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## **Making Sense of Their Own Mobile Identities in Internally Borderless Europe: Europeans, Poles, ‘Bread’ Migrants, Catholics...**

### **Abstract**

EU enlargement and the intra-European labour mobility which followed it, have been conceptualized within two competing discourses. The first one reflects the view of the EU Commission: it has hailed post-accession mobility as a fulfilment of the idea of a borderless Europe. In this benign interpretation, mobile Central and Eastern Europeans have been viewed as the new citizens of Europe empowered by a newly acquired freedom of movement. The alternative discourse could be found in critical sociology and geography. It argues that that post-enlargement mobility has many parallels with previous migration waves from Central and Eastern Europe (McDowell 2009). Far from being recognized as equal citizens, Central and Eastern Europeans have been treated as ‘Eastern’ others, for example, at the level of the Western European mass media (Light, Young 2009). While diverging in their evaluations – the inclusion versus continuous exclusion of Central and Eastern Europeans, both discourses are concerned with what is known in social theory as structures. In contrast, this article looks at the structural constructions (the East-West boundaries versus open borders) from the perspective of the life experiences of migrants themselves. Putting the agency of Central and Eastern Europeans firmly at the centre of the analysis, the article uses original qualitative data to analyze how Central and Eastern European migrants in the UK articulate their cultural identities and reflect on shifting boundaries of Europe.

**Key words:** Central and Eastern Europe, EU enlargement, migration, orientalism

### **Introducing the Debate**

While debating European integration and economic migration from Central and Eastern European countries to the old EU member states such as Britain, social scientists should not unreflectively bypass the historical background of pre-existing socio-cultural East-West divisions. As cultural and social historians such as Todorova (1997) and Wolff (2004) have argued, Central and Eastern Europe has been subjected to the Western gaze founded on a presumed superiority and subordination. In this way, one might argue that the term Orientalism initially introduced by Edward Said to capture Western fantasies of the Arab world is applicable to the Western European view of Central and Eastern Europe and its people. The adjective ‘Eastern’ (the common discourse is about Eastern rather than Central and Eastern Europe) carries pejorative socio-historic connotations and suggests that Central and Eastern

Europeans are not fully European. It is a part of tradition to conceive Central and Eastern European countries such as Poland as not an integral part of Europe, but as a borderland between civilization and the Asian Orient (Zamoyski 2009). Reflecting on a traditional Western imagining of 'Eastern' Europe and its people, Hagen (2003) suggests that 'the West became advanced and modern, while the East remained primitive and pre-modern. By the end of the Enlightenment, the idea of the West had become to represent progress, liberty, civilization, and Europe itself, while the East was identified with backwardness, despotism, barbarity, Asia, and the Orient' (Hagen 2003, p. 492).

The delineation of the political and cultural border between the East and West of Europe has continued to shape social perceptions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and onwards. It is indicative that debates over Poland's belonging to Europe continue to this day: while some argue that Poland is an 'Eastern' European country which will never be equal to its Western European co-members in the EU (Jedlicki 2005), others highlight the changing discourse in which Poland is described as a Northern European country akin to Sweden and, thus, finally freed from 'Eastern' backwardness (Applebaum 2011). On the other hand, some authors (Kaneff 2009) show scepticism over the emphasis on such cultural constructions, instead stressing new social inequalities brought by neo-liberal economic policies in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe.

In terms of recent history, the estrangement of the Cold War had been the most clear political manifestation of the division. However, the restrictions of the labour mobility rights of Central and Eastern Europeans in the post-1989 era (1989–2004) can be seen not only as a measure to maintain national sovereignty over borders but as a clear policy aimed to keep the movements of the 'Eastern' masses strictly in check. This is particularly striking when compared to the ease with which Western managers, professionals and employers were able to access the labour markets in post-communist states in the 1990s (Rudolph, Hillmann 1998). In this respect, EU integration, particularly the enlargement of the EU in 2004, presented an attempt to reconfigure the map of Europe (the EU being the latest incarnation of civilized and advanced Europe) by moving its eastwards and putting an end to the social construction and political division that went back to the age of the Enlightenment. The freedom of movement not only would give new employment rights to mobile Central and Eastern European workers but by opening borders it would transcend the political and cultural boundaries between the East and West of Europe.

