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## MENTALITIES THAT STICK: POST-COMMUNISM AND THE POST-2004 POLISH WORKING CLASS MIGRATION TO IRELAND

### INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to examine how the post-2004 Polish working class migrants mobilize ‘mentalities that stick’, understood as ‘bodies of knowledge, belief and opinion’ (Dean 2010:24) in which they were immersed before engaging in migration. Similarly to classical sociologists, such as Emile Durkheim or Marcel Mauss, I use the notion of mentality as a collective, rooted and relatively fixed unity, which is not realized or challenged by those who dwell in it (Fenton 1984; Dean 2010). Thus, in this paper, migrant mentalities are understood as certain ingrained and ‘sticking’ ways of thinking and acting relating to migrant lifestyles, aspirations, and approaches to family and work.

I utilize the metaphor of ‘stickiness’ to demonstrate how the Polish post-communist mentalities are transferred in migration and how they are adapted by the working class migrants in their transnational shuttling in and between two non-city locales. ‘Stickiness’ is understood here in Sartrean terms as the ‘thickness’ between and betwixt the stability and mobility (Costas 2013), i.e. lasting dispositions which, despite migrant mobility, linger and become a kind of ‘fixed instability’ (Sartre 2003 [1943]:628); an important factor shaping migrant adaptation and experience of migration.

I focus on the post-communist historicity, as reflected in migrants practices and narratives, in order to show how the specific ingrained ways of thinking and acting (mentalities), including reproduction of the estrangement between the people and the state and traditional gender norms, centrality of work in the lives of migrants, and internalization of class divisions, are at work in the experience of contemporary Polish working class migration to Ireland. As such, I make an attempt to demonstrate how the post-2004 migration is

simultaneously characterized by continuation and adaptation. The ultimate message of this paper is to demonstrate how the post-communist subjectivities, are reproduced and lived in migration through transmission of familiar ways of being onto the migration experience.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The paper draws on a larger project entitled *Circular Migration between Ireland and Poland post 2004: the Translocal Lives of Mobile Citizens*, which has been funded by the Irish Research Council in 2011-2014. The project focuses on the lived migration experience of the Polish working class migrants shuttling in and between two non-city locales in Ireland and Poland, with special emphasis of class and gender. Methodologically, the project utilizes the integrated methods approach (interviews, observation and photography) by following the paths of ten Polish migrant families and including the narratives of the key stakeholders in both locales (i.e. representatives of doctors, teachers, principals, priests, social welfare office, political party, employers, etc.) for background data. In this article I employ the narratives of 13 migrant participants (Żaneta, Jarek, Jola, Krzysztof, Hubert, Liliana, Kacper, Julia, Piotr, Kasia, Maria, Joanna and Max<sup>1</sup>).

## CONTEXT

Sztompka (1993) argues that totalitarian control, executed by a coercive state apparatus, and the socialist propaganda in Poland resulted in emergence of defensive and opportunistic patterns of human behaviour and led to contingent naturalization of expectations typical for communist practice, e.g. demands for welfare and security from the state, compliance, and reluctance to take decisions. The adaptive patterns, developed in response to direct indoctrination, also included a lack of respect for law, institutionalized evasions of rules, distrust of authorities, double standards of talk and conduct, glorification of tradition and idealization of the West (Sztompka 1993). Moreover, citizens learnt to draw strict borderlines between 'us' and 'them', private and public, familial and official, nation and state, people and

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<sup>1</sup> The names of the participants have been changed in order to secure anonymity.

rulers, the good and the bad, etc. There was also the ‘uncritical glorification of Western way of life’ which was perceived as synonym for freedom (Sztompka 1993:91).

The post-communist society can be characterised as a society where certain features, deriving from nearly 40-year-long communist indoctrination, are shared amongst its members. Dunn (1999) argues that Polish underdevelopment relative to the West, for example, results from deficiencies in entrepreneurial capital (economy), civic and political capital (polity), and the discourse culture (social consciousness). *Communist mentalities*<sup>2</sup>, resulting from years of socialist practices and imperatives, remain deeply ingrained in people’s behaviours and practices as ‘fragments of the socialist experience are brought forward and inserted into a new context’ (Dunn 1999:146).

