Unpacking the Meanings of a 'Normal Life' Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Eastern European Migrants in Scotland

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This article explores the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) migrants from Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union in Scotland. Drawing on interviews with 50 migrants, the article focuses on the experiences and aspirations which they articulate as being part of 'a normal life', and analyses them within broader conceptual understandings of security and 'normality'. We first examine how normality is equated with an improved economic position in Scotland, and look at the ways in which this engenders feelings of emotional security and well-being. We then explore how more positive experiences around sexuality and gender identity are key to a sense of emotional security – i.e. of feeling accepted as 'normal', being visible as an LGBT person but 'blending in' rather than standing out because of it. Finally we look at the ways in which the institutional framework in Scotland, in particular the presence of LGBT-affirmative legislation, is seen by participants to have a normalising effect within society, leading to a broader sense of inclusion and equality – found, again, to directly impact upon participants' own feelings of security and emotional well-being. The article engages with literatures on migration and sexuality and provides an original contribution to both: through its focus upon sexuality, which remains unexplored in debates on 'normality' and migration in the UK; and by bringing a migration perspective to the debates in sexuality studies around the normalising effect of the law across Europe. By bringing these two perspectives together, we reveal the inter-relationship between sexuality and other key spheres of our participants' lives in order to better understand their experiences of migration and settlement.

Keywords: queer migration; East–West migration; LGBT rights in Europe; normality

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Introduction

Despite extensive research on East–West migration to the UK following EU accession processes in 2004 and 2007, this body of work has, by and large, neglected the role of sexuality and gender identity in migrants' experiences (Mai and King 2009; Binnie and Klesse 2013). In particular, the experiences of non-heterosexual migrants remain virtually invisible in this body of work, despite uneven levels of recognition of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights across Europe. The article discusses findings from a project exploring the experiences of LGBT migrants from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Former Soviet Union (FSU) in Scotland (see Acknowledgements). The wider research project explores how sexuality and gender identity interplay with other factors in shaping decisions to migrate to and to stay in Scotland, as well as lived experiences of transnational migration and settlement, and migrants' networks of sociability and sense of belonging. We explore how East–West post-accession migration, widely understood to be primarily driven by economic factors, maps on to different attitudes, policy and legislation towards LGBT citizens across Europe. Drawing upon 50 in-depth biographical interviews conducted with LGBT migrants living across Scotland, the article focuses on how migrants articulate their aspirations and experiences, and how they evaluate their lives in Scotland in comparison to their lives 'back home'. Key to these aspirations were ideas of a 'normal', 'liveable' life, understood as a secure, dignified, ordinary life, articulated in relation to both material and emotional aspects of the migrant experience. The article unpacks the material and emotional meanings attached to notions of feeling secure and having an easier and better life in the context of migration and settlement. We use the notion of a 'normal life' to frame our analysis here because it was widely used during our interviews, both in relation to economic and material security and to migrants' experiences around sexuality.[1]Notions of normality as both an aspiration and a discourse have emerged in research on post-accession East–West migration (e.g. Galasińska and Kozłowska 2009; McGhee, Heath and Trevena 2012). Concepts of normality, social norms and normativity are also critically explored within the sexuality literature: we draw here in particular on Butler's (2004) notion of 'livable lives', which she understands as enabled or restricted by norms and social conventions, including those coded in law.

This article thus engages with the literatures on both migration and sexuality and provides an original contribution to them: firstly through its focus upon sexuality – which remains underexplored in debates on normality within studies that have looked at CEE migration to the UK – and, secondly, by bringing a migration perspective to the debates in sexuality studies around 'liveable lives' and the normalising effect of LGBT-affirmative legislation across Europe. Furthermore, by bringing these two perspectives together, we reveal the inter-relationship between sexuality and other key spheres of our participants' lives in order to better understand their experiences of migration and settlement. We do this by unpacking migrants' everyday perceptions of what is 'normal' (i.e. expected and common-sense but also desirable), and how these relate to their migration trajectories and their identities (particularly their sexual identities).

Before exploring the diverse ways in which LGBT migrants articulated ideas of normality and security in relation to their lives in Scotland, we start by exploring these ideas conceptually. We look in particular at the literature which relates to the concept of normality with regards to both migration and sexuality. We then briefly outline the design and methodology of the project and the methods we employed, and provide an overview of our participants' demographic profiles. In the remainder of the article, we explore LGBT migrants' experiences and unpack the meanings which they ascribed to a 'normal life'.

Unpacking normality

Notions of a better life

We originally set out to explore perceptions of security among LGBT migrants from CEE and the FSU which emerged through our analysis of the empirical data we had collected. We understand security as a holistic concept which goes beyond access to social welfare and encompasses what might facilitate and encourage a sense of both material and emotional security. Anthropological studies, specifically those by the von Benda-Beckmanns (1994) and von Benda-Beckmann, von Benda-Beckmann, Casiño, Hirtz, Woodman and Zacher (1988), focus attention on the diverse ways in which people actively strive to produce securities (social, economic, personal and cultural) through a combination of public and private resources, formal and informal networks, and state and non-state structures. Such an understanding encompasses and combines the material (e.g. access to jobs or housing) and the emotional (e.g. the existence of positive relations and social connections, a sense of being secure) aspects of what is required for security. We came to understand this holistic idea of security as bound up with the notion of normality, understood in a Goffmanian sense, as both actuality and aspiration, and as something that 'provides us with feeling of safety, certainty and familiarity' (Misztal 2001: 312). This understanding of normality emerged organically from our data; as we were analysing our interview transcripts and making sense of how participants spoke about 'security', we realised that a significant number of them used the word 'normal' when describing their experiences, perceptions and aspirations.

