

# CONTINUITY VERSUS INNOVATION: YOUNG POLISH MIGRANTS AND PRACTICES OF 'DOING FAMILY' IN THE CONTEXT OF ACHIEVING INDEPENDENCE IN THE UK

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This paper explores continuity and innovation in the everyday relational practices of a group of post-accession Polish migrants who first arrived in the UK when in their late teens and twenties. In the context of claims that migration has allowed younger migrants to pursue lives free from familial ties and responsibilities, the paper focuses on their living arrangements in the UK and the extent to which they actively eschew or embrace familial relationships, practices and commitments. Our data suggest that moving to the UK had undoubtedly facilitated new freedoms and opportunities, yet these were utilised by many to bring forward, rather than delay, a sequence of broadly conventional domestic transitions, accompanied for many by ongoing dependency and interconnectedness with networks of extended family members who had also migrated to the UK. Our paper draws on the concepts of frontiering and relativising (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002) and argues that our participants were engaged in sets of practices linked to both. Further, these practices not only entailed a continual revision of migrants' sense of family identity, affected by life stage, but were also underpinned for many by the centrality of traditional conceptualisations of family.

**Keywords:** A8 migrants, youth transitions, family

## INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the living arrangements of Polish migrants who first arrived in the UK whilst in their late teens and twenties, by way of exploring the extent to which migration has allowed younger migrants to pursue lives free from familial ties and responsibilities, a factor which some commentators have argued acts as an important influence on their decisions to migrate (Toruńczyk-Ruiz 2008; White 2010). Following the accession of A8 nations<sup>1</sup> to the European Union in 2004, younger migrants from Poland and the other A8 countries have formed an important ‘transnational fraction’ of a broader ‘global generation’ of young people who have sought to challenge and escape the limitations imposed upon them by nation state borders (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2009). In migrating, they have pursued pathways to adulthood and independence that are often very different from those of their non-migrant peers, not least because they have placed geographical distance between themselves and the strong family support structures that have played such an important role in young people’s transitions to adulthood both before and since the demise of Eastern European state socialism in the late 1980s (Wallace 1995, Roberts 2009). But how, in practice, do younger migrants ‘do’ family and relationships in the context of independence through migration?

Given the strong reliance on family support and limited opportunities to establish lives independently of the parental home during the early years of adulthood, it is perhaps not surprising that some recent studies have suggested that the pursuit of independence is a key theme in the narratives of many younger Polish migrants, including those primarily motivated to migrate as a necessary ‘livelihood strategy’ (White 2010). Toruńczyk-Ruiz’s (2008) study of Polish migrants in the Netherlands, for example, found that many younger migrants spoke of the opportunity afforded by migration to leave the parental home and gain independence for the first time. Most younger migrants felt that life had subsequently improved, not just because of better economic circumstances, but because of ‘the lack of home or family responsibilities which they had faced at home’ (*ibid.*: 53). Many also noted that the transitory nature of their migration experience provided them with a space within which they could defer ‘serious’ decisions such as settling down, establishing their own home, or having children: ‘There is a feeling that one is free and can lead his/her life however s/he wishes to at the moment’ (*ibid.*). White (2010: 573) has similarly noted that younger

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘A8 nations’ encompasses the eight Central European countries that acceded to the European Union in 2004 (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Poland).

Poles living in the UK often speak of a desire to escape from 'constraining family ties at home and to assert their independence', albeit as a welcome bonus of migration rather than the main motivation (most felt under extreme pressure to migrate given limited opportunities in their home country).

