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Social Remittances and Migration (Sub-)Cultures in Contemporary Poland

Anne White*

The article discusses how to research the impact of migration on social change in sending countries, without using a development studies framework. It argues for greater attention to the lives of ‘stayers’. A comprehensive approach to migration impact should begin by using mainstream sociological research to identify overall social trends in the origin country, before considering migration as one determinant of change. The case study is social remittances in contemporary Poland. Social remittances are understood to include not just foreign ideas, but also those resulting from migrants’ reflections on their own changing lives. One way to investigate how such social remittances ‘scale up’ to create cultural change is to consider the meso-level of regional migration culture. Taking the example of changing gender roles, I discuss Polish sociological and migration scholarship before presenting my own quantitative and qualitative data on stayers’ opinions about maternal migration. I show how stayers in regions with high levels of migration can become persuaded to condone maternal behaviour which is at odds with traditional views on gender roles and the importance of the extended family. Migration cultures are, however, not so visible in other parts of Poland or in Polish cities. The final part of the article employs the concept of migration sub-cultures – pockets of migration exposure and expertise among particular social groups. Examining the case of Wrocław, a prosperous city which might appear to be untouched by migration influences, I argue that such sub-cultures are probably more prevalent than might be assumed.

Keywords: social change; social remittances; migration culture; stayers; gender

Introduction

The aim of this article is to suggest new ways of investigating the impact of migration on sending societies. My purpose is not to identify the scale of social remitting or measure the impact of migration *vis-à-vis* other determinants of social change. Instead, ‘social remittances’ is used as a term which focuses our attention on the ways in which sending societies are affected by migration, intertwined with other influences. I argue that migration scholars and mainstream sociologists need to collaborate to create this composite picture. I further suggest that general cultural changes in the sending country can be studied in the context of migration cultures which develop in particular regions. Social remittances can be considered, in a narrow sense, as ideas brought back to Society A from Society B, e.g. British ways of doing things which take hold in Poland. By contrast, this article is more concerned with ideas brought back from migrants moving within their own circles in the

* UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), UK. Address for correspondence: anne.white@ucl.ac.uk.

destination country, e.g. Polish ways of doing things in the UK, which take hold in Poland. Migrants often lead rather isolated lives while they are abroad and may lack much direct knowledge of what life is ‘really’ like for Society B, the majority population of the foreign country, about whom they have instead a range of myths and preconceptions (see e.g. Horolets and Kozłowska 2012). However, migrants are well aware of the changes in their own way of life while they are abroad, and discuss these changes with their contacts in the sending society. In the introduction to their special issue on social remittances, Boccagni and Decimo (2013: 4) refer to this type of remittance as ‘the discursive representations of migrant life which, through a cross-border flow of comments, narratives and gossips, make collectively sense of individual mobility’.

My article begins by discussing shortcomings of current frameworks for understanding migration impact and argues for an approach which focuses more on the already changing lives of ‘stayers’ in the sending country. The next section examines evidence of social change in Poland specifically, based on both quantitative and qualitative data. It considers how to link this evidence to data about social remittances. These are generally considered to be local phenomena, rather than national ones. Levitt (1998: 926) states that social remittances are ‘local-level’ forms of diffusion. The puzzle is therefore to understand the links between small-scale changes in views and habits which may be occurring as a result of migration and the evidence of wider cultural change captured by Polish national surveys, change which has many different causes.

One way to bridge this gap is to consider the meso-level of the region, not necessarily in the sense of the formal sub-national administrative unit or *województwo*. The paper considers the concept of migration cultures, which can be seen to exist in some Polish regions such as Podlasie or Podkarpacie, with traditionally high volumes of migration, where local residents live within transnational social fields spanning Europe and beyond.

The terms ‘migration culture’, or the interchangeable ‘culture of migration’, have different interpretations (e.g. Elrick 2008; Garapich 2013; Horváth 2008; Kandel and Massey 2002; White 2011). Here, I use the phrase to refer to the meso-level (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011) and to encompass regional norms about who should migrate, why, how and where; sets of meanings attributed to migration; and the assumption that international migration is an appropriate and predictable livelihood strategy for many people. For example: a fundamental aspect of migration culture in some parts of post-communist Europe is the re-conceptualisation of proximity and distance which results simultaneously from reduced possibilities for rural inhabitants to commute to work in cities (as they did before 1989) and a sense that it is ‘easier’ to work abroad. This trend has been noted by anthropologists researching life in Bulgarian and Romanian ‘global villages’ (Duijzings ed. 2013; Horváth 2008: 783), whose inhabitants feel disconnected from cities or the national state but close to international destinations (Creed 2013: 62). I found exactly the same in my own research in Poland.

Cultures in the sense of conventions about why and how to migrate intertwine with other ideas brought back from abroad. Social remittances narrowly understood as adopting and perhaps also transmitting new ideas about how to behave and think on specific topics unconnected to migration (e.g. focusing leisure time on the nuclear rather than the extended family, wearing tattoos, accepting homosexuality as normal) are hard to separate from a more general pattern of change in which living and working abroad are accepted by many people in high-migration regions as part of the fabric of everyday life.

Migration cultures are, however, not so visible in other parts of Poland or in Polish cities. The final part of the article therefore discusses the channels and impact of migration in parts of Poland where the impact of migration is even harder to discern. It employs the concept of migration sub-cultures – pockets of migration exposure and expertise among particular social groups in parts of Poland where the impact of migration is not in general so obvious and clear-cut – and argues that such sub-cultures are more prevalent than might be assumed.

