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Migration as Multiple Pathways. Narrative Interviews with Polish Migrants in Belfast, Northern Ireland

Abstract

This article explores the complexities of motivations and the multiplicity of trajectories amongst individual migrants. By analysing the migratory narratives of three Polish migrants in Belfast, Northern Ireland it will display the intricacies of the impact their biographical courses from before migration have on the experiences and perception of settlement in the destination context. The juxtaposition of the stories of the three migrants selected for this study will serve to demonstrate the distinct formation of a sense of belonging, relation to the homeland and the development of interpersonal relations throughout migratory process.

Key words: narrative interview, Northern Ireland, migration decision-making, chain migration, post-accession migration

Polish Migrants in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland became a relatively new destination for Polish migration after the 1st of May 2004, when Poland along with nine other countries joined the European Union and when Polish nationals were granted the right to live and work in the UK without visa restrictions. Out of a few hundred Polish nationals living in Northern Ireland before May 2004 (Bell et al. 2004, p. 118) it is possible to distinguish three distinct groups: (1) Polish navy personnel who during the Second World War were based in Derry/Londonderry, and who later settled around the north of Ireland; (2) a group of Polish women who seized the opportunity of the thaw of 1956¹ to leave Poland and marry Northern Irish men; (3) migrants whose arrival in Northern Ireland was based on various individual motivations. Most of the pre-accession Polish migrants settled all around Northern Ireland and integrated with the local society becoming almost invisible as a national group. This changed rapidly after Polish accession to the European Union and Polish soon became the

¹ In February 1956, the year of Bolesław Bierut's death (Stalin's most trusted confidant in Poland) and several years after the death of Josef Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev delivered a speech criticising the personality cult of Stalin and disclosed information about the crimes of the Stalinist era. Many refer to the period after this event as 'Gomułka's thaw', since it gave some rise to slight improvements in civil liberties along with minor reductions in migration restrictions.

largest ethnic minority group in Northern Ireland (Svašek 2009, p. 129). According to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, the number of allocations of National Insurance Numbers (NINo)² (which every person, whether from the UK or outside it, must have in order to work) rose from 752 in 2004/2005 to 8900 in 2006/2007 (NISRA 2010). Such a sudden influx of a large number of migrants from one country not only had an impact on the receiving society, but it also shaped the specific experience of the migrants themselves. They all appeared in the same place in a very short period of time without having an established Polish community or ethnic organisations in place. In the first few years they relied on informal networks, Internet forums and their own experience in order to gain basic information about work and life in Northern Ireland, until different associations, publications and initiatives started to emerge.

In the case of Polish migrants in Northern Ireland, although there were some single examples of organizing Polish gatherings before 2004, the extensive 'migration industry' (Cohen 2008, p. 145) and ethnic-driven agents of civil society surfaced after Poland joined the European Union. The increased visibility of the new migrants along with the prompt appearance of the structures 'representing' their interests in Northern Ireland drew attention of public debates. These revolved around several established and frequently reproduced designations of Polish migrants which led to the creation of an impression that they generated a homogeneous community. The first tendency was to portray Poles in Northern Ireland as 'economic migrants' (see for example McVeigh, McAfee 2009) in order to distinguish them from 'political migrants' and post-second-world-war settlers in the UK, as well as 'migrant workers' (Bell et al. 2004, p. 10–11; MacDonald, Cholewiński 2007), an expression often used by policy makers and media almost as a reassurance to the local society that Polish migrants earn their living through work and are not a parasite on the UK taxpayer. The second path of distinction presented Polish migrants as predominantly Catholic (see for example BBC News Northern Ireland 2009; Kempny 2010) and taken the destination context, accordingly, expected they would by some means position themselves in the existing ethno-sectarian division of Belfast (Shirlow, Murtagh 2006, p. 34). However, for many Polish migrants not concerned with the complex mapping practises and the city's spatial division into safe and unsafe zones (Lysaght 2005, p. 140 cited in Svašek 2009, p. 130), the local conflict did not appear to have much impact on their decisions about work and accommodation. As Polish migrants began to settle in Belfast, it transpired that they often moved in to mainly Loyalist (Protestant working-class) areas (Kempny 2010, p. 35) since these were generally cheaper and located more centrally in relation to main public transport routes, work places, and most of the bars and restaurants. For residents used to keeping their neighbourhoods closed to outsiders (McKay 2005), a sudden influx of new migrants meant an unsolicited intrusion and led to anti-foreigner sentiments (Svašek 2009, p. 130). Although hostility and occasional attacks on houses inhabited by newcomers were aimed at any strangers irrespective of their ethnic, religious or cultural

