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NARRATIVES OF SETTLING IN CONTEXTS OF MOBILITY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF IRISH AND POLISH HIGHLY QUALIFIED WOMEN MIGRANTS IN LONDON

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Abstract:

Adopting a spatio-temporal lens, this paper explores how highly qualified migrant women negotiate relationships and career motivations in specific socio-structural contexts. Comparing migration experiences of Irish and Polish women in London, I explore similarities and differences across, as well as within, these groups. Having joined the EU in 1973, Ireland can be regarded as part of ‘old EU’, while Poland joining in 2004 is part of the ‘new’ wave of EU members. Migration from old and new member states is often discussed separately using different framing. This paper contributes to understanding migration in three ways. Firstly, by developing comparative analysis which goes beyond narrow and static migrant categories. Secondly, by challenging the temporary/ transient versus permanence/ integration dichotomy to explore a ‘sliding scale’ of migrant trajectories. Thirdly, by illustrating how evolving relationalities, through the life cycle, may enable but also hinder migrant women’s opportunities for settling in or moving on.

INTRODUCTION

As widely noted in the literature; ‘Mobility is an integral aspect of social life’ (Easthope, 2009: 61). And, as modern societies are characterised by high levels of human spatial mobility, there are growing conceptualisations that ‘connect movement and mobilities with formation of subjectivities and identities’ (Skelton, 2013: 471). Discourses of mobility also frame movement within the context of the European Unionⁱ. Concepts such as ‘freedom of movement’ evoke a sense of on-going motion, transience and temporary sojourns (Collett, 2013).

Writing at the start of the 21st century, Russell King (2002) called for the deconstruction of traditional migration dichotomies such as transience and permanence. He pointed to the ‘multiplicity and variety of types of migration and movement’ that challenge simplistic migration ‘polar types’ (2002: 94). However, rather than addressing these challenges, much migration research, particularly in the wake of EU enlargementⁱⁱ, has tended to reproduce rather than interrogate migrant categories. For example, while much of the discussions around settlement and integration tend to focus on the practices of refugees, third country nationals, ‘guest workers’ (Nannerstad et al, 2008; Erdal and Oeppen, 2014), by contrast, the movement of EU citizens tends to be discussed by migration scholars in terms of circularity, temporariness and ‘liquid migration’ (Engbersen and Snel, 2011; Glorius et al, 2011; Collett, 2013). In this way, notions of permanence versus temporariness, integration versus transience continue to inform how different categories of migrants are researched.

The focus on intra-EU mobilities, has meant that, with some recent exceptions (Ryan and Mulholland, 2015; Grzymala-Kazlowska 2016; Koelet et al. 2017), surprisingly little academic attention has been paid to how European migrants negotiate attachments, belonging and processes of settling in destination countries (Collett, 2013; Erdal and Oeppen, 2014). Challenging assumptions within the migration literature, my initial research on Polish migration to the UK (Ryan et al, 2008) already began to find evidence of family reunions, family formations and growing numbers of Polish children in British schools; suggesting patterns of longer term stays were beginning to emerge. In this paper, building on my earlier body of comparative analysis (Ryan, 2009; 2015a), I use new data to explore how women negotiate relationships and career motivations along a spectrum of moving and staying. In so doing, I use the concept of a ‘sliding scale’ to illustrate how migrants’ decisions about duration of stay shift and develop over time depending on a range of factors including personal, relational and structural factors.

However, that is not to suggest that extending the stay can be simply understood as evidence of gradual ‘integration’. As noted by Phillimore, ‘integration’ has diffuse definitions across the academic literature, while within official policy discourse in the UK, and other European countries, it has become increasingly normative and dominated by an ‘assimilationist stance’ (Phillimore, 2012: 529). Integration has become a politically charged concept that assumes a linear and permanent adjustment to the ‘host’ society. As argued elsewhere, such a view of integration as a static achieved state, overlooks the ongoing spatio-temporal dynamism of migrants’ complex and contingent relationships in the home and host countries (Ryan and Mulholland, 2015). It also underestimates how migrant decision-making may be informed by actors’ comparative evaluation of opportunities and obstacles elsewhere, including the homeland and other countries. As shown by the 2016 ‘Brexit’ referendumⁱⁱⁱ, wider structural shifts can re-frame and reverse migrants’ rights and attachments. Hence, rather than exploring the trajectories of Irish and Polish women through the discourse of integration, this paper uses a spatio-temporal lens (Erel and Ryan, forthcoming) to explore the dynamism and contingency of migrants’ plans and motivations, along a sliding scale, through changing relational, life cycle and structural contexts.