Although shared post-communist characteristics are especially relevant to those whose formative years were in communism, (post)communist thinking has been reproduced within the family and by socialization. i.e. by teachers, peers, institutions, etc. (Howard 2002). Post-communist society carries the communist legacy in the form of the ‘intangibles and imponderables’ that form ‘civilizational incompetence’; a ‘cultural code organizing thought and action in the conditions of real socialism’<sup>3</sup> (Sztompka 1993:90), the *discourse of real socialism*. This civilizational incompetence may, according to Sztompka (1993) cause tensions with western-European societies which have no experience of communist system.

Thus, the participants of this study come from a society which has been deeply inculcated by communist regime. At present, 24 years after the collapse of communism in 1989, there is a tendency to undermine the influence of socialist experience on people’s behaviours and ways of living. The migrants taking part in this project are between 26 and 55 years of age, which means that they were all born in the times of communism. In the case of the younger participants, for example, Żaneta (26) and Jarek (28), although they might have not directly experience communism (they were too young to be aware of socialist reality), they have been raised by parents (Jola, 46 and Krzysztof 48) who lived most of their lives under communism and who very likely transferred their worldviews and approaches to life onto their

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<sup>2</sup> Other terms used include: *socialist mentality* (Koralewicz and Ziolkowski 1990), *social subconsciousness* (Marody 1987), *captive mind* (Milosz 1987), and *Homo Sovieticus* (Tischner 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Real socialism refers to the communist doctrine, introduced by the official Soviet propaganda, entailing the totalitarian rule by the Party in the economic, political, cultural, private spheres of human life.

children. As such, certain internalized mentalities have been reproduced within the families and are still alive today.

In the following paragraphs I argue that, although the communist habitus cannot be seen as fixed, unchangeable or static, but rather as transforming and adapting to current circumstances, this historicity in people`s lives constitutes an important element molding migration experience today. I focus on four sub-themes (*Public Enemies*, *Centrality of Work*, *Double-Burden of Women* and *Salience of Class*) in order to show how the ingrained (post)communist mentalities (i.e. socio-cultural norms and values, and ways of thinking) are transferred in migration and adapted in transnational lifestyle.

## PUBLIC ENEMIES

As mentioned, one of the main features of socialist experience was a clear division between the state and the people, in which representatives of the state, e.g. members of the Party, militants, state officials, SB, clerks, or public servants, held power<sup>4</sup> over the suppressed working class (proletariat). In people`s everyday lives, one of the most vivid examples of the exertion of such power, often present in (post)communist memories, was the patronizing and ignorant approach of public servants (e.g. employees of state agencies, such as post offices, registry offices, banks, passport offices, city/town council, etc.) to working class citizens.

In the communist Poland, state apparatus often made it difficult to settle basic formal issues (such as, for example, issuing identity cards, dealing with social insurance agencies or simply paying the bills), which required a lot of energy and time due to ubiquitous and escalated bureaucracy and lack of sense of obligation or pressure from the side of public servants to deal with things quickly and efficiently (which is characteristic for postmodern capitalist/neoliberal societies). As such, people`s lives were made difficult and could be characterized in terms of a constant struggle against the state and the system.

The resistance to such conjuncture took place in the private sphere of people`s lives, in which representatives of the state were despised by people and the relationships between the two groups could be best described as malevolent and hostile. The discourse of politics and

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<sup>4</sup> *Nota bene*, the Polish word commonly used to describe the communist authorities is *‘władza’* which literally translates as ‘power’ and, thus, reiterates the suppression of the society by the ruling class.

state organization was central to the Polish people, as it was seen to directly affect their daily living. Such state of affairs has been maintained through the period of transition to democracy which was characterized by political commotion caused by political transformation and continued to present day when the rhetoric of politicians is still centered on the communist past<sup>5</sup>.

