LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANT ILLEGALITY, LOCAL BUREAUCRATIC MEMBERSHIP AND CHANGE OF STATUS: THE CASE OF HUNGARIAN IMMIGRANTS IN NEW YORK

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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the personal experiences and struggles of New York-based visa-overstayers from Hungary. Building on qualitative semi-structured interviews, the research is going to offer a glimpse into how undocumented status affects migrants' lives in certain social contexts, their attempts and struggles to legalize themselves and their use of local ID cards, while also shedding light on the functioning of illegal employment agencies that recruit low-skilled middle-aged women from Hungary to work as cleaning ladies mainly in New Square and the Borough Park area of Brooklyn. The thesis argues that even though local bureaucratic membership policies are widely celebrated for being progressive measures in the direction of migrant inclusion on the scale of the city, local ID cards are rather controversial in nature, their practicality is questionable, and they can be possible sources of fear and uncertainty given the perceived mass surveillance by the federal government that makes people without legal status especially vulnerable. In addition to that, the empirical findings of the thesis will also engage with the brain waste phenomenon, the change of socio-political status, the role of individualism in integrating, and the widely held perception of the US being the "land of opportunity" as the stories of financial success lure many into making the decision to move to the United States without proper work permits, overstaying their tourist visas and by that becoming undocumented migrants.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The topic of emigration is heavily present in the public discourse in Hungary, given that there is an estimated number of 637,000 Hungarians living outside of the country primarily due to economic reasons (Kováts and Soltész 2018 p. 8).[1] While the primary destination for Hungarian emigrants is Western Europe (mainly Germany, the United Kingdom and Austria), some decide to move to further destinations. The idea of the present thesis stems from personal experiences, encounters and conversations with undocumented Hungarians living in New York City, and a general curiosity about why some people decide to move to the United States with only travel visas to restart their lives. The present thesis therefore aims to explore through a scholarly lens, incorporating literature on transnational migration, citizenship studies and political sociology, the experiences of those who left Hungary and moved to the United States out of financial considerations or simply seeking adventure, without proper work permits, overstaying their tourist visas and so becoming undocumented immigrants.

The research builds on qualitative semi-structured interviews with nine participants who decided to leave Hungary and move to the United States mainly in the early 2000s (or after the 2008 economic crisis), due to their financial situation and debts, in hope to improve their quality of life and send money back to family members in need. While some of them already had an established network of relatives and/or acquaintances living in New York City helping them find jobs, many of them chose to leave Hungary with the assistance of illegal employment agencies operating from the Eastern part of Hungary. The common strategy for all these people was to move to New York without proper work permits, overstaying their travel visas, which – unless they were able to regularize their immigration status – now makes them unable to

[1] According to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office's estimate, in 2016, there were 265,000 Hungarians living outside the country, who had a permanent home in Hungary before (KSH 2018 p. 8). The sample, however, did not include those who left the country with their entire households, and scholars also agree that the number of Hungarians living abroad has been severely underestimated by this statistical report.

leave the United States and visit their family members living in Hungary, otherwise they would be barred from reentering the US for ten years.

The thesis explores Hungarian migrants' lived experiences of illegality, local bureaucratic membership and change of socio-political status in New York, offering a glimpse into how undocumented status affects migrants' lives in certain contexts, their attempts and struggles to legalize themselves and their use of local ID cards, while also shedding light on the functioning of illegal employment agencies that recruit low-skilled middle-aged women from Hungary to work as cleaning ladies in New Square and the Borough Park area of Brooklyn. In addition to that, the thesis will also investigate the role of the political institutional design of the host country in undocumented migrants' incorporation into the American society, not allowing them to fully become members in the new space. The legal conditions of the state (that are interwoven into their daily lives through jobs, interactions with the police and the bureaucracy) constantly remind them that they are not allowed to truly belong, having significant impacts on their opportunities and social relations, limiting them in establishing transnational practices. In this context, the ability or inability to acquire legal permanent resident status (or simply a green card) appears as a decisive factor in the undocumented Hungarians' long-term plans.

Despite the progressive local bureaucratic membership policies that are available in New York, the absence of formal legal status has significant effects on the research participants' opportunities, making them easily exploitable, at the bottom of social hierarchies, working in positions that in many cases are not in line with their qualifications and skills, and that the local nationals are no longer willing to take.

The thesis argues that even though local bureaucratic membership policies are widely celebrated for being progressive measures in the direction of migrant inclusion on the scale of the city, local ID cards are rather controversial in nature, their practicality is questionable, and they can be possible sources of fear and uncertainty given the perceived mass surveillance by the government that makes people without legal status especially vulnerable. The tightening of the anti-immigration policies under the Trump administration is a non-negligible factor when it comes to undocumented migrants' fear of deportation.

As it will be presented throughout the research, undocumented people can easily have the feeling that each time they register their data with any kind of authorities (let it be obtaining local ID cards or temporary tax numbers), it makes them potential targets of the US law enforcement agencies. Challenging the scholarly presumption that local city IDs are novel and useful ways of migrant incorporation and local membership, the thesis shows that they can serve contradictory purposes: they might work as a stigma in certain social interactions and the users of the cards might feel that they are becoming targets by obtaining them. Even though the forward-looking urban citizenship policies aim to mitigate the everyday challenges of people without legal documentation and global cities such as New York serve as sanctuaries for undocumented migrants, the importance of "papers" persist with the nation-state being the main container of rights.

The thesis consists of seven chapters, with the first three sections presenting the theoretical framework, methods and a short institutional description of the United States' immigration policies. Following that, the last four chapters engage with the empirical findings of the research. In Chapter One the main theoretical underpinnings of the thesis will be presented as well as the main research questions according to which the empirical chapters are structured. The literature review is divided into the following subsections: conceptualization of migrant

illegality, citizenship literature and migrant transnationalism. Chapter Two will elaborate on the research methods used in the thesis, including a table with information about the research participants. Having a policy focus, Chapter Three will engage with citizenship, naturalization and immigration policies in the United States, also presenting the charged terminology connected to undocumented migration. Chapter Four, the first empirical chapter of the thesis, will center around loss of social status in the host country, the phenomenon of brain waste, the working of illegal employment agencies, the lived experiences of illegality and finally the role of individualism in integrating. Chapter Five will investigate the relevance of local bureaucratic membership policies and the use of local ID cards in New York among the interviewed individuals, shedding light on the possible stigmas that are connected to the IDNYCs. The primary focus of Chapter Six will be on immigration status and social mobility, the relevance of green cards and citizenship and finally the efforts of the undocumented participants to appear in a favorable light in front of the US authorities. The last empirical chapter will explore the transnational practices of the interviewees and their attitudes towards the United States and Hungary, addressing how the glorification of the United States as the "land of opportunity" combined with the disillusionment with Hungary lure many into making the decision to migrate without thinking through the long-term consequences of visa overstays.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present chapter aims to serve as a literature review helping the understanding of the empirical findings of the research. Starting with the conceptualization of migrant illegality and the process of *becoming* undocumented, the first section presents the theoretical underpinnings and of the lived experience of undocumented status. The chapter continues with a brief overview of citizenship literature, primarily focusing on the continued relevance of the nation-state as the container of rights. Lastly, the chapter will present a critique of transnationalism as an analytical lens and its confusing terminological repertoire, arguing that the overstretched concept cannot adequately be linked to the experiences of those in legal limbo.

1.1. Conceptualizing Migrant Illegality – Who are undocumented migrants and how does someone become undocumented?

Today's public and political discourse is flooded with the theme of migration and while international cross-border movement has many faces, undocumented or "illegal" migrants dominate most of the discussions and perceptions of immigration (Jones-Correa and de Graauw 2013). In the United States debates around unauthorized migration are particularly heated, triggering partisan divisions and there are discrepancies between the federal enforcement regime and local policies dealing with irregular migrants (Jones-Correa and de Graauw 2013). The issue being politically highly divisive and in the center of the public attention all over the world, the public imaginary on who is an undocumented migrant and on "illegality" in general is rather narrow. In a terminological sense, an undocumented or "illegal"/unauthorized migrant is a person who moved or settled outside his or her country of birth, without having a legal status and a right to reside in the destination country (Gonzales et al. 2019). That said, the experience of illegality is very much connected to and shaped by the nation-state and state-

based rules and regulations, defining the state's relationship to citizens and non-citizens while policing "the boundaries of membership" producing illegality itself (Gonzales et al. 2019 pp. 3–4).

While emphasizing the permeable boundaries of statuses, it should be noted that nation-states, establishing rules for formal membership, assign immigrants into a variety of immigration statuses – such as citizen, legal permanent resident, visa holder, refugee, asylum seeker, undocumented migrant – with these categories being status designations that influence the individual's everyday life by affecting social mobility, access to social benefits and entering the labor market (Gonzales et al. 2019 pp. 15–18). The importance of immigration status when entering the host country especially comes forward in terms of employment opportunities.

In order to understand the intense demand for immigrant workers in urban areas, the meaning of the term "global city" should be noted. The concept is mainly attributed to Saskia Sassen, based on her well-known book "The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo" published in 1991. Sassen's definition of the term is further elaborated in her "The Global City: Introducing a Concept" article from 2005 where she claims that "global cities around the world are the terrain where a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms" (Ibid p. 40). The core idea behind the concept is that while the locus of the flow of information, goods, capital, labor and tourists used to be the nation-states, this changed fundamentally in the post-industrial era, as a result of privatization, deregulation and the growing relevance of foreign firms, leading to "the weakening of the national as a special unit" (Sassen 2005 p. 27) and the emergence of global cities as the main sites of economic activity (Ibid p. 28). Global cities, such as New York, are especially in the need of unskilled workers to fill in positions such as taxi drivers, construction workers, waiters, hotel workers and domestic servants to serve the needs of the highly educated workforce that is concentrated in the city (Massey et al.

1993 p. 447). This leads to the development of a dual labor market or economic dualism, which indicates that there is a permanent demand for immigrant workers in modern societies to take jobs in the labor intensive secondary sector, given that poorly educated natives are no longer willing to take low-paying jobs "at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy" (Massey et al. 1993 pp. 441–447). Job opportunities this way can also work as status designators, locking undocumented migrants in lower social statuses, amplifying vulnerability and exploitability.[2]

Emphasizing the non-self-evident character of illegality, Gonzales et al. (2019) argue that instead of asking the question "*Who* is an undocumented migrant?" – which is widely encouraged by public discourse –, the more critical question would be "How does someone *become* undocumented" (Ibid p. 20). Contrary to the narrow public imaginary that regards being undocumented as a fixed state that starts with an unauthorized border crossing, migrants also come to the host countries with valid travel, work or student visas and overstay those. In 2018, the US Department of Homeland Security reported overall 666,582 tourist or business visa overstays. Among them 1,246 were Hungarian citizens (US Department of Homeland Security 2018 pp. 10–18). While some arrive as low-skilled workers or students, it is not uncommon that skilled professionals with university degrees decide to leave Hungary with the aim of seeking better financial opportunities. In the case of the latter, these people often times take jobs that are not in line with their qualifications, yet the financial benefits from even a "lower status employment" combined with the disillusionment with the economic opportunities at home make them stay despite the lack of "papers" and any form of social protection.[3]

[2] This will be of high relevance in the following chapters, discussing the empirical findings of the research. Those who emigrated to the US with the help of illegal employment agencies, operating from both Hungary and New York, are in especially vulnerable positions and frequently exploited by their employers.

[3] As it will be demonstrated later on, my empirical findings show that those Hungarians who had an already established network of friends, family of acquaintances living in New York who encouraged and helped their move, worked in rather prestigious positions in Hungary, but eventually got disillusioned by their low salaries and economic opportunities available to them that, in their view, didn't let them maximize their potential or to live in financial stability.

The phenomenon of brain waste, meaning skill underutilization, or in other words, the wrong and not fully used potential of skills, is an important feature of skilled migration from Central Eastern Europe, a region that with the end of the Cold War experienced an intense outflow of labor force with the main destinations being the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and the "rich countries of the West" in general (Brzozowski 2007 pp. 4–14). Mattoo et al. (2005) engaging with the occupation attainment of educated immigrants in the US labor market, aimed to empirically investigate the popular beliefs connected to the brain waste phenomenon and found that educated immigrants of Latin American, Eastern European and Middle Eastern countries held the lowest probabilities of obtaining skilled jobs, especially when compared to immigrants from the developing countries of Asia and developed countries (Ibid pp. 2–19). Even though Mattoo et al.'s (2005) study builds on data from the 2000 US Census (therefore cannot be considered up to date) and does not account for undocumented immigrants, it highlights that the variations across countries of origin can mostly be explained by the countries' use of English as a medium of instruction and its expenditure on higher education, meaning that individuals coming from countries with greater compatibility of educational standards with the United States, are more equipped to obtain employment that is in line with their qualifications (Ibid pp. 19–20).