² It is a number applicable to anyone who is employed in the UK and is used to keep the track of people's national insurance contributions and benefits they might be entitled.

identities, given the proportion of Polish migrants being targeted by such attacks, it led some commentators to an oversimplified conclusion that these had a sectarian grounding.

Narratives as the Source of Everyday Experiences

In this article I am going to present three migration stories narrated by Polish post-accession migrants to Northern Ireland, which have been collected through biographical narrative interviews conducted between 2009 and 2010 as a part of my doctoral research at Queen's University, Belfast. For the purpose of this article I will concentrate mainly on the participants' reflections about the initial stages of their migration and on the first instances of their negotiation of belonging. Biographical interviews urge narratives rich in everyday experiences of the participants allowing for a greater attentiveness to their own interpretations of these passages. Additionally, being founded on the principles of grounded theory (Glaser, Strauss 1967) the method withdraws from the formerly established hypotheses and therefore allows for a more attentive analysis of the narratives, without taking any assumptions for granted. The stories of migration provided by the Poles in Belfast display a complexity of reasons for leaving Poland, for choosing Northern Ireland and for deciding to stay there for longer than initially anticipated. They provide comprehensive insights not only to the processes of moving and settlement, but also into the development of the sense of belonging and establishing of interpersonal relations.

In order to display different experiences of entering into the new social milieu, the participants selected for this analysis represent distinct cases in terms of some components of cultural capital – meaning occupational groups and fluency in English prior to migrating to Northern Ireland – and the social capital displayed as the level of dependency on chain migration at the time of their arrival. The three interviewees were: Ola, an architect, who was proficient in English and came to Northern Ireland with her boyfriend at the time, to work in their profession, yet without having any pre-arranged contacts to draw upon; Kuba, an owner of a Polish business, who did not speak English and also did not know anyone in Belfast prior to his arrival, yet, came in a group of friends with whom he lived and worked for the first months of his stay; and Maciek, a foreman, whose level of English was intermediate and who came to Belfast joining an already-established 'personal community' (Pahl, Spencer 2004) of Polish migrants. These differences between the interviewees are perceived as having a salient effect on the formation of their relations in the new social milieu as well as on their negotiation of belonging throughout different stages of migration. Yet, as it is going to be argued in this article, the biographical course and migrants' circumstances from before arriving in the country of destination should also not be overlooked in the analysis of their experiences of migration. Consequently, an analysis of migrants' life stories reveals complex processes and multiple trajectories that overlap with the processes of moving and settling in the new country of residence.

Post-enlargement migration is associated with the free movement and the expansion of travel and communication technologies facilitating the maintenance of transnational relations and unrestricted border crossing. Yet, as it emerges, rather than enjoying the benefits of entering the transnational social field, some migrants feel displaced and perplexed by the perception of multiple affiliations brought about by attempts to merge their lives between 'here' and 'there'. The use of biographical narrative interviews in this study proved exemplary in prompting the stories revealing migration as a challenge to the sense of belonging of the individuals involved. Accordingly, migrants seem to be caught in the state of in-betweenness (Bhabha 1994, p. 4) by not feeling at home in the new place of residence yet losing the grasp of the original homeland; the feeling of disjuncture (Amit 2002) from friends and relatives in the place of origin; and extensive emotional negotiation (Svašek 2009, p. 132) partly associated with the fact that most of migrants do not have formulated plans for the future in terms of staying or returning to their homeland (for similar findings see: Garapich 2009, p. 50; Moriarty et al. 2010; Ignatowicz 2011, p. 44). In this, the contemporary Polish migrant becomes similar to Alfred Schütz's 'homecomer', who comes back after the war to find his homeland showing 'an unaccustomed face' (1945, p. 369) making him feel like a 'stranger amongst strangers' (ibid.). Although migrants are able to travel regularly between the two settings and can be in touch with friends and relatives on daily basis due to cheap phone calls and Internet communication, it seems that in many cases the lack of ongoing physical contact in itself can provide a challenge to the sense of continuity of belonging to homeland.