Our findings in relation to security and normality fit well with the body of literature which has looked at the idea of normality and post-accession East–West migration. This literature has focused primarily upon the experiences of Polish migrants who arrived in the UK, in particular England (see Galasińska and Kozłowska 2009; Galasińska 2010; Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Rabikowska 2010; Ryan 2010; McGhee *et al.* 2012). The focus in this work is on how normality is perceived and created by individual migrants in many different aspects of their lives, both real and virtual. The research often focuses on how a 'normal life' is perceived by migrants in the future, as something to be strived for, an aspiration but not yet achieved (Lopez Rodriguez 2010: 349). In addition, a 'normal life' is often discussed as something that is in contrast to the 'abnormal' state of being which was left behind upon departure from their home countries, a creation of a new sense of normality, both different from but also imitating what was, at one time, experienced at home (Lopez Rodriguez 2010: 340; Rabikowska 2010: 287; McGhee *et al*. 2012: 715). Through all of the literature there is an implicit connection of the emotional and material in the empirical discussion of normality. Furthermore, a number of the articles cited above attempt to theoretically underpin their empirical concept of normality, drawing again in particular on Goffman (Goffman 1959/1990, 1963/1990, 1971, 1974; see for example Rabikowska 2010, Ryan 2010). Rabikowska (2010: 288), for example, argues that 'normality is always a state to come, a state projected to the future, but it is also immersed in the present from which desires and ambitions originate'. Importantly, the literature explores the place of the West within this idea or discourse of normality, where 'the West has become an aspiration and a desired embodiment of normality for people living in Eastern Europe' (Rabikowska 2010: 288). This idea of the West reflects past imaginings prevalent in the socialist period and also points to the insecurities which people are facing in the post-socialist present. Lulle and King's (2015) article on Latvian older female migrants, although not explicitly engaging with the concept of normality, offers important insights into the literature outlined above by looking at ideas around 'a better life' and how this is imagined and created in different time-spaces (Lulle and King 2015). The authors write about the 'duality of well-being', i.e. economic considerations and psychosocial dimensions of self-esteem and personal development, which can be easily mapped onto the material and emotional aspects of normality (2015: 458). These ideas around a 'better life' echo what emerged from our study and the way in which participants spoke of

enjoying a 'better life' in Scotland, as we explore below. This body of literature as a whole is relevant to the findings from this research, particularly in its attention to the place of the West in understandings of normality and to the focus upon both the emotional and the material. We add to this literature firstly by interrogating how ideas of a better life complement understandings of normality and a normal life, and then by showing how, for our participants, the way they experience their sexuality in a Scottish context is crucial to their perceptions of 'having a normal life'.

Sexuality, migration and a normal life

As noted in the introduction, the extensive research on post-accession 'East–West' migration to the UK has been largely silent on the issue of sexuality, with rare exceptions (Mai and King 2009; Siara 2009; Binnie and Klesse 2013). Discussion of LGBT 'East–West' migration has often focused on whether it can be 'explained in terms of flight from homophobic persecution or from poor economic opportunities' (Binnie and Klesse 2013: 1114). However, Mai and King argue against explaining migration as exclusively motivated by political or economic considerations, and suggest instead that the 'decision to migrate and to continue living and working abroad can only be understood by bringing into the analytical equation the affective, sexual and emotional dimensions' (Mai and King 2009: 297). We utilise here the notion of 'normality' to encompass these different dimensions of the migrant experience. Social norms are arguably central to any understanding of a 'normal life'. Butler (2004), writing about LGBT subjects, argues that norms and regulations shape the possibilities for how queer lives can be lived, imagined and articulated – while certain norms 'permit people to breathe, to desire, to love and to live', others 'restrict or eviscerate the conditions of life itself' (Butler 2004: 8). Butler's work predominantly focuses on gender and sexual norms; however, she also argues that the notion of 'liveable lives' can only be fully understood by considering how gender and sexual norms play out against the material conditions of 'liveable lives'.

Gender and sexual norms are often inscribed in law and, indeed, the very uneven legal and policy landscape concerning LGBT rights in Europe is an important backdrop to East–West LGBT migration. It informed the design of this project, although it was not explicitly focused on in interviews, which explored migrants' life stories and everyday experiences, rather than LGBT rights. Nonetheless, in response to questions about experiences of prejudice and discrimination, feelings of safety and comfort, and attitudes towards LGBT communities in Scotland and in their country of origin, participants often discussed differences in the legal and policy contexts. For this reason, we briefly outline here the legal and policy landscape concerning LGBT rights in Europe, while acknowledging that social norms are not only inscribed in law and policy but also reproduced and contested in less-formalised social conventions and everyday interactions.

