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The foreigner phenomenon in the novel *Material Fatigue* by Marek Šindelka

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Abstract

The foreigner phenomenon has so far been discussed in various fields of humanities and social sciences. The knowledge about foreigners is not an exclusive area of any research discipline, and any talk about the foreigner phenomenon implies interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, scholarly discussions include discussions on the status of the foreigner figure primarily in social or cultural anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and semiotics. The paper contributes to the research of the foreigner phenomenon in literature by interpreting the novel *Material Fatigue* by Marek Šindelka in the context of semiotics of space, culture, communication, image and media. The foreigner is considered a symbol of the social and spatial relations of distance and proximity, remoteness, foreignness and the unknown. The analysis and interpretation is particularly focused on the position of foreigners in the context of migrations from the Middle East to the European West. The aim is to clarify the literary (re)construction of the image of foreigners, i.e. migrants, refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers, who, in fear of death and in search of a better life, are leaving the Middle East and heading towards the countries of the European Union. The literary (re)construction of the foreigner in the novel is articulated on the level of theme, motif, plot, character, language and style.

Keywords

foreigner, Marek Šindelka, images of the Other, stereotypes, prejudice

Introduction

Marek Šindelka (born in 1982) is a member of the younger generation of Czech writers. He majored in Cultural Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy of Charles University in Prague and graduated in Screenwriting and Dramatic Arts at FAMU in Prague. He entered Czech literature in 2005 with the acclaimed poetry collection *Strychnine and Other Poems (Strychnin a jinébásně)*, for which he was awarded the Jiří Orten Prize for young writers. Šindelka is the author of the novel *Error (Chyba, 2008)* and the co-author of the 2011 comic book of the same name. He confirmed his literary talent with his short story collection *Stay with Us (Zůstaňte s námi, 2011)*, for which he received the most prestigious Czech literary award, the Magnesia Litera Prose Book of the Year Award. Later on, Šindelka published a prose collection *A Map of Anna (Mapa Anny, 2014)* and the acclaimed novel *Material Fatigue (Únava materiálu, 2016)*, for which he again received the Magnesia Litera Award in 2017 and which has so far been translated into seven languages.

Material Fatigue is a work of prose by which Šindelka, as he stated in an interview, decided to react on the situation in the Czech Republic which was a consequence of the so-called refugee crisis of 2015: "A total of 12 (!) refugees arrived in the Czech Republic, but despite this, my people [the Czech people, author's comment] went mad. People began to prepare for the end of the world, new far-right political parties began to emerge, feeding on the fear of the citizens and creating and nurturing that fear themselves. The situation has continued to this day. The turning point for me was when they found a refrigerated truck at the Austrian border in which 71 immigrants, including several children, had suffocated. My

older daughter was eight months old at the time and it all hit me unexpectedly hard. I felt it was necessary to write about it. With this book, I tried to show what it looks like when you look at Europe from the other side of the fence we are using to close ourselves from the world" (Ivačić, 2018: www). It should be emphasized that Šindelka is not a militant instigator but an engaged intellectual who is warning about the current migrant crisis across the European Union.

The intentionality of Šindelka's prose and its implicit political undertone is understandable in the contemporary social and political context of today's European Union. Namely, the migrant crisis began with the Arab Spring in 2011, but also with earlier migration waves from the Arab part of the Mediterranean (Picula, 2012: 20). The areas from which migrants have been arriving to Europe are mostly affected by war and poverty. The main motives for leaving their country of domicile are conflicts and violence, primarily in Syria, but also in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan and other countries where the lives of millions of civilians are endangered (Metcalf-Hough, 2015: 2–3). What all the countries from which the migrant waves originate have in common is high unemployment rate of the younger population, as well as technological lagging behind the member states of the European Union and sluggish economic development. Partial responsibility for initiating migration of this magnitude lies both on the Western allies and the interventions aimed at overthrowing dictatorial regimes in these countries (Tadić et al., 2016: 16). The situation in the Middle East further deteriorated after 2008 and the crisis in the European Union, which used to be the main export market for these countries. The reasons for leaving Syria and moving towards EU Member States, as highlighted by the 2015 UNHCR analysis, are loss of hope, deepening poverty, limited livelihood opportunities and lack of access to adequate health care, hurdles to renew refugee status in Lebanon and Jordan, scant education opportunities and feeling unsafe in Iraq (UNHCR, 2015: www).

Four years following its publication in the Czech Republic, the novel *Material Fatigue* is experiencing a Syrian edition, in Arabic, of course, which is a significant confirmation of its importance and relevance. Furthermore, the migrant crisis has been leaving a trace in fiction throughout Europe, so it is not surprising that a significant number of novels have been dedicated to this topic. The following, mostly award-winning novels should be singled out from among these literary works: *Gypsy, But the Fairest of Them All* (2016) by Croatian writer Kristian Novak, *Exit West* (2017) by British-Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid, *Io sono con te: Storia di Brigitte* (2016) by Italian author Melania G. Mazzucco, *Go, Went, Gone* (2015) by German writer Jenny Erpenbeck, *The European Spring* (2017) by Danish writer Kaspar Colling Nielsen, *Marx et la poupée* (2017) by French-Iranian author Maryam Madjidi, *Minority Orchestra* (2019) by Nigerian writer Chigozie Obioma, and *The Few* (2011) by the Turkish writer Hakan Günday.

