Polish Migrants in Belfast

Polish Migrants in Belfast:
Border Crossing and Identity Construction

By

Marta Kempny

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Polish Migrants in Belfast: Border Crossing and Identity Construction, by Marta Kempny

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2258-2, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2258-9

In loving memory of my father

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to numerous people for contributing directly and indirectly to this book. I feel greatly indebted to the Polish migrants, my informants, to all those without whom this research would not be possible and who at all times granted me with their cordiality, help and understanding.

The Department of Anthropological Studies at Queen's University Belfast offered me wonderful settings in which to read and write. The members of academic staff provided me with insightful comments and questions which inspired me to seek new information and reframe my findings. In particular, I am grateful to Prof. Lisette Josephides for her help and support throughout my research. I am also indebted to Dr. Maruŝka Svaŝek, for her encouragement and for her contribution to the theoretical part of this work.

Roman Frąckowski deserves special thanks for his positive responses to my frantic barrage of emails throughout the whole process of the manuscript preparation and production. His enthusiasm in my book and confidence in my writing is much appreciated. Also, a hearty thanks to all my other friends in the United Kingdom and Poland, who supported me.

INTRODUCTION

1 May 2004, the date which marked the accession of the eight new member states to the European Union, ushered in remarkable changes which are now evident in the socio-cultural map of Europe. The accession was followed by rapid acceleration in migratory movements across the continent. As a result, the United Kingdom experienced a huge migration wave. Between May 2004 and December 2008, a cumulative number of 965,000 migrants from the accession countries applied for the Worker Registration Scheme and of this number 66% were Polish (UK Border Agency 2008). Polish migrants made up the largest proportion of the members of EU accession countries in every sector between May 2004 and March 2009 (UK Border Agency 2009). Whilst some parts of the UK, especially England, had a long history of immigration, dating back to the post-war period, Northern Ireland's socio-economic instability meant it was long excluded from the influx of workers of other nationalities. However, the opening of the labour market that followed the accession of the new member states to the EU has dramatically changed the ethnic situation of Northern Ireland, as this time it was not excluded from the migratory influx. Currently, the largest immigrant ethnic group is the Polish community, having overtaken the Chinese community, the most numerous of the minorities during the 1990s (Svaŝek 2009). The fact that the migration was a relatively new phenomenon for Northern Ireland together with the specific context of the sectarian divide and history of the Troubles became a challenge that both the migrants and the members of the local community had to face.

This book focuses upon the process of construction of ethnic identities among the Polish migrants in Belfast, treating identities and cultures as dynamic, dialogical and multilayered entities, also concentrating on the role of religion as potentially crucial aspect of ethnic identifications. The structure of the book is as follows. In the first chapter I review the literature on ethnicity and identity, and the empirical studies carried out on Polish migration to the United Kingdom, discussing their relevance to my own research. I indicate the gaps in the existing scholarship and point at the possible areas of the existing body of anthropological knowledge, to which my study will contribute. In the second chapter, the background to migration from Poland is sketched, focusing on the economic and political

conditions in Poland following the fall of communism, during the "transformational period". Subsequently, an account of the migration to the United Kingdom after the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 is given, referring to the statistical data from the Home Office. Next I discuss the specificity of the Northern Irish context for migration, touching upon the issue of the religious conflict in this area. I sketch the ethnic makeup of the inhabitants of Belfast, paying particular attention to the situation of Poles. In the third chapter, the fieldwork methods used in my research are considered. I discuss the concept of the ''native anthropologist'' and examine the issues related to my positionality in the field. To this end, I deconstruct the essentializing notions of ''native anthropology'', exploring the dynamics inherent in the process of negotiation of different aspects of my identity throughout my fieldwork. I also present the methods used in my research, which are a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, a kind of bricolage; and subsequently discuss the practical and ethical issues related to them. In the fourth chapter I question the traditional concept of identity as a static and monolithic construct. Following alternative theories and perspectives I envision identity as a multidimensional and multilayered entity and discuss the kinds of identities that my informants constructed in Belfast (i.e. as Poles, representatives of small homelands, cosmopolitans, Europeans and Slavs), emphasizing the fact that these identities are in process. In chapters 5 and 6 I explore the malleability of socio-cultural boundaries in the everyday lived experiences of the migrants as well as in the events that take place beyond their ordinary lives, such as religious holidays and ethnic festivals. In chapter 7, the role of Catholic religion in the formation of the migrants' ethnic identities is discussed. In relation to this I analyze Poles' representations and perceptions of sectarian division of urban space in Belfast, paying attention to the contextual character of the situations in which their discourses are produced.

