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# Doing Citizenship by Leaving: Political, Ethical, and Aesthetic Acts among Post 2022 Russian Emigrants

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SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

**Department of History**

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# ACKNOWLEDMENTS

I am finishing this dissertation in the autumn of 2025, while the war between Russia and Ukraine, which began in 2022, is still ongoing. This academic work has become, for me – a citizen of the Russian Federation – an essential step in rethinking the relationship between the state and the individual. In fact, if it weren't for the war unleashed by the president of my country, I doubt I would have chosen to pursue a degree in International Studies at this point in my life.

All these years, reality has been trying to convince me that the state, hiding behind the faceless machinery of bureaucracy, armed with unlimited resources, an impersonal ruthlessness, and incapable of focusing on the individual – is destined to overpower its citizen.

But then, in the first year of studying, during one of our Anthropology classes in a classroom at ISCTE, Professor Catarina Fróis introduced us to the concept of citizenship and the book Acts of Citizenship (Isin&Nielsen, 2008). I read the Introduction to this book and realized that for someone unaccustomed to taking a passive stance, this text becomes a tremendous source of inspiration – and, of course, of hope. To act means to have the ability to influence what is happening. The authors of *Acts of Citizenship* interpret acts of citizenship in the broadest sense possible, and that perspective deeply resonated with me.

This is how, already in the first trimester, I was able to shape the idea for my future dissertation. Later, I brought this topic into the public space and found among the Russian community in Portugal others like myself, citizens who wanted to take a step back and reflect on their relationship with their home state.

I want to thank Catarina Fróis for her empathy and her excellent choice of literature. My wonderful research participants – each of whom I interviewed three times, and some of whom I even had the chance to meet in person.

My supervisors, Sofia Gaspar and Giulia Daniele, who, at times, also had to act as therapists. My third daughter, Arya, who was born this March and who made some serious adjustments to my academic plans. I'm grateful to my husband, Alexander, who somehow managed to track down a physical copy of *Acts of Citizenship* at an auction somewhere in Britain within five days – just so I could be inspired by it at any time.

And, of course, I am grateful to Portugal, which has become a new home for thousands of Russians who for now do not see a future for themselves in Russia.

# RESUMO

Esta dissertação centra-se na redefinição da cidadania através da lente dos atos de cidadania, examinando as experiências de cidadãos russos que deixaram o país após a invasão em grande escala da Ucrânia pela Rússia em 2022. Afastando-se das abordagens tradicionais que entendem a cidadania principalmente como estatuto jurídico e conjunto de direitos, este estudo considera a cidadania como um conjunto de práticas e ações através das quais os indivíduos expressam identidade, responsabilidade moral e posicionamento político. Com base no enquadramento teórico de Isin e Nielsen (2008), a dissertação investiga se a decisão de emigrar pode ser interpretada como um ato de cidadania de natureza política, ética e estética. Recorre a uma abordagem construtivista e a entrevistas fenomenologicamente orientadas e em profundidade, explorando de que forma as decisões dos participantes de deixar a Rússia foram moldadas pela repressão política, pela oposição moral à guerra e por preocupações de segurança pessoal. Os resultados demonstram que, embora muitos participantes inicialmente tenham enquadrado a sua partida como uma escolha privada ou pragmática, o próprio ato manifesta uma posição política ao desafiar as ações do Estado, uma dimensão ética ao responder a imperativos morais, e uma dimensão estética ao reformular narrativas e influenciar perceções na sociedade de acolhimento. Outros atos, como participar em manifestações contra a guerra, vender propriedades, procurar uma nova cidadania e apoiar familiares na Ucrânia, ilustram ainda mais a natureza multidimensional dos atos de cidadania. A dissertação destaca como os atos de cidadania podem ocorrer para além das fronteiras do Estado-nação, sublinhando os aspetos espaciais e performativos da cidadania. Contribui para a literatura sobre cidadania ao demonstrar que ações, mesmo quando enquadradas como pessoais ou pragmáticas, podem ter um significado político, ético e estético profundo.

**Palavras-chave**: cidadania; atos de cidadania; migração russa pós-guerra; Portugal

# ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the redefinition of citizenship through the lens of acts of citizenship, examining the experiences of Russian citizens who left the country following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Departing from traditional approaches that view citizenship primarily as legal status and rights, this study considers citizenship as a set of practices and actions through which individuals express identity, moral responsibility, and political stance. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Isin and Nielsen (2008), the dissertation investigates whether the decision to emigrate can be interpreted as a political, ethical, and aesthetic act of citizenship. Using a constructivist approach and phenomenologically-based, in-depth interviews, the study explores how participants' decisions to leave Russia were shaped by political repression, moral opposition to the war, and personal security concerns. The findings demonstrate that, although many participants initially framed their departure as a private or pragmatic choice, the act itself manifests a political stance by challenging state actions, an ethical dimension by responding to moral imperatives, and an aesthetic dimension by reshaping narratives and influencing perceptions in the host society. Other acts, such as participating in anti-war demonstrations, selling property, seeking new citizenship, and supporting relatives in Ukraine, further illustrate the multidimensional nature of acts of citizenship. The dissertation highlights how acts of citizenship can occur beyond the borders of the nation-state, emphasizing the spatial and performative aspects of citizenship. It contributes to scholarship on citizenship by demonstrating that actions, even when framed as personal or pragmatic, can have profound political, ethical, and aesthetic significance.

**Key words:** citizenship; acts of citizenship; Russian post-war migration; Portugal

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings have a persistent propensity to connect, often driven by a desire to affiliate with a particular community. Citizenship frequently catalyzes this unity. It is an old idea that remains remarkably adaptive due to its "historical capacity to reinvent itself" (Balibar, 2015, p. 4). From Aristotle's early linkage of the *polites* to the laws of the city – echoed in modern discussions – through Marshall's classic triad of civil, political, and social rights, the concept has evolved while retaining a core concern with membership and equality (Marshall, 1950; see also Kymlicka & Norman, 1994).

Scholars often distinguish between two broad families of citizenship. The first treats citizenship as legal status and rights, emphasizing full inclusion and equal standing within a political and geographical community (Balibar, 2015; Bauböck, 2010; Bosniak, 2006; Brubaker, 1992; Joppke, 2007; Kymlicka & Norman, 1994; Marshall, 1950; Shachar, 2009). The second approaches citizenship as a complex of identities and actions, focusing on how people enact, perform, and negotiate it through practices (Arendt, 1998/1958; Isin, 2009; Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Sassen, 2002; Staeheli, Ehrkamp, Leitner, & Nagel, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 1999, 2011).

The debates surrounding the definition of citizenship are not the focus of this dissertation. Instead, they serve as a starting point for a broader discussion on the specific category of "*acts of citizenship*," introduced by Isin and Nielsen (2008) in the context of the Russian–Ukrainian war. Acts of citizenship refer to a wide range of actions that citizens perform outside their daily routines. Following Isin and Nielsen's (2008) logic, riding the subway to work every day is not the same as painting graffiti or protesting in the same subway: the former represents a routine activity within everyday life, whereas the latter can be regarded as an act of citizenship – an inherently creative one. Chapter 3 reviews these theoretical foundations and related concepts.

At the center of this study is the redefinition of the concept of citizenship through deeds (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). Specifically, I examine how the practices of Russian citizens who left the country in 2022 and after – following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – reshape their relationship to the national state and to citizenship itself. I ask: Can the decision to emigrate, in this context, be considered an act of citizenship?

While forced migration literature typically investigates outflows from territories experiencing hostilities, the Russia–Ukraine case is distinctive: no fighting occurred on

Russian soil, yet a very large outflow occurred. Estimates compiled from Russian and host country statistics suggest that hundreds of thousands – often cited in the 700,000–1,200,000 range for the first year – left between 24 February 2022 and 24 February 2023, for reasons including political repression, moral opposition to the war, and economic/political uncertainty (Gulina, 2023, p. 66). For that wave of migration from Russia the war was not just a backdrop; it was a force shaping the emigrants' experiences. The Chapter 2 of the dissertation will examine in greater detail the phenomenon of post-war immigration from Russia, with an emphasis on the actions of the state in terms of lawmaking that could have influenced the flow of emigrants.

This dissertation aims to illuminate the evolving meaning of citizenship in an era marked by conflict, moral upheaval, and transnational mobility. It explores the motivations behind post-2022 Russian emigration and how these motivations drive specific acts of citizenship. The study examines the hypothesis that the decision to leave one's country of origin, in the case of Russians, embodies the three characteristics of citizenship acts described in *Acts of Citizenship*: it is political in its challenge to state policies, aesthetic in its reshaping of identity narratives, and ethical in its moral considerations (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). In addition to leaving Russia, the study participants engaged in various actions that can be understood through this framework. These actions included participating in anti-war demonstrations, seeking new citizenship, and supporting relatives in Ukraine and Russia. Isin and Nielsen (2008) advocate for interpreting acts of citizenship broadly, suggesting that even actions such as selling property can be regarded as aesthetic acts of citizenship.

To view citizenship primarily through the prism of acts of citizenship is to recognize that actions – particularly the departure following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – have the power to challenge the status quo, initiate processes, and alter circumstances. It is through these non-trivial decisions, in which individuals express their positions, that they most clearly manifest their citizenship. Citizenship, in this sense, is about change and process, interaction and understanding. Leaving Russia after the war began marked a moment that set in motion a series of transformations in the lives of the study participants, prompting them to reconsider their understanding of citizenship. Capturing this moment is both challenging and stimulating, as it is as intricate and multifaceted as the very concept of citizenship itself. Chapter 5 presents the empirical findings based on interviews with participants who reexamined what citizenship meant to them after leaving.

The theory of constructivism was chosen to analyze the actions of Russian citizens, as it most effectively accommodates the complexity of the multiple meanings that define

citizenship. Constructivism, as a social theory, is concerned with dynamics and describes a process of interaction in which pressure is exerted from all sides on all actors and circumstances involved. It is through the lens of constructivism that it becomes possible to examine both the relationship of the departed Russians with their state and the act of departure itself as one in a series of interconnected acts. Migration should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event, as it encompasses motivations, changing circumstances, and continuous adjustments to decisions made during and after the journey. The forced departure from Russia is perceived differently from the current vantage point than it was at the moment the decision was made. It was therefore important for this dissertation to examine these evolving perceptions.

As a methodological approach, in-depth phenomenologically based interviewing, drawing on Seidman's (2006) framework, was employed and is described in Chapter 4. This approach follows a three-interview structure: the first stage focuses on the life history of the interviewee; the second explores concrete details of the participant's present lived experience to reconstruct a full picture of specific occasions; and the third is devoted to reflection and the search for meaning. Thus, three separate conversations were conducted with each participant.

Ultimately, the act of leaving, understood as a true act of citizenship, can influence all dimensions of citizenship – from legal status to the sense of belonging.

# 2. POST-WAR RUSSIAN MIGRATION

## 2.1. Unique circumstances of Russian citizens in the wake of the conflict

In this section, I explore the context surrounding the migration from Russia that began in February 2022, emphasizing how "sending-state policies are a major factor determining immigrants' choices between return migration, permanent settlement as a foreign resident, and naturalization" (Bauböck, 2006, p. 27).

Most research on the relationship between war and migration focuses on conflicts arising from foreign military interventions or internal strife. Zolberg and Benda (2001) found that refugees are more likely to flee from states posing direct threats to their lives than from those primarily infringing on political and civil rights. Their analysis emphasizes that extreme violence often outweighs institutional human rights violations as a migration driver. Although economic issues intertwined with political violence are less relevant to this study, the authors note that "oppressive authoritarian and revolutionary regimes cause refugee migration" (Zolberg & Benda, 2001, p. 79).

Political persecution, which they term institutional *human rights violations*, is identified as a key factor. The authors highlight that, unlike in other regions, the physical safety of the majority in such states is not directly threatened by widespread violence (Zolberg & Benda, 2001, p. 80).

Despite the absence of active hostilities on Russian soil, estimates suggest that between 2022 and 2023, up to one million Russian citizens left the country (Matusevich, 2024).

In the following sections of this dissertation, I discuss in greater detail the legislative changes that have significantly affected Russian society through the infringement of citizens' rights. It is important to note, however, that the lives and freedoms of the study participants were not directly threatened at the time they decided to leave. They were not political activists or public figures who openly opposed the war in Ukraine. Nevertheless, they were among those who left the Russian Federation in the years following the invasion.

## 2.2. Beginning of the war, February, 2022

On February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, dramatically expanding the conflict that had begun in 2014 and initiating the largest war in Europe since World War II. Putin framed his goal as the destruction of the "anti-Russia"

allegedly created by the West on Ukrainian territory. Official Russian narratives do not present Ukraine as an enemy; rather, they describe two Ukraines – one aligned with Russia and another supported by the West. Putin emphasized that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people," portraying the latter as manipulated by Western powers (Kuzio, 2022). The principal demands voiced by Russian authorities toward Ukraine – such as its demilitarization and commitment to non-membership in NATO – have been used as justifications for the war.