To some degree, these claims chime with the strong tendency within the mainstream of migration studies to emphasise *discontinuity* between migrants' home countries and their countries of destination, marked by 'an either/or approach to home and host allegiances' (Baldassar et al. 2007: 11). This is despite recent studies which suggest that A8 migrants in particular find it relatively easy to retain active links to their families of origin across geographical distance due to developments in social media and other online technologies, as well as access to cheaper and faster modes of travel (Wilding 2006, Metykova 2010). In contrast with mainstream approaches, the sub-field of transnational family studies tends to emphasise how migrants may actively maintain ties to *multiple* locations and develop 'dual' or 'hybrid' identities (*ibid.*). The relationships which are formed by migrants in their host countries in the absence of regular physical contact with non-migrant kin are also incredibly important to an understanding of the possibilities and limits of transnational family practices, including the extent to which migrants come to rely on new networks for everyday support and intimacy, alongside networks of longer standing.

Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) are particularly interested in this tension between continuity and innovation in the conduct of everyday transnational relationships, noting that families are essentially 'imagined communities', rather than 'natural, given facts':

*One may be born into a family and a nation, but the sense of membership can be a matter of choice and negotiation... even if we think that we do not choose our relatives, we in fact do, considering the family members with whom one actually interacts in everyday life. (ibid.: 10)*

They propose a fluid conceptualisation of family which is comparable to the concept of 'families of choice' advanced by writers such as Weeks et al. (2001), and place equal emphasis on the ties that are created in the physical absence of one's family of origin. Bryceson and Vuorela further propose two umbrella concepts, *frontiering* and *relativizing*, the former to denote 'the ways and means transnational family members use to create familial space and network ties in terrain where affinal connections are relatively sparse' (2002: 11), and the latter to denote 'the variety of ways individuals establish, maintain or curtail relational ties with specific family members' (*ibid.*: 14). Frontiering is more concerned with

practices which involve migrants in an interaction between their own and the host society culture, whilst relativising includes a more outward looking dimension through focusing on the ways in which a sense of 'being related' is created 'by active pursuit or passive negligence' of both kin and non-kin, including those 'left behind'. Importantly, both are concerned with everyday relational practices, and both stress the importance of engaging with both kin *and* non-kin in order to create a sense of belonging and community. Transnational families are, then, '...not simply blood ties nor are they fixed entities. They are highly relative' (*ibid.*: 19). Bryceson and Vuerola thus highlight the fluidity of migrants' networks and the importance of thinking beyond conventional typologies of family in both understanding the types of connections which are made by migrants and the ways in which those connections are nurtured.

Influenced by this expanded understanding of the transnational family, this paper sets out to explore the extent of continuity and/or innovation in the everyday relational practices of a group of post-accession Polish migrants who first arrived in the UK when in their late teens and twenties. The paper focuses on the nature of their living arrangements in the UK and what this tells us about the extent to which they are actively eschewing or embracing familial relationships, practices and commitments. Our focus is less on young migrants' long distance contact with family members remaining in Poland and more on their domestic arrangements and relationships in the host country. We firstly outline the broader context of migration for younger Poles, as it is important to understand something of the impetus to migrate and how this might relate to a desire or otherwise to gain independence from familial ties. We then introduce our research study and present our findings, focusing first on the impact of leaving the parental home on existing couple relationships and the formation of new relationships, and then exploring the incidence of living with and/or near members of extended family networks once in the UK. According to our findings, rather than deferring 'serious' decisions such as settling down, migration frequently facilitated an *acceleration* of domestically-orientated transitions and familial living arrangements amongst younger migrants (e.g. earlier marriage; earlier access to independent housing), and in some cases the *continuation* of existing close family support networks in situ, rather than a deferral of familial responsibilities and commitments.

