

# Dual Enclavity and Nomadicity. Life Trajectories of Kyrgyz Horse Racing Riders Working in Poland

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## Abstract

In recent years (since 2019), a professional niche formed by Kyrgyz men has rapidly risen to dominate the horse racing ranking in Poland. This article explores their life trajectories and proposes a theoretical framework describing their mode of mobility. It is based on interviews with Kyrgyz riders, complemented by interviews with horse racing trainers.

The study reveals details of their life trajectories and identifies some common features and sequences in their experiences. These are: the usage of unique cultural capital acquired in childhood and physical capital to transition from traditional horse racing to English-style racing, the gradual shift from transregional occupational networks to transnational ones in which Poland serves as a waiting zone, and unspecified (but related to the global horse racing industry) plans for the future.

This case study is analysed from the perspective of translocality and transnational migration. I argue that the socio-economic circumstances in the migrants' country of origin and the vocational pathway they undertook as teenagers within the horse racing, result in the permanent temporality of their mobility between enclaves of horse racing centres. The article proposes the concept of dual enclavity and nomadicity to capture the particular nature of this form of mobility.

**Keywords:** dual enclavity and nomadicity, translocality, horse racing, Kyrgyz, Poland

## Abstrakt

W ostatnich latach (od 2019 r.) powstała w Polsce nisza zawodowa tworzona przez kirgiskich mężczyzn, którzy zdominowali ranking jeździecki wyścigów konnych. Artykuł zawiera analizę ich trajektorii życiowych oraz propozycję teoretycznego ujęcia właściwego im rodzaju mobilności. Bazę

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empiryczną artykułu stanowią wywiady pogłębione przeprowadzone z kirgiskimi jeźdźcami oraz z trenerami koni wyścigowych.

Badanie ukazuje szczegóły właściwe trajektoriom życiowym kirgiskich jeźdźców oraz identyfikuje wspólne cechy i sekwencje w ich doświadczeniach. Do tych drugich należą: wykorzystanie unikalnego kapitału kulturowego nabytego w dzieciństwie oraz kapitału fizycznego do przejścia od udziału w tradycyjnych wyścigach konnych do udziału w wyścigach w stylu angielskim, stopniowe poszerzanie zawodowych sieci migracyjnych od ponadregionalnych do ponadnarodowych (w których Polska stanowi strefę przejściową) oraz niesprecyzowane, ale związane z globalnym przemysłem wyścigów konnych plany na przyszłość.

Prezentowane studium przypadku, analizowane jest z perspektywy translokacyjności i migracji transnarodowych. Twierdzą, że okoliczności społeczno-ekonomiczne w kraju pochodzenia migrantów oraz ścieżka zawodowa podjęta przez nich w wieku nastoletnim w ramach świata wyścigów konnych, skutkują permanentną tymczasowością ich mobilności między enklawami ośrodków wyścigów konnych. Artykuł zawiera propozycję koncepcji podwójnej enklawowości i nomadyczności, która ma na celu uchwycenie szczególnego charakteru tej formy mobilności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** podwójna enklawowość i nomadyczność, translokacyjność, wyścigi konne, Kirgizi, Polska

## Introduction

Everyone interested in sports these days inevitably becomes an observer of the phenomena of mobility, migration, citizenship policies, and the social attribution of national identities to sportspeople. In this article, I analyse the contemporary case of migration in the discipline of horse racing, which is simultaneously: a sport, an industry, a betting medium (Cassidy 2002), and a subculture (Huggins 2003). The article explores the life trajectories of young Kyrgyz in the context of their migration to Poland in order to identify its pivotal sequences. By migration I mean at least one year stay in the country.

With the more than 232 000 migrants of various status in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, around 700 Kyrgyz people seem like a drop in the ocean ([migracje.gov.pl](https://migracje.gov.pl) 2024). However, there is a place in Warsaw where young men from Kyrgyzstan are socially highly visible. This is the Służewiec Racecourse. For the last four years, in the overwhelming majority of the races, two or three Kyrgyz have taken part; and it has not seldom been the case that most of the horses were ridden by them. At the end of the 2023 season, Kyrgyz men occupied all three top positions in the equestrian ranking. Thus, young men from Kyrgyzstan swiftly filled a professional niche that endures from structural stuff undersupply (Bossak-Herbst 2020) and gained the top positions and recognition in the field.

The article begins by outlining the course of the research, followed by the specification of the horse racing riders' professions in the context of mobility. Subsequently, I delve into the socio-economic situation prevailing in Kyrgyzstan in the context of economic migrations and the mobility of its inhabitants. In the main part of the article, I analyse interviews with five Kyrgyz riders who work in the horse racing industry

in Poland, and complement them with the perspective of four horse racing trainers. Along with the thematic analysis I analyse some specificities of Kyrgyz narratives with a focus on how they express the intentionality of their actions, and sequentially in their life courses.

The discussion of the research results consists of three parts revealing certain patterns in interviewees' life trajectories. These are: the transition from traditional horse racing (*bayga*) to globalized English-style horse racing, usage of personal social networks within occupational enclaves to shift from transregional to transnational mobility, and unspecified, fluid (but related to horse racing industry) plans for the future. The analysis draws to the concluding theory of dual nomadity and enclavity, which provides a synthetic summary and offers a model of mobility that can be relevant to the analysis of other empirical cases.

