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**RESEARCH**

# From Going Abroad to Settling Down... While Remaining Mobile? Polish Women in Norway Narrate Their Migration Experiences

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This article analyses mobility of Polish women living transnational lives between Poland and Norway. The emphasis is on the *emic* (insider's) versus *etic* (outsider's) points of view regarding issues of migrant identity, mobility before arriving in Norway, and temporality, permanence, fluidity and settlement after moving to Norway. The article is based on an online survey of 485 Polish women and 126 ethnographic interviews with Polish women residing in Norway. The study findings suggest that while many Polish women are working and raising families in Norway, they maintain strong links to Poland and continue to be very mobile. The way they narrate their mobility and migration experiences are contrasted with categories devised by policy makers and scholars.

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**Keywords:** Mobility; Migration; Poles; Women; Norway

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## Introduction

Poland's accession to the European Union (EU) in May 2004 resulted in an unprecedented number of Poles leaving the country. On 19 November 2006, the *New York Times* reported that 800,000 Poles departed the country since Poland joined the EU; by 2009, the number was closer to 1.5 million (Iglicka & Ziolk-Skrzypczak 2010). With this exodus, Poles embarked on a series of short-term sojourns. Polish migration took a form of 'pendulum' or 'circular' mobility and in some cases transnational commuting. This increase in short-term movements, no longer between just two countries, but often to several different countries in short successions, was accompanied by a corresponding fall in permanent emigration (Cyrus 2006), 'fuelling the feeling that Europe as a whole has become much more fluid, and that the old rules and understandings of migration within the continent were being rewritten' (Burrell 2009: 4). Metaphors such as 'fluidity' and 'liquidity' were deployed to grasp the nature of Polish migration. Wallace (2002) termed these movements mobility rather than migration. This is an apt conceptualisation; the concept of 'liquid migration' corresponds well with

the work of scholars such as John Urry on mobilities (2007). As Russell King asserted, the 'multiplicity and variety of types of migration and movement' challenged simplistic migration 'polar types' (King 2002: 94). King stated: 'in the new global and European map of migration, the old dichotomies of migration study – internal versus international, forced versus voluntary, temporary versus permanent, legal versus illegal – blur as both the motivations and modalities of migration become much more diverse' (King 2002: 127). Louise Ryan suggests that 'rather than addressing these challenges, much migration research, particularly in the wake of EU enlargement (...) has tended to reproduce rather than interrogate migrant categories' (Ryan 2019: 1) and types of migration.

We want to remedy this situation by contributing to the literature on types of mobilities as narrated by mobile women themselves, instead of discussing their experiences within categories devised by policy makers or theorists. We unpack their mobilities within the specificity of the Polish and Norwegian context.

Polish women have been part of migratory processes for a long time, dating back to the 19th-century immigration from Poland to America (Thomas & Znaniecki 1927), post-WWII migration within Europe (Stola 2010), and recent mobility following Poland's accession to the EU. Much of the scholarship on female migrants from Poland to Europe considered them as part of families (Slany et al. 2018). We focus solely on the women; their families are secondary in our analysis. The narratives we collected present the women's own understanding of their mobility.

We analyse these narratives to answer basic research questions: How do Polish women conceptualise their movement between Poland and Norway? What categories do they use to best describe their experiences? How do these experiences affect their future plans? How do these narratives contribute to the ongoing debates about types of migration and mobility?

We analyse the answers to these questions using the grounded theory. Grounded theory was introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) 'to overcome the cleavage between scientific theory and empirical reality' (Nadler 2009). In this article, we use data from a survey and ethnographic interviews to present empirically grounded conceptualisations of mobility from the *emic*, or insiders', points of view. Grounded theory has been applied successfully in other studies of mobility and migration (e.g. Kim & Hocking 2018; Nadler 2009). We do not use the collected data to verify or falsify preconceived theories of mobility as is often customary in research on mobility. Rather, we juxtapose the *emic* perspective with the *etic*, or outsiders', points of view. In this situation, the insiders are the migrant women, while the outsiders include both theorists and policy makers who label migrants' experiences according to theoretical and policy perspectives not necessarily grounded in migrants' conceptualisations of their experiences.