Such benign expectations have been challenged on many grounds: it has been argued that Central and Eastern European countries played the role of junior partners to the old member states during the accession process (Jileva 2002). Critics can also point to the restriction of labour market access by the majority of the old EU member states for the new citizens (until 2011). Finally, the Orientalist discourses of the Western European (and British) mass media (Light, Young 2009) leave no doubts that the Western-Eastern boundary is still present in the Western European public sphere. The image of the oriental otherness of Central and Eastern Europeans and negative stereotyping (e.g. benefit tourists and criminals) which goes with it, are being constantly reinforced by the inflammatory language of the right-wing mass

media (Light, Young 2009). Central and Eastern European professionals working in Western Europe are seen as less-skilled and not knowledgeable enough because of their allegedly inferior 'Eastern' European training (Van Riemsdijk 2010). This narrative could be seen as a direct continuation of exclusionary discourse which goes back to the ethno-religious demonization of Ashkenazi Jews who started to arrive from Central and Eastern Europe to the West in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Julius 2010). Interestingly, the charge of anti-Semitism was used to campaign against Polish migration just after the WWII – the generalising portrayal of Central and Eastern Europeans as anti-Semitic and intolerant is yet another example of Western orientalist projections onto 'Eastern' Europe (Sword et al. 1989). Moreover, the employment experiences of many Central and Eastern Europeans in the old EU member states (even those who opened up labour markets, such as the UK in 2004) are precarious and the discourse of good work ethic (a peculiar upside down reversal of Oriental idleness) of Central and Eastern European workers has often obscured the realities of work intensification and precarious working conditions (MacKenzie, Forde 2009). The new EU citizens are seen as good workers, as long as they are prepared to help to sustain the low-wage sectors of the economy of the old EU member states such as Britain. Looking historically, the notion of a good 'Eastern' worker is not contradictory at all: Western European states resorted to the use of 'Oriental', non-Western labourers when faced with labour shortages in unattractive jobs and working class militancy among the Western proletariat. But unlike in the colonial past, at present it is mobile Central and Eastern European workers who are re-cast as the new Oriental migrants. Ironically, their whiteness is being treated as an advantageous 'soft' skill crucial to emotional labour and body work, particularly in the service sector (McDowell 2009).

The analysis above have highlighted the historical and contemporary contexts which structure Central and Eastern European mobility within the enlarged EU in general and between Britain and Poland specifically. However, notwithstanding the importance of restating the existence of structural constructs and divisions, it would be important not to overlook the agency of individual Central and Eastern Europeans. A number of questions could be raised if the notion of agency was brought in the context of new European migration. How do mobile Central and Eastern Europeans respond and interact with the pre-existent constructs? Moreover, how do they articulate themselves and describe their experiences of migration between the East and West of Europe? The proposed framework not only considers the phenomenon of mobility within Europe in a historical context, but, even more importantly, tries to understand how Central and Eastern Europeans make sense of their mobility and how they express their social and cultural identities vis-à-vis the processes of EU enlargement.

Guided by these considerations, the discussion of these subjects will be structured as follows: firstly, I will present attitudes of Central and Eastern Europeans towards transnational mobility within the EU. Secondly, I will examine the role played by the structures, such as the entrenched East-West division, in shaping individual perceptions of Central and Eastern European migrants. Thirdly, I will explore how the entrenched East-West divisions are complimented by the new

and the cultural construction of 'Eastern' Europe. Moreover, its aim is not to compare different groups of Central and Eastern Europeans in ethnic or cultural terms, but to look at individual dynamics of migration within the pre-existing and emergent structures. Arguably the study's representativeness is a very limited one. However, as Plummer (2001, p. 153) observes, the criticism of biographical narratives as being unrepresentative, 'completely misunderstands the nature of such research – where insights, understandings, appreciation, intimate familiarity are the goals not «facts», explanations or generalizations'. In other words, the main question of this article is not how representative the stories of the interviewed migrants are, but what do those stories represent in the context of history and culture.