When it comes to the lived experiences of illegality, the state does occupy a dominant position in vital spheres of the migrants' lives even to the extent that documented and undocumented immigrants can have such different experiences that render them into different social classes (Menjívar 2006 pp. 999–1000). Precarious immigration status produces fears, anxieties, marginalization, risk of labor exploitation and a sense of being policed even during everyday interactions. Given the heightened awareness of uncertainty and the threat of deportation, De Genova (2002) claims that undocumented migrants have an "enforced orientation to the

present" (Ibid p. 427), where the possibility of deportation prevents them from making long-term plans or developing a sense of membership and belonging.

1.2. The Continued Importance of the Nation-State / Citizenship Literature

As "the right to leave is not accompanied by a general right to enter any country" (Chetail 2019 p. 92) and states set the parameters for inclusion and exclusion (Gonzales et al 2019 p. 19), undocumented migrants can be constantly reminded that they are not allowed to truly belong or to become members in the host state. In the United States, foreigners cannot access citizenship through administrative or legal request (Bloemraad 2017 p. 331), therefore the experience of illegality is largely shaped by the enforcement of immigration control.

Defining citizenship, according to Sassen (2002), its narrowest definition "describes the legal relationship between the individual and the polity" (Sassen 2002 p. 278) and, as the etymology of the word citizenship itself signifies, this polity historically referred to the city, revealing the word's urban origins (Varsanyi 2006 p. 231). The concept evolved into its contemporary meaning with the creation of the nation-state, inherently linking citizenship with nationality (Sassen 2002 p. 278). In addition to the general "rights and obligations" context, the dimensions of citizenship include status, identity and "citizenship acts" such as practices, participation and performance as well, as it was emphasized by Bloemraad (2018) approaching citizenship as "membership through claims-making" (Ibid p. 4).

Paralleling with nationality, citizenship as bounded membership by definition refers to an exclusive regime in which the political community is in charge of distributing membership (as a primary good) to strangers (Walzer 1983 pp. 31–32). Critically highlighting the link between citizenship and inequality, Shachar (2009) termed citizenship's indisputable role in differentiating, entitling and marginalizing people as "birthright lottery". Following the same

line of thought, Kochenov (2018) was also concerned with citizenship's role in preserving global inequalities, arguing that inequality stemming from one's country of residence became more important than class, claiming that "citizenship is a racist and sexist status of randomized violent segregation of the world population into relatively closed groups of varying objective value from the point of view of the individual rights" (Ibid p. 321). In connection with the "birthright lottery" argument, Bellamy (2014) pointed out that it is only a matter of luck whether someone ends up being a citizen of a tyrannical or a democratic state (Ibid p. 15). Hannah Arendt (1967), discussing how the "nation conquered the state" (Ibid p. 275), in the interwar period argued that citizenship is the "right to have rights", highlighting the arbitrary nature of the concept, pointing out that basic human rights cannot be guaranteed without citizenship.

In his 1983 book Walzer claimed that immigrants are strangers in the political space, where admission policies are shaped by economic and political conditions, arguments about the character and destiny of the host country and arguments about the character of political communities in general, adding that "the rule of citizens over non-citizens, of members over strangers, is probably the most common form of tyranny in human history" (Ibid p. 62). Assessing naturalization policies, their functions and recent trends, Orgad (2017) noted that the law of naturalization serves as a gatekeeper that is designed to exclude undesirable people and include desirable ones (Ibid p. p. 337), signaling that it is very much in the competence of states to decide who belongs to the political community and who does not. That said, while certain social scientists, reflecting on the "contradictions of nation-state citizenship [as an object of closure] in a migratory word" (Varsanyi 2006 p. 230), bring forward the notion of open borders as a normative stance building on a moral, human-rights-centered argument (such as Joseph H. Carens in his 2013 book), citizenship scholars turn to postnational and denationalized forms of

citizenship[4] and also "the rise of the sovereign individual" (Harpaz 2019 p. 126) as the increasing global tolerance of dual nationality indicates. The traditional outlines of citizenship are challenged by multi-faceted postnational forms either by looking *up* (from the perspective of the nation-state) at international organizations, the human rights regime, global civil society movements, and the possibilities of transitional and cosmopolitan citizenship; or looking *down* at the subnational level where cities appear as additional containers of rights (de Graauw 2014 p. 312) with the urban scale providing a sanctuary for undocumented migrants.

The concept of urban citizenship entails membership status deriving from jus domicilii (the law of residence), disconnected from nationality and therefore challenging national monopolies on immigration policy (Bauböck 2003 p. 139). Local bureaucratic membership status in a global city appears as a possible remedy to mitigate the challenges of illegality, offering a novel form of political membership that is liked to "the mere reality of presence and residence in a place" (Varsanyi 2006 p. 239). New York, being a sanctuary city, from 2014 enacted a local ID card program where IDNYCs can be obtained by each and every resident of the city regardless of immigration status. The card can be used to access city services and programs while also functioning as a recognized ID for interacting with the New York City Police Department (City of New York 2020). Municipal IDs as this, are first and foremost aimed at improving city administration and not explicitly to expand the right of undocumented immigrants, however they are argued to grant enhanced participation in key aspects of city life to people with precarious status without upsetting the federal monopoly over immigration (de Graauw 2014 pp. 309–313).

[4] It is worth noting however, that while the progressive and inclusive character of postnational and denationalized forms of citizenship is widely emphasized, lived experiences of undocumented migrants show that the role of the nation-state still persist as the lack of legal status not only hinders employment opportunities, but affects social relations, local incorporation, movement and exacerbates feelings of vulnerability.

Even though literature on urban citizenship and local administrative membership (Varsanyi 2006; de Graauw 2014; Bauböck 2003) tend to emphasize progressive changes that would help undocumented migrants to mitigate the challenges of illegality, practice paints a different picture and shows that having local ID cards won't result in greater sense of security or membership, nor do they open up ways to well-paid and secure jobs in an environment where surveillance is perceived to be widespread. Precarious immigration status can turn mundane everyday activities such as working, driving and traveling into illicit acts (Coutin 2000 pp. 30–33) and considering that policing can happen during everyday interactions with ordinary citizens, undocumented migrants might be less confident in registering their data with any kind of authority. Despite the progressive policies towards migrant incorporation and local bureaucratic membership in the city, Brubaker's (2010) argument that the nation-state is still the decisive locus of membership despite the effects of globalization and global migration, and that the "struggles over belonging in and to the nation-state remain the most consequential forms of membership politics" (Ibid p. 77) seem to be the more accurate approach when describing contemporary social reality.

1.3. The Limits to Transnationalism in the Context of Undocumented Migration

The concept of transnationalism entails a variety of practices, activities and social contacts that cross national borders, affecting immigrant experience, identities and belongingness resulting in "complex attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, peoples, places, and traditions beyond the boundaries of [migrants'] resident nation-states" (Çaglar 2001 p. 610). Portes et al. (1999) argue that in order to establish a novel field of investigation, the concept of transnationalism needs to involve a significant number of people engaging in cross-border travel and contacts not just occasionally but on a sustained and regular basis (Ibid p. 219). To establish a "high intensity of exchanges", willingness, ability and certain capabilities are

needed that “include the extent to which individuals and communities identify with the social, economic or political processes in their home countries, which is a prerequisite for them to engage in transnational activities.” (Al-Ali et al. 2001 p. 581).

Having the concept outlined, critical appraisals should be noted. While transnationalism sometimes appears as a novel phenomenon, it does not represent an altogether new theoretical approach, but it is rather brought to the forefront given globalization and the rapid shifts in technological development (Vertovec 2001 pp. 576–577). In addition to that, the concept has increasingly become over-used and overstretched to describe too wide a range of phenomena, which is especially the case when attributing transnational patterns to either specific groups of migrants or to all migrants, to ethnic diasporas or even to travelers and tourists (Vertovec 2001 p. 576). Different typologies can end up being especially confusing, not properly defining concepts around assimilation, acculturation, cultural pluralism, integration, incorporation, inclusion, multiculturalism, ethnic retention and identity in relation to transnationalism, which results in producing an extensive and fuzzy terminological apparatus that try to squeeze in atypical cases without the proper capabilities to establish high intensity transnational connections and practices. This is especially case when discussing undocumented migration.

Dahinden (2010) identifies four ideal types of the “transnational”: localized diasporic transnational formations (with low levels of transnational mobility and high levels of local anchorage), localized mobile transnational formations (with high levels of both mobility and local anchorage), transnational mobiles (who are more or less permanently on the move with low levels of anchorage) and transnational outsiders (who are characterized by low transnational mobility and low degree of local anchorage) (Ibid pp. 53–59). Dahinden (2010) classifies refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants to belong to the fourth category of transnational outsiders, however, if we turn back to the conceptualization of Portes et al.

(1999), Vertovec (2001) and Al-Ali et al. (2001), it is unclear why undocumented migrants should be squeezed into the transnational framework without having the capabilities to establish a "high intensity of exchanges" on a regular and consistent basis. It is also a point of debate to what extent the sheer existence of remittances and home ties (family, friends) can be classified as a transnational practice/experience. When it comes to the experiences and practices of those in a legal limbo, the institutional setup of the host country (nation-state centered exclusionary citizenship regime) has a significant effect on to what extent a migrant can incorporate into the host society, establish local anchorage and mobility, affecting the capability to pursue transnational connections and exchanges. This way, the legal conditions of the state (that are interwoven into their daily lives through jobs, interactions with the police, bureaucracy) constantly remind undocumented migrants that they are not allowed to truly belong, having significant impacts on their opportunities and social relations.

When it comes to the role of nation-state, scholars either depict the transnational phenomenon as being a challenger to the state (Tölölyan 2010 and Vertovec 2001) or emphasize how state regulations have an impact on shaping transnational behavior (Portes et al. 1999 and Dahinden 2010). The role of the nation-state in hindering transnationalism is addressed in the study of Al-Ali et al. (2001) on Bosnian and Eritrean refugees in Europe. As the authors argue, "the sense of security or anxiety, which arises in relation to the question of legal status of refugees, plays a major role in creating or hindering the space from which transnational practices can occur" (Al-Ali et al. 2001 p. 582). The same applies to the case of the undocumented Hungarian immigrants residing in New York. The experience of illegality permeates the everyday life of undocumented migrants, restricting their movement, interactions and opportunities with their primary aim being to secure their positions in the new host countries, and so minimize the risk of deportation.

As a final point, it should also be noted that transnationalism carries a rather high analytical similarity to the concept of diaspora and while frequently overlooked, historical context plays a relevant role in transnational activities. Discussing the case of Eritrean and Bosnian refugees, Al-Ali et al. (2001) pointed out that "forced migration sometimes leads to 'forced transnationalism'" even on the absence of a desire to return (Ibid p. 591).

While transnationalism was predicted to bring about a new era of post-nation-states (Basch et al. 1994), more recent scholarship frequently points out the role of nation-state in shaping transnational experience, either encouraging or hindering transnational orientations (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Smith 1998; Ong 1999 in Al-Ali et al. 2001 p. 587). Even though undocumented Hungarian immigrants in New York maintain contacts with friends and family and send remittances, the legal conditions of the host country prevent them from having high intensity transnational exchanges and given their precarious immigration status (which permeates their everyday lives and interactions, making them unable to travel across international borders), they are generally more concerned about their own well-being, securing their own positions in the destination country rather than establishing multiple orientations. In the words of Aiwha Ong (1999), the nation-state – "along with its juridical-legislative systems, bureaucratic apparatuses, economic entities, modes of governmentality, and war-making capacities – continues to define, discipline, control and regulate all kinds of populations, whether in movement or in residence" (Ibid p. 15).

1.4. Research Questions

Based on the outlined theoretical underpinnings, the research will attempt to answer questions grouped into four categories.