Following the introduction, we include some reflections on the research process. The main section of the article combines presentation of empirical findings with discussion of theoretical and policy considerations regarding female mobility between Norway and Poland. The article ends with a few concluding thoughts on the future trajectories of Polish women living transnationally between Poland and Norway. We hypothesise that the imminent recognition of dual citizenship by the Norwegian government will enhance the rights of Polish women living in Norway and provide them with additional choices about mobility and settlement.

### **Reflections on the Research Process**

This article is based on two data sources: an online survey and ethnographic interviews with Polish women who moved to Norway since 2004. The research was conducted between 2016 and 2018.

We used SurveyMonkey to collect survey data. The survey, available solely in Polish, was distributed online through variety of channels, including Facebook pages established by

different Polish diaspora groups in Norway and listservs dedicated to research on Polish migrants, and through personal contacts with migrants in Norway. A total of 485 women participated in the survey. The survey included basic demographic questions and explored motivations to move to Norway. Since mobility was our main interest, we also asked whether the women lived in other countries before coming to Norway. We analysed their employment trajectories upon arrival in Norway and their ability to speak Norwegian. We also asked about further migration/mobility plans. The questionnaire included multiple choice and semi-structured questions allowing for short narrative responses.

The field research took a form of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), which allowed us to explore transnational dimensions of Polish women's mobility, trajectories they followed and the effects of their mobility on destination and origin communities. We used snowball sampling to select study participants. We accessed different Polish communities in Norway via follow-up with survey participants who indicated they would like to be interviewed in person, personal contacts with Polish women residing in Norway, Norwegian researchers who had conducted research in Polish communities, and Facebook groups established by Polish women living in Norway. Additionally, we conducted observations in different settings: the interviewees' homes, Polish schools in Bergen and Oslo, Norwegian schools and kindergartens in Oslo, public spaces (playgrounds), and religious sites (churches and pilgrimage sites in Norway).

We talked to 126 Polish women, including single women without children, single mothers, childless women in committed relationships, and women with children in committed relationships. In most cases, their extended families resided in Poland. This fact led to multiplicity of relationships and connections with Poland. All the ethnographic interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The generated texts enabled close reading of the interviews for further analysis. We used both thematic content analysis and narrative analysis to identify patterns and themes (Cook & Crang 1995).

The sample is unique because it includes only women. When we started this project in 2015, the research on migration from Poland to Norway focused either on men (e.g. Friberg 2012; Napierała & Trevena 2010; Pawlak 2015) or on families (e.g. Bell & Erdal 2015; Odden 2016; Pustułka, Ślusarczyk & Strzemecka 2015; Ślusarczyk & Pustułka 2015). The notable exceptions were articles on Polish nurses (Van Riemsdijk 2008) and more broadly on the role of female migration (Herzberg 2015; Main & Czerniejewska 2017) and gender equality (Gjerstad et al. 2016). While many of the women in the sample were in committed relationships and had children, the family was not the unit of analysis, the individual women were.

The combined sample was fairly large – more than 600 women – especially in the context of qualitative ethnographic research. The sample was neither random nor representative, but both the survey and the field interviews were structured to target a wide range of women to uncover different categories of mobile women and different types of mobility. The ethnographic interviews constituted the main body of data, on which this article is based. They offered the in-depth feedback not available in surveys. The combination of an online survey and traditional anthropological methods allowed us to understand the studied women's subjective and objective mobility behaviours. All study participants had to formally consent to participate in this research.

Researchers conducting qualitative studies often reflect on their own positionality vis-à-vis study participants (Bourke 2014; Pustułka, Bell & Trąbka 2019). After all, research is shaped by both researcher/s and study participant/s (England 1994). In positionality theory, it is acknowledged that because we have multiple overlapping identities, we make meaning from various aspects of these identities (Kezar 2002). The researchers had much in common with the study participants. All were born, raised, and educated in Poland, all are native Polish

speakers, and some knew Polish migrants living in Norway before we started the research. All of this facilitated easy access to Polish communities in Norway and in Poland.

