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Crossing Boundaries of Self: Multidimensionality of Ethnic Belongings and Negotiating Identities Among Polish Migrants in Belfast, Northern Ireland

Abstract: This paper discusses multidimensional aspects of identity formation in a European context, referring to Polish migrants' experiences of migration in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Its aim is to understand the dynamics inherent in the process of identity construction by exploring the incidence of multiple ethnic identities among Polish nationals. To this end, following theoretical consideration on a sense of belonging and boundary making mechanisms in contemporary societies, it examines the incidence of Polish, local, European and cosmopolitan identities among migrants. It then points out at contradictions between different layers of belonging and explores the situations in which they occur. The paper draws on the findings of a one year long ethnographic fieldwork and uses the results of participant observation and in-depth interviews.

Keywords: belonging, Polishness, small homeland, Europeaness, cosmopolitanism, identity switching.

Intensified flows of people across the member states of the EU, following the accession of new member states in the previous decade, brought about many changes with regards to how individuals think of themselves and make sense of their belonging. The present article tackles issues of identity construction under the current condition in which "certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place in paradoxically a planet-spanning, yet common—however virtual—arena of activity" (Vertovec 2009: 3). It specifically draws on the case study of Polish nationals in Belfast.

Polish migration to the United Kingdom, following the 1 May 2004 accession date of new member states to the EU, increased at an unprecedented scale. In the period from 1 May 2004 to 31 March 2009, the highest proportion of approved applicants were nationals of Poland (66% of the total). The overwhelming majority of Polish migrants were aged between 18 and 34, with only a small percentage (less than 18%) aged over 35, and without dependants in the UK (93%) (Ruhs 2006: 11). According to Owen, Fihel and Green (2007), 25% of Polish migrants held higher education diplomas, but despite this, worked in blue-collar sectors, mostly in construction, agriculture, hospitality and cleaning.

In terms of geographical distribution, the United Kingdom has been the most popular destination spot for the inhabitants of provinces with high industry concentrations: Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodship (49%), Lodz voivodship (42%), Silesian

voivodship (39%), Mazovian voivodship (35%) and Lower Silesian (34%). It was less popular among inhabitants of strictly agricultural areas: Opole voivodship (11%) and Podkarpacie voivodship (21%) (Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2008: 81). Polish workers usually settled in three main regions of the UK: South-East, East and North-West Anglia. Before the migration boom started in 2002–2003, 70% of Polish people applying for a national insurance number were based in London, but the significance of London as the centre of migration has been gradually decreasing (Owen, Fihel and Green 2007: 2). Polish migrants began to choose other regions of the country as their destinations. While from 2005 to 2006, the number of applications submitted by Polish people in London amounted to 16% of the total number of the applications made by foreigners, in the East Midlands this number reached 36%, and in Northern England and Northern Ireland it reached 30% (Owen, Fihel and Green 2007: 2). This shifted the focus of attention from London to other areas in the UK where Polish minorities outnumbered other ethnic minorities.

The Polish community is the largest immigrant ethnic group in Northern Ireland, even surpassing the Chinese, the most numerous of the minorities during the 1990s (Svasek 2009). Currently, there are about 30,000 Polish nationals living and working in Northern Ireland, and approximately 8,000 of them live in Belfast (NISRA 2009). Polish migrants find themselves in a highly politicized part of Belfast, still marked by the history of Troubles where religion persists to be a powerful component of ethnic identity (Cairns 2000, Jenkins 1996). At the same time, Belfast, with a concentration of people from diverse racial, ethnic and national backgrounds allows more opportunities for inter-ethnic and inter-racial interactions, creating more situations for migrants to negotiate their contextually molded identities in order to fit into varying social contexts (Nagel 1994). This, combined with Polish migrants' readily noticeable presence—such as the presence of 'Polish churches' and 'ethnic shops'—offers an interesting field of analysis of migrants' identity construction.