The first empirical chapter (Chapter 4) of the thesis addresses the general question of why someone decides to leave Hungary and move to the United States without any proper work permits, overstaying their travel visas. Besides the personal motivations behind the research participants' move, the chapter will also investigate the everyday lived experience of precarious immigration status.

The second empirical chapter (Chapter 5) addresses whether local bureaucratic membership policies in New York City can help undocumented migrants to mitigate the challenges of illegality and to what extent they support local incorporation for the interviewed individuals. The use of local ID cards as well as the general perceptions and possible stigmas connected to them will be explored.

The main question guiding the third empirical chapter (Chapter 6) will ask why formal membership status / legal permanent residence is important to the research participants and to what extent social mobility is dependent on immigration status. The chapter will also investigate how the interviewed individuals make sense of the concepts of legal permanent residence and citizenship.

The last empirical chapter (Chapter 7) will engage with the question of what kind of transnational practices the interviewees establish and what their attitudes are towards Hungary and the United States.

2. METHODS

The thesis builds on empirical findings from nine qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted via Skype and Messenger in December 2018 and in March and April 2020. According to my initial research proposal, I was planning to conduct personal interviews in New York in April 2020, however due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the research was conducted exclusively via online platforms. Fortunately, the online interviews, even though lacked personal contact and the possibility to make further observations, worked out well and proved to be successful.

Prior to starting my research, for years, I kept hearing stories from acquaintances who decided to leave Hungary and move to the United States due to their financial situation and debts, hoping to improve their quality of life and send money back to family members in need. Many of them chose to leave Hungary without any clear perspectives and work permits, overstaying their visas, which now makes them unable to leave the United States and visit their family members living in Hungary, otherwise they would be barred from reentering the US for ten years. Checking the number of people in the most popular online groups created especially for irregular Hungarians, the number of these people in New York can be around a few thousand. During the summer of 2018, I managed to meet a number of these Hungarians who emigrated from Hungary several years ago due to financial reasons and they made me aware of the dilemmas and hardships they need to face.

In addition to gathering ethnographic notes in August 2018, I conducted three pilot interviews in December 2018 via Skype. The participants were Hungarian migrants who emigrated to New York several years ago with only travel visas and stayed there after their visas expired. Given my friendly relationship with the interviewees, I gathered further data via snowball sampling (recruiting further study subjects from among the interviewees' acquaintances).

Besides contacting the new participants, I also conducted follow-up interviews with the pilot interviewees following my updated interview guide, in order to adequately answer my research questions.

The interviews for the thesis research were conducted via Skype and Messenger in March and April 2020. Distinguished attention was given to making sure that the research follows CEU's Ethical Research Policy[5]. The participants gave their consent to record the conversations and I modified their names and excluded all sensitive information in order to preserve their privacy and anonymity.

The interviews were 40 to 134 minutes in duration. Each participant was asked about the motivations behind their decision to leave Hungary and move to the United States and the way by which they did so, about their experiences and hardships stemming from their illegal status, their work experiences, social networks, usage of local ID cards and future plans. Based on the interviews, I identified patterns, grouped the topics the interviewees talked about and coded them, hence I arranged the empirical findings into four main themes, reflected in the "Research Questions" subsection of Chapter One. Among the wide range of the topics that came up during the interviews, the thesis is specifically going to address the motivations behind the participants' move, the role of illegal employment agencies, the ways the participants navigate illegality, the role (and sometimes controversial nature) of local bureaucratic membership policies, the relevance and ways of obtaining green cards and citizenship, the transnational practices the participants establish and their attitudes towards the United States and Hungary.

Even though initially I encountered mistrust from some of the prospective participants given the politically sensitive scope of the research, after informing them about the ethical guidelines and that their name and personal details would not appear in the thesis, I managed to gain the

[5] Available via: https://documents.ceu.edu/documents/p-1012-1v1805 Date of access: 28/02/2020

interviewees' confidence and they answered all of my questions readily and candidly. Altogether I contacted eleven people and even though none of them declined participating in the study explicitly, one prospective interviewee was too busy to agree on a date and time for the interview, while the other stopped responding to my messages after our initial conversation.

Among the nine participants all were visa-overstayers, and three came to the United States with the help of illegal employment agencies. Among them, one returned to Hungary after three months, realizing her initial goal of earning and gathering money. The remaining six interviewees had personal connections (family, friends) already living and working in New York, who helped them with the move and with finding jobs upon their arrival. The interviewees holding green cards – and in one case citizenship – managed to obtain them via marriage.

The thesis was set out to contextualize the experiences of Hungarian visa-overstayer immigrants in the United States, mapping out certain issues, taking a bottom-up approach, placing personal stories and observations at the center of the research. The limitations of the study lie in the limited number of interview participants and the lack of detailed, well-rounded ethnographic observations, therefore, in order to be able to go beyond scope of the present thesis research and to make wider generalizations, further empirical data collection would be needed.

	Pseudonym	Age	Migratory status	Time in the U.S.	Date of the interview
1	Péter	In his late 40s	Green card holder	14 years	December 1, 2018 and February 17, 2020
2	Erika	In her early 40s	Undocumented	6 years	December 13, 2018 and March 15, 2020
3	Krisztina	In her late 40s	Undocumented	8 years (returned to Hungary recently)	December 16, 2018 and March 31, 2020
4	Ervin	In his late 40s	Undocumented	8 years	February 18, 2020 and February 22, 2020
5	Orsolya	In her 40s	Undocumented	6 years	March 15, 2020
6	Piroska	In her 50s	Undocumented	3.5 months (returned to Hungary a few years ago)	March 16, 2020
7	Magda	In her late 30s	Undocumented	7 years	March 18, 2020
8	Zsóka	In her 30s	Green card holder	8.5 years	March 19, 2020
9	Laura	In her 30s	Citizen	14 years	April 23, 2020

Table 1. Interviewed Individuals and their General Information

3. CITIZENSHIP, NATURALIZATION, AND IMMIGRATION POLICIES IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, citizenship is based on the principle of jus soli (birthright) and foreign-born individuals can only access citizenship via naturalization. The requirements towards those who wish to naturalize is established by the US Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).[6] For those who were not born to US citizens abroad, lawful permanent residence is a prerequisite for the process. Those who wish to lawfully reside in the US can acquire green cards for example via employment, family, refugee status, being trafficking or crime victims, victims of abuse or via green card lottery.[7] For undocumented migrants who either crossed the border clandestinely or overstayed their travel, work or student visas the only viable strategy to regularize their status is via marriage to a US citizen and in some cases, desperate people opt for that solution by committing marriage fraud. Undocumented adults having children born in the US[8] can also acquire green cards once their child turns 21 years-old as they will be considered as "immediate relatives".

Among the nine individuals interviewed for the thesis research, two are green card holders and one interviewee is a US citizen, however, prior to obtaining legal permanent residence and citizenship, all experienced illegality (resulting from the expiration of visas) for longer or shorter periods of time. In one case, an undocumented interviewee is part of a mixed-status family, having a US citizen child with her undocumented partner. Gonzales et al. (2019) argues that these families shed light on the "fragmented and capricious nature of immigration policies" (Ibid p. 130) as the lives of citizens or permanent residents are intertwined with their

[6] More information: https://www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship/citizenship-through-naturalization Date of access: 10/05/2020

[7] More on the green card eligibility categories can be found at: https://www.uscis.gov/green-card/green-card-eligibility-categories Date of access: 10/05/2020

[8] Children born to non-citizen parents are pejoratively referred to as "anchor babies", implying that since they gained citizenship through birthright, they will be able to help family members to gain legal residency.

undocumented family members (Ibid p. 132). As it will be further elaborated under Chapter Seven, Magda having a US-born child, is especially caught up in the dilemma of many on whether to return to Hungary to reunite with parents, family members and friends. Given that circular migration across the globe is disrupted by the fortification of national borders (Gonzales et al. 2019 p. 127), if visa-overstayers decide to leave the United States, they face multi-years bar to reentry.

De Genova (2002) pointed out that illegality has risen to unprecedented prominence as a "problem" in policy debates" (Ibid p. 419). Jones-Correa and de Graauw (2013) argue that the degree to which contemporary immigration debate in the United States is focused on "illegal" immigrants captivated the entire discourse around migration, resulting in an "illegality trap", which has negative consequences on immigrants and ultimately is dysfunctional for immigration policy as well (Ibid p. 185). In 2017, the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States was approximately 10.5 million, representing 3.2% of the total US population (Krogstad et al. 2019). And while in the same year, the total number of the foreign-born population in the United States reached 44.4 million, 77% of them being in the country legally (Radford 2019), immigration debate in the US single-mindedly focuses on the minority of migrants deemed "illegal" with an overwhelming emphasis on enforcement (Jones-Correa and de Graauw 2013 p. 186).

Looking at the historical development of border control and immigration policy in the US, until the 1920s circular migration was tolerated and encouraged with undocumented status being a civil violation rather than a criminal one that could be remedied, immigrants having different avenues to regularize themselves (Jones-Correa and de Graauw 2013 p. 187; De Genova 2002 p. 420). In the second half of the 20th century, however, pathways to legalization had been reduced, and the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act introduced limits and caps on

immigration. With the magnitude of immigration remaining the same, the policy change meant that most migrants suddenly became considered to be illegal (Jones-Correa and de Grauuw 2013 p. 187). Illegal immigration becoming a top political issue by the 1980s, the Congress passed the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) with the aim of providing a comprehensive solution to the problem of unauthorized immigration, increasing border control and employer sanctions while at the same time providing a one-time amnesty to undocumented migrants that helped 3.2 million people to adjust their status (Jones-Correa and de Graauw 2013 p. 187; De Genova 2002 p. 420).

As immigration policies have become increasingly restrictive since the 1990s, the boundaries of immigration and criminal law started to blur, contributing to "the public misconception that residing in the country without legal documentation constitutes a crime, thereby making illegal immigrants an accepted target of all discussions about immigration" (Jones-Correa and de Graauw 2013 p. 188). The discourse around migration is indeed full of loaded terms, and non-status people are seldom portrayed in a positive light (Nyers 2010 p. 132). Pejorative designations such as "illegals", "illegal aliens", "que jumpers", "terrorists" often appear in the public discourse, and as Nyers (2010) pointed out, non-status people are described in terms of absence or lacking something: "undocumented" (lacking documents), "irregular migrant" (lacking established travel arrangements), "clandestine workers" (lack of visibility), "shadow population" (lack of social status), "precarious status" (lack of security) and "alien" (lack of humanity) (Ibid p. 132).

The securitization of migration in the US especially accelerated after 2001, and while until 1996 deportations from the country's interior very relatively rare and subject to judicial review, between 2008 and 2015 nearly three million migrants were deported from the United States, and as deportees face three to ten years bar to reentry, the unintended consequence of the

proceedings was to disincentivize voluntary departures, expanding the number of settled undocumented people living in the US (Gonzales et al. 2019 p. 86–88). Immigration enforcement, deportation and detention practices operate with the primary aim of creating a hostile environment for undocumented migrants, facilitating voluntary return (Gonzales et al. 2019 p. 96), and while visa-overstays seem as rather discrete acts, the US-Mexico border is the main stage of militarized control, "staging the spectacle of "the illegal alien" that the law produces" (De Genova 2002 p. 436). With building his campaign around framing immigration as threat to US economy and public security, upon taking office in 2017, the Trump administration started to press an assertive agenda on immigration, with border security and immigration enforcement in the US interior receiving wide public attention (Pierce 2019 p. 1). The increasingly hostile environment for undocumented migrants came up several times during the interviews, and while some interviewees claimed that in their immediate environments the magnitude of deportations was about the same during the Obama administration[9], for Krisztina it served as a final push towards the decision to move back to Hungary.

[9] The Obama administration deported a record number of 2.7 million people over the course of two presidential terms (Lasch et al. 2018 p. 1773).

4. LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ILLEGALITY AND LOSS OF STATUS: UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS AT THE BOTTOM OF SOCIAL HIERARCHIES

The underlying reason behind the move to the United States for nearly all interviewees were financial motivations, in addition to personal connections that enabled them to gain information about employment opportunities and life in general in the country of destination. The research participants pointed out that they kept hearing stories from friends and acquaintances who encouraged them to move, claiming that even taking low status employment in New York would prove to be financially highly profitable. Listening to the success stories of friends, family and acquaintances and having the perception that they would not be able to earn that much money in Hungary, they decided to move to the United States. In this context, network theory shows how people draw upon their social capital to reduce the risks of movement and to access foreign employment (Massey et al. 1993 pp. 448–449), as it was an important factor for the participants. When discussing their choices to move to the US, the interviewees did not mention any endeavor to find legal ways to go there and did not apply for working visas. They travelled to the United States with tourist visas and overstayed those.

To emphasize her financial motivations and that move to the US was indeed something she didn't fully see the consequences of, Erika claimed that "most of us don't really know what we signed up for… we just come here even to spud [to do anything] to earn that amount of money and then realize that we stayed here" (Erika, personal communication, December 13, 2018). On the same note, Péter framed his move as a daring decision, given they had to build their lives up all over again from scratch, and highlighted the financial issues that he and his family encountered in Hungary:

> "We came here in 2006 with my then-family. The problem with Hungary was that we could not make a living, given that my full-time job contract did not allow me to engage in a secondary employment… […] We came here with a single piece of luggage and started over our lives" (Péter, personal communication, December 1, 2018)

Krisztina also had financial considerations behind her move and emphasized that she is "not here because of the typical 'I'm interested in America and want to seek adventure' approach, but for financial reasons, absolutely for financial reasons" (Krisztina, personal communication, December 16, 2018). Ervin, a former entrepreneur, listening to his friends' advice, decided to move to the United States in his 40s after a bankruptcy and voiced his discontent with the economic opportunities in Hungary, which in his view, would have not allowed him to get back on track with his life:

> "I had my shop for eight years in a mall and then a big department store came to the city and everyone went bankrupt. So all of a sudden it just happened to me and prestige here and there, we could no longer sponsor this competitive situation and the business was over. Well, now, I do not consider Hungary being a place where a start over would be possible at the age of 40 and I thought that I would choose a country where, according to my friends, it possible to start something new." (Ervin, personal communication, February 18, 2020)

As it had been pointed out in the Theoretical Framework section, precarious immigration status occupies such a vital sphere of the migrants' lives that undocumented and documented status can render immigrants into different social classes (Menjívar 2006 pp. 999–1000). Based on the experiences of the interviewees, loss of socio-economic status and the phenomenon of brain waste appeared as a very salient issue, some arriving in the US as skilled professionals, holding university degrees, disillusioned by their low salaries and economic opportunities available to them in Hungary that, in their view, didn't let them maximize their potential or to live in financial stability. As certain jobs can be linked to citizenship (Bloemraad 2017 p. 331) or at least legal permanent residence status, many undocumented people take positions that are not in line with their qualifications; former police offers become construction workers,

entrepreneurs start to work as handymen, while former managers become cleaning ladies and babysitters.

Brain waste and the loss of status in some cases had harsh effects on the mental wellbeing of the interviewees, though not everyone experienced it in the same way. Péter claimed that "it was very humiliating at the beginning. I had had a much better job at home and when I got here, I had to find a job that we could do without papers and that was very humiliating" (Péter, personal communication, December 1, 2018). Krisztina, a formal manager, had to take a job below her qualifications as well, but given that she had experience working with children as a kindergarten teacher, she considered babysitting an autistic child not as far from her skills. Ervin had a rather firm opinion of those who voice their grievances not being able to take positions that would fit their qualifications. When asking him whether he had any feelings about his employment opportunities, he explained to me:

> "Well, as an economist with a university degree, I still have a strong feeling about this until this day. But listen here, you can be an economist at home [Hungary] for 300.000 Forints per month [approximately 926 USD] if you want a job that matches your status, or you can decide to start your life all over again and do whatever it takes. So now why would they give me a proper job that fits qualifications if there are Americans to fill those positions. Instead, I'll pack your concert piano and bring it down from the third floor as well as your fine art stuff and obviously everything that is heavy, that is expensive, that is a responsibility, and what no one else wants to do. And if it's humiliating for someone, you can buy a plane ticket, there are flights in both directions, you can move away from this place if you want a job that suits your prestige." (Ervin, personal communication, February 22, 2020)

As the quote above demonstrates, even though everyone is aware that there is always the option to go back to Hungary and they could be taking jobs that are in line with their skills, the vast differences in the wages between the two places make many to stay in spite of the hardships and occasionally humiliation that come with their precarious status. Undocumented status not only results in economic marginalization, but also limits spatial

and social mobility. Economic dualism in global cities such as New York means that urban areas are in constant need of immigrant workers who can take up positions the locals are no longer willing to take. Undocumented immigrant due to their status, are at the bottom of the US labor hierarchy and easily exploitable (Macías Ayala 2017 p. 19).

4.1. The Case of the Illegal Employment Agencies

Vulnerability and exploitability especially come to forefront in the context of illegal employment agencies operating from both New York and rural Hungary recruiting people to work as cleaning ladies or household servants to Orthodox Jewish households in the Borough Park area of Brooklyn and in New Square. All the interviewees were aware of these agencies and Erika, Piroska and Magda came to the United States with their "help". When I asked the interviewees whether these agencies recruit women only, they told me that occasionally men are recruited to work at construction sites, however it is mainly women aged between 30 and 60, living in rural Hungary who turn to them. The interviewees claimed that the vast majority of undocumented Hungarians living in New York came to the United States via these agencies motivated by financial reasons and the inability to pay their rather heavy debts from their Hungarian salaries, sending money back to their families and kids staying home. When I asked Erika whether these employment agencies based in Hungary operate legally, Erika told me that "totally illegally… they recruit people from Hungary for huge amount of money… […] they are the masters of rip offs" (Erika, personal communication, December 13, 2018).

Piroska, who went bankrupt after the 2008 financial crisis, explained to me during the interview that her trips abroad helped her to achieve financial stability. She worked for three months in the United States as a cleaning lady for several Jewish households in New Square living at a worker's hostel with 17 fellow Hungarian cleaning ladies who got recruited by the same employment agency. In three months, she managed to earn 1 million Forints (approximately

3,050 USD). When I asked her why she decided to go to New York as cleaning lady, she responded:

> "Actually, a friend of mine told me that a family member of hers works in New York and what a fantastic life she has there: that was the first reason. The second one: when the economic crisis came, everyone asked me: "Hi, how are you?" and I said: "Hi, I hit rock bottom". And when I introduced myself like this for the fifth year in a row, I was getting really tired of it. […] And I was looking for an agency on the internet, I didn't really understand what it meant to clean Jewish households. And then I went to this agency on the countryside. I went there, talked, nodded, paid, left. I haven't regretted anything so much in my whole life." (Piroska, personal communication, March 16, 2020)

These employment agencies do not help the Hungarian applicants – who in most of the cases have very limited English language knowledge – to get work permits, they only arrange travel visas or ESTAs [10] for them, and as those expire after three months, people become undocumented. The Hungarians turning to these agencies also advocate it to others: Magda when I asked her whether these agencies are still functioning told me that a year ago she recommended the one she got "help" from to one of her acquaintances who was interested in working in the United States, and just a few months later she came to the US via the agency as well. Magda and Piroska told me that they paid approximately 220,000 Forints (approximately 680 USD) to the employment agency to book their flight, and to find them a family/employer. Upon arrival at the airport, a person was sent to pick them up and take them to the family and to the worker's hostel. As a part of the deal, they also had to give their first weeks' salary (500 USD) to the "intermediary" who arranged the employment for them. This was such a wide practice at a time that people even started to sell their jobs to each other, advertising them on social media platforms, following the same construction. Once a cleaning lady/household servant moved to another family or found a better a job, she started to advertise her former job in Facebook groups for the first weeks' salary of 500 USD. According to Erika, who has a very

[10] Short for Electronic System for Travel Authorization. More information available via: https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/ Date of access: 12/12/2019

negative opinion of fellow undocumented Hungarians in New York, this used to be a wide practice few years ago; she even "bought" a job like that, but since then, it became less common and she hasn't seen a post like that in a long time.

Erika went to the US to replace a woman who was returning after years of working as a household servant. When I asked her about how exactly the process works, she told me:

> "This means that the intermediary [who operates the illegal employment agency] gets you a job, and within a month if you don't like it or the family is not satisfied with you, the intermediary has to find you another one. However, after a month, they can just fire you and you won't get any help… And they keep doing that all the time […] It happened to me as well… Just a week after the first month, the intermediary woman called me that I have one hour to pack and get out of the house when it was –22 Celsius outside… I did not know my rights, I should have turned to the police right away […] I shouldn't have tolerated this, but of course you are abroad, you don't know anything, the ground is shaking beneath your legs… […] Then I got a job at another house at New Square from which I had to flee with the help of my friends…" (Erika, personal communication, December 13, 2018)

Erika's sentence "I did not know my rights, I should have turned to the police right away" in the above-mentioned quote sheds light on a highly relevant issue. Undocumented migrants' unwillingness to turn to the police to report crimes or to seek remedies for exploitation by employers was pointed put by both Varsanyi (2006) and de Graauw (2014). Being in a vulnerable position due to illegality, undocumented migrants might be unwilling to claim their rights, although they are granted certain forms of protection as they are on US territory: both equal rights protection (under 14th Amendment to the US Constitution) and employment protection (under the 1964 Civil Rights Act) apply to them (de Graauw 2014 p. 311). Piroska experienced similar exploitation and even though she could sense injustice, she was unwilling to turn to the authorities.

Coutin (2000) argues that in the case of undocumented migrants, the social space of illegality erases legal personhood generating "spaces of nonexistence", exclusion, subjugation and forced invisibility that "materializes around [them] wherever they go" (Ibid p. 30) making them easily exposed to exploitation and humiliation. Magda – who upon arrival to New York was immediately taken to her future employer's house, where the family wasn't even at home, making her wait on the street for hours – had the following experience:

> "I came here because of the money. My goal was to earn a certain amount and then go home and start a decent life from that. So I went to New York to live with a Jewish family. I got 450 dollars a week, but I didn't have to pay for either housing or food. […] It worked as follows: we had a day off once a week and we worked from 9am to 9pm. If you had already done everything you needed to do at the family's house you were living at, you were sent to the other family. And back then I didn't even know how it worked, only later I figured out that those I lived with later lent me to other families for few hours a week and they received money from them. So basically they told the other family that we will send our cleaning lady over for $10 and they got that much money by lending me… […] So from morning till night you had to be on your feet all the time. So it wasn't that "oh now there are no more things to do, I will just go into my room to relax a bit". If there wasn't any more things left to do then I had to go, they sent me to the other house and then I worked there" (Magda, personal communication, March 18, 2020)

Magda's case sheds light on the sad reality how these women – being unaware of their rights, too afraid to report crimes against them and unwilling to give up their financial goals and turn against their employers – are often times being treated as a tradable commodity. Besides severe forms of labor exploitation, these women are highly exposed to humiliation by their employers. Magda, during her fist months felt uncomfortable taking food from the family's fridge who often times forgot to feed her. She recalled a story when her employer humiliated her for being hungry:

> "There was his one case that really hurt me. I lived with this family and it was on a Sabbath and I cleaned the kitchen in the morning, I started to clean the bathroom and they said that we are going to the grandmother's house and I didn't get breakfast. Neither at their house, nor at the grandmother's house, because the grandmother thought that I had already been given breakfast and we went home in the afternoon and I was so hungry.

> And this was not the only occasion that it happened to me, because at the beginning I was reluctant to tell them to give me food because it was just so awkward. And going back home from the grandmother's house, while I was strolling the little baby on the street in front of them, the husband behind my back told her wife that "well, look, she hurries home because she's hungry". And I can't even explain it to you, it felt so bad. I felt like I was being laughed at." (Magda, personal communication, March 18, 2020)

Reflecting on the undocumented Hungarian migrants' lack of knowledge of their rights, possibilities and ways to take up employment legally in the United States, Erika argued that "Hungarians come here very stupid" with the sole aim of earning money by cleaning houses, not thinking through the long-term consequences of their visa-overstays. Erika wished that this situation would change in the future and added that according to her "Hungarians know very little about how to come to the US legally" (Erika, personal communication, December 13, 2018). Piroska held a similar opinion. When I asked her why she didn't think about legal ways to come to work in the US, she said:

> "It didn't even occur to look up how could I come here to work legally, because I wasn't interested. I probably thought that I didn't want to stay here for long. […] I don't think it even comes to mind for anyone at all that we want to come here legally. Well now listen, I'm not a stupid person and yet it didn't even occur to me. America was a totally random thing in my life. A friend told me about it and after a while I just decided to go. […] I really don't know what we think… I don't know why we think that we cannot come here to work legally. Or just simply we only focus on the things that they tell us and then no one really thinks about it, because everyone comes here that way." (Piroska, personal communication, March 16, 2020)

Piroska's insights highlight that for many Hungarians it does not even occur as a possibility to find legal employment in the United States. Even though Piroska emphasized the unchallenged and unquestioned "ways how things go" approach, the lack of language knowledge, proper qualifications and skills, and the restrictive immigration policies in United States also contribute to the persistence of these conditions.