My research contributes to current anthropological debates about migration and a sense of belonging in a world in flux. It challenges the essentializing notions of cultures and identities and foregrounds the dialectical tension between the fixity and fluidity of cultural and social boundaries inherent in the process of negotiation of ethnic identities by the migrants. It also provides a valuable insight into the transformations currently underway in Northern Irish society.

CHAPTER ONE

MIGRATION AND IDENTITY: EXISTING THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

In this chapter I critically examine, appropriate and extend literature relating to migration and ethnicity in the postmodern world. I open this chapter with theoretical considerations on the nature of identities, introducing the conceptual framework for my research. I then discuss the malleable nature of cultures and sense of belonging in the postmodern world, dwelling upon the role of ethnicity in contemporary society. I subsequently examine empirical studies carried out on Polish migrants in Europe, underlining the ways in which my research advances contemporary debates around migrant identity.

Conceptualizing Identity

Richard Jenkins (1996, 2004) points out that the term ‘‘identity’’ has the Latin root of *idem* and *identitas*, which mean ‘‘the same’’. Identity entails two meanings: ‘‘the first is a concept of absolute sameness: this is identical to that. The second is a concept of distinctiveness which presumes consistency or continuity over time’’ (1996, 3). From this point of view, discussion about identity can be meaningful only if there exists an ‘‘Other’’.

> The practical significance of men for one another... is determined by both similarities and differences among them. Similarity as fact or tendency is no less important than difference. In the most varied forms, both are the great principles of all internal and external development. In fact the cultural history of mankind can be conceived as the history of the struggles and conciliatory attempts between the two (Simmel 1950, 30 cited in Jenkins 1996, 5).

Within such an understanding, identity emerges as a dynamic entity. Jenkins points out that ‘‘identity can in fact only be understood as process; as ‘being’ or ‘becoming’’’ (Jenkins 1996, 4). Such an approach contests primordial theories of identity formation (see Geertz 1963, Narroll 1964), whose proponents often referred to identity as something that ‘‘just is’’ - a social phenomenon that is final or static, thus envisioning identity as something natural, given or unchangeable. According to Clifford Geertz:

> primordial attachment means one that stems from the givens - or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed givens - of social existence (immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly), but beyond them the given-ness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices (1963, 109-110).

Jenkins (1996) cautions against this approach, and seeks for an understanding of personal and collective identity in terms of a dynamic process that centres on social interaction. In this way, he embraces instrumental and constructionist views of ethnic identity formation. Following Fredrick Barth (1969) he believes that ethnic identity is contextual and malleable, and the construction of identity involves an on-going process of negotiation of boundaries between collectivities. Barth's view is that such collectivities are not discontinuous cultural isolates, or logical *a prioris* to which people naturally belong. In his seminal work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* he argues that:

> [...] categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained *despite* changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories (1969, 9).

Abner Cohen has further used this metaphor of boundary in his conceptualization of community and identity:

> The sense of difference [...] lies at the heart of people’s awareness of their culture and, indeed, makes it appropriate for ethnographers to designate as ‘cultures’ such areas of distinctiveness [...]. People become aware of their culture when they stand at its boundary (1982, 2-3).

From this perspective, social groups may be then seen as a result of a constant process of inclusion and exclusion, which takes place across the boundaries. Such a conceptualization of ethnic identity is axiomatic to an

understanding of the Polish migrants in Northern Ireland, who, due to the highly politicized nature of space find themselves standing in, challenge and recreate multiple boundaries (Donnan and Wilson 1999, 21-23). Another important aspect of Cohen's understanding of the boundaries is that:

> The boundary thus symbolizes the community to its members in two quite different ways: it is the sense they have of its perception by people on the other side – the public face or 'typical' mode; and it is their own sense of community as refracted through all the complexities of their lives and experience – the private face, and 'idiosyncratic' mode (1986: 13).

This part of the definition is particularly relevant to the construction of multilayered identities among my informants (as Polish, Europeans, Slavs, cosmopolitans, representatives of small homelands), who are often viewed only as Poles by the members of the local community. The examination of this is in chapter 4 of this book.

Such an understanding of ethnic identity that shifts away from the discussion of its cultural content towards a consideration of boundary processes between groups requires further reflection on the changes that cultures and identities undergo in the contemporary world, in the epoch generally referred to as postmodernism (see for example Baudillard 1994; Bauman 1995, 1997; Jameson 1991), to which I turn in the next section of this chapter.