There is an emerging body of literature dealing with identities of Polish migrants in the United Kingdom. Some of the authors underline the fluidity of migration strategies and the specific location of migrants within the transnational space (Garapich 2009, 2011; Rabikowska 2010). They examine different ways of making sense of one's belonging in an ambiguous location of 'between and betwixt'. Other scholars also notice the complex nature of migrants' self-identifications, and put in question the importance of one's national identity in shaping their sense of self (Garapich 2007, Pietka 2011, White 2011). In relation to this, there is also an increasing body of literature dealing with the issue of cosmopolitanism among migrants (Datta 2010, Garapich 2007, Kropowiec and King O'Riain 2006). However what seems to be missing from these analyses is the recognition of various layers of one's belonging and analysis of how these different layers of belonging relate to each other.

With these concerns in mind, this paper based on ethnographic fieldwork among Polish migrants in Belfast in the time period between January 2008 and January 2009, discusses a multidimensional belonging of Poles in Belfast. It espouses a constructionist approach to identity formation, offering an understanding of identity as a dynamic construct, enacted and played out contextually in the interaction with others.

The methods used in this research are qualitative. For the purposes of the research project, I conducted in-depth interviews with Polish migrants from a variety of backgrounds (class and place of origin in Poland) and of different family and work situations in Northern Ireland, also maintaining a gender balance. I carried out 35 in-depth interviews (16 with men and 19 with women) and most of my interviewees (29) were people whom I directly met in the field. I also interviewed six members of the Internet forum of Polish Belfast, as I was interested in the creation of a virtual Polish community. Interviews were conducted at the interviewees' homes, in cafés, pubs, parks or at other public places. In addition to this, I carried out participant observation among the Polish community in Belfast, attending formal and informal meetings organized by the Polish migrants, sharing accommodation and interacting with them on various social occasions.

Identity Construction

The main premise of this paper is that migrants are active social actors who find themselves in a transnational space spilling beyond the boundaries of the single EU member states (cf. Nina Glick-Schiller 1992, Vertovec 2009). In such a context, "hybridity and diaspora postulate shifting and potentially transnational and trans-ethnic cultural formations and identities. These new identities are seen to be tied to a globalised and transnational social fabric rather than one bounded by the nation-state form" (Anthias 200: 9). Ethnic identity has been traditionally conceptualized by anthropologists and other social scientists as a contextual entity (Barth 1969, Cohen 1969, Gluckman 1958, Horowitz 1985), which is played out across boundaries delineating "us" from "them." Also, current scholarship on identity construction engages with difference conceptualized as "social relation; experience; subjectivity; and, identity" (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 83). Such an intersectional perspective encourages one to consider individuals as located within simultaneous power relations of race, gender, class, etc., without separating different dimensions of social life into "discrete or pure strands" (Brah & Phoenix 2004: 76). Another crucial issue raised in contemporary debates on identity is the question of cosmopolitanism. Pnina Werbner's concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism" (2008) is particularly relevant to the proposed study. She notes that cosmopolitanism does not necessarily imply rootlessness. Instead she maintains, following Cohen:

> What is needed is the fashioning of a dialectical concept of rooted cosmopolitanism, which accepts a multiplicity of roots and branches and that rests on the legitimacy of plural loyalities, of standing in many circles, but with common ground (Cohen 1992: 483 as cited in Werber 2008: 9).

Within such a context, identity emerges as a dynamic and relational entity, enacted contextually in interactions with the others. A person may assume a number of different ethnic identities depending on the social situation. As Joane Nagel (1994) observes,

> Since ethnicity changes situationally, the individual carries a portfolio of ethnic identities that are more or less salient in various situations and vis-à-vis various audiences. As audiences change, the socially defined

array of ethnic choices open up to the individual changes. This produces a "layering" of ethnic identities, which combines with the ascriptive character of ethnicity to reveal the negotiated, problematic nature of ethnic identity (154).

Examples of this can be found in patterns of ethnic identifications in many US ethnic communities. For instance, Pedraza (1992) observes the layering of Latino or Hispanic ethnic identities. A person of Cuban ancestry can be a Latino (referring to non-Spanish speaking ethnic groups), a Cuban-American (referring to other Spanish speaking groups), a Marielito (vis-à-vis other Cubans) and white (vis-à-vis African Americans). The situational nature of ethnic identity demonstrates a nesting of identity. A particular group is a part of a larger collection of larger groups of social magnitude. In this way, an individual's identity reflects their belonging to communities on different scales of social organization. Nested identities allow people to be several things at the same time, even contradictory, without fear of conflict and incoherence. Furthermore, the nests are not fully self-contained; they may spill or overlap. The following sections will show different kinds of identities that my informants take on and point to the contradictions between different layers of their belonging.

