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Invisible Poles and their integration into Polish society: changing identities of UK second-generation migrants in the Brexit era

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Abstract

The article discusses what happens when a ‘critical event’ exposes a migrant population to public view, leading them to reflect on their multiple identities and loyalties. Its focus is on 21st century Europe, where societies spread across international borders, offering opportunities for individuals to identify with two or more, and attempt to integrate sufficiently for their own purposes within each. Our case study is British-born Poles; the critical events are the post-2004 wave of Polish migration and the 2016 Brexit referendum. Based on interviews with 28 British-born individuals who felt they had emerged from ‘invisibility’ and become increasingly Polish, we seek to explain their integration trajectories into new Polish society in the UK and society in Poland. These integration experiences are shaped by the complex intersection of generation, wave, community, and historical and geographical setting. Existing research tends to focus on tensions between the post-1945 and post-2004 waves. We show how tensions can occur. However, we also point to instances of successful integration, where British-born Poles update their linguistic and cultural knowledge, form social relations with the new arrivals and, perhaps most importantly, experience life in Poland more intensely than was possible before 2004.

Keywords: second-generation, integration, intersectionality, identity, Poland, EU

1. Introduction

This article contributes to research on second-generation migrants and return mobilities. It discusses how, since Poland’s EU accession in 2004, British-born Poles (mostly descendants of 1940s refugees) have reacted to the new wave of migration. This wave is conceptualised in the article as Polish society spilling over into the UK. At the same time, UK-born Poles take advantage of new opportunities to engage more fully with Polish society in Poland, even acquiring citizenship. The article adopts a bi-focal lens, taking into account the simultaneity (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004) of the research participants’ lives in both countries, and avoiding the methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003) of considering each society separately. It explores how migrant ‘generation’ intersected with migrant ‘wave’ at the specific historical juncture created by EU Enlargement and Brexit. Saey and Skey (2016, p. 65), in their article about British and US-born Egyptians, find that 9/11 and its aftermath helped consolidate a sense of Muslim identity in the second generation, in the face of increased Islamophobia. They label 9/11 a ‘critical event’. The migration wave of Central and East Europeans following 2004 and its indirect consequence, Brexit, are similarly critical events. Our case study is a group which often experienced stigmatisation in the 1950s-60s, but then tended to become invisible, in most cases merging into the middle class, and often marrying non-Poles. Unexpectedly for themselves, in the 21st

century, they became part of the UK's largest minority national population. The article investigates how individuals experienced and negotiated this change and its implications.

Many British-born Poles, though brought up in thriving Polish communities, had lost much sense of diasporic engagement by the 1990s. Before then, although community life had a strong local flavour, Poles could also feel they belonged to a UK-based Polish diaspora. For example, Poles from across the country contributed to create the Polish cultural centre, POSK, in London. Sporting competitions were organised between teams across the country (Sword, 1996). Though British-born Poles today may choose to belong to one or several old or new Polish organisations, each individual treads her or his own path, discovering and developing different aspects of their personal Polish identity. Galbraith's book about Poles in Poland is titled *Being and Becoming European*; our research participants were 'being and becoming Polish'. Louise Ryan's similarly titled (2010) article, 'Becoming Polish in London: Negotiating Ethnicity Through Migration,' discusses post-2004 Poles, but British-born Poles also negotiate their ethnicity in the context of the post-2004 wave.

The article contributes to understanding the EU as a mobility laboratory. One result of new mobility opportunities is to further blur the distinction between 'return', conventionally understood as return for settlement; temporary/provisional return; and visits. King and Christou (2014, p. 86), in their study of German and US-born Greeks, comment that 'reflecting the frequency and multiplicity of "return" moves – as brief visits, longer sojourns, or more-or-less permanent relocations – we prefer the term "return mobilities" to return migration'. Although the phrase 'EU mobility' to most readers probably implies first-generation migration, free movement also facilitates second-generation mobility.

The re-integration of return migrants has spawned a sizeable literature. By contrast, it might seem bizarre to think about [the partial](#) 're-integration' within Poland of British-born Poles living mainly in the UK. They might be conceptualised as the fuzzy edge of Polish society. Polish society exists mostly in Poland, but also spreads across international borders, as 'Polish society abroad' (White, 2018). People who have recently left Poland typically continue to behave as full members of Polish society in many ways, despite living abroad. They constitute its more obvious fringe. The second generation are less clearly 'full members' (to themselves and others) but they aspire to become fuller members, achieving integration sufficient for their purposes. [In a companion article, we shall discuss the transnational practices of our Invisible Poles, looking at how their lives in the UK became more Polish. The purpose of the current article is, more unconventionally, to observe the British-born Poles from the perspective of how they are incorporated into Polish society.](#)