It is a commonly held thought that migration affects the lives of all people involved: those who decide to leave their country of origin, those who stay (see for example Galasińska 2010) as well as the local communities in the new destination place. Migrants' biographical courses from before migration, their previous experiences, abilities and established relationships all have a vital impact on their lives in the new social milieu as well as on building their cross-border relations with those who stayed in Poland. For some, the move to a new country is a natural course of action following previous migration experiences. This was the case in the stories of two out of three participants chosen for this analysis.

Ola's Example

Ola, an architect from a small city in southern Poland, was thirty-one years old at the time of the interview and had been living in Belfast for four and a half years. She was very open in sharing her experiences and throughout the whole interview it was clear that she previously reflected on her migration trajectory. During her architecture studies at a Polish university she decided to take part in a student exchange programme in Germany. After she came back from Germany, she stayed for several months in Poland and then she found a job as a cabin crew with an airline in England. After half a year in this role, she found a job in architecture in Belfast and decided to move there. Ola described her move to the UK as almost an escape from Poland, where after coming back from Germany she could not find a place for herself.

The homecoming was particularly difficult for Ola, as she finished her studies half a year after her peers in Poland and at the point of her return most of them were already settled into their new jobs or postgraduate studies. The fact of not being able to come back to the course of things as she had left them before leaving for Germany made her feel isolated. Ola's experience of returning to Poland recalls to some extent Schütz's 'homecomer' (1945, p. 369) as it also created a feeling of non-belonging. Although she left Poland for a relatively short period of time and she still had her family there, she felt her life was placed on a side-track and she was not able to fit into the life in Poland. This is how Ola describes her first experiences of migration and homecoming:

This had started far, far earlier, ehm... than it may seem. I studied... I lived in Bielsko-Biała and I studied in Gliwice and on the third year of studies I went on... to Germany, on a half-year-long stipend... which lasted for two years [laughing]. This is where I met Martin [Ola's husband]. But after those two years I finished my studies, I got my diploma... and I was in suspension because I didn't know... I mean... no, maybe it's not that I didn't know what to do with myself; I knew that I wanted to work, but in Poland they weren't looking for architects so much yet and in Germany... unfortunately I needed a permission to work so it wasn't an option. The problem was that after those two years, after coming back to Poland, after the first... all my friends from the studies have finished the studies half a year before me because I extended my studies because I had an internship in Germany. So it was like I didn't have close friends, and also anybody who met me was saying 'so you will go back to Germany' because I was there for so long and for them it was absolutely natural that I wasn't going to come back. And I felt... really excluded, I mean I didn't feel like at home, even though I was at home. I started looking for a job, but I was looking more abroad than in Poland. But it also wasn't going smoothly; I couldn't find anything in architecture ehm... mhm... so it was more or less like that. Anyway, I presume that I would have found a job in Poland far easier but inside me I felt that I didn't want to stay, because I felt so excluded there and so on. Anyway, I went for an interview to be a stewardess... and I got in. [Ola, female, 31]

In the above passage, Ola repeatedly alludes to her feeling of isolation and being 'in suspension' at that point of her life. It could be argued that the moment of starting a career after finishing studies is in itself a very difficult period. For many it constitutes the first time of breaking the long continuity of belonging to a scheduled, sequential path of educational institutions³. In Ola's case it additionally coincided with the return from a two-year-long absence from Poland intensifying the feeling of uprooting, non-belonging and disjuncture in relations to the immediate environment. Even before she came back to Poland, she had been already considering alternative options of prolonging her stay in Germany. Nevertheless, the thorough negotiation of her spatial and emotional affiliation with Poland transpired at the moment of her return to the homeland. This was the stage when she realised that she did not feel

³ At the time when Ola was studying in Poland it was not a usual practice to take a year out of one's studies to travel or work in another place; due to busy degree schedules it was difficult to maintain any full-time internships or employment. Although student exchange programmes such as Erasmus were very popular, most students came back from them to join their peers and continue their courses in homeland.