## THE CONTEXT OF POST-ACCESSION MIGRATION TO THE UK BY YOUNGER POLES

The nature of transitions to adulthood for young people growing up in Eastern Europe over the last few decades has been the subject of much speculation in the years since the demise of state socialism in these countries. It is generally agreed that youth transitions in Northern and Western Europe have been radically transformed during the same period, marked by characteristics such as the apparent breakdown of collective pathways to young adulthood, deferred family formation, and the proliferation of choice (Furlong, Cartmel 2007). However, there is less certainty as to whether similar trends have emerged in former socialist states as a consequence of the rapid political and economic changes experienced since 1989. Many argued that the collapse of a system marked by very predictable, state-mediated transitional routes to adulthood would create a situation of unprecedented individual choice and responsibility (Walker, Stephenson 2011), yet the evidence on the extent to which transitions have become more individualised has been mixed. In one of the earliest studies conducted in the immediate post-socialist years, Wallace (1995) argued that there was little emerging evidence of individualisation as often understood in the West, with its strong emphasis on the necessity of choice (e.g. Beck 1992). Instead, she noted that young Eastern Europeans had become even more dependent on their families of origin as they continued to experience highly standardised transitional pathways. Later research by Kovatcheva (2001) conceded that the family had been left to cope with much of the fallout from reforms across the region, whilst Tomanović and Ignjatović (2006) highlighted the *retraditionalisation* of young people's family transitions in the region as a consequence of both economic and cultural constraints.

Burrell (2011) notes how the generation of Eastern Europeans who have come of age since the 1990s have experienced key transitional moments in their own lives alongside rapid and dramatic societal change: 'young people in the 1990s therefore had to negotiate a potentially destabilising 'double transition', personal and national, temporal and spatial, as the first generation to venture into adulthood in a new regime with new rules, expectations, and indeed freedoms' (*ibid.*: 414). Focusing on a sample of young Polish migrants living in the UK, she notes how they often recounted tales of the early years of Poland's economic transition and its impact on older generations in almost the same breath as their own personal tales of migration, as if these were part of a seamless narrative of transition rather than events occurring at some temporal distance from each other. Many spoke of how they could more easily envision future opportunities

existing for them *outside* of Poland than within it. For example, despite an unprecedented post-1989 educational boom, including the dramatic expansion of higher education, both unemployment and underemployment have rapidly increased in Poland, particularly among young people (Fihel et al. 2008, Trevena 2010). Consequently, many young Poles have opted to migrate, thus sharing the dream of migration with a new global generation for whom increasing insecurity (especially but not only in their home countries) is becoming ‘a key experience transcending borders, a common one, one we can sum up in the words: *united in decline*’ (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2009: 33, emphasis in original).

Commenting on post-accession Polish migrants, Galasińska and Kozłowska (2009: 89) have argued that, in contrast to previous cohorts, they ‘tend to construct migration as an action which is easy to take, does not take long consideration, long-term preparations nor involves a difficult crossing’. Yet Burrell’s research points to the importance of situating such accounts in the broader psychosocial context of ‘a much longer developed, generalised anxiety about the economic situation in Poland’ (Burrell 2011: 418) and the perceived necessity of leaving Poland in order to lead ‘a normal life’ (Hipfl et al. 2003, Galasińska, Kozłowska 2009, McGhee et al. 2012). This ‘normal life’ often translates into a relatively modest set of desires and aspirations: as Rausing (2002: 132, cited in Galasińska, Kozłowska 2009: 87) has put it, ‘the solid ordinary comforts of northern Europe’ which are difficult to attain in one’s home country, even following transition.

As noted earlier, some studies have suggested that these ‘ordinary comforts’ may well include the hope of living an independent life as a young adult, free from the obligations that come from close dependency on family of origin, even at the same time that such hopes are increasingly thwarted amongst younger adults in the countries to which many Polish migrants seek to migrate. Indeed, Roberts (2010) has claimed that emergent patterns in post-socialist societies – extended educational careers, under-employment, and extended family dependency – have in fact blazed the trail for new distinctive patterns of transition elsewhere: ‘In some respects, post-communist countries have become the leaders: (...) the conditions in these countries are the conditions in which the West is heading’ (Roberts 2010: 9), rather than vice versa. Nonetheless, broader societal transitions appear to cast a long shadow across generations and, as Burrell (2011) argues, are perhaps something that migrants only feel able to leave behind when they migrate.