2. Literature and concepts: generation, wave and integration

This article refers to 'British-born Poles', meaning adult Poles whose parents or grandparents came to the UK after World War II. The phrase 'second-generation migrant' will generally be avoided. However, it is helpful to discuss the concept, which is flagged by being included in the article's title. This is because we hope to contribute to scholarship on second-generation migrants, and because awareness of the term underpins

individuals' self-ascribed and ascribed identities. A 'migrant' is someone who has moved to another place. Second and subsequent generation migrants are not migrants by this criterion. However, second-generation migrants may behave similarly to first-generation migrants, notably if they maintain transnational links with their parents' country of origin. In such case, 'the lines between... the first and the second generation blur, making them one interconnected social experience' (Levitt 2009, p. 1226).

Moreover, the second generation are 'honorary migrants' if they are recognised by co-ethnics as having a diasporic identity – being part of a community whose displacement often stretches over more than one generation. Additionally, the majority population can make them feel like migrants because of their different origin, and pigeon-hole them as members of 'ethnic communities'. They can be disadvantaged by obstacles to naturalisation in countries like Germany where citizenship is tied primarily to descent (*jus sanguinis*) rather than place of birth (Sürig and Wilmes, 2015). In many societies, discrimination with regard to employment and educational opportunities results from migrant heritage, although this 'segmented assimilation' (Portes and Zhou, 1993) is often better understood as racial discrimination.

Connectedness to roots often leads to, and is enhanced by, activity in diaspora organisations, as studied by many researchers (Bauböck and Faist (eds.), 2010; Cohen and Fischer (eds.), 2018; Sheffer, 2003). However, especially with today's mobility opportunities, it can also lead to involvement in the society of the diasporic homeland. The extent to which second-generation migrants engage with diaspora organisations and/or society in their parents' country of origin seems to be highly individualised (Sword, 1996; Wessendorf 2007, p. 1099). This is partly because they are such a diverse group. Anthias (2012, pp. 103-4) reminds scholars to consider intersecting identities, such as gender, social class and life cycle, which affect their experiences and opportunities in crucial respects. With regard to return: King and Christou (2014) and Saey and Skey (2016) found that younger, better-educated Greeks and Egyptians, well-integrated in their birth countries, seemed more likely to experiment with return. Górný and Kolankiewicz (2002) describe their sample of post-1989 Polish returnees as highly-educated and entrepreneurial. On the other hand, few of Wessendorf's (2007) sample of Italian 'roots migrants' had worked in Swiss white-collar jobs.

'Generation' also refers to historical generation. The migration of refugees from Poland to the UK in the 1940s coincided with the start of the Cold War. The diaspora was shaped by self-identification as anti-communist and, as the Cold War became entrenched, a conviction that return was impossible (Sword 1996). Similar attitudes were commonplace among emigrés from neighbouring countries like Lithuania (Dapkutė, 2016) or Ukraine (Kubal and Dekker, 2014). [The second generation often cared deeply about their parents' experiences of exile \(Burrell 2006, pp. 53-6\)](#); however, Sword (1996) shows that their Polishness was sometimes less politicised¹ than that of their parents. Since they grew up in the Cold War, their transnational fields were circumscribed. Some visited Poland and received parcels and letters from relatives, but the circulation of culture and information was more limited than today. For some, Poland remained an unknown place behind the Iron Curtain. By contrast, judging from our interviews, third-generation migrants are definitely 'post-Cold War', taking for granted their mobility opportunities. Hence migration generation and historical generation overlap. An additional twist is that post-2004 arrivals from CEE themselves belong to various generations with differing attitudes, depending on whether they grew up under communism (Szewczyk, 2015).

Several scholars have researched tensions between various other migrant waves. Examples include Kubal and Dekker (2014) on Ukrainians, Cubans and others, and Erdmans (1998) on Poles in 1980s Chicago. Misunderstandings and disappointment were perhaps inevitable when too much premium was placed on shared ethnicity as a factor uniting two populations which were actually different in many respects. As Kubal and Dekker (2014) illustrate, newcomers found it hard to escape othering. Historical generation and time period contributed to obstructing good relations. The Cold War created particular barriers to incorporation within existing diasporas because newcomers were suspect as ‘communists’.

Literature on UK Poles today provides plenty of examples of misunderstanding between representatives of different waves. Tensions are illustrated, for example, in Bielewska (2012); Elgenius (2017); Galasińska (2010); Garapich; (2016) and Lehr (2015). These include the perceived age difference between older second generation and ‘young’ arrivals ([though not all new arrivals are young](#)); the Cold War background of the British-born Poles, which created suspicion of people fresh from Poland [even in the 21st century](#); different views on patriotism and history; [and complaints from newcomers about the perceived exclusivity of established diaspora organisations](#). Representatives of each wave sometimes consider the other as a group which cannot really ‘belong’ – in other words, a group with integration problems. Social class is also relevant. Garapich (2016) argues that self-defined elite members of the post-2004 wave align with British-Polish organisations to distance themselves from recently-arrived labour migrants.