'at home' in Poland, moreover, she felt excluded and isolated mainly from relations with her friends who moved on to embark on their career-paths.

Ola was additionally perplexed by the reception she was given by her friends and relatives in Poland, who perceived her as a temporary visitor; forecasting that she was going to go back to Germany. Therefore, even by the immediate social environment she had already been classified as someone belonging elsewhere, which further reinforced her drive to continue migration. Accordingly, when planning her future professional career, Ola directed her attention mainly to employment offers outside of Poland. The significant assumption of others that she would not settle in Poland might have been influenced by Ola's own doubts that she has communicated during her stay in Germany, especially since (as it has been mentioned before) she prolonged her stay there from half a year to two years.

Ola came to Belfast after finding a job in her profession through a Polish newspaper. The fact that she did not have any ties to draw upon before her arrival to Belfast meant that at the beginning of her stay she relied strongly on her work colleagues for socialising. Yet, she soon felt disillusioned about making new friends in Belfast:

But I must say that when we look at our relationships here, mhhmmm... it is by far easier to develop and maintain contacts with foreigners or just with people who have not been born in Belfast, who live here, who migrated here. And it doesn't matter if these people are from Poland, from Germany or Austria, or from anywhere, from Italy; this is completely... completely... They are open differently, that's it! Let's say that it even from our neighbours, but it's maybe different because they are older, but even our colleagues from work. Ehm... they are very friendly, but they keep the distance. And hmmm... it's taking us a lot of time to break through this barrier, to... to make them... I'm not saying they are not nice; they are! Everything is nice but no-one wants to meet you after work, everyone has their own friends for years, from childhood, studies... and at this point in their lives they are not looking for new friends. I know other migrants get friendly with local people but I think in our work they don't think about us as migrants. They think... since we have professional jobs, they don't need to make extra effort to make friends with us. We're not vulnerable in their eyes. [Ola, female, 31]

The above passage provides an interesting insight into the issue of self-perception of highly-skilled migrants. It has been commonly stated that many professionals do not see themselves as 'migrants' (Weiss 2005, p. 707; Favell 2008, p. 101), as it implies also the negative connotations of the word with which they do not want to be associated. Yet, regarding Ola, this external ascription of a 'highly-skilled free mover'⁴ seemed to work against her. She felt once more misplaced by the people around her; she was classified to a category that she did not belong to, which made it even more difficult for her and her husband to establish a satisfactory level of 'personal community' (Pahl, Spencer 2004) in Northern Ireland. Ola's case illustrates a significant puzzlement with establishing one's sense of affiliation within several locations, especially in terms of interpersonal relations. It also indicates the

⁴ A term used by some of highly-skilled migrants interviewed by Adrian Favell (2008).

importance of externally imposed categorisations on migrants' experiences either during settlement or homecoming. The fact that Ola had mainly migrant friends in Belfast made her apprehend the temporariness of her life there; she felt that her social life was running in a parallel world to that of the local society. One of the reasons for her deep reflectiveness in terms of the sense of belonging and her future plans might have been the fact that she was pregnant at the time of the interview. Given her own experiences, Ola was conscientious about the possible sense of belonging that her child would develop having Polish and German parents and living in Northern Ireland.

In her storytelling, Ola did not mention the conflict in Northern Ireland, as it had not occurred as a significant issue in her everyday life there. Even when she referred to a story about a dispute between her next-door neighbours who she later mentioned were Catholics, with her Protestant neighbour living below her flat, she did not put their religion in the context of this story. She only concluded that it took a Polish girl and her German husband to resolve a long-lasting friction between the two families.