Methodology

The focus of the article is mostly theoretical. It is an argument for new avenues of research rather than a report on a specific research project. However, in addition to recent Polish sociological literature, it draws to a limited extent on empirical research which I conducted in Poland between 2007 and 2015, particularly the 2007–2009 research for my book *Polish Families and Migration Since EU Accession* (White 2011), which investigated why an increasing number of parents were moving to Western Europe with their children. The final part of the article uses ethnographic material from my small project in the city of Wrocław in 2015. My impressions of migration cultures are also derived from 45 additional interviews with migrants in the UK (for my book and a project on return migration) and weekly conversations since 2008 with adult Poles from a range of locations in Poland, to whom I teach English at a Polish Saturday school in Bath.

Migration cultures, in the sense of attitudes and opinions about migration, could be investigated by means of regional level opinion polls, although I am not aware that this has been done, except for a poll which I commissioned in 2008 in Podkarpackie region in the south-eastern corner of Poland. At the time the area had one of the highest volumes of emigration in Poland. A total of 1 101 adult residents of Podkarpackie region (except the only city, Rzeszów) were interviewed about their views on parental migration with and without children. I complemented the survey findings with 82 in-depth interviews of stayers, mothers without higher education. My pilot research in 2007 (which helped me frame the survey questions) included nine interviews with women in small towns and villages in western Poland (Wielkopolska). It was apparent, however, that most interviewees were not well-informed about local migration trends and did not have a sense that there was any kind of local opinion with regard to migration. Quite the reverse situation obtained in the eastern towns of Elk and Suwałki, where I completed the pilot survey with a further nine interviews, and this informed my decision to conduct the main part of the research in similar towns with strong migration cultures, Grajewo (Podlasie) and Sanok (Podkarpacie), in 2008–2009. I also carried out 33 interviews in the UK. All my interviews adopted a livelihood strategy approach, discussing the different migration and other livelihood options available to local people, in the context of what was culturally acceptable. I also interviewed key informants such as job centre employees, head teachers and journalists, and scanned the local media (for the most part unsuccessfully) for migration stories.

Limitations of the research included the fact that my in-depth interviews for the study on family migration were conducted only with working-class women, and that I did not conduct research on migration cultures in cities, although cities are much harder to research ethnographically. This prompted my decision to conduct fieldwork in Wrocław in August–September 2015.

The research in Wrocław included interviews (on which I have not drawn in this article), but also conversations with key informants such as local council officials and teachers and with people I encountered working in shops, as receptionists, distributing flyers on the street, etc., I also gathered a range of written material about social change in the city. My purpose was to discover how and why local people thought that life for ordinary people was changing, without prompting for reflections about the impact of migration, since I was curious to see whether my informants considered migration to be a source of change. If I asked about migration at all, it was late in the conversation. This was a pilot project, lasting only a month. However, it provided sufficient evidence for me to at least tentatively back up the arguments about migration sub-cultures developed at the end of this article.

Focusing on stayers to study the impact of migration: an inside-out approach

The mobility of EU citizens is central to the EU project, and should enhance the intercultural competence of citizens across the EU (Xuereb 2011) as well as bringing economic benefits. However, the full effects of mobility on societies of sending countries remain unclear. The impact of mobility on receiving countries is reasonably well documented and sits within a larger literature about immigration to traditional migrant destinations. Less research is conducted about the impact on EU sending countries, and such research as exists is often narrow in scope, tending to have an economic focus and/or discuss social problems (e.g. Bélorgey, Garbe-Emden, Horstmann, Kuhn, Stubbs and Vogel 2012; OECD 2014; Piperno 2012; Thaut 2009).

Research on EU countries is handicapped by the fact that most literature on sending countries, worldwide, focuses on the 'migration–development nexus' (e.g. de Haas 2010; Kapur 2010). Even the standard and otherwise outstanding textbook on migration frames migration's impact on sending countries wholly in terms of development (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014: 55). The standard sending-country literature has aimed to understand countries like Morocco and India, rather than developed post-communist countries within the EU. The issue of whether migration is good for development is only partly applicable to EU member-states (*how* applicable being dependent on how 'development' is defined). To concentrate on development risks overstating the differences between sending and receiving societies in Eastern and Western Europe, both of which have 'very high' Human Development Indices. It can also obscure aspects of migration impact other than the impact of migration for education or employment. These include, for example, migration for family reunification, or in pursuit of adventure and new lifestyles.

Finally, the developmental lens promotes normativity. Most analysis globally (as summed up, for example, in Newland 2013) and inside the EU is organised within a framework of 'costs' versus 'benefits'. One unfortunate consequence of this is that phenomena which cannot clearly be labelled 'bad' or 'good' are missed from view. This is not to deny that migration impact has policy implications: both costs and benefits are real. However, even insofar as scholars should be interested in policy implications, using a normative framework to analyse the phenomenon still remains dangerous, since it runs the risk of exaggeration, for example regarding the supposed abandonment of children by parents working abroad. It promotes exploitation of migration problems by unscrupulous politicians, and precludes the adoption of other conceptual frameworks which might be more helpful for understanding the subject matter in its entirety. More comprehensive and nuanced knowledge would be more helpful for framing policy objectives.