For the most part, the team members conducted their research separately, but at times we spent a few weeks working in pairs in Oslo. It enabled us to confront and discuss our ongoing findings as well as adjust the research topics and theoretical perspective. Additionally, we engaged in a continual dialogue, internal and external.

### **Findings and Discussion: From Going Abroad to Settling Down ... While Remaining Mobile?**

In this part, we focus on the ways the interviewees narrated their experiences and juxtapose them with categories devised by policy makers and scholars. We begin with discussion of categories of 'migrants' and move on to issues of mobility before arriving in Norway, and temporality, permanence, fluidity, and settlement after moving to Norway.

#### ***Mieszkam w Norwegii ... I live in Norway***

Norway Statistics considers Poles in Norway as 'immigrants'. However, the label 'immigrant' does not correspond with the women's conceptualisation of themselves or of the process of moving from Poland to Norway. In our research, almost half of the interviewees moved to Norway to join partners. The men they joined were part of the 'liquid migration', commuting between Poland and Norway on a regular basis (see also Pawlak 2015, 2018). They worked in Norway to improve livelihoods at home. Tired of their partners' nomadic lifestyles, the women decided to move to Norway. This trend corresponds with the overall immigration trends to Norway. Between 1990 and 2014, family reunification dominated immigration to Norway. In 1990, family immigrants totalled 4,500 per annum, and by 2014, this figure reached 16,200. Poland led the way (Statistics Norway 2016). However, equally many women in our sample came on their own.

The move was not always discussed in terms of immigration. Most women spoke about 'moving to Norway' or 'coming to Norway'. Most described their situation as 'living in Norway'. Few identified as immigrants. Why would they? When a French woman moves to Berlin for a new job, her move is labelled 'job transfer'. Nevertheless, many policy makers consider Poles migrants. The European Commission, for example, regards Italians living in Barcelona as 'mobile citizens' or 'free movers', but they consider citizens of the A8 countries, i.e. citizens of the 2004 enlargement countries, as 'migrants' because in the eyes of the receiving countries, their integration seems problematic (Sigona 2018; see also Tirpak & Kariozen 2007).

This lack of identification as an immigrant might be related to Polish vocabulary used to describe migration and mobility. While the Polish words 'migrant', 'immigrant' and 'emigrant' have been used in research and public debates, in the vernacular, Poles mainly use 'emigrant' when referring to the history of the 19th century 'Great emigration' or to more recent post-WWII or post-Solidarity 'permanent' emigration, mainly to the United States. The geographic proximity of Poland and Norway does not conjure the same imagery as emigration across the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, the study participants talked about going or moving to Norway, travelling between Poland and Norway, and were uncertain about the length of the 'move'.

Our interlocutors stressed the inconsistency of the *etic* (outsider's) conceptualisations. Although in Norwegian statistics, Poles are designated as 'immigrants', they are not eligible for assistance accorded to immigrants because of their EU citizenship. Norwegian integration programs focus exclusively on refugees and asylum seekers from outside Europe. The studied women had a lot of educational capital that served them well in navigating the Norwegian societal landscape, but, on occasion, they voiced a desire to have access to integration programs, especially free language courses. Sylwia said: 'They think we are not integrating, but they do not provide any help. I had to pay for my language courses and they were not cheap'.

Scholars have identified different categories of Central/Eastern European migrants. Building on research by Drinkwater, Eade and Garapich (2006) and Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski (2009), Engbersen et al. (2013) used levels of attachment to country of origin and settlement to distinguish four categories of Poles in the Netherlands: (1) circular migrants with weak attachments to the country of destination, (2) bi-nationals with strong attachments to both countries, (3) footloose migrants with weak attachments to both countries, and (4) settlers with weak attachments to the home country.