Identities and Ethnicity in the Postmodern World

The nature of the contemporary world lies in its mobility (see for example Appadurai 1996, Bauman 2000, Hannerz 1996). In the postmodern condition the mass mobility of people, objects and information is no longer constrained by temporal or spatial limits. As a result of these changes, individuals are now ''sedentary in travel'' (Clifford 1997) and changing locations has become a central experience in their lives. Such a condition of ''time and space compression'' (Harvey 1990) makes the trope of displacement central to social scientific thought nowadays, and therefore postmodern theories are permeated with the concepts of dwelling, nomadism, exile, and so on.

In the midst of these displacements new concerns over boundaries, borders and identities arise, as ''cultural action, the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, locals'' (Clifford 1997, 7). An understanding of cultures as discrete phenomena, occupying

discrete spaces, in which the terms ‘‘society’’ and ‘‘culture’’ are ascribed to particular nation states is no longer relevant under the conditions of the growing interconnectedness of the various places of the world (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 7).

As the boundaries of cultural entities become permeable and ambiguous, the identity of an individual also becomes fragmented. In fact, in the contemporary world it is more appropriate to speak of multiple identities rather than of identity. ‘‘The self’’ is constructed as a result of a ‘‘collage effect’’ (Giddens 1990), whereby components from the most disparate and remote discourses with no spatial or temporal continuity are placed together. In connection to this, individual’s identity is often referred to as contested, uncertain, and in flux (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Gergen contends that:

> Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflective questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality (Gergen 1992, 7).

In this way, the self becomes scattered and loses its coherence, a phenomenon, which Gergen refers to as ‘‘multiphrenia’’ (1992). This means of conceptualizing of selfhood corresponds to the notion of a ‘‘dialogical self’’, where different cultures come together and meet each other within the self of one and the same individual. A dialogical self is not only symptomatic of society as a whole but in fact functions itself as a ‘‘society of mind’’ with tensions, conflicts and contradictions being intrinsic features of a healthily functioning self (Hermans 2002). This approach is particularly relevant to chapter 4 of this book, in which I discuss the dynamic character of constructing of identities among the Polish migrants in Belfast.

In such a context of fluidity of identities and cultural entities, the clarity, certainty and defensibility of the boundaries between the familiar and the unknown have been undermined. The figure of the foreigner is emblematic of the postmodern condition. As Zygmunt Bauman claims, drawing on the Simmelian concept of ‘‘stranger’’, a foreigner is ‘‘a man who comes today and stays tomorrow, a potential wanderer’’ (Bauman 1995). A foreigner is unsettled, as by staying he encounters the unfamiliar and the unknown. The situation, in which he is both of an insider and an outsider, is a synthesis of remoteness and nearness and has a high level of ambiguity (Simmel 1971 [1908]). Such a belonging to more than one

category means ambivalence, inconsistency and indeterminacy, not only for the stranger but also for the members of the local community.

In Bammer's words, home ''is nether here, nor there (…) rather itself a hybrid, it is both here and there - an amalgam, a pastiche, a performance'' (1992, ix). In this context, the anthropologists' focus has shifted from territorially defined nation states to cultural borderlands (see Donnan and Wilson 1999). As interstitial zones, borderlands are areas of diverse political, economic and cultural systems that provide illuminating insights into the processes by which identities and cultures are negotiated. The new conceptual apparatus has been invented to refer to the processes of mixing, crisscrossing and crossing-over. Terms such as ''hybrid cultures'', ''creolization'', ''mélange'' are often used to refer to the changes that identities and cultures undergo nowadays (see Garcia Canclini 1993, Nederveen Pieterse 2004). There is a huge body of literature analyzing this process in relation to the Mexican-US borderland (see Alvarez 1995, Anzaldua 1987). As Gomez-Peña claims,

> *las fronteras* are the zones where there are no ''others'', or better put, the only true ''others'' are those who resist fusion, mestizaje, and crosscultural dialogue. In this utopian cartography, hybridity is the dominant culture; and monoculture is a culture of resistance practised by a stubborn or scared minority (1996, 7).

In view of this, the Mexican-US border is ''a membrane, a Ninth nation, Mex-America, and a list of traits that often included *tamales*, Texas chile and Kentucky Fried Chicken'' (Alvarez 1995, 450; on cultural mixing see also Vargas 2002). However, despite the globalizing trends and boundary blurring, in many cases people still persist in maintaining their cultural differences. This tendency is expressed well by Marian Kempny, who argues:

> One can look at collective cravings for fixed, bounded entities to identify with as manifestations of the spread of the Western concept of a person or self, which although contestable, still induces a quandary so as to how to square the notion of shifting identities with the demand of stable core of self. It seems that despite the claims of heralds of postmodern identity, the image of the self as a more or less completed unified structure still sticks with us (2002, 10).