## Theoretical framework

The transformation of migration patterns in an increasingly globalized world, a world of liquid/late modernity in which transnationalism is no longer the privilege of the few, focus researchers' interest (Waniek 2020). Neoclassical theories of migrations (Jaskułowski and Pawlak 2016) and binary categories such as internal *versus* external migrations, forced *versus* voluntary migrations, temporary *versus* permanent ones are challenged by empirical studies on human forms of migrations and mobility. It is argued that the contemporary mobility of many social groups and categories of people can be more accurately described in terms such as fluidity or incompleteness (Okólski 1998). Furthermore, the permanent temporariness applies both to highly-skilled and low-skilled workers (Triandafyllidou 2022).

In recent decades, migration processes have been studied more in the interpersonal contexts considering functions of kinship, social and cultural dependencies of migrants, and their diverse migration histories (Jaskulski, Pawlak 2016). Sports migration mobility researchers aligned with those trends. As Lenartowicz and Ciok (2020) write, in the academic literature available in English, research on sports migration is mainly concerned with Anglo-Saxon countries and the most popular sports. In line with general trends, football researchers also argue:

It is time to invert the research perspective showing how the analysis of commerce and international migration of footballers serves to better understand the process of globalization . . . by underlining the central role that human intermediation plays in the economic construction of competitive advantages and in the dynamics of spatial inequalities

(Poli 2010: 502).

In accordance with the proposal of Raffael Poli (2010) and Thomas F. Carter (2011) my article includes the analysis of migration networks and the experiences

and agency of sports migrants. Also, following Boccagni's, (2012) the life trajectories of Kyrgyz horse racing riders are considered both in the context of globalization processes, their networks, identities, and attachment to home.

What I define as life trajectories are, in the broadest sense, sequential biographical events and how that sequentially is constructed by the interviewees. In my further analysis, elements of biographical research and life course analysis are included due to their interest in interpretive reconstruction of meaning over the life course, dynamics of social structures over time, tracing the interconnections between micro- and macro-sociological components and exploring contextual conditions, circumstances and effects of particular transitions (Jonda, Sackmann: 20-21). However, in this article I am not introducing the particular conceptual terms specific to these research traditions.

In the context of this study, the formation of migration networks is related to the functioning of professional niches. As Agnoletto sums up, the cultural thesis explains the propensity for ethnic occupational niches to form by a particular heritage, ethos, or way of life. The structural approach draws attention to the circumstances in which migrants take advantage of opportunities to engage in certain occupational activities that are not sufficiently undertaken by members of the host society. The "mixed approach" draws attention to the role of ethnic community networks and the influence of law, public institutions, and regulatory practices (Agnoletto 2001). In this case, the focus is on how interviewees describe the genesis of their niche.

Kyrgyz horsemen in Poland form an ethnic occupational niche, which is immersed in a physical enclave at the horse training centre, which itself is highly socially and spatially isolated (Bossak-Herbst 2020). Nevertheless, these communities are linked by transnational networks of people, horses, and capital flows forming a global subculture within the horse racing industry, which will become the groundwork for the concept of dual enclivity. Furthermore, I will elaborate on the characteristics of the mobility model exhibited by Kyrgyz riders and suggest defining it in the context of dual nomadicity relating to their home country's culture and type of profession. In conclusions I interpret their life trajectories in the broader perspective of translocality (Stephan-Emmrich, Schröder 2018), and transnational migration theories. The case of the Kyrgyz horse racing riders in Poland contributes to my proposal of the concept of a dual enclivity and nomadicity aiming at capturing a particular form of mobility.

## **Data collection, participants, research challenges and analytical work**

The project's inception occurred during the public historical walk devoted to the horse racing world in Poland, which I was conducting at the Służewiec Racecourse in February 2022. It was attended, among others, by the sociologist and psychologist Kyunney Takasaeva, who once had prepared the doctoral thesis in sociology under

the supervision of the same professor as I. The researcher noticed the great affinity between the equine culture of a Kyrgyz man working next to the racing stables and her own – the Sakha people of Yakutia. Given Kunney Takasaeva's background, which could create a sense of familiarity with the interviewees (as she also happens to be mistaken for a Kyrgyz woman), and her age, which is older than the riders and potentially conducive to building rapport, I invited her to the research to conduct the interviews in Russian with Kyrgyz riders.

The empirical basis of the article consists of semi-structured interviews conducted with five Kyrgyz riders (marked A–E) and four trainers (marked 1–4), including one Russian trainer who has lived in Poland for more than a quarter of a century and initiated the recruitment of Kyrgyz riders to Poland. Most interviews lasted more than an hour – the longest was 95 minutes, the shortest, with one of the trainers, 20 minutes. One of the Polish trainers contacted us with the first interviewee of Kyrgyz origin. The research was carried out further through the snowball sampling. The interviews were conducted from spring to autumn 2022. I conducted interviews with the Polish trainers, Kyunney Takasaeva with the riders, and one trainer in Russian.

The two youngest riders who took part in the research were each 23 years old at the time of the study, and the oldest was 29. The other Kyrgyz riders in Poland are equally young (there were fifteen of them at the time at Służewiec Racecourse, and a few more were expected to arrive). All are bachelors. They occupy different professional statuses in the racing world: A and C hold some of the highest equestrian ranks, E has had considerable successes, B rarely races and mainly works as a training rider, D exclusively works as a training rider.

Participants provided informed verbal consent to participate in the research. The interviews were focused on the biographical experiences of interviewees, though Kyunney Takasaeva encountered challenges in obtaining narrative interviews if understood as extended, spontaneous narratives without the researcher's intervention (Wanick 2020). Usually after a few minute lasting answer to the opening question "Please tell me about your life from the beginning to the present day" riders expected directing. Thus the researcher was relating to the questions in the scenario and interviews were conducted in the semi-structured form. It was influenced by several factors.