What new frameworks could be adopted to achieve such comprehensiveness and nuance? Broadly speaking, existing scholarship studies absences and ties. Gaps in the sending country include depopulation, brain/brawn drain (where highly skilled or strong young workers emigrate) and care drain (where migrants leave dependent family members for whom they have caring responsibilities). Increasingly, however, scholars see impact in terms of the ties established between receiving and sending countries. These include economic remittances, 'brain circulation' as migrants return after improving skills abroad, or caring 'at a distance' within transnational families. The 'transnational lens' adopted by migration researchers over the past twenty years, against a background of scholarly interest in the role of networks within globalisation, has enabled deeper understanding of the ties created by migration and resulting transnational social fields (e.g. Faist 2000; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Pries ed. 2001; Vertovec 2009). These ties include the topic of this special issue of *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, namely social remittances: the circulation of ideas and practices to and from sending communities (e.g. Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011).

However, approaches to the social impact of migration focusing on gaps and ties, despite their complementary nature, do not paint the whole picture because the unit of analysis is normally migrants and their households, former workplaces and networks. Such approaches beg questions about stayers, people who simply live

in the sending country, particularly outside communities with high levels of migration. In what senses, if any, do they inhabit the transnational social space created by mass migration from their country of residence? Stayers are coming more under the microscope of migration scholars, as indicated by, for example, an IMISCOE conference on the topic in January 2015. However, this is still an underdeveloped area. Scholars compare migrants and non-migrants, or discuss why some people stay and others move (Grabowska-Lusińska 2012; Hammar, Brochmann, Kristof, Faist 2002; Hjälms 2013). They explore the impact of international on internal migration (King and Skeldon 2010). However, they tend to neglect other important questions about stayers. How do stayers construct their everyday behaviour and attitudes differently as a result of that country's migration experience? How does migration affect their opportunities and alter the shifting 'class and ethnic hierarchies' (Kaczmarczyk 2014: 118) which they inhabit?

Of course, existing approaches should not be abandoned, but migration impact can be studied more systematically from the stayers' perspective, i.e. 'inside-out'. This has two further advantages: (a) reducing the risk of overstating the impact of migration which occurs if we focus too much on what migrants do; and (b) tapping additional resources for assessing impact, in the form of existing knowledge about the sending society. Rather than asking what migrants do which shapes the origin country, we can use existing data to map how society in the origin country is changing, then ask how migration contributes to that change. One might suppose that mainstream sociologists of sending countries were already engaged in this process. However, unfortunately this seems to happen less than one might suppose. For all their skill in mapping social change in the society of origin, sociologists can fall into the trap of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). As specialists on just one society, they do not necessarily see that society as part of a transnational social space. Consequently, they are less likely to focus on studying the impact of migration, and instead tend to look for determinants of social change elsewhere. A nice example is an excellent recent publication on changing habits and customs in Poland, based on a project which combined in-depth interviews of ordinary citizens with content analysis of the Polish media, including soap operas (Arcimowicz, Bieńko and Łaciak 2015). It seems that when the research project was designed, the media was assumed to be the main determinant of change. However, at the end of the book the authors acknowledge that the interview evidence suggests that experience of travel and work abroad was more significant than media exposure. When describing changing customs 'more often than the media, our respondents cited personal experience and observation from travel (from tourism, professionally, to work, to visit family – from their own or someone else's experience)' (Arcimowicz *et al.* 385–386).

Meanwhile, migration scholars naturally concentrate their energies on studying migrants and migration and their more obvious and direct areas of influence on the sending society. They might, for example, notice how particular customs were being brought back from abroad, without contextualising this within the wider picture of how customs were changing overall. The two areas of research – migrants/migration and ordinary residents – are mostly disconnected, hindering a truly comprehensive analysis of migration impact. Looking at the topic the other way round – 'inside-out' – provides a more holistic approach. An inside-out approach requires exploration of the main respects in which society is changing, and producing a map of social change in the given country, based on mainstream sociology. One can then investigate migration as one among various determinants of social trends, although, as Boccagni and Decimo (2013: 2) suggest, 'distinguishing migrants' specific influence, within the wealth of material and symbolic resources that circulate between and within nation-states, may be quite a hazardous task'.

Poland: social change

Post-communist EU member-states have experienced considerable social change since 1989 and into the 21st century – change which is even more wide-ranging and profound than changes in Western Europe during the same time. The term ‘social change’ could be discussed at length, but there is no space to do so in this article. It will be understood quite broadly, although I indicate some areas which seem particularly important in the post-communist context. Social science research across the region raises many questions, of which the following seem particularly significant, being relevant in both Poland and neighbouring countries. What new social classes have been emerging since 1989, and how does their emergence relate to changing livelihoods and identities in the region? Are income/lifestyle/gender/other forms of social inequality increasing or decreasing? Are minority rights better observed, and are societies becoming more tolerant? Insofar as society is ‘post-collectivist’ (Pickles 2010), what does this actually entail? How are patterns of consumption changing? What meanings do people attach to the concept of a ‘normal’ standard of living? Is religion becoming more or less significant (and at what levels)? How far do informal practices persist, might they be growing, and if so why? Is civil society becoming stronger, and are democratic values becoming more entrenched? How polarised are political views? How can we conceptualise social change to take into account the fact that thanks to migration the ‘societies’ of individual nation-states are now located partly outside the borders of those nation-states?

Some determinants of such changes may be connected to migration, others to the more general impact of EU policies, globalisation and technological advances; still others are endogenous and represent the continuation of trends since the 1989 transition or before (Bafoil 2009). The puzzle is to understand how migration fits within this pattern of overall exogenous and endogenous change and see connections between migration and other influences, without overstating the role of migration, or assuming that its effects will be instantaneously visible.