Initially, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that approximately four million people might flee Ukraine. However, this figure was soon exceeded, and by mid-2024 nearly 6.5 million Ukrainian refugees had been recorded globally (UNHCR, 2024). In contrast, comprehensive socioeconomic data on the Russian exodus following the invasion has not been released.

The migration outflow from Russia increased significantly in 2022 compared to the previous year. Migration to Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries rose by 339,400, a 2.7-fold increase, while migration to non-CIS countries often referred to as the "far abroad" – grew by 51,100, or 2.9 times. According to data from Russia and host countries, it is estimated that between 700,000 and 1,200,000 individuals left Russia between February 24, 2022, and February 24, 2023. Some emigrated shortly after the conflict began, while others left following the announcement of mobilization on September 21, 2022 (Gulina, 2023, p. 66).

Two major waves of emigration occurred. The first began in the spring of 2022, immediately after the war started, and the second followed the mobilization announcement in September 2022. Those who left before the mobilization were generally more ideologically and politically active, whereas the second group primarily consisted of men seeking to avoid conscription. Sociological studies of Russian exiles suggest that, despite these differences, the two groups are "quite similar in their socio-demographic composition and levels of professional experience" (Matusevich, 2024).

## 2.3. Tightened Legislation

Russia's military actions in Ukraine, along with the reduction of civil rights and freedoms within the country, have led to the targeting of specific professions and vulnerable groups, including journalists, human rights defenders, social activists, and LGBTQ+ individuals (Prague Process, 2023).

Since the war began, Russian authorities have tightened legislation, updating the law on foreign agents and introducing new articles to the criminal code. Additional measures were

implemented to curb the exodus of military-aged men and to penalize those already abroad. Beginning in the summer of 2023, conscription notices were delivered electronically, with noncompliance resulting in travel bans and asset freezes. A December 2023 decree empowered security services and diplomatic missions to confiscate passports from individuals eligible for military service, although it remains unclear whether the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs can invalidate passports of those already overseas (Matusevich, 2024).

One of the most prominent examples of new wartime legislation is Article 20.3.3 of the Administrative Code, which penalizes "public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation." Another significant provision, Article 207.3, criminalizes the "public dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation," enacted on March 4, 2022. Anti-war statements may be deemed as discrediting the armed forces, resulting in fines of up to 50,000 rubles (approximately €600). The so-called "law on fakes" stipulates fines of up to 5 million rubles (approximately €60,000) or imprisonment for up to 15 years for spreading false allegations about the actions of the Russian army (Federal Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity, 2012, Section IX).

During wartime, enforcement of the "foreign agent" clause has been significantly strengthened. The term foreign agent first appeared in 2012 through amendments to the laws on non-profit organizations (NPOs) and to the criminal and criminal procedure codes. In 2017, mass media outlets could also be classified as foreign agents, and since 2019, individuals have been eligible for this designation. On December 1, 2022, Federal Law No. 255-FZ, On Control over the Activities of Persons Under Foreign Influence, entered into force, adding a separate register for persons "affiliated with foreign agents" (Federal Law No. 255-FZ, 2022).

Many individuals opposed to the war, feeling isolated and at risk, chose to emigrate for safety reasons. Political and moral opposition to the Russian government's actions became a significant driver of emigration. The increased risks associated with protesting or expressing dissent in Russia – due to state repression and political violence against opposition figures – prompted many politically active Russians to emigrate rather than voice their disagreement domestically (Sergeeva & Kamalov, 2024).

## 2.4. Host Countries. Portugal

The Russian migrants "find themselves dispersed as temporary residents in countries like Turkey, Serbia, and several former Soviet republics, asylum seekers in the United States

and the European Union, or perpetually on the move between several visa-free destinations around the world" (Matusevich, 2024, p.107).

Because of the bureaucratic and institutional difficulties associated with traveling to the EU and other Western nations, most Russian migrants chose to settle in Central Asian and South Caucasus countries like Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. Interestingly, these countries had been the primary sources of migrants to Russia over the past twenty years (Prague Process, 2023).

Serbia has become one of the top three destinations for Russian migrants. Drawing on its strong historical connections and the legacy of *White émigrés* who sought refuge following the collapse of the Russian Empire, Serbia has welcomed the new wave of Russian emigrants. The country sees this influx as a chance to invigorate its economy with a young and skilled workforce, while also addressing demographic challenges (Khan, 2023).

In contrast, some countries that initially maintained liberal travel regimes for Russian citizens have gradually tightened their immigration policies, with Turkey being a notable example. Instances of discrimination have been reported in several host states, including the denial of residence permits despite full compliance with legal requirements, and economic restrictions such as difficulties in opening bank accounts. These barriers hinder social adaptation and negatively affect both mental and physical health. In certain countries, such as Georgia, fears of repression by host-state authorities further exacerbate the situation. The perception of institutional discrimination erodes trust in local governments. Moreover, states are not merely legal and political entities – they also produce and disseminate cultural and social meaning (Khan, 2023).

Such actions by host countries inevitably shape the perception of nominal citizenship among Russians – or rather, prevent them from forgetting about it.

Portugal was selected as the case study for this dissertation, focusing on Russians residing in the country. I have been living in Portugal since November 2021 and have personally observed a noticeable increase in the number of Russians around me since February 2022. Although some interviews were conducted online, several participants agreed to meet in person. All participants currently reside in Portugal and do not perceive it as a transit country but as a place of permanent residence. Each of them holds a temporary residence permit.

Official Portuguese data confirm the rise in Russian migration beginning in 2022 and continuing thereafter. The number of Russian citizens applying for residency in Portugal increased significantly – from 608 in 2021 to 1,454 in 2022 – and surged further to 4,893 in 2023. This sharp escalation mirrors broader migration patterns observed during this period,

likely influenced by geopolitical events and socio-economic factors prompting more Russians to seek safety and stability in Portugal. Figures from previous years, such as 573 in 2020 and 646 in 2019, further underscore the dramatic rise in applications over the past two years.

Table 2.4: Russian Migrants in Portugal
(Foreign population who has applied for resident status (No.), by Sex and Nationality (Russian Federation); Annual 2019-2023)

| Year | **Male** | **Female** | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2023** | 2441 | 2452 | 4893 |
| **2022** | 759 | 695 | 1454 |
| **2021** | 279 | 329 | 608 |
| **2020** | 211 | 362 | 573 |
| **2019** | 253 | 393 | 646 |

*Source: Statistical table extracted on May 09, 2025 (17:23:46). http://www.ine.pt*

# 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 3.1. The concept Citizenship

Citizenship is an ancient concept that has undergone significant evolution over time. In ancient Athens, it was characterized by the idea that a citizen participates in governance both as a ruler and as one who is governed, reflecting Aristotle's well-known definition (Joppke, 2010). Since then, numerous and often divergent interpretations of the concept have emerged, leading to what Joppke (2007, p. 38) calls a persistent need for "a comprehensive theory of citizenship," which has yet to be achieved. As Balibar (2015) notes, it is neither possible to reject all forms of citizenship simultaneously nor to adhere to a single understanding of its specific constitution.

Most scholars studying the concept of citizenship distinguish between two general types. The first is citizenship as legal status and rights (Marshall, 1950; Bosniak, 2006; Joppke, 2007; Brubaker, 1992; Bauböck, 2010; Kymlicka & Norman, 1995; Soysal, 1994; Shachar, 2009; Balibar, 2015), which refers to the full inclusion of an individual within a political community, where everyone is recognized as a full and equal member. The second is citizenship as a complex of identities and actions, focusing on how people enact, perform, and negotiate their citizenship through social and political practices (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Isin, 2009; Arendt, 1998/1958; Staeheli, Ehrkamp, Leitner, & Nagel, 2012; Osler & Starkey, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 1999, 2011; Sassen, 2002).

Marshall's (1949) seminal essay "Citizenship and Social Class" provides perhaps the clearest formulation of the first type of citizenship and serves as a foundational reference for subsequent debates on the subject. As Kymlicka and Norman (1994) observe, Marshall distinguishes between civil, political, and social rights to which citizens are entitled, arguing that the liberal-democratic state represents the best framework for their realization.

Joppke (2007) identifies at least three dimensions of citizenship. In addition to citizenship as status, he distinguishes citizenship as rights, which Marshall (1949) develops within a legal framework, and citizenship as identity, which pertains to the behavioral aspects of individuals who act and perceive themselves as members of a collective (p. 38).

Bloemraad et al. (2008) propose a broader conceptualization, defining citizenship as a combination of legal status, rights, political and social participation, and a sense of belonging (p. 154). The latter could be interpreted as a form of attachment to the collective and, therefore, subsumed under the identity dimension; however, the authors do not fully develop this notion.

Attempts to integrate all definitions and dimensions into a single universal system have largely failed, due to both terminological inconsistencies and the absence of formally delineated components within this complex concept. The only widely accepted premise remains that citizenship is inherently state-related.

Rogers Brubaker (1992) was among the first to articulate the dual nature of citizenship. He described it as "internally inclusive", in that it grants equal membership status within a political community, and simultaneously "externally exclusive", in that it categorically denies such equality to non-citizens (as cited in Joppke, 2010). This duality underscores the challenges immigrants face when negotiating their rights and identities in new environments. Scholars such as Yasemin Soysal (1994) and Will Kymlicka (1995) further develop these ideas, emphasizing the evolving and transnational character of citizenship in a globalized world.

The type of citizenship linked to questions of inclusion and exclusion is often referred to as "passive" or "private" citizenship, since it does not inherently obligate the citizen to act (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994, p. 354). In Bauböck's (1994) terminology, this form is called "nominal citizenship," as it corresponds to nationality in juridical language. From this perspective, citizenship functions as a mechanism for assigning individuals to specific sovereign states. Bauböck contrasts nominal citizenship with substantial citizenship, which is more complex and primarily entails political participation. This distinction is useful for the present analysis, as in this study, citizenship is conceptualized as "membership in a political community", following Joppke (2010, p. 145).

It is important to note, however, that in Joppke's (2010) discussion of political participation, the focus is on the activity of migrants within the country of immigration. In contrast, this study examines the actions of Russians who have left their homeland, analyzing their engagement with their country of origin rather than their country of residence. This perspective is particularly significant under complex circumstances, such as wartime.

Staeheli (2012) emphasizes the spatiality of citizenship, arguing that it is situated in areas where dedication to the political community and fellow citizens can be most effectively fostered. The evolving territoriality of citizenship has developed alongside globalization, migration, and the advancement of human rights frameworks (Staeheli et al., 2012, p. 637).

The discussion of citizenship in this dissertation revolves around an important concept: external citizenship. As presented by Bauböck (2006), external citizenship pertains to migrants who maintain ongoing ties to their homelands while retaining their original citizenship. In the case analyzed here, Russians left their country of origin after February 2022. According to Bauböck (2006), migrants often retain certain rights in their home countries, including the

ability to return and receive diplomatic protection. The extent of property rights – such as inheritance and landownership – varies by country and is particularly relevant for those considering return migration. External citizenship may also encompass welfare benefits, cultural support, and voting rights.

In this study, participants' perceptions of their rights as external citizens provide valuable insights into how they navigate and enact these rights. The ways in which Russians who migrated after February 2022 understand and exercise their citizenship can be interpreted through the lens of acts of citizenship.

External citizenship is closely linked to the concept of transnationalism. A transnational perspective highlights the presence – and in some cases the normative preference – of individuals to hold multiple memberships within existing frameworks of state sovereignty. According to Bloemraad et al. (2008), the concept of deterritorialized citizenship emerges from two primary sources. First, migrants create cross-border social fields through their daily activities and relationships, maintaining connections to their countries of origin via hometown associations, business ventures, religious affiliations, and political ties. This enables them to live in multiple settings simultaneously. Second, receiving states can actively encourage transnational activities and allegiances, for example, by promoting dual citizenship. From this perspective, integration into the host society and maintaining cross-border ties are not mutually exclusive; feelings of belonging to a new country can coexist with activities supporting the country of origin (Bloemraad et al., 2008, pp. 166–177).

Migrants may participate in activities such as beauty contests and folk music tours. Politically, migrants can influence their home country by mobilizing support abroad, while political leaders from the origin country may seek electoral backing from migrant communities (Staeheli et al., 2012).

Transnational migration studies highlight that migration is often a cyclical process, with immigrants maintaining strong connections to their countries of origin through activities such as sending remittances. Even non-migrants may engage in transnational networks through familial and ethnic ties to migrants (Bloemraad et al., 2008). The extent to which this applies to individuals who left Russia after the outbreak of war remains to be investigated. This issue is particularly important for understanding the dynamics of transnationalism and its impact on citizenship in the context of this study, as participants discussed maintaining ties with Russia, building connections with the Russian diaspora in Portugal, and the implications of these ties for perceptions of citizenship, renouncing Russian citizenship, or holding multiple passports.

