'I Don't Want This Town to Change': Resistance, Bifocality and the Infra-Politics of Social Remittances

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The process of social remitting is complex and multilayered, and involves numerous social actors that at each stage face several choices. By definition, the process of socially remitting ideas, codes of behaviour and practices starts with the migrants themselves and their social context in the destination country. This paper focuses on the as yet unexplored issue of resistance performed and articulated by migrants confronted with potential change influenced by social remittances and the generalised process of diffusion. Faithful to the understanding of social remittances as ultimately a process where individual agency is the crucial determinant, the article follows the ideas, practices and values travelling across the transnational social field between Britain and various localities in Poland. Resistance to change and new ways of doing things is a continuous dialogical process within one culture's power field, which is understood here in anthropological terms as a porous, open-ended field of competing meanings and discourses. Notions of bifocality, infra-politics of power relations and resistance are an important aspect of remittances and their reinterpretations, and resistance to social remittances by migrants, both in their destinations and in their communities of origin, is a crucial component of the whole process without which our understanding of remittances is incomplete.

Keywords: social remittances; resistance; Polish migration; agency; change

Resistance to social remittances: the missing piece of the puzzle

Interaction with novelty and new social conventions faced by migrants in their destination countries means that migrants acquire some levels of reflexivity. They observe, make choices and constantly compare. That comparative state of mind, coupled with a transnational 'way of being' (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994) and resulting in what Vertovec (2004) terms 'bi-focality', is not just at the heart of the transnational lives migrants lead, but is a precondition of any social remittances understood as the diffusion of ideas, norms and practices (Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011) – in other words, stimulating social change. Boccagni and Decimo (2013: 3) also regard this as a fundamental underlying aspect of the discussion on social remittances: 'central to the study of social remittances is, to begin with, the faceted and changing relationship between migrants and their communities of origin'. Social remittances are thus one of the ways change and modernity take hold in given societies. But if, as Levitt argues, the diffusion of ideas, practices and norms

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impacts societies of origin through migrants' agency and feeds into the complex process of modernisation and development with all the social and cultural change that entails, then we can expect that not all change would be regarded as desirable by migrants and non-migrants alike, or rather that at some point these social actors would have conflicting ideas about what *ought* to be remitted and what *ought not*. As social remittances 'are distinct from, but often reinforce and are reinforced by, other forms of global cultural circulation' (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011: 3), one can expect this 'reinforcement' to be conditioned by factors such as power relations, cultural context, and both collective and individual identity-construction processes. In that sense, it is crucial to draw attention to the issue, omitted so far in research, of what happens when aspects of social life in the destination country are regarded negatively and are deemed not to deserve acceptance by wider society at home or, when endorsed by migrants, prove not easily transferable. This article considers resistance to social remittances as the other side of the coin of the whole process, reflecting migrants' evolution from carriers of non-reflective stereotypes to critical thinkers and social actors capable of agency. *What* is not remitted and *why*? What norms, values, and behaviours are deliberately chosen as something that for normative, practical or other reasons *should* not be remitted and implemented? The main aim of this paper is to explore how migrants who take part in social remittances maintain some control over this process. While there is no clear deterministic and causal relationship between migration and social remittance-influenced change, or lack of it, immigrants who are part of the transnational social field are nevertheless vital 'filters' through which new and old clash or are reconciled.