Poland is a suitable case study because it has so much international migration, with relatively little immigration or internal migration. By 2013, around 1 789 000 Poles were living temporarily elsewhere in the EU, about one million more than in 2004 (CSO 2014). Other countries, such as Romania and Lithuania, have also experienced high levels of migration since EU accession, but Poland has further attraction as a case study because of its particular abundance of both migration research and national sociological surveys. As already mentioned, these national surveys frustratingly rarely distinguish between respondents who have lived abroad and those who have stayed in Poland, and tend to ignore migration as a possible determinant of social change. They nonetheless provide some answers to the questions about the direction of change in post-communist Europe as posed above, and therefore supply the indispensable background information for considering how migration might be contributing to such trends.

Although one should avoid assuming that change is linear – and there is a considerable scholarly literature debunking assumptions about a simple modernising trajectory in post-communist Europe – Polish surveys nonetheless suggest the existence of certain trends. Moreover, there are trends which seem to have intensified since 2004, when Poland joined the EU. These include a tendency for Poles to become more secular and individualistic; evidence of changing views on gender roles; more acceptance of minority rights; and decreasing poverty and income inequality. To pick some specific examples: fewer Poles go to church regularly (Czapiński 2013: 242); gender roles are changing as more couples share cooking, everyday shopping and childcare (Hipsz 2013: 23–24); fewer people oppose divorce (Boguszewski 2013b: 41); fewer people support the idea of an ethnically homogenous state and more are in favour of specific rights for Polish ethnic and national minorities (Omyła-Rudzka 2015). Other trends include changes in the social status of certain occupations: builders and cleaners are more respected (Cybulska 2013: 6); and a more positive attitude towards the law: for example, people disapprove more of motorists speeding (Boguszewski 2013c: 6).

One can guess the existence of certain migration-related influences in all cases, e.g. matching Boguszewski's (2013c) findings on speeding to Kubal (2012) on the changing legal culture of Polish migrants in the UK, or attributing greater respect for builders and cleaners to the earning power of those occupations in the West. However, clearly various influences must be at play. For instance, disapproval of speeding motorists no doubt reflects the success of road safety campaigns in Poland and media accounts of horrific road accidents. If more couples believe that both partners should be breadwinners, this could reflect the fact that it has become easier in recent years in Poland for women to do paid work because there are more childcare institutions, as much as a greater commitment to gender equality (which insofar as it exists, could itself have many causes). Moreover, one should not over-generalise about 'Poles', since drilling down into statistics often reveals considerable complexity, e.g. where middle-aged respondents express more liberal views than younger cohorts (see e.g. Omyła-Rudzka 2015 on attitudes to national minorities), as well as distinctions between city dwellers and others.

Given the sharp economic and political differences between Polish regions, it would seem desirable also to collect statistics about attitudes and behaviour on a regional and indeed local level. Only by looking at local migration impact together with evidence of sub-national social trends could one create a composite picture of the impact of migration on 'Poland'. However, detailed sub-national data is scarce. Regional World Values Survey samples, for example, are rather small, and although in 2012 Eurobarometer conducted a regional-level poll (Flash Eurobarometer 356 *Public Opinion in the EU Regions*), this is limited in scope. A more detailed snapshot is provided by the CBOS, EUROREG and ERESTE study *Living Conditions in Polish Society* (Gorzelać ed. 2008), Zagórski (2008) and other titles in the CBOS series *Opinie i Diagnozy 9–12*. The quantitative data from this study, for example, as presented in *Opinie i Diagnozy* booklets on individual regions, provides information about regional differences in livelihood strategies, such as preferences for migrating to work abroad as opposed to taking out a loan in Poland. In 2010 and 2014 the University of Wrocław, in collaboration with the city council, conducted a Social Diagnosis¹ survey of 2 000 residents, but unfortunately this does not discuss migration other than migration into the city (Błaszczak and Pluta 2015).

Many, though by no means all aspects of social change can be mapped by surveys, but insofar as social change is the aggregated effect of multiple actions by individuals in their everyday lives it can only be understood through qualitative studies. An excellent example is US anthropologist Marysia Galbraith's *Being and Becoming European in Poland* (2014), which includes a chapter on migration as one of several influences shaping the European identities of participants in her longitudinal study in south-eastern Poland, a region with strong migration traditions. In general, Polish qualitative research tends not to factor in migration as a determinant of social change. Some studies, however – like Galbraith's, conducted in regions with high volumes of migration – do accord a prominent place to migration. For example, Halamska's (2012) monograph on the changing Polish countryside (nationally) mentions migration just a couple of times, whereas migration is central to Leśniak-Moczuk's (2015) study of rural change in Podkarpackie. Leśniak-Moczuk (2015: 155) asserts that local people who have returned from working in other parts of Poland or abroad, having been exposed to different values away from home, become more independent and individualistic and possess weaker social ties, contributing to the processes of individualisation in local villages. In the same volume, Komorska (2015: 97), writing about the marginalisation of young people in the economically depressed Lublin region, identifies migration as one of the most significant local facilitators of upward social mobility. However, Galbraith, Leśniak-Moczuk and Komorska are quite exceptional: it is much more typical of both qualitative and quantitative research into Polish social trends to completely ignore any possible migration influences.