Such a theoretical approach corresponds to what Meyer and Geschiere refer to as the precarious balance between global flows and cultural closure (1999). They contend that in a paradoxical twist, ''the process of globalization itself appears to lead to a hardening of cultural contrasts or

even to engender new opposition'' (1999, 2). Accordingly, open-ended global flows seem to trigger a search for fixed orientation points as well as a determined effort to affirm old and construct new boundaries. It leads to the solidifying of identity boundaries that were previously more permeable and flowing. Within such a context, the act of migration is problematized in its inevitable creation of boundaries. Caroline Brettell comments that ''it is the negotiation across such boundaries, themselves shifting, that is at the heart of ethnicity'' (2001, 114). This problem of the dialectical tension between one's attempts to maintain fixed boundaries of culture and the fluidity of these boundaries will be examined in chapters 5 and 6 of this book in my analysis of migrants' everyday lives and special events, such as religious holidays and ethnic festivals.

The formation of we/they dichotomization, which corresponds with the boundary maintenance between the members of different ethnic groups, is constructed around an overarching symbolic system of cultural consciousness, often termed as ''ethnic markers'', or ''cultural umbrellas'' (Sommers 1991, 116). These could be attained through language, ethnic clothing, ethnic food, ethnic festivals and so on. An example of such a ''cultural umbrella'' is the Guelaguetza festival in Fresno, California, celebrated by Mexican migrants in the state of Oaxaca. The Guelaguetza is a simulacrum of the *fiesta* that takes place in their place of origins every summer. As Françoise Lestage observes, the festival is a means by which the Oaxaceños in the US sustain and enact their ethnic identity (2001). Use of ethnic markers (ex. Polish language and food) is also pervasive among the Polish migrants in Belfast, to which I will come back in chapters 5 and 6 of this book. Often particular material objects can serve as ''cultural umbrellas'', contributing to strengthening of individuals' ethnic identities. As Hardin and Arnoldi observe, ''objects when coupled with human agency, become powerful allies in construction of identity, meanings and culture itself'' (1996, 16). These observations appear to be in line with the findings of my research, according to which different elements of Polish culture (such as *opłatek*, holy images, books, etc.) are powerful tools in constructing a sense of belonging of migrants.

The use of ''cultural markers'' is also significant in the process of home-making, through which the migrants abroad may feel like at home, although they are displaced from the physically bounded territories of their nation states. This is frequently achieved by ethnic groups carving out their own space within the urban areas. For example, Caroline Nagel, when writing about Arab minority in London, maintains that the members of this minority form neighbourhoods of their own, like North Kensington, ''where Arabic signs can be found on cultural centres, store fronts, and in

the local primary school, where students may opt to attend after-school Arabic classes'' (2002, 275).

Within the migrant spaces, individuals engage in activities that aim to express their identities. In this context, Brettell (2001, 119) emphasizes the importance of religion and its vital role in the process of construction of a sense of belonging among the members of ethnic minorities. Warner, referring to the diasporic churches in the US, upholds that

> The most Americanized of the religious communities (...) still bear signs of their foreign heritage in the hymns they sing, the languages they use for prayer, the special garments their members wear, the architecture of their places for worship, and the names of the saints they venerate and the prophets they follow (1998, 3).

Religious practices within migrant churches often induce powerful emotions, a state which Durkheim (1912) termed as ''collective effervescence'' and the integrated, individual experience of cultural harmony, which Turner refers to as ''communitas'' (Turner 1967). This in turn strengthens the cohesion between the individuals partaking in the religious rituals. From this point of view, religious institutions can be considered as ethnic fortresses where immigrants can enact, preserve and pass on their cultural traditions. Furthermore it should be noted that whilst ethnic churches often serve as ''ethnic community and fellowship'' (Chong 1998 267), they also play vital role in ''preserving ethnicity and culture not only for the members of the local community but also for their future children'' (1998, 267).

Although religion is an important tool in reinforcing one's sense of belonging, not all religious practices take place in the church, but occur also within the home spaces of individuals. For example, Ebaugh and Saltzman Chafetz, discussing ethnic rituals of Mexican migrants in the US (2000), quote their female informant, who says:

> [Women] still lay down and pick up the baby Jesus, celebrate the Day of the Dead, light candles in front of the image of the Virgin and remember the patron saint from either their hometown, their family of origin or some personal favourite intercessor (2000, 86).

The major ways by which ethnicity is reproduced by migrants are then: the creation of ethnic minority religious institutions; the incorporation of ethnic practices and holidays into formal religious ceremonies, domestic religious practices, and congressionally related social activities (Ebaugh and Saltzman Chafetz 2000, 80). I relate to this in chapters 6 and 7,

examining the role of the Polish congregation in Belfast in the construction of migrants' ethnic and national identities. To this end, I explore migrants' participation in the Polish Sunday mass and examine religious practices taking place within their homespaces.