Despite significant regional variations, same-sex sexualities have been widely stigmatised as deviant across Europe for most of the twentieth century, not least through legal and policy provision (e.g. the criminalisation of consensual same-sex relations, the different age of consent for same-sex and opposite-sex relationships, and policies forbidding the discussion of homosexuality in schools). Thus, the 'normal' citizen was implicitly constructed as heterosexual (Richardson 2004). Since the 1990s, however, there has been a notable shift towards greater inclusion of non-heterosexual citizens across Europe, prompting debate about the normalising effects of the law on the lives of LGBT citizens (Richardson 2004, 2015). This shift is evidenced by significant legal and policy change at both national and supra-national levels, and was informed by the process of European integration and transnational activism (Stychin 2003; Binnie and Klesse 2013; Kollmann and Paternotte 2013; Ayoub and Paternotte 2014). Nonetheless, this 'normalisation' through law and policy has occurred unevenly across Europe and, in many ways, remains contested and partial. Noticeable differences remain in terms of the introduction and implementation of LGBT-affirmative policy and legislation across European states: these can

be gleaned from recent comparative surveys (ILGA-Europe 2015, 2016a 2016b). These surveys suggest a marked East/West divide in the introduction of LGBT-positive policy and legislation across Europe with regards, for example, to the legal recognition of same-sex couples. All 13 European countries which have introduced same-sex marriage are located in Western Europe; no Eastern European country has thus far opened up marriage to same-sex couples, although some have introduced civil unions. However, the introduction of same-sex union legislation has been more uneven and controversial in post-socialist Eastern Europe – for example, same-sex unions have more-limited rights attached and have sometimes been accompanied by constitutional amendments defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman, in a deliberate attempt to prevent the introduction of same-sex marriage (Carroll 2016; Ayoub and Kollmann 2017). This, together with the introduction of legislation banning the 'propaganda of homosexuality' in Russia, seems to be indicative of a widespread resistance to the 'normalisation' of LGBT rights, a process often resented as part of an imposed 'Europeanisation' impinging on national sovereignty and national values (Stychin 2003; Stella and Nartova 2015). The narrative of an 'East/West' divide is, in many ways, an oversimplification of a very fluid and complex picture; indeed, post-socialist countries such as the Czech Republic (2006) and Hungary (2007) introduced some form of civil partnership rights much earlier than Western European countries such as Greece (2015) and Italy (2016) (Kollman and Paternotte 2013; Carroll 2016; ILGA-Europe 2016a). Rankings such as the ILGA-Europe (2016b) Rainbow Europe Map are problematic, not least because the letter of the law may not straightforwardly reflect wider social norms and attitudes.

For the purpose of this article, however, it is important to bear in mind that all our participants were originally from countries which, at the time of writing, had a lesser level of legal and policy protection for LGBT citizens compared to Scotland. Indeed, in recent years, the UK (and Scotland within it) has been consistently ranked as among the most 'progressive' countries in Europe in terms of legal and policy provision for LGBT citizens (ILGA Europe 2015, 2016b). The Rainbow Europe Index,[2] which ranks European countries according to their record on LGBT equality, ranked the UK first in 2015 and third in 2016. With regards to the constituent parts of the UK, in both 2015 and 2016, Scotland met a higher number of criteria compared to England, Wales and Northern Ireland (*Guardian* 2015; Harrison 2016).[3] The backdrop of uneven legal and policy provision is important to understanding how Scotland was both imagined and experienced by the LGBT migrants we interviewed. This approach responds to Richardson's (2004) call to consider the possible impact of the normalisation of non-heterosexual subjects through law and policy reform at the level of everyday interaction, by exploring the experiences of those who are expected to benefit from the process of normalisation. A substantial body of research has explored the effects of this 'normalisation' on the ordinary lives of LGBT individuals in the UK, focusing mostly on UK citizens (Browne and Bakshi 2013; Heaphy, Smart and Einarsdottir 2013). This article explores a novel dimension of this debate by examining the experiences of LGBT *migrants* and by considering how migration may open up new 'transnational spaces of possibility' (Morokvasic 2004).

We are aware that normality and normalisation themselves are contested concepts. Indeed, critical sexualities scholars have pointed out that the LGBT equality agenda has produced new normativities, underpinned by neoliberal notions of citizenship. For example, the inclusion of LGBT citizens is conditional upon them fitting into certain narrow parameters of acceptable sexuality and gender, premised on 'monogamy, domesticity, capitalist individualism and consumerism, as well as class and racialized positioning' (Browne and Bakshi 2013: 9). While mindful of these critiques, we wish to bracket them here in order to focus on normality as a functional necessity of everyday interaction, which is based on shared presumptions and understandings of what is 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' and of what is 'in' and 'out of place'. In other words, we are focusing here not on normality as normativity, but on the 'factual' dimension of normality or, referring back to Butler (2004), on what makes people's lives 'liveable'.

Methodology

The interview data on which this article is based were gathered as part of the wider 'Intimate Migrations' project. Fieldwork was conducted in different locations across Scotland between April 2015 and June 2016 and the data were collected in two stages, using different methods. In this article, we draw on stage 1 data, which comprised biographical interviews with 50 participants. These explored migrants' backgrounds, their experiences as LGBT persons in their country of origin, their reasons for migrating, their experiences of migration and settlement in Scotland, and their plans for the future.[4]

Bearing in mind the compounded challenges of reaching a 'hidden' population and of researching migrants, the project was advertised Scotland-wide using a range of different strategies. We produced advertising leaflets, in a number of CEE/FSU languages, which were distributed through voluntary-sector organisations and ESOL colleges, and posted on social media (including on gay dating websites such as Planet Romeo and Facebook pages targeting specific language communities in Scotland). We also left leaflets and posters in commercial venues and community spaces targeting either the LGBT community or migrants from CEE/FSU (for example, Polish/Russian/Baltic corner shops). We also used snowballing, asking participants from the 'Intimate Migrations' project and from a previous pilot project (Stella 2015) to pass on information about the project to friends and acquaintances who may be able to help or be interested in taking part. We offered participants the option of being interviewed in Polish, Russian or English – the languages spoken by the research team – or to be interviewed via an interpreter, although none of our participants requested this latter. Giving participants the option to be interviewed in their first or preferred language whenever feasible was dictated by ethical considerations – it was important to make participation accessible regardless of interviewees' fluency in English. We also anticipated that some participants may be more comfortable talking about deeply personal and intimate issues in their first language. The interviews conducted in Polish and Russian were translated and transcribed into English (the translation procedure employed is discussed in Gawlewicz 2016), while those in English were transcribed *verbatim*.