Šindelka's novel *Material Fatigue* is a disturbing story about refugees from war-torn and devastated countries in Asia and Africa who are trying to reach the northern part of Europe in search of a better life. The story centres on two young brothers who set out on an uncertain path together because their life in their unnamed Middle East country, probably Syria, was marked by a permanent existential crisis, i.e. poverty and misery. When the two brothers separate, due to different smuggling strategies, one of them ending up in a car engine and the other one under the driver's seat, each of them is forced to reach their desired destination somewhere in the European North on their own. However, to reach the destination, they must cross frozen rivers, densely wooded areas, fast railway trains,

abandoned shopping malls, manufacturing plants and factory halls, highways, dilapidated huts and wastelands.

The novel is divided into 22 chapters, with the third person singular narrating alternately about the two migrant brothers. The narrative structure is further complicated by a chapter in which the narration in the first person singular is taken over by a Palestinian who is the companion of one of the brothers, named Amir. The Palestinian's story is a traumatic confession of his heavy predicament in which he found himself after he sold his own organ to provide for his family living in a Syrian refugee camp and bought a ticket to travel to Europe. The chapter that must be added here is the one in which Amir's unnamed brother comes to a manufacturing plant described as the perfect technological achievement of the European West; he becomes an intruder and a disruptive factor from the perspective of the worker who is also the one that focalises in that chapter. In addition, the plot in the novel is not presented chronologically, since the events that happened before and after the escape of the two brothers from the reception centre are mixed.

Finally, the end of the novel is ambiguous. Namely, the unnamed brother arrives to an inhabited urban area and enters one of the houses where he finds food and plays a famous computer game. The fame of the game should be interpreted in the figurative sense of the word as a war game thematically located in the clichéd setting of war-torn Middle East where an armed player fights against enemy soldiers. The boy finds pleasure in a typical European house that is fully equipped and comfortable, whereby the area of his origin is a place of trauma for him, but within the virtual world it is shown as a place of entertainment. However, the whole plot of the novel reveals that Europe, embodied in the symbolic image of a perfect abode, is another place of trauma, not a promised land or a mythical space of prosperity and freedom. Therefore, the ending is not only paradoxical but also ironic.

Methods

The foreigner phenomenon has so far been considered in various fields of humanities and social sciences. The knowledge about foreigners is not an exclusive area of any research discipline, thus any talk about the foreigner phenomenon implies interdisciplinarity. Therefore, scholarly discussions include the debate on the status of the character of a foreigner primarily in social or cultural anthropology, sociology, cultural studies and semiotics. The paper sets the theoretical framework according to the definition of the foreigner phenomenon in the 2013 book *Stranac i društvo: fenomenologija stranca i ksenofobije (Foreigner and Society: Phenomenology of the Foreigner and Xenophobia)* by Anđelko Milardović. In accordance with his research, the following is an overview of the meaning of the word foreigner in the various areas listed above.

The Croatian word *stranac* (foreigner) has multiple meanings. The basic meaning comes from the word *strana*. *Strana* can refer to someone's ideological and political affiliation, or to the legal position of a foreigner within a given legal and political order. Such a meaning is not associated with a foreigner because the noun *stranac* (foreigner) refers to a person who is *on the side*, a foreigner from another region or country (Musulin, 1956–1985: 663). "A foreigner is the same as a member of another country, one who was born in another country, a visitor, an unknown person, someone else, someone who is not a member of the domicile society. The geographical meaning is closest to the man who gets to be called a foreigner. He is a foreigner because he came from somewhere, from another side, to stay. The one who comes from another side is foreign and unfamiliar" (Milardović 2013: 20).

The social and cultural meaning of the Croatian word *stranac* (foreigner) implies the determination of social, cultural and spatial distance which creates a feeling of foreignness/alienation, while the proximity within the listed categories manifests itself as inclusion in a new society and culture. "The lack of understanding and absence of the will to get to know and learn prevents the removal of cultural barriers and emphasizes tension and social distance, and, in extreme cases, the conflict between Us and Them"(p. 23).

Stranac, as an anthropological term, means a human being or a person who, for various reasons, finds him/herself in a society as a member of a foreign culture. "In the anthropological and sociological sense, a foreigner appears positively as a person integrated in society and, negatively, as disintegrated. These are the two types of attitudes or behaviours of an individual who is not a member of an indigenous society and its culture. (...) A foreigner is actually an immigrant, a person who has transited from one state to another. Without transition or immigration, there is no foreigner. A foreigner emerges as a result of the will to move and bring changes in one's life and to continue living in another society or another culture" (p. 25).