One of the migrant participants of this study, Hubert, draws the attention to the Polish people`s tendency to be interested in, and most often criticize, the state structures:

*What do Polish people talk about? The Irish talk about the weather. In Poland you sit at the table to have dinner and you start talking about politics. We don't talk about the weather. We talk about politics, health system. Here [in Ireland] the health system is good, the politics – you can't complain because the social welfare is fantastic. (Hubert, 30)*

Hubert highlights the centrality of politics in the lives of Polish people insofar as it is linked to their welfare, especially with regard to the public healthcare system. The evaluation of the state structures is habitually based on the negative assessment and critique of the government. In migration, Polish people very often contrast the Polish and Irish realities, where the former are usually associated with the 'wrong' workings of the system, while the latter are usually described in terms of better organization of the state. For example, Żaneta talks about her experience of hospital in her locale of origin in Poland as an example of lack of respect for an individual:

*For me the hospital in Tczew is a butchery. [The nurse] comes and yells 'stop roaring' when you are about to give birth or slams the fucking door [pizdnie drzwiami]. The gynecologist comes in with the other men [students] and tells you to lift your skirt because they have to study on someone!!! (Żaneta)*

Żaneta`s account demonstrates the feature which is common amongst the participants, namely the perception of employees of public institutions and agencies (in this case – hospital,

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, *Lista Wildsteina* [Wildstein`s List] – a list of names of people who allegedly cooperated with SB (Służba Bezpieczeństwa) [Security Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs] during communism published by Bronisław Wildstein, an editor of *Rzeczpospolita* daily newspaper in 2005. Wildstein motivated the publishing of the list, which included approximately 200,000 names, with the necessity of unblocking lustration, i.e. the government process regulating the participation of former communists, especially informants of the communist secret police (David 2003).

Moreover, in 2013 there has been a fierce debate in the Polish media, centered around the film *Układ Zamknięty* [The Closed Circuit], directed by Ryszard Bugajski. The film tells the story (based on true events) of three successful Polish businessmen who fall victims of corrupted civil servants (Attorney General and Head of Revenue) who were former active members of The Party and made their careers into capitalist Poland.

which is, according to participants, a very common example of the 'communist relic') as foes who have power over 'ordinary people' and have an unwritten consent to exercise this power over the working class, i.e. look and talk down to people and highlight their superiority. This perception, which is consistent amongst migrant narratives, is often rationalized as a kind of stagnancy in people's mentalities and contingent behaviours, resulting from the (communist) past. Żaneta says that her experience of hospital in Ireland was quite opposite – 'nobody acted as if they were doing you a favour'.

The participants often contrast the 'civilized character' of the Irish society, where an individual is treated with respect, with the Polish *status quo*, i.e. communist heritage still operating in Poland through people's ways of thinking and acting present in public sphere:

*Liliana: When we went to Poland after half a year [in Ireland] and we went to the shop, and as soon as we entered the room [the shop assistant yelled] 'Did you not forget anything?! [Close] The door!' [Changing voice]. Welcome home (laughs).*

*Kacper: Time does not pass, does not change anything, **in some places**.*

*Liliana: You know in these hospitals, nothing has changed. (emphasis added)*

Kacper (32) and Liliana (34) talk about their locale of origin where 'time stopped' and people did not notice changes in social organization from communism to capitalism, where proper customer service is believed to be a fundamental element of social organization. As such, there has been a reproduction of communist mentalities, especially evident 'in some places', where public servants and shop assistants still perceive themselves as somehow superior to their customers.

Moreover, the participants see bribery and corruption as common characteristic of the functioning of public institutions in Poland, resulting from deformation of social relations in the communist Poland and something that 'Polish people do'. For instance, Joanna (36) tells the story of her hospital stay in Poland when she was giving birth to her son – the conditions were very bad and the midwives were rude. The situation changed completely when she paid (bribed) the chief midwife and 'everyone turned nice and lovely in that very moment'. In Ireland, Joanna says, the midwives treat everybody the same, no matter if you pay or not. Also Liliana highlights that in a hospital in Poland 'at the entrance **they** ask for money, not that you are pregnant or how are you feeling, do you have any pains, no, **they** only say how much and whom you have to pay' (emphasis added). Thus, it is evident that the 'public enemy formula',

i.e. contentious character of the relationship between the people and the state (servants), is still at work today.