Local migration cultures and social change: the case of gender roles

In view of this lack of interest among mainstream sociologists in migration influences, it is not easy to investigate the links between small-scale changes in views and habits which may be occurring as a result of migration, and the evidence of wider cultural change captured by Polish national surveys. However, since I do have regional level survey data about gender roles I can, at least in this one field, apply the methodology outlined above, taking an inside-out approach to migration impact by first identifying the relevant social trends, and then seeing how migration might contribute to such trends. This section will therefore consider the case of gender roles and how social remittances might be leading to greater acceptance of equality between the sexes and greater focus on the nuclear, at the expense of the extended family.

Changing attitudes towards gender roles are an important aspect of social change everywhere, but have an extra significance in countries such as Poland, where gender is highly politicised. The apparent divide between Poles who believe that gender roles are God-given and immutable, or, conversely, should be constructed to become more equal, seems to symbolise profound divides within society. On the whole, the evidence is that belief in the value of similar roles for men and women has been growing, a trend which has been observable since the early 1990s (Fuszara 2005: 13–14) and which has continued in recent years, with caring and breadwinner roles becoming more evenly distributed. For example, CBOS surveys found that in 2006 24 per cent of respondents claimed that in their families childcare was the mother's responsibility; 3 per cent the father's; and 29 per cent that it was shared by both (49 per cent of respondents did not have children). In 2013 the figures were 15 per cent, 1 per cent and 35 per cent respectively (Hipsz 2013: 24). Boguszewski (2013a: 51) reports a drop in the percentage of women who would give up work if their husbands got a sufficiently well-paid job (58 per cent in 2006, 52 per cent in 2013). The most recent 2010–2014 round of World Values Survey (WVS) indicates declining agreement with the statement that 'university is more important for a boy than for a girl'.²

Although surveys on these and similar topics show the predictable pattern that younger, better-educated and more urban respondents express more liberal views, it is not the case that every survey shows this unambiguously, and the results are not always easy to interpret. For example, according to the WVS, male city dwellers are not less convinced than other Polish men that 'when a mother works for pay, the children suffer'.³ Although Polish society is often presented as polarised over moral/gender issues, and this does seem true with regard to arguments conducted in the media and politics, one should not assume that ordinary Poles also have very clear-cut views or always behave in accordance with their Catholic principles. (Choices are surely often made as part of livelihood strategies which find the most sensible options, e.g. limiting family size, not having a church wedding, or, as I shall argue, allowing mothers to work abroad.)

Turning now to migration scholarship: migration specialists have also been interested in changing views on gender, and Coyle (2007), Siara (2009) and Duda-Mikulin (2013) all report the views of Polish women who felt they were treated more equally in the UK than in Poland and welcomed this development. However, such interviewees do not necessarily typify 'Polish women', which is a varied category. Many women labour migrants, especially middle-aged and older women who migrate to care jobs in Italian or Greek households (often sites of traditional ideas about gender roles) come from particularly conservative regions in eastern Poland such as Małopolska, Podkarpacie and Podlasie. Indeed, Prasałowicz (2008: 52) argues that some of the most conservative women migrate precisely because they cannot adapt to find a place in the new, post-communist reality of these often depressed regions. There is evidence of the very 'pro-family' orientations of female migrants to Italy (Małek 2010). However, whatever their views about the ideal distribution of family roles, in practice, through their leaving their husbands to work abroad, such women naturally become more self-confident (Urbańska 2015). In some cases they demand recognition of their new breadwinner status on their return to Poland. Ac-

According to Cieślińska (2014: 67), like Urbańska writing about women from Podlasie, ‘Women emigrants, supporting their families – including their husbands – also change their attitudes. They want to be appreciated more, listened to and respected in their family. They expect to see an improvement in their status within the family, an acceptance of their new image’. It should be noted that Cieślińska and Urbańska are both writing about social remitting not in the sense of ideas from Society B brought home to Society A, but rather about the impact of the women’s personal circumstances (gaining self-confidence through migration) on their behaviour when they return.

Research which explores the lives of female migrants often provides hints, but little direct evidence about the impact of their migration on other women staying in Poland: their female friends, relatives and neighbours, or indeed about the impact of women’s migration on local men. However, in order to ascertain the impact of social remittances, these stayers’ views and behaviour needs to be taken into account.

This is why it is useful to situate social remittances within the wider migration culture, particularly with reference to meanings attributed to migration, and conventions about who should migrate and under what circumstances. As mentioned in the *Methodology* section, I found striking similarities in discourse about migration in all four of the towns which I studied in 2007–2009, as indeed in later projects in Grajewo (2012) and Limanowa (2013). There seemed to be widespread conviction that life was precarious in Poland (particularly in small towns in ‘Poland B’) and that this created ‘situations which forced you to migrate’. Interviewees’ stories about themselves and other local people were full of phrases such as ‘the situation forced her to migrate’ or ‘I’ll migrate if the situation forces me’, although ‘the situation’ had different implications: sometimes it seemed to be an unexpected emergency, and sometimes part of the normal, but unsatisfactory, fabric of local life. It was also emphasised that people did not migrate because they were materialistic: they were going abroad ‘for bread’, not ‘in search of coconuts’: their goal was to achieve a ‘normal’ or ‘decent’ standard of living. Stayers’ attitudes towards migrants were therefore not judgmental. Such views were nicely encapsulated in my interview with a non-migrant in Sanok in 2008:

Anne: Do you think it’s bad that so many people work abroad?

Anita: Is it bad that so many people work abroad? [pause] We’re used to the situation as it is today, here in this part of Poland. And for me it’s not surprising that people go to work abroad. It’s normal here. It’s normal here.