## OUR STUDY

In what follows, we draw on data from research conducted between 2009 and 2012 on 'International labour mobility and its impact on family and household formation among Polish migrants living in England and Scotland'<sup>2</sup>. The research explored the impact of family and household-related factors on the (re)migration decisions of 83 'new' Polish migrants (those arriving following EU accession in 2004) who had been in the UK for at least twelve months (and often much longer). The research involved four locations: Glasgow, Scotland's largest city; Southampton, on the English south coast; small towns and villages in rural Dorset, also on the south coast; and small towns and villages in the Scottish districts of Angus and Perth (northwest and northeast of Dundee). All four locations have large Polish migrant populations, employed most commonly (depending on the location) in food processing and packing, factory work, the hospitality industry, agriculture, and care work, sectors which were well represented amongst employed sample members.

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with twenty migrants per location (23 in Southampton), recruited through diverse methods, including via Polish social networking sites, employment agencies, advertisements in Polish shops, personal contacts and snowballing. Our purposive sampling strategy ensured the inclusion of migrants at different ages and life stages, and in varied housing circumstances and forms of economic activity. Interview locations included homes, workplaces and public buildings. Topics included migration biographies and post-migration experiences of employment, housing and household formation; family and friendship networks in the UK and in Poland; the means of maintaining contact with non-migrant friends and family members; and future plans with respect to family and household formation and possible remigration.

The research as a whole involved 83 individuals aged 21 to 66 at the time of the research. This paper, though, focuses on 48 participants who had arrived in the UK in their teens and twenties: four when aged 17 to 19 (all women), 16 when aged 20 to 24 (ten women and six men), and 28 when aged 25 to 29 (16 women and 12 men). (Subsequent references to participants' ages are to their age at the time of the research, not on arrival.) Of this group, the majority (26)

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<sup>2</sup> The project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of the work programme of the ESRC Centre for Population Change, a joint initiative between the University of Southampton and a consortium of Scottish Universities in partnership with the Office for National Statistics and the General Registrar Office in Scotland (ESRC grant reference number RES-625-28-0001).

were in full-time employment at the time of the research, eleven (mostly women) were employed part-time, four were students, two were on maternity leave, and four were full time homemakers. Nineteen were educated to degree level, eight had post-secondary (mainly vocational) qualifications, and the remaining 21 were educated to secondary level. The majority were working below their qualification level, a common finding in studies of Polish migrant employment in the UK (e.g. Currie 2007; Trevena 2011). Half had previously lived in a city or large town in Poland, the other half having previously lived in a village or small town. Thirty three of the 48 younger sample members were living with a partner in heterosexual relationships. Of those not living with a partner, three lived alone, ten in shared households, and two in private lodgings. Twenty had children living with them in the UK, four had children back in Poland, and two women were expecting their first child.

#### LIVING FREE OF THE PARENTAL HOME AND FORMING INDEPENDENT PARTNERSHIPS

One of the most obvious and immediately significant impacts of migration on the domestic transitions of younger migrants is the opportunity it affords to live independently of family members at an age when this is far less likely to occur if they remain in Poland. Polish young adults often remain dependent upon family support well into their late twenties and early thirties. For example, in 2009, 50 per cent of men and 34 per cent of women in Poland aged 25 to 29 lived, unpartnered, with at least one parent, compared with 26 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively, in the UK (Eurostat 2011). Nor is it unusual for young Poles to share the parental home with a partner, if not children also, during their twenties (Eurofound 2004, Mandic 2008). Further, leaving the parental home is often only achieved through mobilising family-based support (Roberts 2009): living with elderly relatives as a strategy for inheriting a tenancy, for example; parents joining housing cooperative waiting lists when their children are young; and engaging in family-based self-builds.