The spatial aspect of citizenship extends beyond its presence within a specific national territory; it is also embedded in communities and daily practices of citizenship (Staeheli et al., 2012, p. 637). This perspective accurately reflects the circumstances in which the Russian participants in this study enact their *acts of citizenship*.

## 3.2. The Concept of Acts of Citizenship

### *3.2.1. Acts as a Concept*

Arguing that citizenship is not merely a static label, Balibar (2015) asserts that one need not believe in an eternal "essence" of citizenship whose form would have been "invented" once and for all (p. 122). Citizenship is a dynamic process, constantly evolving in its definitions, parameters, and implications based on political, social, and cultural changes. The agent of this transformation is the active citizen (Balibar, 2015, p. 124).

In this section, I discuss citizenship as extending beyond merely being a legal status. Such citizenship encompasses feelings and practices influenced by law but not entirely defined by it. Key aspects of citizenship involve participation in community life and interaction with others, which are integral to everyday experiences. Staeheli (2012) proposes understanding citizenship through the concept of "ordinariness," which merges legal structures (laws and rights) and normative orders (social norms and expectations), which he unites under the notion of "Citizenship as a Legal Category," with the practices and experiences of individuals and communities. Participation in civic life and social recognition creates possibilities to influence political processes. This makes citizenship both a broad category and a flexible resource that can be drawn upon in political life. Citizenship as "positioning with respect to the polity" focuses on issues such as belonging, membership, marginalization, and exclusion (Staeheli et al., 2012, pp. 630 – 636). Both perspectives are important for understanding citizenship: while legal status provides a formal framework, the actual experience and practice of citizenship involve more complex social interactions and power dynamics. This duality highlights how citizenship is both a structured legal concept and a fluid social practice.

While participation has traditionally been viewed in terms of political involvement, Marshall (1950) emphasizes the importance of considering other forms of participation. These include economic contributions and social integration, which are essential for individuals to fully exercise their roles as citizens (Bloemraad et al., 2008).

Following Bauböck's classification, which divides citizenship into nominal and substantive categories and emphasizes the integral role of participation in substantive

citizenship, this dissertation focuses on acts that represent forms of participation and give substance to the concept of citizenship.

Much like Balibar, Isin and Nielsen (2008) envisage the evolution of citizenship as an institution shaped by the proactive endeavors of citizens who continuously foster new forms of citizenship through their actions. The authors propose focusing on "acts of citizenship," which distinguish the concept of citizenship from predefined identities and their associated experiences and practices (Staeheli et al., 2012). For this reason, the discussion of citizenship is incomplete without reference to "acts of citizenship" (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). Unlike other perspectives on citizenship, Isin and Nielsen (2008) emphasize the performative and transformative aspects of citizenship practices and introduce the concept of "acts of citizenship" as an alternative way to investigate this complex notion. It is important to note that Staeheli (2012), when discussing practices, primarily refers to routinized actions, giving rise to the term "ordinary citizenship." In contrast, Isin and Nielsen (2008) seek characteristics of acts that distinguish them from everyday, habitual practices.

The authors propose the term "*acts of citizenship*" as a unique lens to analyze the facets of citizenship. Acts are events (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 83) and in this perspective they are breaking the ordinary. This approach provides a richer and more nuanced understanding of citizenship, recognizing it as an ongoing process of enactment and contestation rather than a fixed status. Events include inherent potential to change, which is why they can serve as links between different roles and, ultimately, identities.

The authors examine citizenship not merely as a status conferred upon individuals but as an outcome of their actions, transitioning the focus from the actor to the act, separating "passive forms of participation" and "active forms of engagement" (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 6). These acts are transformative, creative, and often disruptive. While subject identities are fluid and dynamic, existing along a spectrum from hospitality to hostility, and are shaped through interactions. Acts are conditions under which subjects transform themselves into actors who are not pre-defined by existing legal or social categories but are instead defined by their actions and claims. Through these acts, political and social identities are redefined, existing norms are challenged, and new possibilities for justice and recognition are created (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 37-39).

Focusing on those acts when subjects constitute themselves as citizens, Isin & Nielsen, (2008) view new forms of citizenship being derived from acts. This perspective on citizenship echoes strongly with the Balibar (2015) concept of reflexive citizenship, because both possess transformative power and "reinvents themselves" through deeds. Reflexive citizenship refers

to a type of citizenship where individuals and communities are not just passive bearers of rights and responsibilities. Instead, they are deeply aware of and actively participating in the processes, principles, rights, and responsibilities, which make up their own citizenship. Acts of citizenship constitute citizens to the same extent that politeias determine them. They also stand on Arendt's shoulders, who viewed an act as a fundamental human capacity that is central to being political. She distinguished acts from mere behavior by emphasizing their essence as the ability to initiate or set something in motion. Arendt drew on the ancient Greek conception of an act, which encompasses both governing and beginning, highlighting the transformative and initiating nature of true action (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 39, citing Arendt, 1969, pp. 177-179).

That is how new citizens emerge from: the authors do not debate that the traditional roles of citizens, typically limited to functions like worker, warrior, and parent, have considerably expanded to include a myriad of roles, such as ecological citizen, market-centric citizen, cosmopolitan citizen, youth citizen, and several others over time.

Answering the question: "What exactly is citizenship?" with the help of vivid examples, the authors of the book *Acts of citizenship* (2008) in parallel answer another important question "Who am I?", because if they argue that the application of graffiti in some point is an act of citizenship, it means that a citizen is also an artist, a psychologist, a politician, or a social activist (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 4).

*Acts of citizenship* challenge traditional views of formal citizenship by demonstrating how people and groups take political actions to assert their rights and gain recognition, frequently operating beyond or in opposition to existing legal structures (p. 27).

The concept of "*acts of citizenship*" provides a particularly robust framework for analyzing voluntary migration as citizenship practice. "Acts of citizenship" are moments when subjects constitute themselves as citizens regardless of status – precisely what occurs when Russians make the decision to leave their homeland following the invasion of Ukraine. Whether the decision to leave can be considered an act remains an open question and is the focus of this study. To address this question, it is essential to understand the logic that leads the authors of the book to distinguish between the "events" embedded in everyday life and those events that challenge and seek to change this everyday life in every possible way.

### *3.2.2. The Dimensions of the Acts*

To understand acts of citizenship as dynamic "deeds" rather than passive practices, according to authors, we look at citizenship through political, ethical, and aesthetic lenses.

Performing a "deed" involves anticipating and shaping potential responses, intertwining political possibilities and aesthetic appearances with ethical responsibilities. These acts envision future citizenship possibilities and implicitly raise questions about responsibilities to others. The challenge lies in understanding how political, aesthetic and ethical aspects of these deeds interact, potentially allowing for counter-actions to develop.

The concept of "*acts of citizenship*" proposed by the authors caught my attention for two reasons: first, it allows to view citizenship as something not predetermined; second, the authors do not limit all civic acts to being exclusively political but also include aesthetic and ethical acts, while still remaining civic.

The departure of Russians after February 2022 embodies all three dimensions of citizenship acts as described in "Acts of Citizenship." It is political in its challenge to state policies, it involves a direct challenge to the Russian state's actions. By leaving, these individuals are not just passively responding to the situation but actively redefining their political identity and stance. This aligns with the text's idea that acts of citizenship involve creating new political possibilities and challenging existing power structures.

It is aesthetic in its reshaping of identity narratives and perception of Russian identity and citizenship. By choosing to leave, these individuals contribute to a new image of what it means to be Russian in the context of global politics and conflict. This act of leaving creates a new appearance and narrative about Russian citizens, aligning with the text's emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of acts that shape perceptions and possibilities.

It is also ethical in its moral considerations. Isin and Nielsen (2008) build their theoretical framework on ethical acts on Bakhtin's ideas from *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1920s, published 1993), incorporating Weber's notion that ethical acts assume actors attach subjective meanings to their actions (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 28). Ethical acts involve questions of responsibility and moral obligations, which the authors conceptualize as answerability toward others. A crucial feature of any act is that it is made possible by a fundamental decision, which precedes and shapes the performance of the act, the actors involved, and their relationship to responsibility. Responsibility represents the calculable, ontic dimension, concerning duties and obligations toward specific others in a given situation. Answerability reflects the deeper, incalculable, ontological dimension, driven by conscience and a sense of ought, situating the actor in the unique "once-occurrent event of Being" (Heidegger) and compelling them to take a stand. (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, pp. 28–32).

All these three perspectives will be used to examine the decision to relocate itself, as well as other actions of citizenship taken by the study participants, which they described in their interviews.

## 3.3. Factors and Triggers of Migration

Before discussing the reasons behind the mass departure of Russian citizens and framing migration as an act of citizenship, it is useful to first clarify the factors and triggers for migration using a theoretical framework. This provides analytical clarity. Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long (2018) argue that migration is shaped not only by individual agency but also by structural conditions that influence decision-making spaces. It is first necessary to distinguish between structural drivers and migrant agency, aspirations, and desires. Drivers, used to denote more "external material forces such as political climate or the existence of transport infrastructure," are seen as part of a causal chain – from root causes to immediate triggers – affecting whether individuals decide to migrate or remain (Van Hear et al., 2018, p. 930). The task is to determine when and why certain drivers become more significant than others.

The authors draw on Carling and Talleraas (2016) to differentiate between root causes, which are social and political conditions prompting departures, and drivers, which include mechanisms producing migration outcomes (Van Hear et al., 2018, p. 934). In this way, Van Hear et al. (2018) outline a framework for understanding migration drivers, categorizing them into four main types: predisposing, proximate, precipitating, and mediating drivers.

Predisposing drivers create a context that makes migration more likely. They include structural disparities between places of origin and destination, influenced by global economic, political, and environmental factors. Examples include economic inequalities, political instability, and environmental conditions such as resource availability. In the context of this study, the political instability of the past ten years in Russia created a context that made migration in 2022 more likely (Robertson, 2013; Gel'man, 2015; Glazunova & Amadoru, 2023). This will be further unpacked in the main part of the dissertation dedicated to the analysis of the interviews.

Proximate drivers directly impact on migration and stem from structural features. In origin regions, they include economic downturns, security issues, and environmental degradation. In destination areas, they involve economic improvements and new opportunities. Proximate drivers can also be predisposing drivers that have become more acute. The

increasing political pressure and insecurity in Russia acted as direct impacts, making the idea of leaving more urgent and necessary for many individuals.

According to Van Hear et al. (2018), a precipitating driver is a trigger that makes the decision to migrate possible, often linked to specific events. These can be economic (e.g., financial crises), political (e.g., conflict escalation), or environmental (e.g., natural disasters). They may also include positive developments in destination areas, such as job openings or relaxed immigration policies. In this dissertation, which focuses on acts of citizenship related to leaving the country after the onset of the war, this type of driver is particularly relevant, as the war could serve as the key precipitating factor.

Mediating drivers facilitate, constrain, or influence the migration process. They include infrastructure, information, and resources needed for migration. Migration policies and networks, as well as cultural factors, also play a role. Mediating drivers shape the decisions about how, when, and where to migrate.

Van Hear et al. (2018) empathize that while structural conditions are crucial, they alone cannot explain migration. The decisions and actions of individuals and communities, influenced by their capabilities and social factors like gender and class, are also important.

The interplay between agency and structural conditions is complex and requires consideration of various actors and influences. This approach to analyzing the factors of departure, focusing not only on external influences but also on personal responsibility, leads us to discuss acts as actions taken beyond the usual habitus, such as leaving the country of origin.

The theoretical framework, which emphasizes the interplay between structural forces and individual agency in shaping migration behavior, is particularly relevant for analyzing the departure of Russians from the country of the origin after February 2022.

## 3.4 The Theory of Social Constructivism

In his exploration of modernity, Zygmunt Bauman (2000) introduces the concept of “fluidity,” which symbolizes both continuity and constant change. He describes this ongoing transformation as occurring when subjected to shear stress. Social change can be seen as a dynamic interaction where pressure is exerted on all actors and circumstances. At the point where one factor’s pressure exceeds another’s, a “change” occurs. Bauman uses the metaphor of solid/liquid to discuss change. Change disrupts former solidity while striving to create something new and reliable. According to the author, building a new, truly solid order requires

change that he describes as changes, or "melting of solids," as a hallmark of modernity, constantly occurring (Bauman, 2000, p. 2).

Change can be looked at in different ways: as a transition from homogeneous to heterogeneous, as a shift from the simple to the complex. It is extremely difficult to document the changes because of the ongoing evolution of views, perceptions, and the forces shaping their future trajectories.