However, because this literature often focuses on London, and/or organisations, it may overstate hostility between representatives of different waves elsewhere in the UK (Pustulka, 2013) and/or between individuals. It was individual interactions, not just hostile but also friendly, which we hoped to capture in our research. [Moreover, rather than focusing on the post-2004 wave’s encounters with long-established organisations, we were more interested in the attempts of British-born Poles to integrate into post-2004 society.](#)

Integration is a contested concept, ‘a word used by many but understood differently by most’ (Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 167). This article defines it as (a) a two-way process of incomplete assimilation involving accommodation by both the migrant and the receiving, heterogeneous society and (b) a way of adding new members to a society. Many scholars distinguish between different domains of integration, for example, socio-economic and cultural. Ager and Strang’s framework, originally designed to measure refugee integration, provides a useful checklist for analysing progress in different domains, as well as understanding how domains interlink. It has been widely applied to other groups, and recently broadened and updated by Ndofor et al. (2019). Ager and Strang claim (2004, p. 5) that

an individual is integrated within a society when they:

- achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education, health etc. which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host communities;
- are socially connected with members of a (national, ethnic, cultural, religious or other) community with which they identify, with members of other communities and with relevant services and functions of the state; and
- have sufficient linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, and a sufficient sense of security and stability, to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship.

The stress on ‘sufficiency’ is particularly important for our argument below. Sufficiency depends on circumstances, but also on each individual’s perception of what constitutes sufficiency in a particular domain. Priorities may change over time (Gilmartin and Migge, 2012). Integration proceeds by stops and starts, sometimes with setbacks. At various stages, the migrant can feel more or less optimistic about their progress, seeing the glass as half-full or half-empty (White, 2017, p. 166). Writing about the integration experiences of people whose parents migrated from Turkey and former Yugoslavia to Germany, Sürig and Wilmes (2015, p.10) observe that ‘taking part in “society” can... be conceived as an ongoing process of inclusion and exclusion’.

The concept of integration is apt because it implies becoming part of a whole, an aspiration which, we shall argue, was partly motivating our interviewees. The aspiration to ‘belong’ is noted by other researchers of the second generation, for example King and Christou (2014) and Saey and Skey (2016). Finally, ‘integrate’ is both a transitive verb (taking a direct object) and an intransitive one. The state formulates policies to integrate migrants, for example, but migrants integrate [themselves] into society. The article will argue that Invisible Poles fulfil both roles.

3. Methodology and sample

We designed our project as a follow-up to anthropologist Keith Sword’s (1996) monograph *Identity in Flux: the Polish Community in Great Britain*. Sword described the evolution of the Polish diaspora from the 1940s to the 1990s, as well as the individual experiences of first- and second-generation migrants. He argued that, among the second generation, feeling Polish was increasingly a private and individual² matter. The ‘younger’ generation, as he termed them, were Polish in somewhat different ways to their parents. Sometimes they worried that they were ‘not Polish enough’, especially if their parents had been very patriotic and set definite standards, for example about always speaking Polish at home. One aspect of the second generation’s different approach to maintaining Polish identity was that organised community life was in decline. He concluded (1996, p. 233): ‘While it seems rash to make predictions, it seems likely – unless unforeseen changes take place – that only London and a handful of provincial metropolitan centres will retain organised Polish communities of any viability in twenty years’ time.’

Our project was named “‘Invisible Poles” and the new prominence of Polish people in UK society since Poland’s EU accession’. [We have published themed extracts from the interviews as an open access book](#) (White & Goodwin, 2019) [and archived the transcripts alongside Sword’s](#). [Our interviewees knew that sections of their transcripts would be published online, and they checked the transcripts before giving their final consent](#). Our recruitment sheet asked for people ‘willing to share their thoughts on how their life has been influenced by more Poles coming to live in the UK, and to tell their stories about becoming “more Polish” since 2004’. This was not supposed to be a representative sample of people with Polish origins; our aim was not to generalise about British-born Poles, but rather to understand the process of becoming visible within the complex intersection of generation, wave, community, and historical and geographical setting. People volunteered to be interviewed

because they had a sense of increasing contact with Polishness. Carole,³ for example, mentioned that ‘I’d grown up with a lifelong feeling of connection, rather than a real concrete connection, and somehow after 2004 it became easy to make it into something tangible’. Janina recalled that ‘for me, speaking Polish was very domestic, it was something you did within your home, and then all of a sudden [after 2004]... you would hear it in a public space. I’d not heard it outside before.’ Aniela made a more general observation: ‘I think the fact that there are so many more Polish people here has had quite a marked influence on the Poles here. It’s sort of revived us. When I was growing up, it was very difficult – people didn’t even know what or where Poland was.’