Side-by-side, however, with statements about the ‘situation which forced you to migrate’, were numerous accounts of how local people were ‘tempted’ and ‘persuaded’ by friends and family to follow them abroad. Interviewees’ stories made frequent reference to what Boccagni and Decimo, already quoted above, term ‘cross-border flow of comments, narratives and gossips [which] make collectively sense of individual mobility’ (Boccagni and Decimo 2013: 4). It may well be the case that this type of remittance meets less resistance than the export of entirely new ideas emanating from the receiving society. An example from my own research in Grajewo is the following telephone conversation in which a Polish woman in the UK is reported describing her life to the interviewee, Dorota, who lives in Poland:

‘Dorota, I’m alive. I know what I’m working for. And I have free weekends’... She says, ‘It’s a different world...’ She says to me, ‘Pack up and come!’... Here in Poland she never had a holiday, but she went to England and she took her children to Majorca for two weeks. She said, ‘Dorota, it was super!’ If I had a different husband... I wouldn’t even stop to think, I’d just go.’⁴

As this account suggests, social remittances understood as migrants transmitting new aspirations and ideas about how to behave and think on specific topics unconnected to migration (in this case, a working-class Polish woman in 2008 taking her children on a foreign beach holiday) are hard to separate from attempts to persuade stayers to follow suit. The cross-border flow of narratives therefore contributes to Polish migration cultures. Stayers whom I interviewed lived in transnational social spaces which created the opportunity to experiment with migration. The many local people with close friends and family abroad possessed information and networks which they could safely use to follow in their footsteps, at least temporarily. Elsewhere in the same interview, Dorota mused, 'It may be good, it may be bad, that's the way everywhere. But you *have to give it a go*'.

The next section of this article picks up on the themes identified in the previous paragraph – pragmatism, compulsion and experimentation – to discuss the views of stayers. It explores in turn three different aspects of the migration culture, with evidence of changing views about gender roles and the family as a result of social remittances. These were: pragmatic acceptance of migration by lone mothers; acceptance that maternal migration is justified if the goal is to subsidise children's higher education (since one aspect of local cultures is that parents rather than children bear primary responsibility for subsidising university study); and support for migration by whole nuclear families, at the expense of the extended family.

My 2008 poll asked about a specific livelihood strategy undertaken by lone mothers in such regions: leaving their children (often with their own mother) while they experimented with working abroad. Some 85.3 per cent of respondents believed that 'mothers of small children should not leave their children and husbands to work abroad'. However, when asked what they thought of lone mothers migrating, under specific circumstances ('the situation which forces' migration), 55.1 per cent agreed that 'for lone mothers, migration is often a sensible escape route from a difficult financial situation; afterwards, they can bring their children to be with them and start a new life abroad'. This willingness to condone behaviour which conflicted with established norms was explained by an interviewee (herself a return migrant) in Sanok in 2008:

Anne: What do people think if a lone mother migrates, leaving her children in Poland?

Magda: They're not wild about it. Although, I don't know, you always have to hear both sides. If she's in a really hard situation, well, she's forced, then you can't criticise her, can you?...

Anne: But do other people have the same opinion?

Magda: Some people think differently, they say she's wrong, but others think the way I do. I think most people agree with me.

Another area where double standards seem to apply is migration to pay for education. The post-communist period has been marked by a dramatic increase in aspirations for higher education and, although my interviews suggested that parental migration to pay for children's university education is not new, nonetheless the scale seems to have increased, and there are plenty of local examples of this type of migration. Higher education counts as 'bread' rather than 'coconuts': a 'normal' aspiration for decent parents. Migration can apparently justify women leaving their families. This is particularly true for women whose children have left home, but it seems also to sometimes justify migration by women with younger children. The practice was defended, for example, by Beata, a mother of three who had been working abroad for several years, leaving her school-age children in Grajewo: 'After all, I'm a mother. Well, everyone wants their children to have a better life, don't they? I did what I could'. Other local women seemed to accept that this was ordinary behaviour. Kazimiera,

for example, who had never migrated, when asked why people did migrate, asserted that ‘Some migrate to buy themselves housing, others to educate their children’. Danuta, another non-migrant, lamented that ‘I may be forced to work abroad. From the point of view of making some money to help our children get through their five years at university’. Although interviewees did not generally espouse liberal (let alone feminist) opinions, they transgressed gender norms because their behaviour was pragmatic. It was shaped by the conviction that in the absence of local livelihood options you should take up opportunities to work abroad to escape poverty, purchase higher education, etc.

Post-communist societies are said to be becoming less collectivist, and this process can be observed in the growing trend for nuclear families to migrate, leaving behind relatives in Poland and dislodging children from their home communities. This can be seen as both an effect of a wider process of individualisation in post-communist societies, as nuclear families place their own emotional well-being above the interests of their extended families, but also a cause, since it often leads to other families migrating in turn. Families who follow the model of ‘incomplete migration’ – traditional in Poland since the 1990s – are increasingly deciding that instead of the wife and children staying in Poland, while the husband works abroad, it is preferable for nuclear families to uproot the whole household from the local community. My opinion poll demonstrated wide acceptance both that it was ‘easier’ for Polish families with children to live in Western Europe and that it was ‘better’ for children, even teenagers, to live with both parents abroad rather than with one parent in Poland (White 2011: Chapter 6). Families should be together, even if this meant being together abroad. This was quite surprising, given that until recently the norm had so definitely been for only one parent to migrate and that parents who migrated with children were seen as eccentric. The interviews in Poland, as well as my interviews and observations of Poles living in the UK, suggested that this change might be linked to a spreading culture among migrants abroad, especially as EU member-states opened up their labour markets fully to new EU members. Fathers who are working abroad alone see that other Poles invite their family members to join them and often manage to do well, and they decide to do the same, sometimes having been persuaded by friends whose families have reunified abroad. Meanwhile, as in the case of Dorota, quoted in the introduction, women already living abroad are in touch with their female friends and relatives in Poland, and also persuading them that it would be easier and better for their families to migrate. Indeed, one interviewee, Elżbieta, who lived in Suwałki with her children while her husband worked in England, said not only that was it becoming more common in Suwałki for whole families to migrate, but also that many of her friends were asking why she did not go to be with her husband.

