for several years I have learned to recognize victims of modern slavery passing by on the street. Lithuanians are proud; they would not say how they feel. Even weirder is the fact that it is Eastern Europeans themselves who are behind human trafficking and organized crime. Their victims belong to socially

vulnerable groups; most of them do not speak English, which make them feel even more vulnerable in a foreign country. They are so eaten up with guilt, fear and shame that they feel devastated, though one may think they have no will power and should take the blame for their condition. Undeniably, it is shameful to tell anyone that you are deceived, abused and exploited. Your family and relatives may find it shameful to admit that 'the emigration plan did not work out'. The stereotypes about emigration make it more difficult to admit failure. They say, ostensibly, Britain is a wonderland where it pours with pounds. So, the possibility of failure is just out of the question. But believe me – emigration can lead to failure, neither expected nor wanted. ('K. Baubinaitė's romanas'; my translation)

Her novel, set in Peterborough, features Eastern European victims of modern slavery organized by a Ukrainian man, Dima, a rootless, apolitical man whose sole interest is to make money by participating in organized crime abroad. He charms a Lithuanian woman into marrying him so he can have fast-track EU residence. When Dima and his Lithuanian wife and her daughter move to Britain, the woman's ex-husband, Arūnas, follows them hoping to help the British police unmask organized crime networks. Dima's criminal world involves vulnerable Eastern Europeans whom he spots on the street, employment agencies, or bus stops where new immigrants – 'flies', as he calls them – are dropped off. He lures them with offers of accommodation in his place. When the 'flies' are caught in Dima's trap, he forces them to distribute leaflets asking for donations, to harvest daffodils, or to work in a car repair shop, among other things. The victims also become involved in crime like shop lifting, drug dealing and prostitution. Their situation is typical of modern slavery defined as a state of 'exploitation in which a person cannot refuse or leave an exploitative situation due to threats, violence, coercion, deception or abuse of power' (David, Bryant & Larsen, 2019, p. 8). Arūnas's efforts to involve a Lithuanian police informant, a Lithuanian diplomat and a British politician in rescuing the enslaved migrants are to little avail. The immigrants are saved only after one of the tenants, shocked about losing his brother to drugs, returns the tenants' passports which he found in Dima's secret safe alongside a huge amount of money, and urges them to leave Dima's place.

The ineffective actions of people in power in identifying criminal networks acquire overtones of social critique of both home and host societies. The Lithuanian diplomat is not very interested in either Lithuanian crime or its victims. The actions of the British police are hampered by rules and restrictions, which sometimes leave little space for common sense or obvious facts. For the British politician, the situation described by Arūnas is beyond his imagination. Arūnas, a former university lecturer of philosophy, observes closely not only Dima's cobweb-like criminal networks but also British society and provides his commentary on it. In this role he aligns closely with an 'intellectual in exile' in Edward Said's sense (1996, p. 49). According to Said, an exile's vision incorporates a comparative perspective on the country 'left behind' and on the 'actual here and now', allowing one 'a much wider picture' of an issue in question. Not only that, an exile – whether a displaced person or one alienated from one's own society – 'tend[s] to see things not simply as they are, but as they have come to be that way' (p. 60).

In pursuits similar to those described by Said, Arūnas adopts a position of an outsider to probe into causal links related to cultural racism against Eastern Europeans in post-Brexit Britain. Based on his observation, he defines racism as he sees it manifesting itself in British society as 'indescribable' scornful reaction to 'viskam, kas neatitinka angliškos tvarkos, manieros ar elementariausio įpročio' (Baubinaitė 2019, p. 176).[10] By way of elaborating on the question of difference, reasons of antagonism against Eastern Europeans among the Asian community of Peterborough are exposed. Using his networks, Arūnas learns that the antagonism arises not because of the competition over jobs or standards of morality but because of the ability of Eastern Europeans to fully integrate into British society socially and culturally, if they choose to. The explanation acquires an added significance in light of contextual information included in the novel stating that Asian votes in Peterborough contributed significantly to swinging the Brexit vote for Leave (p. 124; see also *The Newsroom*, 2016, n.p.).

As such, the novel engages with an increased sensitivity to race following from the Brexit referendum. Marius, a Lithuanian informant for the British police, admits that even police actions have become affected by political correctness. Asked by Artūras to persuade the British police to raid Dima's establishment on Gladstone Street, Marius doubts he can succeed, explaining that the police

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[10] 'anything which is different from the established British order, manners or even a basic habit'.

may choose to avoid a 'politically sensitive' district with an ethnically diverse community in fear of being accused of '*hate crime*' (Baubinaitė, 2019, p. 73; emphasis in the original). Putting political correctness before the safety of Eastern Europeans enslaved by organized crime highlights discriminatory practices in treating racialised groups, or 'European others', to refer to the title of Fatima El-Tayeb's book (2011). As a strategy of 'writing back', Arūnas starts describing Britain in exclusionary terms. When he says that he is homesick and wants to go back to Lithuania, he says he misses Europe, positioning Britain, as it were, as not belonging to Europe. As a reaction to marginalization and stereotyping, he starts describing British culture by presenting an explanation of particular cultural phenomena from the perspective of 'a john' or 'a michael' (Baubinaitė 2019, p. 58). Arūnas thus ironically depicts how a British person sees the presence of Eastern Europeans in Britain. This echoes Homi Bhabha's idea of 'un-writing' the nation from the point of view of the marginal who produces '[c]ounter narratives of the nation that continuously evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – [to] disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which "imagined communities" are given essentialist identities' (1994, pp. 148–9). Arūnas's counter narrative may be intended to de-essentialize the narrative defining the boundaries of belonging in the cultural imaginary of the host country which locates the 'not-quite European' migrant as an outsider. As an outsider, he hardly has a possibility to know how cultural insiders – 'a John' or 'a Michael' – truly experience the host culture and its cultural 'others'. Arūnas's attempts to present things from the perspective of cultural insiders signals his desperation at exclusion, stemming from the inability to be accepted by the British. He stops seeing them as individuals and resorts to generalising and stereotyping, which suggests his ironic take on the British inwardness amidst the emphasis on multiculturalism (Baubinaitė 2019, p. 145). On the other hand, his efforts to generalize about the country – where he worked night shifts in a factory, observed the workplace culture, visited major historical places, studied their history, probed into the nature of relationships with other ethnic groups, and tried to know the criminal underground – point to him having the qualities of an intellectual who, as Said stated, aims to grasp causalities of events and behaviours (1996, p. 60).

Concluding thoughts

Brexit, albeit belatedly, has drawn attention to the importance of literature as a medium where discursively constructed cultural differences are re-imagined by portraying characters in specific social and historical contexts which produce them as subjects positioned by their social locations. The characters' ways of being within those locations may allow the reader to

see commonalities with regard to their human condition despite the alleged differences. Ultimately, literature reveals differences within cultural communities and, hopefully, can help in tackling the challenges that the multifaceted diversity among and within cultures inevitable pose.

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