The language barrier was a first factor, as the interviews were conducted in Russian, a language varying in proficiency among the Kyrgyz riders. Secondly, the outstanding 'shyness' of most Kyrgyz riders was mentioned by all Polish interviewees. Two of the trainers mentioned the racism they experienced when they were working in Russia, which can make them reluctant to talk with the strangers. One of them also linked it to the influence of religion and, in some cases, to the difficult personal situation resulting from the conflict between the marriage plans established in the family homes. To ensure freedom of expression, interviewees were guaranteed anonymity. However, the situation of the interview, during which personal stories are expected to

be told in detail and anonymized at the same time, was new to the interviewees. As sports people they are much more familiar with the journalistic scheme of interviewing in which the interviewee provides short answers and his/her identity is crucial. In the article, riders names are replaced by first letters from the alphabet, and some details of their places of origin, mobility, and personal lives are concealed.

As it was mentioned, the interviews with the Kyrgyz horse riders were conducted in Russian and then translated into Polish. I carried out the analysis in Polish. Language is a challenge even in qualitative research conducted in one language as there is always a gap between a life as lived, a life as experienced and a life as told (Bruner 1984). As Temple and Young point out, some researchers interested in translation and interpretation issues (which is not common) discuss validity in terms of 'correct' interpretations, register, ethics, matching social characteristics and neutral stances. Analysis is then a matter of examining the findings within the text. Who controls the analysis is irrelevant if objectivity is achieved in the research process. The researcher can represent others by virtue of this objectivity once translation problems have been 'solved'. This is the dominant model in much cross-linguistic research, if only by default. (2004:163).

However, acceptance of even a moderate version of the hypothesis of linguistic relativism leads to the conclusion that a literal translation is impossible. The resolution of this situation is context. As Sherry Simon writes:

The solutions to many of the translator's dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities, to literary forms and to changing identities. Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhabit are 'the same'. These are not technical difficulties, they are not the domain of specialists in obscure or quaint vocabularies. . . . In fact the process of meaning transfer has less to do with finding the cultural inscription of a term than in reconstructing its value" (1996: 137–138).

In this project, Kyunney Takasaeva worked as an interviewer, transcriber, and translator from Russian to Polish. I worked as an analyst, author of the article, and translator into English. My assumption is that our modes of engagement with the reality under study allow me to cautiously assume the essential accuracy of our translations in reflecting the experiences, feelings and values of the interlocutors. When conducting the interviews in her own or the interviewees' homes, Kyunney Takasaeva's unique relationship with the Kyrgyz riders was based on certain cultural similarities between herself and the interviewees, overlaid by the similarity of the situation of migration to Poland. At the stage of translating the transcriptions from Russian into Polish, Kyunney Takasaeva and I discussed issues that seemed unclear to either of us. At this point, the biggest obstacle for the translator was the technical language related to horse racing. However, with my many years of research and experience in horseracing, it was possible to overcome this.

Finally I decided to introduce some minor amendments to translated transcriptions, such as: a) correcting race-related expressions and b) changing instances where riders referred to themselves in the third person minor amendments to avoid confusion. The latter, according to Takasaeva, was a manner taught in elementary schools in former soviet republics. After the amendments, I analysed the interviews in Polish. It was only the final version of my article that I translated into English.

I assume that the epistemological status of autobiographical materials including interviews, is ambiguous; without resolving whether they essentially constitute an informative document or are primarily an interpretative account (Waniek 2020: 92). At the first step my analysis of the empirical material commenced with a thematic analysis focused on the issues the interviewees were questioned about. It concerned: a) first contacts with horses b) participation in various types of horse competitions c) working with horses at different stages of life d) migration processes to Poland and e) plans for the future. Including those biographic details, the article presents three topics, emerging beyond the individuality of life trajectories of the interlocutors, framed in the theoretical language: the transition from traditional horse racing (bayga) to globalized English-style flat racing, usage of personal social networks within occupational enclaves to shift from transregional mobility to a transnational one, and a specific type of plans for the future.

## **The mobility in the horse racing riders profession**

Prior to the analysis of the interviews, I will characterise the working conditions of a racehorse jockey in 60 countries recognised and thus officialised by the IFHA (International Federation of Horse Racing Authorities). This description will focus on job-specific factors that promote and inhibit transnational mobility and migration. The horse racing industry, more specifically flat thoroughbred racing, has been becoming a transnational phenomenon since the 18th century (Huggins 2019). This was due to the global spread of the culture of the British Empire transnationally functioning networks of and bourgeoisie who owned racehorses (Bossak-Herbst 2020).

Unlike other sports, horse racing lacks national, international, or team competitions. Horses are privately owned: by individuals, syndicates or companies (sometimes also by states or royal families) and jockeys' outfits represent their unique colours. During the race day, a jockey may represent a different owner each time during successive races. There are several degrees of equestrian career. The person who wins 100 races obtains the highest title – jockey.

Exceptional jockeys receive offers from various owners, not limited to their home country. Moreover, he/she may actively seek them out. Thus the best horses and the best riders, sometimes independently of each other, can travel between continents,

only to be paired to participate in one prestigious (and potentially very profitable) race. The racing jobs on different continents share far more similarities than differences. The lack of fluency in a country's language, beyond a basic professional vocabulary, isn't a significant barrier. Trainers, like riders, may be foreigners and migrants, given the horse racing industry's transnational nature. Consequently, highly skilled jockeys can adopt diverse mobility strategies over different time horizons, ranging from weeks to years.