Identities as Poles

Given the character of the recent mass migration of Polish nationals to the United Kingdom, it occurred on many occasions that most of my interviewees perceived themselves first and foremost as Poles. In their narratives, migrants often pointed at their existing links and emotional bonds with Poland. From the interviews and through participant observation, it became apparent that in situations where one finds themselves away from their home country, their search for identities grows stronger. Meyer and Geschiere uphold that: "People's awareness of being involved in open-ended global flows seems to trigger a search for fixed orientation points and action frames as well as determined efforts to confirm old and construct new boundaries" (2003: 2).

This statement appeared to be true when examining migrants' narratives, specifically in the case of Judyta. Judyta is a 31 year-old female, working on her doctoral thesis in history at Queen's University Belfast. She reflected on her sense of belonging in the following way:

I feel Polish because of family and cultural affiliations, because of my attachment for my relatives, childhood memories and because of my familiarity with history and culture in which I grew up. The process of shaping of my ethnic belonging was quite long, when I was a child or a teenager, it was something taken for granted and was not subject for discussion. Then, during my undergraduate studies, I wanted to be a "world citizen" or a "European." I was getting irritated by different elements of parochialism and backwardness. Then I started travelling around the world (…) I understood that I will never relinquish my memories and the context in which I was brought up, and I understood that these memories are important to me and define whom I am.

Judyta's experience is shaped by her numerous trips to Lithuania, Germany, Switzerland and France. She is now in a relationship with a Mexican and has also

travelled to Latin America. Similar was Joanna's case. Joanna is a 26 year-old female, enrolled in a master's programme in Medical Education Science at Queen's University Belfast. Joanna was exposed to a variety of cultures during her life. She spent two months in the United States when she was 21, working as a care assistant and has travelled extensively within Europe (Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia and Spain). She is currently working as a teaching assistant at a play group for children from different ethnic backgrounds. When I asked Joanna whether she considered herself as a Pole, her answer was as follows:

> I am Polish and I feel Polish. The fact that I don't live within the territory of my home country doesn't change anything. It is difficult to explain. It is a bit like with transplanting a plant. If you transplant it with a root, then you can do it a couple of times. But if you transplant it without the root, then it will either wither away or the wind will destroy it (…).

These two examples bring attention to the importance of the process of socialization and biographical experiences of individuals in shaping their identities. The modeling of migrants' belonging begins then at birth, at the earliest interactions between child, family and the community (Rotheran and Phinney 1986). The continual presence of societal and cultural markers prepares them for eventual self-labeling. Secondly, a sense of belonging is formed as a result of boundary drawing, ordering and othering (Bauman 1991); it is thus frequently through the encounter and dialogue with people of different nationalities that identity is constructed and negotiated.

In the vast majority of cases, my informants' identifications with Poland were also stimulated through the emotional attachment they had for their families and friends back home. In many instances, especially in the case of migration of single people, a long term migration may induce feelings of alienation and uprootedness, which "become crucial for belonging and identity work" (Čiubrinskas 2009: 98).

For example, Agata, a 29 year-old female, employed at the time of the interview in the human resource sector of a company in Belfast, expressed her nostalgia for the homeland in the following way:

> Yes, of course I feel Polish. I miss Poland a lot. It is a lot of fun here, and I should be happy. But now when I broke up with my boyfriend, I realized that all these friendships are very shallow. It is totally different when you know someone from the primary school. When there was a bank holiday, my friends were out of Belfast. And I thought: 'Gosh in Poland even if my friends were away, I could visit my grandma. But here I am on my own'. This is a disadvantage of being here.