Our sample included a majority of Poles (31), which reflects the demographic prominence of Polish nationals within the recent migration from CEE and the FSU to both Scotland and the UK as a whole (Scottish Government 2016; White 2016). Other nationalities represented included four Bulgarians, four Romanians, two Hungarians, two Russians, two Ukrainians, two Latvians, one Lithuanian and one Belarusian. The vast majority of our participants were citizens of countries that joined the EU in the 2004 and 2007 rounds of EU enlargement. Most of them were therefore able to travel to the UK without restrictions on their right to work, under the principle of the free movement of labour. It is also worth bearing in mind the distinctive features of the Scottish migration context, owing to Scotland's devolved government and its specific demographic and socio-legal characteristics within the UK. Although migration is a reserved matter controlled by the UK government, the Scottish government is generally seen to have adopted a more liberal approach, where migration is seen as a means of encouraging demographic stability and growth in order to facilitate wider economic development. However, due to current constitutional arrangements, Scotland is unable in real policy terms to significantly depart from dominant UK government approaches (Scottish Government 2016).

Our research participants were based in different locations across Scotland, although the majority were based in the Central Belt, especially in Edinburgh and Glasgow. They ranged in age from 19 to 49, and the vast majority of them had lived in Scotland for several years (average: 5.5 years). Most of them were educated to undergraduate degree level or above; this is, in all likelihood, an indication that our sample is skewed towards better-educated and relatively well-off migrants from the CEE and FSU regions. The majority of our participants (46) were in paid employment; despite their educational attainments, a large number of them were

employed in low-pay jobs and worked below their qualifications. It is worth noting that the 'Intimate Migrations' project initially focused specifically on sexual orientation and did not explicitly include gender identity – recruitment material was addressed at CEE/FSU migrants who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual and participants self-selected to participate. Two of our participants identified as transgender and, in the interview, they focused on gender identity rather than sexual orientation. Nonetheless, we were able to include transgender experiences only to a limited extent, and this is also reflected in the focus of the present article.[5]

'A better life': material and emotional security

A very strong narrative which emerged across the interviews was the importance of material security and the presence of it in our participants' everyday lives in Scotland. This material security included having a good job, a decent salary, a pleasant place to live and a more relaxed pace of life. In the quotes below, Przemek talks of how, in contrast to his life in Poland, he was able to live independently and not struggle financially in Scotland:

> *I was hoping to have a peaceful life… and economic stability… You know, a simple job, but a stable job that allows me to afford everything I need. (…) When I lived in [name of large city in Poland], I kind of had a decent salary… but it was just enough to cover my expenses… Sometimes I had to ask mum to give me some money… or send me something to eat. I feel great in [name of city in Scotland]. I've got a very good life… a very good job. (…) I earn good money. I live close to the city centre – the city is just fine in terms of size. It's not too large (…). It's not too small… so I'm not bored here. (…) When I came here I thought I'd be staying for a year or two and that I'd move again after that time. But I sort of settled down here. It's a bit scary, but I just feel good here* (Przemek, m, PL, 35–39).[6]

Like Przemek, many of our respondents associated Scotland with greater material security, in contrast to their experience in their countries of origin. In fact, Marcell, one of our respondents from Hungary, stated that better material conditions were key to his decision to move to Scotland, rather than his sexuality:

> *If the economic situation was much, much better in Hungary, and the salaries were much higher, I think I would go back to Hungary tomorrow, because I'm missing my country a lot. And, because being a gay [man], living a gay kind of lifestyle in Hungary is not a problem at all. There is no reason for me to leave, but unfortunately, I don't want to say it, I'm not materialistic, but earning, like, a four or five times higher salary, with exactly the same job, in the UK, is definitely much, it's definitely something that really attracted many people, not just gay people* (Marcell, m, HU, 35–39).[7]

For many of our participants, material aspects were often paramount in their decisions to migrate, and sexuality was often bracketed as less important or even disregarded as an immediate reason for migration. Nevertheless, despite these material gains, it is important to note that migration was also seen in some cases as a trade-off, which had led to deskilling and downward social mobility.[8] Piotr talks of how difficult this can be:

> *And, it was difficult. Because, in Poland we were people, we were important, we did important things. And here we found out we weren't good enough for a cleaning job… (…) I thought I was tough, that I was insensitive, but… in such moments rain would mix with my tears* (Piotr, m, PL, 40–44).

Although deskilling and downward social mobility in terms of employment were common, this was not a universal experience for our respondents. Some people had found comparable or better jobs in Scotland, but an important factor was that they earned more and enjoyed a higher standard of living than in their home country. Even for those who did experience deskilling, the overall situation was acceptable due to the other forms of material security they were able to achieve through working in these lower-skilled jobs, including access to leisure pursuits. As Piotr adds:

> *I might not have the greatest job, I may not be earning a lot of money… but… life's good. We have a car and a dog and we spend all the weekends outside of the city… so… this country is just great* (Piotr, m, PL, 40–44).