The precarious nature of the jockey's job, characterised by income insecurity and occasional losses, also creates potential motivations for migration. Unsuccessful periods, health problems or the need to transition to the role of trainer or training rider due to weight gain or health limitations may lead to a jockey's decision to explore opportunities in countries where the horse racing industry has a stronger labour market that provides stable employment.

Horse owners, gamblers, and various professional groups associated with the world of horse racing possess different and complimentary forms of capitals (Bourdieu 1987). In the jockeying profession, in addition to talent, skill, and commitment, a specific and rare type of physical capital is crucial; one that is anti-capital in many other social contexts. This is low weight. In most countries, acceptable weights for riders competing in races oscillate between 49.9–63 kg. Yet maintaining a weight over 60 kg can exclude a rider from most handicaps (Wilson et al. 2014).

The demand for tiny horsemen with good physical conditions and a specific aptitude has outstripped supply throughout the 20th century with specific implications. One of these is the feminization of the riding (Bossak-Herbst, Głowacka-Grajper 2021) especially in training riding, whereas the second is reaching for workers from countries where: exposure of youths to horses is not an uncommon experience, and where there is still not a marginal percentage of adult males who can keep their weight below the 60 kg limit. There is no reliable data on the weights of the populations to compare Poland and Kyrgyzstan in this regard. Nevertheless, in terms of average height, for Polish men and Kyrgyz men, the difference is 9 cm, so it is not negligible ([worldpopulationreview.com](http://worldpopulationreview.com)).

In Poland after World War II, racehorses, and the organization of horse racing and betting were nationalized and their number was limited. The national studs replaced the private horse breeders and owners. Between 1950 and 1993, the monopoly for the organization of training, racing, and betting was the National Racecourse in Warsaw. At the end of 1993, this entity was liquidated; the organization of training and horse ownership were privatized. Following Poland's political transformation in the 1990s, many professionals from the horse racing industry emigrated to Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, or Italy (Bossak-Herbst 2020). Their place was filled by amateurs (mainly females) as well as Russians and citizens of former Soviet republics such as Tatarstan, several of whom remained in the Polish horse racing industry until today.



## Kyrgyzstan in the context of citizens' mobility

Located in mountainous Central Asia, the Kyrgyz Republic was one of the less developed and urbanised republics both at the beginning, and the end of its belonging to the USSR. After independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan went through as many as three revolutions ending with the replacement of the ruling elite. Scholars' explanations for these developments point to the instability of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and refer to its tribalism and divided character as a nation (Ivanov 2022). Independence brought economic impoverishment to the people of Kyrgyzstan. Despite reforms, in the 21st century, Kyrgyzstan has not left the group of poorest countries in the world (Sagynbekova 2016).

"There is no life without livestock in this village" – Bernd Steimann (2011) often heard during the course of his research in Kyrgyzstan at the dawn of the 21st century. Animals, especially sheep and horses, formed the basis of the Kyrgyz nomadic lifestyle in pre-colonial times. Also in Soviet times, sheep, cows, and horses were raised not only for the kolkhoz but also for the private needs of the people, and pastoral mobility was not destroyed. Its patterns were soundly altered and restricted only with the development of private ownership after 1991. However, it has never disappeared and, along with the instability of the country, is being activated as a flexible form of adaptation to difficult economic conditions (Steimann 2011).

Diversifying family income through labour migration of some of its members is one strategy for coping with economic uncertainty (Barrett et al. 2001). Based on measurements of GDP, Kyrgyzstan is one of the most remittance-dependent countries in the world (Wang et al. 2019). It is identified as an exemplary non-island country that aligns with the MIRAB model of social-economic development (Jasinski 2018). A distinguishing feature of MIRAB is deriving significant income, at over double-digit rates as a percentage of GNP from two sources – development aid, and remittances from expatriates. Moreover, the trend for remittances is upward in Kyrgyzstan.

In recent decades, internal and international labour migration has become the main livelihood strategy for many families in the country. Migration is such a widespread phenomenon that the national population census includes questions on it (IOM 2023). It is estimated that as many as one-third of Kyrgyzstan's employable population works abroad. Mass migration to Russia appears to be a continuation of the idea of *Druzhba* (friendship of nations), where one transnational identity prevails over ethnic differences (Sahadeo 2007). However, as Sahadeo reveals, during the Soviet era, Central Asian workers in Moscow and Leningrad were perceived as black (*chernye*) and faced discrimination.

According to the researchers, current labour migration phenomena are not so unique, as the history of Central Asia has always been characterised by the movement of people, including seasonal internal but also external migration, forced and voluntary, legal and illegal, permanent and temporary, ethnically or economically motivated

migration (Chandonnet et al. 2016). Mobility associated with a pastoralist-based lifestyle is still an important, non-marginal feature of contemporary Kyrgyz culture. Furthermore, international mobility in pursuit of employment by sections of family groups is also the norm in Kyrgyzstan. Against this backdrop, the very decision to migrate by young Kyrgyz working in the world of horse racing is therefore not atypical.

## Results

### From Bayga races to flat racing

All interviewees hail from large families, with family sizes ranging from five (two interviewees) to seven children (two interviewees). Two are first-born sons, and two are the youngest. E, born in Bishkek, comes from a family with three generations of thoroughbred racing traditions. A and B, originating from small towns, moved to the capital Bishkek, where racing stables are located, during their teenage years. B and E were the youngest sons who along with their older brothers, had engaged in working at racing stables in Bishkek since childhood. Notably, both of them pursued higher or incomplete higher education. The other two interlocutors, C and D, come from one rural region, and families involved in raising farm animals, including horses.