Immigration vividly illustrates the process of change. Immigrants are continually rethinking their roles and identities, specifically their citizenship and connections to their home country. After deciding to emigrate, they experience a transition, consciously or unconsciously, as they engage with political structures, interact with other immigrants, and navigate historical processes.

To trace changes in Russian citizens' perception of citizenship, a theory that views citizenship and acts of citizenship as processes of interaction and confrontation is needed. Constructivism was chosen for this purpose. This work examines the relationship between Russian citizens fleeing their homeland and their perception of citizenship in an oppressive wartime context. Before conceptualizing citizenship, it is useful to elucidate key ideas from constructivist theorists of social sciences.

According to Adler (1997), in exploring the social construction of reality, constructivism examines the interplay between the material, subjective, and intersubjective worlds as the "material world shapes and is shaped by human action (p. 322)." It not only looks at how structures shape the identities and interests of agents but also investigates how individual agents mutually contribute to the creation of these structures. Constructivists observe the formation of identities and interests with real curiosity and attention. They do not deny the existence of the non-socially constructed world either; in this sense, the material world, among other structural components, serves as material for assembling a complete picture.

Citing Knorr Cetina (1993), Adler (1997) argues that constructivists are "ontological realists, who believe not only in the existence of the material world, but also that 'this material world offers resistance when we act upon it' (p. 323)." Thanks to constructivists' perspective on the interaction of various factors, in my dissertation, I aim to explore how tangible factors such as war, relocation, and legalization influence the subjective perceptions of Russian emigrants regarding their citizenship.

Wendt (1995) also writes about mutual constitution, emphasizing that while actors (states, organizations, individuals) shape social structures (norms, institutions), these structures

simultaneously shape the identities and interests of the actors. Constructivists, like postmodernists and post-structuralists who adopt an interpretive approach, embrace a mediative position. “Reality exists independently of our accounts but does not fully determine them” (Fuchs, 1992: 27 cited in Adler, 2007, p. 323). More specifically, a mediative approach suggests that social reality is formed through the assignment of meaning and roles to physical objects. Collective understandings, like norms, give these objects their purpose, thereby helping to shape reality.

Constructivists attach great importance to knowledge in constructing social reality. Knowledge is understood as the sum of concepts, perceptions, and judgments used in the process of social interaction. Constructivism illustrates that even the most enduring institutions are based on collective knowledge or understandings. By institutions, they mean a relatively stable set or “structure of identities, interests, and beliefs” that were brought into existence from nothing by human consciousness. As time passed, these shared understandings were disseminated and solidified, eventually becoming accepted as the norm. The ability of humans to reflect and learn significantly influences how individuals and social groups assign meaning to the physical world and mentally shape their perception of it. Consequently, shared beliefs and understandings offer explanations for the state of things and guide how people should utilize their resources and power (Adler, 2007). Earlier in the dissertation, I examined various perspectives on citizenship and the dimensions it should encompass. This discourse is heterogeneous. As became evident during the interviews, citizens’ perceptions of what it means to be a citizen of their country are even more varied. In this sense, "citizenship" is an institution constructed by collective perceptions. In one case, it may include only legal status, while in another, it may rely on the actions and practices of both groups and individual citizens.

In the current research, it is essential to explore how participants perceive and interpret this institution. Drawing on Adler’s ideas, which describe an institution as a complex of practices and representations, I deliberately refer to citizenship as an institution. This approach allows for a broader interpretation of the concept, including relying on acts of citizenship as illustrations of the individual or even individualistic perceptions of citizenship held by the study participants, through which they express and manifest themselves. Through interviews, I aim to uncover how individuals define and relate to Russian citizenship, revealing how these perceptions influence their identity as citizens. This approach underscores the constructivist view that knowledge and understanding shape social reality.

A constructivist “mediative” epistemology offers comprehensive explanations of social reality. Constructivists seek to understand how norms shape actors’ security identities and

interests. Thus, Adler (1997) introduces *the notion of Verstehen*, using Weber's term to emphasize understanding others' perspectives. It is about really getting into someone else's shoes and seeing the world from their perspective. According to Adler, *Verstehen* is more than just a method employed by social scientists; it encompasses the collective interpretations, practices, and institutions of the actors themselves (Schutz, 1977: 231 cited in Adler, 2007). Essentially, *Verstehen* embodies social reality, which can manifest as norms, shared scientific understandings, diplomatic practices, or arms control. These knowledge structures are continuously created and maintained by members of a community and their actions. Simultaneously, they define the boundaries between what the community's members perceive as real and unreal.

Adler's insights inform this essay's argument, exploring citizenship dimensions and applying this knowledge to Russian citizens fleeing their conventional citizenship due to Russia's war against Ukraine. Without *Verstehen*, this exodus would appear flat.

Process is everything together: what one thinks, what one does, and what one knows about. It is ongoing complex meta-knowledge and meta-experience. It is as if the process could be broken down into even smaller pieces, and each could be called "a change." By fixing these changes in the relationship, one can catch *Verstehen*, and consequently, get to the reasons for these changes. In this study, "change" refers to the decision to leave Russia in search of new citizenship. Understanding participants' actions and decisions requires relying on the theoretical concepts of citizenship and acts of citizenship.

# 4. METHODOLOGY

## 4.1. The Problem of Positionality

The methodology used in this study is based on a series of semi-structured interviews conducted in three stages. The research involved six Russian individuals who emigrated from Russia after February 2022 at different times following the outbreak of hostilities. The objective was to explore their experiences and perceptions of emigration, particularly to Portugal.

Adhering to a constructivist view of the event, in the context of this study, the emigration of Russians after the outbreak of war as a process, I believe it is important to outline the exact timeframe in which all 18 interviews, three with each of six participants, were taken between June and July 2025.

Before describing the method itself, it is important to note the so-called “trap” of sampling, which is relevant to the study. I searched for participants for interviews online, in open-access groups Telegram groups of Russian-speaking migrants. A short message was published calling for participation in the study. In the current political climate, Russians often prefer not to discuss politics in public to avoid persecution. Some of those willing to participate wrote private messages to me, with the caveat that they would not reveal their identities. Participation in such interviews is seen by them as an act – it was later revealed during the first interviews that the participants perceived some risk to themselves. This fact suggests that risk-averse members of the groups simply did not respond to the invitation to participate in the study. To reduce any risks, we communicated anonymously. The dissertation cites the participants’ real names without mentioning their surnames or providing private details such as their places of work or residence.

One important aspect to consider in this section is the issue of positionality. As a Russian citizen who has also chosen to leave the country until there is a regime change and the end of hostilities in Ukraine, I share experiences similar to those of the interviewees. This shared background can influence various aspects of the research process, including the design of the study, the formulation of research questions, and the methods of data collection and analysis. Positionality encompasses a researcher’s perspective and stance, which could shape interactions with participants and the interpretation of findings. As it involves understanding how the researcher sees herself and how she is perceived by others, balancing the roles of

insider and outsider, the question of positionality arises. Despite efforts to maintain objectivity through carefully crafted interview questions, I found it challenging to remain detached from the participants' experiences (Soedirgo & Glas, 2020). Additionally, this section addresses the concept of intersubjectivity, recognizing the researcher's connection to the participants as a fellow Russian citizen. As the researcher shares a cultural and national background with the participants, the intersubjective connection allows for a deeper understanding of their experiences. This shared background also enriches the analysis and interpretation of the data and the mutual influence affects the co-construction of meaning during interviews or interactions.

## 4.2. Methods and Data Collection Techniques

As mentioned before, at the center of this study are six emigrated Russians after the state launched a full-scale military operation in Ukraine. Three men and three women are participating in the research. Five of the six participants are between the ages of 35 and 45, with one woman aged 65. All are married. The people who participated in this study share many characteristics. First, all these people had the privilege of leaving: financial and economic clarity. They are able-bodied individuals: skilled professionals, and business owners with fixed incomes. According to Van Hear et al (2018), financial and professional freedom is not considered to be one of the drivers for the departure, but an "internal or ascribed characteristic" (p.933) of the migrants. With common predisposing drivers like the political instability of recent years and the war as a key precipitating driver, the circumstances for the participants in this dissertation varied, including factors such as job offers from employers and legal opportunities to migrate. This will be analyzed in more detail when discussing the acts.

The decision to leave was made by the participants at different times: some left literally in the first days after February 24, some left in the first months. Some took more time to prepare for their departure. Portugal was the country of arrival for half of the participants - the other half, not having clear ideas about further plans and legal possibilities to stay in an EU country, chose other destinations, such as Turkey and Armenia. Moreover, Portugal was essentially a conscious choice for only one of the participants, who had a daughter living here – for the other five participants it was a rational but largely random choice.

It is important to note that none of the participants were prosecuted in Russia, however, the wife of one of the interviewees was threatened with arrest due to her civil position earlier before the war in the end of the 2021. Today the participants look at the possibility of returning

to Russia in very different ways. Some of them have already been to Russia after leaving and visit it regularly, others cannot imagine returning before the regime change. Aware of the current repressive legislation and the previously mentioned law on fakes, they all wished to participate in the study anonymously, allowing only their first name to be used, due to potential threats of prosecution for any criticism of Russia and the armed forces.

The methodology is based on phenomenological interviewing principles outlined by Seidman (2006). This approach involves the researcher's immersion into the "fabric" of participants' lives and unique experiences. Each interview series is conducted separately and has a distinct purpose: in this dissertation, to explore life before the war or to reconstruct specific turning points, such as the outbreak of the war or the decision to leave. This process enables participants, in the third and final interview, to reflect on the events recalled earlier. The approach relies on open-ended questions starting with "How?" and "Why?" to reconstruct participants' experiences within the research topic.

The interview design – structured around the past, present, and imagined future – makes it possible to trace the dynamics of participants' relationships with the state, divided by the "before" and "after" of emigration. By sequentially recalling life before leaving Russia and the move itself, participants gain space for deeper reflection.

The first interview establishes the context of each participant's experience by exploring their life history related to the research topic. Participants are encouraged to share stories from their past, providing a foundation for understanding their current experiences (Seidman, 2006, p. 16). Key questions included: What was your professional sphere in Russia before 2022? How did you define citizenship while living in Russia? What factors influenced your decision to leave?

The second interview focuses on participants' current lived experiences, going into details of life in Portugal, including cultural belonging and civic participation. As Seidman notes, "our task is to strive, however incompletely, to reconstruct the myriad details of our participant's experiences in the area we are studying" (2006, p. 21). In this stage, participants were asked to reconstruct key moments such as the 24th of February 2022, when the war began – all six recalled that it was a Thursday. Questions included: What is it like for you now to be here? What strategy did you choose to leave and why? What aspects of Russian life do you feel most connected to in Portugal?

The final interview encourages reflection on the meaning of these experiences and how participants interpret them. Questions include: What does it mean to you now to have Russian

citizenship? How do you imagine your relationship with Russia evolving over time? Has this experience changed how you conceptualize citizenship beyond national frameworks?

Seidman's three-interview structure provides a comprehensive exploration of participants' past, present, and reflective experiences. By spacing each interview from three days to several weeks apart, the study achieves a nuanced understanding of participants' journeys and the meanings they assign to them.

To move from theory to case analysis, it is crucial to consider citizenship in all its complexity – as a holistic phenomenon rather than a collection of separate elements. This means avoiding distinctions between legal status and community involvement, or between formal and substantive aspects, and instead examining how citizenship shapes everyday existence.

**Sociodemographic information of participants**

**Table 4.2 Sociodemographic information of participants**

| Name | Age | Gender | Occupation before February, 2022 | Year and month of Departure from Russia | First country of arrival | Year and month of Arrival to Portugal | Current Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Marina** | 67 | Female | Owner of a hotel | February, 2022 | Portugal | February, 2022 | Retiring |
| **Alexander** | 35 | Male | IT specialist, US company | April, 2022 | Turkey | June, 2024 | IT specialist, US company |
| **Anton** | 28 | Male | Marketing Manager in a Corporation | February, 2022 | Portugal | February, 2022 | Searching a new Job |
| **Eugene** | 42 | Male | ENT doctor | June, 2023 | Portugal | June, 2023 | Massage Therapist |
| **Elizaveta** | 34 | Female | Systems Analyst, US company | March, 2022 | Armenia | Summer, 2023 | Systems Analyst, US company |
| **Julia** | 40 | Female | Financier, US company | March, 2022 | Turkey | Autumn, 2023 | Financier, US company |

# 5. DISCUSSION AND DATA ANALYSIS

In the main part of the dissertation, which is dedicated to analyzing the actions of Russian emigrants, I find it important to structure the narrative according to the following principle. First, drawing on the theoretical framework provided by Staeheli et al. (2012), I examine the departure of Russian citizens from Russia after the onset of military actions in Ukraine in 2022 through the lens of causes and triggers. Essentially, the reasons for their departure determined their subsequent actions, including acts of citizenship. Next, before discussing civic acts as one of the possible ways to demonstrate their belonging to the institution of citizenship, it was important to understand how the study participants themselves perceive citizenship. Interestingly, two of them, when initially agreeing to the interview, emphasized that it was important for them to reflect on their position regarding this concept, and this very motive prompted them to respond to my invitation to participate in the study. The main part of the research, dedicated to *acts of citizenship*, opens with a section titled "What Defines an Act?" I included this brief chapter in the study to highlight, with examples from the participants' lives, the differences between routine, everyday actions and acts. Then, I separately examine three types of acts of citizenship: political, ethical, and aesthetic.