Of the 48 younger migrants included in our research, over half had lived with their parents immediately prior to migration. Of the remainder, two had lived in student accommodation, fifteen had lived independently with a partner, and four had lived alone. Many of their friends who remained in Poland were, according to our participants, still living within the parental home:

*Well, based on what I've heard, some of them have got mortgages and bought flats but the majority are still living with their parents. Some have got married but they're still living with their parents or in-laws. (Malina, aged 26, Southampton, cohabiting)*

*Three quarters of my friends have also left [Poland]. And the one-quarter that has stayed lives with their parents. Even a very close friend of mine who has got married recently lives with her parents... And another friend of mine also lives with her parents, even though she has a child. I think none of my closer friends are financially independent enough to afford buying their own flat. (Ola, aged 27, Glasgow, now married).*

Migration was, then, widely perceived as the only alternative to this situation, underlining the view, noted earlier, that at least part of the appeal of migration lies in the opportunity it affords to live independently and to pursue 'a life of one's own' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 22). Yet a desire to live independently should not be conflated with a desire to live alone or without a partner, even though, on the face of it, a very large proportion of the post-2004 migrant population in the UK arrived unencumbered by family ties. For example, only 8 per cent of A8 migrants who registered in the UK between 2004 and 2009 under the now defunct Worker Registration Scheme reported having dependants living with them in the UK *at the point of registration* (Home Office 2009). Nonetheless, many of this (predominantly male) group of migrants had dependants (partners and/or children) who initially remained in Poland, with migration being part of a longer term family relocation strategy. More recently there has also been a gradual increase in female migrants, many joining a partner already living in the UK (Ryan et al. 2009). Other migrants may be single on arrival, but quickly start new relationships, and recent UK birth statistics highlight both the rapid increase of births to Polish-born women (Waller et al. 2012) and the extent of relationship formation with non-Poles (Office for National Statistics 2012).

These trends are born out amongst our own research participants. Migration was rarely about the pursuit of an idealised, independent single life, as most either arrived with or followed in the footsteps of a partner, or formed new partnerships once in the UK. Significantly, of those who had formerly lived with their parents, many had been part of a couple but had lived apart from their partner in their respective family homes. Migration, then, offered not just the opportunity to live away from the parental home but, more importantly for many, the opportunity to share a home with their partner for the first time. Indeed, the prospect of reverting to living with their respective parents or even

moving in together with one set of parents following remigration was often invoked as a powerful incentive not to return until continuing independence could be ensured. As Łukasz (aged 29, rural Dorset, now married) argued, ‘That’s also the reason why I can’t imagine going back to Poland. To what? To living with my parents?’

For those who had previously lived apart from their partners, then, the opportunity to cohabit marked a pivotal moment in their relationship. It is perhaps in this particular respect that migration afforded greatest opportunities for increased choice and freedom in relation to domestic transitions, given the very low rates of cohabitation in Poland (Mynarska, Matysiak 2010). Yet, strikingly, all of those who had been in this situation had, by the time we met them, gone on to marry their partner after having arrived in the UK. Many argued that migration had made marriage possible, and for some parenthood too, at a time when it was unlikely that they would have been able to marry or have children if they had remained in Poland. Indeed, this seemed to be more worthy of comment than the opportunity merely to cohabit:

*Thanks to being here, we were able to get married. It wouldn't be so straightforward if we lived in Poland. We managed to save money for the wedding within a year. We didn't have to take any loans or anything like that. We didn't have to wait for our parents to give us things. We were able to afford whatever we wanted. It's definitely a country of opportunities for young people. (Artur, aged 31, rural Dorset, now married)*

*(If I had remained in Poland) I would definitely live with my mum; I would definitely not be married now. I would probably be working or perhaps I would still be studying. I would be with my current husband, but we wouldn't be married, simply because we wouldn't be able to afford to get married. [Pause] Maybe I would have got married, but it would have been a very modest wedding, just with our parents. (Agnieszka, aged 27, Glasgow, now married)*