Childhood involvement in work was common among all interviewees: some worked with horses on farms, others in racing stables in Bishkek. By ages 8 to 14, they participated in *bayga*, traditional long-distance horse races (in literature in the context of Kyrgyzstan, the word used is *at-chabysh*, yet all interviewees were using the word *bayga*, common in Kazakhstan), or other horse sports competitions. Interviewee D, who works in Poland only as a training rider, as a child was primarily involved in the horse game called *ulak tartysh*.

Bayga is the name of a traditional form of horse racing deeply rooted in the cultures of Central Asia. These long-distance races are often part of larger family reunions and local or national festivals. Until the 1990s, bayga races were held on a smaller scale. After the collapse of the USSR, state horse breeding was gradually liquidated, and in the capital of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, the organization of English-style flat races was discontinued. Since then bayga races began to experience a renaissance; they were joined by trainers, riders, and breeders who were previously associated with English-style racing.

The traditional races are divided according to the weight categories of the riders and between native and foreign-bred horses. Children aged 7–14, up to 40 kg in weight, take part in one of these races. The children mount their horses bareback and gallop continuously for more than two hours covering several dozen kilometres. In the interviews, mentions of bayga races appear as a source of frustration or happiness related to winnings. The interviewees, apart from mentioning that they are

long races without a saddle, do not describe them. One person said a little more, emphasising the dangers of participating in bayga (concussions and fractures) and their different organisation due to the lack of racing statistics. The lack of descriptions of bayga races may be due to the not necessarily positive reactions of the Poles after they had previously told about them.

One racing trainer recounted more about bayga races:

X [Kyrgyz rider working for this trainer – author’s note] told us that he came from poverty. When he was a child, he used to have a butt that was worn out to the bone from riding the bayga races for 50 km at a time (...). Bayga is a stamina race, a devastating sport. There is no halter stage there – good horses are used until the very end. Some horses collapse. Riders, mainly children, ride without saddles, for 2.5 hours at a time. The boys weigh 18–19 kg each! Children and horses are exhausted. A lot of horses have injuries – the Kazakhs [who own most of the horses] therefore have to buy new ones regularly. The bayga races are held every one and a half, two months. Usually 70, 80 horses take part. Some just finish the race. They like the crowd, just taking part. Some children fall off the horses, the horses fall. (...) The prize is prestigious and financial. It’s usually an off-road vehicle; once a Toyota Land Cruiser, now more of a Lada Niva. Children and their families receive money from the owners [of the winning horses– author’s note]. During the bayga races and other horse competitions, the spirit of war games is still palpable. (1)

Participation in the bayga races and training involved journeys, during which, as minors, interviewees had to manage away from their families under the guidance of trainers. Although the interviewees acknowledge the influence of their fathers or brothers, none states that the choice of their current professional path was made for them. The three interviewees point to a moment when, on their own, or even against their parents’ wishes or expectations, as teenagers or young adults they decided to stay with horse sports.

[After the accident that forced a year’s break from competing – author’s note] I was very worried. I knew I would come back. I was dreaming all the time. Yes, I wanted to..., I dreamed. My parents were against it, they wouldn’t let me. Maybe I have that kind of character... I didn’t eat anything, I didn’t talk... then they let me go. I boycotted my parents. I really wanted to go back to the races. (C)

A different narrative is told by B, who did not have a father and was already working in racing stables as a six-year-old with his older brothers. However, as a youngster he fulfilled his family’s dreams and became an economist, graduating from university with honours:

I was working as an economist in one company, I was an accountant. And then it turned out that, exactly when I worked for a year... I wished to go back to horses. Because I was doing the same thing every day... paper-pushing at work. And I wanted the adrenaline, the excitement... .It seemed like all was well. It seems like work: clean, neat, everything is

as it should be... but I wanted... .When you're riding... you're not in the clouds and not on the ground, but... between heaven and earth, and that feeling... that feeling of freedom, and I think that's in our blood! (...) my ancestors also all rode horses, horses were the main means of transport. 'Horses are the most important' as they say. The horse is the wings of man! Yes, and now I don't know... at the moment I can't imagine life without horses. And it is this dream, in my opinion, that has taken me so far from home. For a year as I was working as an economist, I didn't want to work anymore, at some point, I realised it wasn't mine. I resigned. Well... I thought: if I don't give up now and work with horses, it will be too late later. (B)

The life course achieved by gaining an academic degree and a white collar job had brought suffering to the interviewee. Breaking the trajectory of suffering and finding a meaning are revealed in his narrative, and may be called a "biographical metamorphosis", which means an unexpected positive change in the life entailing creative development. At first however, the subject does not know how to deal with them. Thus although they have originated in the inner sphere of the individual's spontaneity they at least initially introduce disorder and a sense of self-alienation into the individual's life (Waniek, Kaźmierska 2020: 113–114).

The interviewee abandoned a stable life to pursue dreams that legitimise cultural traditions, which paradoxically forced him to leave his homeland. The way he presents the reasons for his biographical metamorphosis, suggests a kind of being 'pushed' towards horse racing by the cultural spirit of his country of origin.

Also C made a generalisation about Kyrgyz who came to Poland to race also due to the cultural circumstances:

We actually know how to ride horses from the very beginning. In fact, we were born on horses, we are Kyrgyz. It was not difficult for us to learn how to ride in flat races because we have been riding horses all our childhood and we know the nature of horses. (C)

The age of the interviewees does not reflect in the number of work experiences and related mobility (bayga races are organised in different parts of Kyrgyzstan and neighbouring countries, mainly in Kazakhstan). The youngest of the interviewees, who are also very successful in Poland, have the most to their credit. He, as a fourteen-year-old, had already started many months of trips with racehorse trainers across Kazakhstan (multiple locations) to Krasnodar, Pyatigorsk, Dagestan, and Tatarstan.