The components of the social and psychological concept of a foreigner are intergroup behaviour, the cognitive component, social identity, the emotional component, the component of abnormal social and experiential behaviour towards a foreigner, including xenophobia (p. 27). Intergroup behaviour is a form of social interaction between groups and in such behaviour it is recognized how the in-group or own group behaves towards an out-group or a foreign group/foreigners. The cognitive component deals with the issue of perception because it creates the image of social identities, including the social identity of a foreigner: the way a group sees itself (self-perception), how others see it or how they would like them to see it (hetero-perception) (pp. 36 -37). The emotional component focuses on challenging the emotional relationships of individuals and groups. For example, the feeling of love, narcissism being its extreme form, then the feeling of fear of the unknown - the irrational form of which is a phobia, and its specific social form - xenophobia (p. 39). The social psychology of abnormal behaviour includes aggression, hatred, hostility, and various forms of phobia, i.e. xenophobia aimed at foreigners.

The foreigner, as a sociological term, implies a being who breaks identity relations by trying to join a new society, while being torn between two societies and two cultures. At the same time, the foreigners live somewhere in between, and, in fact, nowhere. They are alien to themselves and others. In addition, the foreigners arouse interest and wonder due to misunderstandings and obstacles caused by the language: they are double foreigners – they have left their own culture and are trying to adapt to another. Often due to the impossibility of assimilation into a new culture, the foreigner goes into self-isolation and becomes marginal or a being on the social outskirts. By becoming familiar with a new language and culture, that is, by breaking through the circle of symbolic reality, a foreigner enters into various social relationships marked by sympathies and antipathies. This experience is based on a culture of relationship to the Other, and can be either friendly or hostile (pp. 40–41).

The last determinant of a foreigner, as a legal term, implies any natural person who is not a citizen of the state in whose territory they currently reside. A foreigner is a person with the citizenship of another state and a person who has no citizenship (Vidaković Mukić, 2006: 1111).

Therefore, in order to approach foreigner phenomenon, it is necessary to engage interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary knowledge that studies the position of a foreigner in old,

modern and contemporary cultures within the field of various fields of humanities and social sciences.

Analysis

Gordon Allport's book *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), which describes the cycle of prejudiced behaviour applicable to the construction of the social and psychological image of a foreigner in Šindelka's novel *Material Fatigue*, emerges as the foundation for the study of the discourse on foreigners. In the aforementioned work, Allport formed a scale of prejudiced action containing five components: antilocution, avoidance, discrimination, physical attack, and extermination.

The first component is antilocution, which involves unsympathetic speech directed at the object of antilocution. Such speech usually leads to the creation of antagonisms, negative images of the Others, discrimination and violence. Verbal rejection or negative discourse about migrants in the analysed novel is evident in the scene depicting the torture of two migrants, a Palestinian and a Syrian, who are first verbally abused by Western children: "The tall one shouted at him: 'Go Turkey, no Europe!' Amir kept looking at one and the other in terror. 'Go Africa!' Everyone was shouting something, Amir saw their excitement grow, their bulging eyes shining above him, the commander grunted, the tall one translated into broken English: 'No Islam here. No terrorist. You want kill people?' Amir did not understand what they wanted from him. He tried to explain something, but the commander slapped him. The tall one shouted: 'You want fuck white woman?' and kicked Amir in the shoulder" (Šindelka, 2018: 135). Furthermore, antilocution in the novel is associated with prejudice as negative judgment about or attitude towards members of other and different groups based on contempt or prejudice. In other words, the ethnic affiliation of the migrants was determined by wrong judgements, so in the selected paragraph, the two migrants were declared Turks, Africans and Muslims, although one of them is a Syrian and the other one Palestinian, and they are both non-Muslims.

The second component of prejudiced behaviour towards foreigners is their avoidance. It is a conscious withdrawal from a foreigner in the social space. If foreigners are defined in the spatial relations of proximity and distance, a greater distance from foreigners in social space is achieved by spatial and social distancing from them, making them even more foreign. In the novel, such prejudice is described in the close encounter between Amir's brother and an unknown woman in front of her house. The meeting took place in a rural area, making the process of distancing oneself from foreigners and accumulating irrational fears about them even more pronounced: "Suddenly her eyes widened, she inadvertently took a step back. She still had a pot and a cigarette in her hands, but she had forgotten about them. Stray snowflakes landed on her hair and melted. The boy realized that the woman was afraid. She was afraid of him. He tried to smile again, shrugged slightly, and shook his head. But it was in vain. The woman did not notice or did not want to notice any of this. The reality between them suddenly got worse. The woman saw a concrete, quite present threat in him, in the whole situation. (...) They stood there in the cold, grey twilight, space stretching between them and the woman was projecting some unknown things in it, and they terrified her so much that she could not move" (Šindelka, 2018: 122). This is a case of a phobia that involves "avoidance that disrupts the normal course of life and is mediated by fear and is disproportionate to the real danger of an object or situation, and the phobic person him/herself perceives it to be unfounded" (Davison and Neale, 1999: 151). The example confirms the avoidance of the object of fear as one of the decisive elements of phobia. Given

that it is the irrational fear of strangers and foreigners, i.e. xenophobia, it is the one closest to social phobias in terms of its literary appearance in the novel. The confirmation of xenophobia as an anxiety disorder towards the foreign/Other is highlighted in the chase after the boy that followed after his close encounter with the woman. Namely, after the woman spatially distanced herself, her husband perceived it as a source of danger to which he usually reacts with hatred and hostility in the process of social rejection of the enemy. In addition, it should be emphasized that, when projecting the guilt for individual and collective failure, an external object of guilt or an enemy in the form of a foreigner is determined. It is paradoxical that the persecuted foreigner is actually a boy who had just come to drink water from a barrel in order to survive.