The number of women migrating across the European Union is increasing and becoming more diverse (Triandafyllidou and Isaakyan, 2016). There are data to suggest that the motivations for migration are slightly different between men and women (Recchi and Favell, 2009). Research by Ackers et al, (2009) also suggests that the post-migration economic status of men and women are likely to be different, with fewer migrant women in full time employment than migrant men. Increased mobility across European borders may impact in particular ways on women’s caring roles and responsibilities (Kraler, et al, 2011). As noted elsewhere, ‘it is largely women who bear the brunt of anxieties, social isolation, responsibilities and sacrifices necessary for the familial strategy to succeed’ (Cooke, 2007: 59).

While much has been written about ‘trailing wives’ (Purkayastha, 2005), there is also increasing diversification within female migration including growing numbers of highly qualified and skilled women who may move alone, unaccompanied by family members (Kofman, 2004; Raghuram, 2004; Van den Bergh and Du Plessis, 2011; Ryan and Mulholland, 2014). There have also been calls for more comparative research to challenge

ethnic exceptionalism and explore shared experiences across groups of women migrants (Mahler and Pessar, 2006).

My paper addresses this call in specific ways. Firstly, I bring together data from ‘old’ and ‘new’ EU migrant groups who are usually discussed separately (Favell, 2011; Burrell, 2009). In so doing, I illustrate the significance of EU mobility rights in shaping future possibilities for settling in or moving on while also indicating the enduring obstacles (such as language and credential recognition) that prevent frictionless mobility across EU borders. Secondly, I use rich, qualitative data from two recent studies to compare across and within the experiences of highly qualified women migrants. All female participants in my two studies were university graduates and therefore can be classified as highly qualified migrants, however, migrants’ personal status is not fixed but rather changes and evolves through the life cycle (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014). Personal status and migration motivation are dynamically intertwined (student, highly qualified, skilled worker, family-migration) (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014). Thirdly, my paper contributes to migration research by challenging the temporary/ transient versus permanence/ integration dichotomy to explore a ‘sliding scale’ of trajectories and how these may change through the life cycle. As discussed in the conclusion, there are policy implications from this comparative research as we seek to go beyond simplistic understandings of linear integration to appreciate the complexity and dynamism of migrants’ experiences, motivations and obligations through the life cycle. I begin by briefly describing the context of Irish and Polish migration to Britain.

IRISH AND POLISH MIGRANTS IN BRITAIN

On the surface, Irish and Polish migrants would appear to have several things in common (Brannen et al, 2014). Historically, as Belchem and Tenfelde stated: ‘Ireland and Poland produce migrant outflows with similar backgrounds, age structure and religious cultures [...] Irish and Polish migrants were mainly rural, predominantly young and single and adhered for the most part to distinctive forms of Catholicism’ (2003: 7). Irish and Polish migrants have come to Britain in different waves with various troughs and peaks. At times these waves have been overlapping, such as the large numbers of Irish and Poles who arrived in Britain in the post-war period.

Of course, there are important differences between these two migrant groups. Immigration status has, until recently, been a key difference. Because of British colonialism in Ireland, Irish migrants have always had an unusual status in Britain being foreign nationals, and thus not British subjects, while simultaneously enjoying full legal, civil, social and economic rights. These rights were further enhanced when Ireland and Britain both joined the European Economic Community (EEC, later EU) in 1973. This differs markedly from Polish migrants whose main routes of entry to Britain, prior to 2004 when Poland joined the EU, were as refugees, asylum seekers, through student and business visas and frequently as ‘undocumented’ migrants (Eade et al, 2006).

In recent years, there have also been increasing numbers of migrants from Ireland and Poland arriving in Britain (UK census, 2011). Following many years of economic growth commonly referred to as the ‘Celtic Tiger’, the Irish economy experienced a severe recession in 2008 which saw a rapid increase in unemployment and a sharp rise in emigration (Glynn, Kelly and MacEinri, 2013). During the time of my research, the number of Irish nationals leaving Ireland was 35,200 (Central Statistics Office, 2013). Just under a half of these migrants

moved to Britain, evidenced by the number of British national insurance numbers issued to people born in the Republic of Ireland: 16,370 in 2013–2014 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014). Since 2004, the numbers of Polish migrants arriving in Britain have increased dramatically. Official estimates in 2014, the year of my study, suggest that 726,000 residents in the UK, as a whole, have Polish nationality^{iv}.