Kuba's Example

Kuba, a thirty-three-year-old hairdresser from a small town in central Poland came to Belfast directly from Poland six years prior to the interview. He had never planned to migrate, but his friends convinced him to join them. They planned to go to Belfast for several months. They chose Northern Ireland after careful consideration of different factors, including work prospects and the novelty of the place as migration destination, meaning that they were not expecting many other Polish migrants to have been there. Kuba's narrative was quite disarrayed, he was distracted which resulted in his story being cut into separate passages. He also moved frequently from the main storyline to general commentaries about Polish people in Northern Ireland, additionally making the narrative parts strongly entangled with argumentative statements. His business attracted many Polish customers and it spontaneously became a place where local gossip was exchanged. Kuba therefore, at different stages of the interview, was performing the role of an observer of Polish life in Belfast – an expert interviewer – and at others he was back to narrating his own biographical course. At this point, let us turn to his initial narrative about his migration:

I mean, you know, obviously it was the whole opening of the borders and you know... I... it was my mates who pushed me more than anything, to go somewhere. I simply, you know, I had, I had a job in Poland, I had my own flat because my parents are, they are... simply... they are dead and so this circle of people I have in Poland is a little bit smaller because of... the absence of my parents. So, you know, I simply had a job and a flat and I simply wanted to change something, this is what I was after. My granny was really against it because she thought that having a flat and a job in Poland that it is the best that can happen to you. It was my mates who really convinced me, right? I wanted to go and see, only to come here for two or three months. And it's been six years now. So I simply wanted to come and earn a couple of pennies, to see something different and go back to

Poland, right? My friend who came here with us, he was an English teacher and he was really familiar with things here. The rest of the guys were in a business school and they did market research just for fun and decided that we needed to go to Belfast. There was a slight worry about the conflict but we thought since we were coming from outside, we were not going to be involved. And that was a perfect choice. And then, with time, those weeks passed, we got our first payslips, we spent them... you know, my dream was to earn and go back to Poland, right? It was all sorted out. I said 'in case anything happens, I get my ticket back to Poland and nothing ever happened'. But it all started working out from the beginning and we stayed, you know? I realised I had no-one to go back to. It's good here, I sat here and I just stayed here. And I had no reason to go back to Poland, right? [Kuba, male, 33]

Using the term 'opening of borders' was fairly common also amongst other interviewees, normally used to indicate the arising opportunities and, at least, widening of choices of places as migration destinations. The unrestricted travel and work in other countries within the European Union⁵ – especially amongst younger migrants – has been often mentioned as the major constituent in making a decision to migrate. This freedom and availability of choices conveyed the readiness to continue their move at any stage in the future (see also Favell 2008, p. 103). It is often associated with an assumption that after the first move, it is easy to move again. Yet, as it transpires from the interviews conducted during this study, migrants put so much biographical work in fitting in and establishing daily routines for themselves and their families in the new milieu, that although they keep their future options open, they do not make tangible plans for leaving Northern Ireland. Perhaps paradoxically, after experiencing how difficult it is to maintain the sense of belonging and relations in the two contexts, some migrants might be less likely to make a move again.

Although Kuba came to Belfast to save some money, like many other interviewees he did not consider himself an 'economic migrant'. During the interview he repeatedly mentioned the fact that he had a job and a flat in Poland, meaning that he did not 'have to' leave in search of financial gratification. For many young people in Poland, having employment and owning a flat might be perceived as the quintessence of a perfect start in life. Therefore, for Kuba, his migration to Northern Ireland was the result of the determined persuasion by his friends who organised the trip as a three-month-long adventure and not because of economic need. Kuba's journey to Belfast was his first time abroad and owing to the fact that he did not speak English, for some time he was highly dependent on his companions (and later, on his co-workers). They lived together, found jobs in the same companies and socialised together; for the first while Kuba and his friends were inseparable. After a while, however, when they came to a decision who was going to stay in Belfast and who was to return to Poland, their paths naturally branched off. At that time Kuba met his girlfriend, he learned English and soon after he decided to set up his own hairdressing salon.