However, these sticking ways of thinking do not apply exclusively to the Polish (post)communist reality, but are also transferred and applied to the contemporary Polish experience of migration. Migrant approaches to the social welfare system in Ireland are a good example of such ‘mentality transfer’. In general, the participating working class migrants perceive social welfare workers as ‘clerks’ (in the post-communist understanding of the term), i.e. persons who are reluctant or unwilling to help them, or to give them information. These workers, the public servants, are seen as hostile, prejudiced and often racist. This is explained by the universal and essentialist perception of ‘all clerks’ as sharing the same unsympathetic ‘nature’:

*They really are thick-skinned these clerks [‘urzędnicy’<sup>6</sup>], everywhere. And you can’t do anything about it. (Krzysztof)*

Krzysztof, who applied to the local Social Welfare Office for Disability Allowance, encountered some difficulties in granting him the benefit by the Department of Social Protection, motivated by the lack of relevant documentation and missing information required for the application. With regard to the fact that neither Krzysztof nor his wife, Jola do not speak English, resolving this issue demanded the engagement of the third person (in their case it was an employee of the Polish Consulate), who had to familiarize herself with the case and make the necessary steps, i.e. making phone calls and inquiries to clarify the issue, producing letters, attending the local social welfare office to interpret the conversation, etc. This required a lot of time and energy which was rationalized by Krzysztof and Jola in terms of ‘clerks making fuss and trouble’.

Moreover, Krzysztof and Jola’s son, Jarek, is currently on Jobseeker’s Benefit. Jarek says that social welfare officers ‘do not wish people well’, i.e. they do whatever they can not to grant (Polish) people benefits. Jarek’s sister, Żaneta, goes even further by saying that the department of social welfare deceives (Polish) people. In her case, the HRC (Habitual Residence Condition) prevents her from getting benefits to which, she thinks, ‘she is entitled’ [‘należą się’]. Żaneta and Jarek’s mother nods in agreement and claims *there are only*

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<sup>6</sup> The Polish term *urzędnicy* [clerks, public servants] is often used in derogatory form ‘*urzędasy*’ [bureaucrat].

*problems with these claims.* This supports the argument for transfer of (post)communist mentality based on the demand of social welfare and security from the state.

The underlying assumption of this reasoning is that dealing with formal issues and state employees is a constant struggle and something that has to be fought out from the state. Julia (30) and Piotr (31) express their negative opinion about social welfare services in Ireland:

*Piotr: Social welfare is organized very badly.*

*Julia: **They are not really willing to give away information.***

*Piotr: You have to know things yourself [to get something]. It's your problem, not theirs.*

*Julia: If you don't say you know specifically this and this, they won't tell you.*

*Piotr: You have to go to Citizen Information or **ask other people.** (emphasis added)*

Thus, as present in Julia and Piotr's narrative, the perception of state agencies and workers as 'not willing' to disclose information, entails relying on others (usually other migrants) to make a living in Ireland and secure benefits seen as 'owed' to (migrant) citizens by the state.

Apart from relying on others, the participants developed other strategies to cope with the difficulties linked to their living in the Irish state. One of the examples may be the practice of concealment or deceit, which is very common amongst participants. In this practice, referring mainly to filling official forms (usually linked to social welfare benefits<sup>7</sup>), saying the truth is not always an obvious option as it may lead to the claimant's ineligibility for the benefits which, in migrants' opinion, are indisputably due to them. This transferred mentality, inculcated in communist times, is reproduced in families, i.e. the children do not perceive it to be bad or immoral because this is what their parents do, and mobilized in migration. As such, not saying the truth in official forms is not perceived as something indecent but rather as a sign of resourcefulness and necessary means for achieving the goal.

Furthermore, lack of trust towards strangers and skepticism, resulting from reproduction of the binary opposition of the people vs. state, are also typical features of post-communist mentality transfer. Thus, apart from being mistrustful towards other Polish

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Jobseeker's Benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance claim forms ask about the ownership of property outside Ireland, savings in foreign bank accounts, continuous presence in the state or 'sincere willingness' to undertake employment.



migrants, the migrants disassociate themselves from the Irish people, who are seen as somehow 'different species' and whose ways of thinking and acting are often juxtaposed against 'what we [the Polish people] do'.

In this way, migrants, firstly, homogenize the Polish 'we'<sup>8</sup> and the Irish 'they' and do not see themselves sharing similar background or experience with the Irish and, secondly, put great emphasis on their own families and circles of close friends; trusted and familiar people with whom they share migration experience. This contributes to understanding of the social functioning of the Polish clusters in Ireland which are characterized by specific blend of homogenization and animosity on one hand and mutual cooperation and close ties on the other.