*I think we probably would not be planning to have a child for obvious reasons [prior financial difficulties in Poland]. We'd probably be renting a flat somewhere because there's no way we would have been able to afford buying a flat. [Pause] I don't know if we would have got married because I don't know what the situation would have been with my husband's work, maybe he'd have to emigrate again. I think life would look totally different. (Ola)*

These accounts carry echoes of desirable aspects of the ‘normal life’ deemed to be made possible only by migrating: a debt-free wedding, a more elaborate marriage celebration than might otherwise have been possible, having children sooner rather than later. These modest milestones were perceived as having

been beyond their grasp in Poland, and were regarded as important benefits of migration. These young adults were not, then, prioritising independence and a lack of responsibility to others, but were using the opportunity afforded by migration to bring forward relatively conventional domestic transitions and commitments.

Of those who had arrived in the UK without an existing partner, the majority had formed relationships in the intervening period, some of which had endured, others of which had been of relatively short duration. For some, migration had accelerated the pace at which these new relationships developed, as they almost inevitably involved early cohabitation. Przemek (29, rural Dorset), for example, met his girlfriend on a Polish social networking site. After five months, he had flown to Poland to meet her in person: 'We spent a week together and she decided to join me here'. She had immediately moved in with him and 'we've lived here together as a couple for a year and a half'. It was also not uncommon for relationships to form amongst housemates living in shared housing (itself a relatively unusual living arrangement in the Polish context). Jadzia (aged 32, Glasgow), for instance, had moved to the UK with a female friend and a man called Stefan whom she had met via the internet shortly before leaving Poland. All three had moved into a large employer-provided shared house, and when she and Stefan were offered a shared room he had quickly become her boyfriend (now husband). For others, this acceleration resulted in relationships collapsing quite quickly too, sometimes precipitated by one partner wanting to remigrate whilst the other wished to stay in the UK. In total, only ten of the 48 younger migrants were without a partner (co-resident or otherwise) at the time of the research, and two thirds of those with partners were married, mostly to other Poles.

#### LIVING WITH OR NEAR EXTENDED FAMILY

So far, the discussion may have given the impression that, partners aside, younger migrants had generally arrived independently of their wider family networks. However, a third of younger participants had in fact initially migrated to the UK in the company of other family members, had been 'brought over' by relatives already living in the UK, or had subsequently 'brought over' relatives themselves. The nature of chain migration amongst new Polish migrants, whereby inhabitants from the same sending communities have tended to migrate *en masse* to the same UK destinations, also meant that even those who migrated alone were often known to fellow migrants from their home towns and villages.

This sense of ongoing surveillance was significant, given that many participants argued that one of the attractions of migration was the opportunity it afforded to distance themselves from certain of their kin. Nonetheless, migration had in fact brought some participants into *closer* contact with family members, at least temporarily, as they had arrived as part of extended family groups who had migrated together or who had arrived in sequence via chain migration, with one relative paving the way for the next by finding work and accommodation for them. Piętka (2011) has described this phenomenon in terms of the ‘translocation’ of close family relationships in the context of migration.

Most of those who arrived as part of or to join extended family groups initially shared accommodation with their relatives, often in very cramped conditions. Iza (aged 24, rural Dorset, married with a child), for example, had initially rented a room in a house with her partner’s parents and four of her in-laws’ friends – nine people in total:

*It wasn't easy. I don't wish anyone to live like that. I would never like to live like that again... My husband, our child and me stayed in one bedroom; my parents-in-law in the second bedroom; next door there was a woman, and next door to her there was a woman with her daughter; and downstairs there was one guy.*

She had subsequently lived with her in-laws for a further year in a bigger property, whilst her father had also lived with them for a year following his own migration to the UK. The couple and their child now live on their own in social housing, in a two-bedroom flat. Others spoke of even more complicated arrangements. Błażej (aged 30, Glasgow, now lives alone) had migrated in order to provide financial support to his mother and two sisters after his father had moved out of the family home. Błażej had initially lived with a friend from his home town, and had then shared a bedroom with his father in a one-bedroom flat which they also shared with another migrant, who slept on the sofa. After Błażej and his father moved out on their own, his father moved in a new partner and a year later Błażej’s older sister also decided to migrate, with the intention of joining them:

*And we really dislike each other so I said that she won't live under the same roof as I am. So in the end [my dad] moved out with his lady friend and my sister joined them there.*

Błażej had subsequently lived on and off with his father, and also with his mother when she and his younger sister also moved to Scotland in an attempt

to retrieve his parents' marriage. At the time of the research, he was finally living alone, in social housing, although his wider family still lived close by.