The concept of constructing the meaning of Otherness indicates the way in which the others are labelled/marked in contrast to the former or the in-group. "It is about the process of marking Otherness that acquires some characteristics, among which those of one's own and of other groups stand out. (...) Through this social marker or marker of social differentiation, a distinction is established between one's own and the other or foreign national identity and the satanization and discrimination of the Other or the Others, Otherness"(Milardović, 2013: 156). "The Other is only a sign/symbolic mark, an attempt to determine the essence and content of someone's opposite identity" (p. 155). The image that the woman began to create the moment she met the boy/foreigner is the product of a social construction: "What did actually happen? Those few seconds, while they were looking at each other, suddenly reached enormous proportions. What did the woman see in him? Whatever happened, it didn't matter anymore, there was only that voice, the look of the woman, the image that no one will be able to fix anymore" (Šindelka, 2018: 123). Thus, social distance is established face to face towards the Other as a foreigner/migrant due to cultural and linguistic barriers, and it is based on the theme of non-recognition of the Other.

The third component of Allport's scale is discrimination, i.e. the creation of harmful differences. "Discrimination comes about only when we deny to individuals or groups of people equality of treatment which they may wish. (...) It occurs when we take steps to exclude members of an out-group from our neighbourhood, school, occupation or country" (Allport, 1954: 51). The establishment of differences precedes the intentional denial of rights, roles or status to a particular individual or group. In the novel, the two main characters - migrants - are portrayed as foreigners who break off with their own language, identity, society, culture and enter a new society, language, culture and civilization. However, in doing so, as people without history or those who need to create a new history of their own, they are denied that right: "He had never seen so many fences. So many wires. When they caught him, a woman wrote a number on his hand with a thick marker. The guards addressed him by using that number. No one here knew how to pronounce his name, so they deprived him of it completely. He found himself in a place called detention centre. As he found out, a detention or reception centre does not differ from a prison at all. Maybe just in the fact that, in prison, most people know why they have been locked up there. All the buildings are overcrowded. He slept in a small tin house for the first two months. Fifteen or twenty workers' housing containers, side by side, tightly packed, arranged so as to create a square-shaped space between them. He could sit inside the little house or stand in the middle of the square. There was a wire fence above the square, welded to the sheet metal. There was no escape from there. (...) People were moving within the enclosed space. But most of them were no longer alive. He could see it in their eyes. The bodies were moving, but there was darkness inside. They were deprived of their mobile phones, documents, computers" (Šindelka, 2018:

10). The paragraph shows that the migrants, as a group, have been imposed restrictions and do not receive equal social treatment because measures have been taken to exclude migrants as an out-group from the neighbourhood, work, school and other areas of life and activity. In addition, the foreigner is portrayed as an isolated and self-isolated being, and an example of intolerance towards foreigners is their ghettoization into reception centres that function as camps. In line with the basic thesis from Georg Simmel's essay *Bridge and Gate* (2001), the image of a foreigner can be an image of connection or an image of separation, symbolized by a bridge or an island. In the novel, great emphasis is placed on the character of a foreigner characterized as a being of separation in a closed type of society in which "the door is closed for him" and he feels isolated in a hostile environment. If the bridge signifies the connection between separate spaces, i.e. cultures, societies and homelands, the door has the role of both separation and connection (Simmel, 2001: 160).

Physical attack and violence are the fourth component of the cycle of prejudiced action. Allport singles out several levels of physical violence: typing the victim group, verbal complaint against the persecuted minority, increasing discrimination, external pressure on members of the in-group, threat of social/political explosion, emergence of radical political movements, incentive for action an individual receives by being a member of the group, creation of incidents and destructive activities (Allport, 1954: 57–58). The already mentioned verbal conflict between the children and the two migrants escalated into a physical attack on the migrants. Thus the foreigners are the object of irrational fear from which one has to defend him/herself. Furthermore, xenophobia can be interpreted as social panic, and the objects of aggression, i.e. the scapegoats, especially in times of crisis, can be different groups, including foreigners: "They treated the Palestinian like a puppet, they lifted him to his feet, he wiggled in their arms, they lowered him to the ground, kicked him, and lifted him up again. Amir bowed his head with all his might, touched the ground with his forehead, they knocked him to his side laughing, then forced him to continue, and he again fell to his knees and lifted himself up again and bowed" (Šindelka, 2018: 137).