## 5.1. Factors and Triggers of departure

Returning from theory to the context of this dissertation, it is important to highlight that interview participants were asked several questions about the conditions that made their relocation possible. These included financial status and Portugal's migration policies. Therefore, the analysis of mediating factors received special attention in the study.

Based on the Staeheli et al.'s theory (2012) it will become evident from the interviews, that the decision to leave was influenced by external factors, however, the personal will, opportunities, and readiness to leave played a significant role in their migration choices. In the context of the dissertation structural conditions such as political instability, economic factors, and social constraints in Russia may have long fostered the idea of emigration among all the participants except Alexander. These conditions create a backdrop against which personal aspirations and desires for migration develop. The war that began in 2022 can be seen as an immediate trigger that activated pre-existing intentions and prompted many to act. In line with the chapter's concept of drivers, the war serves as an element that completes the causal chain, pushing individuals toward making definitive migration decisions. Thus, the war is not the sole

cause of migration but played its role in the mechanism that led to migration decisions. In the main part of the dissertation, concrete examples from the lives of the participants will make it clearer under what conditions these people lived in the last years and why, by the time the war started, they were ready to leave.

## 5.2 Participants and their Perception of Citizenship

Citizenship is not just a legal status or a set of rights and responsibilities. It is an assemblage, meaning it is constructed from various elements including laws, social norms, and the everyday experiences of individuals. The latter are both subjects of the state (subject to its laws and policies) and active participants in the civic sphere. These relationships and processes collectively define what it means to be a citizen (Staeheli et al., 2012, p. 635). I have chosen the concept of citizenship as the starting point for discussing citizenship acts. In the second series of interviews all the participants in the study were asked how they understood citizenship before emigrating and whether their views on it changed once they were outside their country of origin.

Among all the study participants, Marina exhibits the most neutral perception of citizenship, bordering on incomprehension. Born in the Soviet Union, she literally laughed when asked what being a Russian citizen meant to her.

*"I never had to think about it at all in my life. In my youth and young adulthood, it was all kind of fake. I was invited to join the Communist Party, but it was so ridiculous and fake. Everyone treated it accordingly: citizenship and the party were separate from your life, – she says. – All my life I was organically a citizen of my country. This is the natural state of an ordinary person".*

In Bauböck's (1994) terms, Marina is a "passive" citizen, not obliged to perform any acts towards the state. Currently, according to her, nothing but her passport binds her to the Russian state. "Life in Russia is behind me. It is not mine anymore; I don't think about it". Interestingly, despite her proximity to "nominal" citizenship, Marina articulates a clear position regarding the state and its actions by saying that in some moment, many years ago she started to feel "disconnection" with the state and its actions what forced her to express a dissent. This is a case where a person's actions not well formulated concepts speak for themselves.

For Elizaveta, a woman in her early thirties, Russian citizenship felt somewhat nominal. While she acknowledges that citizenship provides rights and opportunities within a specific

territory and the role of passport as an official pass to the rights, she believes it is primarily "the feeling that you live in your land, in your country":

*"Citizenship is, after all, a connection with the country in a global sense: both with its politics and culture", she notes. However, she admits she has never truly felt that all of Russia is her country or that "all this is mine".*

Speaking about citizenship, Elizaveta in the interview repeatedly returns to the sense of belonging as a component of it, emphasizing that it boils down to very specific things: the city, the neighborhood, the street, the family, acquaintances, and social circle.

The views on citizenship of the other two participants, Julia and Alexander, resonate with the liberalism's understanding of the relationship between individuals and the state as a contract in which both sides have rights and obligation. To maintain the citizenship contract, the state guarantees basic rights to individuals, while the individual has the obligation to pay taxes, complete compulsory education, and obey the laws of the country (Bloemraad et al. 2008).

Julia underlines that she had a contract with the state as if it were a corporation pointing out that she is not "nailed down to the state". She says,

*"We work there and receive compensation, including a corporate package, and we pay taxes. I can change jobs or even the state if the terms of the 'contract' are violated. While we cannot change our nationality or cultural identity, we can change our passport. A passport is like an entry in a work record".*

Julia argues that the state has obligations to her as well. If it values her, Julia, as a citizen, it should make an effort to retain her. Otherwise, any citizen can "renegotiate a contract" with another state for better terms. Separately, Julia notes the importance of the social connections she had in Russia, which were her main value. After the war started, most of these people left Russia, so this factor works more against attachments to Russia.

Alexander shares a very similar view on the relationship between a state and a citizen. He fulfilled his obligations to the state by regularly paying taxes: "It is not my problem if the state expects more from me. All it can get are my taxes. Anything beyond that? Please, go take a hike". Alexander has thought about what it is to be a citizen before and thinks about it now:

*"For me, the concept of citizenship at that time was a mix of a sense of possessiveness – 'this is my country'– and personal responsibility, where each person is accountable for their own life. Ideally, everyone's area of responsibility should be vast, extending up to the size of the planet, with the state and citizenship being part of that orbit".*

He emphasizes that, aside from the feelings of love and respect for the motherland, a citizen has the right to determine their own future. Julia and Alexander view citizenship as more than just a nominal status. In Balibar's (2015) terms, they both strongly identify with the concept of "reflective citizenship", a term that can be understood as a form of citizenship where individuals and communities are actively conscious of and engaged in the processes, principles, rights, and responsibilities that constitute their own citizenship (p. 123).

Alexander, reflecting on the citizenship concert, emphasized that the cultural heritage of Russian civilization holds special value for him, without the fanfare of patriotism. The key word here is "heritage," as Bloemraad et al. (2008) suggest there is a link between nationalism and citizenship, indicating that states are not solely legal and political entities but also convey cultural and social meaning. For Julia, the past is also significant. It is an asset that not only remains with people but also influences their sense of belonging to a particular state. She explains,

*"It seems to me that Russian citizens are fundamentally shaped by a shared trauma. This common experience allows us to understand each other better. Europeans, lacking this specific trauma, often do not grasp what we are discussing. It is rooted in shared historical events and context".*

Quoting Cohen (Cohen 1999, p. 248), Bauböck (1994) discusses citizenship as a form of membership, where one can be both included and excluded from the community. Eugene, a 38-year-old doctor who left Russia at the end of 2022, describes his sense of exclusion or incompatibility with the Russian state as "trans-mentality." He explains,

*"There are transgender people who are born in a body not their own, not of their gender. I was not born in my state. I do not like and have never liked the Russian mentality, nor the historical path: eternal restrictions, imperialistic view of the world. That is what is called Russianness."*

For Eugene, the state was merely "a shell, an environment" in which he was compelled to live, as he viewed citizenship, like eye color, as something assigned at birth.

This unusual perspective on citizenship raises important questions about the coordination of the various dimensions of this multifaceted concept. From the state's perspective, citizenship, as a set of rights and obligations, serves as a mechanism to differentiate citizens from non-citizens. In this sense, Eugene "officially" had Russian citizenship from birth. However, even though citizenship "marks a distinction between members and outsiders" (Bauböck, 1994, p. 15), Eugene did not feel like a member of this group.

It is necessary to mention that Eugene belongs to the LGBT community, which is currently facing persecution in Russia. The law enacted in December 2022 extends the ban on the "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" to all age groups. This law is an amendment to Federal Law No. 436-FZ, *On Protecting Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development*, and other legislative acts. The practical experience of citizenship can often diverge from its legal definitions and ideals. Despite laws granting equal rights, groups such as women and racial minorities may still face challenges in achieving true equality in everyday life (Staeheli et al., 2012). The Russian state's actions toward the LGBT community intensify Eugene's sense of "trans-mentality," in which he feels that the Russian state and he, as a citizen, are disconnected (State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 2022).

This suggests that for some, citizenship extends beyond the mere existence of rights, raising the question of whether a sense of belonging is an integral dimension of the concept of citizenship. It can be assumed that the lack of strong ties with Russia at the level of belonging became, if not the reason for leaving, then a factor that made emigration possible.

In the case of Anton, a young man in his thirties, the sense of belonging also plays a significant role. When discussing Russian citizenship, he primarily lists his emotional ties to the country, which have guided his actions. Despite he does not currently have Portuguese citizenship, he also says that his sense of belonging, and therefore his desire to perform various acts of citizenship, is now connected with Portugal, as his ties with Russia have weakened significantly.

For Anton, citizenship was about enjoying life in Russia, speaking Russian with fellow citizens, and having a connection to the country's territory. It involved participating in civic activities like voting and engaging in local issues, such as critiquing city services or "the color of benches on your street." This sense of citizenship now extends to his experiences in Portugal, where local involvement and critique are also part of his identity, even though he is not yet a citizen there. This perspective aligns with Staeheli et al.'s (2012) idea that, while laws clearly define an individual's status as an outsider—potentially limiting their participation in public life or employment opportunities—they do not entirely dictate how a person experiences life in a community. Social interactions, cultural norms, and respect for diversity significantly influence how welcomed and integrated an immigrant, or any individual, feels within a community. This perspective on citizenship as active engagement reinforces the idea that individuals are shaped and defined not only by their legal status but also by their everyday practical actions (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Isin, 2009; Staeheli et al., 2012). As we shall see in the

next section, Isin and Nielsen (2008) further developed the concept of what actions qualify as acts of citizenship in their book *Acts of Citizenship*.

Before discussing the nature of the acts taken by the study participants, that is, deeply analyzing their motives, perspectives, and specific steps based on their own reflections, I find it important to clarify why the departure of these individuals after the onset of full-scale military actions in Ukraine can be called an act, according to Isin & Nielsen (2008). Here are the inherent characteristics of acts according to the authors.

## 5.3. What does define an Act of Citizenship?

***Rupturing***

Even without considering the circumstances under which the decision to leave was made – each participant having their own – emigration itself, as the routine of living in one's country of citizenship, represents a significant rupture from habitus. The word *rupture* is used by Isin and Nielsen (2008) in the context of a "rupture of the given" (p. 35), which, in the case of Russians, can be understood quite literally. For example, when asked what connects her with Russia today, Marina answers "nothing," emphasizing that the rupture has occurred. When asked the same question, Anton replies that his connection is only gastronomic – he maintains relations only with some relatives and his professional community. He emphasizes that there is nothing else: "When I travel, I feel homesick for Portugal, not Russia. If I ever go there, it will be to visit my parents, but not to go home."

***Creative***

Closely related to the issue of disruption is the issue of creativity. The creative act of citizenship involves approaching actions without predetermined answers. It requires posing questions and responding with a leap into the unknown. This perspective balances the stability of habits and belonging with the disruption of creativity and potential, providing a framework for understanding social transformation (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, pp. 54–55). In this sense, leaving Russia for the unknown illustrates the trajectory of Elizaveta's family's movements: in the first month of the war, they hurriedly left for Armenia, lived there for over a year, and then prepared to move to Portugal. Could she have imagined in March 2022 that, in 2025, she would be living in the Portuguese city of Porto and giving an interview about citizenship? Although this act may not have been perceived as creative at the time, it can retrospectively be understood as such, marking a profound transformation in both personal and political dimensions.

***Transformative Nature and Production of New Actors and Roles***

By fleeing Russians transformed themselves into new types of actors – emigrants, exiles, even if they are self-exiled, dissenters, conscientious objectors to the situation defined by this act. Even if we are talking about a new professional role, as in the case of Eugene, who worked as a doctor before moving and is now a massage therapist, it is important to understand that this new identity arose as a response to the specific act. For Eugene, this is not just a new place of work. It is a complex role of rebuilding his identity. The owner of the salon where Eugene works in Portugal is a Ukrainian woman. Many clients from Ukraine come to have massage with him. In the context of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, Eugene has to "play" a new role – not in the sense of hypocrisy, but in the sense of learning new skills, in his case, the skills of interacting with others. He says,

"*At work, there is a rule not to discuss politics with clients, but when a client from Ukraine finds out that I am from Moscow, I always emphasize that I do not support the actions of my state. I am also homosexual, and people like me are persecuted in Russia. Here I can talk freely about who I am, so I often cite personal reasons rather than political as the reason for leaving*".

The departure shaped and continued to shape not only Eugene's new professional identity but also helped him reassemble his sexual identity in the new circumstances. For Eugene, the decision to immigrate was the very act that transformed him into "whom the right to have rights is due" (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 18, as cited in Arendt, 1951; Balibar, 2004; Rancière, 2004).