### **Mobility Within New Borders: Openness and Ambiguity**

In order to explore mobility within the new borders of the enlarged EU, it might be worthwhile to begin with the recollection of Vaclav, a physicist from Slovakia, who came to Britain to study English and then decided to stay permanently, subsequently becoming an interpreter working for a number of statutory agencies in Yorkshire. Once, during a community event, Vaclav was translating the speeches made by a number of Slovak Roma; Vaclav particularly memorized the sentence of one male speaker, who talking about his migration to the UK and the way he felt about his life in Britain, exclaimed: 'I felt like a bird freed from the cage'.

This phrase strikes for many reasons – it arguably reflects the embracing of migration, the rejoicing of the ability to move freely, and, significantly, it testifies that some kind of mobility can be seen as an escape from ethnic discrimination, thus suggesting that EU enlargement improved human rights or at least gave an exit option to some of the new EU citizens. It mirrors the experiences of many Central and Eastern European Romas, for whom migration was not solely about the ability to provide for their families and gaining new experiences abroad, but about coming to a more tolerant, less ethno-centric society (Fremlova 2009). If Imre (2005, p. 82) is correct in stating that 'East European nations' unspoken insistence on their whiteness is one of the most effective and least recognized means in asserting their Europeaness', the act of migration is a way of escaping such an exclusionary notion of Europeaness.

This story and experiences of the wider Roma community described elsewhere (Fremlova 2009) show an empowering interpretation of post-enlargement migration, however, other and very different views on pan-European mobility are possible (indeed, Vaclav himself is a different kind of migrant – it was not ethnic prejudice which propelled him to leave, but education at a British University).

Magda, a Polish interviewee, said with a degree of cynicism that Polish migrants 'Are here just for economic reasons, not for anything else'.

In other words, to use the phrase coined by the Polish writer Henryk Sienkiewicz, who portrayed the 19<sup>th</sup> century migration of Poles to North America in his novella *For Bread (Za Chlebem)*, which became a classic of Polish literature: it is a 'bread' migration. The key features of the 'migration for bread' were a vicious circle of poverty at home and deceit and destitution abroad.

Quiet literally, Jadwiga, when asked about her family's arrival to Britain, said: 'First it was my husband who came here for bread, I joined him with our daughter afterwards'.

As for Polish peasants, whose migration to America a century ago was the subject of the study by Thomas and Znaniecki (1958), a classic of the sociology of migration, EU labour mobility is a necessity – the opened borders of Europe allow Central and Eastern Europeans to move, but there is very little choice or discretion of whether to leave or stay. People move because low wages at home push them to embrace 'the migration for bread'. And it's not only Polish migrants. A group of Latvian migrants upon their arrival discovered the deceit akin to the scenes described by Sienkiewicz: the agents who took fees from them, and in return promised secure employment, had cheated them cruelly: one of the group's members, Nadia, recalls how they were promised work on a farm, but when she arrived with fellow labour migrants, there was no work, no accommodation, nothing of what had been promised and for which they had paid (the agent's fees). Nadia is not Polish, in fact she is a Russian-speaking Latvian, but her experiences fit the pattern of migration between the poorer East and the wealthier West – an underpinning of 'the migration for bread'.

Not only perceived as driven by economic necessity, i.e. 'for bread', the act of migration is not necessarily seen in European terms as this conversation with a Polish couple illustrates:

Researcher: 'How do you perceive yourself? Do you see yourself as Europeans?'

Jolanta: 'I have never thought about it'.

Marek: 'I have not considered it either'.

Jolanta: 'We are in Europe so we are Europeans'.

In this extract, being a European appears to be 'a curiously empty in-grouping device' (Meinhof 2003, p. 793), a supranational identity which is far away from the day-to-day concerns of this couple. However, in spite of the fact that the framework of EU citizenship is not something this couple reflects on daily, it is freedom of movement in the EU which gives them a different spectrum of choices. It is far better than the pre-2004 employment experiences of Marek, when he had to go through stints of clandestine irregular work in Italy and Spain.