The impact of migration on locations with low volumes of international migration

Seeing the map of Poland as a patchwork of different (migration) cultures, some stronger than others, and none of course exactly congruent with administrative regions, begs several questions. The first concerns the geographical boundaries of these migration cultures: for example, whether young people who move to Polish regional capitals bring their small-town migration cultures with them. The second question is more important: whether it is possible to ascertain the impact of migration in Polish cities. My own and other scholars’ research on small communities leaves open the question of how migration influences social change in larger locations, with more diverse economies, a lower incidence of migration, other forms of direct contact with foreign countries (e.g. through business and tourism) and a greater proportion of highly educated residents open to multiple information sources. In particular, it might seem hard to identify the influence of migration on flourishing and fast-developing cities such as Warsaw, Poznań, the Tri-City (Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot) and Wrocław. Such places might be supposed to have weak or non-existent migration cultures.

Wrocław, for instance, might seem to be the polar opposite of small towns such as Grajewo. Located in south-western Poland, with a population of 635 000, it typifies ‘Poland A’ and is often viewed as ‘an iconic success story of Poland’s economic urban transformation’ (Cervinkova 2013: 744). Wrocław has a buoyant labour market: in July 2015, for example, registered unemployment in Poland nationally was 10.1 per cent, but only 3.9 per cent in Wrocław city and 3.8 per cent in Wrocław powiat (constituting much of the suburban area). The housing stock is increasing rapidly: from January to July 2015, 3 288 new dwellings came onto the market in Wrocław city and 1 131 in the powiat (WUS 2015: 14). Like other post-communist cities, Wrocław is acquiring extensive suburbs (Stanilov and Sýkora 2014). Many new estates – as elsewhere – are gated communities, whose inhabitants, according to Kajdanek (2011), work and even go to school in Wrocław city and have little to do with their neighbours. ‘The garden fence is not a border to be crossed when visiting your neighbour. It is a border not to be crossed’ (Kajdanek 2011: 310). By contrast, Kubicki (2011), analysing the worldviews of the 30-something well-educated ‘new bourgeoisie’ of Wrocław and Kraków, emphasises their open-mindedness and sense of civic engagement, ‘breaking away from the closed and mistrustful culture which fatally typified Polish society in the past’ (Kubicki 2011: 226). He writes (2011: 217):

The generation of the baby boom and the boom in higher education is also the generation of European integration. It was the first generation fully to experience the benefits of free movement: study at foreign universities; work abroad, but also in international organisations inside Poland; and mass foreign tourism, boosted by ease of crossing international borders and cheap air travel.

Kubicki portrays his ‘new bourgeoisie’ as enthusiastic supporters of the city’s promotional strategy, associated with the Civic Platform local leadership, ‘whose main goal is to encourage people to come and study in the city and then stay on to work’ (Ładysz 2013: 248). Hence the carefully constructed image of the city as a place where people want to live and work. ‘Wrocław’s promotional strategy, under the banner of Wrocław – the Meeting Place, has been widely credited as key to the city’s wealth and prominence’ (Cervinkova 2013: 747). By referring to the city as a ‘meeting place’ (*miasto spotkań*), the local authorities market it as somewhere open and welcoming: a place where people arrive, rather than leave. It is a magnet for foreign investors and also an agent of cultural globalisation, through, for example, its role as European Capital of Culture 2016, or the 2017 World Games.

There is no place in this narrative for migration away from contemporary Wrocław. However, according to a large Lower Silesia-wide survey in 2010, 8.5 per cent of households in the city contained at least one member who had lived abroad for at least three months (Bieńkowska, Ułasiński and Szymańska 2010: 28). According to this study, Wrocław city migrants had a slightly different profile from migrants living elsewhere in the region: they were on average younger and better educated, and about a third had migrated for educational reasons, rather than work; they were less likely than other Lower Silesians to have returned to Poland by 2010, but, if they did return, they were more likely to express the desire to stay, rather than engaging in repeat migration. One reason cited for staying in Wrocław was that they had purchased housing, and according to my own informants in summer 2015 (a local government official and an estate agent employee), return migrants are well represented among the purchasers of new housing in the city suburbs. This raises the intriguing possibility that there is a ‘migration culture’ in such locations, along the lines suggested by Kubicki, where a significant proportion of youngish residents have a migration exposure which re-confirms and intertwines with the other European and global influences which permeate life in Wrocław, at least for the ‘new bourgeoisie’. This would accord with my own impressions from interviewing a small sample of return migrants in Warsaw and Poznań (White 2014).