***Not Bound by Law***

Acts of citizenship are not necessarily bound by existing laws or responsibilities. They often challenge legal norms and can be seen as irresponsible in traditional terms, yet they are crucial for redefining legal and social recognition. None of the participants in the study violated migration or any other laws, but the circumstances surrounding their departure were far from normal. For example, Anton's wife spent several days trying to leave Russia with her dog, attempting to cross the pedestrian border between Russia and the Baltic countries. Julia hurriedly flew from Russia to Turkey a few weeks after the war began with one bag and has not returned to Russia since spring 2022. Nevertheless, all six of them, without exception, have repeatedly violated and continue to violate the new repressive legislation of the Russian Federation, such as the law on fake news, by openly speaking out against the war. Currently,

any statement directed at the Russian army can be considered an administrative offense and then a criminal offense as I wrote earlier in the section dedicated to the political situation and prosecution in Russia. In essence, it is their willingness to speak openly about the war, even though doing so within the borders of the Russian Federation is dangerous today, that makes the participants in the study de facto lawbreakers and their actions (even participating in the study) – to be called acts of citizenship.

***Creating new sites and scales of struggle***

According to Isin and Nielsen (2008), acts establish new arenas, such as diaspora communities, and potentially new scales and experiences of struggle. This characteristic is evident in the consequences faced by study participants who chose to immigrate. They all had to seek new legal status while maintaining their original citizenship, interacting with the Russian community, and building new connections. For instance, Marina and Julia struggled on a new level by participating in anti-war events and supporting Ukrainians. A powerful example of this is Marina's participation in a demonstration organized by activists in front of the Russian Embassy in Portugal, commemorating Aleksey Navalny after his death in a Russian prison in February 2024. Marina created a poster and joined the activists, fully aware of the risks involved in protesting at the Embassy. Indeed, all aesthetic acts of citizenship, as described by Isin and Nielsen, illustrate the thesis that such acts elevate citizens to a new level of struggle.

***Shifting established practices, status and order***

For instance, Alexander's decision to leave Russia following the announcement of mobilization altered the internal dynamics of military conscription. By departing, Alexander and others like him expressed their anti-war sentiments. As Alexander put it,

*"I didn't want to become a victim, to fall into the clutches of the state."*

To conclude, the key condition for an action to become an act, according to Isin and Nielsen (2008), is that it is performed in interaction with Others. This condition is met in the case of Russians who decide to leave their country. The "Other" can be represented by the state or society from which the individual departs or to which they migrate. On one hand, the act of leaving the country of origin implicitly makes claims and differentiates those who leave from those who stay, as well as from the state, which, since the start of the war, has imposed new demands on its citizens. On the other hand, the immigrants themselves become "Others" in Isin and Nielsen's terms. For "other Russians," the participants could become "Strangers" – people

who are not familiar or integrated into a particular social or political community; "Outsiders" – individuals who exist outside the dominant social or political structures and are not considered part of the mainstream group; and "Aliens" – those who are perceived as foreign or different, often in a legal or cultural sense, and are not recognized as part of the community.

Thus, the decision of some Russian citizens to flee their country when it launched a war of aggression against Ukraine can be seen as an act of citizenship. This choice disrupts their habitual existence, plunges them into uncertainty, and simultaneously forges a new type of relationship with their sense of citizenship. These issues will be further explored through examples from interviews. No theoretical framework can fully capture the diversity of life, including the ideas, motives, and circumstances individuals encounter. To better understand the motives behind such a bold and complex decision as emigrating, we need to listen to their personal explanations and apply Weber's notion of *Verstehen* described in the theoretical section.

## 5.4. Political Acts of Citizenship

Citizenship and politics are related concepts. Based on Staeheli et al.'s (2012) criteria, which suggest that citizenship is viewed with "respect to the polity" (p. 631), I believe it is important to begin analyzing the actions of the study's participants by identifying the political component within them.

According to Isin& Nielsen (2008), the first principle of investigating acts of citizenship is to understand them by considering their foundations and outcomes, which involves individuals transforming into activist citizens through the contexts they create (p. 38). All the participants saw political instability and insecurity in Russia of the last years as a predisposing driver. Elizaveta says, she and her husband had a excel with proximate alternatives to live out of Russia far before 2022:

"*For a long time, my relationship with the state was positive-neutral. That is, I fulfilled my duty as a citizen: I went to work, created some value within the country, paid taxes, behaved well overall, and stayed out of trouble. But my positive-neutral relationship turned into something else before the war. I gradually stopped understanding what was happening, why it was happening, why these people were doing bad things and not allowing others to do good. In other words, they had become more complicated, and I had big questions for the government at various levels*".

Anton started to seek a job in another country in 2021, partly because his activist wife had come to the attention of the authorities, partly because he felt increasing pressure from the state on various areas of life.

Marina as an entrepreneur and an owner of a private hotel clearly felt the shift in her guest's views in last 10-15 years:

*"At some point, I began to feel as if I were split from the state: I don't like with what they are doing, but I can't talk about it with anyone around me because majority supported Putin and his government."*

Last two years she lived half-a year in Portugal with her daughter.

Alexander never had a plan of escape but also felt the pressure of the regime unlike Julia, who had a clear plan for departure, scheduled for the summer of 2022. That is why one year before the war Julia, by her words, "threw herself into her studies in order to retrain and leave."

Eugene sees his relationship with the state in the same way:

*"For me, the state was the shell, the environment in which I was forced to live. I tried not to interact with it unnecessarily. But I always thought about leaving. I made my first attempt 10 years ago, when I wanted to move to Germany and started learning the language. I had opportunities to become a doctor. But then I felt either fear or a lack of strength or enthusiasm."*

Majority of participants in the study do not appraise their decision to immigrate as political. Four of six Alexander, Elizaveta, Eugene and Julia, directly state that the decision to leave was their private decision concerning security. Eugen uses quite a concrete explanation calling it "selfish interest". Julia expresses two main fears: the physical danger of staying in Moscow due to potential attacks and the loss of job with an American company, which she saw as crucial to achieving her personal goals. Alexander, being an employee of an American company too, also emphasizes the fear of losing his job above all else. Elizaveta also speaks about the chance of losing her job and personal insecurity:

*"The reason for leaving was uncertainty. Personal, animalistic, I didn't want my husband and me to get caught up in it. It was unclear what will happen in Russia. Will there be some kind of collapse of all institutions? Will everyone's work come to a standstill? How large-scale is the war? What sanctions will be imposed? There was a feeling that everything was falling apart. We had to flee quickly".*

For Anton, the issue of security was a little more complicated: his wife had been an activist before the war, and with the development of repressive legislation, she was at risk. Alexander and Eugene could have been subject to the mobilization law. Eugene even suspects

that someone came to his home with a draft notice while he was away in September 2022. Marina's personal fear, which made her leave Russia just the day after the war started, was losing touch with her daughter's family, who had been living in Portugal for a few years at that point. So, among the main proximate drivers in the cases of Anton, Elizaveta, Alexander, and Julia, I would mention the presence of a non-Russian employer.

Migration drivers, according to Van Hear et al. (2018) operate in conjunction with one another, but clearly the start of the war was the key precipitating driver or trigger. The unprecedented nature of this event is emphasized by Eugene's words:

*"When the first wave of depression passed, it became clear how broken your country was, how far it had crossed all red lines. You always understood perfectly well who Putin was, what Russia was as a country, but the decision to start a war broke everything."*

Triggers prompt individuals and families to decide whether to relocate or remain in their current location. The participants in the study have chosen to emigrate. Not all the participants of the study fully realize it, but they become activist citizens in a sense – not necessarily protesting actively but performing an act that breaks with the expected norm and implicitly makes a claim. Interestingly, Julia says that she "voted with her feet" when she left – the very choice of words suggests the political nature of her action, even if she herself does not perceive it as such.

From the perspective of *Acts of Citizenship*, the departure of Russians after February 2022 can be seen as a political act because it involves a direct challenge to the Russian state's actions and policies. By leaving, these individuals are not just passively responding to the situation but actively redefining their political identity and stance. This aligns with the text's idea that acts of citizenship involve creating new political possibilities and challenging existing power structures even if they think they are not doing this.

To investigate acts of citizenship is to draw attention to acts of the participants that by themselves may not be considered as political and demonstrate that their enactment does indeed instantiate constituents which in Isin & Neilsen's (2008) framework proves the political character of an act. It has already been mentioned earlier that an act of citizenship is characterized by bringing onto the stage, in the words of the authors, "the Other," the second side. A political act, on the other hand, requires the presence of yet another side.

When examining political actions, the concept of a third party introduced by Levinas (1978) becomes relevant. Drawing on Levinas's philosophy, Isin and Nielsen (2008) argue that political acts inherently involve more than just the immediate participants, introducing a third party that transforms the interaction into a question of justice and politics: "The third party is

the birth of the question of justice" (p. 35). This third party is not merely an observer but an integral element that reshapes the dynamics between the parties involved, highlighting issues of coexistence, visibility, and difference, which are essential for justice. Citing Levinas, Isin and Nielsen (2008) emphasize that justice itself does not stand on law: "justice is not legality regulating human masses, from which a technique of social equilibrium is drawn, harmonizing antagonistic forces" (Levinas, 1978, as cited in Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 35).

Participants' acts of escape indeed instantiate constituents: Russians leaving their country of origin, the country of immigration (in my case, Portugal), and the state. In the context of this dissertation, the Ukrainian people may also act as a third party. Their presence introduces a dimension of responsibility and justice, as their situation compels Russian citizens and the international community to reconsider their roles and actions. This third-party involvement underscores the complexity of political acts, where justice and ethical considerations extend beyond the immediate actors to include those indirectly affected by the events. To back up these thoughts, we can look at what Alexander and Julia said. Alexander, talking about how he doesn't pay taxes in Russia right now, added,

*"And I can look Ukrainians in the eye and say that my money isn't going toward making bombs."*

Yulia, whose cousin lives in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, clearly distinguishes between all three sides: herself as a representative of Russian citizens, the Russian Federation as an aggressor, and her sister as a representative of Ukrainian citizens. Yulia explains that through her sister, she speaks to all Ukrainians on behalf of all Russians who oppose the war.

The decision to departure implicitly makes a claim against the state's actions (the war) or the resulting political climate. It can be a claim for safety, a claim for disagreement, or a refusal to be complicit. This act is noted by the international community, host countries, and potentially influences perceptions of the Russian state. It also challenges the state's desire for national unity and potentially affects the extent (who is considered part of the nation) and depth (the nature of belonging) of citizenship from the perspective of those leaving. These strong words of Marina illustrate how deep rapture is:

*"I reduced my relations with Russian state to zero. Is this even a state? It's a gang of criminals".*

In addition to the fact of departure itself, it is necessary to mention other acts of citizenship by the participants in the study that can be classified as political because in one way or another they concern the relationship between the participants in the study and the Russian state. According to the law, Russian citizens are required to inform the state if they hold any

other type of residence permit. In the current climate, providing such information is essentially additional data about the citizen, which could potentially be used against them. Despite this, Eugene informed the law enforcement authorities about his Portuguese residence permit as soon as he obtained it. Additionally, like Marina, he visited the Russian Embassy to vote against Vladimir Putin's presidential election. I will explore participation in these elections further in the section on aesthetic acts of citizenship, as this event held more declarative than political significance.

As previously mentioned, Julia and Marina participated in several rallies supporting Ukrainians during 2022, risking attention from Russian law enforcement agencies. This participation cannot be viewed as purely political either, as it involves moral considerations and will also be discussed in the section on ethical acts. There is also an aesthetic component in it, as participating in protests and publicly expressing dissent changes the perceptions of those around them about the people standing with placards in front of the Russian embassy. These are not Russians who started the war, but Russians who are protesting against it, who have placed themselves in opposition to the state, risking their freedom in order to express their dissent.

## 5.5. Ethical Acts of Citizenship

According to Acts of Citizenship, an ethical act requires the actor to remain at the scene they have created, facing the consequences of their rupture, thereby constituting the self through the act. This process often involves existential guilt, reflecting the tension between one's thrownness and possibilities, highlighting the profound personal and moral dimensions of ethical acts of citizenship (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, pp. 28–32). As I will explain later, all these could be fully applied to some acts the participants enacted.