Concepts and methods

Although influential insights into social remittances have recently been further refined (see Boccagni and Decimo 2013), there does not seem to be adequate reflection on why certain ideas, norms and practices are *not* being transferred, even if this seems practical, financially advantageous or normatively desirable – for various actors in question, i.e. migrants, communities they come from, returnees. Resistance to these remittances or reluctance to accept or implement them stems from a perception of the social world and the changes it is undergoing that is, overall, culturally meaningful. From the perspective of reflexive modernity, this attitude is informed not just by migrants interacting with non-migrants or people in the transnational social field; it is also informed and influenced by the myriad of multilayered perceptions and constructed meanings and definitions of social change that communities and people are experiencing globally – through media, structural changes such as the impact of European funds, more endemic social changes and global redistribution of wealth and power. Thus, in their resistance to particular aspects of social change expressed by an individual, both global influences and the impact of transnational connections are often merged. The tension, ambiguity and contradiction that ensue often appear as the uniform face of modernity in the worldview of the individuals concerned. Ambiguity, thus, is at the heart of the problem, as it directly links with cultural hybridity and the potential changes undergone by localities of origin. Migrants have traditionally been seen by relatively closed cultural units as liminal figures, being on the threshold, in between worlds, potential transgressors and individuals who may threaten the *status quo* of gendered power relations (Turner 1980, see also Weber 1995). In her brilliant analysis of the modern politics of immigration control, Bridget Anderson (2013) goes further to claim that the figure of the immigrant is in fact essential for the citizenry to – through contrast – define itself. Suffice to say that in the localities of origin immigrant status is ambiguous, as it both benefits and also threatens the given order. It is two decades since Gupta and Ferguson (1997) called upon anthropologists to focus on these transgressive figures whose lifestyles, culture and worldviews occupy so-called borderlands – in the conceptual, empirical and in discursive meanings of the word. Borderlands that contain the multiple meanings of locality, community, identity and bounded notions of town, village, city and group – far from self-evident

and constantly questioned by subjects (1997: 8–9) – are thus embodied in migrants and the new norms, practices and values they bring home.

Resistance is a popular concept among anthropologists and, as is usually the case, has also been injected with various meanings, mainly around its positioning within power relations and its relationship with identity and place. Opposing a classical political view of resistance, Foucault has influenced our understanding through his conceptualisation of resistance as agency that exists in relation to a 'strategy of power' that shifts and adapts along with the development of social contexts. 'There is not', Foucault writes, 'on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy' (1978: 101–102, quoted in Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 19). The mention of 'tactics' by Foucault is important here, bringing forward de Certeau's (1984) understanding of social actors dealing with power and structural determinants through their continuous tactical, mundane actions in the everyday reality of social life. Although power can be invisible or absent in particular circumstances, in de Certeau's (1984) view the weaker side of the equation will always resort to invisible and difficult-to-detect ways of resistance and contestation which do not question underlying ideological or symbolic underpinnings of power relations, but are simply designed to extend the level of individual autonomy in a given unequal power field. In a similar attempt to operationalise the notion of resistance in capturing the 'invisible' forms of power relations, James Scott (1990) writes about 'small scale resistance' and 'infra-politics' which draws its power to contain structural relations of domination from its undetectability (hence the notion of 'infra') and its ability to camouflage resistance as banal forms of cultural production – through gossip, jokes, ridicule, proverbs and 'folk' modes of self-expression. There is also the poignant observation made by Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 19) that we need to 'think of resistance as an experience that constructs and reconstructs the identity of subjects' and that in our modern hyper-mobile and hybrid globalised world, resistance is implicitly functional to the idea of 'place making and identity'. In that logic, a mundane observation, a casual statement and critical reflexive comment gathered during interviews with migrants becomes part of a complex multi-vocal narrative of making sense of structural forces, but also accommodating, adapting and finally resisting them in relation to specific place-making practices.

Resistance to social remittances can therefore be viewed as resistance to social change generated by modernising processes in various domains. There is already a significant tradition within migration studies exploring resistance to globalisation, and there are numerous examples of that approach, usually referred to as 'transnationalism from below' or 'transnational urbanism' (Smith 1994, 2001), or in the literature on contemporary social movements. This usually relates to overt and open contestation of global hegemonic processes at play, with collective actors very much aware of the stakes and operating within a given political opportunity structure (Ireland 1994).

This paper, however, suggests a more mundane, smaller-scale resistance that does not involve collective action or organised, politically charged contestation. Building on Scott's (1990) notion of small-scale resistance and 'infra-politics' of groups that are under particular pressure from institutionalised power and hegemonic discourses, it looks at resistance to social remittances as a sum of small, everyday mundane actions – in discourse, behaviour, norms and values – which are not specifically directed or organised. They stem from the natural inertia of the social world, of mundane patterns of social and cultural reproduction (Miller 2008). They may also stem from strategies of making sense of the world that contest hegemonic discourses in other ways – attention to these forms of resistance by immigrants is, for example, drawn by a study of immigrant Pentecostal churches in Germany where religious symbolism contests the legal nation state-centred dominant discourse on immigration and assimilation (Glick Schiller, Çağlar, and Guldbrandsen 2006). Similarly, in her account of the use of irony in the narratives of migrants from Kerala, Gallo (2015) notes how crucial it is for

social actors to reconcile and make sense of conflicting and ambiguous positions within an unequal power-relations field. The subtle and mundane ways people use irony to address frictions between the normative and actual dimensions of their family lives and instances of social remittances demonstrate how important it is to recognise the agency of migrants.