The described incident can be related to Allport's theory of the scapegoat as part of a broader theory of frustration or aggression that can be applied to the discourse on foreigners. The mentioned theory includes three phases: in the first phase frustration produces aggression, in the second phase aggression is transferred to a helpless victim, and in the third phase this transfer is rationalized and justified by blaming, projecting and stereotyping. The hatred and aggression of the children in the role of abuser in the novel is not only motivated by xenophobia but also by resistance to authority embodied in the figure of a father, and is sadistically redirected to aggression towards the weakest i.e. the migrants: "The commander lifted Amir again by pulling his hair, forcefully turning Amir's face towards him; Amir stared at those ecstatic pupils in horror. He looked into the eyes of a child intoxicated with power. '*This is Europe!*' the commander shouted in his face and hit his head on the ground. (...) They were walking above him watching his futile attempt to escape, as if dazed. One of them unzipped his fly with trembling hands and started urinating on the Palestinian. The others were shouting, laughing, they were in kind of a trance. In childish ecstasy, in which fervour mixed with utter disgust: as if they were torturing an animal, a cat, a dog, a bird with broken wings. The Palestinian no longer moved, just stuck his head into the ground and cried. '*No place for you! Go Africa, motherfucker! Tell him!*' Someone lifted Amir's head by pulling his hair and he translated with tears swelling in his eyes" (Šindelka, 2018: 136–138).

The last level on Allport's scale of prejudiced behaviour involves the extermination or elimination of a foreigner. There is no direct extermination of foreigners in the novel, but

there is torture and multiple cases of manslaughter against migrants during their transit to Europe by various means of transport, i.e. human trafficking. Therefore, it is possible to talk about the financial exploitation of migrants and their torture with fatal consequences during secret transfers across the borders of European countries: "The vibration of the engine resonated in his body. He was soon overwhelmed by unbearable sweetness. He had to press his tongue firmly against his palate because it seemed to him that the wrinkled arch was numb. The tinkling gradually spread to the whole head. There was too much sweetness. Sweat dripped into his eyes. He was breathing, but in that heat he had the impression that his lungs were constantly filtering the same single litre of air. He was exhausted by each breath. Slowly fainting he realized that he was losing the notion of himself, the sense spreading to the entire coachwork" (Šindelka, 2018: 39).

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The novel *Material Fatigue* constantly emphasizes the artificiality and dehumanization of people and the space through which the migrants are moving, indicating the reshaping of the social environment and the consequences of modern accelerated capitalism and production on a global scale. In this context, it should be emphasized that the intelligence and autonomy of many modern devices and machines erases the differences between living organisms and machines (Luke, 1997: 1369). In fact, "our machines are disturbingly alive, and we ourselves are frighteningly inert" (Haraway, 1991: 152). Namely, the boundary between the realms of the physical and the non-physical is very imprecise, modern devices are quintessentially microelectronic devices, they are everywhere and can be invisible (p. 153). This results in the subjectification of objects, and the objectification of subjects and the transformation of the living and dead world into "quasi-objects", which are neither entirely alive nor merely dead as they increasingly come to be treated as "quasi-subjects" (Luke, 1997: 1369). The phenomenon described in the novel is noticeable in the scene when the boy enters the automobile factory plant. In this part of the novel, the focus of the story shifts from the boy to the production worker, who is described as a kind of a cyborg or a hybrid of a machine and a living organism: "The arm, the extremity of the machine, which merged with his body in the shoulder joint. He marvelled at the precision with which, after so many years, his muscles and joints worked as if when a chess player moves the pieces. Like a perfect automaton. (...) He sold his hand for eight hours a day. He sold his eyes to look into the threaded hole. He sold the movement with which his hand extended a screwdriver. He sold a few more moves, and at the end of the month the amount would appear in his account.' (...) But he could not prevent the learned movement. The machine was too deeply rooted in his body" (Šindelka, 2018: 173–174).

Although to a lesser extent, the reverse image of a foreigner can be traced in the novel as well – when the British come to Syria with Amir as their translator. However, the motives for their arrival are not of existential nature, they arrived for tourist reasons and adrenaline seeking war tourism. The British, in conjunction with the new media and the staged tourist itinerary, present themselves as heroes. However, the real situation is reversed because they are arriving to the periphery of the war: "Over time, the men regained courage, the trembling of their hands calmed down, they took photos with an automatic shutter, and then, just in case, with a mobile phone; first with blood, then with the ruins, then with an escort - the men wanted the armed soldiers to point their weapons around them. It was unnecessary, but no one objected, and so the barrels of the short automatic rifles were raised. Both men looked around like unit commanders in the middle of a great battle, then they quickly erased the failed photos and rearranged the whole group until they were satisfied" (pp. 72–73). Talking

about his war tourist campaigns, one of the British listed all the dangerous places and countries he had visited: Chechnya, Pakistan, Chernobyl, Afghanistan, Somalia, North Korea and Rwanda. Apart from the fact that the Briton is leaving visual traces of his false heroism on his internet profile, all the exotic places "conquered" and colonized by the photos were fetishized in the form of alleged war trophies: "The man pulls a dirty, torn notebook from a glass cabinet, and his expression is very serious: 'This one is from Chechnya. Notes written by terrorists.' He pulls out a broken bone, a piece of a joint head and a small piece of a rib, and explains: 'Human remains from Sudan.' He pulls out a cartridge: 'Somalia'" (pp. 76).