While the status of Irish and Polish migrants, as EU citizens, has become very similar, other differences remain. A key difference, discussed later in this paper, is language. While Irish is the official language of Ireland, the vast majority of people speak English as their first language. Thus, unlike Poles, Irish people have not experienced language as a barrier to employment or social interaction in Britain. While being mindful of these differences, I am influenced by Mahler and Pessar's (2006) call for migration scholars to engage in more comparative work. While of course there are many ways of understanding intra-EU mobility, within the academic literature there are some notable trends. For example, migrants from 'old EU' member states have been framed as 'Eurostars' (Favell, 2011) whose mobility is shaped by adventure and lifestyle choices (Recchi and Favell, 2009), while migration from 'new EU' countries is often framed through economic necessity (Bunnell, 2009). However, as discussed below, comparing across these two groups reveals interesting similarities as well as differences which challenge simplistic and static migrant categories (King, 2002).

METHODS

This paper brings together data from two separate studies. In 2013 I undertook a research project with young Irish people who had migrated to Britain after the economic crisis in 2008^v to understand their migration trajectories, experiences and expectations. The average age of participants was 28 years and most had been in Britain for approximately five years, all had university degrees. Most had arrived in Britain as graduates but a few came as students and acquired qualifications post-arrival. For the purposes of this paper I will focus on the 20 women who participated in the qualitative aspect of the research. There were some male participants and an online survey the results of which are discussed elsewhere (Ryan and Kurdi, 2014).

Building upon my earlier work on intra-EU Polish migrants (Ryan et al, 2008), in 2014, on the 10th anniversary of EU enlargement, I carried out a new qualitative project involving 20 migrants who had been resident in the UK since Polish accession to the EU^{vi}. The majority of the participants (17/ 20) were women. The average age was 36 years. The mean year of arrival was 2005, with the majority of participants moving to the UK between 2004 and 2007. For the purposes to this paper I will focus on the 17 women and exclude the three male participants. Like the Irish participants, all the Polish women were university educated. Most arrived from Poland as graduates, though many also did further study post-arrival in London (Ryan, 2015b).

Although these two samples are very similar there are some notable differences. Firstly, the Irish participants were slightly younger and had been in Britain, on average, for a few years less than the Polish. Five Irish women were married, several more were in long term relationships, however, none had children. Reflecting their different age profiles, seven of the Polish women were currently married and four were divorced, while just under half (8 out of

17) had children. Thus, it is fair to say that many of the Polish women were at a different life stage to the Irish women. Nonetheless, in making my comparison I endeavour to take age and life stage into account, as discussed below.

As observed elsewhere (Ryan et al, 2015) working across different qualitative data sets is challenging. In this case, the work was made easier because similar questions had been asked to both sets of participants: processes of migration, motivations, aspirations and experiences, career progression and in-place opportunities. Participants' future trajectories, plans to return home, move on elsewhere or settle in Britain also formed key aspects of the interviews. Family relationships, ties and responsibilities were discussed by all interviewees, including those without children.

Data from each study were analysed separately. Firstly, narrative analysis was used to explore how participants told their individual stories of migration. In addition, a second level of thematic coding, using both a priori and newly emerging themes, across all transcripts was carried out using NVivo software. This combination enabled coding both within and across all transcripts to identify whole narratives as well as themes shared by all participants.

In preparation for this paper I undertook a rigorous re-analysis of the combined dataset. During an intensive period of immersion in the data, I re-read all 37 transcripts. My synthesis of the Irish and Polish transcripts did not seek to contrast two separate bodies of data but rather to identify and explore themes within and across the combined data as a whole. As argued elsewhere (Ryan et al, 2015) combining two relatively small datasets may highlight new themes through comparisons and contrasts across a larger number of cases. This allowed new codes, which had not formed part of the original separate analyses, to emerge, such as anticipated transnational caring for ageing relatives 'back home', as well as highlighting the crucial role of language in how highly qualified migrants navigate career building.