### CENTRALITY OF WORK

In communism, work was an absolute and undisputable priority. Sole (moral) duty of a citizen was to work - formally, since 1951 there was legal obligation to work [*'obowiązek pracy'*]. In the social domain, diligence [*'pracowitość'*] was a most valued trait and hard-working people were automatically perceived as decent people. In migration, work remained central to the lifestyles and livelihoods of the Polish migrants participating in this study. In the following quote Max (29) talks about his work in the hatchery in Ireland:

*[In 2006] There was so much work that you could work 24/7. We were working eight hours and then it was up to us whether we wanted to earn more or not, if we wanted to do overtime. We could, for example, come back [to work] after eight hours again. We went there to make some money so we were working long hours. We were going at 6 am and coming back at 8 pm. We had a cup of tea at home, something to eat and we were going back to work. Seven days a week. (Max)*

Max's narrative demonstrates the centrality of work in migrant lifestyles and a sense of pride and satisfaction from working long hours, working above the norm or standard, or working overtime. The participants often speak of themselves (and other Polish people) as 'good workers':

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<sup>8</sup> In communism the priority was given to group identity over individual identities.

*I'm telling you, we, the Polish, we taught this country a lot. They gained a lot. And it shows with the naked eye. Even at my work, the guy comes to change tyres or something and he asks 'Polish?' and we say yes, and he says 'that's good because the Polish work well, if they start work they will do it well' and the next one comes in and says 'you're Polish aren't you' (...) and he says that two Poles work in his company, [dealing with] electric wires or something, and he said he couldn't complain because when they start doing something, they do it well. So I think that they [the Irish] have learnt a lot from us. (Jarek)*

Thus, Jarek's account presents that the notion of the 'good Polish worker' entails self-perception as hard-working, efficient, punctual person doing everything he is asked for (and even more), working above the local standards, and, very often, working better than Irish workers<sup>9</sup>. As such, both Max and Jarek transfer the discourse of productivity and efficiency, so characteristic for communist organization of labour (Stankiewicz 1956), and the internalized obligation to be a 'good worker' as beneficial both for the family and self and for the (Irish) state.

Linking this rationale to the previous section, in which other participants negotiated their entitlement to social welfare and security from the (Irish) state, it is apparent that the participating migrants frame their Irish lifestyles and livelihoods in terms of the established familiar (post)communist Polish organization and 'ways of doing things', i.e. hard work in exchange for social welfare. This rationale, which involves the moral commitment to work, stays in place and the migrants find it hard to understand the functioning of the social welfare system in Ireland:

*I work here, they take taxes from my salary (...). And those who do not work, like the one across the street, they don't work and they go shopping in Limerick every week, they have 2.0 diesel car and they [social welfare] give them money for nothing! And they don't give anything to people who work. Take, for example, my brother in law, he works on his own and he doesn't get any supplements, for example, family [income] supplement ['rodzinnego']. Problems all the time to give money to this kind of people. And people who don't work, or work off the books ['na lewo'] they get the government money, I don't understand this. Why?*

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<sup>9</sup> In this way the Polish migrants very often rationalize the Irish need for 'good Polish workers', whose presence is seen as necessary for the proper functioning of the Irish economy.

*Why they cut things for people who work? And they pump in those who don't work? I don't understand how they can do this. (Jarek)*

Jarek speaks about how social welfare system benefits those who do not work hard. In his view being a (good) worker conditions access to social welfare benefits – as functioned in the communist organization of labour. As mentioned before, Jarek who has recently lost his job is currently in receipt of Jobseeker's Benefit and he often highlights that he 'earned' ['wypracował'] this entitlement and that he is actively looking for work to fulfill his (moral) migrant obligation and justify his stay in Ireland. As such, the mentality transfer entails the essentialist rationalization of an individual as worker and emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between the citizen and the state.

#### DOUBLE-BURDEN OF WOMEN

As the post-war developments in Poland created the need for additional labour, the communist propaganda created a specific milieu in which women were strongly encouraged to participate in mainstream worker movement (*O roli kobiety w walce o Socjalizm. Lenin Stalin* 1950). As such, there was an emphasis on women as 'equal' at work but traditional gender roles, i.e. women as solely responsible for raising children and running the household, remained in place. The pseudo-feminist climate of communism led to the establishment of naturalized gender categories linked to family, mothering and the domestic work (Reading 1992).