Agata is now going back to Poland and intends on completing her studies in Polish philology, which she interrupted because of her migration to Belfast. She said: "I could probably stay in Belfast and obtain my degree here, start a new MA course, but I've seen what I could see here. I learned how to be on your own, but now it is time to return *home*." This suggests that displacement from home and isolation from one's family may heighten one's sense of identity. Alicja's life-story seems to corroborate this thesis. Alicja is a 28 year-old female, working as a care assistant in Belfast. She obtained a degree in psychology and theology in Poland and is very active in the Polish parish life, organizing pre-communion religious education classes for Polish children. While at the time of the interview Agata was making arrangements

to return to Poland, Alicja expressed her disenchantment with her life in Northern Ireland, also considering such a possibility:

You know that I am here for money mostly. I am wondering how long I will continue like this. I feel like I am missing something out of life. My sister is getting married and the other is going to have a baby. The time passes by through fingers. I feel I should go back.

She then continued:

Maybe you are different. I know you could probably imagine staying outside Poland permanently. You are going to Mexico, but I am different. I think I couldn't stay abroad for a longer time. I think that only when you are far away from home you then understand *where you belong to*.

These excerpts may suggest that the stay abroad, far away from migrants' homeland, may be in itself a powerful resource in strengthening their ethnic identities as Poles. Instead of expanding their ethnic consciousness by strengthening their dual transnational allegiance, migrants distance themselves from the Irish and come to identify more strongly with their Polishness. This suggests that in the situation of being estranged in a foreign country, identities that previously remained dormant, may gain a new dimension and special importance abroad.

Small Homelands

Attachment to particular regions or towns of Poland seemed to be another powerful building block of migrants' identities. Yi-Fu Tuan observes that: "Homeland is an important type of place at the medium scale. It is a region (city or countryside) large enough to support a people's livelihood. Attachment to the homeland can be intense" (Tuan 2007 [1977]: 149).

In German the word small homeland (*Heimat*) exists among such terms as "self, I, love, need, body or longing" (Blickle 2004: 4). Reitz notes that,

Heimat, the place were you were born, is for every person the centre of the world'; the idea of ideal is not simply territorial, but rather invokes a 'memory of origin' and involves the notion of 'impossible return' to roots or origins (as cited in Kaes 1989: 163).

Amongst the Polish migrants, identification with the small homeland seemed of great importance. For example, when I asked Ania, a 25 year-old female, employed at a call centre at the time of the interview, whether she missed Poland, she responded: "I miss my family, my friends; I miss my home town and Silesia. Um, I feel more Silesian than Polish." When I asked her expand on what made her particularly fond of Silesia, she found it difficult to formulate a clear answer. She said:

Hum, never thought of it. Of course on surface level there is nothing to miss in Silesia. It is an industrial region, it is polluted and ugly. Maybe not so much as Silesia I miss Mikołów, my hometown. But I feel Silesian, because we have our own dialect and our own traditions, for example apart from the traditional Christmas Eve dishes, we eat fish soup. It is something typical of our region.

Local dialects are often important markers of such regional identities. An example of this was Magda, a 23 year-old female working at a local recruitment agency. At her

birthday party, someone asked her about her town of origin, Chełm. Magda explained that it was located in a region of Poland referred to as *Lubelszczyzna*. She then said with a note of pride: "Some people notice that my accent is typical of *Lubelszczyzna*." Objectively, her accent is not strong, and even if there was a slight twang in her voice it is not obvious enough to claim that her accent is typical of that region. However, it is a crucial tool in Magda's strengthening of her regional identity, and in this way she makes a distinction between herself and other migrants.

In many instances, migrants' identifications with their small homelands often evoke memories of the elements of landscape that seem to be typical of these places. According to Catherine Palmer (1998) landscape confers ethnic identities and may serve as powerful ethnic marker. She points out:

> For example, the land as a marker of nationality is often enshrined in a country's national anthem. According to the anthem of Austria it is a nation blessed by its beauty, a land of mountains, fields and streams; Denmark is a land of charming beech wood; Ireland of green valleys and towering crag; Portugal is a happy land kissed by the ocean and Sweden is the fairest land of all (193).

These 'enshrined' notions are evident in my interviewees' commentaries; many referred to specific geographical features of the Polish natural environment that they missed the most while abroad.