The motif of manipulated photographs refers to the ideological struggle within the framework of images of the members of the in-group and the out-group, i.e. in relation to "which image will hegemonize a certain area and function as a paradigmatic embodiment of an idea, regime, problem" (Žižek, 2005: 11). Therefore, a photograph can be interpreted on multiple levels. The first one is the imaginary image of superheroes - those are the photos staged in that context. Behind these *unreal* scenes, there is the ideological background that represents the second level or *symbolic* level of media manipulation. The third level refers to the *real* situation because the rather vulgar entertaining aspect of the scene should not be overlooked either: the tourist escape from everyday life and the desire to gain new experiences. Such an example can be seen in another place in the novel when a woman in the role of a humanitarian is distributing the aid received: "People were constantly gathering around the woman, the photographer was walking backwards in front of her: when the woman stopped, he would stop, he was carefully walking between the blankets and the bodies on the floor, he took various positions, knelt in front of the woman, got up again, rested his elbows on his knees. He took a photo of the woman carrying bottles of water and leaning towards the body sitting on a bench. He took a photo a black hand reaching out towards the water. Then he looked at the digital screen, looked at several pictures unsatisfied, deftly removed the lens from the camera, put another one, and swung his outstretched finger with a smile. The woman understood and repeated the whole action: she offered the water with a smile, a black hand reached out for the water, the shutter clicked" (Šindelka, 2018: 117–118). In the situation mentioned, it is not primarily a humanitarian act but the exploitation of foreigners and showing their difficult social situation in order to achieve media attention and a better social and political status. At the same time, it is evident that the focus of the lens is on the humanitarian and a positive image of her, while the migrants are out of focus and shown in the photos as a shapeless mass reduced to outstretched arms begging for help.

In the above examples of the British and the "humanitarian" which deal with hegemonizing real and mental images, it is necessary to distinguish between an image i.e. a photograph as a permanent record of a person, object or any other motif and the mental image to which the image of a foreigner belongs. In semiotic terms, an image has two poles: the first pole is representation, and the second is perception. From the cognitive or conceptual level, the social and psychological image of the foreigner is created. The image of a foreigner is made up of all the knowledge and information about the foreigner and the perception of how the members of the in-group see the foreigner as a member of a foreign group. Furthermore, according to social categorization, that is, the ordering of the social world, images are created of a good, bad, dirty, devilish, dangerous foreigner, foreigner as a competitor or foreigner as a socially endangered person. It represents the creation of a stereotype of a foreigner with clichéd images that refer to individual foreign social and cultural identities (Milardović, 2013: 69). The photo examples prove a pre-constructed,

desired and expected reality that has already been formed at the cognitive level by members of the in-group (Europeans), which has been stereotyped and resent/returned to the West as such.

The image of a foreigner is most frequently based on stereotypes as clichéd images of the Other. "Those who socially categorize foreigners construct their characteristics such as gender, linguistic/cultural/ethnic affiliation, race, customs and habits, appearance and so on. With the help of stereotypical features of a foreigner/foreigners, the effort of recognition is reduced, the status or our position in society in relation to his/their position in society is protected" (p. 73). Cultural stereotypes occupy a dominant place in the typology of stereotypes. "The simplest definition of cultural stereotypes is that these are stories or discourses about one's own and other people's cultures, in fact, about domestic and foreign identities or images of the Others" (p 76). Detecting stereotypes and the description of the stereotyping process are not derived from a secondary reading of the novel, but they derive from its primary thematic layer which is directly related to the foreigner issue. In the already mentioned example of the Palestinian and the children in the role of abuser, the stereotype serves as a justification for aggression and rejection of a foreigner because children assume that the Palestinian is of the Islamic faith and they force him to pray by bowing and prostrating.

The self-image is constructed for the purpose of building self-esteem in relation to other peoples/cultures as large social groups. As auto-stereotypes, these images reflect the relationships of power, pride, cultural superiority, passion, civility, and a good position in the world. However, in the novel *Material Fatigue*, the self-image is distorted because the migrants turn their eyes away from the European who is smuggling them. The turning of the eyes results from understanding the Europeans' perception of migrants, so the auto-stereotypes are portrayed in the negative categories of helplessness, shame, cultural inferiority, humiliation, animalism and a generally bad position in the world: "The European stood in front of the little man: he was standing in front of the Arab in silence. Amir didn't know where the feeling had come from, but he began to feel ashamed. He felt ashamed because of that man. The longer the European watched him, the more ashamed he became. The feeling came from somewhere behind the nerves behind his eyes and from the top of his head, descending to his stomach and thighs. It was a physical, almost palpable shame. He was ashamed of that skin, of the moustache on the man's face, of the hands with the large knots of the joints, of the ring of veins that stretched over the bones on the back of the fist, of the blood that swelled in the veins. It all annoyed him. The posture, the chin, arms, and perhaps even the circulation of blood in the hands. He saw the vein shift from side to side, around a single bone. Shame slowly began to turn to repulsion at the sight of her. He hated that man because his body was visibly showing his origins. He hated him for belonging to the same one. The little man, meanwhile, grew quite nervous: he was sagging under the gaze that would not stop eyeing him, his head bowed, he stared intently at some point on the concrete floor, clinging to tiny cracks on the grey, dirty surface, without daring to look up" (Šindelka, 2018: 14–15).