Significantly, the change lies not only in the ability to access the UK labour market. Circular trips from England to Poland can take unexpected routes: for example, Gustav from Eastern Poland, travels via Kaunas (Kowno in Polish, the capital of the inter-war Lithuanian state), 'an orthodox Lithuanian city', as he calls it. It is simply faster and more convenient to take this route, although Bogusław laments over the lack of road signs and markings on the Lithuanian roads. This ability to move in seemingly borderless Europe (at least within the EU) is a striking contrast when one considers the history of the Polish-Lithuanian border seventy years ago. Czesław Miłosz in his celebrated collection of essays entitled *Native Realm (Rodzinna Europa)* recalls how the conflict over Vilnius (Wilno) led towards the closure of not only the border but of the railway connection – the unused and unrepaired rail tracks between Kaunas and Vilnius (Wilno-Kowno) were taken over by nature, with grass growing unabated.

The last example reminds one of the existence of structural barriers, hence it would be logical to commence the discussion on how the historical division between the East and West of Europe and the perception of Central and Eastern Europeans as Oriental others detached from Europe play out in the experiences and reflections of mobile Central and Eastern Europeans in Britain.

## **Orientalism?**

The concept of Orientalism, which may refer to various registers of entrenched differences between Central and Eastern Europe (or to use the discourse – ‘Eastern’ Europe) and the West is not simply a matter of an abstract cultural imagination. Its key manifestations, such as the use of certain types of clichés, came out explicitly in conversations with the migrants. Firstly, it might be interesting to consider the so-called inward stereotyping. During the interview, Alfred compares English ‘civility’ to Polish ‘barbarism’:

It is safer here – there is less crime. English people are not as aggressive as Poles. We work overnight shifts so we have to go to work late. We pass night clubs on our way to work. And people just say hello. In Poland, it is impossible. I would be afraid to pass such places in Poland. I would definitely avoid them.

The streets of Poland are depicted in classical Orientalist colours – they are wild, dangerous and unruly. In contrast, there is the calmness, civility and tranquillity of ordinary English club goers. Jolanta shares a similar comparison between the advanced Britain and backward Poland, however, for her the key difference lies in the advantages offered by Britain’s consumer society:

There is a completely different culture back home... I have returned there to visit just after eight months of staying in England... But there is a terrible, terrible difference. The difference primarily from the side of comfortability and convenience... Everything is more comfortable here... The fact is that we come from the eastern part of the country broadens the gap. Here we got used to pay for everything with a credit card, not like there.

Once again, a backward Poland (notably, particularly its eastern part) is not an equal match for the advanced England and its Western European prosperity. A similar sentiment could be detected in Helda’s words who comparing Estonia to Britain says that

People are so much more polite here... they say ‘thank you’ all the time. It’s not like in my country, I like it here more.

One might debate whether those examples relate to objective cultural differences or are they the consequence of the material hardships in post-communist society, but they are also, at least partially, linked to the manifestations of Orientalism, occasionally showing itself as a kind of self-condensing Orientalism from within.

However, it would be incorrect to claim that Orientalism is only directed inwards, i.e. that migrants project it onto their societies. The other type relates to

the conscious, argumentative response to the marginalizing projections directed onto migrants. For example, some participants encountered far less sympathetic reactions on the part of the receiving society, such as xenophobia. On one occasion, Witold from Poland resorts to history to counter what one might interpret as Orientalist stereotypes (Central and Eastern Europe being placed on the margins of the major events of European history); he decries the propaganda promoted by the far-right against what is called uncontrolled massive 'Eastern' European migration to Britain as absurd and ignorant:

There is a party which is gaining strength here, it is called the BNP (British National Party). They spend a lot of money on advertising... They produced an election campaign poster with a Spitfire plane on it. If you have noticed, the plane has a white-red insignia – this was a Polish plane which was defending the English during the WWII. But they decided to use it as defence of England against us... This is absurd... They contradict themselves. The people who did it, do not have any knowledge of history.

Furthermore, the presumably tolerant Western society is not immune to the excesses of what is usually associated with Orientalism – the intolerance of the 'Other'. The participation of Poles and other Central and Eastern Europeans in defending European civilisation against Nazi barbarism evades the historic consciousness of some Western Europeans.

Moreover, the interviews revealed the examples of a reflective critique of a Western European tendency to project the Orientalist stereotypes portraying Central and Eastern Europeans as xenophobic, intolerant people:

At the moment, we are a ludicrous country where anti-Semitism exists... Poles are certainly anti-Semites but not like the French. It looks to me that the French are much greater anti-Semites, but they do not recognize it, and instead blame us (Alfred).