Apart from his grandmother, Kuba did not have any family left in Poland. Additionally, four of his best friends from Poland came to Belfast with him. After

⁵ At the time of Kuba's migration, in 2004 it was only the UK, Sweden and the Republic of Ireland.

several months of his stay in Belfast, he had already established a circle of friends and the balance of belonging to the two places suddenly shifted. Having a stable job and a flat in Poland soon became insufficient to pull him towards returning to homeland. It was the dynamics of his relations that became an important factor in making him stay in Northern Ireland. It was clear throughout the interview that for Kuba the sense of affiliation was strongly grounded in interpersonal relations rather than on a physical space or a national belonging.

Kuba created a large circle of local friends mainly due to the fact that he was working through a temping agency and changed his work many times before setting up his own business. As he explained later in the interview, he and his friends were looked after very well by their landlord and colleagues at work. He reflected on it as the feeling of pity for poor Polish boys but they felt that this reception was genuine and it soon developed into long lasting relations. This complies with Ola's story as a highly-skilled migrant who was not perceived as requiring company or the help of local people as much as the Polish men working in warehouses. Paradoxically, Kuba's low level of English at the time when he arrived in Belfast had an additional impact on relations with the local workers, as they put in a lot of effort to teach him the language.

Maciek's Example

Maciek, a twenty-seven-year-old foreman came to Belfast four years prior to the interview, after living in the Netherlands and on Sark, one of the Channel Islands. For Maciek, the interview proved to be an opportunity to arrange his story of migration in chronological order. He was very involved in his storytelling and provided lengthy narratives about his life and migration. Maciek did not maintain almost any transnational communication with non-migrants in Poland. He spoke to his parents only on special occasions, and he did not stay in touch with his friends. Yet, it was not caused by any break in his relations with home. In discussing this issue, Maciek explained that he has never been able to retain any non-physical contacts and talking on the phone to someone who did not know the context of his life in Northern Ireland had been a burden. Instead, he travelled to Poland several times per year to meet everyone. As soon as he arrived in Poland, he was able to chat with his relatives and friends like if he had never left.

This is the passage referring to the beginning of Maciek's migration:

Well... this started since I finished school in 2004. After I passed maturity exam I decided to leave [laughing] somehow I never considered Poland, never had any plans with Poland, with work in Poland. I decided to go to the Netherlands because my friend's cousin was there. I took some money; I think I borrowed it from my parents [laughing]. [narrative about his stay in the Netherlands and on Sark] (...) so I came back from Sark in December 2005 and on the 26th of January I was ready to go to Belfast. I sort of looked for a job but after secondary school... I think it's not enough in Poland to get any job without studies. I met people who say MA is not even enough nowadays. So in January I was ready to go. Bogna, the girl I used to work with on Sark, had a sister in Belfast, so I decided to try it. We came together to Belfast in January 2006 and as it turned out, Bogna's sister and her

husband did not welcome me like I thought they would. I imagined that we would both stay with them for a while until we got jobs and settled and then we would move on. But as it turned out, Bogna stayed with her sister and I had to go. As soon as we arrived in Belfast they sent me to live with... strangers in a completely different part of Belfast, in not the nicest area⁶. There was an older man, about 50, he was called Mietek, and there were other guys living with him. Now I can say I was really, really lucky that I met them. Soon we cracked a couple of bottles open – I brought some ice-breakers from Poland for Bogna's family [laughing] – and we were like a family ever since. [Maciek, male, 27]

Very soon after finishing his education Maciek decided he was going to migrate, since he was convinced that without a degree he was excluded from the Polish labour market. Nonetheless, he has not tested his assumption in practice as he did not apply for many jobs in Poland. As Maciek mentioned later on in the interview, 'everyone was going at the time' meaning that migration was high on a list of cognitively available-alternatives after leaving school.