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The trauma and the distance are further emphasized throughout the novel by the narration about the boy's movement through the frozen winter landscape and the descriptions of experiencing the cold. Thereby the novel elaborates the existential theme within the framework of the so-called cryopoetics, i.e. the dominant descriptions of winter and cold in the denotative and connotative meaning. The motifs of winter and cold in the

novel depict death, loneliness, pain, despair, mental restlessness and a sense of finality and end. It should be emphasized that the whole of Europe is perceived as a cold continent, even as a camp in a metaphorical sense, due to the prevailing negative connotations about migrants: "Only they remained there. Only those who had nowhere to go. Parents dead, missing, lost somewhere along the way - or long ago, where the white lines of sports tracks disappear, like when the board is erased, where playgrounds and sports fields disappear, where sports suddenly, like so many other things, become completely absurd. A few funny names, non-existent phone numbers, stained papers with someone's addresses. And around them the entire cold, hostile continent, bordered by a double fence with razor wire" (Šindelka, 2018: 11). Šindelka's descriptions of landscapes and the cold are in line with the theme of the foreigner because there is an abundance of motifs that the main characters perceive as foreign and alien, thus reinforcing their sense of eradication; for example, "someone else's house", "someone else's black soil" (p. 58), "unknown constellations" (p. 9). In addition, social distance is projected, in spatial sense, on the migrants' failure to integrate as foreigners in Europe which is marked by hyper-industrialization, dystopia and dehumanization: "They were approaching the city. The illuminated pit of a huge construction site opened in the darkness, as if coming from hell. The noise of the machines was heard, steel structures protruded into the air, wire skeletons prepared for pouring concrete. Whistling pistons, hitting pneumatic hammers. The arms of tall cranes towering above everything. The rumble and thuds subsided. Everything was swallowed by the night, like in a dream" (pp. 166–167).

The feeling of foreignness is transferred to the "death" of certain body parts caused by the cold or awkward position of the body in the process of smuggling, whereby the migrants could be identified as goods or material. The title of the novel *Material Fatigue* should be interpreted in the same context. The migrants' loss of identity is emphasised on several occasions in the plot development; for example, the taking away of their names and surnames, the assigning of numbers, deliberate mutilation of migrants' fingertips, them selling their own organs for the purpose of survival, failure to lift the language barrier, reducing the perception of migrants to simple identity patterns and stereotypical prejudice. *Material fatigue* symbolizes the gradual "wear and tear" of the migrants' bodies due to long-term efforts in the attempt to overcome many obstacles in reaching the desired European destination, i.e. Northern Europe, which leads to the psychological and physical breakdown of the migrants. Although Amir and his brother survived the trip, other migrants from their group from the beginning of the novel suffocated in the refrigerator because they could not get out of it. It was this frightening motive that Šindelka took over, following the example of the actual event that constituted his main motive for writing the novel.

Furthermore, the image of the foreigner is emphasized by the foreignness of his own body in the unrealistically perfect European forest landscape where the migrant boy wanders: "He looked at his hand: it suddenly did not fit, he squeezed and relaxed his fist. He did not belong here; he was disturbing the perfect structure of that inhuman landscape with his whole being. He had the number on his hand: 107. He ran and began to count the trees he was passing. When he counted to one hundred and seven, he slowed down. He was walking. Everything has its rules. The rule of the landscape, the rule of the forest, the rule of the roads and the movement of materials from place to place, the rule of sustainable growth. He remembered his brother: while they were together, his brother was reading Wikipedia articles on his cell phone. So he was teaching him English and introducing him to the European continent. Afterwards the boy continued with it on his own. He counted to one hundred and seven and started running. The rule of statistics, social stratification, load-bearing capacity of