Furthermore, in other cases, even if their current employment might be in a low-skilled position, the sense of stability this allowed them in the present allowed a future to be imagined, as Blagoy remarks:

> *I like this place, I like this country, I like the way people are thinking… You're working hard and… you're planning vacations and you're going somewhere and that's it… I want stability in some way. So that's why I was studying here, I have my job, you know, I'm going to develop my skills here* (Blagoy, m, BL, 30–34).

The importance of economic factors and of access to economic stability ties in with the broader literature on East–West migration and what are identified as its primary causes (see, for example, Burrell 2010: 298–300; Trevena, McGhee and Heath 2013). However, what is important to draw out, as is reflected in the quotes by Przemek, Piotr and Blagoy, is that economic stability and security contribute to and interact with a sense of emotional security. This is expressed through phrases such as having a 'good life', a 'peaceful life', of 'feeling great', that 'life's good', and the fact that, as Przemek states, 'I just feel good here'.

It is important to stress that some participants spoke of having a 'good life' in their home countries and of the difficulties they faced when first arriving in Scotland, when their life was indeed initially 'worse' in a material sense. However, for the majority of participants, a 'better life' was achieved in the longer term. The way in which an improved material position fed into and contributed to a sense of a better, easier life demonstrates the duality which is central to our participants' understandings and experiences of a more normal life in Scotland: the existence of material (economic and financial) security, along with emotional feelings of well-being that this material security helps to facilitate. Rafał sums this up well when responding to a question about how the move to Scotland had changed his life:

> *It's changed my life in a sense that it's less stressful, easier, I have a lot more time for self-fulfilment. There's more time to discover the world and yourself. Life here is a lot easier, a lot easier than in Poland. You can afford a lot more things, if you find a job with a good wages. You can go on holidays. There's no problem with asking for time off. I can just go to the office and say that I want holidays. It's a lot easier to work here, it's pleasant* (Rafał, m, PL, 25–29).

Emotional security, sexuality and 'feeling normal'

Importantly, emotional security also emerged for our participants as something often specifically related to their sexuality. For example, Tomek talks about how attitudes to homosexuality are more relaxed ('normally approached') in the UK, and reflects on how this environment impacts on the way he relates to his own sexuality: *This issue is just normally approached here… If people treat you normally, you start treating yourself*

normally (Tomek, m, PL, 35–39). Tomek uses the word 'normally' to convey the sense of something common, ordinary, usual, rather than compliance to social norms and rules. This understanding of normality was commonly used by a significant number of participants in relation to attitudes to homo- and bisexuality, and the impact it had on their lives as LGBT migrants.

The expectation that life is easier in the UK for LGBT people was widespread among participants prior to migration; sexuality was not always mentioned in interviews as a key motivation to migrate, although it did feature in the migration narratives of most of our participants. This is worth stressing, as images of LGBT migrants desperate to leave Eastern Europe to escape persecution, or being attracted by the UK as a 'gay-friendly' country, have not been uncommon in the UK media (e.g. Graham 2007; Paterson 2015; cf. Boston 2014). Nonetheless, greater acceptance of sexual diversity emerged as a key factor when participants talked about their reasons for staying in Scotland, or the reasons why they were not considering moving back to their country of origin. Even participants whose migration was mainly motivated by economic or educational opportunities often talked about more relaxed attitudes towards homo- and bisexuality as a collateral benefit of migration. For example, Vita moved to Scotland from Lithuania to pursue a university degree. She chose a Scottish university because, as an EU student, she would not have to pay tuition fees, something that was very important to her as a working student whose family was unable to help her financially during her studies. However, reflecting on her plans for her future, she mentions her sexuality as a key reason for staying, alongside the lack of job opportunities in her field in Lithuania:

> *It [sexuality] is one of the biggest ones [reasons for staying in Scotland]. (...) I did not think about it before… but last summer, when I had a relationship in Lithuania, I saw all that, and I figured, how could you live there?! I don't want to live openly [there]. (...) Life is too short. Many people think that this is not right, that I should be patriotic: 'Why are you running away [from Lithuania] like a rat from a sinking ship?!' I spent many years in this negative environment and I do not want to live in hiding any longer. Life is too short for that, that's all. It would be difficult to live there, more difficult, I would not say it is very difficult, but it is more difficult. I don't want it* (Vita, f, LIT, 25–29).

The experience of feeling pressurised to be discreet in Lithuania contrasts with the ability which she enjoyed in Scotland to be more open about her sexuality. Like Vita, many other participants experienced a new sense of freedom upon moving abroad, and reflected on how this made them more open about their sexuality. Mags talks about learning to be more open about her sexuality in public spaces only after leaving Poland:

> *So, I don't think about it at all. When we walk and I feel like kissing Grażyna [partner], I kiss her… because I feel like doing it. But, I learnt to be like this only when I moved out from Poland. It's completely – it's like breathing* (Mags, f, PL, 30–34).

Iza also reflects on different expectations about the visible presence of same-sex couples in public spaces by comparing Scotland and Poland. While she feels comfortable holding hands with her partner in the large Scottish city where they live, she expected this behaviour to be met with hostility in Poland:

> *I'm still shocked… that here we can hold hands when we walk… just like this. Although, I'm still thinking in the back of my head – I'm still wondering if there's a chance that I'll get a beating. But… I'm less tense now…* (Iza, f, PL, 25–29).