Anthropological explanations of migration tend to focus on concepts of attachment to place, migrant networks, and the impact migration has on communities at origin and destination (Brettel 2000). In our study, the discussion of attachment was quite nuanced. Many women were attached to Polish traditions and continued to celebrate holidays in 'the Polish way', while rejecting other Polish traits. Magda talked about wanting to maintain 'family climate' (*klimat rodzinny*) and 'home hearth' (*ognisko domowe*) despite lack of appreciation of her efforts by her Norwegian in-laws. She felt attached to the Polish folkways of homemaking, but she did not want to trade the Norwegian gender equality for Polish attitudes towards women. 'I have had enough of Polish misogyny', she said. Several women practiced attachment to Polish customs, while at the same time exercising appreciation of Norwegian social and cultural norms. In the words of Appadurai (1998: 448), they belonged to a 'world [that] is formed of forms of consociation, identification, interaction, and aspiration that regularly cross-national boundaries. Refugees, global laborers, scientists, technicians, soldiers, entrepreneurs, and many other[s] (...) constitute large blocks of meaningful association that do not depend on the isomorphism of citizenship with cultural identity, of work with kinship, of territory with soil, or of residence with national identification'.

### ***Mobility before moving to Norway***

A study of Poles in Norway showed that one-third of couples in their 20s and nearly half of the couples older than 30 lived in other countries prior to coming to Norway (Huang, Krzaklewska & Pustułka 2016). The researchers suggest that these are examples of 'fluid migration', where destinations change frequently, and migration pathways become unpredictable (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski 2009). Our findings not only confirm these assertions but also suggest that as time goes on many women make long-term investments into their lives in Norway. These investments are not always presented as permanent. Some interviewees did not disregard a possibility of moving again. The interviews indicate that post-2004 mobility of Polish women does not follow the traditional migration dichotomies of transience and permanence. Their mobility is not only fluid but also temporal. At various times in their lives, women think about 'permanence' differently.

The proportion of women who were mobile before coming to Norway was much higher among the surveyed cohort – one-third – than that among the interviewed women. Of the 95 women who lived abroad before arriving in Norway, the vast majority (70) lived in one other country, but 25 women lived in more than one country. Most of the survey participants stayed abroad for longer than one year, 32 lived outside Poland between one and three years, 38 between three and eight years, and 16 for more than eight years. The majority (61) left Poland to work and 25 to join family members or to marry. In comparison, of the 126 interviewees, 19% lived abroad prior to moving to Norway, mostly in Europe, but three also spent time in the United States. Eight women lived in more than one foreign country.

Lucyna spent a few months in the United States twice and almost four years in Ireland. She really loved Ireland and did not want to leave. She thought that she would settle in Ireland 'for good'. Her husband, Jerzy, a chef, got a job offer in Norway and Lucyna followed him, but she had very hard time adjusting to life in Norway. In the end, Lucyna returned to Poland to supervise the renovation of a restaurant the couple bought. Jerzy stayed in

Norway for another year. While she likes being back in her homeland, her 'heart remains in Ireland'.

Barbara too lived in Ireland for several years. She left Poland to participate in the Erasmus program in Norway. She stayed in Norway for six months but was transferred to a university in Ireland where she obtained her degree. While in Ireland, Barbara met her future husband, Liam, an Irishman, and they lived in Ireland for a few years before he got a job offer in Norway. They moved to Oslo and have been living there for several years. They like Norway and are happy raising their two children there. While they are certain that they will not move back to Ireland or Poland, they are not excluding the possibility of moving elsewhere. Liam has cousins living in neighbouring Sweden and in faraway United States. Barbara and Liam have good jobs in Oslo with excellent social benefits.

Joanna spent some time in Ghana on a women's empowerment project. During a training in Switzerland, she met her husband. While a student, she lived in Denmark (twice) and in Germany. She likes being mobile; she said: 'I get restless sitting in one place'. She moved to Norway because her husband got a job in Oslo. Both Joanna and her husband visit their respective families in Poland and in Switzerland. Their son spends vacation in Poland with grandparents.

Lucyna, Barbara, and Joanna are examples of women who like being on the go. They appreciate what the globalised world has to offer and do not describe their mobility as emigration but rather as movement between different countries. None of them rejects the possibility of moving again. Their position is similar to global nomads, described more than decade ago by D'Andrea (2007). They are a 'well-educated group with privileges accepted in the country of destination' (Meier 2015: 6) and are able to find employment in new places.