We conducted narrative interviews from November 2017 to July 2018 with 28 people [on the broad topics of how they self-identified as Polish at different times in their lives; their contacts with post-2004 arrivals; and links with Poland. We analysed the interviews thematically, and these themes are reflected in our book of transcript extracts \(White & Goodwin 2019\)](#). Participants were from a range of locations; we avoided a London bias. 23 were the children of post-war refugees and three were grandchildren. The others’ parents came to the UK as economic migrants later in the Cold War. Two could be described as migrants to Poland, where they lived for part of the year; one was retired, the other ran a business. Four others had worked in Poland in the past. The youngest was 24 and the oldest 70. Most were in their 50s and 60s.

As already mentioned, life stage seems to be important when understanding the ethnic identity of the second generation (Levitt, 2009, p. 1226). For our own mostly late middle-aged sample, stimuli to acquire Polish contacts included parental death and the search for new people with whom to speak Polish. Those participants who were retired simply had more time than before to do Polish things. On the other hand, since they tended to assume that newcomers were predominantly young people (which was true of new arrivals *circa* 2004) the presumed age gap could put them off trying to mix socially.

12 interviewees had two Polish parents and, of these, 10 had been thoroughly immersed in Polish community life as children. This was less true among the interviewees with one Polish parent, although there were a few instances where the father was Polish, and insistent on cultivating Polish identity, with the non-Polish mother supporting him. These interviewees usually knew about Polish traditions, and sometimes had classic Polish names. Sometimes, however, the Polish parent had been reticent about his/her Polish identity, because of post-traumatic stress following deportation to Siberia and military action during the Second World War, or because they were socialists or partly Ukrainian. In a couple of cases the Polish parent was absent, because the parents were divorced.

Several interviewees mentioned that they or their siblings were othered and even bullied as children, but, as adults, most had done well. Like Sword’s interviewees, they had blended into the wider British society, except for occasions when they had to reveal their Polish names. These prompted (and still prompt) moments of Polish identity performance. Joanna, for example, recalled ‘saying things like “It’s not difficult, just read it, don’t panic, just read it, think of the “cz” like a “ch”, OK?” A bit patronising, but I got fed up with people mispronouncing my [sur]name.’ Stefan was constantly warding off attempts to spell his name with a ‘ph’. ‘I’m pleased it’s got an f in it. I say “F!... F, F”. That gives me a little opportunity to assert myself. This is who I am.’ On the other hand,

some interviewees had become discouraged and either anglicised their names or gladly adopted their husband's surnames – in some cases reverting to Polish forms later in life.

The rest of the article discusses how and why our participants shed the cloak of invisibility after 2004, and in what senses they can be understood as 'integrating' into Polish society. The next section considers their experiences in the UK, while the following and final section looks at Poland. We argue that British-born Poles integrate other Poles, but also, more importantly, are themselves integrating, within Polish society abroad and in Poland itself.

4. Being and becoming Polish in the UK

Some Invisible Poles were members of transnational migration networks spanning Poland and the UK, and they were in touch with relatives who had recently come to live, study or visit in Britain. In some cases they described inviting family members, although apparently just for visits and partly to repay hospitality extended in Poland, rather than to fix them up with jobs, as often happens within a migration network consisting only of post-2004 migrants.⁴ In other cases, family members came independently, but then became involved in the lives of the Invisible Poles. For example, Teodora described how

we had one family member who was an illegal immigrant in the UK before Poland became part of the EU. We actually had to go and save him. He'd paid a substantial amount of money to be brought into this country illegally. It was about twenty-five years ago. He was given a job in a pet food factory, and was being paid very little. His living conditions were dreadful... One day he phoned us up in a dreadful state. We weren't aware, actually, that he was in the country at that point in time. And my husband said, 'We need to go and sort him out.' So we went and collected him and brought him back home. My husband... helped our relative gain legal status to be in the country.

Usually, it is assumed that migrant networks in receiving countries consist of bonding ties to co-ethnics and bridging ties to the receiving society. As Ryan (2016), for example, has demonstrated, this is too simple. There are plenty of cases where third parties, such as migrants of other nationalities (therefore doubly outsiders) constitute important bonding and bridging connections for a particular migrant population. The Invisible Poles are such third parties, although this is thanks to their identity as double insiders. On the one hand, they are co-ethnics with bonding ties: they can provide emotional support and a place to stay for newly-arrived relatives. On the other, they are citizens and full members of the receiving society, who can be useful as 'bridges' to 'sort out' problems for their relatives from Poland.