For example, Kasia, a 31 year-old female from Mrągowo (Northern Poland), expressed her nostalgia for her hometown in the following way: "I would prefer to live in Poland, but it is not possible to live there at the moment. I miss the food, my family, the alleys, lakes, shore, forests, and my hometown." Kasia came to Northern Ireland with her husband and two children, aged 6 and 9. Her longing for Mrągowo is so strong that she says she asked her children's teachers to let them finish their school year a month earlier in order to spend a prolonged vacation in Poland.

Moreover, although less frequently, some migrants appeared to identify with the places that they associated with their childhood stories, which again suggests that the identity formation process is interwoven in the biographical experiences of the individuals. For example, Oliwia expressed her longing for the lost past:

> When I was a child we used to go to the Beskidy Mountains. We would climb Czantoria, Stożek, Barania Góra. My father was always way in front of my sister and me. We would eat yoghurts on the mountains trails. We would hitchhike on our way back *home*. I remember black and blue-berries that we would pick up on our way in the mountains. It is funny how these memories bounce back when I am in Belfast.

Apart from natural elements of the scenery described, some of my informants also pointed out elements of urban landscape of larger cities such as Kraków or Warsaw, which they particularly missed while in Belfast, very often emphasizing the rich cultural repertoire available in these places. For example Agata commented:

> I miss Poland. I also idealize Warsaw and I dislike Belfast. I became sentimental. I don't miss Poland as such but I miss my places, my small fatherland. I love Warsaw. I miss musical gardens, street concerts. (…) This is a lively city. Not like here.

The above quotes highlight the role of nostalgic elements in creating one's sense of self. Nostalgia is a means by which migrants imagine themselves within those

spaces from which they were displaced. Whether by referring to the elements of natural landscape or to the cultural heritage of Poland, they reinforced their emotional attachments with their small fatherlands, weaving narratives of belonging.

European Identities: The Other *Ante Portas*

This section discusses the construction of European identities among the Polish migrants in Belfast. David Morley and Kevin Robins assert that European identity is:

a defensive identity, a fortress identity, defined against the threat of other cultures and identities (American, Japanese, Islamic, African or whatever). This reassertion of European cultural identity amounts to a refusal to control the reality of a fundamental population shift that is undermining the little white "Christian" Europe of the nineteenth century (1995: 88).

This statement seems to be true as confirmed by my daily interactions with some of the Polish migrants. It frequently appeared that many of the Polish migrants treated members of non-European cultures with certain detachment and were aloof to them, justifying their attitudes with a cultural gap between them and non-Europeans. For example, Marian, a 30 year-old male, with a master's degree in ethnology, commented one day:

You know I got a questionnaire from Ulster University to fill out. It was some kind of survey about the inter-ethnic relations. I had to answer some questions, like with whom I would like to be in relationship: Chinese, Pakistani, Japanese, Muslim and so on. I would rather prefer to be with someone from our cultural milieu. I think it would be easier to communicate with such a person.

In a similar way, one day I had a conversation with Alicja, mentioned earlier in this paper. At that time she was employed by a nursing home. When I asked Alicja about her colleagues, she mentioned that there was a high percentage of the Filipinos at her work. I enquired whether she made friends with them, to which she answered: "I spend most of the time with the Polish and the Northern Irish. I don't think I would be able to understand Filipinos, they are a different story. They have different culture than us, Europeans, you know."

The danger here is that such isolated stances can foster racist attitudes towards people of colour. This mode of thinking, in its most extreme form, can manifest itself in the proposals of some migrants that the borders of the nation states should be strengthened. This was visible in the following statement, made by Zbigniew: "People here should apply certain restrictions to limit the entry of *chiapatych*. Soon Belfast will become like India, where streets are crowded and there is not enough air to breathe." *Chiapaci* is a pejorative designation for Pakistani and Indian derived from the word "chiapata," which is a common food consumed in that region of Asia. Zbigniew's attitude is particularly notable as he is a middle class male and a degree holder in Cultural Studies. Also, during the course of my employment at a call centre, I witnessed many instances in which a particular colleague, Kaśka, would receive a phone call from Asian or African customers, with the comment: "O znowu jakiś brudas dzwoni"—which means "Again some sloven is calling." Kaśka always assumed

from the very beginning that it would be harder to troubleshoot such a customer, and characterized them as slow-thinking and ignorant. She essentialized them on the basis of their skin colour, which was not even a perceptible characteristic in the conversation—instead she would make her own assumptions judging by their accents and names displayed in the computer system.