When I asked Magda – who managed to find better employment opportunities after a couple of months and now works at bed and breakfasts – whether she thought about coming to the United States with a valid working visa, she also highlighted that she wasn't planning on staying in US for long, it was supposed to be a short-term adventure:

> "Back then I didn't know if I would want to live here or I would want to stay here. You know, I told you, I had one year in mind and now I really regret that, but I wasn't thinking this way then." (Magda, personal communication, March 18, 2020)

Asking Magda if she would say something to her past self the night before her departure to the US, she immediately responded "I would say that don't do it this way. Come with a visa instead, but not like that" (Magda, personal communication, March 18, 2020).

For these middle-aged Hungarian cleaning ladies who come to the US without work permits or adequate language knowledge, being able to move out of the families' homes, renting their own apartments or rooms to where they can return after they finished with their work, is an achievement, and, in many cases, it takes years for them to get to that point.

The activity of the illegal employment agencies is such a widespread phenomenon that even those who never had contact with them know almost every detail about their functioning. In recent years, besides cleaning jobs, it has become more common to recruit women, aged between 40 and 60, to work as caretakers to elderly people. The interviewees described this situation being very sad, with Zsóka claiming that many of those women who work as caretakers would instead need caretakers themselves given their age and physique. Since circular migration is not an option for them, these women try to stay as long as they can to earn as much money as they can in the hope of getting out of the debt spiral at home. Laura emphasized that while they work 10 to 12 hours a day, "working themselves to death", they get a salary of maximum 2,500 dollars per month, which might sound like a lot for an "average

Hungarian", however, in the United States it isn't that of a "big deal". Laura, who is fluent in English and managed to acquire citizenship early on, added that she used to earn 2,500 dollars per week, with significantly less amount of work. Signifying how prone these women are to exploitation, Zsóka argued that it is not only that they do not speak English, they are not even aware of their human rights, and occasionally some employers take away and hide their passports. When asking Ervin whether he knows about the illegal employment agencies who recruit middle-aged Hungarian women, he replied:

> "Do you know what they are doing? They'll put you into a house to change the diapers of an old man and that's it. You can stay there for the rest of your life. And these people, these "agencies", they also import cleaning ladies here, and then they work for Jewish families and in absolutely slave-like conditions, you live in a basement and you just stay there for years… And the reason why not many are complaining because of this is that they can save up all of their earnings. And this is very relevant for those who came here having foreign currency loans at home, with a significant amount of debt, and they made an impulse decision without seeing any other way out, because they read or heard something from others… The majority [of Hungarians living in New York] absolutely falls into this category. […] And they typically pump money back home to the next generation or trying to repay their own debts." (Ervin, personal communication, February 18, 2020)

Magda, who was significantly younger (in her early 30s) than the average when she started working as a cleaning lady in New York, had only one friend who fell into the same age group as her. The rest of her friends, all working as cleaning ladies, were all around 50 or 60 years of age, and since they were dependent on each other, not knowing anyone else with whom they could share their struggles and hardships, they became good friends.

As a concluding note, it is important to highlight that the compelling stories of financial success told by migrants to family members, friends and acquaintances and the depiction of New York as the "center of the universe" and the United States as the "land of opportunities" lure many into making the decision to turn to these agencies and migrate to the US without any clear perspectives and work permits to "try their luck". Almost all of the interviewees were exposed

to stories like that before moving to the US and while some had family and friends who helped them find a job and get settled, those who didn't have such connections, migrated with the help of unauthorized recruiters and unlicensed agencies.

4.2. Undocumented Hungarians Navigating Illegality

The everyday lived experience of precarious immigration status is largely shaped by the local policies, federal immigration enforcement and the political climate in general. Illegality, being both a legal and a socio-political condition, can not only increase the risk of labor exploitation and marginalization, but also produces fears, anxieties, and a sense of being policed even during mundane everyday interactions.

Referencing Coutin (2000), De Genova (2002) emphasized that surveillance in the United States has been increasingly displaced from immigration authorities to local police, state officials, clerks, bureaucratic staff (De Genova 2002 p. 426), and this type of "soft enforcement" (Gonzales et al. 2019 p. 80) is a crucial factor to highlight when it comes to the decision-making of undocumented migrants on whether to stay or return home, whether to obtain driver's licenses or apply for local ID cards registering their data with the authorities. In addition to that, in recent years, the current political climate with the Trump administration's intense immigration agenda and hostile attitude towards undocumented immigrants also contributed to the perception of widespread surveillance and increased scrutiny of immigration documents. De Genova (2002) pointed out that "migrant illegality is lived through the palpable sense of deportability" (Ibid p. 439) rendering undocumented migrant labor a "distinctly disposable commodity" (Ibid p. 438), which, on the individual level, translates into a feeling of alienation, the "self-monitoring" of everyday actions and interactions (Gonzales et al. 2019 p. 79), reminding undocumented people that they are not allowed to truly belong.

While the literature on the lived experience of migrant illegality overwhelmingly emphasizes the deportability, anxiety and fear, not everyone experiences precarious immigration status the same way; the empirical findings from the interviews show that the experience of illegality is largely dependent on local embeddedness, integration efforts, language skills, social relations and successful acculturation[11] in general. In the case of those who only maintain social relations with fellow undocumented Hungarians, have difficulties with the language and gather information solely from Hungarian social media groups, the fear of deportation is quite severe and people spreading alarming stories and rumors (in many case just to trigger others) is a very widespread phenomenon.

Ervin and Péter talked at great lengths about how people spread alarming stories with the aim of intimidating others, claiming that the authorities are "hunting" undocumented immigrants and they could be subject to deportation at any time. And while it is quite common that immigrants are placed in removal proceedings after being stopped for minor traffic violations (such as failing to use the turn signal or failing to stop at red lights) with minor offenses carrying severe consequences (Alonzo et al. 2011), Ervin emphasized that it is not in the interest of local law enforcement to deport illegal immigrants, since they are very well aware that their labor in the city is needed:

> "They are not going to take away [deport] anyone, unless they do something very stupid. […] Now, quite simply, just think, for these people, for these officers, it is not that they were given an order to collect everyone and deport them, because if they would do so, then who would stay here to make your sandwich, who would stay here to build your house, because the American people will not do that, that's for sure…" (Ervin, personal communication, February 22, 2020)

[11] The term psychological acculturation that was first coined by T.D Graves (1967) who referred to "the changes that an individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures and as a result of participating in the process of acculturation that his cultural or ethnic group is undergoing" (Berry et al. 1992 p. 271). Acculturation involves both cultural and individual changes, and the cultural differences might be accepted, interpreted, or denied by the individual who faces them, therefore acculturation is a highly variable process in which not every person participates to the same extent (Berry et al. 1992 pp. 272–274).

Turning back to the traffic violations leading to deportations aspect, Péter recalled a story where his friend was deported because already having a penalty for speeding, he had been caught again, by the very same police officer, for turning right on red lights and was summoned to court. Since he did not even have a driver's license, and previously at his first offense promised not to drive again, this time the judge handed him over to the immigration authorities. Another friend of Péter had been caught at an airport for travelling with her kid with whom she did not have the same surname, and the authorities, suspecting child trafficking, investigated her documents and decided to deport her. Péter claimed that this story gained such a wide attention from the undocumented Hungarian community that many people decided not to travel by plane anymore within the United States following the incident. Péter added that "so it is not the case here that immigrants will be hunted down. It is nonsense. There have been few cases from which the Hungarians conclude that this is the way it is done to everyone, and they have to hide" (Péter, personal communication, February 17, 2020).

Among the interviewees, the fear of deportation was especially severe in the case of Erika, who told me several times how she has her luggage fully packed in the corner of her room each time she leaves New York City, in case that she gets "caught" and the authorities deport her.

Magda, discussing the recent political changes in the US, recalling stories of friends and acquaintances who had been deported along the years, and her own single experience with a domestic flight she took when she decided few years ago to move away from New York, she explained to me:

> "I wasn't afraid and I'm not afraid now either, but it is true that they have deported a lot of Hungarians around me since then. Of course, it always turned out that it was because of something stupid. And not because they just walked down the street and were stopped and didn't have American papers, but because they were driving around and let's say their lights were out and they were stopped by a police officer and it turned out they didn't have any papers… But they were not as rough four years ago as they are now... Even if you were stopped, you were sent to court, where you paid the fine and were

> released. This is not the case now. Now, if they stop you, they will take you to the detention center right away and then they will send you home. So a lot has changed since then. I wouldn't sit on a plane now, I wouldn't risk it. It might be the case that nothing happens, but since my little girl was born here, I don't want to risk it, I don't want to go home because of that." (Magda, personal communication, March 18, 2020)

Magda went on saying that since the place where she currently lives lacks proper public transportation system, she must take her car wherever she wants to go, which causes her stress every single day, hoping that she doesn't get stopped by the police. In spite of the general uneasiness and anxiety that accompanies her everyday activities, Magda emphasized that when dealing with her child's paperwork or at the kindergarten, no one ever made her feel less valuable or any different from other parents just because she was "illegal".

Harsh immigration policies, "local manifestation of enforcement" (Gonzales et al. 2019 p. 81) and heated political discourse over the topic of immigration also achieve broader aims and motivate voluntary departures. Krisztina, who for years kept hoping for a policy that would allow her to regularize her status, decided to return to Hungary in 2019 as she felt that the increasingly hostile environment in line with the lack of social security deprives her of the opportunity of upward social and occupational mobility.

Emphasizing the relevance of local embeddedness and social connections, Laura, who is now a citizen, was not particularly affected by fear and anxiety for the brief period while she was undocumented, since she was working as a bartender for her US-citizen friend, surrounded by a supportive social network of native New Yorkers.

4.3. The Role of Individualism in Integrating

In close connection to what has been written about in the previous subchapters, one of the most intriguing findings from the interviews was that the research participants, emphasizing how individualism is crucial for successful integration, held the perception that the undocumented "Hungarian community" in New York holds people back, lowering their changes for self-actualization. Almost every interviewee had very negative experiences with the "Hungarian community", that made them unwilling to socialize with their fellow nationals at the country of destination. Péter, Ervin and Erika were especially vocal about what is going on in various discussion threads in Facebook groups, where people get into intense, hostile disputes about such irrelevant topics as for example where certain spices can be found in the local groceries. As it has been previously mentioned, alarming stories of sudden and unjustified deportations are also frequently spread through these online platforms, triggering panic among those who, lacking proper language skills, mainly gain information from their fellow nationals and the Hungarian Facebook groups.