However, the main point of Teodora's story was to highlight how she expanded her Polish networks in the UK, and thereby enhanced her own Polish identity. She continued:

Since then, this relative has gone from strength to strength, Another family member has since worked with him. And then another family member came across after Poland became part of the EU and has a very good job... Through [our relatives] we met other Polish people, who've now decided to make their homes here.

The story nicely illustrates Teodora's dual position, integrating others, but also personally integrating into the world of new Polish migrants in the UK.

Several interviewees, or their relatives, had responded to the influx of Poles after 2004 by undertaking advice and interpreting work, either for Polish diaspora organisations or local authorities and the Citizens Advice Bureau. In a few cases this led to discouragement about pursuing further contacts, especially for interpreters who found themselves associating with Polish people on the wrong side of the law. Zosia, for instance, complained: 'When you're going somewhere you want to present the best [face], and I'm afraid that we haven't done that. Have we? The young Polish?' Others found that voluntary work enhanced their friendship networks among newly-arrived Poles and helped them see things from their point of view. Brexit also provided a stimulus to integrate the newcomers, by defending them and claiming them as part of British society.

I was actually quite upset, because I thought I wouldn't feel that sort of reaction ever again. And it's come back a bit. It reminds me of what I went through in my childhood. I went to a builders' shop with my [Polish] friend... and this other man was very patronising, because he could hear the foreign accent, and I just said, 'Well actually we speak very good English'. He was so ashamed, embarrassed, because he had been initially very, very rude.
(Barbara)

Like Teodora, a number of interviewees described their aspirations to join the world of the Poles from Poland. [Both Adelaide and Luke, for example, described the 'pull' to speak with Polish strangers on the street. Luke was too shy to actually start a conversation, but found an ingenious alternative, by integrating into a Polish-language online community.](#)

[Around 2004] I started to hear, because I live near Southampton, I started to hear Polish being spoken in the street by young people wearing jeans... I felt a familiarity and a pull, it was pulling me. The language was pulling me towards the people... We have a large Polish community in Southampton, they call it Warsaw-by-the-Sea.
(Adelaide)

I hear Polish all around me, I hear Polish people talking on the street, shopping, in the parks, walking, I hear them everywhere! But I've never met them, to get to know any of them, because they are strangers. And although I can hear their language, and I like to eavesdrop sometimes what they're saying, I can't really make the first step to [laugh], to talk.... It would be like... you are still a stranger, effectively. And how do people take to people randomly talking to them?.. I play a game on the computer, which is just silly really, it's tanks fighting each other. And I've joined a Polish group. So I'm kind of interacting... I thought it would be fun to try, and because I can say few words in Polish I thought to be able to hack into this Polish group and convince them that I'm Polish. (Luke)

[Interviewees with more language confidence – usually people with two Polish parents and a strongly Polish upbringing – acted out their impulse to connect with newcomers. For instance, Joanna reported:](#)

They were chatting away to each other in Polish and I thought 'This is so tempting'. I coughed discreetly and said in Polish to them, 'Hello, gentlemen, are you on your way to work?' And they literally leapt up... And of course we started chatting. Andrzej, that's the name of my friend, recovered himself soonest, and said, 'Hello, nice to meet you, bla bla bla,' and that's how it started... We still keep in touch. In fact, we visited Poland about seven or eight years ago and met his family.

The interviewees who most successfully built friendships with new migrants took advantage of opportunities to ‘refresh’ their Polishness, as Barbara described it. Maria described her efforts in particular detail:

I do now have a whole group of Polish ladies from Poland, who I call my friends... I learned so much – I’ve never heard of some of these recipes, that they were conjuring up, and the things that they were baking! Because they were all things that had developed in Poland, in the meantime, they were modern Polish recipes... At the beginnings of my dealings with them I felt like I wasn’t a real Pole?... I try to mimic as much as possible. So, I feel like I’m on a level playing field, and they’re not talking Polish-Polish and I’m speaking with my very English accent.

All in all, the stories tended to bear out the findings of contact theory (Allport 1954): [positive contact between natives and migrants promotes mutual understanding and friendliness](#). In particular, for both sides, feeling on terms of equality, being empathetic and not disposed to ‘other’ Poles born in the other country were helpful for integration of post-2004 Poles into UK society, and also of British-born Poles into Polish society abroad. On the other hand, interviewees who were particularly conscious of class and/or age differences between themselves and the ‘young Poles’, or saw them through Cold War-era lenses – for example, feeling British Poles to be more genuinely patriotic and less materialistic than the newcomers – could become locked into a kind of vicious circle. It was the intersections of these particular identities, including wave and generational identities, which could create particularly advantageous or disadvantageous mutual relationships, affecting both the integration of both British Poles into Polish society abroad and Poles from Poland into the world of the British-Polish diaspora.