The close proximity of family members, either under the same roof or nearby, tended to be viewed with some ambivalence, as both a source of stress yet for many also a source of comfort and familiarity, especially for those migrants who were otherwise living quite isolated lives. Damian (aged 30, rural Scotland, married), for example, shared a house with his wife and son, plus his father, his brother, and his wife's sister, husband and child. When asked how he found this arrangement, he responded in the following terms:

*I have created this flat share, so I haven't got choice but to be happy with it. It's my flat (laughs). Family is family, you know. There are no major conflicts.*

Similarly, Radek (aged 25, rural Scotland, single) had this to say when asked if he was happy that he was currently sharing a house with his older brother:

*Yes and no. I like my brother, but when we spend too much time together, I find him irritating, although I think it's only normal. We're both adults and have our own ways. We have our moments at times, but generally I don't mind it. We manage to communicate and it's not bad. It is tough to live with one's family for too long, though.*

Importantly, for migrants who had arrived as part of extended family groups, living with parents, siblings and in-laws often represented considerable continuity with their living arrangements back in Poland (if not in some cases a reversal of their independence), rather than a substantial (or at least immediate) change in their circumstances, and rarely provided independence and freedom from close family ties. Sylwia, for example, a 21 year old single mother living with her son, her mother and her young brother in Southampton, noted that her living arrangements were no different to how they had been in Poland, including living in cramped, overcrowded conditions. Nonetheless, access in the UK to a wider range of housing options than those available in Poland did make a very considerable difference to living arrangements in the longer run, if not always initially. Most Polish families are accustomed to the permanent housing shortages and long waiting periods which have characterised housing provision both before and since the demise of state socialism (Mandic 2010), and the subsequent lack of private investment in rental housing construction has further reinforced young people's 'involuntary cohabitation' with parents (Lux 2003). Many families resort to self-build projects to circumvent these difficulties,

especially in rural areas, and the relatively high rates of home ownership in Poland (42 per cent in 1994, rising to 63 per cent in 2007) largely reflect this trend rather than being a sign of new wealth: many privately owned properties are in poor repair (Mandic 2010).

This is the backdrop against which our participants assessed the range of housing opportunities that were available to them in the UK and the types of living arrangements that were therefore possible for them. On arrival, nearly all were reliant on the private rented sector (PRS), often living at least temporarily with friends, acquaintances or family members. Typically, they then moved into shared housing in the PRS, and gradually becoming more discerning in their housing choices: moving into houses with successively fewer residents, for example, perhaps just with a partner or alone, or into better quality accommodation (see Robinson et al. 2007). Their unfolding housing pathways also reflected very different patterns of housing supply in the four locations. For those settling in Southampton, the PRS remained the dominant form of provision, with certain districts well known as areas with large Polish populations. In contrast, those settling in Glasgow and rural Scotland were more dispersed and were as likely to be living in social housing as in the PRS, as many were able to rent vacant housing association properties, albeit in Glasgow in areas which were otherwise difficult to rent to the local population (see Robinson 2009, McGhee et al. 2013). In rural Dorset, the PRS housed the majority of younger participants, with a minority in social housing. Tied accommodation was also common in both rural locations, at least initially, especially for those working in agriculture and the hotel industry.