"In the second stage of the interviews, I began by asking the participants: 'Do you remember the day the war started?' and 'Do you remember the moment when you decided to leave?'" This stage involves probing into specific events, actions, and interactions to gather detailed descriptions of the participant's experiences. First, I talked with each of them about the moment of deciding to leave the borders of the Russian Federation. Julia recalls how the events of late February influenced her decision to leave on March 4th:

"*It was morning, I remember. I thought that now I just need to calm down, live for a week, think, take control of the situation, and only then decide what to do. And on that same day, at one in the morning, I just bought the last one-way ticket to Istanbul."*

In a similar way, Elizaveta and her husband made the decision to leave. In mid-March, realizing that the military actions would not be limited to just a week, they flew to Armenia:

*"We wanted to be outside in case something serious happened. Plus, even from the perspective of risk distribution, because I have my parents and sister remaining in Russia. If something really unfortunate were to happen there, I wanted to have the ability to bring them over."*

It is important to understand that both decisions were made by the participants under conditions of complete uncertainty, but it was these decisions that determined the further trajectory of events.

In the study's context, the decision to leave Russia after February 2022 by could be considered ethical for several reasons. First, due to its uniqueness and unrepeatability: an ethical act is a singular and unrepeatable event that cannot be reduced to general rules or laws. Once the war began in February, the decision not to stay in Russia was made by all participants, even though some do not rule out the possibility of returning. Regarding the political aspect of the act, although the participants initially cited "self-interest" as a reason for leaving, during the third series of interviews – focused on reflection and understanding of previous discussions – all six participants mentioned that they did not support the outbreak of war, and did not want to be associated with the state's actions.

Second, the act involves navigating both responsibility, for example, families left behind in Elizaveta case, or financial obligations – the mortgage in Eugene's case, all of Marina and Alexander's property left; and answerability – a response to the call of conscience regarding complicity in the war, personal values opposing the state's actions, or an existential assessment of safety and future possibilities. Answerability goes deeper, than responsibility, involving a personal and internal sense of responsibility to the "Other" or to one's own conscience. It is about being accountable not just in a formal sense, but in a way that reflects a personal commitment to ethical principles. It is a response to the "ought". Marina exactly states that: "I couldn't imagine anyone associating me with supporting the war, I didn't want to have anything to do with the state that started it."

The actors (leavers) metaphorically (and sometimes literally) remain at the scene they create – the scene of being an emigrant/exile, facing the consequences and challenges of their decision, rather than the act being an impulsive "passage to the act" – fleeing the scene entirely without facing the new reality created. Anton's experience is a telling example of the consequences. Before the war, he worked at Nestlé in an international team collaborating on a project with Ukraine. "February and March were very difficult," Anton recalls. "Professionally,

I had a project presentation with a team from Lviv, Ukraine. I was absolutely sure the project was over because the team wouldn't want to work with me. I understood what had happened and was prepared to hear what the world thought about me and my nation." The project has indeed been suspended.

Based on Bakhtin's developments, Isin and Neilsen (2008) introduce the concept of two sides of answerability. The first side is the content: what the act is about, including the intentions, motivations, and ethical or moral considerations behind it. This represents the "why" and "what" of the act. In my research, the war and the evolving situation within the country can be seen as the trigger, answering why the participants decided to leave. However, it is important to note that not all 140 million Russian citizens made this decision after February 24th. This indicates that, beyond reasons and motives, there is the action itself, which is considered the other side of an act – the occurrence. This is the actual execution or performance of the act, representing the "how" and "when." For example, Julia left the country within the first two weeks without any preparation, and Eugene, despite knowing he would lose his professional identity without a medical license, still chose to leave. When answering the question of "how" the study participants left, the definitions "without preparation," "resolutely," and "boldly" would be relevant. These characteristics speak for themselves. The examples confirm the authors' thesis that the two sides are interdependent and must be understood together to bridge the gap between acts and actions. To fully understand an act as ethical, both the content and the occurrence must be considered together.

These sides are interdependent because if there is only content (intentions or motivations) and the act does not actually take place, it remains theoretical or hypothetical, lacking real-world impact or significance. Conversely, if an act occurs without considering the ethical reasoning or intentions behind it, it might appear random or lacking moral depth, merely a mechanical or thoughtless action.

According to the authors, neither objectivism nor subjectivism, and neither rationalism nor voluntarism, provide sufficient foundations for developing a theory of acts (p.30). Taking this into account, the departure can be considered ethical only because of its unity: it combines both objective and subjective elements, as well as rational and volitional aspects. An act cannot be fully explained solely through its content or intentions – if it occurs, it speaks for itself as well. This may partly explain why Elizaveta and Julia cite only security concerns or uncertainty as reasons for leaving, or why Eugene views leaving as a matter of self-preservation. In their cases, the acts speak louder than words. Ethical issues are difficult to articulate in terms of goals and objectives; they often transcend the realm of the rational. Therefore, I would not deny

the ethical nature of the participants' actions, even if they themselves do not emphasize this aspect.

Continuing the conversation about ethical acts, I would like to focus on other actions of the participants, apart from leaving, which can be interpreted in a certain way.

For example, for Julia, answering the simple question "Where are you from?" is always an ethical act. She cannot mechanically answer "From Russia" because the very fact that she is from Russia imposes certain obligations on her and requires an answer:

*"I still struggle internally when people ask me where I'm from. I don't understand how to answer correctly."*

In this case, Julia is not responsible to anyone, but she senses the moment when answerability is required from here. Moreover, Julia finds it difficult to commit this act because she is in Portugal. Her response here is an understanding that this country and its citizens have a difficult past: "Because they also had a dictatorship 50 years ago, people in Portugal don't particularly judge or evaluate you; I don't feel any condemnation from them, but that doesn't negate the inner work." She openly states that she feels responsible.

In Julia's case, there is another circumstance in which she demonstrates her ethical stance as a Russian citizen. An ethical act is an action that is recognized and performed in the context of personal and profound responsibility, transcending simple social or moral norms. As it was mentioned before, Julia has a sister in Kyiv, Ukraine, with whom maintains a relationship. She considers her phone calls to her sister to be acts that require "the call of conscience" (Isin & Nielsen (2008, p.32):

*"I constantly feel a sense of guilt and the need to support my sister, my moral obligations. Every time, I apologize for being a citizen of the country that is bombing her."*
Thus, the inner feeling of needing to make phone calls to her sister is consistent with the ideas of answerability.

## 5.6. Aesthetic Acts of Citizenship

It is hard to argue with the statement that "The pressure of habits is so strong that it stifles creativity" (Isin and Neilsen, 2008, p. 51). This fully applies to habits associated with place of residence, the familiar portrait of society, predictable career paths, and everything we consider to be "ours."

When asked what citizenship means to him, Anton spoke about the most ordinary things: "For me, being a citizen meant enjoying being in Russia, enjoying conversations in

Russian with my compatriots." Alexander, reflecting on what citizenship means to him, described it as "a mixture of the feeling of ownership – 'this is my country' – and an understanding of personal responsibility for one's own life." An act is something that can break the strong inertia of routine, and performing it requires creativity. Considering acts of citizenship through the lens of creativity and aesthetics is compelling because it highlights moments when individuals disrupt routine behaviors, thereby releasing creative energy. Although this expression of creativity is often intermittent and short-lived, it revitalizes previously static and potentially stagnant ways of thinking and living (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, pp. 51–52).

Bakhtin critiques aestheticism for attempting to extract the content of an act from its moral law, as this diminishes the act's unique occurrence by reducing it to interpretation (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 29). However, examining acts through an aesthetic lens can be useful because their creative nature draws attention to them and can influence the course of events, including circumstances and the behavior of other actors.

According to Isin and Nielsen (2008), political communities are also aesthetic because they create and transform reality. They call this creative process "the politics of aesthetics." The authors cite the example of immigrants who, in a situation where citizenship and political order create an "aesthetic order," are both violators of this order and creators of a new order, despite the fact that, due to their lack of status, they are "disqualified from sharing the stage with citizens as (political) actors" (p. 164).

Developing this idea, I would like to draw a parallel with the community of Russians who have left Russia. First, in the countries of migration, where they are not citizens, they nevertheless create a new aesthetic order with their arrival. For example, Anton recounts how, as a dog owner, he interacts with other dog owners every day and, as a citizen of the Russian Federation, tells them about life in Russia, among other things. In a sense, an aesthetic act, by analogy with an ethical one, consists of an action and an act, occurrence and answerability: thus, by the very fact of relocation, Anton manifests his lack of solidarity with the actions of the state, at the very least. Elizaveta's words also confirm the assertion that not living in Russia is in itself a kind of manifesto:

*"I no longer live there, I no longer work there, and I don't pay taxes there. In that sense, yes, it's an indicator that I'm against it."*

Second, for the Russian state Russians who have left the country represent an aesthetic community of those excluded from society. Russia's war with Ukraine is not a defensive war; however, it is interpreted by the Russian elites as such. Without this narrative of external

enemies and fair protection, instead of a war of aggression, it would not be possible to unite the people. Those, who left – are, in fact, the destroyers of the Russian state's narrative of unprecedented support for the war. Anton, Eugene, and Julia, for example, mention in conversation the difficulties they encounter in communicating with friends and relatives who remained in Russia: in their eyes, those who left are violating internal unity.

For the Russian authorities the war between Russia and Ukraine is an arbitrary external factor which serves to fragment society into external and internal enemies. According to Simmel (1930), the "positive effect" of external conflict manifests itself in the suppression of internal dissent, aimed at strengthening identity. In wartime situations, groups cannot tolerate deviations from their unifying principles; anyone who cannot be integrated into the group is excluded. War, which serves to stress national identity, can be "the last chance for a state ridden with inner antagonisms to overcome them or break up definitely." Briefly noting that another consequence of external conflict is the centralization of administrative machinery, Simmel suggests that external conflict diminishes internal conflict, and this reduction in internal strife is one reason why hostilities are sometimes deliberately encouraged (Simmel, 1964, p. 93, cited in Satow, 1972, p. 7).

As Isin&Neilsen argue, aesthetic acts create an appearance and uniquely require an aesthetic approach to shaping the political landscape to effectively transform administrative, moral, and legal imperatives, regardless of whether the act aims to recover, preserve, or transform the common good. (p. 285) From my point of view, this quality of an act can be particularly important in situations where certain communities, such as Russians who left their country of origin after the start of military operations, have limited means of speaking and influencing circumstances. All six participants in the study emphasize in one way or another that they were dissatisfied with the political climate in Russia in recent years regarding civil rights and the concentration of power in the hands of the ruling elite long before February 2022. Thus, in a sense, they could be called dissidents who undermined the internal cohesion that the regime sought to achieve. Before the war, they had the opportunity to publicly express their disagreement with certain actions taken by the authorities, but in wartime, with the tightening of repressive legislation, this became impossible.

In essence, leaving, "voting with their feet," was the only option left in such a situation. In this sense, the mass departure itself is a visible phenomenon that shapes the appearance of dissent, disagreement, or fear, countering state narratives of unity. The entire repressive policy of the Russian Federation during the war with Ukraine is based on the endeavor of the Russian authorities to unite around the flag. It is possible to say that all six participants left the circle

gathered around the flag, although, of course, not without effort on the part of the Russian authorities, who in the current situation find it easier to give all dissenters the opportunity to leave the inner circle, that is, in effect, to equate them with external enemies. In fact, the main aesthetic task of acts of citizenship is to influence perception, change narratives, and highlight issues. And even if not, all acts have such power, those that do are undoubtedly aesthetic.

The act of departure can be also interpreted as aesthetic also because it creates a sense of the possible: for others contemplating leaving, it demonstrates that exit is a possible action. The performance of leaving – crossing borders, seeking new lives – carries symbolic weight, communicating a break and a search for an alternative.

Continuing the conversation about aesthetic acts, I will give examples of other acts by participants in the study in which, in my opinion, a clear aesthetic component can be identified.

In March 2024, Russia held its regular presidential elections. According to the law, Russian citizens have the right to express their opinion even if they are not in the country. The Russian Embassy in Portugal also organized voting. Eugene went to vote, but, according to him, a huge line had already formed near the embassy at 9 a.m. He says,

*"It was a very cool event because the people standing in line were sharing oranges and tangerines. Some people brought water, and others sang songs. We were with our dog, who everyone paid attention to. I some people in that line with whom I still keep in touch".*

Several hundred people stood in line for almost the entire day, and most of them never got the chance to vote because the line moved so slowly. The participants got the impression that people were deliberately prevented from voting, as most of them would not have voted for the incumbent president, Vladimir Putin. Marina, who was also standing in line that day, confirms this:

*"It wasn't an election, it was a formality, as it always was in the Soviet Union. In the past, we went, and all put our crosses in unison. Now you don't even need to go, the result is a foregone conclusion."*

When asked why she went to these elections, Marina said bluntly,

*"It was a statement, not participation in the elections. I wanted to say, 'We are here!' People stood there until 8 p.m., supporting each other." She added, "It is still unclear how this will affect us."*

As mentioned earlier, unable to truly influence the change of power through voting, people like Eugene and Marina came to the Russian Embassy with one goal in mind: to show themselves off and put themselves on the political map of their country through an official electoral event with an anti-official message.