5. Being and becoming Polish in Poland

Most interviewees visited Poland, and some had been for extended and/or frequent visits during the communist period, usually staying with relatives, often in rural areas not visited by Western tourists. In between, they kept in touch with letters and parcels, from Poland to the UK as well as *vice versa*, and, more recently, by phone and the internet.⁵ Hence they were ‘visible’ to Poles in Poland. Others interviewees had not visited during the Cold War, usually because their families came from parts of Poland annexed by the USSR. Levitt (2009, p. 1228) suggests that ‘whether individuals ultimately forge or maintain some kind of cross-border connection largely depends on the extent to which they are brought up in transnational spaces’. However, while the former group often had ties to Poland which were long and strong, ties could also be short and strong, especially when interviewees discovered close relatives (sometimes in Ukraine and Belarus) of whose existence they had until recently been unaware. Bifulco (2018) [in her study of her own Polish family and their UK exile](#) movingly describes her recent, blossoming friendship with a cousin in Poland the same age as herself.

Russell (2008, p. 113) asserts that ‘as consumers get older, they increasingly seek out intangible experiences that help them connect with their ancestral roots’. To some extent this describes some of our interviewees. It could be argued that British-born Poles, when they visit Poland, are visible just as typical nostalgia or heritage tourists (types of migrant visitor mentioned in Horolets (2014)). As tourists, ties are presumably superficial. Even if they go for longer to Poland, one might suppose they could remain strangers, becoming part of ex-pat

bubbles (Saey and Skey, 2016) and not expected by Poles in Poland to integrate (Andrejuk, 2017, p. 572). A couple of interviewees mentioned that friends from Poland had discouraged them from trying to settle in Poland, on the grounds that British-born Poles were too ‘soft’ and would not be able to cope with everyday life like a regular Polish person. Luke, our least ‘Polish’ interviewee according to multiple markers, stated baldly ‘I’m foreign in Poland’.

However, as several interviewees observed, ex-pat bubbles are confined to certain locations, chiefly Kraków. It was mostly not true that our interviewees lived in ‘bubbles’ in Poland. This was because they generally stayed, or in some cases lived for extended periods, with Polish-born family. Rather than lifestage or nostalgia tourists, our interviewees were most identifiable as visiting relatives – members of transnational families, just as post-2004 migrants might be. The family aspect of their identities in Poland was backed up by the fact that they were often accompanied by other family members. Several instances were cited of supportive and enthusiastic British spouses, such as Teodora’s husband who had ‘sorted out’ her cousin’s problems in the 1990s and now lived much of the year in Poland, or Iza’s husband:

[He] is a smallholder, and really loves the way Poland has been looked after in terms of communist forestry, and the preservation of flora and things are astonishingly good. He’s really loved the whole thing. And he’s said why don’t we go and live for a few months, or a year or two, and learn the language.

Ager and Strang’s framework can be used to analyse how British-born Poles to some extent ‘integrate’ in Poland. For example, they are appearing among the Polish workforce, since the intensification of ties between Poland and the UK since 2004 offered employment opportunities for some interviewees (particularly teaching English) and also for their children.⁶ As EU citizens they could own land in Poland and were in some cases becoming residents. They and their children access education, through Erasmus exchanges and summer schools. There also exist other services accessed by members of any society, as shoppers, tourists, dog owners etc., which do not feature in Ager and Strang’s framework. Anna, for example, found that being in Poland with dogs was excellent for making social connections with Poles. However, as a consumer of dog-friendly travel opportunities she felt frustrated, for example at not being able to walk her dogs in the mountains and some urban parks. To a Polish official, her cultural knowledge would clearly seem lacking.

When you have a dog, the places where you can take your dog are restricted... I didn’t realise what this man was trying to tell me until later. We went to this park to see a remembrance parade and I took the dog. And they were trying to tell me to leave. I suddenly realised that dogs aren’t allowed in parks.

Accessing jobs, accommodation, dog-friendly areas, etc., bring social connections with people and institutions in Poland. It seems, however, that forming links with ‘services and functions of the state’ can be impeded because of frustrations with bureaucracy. Interviewees generally took this in their stride, though Maria complained: ‘I feel lost in that world of anything to do with administration’. King and Christou (2014), Wessendorf (2007) and Scotto (2015) make similar comments about second-generation migrants’ struggles with Greek and Italian officialdom.