bridge structures, daily calorie intake, the rule of information transfer" (Šindelka, 2018: 29). In the role of a foreigner, the migrant is placed between two cultures: to be in between means at the same time to actually be nowhere. In addition, he is unrooted in a double sense because he is foreign both in the new culture and in his native culture. As can be seen in the example, the foreigner tries to gather and connect fragments of his life in two locations (Europe and Middle East) where he is a double foreigner. This is most evident in the example of language when his mother tongue becomes the language of memories, and the new language is still being learned: "There were many people in the reception centre who spoke his language. But it is as if the tongue was also infected. Something in him had died. He belonged to another world. So it was said in the memoirs. A strange automaton of memory" (p. 46). By forgetting their own language and learning new words of a foreign language, foreigners separate themselves from their own past and tradition and strive to be accepted in the society in which they are now seeking their place. In other words, foreigners move from the space of security to the interspace of insecurity and foreignness: "The boy watched it all as if in a dream. The world was suddenly incomprehensible before him. Impassable. A huge yarn of connections he did not understand any more. All those safe, familiar things: the sun was shining outside, he was sitting on a chair, holding a cell phone with Wikipedia page open in his hand" (p. 47). In the novel, the boy's learning of a new foreign language is shown on several occasions by mechanically enumerating terms and their definitions like in a glossary of terms. The listing of terms and their linking without interaction with members of the in-group proves the failed attempt at assimilation, i.e. the impossibility of breaking through the circle of the house of essence (language) of the host. Hereby the novel once again confirms the boy's image as a foreigner in relation to others, but also in relation to himself.

Conclusions

Marek Šindelka's novel *Material Fatigue* is representative of a corpus of texts on the migrant crisis and migrant experiences, all the more because it is based on an actual event. The novel is a tale about refugees from the war-ravaged and devastated countries of Asia and Africa who are trying to reach Northern Europe in search of a better life.

The foreigner phenomenon requires multidisciplinary knowledge without which it is not possible to encompass this extremely complex concept. Thus, scholarly discussions include debates on the status of the foreigner figure in social or cultural anthropology, sociology, cultural studies and semiotics, and they have been engaged in the discussion on Šindelka's novel, mostly for the purpose of interpretation. The paper sets the theoretical framework according to the definition of the foreigner phenomenon given in the book *Foreigner and Society: Phenomenology of a Foreigner and Xenophobia* (2013) by Anđelko Milardović. An overview of the meaning of the word foreigner in the different areas listed above has been presented in accordance with Milardović's research. Another starting point for the discussion of the foreigner phenomenon is the indispensable book by Gordon Allport *Nature of Prejudice* (1954), which describes the cycle of prejudice applicable to the construction of the social and psychological image of a foreigner in Šindelka's novel *Material Fatigue*. In his work, Allport formed a scale of prejudiced actions consisting of five components: antilocution, avoidance, discrimination, physical assault, and eradication of the foreigner.

Throughout the history of different civilizations, as well as in the contemporary world, as evidenced by Šindelka's novel, the attitude towards foreigners is based on minimal integration, exclusion, hostility, rational and irrational fear. Therefore, different images of

fear have been (re)constructed in this paper, in order to arrive at phobia as an irrational form of fear, i.e. xenophobia as one of the social phobias.

The novel constantly emphasizes the artificiality and dehumanization of people and the space through which the migrants are moving, illustrating the reshaping of the social environment and the consequences of modern accelerated capitalism and production on a global scale. This results in the subjectification of objects and the objectification of subjects, as well as the transformation of the living and the dead world into "quasi-objects" that are neither completely alive nor completely dead because they have been increasingly treated as "quasi-subjects".

In addition, the paper considers the manipulation of media content based on certain mental images. It means stereotyping of foreigners with clichéd images that refer to individual foreign social and cultural identities. It should be emphasized that the detection of stereotypes and the description of the process of stereotyping are not derived from the secondary reading of the novel but they derive from its primary thematic layer which is directly related to the issue of perception of foreigners. It is an interesting fact that Šindelka portrayed Europeans as fake humanitarians and fake heroes who use the misfortune of migrants for their own benefit or entertainment.

It is also necessary to highlight the social and psychological insights into the discourse on foreigners and xenophobia based on the social and psychological image of foreigners and fear. It has been observed that, due to ethnocentrism, i.e. the favouring of one's own group, social interactions between the in- and the out-group (foreigners) result in hostility and aggression. It should be emphasized that there is no mechanism for eliminating conflicts and fears in the novel *Material Fatigue*; it does not describe the approximation of one's own and the out-group (foreigners) nor does it offer a solution for maintaining social peace by means of tolerance. In this regard, it should be concluded that Šindelka's image of a foreigner in the novel is emphatically one-sided. Thereby, Šindelka wanted to indicate the "anti-globalization actions in the form of right-wing radical parties and movements using markers such as anti-immigration, opposition to multiculturalism, xenophobia and Islamophobia" (Milardović, 2013: 214).

The paper describes all the observed hetero-stereotypes, i.e. the images that the Europeans create about foreign migrants, but also the appearance of negative auto-stereotypes – the migrants' perception of themselves. In doing so, the knowledge of the mirror theory can be applied in general, based on which each of those who look at the Other through these Others see a better or worse picture of themselves because it is actually their alter ego.

Furthermore, in the reinforcement of the image of a foreigner, the determinants of the so-called crypoetics appear as leitmotifs in the novel, that is, the dominant descriptions of winter and cold in the literal and figurative sense. The descriptions of the winter landscapes through which the boy moves as a migrant and the cold he is constantly feeling are in line with the theme of the foreigner and the notion of foreignness that the migrants feel towards Europeans, and the whole of Europe is metaphorically perceived as a cold continent and a camp, which further intensifies the feeling of uprootedness of the foreigner characters.

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