Another of Marina's actions can be considered symbolic and aesthetic. Having owned a private hotel for more than 20 years, she sold literally everything she had in Russia, down to the last dress.

*"From a material point of view, I no longer have any ties to this place. I sold and gave away everything I had."*

Alexander also personally traveled to Russia in 2025 to sell his apartment to build a full life outside the Russian Federation.

One more example of an aesthetic act of citizenship, in my opinion, is the search for another citizenship. For example, when talking about her second citizenship, Elizaveta specifically emphasizes that when choosing a country to immigrate to, she considered whether that country required her to renounce her other citizenships, because it was important for her to remain a citizen of the Russian Federation. To her the words of Bauböck (2006) could be fully applied: "For these migrants, retaining the nationality of origin was a natural choice both for its instrumental value as a bundle of rights and because of its symbolic value as a marker of ethno-national identity" (p. 9)

Julia, on the other hand, emphasized the special role that having a new citizenship played for her. She says,

*"Having a second passport will allow me to demonstrate that I am against war and the actions of the state".*

In both cases, but in different ways, the search for new citizenship can be considered aesthetic: it is important for Elizaveta to remain a citizen of the Russian Federation, while it is important for Julia to distance herself from the state.

Following an important aspect of an act, formulated by Isin&Nielsen (2008) as "to shape the possibility of a rejoinder" (p. 4) Alexander began by stating that for him, responding to the invitation to participate in the study was an opportunity to express his civic position, influence public opinion, and better understand his own thoughts on the issues of immigration and citizenship. He says,

*"My motivation for participating in this study is to make the Russian immigrant community more understandable to other people".*

He gave his first interview right before heading to Russia, and by not mentioning anything about staying anonymous and keeping things as private as possible, he was basically trying to protect himself from any extra questions at the border. He gave the next two interviews while in Russia, and they differed from the first in terms of candor. Moreover, the third time we spoke, Alexander was in his closed car. It was a coincidence that the interview caught him

on the road, although it was clear from the context that even in a remote Siberian Russian city, the situation did not allow him to freely sit down with his computer in any public space. Based on what Alexander himself said, as well as the other reasons listed above, I interpret the very act of participating in the study as both political and aesthetic—the desire to influence other communities' perceptions of a community close to you, as well as the risks he took, speak for themselves.

# 6. CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation aims to examine how Russian citizens who emigrated after February 2022 enacted their departures and related actions as acts of citizenship, and how these acts: political, ethical, and aesthetic, reshaped their relationship to the Russian state. It investigates the motivations, decision-making processes, and lived experiences of migrants to understand how leaving one's country in response to war constitutes a meaningful and transformative practice of citizenship.

The analysis shows how predisposing drivers such as political instability and insecurity in Russia, combined with proximate factors like foreign employment and fear of repression, shaped their decisions to emigrate. The war acted as a key precipitating driver, compiling individuals and families to break from routine and implicitly claim a political stance, as reflected in Julia's notion of "voting with her feet."

The study demonstrates that the departure itself can be interpreted through the lens of political, ethical, and aesthetic acts of citizenship. Politically, leaving Russia constituted a challenge to the state's actions, as participants redefined their civic identities, resisted complicity, and highlighted injustices, even if they themselves framed their decisions as personal or security-driven (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Levinas, 1978).

Ethically, participants' decisions reflect both responsibility and answerability: they faced the consequences of leaving, considered the well-being of family and others, and responded to their conscience in rejecting the war and distancing themselves from state actions (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, pp. 28–32). While participants often initially framed their departures in terms of self-interest or security, their reflections reveal a deeper ethical dimension, including answerability to conscience, moral opposition to the war, and responsibility toward family and others. Beyond leaving, everyday interactions, such as Julia's struggle to answer where she is "from" or maintaining moral obligations to her sister in Kyiv, also exemplify ethical acts through the call of conscience.

Aesthetically, acts such as selling property, seeking new citizenship, voting symbolically abroad, and participating in the study created visible, symbolic, and transformative effects, challenging state narratives, demonstrating dissent, and reshaping social and political realities in both host countries and the perception of Russian society (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, pp. 51–52, 164, 285). By leaving, participants also created an "aesthetic order"

that challenges the Russian state's narrative of unity and support for the war, signaling dissent and demonstrating alternative possibilities.

Beyond departure, other forms of civic engagement, including attending rallies, visiting embassies to vote, and publicly opposing state policies, illustrate overlapping ethical, aesthetic, and political dimensions of citizenship. These acts disrupt expected norms, challenge state authority, and redefine both individual political identity and collective notions of belonging.

Citizenship is "situated" or "manifested" in different places. If citizenship is understood as inherently spatial rather than territorially fixed (Staeheli et al., 2012; Bauböck, 2010), Russian citizens living abroad do not become less citizens by virtue of their relocation; instead, they enact and renegotiate their citizenship across new spaces.

Based on my research I would like to highlight a paradox at the heart of citizenship. Nominal (formal, legal) citizenship requires no action, while lived citizenship reveals itself only through action. This bridges the gap between status and practice, echoing Isin & Nielsen's distinction. It was the act of leaving – often seen as a withdrawal from the polity – that activated civic identity. That inversion is both counterintuitive and compelling.

It is now important to point out some limitations of the current research. My interviews capture perceptions at a particular moment after departure. Future studies could revisit the same participants over time to see how their understanding of citizenship evolves as they integrate abroad or gain new legal statuses.

It would be also valuable to examine how host societies interpret and respond to these acts of citizenship. Comparative analysis of host-country contexts (e.g., Georgia, Portugal, Israel) could reveal how local political environments shape transnational citizenship.

The constructivist framework could be complemented by theories of transnationalism or cosmopolitan citizenship which were slightly mentioned in the theoretical part, to further examine how civic identity operates outside nation-state boundaries.

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# ANNEXES

## A. CONSENTIMENTO INFORMADO

O presente estudo surge no âmbito de um projeto de investigação a decorrer no **Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa**.

O estudo tem por explorar a forma como os emigrantes russos que partiram depois de fevereiro de 2022 redefinem o seu sentimento de pertença como um aspeto da cidadania, e analisar as suas acções através da lente dos actos cívicos. A sua participação no estudo, que será muito valorizada, irá contribuir para o avanço do conhecimento neste domínio da ciência, é realizar três entrevistas, cada uma com a duração de 40 minutos a uma hora, de acordo com a metodologia que escolhi como investigador. As entrevistas devem ser separadas no tempo por, pelo menos, uma semana, mas não mais de um mês.

Primeira entrevista: falaremos sobre a vida do entrevistado na Rússia até fevereiro de 2022.

Segunda entrevista: Iremos centrar-nos na forma como a vida do entrevistado está agora em Portugal.

Terceira entrevista: Iremos refletir sobre a forma como esta experiência mudou a visão do entrevistado sobre cidadania e pertença.

O Iscte é o responsável pelo tratamento dos seus dados pessoais, recolhidos e tratados exclusivamente para as finalidades do estudo, tendo como base legal o seu consentimento indicar art. 6º, nº1, alínea a) e/ou art. 9º, nº2, alínea a) do Regulamento Geral de Proteção de Dados.

O estudo é realizado por Daria Ospishcheva, Daria_Ospishcheva@iscte-iul.pt, que poderá contactar caso pretenda esclarecer uma dúvida, partilhar algum comentário ou exercer os seus direitos relativos ao tratamento dos seus dados pessoais. Poderá utilizar o contacto indicado para solicitar o acesso, a retificação, o apagamento ou a limitação do tratamento dos seus dados pessoais.

A participação neste estudo é **confidencial**. Os seus dados pessoais serão sempre tratados por pessoal autorizado vinculado ao dever de sigilo e confidencialidade. O Iscte garante a utilização das técnicas, medidas organizativas e de segurança adequadas para proteger as informações pessoais. É exigido a todos os investigadores que mantenham os dados pessoais confidenciais.

Além de confidencial, a participação no estudo é estritamente **voluntária**: pode escolher livremente participar ou não participar. Se tiver escolhido participar, pode interromper a participação e retirar o consentimento para o tratamento dos seus dados pessoais em qualquer momento, sem ter de prestar qualquer justificação. A retirada de consentimento não afeta a legalidade dos tratamentos anteriormente efetuados com base no consentimento prestado.

O seus dados pessoais sob a forma de ficheiros áudio no seu telemóvel e transcrições de texto serão conservados até à defesa da sua dissertação no final de 2025, após o qual serão destruídos ou anonimizados, garantindo-se o seu anonimato nos resultados do estudo,

apenas divulgados para efeitos estatísticos, de ensino, comunicação em encontros ou publicações científicas.

Não existem riscos significativos expectáveis associados à participação no estudo.

O Iscte não divulga ou partilha com terceiros a informação relativa aos seus dados pessoais.

O Iscte tem um Encarregado de Proteção de Dados, contactável através do email *dpo@iscte-iul.pt*. Caso considere necessário tem ainda o direito de apresentar reclamação à autoridade de controlo competente – Comissão Nacional de Proteção de Dados.

**Declaro** ter compreendido os objetivos de quanto me foi proposto e explicado pelo/a investigador/a, ter-me sido dada oportunidade de fazer todas as perguntas sobre o presente estudo e para todas elas ter obtido resposta esclarecedora. **Aceito** participar no estudo e consinto que os meus dados pessoais sejam utilizados de acordo com a informações que me foram disponibilizadas.

Sim ☐ Não ☐

_____ (local), _____/____/_____ (data)

**Nome:**_____

**Assinatura:**_____

## B. INTERVIEW GUIDE

*First series of Interviews (History)*

### 1. Interviewee Profile

1.1. How old are you?
1.2. Where are you from?
1.3. Where were you born?
1.4. Where do you live (at the moment)?
1.5. What do you do for a living?

### 2. Life History

2.1. What was your professional sphere in Russia before 2022?
2.2. What were you doing in Russia prior to leaving?
2.3. How did you define citizenship while living in Russia?
2.4. What was your attitude toward the Russian state and its institutions?
2.5. What determined your sense of belonging or non-belonging?
2.6. What factors influenced your decision to leave?
2.7. How did your family, social environment, or workplace react to your decision?
2.8. Were there any key moments or turning points leading up to your departure?

*Second series of Interviews (Details of experience)*

### 1. Reconstruction of the 24th of February and first months after

1.1. How do you remember this day?
1.2. What were you doing? First actions, decisions
1.3. What did you feel?
1.4. When did you decide to leave Russia?
1.5. What were the reasons behind this decision?

### 2. The Move and Resettlement

2.1. When and how did you leave Russia?
2.2. How did you choose the country to emigrate?
2.3. Why did you choose Portugal?
2.4. What was the most challenging part of your relocation process?

**3. Current Life in Portugal**

3.1. What is it like for you now to live here?
3.2. How do you describe your current relationship with Russian society and the Russian state?
3.3. What aspects of Russian life do you feel most connected to while in Portugal?
3.4. Have your ideas about citizenship or belonging changed since you moved?
3.5. How do you participate in local or diasporic communities?
3.6. Do you engage in any civic or social initiatives in Portugal?
3.7. How do you experience being a "Russian citizen abroad" in everyday life?
3.8. What actions do you do now which could be considered as act towards Russian State?
3.9. Have you participated in any initiatives, events, or discussions related to Russia since moving abroad?

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*Third series of Interviews (Reflection on meaning)*

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**1. The Notion of Citizenship**

1.1. How did you perceive your identity and citizenship while living in Russia before February 2022?
1.2. What was it for you to be a Russian citizen at that time?
1.3. What does it mean to you now to have a Russian Citizenship?
1.4. How has your understanding of what it means to be a "citizen" evolved since leaving Russia?

**2. Acts of Citizenship**

2.1. What kind of citizen do you think you are?
2.2. What acts do you perform toward Russian State?
2.3. How do you currently express your civic or political position, if at all?

**3. Motivations and Experiences of Leaving**

3.1. What were the main reasons for your decision to leave Russia?
3.2. How did the events of February 2022 influence your sense of belonging to Russia?

**4. Impact of the War**

4.1. How has the ongoing war affected your sense of identity and belonging?
4.2. Do you feel a sense of responsibility or connection to the events happening in Russia?
4.3. How would you characterise your emotional and cultural ties to Russia today, compared to before you left?

**5. Reflections on the future**

5.1. How do you imagine your relationship with Russia evolving over time?
5.2. What kinds of activities connected to Russia do you plan to maintain?
5.3. What role do you think your sense of belonging will play in your future decisions regarding citizenship or returning to Russia?
5.4. Under what circumstances would you consider returning to Russia?
5.5. Do you feel a sense of association or linkage between yourself and the state?
5.6. How has your attitude toward Russian symbols, holidays, or cultural traditions changed since the beginning of the war?
5.7. How do you see your future – personally and politically – in relation to both Russia and Portugal?