Vita, Mags and Iza all associate the sense of freedom they experience in Scotland with the perception that they can afford to be more visible about their relationships and their sexual identity there. This is something they relate to their emotional well-being and security ('It's like breathing', 'I'm less tense now'). However, in Iza's case, her sense of security and behaviour in public continues to be informed by expectations about what is normal and acceptable – expectations which were shaped during her previous life in Poland (where the expectation was that being openly gay in public may be met with hostility and even violence).

Public visibility was widely perceived as evidence of the acceptance and ordinariness of homo- and bisexuality in Scotland. At the same time, visibility was not associated with standing out as different, or with coming out as a political act; on the contrary, migrants felt their sexuality could be visible and at the same time inconspicuous and unremarkable. Grzegorz talks about the different levels of comfort he experienced in Poland and Scotland when talking about his personal life at work:

> *In Poland I got accustomed to thinking twice when people asked me what I did over the weekend… I was, for example, in a cinema with my boyfriend… or we were out of town… And I had to think twice in order to reply to such questions. And, I used to – I don't do that anymore – but I used to erase such pieces of information from my stories… information about my boyfriend… and what we did together… Here, I've got very positive experiences… And when I say that I spent the weekend with my boyfriend I can see that this piece of information doesn't matter* (Grzegorz, m, PL, 40–44).

Grzegorz no longer edits out personal information when telling colleagues about what he did at the weekend because, in his experience, his sexuality is unremarkable in Scotland ('This piece of information doesn't matter'). This contributes to a sense of comfort and emotional security.

It should be pointed out that acceptance was not exclusively discussed with regard to Scotland. Many of our participants spoke about spaces of acceptance in their country of origin. However, these were more qualified and usually restricted to the private sphere and to specific social circles, in contrast to a more general acceptance in public and semi-public spaces in Scotland. It was this public visibility and the ability to be inconspicuous *and* visible at the same time, which was associated with the notion of normality and 'liveability'. This very much relates to Butler's (2004: 8) argument that 'liveable lives' are enabled or constrained by social norms. However, Scotland was not uniformly experienced as accepting of and relaxed about sexual diversity. Participants related experiences of being treated differently because of their sexuality, or not feeling safe about making their sexuality visible, in certain locations and social contexts. Roman, for example, felt uncomfortable in the small city in the north of Scotland where he had lived for four years, and spoke of seeking opportunities to move to a larger place:

> *I am a cleaner in a hospital. It's probably my eighth or ninth job here. So it's quite OK. (…) But I still seek opportunities to get away from here as this town is too small for me… because I spent all my life in big cities. Besides, it is too intimate. You say something in one place and suddenly everybody knows in another. This just won't do for me. Because in a bigger city there is greater anonymity. And apart from that, it's not the best place for sexual minorities. Unfortunately (…) I thought it would be different, that it's the West and it should be normal…* (Roman, m, UKR/PL, 35–39).

Roman did not feel at home in the small city where he lived and where his low-paid job as a cleaner meant he could not afford to live on his own. His discomfort, however, was mainly linked to his sexuality; as he related in a different part of the interview, he had experienced homophobic prejudice from both Scottish and Polish flatmates, and had to move out from two flat shares. These experiences challenged his expectation that LGBT

people enjoy a 'normal' life in 'the West', unlike in his native Ukraine – or in Poland, where he lived for several years. This insight helps to provide greater nuance to the assumption, found in many studies of normality and CEE migrants, of 'the West' being an 'embodiment of normality' (Rabikowska 2010: 288).

The normalising effect of law and policy

The perception that sexual diversity is ordinary and unremarkable in Scotland (and, more broadly, in the UK) was often associated with its institutional framework, in particular with the presence of LGBT-affirmative legislation. Law and policy were perceived to have a normalising effect within society and to lead to a broader promotion of inclusion and equality.

As already mentioned, participants' countries of origin offered a lesser degree of legal protection for, and recognition of, LGBT citizens. Legal protection, or the lack thereof, fed into participants' sense of emotional security and featured in participants' accounts of their reasons for moving abroad or for staying in Scotland:

> *All these situations added up and led to this decision [to move to Scotland with his Scottish partner]. Why put up with these kinds of situations over there [in Russia]? Something will happen. And something did happen when they introduced the laws on gay propaganda* (Vlad, m, RU, 40–44).

Vlad met his Scottish partner in his native Russia. They eventually moved to Scotland and their decision to move was linked to a homophobic incident they felt powerless to challenge in a socio-political climate generally hostile to the LGBT community. The latter eventually culminated in the introduction of the law against the 'propaganda' of homosexuality to minors (Stella and Nartova 2015), something Vlad is referring to here. Similarly, Mags relates her decision not to return to Poland to a lack of legal protection, which would make her feel unsafe and isolated:

> *Well, I'm not going back to Poland for sure… because there's no law in Poland that would make me feel safe… Of course we could just move to Poland and buy a house – but I won't build a wall – two metres high – to isolate [myself] from everybody else… because I don't want to isolate myself. But, this sense of safety… it's very important. (…) We've got Polish TV and I try to watch the news… and when I watch the news I keep thinking that I cannot imagine how homosexual people can handle living there* (Mags, f, PL, 30–35).