The central focus on family, as a unit of reproduction, and the expectation that a woman should be a perfect mother – bearer of 'sons (sic!) of communism' (*O roli kobiety w walce o Socjalizm. Lenin Stalin* 1950) was represented through the figure of the 'Polish mother' or 'mother-Pole' (*Matka Polka*), who looked after hearth and was responsible for her husband and children's wellbeing. It was also expected from the mother-Pole that she will raise her children in a patriotic (communist) spirit. The term, which was coined on the basis of Marxist feminism, reiterated the classic gendered division of labour, in which women worked in the private and men in the public sphere. This allowed for greater productivity – when women looked after the family men could work longer and more efficient (Tong 2008). Moreover, Engels argued:

„Communitistic housekeeping (...) means supremacy of women in the house; just as the exclusive recognition of the female parent, owing to the impossibility of recognizing the male parent with certainty, means that the women – the mothers – are held in high respect.” (Engels 2005 [1884])

Indeed, it is clear from migrant narratives and practices that women are seen as ‘naturally’ better-suited for childcare, while it is ‘normal’ for men to work and provide for the family:

*If there are children in the family it is the husband who goes to look for employment. When children go to school parents try not to dislocate them and men are more mobile, really. (...) **Women are traditionally responsible for childcare.** I haven't come across marriage from which a wife would be emigrating, maybe in case when a man cannot find work and someone is needed to look after elderly people, but these are often people [women] who have grown-up children or something like that. But in a **normal mode** it is a man who goes. Among my friends there are a lot of wives whose husbands emigrated and they stayed with the kids. (Kasia, 38) (emphasis added)*

Thus, women are seen, and see themselves, as responsible for the domestic sphere of life and their ambition is to be a ‘good’ mother, wife and housewife. The women are resourceful, e.g. they cook two course dinners every day, bake sophisticated cakes etc., and thrifty insofar as they always look for promotions and sales in the shop to wisely use the family finances.

At the same time, women are encouraged to add to family budget, and seek paid employment, formally and informally, usually part-time posts in cleaning and maintenance. Looking after children, usually children of other Polish migrants, is also a common practice through which women can earn ‘an extra penny’ (‘dodatkowy grosz’)<sup>10</sup>.

In general, the ‘mentality that sticks’ in terms of gender refers to the reproduction of traditional gender norms within the Polish family, community and society at large and the added layer in which women feel obliged to be a (migrant) worker. This puts a lot of pressure

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<sup>10</sup> The odd jobs that women get from time to time, e.g. subbing for a friend who has gone to Poland or a one-off cleaning job (office, window-cleaning, etc.) are termed ‘*fucha*’/‘*fuszka*’, a sideline job.

on migrant women. The following quote comes from an email<sup>11</sup> from Maria who has returned to Poland:

*After my return I was looking for **work** but it was hard to find. I managed to find a part time job in an outpatient clinic – literally few hours. (...) The money is ridiculous but I can't find anything else. If there is something it is always part time subbing for someone. I didn't think I would have such a big problem finding a job. (...) **I have been doing various courses**, but is it going to help – I doubt... I lost my hope for work in Poland. Simply put, **you have to have good connections** to get something. [**My son**] goes to preschool. He has been sick often. It started in October and he is still sick now. Every time he goes to preschool he comes back sick. December, January, February he barely went [to preschool] and **we still had to pay [the fee]**. (...) [**My husband**] does not come [to Poland] often. He has very few days off and he has to use them carefully. There is no option for his return to Poland. Where would he find work and how would we survive? **It is hard on my own**. It is good that I have my mum, but it is still hard. I don't know what to do really. (Maria) (emphasis added)*

Maria's email encapsulates many aspects which I have raised in this paper – for example the centrality of work, perception of the Polish society as corrupted (as elaborated in the *Public Enemies* theme). Moreover, her narrative demonstrates the negotiation of mobile lifestyles and livelihoods on the ground, mainly through thriftiness and in-depth analyzing of the costs of things, as well as the reflexive accounts of separation and contingent challenges on the family-level. The email shows the core-positioning of the family, struggle of the lone parent, combining paid work and looking after her child.