Ager and Strang argue that rights and citizenship form the base for integration in other domains. Rights for visiting and resident Invisible Poles had not been not problematic, at least until Brexit, since they were assured

by EU citizenship. Nonetheless, a number of interviewees were in the process of acquiring Polish passports, or considering this step, sometimes to keep their EU citizenship after Brexit, but also to cement their sense of belonging. ‘Stability and security’, also highlighted by Ager and Strang, were not explicitly raised in the interviews, although they followed from the right to be in Poland conferred by an EU passport, and perhaps also were implicit in assertions made by several interviewees that they felt relaxed and ‘comfortable’ in Poland. Acquiring citizenship can be seen as an ultimate stage of integration and, from a Polish point of view, acquiring a new citizen is a clear marker of an addition to Polish society. Teodora described the enthusiastic reaction in the small town where she now partly lives.

When I eventually received my certificate to say that I’d regained my Polish citizenship, I was immensely proud of that. In the small town where we have the house, people are very pleased about it... When we arrived at the house there was a Polish flag and a town flag flying from the balcony. My cousins were waiting with cake and coffee and wine to celebrate – so they were really pleased. The local mayor sent me a present to celebrate that.

A number of interviewees brought up the subject of contemporary Polish politics, usually to express their concerns: even if not formally citizens, they clearly felt that setbacks for democracy affected them. Filip expressed his sense of connectedness with particular eloquence: ‘I feel that Poland is sleepwalking back into the Dark Ages. I get very frustrated. So if that’s a measure of how much I feel Polish, I would say I feel very Polish.’

With regard to ‘linguistic competence and cultural knowledge’ as domains of integration: Ager and Strang’s framework, designed to guide UK government policy towards refugees, is insufficient, since language is much more than a facilitator. It is an expression of identity and a commitment to belonging. Moreover, language and cultural learning are never-ending processes, rather than outcomes. The most linguistically-integrated Invisible Poles, who could go to Poland and talk Polish confidently, shared certain characteristics. They had grown up in Polish-speaking households and continued as adults to speak Polish to their parents. Even more importantly, as already described, they had made friends among post-2004 Poles and felt to some extent like members of Polish society. Other participants with two Polish parents, who had grown up speaking Polish at home, were in some cases convinced that their Polish made them outsiders in Poland. This seemed to be because they had not had the opportunity to update their language by forming friendships with post-2004 arrivals in Britain.

Interviewees with just one Polish parent, who had spoken English at home, never described their Polish as being fluent. However, even if their language competence was only intermediate, a number did say they considered their language to be sufficient to cope. As Filip expressed it: ‘I’m not a great Polish speaker, I speak enough to go to the dentist, buy a train ticket, plane ticket, shopping, see the doctor. But I couldn’t talk deep stuff about the meaning of life.’ Carole mentioned: ‘I had wondered about buying somewhere, a little place in the mountains... but if you get a little place, a long way from anywhere, you need to be fairly good with the Polish. Maybe I’m underselling myself. I can sort of get by.’ However, typically, at different points in the interview participants saw the integration glass as being alternatively half-empty as well as half-full. Filip also commented: ‘I fully intend to learn properly... I’d understand a nuanced Poland. At the moment, I get a black and white Poland, but I think if I really understood the language it would change things.’ Carole observed:

I look forward to my language being better, so that I can discuss these things [like social issues] properly... I'm just curious in getting to know their reasons. And it's also getting to know the society that my father was dislocated from.

The intangible feeling of 'being accepted' by the receiving society is somewhat diffused among Ager and Strang's domains. For example, the 'cultural knowledge' domain includes cultural adjustments by the receiving society. In the case of British-born Poles, as Andrejuk (2017) found for West European migrants in general, a common type of cultural accommodation they encountered in Poland was Poles' patience with their Polish language, and readiness to speak English to foreigners. However, expectations that they would be accepted and fit in often seemed to be connected less to any particular domains of integration and more to the British-born Poles' overall attitude that they were going to Poland as members of Polish families. When interviewees said 'yes' to our question of whether they could 'imagine' living in Poland, this often seemed not connected so much to their progress in particular domains, but to their imagination – the 'imaginary construction of the homeland' (Wessendorf 2007, p. 1088) founded on childhood and adolescent experiences. As Dominic put it, 'surrounded [in Poland] also by sounds, smells, signs that are familiar to me from childhood... surrounded by people who look like me, remind me of Polish family members.'

Feeling at home in a rather generalised way also manifested itself for at least three interviewees in their habit of inviting guests from England – itself facilitated after 2004 by the expansion of budget flights catering to new Polish migrants. As Natalia mentioned, 'The number of times I've been to Auschwitz and the salt mine is beyond count!' Teodora explained:

We have lots of friends who come to stop with us. The family laugh at us, they say we're like tourist operators, taking people around Poland. But we're very proud to do so. We want to show off the country... For many of them it's their first time in Poland, and they come with a certain perception of what they think it's going to be like, and go away with a very different perception. I think they still have a feeling, maybe it's a throwback to communist times, that it's going to be very grey, and people are very dour. But they come away with a very strong feeling about the people of Poland, I suppose that's because we have family, they're involved in that, and they meet friends, as well.