European identity therefore is constructed on the opposition between "we" (White European) and "The Other" (non-White, non-European). It is shaped by the heritage of Europe's colonial expansion. European identity takes form of "defensive discourse of constructing 'a pure Europe' as a symbolic continent whose territory is cleansed of foreign and uncivilized elements" (Lutz 1997: 95). This sort of identification may lead to the danger of generating racist attitudes among Polish migrants in Belfast.

Cosmopolitan Identities

This section discusses the construction of cosmopolitan identities among Polish migrants. Hannerz considers the perspective of the cosmopolitan as entailing a relationship to the plurality of cultures. This in turn involves "first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It is an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences" (1990: 239). As a result, cosmopolitanism is a mode of behaviour that "in identity terms [is] betwixt and between without being liminal. It is shifting, participating in many worlds, without becoming part of them" (Friedman 1994: 204). In other words, cosmopolitans "draw allegiances from here, there, and everywhere. Bits of cultures come into […] lives from different sources, and there is no guarantee that they will all fit together" (Waldron 1992: 788–789).

My research suggests that many informants construct cosmopolitan identities by expressing openness towards diverse cultural experiences and through incorporating elements of various cultures into their daily lives. Some of them had spent a significant amount of time abroad before coming to Belfast. Take Grzegorz's case as an example. Grzegorz is a 27 year-old male architect, who has extensively travelled across the globe. He shared his memories with me:

Marta: Why did you come to Belfast?

Grzegorz: For work and I also wanted to find out something more, get more experience not only from Poland, one could say international experience. I had work in Poland, but I wanted to get to know something else before I settle down. Before coming here, I was in the US.

Marta: Wonderful, where exactly?

Grzegorz: In California. (…) I was working 4.5 months. I was working as an architect. I went there during my studies. I always wanted to see how that looks like. I went first to Delaware. I had a friend, from my school, who was in California. I went to California too and I found a good job there. (…)

Marta: So you have been living at Donegall Avenue since the beginning?

Grzegorz: Yes, and I share house with great people, a Polish guy and a Slovakian girl. They like travelling too, they have been to China, Morocco, and they went to Greenland. We like sightseeing. While being here, we went to Portrush, the Giant's Causeway, Bangor. We would like to go somewhere abroad but we are saving up money for the beginning of our life together.

Marta: What do you eat?

Grzegorz: I usually eat what is not available in Poland. For example bagels or shrimps. I got used to eating them in California.

Grzegorz is an excellent example of how individuals in contemporary societies are no longer constrained to one single nation state. In his life, bits and pieces from various cultures come together, creating a sort of collage effect. Yet, given this, Grzegorz intends to go back to Poland and get married there to his Polish fiancée, though this does not exclude the possibility of moving abroad in the future. This kind of engagement and taste for cultural diversity is emblematic for the build of a cosmopolitan.

In a similar vein, Ula, a 48 year-old female architect, confessed to me that she did not feel Polish in Belfast but rather considered herself as a part of an international milieu. When I asked whether she identified as a Pole, she answered:

Not so much […]. At my work place I have Chinese, Koreans, German, Austrian, two Spaniards, an Italian, Irish people. Now we have an Irishman who worked in the US, then in Dublin and now he is working here. Young people who graduate from Glasgow or London. It is a melting pot. Oh! Now there is a girl from the US, she is doing an internship. She is indigenous. There are plenty of people from all over the world. You see yourself: many colours, many cultures. We have the same work. But then we go for a beer and the table is colourful.