Maria also talks about self-improvement – 'I have been doing various courses' – which is generally a common theme amongst migrant women. Very often they feel the urge to learn English, in order to find a job or become a respectable parent who is able to communicate with the teachers. Thus, the women attend various language classes and courses which requires a lot of time and energy on top of their duties in the private (domestic work and children) and in the public (paid employment) sphere of life.

On the whole, the combination of being a perfect mother and wife and being in paid employment as a norm for Polish women (Titkow 2007; Pustułka 2012) has resulted in

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<sup>11</sup> Email is perceived as particularly meaningful source of information in which the participant chooses what to say and writes about what she thinks is important in her life.

naturalization and reproduction of certain ways of thinking and acting. For instance, the phrase ‘mother-Pole’ (*Matka Polka*) still functions in the Polish language, with slightly derogatory connotation, especially as used by the radical feminist Polish movements. My aim in this section was to demonstrate how the gendered perceptions of work resulting from (post)communist heritage, which imposed a pseudo-feminist ways of thinking and acting, impact the lives of migrant women today. As such, these women negotiate their lives through family and work priorities and reproduce the established and imprinted mentalities in migration.

### SALIENCE OF CLASS

Polish society is a society on which a doctrine of classless society, based on Marxist materialist paradigm, was implemented and practiced for nearly half of century. However, what was proclaimed as a classless social organization, built mainly on liquidation of private property, turned out to be yet another divisive mechanism, in which there was an absolute control of the ruling class (the state; The Party; bureaucracy) over the working class (proletariat). In everyday life the divisions between people were marked predominantly by access to resources, i.e. who had access to scarce products such as meat, fruit, toilet paper, etc. or who had ‘connections’ (in Polish ‘*układy*’ or ‘*znajomości*’) to ‘fix’ (‘*złatwić*’) the highly desired things or services.

The participants of this study often refer to themselves as ‘ordinary people’ [*zwykli ludzie*]<sup>12</sup>, i.e. people who do not have ‘connections’ and whose aspirations do not reach far beyond having a ‘normal life’. Thus, my aim in this section is to unpick these ‘ordinary lives’, which are approached here as a euphemism for *not* speaking class, and present that class divisions imprinted on the working class migrants by communism are still alive today. Below I make an attempt to demonstrate how working class is lived and negotiated by the participants of this study.

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<sup>12</sup> Another term used in Polish language to talk about working class is ‘*szarzy ludzie*’ – in English literally: *grey men*, or ‘*zjadacze chleba*’ – bread-eaters. The latter term is defined by the Polish Language PWN Dictionary as men with no ideals, average people, with earth-bound interests and no greater aspirations (*Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN 2013*).

The stratification category, to which the participants refer most often, which they can ‘feel’ in their lives, is the economic/financial aspect and the division between ‘the rich’ and ‘the poor’:

*Liliana: Here [in Ireland] everyone is nice. It would never happen in Poland that you pass a stranger in the park or on the street and everyone smiles and says ‘hello, hello’. And this is not even a familiar person. In Poland everyone is looking at you as if you were an enemy. [In Ireland] someone has more money, someone has less, it doesn’t matter. Even with your boss, the owner of [name of the company], I once saw him in the church, and I would never say he’s the owner of [name of the company].*

*Kacper: He’s a billionaire.*

*Liliana: Dressed in an old sweater, you know?*

*Kacper: She said he must be buying his clothes in a second-hand shop (laughs).*

*Emilia: Well, this is exactly how he looked!*

*Kacper: But when he is in a business meeting he knows how to dress up.*

*Liliana: In addition, he would talk to you normally. In Poland **rich people do not talk to their employees, the working people. They would have their own circle of friends, the other rich people.** (emphasis added)*

Liliana and Kacper’s account shows how the internalized and normalized division between the rich and the poor, tracing back to classical Marxist approaches to class, is mobilized in migration. Liliana expresses her surprise with the fact that her husband’s boss, owner of a large firm, talked with them – the workers – ‘normally’. There is an underlying belief in Liliana’s narrative which presupposes a clear separation between the workers and the bosses (as present in the *Public Enemies* theme) which becomes somehow disrupted in her migration to Ireland. However, the Polish ‘norm’ stays in place – ‘in Poland rich people do not talk to their employees’.