6. Conclusion

This article has contributed to scholarship on second-generation migrants, particularly on their 'visibility' and return mobilities. Our research confirmed the findings of Saey and Skey (2016), with regard to Muslim identities after 9/11, that 'critical' historical events can give new meaning and content to the experience of being a second-generation migrant. EU Enlargement and the politics leading up to the Brexit referendum were events which suddenly made Poles highly visible in the UK, and this exposure also affected British-born Poles.

For many interviewees, common EU membership of the UK and Poland offered a welcome opportunity to become more connected with Poland, especially with their friends and relatives. In some cases their return mobilities resembled tourism, but some British-born Poles can be conceptualised as partly integrating into

Polish society, even if they do not settle in Poland: they work and own property, become closely involved in family life of Polish-based relatives, and generally feel ‘accepted’. They have embarked on a path of becoming more visibly Polish by integrating ‘sufficiently’ (Ager and Strang 2004) in selected domains. Language is particularly significant for many, as by being in Poland they update the Polish they learned from their parents, the 1940s exiles. Some interviewees had visited Poland and possessed strong ties with relatives even before 2004, but others had only recently discovered long-lost relations, and their contacts with Poland had become more intense. The EU mobility laboratory therefore offers space to observe how second-generation migrants take up new mobility opportunities and how integration processes occur when underpinned by the basic security offered by EU citizenship. Seen from the perspective of Poland as a whole, the integration of second-generation migrants can be defined as adding new members to Polish society, particularly since many aspire to becoming Polish citizens.

However, the British-born Poles also integrated in various ways into ‘Polish society abroad’. We argued that, avoiding methodological nationalism, it is best to see Polish society today as spilling out beyond the state borders of Poland. This society, in countries like the UK and Germany, is heterogeneous and socially stratified. If not quite a microcosm of Polish society in Poland, it nonetheless constitutes more than a ‘community’. Polish society is a truly transnational social space. Some second-generation migrants can be placed on the fringes of Polish society abroad: they develop friendships with and even marry ‘new’ Poles, work alongside them in Polish organisations and feel ‘more Polish’ as a result. Others dip into the world of the post-2004 Polish migrants, for example by attending cultural events or playing online games. These relations have been developing dynamically since Poland’s EU accession in 2004, partly because of the size and diversity of the Polish population in the UK and the infrastructure which accompanied this.

At the same time, British Poles have a role to play in integrating recent arrivals to the UK. As British people, they offer ‘bridging ties’ for new arrivals, but as Poles (particularly if they are relatives) they offer ‘bonding ties’. They are thus ideal connections for first-generation migrants. For many of our interviewees, dismay at the Brexit referendum result enhanced a sense of solidarity between the waves. However, in other cases, as also documented by a number of other scholars, representatives of different waves find it hard to identify with one another and this leads to mutual misunderstandings. Analysing individual cases sheds light on why relations between two waves can develop in vicious or virtuous circles. It is not predetermined that because one Pole grew up in the UK and another in Poland each should feel the other to be ‘insufficiently Polish’; often, although worries seem to centre on Polishness, other social identities also contribute to mutual othering (as vividly illustrated in Garapich’s (2016) book *London’s Polish Borders*). Contact theory is helpful in understanding how mutual understanding particularly develops between British- and Polish-born Poles when they are social equals – contact within families, or between people of similar social class and age. However, individual people’s choices of strategies for becoming ‘more’ Polish (such as deliberately updating one’s 1930s Polish) are also important. There was also a connection between successful efforts to integrate into Polish society abroad and into Polish society in Poland. British-born Poles who had made friends from the new wave in the UK seemed more at home in Poland than other British-born Poles. Since our project explored the integration paths of participants who for the most part felt they had become more successfully Polish in recent years, the main

empirical contribution of our article is to add to the smaller but important part of the literature which sheds light on virtuous integration circles involving first- and second-generation Polish migrants in the UK today.

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Notes

¹ However, some were involved in supporting the Solidarity opposition movement of the 1980s (Sword 1996, p. 52).

² Temple (2010, p. 295) makes a similar case.

³ A handful chose to keep their real names; other names are pseudonyms.

⁴ However, this could be primarily a class difference, reflecting the mostly middle-class composition of our sample.

⁵ See also Burrell (2011) on parcels.

⁶ Andrejuk (2017, p. 568) indicates that education, especially language teaching, is the most popular type of EU15 migrant business. 676 such businesses existed in Poland around the year 2015.

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