Maciek, a 28 year-old male displayed a similar attitude. He came to Belfast in November 2006. He first worked at local call centres, and then moved to Dungannon where he became employed as an English as second language teacher at a local school. During his stay in Belfast, he often attended multicultural events with his international friends (such as Mela Festival or Newtownabbey Neighbour Day event). Below I present extracts from our interview:

Marta: Have you made friends with many other Polish migrants?
Maciek: To be honest, I have more local friends or native speakers. For example, Margaret is American, Julia is Australian, Jason is Scottish. But I also know the locals, for example my flatmate is from Coleraine. But the other ones one can treat as the locals, because they live here…
Marta: So you make friends with people from all over the world?
Maciek: Yes. Well, last year I shared accommodation with a Ukrainian girl. I also know Turkish people, or people from Turkmenistan. I don't know many Polish people. […]

Some of my informants emphasized the importance of the development of transnational links enhanced by the development of means of transport, leading to the compression of time and space (Harvey 1989). For example, Weronika, a 31 year-old female employed at a local car factory, commented on my question about whether or not she missed Poland:

No, I treat it rather like a place to spend the vacation. I do not identify myself with anything. I am able to contact my family every day or every two days, whenever I feel like it. I talk to them on Skype. There is no problem. My mum is laughing because I am 2,000 kilometres from home. My sister lives in Poland in Bieszczady and it takes her more time to get home than my travel to Poland. This is paradoxical. For me it is easier to contact my family than for her. I visit Poland every three months. I would like to live in Greece or Cyprus.

The above examples appear to demonstrate how some of the migrants adopt a cosmopolitan stance. As part of a globalized world, they embrace and immerse themselves in a variety of cultures and societies by culturally engaging with people of

other ethnic, national and religious backgrounds. This engagement may be achieved through "listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting" and often leads to acquisition of "a build-up skill in maneuvering more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings" (Hannerz 1996: 103).

Identity in Practice

Having explored the different kinds of identities that Polish migrants may construct in Belfast, it is now important to observe that in various situations my informants disclosed different layers to their ethnic identities. It must be noted that particular ethnic identities do not exist in vacuum, but quite the opposite—there exists a dynamic relationship between different layers of one's belonging. In a significant amount of cases I found that these layers complement one another and in these cases one layer of identity encompasses another one.

This nature of one's belonging was illustrated by Katarzyna, a 31 year-old female interpreter, currently employed by Northern Irish Council for Ethnic Minorities. She says:

> Of course I feel Polish. Why, because my life history is connected to Poland. I was also raised and brought up in Poland, which is different from growing up here or anywhere else, but I also feel I am a world citizen. I don't feel limited to being Polish but just the opposite. Poland is the part of Europe, so mentally and culturally I feel myself the citizen of Europe. And what goes with it I feel like a world citizen, due to the easiness in communication and transport.

It is very much the social context that determines which sorts of identities from these multiple layers come into play in particular situations. Consider Marysia's case, for example. Marysia felt Polish when around Northern Irish people and other Europeans and European when around non-Europeans. Although she is fluent in English and is now working towards completing an arts degree at the University of Ulster, she spends most of her free time with other Polish migrants. She enjoys socializing with a group of her friends and often goes on trips with them. Marysia maintains strong links with Poland and regularly receives post deliveries from her home country. She told me during our conversations that she considers herself Polish and in her free time likes reading Polish novels and listening to Polish songs. At the same time, on one occasion her identity as European became overt. When I was looking for a room to rent, she gave me the following advice:

> If I were you, I wouldn't move in with Indians or Chinese because you don't know what to expect from them. If you move in with a European you will be able to communicate with them more easily as we have some common cultural and mental characteristics.

While different aspects of ethnic identity may be viewed as consisting of various layers, it often happens that certain layers of this identity may take on a new significance for an individual that is away from home. For example, when I re-interviewed Ania after a couple of months, and asked her to further elaborate on her feeling of being more Silesian than Polish in the initial interview, she told me:

> Well, actually, in Poland I feel Silesian. I never think of myself as Polish, even though it is always somewhere at the back of my mind. But when I am in the UK, I consider myself predominantly as Polish. It very much depends on whom you interact with.

This confirms the situational and flexible character of ethnic identity. The kind, nature and shape of social interaction moulds one's self-belonging and results in specific layers of one's identity to come to the fore, or in other words, to become more salient. Often there appears to be a certain ordering of identities with regards to what the point of reference is. This tends to reflect territorial-geographical ordering of the social worlds to which migrants belong. One kind of ethnic identity may be engulfed in another. A person, who comes from Silesia, may consider themselves a Silesian while in Poland, but this does not exclude feeling attachment to Poland abroad. In this case, different layers of self become actualized in certain situations, depending on the context and specific nature of a particular interaction. The borders of one's identity are contested and they shift depending on the referent group. The broader the referent group is, the more encapsulating one's ethnic identity tends to be. Feeling Polish may also involve feeling a member of a particular religion or place of origin in Poland and these two types of ethnic attachments seem to be in congruence with one another. One may juggle with their identities and take on a kind of identity depending on what fits well within a given social context.