### ***Temporality and fluidity of migration to Norway***

There have been many debates about the character of the East–West population flows that followed the EU expansions (Black et al. 2010). The discussions focussed on temporality. Scholars wondered how likely were Poles to settle permanently in host countries (Drinkwater & Garapich 2015). The answer is not easy; multiple factors affect the extent to which people remain on the move or settle. They range from institutional, political, and economic considerations to issues of diaspora politics, migrants' agency, and their motivations to stay or return (Agunias 2006; Main 2016).

Several of the women did not have fixed ideas about the duration of their sojourns. Instead, they focused on their attachments to Norway and Poland in describing their mobility. Many are bound to Norway through jobs. More than 60% of the survey respondents and 20% of the interviewed women came to Norway for work. As time went on, a higher percentage of women worked than the proportion of women who declared employment as the reason to move. At the time of our research, 80% of the surveyed and 73% of the interviewed women worked.

Ewa and Jarek, who came to Norway seven years prior to the interview, have good jobs in the IT industry; both of their children were born in Oslo, and they like Norway well enough to have applied for Norwegian citizenship. Yet, they are contemplating going to Canada or Australia. 'In a few years, when the girls graduate from high school or if there is a war in Europe, we would like to move to Canada or Australia. It will be easier if we have Norwegian citizenship', mused Ewa.

Katarzyna also continues to be mobile. Katarzyna's father lived in the Netherlands for more than a decade. Katarzyna visited him several times, but after graduating from the university, she wanted to experience living in the Netherlands. Ever the social activist, Katarzyna lived in a squat with fellow social change agents. When the squat fell apart, Katarzyna returned to

Poland, unsure how long she would stay. While working in Warsaw, she met Marek, a Pole living in Norway. After dating him for a few months, Katarzyna decided to join Marek in Tromsø. In a year, they moved to Oslo at Katarzyna's instigation. She found Tromsø too small. She thought Oslo would be more cosmopolitan. It is difficult to say how long they will stay in Oslo. Perhaps, they will move again, within Norway or elsewhere. Many of Katarzyna's family members live abroad – in Belgium, the UK, Germany and Ireland – and she might be tempted to join them.

Literature on recent Polish migration focuses on the mobile individual to the detriment of analysing mobility of the migrant's kin and friends. In this study, many women joined partners, but equally many struck out on their own, especially those who experienced mobility in their social and familial circles. There are numerous examples of 'cultures of emigration', especially in Mexico and Central America (Ruehs 2016), the Philippines (Tabuga 2018), and West Africa (Hahn & Klute 2007). The history of Polish emigration suggests that Poles have been equally mobile (Thomas & Znaniecki 1927; Zubrzycki 1953). Despite these historical trends, policy makers want to place mobile Poles in fixed categories.

The Polish government has always conceptualised Poles living abroad as Polish diaspora (Polonia) and over time made numerous attempts to entice emigrants to 'come back home'. In 2009, the government established a program called 'Returns' to support return migration of Poles. The idea of having two 'homes' and 'belonging' to two (or more) places is very alien to some policy makers despite the fact that migration scholars have been writing about multiple belongings, especially in the context of intra-European mobility, for quite some time (O'Reilly 2007). Polish mass media often spotlight scenarios of a country losing its population (see Andrejuk 2013) indicating that some three million Poles left the country since 2004. The idea to repopulate Poland with ethnic Poles is further promulgated by government-sponsored 'repatriation' of persons of Polish ancestry from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine.

### ***From mobility to settlement?***

The literature emphasised a high degree of mobility among Poles in Norway. Recently, scholars have argued that there is a strong potential for many of these migrants to settle permanently or long term in Norway (Bygnes & Erdal 2017; Grzymala-Kazłowska 2016). In a recent survey, 52% of Polish women (and 48% of men) declared willingness to settle permanently in Norway. Only 12% were against staying in Norway and additional 36% were not sure about their plans. There was no correlation with age at the time of entering Norway, education, parenthood, or year of moving to Norway (Iglicka, Gmaj & Wierzejski 2018).