This approach has methodological implications, as the driver of the interpretative framework employed to discuss the data in this paper is Anthony P. Cohen's (1994) proposition of the 'anthropology of consciousness', where meaning making, and the perception of what actually happens to people and how they define and categorise the social world is the key to understanding why people do what they do. Here, meaning making refers to the ways in which people make sense of the world as it is shaped by constraining cultural meanings, reproducing them through action, performance and negotiation (Cohen 1994: 166). Similarly Michael Peter Smith (2001) points out, in his study of 'transnationalism from below', that the transnational methodological lens or 'optics' (Levitt and Lamba-Lieves 2011: 3) has to explore people's experience of crossing 'political and cultural borders' and capture 'the emergent character of transnational social practices' through people's narratives as they directly engage with the dominant structures of power, discourses and collective constraints (Smith 2001: 138). When migrants' narratives on transgression are the central point of departure, the link between resistance and place making and identity becomes apparent. Moreover, the place-making process is embedded in a transnational social field where both localities become meaningful through their relation to each other. This aspect is also not well developed in the literature on place making, often being confined to the place of destination (Castles and Davidson 2000; Gill 2010).

Migrants, through their specific status associated with transgression and liminality, and engagement with bifocal 'ways of being and belonging', offer crucial clues to the micro-levels of power structures that people have to deal with – whether related to intergenerational tensions, gender divisions, workplace arrangements, class identity or religious practices and dogma. Methodologically this paper thus links the 'big questions asked to little people' (Smith 2001) with the emerging understanding of the social remittances process as quite distinct from other forms of modernity diffusion through media, cultural production or structural forces driven by globalisation processes. Its distinction lies precisely in the focus on the individual actor and the choices they make at each step of the remitting process. The resulting importance of face-to-face or other direct contact between social actors engaged in the remitting process thus becomes apparent. As argued elsewhere (Grabowska and Garapich 2016), it is through direct interaction, experience and example that ideas, norms and practices travel and are implemented (or not), and this is what makes social remittances significant not only for scholars but in the eyes of migrants themselves. Social remittances as process are thus fundamentally different from other forms of influence since they are personal, subjective and offer social actors the opportunity to express their sense of place and identity, and reflexively position themselves on the complex transnational field.

The data for this paper are drawn from fieldwork in the UK and 50 interviews with migrants from three Polish localities studied. Fieldwork consisted of a combination of semi-structured interviews and observations, such as Friday evening football matches, conversations in informal settings (pubs, parks) and casual scenes of family life. Respondents came from three localities in Poland, and were roughly evenly divided in terms of gender and age. Data gathered focused mainly on changes the individual and the place of origin underwent and on the complex web of understanding of how migrations impact localities of origin. Respondents were selected through snowballing and references from places of origin in Poland. The narratives that were generated aimed to provide a picture combining the individual experience of migration, exposure to the 'new' world in the destination country and a reflection on the individual's own background, culture, social norms and values back in Poland. The result was a detailed model of transferring social remittances (Grabowska and Garapich 2016). At the same time, during fieldwork there was an increasing awareness that migrants critically engage

with the notion of change due to social remittances and articulate a greater or lesser degree of resistance towards the issues discussed, and that resistance emerges at various steps of the social remitting process. The sections that follow discuss three of these steps, each illustrated by an example from fieldwork. The first concerns how migrants in their place of destination resist the idea of changing individual behaviour, ideas or norms as they seem incompatible with their own world view, practice or culturally understood 'taste' or simply because in migrants' perception they feel their locality of origin and its inhabitants should not change at all. Second is the case of a migrant adapting to new ways of 'being' and 'thinking' but, for various reasons, resisting the notion of transferring them to the place of origin. The third example looks at migrants or returning migrants who have attempted to transfer social remittances and implement change but with no desirable outcome. This article focuses predominantly on the process as it is enacted by migrants themselves and their experiences.