In this paper I will focus on the themes of mobility, future plans to return home, moving on elsewhere or extending the stay in Britain to explore the motivations, opportunities and obstacles that enable and hinder women migrants' evolving strategies. In so doing, I propose the metaphor of a 'sliding scale' to illustrate shifting attitudes, motivations and plans over time.

FINDINGS

Across the data there was remarkable similarity in that all participants had arrived in Britain with short-term, uncertain plans. Nevertheless, all participants had stayed considerably longer than originally anticipated and many were planning to further extend their stay in Britain. The mantra of coming 'for a year' was common amongst both Irish and Polish migrants. For example, Aine^{vii}, an Irish woman who had lived in London for 6 years observed: 'I said I would do a year here and then go home'. This statement was echoed by many including Marika, a Polish woman who had lived in London for ten years: 'the plan was that I was going to be here for a year'.

Given the extent to which initial migratory plans had already changed, it is hardly surprising that most were reluctant to explicitly define their future trajectories. However, in undertaking a comparative analysis I found four broad groupings.

Firstly, a few participants had clear plans to return to their country of origin in the near future. Secondly, a small number were open to moving to a third country in the foreseeable future. Thirdly, some people felt deeply uncertain and confused about their future plans. Finally, there were many participants who described becoming more attached in Britain, especially in London, and had no plans to return home or move on elsewhere. In analysing this spectrum of attitudes and actions I challenge any narrow, linear or static view of migrant 'integration'. Instead, adopting a spatio-temporal lens, I explore the dynamic process of migration not as a single act of relocation but rather as an evolving strategy along a sliding scale, whose motivations and trajectories change through time and space. Clearly, these migrants benefitted from mobility rights and in the conclusion I consider what impact 'Brexit' (Britain's exit from the EU) could have on migrants' plans and opportunities.

Future mobility

When I interviewed Adrianna, she and her husband had recently bought a flat in Poland and were seriously considering to move back. Return to Poland was motivated by a strong desire to be reunited with parents and siblings. In addition, owning their own home was a crucial consideration for this couple: 'we would like to go to live in something that we actually own'. Renting a flat in London, they had no prospects of ever affording their own home in the city: 'it's the biggest headache in London'. The specific spatial context of London is salient because house prices are so extraordinarily high. However, Adrianna did not rule out returning to London if things did not work in Poland: 'I want to try it because if you don't try it you may regret it. If something goes wrong we can always come back'.

Having lived in London for more than ten years, it is interesting that returning to Poland was seen as something to try – which may or may not work – while returning to London was considered a safe option. This observation challenges simple dichotomies of permanent versus temporary settlement. Instead, people have complex plans and may resist making decisions that imply finality. The phenomenon of 'double return' migration, facilitated by mobility rights, has been noted elsewhere (White, 2014).

Among the Irish participants, a few had clear plans to return home in the near future. Ciara, one of the youngest interviewees, seemed very unsettled in London. She missed her family enormously and had recently begun to apply for jobs in Ireland. So strong was her desire to go back home that she was willing to consider a loss of earnings by giving up her full time, professional job in London to take part time or temporary employment in Ireland. Like Adrianna, Ciara's desire to return home was motivated by desired proximity to family rather than by economic factors. Thus, just as migration is not motivated solely by economic motives so too decisions about return may also involve a complex combination of different motivations.

However, future mobility did not necessarily mean return to the country of origin. Some participants planned to move to a third country. These women tended to be relatively young and without familial obligations or relationship ties. For example, when I interviewed Cora, an Irish woman, she had recently signed a three year fixed term contract in Indonesia. She emphasised openness to geographical mobility: 'I'm just leaving myself open at the minute. I could travel a bit more or maybe stay on in Indonesia for another couple of years if I really like it' (Cora, Irish participant). The idea of being 'open' was echoed by Marika one of the youngest Polish participants: 'I don't know, maybe if I'm lucky enough, maybe I can get

some amazing opportunities later on when I finish my PhD and I'm going to be off from here, I don't know, I really don't know. But I'm open'.

This kind of future possible mobility strategy was also expressed by Cait, an Irish participant:

I'm about that stage in my life now I'm 24, I could stay on here and have a career and go up the ladder but I'm not ready for it and I just want to do more travelling just see a bit of the world ... I'd probably even come back in a few years' time, you know, cos the way things are at home {Ireland} anyways you probably wouldn't even get a job (Cait, Irish study).