Like Mags, many Polish participants kept up to date with news from their country of origin, and followed political debates, including developments related to LGBT issues. The highly politicised and contentious debates around the recognition of same-sex couples, and the homophobic language routinely used by politicians and religious leaders, were often mentioned as a way to gauge the mood in the country and to assess whether they could imagine moving back.

The legal situation in migrants' countries of origin was often compared to the greater recognition of LGBT rights in Scotland, particularly with reference to family rights (the legal recognition of same-sex couples and parenting rights). This was important to many of our participants: ten of them had entered a civil partnership or same-sex marriage since moving to Scotland and nine had children. Some younger participants mentioned getting married or starting a family as a future aspiration and a reason why they were not planning to return to their country of origin. Marta talks here of how she moved with her partner Nadiya to Scotland with the specific aim of entering into a civil partnership (later converted to a same-sex marriage) and have a child together:

We knew that we wanted... I mean, we recently spoke about it, she always wanted to have a baby and we knew that it would be possible, that it wouldn't be possible in Poland, but somewhere else, where it's much more common. So, we came here. (...) To be honest, to be able to start a family, to be together, not to have to hide. (...) Nadiya got in touch with a girl who lived in London, she also had a girlfriend. (...) They told us how it was here, that it was normal, that you had a normal life and so on (Marta, f, PL, 30–34).

For Marta and Nadiya, having a child as a same-sex couple becomes a possibility because this is 'much more common', ordinary and 'normal' in the UK. Marta emphasised how family rights were empowering because they allowed her and Nadiya to lead an 'ordinary' and dignified life. This contrasts with the situation in Poland, where same-sex marriage is constitutionally banned, attempts to legalise civil partnerships have been repeatedly thwarted and the legal recognition of same-sex couples remains a highly politicised and contentious topic (Piekut and Valentine 2016).

There was also a widespread perception that the law in Scotland trickles down to policies and practices in institutional settings, as Hania's experience at work illustrates:

I feel supported by the law, by the state. I feel nothing can happen to me here. Even at work (...) someone made allusions to my sexuality. (...) My manager (...) said that if anything ever happens or anyone tries to do something to me, he would do his best to take legal action against these people (Hania, f, PL, 25–29).

Here, Hania's manager offers to support her, and even to assist her to take legal action if necessary, if colleagues make inappropriate remarks about her sexuality. Similarly, Grzegorz (m, PL, 40–44) talked approvingly of the zero-tolerance policy towards homophobia at the further education college where he had studied. In some instances, it was the very existence of the law and the sense that it was upheld that made participants feel secure, as Nadiya explains:

I guess many people could say I could do the same in Poland... I could hold hands with my partner in Poland and nobody would care – well, if something happens – either verbal or physical abuse – there's no such law to protect me. (...) Here it's the law – you cannot do this here. It makes me feel secure (Nadiya, f, UKR/PL, 30–34).

Nadiya is aware that holding hands with her partner in public may elicit indifferent or hostile reactions in Scotland as much as Poland. However, she feels differently about doing this in Scotland, safe in the knowledge that homophobic harassment on the street can be legally sanctioned. This adds an important contribution to the literature which has looked at the impact of law and policy reform on the normalisation of non-heterosexual citizens – here, from the perspective of LGBT migrants in the UK, whose stories reinforce the idea that people can benefit from, and feel secure due to, the existence of policy and legal frameworks.

Normality and attitudes to difference

Acceptance of LGBT communities was also frequently linked to liberal attitudes towards difference more generally, understood as encompassing ethnicity, religion, class, gender, age and disability. In the quote below, Tsveta compares discriminatory behaviour towards gay people with discrimination of the Roma in her country of origin (Bulgaria):

You can imagine what it was [like] in Bulgaria. Jokes about homosexual people, this was, I even myself have told jokes and I thought it was really funny, and… nobody was out. You don't even suspect that there are people like that around you. The whole society is very discriminatory towards any kind of minorities, like… the Roma minority, or anybody who is different in any way (Tsveta, f, BL, 40–44).

In framing attitudes towards sexuality within broader attitudes towards difference, many participants implicitly referenced the UK (and EU) equality legislation and its different protected characteristics. The sense of protection that came with the existence of equality legislation, and the feeling that the law was enforced, significantly contributed to a broader sense of safety and 'normality'.

They're [hate crimes] treated seriously and it's not only with regard to non-heteronormative people. Racist attacks or crimes, for example, are also treated seriously. And in Poland – they're not (Iza, f, PL, 25–29).

Nevertheless, some respondents also suggested that there may be a discrepancy between the letter of the law and what it prescribes, and people's actual attitudes. What was framed as 'political correctness' masked, for some participants, a hypocritical approach where people's real views are kept secret or expressed in one's absence. This is particularly evident in Krzysztof's narrative below:

If the [UK] government says 'You have to love gay men', people will love gay men, because the government says so. That's the law. But, they'll still think otherwise. And, I think we're similar in this thinking… Poles and Scots… But, the difference is – Poles show it… Poles will show you what they really think. Scots won't, because it's against what politics say… because it's illegal… they're afraid of the law. (…) They make a show out of it. You're gay and they love you because that's the right thing to do. Because that's politically correct. But, they still have their own thoughts about that. Once you don't see them, they have a laugh at you… or tell jokes (Krzysztof, m, PL, 45–49).