In other words, Central and Eastern European societies may have 'demons of their own'. Anti-Semitism, one of the most deep-seated Orientalist prejudice in Europe, still exists (as well as the racism against the Roma, as the earlier example has reminded us). However, the West (here represented by France, notably not by England about whom Alfred speaks almost exclusively in admiring terms) is not free from it. Prejudice contaminates all societies, not solely the 'Eastern' European ones.

For other Central and Eastern European interviewees, the Eastern separation line presents a different challenge altogether. Leszek, an aspiring publisher of a local journal for Polish migrants, for the front page cover selects emblematic representations of Poland and Britain brought together on the map: the geographical gap between the two is symbolically bridged by the arrival of post-2004 migrants. He further emphasizes that the aim of his bilingual journal is to disseminate the knowledge of Polish culture among the local English public, to dissuade them that 'bears are walking on the streets of Poland' (a reference to the grotesque Western phantasies of 'Eastern' Europe – the famous novella of the 19<sup>th</sup> century French writer Prosper Merimee entitled *Lokis* (*The Bear*) about Lithuania comes to mind).

Kasia, who works part-time as a model and aspires to be an actress, declines to play a role in a British film which tells a story of a 'Lithuanian' woman trafficked by 'Ukrainian' pimps to the UK. She objects not because of the clearly Orientalist scripts built into the role, but because she fears it might create a certain image of her as a performer, to cast her to play fallen 'Eastern' European women in need of rescue. But for her it is not about any ideological rejection of Orientalism – she describes her decision in purely individual, as well as in pragmatic terms: 'I do not want to show off my boobs at the start of my career, you know what I mean'.

Interestingly, Kasia switched from Polish to English while giving this explanation, thus, simultaneously resorting to the language of popular Western culture, and resisting it. Kasia's response exemplifies that when confronted with a Western gaze which projects erotic phantasies onto imagined 'Eastern' European women (Augustin 2008), she did not go along with it. Instead she came out with a counter-response stressing her own choices. It highlights the difference between the Orientalist fantasy of 'Eastern' femininity and an actual Central and Eastern European female migrant.

Overall, the discussion above points to the following: migrants are prepared to recognize the benefits offered by the more affluent societies of Western Europe (the UK in this case), the entrenched view of them as the Orientalist 'other' (in various forms and shapes) does not evade their attention. On the contrary, they are prepared to contest it fiercely, sometimes using historical narratives or turning Orientalist narratives upside down. The notion of an 'Eastern' European might not come out as a subject itself, but many characteristics attributed to it are detectable in the migrants' narratives.

## **Mobility and Stratification**

Orientalism relates to historical patterns of structural differences. However, not all structural constructs of pan-European mobility could be reduced to the East-West divisions between the old and new EU member states. New socio-economic hierarchies are emerging and functioning in a more open Europe.

EU enlargement in general and the ability to access the UK labour market in particular might have created new employment opportunities for Central and Eastern Europeans, however, the extent to which migrants can materialize such potentialities is shaped by the social and human capital of mobile Central and Eastern Europeans, as well as by the structural characteristics of the local labour markets. High-skilled migrants stand a greater chance of getting better employment outcomes from mobility. For example Gosia, originally from Poland, who was working on a fixed-term contract for a highly-recognized British research institution, recalls a bus stop encounter with another Polish migrant woman. The woman had very specific expectations from migration, which she treated as a temporary sacrifice:

I've met a young Polish woman on the bus stop... She has been living here with her husband since 2007, both working in manual labour. Their main goal is to accumulate funds to purchase a house in Poland. As it stands now, they are very dissatisfied with



their working and living conditions here. They live in a shared squalid accommodation... I cannot imagine myself going through something similar. For them migration is a way of earning money; in contrast, in my case, migration is about personal development and new experiences.