The interviewees held the perception that only those who have individualistic attitudes can be successful in the American society and economy, and those Hungarian compatriots who still try to get ahead relying on help from friends, family and the community are "doomed to failure" and unable to successfully integrate. McGuigan (2014) exploring the hypothesis how the presentation and imagination of a preferred self is connected to the leading global economic ideology across the world, proposes the ideal type of the "neoliberal self" that, following the logic of neoliberal capitalism, values a highly individualistic and competitive atmosphere in which the "hardworking taxpayers", "successful entrepreneurs" and "sovereign consumer" are the key players (Ibid pp. 224–225). It is exactly this ideal type of a "neoliberal self" that appeared as a respected and valued trait for the self-actualizing, self-reliant interviewees who

regarded individualism as a key integration strategy, sometimes even devaluing and condemning attempts to get ahead with the help of friends and family members. This is very well-reflected in Ervin's observations:

> "You know what? For a lot of people the problem is that here they are nobodies. I love being a nobody. […] And you know people regard themselves as nobodies because they have to work together with people that are not their buddies and cousins and so on. Here it really becomes clear whether you can be somebody when the silver spoon drops out of your mouth and here you go, welcome to the racetrack! And there are strangers here and everyone expects achievement and quality work and you have to show them that you are not relying on other people to lift you up." (Ervin, personal communication, February 22, 2020)

Laura and Zsóka talking about those who have strong ties with the "Hungarian community" framed it as if they were "trapped" in their immediate social circles, Zsóka adding that while occasionally (out of solidarity) she visits Hungarian service providers (for example estheticians and nail technicians), she doesn't like to attend community events, given that the fellow Hungarians usually cannot be valuable social contacts for her, since they rather need help from her in most of the cases. Laura was highly critical of those who were not capable of "self-actualization" and whose social contacts were limited to fellow Hungarians in the same situation, working in low status positions with limited language skills. Laura went as far as saying that they have a "very countryside [redneck] attitude" (Laura, personal communication, April 23, 2020) and emphasized that each time someone tells her that they want to move to the United States, she warns everyone that only those should come to the US who "really do love to work". The glorification of hard work and individualism as keys to the successful integration to the American society and culture, and that many of the undocumented Hungarians cannot relate to these "values" was a topic that triggered intense reactions for quite many of the interviewees.

5. NEW YORK CITY AS A SANCTUARY – THE USE OF LOCAL ID CARDS AMONG HUNGARIAN IMMIGRANTS

Immigration (and especially undocumented migration) has been in the forefront of public policy concerns for quite a long time in the United States with the immigration system being fractured given the tensions between local, state and federal governments when it comes to the enforcement of immigration law (Bilke 2009 pp. 167–193). Localities that choose to oppose the federal government's efforts to delegate enforcement tasks to local and state authorities by adopting "non-cooperation" policies are referred to as "sanctuary cities" (Bilke 2009 p. 166). O'Brien et al. (2019) define a sanctuary city as "a city or police department that has passed a resolution or ordinance expressly forbidding city or law enforcement officials from inquiring into immigration status and/or cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)" (Ibid p. 4).

Looking at the history of local sanctuary policies, they roots in the Central American Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s that challenged the federal government's refusal to grant asylum to thousands of people fleeing political violence in El Salvador and Guatemala[12] (Ridgley 2008 p. 55; O'Brien et al. 2019 p. 9). Originally funded by churches and faith-based groups that granted housing, transportation and legal assistance to the people fleeing from Central America, in solidarity, the early policies of the Sanctuary Movement were adopted by cities, San Francisco being the first locality that designated itself a "City of Refuge" in 1985 and, passing an ordinance later in 1989, it expressed the city's non-involvement with the federal immigration enforcement (Lasch et al. 2018; Ridgley 2008; Villazor 2010). Even though the concept refers to cities (as they were the initial hubs for sanctuary policies), the current

[12] In the Cold War context, during the 1980s, the United States was supporting regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala with military and economic aid, therefore it became politically sensitive to acknowledge that these regimes were involved in human rights violations. People fleeing from both countries were denied requests for asylum and were labelled as "economic migrants" (Ridgley 2008 p. 65).

sanctuary landscape extends beyond them with several counties and states introducing sanctuary legislations[13] or police departments and sheriffs deciding to stop cooperating with ICE (Lasch et al. 2018 pp. 1710–1711).

In addition to shielding immigrants by disagreeing with the federal immigration policy, sanctuary cities also started to issue municipal ID cards to local residents regardless of immigration status, facilitating the integration of undocumented immigrants, which triggered many opponents of such policies who frequently presenting public safety arguments against them (Bilke 2009 pp. 186–187). As Ridgley (2008) argued, the sanctuary movement and policies challenged the exclusion of noncitizens, advancing an alternative idea of citizenship, disrupting the inherited definitions of bounded political membership (Brown 1997; Mitchell 1997; Secor 2004 in Ridgley 2008 p. 55).

In order to adequately place into context the empirical findings from the interviews, it is important to highlight that by shielding immigrants from deportation when they come into contact with the criminal justice system (Lasch et al. 2018 p. 1704) and issuing municipal ID cards for those with precarious immigration status, the debate around sanctuary cities became strikingly heated under the current Trump presidency. Even though the criminalization of immigration dates earlier than the Trump administration's harsh border control and interior enforcement agenda, sanctuary cities that protect the oft-demonized group of undocumented migrants (O'Brien et al. 2019 p. 10) are now increasingly (and wrongfully) characterized as dangerous and harmful places, with President Trump relying on a rhetoric that conflates

[13] A list and map of current sanctuary jurisdictions can be found here: https://cis.org/Map-Sanctuary-Cities-Counties-and-States Date of access: 05/24/2020

immigration and crime, pushing a campaign to crack down on sanctuary cities (Lasch et al. 2018 pp. 1714–1716).[14]

Despite the narrative of sanctuary cities fostering crime, current research (Martínez et al. 2017 and O'Brien et al. 2019) shows that sanctuary policies have no effect on crime rates. Besides finding that sanctuary policies do not lead to increase in crime, O'Brien et al. (2019) – disclosing the normative implications of their findings – emphasize that the further enhancement of sanctuary policies would be advisable, since, based on the work of Sidanius and Pratto (2001), they act as hierarchy attenuation structures, helping the incorporation of immigrants and leading to a more democratic polity (O'Brien et al. 2019 p. 32).

The characterization of New York as sanctuary came up several times during the interviews. Erika highlighted that "you cannot have the same sense of safety anywhere else outside New York" (Erika, personal communication, December 13, 2018), while Péter also emphasized that up until he managed to legalize himself, "for eight years I hardly ever left Brooklyn… I strictly stayed within the borders of the city" (Péter, personal communication, December 1, 2018). Orsolya claimed that "this is the safest place, this is the easiest city for finding a job, this is the place with the highest salaries, so it has these benefits, and it is even slightly more protected than other places in the US" (Orsolya, personal communication, March 15, 2020).

[14] A recent example from February 2020 of such rhetoric can be found on the White House's Twitter page, where Trump voices the following concerns about sanctuary cities: "They are all over the place and a lot of people don't want them […] But the politicians want them for whatever reason. That's why we are calling on Congress to pass legislation giving American victims the right to sue sanctuary cities and hold them accountable for the suffering and damages that they've caused. American citizens are entitled to safe neighborhoods and safe streets. Not one more American life should be stolen by sanctuary cities." (Trump 2020). Available via: https://twitter.com/WhiteHouse/status/1228453405099728897 Date of access: 05/25/2020

5.1. The Supposed Importance and Benefits of IDNYCs Versus How People Use Them

In New York City the estimated number of undocumented immigrants is around half a million, and while the federal government does not promote or even support immigrant integration, the city has initiatives that are locally developed (de Graauw and Vermeulen 2016 p. 999). In 2014 New York City enacted an ID card program to promote the civic integration of the city's undocumented immigrants (de Graauw and Vermeulen 2016 p. 1000). The card can be used to access city services and programs (such as free entrance to museums and galleries) while also serving as a recognized ID for interacting with the New York City Police Department (City of New York 2020). Since 2011 there has been also a state-wide English language access policy for non-proficient immigrants and New York state created several agencies that help immigrants and promote their participation in the state's economic and civic life (de Graauw and Vermeulen 2016 p. 999). As it was already pointed out both in the Theoretical Framework section and under Chapter 5, local membership policies such as granting municipal IDs for the residents of the city regardless of immigration status, promote a denationalized, inclusive form of postnational citizenship that is linked to the mere presence in the city rather than legal status (Varsanyi 2006). Transferring political belonging to the urban scale, sanctuary policies not only enhance migrant integration, but also challenge the criminalization of migration, advocating that all residents should have access to fundamental rights regardless of their immigration status (Ridgley 2008 p. 56).

While municipal ID cards are argued to promote participation in key aspects of city life to people with precarious immigration status without upsetting the federal monopoly over immigration (de Graauw 2014 pp. 309–313), the idea of incorporation and enhanced political belonging with the help of local IDs does not translate unproblematically into practice. The present research finds that for the undocumented Hungarian immigrants the New York City

identification cards (IDNYCs) do not grant a sense of security and enhanced belonging, their practicality is questioned by the users and, in some cases, they might even trigger a sense of vulnerability as certain service providers can refuse to accept them, forming prejudices about the card holders' immigration status.

Besides the novel strategy of issuing municipal identification cards, some sanctuary cities also have a long existing policy of issuing driver's licenses to undocumented migrants (Bilke 2009 p. 186). With passing the so-called Green Light Law[15] that took effect at the end of 2019, New York became one of the 13 states that allow people without legal immigration status to apply for driver's licenses (Campbell 2019). When the topic of municipal ID cards came up during the interview with Ervin, questioning the usefulness of such cards, said that the IDNYC is like a "student pass for the teeter-totter" (Ervin, personal communication, February 22, 2020), while emphasizing that driver's licenses are more useful since those are "literally IDs", not only locally issued documents with limited acceptability. Ervin, who was generally more confident with less fear and anxiety than the other undocumented interviewees, obtained his New York State driver's license as soon as the new law took effect. He also added that in his view, the IDNYCs are mostly used by those who have very limited language skills and are less incorporated into the US society. Ervin argued that those "who take things seriously, like to play fair and really try to fit in should get driver's licenses" instead of relying on IDNYC cards, justifying his point saying that:

> "A driver's license is a solid background for you, so that they can know that you are clean, that you don't have a criminal record, they cannot accuse you with anything, because they can see your record, they can see that you have done nothing wrong." (Ervin, personal communication, February 22, 2020)

[15] With passing the law, border control and federal immigration officials have been blocked from New York's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) database, while DMV officials have been prohibited to provide data for entities that enforce immigration law unless a judge orders them to do so (Campbell 2019).

When asking Orsolya about whether she has an IDNYC and what is she using it for, the first thing that came to her mind was the access to services and programs such as museums, libraries zoos, and concert halls. When I asked her whether her life became easier because of the New York City ID, she answered that only because she doesn't have to pay entrance fees, but otherwise "this cannot give you a greater sense of security, because it cannot be used for identifying yourself and traveling" (Orsolya, personal communication, March 15, 2020).

For Erika the sole purpose of the card was that having it with herself, she could leave her passport at home, therefore she was less worried that she might lose her most important official document. She claimed that the card itself did not make her feel safer and while having a municipal ID did give her an enhanced feeling of belonging, she argued that this is only an "illusion", because in her view, she could only become a true member of the society by regularizing herself. Erika also added that the holders of IDNYCs cannot be entirely sure whether certain police officers, places, bars and clubs accept it or not, adding that "currently you cannot enter more serious places with it, such as the Empire State Building" and "it is not really useful for other stuff anyways" (Erika, personal communication, March 15, 2020).

Zsóka, who holds a green card, also emphasized that the IDNYC give access to services and programs, and at a few places it can be accepted as an identification document as well. While mentioning the limited acceptability of the card, she claimed that it is mainly beneficial for those without green cards, since this way at least people without "paper" can have a local document.

5.2. IDNYC as a Stigma? – Obtaining Documents in the Age of Mass Surveillance

The current heated debate over sanctuary cities and the policies of the Trump administration have had a very severe effect on whether people "trust" municipal ID cards such as the IDNYCs. During the interview with Krisztina, she highlighted that not only could she never know whether certain places would accept it as an identification document, but in certain scenarios having the IDNYC had a stigma attached to it, with many people automatically assuming the holders of such cards can only be undocumented immigrants. Similarly to Erika, Krisztina applied for the IDNYC so that she could "have a document to show up" instead of her passport, and while noting the several benefits that come with the card she added that she had never used any of them.