One should bear in mind that immigrants use religious gatherings as places to sustain their ''old'' cultural ways, but also as places where new ways are hammered out (Warner and Wittner 1998, Ebaugh and Saltzman Chafetz 2002). As Warner states, ''[t]he religious institutions [immigrants] build, adapt, remodel and adopt become worlds unto themselves'' (Warner 1998, 3). Along similar lines, Leonard points at how migrants' ethnic identities negotiated abroad, inform the ways they practice their national religious rituals:

> given that most immigrants are religious the question is not if they have religious identity, but how their religion articulates with alternative identities with homeland versus adaptive country (...) (2006, 16).

This statement appears to be relevant to chapter 6 of this book where I consider Christmas and Easter celebrations by Poles in Belfast.

Finally, when discussing ethnic identities in the postmodern world, it is also worth noting that a process referred to as ''layering of identities'' is often inherent in construction of one's belonging. As Joane Nagel observes,

> the individual carries a portfolio of ethnic identities that are more or less salient in various situations and vis-à-vis various audiences. As audiences change, the socially defined array of ethnic choices open up to the individual changes. This produces a ''layering'' of ethnic identities, which combines with the ascriptive character of ethnicity to reveal the negotiated, problematic nature of ethnic identity (1994, 154).

Examples of this can be found in patterns of ethnic identifications in many US ethnic communities. For instance, Pedraza (1992) observes the layering of Latino or Hispanic ethnic identity. A person of Cuban ancestry can be a Latino (referring to non-Spanish speaking ethnic groups), a Cuban-American (referring to other Spanish speaking groups), a Marielito (vis-à-vis other Cubans) and white (vis-à-vis African Americans). Such an approach is pertinent to the concept of ''dialogical self'' that I discuss in chapter 4, exploring how Polish people define themselves in relation to other minorities and the Northern Irish majority. Among a repertoire of possible identities that I single out are: Polish, Slav, European, representative of small homeland, and cosmopolitan.

Having presented the theoretical studies on the nature of ethnicity and identity in the postmodern world I will now turn to the second part of this section dealing with empirical research done on the Polish migrants in the United Kingdom.

Research on Polish Migrants

Recently the issue of Polish ethnic minorities occupied an important place in contemporary social scientific debates. It was a subject of interest of major centres for migration research in the UK (more specifically of the Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multinationalism (CRONEM) at the University of Surrey and Roehampton, and the Centre of Migration, Policy, and Society at the University of Oxford (COMPAS), Poland (Ośrodek Badań Migracyjnych – Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw) and Europe Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations and Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy). The researchers tend to categorize Polish migrants as a part of larger group of Europeans, focus on the Polish community within the UK in general, or on the Polish communities dispersed in various countries. What seems to be missing from the existing literature is in-depth, locally grounded ethnography. The studies that are anthropological accounts of context specific socio-cultural realities (see for example Svašek 2009) are usually parts of larger research projects and, although they are valuable for their ethnographic description, they lack the intensity and in-depth characteristic of Malinowskian fieldwork. Seen from this angle, this doctoral study is more extensive in its scope than any existing research on the Polish community in the UK context. Furthermore, it is rooted in the unique local context of Northern Ireland, where religion is treated as an important aspect of ethnic identities.

Polish Migrants as a Part of Larger Migrants' Collectivities

This section will outline studies carried out on larger communities of migrants, wherein Polish migrants were classed as yet one more ethnic minority group within the mainstream society.

The research done by the Institute for Conflict Research on migrant communities in Northern Ireland is a characteristic example. Studies carried out by this institution are usually aimed to make recommendations for public policy bodies (see for example Holder 2007, Jarman 2004, Jarman and Byrne 2007, Jarman and Martynowicz 2009). They contain an overview of the demographic make up of migrants' communities and point

to difficulties in the provision of social services that they may face. Some of the authors also discuss the interactions between the local community and migrants, and often deal with the issue of hate crime and racism (see Bell, Jarman and Lefebre 2004, Holder and Khaoury 2005, Jarman and Monaghan 2004). I will refer later in this book to some of these studies, but at this point it is worthwhile mentioning Jarman's article ''Migrant workers in Northern Ireland'', where he conceptualizes the difference between terms ''immigrant'' and ''migrant''. He notices:

> There is an ongoing debate as to what differentiates a 'migrant worker' from an 'immigrant'. The term 'immigrants' is sometimes used to imply long-term settlement and integration, while 'migrant worker' sometimes has implications of temporariness or the possibility of return migration. However, viewing migrant workers as 'temporary' workers is not straightforward. Some migrant workers come on short-term contracts before either returning to their country of origin or migrating to a third country. Others have fixed contracts lasting a couple of years, which may or may not be renewable. In short, the length of time a migrant worker stays in Northern Ireland will depend on a range of factors - job opportunities, immigration status and experience of Northern Ireland (2004, 10-11).