For Gosia, the difference is striking – she sees how her relatively privileged experiences diverge sharply from the hard realities of other, less fortunate mobile Central and Eastern Europeans. In contrast to Gosia, for the woman, whom she accidentally met on the bus stop, migration is a livelihood strategy, an earning opportunity aimed to secure a better standard of living back in Poland. On the other hand, Gosia's position shows that some high-skilled Central and Eastern Europeans can find employment in professional jobs and they might have a very different trajectory when compared to the stereotype of the low-wage migrant labourer. In some ways it parallels the assertions made by Fligstein (2008) that EU citizenship has brought new advantages to the privileged classes, to the individuals those skills and education can be applicable irrespective of national boundaries. In short, well-positioned 'Eastern' Europeans can find a way into the Western European mainstream, while less advantaged migrants continue to be subjected to the classical features associated with 'Eastern' labour migrants, that is temporality and precariousness in the receiving Western society (Lowe 1996).

If there is a reality of socially stratified positioning between the new EU citizens, the gap is even wider between those Central and Eastern Europeans who were 'lucky' to be born in a country which joined EU, and those whose countries were bypassed by the EU enlargement. Kasia from Eastern Poland talks about her Ukrainian friend whom she met in Britain:

She needed a visa, needed to pay a lot of money, she had very gruesome experiences... Every time an English employer would fire her, she would need to return to Ukraine, apply for a new visa, and pay the agency. I am not sure whether these agencies are legal or illegal in Ukraine, most probably illegal, but they charge big sums for finding work here.

In this example, EU citizenship and the right of mobility it extends, act as a dual sword. It rewards some migrants with a 'right' citizenship, but excludes many others (incidentally, those further to the East), in this case Ukrainians – the citizens of a country which has been culturally, historically intertwined with Poland, but is now separated by new boundaries created by the EU enlargement. Once, the Russian-Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol wrote in his novel *Taras Bulba* that for a Western European, Europe ended with Poland and Ukraine was seen as a strange terrain located beyond the borders of European civilization. Gogol's novel celebrated the temperamental culture of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Zaporozhian Cossacks, but, remarkably, this argument is applicable not only to the imagined past, but to the present reality – Ukraine's ambiguous position vis-à-vis the EU.

In this sense, EU citizenship performs the role of an additional marker, which reinforces boundaries rather than promotes a common cause between similarly disadvantaged social groups. The precariousness of the socio-legal status of the

Ukrainian woman vis-à-vis the more flexible migration status of her Polish friend, can be seen as a potential illustration of Meinhof's (2003) argument: this author while recording the disappearance of separation line between some parts of Eastern Europe and the old EU member states, cautionary adds that 'the same space that is now designed to become ideologically and politically unified represents new exclusions and retains a «bordered» identity for those who are classified as non-Europeans' (Meinhof 2003, p. 784). Furthermore, some reactions towards exclusion do not display the empathy akin to Kasia's sentiment: for example, Grażyna, while discussing the relationships between Poles and other Central and Eastern Europeans such as Lithuanians, said that Poles did not have historical problems with them, unlike with Russians. This remark is interesting because it reveals another kind of Orientalism – the sense of antagonism directed against those further to the East, in this case the Russian people. This kind of internal bordering of 'Eastern' Europe is well-documented in the relevant literature (Kuss 2004). One of its implications is the discriminatory treatment of Russian-speakers in the Baltic states, particularly in Estonia – a factor which encourages the migration of this group, including to the old EU member states (Aptekar 2009). As King (2005, p. 173) observes, 'unlike in the early years of the post-communist transition, a clear migration barrier now cuts through the former Communist bloc itself'.

### **An Inconclusive Conclusion: the National and European in the Experience of Mobility**

One of the most revelatory elements learned during the data generating process relates to the ways migration narratives go beyond the individual and personal. Quite often participants would use cultural-historic imagery to contextualize their current status as migrants. For example, Alfred stated that 'A Pole does not have the angst (lęk) of migration'.

'Lęk' is a Polish equivalent of what Freud called 'angst' – anxiety, an irrational fear of something unexpected and a product of unresolved subconscious conflicts. According to Alfred, for the Polish nation accustomed to the experience of migration since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Sienkiewicz's migration 'for bread'), post-enlargement mobility is a continuation of people's response to socio-economic hardships at home. It also demonstrates a broader historical and cultural awareness in interpreting migration and its human psychology, as opposed to linking mobility from Central and Eastern Europe to the old EU member states primarily to individual consumerist fantasies and global capitalism (Mai 2011).