Maciek provides an interesting example of the chain migration perspective. Throughout his migration trajectory he has been highly dependent on social networks, even when his contacts were very loose. His strategy was to find someone who would provide the minimum foothold in the new place. He first went to the Netherlands where a cousin of his high-school friend was working, a 'pięta woda po kisielu'⁷ – as Maciek called him. Knowing of this man⁸ was for Maciek a sufficient impulse to choose this destination even though he did not have any pre-arranged work or accommodation. When he arrived he had to live in a tent in very poor conditions and had to wait for several weeks to get some part-time work on a building site nearby. Such an attitude adheres to Anne White's observation that many migrants go where their networks take them (2011, p. 20). For Maciek the sole fact of 'knowing someone there' was a sufficient prerequisite to move to the place, no matter if the contact was going to be actively helping in the destination context. His later migration to Sark was based on a similar degree of acquaintance. This time, Maciek joined a friend of his cousin's wife who had decided to work there for the summer.

After coming to Belfast, as Maciek indicated in the above passage, he immediately found common ground with the men he was put into an apartment with. His house mates were a part of an extended family-and-friend network in Belfast and Maciek quickly became a part of it, which determined the development of his circle of friends in Belfast. Accordingly, at the time of the interview, apart from his flat mates, Maciek had many Polish and local friends whom he had met through work.

Even though Maciek mentioned that he moved into a Loyalist area in North Belfast, in his storytelling he also did not mention anything about the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland. Moreover, the interview was conducted after several attacks had happened on Polish families in another part of the city, yet, he did not allude to it either.

⁶ Maciek lived in a rough Loyalist (Protestant working-class) area.

⁷ A saying in Polish indicating a very distant relative or a friend.

⁸ Maciek had not even met him before.

Conclusions

This article was designed to bring attention to individual stories of migration with a particular focus brought to the participants' current attitude and reflection towards the narrated occurrences. Migrants' narratives relating to arrival and settling in Northern Ireland contained complex argumentation about the reasons for migration originating in multiple trajectories. These had their groundings in the biographical courses of the individuals and not in the sole perspective of better financial gratification. Similarly, the religious affiliation of migrants has not been mentioned in the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The narratives presented in this article, especially the case of Ola, display the importance of not only physical locality in positioning one's sense of belonging, but also the impact of the external ascription of a particular label on a person's belonging.

The feeling of being caught between 'here' and 'there' was common to all three interviewees, even though it was articulated to a different degree. Additionally, migrants' determination and ability to live in both places also might vary across the life cycle (see Amit, Dyck 2006, p. 5). For Ola, considerations on her baby's sense of identity brought deep reflection on her own biographical path to understanding where she belonged. Maciek, on the other hand, indicated an awareness that his migration plans could soon be changed by the illness of his ageing parents. Although he was strongly set up on leaving Poland as soon as he finished school, he is now prepared to move back to the homeland to care for his parents.

Even though the biographical narrative interviews were designed to collect specifically the stories of migration, most of the participants of this study spontaneously moved far back into the past in order to portray the dynamics of the occurrences in their sequential order. This helped in unravelling many decision-making processes throughout migration, as well as allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the development of migrants' interpersonal relations. The thorough consideration of the above cases displays the complexity of the effect of cultural capital on individuals in their everyday migration experiences and some of its unexpected impact on building of interpersonal relations in the country of destination.

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Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule opisuję skomplikowane motywacje i różnorodność życiowych trajektorii indywidualnych migrantów. Analizując narracje migracyjne trzech polskich migrantów mieszkających w Belfaście (Irlandia Północna) przedstawiam zawiłości związane z przebiegiem ich biografii przed migracją oraz analizuję wpływ tych doświadczeń na przeżycia i stosunek do osiedlenia się w kraju docelowym. Zestawienie historii trzech migrantów wybranych na potrzeby niniejszego studium posłużyło do przedstawienia różnych koncepcji poczucia przynależności, stosunku migrantów do kraju pochodzenia i rozwoju relacji interpersonalnych w procesie migracji.