For these reasons, I find it more appropriate to use term ''migrant'' rather than ''immigrant'' and I will use this concept in such a way throughout the whole book.

The studies done by Institute for Conflict Research are important sources, as they provide a general overview of migrants' situation in Northern Ireland. However, as they are aimed at the public policy makers they lack characteristics of anthropological research, whereby individual experience of Polish migrants is grasped and details of their everyday lives are presented and analyzed. Similar is the case with the research conduced by the Centre of Migration, Policy and Society at the University of Oxford, as the reports presented by the centre concentrate on Central and Eastern European migrants as a single monolithic entity. While some of the insights yielded may be valuable, the risk inherent in such an approach is the possibility of essentializing notions about Polish people, who are thus considered as members of the post-communist bloc. The research projects carried out by the centre tended to conceptually unite Polish, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, etc. What such an approach omits from its considerations are the specifics of the situation of each individual country. The very legal status of the members of these countries in the UK varies. Namely, Poland and Lithuania are members of the EU, and therefore their nationals can freely work in the UK, while the nationals of Ukraine need

work permits and often their status is illegal. Needless to say, while Ukraine and Lithuania belonged to the USSR, Poland did not, which has implications regarding the varying degrees to which civic freedoms and democracy have been consolidated in these countries.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the research conducted by COMPAS has merits which must be acknowledged. The report by COMPAS ''Fair Enough? Central and East-European Migrants in Low-wage Employment in the UK'', presented by Bridget Anderson et al. (2006), is a study based on interviews and surveys with over 600 migrants and 500 employers, carried out before and after the enlargement of the EU on 1 May 2004. This research touches upon important issues: the legal status of the workers, the reasons why employers seek migrant workers, and the reasons why the employees decide to work abroad. The authors observe that many migrants consider their situation as a ''trade off'' – an opportunity to save money, learn English or study. Furthermore, the authors maintain that in many cases employers prefer particular nationalities for certain kinds of jobs, referring to their ''work ethic'' and reliability, hence contrasting foreign nationals favourably with UK citizens. The research, although mainly quantitative, was comprised also of in-depth interviews, which were useful in exploring motivations and aspirations of the migrants. However, although I do believe that the economic aspect of migration is important, in my research I decided to diverge from such a focus, which until very recently was prevalent in the study of migration to the United Kingdom, and concentrate instead on other realms of social realities in which migrants are immersed, that is, their cultural and social lives.

The further elaboration of the aforementioned project, ''Migrants' Lives Beyond the Workplace: The Experiences of Central and East European Migrants in the UK'', is the report from May 2007 which deals with the lived experiences of migrant workers employed in low paid jobs: agriculture, construction, hospitality, and domestic work, such as au pairs (Spencer et al. 2007). The research tackles many important issues: having practical information upon arrival, accommodation, language skills, leisure-time activities, sociability and the migrants' plans for the future. What seems particularly significant for my own research is the part of the study which concerns the relations between Central and Eastern European migrants and members of local communities. The findings of the research indicate that there is very little interaction between Polish people and the British; Polish people tend more often to spend time with members of their own or other ethnic minority groups, rather than mix with the British. The suggested reason for this is that migrants usually work in occupations

staffed mostly by other migrants. British citizens working there are in most cases low skilled, and migrants, frequently graduates of the Polish universities, are often unable to find common ground with them. It is further suggested that there is a belief among the migrants that the British people are aloof and unwilling to make friends with them. Many of the migrants regret not having British friends, which raises the issue of whether it is the migrants who avoid intermingling with the locals, or the other way round. This matter is of crucial importance to my research, as I also deal with interethnic relations. In my study, however, I contribute to this kind of approach by looking at religion as an important constituent of ethnic identity.

One other interesting study worth mentioning here is Kathy Burrell's *Moving Lives* (2006), done in collaboration with the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic relations (ERCOMER), which focuses on three ethnic minority groups in the UK: Polish, Italian and Greek Cypriot migrants. Although the same methodological problems can be attributed to her work as to the previously mentioned research carried out by COMPAS (as the specificity of the situations of these groups vary regarding their socio-economic and political context), there are several crucial points that the author makes regarding the experiences of migration that are relevant to my research. Using oral history interviewing methods, Burrell analyzes the migrants' representations of migration, the ways that they maintain national consciousness, and the ways they establish community ties in their new locality. She depicts how reminders and embodiments of a national consciousness are present in the everyday lives of the migrants. Burrell claims that:

> even away from the homeland, everyday life continues to hold the key to national identity, ensuring that although the nation can not be seen or touched it can be still imagined, remembered, celebrated, performed, painted, spoken, eaten, and above all, felt (2006, 99).