Furthermore, there is not only an absence of angst but also a perception that migration itself can lead to profound individual and group transformations. Jan states that 'Migration is changing Poles... the Churchmen say that we, the young people, are losing our way here'.

One of these changes is the encounter with a post-colonial British society. New mobility exposes 'Eastern' Europeans previously accustomed to ethnic homogeneity towards multi-racial and religiously diverse societies and creates a potential for ethnically/religiously mixed relationships. Jan compares it with Poland's past,

which in his opinion was almost totally free of encounters with an ethnic 'Other': 'It was long time ago since King Jan Sobieski met the Turks at Vienna'.

One might say that Jan's response represents a form of historical amnesia (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was one of the most multi-cultural states in European history). However, albeit in a different way to Alfred's, who uses history to point to the national precedents in migration, Jan resorts to a historical comparison in explaining migrants adjustment to the life in a multi-racial Western Europe.

The adjustment to the West can also lead to a different kind of response. During the Easter mass sermon to a local Polish migrant congregation, the Catholic priest exclaimed: 'Even someone inclined so unsympathetically towards Christianity as the German philosopher Voltaire could see the profound symbolism of Christ's resurrection'.

It is not the mistaken Germanization of Voltaire that should attract our attention. It is rather the contentious mentioning of Voltaire itself: Wolff (2004) indicates that Voltaire has been a symbol of Western decadence to some Polish conservatives since the 18<sup>th</sup> century partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. By attacking Voltaire, the priest seems to call his congregation to resist secular Western influences. In other words, labour migration should not lead towards the rewriting of migrants' cultural norms and values.

Other interviewees would relate to more recent (as opposed to the defeat of the Ottoman army in the 17<sup>th</sup> century or the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century) historical events of national significance. Asked when she arrived to the UK, Aldona did not simply provide the year, but said: 'We arrived here the year Pope John Paul II passed away'.

John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła) was an all-encompassing Polish national figure, but also the first Slav to become a pope – an 'Eastern' European who broke 'the glass ceiling' of the Western European grip on the Papacy. While Karol Wojtyła left Poland for Italy, both politically and culturally he continued to be a towering figure in Poland, in effect remaining there symbolically. Aldona's arrival to the UK, 'which some time ago used to be itself a Catholic country' (Tadeusz), gets a broader reading when related to the death of the Polish head of the Roman Catholic Church. Aldona's family move was a part of a national journey, where she and her husband, albeit migrating in her view primarily for economic reasons, nonetheless were part of a broader flow of national history. Karol Wojtyła's symbolic presence in Poland after his departure also resonates with Aldona – in her narratives, she kept emphasizing her Polishness, stressing that migration did not change her cultural identity. Similar dynamics can be observed in the earlier example of religious worship in the local Catholic Church: by choosing to attend a Polish language mass, which was conducted by the Polish priest and accompanied by the musical performance of local Polish volunteers, migrants were not only re-affirming their religious affiliation but also attaching themselves to national and cultural identity of Polish Catholicism.

These are pervasive examples of the ways people contextualize their migration, try to build symbolically rich and meaningful comparisons. It assists them in explaining and understanding their mobile lives not as atomized movements but as a part of an unbreakable historical chronology, where an individual, depending

on personal knowledge and worldview can place her/himself. It is a further proof that migration is not simply a process of day-to-day struggles, but an experience triggering a response from the cultural memories of people who are involved in it.