Krisztina, expressing her discontent with the IDNYCs, claimed she ended up taking her Hungarian drivers' license with her, which "didn't have a single word on it in English, but yet they were more willing to accept it in many cases than the card that was issued by their own city". She also recalled a story with a bodyguard at a nightclub, who was not willing to accept her IDNYC as legitimate identification document based on his boss's assertion that those cards are only obtained by "illegal people", who don't have papers. The stigma attached to the card surprised Krisztina, who went back to the same club with her citizen friend also holding an IDNYC, hoping to prove the bodyguard that the cards are used by the residents of New York City and not exclusively undocumented immigrants. However, her efforts were in vain, her Hungarian driver's license yet again proved to be more accepted than her local ID. She added:

> "So this ID is pretty controversial I would say. Moreover, many people say that they don't even dare to apply for such an ID card if they don't have a green card or citizenship, because starting from that point when you register your data, the authorities will know where you live and that you presented your foreign passport to identify yourself upon applying for the card and this way they will know that you don't have papers. But these are only theories. But anyway, I'll tell you honestly that when this new government came to power in 2016, I wouldn't say their name directly on purpose, one of their first actions

> was that they wanted to gain access to the IDNYC database. And everyone started to freak out that oh my lord, then now they will know who is here without papers and what their addresses are. A lot of people moved from their previous addresses to other parts of the city because of this." (Krisztina, personal communication, March 31, 2020)

In 2016, just after Trump was elected as president, the federal government's potential plan to access to the IDNYC database was indeed a concern for Mayor Bill de Blasio and New York City officials, who in December 2016 announced that they will stop keeping records on those who apply for the municipal ID cards (Kirby 2016; Lecher 2016). New York City was eventually legally allowed to destroy its database related to the municipal ID program in April 2017.[16]

As it was clearly highlighted in the interview with Krisztina, vulnerability and deportability could make people with precarious immigration statues reluctant to register data with any local authority, if they can probably assume that their records could be accessed by federal agencies and they could be deported as a result of obtaining them. Reflecting on her decision to move back to Hungary, Krisztina also added:

> "The events of these last four years greatly influenced my decision to come home. So when you have an ID issued by a state or a city and you feel threatened because the government might be able to gain access to your records anytime… Or when you have a driver's license and you feel threatened because the government might be able to access those records as well… Or you have an ITIN number [Individual Taxpayer Identification Number which can be obtained regardless of immigration status], a tax number, a temporary tax number, and as a good prospective citizen you would like to pay taxes, but those records might be accessed by the federal government… So it didn't matter how much I tried to behave like a good prospective citizen, I felt constantly threatened because of my driver's license, because of my New York ID, because of my temporary tax number… And may I add that these records were all there during the previous government as well and yet no one ever threatened us before, only the current government in the last couple of years." (Krisztina, personal communication, March 31, 2020)

[16] See: https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/city-can-destroy-idnyc-applicants-personal-records-after-april-17-judge-rules/90154/ Date of access: 05/24/2020

Turning back to the stigma connected to having an IDNYC card, when I asked the citizen Laura whether she has one, we had the following conversation:

> Interviewer: "Do you have a New York City ID card?"
>
> Laura: "What is that? An ID?"
>
> Interviewer: "Those can apply for it who live in New York City."
>
> Laura: "So the illegals! Yeah, I know, you can go to the theater, to the zoo and to a lot of other places with it… I don't have one."
>
> Interviewer: "How come that you immediately thought of the "illegals"? Do you think that it is mainly those people who apply for these cards?"
>
> Laura: "Yes, because you need an ID. And one or two of my acquaintances have this IDNYC. You need an ID to enter the clubs and the bars, because they check whether you are over 21. And there has been a lot of issues around this, because they do not accept it everywhere. […] I didn't apply for it, I didn't need it, I don't go to museums. A lot of museums are free or donation-based anyways. But yes, mainly the illegals apply for it so that they can have an ID to carry around instead of their passports, because they really don't want to lose it of course." (Laura, personal communication, April 23, 2020)

When asked about whether he had an IDNYC card, Péter framed it in a similar way as Laura did; he said he didn't "need" one, since by the time the municipal ID program started, he already had a green card. The stigma around IDNYCs, and green card holders' and citizens' unwillingness to obtain them, in line with the hostile federal policies towards sanctuary cities and illegal immigrants, seemingly creates a counterproductive situation; instead of the enhanced feeling of membership, undocumented immigrants could very well end up with an enhanced feeling of vulnerability, experiencing policing during everyday interactions.

6. STATUS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Collins and Zimran (2019) pointed out that prior to the closing of the "Golden Door"[17] in 1921, European immigrants significantly shaped the economic, demographic and political development of the United States, and their opportunity for and realization of upward social mobility contributed to the idea of the US being the "land of opportunity" and a "nation of immigrants" (Ibid p. 1). Discussing immigrants' changing labor market assimilation in the 19th and early 20th century, Collins and Zimran (2019) argue that while nineteenth century immigrants managed to upgrade their occupational status relative to natives, this was not the case for the twentieth century cohort, and as opposed to popular beliefs, this difference was not rooted in the changing composition of the sending countries over time, but it was due to the structural economic transformation in the United States (Ibid pp. 25–26). The relevance of the authors' study lies in challenging the widely held view of "old" European immigrants of the mid-19th century being more capable of and successful at assimilation than those who emigrated to the US at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, which ultimately led to the immigration policy of 1921 that was based on biases towards the "new" European immigrants (Collins and Zimran 2019 p. 26). While contemporary immigration policies in the United States are still largely influenced by the widely held beliefs about the labor market assimilation of European immigrants prior to the 1921 restrictions, the authors pointed out that although having some factual basis, the view of past immigrants "working their way up" in the American economy is oversimplified (Collins and Zimran p. 26).

[17] Referring to the 1921 Emergency Quota Act that for the first time issued quantitative restrictions on the number of immigrants from Europe to the United States.

With the restrictive immigration policies of current times, people who enter without pre-settled immigration status (and overstay their travel, work or student visas) become undocumented and the possibility of "working their way up" is no longer feasible, their upward social mobility is significantly constrained. As global cities are constantly in need for unskilled workers in the labor-intensive sector, leading to a dual labor market, undocumented immigrants can easily get stuck at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, working in positions that the less educated local natives no longer willing to take (Massey et al. 1993 pp. 441–447). Precarious occupations with no social protection, therefore, can lock undocumented migrants (even skilled professionals with university degrees and a diverse set of skills) in lower socioeconomic statuses.

6.1. The Persistent Relevance of Papers

Gonzales et al. (2019) pointed out that for undocumented immigrants "chances of social mobility are dependent on achieving some form of status regularization" (Ibid p. 100), which is reflected well in the findings from the interviews. The undocumented interviewees all had a desire for status regularization, and those who were able to acquire green cards (Péter and Zsóka) and citizenship (Laura) all experienced upward social mobility.

Péter, who managed to acquire his green card after eight years, claimed that he only had the courage to look for better employment opportunities after his status regularization. Zsóka also emphasized that the main advantage of having a green card for her was that she could pursue any career that she wanted. When I asked her whether the green card made her life easier, she answered:

> "Yes. Because having it, I can do any job I like anywhere, there are no restrictions. Those who do not have green cards mainly work for Jewish households as cleaning ladies, babysitters or housekeepers or they take care of elderly people. […] Because they [employers] don't care about green cards […] and those Hungarians must work in such

positions because they have no other choice." (Zsóka, personal communication, March 19, 2020)

Criticizing the United States because of its harsh immigration and naturalization policies, and articulating the wish for a viable way for status regularization, the possibility of a repeated one-time amnesty (the last one happening in 1986), came up several times during the interviews. Besides hoping for a policy change, a couple of the interviewed undocumented Hungarians showed conscious efforts to appear in a favorable light to the authorities "when the time comes".

Krisztina and Ervin emphasized the importance of paying taxes, abiding the laws, using credit cards, and building a credit history by which they could show that they deserve to belong and be full members of the society. Ervin shared with me that he would imagine a solution on an economic basis that would involve a relatively big penalty and requirements to have a bank account, credit history, relatively long time of residency, proof of receiving a salary on a regular basis, and proof of paying taxes. Arguing that it is an "unresolved matter for America", and expressing his frustration with the marriage frauds people commit to get papers, Ervin elaborated on his wish to be "accepted as a part of the society":

"If they would tell me to fill out an application form and pay five thousand dollars as a penalty for being here without papers and then I can have it [the green card], I would be among the first to have it. […] I would be happier, I would be happier and I would thank them that they finally accepted me as part of the society. […] I would like to have a badge on me that I'm needed here, and they are happy for me to be here. […] I like playing fair, that's part of the thing, and I think I already deserve this. I WOULD deserve it. This is truly an unresolved matter for America. Who is allowed to be here and who is not… So this cannot be solved by building a wall on the border. Look, it shouldn't be that we're lying back and forth in a marriage interview about what we used to do to earn money. […] There's no way to do that [regularize his status] and I don't want to marry someone for thirty thousand dollars and lie about it." (Ervin, personal communication, February 22, 2020)

Krisztina was among my first interviewees in 2018. In 2019, after 8 years in the US, she decided to return to Hungary. When I asked her in our second conversation in March 2020 why she decided to leave, shedding light on the legalization struggles that heavily impacted her decision-making, she explained to me:

> "The biggest problem for me was that I couldn't legalize myself. That I work in vain, I pay taxes to America in vain, I can't do anything with it because I didn't get a social security number after my employment. And from that I won't have a pension, I couldn't go in and out of the country and even though having my friends and relatives coming to visit me was a fantastic experience, when I had a problem at home with my mom falling very ill I couldn't just go home for two weeks and help her and then come back afterwards… These things bothered me very much and I felt very restricted. Then the new government came from 2016 and I felt constantly threatened, because they said that those who cannot legalize themselves would be immediately imprisoned and sent home if caught. I didn't want to expose myself to that, so I preferred to sell everything, gather some money and come home to Hungary. […] That is the reason." (Krisztina, personal communication, March 31, 2020)

6.2. Obtaining Permanent Residency and Citizenship

Those who came to live and work in the United States by overstaying their visas the only option to regularize their status is via marriage. While Péter, Zsóka and Laura were all lucky enough to find US-citizen partners, those who are less well-integrated, don't speak the language fluently or don't have any time and opportunity to socialize, turn to marriage fraud. Péter said that even though it is rather rare that people risk this option, those who are desperate to regularize themselves are willing to pay even thirty thousand dollars for someone to marry them. Orsolya added that there are lawyers who are specialized in helping those who seek to obtain green cards this way. Among the undocumented interviewees, Ervin was especially vocal about how much he disapproves this process (see previous chapter), and along with Krisztina they were determined to show the authorities – by paying taxes, having driver's licenses and credit histories – that they deserve to belong and would deserve a viable,

reasonable way to regularize themselves. Erika voiced a sorrowful comment regarding the lack of other options for status regularization:

> "There is no other option. I've visited a lawyer, there is no other option. We are waiting for a miracle… We are waiting for a policy, so that they [US statesmen] will finally understand that this does not make sense […]" (Erika, personal communication, December 13, 2018)

Describing his experience with the process and the marriage interviews Péter contended that is very much like in the movie *Green Card (1990)*:

> "So you get the invitation to the interview and there they ask you all sorts of questions: what color your wife's toothbrush is, if you go into the bathroom then what do you see around you, if you want to open the window, what type of window you have or where does your wife usually put her keys, who pays the bills, where do we usually go to do the laundry, what is the name of the laundromat, how far is it, etc. If you answer correctly, then they will say "congratulations". If not, however, they will split the pair apart and question them separately and if their answers differ, they will come to check the place to see if they live together. There is a lot to lose, because if someone is found not telling the truth, they could be fined for 250,000 dollars or could be sentenced to 5 years in prison. It's a really big risk, but people tend to take it." (Péter, personal communication, February 17, 2020)

Laura was very explicit about her immigration status and her aim when she met her first husband. Answering my question on how she managed to acquire citizenship, she shared the following story with me:

> "It went very fast for me, so I was lucky with that too, as I already told you I always get what I ask for. And then I decided that now that my visa had expired – and I didn't really worry about it – I just thought that I'd start looking for a moneyed husband. And it expired in May and then in November I met a man who was cute and everything and we really started dating around Christmas and I moved in with him at the end of January and got married at the end of February. So if we think about it, he married me after two months of dating. I told him at the beginning that I needed this to be able to move on with my life here and he said it was OK. […] I got everything immediately, we got married, I got the 10-year green card and after three and a half years I became a citizen. And then we divorced the next year. I really did get everything very quickly". (Laura, personal communication, April 23, 2020)

When I asked Laura whether she felt more as a part of the American society upon acquiring citizenship or whether it had any symbolic meaning for her, she answered that she already felt as a part of the society before naturalization, and it was acquiring her green card that truly had a symbolic meaning and that really mattered for her. Laura argued that acquiring citizenship was "more of a final step", so that she knew that soon she will be able to divorce from her first husband, but the first time she got her two-year green card carried the meaning that "that from now on, everything is on track".