Another important aspect of Burrell's work is her discussion of how the sense of collective identity is enhanced by the spatial organization of the urban cartography. She emphasizes the role of the geographical proximity of the residences of the individuals, as well as symbolic appropriation of place to certain rituals in keeping the community together. This focus is of special importance to my research, as I deal with the issues of space not only in the context of cultural identity of Polish migrants, but also in the context of their religious background relating it to the spatial segregation of the urban areas of Belfast. Jones refers to it as

> emotional spatialities of becoming, the transaction of body(ies), space(s), mind(s), feeling(s) in the unfolding of life-in-the-now, are the very stuff of life we should be concerned with when trying to understand how people make sense of/practice the world (Jones 2005: 206, compare further Low and Lawrence-Zuñiga 2003).

Polish Diasporas

Having discussed how different studies treated Poles as a part of a larger collectivity of ethnic minorities, I will now examine the research conducted solely on Polish migrants in many different locations. The book edited by Anna Triandafyllidou *Contemporary Polish Migration in Europe: Complex Patterns of Movement and Settlement* (2006) is worth referring to as it deals with lived experiences of migrants, and its authors approach migration process by looking at it through the eyes of informants. More specifically, the study deals with the livelihoods of migrants using life history interviews, conducted with Poles living in Germany, Italy, Greece and the United Kingdom. The contributors of the book concentrate on the meaning of migration as constructed through the individual migrants themselves. Kosic's chapter *Migrant Identities* is particularly pertinent to my study. The author argues that one should move beyond assumptions of the homogeneity of Polish migrants on the basis of their ethnic backgrounds. She advocates an approach founded upon the identities of individuals considered as social actors and encourages listening to their individual experiences. Kosic maintains that ''identities refer to what people conceive themselves to be in a specific context'' (2006, 246). She furthermore states that:

> Individuals confront the reality that identity is not a stable set of characteristics attached to an individual but is hybrid, multiple and shifting. Although identity may have constancy, its content varies, and the construction of identity is a continuous effort to synthesize opposites, differences and similarities (2006, 247).

The author envisions the self as a complex structure, containing not only awareness about the actual, but also about past and future selves. Kosic analyzes how Polish minorities make sense of themselves as migrants, workers and as individuals engaging in relations with host nationals and other compatriots. She thus explores the ethnic, national, personal and professional character of migrants' stories. Although in my research I focus mainly on the ethnic identities of the migrants, such an approach is relevant to my discussion of dialogism and the contextual

nature of identities in the fourth chapter of this book. Despite the fresh insights that Kosic's study yields into the migrants' lived experiences, its main drawback is the loss of the depth that a single ethnographic context might have provided. By focusing on diverse narratives of the migrants located in Germany, Greece, Italy, and the United Kingdom, it sacrifices specificity and the detailed analysis of one social microcosm in order to facilitate inter-societal comparisons.

Whereas Anna Triandafyllidou's book concentrates on the migration of Poles to Europe, a recently published study, edited by Kathy Burrell and entitled *Polish Migration to the UK in the 'New' European Union* (2009) presents the findings of multi-sited research on Polish migrants in the UK, undertaken across a wide range of disciplines: history, economics, sociology, anthropology, film studies and discourse analysis. The following chapters are particularly relevant to this work: Maruška Svašek's ''Shared History? Polish Migrants Experiences and Politics of Display in Northern Ireland'', Bernadetta Siara's: ''UK Poles and the Negotiation of Gender and Ethnic Identity in Cyberspace'', and Marta Rabikowska and Kathy Burrell's ''The Material Worlds of Polish Migrants: Transnationalism, Food, Shops and Home''.

Svašek's study tackles the issue of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland and explores the politicization of settlement processes, by presenting an ethnographic account of the *Shared History* project launched in Belfast in 2006. Svašek examines ''the emotional dimensions of the interaction'' within the Polish group taking part in the project. More specifically, she investigates how ''emotional motifs informed their representational politics in a context of increasing public and media attention to racial intolerance and anti-migrant feelings'' (2009, 130). The insights which this study provides regarding the positioning of Poles within the sectarian divide of Northern Ireland will be incorporated into chapter 2, in which I discuss migrants' situation in Belfast.