Ways of being, ways of resisting

Stephen Vertovec (2004: 977) refers to bi-focality or double orientation as 'clearly discernable in social practices and conveyed in individual narratives' and having a clear impact on 'individual and family life course and strategies, individual sense of self and collective belonging'. This is of course quite a common observation in migration studies (Guarnizo 1997; Golbert 2001). A typical example is the Sylheti migrants studied by Gardner (1993) whose perception of the duality of their lives is articulated through the notions of *desh* (home) and *bidesh* (foreign context), where the interplay and cognitive tension between them gives meaning to their individual agency. This 'oppositional presentation' of which migrants are making sense always take two places of reference into consideration, with the comparison producing various degrees of positive, negative or neutral results. The values migrants put on these indicate various degrees of endorsement, acceptance or resistance.

In the context of resistance to social remittances, fieldwork among various networks of Polish migrants currently residing in the UK and originating from the three locations studied, has brought to the surface two broadly distinct tendencies: 1) a negative perception of the ways host societies are 'doing things'; and 2) a perception of stagnation, static social order and conservatism in the localities of origin. That criticism is not only aimed at constructing a worldview, but a statement on how things *should be* or *should remain* and that social change is either impossible or undesirable. A similar phenomenon was highlighted by Levitt (2009: 1237), who called it the 'ossification' effect, where both migrants and non-migrants are contesting change in the community of origin, mainly to preserve perceived traditional values and retain forms of cultural and social autonomy.

In the first example, respondents categorically reject some aspects of British society as against their value system or worldview. Here, a typical example – although not the only one – would be the critique of equality in relation to gender, family and sexuality that is perceived as having socially destructive effects in Britain. This respondent for example asserts:

They totally destroyed things… This progress is rather controversial… The whole thing with issues around morality and gender here in the UK doesn't look rosy. My friend works at the NHS and that revolution [sexual] that happened some time ago… we now deal with the consequences of this. The biggest percentage of abortions, gay partnerships, that this is the main reason behind spreading STD and AIDS, this is alarming… red lamp is beeping since some time… Family is in a critical state… it looks tragic… things went too far… they say that gay partnerships is a family unit… this is mad.

Resistance in that context focuses on the overall rejection of social liberal values; the respondent was at pains to stress how important it is for this process not to be transferred to Poland. These sweeping generalisations were not that common, and the majority of respondents showed a more nuanced view on sexuality and gender, but this case illustrates how potential change due to socially remitted new ways of thinking is being resisted at the initial stages of contact. This respondent is quite active in the blogosphere, is civically engaged and keeps in close touch with friends in Poland, ensuring an audience for his views.

While variations on this attitude were voiced in some interviews, respondents stressed that it would be impossible for the majority of people in the locality of origin to accept or replicate attitudes that are dominant in the UK. This respondent for example, noting that he himself 'doesn't mind gay people' and agreeing that his familiarity with homosexuality while living in London had made him more tolerant, said that this would not be possible back in his home town: 'no, such a person [gay] would need to hide in Sokółka, he would be beaten up'. Resistance to new ideas at this stage can thus be active, conscious and deliberate, but equally it can be more obscure and passive, and is justified by the apparent static and unchangeable nature of the place of origin. Place making and identity in that context are woven around two radically opposed ideas of progress and stability, family and its alleged disintegration due to the liberal values of the West, quite a common trait in Polish nationalist discourse (see Zubrzycki 2006). We can see, then, how change itself is being contested and at the same time how that contestation positions the identity and claim to the place of the respondent – as the social actor *able* to influence social values and norms 'at home' – as someone in a position of power (active in the former case, passive in the latter) to decide what is wrong and right in their locality, as someone still *there* or at least having a claim to it.