Nonetheless, as the figures in Bienkowska *et al.* (2010) make clear, the majority of Wrocław migrants go abroad to work, not to study, and share many common features with labour migrants from other parts of the region. In the course of my fieldwork in the UK I had met several working-class labour migrants from Wrocław, as well as many from the other major Polish cities. Even cities with higher than average wages contain poor people who migrate to work abroad, either for purely economic reasons or to join friends and family in the West. During my fieldwork in Wrocław I encountered individuals who used language and espoused views about migration identical to what I had heard in Grajewo and other small towns. These included claims about the mass scale of migration – although usually with regard to young people in particular; pessimism about local prospects and the assertion that young people were ‘forced’ to migrate, reminiscent of the ubiquitous discourse in small towns; strong doubts expressed about whether young people would return to Poland (‘what do they have to return to?’); or the culture of only going abroad to someone you know: the sentiment that ‘I would go abroad if I knew someone there prepared to invite me [but I don’t, so I can’t]’. There were also examples of household migration livelihoods typical of other parts of Poland, for example the owner of a small second-hand clothes shop whose husband and son worked abroad, and who claimed that this was a successful and practical strategy. In other words, poor people in Wrocław seemed to share a migration sub-culture which contrasted dramatically with the official image of the city as ‘the meeting place’.

At the same time, however, many of my conversations provided no evidence of social remittances. For example, an employee at the Registry Office stated that the fashion for giving children non-Polish names was confined to people working abroad, not spreading to regular inhabitants of the city;⁵ a pet-shop owner asserted that attitudes towards animals had improved greatly since the 1990s, citing in particular the fact that pet owners bought more expensive dog food, but attributed this to people being richer and better informed from use of the Internet; the owner of a shop selling children’s clothes and toys stated that many of her customers were young Polish parents who worked abroad but were on holiday in Poland and – rather than manifesting any new consumer preferences as a result of living abroad – came to her shop specifically because she sold *Polish* goods.

Conclusion

To understand social change as comprehensively as possible, and the contribution of migration to social change, entails being open-minded and ready to look for phenomena which do not easily fit within standard frameworks. For mainstream sociologists, it involves writing migration ‘into the story’, along with the media, politicians and other agents of change; for migration scholars, it involves seeing the wider picture of change in the sending country and understanding how stayers as well as migrants view the role of migration in influencing change. Only stayers can tell the researcher about the impact of social remittances. In the Polish case, being open-minded involves not being deceived by the marketing strategies of flourishing cities which obscure the existence of labour migration, or by mechanistic assumptions that low unemployment equals low migration. On closer inspection, it seems that working-class people even in cities like Wrocław both migrate to work abroad and share understandings of migration similar to those held by similar people in other types of Polish location. They live within a migration sub-culture with its own discourse about migration being simultaneously ‘forced’ but also a response to opportunity, and the importance of ‘only going abroad to people you know’. A different migration sub-culture is shared by cosmopolitan highly educated young and young middle-aged return migrants, who to some extent can be identified with the occupants of new suburban housing in cities such as Wrocław – although I have also met similar returnees in small towns in eastern Poland. Thanks to their language skills and ability to discover attractive aspects of the receiving society, such migrants are more likely to transmit social remittances directly from one society to the other.

Despite Poland's undeniable geographical diversity, and the need for thorough studies of particular locations, it is therefore important to adopt a sociological perspective and see the similarities between socio-economic groups, whether they live in cities or in small towns. Studies of 'migration culture' have up to now tended to be place-focused (reflecting the preoccupations of demographers and anthropologists), rather than considering sub-cultures of certain occupational groups (traditionally, more studied by sociologists). Place-based studies need to be complemented by a focus on other variables such as age and social class, as well as on the social networks which connect locations within sending countries.

I have argued that migration culture and sub-culture are useful concepts in understanding social remittances. The meanings attributed to migration in sending societies and beliefs about who should migrate and how migration should be done are in themselves a type of social remittance, since they are transmitted by migrants to stayers in the form of information, persuasion, cautionary tales about how not to migrate, etc. However, changing migration cultures also contribute to wider cultural change. My article considered in particular the causes of a more equal distribution of caring and breadwinner roles between men and women, as captured by Polish national surveys. As migration scholars have noted with regard to Poland, as to many countries, when women migrate this can enhance their status as breadwinners and their sense of independence and self-worth. This is reflected in a number of qualitative studies about migrant women. However, a closer look at the specific migration culture of small towns in eastern Poland, exploring the opinions of stayers and returnees, revealed other specific ways in which women were enhancing their breadwinner status and transgressing gender norms. Their behaviour was leading to 'scaling up' of more liberal opinions. In particular, many respondents approved of temporary migration by lone mothers, despite their otherwise strong belief that mothers of small children should not leave their children to work abroad: an attitude which reflected a more general highly pragmatic attitude to migration. Moreover, the value accorded to higher education in contemporary Poland trumped beliefs about mothers not migrating and led interviewees to condone migration to pay for children's higher education. It was also apparent that migrants who had reunified with their families abroad were persuading other families to do the same, on the grounds that *families should stick together*, i.e. the emotional needs of the nuclear family should be prioritised above the claims of the extended family. This was profoundly changing the normal pattern of migration, from 'incomplete' migration to migration by whole families with children, further enhancing the Polish trend towards more individualised and private lifestyles.

Notes

¹ http://uni.wroc.pl/sites/default/files/Wroclawska_diagnoza_spoleczna_UWr_2014.pdf (accessed: 3 March 2016).

² <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp> (accessed: 27 February 2016).

³ <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp> (accessed: 27 February 2016).

⁴ Interviewed in Grajewo, 2008. All interviewees have been given pseudonyms.

⁵ In Poland it has officially been permissible to register Polish children with non-Polish names only since April 2015, but Wrocław had not been observing the regulation, so my informant had longer experience of registering children with foreign names.

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