Apart from complicating the relationship between the employer and the employee, migration to Ireland complicates the dynamics within the working class. The participants gain financially through migration and therefore they reconfigure their positioning as ‘the poor’ – they earn more money than they would have a chance to earn in Poland and they become relatively better off than their family and friends who did not migrate. The participants often speak about the dissonance caused by this move, which is described as envy, jealousy and

aversion. Liliana says 'when you go to Poland, everyone thinks that you're rich'. Therefore, from the perspective of sending community, migration is seen as bringing about advancement, in which migrants become 'richer' and, as such, stand out from their peer cohort. Also Maria points out that the perception of migrants as successful and 'rich' by those who stayed put in Poland often triggers jealousy and hostility. Thus, it can be argued that for the working class migrants, migration entails a local and relative social advancement in the sending country, in which migrants are perceived (and perceive themselves) as successful, economically independent, and courageous. However, on the other hand, this material advancement leads to creation of imaginary boundaries in which relationships with people, who had formerly been a part of the migrants' peer cohort, disintegrates.

Furthermore, the migrants live in Ireland, amongst members of the Irish society and are faced with the question of their status in the receiving community/locale. The fact that immigrants came to Ireland to fill unskilled job positions automatically restates them as the working class. Kasia, the accountant with third level education and quite good and communicative knowledge of English, talks about her experience of work in Ireland:

*My first day at work [in Ireland] was a shock for me. I had never worked in a job like this... [emphasis original], it was hard for me to get used to it [upset]. (...) sometimes **I have a sense that I am at the bottom of social ladder** (...) But I think it depends on the approach. For example, the girls who work with me in the bakery, **they feel good about it**. I think **when you work like that from the beginning it is kind of obvious and they are not bothered by it**. But if you had tried something different [better] and then you go down – you feel different. In Poland I didn't have the experience, **I was hanging out with people in similar situations to mine, material situation, work**. And from these groups of people **everyone was aiming high**, When I meet with friends they live similarly to me, on similar level, they have similar interests. Every group of people spend their time differently. Also material situation makes people different, for sure. There are exceptions of course and there are people who are rich and they have friends who are very poor but I think everyone is trying to have friends in similar situation to theirs because they feel good then and the other side feels good too. Predominantly, people in certain situation are friends with people in similar situation to theirs. (Kasia) (emphasis added)*



Kasia expresses uncomfortableness with her degradation – in Poland she performed professional work, invested in herself and when she came to Ireland she felt she was ‘at the bottom of social ladder’. Basia says that working in Ireland may be easier for the unskilled because they do not experience such degradation and, on the contrary, they are paid much more for the same job they used to perform in Poland. Thus, for the working class migrants migration is generally a success story.

Therefore, in this study class is approached as a durable but not immutable form of social stratification which, alongside other categories, such as gender and rurality, affect the formation of migrant identity and has power of shaping people`s lives and positioning them in community and larger society. I argue that the traces of communist classed society are still alive today, especially in terms of the division between ‘the rich’ and ‘the poor’ but they are reconfigured and negotiated in migration.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I examined how the post-communist historicity shapes migrant habitus and structure migrant experience of migration. I demonstrated how social features characteristic for post-communist society, in particular the perception of public servants and employees of public institutions as unfriendly, unsympathetic and even hostile, centrality of work, gender norms and class divisions, are reinstated and reiterated in this post-2004 working class migration.

What is specific about this migration is that the migrants bring a part of their specific social milieu with them and then adapt it to the current circumstances. They develop their own ways of living, coping strategies in which they are drawing on their pre-migration experience, simultaneously adapting it to the experience of migration. As such, the metaphor of stickiness illuminates tensions, fractions, contradictions, and ambiguities of contemporary mobilities (Costas 2013), insofar as it challenges the metaphors of circulation, liquidity, fluidity and nomadism which have been frequently emphasized as characteristic of the latest migration waves (King 2002; Favell 2008; Garapich 2008). This study reveals that mobility of the working class certainly entails such tensions and the migrant historicity and habitus cannot be undermined in attempts to provide an in-depth insights into the lived experience of migration.

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