In the interviews with the Kyrgyz horsemen, the turning points that divide the narratives into sequences are the racing successes or failures that constitute the closures of the periods of life they recount. I cite an excerpt about A's teenage years to illustrate this dynamic:

The trainer promised to provide me with a school where I would learn and work with the horses. I worked there and studied at the school there. I trained with the horses, worked, fed, cleaned. I was only interested in the horses. I stopped going to school. I was horse

jumping, I was making money. I didn't go to school anymore. After I got the money, I started to participate in races in 2013 in Nauryz, Bishkek. The trainer gave me a chance, but the filly was weak and didn't last the long distance and I didn't get the prize. And I went back home to the farm... Then the second start at the end of the year. We came to Bishkek, I took 3rd place that year. That was important for me, I was very happy. I was praised and the interest in me increased. I was in 9th grade at that time I already had goals, I trained thoroughly and got up in the morning. I already had a goal. For something ...and that's all I was after. And other offers started, I started to win often and took prestigious places, other coaches, other owners. And I changed jobs ... . (A)

Likewise in other interviews, the chronological sequences presented are combined with memories of key emotions associated with racing events:

There were horse races in our village, in the village of M. (...). I remember I was 11 years old, I took 1st place. I didn't win money, I won a picture as a souvenir [laughs]. It was kolkhoz races ... that's where I won my first start. When I was young, money didn't interest me. I was very happy! I remember... the feelings in general.... I don't remember myself before the win, after the win I remember everything. Everybody knew me, recognised me! I cried a lot, I asked my parents a lot, I really wanted to win even more, I wanted to learn and keep going.... And I started practicing. (C)

Interviewees had participated in various types of horse events, also World Nomad Games. A from the age of 14 never went home again for more than a few months: "It turns out that all my childhood I worked at the racing, far away from home, from my parents". As the interviewees approached adulthood, they were starting to take up English-style horse racing jobs in Russia. This path missed only the second of the two youngest interviewees, who straight away had the possibility to join others in Poland (he also competes in racing in the Czech Republic).

In summary, all interviewees, despite their young age (23–29 at the time of the research), already have multiannual experience of working with horses, contributing to the family budget, and experiences of translocality: mobilities connected with horse sports within former Soviet Republics. As they entered adulthood and sought employment with a steady income, the interviewees made the decision, usually without strong support from their families, to move into professional horse racing, which forced them to migrate outside Kyrgyzstan.

### **From translocality to transnationality. Migration networks**

The process of acquiring the necessary documents for Kyrgyz riders to commence work in Poland is time-consuming. The unstable situation in Kyrgyzstan and neighbouring countries often leads to significant delays, spanning many months, in obtaining visas. Furthermore, after assembling all the required documentation, which

includes an invitation to work from a specific Polish employer, the migrant must submit the documents in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, as there is no Polish embassy in Bishkek.

The persistent shortage of manpower at Polish racing stables prompts trainers to actively search for employees. The initiative to attract workers from Kyrgyzstan originated from a Russian trainer and jockey who has been residing in Poland for nearly thirty years. He shared information about job opportunities at Służewiec on Russian-language racing forums and facilitated communication between interested individuals and trainers from Służewiec.

Migration networks play a crucial role in the entire process on multiple levels. Primarily, they serve as a means for both sides to exchange information on each other. Initially, Russian trainers and jockeys acted as intermediary links. The first rider from Kyrgyzstan arrived in Poland in 2019. Before that, he worked at the racetrack in Moscow with the sister of the other Russian jockey who has been working at the Służewiec Racecourse for twenty years. Based on her positive stories on Poland he decided to apply for a job in one of the Polish horse racing stables, where the trainer was looking for new employees. The coach who decided to hire the first Kyrgyz rider obtained information about him from other people connected with the Moscow racecourse. As she recounts:

“There was a trainer M. – a Russian. He was here [at Służewiec Racecourse] some time ago with his wife. Then moved back to Russia. He [the Kyrgyz rider] worked for him at first – rode a several races in Moscow. So I knew that this was definitely a rider who was race-proven.” (2)

Subsequent newcomers from Kyrgyzstan know in person at least one Kyrgyz horseman present in Poland. Some of the riders, like interviewees C and E, were already actively seeking work in Poland through colleagues.

The Kyrgyz horsemen employed in Poland share two types of relationships rooted in their childhood experiences. The first type is familial (brothers, cousins) or neighbourly, while the second is derived from acquaintances from their childhood when they used to take part in bayga races. At present, the Kyrgyz community of a dozen or so Kyrgyz working at races is roughly divided in half – those who are developing a horse-racing career and those who have not started one for the time being. The latter divides into those who have such aspirations and those who prefer to stick to training rides.

Trainer 2 says:

We depend on this migration. The races would fall apart if we hadn't had this landing of a dozen or even more people, we wouldn't have any new employees at all, apart from the girls who come and go, but mainly come when, let's say, they are studying, studying and have time to do something else.

All interlocutors, including trainers, mentioned the language barrier and challenges related to learning Polish as the exam for a riding license is held in Polish.

Trainers and stable friends helped the newcomers learn the language. Thus the key to building trust was not language communication but a good knowledge of horses among the latter:

The locals look at us – because we are the first Kyrgyz who started riding here, and before us, they had French and Russians here for a long time. (...) We are praised because we generally fall less [from horses]. They praise us very much, emphasizing that we are Asians, a nomadic people and we grew up among horses. (A)

Each of the interlocutors emphasized and presented differently what was difficult for them in Poland. Their attitudes cover a wide spectrum when it comes to assessing the challenges associated with adapting to life in Poland.