Legal scholar Peter Spiro in his 2008 book argued that "it is all about the green card not the naturalization certificate" (Ibid p. 159) claiming that for undocumented immigrants, legal permanent residence is the ultimate goal and not necessarily the acquisition of citizenship. The findings of this research confirm that statement; when asked about whether citizenship is important to them, with the exception of Ervin, both the undocumented and regularized interviewees were indifferent towards naturalization, Erika explicitly claiming that she would have no desire to vote and to "shape politics" in the US. Zsóka, who is a green card holder, emphasized the practical aspects around obtaining citizenship:

> "It would make sense to get it, because the 10-year green card always has to be renewed again and again. Whereas with the citizenship, you just get it and you're done. […] Well, um, it would be nice I guess, but it doesn't motivate me that much. Well, it's important, it's important, but not so much." (Zsóka, personal communication, March 19, 2020)

Péter said that the only reason why citizenship would be important to him, because once he naturalizes, he would be able help undocumented people to regularize their status by marrying them. But otherwise "it doesn't give you real benefits. The only thing is that it is much harder to take away someone's citizenship than her green card" (Péter, personal communication, February 17, 2020).

Among the interviewees only Ervin thought of citizenship as an important step towards being truly acknowledged as a part of the society claiming that “I would gladly be an American citizen, because I really like this economy, I can really relate to what I see here, and I would love to be an integral part of it” (Ervin, personal communication, February 22, 2020) .

7. TRANSNATIONAL TIES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS HUNGARY AND THE UNITED STATES

Varsanyi (2006) drew attention to the continuing importance of citizenship or legal permanent resident status as a legal right to remain (Ibid p. 237), however, in addition to that, one should not disregard the legal right to re-enter either, since the dilemmas of the undocumented interviewees mainly revolve around this aspect. As it has been widely pointed out by the literature on transnationalism, instead of complete absorption into the host society or the eventual fading of homeland ties, some migrants "remain strongly influenced by their continuing ties to their home country or by social networks that stretch across national borders" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004 p. 1002). Migrants therefore have an ability to incorporate simultaneously into multiple social contexts (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002 p. 233), crafting "a combination of home and host country orientations" (Bilgili 2014 p. 19). Besides appearing as a key to social mobility, green cards (or citizenship) would be important for the undocumented interviewees to be able to travel back and forth between the United States and Hungary, since now if they would chose to leave the US after spending there many years illegally, they would be barred from reentering for ten years.[18]

Despite having multiple attachments to people, places, and traditions beyond their sending countries Hungarian undocumented immigrants in the US cannot establish a high intensity of transnational exchanges since their movement across borders is constrained. Nearly all the undocumented interviewees framed the question of whether to stay in the United States or return to Hungary as a central dilemma. For the undocumented interviewees, who successfully established themselves in the host state, not being able to see their closest family members and

[18] More information on unlawful presence and bars to admissibility in the United States is available via: https://www.uscis.gov/legal-resources/unlawful-presence-and-bars-admissibility Date of access: 05/27/2020

friends, or help them in times of need is a significant concern, since it takes only a family emergency at home to give up their lives in the United States.

Erika, who has not seen her mother (who is unable to travel because of a heath condition) for six years, emphasized that she is still waiting for a policy that would allow undocumented immigrants like herself to regularize their status:

> "Life would be easier that way and then I wouldn't even need to think about it [whether to stay or return to Hungary]. I would be living a double life. Here and at home. This is what most of us suffer from, that we cannot just go home to visit our families. Otherwise I'm sure that every one of us would stay to work here, but occasionally we would spend more time with our families." (Erika, personal communication, March 15, 2020)

For Magda, having a US-born child, the dilemma of whether to stay or return is especially difficult, since she does not want to take away from her daughter the opportunities that come with her US citizenship. As mixed status families highlight the "fragmented and capricious nature of immigration policies" (Gonzales et al. 2019 p. 130), Magda emphasized that to wait until her child turns 21 to be able to petition for her undocumented parents wouldn't be worth it, because then Magda might not be able to see her parents ever again. When asked about how long they want to stay in the United States, Magda replied:

> "Actually, as long as we can. […] We have a plan B, because there has to be a plan B. I tell you honestly that we are looking forward to seeing what this year and the next year will bring, whether there will be a change or not. If not, then it is likely that we will go somewhere else, because even though I love living here and I really don't want to go back home, but my family is there and I still want to see them. Actually, we are planning to stay here for 1 or 2 more years so we can save some money and then we will see. But if there's going to be no change at all, then we will leave, because everyone around us, acquaintances, friends… They either go home after a while or their family members come and take them home, because… Well because it is really hard to live like this." (Magda, personal communication, March 18, 2020)

Magda argued that "once someone decides to really come here and he or she finds his or her place here, it very hard to leave" (Magda, personal communication, March 18, 2020) , adding that the quality of life is much better in the US and she doubts that she would be able to achieve the same financial stability should she decide to move back. When asked if she has any feelings towards Hungary, Magda replied that she sees her home country as being "grey and sad". Interestingly, none of the interviewees expressed homesickness and nostalgia in connection to Hungary, those who were playing with the idea of return, were only willing to do so because of their families.

As it had been pointed out in Chapter Four, nearly all of the interviewees had financial motivation behind their move to the United States, and many of them were affected by compelling stories of financial success told by acquaintances, family members and friends that eventually led them to the decision. The glorification of the United States as the "land of opportunity" combined with stories of the "American Dream" and the disillusionment with Hungary makes many to migrate without thinking over the long-term consequences of visa overstays.

While Krisztina eventually decided to come back to Hungary, she admitted that she keeps looking for possibilities to return to the US and asserted that "when they say that there is a big stinking American Dream… well, it is real, I have experienced it, it exists, but it largely depends on whether you can legalize yourself" (Krisztina personal communication, March 31, 2020). Ervin when asked about his feelings towards Hungary and whether he would return in the future replied in an apathetic tone that "I'm simply calling it Mordor[19]" adding that "I cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel, some things will never change there and I wouldn't want to experience it again" (Ervin, personal communication, February 22, 2020).

[19] The realm of the arch-villain in J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" fantasy novel.

Ervin is his quote was referring to the post-communist heritage of Hungary, and the deeply embedded structures that the older generations are still nostalgically clinging to. He was especially critical towards the mentality of Hungarian people, and that was a great concern for Laura as well, who asked me directly to include in the thesis that "Hungarians at home should be more open, because they stubbornly cling onto old, well-accustomed things" (Laura, personal communication, April 23, 2020) adding that she hates to see what is currently happening in Hungary. Laura argued that "I see this same kind of mentality in the Hungarians here as well, despite the fact that they don't even live at home and in theory they should be more open-minded here" (Laura, personal communication, April 23, 2020). The highly individualistic, well-integrated interviewees frequently challenged the attitudes of those undocumented Hungarians who, in their view, hold outdated attitudes and values, heavily relying on fellow undocumented Hungarians around them, not being able to individually navigate through the challenges they need to face in the US, not willing to learn the English language properly and lacking efforts to integrate in general.

On a similar note, Orsolya described Hungary as a "backward looking place that lives in the past" (Orsolya, personal communication March 15, 2020), adding that her appreciation of "freedom and diversity" are the main factors behind her commitment to stay in the United States, underlining that she has never felt homesick and she is not planning to return. Zsóka, who is green card holder, was surprised when I asked her if she would ever consider moving back to Hungary and said that she would never do so, declaring that "I'm not a rich person, I do not have a lot of money, but it is definitely better to be poor here than at home" (Zsóka, personal communication, March 19, 2020).

Finally, to get a concluding glimpse into why undocumented people are reluctant to return to Hungary even in the face of fear, vulnerability or maybe even limited financial success, I would highlight Erika's reflections:

> "You know, you have been to the Time Square… Now this is my life since six years… you just come out from the dollar store and there you can see the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building and it is yours, it is nearly yours, and now imagine going back to a small town in rural Hungary… Oh, come on!" (Erika, personal communication, December 13, 2018)

CONCLUSION

The aim of the thesis was to inquire into the personal experiences, struggles, insights of New York-based visa-overstayers from Hungary. Exploring the themes of migrant illegality, the use of municipal ID cards and the change of socio-political status, the research contributes to the literature with empirical findings from nine in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Shedding light on the financial motivations behind the research participant's move to the United States, the thesis explored the phenomenon of illegal employment agencies, brain waste and the relevance of the compelling stories told by family members and friends that eventually encouraged the participants' move into a place where they *became* undocumented immigrants at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, with restricted mobility and lacking social protection. The highly vulnerable position of the middle-aged Hungarian cleaning ladies presented through personal stories, offered insights into how undocumented immigrants experience labor exploitation, while also demonstrating that certain jobs amplify marginalization.

Embedded in the literature on the lived experience of precarious immigration status and deportability, the research also engaged with how "soft enforcement" (Gonzales et al. 2019 p. 80), the policing of mundane everyday activities, combined with the Trump administration's hostile immigration agenda, contributes to the spread of alarming stories among undocumented Hungarians with limited language skills, local embeddedness and social connections. Investigating the role of individualism as a key integration strategy, the thesis found that a couple of well-incorporated interviewees propagated the ideal type of a "neoliberal self" (McGuigan 2014) as crucial personal characteristic of those to whom incorporation into the US society is a priority.

Critically engaging with the literature on role of sanctuary policies in challenging the exclusion of non-citizens and supporting local incorporation, the thesis investigated the use of municipal ID cards (IDNYCs) in New York among undocumented, green card holder and naturalized Hungarian immigrants. The research found that despite the forward-looking, inclusive, postnational nature of such policies, their ability to help in mitigating the challenges of illegality is limited, and the idea of enhanced political belonging does not unproblematically translate into practice. Given the possible discrepancy between the intention behind and the nature of federal and local policies that are connected to immigration, municipal programs shielding undocumented immigrants could become counterproductive. Based on the experiences of the interviewees, holding IDNYCs did not result in an enhanced feeling of belonging or a greater sense of safety, their practicality could be questioned and in addition to that there are apparent stigmas attached to the cards, which are exacerbated by the intense debates about sanctuary cities that are increasingly targeted by the current federal government of the United States.

Investigating the relationship between immigration status and social mobility, the thesis presented how illegal status can lock undocumented immigrants (even skilled professionals) in precarious occupations with no social protections, while also inquiring into the legalization struggles of the undocumented interviewees and their efforts to appear in a favorable light in front of the authorities should a one-time amnesty happen in the future. Analyzing the interviewees stand on acquiring green cards and citizenship, the thesis found that the relevance of "papers" persists, since the regularization of immigration status does indeed have an effect on social mobility, with green cards being the primary "rewards" (Spiro 2008 p. 158), but not necessarily the acquisition of citizenship.

Finally, exploring the research participants' transnational ties and attitudes towards their home and host countries, the thesis engaged with the dilemmas of undocumented Hungarians whether to stay or return. The research revealed that the hardships stemming from undocumented status combined with a general disillusionment with Hungary, and the glorification of the US and the "American Dream" explain why the decisions around return especially hard to make for those without "papers".

The findings of the research reaffirmed role of the nation-state in creating and maintaining the "master status quality of illegality" (Gonzales et al. 2019 p. 163), supporting the assertion that "the institutions of political membership below and beyond the nation-state are not yet potent enough" (Varsanyi 2006 p. 238) to provide sufficient protection to undocumented immigrants. The present thesis analyzed and contextualized lived personal experiences of Hungarian visa-overstayers in New York, while also taking a bottom-up approach in investigating how certain federal and local policies affect their target audiences/relevant populations. Based on the findings of the current study, further research avenues could be taken to broaden the understanding of two key issues. First, when investigating the functioning of illegal employment agencies operating from Eastern Hungary, the present thesis is limited to the experiences of the Hungarian cleaning ladies, not revealing much about the demand side behind the process. Besides gathering more information about the employers and the recruiters of the Hungarian women, future research into the topic would also benefit from a thorough ethnographic investigation conducted in New York. Second, since the debates over sanctuary cities and local bureaucratic membership policies is an especially timely political issue, and the present research only builds on a few cases to test the practical use of municipal ID cards, in-depth interviews might be conducted beyond Hungarian immigrants to find out more about how these local IDs are being used and how they could be improved to be more useful and trusted.

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