Valentine and Harris (2016) argue that, in the UK, equality legislation can lead to the 'privatisation of prejudice' rather than a meaningful engagement with difference and actual change in attitudes. The authors suggest that equality legislation may translate into the enforcement of a superficial and widely resented political correctness in public, while prejudice becomes relegated to the private sphere. Although some of our participants seemed to agree with this, many perceived LGBT-affirmative laws and policies to be making a real and positive difference to people's lives. Interestingly, this appeared to be the case regardless of whether or the participants thought the laws and policies translated into genuinely positive attitudes towards LGBT people:

You know, some people say the society here is hypocritical… that people are not open about things to one another. But, honestly, I'm not interested in the reasons why I'm being attacked. In Poland, I'll get attacked and here I won't. I'm not interested in whether somebody likes me or not. People don't have to like me. It's enough if I'm not beaten up on a street, right? And the reasons for not being beaten up… whether this is because people are afraid of the police or because they simply respect me… that's a completely different story (Piotr, m, PL, 40–44).

Piotr is talking here about hypothetical homophobic violence; in fact, he never experienced this in his native Poland. What he emphasises is, rather, the importance of the law in preventing and sanctioning homophobic aggression. This, as the previous sections of this article have illustrated, seems to significantly contribute to LGBT migrants' sense of security and everyday well-being.

Conclusions

This article contributes novel insights to existing literature within both migration studies and sexuality studies. As already pointed out, the literature to date on East–West migration to the UK rarely touches upon issues of sexuality and intimacy, which are discussed mainly in relation to heterosexual family migration. Thus, the article contributes to the 'sexual turn' in migration studies advocated by Mai and King, whereby migrants are not just seen as mobile workers but also as 'sexual beings expressing, wanting to express, or denied the means to express, their sexual identities' (Mai and King 2009: 296). The article also speaks to work within sexualities studies on the 'normalisation' of LGBT subjects, a process driven by legal and policy change (Richardson 2004, 2015). This work has concentrated on citizens and has rarely explicitly addressed how this normalisation relates to migrants as non-citizens, within a broader context of ongoing disparities concerning equality legislation and policy across Europe and beyond.

In this article, we have explored the experiences of LGBT migrants who settled in Scotland and their articulations of what is involved in having a 'normal', better life. These narratives show how the material, the emotional and the sexual dimensions of their lives are intertwined in their decisions on, and experiences of, migration and long-term settlement. Our understanding of 'normality' as encompassing different aspects of migrants' lives draws on empirical insights from the literature on East–West migration to the UK and on the notion of 'social security' that emphasise how both material and emotional aspects are involved in feeling secure in one's everyday life (von Benda-Beckmann *et al*. 1988; von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 1994). This is integrated with Judith Butler's (2004) notion of 'liveable lives' as grounded in the materiality of life and at the same time enabled or restricted by social norms and conventions pertaining to gender and sexual expression.

Our participants felt that they often enjoyed a better, more dignified life after their migration to Scotland in terms of their material situation – for example in relation to job security, living standards and disposable income. Importantly, material security also engendered a sense of emotional well-being. The material benefit of migration was apparent when they spoke of their reasons for coming to Scotland, with considerations relating to employment often paramount and more prominent than those relating to sexuality. However, sexuality was also important in participants' understandings of a better, more-dignified life, although this was more commonly related to their reasons for staying in Scotland or not returning to their country of origin than to their immediate reasons for migrating. Many participants talked about the greater freedom they experienced in Scotland in terms of their sexuality. Although not universally experienced, and certainly not unproblematic in some cases, participants spoke of how they were able to live in an environment where their sexuality was, in a positive sense, unremarkable and ordinary, even when publicly visible and therefore 'normal'. The presence of an LGBT-positive legal and policy framework in Scotland, and the potential protection this offered, was seen to have a wider 'normalising' effect within society and played a significant role in making our participants feel more secure and 'normal'. This was the case even when these frameworks were not always seen as translating into genuine change in attitudes beyond a superficial and public political correctness. The importance of a sense of normality and security emerged in many different areas of our participants' lives; when these came together, our participants were able to enjoy a 'feeling of safety, certainty and familiarity', which allows them to imagine their future lives as being in Scotland (Misztal 2001: 312).

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Conflict of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

[1] The focus of this paper is sexuality rather than gender identity because the latter was explored only marginally in the project, as explained in more detail in the methodology section of the article.

[2] The Index measures protection against discrimination, measures to tackle hate crime, rights and recognition for transgender and intersex people, and equality in family law, including same-sex marriage and parenting rights.

[3] Because of the partial devolution of power to the devolved administrations of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, the four countries of the United Kingdom have slightly different policies and legislation on LGBT rights. For example, Northern Ireland recognises same-sex partnership but, unlike England, Wales and Scotland, has not introduced same-sex marriage. Scotland offers more-extensive legal protection for intersex and transgender persons.

[4] At the end of the Stage 1 interviews, participants were also asked to draw and discuss a map of their closest social relations (sociograms) as a way of exploring their social networks in Scotland and beyond. In Stage 2, a subset of Stage 1, 18 participants were invited to produce a photo diary on the topic of home to further explore issues of belonging and identity; the photo diary was then discussed in a follow-up interview.

[5] A more detailed overview of the project's methodology and of our participants' socio-economic profile can be found in Stella, Gawlewicz and Flynn (2016).

[6] All names used in the article are pseudonyms.

[7] It should be noted here that Marcell is talking about a large city in Hungary with a fairly vibrant gay scene.

[8] Experiences of deskilling have been found to be common for CEE migrants coming to the UK (see also Drinkwater, Eade and Garapich 2009; Trevena *et al*. 2013).

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