Thus, Cait does not want to settle into a career pathway just yet. At 24 she wants to travel the world. But she does not rule out returning to Britain in the future. Her plans defy simple categorisation as transient or permanent. Among some of the younger Polish migrants there was a similar attitude to mobility.

{I've} kind of gypsy soul, so I always wanted to move somewhere and when I'm here I'm thinking about moving somewhere again. So probably I will then maybe come back here or maybe not, I don't know. But now I'm working for a company which will for sure expand around Europe or Australia or something like this and I was the first person who said '*take me*' because I just like to experience some cultures (Izabela, Polish study).

These narratives of onward mobility reflect Skelton's (2013) observation that mobilities may connect with the formation of identity. Izabela's aspirations for travel are explained by her 'gypsy soul'. However, it is notable that all the women who aspired to this type of future mobility were young and childless. They also had specific skills such as fluency in several languages and professional qualifications that could be transferred to other country contexts. However, as discussed in more detail below, over time, especially through the life cycle, women's mobility may become more restricted.

Uncertainties and dilemmas

Several women remained quite torn and uncertain about their future plans and migration trajectories. Far from being a sign of celebratory mobility this uncertainty was often associated with unease and anxiety. When asked about her future plans Deirdre's reply showed her sense of uncertainty and the frustration this created.

I don't know, I wish I knew but I don't know. It all depends. And I think I'd drive myself crazy asking myself... I'm going to be here next year, and then after that I'm just, just going to see what happens (Deirdre, Irish study)

A similar sentiment was expressed by Agnieszka:

I have some ideas in – I don't know how many years now Yeah I know many people have similar dilemmas as me... I don't know... (Agnieszka, Polish study).

Thus, even after several years in London, both Deirdre and Agnieszka were still unsure about the future and continued to postpone making any clear decision about staying or returning. Hence, passing time was no guarantee of feeling more settled.

It was also apparent that changing life circumstances could open up new questions and uncertainties about returning home. Many participants were mindful about future care needs of ageing relatives back home.

Most women maintained strong ties with family and visited regularly. Angelika (Polish study) commented: 'I have parents, who are elderly and all that, so I still go and visit quite frequently'. As noted elsewhere in the literature, Skype and phone calls were no substitute for actual physical proximity. Despite the relative geographical closeness of Ireland and Britain, participants Irish participants were also mindful of physical separation from family members:

family is very important to me, I need to personally go and make sure I see them and spend time, the phone and Skype can only do so much. So you've got to go home, spend some time (Blaithin, Irish study).

Caring responsibilities may impact particularly on the migration trajectories of women (Kilkey and Merla, 2014; Kraler et al, 2011). Blaithin remarked: 'God forbid, if anyone got sick in my family, you know, seriously ill, I think I'd have to go home...it's always there niggling away in my mind, so if one of them got sick I'd be gone'.

Justyna, a Polish woman, was conscious of how the care needs of her aged mother might influence her own future migration plans.

my mum is reasonably healthy... but maybe in one year or two or three I will have to take care of my mum...I go to Poland to help my mum mainly with doctors and I'm very serious about this (Justyna, Polish study)

These narratives reveal the importance of relationality. Clearly, migrants cannot be understood as individual actors (Kofman, 2004). Adopting a network perspective illustrates how migration decision-making is situated within a web of significant others including family members (Ryan, 2011). Far from being static, however, relationality evolves through spatio-temporal dynamics (Erel and Ryan, forthcoming). While the possibility of returning 'home' was usually discussed in terms of family ties and caring responsibilities, as discussed below, decisions to extend the stay in Britain could also be motivated by relational ties.

Becoming more settled

Across the combined corpus of data there were some participants who were adamant that they intended to stay in Britain permanently:

I am not interested in Ireland, to be going back to Ireland ...No, no I don't think I will go back ever in a permanent way (Laoise, Irish study)

Yeah, it's basically where I come from but I'm never going back (Oliwia, Polish study).

While most participants were not quite as emphatic as that, many were becoming more settled in Britain. In moving along a sliding scale from initial, temporary, short term goals to longer term settlement, it is apparent that motivations were also shifting over time.