The analysis reveals the multiple layers through which mobile Central and Eastern Europeans engage in the experience of migration to Britain. Their narratives point to a complex interlinking of themes: migrants reflect on their mobility by using individual, as well as collective images. The experiences of migration within the enlarged EU are treated as an interception of historical traditions, cultural symbols and individual perceptions. They do not follow the celebratory language of an open Europe, but also do not reflect on the static divisions between the West and East of Europe. New migration in Europe has a positive dimension in terms of exercising mobility rights, but is also shaped by past legacies and new socio-economic and ethnic divisions. Class inequalities and EU citizenship create new boundaries within the supposedly borderless Europe. The complex picture identified in migrants' narratives speaks both about a continuation and a break with established European divisions. Multiple reactions towards new mobility in Europe emerge: from the recognition of a new dawn brought about by a relaxing of the intra-European migration regime to Orientalist projections and counter-narratives. Migrant preparedness in displaying overlapping identities in response to mobility is particularly noteworthy. The analysis here acutely demonstrates the relevance of looking at new European migration through a prism of cultural construction and individual agency: even with all the limitations of the sample – its smallness and homogeneity, as well as the singularity of Central and Eastern European – UK migration in the context of the East and West of Europe, it is fascinating to see how mobile Central and Eastern Europeans engage with a plethora of symbolical meanings while reflecting on their experience of migration. Arguably, social scientists interested in migration should investigate this subject more closely. Another issue is the differences in perceptions. For example, how do the views of Czech and Bulgarians, Romanians and Hungarians differ? The issue of the migration of ethnic minorities: for example, Hungarian Slovaks and Polish Lithuanians may also be interesting. Does ethnic discrimination in sending societies shape cultural aspects of mobility? Finally, the context of receiving country: for instance, Italy versus Sweden and Germany versus Portugal is also worth looking at. These are the topics for serious sociological and geographical research.

Finally, it would be appropriate to conclude this article by recasting the relationship between migration, culture and identity using the words of a migrant. The examples above (and throughout this article) came largely from the extracts of conversations which were loaded with cultural meanings oriented towards national identity. But does it mean that being European is incompatible with national identity? This is how Alfred responds to the question on his self-identification:

I feel good here. When I have a holiday, I do not want to go to Poland – I know it very well. I prefer to go to France or the Netherlands. We are planning something like Bruges or Amsterdam. I certainly do not feel a migrant. My flat is my home. I feel like a Pole

because I am a Pole. And also Poland is a part of Europe and I certainly identify myself as a European.

Whilst being Polish comes out as the first point of reference, it is compatible and complimentary with being European. Being European is about unconstrained freedom of movement, but Alfred also stresses that his mobility choices are something in tune with his national background. His statement reflects an optimistic and embracing interpretation of the new mobility in Europe which goes beyond the traditional migration between nation-states (Poland-Britain). However, one shouldn't forget that the ways European citizens realize the potential of mobility is structured by labour market and workplace experiences even to a greater degree than historical formations. But, as the empirical data interpreted in this article would suggest, historical, cultural and personal dimensions are part of the fascinating mosaic of Central and Eastern European migration/mobility within the EU. It is also a subject of constant interpretations and re-interpretations of the people who perpetuate it – mobile Central and Eastern Europeans themselves.

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## Streszczenie

Poszerzenie Unii Europejskiej i mobilność zawodowa wewnątrz Unii, jaka poprzedziła ten proces, zostały zdefiniowane w ramach dwóch konkurujących dyskursów. Pierwszy z nich odzwierciedla pogląd Komisji Europejskiej, promujący ruchliwość poakcesyjną jako ucieleśnienie idei Europy bez granic. W ramach tej interpretacji, mobilni mieszkańcy Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej są postrzegani jako nowi obywatele Europy, którzy zyskują nowe możliwości dzięki otrzymanej swobodzie przemieszczania się. Alternatywny dyskurs można odnaleźć na polu krytycznej socjologii i geografii. Dyskurs ten dowodzi, iż mobilność poakcesyjna ma wiele wspólnego z wcześniejszymi falami migracji z centralnej i wschodniej Europy (McDowell 2009). Zamiast uznania Europejczyków ze wschodniej i centralnej części kontynentu za równych innym obywatelom Europy, są oni traktowani jako 'Wschodni' inni, chociażby przez wizerunek prezentowany w mass mediach w zachodniej Europie (Light, Young 2009). Rozmijając się w swoich ocenach – włączenie versus ciągłe wykluczenie mieszkańców Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej – obydwie dyskursy dotyczą tego, co określa się w teorii społecznej jako 'struktury'. W niniejszym artykule opisuję strukturalne konstrukcje (granice Wschód-Zachód versus brak granic) z perspektywy doświadczeń życiowych samych migrantów. Stawiając kwestię mieszkańców Wschodniej i Zachodniej Europy w centrum analizy, przedstawiam własne dane jakościowe, które pozwalają odpowiedzieć na pytanie: w jaki sposób migranci z Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej migrujący do Wielkiej Brytanii wyrażają swoje tożsamości kulturowe i oceniają zmieniające się granice w Europie.