A small number of migrants (all with partners) had also taken out mortgages in the UK, an option which nonetheless remained well beyond the means of most participants, at least for the foreseeable future, although many had considered it as a future possibility should they remain in the UK. Others were motivated by a belief that migration would allow them to save substantial sums of money towards offsetting their housing costs back in Poland: helping them to attain 'a normal life' back home, invariably motivated by a desire to provide a family home for their partners and children, and often involving extended family too. Some planned to remain in the UK until they could afford to purchase a house in Poland, whilst for others migration afforded them the means to renovate properties in Poland which they already owned but could not currently afford to maintain.

## CONCLUSION

Migrating to the UK as young adults had undoubtedly opened up new opportunities for the younger migrants involved in our research. It gave them access to transitional experiences which, for many, would have been difficult if not impossible to achieve if they had remained in Poland. For example, migration to the UK enabled the majority to move out of the parental home for the first time, during a period when many of their non-migrant peers remained strongly dependent upon their families of origin. For many, it offered the novelty of living with their peers in shared living arrangements, alongside the possibility of living with a partner outside of the more traditional context of marriage. Many also found that living and working in the UK made early marriage and parenthood viable, when both would have been financially prohibitive if they had remained in Poland. These options were made possible by the ability to access a labour market which, by Polish standards, offered good wages, even if most were working below their qualification level. Moreover, the UK provided a housing market which, compared with that in Poland, was relatively flexible and offered a range of tenures, as well as the possibility for frequent mobility (unusual in Poland, where housing provision remains strongly influenced by a model of housing based on need rather than housing as a tradable market commodity). The relative affordability of these options also meant that many could save substantial sums towards future house purchases or self-build projects back in Poland or for the upkeep and repair of existing Polish properties owned by them which were not yet in a fit state of habitation.

Strikingly, the 'direction of travel' for the vast majority of our younger participants was towards settled couple relationships, invariably in the form of marriage and, for many, early parenthood, underpinned by aspirations of home ownership back in Poland or in the UK in order to provide for their growing families. Interestingly, these markers were often being attained not only earlier than they assumed they would probably occur if they had remained in Poland but also earlier than they occur for many of their British peers, amongst whom later marriage and parenthood, and increased levels of dependency upon the family of origin, have become common (Berrington et al. 2009; Heath and Calvert 2013). In some respects, then, moving to the UK had indeed facilitated the freedom to 'live a life of one's own', yet the relative freedoms thus afforded were utilised by many to *bring forward*, rather than delay, a sequence of broadly conventional transitions. At the same time, for many these new opportunities were also accompanied by ongoing dependency and interconnectedness with networks consisting of extended family members who had also chosen to migrate

to the UK, with some continuing to live with (or very near to) these family members whilst simultaneously entering into new relationships or placing prior relationships on a more permanent footing through marriage and parenthood. In this sense, they were often recreating, at least temporarily, the extended family households that they might well have lived in if they had remained in Poland. Of course, we do not know how our participants' domestic living arrangements would in fact have played out if they had not migrated. Nonetheless, most participants strongly believed that migrating to the UK had made a huge difference to the way in which their adult lives were unfolding.

To return to Bryceson and Vuorela's concepts of *frontiering* and *relativizing*, it is clear that our participants were engaged in sets of practices linked to both. For those with sparse affinal connections in the UK, practices of frontiering led to the creation of new forms and spaces of intimacy in the host country. And nearly all of the sample members were engaged in practices of relativising – both within the UK and across transnational borders – as they variously established, maintained or curtailed their ties with family members in ways which would have been difficult to achieve if they had not migrated to the UK. In some cases this created considerable emotional distance between family members, in other cases migration actually brought them closer together, sometimes geographically as well as emotionally. Yet, as Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) contend, these practices not only entailed a continual revision of migrants' sense of family identity, affected by life stage, but were also underpinned for many by the centrality of traditional conceptualisations of family. Migration may have presented new opportunities for living independently of families of origin and traditional family structures, but their hold remained strong in the lives of our participants, both within and across borders.

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