Scholars use different frameworks to predict permanency and settlement. Writing about 'liquid' migration of 'intra-European migrants', Bygnes and Erdal (2017) focussed on *adult* Poles (and Spaniards) in Norway and argued that this age group (30- to 40-year-olds) is likely to aspire to 'grounded life' more than younger people. Grzymala-Kazłowska (2016) used a similar concept – social anchoring – to discuss settlement and permanency in the context of super-diversity. Our findings are not as straightforward. The ethnographic data show that neither adulthood nor socioeconomic anchoring are predictors of permanence. Social benefits play a stronger role.

Alicja's adventure with Norway started in the mid-1990s when she and her boyfriend, Tomek, visited the country as tourists. In 2001, Alicja came to Oslo on a four-month scholarship. She liked Oslo and extended her stay for additional four months to collect data for her dissertation. When her scholarship ended, Alicja returned to Poland, but not for long. In 2004, she moved back to Norway. Tomek joined her in 2005. The couple considered the UK, but decided that Norway would be better because 'everybody was moving to the UK'. Alicja already spoke Norwegian, which was an advantage.

Alicja and Tomek, and their children, feel part of the Norwegian society. They own a house, participate in the activities at their children's schools, and have Norwegian friends. They appreciate Norwegian values and feel happy to live in a society where 'tolerance, diversity, and love of nature are promoted'. They developed a strong sense of belonging in Norway. They acquired Norwegian citizenship and changed their Polish last name to an easy-to-pronounce surname. They have no intention of returning to Poland. They also emphasise good career options, access to social welfare and state support for families with young children, especially subsidised childcare.

In several cases, having a Norwegian partner affected settlement in Norway. Marta fell in love with Hans in 1992. They married, and she moved to Oslo. By now, she has spent half of her life in Norway. Her two teenage sons feel more Norwegian than Polish, although they speak fluent Polish. Marta and Hans divorced, but she did not return to Poland. As a single mother, Marta received support from the Norwegian government (financial assistance, reduced taxes, and non-refundable mortgage). She is determined to stay in Norway, a place where she earns a good living, raises children, and has made friends.

Maria too moved to Norway to follow her Norwegian husband. Lars studied medicine in Poland and secured a well-paid job first in Kristiansand and later in Oslo. His income allowed Maria to spend the first year after arrival studying Norwegian. However, once she passed the language exams, she was keen to start working. Currently, she manages a clothing boutique and is enrolled in a training program for *haute couture* buyers. Both her marriage to a Norwegian and her employment situation will keep her in Norway for years to come, she thinks.

Elżbieta came to Norway as part of the Erasmus program. Originally, she planned to return to Poland after completing her degree. However, while finishing her thesis, she found a part-time job. Elżbieta met her future husband, a Dutchman, at work. Once she graduated, the company offered her full-time employment. Elżbieta and Bram decided to stay in Norway. They like it there, especially now that they have a baby daughter. They appreciate the social benefits and parental leave they get. Elżbieta plans to return to work once Bram takes over the care of the baby. When the baby turns one, they will put her in kindergarten and work outside the home full-time.

While Polish women are spending prolonged periods of time in Norway, the close proximity of the two countries facilitates frequent contacts with Poland. The majority (86.9%) of the surveyed women visit Poland often and an equally large percentage (83.2%) receive visitors from Poland. On the other hand, despite using nouns signifying temporality – *przyjazd* (coming to) and *przeprowadzka* (moving house) – the women spent considerable amount of time in Norway. One-quarter of the survey participants lived in Norway for more than eight years and an additional 35.5% resided in Norway between three and eight years. Eight years is not an insignificant length of time. Some of the interviewed women have resided in Norway even longer: 13% lived in Norway for 10 years or longer and some for longer than 20 years. Most migration scholars would probably classify these long stays as migration and yet some, not all, of the interlocutors preferred to talk about sojourns (*pobyty*) or arrival (*przyjazd*).

### ***Coming back to Poland***

Return has always been part of migration narratives. Talking about return is not a uniquely Polish phenomenon. However, Poles have always been ambivalent about migration and perceived emigration as a burden, something that must be endured. As Garapich writes:

In Polish emigration ideology, political exile is seen as a sacred act in the fight for freedom and economic migration as a necessary evil, a manifestation of weakness or

simply cowardice, egoism and an ambiguous act of turning away from the fate of the nation (Garapich 2007: 7).