First impression: good atmosphere, normal attitude towards us, nothing like: “Where did you come from?!” and so on... everywhere, not only in the hippodrome. Very nice people, I don’t feel any discrimination based on nationality, for example, when walking down the street. (B)

However, two other interlocutors resigned from working at the racing stables in Warsaw in favour of more intimate training centres. One of them has not yet passed the license exam and for now is content with training riding. His narrative reveals much less determination, and a need for support in others. Although it should be emphasized that his mobility and horse racing experiences are the most modest. However, “C” was successful, and yet his statement unveils that the Służewiec society treated him with a distance that discouraged him:

Previously, I wanted to be in Warsaw. Then I saw the stables in Warsaw, the trainers, and I really didn’t like it and didn’t want to anymore. There are a lot of people and trainers in Warsaw and I don’t know, I didn’t like it. Every stable already had a jockey and no one invited me. I communicated with the Kyrgyz people, they invited me, but it’s the trainers who should invite them. After the victories, they didn’t invite much... I don’t know, not interested? Now I work with trainer Z. [outside Służewiec Racecourse – author’s note]. (C)

Cultural differences sometimes make cooperation difficult as well as the ‘disloyalty’ of the newcomers who, as Polish horse racing people, often changed stables:

There would be other applicants from Kyrgyzstan. However, trainers don’t want to mess around all those documents – it costs time and money. Especially since these riders often left for other stables; they couldn’t always get along. (1)

One trainer fired a Kyrgyz employee for ignoring the equerry, who was a young woman. Some trainers were also surprised by the fact that some Kyrgyz, although Muslim, drink alcohol. However, the trainer who initiated their arrival to Poland praises Kyrgyz riders in all respects, also not directly related to the job:

They are interested in a career, they are interested in racing, they are interested in work – namely winning constantly and every day, not once. (...) They help parents a lot. When they receive their salaries, they constantly send them money. They don't waste money – they buy cars, they don't drink. They even... they all have cars! and some Poles? How much they work! And they can't buy a bike. (...) They are also friendly, better behaved, respectful of elders and generally disciplined and very hard-working. (4)

Present migration is facilitated by the existence of an ethnic professional niche in which young Kyrgyz men support each other. After arrival they usually live in groups of 2–3 in apartments organized for them by trainers. Trainers emphasize the strength of the network within this niche:

Some of them know each other from friends, so they haven't seen each other for 10 years. They know others by name. They treat each other like brothers – they greet each other with "hello brother!" They are very hospitable and willing to cook for guests. They can do anything. They are taught to live alone. (1)

Despite the cooperation not always being satisfactory to both sides, some trainers, due to lack of alternatives, make further efforts to attract more employees from Kyrgyzstan. As one of the Polish interlocutors summarizes: "They are rather liked. Racing is such an open world." (2)

## Future Plans

How do migrants describe their occupational and migration plans? It should be noted that these views may change over time under the influence of actual migration experiences (Triandafyllidou 2022). They may also be presented differently due to the fact that the expectations of the families do not always coincide with the desires of the interlocutors. In all interviews, plans are related to racehorses. Three persons indicate a lack of other skills. This was most clearly expressed in the following statement:

Because I had been working since childhood and was close to horses all the time, I didn't learn anything else. I don't know what I can become if not a jockey or a horse breeder. I don't know anything about anything except horses. I can't even hammer a nail... I can't do anything else! I just know how to ride a horse and that's all, that's why I consider it to be my constant profession. I have been around horses for 15 years, I grew up around them, and I even "went" to school on horseback for fun. (A)

This interviewee, when talking about the past, emphasised his determination in the development of his racing career. Now he is facing its consequences, which will determine his future.

However, according to the trainers who have the closest contact with the Kyrgyz riders, stay in Poland will only be temporary:



For these riders from Kyrgyzstan, yes, we are attractive, but not particularly because of good pay, but rather because it can be the beginning of their riding career; if they excel here, it will be easier to find a job in the West. No longer as an ordinary stable worker, but as a rider. Our races are considered officially in the racing world. These results will be recorded, and if they only raced on baygas in Kazakhstan, then not. (...) They think that this will be a good springboard for their further career. And indeed, some of them may go further to the West and pursue this career. (2)

The perception of Poland as a semi-periphery and a gateway to the highly developed world is confirmed in four interviews:

I would like to work in other countries: Dubai, Emirates, or France. Learn to ride even more. I know there are even better races in France. England is hard to work and horse racing, I was interested in it. I would like to, but it would be difficult. I wanted to make documents there, but it didn't work out. It's easier in Poland, yes. (C)

Poland is presented as a "waiting zone" (Axelsson, Malmberg, Zhang 2017), where migrants improve their qualifications. One of the interlocutors summarizes this thread as follows: "You know, every soldier dreams of becoming a general! (...) I have only been to Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Poland." (B)

Only one rider, who is still only a training rider, when asked about his plans for the future, directs his narration toward his family home, although at the beginning, like everyone else, he declares the development of his racing career:

I want to make a career as a jockey, I want to learn to ride well, learn to prepare horses for races. And when I go back home to Kyrgyzstan, maybe I will become a trainer, maybe a jockey. Time will tell how my brother and I will continue to work. I want to go back. I miss my parents so much... I miss them. I was home 2 years ago. (D)

Another interlocutor, although planning a career in other countries, intends to return to his family home at the end of his life. It should be emphasized that mentions of the families – gratitude towards them and financial assistance sent to Kyrgyzstan appear in most interviews. Therefore, it seems that the strength of emotional and economic family ties may significantly influence their future life trajectories. Summing up, it is noticeable in all answers on future plans are, on one side, the firm declarations of one's relationship with the racing industry, and on the other side, the absence of precise action plans for the coming years.