Siara's chapter analyzes how the Internet forms a part of migrants' everyday life experience. The author demonstrates how the identities and the values of migrants ''come into contact with a new reality of a multicultural society'' and how the forum discussions ''appear to be a crucial part of negotiation of their own identities'' (2009, 183). Siara examines the dialectical process of the liberation of new and fluid identities, which is accompanied by the reparation of allegiances. Moreover, she emphasizes that:

> Many of these internet portals also host various forums and chat rooms, which Poles not only use instrumentally but also socially for keeping in touch with the Polish community in the UK. This may seen as especially

> important not only for creating a feeling of belonging to the Polish community by being able to meet other fellow Poles and make friends but also for discussing a variety of issues related to their everyday lives in the UK (2009, 170).

Siara's study appears to be relevant to chapter 5 of this book where I examine the ways in which Poles maintain their identities in their everyday lives.

Finally, worth mentioning is research done by Marta Rabikowska and Kathy Burrell, *The Material Worlds of Polish Migrants: Transnationalism, Food, Shops and Home*. This study raises important issues that I will also discuss in the present book, such as the importance of ethnic shops in migrants' everyday life experiences. The authors argue that:

> This research keeps returning to the concept of home, and this is where Polish shops especially have proved to be so influential. These shops have provided new outlets which offer a possibility of finding an element of home away from Poland, and which, unlike the transnational mechanisms of carrying food back and forth, are firmly located in Britain (2009, 230).

The question of how ethnic food is a significant tool in the reinforcement of migrants' identities is also raised in this book. However my research suggests that some of my informants step away from what they perceive as ''traditional Polish food'' and consume local culinary products or elsewhere develop so-called ''cosmopolitan tastes''.

Overall I believe that while the studies presented in this section represent individually valuable contributions to research on the migration of Poles to Europe and the UK, they do not provide in-depth ethnographic knowledge about Polish migrants in a single locale.

Other Studies

Another research centre on migration which focuses its interest on Polish migrants is CRONEM. The projects launched by this centre are mostly survey-based and large scale, aiming at the identification of social policy issues, such as the survey for Institute of Public Policy Research 2008 (CRONEM 2008), the survey commissioned by borough council of Hammersmith and Fulham 2008 (CRONEM 2008a), the survey commissioned by BBC Newsnight 2006 (CRONEM 2006).

Among the studies done by CRONEM, the project entitled ''Class and Ethnicity – Polish Migrants in London'', carried out by John Eade, Stephen Drinkwater and Michał Garapich is of particular interest. The

report constitutes an original approach towards the issues of class and its delocalization. As the authors observe, Polish migrants understand class in terms of opportunities that lie ahead rather than an occupational or economic position in the present. In relation to this, they present a typology of the migrants on the basis of their migratory strategies. Inspired by Marek Okólski's approach, they categorize Polish migrants into ''storks'', ''hamsters'', ''searchers'' and ''stayers'' (2001). ''Storks'' constitute about 20% of all migrants and they are mostly found in low-wage occupations, staying from 2 to 6 months and treating their stay as a capital-raising activity (2006, 11). This includes all the types of seasonal migrants, for example students, who work during the summer to pay their tuition fees in Poland. ''Hamsters'' are those who ''treat their move as a one-off act to acquire enough capital to invest in Poland'' (2006, 11). They constitute 16% of the Polish migrants, and are often embedded in Polish networks. They consider their stay in the UK as a source of social mobility back home. The difference between this group and the storks is that their stays in the UK are longer and uninterrupted. ''Searchers'' (42%) are all those who keep their options deliberately open (working either in low waged or highly skilled jobs), a strategy that Garapich et al. termed ''intentional unpredictability''. They are usually young people, who embody the Simmelian concept of a foreigner who refuses to confine himself to one nation-state and easily adapts to flexible, ''deregulated, and increasingly transnational, post-modern *capitalist labour market''* (2006, 11). Finally, ''stayers'' (22%) are those who have been in the UK for some time and decide to remain for good, believing that through the social meritocracy system they will advance on the stratification ladder. I will refer to this typology in chapter 2, discussing Poles' migration strategies and plans as a part of general background to my research.

Research on Polish Migrants: Suggestions for New Directions

To recapitulate, the studies carried out on Polish migrants in the UK usually focus either on the economic aspects of their stay in Great Britain, often treating Polish people as a part of a larger population (whether Central East European or European). They also tend to concentrate either on the Polish community in London, leaving out the other parts of the UK or they focus on the ''grand scheme'' of things investigating the experiences of Polish migrants in multiple locations, thus missing out on locally embedded in-depth ethnography. Therefore my research seeks to fill in the gaps in the existing scholarship on the issue of Polish migrants.