While identities may complement one another, at the same time they may co-exist in an antagonistic tension. An example of such a case is Zbigniew, who often takes on qualities of a cosmopolitan, but discards them on other occasions. For example, he often expresses his cosmopolitan stance through his willingness to travel extensively throughout the world. He is now planning his trip to Morocco and visited Mexico last fall. Zbigniew is open to cultural difference and was happy to join the ethnomusicology concert organized at the social anthropology department at a local university last year, expressing much enthusiasm regarding the music from Mali and Brazil. However this does not square with his racist attitudes discussed in the section on European identities, which shows contradictory identities taking voice within one person.

The same predisposition was also evident in several Polish females who have non-European partners. The fact that they have decided to spend their lives with individuals coming from other continents, such as Africa or Asia, seems to suggest that they embrace a cosmopolitan stance. However, their European identities often become actualized when they converse with other Polish females. In their everyday discussions, I have noticed a tendency to depict gender relations in these countries as oppressive towards women. For example, on the one hand, Magda, who had a Yemeni fiancé, would take part in multicultural festivals in Belfast and spend her holidays in various countries (such as Canary Islands, Egypt, Turkey). However, at the same time in a conversation with me she said:

> Look, these Muslim countries, they are all the same. In Yemen a woman in order to get off the bus needs to knock on the window to be let off. She can't say anything to the driver. And I heard that when some Irish girls went to Yemen and wore tank tops, then men were masturbating on the bus. It was like a porn movie for them. I would never like to live in Yemen. Luckily we will stay in Europe.

There is hence internal contradiction in Magda's attitudes. On one hand she takes on an identity of a cosmopolitan, and on the other her reactions seem to be at odds with such a stance—this is especially evident when she clings on to her European "defensive" identity.

These examples suggest that one's belonging should be considered as a manifold entity. It allows playfulness and identity switching between different aspects of self. Different layers of belonging may complement each other but they also may exist in a contradictory tension with one another. An individual is an active social actor who strategically negotiates their identity and tunes it to the context in which it is played out. Identity in this way is not given but varies in time and according to circumstances. I will reiterate and elaborate on this point in the next final section below.

Migrants' Multilayered Belongings: Towards a Dynamic Understanding of Identity Construction

This paper has proposed such a view of migrants' identity in which belonging is a complex construct. It consists of different layers and in relation to this, one kind of identity may be engulfed by another, broader type of identification. At the same time, one should be aware that ethnic identities are in process of constant repositioning, and challenged by questions, disagreements and confrontations. The self can never be fixed in advance and is characterized by high degree of openness, a characteristic which Hermans referred to as 'unfinalisability' of the self (1996).

Although the majority of the migrants perceive themselves primarily as Poles, there are other aspects of their belonging that they revealed in my fieldwork, such as representatives of their localities, Europeans, and cosmopolitans. From this perspective, migrants' identities could be problematized as "changing same." The concept of "changing same" captures the ways in which the tension between "having been, being and becoming is negotiated, conjugated or resolved" (Fortier 2005: 184). "The changing same" is negotiated and re-created in the interplay of complex cultural and historical factors reaching beyond the territories of a single nation state.

In such a context, the role of individuals' biographical experiences is crucial to the understanding of the process of shaping their sense of the self. As Giddens puts it,

> A person identity is not to be found in behaviour nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going* […]. In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going (1991: 54).

An individual's life-story constitutes different kinds of identities which are in a dynamic and dialogical relationship with each other and their boundaries shift depending upon the context, illustrating how:

> in dialogue—real or imagined—with individuals—real or imagined a person inevitably attempts to grasp the other's discourse and, to do so, takes the perspective of another I position, and by doing so, reformulates ongoing narrative of his or her life (McIlveen 2007: 5).

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