These narratives go hand in hand with issues of national identity. Ewa Morawska wrote about 'difficult Polishness' (*trudna polskość*) when discussing Poles in Berlin. 'Difficult Polishness', wrote Morawska 'is the identity "torn" by contradictory, positive and negative emotions toward one's own (Polish) group and by equally opposing attitudes toward "others", here, Germany/Germans and Europe/the European Union' (Morawska 2003: 173).

While some women talked about missing Poland, feeling isolated in Norway, many visit and receive visitors from Poland often. Affordable flights, flexible work schedules, and geographic proximity enable frequent 'returns' to Poland.

Lucyna, Wiktoria, and Ola have returned to Poland. Whether these are 'permanent' returns remains to be seen. Lucyna's return to Poland appears to be permanent. She and Jerzy made substantial investments in a restaurant and Lucyna got a job as a journalist. On the other hand, Lucyna is quite adventurous, and who knows whether she will live in Poland forever. As she told us, 'Never say never'.

Some women have returned to Poland but continue commuting to work in Norway. Wiktoria is a textbook example of continued mobility. She seems to have been on the move for quite some time. Wiktoria was an au pair in the US, in France, and in Norway. She moved to Bergen to enrol in graduate studies. Her Polish husband followed her. After six years in Norway, the couple moved back to Poland. They are currently living in Warsaw, but Wiktoria's business is registered in Norway. She pays taxes in Norway and is eligible to use social and healthcare services. She makes two or three business trips to Norway a month to provide interpretation in courts and hospitals. For the rest of the time, she translates documents from her home in Warsaw.

Several women are contemplating return, because they have become disillusioned with Norway. Halina and Darek were in a long-distance relationship – with frequent trips between Norway and Poland – before she joined him in Oslo. 'He described life in Norway in rosy colours', she said. Halina soon realised that reality did not match her boyfriend's narratives. Halina worked for a while as an office cleaner but found the job demeaning and quit. She is thinking about taking her young son and returning to Poland to reopen the tourist bureau she used to own. It is difficult to say how serious her plans are as she talks about them in terms of 'trying to revive her business' and 'trying single parenthood'. Given the ambivalence regarding return, we might safely assume that those will not necessarily be permanent returns but rather continued mobility.

It is noteworthy that women's mobility was not always well received by Polish public opinion. Notions of the idealised Polish woman, the nurturing wife and mother, have been constructed through powerful discourses of religion, nationalism, and tradition. The image of *Matka Polka* (Polish mother) stood in sharp contrast with highly mobile women who left in search of better opportunities or out of a sense of adventure (Ryan et al. 2009; Urbańska 2015).

The women in our study cited multiple reasons for moving to Norway. Some joined partners, but others came to pursue educational or employment opportunities. Several desired to travel and experience living in different countries. Migration to Norway was an emancipatory project for many of them (Herzberg 2015). They not only became independent of their parents but also moved to a less hierarchical society, where gender equality is practiced to a larger extent than in Poland (Gjerstad et al. 2016). The women with children appreciated paid parental leave, financial assistance for single mothers, and subsidised childcare. Highly educated women – especially those speaking Norwegian – were the chief decision makers and convinced their partners to join them in Norway.

The fact that many of our interlocutors came to Norway at a young age meant that they were learning Norwegian fast and developing professional skills useful in the Norwegian labour market. The high mobility of Polish women has been linked to lack of opportunities and high levels of female unemployment in Poland (Coyle 2007). Indeed, some women came to Norway in search of employment, but many more came for other reasons. As illustrated earlier, several came to study. Some secured jobs while pursuing higher education and others obtained employment upon graduation. Still others met Norwegian partners and married. Several of the surveyed women indicated that they wanted an adventure. The ability to be mobile made these desires possible.