It was difficult to identify any one specific motivation for migration. Although most of the participants had migrated to work, there were related motivations such as gaining new experiences, having an adventure, acquiring additional qualifications or particular

professional work-experience, as well as in the case of Polish migrants perfecting their English. Motivations from migration may change over time (King, 2002). Simply put, the reason for coming and the reason for staying may not be the same (Erdal and Oppen, 2013). This may partly reflect temporal dynamism with changing priorities through the life cycle. For example, even though most of the participants had arrived in Britain as single, over time many had developed new relationships.

Women in stable relationships tended to be more settled (Mahler and Pessar, 2006). There may be a number of reasons for this including the need to accommodate the career prospects of two people. Ewelina, married to a Polish architect, remarked that her husband's career was the 'driving force' in their decision to stay in London (see also Cooke, 2007). In addition, being in a long term relationship may also enable migrants to feel more settled in the destination society. Two participants in the Irish study had recently married. Both Aideen and Eilish appeared settled in Britain and had no plans to return to Ireland. Eilish said 'this is my home now'. Similarly Aideen remarked: 'we've bought the house a couple of years ago, so you know, we've got roots now. So yeah...we'll stay put, really'.

In addition, among the Irish and Polish participants numerous women formed romantic relationships with English men with particular implications for future mobility. As King (2002:100) humorously observed: 'do not underestimate the libidinal factor in migration'.

Deirdre noted that one of the main reasons she was likely to remain in Britain was because of her English boyfriend: 'my boyfriend probably is one of the main things. Cos he's here and he won't move to Ireland, I don't think, with work and stuff'. Karina, a Polish woman, remarked about her British husband: 'he is useless at languages, it's a national disability for Brits... He's not going to learn Polish'.

These women had migrated as single and unattached. Thus, unlike the 'trailing wife' commonly discussed in migration literature (Cooke, 2007), their migration was not motivated by men. However, over time, their decision to stay in Britain was at least partly motivated by relationships. Through the life cycle, it is also apparent that children play a key role in women's decision making about returning home or extending the stay in Britain.

The role of children and family life stage

Having children raises important questions for migrants about whether they want their children to be socialised and educated in the destination society or return to the cultural and linguistic familiarity of the home country (Sime and Fox, 2015; Moskal, 2013).

About half of the Polish women had children, thus they had already faced questions about whether their children should grow up in Britain or back in Poland. While this was not a once and for all, final decision, and it can be re-visited at various junctures in the life cycle, it is apparent that after children start school, moving becomes more difficult (Ryan and Sales, 2013). Martyna, whose eldest son was born in Poland but who had attended most of his schooling in Britain, observed that she would not consider moving him again: 'I don't think he would cope in Polish schools'. Having moved him to a new country once, she did not want to disrupt his education by moving him back to Poland: 'we took him from Poland when he was five, he had friends then and we took him from it. We don't want to do that again. We just say, once we settle here, we have to stay here'.

While schooling alone is not the only deciding factor for parents, it is also apparent that having children enabled women to develop a deeper understanding of and attachments to British society. Ewa arrived in Britain as a young, single migrant and was uncertain about how long she would stay. However, over time she married and had children. She reflected upon how her changing family situation was re-shaping her sense of belonging to her local neighbourhood in south London:

I think it's very different way of settling in a country if you do have or you don't have children. Because if you have children you have to participate in everything what's happening in society. You have to go to the same hospitals, the same playgroups, midwives, start the same schools, parent evenings, and you really get more and more understanding of what's happening (Ewa, Polish study).

Thus, child-based sociality can provide opportunities for 'embedding' in specific spatial contexts (for a discussion see Ryan and Mulholland, 2015).

Amongst Irish participants the situation was different as none had children. In fact, many simply could not imagine having children in a city like London. The urge to return to Ireland to bring up children in the rural idyll of the Irish countryside has been noted elsewhere in the literature (Ni Laoire, 2007). Among my participants, an Irish childhood was associated with healthy living, safety and security, away from a crowded city like London.

As Ciara remarked:

we all had such brilliant childhoods in Ireland, and I think we want, you know, to have our children, if we ever have any, to experience that as well. I think it's different; you grow up different if you're going to grow up here than at home (Ciara, Irish study).

However, while young and relatively recently arrived women like Ciara found motherhood in London unimaginable, it was apparent that, over time, some Irish women were beginning to see that this could be possible. Aoife noted that while she previously thought that she could never have children in London, as the years went by, she began to change her mind:

I always thought I wanted to raise children in Ireland and educate them Ireland as well. Like now, as I've been here for a few years, I think it's not as important to me. Your priorities change a little bit and things change as time goes on. I think that if I have family I'll stay here (Aoife, Irish study)

But it should not be implied that women only began settling-in through romantic relationships and the needs of children. For many Irish and Polish participants decisions about future mobilities were informed by career opportunities.