A seemingly opposite tactic through which social remitting may be blocked is when migrants construct the place they came from, their place making and identity from afar, through strong insistence on its unchangeable nature. 'Nothing changes there' was the mantra heard time and again during fieldwork and it is important to focus on it here. It is important to understand that the bifocality of migrants, their transnational reflexivity and double frame of reference is a constant place-making and identity-construction mechanism. In order for that reflexivity to remain functional, these points of reference – 'here' and 'there' – need to remain relatively stable, fixed and infused with some static meanings separating them from the locality of destination, in much the same way as the notions of *desh* and *bidesh* are oppositional (Gardner 1993). A fatalistic view, repeated over and over by migrants about Sokółka, for example, may be seen as a way to symbolically insulate the place of origin in a kind of time capsule. This meaning is relational, as it is always contrasted with the fast-moving and changing world of London in which migrants operate. Importantly, however, respondents who strongly criticise their home town, its people and social atmosphere were at the same time very positively predisposed towards the features of the place that London lacks – mainly (in case of Sokółka) its nature, forests and opportunity to 'get away from the city' or (in case of Pszczyna) a small, slower-paced place with a relaxed, family-friendly atmosphere. In that sense, transnational migrants do not want the place to change at all since it will disrupt the bifocal identity they have established with stable places of reference along the binary concepts of: London as urban, fast, famous for its rat race, dynamic, chaotic space; and (for example) Sokółka as natural, friendly, peaceful, stagnant and static. So for many respondents bringing 'something' from London would amount to mixing worlds that should not be mixed since they are defined by their 'oppositional presentation' and cultural meanings forming a stable translocal (in the sense that we are talking not about 'nations' here, but specific localities, as shown by Anne White 2011) social field where the boundaries relate to values or practices people hold dear rather than institutions or structures. The following two dialogues show how contrasting constructions of 'here' and 'there' are made simultaneously meaningful through the notions of change or 'non-change':

Interviewer: So to what kind of place would you like to return? Is it ok as it is, or does something need to change?

M.: Honestly, I can't be bothered to think about it, since nothing will change, but it will always be worse [than here].

Interviewer: Peaceful, what do you mean? You mean here it is...?

J.: Fast pace of life. Too fast. I mean we live. We manage, but it is tiring sometimes. I often think of Sokółka.

I.: Yes? What draws you back there?

T.: I mean, it's like with the food. If you get a taste of something when you are young, you like it... (...) so us, we were brought up somewhere else, not here in a big city, but somewhere else, so we want to go back...

J.: And to spend a weekend... and finish work at 3pm... as they do over there... and you still have half a day... you can jump in [the car] and go somewhere...

T.: So many things you can do…

J.: The elderly [in Sokółka] go there now. Summer picnics, they go to the woods, have a bonfire... And what is there here?

There is a sense, not just of nostalgia in these narratives but a clear place making, a self-identifying practice of making sense of one's emotions. Crucially, T. doesn't frame this as something that bothers a Pole in Britain, but rather voices the sense of alienation and feeling uncomfortable in a big city that a rural person would experience. London in that sense is the emblem of urbanism and occupies a radically different place in this respondent's place making. In migrants' perceptions, their bifocal orientation means that the two localities occupy extreme positions and should not be fused or mixed; the way of life in one place – with all the negative and positive consequences – should not interfere with the other.

Moving along the continuum of the various forms of resistance, the next example is similar to the previous one, except that the respondent deliberately chooses not to talk about the issue in question with people in her home town. The reflection below touches upon the issue of tolerance towards people from other religious or ethnic backgrounds. The respondent, a woman married to an Englishman, stressed several times during the interview that her own views had become more tolerant and liberal but in Poland people seem to be much more conservative, so she decides not to dwell on certain topics in her conversations in order to avoid confrontation:

For example, one of these changes is that a friend I was close to married a Muslim. And for a while they lived in [name of town]. I lost contact with her, he is Egyptian. And I don't know if they returned to Egypt or still live in [name of town]. When I talked about this to my parents, they said that they don't see them. There was a period when my friend, Catholic all her life, was thinking about converting to Islam. And she talked about this with me. For me, this is… no issue, such a normal thing for people to talk about. [But] I did not even mention anything like this to my parents. My parents would… they also would… they have a bit of a racist view. Not only racist but also very traditional when it comes to religion…

Resistance does not have to be related to critical attitudes towards some aspects of the host society. Silence or not talking to non-migrants, family or friends during a visit is an important, often overlooked way that people choose not to remit, hence its best description is an 'infra-political' way in which individuals resist social remitting. This respondent voiced strong anti-clerical views about the Polish Catholic Church, mentioning paedophile scandals, patriarchal structures, etc. However, she chooses not to raise the subject with her strongly Catholic parents back in her home town. As she says, after a few arguments over the baptism of her children and First Communion, she prefers to avoid the subject altogether.