## **Conclusions. The Concept of Dual Enclivity and Nomadicity**

Herein, I examined how the biographical experiences of the Kyrgyz riders in the country of birth have been transforming during their course of life into capitals that allow them to commence a career in the highly globalized, although perceived as semi-

peripheric, horse racing industry in Poland. All come from large families that own farm horses or are engaged in horse racing. From their early teenage years, they were periodically mobile. First, they traveled around Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to participate in horse competitions, mainly bayga races. After the age of 15, already some of them lived outside the family home for longer periods. As adults, leveraging their familial networks and prior equestrian background, they ventured to secure employment in English-style horse racing, with Russia being the initial destination for most.

Neoclassical theories (Jaskułowski and Pawlak 2016) explaining migrations at the macro level as the result of the unequal geographical distribution of labour and capital, and at the micro level in terms of *homo oeconomicus* concept, accurately explain the mobility of the interviewees. The long-term structural shortage of jockeys in Poland and many other countries since decades. However, the fact that the Kyrgyz horsemen are young and unmarried favours their orientation towards their own material and sporting success. Simultaneously, the experiences of Kyrgyz individuals engaged in racing in Poland defy traditional conceptual structures used in the analysis of migration processes. Describing their life trajectories proves challenging when confined to binary distinctions such as internal *versus* external migrations, forced *versus* voluntary migrations, temporary *versus* permanent ones, or the categorization into low- and highly-skilled workers.

Kyrgyz migrants working in Poland are involved in professional networks, first translocal and then transnational, which they will try to use in the future to move to other countries. They are at various stages of entering the transnational circuits in countries approved by IFHA. While the majority express intentions to progress from Poland to wealthier nations with more established horse racing industries, the evolution of their plans is subject to the unpredictable trajectory of their careers. Furthermore, their profound familial ties might play a pivotal role in shaping their future decisions and actions.

Various threads appear in the interviews, explaining how the Kyrgyz economic niche, which is also a socio-special enclave, was formed. Both Polish and Kyrgyz interlocutors underscore the roles of ethnic community networks and the impact of law, public institutions, and regulatory practices in both countries on migration processes. Yet they also indicate a specific heritage and ethos of the Kyrgyz people and are aware of profiting from the opportunities to undertake forms of professional activity that are not sufficiently undertaken by members of the host society.

The case of Kyrgyz horsemen proves that the post-modern origin of undirected migrations with open time structures, as often emphasized by many migration researchers, does not exclusively stem from post-modern processes. The article illustrates how pre-modern cultural elements, such as pastoral nomadism, can fit into the post-modern networked reality. As a result, the example of the Kyrgyz horsemen inspired me to formulate the concept of dual enclivity and nomadicity, aiming to

underscore the cultural nuances and normative patterns that may facilitate mobility and migrations.

In the concept of dual enclivity and nomadcity, the first dual element concerns the location of ethnic professional niches in broader professional enclaves that have clear cultural and spatial boundaries within the country in which they are located. In this case, it involves a small community of young Kyrgyz at the Służewiec Racecourse (and a few in the racing stables outside Służewiec). However, this concept may relate to much larger groups of migrants and professional niches, such as race riders from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, who constitute the overwhelming majority in Lexington, Kentucky (Yamaguchi 2016), and to many other professions. Simultaneously, those professional enclaves are connected by numerous translocal, and sometimes transnational networks. Dual enclivity facilitates the development of mobility and migration networks allowing individuals to move relatively safely, even as they pass from translocal to transnational occupational enclaves, within which they usually do not speak the languages of the countries in which they work.

The second component of the dual enclivity and nomadcity concept refers firstly to the socio-cultural conditions in which Kyrgyz migrants grew up and secondly to the nature of some professions, in this case related to horse racing. Those first ones are conditions in which nomadic traditions and ethos still remain vital and can be rekindled, notwithstanding they have usually been significantly transformed and limited by various forms of colonialism: sovietization, capitalism, and the experiences of poverty and war. In this case the first type of nomadcity relates to translocality, which is characteristic for Central Asia (Stephan-Emmrich, Schröder 2018). Neither the period of affiliation to the USSR nor the last decades of independence contributed to the end of cultural traditions related to transhuman pastoral mobility. In the context being examined, the second type of nomadism is intertwined with the vocation of a horse racing rider endowed with opportunities to elevate earnings and enhance accomplishments through mobility or migration. The case of Kyrgyz horse racing riders points to the forms of 'permanent mobility' as a result of networking processes (Castells 2007) within certain professional groups. Some of them, as jockeys, had existed prior to postmodernity. Nomads never go everywhere. They always have territories in which they operate. In the case of professional nomads, these are delimited by enclaves linked by translocal and in some cases transnational networks.

Remaining open to further exploration, the concept of dual enclivity and nomadcity aims to draw attention to certain patterns of transnational mobility that may be distinctive to migrants from cultures where sedentary status is not a deeply entrenched norm. It aims to enhance mobility studies without succumbing to orientalization and nomadization (van Baar 2015), as it may as well relate to migrants from prosperous countries, such as the United States, and the wide range of occupational categories.

## Funding

The research was funded by Faculty of Sociology, University of Warsaw.

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