Career opportunities

Although all participants were university graduates, their negotiations of the British labour market were quite different pointing to the salience of specific structural opportunities and obstacles. As noted earlier, language is particularly significant in how migrants navigate new contexts. All the Irish participants spoke English fluently, as their first language. Because of the long historical links between Ireland and Britain, their degrees and professional qualifications were usually recognised by British employers. Hence, the Irish women tended

to enter the British labour market on a level commensurate with their qualifications. By contrast the Polish women encountered more obstacles and most were initially de-skilled (Trevena, 2011). Language barriers and the lack of recognition of Polish qualifications meant that access to professional occupations took longer to achieve. Nonetheless, over time all the Polish participants had achieved English language fluency and many completed additional training in Britain. By the time I interviewed them, all of the Polish women were working in skilled jobs.

As noted earlier, a few young women planned to move on to other countries. Cait and Izabela, mentioned above, had particular skills that could transfer to other labour markets. Nonetheless, instead of enabling future onward mobility or return to professional occupations in the home country, investing time and energy in career development could also result in embedding into specific spatial contexts (Ryan and Mulholland, 2015). For many participants there was a growing realisation that credentials built up in the British labour market, particularly in the specific economic environment of London as a global city, were not necessarily easily transportable back to the country of origin. Hence, return home became associated with particular career risks.

Gabi, from Poland, was an accounts manager in London and observed: ‘the job I do here, how could I translate and transfer my knowledge from here to Poland? I’ve worked so hard and I want to have credit for that now you know what I mean...I don’t want to start from the beginning again’.

Similarly, Angelika, who worked in the National Health Service, observed: ‘you’ve built something that’s not necessarily transferable to somewhere else’. She explained:

because going back home, you wouldn’t know where to start because you learnt how the things work here, how to sort out things in here, and plus you’re actually too old to be hired back home. You are, you are probably old if you are thirty-something so if you’re 40, you’re definitely too old (Angelika, Polish study)

Having attained a level of career progression in Britain, both Gabi and Angelika were sceptical about transferring or translating their experience back to the Polish context. In fact, they both suggested that rather than attaining a similar job in Poland they may be disadvantaged.

Several Irish women expressed similar views. Aoife originally came to Britain to study for a specialist teaching qualification in Physical Education (PE): ‘I always kind of thought that I would go back to Ireland and teach back in Ireland’. However, now, with a permanent job as a specialist PE teacher in an ‘outstanding’^{viii} school in south London, she felt that returning to Ireland held no career advantages. In fact, she had an opportunity to return to Ireland but decided against it.

there’s no way to really progress if you’re a PE teacher (in Ireland)... I haven’t spent four years training to be a PE teacher to do that; there’s no point in throwing that away (Aoife, Irish study)

Similarly, Sorcha, a teacher specialising in graphic design, contrasted the opportunities available to her in Ireland and in Britain. In Ireland, graphic design is not a subject on the school curriculum, hence, returning home would mean becoming a general class teacher

rather than pursuing her specialism: ‘There’s a lot more opportunities for me here’ (Sorcha, Irish study)

For these Irish and Polish women, their migration project had been successful to the extent that they acquired specific skills and qualifications leading to career advancement. However, contrary to their initial expectations, these credentials were not easily transportable back to the home context. This highlights the non-transferability of credentials and develops upon Erel’s (2010) observation that cultural capital cannot be simply carried across borders in a ‘rucksack’ to the destination society. However, this analysis can be developed further, as it may also be difficult to bring newly acquired cultural capital from the destination society back to the country of origin (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014; see also Piekut, 2013). This applied not just to knowledge acquired from degree courses but also work-based expertise. This begins to suggest how short stays and temporary mobilities can be gradually extended over time as migrants begin embedding in place-specific opportunities and become increasingly aware of the career risks associated with moving back to the country of origin.