Many women indicated that having children played an important role in their decisions about moving to Norway, settling there or returning to Poland. For example, school-age children with established friendships in Poland were against moving to Norway even when that meant prolonged separation from their fathers who worked in Norway. In these cases, the mothers decided to stay in Poland with their children. On the other hand, women with children in Norwegian schools were reluctant to return to Poland because they preferred their children to stay within the same educational system. This finding corresponds with a study on Polish parents' perception of Norwegian schooling, which showed that 'the legitimized educational capital in the destination country requires them to manage resources in a way that fosters integration and social attachments' (Ślusarczyk & Pustułka 2015: 63).

The questions remain: Will the Polish women continue to be mobile or will they settle in Norway? What will keep them in Norway? What might affect their decision to return to Poland? Who might move to yet another country? Will the geographic proximity of Poland and Norway continue to facilitate high degree of fluidity?

Our data suggest that married women are likely to settle in Norway. Sixty percent of the surveyed women came with their partners. Nineteen percent brought children with them. However, 9.3% left children in Poland with grandparents. An additional 15% came to Norway to marry. Many married Norwegians, which was a decisive factor to settle in Norway (Herzberg 2015). Almost half of the interviewed women followed partners to Norway. An additional 18% came to Norway with partners. In some cases, their partners were foreigners whom they met in other countries. It seems that ethnically mixed couples were more willing to stay in Norway than to move to Poland where employment possibilities for foreign-born partners were more limited and wages lower than in Norway. The financial aspects were important factors:

(...) migration [...] made Polish women achieve a better financial background, giving them the sense of security, peace, fulfilment and independence. When comparing the situation before and after migration, without a doubt they point to a higher comfort of their current situation over their lives before migration (Herzberg 2015: 181).

Many highly educated women argued that they had to migrate to get a better-paid job. While the wages are considerably higher in Norway, the work many of the interviewees performed was not commensurate with their education; only half found employment matching their education, while 49% worked below their qualifications. Most worked in the hospitality industry, cleaned offices, or worked in childcare. It is noteworthy that women who came to Norway in the last year are three times less likely to work in jobs they were not trained for than those who have been in Norway for more than three years.

Interestingly, 35% of the women who do not work in the field they are trained for had a job offer before moving to Norway. This indicates that they were willing to accept employment whether it matched their qualifications or not. However, will they remain satisfied cleaning

offices? Will they decide to leave Norway to search for better possibilities elsewhere, perhaps even in Poland? Or will they have opportunities for upward mobility in Norway? What is the role of the Norwegian state if it is interested in long-term settlement of Polish women?

Lack of job satisfaction on the part of male partners, combined with strong sense of belonging to Poland and the need to keep close family ties with older generations, were important factors in deciding to return. Some saw more possibilities of realising their professional careers and investments in family businesses in Poland. For older women, with family connections both in Poland and Norway, decisions about returning to Poland were based on emotional needs and a sense of belonging to the Polish society, even after spending more than 30 years in Norway.

## Conclusions

Our analysis of factors influencing decisions about mobility shows the importance of family situation, education, and emotional ties to country of origin or settlement. We argue that in the case of Norway, proximity also plays a role. Transnational lifestyles are much easier for women whose families live in northern Poland than those whose families reside in southern Poland. However, new communication technologies and modes of transportation facilitate transnational lives.

Writing about Poles in the UK in the context of Brexit, McGhee, Moreh & Vlachantoni (2017) argue that socioeconomic and demographic variables – relationship status, children, length of stay, or employment, which are considered important in determining settlement or remigration plans – are not significant on their own in affecting mobility plans of Polish nationals. Rather, they argue, awareness of rights, interest, and social proximity to the available options of civic integration carry more weight in explaining both medium-term plans and actions under the circumstances created by Brexit.

Starting in January 2020, Norway will allow dual citizenship. We do not know yet how that might affect Poles living in Norway, but perhaps with two passports, they will have even more freedom to continue their mobile lives and retain the identity of 'free movers' (Braun & Arsene 2009). Mobility as a strategy can be empowering and can result in 'success'. It can become a tool for social innovation and agency as well as an important dimension of social capital provided that migrants retain control over their migration projects. Dual citizenship will most likely accord Poles who chose to apply for Norwegian citizenship a great degree of control and many rights both in Norway and in Poland, and beyond.

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## Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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