An area that was often explicitly talked about as something that should not be remitted back to places of origin is cultural attitudes towards gender and diversity. In particular, and here the attitude was relatively common, respondents voiced strong resistance to accepting public displays of sexuality other than heterosexual. 'In private, it is all right, but they should not demonstrate that and this is not something I would like to see in Poland' was a common response. Crucially, these statements often came while acknowledging the fact that migration and living in the UK resulted in migrants themselves becoming more tolerant on the issue. So acceptance in one context did not mean acceptance in another – the Polish one. Again, we witness here the importance of bifocality for migrants where the frames of reference co-exist but should not merge. In a similar vein we can see it in attitudes towards cultural and religious diversity, in particular towards Muslims. Respondents often acknowledge diversity as a positive feature of life in Britain, but one that should not be replicated or transmitted to Poland (again this mainly referred to the Muslim population). Although in their narratives respondents often talked about becoming more 'tolerant' and 'open-minded' towards other nationalities, ethnic or religious groups, it was often qualified by references to the undesirability of Muslims' presence being replicated in Poland.

The last point of discussion relates to cases where change, despite willingness to implement it on the part of both migrants and returnees, was met with resistance in the locality of origin. Any change through social remittances has the potential to disrupt and challenge given cultural norms, values and resulting power relations. It is not surprising, then, that social change that migrants *may* bring with them is contested and resisted. Again, this takes many forms.

One, which relates directly to the notion of 'hidden transcripts' which is adopted here for the purpose of analysis, is as old as humanity: resistance through gossip and ridicule. The common reference to a migrant who comes back temporarily displaying their recently acquired wealth often includes pity, jokes and irony. Some respondents explained that two decades ago, this may have made an impact on locals, but today it is irrelevant and draws attention to the insecurity and moral collapse of those who try to show their superiority by conspicuous consumption. This timeframe reminds us again that places exposed to migration flows over generations develop specific responses to the outflow of their inhabitants and their continuing impact on the social sphere. This is part of migration culture, after all, and places like Sokółka with its borderland status and long tradition of migratory flows has had time to insulate itself against the potential impact of social remittances. That insulation, however, does not always come from within but is also due to migrants' unwillingness for the place to change or their strong belief that this could not possibly happen.

Social change and new ways of 'doing' are often embedded in objects. Material things are never socially neutral and bring with them significant meanings, symbols, narratives and ideas that the owner wishes to convey to the wider world (Miller 2001). It is here that an agency that may be seen as mere imitation – bringing an object from there to here – once transplanted into a new social setting can trigger resistance as it is perceived as a form of innovative behaviour, sometimes threatening the *status quo* but most importantly, always transgressive in nature. An example of this process was provided by a respondent who began jogging in Sokółka, after taking it up in England. Imitation of behaviour observed in Britain, however, acquired new meanings and new obstacles when transplanted to local settings in Poland. The young jogger began attracting curious looks

from Sokółka's inhabitants which showed that many in this town regarded jogging as behaviour at odds with local lifestyle and in particular at odds with expected gender roles. To avoid comments and sceptical looks, the respondent took to jogging in more secluded areas.

A similar example of this process is the respondents who, after a stay in Britain, changed their perception of wellington boots. Popular in Britain, sometimes being a fashion statement and objects of considerable monetary value, wellingtons in Poland, however, especially in rural communities, are laden with class-related meanings. One would not go out in wellington boots to town, to go shopping, to church or to pay someone a visit. In Polish rural communities this type of footwear is strictly reserved for work-related activities, in particular, work that is dirty – in the field and in stables – and to wear it denotes one's status as rural working class. In caricature, to wear wellies (*kalosze* in Polish) is to be a peasant. Therefore, wearing wellies in town or to church is essentially a class and style transgression that breaks the rules of local behaviour.

The final example is about migrants who are willing to remit a feature of the host society in the face of resistance from the locality of origin. Migrants are in almost unvarying agreement that British driving culture is far superior and that in Poland drivers should learn from the British example to improve road safety and stress. According to many respondents, this is the main thing that Poles ought to bring from Britain. It refers not only to interaction between drivers, but also to overall attitudes to safety, such as wearing seatbelts, not driving while drunk, consideration for pedestrians, and so on. Driving culture and the everyday interaction between strangers it entails forms an important body of differences between Poland and Britain highlighted by our respondents. It seems that migrants value what Vertovec (2007) calls the 'norms of civility' that form the unwritten code of conviviality and interactions in highly urbanised diverse societies. At the same time these norms are transferable and migrants very often emphasise that it seems things in that domain are changing in Poland and that their (migrants') attitudes may be playing a part in that process. This is of course very difficult to determine, but the very fact that migrants are so eager to stress the difference and then argue that change in Poland is highly necessary and is slowly happening, suggests that they are implicit agents in that process, albeit met with strong resistance. This extract from an interview illustrates this process perfectly:

> **M.:** *I'll give you an example. Here, intelligent people (...) when they get into the car, they fasten their seatbelts.... But in Poland, they won't do that. I tell them, fasten your seatbelts. And [they say] shut up, sit where you are. I tell them, listen, just, fasten them because... it is a small town where we live, everyone knows each other, no? Honestly, that example of my friend, I constantly argue with him about it. This is not about you not fastening it. Just that someone will hit you and you'll have a problem. By accident they can lock you up, no? (...) Or letting people go through the crossing. The rule that if you are a metre from the road, [the car has to stop]. In Poland too it is a rule but the culture of these people is different (...) I shout at them, listen man.*

These two respondents discussed the small shifts and changes they undergo while driving on a visit in Poland:

> **J.:** *So, yes, I'd like to transplant the driving culture, all these 'thank yous' and 'pleases'. This is class. This is driving culture. When I am in Poland I try to [follow] but they don't believe me I think.*

> **T.:** *Zebra crossing for pedestrians. In Poland you can show this [British driving culture] but you never know if you'll get hurt for doing it...*

Or this comment:

Interviewer: So, when someone comes from London, he is getting a bit of that other driving culture?

Z.: Oh yes, definitely…

I.: So less drinking and driving…

Z.: Oh, I doubt it…

These micro-level discussions on change, resistance, desirable improvement and the protection of the culture against forms of transgression centre around the global forces that shape power relations, gender dynamics, consumption and even personal safety (as in the case of driving culture). Crucially, they are also place-making meaning-constructing practices where 'here' and 'there' are not just spaces, but places infused with cultural meanings that give a particular space its identity – but in a transnational social space where one place is made meaningful by contrasting it with another. This in turn points to the individual's normative understanding of what a particular place should look like and what ideas, norms and practices ought to be remitted. In the discussion over the wearing of seatbelts, we can read a nuanced tension and the ambiguity of migrants' *versus* stayers' claim over 'how things ought to be'. It is the sum of these discussions' outcomes that makes social remittances influential, but at each step they encounter a carefully calculating, decision-making individual.

Conclusions: transgressors and agents

This paper calls for an actor-centred approach to social remittances. Complex and multi-vocal ways in which people construct their identity and engage in place making in the context of transnational migrations acquire an additional dimension when social change and tensions between two or more localities are taken into account. Places, as identities, are relationally constructed, in the sense that the hyper-urban nature of the global city gives meaning and a sense of particularity to places like Pszczyna, Trzebnica and Sokółka, places respondents are emotionally attached to, or where the traditional heteronormative family structure serves to condemn the negative effects of Western liberalism. The actor-centred approach is also in keeping with the endemic processes within the locality of origin, in which migration is part of the local worldview. Sokółka, with at least six or more generations of migrations, had to deal with the same issues over and over again. It is thus safe to say that the social constructions of emigrants, social changes due to migrants' presence or non-presence and novelties are part and parcel of this town's migration culture. What migrants have been bringing in is potentially transgressive and revolutionary, requiring a set of notions, norms, behaviours and attitudes that neutralise either the changes or the influence of those that carry them. Resisting change can happen on various levels and in various contexts but at each step, social actors are making constant careful decisions about *what, if* and *how* the change in question needs to happen.

In the above description of the various steps and instances when these decisions are made, the mundane, tactical and 'infra-political' nature of their articulation is probably the most important. Whether through ideological rejection, banal omission of a thorny subject during a conversation, chatter about driving culture or gossip about the conspicuous consumption of some returnees or about that jogger, resistance to social remittances builds an important and sometimes impenetrable wall through which it is difficult for returnees or visitors to see anything beyond mere 'stagnation' and 'conservatism'. Remaining insulated from some of the influence of migrants is probably one of the most important features and resources that these small communities have to retain some level of identity, especially in the age of the increasing influence of the globalisation processes of which European integration is one part.

Funding

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