CONCLUSION

Almost two decades ago, Russell King urged researchers to interrogate and challenge traditional migration categories by exploring the variety and multiplicity of types of movement and sensitise themselves to the combinations, dynamics and continua of migrant experiences (2002: 94). In the meantime, Mahler and Pessar (2006) called for more comparative migration research. This paper has attempted to answer both of these challenges by drawing on rich qualitative interviews with Irish and Polish women migrants in Britain. In so doing, I have brought together migrants from ‘old’ and ‘new’ EU countries who are usually framed quite separately. In addition, I have used the women’s narratives to challenge migrant categories of temporary/ transient versus permanent/integrated which continue to underpin constructions of intra-EU mobilities. I argue that anticipated short term stays give very little indication of how people’s actual attachments may develop along a sliding scale of extending the stay, over time. Thus, mobility within the EU continues to be spatially, temporally and relationally contingent.

Adopting a spatio-temporal lens (Erel and Ryan, forthcoming) to examine relational dynamics reveals the factors that shape migration decision-making and evolving plans. Migration is not a once off action but requires on-going negotiations over time. My analysis contributes to better understanding how and why initial short term, temporary migration plans may slowly evolve along a sliding scale of gradual extensions of stay. I argue that changing personal status (from student to skilled worker, from single woman to partner and mother) is intertwined with changing plans and motivations. For example, young, single, childless, highly educated Irish and Polish women tended to have similar ‘open’ attitudes towards future mobility. However, migrants are rarely isolated actors and most decision making is nested in networks of significant others. The needs of family members may become more salient through the life cycle.

Across the combined dataset there were similarities in how relationships to significant others, particularly caring roles to ageing parents, shaped future migration projections. Despite all the advances in new technology, it is apparent that care giving still requires physical proximity (Kilkey and Merla, 2014). Forming relationships with British men, who would not consider moving to Ireland or Poland, was another interesting similarity across the data and

points to how marriage to ‘natives’ may influence women’s migratory strategies (Koelet et al. 2017). However, that is not to suggest that women were contained within caring roles. Economic motivations, in particular, career development prospects were also an important consideration for these highly qualified women. Experience and skills built up in a particular sector or jurisdiction, such as London as a global economic hub, may not easily translate into different contexts. Rather than aiding further mobility, acquired cultural capital may be embedding migrants in specific labour markets, while returning ‘home’ may carry career risks. This finding challenges assumptions about ease of mobility within the EU.

My findings have policy implications at the EU level. It is apparent that, despite ‘freedom of movement’, people cannot simply relocate their lives at will; relational ties, caring responsibilities and place-specific career opportunities shape where and when migrants can move and also provide particular opportunities and obstacles for embedding and settling-in over time. More needs to be done to support migrants in developing local language fluency and transferring recognised qualifications across borders. These enduring obstacles continue to prevent frictionless mobility, even among the highly qualified.

At EU, national and local level, policy makers need to re-consider what is meant by migrant ‘integration’. I argued that narrow, linear and normative policies on integration fail to understand complex, dynamic and contingent relational and emotional attachments of migrants through time and space. The impact of Brexit is likely to be very significant. It is apparent that ‘settling in place’ may be reversed by major structural shifts such as Brexit. The ‘sliding scale’ can suddenly shift back in the opposite direction as some long term resident migrants, become ‘un-settled’ and decide to leave Britain^{ix}. On the other hand, new follow-up research with the Polish participants suggests that threatened loss of mobility rights is influencing many to secure their status by applying for British residency and citizenship (Erel and Ryan, forthcoming). However, we need to be cautious in hailing this as evidence of integration and identification with British national fervour. Rather it may well be a pragmatic response to rising insecurity and loss of rights among European migrants in Britain. More needs to be done by policy makers to assuage the rising fears and insecurities of EU citizens living in Britain.

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ⁱ Free movement of workers between member states is a fundamental principle enshrined in Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

ii In 2004 8 new members mostly from East and Central Europe, including Poland, joined the European Union.

iii In June 2016 when the UK electorate voted narrowly to leave the European Union

iv http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_375449.pdf)

v This study was funded by a small award from the Third Sector Research Centre and was carried out with the support of the 'Irish in Britain' organisation.

vi This study was funded through a small award from the School of Law at Middlesex University.

vii The names of all participants have been changed to protect anonymity.

viii Schools in Britain are rated by the Office for Standards in Education and 'outstanding' is the highest and most coveted award.

ix https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/may/25/surge-in-poles-leaving-uk-since-brexit-vote-fuels-net-migration-drop?CMP=share_btn_link